Samuel Beckett

“All Sturm and no Drang”

Beckett and Romanticism

Beckett at Reading 2006

Edited by

Russell Smith

2007 B1

The acute and increasing anxiety of the relation itself: Beckett, the Author-Function, and the Ethics of Enunciation

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Edited by
Dirk Van Hulle and Mark Nixon

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INTRODUCTION

No matter how tongue-in-cheek Beckett's references to Romanticism sometimes are, they keep recurring with a remarkable persistence throughout his work. The "blue flower," one of the key symbols of Romantic yearning for unreachable horizons, is already present in Beckett's personal *Sturm und Drang* piece, his first published story "Assumption." Later on, the *Blaue Blume* appears as the "blue bloom" in "A Wet Night," alluding to Leopold Bloom's activities in the "Nausicaa" episode of *Ulysses*. To what extent Romanticism plays a role in Beckett's developing poetics and his positioning vis-à-vis his great examples Joyce and Proust is a fascinating, because difficult, question. In his essay on the latter's work, Beckett discerns a "romantic strain in Proust," a "retrogressive tendency," receding from the Symbolists back towards Victor Hugo.

Although the blue flower seems to have withered after its reappearance in *Watt*, the impossible yearning it stands for never completely disappeared, from his early notes on Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* (in the *Dream Notebook*) to the "missing word" (*Stirrings Still*) "afaint afar away" (*what is the word*). The entry on "Romanticism" in the Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett points out, with reference to Molloy:

His condition is essentially that of SB himself, mockery qualified by an undercurrent of German Romanticism, in literature (Hölderlin), music (Schubert), and art (Caspar David Friedrich). Not least of this, as in the art of Jack Yeats, was the sense of isolation, the insignificant human figure in an indifferent world, far from Wordsworth's pantheistic belief but at the heart of the Winterreise. This love is manifest more obviously in the later drama, where SB is less fearful of deceduous beauty. A good study of the Romantic impulse in SB's writings, revealing unexpected insights into a tradition vehemently rejected but never quite denied, is currently lacking.

(487)

In the past few decades there have been scattered efforts to shed some light on isolated traces of, or references to, Romanticism, but it remains difficult to fathom Beckett's ambiguous and somewhat paradoxical

attitude toward this period in literature, music and art history. Far from being a comprehensive examination, the dossier on "Beckett and Romanticism" in the current issue of *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* tries to give an impetus to the study of this complex theme with contributions on Beckett's attitudes toward Romantic aesthetics in general, including notions such as the sublime, irony, failure, ruins, fragments, fancy, imagination, epiphany, translation, unreachable horizons, the infinite, the infinitesimal and the unfinished, but also on Beckett's reading about the Romantic period (such as Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony* and Théophile Gautier's *Histoire du romantisme*), his affinity with specific Romantic artists and their influence on works such as *Murphy*, the trilogy, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *All Strange Away*.

The second part of the current issue presents a selection of papers given at the Beckett at Reading 2006 conference in Reading (30 April – 2 May 2006), which was jointly organised by the Beckett International Foundation and the University's School of English and American Literature. The conference marked Beckett's centenary, an event that Beckett himself had viewed in 1981 (the year of his 75th Birthday) as something to be avoided:

I dread the year now upon us and all the fuss in store for me here, as if it were my centenary. I'll make myself scarce while it lasts, where I don't know. Perhaps the Great Wall of China, crouch behind it till the coast is clear.

(Letter to Jocelyn Herbert, 11 January 1981; RUL)

Reflecting the importance of the Beckett Foundation's Archive to scholars, the focus of the conference somewhat naturally tended to be on empirical research and manuscript studies, but this did not exclude other approaches. Indeed, the variety of essays included in this issue shows the importance and benefits of scholarly dialogue and cross-fertilization between different approaches. Scholars attending the conference were also introduced to the ongoing project of establishing digital editions of Beckett's manuscripts, and an outline of this work is presented at the end of the section.

While the previous *SBT/A* volume (*Présence de Samuel Beckett*) was predominantly French, the current issue is mainly English. Its "Freespace," however, is truly bilingual. Different forms of otherness characterize several of these contributions, opening with essays on Beckett and Judaism, and the enunciative relation between author and

text (focusing on Blanchot, Foucault, and Agamben). Falling down is the central motif in two other English essays, whereas the French contributions zoom in on linguistic matters, the posture of prayer in Beckett's works and the relationship between Charles Juliet and Samuel Beckett. The volume as a whole shows that Beckett Studies is in a better state than *Murphy* during its arduous journey toward publication, described by Beckett as "All Sturm and no Drang" (letter to Mary Manning Howe, 14 November 1936; HRHRC).

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"THE ACUTE AND INCREASING ANXIETY OF THE RELATION ITSELF": Beckett, the Author-Function, and the Ethics of Enunciation

Russell Smith

It is widely agreed that Beckett's writing radically destabilizes the enunciation of linguistic subjectivity through the problematic status of the pronoun 'I' in his work. This is often read as an implicit critique of the 'author-function.' In this paper I examine four different formulations of the enunciative relation between author and text – by Beckett himself, Maurice Blanchot, Michel Foucault, and Giorgio Agamben – and argue that Beckett's impossible "obligation to express" corresponds most closely to the theory of testimony outlined by Agamben, in which the shame experienced through an incapacity to speak responds to a post-war historical crisis of enunciation.

Introduction

In this paper I wish to consider once again a topic that has already received a great deal of attention in Beckett criticism: what we might call the ethical status of the pronoun 'I' in Samuel Beckett's work.

It is by now a common observation that Beckett's writing relentlessly questions the traditional notion of enunciation as the expression of an interiorized subjectivity, in particular through its verbal play with shifters, those pronouns and adverbs such as 'I,' 'you,' 'this,' and 'now,' whose meaning lies solely in their deictic reference to the act of enunciation in which they are spoken. As Emile Benveniste puts it, "I cannot be defined except in terms of 'locution'" (218). Post-structuralist literary theory has therefore drawn attention to the gap, or *écart*, that separates the *sujet de l'énoncé* (the speaking subject; the enunciating 'I') and the *sujet de l'énonciation* (the subject of the statement; the enunciated 'I'). And it is in this gap that Beckett's speakers attempt to situate themselves, often by means of a denial of the articulation between the speaker and the pronoun 'I,' even in the moment of its articulation: "I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me" (Beckett 1958, 3). However, while it is clear that Beckett's writing

questions the nature of enunciation, what is more problematic, it seems, is the ethical significance attributed to this questioning.

In Beckett criticism, the problem has often taken the form of the question posed at the start of Maurice Blanchot's review of *L'Innommable*: "Who speaks in Samuel Beckett's books?" (23). It is a common theme in poststructuralist Beckett criticism that the deictic indeterminacy of Beckett's prose – the unanswerability of the question "who speaks?" – constitutes, not only a questioning of enunciation, but by extension of the author-function (see Trezise, 105-07, Critchley, 172-74). According to this argument, the shiftiness of Beckett's shifters undermines the traditional role of the author as origin and guarantee of a text's meaning, by preventing the identification of a coherent authorial position behind the text. In other words, Beckett's writing is seen as both radically anti-expressive and subversively anti-authorial.

Here I wish to question this understanding of enunciation in Beckett's work, according to which an apparent indifference to the question "who speaks?" would constitute an anti-authorial ethics of desubjectification, of writing as 'exteriority.' Instead, through a reading of Giorgio Agamben's theorization of enunciation in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, I wish to argue that Beckett's writing is authorial, and that the ethical force of his questioning of enunciation consists in its recognition of a double movement of both subjectification and desubjectification, in which the articulation between the speaker and his utterance is simultaneously disavowed and unavoidable.

In particular, I wish to suggest that Beckett's analysis of an impossible "obligation to express" may be related to a historical crisis of enunciation associated with the aftermath of the Second World War. Agamben's ethical figure of *shame* suggests a situation in which the impossibility of speech becomes a means of bearing witness to the existence of those whom suffering and horror has reduced to speechlessness; a means, as Beckett put it, of leaving "a stain upon the silence" (qtd. in Bair, 681).

This argument proceeds in four parts, each corresponding to a different formulation of the problem of enunciation and the ethics of speech: that of Beckett himself, in the *Three Dialogues* of 1949; that of Maurice Blanchot in his 1953 review of *L'Innommable*; that of Michel Foucault in his discussions of the author-function in "What Is an Author?" and "The Order of Discourse;" and that of Giorgio Agamben, in his account of the ethics of enunciation in *Remnants of Auschwitz*.

Beckett

In the *Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit*, Beckett will famously characterize the artist's "ferocious dilemma of expression" (110) as the situation of having "nothing to express [...] together with the obligation to express" (103).² And he will claim (after a fortnight's thought) to have discovered, in the work of Bram van Velde, an art that is genuinely "inexpressive" (120): for Beckett, Van Velde is "the first [artist] whose hands have not been tied by the certitude that expression is an impossible act" (121). He is "the first to submit wholly to the incoercible absence of relation" between the artist and his occasion, between "the representer and the representee" (125).

But it would be wrong to see in Beckett's praise of Van Velde's inexpressiveness an invocation of an 'impersonal' art. Beckett does not question the need for an author, nor the need for a work, but merely the possibility of an expressive relation between them. Instead, for Beckett what should concern the artist is "the acute and increasing anxiety of the relation itself, as though shadowed more and more darkly by a sense of invalidity, of inadequacy, of existence at the expense of all it excludes" (124).

What is interesting here, from an ethical perspective, is its invidious conjuncture of obligation and impossibility:

B. – The situation is that of him who is helpless, cannot act, in the event cannot paint, since he is obliged to paint. The act is of him who, helpless, unable to act, acts, in the event paints, since he is obliged to paint.

D. – Why is he obliged to paint?

B. – I don't know.

(119)

When Beckett states, in a later interview, "to find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now" (Driver, 219), we might speculate that the mess in question is, among other things, the exhaustion of representation, and the form to be found an art that is (to quote Duthuit presumably quoting Beckett) "authentically fruitless, incapable of any image whatsoever" (113). To put this fruitlessness on a platter, to make art's inadequacy or invalidity the subject of an adequate, valid statement, would be ultimately to return us

to the domain of the feasible. It is not something that can be represented, but that must be *enacted*, and it must be enacted not through a dissolution of either of the terms of this ferocious dilemma, but through the authorial assumption of an impossible obligation to speak.

Blanchot

Maurice Blanchot begins his review of *L'Innommable* with the question "Who speaks in Samuel Beckett's books?" (23) He suggests that a "reassuring convention" allows us to answer "Samuel Beckett," but in doing so, we are only "trying to reassure ourselves with a name" (25), whereas "*The Unnamable* is precisely experience experienced under the threat of impersonality, undifferentiated speech speaking in a vacuum, passing through he who hears it" (25). Thus, according to an often-quoted passage:

Who then is speaking? Is it the 'author'? But to whom can such a term refer since anyhow he who writes is no longer Beckett but the urge that sweeps him out of himself, turns him into a nameless being, the Unnamable, a being without being who can neither live nor die, stop nor start, who is in the vacant site where speaks the redundancy of idle words under the ill-fitting cloak of a porous, agonising I? (25)

Blanchot's model of Beckettian enunciation as exteriority, echoed in various ways in post-structuralist readings of Beckett such as those of Thomas Trezise or Simon Critchley, is problematic for several reasons. First, Blanchot constructs as his foil a naïve mode of reading that would conflate the deictic 'I' in a literary text with the text's author. *The Unnamable* is hardly the first novel to feature a first-person narrator, and literary criticism has traditionally had no trouble recognizing the gap that separates the narrating subject and the author. Thus, when we read in *The Unnamable*, "All these Murphys, Molloy's and Malones do not fool me. They have made me waste my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and of me alone" (21), no one imagines for a moment that this is Samuel Beckett finally speaking in his own right. To be sure, Beckett here reduces the *écart* between narrator and author to its extreme point, but the distinction still holds.

Secondly, Blanchot's invocation of the impersonality and namelessness of the voice that speaks in Beckett's texts is, paradoxically, an attribution of authorial intention, albeit an intention dedicated to its own undoing. It is of course pure speculation that Beckett's writing is the product of an "urge that sweeps him out of himself," and little different from the biographical speculations of traditional authorial criticism.

Thirdly, Blanchot's ventriloquistic model of enunciation is perhaps persuasive because it is directly derived from the text of *The Unnamable* itself, where the voice repeatedly invokes just such a notion: "I shall transmit the words as received, by the ear, or roared through a trumpet into the arsehole, in all their purity, and in the same order, as far as possible" (86). But this is not the only model of enunciation in *The Unnamable*, which in fact offers a staggering variety of enunciative acts, many of them, significantly, associated with the institutional contexts of the schoolroom and the courtroom. Thus the speaker describes the text he must speak as a lesson: "the same old lesson, the one I once knew by heart and would not say" (24); and later as a pensum, a recitation imposed as punishment: "if I have a pensum to perform it is because I could not say my lesson" (31). So too, the speaker's text is characterised by various juridical terms, as a "statement" (19), a "perjury" (58), a "verbatim report of the proceedings" (115), a "confession" (175) and an "indictment" (175). In each of these cases, enunciation is characterised as something other than speech "passing through he who hears it," or the product of an "urge that sweeps him out of himself."

To summarize, Blanchot's is a fundamentally *desubjectified* model of enunciation: the voices that speak in Beckett's novels are an outpouring of language in its exteriority, reaching "the point where language ceases to speak, but is" (Blanchot, 28). But is it really possible to have speech – that is, an utterance; *parole* not *langue* – without a speaker? If so, what are the ethical consequences of this? The problem of Blanchot's model, it seems, is that writing is ultimately dissociated from the agency of a speaker, and therefore from enunciation *as such*. If no one is speaking, then *The Unnamable*'s formula "It's not I speaking" (161) ceases to be a paradox; if there is an occasion but no artist, a representative but no representer, then there can be no "ferocious dilemma of expression."

Foucault

Although Michel Foucault never wrote at length on Beckett's work, it is extraordinary that, in the two pivotal essays where he considers the author-function – "What Is an Author?" and "The Order of Discourse" – on both occasions he quotes from Beckett's work, as if Beckett poses in a particularly stark manner the problem of enunciation and the author-function.

At the beginning of "What Is an Author?" Foucault seems to invoke the Blanchotian model:

For the time being, I wish to restrict myself to the singular relationship that holds between an author and a text, the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside it and precedes it.

Beckett supplies a direction: 'What matter who's speaking, someone said, what matter who's speaking.' In an indifference such as this we must recognise one of the fundamental ethical principles of contemporary writing.

(115-16)

As we have seen, this position is curious because it appears to reproduce, albeit in a negative mode, a naive, 'intentionalist' model of the author-function: in seeming to characterize it as a deictic function of the text ("the manner in which a text apparently points to this figure who is outside it and precedes it"); in implicitly conflating the enunciative mode of the narrator with that of the author (indifference to who speaks); and in extrapolating this authorial attitude as a "fundamental ethical principle of contemporary writing."

Foucault outlines more explicitly this "ethical principle" of writing as exteriority:

the writing of our day has freed itself from the necessity of 'expression'; it only refers to itself, yet it is not restricted to the confines of interiority. On the contrary, we recognise it in its exterior deployment. [...] It is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears.

(116)

In other words, the ethical significance of avant-garde writing would lie in its willed dissolution of the linguistic structures of

subjectivity, its abdication of authorial mastery in an attempt to let language speak in its true anonymity. However, Foucault's purpose here is not to endorse this account of the death of the author. Quite the contrary, the ultimate direction of Foucault's essay is to argue that the author-function has less to do with the deictic markers of a text, and more to do with how a text comes to bear a person's name, be collected in a named *oeuvre*, and interpreted in terms of the textual and psychobiographical unity that this process both assumes as an *a priori*, and endlessly seeks to reconstitute as an absent origin. In particular, the post-structuralist theorisation of writing as *écriture*, while displacing the author as a privileged source of textual meaning, has "merely served to arrest the possibility of genuine change" (118) by granting a "primordial status" to writing, whereby the author is preserved in the form of a "transcendental anonymity" (120): precisely the "nameless being" discovered in Beckett's writing.

Foucault's critique centres on the key post-structuralist notion (hitherto central to Foucault's own work) of writing as inherently subversive of the structures of both subjectivity and knowledge. "What Is an Author?" is an inchoate, as yet implicit rejection of the "repressive hypothesis" of the author-function, according to which the figure of the author works simply to *repress* a primordial and unruly textuality. Instead, Foucault's thinking hereafter will concern the *productive* nature of discursive power, where an examination of the author-function becomes a means of broaching the broader question of "under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse?" (137). In these terms, the literary text ceases to be a source of potentially subversive significations, and is reduced to the status of an archival document that would enable a tracing of the discursive boundaries of the sayable and unsayable.

Nevertheless, in his next major essay, "The Order of Discourse," Foucault continues to equivocate with the notion of writing as exteriority. In his opening he quotes a passage from *The Unnamable*, expressing a desire to evade the "obligation to express" by lending his voice to a discourse already in progress:

I should have preferred to become aware that a nameless voice was already speaking long before me, so that I should only have needed to join in, to continue the sentence it had started and lodge myself, without really being noticed, in its interstices.

(51)

Foucault's point is, of course, that this is impossible: no enunciative subterfuge, no trick of the pronouns, can entirely evade the pre-emptive force of the author-function. Indeed, he goes on to make explicit the degree to which any modern writer must consciously work within these enunciative constraints:

I believe that – at least since a certain epoch – the individual who sets out to write a text on the horizon of which a possible oeuvre is proving, takes upon himself the function of the author: what he writes and what he does not write, what he sketches out, even by way of provisional drafts, as an outline of the oeuvre, and what he lets fall by way of commonplace remarks – this whole play of differences is prescribed by the author-function, as he receives it from his epoch, or as he modifies it in his turn.

(59)

While Foucault's model of enunciation concedes the author some degree of agency to "modify" the author-function in his turn, in essence it is powerfully pre-emptive, replacing the transcendental *a priori* of writing as exteriority with the historical *a priori* of the author-function.

Whereas Blanchot emphasises the *desubjectification* of the authorial subject, turning him into a transcendental anonymity, Foucault's theory of statements, outlined in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, insists on the *subjectification* or discursive production of the authorial subject. In terms of Beckett's "ferocious dilemma of expression," for Blanchot the artist cannot speak because he has disappeared into the anonymity of his occasion; for Foucault the artist cannot speak because he is merely a product of his occasion. In each case the *écart* that separates the subject and its utterance is not merely widened, it is sundered, and the ethical dimension of enunciation, its "obligation to express," is elided.

Agamben

The question of authorship, and the relation between the speaker and the act of enunciation, is taken up by Giorgio Agamben in his discussion of testimony in *Remnants of Auschwitz*. The central figure in Agamben's analysis is the *Muselmann*, a word used in the Auschwitz concentration camp to refer to those whose suffering and exhaustion had brought them to "the extreme threshold between life and death" (47) where they had lost the power of speech and the capacity to

respond to their experience. Primo Levi, in his memoir *The Drowned and the Saved*, argues that only the *Muselmann* could be a "complete witness" of the camp, but the *Muselmann* cannot speak (84). This is what Agamben calls Levi's paradox: "how can the true witness be the one who by definition cannot bear witness?" (Agamben, 82). Agamben develops an account of testimony that turns on the question of enunciation, and in particular, on the relation between the survivors like Levi who bear witness to life in the camps, and the *Muselmannen* who cannot speak.

For Agamben, as for Blanchot and Foucault, enunciation, exemplified in the formula 'I speak,' is a "paradoxical act" (116). On a purely semantic (rather than pragmatic) level, the pronoun 'I' is essentially anonymous, since by definition it refers to no individual in particular, but at the same time can refer to any individual who pronounces the word 'I.' Both no-one and everyone, 'I' is neither quite purely linguistic (since its meaning derives from an extra-linguistic context), nor is it quite flesh and blood (since a living being cannot be present in language, can only be 're-presented'). Instead, the 'I' denotes the "pure event" (117) of enunciation itself, the conjunction of living being and empty pronoun in the meaningless fact of having spoken. As Agamben puts it, "This can also be expressed by saying that the one who speaks is not the individual, but language" (117).

At first sight this appears simply to echo the theme of language as exteriority. However, Agamben's concern here is to reconcile this familiar theme with the possibility of ethical speech, and specifically, with the possibility of bearing witness, a form of enunciation that intuitively requires an embodied presence and the enunciation of an 'I.' Agamben's question thus turns on the ethics of testimony, and the "impossibility of speaking" that confronts the witness:

What happens to the living individual when he occupies the 'vacant place' of the subject, when he enters into a process of enunciation? [...] What does it mean to be subject to desubjectification? How can a subject give an account of its own ruin?

(140)

To answer this question, Agamben turns to a concept central to ethical philosophy: *shame*. He draws on the definition outlined by Levinas, who considers shame not in the moral terms of guilt and innocence, but

in ontological terms: as the inescapability of one's own self-presence. The shame of nudity, for example, is not a matter of guilt or innocence, but arises when "the unrestrainable impulse to flee from oneself is confronted by an equally certain impossibility of evasion" (Agamben, 105). In Levinas's definition:

What appears in shame is thus precisely the fact of being riveted to oneself, the radical impossibility of fleeing oneself to hide from oneself, the unalterably binding presence of the I to itself. [...] [Shame] reveals not our nothingness but rather the totality of our existence.

(Levinas, 65)

For Agamben, this experience of shame is a double movement of subjectification and desubjectification:

It is as if our consciousness collapsed and, seeking to flee in all directions, were simultaneously summoned by an irrefutable order to be present at its own defacement. [...] This double movement, which is both subjectification and desubjectification, is shame.

(106)

For Agamben this double movement is characteristic of subjectivity as such: "subjectivity constitutively has the form of subjectification and desubjectification; this is why it is, at bottom, shame" (112). And this double movement also characterizes enunciation, the appearance of subjectivity in language: "the passage from language to discourse appears as a paradoxical act that simultaneously implies both subjectification and desubjectification" (116). Thus flesh-and-blood individuals must desubjectify themselves in order to identify with the pure shifter 'I,' which is "absolutely without any substantiality and content other than its mere reference to the event of discourse" (116). But having desubjectified themselves in this way, speakers find themselves subjected to discourse, where their words are no longer their own, where whatever they say or do not say is entirely overwhelmed by the materiality of language, where they gain access "not so much to a possibility of speaking as to an impossibility of speaking [...] always already anticipated by a glossolalic potentiality over which [they have] neither control nor mastery" (116). This impossibility of speaking recalls the "ferocious dilemma of expression"

that confronts the artist: "It is therefore not surprising that in the face of this intimate extraneousness implicit in the act of speech, poets experience something like responsibility and shame" (117).

For Agamben, it is this shared "impossibility of speaking" that unites the *Muselmann* and the survivors who bear witness; for the *Muselmann*, their experiences have deprived them of the capacity to bear witness; and for the survivors, the fact that they have escaped the fate of the *Muselmann* means they cannot be true witnesses and they therefore essentially have "nothing to say." For Agamben the possibility of testimony depends on this incapacity to speak. To explicate this relation, Agamben turns to the etymology of the term 'author,' arguing that the original sense of the Latin *actor* was as a kind of sponsor, a person who gives legal authority to the incomplete act of a minor, or person otherwise incapable of a legally valid act (148). For Agamben, then, testimony depends on this sense of "authorship" as sponsorship of an incomplete act of speaking:

But if the survivor bears witness for the *Muselmann* [...] then, according to the legal principle by which the acts of the delegated are imputed to the delegate, it is in some way the *Muselmann* who bears witness. [...] Testimony takes place where the speechless one makes the speaking one speak and where the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking in his own speech, such that the silent and the speaking [...] enter into a zone of indistinction in which it is impossible to establish the position of the subject, to identify the 'imagined substance' of the 'I' and, along with it, the true witness.

(120)

Thus, in Agamben's account, "authorship" characterises this complex act of enunciation, in which the one who speaks and the one who cannot speak are united in this doubled figure of shame: "The authority of the witness consists in his capacity to speak solely in the name of an incapacity to speak" (158, emphasis in original).

Conclusion

The value of Agamben's model of enunciation lies in its insistence on the double movement of *subjectification* and *desubjectification*. Where Blanchot elevates the author into a transcendental anonymity, a willed dissolution of subjectivity in the exteriority of language, and where

Foucault reduces the author to a hollow construction of discourse, a phantom of the archive, Agamben's linking of enunciation with shame preserves the concern with embodiment that is such a persistent theme in Beckett's writing. The speech of Beckett's characters is always chained to the embodied voice, a body that is often mutilated or deformed, but never dematerialized, never able to celebrate the blissful dissolution of the subject in the anonymity of a murmur. That is why the modality of enunciation in Beckett is not one of indifference, but of shame.

We are now perhaps in a better position to consider the problem that Beckett addresses in *The Unnamable*. For does not Agamben's figure of shame precisely invoke the "incoercible absence of relation" that is shared by the witness and the *Muselmann*, by the voice of *The Unnamable* and its unnumberable pronouns, proxies and "vice-existers" (37)? Clearly I do not wish to claim that the "unqualifiable murmur" that speaks in *The Unnamable* is in some way the voice of the *Muselmann*. So too, though *The Unnamable* is full of references to prisons and slaughterhouses, testimonies and witnesses, it would be wrong to read these as references, even on a symbolic level, to actual historical events, since this would return us to the paradigm of representation that Beckett is so much at pains to distance himself from. Instead, *The Unnamable* may be read as a text stubbornly dedicated to an examination of the failure of representation and the shame of speaking. In Beckett's writing the ferocious dilemma of expression is never resolved in favour of either the representor or the representee; instead, the task of enunciation is always taken up anew in terms of "the acute and increasing anxiety of the relation itself."

In this, it confronts a historical crisis of enunciation, one that is exemplified in Primo Levi's discussion in *The Truce* of Hurbinek, the nickname given to a nameless, speechless child who appears among the deportees after the liberation of Auschwitz. Over the last few days of his life, Hurbinek stubbornly pronounces a word – "something like 'mass-klo,' 'matsklo'" (198) – which the others cannot make out: "In the following days everybody listened to him in silence, anxious to understand, and among us there were speakers of all the languages of Europe; but Hurbinek's word remained secret" (198).

As in the case of Hurbinek and the word 'mass-klo' or 'matsklo,' it is never just language that speaks, but always *someone* – perhaps nameless, perhaps speechless, perhaps even dead – but always someone. It is not through a submission to the exteriority of language,

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but through a submission to the shame of speaking, that the author takes on the "ferocious dilemma of expression." That is why writing is always an *authorial* act, an act whose ethical force lies in neither decision nor compulsion but in the act of enunciation itself, in which are indissolubly mingled the febrile speech of the living and the authority of the dead.

I have to speak, whatever that means. Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak. No one compels me to, there is no one, it's an accident, a fact. Nothing can ever exempt me from it.

(Beckett 1958, 36)

Notes

1. I would like to thank the respondents from the Samuel Beckett Working Group session at Trinity College, Dublin on 8 April 2006, and especially Angela Moorjani, Linda Ben-Zvi and Jonathan Kalb, for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
2. In my discussion of the *Three Dialogues* I rely on the convention, albeit unwarranted, that B. and D. may be taken to stand for Beckett and Duthuit, respectively.

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DEMENTED VS. CREATIVE EMULATION IN *MURPHY*

Thomas J. Cousineau

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Beckett's notes for *Murphy* in his *Whoroscope* Notebook, especially his distinction between a *force* and a *guide*, allow us to see in *Murphy*'s subservience to a succession of "forces," culminating in his tragicomic effort to emulate Mr. Endon's psychosis, a degraded image of Beckett's own creative emulation of Dante and James Joyce, who serve as his principal literary guides in this novel. Beckett's highly original adaptation of the models bequeathed to him by these predecessors include his pervasive use of chiasmic patterns in *Murphy* and his echoing of the story of Icarus in the narration of *Murphy*'s own doomed flight.

Samuel Beckett's original model for *Murphy*, as recorded in his *Whoroscope* Notebook, took the form of two abstract figures: "H," which designated a horoscope, and "X," which later became *Murphy*. Describing "H" as "a corpus of motives" and "X" as having no motives, Beckett then made the intriguing observation that, although "H" is "any old oracle to begin with," he later becomes "No longer a guide to be consulted but a force to be obeyed" (Ackerley, 22). Beckett's distinction between a guide and a force suggests the possibility that we should locate the generative tension of the novel, not in the more usually invoked Cartesian mind-body dualism, but in the contrast between the *force* that ultimately leads *Murphy* to his demented and self-destructive identification with Mr. Endon, and the various literary *guides*, especially Dante and James Joyce, whom Beckett himself freely "consults" as he pursues his own, highly original emulation of their work.

Three episodes of *Murphy* involve encounters that are presided over by a "force," beginning with Suk, continuing with the Clinch brothers, and concluding with Mr. Endon, that *Murphy*, despite occasional misgivings, willingly obeys. The disaster that awaits him at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat will be prepared, during the conversation in which Ticklepenny proposes that he work as an orderly

Kegan Paul) in 1976, and his last, *Samuel Beckett Chronology* (Palgrave Macmillan), to 'celebrate' the centenary in 2006.

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