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## END-LESS DECONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF IN SAMUEL BECKETT'S NOVEL *THE UNNAMABLE*<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this paper is to interpret Samuel Beckett's novel *The Unnamable* inside the framework of poststructuralist criticism, primarily that of Jacques Derrida. The first part of the paper is dedicated to exploring Beckett's specific, bilingual situation in relation to how *The Unnamable* is narratively constructed. The main analysis focuses on the novel's narrative structure as a process of end-less discursive deconstruction of the narrator's self, which, nevertheless, continuously aspires toward that end, toward *silence*. Special emphasis is placed on the analysis of the discursive treatment of *the body*, narratively positioned as the cultural product and physical setting of such discourse, but also as an insurmountable obstacle in the process of self-deconstruction, which can only go so far. We come to the conclusion that it is via *The Unnamable*'s stream-of-consciousness narration and its attempted dissolution of the self, established in the Western metaphysical mindset, that Beckett most radically criticized the ideological conception of identity.

**Keywords:** Beckett, *The Unnamable*, poststructuralism, deconstruction, Derrida, body, identity, ideology

### **Introduction**

In 1960, Martin Esslin coined the phrase "Theatre of the Absurd", listing Samuel Beckett as one of its principal representatives. Esslin defined the Theatre of the Absurd as the literary expression of confronting "a world deprived of a generally accepted integrating principle, which has become disjointed, purposeless – absurd," (2001: 399) referencing Nietzsche's Zarathustra and his proclamation at the end of the XIX century that God is dead<sup>3</sup>. Although in

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3 Esslin also drew connections between Albert Camus's Philosophy of the Absurd and the artistic expression of the representatives of The Theatre of the Absurd, quoting Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. [...] This divorce between man and this life [...] is properly the feeling of absurdity." (Camus 1991: 6)

this paper we intend to analyze one of Beckett's novels and not his dramatic opus, his obsession with the *absurd* is likewise usually perceived as a vital characteristic of his late prose work, written along with his most prominent absurdist plays after World War II. To cite from *The Unnamable*: "That the impossible should be asked of me, good, what else could be asked of me? But the absurd! Of me whom they have reduced to reason." (Beckett 2009: 331)

Beckett's novel *The Unnamable* (1958) is the last in the sequence of what has since been termed as his "French trilogy". It was first published under the title *L'Innommable* in French, just as the other two novels of the trilogy were initially written in French (*Molloy* and *Malone meurt*). Subsequently, Beckett himself translated them into English<sup>4</sup>.

Beckett's maturity as a writer's writer comes with the composition of *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*, the three novels he started writing in French in the late 1940s, then translated fairly quickly into English [...]. With virtually simultaneous publication on both sides of the Atlantic, the trilogy, as it became known, soon established his credentials as *the fifties* writer, the most remarked-upon practitioner of all that was fractious and hilarious and nouveau in the *nouveau roman*. (Brater 2011: 118)

Beckett's literary world is to a great extent permeated by an existential nausea and the contemplation of the absurd, but his expression is also unique in its attempt at linguistic deconstruction of what was until the XX century considered as stable human identity (Sultan 2004: 421-424). His work transcends the limits of an existentialist perspective and is today thought to constitute one of the first signals of the end of modernity, as well as a sort of prelude to the work of a number of prominent poststructuralist philosophers: "as early as the 1930s and 1940s Beckett had already anticipated, often in strikingly prescient ways, many of the defining themes and ideas of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida." (Begam 1997: 4)

In the following analysis, Beckett's novel *The Unnamable* will be interpreted inside the framework of poststructuralist criticism, with special emphasis on the work of Jacques Derrida. However, prior to the analysis of *The Unnamable*, which will be grounded in a close exploration of the discourse employed by the novel's narrator, we shall provide reasoning as to why Beckett decided to write in French, which was not his mother tongue, and how it influenced the conception of his "French trilogy", primarily considering the deconstructive discourse of *The Unnamable*.

### ***Beckett's French as a method of detachment***

Samuel Beckett was born and raised in Ireland, but during the course of his life, unlike his contemporary and an Irish emigrant like himself, James Joyce, he placed a thematic barrier between his literary work and his homeland. The

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4 Publication of French and English editions of the novels in the "French trilogy" are as follows: *Molloy* (1951; 1955), *Malone meurt* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1956), *L'Innommable* (1953), *The Unnamable* (1958).

narrators in Beckett's novels are, almost exclusively, voices devoid of any decipherable background – “pure voices’ without origin, national, spiritual, familial, often genderless, amorphous creations of the author’s mind.”<sup>5</sup> (Todorović 2009: 435) Furthermore, it was not solely a thematic distance which Beckett established in his work, but a linguistic one, as well. Most literary exiles decide on a writing language based on a combination of personal, cultural, and political reasons<sup>6</sup>. For Beckett, who voluntarily chose to immigrate to France, the decision to write in French, as we shall show, came as liberation in terms of style, and, as he later demonstrated, of literary expression.

Beckett studied modern languages at Trinity College, and, while still invested in a potential career as a professor, taught English in Paris and French at Trinity in London (Gerzić 2010). However, soon he would dedicate himself completely to writing. In the beginning, he wrote exclusively in English, and most of those works had clearly structured plots, while the stories followed their main protagonists on adventures in recognizable cities and countries. His sentences in English were complex, burdened by erudite vocabulary, and fully exploring the richness of his mother tongue (Carrière 2005: 19-30). But it wasn't long before Beckett grew disillusioned with the English language, as was obvious from a letter to his German friend Alex Kaun:

More and more my own language appears to me like a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the *Nothingness*) behind it. Grammar and style. To me they seem to have become as irrelevant as a Victorian bathing suit or the imperturbability of a true gentleman. A mask. Let us hope the time will come [...] when language is most efficiently used where it is being most efficiently misused [...] To bore one hole after another in it, until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through: I cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer today. (qt. in Gontarski 2010: 216; my emphasis)

This letter became an artistic manifesto for Beckett, whose ideas bear remarkable resemblance to Jacques Derrida's poststructuralist tenets<sup>7</sup>. One of Derrida's metaphors for the deconstructive process, expressed in his *Memoirs of the Blind*, is attempting to peep through the jalousie window or blinds of traits which produce our reality, and which “are neither sensible nor intelligible.” (1993: 55) Behind such “reality”, one finds Nothingness, that is, one simply does not find, is not capable of finding, of seeing “what lurks behind

5 This and all subsequent translations in this paper are by Tijana Matović.

6 In her study *Alien Tongues: Bilingual Russian Writers of the “First” Emigration* (1989), Elizabeth Klosty Beaujour discussed the importance of the decision an immigrant writer makes about which language to employ professionally. Such a decision ultimately becomes the consequence of idiosyncratic solutions, but also of a conscious awareness of the numerous factors such a solution implies (qt. in Miletic 2008: 31).

7 In his essay “Structure, Sign, and Play”, today considered to mark the starting point of poststructuralism in the United States, Derrida discussed some of the basic tenets of deconstruction. The paper was presented in 1966, the same year Michael Foucault's *The Order of Things* was published. In it, Derrida posited that deconstruction implies that centered structures be thought in their conventionally *un-thinkable* condition – as decentered. The “structurality of structure” (Derrida 2005: 353) had to be thought, and the presence of the “self” reevaluated, as “not a fixed locus but a function.” (2005: 353)

it.” The Platonic *eidos* is unreachable, but, according to Derrida, in aspiring toward it, one does get to peep through the ever-shifting blinds into the Other. In the course of one’s play with the elements of discourse, of reality, human existence becomes enveloped in time, and thus takes place. Beckett portrayed this paradox, which is essential to the questioning of the metaphysics of presence, like no other author before him. He began by making a bilingual switch.

Beckett made a conscious literary transition from English to French in order to strip his writing of “dishonest” layers of meaning, to do away with style. Cockerham pointed out that “what seems to attract [Beckett] about French is the very fact that it is less second nature to him than is English, that his relationship to it is different and makes him more able to manipulate it consciously.” (1975: 156) The *foreignness* of a second language was what attracted Beckett to French, not any intrinsic quality of that particular language. “The writing of bilinguals tends to play more with the separability of sign and object,” (Miletić 2008: 19) which is why writing in French forced Beckett to face *the arbitrariness of the sign*, concealed by tradition, culture, customs, stereotypes, and mentality instilled in the taken-for-granted mother tongue. “The culture has become a ‘second nature’ to such an extent [...] that a writer has to search, artificially, for a *déracinement* (uprooting) to allow himself a less self-conscious and therefore more natural access to language.” (Miletić 2008: 29) And not only the arbitrariness of sign, but also the artificiality of fiction is revealed once the second language is accepted as a mode of expression – “a foreign language is already a kind of fiction.” (Edwards 1992: 70)

On the other hand, as much as a consciously learned (as differentiated from unconsciously acquired) language enables one to manipulate her/his subject matter with greater lucidity, the impossibility to transcend language by completely deconstructing it, “in order to get at the things behind it,” with Beckett remained an issue in shaping narratives, which *The Unnamable* exemplifies in its extremity. The structure imposed is not the structure to be rid of, which is what tortures all Beckett’s narrators. The narrator of *The Unnamable* cannot in earnest escape structure. He *is* structure behind whose discourse lies only the unnamable nothingness: “I’m in words, made of words, others’ words.” (Beckett 2009: 379) But he continuously struggles against it: “It [the voice] issues from me, it fills me, it clamours against my walls, 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, with this voice that is not mine...” (Beckett 2009: 301) Nevertheless, if it did not ultimately help him succeed in his efforts, Beckett’s French assisted him in managing his narrators with greater control, in giving them linguistic tools to at least attempt to deconstruct their selves. And once it was translated into English, his “French trilogy” managed to retain its distance from familiar clichés, the distance which Beckett was especially successful in embodying in *The Unnamable*.

***Simulacrum of deconstruction in The Unnamable: the end-less struggle***

During the first few decades after the publication of Beckett's trilogy, a tendency among French critics was to treat it *mimetically*, paraphrasing the metadiscourse which Beckett had already made apparent in his novels (Tešanović 2013: 135-136). Then, from the 1990s onwards, inspired by Merleau-Ponty and Benveniste, productive semiotic and phenomenological perspectives of French Beckettian criticism flourished (Tešanović 2013: 137). On the other hand, the body of Anglophone critical literature on *The Unnamable* initially treated it in an existential / absurdist key, while only later it began leaning toward the framework of (post)structuralism, leaving behind existentialism as an inadequate framework (Schwalm 1997: 181), which is the point from which this analysis will begin.

Namely, Derrida wrote extensively on the "center [which] is not the center" given that it is "the very thing within the structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality." (2005: 352) *The Unnamable's* narrator likewise seems to escape imprisonment in discourse via self-deconstruction, but he is also inextricably bound to the position he occupies within that discourse: "I like to think I occupy the centre, but nothing is less certain." (Beckett 2009: 288) He is aware of not having the ability to gaze beyond the blinds of signifiers which constitute his language and the philosophical basis of his existence:

There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest. (Derrida 2005: 354)

As interpreted from a poststructuralist perspective, any discourse is structured with respect to its elementary linguistic premise. What differentiates a poststructuralist from a structuralist perspective is that it makes room for deconstructive play within the boundaries of the said structure, displacing its constituents and dethroning the supposed existence of the center. *The Unnamable's* narrator is aware of the deconstructive demand guiding him through life: "[T]he discourse must go on. So one invents obscurities. Rhetoric." (Beckett 2009: 288)

However, the principal urge which propels the narrator of *The Unnamable* to continue speaking is, paradoxically, the desire to become silent. The inability to control, and ultimately overcome the voice, is what tortures him incessantly: "I shall never be silent. Never. [...] The best would be not to begin. But I have to begin. That is to say I have to go on." (Beckett 2009: 286) Silence is the chimera in Beckett's works, only apparently achieved at the end of *The Unnamable*. The narrator ends his discourse not on account of reaching closure, which would bring about a meaningful conclusion, but with a metanarrative realization that the book must end sometime. There exists no concluding sentence that has not been pronounced earlier, no summing idea; neither con-

solation, nor a statement of ultimate depression. The reader is simply provided with an earlier expression of a possible impossibility: “I can’t go on. I’ll go on.” (Beckett 2009: 407) The novel ends only formally, but it actually inverts back into itself, alternatively closing and opening the narrative discourse.

The succession of deconstructive acts which establishes the narrative flow of *The Unnamable* is also organized as inverted discourse. Each utterance is essentially contradictory, their boundaries becoming less clear as the narrator further decomposes his self. Initially in distinct paragraphs and short sentences with a determinate core sense, the narrative soon turns into one long paragraph, and sentences latch onto each other, separated by comas signifying only short pauses, which discursively mark the never-ending narration of a self created by discursive patterns, and which simultaneously further reiterates those discursive patterns. Therefore, *The Unnamable* functions as a simulacrum, given that it only simulates the deconstruction of the self, of subjectivity. In that sense, all existence is labeled as a simulacrum, only feigning itself.

This narrative method evokes Derrida’s term *iterability*, or *citationality*, which refers to a repetition of signs as the principal condition of identity (see Derrida 1977). “A structure ‘is’ a structure to the extent that it persists as one,” (Butler 1993: 265) Judith Butler pointed out in her discussion of Derrida. But since signifiers are not pre-given, but are pulled into a constant differential exchange, as well as a consequential “*différance* of this irreducible difference,” (Derrida 2005: 370) any resolution, or finiteness of an individual self, is deferred *ad infinitum*. In *The Unnamable*, iterability is what forces and allows the narrator to continue speaking, but just as “it is impossible to say anything in a language in which there is no repetition, it is equally impossible to say anything if one merely repeats oneself.” (Connor 1988: 16) Again, we reach the paradox upon which Beckett’s narrator tries to build his self after deconstructing it completely – the endeavor which will prove to be impossible.

*The Unnamable*’s narrator wants to be God (or at least his own God) who was denied to humankind at the end of the XIX century. And he fails at it. He attempts to create his universe from scratch, to deconstruct the self which is imposed, the body which is marked, and arrive at the essence of things in order to build upon them again. “What doesn’t come to me from me has come to the wrong address,” (Beckett 2009: 343) proclaims the narrator. He desires the end of all things known to the self, and the end of that self as well, in order to from that silence begin speaking as the *I* he feels he was denied.

In *The Unnamable*, *they* or *delegates* are the authorities that the narrator credits with creating the self he cannot escape through deconstruction, although the utopian identity assumed to exist as an escapist alternative proves to be illusory. He has a particular narrative progression in mind in order to “get at the things,” which is hinted by his occasional use of conscious self-censure – “that is soon said,” (Beckett 2009: 286, 331, 345, 361, 367, 404) he would correct – himself. But as early as the first page of the novel, he demonstrates awareness of how essentially flawed and contradictory his discursive reconfiguration of that self is: “I shall not be alone, in the beginning. I am of course



alone. Alone. That is soon said. *Things have to be soon said.*" (Beckett 2009: 286; my emphasis). This process is compatible with the propositions of deconstruction in Derridean terminology, but it pertains to a different sensibility.

In his essay "The Ends of Man," Derrida stated that "[t]he purity of the end cannot be thought on the basis of man." (1969: 43) This proposition supports his previous stance that:

There are [...] two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as *an exile*. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology – in other words, throughout his entire history – has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play. (2005: 369-370; my emphasis)

The narrator of *The Unnamable* makes such an attempt at *un-naming* whatever comprises the universe he inhabits, while simultaneously coming to terms with the fact that such an action can never be completely subversive, since he is not capable of transcending the discourse he belongs to, as no one ultimately is. However, Beckett's narrator still inhabits a space of melancholy and *exile*, not one of "Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is 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 which is offered to an active interpretation." (Derrida 2005: 369) Nor does he allow the absurd to become a source of happiness, as it was for Albert Camus, who stated in *The Myth of Sisyphus* that "necessary imperfection [...] makes happiness perceptible." (1991: 70) *The Unnamable's* narrator is still overcome with a melancholy nostalgia for the chronotopic locus of ontological stability, and he exclaims: "[T]o end would be wonderful." (Beckett 2009: 296)

### ***The continual dethroning of mind and corporality as a lesson in narrative futility***

*The Unnamable* is both in theme and structure a continuation of the previous two novels in the "French trilogy". *Molloy* consists of two parallel narratives – one told by Molloy, the other by Moran. And although Moran is assigned a task to locate Molloy, therein lies the only substantial link between these two narratives. *Molloy* parodies the supposedly rounded, self-sufficient autobiographical narrative via the incapability of its narrators to assign clearly structured form to their stories. Schwalm notes that "both narrators undergo a sort of degeneration into semantic solipsism and regression from the use of language as symbols to the mere issue of signals." (1997: 183-184) *Malone Dies* goes further in that language becomes the main setting, where the impossibility of the individual's presence is made apparent. "The exteriority of self, its relation to the world is reduced to a few belongings and – almost – to

the materiality of the signifier itself: pencil and paper.” (Schwalm 1997: 184) Language begins to refer exclusively to itself, without the means to signify anything outside of it.

As for *The Unnamable*, there are a number of reasons why Beckett decided to entitle it so. Not only is the narrative progression of the novel conceived as the narrator’s failed attempt at naming himself, separate from the imposed self and the likewise imposed body, but also everything else – all that is not the narrator – is unnamable. On the other hand, whatever the narrator brings into his discourse instantly becomes labeled with a signifier and, therefore, some sort of necessary naming occurs. This paradox is unavoidable with Beckett, and also highly suggestive of poststructuralist thought on discourse, which was posited in its framework as all-encompassing.

The narrators from the other two novels in the trilogy, as well as some previous Beckett’s novels (e.g. *Malone*, *Molloy*, *Murphy*), are employed by *The Unnamable*’s narrator as “his creatures” (Beckett 2009: 294), the products of his imagination. This, however, need not be interpreted as the narrator’s claiming to have written the previous novels, thus identifying himself with Beckett, or vice versa, but as a statement of the inexistence, or essential irrelevance of existence, of the Other. In the world of *The Unnamable*, the narrator is, as he himself is aware, alone: “I alone am man and all the rest divine.” (Beckett 2009: 294)

*The Unnamable*’s narrator gradually becomes aware that he is neither of the personified selves which he portrays throughout the novel. Mahood is the “me whom they have reduced to reason.” (Beckett 2009: 331) The suffix *-hood* indicates a condition of being, its essence. Mahood’s first name, or simply another one of his names, is Basil, which indicates a kind of base/basis supporting the individual’s identity. Mahood, or *minehood*, is the ideologically inscribed cognitive subject for the narrator of *The Unnamable*. On the other hand, Worm is the corporal, spatially present part of the subject, which literally translates to a maggot – a body which has not yet been given shape, nor has it been introduced to sensation from a cognitive perspective. He<sup>8</sup> is, therefore, incapable of any form of reflection or communication. Unlike Mahood, who according to *The Unnamable*’s narrator is not unique, “Worm is the first of his kind,” (Beckett 2009: 331) or at least it appears so to the narrator when he conceives Worm. But Worm soon becomes just another trap: “For if I am Mahood, I am Worm too, plop. Or if I am not yet Worm, I shall be when I cease to be Mahood, plop.” (Beckett 2009: 331-332) Worm brings to the narrator no satisfaction of peering into the abyss of man as a whole, because Worm is only a product of Mahood’s ideological discourse. Although imagined as one who would be able to stand from the outside of “the end of man”, it is in the moment of being named, called, thought, that Worm is already dragged into the spatial and temporal dimension of the narrator, located before an absolute

8 All characters in Beckett’s trilogy are male, even Worm, who is supposed to be as generic and primordial as possible. Since Beckett certainly had the neuter pronoun “it” at his disposal, it would be interesting for further research to look into the gender aspect of Beckett’s work.



deconstruction of being. *The Unnamable's* narrator begins thinking the body as, like the mind, discursively constructed, without an ontological primacy of its own. He arrives at this realization when he distances his supposedly independent self from both Mahood and Worm: "I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating." (Beckett 2009: 376)

In this instance, Beckett's narrative deconstruction coincides with contemporary poststructural treatment of the body. Considering the relation between the individual self and power, Michael Foucault writes: "[The individual] is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals." (1994: 214) However, what Foucault posited in his expansive theoretical work about the constructed nature of the body, Judith Butler criticized with respect to Foucault's persistent (and contradictory to his philosophy) marking of the body as a surface, onto which history enforces power, therefore implicitly labelling the body as ontotheologically prior to signification (see Butler 1989). In her study *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler developed her theory of *the body* as "bound up with signification from the start," but admitted that "to think through the indissolubility of materiality and signification is no easy matter," (1993: 30) and, one might add, a fundamentally impossible one.

This is the setting where *The Unnamable's* narrator becomes tortured by his inability to completely shed the burden of signification. Mahood envelops him in ideology and Worm drags him down into accepting the corporal and material as completely evident and primordial. The narrator accuses *the delegates*, among whom Mahood or Basil is the most prominent: "They want me to lose patience and rush, suddenly beside myself, to their rescue. How transparent that all is! [...] Mahood I couldn't die. Worm will I ever get born? It's the same problem." (Beckett 2009: 345) He pierces through the pain with a realization that he is neither Mahood nor Worm, but is also simultaneously both of them, inextricably bound to the ideology of his language and the body constructed by that language, its sheer materiality inaccessible to his self, which is again not free from the differential discourse, always in a state of deferral: "I'm in a dungeon, I've always been in a dungeon, I hear everything, every word they say, it's the only sound, as if I were speaking, to myself, out loud, in the end you don't know any more, a voice that never stops..." (Beckett 2009: 362)

However, as emphasized in the previous section, Beckett's narrator suffers tremendously because of his inability to put a stop to the discourse which produces him, because he cannot induce *silence*. He must go on. But, at the same time, he does not feel capable of proceeding. Torn between participating in the act of deconstruction and wanting to end it, *The Unnamable's* narrator is pulled down by the materiality of the mangled body, jarred and grotesquely pitiful. He is without limbs, reduced to the torso and the head, which neither hears nor sees, with empty sockets which can only shed tears, and do so incessantly. "[A]n eye, it weeps for the least little thing, a yes, a no, the yesses make it

weep, the noes too, the perhapses particularly.” (Beckett 2009: 366) Butler acknowledged that Derrida’s and her own stance concerning the body being the product of discourse “is not to say that the materiality of bodies is simply and only a linguistic effect which is reducible to a set of signifiers.” (1993: 30) But to affirm the “materiality of the body” would be to overlook the intertwined nature of materiality and signification, which allows the perception of materiality in the first place. On the other hand, it is in *The Unnamable* that this “materiality of the body” is overtly tackled as the source of pain and suffering for the narrator. The body escapes complete narrativization via mind/intellect, just as discourse cannot be simply thought of as building upon matter.

A difference between Beckett’s and Derrida’s challenging ideas about the metaphysics of presence is in the cry of the unnamable. In Derrida’s conception the cry is a point of affirmative deconstructive action. To quote the famous ending of his article “Structure, Sign, and Play”: “the as yet *unnamable* [...] is proclaiming itself and [...] can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity.” (Derrida 2005: 370; my emphasis) Beckett’s narrator, on the other hand, is in the state of shock caused by the dethroning of the Center. Derrida’s deconstruction finds consolation in the Other; Beckett’s deconstruction is focused on the suffering which stems from failed attempts to destroy the self before building it from scratch again. What prevents Beckett’s narrator from gladly participating in the everlasting (since the end is unthinkable) exchange of a countless number of signifiers, is the pain of what keeps the linguistically shaped mind situated – the body, the corporal, the material – which the imperfect self is not capable of shedding. Beckett places emphasis on the suffering body, the coming back to the remains of the *I* that does not budge before the attempts at deconstructing the self. The subject may and indeed does refuse to be captured by reflection, but it is still there, signified, or remembered, by the presence of the ailing body which cannot be denied by an imperfect mind. Suffering is never absent in Beckett’s universe, and suffering pertains to the subject.

### ***The (im)possible debris of the self in The Unnamable or, Instead of a conclusion***

Beckett’s narrator is tortured by his inability to ontologically establish or completely deconstruct himself. His discourse marking corporal and intellectual presence causes him pain as much as his self aches with insufficiency. While finding solace in the process of self-deconstruction, he does not succeed in accepting his existence as flawed in its origin. It becomes clear early on, that Beckett’s absurd is not ultimately compatible with that of Albert Camus, nor is his deconstruction completely parallel to that of Jacques Derrida. While all three discerned the paradoxes the XX-century individual had to endure and grapple with, they came up with different responses to this intrinsically contradictory condition. Camus’ was the happiness of Sisyphus who “multiplies

[...] what he cannot unify” (1991: 74), Beckett’s was the desolation of a ravaged being, forced to endure what he cannot explain, and Derrida’s was the affirmation of play in displacing the “center [which] is not the center.” (2005: 352) Some of their discursive practices are on a par with each other, but one should not identify their philosophical backgrounds and narrative methods.

Beckett’s narrator endures existence instead of accepting it as it is. One might tend to find consolation in the novel’s closing words: “I can’t go on, I’ll go on,” (Beckett 2009: 407) but such conclusions do not seem to be supported by what we find in the novel. To impose a forced humanism on Beckett’s writing would be to misrepresent it. The literature he produced may seem to require a life-affirming footnote, because it would simplify the gravity of existential nausea his narrators suffer from as a result of what the basic premise of Beckett’s narratives is – to be human means (paradoxically) not to be human. *The Unnamable*’s narrator states: “[I]n my life, since we must call it so, there were three things, the inability to speak, the inability to be silent, and solitude, that’s what I’ve had to make the best of,” (Beckett 2009: 389) or more concisely: “Where I am there is no one but me, who am not.” (2009: 348) The novel rests on that paradoxical idea, which it then proceeds to deconstruct along the discursive line(s). The question of where to go from there should not imply a false representation of the text on account of a requirement for humanistic validation. To quote from *The Unnamable*, “that’s that,” (Beckett 2009: 374) but, taking into account the linguistically inexpressible, it also stands for so much more.

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## БЕС-КРАЈНА ДЕКОНСТРУКЦИЈА СОПСТВА У РОМАНУ НЕИМЕНЉИВИ САМЈУЕЛА БЕКЕТА

Резиме

Овај рад има циљ да пружи интерпретацију романа *Неименљиви* Самјуела Бекета у оквирима постструктуралистичке критике, првенствено из позиције Жака Дерида. Први део рада проматра Бекетову јединствену, билингвалну позицију у односу на то како је роман *Неименљиви* наративно уобличен. Централна анализа бави се наративном структуром романа као процесом бес-крајне дискурзивне деконструкције нараторовог сопства, премда оне која непрекидно тежи ка том крају, ка *тшишини*. Посебан акценат је на анализи дискурзивног уобличења *тшела* у *Неименљивом*, које је наративно представљено као културни производ и физичко поприште тог дискурса, али и као непремостива препрека у процесу само-деконструкције, која неизоставно има своје границе. Долазимо до закључка да је путем наратије тока свести у *Неименљивом* и њој инхерентног покушаја разлагања сопства, оног које је засновано у Западном метафизичком мишљењу, Бекет спровео јединствену радикалну критику идеолошких концепција идентитета.

**Кључне речи:** Бекет, *Неименљиви*, постструктурализам, деконструкција, Дерида, тело, идентитет, идеологија

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