THE SAME AND THE OTHER:

BECKETT'S *THE UNNAMEABLE*, DERRIDA AND LEVINAS

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In an article concerning the *Mabo* decision of the Australian High Court Paul Patton discusses Deleuze's notion of the problem-field around which structures are formed (Patton, 1995: 90). Events are themselves differences in that, like the present which repeats itself but is always a different present, the events which occur in our world are always different from one another. They are the things which happen in the world, the things which have happened and which are happening now and it is this series of happenings which define who we are. Deleuze further considers that, like an animal adapting to a given environment, events happen around problems and it is the problems which define the shape of a given society. The process is neatly summarised by Patton:

> The specific problems involved in a given form of society will determine the economic, juridical and political arrangements which constitute particular solutions, while the crucial events which mark the history of a society may be understood as the emergence of actual solutions to its problems, or the replacement of one set of solutions by another. (90)

Vincent Descombes has shown how the first generation of French post-World War Two philosophers (a generation which included Sartre and Merleau-Ponty) were hankering after a 'concrete philosophy', one which would explain lived experience. The theme of the relation between the same and the other is one which Descombes identifies as being central to contemporary French philosophy. I intend, here, to build upon this notion of the problem-field by supposing that the nature of the relation between the same and the other and the questions of justice and ethical behaviour it

brings with it constituted a problem which seemed pressing after World War Two in France, and in making this supposition I will assume that insights into the nature of these problems might be gained by comparing contiguous but separate responses to it.

One of the philosophers working in post-war France who has thought most closely about this relation between the same and the other and the question of justice is Emmanuel Levinas. This theme is, arguably, also central to The Unnamable, one of the more challenging of the novels of Samuel Beckett which he wrote (originally in French before later translating it into English himself) in Paris just after the war. Jacques Derrida has suggested that there are close affinities between his own work and that of Samuel Beckett1. Derrida has also closely engaged with the work of Levinas in considering the problem of the relation between the same and the other and in developing his own response to the problem of justice. I will attempt here, then, to read through these problems in comparing the manner in which they are treated in Beckett's The Unnamable, Levinas's Totality and Infinity and Derrida's 'Violence and Metaphysics', 'Force of Law', and Spectres of Marx. In each a central concern is the problem of justice and accordingly this essay will orbit around this problem.

Developing the concept of 'justice' in Spectres of Marx, Derrida cites Levinas from Totality and Infinity: 'the relation with others [autrui] - that is to say, justice'.[2] It is apparent, then, how the problems of the relation between the same and the other and the problem of justice might be closely linked. Further, as will be discussed below, both these concerns are tied in with the question of language in Beckett, Levinas, and Derrida.

In Totality and Infinity, the 'same' which is most clearly represented by the Ego, is set against the 'other', most clearly represented as others.[3] The other, however, is absolutely other. To briefly clarify this point, for Levinas the central conflict (between justice and injustice) involves the opposed conceptions of totality and infinity. Totality (injustice) involves the same reducing all difference to itself, while the concept of infinity (justice), which Levinas opposes to totality, expresses the infinite (irreducible) difference between the same and the other. The other can never be reduced to the same because it is absolutely other. What is infinite then, is the relation between the same and the other. The infinity is an irreducibility, the same can never contain or reappropriate the other, the distance between the two can never be effaced, their difference is that which can never be reconciled, is difference itself. This is a relation through which the terms can not form a totality: totality rests crucially distinct from infinity (Levinas: 39).

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In *The Unnameable* it might be claimed that at times Beckett finds himself wandering this country which Levinas has positioned at 'the antipodes of Spinozism'. The analogy is loose. Beckett does not systematically reject Spinoza or any other philosopher; rather I will argue that in a certain sense *The Unnameable* might be read as a kind of parody of philosophical discourse in general [4] while remaining an oscillating critique which might be read against certain philosophical positions and be said to converge with others (in particular that of Derrida).

It might be useful to digress for a moment so as to sketch the status which will be attributed to Beckett's novel in relation to works of philosophy. Beckett's knowledge of Descartes is well known. A number of critics have remarked that the unnameable is a Cartesian cogito, if a highly unusual and unstable one, a sentient being who finds himself in the black box of his own consciousness. [5] The problem is recognisably a philosophical one: what is the nature of the Being which this being is experiencing, what constitutes the 'I' who experiences and the space that is inhabited? It is also a literary one: how does the unnameable escape being, the pain commensurate with being, how does he exit the labyrinth of language he finds himself in. In common with a philosophical text the work has a 'methodology' and both orbit the question of justice and questions concerning the law:

> What am I to do, what shall I do, what should I do, in my situation, how proceed? By aporia pure and simple? Or by affirmations and negations invalidated as uttered, or sooner or later?
> (Beckett, 1979: 267)

If it were a philosophical text we might note that Beckett seeks to proceed neither by affirmation (as in a purely positive ontology such as that of Spinoza) or negation (as in the progression by negation Derrida identifies in the work of Levinas[6]) nor by the synthesis of thesis and antithesis as in Hegelian dialectic, but through the more or less pure positing of a question mark. The procedure of this questioning apparently marks a limit where Beckett veers away from philosophical discourse: he proceeds, in fact, through unsubstantiated supposition. This pure supposition, however, is always haunted by aporia: the narrator constantly reminds us of the provisional nature of his guesses. The suppositions then, never serve as a stable ground on which to build but carry with them and draw attention to the question mark of the question.

LANGUAGE AS THE OTHER

While Beckett and Levinas might be said to be, at times and to a certain extent, thinking the same relation, a crucial difference is in how the two writers understand language. For Levinas language is the link between the same and the other which is, in turn, justice:

> We shall try to show that the relation between the same and the other - upon which we seem to impose such extraordinary conditions - is language. . . . The relation between the same and the other, metaphysics, is primordially enacted as conversation [discours - discourse], where the same, gathered up in its ipseity as an 'I,'. . . leaves itself. (Levinas: 39)

Metaphysics then, like justice, is originally dependent on the play of language. Levinas's assertion that metaphysics (the relation of the same to the other) precedes ontology is based on an understanding of an originary language. For beings such as ourselves, which comes first? Consciousness of Being (with a capital 'B', the Being of ontology, of Spinoza's substance), or consciousness? Now, consciousness, for Levinas, involves the relation of the same to the other which opens consciousness, and what is consciousness of Being other than consciousness:

> . . . already the comprehension of Being is said to the existent, who again arises behind the theme in which he is presented. This 'saying to the other' - this relationship to the other as interlocutor, this relation with an existent-precedes all ontology; it is the ultimate relation in Being. Ontology presupposes metaphysics. (47-48) [7]

Derrida notes that, through the concept of the face of the other, and the face-to-face of the same and the other, Levinas equates language with thought. The face-to-face might stand for an originary language, a flickering into consciousness that is already language and is still not language, a strange 'language' that escapes the category of language, a non-signifying 'language'.

> . . . the face-to-face eludes every category. For within it the face is given simultaneously as expression and as speech. Not only as glance, but as the original unity of glance and speech, eyes and mouth, that speaks, but also pronounces its hunger. Thus it is also that which hears the invisible, for "thought is language," and "thought is in an element analogous to sound and not to light." .

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> . . the face does not signify. . . .Thought is speech, and is there-
> fore immediately face. (Derrida, 1978: 100)

A similar equation of thought to language is apparent in Beckett in the nar-
rative of Worm. Worm as Worm, in his integrity, is pure existence, pure
Being; he sleeps, without knowing, without sensing. He only comes into
being as Worm once he begins to sense: he hears, a noise. A noise he later
realises or imagines has been going on for a long while, a long while before
he was able to recognise it. A noise he later recognises as language, a noise
he later recognises as, perhaps, his own voice. He is given an eye with
which to weep and be pained by the light a throng of others shines into his
face. But in coming into consciousness he has stopped being Worm.

> Feeling nothing, knowing nothing, he exists nevertheless, but not
> for himself, for others, others conceive him and say, Worm is,
> since we conceive him, as if there could be no being but being
> conceived, if only by the beer. Others. One alone, then others.
> (Beckett, 1979: 318)

How close is this to Levinas? Rather than an other, who is face, which is
'simultaneously expression and speech', radiating this relation to the same
as a kind of discourse, we have others prodding a same (who is still more
other to 'they') into existence by plying him with language. At one point
the unnameable imagines Worm baited like an animal, others linking hands
to dance about him, flinging words across their circle at the most other of
all things: seemingly, a same existing in itself, the true core of an individ-
ual being. This relation seems an inversion to that presented in Levinas.
Worm is brought into consciousness through language, and this language
emanates from the other and to this extent we might make analogies with
Worm's story and Levinas. But the movement of injustice is far different
here in Beckett to Levinas; rather than injustice arising from the efforts of
the same to reappropriate the other into its totality it appears in inverted
form with the other moving to appropriate the I (or the same) by plying it
with its language and hauling it into the light of its day. This is the light of
language-based relations between the same and the other, those inex-
haustibly painful relations the unnameable, in searching out silence, non-
being, is seeking to escape. While language is primarily aligned with jus-
tice by Levinas, then, here it is primarily aligned with injustice by Beckett.

One of Derrida's essays on Levinas, 'Violence and Metaphysics', might be
used to think through some of these problems. Derrida suggests that the
questions indicated are 'questions of language and the question of lan-

guage'. The other is infinitely other and the relation between the same and the other which comprises justice is language. Derrida questions the infinity Levinas thereby requires of language to achieve this relation[8]. If language were infinite would it not be able to state the infinite relation? The unnameable hopes to be able to escape the torment of talking interminably by stating (through sheer chance) something which is required to be stated to end that torment. The supposition that recurs most often is that he is supposed to express his own being in his own voice. He ends the narrative claiming he must go on. We are not able to assert with assurance either that his torment has stopped or that it will never stop, but we are certain that he has not succeeded in stating his self: he remains unnameable and the question remains in suspension, we are unable to think language as either finite or infinite. What Derrida says concerning history seems to go equally well for language:

> A system is neither finite nor infinite. A structural totality escapes
> this alternative in its functioning. (Derrida, 1978: 123)

If language is not infinite, perhaps 'the meaning of alterity is finite, is not positively infinite' (Derrida, 1978, 114). Levinas proposes a positive Infinity (God) which is also infinitely other. Whereas Derrida contends that there can be no possible otherness within a positive infinity,

> As soon as one attempts to think Infinity as a positive plenitude
> (one pole of Levinas's nonnegative transcendence), the other
> becomes unthinkable, impossible, unutterable. . . .The other can-
> not be what it is, infinitely other, except in finitude and mortality
> (mine and its). (Derrida, 1978: 114-115)

It might be claimed that if Levinas describes a reciprocal relation (between the same and the other) as moving in a single direction (from the same to the other), a similar, but inverted, claim might be made concerning *The Unnameable*. Whereas in Levinas language moves between the same and the other, setting out from the same and involving either totality (injustice) where the same tries to annex the other to itself, or infinity (justice) where the same opens itself to the absolute otherness of the other, the unnameable often supposes that language comes to him purely from the other, that it passes through him and does not belong to him.

> It must not be forgotten, sometimes I forget, that all is a question
> of voices. I say what I am told to say, in the hope that some day
> they will weary of talking of me. . . Do they believe I believe it is

I who am speaking? That's their's too. To make me believe I have
an ego all my own, and can speak of it, as they of theirs. (Beckett,
1979: 317, see also 337)

In writing of Beckett and his use of language, Gilles Deleuze has suggested: 'it is always an Other who speaks, since words have not expected/waited for me and there is no language other than the foreign' (Deleuze, 1995, 7). As with Levinas, then, there seems no symmetry here. The unnameable, a 'same' is separated from this 'they' (others) in an originary and infinite way. While the existence of language suggests that there is an other (because while the being that is sensed is itself a being prior to language the existence of language has preceded his existence), the language palpably fails to express either this other or the being which corresponds to the same. Perhaps an important element of the problem is the lack of referent other than that imagined by the language. There is no face here, nothing that might not simply speak but express, not simply signify but be.

> . . . there must be something else, to go with this grey, which goes
> with everything. . . .A face, how encouraging that would be, if it
> could be a face, every now and then, always the same, methodi-
> cally varying its expressions, doggedly demonstrating all a true
> face can do, without ever ceasing to be recognizable as such. . .
> That would be nice. A presence at last. (Beckett: 333-334)

If we are to state the problem, perhaps crudely, in non-reciprocal terms, then perhaps Beckett and Levinas offset one another, each showing different and apparently (and apparently paradoxically) mutually exclusive aspects of the same relation: where language constitutes, at once, justice (the infinite relation between the same and the other in Levinas) and injustice (the infinite non-relation, or failure to relate, between a shadowy same and an equally shadowy other in Beckett).

THE SAME AS THE OTHER

Levinas criticises Husserl for reducing the other to a phenomenon of the ego (Derrida, 1978: 123). Derrida objects that it would be easy to show the pains Husserl takes to respect the alterity of the Other. An important point is that Husserl too is concerned with describing lived experience and as such he 'is concerned with describing how the other as other, in its irreducible alterity, is presented to me. It is presented to me. . . as originary nonpresence' (123). It is important not to lose sight of that with which *The*

Unnameable seems to be concerned, as in this regard it seems at once to turn from and converge with Phenomenology:

> One could neither speak, nor have any sense of the totally other,
> if there was not a phenomenon of the totally other, or evidence of
> the totally other as such. (Derrida, 1978: 123)

In *The Unnameable* there is no phenomenon of the other, except for a system, (the system of language) which (as Derrida suggests here) is all phenomena itself is able to constitute. The implication (which Derrida does not state so unequivocally) is that the face only communicates in relation to a system. The world as it is presented to me, the world of other as other, the world of phenomena, is always mediated, is always signified, a kind of language.

The otherness of language is stressed in *The Unnameable*, and here Beckett seems very close to Derrida: language is the relation to/of originary non-presence and this non-presence moves symmetrically (to/of) between the same and the other. Language carries with it the trace of the other even where there is no phenomenon of the other. Furthermore, though other, language is used as an instrument to define the self or the same (to which language bears no 'natural' relation). As language can only describe through signifying rather than being, it cannot bring the same into true present being, only to a non-presence always at one remove from a 'true presence' that can only ever be 'sensed' (with this intuition itself constituting a sensation which is a phenomenon that can only signify).

> I am he who will never be caught, never delivered. . . there might
> be a hundred of us and still we'd lack the hundred and first, we'll
> always be short of me. (Beckett, 1979: 311)

According to Derrida, in Husserl others are other egos, other subjects who can experience me just as I experience them. In *The Unnameable* no other subjects appear. But might there not be said to be an originary non-phenomenality here in the realisation that I can never be identical to language (which carries the trace of the other which has lent itself to that language)?

In *The Unnameable* it seems that the concept 'ego' is inherent in the language, in the words which pass through the unnameable, but he seems to feel that this ego does not correspond to the silent self present at the core of his being. *The Unnameable* senses that the ego proper to these words, this language, is the ego or the egos of others, and thus supposes the exis-

tence of 'they'.

The same problem leads also to a somewhat different supposition. Towards the end of *The Unnameable* the idea is put forward of a double at the core of self, a double ego, a pair of alter egos within the absent ego of the unnameable, a doubling which in effect prevents the being-present of the absent ego. At one pole there is 'he whose voice it is', the one who speaks through the unnameable. At the other pole is the being who is far, the absentee, he who 'is made of silence' just as his double is 'made of words'. What is sought is the impossible reconciliation of the irreducible alterity of the same. The task is to get the one who is, by definition, 'silence' to speak, to enunciate the silence he is, thereby merging with his double who is the one who speaks; to convert the originary non-presence inherent in the other within the self into a complete self-presence. That such a reconciliation is impossible implies a break with Levinas for whom the same is the same and the absolutely other by definition has no part in this same. That the same itself contains alterity, otherness, in any sense where that term has sense, is a position Derrida's reading tends towards (Derrida, 1978: 127).

A BEING-AT-WAR: LANGUAGE AND VIOLENCE

Between the two poles of the supposed double ego we find a being-at-war. Derrida discusses an analogous war in relation to Levinas and his discussion of the concepts of 'violence' and 'nonviolence'. Derrida notes that Levinas acknowledges a debt to Eric Weil for his identification of the opposition between discourse and violence. Simply put, a certain sort of discourse is nonviolence, and violence is the moving away from this discourse. Derrida, however, underlines the radical difference between Weil's and Levinas's conceptions of that which constitutes the proper nonviolence of discourse. For Weil nonviolent discourse is identified with the project of ontology, 'Harmony between men will be established by itself if men are not concerned with themselves, but with what is'.[9] The nonviolent discourse of ontology, which Derrida suggests is Hegelian at least in style, has infinite coherence as its polarity. For Levinas, on the other hand, this coherence, which hopes to instigate a totality, is violence itself. Ontology is violence itself. For Levinas it is not coherence but the separation of absolutes (the same and absolutely other, with no attempt to reduce the other to the same) which constitutes nonviolent discourse or Peace. Therefore Levinas's Peace equals Weil's violence and vice versa. For Weil violence is reduced by the reduction of alterity but for Levinas the reverse is true. For Levinas coherence is finite and alterity infinite whereas for Weil the

opposite is true. 'But for both, only the infinite is nonviolent, and it can be announced only in discourse' (Derrida, 1978: 315).[10] Now, in *The Unnameable*, silence, which in relation both to Levinas's and Weil's systems comprises 'the worst sort of violence' is exactly that which the unnameable most avidly seeks. According to Derrida, Levinas's discourse is in violent opposition to such silence:

> Discourse [although it is itself originally violent]. . . is the least possible violence, the only way to repress the worst violence, the violence of primitive and prelogical silence, of an unimaginable night which would not even be the opposite of day, an absolute violence which would not even be the opposite of nonviolence; nothingness or pure non-sense. Thus discourse chooses itself violently in opposition to nothingness or pure non-sense, and, in philosophy, against nihilism. (130)

How then are we supposed to read the unnameable's desire for silence? As nihilism? Or as a critique of systems of thought which insist that 'justice' is already latent within the system we have (language), so long as that system is used in a certain way, driven to a given end (coherence for Weil, alterity for Levinas)? Such scepticism is certainly apparent in *The Unnameable*. But we are saying still less than usual if we address only the 'schooling in suspicion' and 'contempt' and ignore the schooling in 'courage and audacity'. Would the unnameable say that this worst violence was in fact peace? It is silence the unnameable desires but it is not just any silence, 'For it is all very fine to keep silence, but one has also to consider the kind of silence one keeps' (Beckett, 1979: 283). The silence he desires may be the seemingly irretrievable silence that is the silence before speech, the silence before the possibility of violence: 'silence once broken will never again be whole' (Beckett, 1979: 336).

Once speech has appeared could there ever be a return to such silence, an impossible return to the before which would erase the after through which that before has returned to being? In *The Unnameable*, paradoxically, language, without which violence would not have been brought into existence, provides the only possibility of achieving the impossible telos (which is not a telos, an end which comes before the beginning, an end which would erase both beginning and end); that is, the only possibility of justice. Language, then, while necessarily involving violence (injustice) also provides the only possible way to peace (justice). In *The Unnameable* too, language might be related to justice through this movement between this beginning and this end, which, while destined to fail, provides the closest

approximation to a gesture which would recover that which is both before the beginning and after the end (another between).

THE BETWEEN 1: THE STEP NOT BEYOND

The effort to move towards this between of before the beginning and after the end (which doubles the between of silence and language) might be compared with Blanchot's notion of le pas au-dela, ('the step not beyond'). The word 'pas' means 'step' and 'not' at once, le pas au-dela, then, is a step beyond which at the same time is not beyond, an impossible movement 'beyond' an infinity, a step taken and erased at once. How can there be a movement beyond all being? In discussing Giordano Bruno's cosmology Alexandre Koyré describes Bruno's interpretation of Aristotle's notion of space:

> We can pretend, as Aristotle does, that this world encloses all being, and that outside this world there is nothing; nec plenum nec vacuum [neither plenum nor vacuum].[11] But nobody can think, or even imagine it. (47)

Bruno's criticism of Aristotle involves the repetition of 'the classical objection: what would happen if somebody stretched his hand through the surface of heaven?' While Koyré contends that the question itself should not be posed as it involves a misunderstanding of Aristotle's concept of the 'place-continuum' he suggests that nevertheless Bruno gives 'a nearly correct answer'. He then goes on to quote Bruno:

> 'BURCHIO - Certainly I think that one must reply to this fellow that if a person would stretch out his hand beyond the convex sphere of heaven, the hand would occupy no position in space, nor any place, and in consequence would not exist.' (47)

What would happen if you threw a spear at the edge of the Infinity? Would it simply fall at your feet? How can there be a beyond of a system which defines the limits of what you might know? For finite beings the threshold between the finite and infinite is non-life: either pre-existence or death. The before the beginning or after the end which equate to the beyond. The step not beyond time, the threshold, is a gesture of pure undecidability, an irreducible undecidability which might be related to an understanding of 'infinity' (as Levinas seems to use the term in referring to the irreducible

difference between the same and the absolutely other). The step not beyond is a beyond all beginnings and endings which have no meaning outside time.

The Unnameable has traditionally been read as a narrative from beyond death. This novel, insofar as Beckett's three novels *Molloy, Malone Dies* and *The Unnameable* comprise a 'Trilogy', follows, of course, *Malone Dies*. But it is important to note that the beyond death here is not beyond, it involves language, consciousness, it is tied to being and lived experience. The narrative of the unnameable is a narrative of the threshold, the undecidable threshold, but it is clearly situated (and could only be situated) before that threshold (that is, before any 'befores' or 'afters' cease to have meaning).

THE BETWEEN 2: POLES

Proceeding by pure supposition one of the strategies the unnameable uses in encountering paradox (which might be said to resemble the structure of the limit or threshold) is by defining poles, extreme possibilities between which the truth might somehow fall, only because everything should fall into the category of this between. The between cannot be fixed: it is aligned with aporia, the question mark of the question, with non-presence. The process might be compared to an understanding of Derrida's deconstruction. The strategy seems to involve the reading of a text and finding a reading which is 'other' to and contradictory of the self-identical authorised meaning, or intended meaning of the original.[12] Différance is, in part, the play between these two readings, these two polarities of meaning. The deconstructive reading, then, would still contain the trace of the authorised reading and vice versa.

An example of this use of poles in *The Unnameable* might be found in the stories of Mahood and Worm, the 'anti-Mahood' (318). In one story Mahood appears in a jar on the street outside a restaurant near a shambles in the rue Brancion, a street around the corner from where Beckett was living while writing this novel.[13] In his former incarnation Mahood lacked an arm and a leg but now all his members but one (the 'virile') are gone; he is a trunk and a head in his jar. The unnameable describes (in the first person) Mahood's existence in the jar, and his relationship with Marguerite/Madeleine the woman who looks after him. After a time, however, he begins to wonder why no one other than her acknowledges his existence. He should be a curiosity but he is ignored by passers by.

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Accordingly he begins to doubt his own existence, and Marguerite/Madeleine too begins to doubt until finally she loses her faith in Mahood completely. While Levinas suggests that the same is incapable of apostasy with regard to its self, Mahood too loses faith and stops existing.

The stories of Mahood and Worm might be said to loosely describe two philosophical poles: Idealism and Materialism. The story of Mahood in his jar might be read as a parable following the ideas of Beckett's compatriot Bishop Berkeley. Beckett was later to use Berkeley's most famous premise *esse est percipi* as a point of departure for his screenplay Film (Beckett, 1990: 323). To be is to be perceived: once Mahood feels himself no longer perceived he disappears (a state of matter is reduced to a state of mind). But this disappearance suggests that Mahood has no self-perception, that the state of mind of this same is not his own state of mind but that of others; Mahood stops existing because 'they' no longer believe in him, not because he no longer believes in himself. To this extent he is like Worm: 'Worm is, since we conceive him, as if there could be no being but being conceived' (318). Neither the Idealism nor the Materialism is pure, then, but the opposition seems clear enough. At an opposite pole to Mahood, Worm is a materialist being. His is a state of mind reduced to a state of matter, he is pre-conscious being, a thing, a creature that sleeps, pure matter without mind, pure matter which has mind brutally branded upon it. Worm begins life as 'pupil Mahood', a blank slate 'they' attempt to inscribe with language. Between these two poles, Mahood and the anti-Mahood, comes the unnameable, just as he comes between silence and language, the same and the other, the inside and the outside:

> . . . perhaps that's what I feel, an outside and an inside and me in the middle, perhaps that's what I am, the thing that divides the world in two, on the one side the outside, on the other the inside, that can be as thin as foil, I'm neither one side nor the other, I'm in the middle, I'm the partition, I've two surfaces and no thickness, perhaps that's what I feel, myself vibrating, I'm the tympanum, on the one hand the mind, on the other the world, I don't belong to either. . . (352)

Such a between, such a 'middle' might also be read as a dialectical synthesis. But the between of the unnameable cannot be fixed, it is its elusive nature, its relation to originary non-presence which allows it to stand in for the beyond. The idea of being a middle, a fixed (or dialectical) between is quickly dismissed. The above quote continues:

. . . it's not to me they're talking, it's not of me they're talking,
no, that's not it, I feel nothing of all that, try something else, herd
of shites, say something else, for me to hear, I don't know how,
for me to say, I don't know how. . . (352)

LANGUAGE AS THE LAW

If discourse is originally violent (in order to quell the worst violence of silence) is it then fundamentally a matter of control? Is it possible to distinguish between language used by a given discourse to tend towards the achievement of a given end and language as a system that will always exceed such control, will always carry within it the possibility of a justice distinct from law. In 'Critique of Violence', Walter Benjamin distinguishes two types of violence which are necessarily related to the law. First there is founding violence, the originary moment of violence through which a regime authorises its right to lay down laws. Such a moment of founding violence might be a general strike or revolution, for example, or an invasion. A second function for violence with regard to the law is the violence which conserves the law: for example, the privation of liberty, or the death penalty: punishment in short. A between which complicates this polarity is the police, who comprise aspects of founding violence and conserving violence, and thereby can themselves be outside or above the law while still being 'the law' (Benjamin: 132). If discourse is originally violent then, is it nothing less than 'the law'?

For Levinas, language, the 'relation' between the same and the other which is justice, is just because it involves the infinite difference of the same and the other, an opening towards the other which also involves a recognition of the other's absolute otherness. What makes language just, then, is its very inability to achieve complete identification: the other can never be contained by language, can never be delivered to the same by language, there is an originary irreducible distance between language and its object and this justly represents the originary irreducible difference between the same and the other. The relation between the same and the other is justice, and language, which constitutes this relation, is just because it is a just representation unless it is distorted through violence (a discourse of coherence for example) which would have it forget itself by falsely allowing the same to reappropriate the other within a totality, to substitute a univocity for an equivocity. Univocity is understood here in Levinas's sense of a finite totality which would eliminate all otherness, and différance.

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Derrida himself calls the relation of the same and the other différance (1978: 129). But Derrida's understanding of the relation between the same and other, like Beckett's and unlike Levinas's, might also involve otherness or différance within the same:

> In the one case "to differ" signifies nonidentity; in the other case it signifies the order of the same. Yet there must be a common, although entirely differant [différante], root within the sphere that relates the two movements of differing to one another. We provisionally give the name différance to this sameness which is not identical: by the silent writing of its a, it has the desired advantage of referring to differing, both as spacing/temporalizing and as the movement that structures every dissociation. (Derrida, 1973: 129)

LANGUAGE AND A JUST SAYING

It seems that this relation between is part of what Derrida means when he speaks of 'justice'. Yet given that this between is, as Levinas suggests, discourse, how does this notion of 'justice' avoid being contradicted by the violence which, it has been suggested, is necessary to discourse, how is it not contradicted by the being-at-war which also seems inherent in the relation between? One answer might be that language is violent because it has been understood through a totality as Levinas understands it, which privileges a certain kind of discourse; the discourse of one meaning. Justice, on the other hand, which Derrida claims in 'Force of Law', is Deconstruction[14], reinstates equivocity, is composed of equivocity:

> 1. The deconstructibility of law (droit), of legality, legitimacy or legitimation (for example) makes deconstruction possible. 2. The undeconstructibility of justice also makes deconstruction possible, indeed is inseparable from it. 3. The result: deconstruction takes place in the interval that separates the undeconstructibility of justice from the deconstructibility of droit (authority, legitimacy, and so on). (Derrida, 1990: 945)

The process of deconstruction then (with a small 'd') takes place between law and justice. Deconstruction (with a capital 'D') would be justice were it possible to fully achieve justice. The contradiction inherent in identifying language both with violence and justice, might now more easily be untangled.

> At the beginning of justice there was logos, speech or language, which is not necessarily in contradiction to another incipit, namely, "in the beginning there will have been force." (Derrida, 1990: 935)

Justice, like Deconstruction, has not been achieved, cannot, perhaps, be achieved: it is the experience of the impossible (Derrida, 1990: 947). [d]econstruction, which stands in for justice just as the between has been said to stand in for the beyond, involves a more just usage of language (an equivocity). Derrida suggests there is no contradiction between the originary need to relate to justice through language, and the force or violence inherent in language. He alludes to Pascal in order to suggest that justice has need of force, that there is a practical, pragmatic element at play here, that justice will not be achieved unless it has the force to be enforced, that a powerless justice is injustice (Derrida, 1990: 937). While equivocal then, deconstruction cannot be passive, it is an active procedure and involves a free decision, or, if you like, the decision of freedom. 'We would not say of a being without freedom, or at least of one without freedom in a given act, that its decision is just or unjust' (Derrida, 1990: 961). It is here, perhaps, that we might begin to gauge the extent to which Derrida's concept of justice might be said to be analogous to ideas apparent in *The Unnameable*.

To what extent might it be said that the unnameable is not free? At first sight he might seem to be totally without freedom. Derrida suggests that the worst form of injustice is the (fixed) presence of the present, the life which is fully present to itself which therefore has no conception of death and no desire to hear it spoken of: no conception of what is past or what is to come (Derrida, 1993: 278). According to Derrida, learning how to live (which is the paradoxical project of any ethics, that is, just dealings with others) can only take place between life and death. And this between life and death involves the ghost: justice, that which is equivocal, must be justice for all, and this all includes the ghostly figures of the not-yet-born, and the already-dead, there can be no justice without responsibility which goes beyond the present living (Derrida, 1993: 14, 16). The ghosts of the not-yet-born are felt in the responsibility for the consequences of our actions, consequences that will determine the hospitality of the world into which they will enter. The ghosts of the already dead are felt in the responsibility for the interpretation of the heritage they have left us with. We are free to choose, in interpreting, how to read the heritage these ghosts have left behind them (Derrida, 1993: 21-40), a reading which will affect the world in which we live. A third kind of ghost is the ghost of ourselves, the not

fully present self who must exist among the traces of the past and the hopes of the future. The ghost, says Derrida, is a thing, an unnameable thing which watches us (Derrida, 1993: 26):

> If we have insisted so strongly. . . on the logic of the ghost, it's because it tends towards a thinking of the event which necessarily exceeds a binary or dialectical logic, that which would distinguish or oppose effectivity (present, as it happens, empirical, living - or not) and ideality (regulatory or absolute non-presence). (Derrida, 1993: 108)

It might be argued that such a 'thing', such a between, would also be necessary for thinking the self which is neither a Cartesian cogito nor the same of Levinas. A self which is the same in its alterity. A self which is there in its non-presence.

Tenuously then, the situation of the unnameable might be said to exemplify a striving for justice. This is, however, by no means the only way Derrida's 'justice' might be seen to be relevant to *The Unnameable*. There seems an important moment at which *The Unnameable* at once converges most closely with and verges away from Derrida's description of justice.

I noted at the beginning how the 'methodology' of *The Unnameable* seemed based on aporia. In beginning his essay 'Force of Law', a paper written in response to a request to address a conference calling itself Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice, Derrida notes that the problems covered by this title are infinite. They are infinite in themselves, he suggests, 'because they require the very experience of the aporia'. By this, he says, he means two complicated things:

> 1. As its name indicates, an experience is a traversal, something that traverses and travels towards a destination for which it finds the appropriate passage. The experience finds its way, its passage, it is possible. And in this sense it is impossible to have a full experience of aporia, that is, of something that does not allow passage. An aporia is a non-road. From this point of view, justice would be the experience that we are not able to experience. . . But, 2. I think that there is no justice without this experience, however impossible it may be, of aporia. Justice is an experience of the impossible. (Derrida, 1990: 947)

In addressing the question of language, which, as we have seen, is the rela-

tion between law (or Philosophy) and justice, the same and the other, the outside and the inside, critically, testing its limits through pure suspicion, pure aporia, *The Unnameable* might be said to be among the most detailed of all possible descriptions of the impossible. The impossible of le pas audela, the beyond of all these betweens. But to what extent is it a description of the experience of the impossible? Despite, or perhaps, because of its methodology, the ghostly unnameable becomes irreducible, finds perhaps an irreducible seed of being which is pure ignorance and incomprehension. If such a discovery were possible it might be claimed that the unnameable has found that stable cornerstone with which we might rebuild the universe in the likeness of itself: all interfused with pure incomprehension. But such a discovery is not possible, and it is the very insistence on this impossibility which might be said to be that through which Beckett's work is most just, most effectively a process of justice. The self is shown to be unfixable, other to itself, without core or cornerstone. Rather than accepting the same as simply self-identical, Beckett does justice to the complexity of the same, to the infinitely other within the same, and in this sense the justice he expresses is universal. The self-presence of the totality, the presence of the present it insists upon, which Derrida considers the greatest injustice, is shattered.

That Beckett was aware of the specific question of justice (an ideal justice not related to human law) might be supported with reference to his 1962 piece for theatre *Play*. A man and two women are shown up to their necks in three jars. Both women have been lovers of the man, a situation which has caused suffering to all. The play is a kind of process of justice: but it is pure aporia, a non-road, and it is not traversed. Each of the three speaks when a light of interrogation shines in his or her face; at times they all speak at once. The structure of the play suggests that they may go on forever, each repeating from their particular point of view the story of their relations, each attempting to expiate his/her own guilt. At one point the man 'M' says, 'I know now, all that was just. . . play. And all this? When will all this - . . . . All this, when will all this have been. . . just play?' (Beckett, 1990: 313). In 'Structure, Sign, Play. . .' Derrida describes an oscillation between (which formally resembles différance, justice) as 'play' (1978: 289-293). The answer to M's question may be 'never', that 'play' will be 'just play' (pure enjoyment, play alone and the play of justice) when it is infinite play: the telling of the whole story, all stories at once.[15] Again here we have pure aporia, and this, for Beckett, may be equated with pure justice. But Derrida is talking of a legal justice: the production of a decision as just as possible and as aware as possible of its own injustice; that is, the experience of aporia. Derrida suggests that the undecidable is

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not merely the oscillation between two contradictory or determinate rules but the obligation to decide, to make the impossible decision while taking account of laws and rules, suggesting, 'A decision that didn't go through the ordeal of the undecidable would not be a free decision' (Derrida, 1990: 963).

> Law is the element of calculation, and it is just that there be law, but justice is incalculable, it requires us to calculate with the incalculable; and aporetic experiences are the experiences, as improbable as they are necessary, of justice. (Derrida, 1990: 947)

Where Derrida speaks of the experience of aporia then, Beckett speaks of pure aporia. Where Derrida speaks of the ghost in its relations to the living, Beckett speaks as a ghost. Where Derrida confronts a world in which to act, Beckett contemplates acts without worlds. At his greater level of abstraction, then, Beckett can lead us through a maze of language and allude to a threshold, but it can not be crossed because there is nothing with which to cross, nothing to cross. The aporia is pure because we may have been taken to the edge of the universe but there is no spear to throw, no hand to stretch through the surface of heaven which encloses the unnameable like a wall, no way of telling if we are facing a void or its opposite:

> . . . may not this screen which my eyes probe in vain, and see as denser air, in reality be the enclosure wall, as compact as lead? To elucidate this point I would need a stick or pole, and the means of plying it. . . Then I would dart it, like a javelin, straight before me and know, by the sound made, whether that which hems me round, and blots out my world, is the old void, or a plenum. (Beckett, 1979: 275)

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NOTES

1 Asked why he has never written on Beckett Derrida replied, 'This is an author to whom I feel very close, or to whom I would like to feel myself very close' (Derrida, 1992: 60).

2 Derrida, 1993: 49, citing Levinas, *Totalité et Infini*, p. 62. 'La relation avec autrui - c'est-à-dire la justice'.

3 Derrida shows how this adequation constitutes a break, not only with 'the Greek and most modern philosophies of subjectivity', but with Levinas's earlier work, 'which were most careful to distinguish the Ego from the same and Others from the other' (Derrida, 1978, 109-110).

4 Butler (2) and Adorno also speak of Beckett's works parodying philosophy.

5 See, in particular, Davies (1994: 43-66), and Kenner (1962: 128).

6 'It could doubtless be shown that it is the nature of Levinas's writing...[to progress] by

legations, and by negation against negation. Its proper route is not that of an "either his...or that," but of a "neither this...nor that,'" (Derrida, 1978: 90)

7 Derrida quotes this, (1978: 98)

8 'To say that the infinite exteriority of the other is not spatial, is non-exteriority and non-interiority, to be unable to designate it otherwise than negatively-is this not to acknowledge that the infinite (also designated negatively in its current positivity: in-finite) cannot be stated? Does this not amount to acknowledging that the structure "inside-outside," which is language itself, marks the original finitude of speech and of whatever befalls it?' (Derrida: 113)

9 Derrida, 1978: 315, footnote, Derrida quoting Weil.

10 Derrida's note on the philosophical significance of these diametrically opposed readings of the same relation should perhaps be noted here: 'One should examine the common presuppositions of this convergence and divergence. One should ask whether the predetermination, common to these two systems, of violation and of pure logos, and above all, the predetermination of their incompatibility, refers to an absolute truth, or perhaps to an epoch of the history of thought, the history of Being' (315).

11 Earlier in this book Koyré in describing the development of seventeenth century conceptualisations of the nature of the universe, alludes to the ancient 'struggle between the "plenists" and the "vacuists"' (3).

12 In 'Tympan', Derrida discusses the deconstructive process of questioning the idea of the limit and suggests that this 'implies that the text...functions as a writing machine in which a certain number of typed and systematically enmeshed propositions (one has to be able to recognize and isolate them) represent the "conscious intention" of the author as a reader of his "own" text, in the sense we speak today of a mechanical reader' (1986: xi).

13 See, *Paris par Arrondissement*, for rue Brancion, in the 15eme Arrondissement. The street runs on to rue des Favorites, where Beckett lived (see Bair, 1990).

14 'The structure I am describing here is a structure in which law (droit) is essentially deconstructible, whether because it is founded, constructed on interpretable and transformable textual strata...or because its ultimate foundation is by definition unfounded....it is this deconstructible structure of law (droit), or if you prefer of justice as droit, that also insures the possibility of deconstruction. Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice.' (945).

15 Might this be compared to a Spinozian conception of the adequate idea of an event? Such an idea would necessarily involve an adequate idea of all the bodies involved in the production of the event, which is impossible outside the mind of God (substance): see Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part 2, Props, 19-32.