

This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.

Author(s): Manninen, Paavo

Title: Nothing Left but the Core of Murmurs? : Attacks on Linking as Communication in Beckett's The Unnamable

Year: 2022

Version: Published version

Copyright: © Author, 2022

Rights: In Copyright

Rights url: <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/?language=en>

Please cite the original version:

Manninen, P. (2022). Nothing Left but the Core of Murmurs? : Attacks on Linking as Communication in Beckett's The Unnamable. *PsyArt*, 26, 78-100. <https://psyart.org/nothing-left-but-the-core-of-murmurs-attacks-on-linking-ascommunication-in-becketts-the-unnamable/>



PsyArt

Nothing Left but the Core of Murmurs? Attacks on Linking as Communication in Beckett's *The Unnamable*

Paavo Manninen

Doctoral Researcher, University of Jyväskylä

Abstract

*Literary studies have usually interpreted Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* (1959) to reflect an area void of meaning and inaccessible to representation. The present article, by contrast, argues that Beckett experientially communicates archaic psychic reality where certain contents develop in an interpersonal relationship. The article offers psychoanalytical close readings of a few key passages in the text, where the function that is integrated in the narrative voice and actively destroys connections manifests itself on different textual levels. Using the psychoanalyst Avner Bergstein's interpretation of Wilfred Bion's concept, "attacks on linking", as a paradoxical form of communication, the article argues that the narrative voice wishes to communicate – at a (non-symbolic) primitive level of projective identification – exactly the theme that is central to his psyche, that is, his tendency to destroy any link that connects an object to another object. The article opens up questions on how interpretations of a certain kind narrow the other's psychic experience rather than give it liberty of movement. Beckett's work brings to the fore the question what possibilities exist to meet the other from within the inner world when the other specifically tries to destroy this attempt at meeting.*

Keywords: attacks on linking, projective identification, transference, Bion, Beckett, communication, interpretation

To cite as: Manninen, Paavo, 2022, “Nothing Left but the Core of Murmurs? Attacks on Linking as Communication in Beckett’s *The Unnamable*,” *PsyArt* 27, pp. 78-100.

Introduction

The knowledge of transference relations between literature and reader is of great importance to psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic literary studies. The idea of projective identification – an aspect of transference (Ogden, 1992, p. 69) – in reading literature has also caught the ear of psychoanalysts (Miller, 2013; 2017; Roth, 2019). Wilfred Bion, for whom the concept projective identification he adopted from Melanie Klein was central, worked as Samuel Beckett's (1906–1989) psychotherapist from 1933 to 1935 (Miller, 2013, p. 3). He published his famous article "Attacks on Linking" the same year as Beckett published *The Unnamable*, 1959, the last part of his post-war trilogy, in his own translation of *L'Innommable* (1952).

The Unnamable is in the form of a monology, 125 pages long and mostly with no paragraphing. There is no plot, no character continuity and no sense of time and place. The overall stylistic devices of the *Unnameable*¹ are well known: first, he creates "puppets" (p. 294), milieus and stories in order to establish his self and his external world and then constantly erases these literary experiments as well as anything he says. The narrating voice is characterised by a compulsive awareness of the event of narration: "I'm a big talking ball, talking about things that do not exist, or that exist perhaps, impossible to know, beside the point. Ah yes, quick let me change my tune. And after all why a ball, rather than something else, and why big?" (*The Unnamable*, p. 307; hereafter, *U.*) The passage illustrates how central events take place *within* the narrative process in the form of interruptions. Throughout the text, the narrator doubts the authorship of his voice ("I have no voice and I must speak ... with this voice that is not mine", p. 309). In short, the narrating voice seems unapproachable to us – though not without an identity.²

Ample research has been published on emptiness and lack of meaning as a central theme of *The Unnamable* (Parkin-Gounelas, 2001; Brown, 2011; Stewart, 2014), its "palpable unknown" (Abbott, 2013) and its actualisation of "the schizoid voice" (Weller, 2009). Beckett is well known to have devoured psychoanalytic literature, and his transformation of psychoanalytic concepts into literature and his relationship with Bion have also been studied copiously (Weller, 2009; Miller, 2013). Among the scholars who have studied projective identification in Beckett, the psychoanalyst Ian S. Miller (2013; 2017) stands out clearly. Miller (2017) sees much of Beckett's literary work as "the working-through of a narrator's depiction of childhood trauma" (p. 456) and argues that "the rejecting and neglectful image of mother" only changes in Beckett's works after *The Unnamable* (2013, p. 219). He argues that projective identification is realised in *The Unnamable* both internally in the text in the narrator's relationship with his experimental characters, particularly in "the internalised presence of a Bion character in resolution of a charged transference relationship" (2013, p. 187), and externally in the text–reader relationship. However, Miller does not seem to show exactly what psychic contents – such as the experience of the collapse of thinking – the narrator's projective identification manifests.

Whatever the area void of meaning in the book is, it at any rate links in some way to the reader and may change in that relationship. That is to say, I do not wish to approach *The Unnamable* as a textual object "out there".³ In the present paper, I suggest that Bion's (1959) concept "attacks on linking" helps us see how psychological content can evolve from

nothingness, provided that the reader consents to become a “projective identification welcoming object” (Eaton, 2005). To my knowledge, Bion’s concept has not been used in psychoanalytic literary studies of *The Unnamable* from the viewpoint of communication. The psychoanalyst Avner Bergstein’s (2015) interpretation of Bion’s concept of attacks on linking as, paradoxically, both a destructive force and communication helps us analyse the narrating voice of *The Unnamable* where two powers clash: one looking for a good connection with the recipient of the narration and one that attempts to destroy that and other meaningful relationships. In this article, I do not delve into biographic research, nor Beckett’s widely discussed mother relationship (on that, see Bair, 1978; Miller, 2013; Stevens, 2005, p. 631), nor the mutual influence relationships between Bion and Beckett (see Connor, 2008; Miller, 2013). My purpose here is to describe and clarify the psychological experiences that the “schizoid voice” (Weller, 2009) communicates, not at the symbolic level but at the level of projective identification.⁴ To apply Bergstein’s (2015) notion from a clinical context to the analysis of literature, “the potential to understand arises if the analyst [or, the reader] recognises that the disturbance is itself a clue to what is happening” (p. 940). As unapproachable as Beckett’s narrating voice seems to us, it does evoke precisely the experience of unapproachability. The concept of projective identification helps us explain how that experience is communicated, and the idea of attacks on linking has transformative potential to see sense in what seemingly only appears to be a “rather brutal use of reader as containment for projective identification” (Miller, 2013, p. 187).

To study the transferential voices produced by *The Unnamable* might be of interest not only to psychoanalytic scholars but also to psychoanalytic psychotherapists who wish to do “ear training” (Ogden, 1999)⁵ with literature. Though not a clinician, I venture to suggest that Beckett’s text might be used to practise difficult clinical situations where a patient seems to work hard in order to destroy the link between themselves and the analyst, in ways Bion (1959), Ogden (1992), Eaton (2005) and Bergstein (2015) have described in their case studies. I will show how a literary text that seems to present the failing of its own reading⁶ represents precisely the kind of psychic reality where the failing of interpersonal relationships is the central topic. *The Unnamable* creates an unpleasant aesthetic experience of disintegration, felt concretely during the reading process.⁷ Beckett has created a representation of a narrating voice that is not one but where a power struggle between two voices is going on. In it, the narrator’s “own” voice seeks a good contact with the other (“drive to communicate”; Bergstein, 2015) while at the same time, the voice of a destructive object integrated in him attempts to destroy connections and object relationships (“attacks on linking”; Bion, 1959). From the viewpoint of these notions, *The Unnamable* does not in fact communicate nothing, but a particular kind of psychic pain that develops and arises from “nameless dread, annihilation, and fragmentation that cannot be thought about, but is overwhelming chaos of sense impressions, affects, and preconceptions ...” (Stevens, 2005, p. 620). How that transformation can happen in my “case study” of the Unnameable is the main focus of my analysis in the following close readings.

This paper is structured as follows. In the first part, I introduce the concepts of projective identification and attacks on linking as well as Bergstein’s (2015) interpretation of Bion’s concept in communication. In the second and third parts, I ask what attacks on linking produce in the text–reader relationship. In the fourth part, I present a summarising argument

of the book and attacks on linking as communication and study the main problem the novel presents to interpretation: How to meet in a psychoanalytic interaction or an interaction created by literary illusion the other whose experience of their own ego is discontinuous and the only continuous thing is the threat of its collapse?

1. The attacking function as communication

Originally Melanie Klein's concept in 1946, projective identification is a mechanism where a person unconsciously phantasises being able to transfer, or "evacuate", distress⁸ or an unpleasant psychic element within themselves for another person to experience (Eaton, 2005, p. 364). The recipient begins to feel "pressure" to experience "in a manner congruent with the projection" (Ogden, 1992, p. 12), to process or "digest" it, and might then be able to help the other to re-internalise the result. According to Ogden (1992), whose views on the topic I follow here, the pressure the recipient feels is created by objective features of the interaction, such as facial expressions or the tone of voice (p. 70).⁹ In literature, correspondingly, as I will argue, it is created by the diction. Ogden (1992) describes many situations where the analyst is being manipulated to play a role in the patient's inner object relations. Projective identification is usually understood as an archaic mind's only possible level (function) of communication exactly when the ability to think symbolically is blocked (Eaton, 2005; López-Corvo, 2005, p. 36; Bergstein, 2015). Wilfred Bion (1962), who had Klein as an analyst, saw projective identification not merely as a clinical phenomenon but also as a normal, early form of communication between mother and infant (p. 157, 1690; see also Ogden, 1992, p. 26). A widely accepted idea of projective identification is that the infant "transfers" its distress to the mother who then gives it form and meaning (see for example López-Corvo, 2005, p. 186).

The mechanism of projective identification explains the meaning-making one carries on when reading *The Unnamable*. If the novel communicates *nothing*, it must also mean that it communicates the *experience* of "nothingness". Stevens (2005) suggests that "nothingness" in Beckett consists of emptiness and lack of meaning, on the one hand, and the sense of unworthiness, on the other. Beckett was, however, capable of transforming nothingness into his art: "Beckett's art becomes a radical affirmation of and gives voice to nothing ... rather than nothing as a surrender to nothingness and the 'black hole'." (p. 633.) Correspondingly, Bergstein (2015) states that "[t]he paradox of nothingness is that it is full of desire, a desire to communicate", and that it may be met in transference (p. 938). Both seem to say that for "nothingness" to be transformable it would have to be communicated either in literary creation or in the psychoanalytic process, and that the recipient has to be pulled into it in such a way that they are forced to experience a kind of emptiness and absence. This also happens in the text-reader relationship of *The Unnamable*. Psychic vivacity, meanings and illusions that usually accompany reading (Jacobus, 1999; Roth, 2019) are not easily created in the process of reading *The Unnamable*, and it is *this* experience that the narrator communicates at the level of projective identification. The exhausting and almost meaningless narration in *The Unnamable* "transfers" "nothingness" into the reader, although it was not originally the

reader's experience. Just as in psychoanalysis, (Ogden, 1992, p. 3), the concept of projective identification helps us think these experiences through.

What kind of contents, more exactly, can be created in the void of "nothingness" (Stevens, 2005) in psychoanalytic or text–reader interaction? Bion's "Attacks on Linking" (1959), a much-studied essay (Bronstein & O'Shaughnessy, 2017), illustrates the question. Bion (1959) offers case studies and develops the model of a destructive function internalised by psychotic patients from interaction, that is, the tendency to destroy emotional connections that are beginning to form. It can be seen as an unfavourable line of development when the development of the thinking function is prevented; for that reason, I will also briefly present Bion's theory of thinking.

According to Bion's article, "A Theory of Thinking" (Bion, 1962), "[T]hinking has to be called into existence to cope with thoughts" (p. 154). In Bion's classification, the developmental history of *thoughts* goes as follows. There is an inborn "pre-conception" in an infant's undeveloped psyche which encounters its counterpart, a "good breast", in reality. As a result of this encounter, "conception" develops: "When the preconception is brought into contact with realization that approximates to it, the mental outcome is a conception" (p. 154). A "concept" in Bion's model is the last stage of the development of thought, an established and nameable thought (p. 154). Thoughts, therefore, are accompanied by an "emotional experience of satisfaction" (p. 154), on which they are based: thoughts have an emotional foundation, because they are based on memory traces of satisfaction.

Bion (1962) focuses on a description of the encounter between a preconception and frustration, which gradually gives rise to the idea of "no-breast" (p. 154). "Rudimentary infant consciousness" (p. 158) notices the absence of a breast, which creates a "pressure of thoughts" (p. 154). The pressure created by thoughts leads in Bion's model to the birth of *thinking*. Its development is related to a working normal, or in Bion's terms, "realistic" projective identification between infant and mother. Early experiences of destruction, for example, can develop into a *fear* of death which is easier to bear and think about (López-Corvo, 2003, p. 186), if the mother helps the infant to tolerate frustration and integrate its own ability to digest and process knowledge based on sense perception into psychic knowledge (Bion 1962, 157). Fear is, as it were, already a psychic achievement, because it involves a thinker who is capable of thinking about dread instead of really believing death is immanent (López-Corvo, 2003, p. 186).¹⁰ Experiences begin to gain form and meaning around them, as we learn to think about them and contain them independently. In Becket's text, the prevention of the thinking function and its momentary appearance is seen in my analysis of the so-called jar episode.

However, the development of the thinking function may also be prevented. It is widely accepted that in unfavourable circumstances the mother is unable to contain the infant's normal projective identification and, as a consequence, the infant is unable to identify with the projections "transferred" to its mother and build meanings supported by the mother's meaning-making. In Bion's thought, if normal projective identification fails in such a way, the destruction of this early link between mother and infant becomes internalised in the infant as an "obstructive object" (Eaton, 2005): "If the mother cannot tolerate these projections, the infant is reduced to continued projective identification carried out with increasing force and frequency" (Bion, 1959, p. 157). When the ability to think is prevented from developing, the

psyche resorts to "hypertrophic" projective identification (p. 155),¹¹ which is used to evacuate internal elements experienced as destructive to the mother.¹² The infant's "feeling that it is dying", (p. 159) does not change into "a fear of dying", "but a nameless terror".

Nameless terror is not the same as manifest hatred. Hatred, too, is an emotional connection that links to the object (Bion, 1959), and "*hatred is directed toward emotional experience itself*" (Eaton, 2005, p. 360; italics orig.).¹³ Bion suggests in his "Attacks on linking" (1959) that the fragile psyche cannot bear an emotional contact with another person, because it would mean giving up its defensive self-sufficiency: "In this state of mind emotion is hated; it is felt to be too powerful to be contained by the immature psyche, it is felt to link objects and it gives reality to objects which are not self and therefore inimical to primary narcissism" (p. 152). In my view, this may also be expressed so that the idea of an obstructive object would become *thinkable*, which would be intolerable. And because thinking does not develop, the difference between conscious and unconscious cannot arise, either: "All impressions of the self are of equal value; all are conscious" (p. 158). It is as if the place where to repress experiences cannot be built. As we will see, the lack of the difference between conscious and unconscious also characterises *The Unnamable*.

Bion's theory of thinking could be summarised to state that an undeveloped psyche is unable to build a *psychic distance* to its emotionally charged thoughts which, as a consequence, develop into internal objects experienced as destructive. What has originally characterised the interaction between two people becomes internalised as a defensive intrapsychic mental structure. Breaks, a "nameless dread" or other types of destructivity become familiar and in that sense safe – they are as such an archaic link to an immemorial object.¹⁴ Here we begin to note the relation of "attacks on linking" to transference as resistance, as well as the theme essential to my present article that "attacks on linking" may in itself act as a link that must not be destroyed. Its destruction would mean the destruction of the fundamental structures of the psyche and letting go of a self, however fragile, and the object prevalent in it – a theme I develop further below, in connection with Bergstein (2015).

What is the course of development and the fate of this destructivity as the individual grows up? Bion (1959) shows us how attacks against an emotional connection occur later in life in psychoanalysis. The mechanism of the link between analyst and analysand is projective identification with roots in the early infant–breast link, (López-Corvo, 2005, pp. 36–37). The destruction of this early link is transferred between patient and Bion in transference. In his first case study, the patient's "destructive attacks on verbal thought itself" (p. 286) suppress the patient's own speech by a stammer, even if the patient, on a conscious level, accepts the interpretation the analyst provides (Bion, 1959, p. 286). Bion's general view is, in other words, that thinking connects emotions to the ego, which is why thinking as a link has to be destroyed. In another example, Bion describes how the patient was afraid to fall asleep, because sleep would have meant "the same thing as the oozing away of his mind itself" (p. 287). Bion continues that the patient began to experience the analyst's good interpretations as "urinary attacks on an object", which then "seeped uncontrollably away" (p. 287). Bion draws the conclusion that his interpretation of the patient's way of being in a relationship with the other and using projective identification made the patient's emotional reality and integrated object-relation scenes dangerously thinkable. According to Bion, the patient therefore attacked projective identification: the patient refused to integrate the

analyst's interpretations and destroyed them, for instance by experiencing them as "urine".

The attack is, therefore, "on anything which is felt to have the function of linking one object with another" (Bion, 1959, p. 285).¹⁵ Such links were provided to the patient by words, sleep and Bion's interpretations. They would all have connected the patient to his inner objects or to Bion as a transference object. Thus, it appears that the internalised attacking function inhibits the development of transference in the first place: The patient either destroys the link (language and thinking) with the analyst or does not allow it to form at all.

However, the patient's emotional reality, specifically including the attacks, became a lived reality between the patient and Bion. The psychoanalyst Avner Bergstein (2015) emphasises in his article this nature of attacks on linking as something that the patient experiences as familiar and their own. Bergstein suggests that Bion need not have developed a new concept, if it in fact was only an expression of primitive hatred toward the object (p. 930). In his own case study, Bergstein (2015) interprets that, besides repeating the attack function, his patient attempted to communicate that the relationship with the other was under threat and wanted to be met in his very destructiveness: "What at times appeared as an attack on thinking was in fact a profound expression and a primitive mode of thinking, stemming from an unrelenting drive to communicate" (p. 939). According to Bergstein, in other words, the patient had a need to express his inner truth while simultaneously dreading that it might come within thought. The integrated tendency of the psyche to destroy links and object relationships would not, in fact, prevent transference from developing; rather, this tendency as such was being communicated to the other. "The attack on linking is also a link in itself" (Bergstein, 2015, p. 930). In other words, the patient's attacks are expression, a link that is taking him towards the object.¹⁶

Bion's (1959) and Bergstein's (2015) ideas may be summarised as follows. If a person seems to be trying everything to destroy a relationship, one needs to consider the possibility that under this manifest surface runs a fragile call for help for the other to support the destructiveness, so that it may turn into a separate *content* in psychic reality. As a logical consequence, if one perceives that psychic content exists, one also perceives an ego who hosts it. The study of attacks on linking and how to meet them may, therefore, lead to an increased sense of the ego and the feeling that there is something truthful and genuine in oneself – something that will not be destroyed. It seems to me, on the basis of the case studies discussing attacks on linking (Bion, 1959; Eaton, 2005; Bergstein, 2015) as well as theoretical clarifications (López-Corvo, 2005, pp. 36-37; Stevens, 2005), that the attacks on linking will otherwise remain unarticulated and unrepresented and spread destructively everywhere – as happened to Bion's (1959) patient who felt that his analyst's interpretations were "urine" (p. 287). Attacks on linking as such can be interpreted as a thought looking for a thinker to think it – and in *The Unnamable* as a theme that awaits its reader, as I aim to show in the present article.

According to the psychoanalyst Jeffrey Eaton (2005), literature is another area, alongside the psychoanalytic clinical situation, which can teach us about attacks on linking.¹⁷ In the following close readings, I use Bion's and Bergstein's ideas to illuminate the darkness of "nothingness" in *The Unnamable* (Stevens, 2005). Bion's concept helps us understand why the narrating voice directs its destructive power "on anything which is felt to have the function of linking one object with another" (Bion, 1959, p. 285). *The Unnamable* represents

precisely such an inner reality of “nameless terror” (see López-Corvo, 2005, pp. 185–186). The key psychological content in *The Unnamable* is created by attacks on linking, including attacks on the emotional connections of the narrating voice with thinking and meanings, such as stories and characters, and particularly with the reader. Thus the psychic reality conducted to the text–reader relationship from the viewpoint of “attacks on linking” might be described meaningfully as something else than mere meaninglessness or emptiness. *The Unnamable* is full of thoughts looking for a thinker to think them *simultaneously as* a counterforce to this search both tries to destroy the search for this link and generally prevent the formation of an articulated, *perceptible* thought. In the mental landscape that the book describes, it has not yet been possible to think about the inner chaos and distress (“nameless terror”). *The Unnamable* can be interpreted to reflect the early times of the psyche when the object had not been separated yet: the book does not so much aim to *recreate* the object, but rather to create it as *thinkable for the first time*.

2. The Unnameable’s “stammer” and attacks on projective identification

Right at the beginning of the book, we come across two different attacks on thinking: an attack on the meaning of words and an attack on grammar. They prevent the reader from getting involved. Example 1:

Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses, call them that. Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on. Can it be that one day, off it goes, that one day I simply stayed in, in where, instead of going out, in the old way, out to spend day and night as far away as possible, it wasn’t far. Perhaps that is how it began. You think you are simply resting, the better to act when the time comes, or for no reason, and you soon find yourself powerless ever to do anything again. No matter how it happened. It, say it, not knowing what.

(U, p. 293.)

The verbless sentences reflect the difficulty of thought and narration, as the narrator constantly “stammers” like Bion’s (1959) patient, thus attacking his own thinking. The communicative function and descriptive power of the apparently artificial language collapse. There seems to be no certainty for the narrator, besides the event of narration – the only event which is truthful to him (“call that going, call that on”). But he cannot make it coherent. He is still able to distance himself from his narration to some extent, whereas in the end, as we will see, the only thing that remains is the “mumbling” voice. Now, still at the beginning, the narrator eyes the linguistic desert of his narration as if wondering what the power of attraction of emptiness is and what is the destructive power that makes his connection to meaning collapse: “Questions, hypotheses, call them that.” Incapable of creating and maintaining illusions about himself, others and external reality, the Unnameable expresses

himself in language that represents, to use Thomas Ogden's (1999) expression from a clinical context, "forms of deadness" (p. 23).¹⁸ In Freud's (1915) terms, he destroys the thing-presentations associated with word-presentations (p. 209): "It, say it, not knowing what." The question is whether meanings could exist at all.

In addition to the meaningfulness of words, there is another attack on linking in the opening lines. When the reader arrives at the words, "Can it be that one day", the narrative actually becomes vivid for a while as the reader can forget about the words *as* words.¹⁹ The pause between the last phrases of the sentence, "as far away as possible" and "it wasn't far", is a pause before which language *might have* meanings, like poetic past ("instead of going out, in the old way, out to spend day and night as far away as possible"), and until that point, after the opening questions, "sense of aliveness" (Ogden, 1999, p. 23) prevails. However, by the end of the sentence, "Can it be that one day", the reader gives a start: no answer or representations of any kind to what might be going on "inside" are actually given; a linguistic completion of the relative clause beginning with "in where" is missing.

The interruption itself becomes the key psychological content of the passage. It is precisely the continuity of desire, aliveness and meaningfulness that the Unnameable attacks. Narrators in literature usually have "dual-voices" where different discourses "speak", such as discourses of their characters or political discourses (Aczel, 1998). Correspondingly, in the narrating voice of *The Unnamable*, the voice of the object integrated in it "speaks" at the points where meanings are destroyed. It is the attacking part of the voice that is responsible for the interruption that makes the grammar collapse in my previous example.²⁰

There seems to be a battle of two voices going on in the dual-voice of Beckett's text. The result is exactly the same as in the attacks on linking where "thought and object relations are disturbed, but consciousness of reality remains" (López-Corvo, 2005, pp. 36). The narrator cannot form an emotional contact with either his past or his future, because of the internalised attacking function of his voice. However, his sense of reality is not a madman's; rather, the whole existence of a meaningful external (and internal) reality is in serious doubt. The result can be described in Miller's (2013) words: "It is not the narrator alone who asks, 'what am I to do, what shall I do, in my situation, how proceed?' It is the reader, too, nearing saturation in *The Unnamable*, befuddled by incoherence." (p. 192.)

Not only psychoanalytic scholars but also the Unnameable himself seem to be aware of projective identification in the text, as Connor (2008), for example, has pointed out (p. 18). On page 13, Beckett purposely used the concept to describe his narrator's endeavour to establish a self. Example 2:

All these Murphys, Molloyes and Malones do not fool me. They have me wasted my time, suffer for nothing, speak of them when, in order to stop speaking, I should have spoken of me and of me alone. ... They never suffered my pains, their pains are nothing, compared to mine, a mere tittle of mine, the tittle I thought I could put from me, in order to witness it. Let them be gone now, them and all the others, those I have used and those I have not used, give me back the pains I lent them and vanish, from my life, my memory, my terror and shames.
(*U*, pp. 305–306.)

The narrator claims to have now realised why he has created his avatars: it was to “lend” them (project to them) his own suffering “in order to witness it” (identify with it) after it has been projected to the other in phantasy. Then he wanted them to “give [it] back”, meaning that he wishes to re-internalise the projection (“the pains”). The narrator expresses his awareness of the mechanism that he has used in his relationship with his “puppets” (p. 294): “They never suffered my pains”. The narrator is aware that it has only been his phantasy, and the other never in fact experienced his pain at the time he narrated about “[a]ll these Murphys, Molloyes and Malones”. Here the reader cannot easily distinguish the narrator from Beckett himself, the author of *Murphy*, *Molloy* and *Malone dies*.

However, we see in the quoted passage not only the narrator’s awareness of the mechanism of projective identification but also an attack on projective identification. What the narrator has created has not been enough in his search for his real self nor for his attempt to expel his psychic pain. Disappointed, he therefore undoes his meaning-making on projective identification: he “should have spoken of me and of me alone”, but has failed to do so and now draws the conclusion that his literary experiments have been in vain.

After this, the narration begins to systematically destroy representations and conventions such as the unity of the narrating voice and the story. Soon after the quoted passage, the narrator convinces us that now “there is no one here but me, no one wheels about me, ... only I and this black void have ever been” (*U*, p. 306). The narrator now tries to make “the pain” his own and no longer project it to his “puppets”, in accordance with the task he set himself in his very first words: “Where now? Who now? When now?” However, the task proves too difficult to carry out alone. Often the narrating I seems to be but the eye of the textual whirl with no essence, a mere void amidst raging words. He really cannot continue by operating with the concept of “I”, because he relentlessly starts to doubt his thoughts, emotions and voice – all that which we might call contents of his self, “I”: “I feel nothing, know nothing, and as far as thinking is concerned I do just enough to preserve me from going silent, you can’t call that thinking” (p. 309).

While the narrator’s projective identification inside the narration turned to “nothing” and “a mere tittle of mine”, its position at the beginning of the narration we now have changes. In the process of his search for truth, projective identification as a mechanism of meaning-making is transferred from meaning-making *inside* the text “outside” the text. Where earlier in Beckett’s trilogy the “puppets” job was to support the narrator’s emotional reality instead of and for the narrator, this role now falls on the inner recipient of the voice, the one from whom we always expect an answer in our expression (see Aczel, 1998). The distress expressed by the text begins to “leak” from inside the textual borders to the text–reader relationship, as the narrator now uses projective identification by transferring the distress in his phantasy to be experienced by the recipient. The “how” in the text (Aczel, 1998), its actual characteristics, really begin to put “pressure” (Ogden, 1992) on the reader to experience in accordance with this pain. From page 14 on, there is no paragraphing, and the reader is often demanded to follow the “murmurs” (p. 417) of the exhausting voice, its raw “working through” (Miller, 2013). The voice invades the reader’s mind stifling the ability to think and create meanings and illusions together with the narrator.

3. The Unnameable's attacks on poetic imagination and the reader's ability to think

Even though his projective identification in relation to his "puppets" failed, the Unnameable nevertheless keeps striving for consolidation by identifying with Mahood – his central "puppet" (p. 294) or "avatar" (Stewart, 2014, p. 171) – in rudiments of a story that occasionally interrupt the exhausting monologue. The embryo of the story, where we find the narrator/Mahood in a jar, manifests itself for instance on the brief but exceptional episode, about six pages long and approximately in the middle of the book (pp. 342–347). Putting his "puppet" in a jar, the Unnameable can tell a story of Mahood which did not bend into one before. Example 3:

How close to me he suddenly seems, squinting up at the medals of the hippophagist Ducroix. It is the hour of the apéritif, already people pause, to read the menu. Charming hour of the day, particularly when, as sometimes happen, it is also that of the setting sun whose last rays, raking the street from end to end, lend to my cenotaph an interminable shadow, astraddle of the gutter and the sidewalk. There was a time I used to contemplate it, when I was freer to turn my head than now, since being put in the collar.

(U, p. 342.)

"He" (line 1), that is, Mahood, becomes the "I", or the narrator (line 6). The narrator/Mahood has reduced himself to a head wearing an iron collar round the neck. He is in a jar outside a restaurant, with flies buzzing around him. He is at any rate able to admire the "[c]harming hour of the day" from his jar and wants to look at the restaurant guests.

The identification of the narrator with Mahood may be seen as an effort to integrate the experiences of destructiveness and externality. As disturbing as the poetic image of a head in a jar is, and although the narrator's bodily existence is still questionable and he cannot move freely in his jar, the narration itself can move more freely than before and remains longer unaffected by the attacks on linking of language itself. The poetic image of a head in a jar and the character Mahood act as a container, inside the text, to the narrating voice which it tries to use to give meaning to a nameless dread.²¹ Symbolic thinking and poetic imagination start, and stable fictive reality has established itself. The narrator ventures to explore, create and think about his dawning separateness: he hopes that Marguerite "makes me a nest of rags, well tucked in all round me, to preserve me from chills" (p. 343). Thanks to the new narrative cohesion, nothingness no longer stretches uncontrollably all over the narration itself. Instead, the narrator is able to experience "*feelings as if* life were empty and thinking that nothing matters" (Ogden, 1992, p. 8; italics orig.), in other words, a living psychic and emotional reality. He has succeeded in creating a kind of literary holding environment for himself where he can have *feelings* and *experiences*.

This stylistic transfer of the jar episode suggests a change in the transferential structure of the text. The reader is no longer addressed from a position where the narrating voice

constrains and controls the inner recipient. This is again a significant change in *where* projective identification occurs, though now in a reversed direction – from the narrator’s relationship with the reader back to his relationship with his story world. The reader now enjoys a new freedom to read and form illusions. The episode represents a psychic reality where the first meanings and illusions are about to dawn. Projective identification, in other words, operates here in its form of creating meanings and signification. Thus, the jar episode brings the conflict between meaninglessness and meaningfulness to the fore – a conflict that comes close to what Ogden (1992) calls schizoid by nature (p. 170).²² The episode represents an archaic experience where it becomes possible to think about the absence of the mother (“no-breast”; Bion, 1962). In this way, an emotional contact, a link, to the mother is built anew – or, to be more exact, to the absence of the mother, which the narrator is now capable of thinking.

However, the Unnameable’s psyche is ultimately unable to bear this formation of a new type of emotional contact. At the end of the jar episode, not surprisingly, the creation of a good emotional connection is destroyed or, as the Unnameable says, it becomes “shit”.²³

Example 4:

I shall now sum up. The moment is at hand when my only believer must deny me. Nothing has happened. ... There will never be another woman wanting me in vain to live, my shadow at evening will not darken the ground. The stories of Mahood are ended. He has realized they could not be about me ...

(*U*, pp. 347–348.)

The narrator destroys the achieved emotional connection by means of denarration,²⁴ that is, by withdrawing the embryo of the story just told (“[t]he stories of Mahood are ended”). Attacks on linking are here aimed at poetic fancy which would have connected the narrator’s emotional reality to the inner containers²⁵ of the story world – the jar, Marguerite and the restaurant – and towards a conventional narrative. The quote also exposes the narrator’s wish to manipulate his “only believer” into a role that “denies” him; otherwise put, the narrator aims to outsource the attacks on linking to be executed by the other. In the jar episode of *The Unnamable*, the narrator is momentarily able to understand and can tell somebody understandably, but this yearning for intimacy comes with the fearful threat of a separate other. Denarration can be interpreted as the return of the bad internal object on the scene of the Unnameable’s psyche.

The hopeful experience in the jar episode seems to disappear completely as the narration continues towards its end. The ending section consists of several pages-long sentences with no full stops or other breaks. The section reveals the novel’s characteristic resistance to ending (Parkin-Gounelas, 2001, p. 81) and establishing representations. It seems that, at the end of the text, the destructive part of the voice has invaded the narrator’s “own” voice completely, like a virus, and destroyed the original narrative organs. The narration means (literally) nothing: everything in it ends up psychically equal. The narrator yearns for (Example 5):

the story of the silence that he never left, that I should never have left, that I may never find again, that I may find again, then it will be he, it will be I, it will be the place, the silence, the end, the beginning, the beginning again, how can I say it, that's all words, they're all I have, and not many of them, the words fail, the voice fails, so be it, I know that well, it will be the silence, full of murmurs, distant cries, the usual silence, spent listening, spent waiting, waiting for the voice, the cries abate, like all cries, that is to say they stop, the murmurs cease, they give up, the voice begins again, it begins trying again, quick now before there is none left, no voice left, nothing left but the core of murmurs ...

(U, p. 417)

The episode, which represents the entire narration, can be interpreted as a manifestation of the attacks on linking and the drive to communicate. The passage employs switching to opposites and mixing identities ("it will be he, it will be I"), as well as the end of time levels and conflicts. The Unnameable's effort to destroy representations of any kind actually extends to the representation of the self as well. As long as there is a representation of the self in the psyche, there is inevitably a difference between the self and the desired state of undifferentiation.

The schizoid voice in Beckett's text that turns towards itself and either shuns relationships or attacks them is, nevertheless, directed at someone. From the viewpoint of projective identification, the narration helps him hold on to his fragile ego via his speech. He can get rid of nothingness by producing it, in unconscious phantasy, in the other (the reader), while still retaining a mental connection to nothingness by identification with the fantasised other. Actual linguistic characters put pressure on the reader to contain the narrator's nameless dread and chaotic inner reality, because he is unable to experience those parts of his personality by himself. The narration submits the reader to the same threat of losing her sense of the ego and to a psychically meaningless reality, the habitat of the Unnameable.²⁶

What makes *The Unnamable* a difficult read is the reader's attempt to understand the text but failure to do so. Beckett's narration turns away from the text-reader relationship by destroying the link that would enable a contact: communication at the symbolic level of language which would link the narrator to his inner recipient. This *The Unnamable* achieves by bringing the materiality of language – words *as* words – to the fore and by making all thoughts and feelings equal, with increasing fury towards the end. The reader drowns in his meaningless flood of words with no psychic freedom to feel and think. Thus, the text ultimately attacks the reader's attempt to understand²⁷ and expresses its central theme by a primitive way of communication: the theme of not letting the other psychically close. This painful experience, which the narrator himself was unable to integrate, is communicated to the reader in the mechanism of projective identification. However, projective identification itself is a concept that allows us to think about this experience afterwards. The deprivation of psychic freedom and the collapse of meanings, as well as the experience of being abandoned and shut out of interaction "are in an important sense not entirely one's own" (Ogden, 1992, p. 1), that is, the reader's. Their origin lies in the Unnameable.

The Unnameable tries to destroy the relationship with his inner recipient, although that is where he, at the same time, wants to be met as himself, that is, as one with an integrated

tendency to destroy object relations and links. In my view, this creation of a fictive psychic reality for the narrator of the book is what Beckett's novel achieves. It manages to create a psychological depth for its narrator, which the narrator himself pretends to lack. We would not have achieved experiential understanding of attacks on linking had Beckett obeyed the "stories of Mahood" (p. 348) or let Mahood tell the story in a coherent form. The Unnameable has, in fact, created a form to correspond to his inner experience – a link to the archaic layers of his psyche and his destructive inner objects. The event where these inner objects become accessible to thought releases the capacities of the narrator's psyche. The only link which does not become an object of the attacking function in *The Unnamable* is the book itself.

4. Conclusions: How not to interpret

One of the values of *The Unnamable* from the reader's perspective is that it is not, in Bion's words, merely "learning something" but "learning from experience" (see López-Corvo, 2005, p. 163), based on the reading experience of the archaic functions of a psychotic mind which are actualised in poetic transference. Another value of *The Unnamable* is that it gives us interpretative advice, as it were, on exactly how to face a fragile psychic reality, as I will here suggest.

I showed in my Example 3 how narrative cohesion, the illusion of an ego and an established story world developed in the jar episode. At the end of it, denarration blocked all shortcuts to "story" or "self", when the narrator cut off the story he had told us about Mahood in a jar: "The stories of Mahood are ended." The vivid moment we and the narrator shared together with Mahood is wiped out of the narrator's mind. When his narration then gets back to normal, so to speak, he states:

Do they believe I believe it is I who am speaking? That's theirs too. To make me believe I have an ego all my own, and can speak of it, as they of theirs.

(U, pp. 347–348.)

The lines present a representation of "their" interpretation.²⁸ Who are "they"? They are our voices, the readers'. We had interpreted that the narrating voice had an "ego all [his] own", even though, in the final analysis, what we read in the jar episode only appeared to be yet another "story of Mahood", one of the Unnameable's "puppets", not of himself. The narrator shows how the reader interpreted cohesion and meaning in the jar episode where he did not yet have them in his experience. He himself does not in the end make the mistake of establishing the illusion of an ego where the established experience of a solid continuous ego does not yet exist experientially; instead, he submits his narrative to a narration that furiously destroys meanings within it, as described in my Example 5. The text suggests that the word "of" in "stories of Mahood" means not only 'about' Mahood but also stories that Mahood narrates about (of) him. He does not accept that "stories of Mahood" which come from the outside describe him and talk about him. The Unnameable perceives interpretations that he

"could speak of his ego as we speak of ours" as an attack. The Unnameable's words thus suggest that Beckett had ethical purposes to express his insights (or suspicions) concerning the attacking nature of certain kind of interpretations. We may also here detect Beckett's, who had an ambivalent attitude to psychoanalysis (Weller, 2009, p. 46), mistrust of the kind of psychoanalytic interpretations that the patient feels are coming from above or outside. Yet the very experience of the analyst's interpretation as an attack may indicate that "attacks on linking" are entering the transference relationship (Bion, 1959).

To summarise, every time the Unnameable is about to get a grip on meanings and generally feel anything psychically alive, his effort becomes the object of a destructive power and vanishes like a *fata morgana* in the desert. Of this the text convinces us, and does not fail to communicate. The Unnameable paradoxically feels both the need to destroy his relationship with the recipient of his narration and communicate this internalised tendency of his to destroy his object relations and the dread of being left alone, so that the other would be able to support and "digest" his destructiveness. In the narration of *The Unnamable*, meanings are about to emerge while at the same time being continuously threatened by destruction.

These attacks are so powerful and incessant that the narrator's inner and outer realities can never become established. This unestablished state of the inner and outer realities is an effect of reading produced by the lack of an integrated narrator's voice, a story world or tensions between the characters. These in a way "easy" routes to understanding the psychology of the narrator have been blocked in *The Unnamable*. To understand the psychology of the narrating voice we need to take other paths through the analysis of the text-reader relationship, as the reader "engages with a new and dynamic form of modern literature" (Miller, 2013, xiv). As readers, we physically feel how we are being denied the possibility of creating meaningful illusions typical of literature and our attempts to understand, and yet it is this very blocking of meaningful illusions and the sense of threat that reflect the narrator's experiences transferentially. Like Bergstein's (2015) patient, the Unnameable "communicated his internal world in a primitive and unconscious way, the only way that he could" (p. 939).

In psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic literary study, we must try to meet the other person from within their inner world. Beckett would seem to be saying in his book that the recipient of his narrator must try to empathise with an archaic world of experience but not by imposing meanings where they do not exist. As Ogden (1992) says, "Interpretation of meaning in a meaningless field is a form of denial" (p. 147). If attacks on linking are the Unnameable's deepest experiential reality, which needs to be communicated, it must not be destroyed as a primitive link in itself. The book urges us to resist the pressure of making interpretations that reduce the other into corresponding to our conceptual armature, even such an obvious one as "the self", which we take for granted but which the other person may not feel as their own. At their worst, reductive interpretations might boost a "false self" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 17) or other pathological courses instead of being an effort to understand. They would suppress the experienced psychic place where the other person lives,²⁹ instead of helping them to symbolise and integrate that place as psychically their own. This is no easy task, however, when a person attempts to destroy our very effort to understand them.

In his readings on literature, Ogden (1999; 2013) has given us examples of how important it is to keep alive the voice we hear in literature. The psychoanalytic truth is, for Ogden (2016), “expressed in tone of voice or in what is left to the imagination” (p. 412) or “in the parts left out, in the breaks in the discourse” (p. 413). When the destructiveness “passed on” to the reader by *The Unnamable* can be considered in the light of the concept of projective identification, the alarm and helplessness under the surface of the narrating voice’s manifest attack becomes audible. The entire narration of *The Unnamable* is a kind of gesture towards the other, a call for help to support the destructiveness: *this* voice, which is directed at the other in a “drive to communicate” (Bergstein, 2015), is its central illusion. Thus, the text does in fact build a living psychic reality in the text–reader relationship. At the same time as the narrator tries to destroy the link between himself and his recipient – meaningful narration – he ends up doing it in *language*. The big paradox of *The Unnamable* is that communication taking place at the level of primitive projective identification, and the theme of a call for help hidden within it, are an effect of reading which is attained at the symbolic level, that is, in art.

In the end, it might be reasonable to ask what exactly “the narrator” means. According to Merav Roth (2019), readers give psychological birth to literary characters via the mechanism of normal projective identification. We think that we experience and interpret characters “in” the book outside ourselves, but in fact we do it in an essential illusion which Roth calls a “distancing paradox” (p. 33). It is we, in unconscious phantasy, who transfer our wishes, fears, experiences and so on to characters and narrators to find a form and to be contained (Roth, 2019, p. 26). Consequently, we need to ask what kind of a container Beckett’s book as an object is to the reader.

According to Ogden (1992), we too have experienced at the beginning of our life a “[d]iffusion of ego boundaries” (p. 71).³⁰ If some unnameable areas still exist in the archaic layers of our psyche in some form, the representation of an inner world where meanings are only about to evolve – which *The Unnamable* provides – may not be completely alien to us after all. From the viewpoint of the *reader’s* projective identification, *The Unnamable* is a form, a “mother”, who “hears” these very early psychic layers of ours and processes them. The wish that is reflected in the novel has been familiar to us, too, at some stage: The other should contain nothingness until the dawn of something arises.

* * * * *

In my article, I at first presented the concepts of projective identification and attacks on linking that are central to a psychoanalytic reading of Beckett’s *The Unnamable*. With projective identification, I followed Thomas Ogden to emphasise the pressure that the projector exerts on the recipient. I used Bion’s (1959) concept, “attacks on linking”, in accordance with Avner Bergstein’s (2015) interpretation to show that the manifestation of destructive tendencies in a human relationship may indicate the only true way a person is capable of being in a relationship with the other.

After the theoretical chapter, I showed, using psychoanalytic close reading, firstly, how a destructive tendency integrated in the narrating voice destroys the narrator’s relationship

with the world of internal and external objects (Example 1). After that, I showed how projective identification fails as a meaning-making mechanism in the narrator's relationship with his avatars (Example 2) and story world (Examples 3 and 4), and how the narrator showed his awareness of this. The failure of projective identification inside the text I interpreted to lead to a situation where the narrator begins to use projective identification in his relationship with the inner recipient of his expression. In my interpretation, the attacking function integrated in the narrator's psyche extended "outside" the text and became manifest in the text–reader relationship. This was shown to cause the reader to feel that the narrator attacked her attempt to understand (Example 5).

At the end of the article, I discussed the value of *The Unnamable* as concerns the questions of the ethics of interpretation it brings to the fore. The narrating voice of *The Unnamable* tries to make his recipient perceive experientially that the attacking function integrated in an individual's psyche must be met in a way that will keep it alive without resorting to reductive interpretations. In other words, attacks on linking as a link must not be destroyed. Beckett's novel may be seen as a link not only to the narrator's but also the reader's archaic mind, when the first illusions are only beginning to dawn in the unnameable nothingness.

Translated from Finnish by Kaisa Sivenius

References

- Abbott, H. P. (2013). *Real mysteries: Narrative and the unknowable*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Aczel, R. (1998). Hearing voices in narrative texts. *New Literary History*, 29(3), 467–500.
- Bair, D. (1978). *Samuel Beckett: a Biography*. New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Beckett, S. (1959) *Molloy; Malone Dies; The Unnamable*. Repr. London: Calder and Boyars, 1966.
- Bergstein, A. (2015). Attacks on Linking or a Drive to Communicate? Tolerating the Paradox. *The Psychoanalytic quarterly*, 84(4), 921–942.
- Bion, W. R. (1959/2013). Attacks on Linking. *The Psychoanalytic quarterly*, 82(2), 285–300.
- Bion, W. R. (1962/1967). A theory of thinking. In *Second Thoughts* (including in *The complete works of W. R. Bion*, 2014).
- Bronstein, C. & O'Shaughnessy E. (ed.) (2017). *Attacks on linking revisited. A new look at Bion's classic work*. London: Karnac.
- Brown, L. (2011). Voice and pronouns in Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*. *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 20(2), 172–196. Edinburgh University Press.

- Connor, S. (2008). Beckett and Bion. *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 17(1–2), 9–34. Edinburgh University Press.
- Culler, J. (1984). Textual Self-Consciousness and the Textual Unconscious. *Style*, 18(3), 369–376. Retrieved 3.11.2021 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42946137>.
- Dukes, H. (2017). Beckett's vessels and the animation of containers. *Journal of Modern Literature*, 40(4), 75–89.
- Eaton, J. L. (2005). The obstructive object. *Psychoanalytic review*, 92(3), 355–372.
- Foster, D. (2013). Between Beyonds: "Play"'s Urns and Their Exhabitants. *Samuel Beckett today/aujourd'hui*, 25, 211–223.
- Freud, S. (1915). The Unconscious. *Standard Edition* Vol.14. London: Hogarth Press. Pp. 159–215.
- Freud, S. (1921). Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego. *Standard Edition* Vol.18. London: Hogarth Press.
- Holland, N. N. (1980/1979) Hermia's Dream. *Shakespeare through Contemporary Psychoanalysis. Representing Shakespeare: New psychoanalytic essays*. Ed. Kahn, C. & Schwartz, M. M. Baltimore (MD): The Johns Hopkins University Press. Pp. 1–20.
- Jacobus, M. (1999). *Psychoanalysis and the scene of reading*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Kilgore, C. D. & Irving, D. (2018). Event: From Object to Schema to System. *Poetics Today*, 39(3), 543–567.
- Laplanche, J. & Pontalis, J. B. (1988). *The Language of Psycho-analysis*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. London: Karnac Books.
- López-Corvo, R. E. (2005/2003). *The Dictionary of the Work of W. R. Bion*. London: Karnack.
- Miller, I. S. & Souter, K. (2013). *Beckett and Bion: The (im)patient Voice in Psychotherapy and Literature*. London and New York: Karnac. Retrieved 13.4.2022 from <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.jyu.fi/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=612588&site=ehost-live>.
- Miller, I. S. (2017). Reading Beckett in the context of psychoanalysis: a literary bridge between one-person and two-person psychology. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 33(4), 456–469.
- Moore B. E. & Fine, B. D. (1990). *Psychoanalytic Terms an Concepts*. New Have and London: The American Psychoanalytic Association and Yale University Press.
- Ogden, T. H. (1992/1982). *Projective Identification and Psychotherapeutic Technique*. London: Maresfield Library.
- Ogden, T. H. (1999). *Reverie and Interpretation. Sensing Something Human*. London and New York: Routledge.

Ogden, T. H. & Ogden, B. (2013). *The Analyst's Ear and the Critic's Eye. Rethinking psychoanalysis and literature*. London & New York: Routledge.

Ogden, T. H. (2016). On language and truth in psychoanalysis. *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 85(2), 411–426.

Parkin-Gounelas, R. (2001). *Literature and Psychoanalysis: Intertextual Readings*. Houndmills: Palgrave.

Rimmon-Kenan, S. (1999). *Kertomuksen poetiikka*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura. Translated from English original, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1983) by Auli Viikari.

Roth, M. (2019). *A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Reading Literature: Reading the Reader*. London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Stevens, V. (2005). Nothingness, no-thing, and nothing in the work of Wilfred Bion and in Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*. *The Psychoanalytic review*, 92(4), 607–635.

Stewart, P. (2014). Suffering fiction in "The Unnamable". *Samuel Beckett today/aujourd'hui*, 26, 165–177.

Tunkkari, E. (2019). Ajatella vai tuhoutua. *Psykoanalyttinen psykoterapia* 15, 165–172.

Weller, S. (2009). "Some experience of the schizoid voice": Samuel Beckett and the language of derangement. *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 45(1), 32–50.

Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and Reality*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books.

Acknowledgements: *I am grateful to Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation and Signe & Ane Gyllenberg Foundation for supporting my doctorate thesis. Thank you also to the two anonymous peer reviewers for their excellent suggestions, as well as all the other readers who have given their comments on my article.*

Notes:

¹ I here refer to the narrator of *The Unnamable* as the "Unnameable", as is common in Beckett studies. Throughout my article, to make a distinction, I use the pronoun 'he' when referring to the narrator, while the reader is referred to as 'she'.

² By the narrating voice in prose, following the narratologist Richard Aczel (1998), I mean the party construed by the reader and considered responsible for the unity and rhetoric order of the work (p. 495). It is a "heuristic metaphor" (p. 494), and not the same as an overall characterisation of the "author's voice". The identity of the narrating voice is created by "the realm of 'how' – tone, idiom, diction, speech-style" (p. 469).

³ Norman Holland (1980), a pioneer of psychoanalytic literary studies, illustrated the three phases of psychoanalytic literary criticism by reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. At the first phase, "I have been thinking Hermia's dream mostly as though it were an event 'out there' in a play 'out there', wholly separate from me" (p. 9). At the third stage, however, Holland discusses the way his own

inevitable subjectivity is intertwined with the psychological birth of the play. In my analysis of Beckett's work my own subjectivity is partly "seized" by the narrating voice and, because of projective identification, experiences the distress that was originally another's.

⁴ A narratological specification is due. An expression is always aimed at another. In literature, it is aimed at the inner recipient of the narrating party (Aczel, 1998). The actual reader identifies with that *addressee*, that is, the reader structure produced by the text (Rimmon-Kenan, 1999). How the narrator treats the recipient does not necessarily reflect the same attitude as the relationship that is forming between the author and the reader. The author may, for example, build a relationship between the narrator and his recipient in the text with the purpose of making the actual reader analyse it. Psychoanalytically speaking, this analysis takes place so that the actual reader allows themselves to identify with the reader structure to get a vivid experience of the narrator's way of being in a relationship – exactly as the analyst needs to discover the position of recipient that matches the analysand's transference, while not lapsing into carrying it out.

⁵ To Ogden (1999), both psychoanalysis and literature are "ear training" (1999, pp. 211–231), and he refers to "the very hardest of questions, and not one likely to encourage a search for coherent patterns": "What is it like to read this poem?" (p. 206.) In *The Unnamable*, "the very hardest of questions" is not only difficult but distressing to confront.

⁶ Beckett himself has described the impossibility of expression for instance thus: "[t]he expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with obligation to express" (Parkin-Gounelas, 2001, p. 227, endnote 4).

⁷ In his early study of Proust in 1931, Beckett already took interest in the importance of inner object relationships, for example, as well as the text-reader relationship in Proust's novel, and later used these ideas in his *The Unnamable* as well (Miller, 2013).

⁸ According to Eaton (2005), distress and beta elements mean "raw emotional experience at the level of sensation that obtrudes upon the infant's attention or awareness" (p. 357).

⁹ The projector's mental powers produce the characteristic features in the expression, such as breaks, suffocation or repetition. The recipient interprets them in the context of her or his personality. It is a question of psychic forces being conveyed to the expression and impression of the recipient, not "directly" of those contents "being passed on" to another person. According to Ogden (1992), the doubts many psychoanalysts have about the concept of projective identification may reflect their resistance to the idea of "experiencing feelings and thinking thoughts that are in an important sense not entirely one's own" (p. 1). Similar opposition against the threat of losing one's safe position as a reader who is separate from the text may indicate that the boundaries between reader and text have been drawn too sharply.

¹⁰ The Grimms' tale, "The story of the youth who went forth to learn what fear was" illustrates powerfully the difficulty of becoming able to think about and integrate fear.

¹¹ Bion (1962) also briefly describes the development of "omniscience" as a defensive solution (p. 156–157), which I do not discuss here.

¹² According to Bion (1962), a patient like this is unable to receive anything from their environment and, consequently, their analyst in analysis (p. 158).

¹³ This is an important difference between Beckett's and for example Thomas Bernhard's texts. According to Weller (2009), Bernhard is "the writer who is perhaps closer than any other to Beckett

in his attempt to produce a literature of the ‘schizoid voice’, although Bernhard’s conception of that voice differs from Beckett’s in a number of important ways ...” (p. 45). One difference is that in Bernhard’s texts, a clear emotional connection is created with objects in the form of hatred, as Tunkari (2019) has shown, whereas in *The Unnamable*, the destructive power that floods over everything is pointed at hatred as well.

¹⁴ The child assumes not only the characteristics of the object, (*introjection*; Laplanche & Pontalis, 1988, p. 229–230), but also the entire interpersonal *relationship* (*internalisation*; mts. 226–227). Different thinkers have defined the internal object in psychoanalysis in different ways (Moore & Fine, 1990, 109), and there is no need to go into the exact differences here. In my article, I use the concept of internal object in accordance with both the ideas suggested by Bion’s essays on “Attacks on Linking” and “A Theory of Thinking” and one of the definitions of identification given by Freud (1921), which Laplanche and Pontalis (1998) describe as “[t]he primal form of the emotional tie with the object” (p. 207). From this perspective, the internalisation may be seen as an attempt in early childhood to take the only object that has been available as one’s own. To interpret the psyche of the Unnameable from these perspectives means that the object (or the relationship) is internalised as destructive as it may be, because the developing psyche cannot be *without anything*. There has to be *at least something*. I interpret *The Unnamable* to represent such an early psyche where a destructive internal object prevails – an object earlier identified with (before the separation of the object) and which the narrator tries to get rid of in his excessive projective identification.

¹⁵ Different from Klein’s thinking, in Bion, the emphasis is not so much on the *object* as on the *link* that connects the objects to each other (López-Corvo, 2005, pp. 36).

¹⁶ For example Horovitz (2017, abstract) is thinking along the same lines as he discusses how attacks on linking appear in analysis: “The powerful and new resistance at this stage seemed to come from only one part of her patient’s personality, while at the same time another part continued to respond to the analytic work.”

¹⁷ Interestingly, Eaton (2005) compares the figure of the Sphinx to an obstructive object which attacks anyone who seeks contact with it.

¹⁸ For Ogden (1999), “the sense of aliveness and deadness of the transference-countertransference” is “perhaps the single most important measure of the moment-to-moment status of the analytic process” (p. 23) The description is trenchant for the dynamic reading process of *The Unnamable* as well.

¹⁹ Jacobus (1999), following Winnicott, describes how reading in general “depends on not-seeing the words” (p. 7). That is to say, the reader usually forgets the words as material and plunges into the sphere of meanings.

²⁰ On the next page, too, grammar breaks down, with a similar impact on the reading:

The fact would seem to be, if in my situation one may speak of facts, not only that I shall have to speak of things of which I cannot speak, but also, which is even more interesting, but also that I, which is if possible even more interesting, that I shall have to, I forget, no matter. And at the same time I am obliged to speak. I shall never be silent. Never.
(*U*, p. 294.)

The “fact” assumed by the narrator is deprived of adverbial completion (“I forget, no matter”), and the reader sinks in a textual gap or void.

²¹ On containers in Beckett, see also Dukes, 2017 and Foster, 2013.

²² The jar episode is not, however, completely whole in its exceptionally emotional liveliness compared with the narration otherwise. In the course of the episode, the narrator also foresees the intrusion of a destructive power into the narration, as if he were fighting against something inevitable. He says, after the passage quoted above: “The evening is still young, I know that, don’t let us go just yet, not yet say goodbye once more forever, to this heap of rubbish” (p. 343). The narrator would like the evening – his *story* in the jar – to go on a little longer, but our familiar destructive power attempts to change the story and the form into a “heap of rubbish” and thus again spread his metastases in the narration which attempted to free itself from its grip – in a literary experiment that now, retrospectively, already seems unviable to the narrator.

²³ At the beginning of the text the narrator stated: “With yesses and noes it is different, they will come back to me as I go along and how, like a bird, to shit on them all without exception” (p. 294).

²⁴ Denarration is a type of unnatural narration “where a narrator presents an event but then retracts it in such a way as to problematize the storyworld situation” (Kilgore and Irving, 2018, p. 551).

²⁵ Bion’s concept “container” refers to the mother’s/analyst’s ability to think and give meaning to the experiences the infant/patient “passes on” to her in projective identification (López-Corvo, 2005, pp. 70–72).

²⁶ It might be of interest to compare this type of a reading situation with the clinical situations of psychoanalysis Ogden (1992) describes. There, the patient manipulated the analyst in unconscious projective identification into experiencing parts of her personality, so that the therapist “felt as if there were no space in the room for him” as “the patient puts pressure on the therapist to experience himself as inescapably intruded upon” (pp. 14–15). The analyst may experience dread of the loss of boundaries and collapse of her own ability to think (p. 5). Similarly, the reader of *The Unnamable* ends up in the unpleasant situation where her psychic freedom has been taken away and the text manipulates her into a particular experience – the sense of being “powerless” to create and maintain meanings and illusions.

²⁷ The reading effect resembles Bergstein’s (2015) description of his patient whose “abstract, distant speech was often experienced as an attack on my capacity to think” (p. 935).

²⁸ The sentence would “apply to its own condition and situation as text”, as the famous literary theorist Jonathan Culler (1984, p. 372) put it in his analysis of literary representations of how we read fiction. Some texts are “already about a reading of the text” (p. 372).

²⁹ Bergstein (2015) describes how his patient gained a profound insight of a “place” where he is in his own experience: “Perhaps this is what I do over and over again. I create an experience in which we can’t communicate. Perhaps, more than the closeness I say I want to achieve, I want to arrive at a deep conviction that this is not possible. This is the place I’m at.” (pp. 940–941.) As painful as becoming conscious of this is, the link between the dimensions of the reflective and the experiencing psyche has not been destroyed.

³⁰ Ogden (1992) writes: “Those who view projective identification as ‘a basically psychotic mechanism’ (Meissner, 1980) confuse that which is primitive with that which is psychotic. Diffusion of ego boundaries and treatment of the object as an extension of the self are characteristics of psychotic states, but they also have their place in a hierarchy of modes of relatedness that constitute the healthy personality.” (p. 71.)