This article provides a reading of *The Unnamable* in the light of contemporary cognitive theories of self and self-consciousness. By drawing on Daniel Dennett’s account of self as a ‘centre of narrative gravity’ and on the three-levels model of self proposed by Antonio Damasio, the article foregrounds significant analogies with Beckett’s literary journey into cognition, even before and beyond *The Unnamable*. It concludes by arguing that a cognitive approach to his narrative work can offer a framework for interpreting the extent to which Beckett has been able to explore the mind, generating through language and narrative devices experiences which sciences can only discursively report.

1. Introduction: A Cognitive Journey
It is fairly odd discovering, in a letter to Georges Duthuit at the very beginning of June 1949 – only two months after having started to draft *The Unnamable*, in one of the gloomiest periods of his creative career – that Beckett was “reading *Around the World in 80 Days,*” positively classified as “lively stuff” (*LSB II*, 163). Given the descending, excavating nature of the last novel of the trilogy, it would have been less surprising to find a mention of the equally famous masterpiece by Verne, the *Voyage au centre de la Terre* (1864). Yet, in a less local scrutiny, both the horizontal, superficial (and significantly circular) orbit of Phileas Fogg’s enterprise, and the vertical, geologically stratified axis of Professor Lidenbrok’s quest are present in Beckett’s narrative work. However, these two movements are not simultaneously operative, but rather are subsequently exploited throughout Beckett’s narrative trajectory. As Mark Nixon elucidates, sometime after *Murphy* there is a turning point in how the trope of the journey is treated in Beckett’s fiction, since Beckett has accepted “that there was no ‘to’ or ‘towards’, and thus no redemptive destination” (191). The horizontal pointless excursions of Belacqua across Irish cityscapes or *Murphy*’s wandering in the outer world of London progressively come to an end.
in the trilogy – passing, as Shane Weller argues, from the “object-world or subject-world” of *Murphy* to the “flight from all world” in *Malone meurt* (Weller, 109). This is not to say that the trope of the journey disappears from Beckett’s literary imagination. Rather, as Nixon indicates, it “remains central to Beckett’s postwar work, but is negated” (97) or, I would suggest, inverted (*The Unnamable* being “a kind of inverted spiral,” (Beckett 2009, 310)). The horizontal plane of movement is replaced by a vertical expedition, and Belacqua’s “gressio” (Beckett 2010, 33) is substituted by an inward plunge, of which *The Unnamable* constitutes the endless bottom. In this narrative manoeuvre, a different ‘towardness’ emerges, for Beckett understands, as we shall see, that the outward journey in search of the self is the “wrong figure” (qtd. in Knowlson, 247). An alternative exploration has to be directed on the way to what he calls the “seed of motion” (247) by going beyond what is called in *Molloy* “the surface leaden above the infernal depths” (Beckett 2009, 73) of the mind from which the illusion of selfhood stems.

In the present article, I want to account for this second speleological journey in Beckett’s fictional work by drawing on contemporary cognitive theories of self.¹ On the one hand, I want to suggest that, in *The Unnamable*, Beckett does indeed reach some kind of centre of the subjective planet, the structure and functions of which resemble those qualities that the philosopher of mind Daniel Dennett attributes to what he calls the “center of narrative gravity” (1991, 418). This parallel should enrich the interpretation of the outcome of this expedition, with the discovery that the feeling of a seed of (narrative) motion is a false sensory impression responsible for the “stupid obsession with depth” (Beckett 2009, 287), which in turn accounts for the conception and perception of the self as an internal locus of subjectivity. Furthermore, I put this narrative account of the self into relation with two distinct problems related to self-consciousness: namely, the problems of circularity and of infinite regress. As we shall see, *The Unnamable* can be read as a fictional rendering of these two complications indissolubly bounded to an ontology of self-knowledge. On the other hand, I elaborate on the remarkable similarities between the three-levels model of self proposed by the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (2010), and the distinct cognitive levels that the narrator of *The Unnamable* lets the reader perceive, especially by pointing beyond its linguistic existence. In a letter to Aidan Higgins in 1952, Beckett wrote about *The Unnamable* as “the end of the jaunt,” going further by