Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Signature:

Stephen R. Hager 12 April 2010

“For to End Yet Again”: Continuity and Closure in Samuel Beckett’s *Fizzles*

by

Stephen R. Hager

Adviser William Gruber

Department of English

William Gruber
Adviser

Michael Elliott
Committee Member

Richard Williamon
Committee Member

12 April 2010

“For to End Yet Again”: Continuity and Closure in Samuel Beckett’s *Fizzles*

By

Stephen R. Hager

Adviser William Gruber

An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of English

2010

Abstract

"For to End Yet Again": Continuity and Closure in Samuel Beckett's *Fizzles*

By Stephen R. Hager

This study attempts to explore a seminal yet largely overlooked aspect of Samuel Beckett's artistic achievement: his shorter prose, with a particular focus on his late collection *Fizzles* (1973-75). While often considered to be a series of "failed starts," this study views the texts not as failures of completion, but rather as willfully undermining the aesthetic norm of completion and integrality to which most works of literature have historically adhered. Influenced by the unfinished poems that proliferated during the Romantic Period, such as Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," Beckett has cultivated an aesthetic expression of incompletion that suggests that his works should not be seen as distinct, autonomous entities but rather as fragments of an ongoing project. The incompletion of these works is necessitated by Beckett's focus on the inherently divisive nature of consciousness. Because memory does not serve as a means of connecting the consciousness of the present with the memory of the past, these two are presented within the text as being separate. To end a work that fixates on the inherently fragmented nature of existence with a conclusive finale would be inappropriate, and this study, using Barbra Herrnstein Smith's *Poetic Closure* as a major source of reference, examines how Beckett manages to attenuate the effects of closure in his works again and again. In so doing, his works represent the tenacious striving to "end yet again" (Beckett, "8" 246).

“For to End Yet Again”: Continuity and Closure in Samuel Beckett’s *Fizzles*

By

Stephen R. Hager

Adviser William Gruber

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of English

2010

Table of Contents:

Introduction

How can I know what I think until I see what I say?
W.H. Auden

Himself has but to will
And easy as a Star
Abolish his Captivity-
And laugh-No more have I-

Emily Dickinson

The work of explicating Samuel Beckett's longer narratives and plays and assimilating them into the traditions of twentieth-century literature has been amply pursued, but the task of describing his shorter prose pieces as something other than a collection of ideas familiar in Beckett studies – Cartesian philosophy, the dissolution of the ego, the difficulties of fiction-making, and so on – has been less adequately accomplished. When they are viewed from generic or aesthetic angles, these short pieces (there are more than several dozen of them) – are often treated as experimental curiosities, "stories pared to fragments," as one Beckett scholar put it, "first abandoned and then 'completed' through the act of publication" (Gontarski, "Int" xi). Given their referential qualities and common themes, these texts are often viewed as introductions to Beckett's longer works, not as distinct and meaningful entities in themselves.

The relatively sparse amount of attention paid to Beckett's considerable achievement in the medium of short prose is surprising when one considers that his career is, in fact, bookended by short prose – from his first work of published fiction in 1929's "Assumption" to the aptly-titled "Stirrings Still" published in 1988 – and that the artist referred to his prose as "the important writing" (qtd. in Gontarski, "Int" xi). Perhaps this oversight is related to the strikingly

pejorative nature of their titles – like "From an Abandoned Work," "Imagination Dead Imagine," "Enough," "Ping," "Lessness," and "Neither," as well as the collections *Texts for Nothing* and *Fizzles* – which suggest texts characterized by exasperation, failure, and withdrawal. Of all of these titles, *Fizzles* is perhaps the most self-deprecating, in its allusion to subtle acts of flatulence. Beckett's own description of *Fizzles* as a series of "failed starts" has inevitably fostered this scholarly neglect (Knowlson, "Fres" 137).

Yet if the works are in certain respects fragmentary or failed narratives, they are correspondingly subversive of the structures they fail to complete. Beckett does not wholly reject representation, narrative, or even basic plot, but his short works often willfully undermine aspects of literature historically viewed as integral – those of character, setting, dialogue, and logical temporal sequence. In the absence of these basic features of narrative, what does Beckett include in their place?

The lack of such details results in large part from Beckett's focus on consciousness. The subject in these short works (to call them "stories" is in most cases misleading) is not the structure of intention and event that characterizes realistic narratives, but what Helen Vendler terms "the interior world of perception, emotion, and intellectual construction [that] has always seemed, to lyric poets, the locus of reality" (Vendler 5). "The volatility of the inner word," Vendler writes, "is precisely the volatility of the lyric. The *stability* of lyric, on the other hand, depends not on external objects but on the convergences and exigencies of achieved form" (Vendler 5 – my emphasis). This study is an attempt to explore the inner reality that Beckett so unapologetically depicts in a group of eight brief, haunting narratives that he wrote independent of one another over a period of nearly fifteen years and collected subsequently as *Foirades* or "Fizzles" (with the order of narratives differing in the French and English versions). With

particular focus on “Fizzle 1,” “Fizzle 3: Afar a Bird,” and “Fizzle 8: For to End Yet Again,” this study attempts to examine these texts not merely as distinct entities, but as a sequence that represent the common struggle to forge from the elusive and incomprehensible nature of this inner world a form that, to use Beckett’s expression, “accommodate[s] the mess” of human perception (Knowlson, “Dam” 342). These prose pieces achieve stability by the various formal comings together, convergences, and repetitions that exist within individual pieces, but more importantly, extend to Beckett’s short prose achievement as a whole.

Carol Shloss accurately observes that the *Fizzles* are connected in their common “variations on a past image”; this past image, however, does not apply to an element of external reality, but is the image of consciousness itself (Shloss 159). Beckett represents this inner division and fragmentation as detached narrators observe bodies engaged in dark travels, mingling among the disjointed ruins of their past in the effort to assemble the requisite materials for comprehension and identity. The difference between narrator and the object of narration is not to suggest two different characters, but a self reflecting on itself as through a mirror. Beckett displays the act of self-contemplation by representing the figures as separate entities. The subject of Shloss’s inquiry, the 1972 *Foirades/Fizzles* collaboration between Beckett and visual artist Jasper Johns (in which the latter provided thirty-three etchings to accompany five of the prose works contained within *Fizzles*), adds further insight into the fragmented nature of these texts; it is as if the works themselves yearn for some exterior mode of completion outside of language.

The failed starts that constitute the central thematic and formal concern of these works involve a divided consciousness attempting to form from memory a complete image of itself, an effort that is ultimately destined to fail. In the face of this ultimate incapacity, the narratives do not progress to logical conclusions, but instead breed further failed attempts. Cohesive identity is

inextricably related to the stability of one's memory; in the disunion of the two, the idea of a congruous identity crumbles under the weight of an overwhelming and incomprehensible experience. For it is this inadequate bond that fails to connect the experiencing self in the present and that of the self remembered from a distant past. *Fizzles* should not be viewed as failures of completion, then, but as a sequence of lyric reflections on the very instability that our problematic formation of identity is based on.

One of the central aims of this thesis is to examine the continuity of form and thematic intention in Beckett's sequence of narrative fragments, with particular emphasis on *Fizzles* as a collection, but also taking into account Beckett's larger short prose career (from the 1946 collection *Stories and Texts For Nothing* onward). The form that Beckett utilizes in these works is often disorienting in its smallest manifestation (on the level of individual stories). Part of this disorientation results from Beckett's avoidance of descriptive external detail, his familiar skepticism with regard to language as a legitimate means of representing the world. While every artist invariably encounters the problem of representation, certain mediums are better equipped to present external reality. A painting is better able to capture the essence of a tree, for example, when compared to verbal representation. In relation to this problem of artistic depiction, Elaine Scarry offers a useful way to view Beckett's texts:

> Precisely because each writer needs to solve a different problem of representation, each requires a sentence bearing a different grammatical shape. That shape, the 'acoustic signature' of the resistance the sentence must overcome, holds visible within a small compass of the larger shape of the scene as a whole. (Scarry 5)

Given his doubt that language could adequately represent external reality, Beckett aspires toward a syntax and form that will both record the world's erasure and at the same time manifest the perceiving consciousness of the narrative voice. Like Mandelbrot's formulation of fractal geometry, Beckettian structures often appear incoherent in their smallest manifestation; characteristically, his prose is built on nouns, noun phrases, and participles. When these structures are extended regularly over a large body, however, they become a kind of formal generative principle and begin to manifest a coherent shape. In this way, the individual stories display their collective resonance by recurrence of multi-faceted metaphors, familiar objects, and, most importantly their stubborn will to "go on" (Beckett, "Text" 100). Ultimately they manifest a central paradox of Beckett's short fiction, a literary aesthetic made complete through incompletion.

Chapter 1:

The Romantic Legacy in Beckett's Prose Fragments

"A fragment must like a small work of art be quite separate from the surrounding world and complete in itself like a hedgehog."

Friedrich Schlegel

"The winged words on which my soul would pierce / into the height of Love's Rare universe, / Are chains of lead around its flight of fire – / I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!"

Percy Shelley

"To hell with all this fucking scenery."

Malone Dies

Interpretations of literary fragments often assume that such works logically must have been detached from an elusive whole. Fragments are often seen as aberrant violations of the authentic norms of wholeness and completion that readers so often value in works of art. In his magisterial study, *The Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode speaks of the fundamentally human "need in the moment of existence to belong, to be related to a beginning and to an end" (Kermode 4). Aristotle made this need a dramatic necessity in *The Poetics* when he postulated that works of art should have a beginning, middle, and an end and progress by a logical and temporal succession of events. Such cohesion is comforting, and reflects the intrinsically human striving for full disclosure and completion in an existence that often fails to conform to our ideal standards of order, symmetry, and logical progression. Fictional works that conclude with the end of an experience allow us to "project ourselves… past the end, so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle" (Kermode 8).

But does our experience in life justify such a coherent representation? Are we to ignore the baffling contingencies and paradoxes that we encounter – whether or not it is convenient for us acknowledge them – on a daily basis? If the ultimate goal of poetry is, as Wallace Stevens suggests, "the act of finding / what will suffice," should art not reflect the insuperable complexities that far outweigh the certainties in life? (Kermode 18) For experience does not always – nor often for that matter – lend itself to such clear demarcations as beginnings, middles, and ends. Few experiences conform to the kind of closure that we experience at the end of a novel or the fall of a curtain. One of Samuel Beckett's chief aesthetic convictions is that works of art need not explain or simplify the act of being. As one reads Beckett, he seems to revel in the contradictory and often mundane aspects of being that do not accommodatingly facilitate one-dimensional extrapolation or satisfaction of plot. In order to explore the complexities of consciousness that he did not see properly represented in plot-bound novels, Beckett would gravitate toward a generic hybrid that was better able to "accommodate of the mess" of human existence (Knowlson, "Dam" 342). In so doing, Beckett's short fiction is not fundamentally "anomalous," "aberrant," "obscure," or even wholly "unconventional," as some critics have suggested (Gontarski, "Int" xi; Rabinovitz 2). Beckett was a conscious innovator, an artist whose works demonstrate that he adhered to Eliot's tradition. Beckett's prose fragments demonstrate the historical sense, and are an outgrowth of the Romantic Period, a time in which the literary fragment became, especially in Britain, a prominent means of representing the very limitations of the poet's ability to express the inexpressible.

A common confusion within discourse on fragments arises when one fails to appreciate the varying circumstances that surround a given fragment's realization. In *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*, an otherwise comprehensive and illuminating reflection on the "fragmentary" as

a definitive symbol of the Romantic spirit (particularly with regard to Wordsworth and Coleridge), Thomas McFarland makes a fundamental error by his problematic observation, "and whether fragmentary by intent or by accident makes little difference" (McFarland 20). Surely a distinction should be made between projects that are unfinished due to external factors beyond the artist's control – as when the writer dies before the work's completion – and those that were intentionally constructed as fragments. This inquiry concerns the latter category: works explicitly written and read as fragments, what we may refer to as the *intentional fragment*.

While unfinished works have existed throughout literary history, it was the Romantic Period (1798-1832) that saw the mass publication of the intentional fragment. During this time, literary fragments were viewed by readers and writers alike as an acceptable, even privileged, aesthetic mode of expression. In *The Romantic Fragment Poem*, Marjorie Levinson defines the fragment as an "*exemplary*" Romantic phenomenon (Levinson 11). Levinson views the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (the initial 1798 publication includes two fragment poems from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, while William Wordsworth would contribute two of his own in the subsequent 1800 edition) – as "herald and manifesto of the English Romantic movement" (Levinson 23). This is an important moment in the history of literature; for while readers had previously been accustomed to fragments *of* poems, such as *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Faerie Queene*, *Lyrical Ballads* marked the beginning of the proliferation of poems *as* fragments, such as Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" (1797-98). The enduring legacy of *Lyrical Ballads* is humorously documented by Francis Jeffery of the *Edinburg Review* on 21, July 1813:

> Since the increasing levity of the present age, indeed, has rendered it impatient of the long stories that used to delight our ancestors, the taste for fragments, we suspect, has

> become very general; and the greater part of polite readers would now no more think of sitting down to a whole Epic, than to a whole ox…. The truth is, we suspect, that after we once know what it contains, no long poem is ever read, but in fragments; -- and that the connecting passages, which are always skipped after the first reading, are often so tedious as to deter us from thinking of a second; -- and in very many cases so awkwardly and imperfectly brought out, that it is infinitely less laborious to *guess at* the author's principle of combination, than to follow out his full explanation of it. (qtd. in Levinson 235)

In the years following the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, Levinson notes that "almost every volume of poetry produced by major and minor Romantic poets includes at least one fragment" (Levinson 23). Among these poets are several of the most renowned literary figures of the period, including Coleridge, Wordsworth, Percy Shelley, and John Keats.

In these fragmentary works, the subjectivity of the speaker becomes a central thematic concern as the focus shifts from the external wholeness of classical literature to the divisive and often tumultuous locus of the individual consciousness. During the Romantic era, according to Lascelles Abercrombie, "We see the spirit of the mind withdrawing more and more from commerce with the outer world, and endeavoring, or at least desiring, to rely more and more on the things it finds within itself" (qtd. in Janowitz 112). Abercrombie could have been referring to the progression of Beckett's career. His earlier protagonists were squarely situated in a coherent external reality; works like "Assumption" and "First Love" depict discrete characters in narratalogically consistent situations, but these figures would eventually give way to the detached voices and muted figures that proliferate in Beckett's later prose works like "All

Strange Away," "Imagination Dead Imagine," "Ping," "Lessness," "The Lost Ones," and, of course, *Fizzles*. The peculiarly titled "From an Abandoned Work," fortuitously placed in between the two periods, marks an important turning point in Beckett's career. While retaining familiar themes from his earlier fiction (both the novels as well as the shorter prose narratives) such as the comedic stance on the endless journey, the narrator's perception toward his own enterprise in "From an Abandoned Work" ("breaking up I am") foreshadows the self-fragmentation and inner divisiveness that would become a central – if not dominant – focus of Beckett's later prose (Beckett, "From" 160). It is to this relatively late form of narrative that the short prose texts collectively grouped as *Fizzles* make an indispensible contribution. While the profoundly fragmented nature of Beckett's later works would far exceed those of most Romantic fragment poems, his focus on the inner turmoil that necessitates the striking incompletion of his prose makes him an outgrowth of that period, and in order to understand Beckett's aesthetics of incompletion it will be useful to review briefly that component of the Romantic literary tradition.

Many of these incomplete or uncompleted works promote the aesthetic appeal and rampant indeterminacy of the fragment. The appeal here is to the psychology of the reader and to the satisfaction he or she derives from contemplating a work of art which is simultaneously perfect and flawed; as Balachandra Rajan remarks in *The Form of the Unfinished*, "to speak of the form of the unfinished is to acknowledge an addiction to paradox" (Rajan 5). Many Romantic fragment poems embrace outright contradiction and paradox, viewing unresolved tension, whether aesthetic or psychological, as preferable to self-evident or complacent conclusions. The paradox of the fragment is analogous to the paradox at the heart of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," where the "Attic shape" exerts its hold on the poem's speaker because it manages to exist within time and somehow beyond it (Ferguson 586). Here the speaker, beholding an image of

human activity "evermore about to be" (to use Wordsworth's phrase), is teased out of thought, forced to adopt the (quasi-epigrammatic) observation: "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' – that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (Ferguson 586).

Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" is perhaps the best-known example of this aspect that was, for the English Romantics at least, such a chief thematic concern. The poem's title is an overt admission of fragmentation: "Kubla Khan: Or a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment" (Ferguson 486). While the speaker hints at the "caverns measureless to man" and "ceaseless turmoil" of the land, the poem terminates abruptly with his inability to recall (and represent) the abundant and consuming ecstasies of an inner experience which must be forever imagined as incomplete (Ferguson 486-487):

> A damsel with a dulcimer
> In a vision once I saw:
> It was an Abyssinian maid,
> And on her dulcimer she played,
> Singing of Mount Abora.
> Could I revive within me
> Her symphony and song,
> To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
> That with music loud and long,
> I would build that dome in air,
> That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
> And all who heard should see them there,

> And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
> His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
> Weave a circle round him thrice,
> And close your eyes with holy dread,
> For he on honey-dew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise.
> (Ferguson 487)

Despite his lofty aspirations, the speaker cannot fully recall the song of the "Abyssinian maid" (Ferguson 487). Similarly, the image of Kubla Khan remains only in fragmentary detail – his "flashing eyes" and "floating hair" (Ferguson 487). Coleridge leaves it up to the reader's imagination to complete the mystical experience that the speaker only describes in ruinous bits and pieces. Even though it exists as a fragment, as something incomplete, the poem has never been considered inadequate or unsatisfying but a thrillingly indefinite suggestion of the infinite and endless wonders of Khan's mystical dominion: In Freudian terms, Coleridge's fragment compels us to imagine the forgotten that evades representation.

Coleridge's poem tests the limits of poetic expression to represent inner experience; his suggestion that language is inadequate to its task accords with Shelley's observations in *A Defense of Poetry* (1821) in which the imagination is likened to a "fading coal" which, by the time of composition, has diminished considerably as well as Keats's aphorism in "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / are sweeter" (Ferguson 585; Shelley 39). According to Mario Praz in *The Romantic Agony*, "The Romantic exalts the artist who does not give a material form to his dreams – the poet ecstatic in front of a forever blank

page, the musician who listens to the prodigious concerts of his soul without attempting to translate them into notes" (Praz 14-15). Coleridge respects the inexplicable and forgotten substance of inner experience by leaving its completion up to the reader's imagination. Where the speaker's inability to summon the complete vision abruptly ends, the reader's imagination is excited and activated.

The lack of overt thematic resolution typical of a Romantic fragment should not be viewed as a failure of completion; if anything, the poems consciously strive towards their own incompletion; they depend, rather, on a calculated asymmetry of form. Levinson postulates the "ideological provenance of… self-thwarting formal intention" in these fragmentary works (Levinson 13). The relation is not towards something that once was, or something that should have been finished, but rather *what might be*. The fragment aspires toward a completion that is not, and cannot, be realized in the text. Such works are not failures of completion, but rather significant examples of conscious *incompletion*, a paradoxical aesthetic, to borrow Lucien Goldmann's term, in which works can be "achieved by [their] inachievement" (qtd. in McFarland 3). They do not aspire toward classical notions of completion, but approach the cohesiveness of their art from a different angle – one that is reflective of the inherent limitations and ambiguities of human experience, as well as the poet's own inhibitions in bringing his or her vision to fruition. As a result, the internal tensions that constitute the bulk of many of these works are not ultimately resolved, but are truncated at a point of maximum imaginative suggestiveness.

Whatever his status as a "modernist" or "postmodernist" author, Beckett clearly writes out of this tradition. His works, nevertheless, mark a significant departure from the Romantic legacy in part because of their utter lack of sentimentality and idealization, and, most

importantly, because of their tenacious deferral of closure. For while the aforementioned poems are thematically concerned with the inherent incompletion and senescence of existence, they can nevertheless be viewed as whole in and of themselves. Despite Coleridge's concern with the incomplete remains of a consuming vision, the poem itself ends on a rising and climactic note. The final lines of "Kubla Khan" ("For he on honey-dew hath fed, / And drunk the milk of Paradise") – their reference to divine salvation notwithstanding – are markedly satisfying and conclusive (Ferguson 486).

In Beckett's works, indeterminacy persists until the very end, at which point the texts invariably point to forthcoming developments. His endings lack the closural tone that marks the point where Coleridge's poem breaks off. For example, in Beckett's hilarious "First Love," the final line subverts any semblance of a text coming to rest: "I could have done with other loves perhaps. *But there it is*, either you love or you don't" (Beckett, "First" 45 – my emphasis). Certainly Beckett's words point at closure: "But there it is" suggests a moralizing conclusion. This conclusion, however, is ultimately doomed by a remarkably open final statement: "either you love or you don't" (Beckett, "First" 45). In other works, Beckett is even more derisive of the stories he has just related, as, for example, in "The Expelled" when the narrator admits, "I don't know why I told this story. I could just as well have told another. Perhaps some other time I'll be able to tell another. Living souls, you will see how alike they are" (Beckett, "Exp" 60). Perhaps the most conspicuously open of these early "conclusions" comes in the work titled, ironically, "The End," whose final sentences trail off in a paroxysm of narrative self-doubt:

> I swallowed my calmative. The sea, the sky, the mountains and the islands closed in and crushed me in a mighty systole, then scattered to the uttermost confines of space. *The*

> *memory came faint and cold of the story I might have told, a story in the likeness of my life, I mean without the courage to end or the strength to go on.* (Beckett, "End" 99 – my emphasis)

The end of "The End" begins as a sort of climactic resolution, as the environment consumes the protagonist and distributes him to "the uttermost confines of space" (Beckett, "End" 99). However, just at the moment when a satisfying (though perhaps excessive) closure seems possible, if not imminent, the narrator breaks the barrier of his story and directly confronts the reader with the inadequacy of such an ending, drawing attention instead to a tale he "might have told" (Beckett, "End" 99). This ending, which suggests another beginning (and so another ending), depicts one of Beckett's most urgent concerns, the image of a creature, barely human, caught in a suspended existence between stasis and movement. Instead of coming to rest, instead of the narrative reaching a point of stability (even if only an artificial stability, as in "and they lived happily ever after"), the text restlessly defers closure and, in place of conclusion, gestures toward narratives to come.

Chapter 2:

"Fizzle 1": A Weary Traveler in the Dark

"I did not know where to begin nor where to end, that's the truth of the matter."

"The Expelled"

"…it was he had a life, I didn't have a life, a life not worth having, because of me, it's impossible I should have a mind and I have one, someone divines me, divines us, that's what he's come to, come to in the end, I see him in my mind, there divining us, hands and head a little heap, the hours pass, he is still, he seeks a voice for me, it's impossible I should have a voice and I have none…"

"Fizzle 3: Afar a Bird"

A long, languorous sentence initiates the American edition of Samuel Beckett's *Fizzles*:

> He is barehead, barefoot, clothed in a singlet and tight trousers too short for him, his hands have told him so, again and again, and his feet, feeling each other and rubbing against the legs, up and down his calves and shins. (Beckett, "1" 224)

The formidable opening sentence of "Fizzle 1" serves less to initiate a purposeful, linear journey than it does to situate the reader in the middle of a repetitive action. The elongated clause exudes a sense of exasperation as the reader is welcomed unwelcomingly to the disjointed narrative of a solitary wanderer's erratic travels, "black windings" in a seemingly impenetrable maze (Beckett, "1" 227). In characteristic fashion, the opening is unabashedly simple and direct. The unnamed subject's outward characteristics, "barehead" and "barefoot," elicit naked and vulnerable

qualities, like the sentences of the work, as each assertion or declarative statement is invariably subjected to qualification or outright contradiction (Beckett, "1" 224). While his state is a revelation to the reader, it is one that "he" has apparently been aware of for some time: the awkward dimensions of his clothing are familiar to him: "his hands have told him so, again and again" (Beckett, "1" 224). The image conjures fingers feeling for fabric, like a nervous child in unfamiliar shorts. Though he has a past, however tenuous, the reader begins not at the start but mid-journey.

(For purposes of clarity, the lonely traveler shall be referred to henceforth as "Barehead"). The most shocking quality that Barehead evinces is the inadequacy of his memory. He cannot definitively say that he has clothed himself; he can only assert that "he is … clothed" in uncomfortably tight outerwear, like a strangely dressed amnesiac (Beckett, "1" 224). As to how he finds himself clad in this "vaguely prison garb none of his memories answer, so far" (Beckett, "1" 224). His memory is, decidedly, as minimalist as his narrative. The reader is not led to believe that the narrator is withholding information; Barehead's memory is simply insufficient to recall any relevant details of his past. He can articulate only the burdensome associations his memories evoke, those of "heaviness… fullness and … thickness" (Beckett, "1" 224). Barehead does not experience the crystal clear recall of cinematic flashbacks; his capacity for memory is delicate and frail. If anything is unreliable, then, it is his memory.

While he lacks the convenience of informative, detailed memories that would enable him to recall the circumstances of his dress (and, for that matter, the purpose of his Dante-esque travels), Barehead appears to be aware of a general, circuitous motion: "The great head where he toils is all mockery, he is forth again, he'll be back again" (Beckett, "1" 224). And so, at the very

outset of Barehead's recorded travels, the narrator suggests that his movements lead nowhere and are destined to end at their point of departure.

As Barehead leans against a wall later in the work, the detached narrator further elucidates the traveler's strikingly vacuous mental state:

> He has already a number of memories, from the memory of the day he suddenly knew he was there, on this same path still bearing him along, to that now of having halted to lean against the wall, he has a little past already, even a smatter of settled ways. But it is all still fragile. And he often surprises himself, both moving and at rest, but more often moving, for he seldom comes to rest, as destitute of history as on that first day, on this same path, which is his beginning, on days of great recall. (Beckett, "1" 227)

These memories are, as the earlier passage suggests, inescapably flawed. Not only does the narrator appear to contradict itself by declaring that "he [Barehead] has … a number of memories" followed soon by the assertion that he is "as destitute of history on that first day," but one is further inclined to question the point of his memories at all, for he has been on "this same path" all along (Beckett, "1" 227). While, "on days of great recall," Barehead is able to consider his earliest memory, his "beginning," this is really no different from where he was just a moment ago, "halted to lean against the wall," in what the narrator leads the reader to believe is the present (Beckett, "1" 227). His memories are presented as amusing deviations, "surprises" of

varying degrees in an interminable motion (Beckett, "1" 227). These recollections serve as mere moments of illumination on a circuitous journey.[1]

Adding to Barehead's apparently vacuous state, the narrator observes as "He halts, for the first time since he knows he's under way, one foot before the other, the higher flat, the lower on its toes, and waits for a decision. Then he moves on" (Beckett, "1" 224). The journey appears to perpetuate itself without purpose; it in no way requires Barehead's active intellectual engagement. Instead, it seems as though he operates on a mental auto-pilot of sorts. Jolted back into consciousness, he stops in his tracks and submissively "waits for a decision" (Beckett, "1" 224). Again, as was previously indicated by the narrator's observation that "He is … clothed," the mood here is unavoidably passive (Beckett, "1" 224). The overwhelming implication here is that Barehead is not fully responsible for his internal decision making processes, almost like a subordinate constituency of the larger Barehead bureaucracy. Perhaps his mental processes resemble the slowness of his pace. This remains an inference; the reader is left in the dark with regard to the particular politics of his consideration. What one can reasonably infer from this passage, though, is that Barehead is ascending a staircase, or some structure of similar configuration, as indicated by the positioning of his bare feet: "one foot before the other, the higher flat, the lower on its toes," – no small achievement in such a dark and indiscernible setting (Beckett, "1" 224). Barehead's actions demonstrate that a decision has been made to go on, and he perseveres up the staircase.

---

[1] The circuitous journey is a pervasive theme in Beckett's short prose. In "From an Abandoned Work," the narrator announces, "Well after the horse and rage I don't know, just on, then I suppose the slow turn, wheeling more and more to the one or other hand, till facing home, then home" (Beckett, "From" 159).
In "The Calmative," the narrator makes a similar admission: "For me now the setting forth, the struggle and perhaps the return" (Beckett, "Calm" 64).

Before progressing any further, it is important to briefly establish Beckett's *Fizzles* as narratives, particularly considering the myriad ways in which they appear to exist outside of the category. Narrative, according to Suzanne Fleichman, is, among other things, conventionally understood to be "composed of a series of temporally ordered acts" (Fleichman 98). Beckett's works, however, do not display this linear, neatly organized sequence. They are expressive of duration, certainly, but lack the sequence and causality traditionally understood to be integral features of narrative. The time that Barehead occupies is not ordered temporally, but all appears to bleed into one circuitous pattern, a temporal vacuum of sorts. Beckett shatters the easy temporal relations of most narratives, and, accordingly, the narrator's allusions to beginnings and endings are invariably undermined by irony, qualification, or outright dismissal. As the disgruntled narrator of "Fizzle 2" remarks, "These allusions to now, to before and after, and all such yet to come, that we may feel ourselves in time" (Beckett, "2" 229). Beckett's *Fizzles* are fragmentary moments of being rather than holistic depictions. Yet, despite its subversion of typical narrative conventions, "Fizzle 1" retains a recurring subject and protagonist in the figure of Barehead, as well as what functions as a detached, omniscient narrator who monitors his progress, or lack thereof.

And so Barehead perseveres with an affecting combination of clown-like absurdity and warrior-like resilience.[2] The "bowed," "humped" figure blindly collides into walls in the darkness, inflicting wounds on virtually all of his protruding body parts (Beckett, "1" 224). This would be entirely humorous if the depiction were not quite so violent. Beckett employs strikingly physical verbs here to describe Barehead's travels: "strike," "cast," "shock," "attack," "pierce" (Beckett, "1" 224- 225). Indeed, "He loses blood, but in no great quantity, the little wounds have

[2] A characteristic depiction of Beckett's figures such as Vladimir and Estragon of *Waiting for Godot,* Hamm of *Endgame,* and the desolate figure of *Not I*.

time to close before being opened again, his pace is so slow" (Beckett, "1" 225). The narrator's remarks allude to Barehead's past and temporal space by suggesting that his arduous travels have been going on for some time and will undoubtedly (and perhaps indefinitely) continue.

Eventually, though, the humor invoked by Barehead's comically exaggerated movements is overcome by a dire state of desperation, one that becomes more and more apparent as the narrative continues. Even more disturbing than his violent altercations with walls is the consuming, "adamantine" darkness all around (Beckett, "5" 236).[3] The journey has progressed to a point at which Barehead considers opening his eyes a pointless exertion, "needless fatigue": "Do his eyes, after such long exposure to the gloom, begin to pierce it? No, and this is one of the reasons he shuts them more and more, more and more often and for ever longer spells" (Beckett, "1" 225). This passage formally reinforces the work's thematic fixation on Barehead's monotonous movements. "More and more, more and more," like the previous usage of "again and again," conveys an endless sense of duration, one that appears to drone on "for ever" (Beckett, "1" 225). And for all the damage inflicted to him in his solitary wanderings, Barehead is essentially unable to return the favor; his eyes fail to "pierce the darkness all around" (Beckett, "1" 225).[4]

The experience of Beckett's wandering protagonist instructs the reader about the fraudulent nature of endings from the early moments of "Fizzle 1." Amid his desperation, Barehead first contemplates the idea of an end in the narrative in the following passage:

[3] A phrase from "Fizzle 5" in reference to a similarly dark, "Closed space" (Beckett, "5" 236).
[4] A reference, perhaps, to the "piercing sight" of the protagonist of "From an Abandoned Work" (Beckett, "From" 156).

> But instead of stopping short, and even turning back, saying to himself, This is the end of the road, nothing now but to return to the other terminus and start again, instead he attacks the narrow sideways and so finally squeezes through, to the great hurt of his chest and back. (Beckett, "1" 225)

While Barehead purposefully refuses to submit, he nevertheless retains the ability to conceive of "the end" (Beckett, "1" 225). This perception, however, requires a fundamentally arbitrary determination, an act of his imagination. It depends on him "stopping short," "saying to himself" that he has reached a fictive "end" when his experience tells him that the darkness will continue (Beckett, "1" 225). This point bears repeating: to conceive of an end here is represented as an illusion, a perversion that is inconsistent with the protagonist's experience of living, or, at least, his ongoing attempts to live. To continue is a painful, violent experience, fraught with "toils" and strife, but the act of continuing is somehow viewed as preferable to making such a fraudulent concession as that of some fixed end (Beckett, "1" 225). He continues on the "same road," confronting the malicious "spite of the dark" with tenacity (Beckett, "1" 224). Though Beckett hides Barehead's motives and justifications, the protagonist's actions propel the narrative forwards. The question remains, however, where does Barehead's motivation come from? He does not appear to have complete, or even partial, control over his decision making process. What compels such an inert creature to keep going?

As the narrator considers the potential pitfalls of Barehead shutting his eyes to the darkness around him, "the end" is referred to once again in a revealing fashion: "This is not the time to go into his wrongs, but perhaps he was wrong not to persist, in his efforts to pierce the gloom. For he might well have succeeded, in the end, up to a point, which would have

brightened things up for him" (Beckett, "1" 225). Here again, Beckett presents the idea of ending as illusory and contrived, a state that is in no way final. Immediately after "the end" is mentioned it is qualified by the assertion, "up to a point" (Beckett, "1" 225). Also, it is unclear as to whether Barehead's "wrongs" pertain to those inflicted upon himself or against others (Beckett, "1" 225). Either way, his "prison garb" would appear to reinforce the inference that a wrong has been committed (Beckett, "1" 224). This addition was not included casually, and it appears to be somehow related to Barehead's arduous travels.[5]

Beckett affirms the spurious notion of beginnings and ends yet again when the narrator appears to recognize that Barehead's efforts constitute not beginnings or endings but continuations, ongoing attempts: "And often he suddenly begins, in these black windings, and makes his first steps for quite a while before realizing they are merely the last, or latest (Beckett, "1" 227). Here Beckett offers an amusing moment as the narrator struggles to accurately describe Barehead's anti-teleological journey. The phrase "first steps" clearly won't do, but this leads the narrator to an equally absolute "last," which is subjected to a final clarification – the superlative "latest" (Beckett, "1" 227). The narrator's clumsy description serves to reinforce the notion that Barehead's current efforts sit squarely, and inexplicably, in the middle without a definitive beginning or end (Beckett, "1" 227).

Nevertheless, the narrator's imagination takes over, envisioning what is perhaps the full realization of Barehead's aspirations, an indication of some kind of purpose or reward for his

---

[5] Beckett's critical commission *Proust* might offer some insight into Barehead's ambiguous wrongdoing: "The tragic figure represents the expiation of original sin, of the original and eternal sin of him and all his 'soci-malorum,' the sin of having been born" (Beckett, "Pro" 35). The protagonist of "From an Abandoned Work" corroborates this view in his assertion, "No, I regret nothing, all I regret is having been born, dying is such a long tiresome business I always found" (Beckett, "From" 158). Beckett's use of "regret" here almost suggests that the birth was his own decision, his own sin of existing (Beckett, "From" 158).

arduous travels. This imaginative projection takes the shape of a glorious and gradual infusion of celestial light:

> And all may yet grow light, at any moment, first dimly and then – how can one say? – then more and more, till all is flooded with light, the way, the ground, the walls, the vault, without his being one whit the wiser. The moon may appear, framed at the end of the vista, and he in no state to rejoice and quicken his step, or on the contrary wheel and run, while there is yet time. (Beckett, "1" 225)

This imaginative and hopeful moment is rife with logical contradictions. The space that Barehead traverses is described as an enclosed space, as indicated by the narrator's mention of the "vault" (Beckett, "1" 225).[6] If the space is enclosed, though, how might the moon illuminate its dimensions? Is the space open, or is it closed? This question remains unanswered, reinforcing the ambiguity of Barehead's dark travels. Further, the term "vista" is defined not only as "a distant view seen through an opening, as between buildings," but also as "a comprehensive awareness of a series of remembered, present, or anticipated events," which provides an added psychological dimension to the expression (American Heritage 1352). We are, thus, dealing not only with someone who appears to be situated in a physical space that is both open and closed but also one whose cognition is apparently faulty, far from "comprehensive awareness" (American Heritage 1352). Beyond the narrator's evident confusion concerning the particular dimensions of the setting, it is ultimately uncertain as to what Barehead's response would entail

[6] Definitions of "Vault": "a. An arched structure, usually of stone, brick, or concrete, forming a ceiling or roof. b. An arched covering, such as the sky, that resembles a vault" (American Heritage 1339).

in the case of its hypothetical illumination. It is unclear as to whether he will "rejoice and quicken his step" forwards, presumably toward the moon, or, conversely, "wheel and run" in the opposite direction (Beckett, "1" 225).

To sum up Barehead's predicament at this point in the text, he is virtually without memory, traveling in complete darkness, clad in uncomfortable "prison garb," and bleeding from innumerable collisions with the walls all around him (Beckett, "1" 224). His response to this less than ideal state of affairs: "No complaints" (Beckett, "1" 225). These certainly appear to be low expectations, but the comment helps to further the idea that Barehead has been traveling for so long that he has become accustomed to the treacherous "gloom" in which he finds himself (Beckett, "1" 225). The narrator goes on to inventory the tangible qualities of Barehead's person. His head is characterized as "weak," his heart, okay, "enough to see him through" (Beckett, "1" 225). The legs, his means of interminable motion, are in "good shape" (Beckett, "1" 225). Fixating on his legs, the narrator remarks, "Murphy had first-rate legs," a revealing moment as Murphy was the narrator of Beckett's first published novel, 1938's *Murphy* (Beckett, "1" 225). This is perhaps Beckett's most explicit reference to an earlier fictional character in *Fizzles*. This allusion adds a retrospective, even nostalgic dimension to the text. The tone here sounds like that of an approving grandparent, acknowledging the similarities between his child and grandchild. The moment enforces the continuity of Beckett's artistry, as themes and characters constantly bleed into subsequent narratives. Barehead may not be the most incendiary thinker, but his Murphy-like legs equip him adequately for mindless travel.

The text moves on, detailing Barehead's turns from left to right, reinforcing the limitations of his movements with strains of formal repetition: "But *see how now*, having turned right for example, instead of turning left a little further on he turns right again. And *see how now*

again, yet a little further on, instead of turning left at last he turns right yet again" (Beckett, "1" 225 – my emphasis). The narrator notes with some satisfaction when Barehead's "zigzags resume their tenor" but remarks that the exact motions are of little consequence provided that "he keeps on climbing," which confirms the ascent a step-like surface as was previously suggested by his stopping, "one foot before the other, the higher flat, the lower on its toes" (Beckett, "1" 226, 224).

This formal repetition is employed again when Barehead encounters a precipitous drop:

> But *see how now* a little further on the ground falls away so sheer that he has to rear violently backward in order not to fall. Where is it then that life awaits him, in relation to his starting point, to the point rather at which he suddenly realized he was started, above or below? Or will they cancel out in the end, the long gentle climbs and the headlong steeps? It matters little in any case, so long as he is on the right road, and that he is, for there are no others, unless he has let them slip by unnoticed, one after another. (Beckett, "1" 226)

The narrator surmises that Barehead cannot definitively conceive of a "starting point," only the moment when "he suddenly realized he was started" (Beckett, "1" 226). This comment suggests the rift between Barehead's consciousness and memory, for they have begun at different moments. Furthermore, the narrator considers where "life awaits him," attributing to the human notion of "life" the distinctly human quality of anticipation (Beckett, "1" 226). This question suggests that Barehead is traveling for existence; his life is not a definite or stable concept, but one that is constantly in the process of being formed and reformed (Becket, "1" 226; Janowitz

447). This moment resonates with Friedrich Schlegel's "organic" interpretation of Romantic poetry (Janowitz 446): "Romantic poetry is still in the process of becoming; this indeed is its very essence, that it is eternally evolving, never completed" (qtd. in Janowitz 447). The only vague semblance of purpose the narrator offers for Barehead's travels is that he is "moving closer and closer to the open" (Beckett, "1" 227). Similarly, "Fizzle 1" does not aspire to be contained within a coherent representation; instead it gestures beyond itself as when the narrator alludes to Murphy. Also, the conspicuous obstruction of the narrative voice – its incapacity or refusal to display Barehead's motivations and personal history – invites a participatory reading and completion beyond the limitations of verbal representation. Where the text demonstrates its own restrictions, the reader's imagination is consequently liberated (Beckett, "1" 227).

The narrating voice further reflects the futile attempt to apply logic to an existence that defies rationality. Suspecting its own limitations, the narrator considers the logical prospect that the crests and troughs might conveniently "cancel out in the end," while coolly acknowledging the possibility that one's perception is simply inadequate to comprehend the unseen complexities, the roads that "slip by unnoticed" (Beckett, "1" 226). Thus, while the narrator applies reason, it is not bound by rational thought. The world does not adhere to such reasonable assertions. Logic does not yield any useful applications in the dark abyss of the Fizzle's setting.

During Barehead's travels, the narrator is able to hear sounds and displays a curious propensity for attributing physical motions with human qualities:

> The only sounds, apart from those of the body on its way, are of fall, a great drop dropping at last from a great height and bursting, a solid mass that leaves its place and crashes down, lighter particles collapsing slowly. Then the echo is heard, as loud first as

> the sound that woke it and repeated sometimes a good score of times, each time a little weaker, no, sometimes louder than the time before, till finally it dies away. (Beckett, "1" 226)

Again, the darkness does not adhere to scientific principles, as the Doppler Effect requires that echoes are quieter than "the sound that woke" them (Beckett, "1" 226). While these occasional "drop[s] dropping" are the only sounds external to Barehead's body, they are nevertheless described as having human qualities (Beckett, "1" 226). A "solid mass" "*leaves*" where it was and falls to the ground (Beckett, "1" 226 – my emphasis). Once "woke[n]," the echo resonates to a degree that the narrator cannot decide upon, and eventually "dies away" (Beckett, "1" 226). Here, there is no attempt to be scientific about the matter; these mysterious external agents are given human form without consideration apparently.

Throughout the text, the narrator attributes human qualities to inanimate objects and phenomena as if they had a conscious will of their own, contrasting with Barehead's overt passivity. Barehead's hands "have *told* him" that his clothes are far too small; his head is "all mockery" (Beckett, "1" 224 – my emphasis). The tight-fitting clothes are described as "espousing and resisting the movements of the body" (Beckett, "1" 224). The narrator describes Barehead's hands in terms of facial expression, as demonstrated by his hands being "agape" (Beckett, "1" 224). Echoes awake and perish. The degree to which the narrator humanizes the objects that it observes suggests that the perception of ending and beginning is a simplistic personification of the incomprehensible passage of time.

In the final sentence of "Fizzle 1," the narrator continues to anthropomorphize by describing Barehead's history as taking "shape" (Beckett, "1" 228). Yet, in conjunction with the

narrator's tendency to humanize, the final sentence offers a remarkably detached (almost mathematical) appraisal of Barehead's inner development:

> So with one thing and another little by little his history takes shape, and even changes shape, as new maxima and minima tend to cast into the shade, and toward oblivion, those momentarily glorified, and as fresh elements and motifs, such as these bones of which more very shortly, and at length, in view of their importance, contribute to enrich it. (Beckett, "1" 228)

The final sentence of "Fizzle 1" begins, ironically, as one would expect from a conventional narrative lyric, as a recapitulation of the story just told. But this ending is not the sort that offers the kind of clinch or stability that concludes an experience or strikes the reader as a complete and coherent representation. Instead, Beckett anticipates an interminable and unrelenting state of flux. It is also a remarkably detached observation, as the narrator describes the happenings and memories of Barehead's experience with mathematical referents. The terms "maxima and minima" conjure images of an algebraic graph of sorts (Beckett, "1" 228).

Barbra Herrnstein Smith defines a state of adequate closure as:

> A modification of structure that makes *stasis*, or the absence of further continuation, the most probable succeeding event. Closure allows the reader to be satisfied by the failure of continuation or, put another way, it creates in the reader the expectation of nothing. (Smith 34)

From a formal perspective, “Fizzle 1” flows without paragraphs. It is, however, comprised of normal sentence structures, which, for Beckett, is quite abnormal. The final lines conclude in the manner in which each sentence before has ended: namely, with final punctuation and without the creation of a new paragraph. As such, one can decidedly say that the text remains structurally unchanged until its point of cessation.

The final line is also formally significant in that it echoes an earlier passage:

> In any case *little by little his history takes shape*, with if not yet exactly its good days and bad, at least studded with occasions passing rightly or wrongly for outstanding, such as the straightest narrow, the loudest fall, the most lingering collapse, the steepest descent, the greatest number of successive turns the same way, the greatest fatigue, the longest rest, the longest – aside from the sound of the body on its way – silence.
> (Beckett, “1” 227-228 – my emphasis)

The two passages differ considerably in their potential closural effects. Unlike the final sentence, this passage reflects upon Barehead’s retention of memories – those that, for various reasons, are sufficiently “outstanding” to be incorporated into his history (Beckett, “1” 228). To end on this note, however, would run counter to what serves as the primary focus of the text (and, for that matter, *Fizzles* as a collection): the devastating inadequacy of memory. Furthermore, the final word (“silence”) could potentially provide the reader with “the expectation of nothing” that Smith defines as a principal criterion of closure (Smith 34; Beckett, “1” 228). One might even go so far as to suggest that the imposition of silence at the end of the work would indicate the death of the narrator and or the protagonist. Such a morbid development would ultimately create a

means by which the reader could conceive of the work as an integral whole and thus run counter to what is perhaps Beckett's most enduring theme (albeit often overlooked): the compulsion to "go on" (Beckett, "Tex" 100).

The fact that the final sentence operates as a partial repetition of an earlier one confers added significance to the piece's ending (or lack thereof) when one considers "Fizzle 1" in conjunction with Beckett's earlier works of short prose. Frequently, these earlier narrators, invariably lost in their own digressive ruminations, attempt to jump-start their narratives with forced and repetitive phrases. The device is humorously utilized in "First Love" when the narrator purposefully affirms, "*But to pass on to less melancholy matters*, on my father's death… *But to pass on to less melancholy matters*, the name of the woman with whom I was soon to be united was Lulu" (Beckett, "First" 27, 29 – my emphasis). This repetition is used in "First Love" as a formal manifestation of narrator's decidedly unromantic assertion that he connects ("rightly or wrongly") the death of his father with his marriage (Beckett, "First" 25). "From an Abandoned Work" demonstrates a similar, albeit more persistent, use of repetition: "But let me get on now with the day I have hit on to begin with… But let me get on now from where I have left off… But let me start as always with the morning and the getting out… But let us get on and leave these old scenes and come to these" (Beckett, "From" 156, 158, 161, 163). By reinforcing these similar constructions, Beckett underscores the repetitive nature of the situations that he constantly reenacts, such as the circuitous and seemingly purposeless journey present in these two earlier works, and, of course, in "Fizzle 1." Usually such narrative catalysts suggest further developments within the narratives themselves; they do not usually indicate the end of the work. In the case of "Fizzle 1," however, Beckett subverts his normal implementation of the device in order to further desensitize his readers to the finality of the work's ending. The Beckett reader

has been conditioned to expect further development at this point in the text and Beckett exploits these expectations to further attenuate the effects of closure.

As it stands, in terms of the work's ability to create the effect of "*stasis*, or the absence of further continuation the most probable succeeding event," it is clear that "Fizzle 1" achieves just the opposite effect (Smith 34). By ending with the assertion that Barehead's "history" is continually changing shape, Beckett essentially precludes the possibility of the reader ascribing the character, or the work for that matter, with any definitive form (Beckett, "1" 228). The effects of closure are further weakened by the narrator's promise that "fresh elements and motifs, such as these bones," will be supplied "very shortly" – the implication being that more narratives are forthcoming, subsequent fragments of an ongoing narrative (Beckett, "1" 228). Through its representation of Barehead's memory as being in a constant state of flux and its suggestive formal and thematic affinities with previous works – which only further serve to buttress the narrator's promise of more "bones" to come – the last sentence of Beckett's "Fizzle 1" operates as more of a prelude to further developments than as a final resolution (Beckett, "1" 228).

Chapter 3:

Memory and Ruin in "Fizzle 3: Afar A Bird"

"No, there's no accounting for it, there's no accounting for anything, with a mind like the one I always had, always on the alert against itself."

"From an Abandoned Work"

"You'll be on me, it will be you, it will be me, it will be us, it was never us."

"Fizzle 6"

Before initiating this chapter's analysis of "Fizzle 3: Afar a Bird" it is important to distinguish between the fragment and the ruin, a distinction with affective resonances as well as formal literary implications. While a fragment is a piece of something whole or a part of something unfinished, a ruin – whether in the form of bits and pieces of a Grecian urn or the disjointed remains of a fallen building – is by definition a fragment of something that was once whole. This distinction between the two important and disparate Romantic preoccupations is one that Anne Janowitz emphasizes in *The Romantic Fragment*:

> The crucial difference is that between a temporal and spatial construct. If something is ruined, then presumably it once had a full form that has eroded through time. A fragment, on the other hand, is simply part of a whole: temporal or visual. Unmoored from an antiquarian grounding, the fragment opens itself up to a new poetic matter: the relation between its own incompletion and the greater whole to which it alludes, and which it both aspires to and struggles against. In this de-historicizing and aestheticizing process, the fragment form becomes the place where the theme of incompletion is enacted. (Janowitz 444)

Unlike the fragment, then, the significance of the ruin depends on the observer's sense of history which makes its appeal both emotionally and aesthetically, to an imagined whole. The meaning of a ruin is not apparent in and of itself; it is contingent upon its involvement in the twin processes of decay and imaginative restoration that its incomplete status implores the viewer to make. The statue referenced in Shelley's "Ozymandias," in other words, is meaningful only when its current ruination is grouped in relation to its former state of completion. The fragment, on the other hand, does not require this act of completion, indeed, it actively "struggles" against it (Janowitz 444).

Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" can be used to illustrate this process of incompletion. The poem does not attempt to create a full depiction of the "pleasure dome" that haunts the speaker's memory; rather, the poem serves as a testament to what cannot be fully formed in memory (Ferguson 486). The work can be read as a lamentation of the speaker's inability to faithfully express the inexplicable traces of memory, the forgotten that eludes recollection and representation. The piece revolves around the impossibility of representing what has been forgotten. By asserting its own fragmentation, the speaker hints at the absence without having to do the impossible: namely, represent the missing pieces of recollection that evade his comprehension.

Similarly, "Fizzle 3: Afar a Bird" concerns the distortions of identity that arise from an existence located in a painful limbo, "suspended between physical destruction and recovery of integrity, between oblivion and memory" (Pireddu 2). The "ruinstrewn land" that the wanderer of "Fizzle 3" traverses appears to be a metaphorical allusion the memory-laden turf of the mind, the veritable ground zero from which "he" attempts to make sense of his experiences (Beckett,

"3" 232). As is the case with the ruin, one might also define memory as a remainder of something that was once experienced as complete but persists in a state of fragmentation. The remains of our experiences are not only significant in themselves; they are meaningful in their testimony to the prior existence of what has been forgotten. Both the ruin and the process of memory implicate the perceiver in a restorative effort that compels him or her to contemplate the fullness of what once was and what is no longer inscribed in what remains.

Memory does not provide Beckett's subjects with a continuous or comprehensive narrative of experience; rather, memories are represented as isolated fragments hopelessly "strewn" around a figurative "field" (Beckett, "3" 233). Beckett suggests this discontinuous process in "Fizzle 3" through the image of a weary traveler "stopping ever and again," exhaustively "catching his breath," so that he can "listen now" (Beckett, "3" 232). The disordered remains of past experiences produce a disfiguration of the past: "Confusion of memory and lament, of loved ones and impossible youth, clutching his stick in the middle he stumbles bowed over the fields" (Beckett, "3" 233). This pathetic image of the weary traveler is considered repeatedly throughout the Fizzle, while the "I" of the piece – presumably the experiencing center of consciousness – repeatedly disassociates itself from the remembered experience by the recurring statement, "I was inside… I'm inside… I'll be inside … I'll be inside… I'm still inside" (Beckett, "3" 232-233).

While the relationship offered by the "I" is initially suggestive of stark discord between mind and body (or "self" and "other"), the Fizzle's progression makes clear that the two share a mutual consciousness. The "I" expresses its ability to access the thoughts of the "he" as well as the ability to control them. The "I" states the purpose for the third person's wanderings in the "ruinstrewn land": "he seeks a voice for me" (Beckett, "3" 232). In other words, "he" is

searching for an authentic stance by which to integrate the twin components of his being and tell his own story; thus, "he" searches for comprehension and meaning amidst the decaying mental structures encountered in his travels. The "I" announces the futility of his tenacious efforts by observing that there is, in fact, "no sound" to be heard (Beckett, "3" 232). Yet, what the traveler longs for, what he attempts to find in these ruins, is no longer present. Like the "zigzags" of Barehead's erratic and anti-teleological progression, his repeated efforts are not rewarded by any kind of enlightenment or revelation but merely more vain efforts that lead nowhere (Beckett, "1" 226).

Nevertheless, "he" persists, "stopping ever and again" to listen in the persistent attempt to forge from his ruins the essence of their former significance, a means by which to establish chronology, to make an accurate appraisal of who "he" is in the distant present (Beckett, "3" 232). His efforts suggest the endless series of revitalized attempts at self-creation that are ultimately doomed to fail because the necessary materials with which to bridge this gap between consciousness and memory are no longer present. What is forgotten ultimately inhibits this union of the self. As such, the ruins of memory open up an aesthetic possibility whereby Beckett can repeatedly enact incompletion in *Fizzles*.

Much of the difficulty in understanding the piece results from Beckett's characteristic habit of depicting a single narrated consciousness as both "I" and "he." Yet, by splitting the narrative in this way, Beckett does not attempt to be intentionally confusing or evasive; rather he grapples with the limitations of conventional narrative technique, searching for a literary solution to the problem of representing the narrating subject in the act of perceiving itself as divided. Narrative conventions assume a cohesive "pronominal unity" for the convenience of the narrating voice, but, for Beckett, this would serve to confuse the principal focus of *Fizzles*: self-

fragmentation caused by the staggering inadequacy of memory (Gontarski, "Int" xvii). Because memory fails to provide the inquiring subject with enough of a substantive foundation for it to refer to itself in terms of a stable "I," the two must be represented as distinct entities. Hence, Beckett's utilization of the third person pronoun "he," does not imply the subject-object differentiation, but rather that of a self reflecting on itself as divided. Here we have apperception without a cohesive sense of identity.

Because memory does not serve as a means to link the experience of consciousness with its recollection of previous experiences, the two are represented as separated from one other. The "I" articulates this schism by asserting a categorical distance from the remembered self: "it was he who wailed, he who saw the light, I didn't wail, I didn't see the light" (Beckett, "3" 232). Beckett's technique here indicates that the two components of being are not unified by a common experience because this experience is not fully retained in memory. Memory fails to create an effective bond between the past and present. This is not merely the distinction between mind and body, as Beckett's approach to representing being-in-time is often understood. *The Grove Companion To Samuel Beckett*, for example, suggests that "Fizzle 3" presents an image of "familiar Cartesian dualism," whereas it really depicts a self depicting itself as "other" (Gontarski, "Comp" 7). The subject's inability to contemplate what it once was is hinted at through the ruined structures of memory.

Just as one can never step into the same river twice, so the self in the act of remembering is disjoined from the object of its memory.[7] Beckett comments on this disconnect in his critical commission on Proust: "We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no

[7] A famous aphorism of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, a thinker whom Beckett greatly admired: "All things are flowing… You can never step twice into the same river" (qtd. in Gontarski, "Comp" 252).

longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday" (Beckett, "Pro" 3). These experiences, like the "maxima and minima" of "Fizzle 1" that are both temporarily found and simultaneously lost, indicate the futility of memory in the subject's inability to unite the self of the past with that of the present, thereby making impossible the idea of self-comprehension implied by a unified "I" as subject (Beckett, "1" 228).

This self-alienation and detachment makes the narrating "I" contemptuous of its remembered self; it does not experience its own self but actively disowns it. The Fizzle repeatedly emphasizes the process of "he" stopping and listening: "One on top of the other the hands weigh on the stick, the head weighs on the hands, he has caught his breath, he can listen now, the trunk horizontal, the legs asprawl, sagging at the knees, same old coat, the stiffened tails stick up behind" (Beckett, "3" 232). This image of the disowned self is echoed in "Fizzle 7: Still" where a figure is presented as "all quite still head in hand listening for a sound" (Beckett, "7" 242). Here again, Beckett's narrator attempts to unite the two components of being, to "find a voice" for what he has been in order to determine what he is (Beckett, "3" 232). But the attempt at full recollection is impossible, and each effort is doomed to be incomplete. The process of living is not defined by a linear, comprehensible progression toward a cohesive end but rather as a series of failed attempts to reach this very completion. Because our memories are constantly changing, we must forever remain suspended in a constant state of beginning, constantly re-forming our history. Living is a series of attempts to forge from the past a cohesive picture, but all we get are temporary parcels that refute the notion of continuous progress.

Nevertheless, Beckett's protagonists display commendable tenacity in their repeated efforts to forge from the shadowy depths of consciousness some semblance of identity. In the absence of any clear-cut conclusion to the efforts of self-restoration, these characters are

ultimately subjected to perpetual beginnings. If "Fizzle 1" lacks external dramatic development, "Fizzle 2" is virtually static: the work features a narrating "I" who, while noticeably confused by the passage of time, nevertheless endeavors "to get out of bed again" (Beckett, "2" 229). In preparation for this momentous occasion, the narrating "I" articulates the necessity of perseverance in the face of a disorientating existence:

> I thought I had made my last journey, the one I must now try once more to elucidate, that it may be a lesson to me, the one from which it were better I had never returned. But the feeling gains on me that I must undertake another. (Beckett, "2" 230)

The unexplained "journey" to which the narrator refers is reflective of Beckett's constant efforts to depict interior reality, with similar themes and characters frequently appearing in subsequent works (Beckett, "2" 230). *Fizzles*, as their title suggests, represent the constant undertaking of ultimately failed ventures that do not lead to closure, but only further attempts at self-creation. Despite the perplexing nature of these texts, Beckett is direct in their common purpose – by way of reference to earlier characters Beckett highlights the prevalent theme of repetitive action and familiar undertakings that persist throughout the sequence of narratives.

This compulsion towards repetition, born of the narrator's lack of self-unification in "Fizzle 3," is illuminating considering the work's reference to an earlier character, the unified "I" of "The Calmative." While the Fizzle echoes this text throughout, the most compelling similarity is the "same old coat" that the "I" notices: the green greatcoat sported by Beckett's early protagonists, with the "stiffened tails [that] stick up behind" (Beckett "3" 233). Compare this moment to an early passage of "The Calmative": "My legs were paining me, every step would

gladly have been the last. I was wearing my long green greatcoat … the tails swept the ground, scraped it rather, they had grown so stiff" (Beckett, "Calm" 65). "The Calmative" is again echoed in "Fizzle 4" when the "I" of the narrative recollects, "perhaps he'll drown, he always wanted to drown," expressing a desire which recalls the earlier protagonist's morbid rumination, "That's the advantage of death by drowning, one of the advantages, the crabs never get there too soon" (Beckett, "4" 235; Beckett, "Calm" 63). The unified narrative "I" of the earlier fiction is now observed by another more remote "I," a divided self that resists the incorporation "he" longs for. This reference to an earlier text – often a characteristic of Beckett's later prose narratives – is not merely nostalgic, but an indication of the progression that has occurred from the early stories to *Fizzles*. More importantly, the allusion operates to situate the character of this fragment within the larger constellation of Beckett's prose work.

In works as early as 1946's *Stories and Texts for Nothing*, Beckett began to demonstrate the technique of echoing memories, images, and settings – green greatcoats, walking sticks, oil lamps, flowers, park benches – that serve to indicate that the protagonists were not to be viewed as separate beings, but as fragments of an ongoing narrative. Rubin Rabinovitz has noted this strain, remarking on Beckett's violation of the established convention that "unless… specifically designated as the continuation of one that came before, a work should not contain episodes and characters carried over from an earlier one" (Rabinovitz 137). Despite her rather authoritative stance on the matter (which overlooks the recurring characters of Salinger and Hemingway, among others), Beckett does not engage in narrative transgression for its own sake. The recurrence of former characters in *Fizzles* suggests that the works should not be viewed as separate, autonomous entities but as inextricably connected: continuous fragments of a resilient undertaking.

These attempts, however, do not lead to any glorious epiphanies or "cathartic discharges," to use Frank Kermode's term (Kermode 8). The traveler's movements in "Fizzle 3" are depicted as repetitive and futile – "stopping ever and again, every ten steps say… now he stops again, for the hundredth time that night say," – and numerous syntactic repetitions reinforce the theme of continuous repetition (Beckett, "3" 232). While "ruinstrewn land" is the most evident repeated phrase, appearing five times in the work, "Fizzle 3" is comprised of myriad partial repetitions. Some of them concern the static whereabouts of the "I": "I was inside … I'm inside … I'll be inside … I'll be inside … I'm still inside" (Beckett, "3" 232-233). Others describe the protagonist's movements as "he" continues from place to place: "Little slow steps… little weary steps… little panic steps" (Beckett, "3" 232-233). Finally, in observing the tenacious "he," the "I" comments that he merely has to "raise his eyes… raise his eyes" – a trope that harks back to Beckett's earlier fiction, in which staring at the sky offers the possibility that an individual creature might hope to find answers by turning his glance up to the heavens, as does the protagonist of "The Expelled": "I raised my eyes to the sky, whence cometh our help, where there are no roads, where you wander freely, as in a desert, and where nothing obstructs your vision, wherever you turn your eyes, but the limits of vision itself" (Beckett, "3" 232; Beckett, "Exp" 49-50).

The close relationship of "Fizzle 3" and "Fizzle 4" further enhances this scope of formal repetition, as the latter features prominently as a repetition of the themes and phrases of its predecessor. The following juxtaposition illustrates the works' stark similarities:

> I gave up before birth, it is not possible otherwise, but birth there had to be, it was he, I was inside, now he stops again, for the hundredth time that night say, that gives the distance gone[.] (Beckett, "3" 232)

> I gave up before birth, it is not possible otherwise, but birth there had to be, it was he, I was inside, that's how I see it, it was he who wailed, he who saw the light [.] (Beckett, "4" 234)

The evident likeness of the two Fizzles, however, does not serve to clarify the questions raised in "Fizzle 3," but often complicate them, thereby supporting the lack of definition and continuity that "Fizzle 3" suggests in its contemplation of self-divisiveness. In "Fizzle 3," for example, the incredulous narrator declares, "it's impossible I should have a voice and I have none," whereas "Fizzle 4" serves to complicate the notion, building off of the previous assertion, "it's impossible I should have a voice… and I *speak* and think (Beckett, "3" 232; Beckett, "4" 234 – my emphasis). The impossibility of the "I" possessing a "voice" in "Fizzle 3," as the "I" had the reader believe, is thus contradicted in the subsequent Fizzle (Beckett, "3" 232). Beckett thus utilizes repetition not as a means of clarification but as an underscoring of the inherent state of divisiveness and interminable flux that impedes self-realization.

The recurring phrases and themes of "Fizzle 3" and "Fizzle 4" do not demonstrate a single consciousness that is in any way definite or constituent, but one that is inherently paradoxical and unstable. Despite the assertive stance of the "I" voice, the works suggest an inexplicable level of indeterminacy perhaps best phrased in "Fizzle 4": "I do the impossible, it is not possible otherwise" (Beckett, "4" 234). On the one hand, the consciousness that the "I"

assigns to “he,” one that will “meet the need, his need” returns invariably to contemplation of his own death. On the other hand, even though the narrator claims, “I gave up,” it nevertheless persists in its efforts to “feed it [the remembered self] all it needs, all it needs to end” (Beckett, “3” 233). This process of ending is not seen as novel experience, but itself a repetition, a means by which “he may love again, lose again” (Beckett, “3” 233).

There is, of course, a striking metafictional quality to “Fizzle 3.” As the narrative moves closer and closer to its own termination, the narrator simultaneously contemplates the means by which literary narratives enact their own ends, the journey towards ultimate cessation. The implication here is that, in the absence of a consistent “voice” capable of expressing a unified consciousness, one must imaginatively construct a fiction according to which a stable self persists over time (Beckett, “3” 232). Conventional first-person narratives project a simple and coherent identity from beginning to end, but Beckett’s works, in articulating an estrangement of the narrating “I” from the remembered “I” which is the object of the narration, compel the former to adopt an inherently unreliable stance. The “I” even picks an unconventional narrative tense for the tale, “in the present,” when in truth the represented voice exhibits no such order of succession or stability (Beckett, “3” 233). Indeed, the mere notion of the present depends on a stable past. To reconcile these two, “I” must lapse into established conventions of fiction.

The obviously fraudulent nature of this ending causes the reader to retrospectively question the validity of the “birth,” especially when one recalls the earlier admission, “I gave up before birth” (Beckett, “3” 232). For this deeper portion of the consciousness is constantly presented as unchanging, “the same”: “It’s he will die, I won’t die, there will be nothing of him left but bones, I’ll be inside, nothing but a little grit, I’ll be inside” (Beckett, “3” 233). “He,” like the “bones” of “Fizzle 1,” is subjected to the decay of time, physical death, while the “I” remains

"inside," a mind droning on past the senescent externality of its mortal shell (Beckett, "1" 228; Beckett, "3" 232).

As "Fizzle 3" draws to a close, the narrative voice appears to be honing in on the particular details of the story it intends to concoct; the imagined persons and events seem at first almost distilled into a projected overview of a life: they promise a summing up, only to fall apart again in the final, stumbling phrases:

> I'll put faces in his head, names, places, churn them all up together, all he needs to end, phantoms to flee, last phantoms to flee and to pursue, he'll confuse his mother with whores, his father with a roadman named Balfe, I'll feed him an old curdog, a mangy old curdog, that he may love again, lose again, ruinstrewn land, little panic steps[.] (Beckett, "3" 233)

The details and pursuits, "names, places," "phantoms to flee and to pursue" are all given temporary relevance and meaning in their relationship to a projected "end" (Beckett, "3" 233). The final lines of "Fizzle 3" further cement the nostalgic dimension of the text by its conspicuous allusion to another earlier work. As the protagonist of "From an Abandoned Work" engages in his circuitous travels, he recalls the memory of the elusive figure: "The day I saw the look I got from Balfe, I went in terror of him as a child. Now he is dead and I resemble him" (Beckett, "From" 163). Beckett thus employs the literary memory of a minor character in the earlier fiction as a means by which to enforce the perversion that time bestows on one's sense of identity. When "he" came into the world, his parents were presumably the first people he recognized, but, by the end of his life, he will not be able to distinguish his father from a peripheral character of

an earlier "abandoned" work. Here, Beckett not only indicates that the protagonist's memories will be inexplicable and confused but also incorporates a previous character, in the form of "Balfe," to offer a relevant memory from a previous text (Beckett, "From" 163).

Given the narrator's interest in divining an end for its narrated self, the piece draws inevitable attention to its own ending, which, yet again, resists closure and defers any formal ending in an intriguing fashion. The most conspicuous and unchanging repeated phrase in the piece is "ruinstrewn land," which begins "Fizzle 3" and is repeated in the final line of the work (Beckett, "3" 232-233). However, "Fizzle 3" does not end on that phrase, concluding instead with the anti-climactic "little panic steps" (Beckett, "3" 233). Initially puzzling and inconclusive, this ending phrase has, if we look back at the work, been anticipated by earlier references to the subject's manner of walking with "little slow steps… little weary steps" (Beckett, "3" 232). One may note, in addition, that there emerges here a progression from the relatively neutral "slow" and "weary" "steps" to the final, highly charged "panic steps" (Beckett, "3" 232-233).[8] This progression, however, is hardly sufficient to serve as a resolution of the work; if anything, the image suggests further movement and development.

Yet such repetitions are not entirely lacking in closural effects. Barbra Herrnstein Smith notes that, "In general, whenever a poetic form repeats at its conclusion a formal unit with which it began, closure will be thereby strengthened" (Smith 27). Indeed, repetition in and of itself serves as a powerful terminal device. The work does not quite come "full circle" so to speak – that would make it seem more coherent and complete than is consistent with Beckett's design – but the chaotic nature of the prose is to some degree, nevertheless, contained. The most obvious formal manifestation of the piece's incompletion is its lack of final punctuation. While the rest of

[8] This progression is a further a reference to "The Calmative," which includes a similar formal variation: "short steps… little stiff steps…" (Beckett, "Calm" 62, 65).

the phrases are separated by commas (132 in all), which serve most prominently to separate the inherently fragmentary and associative strain of the piece, the final phrase, “little panic steps” is not followed by any punctuation whatsoever (Beckett, “3” 233). The piece comes to rest posed between completion and incompletion: a lack of final punctuation exists in conjunction with a thematic return to the beginning (marked by the phrase “ruinstrewn land”) (Beckett, “3” 233). In the presence of incompletion, the reader draws from the work the impression of continuity rather than closure.

Chapter 4:

"Fizzle 8: For to End Yet Again"

"Repetition always includes the idea of variation in time, and may ever be a progressive act."

Peter Brooks

"Sometimes it's the sea, other times the mountains, often it was the forest, the city, the plain too, I've flirted with the plain too, I've given myself up for dead all over the place, of hunger, of old age, murdered, drowned, and then for no reason, of tedium, nothing like breathing your last to put new life into you, and then the rooms, natural death, tucked up in bed, smothered in household gods, and always muttering, the same old mutterings, the same old stories, the same old questions and answers, no malice in me, hardly any, stultior stultissimo, never an imprecation, not such a fool, or else it's gone from mind."

Texts For Nothing "2"

"If it was the end I would not so much mind, but how often have I said, in my life, before some new awful thing, It is the end, and it was not the end, and yet the end cannot be far off now."

"From an Abandoned Work"

If the aesthetics of fragments and ruins are useful ways of approaching Beckett's short prose narratives, equally important – if not more so – are the aesthetics of repetition. Intriguingly, all three topics ("fragment," "ruins," and "permutations") are explicitly referenced in final text of the American publication of *Fizzles* (Beckett, "8" 243, 244). This repetition exists within the individual pieces themselves and extends to Beckett's career as a whole. The common themes and patterns present in "For to End Yet Again" are indicative of Beckett's ongoing attempt to describe the process of the imagination, a portion of consciousness that is inextricably bound to the restoration of memory. Repetition features most prominently by means of reference to earlier works, suggestive puns, and, perhaps most importantly, the ubiquitous display of partially repeated phrases, or verbal permutations, that essentially move the work forward. Cohn,

Connan, et all. have written on this general subject; I draw on this extensive commentary in my analysis of the device as it features in *Fizzles*.

Steven Paton analyses Beckett's use of verbal permutations in the short piece "Lessness" and finds that "the force of simultaneity… is especially strong owing to the high degrees of repetition and equivalence in the text" (Paton 361). Paton views the repetition employed in "Lessness" (along with the omission of subordinate clauses and verbs indicative of tense) as a means by which Beckett attempts to attenuate the passage of time by engaging in a seemingly endless series of variations on a limited number of words. The striking similarities between "Lessness" and "For to End Yet Again" compel one to conflate the works in their formal intention. Like "the expelled" of "For to End Yet Again," who is distinguished from his grey surroundings by his "bright" "blue" eyes, the protagonist of "Lessness" is similarly described as "Grey face two pale blue" amidst the "scattered ruins same grey as the sand" – a nearly identical description to the central figure and setting of "For to End Yet Again" (Beckett, "Less" 197; Beckett, "8" 245).

Unlike the seemingly motionless state of "Lessness," however, "For to End Yet Again" is expressive of duration and movement as well as stasis. While the environment is often depicted as unchanging and eerily vacuous, the characters that inhabit the seemingly endless terrain display movement, especially the two "white dwarfs" that the narrative eye contemplates throughout the text (Beckett, "8" 244). The expelled, too, is captured in the process of movement, however minimal it may be. Beginning "stark erect amidst his ruins" towards the end of the Fizzle, he has fallen over (for the first and last time presumably) into the dust (Beckett, "8" 243). Intermittent images of fragments descending from their places of origin further serve to disrupt the static nature of the environment. Unlike in "Lessness," the narrative developments

that comprise the final Fizzle do not create stasis so much as they depict the imagination's ongoing effort to realize its own creations. However, as usual, the most revealing aspects of the work lie in its formal intention, which stubbornly perseveres in a cyclical maelstrom of beginnings and ends.

"For to End Yet Again" demonstrates this theme of progressive repetition immediately in its opening lines:

> For to end yet again skull alone in a dark place pent bowed on a board to begin. Long thus to begin till the place fades followed by the board long after. For to end yet again skull alone in the dark the void no neck no face just the box last place of all in the dark the void. (Beckett, "3" 243)

And so the reader is re-introduced to the familiar confines of an impenetrable and desolate "skull" (Beckett, "8" 243). Alliterative combinations of "place pent," and "bowed on a board to begin" reinforce the stark, understated simplicity of Beckett's opening image of a "skull alone in the dark" (Beckett, "8" 243). As early as *Stories and Texts For Nothing* the image of physical confinement has featured as a pervasive thematic concern in Beckett's works. Following their expulsion from an initial environment (often the start of the narrative) these early protagonists would set off in search of barns, sheds, empty rooms, even benches (provided that they were properly covered by trees) in the hopes of escaping or shielding themselves from the world of objects. Within these confined environments, the narrators were most at ease; they longed for the stillness and solitude that was, for them, analogous to mental exploration.

As Beckett's prose career progressed, the theme of physical confinement was equally pervasive – if not distinctly so – but the enclosures themselves would reduce to simpler and simpler structures as evidenced by the short prose of the sixties, works like "Imagination Dead Imagine," "All Strange Away," "Ping," and "The Lost Ones." "The Lost Ones" offers a particularly striking example of Beckett's meticulous attention to the details of these geometric enclosures: "Inside flattened cylinder fifty meters round and sixteen high for the sake of harmony" (Beckett, "Lost" 202). The scientific and mathematical lens through which the narrators examine structures like cubes and cylinders would become a distinguishing feature of these later works. Yet beyond the richness of detail and mathematical analysis lay the obstinate presence of "closed systems that Beckett's work so insistently, and so bleakly, sets before us as objects of reflection" (Shloss 168).

Unlike the relatively accommodating description of setting in "The Lost Ones," "Fizzle 8" does not delve into the particular dimensions of this physical enclosure; the work's description is unavoidably understated and fragmentary. In its minimal establishment of setting, "Fizzle 8" is reminiscent of "Fizzle 5," which abruptly reveals a "Closed space" (Beckett, "5" 236). Like the isolated mouth featured in Beckett's work for stage and television, *Not I*, the "skull" of "Fizzle 8" is detached from the rest of the body and remains suspended alone in a "dark place" (Beckett, "8" 243): "No neck no face just the box last place of all in the dark the void" (Beckett, "8" 243). The removal of the skull from the rest of the body serves to diminish the substantiality of the image, challenging the reader to imagine a being that is severed from the body that the image of its skull logically implies.

From its very opening lines, "For to End Yet Again" utilizes strains of partial repetition that invariably involve, unsurprisingly, notions of the "end" (Beckett, "8" 243):

1. For to end yet again skull alone in a dark place pent bowed on a board to begin. (Beckett, “8” 243)

2. For to end yet again skull alone in the dark the void no neck no face just the box last place of all in the dark the void. (Beckett, “8” 243)

If the subsequent variation provides the reader with further information, it also subtracts from the original source. While phrase 2 adds the description, “no neck no face just the box last place of all in the dark the void,” it fails to retain several original elements: “pent bowed on a board to begin” (Beckett, “8” 243). Like the constantly changing store of Barehead’s memory, while “fresh elements and motifs” are added to the original structure, others are simultaneously lost (Beckett, “1” 228). The above phrases represent both a burgeoning and a withering of meaning that does not lead to any conclusion or finality, but instead induces further speculation. As Ruby Cohn trenchantly observes, “Verbal repetition serves Beckett as music, meaning, and metaphor. The repetitions themselves are very various, and against that background, singular phrases shatter, ‘as one frozen by some such shudder of the mind’” (Cohn 139). By frequently revising previous assertions or definitive statements, Beckett represents the narrator’s ongoing attempts to comprehend the inexplicable events of its own imaginative ruminations and memories.

The obstinate presence of repetition in “For to End Yet Again” suggests a perpetual and indefinite reconstruction from the limited store of available materials by which one may attempt to divine his or her identity. In *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, Peter Brooks asserts, “We cannot really move ahead until we have understood that still enigmatic past,

yet ever pushing us forward, since revelation, tied to past, belongs in the future" (Brooks 123). In the absence of pure "reproduction," or "full reliving," Beckett's disoriented narrators lapse into sustained repetition, which, according to Brooks, "always takes place in the realm of the symbolic – in the transference of language – where the affects and figures of the past are confronted in symbolic form" (Brooks 123-124). It should be noted that Brooks's observations are heavily influenced by Freud, particularly his formulation of the "Uncanny" as the disturbing repetition of a familiar experience, "something which is familiar and old-established in the mind which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Freud 241). For Beckett, this alienation stems from the dislocation between the self of the present and the self of the past, a schism that the text reflects through repetitive yet ultimately discontinuous statements.

As the narrating eye scans the depths of its consciousness, it inevitably encounters familiar images of its distant past, figures that are meaningful both in terms of Beckett's career as a whole and on more fundamentally human dimensions. "The expelled" serves as a conspicuous allusion to the title of a work of short prose contained within the collection *Stories and Texts For Nothing*, a connection that Beckett further emphasizes when one of the dwarfs "hoist[s] as best he can his head as if to scan the void and who knows alter course" (Beckett, "8" 245).[9] On a more universal level, imagery such as the "mother ruin" – from which a fragment is detached – and the confined "box" at the start of the work suggest the intra-uterine existence, a distant life that cannot be fully revisited but only gestured at through the act of repetition

[9] This moment recalls a previously cited moment in "The Expelled" when the narrator looks to the sky for answers: "I raised my eyes to the sky, whence cometh our help, where there are no roads, where you wander freely, as in a desert, and where nothing obstructs your vision, wherever you turn your eyes, but the limits of vision itself" (Beckett, "Exp" 49-50).

(Beckett, "8" 244, 243).[10] Upon the birth, the expelled exists within the shadow of his own demise; the beginning is really the beginning of the end. To reproduce or recollect is an ideal (and illusory) reencounter with one's previous self whereas to repeat is to emphasize the inherent states of divisiveness and discontinuity that, for Beckett, signify the sparse and shifting remains of experience. Because we are unable live a "timeless" existence, we are subjected to the progressive and inherently time-bound act of inexact repetition (Beckett, "8" 244).

On a macro level, the ending of "Fizzle 8" mirrors its earliest moments as darkness descends and the skull is yet again acknowledged. This repetition appears to suggest that death is a return to the unconscious state that precedes birth (the beginning of the end). Beckett's acknowledgement of this ultimate repetition is a constant theme in his works, and the circuitous journey is a metaphor of this final experience of repetition. The author's response to this cosmic injustice is characteristically ironic; he subverts the typical order of beginning and end to suggest their elemental equivalence.

Within the text, the "end" is immediately and counter-intuitively established as a harbinger of further action (Beckett, "8" 243). While many of the work's sentences contain some reference (whether overt or subtle) to the end, they are inevitably followed by new beginnings. This development is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the opening line of "Fizzle 8": "For to end yet again skull alone in a dark place pent bowed on a board to begin" (Beckett, "8" 243). This strategy of beginning with the end and ending with the beginning is again present a few lines later: "There in the end all at once or by degrees there dawns and magic lingers a leaden dawn" (Beckett, "8" 243). While the sentence is prefaced by "There in the end," the phrase

[10] Consider the repetitive declaration of the narrating "I" in "Fizzle 3": "I was inside … I'm inside … I'll be inside … I'll be inside … I'm still inside" (Beckett, "3" 232-233).

concludes with an image of renewal and beginning: the "leaden dawn," itself opening up the possibilities for the developments of the narrative (Beckett, "8" 243).

The repetition of the phrase "There in the end" further establishes narrative momentum as its presence signals the introduction of the principal actors of the Fizzle ("the expelled" and the "two white dwarfs"): "*There in the end* same grey invisible to any other eye stark erect amidst his ruins the expelled… *There again in the end* way amidst the verges a light in the grey two white dwarfs" (Beckett, "8" 243, 244 – my emphasis). Rather than indicating imminent oblivion or expiration, Beckett establishes "the end" as a prominent source of progress within the text, a marker of developments to come (Beckett, "8" 243).

Another example of repetition includes the following varied sentences and puns:

> Thus then the skull makes to glimmer again in lieu of going out. (Beckett, "8" 243)

> Thus then the skull last place of all makes to glimmer again in lieu of going out. (Beckett, "8" 244)

Here it remains unclear as to whether "going out" refers to beginning, as in "going out to the supermarket," or ending, like the "going out of a candle" (Beckett, "8" 243, 244). Beckett exploits this ambiguity to suggest the nebulous relationship of the two principle thematic concerns of the work: beginnings and ends. In this instance of repetition, the phrases are virtually identical, with the relatively minor addition in the latter phrase of "last place of all," a description which occurs in some variation at three other moments in the text (Beckett, "8" 243).[11] These

[11] "Last stage of all… Last change of all… Last state all" (Beckett, "8" 243, 245, 246).

phrases are implemented in order to denote a shift in perspective. It is first used to suggest the act of creation that establishes the "Grey cloudless sky grey sand as far as eye can see" (Beckett, "8" 243). It is again utilized to denote the narrator's shift in focus from the "grey sky" to the other characters of the Fizzle: "There again in the end way amidst the verges a light in the grey two white dwarfs" (Beckett, "8" 243).

The "glimmer" of the "skull" precipitates the transformation of the setting from the dark, restrictive confines of the "box" to the "final grey" of a seemingly endless expanse: "There in the end all at once or by degrees there dawns and magic lingers a leaden dawn. As if switched on grey sand as far as eye can see beneath grey cloudless sky same grey" (Beckett, "8" 243). Beckett clearly demonstrates that this "magic" transformation is the result of an activated imagination (Beckett, "8" 243). His verb choice in this matter is particularly revealing. While "dawn" is perhaps most intuitively understood in this context as referring to the daily appearance of the sun, the word can also pertain to an act of realization, i.e. "it dawned on me that…" (Beckett, "8" 243). Similarly, the implementation of the verb "makes" in the phrase, "the skull *makes* to glimmer again in lieu of going out," suggests that the subsequent developments are an act of creative will as the imagination begins to craft its scene (Beckett, "8" 243 – my emphasis).

Revealingly, the activation of the imagination coincides with the development of the perceiving "eye," which serves as the principal means of organization for the narrative as it repeatedly attempts to decipher the expelled, the white dwarfs, and the falling fragments (Beckett, "8" 243). It is surely no coincidence that "eye" is a pun that suggests the first person pronoun (Beckett, "8" 243). Perhaps the most conspicuous manner in which the narrator demonstrates its privileged, authorial perspective is through its impressive movement and sight.

The eye demonstrates its prowess by achieving a kaleidoscopic view of the seemingly endless terrain, oscillating between ground level positioning, as when it observes the expelled "mingling with the dust," to a lofty "birds-eye-view" where it is able to spot the relative positions of its imaginative projections (Beckett, "8" 243, 245).

Yet, while the eye suggests its omniscience by its seemingly uninhibited sight and movement, its narrative agency is undermined by the inherent ambiguity of its observations. The eye displays its limitations from the very beginning of Beckett's twisted genesis: "There in the end *all at once or by degrees* there dawns and magic lingers a leaden dawn. *By degrees* less dark till final grey *or all at once* as if switched on grey sand as far as eye can see…" (Beckett, "8" 243 – my emphasis). The first mention of "all at once or by degrees" is broken up in the next line, which begins to read as if narrator has made the decision that the "dawn" appears "by degrees," but this is quickly qualified by the repetitive addition of "or by degrees" (Beckett, "8" 243). In both circumstances the narrator is unable to discern how exactly the phenomenon comes about. Furthermore, "As far as eye can see" can be taken literally as a means of expressing the staggeringly expansive landscape, or (especially when spoken aloud) the term can be understood as far more tentative, as it features in the expression, "as far as I can see," which is essentially equivalent to "as far as I know" (Beckett, "8" 243). Beckett thus exploits the ambiguities of repetitive language to enforce the heightened uncertainty of the narrator's perception. Even within its own act of creation, the eye of the imagination does not offer any definitive statements.

The most prevalent permutation of "Fizzle 8" involves the description of the voluminous landscape, whose sheer scope simply evades the narrator's comprehension:

1. By degrees less dark till final grey or all at once as if switched on grey sand as far as eye can see beneath grey cloudless sky same grey. (Beckett, “8” 243)

2. Grey cloudless sky grey sand as far as eye can see long desert to begin. (Beckett, “8” 243)

3. Grey cloudless sky ocean of dust not a ripple mock confines verge upon verge hell air not a breath. (Beckett, “8” 243-244)

4. Grey cloudless sky verge upon verge grey timeless air of those nor for God nor for his enemies. (Beckett, “8” 244)

5. Grey dust as far as eye can see beneath grey cloudless sky and there all at once or by degrees this whiteness to decipher. (Becket, “8” 244-245)

These variations on the “grey cloudless sky” serve to underscore the baffling expansiveness of the setting (Beckett, “8” 243). In its visual association with the “grey dust,” the sky appears to both represent time and exist beyond it (Beckett, “8” 244).[12] Its changeless appearance contrasts with the dilapidating and decaying structures throughout the “ruinstrewn land” (Beckett, “3” 232). It is almost as if the momentous nature of the environment compels the eye to summon the subjects of its narrative, whose unique colors function as figures against the ground of boundless grey. Following phrase 2, the eye notices the expelled as a result of his “bright” “blue” eyes,

[12] This association between sky and dust recalls the “bedlam nature” referred to in “Fizzle 5,” where elements are no longer living but are rather “crumbling into dust” (Beckett, “5” 237).

which serve as a striking juxtaposition to the grey ruination all around (Beckett, "8" 243, 246). His eyes are a testament to perseverance, and, perhaps, the endurance of the imagination when confronted with an inexplicable existence. The resilient brightness of his eyes recalls the glimmering within the skull that establishes the abundant and imaginative setting in the work's opening lines.

As the narrator descends to a surface position to examine the expelled, its observations are noticeably conflicted. The figure is depicted as being "still" and is likened to inanimate objects, such as a "statue" and a "doll" as well as the ruins that pervade the landscape (Beckett, "8" 243, 245). His luminous eyes and noticeable breathing, however, reveal that he remains alive, despite his ostensible lack of motion. But this immobility is dubious when one considers the narrator's observations of his physical stature: "The arms still cleave to the trunk and to each other the legs made for flight" (Beckett, "8" 247). While the expelled does not appear to be moving, the narrator's description suggests that he could break off running at any point. The expelled does not lend itself to clear analysis; it is paradoxically situated somewhere in the void between stasis and movement.

As if vexed by the enigmatic figure on the ground, the narrator manages to construct another image, a recurring theme in Beckett's works: "There *again* in the end amidst the verges a light in the grey two white dwarfs" (Beckett, "8" 244 – my emphasis). The theme of white is an unavoidably familiar thematic concern in Beckett's later prose, one he appears to acknowledge in his almost exasperated usage of "again" in the line above (Beckett, "8" 244). One recalls the white in "Ping," "Imagination Dead Imagine," and "All Strange Away," or the white face of the protagonist in *Krapp's Last Tape*. Indeed, the preoccupation can be dated back to "From an Abandoned Work," a transitional achievement of short prose that signaled Beckett's artistic

progression toward simplicity, compression, and fragmentation. In his routine travels, the narrator encounters a white horse and relates his fascination with the color: "White I must say has always affected me strongly, all white things, sheets, walls and so on, even flowers, and then just white, the thought of white, without more" (Beckett, "From" 157). As if in response to the endless expanse of grey, the narrating eye is compelled to create these white figures. By referring to a color that figures repeatedly in his works, Beckett creates a kind of short-circuit in the plot, the kind of "intentional deviance" that Brooks identifies as the materials of narrative (Brooks 104).

When the perspective shifts from the expelled to the white dwarfs it moves from the surface to an aerial perspective. From its lofty "birds-eye view" the narrating eye betrays a perplexing combination of complicity and removal from the dwarfs' movements (Beckett, "8" 245). The imperative nature of its descriptions ("Let him veer to the north… Let one stop short") would appear to establish the dwarfs as the eye's dramatic subjects, actors of its creative will. (Beckett, "8" 244). The eye's inability to distinguish between the two, however, calls this control into question: "they are so alike the eye cannot tell them apart" (Beckett, "8" 244). The appearance of the doubles is even more enigmatic, for they have miraculously "sprung from nowhere" (Beckett, "8" 245).[13] Like the "magic" appearance of the grey environment, if the

[13] This moment in the text bears a striking resemblance to Freud's synopsis of the double as a pathological phenomenon: "We have characters who are to be considered identical because they look alike. The relation is accentuated by mental processes leaping from one of these characters to another – but what we should call telepathy – , so that the one possesses knowledge, feelings and experience common with the other. Or it is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self. And *finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing – the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names through several consecutive generations*" (Freud 234 – my emphasis). Beckett's literary pathology could not have been better articulated.

dwarfs' appearance is to be interpreted as an act of the imagination, the imagination does not have full control over its own creations (Beckett, "8" 243). At times the eye's view is obstructed and it can only predict the white dwarfs' movements. They move "on so soft the eye does not see them go driftless with heads sunk and lidded eyes… Strain as it will the eye achieves no more than two tiny oval blanks" (Beckett, "8" 245). The self-evident limitations of the narrator's vision mirror the "gaping sockets" of the expelled in the proceeding lines (Beckett, "8" 246).

This lack of comprehension compels the eye to change position yet again, ascending to an even greater height. Beckett suggests the eye's location by means of one of the work's most anomalous and difficult sentence structures: "Atop the cyclopean dome rising sheer from jut of brow yearns white to the grey sky the bump of habitativity or love of home" (Beckett, "8" 245). But within the disrupted syntax, itself suggestive of a tumultuous mental state, the reader is able to discern a state of anguished estrangement, as the narrator "yearns," perhaps for "home," which, in the context of the aforementioned intra-uterine imagery, suggests a return to the origin of existence: the beginning of the end (Beckett, "8" 245).

Interspersed between the narrator's descriptions of the expelled and the dwarfs, the eye focuses upon falling fragments:

> First change of all in the end a fragment comes away and falls. With slow fall for so dense a body it lights like cork on water and scarce breaks the surface. (Beckett, "8" 244)

> First change of all a fragment comes away from mother ruin and with slow fall scarce stirs the dust. (Beckett, "8" 245)

In this juxtaposition, the basic image of the fragment falling uncharacteristically slowly and producing only a minor effect on the surrounding surface is present in both sentences. Yet once again, components are both added and subtracted in the subsequent depiction. While the reader learns that the larger structure is a "mother ruin" from which the fragment is detached in the second example, the construction fails to include mention of the fragment's density as well as the metaphoric observation, "it lights like a cork on water and scarce breaks the surface" (Beckett, "8" 244). While they are certainly not identical, however, the similar phrases essentially reinforce the same basic tragic notion. The imagery of the fragment detaching from its larger structure (or "mother ruin" as it is referred to in the second example) is immediately suggestive of a metaphor for life, connected to the constant repetitions and permutations of the Fizzle: as the eye attempts to achieve a proper positioning in the dusty expanse, the text constantly endeavors to construct the ultimate manifestation of syntax (Beckett, "8" 245). By returning to and altering formerly articulated observations, Beckett reinforces the uncertainty of the narrator in expressing its thoughts and sights. It as if the narrator is constantly re-attempting to elucidate what it once saw and is ever confronted with varying degrees of mutations and distortions that never quite manage to capture the original experience. Beckett combines the themes of repetition and memory in the final Fizzle to suggest their fundamental correspondence: For "repetition is a kind of remembering, and thus a way of reorganizing a story whose connective links have been obscured and lost. If repetition speaks of the death instinct, the finding of the right end, then what is being played out in repetition is necessarily the proper vector of the drive toward the end" (Brooks 140).

The general sentence structure of the falling fragments is employed once more to describe the fall of the expelled: "Last change of all in the end the expelled falls headlong down

and lies back to sky full little stretch amidst his ruins" (Beckett, "8" 245). This "last change," despite its noticeable similarity to the previous depiction of falling fragments, causes a final shift in perspective to the ground. At this point, the eye appears to enter into the consciousness of the fallen protagonist, further solidifying the connection between the eye and its imaginative creations. Despite its fall, however, the expelled retains its former posture: "As in the days erect the arms still cleave to the trunk and to each other the legs made for flight" (Beckett, "8" 241). As the surroundings achieve a sudden stillness from the protagonist's perspective, the implication remains that he might yet move. This uncertainty aroused by the familiar positioning of the expelled is further expressed by the unknown cause of its fall: "Fallen unbending all his little length as though pushed from behind by some helping hand or by the wind but not a breath" (Beckett, "8" "246). The setting becomes ominously desolate, and the "sky [is] forsaken of its scavengers" (Beckett, "8" 246). Despite the surrounding stillness that accompanies the protagonist's lack of overt movement, he continues to show signs of life: "breath has not left him though soundless still and exhaling scarce ruffles the dust" (Beckett, "8" 246). These moments of virtual quiescence, "all silent marble still," suggest the stasis of death, the final expiration that would serve to transform the living expelled into another anonymous ruin in the landscape (Beckett, "8" 246). Indeed, he is almost there; the rest of his body is the "same grey" as his ruinous surroundings (Beckett, "8" 243). Yet, the eyes remain "wash blue" and the expelled continues to breathe, even though his breath, like the minimal effects of the falling fragments on the impenetrably static environment, "scarce ruffles the dust" (Beckett, "8" 246). Furthermore, he is not yet to be considered an inanimate object, for his own lack of movement remains, at least for the moment, "still unlike the doll's" (Beckett, "8" 245).

This moment of stillness compels the narrator once more to address the skull, reaffirming the locus the subjective imagination:

> Sepulchral skull is this then its last state all set for always litter and dwarfs ruins and little body grey cloudless sky glutted dust verge upon verge hell air not a breath? And dream of a way in a space with neither here nor there where all the footsteps ever fell can never fare nearer to anywhere nor from anywhere further away? (Beckett, "8" 246)

These questions posed to the objectified skull function as a sort of synopsis or compressed summary of former permutations: "skull," "last state," "litter," "dwarfs," "ruins," "little body," "grey cloudless sky," "dust," "verge upon verge," "hell air," "not a breath" (Beckett, "8" 243-246). In what appears to be the final moment (like so many others before in *Fizzles*) the imagination clumsily attempts to summarize the work's previous phrases in anticipation of the end, in order to conclude the narrative and expire on a definitive note. The second question appears to anticipate a removal from external reality, "a space with neither here nor there," the ultimate return to the oblivion of unconsciousness (Beckett, "8" 246).

The threat of extinction dissipates, and the reader is returned to the setting of the work's beginning as darkness descends, disturbing the stillness that so promised to be the much-anticipated moment of cessation. The answer to the narrator's questions, "No for in the end for to end yet again by degrees or as though switched on the dark falls there again that certain dark that alone certain ashes can," constitutes an obviously inadequate means of concluding due to its affirmative certainty. The final, epigrammatic "No" and the definitive quality of the "certain

dark" would serve as an anti-climactic ending to a work that dwells on the uncertain persistence of the imagination (Beckett, "8" 246).

Instead, "For to End Yet Again" "fizzles out" with an affecting combination of indecisiveness and energy:

> Through it who knows yet another end beneath a cloudless sky same dark it earth and sky of a last end if ever there had to be another absolutely had to be. (Beckett "8" 246)

In accordance with the work's formal features, the concluding sentence of Beckett's "For to End Yet Again" features two notable repetitions: "who knows" and "had to be" (Beckett, "8" 246). The sentence begins as an admission of detachment and disillusionment. "Who knows," was previously used in reference to the peculiar motion of the white dwarfs. Its repetition at the end of "Fizzle 8" suggests the narrator's uncertain stance, which forms a significant contrast to the "certain dark" of the previous line (Beckett, "8" 246). If the skull was not detached from its shoulders, one might expect a complacent shrug. The uncertainty conveyed by the phrase "who knows" serves as a harbinger of the disorientation produced by the syntactically obscure train of words that follow: "same dark it earth and sky of a last end" (Beckett, "8" 246).

Through the remoteness of the expression emerges an expressive and emotional statement that resembles the yearning of the imagination earlier as it perched solitarily "atop the "cyclopean dome" (Beckett, "8" 245). "If ever there *had to be another* absolutely *had to be*" represents a final partial repetition, one in which "another" is conspicuously left out of the proceeding addition (Beckett, "8" 246 – my emphasis). From a purely formal point of view, "had to be" appears to be cut short in its asymmetrical presentation of the phrase it follows (Beckett,

"8" 246). The final 8 words of Beckett's text indicate a "cutting short" in the sense that it is not a fully symmetrical repetition. Nevertheless, the repetition "had to be" enforces the imagination's tenacious striving to "end yet again" (Beckett, "8" 243).

The repetitions and retrospective allusions to earlier works in *Fizzles* represent Beckett's response to the problem of narrative and narrative closure, as well as to the related problem of representing the self. If one cannot be sure of his or her identity from one moment to the next, life can only be truly represented as a never-ending process of eternal beginnings, repeated failed attempts to forge a sense of self from the incoherent fragments of memory. These repeated attempts at self-discovery amount to a cycle of abandoned works that are meaningful not in the revelations or answers any individual work may provide but in their cumulative enactment of constant beginnings. By avoiding their own sense of completion and closure, Beckett is able to reinforce the notion of repetition and new beginnings in an inherently anti-teleological manner. Such works do not conclude at any point where the narrative reaches a point of cessation; instead they defer closure by contemplating the inevitable inadequacy of the representation to tell a story in the likeness of the life it is intended to reflect. As such, "bones" must constantly be forthcoming (Beckett, "1" 228). These works can certainly be read alone, but they develop far greater significance when read in conjunction with one another in terms of their collective repetitions and incompleteness. In their constant failed attempts to come to rest, they beautifully represent the fragmentary nature of being.

Works Cited:

Ackerley, C. J. and Gontarski, S. E. *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*. New York: Grove Press, 2004. Print.

Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. James Hutton. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982. Print.

Barrett, William. *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy*. New York: Random House, Inc, 1958. Print.

Beckett, Samuel. *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*. New York: Grove Press, 1955. Print.

Beckett, Samuel. *Proust*. New York: Grove Press, 1931. Print.

Beckett, Samuel. *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*. Ed. S.E. Gontarski. New York: Grove Press, 1995. Print.

Brooks, Peter. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984. Print.

Ferguson, Margaret, and Salter, Mary Jo, and Stallworthy, Jon. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry: Shorter Fifth Edition*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005. Print.

Freud. "The Uncanny." *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol XVII. Trans. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press, 1955.

Gontarski, S.E. *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985. Print.

Janowitz, Anne. "The Romantic Fragment." A Companion to Romanticism. Ed. Duncan Wu. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998. Print.

Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending*: Studies in the Theory of Fiction. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.

Knowlson, James. *Dammed to Fame*: The Life of Samuel Beckett. New York: Simun & Schuster, 1996. Print.

Knowlson, James, and Pilling, John. *Frescoes of the Skull: The Later Prose and Drama of Samuel Beckett*. London: John Calder Ltd, 1979. Print.

Levinson, Marjorie. *The Romantic Fragment Poem*: A Critique of a Form. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1986. Print.

McFarland, Thomas. *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin*: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Modalities of Fragmentation. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981. Print.

Paton, Steven. "Time- Lessness, Simultaneity and Successivity: Repetition in Beckett's Short Prose." Language and Literature Vol. 18 No 4 (2009): 357-366. Jstor. Web 20 March 2010.

Perloff, Marjorie. "Between Verse and Prose: Beckett and the New Poetry." Critical Inquiry Vol. 9 No. 2 (1982): 415-433. Jstor. Web 5 November 2010.

Pireddu, Nicoletta. "Sublime Supplements: Beckett and the 'Fizzling Out' of Meaning." *Themodernworld.com*. The Modern World, n.d. Web 15 March 2010.

Praz, Mario. *The Romantic Agony*. Trans. Angus Davidson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1951. Print.

Rajan, Balachandra. *The Form of the Unfinished*: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985. Print.

Rabinovitz, Rubin. *Innovation in Samuel Beckett's Fiction*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992. Print.

Scarry, Elaine. *Resisting Representation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. Print.

Shelley, Percy. *A Defense of Poetry*. Ed. Albert Cook. Boston: Ginn & Company, 1891. Print.

Shloss, Carol. 1985. "*Foirades/Fizzles*: Variations on a Past Image." *Journal of Modern Literature* 12(1): 153-168. Web 16 March 2010.

Smith, Barbra Herrnstein. *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968. Print.

Tseng, Li-Ling. "Samuel Beckett's 'For to End Yet Again': A Conflict between 'Syntax of Energy' and 'Syntax of Weakness'". Twentieth century Literature Vol. 38 No. 1 (1992): 101-123. Jstor. Web 1 April 2010.

Vendler, Helen. *The Breaking of Style: Hopkins, Heaney, Graham*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. Print.