

*Voicing the Void:*

*Subject & Subjectivity in Samuel Beckett's Fizzles*

by

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A thesis presented for the B.A. degree

with Honors in

The Department of English

University of Michigan

Spring 2008

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my friends and family, my advisor Enoch Brater, Scotti Parrish, Dr. Oren Sagher M.D., Dr. Wayne T. Cornblath M.D., Dr. David Gordon, The Departments of Neurosurgery and Neuro-Ophthalmology at the University of Michigan , and The Michigan Head Pain and Neurological Institute, who all in their own way made certain that I finished this paper.

## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates four short texts of Samuel Beckett's—*Fizzle 3: A far a bird*, *Fizzle 4*, *Fizzle 5*, and *Fizzle 6*—in terms of both their narrative voices and their wider narratological and phenomenological implications. In doing so, it adopts the method of Carla Locatelli's *Unwording the World: Samuel Beckett's Prose Works After the Nobel Prize*, but argues against her conclusion that the 'late' Beckettian subject is one strictly of deconstructed, Derridean *différance*. As a philosophical support for its argument, the paper refers to Slavoj Žižek's formulation of the Subject as an 'empty' Cartesian *cogito*, as expressed primarily in his book *The Parallax View*.

Chapter One provides a close reading of the "almost identical" *Fizzles 3* and *4*, while Chapter Two limits its analysis exclusively to the "closed place" of *Fizzle 5*. The conclusion deals with *Fizzle 6* in an overly brief manner, but hopefully argues its point sufficiently.

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## Introduction

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“All save void. No. Void too. Unworsenable void. Never less. Never more.”

— Samuel Beckett, *Worstword Ho*

In my estimation, the closest Slavoj Žižek comes to an analysis of the modernist literary project is in response to Jacques Lacan’s *Joyce-le-symptôme*:

The ‘modernism’ of Joyce resides in the fact that his works ... are not simply external to their interpretation but, as it were, take into account in advance their possible interpretations, and enter into dialogue with them ... in modernism, a theory about the work is comprised in the work, the work is a kind of pre-emptive strike at possible theories of itself.<sup>1</sup>

If this notion is true with regards to James Joyce, then it is doubly true with regards to Samuel Beckett, who presents texts of “indisputable ... openness” that live up to their reputation as “obstinately paradigmatic, fragmentary and obscure.”<sup>2</sup> In tackling what I see as a definite narratological and phenomenological progression in *Fizzles 3* through *6*, I have limited my analysis

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<sup>1</sup> Slavoj Žižek. *The Indivisible Remainder, or Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (New York: Verso), 202.

<sup>2</sup> Carla Locatelli, *Unwording the World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 1, 182.

to what Carla Locatelli calls “the epistemic coordinates of 1) subject, 2) time, and 3) space [that] ... map out Beckett’s fictional world, inasmuch as they are the only recurrent thematic and structural elements of his entire production.”<sup>3</sup>

In the spirit of Locatelli’s triadic schema, I have devoted this introduction to answering the three questions underpinning my analysis: 1) Why read *Fizzles*? 2) Why is the ‘Subject and Subjectivity’ of these texts worth considering? 3) Why support that investigation with Slavoj Žižek’s philosophy?

In his commentary of “the later prose and drama of Samuel Beckett,” James Knowlson—Beckett’s official biographer—refers to the *Fizzles* collection thusly:

Any experienced reader of Beckett will be struck, on reading the *Fizzles*, by the plethora of motifs that have been encountered before ... the *Fizzles* are clearly, therefore, transitional works ... surprisingly homogenous and form, no doubt with a judicious sprinkling of hindsight, a genuine collection, with a number of points of contact between the separate texts.<sup>4</sup>

According to the blurb on the first American edition of *Fizzles*, “*Fizzles 1* through *6* were written in French about 1960 and translated [into English] by Beckett in 1973-74.”<sup>5</sup> In terms of their chronology then, the first six *Fizzles* truly are “transitional works” originally composed well before Beckett’s Nobel Prize

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> James Knowlson, *Frescoes of the Skull* (London: John Calder, 1979), 133.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Fizzles* (New York: Grove Press, 1976), back cover.



in 1969 yet not translated into English until some while after.<sup>6</sup> While I do not agree with Knowlson that “of the individual ‘fizzles,’ only two ... are really noteworthy [*Fizzles 1* and *6*], since ‘Closed Place’ [*Fizzle 5*] returns to *The Lost Ones* material, and two of them (‘Afar a bird’ [*Fizzle 3*] and ‘I gave up before birth’ [*Fizzle 4*]) are almost identical,”<sup>7</sup> I do agree that *Fizzles 1* through *6* (and especially *3* through *6*) form a sustained and cohesive aesthetic-ontological investigation, one that stands as a conceptual equal to any of Beckett’s later projects.

As a sustained investigation of the problems of the Self, *Fizzles 3* through *6* propose a theory of subjectivity opposed to what Locatelli finds in her analysis of *Company*, namely “the refusal of the *cogito* ... [both] as description and as reproduction of [the Subject].”<sup>8</sup> Locatelli describes Beckett’s late prose as a “systematic refusal to reproduce the usual meaning of ‘I,’ a meaning that implies a unity which was actually never there.”<sup>9</sup> Occupying a temporal space simultaneously before and during Beckett’s ‘late’ period (thanks to Beckett’s decision to self-translate into English), *Fizzles 3* through *6* present a theory of subjectivity directly opposed to Locatelli’s decentered and deconstructed ‘I.’

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<sup>6</sup> The following paper uses *only* Beckett’s English translations.

<sup>7</sup> Knowlson, 134.

<sup>8</sup> Locatelli, *Unwording the World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 157.

<sup>9</sup> Locatelli, 162.

By replacing the *cogito* with a shifting subject-position made up of nothing but “different, successive, specific images,”<sup>10</sup> I feel Locatelli makes a critical misstep, reducing Beckett’s paradoxes to an easily digested, theoretical end-note. While I agree completely that Beckett’s late texts “[negate] a single dominant narrative point of view ... inasmuch as it is shown to be both an object and a subject,”<sup>11</sup> I find the conceptual problem Beckett presents to be a far more difficult one: “not to bridge the gap [in the Subject itself] but, rather, to *formulate* it as such, to conceive it properly.”<sup>12</sup>

My analysis *Fizzles 3* through *6* presents the Subject as a stable *cogito*, as “an existant whose being *cannot* inexist,”<sup>13</sup> albeit one quite different than how Descartes intended. In *Fizzles 3* through *6*, Beckett shows a series of subject who always present themselves as “a paradoxical single entity that is ‘doubly inscribed,’ that is simultaneously surplus and lack ... an entity that is simultaneously—with regard to structure—an empty, unoccupied place—with regard to the elements—an excessive occupant without a place.”<sup>14</sup>

My reliance on Žižek as a theoretical support for my analysis of the Subject in *Fizzles 3* through *6* requires some explanation. It is important to emphasize here that I do *not* view Žižek or any other theorist’s work as a key to

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<sup>10</sup> Locatelli, 161.

<sup>11</sup> Locatelli, 163.

<sup>12</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (New York: Verso, 2006), 214.

<sup>13</sup> Alain Badiou, *On Beckett*, ed. Nina Power and Alberto Toscano (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>14</sup> Žižek, 226.

unlocking these texts and laying bare any kind ‘authorially intended’ truths. My use of Žižek’s throughout my argument is therefore two-fold.

Strictly from the perspective of their respective ontologies, I view both *Fizzles 3* through *6* and Žižek’s formulation of the subject as attempting to tackle the same fundamental problems of the Self, albeit while employing two wildly differing methodological methods. Because Žižek operates solely within the realm of formal philosophy, I feel his approach is fundamentally limited by his (rightfully) chosen form. While I find Žižek’s formulations useful for glossing certain difficult concepts in *Fizzles 3* through *6*, the inverse is also true. With regards to the difficult concept of the Subject-as-Void, Beckett and Žižek’s individual projects fill in each other’s gaps nicely.

If there is any question to how Beckett would feel about this strategy of mine, I must refer to an interview cited by Locatelli herself:

Interviewer: Have contemporary philosophers had any influence on your thought?

B: I never read philosophers.

I: Why not?

B: I never understand anything they write.

I: All the same, people have wondered if the ... problem of being may afford a key to your works.

B: There’s no key or problem. I wouldn’t have had any reason to write

my novels if I could have expressed their subject in philosophic terms.<sup>15</sup>

Writing from the unfortunate position of never fully understanding either what Beckett or Žižek write, it is my hope that the process of reading and playing the two off of each other produces some kind of glimmer from the Beckettian Subject itself.

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<sup>15</sup> “Samuel Beckett in an interview with Gabriel D’Aubarède, first published in *Nouvelles Littéraires* (16 February, 1961), now in English translation in Graver and Federman” (Locatelli’s footnote, not mine).

## Chapter I

### *The Undying Voice of Fizzle 3 & Fizzle 4*

*“On account of its temporal loop, the phantasmic narrative always involves an impossible gaze, the gaze by means of which the subject is already present at the act of his/her own conception.”*

—Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*, pp. 16

*“And I, whose wretched slave shall I be? ... A faint drone, poor image of a corpse, weak shining among dead men?”*

—Euripides, *The Trojan Women*.

The voice of *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird* and *Fizzle 4* refuses to go quietly. Like any good Beckettian subject, it finds itself stuck with “the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.”<sup>16</sup> *Fizzles 3* and *4* present a voice that seems to do nothing but narrate the conditions of its own subjectivity. The inherent ‘impossibility’ of its being there does not stop it from going on. As the voice itself puts it: “it’s impossible I should have a voice, impossible I should have thoughts, and I speak and think, I do the impossible, it is not possible otherwise.”

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<sup>16</sup> Samuel Beckett, “Three Dialogues,” *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 139.

*Fizzle 3: Afar a Bird* and *Fizzle 4* present two variations of the same narrative voice. In both cases the subject finds itself trapped in its own unceasing consciousness, unbounded by the voids of before-birth and after-death: “I gave up before birth, it is not possible otherwise, but birth there had to be ... there will be nothing of him left but bones, I’ll be inside, it is not possible otherwise.”<sup>17</sup> The voice has no beginning and no end; it has been existing since before its body was born and will go on existing long after its body is dead, “he’ll rot, I won’t rot ... I’ll be inside, nothing left but dust, I’ll be inside.”<sup>18</sup> Even in the absence of a biological body—the traditional ‘prison of the soul’ in the Platonic formulation—this voice finds itself imprisoned within the parameters of its own subjectivity, be it a speck of dust or the space of “before birth.” This subject exists only to end its object and to narrate that ending (“because of me, he’ll do himself to death, because of me, I’ll tell the tale, the tale of his death, the end of his life and his death”<sup>19</sup>) but cannot end itself. It is trapped by the constant awareness of its own going on.

Beckett establishes the voice’s consistency through a large section of narrative repeated in both stories. By ignoring for a moment the differences of *Fizzles 3* and *4* and looking only at this narrative kernel, the concurrences of this subject’s two stories emerge:

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<sup>17</sup> Samuel Beckett, “Fizzle 3: Afar a bird” & “Fizzle 4,” *Fizzles* (New York: Grove Press, 1976), 27 & 32.

<sup>18</sup> *Fizzle 4*, 32.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

... I gave up before birth, it is not possible otherwise, but birth there had to be, it was he, I was inside ... it was he who wailed, he who saw the light, I didn't wail, I didn't see the light ... 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 voice ... I'll live his death, the end of his life and then his death ... in the present, how he'll go about it, it's impossible I should know, I'll know, step by step ... there will be nothing of him left but bones, I'll be inside ... I'll be inside, it is not possible otherwise ... he will never say I ... there's nothing left in his head, I'll feed it all it needs<sup>20</sup>  
[...]

I gave up before birth, it is not possible otherwise, but birth there had to be, it was he, I was inside ... it was he who wailed, he who saw the light, I didn't wail, I didn't see the light, it's impossible I should have a voice ... it was he who had a life, I didn't have a life, a life not worth having, because of me ... I'll tell the tale, the tale of his death, the end of his life and his death ... I'll be inside ... there will be nothing of him left but bones, I'll be inside ... the end of his life and his death, how he will go about it ... it's impossible I should know, I'll know, step by step ... impossible I should tell, I'll tell, in the present, there will be no more talk of me, only of him, of the end of his life and his death ... there will

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<sup>20</sup> *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird, 25-27.*

be no more I he'll never say I any more ... there's nothing left in his head, I'll feed it all it needs.<sup>21</sup>

The shared tensions between both stories then revolve around a key opposition: an immortal subject's relation to its mortal object, of an infinite voice and its finite shell. The repetition of these lines suggest a traumatic core underlying the subject's basic narrative thinking, a story that *must* be told (with room for variation). *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird* and *Fizzle 4* 'really' occur in the ellipses of a far more fundamental story of a subject painfully aware of its own impossible voice. The kernel plays out like a "dripping in [the] head," a narrative leak emerging from somewhere so deeply buried that it seems to come from nowhere.<sup>22</sup>

The narrative kernel of *Fizzles 3* and *4*—itself a repeated construct, representative of what Carla Locatelli calls "the problematic practice of a ceaseless use of language"<sup>23</sup> —proceeds through a sequence of lexical repetitions. With the exception of the final two 'sentences,' each phrase introduces a word which the voice then repeats at least once. Taken in order, these words provide a map of the subject's basic thematic thinking, moving from one abstract word-concern to the next while attempting to place both itself and its body within them. In addition to indicating a voice who seems to

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<sup>21</sup> *Fizzle 4*, 31-32.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

<sup>23</sup> Locatelli, 177.



be always doubling back on itself, these notions give shape to the voice's sense of its being in relation to the life of its body.

The variation in this narrative anchor between *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird* and *Fizzle 4* is more stylistic than substantive. The subject voices the same obsessions, repeating verbatim the opening section of the kernel (“I gave up before birth ...” to “... a life not worth having, because of me”) with an important distinction. In *Fizzle 4* the declaration “it’s impossible I should have a voice” comes *before* “it was he who had a life, I didn’t have a life.” After this change in order, the kernels proceed to say the same thing but with a slightly different style. *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird’s* “I’ll live his death, the end of his life and then his death” becomes “I’ll tell the tale, the tale of his death, the end of his life and his death ... I’ll be inside ... there will be nothing of him left but bones, I’ll be inside ... the end of his life and his death, how he will go about it.” This tinkering with word order suggests a *revising* voice: it knows it has told the story before and is trying to get it ‘right,’ trying to find the proper way to say it in spite of the impossibility of telling it “in the present.”

This question of the ‘present’ is problematic in both stories. All four instances of the present tense in the kernel—“it is not possible otherwise,” “it’s impossible I should have a voice,” “it’s impossible I should know,” “there’s nothing left in his head”—rely on a similar construction: an unidentified and ambivalent third-person pronoun (“it” or “there”) followed by some sort of

negation or negative idea. The kernel, part of a narration told in the present, focuses on either the remembered past or the imagined future and ignores the current state of things. This constant temporal shifting suggests a subject with little perspective of the present beyond the body's going on. The emphasis on *negation* when using the present tense highlights the subject-voice's inability to locate the reason for its voice and its point of emanation. The voice remembers itself "before birth" and seems convinced of its unending existence, but cannot find any concrete sense of itself without the body's presence. Its hesitance to speak about itself in anything but negative, "impossible" terms without referencing its object-body indicates a break in its chronology. At the moment of narration, the voice is a gap on its own timeline of memory and imagination. Every time the voice tries to talk it finds itself strangely absent: "it's impossible I should have a mind and I have one." The subject's existence is one of self-recognizing, unending paradox.

The primary narrative difference between *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird* and *Fizzle 4* is one of perspective. While the kernel divides its locus equally between the subject 'I' and the object 'he,' each story chooses a particular side of the divide as its focus. *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird* contrasts the narrative voice's "dripping in [the] head" to, in the first half of the story, the narrated body's "little slow steps."<sup>24</sup> The voice switches constantly between an analysis of itself and a narration of

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<sup>24</sup> *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird*, 25.

the body's action: "Ruinstrewn land, he has trodden all night long ... hugging the hedges, between road and ditch, on the scant grass, little slow steps, no sound, stopping ever and again, every ten steps say, little wary steps, to catch his breath, then listen."<sup>25</sup> The body's action is repetitive and hopeless, waiting and listening for some other sound that never comes, playing out his end seemingly oblivious to this voice in his head.

By returning again and again to the toiling and moiling of the body, *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird* firmly anchors itself to the passage of 'real'—albeit repetitive—narrative time, stressing the body's movement towards his end. The voice narrates the movement of its body in the present tense, switching to talking about itself in the past and future tenses only when his body falls asleep, "hunched over his stick."<sup>26</sup> The voice signals this shift of gaze from the object to itself with the announcement "I'm inside," an attempt to impose a kind of coordinate-boundary around its non-being. When its physical body "fled" to the 'temporary death' of sleep, the voice must make itself its object-referent. The voice can only manage "I'm inside" in the present tense and nothing else before retreating into its own remembered past or its imagined future, when the body will return so can "put faces on his head, names, places, churn them

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

all up together.”<sup>27</sup> In spite of its own immortality, the voice cannot exist without something to talk about.

The voice does not bother much with names. With the exception of the mysterious roadman, Balfe, in *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird*, there is no mention of a proper noun in either story. The only means of identification we have is in a sea of pronouns, which serve to identify only through their relation to one another. “I” cannot be “he” and “he” cannot be “it,” although at certain points the voice calls into question the issue of what these pronouns are actually referring to. Interested in keeping some kind of coherent narrative, the voice does not play much with its pronominal distinctions, preferring rather to give some kind of lexical clarity in its fragmented style. This is a voice that latches onto ‘stable’ concepts, so as to calm its own sense of instability. The subject’s obsession with its personal “I” is another attempt for it to coordinate itself, but this time within the bounds of the word itself.

Coinciding with the only external cognitive intrusion in either story, *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird* shows the subject’s attempts at its own kind of ontology, breaking free of the story’s narrative threading and—for a moment—entertaining its body’s only conviction:

... 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

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

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, he'll find one for me, ill beseeming me, it will meet the need, his need, but no more of him, that image, the little heap of hands and head, the trunk horizontal, the jutting elbows, the eyes closed and the face rigid listening, the eyes hidden and the whole face hidden, that image and no more, never changing ...<sup>28</sup>

What emerges here is a fuller fleshing-out of the subject's sense of itself.

Beckett crafts a voice actively defining itself by its manipulation of the body (“I'm inside, he'll do himself to death, because of me”) but does not give this force unbridled power. Beckett extends the subject-object relationship by adding a third term to the mix and shifting the voice to the body's position. The point-of-enunciation, however, does not jump to this new divining entity, rather the voice continues its narration and imagines the possibility of *being* divined. It is an interesting twist that this idea originates from *outside* the voice's understanding (“[it's] what he's come to,” i.e., the object-body). For an entity which claims to hold so much power over its body, its willingness to entertain—even for a moment—an idea ‘beyond’ itself seems like a change of pace.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, italics mine.

To further complicate things, this section marks the completely breakdown of the third-person pronoun's delineation. 'He', which has thus far served as a stable semiotic, takes on an extreme ambiguity in the lines before "but no more of him." Instead of conferring upon this new and imagined diviner entity some kind of title or special distinction, the voice continues on with its old vocabulary. If the voice ever plays with new cognitive concepts (we do not know if this diviner idea has cropped up before in this voice's existence), it does not bother to revise its language. This insistence to stick to pronouns after introducing a third-term to the subject-object relationship leads to some very tricky interpretive imperatives, stuffing the pronoun with two or more possible interpretations. This conscious move towards what H. Porter Abbot calls "incomprehensibility" makes this passage very difficult to parse, but of course, that is the point. The near-complete breakdown of pronominal distinction in this passage serves to show the terrifying process the subject-voice endures every time its object-body falls asleep, when distinctions between I and He and It seem to dissipate into an incomprehensible air.

This section of text contains some of the strongest lexical ambiguity in either *Fizzle 3* or *Fizzle 4*. The pronoun "us" found in this section is particularly problematic.<sup>29</sup> The voice gives no indication before or after the line "someone divines me, divines us ... I see him in my mind, there divining us" what it

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<sup>29</sup> In fact, "us" only appears one other time in the entire *Fizzles* collection, again in a similar 'once-repeated' set-up. See *Fizzle 6*.

means by this word, whether it includes only itself and its body or if it intends ‘the diviner’ as well. By using “us,” the voice also seems to be—knowingly or not—including its implied hearer/reader into its ontological mapping. Whether we, as readers of *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird*, choose to include ourselves in this process is of course our choice, but the ontological ambiguity of “someone divines us” has power outside of the “closed space” of the text.

To compound the confusion, the voice then begins to refer to the diviner in the masculine third-person, the exact same way it has been indicating the body. Despite its unease when left by itself, the voice also seems troubled when anything but the body intrudes on its space. It seems to lack the linguistic faculty necessary to process the diviner figure on his own terms. The idea that some other “impossible” force is at play, creating and controlling both body and voice simultaneously comforts and disturbs the already unsettled subject, who tries desperately to account for it.

In interpreting this ‘diviner’ figure, Birgitta Johansson makes an immediate and unjustified leap to Christian transcendence by claiming that “‘something divines me, divines us’ ... converges in evoking the notion that we may not be alone, after all, and that there may be a force that affects our lives ... an invisible, unnamable source.”<sup>30</sup> While I agree that there exists an “invisible, unnamable ... centre” to *Fizzle 3* and *Fizzle 4* (the subject-voice itself), it is

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<sup>30</sup> Birgitta Johansson, “Beckett and the Apophatic in Selected Shorter Texts,” *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd’hui* 9 (2000), 63.

necessary to resist any kind of blatant association between a specifically Christian ‘God’ and this ‘diviner,’ an argument Johansson makes explicit later on in her article. By projecting into the separation between subject-voice and object-body the image of a “Christlike figure, who takes on the sins of the world, and a suffering human being [that] ... epitomises the failures and weaknesses of humankind, but ... also provides meaning to such shortcomings,” Johansson limits the text to one-dimension, discounting not only the ambiguities between voice, body, and diviner, but also the problems this diviner poses to the voice’s paradoxical existence.

In teasing out the figure of the diviner, the voice uses its body as a starting point. The voice imagines the diviner in a similar physical position as the body, comparing “I see him in my mind, there divining us, hands and head a little heap, the hours pass” from this section with the earlier description of the body’s listening-position, “one on top of the other the hands weigh on the stick, the head weighs on the hands.” This description of hands and head creates a physical link between diviner and body, transforming the alien idea of diviner into something more comprehensible to the voice. Once the voice has decided what the diviner ‘looks like’ it can continue its fantasy and inject some of itself into this phantom Other.

While, from the voice’s perspective, the diviner looks an awful lot like the body, he engages in activities remarkably beneficial to the voice. The body’s



“little slow steps” would probably continue with or without the voice’s injunction, as the voice seems to think it can only influence the body’s cognitive processes (“I’ll put faces on his head, names, places, churn them all up together”), even if we never see a direct example of it in the present tense. The diviner, on the other hand, is invested completely in the subject, actively seeking the voice it always-already has. The subject transforms the body’s idea of a diviner into a temporary answer to its troubles, a make-shift skeleton-key to the paradoxes of its fragmented existence. Before rejecting it completely, the voice entertains this diviner as a kind of synthesis between itself and its body, an imaginary unity of subject and object. The diviner appears as an immortal, imagined version of the body with the cognitive and linguistic powers of the voice, but as soon as this image congeals the voice rejects it, recognizing its own hated immortality in its very salvation: “but no more of him, that image, the little heap of hands and head ... that image and no more, never changing.” The voice longs for something different and even in the messianic, self-created figure of the diviner it can only find more of the same.

In terms of the voice’s quest to define and control its own subjectivity, *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird* is a failure. The voice can recognize the possibility of a way out but is either unwilling or unable to realize it. The title, *Afar a bird*, alludes to the bird seen on the horizon in the middle of the narrative, a foggy reminder of everything the voice is not. In the end it can only go back to the beginning,

as the text fades into the white-space of the page without any kind of definitive, punctuational end point. The subject keeps talking into infinity, with nothing but the body's "little panic steps" and the desolate landscape as company. That the narrative ends in a similar but condensed retelling of the opening line "Ruinstrewn land, he has trodden it all night long, I gave up, hugging the hedges, between road and ditch, on the scant grass, little slow steps" reminds of the voice's eternal injunction to recognize itself for what it is.

It is not clear if *Fizzle 4*—which obviously follows *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird* within the larger structure of *Fizzles* itself—is an earlier or later permutation of the narrative, but the voice finds itself in remarkably similar circumstances to that of *Fizzle 3*. It is still ultimately concerned with bringing about the end of its unfortunate body. While *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird* balanced equally between subject and object (even providing a mysterious third-term between the two in the form of the diviner), and provided some sort of description of the body's movements in the present, *Fizzle 3* operates almost entirely in the memory and imagination of the voice. Gone are the little slow steps, the listening and catching of breath, the bird on the horizon. The voice of *Fizzle 4* is still firmly connected to its body, but in a slightly more sinister and single-minded permutation: the voice wants to exclude everything outside of the subject-object relationship, be it landscape or diviner, but cannot fully realize this goal. The almost sad, weary tone of "a life of my own I tried, in vain, never any but his, worth nothing,

because of me, he said it wasn't one, it was, still is, the same, I'm still inside, the same"<sup>31</sup> gives way to "his death alone would not be enough, not enough for me, if he rattles it's he who will rattle, I won't rattle, he who will die ... I'll be inside, he'll rot, I wont rot."<sup>32</sup> The perspectival difference between *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird* to *Fizzle 4* is partially this shift from "it was he who had a life, I didn't have a life, a life not worth having," which appears in both stories, to "his death alone would not be enough," a line unique to *Fizzle 4*. The fundamental antagonism between immortal and mortal remains the same, it is the subject-voice's perspective and attitude that changes.

While the ambiguous "us" of *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird* hinted at a subject cognizant of its story's extra-narrative audience, *Fizzle 4* presents the voice as fully aware of its inherently performative function. Projecting itself into a future after the body's death, the voice imagines how it will go about passing the time: "I won't go on about worms, about bones and dust, *no one cares about them.*"<sup>33</sup> Taken from either a meta-textual or intra-textual perspective, this self-conscious concern with appealing to an audience is a change from *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird*. Gone are the pointed probes into the nature of its own existence and the lamentations of immortality. The voice temporarily ignores its doubts about itself, choosing instead to accept its impossible nature and the power that entails. "I speak and think, I do the impossible" it says in a triumphant revision

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<sup>31</sup> Fizzle 3: Afar a bird.

<sup>32</sup> Fizzle 4.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Emphasis mine.

of its narrative kernel, showing off for whatever audience it imagines is listening. The indefinite pronoun “no one”—which crops up only three times total in the entire *Fizzles* collection, two of which in *Fizzle 4*—is a fitting metaphor for the voice’s ideal audience: an absent presence, a conscious void that nevertheless does the impossible.

Like *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird*, *Fizzle 4* contains a ‘third-term’, a pronominal reference outside the immediate link between the voice and the body. This time, instead of a singular, definite ‘diviner’, the voice offers only a third-person plural, as an obverse to *Fizzle 3*’s figure. While the diviner occupied a space associated with origins—“someone divines me, divines us”—the unqualified “they” of *Fizzle 4* function as distant, unseen undertakers or garbage collectors: “perhaps they will bury him, if they find him ... there will be no more talk of me, only of him, of the end of his life and his death, of his burial if they find him ... he always wanted to drown, he didn’t want them to find him.”<sup>34</sup> Given its concern with impressing its audience a mere line before “there will be no more talk of me, only of him,” it is possible to read “they” as only concerned with the material, dumb stuff of the body, of finding it and immediately interring it in the earth. Whether the voice is angry at its imagined removal from “their” discourse or not is unclear, but this issue of ‘who is listening to me and who is not’ suggests a voice—in spite of its longings to end

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

in *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird*—who fears a possible shift from immortal to mortal, contingent not on *its* desires, but those of its audience.

Unsure of where exactly it resides, be in the body or the imagined “nothing left but dust,” the voice cannot be sure that it is even being heard at all. In a meta-textual analysis of the problem, the voice will always have an audience as long as Samuel Beckett’s *Fizzles* has an audience, but this answer is not entirely satisfactory. Within the narrative itself, “they” seem to at least be aware of the voice’s presence in the present, but whether they are merely confusing voice with body is unclear. In the voice’s imagined future, “they” seem unaware that the voice’s presence will continue going on: is the voice concerned with the possibility of losing its others and therefore its immortality? If Berkeley’s maxim “to be is to be perceived” holds any sway in *Fizzles 3* and *4*, it is in this zen space of—to use a clichéd formulation—“if a tree falls in the woods and no one is around, does it make a sound?” The voice may not be sure that someone is hearing it speak, but perhaps it imagines—much like the ontological figure of the diviner—its own audience to keep its speech flowing. If the voice is moving its body on towards death, it is also keeping itself immortal.

Twice in *Fizzle 4*, in place of the usual syntactical constructions which take I, He, They or It as their subject, the voice utters and then repeats a strange statement:

... unless I'm bored in his dust, that would surprised me, stiff as I was in his flesh, *here long silence*, perhaps he'll drown ... he usen't to want them to find him, deep water and a millstone, urge spent like all the others, but why one day to the left, to the left and not elsewhither, *here long silence* ...<sup>35</sup>

These spoken demands for silence are in themselves just as “impossible” as the voice and call direct attention to the ambiguities of the text itself. To return for a moment to the meta-textual mode, in which we acknowledge the author Samuel Beckett as the voice-behind-the-voice, the inclusion of an enunciated indication of “silence” raises a number of concerns about both the words on the page and the narrative voice they conjure.

The inclusion of “here long silence” in the place of an exaggerated space in the text or a line break works on two differing interpretive levels, neither mutually exclusive. On its primary level, “here long silence” operates as a type of stage direction, plainly announcing ‘at this point in the narration, the voice is silent.’ This kind of violent intercession on the part of the Author seems uncharacteristic of Beckett’s prose from *The Trilogy* onward, but perhaps this omniscient command is the theatre poking through: a pragmatic decision to indicate silence in a textual narrative. This ultimately reductionist reading sheds some light on the function of the mysterious phrase, but ignores the far

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

more complicated and worthwhile question of its relationship to the voice itself.

Within the narrative itself, “here long silence” is something the voice says when it wants to say nothing, an empty placeholder for the silence it cannot muster. This is the Beckettian “obligation to express” taken once again to its outward limit, in which speech cannot be silenced or stopped by the subject itself. The voice must speak even when it has nothing to say, echoing Paul Éluard’s ‘L’amoureuse’, a poem which Beckett translated:

*L’amoureuse*

Elle est debout sur mes paupières  
Et ses cheveux sont dans les miens,  
Elle a la forme de mes mains,  
Elle a la couleur de mes yeux,  
Elle s’engloutit dans mon ombre  
Comme une pierre sur le ciel.

Elle a toujours les yeux ouverts  
Et ne me laisse pas dormir.  
Ses rêves en pleine lumière  
Font s’évaporer les soleils,  
Me font rire, pleurer et rire,  
Parler sans avoir rien à dire.<sup>36/37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Paul Éluard, “Mourir de ne pas mourir.” *Capitale de la douleur* (Paris: Galimard, 1966), pp 56.

<sup>37</sup> Beckett’s own translation, taken from *Collected Poems in English & French* (New York : Grove Press, 1977, pp. 67), is as follows:

*Lady Love*

She is standing on my lids  
And her hair is in my hair  
She has the colour of my eye  
She has the body of my hand  
In my shade she is engulfed  
As a stone against the sky

In addition to echoing the very same antagonisms between subject and object, Éluard's final line reflects the exact same injunction behind "here long silence": to speak when there is nothing to say because some other force is commanding you to. While Éluard's figure occupies the subject position in the first stanza ("She has the color of my eye / She has the body of my hand / In my shade she is engulfed"), he finds himself stuck on the other side by the end of the poem, when he functions as the object-body to his lover's (imagined) voice: "She will never close her eyes / And she does not let me sleep / And her dreams in the bright day / Make ... / Me laugh cry and laugh / Speak when I have nothing to say."

Beckett's subject-object relationship is equally symbiotic, but far more rigid than Éluard's. The closest it comes to a reversal of terms is in *Fizzle 3*, when the voice imagines a figure like its body as the cause of its origin, but even in that temporary fantasy the subject and the object keep their distance from each other. To borrow a particularly useful sentence from Slavoj Žižek, "... we have here the structure of the Moebius strip: the subject is correlative to the object, but in a negative way – subject and object can never 'meet'; they are in

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She will never close her eyes  
And she does not let me sleep  
And her dreams in the bright day  
Make the suns evaporate  
And me laugh cry and laugh  
Speak when I have nothing to say



the same place, but on opposite sides of the Moebius strip.”<sup>38</sup> This idea of occupying the same space and never meeting will be echoed later in the *Fizzles* collection, when in *Fizzle 5* the disembodied voice describes the track as “Just wide enough for one person. On it two never meet.”<sup>39</sup>

Taken together, *Fizzle 3: Afar a bird* and *Fizzle 4* show a symbiotic but ultimately deadlocked relationship between subject and object. The final line of *Fizzle 4*—which does, in fact, end with a full-stop—“... he’ll get up and go on, badly because of me, he can’t stay still anymore, because of me, he can’t go on anymore, because of me, there’s nothing left in his head, I’ll feed it all it needs” highlights the voice’s need for other voids like itself and the body’s need for something to keep it moving on towards the end. By refiguring “the old Beckettian desire to represent one’s own perceiving consciousness together with the representation of self as the content of that consciousness”<sup>40</sup> in the split between voice and body, *Fizzles 3* and *4* represent a sustained and nuanced investigation into the nature of subjectivity itself. Contained within this investigation, however, is the presupposition of an imaginary space in which these two ‘sides of the strip’ can interact. The following narration—*Fizzle 5*—shifts Beckett’s investigation from a “subject/subject split combined with a subject-subject confrontation” to the presentation of “a polymorphic space, a

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<sup>38</sup>Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (New York: Verso, 2000), pp. 28.

<sup>39</sup> *Fizzle 5*.

<sup>40</sup> Carla Locatelli. *Unwording the World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 11.

space no longer reducible to the objective/subjective polarity.”<sup>41</sup> What emerges in that “closed place” is a further refinement of Beckett’s ontological project, with a specifically spatial twist.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

## Chapter II

### *Out of Inner Space: The Strange Labyrinth of Fizzle 5*

*“It is not drawn on any map ; true places never are.”*

—Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, pp. 61

*“In this strang labourinth how shall I tourne?  
Wayes are on all sids while the way I miss ...  
Lett me goe forward, therein danger is.”*

—Mary Wroth, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*

*Fizzle 5* begins on a spatially disorienting note: “Closed space. All needed to be known for say is known. There is nothing but what is said. Beyond what is said there is nothing.”<sup>42</sup> Gone is the first-person point of narration, the obsession with self, and the uneasy dynamic of body and voice. While *Fizzles 3* and *4* present themselves as but a tiny glimpse of their unsaid narrative context—of a voice’s never-ending speech—*Fizzle 5* immediately denies its reader any kind of extra-textual space. It does not invite “imagining” of this place’s history or its contents. This new voice proposes a space of pure geometry, one that purposefully denies access to its very axioms of operation.

The first challenge of *Fizzle 5* is an administrative one. If we temporarily accept the voice’s initial claims as a kind of explicit ‘stage-direction’ for the interpretation of its own narrative space (an uneasy provision that will be

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<sup>42</sup> Samuel Beckett. “Fizzle 5,” *Fizzles* (New York: Grove Press, 1976), 37.

analyzed further below), then the first task of parsing this text is geographical: to draw a “mental image”<sup>43</sup> of the space as described. In *Fizzles 3* and *4* the voice uses a mostly unequivocal lexicon to describe its spatial context. Words like “body,” “dust,” “bones” lend themselves to a quick and easy association with some familiar *thing*. The concept of “before birth” presents an imaginative problem, but its purpose in *Fizzles 3* and *4* is far more temporal than spatial. Our inability to imagine the space of “before birth” in *Fizzles 3* and *4* is precisely the point as it reinforces the voice’s alien and impossible nature.

Space is not the primary concern of *Fizzles 3* and *4*, as the voice rarely if ever mentions the spatial context of its body. Having illustrated the subject’s deadlock through the tensions between body and voice, Beckett moves on to a different thematic concern in *Fizzle 5*. By moving from the paradox of subjectivity to the paradox of space—specifically space as described by language—Beckett takes his ontological investigation that much further. Just as *Fizzle 3/4* presents an impossible voice that nevertheless exists, *Fizzle 5* creates an impossible, subjective space with words alone.

*Fizzle 5*’s primary progression is through a voice’s description of an unfamiliar place, but with an appropriately Beckettian twist: “Place consisting of an arena and a ditch. Between the two skirting the latter is a track. Closed

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<sup>43</sup> Caselli, 185.

place. Beyond the ditch there is nothing.”<sup>44</sup> These short, declarative sentences seem simple and straightforward enough. To borrow Daniela Caselli’s incomplete but useful reformulation of this description, the text describes a space “divided into three zones ... concentrically arranged: the ‘arena’ is surrounded by the ‘ditch.’”<sup>45</sup>

What Caselli leaves out is the fourth element of the equation, that the “three zones” are further surrounded by the explicit *absence* of definable space, as “beyond the ditch there is nothing.” The abyss outside of the “closed place” is beyond both linguistic and physical figuration but the text still manages to arrange it *spatially*. This paradox of a spatially conceived “nothing” haunts the entirety of *Fizzle 5*, forcing any kind of “mental image” to operate only on the micro level, on “what is said.” This unimaginable—but nevertheless palpable—“nothing” thwarts any attempt to mentally figure the three-zoned “closed place” within any spatial context but its own, while simultaneously calling attention to the strange provisions of the place’s existence.

At the innermost space of the ‘closed place’ is an arena, an area just as “unknowable” as the aforementioned “nothing.” Even if we do not know its precise, numerical dimensions of the arena (and we do not), we know that the spaces of both track and ditch surround it. Opposed to the indefinable “nothing” outside of the ‘closed place,’ the arena is an actively definite space,

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<sup>44</sup> *Fizzle 5*, 37. Emphasis mine.

<sup>45</sup> Caselli, 189.

but one in which “what goes on ... is not said,” as it is “not for imagining.”<sup>46</sup>

The narrator, somewhat paradoxically, does offer up some description as to the arena’s goings on a few sentences later, but in a strangely almost-hypothetical mode: “Arena black vast. Room for millions. Wandering and still. Never seeing never hearing one another. Never touching. No more is known.”<sup>47</sup> We thus ‘know’ only three things about the arena. It is bounded by the track and the ditch, it is very large, and it is very dark.

A cursory reading of this description would suggest that “millions” of beings inhabit the space of the arena, but the text does not explicitly say so. The qualifications of “room for millions” stand to give some vague indications of its size, presenting the matter conditionally in a mood that seems to indicate ‘if there were millions of beings in the arena, there would be enough room for them all to coexist without having to interact with each other in any way.’ The arena is so big that we cannot hope to hold it in our minds, let alone imagine what goes on within its confines (the very definition of the Kantian sublime). The arena and the space “beyond” the ditch reflect each other in their incomprehensible natures, but nevertheless remain separated by the more ‘knowable’ spaces of track and ditch.

Ignoring for a moment the ‘impossible’ zones both within and beyond the place described, *Fizzle 5* presents two spaces which can be grasped both

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<sup>46</sup> *Fizzle 5*, 37.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

geometrically and geographically. The track and the ditch form the interface between the ‘unknowable’ places of inner arena and outer abyss, a kind of equalizing space that *can* be understood through “what is said.” *Fizzle 5* assigns the bulk of its description to these two places, to both their physical structure and the goings on therein.

Compared to the arena, *Fizzle 5*’s narrator provides a relatively detailed account of the ditch’s properties and dimensions:

Depth of ditch. See from the edge all the bodies on its bed The millions still there. They appear six times smaller than life. Bed divided into lots. Dark and bright. They take up all its width. The lots still bright and square. Appear square. Just room for the average sized body ... Thus the width of the ditch is known. It would have been in any case ... The ditch seems straight. Then reappears a body seen before. A closed curve therefore.<sup>48</sup>

As opposed to the ambiguous millions of the arena, within the space of the ditch there are “millions” of still bodies, each occupying their own bright lot. The concurrence of the “not for imagining,” imagined millions of the arena (“Never seeing never hearing one another. Never touching”) and the actual bodies along the ditch-bed is obvious, suggesting some kind of connection between the dark arena and the semi-bright ditch. The problem proposed by

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-8.

the ‘inhabitants’ of this space is, however, a moot one. This is a text concerned with space itself, not what goes on within it. Parsing why and how these bodies came to be here is irrelevant, as they simply are.

In spite of this confusing talk of bodies, the description of the ditch brings an important spatial element to the ‘closed place.’ Up until this point, the text’s conception of its space has been two dimensional, offering only a ‘top-down’ view of the four zones, not unlike our perception of words on a page. We do not know each circle’s particular radius, but it would be a simple task to sketch their relative relationship: one large circle containing two progressively smaller ones, the remaining white space outside standing in for the “nothing” beyond the ditch.

The “bright lots” however, complicate this simple schema, as they shine “unimpeded” into the darkness, “high above the level of the arena. As high above as the ditch is deep.”<sup>49</sup> These three sentences radically alter our ‘mental mapping’ of this space, as the narrator forces us away from our schematic diagram, which is now composed not only of the relative relationships between definite and indefinite spaces, (arena/ditch/track and the surrounding “nothing”) but of darkness, light, and depth, operating on the opposite plane.

Beckett complicates further our image of the ditch with the “[millions of] bodies on its bed,” an immediate evocation of the “room for millions” of the

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.



incomprehensible arena. Unlike the body/voice of *Fizzle 3/4*, the bodies contained within this ‘closed space’ have no verbal or physical effect in the text; they are like so much decorative furniture. An interpretation of this absence of character can move in two directions. Either these bodies have died or find themselves in some similar state of separation (from the powers of language, physical action, etc.) or the narrator of this text does not or cannot penetrate their exterior forms. If we take the latter interpretation as the case, then the narrator here lacks the omnipresence of a ‘typical’ third-person narrator. If we imagine each body as a discreet, conscious being like that of *Fizzle 3/4*, then what is the narrator of *Fizzle 5*’s point of enunciation? Does it “divine” this space and these people through the power of its words—beyond which there is “nothing”—or is it an entity as passive as those it perceives, who can only perceive a pre-existing space and reports on it?

Caselli formulates this innate tension of *Fizzle 5*’s narrative voice as between “both the untenable opposition between sensory experience and textuality, and the oscillation ... between narration as the reportage of an external reality and as the invention of a microcosm ‘teeming’ with ‘little people.’”<sup>50</sup> The narrative voice of *Fizzle 5* operates in both of these stylistic modes, both reporting on the strange, “external” reality in which it finds itself (“see from the edge all the bodies on its bed ... the ditch *seems* straight”) and

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<sup>50</sup> Caselli,, 184.

constructing that reality through language (“for say is known ... there is nothing but what is said ... beyond what is said there is nothing”). The narrator’s “oscillation” between the two modes poses a problem if the desired analytical outcome is a definitive one, but accepting the paradoxical and ambivalent nature of Beckett’s voices is key to understanding how they work: they are both inside and outside both their realities and their languages.

While the voice of *Fizzle 3/4* has a past and a future and utilizes their respective tenses, *Fizzle 5* plays out entirely in the present. But despite the narrator’s unity of tense, it still raises important temporal questions. If we accept the narrator as a thinking subject, operating from a particular point-of-enunciation, then it must put in a certain amount of mental or perceptual work before it speaks. Is this a space imagined, remembered, or seen? In its descriptions, the narrator favors the lexicon of sight and appearance as much as that of speech and speaking, suggesting some kind of vantage point: “See from the edge all the bodies on its bed. They *appear* six times smaller than life ... The lots still bright are square. *Appear* square ... then *reappears* a body seen before ... so many bodies *visible* on the bed.”<sup>51</sup> Coupling this lexical preoccupation with the text’s emphasis on giving a spatial, schematic structure to the place—however difficult it is to imagine that schema in its totality—

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<sup>51</sup> *Fizzle 5*, 37-8.

suggests a spatially definite “point of narration,” even if it remains an ambiguous one.

The question of *Fizzle 5*’s narrator is, of course, a paradoxical one. The text never once includes any kind of pronominal indication of its speaker while it simultaneously claims that “beyond what is said there is nothing.” Never once mentioning itself, the narrator is—in a literal sense—beyond what is said: according to itself it should not exist. This notion of an ‘impossible’ but nevertheless existing narrative voice is in many ways one “seen before,” in the previous chapter of both this essay and the *Fizzles* collection.<sup>52</sup>

Like the voice of *Fizzle 3/4*, which must always locate itself within some space or another, the narrator of *Fizzle 5* emerges from a point within its own ‘closed place,’ not outside of it in the unimaginable “nothing” beyond. The voice seems to occupy the space of the track, given its ability to see that the lots diffuse “vertically ... unimpeded ... as high above as the ditch is deep” and the layout of the place itself. If we instead imagine how the three zones relate to each other in terms of their height (“The track ... is on a higher level than the arena, a step higher”), we see that the track operates as ‘wall’ separating track from ditch both visually and spatially. The narrator seems to occupy this very space on top of the wall, giving it a point from which it can see both within and beyond.

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<sup>52</sup> “It is impossible [it] should have a voice ... [it] speak[s] and think[s], [it] do[es] the impossible, it is not possible otherwise.”

From its very position within the space of the text and its tone, *Fizzle 5*'s narrator presents itself as the director of our mental tour. This is a voice that moves us through its space while highlighting particular points of interest along the way. Has this voice, through its narrative position, made us its silent and manipulated object, much like the voice of *Fizzles 3* and *4* made its body? There is always a kind of power relation at play in these texts, playing with the line between “what is said” and “what ... is not.” If “seeing [is] produced by saying”—as it is within this narrated place—there is nothing to suggest that we are experiencing anything but pure, subjective space, objectively described.<sup>53</sup>

The final cognitive problem of *Fizzle 5*, once we accept its impossible existence, is this very tension between our ‘objective’ point of view and the narrator’s ‘subjective’ one. Caselli is correct, I feel, in claiming that this “text, therefore, creates a loop ... sensory experience is created by a mental image, in its turn created by sensory experience.”<sup>54</sup> *Fizzle 5*'s subject-narrator occupies a point on the perceptual loop and we, as readers, occupy the opposing one. Both of us find ourselves trapped within the same closed, symbolic space of language and narration. Ruby Cohn correctly takes the simple schema of arena, track, and ditch, as a metaphor for the paradox of perception, as she mentions that “the concentric circles of ditch and track also mirror the human eye ... establishing a clear link between the split perceiving self and the spatial

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<sup>53</sup> Locatelli, 189.

<sup>54</sup> Caselli, 185.

organization of this [*Fizzle*].”<sup>55</sup> The reemergence of the “split perceiving self” of course echoes *Fizzles 3* and *4*, only now the audience (as readers) and the voice (as narrator) occupy the space of the Moebius strip, forever oscillating back and forth. The narrator needs “another body” to find itself and we need someone to guide us through this strange space. We are still in the universe of the subject and subjectivity, of an “impossible voice” that nevertheless “does the impossible.” Returning to Caselli’s useful (and this time, complete) formulation: “the position of the narrator/observer can be neither internal nor external.”<sup>56</sup> As discreet subjective and symbolic entities, both the narrator and its audience occupy the position “of the ‘interface,’ of the surface-contact between inside and outside.”<sup>57</sup> The following *Fizzle* raises this very tension between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ to the fore, and completes the ontological loop of *Fizzles 3* through *6*.

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<sup>55</sup> Ruby Cohn, *A Beckett Canon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 189.

<sup>56</sup> Caselli, 185.

<sup>57</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (New York: Verso, 2006), 223.

## Conclusion

### *An Inner/Outer Glimmer of the Split Perceiving I*

“And as thy house was thine own tomb,  
So thine own womb concludes thy tomb.”

—Richard Lovelace, *The Snail*

*Fizzle 6* presents a final shift of perspective, from the ‘unsaid’ narrator of *Fizzle 5* back to one “seen before.” In many ways *Fizzle 6* represents a synthesis between *Fizzles 3/4* and *Fizzle 5*: the first person point of narration returns as an I with an “other,” coupled with an emphasis on sight: “Old earth, no more lies, I’ve seen you, it was me, *with my other’s ravening eyes.*”<sup>58</sup> Beckett now introduces us to a mortal narrator—one of the body—presenting once again the split between the “I’ which calls himself ‘me’ ... the split self [and] the split I/eye.”<sup>59</sup>

In addition to the subjective deadlocks carried over from *Fizzles 3* through *5*, *Fizzle 6* brings two other conceptual concerns from background to foreground: 1) the tension between inside and outside, and 2) the tension between life and death. There is no particular immortality in either this voice or this ‘old earth’ save only a general one. While the voice of *Fizzle 3/4* repeats the same basic narration endlessly, the voice of *Fizzle 6* knows (or thinks) it is going

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<sup>58</sup> Samuel Beckett. “Fizzle 6,” *Fizzles* (New York : Grove Press, 1976), 43.

<sup>59</sup> Daniela Caseli. *Beckett’s Dantes* (New York : Manchester University Press, 2005), 187.

to die sometime soon. There is a general, positional immortality in *Fizzle 6*: the same things come to pass again and again if given a long enough timeline, like those intermittent “cockchafer years.”<sup>60</sup>

There are three thematic ‘sections’ to *Fizzle 6*, with the last two overlapping slightly: the prefiguring of the narrator’s future death and burial, the end that will bring about the body’s entry into the realm of passive immortality (“Old earth, no more lies” to “how you refuse me, you so refused”); the continuous and habitual action of both the narrator and the ‘natural’ environment (“It’s a cockchafter year” to “To the river perhaps, they head for the river”); then the narrator’s particular, bodily actions during the moment of the narration (“For an instant I see the sky, different skies” to “Other skies, another body”). This move from the general to the particular represents—to resurrect the film metaphor from the previous chapter—a sustained, slow zoom, moving from the wide-angled “old earth”—the narrators imagined, final resting place—to the unexplained other “body,” seen on the horizon.

In the middle section of the text, the narrative voice compares its own life to the lives of the beetles that are slowly eating the leaves of his “little oaktree.” Bodily or biological forces determine the lives and routines of these non-conscious beetles. This is a formulation stark in contrast to this subject-voice but one proposed in a similar, circular presentation: “I come home at

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<sup>60</sup> *Fizzle 6*, 43.

nightfall, they take to wing, rise from my little oaktree and whirr away ... Three years in the earth, those the moles don't get, then guzzle guzzle, ten days long, a fortnight, and always the flight at nightfall. To the river perhaps, they head for the river."<sup>61</sup> The cockchafers begin in the earth and this body hopes to end there. The question remains, however, whether its voice will die along with it or forever be stuck in the closed, spatial interface between life and death.

*Fizzle 6*, which ends with “another body,” provides a point from which we return to the deadlock of *Fizzle 3*, that of an immortal voice trapped in a body. *Fizzles 3* through *6* formulate “the parallax gap between the ‘inside’ experience of meaning and the ‘outside’ view of a flat, meaningless organism, this piece of meat that sustains ... experience.”<sup>62</sup> The question of what ‘really’ lies behind the symbolic pronoun ‘I’ has a specifically specific formulation in *Fizzles 3* through *6*. Both Beckett and Žižek succeed in “conceiv[ing] it properly,” and Žižek here puts into theory what Beckett shows through his art:

What am I? I am neither my body ... nor the stable core of my autobiographical narratives that form my symbolic identity; what ‘I am’ is the pure One of an empty Self which remains the same One throughout the constant change of autobiographical narratives.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-4.

<sup>62</sup> Žižek, 222.

<sup>63</sup> Žižek, 227.



What emerges through the perceptual changes throughout the *Fizzles* is exactly this Subject-as-Void, but one that, through its particular narrative voicing, “glimmers ... in lieu of going out.”

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