"Say it simply. [...] Say it simpler": The role of error in the creative praxes of Samuel Beckett and Gertrude Stein.

In this paper I will compare the aesthetics of failure in the writings of Samuel Beckett and Gertrude Stein through a close comparative study that specifically focuses on error as a strategic tool for disassembling semantic certitude and, as Beckett puts it in the 1937 Kaun letter, for tearing at the surface of the word and inducing porosity into "the fabric of the language."¹ While this "fidelity to failure,"² together of course with the concept of writing "worser"³ is nothing new to Beckett scholars, to my knowledge little or no connection has been made between Beckett's attitude here and the all but identical attitudes expressed by Stein, the author Beckett commends in Kaun 1937 for having induced porosity into certain of her writings. This same "fidelity to failure"⁴ and concept of writing "worser"⁵ is particularly palpable throughout Stein's How To Write, a collection of essays published in 1931 that subjects the grammars of the English language to a relentless series of forensic analyses. It can be seen for example in her advice to "Say it simply. [...] Say it simplier"⁶ a statement that reveals a very particular and error-prone creative praxis that holds much in common with what we can here term the "for want of worser worst"⁷ prose identifiable in mid-to-late Beckett. The Stein texts I will refer to are How To Write and Tender Buttons. The Beckett texts I will refer to are "Three Dialogues," How It Is, and Worstward Ho.

¹ SB to AK, 9 July 1937, Beckett, Letters 1, 519.
² Beckett, "Three Dialogues" in Disjecta, 139.
³ Beckett, "Worstward Ho" in Company etc., 96.
⁴ Beckett, "Three Dialogues" in Disjecta, 139.
⁵ Beckett, "Worstward Ho" in Company etc., 96.
⁶ Stein, "Sentences," in How To Write, 147.
⁷ Beckett, "Worstward Ho" in Company etc., 95.