All That Fall
Education Work Pack
Out of Joint
2016
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Aim

The resources, research and information in this study pack are intended to enhance our audiences' enjoyment and understanding of All That Fall by Samuel Beckett. These resources illustrate the process that was embarked on in rehearsals by director Max Stafford-Clark, the cast and the rest of the creative team.

These resources are aimed at anyone with an interest in theatre wishing to gain a deeper understanding of the process it took to create this new production.

We hope that you find the materials interesting and enjoyable. If there is anything more you would like to know about All That Fall, the page-to-stage process of an Out of Joint production, or if you would like to book a workshop, please contact Isabel Quinzaños on 0207 609 0207 or at isabel@outofjoint.co.uk.

Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett was born on April 13, 1906, in Dublin, Ireland into a Protestant family in a predominantly Catholic society. His father, William Frank Beckett, worked in the construction business and his mother, Mai Jones Roe, was a nurse. At 14, he went to Portora Royal School, the same school attended by Oscar Wilde. He suffered from depression in his youth, periodically keeping him in bed.

He received his Bachelor’s degree from Trinity College in 1927. In 1928, Samuel Beckett moved to Paris where he met and became a friend of James Joyce. In 1931, he embarked on a trip through Britain, France and Germany (he spoke French, Italian, German and English). He wrote poems and stories and did odd jobs to support himself. In 1937, Samuel Beckett went back to Paris and settled down, but still found great difficulty in getting his work published.

During World War II, Samuel Beckett’s Irish citizenship allowed him to remain in Paris as a citizen of a neutral country. He fought in the resistance movement until 1942 when members of his group were arrested by the Gestapo. He and his wife Suzanne fled to the unoccupied zone until the end of the war. Here is an interesting article written by his biographer James Knowlson about his time as a spy.

After the war Beckett was awarded the Croix de Guerre for bravery during his time in the French resistance. He settled in Paris and began his most prolific period as a writer. In five years, he wrote Eleutheria, Waiting for Godot, Endgame, the novels Malloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, and Mercier et Camier, two books of short stories, and a book of criticism.

In 1969 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.
By the late 1980s, Samuel Beckett was in failing health and had moved to a small nursing home. Suzanne, his wife, died in July 1989. He died on December 22, 1989, in a hospital of respiratory problems just months after his wife.

For more details about Beckett’s life visit biography.com which we used as our main source of information for this section.

Beckett’s Work

In spite of Beckett’s determination to write about the despair of human existence, he was essentially a comic writer.

Technically, Beckett carefully and meticulously crafted all of his works, with impeccable precision. Every word and the format of the work has been considered. Waiting for Godot, for instance, is constructed symmetrically; two parts mirroring each other. (Here is an interview with Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen talking about their experience doing the play.)

His radio play All That Fall (1956) is a model for the combined use of spoken word, music and sound effects.
Beckett’s later works tended toward extreme concentration and brevity. Come and Go (1967), a playlet, or “dramaticule,” as he called it, contains only 121 words that are spoken by the three characters. His series Acts Without Words are exactly what the title denotes, and one of his last plays, Rockaby, lasts for 15 minutes. His play Breath, written in 1969, “is a minute long and features just the sound of breathing.” His focus on brevity is an expression of his determination to waste no words. For more analysis of Beckett’s work, we recommend you visit here.

Summary of the Play

“It is a text written to come out of the dark” Samuel Beckett of his mysterious, tragicomic first radio play.

All That Fall charts the faltering journey of elderly Maddy Rooney as she ventures along a country road to surprise her blind husband at the train station for his birthday treat. Along the way she meets an array of local characters; some of them friendly, some of them not so much. She is an eccentric and vociferous woman, cantankerous and unpredictable who likes to provoke others. When she finally arrives to the train station she is disconcerted to find her husband’s train is late. This event prompts much speculation and worry from Mrs. Rooney and other people at the station.

When the train finally arrives, Mr. Rooney is cold and distant. Their slow and decrepit journey back home is punctuated with Mr. Rooney’s tale of what happened to delay the service. But is he telling the truth?

First broadcast in 1957, All That Fall was the first time Beckett centred his work on a female protagonist. Listen to the original radio production here.

Research

A Brief History of Ireland

Here is a brief summary of landmark events in the history of Ireland leading to 1956, the year All That Fall was written. This is a key aspect of Max’s rehearsal process, which helps him and the company deduct the lives and habits of the characters in the play. For a more extensive history of Ireland, you can start here.

Easter Rising

On April 24th (Easter Monday) 1916, two groups of armed rebels, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army seized key locations in Dublin. Outside the GPO (General Post Office) in Dublin city centre, Padraig Pearse read the Proclamation of the Republic which declared an Irish Republic independent of Britain. Battles ensued with casualties on both sides and among the civilian population. The Easter Rising finished on April 30th with the surrender of the rebels. The British administration responded by executing several leaders of the Rising.
**War of Independence**
What followed is known as the ‘war of independence’ when the Irish Republican Army – the army of the newly declared Irish Republic – waged a guerilla war against British forces from 1919 to 1921. In December 1921 a treaty was signed by the Irish and British authorities. While a clear level of independence was finally granted to Ireland agreement to the treaty to split Irish public and political opinion. One of the sources of division was that Ireland was to be divided into Northern Ireland (6 counties) and the Irish Free State (26 counties) which was established in 1922.

**Civil War**
Such was the division of opinion in Ireland that a Civil War followed from 1922 to 1923 between pro and anti treaty forces. The consequences of the Civil war can be seen to this day where the two largest political parties in Ireland have their roots in the opposing sides of the civil war. A period of relative political stability followed the Civil war.

**Social**
Through the 1940’s and into the 1950’s there was a period of mass emigration in Ireland, approximately 409,000 people emigrated either to the United States or to Britain. Those who stayed in Ireland throughout the emigration period, and even those who went away, felt socially isolated to a certain extent.
Theatre of the Absurd

Many of Beckett’s works were written at the beginning of a period known as Theatre of the Absurd. His plays often ended with no solution to the problems presented; this way of theatre was very unconventional at the time. The external environment of these plays is unknown. Even though they can draw comparisons of this unknown environment into their own world it is captivated in a way that is dark and incoherent. In fact, in All That Fall, Beckett depicts a social setting which makes it stand apart from his other works. It is in fact autobiographical as the place he describes is much like Foxrock, where Beckett grew up in. This makes it arguably the most naturalistic of Beckett’s plays, albeit strongly influenced by his preference for putting his characters in absurd and extreme situations.
Rehearsals

Actioning and Analysis

In the intense period of rehearsals prior to this production of *All That Fall*, the main focus went into actioning the script. Actioning is a key aspect of Max Stafford-Clark’s method. Now, let’s not beat around the bush, actioning is hard work. It requires an enormous amount of focus and determination.

However, when used correctly, actioning is an efficient and effective tool for both actors and directors. Its purpose is to create a common language between them which respects both the job of the actor (creating a character) and the domain of the director (giving the piece shape). So we encourage you to persevere, even when it gets tough. Take a break, regroup and go back in.

Here is a video of the man himself, talking about his process. Max has also spoken about his process in his books *Taking Stock* and *Letters to George*. Additionally, our friends at Nick Hern Books have produced this clever video that also illustrates the use of actions.

Here is how to do it

An action is a transitive verb. In simple terms, “I something you”. Every word you ever say to anyone (even to yourself) has a purpose- it seeks to achieve something.

For instance, you are having a conversation with your friend at school. It goes something like this:

A- Hey, how’s it going?

B- Fine; and you?

A- Great. See you at break?

B- Sure.

You could have this same conversation, word for word, the next three days and for it to mean very different things. For example:

-it’s the morning before a big exam neither of you have prepared for:

A- (tests) Hey, how’s it going?

B- (convinces) Fine; and you?

A- (tests) Great. See you at break?
B- (reassures) Sure.

- maybe you had a fight the previous day:

A- (probes) Hey, how’s it going?

B- (chills) Fine; and you?

A- (fishes) Great. See you at break?

B- (evades) Sure.

-or you are both going to a concert you are very excited about that day

A- (warms) Hey, how’s it going?

B- (welcomes) Fine; and you?

A- (enthuses) Great. See you at break?

B- (charms) Sure.

So when you think about it, its not just what the words say but what you do with them that really brings a text to life. Naming this intention in an action not only gives your performance detail and variation, but also forces you to commit to the action being played.

Ciaran McIntyre, Frank Laverty and Bríd Brennan. Photograph by Robert Workman
Here is an extract from All That Fall to illustrate the work we did during the rehearsal period:

**MRS. ROONEY:** (tests) Is that you, Christy?
**CHRISTY:** (reassures) It is, Ma’am.
**MRS. ROONEY:** (befriends) I thought the hinny was familiar. (tends) How is your poor wife?
**CHRISTY:** (sobers) No better, Ma’am.
**MRS. ROONEY:** (draws out) Your daughter then?
**CHRISTY:** (reassures) No worse, Ma’am.

Silence

**MRS. ROONEY:** (probes) Why do you halt? (Pause) (engages audience) But why do I halt?

Silence

**CHRISTY:** (befriends) Nice day for the races, Ma’am.

**MRS. ROONEY:** (humours) No doubt it is. (Pause) (sours) But will it hold up? (Pause. With emotion) Will it hold up?

Silence

**CHRISTY:** (focuses) I suppose you wouldn’t—

**MRS. ROONEY:** (squashes) Hist! (Pauses) (alarms) Surely to goodness that cannot be the up mail I hear already.

Silence. The hinny neighs. Silence.

**CHRISTY:** (placates) Damn the mail.

**MRS. ROONEY:** (cheers) Oh thank God for that! (worries) I could have sworn I heard it, thundering up the track in the far distance. (Pause) (engages) So hinnies whinny. Well, it is not surprising.

**CHRISTY:** (focuses) I suppose you wouldn’t be in need of a small load of dung?

**MRS. ROONEY:** (tests) Dung? What class of dung?

Do you agree with the actions we chose? Would you change any? Why?

Try out the next section yourself:

**CHRISTY:** Stydung.

**MRS. ROONEY:** Stydung... I like your frankness, Christy. (Pause) I’ll ask the master. (Pause) Christy.

**CHRISTY:** Yes, Ma’am.

**MRS. ROONEY:** Do you find anything... bizarre about my way of speaking? (Pause) I do not mean the voice. (Pause) No, I mean the words. (Pause. More to herself) I use none but the simplest words, I hope, and yet I sometimes find my way of speaking very... bizarre. (Pause. Sound of hinny defecating) Mercy! What was that?

**CHRISTY:** Never mind her, Ma’am, she’s very fresh in herself today.

Silence

**MRS. ROONEY:** Dung? What would we want with dung, at our time of life (Pause) Why are you on your feet down on the road? Why do you not climb up on the crest of your manure and let yourself be carried along? Is it that you have no head for heights?
CHRISTY: (To the hinny) Yep! (Pause. Louder) Yep wiyya to hell owwa that!

MRS. ROONEY: She does not move a muscle. (Pause) I too should be getting along, if I do not wish to arrive late at the station. (Pause) But a moment ago she neighed and pawed the ground. And now she refuses to advance. Give her a good welt on the rump. (Sound of welt. Pause) Harder! (Sound of welt. Pause) Well! If someone were to do that for me I should not dally.

NO VISION - Interview with Max Stafford-Clark

The Beckett Estate fiercely guards the rights to his plays to those that will respect Samuel Beckett’s wishes. You can read an article on this very matter here. In the case of All That Fall, a radio play, Beckett was very clear that he was not interested in it being staged or even turned into a film. He wanted the voices to come as if from the void. Therefore our production needed to respect that wish. And then came the idea to blindfold the audience.

Jon Bradfield discusses All That Fall, Beckett and trains with director Max Stafford-Clark.

JB: When did you first encounter All That Fall?
MSC: I read it I suppose about 25 years ago. I think I find myself out of sympathy with the nihilistic, non-specific worlds of Beckett’s better known stage plays, such as...
Waiting for Godot, so I was intrigued to find that Michael Billington had chosen not one of the better known plays but All That Fall for his book The 101 Greatest Plays.

What’s interesting is it contains the tropes of Beckett, the decay and death and that view of the world he had after the war when his belief in Christianity, or socialism, seemed to have been eradicated...

But it’s softened in All That Fall?
It’s contextualised more, and therefore it’s more comprehensible. I find his a gloomy philosophy of life but it’s one he held, and when you read his life you begin to understand his certain cynicism. He was a medical orderly and a nurse in a bombed-out French village after the war. And indeed his experiences in occupied France - the local priest in the place he was hiding was involved in giving information to the Gestapo.

I think the fact that All That Fall is socially specific, that it evokes a particular suburban world of Anglo-Irish Protestantism drew me to the play.

It’s a very simple story – Mrs Rooney’s journey to the station to pick up her blind husband on a Saturday lunchtime. It would have been quite normal to for people in office jobs to work on a Saturday morning. But to that simple structure he adds a specificity to the class of people she meets.

It’s certainly more naturalistic than Godot or Endgame or Happy Days. Is the Irishness part of the draw too? Like Beckett you were at Trinity College, your wife [playwright Stella Feehily] is Irish, you’ve worked regularly with Sebastian Barry, you’ve twice directed Tom Kilroy’s Irish version of The Seagull...
Well I’m a Hibernophile from way back. And Beckett was drawing on real life. Connolly’s van passes Mrs Rooney on her outward journey in the play, and there was a grocers called Connolly’s in Foxrock... When I was in Dublin in the early sixties it was still a collision of country and town. Donkeys were used as working animals in rural towns around Dublin.

So Foxrock would have been semi rural?
It would have been completely rural and is now suburban. The station has gone.

The play is slightly unresolved. We’re left not knowing if Mr Rooney had anything to do with a child falling from the train, or what the strange object is that he has dropped. Do you and the cast need to know these answers in rehearsal to make the play work?
I left it open as late as possible last year but by the middle of the run the actor playing Mr Rooney became convinced he was involved in the death of the child in some way. When Beckett himself was asked he said “if I knew I’d tell you” so he was deliberately out to create an unresolved mystery.

And do you like that, or do you find it frustrating?
Initially frustrating, but eventually I found it very satisfying that we don’t know.
It’s a way of suggesting a distance between them as a couple.
The thing about them as a couple is that in the first half when Mrs Rooney’s going to the station by herself she’s entirely dominant. She’s a rather acerbic and fractious neighbour to the people she meets. Yet when she meets her husband she’s totally dominated by him. It rings true of a number of literary relationships and probably rings true of a number of relationships Beckett had.

You like your trains. Was that part of the appeal?
It was part of the appeal of the sound effects, yes! There’s scope for a couple of trains to pass and I have a very clear picture in my mind of what kind of locomotives would have been involved.

Someone recently suggested to me that steam trains are magical to us because they’re the closest we’ve come to creating life.
I’ll have to digest that but they’re very exciting creatures.

They sort of breathe.
Yeah that’s right. I think my first memory was driving down to Devon with my parents for a holiday. There was a huge traffic jam outside Honiton and we stopped and walked across a field, my father and I, and sat on a fence above a railway cutting and saw these extraordinarily beautiful and noisy steam engines going by. And as you know I have an extensive model railway that I return to every night.

You play with it every day?
Operate it. Not play! It’s a complete world, it’s Vermont in 1956, about the same time as All That Fall in fact, so I’m fifteen when I go in there, and Stella doesn’t exist.

Did you know Beckett?
No. I met him a few times. He’d talk about the impossibility of controlling his work. So when we sought permission from the Beckett estate to stage All That Fall and they asked me what was my vision for the play I knew the correct answer was that there was no vision at all. Beckett’s instruction was that the voices come “as from the void”.
Our Production

As you may have deduced from either attending the show or from reading this work pack, our production of *All That Fall* is not to be watched, it is to be experienced.

In order to stage it, we created a circuit with chairs all around it- a large outer circle with seats facing in, a smaller inner circle with seats facing out. At one end of the space there is a stage that serves as a train platform with a set of steps to one side. There is a series of speakers dotted along the course that help create “surround sound” for the recorded sound effects, although quite a few of the sounds are done live (the bike bell, the hinny’s bridle, the dragging of feet, etc).

Our very fantastic sound designer, Dyfan Jones, created a very rich soundscape and a series of sophisticated cues that help create the setting of the play. His work respects the precise instructions that Beckett stipulates in the text, not adding any additional scoring. This is to respect the meticulous

Tara Flynn, Ciaran McIntyre, Gary Lilburn, Brid Brennan, Frank Laverty and Killian Burke. Photograph by Robert Workman.
Production Credits

Company

MRS ROONEY (Maddy) Brid Brennan
CHRISTIE Frank Laverty
MR. TYLER Gary Lilburn
MR SLOCUMB Ciaran McIntyre
TOMMY Killian Burke
MR BARRELL Frank Laverty
MISS FITT Tara Flynn
MR ROONEY (Dan) Gary Lilburn

Director Max Stafford-Clark
Writer Samuel Beckett
Sound Designer Dyfan Jones
Production Manager Andy Reader
Stage Manager Sally McKenna
Production Sound Sam Finn
Assistant Director Isabel Quinzaños

Production Photos Robert Workman

THANK YOU

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