# *Visualising the unseen: stage and screen adaptations of Samuel Beckett's radio play 'All That Fall'*

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# Visualising the unseen: Stage and screen adaptations of Samuel Beckett's radio play *All That Fall*

## Abstract

Samuel Beckett's radio play *All That Fall* (1957) has been adapted for different media. In order to understand the challenges it poses for any form of visual representation, this article will first show how the radio play exploits the acousmatic nature of the medium and its so-called 'blindness'. In a next step, it will discuss how the various stage performances of *All That Fall* have dealt with these difficulties, in light of the author's reservations about the matter and the restrictions imposed by his estate. However, Beckett did allow French film and television versions to be made during his lifetime – respectively by Alain Resnais and Michel Mitrani, the latter for RTF (Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française). This not only raises questions about how authors and cultural contexts impact the adaptation process, but also about the aesthetic differences and historical relations between theatre and technological media, which the article will additionally probe.

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The radio medium has a long history of adapting all kinds of literary works, even nonfiction. Less frequently, radio programmes also find their way to the theatre, cinema or television, in particular the latter, given the shared history of broadcast media. This article looks at various off-radio adaptations of Samuel Beckett's first radio play, *All That Fall* (1957; 2006), which together with Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* (1954) – also adapted for the stage and the screen – made the reputation of the BBC Third Programme. While Thomas encouraged such creative reworkings and often actively participated in them, Beckett was more reticent. In what follows, I will first show how *All That Fall* exploits the 'acousmatic' nature of the radio medium and its so-called 'blindness', which will allow us to better understand the challenges it poses for any form of visual adaptation. In a next step, I will discuss how the various stage performances of the radio play have dealt with this, in light of the author's reservations about the matter and the restrictions imposed by his estate. However, Beckett did allow French film and television versions to be made in his lifetime – respectively by Alain Resnais and Michel Mitrani, the latter for RTF (Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française, 1963). This raises questions about how authors and cultural contexts impact the adaptation process, but also about the perceived aesthetic differences and historical relations between theatre and technological media, which the article will additionally probe.

**Acousmatic radio, sound and the body**

Popularized by Pierre Schaeffer (1966) in the context of *musique concrète*, for sounds heard through loudspeakers while the source remains hidden, the term 'acousmatic' was later also applied to film by Michel Chion (1985) for sounds generated off-screen. Radio, by contrast, is an entirely acousmatic medium. Due to its lack of a visual dimension, it has typically been regarded as 'blind', although this claim has been contested by various critics (Cazeaux 2005; Crook 1999; Hand and Traynor 2011). Beckett's radio plays, and *All That Fall* in particular,

exploit this sense of deprivation as opportunity for radiophonic experimentation (see Morin 2014). Every sound we hear is filtered through protagonist Maddy Rooney's consciousness. She is therefore what in classical narratology is referred to as a focalizer. Owing to the visual connotations of this term, some film as well as audionarratologists have proposed the variant term 'auricularizer' (Lutostański 2016: 120). However, as Jarmila Mildorf contends, despite it being an acoustic art form, 'the senses are often interfused' in radio drama (2021: 86). As such, both terms apply, be it with an emphasis on hearing. This is illustrated by *All That Fall*, where the protagonist is the source of both the listeners' visual and auditory information.

When Maddy reaches the train station to escort her blind husband, Dan, she is offered a panoramic view of her surroundings, describing what she sees to us, who are sightless as her husband in the medium of radio: 'The entire scene, the hills, the plain, the racecourse with its miles and miles of white rails and three red stands, the pretty little wayside station [...], and over all the clouding blue, I see it all, I stand here and see it all with eyes' (Beckett 2009: 17). This same connection between Maddy and eyesight is made less explicitly, rather metaphorically, at other moments in the radio play. Just after she describes herself as a 'big fat jelly out of a bowl' or a 'great big slop', a van speeds by covering her 'thick with grit and dust' (Beckett 2009: 5), which she emphatically refers to twice as 'vile' (Beckett 2009: 7). This juxtaposition of the words 'vile' and 'jelly' has been related (see Van Hulle 2010) to the scene in Shakespeare's *King Lear* where Cornwall '*plucks out Gloucester's other eye*' and triumphantly exclaims: 'Out, vile jelly!' (2008: 2433). Finally, when Maddy is shaking from sheer exhaustion, Dan says to her: 'You are quivering like a blancmange. [*Pause*.] Are you in a condition to lead me? [*Pause*.] We shall fall into the ditch' (Beckett 2009: 21). Not only is he likening her to a gelatinous dessert that has the shape and viscosity of an eyeball, Dan also invokes the Biblical parable of the blind leading the blind from Matthew (15:14).

We have no way of verifying what Maddy sees, yet what she hears we can too, if only indirectly. However, the text of the radio play ambiguates the nature of these sounds, further augmented through the actual recording of *All That Fall*. Early on in the radio play, Maddy thinks the train is 'thundering up the track in the far distance' (Beckett 2009: 4), as she urges Christy, a carter, to be silent: 'Hist! [*Pause*.] Surely to goodness that cannot be the up mail I hear already' (Beckett 2009: 3). As the stage directions indicate – [*Silence*. *The hinny neighs*. *Silence*.] – there is no train to be heard in this scene (02:30–02:37), which casts doubt on Maddy's reliability and distinguishes actual sounds from imaginary ones. The same scene occurs one more time (06:15–06-20), as a reminder for listeners, unable to peel their eyes, to keep their ears pricked – 'Heavens, there is that up mail again' (Beckett 2009: 5) – but now Maddy acknowledges there is no train and shrugs it off as merely the fancy of 'a hysterical old hag' (Beckett 2009: 5). It thus conveys her deep-seated fear of missing the train's arrival at the station, possibly because her tyrannical husband would not just be helpless but furious with her, as we find out later in the radio play.

Even the noises that are 'real', as in not conjured up by Maddy in her mind, sound out of the ordinary. This is not clear from the text of *All That Fall*, but Beckett discussed it with BBC producer Donald McWhinnie by letter. For example, about the '*Rural sounds. Sheep, bird, cow, cock, severally, then together*' (Beckett 2009: 3) at the beginning of the radio play (00:00–00:35), Beckett remarked that 'the absurd apropos with which they occur, and their briefness, are enough to denaturalize them' (2014: 687). Questioning McWhinnie's decision to have an actor mimic these animal noises, which made them easier to manipulate, Beckett proposed that they be 'distorted by some technical means' (2014: 687). His suggestion was ignored in this specific case, but it became the technique that McWhinnie would use for the other sounds in *All That Fall*. As he details in his influential book *The Art of Radio*:

> The highly individual blend of realism and poetic vision in the text necessitated a corresponding feeling in the treatment of the actual sounds. Strict realism would have been crude, complete stylization pretentious. It soon became clear that a double technique was the probable solution. The sounds which gradually impinged on the consciousness of the presumably alcoholic heroine must begin as fantasy and resolve into some form of perceptible reality; thus the donkey-and-cart, the bicycle, the car, which approach her on the road, were initially distorted and only gradually emerged into a recognizable sound. (1959: 58)

Sound engineer Desmond Briscoe explains that this 'fantasy feeling of things happening in a larger-than-life way' or 'flutter-echo' was arrived at when they 'faded up the replay knob of the recording machine while it was still recording', which resulted in 'tape feed-back' (1983: 18). As such, listeners have to decode the electronically manipulated noises at the same time as Maddy, from her skewed 'point of audition'.

These different functions that Maddy fulfils in *All That Fall*, as both a focalizer and an auricularizer, give her a highly volatile physical presence, one that is often regarded as 'disembodied' in the context of radio (see Soltani 2020), but which Anna McMullan has more fittingly described as 're-embodied' (2010: 4). Indeed, Maddy functions as a shape-shifter of sorts, constantly assuming different forms whenever she speaks. It is here that the French text of the radio play (*Tous ceux qui tombent*), which Beckett translated with Robert Pinget, is of special interest. When Dan rebukes Maddy for not listening to him on the way home, and she assures him 'No, no, I am agog' (Beckett 2009: 26), this phrase is rendered as 'Non, non, je suis tout ouië' (Beckett 2013: 64), literally meaning 'I am all ears'. Or when Mr Slocum, who gives her a ride to the station, asks how she wants to be hoisted into his car and Maddy responds 'as if I were a bale' (Beckett 2009: 9), this bundle of grain is idiomatically

translated and specified as ‘bran’ – ‘Comme si j’étais une balle de son’ (Beckett 2013: 23) – which sounds exactly the same in French as ‘a (little) ball of sound’. Yet even when Maddy makes no sound, either through talking or moving, she is still there, as becomes clear when she states sarcastically: ‘Do not imagine, because I am silent, that I am not present, and alive, to all that is going on’ (Beckett 2009: 17). Comments like these root her body in a theatrical tradition and should, in theory, facilitate the radio play’s adaptation for stage or screen.

A more difficult character to transpose is Miss Fitt, who functions as a foil to Maddy. Whereas Mrs Rooney is repeatedly characterized as being corpulent – ‘Two hundred pounds of unhealthy fat!’ (Beckett 2009: 23) – and laboriously makes her way along the long country road, Miss Fitt never makes a sound except when she speaks in her shrill, high-pitched voice (26:42–36:46). ‘Heavens, child, you’re just a bag of bones, you need building up’ (Beckett 2009: 15), Maddy remarks when she holds her arm to mount the station steps, which prompts Miss Fitt to retort:

> I suppose the truth is I am not there, Mrs Rooney, just not really there at all. I see, hear, smell, and so on, I go through the usual motions, but my heart is not in it, Mrs Rooney, my heart is in none of it. Left to myself, with no one to check me, I would soon be flown. . . home. (Beckett 2009: 14)

This is indeed what happens to her in the radio play. Seemingly appearing out of nowhere, and no longer spoken to by anyone after a while, she simply dissolves into thin air without making an audible exit. She is known as ‘the dark Miss Fitt’ (Beckett 2009: 14, 16) by all the people in town, an epithet that shrouds her in darkness and makes her the perfect embodiment of a radiophonic character, contrary to what her name suggests. Upon seeing her, Mr Barrell, the station master, even remarks ‘Where is her face?’ (Beckett 2009: 16), as if to stress her

ephemerality. Maddy, on the other hand, is trapped inside a body yearning to be pure voice: 'Would I were still in bed, Mr Barrell', she tells him, 'wasting slowly, painlessly away [...], till in the end you wouldn't see me under the blankets any more than a board' (Beckett 2009: 12). She desires 'to be in atoms, in atoms! [*Frenziedly*.] ATOMS!' (Beckett 2009: 8), a body broken down into particles and scattered across the airwaves, but her fate is to constantly rematerialize in the imagination of the listener.

**'Straight readings' and stage performances of *All That Fall***

Unlike Beckett's other radio plays, *All That Fall* has often been the subject of transposition. One of the earliest productions was a performance at the Poetry Center in New York on 22 December 1957. When Barney Rosset, Beckett's American publisher at Grove Press, asked him for permission, the author would only approve it under strict conditions, as appears from his reply of 23 August:

> *All That Fall* is specifically a radio play, or rather radio text, for voices, not bodies. I have already refused to have it 'staged' and I cannot think of it in such terms. A perfectly straight reading before an audience seems to me just barely legitimate, though even on this score I have my doubts. But I am absolutely opposed to any form of adaptation with a view to its conversion into 'theatre' [...] and to 'act' it is to kill it. Even the reduced visual dimension it will receive from the simplest and most static of readings [...] will be destructive of whatever quality it may have and which depends on the whole thing's *coming out of the dark*. (2014: 63, original emphasis)

Over the next couple of months, more requests poured in, from all over the world. This gave Beckett a chance to consider the matter carefully, causing him to mitigate his stance on some

of the stipulations. On 28 January 1958, he wrote to Alan Simpson of the Pike Theatre, who hoped to mount a similar production in Dublin:

> I mean no props or make up or action of any kind, simply the players standing reading the text. The ideal for me would be a stage in darkness with a spot picking out the faces as required. It is a text written to come out of the dark and I suppose that is the nearest one could get to that with a stage reading. There could be a preliminary presentation of the characters, with lights on, by a speaker, who should also read the indications given in the text with regard to sounds, movements, etc., many of which I think could be omitted. No sound effects. In New York I am told they used a lectern from which the actors read as their turns came. I don't think this is a good idea. Don't think I'm imposing this form of presentation. Do it your own way. All I want you to observe is the strict limits of a reading. (2014: 102)

Simpson proposed to let Maddy walk around in circles, combining props with mime for the vehicles she encounters as well as steps for the station platform, but this was not acceptable to Beckett and the production eventually stalled for other reasons. As these examples show, not only was the author constantly negotiating 'the strict limits of a reading', they were also slightly ludicrous with respect to the artistic freedom needed for adaptation, or for Simpson to do the radio play 'his way'.

Posthumous stage versions of *All That Fall* have picked up on this, either playfully interpreting or parodying Beckett's authorial directives, still upheld by his estate, as part of the performance. In the 2012 Jermyn Street Theatre production, directed by Trevor Nunn – who, twenty years earlier, had been refused permission to stage the play – Eileen Atkins and Michael Gambon starred as both themselves and the Rooneys, performing the parts of Dan

and Maddy in what appears to be a radio recording studio. As such, the audience was actually sitting in on a live broadcast of *All That Fall*. Microphones were suspended from the ceiling, a red 'on air' light shone at the back of the stage, and the actors, fully dressed for their parts (rare in the case of radio), were holding the playscripts from which they read out their lines (standard practice). They interacted with each other as well as with props, e.g. the body of a car, in addition to miming some of the scenes. Most sound effects were not produced on stage but emanated from loudspeakers. This, in most cases, hid their source, as a broadcast would have. This setup was much more lenient than anything Beckett had ever allowed for theatrical adaptations during his lifetime. As Everett Frost is right to point out, 'a stage production must necessarily find ways to cope with avoiding the reductive literalism risked when embodying the invisible' (2013: 248), but here it is used to great comic effect.

Another, more serious-minded example is Pan Pan Theatre's 2011 production of *All That Fall*. Rather than opting for a conventional stage, it positioned the spectator-listener in a 'specially developed "listening chamber" or installation space in which their senses of sight, sound, and even smell are manipulated' (Johnson and Heron 2020: 40; see also Duane 2023). Seated in rocking chairs, audience members were engulfed by a wall of lights hanging from the ceiling that responded to the prerecorded voices as well as sound effects of the radio play, resulting in a spectacle of visualized acoustic waves with varying intensities. Instead of a directly realistic or figural correspondence, these luminous pulsations represented Maddy's emotional and psychological state, shared by those present in an interactive way, not just as passive witnesses, again preserving some of radio's suggestive reliance on the imagination. The same holds true for Out of Joint's 2015 production, which considered performing *All That Fall* in the dark but eventually settled for masks, so performers would not be deprived of their ability to see. Building on Pan Pan's production, chairs were lined up in facing rows on the auditorium's floor, allowing actors to walk around. Sometimes they sat next to audience

members, creating an immersive effect, as if one were listening to headphones with surround sound, enhanced by the nonrealistic sound design of Dyfan Jones.

The subjectivity of this experience is lost in Mouth on Fire's two on-site productions from 2019. The first one took place at Tullow Church, where Beckett attended services close to his childhood home in Foxrock; the second at the official residence of Irish Prime Minister Michael D. Higgins. Feargal Whelan (2023) has noted that re-situating these two productions of *All That Fall* so explicitly in a national(istic) context invited veneration, commemoration and biographical interpretation, which was reflected in the naturalistic treatment of the sound effects as well as the faithful rendition of local accents. As in the production by Out of Joint, all attendees were blindfolded, but actors, who read their parts from lecterns, did not engage with one another or the audience. A spotlit radio was planted centre-stage in front of the altar, tuned up at the start as a cue for all masks to be put on, before giving way to an announcer's voice. Such an allusion to the domestic receiving end of radio broadcasting reflected Jermyn Street's replicated studio production environment, the two adaptations mirroring each other.

What all of these creative reworkings, though variously situated on the audiovisual spectrum, share is their drawing attention to something lacking – that is, (an aspect of) the visual dimension – while foregrounding sound. This was due to restrictions imposed by the Beckett Estate, which struggled to unify the author's evolving and contradictory directives about non-radio performances of *All That Fall*. It is clear that Pan Pan, Jermyn Street, Out of Joint and Mouth on Fire had looked towards each other for inspiration, as is usually the case with subsequent reworkings, but none of them drew on a screen adaptation that Beckett had approved some fifty years earlier.

**Alain Resnais's docufilms and *All That Fall* on the big screen**

How do we square the author's repeated refusals, and the current restrictions imposed by his estate, with Beckett's approval of an adaptation for French television? The idea dates back to 27 April 1958, when he told Mary Hutchinson that French director Alain Resnais expressed an interest in making a film of the radio play. In that same letter, Beckett mentioned that he so admired Resnais's documentary film *Nuit et Brouillard* (*Night and Fog*, 1956), about the Nazi concentration camps, as well as some of his shorts, e.g. *Toute la mémoire du monde* (*All the World's Memory*, 1957) on the national library in Paris (see Beloborodova and Verhulst 2019), that he felt inclined to give him permission. This prompts the question what attracted Beckett to the young up-and-coming director's work. A decisive factor seems to have been that it would not be a case of 'adapting', as Beckett wrote to Donald McWhinnie on 27 April 1958, but presented the 'integral text' (see Verhulst). This comment is very intriguing, since Beckett's decision was solely based on Resnais's docufilms. However, unlike *All That Fall*, these were not driven by plot or character, which also made them different from his first two and most famous feature-length features – i.e. *Hiroshima mon amour* (*Hiroshima, My Love*, 1959) and *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (*Last Year at Marienbad*, 1961). Yet to be made at the time, when Beckett later saw them, he was rather dismissive of both, yet still considering Resnais 'the most gifted of the lot', by which he meant the French 'Nouvelle Vague' or New Wave cineastes (2014: 246).

*Hiroshima* he described as 'not satisfactory', in the same letter to John Manning of 15 October 1959 (246). Based on a script by Marguerite Duras, the film is set in the aftermath of the 1945 atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Shot by two different cinematographers, Sacha Vierny – Resnais's partner on ten films, including *Brouillard* – and Michio Takahashi, it has two deliberately jarring visual styles. The historical-political context is largely sidelined in the poetic love story of a French actress and a Japanese architect, to a highly aestheticized and somewhat effete result. These long scenes are dominated by dialogue and conveyed from

static camera angles, usually in close-up but sometimes with shifting viewpoints, as well as slow tracking shots when the characters move. The opening sequence and later intermezzos, on the other hand, carry the trademark of Resnais's docufilms, where the human presence is indirectly suggested by means of the many destroyed objects, relegated to the far background or decentralized at the margins of the frame. People are often anonymized, through shots of averted faces or backs, and bodies appear fragmented (just legs, no heads) or inhuman, due to severe burns. In *Marienbad* – based on a screenplay by Alain Robbe-Grillet and shot by just Vierny – Resnais was more experimental in his use of the camera and stuck close to the cool observational style that Beckett appreciated in the *nouveau romancier*'s novels (2014: 222), such as *La Jalousie* (*Jealousy*, 1957). It is a poetic meditation on time and memory, in which a man tries to convince a woman that they met the year before. The characters increasingly merge with the abstract shapes of the hedges or the statues surrounding them in the palatial mansion's vast exterior as well as interior spaces, but for Beckett 'the love-story in this film was traditional and banal [...], merely expressed differently' (Knowlson and Knowlson 2006: 135). In both cases, the plot detracted from the films' visual storytelling or cinematography.

*Brouillard* and *Mémoire* are proper docufilms, reporting on factual states of affairs, yet each approaches the genre in slightly different ways. *Brouillard*, like parts of *Hiroshima*, combines archival with original footage in colour, whereas *Mémoire* was shot on location at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, entirely in black and white. Apart from this distinction, their techniques are roughly the same: brief shots of spaces and artefacts alternate with slow zooms or pans, complemented with a voice-over narration that provides explanatory as well as contrastive comments on the images. Another trait they have in common is their treatment of human bodies. *Mémoire* concentrates on items from the library's vast collections, showing them from unusual camera angles, often making it difficult to recognize what we see at first sight. This visual alienation extends to the library itself, as we explore its nooks and crannies

through a series of maze-like stairs, hallways, corridors, vaults and reading rooms that dwarf the staff who work in them or merely show them in reflections on the glass cases. The same attention to objects and structures marks *Brouillard*, whose uneasy atmosphere resides in the heaps of discarded items (shoes, spectacles, combs, brushes, cups and hair), juxtaposed with dilapidated buildings and demolished barracks, to emphasize the Holocaust's dehumanising effect. The victims in the archival footage are either objectified as piles of dead bodies, like the heaps of discarded items, or reshaped as emaciated ghosts (nearly) rid of all flesh. Quite literally, the film relates how corpses were processed into soap – a claim now contested.

This radical highlighting of disembodiment, along with the appearance of train tracks in *Brouillard*, as symbols of mass deportation, and the use of a on-screen microphone for the voice-over in *Mémoire*, offer some insight into what may have attracted Beckett to Resnais's early work, making him an eligible director for a film version of *All That Fall*. It also seemed to resonate with Beckett's distinction between theatre, which 'requires that this last extremity of human meat – or bones – be there, thinking and stumbling and sweating, under our noses' (2014: 63), and the screen, in which case such direct contact is lost and the body takes on a sculptural or spectral quality, in any case a more elusive one, especially in black and white. As he told John Manning in his letter of 15 October 1959 (2014: 246), Beckett discussed the production with Resnais, who had even scouted a suitable location (Perrin 1964: 44). It is not clear why their plans fell through, but perhaps the radio play relied too heavily on narrative, dialogue and character development to be aligned with the documentary aesthetic Beckett so preferred. Or maybe Resnais's schedule had gotten too busy, with him being on the verge of two major breakthroughs in his career. Whatever the case, when French-Bulgarian director, Michel Mitrani, took charge of the project in the early 1960s, the medium was changed from cinema to television. And when, after its broadcast premiere, Mitrani proposed the *téléfilm* be shown in a select number of Paris theatres, Beckett objected it would be too 'gruesome on the

big screen' (see Verhulst). This implies that Mitrani's style so fundamentally deviated from Resnais's that, in the author's own view, his radio play was no longer compatible with film, despite it being the initial target medium of the adaptation.

**Michel Mitrani and the French television adaptation of *All That Fall***

Donald McWhinnie, who produced *All That Fall* play for the BBC Third Programme, had already offered a few thoughts on how the play might be realized for television:

> How would a visual medium interpret the moment in *All That Fall* when Mrs. Rooney pauses as she catches sight of the laburnum? Not by a loving close-shot of the laburnum. The only possible way of achieving the emotive effect is by *not* depicting the main agent in this scene – that is to say by leaving the laburnum to the imagination and relying on the words and the actress to create it in the mind of the audience. (1959: 27–28)

This approach does not expose what is suggested in sound but leaves intact some of radio's imaginative power by focusing on Maddy's facial expressions in reaction to the object she perceives off-camera. At the same time, McWhinnie does not comment on how he would convey the sound effects, thus considering television primarily as a medium of images rather than an audiovisual one. This shows some parallels with the way Mitrani eventually filmed *All That Fall*, Beckett 'essentially leaving the director's hands free', even though he did meet with him and Alice Sapritch – the actress playing Maddy – before the production (Kiryushina 2023: 126).

One of the most outstanding features in this television adaptation is that it shifts the focus from hearing to seeing. This is perhaps best illustrated by the extreme close-up shots of

animal eyes – a chicken, a rabbit, a cat – that replace the artificial farmyard noises with which the radio play opens. Mitrani seizes on this scene to highlight Maddy's 'agony of perception' (2009, 99), a theme Beckett would soon explore in his own *Film* (1965), realized shortly after *Tous ceux qui tombent* and possibly inspired by it (see Kiryushina 2021). When the camera zooms in on the eye of Christy's hinny, Maddy says: 'How she gazes at me to be sure, with her great moist cleg-tormented eyes. Perhaps if I were to move on, down the road, out of her field of vision' (Beckett 2009: 5). And when the carter gives the animal a welt, Mrs Rooney implores him: 'No, no, enough! Take her by the snaffle and pull her eyes away from me. Oh this is awful!' (Beckett 2009: 5). The scene, somewhat out of place in the acoustic medium of radio, is used to much greater effect on screen. Although Mitrani was not allowed to add lines and amplify the theme, he managed to establish it as a motif in his visual re-interpretation of *All That Fall*. The camera often accentuates round, eye-shaped objects (pans, wheels, lights, bells, chainrings, tires, watches, clock faces, buttons, etc.), in some cases menacingly close to Maddy's face, like the hood ornament on Mr Slocum's car. Scenes are rarely presented from her subjective point of view, as in the radio play, but rather from an external or non-diegetic perspective. When two characters engage in a conversation, they usually do not make eye-contact, and their faces often appear at perpendicular angles, as if talking at cross purposes. Intensely claustrophobic shots isolate them from their surrounding and confine them to their own little world boxed in by the picture frame. The atmosphere is one of uncomfortable and voyeuristic intimacy, the camera intruding on private scenes indiscreetly observed through a keyhole – a trademark Mitrani himself described, in the magazine *Cahiers du cinema*, as 'une télévision du trouble' (1968: 4), which means both troubled and out of focus.

The latter gestures towards the radiophonic origins of *All That Fall*, but more subtly than the stage renditions discussed before. For example, the fog of the damp countryside and the steam of the train engine occasionally obscure characters, making them partially invisible.

Also, the extreme close-ups sever body parts (noses, mouths, teeth, eyes, hair, heads, torsos, backs, hands, legs, feet, etc.), resulting in a visual dismemberment or fragmentation. Several of the shots are filmed from a bottom-up perspective, which makes the characters and their environment seem 'larger-than-life', like in McWhinnie and Briscoe's sound design for the radio play, giving the storyworld an unreal or fantasy – not to say dreamlike or nightmarish – quality. While the visuals have become denaturalized and distorted, sounds are realistic and their source is always revealed. Some of the lines that signal the acous(ma)tic nature of radio have been cut as well, for example when Maddy recognizes Christy's pack animal by hearing it bray: 'I thought the hinny was familiar' (Beckett 2009: 3). And the allusions to her as the main focalizer-auricularizer, or that she still exists when keeping silent – some of which are retained – do not have quite the same impact on screen as in sound, where Maddy is visible. Small textual alterations also occur, such as 'the dark Miss Fitt', who is now referred to as 'blonde', in accordance with the hair colour of the actress who portrays her (i.e. Pascale de Boysson). Beckett translated the name as 'la brune demoiselle Fitt' (2013: 30), synonymous with 'dusk' or 'nightfall' in addition to 'brunette', but his association of radio with darkness becomes less explicit as a result, which again foregrounds the visual.

The only time the television adaptation uses sound ingeniously is during the opening credits, where we get a top-down view of the area that shows Maddy's road to the station and back, accompanied by a voice-over summary of the story. Although it gives away much of the plot, considerably divesting *All That Fall* of narrative interest, the godlike perspective, together with ethereal electronic music produced by a theremin, resonates with the biblical allusion in the radio play's title, taken from Psalm 145:14 – 'the Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down'. Yet, the fact that a helicopter was used for this preamble, shot in one long unbroken take, again illustrates that the emphasis here is on what is seen, not on what is heard. The French broadcast of *All That Fall* was even accompanied

by a thirty-minute 'making of' featurette that explained in great detail how this scene – as well as a few others – were realized, setting great store by the technical complexities of the production. Apart from a rare instance when Mitrani goes into his televisual poetics and talks about the 'gonflement de personnages' ('inflation of characters'), he is usually on the phone shouting directives to cameramen in the field while looking intently at his monitor (Copeau and Blanchard 1963).

As Galina Kiryushina has suggested, the RTF broadcast of *All That Fall* was meant to be a flagship television show that placed the relatively new medium on a par with other more historically and critically established ones: 'If silent (and later also sound) film had to assert its artistic value by distinguishing itself from stage drama, television drama in France spent its first fifteen years in a struggle to distance itself from both theatre and cinema' (2021: 131). Still, unlike its relationship with the theatre, from which it often borrowed plays and recruited writers, television was not so much distancing itself from cinema as it was proving itself as a medium equally capable of producing high art. In France, it had to vie with New Wave films by Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut, Agnès Vadra and – last but not least – Alain Resnais. The goal was to suffuse *téléfilms* with a personal signature similar to that of *auteur* cinema. Indeed, as Jonathan Kalb has observed about some of Mitrani's other works for television, his 'camera is very clever, as if it wants to be something of an artiste' (1989: 113). In this case, however, it rather showcased what the upstart medium was capable of, not always putting its impressive array of artistic choices at the service of Beckett's radio play, but rather showing them off in spite of it.

At the same time, Mitrani's television adaptation of *All That Fall* is part of a wider cultural phenomenon. Theorists and historians of broadcasting have long argued that it was originally a medium led by sound, not image, and that rejecting the former was the 'original

sin' television commited in order to break free from radio. As film historian Rick Altman explains:

> Our daily language makes it quite clear that a television is simply not the same thing as a radio. Yet the apparently innocuous process of naming is actually one of culture's most powerful forms of appropriation. Once named, an object or a technology seems to be *naturally* associated with that name. Not only is it impossible today to confuse television with radio, but we assume that the distinction is based on real differences. In distinguishing between a 'television' and a 'radio', we voluntarily ignore the fact that every television includes a radio. In fact, a television is in one sense just a radio with images. Indeed, the object that we know as 'television' could have been called an 'enhanced radio' or an 'image radio' or a 'screen radio' or even simply a 'radio'. Not only *could* television have been called these things, but it was *in fact* called all of these things during its formative period. However strong our convictions that we know what a television is and what it is not, we must recognize the historical contingency of that apparent 'knowledge'. (2004: 16, original emphasis)

Similarly, by the early 1960s, French television had dissociated itself from radio to such an extent, in spite of their shared pasts, that Mitrani neglected its acoustic potential in his screen adaptation of Beckett's *All That Fall*, focusing almost exclusively on the visual dimension. Also ironic, of course, is that in this case television attempted to achieve its independence by adapting a play originally written for radio, an old medium regarded as passé and lacking the cultural prominence still enjoyed by film, which had long managed to shake the associations with broadcasting it still had in the early decades of the twentieth century (see Arnheim 1932, 1936), before the rise of talkies.

## Conclusion

On 6 February 1963, some two weeks after *All That Fall* premiered on French television (25 January), Beckett complained to the American director Alan Schneider that it had been done '[b]adly, I thought – but well received' (1998: 135). Such discrepancy between intention and reception is emblematic of adaptation. In England, *All That Fall* had made its reputation as a highly innovative radio play, but in France the original broadcast was less well known, so it became more popular as an equally avant-garde television play. This goes to show that any value judgment of an adaptation's artistic merit or success is shaped by the extent to which audiences are conscious of a production as a re-production. Whereas UK and Irish off-radio performances of *All That Fall* tend to present themselves as adaptations, and are considered as such, in France the magazine *Télé 7 Jours* hailed *Tous ceux qui tombent* as an 'original creation' (Perrin 1964: 44), in the sense that it was not merely another television version of a theatre classic but instead a true attempt to engage with the medium, which is now considered an essential trait of adaptations (see Hutcheon 2013). Both are also forms of 'appropriation' (see Sanders 2016), whether it be to emancipate television, to experiment with the boundaries of multimedial performance, to reclaim Beckett for Ireland, or to criticize his overprotective estate. *All That Fall* is thus an insightful case study, not only to understand the aesthetic as well as historical relationships between radio, theatre, film and television, but also how an author's often changing views on adaptation can impact its production as well as reception.

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