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ETHERIZED VICTORIANS: DRAMA, NARRATIVE, AND THE AMERICAN
RADIO PLAY, 1929-1954

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Introduction

In the fall of 1930, thousands of Americans were rallied to determine the outcome of a sensational murder trial presided over by Senator Robert F. Wagner. Broadcast from a New York studio, the *Trial of Vivienne Ware* cast a faceless, fragmented, and remote public as members of a “Radio Jury” whose charge it was to decide by majority vote whether or not a fellow being should be condemned to death. An elaborate tabloid stunt, the interactive serial drama was subsequently published as the “first radio novel.”

A decade later, a group of Pulitzer Prize winners including Maxwell Anderson, Paul Green, Ernest Hemingway, William Saroyan, and Robert E. Sherwood formed the Free Company. Their aim was to write and produce plays that would stimulate the American public to think about democracy, civil rights, and “the whole subject of freedom.” To realize this project, they chose commerce-coopted network radio as their forum. A crowded marketplace, the medium also attracted W. H. Auden, Sherwood Anderson, Louis Bromfield, Pearl S. Buck, Marc Connelly, Howard Fast, Langston Hughes, Fannie Hurst, Samson Raphaelson, Irwin Shaw, and Booth Tarkington.

During the spring of 1950, dramatic digests of Mrs. Dalloway, Prater Violet, Sons and Lovers, and The Wild Palms were presented to literati and illiterates alike as part of NBC’s University of the Air project. Appearing before the microphone to comment on such writings were Elizabeth Bowen, E. M. Forster, James Hilton, Katherine Anne Porter, and Diana Trilling. Some tuning in to the weekly drama-cum-lecture broadcasts felt intrigued enough to enroll in university supervised correspondence courses and were awarded certificates for their ensuing studies.

Removed from our knowledge repositories and the image-empire of Hollywood, these and many other records of a substantial if seemingly incorporeal body of drama, narrative, and poetry have long been kept out of earshot, a soundproofing against aural play that resulted in perceptually imbalanced representations of America’s early to

mid-twentieth-century everyday. To conceive of American life during the Depression, World War II, and the McCarthy era without acknowledging the sway of the airwaves, its stories and tellers, is akin to abstracting the Elizabethans without their public theaters or the Victorians without their Household Words. The fact that only a few faint echoes of radio's vast output of texts are still reverberating in discussions about American literature--whereas motion pictures and periodicals are repeatedly, and quite mistakenly, pronounced the primary mass media prior to the installment of television in the American home--suggests that most of today's readers, spectators, and reviewers have taken leave of at least one of their senses.

"Etherized Victorians: Drama, Narrative, and the American Radio Play, 1929-1954" provides an alternative soundtrack for the poorly voiced over histories of popular culture in the United States. Drawing on a collection of approximately five hundred published scripts and ten thousand transcriptions (that is, recordings), it reintroduces twenty-first century audiences to an eclectic and boundaries-defying hybrid of dramatic, narrative, and lyric plays written or adapted for radio and carried into millions of homes by the major networks (NBC, CBS, MBS, and ABC) or high-wattage independent stations during a quarter of a century nostalgically referred to as radio's golden age. How did aural play develop within--according to or in spite of--the confines of American broadcasting? Why did these soundtexts, wireless acts ranging from short vaudeville routines to decades-spanning serials, from occasional verse to episodic melodrama, cease to be a popular form of dramatic storytelling? And what does their fabulous rise and summary eclipse tell us about American culture, psyche, and society in what Walter J. Ong has termed the self-conscious "age of secondary orality"?

After all, it was not that radio producers and playwrights could rely on--let alone bring about--an uncontested recrudescence of storytelling in the oral tradition. Even well before the popularity of radio plays had reached its peak shortly after World War II, television, long delayed and highly anticipated, was believed by many to be a much-needed

corrective, a medium capable of restoring the balance of sound and vision, of telling and showing. As its title suggests, “Etherized Victorians” contrasts the prevalent Victorianisms of American radio playwriting--its indebtedness to episodic magazine fiction and spectacular stage melodrama--with works reflecting an ambivalence toward such nostalgic intoxications and toward the commodification and codification of popular entertainment in general. Despite the restraint exercised by broadcasters mindful of public tastes and private interests, the airwaves not only carried the echoes of nineteenth-century realism into the American middle-class home--that enclave of statistical averages conceived of and targeted by the sponsors--but resounded with features expressive of a volatile present and alive to the medium’s Romantic affinities, its kinship to closet dramas and gothic romances. Challenging the perceptions of an essentially visual-minded and print-oriented audience by employing choric speech and radiogenic montages, a number of broadcast playwrights set out to vaporize the proscenium arch and to expose stuffy libraries to modernity’s laboratory of sound.

In more than one sense, print and visual media have marginalized aural play. Publications about American broadcasting are no exception. Rather than providing audition-based sociological and psychological analyses of programming content and reception, radio research conducted during the 1930s, ‘40s, and ‘50s was almost exclusively quantitative in nature, surveying audiences of soap and cereal operas, programs to which data miners did not feel obliged to listen. Often commissioned by the industry, such studies contributed in turn to formulaic programming, since broadcasters interpreted the findings to predict listener responses so as to develop sponsorable entertainments. As a critical approach to radio culture, assessment without audition fostered the spreading of academic hearsay about the broadcaster’s message and its supposed workings on the American mind. Primarily auditing nighttime and weekend programs, which reached the largest, most diverse, and thus least predictable segments of the listening public, “Etherized Victorians” forgoes assumptions about target audiences in

favor of script readings and, whenever possible, actual listening experiences. It reaffirms the centrality of the broadcast text without losing sight of broader historical contexts. The study's ample scope, its inclusive, inter-disciplinary approach, and its insistence on the primacy of the texts under discussion are direct responses to the apparent impotence of current media studies to regenerate discourse about American radio culture. Informed by the writings of communications theorists, broadcasting historians, notable American radio playwrights and their contemporary critics, as well as the cataloguing efforts of extra-academic OTR (old-time radio) aficionados, "Etherized Victorians" contrasts the potentialities of the medium--the *Hörspiel* aesthetics explored in works like Arnheim's seminal *Radio* (1935)--with the broadcasters' praxis of negotiating and reconciling the at times conflicting aims of producers, artists, and patrons. It is through and within these networkings that the failure of the American radio play to evolve into an independent art is best understood.

Chapter one ("The 'time between commercials'?: An Intervention") traces the reception of the American radio play from the 1920s to the present. After a short period of excitement about wireless dramatics, mixed with concerns about the future of the performing arts, play broadcasts attracted little attention and less support from the contemporary press. Turning down their receivers, drama critics sneered that if radio entertainment was taking over the role of the "ten-twenty-thirt'" shows and vaudeville houses, it was at least purging the American stage, indirectly improving its repertory and reputation. Not surprisingly, the sweeping dismissal of radio as counterfeit culture is most often argued to be rooted in the arrogation of the airwaves by corporate entities. Histories of American broadcasting too readily rely on the dichotomy of sponsored (that is, commercial) and sustaining (that is, commercial-free) programs, rejecting the former as corrupt and inconsequential, the latter as too infrequent to be truly representative of network offerings. As a result of such facile commerce/art binaries--which fail to acknowledge that many educational programs enjoyed sponsorship, while popular

blood-and-thunder anthologies remained unsponsored--greater attention is now being paid to commercial copy than to the plays thus framed. A patently perfunctory justification of the marginal status of aural art, this preoccupation with commercial spots and soundbytes at the expense of the vast radio culture betrays today's phonophobia, the inability to grapple with the soundscapes that the type and margins of the printed page cannot quite render or contain.

Compositions of speech, music and sound effects performed before live theater audiences and instantaneously heard in private by an unseen yet hardly amaurotic public, ephemeral texts supplemented by published images and subsequently returned to the printed page, radio's scripted auralty bespeaks the age of multimediacy in which broadcasting assumed a central position by the end of the 1920s. Indeed, this sensorial battlefield, the self-consciousness from which it stems and the reflexivity to which it gave rise, are the earmarks of the American radio play. Chapters two and three examine the challenges of "secondary orality" in the uneasy shift of radio from a system of delivery to one of production, or, considering radio's indiscriminate recyclings of drama and literature, re-production. Although the earliest dramatic broadcasts date from 1922, failures in making remotes from the stage intelligible to home audiences prevented plays from becoming a significant component of local and network programming until at least 1929--the year tuning in to the misadventures of *Amos 'n' Andy* became a national pastime and the *Radio Guild* began its eleven-year run with an hour-long adaptation of Romeo and Juliet.

Producers of drama broadcasts soon learned to rely on more than the spoken word, engaging sound effects artists to convey stage business, previously telescoped by microphone interpreters, and musicians to indicate shifts in scenery with so-called musical curtains. Yet despite such elaborate efforts, analogous to the surface realism and star-trap theatricals of the Victorian stage, the absence of visuals continued to be perceived as a fundamental flaw--not an attribute--of the ostensibly blind medium. Chapter two

(“‘Barbarians ready! Flash the orchestra!’: The Soundstage as Popular Playhouse”)

documents how this aesthetic defect became a cornerstone of commercial soundstaging.

In order to stimulate the listener’s desire to have and *behold*, to consume rather than create, networks and advertisers promoted the construct of an ersatz stage whose cheering crowds and cheerful impresarios served to recreate, rather than annihilate, the performance space as a manifest extension of the marketplace.

Half-dramatizing the novel and semi-narrating drama, the radio play was a queer stand-in that never quite allowed readers to position it firmly, to evaluate its soundtexts *qua* literature or drama within the boundaries of traditional storytelling. And whereas radio’s ability to play upon the imagination was widely recognized, its appeal to the intellect was generally doubted. The exactions of mass culture and mass communication corrupted language and made it “perform tasks of ever increasing tawdriness,” George Steiner lamented in Silence and Language. “What save half-truths, gross simplifications, or trivia can, in fact, be communicated to that semi-literate mass audience which popular democracy has summoned into the market place?” Chapter three (“‘Yeah, hit’s jist like a library’: The Broadcast as Virtual Bookshelf”) discusses how tabloids, book publishers and educators took advantage of what Gilbert Seldes termed the “mass-minority medium” by staging dramatic novelcasts designed to cultivate the buying habits of the many and the reading habits of the few.

Persuading the public by means of “half-truths” and “gross simplifications” became an even more significant function of broadcast language during World War II, a period that brought about a shift from adaptation and re-production to the creation of made-for-radio dramas and narratives. The next three chapters examine the works of aspiring and established American writers who were drawn to broadcasting to preserve democracy or were actively recruited to serve the war effort. Chapter four (“‘Rise up and speak, you voices!’: Poetry, Medium, and *Zeitgeist*”) discusses how the dangers of isolationism and the threat of fascism convinced poets like Stephen Vincent Benét,

Archibald MacLeish, and Edna St. Vincent Millay to avail themselves of a medium that all but guaranteed a national audience of millions on any given night. Prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, networks avoided controversial broadcasts that spoke concretely in favor of support for England or war against the Axis; it was an attempt at neutrality that forced outspoken poets to retreat into allegory and resort to various modes of indirection. Conceiving of radio as oracle, these orators by proxy frequently evoked the dead to stir the living out of complacency. Vacillating between appeal and accusation, their performances often betray a lack of trust in or respect for broadcasters and their audiences.

After the US entry into World War II, plays with a purpose became at once less subtle and more prevalent. The poetry of indirection made way for directives in prose, written by noted playwrights and novelists including Maxwell Anderson and Pearl S. Buck, as well as ambitious apprentices like Arthur Laurents and Arthur Miller. Chapter five (“‘It’s going to hurt, but think of this’: Drama, Front Lines, and Effacement”) examines whether the government’s demand for propaganda could be met by an industry unprepared and reluctant to clear the airwaves for non-commercial announcements and thereby relinquish the profits of advertising. Whereas sustaining and government-sponsored play cycles gave their contributors ample opportunities to launch passionate attacks against fascism in seemingly unscripted docudramas or unrestrained choric compositions expressive of the immensity of the global conflict and its repercussions, the producers of commercially sponsored prestige programs frustrated their writers by insisting on patriotic sentiment and peacetime nostalgia. Inexperienced playwrights at the front line of this clash between barkers and bugles found themselves combating their own artistic effacement.

Chapter six (“‘Until I know the thing I want to know’: Eavesdroppers, Spy Stories, and Mouthpieces”) continues the discussion of radio propaganda by auditing thriller anthologies and episodic mysteries that, in accordance with the network allocation

plan of the Office of War Information, were pressed into secret and public service. Notwithstanding the adaptability of melodrama to the purposes of indoctrination, radio-readying the detective story for wartime duty involved more than revising the peacetime catalogues of heroes and villains or transforming armchair logicians into firearmed avengers. Notable authors of crime and detective fiction--John Dickson Carr, Leslie Charteris, and Mignon Eberhart among them--were called upon to accommodate the complex structures of their byzantine guessing games to the delivery of unambiguous directives, a task complicated by the exigencies of a medium whose time-art does not offer the benefit of leisurely deduction. Transformed into adventures of pursuit and revenge, the thriller not only proved an effective wartime messenger, it emerged as the most profitable and fastest growing genre on network radio. Daytime serials aside, it was the only form of non-musical audio play to survive, however briefly, the pop-cultural takeover by television in the mid-1950s.

After V-J Day, networks and sponsors showed little interest in retaining any of the dramatists, poets, and novelists whose continued, non-propagandistic reconnaissance of the airwaves might have attracted academic interest in--or garnered respect for--radio as a viable artistic medium. By the early 1950s, even a poet of MacLeish's stature met with indifference and rejection when he attempted to soundstage a new play in the United States. Growing anti-Communist sentiment and budgetary conservatism also alienated or silenced experienced broadcast writers (under contract or in the open market) whose further adventures in voice and sound might have helped foster a tradition of aural storytelling, thereby preventing its quietus in American culture. Chapters seven to nine trace the promises of such a *Hörspiel* tradition--serial fiction, unit dramas, and documentaries--in the original works of America's most significant and prolific radio playwrights, among them writer-director-producers like Carlton E. Morse, Arch Oboler, and Norman Corwin. It was in their use of sound effects, dramatic monologues, and

choric narratives that the mediation of novelistic and dramaturgic impulses found some of its most radiogenic expressions.

The alignment of aural playwriting with stage dialogue and print narrative resulted in severe limitations of the use of sound, which, for the most part, was reduced to setting scenes, enhancing moods, or underscoring the spoken word. While sound effects were a chief attraction of the form and much energy was expended in noisemaking, the radio play was generally defined by a tendency one *Hörspiel* critic referred to as *Verwortung*--the ascendancy of the strictly oral over the more inclusively aural. Chapter seven--“‘There ain’t no sense to nothing’: Serial Romance and the Gothic of Audition”--examines a sequence of Morse’s *I Love a Mystery*, a serial thriller that casts listeners as audio detectives called upon to locate the source of an apparently incorporeal sonic menace. Like its Romantic precursors, Morse’s chapter play emphasizes suspense rather than solution, protracted Udolphish uncertainties rather than revelation and closure. Like Radcliffe’s “*picturesque* sounds,” mistaken messengers, and torturous silences, the neo-gothic of the airwaves plays fast and loose with the audience’s wavering between blind faith and ocular proof.

“Orality-literacy dynamics,” as Ong argues, “enter integrally into the modern evolution of consciousness toward both greater interiorization and greater openness.” Chapter eight--“‘If I’m alone one more second, I’ll go mad’: Broadcast Realism and the Meeting of Minds”--discusses the gradual preparation of the mental stage for the exploration of mental states, the unspoken and unspeakable. The bias against narration--long considered an expedient reserved for the translation of silent stage business--delayed the development of dramatic monologues and stream-of-consciousness techniques. As a result, the interiority of characters in radio fiction remained largely untapped. Like epistolary novels, radio confessionals generally installed proxy listeners as the addressees of the uttered word. Filter techniques that enabled listeners to distinguish between speakers distant and close--and between outer and inner voices--gave rise to

telephone dialogues exemplified by Lucille Fletcher's "Sorry, Wrong Number."

Sensationalistic playwrights like Oboler attempted to auscultate the secret hearts of their characters by removing the diegetic listener; alternately monologuing and dialoguing the mind, Oboler promised to give voice to the intimate thoughts of outcasts and shut-ins.

While at times little more than radiogenic revisitations of Victorian melodramas like Leopold Lewis's The Bells, these telephonic and schizophonic plays also addressed what Baudrillard calls the lack of "responsibility"--the non-reciprocity--of the broadcast media by dramatizing the position of the solitary listener *qua* frustrated telecommunicator.

Commercial broadcasting further impeded the development of narrative techniques by assigning the privileged voice of intimacy to the product-peddling announcer. Chapter nine--"Whenever you hear my voce sotto': Speaking of Broadcast Language"--discusses Corwin's response to the commercial and artistic uses of radio speech, in particular the mediating role of the announcer-narrator. In a number of reflexive, satiric--and unsponsored--performances, Corwin annihilated the announcer *figure* and diffused broadcast authority by turning the single voice of the spokesman into a latter-day Greek chorus, mocking voices commenting on the commercially-imposed ossification of airwaved culture. Corwin's more ambitious, serious-minded plays struggled to reinsert a representative voice of the "common man" into the artifice of the broadcast exchange, until the tape-recording technology of the postwar era permitted him to capture the spoken words of the world's peoples in a series of polyvocal documentaries--the last significant form of aural art to emerge in American broadcasting just prior to the publication of Red Channels.

None of these sound performances *mattered* much to an audience that, by the early 1950s, was consumed by video culture. The increasingly mobile, picture-snatching and transistor-radio equipped public of the atomic age--the age of TV/3D hyperreality and invisible, radioactive menaces--was less receptive to the promises of incorporeality than the impoverished, disenfranchised and isolated listener anno 1930 or 1942. Along with

the circumscription imposed on the outspoken and non-materialistic during the early 1950s, the broadcasters' growing reliance on recorded programming further diminished radio's edge over live television and permanent print. The final chapter--“Hawkers of *feces*? Costermongers of *shit*?”: Voiding Radio”--explores the troubled afterlife of audio fiction in print. Beginning with Sue ‘Em (1925), the first radio play to be published in the US, thousands of scripts--and indeed most of the major works discussed in this study--appeared in anthologies, magazines, and handbooks for students of broadcasting. Broadcast writers like Herman Wouk (Aurora Dawn) and Irwin Shaw (The Troubled Air) often made the transition to other, ostensibly superior media--film, stage, and novel--by anathematizing radio, particularly the excesses of commerce and anti-Communism. Late twentieth-century writers like NPR stalwart Garrison Keillor (WLT: A Radio Romance), on the other hand, romanticized what appeared to be irretrievably lost.

Both the commodified nostalgia about radio's aureate days and the wholesale denunciation of broadcast writing as spurious or inartistic contributed to the silence about those American writers who dared to conceive of aural play as an alternative to literature--the temporary laborers on the edge of what Lewis Mumford once termed the “Paper Dream City,” a world in which what is “real” is “only what has been transferred to paper.” Due to its position and posturing vis-à-vis print culture and visual arts in the age of secondary, self-conscious orality, the American radio play is now but a dark star in McLuhan's Gutenberg Galaxy. Its story is that of a literary bastard, a lively yet transient art, demotic and eager to please, while all along, reminded of its obsolescence and ultimate inconsequentiality, rehearsing its protracted denouement. It is this story of the American radio play and its place in the widening web of multimediacy--told, by and large in its own words--that “Etherized Victorians” sets out to recover.

A Note about the Sources and Their Documentation

In order to assist readers in differentiating between scripts and broadcasts without cluttering the text with extensive notes, only print sources appear in footnotes, while detailed and pertinent information about broadcasts (writers, actors, networks) are provided in a separate list of “Recordings.” All individual broadcast plays--unit dramas, episodes of a series, or chapters in a serial--are rendered in quotation marks; titles of series appear in italics. Only the titles of books and films are underlined. Thus, “Les Misérables” denotes a single broadcast regardless of its length, *Les Misérables* a radio series, and Les Misérables the title of Hugo’s novel or its cinematic adaptation.

Whenever available, the exact airdates appear in parentheses after the titles of each individual broadcast. The run of an entire *series* appears in parenthesis after its italicized title. To indicate that a recording is available and was actually consulted for this study, the date appears in bold print. Thus, (Oct. 30, 1938) identifies an original broadcast date, whereas (**Oct. 30, 1938**) specifies a broadcast as an extant recording. Bold print always refers readers to a corresponding entry in the alphabetical list of “Recordings.”

Unless specified otherwise, the following reference texts have been consulted to verify the spelling of titles and names (of sponsors, writers, performers and characters), and the times during which a particular series was on the air (the overall run of a program): Buxton and Owen’s Big Broadcast, 1920-1950, DeLong’s Radio Stars, Dunning’s On the Air, Goldin’s Golden Age of Radio (and its frequently updated online version), Grams’s Radio Drama, Lackmann’s Encyclopedia of American Radio, Sies’s Encyclopedia of American Radio, Summers’s Thirty Year History of Programs, and Terrace’s Radio’s Golden Years. See Works Cited (“Secondary Sources”) for publication details.

Chapter One

The “time between commercials”?: An Intervention

Radio was sacred, mysterious, and people talked about it in hushed tones (“Got WJZ in Newark and KDKA in Pittsburgh last night, clear as anything, and last week I got WSM in Nashville,” you’d hear men murmur on the streetcar), and ministers preached on its enormous potential for good, its power to bridge great distances and reach great multitudes and promote mutual understanding and world peace. Newspapers printed editorials about “The Responsibility of Radio” and urged the new industry to follow a path of sober adherence to solemn duty. To use such a gift and a godsend to peddle soap--would people stand for it?--Garrison Keillor, WLT: A Radio Romance (1991)

The year 1920 marks the beginning of “modern broadcasting,” defined by inventor, wireless promoter and pulp magazine editor Hugo Gernsback as “a radio intelligence that is sent out at a certain pre-determined schedule or program.”¹ No longer under the control of the US Navy or in the hands of a small if growing number of hobbyists, radio was about to emerge as a cultural force. “Until recently the motion-picture held the field as the latest development in the effective spreading of information to the greatest number,” remarked Orange Edward McMeans, author of Eavesdropping on the World, in the spring of 1923:

Now comes radiotelephony, calling in unmistakable tones to art, science, education, amusement, and religion, to make use of this far-reaching but direct-acting approach to the people through the medium of sound. The call is being heard by artists, teachers, preachers, leaders of thought in every line of human activity, who are addressing the great invisible audience of those who sit at home yet gather to listen, who applaud not with the clapping of hands, but nevertheless are responsive in high degree,

an audience even now compelling attention for its overwhelming size, and growing fast into “a great multitude which no man could number.”²

The “call” emanated not only from the wireless itself, but was received more widely still from daily newspapers and magazines cashing in on the promising novelty. According to the gleefully entrepreneurial Gernsback, whose magazine Modern Electrics had stirred the public’s interest in wireless technology as early as 1908,³ print ads, program listings and radio columns generated such “tremendous publicity” that it culminated in the “radio boom” of early 1922, a craze Gernsback likened to the “oil rush of the Texas oil fields. The country had suddenly gone wild over radio, and every one wanted to have an outfit to listen in to the fascinating entertainment.”⁴ The “fascinating entertainment” during those early years of pre-network broadcasting was not the consumption of prepared programs, but the uncertainty of the signal chase and the thrill of reception. Both transmitting and receiving were acts of conception that inspired popular poetry such as the following piece published in Scribner’s in 1922:

The tingling air is thrilled with spirit;
The universe I can inherit;
Mysteriously great and near,
Creation’s throbbing heart I hear.⁵

The excitement of tuning in lay in the listener’s realization of being connected with broadcasters and audiences near and far through an invisible web that Gerald Nachman aptly calls “yesterday’s Internet.”⁶ “How easy it is,” marveled McMeans

to close the eyes and imagine the other listeners in little back rooms, in kitchens, dining-rooms, sitting-rooms, attics; in garages, offices, cabins, engine-rooms, bungalows, cottages, mansions, hotels, apartments; one here, two there, a little company around a table away off yonder, each and all sitting and hearing with the same comfort just where they happen to be. Work your imagination a trifle harder and see the snow-bound huts of the

great north-land, where fur-clad figures silently listen to the strains of the great organ. Then slip down to the island of the South, where amid fronded palms, little companies clad in summery white sit listening to that same choir and organ. Let fancy take you into hospital wards where helpless sufferers lie, smiling for a time as the pealing harmony rings out, "lead kindly light, amid the encircling gloom, lead though me on." Is imagination weary with these flights, or will it still carry you on, hard pressing the flying ether-borne strains far out upon the vasty deep, where, over the sea and under the sky, the great organ and the choir find still other hearers who sit in the great audience?⁷

What McMeans perceived as the "world-broadening and boundary-obliterating mission of radio broadcasting," coupled with the instantaneousness of transmission, remained the medium's chief asset and distinguishing feature until the early 1950s, and, as we will hear, greatly influenced radio entertainment long after such Emersonics had made way for the pragmatics with which even McMeans tempers his transcendental effusions. Already, complaints were being voiced about "unsatisfactory receiving apparatus," "makeshift" stations, and "extremely amateurish" programs:

At the very first, any sort of a sound which could be recognized as speech or music was interesting. But the public to-day has been trained to expect rapid improvement in any invention catering to their comfort, convenience, or amusement. [. . .] Many changes must come in the near future to systematize and standardize conditions which are still crude and haphazard in relative schedules, distribution of broadcasting stations, and nature of programmes.⁸

Aside from significant technical improvements that made staying tuned to specific stations not merely possible but pleasurable, the 1920s did indeed witness the systematizing and standardizing McMeans deemed essential to the viability and growth of

the fledgling industry. These changes, outlined and documented by broadcasting historians including Erik Barnouw (A Tower in Babel), Susan J. Douglas (Inventing American Broadcasting) and Susan Smulyan (Selling Radio), transformed the invisible web into national networks of affiliated stations, enmeshed corporate sponsors and their advertising agencies, and eventually fashioned the strands of competing media into a profitable plexus of symbiotic interrelations. Before the decade crashed, the boom box of 1922 complemented motion pictures and periodicals, rivaled the phonograph, and--according to some wary and perceptive observers within the entertainment industry--threatened to supersede vaudeville. Broadcasting had ushered in an age of multimediacy.

Observers and shapers of the growing industry--whose "output" value was already estimated at \$650 million in 1925--did not uniformly embrace the notion that radio could potentially level cultural differences by creating a supposedly indivisible, invisible audience. Before emerging as network radio's chief political commentator, journalist H. V. Kaltenborn warned that, if left uncontrolled, radio was threatening to make "people think in unison," that since broadcasters dreaded to offend its diverse audience, the medium's offerings had to be "sufficiently innocuous to appeal to young and old, male and female, to butcher and baker and radio-set maker."⁹ Could intellectually stimulating plays, sound art reflecting the diversity and inequalities of American lives develop under such conditions? Broadcast reformer and New Republic editor Bruce Bliven envisioned with horror the

civilization of 1930, when there will be only one orchestra left on earth, giving nightly world-wide concerts; when all the universities will be combined into one super-institution conducting courses by radio for students in Zanzibar, Kamchatka and Oskaloosa; when instead of newspapers, trained orators will dictate the news of the world day and night, and the bed-time story will be told every evening from Paris to the sleepy children of a weary

world; when every person will be instantly accessible day or night to all the bores he knows, and will know them all; when the last vestiges of privacy, solitude and contemplation will have vanished into limbo.¹⁰

The challenges of developing a common theater of the air whose plays were broadly appealing without being vulgar or overly familiar contributed to the broadcasters' emphasis on musical entertainment; radio drama did not become a prominent feature in American broadcasting until the latter half of the 1930s.

Throughout the 1920s, the notion that dramatic works could be written especially for the new medium was more astonishing still. In 1924, news about such an attempt in Britain--Richard Hughes's "Comedy of Danger"--were duly reported stateside. An "ingenious dramatist," Hughes had overcome the "apparently insuperable difficulty" of "invisibility" by "placing his scene in the pitch blackness of a caved-in coal-mine":

Listeners-in received instructions to turn out the lights in their rooms, in order to create the atmosphere of a coal mine,--one would think a little more might be required,--and were further warned that if they thought the tragedy would be too dreadful for them they had better not listen in. [. . .]

The whole cast consisted of one resourceful individual plus the book of the play and a choice assortment of noise-making implements.¹¹

The notice, however brief, not only questioned the merit of Hughes's play, a seminal work still considered experimental enough more than a decade later (**July 18, 1936**) to be featured in the inaugural broadcast of the *Columbia Workshop* (1936-42; 1946-47), network radio's most significant anthology of original radio plays; it specifically objected to the playwright's attempt to draw on the common to engage its audiences--universal fears of darkness and disaster--and his presumption that a working-class environment like a colliery was so readily envisioned. What could be said in favor of a form of theatrical entertainment that aspired to transforming a nation's living rooms into imaginary coal pits?

What once had inspired awe was soon argued to be positively awful. From the earliest days of network broadcasting onward, reviews about radio plays as popular art were delivered in the mocking tone that defines the criticism of a medium whose best known commentators were humorists Ring Lardner and James Thurber, contributors to the New Yorker in 1932-33 and 1948, respectively. "The art of broadcasting is entirely too important to be ignored or squelched by derogatory attacks," a dissentient voice from the Forum insisted in 1932; unable to find reviews elsewhere, the writer had taken it upon himself, for his "own amusement and information," to "prove by a few examples that such criticism [was] feasible." Now that radio had become "our new art" and, as such, "worthy of attention," time was "ripe for the conception of a new genus of critic with the radio as his field."¹² Instead of being carefully investigated for its impact on American culture and folk art, the medium that stopped traffic with blockbusters like *Amos 'n' Andy* was invalidated as a purveyor of so much "blather and bunk." How could loudspeakers "blaring forth daily millions of words and millions of notes for millions of listeners," be reconciled with the claims of after-dinner speakers and anniversary orators that radio, like Gutenberg's invention, marks a new epoch in the progress of civilization, that it is the distinctive contribution of our age to the enlightenment and education of mankind, every bit as important as the wooden printing blocks of the Middle ages?

In the binaries common to such printed invectives, generally not intended for the "masses" they scorned, the irate critic refused seriously to consider any "analogy between broadcasting and printing," the latter having proven its worth, the former having only disappointed thus far. If the written word could refine the spoken word and thereby elevate a large number, the radioed word--the spoken word defiled--only reminded the educated of the lowly state they had escaped:

How much of knowledge and beauty, of wisdom and pleasure is offered to our world? How near are we to another Renaissance because again the

undeveloped masses of mankind are stimulated by the highest products of the human mind; products so easily communicated through this new and all-pervasive medium?¹³

Made chiefly responsible for the debasement of the spoken word was, of course, its exploitation for commercial use. The airwaves cast listeners upon that “Isle of Voices” which Robert Louis Stevenson conceived as a site of greed and corruption, a beach strewn with “millions and millions of dollars,” and “hundreds and hundreds of persons culling them,” a crowd as “thick as a cried fair” in which “bodiless voices called and shouted one upon another.”¹⁴ Radio did not deliver culture’s “highest products,” but cultivated desires for the lowest:

The wholesale exploitation of sound in the various perversions of money getting is a far worse thing than the desecration of the countryside by billboards. It is at once more intimate and more degrading. The unctuous bleating of the high priests of salesmanship would be ethically less intolerable were it their own wares they were crying. The fact that their voices, like their machinery, are for hire renders it a form of prostitution essentially akin to its older prototype. [. . .] To become accustomed--much more, to become reconciled--to the standards and practices of broadcast advertising is to connive at an irredeemable insult to human decency.¹⁵

Ostensibly “in a spirit of impartiality,” one critic spent seventeen hours listening indiscriminately to various stations to share his experience with the readers of the Atlantic Monthly. Having exposed himself to calisthenics at breakfast (“All together for the upper and lower lobes of the lung”); Hamlin Garland talking about “diction” on behalf of the American Academy of Arts and Letters; jazz, Brahms, and Rudy Vallee; a poetry recital to the sound of twittering canaries; and a radio playlet of the boy-meets-girl variety (“I love you so much, I hate you . . . you, you darling!”)--all wrapped up in copiously supplied commercial copy (“S Y L P H. . . . It removes gas and bloat instantly”; “Do you know

what neckband worry is?"; "What is love but a helping of Angel Cake?")--the bewildered listener concluded with a sigh: "O my country, my country, the pains are so great you must be growing up at last!"¹⁶ Informed, regular listeners may have been better able to select the broadcasts that appealed to them; but none could entirely escape the words from the sponsors: "Shout it--*loud!* spread it about! Tell every one! Tono--TONO,--TONO-BUNGAY!"¹⁷

Even publications geared toward radio audiences began to temper their paeans to that "ether-riding soul, / Adapted by man from out Jehovah's thunder!" with acknowledgments that both "[t]hings good" and "things bad" emerged from the "box of this up-to-date Pandora."¹⁸ Objections were being voiced about the commercial excesses that, prior to the institution of the Federal Communications Commission in 1934, had remained virtually unchecked. An anonymous poem, supposedly penned by a "Radio Artist who chooses to be called Anon," complained about a new "disease" contaminating the ether:

It's thriving like a healthy weed
 Or fungus newly grafted,
 And mercenaries sow the seed
 Wherever sound is wafted
 The artists rave then grow morose
 Because of laryngitis
 And "fans" then get a stronger dose
 Of this same Sponsoritis.

The speaker invites readers to commiserate, but sees no cure for broadcasting, no remedy for the spread of commerce that quashed artistic growth and quelled aesthetic pleasure:

No use to try to save the wreck
 Or prophecy disaster,
 For he who signs the mighty check

Is boss and lord and master;
 When there's a program spoiled or botched,
 It's money bags who fight us,
 With heavy hearts we've stood and watched
 The spread of Sponsoritis.¹⁹

The “disease”--which had been spreading since WEAf aired the first commercial announcement on August 28, 1922, and which did not prevent millions of Americans from tuning in daily--became and remained a key argument for the wholesale dismissal of radio art, despite statistical evidence that broadcasting executives like CBS president William S. Paley presented before the Federal Communications Commission, figures which documented that, in 1933 and 1934, less than one third of CBS's scheduled programming was commercially sponsored, the majority being produced at the expense of the network.²⁰

“Radio is vaudeville. It is trivial. It is the market place,” sneered 1940s radio drama producer and *Variety* critic Robert J. Landry, mimicking the “habit of satire of all things radiogenetic [. . .] typical of the modern intellectual.” Landry responded by arguing that the “educator and the superior citizen will have little influence in the betterment of radio--and that task goes incessantly forward--until and unless they descend from their platform of amused contempt.”²¹ Norman Corwin, the “patron saint of quality programming,”²² shrugged off the public drubbing radio playwrights and producers received by claiming that the “snobs” were “wasting their breath,” that radio would persist, every now and then, in producing new and challenging work--persist in spite of the very barflies who moan at five cents a word because the industry never tries anything new, yet who are the first to throw tin cans at the new thing tried.²³

If radio art did prevail as art, little evidence of it was reported in newspapers and magazines. On the air, Corwin commented on the situation in his “Radio Primer” (May 4,

1941), the first play in his CBS series *Twenty-Six by Corwin* (1941):

NARRATOR. P. P stands for press.

DEFINER. Press means newspapers. There are all kinds of newspapers.

This is well. Most of the press believes radio is here to stay, and likewise most of radio believes the press is here to stay. This is well.

Some papers have their doubts about radio drama, however, as may be seen in Figure 11.

FIRST RADIO MAN. Well, chief, the show's all lined up and the announcements have gone out.

SECOND RADIO MAN. Fine. Did you stress the angle of the bigness of the production setup?

FIRST RADIO MAN. Yes, sir, I listed everything: script by Ernest Hemingway, music by Sibelius, orchestra of seventy-five men under Stokowski, Deems Taylor announcing, cast of sixty-two including eight stars, a choir of twenty voices, a sound-effects crew of seven, and four hundred extras.

SECOND RADIO MAN. Good. I see the Chronicle gave it an excellent advance notice. How did the Evening Clarion-Call list it?

FIRST RADIO MAN. "Ten-thirty to eleven PM, sketch."

This anticlimax aptly captures the frustration of those writers and artists whose contributions to the furtherance of the aural arts on network radio met with the deaf ears or sealed lips of a less than cooperative press.²⁴

"[W]hy should we plug a setup that's cutting our advertising," a theater editor reminds upstart office boy Sammy Glick in Budd Schulberg's What Makes Sammy Run? (1941). "But millions of people are listening in all day long," the aspiring radio columnist replies, "And I'll bet the column would land us plenty of radio ads. So if you'd put in a good word for me with the boss. . . ." ²⁵ Few newspaper publishers were as readily

swayed as the executive in charge of Schulberg's fictional Record. An extensive study of broadcast criticism concluded that there existed in America a "common determination of the newspaper industry to try to ignore broadcasting just as completely as its readers would allow." Given the fabric of commerce in which even sustaining (that is, commercial free) efforts like Corwin's series were enmeshed, a great number of American newspapers argued the announcement of radio programs to be advertisement and, charging broadcasters for printing their schedules, refrained from commenting on their offerings.²⁶ When the networks' live programs were discussed at all, often long after their initial and frequently final broadcast, the postmortems were both gratuitous and mordant. Just how negatively the efforts of radio playwrights were portrayed in the national press can be illustrated by Time magazine's fierce attacks against Arch Oboler, radio's premier melodramatist. Heard on *Arch Oboler's Plays* (Aug. 26, 1939) and subsequently published in a collection of outstanding broadcast scripts, "This Lonely Heart" was a notable radio event, featuring, for the first time in a dramatic program, the entire NBC Symphony Orchestra, as well as acclaimed stage and screen actress Alla Nazimova.

Despite such assets, Time's radio column dismissed the Procter & Gamble sponsored effort as a "doloroso radio fluoroscopy of the troubled soul of Tschaikowky's ever-loving patroness," describing its "[g]rey-bobbed" star as taking to the microphone "like a trouper reclaimed for a Billy Rose floor show, emot[ing] copiously in black slacks in an audience-less studio," and "wast[ing] wordily away" like a "traditional Camille":

Mightily pleased with the play, the playwright and a medium which let her hold most of the stage for a full hour without a single program or gum wrapper crackling, Alla Nazimova let out a secret. "Always," she confessed, "I have hated audiences. Always!"

Rather than being intimate and all-embracing, the article implied, the alleged people's medium was mere pretense, a business indifferent to those it was designed to serve. As if to suggest that listeners would do well to distance themselves from such false shows, the

caption of a photograph showing star and writer in the studio read: "Their audience was removed."²⁷

"Pleased that Nazimova shared a conviction that he himself had held for years," Time remarked eighteen months later, Oboler had managed to convince Elisabeth Bergner to "run through" his latest radio work, "An American Is Born" (Nov. 29, 1940). Pointing out the cost of such productions--as much as \$3600--the article implied that full orchestration to "weave in a bit of Tchaikovsky" was ill-spent on trifles like "This Lonely Heart." When Proctor & Gamble decided to cancel its sponsorship of Oboler's *Everyman's Theatre*, Time reported gleefully that this was a "rather unusual situation" for the man who considered himself "a sort of Radio Reinhardt." Fond of "pronunciamentos" about good radio writing as innovative drama that had "something to say," Oboler had "never managed to live up to his own dictum."²⁸ Even when it listed Oboler's accomplishments, such as the publication of his Fourteen Radio Plays (1940) and his work on Mervyn LeRoy's anti-fascist melodrama Escape (1940), Time's radio column concluded with the remark that the film director was reportedly so annoyed with Oboler's comments about studio technique that he "demonstrate[d] a storm scene" by drenching the upstart of the airwaves with "cinema rain."²⁹ In this, Time did by no means represent the views of the vast radio audience, considering that the *Arch Oboler's Plays* production of "Ivory Tower" (July 8, 1939) had reportedly drawn the "largest and most enthusiastic response to an NBC sustaining program since the opening of the Toscanini broadcasts."³⁰ Courting a smaller and presumably better educated audience while the masses turned increasingly to radio for both news and entertainment, a smarting press resorted to disdainful silence or strained *Schadenfreude*.

The broadcast industry could readily counter such publicized ridicule with figures that bespoke the tremendous popularity of the medium. According to a 1945 survey conducted by noted media analyst, psychologist, and social scientist Paul F. Lazarsfeld and his colleague Harry Field, 82% of those questioned considered radio's overall service to

be “excellent” or “good,” were vastly in favor of corporately funded broadcasting, believed themselves to be better served by radio (67%) than by newspapers (17%) or magazines (3%), and were more likely to give up newspapers (62%) than radio (30%). Yet quantitative research did little to explain why Americans kept tuning in--and what they heard. When not accused of vulgarity and insipidity, radio and its audience were approached chiefly by statisticians, researchers who supplied the industry with data useful to the development of programming strategies without feeling obliged to listen to any of the programs listed in their reports. Significantly, the listeners of daytime serials, a form of entertainment few critics bothered to audition regularly, if at all, were the “most thoroughly studied and best known sector of the radio audience.”³¹

Lazarsfeld and Field justified their study by arguing that there was a “great need” for “cultural and psychological insights applied to modern media of mass culture,” an approach in keeping with the “interesting development” they noticed in the “art of literary criticism,” a “growing feeling that the soundest criticism does not come from frustrated journalists and poets who substitute their artistic ideas for the content of the piece they are criticizing.” Yet even though they held that it was “increasingly felt that the social conditions under which a piece of art is produced and the psychological conditions under which it is received constitute more legitimate data for literary criticism,” they contributed little to the critical examination of radio programs as indicators of social conditions or effectors of behavioral changes. As numbers were left to speak for themselves, both the aural arts and their critical reception were being silenced; and once the medium was, in the words of Peabody Award winning radio comedian Fred Allen, “abandoned like the bones at a barbecue,”³² looking back at--or listening anew to--the dramatic programs of the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s seemed pointless and unprofitable to all but the compilers of hobbyist-targeting program guides or nostalgic scrapbooks dedicated to the aureate days of aural delights. The actual reception of American radio, listening as an act of reading, remains, to date, largely unexplored.

In the early 1960s, when radio had already ceased to be a popular form of entertainment, Leo Rosten expressed confidence that humorists like Jack Benny or Phil Silvers might “yet achieve classic dimensions” already permitted the “once despised” Marx Brothers:

Intellectuals generally discover “artists” in the popular arts long after the public, with less rarefied aesthetic categories, has discovered them. Perhaps there is rooted in the character structure of intellectuals an aversion, or an inability, to participate in certain sectors of life; they do seem blind to the fact that the popular can be meritorious. This changes with time (e.g., consider the reputations of Twain, Dickens, Dumas, Balzac, Lardner).³³

How is such catching up encouraged by cultural historians like Susan Smulyan, who argues that “[t]reating radio programs as literature, even when applying the most sophisticated literary theories, often misses the point of broadcasting”? Smulyan rejects “[t]ext-centered examinations of how meaning is constituted by readers” as “insufficient” at best. Intended to “sell products” rather than to “entertain or educate or uplift, unless those actions would help sell,” radio programs “merely filled the time between commercials, just as they do in current television offerings.”³⁴ Considering the audience--and the event of audition--primarily as a construct of the broadcasting industry, Smulyan seems to advocate covering American earplay with one’s ears covered. Spot-checking via remote control those records that spoke to millions and may still speak for themselves, her study contributes to the further invalidation of listening-based program analyses. By bracketing this alleged cultural vacuum--the “time between commercials”--the majority of today’s broadcasting scholars and cultural historians continue to deny themselves and their readers access to many of the narratives and dramatic performances that make up twentieth-century America.

Many assessments of American radio programming too readily rely on the facile dichotomy of sponsored and sustaining shows, dismissing the former as corrupt and inconsequential, the latter as too infrequent to be truly representative of network offerings. As a result of such distorting generalizations--which fail to acknowledge that many educational programs enjoyed sponsorship, while popular blood-and-thunder anthologies remained unsponsored--greater attention is being paid to radio continuity (that is, commercial copy) than to the plays thus packaged. And even though few critical readers of today's television culture would dismiss the examination of programming content quite so glibly, Smulyan, whose Selling Radio discusses the pre-network period and early years of network broadcasting (1920 to 1934), shrewdly markets as an approach what might otherwise have been perceived as a fundamental shortcoming of her study--the lack of a comprehensive and carefully archived recordings library for the period under investigation.

At the turn of the millennium, tens of thousands of OTR (old-time radio) recordings from the mid-1930s to mid-1950s became readily available through internet downloads and online trading. Much to the dismay of RadioSpirits, the leading dealer in audio Americana, dedicated hobbyists have amassed collections far more extensive--and often more thoroughly researched--than those maintained by understaffed cultural institutions like the Library of Congress in Washington or the broadcasting museums of New York and Chicago. Erstwhile popular programs may once again be appreciated as they were heard during the so-called golden days of broadcasting--in private rather than public and often quite austere, academic settings. This homecoming of historical recordings coincided with the publication of a great number of research guides, among them John Dunning's On the Air (1998), Ron Lackmann's Encyclopedia of American Radio (1999), and Luther Sies's Encyclopedia of American Radio (2000), as well as detailed broadcasting logs for individual programs like *Cavalcade of America*, *Lux Radio Theatre*, and *The Adventures of Ellery Queen*. Yet only a few scholarly readers appear to have taken note.

How far American academics and OTR enthusiasts have drifted apart can be illustrated by episodic broadcast logs, which, page after page, list vaguely familiar titles like “They Stopped to Folly,” “Of Human Bandage,” and “The Marble Fawn.”³⁵ Unlike other media of popular entertainment--television, motion pictures, and the pulps--“radio, especially in its ‘Golden Age,’” as Alan Havig once put it, “has been left almost entirely to the nostalgia merchants and their patrons, private collectors of taped programs, radio premiums, and photographs of former stars.”³⁶ To date, one of the most comprehensive studies on US radio dramatics, Eckhard Breitingner’s Rundfunk und Hörspiel in den USA 1930-1950 (1992), has remained untranslated and entirely ignored by American scholars. This imperviousness to the airwaves has been lamented by almost everyone attempting to provide remediation; indeed, the lament appears to have become the preferred curtain raiser for any study of radio writing and performance, regardless of its approach. Four years after the Media Studies Journal dedicated an entire issue to Radio: The Forgotten Medium (1993), Michele Hilmes’s Radio Voices (1997) reiterated that “[n]o other medium ha[d] been more thoroughly forgotten.” Despite its pop-cultural dominance during the second quarter of the twentieth century, radio is now but a “dark and fading memory somewhere between vaudeville and I Love Lucy”--a “neglected body of texts” that has “become the ‘repressed’ of television studies.”³⁷ The fact that a 1999 study of radio drama could still open with the statement that the *Hörspiel* “has been one of the most underappreciated and understated literary forms of the twentieth century”³⁸ without sounding altogether disingenuous already implies an answer to the question why most literary critics have kept their receivers turned off. Those who purport to introduce the uninitiated to wireless writing celebrate the martyrdom of the marginalized instead of making concerted efforts to reacquaint readers with the ostensibly quaint by accommodating the radio play to the canon of world literature and drama.

“Radio may be invisible, but it is important to remember that its accomplishments and contributions to our culture are anything but. Maybe another gentle tap on the

shoulder is overdue,” broadcast historian Mary Ann Watson wrote in 1993, “especially for those who teach, research and write about the electronic media.” To “overlook radio is to miss the big picture,” Watson cautions³⁹; to overlook the erstwhile central position of the radio play within this picture would mean to misconceive it. While it is true that the popular arts of narrative sound film and television drama, both virtually unchanged in formats and storytelling techniques since their respective inceptions, generated and continue to stimulate literary discourse because, in contrast to the ephemera of the ether, they were almost at once more readily accessible--that is, intellectually approachable in their reliance on audio-visual signposts crucial to the rendering of traditional Western drama, as well as physically retrievable due to their commercially advantageous reproducibility on celluloid and magnetic tape--it should also be considered that the general perception of the broadcast aerial acts performed in the pre-TV era as vintage thin air theatricals may have been nurtured rather than countered by those engaged in their vindication. Critics like Susan J. Douglas, who, within the span of ten years, turned from exposing the image of American broadcasters as “servants of the people, giving the people what they want to hear or see” as a “myth [that] masked the corporate acquisition of control over the content and patterns of mass communication in America, and thus veiled the less romantic and less appealing realities of industrial capitalism” to writing a “romantic book, in the way that Woody Allen’s Radio Days is a romantic movie,” suggesting that the “sighing about radio should interest us too, the silky nostalgia that swirls around it, and radio’s role in constructing and activating the collective memories of so many Americans,” seem to have created a comfortable recess, reveling in the pastness of radio culture rather than *representing* it.⁴⁰

Such wireless funambulism--uneasy balancing acts of preserving culture and culturing self-preservation--call for academically viable alternatives. After all, even chroniclers like Ray Barfield, who offers a “book about the play of memory on a transient medium,” based on accounts of actual listeners whose “impressions, slight misimpressions,

and little asides are at least as telling as facts--and often moreso [sic],”⁴¹ occult the fact that, given the wide circulation of recordings, anyone today can be an actual listener of classic radio plays. “Does anyone really give much of a damn whether there is radio drama in America or not? Do many people even know what radio drama is--or could be?” Richard Imison, Deputy Head of Radio Drama at the BBC in London asked in 1991, contending that for “most people, radio drama, if it means anything at all, brings back memories of an age of sit-com and soap opera and mystery, which, like the silent movie, has passed into history, with value only as nostalgia.”⁴²

However, recovering the past at the expense of the present (for radio plays are still being produced, even in the US) does not necessarily perpetuate the romanticizing of the dial. Instead, it means to acknowledge that during a span of nearly two decades--from the mid-1930s to the early 1950s--radio dramatics were at the center of US popular culture; they were the project of a vast and complex industry employing writers, technicians, and performers who were especially trained and called upon to draw together audiences of a size today’s increasingly diversified television offerings can no longer attract. No one writing about twentieth-century American culture--about how Americans thought, what they perceived or were told to feel--can afford to ignore the airwaves. That radio plays are merely remembered, rather than auditioned anew, contributes not only to a silencing of radio’s dramatic and narrative past, but of its present and future. It is a silence that, as Gregory Whitehead cautions, “can only feed upon itself,” eventually making the very “thought of radio as cultural space seem remote, farfetched, improbable.”⁴³

Even if this “cultural space” is to be reimagined as free from commercial clutter, the unrelenting disregard for American radio writing cannot be entirely explained away as being rooted in misgivings about its integrity and artistic merit; for long gone are the Arnoldian days when literary criticism was defined as the “*disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.*”⁴⁴ Landry already argued that while “such esoteric arts as the ballad, the cantata” and “drypoint etching,”

“unabashed ‘stage turkeys’” and B pictures are given “serious, straight-faced criticism,” the “only art medium with a universal audience, the one conduit for ideas that must be kept unclogged if democracy is to survive is practically without any organized, extensive, general criticism.”⁴⁵ The fact that broadcasting criticism increased dramatically with the advent of television, that by 1950 critics were already devoting seventy-six percent of their space to TV, speaks against commercials as being a major deterrent.⁴⁶ It is not so much the quality of what aired but the qualities of air, the nature of sound, the intangible *stuff* of radio, that renders dramatic broadcasts suspect to those who could have been instrumental in promoting the reading of such plays as an aesthetic project of cultural relevance. Even in Britain, the acknowledged refuge of radio dramatists, aural play has met with general “critical neglect,” as playwright and drama critic Ian Rodger noted, scholarly emphasis having been placed on the medium “solely as a sociological factor.”⁴⁷ “Who are the literary historians,” fellow broadcast critic Peter Lewis inquired:

From what position do they define literary history? What are their presuppositions, conscious and, even more important, unconscious? What are the built-in biases of their ideology? Why should criticism of film, a mass-media art form that cannot be subsumed under Literature, have reached such a degree of sophistication that literary critics are learning from it, while criticism of radio drama, a mass-media art form that for the most part can be subsumed under Literature, has hardly got off the ground? In asking questions like these, the student[s] of radio [find themselves] being drawn into the centre of a debate about literary theory, criticism and history that is likely to shape the future of literary studies . . .] Is it too much to hope that radio drama will receive at least some of the recognition it deserves as postmodernist literary theories and critical ideas circulate more widely, perhaps expanding our literary consciousness to take more account of the media and of words not on the page but in the air?⁴⁸

To date, Lewis's claim that the radio play can be--or ought to be--"subsumed under Literature" has not found widespread acceptance, either among the custodians and theorists of literature or the promoters and practitioners of aural play.

While readers weaned on ocular proof, on textual scholarship yielding authoritative editions, have remained unwilling to play by ear, those attuned to radio dramatics, its techniques and traditions, have expressed doubts that orality and literacy should be reconciled at all. "Words written for the eye represent one acknowledged art form. Why, then, should not words written for the ear in time be recognized as another art form?" propounded one creator of early broadcast fictions.⁴⁹ Radio, as Anthony Burgess suggests, ought to be considered as "an extension of literature, but in the sense of a literature as Homer knew it--not the visual symbols but the direct auditory impact, words as sound"; and "in developing a critical approach to radio, an approach fitted to the contours of the medium," Don Druker insists, "it is necessary to consider *sound itself* as the raw material for analysis."⁵⁰ Nor did American reviewers and radio playwrights of the 1940s embrace the prospect of any interference from an intelligentsia unprepared or unwilling to audition radio entertainment as it was appreciated by the multitudes--over the airwaves. As Landry pointed out, the "purely academic radio critic" who "seldom listens over the air but chiefly ponders gaunt mimeograph," of which "only a carefully sifted selection" would ever "reach the professional closet," was not likely to comprehend or capture the "true flavor" of radio, which was "found in production." Concerned with the "adequate library cataloguing" and study of "radio scripts as literature," rather than with the "run-of-the-mill stuff" that was live network radio, the "scholarly script reader" would fail to realize the "impact" directors, actors, and studio technicians had on the "living broadcast."⁵¹

Those who "attempt to study radio plays of the past by reading the scripts should appreciate that what appears on the page is often an incomplete guide to the resulting production," Rodger agreed; reading without listening is "no more to be recommended

than the unfortunate scholarly practice of judging theatre plays from the text without seeing them on a stage.”⁵² This practice is particularly unfortunate in the assessment of melodrama--and popular Western drama, whether performed on stage, screen, or sound stage, remains by and large melodramatic--since such entertainment relies more heavily on collaboratively achieved theatrical effects than on carefully crafted dialogue. Reading dramatic scripts rather than experiencing performances has led melodrama scholars like Michael Booth to conclude that past generations have “enjoyed less sophisticated artistic pleasures than we do today.”⁵³ In the assessment of the neo-Victoriana of broadcasting’s pre-television era, recordings of which invite us to reconsider the *melos* in melodrama, such script-fixated readings seem unjustifiably short-sighted. As the editors of Broadcasting: Radio and Television (1952) put it: “Books are written to be read, stage plays to be seen, and radio plays to be heard.”⁵⁴

Written to be heard! Even if we read the radio play as it is presented to the audience, thus privileging the relationship between transcription and reception, and not between script and transcription, the scriptedness of such art does not allow us to place it entirely in an oral or, more inclusively, an aural tradition. As a result, there is an air of the anachronous, the belated about the radio play that complicates our response to it. Yet perhaps too much has been made of the incompatibility of print and sound, paper and air. If radio dramas and narratives have remained a largely uncharted territory, it is in part the result of erroneous notions about their “essence” as “pure oral production designed for pure auditory experience.”⁵⁵ As subsequent chapters will document, the plays scripted for on-air productions were filtered--adapted, edited, transcribed--yet hardly pure. They were products of what Walter J. Ong refers to as the “secondary orality of our electronic age,” a “more deliberate and self-conscious orality” that is “based permanently on the use of writing and print.”⁵⁶ Returning broadcast plays to the page by means of which they were translated by actors, musicians, and sound effects artists--and on which hundreds of them have been preserved--does not constitute the betrayal that some theorists of

so-called “oral literature” argue it to be. And rather than sighing, as Paddy Scannell does in the introduction to his phenomenological study of radio and television, that a book about broadcast texts should ideally be issued as or accompanied by a CD-ROM that would allow readers to compare their interpretations with those of the author, those committed to the reappraisal of radio drama and narrative must be prepared to transcribe, or at least describe, the broadcast segments they choose to discuss.⁵⁷

To undertake this task responsibly, critics of radio plays must do more than evade the argument that reducing broadcasts to print leaves one with the “barest of bones” by suggesting, as Frances Gray does, that a “major advantage of studying radio drama” is that readers may carry the stage around with them.⁵⁸ Instead, as Oboler has argued, readers of broadcasts need to be “versed in the listening idiom,” the “mechanics of radio,” and the “meaning of the radio terms and direction which make up a large part of the printed radio drama.”⁵⁹ In other words, even though the stage they carry in their minds does not have to resemble the soundstage of the broadcasting studio, critics should be aware of the conditions under which these plays were produced so as to be able to determine to what degree a printed text succeeds in realizing the potentialities of the medium. Equipped with a knowledge of broadcasting techniques and traditions, the audile reader can make audible the thousands of scripts for which recordings are not available, thousands of broadcast performances that have been preserved on paper since the 1925 publication of “Sue ‘Em’: The First Radio Play Printed in America. To a listening-informed reader, such scripts can become an “adequate representation” of a broadcast play.⁶⁰

Furthermore, dealing with a commercial mass medium, broadcast critics must also concern themselves with “both the technology and the institutions that control and profit from it,” as Smulyan insists:

[A]ny isolation of a single element--whether by historians of technology focusing on modes of distribution, literary critics examining texts, or social

historians looking only at audience members--misses a synergy: the culture produced by the interaction of all the elements.

In order to realize what Smulyan advocates as a "holistic approach"--the examination of the "entire popular culture equation of producer + text + audience, and the links among the three components"⁶¹--radio critics must consider the broadcast text in its entirety. The aesthetic revaluation of cultural products whose "authorial diffusion" contributed to their initial dismissal as a "tossed salad of efforts" rather than art,⁶² is best served by a tossing together of critical approaches engaging a variety of disciplines. That such readings involve factors "far out on the fringes of criticism's classic provinces," as Ralph Lewis Smith put it in his survey of radio reviews,⁶³ should not result in the further marginalization of the texts that were central to the industry as well as the lives of millions of Americans.

Susan M. Squier posits that radio "creates" and "*mixes up*" various sets of "overlapping communities of the air," which include "not only radio listeners but also those who study and theorize radio as a technological, social, and historical phenomenon." As a result, Squier argues, "cultural studies scholars, so often fascinated by precisely that range of engagements, find radio programming a rich site of investigation."⁶⁴ Considering the marginality of broadcast criticism, this is somewhat of an overstatement. The communities, not the medium, must initiate the mixing up; and approaches to twentieth-century American broadcasting have not been interfaced enough to convince literary scholars to enter into the mix or to consider radio programs *qua* literature as readily as they now embrace virtually all other media. In recent years, a small number of cultural historians including Jason Loviglio, Alexander Russo, and Alison McCracken have begun to recover popular programs like *The Shadow* (1930-54), *The Green Hornet* (1936-52), and *Suspense* (1942-62) by reading individual broadcasts in the contexts they bespeak. For the most part, however, the discourse-generating centrality of the broadcasting text has not been realized.

Further to counter these academic voice-over practices--silencing acts that keep enclaves from becoming communities by forcing all but a select group of already radio-literate readers to take an authority's word for the medium's *it*--studies of American network broadcasting, lest content to revel in their own obscurity, need to make legible the scripts and performances that to the vast majority of today's students of literature might otherwise remain little else than the lapsed "time between commercials."

Notes

- ¹ Gernsback, Radio for All (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1922) 16.
- ² McMeans, "The Great Audience Invisible," Scribner's Apr. 1923: 416.
- ³ Douglas, Inventing American Broadcasting (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987) 199.
- ⁴ Gernsback 169-70.
- ⁵ Archibald Rutledge, "Radio," Scribner's July 1922: 108.
- ⁶ Nachman, Raised on Radio (New York: Pantheon, 1998) 7.
- ⁷ McMeans 411.
- ⁸ McMeans 414-15.
- ⁹ Kaltenborn, "Radio's Responsibility as a Molder of Public Opinion," Century Oct. 1926: 676.
- ¹⁰ Bliven, "The Ether Will Now Oblige," New Republic 15 Feb. 1922: 330.
- ¹¹ "Drama by Radio," The Living Age 1 Mar. 1924: 432. For a script of "Danger," see Plays by Hughes (New York: Harper, 1966) 169-91. For a discussion of the play as a model for American broadcast drama, see Eckhard Breiting, Rundfunk und Hörspiel in den USA 1930-1950 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1992) 31-54.
- ¹² Darwin L. Teilhet, "What America Listens To," Forum May 1932: 275; for a similar critique of "shallow thinking" and "stupidity" in broadcast criticism, see F. C. Brokaw, "Nobody Loves the Radio," Forum and Century July 1934: 27-29.

- 13 Johan Smertenko, "Noises on the Air," Outlook and Independent 16 July 1930: 409.
- 14 Stevenson, "The Isle of Voices," Complete Stories, ed. Charles Neider (1893; New York: Da Capo, 1998) 673; 674.
- 15 William Orton, "The Level of Thirteen-Year-Olds," Atlantic Monthly Jan. 1931: 7.
- 16 Robert Littell, "A Day with the Radio," American Mercury Feb. 1932: 217-25.
- 17 H. G. Wells, Tono-Bungay (1917; New York: Modern Library, 2003) 118. For a radiogenic update of Wells's satire about the "Romance of Commerce," see Herman Wouk's Aurora Dawn, discussed in chapter 10.
- 18 Alice Remsen, "A Sonnet to the Instrument International," Radio Revue Dec. 1929: 14.
- 19 "Sponsoritis," Radio Revue Mar. 1930: 16.
- 20 Paley, Radio as a Cultural Force (New York: CBS, 1934) 3-4. For a thorough and well-documented account of the debate over the control of US radio and the failure of educators, civic organizations, and various reform movements to challenge the emergence of an advertising-supported system during the first, formative decade of network broadcasting (1928-1935), see Robert W. McChesney, Telecommunications, Mass Media, and Democracy (New York: Oxford UP, 1993).
- 21 Landry, This Fascinating Radio Business (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1946) 326-27.
- 22 R. LeRoy Bannerman, Norman Corwin and Radio (Birmingham, AL: U of Alabama P, 1986) 5-6.
- 23 Corwin, "Looking for Art, Bub?" Theatre Arts May 1947: 55.
- 24 Corwin, "Radio Primer," Thirteen by Corwin (New York: Holt, 1942) 40; this passage was performed as it appears above. For a discussion of Corwin's plays, see chapter 9.
- 25 Schulberg, What Makes Sammy Run (1941; New York: Vintage, 1993) 16-17.
- 26 Ralph Lewis Smith, A Study of the Professional Criticism of Broadcasting in the US, 1920-1955, diss. U of Wisconsin, 1959 (New York: Arno, 1979) 23; also see Douglas Duff Connah, How to Build the Radio Audience (New York: Harper, 1938) 32-38.
- 27 "Genius's Hour," Time 4 Sept. 1939: 30. Scripts for "This Lonely Heart" were published in Oboler, Fourteen Radio (New York: Random, 1940) 9-46, and Oboler Omnibus (New York: Duell, 1945) 114-49.

- 28 "*Wunderkind* Out," Time 17 Mar. 1941: 87.
- 29 "Busy Wunderkind," Time 2 Dec. 1940: 57; for readings of Oboler's plays, see chapter 8.
- 30 Leonard Allen, "Arch Oboler: Literary Light of Radio," Christian Science Monitor 31 Aug. 1940, Weekly Magazine sec.: 5.
- 31 Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Harry Field, The People Look at Radio (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1946) 5-6; 87; 82, 99; 102; 50; 80.
- 32 Allen, Treadmill to Oblivion (Boston: Little, 1954) 239.
- 33 Rosten, "The Intellectual and the Mass Media," Culture for the Millions², ed. Norman Jacobs (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1961) 77. By the 1980s, the Marx Brothers had become such pop-cultural icons that even the broadcast scripts for Groucho and Chico Marx's unsuccessful comedy series were being rediscovered. For twenty-five of the twenty-six episodes spanning series, scripted by Nat Perrin and Arthur Sheekman, see Flywheel, Shyster, and Flywheel: The Marx Brothers' Lost Radio Show, ed. Michael Barson (New York: Pantheon, 1988).
- 34 Susan Smulyan, Selling Radio (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Inst., 1994) 7; 9.
- 35 Martin Grams, Jr., Radio Drama (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000) 345.
- 36 Alan R. Havig, "Beyond Nostalgia," Journal of Popular Culture 2.2 (1979): 218.
- 37 Hilmes, Radio Voices (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997) xiv-xv.
- 38 Crook, Radio Drama: Theory and Practice (New York: Routledge, 1999) 3.
- 39 Watson, "*Seems Radio Is Here to Stay*," Radio: The Forgotten Medium, Media Studies Journal 7.3 (1993): 197.
- 40 Douglas, Inventing 321; Douglas, Listening In (New York: Random-Times, 1999) 7.
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- 42 Imison, "Radio and the Theater," Theatre Journal 43 (1991): 289.
- 43 Whitehead, "Out of the Dark," Wireless Imagination, ed. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (Cambridge: MIT, 1992) 253.
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- 48 Lewis, "Radio Drama and English Literature," Radio Drama, ed. Peter Lewis (New York: Longman, 1981) 183-84.
- 49 Peter Dixon, Radio Writing (New York: Century, 1931) 83.
- 50 Burgess, "European Culture: Does It Exist?" Theatre Journal 43 (1991): 306; Druker, "Listening to the Radio," Theatre Journal 43 (1991): 334.
- 51 Landry, "The Improbability of Radio Criticism," Hollywood Quarterly 1.1 (1946): 70.
- 52 Rodger 8.
- 53 Booth, introduction, Hiss the Villain, ed. Michael Booth (New York: Bloom, 1967) 15.
- 54 Henry L. Ewbank and Sherman P. Lawton, Broadcasting: Radio and Television (New York: Harper, 1952) 243.
- 55 Fred E. H. Schroeder, "Radio's Home Folks, *Vic and Sade*," Journal of Popular Culture 12 (1979): 253.
- 56 Ong, Interfaces of the Word (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1977) 305; Orality and Literacy (London: Methuen, 1982) 136.
- 57 Scannell, Radio, Television and Modern Life (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 3.
- 58 Frances Gray, "The Nature of Radio Drama," Lewis 49.
- 59 Oboler, "Oboler on Reading," New Republic 1 Sept. 1947: 36-37.
- 60 Fink, "On the Trail of Radio Drama," Journal of Radio Studies 6 (1999): 131.
- 61 Smulyan 7; Landry, "The Improbability of Radio Criticism," Hollywood Quarterly 1.1 (1946): 70.
- 62 Hilmes, Radio Voices 212.
- 63 Smith iii.

⁶⁴ Squier, "Communities of the Air," Communities of the Air, ed. by Squier (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003) 1-3.

Chapter Two

"Barbarians ready! Flash the orchestra!": The Soundstage as Popular Playhouse

Meanwhile, the house was filling up. A few side brackets were turned on. The ushers ran up and down the aisles, stubs of tickets between their thumb and finger, and from every part of the auditorium could be heard the sharp clap-clapping of the seats as the ushers flipped them down. A buzz of talk arose. In the gallery a street gamin whistled shrilly, and called to some friends on the other side of the house.

"Are they go-wun to begin pretty soon, ma?" whined Owgooste for the fifth or sixth time; adding, "Say, ma, can't I have some candy?" A cadaverous little boy had appeared in their aisle, chanting, "Candies, French mixed candies, popcorn, peanuts and candy." The orchestra entered, each man crawling out from an opening under the stage [. . .].

"Ma, when are they go-wun to begin?" cried Owgooste. As he spoke the iron advertisement curtain rose, disclosing the curtain proper underneath.--Frank Norris, *McTeague* (1899)

"I suppose there were no more than a hundred listeners to the inaugural broadcast of KDKA on that evening of November 2, 1920, when we placed it in operation as the first permanent radio broadcasting station in the world," Frank Conrad, the "father of American Broadcasting," recalled in an article commemorating the tenth anniversary of that historic transmission; it was an event that marked the beginning of the radical transformation of the ethereal realm from a ham-and-DXer playground to the bread and butter of virtual billboarders, from the site of an amateur cult to that of consumer culture. As more people read reports about--and advertisements for--these hour-long broadcasts emanating from the Westinghouse owned station in Pittsburgh, the demand for receiving equipment began to grow, and with it, as Conrad put it, an "implied obligation" to supply "programs with a fair degree of consistency." This required the development of

broadcasting content, formats, and schedules that would recast erratic signal searchers and senders as constituents of a receptive mass audience, an audience convinced enough of the “new service” gradually to relinquish the sets they had cheaply assembled--and the very notion of tinkering and transmitting--for sophisticated receiving equipment and the privileges of leisured listening.¹ The radio boom of 1922 suggested that Americans were ready to explore the airwaves; yet what would compel them to stay tuned to a particular station or broadcast and to tune in again, repeatedly and regularly, to be impressed by the “important messages” of their entrepreneurial compatriots? Scheduled entertainment, once little more than a researcher’s afterthought, was soon becoming a sought-after commodity.

Among the first wireless enthusiasts to grasp the “distinct and very important use for broadcasted entertainment,” Hugo Gernsback was quick to point out that, in addition to news and music, stock quotations and weather reports, radio listeners of 1922 could already tune in children’s stories, lectures, and “even complete musical shows or operas.” Conceivably, Gernsback marveled, “[e]ntire vaudeville programs that lend themselves to the purpose” could thus be relayed.² As the latter remark suggests, radio--an outgrowth of failed point-to-point wireless technology--came before the public as a transmitter, not as a translator or generator of art and entertainment. Just in which ways the audio-visual presentations of the stage needed be processed to “lend themselves” to on-air delivery and to what degree audiences accustomed to magazine fiction and comic strips, to stage spectacles and silent movies, had to be reconditioned or accommodated to conceive of such broadcasts as intelligible and evocative rather than puzzling and frustrating had to be worked out, by trial and error, before radio plays could succeed both as palatable entertainment and profitable enterprises.

The notion of the broadcast station as a bridge to and extension of the nation’s vaudeville houses and concert halls, its movie palaces and showboats, was instrumental to the shaping of one of the most prominent aspects of American broadcasting, namely the

development of the radio play as the people's theater. In pursuit of transmittable entertainment, some New York and Chicago broadcasters of the pre-network period literally took to the playhouses, transplanting dramatic performances by planting microphones in the orchestra pits, with announcers in the wings to translate the perceptual gaps created by silent stage business. It was a wireless update of the wired broadcast experiments conducted during the 1880s and '90s, theater-by-telephone services such as the Théâtrophone, by means of which subscribers, including Queen Victoria, enjoyed remote access to metropolitan playhouses.³ And although the theatrical productions were reviewed to gauge their broadcasting potential, with precedence given to musical comedies, no further attempts at obliging the sightless audience were made, resulting in transmissions that were rarely satisfying. As one drama critic pointed out in the November 1924 issue of Theatre Magazine, since stage actors perform "without regard to the locations of the microphones" the dialogue was "heard unevenly by listeners-in; some lines are too loud, some scarcely 'come through' at all."⁴ Yet what was first perceived as a technical problem was soon realized to be a serious lack of technique, defined by British radio drama producer Val Gielgud as the "application to a medium of artistic expression of the practical possibilities and limitations inherent in the medium in question."⁵ Added or adjusted microphones could assist in making a performance audible; they did little to encourage its listeners to become audile.

British and German advocates of radio art had always deprecated drama remotes as "unworthy of the wireless" since they reduced radio to a "mere relaying-apparatus," thereby negating a "world of sound differentiated from reality by its own formal laws."⁶ In the absence of such formal laws, radio was "condemned to a position of aesthetic contempt and practical inferiority."⁷ As Rudolf Arnheim remarked:

A grievous wrong is done to any work of art, however humble, if the audible is rudely torn from the wholeness of the visual plus acoustic impression and presented alone. Moreover, there is no more effective way

of destroying the only means of training the listener to concentrate on the audible. For if he is offered transmissions that can only be fully appreciated by the effort to enlarge them to the whole of which they may be a part, one cannot demand that in the radio play next day the world of sound should retain its hold without the aid of a visual supplement.⁸

In the United States, such comments were already commonplace before the formation of the networks, and they were voiced not only by high-hatting observers of mass culture but also by the medium's advocates and tributaries. In March 1926, for instance, a broadcast critic whose column purported to represent "The Listener's Point of View" complained that the reason for the general failure of radio drama had already "been stated so often" as to have "become banal: 'Radio is an entirely new medium and requires an entirely new and distinct type of play.' Yet, in spite of the frequent reiteration little has been done about it."⁹ In light of such criticism, the experimental relays, which continued until the end of the pre-network period, appear to be something other than "evidence" that "not even those closest to early radio had any clear conception of either its possibilities or its limitations."¹⁰ The broadcasters were not ignorant of the shortcomings of their remotes, but chose to ignore them. In a period during which radio was discovered as a "Profit Rainbow,"¹¹ the aesthetic possibilities of radio drama, much less the presentation of fully realized audio plays, were of little interest to a fledgling industry aiming at integration, not integrity.

Instead of declaring their independence by introducing a "new and distinct" art, broadcasters set out to involve the established sites of popular culture--the playhouses, the press, and the pictures--to demonstrate the potential benefits of multimediacy. The press being least adversarial (since prominent dailies were owners of stations) and the pictures being least advantageous (since film narratives were still pantomimic), pre-network radio was most eager to approach, engage, and approximate the popular playhouses. The

resulting interfaces were to define and circumscribe much of the dramatic entertainment presented on US network radio throughout the 1930s and '40s.

From Broadcasting Broadway to the Radio Guild: The Air Presumptive

The broadcasters stood to gain much from an association--or from being associated--with professional stage entertainment, particularly since their earliest efforts to produce radio plays were rather amateurish by comparison. The same critic who demanded "new and distinct" plays for the medium nonetheless insisted upon an alignment with the stage in order to debar the "second rate hams" of early radio dramatics "who would in no wise add to the glory of a third-rate stock company"; he reasoned that

nothing short of an all-star cast culled from the headliners of the legitimate stage would be able to put across a flawless radio play, so difficult is the chore. Such a cast we may not expect; but at least we may ask the station directors to come a little closer to it. High school dramatics may be endured while we are waiting for little Oswald to go up for his diploma, but they are likely to be tuned-out when they come via radio.¹²

Quite clearly, the days when the public marveled at reports that the WGY Players of Schenectady, New York, was using scripts "printed on paper of a quality that practically eliminates all noise of rustling"¹³ or had solved the "problem of entrance and exit of a character" by constructing a "special portable door and door frame"¹⁴ were coming to a close.

On the other hand, a pioneering troupe like the WGY Players could already count professional talent among its members, who, as the theatrical world duly noted, "were selected with regard to the distinctiveness of their voices." WGY had begun its drama broadcasts on August 3, 1922, with a production of The Wolf, a 1908 melodrama by American playwright Eugene Walter. Within the course of two years, the company under the direction of a former stage actor was considered the "leading repertory theater of the

ether”; its eighty-five productions ranged from one-acters to “full-length Broadway successes” like William Archer’s The Green Goddess.¹⁵ Since WGY stipulated, at first, that the dramatic broadcasts be limited to forty minutes, the WGY Players needed to modify the plays they presented. Four years prior to the advent of network broadcasting, which demanded precise timing to enable national hookups and imposed an inflexible grid upon its programming content, the WGY Players were already developing techniques of cutting and abridging, techniques that were to become the single most important aspect of adaptations for the medium.¹⁶ In most respects, then, the studio productions of many small-town radio stations were more suited to the medium than the drama remotes conducted by urban broadcasters. If New York broadcasters continued to step outside the reliable, acoustically stable environment of the studio to take their microphones to the footlights, they did so in an effort to convince theatrical producers, apprehensive about an upstart providing free home entertainment nightly, of the promotional benefits of radio in a competitive marketplace.

The editor of Theatre Magazine--a publication that followed the development of radio and its influence on the performing arts with keen interest--argued that theater managers had reason to be alarmed at radio’s growing popularity, pointing out that a single New Year’s broadcast from New York’s Metropolitan Opera House attracted an estimated six million listeners, affecting the “patronage of nearly every theatre on Broadway”; “[m]any plays for which it had generally been found impossible to buy seats, found themselves with empty rows.” Although Theatre Magazine suggested “better plays” as an “easy remedy,” drama remotes like Bertha Brainard’s *Broadcasting Broadway* (1922-24) were at least an attractive nostrum.¹⁷ In 1925, a planned collaboration of station WJZ, New York, with Lee and Jacob Shubert was hailed as

[o]ne of the most important of the recent developments in the theatrical world that probably will result in the broadcasting of theatrical productions heretofore withheld from the microphone [. . .]. It appears from the

conferences that the broadcasting of stage productions is now looked upon with favor, at least as far as the Shuberts are concerned. [. . .] The reaction of the radio audience will determine in a large measure the course to be taken in connection with future broadcasts, and it is reported that if the results at the box office are satisfactory the Shuberts may build their own broadcasting station.¹⁸

While this particular venture did not yield the desired results, media-savvy theatrical producers like Samuel “Roxy” Rothafel readily attributed “noticeable increases in attendance” to the “powerful interest-creating forces of radio; on at least one occasion a dismal financial failure was illuminated by the comforting light of more than mediocre success.”¹⁹ Theatre Magazine, for instance, reminded its readers that at least three thousand patrons of a 1923 Broadway production of Wildflower bought their tickets after hearing a “direct transmission” of the play over WEAJ, New York.²⁰

“No need to fear that radio is going to harm our theatre,” concluded another observer. “It is working for it, by encouraging millions to want to attend the living performance of the very finest order”; for “when they do listen to the radio they are not being fully satisfied and never will be, not while human things are in existence.”²¹ This backhanded compliment--acknowledging radio as an effective barker while dismissing its theatricals as mere sideshow--aptly describes the role broadcasters themselves were quite willing to negotiate for their protégé. Instead of striving toward the establishment of a fully realized alternative to the stage, broadcasters established radio dramatics as an ersatz theater that, by simultaneously providing and withholding access to the playhouse, not only left something to be desired, but actually fostered a longing for the theater--and the theater-going experience--as the real thing. Had the cat’s whisker simply announced a cat’s paw?

The formation of the networks (NBC in 1926, CBS in 1927) put a halt to drama remotes, since the radio industry was beginning to pursue national associates and urban

theaters had little use for coast-to-coast hook-ups. Having become hawkers for some of America's most prominent manufacturers, broadcasters ceased to be eager and effective barkers for local stage productions. Whereas local stations like WOR, Newark, continued both studio and relay broadcasts of plays,²² the schedules of the networks were dominated by musical-variety programs which, as their titles invariably proclaimed, were beginning to attract major corporate sponsors;²³ and despite an appreciable and steady increase, radio plays (including sketches, serials, and "star" drama) still occupied less than ten percent of the 1934 program schedules of major urban broadcasting stations.²⁴ With the *Hoover Sentinels*, the *Ipana Troubadours*, and the *Vicks Vaporub Quartette* singing the praises of commerce, there was little need and less room for dramatic experimentation. It was not until the end of the decade that the networks could afford to rethink the medium's theatrical ties. For this return to radio drama the collapse of the stock market created propitious conditions.

Whereas to most Americans the year 1929 marked the end of an era, the industry for whom networking (chain-broadcasting and synergism) had secured a central position in the widening web of multimediacy was entering a new phase marked by affluence and authority. Radio announcer Ted Husing went so far as to call 1929 a year that "ought to be haloed every time it appears in print"; it "was the year in which radio took its most dramatic place"; the year in which "programs reached high in the artistic world," as "[b]ig names of the stage, screen and concert platforms began to appear in the broadcast schedules"; it was the year in which radio became the "Fifth Estate."²⁵ And although both the fourth estate and Hollywood (that is, studios without corporate ties to network radio) made attempts to refuse their co-operation by keeping program listings off the page and matinee idols off the air, none could afford to turn a deaf ear to radio's ballyhoo.²⁶

During the mid-1930s, the network radio's growing influence and commercial appeal contributed to the rise of sponsored dramatic series which were *uber*produced with the generous budgets previously reserved for musical-variety shows. Procter & Gamble's

Uncle Charlie's Tent Show (1935) and Texaco's *Jumbo Fire Chief Program* (1935-36), both heard over NBC stations, were musical star vehicles (for Charles Winninger and Jimmy Durante, respectively) set in the very sawdust circuits radio had come to supersede--vaudeville and the circus. The latter program coincided with the extravagant and financially troubled Billy Rose production of *Jumbo* at New York's 4500-seat Hippodrome, the site from which the continuing comedy-melodrama of circus folk was broadcast each Tuesday evening. With a book by Charles MacArthur and Ben Hecht, a score by Richard Rodgers, lyrics by Lorenz Hart, and a large orchestra conducted by Adolph Deutsch--assets the announcer did not fail to point out at the beginning of each episode--the nostalgic *Jumbo Fire Chief Program* eulogized what Depression-era radio helped euthanize.

The program's central figure is not the impresario, but the press agent, Claudius "Brainy" Bowers (Durante), whose malapropism-filled fanfaronades nearly ruin the business. "However dark the clouds," "Brainy" insists in the premier broadcast ("[Trouble with the IRS]," **Oct. 29, 1935**), "people can always pay fifty cents for a peek at the pomp and glitter of old Roman days. The circus--what a spectacle, what a gold mine!" Yet the series' central story line suggests otherwise. Vilifying the Internal Revenue Service which threatens to close the alleged "gold mine" and glorifying the mobile and presumably Texaco-propelled American in search of honest labor, *Jumbo* dwells not on the glamour of popular stage entertainment but on its gloaming, reminding Depression-era audiences of the benefactions of gratis amusements which, under the sponsorship of major corporations like Texaco--the "Jumbo of gasolines"--pour into the home like fool's gold to airy thinness beat.

According to theater critic John Gassner, the mass media "drained off a good deal of the dross that the legitimate stage would have otherwise surely presented and for which it would have received the consent of large audiences, as it did in the nineteenth century."²⁷ During the 1930s, however, the depression accomplished most of the

drainage--and radio was a ready trough for talent. No longer were networks compelled to meet the stars of the legitimate theater at the footlights. As Daniel J. Czitrom points out, the medium “benefited enormously from the influx of talent that had been forced out of a depressed entertainment world.” Both vaudeville and the legitimate stage were adversely affected by the economy, convincing a great many performers temporarily to drop their masks for the sound stage.²⁸ The earliest studio broadcasts to avail themselves of eminent stage actors were produced by the *Radio Guild*, a weekly feature of NBC’s Blue network that originated from station WJZ, New York. Premiering just days after the stock market crash, on November 6, 1929, with a production of *Romeo and Juliet*, the anthology program presented adaptations of Western drama ranging from *Antigone* to *Craig’s Wife*. Initially known as the *Melodrama Hour* (excepting Shakespeare, no playwright featured more prominently than Boucicault), the program could boast “guest artists” like Eva Le Gallienne and Dudley Digges. Other “stars of the legitimate stage” to join the *Guild*’s stock players under the direction of Vernon Radcliffe, a former stage actor, included Tom Powers, Constance Collier, and Basil Rathbone.²⁹

Yet the newly reinstated soundstage repertoires were hardly a last resort for deracinated thespians who lowered themselves to microphone duty for the peddlers of soaps or cigarettes. It would take another decade until a dramatic series like *Mercury Theatre* would be souped up to serve the sponsors of the *Campbell Playhouse* (1938-41). Instead, the *Radio Guild* (which continued, with format changes, until 1940) was a sustaining program, a prestige effort that provided the network with an opportunity to mask its obligation to serve the “public interest, convenience, and necessity” as generous acts of good will. John W. Elwood, vice president of NBC, wished the program to be understood as an “extra-curricular course in appreciation of the drama,” well suited to “contribute immeasurably to the cultural welfare of the nation.”³⁰ For this, the *Radio Guild*, despite its appealing repertoire of popular plays, was granted “a cozy little obscure hour,”³¹ a weekday slot in the virtually unsponsorable mid-afternoon. Indeed, the caliber

of its occasional star actors notwithstanding, the *Radio Guild* still lacked both the showmanship and the shape of radio theater, qualities without which the adaptation of stage plays could not have become a key component of network programming.

Having attended the radio debut of Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Shaw's Eliza, who appeared on the *Radio Guild* program in the title role of Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, a part she had originated nearly four decades earlier, theater critic and novelist Howard Rockey remarked that "[a]lthough she probably played to more people in the course of that single hour than she has ever appeared before in the whole of her career," the actress was "greeted by no applause--save the congratulations of those in the studio."³² Its actors huddled before the microphones in a cramped studio, the *Radio Guild* was a showcase under wraps; as such, it became virtually unsponsorable. While borrowing most of its plays and some of its players from the theater, the *Radio Guild* left the boards, the pit and the gallery behind. Its well-intentioned, serious-minded director claimed that through his efforts radio drama had "won a complete divorce from the stage" and that it aspired instead to the condition of music.³³ To this end, Radcliffe introduced original plays to the repertoire and eventually dispensed with expensive guest stars, relying exclusively on radio performers whose voices and line readings were more ideally suited to the microphone.³⁴ Such rarefied notions about the medium's self-sufficiency did little to ensure the prominence--the visibility--of radio dramatics vis-à-vis the popular entertainments presented by the established commercial media. Unless they could attract a stage legend like Maude Adams, who headed the *Ponds Players* (1934) only after the show's producer, advertising agency J. Walter Thompson, agreed to dispense with spectators,³⁵ broadcasters, not satisfied with playing in the private ear, insisted on parading in the public eye. The theaters of the airwaves needed to materialize, to become concretized even in sound, if they were to matter to both networks and sponsors.

“This way to the big show!”: Realizing the Virtual Theater

Well before the construction of spacious venues for radio theater, such as the studios of Radio City, local broadcasters like WHB, Kansas City, tried to encourage their listeners to conceive of their radio station as a

great invisible theater, with all of the attributes of a tangible thing; with ushers, actors, seats, curtain, and, of course, a box-office for the usual purpose. Yearly tickets were to be sold, and a printed program was to be an extra service that went with contributions reaching a certain figure.³⁶

When corporate sponsors rather than individual listeners were expected to foot the bill, they too had a vested interest in promoting the listener's sense of the performance space as an electric market and meeting place where chestnuts were served and oranges promised. It is telling that most of the anthology series to succeed the *Radio Guild*, whether sponsored or sustaining, identified themselves as sites of entertainment or edification (*Knickerbocker Playhouse*, *Textron Theater*, *Brownstone Theater*); this was a pattern established by variety programs like *Maxwell House Show Boat*, *Hollywood Hotel* and *Kraft Music Hall*, imaginary meeting places reverberating with contrapuntal song and spiel.

Although the virtual playhouse in most cases bore little or no resemblance to the actual soundstage, the “theater” tag encouraged listeners to go and see the studios from which the spectacles originated; in turn, the “visible audience,” as radio researchers Hadley Cantril and Gordon W. Allport argued, provided “tangible evidence” for the sponsors that their “expensive program” was actually “reaching its human destination.”³⁷ The networks, likewise, were eager to exhibit talent and technology at work, to enhance both their image and visibility. For this purpose a number of Broadway theaters, including the Belasco and the Vanderbilt, became once more the site of drama broadcasts. In October 1930, NBC flagship WEA, New York, presented William Gillette as Sherlock Holmes, the role with which he had been most closely identified since 1899, by placing the aged

actor behind a soundproof “glass curtain” in the station’s Times Square studio atop the New Amsterdam Theatre; the studio audience heard the performers over loudspeakers in the auditorium.³⁸ “Picturesquely enough,” remarked Rockey in his review of this George Washington Coffee sponsored broadcast, the theater had been the site of Gillette’s farewell return to the footlights a year earlier.³⁹

As radio actress Mary Jane Higby describes it, the “physical setup” of most soundstage theatricals involved an orchestra seated backstage, a microphone suspended above the conductor’s head, with announcer and cast clustered around standing microphones at the front of the stage. When not reading their lines, actors were seated in a row before the orchestra, with the star performers near the center. To monitor audible spectator reaction, sound effects artists were moved as close to the wings as possible; otherwise, onlookers were apt to “show more interest in the rolling up of a window blind than they did in the drama,” an ocular preoccupation that could express itself in disruptive snickering during tensely dramatic scenes.⁴⁰ Introducing the playhouse atmosphere and entrepreneurial spirit of the early drama remotes to the heretofore remote soundstage, creators of radio entertainment had finally arrived at an architecture for radio drama that proved resonant to listeners, sponsors, and networks alike. The resulting dramatic presentations were byzantine echo chambers within whose reflexive borders the spoken word of the fragmented stage adaptation was just one of many languages competing for the listener’s attention.

One of the earliest drama anthologies to explore the potential of the play-as-theater format was *Hank Simmons’ Showboat*, an hour-long drama anthology that aired on CBS between 1928 and 1931. Broadcast writer Peter Dixon included a script excerpt in one of his critical radio play anthologies as an illustration of the “‘play within a play’ technique.”⁴¹ The weekly program was written, produced, and directed by Harry C. Browne, who also starred as Captain Simmons. To Rockey the show’s success bore out that “whatever theatrical modes may rule, everyone enjoys a show in which a villain still

pursues her. So it is lucky that the saw mill's buzz can be counterfeited thrillingly through the microphone."⁴² More than just presenting "clever condensations of such eight-act classics as *Osler Joe*, *The Fairy Well*, and other melodramas,"⁴³ however, Browne's program recreates both show and boat, vividly evoking the spectacle itself, the theater-going experience, as well as the drama behind the scenes. While sustaining, *Hank Simmons' Showboat* prefigures several of the major radio theatricals developed by advertising agencies like J. Walter Thompson and Procter & Gamble during the 1930s and '40s.

The program opened with a few words from popular announcer Harry Von Zell. Since *Hank Simmons' Showboat* was not sponsored, his main tasks were to demarcate the broadcast as a discrete yet regular feature of CBS by naming the network as well as next week's offering (for instance, "the "Western drama, 'Triss, or Beyond the Rockies'") at the close of the program, and to serve as an extradiegetic narrator by delivering its exposition:

To-night Hank Simmons'[s] floating theater, The Maybelle, lies moored along the levee of a Mississippi River town, actors and stage-hands are making final preparations for the evening performance, while outside along the levee the crowds are beginning to gather, attracted by Hank's band, which is giving the customary evening concert before the big show begins aboard the showboat.⁴⁴

Although it does not position listeners either as spectator or participant, this introduction is both vague and concrete enough to allow them to picture the scene. As the author of a 1941 textbook for college-level broadcasting students insisted, the majority of the culturally and intellectually diverse broadcast audience is sightless, not blind. The radio playwright is "writing for an audience that has mental images built upon remembrances of scenes and experiences which help it to visualize and to create scenery."⁴⁵ The sparing

use of descriptive adjectives and the general simplicity of the vocabulary enhances a program's chances of being imaged and appreciated by a large number of listeners.

Having been supplied with the *there* and now of the action, the sightless onlooker is then drawn into the scene by the voice of a barker and the sounds of a marching band animating a crowd:

This way, folks! This way to the big show! See the Hank Simmons Dramatic Comedy Company, playing the popular classical drama, "Ingomar the Barbarian." Four acts, with specialties between, no waits, show going on all the time! The first performance of this delightful comedy drama ever given aboard the showboat. Act one: The capture. Act two: The hostage. Act three: The conversion. Act Four: All's well that ends well. See Hank Simmons in the greatest part of his showboat career as Ingomar the Barbarian! See Maybelle as Parthenia, the beautiful Grecian maid! Special scenes and costumes for this beautiful Grecian play! This way, folks! Remember the prices--no advance for this performance. 10-20-30 cents. Box-office in the gangway yonder. Come one! Come all! See the great Hank Simmons Quartette and don't forget charming dainty Jane McGrew in their delightful specialties between the acts! This way, everybody!⁴⁶

The voice of the barker encourages listeners to see themselves as members of the crowd while reminding them of their inability to see for themselves; the "you are here" of the radio play is thus tempered with the "wish you were here" of radio theater.

Cantril and Allport held that this creates an "incomplete closure," which impels listeners to "supplement their auditor impressions with visual" by attending studio broadcasts,⁴⁷ which, the barker's solicitation drives home, cost even less than the entertainment aboard the showboat. Rockey remarked:

Listening to the announcer's spiel, one seems to join the chattering crowd as it passes up the gang-plank at the barker's invitation. In the studio the

other night, some fifty guests were present, and to their delight, they found themselves cast in the role of supers. At intervals in the action, the director help up cardboard signs which called for “Hearty Laughter,” “Groans,” “Applause”--and “Hisses!” The response was so spontaneous that those who listened could have no doubt that it was genuine.⁴⁸

The implicated audience members, later denounced by radio critic John Crosby as “one of the most lamentable mistakes ever made by radio,” and indeed as one of the medium’s “Seven Deadly Sins,”⁴⁹ were the real toads in broadcasting’s imaginary gardens. As such, they were inscripted and became an integral part of many programs, especially after the construction of large auditoria like studio 8-H in Radio City. After attending a mid-1930s broadcast of *Maxwell House Show Boat* (1932-37), a format-defining variety program inspired by the stage musical based on Edna Ferber’s 1926 novel, Cantril and Allport observed that the audience in studio 8-H “join[ed] the conspiracy with good humor,” even though they were informed that they would not be able to hear what they were meant to cheer because the vocal numbers were “sung softly and directly into the microphone.”⁵⁰ The apparent aesthetic imperfections of the occasionally unintelligible stage show were thus worked into an orchestral arrangement which contributed greatly to the popular success of a program Ring Lardner once commended for holding the “interest of even as dumb a drove of oxen as the great invisible audience (and the dumber drove that frequents the National Broadcasting Company’s Times Square studio)”⁵¹; only with the assistance of their choral cheers, the implicated audience was reminded, could the performance become complete.

For the home audience of a program like *Hank Simmons’ Showboat*, the sense of a performance in the works is amplified by the delay of the scheduled entertainment aboard the *Maybelle*. Led to the theater by the barker’s voice, the listener, rather than following the crowd into the theater, is held back and privileged instead to eavesdrop on Captain Simmons. Unlike the announcer and the barker before him, the Captain is not at this

moment in the service of the extended--real and imaginary--audience of "Ingomar the Barbarian," but is overheard reminiscing at the box office as he receives a surprise visit from a former member of his troupe who has turned producer himself. When asked about the performers, the jovial Captain boasts about his "great heavy man" and his "new ingenue soubrette," while his visitor, having played Ingomar in the past, recites the play's climactic lines, thereby disclosing the play's ending before the curtain opens: "Two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one."⁵²

It is not before the barker has made an attempt to pitch "beautifully illustrated" song albums that the Captain addresses the showboat audience to introduce the play (attributed to its translator, Maria Lovell, rather than its author) and the fictional players (rather than the radio actors). The truncated verse drama--reduced to far less than the already short time allotted for the program--is segmented into four acts, in the interstices of which Simmons steps out of his role as Ingomar to shift the scenes and direct the stagehands his verbal scene-setting renders unnecessary: "Clear stage! Second act! Barbarians ready! Flash the orchestra!"⁵³ The desire to eavesdrop is answered by mere echoes of theatrical pastness. *Hank Simmons' Showboat* meets the challenge of creating living theater out of dramatic matter it is at a loss to revive by implicating its listeners in a protracted rehearsal whose tone wavers between nostalgia and camp.

A transient theater approaching its audience and promising to lend gaiety and glamour to the otherwise thoroughly practical channels that enable its existence, the showboat serves as an apt metaphor for the variety-drama programs of 1930s network radio. "It's all business on the river now," a 1938 article in Radio Guide lamented about life on the Mississippi:

No more do the gaudy palaces of pleasure come down the old river
and tie up at the levees where the plantation children, black and white, used
to wait for them [. . .]. No more does the showboat captain stand on the
hurricane deck and address the folks, his Elk's-tooth watch-charm

glittering in the sun, and his deep sing-song voice assuring the river people that his showboat is the greatest on the Mississippi. No more do the bands parade through the sleepy plantation towns, scaring the mules and disturbing the cows that drowse by the plantation commissary. [. . .]

It's all gone.

Gone also was the naiveté with which the “folks”--who “like their melodrama raw and wild,” who “*live* the programs” they take in--believed in the *Show Boat* broadcasts, the latter-day substitutes for riparian thrills, a “faith” that once made them run to the levees in anticipation of the announced entertainment until it was shaken when the fictive riverboat was reported to be “tied up” at coastal Pensacola.⁵⁴ Instead of attempting to restore this “faith”--a dangerous undertaking, as “The War of the Worlds” would prove--networks and advertisers had a greater interest in preventing Depression-shaken listeners from questioning their trust in radio-promoted consumerism and the corporate sponsorship of the popular arts. Listeners were not to lose themselves in airwaved amusements, but to be won over by the advertisers sponsoring such fare.

Unlike the early drama remotes, which were intended for the advertisement of current if not necessarily less Victorian plays, the theater anthologies that emanated weekly from the broadcasting studio relied almost exclusively on tried-and-true vehicles to convey their promotional messages, so that, by the late 1930s, radio had become a year-round outlet for summer stock. When veteran theater producer Arthur Hopkins took to the airwaves, he declared his anthology *Arthur Hopkins Presents* (NBC, 1944-45) to be the “beginning of a people’s theatre and a repertory theatre,” arguing that radio offered a temporary “solution to the unavoidable extravagance of the commercial theater in shelving a play when the immediate audience has been served,” and to the “economic encumbrances” that made repertory “impractical” in a Broadway venue. By reprocessing recent stage successes, Hopkins sought to “create adult theatre audiences for them and eventually for Broadway.”⁵⁵ Although the series premiered promisingly with Thornton

Wilder's radiogenic Our Town, producers of anthology drama drew, for the most part, on material written for the very proscenium arch that radio plays could have so readily abolished.

Had Sheridan's Sir Benjamin Backbite been a media critic, he might have sneered that network radio was like a mended statue whose modern head rested on a trunk decidedly antique. In keeping with the nostalgia of its own *Show Boat* series, Maxwell House sponsored a series of *America's Lost Plays* (1939), under which rubric nineteenth-century crowd-pleasers like Adolphe D'Ennery's The Two Orphans, George C. Hazelton's Mistress Nell, and Charles Hoyt's A Trip to Chinatown were presented. Even educational programs like NBC's sustaining matinee *Great Plays* (1938-42), designed to "trace the development of drama from the sunrise performances in ancient Athens down to the contemporary dramas produced on Broadway"--devoted much time to productions of plays like Henry Arthur Jones's The Silver King, William Gillette's Secret Service, and The Octoroon, whose playwright, Boucicault, was described by host and *Best Plays* editor Burns Mantle as a "sort of theatrical godfather to George M. Cohan" (Feb. 12, 1939). Indeed, when Welbourn Kelley, who scripted a broadcast lecture on "The Victorian Era" (Feb. 23, 1941), acknowledged that the period could be defined as one in which "playwrights utterly failed to grasp the realities around them--the vast social and economic changes; in which the drama as an art form was almost allowed to lapse by default," his remarks might have served as a commentary on the general state of network drama in the months prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor.⁵⁶

Network radio's reliance on adaptations from stage and screen was rooted in part in the broadcasters' interpretation of service in the public interest, as demanded yet ill defined by the FCC. To network executives, it became the need to please all and offend none, an obligation which resulted in content guidelines for dramatic programs that made the motion picture production code seem permissive. "The most modest of Broadway plays would have to be expurgated before it could be sent into the pure country air,"

remarked Abbot; and while melodrama became a “popular radio form” it had to be “somewhat Victorian in character, for the unseen audience will not permit the air to be polluted by profanity or suggestiveness.”⁵⁷ When Irene Westcott, the eavesdropper of John Cheever’s “Enormous Radio,” tunes in a man’s voice uttering “something dirty,” she can readily dismiss her husband’s suggestion that “It’s probably a play.”⁵⁸ Was it “any wonder,” sneered a critic in the Forum,

that outstanding plays suffer so by adaptation by radio? Seduction is purified to a mere kiss. Sadie Thompson is simply a naughty woman who apparently uses too much make-up. A playwright’s lovable old souse becomes merely a character to be pitied because he has grown untidy and doesn’t care if he spills ashes over his vest.⁵⁹

Playing in the public ear and increasingly projecting the voice of their sponsors, the networks presented sanitized classics with a squeamishness that inspired Rockey to quip that a rumored radio adaptation of Lysistrata “would be more like the silent drama than any screen play ever produced prior to the talkie invasion.”⁶⁰ And even though the FCC did not interfere with network programming, the very threat of a revoked license caused broadcasters to adopt strict codes of self-censorship. As the result of a single listener complaint about an adaptation of Eugene O’Neill’s Beyond the Horizon, which retained the words “hell,” “damnation,” and “for God’s sake,” several NBC Blue affiliates were cited by the FCC and ordered to defend their decision to air such an offensive program.⁶¹ To network audiences, O’Neill was presented chiefly as a man who had sighed Ah, Wilderness!, a sponsor-soothing susurrant that made for a “nostalgic hour” reminiscing about the era of James O’Neill--“Merry Widow hats, chatelaine bags, and black lisle stockings”--on programs like *The Theatre Guild* (1943-53).⁶²

In its stimulation of desires for domestic comforts and its accentuation of wish fulfillment--the temporary satisfaction of a craving for the unattainable--nostalgia was recognized to be an ally to commercialism, as long as producers could translate abstract

longing into concrete demand. The elaborate frame narrative of *Hank Simmons' Showboat*, which reifies the stage at the expense of the plays it was presumably designed to contain, thus served as a model for a virtual playhouse dedicated not so much to the presentation of drama as to the drama of presentation. To sponsors, to whom display's the thing, the self-conscious play-as-theater approach to adaptation was an attractive alternative to engrossing melodrama. It made full use of the spectacular without encouraging listeners to get too wrapped up in the play thus packaged.

“Presenting for your delectation and enjoyment . . .”: Bread and Circuity

By the mid-1930s, the make-believe theater was a familiar construct, used to advantage even by programs not devoted to adaptation of stage plays. For example, the highly popular *First Nighter Program* (which discontinuously ran from 1930 to 1953), distinguished itself from other boy-meets-girl playcycles by what one reviewer described as a “succession of illusions”:

The trip in a taxicab to the theater off Times Square, the exciting entrance into the theater itself with the deft suggestions of lights and glamour, the subdued rustling of an audience impatiently waiting for the curtain to rise, the appearance of the actors on the stage in a new and often uncommonly good play, and finally the exit from the theater into the street, with the newsboys shouting the morning extras in the distance--all of these illusions are built up and caught in a swift, sure pattern of sound.⁶³

Few dramatic anthology series realized the commercial advantages of the play-as-theater technique with greater ingenuity than *The Wonder Show* (1936), an hour-long program conceived by Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn for their client, the Continental Baking Company. Ranging from the sensational (*Sweeney Todd*) to the sentimental (*Uncle Tom's Cabin*), *The Wonder Show's* “gaslight-era conception of satirized melodramas” not only “exploited the quaint rococo charms of Grandpa's day,”

but “provided the public with legitimized opportunities to hoot and poke fun at the entertainment.”⁶⁴ Notwithstanding the short run of this series, which originated from WOR and aired in a prominent 9:00-10:00 PM EST slot over the Mutual network, one of its scripts was included in a 1938 anthology of exemplary Radio Continuity Types. Introduced by a theater manager, who ostensibly spoke from the “vast Mecca Temple in New York City,” *The Wonder Show* promised a

full hour of breath-taking melodrama, delightful music and good old fashioned gayety. [. . .] Responsible for this presentation are the Happy Wonder Bakers, whose famous slo-baked Wonder Bread and Hostess Cake are the first choice of millions of women. Each Sunday night at this same hour the *Wonder Show* brings you a revival of a genuine old fashioned melodrama, played as it was originally played--with boos and hisses for the villain and his cohorts, cheers and applause for the hero and heroine.⁶⁵

Nostalgia, high camp, and salesmanship merge in a clever spiel that promotes a longing for--or at least a disposition in favor of--past times, pastiche, and pastry.

Having supplied the sales pitch, the theater manager calls to the microphone his star actor, the Great McCoy (played by Orson Welles), who introduces the play--which, on the October 25, 1936 broadcast, was an adaptation of Parted on Her Bridal Tour--provides the exposition, “for the benefit of those who arrived too late to secure the handsomely embossed program,” and relates the company’s experience touring with this “handsome and costly” production, which

has been received with mighty acclaim over the length and breadth of the vast land except in Niagara Falls. After our first performance in that Eden of America the city authorities requested us to change the bill as the many honeymooning couples in the audience were found trying to occupy the same seat, so affected they were by the plight of the lovely heroine [. . .].⁶⁶

At the beginning of the second act, McCoy boasts that the scenery, a “startling reproduction of the great Pennsylvania railroad station” is so “realistic” that he feels “compelled to request that all Long Island commuters in the audience refrain from letting imagination play havoc and trying to run up on the stage to catch the five-fifteen.”⁶⁷ The rodomontade of such anecdotes establishes a satiric tone that further undermines the mimetic potential of play and performance; it invites the listener to assume instead the role of an amused, emotionally detached auditor of the drama presentation who, rather than becoming absorbed in the action, participates in a merry ritual of hissing the villain and partakes of the commodities of a transpontine setting in which vendors of food and drink compete with the entertainment onstage.

Gilbert Seldes, himself a producer of dramatic radio series and adapter of stage plays, once referred to broadcast writing as the “pumping out of never-ending waters of oblivion”—the novel art of writing “*in order to be forgotten*.”⁶⁸ By sending up the forgettable and passé, *The Wonder Show* draws attention to the surface on which the sponsor’s product is laid out. Rather than creating a sense of intimacy, loyalty, and spectatorial passivity by “encouraging” listeners “to see themselves and to behave as a *disciplined* audience,”⁶⁹ the commercially sponsored theaters of the air create a permissive structure in which audiences find themselves freed from the captivating illusions of the proscenium arch to mingle instead with an imaginary, vocal crowd so as to take in the overarching drama of the theater as a site of commerce. Not unlike the variety format, in which jingles and jokes, show tunes and sales pitch complement each other so as to become a program’s central dialogue, the theater-as-play format diminishes the boundaries between commercial packaging and dramatic content by fashioning a continuum of theatrical spiel and entertainment.

Indeed, subsumed under the title of the Great McCoy are the roles of theatrical star, dramatic character, radio announcer, and narrator. Between each of the three acts, McCoy steps out of his role as Karl Heathcliffe, delivers the sales talk, coyly presented as

“education and enlightenment,” introduces the musical numbers, and raises the curtain:

In order that you will not be over-taxed by the emotional strain of “Parted on Her Bridal Tour,” the Happy Wonder Bakers perform a song, for which number we are going to forget that footlights separate the performers from the audience and make this vast and sumptuous auditorium one big stage.

During the second chorus each and every one of you join in.⁷⁰

Even though the hero of the play never has to stoop to cupcakes, the commercial messages are nonetheless integrated into the overarching drama of the spectacle; since they do not interfere with but reinforce the play-as-theater, they are not perceived as disruptive, and thus more likely to be received favorably by the listener. The episodic drama--the plot of which involves bigamy, somnambulism, and jailbreak--is rendered insignificant enough to prevent the radio audience from resenting its segmentation, while the sophisticated reflexivity of the entire program is engaging enough to make tuning-in worthwhile.

In all this, the bathetic and fragmented plays presented on programs like *Hank Simmons' Showboat* and the *Wonder Show* are entirely in keeping with the spirit of stage melodrama, which, as Michael Booth points out, is “not only a rapid sequence of breath-taking incidents and situations, but also a pattern of equally rapid changes from the horrible and the pathetic to the humorous and absurd and back again, without any sense of impropriety.”⁷¹ And not unlike nineteenth-century dramatists, whose plays needed to withstand the poor acoustics and dim lighting of the large playhouses, writers and adapters for the new medium had to accommodate audiences who, challenged not only by static and acoustic interference, but by generations of visual conditioning, were not always able to remain intent upon a particular performance. “Hearing a play on the radio demands concentrated attention,” observed one contemporary critic of the medium,

a quality not yet possessed by American listeners except that small group of earnest music lovers. It is doubtful they will ever acquire it. It is difficult

to conceive of Americans minimizing the distractions to eye and ear about them to listen in silence and darkness--and silence and darkness are essential--to the broadcast of drama.⁷²

Unencumbered by concerns of artistic integrity and fidelity, the play-as-theater format of programs like the *Wonder Show* not only makes fewer demands on the listener, but is in many respects more radiogenic than the dramas heard on legitimate theater series like *Great Plays* and *Arthur Hopkins Presents*, sustaining programs that did not reassemble the building blocks of the Freytag pyramid to serve as stepping-stones to profit. George Wells, for nine years in charge of preparing stage and screen properties for the Lever Brothers sponsored *Lux Radio Theatre* (1934-55), readily accepted that “cutting,” although a “very ugly word,” had justly become a “synonym for *adapting*.” To make such cuts possible without rendering the condensed plot unintelligible, adapters needed to rewrite rather than preserve most of the original text, bridging gaps through interpolated narration, sound effects and musical curtains, techniques that assist in positioning the players and propelling the action.⁷³ Arthur Hopkins, by comparison, was vehemently opposed to translation; rejecting the compère, retaining original dialogue, and reducing “obtrusive” sound effects and music to a minimum, he insisted on dramacasts that “meticulously preserved” the “inherent” rather than the “imposed value” of the stage play to be broadcast.⁷⁴ As a result, the ostensibly faithful adaptations staged for *Arthur Hopkins Presents* come across as breathlessly diffuse, their nearly incessant chatter conveying little sense of place or time, but an image of performers rushing to and from the microphone in the bootless attempt to recite as much of the original text as possible within the allotted sixty minutes.

Chiefly making editorial adjustments in order to eliminate radiopaque passages (i.e. the inseting of proper nouns or the naming of props), such reproductions did not attempt to capture what John Drakakis calls “the essence that is not seen,” let alone engage in an “‘intertextual’ relationship” that commented on the “mediating influence” exerted upon the

source material.⁷⁵ In this respect, the *Campbell Playhouse* production of The Green Goddess (Feb. 10, 1939) is almost experimental in its realization of the radiogenic potential of a melodrama whose central plot device is a wireless transmitter in the struggle of control over which imperialist anxieties are played out. Howard Koch, the adapter largely responsible for the “War of the Worlds” script, translates *in medias res* for the broadcast medium by commencing the play in midair, thus prior to the emergency landing that delivers three Britons into the hands of the ruthless Raja of Rukh, a new opening line signaling their impending isolation: “Can you do anything about the wireless?” Throughout the broadcast, Koch proved that he could do something *with* it by intercutting the events in the Raja’s transmitter-equipped palace with the attempts of a search party to establish radio communication with the hostages. The Green Goddess thus becomes a play “about the wireless,” about the imperative of techno-literacy when confronted with the challenges of reaching out to a remote audience.⁷⁶

As Helen Hayes reminded listeners in a statement read at the close of the *Campbell Playhouse* presentation of Molnar’s carnival romance Liliom (Oct. 22, 1939), Welles’s program was

a *real* radio show, produced for the air, without a stage, without a curtain, without an audience in the studio. It allows the producer to produce and the actors to act for their *real* radio audience, for those millions of listeners sitting at their radio sets in their own homes all over the country.

By comparison, the literal-minded version of The Green Goddess staged before a studio audience nearly a decade later by the *Theatre Guild* (Oct. 20, 1947) forgoes radiogenic revision in favor of a boards-fixated fidelity that bespeaks the conservative approach to adaptation taken by the producers of most prestige drama anthologies. The *Guild* authenticated its condensation of Archer’s play by pointing out that star Ronald Colman had been in the original production a quarter century earlier, albeit as a supernumerary.

More than twenty years after the failure of the drama remotes, a radio playhouse like *Arthur Hopkins Presents* still treated the medium as an adjunct to an economically challenged theater, a makeshift stage to be demolished after the war, without acknowledging that the soundstage had already become the people's theater, that commercial broadcasting, even when it resorted to the adaptation of plays or scenarios, had developed its own formats, techniques, and voice talents, which producers of soundstage entertainment would do well to exploit and promote. Its very title, not "meaningful to any but a handful of theatregoers",⁷⁷ signaled the aural ineffectuality of Hopkins's short-lived and apparently unsponsorable program, a defect rooted in the presumption that broadcasting meant transmission rather than production. Whereas the *Wonder Show* availed itself of a radio-trained stock company including Jeanette Nolan, Frank Readick, Ted de Corsia, and Ed Jerome, prestige programs were often ill-served by a stars-and-sticks system that favored theatrical performers who were unable to emote with script in hand or had little respect for the medium. Recordings of the program demonstrate the shortcomings of Hopkins's Broadway casting. The acclaimed stage actress Pauline Lord, for instance, sounds mechanical and misses her cues in her reprisal of her 1932 role of Abby in the *Arthur Hopkins Presents* revival of The Late Christopher Bean (June 21, 1944), while a nonchalant Roland Young not merely slurs his lines as Lord Arthur Dilling, a part he first played in 1925, but appears to be inebriated as he pronounces The Last of Mrs. Cheyney (July 12, 1944). Rendering these comedies barely intelligible, let alone aesthetically pleasing, fluffed lines and uninterpreted stage business reduced many a potent melodrama to mere thud and blunder.

"If radio is to survive as an art," one early critic of network radio remarked, "it must do so by 'hitching its wagon to a star' as all other amusement lines have done before it!" He did not refer to borrowed celebrities from film and stage, but to the medium's own disembodied entertainers, who, "no matter how well qualified [. . .] from the radio viewpoint," were likely to get "lost in the shuffle" unless they had, "in a sense, been 'radio

dramatized.”⁷⁸ Although beholden to their client, the producers responsible for a program like *Wonder Show* were aware that it would behoove them to exploit and advance radiogenic performers such as Frank Readick whom frequent listeners were likely to recognize from other programs. Like *Hank Simmons' Showboat*, the *Wonder Show* presented its list of cast and characters in the manner of Victorian melodrama; yet the creators of the latter improved upon its predecessor by using this technique to advertise the actual radio players. The Great McCoy, who alone stays in character here, rather than becoming Orson Welles, announces the

handsome and stalwart leading man, Mr. Ned Wever who plays the part of Frederick Esmond [. . .]. Irene Middleton, the lovely niece of John Middleton will be performed by our talented and winsome little leading lady, Rita Johnson. The taxing role of Emily, a deserted wife, is in the capable hands of Jeanette Nolan. The scheming Dr. Ross will be played by our talented heavy man, John McIntire.⁷⁹

Commercial or sustaining, no radio theater on the air could entirely ignore the medium's potential--its need--to foster and exhibit its own voice talents in plays adapted to their vocal range and personae. This was acknowledged even by the creators of conservative programs like the *Lux Radio Theatre*, who perfected the theater-as-play format to serve not one, but two master builders of network entertainment--the corporate sponsors and the motion picture industry.

A “special treatment”: Where One Hand Washes Another

Michele Hilmes has pointed out that three dominant “institutions” are involved in the production of the *Lux Radio Theatre*--the sponsor, commercial radio, and Hollywood--whose conflicting demands account for the show's framing and fragmentation. Equating the broadcasting institution with the network airing the program, and Hollywood with the motion picture industry, Hilmes distinguishes two main “purposes” of a *Lux*

program, namely its *raison d'être* as a means of “boosting the fame and familiarity of Hollywood’s movie stars, and as a “source of ready-made ‘glamour’ and attraction,” designed to “draw” listeners to the commercial message. Yet while dominated by those interests, a network like CBS (which aired the *Lux* program for most of its run) did not entirely abdicate; in other words, the networks were not merely the providers of production and transmission facilities. A third role of *Lux*, exercised on special, although not infrequent occasions, was to pay tribute to network entertainment itself, to advertise programs and players, and to extol the virtues of commercial radio as the live medium that brought together small-town America, big business, and larger-than-life Hollywood. It was in its mediation between the ordinary and the supreme that a middlebrow program like *Lux* served to promote network programming as a commercially effective and culturally sophisticated hub for consumers, sponsors, and related entertainment industries.⁸⁰

Prior to its move from New York to Hollywood on June 1, 1936, *Lux* had been an anthology series of Broadway plays, distinguished from earlier drama programs by its advantageous nighttime spot, which it held for twenty seasons. Having secured the sponsorship of Lever Brothers with an audition recording of The Green Goddess, *Lux* had a budget large enough to cast prominent actors of stage and screen in all of its productions. When it was broadcast from New York, *Lux* presented Helen Hayes in James M. Barrie’s What Every Woman Knows, Eva Le Gallienne in David Belasco’s The Girl of the Golden West, and Ethel Barrymore in Henry Arthur Jones’s Mrs. Dane’s Defense. The venerable William Gillette was once more given an opportunity to assume the title role of his Sherlock Holmes, and both Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford and The Song and Dance Man starred their famous author, George M. Cohan, who was at one point considered as a compère for the *Lux* broadcasts.⁸¹

Like *Hank Simmons’ Showboat* and the *Wonder Show*, *Lux* brought cohesion to the loose feature format of anthology programs by employing a fictitious impresario

character, a figure whose very name, Douglass Garrick, evoked the romance of the footlights. As the show relocated to Hollywood, however, the creators of *Lux* improved upon this formula, central to the theater-as-play construct, by giving the part of the manager-host to Cecil B. DeMille, who appeared under his own household name, but in the fictive capacity of producer. In this guise DeMille mediated between story and sponsor, between actors and audience. In a scripted chat before the curtain he introduced the stars, some of whom he pointed out as sitting in the auditorium of the Vine Street Theater (the actual site of the broadcast) along with the general public. The *Lux Radio Theatre* was not just home to the luminaries of the studio system--it presented itself as an open house. Whereas a "Broadway first night" entertained only the "few hundred people who can enjoy the play," and a "Hollywood premiere is exciting for the few thousands who gather to see the stars," an "opening night in the *Lux Radio Theatre* belongs to the millions, the millions in American homes and camps from coast to coast," an enthusiastic DeMille greeted those tuning in to "The Phantom of the Opera" (Sept. 13, 1943), a broadcast that marked the beginning of *Lux*'s ninth season. The play's theatrical setting served to support the program's commerce-as-theater format. DeMille reminded listeners that they could assist "backstage in this theater," not merely by buying soap--"I think you'll do that anyway"--but by sending in requests and comments ("you give all the orders for our command performances"). Such written feedback, in turn, enabled broadcasters to gauge the effectiveness of their programs and to demonstrate it to its sponsors.

Combining the dramatic formats of early 1930s programs like *On with the Show*, a local West Coast series that presented adaptations of scenarios reenacted by motion picture soundalikes,⁸² and the showmanship of promotional efforts like the *Paramount-Publix Playhouse* or the *MGM Movie Club*, which exploited "the romantic appeal of hearing something direct from Hollywood,"⁸³ *Lux* made distant stars seem closer, thus realizing the broadcast medium's distinct quality of intimacy. As DeMille is heard saying in his introduction to "The Whole Town's Talking" (Feb. 24, 1941):

One of the miraculous things about radio is the feeling of intimacy between the people on your side of the microphone and the people on this side.

Long before I ever met tonight's stars, I considered them as old friends; because, like millions of other radio listeners, on Tuesday nights my ears belong to Fibber McGee and Molly.

Especially during the war years, the days of rationing and sacrifice, *Lux* downplayed the glamorous in favor of the homey, an image adjustment for which the casting of wholesome radio personalities, America's house guests, was an ideal choice. The familiar voices of the airwaves who mingled with that of the formidable *Lux* spokesperson in the radio theater suggested that water could be thicker than blood, provided it was worked into a purifying lather.

The frequent appearances of radio players like the Jordans (*Fibber McGee and Molly* [1935-57])--whose program aired on another network, had a different sponsor, and could boast higher ratings than *Lux* (CBS's most popular show)--demonstrate the willingness of all institutions involved to perpetuate broadcasting's revenue-generating multimediacy, the success stories of which were played out in print and on screen (in Fibber's case, in RKO features like the 1941 box office success Look Who's Laughing).⁸⁴ Featuring such crossover performers encouraged the producers of *Lux* to modify the show's established format of (screen)play reenactments and resulted in adaptations that were more flexible, radiogenic, and coherent than those presented on the highbrow theater matinees or the lowbrow *Wonder Show*. While not opposed to serving as a promotional vehicle for the broadcasting industry, as was the case when Bob Hope appeared in a dramatization of his latest book, I Never Left Home (Jan. 8, 1944)--which would become the non-fiction bestseller of 1944⁸⁵--the Peabody Award winning *Lux* program generally found a middlebrow compromise by providing image-appropriate roles for network notables, for instance by featuring newspaper columnist and radio commentator Walter Winchell as fast-talking Hildy Johnson in Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur's 1928 stage

hit The Front Page (June, 28, 1937), or by revising some of its earlier adaptations of Broadway plays into proper vehicles for the voice talents of radio's star comedians. The stagy version of the George S. Kaufman and Marc Connelly scripted comedy Dulcy (1921) from the program's New York run (Oct. 28, 1935) was suited to the scatterbrained volubility of radio vaudevillian Gracie Allen and her foil, George Burns, who were aided by a supporting cast of players from the original Broadway production (Mar. 29, 1937). George Kelly's The Show-Off, first heard on *Lux* with Joe E. Brown in the title role (Dec. 9, 1935), was customized for the chortling Harold Peary, better known to radio listeners as *The Great Gildersleeve* (1941-57), a *Fibber McGee and Molly* spin-off (Feb. 1, 1943).⁸⁶

The most intricate of these revisions was *Lux*'s September 26, 1938, production of Seven Keys to Baldpate. The reflexive story proved another effective showcase for one of radio's most recognizable performers, Jack Benny, who, together with his wife and co-star Mary Livingstone, had previously appeared on *Lux* (Feb. 15, 1937) in an update of the 1906 stage version of George Barr McCutcheon's novel Brewster's Millions (1902). Such revisitations were not entirely new to the former vaudevillian. Before guest-starring on prestige programs like *Campbell Playhouse*, where he snatched the lead from "acting coach" Welles in an adaptation of the 1929 Kaufman-Lardner comedy June Moon (Mar. 24, 1940), Benny had already drawn on a number of well-known American plays--low, high, and middlebrow alike--as material for his own comedy-variety programs (1932-55). He was heard in none-too-subtle burlesques of melodramas like Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl (Jan. 22, 1933) and Uncle Tom's Cabin (Dec. 10, 1933), in which Tom--played by a pre-"Rochester" Benny--is confronted with the threat of being sold to the *Show Boat* program. "What was that noise, Mary?" Benny asks as the curtain rises on a bungled adaptation of Ah, Wilderness! (Apr. 12, 1936). Livingstone's response: "O'Neill just turned off his radio."

In George M. Cohan's Seven Keys to Baldpate, itself a farcical reworking of a 1913 mystery novel by Charlie Chan creator Earl Derr Biggers, "cheap melodramatic ranter" William Hallowell Magee accepts a \$5000 challenge by his friend Hal Bentley, who dares him to write a novel within twenty-four hours. For this Magee has been granted what he believes to be the only key to Bentley's Baldpate Inn, a summer resort shut down for the winter. During his night at the inn, Magee faces an omnium-gatherum of ganefs and loons, until Bentley appears to disclose that the bizarre goings-on were a practical joke designed to illustrate "how perfectly improbable and terrible [Magee's] awful stories [. . .] would seem if such things really and truly happened." The epilogue of the play, however, reveals the action to be a dramatization of the novel Magee actually completed that night; he wins the wager by fictionalizing his challenge. The *Lux* broadcast fictionalizes an updated, topical variant of this challenge, turning a frothy farce into a self-conscious commentary on the condition of radio entertainment in relation to screen and stage.⁸⁷

In his introduction to *Lux*'s return to Baldpate, DeMille informs the audience that the drama for the evening would be a "special treatment" of Cohan's play, "which finds Mr. Benny tackling one of the most difficult roles of his career: the role of Jack Benny." The "producer's" talk before the curtain is a plug presented as a mild insult comedy act, an effective stratagem to promote and perpetuate the Benny persona. Its allusions to Benny's "debonair violin-playing," and his "flashy Maxwell towncar" were hardly lost on the millions of Americans who listened to NBC's Jell-O sponsored *Jack Benny Program*, which was about to resume after its customary summer hiatus. DeMille tells his listeners as much, referring to Benny as "Mr. Livingstone" whom Mary always brings to "her" radio program; "and when she goes back on the air next Sunday, she'll once again try and have a place for him." As Benny is being put in his place by a reputable Hollywood authority, the comedian's "place" on the *Lux* stage and the extent to which radio as the

new people's theater should accommodate or relate to the old vaudevillians become concerns dramatized in the broadcast.

Having told the anecdote of how Cohan got to star in his play after he and his leading actor had suffered a serious accident (in Cohan's case, a broken collar bone), DeMille relates Mary's response that "if Mr. Cohan could carry on with such a handicap, she could carry on with Jack Benny." The "handicap" is the Benny character's notorious vainglory, of course, his failure to come to terms with his artistic limitations and his senescence; yet it is also vaudeville itself, the expired passport to the airwaves. Anthology programs like *Lux* gave vaudevillians an opportunity to step outside the narrow confines of their routines and to show their dramatic abilities in plays akin to the dynamic situation comedy, an increasingly popular format used by the new radio comedians. Comedy and variety stars like Benny continued to "radio dramatize" their acts by appearing on shows like *Lux*, *Campbell Playhouse*, and the *Ford Theater* (1947-49) in performances that could also serve to prepare audiences for the attempts of their favorite radio personalities to take on dramatic film and stage roles.

"Whether he knows it or not, the comedian is on a treadmill to oblivion," Benny's archrival, the satirist Fred Allen, concluded his 1954 epitaph for radio comedy:

When a radio comedian's program is finally finished it slinks down Memory Lane into the limbo of yesteryear's happy hours. All that the comedian has to show for his years of work and aggravation is the echo of forgotten laughter.⁸⁸

Lux's revision of Seven Keys to Baldpate parodies the anxiety of radio artists to achieve lasting cultural significance by turning Cowan's novelist Magee into "Jack Benny," a frustrated comedian who, hankering after roles in "serious pictures" no director seems willing to offer him, accepts the challenge to design a dramatic vehicle for himself; and since "fourteen hundred actors in Hollywood have refused [his] generous bribes to play the part," DeMille tells the audience that he agreed to assign his "customary duties" as

narrator to announcer Mel Ruick in order to assume the role of Benny's challenger, Cecil B. DeMille. While emphasizing his role as producer, DeMille, for the only time in his involvement with *Lux*, steps out of the frame, past the musical curtain, and into the action.

Not remembered for its prose, Cowan's play is thoroughly multimediated, peppered with verbal and musical allusions to radio programs, Hollywood stars, and popular news items. The highbrow/lowbrow debate is played up with Benny's violin, which, at the opening of the first act, is heard in a wistful--and awful--rendition of "Thanks for the Memory," a new tune that had already become associated with another one of Benny's rivals, Bob Hope.⁸⁹ The "intermission," the second and longer break between the three acts in which *Lux* customarily offered its adaptations, is an elaboration on one of the most famous running jokes of radio comedy, dramatically played out on a number of programs. In a style mocking the sophisticates' disdain of the popular, announcer Mel Ruick asserts that

due to the insidious machinations of Jack Benny all violinists have fallen into a mild sort of disrepute, and especially a certain composition for the violin written by Schubert, a composition spelled B, as in Benny, E, E. Like a knight of old, aglow with the fierce flame of vengeance, Mr. Zimbalist is here to right an ancient wrong and to play the "Bee" with some regard for Mr. Schubert and the sensibilities of listening America. At last, Mr. Benny is cornered.

Struggling with his lines, Efrem Zimbalist comments on Benny's musical abilities, concluding that "when a violinist tries to be a comedian, or when a comedian tries to be a violinist, Heaven help the audience." Other than the announcement that the interlude is presented "with the good wishes of the makers of *Lux* flakes," the "intermission" does not contain a commercial message. A privileged spot is surrendered to the advancement of high culture, made to appear relevant and disarming to a wide audience.

The farce continues very much in keeping with the spirit of Cowan's play; yet unlike many adaptations prepared for anthologies like *Lux*, which are marred by their unimaginative and superficial fidelity to an original on whose memorability they depend and frequently insist, the radio version of Seven Keys to Baldpate exhibits a new wrinkle as it folds. When Benny presents his script in a conference with DeMille, he learns that he lost the wager after all, since the story, far from being original, had already been a novel in 1910 [sic], a play in 1913, a Paramount silent movie in 1925, and an RKO talkie in 1930. "I thought it was my brainchild," Jack sighs, to which Mary replies, "and it turned out to be an orphan." Without giving credit to the adapters of its dramas, *Lux* anticipates here the frequent complaints about the theaters of the air, namely that they were responsible for the literary critics' disregard of "radio writing" as an "orphan child of accepted literature." Rather than training and promoting its writers, as former CBS director of script and continuity Max Wylie commented in 1939, radio had

appropriated almost all of them, at least all of those who could tell a good story. The medium used for this storytelling has been of secondary concern. If the elements are present in the original and if these elements are properly recognized and intelligently treated, a good radio adaptation will probably result. But this, in the artistic and creative sense, has not been radio writing. It has been an effort in translation; it has been a work of appropriation whose legitimacy depends upon the skill of its treatment but whose real existence depends upon the work of some able craftsman who quite likely never anticipated the electrical accident of the microphone.⁹⁰

What constitutes radio writing in the case of an "effort in translation" such as "Seven Keys to Baldpate," however, is the careful construction of the show's continuity. Unlike the *Wonder Show*, which did not attempt to negotiate between art and entertainment, the *Lux* broadcast achieved an integration of its drama presentation into an intricately structured

comedy-variety program. Rather than fragmenting and subordinating the adaptation to the theater-as-play frame, it segmented and incorporated the drama into a play about Hollywood, popular culture, and radio vaudeville--the house that Jack Benny built.

At the end of this carnivalesque broadcast, the two leads resume the roles prescribed by the formats of their respective shows, as "Mr. DeMille, the actor, surrenders to Mr. DeMille, your host and producer," while Benny bids farewell to the theater, promising to "wash [his] hands of the whole thing"; "and to show you there's no hard feelings," Benny tells DeMille in a rare nod to a competing sponsor, "I'll do it with Lux." The entire broadcast is offered as a generous show of good will and showmanship performed at an accommodating concourse of culture and commerce. Since the intentions of all institutions involved are fairly and proudly disclosed, the listener is hardly drawn "unwittingly" toward the commercial message, as historians like Hilmes tend to argue,⁹¹ but openly solicited to engage in a public display of intricate skywriting.

For the producers of *Lux* (generally labeled "DeMille" in the press), the show was not merely a radio play. The whole thing is Theater, and [DeMille] insists that it be treated as such. Even the commercials, the ads the agency people run in to sell their soap, he considers no more out of place than the ads in a theater printed program [. . .].⁹²

Not surprisingly, it was this kind of promotion--which began with DeMille's jest that he was an ideal spokesperson since Lux had "been a household word in the DeMille family for 870 years," his family crest bearing the motto "Lux Tua Vita Mea" ("Legionnaire and the Lady," **June 1, 1936**)--that convinced advertising agencies and networks to explore anthology drama, a format that, prior to *Lux*'s move to Hollywood, had played only an insignificant role in network programming. By 1940, the so-called "prestige drama" programs, sponsored series like the *Hollywood*, *Campbell*, and *Screen Guild* Playhouses rivaled or surpassed most of the "musical variety" and "semi-variety" shows in the Hooper ratings.⁹³

Before closing after twenty seasons and 926 performances, the *Lux Radio Theatre* helped redefine stage drama for the purposes of commercial broadcasting. Prestige drama programs, especially those insisting on live audiences, learned to revise their repertoire in favor of repartee. Taking their cue from the “informal works” presented on comedy programs--which have been called the “greatest theater on American radio”⁹⁴--producers of formal theater programs began to lighten up during the 1940s, relying more on smart dialogue than melodramatic plots. The *Ford Theater*, whose host Howard Lindsay insisted that “the play’s the thing” (“The Adventure of the Bad Boy,” **Jan. 4, 1948**), even began to offer an occasional “original” comedy. In his introduction to the life-with-impossible-paterfamilias comedy “Father, Dear Father” (**Dec. 28, 1947**)--the second work “written especially for this radio theater”--Lindsay recommended the broadcast “not only to the attention of listeners, but also to the consideration of motion picture producers on the lookout for new material. Radio has borrowed from the movies long enough; it’s time radio started paying back its debt to the stage and screen.”

Whereas the maudlin daytime serial took the epic down market, the upmarket evening or weekend theatricals reclaimed the epigram. The United States Steel sponsored (and Peabody Award winning) *Theatre Guild* adapted Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest featuring John Gielgud (**Apr. 13, 1947**) and Rex Harrison (May 17, 1953), and An Ideal Husband with Harrison and Lilli Palmer (**Mar. 30, 1950**). By the mid-1940s, the producers of most theater programs felt confident enough to adapt urbane comedies rather than ridiculing, let alone taking seriously, the melodramas of the Victorian era; East Lynne, whether mocked or mourned, was finally giving way to My Sister Eileen. After all, nothing rendered the atmosphere of living theater and the pleasure of attending a successful production more tangible for the radio listener than the cheers, laughter, and applause of a large studio audience. Their at times cued participation would later be distilled and canned, processed into the punchline-augmenting laughtracks that still punctuate the broadcast television sitcoms of the early 21st century.

The broadcast studio did not just house plays--it played house. By the mid-1930s it had become a "vast combination of circus and counting house, presided over by fabulous supershowmen who combine something of the amusement resourcefulness of a Barnum with the financial responsibility of a Rothschild."⁹⁵ Rehearsing yesterday's theatricals while creating the illusion of a modern people's theater, radio's commercial playhouses removed the fourth wall only to fortify the remaining three; the performance space, not the plays performed, was to be felt as real by listeners who, rather than being cast as experiencers of a fully realized and thoroughly absorbing *Hörspiel*, served the broadcasters' sponsored claque-trap in the roles of supporting player, backstage reporter, and financial backer. Even when they had come to depend on the motion picture industry for much of their material and many of their players, the producers of dramatic broadcast entertainments continued to translate both play and playhouse in self-conscious vacillations between verisimilitude and *Verfremdung*⁹⁶; although they succeeded in eliminating much of the initial staginess of radio adaptations, Hollywood's new phono opportunities could not be permitted to dismantle the display case that was the broadcast auditorium.

Not unlike the barbaric Ingomar and his beloved Parthenia, the theater of the Hertzian waves desired "two hearts that beat as one." By achieving this juncture, the creators of such soundstage entertainment effectively undermined the independence of radio drama and compromised its chances at becoming truly at home in a language of radiophonic art.

Notes

¹ Conrad, "Broadcasting's Tenth Birthday," Christian Science Monitor 1 Nov. 1930, Eastern ed.: 6. Conrad credited Westinghouse vice-president H. P. Davis with the "vision" of creating a "new industry by supplying the public with a new broadcasting service."

- ² Gernsback, Radio for All (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1922) 174.
- ³ For a discussion of this service, see Tim Crook, Radio Drama (New York: Routledge, 1999) 15-20.
- ⁴ Lawton Mackall, "Mimes of the Microphone," Theatre Magazine Nov. 1924: 48.
- ⁵ Gielgud, "The Broadcast Play," Theatre Arts Nov. 1930: 957.
- ⁶ Rudolf Arnheim, Radio, trans. Margaret Ludwig and Herbert Read (London: Faber, 1936) 141.
- ⁷ Gielgud 957.
- ⁸ Arnheim 141; see also Donald McWhinnie, The Art of Radio (London: Faber, 1959) 153-56.
- ⁹ John Wallace, "The Listener's Point of View," Radio Broadcast Mar. 1926: 578.
- ¹⁰ Francis Chase, Sound and Fury (New York: Harper, 1942) 199.
- ¹¹ Robert J. Landry, Who, What, Why Is Radio? 2nd ed. (New York: Stewart, 1942) 23.
- ¹² Wallace 578.
- ¹³ Huntley, "Plays by Radio," Drama Nov. 1923: 52.
- ¹⁴ "From Stage Thrills to Radio Drama," Popular Mechanics Dec. 1924: 998.
- ¹⁵ Mackall 24.
- ¹⁶ Contrary to Erik Barnouw's oft-cited account in A Tower of Babel (New York: Oxford UP, 1966) 136, it was only after the third broadcast that WGY, convinced by several thousand letters from its listeners, decided to allot more time for each production; see Frances Knight, An Analysis of the Aspects of Radio Drama Which Differentiates It from the Legitimate Stage, MA thesis (Akron U, 1932) 2. Knight's account is based on interviews with WGY producer Edward H. Smith.
- ¹⁷ Arthur Hornblow, "The Editor's Uneasy Chair," editorial, Theatre Magazine Mar. 1925: 7; for Brainard's account, see Samuel L. Rothafel and Raymond Francis Yates, Broadcasting: Its New Day (1925; New York: Arno, 1971) 59-64.
- ¹⁸ "Theatrical Producers Join with Radio," New York Times 4 Oct. 1925, sec. 10: 16.

- ¹⁹ Rothafel and Yates 58; for Rothafel's own broadcasting enterprises, see Thomas A. DeLong, The Mighty Music Box (Los Angeles: Amber Crest, 1980) 27-28; 181.
- ²⁰ Mackall 48.
- ²¹ Charles D. Isaacson, "Is Radio an Enemy of the Theatre?" Theatre Magazine Jan. 1923: 58; 15.
- ²² Rockey, "Listening Room Only," Theatre Magazine Mar. 1931: 39-40.
- ²³ Harrison B. Summers, A Thirty Year History of Programs (1958; New York: Arno, 1971) 7-13.
- ²⁴ William Albig, "The Content of Radio Programs, 1925-1935," Social Forces 16 (1938): 344.
- ²⁵ Husing, Ten Years Before the Mike (New York: Farrar, 1935) 108-09.
- ²⁶ For a discussion of Hollywood's short-lived and half-hearted ban on radio, see Hilmes, Hollywood and Broadcasting (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 1990) 55-60; for an account of the newspaper "boycott" of radio and its consequences, see Ralph Lewis Smith, A Study of the Professional Criticism of Broadcasting in the United States, 1920-1955, Diss. U of Wisconsin, 1959 (New York: Arno, 1979) 23-24, as well as Gwenyth L. Jackaway, Media at War (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995) 94-97.
- ²⁷ Gassner, The Theatre in Our Times (New York: Crown, 1954) 5.
- ²⁸ Czitrom, Media and the American Mind (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1982) 79-80.
- ²⁹ Harriet Menken, "Front Centre for Radio Drama," Radio Digest Feb. 1931: 96; John A. Neagle, "Brush Up on Your 'Lit' by Tuning in the *Radio Guild*," Radio Digest Apr. 1932: 39.
- ³⁰ Neagle 38.
- ³¹ John Dunning, On the Air (New York: Oxford UP, 1998) 564.
- ³² Rockey, "Listening Room Only," Theatre Magazine Mar. 1931: 40.
- ³³ Neagle 38.
- ³⁴ "Guild: Stage Stars Must Learn Acting Over Again for Radio," Newsweek 29 June 1935: 29. Radio columnist Cyrus Fisher applauded Radcliffe as "one of the few inspired

directors concerned with radio production"; see Fisher, "Radio Reviews," Forum Jan. 1933: 63.

³⁵ Dunning 549.

³⁶ Rothafel and Yates 153.

³⁷ Cantril and Allport, The Psychology of Radio (New York: Harper, 1935) 69.

³⁸ "New Sherlock Holmes Sleuths on the Radio," New York Times 26 Oct. 1930, sec. 9: 12.

³⁹ Rockey, "Listening Room Only," Theatre Magazine Jan. 1931: 40.

⁴⁰ Higby, Tune in Tomorrow (New York: Cowles, 1968) 163-64.

⁴¹ Dixon, Radio Writing (New York: Century, 1931) 299.

⁴² Rockey, "Listening Room Only," Theatre Magazine Dec. 1930: 60.

⁴³ Rockey, "Listening Room Only," Theatre Magazine Sept. 1930: 43.

⁴⁴ Harry C. Browne, "Ingomar the Barbarian," Radio Writing, ed. Peter Dixon (New York: Century 1931) 299-300.

⁴⁵ Waldo Abbot, Handbook of Broadcasting, 2nd. ed. (New York: McGraw, 1941) 103.

⁴⁶ Browne 300.

⁴⁷ Cantril and Allport 69.

⁴⁸ Rockey, "Listening Room Only," Theatre Magazine Sept. 1930: 43.

⁴⁹ Crosby, "Seven Deadly Sins of the Air," Life 6 Nov. 1950: 154.

⁵⁰ Cantril and Allport 69.

⁵¹ Lardner, "Over the Waves," New Yorker 17 June 1933: 39.

⁵² Browne 302.

⁵³ Browne 306.

⁵⁴ James Street, "Radio on de Ribber," Radio Guide 16 Apr. 1938: 2-3.

⁵⁵ Hopkins, "Looking Toward a People's Theatre," New York Times Magazine 30 July 1944: 33.

⁵⁶ Qtd. in David Blevins, ed., National Broadcasting Company Presents Great Plays (New York: Columbia UP, 1939) 97. For logs of both programs, see Grams, Radio Drama (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000) 28-29; 202-05.

⁵⁷ Abbot 104.

⁵⁸ Cheever, "The Enormous Radio," The Stories of John Cheever (1953; New York: Knopf, 1994) 36. When the story was dramatized for the *CBS Radio Workshop* (May 11, 1956), nothing "dirty" was overheard; the narration omits words like "damned" (substituting "filthy"), "whore," and "abortion."

⁵⁹ Carroll O'Meara, "Not on the Air!" Forum, June 1940: 302.

⁶⁰ Rockey, "Listening Room Only," Theatre Magazine, Dec. 1930: 58.

⁶¹ Chase 234; Landry, This Fascinating Radio Business (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1946) 100.

⁶² Arthur Arent, adapt., "Ah, Wilderness!" after O'Neill, The Theatre Guild on the Air, ed. William H. Fitelson (New York: Rinehart, 1947) 175; this script was produced on Oct. 7, 1945; a very similar invitation to reverie about the "good old days, "the "incredible remote years before the first World War, when most of us were young and some of us were gay" was read by Howard Lindsay for the *Ford Theater* version of O'Neill's play (Nov. 2, 1947); earlier adaptations were soundstaged by the *Campbell Playhouse* (Sept. 17, 1939) and *Arthur Hopkins Presents* (May 24, 1944).

⁶³ Darwin L. Teilhet, "On the Summer Air," Forum June 1932: 383-84. For a typical introduction to the program, see Vincent Terrace, Radio Program Openings and Closings, 1931-1972 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003) 135.

⁶⁴ Landry, This Fascinating Radio Business 173-74.

⁶⁵ "Parted on Her Bridal Tour," Radio Continuity Types, ed. Sherman Paxton Lawton (Boston: Expression, 1938) 127.

⁶⁶ "Parted" 127-28.

⁶⁷ "Parted" 134.

⁶⁸ Seldes, The Great Audience (New York: Viking, 1950) 110.

⁶⁹ Hilmes, Radio Voices (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1997) 186.

- 70 "Parted" 141; 133.
- 71 Booth, introduction, Hiss the Villain, ed. Michael Booth. (New York: Blom, 1967) 12.
- 72 Louis R. Reid, "Amusement: Radio and Movies," America Now, ed. Harold E. Stearns (New York: Scribner's, 1938) 14.
- 73 Wells, "Radio's Strangest Bird," Off Mike, ed. Jerome Lawrence (New York: Essential-Duell, 1944) 88.
- 74 Flora Rheta Schreiber, "Radio as Arthur Hopkins Presents It," Quarterly Journal of Speech 31.4 (1943): 440.
- 75 Drakakis, "The Essence That's Not Seen," Radio Drama, ed. Peter Lewis (New York: Longman, 1981) 114; 130-31.
- 76 Calling it "enjoyable radio hokum," biographer Simon Callow notes that "The Green Goddess" broadcast was "one of the few shows" of the *Campbell Playhouse* to "stretch the medium a little"; see Orson Welles (New York: Vintage, 1996) 445-46. For Callow's insightful overview of Welles's radio career, see 370-453.
- 77 Schreiber 445.
- 78 K. Trenholm, "If Radio Is to Survive It Must Hitch Its Wagon to a Star," Radio Revue Dec. 1929: 14; 13.
- 79 "Parted" 128.
- 80 Hilmes, Radio Voices 97; 93; for an analysis of a typical *Lux Radio Theatre* broadcast, see Hilmes's Hollywood and Broadcasting 89-110, as well as Eckhard Breiteringer, Rundfunk und Hörspiel in den USA 1930-1950 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1992) 151-75.
- 81 For a detailed, well-documented history of the *Lux Radio Theatre*, see Connie Billips and Arthur Pierce, Lux Presents Hollywood (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1995) 1-72.
- 82 Ralph L. Power, "Radio Talkies," Radio Digest Feb. 1931: 58-59.
- 83 Frank Orme, "High-Hatting Hollywood," Radio Digest Apr. 1931: 104.
- 84 Other radio personalities who were promoted in RKO, Paramount, and MGM films include Amos 'n' Andy, Edgar Bergen (with Charlie McCarthy), Burns and Allen, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Kay Kyser, Red Skelton, and the stars of *Lum and Abner*. See, Bob Kolososki, "Radio Stars in the Movies," Nostalgia Digest Apr.-May 1989: 2-6.

- ⁸⁵ Michael Korda, Making the List (New York: Barnes, 2001) 92.
- ⁸⁶ *Lux* received the Peabody Award (for Drama Entertainment) in 1943. Aside from the *Theatre Guild* (1947), no other commercially sponsored drama anthology was so honored; see Don Franks, Entertainment Awards (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1996) 132-33.
- ⁸⁷ Cohan, Seven Keys to Baldpate, Famous Plays of Crime and Detection, ed. Van H. Cartmell and Bennett Cerf (New York: Doubleday, 1946) 175; 226; see also Biggers, Seven Keys to Baldpate (1913; Holicon, PA: Wildside, 2003) 12; unlike Cohan's farce, Biggers's novel, a lighthearted defense of melodrama, does not reveal the absurd events at the inn to be a hoax.
- ⁸⁸ Allen, Treadmill to Oblivion (Boston: Little, 1954) 240.
- ⁸⁹ "Thanks for the Memory" was prominently featured in Mitchell Leisen's box office hit Big Broadcast of 1938, Hope's screen debut; fourth and last in Paramount's series of Big Broadcast movies, it was released on February 11, 1938. See David Chierichetti, Mitchell Leisen (1973; Los Angeles: Photoventures, 1995) 109; 320.
- ⁹⁰ Wylie, Radio Writing (New York: Rhinehart, 1939) 3-4.
- ⁹¹ Hilmes, Hollywood and Broadcasting 93.
- ⁹² Frank Daugherty, "He Sells Soap!" Christian Science Monitor 25 Mar. 1944, Magazine sec.: 8.
- ⁹³ "Semi-variety" programs contained dramatic sketches; for 1940 ratings figures, see Summers 83-85.
- ⁹⁴ Richard Kostelanetz, "The American Hörspiel," North American Review 270.4 (1985): 64.
- ⁹⁵ Reid 12.
- ⁹⁶ The suitability of radio drama to the purposes of the Brechtian, epic theater has been pointed out by Walter Benjamin in "Theater and Radio," trans. Louis P. Kaplan, Radiotext(e), Semiotext(e) 6.1 (1993): 31.

Chapter Three

“Yeah, hit’s jist like a library”: The Broadcast as Virtual Bookshelf

A few days ago her startled eye had caught an advertisement in the newspaper, headed “Literary Machine”; had it then been invented at last, some automaton to [. . .] turn out books and articles? Alas! The machine was only one for holding volumes conveniently, that the work of literary manufacture might be physically lightened. But surely before long some Edison would make the true automaton; the problem must be comparatively such a simple one. Only to throw in a given number of old books, and have them reduced, blended, modernised into a single one for today’s consumption.--Gissing, *New Grub Street* (1891)

In 1921, Russian avantgarde poet Velimir Khlebnikov predicted that radio would become “just as indispensable to every village center as the school or library” was then; each day, “lessons and textbooks” would “fly across the sky” and foster a people’s consciousness “united in one will.”¹ As the centrality, if not the sublimity, of this message-radiating force was making itself felt in the everyday of American culture, the shortcomings and detriments of a virtual library, its catalogue of transmittable texts, and its curatorship in the hands of commerce-invested licensees came under close scrutiny. Each year, academics pondered such concerns at the Institute of Education by Radio, first held at Ohio State University in 1930. While few doubted the power of the medium to convoke individuals as masses, many educators cautioned against the wisdom of such leveling. Both the democratization and dogmatization by aural means seemed to count on rather than counter illiteracy.

At the very least, the indiscriminate airdropping of authoritative or academically sound texts amid Cole Porter tunes and importuning colporteurs involved what one critic called “serious disabilities.” However “stimulating” to the “inert but well-disposed mind,” radio tended “naturally to encourage the passive attitude on the part of the learner” by

leaving little occasion for reflection and response.² Others, particularly those who had already seized the microphone, were less dismissive of the medium's potential as circulating library or lecture circuit. Calling education the broadcasters' "greatest opportunity," radio commentator H. V. Kaltenborn insisted that the airwaves were suited to home study courses on "any subject" provided it did not "require apparatus or laboratory work." Kaltenborn held that learning "comes more easily through the ear than the eye" and that the "appeal of voice and personality" greatly improved upon correspondence courses, the Chautauqua and Lyceum movements of earlier generations.³ How likely was it for broadcasters with conflicting aims--"show business, educational business, and just plain business"⁴--to contribute meaningfully to the advancement of cultural uplift?

As an educator who contended that the "arts which today have most vitality for the average person are things he does not take to be arts" (such as newspapers, movies, and comic strips) and who insisted that in the experience of the many languages of art, the "hearer is an indispensable partner," John Dewey counted among the advocates of the broadcast medium, even though he, too, was wary of its actual deployment. In a December 8, 1934, broadcast inaugurating the third year of WEVD's *University of the Air*, Dewey spoke of radio as the

most powerful instrument of social education the world has ever seen. The eye is superior to the ear with respect to the understanding of physical and technical matters. But in all social matters the mass of people are guided through hearing rather than by sight. The progress of democracy has been greatly hindered by the fact that modern means of exchange of physical things has advanced far beyond the means for exchange of knowledge and ideas. The radio brings us the possibility of redressing the balance.

Thus far, Dewey continued, such a remedial and intermediary utilization of radio was "only a possibility, not as yet an accomplished fact."⁵ Indeed, national broadcasters--

unlike a few influential local stations such as the socialist WEVD, New York--had long profited from permitting this “means of exchange of knowledge and ideas” to be exploited for the purposes of the “exchange of physical things.” They insisted, as CBS founder William Paley did when he appeared before the FCC (Oct. 17, 1934) to oppose proposals to allot fixed percentages of the nation’s radio facilities to non-commercial broadcasting, that the “continued regard for the fact that radio, to be more effective in serving the whole people, must be conducted on sound business principles, [would] enable radio to continue to render its greatest service.”⁶

Prior to the establishment of the major national broadcasting chains, about sixty American colleges and universities availed themselves of the new medium to broadcast educational programming. New York University conducted experiments in transmitting lectures directly from its classrooms, while Columbia University organized special studio courses for radio listeners.⁷ The increasing commodification of broadcasting after the formation of the networks resulted in the gradual disappearance of independent, college owned and operated stations. By 1936, eighty percent of the more than two hundred educational stations licensed between 1921 and 1936 had ceased operations.⁸ Research also suggested that between 1927 and 1935, network offerings devoted to “serious entertainment” had decreased from fifty percent in 1927 to twenty-five percent in 1935, as lighter, more frivolous commercial fare began to dominate the broadcasting schedules of the affiliates.⁹ Commenting on this trend and its implications, Paley asserted that reaching a far greater number of listeners, commercial radio could “do far more for mass education and culture” with only a “few programs of brief duration” than a local station broadcasting such programs to a limited audience for many hours of the day. More than a “few,” “brief” educational programs should not be required of commercial broadcasters, Paley reasoned, since teaching by radio ought to be understood as “supplemental to formal educational agencies and methods,” not as a “substitute” for the “classroom and the

lecture platform”; nor did commercial use of radio *ipso facto* result in inferior programming.¹⁰

According to H. L. McClinton, vice president in charge of radio for the national advertising agency N. W. Ayer & Son, the “best productions in radio have been the result of commercial compulsion, in much the same way that the best paintings, the best books, and the best plays have been produced by gifted persons aware of the emoluments therefrom.”¹¹ The *sine qua non* of vying for influential and vocal patrons--chary retailers and choosy consumers--was argued to be a sufficient incentive for broadcasters to serve the “public interest, convenience, and necessity.” With this definition of public service in mind, broadcasters continued their search for the “best” broadcasting text, having already discovered the “best” broadcasting context in the theatrical setting. After effectively approximating the ambiance of the theater, the circus, and the dance hall in order to draw the listener into a lively exchange place in which to hawk the wares of the sponsors, programmers approached the bookstore, the kiosk, and the library for a ready supply of reading matter accessible and respectable enough to suit, ideally all at once, the purposes of entertainment, reportage, as well as education--provided it was dramatized, rather than read. “Anyone can read a lesson,” one critic complained, but listeners are beguiled chiefly by the “lure of entertainment,” not by educators they reject as “bum showmen.”¹²

Few of the so-called prestige drama programs developed during the 1930s as a middlebrow alternative to earlier minstrel, vaudeville, and comedy-variety formats were devoted exclusively to the presentation of stage plays; unless they adapted motion pictures (many of which were based on novels and plays) or soundstaged original radio plays, dramatic anthologies--including *Mercury Theatre on the Air* (1938), *Hallmark Playhouse* (1948-53), and *Four-Star Playhouse* (1949)--processed familiar Victorian narratives, recent bestsellers, as well as contemporary magazine fiction. Notwithstanding the threat radio posed to competing media, particularly during the depression, the relationship between publishers and broadcasters was never entirely adversarial. After all, if national

broadcasts could do little to revive interest in the regional theater they all but superseded, they had great potential as a billboard for local libraries, booksellers, and national publishing concerns. Yet it was only gradually and rather tentatively that the networks permitted the radio play to evolve from a pushcart for the press to a promotional vehicle for adult education.

“ . . . that strangely compulsive modern desire”: Pushing Paper

As one observer of the broadcasting industry pointed out, the fact that newspaper circulation in America increased sixteen percent between 1926 and 1937, fails to indicate that radio, experiencing its greatest growth during the same period, had in any way harmed American newspaper interests which, according to a 1937 report by the FCC, owned or operated nearly one fourth of the country's 650-odd radio stations.¹³ Any industry in need of spreading word about its ready stock of mass-manufactured consumer goods could profit from on-air promotion, and the dealers in pulp were no exception. In 1912, a joined venture of Ladies' World magazine and Edison's Kinetoscope Company had given rise to the romantic chapter play of the silent screen, a new mode of cultivating the public's demand for a growing number of periodicals; over a decade later, publishers turned to the new medium of broadcasting further to increase the readership of dailies and magazines in a highly competitive market.¹⁴ Unlike the previous experiment, which had depended on the cooperation of separate if related entertainment industries and the negotiation of their demands, the latter was more fully under the control of the press it was designed to serve. One such sales amplifier was *Sam 'n' Henry* (1926-27), a prominent feature of both the Chicago Tribune and its radio station, WGN, whose very call letters spelled World's Greatest Newspaper. Developed, written and performed by Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, a team of minstrel show players turned WGN staff artists, this airborne funnies act constitutes a milestone of multimediacy.

By promising nothing short of talking pictures at a time when movies were still silent, *Sam 'n' Henry* turned weekday listeners into weekend readers and made oral comedy a herald for the printed page. Illustrated scripts published in the Tribune's Sunday edition--and syndicated elsewhere--responded to the radio audience's desire to picture the two southern blacks who daily talked themselves in and out of scrapes in the Windy City. According to a Tribune reader survey, the eyecatching earfuls of *Sam 'n' Henry* quickly became the most popular item of the paper's new metropolitan section. Other efforts to cash in on the success of the serial included a volume of *Sam 'n' Henry* dialogues, as well as record albums of sketches and songs. When WGN refused to permit Gosden and Correll to transcribe their show and lease the recordings to other radio stations nationwide, the team offered their serial to WMAQ, Chicago, a rival station owned by the Daily News. Since the Tribune owned the rights to *Sam 'n' Henry*, Gosden and Correll had to rename their radio act, which soon became known nationally as *Amos 'n' Andy* (1928-60). Within five months, the *Sam 'n' Henry* soundalike was picked up by NBC's Blue network, a profitable deal that convinced the two writer-comedians to sever their ties to the press and to run messages for the makers of Pepsodent instead.¹⁵

This loss notwithstanding, radio continued to be pressed into the service of the publishing industry. Less suited to the peddling of local newspapers, chain broadcasting led to the rise of magazine dramas, among them the *True Story Hour* (1928-32), a series of dramatized confessionals promoting Bernarr MacFadden's True Story magazine, as well as Street and Smith's *Detective Story Hour* (1930-31) and *Love Story Drama* (1931-32), best known for their announcer-narrator, The Shadow, a mysterious voice that by 1932 had gained such popularity that it not only became the eponymous hero of the long-running radio feature, but of a corresponding Street and Smith publication and a series of best-selling novels.¹⁶ Cashing in on the resulting proliferation of radio melodramas was Simon and Schuster, which, in the early 1940s, launched a tie-in with *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, even though the weekly episodes were only nominally related to

the book series that was advertised, in addition to the product of the show's principal sponsor, at the conclusion of each broadcast.¹⁷ Few promotional ventures, however, exploited radio's multimediacy as effectively as the much-hyped and extravagantly produced *Trial of Vivienne Ware* (1930-31), an intriguing hybrid of fictional newspaper reportage and live courtroom drama, packaged as a prize competition.

"There's murder in the air," the New York Times announced in its Sunday radio section, predicting that *The Trial of Vivienne Ware* would "occupy the attention of listeners over WJZ's network for six consecutive nights beginning Tuesday." Rather more enthusiastic was the New York American, which declared the six-part serial to be "one of the most stirring mystery radiodramas ever presented," quoting NBC president M. H. Aylesworth as saying that its script "established a new standard in the creation of radio plays. The simplicity and fidelity of the theme, together with the colorful word and character pictures, stand out in this new field of adaptive writing." The Hearst tabloid--the "paper for people who think"--had good reason to eulogize the as yet unproduced serial as "one of the best radio dramas ever written," given that the program had been conceived by one of its own feature writers.¹⁸

Editor Edmund D. Coblentz had reportedly read about the broadcast of an actual trial in Denmark and decided on the sponsorship of a fictitious murder trial in which its readers were invited to serve as jurors. Every effort was made to prevent the program from appearing like a cheap marketing ploy and to convince WJZ, New York--the flagship station of NBC's Blue network--to produce the series in its glass-curtained Times Square studio atop the New Amsterdam Theatre and to broadcast the event locally instead of making the required six half-hour spots available to national advertisers. Certain to impress NBC executives was the fact that--along with Ferdinand Pecora, Assistant District Attorney of New York, and prominent New York attorney George Gordon Battle--none other than US Senator and Supreme Court Justice Robert F. Wagner had agreed to participate in the mock trial by assuming the role of the presiding judge. The titular

heroine was played by Rosamund Pinchot, a stage actress who had appeared in Max Reinhardt's celebrated staging of The Miracle, and the entire spectacular was supervised by well-known Broadway producer John Golden.

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the Radio Jury," Wagner addressed the audience during the inaugural broadcast (Nov. 25, 1930):

You have been called to one of the most trying tasks which befalls the lot of a citizen. You are to try a fellow being on a charge of first degree murder. It is the more difficult for you in that this defendant has everything which would make life for any young woman most desirable. Yet it may become your solemn duty to deprive her of her enjoyment of that life.¹⁹

Standing to gain cash prizes for the most convincing verdict, readers of the New York American were advised to prepare themselves by taking in the published "information" daily, since they might miss "important loop-holes" if they did not "carefully follow the testimony and the evidence" as presented on the radio. "By reading the New York American every morning" throughout the trial and by "tuning in on WJZ each night at the specified time," readers should be able to form their verdict as to Miss Ware's guilt or innocence--"just like any other juror."²⁰

As promised, the progress of the trial was reported in daily news columns of the New York American, which offered detailed transcripts and commentary, with headlines reading "Knife Hurling Brings Tension at Ware Trial," "Night Club Girl Faints under Grilling at Radio Murder Trial," and "Identity of Knife Thrower Exposed at Radio Murder Trial." Bylined "Randolph McNally, the reporter in the great murder case" and surrounded by advertisements for Brunswick receivers, RCA consoles, and Cunningham Radio Tubes designed to "help render a just verdict," the trial updates indiscriminately mixed with--and dwarfed--news items such as "Cuban Editors Hit Censorship," "Deaf, Dumb Couple United in Marriage," and "NY Railways Seeking Nine More Bus Lines." What Theatre Magazine pronounced the "most original radio-play yet produced" was

clearly a stunt of Hearstian proportions.²¹ According to Radio Digest, 200-word verdicts, letters of congratulations, as well as demands for a sequel were received from places as remote as Canada and Virginia, as well as from ships at sea; an estimated 14,000 listeners acquitted Ware, with about 2000 arguing the “society girl” to be guilty. More significant for the publisher was that the serial had increased the circulation of the New York American “far in excess of expectations,” as a result of which Hearst papers in San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, and Omaha sponsored the trial with different casts of local luminaries.²² A follow-up trial involving the murder victim’s less privileged “friend,” night club singer Dolores Divine, was staged a few weeks after the acquittal of the first defendant. A generic version of the radio scripts for both serials, prefaced by excerpts from the printed reports and concluding with the audience verdict, was subsequently published by Grosset and Dunlap, which marketed Kenneth M. Ellis’s The Trial of Vivienne Ware as the “first radio novel, an innovation in both the radio and publishing worlds.”²³

Within weeks after the trial broadcasts (Mar. 10, 1931), Time began to promote its magazine with the dramatized news program *March of Time* (1931-1939; 1941-45). Time had employed radio as an advertising tool as early as 1924, when, within a year of its first issue, editor Briton Hadden took to the air with the quiz program *Pop Question*.²⁴ Employing teasers that resembled those heard on daytime serials, *March of Time* referred listeners to the “pages of Time,” rather than to subsequent broadcasts. The broadcast of October 15, 1936, lured audiences to the newsstand with the following sensationalist prompt:

In the months and years ahead, what governments will fall, what dictators, wise men, statesmen, fools, will stride across the stage of the world’s news? This week no man can say. No man in his imagination can conceive the exciting, stranger-than-fiction true story which the pages of Time will be telling thorough the weeks and months to come.²⁵

Only “one thing was certain,” the “Voice of Time” (announcer Westbrook Van Voorhies) insisted at the close of another broadcast (Sept. 16, 1938), namely that the

crisis of this week’s news is not the *end* but the *beginning* of one of the most tempestuous, news-packed eras any age has known. It will be an era of fast-moving events greater in the vast sweep of their influence than any events in history before them. And it will be an era that will be *seen* as no era has been seen before! For week after eventful week, *Life*’s pages will make the 18 million men, women, and children who read *Life* each week *eyewitnesses* of the news of the world and the ways of the world’s people. And, having *seen*, their knowledge of the world will be enriched and their understanding deepened. For they have discovered in *Life* a new kind of pictorial journalism, which satisfies that strangely compulsive modern desire to see and to know and to be informed.²⁶

Although it did not even carry a radio section until May 1938, *Time* exploited the medium so shrewdly that when by 1933 it was determined that the program was too costly to produce, other sponsors (Remington-Rand, Electrolux, Wrigley’s) were found to foot the bill.²⁷

The question arose whether such carefully orchestrated multimedia events, less elaborate stagings of which were instrumental in the promotion of motion pictures, could become useful to the literary trade as well. Could radio perhaps be at once blackboard and billboard, a medium that transplanted libraries instead of supplanting them? As early as 1923, Augustus H. Shearer, former President of the American Library Association (ALA), suggested the possibility of a symbiotic relationship between the circulators and the broadcasters of books. Notwithstanding a “recent drop in book circulation,” which might have been “caused by interest in radio,” the new medium could still prove valuable in the cultivation of reading habits even as it exposed the public to the living voices the printed page could not preserve.²⁸ Nearly a decade after the *Vivienne Ware* trial broadcasts,

however, it had remained unclear just “what radio actually does to reading.” As Alberta Curtis of the Princeton Radio Research Project summed it up, the “book world” continued to view with both contempt and alarm the “inroads” that radio--a medium “more facile and sociable” than print--had made on the “leisure-time of the reading public.” Since “optimistic broadcasters, librarians, publishers, and booksellers” had not altogether given up on the idea that radio could be “used as a powerful tool to stimulate interest in reading,” America’s premier media analyst Paul F. Lazarsfeld was called upon to investigate more conclusively whether the media were indeed “allies or enemies”; in 1940, the findings were published in Lazarsfeld’s Radio and the Printed Page.²⁹

One objective of Lazarsfeld’s listener survey was to determine which of the many programming formats were more likely to encourage follow-up reading by appealing to “certain strata of the population educated enough to have reading habits, but not so high on the upper cultural level” as to have become too “sophisticated” to be influenced by the medium’s generic and wholesale inducements. Among the formats specified in the survey--talk shows, news broadcasts, dramatizations, classical music, quizzes, and comedy-variety series--“serious talks programs” were singled out as having the most immediate impact on their listeners’ choice of reading matter.³⁰ Notable exponents of this format include CBS’s *Invitation to Learning* (1940-64), which, early in its run, was hosted by Mark Van Doren, and NBC Blue’s *Meet Mr. Weeks* (1939-41), an informal series of book talks whose “general subject” was announced as the “human side of literature.” The latter discussed topics like “What’s in a Diary?” or “Poets Who Made the World Laugh,” featured guests from stage, press, and the academia, and concluded each broadcast with Atlantic Monthly editor Edward Weeks’s response to listener mail.³¹

Still, no book talk series of the 1940s could duplicate the appeal of Alexander Woollcott’s *Early Bookworm* (1930-31) and *Town Crier* (1930-37), whose endorsements prompted thousands of receptive listeners to pick up copies of Hammett’s Maltese Falcon (1930), Faulkner’s Sanctuary (1931), and Paul Alverdes’s novella Die Pfeiferstube (1929),

a translation of which (The Whistler's Room) had already gone out of print. Woolcott's influence made itself felt most strongly in the case of James Hilton's Lost Horizon (1933); for two years, Hilton's Shangri-La had remained virtually undiscovered in American bookstores until Woolcott's went "quietly mad" over it and initiated a mass pilgrimage.³² As impressive as such favorable responses might have seemed to a trade that measured success in thousands of volumes annually, book talks did not attract audiences substantial enough to warrant prominent and regular spots on the networks' evening schedules which, by the late 1930s, were gradually being taken up instead by eminently sponsorable comedy-variety series and serialized comedy-melodramas without literary pedigree or pretensions. A growing segment of the listening public being taken with the dialects and cadences of aural comic strips, the networks felt less compelled than ever to relinquish airtime to serve as a bookstore or library referral system.

Unwilling to forgo the opportunity of reaching millions of Americans who now turned to radio for fiction rather than music and talk, the ALA developed a public service campaign that made library referrals at once appealing to audiences and acceptable to programmers. Locally, the ALA had already been actively involved in several aspects of broadcasting as hundreds of public libraries across the United States broadcast book reviews, interviews, or readings; preparing for listener response, libraries set up book shelves containing copies of works discussed on the air. From the nation's chain broadcasters, however, such low-key efforts were not likely to receive enthusiastic support. So, instead of yielding to radio drama, the ALA resorted to it, convincing broadcasters to weave reminders about the benefits and pleasures of reading into two of the networks' highest rated serials, *One Man's Family* (1932-59) and *Lum and Abner* (1931-54).³³ In one episode of the latter program, Lum Edwards, a storeowner in the imaginary backwoods community of Pine Ridge, Arkansas, surprises his friends Abner Peabody and Cedric Weehunt with the news that he has been "readin' fer two nights straight," all on account of a new delivery service he discovered:

CEDRIC. That truck full of books you mean, Mr. Lum?

LUM. Yea, bookmobile they call it. . . . The library in there at the county seat sends the truck all over this county.

ABNER. And you buy books from him, huh?

LUM. No, you jist take out a library card and they come around 'bout oncet a week and you pick out what books you want to read. . . . Don't cost a nickel.

ABNER. I doggies, that's a good idy.

LUM. Oh, hit's the finest thing atall. . . . The American Library Association got up the idy and this state was one of the first to start it.

ABNER. Well, good fer us. . . .

LUM. Now they're tryin' to get all the states to put 'em in.

ABNER. They bring the truck right around to the door, huh?

LUM. Yeah, hit's jist like a library sept it gives fokes like us that lives in small towns and the country and don't have 'em a chance to read good books.

Puzzled by the array of less than promising titles--"How to Raise a Dog," "One Thousand and One Questions about Your Aquarium" and "Babies Are Huming Beings"--Lum and his pals eventually select "Modern Inventions" as a worthwhile read, convinced that it "was a purty good invent, that truck with them books."³⁴

Predating the dramatized governmental appeals that had popular radio characters mouth reminders about price controls, car pooling, or sugar rationing, the campaign was acceptable to broadcasters since it made them appear socially responsible without forcing them to compromise their programming schedule. Nor were listeners, long accustomed to promotional messages, likely to object to this strategy, since the book talk was skillfully adapted to the language and personality of each fictional speaker. Yet this attempt at accommodation was also one of the main shortcomings of the ALA approach. Programs

like *Lum and Abner* had become rather too convincing as an alternative bookmobile to be successfully transformed into a temporary billboard for the nation's libraries; nor were listeners likely to take seriously any advice about self-improvement from cartoonish characters at whose foibles they were invited to laugh week after week and whom they expected to keep on muddling through, impervious to change. Indeed, the episodic formats and flat characters of sponsored network drama seemed ideally suited to disprove the virtues and benefits of formal education. Genuine and ingenious malaprops like Gertrude Berg's Molly on *The Goldbergs* (1929-50), Gosden and Correll's *Amos 'n' Andy*, and Ed Gardner's Archie on *Duffy's Tavern* (1941-52) suggested that book learning was both unattainable and ultimately overrated, that those unaffected by formal education were none the worse for it.

"It has been stated that radio has made no serious effort to play a part in education," remarked the author of *Radio Speech* (1932), retorting that neither academics nor the "radio public" had "betrayed any overwhelming interest" in broadcast education.³⁵ By catering to the intellect of twelve-year-olds, as was commonly presumed, radio resounded--and redounded to--a national crisis one educator referred to as the rise of an "Aldrichian civilization" eager for instant gratification and reluctant to mature.³⁶ In later situation comedies like *Our Miss Brooks* (1948-57) and *Halls of Ivy* (1950-52) school teachers and college professors were ridiculed for their stuffed shirtedness, their inability or reluctance to relate to their fellow mortals. With *The Magnificent Montague* (1950-51), writer-producer Nat Hiken thumbed his nose at the sophisticates by demoting a pompous Shakespearean actor (portrayed by Monty Woolley) to Uncle Goodheart, the host of a radio show for children, and by chronicling his struggle to conceal this humble living from his highbrow friends. To Gilbert Seldes, the anti-intellectual sentiments reverberating in these portrayals were "holdovers from the 1850s," the early days of public education when the "shrewd untutored" had to defend themselves "against invasion by the

educated”; as such they were “as harmful in the present state of the world as the prejudice against medical science was in the days of cholera and plague.”³⁷

In the wake of the lavish but unsponsorable educational drama broadcasts of 1937--NBC Blue’s *Streamlined Shakespeare*, *The O’Neill Cycle*, and CBS’s *Shakespearean Cycle*--network executives concluded, no doubt with relief, that the bewildered masses did not turn to radio to have greatness thrust upon ‘em. Nor were audiences keen on being reminded of their own educational defects by being referred to sites of culture and learning; instead, many had come to accept the household words, the mild chuckles and slight chills that radio provided daily as adequate everyday amusements. Serials and aural comics having caught on with the public, the networks gradually replaced cultural referrals (book talks) with print-culture transferals (talking books). Further encouraged by the marketability of the *Mercury Theatre on the Air*--the first major literary anthology to gain national sponsorship when, after its twentieth broadcast in November 1938, it was transformed into the *Campbell Playhouse* (1938-41)--the networks began the wholesale airlifting of literature, appropriating liberally and adapting freely that which could be predicted to resonate with the largest possible audience.

“Mon Doo! Alone in this sewer!”: Recycling Classics

During the 1940s, volatilizing largely unread yet familiar sounding volumes of American and British fiction for aural reception became a significant aspect of the networks’ prestige programming. It was chiefly the claim to literary lineage and silver screen affiliations, rather than the promise of fidelity to their print sources, that lent commercial credibility and popular appeal to such broadcast reproductions, which, unlike the audiobooks of the late-twentieth century were never mere single-voiced readings of condensed texts.³⁸ Radio playwrights like Arch Oboler--whose first radio rewrite was Somerset Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage*--commonly denounced the majority of “those literal transcripts of which our networks have a surfeit” as inartistic clippings “achieved

solely through the brilliant use of a sharp pair of scissors and a paste pot.”³⁹ Aside from the attention lavished upon them by the sponsors, what rendered the offerings of radio’s literary anthologies artistically and academically suspicious was that virtually every piece of transplanted fiction, regardless of the original’s narrative qualities, was subjected to the same editing techniques, namely the practices of condensation, fragmentation, and dramatization.

Radio playwright True Boardman held that the “narrative counterpart of the half-hour original radio drama is the short story.” Faced with the “perpetual race against a stop-watch,” writers would do well to devise a “direct and uncomplicated story-line” for “as few characters as possible (and those distinctive).” Yet while a small number of later play cycles distinguished themselves in a crowded market by specializing in the adaptation of short stories--*The Damon Runyon Theater* (1950-51) and *NBC Presents: Short Story* (1951-52) among them--most of the narratives scattered to the winds were novels of considerable density. In the less than twenty-five minutes earmarked for most of the weekly on-air editions of literary classics, adapters were expected to condense works like *Don Quixote*, *Gulliver’s Travels*, or *Vanity Fair*. In an effort to render the broader strokes of literary caricatures and the roughest outlines of a central, intelligible plot, writers could not but remove any references or allusions in need of a footnote or an illustration; as a result, historical contexts, political arguments, and philosophical debates were invariably lost in translation. As Thomas Inge points out, even a two-part, sixty-minute version of *Moby-Dick* prepared for the acclaimed, commercial-free *Columbia Workshop* (Oct. 19 and 26, 1946) little more than “emphasizes the dramatizable events of the novel” with vivid sound effects and “incorporates a minimum of philosophy, thus making the story into the tale of a demented man out to wreak revenge on a brutal beast of the sea.”⁴⁰

In order to accommodate commercial messages, adaptations prepared for sponsored programs like *This Is My Best* (1944-46), *Favorite Story* (1946-49), and *Hallmark Playhouse* were also subject to fragmentation, thereby imposing a two or

three-act format and precisely timed climaxes on some of the most sprawling serial structures of the Victorian multiplot novel. Half-hour shows, presented in two parts--generally referred to as acts--separated by a middle commercial, devoted about twenty-four minutes to the play proper, including the at times extravagant musical curtains and bridges performed on fully orchestrated shows like the *Mercury Summer Theatre of the Air* (1946). Sponsored hour-long series, divided into two or three acts, allotted between forty-five and fifty minutes for each play, just so that a sponsor's spokesperson could ponder the question how Charlotte Brontë, who, according to one biographer, liked lace, ever managed to wash her clothes without the benefit of Lux Flakes ("Jane Eyre," *Lux Radio Theatre*, **June 14, 1948**). To Boardman, the results bore as close a relation to the original as "powdered milk does to the stuff that comes out of cows."⁴¹ To the broadcasters, however, the public domain was a barnyard of cash cows, rather than sacred ones.

In some cases, adapters took advantage of the episodic structure of melodrama by extracting a single notable incident, so that broadcasts announced as "Les Misérables" or "Pickwick Papers" were confined to dramatizations of Valjean's refuge at the home of the Bishop of Digne or the court trial of Bardell versus Pickwick. Generally, however adapters were expected to synopsise overarching plots in their entirety, only a single broadcast being allotted for each dramatization; literary adaptations in three or more installments, common in British novelcasting, were seldom attempted. William Morwood, a writer for daytime soaps and episodic mysteries, quipped that Jane Austen had "real potential as a daytime serial writer," notwithstanding her mistake of bringing Pride and Prejudice to a happy ending after what might have translated into no more than three years on the air.⁴² Yet despite the *succès d'estime* of the Mercury Players' seven-part adaptation of Les Misérables (**July 23 to Sept. 3, 1937**), the process of serialization was largely reserved for the promotion of books of the day--for instance, works by Marguerite Allis (Charity Strong), Robert Molloy (Pride's Way), or Dan Wickenden (The Wayfarers),

each presented in five parts on *Best Seller* (1945)—and the less than amaranthine fictions of the past, like the “true-to-life sequel” of Olive Higgins Prouty’s *Stella Dallas*, which enjoyed an eighteen-year run on daytime radio.

With the exception of juvenile adventurers and detectives like Frank Merriwell and Sherlock Holmes, famous fictional characters were generally wrapped up in the tangled storylines most adapters were at a loss to string together in a single broadcast. Victorian plots are teeming with flat characters whose likenesses, already reproduced by the Cruikshanks of Hollywood, many radio listeners might still have been able to recall with the aid of a few catchphrases. On American radio, no other personage was given as many voices as Ebenezer Scrooge, whose “Bah! Humbug!” was uttered by actors as dissimilar as Lionel Barrymore and Canada Lee.⁴³ So familiar had Sam Weller and Mrs. Gamp remained a century after their first appearance in *Pickwick Papers* and *Martin Chuzzlewit* that one *Columbia Workshop* play, aptly titled “Public Domain” (Jan. 2, 1937), liberated them from “Copyright Lane” and tossed them into the airwaves along with Hamlet, Alice and the Mad Hatter. For the most part, however, even the most playful updates of old favorites—such as Scrooge’s disincarnations on situation comedies like *Blondie* (“Scrooge,” Dec. 15, 1939) and episodic Westerns like *The Six Shooter* (“Britt Ponset’s Christmas Carol,” Dec. 20, 1953), as well as his wartime duty as an air-warden in *Treasury Star Parade*’s propaganda play “The Modern Scrooge (\$18.75)” (ca. 1942; syn.)—attempted to follow the broad outlines of the original plots as closely as possible.⁴⁴

Adaptations like “The Modern Scrooge” involve a rethinking of literary classic in the context of the radio audience’s experience, thereby making effective use of the immediacy of radio to airlift into the here and now what might otherwise remain nostalgic escapism. As Joyce Sparer Adler has suggested, translating novels into plays may be a dramatic alternative to literary criticism.⁴⁵ Yet the uproar caused by Howard Koch’s perplexingly verisimilitudinous evocation of *The War of the Worlds* for the *Mercury Theatre* (Oct. 30, 1938) discouraged experiments in translation, particularly since critics

suggested that the notorious panic was rooted in the listeners' "superficial literacy and sophistication," which spread over a "sea of insecurity and actual ignorance" of current events "like a thin crust."⁴⁶ Even when deleterious ambiguities could be ruled out, play cycles that flattered or rewarded well-read listeners were not likely to enjoy a long run, much less a sponsored one. Commenting on Wyllis Cooper's sustaining terror anthology *Quiet Please* (1947-49), one academic listener noticed "literary references not likely to be familiar" to the average audience. Cooper's "Is This Murder?" (Jan. 16, 1949) ponders the question whether a Frankensteinian cyborg avenging itself on its creator could be held accountable for homicide. A failure to appreciate the reference to Mary Shelley, the observer remarked, could render the play "meaningless."⁴⁷ Determined to avoid challenging, mystifying, and potentially antagonizing the less-than-literary listener whom analysts construed as representative, networks and sponsors generally preferred cursory recaps over experimental updates, abridgment over transformation.

"A short passage of narrative (usually by one of the characters in the story) is blended into a snatch of drama at climactic moments, the whole is underlined, interpreted, and swaddled in music," Alan S. Downer summed up the "technique" of radio adaptation as employed by the *Mercury Theater*. To him, it was the "best solution so far discovered for an art which combines extreme intimacy between performer and audience, and a highly limited sensory appeal."⁴⁸ To radio playwright Robert Lewis Shayon, the resulting "high-compression writing" was fraught with "artistic problems and dangers." Shayon declared that he "would rather be briefed on a novel's outline, told something about its untransferable qualities, and have one scene accurately and fully done than be given a fast, ragged, frustrating whirl down plot-skeleton alley."⁴⁹ Yet it was precisely for this circumscribed path that handbooks like Whipple's *How to Write for Radio* and Niggli's *Pointers on Radio Writing* prepared prospective adapters, reminding them that, for the sake of action, they needed to "retain just sufficient characters and situations to present the skeleton plot"⁵⁰ and that they could not "afford to waste even thirty seconds on

beautiful descriptive passages.” Broadcast writers were advised to “free [themselves] first from the enchantment of the author’s style” and to “outline the action from memory.”

Illustrating the technique, Niggli reduced *Jane Eyre*--one of the most frequently radio-readied narratives--to a number of plot points, “bald statements” designed to “eliminate the non-essential.” Only the dialogue of the original text was to be restored whenever possible, although here, too, paraphrases were generally required to clarify action or to shorten scenes.⁵¹ Indeed, as Waldo Abbot’s *Handbook of Broadcasting* pointed out, dialogue had to be “invented to take care of essential description.”⁵²

In keeping with this method, half-hour presentations of *Jane Eyre* generally preserved Brontë’s bigamy plot by transporting Jane pell-mell to Thornfield Hall, where, seemingly within minutes of her arrival, she was being terrorized by the mysterious cachinnations that, along with Mr. Rochester’s temporary loss of vision and the lovers’ telepathic communication, made the original narrative such radiogenic fare. With the exception of the restrained production soundstaged by *Family Theater* (Oct. 25, 1950)--a program designed to encourage family prayer--most radio versions of *Jane Eyre* were less concerned with the morals of Mr. Rochester than with the mayhem of Bertha Mason, whose identification and removal were argued to suffice in effectuating the happiness of a friendless, insecure maiden. As in the gloomy *Mercury Summer Theatre* version attributed to Norman Corwin (June 28, 1946), the young governess was generally deprived even of interactions with her French pupil, Adèle, a role difficult to cast and of little significance to the girl-meets-Welles plot central to all productions showcasing the talents of the former boy wonder. Instead, Jane was given little else to do than to wait for, respond to, or talk about her forbidding employer while Bernard Herrmann’s imitation of *Tristan und Isolde* signaled impending doom.

“ . . . and a special nod to Helen Geddes who screamed so convincingly as the mad wife,” *Favorite Story* host Ronald Colman closed the curtain on “Jane Eyre” as conceived by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee (Sept. 3, 1946; syn.). Bertha Mason’s ominous

laughter aside, only three speaking parts were deemed essential to any half-hour radio dramatization of the romance-mystery triangle--Jane, Mr. Rochester, and the messenger (Mason or his solicitor) who interrupts their marriage ceremony. Building suspense by delaying Mr. Rochester's entrance without having to resort to lengthy narration, most dramatizations also retained Mrs. Fairfax, the housekeeper, who serves as a confidante to whom Jane could express, however laconically, her expectations and impressions of the master of Thornfield Hall. To justify--or maximize the utility of--a speaking part for a minor character, some adapters chose to transform Mrs. Fairfax into a Mrs. Danvers type, perhaps in an effort to toss a red herring into the depopulated mystery plot; in the *Matinee Theatre* production (Dec. 3, 1944) she becomes Grace Poole, while *Weird Circle's* "Jane Eyre" (Aug. 12, 1946; syn.) identifies her as Mrs. Campbell. Although not the "frustrating whirl" deplored by Shayon, these truncated thrillers are hardly faithful retellings of Jane Eyre, precisely because they *tell* little of Jane's intimate thoughts and instead *express* her emotional responses in fragmentary dialogue and melodramatic action.

Dialoguing Brontë's autodiegetic novel, radio dramatizations generally preserve only a rudimentary first-person narrative, which mainly assists in stringing together the most sensational of Jane Eyre's melodramatic episodes (Niggli's plot points), thereby reducing the Jane of the airwaves, about whose past and inner life listeners are left in the dark, to an aural cartoon, a little orphan nanny who has nothing to demonstrate but her loyalty to the man largely responsible for her torment and her humiliation at the altar. In the *Matinee Theatre* version, which dispenses with first-person narration altogether, dramatic compression does not permit Jane to leave Rochester at all; fire engulfs Thornfield Hall as soon as she attempts to depart. By comparison, *Favorite Story* manages to emphasize a long separation by way of flashback narration, only to contribute to the listener's impression that the key to the heroine's past lies not in Brontë's Jane Eyre, but in Daphne Du Maurier's Rebecca: "Last night I came back to Thornfield Hall," the play opens. "I expected to see the familiar stately manor house. I saw a blackened

ruin.”⁵³ As radio playwright and London *Times* broadcast critic David Wade puts it, the original author “tends to disappear with the prose” and is not easily recaptured in the adapter’s verbal substitutions.⁵⁴ The insistence on dramatization, radio *theater*’s emphasis on dialogue at the expense of narration, description, and authorial commentary--the three other prose “systems” operating in the traditional novel⁵⁵--thus further discredited radio’s literary anthologies as unauthorized simulacra.

Apparently, most listeners were either unconcerned or unaware that such recycled classics were in many respects less than authoritative renderings; nor were they compelled to judge for themselves by consulting the original volumes. According to Lazarfeld’s survey, adaptations presented on prestige shows like *Mercury Theatre* attracted about twice as many listeners as literary talk programs, but had not proven half as effective in stimulating follow-up readings.⁵⁶ The creators of radio “impressions,” as dramatized novel digests were called on *Favorite Story*, carefully avoided such referrals since any apparent gap in their dramatizations might have suggested to listeners unfamiliar with the original that their trust in radio was unsound and their listening experience in need of supplementation. Dramatizations thus ran counter to the goals of educators and the medium’s “greatest educational asset,” which Davidson Taylor, director of programs and vice-president of CBS, argued to be the

ability to stimulate curiosity. Instead of confirming hearers in the opinion that they are receiving a pellet of knowledge which is their learning for the day, educational broadcasts can--and should--dissatisfy the listener with what he knows, should lead him to believe that some of the gaps in his equipment are remediable.⁵⁷

Instead, adapters were so adept at airbrushing storylines that, unlike earlier broadcasts of stage drama, even the most chopped up novels came across as complete plays, leaving audiences satisfied, grateful to the sponsor, and incurious about an original whose “untransferable qualities” had been thoroughly erased.

Not all critics were troubled by the radio theatricals' author-silencing voice-overs.

Saul Carson protested that the

perfectionist who wants his stage play "pure" and his novel pristine when transferred to the air, is really indulging his snobbishness. He studied Madame Bovary in college (if not in his grandmother's attic) and discussed Dreiser's "massive ponderousness" in bull-sessions among self-confessed Young Intellectuals. How, then, can several million listeners tuned in on a coast-to-coast network appreciate such fine fare? Let the masses wallow in the coarseness of soap opera, the cheapness of whodunits, the tawdriness of radio comedy. These are to be denounced, indiscriminately. But literature? That's too good for the people.⁵⁸

Dismissing the charge of "bowdlerization," Carson commended adapters of An American Tragedy for having "improved on [Dreiser's] prose without losing any of his vigor." Such views were fostered by an industry that had more to gain from the approval of the masses than from the praise of the elite.

In sketches presented on variety programs like the *Jack Benny Program* and the *Fred Allen Show*, certified Grade A culture and those who foisted it in the spirit of telescopic philanthropy on the Borrioboola-Gha of the listening masses were common subjects of crude burlesques that demanded only a fleeting acquaintance with the fictions thus reclaimed for public entertainment. In other words, what was ridiculed on such high-rated comedy programs was not so much literature itself, but the literati conceit, the misguided attempts of high-toned arbiters of taste who sought to employ a demotic medium like radio as a means of turning public domain fictions into uplifting or elitist fare. Fred Allen, whose literary guests included humorists Robert Benchley, Franklin P. Adams, and H. Allen Smith, amused his audiences by mocking self-appointed cultural custodians and their "unrehearsed, unprepared, and uncalled for" book talks ("The Author Meets His

Match,” **Apr. 18, 1948**), while gladly providing plugs for the writings of that “little fella” who used to be part of his team of gagmen--Herman Wouk (**May 25, 1947**).⁵⁹

Making a guest appearance on the *Fred Allen Show* (**Oct. 18, 1942**), Orson Welles parodied his carefully nurtured auteur persona by sending up Victor Hugo’s Les Misérables, the novel he and his Mercury Players had adapted five years earlier with Welles in the lead. Portraying himself as a prideful thespian out of touch with the radio audience he once knew how to delight, Welles refers to the novel as an “immortal story of a soul transfigured and redeemed, through suffering,” but reduces its plot to a frantic game of cops-and-robbers, dramatized in three brief confrontations between Valjean (Welles) and his nemesis Javert (Allen). As a result of Welles’s determination to keep the “immortal” material from Allen, the broadcast vaudevillian who mocked him in the past, the entire production becomes quite literally an effort gone to waste:

ALLEN. Now look, Orson, I don’t want to hog the whole thing. But
in two acts all I’ve done so far is knock on a door and blow a whistle.
Now, after all, I’m an actor, not a soundman. When do I get to read
some lines?

WELLES. The next scene is all yours, Fred. Your speech is the climax of
the entire play.

ALLEN. Well now we’re getting some place. What’s next?

WELLES. In this final scene you trail me through the sewers of Paris.

ALLEN. Oh, the sewers.

WELLES. You finally corner me single-handed. There we stand, face to
face. I have just a few words and then you speak.

ALLEN. I speak. Well, that sounds good. Let’s go.

(Music: heavy, then fades.)

WELLES. Mon Doo! Alone in this sewer! Trapped like a rat
who nightly crawls through this hideous muck of the city. The gloomy

darkness, this narrow archway above me head, these two slimy corridor walls. (*Hysteric laugh.*) Oh, but hark! That sloshing through the muck. Javert! At last you've cornered me, Javert! Don't talk, Javert! Before you seal my doom, I would speak for the last time. You will never take Jean Valjean alive, Javert. (*Laughs.*) The water in this sewer is rising, Javert. I am six feet nine. You, Javert, are five feet two. The water rises, Javert. There is no turning back. The water! Higher, higher. Now, Javert, you have Jean Valjean at your mercy. Pronounce my doom. Speak, Javert. Speak.

ALLEN. (*Gargles.*)⁶⁰

The promises of literary greatness is exposed as so much hogwash, leaving radio's true voice submerged, its acknowledged genius at wit's end.

When the sketch was revised and revived a few years later (**Mar. 3, 1946**), Allen prefaced it with the announcement that he had just become the "talk of the literary set"--albeit in "subdued voices, for the nonce"--ever since his name appeared in "Dr. Funk's new tome, The Way to Vocabulary Power and Culture." Now a "part-time intellectual," even society columnist Elsa Maxwell had blown him a kiss; but "she was a little short-winded" and "it fell in the gutter." Minutes later, it was Allen who once again drowned in cultural waste product spuriously elevated to the level of refinement. Such highbrow beatings and acts of public humiliation appealed to broadcasters and listeners alike, since they perpetuated the notion that the entertainments provided by the networks were both connective and collaborative, that the medium *per se* was not designed for the authoritative airings of so-called literary classics whose niceties could be discerned only by the scholarly few, let alone suited to the authorial airs of latter-day actor-managers too self-absorbed to serve the great American public. To resist, refuse, or rethink the networks' equation of public service with mass entertainment constituted the elitist bias the broadcast burlesques exposed as preciousness and presumption.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the programming strategies of commercial broadcasters “met with some opposition upon the campus,” as one contemporary commentator on radio’s educational potential observed, somewhat understating the severity of the academy’s objections.⁶¹ Unlike roundtable talks and classical music, the fictions of the air were becoming profitable by remaining less than edifying. Fast-paced dramatizations of Victorian page-turners like *Oliver Twist*, *Around the World in 80 Days*, or *Treasure Island* successfully negotiated the public’s longing for old-fashioned melodrama, the broadcasters’ interest in appeasing the FCC by airing nominally literary programs, and the advertisers’ need to reach solvent audiences with theatricals none would mistake as bookish. After all, if winning over the crowd and securing a sponsor meant having to place a microphone inside a “constantly flushed toilet bowl” to achieve a “faithful rendering of the waves breaking against the wall of the Chateau D’If,” even the creators of *Mercury Theatre*’s “The Count of Monte Cristo” (Aug. 29, 1938) stooped to conquer.⁶²

“The keenest minds have failed to answer how education shall be fashioned to compete with Charlie McCarthy and the ‘Singing Lady,’” remarked one critic of drama broadcasts.⁶³ Showmanship, suggested another, was a “practical approach” to radio education that would make the masses “forget to run away from education”; it was the “art of not squeezing ideals too hard, not letting the abstract become the ab[s]truse, not making goodness synonymous with dullness, civic virtue with prissiness.”⁶⁴ The question remained whether radio’s virtual libraries, which had proven so appealing to advertisers, audiences, and networks, could be retooled and reclaimed for educational purposes.

“Where is the heart of darkness anyway?”: Aerostatic Lecterns

Unlike readers and theatergoers, those tuning in to radio drama both retrieved and imbibed culture in private; sheltered from public scrutiny and institutional pressures, they also received considerably less cultural guidance, relying for indicators of quality primarily

on the broadcast itself. Star voices, lavish orchestration, and sophisticated sound design were express markers of prime programming. Beyond this, listeners often had to rely on the announcer for hearsay evidence of cultural significance or excellence. In order to distinguish their plays from other network offerings, the producers of what Boardman referred to as the “‘let’s-give-‘em-a-quick-brush-over-of-something-they’re-sure-to-go-for-on-account-it[’]s-gotta-great-title’ adaptation programs”⁶⁵ came to appreciate the value of name recognition and learned to exploit the listeners’ vague familiarity with famous titles and authors, a little learning coupled with mild curiosity, a desire for self-improvement, and the consolation of not having to read the work in question. If cowcatchers (opening commercials) and inserted advertising messages tied each performance to the sponsor’s products, a clear identification of well-known authors and titles served to market the entire broadcast as middlebrow entertainment. The more sensational the melodrama, the more eager were producers to demonstrate to broadcasters, audiences, and potential sponsors just from which famous volumes such ripping yarns were ripped.

The potential benefits of name-dropping were realized only gradually; perhaps it was thought at first that mentioning yet another signature would detract from the label that mattered most to the sponsor. One of the earliest dramatic programs boasting literary ancestry to bolster its original productions was Alonzo Deen Cole’s *The Witch’s Tale* (1931-38), the “great granddaddy” of broadcast gothic. Addressing listeners from her home in Salem, Massachusetts, superannuated witch Nancy introduced “Frankenstein” (July 17, 1935) as a yarn made “famous all over the world” by a “woman named Mary Shelley,” even though “she nor no one else never knew the true facts of the case” but old Nancy herself.⁶⁶ When his sources (which included Chamisso, Fouqué, and Gautier) were too obscure to make an impression on a larger audience, Cole, always credited as writer and producer, omitted such references. By comparison, later thriller anthologies like *Suspense* (1942-62) and the sustaining series *Escape* (1947-54) never neglected to

reveal their literary sources, the former presenting two-part adaptations of The Moonstone and The Mystery of Edwin Drood to set itself apart in the highly competitive thriller market of 1953, the latter regularly featuring stories by Stevenson (“Sire de Malétoit’s Door”), Kipling (“The Man Who Would Be King”), Conrad (“Typhoon”), and H. G. Wells (“The Country of the Blind,” “Jimmy Goggles the God”). Even though these radio digests played fast and loose with the original narratives, titles suggesting literary pedigree or cultural significance could invest lowbrow escapism with the middle-brow respectability that commercial broadcasters realized to be so much more advantageous than educational credentials.

The syndicated terror anthology *The Weird Circle* (1946-47) was particularly thorough in signaling its literary connections. Promising listeners tales “from the timeworn pages of the past”—among them Prosper Mérimée’s Mateo Falcone, Bulwer-Lytton’s Falkland, and Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”—*The Weird Circle* prefaced its twenty-four minute dramatizations with the following advertisement:

VOICE 1 (FEMALE). Who are the outstanding writers of weird and uncanny stories?

VOICE 2 (MALE). Poe, De Maupassant, Bulwer-Lytton, Wilkie Collins.

VOICE 1 (FEMALE). Where can I hear these stories?

VOICE 3 (MALE). Listen to *The Weird Circle*.⁶⁷

It was left to the local announcer, who also read the commercial copy, to identify the authors, thereby establishing a close relationship between literary tradition and quality merchandise.

Rather than depending on the support and approbation of scholastic authorities, producers of popular dramatizations developed systems of authorization that were more meaningful to the listener. In order to assure that the literary pedigree was appreciated by its audience, the transcribed and syndicated anthology *Favorite Story* added the figure of

the endorser by proxy. Each week, host and occasional star Ronald Colman announced which luminary from the world of literature, stage, motion pictures or radio had requested the work of fiction being dramatized by the capable team of Lawrence and Lee, who also produced and directed the series. Bennett Cerf, for instance, had presumably chosen Wuthering Heights, while Sinclair Lewis was said to have declared Vanity Fair to be his “favorite story.” Other endorser included S. J. Perelman (“The Suicide Club”), Alfred Hitchcock (Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde), Irving Berlin (Alice in Wonderland), Russel Crouse (The Moonstone), Howard Lindsay (Moby-Dick), Merle Oberon (Peter Ibbetson), Ozzie and Harriet (Frank R. Stockton’s The Casting Away of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine), and Fred Allen (Frankenstein).⁶⁸

No proxy was required when authors were given the opportunity to advance their own literary careers. For the benefit of cross-promotion, *Campbell Playhouse* at times left the “baggy monsters” of the Victorian age on the shelf, offering in their stead adaptations of recent or current fiction. When the Howard Koch scripted “Rebecca” opened the *Playhouse* on **December 9, 1938**, the legitimacy of the production, its kinship to the current best-seller, was underscored by producer-host Orson Welles’s transatlantic telephone conversation with Daphne du Maurier, who congratulated star Margaret Sullavan on her performance in a “splendid adaptation” she claimed to have enjoyed “enormously.” Five months later, the *Campbell Playhouse* adapted Wickford Point (**May 5, 1939**), the latest novel by J. P. Marquand, who also appeared as a guest on the program. “Now what about this, Mr. Marquand,” inquired Welles at the conclusion of the broadcast, “Tell us the truth about these famous characters of yours. Are they real people?” A rather dull and serious sounding Marquand responded that his characters were a “composite of dozens of people”; “if Mr. Moto ever comes knocking at your door,” Welles quipped, “please don’t tell him he’s a composite type, Mr. Marquand, just send for me. I want to meet him.”

Considerably more sophisticated was Agatha Christie's endorsement of the spurious, anonymously penned *Hercule Poirot* (1945), a series relating the Belgian detective's adventures in America. At the opening of the inaugural broadcast, Christie expressed her hope that the detective's "new career on the radio [would] make many new friends for him among a wider public" (Feb. 22, 1945). While claiming that the occasion to address the public "would have appealed" to Poirot, Christie, as "one of his oldest friends," agreed to "deputize" for the detective since he was "heavily engaged on an investigation" about which the audience would "hear in due course." The recorded shortwave message, inserted after a transatlantic telephone connection could not be established, at once authorized the series and distinguished the broadcast ersatz from the authentic adventures only Christie herself could relate.

Guest appearances were not always financially motivated, however. On **March 31, 1939**, Edna Ferber joined the stock company of the *Campbell Playhouse* to play the role of Parthy in a non-musical adaptation of her 1926 bestseller Show Boat, the novel that, more than any other popular narrative, had influenced the early episodic melodramas and musical-variety programs discussed in the previous chapter. Rather than advertising her literary output, Ferber used the curtain call to speak about the meaning of literature in the time of fascism and impending war. She declared herself to be "too agonized" about present world-political developments to write another novel like Show Boat, which was "just a romantic novel" that "carrie[d] no message":

A writer should feel free to write as he pleases, and in these times he is deprived of that feeling. Those millions of you here in America who have chuckled over Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer, those of you who have thrilled to that majestic piece of prose of the Gettysburg Address, who have read and heeded the wise sayings of Benjamin Franklin, whose pulses have quickened to the beat and march of Walt Whitman's poems: if you love these things, and believe in their beauty and worth, save them. For long, long after

the rulers of people are dead, the literature of a country lives on. You, who are listening to the Orson Welles program tonight, make up your minds what kind of world you want for your children.

Given the readiness with which accomplished novelists approached the microphone, the networks' would probably not have had any difficulties in creating a sustaining series of weekly literary talks or readings, or perhaps something akin to the nostalgic reminiscences Max Beerbohm shared in his infrequent but popular BBC broadcasts beginning with "London Revisited" (Dec. 29, 1935).⁶⁹ Yet network executives were not in favor of talk, at least not during evening hours. Music and drama was to bring literature and history to life. "To radio's democratic audience," Paley insisted, "history must be made to seem not a recitation of facts and dates, but rather a spy-glass into the past where characters live again." Classic literature, too, should "become a living expression of today's thought in yesterday's imagery," so that every listener could be "aware of the direct application of this material to his own life, that he listens as avidly as to sheer entertainment."⁷⁰

In an effort to produce what a later generation would call edutainment, the networks developed series of dramatized lectures, digests interweaving fragments of literature, history, and biography, alternating quotations and commentary, drama and narration through the use of sophisticated transitions and prolepses. NBC's *Adventure in Reading* (1938-40), for instance, promised "dramatized episodes from the lives of the men and women who have written the world's most exciting stories."⁷¹ Exemplary of such writing are the plays of Katharine Seymour, an expert in literary and historical radio biography whose work was deemed demotic enough to appear on sponsored programs like *Cavacade of America*. In "James Fenimore Cooper: First American Novelist" (Mar. 17, 1937), Seymour dramatizes Cooper's struggle to break with the tradition of novelists like Mrs. Opie, imitated in his Precaution, to undertake the writing of The Last of the Mohicans, dictated to his wife Susan on his sickbed. The drama of his effort to produce a truly American novel gives way to a dramatization of said work:

COOPER. (*Calling feebly.*) Susan! Where are you going? I've not finished! I must get this scene on paper!

SUSAN. I'm right here, dear.

COOPER. What was that last line I gave you?

SUSAN. (*Reading.*) "The fiery eyes of Magua were seen glittering like the fabled organs of the basilisk. . . ."

COOPER. The Mohican now found an opportunity to make a powerful thrust with his knife. . . . Magua suddenly fell backward without motion. . . . "Victory to the Mohican!" cried Hawkeye. (*His next words fade out.*) Elevating the butt of the long and fatal rifle. . . .

NARRATOR. And in this manner was born the book which was to assure James Fenimore Cooper immortality--The Last of the Mohicans. Let us turn the pages and recall some of its stirring scenes. Its hero--the noble Indian, Uncas, soon ranked in popularity here and abroad with Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. The setting of this dramatic narration of frontier and Indian life is the wilderness of northern New York State. Now, as our scene opens, Uncas, with ear to the ground, warns his friend the white hunter, Hawkeye, that men are approaching. . . .

(*Biz: forest sounds.*)

HAWKEYE. Your ears are sharper than mine, Uncas! I hear nothing!

UNCAS. The horses of white men are close to us.

HAWKEYE. Why, 'tis true! The leader comes in sight. And . . . two young ladies riding close behind! Fools--to venture into these woods infested as they are with Hurons! (*Loud.*) Who comes?⁷²

While in keeping with Paley's concept of educational broadcasts as dramatic and commercially viable entertainments, such composites of staged fictions and storied facts

played out their lessons as legend--aural *Künstler* romances in the tradition of Besier's Barretts of Wimpole Street (1930), itself frequently adapted for radio.

The skills of radio playwrights like Seymour, who had previously turned the story of early nineteenth-century Irish nationalist Robert Emmet into a fifteen-minute romance for *Famous Loves* (1931-32), were much sought after by network executives in search of innocuous and nominally educational melodramas. Another such effort was Frank and Virginia Wells's "Poet of Liberty," a half-hour play written for NBC's sustaining series *We Came This Way* (1944-45). Contextualizing soundbytes of Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetry (not always identified by title) through narration and episodic re-enactments of the author's life, "Poet of Liberty" glosses over the radical and revolutionary to emphasize the courtship of Percy and Mary, the latter replacing the third-person narrator as she enters the story:

MARY. I was away in Scotland when Shelley first began coming to my father's house to talk about Political Justice. Then I came back and. . . . Well, he forgot Political Justice for a while. Shelley and I used to walk among the tombstones of the churchyard where my mother was buried. She had been Mary Wollstonecraft, the great champion of women's rights. We would read the epitaphs, munch raisins, and . . . talk.

(*Biz: Crickets.*)

SHELLEY. I have a new poem, Mary.

MARY. Read it to me.

SHELLEY. Wait till I swallow these raisins. (*He swallows.*)

MARY. Watch out! You'll choke.

SHELLEY. There. (*Reading:*)

Upon my heart thy accents sweet,
Of peace and pity fell like dew [. . .].

(Pause. Biz: Feature Crickets.)

MARY. Does the poem have a name?

SHELLEY. Just . . . “To Mary.” *(Pause.)* I love you, Mary.

MARY. And I love you, Shelley.

SHELLEY. Then it’s settled! We’ll elope. Go to France!

MARY. I always wanted to see France.

SHELLEY. And you shall. We’ll walk through France bareheaded like
peasants! . . . No, wait! I won’t let you walk. I’ll buy you a
donkey. . . .

MARY. Oh, Shelley!

SHELLEY. You’ll come, Mary?

MARY. I’ll come, Shelley! . . . I’ll come.⁷³

To allow time for such crowd-pleasing heart-to-hearts, in which authenticating references (to Leigh Hunt, the Prince Regent, or the Piedmontese) could be dropped like so many names at a longhair soirée, “Poet of Liberty” compromises its considerably more ambitious design, expressed in a choric lecture at the opening of the broadcast:

NARRATOR. One Englishman once said to another . . .

VOICE 1. And what is poetry, sir?

VOICE 2. *(Ponderous.)* What is poetry. . . ? Why, sir, it is much easier to
say what it is *not*.

NARRATOR. If the great Doctor Johnson found poetry hard to define,
other men have given us definitions.

(Biz: montage effect for following.)

VOICE 3. Poetry is passion.

VOICE 4. Poetry is indignation.

VOICE 5. Poetry is emotion recollected in tranquillity.

VOICE 1. Poetry is a most flattering disease.

VOICE 2. All that's not prose is poetry.

VOICE 4. Poetry . . . well it's damned hard reading.

NARRATOR. There you have seven definitions of poetry. One for every day in the week. But maybe you prefer your own. Or maybe you would agree with that young poet of the nineteenth century to whom poetry was none of these things, but a *weapon*. A shimmering sword against the enemies of man's spirit.⁷⁴

In passages like these, radio's potential to engage the listener are most fully realized; yet the networks' insistence that broadcasts should speak to anyone--and ideally everyone--greatly impeded the development of the radio essay on literary subjects. Literature programs had "rather overdone dramatization," Frank Hill, scholar, poet, and advocate of adult education by radio complained as early as 1937; he predicted that the non-dramatic lecture would become a more prominent feature of public service programming, assisted only by a few "dramatic 'spots.'"⁷⁵ A decade later, it was the lecture instead that punctuated the dramatic broadcasts of network radio's most ambitious educational program--the *NBC University Theater* (1948-51).

Like *We Came This Way*, the *University Theater* was part of NBC's University of the Air, a short roster of regularly scheduled public service broadcasts intended to appease naysayers and keep FCC watchdogs at bay. The *University Theater* was begun as *World's Great Novels* (1945-48), a weekly half-hour program dramatizing nineteenth-century British and American fiction, with a few French and Russian titles interposed to justify the title. The distinguishing feature of the series was that it aired its "books that live" serially, allotting four installments each to adaptations of *The Cloister and the Hearth*, *The Return of the Native*, and *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. Largely ignored since the Mercury Players' *Les Misérables* broadcasts, the format promoted listener read-along, as each cliffhanger, however unsensational, aroused curiosity while enabling a catching up through independent readings; furthermore, it stimulated critical thinking by facilitating

comparisons between book and broadcast. Each episode closed with a reminder that “many fine books” were to be had at the listener’s local library; to “enhance” their enjoyment of the series, listeners were also encouraged to read the handbook accompanying the broadcasts, which could be obtained from NBC by mailing in 25 cents. A similar service had been provided by NBC’s Great Plays (1938-42), which, in cooperation with the ALA, furnished public, school, and college libraries with reading materials in connection with each broadcast.⁷⁶

In July 1948, when production moved from station WMAQ, Chicago, to NBC’s Hollywood studios, the series’ format was changed along with its title. Being converted from serial to unit drama while expanding the airtime for most episodes to sixty minutes, the weekly broadcasts were now offered as part of an academically endorsed home study course in literature. By contacting one of the participating institutions (University of Louisville, Kansas State Teachers College, University of Tulsa, Texas College of Arts and Industries, and Brooklyn College), those tuning in could sign up for a correspondence course under college supervision. Nine months after the program’s inception, more than five thousand listeners from coast to coast had enrolled, and, having passed the final examination, the first fifty students had been awarded “Certificates of Performance.” Addressing the radio public prior to the **April 10, 1949**, presentation of “Moby-Dick,” John W. Taylor, president of the University of Louisville, called the program an “important milestone in the history of American education,” since it enabled those “for whom the facilities of a university are not easily available to secure an education at the college level.” The Peabody Award winning series was endorsed by the Institute for Education by Radio and by the National Council of Teachers of English which, as announcer Don Stanley informed listeners in his introduction to “The Wild Palms” (**Dec. 4, 1949**), honored *NBC University Theater* for having “done most to promote greater understanding and appreciation of our literary heritage, to promote powers of intelligent listening and critical thinking, and to raise the ideals of good speech and writing.”

In its insistence that the motivation of five thousand listeners--or the demonstrable uplift of fifty--constituted a success, the *University Theater* was the first major network program to redefine public service, acknowledging that a medium accessible to anyone was not obligated to humor everyone. Breaking with industry conventions, the program broadened the range of *prêt-à-transporter* fictions to include works like Sherwood Anderson's Dark Laughter (Oct. 30, 1949), Dos Passos's Manhattan Transfer (Jan. 8, 1950), and Sholem Asch's 1939 bestseller The Nazarene (Apr. 9, 1950). Further augmenting its roster of nineteenth-century classics, the 123-episodes spanning series also adapted contemporary novels such as Stefan Heym's The Crusaders (Aug. 20, 1949), Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four (Aug. 27, 1949), Thornton Wilder's The Ides of March (Jan. 15, 1950), Walter Van Tilburg Clark's The Track of the Cat (Feb. 5, 1950), Christopher Isherwood's Prater Violet (May 14, 1950), and Sartre's Les Jeux sont faits ("The Chips Are Down," July 2, 1950). Somewhat less impressive than its library were the media transfers achieved by NBC staff writers who, employing mostly traditional dramatization techniques, were at a loss to render the stories and themes of such post-Victorian narratives intelligible, let alone to retain their texture.⁷⁷

In the opening announcement to an adaptation of Robert Penn Warren's 1946 bestseller All the King's Men (Jan. 16, 1949), *University Theater* acknowledged that, due to the "great power and scope" of the Pulitzer Prize winning novel, it was "impossible to convey the full story in a single hour." The play was presented instead "in the sincere hope" that it would encourage "an actual reading of the book." Already troublesome in the adaptation of episodic melodrama, efforts to condense plot and dramatize narration were even more questionable when applied to some of the more arcane, experimental, or subtly-themed fictions of the twentieth century, particularly by a program that prided itself on its educational merits. Commenting on George Lefferts's "A Passage to India," first produced by *University Theater* on November 28, 1948, Shayon argued that the adaptation had "missed the boat completely," since the "subtleties of the aftermath" of the

trip to the Marabar caves, the “details of the characters’ destinies,” along with the “richly prosed descriptions of Indian religious ceremonial,” had been crudely excised. Shayon particularly objected to a dramatization of the scene in the caves, in which Miss Quested dumbfounded Dr. Aziz with her inquiry whether he had “one wife or more than one.” As told by Forster, the

question shocked the young man very much. It challenged a new conviction of his community, and new convictions are more sensitive than old. If she had said “Do you worship one god or several?” he would not have objected. But to ask an educated Indian Moslem how many wives he has--appalling, hideous! He was in trouble how to conceal his confusion. “One, one in my own particular case,” he sputtered, and let go of her hand. Quite a number of caves were at the top of the track, and thinking, “Damn the English even at their best,” he plunged into one of them to recover his balance. She followed at her leisure, quite unconscious that she had said the wrong thing, and not seeing him, she also went into a cave, thinking with half her mind “sight-seeing bores me,” and wondering with her other half about marriage.

By adhering to the conventions of radio dramatization, Lefferts retained the line “Damn the English,” but, without access to interior thought, forced Aziz to utter the unspoken thought, a response Shayon rejected as “decidedly out of character.”⁷⁸

In an attempt to authorize its less than authoritative dramatizations, *University Theater* featured intermission commentaries read by noted critics, editors, and authors. Supplying his own notes on A Passage to India, Forster remarked that the novel was “out of date,” and, expressing his confidence in the partition and independence of India and Pakistan, that he was “thankful it should be.” Heard again between the “acts” of The Ambassadors, Forster pondered the “instability” of his attitude toward Henry James (May 29, 1949), while Robert Penn Warren pointed to the “stories of the driven and

dispossessed” in Faulkner’s The Wild Palms (Dec. 4, 1949), and Katherine Anne Porter recommended Woolf not for her obvious qualities, her “dazzling style, her brilliant humor, and her sensibility,” apparent in works like Mrs. Dalloway (Apr. 2, 1950), but for her “first-rate intelligence.” Speaking candidly--if sounding rather aloof to American ears--was Elizabeth Bowen in her assessment of her 1935 novel The House in Paris (May 21, 1950), a “mysterious book,” in which she could “trace no part of [her] own experience,” but for this reason rated it “in certain ways more highly” than some of her other writings:

When I was last in New York in 1933, I was brooding over the theme of The House in Paris, which I began to write immediately on my return to England. So, paradoxically, The House in Paris will always seem to me to be New York’s child. The book was the fruit of the stimulus, the release, the excitement I had received here. Perhaps a newcomer to a city, hitherto a legend city, always feels childish. . . .⁷⁹

Most radiogenic among the commentators was James Hilton, whose career in the US had benefited from Woolcott’s on-air promotion in the early 1930s and whose assured line reading and unaffected, avuncular voice was heard each week on the *Hallmark Playhouse*, a series of dramatized novels for which he served as host in the late 1940s. During the *University Theater*’s production of Jane Eyre (Apr. 3, 1949), starring Deborah Kerr, Hilton delivered a compact yet perspicuous lecture touching upon the reception of the novel, its biographical background, its historical significance, and its relevance for twentieth-century audiences. Quoting excerpts from the “mixed press”--reviews bespeaking the work’s importance as a “signpost in social and literary history”--Hilton called Jane Eyre the “first great novel that emancipated woman emotionally by portraying her not merely as the passive recipient of man’s favor, but as the possessor of rightful and independent passion of which she need not be ashamed.” However “shocking” an idea to the Victorians, the “battle so joined” continued into the twentieth century, when H. G.

Wells could be argued to have “fired the last shot” with Ann Veronica. To be sure, Hilton conceded, Jane Eyre was a “good story with all the popular ingredients--melodrama, romance, and a happy ending”; but “what gave it life is what gave it birth: a quality of passionate imagination which could make a shy spinster governess the equal, in her own mind and by her own showing, of a Sappho or a Cleopatra.”

For the most part, however, the lectures only emphasized the inadequacies of the dramatizations. Listeners having been told about Woolf’s “dazzling style” or the wit of Ellen Glasgow’s They Stooped to Folly, as described--and sagaciously quoted--by Glasgow’s friend and Saturday Review editor Harrison Smith (Oct. 24, 1948), were not likely to encounter much of it in the dramatizations. The guest speakers’ remarks--most of which were prerecorded--were never about the play, but about the original. Scholars like Bennett Cerf, Diana Trilling, and Columbia University president Mark Van Doren had never heard the dramatizations that featured their four-minute talks. “Stripped of Scott’s genius,” Saturday Review editor Amy Loveman insisted, “what is The Heart of Midlothian but melodrama of the rankest sort” (Feb. 27, 1949); stripped of Scott’s prose, the dramatization starring Maureen O’Sullivan was little more than that. And when Granville Hicks inquired “Where is the heart of darkness anyway?”--relating Heart of Darkness to the Holocaust--he did not search for it in Morton Friedman’s audio transplant (May 15, 1949). So indifferent were the program’s producers toward the medium they employed that an adaptation of Richard Hughes’s 1929 novel A High Wind in Jamaica (Aug. 20, 1950) even neglected to acknowledge that, in 1924, its author had written what is generally considered to be the first original radio play, “Comedy of Danger.” Defining aural play as an adjunct to print culture, the producers of *University Theater* turned a deaf ear to a quarter century of airplay.

Whether they promised listeners a *Favorite Story* or promoted *The World’s Great Novels*, the digests and lectures emanating from radio’s ersatz libraries generally provided little more than cursory once-overs of twice-told tales. The broadcasters’ attempts to

render written texts intelligible within short, often single sittings at fixed periods not of the auditor's choosing, resulted in *coups d'oreille* that dissolved most of the complexities and subtleties discoverable by the page-scanner's surveying eye. Suggesting an incompatibility of print and sound, such flawed or insubstantial media transfers ultimately led many critics to dismiss the notion of higher education by radio. Lazarsfeld concluded that there was "no limit to possible refinements of understanding in the domain of print," which permitted the building of "layer upon layer of thought and information" as readers advance from "simple" to more "complicated" texts; the broadcast medium, by comparison, had to "reckon with an ever-changing audience" and could therefore "never move very far from a base of simple, elementary communication."⁸⁰ Of great significance to the producers of daytime serial, the advertising agency-controlled soap and cereal operas, the concept of a select, target audience was never successfully applied to adult education. Instead, as Hill put it, instruction by radio was almost exclusively "teaching for beginners," aimed at an "audience with about nine years of schooling but with adult experience."⁸¹

"The poorer and the less educated we are, the more we listen--and naturally so," remarked Charles A. Siepmann, a former BBC executive who, in the US, served as Policy Advisor to the Radio Bureau of the Office of War Information (OWI); "cheap, accessible, and generous in its provision of popular tastes," radio had become the "poor man's library, his 'legitimate' theater, his vaudeville, his newspaper, and his club"--a club in which famous and interesting people seemed attentive to the wishes of millions of Americans. "Even a President," Siepmann marveled, repeatedly addressed the listener "as a friend!"⁸² Never was this influence more thoroughly felt and exploited than during World War II, when uniting a culturally diverse and socially unequal populace became an urgent objective for the US government, when education by radio became a synonym for propaganda, and when even literary anthologies like the Carl Van Doren hosted *Words at War* (1943-45) were designed to drive home something other than books. How far an industry dependent on corporate sponsorship and barred from serving as public advocate

managed to play this role effectively and responsibly by engaging noted poets, promising dramatists, and popular novelists is the subject of the three subsequent chapters.

Notes

- ¹ Khlebnikov, "The Radio of the Future," 1921, Radiotext(e), Semiotext(e) 6.1 (1993): 32-35.
- ² William Orton, "'The Level of Thirteen-Year-Olds,'" Atlantic Monthly Jan. 1931: 7.
- ³ Kaltenborn, "Radio's Responsibility as a Molder of Public Opinion," Century Oct. 1926: 670; see also Max Wylie, "The Realities of Educational Broadcasting," Radio and English Teaching, ed. Max J. Herzberg (New York: Appleton-Century, 1941) 127.
- ⁴ David R. Mackey, Drama on the Air (New York: Prentice, 1951) 4.
- ⁵ Dewey, Art as Experience (1934; New York: Perigee-Berkley, 1980) 6; 106. "The University of the Air," School and Society 15 Dec. 1934: 805; the article summarizes rather than quotes Dewey's speech "Radio's Influence on the Mind."
- ⁶ Paley, Radio as a Cultural Force (New York: CBS, 1934) 2; for a brief history of independent stations like WEVD--which served as an on-air memorial to presidential candidate Eugene Victor Debs--see Bill Jaker, Frank Sulek, and Peter Kanze, The Airwaves of New York (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1998) 64-67.
- ⁷ Kaltenborn 670.
- ⁸ Llewellyn White, The American Radio (1947; New York: Arno, 1971) 101-02.
- ⁹ Frank Ernest Hill, Listen and Learn (New York: Amer. Assn. for Adult Educ., 1937) 161.
- ¹⁰ Paley 27; 15.
- ¹¹ McClinton, "Radio Entertainment since 1935," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 213 (1941): 29.
- ¹² Robert West, The Rape of Radio (New York: Rodlin, 1941) 181-82.
- ¹³ Douglas Duff Connah, How to Build the Radio Audience (New York: Harper, 1938) 37-38.

- 14 Raymond William Stedman, The Serials, 2nd ed. (Norman, OK: U of Oklahoma P, 1977) 4-7.
- 15 Melvin Patrick Ely, The Adventures of Amos 'n' Andy (1991; Charlottesville, VA: U of Virginia P, 2001) 47-63; Bart Andrews and Ahrgus Juilliard, Holy Mackerell! (New York: Dutton, 1986) 4-5.
- 16 Les Daniels, Living in Fear (New York: Scribner's, 1975) 142.
- 17 "Radio Program Builds Audience for Inner Sanctum Mysteries," Publishers Weekly 4 July 1942: 30.
- 18 "Lawyers Turn to Radio Acting in Murder Trial on the Air," New York Times 23 Nov. 1930, sec. 9: 16; "Broadcast of Vivienne Ware Trial Marks New Epoch in Radio Drama," New York American 23 Nov. 1930: 2R.
- 19 Kenneth M. Ellis, The Trial of Vivienne Ware (New York: Grosset, 1931) 11.
- 20 "Vivienne Ware Trial to Open Next Tuesday," New York American 22 Nov. 1930, 6 am ed.: 5.
- 21 Howard Rockey, "Listening Room Only," Theatre Magazine Feb. 1931: 39. Randolph McNally, "Knife Hurling Brings Tension at Ware Trial," New York American 27 Nov. 1930, midnight ed.: 7; McNally, "Night Club Girl Faints under Grilling at Radio Murder Trial," New York American 29 Nov. 1930, 6 am ed.: 4; McNally, "Identity of Knife Thrower Exposed at Radio Murder Trial," New York American 30 Nov. 1930: 16L.
- 22 Doty Hobart, "Guilty?--or--Not Guilty?" Radio Digest Mar. 1931: 22; 25; 101.
- 23 From the dust jacket of Ellis's Trial of Vivienne Ware, which hails the book as "Something New Under the Radio Sun." The sequel, by the same author, was published as Dolores Divine: Guilty or Innocent? (New York: Grosset, 1931).
- 24 Lawrence W. Lichty and Thomas W. Bohn, American Broadcasting, ed. Lichty and Malachi C. Topping (New York: Hastings, 1975) 324-33. For a discussion of the strategies of fictionalization and emotionalism employed by the creators of the series, see Eckhard Breiting, Rundfunk und Hörspiel in den USA 1930-1950 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1992) 186-229.
- 25 "The March of Time," Radio Continuity Types, ed. Sherman Paxton Lawton (Boston: Expression, 1938) 374.
- 26 "The March of Time," Best Broadcasts of 1938-39, ed. Max Wylie (New York: Whittlesey, 1939) 137; 154.

- ²⁷ Lichty and Bohn 330-31. Other radio editions of magazines include *Redbook Drama* (1932), *American Weekly's* syndicated *Front Page Drama* (1933-54), and *Radio Reader's Digest* (1942-48).
- ²⁸ J. H. M., "The March of Radio," *Radio Broadcast* Nov. 1923: 3-12.
- ²⁹ Curtis, "Radio and Reading: Do Broadcasts Compete with Books?" *Saturday Review of Literature* 8 June 1940: 11.
- ³⁰ Lazarsfeld, *Radio and the Printed Page* (New York: Duell, 1940) 324-25.
- ³¹ For sample scripts, see "Invitation to Learning," *Best Broadcasts of 1940-41*, ed. Max Wylie (New York: Whittlesey, 1942) 264-78; "Meet Mr. Weeks," *Best Broadcasts of 1939-40*, ed. Max Wylie (New York: Whittlesey, 1940) 249-61.
- ³² Lazarsfeld 298-99; for a discussion of non-dramatic "book programs" on network radio, see Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middle-brow Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1992) 266-329. For more on Woolcott's broadcasting career, see radio writer Howard Teichmann's *Smart Aleck* (New York: Morrow, 1976) 180-207.
- ³³ Lazarsfeld 173-76; 299; for a collection of library broadcast scripts ranging from interviews with popular authors to general information about library services, see Marie D. Loizeaux, ed., *Library on the Air* (New York: Wilson, 1940).
- ³⁴ Lazarsfeld 326-27. The date for this particular chapter of the serial is unknown. Considering Lum and Abner's schemes, the educational value of the ALA spot seems doubtful. Education is not an end, but a means to them. For instance, to get to see more of the school teacher he fancies, Lum proposes to "get a bunch of books," a "long table with a green lamp on it and some chairs around it," to set up Pine Ridge's first lending library in his store ("[Lum Plans a Free Lending Library]," Nov. 10, 1941; "[Organizing the Pine Ridge Library]," Nov. 11, 1941). The library--which temporarily features a real lion, but more canned goods than books--is up and running a few weeks later ("[Lum and Abner Research in the Library]," Dec 2, 1941).
- ³⁵ Sherman Paxton Lawton, *Radio Speech* (Boston: Expression, 1932) 192.
- ³⁶ Bernard Iddings Bell, "Perennial Adolescence," *Atlantic Monthly* Jan. 1947: 57.
- ³⁷ Seldes, *The Great Audience* (New York: Viking, 1950) 124-25.
- ³⁸ The claim that radio dramas are "in many ways like audiobooks" has been made by James Shokoff, "What Is an Audiobook?" *Journal of Popular Culture* 34.4 (2001): 178.
- ³⁹ Oboler, *Oboler Omnibus* (New York: Duell, 1945) 152.

- ⁴⁰ Inge, "Melville in Popular Culture," A Companion to Melville Studies, ed. John Bryant (New York: Greenwood, 1986) 717-18.
- ⁴¹ Boardman, "The Original Radio Drama: For Money!" Off Mike, ed. Jerome Lawrence (New York: Essential-Duell, 1944) 67.
- ⁴² Morwood, "An Old Daytime Serial Writer Looks at Pride and Prejudice," Persuasions 8 (1986): 17-19.
- ⁴³ F. Dubrez Fawcett, Dickens the Dramatist (London: Allen, 1952) 218-19.
- ⁴⁴ Joseph Ruscoll and Noel Huston, "A Modern Scrooge (\$18.75)," The Treasury Star Parade, ed. William A. Bacher (New York: Farrar, 1942) 225-40.
- ⁴⁵ Adler, Dramatizations of Three Melville Novels (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1992) 1.
- ⁴⁶ "Panic from Mars," The Nation 12 Nov. 1938: 498. For a detailed assessment of this oft-discussed broadcast, see Robert J. Brown, Manipulating the Ether (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997) 197-253. Also see chapter 8.
- ⁴⁷ Charlene Betty Hext, "Thriller Drama on American Radio Networks," MA thesis (Ohio State U, 1949) 76.
- ⁴⁸ Downer, "Orson and the Carpenters," Sewanee Review 52 (1944): 134.
- ⁴⁹ Shayon, "Whirling Down Plot-Skeleton Alley," Saturday Review 8 Sept. 1951: 46-47; see also Ralph Lewis Smith, A Study of the Professional Criticism of Broadcasting in the United States, 1920-1955 (Diss. U of Wisconsin, 1959; New York: Arno, 1979) 148-52. For a sample of Shayon's own radio writing, a docudrama concerning postwar juvenile delinquency that aired Mar. 5, 1947 (preempting *Information Please*), see "The Eagle's Brood," Radio and Television Writing, ed. Max Wylie (New York: Rinehart, 1952) 386-406.
- ⁵⁰ James Whipple, How to Write for Radio (New York: McGraw, 1938); see also Jan Brockmann, "Roman- und Novellenbearbeitung für das Hörspiel," Rundfunk und Fernsehen 5 (1957), 11; the latter argued episodic, single-stranded "Perlenschnur" (string of pearls) narratives to be particularly suited to radio adaptation.
- ⁵¹ Niggli, Pointers on Radio Writing (Boston: Writer, 1946) 33-34.
- ⁵² Abbot, Handbook of Broadcasting, 2nd. ed. (New York: McGraw, 1941) 115; also Albert Crews, Professional Radio Writing (Cambridge: Riverside-Houghton, 1946) 415.
- ⁵³ Further half-hour dramatizations of Jane Eyre include productions by the *Screen Guild Theater* (Mar. 2, 1941), *Romance* (Apr. 18, 1944), and *Textron Theater* (Feb. 2, 1946);

hourlong versions were heard on *Mercury Theatre* (Sept. 18, 1938), *Campbell Playhouse* (Mar. 31, 1940), *Lux Radio Theatre* (June 17, 1938; June 5, 1944; and the aforementioned production dated **June 14, 1948**), as well as *NBC University Theater* (**Apr. 3, 1949**). For a script of a half-hour adaptation performed by the *Yankee Players* over New England's Yankee-Mutual network, see Walter Hackett, *Radio Plays from History and Literature* (Boston: Baker's Plays, 1952) 9-28.

⁵⁴ Wade, "Popular Radio Drama," *Radio Drama*, ed. Peter Lewis (New York: Longman, 1981) 102.

⁵⁵ Gordon, *The Movement of English Prose* (1966; New York: Longman, 1980) 162-65.

⁵⁶ Lazarsfeld 315-17.

⁵⁷ Taylor, "Good Radio," *Theatre Arts* Mar. 1941: 220.

⁵⁸ Carson, "Radio: Translating the Classics," *New Republic* 25 Oct. 1948: 27.

⁵⁹ Allen made another reference to his former writer on **Oct. 26, 1947**. Adams appeared on *Texaco Star Theatre* on **Mar. 5, 1941**; Benchley was Allen's guest on **Nov. 1, 1942**. Benchley had previously--and without much success--hosted the variety show *Melody and Madness* (1938-39).

⁶⁰ Allen, *Treadmill to Oblivion* (Boston: Little, 1954) 146; 150-51. In the extant recordings, prepared for the Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS), Welles's lines "Sluice as far as the eye can see" and "Filth and offal dance on this sea of scum" are cut; the script is reprinted in its entirety in Stuart Hample, ed., "all the sincerity in hollywood . . ." (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2001) 26-39. "[T]hat is why I think that every comedian who survives in radio is entitled to an award," Allen remarked on the censorship that "jeopardizes the comedian's humor" when he accepted his Peabody Award; see, Allen, "Fred Allen Discusses Mr. La Guardia," *New York Times* 15 Apr. 1945, sec. 2: 7.

⁶¹ Louis Reid, "Broadcasting Books: Drama, Fiction, and Poetry on the Air," Herzberg 184; this article first appeared in the *Saturday Review* 14 Jan. 1939: 3+.

⁶² John Houseman, *Run-through* (New York: Simon, 1972) 367.

⁶³ West 174.

⁶⁴ Robert J. Landry, "Showmanship, Radio and Education," *Education* Mar. 1942: 418.

⁶⁵ Boardman 67.

⁶⁶ David S. Siegel, ed., *The Witch's Tale*, by Alonso Deen Cole (Yorktown Heights, NY:

Dunwich, 1998) 3; 239-49. This anthology contains thirteen plays from the series, as well as a program log.

⁶⁷ This introduction was prefaced to transcriptions of "The Heart of Ethan Brand" (Sept. 30, 1946) and "Falkland" (Dec. 9, 1946).

⁶⁸ All of the titles mentioned above are included in the list of recordings. Lawrence and Lee's other major contribution to radio culture was the *Railroad Hour* (1948-54); aside from twenty-two minute digests of operettas and musicals, it featured musical versions of Oscar Wilde's "The Happy Prince" (Dec. 24, 1951), James M. Barrie's *The Little Minister* (June 23, 1953), and George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (Aug. 10, 1953).

⁶⁹ N. John Hall, *Max Beerbohm* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2002) 194-97.

⁷⁰ Paley 14-15.

⁷¹ For a published script from *Adventure in Reading*, see Helen Walpole and Margaret Leaf, "The Story of John Milton," *Best Broadcasts, 1938-39*, ed. Max Wylie (New York: Whittlesey, 1939) 263-81.

⁷² Seymour, ["James Fenimore Cooper: First American Novelist"], *Practical Radio Writing*, ed. Katharine Seymour and John T. W. Martin (New York: Longmans, 1938) 104; these lines were broadcast as scripted.

⁷³ Frank Wells and Virginia Wells, "Poet of Liberty," *Professional Radio Writing*, ed. Albert Crews (Cambridge: Riverside-Houghton, 1946) 395; see also Katharine Seymour, "Robert Emmet and Sarah Curran," *Radio Writing*, ed. Peter Dixon (New York: Century, 1931) 246-55.

⁷⁴ Wells and Wells 395.

⁷⁵ Hill, *Listen and Learn* 165; also see Hill, "English by Radio--For Adults," *Radio and English Teaching* 207-13.

⁷⁶ David Blevins, ed., *National Broadcasting Company Presents Great Plays* (New York: Columbia UP, 1939) 3-4; for a published script from *World's Great Novels*, see Frank Wells, "Gulliver's Travels," after Jonathan Swift, *Adventure in Radio*, ed. Margaret Cuthbert (New York: Howell, 1945) 221-36. The play was repeatedly staged for programs that were part of the NBC University of the Air, including *World's Great Novels* (Mar. 7, 1947) and *University Theatre* (Sept. 24, 1948).

⁷⁷ Nearly all of the plays produced on this series are extant. For a complete if typographically flawed program log, see Martin Grams, Jr., *Radio Drama* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000) 344-48.

⁷⁸ Shayon 46-47; Forster, A Passage to India, 1924 (New York: Harcourt-Harvest, 1984) 169.

⁷⁹ For Bowen's own experiment in literary radio biography, see her train ride-to-Barsetshire fantasy Anthony Trollope: A New Judgment (New York: Oxford UP, 1946). There exists no evidence that this play was ever produced on US network radio.

⁸⁰ Lazarsfeld 139; 277-78.

⁸¹ Hill, Listen and Learn 186.

⁸² Siepmann, Radio, Television and Society (New York: Oxford UP, 1950) 82-83.

particularly eager to devote much airtime and creative effort to the development of potentially controversial and virtually unsponsorable highbrow programming. The miracle of the ether was left to be exploited by merchandising rhymesters and moralizing riders of the superheterodyne circuit. Submitting to transmission, to airwaves humming with homey or homiletic rather than Homeric verse, seemed more demeaning than selling out on New Grub Street.³ “Possibly the time approaches when it will be no longer necessary to write for newspapers,” Franklin P. Adams quipped in “Radio and Poetry” (1924):

The radio concerns will convince writers that they can reach four million hearers instead of 400,000. That will denude journalism of its poets, for, as every reader knows, all a poet is concerned with is reaching the greatest possible number with his message.⁴

More suspect than the broadcast messages was the medium, which appeared to impose a communion that opposed communication. Whether big business operated or government owned, radio struck many intellectuals--from Brecht to Baudrillard--as proto-fascist rather than democratic, a “Distributionsapparat” that not merely controlled but prevented discourse.⁵ Instead of interacting with one another, Depression-era Americans were just sitting around in the parlor, John Dos Passos observed, “listening drowsily to disconnected voices, stale scraps of last year’s jazz, unfinished litanies advertising unnamed products that dribble senselessly from the radio,” only to become receptive to President Roosevelt’s deceptively communal “youandme” from the fireside.⁶ Prior to the emergence of a cause that demanded the undivided attention of an entire nation--and a nation united--there seemed to be little artistic reward or intellectual benefit in “reaching the greatest possible number” of a presumably passive and undiscerning public. By the time James T. Farrell inveighed against the “counterfeit culture” of film and broadcasting--industries whose pseudo-democratic mass productions supplied and nurtured a “doped” audience--a “large proportion of the literary talent of America” had already been “diverted into Hollywood and radio writing.” Contrary to such fulminations,

the mass media transit of the late-1930s and early 1940s was not entirely driven by marketplace concerns. It involved temporary and uneasy alliances between conservative broadcasters and independent, politically outspoken artists whose contributions to popular culture few contemporary critics would have quite so readily dismissed as a “positive social loss.”⁷

The first major American poet to reconsider the utility of the soundstage for the advancement of socially responsible plays was Archibald MacLeish. In a 1937 appeal that was to be called a “manifesto” for a “new poetry” of the airwaves,⁸ MacLeish reminded his compatriots that in light of the “suspension of the experimental work of the Federal Theatre Units” and the growing reluctance of major theatrical producers to stage verse drama, the radio, although unable to “provide the immediate sense of the live and vigorous audience which the radical theaters give,” offered creative writers an attractive means to reach an infinitely greater number of people and should be capable, in time and with adequate materials, of shaping sections of that greater number into a living audience which the poet and his actors can feel. This consideration alone should deeply move the American poet whose present tragedy is his isolation from any audience vigorous enough to demand his strongest work.

After all, MacLeish asked, “what poet ever lived who was really satisfied with writing the thin little books to lie on the front parlor tables?”⁹

It was not the “tragedy” of their own “isolation” that compelled poets to take to the air; instead, it was America’s isolationism and the “spiritual silence” in the parlor that provoked the raising of voices. In the face of fascism abroad and at home, poets including MacLeish and Stephen Vincent Benét, Norman Rosten and Edna St. Vincent Millay attempted to transform the networks’ broadcasting studios into “radical theaters” and lecture halls.¹⁰

“Words . . . win”: Uneasy Remediations

In his 1941 instruction manual for students of broadcasting, Waldo Abbot called radio a “stimulant for verse, which, being too ethereal to be bound to a printed page, is in danger of extinction.”¹¹ At a moment in history when literature itself seemed in danger of extinction, the airwaves suggested themselves as an apt and timely medium of poetic expression. Both the threats against liberty and the risks of isolationism were to become recurring themes in plays written and produced on network radio during the late 1930s and early ‘40s; however, broadcasting policies and the network’s commercial interests forced politically motivated poets to voice their concerns about totalitarianism by indirection, in allegories rather than realist drama.¹² The question arose in what language the poet’s message should be couched to render a circuitously delivered anti-fascist message plainly enough without alarming network executives, confounding the listener, or trivializing the cause. In “They Fly Through the Air with the Greatest of Ease,” first heard on *Words Without Music* (Feb. 19, 1939), Norman Corwin sent his narrator on a frustrated quest of

A bombproof ode, whose strophes will stand stout
Against all flood and famine, epidemic war,
And pox and plague and general decay.

The speaker’s conviction that “poetry’s the thing” gives way to the realization that human “language beats against its limitations” when memorializing the terrors of fascism. Yet whereas Corwin’s play was a response to the perversion of poetic diction by the fascist cause--Mussolini having reportedly remarked that, viewed from above, exploding bombs resembled a “rose unfolding”--most poets-turned-broadcasters still needed to come to terms with the corruption and censorship of language by the networks.¹³

The pusillanimity of prewar network radio was so pronounced, that even shortly before the US entered the war, talk show guest Tallulah Bankhead was not permitted to exclaim “I love England” when she appeared on Ilka Chase’s *Penthouse Party* (1941) in a

rehearsed chat that casually mentioned Bankhead's acting experience on the London stage.¹⁴ As LeRoy Bannerman puts it, broadcasters were "caught in a vise of opposing public sentiment." Providing a forum for isolationist and pro-Allied factions, those licensed to broadcast were not permitted to editorialize, and thus struggled to remain politically unbiased.¹⁵ Even prior to the 1941 FCC ruling that prohibited both independent and affiliated stations to serve as "advocate"--a ruling known as the Mayflower Decision--the propagation of overtly anti-isolationist views in politically motivated plays had been impeded by what Gilbert Seldes called the "split personality" of the industry, a "huge private enterprise" licensed to operate in the public interest.¹⁶ Dependent on advertising, broadcasters could not afford to alienate isolationist tycoons to many of whom war meant primarily a loss of business.

The resulting cacophony of distant sirens and nearby ballyhoo met with the suspicion of satirists like Harper's columnist E. B. White. While anticipating the day the air would be filled with "the unmistakable aroma of charred books," White nonetheless argued printed truth to be imperishable and favored the continued investment in bookcases over the invention of broadcasting:

Where shall I find freedom on the dial?
 What number on the dial, please?
 Is it between the magnetic mines and the ABC shoe polish?
 Or is it that humming I hear
 Between the well-informed source and that incomparable substance that
 has been toasted to a rich golden brown?
 Perhaps it has escaped the box
 And lies hidden somewhere in the shelves alongside the radio. [. . .]
 That's where it is--in the books,
 All written down.
 I must remember to instruct the young

So they will know where they are going.

It is of the utmost importance

That the young be told in plain words [. . .].¹⁷

Juggling rather than balancing the messages it tossed into the air, the medium threatened to desensitize the public. Should American poets add their voices to the mix or withdraw from the mike entirely?

After all, in the jumble of familiar jingles and foreign jingoism, critical voices like these were also known to have “escaped the box” by being broadcast rather than banned. A few weeks after its initial publication, White’s poem was recited (as “Radio in the Rain”) along with Stephen Vincent Benét’s “Nightmare at Noon” on CBS’s *Columbia Workshop* (Aug. 11, 1940), the sustaining experimental series without which MacLeish’s verse play “The Fall of the City” might “never have been broadcast,” because, as one radio playwright pointed out, “there was no place for it” elsewhere.¹⁸ It was not that the *Workshop* encouraged political commentary. Under the direction of former studio engineer Irving Reis, it mainly sought to promote experiments in sound and audio technique. Challenging the ingenuity of the *Workshop* technicians, who accorded it a punctiliously orchestrated premiere, MacLeish’s anti-totalitarian parable became the earliest and perhaps most significant of radio’s political verse plays to combat the dormancy of the masses and the medium.

According to biographer Scott Donaldson, MacLeish “learned to use whatever means were available” to speak against fascism abroad and at home. In 1936, he contributed to the communist journal *New Masses*, commenting on the crisis in Spain; he also wrote and performed the voice-over narration for the documentary film *The Spanish Earth*.¹⁹ In his 1937 “Speech to the Scholars,” delivered at Columbia University, MacLeish warned young intellectuals not to be corrupted by the “bought historian” who “rebuilds / The past to make the present true” and the “churchman,” who “will lie / To justify the tyrants’ guns.” The poem concludes:

I say the guns are in your house:
 I say there is no room for flight:
 Arise O scholars from your peace!
 Arise! Enlist! Take arms and fight!²⁰

“The Fall of the City,” broadcast several months earlier, is essentially a dramatization of the debate over isolationism mediated by the single most recognizable figure in broadcasting--the announcer. By appropriating the conventions of broadcast news, the play engages the medium it employs; it is a fictional newscast commenting on the responsibilities of the history-makers and opinion-shapers in control of the media, as well as on the obligation of the public to regain said control or to become aware at least of the consequences of its loss. As Eckhard Breitingen points out, MacLeish employs radio to address the very dangers of which the medium is capable: its potential to enthrall, to mislead, and to instill fear.²¹

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the play opens, “This broadcast comes to you from the city.” Addresses like these are so familiar to radio listeners that there seems no need to account here for the disembodied voice that serves as narrator and commentator. “The Fall of the City” has two such mediating voices, one emanating from the broadcast studio, the other from the “spot,” the scene of a reported event. The first voice (House Jameson’s in the **April 11, 1937** production) reports the “resurrection from death” of a recently buried woman who, for three consecutive days, has appeared before a crowd of spectators in the square of an unspecified city. “In a time like ours seemings and portents signify,” the speaker comments before the listener is transferred, in the customary style of spot reporting, to the scene of broadcast event (“We take you now to the great square of this city”), where the dead woman appears before the multitude.²² In his review of the broadcast, Seldes remarked that although the play at times appeared to be written by someone “not particularly fond” of radio technique, there were nonetheless “moments”

when “production and text together” managed to achieve the “effect of significance and reality” that listeners sense in a “broadcast of an actual event of historical importance.”²³

Another reviewer likened this “sense of actuality and importance” to “that feeling of participation conveyed by [King] Edward’s abdication speech or the brief eye-witness account of the Hindenburg disaster.”²⁴ Yet since MacLeish’s play does not permit its listeners to distinguish between the living and the dead, each voice being alive when uttered, the miracle of broadcasting and the broadcasting of miracles become one in a *trompe-l’oreille* tableau, the hype and hyperrealism that is the media event. The listener is led by the ear into a crowd stirred by speeches, dissonant voices of eyewitnesses and hearsayers, orators and oracles, pacifists and warmongers. Each voice is real, each conflicting message potentially yet unverifiably true; the medium makes it so. At the conclusion of the play, the throng is so bewildered by words that it believes itself to be incapable of action and surrenders to the mute “conqueror”—a hollow suit of armor, a mere shell of clanking metal. As the city falls, nothing seems less assuring than listening (hearing and obeying) in blind faith.

In “The Fall of the City,” the warnings against fascist silencing and silent fascism are articulated in a drama of warring broadcast voices--harassing, placating, disarming--and their effect upon the hysterical masses, citizens echoing, rather than reflecting upon, the disquieting speeches they hear. An extension of the crowd in the play, the listener at home is granted even less time for contemplation. Any interval of silence, interpreted for the broadcast audience by the announcer, is robbed of its potential to give pause for thought:

They stand still circling the ministers
No one has spoken or called out:--
There is no stir at all nor movement:
Even the farthest have stood patiently:
They wait trusting the old men:

They wait faithfully trusting the answer.²⁵

Throughout the play, the announcer on the spot (the ubiquitous, commanding voice presence of Orson Welles) not only verbalizes the unfolding event, but editorializes with increasing excitement, commenting on the reactions of the crowd and the speakers to the words of the dead woman who has come to prophesy that the “city of masterless men / Will take a master”:

Small wonder they feel fear.

Before the murders of the famous kings--

Before imperial cities burned and fell--

The dead were said to show themselves and speak.

When dead men came disaster came. Presentiments

That let the living on their beds sleep on

Woke dead men out of death and gave them voices.²⁶

Engaging in the spectacle of resurrecting and perpetuating the voices on which they feed, the broadcasters--the conquerors of the public airwaves, the hollow invaders of the American home--impose silence in the very act of articulation. As Dan Landers puts it, they cannot tolerate the “phenomenon of dead air” since it

allows authority to fall away. Silence has plagued the entire history of radiophonic production, as it is believed to indicate a nothingness, a space in which the listener is apt to inset his or her own idiosyncratic noise and meaning, a space in which the listener’s own body may constitute a presence.²⁷

“The Fall of the City,” like most of MacLeish’s subsequent radio plays, including “Air Raid” and “The States Talking,” dramatizes the debate it entered--the battle over the airwaves and the conscription of the listener.

Was the mass medium democratic or proto-fascist? Were listeners drawn to radio as a messenger, an interpreter, or as what Seldes called “the modern oracle,” whose

speakers were “unseen, answering questions of statecraft, propounding riddles, explaining and foretelling events, denouncing the enemies of the state,” an oracle which, like the ancient ones, could be manipulated and bribed?²⁸ In MacLeish’s plays, the audience, lured to their receivers like the crowd in “The Fall” to the town square, is confronted with the responsibilities of making educated decisions based on the riddles and prophecies coming to their ears. In “The States Talking,” America is listening and collectively laughing at the fascist messages from Europe; in “Air Raid,” the audience is asked to “stand by” as women and children, refusing to heed warnings of an impending blitz, are attacked and annihilated:

You who fish the fathoms of the night
 With poles on roof-tops and long loops of wire
 Those of you who driving from some visit
 Finger the button on the dashboard dial
 Until the metal trembles like a medium in a trance
 And tells you what is happening in France
 Or China or in Spain or some such country
 You have one thought tonight and only one:
 Will there be war? Has war come?
 Is Europe burning from the Tiber to the Somme?
 You think you hear the sudden double thudding of the drum
 You don’t though . . .
 Not now . . .
 But what your ears will hear with in the hour
 No one living in this world would try to tell you.
 We take you there to wait it for yourselves.
 Stand by: we’ll try to take you through. . . .²⁹

Here, as in “The Fall of the City,” the radio listener, cast as a silent partner in the business of war, is reminded of the dangers of unreflecting and unresisting reception:

Let this conqueror come!
 Show him no hindrance!
 Suffer his flag and his drum!
 Words . . . win!³⁰

Although it did not fail to catch the attention of theater critics and cultural historians, MacLeish’s foray into broadcasting was deemed significant less for its aesthetic qualities or its substance than for its potential to encourage other noted American poets and dramatists to follow suit. In 1939, John Gassner included “The Fall of the City” among the Twenty Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre, not primarily because the play was a “brilliantly imaginative treatment of fascism or because its poetry was superior to any that had been written for the American Stage,” but because “with it a real poet and an intelligent dramatist invaded the broadcasting studios.” Owing largely to MacLeish, Gassner argued, the “air-waves are no longer completely monopolized by Pollyanna and her laxative-sponsored cousins.”³¹ Convinced that the reception of MacLeish’s radio parable “proved there was an audience for a better type of play,” the *Columbia Workshop*--which had already produced over thirty experimental broadcasts, including works by radio dramatists and craftsmen like William N. Robson, Milton Geiger, and Reis--decided to pay two and a half times more for each script it accepted.³² “The Fall of the City” thus gave rise to *Workshop* productions of a number of original radio plays by established American writers, including Alfred Kreymborg’s “The House That Jack Didn’t Build” (**Jan. 5, 1938**), William Saroyan’s “Radio Play” (**Aug. 10, 1939**), and W. H. Auden’s “The Dark Valley” (**June 2, 1940**).

To media critics and the broadcasting industry, the production of a radio play by a major American poet itself became oracle. An exponent of an art form often believed to be less than alive, dead to scholars, artists, and sponsors alike, “The Fall of the City”

prophesied not only the renaissance of poetry as public performance, but foretold its palingenesis as public service broadcast designed to raise national awareness of wartime objectives. Milton Kaplan, an astute critic of broadcast poetry, compared the purpose of the radio verse play to that of John Trumbull's *M'Fingal* (1782), written at the request of members of Congress; Kaplan held that such "utilitarian" poetry, which not only can but "*must* move multitudes," needed to be "a social document, direct, simple, and immediate."³³ Less than five years after his broadcasting debut, MacLeish was appointed head of the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF) and served as assistant director in charge of the Policy Development Branch of its follow-up agency, the Office of War Information (OWI), in which capacity he got involved in the planning and production of government propaganda series like *This Is War!* and specials such as Corwin's "We Hold These Truths."³⁴ In contrast to the inspiring and overtly propagandist broadcasts of the war years, however, the pre-war avatars of what Kaplan termed the "radio pamphlet"³⁵ were not yet reconciled with the medium that enabled their dissemination. It is this ambivalence toward indoctrination by radio--the medium's Hearstian capacity to stage resurrections so as to stay insurrections or stir them at will--that informs the central paradox of "The Fall of the City," a play spreading word about the tyranny of words.

Some critics were puzzled by a broadcast play in which words were pronounced to have won what was a decidedly hollow victory. Without questioning the significance of a play that rendered "everything else in the field comparatively negligible," Seldes argued that "MacLeish's work had a harder time making itself effective" since it militated against "certain habits of listening" promoted and satisfied by conventional radio dramas. By making "us listen to speeches, and not to drama," "long speeches which in spite of their own variety and interludes of music and dancing, allowed the mind to wander," MacLeish's play at times "sagged so low in interest that one feared he had written 'words win' as an ironic epitaph."³⁶ Critics understood that MacLeish "wanted the listener's attention focused upon the speeches" that "expressed the message of the drama"³⁷; yet

they also felt that even his most radiogenic composition, “Air Raid,” in which the author sought to employ the “recurrent phrase” of the siren “as in a symphony,”³⁸ was trying the patience of an audience that “knew the end at the beginning.”³⁹ As a radio poet, MacLeish was not “any closer to the theater” than he had been in *Panic*--and that, although it “appeared on the stage, was not very close.”⁴⁰ As Kaplan argued, radio plays permit little time for character development; instead, the “radio verse play becomes a play of ideas” which “of themselves do not constitute plays. Very often there may be dialogue, action, oratory, exhortation--but no play.”⁴¹

Apparently, MacLeish’s broadcasting efforts were judged not so much based on the potential of radio verse than on the conventions of nineteenth-century drama and storytelling that had become the flawed models of the American radio play onto which mood-enhancing or mimetic sound effects were liberally grafted. Despite his experimentation in “Air Raid,” MacLeish was not in favor of nonverbal effects, as would become particularly clear in his 1944 prose cento *The American Story*, polyvocal lectures about the exploration and exploitation of the Americas based largely on sixteenth-century travel narratives and historical writings. Critics dismissed these educational broadcasts, part of NBC’s University of the Air, as being “overloaded with conversation”⁴² and “self-denyingly austere.”⁴³ In the foreword to the published scripts for the series, MacLeish defended his minimalist approach by reasoning that “radio’s unique function and unique opportunity” was simply to convey speech, rather than presenting words, “artfully blended” by means of “[s]killful devices,” to “produce dramatic effects”:

Because radio is limited mechanically to sound, and particularly to the sound of speech, radio is capable of a concentration of speech itself, the text itself, which can give words a life and a significance they rarely achieve outside the printed pages--and which they achieve there only for the most gifted and fortunate readers.

Radio to MacLeish was not an “instrument” to be played, but a “new stage on which the

spoken word, freed of all external paraphernalia, should create by its own power and eloquence the emotions of which it alone is capable.”⁴⁴ “The Fall of the City,” which relishes in this eloquence, may thus be read as a self-reflexive soapbox opera, a commentary on the readily exploitable power of the soundstage to stir the emotions of the masses.

The play’s only non-speaking figure is the conqueror ideated by the words of the orators; it is the annihilating void--“No one!”--whose concreting presence is sounded by the conquered, the voiceless but noisy mob created with high realism by a crowd of two hundred inside the Seventh Regiment Armory in Manhattan:

The city of masterless men has found a master!

The city has fallen!

The city has fallen!

“The city has fallen,” the announcer repeats soberly as the broadcast comes to a sobering end.⁴⁵ Granting that the play’s “theme,” the “oppressor invented by the people” made it necessary for its author “to give no voice or body to the invader,” Seldes nonetheless objected that,

consciously or not, Mr. MacLeish was writing Greek drama and observing the unity of time and space and not allowing himself the variety of action which the radio encourages. He might have used sound effects which are a legitimate element in radio and are a welcome relief after too many words.

To Seldes, this lack of conventional radio drama technique bespoke a poet who had not entirely “come to terms with radio.”⁴⁶

“People talk, talk, talk, talk,” Randall Jarrell complained, “but no one really does anything--not even the Conqueror.” In a “series of arias or recitations,” MacLeish offered a “play-by-play account of how an ignorant and cowardly people slide into their ruin, continually hoodwinked by everybody.”⁴⁷ Bombarding audiences with “too many words,” the play suggests that MacLeish had not “come to terms” with the radio *listener*

as a collaborator of the playwright. Contemporary reviewers who felt compelled to offer MacLeish “some indication of the response of his audience with which he has practically no means of contact,” and “some modest suggestions as to the qualities of the radio as a writer’s medium”⁴⁸ may have sensed that the play did not acknowledge them as individuals united in the state of receptiveness but separate in the act of responding. Both “The Fall of the City” and “Air Raid” identify the audience with--and as--the ignorant, heedless masses of indifferent or indiscriminate listeners who, neither helpless nor blameless, are destined to be conquered or slaughtered. Not only is there “no dialogue in the whole play,” as Jarrell pointed out, there is no dialogue with the broadcast audience.⁴⁹

The “ear,” MacLeish maintained, “is already half poet. It believes at once”; it “accepts and believes, accepts and creates.”⁵⁰ “The Fall of the City” implies that being half a poet is a dangerous thing. Prompted to image forth only to be reminded of the fetters of their imaginings, radio listeners are chastised for the readiness with which they accept and believe in the voices raised on the air. Neither the age-old miracle of transmigration nor the modern miracle of transmission can prevent cities from falling if the citizenry is disposed to fall for rhetoric. “The manner of the fall is poetic, but there is more poetry than truth in it,” protested Oliver Larkin, set designer for a 1938 stage production of MacLeish’s play at Smith College:

Not in this way, one insists, do dictatorships come to free peoples. One hopes MacLeish will some day create a play which, although it may close with catastrophe, will not begin by assuming that nothing can be done to prevent it; which, although it may begin with a threat, will not end by declaring the threat was a bogey; which will dramatize not only one man’s fears, his credulity, his tragic mistakes, but also those qualities of courage, of wisdom and of strength which are the reason why cities need not fall.⁵¹

The “oppressors are real,” concurred Jarrell, “that suit of armor was never empty: it is MacLeish who has invented, not the people,” many of whom, the world over, “have died

fighting” for freedom. “If MacLeish put his philosophy in a book, he should call it ‘The World as Will and Nothing But Will.’”⁵² If the “plays of ideas” were to succeed as propaganda, they needed to be more embracing of the masses they sought to reach and less skeptical of the medium--the McLuhanesque “tribal drum”⁵³--they employed. If their words were to be welcomed and heeded by the American listener, they needed to be imbued with and invoke the spirit of telescopic philanthropy.

Like the old astronomer in Kreymborg’s allegory “The Planets,” broadcast poets were called upon to traverse time and space in an “effort to save the human race.”⁵⁴ Kreymborg, a New York City poet and playwright active in the Federal Theatre Project, argued an “author” to be a “two-sided being,”

the one involved in the lives of his fellow travellers and the other in a detached communication of experience. Foreign events and threats are so close to our doors that we touch not alone our neighbors, but the rest of mankind. The world is a part of our intimate being, and war or a pseudo war in some distant place brings home the civilian brother whose house is under bombardment or innocent family slain.

While the “movement toward a genuine reciprocity” was “still in its infancy,” broadcasting promised to reshape the relationship between poet and public.⁵⁵ Emphasizing both the ability of the broadcast medium to bridge distances and the colossal implications of such an achievement, “The Planets”--an hour-long play one critic described as an “interesting if somewhat baffling experiment” of balladry, free verse, blank verse and rhythmic prose--was broadcast over NBC on June 6, 1938, from the solar room of the Hayden Planetarium in Manhattan: “I’ll tear all space apart till I can hear / Some other voice than mine [. . .].”⁵⁶ Kreymborg insisted that

more and more artists should turn to radio as a means of original expression and should do so in a mood of practical collaboration. Radio is a remarkably sensitive instrument already demanding coordination among

the people concerned in a given production. We have all been too impatient with radio in the past, and have based our judgment on the very worst things we could listen to.⁵⁷

Dedicating his composition “to Peace,” the author explained that he took to the airwaves because the “world we live in now is so closely knit that a sudden event touches all people, no matter how far removed from one another. Our local or personal spheres have become universal.”⁵⁸

MacLeish’s earliest radio plays--“The Fall of the City” and “Air Raid”--lack this sense of reticulation and reciprocity, an appeal to fellowship that distinguish some of his printed verse of the period. The patriotic apostrophes of *America Was Promises* (1939), for instance, served to remind the American public of the “dead men in the pits” in foreign countries whose “mouths are silent but they speak”:

Listen! Brothers! Generation!
 Companions of leaves: of the sun: of the slow evenings:
 Companions of the many days: of all of them:
 Listen! Believe in the speaking dead! Believe
 The journey is our journey. O believe
 The signals were to us: the signs: the birds by
 Night: the breaking surf. Believe
 America is promises to take!⁵⁹

The radiogenic qualities of its dramatic exclamations were realized by the *Columbia Workshop*, which produced the poem as a cantata, with a musical score by Nicholas Nabokov (Apr. 25, 1940). Introducing the broadcast, MacLeish seized the opportunity to drive home its historicity and topicality, arguing that the “meaning of the poem itself is that the promises do not come true of themselves,” something

we have learned in Austria and Czechoslovakia and Poland and Spain, that unless the people of a country, the whole people of a country, make the

promises come true for the sake of the people, others will make them come true, and not for the sake of the people, for the sake of others.

As in “The Fall of the City,” the continuum of history is personified by the departed who appeal to the living; yet what is imparted in America Was Promises--despite the titular past tense marker--is not a message of inevitable defeat, but an urgent entreaty emphasizing the need for immediate and joint action.

“Action is the order of the day,” while “[t]hinking becomes secondary, or an impertinence,” one critic observed, dismissing the “incredibly shabby” verse with which MacLeish, by an “extraordinary case of the felicity of tragic events,” turned “prophet and Voice of Destiny.” MacLeish having “reduced his new patriotic function to a condition of verbal ineptitude and moral hogwash,” the “great public-speech hope collapsed beyond any present hope of revival.”⁶⁰ This critique of American broadcast verse was somewhat of an overstatement, particularly when these artistic efforts are compared to the pro-fascist rants Ezra Pound, the Goebbels of modern poetry, airwaved from Rome between 1941 and 1943.⁶¹ Whatever the literary merit of MacLeish’s prophesies, his lectures about America’s destiny--or, rather, of its destination--as recalled by voices of the past or the vast beyond served as a paradigm for broadcast verse pamphlets, the loosely structured rallying cries that issued from America’s “public-speech hope,” radio, until the end of the war, when a deceased President Franklin D. Roosevelt, channeled by a chorus of broadcast voices, addressed the citizenry to deliver his final speech, scheduled to air one month after his death:

I ask you to keep the faith.
Today, we are faced with the pre-eminent fact
That if civilization is to survive,
We must cultivate the ability
Of all peoples, of all kinds,

To live and work together,
In the same world--at peace.⁶²

Those poets who could be induced to make an occasional contribution to broadcasting for the sake of the war effort seemed intent on transforming a modern means of mass communications into a site for a communications mass; and few writers were more adept at conducting an exalting radio séance than Stephen Vincent Benét.

“Strong voices, chanting of the rights of man”: Inspiring the Listener

As one critic remarked a few years after the death of Benét in 1943--a death argued to be “an even greater loss to radio than to poetry”--his broadcast plays were “frankly and proudly propagandist,” namely

for those things which Benét had been writing about most of his poetic life: his faith in democracy, deep-rooted in the American past, his sense of the spaciousness and beauty of the American soil and the benison of freedom achieved by the efforts of dead Americans, great and small, and to be preserved by the unremitting zeal of the common people.⁶³

In themes and sentiment, Benét’s verse plays for the airwaves are in keeping with his published poetry of the late 1920s and 1930s, particularly his Pulitzer Prize winning historical verse narrative *John Brown’s Body* (1928), which was given a *Workshop* production. In addition to his popular short stories “The Devil and Daniel Webster” and “Daniel Webster and the Sea Serpent”--a fantasy in which the statesman and noted orator enlists the “Leviathan of the Scriptures” in the United States Navy--adaptations of Benét’s works were heard on numerous patriotic programs, including the Treasury Department’s syndicated *Treasury Star Parade* and the Du Pont sponsored *Cavalcade of America*; his unfinished epic *Western Star* (1943), for which Benét was awarded a posthumous Pulitzer Prize, was adapted by the poet Norman Rosten and broadcast over NBC in 1944. Rosten, himself a recipient of an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for his

contributions to radio, declared that when Benét “saw the fascist idea in all its evil and murderous stature,” he “rolled up his sleeves and began turning out weapons,” by writing plays “built to specification, made for the need and cause of our time.”⁶⁴

In Benét’s plays, unlike in “The Fall of the City,” words win the fight against fascism: “Our voice is not one voice but many voices. / Not one man’s, not the greatest, but the people’s,” insists the “American Voice” in “Listen to the People,” presented as a special broadcast in cooperation with the Council for Democracy over NBC on Independence Day, 1941. The play extols the virtues of *e pluribus unum*, a sense of kinship in diversity that, if recalled and rekindled, is capable of conquering the “Totalitarian Voice” hissing like a serpent in an Edenic New World:

For there’s a buried thing in all of us,
Deeper than all the noise of the parade,
The thing the haters never understand
And never will, the habit of the free.⁶⁵

This “buried thing” needed to be reawakened to prepare the American public for a war against fascism as the period of American neutrality was coming to a close. After all, a government survey conducted during the spring of 1942 revealed that, even months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, half of those questioned were not sure just what the war was about.⁶⁶ Object lessons, rather than parables, were entering the “play of ideas” in order to demonstrate the destructive force of totalitarianism.

Essentially a dramatization of what President Roosevelt labeled the Four Freedoms, Benét’s “They Burned the Books” invokes the free spirits of those poets and thinkers whose words were condemned yet not quite obliterated by the Nazi regime. Broadcast under the auspices of the Council on Books in Wartime and the Writers’ War Board (WWB), the half-hour play premiered as a special over NBC on May 11, 1942, commemorating the ninth anniversary of the infamous German book-burning. Praised as a “dramatic protest worthy of a place beside Milton’s *Areopagitica*,”⁶⁷ “They Burned the

Books” became “one of the most influential plays written for radio during the war”; aside from airing twice on NBC, recordings of the play were distributed by the WWB to hundreds of groups for local broadcasts; they were piped into classrooms over public address systems and used in army camps for orientation periods.⁶⁸ Rosten attributes the success of Benét’s plays to the poet’s “gather-ye-round quality,” which expressed itself in a language that is “eloquent without being pompous.”⁶⁹ In its **July 24, 1942**, production, broadcast over CBS, the play was well served by stage and screen actor Ralph Bellamy, whose sonorous narration is magisterial, yet devoid of the grandiloquence with which Orson Welles impersonated--and impersonalized--the announcer in “The Fall of the City.”

“Why bother about the books?” the Narrator asks, anticipating the responses of apathetic listeners: “Burn a few books--burn hundreds--burn a million-- / What difference does that make?” It is a question that, quite literally, has dead poets, the ghost writers of democracy, turning in and returning from their graves. The voices of two politically outspoken German writers, Schiller and Heine, are the first to respond:

Excuse me, sir--my name is Friedrich Schiller,
A name once not unknown in Germany [. . .].
I spoke and wrote of freedom.
I spoke against oppressors and dictators.
I spoke for every man who lifts his head
And will not bow to tyrants.
And, though I died, my poems and plays spoke on
In every tongue, in every land for freedom,
For that’s what books can do.⁷⁰

The “ghost” is interrupted by a stereotypically shrill “Nazi Voice” that declares that Schiller’s Wilhelm Tell will no longer be performed on stage and that Heine’s name will be removed from German textbooks and anthologies. The implications of such fascist revisionism are demonstrated by a set of dramatic episodes in prose: in the first, a history

lesson in an American classroom is taken over by a Nazi instructor who forbids a young boy's recitation of the Gettysburg Address; in the second, designed to show what would happen if "our schoolbooks wore swastikas," the boy denies having any knowledge of Lincoln, having been coerced into pronouncing Benedict Arnold an honorary Aryan.

Signaling the end of indirection in radio propaganda and the consequent demise of radio verse drama, these blatantly manipulative what-if scenarios not only served the didacticism of melodramatists like Oboler, but were also suited to the dialogism characteristic of Corwin's prose essays. Unfolding as a contrapuntal series of idealistic speeches and their message-reaffirming quasi rebuttals or dramatic enactments, "plays of ideas" which relied on theme and variation rather than plot line and *telos* for their cohesion became a dominant schema for quickly assembled radio propaganda. In "They Burned the Books," the dramatic enactments of the totalitarian annihilation of literature and recorded history are followed by the argument that the suppression of thought is motivated by fear. The old books, the "Nazi Voice" readily admits, "are terrible":

These immaterial and airy words,
Sharp as edged swords, infectious as the plague.
They travel silently from mind to mind,
Leaving no trace. They live in quiet books
You hardly would suspect unless our leader
Had wisely warned us of them.⁷¹

Printed matter having suffered the loss of its proverbial permanence, the airwaves needed to reverberate now with thought that would otherwise be consigned to oblivion; script no longer serving as a reliable carrier of words through generations, the spirits that generated them had to fly into battle to defend their legacy:

This is in memory. This is in remembrance.
This is for all the lies that have been told.
The innocent blood, the blood that cries from the ground,

Rise up and speak, you voices!
 Voices of dead and living, past and present,
 Voices of gagged men, whispering through sore lips,
 Voices of children, robbed of their small songs,
 Strong voices, chanting of the rights of man,
 Rebel and fighter, men of the free heart [. . .].
 Who marches with us?

Among those answering the call to campaign for freedom are Milton, Swift, Twain and Whitman, reduced to readily identifiable soundbites.⁷²

In the defense of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness," few voices beside those of Lincoln and his biographer Carl Sandburg were more frequently appropriated for national broadcasts than that of Whitman, a professed lover of the "sound of the human voice," who channeled "many long dumb voices" and "sound[ed] triumphal drums for the dead," the "conquered and slain."⁷³ Radio critic John K. Hutchens insisted that wartime radio needed to make Americans "acquainted, as they have never been before, with one another [. . .] on the epic scale Walt Whitman dreamed of. For the radio has gone forth, as his songs did, to talk with the people and move among them." To Whitman,

the wonders of the radio would have appealed mightily, and never more
 than now, when its principal concern is the Democracy whose glories he
 hymned. Especially, one suspects, he would have liked those programs
 which carry you in a flash from one point to another of the continent,
 pausing to talk with this person and that in home and factory [. . .]. For
 there is the voice of America: the eloquent roar of a Pennsylvania shipyard;
 a woman welder in a California airplane factory, a mother of four children,
 wife of a soldier last heard from in Bataan; a South Carolina church choir
 singing in the Summer night; a New Hampshire mica miner.⁷⁴

“I sang democracy, / The new word, the new meaning, the bright day, / And I march with you!” Benét’s Whitman declares⁷⁵; and since it was not difficult for 1940s radio listeners to imagine an aged survivor of the generation born during the Civil War to be walking in their midst, “granddaddy Whitman,” a poet whose “all-embracing sense of society” appealed to writers like Rosten,⁷⁶ became one of wartime radio’s most prominent recruits, a war correspondent serving as a liaison between generations in defense of embattled liberty and between millions of solitary listeners at the home front. In Talbot Jennings’s “Man with a Beard,” for instance, a verse-dispensing Whitman walks into a reception center at a 1943 army post, listening to the concerns of a sullen, dispirited private; reminding him that, on Memorial Day, “it don’t hurt anybody to pull up and remember someone they’ve lost,” the “swell old guy with the [. . .] poetry” manages to dissipate the soldier’s cynicism and lack of camaraderie. And in Corwin’s “Oracle of Philadelphi,” Whitman is among the “quick and dead” summoned as “expert witnesses” of freedom’s force:

ORACLE. Walt Whitman, poet:

WHITMAN. Liberty is to be subserved, whatever occurs.

When liberty goes out of a place it is not the first to go, nor the second
and third to go,

It waits for all the rest to go, it is the last.⁷⁷

Having evoked the free spirits of the world, “They Burned the Books” concludes with a corresponding roll call of those who tried to “quench” freedom, including “Attila the Hun, devourer of peoples,” “Alaric, destroyer of Rome,” and “Adolf Hitler, destroyer of thought,” for whose death books, fire, and God are waiting. The obliterating pyres of fascism, the play drives home, are best fought with the “cleansing fire” and the “bright candle” of free speech.⁷⁸ The juxtaposition of voices representing and opposing democratic principles (if not of actual rebuttals) served to suggest that even in the service

of indoctrination, American radio as an institution was not a fascist *Volksempfänger*, a people's receiver, but a democratic communications network, the people's transmitter.

In keeping with this notion of American radio as a public forum, Benét's "Listen to the People" and "They Burned the Books" employ the figure of the narrator not so much as chronicler of history--a purveyor of facts--but as an essayist, a conjurer and conjoiner of voices--past or present, demotic or demonic, actual or imaginary--who, however manipulative, appears before the listener as a moderating and moderate presence.

MacLeish's pre-war plays had experimented with the familiar yet hardly fraternal figure of the announcer, a voice that, once identified or identifiable as such, becomes a formal, appointed interpreter set apart from the action--and the listener--by the broadcast-as-play frame. During the premiere broadcast of "The Fall of the City," Welles (as the diegetic announcer) was "carefully boxed off" from the crowd by "acoustic screens."⁷⁹ Benét, on the other hand, presented the narrator as an accommodating lecturer or kindly host transcending the conventions of commercial broadcasting:

I'm your narrator. It's my task to say
 Just where and how things happen in our play,
 Set the bare stage with words instead of props [. . .].
 In this, our viewless theater of the air.
 It's an old task--old as the human heart,
 Old as those bygone players and their art
 Who, in old days when faith was nearer earth,
 Played out the mystery of Jesus' birth
 In hall or village green or market square
 For all who chose to come and see them there,
 And, if they knew that King Herod, in his crown,
 Was really Wat, the cobbler of the town,
 And Tom, the fool, played Abraham the Wise,

They did not care. They saw with other eyes.
 The story was their own--not far away,
 As real as if it happened yesterday,
 Full of all awe and wonder yet so near,
 A marvelous thing that could have happened here
 In their own town [. . .].⁸⁰

Thus begins Benét's "A Child Is Born," a nativity-story-cum-indictment-against-fascism told from the perspective of the innkeeper's wife, who "know[s] that kings like Herod should not be" but is asked to keep quiet by an opportunist husband who, until his ultimate reformation, accommodates his oppressor to escape persecution. Attesting to the bardic quality of broadcast verse, the opening narration invites listeners to conceive of themselves as being in communion with players, characters, and audiences--"human beings, talking each to each"--in a ritualistic performance "in plain and simple speech" that promises renewed significance in each restaging.

The time is--time. The place is anywhere.
 The voices speak to you across the air
 To say to you that once again a child is born.⁸¹

While not always quite as gentle as--and often considerably more crudely propagandistic than--this the season befitting offering, Benét's radio plays, unlike MacLeish's pre-war parables, never problematize the event of broadcasting. Speech, however despicable or disingenuous, is always decodable as such. Benét's radio listeners, like the audience of a melodrama, are privileged interpreters of good and evil, and thus never forced to question their faith in the words cast abroad through the miracle of transmission or to challenge the notion of tuning-in as an active engagement with life by reflecting on its promotion of passive consumerism.

"They Burned the Books" even excuses years of American isolationism and the public's media-enabled ignorance of or lack of concern for world affairs: "They burned the

books and that was the beginning. / We didn't know it then. We know it now."⁸²

Breaking the silence, wartime radio was finally making "it" knowable, thereby redeeming itself. As the radio-listening speaker in another one of Benét's dramatic broadcast essays declares:

The last war was bad and yet it was far away

For us, for most here, for the lucky.

This is near and near and near.

It walks into our houses, every day [. . .].

In the sharp clear voices over the radio

And the going away of men. . . .⁸³

Benét's plays insist that radio is a medium capable of inspiring a nation by recalling to life those who voice the principles of the republic. Their words are flung far so cities need not fall.

"Unless ye would die as we!": Terrorizing the Audience

As more and more cities did fall, poets began to transport listeners to the theaters of war in Europe (Rosten's "Paris Incident") and the Philippines ("Ballad of Bataan," also by Rosten), using actual settings for their verse plays even as they, like Rosten, continued to call upon the "saints of yesteryear." In "Paris Incident," for example, Joan of Arc, hearing "voices" that tell her to "[g]o out and lead the soldiers," is reincarnated to be executed as a latter-day, Nazi-defying Parisienne.⁸⁴ Yet citizens, too, were falling, and the atrocities of the Nazi regime demanded responses other than the fantastic and the abstract. As Larkin remarked in his discussion of the 1938 stage adaptation of "The Fall of the City" in the wake of the Austrian *Anschluss*, the mind had already

become too crowded with images of flesh-and-blood townsmen being

blown to bits by quite substantial Conquerors, to be impressed by the

brittle abstraction before whom MacLeish's city falls--an oppressor
invented not so much by people, one feels, as by the poet himself.⁸⁵

The "moral of the Conqueror's being a suit of armor without an inhabitant, that the people invent their own oppressors, is hardly convincing (Hermann Goering always seemed solid enough to me)," remarked another critic at the end of the war.⁸⁶

An attempt at concretizing the horrors inflicted upon the civilian population was Edna St. Vincent Millay's "The Murder of Lidice." First broadcast over NBC on October 19, 1942, four months after the Nazi's retaliatory raid on the Czech village, the dramatic verse narrative was cited as an example of how radio--in contrast to the slowly responding stage, still "labor[ing] under an adverse critical attitude [. . .] prone to decry 'journalism' in drama"--successfully "picked up an item out of the current war and made it at once into effective art."⁸⁷ Like Benét, and indeed hundreds of American writers, Millay was approached by the WWB to intensify the public's hatred for Nazi Germany by contributing a piece of unabashed propaganda. Founded weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the WWB quickly became the premiere recruitment center for anti-Fascists poets, novelists, and playwrights. While operating independently from the government, it was entirely in support of the Roosevelt administration, received government funding, and worked largely at the request of government agencies like the OWI. Headed by the fiercely anti-German mystery writer Rex Stout, the group was organized to serve the objective of influencing public opinion; it could do so far more directly than the OWI itself, which was restricted in its distribution of propagandistic material within the US.⁸⁸

Upon being engaged by the WWB, the first time she had ever been asked to compose on request, Millay reportedly remarked: "I knew I should not be able to draw one contented breath unless I tried to do the job." The "job" received a great deal of attention when it was produced before a crowd of over 1000 visitors to Radio City's studio 8-H, the world's largest broadcasting studio. The cast included Paul Muni and Clifton Fadiman, then executive chairperson of the WWB's Lidice Lives Committee.

Rebroadcast one day later, the play was also shortwaved to Britain, Australia, and South America, translated into both Spanish and Portuguese.⁸⁹ Not since MacLeish's "Fall of the City" had an original verse play by a noted American been turned into such a widely discussed spectacle.

Millay was no stranger to the medium or its audience, her libretto for Deems Taylor's opera *The King's Henchmen* (1927) having reached millions during CBS's inaugural broadcast (Sept. 18, 1927).⁹⁰ A professed admirer of radio's top-rated Charlie McCarthy, whom she called the "little man who wasn't there,"⁹¹ she had experienced prominent invisibility herself during the 1932-33 season, when her own 15-minute program of Sunday night poetry readings aired on the Blue network of NBC.⁹² Nor had Millay ever been a "tenant of an ivory tower," as Hutchens pointed out in his review of the play's broadcast premiere, citing her 1927 response to the controversial verdict in the Sacco-Vanzetti trial and later political poems like "There Are No Islands Any More." And "if she permitted herself in 1940 to indulge in some shoddy political stanzas which smacked more of election year nerves than artistic conviction," Hutchens remarked, Millay "nevertheless had made clear her stand in the war for the democratic way of life." Without calling it altogether "shoddy," Hutchens held that "The Murder of Lidice" was neither a "great" poem nor Millay's "best," but added that considerations of how it would eventually measure up aesthetically were, "for the moment, beside the point." Due to the "haste in which it was written," the poem lacked the "flawless, studied line," and thus "marched in the great tradition of lines wrought in noble fury, in quick and passionate loathing." In short, it was a "fighting poem" that "finely serve[d] the time, the medium and the intention."⁹³

The "intention" informing the play, "one of the finest pieces of true propaganda to come out of the war," was bluntly stated in the Foreword to the published script, in which the WWB claims that the Germans "joyfully created ten thousand Lidices," that the "murder of all the innocent Lidices of the world is their religion. It is what they believe in.

It is their form of pleasure, as other men take pleasure in nature or play or love or family, life or art. They *like* murder.”⁹⁴ A somewhat less histrionic introduction was delivered by Alexander Woollcott on the night of the broadcast premiere, a speech emphasizing instead the heroism of the villagers and the costly “error” of Nazi “stupidity.”⁹⁵ Both a timeless memorial to the dead and a timely appeal to the living, “The Murder of Lidice” turns a historical event of unspeakable horror into an occasion to lament the loss of innocence and to hiss the villain. “Good and evil suddenly become as concrete as black and white. Human beings become friends or enemies,” sneered Morton Dauwen Zabel in his assessment of MacLeish’s wartime verse: “Poets soon learn the value of the ‘contagion’ of melodrama”; and Millay, “though slightly slower than Mr. MacLeish, has been quick to repair her fortunes and join the cause.”⁹⁶

The play opens by acknowledging the difficulties of the assigned task of responding to a

Human disaster on so vast a scale
The mind can not conceive;
Country by country, town by town,
Village by village, the hurt mind reads down the painful page
In search of symbols--symbols of the proud, the fearless
Resistance of free men to the tyrannic rage,
The ruthless act, the edict to inhuman, almost, to believe.

A pair of spirit voices pondering the fate of “this maddened planet” are disencumbered of their search for the “fierce light” of freedom by the “Teller of the Tale” who, before relating “one of the many stories” of war, comforts the listener that “Wrong” shall not prevail “for long.” While the play now shifts from the abstract to the concrete, Millay’s foregrounded storytelling approach, as well as her choice of poetic language and rhyme schemes, rarely employed in 1940s radio propaganda, distances or shelters the listener

whose innocence is argued to be under attack; it is clearly not a critical but a comforting distance that the play seeks to establish.

An almost prelapsarian innocence is evoked in the pastoral setting of the “fair Bohemian plain” and a village “in the sun” built some six hundred years ago, a place in which life is governed by the seasons and in which the worst crime and its most dreadful consequence is argued to be a child’s fall from a cherry-tree. The idyllic life of the villagers is described or dramatized in brief episodes of harvesting, child rearing and marriage proposals (universals made palpable by the concrete figures of farmer Mirko and his family), until the disruption of the regenerative cycle by an intruding force of evil:

First came Spring, with planting and sowing;
Then came Summer, with haying and hoeing;
Then came Heydrich the Hangman, the Hun [. . .].

With this unexpected line, whose impact is heightened by the sudden silence of the orchestra and the listener’s anticipation of a previous conclusion to the same couplet--“Then came Autumn, and the Harvest Home”⁹⁷--the pastoral gives way to the spirit of gothic melodrama as the courageous villagers are haunted by the ghost of the Gestapo chief whose assassins they harbor. Mirko’s daughter, Byeta, whose “senses do number more than five,” looks “like a corpse in [her] wedding-veil,” because she begins hearing “what nobody hears! Heydrich the Hangman howls in his tomb!”:

He howls for a bucket of bubbly blood--
It may be man’s or it may be of woman,
But it has to be hot, and it must be human!
Oh, many’s the sweet warm throat he’ll suck.⁹⁸

Although some of the Grandstanding Guignol elements--lines like “For he snuffs your blood through the crack of the door!”⁹⁹--were excised from the broadcast script, the revenge of the Nazis is nonetheless gruesomely rendered in the conclusion of the narrative: a newborn, hidden by a mother who just learned of her husband’s assassination, is killed

by being “banged” against a wall; an aged priest administering the last rites to a fellow villager is “dragged [. . .] up from his bended knees,” the “hallowed book” and his crucifix “stamped” into the floor, the dying man set on fire; and Byeta, having “struck her throat with a scissors-blade,” infuriates the German officer who forced himself upon her, soiling his shirt with the “clean red blood that forth did pour / And jet from a girl’s death-hurt.” The time for subtlety or philosophical abstractions having passed, the spirit of melodrama prevailed. After this succession of violent images in forced rhyme, could a sudden, unexpected twist of fate be in the offing for the massacred villagers?

Listeners did not have to tune in tomorrow to hear the rather astonishing suggestion that the people of Lidice may not have died at all, but are “plainly seen” after sunset, at prayer in the burned down church of St. Margaret--“and no blood there!”¹⁰⁰ A single-voiced chorus of the dead--or the indomitable spirit of freedom they are made to represent--is summoned for a curtain call, reminding listeners that the war for democracy and freedom must continue, that the story of Lidice is part of the continuing and comprehensive struggle for the preservation of humanity:

Good people all, from our graves we call
 To you, so happy and free;
 Whether ye live in a village small
 Or in a city with buildings tall,
 Or the sandy lonesome beach of the sea,
 Or the woody hills, or the flat prairie:
 Hear us speak; oh, hear what we say:
 We are the people of Lidice!
 Hear us speak; oh, hear what we say,
 Who and where soever ye be . . .
 Unless ye would die as we!

It seems a gratuitous act of conjury, particularly since the audience of “The Murder of Lidice,” even more so than the listeners of MacLeish’s “Air Raid,” are aware from the outset that the voices they hear are those of the dead transcribed, recorded history having prescribed the conclusion.

Nor are the dead now clamoring for an audience given an opportunity to speak on their own behalf. Instead, the silenced and disincarnate, rather than the dematerialized “Teller,” are called upon to mouth the moral of the carnage they just reenacted for the benefit of the American public. “We,” the “people of Lidice” become the conscripted advocates of “We, the People” by appealing to the listener’s spirit of self-preservation. The “Teller” goes so far as to suggest that the victims, on whose innocence the play insisted until this point, may very well be responsible for getting “caught” by failing to keep their country free “from the foe you hate.”¹⁰¹ Thus, in a rather graceless coda to a dramatic narrative vacillating between melodrama and allegory, between Sweeney Todd horrors and American pie idealism, the corpses of those who were made an example of by the Nazis are recycled to serve as an exemplum to an uncorrupted people yet at liberty to choose between independence and oppression.

In all this, the broadcast was entirely in keeping with the objectives of the Lidice Lives Committee, whose express purpose was to arouse hatred for the enemy, rather than sympathy for the victims.¹⁰² The published version of the play, on the other hand, does not argue the “Good people” tuning in to be entirely blameless, but extends the coda by reprimanding a “Careless America, crooning a tune.” In a more direct appeal, devoid of mediating spirits and archaic pronouns, the printed play not merely warns against fascism abroad, but against self-satisfied isolation and inaction at home:

Who, after all, are we?--

That we should sit at peace in the sun,

The only country, the only one

Unmolested and free?

Catch him! Catch him! Do not wait
 Or will you wait, and share the fate
 Of the village of Lidice?
 Or will you wait, and let him destroy
 The village of Lidice, Illinois?
 Oh, catch him! Catch him, and stop him soon!
 Never let him come here!¹⁰³

Not surprisingly, this conclusion was excised from the broadcast script, which were designed to promote vigilance, not vigilantism. Nor could sustaining or government sponsored programs, which competed with more popular escapist fare, expect to be effective if they alienated or offended consumers by implying any parallels between the listener's physical isolation and the spirit of isolationism. Instead, as in Millay's "Poem and Prayer for an Invading Army," written "for exclusive radio use" by the NBC and recited on **D-Day** by Ronald Colman, radio audiences were assured of the significance of their home front contributions and encouraged to imagine themselves close to the embattled with whom they were brought into communion through the marvel of broadcasting:

Say that you go with them, spirit and heart and mind!
 Although the body, grown
 too old to fight a young man's war; or wounded
 too deeply under the healed and whitened scars
 of earlier battles, must remain behind.
 You, too, may not be with them, save in spirit, you
 so greatly needed here[, here]in the [very] van
 and front of Duty,
 to fashion tools and engines, and to engineer
 their transport[s]; build the ships and mine the coal

without which all their efforts would be worse than vain!

In return, the home front listeners, whose patience and strength were so thoroughly tested, were granted a telepath to “those about to die”:

Some messenger, the vicar and the angel[s]
 Of what we feel,
 Will fly before them where they fly, before them and above,
 Like patron goddesses in wars of old,
 Cleaving with level lovely brows the hard air
 Before the eager prowls,
 Lighting their way with incandescent wings and winged heel.¹⁰⁴

At least one writer, folklorist and historian Carl Carmer, felt compelled to work a defense of the readily relied upon *deus ex media* into one of his radio plays. In “Taps Is Not Enough,” produced as a special broadcast on V-E Day--the day on which the Almanac Singers danced “Round and Round Hitler’s Grave” in Corwin’s “On a Note of Triumph”--a “Realist” protests:

Dead men don’t talk, so let’s not be dramatic,
 Calling on ghosts to speak across the waters.
 I am a realist. Your talk sounds silly.
 But if you wish I’ll play your game with you.
 Listen, and all that you can hear is--nothing.

Yet the complaint is immediately dismissed as unpatriotic by a Soldier who denounces the “Realist” as a “prophet of defeat” not “worthy to be called a man” in “company with those who gave their lives”:

You say that lifeless men no longer talk.
 No--but the dead can *speak*, and do today,
 Giving the answer to your whining lies
 And overwhelming you with their grim silence.

The Soldier reasons that, despite the “victory,” the “war” continues and that the fallen, when remembered for the ideals for which they fought, “shall march beside us as we go.”¹⁰⁵ If drum taps memorialize those killed, table-tapping often served to eternize their cause. “Perhaps, for all we know,” Corwin speculates in “Seems Radio Is Here to Stay” (*Columbia Workshop*, Apr. 24, 1939),

This is telephony with *buried* listeners
 If all a planet’s denseness
 Cannot stop our whisperings
 Will then mere coffin walls?
 We hardly think so.¹⁰⁶

The widespread insistence of a connection between the ether and the netherworld seems to refute Jeffrey Sconce’s argument that, with the advent of network broadcasting, the “voice of radio” lost its appeal as a “fleeting and mysterious presence.” According to Sconce, the

early fantasy of contacting ghostly consciousness via wireless had played on the initial fascination with radio as a form of electronically disembodied consciousness, calling to earth across the void of space or through the void of eternity. Such forms of paranormal radio presence suggested access to an unseen and fleeting order of consciousness lost in the ether. With the growth of broadcasting, however, the once spectral presence of radio no longer appeared as mysterious “voice from the void,” becoming instead the familiar “live” and “living” voices of the national networks.¹⁰⁷

Whether to mitigate wartime anxieties about separation and loss or to militate against the apathy of remote listeners, whether to lend sublimity to transitory and less than inspired verse or to restore the dignity of a medium whose most prominent voices were the projected one of Edgar Bergen and the filter-miked one of *The Shadow*, the propaganda verse written on assignment for network radio seemed at a loss to deal with the realities of

warfare without resorting to spiritual intervention. Fighting what was already more than a mere specter of war with the ghost of Whitman or spirit armies recruited from gothic melodrama, such plays exploited some of the old blind magic of wireless telephony, the mysteries of the Hertzian waves explored by Kipling, whose “Wireless” (1902) tapped the etherized mind of Keats in a “spiritualistic séance.”¹⁰⁸

More than a souffleur in the theater of war, the wartime radio poet was a ventriloquizing occultist, attributing to those whose lips were sealed the cautionary or inciting speeches that echoed official US policies and, as the conclusion of the “Murder of Lidice” broadcast assured its listeners, were underwritten by the forces of heaven: “Vengeance, mighty angel of the Lord” was already drawing his sword against the “maniac killer who stills runs wild.”¹⁰⁹ Delivering, by indirection, the directives from above in voices of awe-inspiring authority had become a propagandist device so effective and pervasive that, one postwar short story suggests, even the Creator pressed broadcasting into service when appealing to a generation “used to hearing voices on the radio.”¹¹⁰

And yet, the orphic retreat into a historical and literary past at the expense of the concrete American everyday may very well have been the death of the radio verse play. The broadcast studio held the promises of what Wallace Stevens demanded “Of Modern Poetry” in 1941, a “theatre [. . .] changed / To something else,” a theatre that “has to be living,” “to think about war,” and to “construct a new stage” on which poetry speaks with “meditation” in the “delicatest ear of the mind,”

[. . .] at the sound
 Of which, an invisible audience listens,
 Not to the play, but to itself, expressed
 In an emotion as of two people, as of two
 Emotions becoming one. The actor is
 A metaphysician in the dark, twanging

An instrument, twanging a wiry string that gives
 Sounds passing through sudden rightnesses, wholly
 Containing the mind [. . .].¹¹¹

Propaganda verse, the poetry of “sudden righteousness,” rarely encouraged the invisible audience to listen “to itself,” but shouted down doubt with noisy choirs from the beyond.

Speculations about broadcasting’s lasting influence on American poetry--about the gradual evolution of “[n]ew fields within the art,” “new methods of presentation” and a “new attitude toward poetry”¹¹²--were soon discounted as the judgment-impairing “enthusiasm” of critics who had been taken in by the “spectacle of poetry resurrected as popular literature.”¹¹³ And even if the war had “freed radio drama from its most repressed and frustrated period”¹¹⁴ by creating a need for original plays, it also resulted in the temporary suspension of the *Columbia Workshop* broadcasts, the only regular forum for poetic expression on network radio. The verse play for the common audience now serving as an “instrument of the special occasion”¹¹⁵--the commemoration of national holidays or historical events--the networks’ poet recruits were expected to deliver the extraordinary and exalted in order to reify shared goals and democratic principles, a commission resulting in modern dramaturgy compromised by the promises of ancient thaumaturgy.

Notes

¹ Arnheim, *Radio*, trans. Margaret Ludwig and Herbert Read (London: Faber, 1936) 208.

² Qtd. in Claire Price, “The Poet Laureate Talks of Poetry,” *New York Times Magazine* 16 Nov. 1930: 6.

³ Among the established writers of magazine fiction to turn radio playwrights during the 1930s were William Corcoran, Virginia Dale, Phyllis Duganne, William Fowler (Borden Chase), Talbot Mundy, and Margaret Sangster. See “Writing: Established Authors Skim Cream of Air Script Work,” *Newsweek* 16 Jan. 1937: 34.

- ⁴ Adams, So Much Velvet (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1924) 57; in 1938, Adams attracted even more listeners as a panelist on the literary quiz program *Information, Please* (1938-48).
- ⁵ Brecht, "Radiotheorie: 1927 bis 1932," Bertold Brecht: Gesammelte Werke, vol. 18 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1968) 129-30; Baudrillard, For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign (St. Louis: Telos, 1981) 169.
- ⁶ Dos Passos, "The Radio Voice," Common Sense Mar. 1934: 17; for more on radio as a silencer of exchange, see chapter 8.
- ⁷ Farrell, "Language of Hollywood," Saturday Review 5 Aug. 1944: 29-32.
- ⁸ Erik Barnouw, Handbook of Radio Writing (Boston: Little, 1947) 157-58.
- ⁹ MacLeish, foreword, The Fall of the City (New York: Farrar, 1937) xii-xiii.
- ¹⁰ John Peale Bishop, "The Muse at the Microphone," rev. of "Air Raid" and "America Was Promises" by Archibald MacLeish, The Nation 3 Feb. 1940: 132. Bishop argues that the "conflict out of which all that is most moving in MacLeish's poetry has come is a conflict between silence and sound--between a sensuous sound and a spiritual silence."
- ¹¹ Abbot, Handbook of Broadcasting, 2nd. ed. (New York: McGraw, 1941) 76.
- ¹² The phrase "period of *indirectness*" was already used by Howard Becknell in "Radio Drama, 1935-1945, Television Drama, 1945-1950," MA thesis (Indiana U, 1951) 14. For an overview of broadcasting in the pre-war period, see Howard Blue, Words at War (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2002) 75-98.
- ¹³ Corwin, "They Fly Through the Air," Columbia Workshop Plays (New York: Whittlesey, 1939) 112-13; the play was performed on the *Columbia Workshop* on **April 10, 1939**; also see chapter 9.
- ¹⁴ Ilka Chase, Past Imperfect (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1942) 232; the line was changed to "I love the English theater."
- ¹⁵ Bannerman, Norman Corwin and Radio (Birmingham, AL: U of Alabama P, 1986) 75.
- ¹⁶ Seldes, The Great Audience (New York: Viking, 1950) 105.
- ¹⁷ White, "One Man's Meat," Harper's July 1940: 219.
- ¹⁸ Merrill Denison, "Radio and the Writer," Theatre Arts May 1938: 370.
- ¹⁹ Donaldson, Archibald MacLeish (New York: Houghton, 1992) 262-64.

- 20 MacLeish, "Speech to the Scholars," Saturday Review 12 June 1937: 12.
- 21 Breiting, Rundfunk und Hörspiel in den USA 1930-1950 (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1992) 337.
- 22 MacLeish, The Fall of the City (New York: Farrar, 1937) 3-4; the Apr. 11, 1937, broadcast abridges the play slightly, but keeps closely to the script. All passages quoted above appear in both print and performance. The *Workshop* restaged the play on Sept. 28, 1939.
- 23 Seldes, "Screen and Radio," Scribner's June 1937: 61.
- 24 Denison 367.
- 25 MacLeish, The Fall 13.
- 26 MacLeish, The Fall 7; 8-9.
- 27 "Radiocasting: Musings on Radio and Art," Radio Rethink, ed. Diana Augaitis and Dan Lander (Banff, AB: Walter Phillips Gallery, 1994) 22.
- 28 Seldes, The Great Audience 105.
- 29 MacLeish, Air Raid (New York: Harcourt, 1938) 3-4; the *Columbia Workshop* produced "Air Raid" on Oct. 27, 1938, three days prior to the *Mercury Theatre* production of "War of the Worlds"; "The States Talking" was heard on *The Free Company* on Apr. 20, 1941. "Air Raid" was also heard on Sept. 27, 1941, on CBS's *Cavalcade of Literature*. On Mar. 10, 1957, nearly two decades after its premiere, it was restaged for the *CBS Columbia Workshop* (1956-57); "Mr. MacLeish's prophecy" was argued to be "grim reality" in an age of "guided missiles" threatening "nuclear destruction." "Learn what you can do to increase your chances of survival," the program's announcer implored listener's at the close of the broadcast: "Contact your Civil Defense Office."
- 30 MacLeish, The Fall 16.
- 31 Gassner, introduction, Twenty Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre, ed. John Gassner (New York: Crown, 1939) xx; xxi.
- 32 "Radio as an Art Form," Educational Broadcasting 1937 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1938) 298.
- 33 Kaplan, Radio and Poetry (New York: Columbia UP, 1949) 233; 232.

- 34 For an overview of MacLeish's involvement in above agencies, see Allen M. Winkler, The Politics of Propaganda (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1978) 8-13; 23-24; 40-42.
- 35 Kaplan 239.
- 36 Seldes, "Screen and Radio" 61-62.
- 37 Donald W. Riley, "A History of American Radio Drama from 1919 to 1944," diss. (Ohio State U, 1944) 75.
- 38 Orrin E. Dunlap, Jr., "Radio Challenges Playwrights to Try New Tricks," New York Times 30 Oct. 1938, sec. 9: 12.
- 39 Hermine Rich Isaacs, "The Fall of Another City," Theatre Arts Feb. 1939: 149.
- 40 Richard Lockridge, "Library, Stage, and Radio," Saturday Review 31 Dec. 1938: 7.
- 41 Kaplan 237.
- 42 "Voice of History," Time 3 Apr. 1944: 60.
- 43 Glenn J. Christensen, "A Decade of Radio Drama," College English Jan. 1947: 180.
- 44 MacLeish, foreword, The American Story (New York: Duell, 1944) x-xi.
- 45 MacLeish, The Fall 32-33.
- 46 Seldes, "Screen and Radio" 61-62.
- 47 Jarrell, "The Fall of the City," Sewanee Review 51 (1943): 277. Belatedly published, the article was prefaced by the politic disclaimer that it was "a criticism of the 1937 MacLeish who wrote 'The Fall of the City,' not of the 1942 MacLeish who writes government reports" (266).
- 48 Isaacs, "The Fall of Another City" 149.
- 49 Jarrell 270.
- 50 MacLeish, foreword, The Fall x.
- 51 Larkin, "Air Waves and Sight Lines," Theatre Arts Dec. 1938: 896.
- 52 Jarrell 276.
- 53 Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media (New York: McGraw, 1964) 297; to

McLuhan, the “tribal drum” of radio was a fascist instrument to which the US was largely “immune,” however, due to its long exposure to literacy and industrialism.

⁵⁴ Kreymborg, The Planets (New York: Farrar, 1938) 3.

⁵⁵ Kreymborg, overture, The Four Apes, and Other Fables of Our Day (New York: Raley, 1939) 8-9. Titled *Fables in Verse*, the ten plays in this anthology were produced by NBC and aired on Sunday afternoons between January 8 and March 12, 1939.

⁵⁶ Kreymborg, The Planets 49; Richard B. O'Brien, “Radio Tests Poetic Play,” New York Times 12 June 1938, sec. 10: 8.

⁵⁷ Kreymborg, “A Poet Gives ‘The Planets’ a Spin,” New York Times 5 June 1938, sec. 9: 10.

⁵⁸ Kreymborg, introduction, The Planets xi.

⁵⁹ MacLeish, America Was Promises (New York: Duell, 1939) 18; 19.

⁶⁰ Morton Dauwen Zabel, “The Poet on Capitol Hill,” Partisan Review 8 (1941): 128; 4; 7; 141.

⁶¹ For Pound’s broadcast scripts, see Leonard W. Doob, ed., “Ezra Pound Speaking”: Radio Speeches of World War II (Westport: CT: Greenwood, 1978).

⁶² Carl Carmer, “The Last Speech,” Radio’s Best Plays, ed. Joseph Liss (New York: Greenberg, 1947) 185; the *Columbia Workshop* production of Lou Cooper’s cantata, which did not air until **April 6, 1946**, updates the libretto by omitting the second line.

⁶³ William Matthews, “Radio Plays as Literature,” Hollywood Quarterly 1.1 (1945): 46-47.

⁶⁴ Rosten, foreword, “We Stand United” by Benét (New York: Farrar, 1945) v-vi. The *Columbia Workshop* produced “Daniel Webster and the Sea Serpent” (**Aug. 1, 1937**), “The Devil and Daniel Webster” (Aug. 6, 1938), and “John Brown’s Body” (July 20, 1939). Further productions of “The Devil and Daniel Webster” were heard on the inaugural broadcast of the *Hallmark Playhouse* (**June 10, 1948**); it was also soundstaged for *Great Scenes from Great Plays* (**Dec. 3, 1948**). For Rosten’s radio adaptation of Benét’s “Western Star,” see Liss 135-55. An adaptation of “Daniel Webster and the Sea Serpent” by Sheldon Stark is included in Columbia Workshop Plays, ed. Douglas Coulter (New York: Whittlesey, 1939) 299-322.

⁶⁵ Benét, “Listen to the People,” “We Stand United” 149; 153. The play was later heard on *Cavalcade of America* (**July 4, 1943**).

- 66 Gerd Horten, Radio Goes to War (Berkeley: U of California P, 2002) 42-43.
- 67 Glenn J. Christensen, "A Decade of Radio Drama," College English Jan. 1947: 181.
- 68 Barnouw, Radio Drama in Action (New York: Farrar, 1945) 112.
- 69 Rosten, foreword, "We Stand United" vii; vi.
- 70 Benét, "They Burned," "We Stand United" 101-02.
- 71 Benét, "They Burned" 111; 113.
- 72 Benét, "They Burned" 114-15.
- 73 Whitman, Leaves of Grass (1855; New York: Library of America, 1992) 53; 50; 44.
- 74 "Fighting Shows," New York Times 14 June 1942, sec. 8: 10.
- 75 Benét, "They Burned the Books" 114.
- 76 Rosten, "Brooklyn and Whitman's Ghost," Neighborhood Tales, by Rosten (New York: Braziller, 1986) 18.
- 77 Jennings, "Man with a Beard," Free World Theatre, ed. Arch Oboler and Stephen Longstreet (New York: Random, 1944) 191; 203. Corwin, "The Oracle of Philadelphia," Thirteen by Corwin (New York: Holt, 1942) 324-25; Corwin quotes here from Whitman's "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire." "Man With a Beard" was heard on May 30, 1943 on NBC Blue's *Free World Theatre* (1943); "Oracle" was produced on Apr. 21, 1940 on CBS's *Pursuit of Happiness* (1939-40).
- 78 Benét, "They Burned the Books" 115-17.
- 79 Irving Reis, "Techniques in Radio Drama," Education on the Air: Eight Yearbook, ed. Josephine H. MacLatchy (Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 1937) 216.
- 80 Benét, "A Child Is Born," "We Stand United" 157-58. This play was written for *Cavalcade of America*, which produced it on Dec. 21, 1942, and Dec. 20, 1943. On Dec. 22, 1945, it was heard on the *Textron Theater*; on Dec. 19, 1947, it was restaged for *World's Great Novels* (1945-48).
- 81 Benét, "A Child Is Born," 161; 158.
- 82 Benét, "A Child Is Born," 114.

- ⁸³ Benét, "Letter from a Housewife and Mother," "We Stand United" 44; this play was part of Benét's *Dear Adolf* series discussed in the next chapter.
- ⁸⁴ Rosten, "Paris Incident," Treasury Star Parade, ed. William A. Bacher (New York: Farrar, 1942) 155. The volume also includes Rosten's "Ballad of Bataan (7-20) and "Miss Liberty Goes to Town" (271-86), a "radio fantasy" starring Lunt and Fontanne (all, *syn.*).
- ⁸⁵ Larkin 890; 896.
- ⁸⁶ Matthews 48.
- ⁸⁷ "The World and the Theatre," Theatre Arts Dec. 1942: 733-34.
- ⁸⁸ Thomas Howell, "The Writers' War Board: U.S. Domestic Propaganda in World War II," Historian 59 (1997): 795-813.
- ⁸⁹ "Miss Millay's Lidice," Newsweek 26 Oct. 1942: 72.
- ⁹⁰ "Networks," Encyclopedia of American Radio, 1920-1960, ed. Luther F. Sies (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000).
- ⁹¹ Qtd. in Margaret Cuthbert, ed., Adventure in Radio (New York: Howell, 1945) 62.
- ⁹² John Spaulding, "Poetry and the Media," Journal of Popular Culture 33.2 (1999): 150; Harrison B. Summers, A Thirty Year History of Programs (1958; New York: Arno, 1971) 34.
- ⁹³ Hutchens, "Miss Millay's New Poem," New York Times 25 Oct. 1942, sec. 8: 12; also see Riley, "A History of American Radio Drama" 188.
- ⁹⁴ Writers' War Board, foreword, The Murder of Lidice by Millay (New York: Harper, 1942) v-vi.
- ⁹⁵ Millay, "The Murder of Lidice," Adventure in Radio 238.
- ⁹⁶ Zabel 141.
- ⁹⁷ Millay, "The Murder of Lidice" 242; 240.
- ⁹⁸ Millay, "The Murder of Lidice" 244; 246.
- ⁹⁹ Millay, The Murder of Lidice 17.
- ¹⁰⁰ Millay, "The Murder" 251-52; 253.

- 101 Millay, "The Murder" 253-54.
- 102 Howell 804.
- 103 Millay, The Murder 32.
- 104 Millay, Poem and Prayer for an Invading Army (New York: NBC, 1944) n.p.; the changes made in the broadcast script as read by Colman are bracketed.
- 105 Carmer, Taps Is Not Enough (New York: Holt, 1945) 7-8; 11.
- 106 Corwin, "Seems Radio Is Here to Stay," Best Broadcasts of 1938-39, ed. Max Wylie (New York: Whittlesey, 1939) 506.
- 107 Sconce, Haunted Media (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000) 15; 93.
- 108 Kipling, "Wireless," Scribner's Aug. 1902: 143; also discussed in Sconce 69-70.
- 109 Millay, "The Murder" 253-54.
- 110 George Sumner Albee, "The Next Voice You Hear," Cosmopolitan Aug. 1948: 112. No stranger to the persuasive powers of broadcasting, Albee was continuity writer for the patriotic *Cavalcade of America*; see Martin Grams, Jr., The History of The Cavalcade of America (Kearny, NE: Morris, 2000) 21-24.
- 111 Stevens, "Of Modern Poetry," Collected Poems, ed. Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library of America: 1997) 218-19; the "legerdemain" of appealing to Stevens's poem in the defense of radio drama was also attempted by Elissa S. Guralnick, Sight Unseen (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1996) 191-92.
- 112 Abbot 76.
- 113 Kaplan 236.
- 114 Barnouw, Radio Drama in Action 386.
- 115 Barnouw, Handbook 160.

Chapter Five

"It's going to hurt, but think of this": Drama, Frontlines, and Effacement

There was nothing but myself between him and the dark ocean. I had a sense of responsibility. If I spoke, would that motionless and suffering youth leap into the obscurity--clutch at the straw? I found out how difficult it may be sometimes to make a sound. There is a weird power in a spoken word. And why the devil not? I was asking myself persistently while I drove on with my writing [. . .]. And a word carries far--very far--deals destruction through time as the bullets go flying through space.--Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim (1900)

With America's entry into the war, an era of largely apolitical, noninterventionist broadcast drama came to a sudden close. Networks and advertisers were now called upon to cooperate with government agencies to recruit and promote writers capable of scripting morale-boosting and work force-mobilizing plays that echoed the frontline horrors of combat, trauma, and death, as well as the far-reaching home front challenges of rationing, profiteering, and bias crimes against foreign-born US citizens. The time for ageless parables and poetic affectation having passed, radio playwrights were prompted to realize the propagandistic potentialities of the live medium and its appeal to millions of individuals listening and reacting simultaneously. Sporadic verse plays of indirection were to make way for periodic directives in prose--terse, vernacular, and reportorial. Donald W. Riley, a contemporary observer of trends in 1940s network programming, remarked that broadcast drama "assumed a greater importance in wartime" because it was "well adapted" to the exploitation of the medium as an "instructional and inspirational weapon":

It may be safely said that radio drama reacts more quickly and obviously to changes in public tastes and to current events than does the stage or screen. Plays for radio are more quickly written and produced than are those for the other two vehicles. An event of one week is

frequently dramatized by radio during the following week, whereas it usually would require months to make use of it for a stage or screen play. Furthermore, in radio there is seldom any attempt to write or produce a play for more than a single performance since a radio play does not depend upon a “run” for evidence of its success or for profit.¹

Yet even though the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF) appreciated such benefits and had been preparing strategies for the activation of the mass medium in the service of propaganda, the confluence of private, corporate, and federal interests in American broadcasting resulted in an at times less than satisfying deployment of what radio producer-director Sherman Dryer referred to as “one of the most potent weapons of psychological warfare”:

Like the legendary steed, radio is riding off furiously in all directions. When the first news of Pearl Harbor came at 2:30 Eastern time on Sunday, December 7, 1941, it had no war plans, no war policies ready. In the months which have passed, radio has been too busy galloping to bother much about where it is going or why it is going there.²

The requisite adjustments in the production, sponsorship and scheduling of dramatic programming conflicted with the fundamentals of non-governmental, commercial broadcasting, a system that, despite the emergence of government-sponsored play cycles, remained intact throughout the war--a period during which the networks generated unprecedented profits.³

American radio had been developed in a time of “easygoing peace,” Curtis Nettles remarked in his critique of commercial broadcasting in wartime. In 1942, it was “still operating on a peacetime basis” and was “fostering an attitude in the public mind” that was “more suitable to peace than to war.” Rather than “binding” the people in a “common endeavor,” radio advertising separated the public by urging individuals to “gratify self-interest and to gain some trivial advantage.” Even as propaganda slogans and war

news reminded listeners of the need to be “self-denying and hardy,” commercial programming continued to encourage listeners to “indulge in wishful thinking.” By such “contradictory appeals,” a “unity of purpose” was not likely to be engendered. Even though few observers went as far as Nettles--who insisted that “radio advertising *is* enemy propaganda”⁴--many doubted whether the objective of selling the war should be left to the creators of soap operas and comedy-variety programs. According to *Fortune*, the networks’ attempts at adjusting to wartime conditions without alienating present or future sponsors was altogether reprehensible:

Breakfast foods and battles, death and depilatories are mingled on the air indiscriminately, and the insensitive hand of the commercial script writer shows up too often in the embarrassments of so-called war programs, particularly when true heroes are involved. Worse than violations of good taste, these are invitations to depreciate the war effort by stripping it of the dignity it derives from supreme human effort and sacrifice.⁵

Such widespread and often overstated reservations about the integrity of the broadcast medium notwithstanding, the much-publicized and favorably received dramatic experiments of MacLeish and Stephen Vincent Benét, as well as the networks’ installment and promotion of radio auteurs like Oboler and Corwin, convinced a growing number of storytellers and dramatists to enlist in the air raids against the Axis.

In MacLeish and Corwin the medium had outspoken and widely respected advocates. The latter argued radio to be “especially attractive to creative workers who don’t want their work to pass down an assembly line before it reaches an audience”:

[R]adio may be the poorhouse of writing, [but] Hollywood is its graveyard. Radio allows immeasurably more latitude to writers than pictures. The level of radio’s best literary efforts is closer to literature than anything the American cinema has ever attempted. The work of Auden, MacLeish,

Eliot, Dunsany and other contemporaries is generally broadcast as written, and not as some producer has caused it to be rewritten.

Yet even though Corwin favored the training of radiogenic newcomers over the recruitment of established authors who had remained ignorant of the “medium’s special requirements and [were] unaware of its literary possibilities”--ameliorating the immediate script crisis of wartime broadcasting was assumed to depend on the assistance of those alien to the industry.⁶

Apart from the poets discussed in the previous chapter, a small number of well-known American storytellers--Pulitzer Prize winners Booth Tarkington and T. S. Stribling among them--had made tentative forays into broadcasting prior to the war; nor were prose plays with a purpose altogether novelty acts on the radio, Fannie Hurst and Irwin Shaw, among others, having penned scripts that dramatized the social problems of 1930s America.⁷ In early 1941, the *Free Company* had given novelists and playwrights an opportunity to express their concerns about fascism by reminding Americans not to surrender their constitutional freedoms “in a moment of inertia.” Members included Robert E. Sherwood, Elmer Rice, William Saroyan, and Paul Green; supportive of the *Free Company*, although unable to contribute as originally planned, were George M. Cohan and Ernest Hemingway. The idea behind the series was to present parables dealing with basic civil rights, written by leading American writers who, “unsponsored and uncontrolled,” expressed “as a voluntary act of faith” their belief in America’s fundamental institutions.”⁸ Paul Green’s “A Start in Life,” for instance, deals with the humiliation and abuse of poor blacks, making the distinction between the letter of the law and the “spirit of understanding,” while Marc Connelly’s “The Mole on Lincoln’s Cheek” distinguishes between propaganda and true patriotism in education, arguing that the “chief purpose of teaching history is not to glorify the past but to insure the future.” Although it met with the ire of William Randolph Hearst, who reportedly regarded the program as “communist propaganda,” the project enjoyed the support of the US State Department.⁹

Unlike such local efforts of vocal individualists, however, the propagandistic broadcasts of the war years rarely tempered expressions of faith in democratic ideals with doubts about their successful actualization; nor could their authors expect to be “uncontrolled” while providing a service so vital to the war effort. Still, few broadcast critics would contest the view of playwright-producer Joseph Liss that the “best of radio literature was written during the war”—and as a direct result of it.¹⁰ In plays that bore little or no resemblance to the literary achievements for which they had earned critical acclaim, noted playwrights, poets, and novelists like Maxwell Anderson, Stephen Vincent Benét, and Pearl S. Buck faced the task of dispatching urgent public addresses by challenging many of the medium’s melodramatic storytelling conventions. The rather less experimental and apparently featureless scripts delivered by aspiring dramatists like Arthur Miller, Millard Lampell, and Arthur Laurents, on the other hand, often bespoke the quandary of radio’s unsung writer-recruits who, committed to serving as flag-bearers or town criers, confronted—in defiance or resignation—the prospect of their own artistic and intellectual effacement.

“We’re all against you, Adolf”: Addressing the Enemy

“Anybody who still thinks it’s going to be a pushover should just do a little of the pushing and see for himself. It’s going to be a hard, long battle, and no fooling about that.”¹¹ Such is the message of “Your Navy” (**Feb. 28, 1942**), Maxwell Anderson’s contribution to *This Is War!* (1942), a cycle of propaganda plays radio producer-director Sherman H. Dryer called the medium’s “first big bang as an effective weapon.” Developed in collaboration with the OFF to be an accurate reflection of national policy, the thirteen-week series, broadcast simultaneously over all four networks—by over 700 of the 924 US radio stations—began solemnly on **Valentine’s Day, 1942**, with a script by Norman Corwin that included a letter from President Franklin D. Roosevelt read by Archibald MacLeish, then head of the OFF.¹² Adding his “appreciation,” MacLeish

responded to the President's expressed belief that the cooperation of network radio would ensure a "fuller comprehension of the nature of the War in which we are engaged" by justifying this unprecedented use of radio in the service of propaganda. Whereas the Nazi party had begun its "activities years ago by turning the radios against the people of Germany as other revolutionists might have turned machine guns," the "United Peoples" were making a "very different use" of the medium that would "meet the Axis strategy of lies with the United People's strategy of truth."¹³

The three "aims" for the series were to frighten, to inspire, and to inform its estimated twenty million weekly listeners with broadcasts its producer, H. L. McClinton, labeled "documentary." Yet McClinton also insisted on the "dramatic and literary values" of the scripts, which were published soon after they were produced.¹⁴ In their reportorial techniques--public addresses, interviews, and sound montages--many of the plays presented on *This Is War!* depart radically from the formulaic storytelling--dramatic episodes linked through musical or narrative bridges--to which most dramatic programs remained committed. The series most celebrated recruits, Anderson and Benét, radically transformed the diction and design of their prewar plays to arrive at an entirely radiogenic aesthetics of agitation.

Aside from its commitment to democratic ideals under attack, "Your Navy" differs greatly from Anderson's prior contributions to radio, allegories like "The Feast of Ortolans," in which a nobleman's dinner party on the eve of the French Revolution is disrupted by prophecies of death: "The voice of the people is the voice of gods, / and the gods are athirst." Similarly indirect in its warnings against totalitarianism is "Second Overture," set in 1918 Russia, in which an executioner is "haunted" by the former political and spiritual leaders he killed, convinced that the prisoners he is now ordered to shoot are the "phantoms" of those "long dead and buried." Even the *Free Company's* "The Miracle of the Danube" (Apr. 27, 1941)--while remarkable for its overt references to Nazi Germany--still resorts to the metaphysical in its portrayal of a Nazi officer haunted by

Giotto's image of Christ, in whose visage the penitent discovers his own "inner spirit" that "would not be denied."¹⁵ The reportorial realism of "Your Navy," by contrast, renders all explication unnecessary by concluding with the appeal that "we must out-produce and out-think and out-guess and out-shoot" the Axis to "escape invasion" and attack. "We had a lot of illusions about this war, but we're losing them fast."¹⁶

Addressed to the Navy, Marine Corps, and the Merchant Service, as well as the "civilians at home who've been wondering where our Navy is and what it's doing," the play is framed by rapid exchanges between the commander and torpedomen aboard a destroyer whose crew is preparing for an attack on an enemy submarine. If, by virtue of its scriptedness and for reasons of security, the play could never answer the question "where our Navy is" other than in the most abstract terms, it nonetheless achieves concreteness in its demonstrations of "what it's doing." Mediating between the civilians ashore and the "boys on blue water"--as the sailors are saluted in a whisper of poetic diction--is a reporter (Fredric March) whose question "what it's like" in the Navy is answered by a lieutenant (Lt. Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.):

Well, of course, the Navy gives you quite a variety, fair weather and foul, and eyes peering through the mist, and sextants and calculations, and the hundred and one sounds that mean freedom of the seas. . . .

(Biz: Bosn's pipe.)

That's the blast of the bosn's pipe, piping down all hands to chow.

(Biz: Anchor chain; low tweet of bosn's pipe.)

Those are the turbines turning over as the cruiser slips from the harbor, under sealed orders, in the dead of night. . . .

(Biz: Diesel engines.)

Those are the Diesel engines powering our new trim submarines, with names like Sculpin, Skipjack, Stingray, Shark. . . . Now you'll hear the big

electric motors humming . . . pushing the sub along at ten knots under water. . . .

(Biz: Electric motors.)

Then there are the torpedoes, leaving their tubes and heading home against the enemy. . . .

(Biz: Compressed air; firing torpedo.)

Now the sound detectors, deep down beneath the water line, picking up squeals and howls and all suspicious hums. . . .¹⁷

Such aural glossaries--vocal commentaries on demonstrations in sound--are an effective encyclopedic device, a rhythmic exchange of examples and definitions not merely of something to be visualized, but of concepts--freedom, democracy, security--to be envisioned.

Choral devices like these also serve to amplify propagandistic messages and quicken their impact, since the listener does not have to follow a story or distinguish characters, ponder the relationship of the speakers or the veracity of their words. A list of names, recited by one speaker or a relay of voices, can evoke the diversity and grandeur of the Republic, as the proto-poetic muster roll read by a sergeant in Benét's "Letter from an American Soldier"--"Papagos, Patterson, Prokosch, Pryor, Quintanilla, Quisada, Que Lung"--and the fleet of US battleships in "Your Navy," which are argued to "stand for America on the move, keeping freedom and its destiny on the earth."¹⁸ Morton Wishengrad, a prolific and politically engaged playwright whom noted radio actor Joseph Julian once called the only writer beside Corwin to create a "body of radio literature that deserves a perennial life,"¹⁹ used the cataloguing technique to tabulate Axis crimes against humanities. In "The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto," first heard on NBC on the eve of Yom Kippur, 1943, the personal account of a holocaust victim, told from the grave, is reinforced by the sound of "black trucks" rolling out of the Ghetto to the concentration

camps and by three voices of fate calling up the facts with a statistical precision that echoes the calculated ruthlessness of the acts committed:

VOICE I. July 22, 1942.

VOICE II. Six thousand two hundred and eighty-nine.

VOICE III. Destination . . . Tremblinka.

VOICE I. July 23rd.

VOICE II. Seven thousand eight hundred and twenty.

VOICE III. Destination . . . Oswiantzem.

VOICE I. July 24th.

VOICE II. Seven thousand four hundred and forty-four.

VOICE III. Destination . . . Belzec.

(Biz: Voices and truck sounds hold under narrator.)

NARRATOR. Done with method, precise, efficient, recorded. To Tremblinka, Oswiantzem, Belzec, Sobibor, Majdany--a lethal gas chamber, an electric furnace, a poison pit, an execution field, a cemetery. And add also ten thousand brave, hopeless, tragic men who seized sticks and stones and knives and bare fists and charged the tanks and tried to halt the trucks. Add their bodies to the list for the ten days of June, 1942. Make your total and then add two precise, methodical, documented months in August and September, 1942. Reckon it. Do it carefully. You cannot do it on your fingers. No! Let me give you the sum. Listen, 275,954 fewer bread cards in the Ghetto! Swift, accurate, final. Quicker than typhus, surer than hunger.²⁰

While hardly ambiguous, such inventories were generally propped up by plain speeches that recapitulate the lessons to be gleaned from each broadcast. After in-voicing the services rendered by the “boys on blue water,” Anderson’s “Your Navy” sums up the price of glory:

We know that our existence as a nation and as citizens depends on doing our jobs at home as relentlessly, as tirelessly, as efficiently, as courageously as you do yours at sea.

We know that we must face the production struggle with the same resolution which you show at your battle stations when the enemy line looms up over the horizon. We pledge you, men of the navy, your nation will not let you down.²¹

Direct appeals to the listener became a prominent feature of reportorial propaganda plays; they had proven extraordinarily effective during War Bond drives, particularly those involving amiable radio personality Kate Smith, whose emotional pleas reportedly translated into bond pledges to the tune of \$39 million in the course of a single day and became the subject of an extensive study.²² As Dryer insisted, the

morale of people cannot be stamped, sealed and delivered; it cannot be advertised or ballyhooed into being. Morale is the unity of people who believe in each other and the values upon which their society stands. Radio contributes to morale because radio is a back-yard fence where all the neighbors tell each other about each other and themselves.²³

Rather than expostulating and potentially offending listeners by implying their inaction or lack of commitment, radio voices generally spoke to the audience as well as on behalf of it, emphasizing a telecommunal “we” rather than a televangelical “thou shalt.” In Anderson’s address to the home front, the first person plural underscores that the burden of war is shared by listener, broadcaster, and government alike.

Benét’s “Your Army,” presented on *This Is War!* one week after Anderson’s play (Mar. 7, 1942), aligns home front and frontlines by discussing the uses of telecommunications in wartime. The narrator (Tyrone Power) interviews a Signal Corps sergeant who briefly explains the importance of two-way radios, wire and wireless technology, and also gives the radio audience an opportunity to listen in on a private who

received permission to greet his parents, via short-wave, from Northern Ireland--just as *This Is War!* itself, the opening announcement disclosed, was being short-waved to the troops abroad. The days of indiscriminate listening-in were past; now, receiving orders and being on call was the duty of all Americans:

And--what are *we* going to do, sitting here at our radios? Squabble some more? Write letters to the papers? Hoard sugar? Curse out the government? Spread the lies that divide a people? Fold up in a chilly sweat every time there's bad news? There's bad news now, and there's going to be bad news for quite a while.

With forceful reminders like these, the broadcast that preempted all commercially sponsored escapism justified the unprecedented deployment of the medium in the service of propaganda. A "skillful, savage, and relentless" enemy that had "trained for years" and was using "every trick and tool" for a "chance to enslave the world" could only be conquered by a people united through radio: "It's you that I'm talking to--and you and you--all over America. We've got a fighting army--let's show them a fighting people!"²⁴

Radio transmissions also united America with its allies, and many reportorial plays were designed to remind listeners of their country's friendly relations with distant nations. "Freedom, like culture, must be international," Fannie Hurst remarked, and broadcasting was "the most powerful force yet evolved by the minds of men" to combat nationalism, isolationism, and xenophobia:

Radio can and will reach into and open the Caucasian or Mongolian hearts of men, one to the other, and let them hear for themselves the identity of their heartbeats. It can and will level the ivory walls of all national towers for all time. It can and will make men more similar and less different.

It can. It will.²⁵

Dedicated to the education of American and Chinese audiences alike was Nobel Prize winning novelist Pearl S. Buck who, prior to the war, had endorsed the *Campbell Playhouse* dramatization of her 1939 novel *The Patriot* (Apr. 14, 1939) by giving a brief talk about what Welles referred to as the “difficult situation in the Orient.” Intrigued by the popular medium, Buck enrolled “incognito” in Erik Barnouw’s radio writing course at Columbia University and cooperated with the OWI on a series of six short-wave broadcasts to China entitled *America Speaks to China*; written in English, the plays were translated into Chinese and produced with a cast of Chinese-Americans.²⁶ Buck, whose enthusiasm about broadcasting led her to consider the creation of what she called “radio novels,” also composed a number of reportorial plays for American audiences. In “China to America” (May 2, 1943), her contribution to Oboler’s *Free World Theatre* (1943)--a joined effort by the OWI, the WWB, the Hollywood Writers Mobilization, the Hollywood Victory Committee, and NBC Blue--two Americans take to the airwaves to correspond with a group of Chinese citizens.

The dialogue of “China to America” is set up with refreshing simplicity; no attempt is made to package its humanitarian message in the narration-cum-dramatization format of conventional radio plays. Its voices quite literally possess themselves of the air:

FIRST AMERICAN. Hey, whadda yah mean, you can’t send a message like that!

SECOND AMERICAN. Why not? The radio station’s here--the thing you plug into there says “China”--so why shouldn’t I talk to ‘em?

FIRST AMERICAN. But they’ll think we’re crazy over there. Who’s supposed to be China?

SECOND AMERICAN. Anyone the message happens to reach. Why shouldn’t I talk to ‘em? Everybody’s sayin’ this about China and that about China. . . . So here’s a radio station, and I’m a helluva lot over twenty-one--so why shouldn’t I find out for myself?

The two anonymous Americans are both proxy listeners and alternative broadcasters, enabling a direct connection between ordinary people thousands of miles apart. Mediated dialogue gives way to immediate narrative. According to Erik Barnouw, her instructor at Columbia University, Buck was an “avid experimenter” who “responded enthusiastically” to radio’s “turning away from theatrical all-dialogue drama to more narrative forms.”²⁷

Facing enemy attacks, the Chinese--among them a school teacher and his daughter, a silk shop owner with a cousin in New York, and Mr. Peng, an aged magistrate--talk about their lives and ideals, reminding Americans of the beliefs shared by both peoples, cultural universals like family, friendship, and freedom. Intrepidly exposing himself to the approaching Japanese, Mr. Peng seizes the microphone for one final opportunity to appeal to the free West:

As I said, people of America, do not believe it if you hear it said anywhere that we people of China will ever surrender to these devils. We believe in freedom--not only in our own but we believe in the freedom of all peoples under heaven. We will fight for that freedom until we win it. Though we starve--and many of us are starving--through we die of disease--and many of us are dying--we fight on!

At this point, Mr. Peng is interrupted by an air raid and the demolition of the room from which the Chinese radio operator, now dead, effected the transmission; in apparent agony the wounded man--and the broadcast itself--concludes: “America, if you hear me, I have one more word for you. When, at last, your great armies come to help us drive out the last of the invaders, we will be here. *We will always be here.*”²⁸ The two faceless Americans who introduced the broadcast and initiated the connection are not heard from again; it is the American listener who must now respond.

The diegetic listener address permitted direct appeal while shielding its audience from personal accusation. Listeners were encouraged to identify with the speakers and heed the lessons expressed without being implicated themselves; staying attuned through

radio, they could prove worthier patriots than those tuning out or turning away from the duties that lay ahead. Both the accommodation of the listening public and the insistence on the positive role of radio, still absent in MacLeish's "The Fall of the City," made the overheard appeal one of the most significant techniques of indoctrination by radio. Oboler explored its potential in his anthologies *Plays for Americans* (1942) and *To the President* (1942); for *Plays for Americans* he wrote "Memo to Berchtesgaden" (Feb. 15, 1942), addressed to Hitler by a Nazi spy captured on American soil, and "Letter at Midnight" (Mar. 15, 1942), an American soldier's personal message to his father. The latter accuses those still reminiscing about the "glorious nineteen-hundreds"--about David Harum and Floradora, Ben Hur and Beau Brummell--of selfishness and inaction. Yet this veiled critique of American broadcasters and their nostalgia-rapt audiences is itself delivered by a voice from the past: the missive, as the father reveals in conclusion, was written the night before his son's death at Pearl Harbor and thus reproaches a bygone and heedless era, rather than those present to listen.²⁹

Most often, open--or opened--letters gave listeners the satisfaction of talking back, jointly, to the man intent on silencing free speech and peaceful dialogue among nations. It was a device--and a desire--that inspired Benét's *Dear Adolf*, a six-part series that aired during the summer of 1942 on affiliated stations of NBC's Red network. Commissioned by the Council of Democracy, *Dear Adolf* presented the voices of ordinary US citizens, portrayed by prominent actors of stage and screen, each addressing the enemy and expressing the nation's hopes, fears, and anger in prose bespeaking the social position of the writer. A well-to-do businessman represents thousands, a farmer speaks on behalf of six million raising "food for freedom," and a group of factory workers stand in for twenty million American laborers. The first broadcast, "Letter from a Farmer" (June 21, 1942), addressed to "that fellow over in Germany that started all this trouble," established the colloquial tone of the series:

My farm's just one of six million.

But I want to say this. We're all against you, Adolf.

Every bushel of wheat in this country is against you. Every furrow we plowed this spring, we plowed against you.

Every time a hen lays an egg, that egg's against you. Every time an Iowa hog puts on another pound, that pound's against you.

Against you and all your works, because we don't like you and can't stand you and we're bound and determined to get rid of you, whatever it costs us all.

Ever think what that means--to rouse up a free people, Adolf?

Guess not.³⁰

The corresponding voices of other farmers, men and women described in the letter, create a chorus of outspoken and rhetorically artless civilians united against the Axis. Like Anderson, Benét departs from the prosodic artifice of his prewar compositions to achieve an effect of a spontaneous overflow of powerful emotion shared at a moment of crisis that suspended all tranquil recollection. Benét's lines, such as those of the "Letter from a Working Man," suggest that they were "written around the clock by the working stiffs of America" who have "no time to gab" and no use for "fancy words." Loosely structured and incongruous, some of the missives even feature built-in replies. In the "Letter from a Working Man," a Nazi official comments that Americans won't win the war because of their limited work hours. After questioning his overtime-committed fellow workers, the writer-narrator (James Cagney) rejoins: "That's where you made your mistake about us, Adolf. You thought we weren't tough. You thought dough was all we were after. And you thought we couldn't think."³¹ The feverish quality of the scripts were hardly feigned; as Howard Blue points out, Benét was himself on the brink of death while writing the series.³²

Occasionally, the scripts acknowledge the complexities of US society, a society not without divisions and prejudices. When the speaker of the “Letter from a Housewife and Mother”—a homemaker and part-time First Aid instructor—proclaims to represent free women everywhere, an African-American protests: “What of my people, bowed in darkness still?” The black voice complains that “even today” her people “find no place” and are not even in wartime given the opportunity to contribute according to their abilities. The narrator admits this to be “true,” but insists that “there is a change,” a change that can only come about in a democracy, upon which the mocking voice of a Nazi is heard deriding meddling women whose “proper” sphere ought to be the home--“bed, cooking, work, children, bed.”³³ To protest against injustice by refusing to support the war, the play suggests, is to surrender to abject bondage.

The final script, “Letter from a Foreign Born American,” sums up the new world ideals and realities worth the fight:

We, the Pilgrims of a thousand unnamed and forgotten *Mayflowers*--our freedom and our citizenship was bought with all we have [. . .] And that price seems little today. We would pay it again, Herr Reichschancellor [. . .]. You would bring to this country the things we escaped and hated. You would poison the air and the water and the minds of our growing children. You would drag them back--not even to the life we knew--but to the life of the serf, the life of the slave. But we have tasted liberty and soon liberty walks in the streets [. . .].

The series concludes with a chorus of immigrants pledging allegiance to the American flag, “[f]umbling voices--voices with accents--with every accent--but meaning it, meaning every word.”³⁴ Employing such listener stand-ins enabled writers like Anderson, Buck, and Benét to mobilize the home front, to prime without reprimanding, while all along confronting public sentiments inimical to the American cause.

As one contemporary theater critic pointed out, the “radio-dramatic is in some ways puzzlingly unlike the theatre-dramatic.” Whereas stage drama traditionally displays characters evolving through conflicts and crises, the radiogenic prose plays of the war years--intimate and compendious if limited in scope--featured largely static characters or choric voices in “conflicts that are resolved not chiefly between the *dramatis personae* but between the theme of the play and the mind of the audience.” In propaganda plays, particularly, the listener is the “drama’s obstacle that needs to be overcome or focussed into action.”³⁵ Not surprisingly, Barnouw contended that poets and novelists “adjusted themselves far more successfully to radio than playwrights of the theater.” Considering Maxwell Anderson’s contribution to *This Is War!*, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that established authors who lent their voices to broadcast propaganda without conceiving of radio as an intermedium or makeshift stage were more likely to experiment with techniques that very nearly enabled the so-called theater of the air to come into its own.³⁶ Prevalent, however, remained the telescopic “plays with a purpose,” ersatz dramas whose characters mouthed more or less generic lectures about America’s past, present, and future while hurrying through plots compressed almost beyond credibility. The less subtly integrated the speeches, the more such plays appeared to be what Arthur Miller labeled a “form of yelling.”³⁷ Vacillating between muted battle cries and stage whispers about the disgrace of such performances, Miller’s own radio writings dramatize the political challenges and artistic failures to negotiate the conflicting agendas behind commercial broadcasting in wartime.

“I’m ashamed of myself in front of you”: Integrity on the Line

Deferred from military service due to a sports injury, Miller, as he later reasoned, “tried to justify [his] existence by throwing [him]self into writing patriotic war plays” for radio; in the same breath he dismissed his contributions to the medium as “an easy dollar” that allowed him to pursue worthier projects, since his assignments “took less time than

teaching or some other job.” Arguing and operating pretty much along these lines, the broadcast industry valued the struggling playwright because he could reportedly crank out a 25-minute script in eight hours, thus proving a reliable, efficient purveyor of slogans and sentiment. Receiving up to \$500 per script, Miller in turn would depend on radio writing as his primary source of income during the war.³⁸ Yet even though he received not only considerable emolument but on-air credit for the grind of scripting plays that enjoyed the largest audiences of his career and were interpreted by noted screen and stage performers like Charles Laughton, Claude Rains, and Edward G. Robinson, Miller was even more hostile toward the medium than his less-than-enthusiastic contemporaries, ambitious tyros like Arthur Laurents, Herman Wouk, or Irwin Shaw.

“I despise radio,” Miller told an interviewer during the successful Broadway run of All My Sons: “Every emotion in a radio script has to have a tag. Its [sic] like playing a scene in a dark closet.” His 1945 novel Focus having sold an impressive 90,000 copies, Miller was not certain whether to express his latest ideas in dramatic or narrative form; but the choice did not “bother” him, since he regarded both the theater and the novel as “free mediums for a writer who wants to speak his mind.”³⁹ The playwright whose After the Fall “takes place in the mind, thought, and memory” of its protagonist⁴⁰ never acknowledged any debt to the experimental plays staged for radio after “The Fall of the City.” Arguing that selling out to a system of corporate sponsorship meant the death of art, he appropriated radio drama’s interior voices and incorporated them in Death of a Salesman instead. “No medium of expression can fulfill itself if its forms and its content are prescribed beforehand,” Miller offered as a commentary in an introduction to one of his published plays:

There is so much you can’t say on the radio that for a serious writer it presents a blank wall. The answer is freedom, which is tightly circumscribed in the present setup. I mean not only freedom of speech, but freedom to write a radio play without a format.⁴¹

While it is true that most prose plays, unlike the occasional verse of the broadcast specials, were expected to adhere to the format of the series to which they were submitted, the *Columbia Workshop*--which produced Miller's "William Ireland's Confession" (Oct. 19, 1939), and "The Pussycat and the Expert Plumber Who Was a Man" (Sept. 29, 1940)--was unquestionably the most flexible of the network anthologies. Perhaps not surprisingly, the two pre-war fantasies produced by the *Workshop* constitute Miller's most playful as well as his most personal engagements with the medium he so passionately disliked.

In "William Ireland's Confession," a series of flashback vignettes introduced and punctuated by a first-person narrative, the eighteenth-century literary forger, "rotting in his grave, disgraced and unremembered," vindicates his impostures by claiming them to have been an unloved son's attempt at gaining his father's respect. The play echoes the anxieties of an aspiring playwright reduced to the inglorious task of adapting for--and to--radio, modernity's spoiler of art and devourer of talent. After all, even though Miller's Shakespeare ultimately embraces his plagiarizer, Ireland is called upon to reedit *Hamlet* while the verse he subsequently wrote under his own name was "ridiculed into oblivion."⁴² In the satire "Pussycat," a megalomaniacal tomcat with political ambitions sways the multitudes by dint of a "lovely tenor voice." Remaining hidden from view, he convinces his listeners that he "must be a wonderful man" until exposed by an average guy and forced to concede that "a cat will do anything, the worst things, to fill his stomach, but a man . . . a man will actually prefer to stay poor because of an ideal"⁴³--a noble principle their young creator did not manage to uphold. Both the obliterated Ireland and the occulted feline--the only genuinely radiogenic characters Miller ever created--are failed fakers who squander their talents and, losing face, suffer ostracism and obscurity.

Nor were the apprehensions Miller reenacted in his prewar plays altogether unreasonable. With the wartime closing of the *Workshop* and Broadway success not yet in the offing, Miller found himself dealing with far more formulaic and cumbersome

assignments. To be sure, his *Workshop* efforts are “not envelope pushers like ‘The Fall of the City,’” as Gerald Weales puts it⁴⁴; still, they gave Miller a “strange sense of power at being able to leave [his] voice, in effect, speaking in [his] absence” when he listened to his writing coming to life on the air.⁴⁵ By comparison, the majority of Miller’s wartime plays bespeak his absence, the virtual lack of personality and authorial control. Many of them were written for *Cavalcade of America* (1935-53), a series of historical portraits whose subjects moved “west, not left,”⁴⁶ a program that in politics and praxis was incongruous with the ideals of a young intellectual whose attitudes toward contemporary history were shaped by *The Nation* and *The New Masses*. It was primarily his experience writing for *Cavalcade* that convinced Miller of the medium’s insuperable demerits, of what he called the “impossibility” of “fine radio drama.”⁴⁷

Judged by its impressive record of contributors alone, *Cavalcade* promised something “fine” indeed. Few dramatic programs took the writer’s role—or rather that of the script—more seriously than this New York-produced play cycle, which, along with the *Columbia Workshop*, had gradually become one of a very small number of regular network series to feature original works by noted American dramatists and novelists including Pulitzer Prize winners Maxwell Anderson, Louis Bromfield, and Robert E. Sherwood, as well as critically acclaimed radio playwrights like Corwin, Oboler, and Wishengrad. Carl Sandburg read here from his own poems, and Lunt and Fontanne interpreted the words of Benét. Such highlights notwithstanding, most of the playlets that aired during the series’ eighteen-year, 781-episode run were written by utility writers like Miller, who were expected to pore over and dramatize assigned reading material ranging from scholarly books to popular periodicals. The sources for Miller’s “I Was Married on Bataan” (Oct. 5, 1942) and “The Philippines Never Surrendered” (Apr. 30, 1945), for instance, were articles published in *American Magazine* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, respectively; other adaptations by Miller, including “Captain Paul” (Oct. 27, 1941), a biography of John Paul Jones, and “Toward a Farther Star” (Nov. 2, 1942), a play about

Amelia Earhart, were prepared in collaboration with fellow radio writers. Since *Cavalcade* came to be valued among educators for its commitment to historical accuracy--assured by the series' historical advisors Dixon Ryan Fox, Arthur Schlesinger, and Marquis James, as well as folklore specialist Carl Carmer--the material culled from prescribed texts was closely supervised and scrutinized in an editorial process that permitted contributors considerably less authorial input than the experimental *Workshop*.⁴⁸

When Corwin argued radio to be "especially attractive to creative workers who don't want their work to pass down an assembly line before it reaches an audience," he referred to sustaining programs like the *Workshop*. *Cavalcade*, on the other hand, was one of the networks' commercial programs, and thus encumbered, like all sponsored shows, by "a whole bureaucracy: the producer, the agency executive, the sponsor, and the sponsor's wife."⁴⁹ Its aural histories needed to comport with the program's sales talk, to be both fact and flattery. Artistically, Miller's move to *Cavalcade* was decidedly a demotion. While it was not the playwright's responsibility to supply the commercial copy that framed each play--continuity prepared by short story writer George Albee--the advertising executives representing the sponsor's interests studiously monitored the productions for which their client footed the bill. Any historical incident or character, any reference or figure of speech that could be construed as being critical of or inimical to the sponsor was subject to revision or expunction. As the caustic anecdotes about *Cavalcade*'s deaf executives and meddlesome agents in *Timebends* suggest, still more offensive to Miller than the circumscriptions of the "dark closet" were the skeletons he was expected to conceal in it.

Created in 1935 by the advertising agency Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn (BBD&O), *Cavalcade* was designed to promote nineteenth-century gunpowder giant E. I. du Pont de Nemours, the show's sponsor, as a philanthropic institution devoted to the research and development of "better things for better living through chemistry." The

nationally broadcast program was part of a comprehensive campaign to adjust Du Pont's corporate image in the wake of a report about the company's profiteering during World War I, findings that contributed to the 1935 Neutrality Act and arms embargo.⁵⁰ Since the early 1920s, Du Pont had been acquiring other chemical concerns and greatly expanded its range of products which it now thought to boost while blotting out its recent past. Conservative in its dramatizations of historical accounts, *Cavalcade* was revisionist in its accounting for Du Pont's role in American history. Not even Robert E. Sherwood's radio adaptation of Carl Sandburg's Pulitzer Prize winning biography Abraham Lincoln: The War Years (1939) could air without being prefaced and recontextualized to extol the virtues of the sponsor:

Tonight we look backward to the one man who above all others epitomizes the American character. Du Pont, in looking backward on the role it has been privileged to play in the American scene, takes pride in the fact that it has been able to add to the strength of the Union of the American States that Lincoln re-welded. For [D]u Pont and chemistry are doing their parts in making America secure and self-sufficient within her own borders, no longer dependent on foreign sources for the vital raw materials for factory and farm that once came from the four corners of the earth. At the time of the last world war, American life and industry were plunged into a chaotic state through sudden stoppage of foreign imports. Rubber, camphor, nitrates, dyestuffs--to mention a few of the necessary ingredients of our daily living--rose to almost prohibitive prices as their scarcity increased. The chemical industry, faced then with the gargantuan task of developing domestic sources of supply has, in the past 20 years, emerged triumphantly with man-made rubber, a native dyestuffs industry, fertilizers made from air, yarn made from wood-pulp and from coal, air and water--to name only several of chemistry's unending stream of developments.

Our liberation from dependence on an *undependable* world is even now a saga of American enterprise that we might well thrill with pride to hear. But of more importance is the fact that these advances of chemistry and industry are a guarantee that we may look confidently ahead. For once again, as she has in the past, America has found a road wide and straight, along which its Cavalcade may roll.⁵¹

Initially, Du Pont's weekly *son sans lumière* presentations were more ideally suited to the promotion of the sponsor's products and research activities, dramatizing historical accounts of "Heroism in Medical Science," "Defiance of Nature," and "The Will to Explore." The public's indifference to "The Story of Rubber" or "John Hyatt, Father of Plastics" revealing itself in middling and declining ratings during the show's first two seasons, producers broadened the range of subjects to include biographies of literary figures ("Oliver Wendell Holmes," "Mark Twain"), composers ("Stephen Foster," "George Gerswhin"), and entertainers ("Charlotte Cushman," "Will Rogers"), gradually tending toward the demotic.⁵² As fertilizers and synthetic rubber are not readily associated with the distinguished careers of Edwin Booth or Ernestine Schumann-Heink, the increasingly forced analogies and absurd claims which had characterized the opening announcement made way for somewhat more subdued promotional messages. Repackaged as entertaining chemistry lessons, the words from the sponsor were relegated to the conclusion of the broadcast without coloring or interrupting the show's dramatic content which, by 1940, was delivered by some of Broadway and Hollywood's most distinguished actors. The show's producers were thus able to improve the program's popular appeal along with its apparent philanthropic posture. It was toward the end of this period of expansion, diffusion and increased prestige that Miller joined *Cavalcade*'s roster of credited writer-adapters.

When the first of a dozen scripts by Miller was produced on the program in the early summer of 1941, network radio was still far removed from airing "patriotic war

plays.” Indeed, Miller could hardly have chosen a program less likely than *Cavalcade* to feature topical drama in direct response to the global crisis then escalating. If the program’s weekly playlets were becoming more attractive to leisured listeners and litterateurs alike, the tendency toward cultural subjects was not motivated by rating points or rave notices alone. In keeping with—and initially validated by—the isolationist stance of the broadcasting industry, the show’s producers carefully avoided dramatizations of current historical events or vivid reenactments of violent episodes from America’s past. Although Sherwood’s Lincoln did not dodge his assassin and Robert L. Richards’s Annie Oakley did not turn trapeze artist, *Cavalcade*’s fine-tuned histories probably featured fewer gunshots during the entire 1940–41 season than could be heard on a single late-afternoon of children’s programming. Even Miller’s biographical sketch of John Paul Jones, ideally suited to propagandist aims, was reduced to the story of a frustrated lover.

Shelved, too, for the most part, were *Cavalcade*’s earlier tributes to American captains of industry and political leaders; instead, their mothers and daughters were eulogized (“Nancy Hawks,” “Theodosia Burr”). The issues of lend lease and alliance were merely hinted at in Maxwell Anderson’s “Ode to a Nightingale,” originally titled “John Keats and America” (Sept. 14, 1942). Notwithstanding the merits of these educational broadcasts, rarely attempted elsewhere, such plays constitute an escape to culture in the face of crisis, a trend that continued well into the summer of 1942, when Norman Rosten retreated into the “forest primeval” with his adaptation of Longfellow’s *Evangeline* (“This Our Exile”). Rather than “writing patriotic war plays” for *Cavalcade*, as Blue has it,⁵³ Rosten contributed sketches of “Edgar Allan Poe,” “O. Henry,” and Emily Dickinson (“Wait for the Morning”), until the play circle reached its apogee—farthest from facing the Axis that threatened the democratic principles it celebrated—by drifting toward the sentimental comforts of “The Trials and Triumphs of Horatio Alger.” This season of deliberate retrocession was prolonged by Miller’s *Cavalcade* debut, the light-hearted audio-biography of “Joel Chandler Harris” (June 23, 1941).

Intriguing as a companion piece to “William Ireland’s Confession,” the sketch proposes Harris (radio actor Karl Swenson, later cast in Miller’s first Broadway play, The Man Who Had All the Luck) as a shy, soft-spoken Southerner who, transcribing the tales he heard in his youth, reluctantly gains fame and has to come to terms with it. Invited to the White House to tell “Uncle Remus” stories to Theodore Roosevelt, Harris is faced with a crowd of his youngest readers who, seeing him, exclaim in disappointment: “Why, he’s white!” and “You ain’t Uncle Remus.” “I might just as well been a streetcar conductor coming out there,” a stunned yet relieved Harris remarks to the President: “I just realized that I finally got what I wanted.” America, he insists, “has got to remember her roots. The plain people.” “You’ve written Uncle Remus into history, Mr. Harris,” the President assures his guest, who cheerfully retorts: “I guess I kinda wrote myself out of it.” Unlike the protagonist of his play, Miller was not willing to accept such effacement. Yet writing for *Cavalcade* would become a still more complicated and discomfiting task as 1941 drew to a close. The war had arrived--and Miller was still barred from meting out a fighting script equal in calculated directness and pith to those Benét and Anderson contributed to *This Is War!*

The US entry into the war rendered the continued evasions of current political events in *Cavalcade*’s patriotic dramatizations of America’s democratic principles not only paradoxical but increasingly indefensible, especially since, by the spring of 1942, even commercially sponsored soap operas and sitcoms were doing their part in creating awareness about the war by developing dialogues and story lines that reflected pressing home front concerns. Notable propaganda play cycles include the Johnson’s Wax polished *Words at War* (1943-45) and the Wrigley’s Gum-powered *First Line of Defense* (1941-45), *America in the Air* (1943-45), and *Service to the Front* (1944-45). *Cavalcade*’s commitment to historical accuracy made it particularly valuable to the Elmer Davis-headed OWI and its strategy of truth. And yet, for most of 1942, the plays featured on *Cavalcade* remained firmly rooted in the past, expressing their patriotism in portrayals

of Molly Pitcher, Clara Barton, Betsy Ross or Julia Ward Howe. War, according to Du Pont, was invariably a threat America had already conquered with forbearance and ingenuity. Miller's "The Battle of the Ovens" (June 22, 1942), for instance, dramatizes the fact-based story of Christopher Ludwick, a resourceful baker from Philadelphia who, too old to fight, served as "Superintendent of Bakers and Director of Baking" in General Washington's Continental Army.

Deploying a corps of bakers and a battery of ovens far removed from the actual position of the American troops they are meant to sustain, Ludwick misleads the British and contributes to the success of the revolution without ever having to fire a gun. "We are soldiers with spoons and ladles," he reminds his momentarily disaffected doughboys, "We must go on baking as though the ovens were cannons and our bread loaves bullets." Despite his military achievement, Ludwick is eager to resume his humble business, dismissing the very notion of being made a general for his deeds. When he finally returns home after the war, the proud breadwinner tells his wife about his encounter with the General and delivers what Weales calls "Washington's message for 1942," namely that America triumphed over its enemy only because the "bakers and the shoemakers and all the people like us got so mad they could not rest until they won."⁵⁴ *Cavalcade's* production of this civilian bugle call further emphasizes the benevolence behind Ludwick's resolve by casting veteran actor Jean Hersholt, best known to radio listeners as the sage and kindhearted physician in the popular *Dr. Christian* series (1937-54). Unaggressive characters in retrogressive stories defined most of *Cavalcade's* war-themed plays.

Far more direct in its history lesson by comparison is Howard Fast's "Tomorrow Will Be Ours," a WWB "Script of the Month" for May 1943, heard on *Freedom House* over station WEVD (Nov. 18, 1943). Like "The Battle of the Ovens," Fast's play deals with an aging Easterner eager to fight in the American Revolution. Yet the protagonist's determination to join the fight is invested with present-day urgency as a set of commentators remind "all of those who plan to rescue the bedraggled ghost of

isolationism from the ruins of this war” that “for a hundred years this nation of ours was called the *Union*,” forged as a “military necessity” by people “further removed” from each other than America, anno 1943, is from its Russian and British allies: “We might do well to think of it as a union again, and to recall the pain and suffering we went through so that Union might endure in peace.”⁵⁵ The *Cavalcade* broadcasts of 1942 provide no such translations. Miller’s baker is heralded as a “symbol of all the thousands who *made* our history and who have not been recognized *in* our history.” Yet all the millions whose lives were histories in the making were still asked to interpret symbols in order to recognize themselves in the heroics thus storied.

It was only in the program’s non-dramatic segment that the war was being addressed more concretely, as in the brief speech following “The Battle of the Ovens,” in which Hersholt, the actor, expressed his hope that the people of his native Denmark withstand their oppressor; in “Gentleman from Paris” (Jan. 12, 1942), a play about Washington and Lafayette, Charles Boyer shared similar thoughts about the fate of the French. Such curtain calls followed the promotional messages that, even prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, had acknowledged the sponsor’s involvement in preparing for America’s defense. Rosten’s “O. Henry” (July 21, 1941), for example, was followed by the announcement that neoprene, a synthetic rubber of which Du Pont was the chief manufacturer, had been placed under “mandatory priority rule” by the US government as being “vital to defense production” during a “time of national emergency.” The presentation of Marc Connelly’s “The Green Pastures” (Dec. 22, 1941) was wrapped up with holiday greetings on behalf of the 60,000 Du Pont workers who added to the “peacetime task of making better things for better living through chemistry the wartime job of helping to make sure that we will enjoy those better things in the future.” At a time when many commercial programs were struggling to raise memorials to consumer goods no longer readily available--Lipton’s *Helen Hayes Theatre* being announced the first “casualty of war” due to an anticipated tea shortage⁵⁶--the sponsor of *Cavalcade* not only

thrived, but could capitalize on being essential to national security. In the chemistry lesson following “A Continental Uniform” (**Apr. 13, 1942**), a play about Benedict Arnold, even cellophane was argued “to safeguard our democracy” since it protected medical supplies shipped overseas. In short, whereas *Cavalcade*’s commissioned plays were designed to erase memories of Du Pont’s profiteering in the first world war, the advertising copy served to remind listeners how the sponsor benefited America in the present.

It was this duplicity, the hypocrisy with which BBD&O, the “voice box of corporate America,” refashioned the “profit motive into themes of high-minded service,” that most irritated Miller. The playwright experienced the producer’s tactics firsthand when he submitted his script for “Thunder from the Mountain” (**Sept. 28, 1942**), a Plutarchan exercise paralleling the lives of two nineteenth-century leaders--Mexican revolutionary Benito Juárez and Abraham Lincoln. According to Miller, who for once approached his assignment of adapting the supplied biography with “some excitement,” the advertising agency rejected a scene in which Lincoln tacitly assists Juárez in the fight against archduke Maximilian by leaving rifles at the Mexican border, since it “did not want Du Pont accused once again of gunrunning in Latin America.” Remington, after all, was corporately linked to Du Pont. While the scene ultimately remained in the script--a fact Miller did not recall (or chose to omit) forty-five years later--the argument intensified the playwright’s dissatisfaction with commercial radio and the consequent corruption of a “worthwhile theme” by executives whose main interest in the story was that their client “did a lot of business and owned plants south of the border.”⁵⁷ The producers had reason to be circumspect, not only because educated listeners frequently commented in writing, but particularly because two weeks prior to the presentation of “Thunder from the Mountain,” *Cavalcade* had acknowledged, even celebrated, its association with Remington by broadcasting a speech from the Remington Arms factory in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The Remington Arms broadcast (“[Untitled],” **Sept. 14, 1942**) marked a turning point in the history of *Cavalcade*. Instead of its customary play, the program featured a speech by Joseph C. Grew, former US ambassador to Japan. Remington had just been honored with the Army Navy Award for “outstanding achievement in war production” and now trumpeted its ability to manufacture more small arms ammunition within a six-month period than had been produced during the entire first world war. The government having given its official approval of Du Pont as an active and valued player in the present war, *Cavalcade* plays finally began openly to address contemporary concerns, an up-to-dateness and historical relevancy for which listeners turned to radio in times of uncertainty; for the only time in its run, the program’s ratings exceeded those of popular series like *Lights Out*, *Gangbusters*, and *The Adventures of Ellery Queen*.⁵⁸ Gradually phased out were the mealy-mouthed directives and indirections that still marred Miller’s “The Eagle’s Nest” (**Dec. 28, 1942**), a play based on material by historical novelist Konrad Bercovici.

Contrasting Garibaldi’s quest for Italian unity with modern-day resistance to fascist rule, “The Eagle’s Nest” opens with Fredric March’s reading of an excerpt from an unpublished letter Garibaldi wrote in the fall of 1866:

The sympathy which comes to me from free men, citizens of a great nation like yourselves, gives me courage for my task and the cause of liberty and progress. I regard the American people as the sole arbiter of questions of humanity amid the universal thralldom of the soul and the intellect.

The performance is soon robbed of its dignity, however, as Miller’s dramatization installs a rather unconventional dictaphone to broadcast its propagandistic message “from the tomb” of the Italian liberator. After sixty years of silence, Garibaldi’s aged pet parrot is suddenly agitated into screeching the one-liner “Down with the tyrant” (a demeaning role assigned to versatile radio actor Junius Matthews, who would later play a talking fish on a children’s adventure series). A jarring note in an otherwise sober play, it was perhaps a

cry of defiance by a seemingly compliant writer-adaptor, an act of mimicking and mocking the sponsors who both financed and delayed the fledgling career of a socially relevant novelist and playwright.

Even without such distancing acts, Miller's scripts for *Cavalcade* never approached the immediacy of the epistolary and reportorial plays heard on *This Is War!*, let alone the urgency of Wishengrad's "The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto." The *Cavalcade* sponsors continued to demand a kind of personified idealism that was far removed from the character studies to which Miller was drawn. Week after week, the program presented uplifting success stories, portraits of individuals who became steadfast and determined in the face of adversity, heroic gains that translated into a character's loss of complexity. To a writer like Miller it mattered little that the scenarios in which these melodramatic personages could demonstrate their strengths were gradually becoming more realistic and contemporary, that the *Cavalcade* finally eased its restrictions, permitting contributors to hail the "Star-Spangled Banner" without forcing them to muffle the sound of "bombs bursting in air." To be sure, the program's military sound effects remained largely reserved for enemy fire rather than American fighters. The fact-based war stories selected for the series were those of benevolent educators and caregivers who, finding themselves under attack, are forced to respond to a hostile world. Miller's assignments included adapting the stories of Lt. Engel, an army nurse and widow whose battle cry, "I Was Married on Bataan," leads her into the very epicenter of war; Pastor Niemoeller who, undecieved yet not disillusioned, looks westward from his Nazi prison cell to "Listen for the Sound of Wings" (**Apr. 19, 1943**); and Edward Kuder, a kindly Superintendent of Schools on Mindanao who demonstrates that "The Philippines Never Surrendered" after realizing that the present was "no time for philosophy," but "time for the Moros to kill Japs."

Between April 19, 1943 and August, 21, 1944, Miller did not contribute any scripts to *Cavalcade*; instead, he realized projects in other media--the Broadway

production of The Man Who Had All the Luck, the screenplay for The Story of GI Joe, as well as the novel Focus. It was during this period that the series presented some of its most mature plays, fictional documentaries for which it was honored with the 1944 Peabody Award for outstanding radio drama.⁵⁹ Notable among these reports from the frontlines are “Tokyo Spearhead” (**June 19, 1944**), based on a 1944 diary about combat in the jungles of New Guinea, “U-Boat Prisoner” (**Dec. 27, 1943**), an account of an American sailor captured by the Nazis, and “Ambulance Driver, Middle East,” “based on authentic material cabled from abroad” (**Apr. 3, 1944**); the last two were adapted or co-written by playwright Arthur Arent, best known for his involvement in the “Living Newspaper Unit” of the WPA’s Federal Theatre Project. Employing first-person narratives to introduce their dramatic scenes, these unsentimental and remarkably subdued melodramas achieved a verisimilitude and urgency generally missing from previous *Cavalcade* broadcasts. It was a reportorial approach that Miller generally avoided, perhaps in an effort to render impersonal--or to deny the authenticity of--command performances over which he had so little artistic control. A notable exception had been “The Story of Gus,” a play in which Miller drew on his personal experience as a seaman.

“The Story of Gus” was not written for *Cavalcade*, but for a proposed series of OWI broadcasts designed to recruit men for the Merchant Marine. According to Joseph Liss, then editor of the OWI Domestic Radio Bureau, Miller was impressed with the “honesty and sincerity” of the project; to assure the authenticity of his script, he conducted interviews in East Coast and Gulf ports. Yet the play was never produced because network executives could not be convinced to allocate time for the non-commercial program. The decision only intensified Miller’s disdain for commercial broadcasting. In his preface to the published script, he remarked:

Radio today is in the hands of people most of whom have no taste, no will, no nothing but the primitive ability to spot a script that does not conform

to the format. Give the medium to the artists and something might happen.

As it is--death in the afternoon and into the night.

"I'm a seaman, I know ships, and they're calling for seamen every day," Gus, a 45-year old former merchant marine tells his wife, "I'm ashamed of myself in front of you. If I'm a seaman I oughta be on the sea."⁶⁰ As a dramatist, Miller determined he ought not to be on the air, where he never felt at ease to share his thoughts about the front he never got to experience.

By the time of Miller's return to the *Cavalcade* program, the war's decisive battles seemed to have been won and the reports from the front were being replaced with disarming stories of reintegration, recovery, and renewal. Miller artfully dodged radio verité with fact-based comedy-melodramas like "The Story of Canine Joe" (**Aug. 31, 1944**), in which a discharged Private relates the antics of an obstinate service dog (arfed by Bob Barker) who "very nearly made a jerk out of the whole United States Army" until he shows his mettle in the South Pacific and is sent home with a citation. The "old gold brick" must have "come to his senses," his trainer reasons, when he realizes that "those Japs were treating those poor natives worse than dogs." Reminiscent in name only of Miller's screenplay for *The Story of GI Joe* (1945), then in the works, the play suggests that on radio, serious wartime drama was bound to go to the dogs. Miller's next contribution to *Cavalcade* was "Bernadine, I Love You" (**Mar. 5, 1945**), proposed as the "story of paratrooper who had a problem and of how the Red Cross helped him out." The play--"warm as a hand clasp and sentimental as young love"--was meant to illustrate "one of the human little odd jobs which the Red Cross does for the fighters in the lines and for the lonesome servicemen behind the lines." In this case, the "odd job" was to reassure a demoralized soldier (*Life of Riley's* William Bendix) of his war bride's devotion. Blending comedy and sentiment somewhat more felicitously is Miller's history lesson-as-Dickensian character sketch "Grandpa and the Statue" (**Mar. 26, 1945**). Announced as a "warm, human story of the most famous pinup girl in the world"--the Statue of Liberty--the play is

a nostalgic response to the public's growing World War-weariness and the prospects of international unity and concord after Yalta.

The story is told in dramatized prolepses by a wounded American soldier recovering in a hospital room with a view of New York Harbor. His "Grandpa" is "Merciless Monaghan," the "stingiest man in Brooklyn" (Charles Laughton), who refuses to make a contribution to the Statue of Liberty Fund and stubbornly defends his position until many years later--but still well in the past--his grandson entreats him to take a ferry to Bedloe's Island:

MONAGHAN. What I can't understand is what all these people see in that statue that they'll keep a boat like this full makin' the trip, year in year out. To hear the newspapers talk, if the statue was gone we'd be at war with the nation that stole her the followin' mornin' early. All it is is a big pile of French copper.

CHILD MONAGHAN. The teacher says it shows us that we got liberty.

MONAGHAN. Bah! If you've got liberty you don't need a statue to tell you you got it; and if you haven't got liberty no statue's going to do you any good tellin' you you got it. It was a criminal waste of the people's money.⁶¹

Uninspired by the monument and several of its equally pococurante onlookers, Monaghan encounters a veteran of the Spanish-American War who, celebrating the birthday of his fallen brother by visiting the "only stone he's got," convinces the old man that the "statue kinda looks like what we believe." Deeply moved, Monaghan asks to be left alone while inspecting the inscription at the base of the statue:

MONAGHAN (*to himself*). "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses . . ."

(*Music: Swells from a sneak to full, then under to background.*)

YOUNG MONAGHAN. I ran over and got my peanuts and stood there

cracking them open, looking around. And I happened to glance over to grampa. He had his nose right up to that bronze tablet, reading it. And then he reached into his pocket and kinda spied around over his eyeglasses to see if anybody was looking, and then he took out a coin and stuck it in a crack of cement over the tablet.

(Biz: Coin falling onto concrete.)

YOUNG MONAGHAN. It fell out and before he could pick it up I got a look at it. It was a half a buck. He picked it up and pressed it into the crack so it stuck. And then he came over to me and we went home.

(Music: Changes to stronger, more forceful theme.)

That's why, when I look at her now through this window, I remember that time and that poem [. . .].⁶²

The aural metaphor of the dropping coin which signals Monaghan's belated and rather synthetic epiphany gains in resonance when read as a response to--and reflection of--the cash nexus of network radio, to commercially sponsored programs like *Cavalcade* whose token contributions to the war effort were designed to square the social debt of past and present profiteering. Bridging the years between 1885 and 1945, the play makes no reference to World War I; even though its climactic scene is set in the 1920s or early 1930s, the Statue-cum-cenotaph serves to remember the Maine and not the Marne. Having squandered his talents and betrayed his art, *Cavalcade*'s utility playwright pays his dues by depositing penny-press sentiments on what he argued to be the colossal tombstone of American culture.

Whether motivated chiefly by ideals or pragmatics, morals or money, the *Cavalcade* plays that bear Miller's name demonstrate little concern for and less faith in the development of an audio drama aesthetics. In their uneasy conformity, these performances are not only complicit in the commercial exploitation of a system Miller publicly denounced as soon as he could afford to do so, but also in the propagation of the

myth that broadcasting under corporate sponsorship, unlike other commercial media, could never be a genuine forum for artistic expression, that the so-called blind medium was entirely incompatible with authorial vision. Established authors who committed themselves to radio propaganda could do so at least without tarnishing their image, their exoteric and evanescent efforts being lauded as politically responsible. And yet, as the experiences of other young writers suggest, the “dark closet,” notwithstanding its apparent restrictions, could be envisioned as a dispatch box for intimations other than generic and somewhat disingenuous laments about one’s own obliteration by radio. The last days of the war and the homecoming of the wounded, in particular, offered Arthur Laurents and Millard Lampell an opportunity to shape propaganda into public service broadcasts through which to articulate the many challenges that lay ahead for a generation that had given the best years of their lives without being likely to realize the freedoms they had served to defend.

“Think of that face”: Injuries Remembered

Like Miller, Laurents began his radio career in 1939, when the *Columbia Workshop* produced his first original play, the minor Corwinian exercise “Now Playing Tomorrow” (Jan. 30, 1939). A diffuse if blithely unpredictable fantasy about the doubtful advantages of being clairvoyant, the play features filter-miked voices, choric recitation, and dialogue in light verse. With a *Workshop* debut to his credit, Laurents had little difficulties selling scripts to various network programs, including *Hollywood Playhouse* (1937-40), *The Adventures of the Thin Man* (1941-50), and *This Is Your FBI* (1945-53). “Commercial pulp, all of it,” he commented sixty years later. Finding himself accepting more assignments than he could easily complete, Laurents “invented a method for devising plots” that involved listing the common “twists and turns” he observed in the movies, choosing them “at random,” and linking them in a unifying story line that could reasonably support them. Unlike Miller, however, Laurents was not quite as nonchalant about radio

writing as such professed plot-juggling suggests. He actively pursued his career in broadcasting, attending *Columbia Workshop* producer-director William N. Robson's evening class in radio writing at NYU "to gain entree to the networks." Nor did Laurents feel "faced with the art vs. commerce dilemma"; he was "too flattered" being "wanted, too thrilled at being paid for being happy."⁶³

Contributing to the war effort by writing plays for a number of dramatic propaganda series not only secured Laurents a considerable income of up to \$350 per script, but kept the draftee from facing combat overseas. The Army arranged for him to write scripts for programs like *Armed Service Force Presents* (1943-1944), a series dramatizing the work of various branches of the US military, *Assignment Home* (1944-46), which Laurents describes as "propaganda in the guise of drama to prepare the home front for the men returning home," and, most significantly, the Peabody Award winning documentary drama *The Man Behind the Gun* (1942-44), an anthology series best remembered for its present tense, second-person narration. The technique, exemplified here by Randal MacDougall's opening narration for "Ten Percent Is Not Enough" (**Mar. 28, 1943**), was designed to encourage listeners to imagine themselves as agents in the theaters of war:

You're a chief bosun's mate aboard the "Boise"--a gun pointer--the guy that points and fires the fifteen big guns of the cruiser. Right now you're standing by for action--off Savo Island--in the Solomons--it's nearly midnight on October 11, 1942. Your guns are manned, ready, loaded, and laid. You've sighted the enemy, and your eye is jammed into the telescopic gun sight, searching for a target. [And] now, very dimly, you see a light-gray spot on the lens . . . then another . . . and another--five of them. It's them! You can see them plainly.⁶⁴

Even though Laurents did not, as he implies in his biography, originate the you-are-there technique--which MacDougall, creator of the series, believed to have been previously

employed by Corwin--its use fostered his sense of the medium's suggestive powers and the distinct qualities of radio writing. He insisted that, rather than airing "unseen plays with sound effects," radio "should be a new art form of the drama."⁶⁵

Toward the end of the war, Laurents had found his voice as a radio playwright--a voice powerful and convincing enough not to be muffled by overly cautious industry executives. Drawing on personal experiences, he managed to explore themes on radio similar to those he tackled on Broadway, where he made his debut with Home of the Brave (1945), a play dealing with anti-Semitism in the Army. While Washington looked closely at his scripts after he had been accused of communist affiliations, Laurents nonetheless succeeded at getting even controversial plays produced. Initially rejected, for example, was "The Knife," a play emphasizing, as few other wartime dramas had done, the experience of African-Americans in the service. Laurents fought to see it produced as late as 1945, by which time scripts featuring and telling the stories of heroic present-day African-Americans disappeared almost entirely from wartime propaganda drama, as "blacks," in Laurents's words, "were expected to resume their menial positions in society." With the support of Henry Stimson, Secretary of War, the play was produced and earned its author a citation. Without ever having had much "respect" for such awards, Laurents was "proud" of his broadcasting achievements and honors, including the to him unexpected publication of "The Face" and "The Last Day of the War," scripts he had written for *Assignment Home*.⁶⁶

As Laurents discovered, wartime propaganda was not limited to sentimental sketches or muscular speeches. There was also a demand for scripts dealing with the aftermath of combat, the difficulties faced by traumatized and disillusioned soldiers readjusting to civilian life. To the jingoistic *Treasury Star Parade* and the largely idealistic *Calvacade* both "The Face" and "The Last Day of the War" offer sobering correctives, at times by appropriating and subverting the radiophonic repertoire of earlier propagandist plays. "The Last Day of the War," for instance, opens with a curtain raising montage of

narration and sound effects that may be read as a sardonic commentary on radio propaganda's facile if stirring *bruitism*:

VOICE. There was a chunky redheaded kid from Nevada. He got it this way.

(Biz: Machine gun shot--short, sharp, loud.)

There was a solemn-faced boy from Cape Cod who told jokes with a dead pan. He got it this way.

(Biz: One rifle shot--sniper.)

Then there was this guy--big, lazy shoulders, strong thighs, dirty blond hair. He was from Toledo, Ohio. He got it good.

(Biz: The long shrill scream of a shell. It explodes violently on mike.)

(Music: A crash and then very short bridge.)

MICKEY. *(Groans softly.)*

VOICE. That's how it begins. . . .

To capture the silencing of a generation, Laurents's play employs and anticlimactically exhausts the inventories of sound so frequently taken to authenticate propagandist documentaries. The reverberations of war, the commenting voice suggests, far outlast the tumult and the shouting; nor does quiescence necessarily signal peace, but may translate instead into speechlessness, despair, or sensory impairment. In the case of Mickey, reduced here in effect to low sound, it communicates the numbness of an anaesthetized amputee who, as the narrator puts it, "doesn't know from nothing" until he "comes out of the fog," unable to reconcile himself to the loss of his gangrenous legs and the inevitability of having to "face the world."⁶⁷

The theme of outfacing adversity rather than hiding behind a mask of cynicism is further problematized in "The Face," which opens with the narrator's challenge to the listener:

Stop now and think of them. Stop this minute and think of these husbands, sons, brothers, lovers . . . this soldier of yours who has gone away. Think of him and what do you see? His face. A face that you've known and loved and held close. . . . All right now. Think of this.

(Music: Here, takes on an agitated quality. . . .)

It's going to hurt, but think of this. Think of that face--burned, scorched, almost destroyed. *(Quickly, as though to alleviate the pain.)* All right; it hurts. But, you think; plastic surgery. With plastic surgery, the army can restore that face, can make it as good as new.

(Music: Out.)

Well . . . can it? And even if it can't, does that matter so very much? Do you love a man for his face?⁶⁸

Through this series of conflicting expositions, the listener is set up to imagine--and thus to expect from the subsequent drama--the affecting recognition scene of the sentimental homecoming story, the shocking revelations typical of sensational melodrama, and the realistic case studies of radio's didactic progress reports. While Laurents's character study of Harold Ingalls, a soldier who suffers the erasure of his physiognomy, contains some of these elements, the narrator's leading questions encourage the listeners to look beyond the dramatized incidents, to close their eyes and auscultate the conscience instead.

"Do you love a man for his face?" Like many of Laurents's early works for stage and screen, from Home of the Brave (1945) to his screenplay for Hitchcock's Rope (1948), "The Face" explores the transgressions of societal boundaries and of language capable of sharing and shielding the illicit; it is a play of masked figures and figurative unmasking. Dreading the prejudices of post-war America, Harold Ingalls and his fellow patients must learn to redefine companionship in civilian and personal terms:

GOLDSTEIN. When you get plastered . . . who do you go with?

INGALLS. There used to be a fellow--but he was discharged last week.

GOLDSTEIN. Was he--like us?

INGALLS. Yeah. So now I go alone.

GOLDSTEIN. If--if I can get a pass . . . can--I go with you?

INGALLS. Sure! You know it makes it good, when there are two of you.

Having been nearly silenced in combat, the voices of two men who have become strangers to their own reflections begin to echo and complement one another in a scene as tender as it is awkward. Listeners, having access only to their tentative words and telling pauses, are free to imagine themselves, another--and any other--beneath the uniform.

Rather than confronting his biological family, his brother and mother, Ingalls soon becomes eager to escape with his double, his secret sharer:

INGALLS. You're more of a brother than he is.

GOLDSTEIN. Now that's a real compliment.

INGALLS. Oh you know what I mean.

GOLDSTEIN. Sure.

INGALLS. Well, I'll get my mother over with quick and then we'll beat it into town and really tie one on. You and me.

GOLDSTEIN. Right!

INGALLS. That's the best way.

(Biz: Fade in MOTHER's footsteps approaching slowly.)

INGALLS. You and me. That's the-- *(He cuts as he hears the footsteps. They are still off but coming closer, closer.)*

The diegetic ellipsis, intimate speech cut short by the sound of intruding speakers, serves to foreground the unspoken instead of deadening it as utterly unspeakable. Social norms and private desires are argued to be at odds. Yet if being in the service presupposed the suspension of personal desires, reentrance into civilian life means to negotiate them. The fight for America's liberty must make way for the struggle to secure individual freedoms.

When Ingalls is finally discharged after his twenty-fifth reconstructive surgery, the Army psychiatrist gives him--and the listener--a last lecture, telling him that "every single day, people get slapped because of ignorance. They get slapped for religion, for color, for how they talk or what they look like." She encourages him not to tolerate the intolerant, but to "stand up to them and tell them they're wrong!" The play ends with the wish that "this will be the beginning, the beginning of a world where the only thing that does matter is each man himself for what he is himself."⁶⁹ While fairly conventional, narrative and dramatic techniques in Laurents's plays serve to publicize a private message. A Jew and a homosexual, their author saw himself as "an outsider, if not a pariah" among the "liberals, progressives, left-wingers" he encountered in his radio days and whose comradeship he sought.⁷⁰ Miller's scripts, by comparison, largely lack personality since their author did not believe that intimate messages could be broadcast without being censored or misread. Although radio may very well have been what Michael Denning calls the "site of the left's greatest success," capable of producing "vehicles of political and aesthetic innovation,"⁷¹ Miller opted to hide his copies of The New Masses and to deliver what he was assigned to write, even if it meant having to advocate informing against fellow citizens, as in "That They May Win," a play he wrote for one of the War Bond Drives.⁷²

The homecoming stories that dominated propaganda plays during the final days of the war lent themselves to the critique of a society that did not seem to heed or realize the ideals for which Americans had gone into battle. Touched upon in Laurents's scripts, such concerns are central to The Long Road Home, a volume of radio plays written between 1944 and 1945 by Almanac Singer and Army Air Force Sergeant Millard Lampell. Like Miller, Lampell wrote original plays for *Cavalcade* and adaptations for *The United States Steel Hour* (also known as *The Theatre Guild on the Air*, 1945-53); but he also found projects more in keeping with--or more readily suited to--his political views. Beginning with his earliest scripts for the CBS produced serial *Green Valley, USA* (1942-44), which dealt with issues including lend-lease, black markets, and race discrimination, Lampell

built for himself a broadcasting career that, as Judith E. Smith puts it, “can serve to illustrate some of the multiple openings for a left-wing political sensibility on radio in this period.”⁷³

It would have been “easy enough” to get “all hopped up on this hero stuff,” William Rose Benét remarked about Lampell’s scripts for *First in the Air*, an official AAF series heard on CBS in 1944; yet Lampell’s plays were “not *at all* about ‘heroes’ in a book sense,” but “merely about men”⁷⁴--servicemen who were spent, disenchanted with civilian life and highly doubtful of an enduring peace. Had anti-Semitism and fascism truly been conquered? In “October Morning,” Lampell’s final assignment for the Army, a returning soldier finds himself unable to enjoy his first day back home. While taking a walk with his son in the brisk autumn air, he remembers the “odor of the dying” at a “place called Belsen.” Thinking about Paris, he calls to mind the bitterness of a Frenchwoman who observed that American soldiers preferred “German girls” because they, unlike the French, were clean, and that they “listen[ed] to them explain how the French are degenerate, and the Russians are liars, and the Jews started the war.” Prejudices lingered, hatred and ignorance that the war had not erased.

DAVE. And so it’s good to be home, and yet . . . the fear is there.

Only a low murmur heard in the side-streets of the cities, a casual fragment picked up on a train. . . .

MAN. The way I figure. . . the next war . . .

DAVE. I think of the men who landed in Normandy with me and wonder what they think of this talk of a new war. Johnson won’t care; he’s dead. Weiser won’t care; he’s dead. Casey won’t care; he went out of his mind at St. Lo. But I am here and alive and walking the road to home and smelling the sweet October air, and by the living and the dead, I care! I’ve had enough of war [. . .].

(*Music: Sneak with simply dignity.*)

DAVE. You diplomats and statesmen where you sit at your conference tables, please be informed that I have seen the face of war, and remember it well. And I am passing along the memories to my son, and we will not forget!⁷⁵

Lampell called his plays “a battle report.”⁷⁶ Instead of documenting frontline encounters, however, they took on the social, political, and economic challenges of post-war America; and in contrast to earlier propaganda plays, the scripts, like those by Laurents, generally do away with the mediating proxy listener. At times retaining the palliative, telecommunal “we,” the disembodied, extradiegetic narrator addresses the listening public directly, raising awareness about pressing concerns of the day:

Are we ready now? Are the factories with their special veterans' readjustment plans ready? Are the unions ready, and the community centers, the free classes, and the special training for the job? Is the nation ready for these men who have fought our war and are coming home? We must send them to college, give them loans, help them build homes and get started in business. They fought a war for us. Are we ready to build a peace for them? When the medicine of jobs is prepared, and the instruments of security are ready, the operation on the wound that shows no scars will then begin.⁷⁷

Each of the research-based if fictional case studies collected in The Long Way Home captures the many aspects of a soldier's life before, during, and after combat, fragments of experiences gathered and interpreted by a reportorial voice that serves as the listener's personal correspondent. “The Empty Sleeve,” for instance, is a biographical phono-montage, a composite sketch of an amputee for whom Lampell chose the name of a fellow Almanac Singer.

After a brief opening scene on a bus, in which the central character meets with ignorant, indifferent, or insensitive civilians, the narrator offers the following description:

The soldier is a skinny, long-legged guy with big feet that keep getting in his way. His name is Pete Seeger, and I think you must know him. He had his empty sleeve pinned up, remember, and you passed him on the street and just turned and stared. He sat next to you in a drugstore last week, remember? and you noticed the stiff sleeve and artificial hand.

Pointed out in this way, the soldier is no longer a protagonist in a dramatic sketch, but a translatable if mutable figure, a familiar sight and strange cipher in the listener's everyday: anyone with an empty sleeve could be somebody like Pete. Throughout the play, the soldier becomes knowable as the narrator introduces comrades, family members, physicians, and psychiatrists with whom Pete Seeger or Danny O'Brien or Ernesto Santini is then heard in brief dramatic scenes. Gradually emerging are the features of average citizens demanding to be heard; and even if they have literally lost the power to speak, Lampell's all-important narrator translates their experiences until assigning the task of constructing this life in progress to the listener:

There's an ending waiting to be written to the story of Pete Seeger, and if you think about it long enough you may be able to write it yourself. If you happen to figure out how it should go, you might let Pete Seeger know about it.⁷⁸

The process of reintegration, Lampell's plays insist, is a responsibility to be faced by all Americans, both jointly and individually. Neither the subject of hero-worship nor the object of pity, the forgotten men brought to life in these fictional documentaries bespoke the ideological battles and embattled ideals of a recent past and receding present that American civilians seemed far too eager to leave behind in favor of material comforts and conveniences long forgone.

Before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, along with a resurgence of arrant consumerism, forced many radio artists off the air--and nearly put an end to socially relevant network drama--writers like Laurents and Lampell understood to take

advantage of radio's anonymity to interpret and document the fight for the pursuit of happiness in personal yet widely accessible plays. After the war, socio-political commentary in radio drama was limited to a small number of low-budgeted or regional programs like WMCA's *New World A-Coming* (1944-47), which featured soon to be blacklisted Canada Lee, and WMAQ's *Destination Freedom* (1948-50), which offered an African-American alternative to *Cavalcade of America* by telling the stories of Ralph Bunche, W. E. B. DuBois, or Mary McLeod Bethune. However significant in their contribution to broadcast culture, such minority-targeting and low-rated programs received little support from the networks and were vulnerable to cancellations.⁷⁹ For the most part, broadcasters no longer struggled to find the lowest common denominator in order to disseminate the highest democratic ideals. After a period of restrained commercialism, network radio was once more becoming what Lampell called the "juke box of the corporations. As long as they keep sticking nickels in the damn thing, it will play the tunes they pick." Only, Lampell vowed, he would not "be around to write them."⁸⁰

Of course, network radio had never ceased to be a corporate "juke box." Most of the propaganda play cycles were of such short duration that they could be readily accommodated in temporarily vacant timeslots. With the exception of the unprecedented propaganda blitz of *This Is War!*, these series rarely disrupted the networks' regular programming schedules, which even in wartime remained at the disposal of America's leading advertising agencies. As the complicated history of the *Cavalcade of America* suggests, reconciling the conflicting aims of profit and propaganda by integrating specific directives and appeals into the dramatic content of existing, commercially viable programs was a considerably more elaborate project, involving a dialogue between networks, sponsors, and government agencies. Regardless of their politics, advertisers were generally reluctant to sponsor any experimental program whose writerly techniques could distract from the commercial copy to be billboarded. As a result, the aesthetics of

agitation developed by the established authors discussed above enjoyed comparatively little support or exposure on network radio whose broadcast fictions remained committed to the conventions of nineteenth-century melodrama. Assessing the propagandistic potential of such traditional storytelling formats, the next chapter investigates how far radio's top-rated, long-running thriller anthologies aided the war effort by attracting bestselling novelists willing to press their keen-eared sleuths and foreign-sounding villains into the uneasy service of indoctrination by diversion.

Notes

¹ Riley, "A History of American Radio Drama from 1919 to 1944," diss., Ohio State U, 1944, 149-50.

² Dryer, Radio in Wartime (New York: Greenberg, 1942) 3.

³ According to Variety, the four major networks' annual advertising revenues rose from \$44.3 million in 1940 to \$150 million in 1943--"an all time high." See, Abel Green and Joe Laurie, Jr., Show Biz (New York: Holt, 1951) 490-91.

⁴ Nettels, "The Radio and the War," New Republic, 18 May 1942: 666-67.

⁵ "American Man-in-the-Street," editorial, Fortune Dec. 1942: 144.

⁶ Corwin, "Careers in Screen and Radio," Theatre Arts July 1941: 515; Corwin, "The Sovereign Word," Theatre Arts Feb. 1940: 136.

⁷ Robert West, The Rape of Radio (New York: Rodlin, 1941) 58-59. Tarkington's A&P sponsored serial *Maud and (Cousin) Bill* aired on NBC Blue (1932-33); T. S. Stribling's serial *Conflict*, based on one of his earlier novels, was heard on CBS (1934). Hurst's "Society's Business" was written for the Roosevelt administration's Mobilization of Human Needs campaign (broadcast date unknown); Irwin Shaw's "Supply and Demand" was produced by the *Columbia Workshop* (May 9, 1937).

⁸ Boyd, introduction, The Free Company Presents, ed. James Boyd (New York: Dodd, 1941) v-ix.

- ⁹ Green, "A Start in Life," The Free Company Presents 218; Connelly, "The Mole on Lincoln's Cheek," The Free Company Presents 48. For Connelly's own account of his experience with the Free Company, see his Voices Offstage (New York: Holt, 1968) 239-42.
- ¹⁰ Liss, "Playwriting Around with Radio," Theatre Arts Mar. 1947: 61-62; an expanded version of this article served as the introduction to Liss's collection of Radio's Best Plays (New York: Greenberg, 1947) xi-xiv.
- ¹¹ Anderson, "Your Navy," This Is War! (New York: Dodd, 1942) 65.
- ¹² Sherman H. Dryer, Radio in Wartime (New York: Greenberg, 1942) 245-48. For a script of Corwin's "This Is War," see This Is War! 3-22.
- ¹³ Dryer 249. According to Hutchens, the inaugural broadcast was "talking to too many people"--including the enemy, via short wave; it celebrated America's might, then chided the American public for a complacency of which [. . .] the program seemed itself to be guilty." See Hutchens, "This Is War!--No. 1" New York Times 22 Feb. 1942, sec. 8: 12.
- ¹⁴ McClinton, introduction, This Is War! (New York: Dodd, 1942) vii-viii.
- ¹⁵ Anderson, "Feast of Ortolans," Eleven Verse Plays, by Anderson (New York: Harcourt, 1940) 23; "Second Overture" Eleven Verse Plays 22-23; "The Miracle of the Danube," The Free Company Presents 266. For a review of "Second Overture," see Orrin E. Dunlap, Jr., "Radio Drama as an Art Lures the Playwright's Pen," New York Times 6 Feb. 1938, sec. 10: 12.
- ¹⁶ Anderson, "Your Navy" 67; the play was essentially broadcast as it later appeared in print, albeit enhanced by a musical score by Kurt Weill.
- ¹⁷ Anderson, "Your Navy" 48; 51.
- ¹⁸ Benét, "Letter from an American Soldier," "We Stand United" by Benét (New York: Farrar, 1945) 56; Anderson, "Your Navy" 50.
- ¹⁹ Julian, This Was Radio (New York: Viking, 1975) 186.
- ²⁰ Wishengrad, "The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto," The Eternal Light by Wishengrad (New York: Crown, 1947) 40-41; the play was restaged for The Eternal Light as late as **Apr. 19, 1959**, when above passage was broadcast essentially as it appears in Wishengrad's book.
- ²¹ Anderson, "Your Navy" 67.
- ²² Robert K. Merton, Mass Persuasion (New York: Harper, 1946) 2-3.

- 23 Sherman H. Dryer, introduction, 100 Non-Royalty Radio Plays, ed. William Kozlenko (New York: Greenberg, 1941) xvi.
- 24 Benét, "Your Army," "We Stand United" 197-99. The play was broadcast as it appeared in print; Morton Gould supplied the score.
- 25 Hurst, "No Ivory Tower," Tune In Mar. 1943: 42; 43.
- 26 Another student enrolled in Barnouw's class was Brooklyn high school teacher Bernard Malamud; Barnouw, Media Marathon (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1996) 66-70; also see Barnouw, "Erik Barnouw: A Man for All Media," interview with Robert L. Hilliard, Journal of Radio Studies 6.1 (1999): 59-60.
- 27 Barnouw, Media Marathon 66.
- 28 Buck, "China to America," Free World Theatre, ed. Arch Oboler and Stephen Longstreet (New York: Random, 1944) 140; 149-50.
- 29 Oboler, "Letter at Midnight," Oboler Omnibus (New York: Duell, 1945) 188-90.
- 30 Benét, "Letter from a Farmer," "We Stand United" 11-12.
- 31 Benét, "Letter from a Working Man," "We Stand United" 30-31; 33.
- 32 Blue, Words at War (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2002) 145.
- 33 Benét, "Letter from a Housewife and Mother," "We Stand United" 45-46.
- 34 Benét, "Letter from a Foreign Born American," "We Stand United" 66-67.
- 35 Frederick Morton, "Radio Propaganda: New Style," Theatre Arts Feb. 1943: 97.
- 36 Barnouw, Radio Drama in Action (New York: Farrar, 1945) 112.
- 37 Miller, Timebends (New York: Grove, 1987) 203.
- 38 Miller, Timebends 203; Benjamin Nelson, Arthur Miller (London: Owen, 1970) 40; Martin Gottfried's Arthur Miller (New York: Da Capo, 2003) barely mentions Miller's career in radio, adding only that Miller's first broadcast play was a sketch for the *Rudy Vallee Show* (51-52).
- 39 Qtd. in John K. Hutchens, "Mr. Miller Has a Change of Luck," New York Times 23 Feb. 1947: 2: 3.
- 40 Miller, After the Fall (New York: Viking, 1964): 1.

- 41 Miller, "The Story of Gus," Radio's Best Plays 306.
- 42 Miller, "William Ireland's Confession," One Hundred Non-Royalty Radio Plays, ed. William Kozlenko (New York: Greenberg, 1941) 512; 521.
- 43 Miller, "Pussycat," One Hundred Non-Royalty Radio Plays 23; 29.
- 44 Weales, "Arthur Miller Takes the Air," American Drama 5.1 (1995): 7.
- 45 Miller, Timebends 71.
- 46 Landry, This Fascinating Radio Business (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1946) 174.
- 47 Miller, introduction, "Three Men on a Horse," after George Abbott, adapt. by Miller, The Theatre Guild on the Air, ed William H. Fitelson (New York: Rinehart, 1947) 205.
- 48 For a complete log of the program and information about its productions, see Martin Grams, Jr., The History of The Cavalcade of America (Kearny, NE: Morris, 2000).
- 49 Corwin, "Careers in Screen and Radio," 514; for a brief overview of the producer's many biases, see Blue 164-66.
- 50 Barnouw, The Golden Web (New York: Oxford UP, 1968) 89-91.
- 51 Sherwood, Original Radio Script of "Abraham Lincoln" (New York: Harcourt, 1940) 9-10; the play was broadcast on Feb. 13, 1940, Feb. 12, 1941, and Feb. 9, 1942.
- 52 For published scripts from the program's early years (1936-37), see Dixon Ryan Fox and Arthur M. Schlesinger, eds., The Cavalcade of America (Springfield, MA: Bradley, 1937), containing 16 plays; Fox and Schlesinger, eds., The Cavalcade of America, series 2 (Springfield, MA: Bradley, 1938), containing 20 plays broadcast between 1936 and 1938.
- 53 Blue 32.
- 54 Weales 10-11.
- 55 Fast, "Tomorrow Will Be Ours," Plays 4.5 (Feb. 1945): 71-73.
- 56 "Today in Radio," Movie-Radio Guide 3-9 Jan. 1942: 20.
- 57 Miller, Timebends 203-06.
- 58 Ratings for *Cavalcade* rose steadily, from 6.5 in January 1940 to 13.0 in January 1943; by comparison, ratings for Time magazine's dramatized news program *March of Time* rose from 4.2 in January 1938 to 19.6 in January 1943; Harrison B. Summers, A Thirty

Year History of Programs (1958; New York: Arno, 1971) 69; 85; 93; 101; 109.

⁵⁹ Don Franks, Entertainment Awards (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1996) 132.

⁶⁰ Miller, "The Story of Gus" 306; 315.

⁶¹ Miller, "Grandpa and the Statue," Plays from Radio, ed. A. H. Lass, Earle L. McGill, and Donald Axelrod (Boston: Houghton, 1948) 238; 246-48.

⁶² Miller, "Grandpa" 249; 250-51; all quoted passages were essentially broadcast as they appeared in print; but unlike the published script, the broadcast concludes with Laughton repeating the last lines of Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus."

⁶³ Laurents, Original Story By (New York: Knopf, 2000) 12-13; another early play by Laurents, the show business melodrama "Baby," aired **Nov. 2, 1940**, on the sustaining *Listener's Playhouse* (1940-42), NBC's attempt at rivalling *Columbia Workshop*.

⁶⁴ MacDougall, "The 'Boise,'" Radio Drama in Action 254; the second of two scripts about the USS Boise, it was retitled "Ten Percent Is Not Enough" for broadcasting. With the exception of the bracketed conjunction, the passage was read as it appears in the published script.

⁶⁵ Laurents, "The Face," Radio's Best Plays 81.

⁶⁶ Laurents, Original Story By 28-30. One of Laurents's contributions to *The Man Behind the Gun* was "K9 Corps" (**June 6, 1943**), a virtually yelp-free account of "war dog" training from the point of view of a cynical soldier ("I joined the army, not the circus") to which Miller's "Story of Canine Joe" compares like an episode of *Lassie*.

⁶⁷ Laurents, "The Last Day of the War," Radio Drama in Action, ed. Erik Barnouw (New York: Farrar, 1945) 93; 95; 106.

⁶⁸ Laurents, "The Face" 83.

⁶⁹ Laurents, "The Face," 95; 97; 100-01.

⁷⁰ Laurents, Original Story By 36.

⁷¹ Denning, The Cultural Front (New York: Verso, 1997) 91.

⁷² Nelson 43.

⁷³ Smith, "Radio's 'Cultural Front,' 1938-1948," Radio Reader, ed. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York: Routledge, 2002) 220.

- ⁷⁴ Benét, "Something About These Men," The Long Way Home by Lampell (New York: Messner, 1946) vii.
- ⁷⁵ Lampell, "October Morning," Radio's Best Plays 115-16.
- ⁷⁶ Lampell, "Author's Remarks," The Long Way Home xi.
- ⁷⁷ Lampell, "The Wound That Shows No Scars," The Long Way Home 87.
- ⁷⁸ Lampell, "The Empty Sleeve," The Long Way Home 110; 121.
- ⁷⁹ See Smith 222-24; for the troubled history of *Destination Freedom*, see J. Fred MacDonald, "Richard Durham and *Destination Freedom*," Richard Durham's *Destination Freedom*, ed. by MacDonald (New York: Praeger, 1989) 1-11; the discussion is followed by selected plays from the series, recordings of which are extant as well.
- ⁸⁰ Lampell, "October Morning" 106.

Chapter Six

"Until I know the thing I want to know": Eavesdroppers, Spy Stories, and Mouthpieces

I suppose he thought I didn't understand, for just as he was drawing ahead again he pointed to the south'ard, and then shouted through his hands as a trumpet "Verstehen Sie? short-cut through sands; follow me!" the last two sentences in downright English. I can hear those words now, and I'll swear they were in his native tongue. Of course I thought nothing of it at the time. I was quite aware that he knew a few English words, though he had always mispronounced them; an easy trick when your hearer suspects nothing. But I needn't say that just then I was observant of trifles. I don't pretend to be able to unravel a plot and steer a small boat before a heavy sea at the same moment.--Erskine Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903)

One of the most significant and controversial programming trends of the 1940s was the networks' increasing reliance on mystery and suspense dramas. In January 1930, only three thriller series were regularly featured on network radio; one month after the attack on Pearl Harbor, nineteen such programs were broadcast weekly.¹ Four years later, the number had risen to thirty-two. Notwithstanding a few early and lasting successes--the nostalgic whodunits of *Sherlock Holmes* (1930-55), the true crime reenactments of *Gang Busters* (1935-57), and the neo-gothic melodramas of *The Shadow* (1930-54)--most of radio's longest-running adventure, horror, and detective programs originated in the early to mid-1940s, including the thriller anthologies *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* (1941-1952), *The Whistler* (1942-1955), and *Suspense* (1942-1962). How could such programming strategies be reconciled with what Corwin called the "duty and responsibility" of American broadcasting--"to explain to the people the nature of fascism and why we are fighting it," to "face squarely the issues of this war instead of ducking them"?²

According to a Newsweek article published shortly after the first anniversary of the US entry into the war, broadcasters initially

pondered whether the creepy detective and plain and fancy horror should be cast aside for the duration. With so much horror on the post-Pearl Harbor front pages, they thought listeners might shy away from further unpleasantries on the radio.

But the broadcasters wasted time worrying. Today, more gunshots, awesome screams, and insane shrieks shatter the air waves than ever before--with the din on the increase and programs competing to be the ether's most eerie.

As the article points out, audiences for established crime dramas like *The Shadow* and *The Adventures of the Thin Man* (1941-50) increased considerably during wartime; the topical *Mr. District Attorney* (1939-52) now achieved higher Hooper ratings than some of radio's most popular entertainers, crooner Rudy Vallee, comedian Eddie Cantor, and bandleader-quizmaster Kay Kyser.³ The weekly airtime for most of the lavishly produced, star-studded, and fully orchestrated comedy-variety programs were being trimmed down from one hour to thirty minutes, and the newly available half-hour slots were most cost-effectively filled with comparatively low-budgeted thriller series. Yet this retrenchment rationale could hardly be expected to convince either media critics or the FCC that, by providing cheap thrills, affiliated stations served the "public interest, convenience, and necessity."

Creators of crime and terror narratives have always been wont to defend their escapist fiction as being ethically instructive and socially responsible. Before the war, producers of thriller programs like *Gang Busters* and *The Shadow* tried to vindicate their dime-novel and ten-twenty-thirt histrionics through more or less tagged-on conclusions or overt moralistic tags ostensibly designed to remind listeners that, in the words of *The Shadow*, "the weed of crime bears bitter fruit." Ed Byron, for instance, modeled his series

Mr. District Attorney on the exploits of New York City's racket-busting Governor Thomas E. Dewey. As *Newsweek*'s radio column put it, the series "gradually mixed regulation blood and thunder with liberal (for radio) thinking." In addition to attacking the "moral wrongs of black markets," Byron claimed that his program was the first to assail anti-Semitism. Yet, the article acknowledged, the great popularity of the program was chiefly due to the program's exploitation of real-crime headlines and its convincing portrayal of "mobsters and their language."⁴

After Pearl Harbor, as ruthless, tough-talking underworld characters were replaced by far more formidable adversaries, makers and sponsors of thriller series reasoned that their jingoist melodramas served wartime objectives by boosting home front morale and by dramatizing government-endorsed directives. Responding to the ratings successes of established mystery and horror series, broadcasters introduced a growing number of war-themed thrillers, including *Alias John Freedom* (1942-43), "a modern Scarlet Pimpernel who aids those suffering from Axis oppression," and the highly popular *Counterspy* (1942-57), whose government agent, David Harding, "thwarts the best laid plans of Axis saboteurs."⁵ According to Frank Rahill, the "dramaturgic apparatus" of melodrama with its villain-hero conflict, its persecution plot, and its mediating, audience-addressing *raisonneur* is an "almost perfect instrument for propaganda--an apparatus contrived indeed with that very end in view."⁶ Whether to appease critics or to boost ratings, sponsors and networks made an effort to reactivate this apparatus, largely dormant in the escapist thriller, for the purposes of wartime propaganda.

From the French Revolution and the American War of Independence onward, times of violent political and military conflicts have produced conditions favorable to the conception and reception of melodrama, which, according to Peter Brooks, "substitutes for the rite of sacrifice an urging toward combat in life, an active, lucid confrontation of evil"; through "clarification and recognition" of "what is being fought for and against," melodrama prepares audiences for action by rendering threats explicit and by suggesting

concrete ways to overcome them.⁷ While World War II was no exception, few critics were entirely convinced by the argument that sensational crime dramas could adequately fulfill the task of indoctrination by radio. A report on radio thrillers and their effect on juvenile listeners conceded that such plays “may serve admirably in draining off aggression through vicarious experience,” but insisted that broadcasters

cannot continue to provide vicarious aggression in mass proportions, and at the same time hope to build up the kind of aggression necessary for defeating the enemies of democracy. Interestingly, Hitler never provided the Germans with vicarious horror on the radio. He gave them a zealous faith in themselves and their state and proceeded to use the radio to unleash sadism, lust, and aggression upon human objects. In order to develop an offensive against Hitler and his methods, it is of the utmost importance to use radio, the press, and motion pictures for implementing an active faith in democratic aims, ideal, and processes.⁸

The crimefighters of the airwaves--the fictional defenders of democratic aims and ideals--were increasingly called to arms against the incarnations of fascism at home and abroad. This drafting of the detectives, which had begun during the “transition-period” of 1940-1941 with the short-lived *Wings of Destiny* (1940-42), frequently made for uneven mixtures of private eye pursuits and public servant missions, of armchair detection and “armed-forces adventure.”⁹ While eminent radio critic Robert Landry reminded the industry that the “power to divert is not identical with the power to convert,”¹⁰ the weekly mystery and suspense programs nonetheless provided many radio melodramatists with the opportunity to prove themselves as anti-axis operatives by transforming the broadcast thriller into a potentially effective weapon of propaganda. After all, thriller writers had a prominent and outspoken role model in detective novelist Rex Stout; co-author and host of the counter-propaganda program *Our Secret Weapon* (1942-43), he also served as chairman of the Writers War Board.

“I hate all Nazi Germans,” Stout declared in the fervid language of melodrama:

I hate all Germans who accept, either actively or passively, the doctrine which permeated German thought long before Hitler was born, the doctrine by which the Germans justify their contempt of all other people and their domination of other countries by force. I hate all Germans who joined with the Nazis to bring that doctrine to its inevitable culmination of brutal disregard of the rights and dignities which distinguish a man from a beast. I hate all Germans who, reluctant to join the Nazis, nevertheless failed, through lack of courage or conviction, to prevent the Nazis from seizing power and plunging the world into this filthy swamp of destruction, misery and hatred.¹¹

By 1942, seasoned explorers of the quagmires of humanity, best-selling mystery writers like John Dickson Carr, Leslie Charteris, and the cousins Ellery Queen, had few difficulties and fewer reservations about approaching the miasmic airwaves and advancing their neat solutions to the indeterminacies of a seemingly interminable war. The resulting identity crisis of the wartime radio thriller, whose escapist yet didactic revenge fantasies were inspired by the stark realities of war, is particularly noticeable in the first seasons of *Suspense*, network radio’s most extensive and preeminent mystery and adventure anthology.

“English magic is better”: Prelections on *Suspense*

Suspense was conceived by CBS as a prestige anthology of literary thrillers and a vehicle for master of suspense Alfred Hitchcock, who is credited with directing the pilot for the series (**July 22, 1940**), a reflexive adaptation of Marie Belloc Lowndes’s 1913 novella The Lodger. In 1926, Hitchcock had attempted to translate the “pure narrative” of this Jack-the-Ripper story in “purely visual terms”; his only regret had been that the motion picture star system ruled out that a leading man could portray a killer, thereby

diminishing the visual storyteller's opportunities to generate suspense.¹² The *Suspense* pilot sought to establish the formula for a program that, for years, was announced as being "compounded of mystery and suspicion and dangerous adventure . . . calculated to intrigue you, to stir your nerves, to offer you a precarious situation and then withhold the solution until the last possible moment." Defying cinematic conventions and audience expectations, "The Lodger" withheld the solution altogether, ending instead with the director's refusal to tell even his cast whether the eponymous character was guilty or innocent, dead or alive. "Your guess, gentle listener, is as good as ours," program announcer Thomas Freebairn-Smith slyly remarked at the conclusion of the trial broadcast. Favorable audience response notwithstanding, the series' premiere was being delayed by nearly two years. By that time, Hitchcock was no longer available for the project. This, however, was hardly the network's greatest concern. With the United States at war, the producers of the sustaining program had reasons to doubt whether listeners and potential sponsors would be amused by open-ended and ambiguous crime stories at a time of global chaos and uncertainty. For fifteen weeks, the newly launched *Suspense* series primarily presented adaptations of conservative whodunits by established mystery writers like Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie, beginning with a convoluted flashback dramatization of John Dickson Carr's 1937 novel The Burning Court (June 17, 1942). Then, after a month-long hiatus in October 1942, the series returned with Carr himself as head writer and an emphasis on mysteries written especially for the medium.

"Mystery" was a much employed label in American radio entertainment; it was often used interchangeably with "adventure," the latter being the preferred term for episodic whodunits. Perhaps in an attempt to suggest melodramatic action and romance rather than the challenges of deduction, "The Adventures of" was prefixed to the names of many well-known fictional crimesolvers, including armchair detectives like Sherlock Holmes and Nero Wolfe. "Mystery" could denote a puzzler devoid of supernatural elements, as solved by a panel of amateur sleuths on *The Five Mysteries Program*

(1947-50); a tale of the uncanny, the supernatural dissolved in *The House of Mystery* (1945-49) by a scientist who set out to prove that “ghosts and phantoms exist only in the imagination”¹³; or the supernatural absolver, the *Mystery in the Air* (1945; 1947) that relieves its listeners of the burden of proof by refusing its magic to be explained away. All such mysteries--crimes, rumors, and superstitions--could be subsumed under the title *Suspense*, an apt rubric for a series whose “distinction” lay in the “absence of any set pattern of plot material and subject-matter than in its adherence to certain rules”; as a result, the suspense of the program was heightened by the listener’s inability to predict just what kind of play would be performed.¹⁴ As a juggler of red herrings and a trickster who ultimately discloses miracles to be mere legerdemain, Carr exploited this accommodating forum in plays suggesting that the crimes against humanity were perpetrated by a concrete, demonstrable if frequently insidious force of evil.

In their approach to mystery--and to *Suspense*--Hitchcock and Carr differed greatly. However, both Hitchcock, a Briton-gone-Hollywood with films like *Rebecca* and *Foreign Correspondent*, and Carr, an American whose British detectives reminded readers of Winston Churchill and G. K. Chesterton, were prominent transatlantic ambassadors; and the selection of either one of them as an author figure for a major US network program was not without propagandist implications. During the early 1940s, one of the most pressing objectives of the US government was to convince the citizenry that the German raids on Britain warranted the modification of America’s isolationist position, that England was deserving of financial and military support. Norman Corwin’s *An American in England* (1942), a dramatic series shortwaved from Britain, was expressly “designed to counteract Dr. Goebbels’s transparent attempt to foster suspicion between England and the United States” and was cited as an example of radio’s success in improving the American public’s perception of the British.¹⁵ “There were perfectly sensible Americans,” commented Corwin,

who had never been able to respect British colonial policy and who were exasperated by British statesmanship up to and including Munich. Later, from the fall of France to Pearl Harbor, Britain was suspected by thousands of additional Americans, especially isolationists and their bedfellows, of doing her best to draw us into her “imperialist” war.¹⁶

Weeks prior to Corwin’s landmark program, the precedent had already been set by *Chip Davis, Commando* (1942-43), a CBS sustaining feature that sought to marshal public support for England by relating the adventures of “an American and his exciting adventures in Britain’s famous fighting unit.”¹⁷ Many of the twenty original plays Carr contributed to *Suspense* between October 27, 1942, and June, 22, 1943, betray a similar agenda.

As an Ellery Queen edited anthology of mystery stories and radio scripts observes in its introduction to Carr’s *Suspense* play “Mr. Markham, Antique Dealer,” its author occupies the enviable and eminent position of being our first literary lend-lease: he is the perfect example in the field of the modern detective story of Anglo-American unity. His books have done more to cement friendly international relations than--well, let’s put it this way: every John Dickson Carr (or Carter Dickson) story is a combination peace treaty, nonaggression pact, and charter of collective comradeship.¹⁸

Although his broadcast fiction is somewhat less pacifist than this early postwar comment suggests, “Anglo-American unity” is certainly a resonant theme in Carr’s American radio plays, mysteries involving inter-continental partnerships (“The Customers Like Murder” [Mar. 23, 1943], “The Moment of Darkness” [Apr. 20, 1943]) and love affairs (“Till Death Do Us Part” [Dec. 1, 1942]), transatlantic journeys by ship (“Cabin B-13” [Mar. 16, 1943]) or plane (“Death Flies Blind” [May 4, 1943]), and an American actor playing Macbeth at Drury Lane (“Fire Burn and Cauldron Bubble” [Apr. 6, 1943]).¹⁹

Carr was no stranger to indoctrination by radio. Prior to his involvement with *Suspense* he had written and narrated propaganda broadcasts for the BBC, dramatic scripts with titles like “Britain Shall Not Burn,” “Black Market,” and “They Strike at Night.” Although the BBC had tried to make arrangements with the United States embassy that would allow Carr to remain in London—his choice of residence despite the fact that he had lost his home during the blitz—the writer was summoned back to America to register for military service. It was while awaiting orders from the US government that Carr agreed to write plays for the fledgling CBS series, then originating from New York. In May 1943, after a nine-month sojourn in the United States, Carr was finally permitted to return to England and resume his propaganda efforts for the BBC.²⁰

Bearing little resemblance to Britain’s government-sponsored broadcast propaganda, *Suspense* gave Carr the opportunity to explore more fully the medium’s melodramatic potential, an unmuzzled soundscape theatricality the BBC had discouraged. Carr reportedly preferred the melodramatics of American broadcast drama, with its emphasis on acoustic stagecraft and non-diegetic music, to the comparatively austere, dialogue-driven radio plays produced by the BBC. It was this emphasis on effect he most thoroughly exploited in one of his favorite scripts for *Suspense*, an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe’s “Pit and the Pendulum” (**Jan. 12, 1943**) of such frenetic intensity that the BBC was reluctant to restage it.²¹ Atmospheric and playfully phonic thrillers like “The Bride Vanishes” (**Dec. 1, 1942**) and “The Dead Sleep Lightly” (**Mar. 30, 1942**) demonstrate Carr’s audile sensibility, his appreciation for the sounds of mystery and the mysteries of sound, a keen-eared engagement with the medium that lasted until well after the war, when Carr returned to CBS with his own thriller anthology, *Cabin B-13* (1948-49). Still, many of the Anglo-American audio-puzzles Carr contributed to *Suspense* struggle to conciliate the game of deception with the limitations of artful indirection as well as the impediments of auricular detection.

Carr's first entry in the *Suspense* series, "The Lord of the Witch Doctors" (Oct. 27, 1942), is set on the island of Zanzibar at the end of the nineteenth century--a locale effectively evoked by the expository narration, incidental music composed and conducted by Bernard Herrmann, and an exotic soundscape of tribal drums punctuated by the roars of a lion. The story concerns a plot by a German agent posing as a London magician whose tricks are intended to force the superstitious natives into submission so that the German empire may gain control over the island. The plan is thwarted by the British resident or crown official who by virtue of his diplomacy, wit, and compassion toward the locals manages to hold "uneasy sway against German and Italian influence."

"German magic is great magic," a native exclaims in awe of the German rifle that killed a threatening lion; yet the shot also serves as an acoustic signal to the German gun boat, effecting its retreat. The magician and his co-conspirator having thus been tricked by their own secret art, the crown official replies triumphantly at the close of the play that "English magic is better." Carr's biographer Douglas Greene reads "Lord of the Witch Doctors" as the playwright's assurance to his listeners that "Germans are too rigid to succeed" not only in colonial disputes, but in the Battle of Britain, which was being fought while the play was first broadcast in England.²² Given the byzantine plots of both Carr and his German villains, however, American audiences may have interpreted this dramatization of Britain's continuous confrontations with Germany as a warning against the cleverness of a mutual enemy who may don many disguises and resort to stealth, deceit and deadly force in its unrelenting quest to gain *Lebensraum*.

The tortuous plot of "The Lord of the Witch Doctors" sounds hardly less preposterous in a rigidly timed twenty-five minute performance than in a terse one hundred word synopsis. As a writer accustomed to the greater scope and flexibility afforded by print narratives and the forty to sixty minutes allotted to BBC drama broadcasts, Carr was too ambitious in the construction of his mysteries, many of which follow the design of his novels by asking audiences at once "whodunit" and "howdunit."²³

The answers to both, withheld until seconds before the conclusion of a broadcast, require minute yet hurried explanations that are neither dramatic nor radiogenic. Both the whodunit and the “howdunit”--the locked room or impossible crime puzzle favored by Carr--are generally too complex to be realized successfully in a purely aural medium. The former depends on a substantial number of characters and red herrings, more than can be absorbed, differentiated, recalled with ease during a twenty-five minute program. The latter has been likened to stage conjuring²⁴ and requires elaborate exposition to enable the precise visualization of location and props, a prescription of definite spatial boundaries at odds with the freedom to imagine the medium encourages.

Furthermore, Carr’s decision to remove the anchoring detective figure of his novels and BBC plays from his considerably shorter *Suspense* scripts made it necessary to establish the visual aspects of setting and character through dialogue between suspects, an approach that, while dramatic, invalidates reliable description as unverifiable hearsay. For the purposes of the fair-play puzzle alone, the insistence that listeners are ultimately to accept the word of one of the implicated characters as dictum or datum is as unsatisfactory as The Murder of Roger Ackroyd. For the purposes of radio propaganda, the premise that any broadcast voice lacks authority unless--and until--it has the last word is more questionable still. The trust of the listener, once undermined, is not easily restored, particularly not in the extremely foreshortened denouement of a program like *Suspense*. In Carr’s radio mysteries, the alleged daughter of time is too often at a loss to substantiate the claim of her parentage.

Momentary indeterminacy, however, is not antithetical to propaganda, but--with implied or overt messages like “don’t trust anyone” or “don’t be too quick to judge”--could assist both in the “loose talk” campaign and in appeals against discrimination. The most compelling *Suspense* plays challenge the audience to conjecture whether or not their central characters are what they claim to be (true, sane, or pure) or whether they will ultimately succeed in their endeavors (win, escape, or kill). “Is he or ain’t he?” and “will

he or won't he?"--the very timbre of Peter Lorre's voice invites such speculations, a quality Carr used to advantage in thrillers like "Till Death Do Us Part" (in which Lorre's character is the murderer) and "A Moment of Darkness" (in which he is not). The use of German names and voices constitutes Carr's single most effective attempt at creating aural red herrings, phonic misdirections that could be employed to teach, by indirection, that national origin as deduced from onomastic clues, accents or speech patterns should not be mistaken as incontrovertible proof of a speaker's guilt or rectitude.

According to Greene, Carr was displeased with the restrictions imposed on him by the network, which disapproved of plays whose villains were defined or identifiable by their national or regional origin.²⁵ While Germans were included in a small group of what one researcher called "convenient villains," "creatures of auditory stimuli" unlikely to offend an "extremely diverse" population and to "court the disapproval of pressure groups,"²⁶ Carr's wartime whodunits challenged the conventions of broadcast melodramas that invariably availed themselves of teutonic voice caricatures as the sonic equivalent to a scarlet letter. It may very well have been the debate about "convenient villains" that contributed to the termination of Carr's association with *Suspense*.

As broadcast, Carr's final play for the series, "The Man Without a Body" (June 22, 1943) is set in a Suffolk village in 1938 during the building of air raid shelters along the North Sea coastline. Like the Zanzibar natives of his first *Suspense* play, the British villagers are terrorized by apparent acts of magic. Even the vicar is convinced of the existence of an "invisible man." When a frightened and angry mob sets out to attack the only foreigner in the village, an American professor, the local doctor determines to put an end to superstition and suspicion by confronting the accused. In an elaborate demonstration, the professor discloses the mystery to be a vanishing act; by doing so, he inadvertently reveals himself to be a "celebrated stage magician." Recognizing the act from a performance he once attended, the village doctor set out to recreate it with the intention of tricking the conceited magician into disclosing his art and identity so that his

secret mission to spy on a camouflaged airdrome in the region may be aborted.

Reportedly, Carr had an Italian villain in mind; but CBS policies forced him to change the faux-American foe into a still more pronounced and incontrovertible adversary of the Anglo-American alliance--a German.²⁷

The imposed transpatriation does not substantially alter the anti-fascist message conveyed. Like "The Lord of the Witch Doctors," "The Man Without a Body" is a mystery that plays itself out as a revenge fantasy in which the Axis powers are defeated with their own weapons. As a soundstage wizard compelled to explain his own illusions, Carr suffers a similar defeat. The genius of ratiocination--whether British, American, or German--is never "better" than radiogenic machination, the magic that convinces listeners that hearing is believing. After all, as Elissa Guralnick insists, "what of misimpressions that retain their authority even after they have proven to be false?" Guralnick posits that

radio images are at bottom pure paradox. Being only imagined, they are all of them false. Being faithful to our fancies, they are all of them true. And being subject to revision as our reason demands, they are powerfully expressive of our need to make meaning from the welter of impressions that we gather through our senses.²⁸

And even if some Radcliffe hangers-on are willing to trade their thrills for explanations, such delayed ravelings of clues and motives are more likely to confound than convince.

To be made sense of readily and fully in a single sitting that does not permit rereading or pause for reflection, the plot of the radio thriller is most effective when it is reduced to the resolution of one central problem. Yet Carr never permitted his voice-body-mind games--or any single challenge for the listener--to govern the plots of his propagandist *Suspense* plays. Instead, he generally combined his whodunits with the excitement of the chase and the bafflement of the impossible crime, the locked room puzzles that fascinated Carr so much he once made the Führer himself disappear.²⁹ In the espionage thriller "Death Flies Blind," for instance, a small American passenger plane is

hijacked and headed for Germany. In addition to determining the traitor aboard, the listener is kept in suspense about whether and how the plan may be thwarted. Still more complex is the plot of "Menace in Wax" (Nov. 24, 1942), an action-adventure-screwball caper set in London during the blitz. Two competing journalists are trying to solve the mystery of wax figures coming to life in Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum; what they discover instead is a message on a playing card held by one of the figures. Its successful decoding culminates in a race against the clock to prevent Nazi bombers from reaching their target as specified in the cryptogram. Carr's anfractuous plots contain patriotic messages of successful British-American cooperation against fascist Germany as securely as a locked room. Designed to escape as the mystery unfolds, these messages must be overt enough to be appreciated by an audience encouraged to ponder the room and to marvel at the artistry expended in the unlocking, an intellectual engagement the convoluted plot impedes and the communicated thought itself hardly seems to warrant.

After Carr's departure, *Suspense* continued to produce original scripts dealing with World War II espionage, plays that were considerably less complex in their construction and often more satisfying in the delineation of their central characters. Many of them were written by experienced radio writers like E. Jack Neuman, in whose thriller "The Strange Death of Charles Umberstein" (Nov. 23, 1943) an Allied spy (Vincent Price, narrating) tries to determine how a Gestapo officer managed to discover his identity. The spy's mental pursuit of the person responsible for his detection is conveyed as a first-person-singular narrative that strings together a series of dramatized flashbacks. In Sylvia Richard's "The Bluebeard of Bellac" (Sept. 21, 1944), "inspired by an actual recent news item from occupied France," an Englishwoman (Merle Oberon, narrating) and her French husband trap and kill the Nazi officer responsible for concocting the legend of the eponymous mass murderer, thereby protecting the "nerve center of Bellac," a secret radio station. Since the listener is kept in the dark about the scheme until the end of the play, the suspense largely derives from the question whether the female narrator will succeed or

fail in her precarious dealings with the Nazi officers. A play that employs the “is he or ain’t he” formula is Harold Medford’s “Dateline: Lisbon” (Oct. 5, 1944), previously aired as “Lisbon Adventure” on the popular West Coast anthology *The Whistler*; it tells the story of a seemingly opportunist foreign correspondent (John Hodiak, narrating) on trial for treason, until it becomes clear, through dramatic flashbacks, that in all his dealings with the enemy he had nothing but the interests of his country in mind.

Assessing the evolution of the whodunit during the war, Howard Haycraft argued that the “simplified first-person ‘suspense’ drama, as typified by the program of that name” was perhaps the “most effective type of radio mystery to date.” It also followed the general trend of 1940s mystery fiction, which moved from the puzzle of “mechanics” to the “puzzle of character.”³⁰ *Suspense*, which in the early 1950s offered \$250 to \$500 per script, warned prospective freelance contributors that it deemed “[p]lain ‘who-dun-its’ or detective stories not suitable,” demanding instead that submitted plays be “believable from start to finish,” preferably use first-person narration, and “contain at least one richly rewarding role for a Hollywood star.”³¹ Audiences apparently embraced this change in formula and sponsors took note. The week following “The Strange Death of Charles Umberstein,” *Suspense*, which until then had been a sustaining feature of CBS, entered a long period of commercial sponsorship.³²

By 1944, plays about apparently irresponsible Americans showing their mettle aired nearly as frequently as those designed to illustrate the insidiousness of the enemy. Despite victories on all fronts, listeners needed to be convinced that the war was far from over and that the public’s indifference and hubris could endanger the war effort, that both vigilance and dedication were required of even the most war-weary citizen. One of the most radiogenic of these character trials was Robert L. Richards’s *Suspense* melodrama “You Were Wonderful” (Nov. 9, 1944), a compact *Casablanca* for the airwaves.

When a performer in a third-rate nightclub in Buenos Aires suddenly collapses on stage and dies, a famous American entertainer (Lena Horne) is rather too eager replace

her. "I'm a singer, not a sob sister," she declares icily, thawing for a tantalizing rendition of "Embraceable You." The very name of the mysterious substitute, Lorna Dean, encourages listeners to read the play in relation to the perennially popular heroine Lorna Doone, or the Victorian melodramatic heritage in general, and to consider the potential affinities between the fictional singer and her impersonator, Lena Horne, suggesting the story to be that of an outcast struggling to redeem herself against all odds. Johnny, one of the American regulars (Wally Maher), who declares that his country never did so much for him that is worth getting "knocked off for," seems patriotic enough to become suspicious of the singer's motivations, especially after the club falls into the hands of a new manager, an Austrian who requests that his star performer sing specific tunes at specified times. The absence of a narrator signalling perspective promotes audience detachment, a skeptical listening-in on the two central characters as they question each other while all along compromising themselves. When confronted with her unquestioning compliance, she replies:

I'm an entertainer because I like it. And because it's the only way I can make enough money to live halfway like a human being. With money I can do what I want to--*more or less*. I can live where I want to, go where I want to, be like other people--*more or less*. Do you know what even that much freedom means to somebody like me, Johnny?

However restrained, such a critique of the civil rights accorded to and realized by African-Americans, uttered by an African-American star of Horne's magnitude, was uncommonly bold for 1940s radio entertainment, especially considering that *Suspense* had become a sponsored program. "[W]e are not normally a part of radio drama, except as comedy relief," Langston Hughes remarked, reflecting on his own experience in 1940s broadcasting.³³ A comment on this situation, Richard's play raises the question whether Horne's outspoken character could indeed be the heroine of "You Were Wonderful." Talking in the see-if-I-care twang of a 1930s gang moll, Lorna is becoming increasingly

dubious, so that the questionable defense of her apparently selfish behavior serves to render her positively un-American. After all, when told that her command performances are shortwaved to a German submarine and contain a hidden code to ready Nazis for an attack on American ships, she claims to have known this all along. The conclusion of the play discloses the singer's selfishness to have been an act. Risking her life, the entertainer defies instructions and, deliberately switching tunes, proudly performs "America (My Country 'Tis of Thee)" instead.

About to be shot for her insubordination, Lorna is rescued by the patron who questioned her integrity, a man who now reveals himself to be a US undercover agent. When asked why she embarked upon this perilous one-woman mission, the singer proudly declares: "Just to get in my licks at the master race." The play, which like many wartime programs was shortwaved by the Armed Forces Radio Service to the troops overseas, could thus be read as a vindication of the entertainment industry, an assurance to the GIs that their efforts had the unwavering support of all Americans, and a reminder to minorities, soldiers and civilians alike, that even a democracy marred by inequality and intolerance was preferable to Aryan rule. Ever since the Detroit race riots of June 1943, during which police shot and killed seventeen African-Americans, it had become apparent that unconditional servitude from citizens too long disenfranchised could not be taken for granted, so that the message "We've got too tough an enemy to beat overseas to fight each other here at home" was temporarily added to the propagandists' catalogue of slogans.³⁴

Due to their increasing popularity, thriller programs, like situation comedies and varieties shows, had become important conduits for direct government propaganda. Such messages were not always fully integrated into the plot of thriller programs, which rendered them even more conspicuous. A 1944 script for the series *Hot Copy!* (1941-44), for instance, opens with "Anne Rogers, girl reporter," the recurring character of the series, writing an article encouraging the public to buy War Bonds: "Every Bond is a bullet . . .

every bullet a bid for a swift and lasting peace”; her office friend remarks, approvingly: “If today’s column doesn’t make ‘em buy Bonds . . . nothing will!” Even though it pits responsible journalist Rogers against a gossip columnist suspected of murder, the play does not fully realize the didactic potential of such a premise, revealing the “scandal-monger” to be innocent instead.³⁵

At times, OWI slogans and solicitations, like commercials and public service announcements, were appended to sponsored radio programs, suggesting the government’s endorsement or underwriting of the broadcast. One such oral bookend flanked Joel Malone’s “Voyage through Darkness” (Sept. 7, 1944), an “is he or ain’t he” thriller in which an American woman returning from England (Olivia De Havilland, narrating) suspects that the charming Britisher with whom she is having a shipboard romance may be London’s notorious “Blackout Killer.” After she and the audience are assured that her suspicions are unfounded, the play’s lead actress--an American born in Tokyo to British parents--addresses the listener during the curtain call:

This is Olivia De Havilland. I have certainly enjoyed appearing here tonight on *Suspense*, which is a program I have admired for a very long time. Our government has asked us to bring to the attention of women listeners a very important message. In spite of our wonderful victories on all the fighting fronts, you must remember that the war is by no means over or nearly over. Hundreds of thousands of women must get into war work this year. You are desperately needed both because you are admirably fitted for these jobs and because you represent the only adequate source of labor to replace the men in the armed forces and in the heavy war industries. Make a realistic appraisal of your household duties and your state of health. Talk it over with your family and with friends who are now employed in war work or in one of the branches of the women’s armed services. If you are still in doubt after analyzing the situation, go to the

United States Employment Service Office and ask for information about the kinds of full time or part time jobs for which you are best suited. We cannot stress too highly how vitally necessary your immediate action can be. And here is a thought for everyone: *Six million Americans are fighting overseas*. Here at home let us all remember that until final victory everywhere, winning the war still comes first with every last one of us.

For the duration of the war, the curtain call thus served not merely as yet another sales pitch occasion for the sponsors--who, during times of shortages and rationing, often had little more to advertise than their name--but was seized by the OWI as an opportunity to emphasize and concretize the shared, American objectives by closing the gap between star performer and listener. These direct and seemingly ad-libbed appeals to the audience were privileged moments in which escapist entertainment could *get real*, in which broadcast make-believe achieved a *you better believe it* urgency. Not the responsibility of the playwright, such readily inserted announcements permitted listeners to enjoy plays and performances unadulterated by wartime didacticism; in return, they were expected to demonstrate their loyalty to the sponsor as well as their country.

“[T]hree little bits of loose talk!”: The Recruitment of Ellery Queen

Notwithstanding the appreciable changes in the *Suspense* format, from convoluted puzzles to effective if formulaic character studies, whodunits continued to be a significant aspect of network programming. It was largely the unwillingness of advertising agencies and network executives to let go of a rather worn-out--and for broadcasting decidedly ill-suited--genre that kept the radio thriller in disrepute among media critics and mystery scholars alike. Ken Crossen, radio producer-director and founder of the Mystery Writers of America, held that unlike the detective novel, which had “made significant strides toward literary dignity and maturity of form,” the broadcast mystery by and large still exhibited the “puerility of a bad Edgar Wallace” and the ineptitude of the notoriously

incoherent Harry Stephen Keeler.³⁶ Arguably, the growing popularity of most of these weekly crime-and-detection dramas throughout the 1940s depended mainly on the charm, wit or sex appeal of their central characters--the one-liner delivering sleuth or straight man and the less competent or facetious sidekick--rather than the quality and perspicuity of its puzzles. And by virtue of their broad appeal, the punch-lined detective series, like the personality-driven situation comedies they not infrequently resembled, were becoming increasingly important to the government's propaganda efforts.

Even mysteries whose popularity was derived in part from their remoteness in place and time, such as the cases Dr. Watson reminisced about in *The (New) Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1939-47), were expected to temper their nostalgic escapism with the relevant and practical. Prior to the US entry into World War II, Watson impersonator Nigel Bruce reportedly referred to the series a

great tonic in these days of stress. The war with all its untold horrors, he [felt], ceases to exist for the people who listen in on the air to the problems involving Scotland Yard detectives of long ago. The London of the Nineties with its rolling cobblestones and its open landaus can be re-created in imagination almost as if the reality of bombing planes were yet to be experienced.

Bruce expressed himself "glad to go back to old Watson [. . .] and to the old London where [he] first gained success and fame. When so much we love is being destroyed, it is comforting to go back to it, even if it has to be re-created by the unreal world of acting."³⁷ Instrumental to the network's neutrality even during the lend-lease period of British-American relations, such re-creational uses of melodrama were soon looked upon as utter prodigality. As *Sherlock Holmes* director Glenhall Taylor recalled, the series was one of several sponsored programs whose "services were requested by the War Department." The charms of an imagined past were to yield to visible demonstrations of the responsibilities broadcasters and audiences shared in the shaping of the future. To

promote the sale of defense bonds during the War Loan Drives, Bruce and co-star Basil Rathbone gave “special theatrical performances,” live broadcasts to which “admission was gained solely through the purchase of bonds.” According to Taylor, the producers of the series “gladly complied, giving sell-out performances” in several West Coast theaters.³⁸

Soundstaged during the seventh War Loan Drive at the Paramount Theater in Hollywood, one episode was set in the less remote period of World War I; a retired yet patriotically invigorated Holmes is being sent on a “secret mission” close to enemy lines “In Flanders Field” (May 14, 1945) where he investigates the case of a Shakespearean actor suspected by his brother, a British general, of being a German sympathizer. In the course of his front line adventure, the aged sleuth-turned-spy not only effects the execution of the thespian at the hands of the Jerries--after the general’s attempt at fratricide nearly causes the death of a very forgiving Holmes--but also proves the propagandistic relevance of literary pastiche by delivering an excerpt of the St. Crispin’s Day speech from Henry V to the American troupes and their allies to whom the program was shortwaved each week--Agincourt, Flanders, and Japan become one in the battle for the “freedom of justice.” The generally unflappable detective, who formerly believed the “appreciation of art” to be “independent of nationality,” is thoroughly reformed by the mission; now holding Germany to be a “country of Barbarians,” he returns a medal he once received for assisting the German government by slipping it into the turncoat’s pockets, a cunning act of revenge that causes the enemy to confuse the defected actor--trained by a Wagnerian disciple--with the detective who takes his place. After all, the “show must go on” insists Holmes, whose oratory makes way for the words of the sponsor.³⁹

In well-known mystery author Anthony Boucher and his frequent co-writer Denis Green who penned this episode, and indeed most of *The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, the OWI had two highly capable agents. Despite the significance of spot announcements, celebrity endorsements, and command performances in continued

government attempts at raising both funds and public awareness, selling the war remained chiefly the task of those frequently accused of selling out--the freelance and contract writers who weaponized the literary flotsam and jetsam that broadcasters had tossed into the airwaves since the early 1930s. Whether the producers of mystery programs were willing conspirators in this process, as Taylor asserts, or whether they were conscripted agents has itself been the subject of speculation in the case of one of radio's most innovative whodunit series, *The Adventures of Ellery Queen* (1939-48).

"Ellery Queen"--which served as both pseudonym and eponym for a long series of detective fiction--was the brainchild of Brooklyn cousins Fred Dannay and Manfred Lee who, like their confrere Carr, had been writing mysteries since the late 1920s. After unsuccessful attempts at writing for stage and screen, Dannay and Lee accepted an offer by CBS Program Department executive George Zachary, whose idea it was to develop an interactive detective series that would allow listeners to match wits with the principal characters. In the spring of 1939, despite their lack of experience in radio writing and the low weekly salary of twenty-five dollars, Dannay and Lee began their secondary career as radio playwrights. They prepared for their assignment by contributing scripts to established detective programs like *Alias Jimmy Valentine* (1938-39) and *The Shadow*; and whenever their *Ellery Queen* scripts lacked the all-important timing, Zachary, along with his assistant Charles Jackson (best known for his 1944 novel *The Lost Weekend*) inserted additional dialogue.⁴⁰

By 1942, their series trimmed from an hour-long to a less demanding thirty-minute weekly program and their salary raised to \$350 a week, the cousins had become competent and contented radio playwrights. As Greene suggests, the success of their CBS series may even have played a role in convincing Dannay's friend Carr to associate with the producers of *Suspense*, which was broadcast from the New York studios of the same network.⁴¹ The format of the *Ellery Queen* series allowed Dannay and Lee to suit their "Challenge to the Reader" to the broadcast medium by combining the dramatized

crime puzzle with quiz show elements. While differing considerably from drama anthologies like *Suspense*, the hybrid was not altogether untried. Just weeks before the June 18, 1939, premiere of *Ellery Queen*, Dannay and Lee themselves had been celebrity panelists on *Author! Author!* (1939-40), a program of “literary riddles and radio charades” emceed by satirist S. J. Perelman.⁴² Nor was the whodunit contest a broadcast novelty. During the 1920s, prior to the establishment of reliable ratings systems, audience participation programs frequently served as a means of gauging the popularity of sponsored programs. In the mid-1920s, *Radio Digest* sponsored several locally produced mystery serials, offering five hundred dollars in gold to armchair detectives who sent in correct solutions to whodunits like *A Step on the Stairs*.⁴³ Yet in order to enable audience response, audio puzzles like the two-part presentations of *Kenrad's Unsolved Mysteries* remained subject to fragmentation and serialization, a broadcast format that, by the late 1930s, was almost entirely relegated to the networks' daytime schedules, which abounded with juvenile adventures and soap operas. And even though a series like *Minute Mysteries*--billed as the “fastest contest in history”--gave listeners the opportunity to send solutions by telegram and to learn “whodunit” in a second installment that aired less than two hours later, *Ellery Queen* was the first major network whodunit that successfully contained mystery, guessing game and dramatized solution within a single hour-long or half-hour frame.⁴⁴

To achieve this, the creators of the program needed to abandon the listener participation format as it was initially proposed. Unscripted and therefore unpredictable call-in segments were frowned upon by networks and sponsors alike, to whom any loss of control over the spoken word was anathema, especially since the vast majority of shows were broadcast live. During the war, interactive quiz programs--more vulnerable to loose talk and enemy infiltration than any other form of radio entertainment--were banned from the programming schedules. Instead, the producers of *Ellery Queen* decided to avail themselves of “guest armchair detectives,” paid celebrity ad-libbers who served as

representatives of the audience at home. Those tuning in to the program thus matched wits not only with the infallible Ellery, but with the frequently paralogistic guests, who, unless they were plot-savvy playwrights like Lillian Hellman or mystery experts like Harry Kurnitz, reassured millions of gratified listeners that they were not alone in their bewilderment. An attempt to employ average Americans as amateur sleuths turned out to be far less engaging. “More like flatfeet than fancy-dans,” as one review put it, the “unpaid fans not only proved uniformly baffled, but dull.”⁴⁵

Throughout the war, panelists also included military personnel, elected officials, and other professionals whose unaffected voices could serve at once as role models for the listener and redeemers of Hollywood-style radio entertainment. For instance, the “guest armchair detectives” chosen for the West Coast broadcast of “The Adventure of the Mischief Maker” (Jan. 13, 1944) were a member of the United States Cadet Nurse Corps and the executive secretary of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. The segment introducing and questioning the panelists thus constitutes another privileged spot for the insertion of war-related messages, the other two being the broadcast frame (introductory or concluding announcement) and the playlet itself, making *Ellery Queen* a particularly useful carrier of propagandist messages.

Unlike Carr, who imposed his vision of “Anglo-American unity” on an existing thriller program, Dannay and Lee were faced with the task of suiting characterizations and storylines for a series whose inception and success depended largely on the brand-name appeal of their highly recognizable pseudonym to accommodate directives set forth and dictated to them by the government. According to whodunit scholar Francis M. Nevins, the cousins were approached by a representative of the OWI during the spring or summer of 1942, a contact that may have been initiated by producer Zachary, who had left the series earlier in 1942 to work for that agency. The writers agreed to incorporate official propaganda motifs into some of their scripts, so that “‘the message’ would get across to unwary Americans in the guise of a detective story”; the OWI would supply the “slogans”

from which the writers were asked to fashion their storylines. Nevins, who first learned about this agreement in an early-1970s interview with Dannay, labels the anecdote “a hidden page of history.” Like other scholars of mass entertainment, he objects to the “completely improper” use of the medium, echoing J. Fred MacDonald’s warning that a “free system of broadcasting” should not tolerate “governmental propagandizing,” as a result of which it turns into “an adjunct of the state rather than a conduit for truthful information and genuine entertainment.”⁴⁶

Yet what Dannay related to Nevins “with total frankness” was well-known and little-contested practice during the World War II, a time when the commercial medium, its entertainment and its intricate network of co-creators served higher American ideals than the peddling of consumer goods, a time when the pursuit of happiness was not reduced to the quickening of mean habits and selfish desires. Introducing “The Adventure of the Murdered Ship,” one of their *Ellery Queen* scripts in a 1946 radio thriller anthology published by fellow mystery writer Leslie Charteris, Dannay and Lee proudly proclaimed the episode to have been

a “command performance,” so to speak, by the OWI with whom we co-operated in the “loose talk” campaign. As a special assignment from Washington, it represents--we think--something superior in radio propaganda, inasmuch as it doesn’t bat its audience over the head, but approaches the lesson through entertainment.⁴⁷

Nor does it seem likely that the government official who approached Dannay and Lee insisted the writers begin their propaganda mission without telling either network or sponsor, especially since OWI’s Network Allocation Plan was already in effect by April 1942. Conceived by the Radio Advisory Committee of the War Advertising Council, the Network Allocation Plan was designed to provide national advertisers with messages to be conveyed in the programs they produced for their sponsors. Advertising agencies in charge of weekly dramatic series and situation comedies were requested to dramatize

themes like sugar rationing, car pooling, war bond drives and scrap metal recycling.⁴⁸ The propagandist messages were so blatant that the adulteration of sponsored entertainment programs could not have escaped the supposedly “unwary” listener, let alone anyone involved in the production of the program. What Dannay’s anecdote does suggest, however, is that the OWI appealed directly to established authors then writing for radio, forcefully reminding them of the great impact their weekly scripts had on the American public.

Dannay and Lee’s commitment to the war effort comes across in “Ellery Queen, Swindler” (Apr. 9, 1942), broadcast more than two weeks prior to the inauguration of the Network Allocation Plan. The episode is an unabashed World War II revenge fantasy played out in a Chicago jewelry store. Mr. Humperdinck, a misanthropic German jeweler, cheats his young employee, James Grant, out of four thousand dollars by promising him a partnership: “Now we’re partners, James (*with a leer*)--call me Adolf.”⁴⁹ Instead of receiving the signed contract, James walks home with what he soon realizes to be a blank sheet of paper. The play thus echoes the sentiment of *You Can’t Do Business with Hitler* (1942-43), a syndicated series of fifteen-minute propaganda playlets conceived by the Office of Emergency Management which began its broadcast run that same month and which emphasized the “complete disregard for common decency and humanity” of Nazi Germany and dramatized the dark vision of an America occupied by the Nazis.⁵⁰

Rather than confronting his employer, the destitute victim consults Ellery Queen, who promptly sets out to “teach a cheat that cheating doesn’t pay!” Having instructed James not to let Humperdinck know that he realized the fraud, Ellery purchases an overpriced diamond from the greedy jeweler. When his customer asks for a matching stone--at any price--Humperdinck instructs James to call other jewelers to find one. To defend American interests, Ellery has involved a French ally, a jeweler who sells Humperdinck the original stone for \$4500 more than he initially received for it from the detective. By refusing to purchase the alleged second stone, Ellery wins back the four

thousand dollars of which James was bilked, leaving an additional five hundred dollars for the young man's wife, an expectant mother. "Aha!" the cheated and comically deflated cheater exclaims, "I am being hanged up in a frame!" A righteous and triumphant Ellery Queen dismisses the German's threats of legal repercussions, advising "*Herr Humperdinck*" to "beware of the shepherd before you fleece the lamb."⁵¹

As Nevins points out, the store owner-turned-con artist has "no conceivable motivation except that he's German."⁵² It seems unlikely that the OWI would have endorsed such a broadcast unless the script made unmistakably clear that the villain was not a legal American immigrant or that the play, like the "what if" scenario of Oboler's "Chicago, Germany," was intended as allegory or dystopia. *The Adventures of Ellery Queen*, unlike the flexible and accommodating anthology series, was confined to the presentation of realist fair play puzzles with recurring central characters, a format that could not quite contain "Ellery Queen, Swindler," which fails nearly as abjectly in executing its scheme as does Adolf Humperdinck, fascist fabulist.⁵³ More in keeping with the tone and formula of *Ellery Queen* were episodes like "The One-Legged Man" (Feb. 25, 1943) and "The Adventure of a World Series Crime" (Sept. 30, 1943). The former involves murder and sabotage at a munitions plant, which gives the recruited "loose talk" investigator ample opportunities to reprimand workers for their willingness to disclose information. The latter deals with the disappearance of "Uncle Sam," a lucky baseball bat that may prevent Ellery's favorite team from winning the World Series. "Don't forget Uncle Sam," the play concludes. He "came through" once again--and "he always will."⁵⁴

Of the few *Ellery Queen* episodes still extant in print or recording, "The Adventure of the Murdered Ship" may very well be what Nevins calls the program's "most unadulterated piece of OWI propaganda."⁵⁵ Originally broadcast under the tongue-in-cheek title "Tom, Dick and Harry" (Jan. 28, 1943), the espionage puzzle is wholly dedicated to OWI's "loose talk" campaign. It is apparent from the start that even for Ellery Queen this mystery is something quite out of the ordinary. Instead of being

approached by everyday citizens or stumbling into another adventure, Ellery and his father, Inspector Queen, are summoned to Washington to solve the case of a “surprise submarine attack.” The loss of the US vessel, a government official explains, “not only caused the deaths of a large number of American fighting men, but a war plan closely integrated with the over-all Allied strategy was licked before it got started.” Queen is appointed “special investigator for the United States Government” for which extraordinary nomination the writers felt compelled to offer a number of justifications.

The straightforward one, that the “investigating agencies of the Government are short-handed,” drives home that the involvement of the famed writer-detective does not imply an admission of intellectual inferiority or incompetence on the part of the US government. The rather more intriguing one is that Ellery Queen himself is implicated in the crime, a note reading “Ellery Q” having been found in the possession of the captured enemy submarine commander. As the play suggests, all citizens are inextricably enmeshed in the war, and protecting one’s own interests or saving one’s face cannot be separated from the general objectives of the war. And when Ellery finally discloses the solution to the secondary puzzle of the encrypted message--E L L E R Y standing for A T T A C K, Q (being the seventeenth letter) pointing to 5 PM--the government official assures him and the listener that this was “[e]xactly what the FBI figured out” just one day after Ellery accepted his mission.⁵⁶ Washington may be short-handed, but not dumb-founded.

Equipped with a list of names and addresses, Ellery and his team embark upon a cross-country quest, interviewing the families of all the soldiers aboard the “Murdered Ship.” Throughout the investigation, Dannay and Lee remind listeners that this fair play puzzle is meant to transcend the boundaries of the genre, that the death of hundreds of Americans does not merely serve as the occasion for an intellectual exercise, a lively if essentially necrogenous guessing game. When Ellery’s secretary complains about having to go “through a batch of stuffy reports,” she is solemnly admonished that before her is a record of “the survivors, the missing . . . and the dead of that torpedoed American ship.”

And rather than merely furnishing Ellery and the listener with clues, the list also generates stories of personal sacrifice and everyday heroism as the names of the victimized families come alive during Ellery's interview. One widow has translated her despair into action by seeking work at an airplane factory: "My husband's dead--died on a ship. So I got myself this job helpin' to make planes." "In overalls!" Ellery's secretary marvels. The determined young worker--an aural equivalent to Rosie the Riveter--dismisses being called "courageous": "Courageous? Hooey. I wish they'd let me shoot a machine gun. Make it snappy, please. Every minute I'm away from my bench means I'm holdin' up a plane."⁵⁷

It is only during this--his 540th--interview that Ellery comes across the first clue; each of the three dramatized visits provides the newly appointed "special investigator" with the insignificant pieces of information that enabled the Axis powers to strike their deadly blow. Each "thoughtless remark" bespeaks the public's fatal lack of vigilance, a dangerous tendency toward "loose talk." Unlike in the traditional murder puzzle, Ellery's list of leads is at once a record of the victims and the suspects. Not even the clergy is argued to be above such pernicious chatter, as this exchange between Ellery, his father, his secretary Nikki, and his friend Sergeant Velie demonstrates:

NIKKI. But Ellery, I still don't see--

ELLERY. Ah, but what little bit of information did Reverend Jones of Minneapolis unconsciously reveal?

VELIE. That joke about the argument in camp over Dorothy Lamour's photo and how their CO settled it--

ELLERY. That yarn came from [his son's] *last letter*--written, therefore, just before he was shipped out of camp. Rev. Jones's son knew he might never come back, so on the eve of departure he tried to give his father an important piece of information by *inventing* a bit of apparently incoherent camp gossip. Can we figure out what Tom was trying to say? Oh, yes. Consider that the letter was written to *a minister of the*

Gospel on Christmas Eve. Consider that it was the story of two people claiming the same cherished object and a wise arbiter who said: “*Cut it in half.*”

INSPECTOR. Tom was writing a parallel to the *Bible* story. Of the wise king who ordered an infant cut in half when two women claimed it!

ELLERY. And who was that wise king? *King Solomon*.

NIKKI. *The Solomon Islands!*

VELIE. Tom was tryin’ to tell his father he was bein’ shipped to the Solomons.

ELLERY. Precisely. Reverend Jones thoughtlessly repeated it to friends and parishioners--

OFFICIAL. (*Grimly.*) And eventually it reached a spy’s ears, or some Axis sympathizer, and was sent along to enemy HQ to be added to the other bits of information [. . .].

“There it is, Sir,” Ellery concludes, after explaining the significance of the final clue, “the whole picture, from three little bits of loose talk!”⁵⁸ To the listener, the quickly delivered clues, “little bits” it took Ellery and his team hundreds of cross-country trips to assemble, remain so elusive as to render the enemy--a most ingenious eavesdropper and interpreter of hearsay--an even more formidable threat to democracy and freedom. Unlike Carr, Dannay and Lee seem to have made a deliberate travesty of the fair play puzzle in order to foreground their propagandist message.

A somewhat different approach toward the reconciliation of escapism and indoctrination was taken by Leslie Charteris, whose 1945 series *The Saint* effected a conscription of his late-1920s creation, Simon Templar, to sustain the fight against Japan, an uneasy reassignment that tested the independent spirit of the eponymous hero. In crime-solving adventures that de-emphasized fair play in favor of cat-and-mouse games in the tradition of William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794) and John Buchan’s *The*

Thirty-Nine Steps (1915), Charteris's "Robin Hood of Modern Crimes" delivered fisticuffs and repartee, pursuing criminals while dodging authorities, thus sounding the eroding patience of a war-weary audience.

"This gun talks a lot faster than you": A Robin Hood of Modern Means

By the end of the war, the airwaves were teeming with the exploits of pulp fictional sleuth Nick Carter and his descendants, intrepid reporters like Flashgun Casey and reformed hoods like Boston Blackie, even though, as Crossen remarked, the connoisseurs of such stories "would be hard put to recognize their favorites after the face-lifting routine of radio."⁵⁹ In most cases, the originators of such franchises had little or no involvement in the radio programs that contributed to the longevity of their creations. For instance, when NBC launched *The Adventures of the Thin Man* in July 1941, Dashiell Hammett was credited as the show's writer, even though he never as much as talked to its producers about storylines or characterizations. By the mid-1940s, Hammett--who in 1937 had sold the rights to his Thin Man characters to MGM and retained only broadcasting rights--received up to \$1,300 per week in royalties for permitting the broadcast of three series under his name--*The Adventures of the Thin Man*, *The Fat Man* (1946-51), and *The Adventures of Sam Spade* (1946-51).⁶⁰ Such attributions merely served as endorsements, since it was hardly a trade secret that the shows were not written by Hammett, with *Life* lauding Milton Lewis for "keeping Nick and Nora as much like the original as the formula for a fast-moving radio melodrama will allow," while a New York Times review of *The Fat Man* credited Robert Sloane as "adapter and director."⁶¹

Unlike Hammett, Charteris had complete copyright control of his fiction and, protective of his property, was actively involved in suiting his lucrative franchise to the broadcast medium. He was an experienced radio playwright, having collaborated with Denis Green on some thirty-nine episodes of *The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*

(1943-46), albeit under the pseudonym Bruce Taylor.⁶² When *The Saint* made its American broadcasting debut in January 1945 under the sponsorship of Bromo Seltzer, Charteris not only prepared the scripts, but effected changes in the production, including a replacement of director and lead actor. It was only when the series was revived in 1947, with Vincent Price in the title role, that Charteris permitted his hero to mouth the words of other writers while “drawing a nice little honorarium for doing nothing.”⁶³

Although no recordings of the 1945 series are known to be extant, the published script of an episode titled “The Miracle Tea Party” (June 25, 1945) provides an intriguing glimpse at Charteris’s ambivalence toward American culture, particularly toward commercial broadcasting and the medium’s propagandist potential. Originally written in 1938 as a British espionage story, “The Miracle Tea Party” transplants Templar and his cohorts, Pat and Hoppy, into the contemporary American setting of wartime San Francisco. As the brief opening narration establishes, the three recurring characters “have just finished a stroll through Chinatown and are now sitting down in a small neighborhood bar for a little rest and refreshment.” A radio is playing, reporting news of a war whose outcome may have seemed by then nearly as predictable as that of most episodic melodramas, but whose dramatic episodes no longer generated much excitement on the home front. The play, which aired only a few weeks prior to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, evokes the discontent and impatience of an audience eagerly awaiting the surrender of a remarkably persevering enemy.⁶⁴

Like many mystery and adventure programs broadcast in the spring and summer of 1945, “The Miracle Tea Party” served its thrills to inculcate listeners with a renewed fear of Japan in order to keep in check the sense of security to which the military triumphs in Europe were giving rise. In the revenge fantasy “Death Comes for Adolf Hitler,” heard on *The Mysterious Traveler* one month prior to Hitler’s suicide, the *Führer* (played by Lon Clark, radio’s Nick Carter) escapes allied forces via U-boat, leaving a double in charge; his execution is carried out by the casualties of war, who drag him to the bottom of the

Atlantic (Mar. 24, 1945). “But let us remember,” urges Dr. Watson--Nigel Bruce, still in character--at the conclusion of the April 30, 1945, episode of *Sherlock Holmes* (“The Unfortunate Tobacconist”),

the war won't be over when Germany quits. We've still got to lick Japan. That's gonna take a long time. So instead of celebrating when V-E Day comes along let's just strengthen our resolve, support the war more than ever here at home. Keep that war job, don't leave it 'till you're released. Keep on buying more and more and more war bonds, and keep 'em, don't turn them in. Help all you can with all home front activities and observe all our wartime regulations such as price ceilings. That's the real way to celebrate a victory in Europe, by working harder to end the war in the Pacific.

“Remember,” he insisted two weeks later as he entreated the home audience of “In Flanders Field” to follow the theatergoers’ example by contributing to the latest War Loan Drive, “in spite of the magnificent achievements of our force in the Pacific, the Japanese war has just begun.”

Listening to the radio, Charteris’s adventurers are stand-ins for a broadcast audience to whom such warnings and appeals, whether packaged as Hollywood histrionics or issued in the institutional voice of the newsreader, must have sounded as familiar as the situation enacted: a group of civilians in search of “refreshment” is being intruded upon by a ubiquitous and delusory transmitter of escapism whose intermittent lectures deny the pleasures of “rest” by making confrontations with war inescapable. The diegetic news bulletin tempers updates of victories overseas (the destruction of a “Kamikaz[e] aircraft plant at Okazaki”) with reports of home front setbacks--“another incident in the outbreak of sabotage which has been spreading through war plants on the Pacific Coast in the last few months,” a “mysterious fire” whose “damage will cause several days’ delay in urgent naval repairs.” The responses of the three conscripted listeners--who, as patrons of a pub,

are unable to turn the dial--echo the listlessness of the American public in the wake of V-E Day:

PAT. I didn't think that would be going on any more. Sabotage--enemy agents--all that sort of thing.

SAINT. Darling, some people never know when to stop, and other people will do any kind of work for money.

As the three friends sip triple bourbons and dry martinis, Templar gives Pat his "word of honor" that he will "simply ignore" the report instead of "trying to do the FBI's work and meddle with this sabotage business." Having been subjected for years to the iterations of war news and propaganda, the public was finally yet prematurely tuning out.⁶⁵

In the indiscriminate flux of airwaved noise, the newscast gives way to the titular "Miracle Tea Program," a dance music broadcast sponsored locally by a laxative manufacturer whose spokesperson promises to rectify just what is ailing Americans:

Is your dinner chummy with your tummy? If not, try Miracle Tea. This amazing tea is guaranteed not only to relieve indigestions immediately, but to effect a complete and permanent cure. Every day we are receiving new testimonials.

Charteris's reflexive thriller--itself sponsored by Campbell Soups--employs "dyspepsia" as a metaphor for discomfort and dissatisfaction, for the unwillingness of the home front audience to stay put and digest each morsel of news without much hope for immediate and lasting relief. Like their listeners, the Saint and his friends are frustrated receivers of news and entertainment, the daily offerings of commercial broadcasters who like wartime saboteurs "never know when to stop" and "will do any kind of work for money." At the same time, the opening of the play challenges its audience to remain receptive to the reportorial radio voices that, mingling with the trivial and catchpenny, too often recede into the everyday soundscape, and to reflect upon the possible consequences of a wartime listener's ignorance, indifference, or premature insouciance.⁶⁶

Sabotage underfoot, the Saint remains seated. Instead of leaping into action with the superheroic swiftness common to radio's patriotic crimefighters, he promises Pat to prove the "most virtuous character [she] ever met." As the radio mystery conditioned listener is well aware, however, Charteris's exposition is too elaborate, the play's simulated newscast too carefully foregrounded not to be of vital importance to the unfolding plot. Yet what actions could he possibly take, even if his nonchalance were feigned and his boozy interlude foreshortened? Notoriously at odds with the law--an irreverent Robin Hood about town whose gun "talks a lot faster" than those who cross his path--Templar seems ill-suited to join Ellery Queen as a "special investigator" in the government's service. Could he really discover a swift and satisfying solution to urgent home front woes, a secret weapon effective enough to hasten the much anticipated termination of the war? Any attempts at serving America seem frustrated from the start since the Saint's influence on world affairs is curtailed by the law, embodied by a single dyspeptic lieutenant who, apparently on the verge of becoming "a walking mass of gastric ulcers," orders Templar out of town.⁶⁷

When the bilious marplot is assaulted after having purchased a packet of the patent medicine at Dr. Yee's "New Asia Pharmacy"--a box containing several thousand dollars--Templar, an accidental witness to the crime, sets out to investigate the "quite Occidental" store. He plays "Japanese Sandman" by putting "to sleep" its manager, a heavy-accented, "Gott im Himmel" cursing German, while Pat searches the place and discovers papers that "look like radio commercials, advertising Miracle Tea." As it turns out, the "pretty corny" show that made Hoppy long for a good mystery truly "is a mystery program": the pharmacy serves as an exchange place for a ring of saboteurs whose virtual nexus is the broadcast medium itself, as operatives are called into action through secret directives embedded as consumer testimonials into the "Miracle Tea" continuity. As the Saint puts it, the yet unseen Dr. Yee has "stumbled onto something that every sponsor would give his eye-teeth for--a commercial that works miracles."⁶⁸ The hidden infiltrator

is well served by a medium that preserves both the anonymity of its consumers and its host of continuity scribes. “No detective in the world would trace the connection between a radio program and the particular people who listen to it,” Templar remarks. Reaching his target audience through local channels rather than national networking, the stealthy air raider threatens to nullify American radio as an instrument through which, according to one contemporary, “democracy has realized itself in modern times.”⁶⁹ It is left to the Saint to remove the subversive element without destroying the valuable if flawed mass communications link and without further undermining public trust in its utility.⁷⁰

Unlike the propaganda-inflected guessing games written for *Suspense* and *Ellery Queen*, “The Miracle Tea Party” is primarily a thriller whose suspense is generated by a series of delays and obstacles to the Saint’s patriotic counterplot, which involves a rewriting of the commercial copy to order all of Dr. Yee’s operatives out of their hiding-places. From the start, listeners are encouraged to anticipate the actions of Charteris’s adventurer and his adversaries, and, on two occasions, are earwitnesses to exchanges before the protagonist arrives at the scene. While details about the saboteur’s methods are delivered piecemeal, the only mystery whose solution is withheld until the villain’s plot is foiled is the identity of the invisible Dr. Yee. If it is rather obvious early on “*why* Dr. Yee spikes his tea with hundred dollar bills and just who drinks all this filthy lucre,” the question remains *why* it is *Dr. Yee*, presumably a Chinese, who acts as the mastermind of this conspiracy.⁷¹

Charteris, who did not become a US citizen until 1942, and who was born in Singapore to a British mother and Chinese father, delivers in the puzzle of Dr. Yee’s identity--entirely altered from the 1938 original⁷²--a poignant and personal response to the challenges of indoctrination by radio, a medium whose occidental voice-overs threatened to render Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos--allies and enemies--practically indistinguishable. Breaking into Yee’s home, the Saint confronts the owner of the “New

Asia Pharmacy” just as he--heard for the first time--dictates his latest list of names to the radio announcer, his unwitting mouthpiece.

SAINT. I rather suspect it means Hara Kiri for you, Honorable Doctor,
only we'll let Uncle Sam hold the sword.

DR. YEE. How did you find out I was Japanese?

SAINT. The flower arrangement in your bedroom for one thing--your
kimo shoker kimono for another. I was pretty sure though when you
couldn't pronounce the “L” in Miracle Tea. I'm afraid, my dear
Doctor, your little sabotage organization is kaput.⁷³

The enemy, the play suggests, is ultimately betrayed and silenced by his own voice--provided he is overheard by a linguistically discerning ear-witness. Through the Saint's sinologically informed detection “Dr. Yee's” utterance becomes a revocation of nominal and visual identity markers as simulacra, dissimulations enabled by a prevailing orientalism that renders a Japanese in a sino-American enclave virtually undetectable and aided by the occulting medium of radio whose institutional voices contribute to the effacement of cultural distinctions.

That Charteris's western-voiced melodrama not only critiques but advances such erasures by reducing cultural difference to a single letter points up the limitations and inconsistencies of radio propaganda whose aim it was to create aural labels and signatures to assist in the listener's differentiation between specified Asian friends and foes while relying on the ignorance of the American public for its exploitation of lingering yellow peril anxieties in its stereotypical portrayals of undifferentiated “Orientalness.”⁷⁴ For example, a 1942 playlet about the “imitative little Japanese”--whose sub-humanity is represented aurally by ophidian hisses and choric apings of the narrator--begins its “Lesson in Japanese” stating:

[W]e know so little about the Japs to start with. I don't think I would be stretching it to say that perhaps 90 per cent of our people have never even

seen a Jap. A Chinaman to most of us is a man who runs a laundry; a Jap, wherever he is known, tends flowers, does gardening and a little farming. It is difficult for most of us to even distinguish between a Chinese and a Japanese at sight. We have always construed the Japs to be very simple naive fellows. We were beguiled by his smile.⁷⁵

Charteris's didactic mystery is similarly discretionary in its correctives: it counters the leveling force of rampant orientalism while promoting the stereotype of the Japanese as cunning simulators and shapeshifters. The portrayal of Japanese guile was not reworked until the Korean War, when radio listeners were belatedly yet opportunely introduced to the "world's greatest international secret agent," *Mr. I. A. Moto* (1951), a man who brought "the subtlety of his oriental ancestry" and the "strength of his American heritage" to the fight against the "evils of communism--quietly, ruthlessly, courageously." By that time, Chinese-American detective Charlie Chan had disappeared from the airwaves.⁷⁶

In "The Miracle Tea Party," the solution to the puzzle of identity at least partially rehabilitates American broadcasting. The vocal re-orientation of Dr. Yee and the re-claiming of the airwaves through the dictation of a latter-day Robin Hood establish motives other than financial gain for both crime and detection, uses and abuses of the medium. Foul play is averted, its agents removed, and the Saint, infusing the dyspeptic officer's "Miracle Tea" with Epsom Salts, brings about an all-around cure for indigestion. Decidedly less neat in its conclusion was a propagandist thriller by mystery writer Mignon G. Eberhart, who, in a perversion of the game of detection, questioned the very concept of fair play in the service of wartime propaganda.

"Perhaps I can weld a chain of death": The Disgrace of Detection

With series like *Suspense* and *The Adventures of Ellery Queen* firmly established and frequently in the service of the OWI, the espionage thriller was believed to be such an effective weapon of propaganda that even a staunchly conservative, educational play cycle

like the patriotic *Cavalcade of America* permitted a melodramatic departure from its meticulously researched historical dramas to present Eberhart's original radio play "The Enemy Is Listening" (June 7, 1943). Eberhart, who began her highly successful career as a mystery novelist in 1929 with the publication of *Patient in Room 18*, often played her thrillers by ear. Rather than taking leave of their senses, her characters often come to realize the inadequacies of sensory perception. *The Dark Garden* (1933), for instance, opens with the murder victim sitting and "listening" intently for a "stealthy, unaccustomed sound" in a silent house--a subfusc and silent world in which the fog itself seems to listen--while the prime suspect is driving as if "blindfolded" through the "pandemonium of sound" that is 1930s Chicago, the fog creating a "kind of Cheshire-cat effect gone modern and very noisy." In Eberhart's world, reality is not merely obnubilated, but nubigenous, conceived in a fog that "[d]oes all kinds of queer things to one's ears." For the clues of this romantic whodunit, too, are broadcast in the brume, the solution hinging on the correct interpretation of an overheard conversation, a seemingly nonsensical utterance whose inflection, once identified as German, yields a crucial clue.⁷⁷

Yet despite her intriguing fair play efforts, Eberhart was generally classified as a follower of the so-called "Had-I-But-Known" school of thriller writers, popular novelists influenced by Mary Roberts Rinehart's 1908 novel *The Circular Staircase*. Such neo-Radcliffean conflation of romance and *ratio*--whose modally gothic narratives generate suspense by skirting the revelatory, rather than scattering the relevant--were widely dismissed by contemporary practitioners and scholars of mystery fiction. Haycraft, for example, derided the "Had-I-But-Known" thrillers for their "coy and self-conscious style of feminine overwriting":

Long-suffering readers need no reminder of the spinster-narrator who "forgets" (she was baking bread that morning) to tell the Sheriff about the bloody axe she found in the woodshed with the murderer's fingerprints on it, thereby causing five more brutal deaths--and incidentally stringing out a

wabbling plot another 200 pages. (Worse still, the heroine who deliberately conceals vital evidence from the official police, with the same net result.) But happily the ridicule which has been heaped on this sort of meretriciousness in recent years is beginning to bear fruit.⁷⁸

For the purposes of the “loose talk” campaign, however, the negligence and absent-mindedness of the witness could be effectively exploited in cautionary tales and didactic case studies of civic irresponsibility. Announced as “a tensely dramatic spy story,” “The Enemy Is Listening” realizes the moralistic potential of the “Had-I-But-Known” thriller by assigning the central role of the clue-gathering detective to the information-craving enemy spy. Playing radio’s oldest and most effective device--the direct address--into the hands of the enemy, Eberhart drives home that a temporary, self-imposed silence may be the listeners’ most effective safeguard against being permanently divested of their voice since no means or media of communication can be entirely safe from infiltration and subversion.

The implied admonition of the audience is extenuated by the announcer’s assurance that no “real American intends to give information to the enemy. And yet, sometimes . . .”--at which pregnant pause the institutional, authoritative but polite American broadcast voice is supplanted by one that is harsh, smug and distinctly sinister without being grotesque (a part expertly read by versatile radio actor Everett Sloane)--

sometimes, sometimes someone forgets. A word overheard and repeated. A small fact passed on to someone else may mean little to you. It may mean nothing to the person to whom you repeat it. But the third or the fourth person or the tenth or the twentieth may be your enemy. Your enemy.

At this moment it becomes clear to the listener that the speaker, like Wilkie Collins’s “miserable Spy” Count Fosco,⁷⁹ is an adversary who, taking over the narrative, assumes control over the medium:

I am waiting for such words. I am listening. Perhaps I can weld a chain of death. A phrase may give me the first link. A word may give me a clue. I may hear it anywhere. On a bus, or on the street, or on a train. Any train, anywhere. . . .

For now, the enemy at the microphone welds only a chain of commentary, listening in on two young soldiers, Pinky and Bill. As our perfidious mediator remarks, they are only two boys in a city where there are so many boys. . . . Why should anyone follow these soldiers? (*Laugh.*) But I follow them. There's something I want to know. I wonder how I'm going to find out the thing that I want to know. How can I find out where they're going?

This information is readily supplied by the two men who, returning home on a train, are talking--and overheard talking--by fellow passengers. While cheerful, neither the soldiers nor their female admirers are entirely carefree, reminding each other of their duty to remain on guard, to keep their chatter in check.

Other than the fact that the soldiers are on leave and that Bill is the boyfriend of Pinky's sister, nothing of moment appears to have been conveyed. And when Pinky reaches the sanctity of his family home, where he can presumably speak more freely, the voice of our enemy guide reappears: "Now what can I do here? This is an American home. I can't pass these walls. There's no chance for me to get information here. Or is there?" The spy whose voice now reaches the American listener at home also has the capacity of entering that of Pinky's parents, availing himself of an existing network of telecommunications--the telephone. Calling Pinky's mother, one of his operatives learns when the young soldier is scheduled to report for duty. Even though the mother refuses to disclose any further details to the stranger who pretends to be a friend of her son, the relentless secret agents gradually reach their objective.

The enemy is listening. Eavesdropping on a nation. That's why I'm here.

To listen. To piece one small fact with another, and then another. Until I know the thing I want to know.

Addressing the listener, the enemy agent expresses confidence that those accustomed to the freedom of speech are bound to use it too freely. Somewhere, someone will provide the final clue: "But I know you were there. A lot of careless people were in between. See how it all adds up? Remember how it all started?"

At the end of the play, Pinky's mother receives a letter from her son, somewhere in safety even in combat. While she ponders a passage that has been "blackened out by the censors," Bill's uncle pays a visit, delivering the terrible news: Bill was killed when his transport was hit by a torpedo. American civilians not unlike the listeners at home have proven to be their country's most forcible saboteurs. Words having all along spoken louder than the silencing actions they begot, the climax--in keeping with the moral of the play--is relayed verbally, the triumphant detective having the last laugh:

See how simple it all was, how easy? Yet these people could have stopped it. How lucky for me that they didn't. (*Laugh.*) They were all nice people, too. Ordinary everyday people. Not one of them would have told me anything if they'd known I was listening. Well, that chain is finished. But I wonder. Let me see. Can I find another chain beginning anywhere? I must listen. To the man on the bus, the woman going shopping. I must listen to you and you--and *you*.

If Dannay and Lee's "Tom, Dick and Harry" tempers the rewards of the fair play puzzle with reminders that retrograde investigation, however fruitful, yields rather hollow victories compared to the enemy's deadly coups de main, Eberhart's account of murder in the making--as straightforward in its narrative as it is in its propagandist intent--serves as a warning to the American public in general, and mystery lovers in particular, that warfare, however neatly strategic, is decidedly a matter of foul play. More than implicating its victims, Eberhart's discomfiting "Had-I-But-Known" drama dispenses with the makeshift

heroics and disingenuous reversals of fortune which characterize the supposedly superior fair play mystery. The account delivered by the triumphant, self-satisfied enemy appeals instead more immediately to the listener's sense of responsibility: only a vigilant public can prevent the crimes that rivaling wartime hawkshaws are eager to commit and detect.

It becomes clear, then, why Eberhart's play was presented on *Cavalcade* rather than a blood-and-thunder anthology like *Suspense*. Implying that the listening public may be as incompetent and obstructive as the protagonists of the "Had I But Known" thriller, "The Enemy Is Listening" more closely resembles MacLeish's prewar allegories "The Fall of the City" and "Air Raid" than any of the escapist crime dramas which, even when told from the perspective of the criminal, invariably contain both the criminal act and its resolution. If, as broadcast critic and playwright David Wade suggests, many radio plays intrigue as occasions to "spy on one's neighbors, near and far, to indulge in one of the enduring pleasures of human beings but to do so without any of the attendant risks,"⁸⁰ Eberhart's didactic thriller problematizes the curiosity which it deems pathological and compels listeners to consider their own culpability.

Insisting not only that crime *does* pay, but that victims are paying for their criminal negligence, "The Enemy Is Listening" is a precursor of the infiltration fantasies of the McCarthy era, a period during which propaganda was hardly wanting on the airwaves. During 1940s postwar radio boom, and indeed well into the 1950s, the spy thriller warned listeners alternately against the evils of communism, as did *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1952-54), and against un-American finger-pointing. Ellery Queen's "The Three Frogs" (Apr. 29, 1948), for instance, a play about juvenile delinquency, is prefaced by the words of announcer Paul Masterson, who proposes the play in the "interest of a safer American home, a happier American community, [and] a more United States." Ellery Queen--in his dual role of author figure and central character--adds: "I dedicate this program to the fight against crime. Not only crimes of violence and crimes of dishonesty, but also crimes of intolerance, discrimination, and bad citizenship--crimes against America." Similar

reminders were prefixed to late-1940s episodes of *The Saint*, and were delivered by Vincent Price.

Yet by this time, neither Leslie Charteris nor Fred Dannay were involved any longer in the programs based on their creations, even though Manfred Lee continued to write scripts in collaboration with the aforementioned co-writer of *Sherlock Holmes*, Anthony Boucher. In an era during which *The Adventures of Sam Spade* was forced off the air and an estimated eighty to one hundred writers, directors, and actors employed by or freelancing in the broadcasting industry became *personae non grata* due to alleged communist affiliations, American radio--unlike its British and European counterparts--found itself almost entirely abandoned by those playwrights and novelists who had something to say and who had just acquired the techniques to communicate it effectively on the air.⁸¹

Notes

¹ Harrison B. Summers, A Thirty Year History of Programs (1958; New York: Arno, 1971) 17; 102; 134.

² Corwin, "Radio and Morale," Saturday Review 4 July 1942: 6.

³ "Radio's Crime Wave," Newsweek 21 Dec. 1942: 78.

⁴ "Byron's D.A.," Newsweek 7 Oct. 1946: 66-67.

⁵ "Radio's Crime Wave" 78.

⁶ Rahill, The World of Melodrama (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania UP, 1967) xvi.

⁷ Booth, introduction, Hiss the Villain, ed. Michael Booth (New York: Blom, 1967) 15; Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 206.

⁸ Howard Rowland, "Radio Crime Dramas," Educational Research Bulletin 23 (1944): 216.

- ⁹ Charlene Betty Hext, "Thriller Drama on American Radio Networks," MA thesis (Ohio State U, 1949) 42.
- ¹⁰ "Radio Writing under War Conditions," Education on the Air: Fourteenth Yearbook, ed. Josephine H. MacLatchy (Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 1943) 151.
- ¹¹ Stout, "We Shall Hate, or We Shall Fail," New York Times Magazine 17 Jan. 1943: 29.
- ¹² François Truffaut, Hitchcock (New York: Simon-Touchstone, 1985) 43-44. In 1945, Hitchcock recorded an audition disk for a proposed ABC thriller series titled *Once Upon a Midnight*. "It was not until several weeks after he had decided to murder his wife that Dr. Bickleigh took any active steps in the matter," a cheerful Hitchcock introduced this dramatization of Francis Iles's 1931 Malice Aforethought, a novel he had wanted to bring to the screen (**Audit**). A few years later, another production of "Malice Aforethought," again narrated by Hitchcock, was recorded for the *Alfred Hitchcock Show* (**Syn./Audit**). Despite his apparent interest in the medium, Hitchcock did not realize his radio projects.
- ¹³ John Dunning, On the Air (New York: Oxford UP, 1998) 255; 333.
- ¹⁴ Hext 119-20.
- ¹⁵ John K. Hutchens, "That Realm, That England," New York Times 16 Aug. 1942, sec. 8: 8.
- ¹⁶ Corwin, "London by Clipper," "Untitled" and Other Radio Dramas (New York: Holt, 1947) 159; for a brief discussion of Corwin's series, see chapter 9.
- ¹⁷ This introduction was heard in the episode "Anniversary in Holland," broadcast on the eve of the third anniversary of the German occupation of the Netherlands (**May 9, 1943**).
- ¹⁸ Ellery Queen, ed., Rogues' Gallery (Boston: Little, 1945) 121. The play was produced on **May 11, 1943** and, retitled "The Dealings of Mr. Markham," on **June 28, 1945**.
- ¹⁹ After Carr's departure from *Suspense*, "Cabin B-13," was restaged on **Nov. 3, 1943**.
- ²⁰ Douglas G. Greene, John Dickson Carr (New York: Prenzler, 1995) 232-56.
- ²¹ Greene, John Dickson Carr 249; Greene, introduction, The Dead Sleep Lightly by John Dickson Carr (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 8.
- ²² Greene, John Dickson Carr 239.
- ²³ Greene, introduction, Door to Doom (New York: International Polytonics, 1991) 10.

- 24 Ian Ousby, Guilty Party (New York: Thames, 1997) 71.
- 25 Greene, introduction, The Dead Sleep Lightly 7.
- 26 Rowland 212.
- 27 Martin Grams, Jr., Suspense: Twenty Years of Thrills and Chills (Kearny, NE: Morris, 1997) 23; Greene's biography does not corroborate the story of Carr's dispute with CBS. It should also be noted that Carr's supposedly original play closely resembles The Mysterious Doctor (1943), a US propaganda thriller involving a Nazi plot to keep superstitious British villagers from mining tin by terrorizing them with the legend of a headless ghost; this film was released just months prior to the *Suspense* broadcast.
- 28 Guralnick, Sight Unseen (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1996) 52.
- 29 Greene, introduction, The Dead Sleep Lightly 6.
- 30 Haycraft, "Evolution of the Whodunit in the Years of World War II," New York Times Book Review 12 Aug. 1945, 29. For a discussion of narration and dialogue and their relation to interiority, see chapter 8.
- 31 "Markets for Manuscripts Sales," The Writer Feb. 1951: 58.
- 32 Grams 27.
- 33 The remark appears in Barnouw's preface to Hughes's "Booker T. Washington in Atlanta," Radio Drama in Action (New York: Farrar, 1945) 284. The play was written as a broadcast special to coincide with the issuing of the 1940 Booker T. Washington stamp.
- 34 William N. Robson, "Open Letter on Race Hatred," Radio Drama in Action, ed. Erik Barnouw (New York: Farrar, 1945) 75; also see Howard Blue, Words at War (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2002) 271-93.
- 35 Nelson Bond, "Mind Over Murder," Murder for the Millions, ed. Frank Owen (New York: Fell, 1946) 578-79.
- 36 Crossen, "There's Murder in the Air," The Art of the Mystery Story, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon, 1946) 306.
- 37 Lanfranco Rasponi, "Dr. Watson Speaks Up," New York Times 6 Oct. 1940, sec 9: 10.
- 38 Taylor, Before Television (New York: Barnes, 1979) 127.

³⁹ Two of the wartime scripts, "The Case of the Amateur Mendicants" (Apr. 2, 1945), involving an attempt by a "filthy traitor" and his followers to assassinate the British prime minister, and "The Notorious Canary Trainer" (Apr. 23, 1945), in which an English-woman weds the American on whom she foolishly cast suspicion, appear in Ken Greenwald's The Lost Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (New York: Barnes, 1993), 43-55; 183-99. Divested of the historical context and the OWI messages read by Bruce, Greenwald's short story adaptations of "a long lost medium of writing" (7) obliterate the propagandistic role of these seemingly quaint pastiches.

⁴⁰ Francis M. Nevins, Jr., The Sound of Detection (Madison, IN: Brownstone, 1983) 1-2; 17-29. Revised, this text was republished as "The Ellery of the Airwaves," The Sound of Detection, ed. Nevins and Martin Grams, Jr. (Churchville, MD: Brownstone, 2002) 1-60.

⁴¹ Greene, John Dickson Carr 248.

⁴² "Murder Guessing Contest," Newsweek 26 June 1939: 26. Ogden Nash was the host of the first broadcast and only extant recording of *Author! Author!* ("[The \$2001 Watch]/[The Extraordinary Bequest]," Apr. 7, 1939). Two peculiar situations (a \$2000 watch is being sold for \$1; an heir chooses an empty envelope over a \$10,000 inheritance) were presented as brief dialogues; the guests (including Dannay and Lee) were called upon to make up a story leading to and explaining each dramatized incident.

⁴³ "Who Will Win the \$500 in Gold for Solving *A Step on the Stairs???*" Radio Digest Mar. 1926: 11.

⁴⁴ For a script of *Kenrad's Unsolved Mysteries* see Edward Carder, "Seance at Brockman Manor," Radio Continuity Types, ed. Sherman Paxton Lawton (Boston: Expression, 1938) 8-21; for an episode of *Minute Mysteries*, see Austin Ripley, "The Stuyvesant Case," The Do's and Don'ts of Radio Writing by Ralph Rogers (Boston: Associated Radio Writers, 1937) 72-79.

⁴⁵ "Clew of the Busted Hose," Time 23 Oct. 1939: 58.

⁴⁶ Nevins 51; MacDonald, "Government Propaganda in Commercial Radio," Journal of Popular Culture 12.2 (1979): 304.

⁴⁷ Charteris, The Saint's Choice of Radio Thrillers, ed. Leslie Charteris (Hollywood, CA: Saint Enterprises, 1946) 38.

⁴⁸ Gerd Horton, Radio Goes to War (Los Angeles: U of California P, 2002) 116-17; 124-30.

⁴⁹ Queen, "Ellery Queen, Swindler," Rogues' Gallery 501.

⁵⁰ Horton 55-59.

⁵¹ Queen, "Ellery Queen, Swindler" 505; 513-14.

⁵² Nevins 49.

⁵³ As its title suggests, Oboler's "Chicago, Germany" imagines life under Nazi occupation. The play was written for and produced by the *Treasury Star Parade* (syn., 1942). For a script, see *Treasury Star Parade* ed. William A. Bacher (New York: Farrar, 1942) 311-28.

⁵⁴ Nevins 55-56.

⁵⁵ Nevins 54; unlike *Suspense*, which is preserved almost in its entirety, only about ten percent of *Ellery Queen's* 355 episodes are known to have survived in either print or recordings. According to radio historian Jim Cox, 18 recordings are extant; see Cox, *Radio Crime Fighters* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002) 12.

⁵⁶ Queen, "The Adventure of the Murdered Ship," *The Saint's Choice*, ed. Charteris 40; 49.

⁵⁷ Queen, "The Adventure" 41; 46-47.

⁵⁸ Queen, "The Adventure" 49-50.

⁵⁹ Crossen 304.

⁶⁰ Richard Layman, *Shadow Man* (New York: Harcourt, 1981) 166; 183; 203.

⁶¹ "Thin Man," *Life* 23 Oct. 1944: 110-11; Jack Gould, "Four at a Time," *New York Times* 3 Feb. 1946, sec. 2:7.

⁶² Charteris, *The Saint's Choice* 110; the collection includes Green's "The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax" 51-66. This play was produced on the *Sherlock Holmes* program on Feb. 26, 1945.

⁶³ Burl Barer, *The Saint* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1993) 74-79.

⁶⁴ Charteris, "The Miracle Tea Party," *The Saint's Choice* 111.

⁶⁵ Charteris, "The Miracle" 111-12.

⁶⁶ Charteris, "The Miracle" 113; 112.

⁶⁷ Charteris, "The Miracle" 124; 114.

⁶⁸ Charteris, "The Miracle" 119-21.

- ⁶⁹ Albert N. Williams, "Radio and the Writer," Saturday Review 24 Oct. 1942: 44.
- ⁷⁰ Charteris, "The Miracle" 122.
- ⁷¹ Charteris 121, "The Miracle"; emphasis added.
- ⁷² Barer 78.
- ⁷³ Charteris, "The Miracle" 123-24.
- ⁷⁴ For a related discussion see Alexander Russo, "A Dark(ened) Figure on the Airwaves: Race, Nation, and *The Green Hornet*," Radio Reader, ed. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York: Routledge, 2002) 257-76.
- ⁷⁵ Neal Hopkins, "A Lesson in Japanese (Bushido)," Bacher 359; 353. The opening was omitted from the *Treasury Star Parade* production (syn., ca 1942), in which narrator Fredric March merely points to the importance of knowing one's enemy.
- ⁷⁶ Introductions to "Project 77" (July 1, 1951) and "Sabotage" (July 8, 1951).
- ⁷⁷ Eberhart, The Dark Garden (1930), republished as Death in the Fog (Lincoln, NB: U of Nebraska P, 1996) 1; 166; 169; 9. In 1942, a serialization of the novel aired on the *Mystery Man* program (1941-42); see Grams, Radio Drama (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000) 341.
- ⁷⁸ Haycraft 7.
- ⁷⁹ Collins, The Woman in White (1860; New York: Bantam, 1985) 261. Like Eberhart's infiltrator, Fosco delights in showing that society is "as often the accomplice, as it is the enemy of crime." While the "world is in a conspiracy to accept the mask for the true face," his is the "rash hand that tears off the plump pasteboard, and shows the bare bones beneath" (206-07).
- ⁸⁰ Wade, "Popular Radio Drama," Radio Drama, ed. Peter Lewis (New York: Longman, 1981) 103.
- ⁸¹ Merle Miller, The Judges and the Judged (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1952) 29.

Chapter Seven

"There ain't no sense to nothing": Serial Romance and the Gothic of Audition

"Nonsense, sir," interrupted Mr. Glowry. "That is not at all like the sound I heard."

"But, sir," said Scythrop, "a key-hole may be so constructed as to act like an acoustic tube, and an acoustic tube, sir, will modify sound in a very remarkable manner. Consider the construction of the ear, and the nature and causes of sound. The external part of the ear is a cartilaginous funnel."

"It wo'n't do, Scythrop. There is a girl concealed in this tower, and find her I will."--Thomas Love Peacock, *Nightmare Abbey* (1818)

As suggested in the previous chapter, World War II contributed greatly to the rise of the radio thriller, either by promoting melodramatic excess to an agent of anti-Axis propaganda or by provoking terrors evocative enough to drown out for a moment the actual, more resonant horrors of warfare. Whereas the expediency of blood and thunder in the service of propaganda was often disputed, broadcast critics of the early 1940s were less likely than their peacetime counterparts to condemn such stirring sensational plays as morally irresponsible or socially harmful. "Those sound effects men know their business," a wartime reviewer of radio "shockers" like *The Shadow* and *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* conceded: "The story may be dubious and the characters dull, and the violence so immoderate as finally to be only ridiculous, but the atmosphere is always 'right,' proving once more that radio's power of suggestion is unequaled." With only a few bewitching sound effects, more instrumental in thriller broadcasts than in any other form of radio entertainment, the listener could "create a Walpurgis Night for himself"--an imaginary eve of May Day in a world resounding with distress signals.¹

Once the newsflashes and reports from the battlefields had faded, the prewar debate over the noxiousness of the networks' Grand Guignol, its "night terrors" inducing

screams and formidable potential of “breed[ing] a race of neurotic impressionables” began to flare up anew. By virtue of its “power to play on the ear with horror effects,” one prewar critic remarked, radio

exercises a far stronger influence than did the dime-shockers of the ‘Eighties. Moreover, in those days, such moralistic *littérateurs* as G. A. Henty, Horatio Alger, and Oliver Optic were on hand to ameliorate the shock. Today’s radio gives virtually no respite. Each day, come 5 o’clock, the same bloodcurdling broadcasts gurgle through the loudspeaker.

More than merely “gurgle,” the alarmed auditor pointed out, the radio emitted nerve-racking noises like the “wail of a police siren, the rattle of a machine-gun, the explosion of a hand grenade, the shriek of a dying woman, the bark of a gangster’s pistol, or the groan of a soul in purgatory,”² an inventory that could be extended to include the sounds of human bodies being turned inside out, eviscerated or devoured by certain--and more frequently uncertain--flesh-consuming entities. Although the *Mercury Theatre*’s Halloween 1938 broadcast of “The War of the Worlds” had demonstrated that the critics’ warnings against such air raids were not altogether unwarranted, the drama of the human voice struggling for survival--intelligible speech confronted with the threat of being silenced or reduced to feral screeches amid a din of natural, machine-made, or unearthly sounds--proved to be the very stuff of radio.

In Art and Experience, John Dewey remarked that sound alone had the “power of direct emotional expression”; while coming “from outside the body,” sound is “near” and “intimate”--an “excitation of the organism,” a “clash of vibrations” felt throughout the entire body. Reporting change, sounds like a “foot-fall, the breaking of a twig, the rustling of underbrush may signify attack or even death.” Sound is a “conveyor of what impends,” and

about the impending there is always an aura of indeterminateness and uncertainty--all conditions favorable to intense emotional stir. Vision

arouses emotion in the form of interest--curiosity solicits further examination, but it attracts; or it institutes a balance between withdrawal and forward exploring action. It is sounds that make us jump.³

Charged with this fury of sound, thrillers were coming on like *Gang Busters*--that is, noisily, suggestively, and regularly. During the 1937-38 season, to which the above critique responded, only about a dozen thrillers were regularly featured on network radio; a decade later, as corporate sponsors reclaimed the airwaves after years of relative self-abnegation, that number had more than tripled. Popular enough to attract sponsorship and inexpensive enough to serve as schedule fillers on a sustaining basis, the thriller series of the late 1940s and early 1950s eclipsed comedy-variety formats to emerge as broadcasting's most valuable commodity. In January 1948, listeners could tune in to forty-one crime dramas, compared to nineteen situation comedies, with the former increasing in number until January 1951, in which month an unprecedented fifty-two weekly suspense dramas dominated the networks' evening lineups.⁴ So prominent had these programs become that they served as the subject of a 1949 MA thesis--Charlene Betty Hext's "Thriller Drama on American Radio Networks"--which concluded with the prediction that the radio thriller was likely to thrive since the live broadcasts from the narrow confines of the television studio were no match for the boundlessness of the airwaves.⁵

The listener's sense of the ethereal realm as a world out of bounds seemed hardly diminished by the strict codes under which radio playwrights and producers were forced to operate. The radio drama guidelines of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), established in 1939 in the wake of the "War of the Worlds" controversy and revised or augmented thereafter, singled out as objectionable the "excessive horror in slaying" and the "kidnaping or beating of children." Based on these recommendations, the networks developed their own codes for continuity acceptance. NBC, for instance, stipulated that writers refrain from the glorification, cynical treatment, and "overly-realistic

dramatizations” of criminal acts, explicit and detailed portrayals of physical agony and torture “of any kind,” as well as the mere mention of “sex crimes, prostitution or sex perversion.” Nor was crime a “subject for comedy”; the law was to be treated “without disparagement or ridicule” and criminals had to be punished “specifically or by implication.”⁶ Such strictures notwithstanding, what escaped into the air and insinuated itself into the mind of the listener at the onset of the baby boom was often more concrete--terrifying or salacious--than the images captured by Hays Office trammelled motion picture producers.

This is not to say that a filmed spectacle adhering to the production code could not be suggestive, that it could not make audiences believe that they saw more than was actually depicted. Yet it was considerably less difficult to direct or censure the cinematographer’s lens than it was to determine to what degree the listener’s mental image might be drawing on--or drawn by--the gadgetry of the sound effect artist. Vocabulary could be tabooed, story lines proscribed and performers banned; but the question whether dreadful noise could be deemed responsible for the audience’s dread imaginings remained unresolved, a haziness contributing to the post-war flourishing of radio violence. On a single evening in February, 1948, *Life* counted a “total carnage” of “at least a dozen violent deaths” in the scripts for shows to air on ABC, CBS, and the Mutual network, with victims being “stabbed, poisoned, shot, blown up and thrown out of windows, plus one exceptionally messy suicide.” Assisted by cartoonist Charles Addams and a series of photographic reenactments, *Life* reduced such listening experiences to high camp. Playing by ear, the radio audience may have formed a far less light-hearted impression of a scene from *The Shadow* (1930-54) in which two graverobbers employ such “useful instruments” as a vise, a saw, and a blowtorch to mutilate and murder their partner in crime.⁷ The participatory nature of radio plays complicated the practical application of self-censorship. In addition to being sanctioned by tags like “crime does not pay”--also the title of a 1949-52 mystery anthology--radio’s carnage occurred under shelter of its disembodiment

of the human voice, as a result of which airwaved thrillers could, and did, get away with horrid scenes of bloodshed and disfigurement--and that despite growing disapprobation.

When radio's rogue wave became noticeable during the 1946-47 season, it was met with the vocal opposition of parent-teacher groups and women's clubs, as well as the American Bar Association. In 1947--the year in which *Fortune* called for "The Revolt Against Radio"--NBC felt pressured to make at least token adjustments in programming content and scheduling. Its affiliates voted to adopt a more stringent code of moral standards and announced that, beginning in 1948, the network would ban explicit dramatizations of crime and punishment from its early to mid-evening lineup.⁸ These measures acknowledged that family listening under parental supervision was a thing of the past, now that affordable portable receivers were fast becoming a common feature in the bedrooms of America's youth. Yet, as Hext points out, the self-imposed ban was somewhat specious; with the exception of *Mr. District Attorney* (1939-53), all of the season's high-rated thriller series aired on other networks, so that NBC could denounce its rivals without having to renegotiate with its current advertisers. Unable to ignore for long the marketability of such fare, NBC aired five crime dramas during the summer of 1948 and began to violate its own policy by the fall of 1949.⁹

Strident and sensational, network radio of the mid- to late-1940s--roughly the interlude between V-J Day and the Korean War--was able to realize a highly profitable phase of calculated excess during which thrillers, along with vacuous giveaway programs, responded to, fed on and fueled the public's long-suppressed desires. Broadcasters effectively reduced the pursuit of happiness to opportunities to *Get Rich Quick* (1948) and to *Go For the House* (1948-49) or to moments of *Escape* (1947-54) and *Pursuit* (1949-50). Postwar listeners could take flight with new thriller anthologies like *The Weird Circle* (1946-47), Wyllis Cooper's *Quiet Please* (1947-49) or John Dickson Carr's *Cabin B-13* (1948-49), programs that offered radiogenic updates of Frankenstein, Sweeney Todd, and Jack the Ripper. The creators of *Escape* even supplied concrete reasons for

tuning out from current events. Its dramatization of Richard Connell's "The Most Dangerous Game" and H. G. Wells's "Pollock and the Porrah Man" were prefaced, respectively, by the announcer's inquiry whether listeners were "Fed up with the housing shortage?" (Oct. 1, 1947) or "Worried about the United Nations?" (Oct. 29, 1947), questions that were always followed by a straightforward and hard-to-resist invitation: "Want to get away from it all? We offer you--*Escape!*" Easy as Mrs. Lovitt's pie, ratings points could always be produced as evidence that the business of processing the rags and bones of gothic romance into weekly helpings of fresh pulp was in the service of public interest, convenience, and necessity after all.

It was at the height of this period of high profits and lowered brow that the Mutual network revived one of network radio's most unapologetically escapist thriller programs, Carlton E. Morse's *I Love a Mystery* (1949-52). Relating the fantastic adventures of Jack, Doc, and Reggie, three soldiers of fortune, the transcribed series not only combined the dialogue-driven, character-centered plays of episodic crime dramas with the sound effects-powered, atmospheric mysteries of the tales-of-terror anthologies, but merged them in the rambling, sprawling narratives of the serials. As aware of its literary stirpes in eighteenth-century romance and nineteenth-century realism as it was of the disparities between the medium's Romantic potential and the industry's Victorian constraints, *I Love a Mystery* nimbly cultivated that which it did not dare to uproot. Imitative, allusive, and occasionally reflexive, the series distinguished itself as a neo-gothic extravaganza whose unseen terrors and telling silences at once mollified and mocked those who watched over the airwaves by suggesting that the mind's eye either made much ado about ethereal naught or was indeed more naughty than that upon which it was free to feast.

"Law don't get out this way much": The Terrors of Indeterminacy

"There was nothing else on the air quite like *I Love a Mystery*," cultural historian Russell Nye once remarked. Resounding with "violence, blood, tough talk, and overtones

of sex” not heard anywhere else on radio, the program struck him as a “most singular” combination of the “better hard-boiled dick story and the adventure pulps.”¹⁰ Among the other labels that have been affixed to it over the years are “suspense series,” “adventure-mystery serial drama,” and “weird mystery.” Jim Harmon, the only radio drama aficionado to have written about it at any length, simply calls *I Love a Mystery* “the greatest radio program of all time!”¹¹ Deserving each hyphenate and hyperbole it inspired, the program exploited every gothic ingredient known to mankind and Mary Alcock to achieve its celebrated genre-defying compounds. Decades later, it was still being recalled by authors as diverse as William Goldman, Stephen King, and Philip Roth, in whose novel *I Married a Communist* Morse is ranked among the most prominent and influential radio writers of the 1930s and ‘40s, namely Corwin, Oboler, Himan Brown, William N. Robson, and humorist Paul Rhymer.¹²

When *I Love a Mystery* premiered in January 1939 under the sponsorship of Fleischmann’s Yeast, it was broadcast exclusively over NBC’s West Coast stations. Proving successful even in its unpopular 3:15 PM timeslot--the dead spot between morning soaps and late-afternoon cereal operas--the program was moved to 7:15 PM and broadcast nationally beginning in October of 1939; by January 1940, the five weekly installments were approaching *The Shadow* and surpassing *Sherlock Holmes* in the Hooper ratings.¹³ Breezing into American living rooms when circulating libraries smothered romance readers with midnight-for-Cinderella tales of connubial obnubilations, *I Love a Mystery* reconstituted the modal potentialities of the gothic which works like *Rebecca* appeared to have relinquished in favor of its reconception as genre with *meubles* so scant they could barely furnish a flat on Angel Street. Morse’s series, by comparison, recuperated gothic melodrama by surrendering inventory to invention, by mandating luxuriance rather than limitation. Even listeners familiar with the program could never be certain just where terror lurked or what shapes it might take--if it took a definitive shape at all. They needed to be prepared instead to confront any peril, from the sublunary to the

supernatural. Although foremost an arena for contesting “detective” and “horror” stories, Morse’s scripts accommodated Graustarkian romance and Wellsian science fiction, thus containing elements of at least four of the five major genres to which, according to David Richter, the gothic became “genetrix.”¹⁴

The particular and never entirely reintegrated genre markers interacting in *I Love a Mystery* are voiced in clearly distinguishable accents by the three central characters of the serial--the methodical, intellectual Easterner Jack Packard, the hot-tempered, simple-minded Texan Doc Long, and the cultured, cautious Englishman Reggie Yorke (or some able substitute of either sex). Their distinct personalities and skills complement each other not unlike those of the vampire slayers in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, even though their goal is not primarily to rid Western civilization of outlandish influences, but to take on challenges no private investigator or secret agent would have a broad enough mind to accept. The titles of many of the sequences bespeak the show’s gothic affiliations--“The Hermit of San Felipe Atabapo,” “The Bride of the Werewolf,” “My Beloved Is a Vampire,” and “I Am the Destroyer of Women” among them--while others evoke the fictions of H. Rider Haggard, B. Traven, or Edgar Wallace. The three soldiers of fortune climbed the “Stairway to the Sun” one month and faced “Trouble at Sea” another; and they approached “The Killer of Circle M” as readily as “The Terror of Frozen Corpse Lodge.” “Law don’t get out this way much,” a codger named Jumping Dick warns Jack, Doc, and Reggie in chapter three of “Bury Your Dead, Arizona.” He might have been describing the program itself.

When *I Love a Mystery* was revived in October 1949 after a nearly five year hiatus, during which interest in the property was kept alive by a number of B-movies--*I Love a Mystery* (1945), *The Unknown* (1946), and *The Devil’s Mask* (1946), adapted from and incorporating various radio scripts--and a thirteen-part series of loosely connected episodic thrillers titled *I Love Adventure* (1948), the market for radio thrillers was all but saturated. Just before the serial returned to the airwaves, episodic thrillers had

become so formulaic that Hext could readily label them “Supernatural, Comedy, Detective, Documented, Newspaper, Police, [and] Western,” the only “composite type” being anthologies like *Suspense*.¹⁵ Morse’s soldiers of fortune now faced competition from tough-talking investigators such as *Sam Spade* (1946-51) and *Philip Marlowe* (1947-51), who made their belated radio debut amid programs whose titles--like Mickey Spillane’s *The Jury* (1946)--suggest that popular entertainment of the postwar era was a sounding board for romantic notions about private enterprise and individualism: *I Deal in Crime* (1946-47) and *Pat Novak, For Hire* (1946-47), *I Love Adventure* (1948) and *Lone Wolf* (1948-49).

Instead of being upright enforcers of the law, radio’s latest if comparatively short-lived bloodhounds included an eccentric sensualist called *The Fat Man* (1946-51), a Sing-Sing parolee known as *Little Herman* (1949), and *Candy Matson* (1949-51), a brassy vamp who turned private investigatrix in order to maintain a penthouse on Telegraph Hill. *The Saint* (1947-51), heard only briefly toward the end of the war, returned as a hedonistic, debonair adventurer, a man about town (voiced by Vincent Price) unencumbered by the duties the OWI had once imposed and removed from the narrow circle of associates Leslie Charteris had created for him. Eventually, even Graham Greene’s Harry Lime, the very epitome of opportunism, was resurrected as a chameleonic double-dealer (voiced by Orson Welles) who introduced his past escapades--*The Lives of Harry Lime* (1951-52)--from the beyond. Before these shadier figures were gradually cornered by the institutional crimefighters of *Dragnet* (1949-57), *The Lineup* (1950-53), and *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1952-54), the airwaves promised to transport listeners to a *Rogue’s Gallery* (1945-51) of a *Black Museum* (1951-52) whose guards were temporarily off duty.

A growing number of American and British companies specialized in the production and syndication of packaged potboilers whose appeal lay chiefly in the box-office tested voice boxes of their leads. Until this time, prominent screen actors had

been heard primarily on variety programs and so-called prestige drama anthologies, rather than episodic series. In the final days of radio's pop-cultural predominance, however, stars like George Sanders not only served as hosts of suspense programs (*High Adventure*; 1947-49), but, like Alan Ladd (*Box 13*; 1948-49), even scripted, directed, and produced their own transcribed vehicles at a time when some of radio's long-reigning vaudevillians retired in response to declining ratings (most notably Fred Allen) or deserted the medium for live television and its occasion for Berlesque slapstick. Offering flexible recording schedules, high production values, and comparatively low costs, radio's prefab thrills continued to be attractive to players, audiences, and broadcasters alike.¹⁶

Considerably more exotic than the voices of Jack, Doc, and Reggie were those of Hungarian-accented Ilona Massey, who appeared as a World War II Mata Hari in international adventures heretofore *Top Secret* (1950), Bogart and Bacall, who faced latter-day buccaneers and fortune hunters in the Calypso-charged Cuba of *Bold Venture* (1951-52), and Marlene Dietrich, who was heard as nightclub hostess Mlle. Madou in the shady *Cafe Istanbul* (1952) and as a globetrotting, trilingual chanteuse with an ear for mystery in *Time for Love* (1953-54). Released from the service of propaganda, voices--aided by sound effects and exotic strains of guitar, organ, or zither music--again conjured the romance of a mysterious, unstable world and its hazardous transactions, a feverish babel rather than a battlefield of outright inimical forces, which 1950s popular culture frequently rendered as mute extraterrestrials or inarticulate mutants. It was the business of radio to chime, burble, or ballyhoo itself out of any crisis, particularly its impending supersession by television; and the polyglot, cosmopolitan adventure series was one of the medium's low-budget equivalents to the glossy epics designed to help cinemas cope.

Amid such generic if attractively voiced newcomers, the revival of *I Love a Mystery* distinguished itself by virtue of genre-bending adventures that made Morse's well-remembered serial seem as novel and exciting as it was heralded to be. Announcers

like Frank McCarthy loftily introduced each chapter of the sustaining East Coast production as a “new Carlton Morse adventure thriller,” somehow managing to place equal emphasis on all the words in the tag. Only the adjective was disingenuous, considering that the transcribed program recycled scripts written a decade earlier. Like many latter-day romances, however, *I Love a Mystery* is set in a present so devoid of any historical context that its post-World War II restaging could be sold as “new” without requiring extensive rewrites. In contrast to comedy-variety programs, which suffered considerably from the process of transcription since they often drew material from current news items, radio thrillers were not substantially affected by the lack of topicality. According to Harmon, the politically and culturally most significant update made to the scripts of Morse’s serial was that the appellation “comrade,” frequently used in the original version to describe the relationship of the three central characters, was suppressed during a time when a McCarthy with a voice more powerful than an announcer’s—or even Edgar Bergen’s thrown one—began to broadcast aspersions. Yet even this change was not consistently observed. In the introduction to one of the chapters of “Temple of Vampires” (Jan. 11, 1950), for instance, Reggie is described as being “unaware of what has happened to his two comrades.”¹⁷ During a volatile period in broadcast history, when urban detective series like *The Adventure of Sam Spade* and *The Adventures of the Thin Man* lost their sponsors and went off the air due to Dashiell Hammett’s communist affiliations, Morse’s scripts withstood time by suggesting few signs of it.

“Mystery,” “adventure,” “thriller”! Not unlike *Escape* or *Suspense*, the title and signature phrase of *I Love a Mystery* bespeak the series’ unabashed emotionalism, an avowed passion for the theater of affect, without ever referring to its excesses as “melodrama,” a word that, with the arrival of daytime radio serials in the late 1930s, came to connote the sudsy rather than the sanguinary, the sentimental rather than the sensational. A prolific radio novelist whose chapter plays were generally “a bit more sedate,”¹⁸ Morse knew mellow drama well enough. Throughout his broadcasting career,

he was better known still for the “sunnier images of everyday family life” as conjured up by the highly popular and critically acclaimed evening serial *One Man’s Family* (1932-59), a Galsworthy-inspired, 3,256 chapter epic that, according to one approving contemporary, could count even “[p]hysicians and child welfare specialists [. . .] among its friends.”¹⁹ *I Love a Mystery* sought no such allies. Airing as late as 10:15 PM during its East Coast run, Morse’s series succeeded in regenerating serial drama--a storytelling format once considered flexible enough to accommodate the adventures of *Amos ‘n’ Andy* and *The Shadow of Fu Manchu*, but by 1939 almost entirely reserved for washboard weepers and comic book adventures--by restoring it to the wider and more diverse nighttime audience.²⁰ After all, the ultimate-conclusion serial--as distinguished from the interminable chapter plays of the revolving plot soap operas--is ideally suited to the design of the gothic, which, as Linda Bayer-Berenbaum puts it, tends to delay the climax by replacing it with “ever-developing contingencies.”²¹ The promise of resolution propels the mystery; the potential for boundlessness promotes the adventure. It is by way of the listener’s negotiation between both impulses--propulsion and protraction--that the finite chapter play generates its thrills. Even in its recycled version, *I Love a Mystery* breathed tantalization, rather than nostalgia.

Airlifting listeners across asphalt jungles and tropical climes, Morse’s “adventure-thriller” defies definitions like those proposed by cinema scholar Martin Rubin, who asserts that adventures, unlike thrillers, are “predominantly set in an environment that is already exotic, often primitive, and clearly removed from the realm of the mundane, modern-day urban existence.” After all, gothic fictions, which Rubin acknowledges to be “transitional, borderline forms of thriller,” frequently vaporize this forced dichotomy, since both their indoors and outdoors may transpire to be domestic as well as demonic, sublime as well as serene, shelter as well as snare, thus proving terror to be positively osmotic.²² At least until Igor entered the refurbished laboratory to hear his master exclaim “It’s alive! It’s alive,” the most chilling words of *Frankenstein*, a story ostensibly devoted to “the

exhibition of the amiableness of domestic affection,” were uttered by its globetrotting creature: “*I will be with you on your wedding-night.*”²³ Ditching its moats as soon as it dug them, the serial architecture of Morse’s modally gothic thriller succeeded in petrifying audiences, not storytelling.

Instead of becoming a police record or psychiatric report, each “Case” or “Mystery” handled by the A-1 Detective Agency--the business Jack, Doc, and Reggie are ostensibly operating--remain an adventure that, according to one critic, “could rush you right into the eternal Evil.”²⁴ Even Jack, the most rational and scientific of the three thrill-seekers, flatly rejects being called “detective”: “I don’t like the term,” he tells those seeking his assistance (“The Thing That Cries in the Night,” ch. 3). If they eventually disclose the natural or hyperphysical occasion of each individual mystery--a tendency Hext noticed in all radio thrillers she reviewed during the 1948-49 season--Morse’s serials are fantastic in Todorov’s sense of the word. The fantastic, Todorov postulates, is “located on the frontier of two genres, the marvelous and the uncanny” rather than being an “autonomous genre”; it “lasts only as long as a certain hesitation.”²⁵ In the case of Morse’s listeners, the fantastic is a prolonged wavering of which the announcer’s promise of “a new Carlton Morse adventure-thriller” is both usher and agent.

To *love* a mystery suggests delighting in suspension, rather than solution, in protracted Udolphish uncertainties, a dwelling--a reveling--in experiences “beyond the confines of orderly illusions or restrictive limitations” during which one becomes “heedless of the balancing principles of art or society. The goal is the process itself, an intensified perception of a limitless reality.”²⁶ Pushing forward and drawing back, *I Love a Mystery* is a voluptuous waltz, rhythmic and circular, a mortal coiling and recoiling. It insinuates itself as such not in words alone, for its signature melody is Sibelius’s “Valse Triste” performed on an organ--somerly, slowly and sensuously. Whether it quite manages “to pull the listener into a vortex of darkness and danger”²⁷ depends, of course, on the emotional responsiveness of each individual auditor. Still, while decidedly less agitated

than the fierce openings of *Escape* (Mussorgsky's "A Night on Bald Mountain") or *The Green Hornet* (Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumblebee"), the signature, framed by the sounds of a train whistle--"that most promising of radio sounds"²⁸--and followed, rather incongruously, by the noise of screeching tires, spells flight and pursuit, a sonic existence in transit.

This introductory collage is completed by the expository sound of a clock striking the hour of the action, after which a narrator briefly recapitulates the events leading to the scene the listener, "drawn by a bell surely forged alongside that which excited Pavlov's dog,"²⁹ can then effortlessly establish:

Seven o'clock in the evening in a backstreet hotel somewhere in San Diego. A few minutes ago, Jack Packard and Doc Long, hearing a girl crying in the next room, investigated, and found her lying on her bed, head buried in her arms. She wasn't upset by their unexpected appearance, but warned them away from her. She babbled that she was possessed of the Richard's curse, and that she brought death and disaster to any and all who would help her. Jack and Doc have finally calmed her to some degree of coherence. . . . ("The Million Dollar Curse," ch. 2)

The slow chimes of the clock serve as a reminder that time is of the essence in one-dimensional play: both protagonists and listener are bound to run out of it, each interlude of action being followed by about twenty-four hours of suspension (and considerably longer periods on weekends). Certainly the most unyielding element of dramatic storytelling on American radio--with each program forced into a grid composed of daily and weekly slots of fifteen, thirty, or sixty minutes, punctured, sustaining shows excepted, by tightly fitted commercials--timing often threatened to render dramatic series formulaic and predictable. As one critic remarked, even some of radio's more exciting shows had "little suspense in the true sense":

[T]here is the clock. When it says that twenty-eight and a half minutes of a thirty minute program have gone, you are aware that there is little time in which to remain on tenterhooks, a fact that definitely detracts from the kind of a suspense a film or a play affords.³⁰

Just months prior to the revival of *I Love a Mystery*, Morse himself had sought to conform his fiction to the more marketable episodic 30-minute format. *I Love Adventure*, as Harmon puts it, was “an attempt to adjust to the times”; the series boasted the same characters, bizarre storylines, and elaborate sound effects listeners had come to expect from Morse’s thrillers, but lacked both the dramatic tension and the cohesiveness of *I Love a Mystery*. To Harmon, it was a “noble experiment” at best; to Dunning, the result was a “jerky mishmash” that suggested its author simply “couldn’t decide from week to week what to do with the show.” Confined to the clock and unable to click with sponsors, *I Love Adventure* expired after only thirteen episodes.³¹

Considerably more flexible than the roster-dominating weekly unit dramas (complete, single-broadcast plays), ultimate-conclusion (as opposed to revolving plot) serials still remained somewhat predictable by beginning new sequences on Mondays and concluding them on Fridays after five, ten, fifteen, or twenty broadcasts. Morse’s sequences on the other hand, although frequently spanning fifteen chapters, range from five to forty-four installments. This allowed for melodramatic arches whose thresholds were rather more difficult to foretell. In an **audition** record issued to potential sponsors of Morse’s earlier syndicated serial, *Adventures by Morse* (1944-45), Gayne Whitman, the series’s announcer, points out the benefits of the uncertain length of a storyline, calling it a “special gimmick, a hook, to bring back your listeners week after week.” In this case, the program’s eight serialized stories, described as being comprised of “mystery, detective thrills, and high adventures,” were narrated and dramatized in three to ten chapters. In all this, Morse could not be arbitrary, however, but had to adhere to the thirteen-week cycles then standard in network broadcasting.

I Love a Mystery further circumvents the predictability of most episodic series and conventional ultimate-conclusion serials by creating overarching storylines and characters. After slapdash wrap-ups that make Ann Radcliffe's lifted veil appear substantial, threads of unraveled clues intertwist with new ones, and characters like the cursed beauty mentioned above--whose lifespan Thesean listeners assumed to be measured by the length of a sequence--wind up joining Jack, Doc, and Reggie on their next adventure, "Temple of Vampires." Such longevity lends at once realistic continuity and romantic nonuniformity to the unfolding stories. Considering such careful plotting and pacing, no exploration of the melodramatic arches of across-the-board programs (or strip shows) like *I Love a Mystery* can be satisfactorily undertaken by selective audition. Confronted with the ruins that are the vaults of old-time radio drama, however, today's listener must be prepared to supply the occasional voussoir. Only six of the forty-odd sequences have survived virtually intact, albeit in omnibus editions that eliminate most of the introductory narratives. They are the 1949-52 East Coast revivals of "The Thing That Cries in the Night," "Bury Your Dead, Arizona," "The Million Dollar Curse," "Temple of Vampires," "Battle of the Century," and "The Hermit of San Felipe Atabapo." Of these, "The Thing That Cries in the Night," a fifteen-part sequence first broadcast on NBC between November 20 and December 8, 1939, and revived on MBS between **Halloween and November 18, 1949**, is particularly successful in realizing--and indeed foregrounding--the medium's neo-gothic possibilities. Had it been conceived at Strawberry Hill, the sequence might have induced Horace Walpole to remark that "[t]error, the author's principal engine, prevents the story from ever languishing; and it is so often contrasted by pity, that the mind is kept up in a constant vicissitude of interesting passions."³²

"Somebody slashed me": Sounded Minds, Bodied Sounds

Its frame narrative aside, "The Thing That Cries in the Night" opens with the humming of propellers, suggesting the interior of a commercial aircraft. Jack (voiced by

Russell Thorson), Doc (Jim Boles) and Reggie (Tony Randall) are once again on the go, returning to Los Angeles to enjoy the reward money from a previous assignment. They are surprised by a black limousine, “a block long,” waiting for them at the airport. Unable to resist the pretty “armful of girl” in the back seat, Doc, whose drawl is just shy of caricature, exclaims: “Let’s climb in. What are we waiting for?” The rhetorical question serves as the cliffhanger of an introductory installment designed as an epilogue to the previous sequence and as a reminder that the central characters are not, as Doc has it, “a bunch of doggone heroes,” but common Joes hankering after adventure.

To Morse, the “tag situation of a continued serial” was less significant than characterization. “A good tag,” he explained,

is not the cream off the top of the milk. It’s not the daub of jelly on a loaf of stale bread. An audience who has to listen through twelve minutes of dull routine for the “flash” finish isn’t going to be a listener long. The tag is the logical conclusion of eleven or twelve minutes of delightful and satisfying dialogue and situation. But it’s more than that! It tops off what has gone before and at the same time promises infinitely more tomorrow. Not in so many words, not by making the announcer say, “Listen tomorrow for the most hair-raising and exciting blah, blah.” That doesn’t excite a listener’s desire to be beside his radio tomorrow. But a subtle, thought-provoking, emotion-arousing tag *can* rouse that desire.³³

Doc Long’s emphatic “What are we waiting for?” is such a “logical conclusion.” Having spent the duration of his flight to Burbank with his head in the clouds, trying to relive his latest exploits by devouring a newspaper article that refers to him as “the modern Tarzan,” Long suffers the humiliation of being cut down to size by an unimpressed air hostess. “Pooh!” she taunts him, “My folks live on a mountain ranch up in Washington. My mother scares mountain lions out of her chicken yard by shushing her apron at them.” Now Doc is eager to regain the “he-fighter” status that has turned into yesterday’s news.

Not only does letting characters “talk a little longer about a little less” increase realism and encourage emotional engagement, as radio playwright True Boardman suggested,³⁴ but, in the economics of radio writing, such comic deflation also counteracts the potential erosion of a serial’s thrill value. To characters so puerile and vulnerable, hopping into an unsolicited auto may be as hazardous as hunting werewolves and vampires.

In chapter two, Jack, Doc, and Reggie find themselves in the mansion of Randolph Martin, a host who doesn’t deign to greet them. The house, as Jack describes it, is “overflowing with the refinements and niceties of an old family,” with “signs of the family tree almost everywhere.” Before they can inspect the premises further, the three adventurers are approached by a distraught young woman who appeals to them in a tremulous voice: “Look. Somebody slashed me.” She does not identify her attacker, but only whispers that “they” did it, and that “they” are trying to kill her. Having dressed her wounds, Jack observes that it is “apparent that the family tree is beginning to show signs of decay.” “Rotten clean down to the root,” Doc agrees. Without being offered any descriptive details, an enumeration of artifacts that might serve to constitute a neo-gothic milieu, the listener is nevertheless introduced to an environment in stark contrast both to the settings of the previous episode (plane, airport, limousine) and the urban or nouveau riche surroundings of a sprawling metropolis.

The exsanguinated one (played by radio stalwart Mercedes McCambridge) is Charity, one of three sisters living in the mansion of Randolph Martin: Faith (the “armful” in the limousine), Hope, and Charity. “Whoever heard of naming girls Faith, Hope, and Charity?” Doc protests, “Sounds like a Texas camp meeting.” There is also a brother, Job, the three comrades are being told, as Jack dresses the young woman’s wounds. Morse’s mystery is thus being set up as an elaborate onomastic guessing game for the listener, namely whether nomen is omen, whether the Christian cloaks of said Martins truly suit their wearers, virtuous and long-suffering, or ought to be considered in a Pickwickian sense. That the young woman begs to be called “Cherry” suggests at least a nominal

rebellion against the impositions or impostures of a “rotten” lineage. Yet perhaps, in keeping with the Victorian epigram, Charity by any other name is covering a multitude of sins.

Suddenly, the air is filled with the fierce cries of an infant, followed by sounds of a body taking a tumble. The noise subsides. A voice, stern, elderly, and female demands to know what happened. Before the perplexed guests can utter her name, the woman introduces herself as “Randolph Martin. And I need help. I am having granddaughter trouble.” Loudly and shrilly, the Godbox (as organs were sometimes called in producer jargon) signals the end of the second installment. The *Valse Triste* plays on while the announcer promises that the “further transcribed adventures of Jack, Doc, and Reggie will come to you tomorrow at the same hour.” Violent deeds and nominal virtues, a “blooming infant” and a fading matriarch, material tokens of cultural refinement and, as Jack has it, “the stench of a decaying family tree that’s permeating the environment”—the listener is confronted with a series of dramatic opposites that turn into paradox as Faith Martin, the self-proclaimed “vulgarian of the family,” reveals that “there’s not a baby in this house. There hasn’t been for years.” It is the eponymous “thing,” the “creeping, unhealthy menace” Jack sensed from the start.

Charity appears relieved that she is not the only one hearing the “thing.” In a tremulous whisper she insists at the close of chapter three that “every time it cries, something horrible happens.” Should we take her word for it? As long as even the probability of the implied causal link is in dispute—and the young woman’s sanity seems doubtful indeed—the listener is likely to associate the infant’s bawling, this most innocent and earthy of noises, with acts homicidal or preternatural. As Harmon points out, the technique of foretelling through non-verbal sounds is characteristic of Morse’s thrillers. In “The Monster in the Mansion,” for instance, an unseen killer plays an organ rendition of Brahms’s “Lullaby” to announce each murder. In “Bride of the Werewolf” it is a mausoleum bell that tolls death.³⁵ That the herald of death may be an *infant*, a creature

literally “not able to speak,” is a playful challenge of commonly held beliefs about the limitations of the medium, namely its dependence on the spoken word, and radio playwrights’ consequent exaltation of voice and diction.

When Martin Esslin, who headed BBC’s radio drama division in the 1960s and ‘70s, argued that such “drama” was “pre-eminently a *writer’s* medium,” since it relied “almost entirely on *words*,”³⁶ he expressed the BBC’s auralty-as-orality bias against which Carr fought when he returned to England to revive his CBS *Suspense* thrillers, a bias that was somewhat less pronounced among radio producers in the US. Yet even though one less-than-scientific survey of American broadcast plays concluded that, between 1935 and 1945, there was a “definite trend toward the reduction of the number of words of dialogue used in the thirty-minute radio dramatic scripts,” Friedrich Knilli’s critique of the traditional German *Hörspiel* as verbal art (“Wortkunstwerk”), its overemphasis of the word (“Verwortung”) at the expense of aural play (“Schall-Spiel”) is applicable to the melodramas aired on network radio as well.³⁷ The sound effects used in most of these plays are chiefly expository or atmospheric; they add character, rather than being permitted to become one. An announcer’s scene-setting “This is Illyria,” for instance, is augmented or amplified by the sound of waves splashing onto a shore. To prevent listener confusion, such indicial and incidental sounds rarely speak for themselves, but become backcloth or sound-carpet; as such, they are often explained in dialogue or narrative and, having served their purpose, fade (or go “under”) so as not to supersede the actor’s voice as the principal carrier of meaning. In one chapter of “Secret Passage to Death” (Dec. 8, 1941), Morse’s commented on the artifice of these exhausted techniques by sending Jack, Doc, and Reggie on horseback across changing terrain and surfaces (including sand, mountain stream, gravel road, rock cliffs, and swinging bridge) in a sequence lasting over three and a half minutes (or about one third of the time allotted to the dramatic portion of each installment), during which the three heroes are reduced to a few shouts, nearly drowned out by the clopping of hoofs.

In radio playwriting and engineering, considerations of verisimilitude were often paramount. Producers went out of their way--or at least to the Barnum and Bailey Circus at Madison Square Garden--to capture realistic effects, such as sounds suggestive of a chariot race, which were deemed necessary for a twenty-five minute version of *Ben Hur* (Apr. 26, 1940).³⁸ Even noted experimenters like sound technician and *Columbia Workshop* director Irving Reis, whose aural "abstractions" included the "ringing of silence" and the "crying" of fog, were often obsessive in their attempts to achieve and heighten the realism of broadcast plays. To this end, Reis attached a microphone to a stethoscope auscultating an athlete's chest for the *Workshop*'s version of "Tell-Tale Heart" (July 11, 1937) and hired actual New York prize fighters to enhance an adaptation of Hemingway's "Fifty Grand" (July 18, 1937).³⁹ By the mid-1940s, both manual and recorded sounds had long become standardized, the war years having been the last major period of aural innovation; even an intriguing invention like the Sonovox--a patented device that could invest foghorns, trains and police sirens, or any musical instrument, with human speech--was being exploited primarily for commercial use.⁴⁰ In addition to routinely performed doorslams and footsteps, producers of radio thrillers increasingly availed themselves of libraries filled with "effects records," which "soon bec[a]me irritatingly familiar to regular listeners."⁴¹ Most overused among the effects to which Esslin refers as "aural clichés" or "acoustic ideograms" were howling winds and crickets (the indices of night), as well as action-accentuating noises of cracking bones, ricocheting bullets or the "lovely patty-cake of fist hitting flesh," sounds that effected little more than the ridicule of the press.⁴²

Morse's serial, on the other hand, was appreciated and remembered for its considerably more evocative sound design, as McCambridge was reminded during an encounter with a "typical" radio drama enthusiast in Atlanta, circa 1980:

He waved his arms in full-sweeping gestures and made nasal-screeching sounds. He was describing "the giant killer bats in that cave in South

America” on the *I Love a Mystery* program. That show was broadcast in 1943! Maybe earlier!

How could I tell him that the killer bats were nothing more than a sound man flipping strips of canvas in front of a microphone, and the screeching sounds were made by twisting a cork on a thin layer of gravel in a cookie tin? And that those of us in the dark vault of the canyon-cave were really four actors standing around a mike in the old CBS studios on Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood.

It always amazes me that people all over the country have retained for so long and so vividly the visions they themselves created merely from sounds [. . .]. They don’t remember what they saw on TV night before last, but they remember forever what they heard on radio!⁴³

Although the East Coast run was comparatively slipshot in its execution of aural effects, *I Love a Mystery* succeeded in setting itself apart from thrillers that primarily employed familiar sounds to create spatial relationships--the three-dimensional realism achieved through changes in reverberation and implements imitative of movements across various surfaces--and melodramas that resorted to extra-diegetic, mood-enhancing musical crutches, dialogue support of which “The Thing That Cries in the Night” is entirely free.

The most memorable sounds in radio thrillers are non-commutable; for such noises, a conventionalized visual equivalent is not readily available in the listener’s mind. Either the mental encyclopedia of the physical world does not yield a perfect match for the sound (of a cavern swarming with “giant killer bats,” for instance), or the explications offered in the words of narrators and protagonists do not seem an echo to the sense as listeners are made aware that an infant’s crying may not confirm the presence of a crying infant. “How interesting it would be,” Tim Crook speculated some six decades after Morse’s series first took the air,

if the anticipated “realistic, confirmatory effect” was designed to do the

exact opposite. This concept has not been explored enough in audio drama largely because writers and producers have not had the courage to represent alienation, dislocation and the loneliness of the human condition by using sound to “cast the anchor” and deliberately render the listener “adrift.”⁴⁴

Without any existentialist pretensions, *I Love a Mystery* accomplishes just that by rendering the homely sounds of the nursery *unheimlich*. In the event of listening, the infantile transpires to be infernal noise, issuing forth and permeating the air like a miasmic presence until it exhausts our reason--or until reason discharges it as exhaust. Uncanny as the echo of a guitar and the “sweet,” disembodied voice accompanying it, which, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, are said to “warn people of their death,”⁴⁵ Morse’s nocturnal ululations turn character, their interpretation becomes plot.

Sonance, the “thing” *qua* sound, is never in doubt; the listener hears what is perceived by the adventurers, and indeed everyone dwelling in the Martin household. Faced with the task of tracing and interpreting the rug rat oracle, the audience of *I Love a Mystery*, although never addressed, is generally in the presence of at least one of the adventurers, with Jack serving as their reliable guide, Reggie as their equal partner, and Doc--who offers the theory that the crying “thing” must be a “baby ghost”--as a companion who comforts by virtue of his intellectual inferiority. Since the listener experiences the terrors in the mansion in the company of the three protagonists once the narrator has dropped them off on the premises, Morse’s serial does not offer what Terry Heller calls safe, “distant terror.” Heller asserts that in

most works of the Gothic tradition terror is the experience of characters. The implied reader’s role is that of sympathetic onlooker. The general situation in these stories is familiar. A reasonably interesting character undergoes a series of adventures, many of which are terrifying [. . .]. In the process of these adventures, the character’s isolation increases, he or she

comes to feel that the world that was once a home has become an alien mystery, finds his or her reason threatened, and either is victorious over opposing forces or is defeated and perhaps destroyed. This general story line shares, in all its many variations in all types of tale of terror, the intent of arousing highly intense suspense.⁴⁶

The very sensation of *hearing* the voices of Jack, Doc, and Reggie, of being directly exposed to the sounds which they, while enjoying the ostensible benefit of vision, can neither place nor translate, draws the listener into a presence, a here and now, that a printed record of past exploits cannot quite approximate. Thus, Morse's terror is decidedly close, and it is safe only as long as one of the listener's radio companions remains nearby.

Apart from its introductory narration or lead-in, which Morse called "the greatest bugaboo the serial writer has to face,"⁴⁷ *I Love a Mystery* dispenses with those storytelling techniques of radio drama that stress a story's pastness or enforce the listener's quiescence to maximize instead the audience's sense of active engagement in an unfolding event. Retrospective narration, in which the narrator who sets up a story becomes, in flashbacks, one of its experiencers, is rejected in favor of *dialogue recall*, in which a participant in a discussion or an experiencer of an event relates to other characters what the radio listeners have already overheard or experienced themselves. Whereas chapter three, for example, draws the listener into Jack's conference with grandmother Martin, Charity and Faith, the subsequent installment reunites the adventurers, with Jack relating the results of this discussion to his friends. The occasional separations of the main characters and the recapitulation of dialogue it requires have obvious benefits for the commercial sponsor, as they protract story lines (while simultaneously reducing the number of performers) and counter a gradual decline in ratings by permitting even infrequent listeners to re-enter the story with relative ease. Yet unlike the announcer's synopsis at the beginning of each chapter--a "necessary evil demanded by the sponsor and

the agency representing the sponsor”⁴⁸--the hearsay technique also manages to transform rehearsal itself into a dramatic event.

Giving regular listeners an opportunity to share in the act of disclosure and to assess to what degree a character-turned-editor, in this case Jack, refashions the plot by omitting or emphasizing certain details, Morse turns the device Erik Barnouw refers to as a *proxy listener*--one who, like the radio audience, receives a story for the first time and, unable to advance additional information, is generally reduced to an occasional interjection⁴⁹--into a participatory event of *informed listening*, in which the listener of *I Love a Mystery* is temporarily superior to the listener *in* the program. Taking the place of Doc and Reggie, the loyal auditor accompanying Jack is rewarded by becoming a privileged secret sharer, as well as the judge of the tale, the teller, and those being told in the very event of sharing. Hearing Jack tell the truth diplomatically--as he appeases his companions that the reason for their exclusion was grandmother Martin's misgivings about the virtue of her wards in the presence of handsome strangers--draws us still closer to our trustworthy guide and sets us up for the disconcerting moment of withdrawal.

The listener's sense of intimacy and immediacy is reinforced by a general congruity of *Erzählzeit* and *erzählte Zeit*. Each fifteen-minute chapter, as Harmon points out, generally constituted one seamless scene without cuts and transitions. Some contractions notwithstanding, Morse's characters, for the most part “did no more than could actually be done in about a quarter hour.”⁵⁰ This heightens the verisimilitude of the play, which unfolds daily as if audiences were participating in the events occurring within a few minutes in the lives of the three friends. But what can Jack, Doc, and Reggie actually *do* within the brief period allotted for their exploits? Like the responsive listener, the eavesdropping explorers of the dark and secret-harboring mansion are forced to re-act, depending almost exclusively on aural and oral clues provided by none-too-reliable victims, witnesses, and suspects: the “thing,” a disembodied voice foretelling doom; Charity, an apparent phonophobe suffering persecution anxiety; Hope, a nymphomaniac

likely to reveal all but the unadulterated truth; Faith, a tattletale seemingly intent on provoking, rather than informing; Job, a feckless dipsomaniac ostensibly oblivious of his surroundings; and grandmother Martin, a grim matron determined to annihilate whatever tarnishes the family name. “There ain’t no sense to nothing,” Doc grumbles in chapter seven, responding to the want of empirical evidence which threatens to stall the investigation. To him, such lack of certainty temporarily diminishes the excitement of being introduced into a household in which “all these female women are running around in flimsy wisps of lace, wanting to be rescued.”

Who really wants to be rescued--and who is in pursuit? Morse’s secret agents--the investigators and instruments of secrets--are never quite within the law (and, when on the lam themselves, as in “Bury Your Dead, Arizona,” decidedly without). They are not playing by the book, but by ear, as becomes apparent when, after the discovery of the first victim (the family chauffeur), the generally unimpeachable Jack implicates himself by burning Hope’s blood-stained dress in an attempt to protect his employer. Any criminal investigation by the police is held off until the murder of Job in chapter nine (the first murder listeners, along with the three soldiers of fortune, are privileged to witness). Chapter ten begins just after the police have left; and by chapter fourteen, when the house is completely surrounded by voiceless and ineffectual plainclothes detectives, Reggie, noticing a creeping shadow, knocks one of them unconscious.

To those listeners who align themselves with the benighted Doc in an effort to solve the case of a terrorized maiden whose mind does not appear to be altogether sound, “The Thing That Cries in the Night” may be little more than a well-wrought if increasingly byzantine mystery of the *Gaslight* school. The audience, of course, is encouraged--and indeed likely--to look upon Doc’s momentary loss of *brio* as an act of misreading and to side with an intellectually equal partner such as Reggie, who declares the situation, albeit unsolvable, to be “deucedly interesting.” Doc’s momentary frustration constitutes only one of several reading instructions *I Love a Mystery*, like most tales in the gothic tradition,

offers its audience, namely that the reward for *teloscopy* is often no more than the revelation of a piece of waxwork (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*), a preposterous incident of cross-dressing (*Villette*), or a mere laundry list (*Northanger Abbey*). To a true sucker for mystery, the real predicament of being assigned the task of putting a stop to “The Thing That Cries in the Night” may very well lie in being reduced to serving as pacifier. “Sound exists only when it is going out of existence,” Ong reminds us; there is “no way to stop sound and have sound.”⁵¹ It shares this transient quality with the fantastic.

“I don’t quite know where you are”: A Matter of Blind Faith

If, in the *Hörspiel*, the sound’s the thing, and if words are, as Ong has it, “basically and irreformably sounds,” to what extent should such an art form satisfy the audience’s impulse to give a concrete shape to the unseen? Does the “Thing That Cries in the Night,” the menacing sound that creeps through the air and reaches the cartilaginous funnel of our ears, materialize only when traced to its point of origin? What is the relationship between sound and substance? In his seminal study of wireless aesthetics, Rudolf Arnheim contended that acoustic art only “seems much more sensorily defective and incomplete than the other arts—because it excludes the most important sense, that of sight,” but that it lacks nothing, since “the essence of broadcasting consists just in the fact that it alone offers unity by aural means.” Arnheim insisted that the

wireless artist must develop a mastery of the limitations of the aural. The test of his talent is whether he can produce a perfect effect with aural things, not whether his broadcast is capable of inspiring his listeners to supplement the missing visual image as realistically and vividly as he can. Just the contrary: if it demands such supplementing it is bad, because it does not succeed with its own resources, but has a bitty effect.⁵²

Few non-musical compositions of popular appeal ever lived up to such a standard; but in contradistinction to many dramatic programs on the air whose appeal lay precisely in the

picture-this approach of supplementary sound and narration and the if-only-you-could-see-us nowness of the star-studded spectacle, *I Love a Mystery*, which was not staged before a studio audience, rarely gives listeners the impression that sound is not quite the genuine article.

Considering that, as a time-bound art, the radio play makes great demands on the listener's memory, it may seem surprising how many episodic radio thrillers were architecturally whodunits, murder mysteries hinging on inconsistent testimonies a listener is called upon to reexamine and compare as the plot moves forward, and on visual clues such as a suspect's sinistrality or color-blindness, conveyed in dialogue or narration. Attempting to detract from narrative insufficiencies rooted in the inadequacies of the medium to accommodate the whodunit page-turner--whose pages we can, after all, turn forth *and* back--the scribes of the airwaves frequently squandered opportunities to "develop a mastery of the limitations of the aural," so that the success of the detective genre on American radio must be attributed not to its narrative and dramatic techniques, but its trappings, to the one-liners delivered by the fast-talking private eye (or the Nick-and-Nora screwball banter of male detective and female sidekick) and the aforementioned line-up of marquee-valued voice talent that gave it life. "Radio," David R. Mackey remarked in 1951, "provides a wonderful medium for the true mystery melodrama [. . .]. It does seem too bad that many of [them] have been replaced with pseudo-psychological pieces and run-of-the-mill whodunits."⁵³

In its approach to the medium, Morse's thriller could hardly be farther removed from a program like *Mr. Chameleon*, for instance, a crime melodrama that made its debut during the 1948-1949 season. To the theme of "Masquerade," the show's eponymous crime-fighter keeps disguising himself to elude his adversaries. Each instance of camouflage is described in such detail that, as Hext remarked, it threatens to "hinder the progress of the plot."⁵⁴ The listener is reduced to matching each word with its corresponding image, dressing up the hero with the clothes laid out for him. Morse, on

the other hand, avoids privileging the visible. Cherry's stigmata, the only ocular proof that the "thing" may be real, are dismissed as potentially self-inflicted. In chapter eleven, Hope and Charity struggle for a gun, the weapon used in the murder of their brother Job. The gun goes off and Hope is wounded. When Doc, the only eyewitness, relates the scene in the next installment in another instance of *dialogue recall*, he is unable to determine who pulled the trigger. And even when it performs a "striptease" right before our ears, as it does in chapter ten, in which a trail of clothing, "feminine, lacy, and perfumed," leads to a bound and gagged Cherry in the furnace room, "The Thing That Cries in the Night" is a strip show that teases precisely by setting a scene that could not have been fleshed out for public display, at least not on Hays-coded celluloid or commercial television.

In chapter eleven, Cherry is carried to her quarters, a room she claims to have "always hated." Apparently about as comforting as the "red-room" at Gateshead, it was once wallpapered with images from Mother Goose, figures that seemed to spring to life in the darkness. When asked to return to the events of the night, Cherry tremulously relates being abducted and taken to the furnace room by a faceless creature hovering about in a blood-red hood ("red, like when you stick your finger and the blood comes out"), lining the imagination of her listeners with illustrations of concrete horrors which, she insists, have "got to go on and on and on until there isn't any of us left." All this she claims to "know." "Do you, actually? Or is it just your belief?" Jack asks. To Cherry "it's the same thing"; she reminds her listeners that she hasn't "been wrong about anything [she] said was going to happen." It remains uncertain, however, whether Cherry's retrospective foretelling suggests second sight or revision; and notwithstanding their emotive force, her spoken words, whether referring to past, present, or future, are not readily believed.

Having encouraged this outburst, Jack surprises Cherry, his partners, and the listener with a seemingly unrelated question: "Do you know a girl named Pauline West?" Cherry is unsure, an uncertainty expressing itself in delayed responses and intervals of silence. The flush of evocative images is stanchd by a proper noun from which no

definitive mental picture can yet be derived. Jack explains that he read the name on a casting sheet he found next to Cherry's body, and that Pauline West appears to be a radio actress. "I never heard of her before," Doc protests, admitting to being an avid listener of radio drama, "in love with all the women on the air" (as Jack puts it, mockingly). A "couple of 'm I'd like to write dialogue for," Doc confesses; and the "words [he'd] put into those babies' mouths'd make the radio censors turn over in their graves." Apparently, this modern Tarzan is *au fait* with both Hollywood *and* Vine, opting for verbal fantasy over veritable flesh (a fictional character forced to mouth his words, rather than a real woman stripped and speechless at his feet), thus challenging and outwitting censors and sponsors in the tradition of Hollywood's innuendo-juggling, production code-shackled writers.

The reference to the obscure radio actress is more than an instance of an author's checked *glossa* reveling in the shelter of a cheek. We are reminded just how near the House of Martin stands to the edge of the burgeoning motion picture colony, whose scandalmongers and namedroppers were once fed by the family's disloyal (and recently liquidated) chauffeur. Now the name of Martin is threatened by Hollywood refuse, a nobody who could not make a name for herself. Reminiscent of Stoker's Lucy Westenra, the name of the unknown intruder seems similarly allegorical, yet far less perspicuous. Perhaps hers is the voice of the new West, the impersonal voice of Hollywood, a world of Jesuit morals and Jewish finance insinuating itself into the old Protestant homes of America with messages at once irreproachable and corrupt--a far cry from the homespun parlor amusements of yore. Perhaps hers is a voice of an outcast recasting herself as an avenger exacting retribution for being reduced to hawking her wares in a marketplace so dehumanized in its production line approach to the performing arts that it is interested solely in her imitations of bawling infants--a faux crier like actresses Madeleine Pierce, Sarah Fussell, or Leone Ledoux, who was heard in Morse's *One Man's Family*. Perhaps hers is a voice like Paulina's in The Winter's Tale, the voice of a secretly scheming principal who pulls the wool over the eyes of those short-sighted enough to insist on the

supremacy of visual signs. Failing to materialize, the nominal one remains a hovering signifier, becoming as delphic as the ominous “thing” with which “Pauline West” is now associated.

Jack is convinced that Pauline is at the heart of the perils encroaching upon the household of Grandmother Martin. Indeed, he claims to have untangled the mystery, but decides not to share his thoughts with his companions--and, by extension, with the listener. Refusing to withdraw, despite Grandmother Martin's attempt to dismiss her inquisitive retainers, Jack leaves cryptic instructions (such as peeling off the three top layers of the wallpaper in Cherry's room), to be carried out in the case of his demise. Having sent all to their rooms, Jack remains behind in the sepulchral stillness of the deserted library to confront the “thing.” Knowing less than our guide--who, for the first time, is keeping a secret from the audience--we cling to his every words, trying to determine whether Jack is facing a deathly adversary or dead air, whether the verbal sparring in the repository of words spells calculated strike or desperate shadow-boxing:

I don't quite know where you are. You may be right here in the room with me. You may be watching from some panel I don't know about or one of the windows or doors. I don't know. All I know is that you've been listening to everything that's been said in this room. I know you were there. . . . You may be the murderer. I don't know. But whether you are or not, you're a very unhealthy person. You're afraid. You feed on darkness. Your thoughts are lustful and violent. You're the power of evil in this house. You're not only cowardly and violent and evil, which are much worse because you are a woman. When a woman's bad she can be so much more wicked than a man. Strange, isn't it, that anything which can be the greatest instrument for good in the world can also be the greatest instrument for wickedness. I feel sorry for you. It wasn't your fault in the beginning. I think of all the people in this house you have the

greatest potentialities for greatness. You could have been just as great in the realm of goodness as you are superior in the realm of evil. . . . It's been fascinating working against you, and in a way it seems a pity that you're at the end of your rope. I don't know when that end will come. That'll depend on you. An hour, day, not much more than that. And I want to tell you that I . . .

At this moment, Jack is interrupted by Doc, who staggers into the room, stammers that he has been hit over the head, and collapses. The “thing” begins to make itself heard, and Jack cries out for Reggie. The listener's inability to determine whether Jack's words constitute a soliloquy or the intelligible portion of a dialogue with an inaudible, stealthy addressee make this the most unsettling scene of the sequence. In most radio plays, a character's silence denotes absence or death. Since many bodily sounds were deemed unsuitable for broadcasting--and permissible ones, like screams, snores or sneezes, signalled unsound bodies and absent minds--the characters of radio drama had to speak to remain alive and well in the consciousness of the auditor; otherwise, as Barnouw cautioned writers of broadcast dialogue, they would soon vanish “into a cloud of non-existence.”⁵⁵ Sending his heroes and his listeners in search of a missing body--now bawling, now lurking--Morse subverted these conventions, thereby heightening uncertainty and suspense. After all, if the unseen “thing” has existence in sound as well as silence, how is it to be quelled?

The fear of silence--feared, to be sure, by none more than the broadcasters--precludes calm reasoning, and what follows in the penultimate chapter is a nocturnal free-for-all during which the stuffy air of the Martin mansion is filled with much mindless clamor and sense-numbing chloroform (the weapon of choice for Morse's ethereal adversaries). Even in the fifteenth and final installment of the sequence, Morse postpones the prosaic business of making sense; and instead of explaining away the mystery of the voice without a body (and solving the case of the name without a face), he leaves the

audience without a leg to stand on. This is achieved in the only montage of the sequence, during which listeners are cut off, albeit briefly, from their three companions. Determined to prevent the disclosure of Pauline West's identity from becoming "something for the newspapers to gloat over," Fay takes matters in her own hands and eludes our guides by locking them up. As they attempt to escape their imprisonment, the perspective shifts, and, without warning (a fade, for instance, or a musical bridge), listeners find themselves at the mercy of Fay, who grabs her frightened sister Cherry, rushes her to the attic and, playing a seductive Mrs. Danvers to Cherry's disoriented Rebecca, lures her closer to the edge of the roof. Our sudden incorporeality as we pass through the obstructing door conflicts with our sense of being there in the flesh, a verisimilitude that has been, up to this point, the foundation of the entire sequence. Just as Cherry attempts to countervail, the voices of the two women fade; the scene shifts once more.

Having witnessed the escape of our unwitting guides, we are subjected to their decision to search for Fay downstairs, until they spot the two women through the "glass roof of the sunroom." In a scene that makes a cruel mockery of the "look-see" dialogue frequently employed by inept radio playwrights, the hapless observers feverishly describe what we already know, namely that Cherry and Fay are engaged in a parlous struggle above. The crash that follows is a final assault on what Arnheim referred to as the "dangerous illusion that seeing is knowledge."⁵⁶ Generating suspense like a Hitchcockian episode of informed but impotent spectatorship, instead of serving as mere ellipsis, the climactic montage does not simply shatter the Martin mansion or silence the "Thing That Cries in the Night"; by rendering permeable what was believed to be solid, it corrupts the very architecture of the maze. Listeners regain their footing with the sobering realization that, far from having been granted momentary transparency, they were forced into dissolve so close to the resolution. "No, no, it shouldn't have happened that way," Doc moans, sounding as incredulous and dispirited as Herbert Morrison at the sight of the Hindenburg explosion.

Leaving behind a desolate, decrepit mansion whose inmates now rest elsewhere (Job, Cherry, and the chauffeur having died; Hope, Fay, and grandmother Martin requiring hospitalization for a bullet wound, a fractured skull, and a broken leg, respectively), our “doggone” watchdogs move on with their tails between their legs. “The House of Martin has fallen,” Jack concludes, having found little pleasure or reward in the lifting of the veil. Jack explains that “Pauline West” was a pseudonym Cherry adopted during her stint as a baby impersonator on radio, her talents as an actress having been deemed insubstantial. Realizing that Job had silenced the hush money-demanding chauffeur who threatened to divulge his secret (he “hate[d] girls”), Cherry shot her brother to save him from the law, and, having always been a “nervous, excitable child” whose “mind absorbed the [figures on her wallpaper] to the point where she could never get rid of them,” lapsed into dementia.

Thus ends the story of a superannuated matriarch who, dreading the thought that her graceless charges might supply fodder for Hollywood’s yellow journalism, appoints a triumvirate of headline-making adventurers, only to find the papered-over defects of her kin exposed and her home consumed by the very sweepings of Tinseltown. The surprising glass roof montage, the most cinematic technique employed in the sequence, drives home that neither Morse’s characters nor their creators (including their transcribing listeners) can entirely ignore or escape the influences of the motion picture industry and its web of multimediacy. Indeed, the botched exorcism performed in the mansion of Randolph Martin rehearses the fate of the American radio play, a sound art whose integrity and autonomy were undermined by the spirit of William Randolph Hearst, the multimedia potentates governing Lewis Mumford’s “Paper Dream City.” According to Mumford, the modern urbanite “lives, not in the real world, but in a shadow world projected around him at every moment by means of paper and celluloid,” a world in which what is “visible and real” is “only what has been transferred to paper.”⁵⁷ While the reliance on the ocular is

rebuffed by the eponymous “Thing That Cries in the Night,” efforts to controvert the supremacy of the printed word or image are ultimately doomed to come to naught.

In his story of Charity Martin and Pauline West, the secret career and inglorious demise of a radio voice and its bodied double, Morse resorts to the familiar if for aural play unlikely contrivance of ventriloquism, an act of elocutionary dislocation that serves as a metaphor for the depersonalizing business of commercial broadcasting and its body of tongue-tied artists and scribes who, generally barred from speaking their mind and forced to mind their speech, stomached ignominy while devising various modes of indirection. Prior to Charity’s mental power failure, two of radio’s highest-rated attractions had promoted voice projection to a figure of transgressive empowerment. Naughty Charlie McCarthy aside, radio’s premier voicecaster was, of course, Lamont Cranston, a “technocrat magician” whose “clipped, telegraphic speech” and metallic, filtered voice, as Jason Loviglio has pointed out, reverberate with the “idiom of electronic communication.”⁵⁸

A “student of science” determined to auscultate the evil lurking in the hearts of men, Cranston is a formidable wireless operator, “never seen, only heard,” as “haunting to superstitious minds as a ghost, as inevitable as a guilty conscience.” In this Cranston’s alter ego bears a fleeting resemblance to Du Pont, Emily’s secret admirer in The Mysteries of Udolpho, who, reasoning that the “most impious men are often the most superstitious,” casts his voice to awe his enemies “from the commission of the crime [he] dreaded.” While ostensibly intent on demonstrating that the “weed of crime bears bitter fruit,” however, The Shadow blows his cover each time he emits one of his menacing laughs, the series’s famous signature, thereby betraying himself to be a merciless eye-for-an-ear avenger who relishes the very fruit he pronounces unsavory. Unlike The Shadow, neither Charity Martin nor hapless lover Du Pont are rendered invincible or superheroic by their vocal powers. “The Thing That Cries in the Night” recalls instead the disgrace of Carwin, the bilquist, Charles Brockden Brown’s “double-tongued deceiver” who, “for the sake of

creating a mysterious dread,” took to the air and “made [himself] a villain.”⁵⁹ In the mystery of Pauline West, the dark art of casting voices, narrowly or broadly, is exposed as a duplicitous act, an impersonation in whose impersonal nature we can descry the corruption of communication and the unwholesome fragmentations of modern life.

“The gothic,” Maggie Kilgour suggests

gives us an ancestor for our current obsessive self-criticism and self-scrutiny [. . .]. Like other ironic and parodic art forms, it appeals to a postmodern sensibility because of its [. . .] blatant confession of its own inability to create anew, or originate.⁶⁰

More than any inventory of mad monks and ruinous castles, it is this reflexivity--the rehearsal of its dependency on motion pictures and magazine fiction, its belatedness and transience in the presence of talkies and television--the latter having presented its first dramatic anthology, *The Television Ghost*, in 1931⁶¹--that defines the radio gothic of the 1930s, '40s, and early '50s. In the words of Bertolt Brecht, radio was an antediluvian invention (“vorsintflutliche Erfindung”).⁶² “[D]reamlike, precognitive” and “intimate,” it was, as Roy Soderbjerg, the transcendental tinkerer of Garrison Keillor’s *WLT: A Radio Romance*, remarks, a “raw primitive gorgeous device that unfortunately had been discovered too late. In the proper order of things, it should have come somewhere between the wheel and the printing press.”⁶³ Soon-to-be junkyard-relegated air-crafters like Morse appear to have drawn on their anxieties about the medium’s belatedness and commodification, the ephemerality and marginality of their work, as well as their own lack of artistic and financial independence in order to fashion modally gothic and at times subversive performances that, as in the case of “The Thing That Cries in the Night,” demonize the very source of their subsistence.

Morse’s serial thus translates to the medium of radio what Garrett Stewart observes about late Victorian gothic thrillers like *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), works that generate not a terror of

the text, but a “carefully controlled gothic of reading,” reflexive works that “unload the burden of psychological disturbance from content onto form,” as a result of which audiences are “made to fear the lurking morbidity of [their] reading.” Yet whereas the “metatextual gothic of reading” instituted by fin-de-siecle writers arguably had a “recuperative aesthetic mission” to erase the tarnish of “rank escapism,” the gothic radio play, which was always looked upon as “rank,” did not develop such a shielding aesthetics; if it had any armor, it was its awareness that it could *not* be saved.

Conscripting its eager listeners for combat on the audio-visual battlefield--a combat staged and suffered within their reverberating bodies--while intent, as all commercial art must be, on remaining in the “healthiest possible circulation” itself, a serial like *I Love a Mystery* inscribes upon its sponsor-reflecting surface the evidence of its own pathology.⁶⁴

Most late-twentieth century readings of gothic romances lack an awareness of the battle of the senses played out in these fictions, of the stealthy infiltrations and hostile takeovers of the aural realm. An evening with *The Shadow*, the Whistler, or Morse’s “adventure-thrillers” might inspire critics to ventilate their studies of Radcliffe’s “cinematic word-paintings” or their “association of melodrama with elemental contrasts of darkness and light”⁶⁵ with synesthetic admixtures like Radcliffe’s “*picturesque* sounds” or connections between optical illusion and auricular substantiation, gothic preoccupations that are as central to radio terror as they are to the eighteenth-century gothic novel. After all, “mystery,” as a bit of etymological probing reveals, has its roots in *muein*, “to close the eyes,” as well as *mu*, a “slight sound with closed lips; of imitative origin.”⁶⁶ By listening to Morse’s mysteries it becomes apparent just how well the heirs of Montoni and Zanoni were served by the legacy of Marconi.

Both the disquieting narratives of the romantic age, an age that rehearsed the uneasy shift from phonic to graphic culture in the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” being “recollected in tranquillity,” and the scripted or phono-graphic broadcast fiction aired during the second quarter of the twentieth century--Ong’s age of

“secondary,” self-conscious orality--often play upon our brittle faith in ocular and typographic proofs in torturously self-conscious performances. Whether posing as translated medieval documents or presented as epistolary narratives and travelogues, gothic novels frequently foreground the precariousness of chirography through stories involving the word’s corruption in the unholy writ of rotten clerics, or by means of crypto-centric plots hinging on illegible wills and purloined diaries. Similarly, the gothic of the air often echoes its mode of transmission with tales of treacherous telephony and ear-rending iconoclasm, with astatic texts that at best suggest Stanton’s manuscript in Maturin’s Melmoth the Wanderer, untranscribable, unstable “beyond any that had ever before exercised the patience of a reader.”⁶⁷

The most haunting gothic narratives involve us--along with their characters--in acts of hazardous transcriptions. Teasing us out of our senses, they thrive on our longing for the concrete and insist on making us aware of our perceptual failings. Not unlike Conrad’s Marlow, who is “no more to [his audience] than a voice” relating a “narrative that seem[s] to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air,” radio plays in the gothic tradition taunt listeners by turning them into thwarted translators: “Do you see the story? Do you see anything?”⁶⁸ Not unlike Maturin’s Alonzo Monçada, readers stepping into the unmapped soundscapes of the *Hörspiel* may find themselves to be at once trapped and escaping, like “pioneers of darkness,” clinging to an extinguished lamp in a seemingly endless passage steeped in blackness, lured by the “faint sound” of the “chaunt of matins,” a “parricide for [a] companion” goading them on: “‘Follow me, and feel your way in darkness.’ Dreadful sounds!” Not unlike Emily St. Aubert sitting in “torturing suspense” by the “casement to catch the sounds, which might confirm, or destroy her hope” until “wearied with anxieties,” readers of radio gothic forced to rely on the midnight air, may find it a mercurial, perilous carrier. Yet decidedly unlike the scholarly perusal of authoritative editions, of clear black type on clean white sheets, the definitiveness of which never quite permits us to experience the frustrated acts of decoding as they are suffered by

Stanton or Emily (who not only confounds the voices of her suitors, but is tricked into signing over her property), listening *is* gothic performance.⁶⁹

Long after the aural medium had been abandoned as the site of an American neo-gothic, Morse collected the bones of his progeny and attempted to revive his serial in print. *Stuff the Lady's Hatbox* (1988), a privately published novel conceived as the beginning of a series, recaptures the spirit of the central characters, but walls up the gothic mode of *I Love a Mystery* in the narrower confines of the private eye genre of the 1930s and '40s. Rather than serving as the architectural framework of the narrative, the gothic becomes an incidental element of its otherwise plain interior design, as in this psychedelic description of a Las Vegas restaurant (the Herman Lee Fong's Rathskeller):

The ceiling of the waiting room at the foot of the escalator was onyx, upon which subtle red and blue flames played, from an unknown source, in everchanging moving patterns, sometimes fascinating, sometimes sinister, but always with the puckish, perverse humor of the imps of Satan romping in the flickering coals of hell fire.⁷⁰

"What happened to Jack and Doc and Reggy [sic]?" Anne Sexton inquired in "Flee on the Donkey," attesting to the perdurable reverberations of sonic ephemera in the echo chambers of the receptive mind. Those eager to see for themselves how the three comrades had fared out of earshot were dealt a novelistic *autopsia* of bygone thrills.⁷¹

If *I Love a Mystery* remains alive in the memory of its listeners, it does so despite the fact that Morse never gave them access to the minds of his characters. Rather than sounding interiors, his thrillers create exteriors in sound. They rely on verbal exchanges, audible clues, and diegetic music to communicate--or encourage speculation about--the inner lives of the disembodied speakers who occupy the listener's mental stage. As in the case of the "Thing That Cries in the Night," clandestine thoughts are eventually being talked out--voiced and voided--however unreliable the messengers or contradictory their utterances. Should the listening public be granted a more direct passway to the private

and intimate, an ingress to hidden desires and inarticulate fears? Could interior monologues and stream-of-consciousness narration supersede or infiltrate the dialogue-driven dramas favored by networks and sponsors? Or might the voices inside be dialogued as well? These and other questions about the relationship between dialogue and narration will be raised in the next chapter. . . .

Notes

¹ John K. Hutchens, "The Shockers," New York Times 8 Nov. 1942, sec. 8: 12; Hutchens, "Crime Pays--on the Radio," New York Times Magazine 19 Mar. 1944: 31. For a published script from *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, see Robert Newman, "Death Across the Board," Radio and Television Writing, ed. Max Wylie 360-71.

² Worthington Gibson, "Radio Horror: For Children Only," American Mercury July 1938: 295-96. For more on this debate, see Marilyn Lawrence Boemer, "An Analysis of the Violence Content of the Radio Thriller Dramas--and Some Comparisons with Television," Journal of Broadcasting 28.3 (1984): 341-45.

³ Dewey, Art as Experience, 1934 (New York: Perigee-Berkley, 1980) 237-38.

⁴ Harrison B. Summers, A Thirty Year History of Programs (1958; New York: Arno, 1971) 69-70; 77-78; 143-44; 177-78.

⁵ Hext, "Thriller Drama on American Radio Networks," MA thesis (Ohio State U, 1949) 147; for an encyclopedia of over three hundred radio mystery programs, the majority of which were on the air during the late 1940s and early 1950s, see Jim Cox, Radio Crime Fighters (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002).

⁶ Jack Gould, "NBC to Ban Its Crime Shows Except After 9:30 at Night," New York Times 14 Sept. 1947, sec. 1: 7.

⁷ "Speaking of Horror," Life 16 Feb. 1948: 14-16. Over the years, the magazine had offered radio listeners "pictorial enactments" of episodes from various thriller programs. Offered as a "good example" of the "goriness" of *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, Life featured a photo-novelization of "Dealer in Death" (Feb. 5, 1944); the images show a serial killer (Laird Cregar) who murders for money by selling the corpses to a surgeon; see "*Inner Sanctum*," Life 7 Feb. 1944: 45. A similar treatment was given to episodes of *The Thin Man* (Life 23 Oct. 1944: 110+) and *The Fat Man* (Life 29 Apr. 1946: 100-1).

⁸ "The Revolt Against Radio," Fortune Mar. 1947: 101+; Gould, "NBC to Ban" 1.

⁹ Hext 75; violations of this policy in NBC's daytime programming were pointed out in a script from *The Adventures of Frank Merriwell*; see Jack Gould, "Murder Will Out," New York Times 19 Sept. 1948, sec. 2: 11.

¹⁰ Nye, The Unembarrassed Muse (New York: Dial, 1970) 404.

¹¹ Raymond William Stedman, The Serials, 2nd ed. (Norman, OK: U of Oklahoma P, 1977) 177; John Dunning, On the Air (New York: Oxford, 1998) 336; Michael Klossner, "Horror, Fantasy and Animation in Film, Television and Radio," Fantasy and Horror, ed. Neil Barron (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1999) 572; Harmon, The Great Radio Heroes (New York: Doubleday, 1967) 25. In 1992, Harmon went so far as to recreate and direct *I Love a Mystery* with a cast including noted radio actor Les Tremayne and Harmon himself in a minor role. Recordings of the sequence titled "The Fear That Creeps Like a Cat" are extant. See Harmon, Radio Mystery and Adventure (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992) 68.

¹² Goldman, Marathon Man (New York: Delacorte, 1974) 174; King, Danse Macabre (New York: Everest, 1981) 111; Roth, I Married a Communist (New York: Houghton, 1998) 127.

¹³ Summers 86.

¹⁴ Richter, The Progress of Romance (Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 1996) 145.

¹⁵ Hext 47.

¹⁶ Other motion picture stars to take leads in radio thriller programs of the late 1940s and early 1950s are Brian Donlevy in *Dangerous Assignment* (1949-54), Glenn Ford in *The Adventures of Christopher London* (1950), Joel McCrea in *Tales of the Texas Rangers* (1950-52), and James Stewart in *The Six Shooter* (1953-54).

¹⁷ Harmon, Radio Mystery and Adventure 60.

¹⁸ Les Daniels, Living in Fear (New York: Scribner, 1975) 143.

¹⁹ Walter P. Sheppard, "Some Notes on *One Man's Family*," Journal of Broadcasting 14.2 (1970): 183; Luther Weaver, The Technique of Radio Writing (New York: Prentice, 1949) 306.

²⁰ An early network thriller serial, NBC's Westinghouse-sponsored *Townsend Murder Mystery* (1933), was penned by Southern humorist Octavus Roy Cohen; see Cyrus Fisher, "Radio Reviews," Forum Apr. 1933: 256. By the late 1940s, however, "serial" had become synonymous with "soap opera" as weekday programming that aired on network radio between 10:30 AM and 6:00 PM; see Stanley Robert Rowe's "The Radio Serial," MS thesis (Boston U, 1949) ii.

- 21 Bayer-Berenbaum, The Gothic Imagination (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1982) 24.
- 22 Rubin, Thrillers, Genres in American Cinema (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999) 16; 41.
- 23 Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, ed. Johanna M. Smith, Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism (Boston: Bedford-St. Martin's, 1992) 25; 143.
- 24 Brock Brower, "A Lament for Old-Time Radio," A Pictorial History of Radio by Irving Settel (New York: Citadel, 1960) 9.
- 25 Hext 3-4; Todorov, The Fantastic, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland, OH: P of Case Western Reserve U, 1973) 41.
- 26 Bayer-Berenbaum 71.
- 27 Ray Barfield, Listening to Radio, 1920-1950 (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996) 157.
- 28 Gerald Nachman, Raised on Radio (New York: Pantheon, 1998) 303.
- 29 Stedman 178.
- 30 Hutchens, "Crime Pays--on the Radio" 16.
- 31 Harmon Radio Mystery 63; Dunning 340.
- 32 Walpole, preface to the first ed., The Castle of Otranto (1764; New York: Oxford UP, 1998) 6.
- 33 Morse, "One Man's Radio Program," Off Mike, ed. Jerome Lawrence (New York: Essential-Duell, 1944) 119.
- 34 Boardman, "The Original Radio Drama: For Money!" Lawrence 67.
- 35 Harmon, Radio Mystery 65.
- 36 Esslin, "The Mind as a Stage," Theatre Quarterly 1.3 (1971): 6.
- 37 Howard Becknell, "Radio Drama, 1935-1945, Television Drama, 1945-1950," MA thesis (Indiana U, 1951) 102; Knilli, Das Hörspiel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1961) 7-8.
- 38 Elpha A. Ellington, adapt., "Ben Hur," after Lew Wallace, The Writer's Radio Theater, 1940-1941, ed. Norman S. Weiser (New York: Harper, 1941) 48.

- 39 "Broadcast Gives 'Sight' to the Ears," Popular Mechanics Jan. 1938: 129A; 131A.
- 40 Even though the patented Sonovox was occasionally used on thriller programs like *The Shadow*, it became best known to radio listeners as the "Bromo-Seltzer, Bromo-Seltzer, Bromo-Seltzer" chugging locomotive heard on *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*; see Barnouw, Handbook of Radio Writing (Boston: Little, 1947) 125-26. In motion pictures, the Sonovox was effectively used in Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *A Letter to Three Wives* (1948), a dark comedy notable for its scathing critique of radio censorship and serial writing.
- 41 Felix Felton, The Radio Play (London: Sylvan, 1949) 52.
- 42 Esslin 10; Harriet Van Horne, "Just Showing How Dull a Thud Can Be," New York World Telegram 20 May 1948: 20.
- 43 McCambridge, The Quality of Mercy (New York: Times, 1981) 69.
- 44 Crook, Radio Drama: Theory and Practice (New York: Routledge, 1999) 70-71.
- 45 Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794; New York: Oxford UP, 1966) 68.
- 46 Heller, The Delights of Terror (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 1987) 48.
- 47 Morse, "One Man's Radio Program" 119.
- 48 Morse, "One Man's" 119; for more on such narrative techniques, see chapter 8.
- 49 Erik Barnouw, Handbook of Radio Writing (Boston: Little, 1939) 50.
- 50 Harmon, Radio Mystery 64-5.
- 51 Ong, Orality and Literacy (London: Methuen, 1982) 32.
- 52 Ong, Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1971) 264; Arnheim, Radio, trans. Margaret Ludwig and Herbert Read (London: Faber, 1936) 135-36.
- 53 David R. Mackey, Drama on the Air (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951) 62-63.
- 54 Hext 91.
- 55 Barnouw 56-57.
- 56 Arnheim 280.
- 57 Mumford, The Culture of Cities (New York: Harcourt, 1938) 255-56.

- ⁵⁸ Loviglio, "The Shadow Meets the Phantom Public," Fear Itself, ed. Nancy Lusignan Schultz (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1999) 322; 324.
- ⁵⁹ Brown, Wieland (1798; New York: Modern Library, 2002) 35; 233; 200. For a more light-hearted tale of a belly-talking avenger, see Henry Cockton, The Life and Adventures of Valentine Vox, the Ventriloquist (1840; London: Routledge, 1867); according to Cockton's narrator, there is "nothing in nature which startles men more than a noise for which they cannot account"; it "at once chills their blood, and in spite of them, sets their imagination on the rack" (144).
- ⁶⁰ Kilgour, The Rise of the Gothic Novel (New York: Routledge, 1995) 222-23.
- ⁶¹ William Hawes, American Television Drama (Tuscaloosa, AL: U of Alabama P, 1986) 34.
- ⁶² Brecht, "Radiotheorie: 1927 bis 1932," Bertold Brecht: Gesammelte Werke, vol. 18 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1968) 119.
- ⁶³ Keillor, WLT: A Radio Romance (New York: Viking, 1991) 146.
- ⁶⁴ Stewart, Dear Reader (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996) 344; 392.
- ⁶⁵ Rhoda L. Flaxman, "Radcliffe's Dual Modes of Vision," Fetter'd or Free?, eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1986) 124; Martin Meisel, "Scattered Chiaroscuro," Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen, eds. Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill (London: BFI, 1994) 66; Radcliffe 73.
- ⁶⁶ "Mystery," Etymological Dictionary of the English Language, revised ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1909).
- ⁶⁷ Ong, Orality and Literacy 11; Charles Maturin, Melmoth the Wanderer (1820; New York: Oxford UP, 1989) 28.
- ⁶⁸ Conrad, Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad: Heart of Darkness: A Case Study, ed. Ross C. Murfin (1899; New York: St. Martin's, 1989) 42.
- ⁶⁹ Radcliffe 387-88; Maturin 191-94.
- ⁷⁰ Morse, Stuff the Lady's Hatbox (Woodside, CA: Seven Stones, 1988) 210.
- ⁷¹ Sexton, "Flee on Your Donkey," Selected Poems of Anne Sexton, ed. Diana Wood Middlebrook and Diana Hume George (Boston: Houghton, 1988) 75; Sexton's reference to the series has been pointed out by George Monteiro in "Anne Sexton's Radio Days," Notes on Contemporary Literature 25.5 (1995): 4-5.

Chapter Eight

"If I'm alone one more second, I'll go mad": Broadcast Realism and the Meeting of Minds

[S]he continued to sit at the table, sorting her papers and writing, till the intense silence of the house reminded her of the lateness of the hour. In the street the noise of wheels had ceased, and the rumble of the "elevated" came only at long intervals through the deep unnatural hush. In the mysterious nocturnal separation from all outward signs of life, she felt herself more strangely confronted with her fate. The sensation made her brain reel, and she tried to shut out consciousness by pressing her hands against her eyes. But the terrible silence and emptiness seemed to symbolize her future--she felt as though the house, the street, the world were all empty, and she alone left sentient in a lifeless universe.--Wharton, The House of Mirth (1905)

The radio play, Esslin posits, was being introduced at a "particularly appropriate moment in the development of modern literature," namely at a time when a reaction against realism and naturalism led playwrights and novelists to an "increasing subjectivization and internalization of subject-matter." Tuning in is a turning inward, an ingress into the "world of the dream" in which the playwright can "project his [or her] own solitary vision more immediately, more directly and more completely [than in any other medium]." According to Guralnick, the

paradox of radio--that we cannot see, yet see distinctly--is the medium's gift to the playwright who seeks to exhibit the mind as a maker, not just an imbiber, of reality. As for the mind on exhibit in a radio performance, it is finally none other than the listener's, caught in the curious process of fabricating exactly those things it appears to observe.

Radio is thus ideally suited to explorations of the mind in relation to objective reality.

Following a performance on film or stage,

we know what we see, even when the spectacle is called into question. On radio, conversely, we know only what we know, because what constitutes spectacle is purely imaginary. As a consequence, radio inclines us to favor the action of the mind above the actuality of matter.¹

In American broadcasting, however, the modernist mind was no match for the business that mattered. The commercial architecture of the so-called theater of the mind was closed off to monologic character close-ups akin to Alan Bennett's popular *Talking Heads* sketches of the 1980s and '90s, let alone the multipersonal representations of consciousness explored by the opponents of Arnold Bennett in what Erich Auerbach called the "realistic novel" between the world wars, narratives that attempted to "fathom a more genuine, a deeper, and indeed a more real reality."² Intent on calling certain products to mind, the broadcast industry continued to privilege the authoritative announcer-narrator, the sales representative whose single-voiced continuity controlled--rent or restored--the surface realism of polyvocal drama. In the soundscape of early network radio, in which *Real Folks* (1928-31) and reporters of the *Adventurer's Club* (1932) roved like so many latter-day Pickwickians, interiority was the last frontier.

As suggested in the previous chapter, broadcasters dreaded nothing more than dead air--interstices of naught that would cause audiences to touch the dial or question the soundness of their receivers. Since music and aural effects served mainly as scene-setting bridges and mood-sustaining crutches instead of being permitted to challenge the supremacy of the spoken word, radio playwrights needed to devise situations that would enable characters to keep on talking to and about each other. That their *dramatis personae* could just as readily be thinking to themselves and that trains of unuttered thought could be rendered audible to those tuning in were suppositions rejected by the developers of early broadcast drama. In radio writing, "dialogue is everything," insisted Peter Dixon, creator of the evening serial *Raising Junior* (1930-32).³ "People in real life

do not speak soliloquies,” concurred colleague Carl A. Buss in an assessment of his own trials and errors writing for the medium.⁴ After all, it was in dialogue that commercial playwrights were farthest from the apostrophes of the announcer, the spokesperson for the sponsors to which they had pledged their word.

Trend-setting chapter plays like Gosden and Correll’s *Amos ‘n’ Andy* (1929-43) or Phillips H. Lord’s *Uncle Abe and David* (1930-31) had taken their cue from the minstrel shows and vaudeville routines of the 1920s; drawing on the comic banter between end men and their interlocutors, these dialect-driven adventures of rustics among urbanites were often plainly referred to as “dialogues” or “nightly conversations.”⁵ Even though critics soon complained that the “dramatic machinery” of these “old-fashioned” and at times “ponderous exchanges” was beginning to creak, producers of network entertainment continued to emphasize repartee over single-voiced reflections which, in the words of one radio drama instructor, constituted nothing but a “post-mortem on what already has happened.”⁶ Writer-adaptor James Whipple argued dialogue to be “the only medium the radio writer can employ to compensate for the lack of visual aids.” However effective on the stage, speeches were “monotonous on the radio except in situations of great emotional value”; and even then they needed to be shorter than in the theater where they were rendered more vivid through gestures and facial expressions.⁷ Not suited to the dialogic of commercial broadcasting--the contrapuntal play of *spiel* and drama--the monologue remained what Max Wylie called a “radio rarity.” The “only genuine primitive in the entire gallery of dramatics,” it hung upon the “upright body of modern entertainment” like some “sort of vestigial tail.” As far as Wylie could recall, even Ruth Draper, America’s most popular *diseuse*, had only made a single US radio appearance in the 1930s.⁸

Since the solitary speaker was a *persona non grata* in the social discourse of broadcast dramatics, the private thoughts of radio’s fictional characters were not immediately accessible. “Of course, internal monologue can be polyphonous,” Esslin insists, citing Dylan Thomas’s “Under Milk Wood” (1954) as the in literary circles best

known--and for American broadcasting least representative--example. As Rodger has pointed out, the "factory conditions" of commercial radio promoted instead the polyvocal realism of "narrative play or dramatised story," dialogues introduced and occasionally interrupted by the guiding voice of the announcer-narrator. This prevalent storytelling formula, Rodger suggests, was not the "invention of radio," but an "embellishment" of the public readings in which Dickens presented his novels to his contemporaries.⁹ However, broadcasters did more than just cast multiple readers to act out their narrative-embedded conversation pieces; adapting nineteenth-century realism for the commercial soundstage, they significantly shortened narration while emphasizing the role of the storyteller as usher and Atropos. A Thackerayean puppet master without whose say the voices of the play would not be let out of their boxes, the announcer-narrator granted temporary access to radio's virtual reality--a world as readily set up as it was upset.

Each weekday, the announcer-narrator of Paul Rhymer's *Vic and Sade* sketches (1932-45) responded to the ringing of a doorbell by greeting the listener with a jovial "Hello there!" Having talked about the advantages of Procter & Gamble's Crisco shortening, for instance, he paused briefly and followed up his spiel with casual invitations like this one:

Well, sir, it's a few minutes or so past eleven o'clock in the morning as our scene opens now, and here in the kitchen of the small house half-way up in the next block we discover Mrs. Victor Gook industriously bending over her ironing-board. *Tuesday* is the time usually given over to this task, but the holidays have more or less thrown Sade off schedule. And so she irons. But there's a newcomer approaching apparently . . . because the back door is opening. Listen.¹⁰

Once the narrator had stepped aside, the overheard characters expressed their emotions or betrayed their mental states chiefly in conversation with one another, not in the exclusive presence of the "listeners-in," as early broadcast audiences were commonly called. For

the next ten minutes, Vic and Sade were heard going about their chores while going on about distant relatives, social gatherings past and future, and the everyday inconsequentialities that matter.

Verbal exchanges did not merely reveal character and propel plots; they constituted reality as a set of phonic, that is, socially expressive and responsive bodies--a world that communicated and therefore was. When Buss insisted that the drama of the dial was "essentially impressionistic," he simply meant to suggest that the creators of broadcast fiction were not impeded by the "technical handicaps" of the stage, since they could readily shift scenes to "convey the most interesting and arresting moments" in the lives of their characters.¹¹ And yet, the curtailment and corruption of narration in the service of commerce all but ruled out intensely "arresting"--and thoroughly otic--moments like this one from Woolf's To the Lighthouse (1927), an instant in which a solitary listener experiences the burden placed on the oral to contain or disambiguate a supravocal, hence potentially chaotic, environment:

[T]his sound, which had lasted now half an hour and had taken its place soothingly in the scale of sounds pressing on top of her [. . .] had ceased; so that the monotonous fall of the waves on the beach, which for the most part beat a measured and soothing tattoo to her thoughts and seemed consolingly to repeat over and over again [. . .] the words of some old cradle song, murmured by nature, "I am guarding you--I am your support," but at other times suddenly and unexpectedly, especially when her mind raised itself slightly from the task actually in hand, had no such kindly meaning, but like a ghostly roll of drums remorselessly beat the measure of life, [. . .] warned her whose day had slipped past in one quick doing after another that it was all ephemeral as a rainbow--this sound which had been obscured and concealed under the other sounds suddenly thundered hollow in her ears and made her look up with an impulse of terror.

They had ceased to talk; that was the explanation.¹²

In the “narrative play” of the airwaves, in which ceasing to talk meant the slippage into nonexistence, it was not by rationalizing or thinking it through in solitude, but by talking it over with others that characters beyond the narrator’s reach could escape such surges of disquietude.

Even in moments of physical separation, radio characters were rarely left to themselves; whenever they spoke, a narratee installed at a listening post near or far could be assumed to lend an ear. Among these descendants of the late-eighteenth century epistolary pal was the unheard Mrs. Bloom, the financially troubled neighbor with whom the kindhearted Molly Goldberg connected through the dumbwaiter shaft of her Bronx apartment: “So you’ll give me back a dollar a week when Mr. Bloom starts in vid de vork. So come down a liddle after; maybe ve’ll go to a mofie--is playing de Four Horsemen in de Apoplexies”¹³; or Ruthie Stembottom, the unvoiced friend and confidante of the aforementioned Sade Gook who, along with the audience, learned the latest (such as there was) from the “small house half-way up in the next block”:

Yes, *isn’t* it a quiet afternoon. One of them hushedy-hushed afternoons where a person sits and listens to pins dropping. Little bit ago I was out on the back porch shaking my mop and ‘way off in the distance somewhere I heard some fella say giddap to his horse and I bet twenty-five cents he was clear away over on Chestnut Street and that’s eight hundred miles from here if it’s an inch. Yeah . . . you run inta *real* still afternoons every so often. Like *Sunday* kinda. I was sayin’ to . . . say, lady, hang on a second, I think I heard my kitchen door open. . . .¹⁴

Intimacy was being promised yet ultimately denied. Despite the fact that each rendezvous with the virtual folks of Gertrude Berg’s *The (Rise of the) Goldbergs* (1929–45) or Rhymer’s *Vic and Sade* lasted less than a quarter of an hour, audiences were rarely alone with any single character for as much as a minute at a time. For the most part, commercial

broadcast fictions played themselves out in a succession of thwarted advances and sudden retreats--dialogic interludes and narrative intrusions--as Rhymer slyly plays up in this breathless conclusion:

RUSH. [. . .] I got to go.

SADE. Where you going?

RUSH. Tatman's vacant lot.

(Biz: Auto horn.)

VIC. *(Promptly.)* There's Gumpox honking the horn on his garbage wagon. I'll be sauntering on outdoors, Sadie honey.

SADE. *(Cheerfully.)* Everybody leaving me.

(Biz: telephone rings.)

VIC and RUSH. Telephone is ringing, telephone is ringing.

SADE. I'll get it.

FLETCHER. *(Off a ways.)* Good-bye.

SADE. Good-bye, Uncle Fletcher. So long, fellas.

VIC. *(Moving off.)* So long, kiddo.

RUSH. *(Moving off.)* So long, Mom.

SADE. *(To phone.)* Hello? *(Warmly.)* Oh, yes, lady. Why, bless your old sweet heart, you *did* call back. *(Giggles affectionately.)* Gee, lady, I *still* haven't got anything to say. It was just such a still quiet lonesome afternoon I felt like I had to *talk* to somebody. *Isn't* it quiet though.

Person runs into quiet afternoons like this every so *often*. Yes.

(Giggles.) Well . . . quietness is *nice* sometimes. Gollies . . . I don't think I've spoken to a soul all day. No. *(And then briskly.)* *Who* had an operation, Ruthie? Mis' McFreemer? Which Mis' McFreemer? The one on South Morris Avenue or the one on West Monroe Street?

ANNOUNCER. Which concludes another interlude at the small house

half-way up in the next block.¹⁵

Clearly, this was no eavesdropping at keyholes. In whatever state of confusion the household, there was nothing unseemly or unsettling about such listenings-in, since the overheard confabulators were already wearing their social masks when the announcer-narrator--the gatekeeper of broadcast fiction--invited the public to enter. As such, these sketches were what Whipple called an "answer to the prayer of the national advertiser who seeks a clean, wholesome type of entertainment which appeals to the entire family."¹⁶

Containing and curbing the free-flowing narratives of independent thought in the social channels of radio dialogue, the demotic plays of the airwaves denounced and subdued the solitary as unstable, sociopathic, if not outright demonic. Whether exorcising hidden thought or excommunicating the self-absorbed, radio drama thus assisted in defending the virtues of mass communication by equating interiority with unsociability and by extinguishing both.

"You hear them, but they can't hear you": Mindful Play

According to one contemporary review of Rhymer's comic sketches, Vic and Sade--performed by a former grain broker-turned ad man (Art Van Harvey) and a "fugitive from Eugene O'Neill's Strange Interlude" (Bernadine Flynn)--had become "symbols of US small-town living."¹⁷ The throwaway reference to O'Neill's 1928 Pulitzer Prize winning nine-acter served to underscore how wisely and how well Rhymer's highly regarded playlets for the parlor stayed clear of experimental techniques that permitted even the Broadway stage to sound the mind. "Strange Interlude would hardly be successful on the air," Dixon had cautioned earlier. "Court-rooms, dinner-tables, softly lighted living-rooms--all places where what people say is of more importance than what they do--offer excellent backdrops for radio sketches." More needed to be learned about

“writing for the microphone” before radio playwrights could begin to “juggle with the obscure and hidden emotions.”¹⁸

One of the earliest attempts to dramatize the unspoken was undertaken in December 1930 by CBS employee Georgia Backus, daughter of an established theatrical family. Although she became chiefly known as a radio actress on dramatic series like *The March of Time* and *Campbell Playhouse*, Backus was an active promoter of early American radio drama. In collaboration with Don Clark, writer for the dramatic anthology *Majestic Curiosity Shop* (1928-30) and Nila Mack, creator of the dramatized fairy tales series *Let's Pretend* (1929-54), Backus explored techniques to compensate for the medium's lack of visual props and pantomime. Like many of her colleagues, she was not in favor of the announcer-narrator, whose presence she deemed to be detrimental to broadcast realism, with the heightening and deepening of which she was mainly concerned. As an alternative to narration, Backus considered combining the “extinct ‘aside’” familiar to “theatre-goers of another generation” with “something of the more recent technique of Strange Interlude,” the very techniques her more conservative colleague had rejected as unfit for radio. First in a series of trial broadcasts was the play “Behind the Words,” in which Backus experimented with a double set of lines for each character, to be read in different tones of voice, with incidental music signaling the transitions from speech to thought. Special organ motifs were arranged to suggest the traits and moods of each speaker-thinker. The technique was considered so startling that it was demonstrated to a studio audience of stage actors, drama critics and theatrical producers as an exercise in “radio-telepathy.”¹⁹

To stage director Augustin Duncan, brother of the late Isadora, it was “thrilling to contemplate” what had been achieved by such “devotees of the drama” as Backus and Clark; having lost his eyesight, Duncan involved himself in broadcast experiments designed to “visualize dramatic acts in the minds of [the] vast audience, by creating vivid pictures in their memories.”²⁰ Their favorable reception among theater folk

notwithstanding, Backus's attempts at redefining the boundaries of radio realism by dramatizing the unspoken had little impact on the development of network programming. Some outspoken members of that "vast audience" had their mind set against the stagings of hidden realities; they vehemently rejected public invitations to infiltrate the private sphere, let alone to penetrate intimate thoughts. Mindful of their obligations as lessees of the airwaves, broadcasters rarely ignored such voices of dissent. In their decision to show the "soul" with "its clothes on"--as William Dean Howells once said about the "plain and open" character studies of fellow novelist Anthony Trollope--the creators of broadcast realism were influenced to no small extent by those who took it upon themselves to act as guardians for the impressionable listening public.²¹

"I voice the protest that clean-minded men and women, everywhere, feel against the sex filth that you are permitting *One Man's Family* to broadcast," one irate listener from upstate New York wrote to the president of NBC in April 1935 in response to dialogue heard on Carlton E. Morse's popular evening serial (1932-59). Instead of "clean, bright, and entertaining material," the letter writer expounded, audiences were becoming privy to "'in bed' confidences of husband and wife--so frightfully intimate, that one gasped, in anticipation of what might be next--and expelled the children of the family from the living rooms." In an inter-departmental memorandum, Don E. Gilman, then vice president of NBC (West Coast), forwarded the letter to Morse, cautioning him that he was "treading on very dangerous ground." To avoid risking FCC interference and jeopardizing contract renewal, Morse should move his scenes from bedroom to living room, so that the dialogue did not suggest the "intimate relationship between men and women."²² At the same time, even the most circumspect broadcasters could not deny that the vespertine tabletalks were getting rather too quaint, that listeners who had overheard too many exchanges without having learned anything more about their radio neighbors were going to tune out before long.

In the 1940s, many of the chapter plays and daily sketches were being transformed into weekly half-hour programs; and unless they had already been relegated to the morning hours, during which listeners were assumed to be somewhat less attentive and therefore less likely to tire of their flat familiars, the established personages of broadcast fiction returned to the networks' evening schedules in zippier, more sophisticated vehicles--the situation comedies. In order to adjust their leisurely-paced conversations to a format that demanded accelerated loquacity, writers like Rhymer were forced to reduce the interpersonal to a fusillade of one-liners. Removed were even the slight yet pregnant pauses afforded by the unvoiced proxy listener who, like the "phantom" friend of Dickens's Mrs. Gamp, appeared to have been created for the "express purpose" of "visionary dialogues" on "all manner of subjects."²³ As their respective runs suggest, reconstituted favorites like *Amos 'n' Andy* (1943-55), *Vic and Sade* (1946), and *The Goldberg's* (1949-50) persevered on these chatty plena with varying degrees of success.

The mind, meanwhile, had remained the almost exclusive domain of occult melodrama. Unexamined in the dramatized stories of radio realism, it was read weekly in the episodic radiographs that made *The Shadow* (1930-54) such a fitting spokesperson for conservative, thought-policing broadcasters:

SHADOW. [. . .] an unseen presence speaks to you.

WALKER. (*Dazed and frightened.*) Speaks! . . . Yes, I *am* hearing a voice. I *must* be hearing it, or else I'm going crazy!

SHADOW. The voice is as real as the fear and remorse that is slowly destroying your mind, Sam Walker.

WALKER. What . . . where are you?

SHADOW. Not behind you . . . not in the dark corners of this tavern. I am right here . . . in front of you . . . close enough to touch you.

WALKER. (*Panic-stricken.*) No! It can't be! It's just in my mind!

SHADOW. Of course! . . . for I have the power to remain unseen . . .

invisible to the eyes of men with tormented minds such as yours. . . .

(*Emphatically.*) But I *am* real.

WALKER. No . . . not real!

SHADOW. (*Slow and deliberate.*) So real that I could reach out and touch your trembling hand that clutches the empty glass you have drained of the last bitter dregs of the false courage of the coward!

WALKER. Who--who *are* you?

SHADOW. Many men and women . . . such as you . . . have known me as the Shadow.²⁴

In these infiltrations, creators of aural romances were being assisted by advances in microphone technology, in particular the filter, a device that enabled the distortion of a speaker's voice through the incomplete rendering of its frequency range. Whereas situation comedies made mediocre lines seem fresher by delivering them with greater speed, melodramas like Vera Oldham's *Chandu the Magician* (1932-35) could make trite verbiage sound thrilling by dispensing it through a filter. Yet filter and echo chamber did not merely alter the acoustic qualities of radio speech; assisting in the layering of expressed and verbalized thought, they had a direct and lasting impact on the quality of dramatic writing for the monaural medium. Radio playwrights who were expected to dramatize mental states within the confines of traditional soundstage dialogue found in these aural analogues to cinematic closeups the means of giving voice to the inaccessible, the uncommunicated, and the repressed.

"The echo has only recently been conquered," Lucille Fletcher noted at the beginning of her highly successful career in broadcast dramatics. "Obviously," the sound effects artists who developed such voice-distorting devices were "only waiting for an O'Neill to give [them] a psychological drama to interpret."²⁵ Their frequent exploitation on juvenile thriller programs notwithstanding, artificial modulations and reverberations served some of the more ambitious radio playwrights as passkeys to the interior. Allowing

listeners readily to distinguish between the shared and the secret, advancements in microphone technology permitted playwrights to render dialogic what was generally believed to be the stuff of single-voiced monologues and, as such, had long been discouraged. Opening transcontinental and transcendental lines, filter and echo chamber gave rise to psychodramas like Fletcher's "Sorry, Wrong Number," telephone dialogues in which wired individuals struggled to extricate themselves or to exert their influence on others, and Arch Oboler's "Alter Ego," schizophonic duologues in which weird, inner voices clamored for an audience or corporeal control. Such popular performances seemed to suggest that it was possible for commercially viable broadcast fictions to tap into what McLuhan argued to be "inherent in the very nature" of radio--the power to turn "psyche and society into a single echo chamber."²⁶

The more urgent concern for broadcasters had always been whether it was proper for radio dramatists to exploit this power at all, especially after the codes of radio's surface realism had been so forcefully violated by Howard Koch's dramatization of "The War of the Worlds" (Oct. 30, 1938) for the *Mercury Theatre on the Air*. In one of the most disturbing scenes of the play, a speaker identified as a CBS announcer addresses the public to document the end of civilization--"This may be the last broadcast"--until succumbing to the noxious fumes that spread across Manhattan and extinguish all human life below. His body having collapsed at the microphone, a lone voice--rendered distant and faint by a filter--attempts to establish communication. It is the voice of a radio operator: "2X2L calling CQ. . . . 2X2L calling CQ 2X2L calling CQ . . . New York. Isn't there anyone on the air? [Isn't there anyone on the air?] Isn't there anyone. . . ." ²⁷

The Mercury Players' "holiday offering" had not only "destroyed the Columbia Broadcasting System," as Welles jested at the conclusion of his infamous Halloween prank, but had pronounced the death of its receivers--the listening public. Considering the near panic that ensued, was it advisable to open the realm Esslin called a "region akin to the world of the dream" without clearly demarcating it as fantasy by resorting to the spells

of *Trilby*, Chandu, or *The Shadow*? In other words, was the aural medium destined to perpetuate what Trilling referred to as the “chronic American belief” in the “incompatibility of mind and reality”?²⁸

As Richard Butsch has pointed out, many sociologists blamed network radio for weakening community ties by encouraging individuals to stay at home and listen to faraway voices rather than connecting with their neighbors or attending social gatherings.²⁹ Feigning companionship and staging exchanges, commercial broadcasters had a vested interest in demonstrating the social “responsibility” of the new medium--this intruder in the parlor--as shared communications channel and common theater. In his “Requiem for the Media,” Baudrillard defined “responsibility” as the reciprocal space of speech and response. Being essentially “anti-mediatory and intransitive,” broadcast media not only prevent “processes of exchange,” but “fabricate non-communication” through “various forms of response simulations” (such as appeals for listener feedback).³⁰ Defensive about their exploitation of wireless technology in the service of commerce, broadcasters favored--and at times commissioned--plays that reminded listeners of the medium’s roots in point-to-point communication and its continued “responsibility” as an agent of exchange.

“We broadcast not to cabbages and walruses,” Corwin insisted in “Seems Radio Is Here to Stay” (Apr. 24, 1939), a *Columbia Workshop* play written at the behest of CBS as part of a campaign by the National Association of Broadcasters to promote the medium. Network executives were hearkening to public demand and private wishes, Corwin’s “verse brochure” assured the listener; they delivered their made-to-order goods according to the specifications of discerning individuals:

You are the critic and the judge,
The mighty ear,
The twister of the dial knob.
You rule the wave lengths

By selection.

Do you like it *this* way?

Thank you. This way it shall be.

You like it *that*?

Then that.

Instrumental in advertising and propaganda, the listener address served the broadcasting industry in touting the reciprocity of the medium and its messagings. Networks, advertisers, and radio playwrights alike stood to gain from dispelling the notion that the radio--being both dial and receiver--was incapable of establishing intimate as well as socially meaningful connections.³¹

In "The Voice of the Wizard," one of Erik Barnouw's freelance scripts for the *Cavalcade of America* (Feb. 10, 1947), Edison himself--voiced, without filter, by Dane Clark--addresses the listening public, relating not only the history of broadcasting and its social significance, but sharing also his motivation for getting involved in its development:

Hello . . . hello. This is Thomas Alva Edison [. . .]. In a way I can't help being here. This microphone, and the tubes in your radio--*I* had a hand in them. So, when those tubes light up and bring you a voice from far off, in a way it's me talking. And then many radio programs are *recorded*, for schools, and for broadcasts overseas--all ideas that I fought for. Because the inventions that I cared most about were those that would bring men's voices across space and time. So--I'd like to tell you the story behind those inventions. A few words for a new age.

In only a "few words," the play links the invention of the telegraph, an instrument that was already "beginning to bind the world closer," to the institution of American broadcasting and its contributions to a "new age" of peace:

You who, in a later age, have sat at crystal sets to pick up Pittsburgh or Kansas City, or who, during dark days of World War II have listened by

short-wave to London under air attack, you will understand how a seven-teen-year-old boy felt, sitting at his telegraph instrument in Indianapolis.

There was already in that room a hint of the radio age [. . .].³²

In keeping with the conventions of *Cavalcade*'s dramatized lectures--and American radio dramatics in general--the single-voice recital gives way to a series of episodic prolepses, dialogues emphasizing Edison's own struggle to communicate with others, as expressed in this exchange between Edison and his assistant and spouse-to-be, Mary Stilwell (Donna Reed):

EDISON. I can understand some people easily. You, for instance. Others I can't at all. And that's not good, Mary. It shuts you off from people. But that's made me think: Almost everyone in the world is really shut off. We don't hear each other. We don't know each other.

MARY. That's true--yes!

EDISON. There are barriers between people--and countries--that we almost never break down. Now these things I'm working on, Mary--they're for breaking down barriers. Talking machines, loud-speaking telephones, talking photography--we'll have them all! Machines that talk across space and time[. . .].

Through its alternation of narration and dialogue, the play suggests radio to be both "talking machine" and hearing aid, a democratic communications apparatus by means of which "truth" is enunciated and disseminated among nations--the "truth that will set them free." The institution of broadcasting is construed as the product and propagator of "the American Idea . . . and the whole world is better off because there is an American Idea." The "Voice of the Wizard" thus serves to call forth the American spirit of which the telecommunications media that Edison conceived are argued to be a true expression.³³

Radio playwright Ethel Deckelman found an even more compelling spokesperson for democratic exchange in the figure of Helen Keller, whose biography she turned into

the story of the need of the whole human race. That need is *communication*. It is impossible for a growing brain to be isolated. And the personality of Helen Keller, locked within a silent, blind body, broke through when her growing brain began to reach out, searching for society.³⁴

Introducing dramatic episodes of Keller's struggle in words partially excerpted from *The Story of My Life* (1902), Deckelman's heroine explains how her need "for communication--the need of the human being," grew

so urgent that the outbursts of passion occurred daily, hourly! Have you ever been in a ship at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore? I was like that ship. "Light. Give me light!" was the wordless cry of my soul.³⁵

Instead, in the absence of that light, Keller learns the Morse code, signals that lead her, like the ships at sea, out of perilous isolation. The story of Helen Keller--an educator who was no stranger to the broadcast medium that enabled her to address the public at the conclusion of a *Cavalcade of America* tribute to her teacher, "Anne Sullivan Macy" (Mar. 2, 1938)--is turned into another metaphor for the telecommunications revolution.

Significantly, "Helen Keller" was produced in 1946 by the Office of Inter-American Affairs, a government agency that later became part of the State Department; in addition to being presented on WMCA's *New World A'Coming*, it was shortwaved to Europe and Latin America through the facilities of NBC. Like Barnouw's play, it suggests that American broadcasting could be an instrument of social equality and global understanding. Keller's voice ultimately becomes the voice of America propagating the democratic ideals of the nation by professing her love for "this great free country of ours," vowing to "preach love, brotherhood," and "peace," and fighting against "intolerance," "bigotry," and "racial prejudice" by insisting on continued and increased

“communication.”³⁶ Conquering personal challenges or physical impairment to end their isolation, idealized public figures like Barnouw’s Edison and Deckelman’s Keller were invested with narrative privileges in order to set up the dramatic episodes of life stories that communicated the ideals of American broadcasting as a facilitator and generator of discourse among the detached, visuals-deprived members of the radio audience. Broadcasting was thus glorified as a unifying, Americanizing institution. In contrast, when radio playwrights pointed up the demoralizing and dehumanizing aspects of everyday telecommunications, they invariably picked up the telephone, demonstrating its supposedly reciprocal point-to-point connections to be unreliable, even treacherous.

An early exponent of such wire acts is writer-director-producer Irving Reis’s “Meridian 7-1212,” an episodic melodrama that gainsays telephony as a soulless cybernetic system beyond the sway of the removed customers and seemingly immovable operators it entangles. First performed on the *Columbia Workshop* on October 10, 1937, and subsequently singled out in a series of “festival” broadcasts on **August 24, 1939**, Reis’s play opens with the filter-miked voice of a female telephone operator, unemotionally and unfailingly telling time in fifteen-second intervals: “When you hear the signal the time will be eleven thirty and one quarter.” After three such announcements, the voice fades and gives way to the sounds of a typewriter and of paper being ripped out and crumpled. Readily imagined to be sitting in front of it as midnight approaches is a frustrated, cursing magazine writer who, the listener learns from his conversation with one of his colleagues, is in dire need of a “human interest” story. When he dials Meridian 7-1212, New York City’s telephone time service, to find out just how fast his deadline is approaching, he has a brainstorm: why not interview the clock-watchers employed there. Dialing again, he tries to talk to one of the operators, but realizes that she cannot hear him; so he decides to send a colleague, Jim Fawcett, to the time service office to conduct the interviews for him and to phone in his report. Dependent on deadlines, storylines, and lifelines, the careers of all the characters in the play are quite literally on the line.

Measuring time like a latter-day Lachesis, Meridian 7-1212 is demonstrated to control the destinies of anyone calling in or dialing out.

The scene shifts to the premises of the time service where one of the operators, Dot, too noticeably distressed to continue her work, is being temporarily relieved. In the impersonal environment of their hermetic confines, the only succor her co-worker can conceive of is to suggest that Dot take advantage of the employee discount and make a long distance call to her family. Yet to Dot, simulated proximity is no adequate substitute for propinquity, for the filial bond that is about to be severed. Her controlled voice breaking down once again, Dot communicates the source of her misery by telescoping the ordeal of her brother:

Oh, Tommy! Tommy! (*Checking herself.*) They're going to kill him at twelve o'clock tonight, and I can't do anything. I can't do anything except sit here and call off the time every fifteen seconds . . . the last in Tommy's life . . . and he didn't do it. . . . He couldn't have. . . . He wrote me that he was in the bank when it happened . . . and somebody swore he handed a gun to the man that did the killing . . . but he had nothing to do with it.³⁷

That her co-worker is already familiar with the case while ignorant of Dot's connection to it further underscores the women's isolation not only from the customers, but from one another. It is at this moment also that the listeners of "Meridian 7-1212" are drawn closer to the character they were heretofore encouraged to perceive as a means to a journalist's success--mere press fodder and page filler.

Having made the audience privy to Dot's despair, Reis renders the journalist's predicament negligible by comparison and effects a transfer of the listener's sympathies from the initial caller to the operator. The narrative structure of the play thus operates as a switchboard, permitting the radio listener to eavesdrop on a series of speakers as they confide in others about their cares, only to pull the plug just at the moment when base curiosity might turn into personal involvement. The audience's attachment to Dot is

promoted not simply through melodramatic excess--a sudden emotional outburst and the rapid delivery of a horrendous tale of injustice--but through a conflation of diegesis, narrative structure, and listening experience. It is at the moment when Dot relates her story that it becomes clear to the audience that the half hour allotted for the play is also the time Dot's brother has left to live, the time Dot will spend counting down the minutes to his death.

Before they can learn anything else about Dot, listeners are disconnected once again as the scene shifts to the office of Mr. Bradley, the man in charge of the telephone time service. Fawcett, the proxy journalist, is overheard interviewing him. Eying the operator in her "glass-enclosed" and "soundproof" cubicle, both men remain ignorant of Dot's suffering, even though Bradley remarks upon the irregularity of the unscheduled relief as Dot resumes her work. Unlike the eavesdropping audience the play seeks to enlist as compassionate witnesses, the two observers listen in on the time servants with almost clinical detachment:

FAWCETT. And they just sit there and wait for the calls to come in?

BRADLEY. Oh, no. They have no way of knowing whether anyone is on the line or not. They call time every fifteen seconds, regardless. You hear them, but they can't hear you.

In the absence of any contact with the women and without access to their accounts, Fawcett begins to speculate instead about the private lives of those availing themselves of the service. There is no way of tracing the calls, Bradley informs the frustrated deputy reporter. As the telephone once again fails to supply the scoop, the radio audience is granted connections to realities about which the thwarted communicator and his cooped-up colleague can only hypothesize.³⁸

First in a series of wiretappings is a telephonic exchange that seems to be entirely unrelated to the time service. Joined by another faceless intermediary, a hotel operator, a couple is heard talking about their separation:

WOMAN [*On filter mike throughout scene.*] Oh, John . . . why didn't you call and say you'd be late? Where are you?

MAN. I'm at a hotel, dear.

WOMAN. But what are you doing at a hotel?

MAN. I've got something very important to tell you, Grace . . .

WOMAN. Please save it and come right home.

MAN. It can't wait.

WOMAN. But it's so late, dear, and we've been worried all day . . .

MAN. I've been pretty busy.

WOMAN. I know . . . but . . .

MAN. Grace . . . my insurance policy expires at midnight.

WOMAN. That doesn't matter, John. You'll get another when things pick up.

MAN. There isn't a chance, dear. I'm all washed up.

WOMAN. Darling! I won't have you talk that way [. . .] We'll find some way out. . . . We still have each other [. . .].

MAN. My policy is for fifty thousand dollars, Grace. . . . It expires in about eighteen minutes.

WOMAN. John! What are you thinking of. . . . I won't listen--I won't listen!

MAN. I'm going to leave you, darling. . . . Please take care of Priscilla and Jim . . .

WOMAN. John . . . don't, John. . . .

(*Biz: Receiver hangs up and cuts; jiggle receiver*).³⁹

Encouraging John's unilateral decision to confront his failures in death by permitting him to evade the gaze of his consort, the telephone is demonstrated to be responsible

for--rather than merely symbolic of--social disintegration, the loss of intimacy and reciprocity.

As the sound of the jiggled receiver indicates, the audience remains in John's presence even after he has cut off his spousal lifeline to place a call to Meridian 7-1212; playwright and listener are, after all, drawn together by a wireless medium. The hotel operator who makes the connection is instructed by John to remain on the line in order to testify later that what he is about to witness occurred at "eleven forty-four and one half," thus prior to the expiration of John's policy. The next signal the hapless switchboard operator hears is the presumably fatal shot. Even as the moment of her brother's execution approaches, Dot becomes an unwitting instrument in the violent death of another by stoically carrying out her duty. For the audience of Reis's play, remaining on the line becomes a privilege as well as an ordeal.

The radio listener is momentarily switched back into the presence of Bradley and Fawcett, who dismiss the possibility that anyone outside New York City might have a reason to dial the service. The two subsequent dialogues confute their prosaic notions while also diverging sharply from the deadline realities of Tommy and John. They involve a drunken New Yorker at a London pub who wins a five dollar bet that it is not yet midnight on the East Coast by calling Meridian 7-1212 at the expense of six pounds (thirty dollars), and a naive sailor who learns that Meridian 7-1212 is not the number of the girl who just turned his head and took off with his wallet. Reis's exchange drama never returns to Fawcett or his colleague. Instead, it introduces yet another set of characters--while nonetheless closing its circuit--by transferring listeners back to Dot and the source of her despair. In the play's final scene, Tommy's lawyer is heard making a last-minute attempt to prove the innocence of his former client. Under duress, the witness whose testimony led to Tommy's conviction confesses that he perjured himself in court. When the truth is out, the lawyer reaches for the phone to stay the execution, only to learn that his watch has stopped, that it is really one minute to midnight and thus too late to save

Tommy's life. For once, the timely and responsible use of the telephone might have served a just cause. Instead, Tommy's sister "Dot"--always on time but never more than a signal in a code--tearfully announces the midnight hour.

With its bathetic twists and none-too-subtle ironies, "Meridian 7-1212" creates a sense both of tangled wires and wireless freedom. Networking through channels not engaged by its inoperative newspaper journalist, Reis's melodramatic montage relates the isolated voices within the multitude and dialogues the untold. By exposing the dead ends of telecommunication--a demoralizing point-to-point system that reinforces fragmentation by promoting detachment--it demonstrates the moral force of broadcast radio as a unifying means of mass communication capable of initiating the meeting of minds. Reis's play was only the first in a long line of radio melodramas that anathematized the telephone as the anti-wireless, a menace in the broadcasting menage. While too experimental to inspire direct imitations, Reis's narrator-less dialogues convincingly attested to the dramatic value of two-sided telephone conversations, interceptions that Waldo Abbot's 1937 Handbook of Broadcasting still discommended as "unnatural."⁴⁰ Following Reis's performance, many of the more conventional broadcast writers began to draw on the inside/outside and absence/presence dynamics of telephonic speech and its discarnate speakers to introduce a corrosive element or destabilizing force into the social discourse of radio realism.

"And if you'll please hang up": Mind over Manners

Radio, more so than the telephone, is an "extension of the central nervous system that is matched only by human speech itself," McLuhan has argued⁴¹; in broadcast drama, the filtered voice was being associated with the unreachable or unconquerable other and served to signal the systemic corruption and disease of point-to-point communication. Testing the mental soundness and attesting to the moral weaknesses of the solitary speaker, the telephone thus became a much relied-upon expedient for broadcast writers operating in a considerably more restricted medium than McLuhan's "echo chamber" of

“psyche and society.” Throughout the 1940s, radio playwrights sent voices athwart the wire to intimidate and deceive their diegetic listeners. Aside from Eberhart’s previously discussed propaganda play “The Enemy Is Listening” (**June 7, 1943**), thrillers like *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*’s “Voice on the Wire” (**Nov. 29, 1944**), *The Whistler*’s “Phone Call from Death” (**Sept. 10, 1945**), or *The Mysterious Traveler*’s “No One on the Line” (**Sept. 1, 1946**), drove home just how readily wired messages could cross their receivers. Never was this more forcefully argued than in Lucille Fletcher’s “Sorry, Wrong Number,” the most famous telecommunications drama, indeed the best-known original American radio play to date.

Opening with the familiar sounds of frustrated communication--dialing, busy signal, the slamming of a telephone receiver--“Sorry, Wrong Number” connected immediately with the listening public when it premiered on *Suspense* on **May 25, 1943**. Hailed as “radio’s perfect script,” it was performed more often than any other broadcast play of its day, eight times on *Suspense* alone; its third restaging within less than two and a half years was considered a “radio record.”⁴² It was adapted for stage, motion pictures and television, published as a novelization and parodied on the *Jack Benny Program* (**Oct. 17, 1948**). Still considered significant and memorable enough to be included, along with works by O’Neill, Yeats, and Chekhov, in a 1958 anthology of favorite one-acters, Fletcher’s high-tension wire-act even inspired an audio sequel more than half a century after its first broadcast.⁴³ Since its origin as a radio play is acknowledged in the opening of the better known film adaptation, also scripted by Fletcher, “Sorry, Wrong Number” now serves as a tentative nexus for cinema and broadcasting studies; Fletcher’s screenplay invites such connections by signaling its radiogenesis in its use of voice-over narration, despite the fact that the action of original play unfolds entirely as dialogue.⁴⁴

Indeed, what made “Sorry, Wrong Number” such a “perfect” script, from the broadcasters’ standpoint--and what made it a model for radio realism--was that it demonstrated how to create a dynamic portrait of a solitary figure without having to resort

to monologic speech. A drama for nine voices, it records the last minutes in the life of Mrs. Elbert Stevenson (Agnes Moorehead in what would become a signature role), a bedridden invalid whose only link to the outside world is her telephone. “[. . .] I’m all alone here in the house. My health is very poor--and I’ve been feeling so nervous all day,” she complains to a telephone operator at the opening of the play. She has been trying to contact her husband’s office, but the line, she claims, is “always busy.” When the connection appears to have been established by the operator, Mrs. Stevenson overhears instead an exchange between two men who are making final preparations for a homicide, to be carried out within the next half hour. Already tortured by a message she cannot quite decode, Mrs. Stevenson is further tormented by operators who cannot provide assistance or authorities who deny their cooperation in preventing an act as “inhuman” as the “cold-blooded murder” of some “poor innocent woman.”⁴⁵

Amy Lawrence suggests that Mrs. Stevenson occupies the “position of the radio listener”; eavesdropping on a conversation, she is unable to exert any direct influence on what has passed through her receiver.⁴⁶ And like some assertive listeners of the broadcast public, Mrs. Stevenson refuses to remain unheard: “I’ve never seen such inefficient, miserable service.” Whatever her physical or psychosomatic afflictions, she is a commanding vocal presence who, along with the other speakers in the play, takes advantage of her temporary incorporeality; being all voice to the world, she insists that the world be all ears. “Oh--why are you so stupid?” she berates the operator who cannot “make that same mistake again” and dial the wrong number “in the same sort of careless way” that had allowed her to listen in on the suspicious exchange. Told that it would take “something more official” than her “say-so” to have the call traced, she is being referred to the police. To Mrs. Stevenson, “all this red tape” is “perfectly idiotic.” A tired police sergeant on night duty rebuffs her report. “Telephones are funny things,” he replies nonchalantly, audibly smirking at her demand for a “complete and thorough search of the whole city.” When she insists on becoming a newscaster by proxy, requesting that a

warning be “broadcast [. . .] all over the city” and “radio cars” be sent around, Mrs. Stevenson is asked to “hang up” so that the police may concentrate on “a couple of other matters” that “require immediate attention.” Fletcher’s play thus disciplines its central character not only for airing her concerns but for attempting to contest the role assigned to her. Mrs. Stevenson must be out of her mind, the play argues, to meddle with what is traditionally none of her business--the business of broadcasting.⁴⁷

As radio drama instructor Rome Cowgill pointed out, Fletcher’s two-sided telephone conversations effect various “changes of scene” and establish “direct contact” with each character; and yet, instead of being switched back and forth between speakers, the audience remains in Mrs. Stevenson’s presence throughout.⁴⁸ It is a perspective enforced by Fletcher’s scripted indication of filter usage. Until the final moment of the play, Mrs. Stevenson is the only speaker whose voice is not electronically distorted. In “Meridian 7-1212,” frequency filtering suggests separation and lack of influence; Reis’s filter-enfeebled speakers--among them Dot, the operator, and Grace, the suicide’s wife--have no control over the action. In Fletcher’s dialogue, by comparison, the filter-enhanced voices--the telephone operators, the authorities, the conspirators--are indifferent, intimidating, or outright inimical. Whatever their message, their voices are constant in volume. Mrs. Stevenson, by comparison, becomes more shrill in her high-pitched responses to an apparently hostile world as she gradually talks herself into believing that the murder plot concerns her own person. “Oh--you’re being spiteful, aren’t you?” she shrieks at the operator. “You don’t care, do you, what happens to me?” Yet she does not break down entirely until even her husband’s words--a message informing her of his overnight trip on “urgent business”--are being delivered to her in the professional monotone of an apathetic telegram reader.⁴⁹

Cut off from social interaction, Mrs. Stevenson is increasingly forced to talk to herself, screaming or sobbing into the receiver. Speaking her mind, she is left without an

audience, a communications partner that, Fletcher suggests, the ill-tempered and self-centered virago never respected:

OPERATOR. (*Filter.*) Your call, please?

MRS. STEVENSON. Murray Hill 3-0093.

OPERATOR. (*Filter.*) You may dial that number direct, mada . . .

(*Biz: She cuts Mrs. Stevenson off.*)

MRS. STEVENSON. Oh . . .

(*Biz: You hear her nervously dialing the number. It comes through, ring after long ring. No answer.*)

MRS. STEVENSON. He's gone. Oh--Elbert--how could you? How could you . . .

(*Biz: She hangs up the phone.*)

MRS. STEVENSON. (*Sobs, pitying herself.*) But I can't be alone--tonight. I can't. If I'm alone one more second, I'll go mad. I don't care what he says--or what the expense is--I'm a sick . . . I'm entitled. . . .

Insisting on solace and solidarity on demand, Mrs. Stevenson tries to hire a nurse for the night, but is reminded of wartime personnel shortage. The nurse's registry still on the line, she is visited by one of the "cold-blooded fiends" she overheard plotting her murder.

"Sorry. Wrong Number," the infiltrator responds in a calm, no longer filter-miked voice to the police sergeant whom Mrs. Stevenson attempted to reach once more at the moment of her death.⁵⁰

Like all of the plays Fletcher brought to *Suspense* over the course of four years, "Sorry, Wrong Number" has at its center an apparently victimized character in want of sympathy. In "The Diary of Sophronia Winters" (Apr. 27, 1943), this figure is a middle-aged newlywed terrorized by the stranger she married; in "The Hitch Hiker" (Sept. 2, 1942), "Night Man" (Oct. 26, 1944), and "The Thing in the Window" (Dec. 19, 1946),

the role of the tormented and misunderstood is assigned to single urbanites who seem to be haunted by the dead. Eventually, the listener's trust in the central character proves to be misplaced as the alleged victims who monopolize the microphone and demand a hearing are revealed to be schemers, psychopaths, or specters.⁵¹ Unlike these plays, however, "Sorry, Wrong Number" transcends the thriller genre in that its character study is not invalidated by a climactic, startling twist that exposes the supposedly true nature of its main speaker. It is not a confidence game in which overheard (voices and sounds shared with the audience) and hearsay (a speaker's account or interpretation of the experience) prove mutually exclusive. Having access to same incomplete piece of information that incites Mrs. Stevenson (the overheard murder plot), the audience is invited to judge her response to it and her interactions with others. That the play ends in her silencing, rather than the apprehension of her murderers--a conclusion almost unheard of in broadcast fiction--leaves little doubt that the "victim," as Allison McCracken puts it, is to be perceived as the "real monster."⁵²

Unless serving the purposes of commerce or propaganda, the discourse-monopolizing speaker was a suspect figure in broadcast realism; and in a medium whose announcer-narrators were almost uniformly male, no voice was more disruptive than that of a woman screaming bloody murder. By constructing a real-time dialogue that, for its full effect, demanded the expulsion of the announcer-narrator to the frame of the broadcast, Fletcher negotiated for herself the "perfect" radio special: an infiltration drama ending with the scheduled execution of the usurper.

Not surprisingly, the success of CBS's *Suspense* play inspired rival network NBC to stage a similar trial by telecommunication. A few weeks before the release of the motion picture adaptation "Sorry, Wrong Number," NBC's *Radio City Playhouse* began its two year run (1948-50) with "Long Distance" (July 3, 1948) by Harry W. Junkin, who also directed this showcase anthology of original plays and adaptations. Starring the popular radio actress Jan Miner in a role and performance rather closely modeled after

Moorehead's Mrs. Stevenson, "Long Distance" combined the dramatic structure of Fletcher's play with the main story line of "Meridian 7-1212"; and, as in both of these plays, the tension of Junkin's dialogue derives from the isochronism of dramatic action and listening experience. The central character is a distraught wife who makes a final attempt to save her husband, a convicted murderer to be executed within the next half hour. In her call to the prison warden, she claims to have found a long-lost piece of evidence that would prove her husband's innocence. For the next twenty-five minutes she is heard trying to get hold of the judge who can stay the execution. Yet it is only after the clock has struck the fateful hour that she finally manages to talk to him; she is urged to hang up and await his return call. The deadline having passed, the dramatic clock stops. After a short musical bridge suggesting the passage of time, the telephone rings and the agonized intercessor reluctantly picks up the receiver. She begins to laugh frenetically, shouting out her husband's name.⁵³

Unlike the conclusion of "Sorry, Wrong Number," which leaves no doubt as to the fate of its central character, the epilogue of "Long Distance" permits alternate readings. Since the voice to which the character responds so euphorically is the only one in the play not rendered audible, it is for the audience to determine whether her husband's body has been spared or whether her mind has been expended during the ordeal of recalling him to life. In the social realism of radio dialogues, any hint of the monologic at such a pivotal dramatic moment was suggestive of the monomaniac.

"I know what you're thinking. The old woman is going mad. Only mad people talk to themselves," scoffs the solitary speaker in W. H. Auden's "The Dark Valley" (**June 2, 1940**), a *Columbia Workshop* play starring noted British stage actress May Whitty. Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire, she was cast opposite a sound effect--the fiercely honking goose her character addresses throughout. A "poor old woman alone in the mountains" rambling on about a youth without "radio or magazines or movies or romances," she chases and ultimately kills her feathered companion in what may

be read as a sacrifice for--or “wild-geese chase” after--the endangered art of the monologue in commercial broadcasting: “For business is business, and boys will be boys, and lust is a natural need like eating, and the search for the gold of grace is a grueling voyage.”⁵⁴ The unvoiced proxy listener and the filtered telephone voice were among the many tamed geese of everyday radio drama. Writers who sought to make a living in the business of broadcasting learned to yield to the industry’s bias against monologic speech while all along introducing first-person narration in many “guises,” as Barnouw put it, by employing almost every kind of “human communication.”⁵⁵ No American radio playwright was more ingenious than Arch Oboler in devising ways of processing mental states for the mental stage.

“You little fool! It’s reality!”: Mind Games That Answer

As early as 1934, former BBC production director Ivan Firth and radio editor Gladys Erskine reminded American broadcast writers that the “best Radio Drama is supplied by *mental conflict*, rather than action.”⁵⁶ Peabody Award winner Oboler succeeded as a commercial broadcast playwright precisely by demonstrating that “mental conflict” could be rendered as melodramatic “action.” A Chicagoan removed from the two centers of entertainment that, by the late 1930s, dominated network broadcasting, Oboler was less influenced by the surface realism of conventional radio drama, the “dramatized story” and “narrative play” models rooted in the broadcasting industry’s well-established ties to motion pictures, theaters, and publishing concerns. In one of his more whimsical moments, he offered this imaginary dialogue as a piece of advice to aspiring radio writers:

YOU. Mr. Oboler, please wake up.

OBOLER. I didn’t know that I was sleeping.

YOU. You had your eyes shut.

OBOLER. I was looking for an idea.

YOU. Where?

OBOLER. On the borderline between the conscious and the unconscious.

You see, I think one of the faults in today's radio dramatic writing is that the ideas come from conferences, headlines, and memories of other stories one's read or movie-screened.

YOU. You mean I have to become a Yogi and concentrate on my navel?

OBOLER. I mean that if you want to say something dramatically over the air and say it well, you must give your subconscious time to gestating [sic] ideas, instead of rushing to typewriter and pounding off the first idea which comes to mind--which is generally a vague plagiarism of an oft-done theme.⁵⁷

As he later explained it to the readers of Theatre Arts, the sparsity of original and truly radiogenic plays had been a direct result of the East Coast/West Coast dynamics of broadcasting. New York radio had been "too much fashioned after Broadway," whereas the West Coast productions were "too screenplay conscious"; "Chicago alone, free of old influences, worked on this new art form wherein the listener, in his own mind, built up pictures evoked by the sounds of words, and effects, and orchestral accompaniment."⁵⁸

To be sure, Oboler had made a name for himself by catering to Radio City and Hollywood, writing sketches for Hollywood crooner Rudy Vallee and former vaudevillian Edgar Bergen. It was for Bergen's *Chase and Sanborn Hour* (1937-48) that Oboler scripted the infamous "Garden of Eden" skit (Dec. 12, 1937) which resulted in Mae West's ban from the airwaves; an FCC investigation concluded that West's sultry delivery, not Oboler's innocuous dialogue, was to blame for the barrage of listener complaints about the profanity of the broadcast. By 1940, Oboler was considered a "one man literary factory," having already turned out over four hundred dramatic pieces.⁵⁹ Yet Oboler's earliest dramatic experiments indeed originated from NBC's Chicago studios; between May 1936 and July 1938, he was chief writer for the then Chicago-based horror anthology

Lights Out! (1935-39; 1942-43; summer revivals, 1945-47), to which he contributed more than one hundred scripts. His very first entry into the series--"Burial Service" (June 10, 1936), the story of a cataleptic girl buried alive--already challenged the conventions of broadcast drama by exploring techniques for representing the uncommunicated thoughts of a solitary figure; as a result, "Burial Service" was of such startling intensity and realism that it reportedly provoked the outcry of thousands of listeners who had suffered the loss of a loved one. Experimental yet accessible, intriguing yet inoffensive, Oboler's subsequent *Lights Out!* performances convinced NBC to give the eccentric playwright the opportunity to direct and produce his own Saturday night showcase, *Arch Oboler's Plays* (1939-40; 1945); it was the first dramatic anthology on network radio to be named after its writer.⁶⁰

With the notable exception of the short monologue "The Steel Worker" (June 3, 1939), *Arch Oboler's Plays* are polyvocal, although many of them deal with situations of confinement and isolation; social outcasts or physically impaired, Oboler's central characters struggle to communicate with the world outside or escape despair and insanity by surrounding themselves with remembered or imaginary friends. In each case, the loss of sight or the apparent inability to respond places the victimized speaker-thinker in a position comparable to that of the broadcast audience; unlike Fletcher's Mrs. Stevenson, Oboler's communications-challenged victims triumph over adversity by learning how to listen effectively or responsibly. In "Dark World" (June 3, 1939), a deceased woman, having spent her life in a hospital room, blind and paralyzed, refutes the nurses who pity her dead body; she relates to the audience how she managed to "ma[k]e a world" in her "darkness" by learning to surround herself with literature and music--"friends" like the Brownings and Whitman and Schubert who used to come to her bedside and talk with her. In "The Women Stayed at Home" (Feb. 24, 1940), a widow conquers her "horrible loneliness" by nursing a foreign soldier back to health; despite his sudden, unannounced departure, she has learned anew to live purposefully and rejoices "I'll never be lonely any

more.” In “Johnny Got His Gun” (Mar. 9, 1940)--an adaptation of Dalton Trumbo’s 1939 “‘mind’ story” of the same title⁶¹--a veteran of the first world war, hospitalized “because he had no arms, no legs, no ears with which to hear, no eyes with which to see, no mouth with which to speak,” recalls the voices of his past; sensing the presence of others by registering the vibrations of their movements, he learns to communicate his hatred for war by tapping the Morse code with his head.⁶² This formula--redemption through receptiveness--enabled Oboler to contrast monologic stream-of-consciousness narratives expressive of the desires and despair of the isolated individual with the challenges and comforts of interpersonal discourse.

“The Ugliest Man in the World” (Mar. 25, 1939), for instance, relates the death wish of the central character, Paul, a hideous-looking outcast on the verge of suicide, in a stream-of-consciousness monotone that is episodically interrupted by dramatic prolepses exemplifying his humiliation, torment, and ultimate salvation through social reintegration. Until Paul regains his confidence by becoming a narrator-reader to a blind woman who confesses her love for his “good mind,” his thought-narrative expresses both his anguish and his determination to put an end to the laughter and ridicule that defined his social interactions:

PAUL. [. . .] gun in my hand gun in my hand in all my life I never had a
gun in my hand smooth gun hard gun cold gun in my hand bullet won’t
be cold warm bullet hot bullet burning hot hot as the blood--no, can’t
think of that lift the muzzle of the gun up hole as black as where I’m
going one way entrance to eternal blackness turn the muzzle up and
press the trigger trigger cold against my finger cold as death but life is
colder--rhythm to that--poet dies with final rhythm poet dies who never
wrote a poem--headline for the tabloids--Poet Dies with Final Rhythm.

VOICE. (*Distant.*) Ugliest Man in the World a Suicide.

PAUL. (*Firmly, spacing words so to drive the previous thought out.*)

Poet-Dies-With-Final-Rhythm.

VOICE. (*In close.*) Ugliest Man in the World a Suicide!

PAUL. (*Louder, in anguish.*) Poet Dies in Final Rhythm!

VOICE. (*In close, shouting.*) Ugliest Man in the World a Suicide!

(*Repeats again simultaneously with:*)

PAUL. (*In time with above shouting as if to drown it out.*) Poet Dies in
Final Rhythm!

VOICE. Ugliest Man in the World a Suicide!

PAUL. No, no, stop! Stop!

When the blind woman regains her sight, Paul has to learn to overcome his self-loathing--“I’m not meant for light”--and confront the reality her condition permitted him temporarily to forget. Both his thoughts of suicide and his escapist fantasies--“I wasted too much time thinking . . .”--are conquered in the concluding dialogue in which Paul hearkens her insistence on seeing and loving him “apart from” his “ugliness.” A careful listener herself, she already surmised the cause of his anguish--the disfigurement she never got to see--when she heard him weeping while reading Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac* to her. She pursues him to his hiding place as he is about to put a violent end to the mocking voices in his mind, an intervention that effectively terminates his tormenting flashbacks.⁶³

With a title and plot elements reminiscent of Frederick Melville’s stage success *The Ugliest Woman on Earth* (1904), this sensational opener for *Arch Oboler’s Plays* hardly suggests that Oboler sought to distance himself from his earlier “shriek-and-shudder work,” as one hostile review claimed. In fact, many of his scripts were performed on both *Lights Out!* and *Arch Oboler’s Plays* or *Everyman’s Theater*. Retitled “Mr. Freak,” but otherwise unchanged, “The Ugliest Man in the World” was revived first on *Everyman’s Theater* (Mar. 14, 1941), then on *Lights Out!* (June 1, 1943). Unlike his *Lights Out!* offerings, however, which so unabashedly “smacked of the pulps,” Oboler’s

“latter-day effusions” sought to appeal to the more literate audience of radio’s sustaining drama anthologies; instead, they never lost their “soapy flavor, even when social significance [was] being dragged in by the ears.”⁶⁴ In one of the earliest scholarly assessment of Oboler’s work, Frances Lee Hall dismissed the resolution of “The Ugliest Man in the World”—a rescue “in the nick of time”—as “cheap” and “artificial,” calling it “unfortunate” that the playwright chose melodrama over tragedy by “sacrific[ing] logic, consistency of characterization, and plot in order to give the listening public a sentimental ending.”⁶⁵

Yet if Oboler’s crowd-pleasing performances were rejected as thickly sliced “baloney,” as “claptrap melodrama” that was “shallow, secondhand, tearjerking, pompous,” as “philosophical as flatulence” and “in social matters impertinent or fantastic,”⁶⁶ it was partly because they so shrewdly—and altogether solemnly—exploited psychoanalysis as what Peter Brooks calls the “systematic realization of the melodramatic aesthetic,” its conception of “conflict,” its “dynamics of repression,” its redefinition of “evil” as the treacherous unconscious. According to Brooks, the very structure of ego, superego, and id are suggestive of the “subjacent manichaeism” of melodramatic characterizations.⁶⁷ Years before Hitchcock’s *Spellbound* (1945) plunged movie-goers into Dali’s liquid dreamscapes and led them through door after metaphorical door into the subconscious in a romantic thriller its director insisted to have been the “first motion picture to deal with psychoanalysis,” Oboler redefined melodrama for the aural medium as a system of social trial and psychological terror: a sparring contest of voices during which individuals talk themselves (or are being talked) into and out of sanity.⁶⁸ “Alter Ego,” for instance, dialogued the mind with a subtlety Hall argued to approach that of a “boxing match.”⁶⁹

Having served as a *Texaco Star Theater* vehicle for Bette Davis in the dual role of a young woman compelled by an inner voice to kill her lover (Oct. 5, 1938), the play was subsequently retitled “Another World” and presented on *Arch Oboler’s Plays* (July 28,

1939). According to Oboler, it was inspired by the Beauchamp case, a study of dissociative identity (or multiple personality) disorder that had appeared more than thirty years earlier in the Journal of Abnormal Psychology. “‘Alter Ego’ is definitely a play indigenous to the radio form,” Oboler commented on published script. “In no other medium could the ‘two mind systems’ existing in the same body be portrayed as effectively.” In the opening of the July 28, 1939 broadcast, Oboler proposed the play as a “story of another world within our own”: “Why go out into interstellar space for a story of another world when here, on this earth, within ourselves, there are other worlds, the other beings we might have been?” Promising a tapping into unrealized potentialities--and, by extension, a commentary on what the time art of the ether might become if it were freed from the confinements of corporeality and corporate realities--“Alter Ego” subdues the very “world within” that it struggles to release.⁷⁰

In keeping with the conventions of broadcast drama, the *Arch Oboler's Plays* presentation of “Alter Ego” opens conservatively with the paternal voice of a third-person narrator setting the scene--a “cold, dismal, dreary night” in a “cell of the death block of a Southern penitentiary”; his is, quite literally, a voice that bespeaks confinement. It also establishes the boundaries of the ensuing debate, the inside/outside, psyche/society, and monologue/dialogue dichotomies to be explored in the play: “Outside, a chilling rain beats endlessly against the small barred window. Inside, alone, a young girl kneels beside her prison cot, talking softly to herself.” The solitary figure is Joan (radio actress Betty Garde); rather than talking “to herself,” as Oboler’s announcer-narrator puts it, the young woman is addressing her dead mother, a melodramatically effective proxy listener that defines the imprisoned woman as a quintessential victim--a helpless, unheeded orphan:

I couldn’t help it, mother--I couldn’t help it! It wasn’t my fault--oh, please believe me, mother--there’s no one else I can turn to now--you’ll understand, won’t you? If you’d only been alive, you could have helped me

. . . and now, somehow, I think you're close, listening to me and I want to explain to you . . . tell you everything that happened.⁷¹

Joan's fragmented narrative, to which the play intermittently returns, gives way to the episodic drama of her ill-fated romance. During an outdoor tête-à-tête on the night after the announcement of their engagement, Joan is at a loss to communicate to her betrothed, Bob, a strange sensation she herself does not yet comprehend. Noticing her unease, Bob urges Joan to confide in him--"I want to know everything that you think"--despite her insistence that "it isn't good for anyone to know so much about anyone else." In a series of tentative questions, Joan tries to find out whether hers is an experience shared by others or whether to keep it contained and unexpressed, lest she should be declared "insane" as a result of her openness:

JOAN. Bob . . . do you ever . . . I mean . . . well, does it ever happen that . . .

BOB. What are you trying to ask me, dear?

JOAN. Oh, I don't know.

BOB. Come on, now, what's on your mind?

JOAN. Well . . . do you ever hear things?

BOB. Sure, that's what I was telling you. Listen to them singing--crickets and frogs . . .

JOAN. But I don't mean that, Bob. I don't mean from the outside. I mean do you ever hear things from the inside?

BOB. From the inside? Well, now . . .

JOAN. Oh, if I could only explain. It's *not* like a voice--and yet maybe it is a voice . . .⁷²

Trying to comfort his shivering fiancée from the outside, Bob rushes to fetch her coat, thereby ignoring her plea not be left alone. During his brief absence, Joan hears the voice she has been dreading, a woman's voice calling her name. The speaker is Joan's

alter ego, later identified as Carmen (a part also read by Garde, whose slightly reverberating alter-ego voice comes across as fierce yet hollow):

JOAN. Where . . . where are you? I hear you . . . you're close by, but I can't see you! Please . . . where are you? You're frightening me.

CARMEN. (*Declaratively.*) I frighten you . . .

JOAN. (*Gasps in fright.*)

CARMEN. So! Now you know where I am, don't you?

JOAN. I . . . no! It can't be true!

CARMEN. It *is* true. . . . I speak from within you . . .

JOAN. No, no! It's someone speaking from the outside . . . someone trying to frighten me! I won't listen to you!

CARMEN. (*In cold amusement.*) Yes . . . cover your ears . . .

JOAN. (*Moans.*)

CARMEN. Yes . . . you still hear me . . .

JOAN. (*Dazedly.*) In my head.

CARMEN. Yes . . . in your head.

JOAN. (*Tearfully.*) Madness!

CARMEN. (*Sharply.*) You little fool! It's reality! Stand where you are and listen--you *must*!⁷³

The voice inside not only insists on an audience, but on dispossessing Joan of the body she once controlled. Threatening to "destroy" the "little white-faced Puritan," of causing her to be declared "insane" and put away in "an asylum for life," Carmen commands Joan to abandon her husband-to-be and to stop fighting her impulses: "You've got to give up your body--your mind--to me! It'll be easy--just give up--give up struggling against me!" When Bob refuses to let go of Joan, Carmen forces her to stab him to death with a pair of scissors by dictating the movements of her body: "He's not looking! Raise your arm!" Joan is tried for murder. Although the jury finds her not guilty, Joan decides

to conquer her fiendish alter ego by confessing to the crime of which she believes herself to be innocent, thereby rendering void what had become contested territory. Joan gives up her body on her own terms. Heroically, she faces the gallows. After the trap is sprung, a soft-voiced Joan, “*free from earthly cares*,” triumphs from the beyond: “You were wrong, Carmen--evil one--you were wrong. . . . Now there *is*--peace.”⁷⁴ According to the peculiar mind-over-matter logic of Oboler’s play, Joan is victorious because she finally has--or is--a mind of her own, free from corruption and infiltration. Yet once the fight for this freedom has been won, once Joan is rehabilitated, her single voice fades, this time for good. The end of radio drama being dialogue, the interrupted soliloquist has nothing to communicate but her inability to speak freely.

For all their technical ingenuity, plays like “Alter Ego” merely translated to the aural medium what 19th-century melodramas had audio-visualized for the stage with considerable resourcefulness. In Leopold Lewis’s *The Bells* (1871), for instance, a respected magistrate who secretly enriched himself by murdering an itinerant, well-to-do Jewish merchant is plagued by a guilty conscience, a haunting expressing itself as the sound of bells audible only to him and the theater audience. In a climactic scene, Lewis’s play dramatizes the inner workings of the mind of its central character (Mathias); staged as a courtroom trial, the process of denial and rationalization is rendered as a desperate attempt at public defense:

PRESIDENT. The public voice accuses you. Answer me this; how is it that you hear the noise of Bells [. . .]?

MATHIAS. (*With confidence.*) Listen, friends! Don’t fear for me! All this is but a dream--I am in a dream. If it were not a dream should I be clothed in these rags? Should I have before me such judges as these? Judges who, simply acting upon their own ideas, would hang a fellow creature. Ha, ha, ha! It is a dream--a dream! (*He bursts into a loud derisive laugh.*)

PRESIDENT. Silence, prisoner--silence! (*Turning to his companion*

JUDGES.) Gentlemen--this noise of Bells arises in the prisoner's mind from the remembrance of what is past. The prisoner hears this noise because there rankles in his heart the memory of that he would conceal from us. The Jew's horse carried Bells.

MATHIAS. It is false; I have no memories.

PRESIDENT. Be silent!

MATHIAS. (*With rage.*) A man cannot be condemned upon such suppositions. You must have proofs. I do not hear the noise of Bells.

As Mathias persists in what the court dismisses as "denial," a mesmeric is called upon to assist in giving voice to the repressed: "Speak on. I command you!" Against his will ("I oppose it! Dreams prove nothing!"), Mathias at last provides a truthful account of his crime. The court of his mind having sentenced him to be "hanged by the neck until he is dead," he awakes, gasps for air ("The rope! The rope! Cut the rope"), and expires.⁷⁵

Like Lewis's spectacularly staged infiltration fantasy, Oboler's dialogued interiors and polyvocally interrupted streams-of-consciousness sounded the unspoken in order to discipline, expel or reintegrate the thinker through social intervention. By the mid-1940s, such thought policings became the staple of terror and suspense anthologies like *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* and *Suspense*, which, in the words of thriller producer Himan Brown, began to show a "tremendous leaning" towards storytelling techniques that permitted writers to "delve more deeply into the psychological horrors and interior workings of the killer or his victim."⁷⁶ Frequently rejected as hokum, such psychodramatics even met with the scorn of pulp novelist Fredric Brown whose bleak and cynical *Here Comes a Candle* (1950) played up the conventions of broadcast thrillers by partially relating the nightmare of a guilt-tormented teenage hoodlum as a serial script that includes theme music ("motif from Rachmaninoff's *Isle of the Dead*"), sound cues (voices were to be

“*distorted in echo chamber*” so as to become “*truly mysterious and menacing*”), as well as announcer narrative:

Now let's go back over to the child's bed in which little Joe Bailey, age three and a half, is sleeping. We can see him dimly in the light of the candle and we can see on the wall behind him the monstrous flickering shadow that the candlelight casts there. And what's this we hear? A voice? Yes, but it's a voice that's inside Joe's head, a voice in a dream; no one but Joe--and you and me--can hear it. It is the voice of his Uncle Ernie reciting a delicious little jingle that puts pleasant little shivers up and down Joe's back. Listen carefully and you can hear the voice in Joe's dream--listen carefully. . . .⁷⁷

Some of the experimental plays produced by the *Columbia Workshop* were similarly derisive of radio's melodramatic mind-probings and their elaborate sound-stagecraft. For instance, in Vernon Delston's "Three Strikes You're Out: A Comedy-Romance of a Piano Tuner" (Apr. 18, 1940), the central character is being confronted by his Ego when he decides to marry and settle down. Bored with the social life of the conventional nobody it inhabits, the Ego hitches a ride to Florida: "I've been under cover too long. I need some fresh air."⁷⁸ Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee's "Inside a Kid's Head" (June 12, 1942) promises a "personally conducted tour through the brain of a ten-year-old boy," a *Penrod* for the age of psychoanalysis:

(*Biz: Fire gong, clanging violently.*)

WOMAN. Good gracious, guide! What's that?

GUIDE. That's a three-alarm warning from the conscience.

MAN. What's going on?

WOMAN. Is there any danger?

GUIDE. Can't tell exactly, yet. Evidently young Ritchie's up to something he shouldn't be doing. I haven't heard a racket like that

from his conscience since he cribbed in an arithmetic exam back
in '43 [sic].

(Biz: Fire gong becomes fainter and more muffled.)

WOMAN. Say guide! Isn't it getting fainter?

GUIDE. *(With a sigh.)* Yes, I'm afraid he isn't paying too much attention
to it.⁷⁹

The radiophonic infiltration of the mind was thus reduced to a juvenile sound-effects
extravaganza of filter, echo chamber and assorted noise-making devices. Mocking these
silly excesses in his "Radio Primer" (**May 4, 1941**), Corwin, the *Workshop*'s most
prominent and prolific contributor, dismissed the filter as a

gadget which makes you sound dead, or, if alive, on the other end of a
telephone. You are an honorary filter user if you are a ghost or a
conscience. Nobody ever thinks thoughts to himself in radio withouten he
does it on a filter.⁸⁰

One of Corwin's rare attempts at a realist character portrait, *Columbia Presents*
Corwin's "Moat Farm Murder" (**July 18, 1944**), countered the filter microphone
technique and suggested that the mind of a killer could be examined without such
gadgetry. Based on a 1899 murder case and adapted from English court records, the play,
as read by Charles Laughton, was a "statement, not a stream-of-consciousness," as
Corwin pointed out in his notes to the published script.⁸¹ It, too, however, tempered
narrative with dramatization, adapting long passages of the court transcript as dialogued
flashbacks between killer and victim. As Corwin was well aware, to broadcasters and
audiences monologues had come to suggest budgetary restraint rather than freedom to
imagine. "Let us compute the cost of Workshop on the air," Corwin's "Soliloquy to
Balance the Budget" (**June 15, 1941**) opens, the sound of the adding machine punctuating
the words of the speaker:

Nine moods at fifty (*click*),
 Four jests [jokes] at seventy apiece (*click*),
 Twelve gags marked down to thirty-five
 Because they only half came off (*click*),
 Two streams of consciousness (*click*),
 Five rays of hope (*click*),
 Faith, charity, the virtues, other miscellany (*click*),
 Blank verse per metric foot. (*Click.*)
 So much for script.

In self-conscious performances like these, Corwin investigated the codification of radio play and the boundaries of broadcast language. As the next chapter will tell, Corwin's plays provided some of the most incisive criticism of American broadcasting, the medium in which the highly regarded playwright, poet, and journalist operated with unprecedented freedom.⁸²

Notes

¹ Esslin, "The Mind as a Stage," *Theatre Quarterly* 1.3 (1971): 8; Guralnick, *Sight Unseen* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1996) 127; 100. The inadequacy of film to render mental states has been argued in George Bluestone, *Novels into Film* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1957) 47-48.

² Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (1946; Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1953) 540; 534.

³ Dixon, *Radio Writing* (New York: Century, 1931) 103. Samples of Dixon's dramatic writings appear in Dixon, *Radio Sketches* (New York: Stokes, 1936).

⁴ Buss, "Writing and Producing the Radio Play," MA thesis (U of Wisconsin, 1933) 65. The paper includes three of Buss's early sketches, aired locally over WIBA in Madison, Wisconsin; for a sample of his later serial writing, a chapter of *One Girl in a Million*, see *Radio Continuity Types*, ed. Sherman Paxton Lawton (Boston: Expression, 1938) 71-78.

- ⁵ "Dialogues Gain Radio Applause," Christian Science Monitor 30 Aug. 1930, Eastern ed.: 6; L[eslie] A[llen], "The Week's Program Trend," Christian Science Monitor 15 Feb. 1930, Eastern ed.: 6.
- ⁶ Darwin L. Teilhet, "What America Listens To," Forum May 1932: 277; Luther Weaver, The Technique of Radio Writing (New York: Prentice, 1948) 83.
- ⁷ Whipple, How to Write for Radio (New York: McGraw, 1938) 21; 23. The text contains several samples of Whipple's broadcast writings, including episodes from *Forty Fathom Trawlers* (1929-30), an early anthology of seafaring adventures.
- ⁸ Wylie, Best Broadcasts of 1938-39 (New York: Whittlesey, 1939) 386-87.
- ⁹ Esslin 8; Rodger, Radio Drama (London: Macmillan, 1982) 28; 30.
- ¹⁰ Rhymer, "How Neighbor Ladies Greet Each Other When on the Outs," Vic and Sade ed. Mary Frances Rhymer (New York: Seabury-Continuum, 1976) 112. The broadcast dates for the playlets quoted here are unknown. Although the sponsor of the program had most of the transcriptions destroyed, over two hundred recordings are extant. For an insightful discussion of the announcer-narrator in daytime serials, see Robert C. Allen, Speaking of Soap Operas (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1985) 153-64. For Corwin's take on the announcer, see chapter 9.
- ¹¹ Buss 20; 69.
- ¹² Woolf, To the Lighthouse (1927; New York: Harvest-Harcourt, 1989) 15-16. In her discussion of third-person narratives, Dorrit Cohn coined the term "psycho-narration," defining it as "the narrator's discourse about a character's consciousness"; see Cohn, Transparent Minds (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1978) 14.
- ¹³ Gertrude Berg, The Rise of the Goldbergs (New York: Barse, 1931) 113; this is a novelization of the earliest episodes of Berg's serial melodrama, which began as a weekly evening feature of NBC Blue.
- ¹⁴ Rhymer, "The Stillness of an Afternoon Is Broken" 122. To one contemporary critic, such "shouting over the fences at neighbors who don't reply" was a sign that the program was "parsimoniously produced"; see Cyrus Fisher (David Teilhet), "Radio Reviews," Forum May 1933: 318. For an extant recording of an episode using one-sided telephone conversations, consider "[Sade Provides Names of Wildflowers]" (Sept. 22, 1939).
- ¹⁵ Rhymer, "The Stillness" 112-13. Further scripts from the series can be found in Rhymer, The Small House Half-way up in the Next Block, ed. Mary Frances Rhymer (New York: McGraw, 1972). Sample episodes are also included in Wylie's Best Broadcasts of 1940-41 (New York: Whittlesey, 1942) 301-9, and Whipple's How to Write for Radio 128-37.

- 16 Whipple 138.
- 17 "Vic and Sade," Time 27 Dec. 1943: 42. For a discussion of Rhymer's comic realism in the context of American folklore, see Fred E. H. Schroeder, "Radio's Home Folks, *Vic and Sade*," Journal of Popular Culture 12 (1979): 256.
- 18 Dixon, Radio Writing 82-83; 84.
- 19 Rockey, "Listening Room Only," Theatre Magazine Dec. 1930: 41-42; also Feb. 1931: 40. Strange Interlude was ultimately adapted for the *Theatre Guild on the Air* (Mar. 31 and Apr. 7, 1946); in this production, actors simply stepped closer to the microphone to hiss or stage-whisper their character's thoughts.
- 20 Duncan, "Behind the Scenes of the Stage Invisible," Radio Digest Mar. 1931: 105.
- 21 Howells, Heroines of Fiction, vol. 2. (New York: Harper, 1901) 107; 122.
- 22 A facsimile of the memo appears in The One Man's Family Album (Woodside, CA: Seven Stones, 1988) 43-45; the volume also includes four scripts from Morse's serial.
- 23 Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit (1843-44; New York: Oxford UP, 1951) 404.
- 24 [Jerry McGill,] "The Final Hour," The Shadow Knows, ed. Diana Cohen and Irene Burns Hoeflinger (Glenview, IL: Scott, 1977) 153-54. Cohen and Hoeflinger's book, designed as an educational tool to encourage reading, includes 16 scripts from the final two seasons of the series; writers' names and broadcast dates (in this case, Oct. 31, 1954) are not supplied; for such information, consult Walter Brown Gibson and Anthony Tollin, The Shadow Scrapbook (New York: Harcourt, 1979) 92.
- 25 Fletcher, "Squeaks, Slams, Echoes and Shots," New Yorker 13 Apr. 1940: 48; 50.
- 26 McLuhan, Understanding Media (New York: McGraw, 1964) 300.
- 27 Koch, "The War of the Worlds," The Panic Broadcast, by Koch (New York: Avon, 1970) 66-67; 80. The published script omits the bracketed line. The debate over the much-hyped "panic" was satirized in Hullabaloo (1940), an MGM musical-comedy set in the world of commercial broadcasting.
- 28 Trilling, The Liberal Imagination, uniform ed. (1950; New York: Harcourt, 1979) 10.
- 29 Butsch, The Making of American Audiences (New York: Cambridge UP, 2000) 218.
- 30 Baudrillard, For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign (St. Louis: Telos, 1981) 169-70.

- 31 Corwin, "Seems Radio Is Here to Stay," Best Broadcasts, 1938-39 517-18.
- 32 Barnouw, "The Voice of the Wizard," Creative Broadcasting, ed. H. J. Skornia, Robert H. Lee, and Fred A. Brewer (New York: Prentice, 1950) 281-82; the passages were read as they appear in the published script.
- 33 Barnouw, "The Voice" 288-89; 295.
- 34 Deckelman, "Helen Keller," Radio's Best Plays, ed. Joseph Liss (New York: Greenberg, 1947) 271-72.
- 35 Deckelman 276-77.
- 36 Deckelman 284.
- 37 Reis, "Meridian 7-1212," Columbia Workshop Plays, ed. Douglas Coulter (New York: Whittlesey, 1939) 39-40.
- 38 Reis 41-42.
- 39 Reis 46-47.
- 40 Abbot, Handbook of Broadcasting, 2nd. ed. (1937; New York: McGraw, 1941) 109.
- 41 McLuhan 302.
- 42 "'Sorry, Wrong Number,'" Life 24 Sep. 1945: 91.
- 43 For the stage version, see Fletcher, "Sorry, Wrong Number," Twenty-four Favorite One-Act Plays, ed. Bennett Cerf and Van H. Cartmell (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958) 117-32. For the novelization of Fletcher's screenplay, see Allen Ullman, Sorry, Wrong Number (New York: Random, 1948). The *Seeing Ear Theater's* camp sequel "Jumping Niagara Falls" resurrects the main character as a disembodied avenger (Nov. 1, 1999).
- 44 See Matthew Solomon, "Adapting 'Radio's Perfect Script,'" Quarterly Review of Film and Video 16.1 (1995): 23-40. Still too little knowledge about broadcasting circulates even among scholars of telecommunication. In a study subtitled "Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech," Avital Ronell mentions the film adaptation of Fletcher's play--along with Dial M for Murder--without ever interfacing radio and telephone; see The Telephone Book (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1989) 213.
- 45 Fletcher, "Sorry, Wrong Number," Plays from Radio, ed. A. H. Lass, Earle L. McGill, and Donald Axelrod (New York: Houghton, 1948) 9; 16; 12; all quoted passages were performed as they appeared in the published script.

- ⁴⁶ Lawrence, "Sorry, Wrong Number: The Organizing Ear," Film Quarterly 40.2 (1986-87): 22.
- ⁴⁷ Fletcher, "Sorry" 18; 11; 13; 17.
- ⁴⁸ Cowgill, Fundamentals of Writing for Radio (New York: Rinehart, 1949) 40.
- ⁴⁹ Fletcher, "Sorry" 20.
- ⁵⁰ Fletcher, "Sorry" 21; 11; 24.
- ⁵¹ Fletcher's other contributions to *Suspense* were "Fugue in C Minor" (June 1, 1944), "The Search for Henri Lefevre" (July 6, 1944), "The Furnished Floor" (Sept. 13, 1945), and "Dark Journey" (Apr. 25, 1946); her plays were also heard on *Columbia Workshop*, *Philip Morris Playhouse*, and *Romance*. The script of "Night Man" appeared in The Saint's Choice of Radio Thrillers (Hollywood, CA: Saint Enterprises, 1946) 69-80; for "The Hitch Hiker," see Radio's Best Plays 321-35, as well as Drama on the Air, ed. David R. Mackey (New York: Prentice, 1951) 271-308.
- ⁵² McCracken, "Scary Women and Scarred Men," Radio Reader, eds. Michele Hilmes and Jason Loviglio (New York: Routledge, 2002) 189; 190.
- ⁵³ By popular demand, the play was repeated on August 21, 1948; it was subsequently heard on NBC's thriller series *The Chase* (Nov. 2, 1952).
- ⁵⁴ Auden, "The Dark Valley," Best Broadcasts, 1939-40, ed. Max Wyllie (New York: Whittlesey, 1940) 33; 37; 39; 40; 42.
- ⁵⁵ Barnouw, Handbook of Radio Writing (Boston: Little, 1947) 65-66.
- ⁵⁶ Firth and Erskine, Gateway to Radio (New York: Macaulay, 1934) 136.
- ⁵⁷ Oboler, "A Dialogue between You and Oboler," Off Mike ed. Jerome Lawrence (New York: Essential-Duell, 1944) 56. Oboler received the 1945 Peabody Award (Drama) for his revival of *Arch Oboler's Plays* on MBS; see Don Franks, Entertainment Awards (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1996) 132.
- ⁵⁸ Oboler, "Windy Kilocycles," Theatre Arts July 1951: 46.
- ⁵⁹ Leonard Allen, "Arch Oboler: Literary Light of Radio," Christian Science Monitor 31 Aug. 1940, Weekly Magazine sec.: 5.
- ⁶⁰ Barnouw, Radio Drama in Action (New York: Farrar, 1945) 386. For Oboler's account of "*l'affaire Mae West*" and the reception of "Burial Service," see his Oboler Omnibus (New York: Duell, 1945) 44-46; 22-23.

⁶¹ Oboler, Oboler Omnibus 154.

⁶² "Dark World" was published in This Freedom by Oboler (New York: Random, 1942) 71-76; it was revived on **Aug. 3, 1942** for *This Is Our America* (1940; 1942). "The Women Stayed at Home" likewise appeared in This Freedom 125-38; it was later soundstaged on **Dec. 20, 1940**, for Oboler's *Everyman's Theatre* (1940-41). Revised to serve wartime propaganda, "The Women Stayed at Home" was again broadcast on **Feb. 22, 1944**, as part of the variety program *Everything for the Boys* (1944-45). For a script of "The Steel Worker," see Best Broadcasts of 1938-39, ed. Max Wylie (New York: Whittlesey, 1939) 386-90.

⁶³ Oboler, "The Ugliest Man in the World," "Ivory Tower" and Other Radio Plays (Chicago: Targ, 1940) 74; 61-62; 78; 79. The script was subsequently included in Oboler Omnibus 49-66. For a comment on the not fully realized expressionistic potentialities of the stream-of-consciousness technique in Oboler's melodrama "Baby" (first heard on *Arch Oboler's Plays*, May 13, 1939) see Eckhard Breiter, Rundfunk und Hörspiel in den USA (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1992) 252-53; the script is included in Oboler's Fourteen Radio Plays (New York: Random, 1940) 165-85. For a critic of the technique as "a little too pretentiously" applied in Oboler's "Strange Morning" (*Arch Oboler's Plays*, **Apr. 5, 1945**) see Jack Gould, "Oboler's New Series," New York Times 15 Apr. 1945, Sec. 2: 7; this play was also published in Oboler Omnibus 3-17.

⁶⁴ "Wunderkind Out," Time 17 Mar. 1941: 87.

⁶⁵ Hall, Arch Oboler, Radio Dramatist, MA thesis (Indiana U, 1944) 69.

⁶⁶ William Matthews, "Radio Plays as Literature," Hollywood Quarterly 1.1 (1945): 44-46.

⁶⁷ Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (New York: Columbia UP, 1985) 201-02.

⁶⁸ Hitchcock made this claim in his introduction to the *Screen Directors Playhouse* adaptation of Spellbound (**Jan. 21, 1951**). He later described his film as "just another manhunt story wrapped up in pseudo-psychoanalysis"; see François Truffaut, Hitchcock (New York: Simon-Touchstone, 1985) 165. In 1941, psychoanalysis was already material for Broadway musicals, namely Moss Hart's Lady in the Dark; Mitchell Leisen's 1944 film version, which contains three elaborate Technicolor dream sequences, was twice adapted for the *Lux Radio Theatre* (**Jan., 29, 1945**; Feb. 16, 1953); Hart's original was adapted for the *Theatre Guild* (**Oct. 19, 1947**).

⁶⁹ Hall 62.

⁷⁰ Oboler, "Alter Ego," "Ivory Tower" 58. That the play was indigenous to radio did not prevent Oboler from adapting it for the movies; directed by its author, the low-budgeted MGM thriller Bewitched (1945) stars Phyllis Thaxter in the role of Joan. Audrey Totter

lent her voice to Joan's alter ego, but does not appear onscreen.

⁷¹ Oboler, "Alter Ego" 41. All passages quoted here were essentially performed as they appeared in the published script.

⁷² Oboler, "Alter Ego" 42.

⁷³ Oboler, "Alter Ego" 44.

⁷⁴ Oboler, "Alter Ego" 47; 52; 53; 58. The plot is similar to that of Oboler's *Lights Out!* thriller "The Dream" (Mar. 23, 1938), in which a mild-mannered man (Boris Karloff) is being tormented by a "siren" voice that urges him to "kill." He succumbs, murders his wife, and is sentenced to death; exulting in the thought of being free of that "essence of evil" within him, he mysteriously dies just prior to his execution.

⁷⁵ Lewis, *The Bells, Hiss the Villain*, ed. Michael Booth (New York: Blom, 1967) 375-76; 378. The play was part of the repertoire of NBC's *Radio Guild*, which presented it four times, first on July 29, 1932, and last on May 13, 1938. See Martin Grams, *Radio Drama* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000) 393-400.

⁷⁶ Brown, "The Mystery Show," *Radio and Television Writing*, ed. Max Wylie (New York: Rinehart, 1952) 353.

⁷⁷ Brown, *Here Comes a Candle* (New York: Dutton, 1950) 59; 54.

⁷⁸ Delston, "Three Strikes You're Out," *One Hundred Non-Royalty Radio Plays*, ed. William Kozlenko (New York: Greenberg, 1941) 95.

⁷⁹ Lawrence and Lee, "Inside a Kid's Head," *Radio Drama in Action* 184; 195. The play was revived on the Lawrence and Lee produced *Favorite Story* (Dec. 9, 1947).

⁸⁰ Corwin, "Radio Primer," *Thirteen by Corwin* (New York: Holt, 1942) 34. Years later, when the *Workshop* did present an experiment in psychoanalysis, it relied less on sound effects than on music; modernist composer George Antheil provided the score to "The Path and the Door" (Aug. 25, 1946) by Les Crutchfield, a writer best known for his subsequent work on the thriller series *Escape*.

⁸¹ Corwin, *Untitled* 301-03. "Moat Farm Murder" was later heard on the *Mercury Summer Theatre* (July 26, 1946).

⁸² Corwin, "A Soliloquy to Balance the Budget," *Thirteen by Corwin* 165-66.

Chapter Nine

"Whenever you hear my voce sotto": Speaking of Broadcast Language

Life is our dictionary. Years are well spent in country labors; in town--in the insight into trades and manufactures; in frank intercourse with many men and women; in science; in art; to the one end of mastering in all their facts a language, by which to illustrate and embody our perceptions [. . .]. Life lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get tiles and copestones for the masonry of to-day. This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the workyard made.--Emerson, *The American Scholar* (1837)

According to Guralnick, radio alone "yields appropriate conditions for releasing the music in language: namely, a performing space at once empty and dimensionless, from which words can emanate free of any material associations." Whereas stage and screen "must subvert their true nature," their "appeal to the eye," in order to "accommodate words that make music," radio "need only be itself."¹ In American broadcasting, however, the medium was never quite "itself," since language, liberally dispersed yet far from free, was forced into distinct and decidedly materialistic associations from which even the networks' most distinguished playwright, *Words Without Music* creator Norman Corwin, seemed at a loss to release it. A CBS contract artist who entered broadcasting with a background in journalism, rather than theater, writer-director-producer Corwin understood commerce-driven network radio to be a "department store, carrying in stock a few luxury items, a lot of supposedly essential commodities, and perhaps too many cheap brands of goods." Yet instead of advocating government owned and operated broadcasting, which he dismissed as a "cross between a museum and a religious school, dispensing classics and credo, but not especially concerned with new works," Corwin believed that what radio playwrights and producers required was an "artist's studio, dedicated to creation alone." Deprived of such ideal conditions, mainly owing to a lack of

willingness and leadership on the part of those in charge of programming, budget and time, American radio artists had to exhibit their works in the “gallery of the department store.”² It was this uneasy compromise or hard-earned concession that informs much of Corwin’s most compelling works--plays in search of a language, of “words that make music.”

Circumscribed by commerce and itself subject to commodification, a spot on the network schedule was hardly the “space without walls,” that, as Jackie Apple claims, makes the broadcast medium itself the “ideal locale for an art that seeks to present itself as information and experience as opposed to goods.”³ And whereas museum, theater, and library are capable, to some extent, of imbuing a commodity with qualities its audience is encouraged to perceive as artistic, the marketplace atmosphere of live radio, the continuous stream of speech, sound, and music listeners accepted into their own four walls during the 1930s and ‘40s all but vaporized established notions about the boundaries of the culturally momentous and the ephemeral, the edifying and the mercenary, the consecrated and the profane. Certainly no listening experience in the history of American broadcasting had proven more forcefully than the *Mercury Theatre*’s infamous Halloween prank just how difficult it could be for those tuning in to recognize radio art amid news bulletins, public service announcements and commercial messages. Did Howard Koch’s adaptation of The War of the Worlds succeed because it imitated a language not generally found in radio fiction or because the language of news and entertainment had remained virtually interchangeable?

Contemplating the “dual nature” of radio as both a “means of direct communication” and a “medium of narrative and dramatic art,” drama critic John Anderson argued that the latter had remained by and large an unrealized potentiality since it was “difficult for the radio to divest itself of ordinary speech and accept the terms of higher expression when it turns from the daily average to the special domain of language that is its greatest asset.”⁴ Did the apparent failure of the American radio play to establish

itself as a recognized artform lie in the writers' inability to conceive--or the medium's impotence to cultivate--a poetic diction appreciably removed from the matter-of-factness of the "means of direct communication" to which it owed its existence? What, if not everyday speech, should be the language of radio art?

To media critics, the development of a language appropriate for aural play on radio was primarily a question of social responsibility; to broadcasters it was a matter of finance and legal accountability. Language of "doubtful propriety," of course, had always been curtailed by the networks, the average--that is, preferred--radio audience being conceived of as what one instructor in radio writing called "Carl Sandburg's people and William Allen White's people." Increasingly well-defined guidelines, such as NBC's 1943 "Working Manual for Continuity Acceptance," spelled out the restrictions writers were obliged to heed if they wanted to air their works on network radio.⁵ While many American writers simply preferred not to, those who did accept the considerable limitations imposed by the industry settled for the unassuming diction of established radio playwrights like Oboler, whose style was considered "successful" radio language, marked by "directness, understatement, and simplicity."⁶ Wrapped in the fustian or frothy verbiage of advertising claptrap and inspirational verse, the language of 1930s radio drama rarely aspired to the condition of music. Yet was it not precisely jingly effervescence and pulpit eloquence that cheered and transported listeners--some of them as far as the nearest department store?

Corwin was the first radio playwright to question the efficacy of a supposedly "natural" broadcast language. After he had gained local prominence in the mid-1930s with *Rhymes and Cadences* on WBZ, Springfield, and *Poetic License*, on WQXR, New York, Corwin made his debut on CBS with the poetry omnibus *Words without Music* (1938-39) and was soon lauded as the poet laureate of the airwaves, the first radio writer to be honored by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. *Theatre Arts* editor Edith Isaacs went so far as to suggest that he was

perhaps the first poet for whom the radio seems to be a natural medium,
 who seems to have the rhythm and the sweep of radio in his own blood.
 His verse pulses with it. You cannot escape the pulse-beat when you hear
 his plays and, more surprisingly, when you read them.⁷

As writer-producer-director of entire play cycles including *Twenty-Six by Corwin* (1941) and *Columbia Presents Corwin* (1944-45), Corwin developed a keen understanding of the broadcast medium and industry, a commitment to the furthering of the aural arts that imbues even his light-hearted work with both authority and self-consciousness. Even though calling a “creative artist a fine technician usually has about it the air of a left-handed compliment,” radio critic John K. Hutchens remarked, in broadcasting the “finest writers are those who have grown up in the mechanics of the medium, who know by second nature the devices that make a program a living thing on the air.”⁸

It has been argued that Dylan Thomas, the author of one of the few radio plays ever to achieve literary status, struggled to “purify language” from its corruption and debasement during centuries of “literate usage”⁹; Corwin’s aural art, by comparison, bespeaks the only slightly less epic struggle of the contract writer in American network broadcasting, namely to reclaim language in all its oral-literate impurity for an artistic medium subjected to decades of co-option by commercial interests and standardization by literal-minded censors. Technical expertise aside, what distinguishes Corwin’s plays is their engagement with languages and literatures, both classical and contemporary, a speaking through--and talking back at--books from which they borrow freely and often irreverently. Corwin’s first published volume, *So Say the Wise* (1929), was a collection of quotations--and many of his plays are proudly encyclopedic, slyly burlesque, or both. According to historian J. Fred MacDonald,

Corwin’s skill lay not in handling radio as a new art but in his ability to write words effectively and to produce a breadth of broadcast drama that ranged from poetic impressions of life and moving patriotic statements to

clever satires and sensitive human fantasies. Corwin brought the older art forms--literature and poetry--into the new medium of radio and, more brilliantly than anyone before demonstrated its esthetic potential.¹⁰

Among his "most significant literary influences," Corwin named Shakespeare, the Bible (both for "richness of language"), Whitman ("power of rhetoric, his humaneness, his glorification of the individual, and his vision of America"), Edgar Lee Masters (for "his range, compression, succinctness, and brilliance of characterization"), Carl Sandburg (for "his high-octane mixture of colloquial and heightened language, his unabashed emotion and sentiment," rather than bathos, as well as his "genuine love and respect of The People"), and Heywood Broun ("as an inspiration to the journalist in me, thanks to his reportorial and editorial strengths, his humor, charm, liberalism, compassion, and integrity").¹¹

Far from being random, Corwin's samplings and appropriations--at times unfavorably compared to the writings of Whitman, Donne, and Ogden Nash--suggest a programmatic inquiry into the orality of literature and the literacy of the aural arts. The Corwinian diction Bernard De Voto dismissed for its "bargain-counter jauntiness" and "semi-clever talkativeness," a "non-poetry" that transformed the "language of radio" into a "bastard form of speech," is at once an eloquent testament to the lost battle for harmony and integrity in the disputed territory of broadcast art and a triumphant campaign to reconcile the languages of art and industry.¹² Throughout his broadcasting career, Corwin staged fanciful feats of arms between culture and commerce ("Descent of the Gods," "My Client Curley"), sought to conquer the meddlesome voice of the business ("Soliloquy to Balance the Budget," "Murder in Studio One"), and achieved a conciliation of discordant tongues in his documentary soundscapes ("New York: A Tapestry for Radio," *One World Flight*). Since virtually all of Corwin's plays were heard on sustaining programs--affording a nearly unobstructed overlook of the sphere of contention, a privileged position enjoyed by no other American radio playwright--they could enact,

albeit not counteract, the pitched battle of languages that continued to result in numerous artistic casualties among the networks' commercially sponsored series.

"They're all in your dictionary": A Defense of Non-Poetry

"Radio style," as one critic of the medium put it, "is neither difficult to master nor puerile. It requires only complete honesty; it abhors euphuistics."¹³ Although the ring of "honesty" was as much a matter of delivery as of vocabulary, any script that smacked of pretentiousness--"radio's occupational disease"¹⁴--was widely dismissed by broadcast critics, instructors, and playwrights alike. Practical demonstrations of the turgid and orotund are provided in Corwin's instructive "Radio Primer" (May 4, 1941), which comments on the windy strains of the "inspirational" verse that passed for poetry on the radio. "Poetry inspires people more than prose," Corwin's aural lexicon proposes:

One of the greatest radio poets of inspiration is an anonymous man named Elwood Prue, who says he intends to be buried in a Time Capsule along with a copy of his verse just brought out by the Muses Press, named Wings over Everything, to be unearthed in 2941 AD.

An emblem of lowered culture and pop-cultural leveling since the public interment of the Westinghouse-sponsored sphere at the site of the 1939 World's Fair, the time capsule, along with the oxymoron of the "anonymous" Prue, captures the quandary of radio writers who, in order to escape being labeled "ephemeral," "everyday," or "elitist," attempted to be universal only to slip into the platitudinous. One of Prue's stanzas reads:

If you have but one shirt left, do not despair.
That's better than being absolutely bare.
If you're sentenced to be hanged 'most any day,
Cheer up; we all die sometime, anyway. . . .
For the black is always stormest ere the gloom,
No matter where you are, or what, or whom.¹⁵

Even more suspect to Corwin were attempts at peddling spurious poetry as uplift by means of unwarrantably solemn delivery, defined by the “Radio Primer” as “soporific”:

When Phoebe doth her grummons gather up
 And in the trancid night forsoonly sup
 Of myrrh and the smerds of Arcady,
 When chumblers in the dim-lit aspenade
 Bestrew the glamorantine of the glade,
 Then come, love, cast thy wampts and cherybdibs
 And frols and fulsome friptures on the air,
 For hearts that beat in wambledon garoome
 Can ne’er the druid fluid flume the frume.

Here, Corwin imitates late-Victorian nonsense verse to throw the book at the poetasters of the air, but squanders the opportunity to explore the musical instrumentality of such apparent vacuity, the “unrequited passion” T. S. Eliot sensed in the poetry of Edward Lear. With the lexicon at anyone’s disposal, nonsense rhyme struck Corwin as the epitome of foul play.¹⁶

In one of numerous handbooks for radio writers, Luther Weaver suggested that there was a “way of speaking for the listening ear that may be sharply different from writing for the reading eye.” Since writing for the one-dimensional medium of sound required “greater clarity than any other form of writing,” Weaver urged aspiring radio playwrights to employ the “phrases of informal speech” and to remember the value of “staunch and sturdy” Anglo-Saxon words--“short, crisp, direct, easy to say, easy to listen to, easy to understand.” After all, the audience for the radio writer was close, not remote; writers were not “shouting” at listeners “across a valley, or from a pulpit or rostrum,” but entered their living rooms, “talking *with* them, not *at* them.”¹⁷ Corwin, who pronounced radio to be the “greatest disciplining force in modern playwriting,” agreed that it was a “good thing” to

write simply and clearly, and to write for radio one must do both. The medium requires simplicity, and this has nothing whatever to do with the intellectual level of its audience. It has to do with the normal physical limitations of the ear--the inability of the ear to regress, as the eye does on the printed page. There is no retina of the ear to carry over syllables as the eye does images; hence the radio writer's imagery must never be too intense, or shot at the listener too fast. It must be directly communicable and easily assimilated, or it has no right to be on the air. The tightly packed imagery of a poem like Mallarmé's "L'Après-Midi d'un Faune" wouldn't have a ghost of a chance.¹⁸

Less condescending toward the listening public than most critics of the medium, Corwin nonetheless arrived at the same conclusion, namely that compositions suited to the aligning eye could not be rendered coherent by the orchestrating ear, at least not within the span of a single recital. On the air, the symbolism of Mallarmé was bound to come across as so much malarkey--and Corwin's miscellanies encouraged audiences to discern the phony even in the euphonic. To Corwin, "simplicity" did not mean abstention from lexical experimentation. By satirizing the "friptures on the air," encyclopedic plays like "Radio Primer" courted the audience by promising to take broadcasters to court; but, safe for their exposure of false notes, the trials Corwin staged are generally less wrapped up in passing judgment than in their own impassioned logomachy.

One such instance of verbal sparring is "The Undecided Molecule," which was given a lavish production by *Columbia Presents Corwin* (July 17, 1945) under the direction of its author. Announced as a "rhymed fantasy concerning dangerous developments among the elements," it dramatizes the case of X, a molecule charged with endangering the universe by failing to find its place in the animal, vegetable, or mineral kingdoms. After the Prosecutor (Vincent Price) has stated his case, the Defense Counsel (Keenan Wynn) reminds the hasty Judge (Groucho Marx) that the court's decision to

execute X is “far from ineluctable” since “*matter’s indestructible*.” At the suggestion of the Defense, the representatives of each kingdom are called in to assist X to make up its mind. In this scene, Anima (Sylvia Sidney, occasionally struggling with her lines) serves as a spokesperson for the animal kingdom:

ANIMA. I could fascinate X with the mystery
Of our considerable natural history,
[I could] tell him the fame
Of each colorful name--

JUDGE. Go on. I’m goose-pimplly and blistery.

ANIMA. I could tell of a bird named the smew
And another yclept urubu--
Of the dziggetai, dzo,
And of zingel roe--

JUDGE. And a fish that is called inconnu.

ANIMA. Quite true.

JUDGE. And a monkey that’s called wanderoo.

ANIMA. Quite true.

JUDGE. Oh, I just love to listen to you.

ANIMA. I could tell of the vinegaroon,
The squacco, the gweduc, baboon,
The antelope bongo,
The crow known as drongo--

JUDGE. Will you join me for lunch one day soon?

CLERK. For the record, may I ask whether these names are real or
fictionary?

JUDGE. Don’t interrupt. They’re all in your dictionary.¹⁹

Anima's pitch not only convinces X to join the ranks of the animal kingdom but also enthralls the Judge who, freed from the obligation of ruling, successfully courts her. The stability of the universe being restored, eloquence has not only won the day, but defers *dies irae*.

They “*are* all in your dictionary,” Corwin insists about the play’s *copia verborum*, stating that he had “enormous fun” weeding each word out of an unabridged Webster’s. Although it was written at the time of the atomic bomb testing near Alamogordo, New Mexico, Corwin denies that the play was politically motivated; after months of delivering “urgent and serious” prose he finally felt justified in returning to light-hearted rhyme. In the case of “The Undecided Molecule,” swearing on the lexicon is not merely a defense, but a *raison d’être*. To Corwin, wordhoards, encyclopedias and atlases, served as inexhaustible fonts of stimulating sound-clusters to be appropriated and applied at will. Indeed, a vast store of words and the moxie to mix them served as metaphors for America, its diversity, its inexhaustible potentialities, and its freedoms.

As titles like “The Oracle of Philadephi,” “The Odyssey of Runyon Jones,” and “Descent of the Gods” suggest, Corwin, who once described himself as a “a sentimentalist with cross-fertilizations of realism and practicality,” delighted in the confrontation of the lofty and the popular as he encountered it in the haphazard continuity of the medium for which he wrote.²⁰ A few such collisions were forced in “Descent of the Gods,” a fantasy first presented on *Twenty-six by Corwin* (Aug. 3, 1941). While tuning his dulcimer, Nick, the god of Trivia (played by radio wit Henry Morgan), recalls how Mars, Apollo, and Venus came down to earth, and how the event was “treated by the press and radio with the proper sensationalism”; how Mars was placed before the microphone on Clifton Fadiman’s quiz program *Information Please*, where he failed to deliver the answer to a “special question on war,” an art much more advanced in the twentieth century; how Apollo was offered to appear on *The People’s Platform* to discuss the topic “Western Culture--Is it Worth Preserving” with a taxi driver, the “editor of Western Culture

Magazine, and a soda Jerker from a chain drugstore”; and how Venus, after being subjected to a public hearing by the immigration authorities, was accosted by an agent who proposed a beaut of a deal in broadcasting:

I’m telling you, darling, we put an orchestra behind you, and get a good MC who can sing, like Don Ameche, see, and get Lyn Murray’s chorus to give it class, and a good comedy team, and I’ll guarantee you the biggest Hooper’s rating on the air. We can call it *The Venus Varieties*, or *Venus Presents*, or *Twenty-six by Venus*, or something like that, and get a soap or perfume sponsor, and. . . .

The profaned deities in turn seize the opportunity--that is, the media--to remind the mortals of their own debasement. Modernity’s resourceful “wonder-man” was capable of “fling[ing] his voice around the world,” Apollo remarks in a “radio talk,” but failed to overcome a “simple problem such as how to keep from killing several million other wonder-men just like himself each twenty years or so.”²¹

“[B]urking his own aspirations by being smarty,” Corwin missed the “great opportunity of the potentialities of grandeur and beauty offered to radio by fantasy,” complained William Matthews, Professor of English at UCLA. When Corwin “takes up fantasy, he is usually frightened to take it up seriously; he goes so far, then gets flippant, and finally giggles or becomes pooksy or quaint or cute”; but “[w]hy always be like Walt Disney when you may be like Shelley or Gustav Holst?”²² What appeared to be wanting in Corwin’s tospy-turvy universe and its opposing forces was the authoritative voice of Zeus or Jupiter--the mediating voice of the poet as maker. As recounted by Nick, the conflict in “The Descent of the Gods” and its potential lessons are not only trivialized, but become trivium, a mere exercise in grammar, logic, and rhetoric. A more favorably inclined critic suggested that Corwin, who once aspired to be a writer of advertising slogans, was “more of an interpreter of *vox pop* than a teacher.”²³ In some of his

fantasies, Corwin declined to interpret altogether and assumed instead the role of a jocular chronicler of *pop vox*.

A particularly well received record of folly was “My Client Curley” (Mar. 7, 1940), a *Columbia Workshop* play based on an unpublished story by Lucille Fletcher and subsequently adapted for the screen.²⁴ In it, a talent agent recalls how the pet caterpillar of a boy named Stinky metamorphosed into a media sensation after his “terpsichorean” talents become known, inspiring a “ballet entitled ‘Extravaganza for Insects Only,’ by William Saroyan” and resulting in the sales of “Curley balloons and spaghetti and dolls and toys and picture books and decorations on the outside of drinking glasses,” as his agent crudely puts it. Lepidopterists marvel at the specimen’s “chitinization” and “unusually conspicuous first maxillae,” whereas Eleanor Roosevelt affirms that it is “not often that a creature smaller than one’s little finger can completely captivate the imagination of millions.” *Le Temps* reports “que cet insecte ne consent à danser que si l’on joue l’air justement célèbre, ‘Oui, monsieur, c’est mon bébé,’” while *Variety*--the quintessence of language for trade--notes that “Bliz and Driz Fail to Fizzle Biz as Bug Wows BO from NY to LA.” When Curley disappears to attend to the transformation nature intended, a newsflash from Walter Winchell talks of kidnapping, and the civic authorities ask the listening public for their assistance: “Whenever you hear the song ‘Yes Sir, That’s My Baby’ will you please watch very carefully[,] wherever you may be, for a dancing caterpillar in your vicinity.”²⁵

Accorded a central role in the democracy of which it could be construed as a symbol, American radio--the medium and the Depression-proof industry it had called into being--was not to be undervalued simply because it permitted the dissemination of much that was questionable. “How else can Hamlet rant in Honolulu,” Corwin insists in “Seems Radio Is Here to Stay” (Apr. 24, 1939), providing a “complimentary” scene from act three of *Hamlet* as part of a practical demonstration. While the performance is being transmitted, Corwin--the playwright whom Carl Van Doren once called the Christopher

Marlowe of the airwaves--takes the liberty of muffling the Bard in favor of the secret, unscripted behind-the-scenes language of broadcasting, spoken by the engineers at the control switches. "Their language has a listenable cadence of its own," Corwin's narrator comments on the overheard references to "cycles" and "SE filters" and "nemo points," broadcaster jargon generally not intended for broadcast. "Poor Hamlet, he has never been so interrupted" the narrator sighs facetiously as the engineers effect the prince's execution: "Stand by to hear a Dane evaporate." Hamlet's "But it reserved some quantity of choice, / To serve in such a difference" are the last audible lines of Shakespeare's play. "Thank all the heavens and the gods for differences," Corwin's narrator exclaims.²⁶

Involving everyday and elevated speech, orality and literacy, tradition and modernity, Corwin's stylistic free-for-alls were in the service of "difference," a reaffirmation of radio's "quantity of choice." Even though the national broadcasts of the networks tended to promote a leveling of everyday speech, of American identities as vocalized in dialect and argot, the writer-producer-director in the studio might yet turn the switch and sound the voices of those individuals who produced the ostensibly faceless entertainment for the masses. Unity, however desirable, did not have to transmute into uniformity. "They're all in your dictionary" was thus a cry of defiance, a justification of play, a plea for the withholding of judgment until each voice was heard. It was the flippant answer to the serious questions Corwin asked more directly in his somber works, questions about fascism, nationality, and the four freedoms.²⁷

Unwilling to impose the strictures of an Oboleresque vocabulary in order to bring his pro-democratic messages across, Corwin generally opted for what he once described as a "non-poem"²⁸--a rhapsodic, impressionistic record of modern life in which the incongruous could be perceived as comprehensive and inclusionary. The "happy mixture of the colloquial and the eloquent" applauded by John Mason Brown, the "untutored dipping into all forms of English literature" noted by Shipp, the dissonance of "sumer is icumen in with the sound of another broken treaty"²⁹ loathed by De Voto, bespeak the

Corwinian program, his distrust of a controlling broadcasting voice, of totalitarian speech, of *diktat*. Any single, mediating voice was suspect to Corwin. He would rather engage a talent agent or a god of trivia as his narrator than entrust the public domain to the authoritative spokesperson for the industry, the institution known as “announcer.”

“Tune in tomorrow, on some other sphere”: Being Mercurial About Hermes

According to Matthews, Corwin had a tendency to be “undergraduateish,” a label “not entirely fair to undergraduates.”³⁰ What justifies its application, particularly from an academic standpoint, was that in many of his satires and burlesques, Corwin mocked, muffled or modulated radio’s most conspicuous voice of authority—that of the announcer. By doing so he challenged an institution that predated the system of network broadcasting by whose rules he was expected to play. As early as 1925, Rothafel and Yates held that radio would “never reach the higher levels of artistic presentation” unless it acknowledged and exploited the “power” of the announcer’s voice. To be sure, to American impresarios like “Roxy,” who defined the announcer as a “toast-master” in charge of “pull[ing] a lame dinner to its feet and give it the stamina necessary for entertainment,” this power lay chiefly in the ability to “create an illusion of intimacy.”³¹

Without concerning themselves much with “higher levels of artistic presentation,” commercial broadcasting learned quickly to harness such vocal powers and elevated the announcer, along with the crooner, to the status of celebrity. Listeners were responding to the announcer by repeating him, believing what he says about culture, Adorno observed; listener mail suggested that audiences “were strongly under the spell of the announcer as the personified voice of radio as a cultural institution,” frequently expressing their approval of a particular broadcast in the very terms supplied by a compère who praised tuners-in for their discernment.³² *Animateurs* like Milton Cross, Harry Von Zell, or Jimmy Wallington were among the industry’s highest-paid and most recognizable performers. To Corwin, the fact and folly that the public not only tolerated but exalted the

barker while depreciating the creators of the show provided ample material for satire.³³

The word “announcer” was prominent in Corwin’s dictionary. The first entry of his alphabetical “Radio Primer” sings and echoes the praises of the announcer in a jingly debasement of fact-based eulogia:

DEFINER. (*Singing.*) Announcers are men who announce;

They have pep, they have zip, they have bounce;

They win friends and influence masses

By diction which simply surpasses

The fanciest talk on Parnassus;

They never coax, wheedle, or flounce.

They stress only what really counts.

And no matter what the time of day or the circumstances or their
personal or public opinions or the state of the nation or the weather or
their last quarterly earnings, their soul is in their work up to the last
ounce!

QUARTET. (*Singing.*) *Good to the last ounce!*

Reclaiming the rhetoric of advertising--tautology, hyperbole, and pleonasm--Corwin’s “Radio Primer” merrily cuts down to size (an “ounce”) the single, privileged voices of those who merely “announce” in a public quartering that reminds its audience that the commodity of speech itself is at stake. The booming voice of commerce, the Parnassian anathema, is further reduced to a series of interchangeable catch phrases, a glossary for an importunate tongue:

DEFINER. There are all kinds of announcers. This is well. Some
announcers are very commanding:

COMMANDING ANNOUNCER. Go now! Tear out! Don’t fail!

Remember the name! Don’t be fooled! Insist on! Send in! Try once!

DEFINER. Others are more appealing:

PLEADING ANNOUNCER. Why not try? Have you ever wondered?

Won't you ask?

DEFINER. And some are very friendly:

FRIENDLY ANNOUNCER. Friends, I want to tell you about an easy way. . . . Did you ever wake up in the morning feeling. . . .

DEFINER. Now there are many verbs and adjectives in the vocabulary of announcers, but only three conjunctions.

ANNOUNCERS. And now. . . . But first. . . . And next we hear. . . .

NARRATOR. So much for announcing.

QUARTET. (*Singing.*) So much for announcing.

NARRATOR. B. B stands for breakfast food[. . .].³⁴

Yet "Radio Primer" was hardly Corwin's last word on the craft of announcing; his "undergraduateish" imagination continued to demote or dispose of the windbags for the trades.

"You Can Dream, Inc.," for instance, the sixth broadcast in the *Columbia Presents Corwin* series (Apr. 11, 1944), concerns a dream factory that promises to satisfy the longings of those bored with their mundane realities. One of its clients, real-life announcer Harry Marble, complains about being "relegated to opening and closing routines with little chance at self-expression." Rather than aspiring to be an actor, Marble yearns for "something by which the listener could remember [him]--by which there would be no mistaking [him] for Frank Gallop or Ken Roberts or Tony Marvin," Marble's actual competitors. In other words, he desires his speech to be recognized not as prologue, but as main event deserving of--rather than serving as--an introduction. In the play's concluding fantasy scenario, "Closing Routine Daydream 29-30," prominent radio reporter Robert Trout--a composer, not a mere reader of lines--minutely documents Marble's memorable entrance as he "strides briskly toward his microphone" and the orchestra rises to greet him:

The conductor has stepped off the podium to shake his hand. Mr. Marble has graciously accepted the baton that has been proffered to him, and he is now breaking it over his knee and handing back the narrow end--it's an old Chinese custom, I believe, but the significance escapes me at the moment.

The conductor is bowing, and now Marble has *turned* and is heading this way. He has just waved to several justices of the United States Supreme Court who are sitting in the audience, and they have waved back. *The justices waved right back at him!* There is an air of festivity and gaiety such as I have never *seen* in a studio! *My!* Now four actors have stepped up and are presenting Mr. Marble with gifts appropriate to the occasion. From left to right they are a bouquet of flowers, a bronze plaque, loving cup, and a marble urn.

Laughter is heard off-mike as the announcer, "a dashing picture with his coattails flapping in the air-conditioning system," reportedly accepts the urn he hopes to make a "receptacle for 'Marble earnings,'" after which ad lib, in an instance of poetic justice, he "nearly trip[s] over a microphone cable":

TROUT [. . .]. The next voice you hear will be that of Harry Marble. (*A pause. Then hushed and reverent.*) A great hush has fallen on the assembly. At any moment now you will hear the long-awaited voice of Harry Marble. (*A long pause.*) I don't know what's delaying him. His eyes are closed. He is about to speak. . . .

MARBLE. (*After another pause.*) This . . .

(*Music: A great fanfare. The orchestra, trigger-happy, has jumped the cue.*)

MARBLE. . . . is Harry Marble.

(*Music: Another great fanfare.*)

MARBLE. It is my privilege to tell you that you have been listening to

“You Can Dream, Inc.,” a presentation of the Columbia Broadcasting System.³⁵

In this exercise of comic deflation, the anticlimax serves as the actual closing announcement for the program, the playwright thumbing his nose at listeners who expected anything of consequence to issue from the lips of a professional pitchman, whose “privilege” is merely to deliver the last word.

Silenced altogether is the announcer of “Murder in Studio One” (Oct. 12, 1941), the twenty-third broadcast of *Twenty-Six by Corwin*. The play opens *in medias res*, the “most popular radio announcer in the country” having been poisoned after licking the tip of a pencil “dipped in insidium.” The detective in charge of the case discovers the script clenched in the dead man’s hand and reads his lines, including the commercial message he was assigned to circulate:

Don’t forget to remember to insist on the name of Fudgiecream for a real, honest-to-goodness, creamy, delicious, wholesome, tempting, tangy, healthful, different, appetizing, mellow-rich, lusciously nourishing, energizing, irresistibly fragrant, refreshingly crunchy. . . .³⁶

The motive for the crime was the victim’s attempt to voice an opinion; his derogatory remarks about the Dodgers, as recalled by the unrepentant killer, expose the announcer, a Brooklyn native, as a traitor, a fraud who renounced his community for a national career and an affected tongue. The act of poisoning--for which the murderer is apprehended, but nonetheless applauded--may be read as a response to what one radio insider called the

scant hospitality in the radio salons for the varied and picturesque flavors of American speech. The overlords of the microphone frown upon any attempt of their announcers to deviate from a standardized policy of unctuous pronunciation which they choose to call “cosmopolitan English.”³⁷

The fact that both the investigator who reads the announcer’s lines and the proud local who silenced him--“It was a far, far better thing I done for Brooklyn”--are female

characters (played, respectively, by Ruth Gordon, for whom the comedy was especially written, and Minerva Pious),³⁸ constitutes an assault on the “overlords” of a patriarchal system whose privileged speakers were almost exclusively business-suited baritones. Pronouncing the announcer “moldered” was a step toward the re-democratization of the airwaves.

Still more cynical than such trippings and poisonings of tongues was House Jameson’s “mooch[ing]” among the neon-lit monuments on display at the graveyard of culture in “A Soliloquy to Balance the Budget” (**June 15, 1941**). After catching himself whistling, the Soliloquist facetiously apologizes--“Dear me--I forget myself”--only to dismiss the charge of sacrilege; after all, he was “visiting the tomb of an announcer”:

Here lies the unknown announcer.

Spelled A-N-N-O-U-N-C-E-R.

Brief pause--while we identify the soul.

He said, “Go now,” and went.

He said, “Don’t fail,” and failed.

He said, “Remember the name,” and now he can’t recall his own.

Tear off the top of his tombstone, lads, and send it in.

A letter also, saying why it’s good to be.

Oh, Mr. A-N-N-O-U-N-C-E-R,

I want to tell you about an easy way--

To rest:

In peace.

No more need you wake up in the morning feeling--

Alive

And well.

Tests *show*--

That you are dead.

*Insist on it!*³⁹

As pointed out at the conclusion of the previous chapter, this soliloquy was a direct response to the budget problems Corwin faced at CBS. The constraints imposed upon artists and writers are contrasted with the attention lavished on the one voice in broadcasting that, aesthetically speaking, is most expendable. The broadcast opens “cold,” its sole speaker addressing the audience unannounced and unidentified. Corwin’s heteroglossic performance, its shifts in diction and its irreverent appropriation of phrases typifying the announcer, preserves the speaker from being mistaken for the broadcast-dominating voice he evokes only to pronounce dead—a forceful demonstration that aural art, speaking for itself, is not in need of hawkers or captions to be understood as such.

These death notices notwithstanding, surveys would have shown that everywhere on the dial announcers were very much alive. By insisting on the deadening of a voice the radio industry had raised to exploit the intimacy and immediacy of broadcasting, Corwin’s gleefully sophomoric revenge fantasies did little more than process tired lament into crisp lampoon. Being offered on a sustaining basis, his plays cheered listeners for choosing to tune out the spiel less discerning audiences were willing to tolerate. Considerably more involved than such outright lashings of glib and slippery tongues was Corwin’s restitution project, namely the programmatic dismemberment of the artistically questionable announcer-figure and its ultimate reformation as an incorporeal emissary, a representation of the common man dispatched in the service of democracy.

To cultivate the reportorial and editorial potentialities of the announcer figure for the arts, Corwin’s rhapsodic plays attempt to reconstitute this embodiment of commerce—corporate culture itself—as vocal abstractions, as qualities without the man. By doing so, Corwin ran counter to the beliefs of many American radio dramatists and critics who held that narrators or commentators had no place in the theater of the air, that their intrusions into the action of the play would disrupt the “aesthetic distance” necessary

to sustain the theatrical illusion.⁴⁰ Corwin was one of the first playwrights for network radio to reconsider the announcer as the voice Arnheim had called “one of the purest of radio features achievable in words.” According to Arnheim’s broadcasting aesthetics, it was “not so much the function of wireless to give the listener the vivid *illusion* of a real event,” but rather to encourage “critical attitude, a participation from a distance”; for this purpose, the announcer could serve as a “reasoning voice” from without--a wireless equivalent to the chorus in Greek drama.⁴¹ By rediscovering this “ancient device” and by taking it to “points never before reached,” Corwin argued, the broadcast medium was contributing the “greatest stimulation to dramatic technique since the invention of the movies.”⁴²

Rehabilitating the industry’s middleman as chorus proved a challenge for Corwin, since it meant to reinvest the announcer’s voice with the sincerity, dignity and authority the satirist had been so eager to question and disclaim. It was far easier playfully to annihilate the announcer’s body than to install in its stead an independent voice of reason, truth or beauty. Arnheim thought it imperative to “dehumanise the announcer as much as possible”; aside from being “distinct, clear and pleasant,” this voice should have “no character, nothing peculiar or personal.” Like “print,” the announcer type should be “easy to read and nothing more.”⁴³ Yet far from being neutral, the nobodies of radio are gendered; and even if they cannot be regionally or socially placed, a speaker’s timbre, pitch and diction, however generic or refined, assumed or rehearsed, invite speculations about the body behind the mask, potentially imbuing words with meanings distinct from--or even at odds with--those scripted. While this is true for recitals in general, deciding on any single, representative narrational voice becomes especially problematic for a writer-producer-director entrusted with the creation of aural Americana that, in the case of “We Hold These Truths” (Dec. 15, 1941), were heard by as many as sixty million citizens--affirmations of diversity and national identity in words that one critic called “antifascist, prodemocratic, pro-Common Man pronouncements.”⁴⁴

As Barnouw observed, Corwin chose his main speakers with great care, often composing his lines with certain voices in mind: House Jameson's for its irony and Olympian detachment, Joseph Julian's for its "down-to-earth, GI quality," and Martin Gabel's for its brusqueness and "smoldering anger"--Corwin's "voice of challenge."⁴⁵ It was Gabel's voice that Corwin required for the solemn and only guardedly optimistic reflections of "On a Note of Triumph" (May 8, 1945), a performance in commemoration of V-E Day. In the production notes appended to the anthologized script, Corwin agreed with Barnouw's assessment, adding that Gabel possessed an "aggressive intelligence" and a "set of political convictions that enabled him to sound as though he were woven right into the texture of the script rather than attached to it by special arrangement with some casting office."⁴⁶ Entering through Bernard Herrmann's musical curtain, Gabel opens the broadcast with the following words:

So they've given up.

They're finally done in, and the rat is dead in an alley back of the
Wilhelmstrasse.

Take a bow, GI,

Take a bow, little guy.

The superman of tomorrow lies at the feet of you common men of this
afternoon.

This is It, kid, this is The Day, all the way from Newburyport to
Vladivostok.

You had what it took and you gave it, and each of you has a hunk of
rainbow round your helmet.

Seems like free men have done it again.⁴⁷

Critics debated whether this was indeed the voice of the hour--the voice of history, victory, democracy--questioning whether this lip servant reaching American homes well before those it addressed as "kid" and "little guy" was speaking on behalf of or down to

“common men.” Was the disdain noticeable in what Richard Kostelanetz calls the “bombastic” and potentially offensive tone of Gabel’s “aggressive voice”⁴⁸ reserved for the defeated enemy or directed toward the ostensible victors as well? Broadcast reviewer Jack Gould complained that Gabel’s performance was not acting, but “dramatic reading,” a job the speaker seemed to have accepted “with perhaps an excessive degree of literalness” that conveyed the denotative, but not the connotative meanings of Corwin’s lines. “Whatever the emotion required,” Gould objected, Gabel adhered to a “rigid formality and pitched his voice to almost a steady monotone, throwing away line after line in prodigal waste.”⁴⁹ If a single-voiced rather than choric declaration of victory over fascism was itself problematic, the debate over the speaker’s theatricality or affectedness suggested that sincerity in broadcasting was “finally done in” by the duplicitous pitch of sophisticating commerce.

Basing his candid dismissal of “On a Note of Triumph” on both its broadcast performances and a perusal of the immediately published--and best-selling--script, *De Voto* held that Corwin’s diction, unlike the reportorial writings of the V-E Day news broadcasts and their delivery, was “dull, windy, opaque, pretentious, and in the end false.” Chiefly to blame for this aesthetic failure, *De Voto* argued, was the “narrator” whom he as a seasoned radio listener could no longer separate from the “announcer,” the sales spieler who interrupted sponsored broadcasts for supposedly important messages and the storyteller who invited listeners to tune in tomorrow to their daily serials--the “interlocutor, the monologist, the voice, the emcee--whatever is the proper designation.” *De Voto* suggested that the industry was perhaps “paying a fine for some of its practices,” the “conventions peculiar to radio,” conventions that radio had originally derived from an “obsolete and overblown oratory” and had gone on “to associate them with the advertising business.” When the play’s principal voice was

supposed to be attuning [listeners] to extremities of hope or tragic realization, it had to work with the exaggerated, unctuous, and richly

phony elocution of any commercial announcer. However real the emotion of the part he was reading, the tradition of his medium required him to represent it as unreal. A convention was bringing in two echoes along with Mr. Corwin's program. One was an echo as of some cheap orator tearing a faked emotion to tatters. The other was an echo as of a thirty-second break in a dance program when some drug company commands us to move our bowels.⁵⁰

Corwin's rhapsodic play is indeed a chamber of echoes. Incapable of quelling the false notes reverberating in the listener's mind after years of exposure to the split personality of commercial broadcasting, Corwin often played up this cacophony by resorting to rhetorical stunts ("Lord of test-tube and blueprint") and lexical eccentricities ("Accept the smoke of the milltown among the accredited clouds of the sky") which critics like De Voto dismissed as immature. "On a Note of Triumph" suggests that the celebrated moment itself was not quite ripe for authoritative conclusions. Gathering folk songs and news reports, popular sentiments and foreign correspondences--discordant notes expressive of an epoch not yet assimilated and translated for posterity--the main speaker assumes various postures to convey misgivings rather than assurances or conclusive assessments:

Shall those of us who never quite believed that war could come
Now hasten to believe it over?
We here at home who safely tidied battles into books,
Spliced the counter-offensive into a feature film, and went to see it
together with an Andy Hardy picture at the Orpheum?--
Shall we who followed the bloody tracks on maps, and took assurances
from pins that tanks had gotten through--
Shall any of us celebrate beyond the compounds of a day?

With the exception of a few shorter scripts, Corwin rarely permitted any single narrative

voice--a host by any other name--to dominate his pro-democratic voice collages uncontested. Instead, he generally dialogued his narratives by inserting multiple guest speakers who comment on or complement each other: "Don't expect to hear metallic speech from a rosette of amplifying horns on the high poles of a public address system [. . .]."51

More than just being "particularly resourceful" in the devising of what Barnouw referred to as "assistant narrators,"52 Corwin's plays installed *resistant* narratees, voices that questioned, edited, or footnoted the ostensibly primary speaker. In "Seems Radio Is Here to Stay," for instance, an unidentified pirate voice takes over the announcer's privileged position by addressing the audience at the top of the program. Contrary to broadcasting conventions, the speaker does not frame the play by stating its title or by billboarding its creators or cast, but assigns the task to a secondary voice--the demoted announcer:

NARRATOR. Do we come on you unaware,
 Your set untended? [. . .]
 We wish a thousand words with you
 Concerning magics that would make a Merlin turn pistachio with envy;
 The miracle, worn ordinary now, or just such business as this
 Between your ears and us, and ocean tides of ether.
 We mean the Genii of the Radio,
 Kowtowing to Aladdins everywhere,
 As flashy on the run as light, and full of service to ships at sea and
 planes in air and people in their living rooms, resembling you.
 All this by way of prologue, Listener;
 And prologues should not be prolonged.
 Let our announcer do what he's engaged to do:

Announce

What this is all about.

ANNOUNCER: The *Columbia Workshop* presents an original verse brochure by Norman Corwin, entitled, "Seems Radio Is Here to Stay."⁵³

In "The Plot to Overthrow Christmas," first produced on *Words Without Music* (Dec. 15, 1938), Corwin employs an editor, "Sotto Voce," who mediates between audience and primary speaker by translating the exalted language of the latter and by commenting, as the playwright explained, on the broadcast, its "principals, a few radio clichés and himself"⁵⁴:

NARRATOR. Did you hear about the plot to overthrow Christmas?

Well, gather ye now from Maine to the Isthmus

Of Panama, and listen to the story [. . .].

With aid of a fade, a fade on the radio,

We'll take you there, with a hi and a hey-di-ho,

To hear first-hand the brewing of the plot

Down in the deepest Stygian grott.

SOTTO VOCE (confidentially). Grott is a poetical term for grotto.

(Whenever you hear my voce sotto

Or sotto voce, whichever you prefer,

It's just I, taking pains to make quite sure

That nobody makes a poetical allusion

Which may in any way create confusion.)

I return you now to the voice you were hearing

Before I had to do this interfering.

NARRATOR. As I was saying: In this Stygian *grott*

The notables of limbo hatched a plot--

And what went on in the sulphurous hole
 We'll soon pick up by remote control.⁵⁵

Developed in his light verse, such investigations of broadcast language punctuate many of Corwin's essayistic plays with a purpose, including his definition of the Four Freedoms in "A Moment of the Nation's Time" (Jan. 30, 1943), his reading of the Constitution in "We Hold These Truths," and his debate about victory in "On a Note of Triumph." Not unlike MacLeish's contributions to American broadcast culture, Corwin's radio plays are intensely self-conscious in their examination of the medium; more than just telecommunicating ideas, they reflect on the matrix of telecommunication in which ideas are conceived and disseminated. Corwin's "rubrics and vignettes," remarked Max Wylie, "never serve to illuminate character, nor to explore the emotional interior of a protagonist. Instead, they illuminate a mood." Corwin's average "Joe" is "often no individual at all; more often he is the entire bleachers." Seldes added that when tackling "controversial subjects," Corwin "presented them through symbols and a group of characters" who "were more voices than people" and who "became as stereotyped in their way as the familiar characters of other radio programs."⁵⁶

Corwin later argued this to be an overstatement, maintaining that in his body of work there are "specimens [he] could cite that would indicate that [he] did not find character and development of character alien." He nonetheless conceded that he could not treat his "broad murals" with the "kind of patient and delicate detail that would go into a valid, worthwhile portrait of a character."⁵⁷ In Corwin's portraits of the medium, the at times facetious exchanges between the commenting, complementing and competing announcer-narrators express the playwright's misgivings about designating a single, authoritative speaker as a representative stand-in for his listeners. It was this insistence on polyphony, rather than the monophone or homophonic, that eventually led Corwin--aided by advancements in transcription technology--to discard the infelicitous construct of the disembodied common Joe and to record instead the living voices of the world's people.

“We are one with others . . .”: Listening High and Low

When asked whether he thought of himself as a “creative, imaginative writer or as a sociologist or documentarian,” Corwin, rather too accepting of the dichotomy, declared that he was “definitely” the former. His “documentary activity” for CBS had been “an accident.” He had enjoyed writing comedies and fantasies, but found himself “importuned by radio entities” to “create historic and commemorative materials”:

We had a war on, and there were burning issues, and I was among those burned. I felt strongly, and that feeling showed in my work. Not that I would have been without social awareness had there been no situation of war. Were it not for issues that [. . .] demanded the services of my kind of radio man [. . .] I would have written a great deal more personal drama, comedies, more poetry laced with music.⁵⁸

Involuntarily or not, Corwin remained a passionate historian and social critic throughout his career in radio, film, and journalism. A member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences after receiving an Oscar nomination for the screenplay of *Lust for Life* (1956), he became actively involved in “contributing to an improvement of the status of the documentary film within the Academy structure.”⁵⁹ What the broadcast documentary of the 1930s and ‘40s lacked, by comparison, was not status but definition.

Acknowledging that Corwin made his “particular mark” in this field, Seldes was quick to add that the term “radio documentary” had come to “mean one of two things in the United States: an inspirational program during wartime, or a study of a disagreeable subject.” According to Seldes, Corwin’s documentaries were “rhetorical,” rather than reportorial in nature. They tended to

soar away from fact, to start with the number 88 for radium and then make, not radium, but 88 the figure in the carpet. It worked when the subject was a great idea, and it failed when the subject was a great fact. The rhetoric stemmed from Walt Whitman by way of Pare Lorentz’s catalogue

in his great poetic-documentary film The River; at best the cadences and the rhythm cast a spell--and used radio for one of its natural purposes. As such, they "remained a rather special taste," and were eventually "supplanted" by documentaries of "another order." If perhaps based on too small a sample of plays, Seldes's remarks nevertheless capture the peculiar artifice of many of Corwin's better-known broadcast essays, performances that seem to betray a poet's reluctance to accept the prosaic task imposed upon him. Impressionistic and ambagious, plays like "We Hold These Truths" and "On a Note of Triumph" seem to have little in common with the newsreel realism of *The March of Time*, a series Seldes commended for its "frankness of approach." And yet, the scripted reenactments of the docudrama--a format that, as Seldes admitted, preceded rather than succeeded Corwin's "worlds of words"--merely hushed up the broadcasting realities of which many of Corwin's "rhetorical" documentaries took soundings, namely that wartime restrictions, network policies, and technological limitations all but ruled out the unscripted interview, the free and flexible use of the microphone.⁶⁰ By resorting to abstractions, Corwin rendered the reportorial challenges of radio concrete.

When Eliot postulated that the "Music of Poetry" must be a music latent in the common speech of the poet's time and place, he deplored the "ubiquity of standardised or 'BBC' English," thus drawing attention to the fact that the medium most capable of echoing the everyday also contributed most effectively to its silencing.⁶¹ As a broadcast poet closer in spirit to open-eared Walt Whitman than to loud-mouthed Walter Winchell, Corwin felt compelled to air such concerns about standardization and misrepresentation by radio, concerns about a means of telecommunication whose loudspeakers reached the many, but whose microphones were in the hands of the few. Unlike McLuhan, however, who argued the ear to be "intolerant, closed, and exclusive," Corwin did not conceive of the aural medium as inherently fascist.⁶² Alive to the currents of expressed thought and capable of amplifying the small voices in the crowd, of making them intelligible without

obliterating their distinctions, the dynamic microphone served Corwin as an emblem of democracy. Many of his broadcast essays play out the liberation of the mike, its removal from the confines of the studio into the compass of the citizenry.

In “New York: A Tapestry for Radio” (May 16, 1944; July 24, 1945), Corwin imagined lending an “electric ear” to the “people of the city,” demonstrating its voices to be at once diverse and united:

NARRATOR. Do not underestimate these people, for they are you. . . .

Do not mistrust them because of their accent, for we ourselves might be incomprehensible in Oxford.

LULU. So I says to him: “Sure, I’ll miss you. Like poison I’ll miss you,” I says to him. “If you want to see how much I’ll miss you, just stick your finger in the pond at Central Park and then pull it out and look at the hole.”

Seemingly random utterances by folks like Lulu, speakers nameless to the audience, constitute the “individual threads” of a tapestry whose pattern, unlike the grid formed by the city’s streets, cannot be visually apprehended; nor can it be perceived by the unaided ear. It is microphonic, rather than macroscopic. “The people of the city are the main design,” the narrator contends, and “[h]ow can you tell, from Seat No. 5 on the plane from Pittsburgh, what goes on here?” To know even half the voters in the city--the voices who count by making themselves heard--is “beyond the power of certified public accountants.” Only a “surpassing and great Omniscience” could “tell just what the man from Harlem thinks this moment, riding downtown on the Eighth Avenue express” or “keep close track of things in all five boroughs, including Richmond.” Lacking supersensory powers, the narrator implores “Americans on this wave length” to follow the threads of “interwoven hopes” by “listening acutely” to the various representatives of the “little people”--among them a grocery salesman in Spanish Harlem, a “Swede from Bruckner Avenue,” and a “Greek corporal from Twenty-fifth Street” now serving

overseas. Their voices have been brought into a meaningful relation through the aid of the microphone, of which the main speaker--the gatherer, amplifier and transformer--is an abstraction.⁶³

The design that emerges is a model for a United Nations "in miniature," a global interface through which peoples of the world may be "living side by side so effortlessly, no one calls it peace." An advocate of internationalism and spokesperson for the UN, Corwin held that

if any instruments of our widely ingenious civilization are going to be of help [in bringing the world's people closer together], certainly radio and the airplane are chief among them. Properly used (which it hasn't been on any large scale), radio can do more for international relations than ambassadors, visiting generals, Olympic teams, and exchange professors. The airplane [. . .] can do for the world what the automobile has done for this country--make it all one piece.⁶⁴

"Properly used," the airways and airwaves could assist in the broadening of minds, in giving the lie to official records, in gainsaying the near-sighted and one-sided argument, uses about which Corwin had already fantasized in "They Fly Through the Air with the Greatest of Ease" (Feb. 19, 1939; **Apr. 10, 1939**). In this response to the air raid on Guernica and the fascists' glorification of war, a pilot-narrator invites the audience to listen in as a bomber takes off and approaches its "objectives," the "enemy" to be annihilated. Overtaking the plane, he projects his microphone into the homes of the unsuspecting civilians, ordinary people sitting around their breakfast tables. Through several shifts of the mike, the inconsequential chatter overheard in the tenements--mild arguments about burned toast and baby's teething--is transformed into a mordant commentary on the bombers' euphemistic and euphoric "jargon of the kill," their abstraction of human lives into military targets. As explosions silence both his subjects,

the narrator, having declared himself to be at a loss for commemorative rhetoric, launches a fierce attack on heroics.⁶⁵

The distinct registers of Corwin's "rhetorical" documentaries assist listeners in discerning the true voice of the commons--a voice Corwin, like other radio documentarians, could only approximate. Corwin's experiments in *demophonics* could only come off if the narrator's lofty prose, along with the false notes of competing speakers, showed up the vernacular as both real and exemplary. First aired on the day of Germany's surprise attack on Russia, "Daybreak," a "program to follow on your atlas" (June 22, 1941), promises to take its audience on a global journey in pursuit of the ever-rising sun, the hope uniting all. Scanning the horizon for the "young light which makes milk bottles pink in Winthrop" at the "very moment" it "reddens the high peak of Aconcagua in the Andes of the Argentine," the "Pilot" identifies a series of locations, upon which short dialogues communicate the existence of those below--fishermen southwest of the Cape Verde Islands, young lovers in Logan County, Oklahoma, or voyagers aboard an ocean liner passing the international date line.⁶⁶

In his production notes for the play, Corwin pointed out that the "people of the vignettes must be authentic in order to contrast effectively with the stylized language of the Pilot." Indirectly, he acknowledged that the "authentic" could not be achieved without the "stylized," since "[o]ne of the limitations of radio" was precisely "its language," the blue-pencilled prose that was anything but earthy. Corwin's fishermen in Penobscot Bay, for instance, are heard complaining how the crabs eat their "danged bait till they ain't nothin' left for the lobsta." "No Maine lobsterman would say 'danged,'" Corwin acknowledged to the readers of his play, "He would say 'God-damned.'" ⁶⁷ The words that traveled the airwaves were of such "Sunday-school caliber," as one contemporary observer of network policies put it, that even "the foulest type of cutthroat villain will be found resorting, in his wrath, to a resounding, 'Darn it!'" ⁶⁸ Containing the genuine and its generic substitute within the ambit of carefully mapped out flights of fancy, Corwin

lifted the art of the soundstaged documentaries above the act of feigning. Introducing his “rhetorical” performances with lines such as “If you could keep a half degree ahead of sunup” or “Assume it is morning,” the playwright signaled what the journalist regretted: that his microphone, like the pilot’s vehicle, was far removed from the world he surveyed.⁶⁹ In the summer of 1942, one year after the “Daybreak” broadcast, Corwin received an assignment that promised to take the artist out of the studio and into the world, a project that encouraged reportage rather than rhetorical abstractions.

“It seemed utterly impossible to me,” Corwin recalled a few years later about his first transoceanic flight, “that the space between Pennsylvania Avenue and Charing Cross Road could be compressed into thirty hours.” As a CBS contract artist sent overseas to “establish the character of the British people through the eye and idiom of the inquiring American,” Corwin was expected to create live broadcasts that could bridge this distance in less than thirty minutes.⁷⁰ Produced by noted CBS journalist Edward R. Murrow and, as the BBC announcer informed listeners of the fourth episode, “broadcast from somewhere in the British Isles” (“Women of Britain,” **Aug. 24, 1942**), *An American in England* was a weekly travelogue by proxy. Notwithstanding the fact that it was scripted and rehearsed, performed by professional radio actors in a BBC studio, and musically underscored by Benjamin Britten and a sixty-two-piece symphony orchestra, the broadcasts nonetheless bear a closer resemblance to Murrow’s own eyewitness accounts from London than to any of Corwin’s previous performances.

However prominent, vivid, and distinct the speakers of Corwin’s “rhetorical” documentaries, their individual utterances rarely seem to warrant amplification. Overheard in passim rather than interviewed in person, the “little people” under attack in “They Fly Through the Air” or at work and play at “Daybreak” are ignorant of the pattern the “electric ear” detects in or imposes on their petty existences. Not drawn upon to share anything of consequence, they merely articulate their distinct commonness by delivering the commonplace in a variety of idioms, the aural aids of the radio essayist. *An American*

in England, by comparison, is as authentic in its delivery of people's voices as it is genuine in its regard for the voice of the people, a people whom Corwin had encountered during the four months he spent in England to research, write, and direct the series. During this time, Corwin had "met or watched or listened to" hundreds of individuals who, by virtue of being "little in income, property, investments, social standing, influence and renown," were representative rather than symbolic of the "little guy." From their accounts and his observations he attempted to relate the "story of the life and times of the common people of another country." "I did not once interview a high government official," he assured his readers; nor had he resorted to the "handouts of the Ministry of Information."⁷¹ "This is a report, not a play," Corwin insisted in his production notes to "Cromer" (Dec. 1, 1942), one of nine scripts written for the series.⁷² The program was appreciated as such by the British audience, who, according to a BBC survey, found the broadcasts "interesting," "stimulating," and "quite penetrating."⁷³

Beginning with "London by Clipper" (Aug. 3, 1942), *An American in England* relates the observations and conversations of the eponymous visitor from the moment he departs for England to his return to New York in "Clipper Home" (Dec. 22, 1942). After atmospheric disturbances had rendered the inaugural broadcast of the cycle (July 27, 1942) unintelligible for American audiences, the program was shortwaved from London on six consecutive Monday nights, three months after which a four-part extension of the series was produced in New York. In his review of the first two London broadcasts, Hutchens aptly described *An American in England* as a "major work in a minor key." Corwin was "once more writing with a poet's vision, a good reporter's clarity and a technician's precise knowledge of his craft--three attributes that have made him pre-eminent in radio literature." Understated yet "profoundly stirring" in its "cumulative effect," each one of these audio essays was a "chain of vignettes" consisting of "brief meetings" and "capsule interviews" that conveyed the reality of "good, average,

unspectacular people” with the “intimacy and detail of a good travel letter that catches not only the moment but the vast implications behind it.”⁷⁴

Since the program was designed to make the citizens of the two allied nations seem less remote and more human to each other, sensitive casting was of the utmost importance. Once again, Corwin aimed at contrasts in register, yet without recourse to the stylized narration employed in his “rhetorical” plays. As a stand-in for the author, the American traveler was to be neither “in awe of the British nor patronizing them.” Not feeling “obliged to sell the British to Americans,” he “never consciously ‘acts.’” Unable to find such an “authentic” voice talent in London, Corwin had the aforementioned Joe Julian flown in by bomber a day before “London by Clipper” was to go on the air. To “acquire at least a superficial familiarity” with the “color, timbre, and range” of British voices, with regional and class distinctions of which he was not yet a reliable judge, Corwin auditioned about fifty British actors. Corwin was not looking for soundalikes of George Sanders or Alan Mowbray to read lines like those uttered by a man he met at a pub in the Norfolk town of Cromer.⁷⁵ The premier broadcast of *An American in England* served Corwin as an opportunity to remind his binational audience of the vocal caricatures he sought to avoid. Still en route to England, the traveler calls to mind the voices his countrymen are wont to think of as quintessentially British:

JOE. [. . .]. It occurs to you that we Americans as a whole know very little about Britishers, although we’ve been speaking their language all our lives, and half our cities are named after theirs. We know more about English dogs and muffins and tweeds than about English people. According to what we’ve always imagined, England is made up of three or four distinct types. There’s the upper-class old-school-tie Lord Smudgepot type, who’s files away in your mind as a stuffed shirt, and who talks like this:

(*Biz: Motors out.*)

SMUDGEPOT. Absolutely ripping, old fruit. I remember at Ascot one year early in June. It was really remarkable. Believe it or not, the jolly old horse actually stopped running.

(Biz: Motors in.)

JOE. That's the fellow you blame for the loss of Singapore. And then there's another type you're sure represents most of Great Britain--the cockney. You gather from the movies that all cockneys are natural-born comedians who break into song at the slightest opportunity, like this.

(Biz: Motors out.)

COCKNEY. Talk about a toff--blimey, you ought to see him sitting around Covent Garden in a . . .

(Music: tremendous exaggerated opening to song, which then reduces rapidly to a mere patter of accompaniment. The whose effect fades under.)

JOE. And then there's the high-spirited type who founded the Empire and has been losing it, cheerfully, ever since. . . .

CHEERFUL. Chin up, cheerio, carry on, old chap--bear up, righto, wot? . . .

(Biz. Motors in.)

JOE. So altogether, when you try to picture the average Englishman, he seems to you mainly one of two things: a cold, calm, aloof highbrow, or a funny little guy who sings.

As a phonic compendium of the British people, subsequent broadcasts did much to counter such stereotypes, some of which, the narrator suggests, might have been instilled by the "movies, or the novels, or the short-wave radio," the very medium that now transmitted his own "authentic" American voice.⁷⁶ For as much as it insisted on fidelity

and aimed at its realization, *An American in England* retained enough Corwinian self-reflexivity to call the hazards and corruptions of its transmissionary channels to the listeners' mind.

“‘We take you now to England.’ If it only were as simple as that,” Corwin’s deputy correspondent remarks at the beginning of “An Anglo-American Angle” (Sept. 7, 1942), the sixth and final broadcast from London. A seemingly ready-made bridge in the service of diplomatic exchange, the airwaves are subject to interferences well beyond the control of the emissary. Deep within the “bowels of the British earth,” in the “battle-scarred” studios of the BBC, the narrator listens in on a transatlantic news broadcast and an American program received via shortwave. The latter comes across as “far away, as London sounds to listeners at home; it had an unreal quality--again the Arabia of one thousand and one nights.”⁷⁷ It was Corwin’s response to comments by critics like Hutchens, to whom the flaws in reception, the “fading in and out, like the sound of the sea across which they travel” had added a “sense of wonder, a suggestion of places at once so far and so near.”⁷⁸ To contest such romantic and nostalgic readings of his reports, the narrator, about to depart for America, makes a last effort to drive home the purpose of Corwin’s good will tour. Listening once more to British radio before turning in his borrowed set, he hears the strains of a folk tune that evokes the “old romantic English of the green farms and the thatched cottages,” of Shakespeare sonnets and nightingales and “Kew in lilac time.” Irritated, he switches off the receiver

before the song was finished. It was wrong to leave England with that tune in my ears. [. . .]. The England I saw was no tea shoppe. It was a grim, crowded, shabby, busy country, with guns in the gardens and trenches in the parks and drilling down at Kew in lilac time.⁷⁹

A documentary broadcast that endeavored to “take you now” to bleak places would do well to impede those who were too readily transported.

Interference of another kind made it very nearly impossible to take listeners to any concrete wartime location, as episodes like “Clipper Home” demonstrated. Shattering the verisimilitude of the travelogue, Corwin emphasizes the realities of censorship and the imperatives of circumspect reportage. The broadcaster’s silencing agents, however justified their presence, are being represented here in speaking roles so as to call attention to the otherwise untold acts of erasure and tacit voice-overs in which they have a say:

JOE. We landed at a port called Censored, all the physical features of the place bearing the same name. Ashore we ate a hearty breakfast and roamed around while the Clipper was having a snack of gas and oil, seeing . . .

CENSOR. Four words censored here.

JOE. And also the pretty . . .

CENSOR. Six words censored here.

JOE. And we stood on the banks of the . . .

CENSOR. Three words.

JOE. Watching the . . .

CENSOR. Two words.

JOE. . . . until it was time to go. And we flew to another port in West Africa, also bearing a name unmentionable for good and sufficient reason [. . .].⁸⁰

Instead of confining his documentarian mission to the broadcasting of language, Corwin continued to rely on such intermissions to confront the language of broadcasting and the limitations it imposed on the “authentic.”

“Why do all foreign people in radio dramas speak broken English in their own countries?” the narrator of “Good Heavens” (Sept. 28, 1941) protested, months before cartoonish portrayals of foreigners became *de rigueur* in radio propaganda.⁸¹ When the OWI requested CBS to develop a “goodwill” series about the non-anglophone allies of the

United States, Corwin seized the opportunity to expose listeners to the languages of the world. Another travelogue by proxy, *Passport for Adams* (1943) relates the impressions of a smalltown newspaper editor who is hired by a syndicate to report on the impact of the war on the world's civilian population. Researching for the series, Corwin became "impressed by the Hebrew language, which [he] had never really encountered before then."⁸²

In "Tel Aviv" (Sept. 21, 1943), the titular reporter advises his sidekick, the culturally insensitive news photographer Quisinberry, to prepare for his assignment by "striking up an acquaintance with the Hebrew language," upon which "Quiz" wisecracks that he knows "plennya Hebrew: aleph, baze, vaze, gimbel, dullard, kibitz, schlemiel, guniff, kosher, gefilte fish, Yehudi Menuhin. . . ." "Splendid. You have a remarkable command of pidgin Yiddish," Adam sneers, "which has so little to do with the Hebrew language, it wouldn't do you any harm to spend an hour with this booklet." During their tour of the city, the two gather information like pieces of vocabulary, from the shouts of a newsboy ("Davar Iton Erev") to street signs like "Rechow Umot Hameuchadot" (Street of the United Nations). Along the way, Quiz is set right about the Hora--which to him was some "kind of a Jewish jitterbug dance"--while Adams talks to people like Shameer, a construction worker who, once a lawyer in Germany, is proud of having helped laying the bricks of the "Bet-Haam" (House of the People). The broadcast ends with the word "Shalom," which Adams hopes will gain in a "future not too distant" a "new meaning and a more lasting one than we have ever known."⁸³

Corwin had been an interpreter of this word, this plea of the common man, for most of his broadcasting career; the readers of scripted voice-overs had been his messengers. Even when purporting to deliver "Word from the People" (Apr. 24, 1945), a shortwaved live broadcast to mark the occasion of the United Nations Conference in San Francisco, he relied on emissaries such as regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton, German-born conductor Bruno Walter, or bacteriologist Alexander Fleming to "translate"

the “meaning” of the conference “in terms of the hopes of people in all walks of life.”⁸⁴ It was not until after the war that advancements in recording technology made it possible for Corwin to move the microphone out of the studio and to open the electric ear to unscripted speech. A recipient of the first annual One World Award commemorating Wendell Willkie’s diplomatic tour in 1942, Corwin spent four months traveling around the globe, gathering one hundred hours of speeches, interviews, indigenous sounds and ethnic music. The story and record of this trip was presented as a thirteen-part series titled *One World Flight* (1947). “Here is real documentary radio,” playwright Jerome Lawrence declared in his introduction to a published transcript of the inaugural broadcast (**Jan. 14, 1947**). The use of a wire recorder had “enabled [Corwin’s] microphone to go traveling to places microphones have never been before”; “[r]adio from a shiny chrome studio at Sunset and Vine or at 485 Madison [was] kindergarten stuff in comparison.”⁸⁵

One World Flight takes off with a few notes of Alexander Semmler’s musical score and the blast of a train whistle, after which an unidentified male speaker addresses the audience:

You are standing in the Maikovsky station of the Metro under the heart of Moscow. A waiting train signals to workmen in the subway to clear the track.

(Biz: Another blast of the whistle.)

You are strolling along Hallam Street in London, and you are overtaken by a cockney street peddler selling cut iris, cut cauliflower, Yorkshire blue peas, and brand new potatoes. . . .

(Biz: The street peddler, fade under.)

You are in the library of a pleasant house in New Delhi, India, talking with Pandit Nehru about the world and the future. He says. . . .

Before the listener is presented with an aural snapshot of the reconstruction of the Philippines--the sounds of hammers and chisels recorded at a hotel in Manila--the future

prime minister of India is heard calmly expressing the belief that “freedom for one world” lies in acceptance of the fact that people and nations “are not alike,” that “everybody is not the same,” and that otherness does not imply inferiority. The introductory broadcast, and indeed the entire series, provides aural proof of this sentiment, exposing listeners to “moments out of interviews with people high and low; optimists, pessimists; liberals, fascists, communists; stevedores, prime ministers.” The “profoundest things” were not always said by “presidents and premiers,” but by “ordinary” and “humble people.”⁸⁶

Keen-eared rather than cockeyed, *One World Flight* plays back what “rhetorical” documentaries like “Daybreak” play down as external differences in speech. Among the “actually recorded” speakers and their on-the-spot translators are an Italian woman despairing over the loss of her husband and children during the bombardment of her village; a Filipino girl dismayed that Truman did not drop the atomic bomb on Russia; a Russian newspaper editor who warns that fascist conflagrations begin with a spark; and an Australian accountant cautioning against the advancement of the “colored races,” a “Frankenstein monster” that would “turn on” and “devour us, like the Japanese.” Replacing his idealized--and idealizing--microphone with a magnetic wire recorder, Corwin picked up ideological dissonance where he had hoped for “testaments of agreement.”⁸⁷

To Lawrence, these recordings, though not always “Magnavox-clear,” were of an “authenticity” that was “startlingly refreshing to a fiction-tired radio listener.” He defied his readers to “sit down at a typewriter and compose such simple, straightforward literary dynamite” as was set off on *One World Flight*. The “sincerity” of the broadcast was only enhanced by the main speaker who, for once, was not “any bell-toned narrator with ham in his soul and a built-in echo chamber in his vocal chord,” but a tour guide with the “voice of a good human being.” Amiable, assured and unaffected, the speaker introduces himself and his project a few minutes into the broadcast:

This is Norman Corwin. These broadcasts have to do with some of the

people of the world, and with much of the state of the peace, and therefore I believe they have to do with you and me. For today, if war comes anywhere, it will be close to us. No place is far any more. We are one with others, whether we want to be or not.⁸⁸

After a decade of commenting on the double life of broadcast speech, of flouting the conventions of commercial radio, and of rhapsodizing about microphones at large, Corwin appeared to have arrived at what Lawrence lauded as a “New Radio Form”—well-grounded, straightforward, and unself-conscious. With imported soundbytes speaking for themselves, the journalist’s quest for the “authentic” and the poet’s questioning of the “natural” ceased to be defining features of the radio documentary.

The editing techniques Arnheim had anticipated as a “step of great importance for the development of the art of radio drama”⁸⁹ promised to challenge both the surface realism and the “rhetorical” theatricality of studio-bound productions. “Without the tape recorder one wonders if radio would be the exciting instrument it is today,” remarked one radio critic, citing as exemplary *The People Act* (1952), a short-lived series of community documentaries that relied entirely on taped interviews and speeches.⁹⁰ Such uses of magnetic tape remained the exception, however; the increasing reliance on recorded material resulted instead in the prefabrication of formerly live programming and the institution of summer reruns, a new efficiency in network broadcasting which signaled the “beginning of the end.” As Emmy-nominated sound effects artist Robert L. Mott argues, after two decades of live entertainment, audiences sensed that the people at the microphone “were no longer talking directly to them but were being electronically reproduced”; radio, unlike live television, was now perceived as an “impersonal, electronic gadget.”⁹¹ Taped programming lacked the “excitement and spontaneity” experienced in live performance, Corwin acknowledged in retrospect, even though editing was a “great boon” to a writer-director-producer “so addicted to revision” and “so upset by glitches

and flaws.”⁹² Along with foul-ups and flubs, Corwin’s “sotto voce”--the voice of an art in search of its language--was being edited out of existence.

In his assessment of Corwin’s plays, broadcast critic Albert N. Williams argued that not until the emergence of a new generation of radio artists unfettered by memories of radio’s “chaotic, inarticulate adolescence” would writers be able to work “with a complete absence of self-consciousness about the tools of their craft.” Then would the medium give rise to “men of letters” with “reputations [. . .] as sure as those of novelists, historians, or biographers, poets, or playwrights.”⁹³ In an age of “secondary orality,” in which radio competed against established print and visual media, passing this adolescent stage meant that aural play was already passé as a viable popular form. Not unlike fellow Bostonian Fred Allen, whose comedy program satirized broadcasting conventions, Corwin transformed radio’s self-consciousness into an artistic project. As one of the very few auteurs of network radio, Corwin did not have to negotiate with sponsors or labor in obscurity by churning out scripts for daytime serials or variety programs. From this vantage point he reflected upon the commercial sophistications, aesthetic shortcomings, and reportorial challenges of network broadcasting while all along exploring the potentialities of the medium. By comparison, writers for sponsored programs--including serial drudge Irwin Shaw and gag compiler Herman Wouk--had little occasion to contribute to the advancement of an art of which they found few promises in their assigned hackwork. Instead, as the final chapter will document, they expressed their discontent off-mike, renouncing radio by fictionalizing their broadcasting experience in order to launch their careers as reputable novelists, dramatists, and screenwriters.

Notes

¹ Elissa S. Guralnick, *Sight Unseen*, (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1996) 98.

² Corwin, “Looking for Art, Bub? Talent vs. Leadership in Radio,” *Theatre Arts May*

1947: 55-56; this article also served as the Preface to Joseph Liss, ed., Radio's Best Plays (New York: Greenberg, 1947) iii-vi.

³ Apple, "The Art of Radio," Radiotext(e), Semiotext(e) 6.1 (1993): 307.

⁴ Anderson, "Notes on Radio," Theatre Arts June 1943: 343.

⁵ Albert Crews, Professional Radio Writing (Cambridge: Riverside-Houghton, 1946) 27; 112.

⁶ Frances Lee Hall, "Arch Oboler, Radio Dramatist," MA thesis (Indiana U, 1944) 119.

⁷ Edith J. R. Isaacs, "Radio Poet," rev. of Thirteen by Corwin, by Norman Corwin, Theatre Arts May 1942: 347.

⁸ Hutchens, "Mr. Corwin Starts Another," New York Times 12 Mar. 1944, sec. 2: 7. For a chronology of Corwin's radio programs, see R. LeRoy Bannerman, Norman Corwin and Radio (Birmingham, AL: U of Alabama P, 1986) 233-48.

⁹ George P. Weick, "The Crucial Antithesis: Orality/Literacy Interaction in the Poetry of Dylan Thomas," Time, Memory, and the Verbal Arts, ed. Dennis L. Weeks and Jane Hoogestraat (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna UP, 1998) 234-35.

¹⁰ J. Fred MacDonald, Don't Touch that Dial (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979) 58.

¹¹ Corwin, "Norman Corwin: Words in Flight," interview with Michael C. Keith, Journal of Radio Studies 5.2 (1998): 59.

¹² De Voto, "The Easy Chair," Harper's July 1945: 33-36.

¹³ Albert N. Williams, "Radio and the Writer," Saturday Review 24 Oct. 1942: 44.

¹⁴ De Voto 36.

¹⁵ Corwin, "Radio Primer," Thirteen by Corwin (New York: Holt, 1942) 36-37.

¹⁶ Eliot, "The Music of Poetry," The Third W. P. Ker Memorial Lecture (Folcroft, PA: Folcroft, 1942) 14; Corwin, "Radio Primer" 43.

¹⁷ Luther Weaver, The Technique of Radio Writing (New York: Prentice, 1948) 26; 39.

¹⁸ Corwin, "The Sovereign Word," Theatre Arts Feb. 1940: 131.

¹⁹ Corwin, "The Undecided Molecule," "Untitled" and Other Radio Dramas, by Corwin (New York: Holt, 1945) 26-27; 43; 36-37; this passage, with the exception of the addition

"I could" (bracketed above), was performed as scripted.

²⁰ Corwin, "Re Me," Off Mike, ed. Jerome Lawrence (New York: Essential-Duell, 1944) 50.

²¹ Corwin, "Descent of the Gods," More 110; 114; 106; 117; during Corwin's illness, the play was repeated on **Oct. 19, 1941**, for which above script was substantially revised.

²² William Matthews, "Radio Plays as Literature," Hollywood Quarterly 1.1 (1945): 41-42.

²³ Cameron Shipp, "Corwin of the Air Waves," Coronet Dec. 1945: 34-35.

²⁴ Produced by Columbia, the motion picture version was titled Once Upon a Time (1944); it stars Cary Grant under the direction of Alexander Hall.

²⁵ Corwin, "My Client Curley," after Lucille Fletcher, Best Broadcasts, 1939-40, ed. Max Wylie (New York: Whittlesey, 1940) 9-18; owing to listener requests and favorable notices, the play was repeated on **Apr. 4, 1940**, only one month after its original broadcast. Revivals were soundstaged by the *Campbell Playhouse* (Apr. 11, 1941) and the *Screen Guild Theater* **Feb. 4, 1946**.

²⁶ Van Doren, preface, Thirteen by Corwin vii; Corwin, "Seems Radio Is Here to Stay," Best Broadcasts, 1938-39 512-13. The play was also performed on **Nov. 6, 1945**, in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of broadcasting.

²⁷ Corwin, "Seems Radio Is Here to Stay" 518.

²⁸ Corwin, foreword, On a Note of Triumph (New York: Simon, 1945) 7.

²⁹ John Mason Brown, rev. of "On a Note of Triumph," Saturday Review 26 May 1945: 26; Shipp 37; De Voto 36.

³⁰ Matthews 41-42.

³¹ Samuel L. Rothafel and Raymond Francis Yates, Broadcasting: Its New Day (New York: Century, 1925; New York: Arno, 1971) 19; 22; 24.

³² Adorno, "A Social Critique of Radio Music," Kenyon Review 7 (1945): 215; for a brief discussion of the audience-announcer bond, see Richard Butsch, The Making of American Audiences (New York: Cambridge UP, 2000) 186-87.

³³ For a related discussion about "star" announcers, see Sam J. Slate and Joe Cook, It Sounds Impossible (New York: Macmillan, 1963) 111-26.

- 34 Corwin, "Radio Primer" 29-30.
- 35 Corwin, "You Can Dream, Inc.," "Untitled" 265-66; 267-68.
- 36 Corwin, "Murder in Studio One," More by Corwin (New York: Holt, 1944) 306; 322; 309.
- 37 Louis R. Reid, "Amusement: Radio and Movies," America Now, ed. Harold E. Stearns (New York: Scribner's, 1938) 13.
- 38 Corwin, "Murder" 236.
- 39 Corwin, "A Soliloquy to Balance the Budget," Thirteen by Corwin 177-78.
- 40 Carl Alfred Buss, "Writing and Producing the Radio Play," MA thesis (U of Wisconsin, 1933) 75.
- 41 Arnheim, Radio, trans. Margaret Ludwig and Herbert Read (London: Faber, 1936) 199-200. A comparison between the radio "Reader" and the "ancient Greek Chorus" already appeared in William Ford Manley's Bible Dramas (New York: Revell, 1928) 7.
- 42 Corwin, "The Sovereign Word," Theatre Arts Feb. 1940: 133; see also Milton Allen Kaplan, Radio and Poetry (New York: Columbia UP, 1949) 232.
- 43 Arnheim 143.
- 44 Matthews 41. Reportedly, 63.3 percent of all radio-set owners had tuned in to the broadcast, "the largest listening audience ever to hear a program using the regular entertainment-technique of radio"; see, "Today in Radio," Movie-Radio Guide 3-9 Jan. 1942: 21.
- 45 Barnouw, Radio Drama in Action (New York: Farrar, 1945) 205-06.
- 46 Corwin, "On a Note of Triumph," "Untitled" 491-92.
- 47 In On a Note of Triumph (New York: Simon, 1945) 9; in this "non-radio" edition of the script, Corwin interpolates lines from "There Will Be Time Later," a play broadcast on Columbia Presents Corwin on Aug. 15, 1944, and included in Untitled 407-27. Like "On a Note," "There Will Be Time Later" distinguishes between optimism and complacency.
- 48 Kostelanetz, "The Radio Dramatist Norman Corwin," American Drama 1.2 (1992): 56-57.
- 49 Gould, "A Minority Report," New York Times 20 May 1945, sec. 2: 5.

- 50 De Voto 33-34.
- 51 Corwin, On a Note of Triumph 70; 54-55; 17.
- 52 Barnouw, Handbook of Radio Writing (Boston: Little, 1947) 60-61.
- 53 Corwin, "Seems Radio Is Here to Stay" 502-03; for Corwin's updated version of the play, see Michael C. Keith, Talking Radio (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2000) 195-208.
- 54 Corwin, "The Sovereign Word," Theatre Arts Feb. 1940: 134.
- 55 Corwin, The Plot to Overthrow Christmas (Mt. Vernon, NY: Peter Pauper, 1940) 5-6; also Thirteen by Corwin 89-90. When it was restaged for the *Columbia Workshop* (Dec. 22, 1940), for *This Is My Best* (Dec. 19, 1944), and as a special on Dec. 24, 1945, above passage was performed as it appeared in the published script. The play was also adapted for PBS television and was revived on NPR in 1993.
- 56 Wylie, Radio and Television Writing (New York: Rinehart, 1952) 129; Seldes, The Public Arts (New York: Simon, 1956) 121.
- 57 Corwin, Years of the Electric Ear (Metuchen, NJ: Directors Guild of America-Scarecrow, 1994) 207.
- 58 Corwin, Years 237-38; Corwin, "Norman Corwin: Words in Flight" 58.
- 59 Corwin, Years 259-60.
- 60 Seldes 72-73.
- 61 Eliot 17.
- 62 Corwin, Years 29-30; McLuhan, Understanding Media (New York: McGraw, 1964) 303; the eye, according to McLuhan, is "open, neutral, and associative."
- 63 Corwin, "New York," "Untitled" 312-14; 322-24. The phrase "electric ear" appears in Corwin's "Network at Fifty" (1978), an excerpt of which prefaces Years of the Electric Ear.
- 64 Corwin, "New York" 329; Corwin, "Clipper Home," "Untitled" 246.
- 65 Corwin, "They Fly Through the Air," Columbia Workshop Plays (New York: Whittlesey, 1939) 104-09.
- 66 Corwin, "Daybreak," Thirteen by Corwin 121; four years later, on July 10, 1945, the play received another production on *Columbia Presents Corwin*.

- ⁶⁷ Corwin, "Daybreak" 120; 135. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Corwin wrote several plays for United Nations Radio. His advocacy of internationalism--a world so interdependent that "you can't tell where you begin and the world leaves off"--was also expressed in "Citizen of the World" (July 10, 1949).
- ⁶⁸ Carroll O'Meara, "Not on the Air!" *Forum* June 1940: 302.
- ⁶⁹ Corwin, "They Fly" 98; Corwin, "Daybreak" 117.
- ⁷⁰ Corwin, "London by Clipper," "Untitled" 157; 162.
- ⁷¹ Corwin, "An Anglo-American Angle," "Untitled" 220-22.
- ⁷² Corwin, "Cromer," *More by Corwin* 52; this play was restaged for *Columbia Presents Corwin* on May 9, 1944.
- ⁷³ Excerpts of the survey appear in a publisher's appendix to "Untitled" 528-31.
- ⁷⁴ Hutchens, "That Realm, That England," *New York Times* 16 Aug. 1942, sec. 8: 8. Despite the technical difficulties of simulcasting, Corwin became later involved in the development of *Transatlantic Call* (1943-46), a series of BBC/CBS co-productions of plays and talks designed to acquaint the citizens of the United States and Great Britain; see Corwin, *Years* 68-71.
- ⁷⁵ Corwin, "London by Clipper" 164; 167-68; Corwin, "Cromer" 51-52.
- ⁷⁶ Corwin, "London by Clipper," "Untitled" 143-44.
- ⁷⁷ Corwin, "An Anglo-American Angle" 210; 211. The published script, which differs significantly from the London broadcast, omits the opening line.
- ⁷⁸ Hutchens, "That Realm, That England" 8.
- ⁷⁹ Corwin, "An Anglo-American Angle" 214.
- ⁸⁰ Corwin, "Clipper Home," "Untitled" 234; a similar passage appears in "London by Clipper," "Untitled" 148, an episode broadcast on Aug. 3, 1942.
- ⁸¹ Corwin, "Good Heavens," *More* 147.
- ⁸² Corwin, "Tel Aviv," "Untitled" 364. Another script from the *Passport for Adams* series, "Moscow," appears in *Untitled* 375-98.
- ⁸³ Corwin, "Tel Aviv" 342-43; this play was also heard on *Twenty-Six by Corwin* (May 23, 1944).

- 84 Corwin, letter to Thomas Mann, 27 Mar. 1945, Norman Corwin's Letters, ed. A. J. Langguth (New York: Barricade, 1993) 87; Mann accepted the invitation to appear on the program.
- 85 Lawrence, "A New Radio Form," introduction, "*One World Flight*," by Corwin, Hollywood Quarterly 2.3 (1947): 280.
- 86 Corwin, "One World Flight" 281-82; 285. The clips used for the inaugural collage were part of subsequent episodes like "Czechoslovakia" (Feb. 18, 1947) and "Italy" (Feb. 25, 1947).
- 87 Corwin, "One World Flight" 282; 286; 284.
- 88 Corwin, "One World Flight" 286; 282; Lawrence 281.
- 89 Arnheim 126.
- 90 Harriet Van Horne, "Radio Grows Up," Theatre Arts May 1952: 98.
- 91 Mott, Radio Live! Television Live! (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000) 15.
- 92 Corwin, Years 123.
- 93 Williams, "The Radio Artistry of Norman Corwin," Saturday Review of Literature 14 Feb. 1942: 6.

Chapter Ten

“Hawkers of feces? Costermongers of shit?”: Voiding Radio

He felt a desperate urge to write a book. The many pleasant and comfortable years he had known, the agreeable times that the career had given him, the boon of care-lightening amusement that he had helped to bring his countrymen by taxing his nerves in the tasks of radio: all these were erased from his memory. In this great awakening of conscience [. . .] he felt only the single quickening urge of the reforming enthusiast: Destroy! O for two pillars to tug down and bring the Philistine temple of radio and advertising tumbling to ruin!--Herman Wouk, *Aurora Dawn* (1947)

In 1949, the advertising agency Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborne sent out a questionnaire in order to determine just how much money was left to be made in radio or whether to concentrate instead on television, a medium in whose commercial exploitation the company was already heavily invested. Sixty percent of the industry experts responding to the survey--executives of the four major networks, advertisers, and trade editors among them--predicted that by the end of 1954 television would be “more important than radio.”¹ Notwithstanding radio critic Harriet Van Horne’s enthusiasm about radio’s reemergence as a “lively new source of entertainment and information” in 1952--the “comeback most talked about” next to Judy Garland’s²--the prediction proved accurate. By January 1955, only two of the so-called prestige dramas--*Lux Radio Theatre* and *Hallmark Hall of Fame*--were still on the air; both were gone before the year was half over. Gone also were network staples like *Lum and Abner*, *Death Valley Days*, and *The Shadow*, all of which had been on the air for over two decades; other series, including *Lights Out*, *Cavalcade of America*, and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* had already been retooled for television.³ Among the dramatic offerings still on the air in the mid-1950s, none reached Nielsen ratings higher than 5.7 (compared to the 25.2 and 19.0 ratings reported for shows like *Lux Radio Theatre* and *Mystery Theater* only five years

earlier).⁴ Jockeyed disks and audio tracks from television were gradually taking their place.

“Even without the coming of television radio seemed doomed,” Fred Allen remarked in 1954. His own career as writer and star of a long-running comedy-variety program had come to an end in 1949 when a short-lived fad of call-in giveaways caused ratings for established broadcasting fare to plummet. “The audience and the medium were both getting tired,” Allen reasoned. “The same programs, the same comedians, the same commercials—even the sameness was starting to look the same.”⁵ The increased commercialism of late-1940s and early 1950s broadcasting aside, what contributed most to the general insipidity and inconsequentiality of network programming was the Red Channels hysteria and the resulting talent drainage in the entertainment industry. No “major radio writer ever really recovered from the war,” Howard Fink argues⁶; it is more accurate to say that none recovered from the subsequent cold war. Among those named in the 1950 “Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television” were playwrights Norman Rosten, Arthur Laurents, Millard Lampell, and Norman Corwin. The investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee, to which Corwin responded in the two-part protest broadcast “Hollywood Fights Back” (Oct. 26 and Nov. 2, 1947), made even liberals like CBS president William S. Paley cautious about “McCarthy and McCarran and the rest,” about anti-communist “investigations and volunteer bloodhounds.” Asked to write for a “broader audience” and dealt with a financially unacceptable contract, Corwin left CBS in 1949, turning his attention to UN Radio instead.⁷

Corwin’s advice to those who sought to “make a living from radio in these years of its decline” was to be “mediocre”; “until such time as radio returns to a constructive attitude toward public service and to a respect for esthetic values in writing,” prospective playwright should “look upon radio as a trade outlet, not an art, and curb [their] imagination.” More ambitious writers should simply “[f]orget radio,” at least for the

present, and turn to theater and periodicals, media that still had “diplomatic relations with originality.” Corwin claimed that what compelled him to proffer his advice was neither “cynicism, anger, nor contempt.” He only felt

sadness for an old friend, now bedridden, who has been kind and generous to many writers, including [himself]. The disease is probably incurable. Radio may well die, as a cultural force, of the after-effects of the childbirth of television. The complications are greed, venality and social irresponsibilities. Its spawn, the half-breed that is neither pictures nor radio but both, is already devouring everything around it, an omniphage chomping steadily into the economy of books, sports, movies and radio itself.⁸

“I’m not ex-Radio,” Corwin insisted half a century later, “Radio is ex-America.”⁹

Although the potentialities of non-commercial, socially responsible, and culturally relevant broadcasting were at least partially realized with the inception of National Public Radio in the early 1970s--giving rise to novelist-raconteur Garrison Keillor, the experimental (albeit not trendsetting) “Wings” (1978) by Arthur Kopit, and offering even Corwin a chance to soundstage new productions¹⁰--aural play was never resurrected as a pop-culturally viable alternative to that “omniphage” in the living room. A “marvelous” opportunity to make a living during the 1930s and ‘40s, radio in the age of television was an “abandoned mine,” as Orson Welles decried it in the late 1960s--a “victim of technological restlessness.”¹¹

As most poets and playwrights chose to forgo radio, the final years of network drama were indeed largely forgettable. On November 25, 1960, the last of the daytime serials wrapped up their loose storylines; fifteen months later, on September 30, 1962, the remaining two nighttime series, *Suspense* and *Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar*, were taken off the air, ending the decade-long fadeout of airwaved melodrama.¹² What remained as tokens of American broadcast culture was limited to a small number of commercially released recordings and a considerably greater number of published scripts, of which at

least one, Corwin's On a Note of Triumph (1945), had been a national bestseller. Such volumes, one critic hoped, would preserve "permanently the best of the vigorous, experimental drama written for the air":

When finally the television screen takes its accepted place as part of the furniture of most American homes and "blind radio" suffers the fate of silent movies, there will remain the shelf of radio plays. Some of the scripts on that shelf will be little more than historical curiosities, but others can claim a place beside the best novels, short stories, and legitimate dramas of the past decade.¹³

Beginning with Sue 'Em: The First Radio Play Printed in America (1925), the winner of a WGBS, New York, playwriting contest, thousands of scripts were published in form of illustrated scrap books (All About Amos 'n' Andy [1929]), novelizations (The Rise of the Goldbergs [1931]), drama anthologies (100 Non-Royalty Radio Plays [1941]) and handbooks for students of broadcasting (Professional Radio Writing [1946]).¹⁴ Yet publications like these were only slightly less ephemeral than the performances they transcribed and on whose lifespan their own marketability was contingent. By the early 1950s it was clear that even the collected works of radio's most eminent poets and dramatists were unlikely to gain new audiences, let alone literary status. Proven ineffective in recalling aural art to life, the printed page was frequently the site of recantation.

When given an opportunity to comment on their craft, radio writers tended to "bemoan their lot," as a critic of the New Republic observed; they complained about "limitations" imposed upon them, particularly in the rendering of "socially significant" themes.¹⁵ "You write--when you write radio for the long green stuff--in a prison," remarked True Boardman, a contributor to sponsored drama anthologies like *Silver Theater* (1937-47) and *Skippy Hollywood Theater* (1941-50) whose comedy "For Richer, For Richer" (Dec. 19, 1939) had appeared in Wylie's Best Broadcasts, 1939-40:

The thickness of the walls and the strength of the bars vary with different sponsors, but four walls are always there. This theme is taboo; that narrative device is against policy; you can't deal with such-and-such a type of character.¹⁶

Broadcast writers conjured up images of fiction factories not unlike the one described by H. Rider Haggard more than half a century earlier, establishments "created for and devoted to money-making" in which "tame authors" toiled namelessly in "vault-like hutches."¹⁷ As a result of such real or imagined walls, what emanated from the radio was argued to be impersonal, disingenuous--"junk, trash, pulp, penny-dreadful, soap-opera drivel" not to be found in the Broadway playbills listing the "literary credits" of former radio writers like Jerome Lawrence.¹⁸ "Radio always was phoney," William Saroyan opined in *Razzle-Dazzle*, a collection of his dramatic writings. Far from "strengthening the integrity of man," Saroyan held, the "spoken word of the radio"--along with the words and images of other newer media--had canceled whatever integrity had been brought into being by the printed word of the poet." Like George Steiner, who several decades later predicted that the "diminished or corrupted language" in which "mass communication" spoke to a "semi-literate mass audience" would bring about a "new Dark Age" of "chaos," Saroyan foresaw a "swift decline of Western civilization." It was "inevitable," he argued, that "our mediums of expression shall, under present circumstances, only increase the moral anarchy, hasten the ruin, and nullify the potency of the world we made."¹⁹

Although he chose to include four pieces composed for the noisome airwaves--among them "Radio Play," a burlesque about the impossibility of soundstaging culture for the multitude--Saroyan distanced himself from network broadcasting, claiming that most of its eclectic offerings were something decidedly inferior to real life:

I never did like *Information, Please*. I always did think it was a phoney. I never was impressed with anybody having the answer to any of

those easy and absurd questions. I always thought it was a literary frame-up.

I never did like radio announcers. They were ruining the native speech.

I never did like anything heavy and cagey on purpose, like a young genius scaring everybody in New Jersey with microbes from Mars, and then excusing himself with the deep-fluted farewell--“your humble servant Orson Welles.” Humble? Servant? Orson?

I never did like a man getting up every Sunday afternoon and interrupting good Andre Kostelanetz or somebody else like that with a rasping preachment on A-mer-i-can prin-ci-ples--Cameron’s the name, Ford’s my boss, I’ve got a good voice, and know a thing or two about law and order, medieval history, and how to instruct the Sunday sleepy.

I never did like the peachy all-star radio love stories where everything got gaspier and gaspier with frustration and jitney tragedy, as a Hollywood moll whispered and screamed her bogus love-sickness and despair all over the country.

I never did like the coy and cute Jack Benny.

I never did like the emphasis on money all over the place in radio--contests and questions and all the rest of it. Or things cheaper, or more expensive, but better, and so on.

I never did like news commentators spreading ignorance around all the time.

I never did like a speech from the Reich, a bellow from the balcony, a stutter or a lisp from the Empire.

I didn’t care much for anything over the radio, but I *listened* to everything.²⁰

Having been submerged by the airwaved dross that sweeps over the masses, the individual talent resurfaces triumphantly on the printed pages of his own volume, an author exulting in the freedom broadcast radio denies or curtails: the privilege to stand apart and raise one's voice in defiance, to talk back and sound off on behalf of the discriminating few who did not mistake the false notes of commerce for true American folk art.

Saroyan concludes his declaration of independence by acknowledging those struggling vaudevillians who seemed to have been less assured of the new medium than Jack Benny, their most ingratiating and enduring confrère, and by singling out the comedian widely regarded as the "sharpest wit on radio," a satirist Alan Havig labeled broadcasting's "critic-from-within"--Fred Allen. The "rest" just sounded like

a lot of deliberate mahoogie-googie-oogie, as the babies say. It just didn't make sense of any kind. I listened to it all and I listened to it regularly, but that didn't make it get better; didn't stop it from being ooglie; didn't do anything to it. It stayed the same all the time, no matter which one of them it happened to be at the time. I have heard ordinary birds do better, unsponsored, without half trying. I have heard Saturday night drunk Bohunks wiser than Cameron, gambling house hustlers cuter than Benny, cab drivers with more and better news than any of the commentators, waitresses with more heart than any moll in Hollywood, and late-night newsboys with better and deeper-fluted farewells for the people than Welles'[s].²¹

No mention is made here of alternative programs such as the *Columbia Workshop*, which had commissioned and produced Saroyan's "Radio Play" (Aug. 10, 1939), or *The Free Company*, for which his "The People with Light Coming Out of Them" had been written (Feb. 23, 1941). Portraying himself as a dissentient listener, a naysayer in a voiceless crowd, Saroyan obscured the fact that the networks were courting noted authors like himself, the issue of which he now proudly displayed on paper.

By many of its most distinguished contributors, broadcast culture was rather too readily deprecated as what James T. Farrell labeled “counterfeit art,” wholesale “commodities” delivered to an ostensibly supine public.²² Poet Norman Rosten, recipient of an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for his broadcast writings, dismissed any talk about “the ‘literature’ of radio,” arguing that those with experience in broadcasting knew its output to be the “sheerest caricature of art. Most of radio writing is polemic or melodrama when it is not merely nonsense, and most serious writers have chosen to stay in their rooms and write books.”²³ Not limited to occasional statements in the daily press, such public recoiling from radio as anti-literature was also rehearsed in a small but marketable genre of anti-radio literature, fictional exposés in which former radio insiders threw the book at a corrupting industry and combated broadcasting in forcible reversions to type.

One such insider was Irwin Shaw, who became a serial writer for broadcast pioneer and noted radio drama producer Himan Brown, a fellow Brooklyn College alumnus. Brown had acquired the rights to the comic strips Dick Tracy and The Gumps and, developing them into radio serials, engaged Shaw as a writer. Between 1934 and 1937, Shaw regularly contributed scripts to both sponsored programs at \$20 to \$25 per episode. According to his biographer, Michael Shnayerson, Shaw “wanted desperately to get published and escape the treadmill of radio-serial writing.” Beginning in 1934, he sent out stories to newspapers and periodicals including Collier’s, The Saturday Evening Post, as well as popular magazines by Street and Smith.²⁴ One such early effort was “Main Currents of American Thought,” which appeared in the August 5, 1939, issue of the New Yorker, the same magazine that had once featured Ring Lardner’s radio column “Over the Waves.” Whereas the ailing, homebound Lardner had been a reluctant yet “faithful listen-inner” who shared his impressions about “dat new daval radio,” Shaw was a former radio hack who took his readers straight into New Grub Street hell.²⁵

A sarcastic footnote to Vernon L. Parrington's Pulitzer prize winning study of American writing and history from which it appropriates the title, "Main Currents" opens with the dictation of a serial script, the broadcast fiction that consumes the life of Andrew Draper, Shaw's alter ego:

"Flacker: All right now, Kid, now you'd better talk," Andrew Draper dictated. "Business: sound of the door closing, the slow turning of the key in the lock. Buddy: You're never going to get me to talk, Flacker. Business: sound of a slap. Flacker: Maybe that'll make you think different, Kid. Where is Jerry Carmichael? Buddy (laughing): Wouldn't you like to know, Flacker? Flacker: Yeah. (Slowly, with great threatening in his voice) And I'm going to find out. One way or another. See? Business: siren fades in, louder, then fades out. Announcer: Will Buddy talk? Will Flacker force him to disclose the whereabouts of the rescued son of the Railroad King? Will Dusty Blades reach him in time? Tune in Monday at the same time etcetera etcetera--"

Andrew dropped onto the couch and put his feet up. He stretched and sighed as he watched his secretary finish scratching the dictation down in her shorthand notebook. "There's another thirty bucks," he said. "Is it the right length?"

"Uh huh," she said. "Eleven and a half pages. This is a very good one, Andy."

"Yeah," Andrew said, closing his eyes. "Put it next to Moby Dick on your library shelf."

Like each of his well-timed yet slow-paced scripts, Andrew's existence appears to be mapped out and consigned, an indifferent career measured in page numbers--over one million words in the course of four years--and dollar amounts earmarked for his family's living expenses and doctors' bills.

As he tries to escape the radio continuity that is his everyday--a sensory assault of screaming neighbors, his mother's vacuum cleaner, and a telephone delivering disagreeable news from his bank and his agent--Andrew daydreams about going off in his car, of finding a "place in the mountains," of writing a play. "Only he could never get himself far enough ahead on [his serial scripts]. Twenty thousand words a week, each week, recurring like Sunday on the calendar. How many words was Hamlet? Thirty, thirty-five thousand?" Andrew is merely twenty-five, but his eyes are tired, his bones ache and his talent is spent.

Will Dusty Blades head off the desperate gang of counterfeiters and murderers in the race for the yacht? Will I be able to keep it up? Andrew asked himself. The years, the years ahead. . . . He would grow fat and the lines would become permanent under his eyes and he'd drink too much and pay more to the doctors because death was nearer and there was no spot, no vacation from life, because in no year could he say, "I want to sit this one out. Kindly excuse me."²⁶

Aside from being "tainted with a bit of self-pity," as Shnayerson puts it, Shaw's autobiographical sketch is an exercise in erasure. It reduces broadcast writing to a monotonous and impersonal chore unworthy of--and harmful to--the serious and sensitive artist. Unlike Shaw, Andrew does not have his dramatic works featured on the prestigious *Columbia Workshop*, which presented Shaw's original radio play "Supply and Demand" (May 9, 1937) and adapted his off-Broadway drama Bury the Dead (May 28, 1938). As in most critiques of broadcasting, such opportunities for artistic expression and socially relevant commentary were blotted out so that the horrors of commerce could be thrown into relief. Exiting the industry by turning a deaf ear to the possibilities of the aural medium and by shouting down or lamenting its practitioners was a lustrative act for former radio writers, a literary initiation ritual for serial offenders like Shaw who sought to make good as legitimate playwrights or socially conscious novelists. Shaw's *esprit*

d'escalier was not appreciated by Brown, who kept the pot boiling with highly popular radio melodramas and avoided ever talking to his defected writer again.²⁷

A less splenetic retreat from radio is Aurora Dawn, the first novel of former gagman Herman Wouk, who prefaces his caricature of broadcasting by stating that “[t]he artist’s revenge’ is a familiar flaw in satire.” As his narrator insists, the moral of the book is not that “[r]adio and advertising are the curse of our age” or that “authors are better men than advertisers.” Instead, he merely asks the reader to consider that the “road to happiness” may not lie in “becoming very rich very fast.” Wouk’s hero, a young salesman for the fictional Republic Broadcasting Company, believes just that, but redeems himself by “throw[ing] away a golden future” in radio, “caper[ing] off down the street, shouting, loud enough to bring wondering old ladies to their windows, ‘Free! Free!’” His responsibility had been “to see that cordiality was maintained between the sponsor who paid such large sums for radio time, the network which gave them its gargantuan technical facilities in return, and the advertising agencies which acted as middlemen”—a mission that not only proved fruitless, but disastrous.²⁸

All that is “cheapening” and “horrid” about radio writing is expressed in the novel’s tautological title, the name of a cleansing agent for the promotion of which the broadcasting industry created and maintained a number of soap operas. Among them,

“Meet Mother Murphy,” wherein homespun Irish charm furthered the cause of Aurora Dawn Energized Soap Beads; and “Doctor Morris’s Secret,” a serial which had successfully advocated the virtue of Aurora Dawn Dubl-Bubl Shampoo for four years without bringing its listeners one jot closer to the nature of the kindly old horse doctor’s secret.

If the literary world had “suffered a blow” because his reformed hero did not follow his urge to “write a book” that would “bring the Philistine temple of radio and advertising tumbling to ruin,” Wouk’s narrator concludes that “[o]f making of such books” there was “no end,” and that “literature may be consoled with the reflection that it might have

suffered a greater blow had he written it.” After all, Aurora Dawn, which was begun in 1943 but not completed until May 1946, needed to distinguish itself not only from broadcast bilge, but from the “recent publication of more than one novel intended to expose the inner workings of the advertising industry,” books that had reached the marketplace while Wouk was still in the service.²⁹ Struggling to leave behind a thirteen year stretch of commercial radio writing, the fledgling author did not want to be launched into oblivion by competing against those who were already profiting from railing against it.

By far the most prominent of these parting shots was the bestseller The Hucksters (1946) by Frederic Wakeman, a former employee of the advertising agency Lord and Thomas. Between 1937 and 1945, Wakeman had developed radio programs and sales campaigns for corporate sponsors, an experience which apparently convinced him that “[m]ost radio writers [were] semi-literate hacks” and that there was “no need to caricature radio. All you have to do,” his fictional stand-in sneers, “is listen to it. Or if you were writing about it, you’d simply report with fidelity what goes on behind the scenes. It’d make a perfect farce.” Like Shaw, Wakeman portrays working in commercial radio as an emasculating experience. Shaw’s Andrew Draper donates money to the Spanish cause but can no longer throw a baseball without feeling pain in his shoulder; Wakeman’s Victor Norman senses the “ache of war, as it can only ache to a man who can’t get in it. OWI did not count. It was not participation to his mind and he had no feeling of having been part of this most colossal drama of history. . . .” Wracked with guilt, Norman imagines himself on trial:

Q. Your name?

A. Victor Norman.

Q. Occupation?

A. Huckster.

Q. Are you a returned veteran?

A. No, sir.

Q. Overage?

A. No, sir. I was 4F.

Q. What did you do during this war period?

A. Oh, a little radio work. Nothing important.

Q. What else?

A. Nothing much. I sold a little soap, I guess.³⁰

Like Wouk, Wakeman ends his narrative by permitting his antihero to extricate himself from the vitiating influences of the industry he had served. The broadcast writer, not the institution of broadcasting, was argued to be capable of reform. “American radio has been panned consistently for years, often by its own sons,” Corwin commented; but did the airwaves carry “any fewer singing commercials as a result? Any better programs at better times, any deeper cultural stirrings?”³¹

Indeed, as Shaw insisted in The Troubled Air (1951), the radio business had only become more treacherous and demoralizing as the 1940s drew to a close. Although he had long since turned his back on the medium, Shaw seized the ongoing Red-baiting of radio and television artists as an occasion to expand upon his earlier sketch of the tormented broadcast scribe. The Troubled Air tells the story of Clement Archer, a history teacher whose dreams of becoming a playwright are crushed when he is lured into the morass of radio by one of his former students, a World War II veteran who made a name for himself as a radio actor: “A two-headed Zulu could do it,” Archer is told. “As long as you can type fast enough, you have nothing to worry about.” As Shnayerson points out, the situation is based on young Himan Brown’s successful recruitment of one of his college professors, who was put to work penning Brown’s less-than-scholarly epic *Marie, the Little French Princess* (1933-35), the first daytime soap opera to air on CBS. Although not at all certain whether he is suited for such an assignment, the misguided intellectual abandons his academic career for an adventure in broadcasting. “My natural prose style,” he quips,

is something of a cross between Macaulay and the editorial page of the New York Times, and my idea of how people should behave in fiction comes mostly from James Joyce and Proust. And I never had Bright's disease and I never tried to seduce a twenty-year-old immigrant, and I actually believe that the innocent always suffer and the evil always prosper in real life. So I can't say I feel boyishly confident about my equipment on a Monday morning when I sit down and know I have to write five fifteen-minute heart-breaking episodes before Friday. I have a lovely idea for next week. Little Catherine (the name of the program was *Young Catherine Jorgenson, Visitor from Abroad*) is going to California and she's going to get caught in an earthquake and be arrested for looting when she goes into a burning building to rescue an old miser in a wheelchair. Ought to be good for ten programs, what with the arrest, the examination by the police, the meeting with the cynical newspaper reporter who is reformed by her, and the trial.³²

According to the logic of Shaw's melodrama, not-so-young Clement Archer, visitor among broadcasters, soon discovers that the joke is on him, that writing such tripe is "murderously hard work." He must suffer the consequences of his folly and revisit the New Grub Street nightmare that once plagued Andrew Draper:

He wrote frantically, then found himself staring blankly at the wall for days, hopeless and disgusted with himself. He began to drink too much, snapped at [his wife and daughter], had trouble with his stomach, slept badly and woke feeling listless and hot-eyed. He went to a stomach specialist who gave him pills, but told him they wouldn't work and advised long vacations. He wrote his last play during this time, working heavily on the week-end on it, and then quit that.

Rather than quitting the business that wrecks him, the defected academic eventually becomes the producer-director of a sponsored drama anthology tauntingly titled *University Town*. Yet it is not until the program is being investigated by Blueprint, a “belligerent little magazine, financed mysteriously, dedicated to exposing radical activities in the radio and movie industries,” that Archer understands why “everything” in the television-challenged medium is “treated as though it’s a matter of life and death.” The advertising agency in charge of *University Town* gives Archer two weeks to disprove the accusation that five of his performers are communists, his former student among them. By the time he learns that the charming young man who turned him into a servant of commerce and whom he, in violation of the advertiser’s policy, defended before the sponsor, is an embodiment of broadcasting hypocrisy--a red opportunist--Archer has not only rendered himself unemployable, but has suffered irreparable losses in his personal life. Being a straight arrow in radio proves to be his tragic flaw.³³

Shnayerson calls The Troubled Air a “detective story” in which “morality, rather than a murder, is at stake.” The conflicting interests of sponsors, advertising agents, and network executives between whom the highly vulnerable broadcast artist was forced to negotiate continued to make the radio industry an ideal backdrop for mysteries like Murder on Mike (1984) by H. Paul Jeffers, head of the WCBS news department, in which the cast and crew of “one of the hottest radio dramas on the air” band together to avenge themselves on the “big shot” whose selfish actions threaten to shut down the production.³⁴ By the mid-1950s, however, few radio insiders felt compelled to resort to fictionalizations, since the industry, which had employed thousands of actors and writers for about a quarter of a century, no longer had any opportunities for--or sway over--artists eager to tell all. To be sure, most radio-related writings had become virtually unpublishable. “Who would have dreamed, a mere ten years ago, that the money-crammed world of radio was a bubble about to burst?” Wouk marveled in the preface to the 1956 edition of Aurora Dawn, only to add that his fiction was equally relevant in the

age of television; radio was “all but dead for dramatic purposes,” MacLeish put it in the foreword to the 1960 edition of his 1944 play cycle An American Story, the only major collection of broadcast scripts to appear in print during the early post-radio period. Those who offered candid accounts of a none-too-innocent business, on the other hand, could still command an audience throughout the 1960s and ‘70s.³⁵

Following the publication of Allen’s Treadmill to Oblivion, a number of radio personalities and writers shared their now-it-can-be-told accounts of the never-quite-legitimate radio theater; such recollections include soap opera actress Mary Jane Higby’s Tune in Tomorrow (1968), an anecdotal survey of the “entire radio field” which promises to disclose “what really went on behind those mikes,” and Joseph Julian’s This Was Radio (1975), a memoir relating his “thirty years of radio activity,” a career that peaked in the late 1940s and very nearly terminated after his name had appeared in Red Channels. “Throughout it all, [he] stubbornly clung to the notion that this was not really [his] career, only a temporary way of making a living until [he] connected with the right role and made it big in the theater, or Hollywood.” While not nearly as antipathetic or monopathic as Shaw’s melodramatic reckonings, the afterthoughts of those who sold out in the “last Klondike” of the acting profession for the promises of a “brass ring” hardly betoken unalloyed pride in the popular culture of radio’s so-called golden age. As Julian put it, nonchalantly:

What was radio? It was, actually, a rather silly-looking spectacle: a group of unglamorous people sitting or strolling around a large room, holding sheets of paper in their hands, mumbling to themselves; going up to a microphone, delivering their lines, sitting down, lighting a cigarette. A grown man jumps up and down in a sandbox creating the sound of running footsteps, or slaps his chest for horses’ hoofbeats, or slowly crushes the cellophane wrapper from a pack of cigarettes to indicate a forest fire, while behind a glass panel, a man with a worried look on his face and a stop

watch in his hand makes “stretch” or “faster” signs for the performers, who then change pace according to the purchased piece of time rather than the dictates of artistic imperative.³⁶

As in the Hollywood romance The Way We Were (1973), scripted by former radio playwright Arthur Laurents, the soundstage was recalled as a gadget-filled playground on which clock-conscious pros enacted scraps of dialogue within a “purchased piece of time” that bore little resemblance to art or life. For the writer, the “artistic imperative” was to be delivered from this hourglass-admeasured lot and to celebrate this deliverance in chronicles of bondage and release, escapist tales whose length or pace was not dictated by the brokers and tallymen of the dial.

One of these escape artists was Arnold Auerbach, a musical and revue librettist whose autobiography Funny Men Don't Laugh (1965) relates the story of an “aspiring twenty-two year old humorist” who conceived of “writing--even radio writing--as a spontaneous outpouring of creative juice,” only to realize that he had “strayed into the den of a literary graverobber.” Like the fictional hero of Shaw's “Main Currents,” Auerbach was a college graduate who began writing for the medium at the height of the Depression. The assurance of a weekly income of \$25 to \$30 notwithstanding, Auerbach “grew more and more disenchanted” as he found himself maintaining the joke files of a noted gagman for whom he dug up lines from nineteenth-century humorists like Charles Farrar Browne (Artemus Ward), Henry Wheeler Shaw (Josh Billings), Bill Nye, and Finley Peter Dunne. The bons mots snatcher attempted to burke Auerbach's dissatisfaction by arguing that such labor was “creative,” since it required the skillful conversion of stale jests into newly surprising and at times topical quips. After all, he reasoned, novelists and poets did not invent words either, but only “used the old ones over and over again.” Out of “love,” Auerbach concealed the identity of his “self-delusive” employer--CCNY graduate, Phi Beta Kappan and published writer David Freedman--who, “bogged down in money tangles” and unable to “escape hack work,” died of a heart attack at the age of 38.³⁷

Auerbach eventually found success and some satisfaction writing for Fred Allen comedy-variety programs *Town Hall Tonight* (1934-39), the *Fred Allen Show* (1939-40), and the *Texaco Star Theatre* (1940-45). Granted considerable freedom by the comedian who continued to write much of his own material, Auerbach worked on some two-hundred broadcast scripts over a period of five years (1936-41). Yet, looking back at his contributions to American culture, Auerbach was “disconcerted to recall” that his years in radio were “among the most momentous in modern history,” a “time of war, upheaval and social protest. The names in the headlines come back like drum rolls: Ethiopia, Manchuria, Munich, Guernica. But if you want historical perspective on that turbulent period,” he cautions his reader, “you can’t get it from me.” While not “unaware of what was happening,” he nonetheless “viewed Berlin and Madrid merely as vexing warts on the *real* world, the only world that mattered: the Fred Allen radio show.” Poring over the newspapers--“and very thoroughly too”--he was only “searching for *funny* items,” trivia that “might make a sketch or a Town Hall News bit.” “Luckily,” Auerbach added, he could always “talk things over with a colleague,” the “mature and practical” Herman Wouk, with whom he worked for both Freedman and Allen, and who, some twenty years after the publication of *Funny Men Don’t Laugh*, was both mature and practical enough to wring a few humorous episodes from their apprenticeship with the forgotten gagman.³⁸

As its title implies, Auerbach’s autobiography is a solemn leave-taking, a survivor’s reminiscences of two comic talents--“Humor” (Freedman) and “Wit” (Allen)--who had collapsed on the enormous radio treadmill. Wouk concurred that Freedman was a “man of exceptional gifts” bogged down by “life-consuming radio rubbish,” while Allen was “[i]n truth” a “classic humorist” who had “passed through this life masquerading as a vaudeville and radio comedian.”³⁹ Having exercised his wit on broadcasting in the mannered if mild-mannered *Aurora Dawn*, Wouk let go of the past in the unreservedly ribald episodes of his 1985 novel *Inside, Outside*, a *roman à clef* that contrasts the careers of two former gagwriters and their attitude toward the radio industry. The narrator,

David Goodkind, looks upon their “outlandish employment” as assistants to a radio “gag czar” as “rare fun in a dream world,” an opportunity to meet actors, novelists and publishers; his colleague and friend, Peter Quat, distances himself from such “prostitution” by frequenting cafes and automats, where he “talk[s] literature with other aspiring writers” in whose company he “sneer[s] at gagwriting as mere thievery” and denounces his employer as a “sellout and a barbarous kike.”⁴⁰ Wouk’s previous farewells to the “useful and rewarding trade” that provided him with a weekly income of up to \$500, had been the choice words of a radio insider on the verge of moving out, but not yet certain whether he could get away from a life on the “twilight edge of society.” Four decades after he had sold his first manuscript, such balancing acts were no longer necessary; in the mid-1980s, the business and its tradesmen were largely forgotten, so that Wouk could amuse himself with inside jokes about a “madhouse” exotic to many of his television-age readers.⁴¹

At last, radio entertainment could be derided as what many of its self-conscious creators had always believed it to be, in a language broadcasters would never permit: “crap.” The Hucksters and Aurora Dawn had merely revealed the seamy side of soap peddling; and while the plot of the latter revolved around the delivery of an anti-advertising broadcast sermon titled “The Hog in the House,” Inside, Outside took readers straight into the Augean Stables. Sheltered by the belatedness of his commentary, Wouk reveled in heaping dirt on a business as infamous for its restrictions as it was for its euphemism. Like Auerbach and Wouk, who supplied an “Hour of Smiles” designed to stimulate sales of the Bristol-Myers laxative Sal Hepatica, David and Peter are expected to put their experience in the service of pushing an aperient. When their boss promises the sponsor a “breakthrough in class”—a serialized adaptation of War and Peace starring the Barrymores--the two young writers are called upon to compress the first chapters of Tolstoy’s epic into a half-hour audition script, “with appropriate pauses for selling Ex-Lax.” The laborious and messy task of “patching up” the script results in the mutilation of several copies of the novel, pieces of which are strewn all across the office.

The deal is off, however, when the venerable John Barrymore gets wind of the sponsor involved. “You degenerate pen-pusher!” he assails one of the gagman’s assistants, “How DARE you plot and plan and propose that the Barrymores be purveyors of *excrement*,” that they be “Promoters of *bowel movements*,” “Hawkers of *feces*? Costermongers of *shit*?”⁴² Long delayed, catharsis takes on a crude literalness.

By the end of the twentieth century, a regression to the oral stage of broadcasting, a longing for the kitsch, camp, and schlock of those “thrilling days of yesteryear,” was seen as the giving in to guilty pleasures. “[R]adio was a cinch if you kept reaching down and grabbing up handfuls of the ordinary,” philosophizes a listener-turned-broadcaster in Garrison Keillor’s *WLT: A Radio Romance* (1991), the first novel about the aureat days of radio to become a national bestseller since the end of that era.⁴³ The “sheer trashiness of radio! the tedium and garbage and fruity pomposity” of its announcers and crooners,

the fake warmth of radio stars. *Evenin’, folks, and welcome to The Best Is Yet to Be and I just want to say how much it means to us to know that you’re there. Bullshit. But that’s what radio was all about! False friendship. That was radio in a nutshell. Announcers laying on the charm to sell you hair tonic.*

A storyteller whose career in radio began in 1963, one year after the networks’ last two regular dramatic programs went off the air, Keillor is best known for his NPR broadcasts from Lake Wobegon. In *WLT*, which takes readers inside a fictional Minnesota radio station launched in 1926 by the struggling restaurateurs Ray and Roy Soderberg, Keillor captures both the excitement and the monotony, the ingenuity and limitations of commercial radio, from its rise in the late 1920s to its decline after World War II. When their enterprise takes off--a “dazzling success! But so dreadful!”--the baffled yet none too proud Ray marvels at the

sheer bulk of it! After a year they had broadcast more words than Shakespeare ever wrote, most of it small talk, chatter, rat droppings.

Radio personalities nattering about their pets, their vacations, their children. Dreadful. The thought that normal healthy people didn't have better things to do than sit idly absorbing it all--the daily doings of Avis and her cheery friends and Little Corinne warbling "My North Dakota Home" and LaWella's recipes for oatmeal cookies, the cowboy bands, the Norsky Orchestra, Grandpa Sam telling the story of Squeaky the Squirrel, and Vesta droning on earnestly, plowing through Louisa May Alcott--it was *eminently* dreadful, he thought--*I hope to high heaven people don't listen to all this!*⁴⁴

Authors who openly declare that they listened to--and loved--old-time radio continue to bestow their compliments underhandedly. For instance, when Philip Roth pays homage to Corwin in I Married a Communist (1998) by expressing his awe at the "power," "soul" and "apotheosizing effect" of "On a Note of Triumph"--the first hardcover his narrator "ever owned outright"--the praise for the playwright's "poeticized vernacular," eloquently described as a "verbal counterpart of a WPA mural" with traces of Clifford Odets and Maxwell Anderson, is delivered with several reminders that the impressionable listener was "not thirteen" when World War II came to and end.⁴⁵ A source of pre-pubescent delight, broadcasting was not to be seriously reconsidered by the mature artist. Gabriel Noone, the narrator of Armistead Maupin's The Night Listener (2000), fondly recalls the childhood amusements of climbing to his "aerie after supper and surrender[ing] to the smoky-warm, mannish voice" of Tallulah Bankhead, hostess of *The Big Show* (1950-52), and of having breakfasts in bed while listening to the kiddie program *Big Jon and Sparky* (1950-58); as an adult, however, he suffers anxieties of not being a "real writer," of being but a "clever impostor, a sidewalk magician performing tricks for the crowd outside the opera house":

[. . .] I've always been unsure about my literary powers. My work, after all, was originally intended for radio: grabby little armchair yarns that I

would read for half an hour every week on a National Public Radio show called *Noone at Night* [. . .]. The show eventually became a cult hit; listeners would cluster en masse around their radios in a way that hadn't happened since the serials of the forties. While this fulfilled me hugely as a storyteller, it left me feeling illegitimate as a writer, as if I'd broken in the Temple of Literature through some unlocked basement window.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, a new generation of American playwrights not subjected to the entertainment mill of radio's network years was beginning to look somewhat more favorably on the aural medium, if only as a "great training ground for dramatists." David Mamet, author of several radio plays, including "Reunion" and "Prairie Du Chien," recalls listening to the last remaining dramatic programs of the late 1950s, series like *Suspense* and *Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar*, while sitting in his parents' car. He "wanted the trip to be endless--rolling through the prairies and listening to the intimate voices." During those days, radio was already a stranger in the living-room, and a joyride on the airwaves had become an off-the-wall excursion in a visuals-dominated everyday. "We were the very first television generation," he adds. "It never occurred to us to turn on the radio when we got in." Mamet claims to have "learned a lot about playwriting" from his experience writing for the ear, namely that

[g]ood drama has no stage directions. It is the interaction of the characters' objectives expressed *solely* through what they *say* to each other--not through what the author says *about* them. The better the play, the better it will fare on the radio. Put Streetcar, Waiting for Godot, Long Day's Journey, Lear on the radio, and what do you miss? Nothing.

Yet his claim that the time was "auspicious for a rebirth of American Theater, and radio would be a good place to look for it to happen" was made two decades ago,⁴⁷ years during which Mamet turned out to be a prolific writer of screenplays. Indeed, considering how greatly the internet has widened access to recorded sounds and live broadcasts in

what Tim Crook calls the “Sixth Age” of audio drama, it seems that American storytellers have been too busy making eyes at Hollywood or striking deals at Sundance to give earplay another thought.⁴⁸

At the heart of this great evacuation is not the disdain for the lowbrow, but a fear of invisibility. Radio’s true threat was never its commercial matter, but its immateriality; not trash, but chaos. For a quarter of a century, Americans had been like H. G. Wells’s accidental tourist in “The Country of the Blind,” a realm in which they were challenged to question the “shreds of belief and tradition they had brought with them from their seeing days” and gradually to make “for themselves new imaginations with their ever more sensitive ears.” As they were beginning to conceive of a sensorial battleground not readily reconciled with the watchword that in the “Country of the Blind the One-eyed Man is King,” they found themselves incapable of forswearing the faculty of sight. “My world is sight,” they exclaimed and “escaped from the valley of the Blind in which [they] had thought to be King.” Though some are waxing nostalgic, they do not hark back.⁴⁹

Notes

¹ Jerry Walker, “Radio Doomed by TV,” Editor and Publisher 21 May 1949: 54.

² Van Horne, “Radio Grows Up,” Theatre Arts May 1952: 36.

³ Cox, Say Goodnight, Gracie (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002) 62-63; 116-17.

⁴ Harrison B. Summers, A Thirty Year History of Programs (1958; New York: Arno, 1971) 215; 167-68.

⁵ Allen, Treadmill to Oblivion (Boston: Little, 1954) 238. Announced as the “voice that gave us the best in radio entertainment for seventeen years and [that] was displaced with the advent of television,” Allen nonetheless took to the airwaves to promote his book--and condemn television as the “triumph of machine over people”--on the Tex McCrary and Jinx Falkenburg starring daytime radio talk show *New York Close-Up* (Nov. 24, 1954).

⁶ Fink, “The Sponsor’s V. the Nation’s Choice,” Radio Drama, ed. Peter Lewis (New

York: Longman, 1981) 219.

⁷ Corwin, Years of the Electric Ear (Metuchen, NJ: DGA-Scarecrow, 1994) 88; for a discussion of red-baiting and its impact on the broadcasting industry, see Howard Blue, Words at War (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2002) 371-74.

⁸ Corwin, "Radio Writing, USA," The Writer Feb. 1951: 35-37.

⁹ Corwin, Years of the Electric Ear 237.

¹⁰ Kopit's radio play, which was adapted for the stage, is discussed in Guralnick, Sight Unseen (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1996) 102-12. During the demise of network radio in the age of television, audio drama revivals included Himan Brown's *CBS Radio Mystery Theater* (1974-82) and Elliot Lewis's *Sears Radio Theater* (1979); see Cox 151-82.

¹¹ Welles and Peter Bogdanovich, This Is Orson Welles (1992; New York: Da Capo: 1998) 11; 10.

¹² Cox 150; 159-61.

¹³ Glenn J. Christensen, "A Decade of Radio Drama," College English Jan. 1947: 179; 185.

¹⁴ An attempt at documenting such writings is G. Howard Poteet's Published Radio, Television, and Film Scripts (Troy, NY: Whitston, 1975); the main shortcoming of this bibliography is that it does not distinguish between scripts written for radio and those actually broadcast. Aside from scripts, listeners could order synopses of long-running serials; such "premiums" were issued by the sponsor. Bess Flynn's Bachelor's Children (Chicago: Old Dutch Cleanser 1939), for example, a small volume containing photographs of the author, announcer, and cast of *Bachelor's Children* (1935-46), summarizes the first four years of the daytime serial and "brings the story up to March 1st, 1939" (25).

¹⁵ Saul Carson, "Writers Sound Off," New Republic 28 July 1947: 34.

¹⁶ Boardman, "The Original Radio Drama: For Money!" Off Mike, ed. Jerome Lawrence (New York: Essential-Duell, 1944) 63.

¹⁷ Haggard, Mr. Meeson's Will (London: Blackett, 1888) 20.

¹⁸ Lawrence, "Who Knows Who May Be Listening? And Where?" 13 for Corwin (Los Angeles: USC School of Journalism, 1985) 80; unlike most radio writers gone Broadway, Lawrence looked back with pride on his achievements in broadcasting.

¹⁹ Saroyan Razzle-Dazzle (New York: Harcourt, 1942) 183; Steiner, Language and Silence (New York: Atheneum, 1967) 26; 35.

- 20 Saroyan 205; 204.
- 21 Saroyan 204-05; Arthur Frank Wertheim, Radio Comedy (New York: Oxford UP, 1979) 157; Havig, "Critic from Within," Journal of Popular Culture 2.2 (1979): 329.
- 22 Farrell, "Language of Hollywood," Saturday Review 5 Aug. 1944: 30.
- 23 Rosten, "Let Writers Write," New York Times 15 Jul. 1945, sec. 2:5.
- 24 Shnayerson, Irwin Shaw, (New York: Putnam's, 1989) 49; 56-57.
- 25 Lardner, "Over the Waves," New Yorker 18 June 1932: 30.
- 26 Shaw, "Main Currents of American Thought," New Yorker 5 Aug. 1939: 15; 19. The story can also be found in Shaw, Short Stories (1978; U of Chicago P, 2000) 20-28.
- 27 Shaw, "Main Currents" 17; Shnayerson 51-54.
- 28 Wouk, Aurora Dawn (New York: Venture-Simon, 1947) vii; 233; 231. For a discussion of this novel, see Arnold Beichman, Herman Wouk (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1984) 21-31.
- 29 Wouk 33; 37; 111-12; 221; 240; vii.
- 30 Wakeman, The Hucksters (New York: Rinehart, 1946) 50; 132; 278; Havig, "Frederic Wakeman's The Hucksters and the Postwar Debate over Commercial Radio," Journal of Broadcasting 28.2 (1984): 189.
- 31 Corwin, "Looking for Art, Bub?" Theatre Arts May 1947: 55.
- 32 Shaw, Troubled Air (New York: Random, 1951) 74; 75-76; Shnayerson 191-92.
- 33 Shaw, Troubled Air 76; 23; 17.
- 34 Shnayerson 191; Jeffers, Murder on Mike (New York: St. Martin's, 1984) 15; 13. Examples include Fredric Brown's A Plot for Murder (New York: Bantam, 1949), George Baxt's Tallulah Bankhead Murder Case (New York: St. Martin's, 1987), and radio historian John Dunning's Two O'Clock, Eastern Wartime (New York: Scribner, 2001).
- 35 Wouk, preface, Aurora Dawn, by Wouk, illustrated ed. (1947; New York: Doubleday, 1956) 7; MacLeish, foreword, The American Story, by MacLeish, 2nd ed. (New York: Duell, 1960) xiii. In a 1952 letter to radio critic Flora Rheta Schreiber, MacLeish wrote that he had little confidence that American broadcasters would air his third radio play, "The Trojan Horse," which had been produced by the BBC on January 14, 1952. See Schreiber, "Broadcast Poetry: A Lost Art?" Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television 6

(1952): 399. Years later, MacLeish made another attempt to revive radio verse with The Great American Fourth of July Parade (Pittsburgh, PA: U of Pittsburgh, 1975).

³⁶ Higby, Tune in Tomorrow (New York: Cowles, 1968) vii; Julian, This Was Radio (New York: Viking, 1975) 223-24; 231. The “Klondike” metaphor is Julian’s (44-45), the “brass ring” Higby’s (224).

³⁷ Auerbach, Funny Men Don’t Laugh (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 25-32; 49; 20; 116; 107; ix; 175. The true identity of Auerbach’s “Lou Jacobs” is disclosed in Havig’s Fred Allen’s Radio Comedy (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1990) 87-88; 244 n61.

³⁸ Auerbach 155-56; 167. Allen acknowledges their contributions in Treadmill to Oblivion 70, as did Max Wylie in his introductory notes to one of the scripts from Allen’s show, which appeared in Best Broadcasts of 1939-40 (New York: Whittlesey, 1940) 132.

³⁹ Auerbach 107; 174; Wouk, foreword, Fred Allen’s Letters, ed. Joe McCarthy (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) v; Wouk, Inside, Outside (Boston: Little, 1985) 591.

⁴⁰ Wouk, Inside, Outside 420-21; 442.

⁴¹ Wouk, Inside, Outside 477. Coinciding with the publication of Aurora Dawn, Wouk’s other “Farewell to Radio Humor” was the article “Make It with Kissing,” which appeared in the Nov. 1947 issue of 47: “I suffer from the writer’s vanity of wanting to see my work in print, and the career of refueling vaudeville acts is one of perpetual anonymity” (21).

⁴² Wouk, Inside, Outside 483; 469; 472-73.

⁴³ Wakeman’s novel was number five on Publishers Weekly’s annual bestseller list for 1946; Keillor’s WLT reached number fifteen in 1991; Inside, Outside made the list in 1985, but is only incidentally concerned with radio. See Michael Korda, Making the List (New York: Barnes, 2001) 94; 202; 184.

⁴⁴ Keillor, WLT (New York: Viking, 1991) 29; 50.

⁴⁵ Roth, I Married a Communist (New York: Houghton, 1998) 38; 40; 41.

⁴⁶ Maupin, The Night Listener (New York: Bantam, 2000) 157; 7.

⁴⁷ Mamet, Writing in Restaurants (New York: Viking, 1986) 12-14; 18.

⁴⁸ Crook, Radio Drama: Theory and Practice (New York: Routledge, 1999) 26-29.

⁴⁹ Wells, “The Country of the Blind,” Selected Short Stories (1904; New York: Penguin, 1979) 132; 129; 143; 146.

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- , adapt. "Drums of Conscience." After Arthur K. Akers. Whipple 78-96.
- , adapt. "The Frozen Pirate." After William Clark Russell. Whipple 290-306.
- . How to Write for Radio. New York: McGraw, 1938.
- , adapt. Treasure Island. Episode 1. After Robert Louis Stevenson. Whipple 308-17.

Wishengrad, Morton. "The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto." The Eternal Light. By

Wishengrad. New York: Crown, 1947. 31-45.*

---. "The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto." Barnouw, Radio Drama in Action 31-45.*

Wylie, Max, ed. Best Broadcasts of 1938-39. New York: Whittlesey, 1939.

---, ed. Best Broadcasts of 1939-40. New York: Whittlesey, 1940.

---, ed. Best Broadcasts of 1940-41. New York: Whittlesey, 1942.

---, ed. Radio and Television Writing. New York: Rinehart, 1952.

Works Cited: Recordings

Listed below are the broadcasts and audition records mentioned or discussed in this study and identified by date (in bold print). The asterisk next to the title of a unit play, episode, or chapter indicates that a published script for the broadcast is listed under “Works Cited: Scripts.”

Since this study is chiefly concerned with scripted speech, only writers, adapters, and actors are named (if known); information about directors, producers, composers, and sound effects artists are generally omitted, unless they were discussed or are of particular interest. Question marks indicate that the spelling of a name could not be verified. Names in brackets identify playwrights or adapters who may not have penned the particular episode (or broadcast segment) cited, but were staff writers for a series during the period in which the episode aired. “Perf.” is used only for actors in a play, “with” for guest stars or hosts. “Ann.” identifies program announcers. “Comm.” denotes commentators.

Bracketed titles indicate that a broadcast was originally untitled or differently identified; serial chapters were generally numbered, not titled. For plays based on adaptations of original works (e.g. film versions of books or plays), the name of the original author (“after”) is preceded by the first adapter (“Play by” or “Screenplay by”). The name of the radio adapter (if known) is always listed last, immediately prior to the performers. For burlesques and pastiches, “after” (rather than “by”) is used to suggest a loose adaptation. “Cont.” identifies writers of commercial continuity.

Recordings edited for the Armed Forces Radio Service are marked AFRS. The editing always meant the removal of commercials, but could also involve the cutting of lines deemed unsuitable or offensive to the military audience. Otherwise incomplete or corrupt recordings are labeled “fragment.”

Titles for unaired recordings (auditions or pilots) are marked “Audit.” Syndicated programs, which were transcribed and sold to individual stations or networks, are marked

“Syn.” The date provided for these recorded programs refers to the earliest date on which they are known to have been broadcast by a major station or network.

As of June 2004, almost all of the recordings were available for trade or purchase from the following online libraries. The bracketed acronyms at the end of each entry refer to these sites:

AR.	OTR Archives	www.otrarchives.com
CA.	OTR Canada	www.otrcanada.com
DD.	Digital Deli	www.digitaldelift.com
GT.	Gold Time Radio	www.goldtimeradio.com
JH.	Jerry Haendiges	www.otrsite.com
OC.	OTRCAT	www.otrcat.com
ON.	OTR NOW	www.otrnow.com
RS.	RadioSpirits	www.radiospirits.com
SE.	Seeing Eye Theater	www.scifi.com/set

“Abraham Lincoln: The War Years.”* By Carl Sandburg. Adapt. Robert E. Sherwood.

Perf. Raymond Massey. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC Red. 13 Feb. 1940. [JH.]

“Adventure of the Bad Boy.” Writ. Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee. Hugh

Marlowe, Ted de Corsia, and Santos Ortega. *Ford Theater*. NBC. 4 Jan. 1948.

[ON.]

“The Adventure of the Mischief Maker.” Writ. Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee.

Perf. Sydney Smith, Santos Ortega, Ted de Corsia, and Marian Shockley. *The Adventures of Ellery Queen*. NBC. 13 Jan. 1944. [OC.]

“The Adventure of the World Series Crime.” Writ. Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee.

Perf. Sydney Smith, Santos Ortega, Ted de Corsia, and Marian Shockley. *The Adventures of Ellery Queen*. NBC (East). 2 Oct. 1943. [OC.]

- “Ah, Wilderness.” By Eugene O’Neill. Perf. Orson Welles, Joseph Cotten, and Agnes Moorehead. *Campbell Playhouse*. CBS. 17 Sept. 1939. [OC.]
- “Ah, Wilderness.” After Eugene O’Neill. Perf. Jack Benny, Mary Livingstone, and Kenny Baker. *Jell-O Program*. NBC Blue. 12 Apr. 1936. [AR.]
- “Ah, Wilderness.” By Eugene O’Neill. Adapt. Wyllis Cooper. Perf. Montgomery Clift, Dudley Digges, and Charita Bauer. *Arthur Hopkins Presents*. NBC. 24 May 1944. [JH.]
- “Ah, Wilderness.”* By Eugene O’Neill. Adapt. Arthur Arent. Perf. Walter Huston. *Theatre Guild on the Air*. ABC. 7 Oct. 1945. [JH.]
- “Ah, Wilderness.” By Eugene O’Neill. Adapt. Sylvia Sirro (sp.?). Cont. George Faulkner. Perf. Raymond Ives, Eric Dressler, Anne Seymour, and Rosemary Rice. *Ford Theater*. NBC. 2 Nov. 1947. [JH.]
- “Air Raid.”* Writ. Archibald MacLeish. Perf. Aline McMahon and Orson Welles. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 27 Oct. 1938. [JH.]
- “Air Raid.”* Writ. Archibald MacLeish. Perf. Frank Goss, Ben Wright, Lurene Tuttle, and Virginia Gregg. *CBS Radio Workshop*. CBS. 10 Mar. 1957. [JH.]
- “Alice in Wonderland.” By Lewis Carroll. Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Dawn Bender and Arthur Q. Bryan. *Favorite Story*. Syn. 5 Nov. 1946. [JH.]
- “All the King’s Men.” By Robert Penn Warren. Adapt. Claris A. Ross. Perf. Wayne Morris, Paul Frees, and Luis Van Rooten. *NBC University Theater*. NBC. 16 Jan. 1949. [OC.]
- “Alter Ego”* [“Another World”]. Writ. Arch Oboler. Perf. Betty Garde, Hester Sondergaard, Frank Lovejoy, and Arnold Moss. *Arch Oboler’s Plays*. NBC. 29 July 1939. [JH.]
- “The Amateur Mendicant Society.” After Arthur Conan Doyle. Writ. Denis Green and Anthony Boucher. Perf. Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce. *New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. MBS. 2 Apr. 1945. [OC.]

- “The Ambassadors.” By Henry James. Adapt. Leslie Reid. Perf. Henry Daniell and Alma Laughton. Comment. E. M. Forster. *NBC University Theatre*. NBC. 29 May 1949. [JH.]
- “Ambulance Driver, Middle East.” Writ. Arthur Arent and Paul Franklin. Perf. Alan Ladd, Leo Cleary, and Lal C. Mehra. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC Red. 3 Apr. 1944. [JH.]
- “America Was Promises.”* Writ. Archibald MacLeish. Perf. Eugene Lowenthal, Pauline Pearce, and Don Perceval. Score by Nicholas Nabokov. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 25 Apr. 1940. [JH.]
- “An Anglo-American Angle.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Joseph Julian and Betty Hardy. Score by Benjamin Britten. *An American in England*. CBS, BBC. 7 Sept. 1942. [JH.]
- “Anne Sullivan Macy.” Writ. Ruth Adams Knight. With Helen Keller. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC Red. 2 Mar. 1938. [JH.]
- “Anniversary in Holland.” Perf. Clayton Collier. *Chip Davis, Commando*. CBS. 9 May 1943. [OC.]
- [Audition.] Writ. Carlton E. Morse. Perf. Gayne Whitman (ann.). *Adventures by Morse*. [OC.]
- “The Author Meets His Match.” Perf. James A. Farley and Fred Allen. *Fred Allen Show*. NBC. 18 Apr. 1948. [GT.]
- “Baby.” Writ. Arthur Laurents. Perf. Marjorie Clark, Clinton Sunberg, and Curtis Cooksie. *Listener’s Playhouse*. NBC Blue. 2 Nov. 1940. [JH.]
- “Ballad of Bataan.”* Writ. Norman Rosten. Perf. Alfred Lunt. *Treasury Star Parade*. Syn. Ca. 1942. [ON.]
- “The Battle of the Ovens.” Writ. Arthur Miller. Perf. Jean Hersholt. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC Red. 22 June 1942. [JH.]

- "The Battle of Warsaw Ghetto."* Writ. Morton Wishengrad. Perf. Santos Ortega, Burt Cowlan, Roger DeKoven, and Mitzi Gould. *Eternal Light*. NBC. 19 Apr. 1959. [JH.]
- "Bernadine, I Love You." Writ. Arthur Miller. Perf. William Bendix. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 5 Mar. 1945. [JH.]
- "Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl." After Charles Foster. Perf. Jack Benny and Mary Livingstone. *Canada Dry Program*. CBS. 22 Jan. 1933. Fragment. [AR.]
- "Bluebeard of Bellac." Writ. Sylvia Richards. Perf. Merle Oberon, Ludwig Donath, and John McIntire. *Suspense*. CBS. 21 Sept. 1944. [JH.]
- "Brewster's Millions." After George Barr McCutcheon. Play by Winchell Smith and Byron Ongley. Adapt. George Wells. Perf. Jack Benny, Mary Livingstone, Crauford Kent, and Fred Harrington. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 2 Feb. 1937. [JH.]
- "The Bride Vanishes."* Writ. John Dickson Carr. Perf. Hanley Stafford and Leslie Woods. *Suspense*. CBS. 1 Dec. 1942. [JH.]
- "The Bride Vanishes."* Writ. John Dickson Carr. Dir. John Dietz. Perf. Arnold Moss and Mary Patten. *Cabin B-13*. CBS. 12 Dec. 1948. [JH.]
- "Britt Ponset's Christmas Carol." After Charles Dickens. Writ. Frank Burt. Perf. James Stewart, Sam Edwards, and Dick Beals. *The Six Shooter*. NBC. 20 Dec. 1953. [RS.]
- "The Burning Court." By John Dickson Carr. Adapt. Harold Medford. Perf. Charles Ruggles and Julie Hayden. *Suspense*. CBS. 17 June 1942. [JH.]
- "Bury Your Dead, Arizona." Writ. Carlton E. Morse. Perf. Russell Thorson, Jim Boles, Tony Randall, and Mercedes McCambridge. 15 chapters. *I Love a Mystery*. MBS. 21 Nov.-9 Dec. 1949. [OC.]
- "Cabin B-13."* Writ. John Dickson Carr. Perf. Hans Conried, Bill Johnstone, Margo, and Phillip Dorn. *Suspense*. CBS. 9 Nov. 1943. [JH.]

- “Captain Paul.” Writ. Arthur Miller. Perf. Claude Rains, Karl Swenson, John McIntire, and Jeanette Nolan. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 27 Oct. 1941. [JH.]
- “The Careless Victim.” After Agatha Christie. Perf. Harold Huber. Introd. by Christie. *Hercule Poirot*. MBS. 22 Feb. 1945. [CA.]
- “The Casting Away of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine.” By Frank R. Stockton. Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Perf. Jane Morgan and Lurene Tuttle. *Favorite Story*. Syn. 28 Oct. 1947. [JH.]
- “Chicago, Germany.”* Writ. Arch Oboler. Perf. Joan Blondell, Sharon Douglas, Hans Conried, and Gale Gordon. *Treasury Star Parade*. Syn. Ca. 1942. [ON.]
- “A Child Is Born.”* Writ. Stephen Vincent Benét. Perf. Lynn Fontanne, Alfred Lunt, and Carl Frank. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 21 Dec. 1942. [JH.]
- “A Child Is Born.”* Writ. Stephen Vincent Benét. Perf. Helen Hayes and Philip Merivale. Introd. by William Rose Benét. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 20 Dec. 1943. [JH.]
- “A Child Is Born.”* Writ. Stephen Vincent Benét. Perf. Helen Hayes and José Ferrer. *Textron Theater*. CBS. 22 Dec. 1945. [ON.]
- “A Child Is Born.”* Writ. Stephen Vincent Benét. Perf. Geraldine Kay, Maurice Copeland, and Ken Nordine. *World’s Great Novels*. NBC. 19 Dec. 1947. [ON.]
- “The Chips Are Down” [“Les Jeux sont faits”]. By Jean-Paul Sartre. Adapt. Claris A. Ross. Perf. Ted Von Eltz, Vivi Janniss, Don Randolph, and Frank Gerstle. *NBC (University) Theater*. NBC. 2 July 1950. [OC.]
- “Citizen of the World.” Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Lee J. Cobb, Paul Bouchaud, Joseph DeSantis, Robert Dryden, and Bryna Raeburn. With Carl Sandburg and Archibald MacLeish. CBS. 10 July 1949. [ON.]
- “Clipper Home.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Joseph Julian. *An American in England*. CBS. 22 Dec. 1942. [JH.]

- “Comedy of Danger.”* Writ. Richard Hughes. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 18 July 1936. [JH.]
- “The Continental Uniform.” Writ. Robert Tallman. Perf. Basil Rathbone, Rosemary De Camp, Gale Gordon, and Elliott Lewis. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 13 Apr. 1942. [JH.]
- “The Count of Monte Cristo.” By Alexandre Dumas. Adapt. John Houseman. Perf. Orson Welles, Ray Collins, George Coulouris, and Edgar Barrier. *Mercury Theatre on the Air*. CBS. 29 Aug. 1938. [ON.]
- “Cromer.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Joseph Julian and Frank Lovejoy. *An American in England*. CBS. 1 Dec. 1942. [JH.]
- “The Crusaders.” By Stefan Heym. Adapt. Ernest Kinoy. Perf. Cesar Romero, Wally Maher, Charles Seel, and Lynn Whitney. Comment. Harvey C. Webster. *NBC University Theatre*. NBC. 20 Aug. 1949. [OC.]
- “The Customers Like Murder.” Writ. John Dickson Carr. Perf. Roland Young and Peggy Conklin. *Suspense*. CBS. 23 Mar. 1943. [OC.]
- “Czechoslovakia.” Writ. Norman Corwin. Narr. by Corwin. *One World Flight*. CBS. 18 Feb. 1947. [ON.]
- “Daniel Webster and the Sea Serpent.”* By Stephen Vincent Benét. Adapt. Sheldon Stark. Perf. Gene Morgan. Score by Bernard Herrmann. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 1 Aug. 1937. [JH.]
- “Dark Laughter.” By Sherwood Anderson. Adapt. Ernest Kinoy. Perf. Parley Baer, Gloria Hunter, and Vivi Janniss. Comment. Harvey C. Webster. *NBC University Theater*. NBC. 30 Oct. 1949. [OC.]
- “Dark Journey.” Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Nancy Kelly and Cathy Lewis. *Suspense*. CBS. 25 Apr. 1946. [OC.]
- “The Dark Valley.”* Writ. W. H. Auden. Perf. May Whitty. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 2 June 1940. [JH.]

"Dark World."* Writ. Arch Oboler. Perf. Kay Francis. *This Is Our America*. Syn.

3 Aug. 1942. [JH.]

"Daybreak: A Program to Follow on Your Atlas."* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Frank

Gallup and La Coehlo. *Twenty-Six by Corwin*. CBS. 22 June 1941. [JH.]

"Dateline: Lisbon" ("Lisbon Adventure"). Writ. Harold Medford. Perf. John Hodiak and

Cathy Lewis. *Suspense*. CBS. 5 Oct. 1944. [OC.]

"The Dead Sleep Lightly."* Writ. John Dickson Carr. Perf. Walter Hampden, Lee

Bowman, and Susan Hayward. *Suspense*. CBS. 30 Mar. 1943. [JH.]

"The Dealings of Mr. Markham" ["Mr. Markham, Antique Dealer"].* Writ. John Dickson

Carr. Perf. Henry Daniell, Gavin Gordon, and Joan Lorring. *Suspense*. CBS.

28 June 1945. [OC.]

"Death Comes for Adolf Hitler." Writ. Robert A. Arthur and David Kogan. Perf. Tony

Barrett, Philip Clark, and Lon Clark. *The Mysterious Traveler*. MBS. 24 Mar.

1945. [OC.]

"Death Flies Blind." Writ. John Dickson Carr. Perf. Richard Dix, Montague Love, and

Gale Page. *Suspense*. CBS. 4 May 1943. [OC.]

"A Descent of the Gods."* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Henry Morgan, Eileen Burns,

Winfield Hoeny, and House Jameson. *Twenty-Six by Corwin*. CBS. 19 Oct.

1941. [JH.]

"The Devil and Daniel Webster." By Stephen Vincent Benét. Adapt. Jean Holloway.

Perf. John McIntire and Alan Reed. With James Hilton. *Hallmark Playhouse*.

CBS. 10 June 1948. [ON.]

"The Devil and Daniel Webster." By Stephen Vincent Benét. Adapt. Philo Higley. Perf.

Raymond Massey and Will Geer. With Walter Hampden. *Great Scenes from*

Great Plays. MBS. 3 Dec. 1948. [WFUV, New York, Archives.]

"The Diary of Sophronia Winters." Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Agnes Moorehead and

Ray Collins. *Suspense*. CBS. 27 Apr. 1943. [OC.]

- “The Diary of Sophronia Winters.” Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Agnes Moorehead and Ray Collins. *Suspense*. CBS. 17 Aug. 1943. [OC.]
- “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.” Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Perf. William Conrad. *Favorite Story*. Syn. 15 Oct. 1946. [JH.]
- “The Dream.” Writ. Arch Oboler. Perf. Boris Karloff and Mercedes McCambridge. *Lights Out!* NBC. 23 Mar. 1938. [OC.]
- “Dulcy.” By George S. Kaufmann and Marc Connelly. Adapt. George Wells. Perf. Zazu Pitts, Gene Lockhart, and Leslie Adams. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 28 Oct. 1935. [JH.]
- “Dulcy.” By George S. Kaufmann and Marc Connelly. Adapt. George Wells. Perf. Gracie Allen, George Burns, Wallis Clark, Norma Lee, and Howard Lindsay. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 29 Mar. 1937. [RS.]
- “The Eagle’s Nest.” By Konrad Bercovici. Adapt. Arthur Miller. Perf. Paul Muni, Will Geer, Betty Garde, and Junius Matthews. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 28 Dec. 1942. [JH.]
- “The Enemy Is Listening.” Writ. Mignon G. Eberhart. Perf. Everett Sloane, Edwin Jerome, Jackie Kelk, and Betty Garde. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 7 June 1943. [RS.]
- “The Enormous Radio.” By John Cheever. Adapt. Antony Ellis. Perf. William Conrad, Virginia Gregg, Stacy Harris, and Hans Conried. *CBS Radio Workshop*. CBS. 11 May 1956. [OC.]
- “Falkland.” By Edward Bulwer-Lytton. *Weird Circle*. Syn. 9 Dec. 1946. [AR.]
- “The Fall of the City.”* Writ. Archibald MacLeish. Dir. Irving Reis. Perf. Orson Welles and Burgess Meredith. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 11 Apr. 1937. [JH.]
- “Father, Dear Father.” Writ. Terese Lewis and Erwin Pinkus. Perf. Fran Darden, Elsie Hitz, Edwin Jerome, and Bert Parks. *Ford Theater*. NBC. 28 Dec. 1947. [ON.]

- “Five Canaries in a Room.” Writ. John Dickson Carr. Perf. William Johnstone, Lee Bowman, and Ona Munson. *Suspense*. CBS. 8 June 1943. [OC.]
- “Fire Burn and Cauldron Bubble.” Writ. John Dickson Carr. Perf. Paul Lukas. *Suspense*. CBS. 6 Apr. 1943. [OC.]
- “Frankenstein.” By Mary Shelley. Adapt. Alonzo Deen Cole. *Witch’s Tale*. MBS. 17 July 1935. [ON.]
- “Frankenstein.” By Mary Shelley. Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. With Ronald Colman. *Favorite Story*. Syn. 24 Sept. 1946. [JH.]
- Fred Allen Show*. Perf. Fred Allen and Rudy Vallee. NBC. 25 May 1947. [GT.]
- “The Front Page.” By Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. Adapt. George Wells. Walter Winchell, Josephine Hutchinson, James Gleason, and John Butler. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 28 June 1937. [JH.]
- “Fugue in C Minor.” Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Ida Lupino, Vincent Price, and Bea Benaderet. *Suspense*. CBS. 1 June 1944. [OC.]
- “The Furnished Floor.” Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Don DeFore and Mildred Natwick. *Suspense*. 13 Sept. 1945. [OC.]
- [“The Garden of Eden”]. Writ. Arch Oboler. Perf. Don Ameche, Mae West, and Ted Osborne. *Chase and Sanborn Hour*. NBC. 12 Dec. 1937. [RS.]
- “The Gentleman from Paris.” Writ. Robert Tallman. Perf. Charles Boyer, Sharon Douglas, Howard McNear, and William Farnum. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 12 Jan. 1942. [JH.]
- “Good Heavens.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Bartlett Robinson, Henry Morgan, and Martin Wolfson. *Twenty-Six by Corwin*. CBS. 28 Sept. 1941. [JH.]
- “Grandpa and the Statue.”* Writ. Arthur Miller. Perf. Charles Laughton and David Ellis. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 26 Mar. 1945. [JH.]

- "The Green Goddess." By William Archer. Adapt. Howard Koch. Perf. Orson Welles, Madeleine Carroll, Edgar Barrier and Eustace Wyatt. *Campbell Playhouse*. CBS. 2 Oct. 1939. [OC.]
- "The Green Goddess." By William Archer. Perf. Walter Abel, Ronald Colman, and Anita Louise. *Theatre Guild on the Air*. ABC. 20 Oct. 1947. [JH.]
- "The Green Pastures." By Marc Connelly. Adapt. by Connelly. Perf. Juano Hernandez. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 22 Dec. 1941. [JH.]
- "Gulliver's Travels."* By Jonathan Swift. Adapt. George Wells. Perf. Henry Hull, Ken Christy, and Gale Gordon. *NBC University Theatre*. NBC. 24 Sept. 1948. [JH.]
- "The Happy Prince." By Oscar Wilde. Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Perf. John McIntire, Gordon MacRae, Lucille Norman, and Herb Butterfield. Music. Dir. Carmen Dragon. *Railroad Hour*. NBC. 25 Dec. 1951. [ON.]
- "Heart of Darkness." By Joseph Conrad. Adapt. Morton Friedman. Perf. Brian Aherne and Doris Lloyd. Comment. Granville Hicks. *NBC University Theatre*. NBC. 15 May 1949. [JH.]
- "[The Heart of] Ethan Brand." By Nathaniel Hawthorne. *Weird Circle*. Syn. 30 Sept. 1946. [AR.]
- "The Heart of Midlothian." By Walter Scott. Adapt. Ernest Kinoy. Perf. Maureen O'Sullivan, Whitfield Connor, and Ben Wright. Comment. Amy Loveman. *NBC University Theatre*. NBC. 27 Feb. 1949. [JH.]
- "A High Wind in Jamaica." By Richard Hughes. Adapt. James Speed. Perf. Ramsay Ramsey Hill, Ann Whitfield, and John Ramsey Hill. *NBC University Theatre*. NBC. 20 Aug. 1950. [OC.]
- "His Honor, the Mayor."* By Orson Welles. Perf. Orson Welles, Ray Collins, and Agnes Moorehead. With James Boyd. *Free Company*. CBS. 6 Apr. 1941. [ON.]
- "The Hitch-hiker."* Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Orson Welles and Alice Frost. *Mercury Summer Theatre of the Air*. CBS. 2 Sept. 1942. [ON.]

“The Hitch-hiker.”* Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Orson Welles. *Suspense*. CBS. 2 Sept. 1942. [OC.]

“Hollywood Fights Back” (Part 1). Writ. Norman Corwin and William N. Robson. With Charles Boyer, Judy Garland, Gene Kelly, Lauren Bacall, Joseph Cotton, Peter Lorre, June Havoc, John Huston, Danny Kaye, Walter Wanger, William Holden, Lucille Ball, Van Heflin, Keenan Wynn, Henry Morgan, William Wyler, Deems Taylor, Artie Shaw, Arthur Garfield Hays, Archibald MacLeish, Claude Pepper, and Corwin. ABC. 26 Oct. 1947. [DD.]

“Hollywood Fights Back” (Part 2). Writ. Norman Corwin and William N. Robson. With Fredric March, Myrna Loy, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Lauren Bacall, John Huston, Peter Lorre, Burl Ives, George Kaufman, Moss Hart, Richard Rodgers, Leonard Bernstein, Bennett Cerf, Clifton Fadiman, and Thomas Mann. ABC. 2 Nov. 1947. [ON.]

“The House in Paris.” By Elizabeth Bowen. Adapt. Richard E. Davis. Perf. Norma Varden, Alma Laughton, Ann Whitfield, and Joel Nessler. Comment. by Bowen. *NBC University Theater*. NBC. 21 May 1950. [OC.]

“The House That Jack Didn’t Built.” Writ. Alfred Kreymborg. Perf. David Ross. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 15 Jan. 1938. [JH.]

“I Never Left Home.” By Bob Hope. Adapt. Sanford Barnett. Perf. Bob Hope, Frances Langford, Jerry Colonna, and Tony Romano. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 8 Jan. 1945. [OC.]

“I Was Married on Bataan.” Writ. Arthur Miller. Based on an American Magazine article. Perf. Madeleine Carroll, Kenneth Delmar, Betty Garde, and Arlene Francis. *Cavalcade of America*. 5 Oct. 1942. NBC. [JH.]

“An Ideal Husband.” By Oscar Wilde. Perf. Rex Harrison and Lilli Palmer. *Theatre Guild*. NBC. 30 Mar. 1952. [JH.]

- “The Ides of March.” By Thornton Wilder. Adapt. Brainerd Duffield and Emerson Crocker. Perf. Whitfield Connor, Parley Baer, Leslie Allen, and Doris Singleton. Comment. Edward Weeks. *NBC University Theater*. NBC. 15 Jan. 1950. [OC.]
- “The Importance of Being Earnest.” By Oscar Wilde. Adapt. Arthur Arent. Perf. John Gielgud, Pamela Brown, Robert Fleming, Margaret Rutherford, and Jean Cadell. *Theatre Guild on the Air*. ABC. 13 Apr. 1947. [JH.]
- “In Flanders Field.” By Arthur Conan Doyle. Perf. Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce. *New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. MBS. 14 May 1945. [OC.]
- “Introduction.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Narr. by Corwin. With Pandit Motilal Nehru and Clement Attlee. *One World Flight*. CBS. 14 Jan. 1947. [JH.]
- “Is This Murder?” Writ. Wyllis Cooper. Perf. Ernest Chappell and Joyce Gordon. *Quiet Please*. ABC. 16 Jan. 1949. [OC.]
- “Italy.” Writ. Norman Corwin. Narr. by Corwin. With Sergio Amidei and Palmiro Togliatti. *One World Flight*. CBS. 25 Feb. 1947. [JH.]
- “Ivory Tower.”* Writ. Arch Oboler. Perf. Alla Nazimova. *Arch Oboler’s Plays*. NBC. 8 June 1939. [JH.]
- “James Fenimore Cooper.”* Writ. Katherine Seymour. *Cavalcade of America*. CBS. 17 Mar. 1937. [JH.]
- “Jane Eyre.” By Charlotte Brontë. Adapt. David Victor and Herbert Little, Jr. Perf. Gertrude Warner and Victor Jory. *Matinee Theatre*. CBS. 3 Dec. 1944. [ON.]
- “Jane Eyre.” After Charlotte Brontë. Screenplay by Aldous Huxley, Robert Stevenson, and John Houseman. Adapt. Sanford Barnett. Perf. Loretta Young, Orson Welles, Mary Lou Harrington, and C. S. Ramsey-Hill. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 5 June 1944. [OC.]

- “Jane Eyre.” By Charlotte Brontë. Adapt. Norman Corwin. Perf. Orson Welles and Alice Frost. Score by Bernard Herrmann. *Mercury Summer Theatre of the Air*. CBS. 28 June 1946. [OC.]
- “Jane Eyre.” By Charlotte Brontë. *Weird Circle*. Syn. 12 Aug. 1946. [AR.]
- “Jane Eyre.” By Charlotte Brontë. Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Perf. Peggy Webber, William Conrad, and Helen Geddes. *Favorite Story*. Syn. 3 Sept. 1946. [JH.]
- “Jane Eyre.” After Charlotte Brontë. Screenplay by Aldous Huxley, Robert Stevenson, and John Houseman. Adapt. Sanford Barnett. Perf. Ingrid Bergman, Robert Montgomery, Ann Carter, and Herb Butterfield. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 14 June 1948. [RS.]
- “Jane Eyre.” By Charlotte Brontë. Adapt. Agnes Eckhardt. Perf. Deborah Kerr, Eric Snowden, Doris Lloyd, and Harry Martin. Comment. James Hilton. *NBC University Theater*. NBC. 3 Apr. 1949. [JH.]
- “Jane Eyre.” By Charlotte Brontë. Adapt. Maurice Zimm. Perf. Donna Reed, Vincent Price, Irene Tedrow, and Ben Wright. *Family Theater*. MBS. 25 Oct. 1950. [OC.]
- “Joel Chandler Harris.” Writ. Arthur Miller. Perf. Karl Swenson, Ray Collins, Juano Hernandez, Edwin Jerome, and Agnes Moorehead. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 23 June 1941. [JH.]
- “Johnny Got His Gun.” By Dalton Trumbo. Adapt. Arch Oboler. Perf. James Cagney. *Arch Oboler’s Plays*. NBC. 9 Mar. 1940. [RS.]
- “Juarez: Thunder from the Mountain.” Writ. Arthur Miller. Based on *Juarez* by Nina Brown Baker. Perf. Orson Welles, Karl Swenson, Kenneth Delmar, and Edwin Jerome. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 28 Sept. 1942. [JH.]
- “Jumping Niagara Falls.” Writ. Brian Smith and George Zarr. Tim Jerome, Claire Bloom, and Anne Bobby. *Seeing Ear Theater*. 1 Nov. 1999. [SE.]

- “June Moon.” By Ring Lardner and George S. Kaufman. Perf. Jack Benny, Orson Welles, Benny Rubin, and Bea Benaderet. *Campbell Playhouse*. CBS. 24 Mar. 1940. [AR.]
- “K9 Corps.” Writ. Arthur Laurents. Perf. Jackson Beck. *Man Behind the Gun*. CBS. 6 June 1943. [ON.]
- “Lady in the Dark.” After Moss Hart. Screenplay by Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich. Adapt. Sanford Barnett. Perf. Ginger Rogers, Ray Milland, Carlton KaDell, and Verna Felton. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 29 Jan. 1945.
- “Lady in the Dark.” By Moss Hart. Adapt. Philip Lewis. Perf. Gertrude Lawrence, Bert Lytell, John Conte, and Alan Hewitt. *Theatre Guild on the Air*. ABC. 19 Oct. 1947. [JH.]
- “The Last of Mrs. Cheyney.” By Frederick Lonsdale. Perf. Roland Young and N. Mary Phillips. *Arthur Hopkins Presents*. NBC. 12 July 1944. [JH.]
- “The Last Speech.” Writ. Carl Carmer. Incl. quotations from Stephen Vincent Benét, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Cantata by Lou Cooper. Perf. Eric Dressler, Eileen Farrell, and Evelyn Pasen. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 6 Apr. 1946. [JH.]
- “The Late Christopher Bean.” After Rene Fauchois. Play by Sidney Coe Howard. Perf. Charita Bauer, Pauline Lord, and Sidney Blackmer. *Arthur Hopkins Presents*. NBC. 21 June 1944. [JH.]
- “Legionnaire and the Lady.” By Benno Vigny. Adapt. George Wells. Perf. Marlene Dietrich, Clark Gable, Frank Reicher, and Walter Kingsford. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 1 June 1936. [RS.]
- Les Misérables*. By Victor Hugo. Adapt. Orson Welles. Perf. Orson Welles, Martin Gabel, Alice Frost, and Virginia Welles. 7 chapters. MBS. 23 July-3 Sept. 1937. [RS.]
- “Les Misérables.”* Perf. Fred Allen and Orson Welles. *Texaco Star Theater*. CBS. 18 Oct. 1942. AFRS. [GT.]

- “Les Misérables.”* Perf. Fred Allen and Orson Welles. *Fred Allen Show*. NBC. 3 Mar. 1946. AFRS. [GT.]
- “A Lesson in Japanese (Bushido).”* Writ. Neal Hopkins. Perf. Fredric March. *Treasury Star Parade*. Syn. Ca. 1942. [ON.]
- “Liliom.” By Ferenc Molnár. Adapt. John Houseman. Perf. Helen Hayes, Orson Welles, Agnes Moorehead, Frank Readick, and Joseph Cotten. *Campbell Playhouse*. CBS. 22 Oct. 1939. [OC.]
- “Listen for the Sound of Wings.” Writ. Arthur Miller. Perf. Paul Lukas, Karl Swenson, Edwin Jerome, and Dwight Weist. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 19 Apr. 1943. [JH.]
- “Listen to the People.”* Writ. Stephen Vincent Benét. Epilogue by Carl Sandburg. Perf. Ethel Barrymore, Everett Sloane, and Will Geer. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 5 June 1943. [JH.]
- “The Little Minister.” By James M. Barrie. Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Perf. Gordon MacRae, Dorothy Warenskjold, Gloria Gorden, and Eric Snowden. Music. Dir. Carmen Dragon. *Railroad Hour*. NBC. 23 June 1953. [ON.]
- “The Lodger.” By Marie Belloc Lowndes. Perf. Herbert Marshall, Lurene Tuttle, Edmund Gwenn, and Noreen Gammill. *Forecast: Suspense*. CBS. 22 July 1940. [JH.]
- “The Lonesome Train.”* Writ. Millard Lampell. Earl Robinson. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 21 Mar. 1944. [JH.]
- “Long Distance.” Writ. Harry W. Junkin. Perf. Jan Miner. *Radio Playhouse*. NBC. 3 July 1948. [JH.]
- “Long Distance.” Writ. Harry W. Junkin. Perf. Jan Miner, Connie Lemke, John McGovern, and Abbie Lewis. *The Chase*. NBC. 2 Nov. 1952. [ON.]
- “Lord of the Witch Doctors.” Writ. John Dickson Carr. Perf. Nicholas Joy and Joseph Kearns. Score by Bernard Herrmann. *Suspense*. CBS. 27 Oct. 1942. [JH.]

- ["Lum and Abner Research in the Library"]. Writ. [Roz Rogers]. Perf. Chester Lauck and Norris Goff. *Lum and Abner*. NBC. 2 Dec. 1941. [ON.]
- ["Lum Plans a Free Lending Library"]. Writ. [Roz Rogers]. Perf. Chester Lauck and Norris Goff. *Lum and Abner*. NBC. 10 Nov. 1941. [ON.]
- "Malice Aforethought." By Francis Iles. Perf. Alfred Hitchcock. *Once Upon a Midnight*. Audit. 1945. [ON.]
- "Malice Aforethought." By Francis Iles. Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Perf. Alfred Hitchcock. *Alfred Hitchcock Show*. Syn./Audit. Ca. 1948. [ON.]
- "Man without a Body." Writ. John Dickson Carr. Perf. John Sutton, George Zucco, and Wendy Barrie. *Suspense*. CBS. 22 June 1943. [JH.]
- "Manhattan Transfer." By John Dos Passos. Adapt. Ernest Kinoy. Perf. Gayne Whitman, Anne Diamond, Don Randolph, and Gail Bonney. Comment. Harvey C. Webster. *NBC University Theater*. NBC. 8 Jan. 1950. [OC.]
- Maxwell House Show Boat*. After Edna Ferber. Libretto by Oscar Hammerstein II. Score by Jerome Kern. Writ. William H. Bacher. Perf. Charles Winninger, Lanny Ross, and Muriel Wilson. NBC. 15 June 1933. [ON.]
- "Menace in Wax." Writ. John Dickson Carr. Perf. Joseph Julian. *Suspense*. CBS. 17 Nov. 1942. [JH.]
- "Meridian 7-1212."* Writ. Irving Reis. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 24 Aug. 1939. [JH.]
- "The Million Dollar Curse." Writ. Carlton E. Morse. Perf. Russell Thorson, Jim Boles, Tony Randall, and Mercedes McCambridge. Chapters 1-9 and 11-15, of 15. *I Love a Mystery*. MBS. 12 Dec.-30 Dec. 1949. [OC.]
- "Miss Liberty Goes to Town."* Writ. Norman Rosten. Perf. Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. *Treasury Star Parade*. Syn. Ca. 1942. [ON.]
- "The Moat Farm Murder."* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Charles Laughton and Elsa Lanchester. *Columbia Presents Corwin*. CBS. 18 July 1944. [JH.]

"The Moat Farm Murder."* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Orson Welles and Mercedes McCambridge. *Mercury Summer Theatre of the Air*. CBS. 26 July 1946. AFRS. [OC.]

"Moby-Dick." By Herman Melville. Adapt. Ernest Kinoy. Perf. Sydney Smith, Neil O'Malley, and Charles Irving. 2 episodes. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 19 Oct. and 26 Oct. 1946. [RS.]

"Moby-Dick." By Herman Melville. Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Perf. William Conrad, Howard Duff, and Frank Lovejoy. *Favorite Story*. Syn. 19 Oct. 1946. [JH.]

"Moby-Dick." By Herman Melville. Adapt. Ernest Kinoy. Perf. Henry Hull, Hy Averbach, John Beal, and John Dehner. Introd. by John W. Taylor. *NBC University Theater*. NBC. 10 Apr. 1949. [OC.]

"A Modern Scrooge."* Writ. Joseph Ruscoll and Noel Huston. Perf. Fredric March and Lionel Barrymore. *Treasury Star Parade*. Syn. Dec. 1942. [ON.]

"The Moment of Darkness." Writ. John Dickson Carr. Perf. Peter Lorre, George Zucco, and Wendy Barrie. *Suspense*. CBS. 20 Apr. 1943. [OC.]

"The Moonstone." By Wilkie Collins. Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Perf. Marvin Miller and Thomas Freebairn-Smith. *Favorite Story*. Syn. 13 May 1947. [JH.]

"The Moonstone." By Wilkie Collins. Adapt. Richard Chandlee. Perf. Peter Lawford, Ben Wright, Norma Varden, and Betty Hartford. 2 episodes. *Suspense*. CBS. 16 Nov. and 23 Nov. 1953. [OC.]

"The Most Dangerous Game." By Richard Connell. Adapt. Irving Ravetch. Perf. Paul Frees and Hans Conried. *Escape*. CBS. 1 Oct. 1947. [OC.]

"Mr. Markham, Antique Dealer."* Writ. John Dickson Carr. Perf. Paul Lukas, Bramwell Fletcher, and Heather Angel. *Suspense*. CBS. 11 May 1943. [OC.]

- “Mrs. Dalloway.” By Virginia Woolf. Adapt. Claris A. Ross. Perf. Marion Richman, Doris Lloyd, Charles Davis, and Robin Hughes. Comment. Katherine Anne Porter. *NBC University Theater*. NBC. 2 Apr. 1950. [OC.]
- “My Client, Curley.”* Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Adapt. Norman Corwin. Perf. John Brown and Everett Sloane. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 4 Apr. 1940. [JH.]
- “My Client, Curley.”* Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Adapt. Norman Corwin. Perf. Robert Montgomery and Ted Donaldson. *Screen Guild Theater*. CBS. 4 Feb. 1946. [OC.]
- “The Mystery of Edwin Drood.” By Charles Dickens. Adapt. Sidney Marshall. Perf. Herbert Marshall, William Johnstone, Betty Hartford, and Ben Wright. *Suspense*. 2 episodes. CBS. 5 Jan. and 12 Jan. 1953. [OC.]
- “The Nazarene.” By Sholem Asch. Adapt. Ernest Kinoy. Perf. Gayne Whitman, Larry Dobkin, Nestor Paiva, and Stephen Chase. *NBC University Theatre*. NBC. 9 Apr. 1950. [OC.]
- “New York: A Tapestry for Radio.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Martin Gabel and Minerva Pious. *Columbia Presents Corwin*. CBS. 16 May 1944. [JH.]
- New York Close-Up*. With Tex McCrary, Jinx Falkenburg, and Fred Allen. NBC. 24 Nov. 1954. [ON.]
- “Night Man.”* Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Virginia Bruce. *Suspense*. CBS. 26 Oct. 1944. [ON.]
- “Nightmare at Noon.”* By Stephen Vincent Benét. Perf. Martin Gabel. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 11 Aug. 1940. [JH.]
- “Nineteen Eighty-Four.” By George Orwell. Perf. David Niven. Comment. James Hilton. *NBC University Theatre*. NBC. 27 Aug. 1949. [JH.]
- “No One on the Line.” Writ. Robert A. Arthur and David Kogan. Perf. Maurice Tarplin and Mary Jane Higby. *Mysterious Traveler*. MBS. 1 Sept. 1946. [AR.]

- “The Notorious Canary Trainer.” After Arthur Conan Doyle. Writ. Denis Green and Anthony Boucher. Perf. Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce. *New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. MBS. 23 Apr. 1945. [OC.]
- “Now Playing Tomorrow.” Writ. Arthur Laurents. Perf. Arlene Francis and Karl Swenson. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 30 Jan. 1939. [JH.]
- “O. Henry.” Writ. Norman Rosten. Perf. Karl Swenson, Betty Garde, Kenneth Delmar, and Edwin Jerome. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 21 July 1941. [JH.]
- “Octoroon.” By Dion Boucicault. Adapt. Joseph Bell. Perf. Jane Wyatt, Parker Fennelly, and Roger De Koven. Comment. Burns Mantle. *Great Plays*. NBC Blue. 12 Feb. 1939. [JH.]
- “Ode to a Nightingale.” Writ. Maxwell Anderson. Perf. Karl Swenson, Agnes Moorehead, Kenneth Delmar, and William Johnstone. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 14 Sept. 1942. [JH.]
- “Odyssey of Runyon Jones.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Larry Robinson, Roy Fant, Hester Sondergaard, and Arthur Vinton. *Twenty-Six by Corwin*. CBS. 8 June 1941. [JH.]
- “On a Note of Triumph.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Martin Gabel, Lurene Tuttle, and Harry Bartell. CBS. 13 May 1945. [RS.]
- [“Organizing the Pine Ridge Library”]. Writ. [Roz Rogers]. Perf. Chester Lauck and Norris Goff. *Lum and Abner*. NBC. 11 Nov. 1941.
- “Paris Incident.”* Writ. Norman Rosten. Perf. Bette Davis. *Treasury Star Parade*. Syn. Ca. 1942. [JH.]
- “A Passage to India.” By E. M. Forster. Adapt. George Lefferts and Van Woodward. Perf. Joseph Schildkraut, Alma Laughton, and Ben Wright. Comment. Ralph Bates. *NBC University Theater*. NBC. 28 Nov. 1948. [OC.]
- “The Path and the Door.” Writ. Les Crutchfield. Perf. Elliott Reid and Jay Novello. Score by George Antheil. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 25 Aug. 1946. [RS.]

“The Patriot.” By Pearl S. Buck. Anna May Wong, Orson Welles, and Ray Collins.

Comment. by Buck. *Campbell Playhouse*. CBS. 14 Apr. 1939. [OC.]

“Peter Ibbetson.” By George Du Maurier. Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee.

Perf. John Beal and Helen Craig. *Favorite Story*. Syn. 1 Apr. 1947. [JH.]

“Phantom of the Opera.” After Gaston Leroux. Screenplay by Eric Taylor and Samuel

Hoffenstein. Adapt. John Jacoby. Perf. Nelson Eddy, Susanna Foster, Basil

Rathbone, and Edgar Barrier. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 13 Sept. 1943. [OC.]

“The Philippines Never Surrendered.” By Edward Kuder and Peter Martin. Adapt.

Arthur Miller. Perf. Edward G. Robinson, Charlie Lung, and Hal Dawson.

Cavalcade of America. NBC. 30 Apr. 1945. [JH.]

“Phone Call from Death.” Perf. Bill Forman. *The Whistler*. CBS. 10 Sept. 1945. [RS.]

“The Pit and the Pendulum.” By Edgar Allan Poe. Adapt. John Dickson Carr. Perf.

Henry Hull. *Suspense*. CBS. 12 Jan. 1943. [OC.]

“The Plot to Overthrow Christmas.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Ray Collins, Martin

Gabel, Everett Sloane, Karl Swenson, and Luis Van Rooten. *Columbia*

Workshop. CBS. 22 Dec. 1940. [JH.]

“The Plot to Overthrow Christmas.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Orson Welles,

Ray Collins, and John Brown. CBS. 19 Dec. 1944. [ON.]

“The Plot to Overthrow Christmas.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Henry Morgan,

House Jameson, and Eric Burrows. CBS. 24 Dec. 1945. [ON.]

“Poem and Prayer for an Invading Army.”* Writ. Edna St. Vincent Millay. Perf. Ronald

Colman. NBC. 6 June 1944. [OC.]

“Pollack and the Porrah Man.” By H. G. Wells. Adapt. John Dunkel. Perf. Barton

Yarborough, Luis Van Rooten, and William Conrad. *Escape*. CBS. 29 Oct.

1947. [AR.]

- “Prater Violet.” By Christopher Isherwood. Adapt. Richard E. Davis. Perf. Whitfield Connor, Doris Lloyd, Harry Martin, and Fritz Feld. *NBC University Theater*. NBC. 14 May 1950. [OC.]
- “Project 77.” Writ. and dir. Harry W. Junkins. Perf. James Monks, Bill Smith, and Connie Lemke. *Mr. I. A. Moto*. NBC. 1 July 1951. [ON.]
- “Public Domain.” Writ. Eustace Wyatt. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 2 Jan. 1937. [JH.]
- “The Pussycat and the Expert Plumber Who Was a Man.”* Writ. Arthur Miller. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 29 Sept. 1940. [JH.]
- “Radio in the Rain.”* By E. B. White. Perf. Martin Gabel and Dwight Weist. CBS. 11 Aug. 1940. [JH.]
- “Radio Play.”* Writ. William Saroyan. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 10 Aug. 1939. [JH.]
- “Radio Primer.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Ted Di Corsica, and Beatrice Kaye. *Twenty-Six by Corwin*. CBS. 4 May 1941. [JH.]
- “Rebecca.” By Daphne DuMaurier. Adapt. Howard Koch. Perf. Orson Welles, Margaret Sullivan, and Agnes Moorehead. Interview with DuMaurier. *Campbell Playhouse*. CBS. 9 Dec. 1938. [OC.]
- “Sabotage.” *Mr. I. A. Moto*. Writ. and dir. Harry W. Junkins. Perf. James Monks, Hedley Rennie, and Ross Martin. NBC. 8 July 1951. [ON.]
- [“Sade Provides Names of Wildflowers”]. Writ. Paul Rhymer. Perf. Bernadine Flynn, Art Van Harvey, and Bill Idelson. *Vic and Sade*. CBS. 22 Sept. 1939. [AR.]
- “Scrooge.” After Charles Dickens. Perf. Penny Singleton and Arthur Lake. *Blondie*. CBS. 25 Dec. 1939. [RS.]
- “The Search for Henri Lefevre.” Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Paul Muni, Hans Conried, and Lurene Tuttle. *Suspense*. CBS. 6 July 1944. [RS.]
- “The Search for Henri Lefevre.” Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Orson Welles and Mercedes McCambridge. *Mercury Summer Theatre of the Air*. CBS. 12 July 1946. [ON.]

"Secret Passage to Death." Writ. Carlton E. Morse. *I Love a Mystery*. NBC Blue.

8 Dec. 1941. [OC.]

"Seems Radio Is Here to Stay." Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. House Jameson and Kermit

Murdock. CBS. 6 Nov. 1945. [JH.]

"Seven Keys to Baldpate." After Earl Derr Biggers. Play by George M. Cohan. Adapt.

George Wells. Perf. Jack Benny, Mary Livingstone, and Cecil B. DeMille. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 26 Sept. 1938. [AR.]

"Show Boat." After Edna Ferber. With Margaret Sullavan, Helen Morgan, Bill

Johnstone, and Edna Ferber. Comment. by Ferber. *Campbell Playhouse*. CBS. 31 Mar. 1939. [OC.]

"The Show-Off." By George Kelly. Adapt. George Wells. Perf. Harold Peary, Una

Merkel, and Beulah Bondi. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 1 Feb. 1943. [OC.]

"Soliloquy to Balance the Budget." Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. House Jameson.

Twenty-Six by Corwin. CBS. 15 June 1941. [JH.]

"Sorry, Wrong Number."* Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Agnes Moorehead. *Suspense*.

CBS. 25 May 1943. [OC.]

"Sorry, Wrong Number."* Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Agnes Moorehead and Hans

Conried. *Suspense*. CBS. 21 Aug. 1943. [RS.]

"Sorry, Wrong Number."* Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Agnes Moorehead, Hans

Conried, Cathy Lewis, and John McIntire. *Suspense*. CBS. 24 Feb. 1944. [OC.]

"Sorry, Wrong Number."* Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Agnes Moorehead. *Suspense*.

CBS. 6 Sept. 1945. [OC.]

"Sorry, Wrong Number."* Perf. Barbara Stanwyck and Jack Benny. *Jack Benny*

Program. NBC. 17 Oct. 1948. [AR.]

"Sorry, Wrong Number."* Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Agnes Moorehead, Elinor

Audley, and Ann Morrison. *Suspense*. CBS. 18 Nov. 1948. [OC.]

- “Sorry, Wrong Number.”* By Lucille Fletcher. Adapt. Sanford Barnett. Perf. Barbara Stanwyck, Burt Lancaster, William Conrad, and Frances Robinson. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 9 Jan. 1950. [OC.]
- “Sorry, Wrong Number.”* Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Agnes Moorehead and Joseph Kearns. *Suspense*. CBS. 15 Sept. 1952. [OC.]
- “Sorry, Wrong Number.”* Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Claire Bloom, Anne Bobby, and Todd Cummings. *Seeing Ear Theater*. 1 Nov. 1999. [SE.]
- “Spellbound.” After Francis Beeding [Hilary St. George Saunders and John Leslie Palmer]. Screenplay by Ben Hecht. Adapt. Jack Rubin. Perf. Alfred Hitchcock, Mercedes McCambridge, Joseph Cotten, and Herbert Butterfield. Comment. by Hitchcock. *Screen Directors Playhouse*. NBC. 21 Jan. 1951. [RS.]
- “The Story of Canine Joe.” Writ. Arthur Miller. Perf. Everett Sloane, Warren Parker, and Edwin Jerome. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 21 Aug. 1944. [JH.]
- “The Strange Death of Charles Umberstein.” Writ. E. Jack Neuman. Vincent Price and Hans Conried. *Suspense*. CBS. 23 Nov. 1943. [OC.]
- “Strange Interlude.” By Eugene O’Neill. Adapt. Arthur Arent. Perf. Lynn Fontanne, Walter Abel, and Alfred Shirley. Part 2 of 2. *Theatre Guild on the Air*. ABC. 4 Apr. 1946. [JH.]
- “Strange Morning.”* Writ. Arch Oboler. Perf. Charlotte Holland, Mason Adams, Maurice Ellis, and Lamont Johnson. Introd. by Oboler. *Arch Oboler’s Plays*. MBS. 5 Apr. 1945. [RS.]
- “The Suicide Club.” By Robert Louis Stevenson. Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Perf. William Conrad and Raymond Burr. *Favorite Story*. Syn. 2 Dec. 1947. [JH.]
- “Tel Aviv.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Walter Burke, Ed Cullen, Minerva Pious, and Hester Sondergaard. *Columbia Presents Corwin*. CBS. 23 May 1944. [OC.]

- “The Tell-Tale Heart.” By Edgar Allan Poe. Adapt. Charles Tazewell. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 11 June 1937. [JH.]
- “Temple of Vampires.” Writ. Carlton E. Morse. Perf. Russell Thorson, Jim Boles, Tony Randall, and Mercedes McCambridge. Chapter 8 of 20. *I Love a Mystery*. MBS. 11 Jan. 1950. [OC.]
- “Ten Percent Is Not Enough” [“The ‘Boise’” (Part 2)].* Writ. Ranauld MacDougall. Perf. Jackson Beck. *The Man Behind the Gun*. CBS. 28 Mar. 1943. [ON.]
- Texaco Star Theater*. Perf. Fred Allen, Portland Hoffa, and Franklin P. Adams. CBS. 5 Mar. 1941. [GT.]
- Texaco Star Theater*. Perf. Fred Allen and Robert Benchley. CBS. 1 Nov. 1942. [GT.]
- “They Burned the Books.”* Writ. Stephen Vincent Benét. Perf. Ralph Bellamy. CBS. 24 July 1942. [JH.]
- “They Fly through the Air with the Greatest of Ease.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. House Jameson. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 10 Apr. 1939. [JH.]
- “They Stooped to Folly.” After Ellen Glasgow. By Jack C. Wilson. Adapt. Richard Allen Simmons. Perf. Paul Frees, Jane Webb, Lynn Whitney, and Stephen Chase, and Georgia Backus. Comment. Harrison Smith. *NBC University Theatre*. NBC. 24 Oct. 1948. [OC.]
- “The Thing in the Window.” Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Joseph Cotten, Hans Conried, Cathy Lewis, and Jeanette Nolan. *Suspense*. CBS. 19 Dec. 1946. [OC.]
- “The Thing in the Window.” Writ. Lucille Fletcher. Perf. Robert Montgomery. *Suspense*. CBS. 27 Jan. 1949. [OC.]
- “The Thing That Cries in the Night.” Writ. Carlton E. Morse. Perf. Russell Thorson, Jim Boles, Tony Randall, and Mercedes McCambridge. 15 chapters. *I Love a Mystery*. MBS. 31 Oct.-18 Nov. 1949. [OC.]
- “This Is War.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. *This Is War!* CBS, MBS, NBC Blue, NBC Red. 14 Feb. 1942. [JH.]

"This Lonely Heart."* Writ. Arch Oboler. Perf. Bette Davis. *Gulf Screen Guild Theater*.

CBS. 14 Jan. 1940. [JH.]

"The Three Frogs." *Adventures of Ellery Queen*. Writ. Anthony Boucher and Manfred

B. Lee. Perf. Howard Culver, Herb Butterfield, Alan Reed, and Virginia Gregg.

ABC. 29 Apr. 1948. [ON.]

"Three Strikes You're Out."* Writ. Vernon Delston. Perf. Ray Collins and Frank

Lovejoy. *Columbia Workshop*. CBS. 18 Apr. 1940. [JH.]

"Till Death Do Us Part." Writ. John Dickson Carr. Peter Lorre, Mercedes

McCambridge, Alice Frost and David Gothard. *Suspense*. CBS. 15 Dec. 1942.

[OC.]

"Tokyo Spearhead." By Paul Lutsens. Adapt. Bernard Feins and Russell Hughes.

Perf. Richard Conte and Stuart Erwin. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 19 June

1944. [JH.]

"Toward a Farther Star." By George Palmer Putnam. Adapt. Arthur Miller and Addy

Richton. Perf. Madeleine Carroll and Frank Readick. *Cavalcade of America*.

NBC. 2 Nov. 1942. [JH.]

"The Track of the Cat." By Walter Van Tilburg Clark. Adapt. George Lefferts. Perf.

John Dehner, Noreen Gammill, Lynne Millan, and Don Randolph. Comment.

Bruce Bliven. *NBC University Theater*. NBC. 5 Feb. 1950. [OC.]

"Trilby." By George Du Maurier. Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Perf.

Gordon MacRae, Dorothy Warenskjold, and Raymond Burr. Music. Dir.

Carmen Dragon. *Railroad Hour*. NBC. 10 Aug. 1953. [ON.]

["Trouble with the IRS"]. Writ. Charles MacArthur and Ben Hecht. Perf. Jimmy

Durante, Arthur Sinclair, W. J. McCarthy, and Gloria Grafton. *Jumbo Fire Chief*

Program. NBC. 29 Oct. 1935. [ON.]

["The \$2001 Watch"/"The Extraordinary Bequest"]. With Ogden Nash, Marion Collins, Ellery [Frederic Dannay], Queen [Manfred Lee], and Carl Van Doren. *Author! Author!* MBS. 7 Apr. 1939. [ON.]

"U-Boat Prisoner." Writ. Archie Gibbs. Adapt. Arthur Arent. Perf. Ned Wever, Richard Arlen, Roland Winters, and Frank Readick. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 27 Dec. 1943. [JH.]

"The Ugliest Man in the World" ["Mr. Freak"].* Writ. Arch Oboler. Perf. Raymond Edward Johnson, and Ann Shepherd. *Lights Out!* CBS. 1 June 1943. [JH.]

"Uncle Tom's Cabin." After George L. Aiken. Perf. Jack Benny and Mary Livingstone. *Chevrolet Program*. NBC. 10 Dec. 1933. [AR.]

"The Undecided Molecule."* Writ. Norman Corwin. Groucho Marx, Sylvia Sidney, and Vincent Price. *Columbia Presents Corwin*. CBS. 17 July 1945. [RS.]

"The Undefended Border."* Writ. Stephen Vincent Benét. Perf. Raymond Massey, Robbin Cravin, and William Johnstone. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC Red. 18 Dec. 1940. [JH.]

"The Unfortunate Tobacconist." By Arthur Conan Doyle. Adapt. Denis Green and Anthony Boucher. Perf. Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce. *New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. MBS. 30 Apr. 1945. [OC.]

[Untitled.] Speech by Joseph C. Grew, former US Ambassador to Japan. Introd. by C. K. Davis (Pres., Remington Arms), and Frederic C. Walcott (former Sen., CT). *Cavalcade of America*. NBC Red. 14 Sept. 1942. [JH.]

"Untitled."* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Fredric March, Charmé Allen, and Joseph Julian. *Columbia Presents Corwin*. CBS. 18 Apr. 1944. [JH.]

"Vanity Fair." By William Makepeace Thackeray. Adapt. Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Perf. Joan Larring. *Favorite Story*. Syn. 10 Sept. 1946. [JH.]

"Voice of the Wizard."* Writ. Erik Barnouw. Perf. Dane Clark and Donna Reed. *Cavalcade of America*. NBC. 10 Feb. 1947. [JH.]

- “Voice on the Wire.” Writ. Robert Sloane. Perf. Leslie Woods. *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*. CBS. 29 Nov. 1944. [OC.]
- “Voyage through Darkness.” Writ. Joel Malone. Perf. Olivia De Havilland, Reginald Gardiner, and Herbert Rawlinson. *Suspense*. CBS. 7 Sept. 1944. [OC.]
- “War of the World.”* By H. G. Wells. Adapt. Howard Koch. Perf. Ray Collins, Kenny Delmar, and Joseph Cotton. *Mercury Theatre on the Air*. CBS. 30 Oct. 1938. [RS.]
- “We Hold These Truths.”* Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. James Stewart and Lionel Barrymore. CBS, NBC Red, NBC Blue. 15 Dec. 1941. [RS.]
- “The Whole Town Is Talking.” By Jo Swerling and Robert Riskin. Adapt. George Wells. Perf. Fibber McGee [Jim Jordan], Molly [Marian Jordan], Paul Guilfoyle, and Dewey Robinson. *Lux Radio Theatre*. CBS. 24 Feb. 1941. [OC.]
- “Wickford Point.” By J. P. Marquand. Perf. Orson Welles, Agnes Moorehead, and Ray Collins. Comment. by Marquand. *Campbell Playhouse*. CBS. 5 May 1939. [OC.]
- “The Wild Palms.” By William Faulkner. Adapt. Richard E. Davis. Perf. Wally Maher, Lynn Allen, and Gayne Whitman. Ann. Don Stanley. Comment. Robert Penn Warren. *NBC University Theater*. NBC. 4 Dec. 1949. [OC.]
- “Women of England.” Writ. Norman Corwin. Perf. Joseph Julian. *An American in England*. CBS, BBC. 24 Aug. 1942. [JH.]
- “The Women Stayed at Home.”* Writ. Arch Oboler. Perf. Norma Shearer, Hans Conried, and Howard Duff. *Everyman’s Theatre*. NBC. 20 Dec. 1940. [OC.]
- “The Women Stayed at Home.”* Writ. Arch Oboler. Perf. Mercedes McCambridge and Ronald Colman. *Everything for the Boys*. NBC. 22 Feb. 1944. [OC.]
- “You Were Wonderful.” Writ. Robert L. Richards. Perf. Lena Horne and Wally Maher. *Suspense*. CBS. 9 Nov. 1944. [OC.]

"Your Army."* Writ. Stephen Vincent Benét. Perf. Tyrone Power. *This Is War!* CBS, MBS, NBC Blue, NBC Red. 7 Mar. 1942. [JH.]

"Your Navy."* Writ. Maxwell Anderson. Perf. Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and Fredric March. *This Is War!* CBS, MBS, NBC Blue, NBC Red. 28 Feb. 1942. [JH.]