Orwell and the Radio Imagination

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**Introduction**

George Orwell’s literary and professional life was situated in the radio age of the 20th century. His experience of the media was an everyday world in which radio was the dominant mass medium of electronic communication. His death in 1950 marked the year when television’s competition for audiences and power was intensifying to a tipping point of overtaking radio.

Orwell was connected through his literary and cultural reviewing and criticism with the world of broadcasting at a period when important experiments were being conducted in sound drama and documentary in terms of their political, social and cultural content and aesthetically. Recorded and synthesized sound blended the margins of factual and fictional representation. Orwell may well have been a regular listener to plays and features when he returned to stay with his parents in Southwold, Suffolk, in the late 1920s after resigning from the Indian Imperial police in Burma. By this time the BBC had become a corporation and developed the ability to broadcast nationally and regionally. Moreover, his diary gives brief references to hearing dramatic news of Britain’s involvement in the Second World War on the radio in public places. He had a battery powered radio set of his own after the war. (Davison 2011)

As a prolific reviewer of the cultural scene, it is possible to imagine him embracing the new medium and enthusiastically listening to modernist commentators such as Harold Nicholson and feature program-makers such as Archie Harding, Lance Sieveking, D.G. Bridson ad Olive Shapley. This was a time for avant-garde microphone play experiments by Lance Sieveking (1934) and sound operas and verse plays by Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. (Fisher 2002, Frattarola 2009)

This chapter argues that Orwell was radiophonic in his writing. There was a style of documentary vision in his prose writing that evoked the sound perspective of radio broadcasting. Indeed, there is a distinct drama-documentary style of prose in books such as *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), *The* *Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). The first part of Chapter Three of his 1935 novel *A Clergyman’s Daughter* reads like a transcript of the 1934 BBC Manchester feature *‘Opping ‘Oliday*. Both the chapter and the radio feature deal with the now lost sub-culture of casual hop-pickers traveling to Kent in the late summer. The BBC program was the first documentary feature to use a recording van. The microphone was thus taken out of the studio to record people directly on location.

This ‘sonic realism’ appears in a considerable amount of Orwell’s writing. I think it also accounts for the longstanding success of the adaptation and production of his novels and documentary journalism on BBC radio since the early 1940s. The very fact he joined the BBC as a producer and worked intensively, writing and making programs for two years between 1941 and 1943, means that he was fully professionalized and immersed in a creative public broadcasting institution. Orwell became an expert in making radio for news, editorial propagandizing, and education through entertaining sound dramatization and cultural discussion. It was the equivalent of devising a multimedia syllabus for an Open University of the Air.

Thus, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of Orwell’s completion of a two-week BBC induction training course headed by the former head of feature documentaries at BBC Manchester, Archie Harding, and including on the training staff Felix Felton, the assistant producer of *‘Opping ‘Oliday* and future author of *The Radio Play* (1949). (Orwell/Davison Vol.13:5-9) In this way, Orwell became part of a critical and creative sound program tradition that pioneered and fostered radiophonic and audiogenic story telling.

Four significant legacies emerged out of his full-time broadcasting work during those two years. His direct experience and professional toil at writing talks, documentaries, features and drama for the sound medium amounted to a manifesto for impartial radio and broadcasting news. I argue that the seminal essay ‘Politics and the English Language’ (1946) arises out of his BBC experience. It is the exposition of a radio journalism communicator.

A second legacy is a creative sensibility about the importance of poetry and radio. Orwell was the first BBC producer to enable T. S. Eliot to read his poetry live on the radio. His essay ‘Poetry and the Microphone’ (1945) is confirmation of how powerful the radiogenic qualities of sound broadcasting can be for what Eliot defined as the ‘auditory imagination.’ A third legacy is Orwell’s significance as a radio dramatizer, sound playwright and critic of the genre. He would write his own dramatization of *Animal Farm* (1947) that would be produced by BBC Radio several times – most recently in a George Orwell season on BBC Radio 4 in 2013. This dimension of Orwell’s exploration of the radio imagination will be addressed by a critical analysis of his adaptation of ‘A Slip under the Microscope,’by H. G. Wells (1943).

This is connected to the fourth legacy. Orwell’s undoubted genius as an essayist for newspapers and periodicals transferred powerfully to the radio medium as a commentator. Today, the radio commentary retains its intrinsic genre on BBC Radio 3 with fifteen-minute talks called *The Essay* and on BBC Radio 4 and World Service through the iconic series *From Our Own Correspondent*. This provides a platform for foreign correspondents to give background, interpretation and original perspectives on the news stories of the day.

**The radiophonic *Clergyman’s Daughter***

*A Clergyman’s Daughter* is sometimes described as ‘the most adversely criticized of all Orwell’s books’ (Lee 1969: 23). It was written in 1934 for publication in 1935. Orwell conceded it had a weak ending and he did not want it republished while he was alive. It was subject to considerable censorship in relation to libel and indecency. It incorporated a a severe denunciation of private education and his publisher, Victor Gollancz, had had to defend libel writs for a previous work of fiction about a school in Kensington. (Orwell/Davison Vol. 3 1998: 303-307).

Consequently, it was not clear in the first edition that the reason for the loss of memory by the central character, Dorothy Hare, had been an attempt to rape her. However, Dorothy’s entry into the world of down-and-outs in Trafalgar Square and her experiences in the hop fields of Kent are acknowledged by most critics as an example of Orwell’s most experimental writing: ‘In its use of stream-of-consciousness and surrealism, the scene is reminiscent of the Circe episode in Joyce’s *Ulysses*’ (Lee 1969: 40). Lee argues that the novel’s supposed failure ‘is usually attributed to its so-called documentary interpolations and its episodic structure’ (ibid: 23). I would argue that this is one of its strengths as innovative radiophonic literature.

It does read as a modernist montage of voices, with a sort of ‘literary camera’ taking shots of the general scene as in: ‘Trafalgar Square. Dimly visible through the mist, a dozen people, Dorothy among them, are grouped about one of the benches near the north parapet’ (Orwell, *Complete Works*, Vol 3: 151) then moving on to the use of the close microphone recording the voices of individual characters singing and talking:

*Mr Tallboys* (to himself): ‘*Non sum qualis eram boni sub regno Edwardi*! In the days of my innocence, before the Devil carried me up into a high place and dropped me into the Sunday newspapers – that is to say when I was Rector of Little Fawley-cum-Dewsbury…’

*Deafie* (singing): ‘With my willy, willy, *with* my willy willy …’ (ibid).

This has all the hallmarks of a post-World War Two Theatre Workshop drama script developed through social immersion and observation, and the transcription of improvization by actors. Of course, Orwell’s ear and appreciation for the language of this sub-culture as well as the realism of its social reality had been honed by direct experience. Being down and out with the hop-pickers of London and Kent was the subject of his 1931 diary documentary essay ‘Hop-picking.’ Scannell describes it as abrasive. ‘While making it clear that the hop pickers had a good time,’ the diary brings out the stringent rules imposed by the farmers, their sharp practices at weighing, and the tactics of the pickers to get fair measure’ (Scannell and Cardiff 1991: 396).

The diary also forms a sort documentary basis for the novel. His entry for 26 August 1931 hints at how he would later use his aural memory to provide the foundation for the continuous stream of consciousness sequence of writing in *A Clergyman’s Daughter*:

The next day I went to Trafalgar Square and camped by the north wall, which is one of the recognized rendezvous of down-and-out people in London. At this time of year the square has a floating population of 100 to 200 people (about ten per cent of them women), some of whom actually look on it as their home (Orwell, *Collected Works*, 1998: Vol. 10: 215).

Orwell’s third novel is also a biting satire and attack on the shabby ethics of the popular Sunday press and its pre-occupation with exposing the sexual hypocrisy of vicars for his characterization of Mr Tallboys recognizes the abuse of children:

*Mr Tallboys* (to himself): ‘My curate days, my curate days! My fancywork bazaars and morris dances in-aid-of on the village green, my lectures to the Mothers’ Union- missionary work in Western China with fourteen magic lantern slides! My Boys’ Cricket Club, teetollers only, my confirmation classes – purity lecture once monthly in the Parish Hall – my Boy Scout orgies! The Wolf Cubs will deliver the Grand Howl. Household Hints for the Parish Magazine, “Discarded fountain-pen fillers can be used as enemas for canaries…”’ (*Complete Works*, Vol. 3: 165).

The radio documentary feature movement at the BBC in the early 1930s was inspired by developments in film. BBC producer Laurence Gilliam sought to imitate the documentary film technique by hiring mobile sound-recording vans. In the summer of 1934, at the same time Orwell was writing *A Clergyman’s Daughter*,he hired an outside recording vehicle from HMV and made ‘the first radio feature using actuality sound recordings taken on location’ (Felton 1949: 99; Cardiff and Scannell 1991: 147). Coincidentally, this incorporated a ‘sound picture’ of East Enders, and quite possibly some down and outs harvesting the hop crop in the Kent fields. *‘Opping ‘Oliday* was broadcast on 15 September 1934 on the London Regional service. Rather like Orwell’s novel, it switched between studio narration and what were coined at the time as ‘microphone snap-shots.’ It ended with an outside broadcast link-up for a sing-song from a Kent ale-house with the hop-pickers warbling their delight at finishing their end of summer casual and back-breaking work. Scannell says:

This was the first broadcast programme to realise that populist impulse at the heart of documentary which allows people to speak for themselves. No longer are they merely described by another in a studio talk, or else read a scripted talk from the studio in which they express the viewpoint of ‘ordinary person.’ Now they speak from their own everyday environment, and produce impromptu talk, via an interview, for the microphone. Broadcasting has gone out into everyday life to capture ‘the essence’ of that reality as lived by those who speak of it in order to re-present this experience to listeners (ibid).

Orwell was doing the same in his novel though the language of his fictional characters was replete with the dimension of expletives and realistic communication the BBC would not be able to broadcast in the present day. The 1934 BBC radio feature included no de-frocked ecclesiastical paedophiles. Nor were there any encounters with disorientated middle-class women whose memory of attempted rape had also erased their bearings and sense of identity. But the program did relate to Orwell’s iconoclastic description of the hop pickers’ hardships. It included testimony from an unemployed clerk who worked as a checker/weigh-man and was advised to flee the district by the local police. (ibid: 396-397).

*A Clergyman’s Daughter* may have been intended to reveal other aspects of the underground nature of British society. In his 1931 ‘Hop Picking’ diary, Orwell had recorded that Charing Cross Underground station was a great rendezvous for ‘homosexual vice in London’:

It appeared to be taken for granted by the people on Trafalgar Square that youths could earn a bit this way, and several said to me, ‘I need never sleep out if I choose to go down to Charing Cross.’ They added that the usual fee is a shilling (Orwell, *Collected Essays*, Vo1. 1: 96-97).

This was certainly an aspect of Orwell’s direct observation that could not be represented in his novel nor any radio program broadcast by the BBC at that time. *‘Opping ‘Oliday* was designed primarily as its *Radio Times* billings explained: ‘An Excursion in Sound to the Hop Gardens of Kent,’ including ‘sound pictures of work in the hop gardens, and a sing-song celebrating the end of the picking from a village inn in Kent,’ and ‘a recorded sound picture’ of ‘‘Arry, ‘Arriet, and their families’ taking themselves off from London's East End for the hopping season (*Radio Times* 1934, 1937 and 1939).

Despite being regarded as Orwell’s weakest novel in terms of plot and characterization, with Orwell himself doing his best to buy up unsold copies in the late 1930s (Lee 1969: 23), the BBC was to recognize its merits as a source of radio story-telling and full sound dramatization. In 1988 it was abridged for *A Book at Bedtime* in ten, fifteen-minute episodes read by the actor George Baker. The abridgement continued to avoid explicit representation of the ‘incident’ that caused her to leave the shelter of her home, but it is significant that Graham Gauld, the producer of the spoken word representation, focused on ‘her progress after that, through the England of the 30s’ giving ‘George Orwell an opportunity for one of his earliest pieces of social reportage’ (*Radio Times* 1988).

Four years later, BBC Radio 4 commissioned an original 90-minute dramatization of the novel in the ‘Monday Play’ strand. It was produced in stereo by one of the Radio Drama department’s in-house young women directors, Celia De Wolff, from a script by John Peacock. It was billed as ‘George Orwell’s novel about the scandal which rocked a small town when, following an encounter with an elderly free thinker, the clergyman’s daughter suddenly disappeared’ (*Radio Times* 1992). It was repeated in 1993.

**BBC trained and inspired**

George Orwell’s witty observations about his self-styled two wasted years at the BBC are often quoted:

Its atmosphere is something halfway between a girls’ school and a lunatic asylum and all we are doing at present is useless, or slightly worse than useless. Our radio strategy is even more hopeless than our military strategy (Orwell 2009: 322).

However, in those two years Orwell produced hundreds of disciplined talk, documentary and creative drama scripts specifically for the sound medium and William J. West argued in 1985 that the two years he spent as a Talks Producer in the Indian Section of the BBC’s Eastern Service from August 1941 until November 1943 are the key to his ‘evolution from the slightly pedantic and unpolished author of pre-war days’ (West 1985: 13). West was emphatic that it was far from the case that these were lost years for Orwell the writer. Orwell’s own creative writing continued, while at the BBC, he applied a prodigious force of hard work and creativity to achieving something of great cultural value:

…nothing less than the setting up of what was in effect a ‘university of the air’ for students of the Punjab and other Indian universities, coupled with weekly news broadcasts that enabled educated Indians generally to follow the progress of the war around the world (ibid).

West distilled his view and archival script evidence of the significance of Orwell’s BBC years in two edited volumes published in the 1985 *Orwell: The War Broadcasts* and *Orwell: The War Commentaries*. Previously he had contributed to a BBC Radio 4 documentary ‘George Orwell at the BBC,’ broadcast on 9 October 1984 and produced by Angela Hind. This program argued that Orwell’s job as Talks Producer ‘was to influence his life and help him become one of the best-known writers of the 20th century’ (*Radio Times* 1984). Moreover, on his two years – in Room 101 – at the BBC, the editor of Orwell’s *Collected Works*, Professor Peter Davison, argues: ‘Indeed, given the circumstances his achievements were formidable and had long-term benefits for the institution and those who tuned in to it long after he was dead.’ (Davison 2011). Certainly, Orwell elevated colonial and proto-postcolonial writers such as Una Marson, Mulk Raj Anand, Balraj Sahni and his wife, Damyanti. to cultural importance when he was a producer in a complex propaganda effort to bring onside young intellectuals in India and elsewhere in the Empire.

The key to Orwell’s broadcasting career may well lie in the two-week induction training course he undertook at Bedford College, University of London in Regents Park. The course director was the guru of the left-wing radio documentary movement at BBC Manchester in the 1930s, Archie Harding. In the early 1930s he was embroiled in censorship rows and political controversies and according to his protégé D. G. Bridson, was banished by John Reith to Manchester as Program Director, North Region, with the memorable words: ‘You’re a very dangerous man, Harding. I think you’d be better up North where you can’t do so much damage’ (Bridson 1972: 22). It would seem Harding continued his mischief quite happily in Manchester. He headed a department that commissioned two radio plays from Bridson, *Prometheus: A Tragedy of his Ransom and New Power* in 1934 and *Scourge* in 1935, which were pulled from transmission in the middle of rehearsals after being billed in the *Radio Times* due to concerns about political controversy and issues of indecency (ibid: 40, 46-47). He was at the helm when Joan Littlewood teamed up with Olive Shapley in 1939 to produce *The Classic Soil*, a powerful Marxist denunciation of housing conditions for the working class in Manchester. It had the political spirit, iconoclasm, and agitational attitude of Orwell’s investigation of the Lancashire coal mines in *Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). Shapley reflected in later life it was:

…probably the most unfair and biased programme ever put out by the BBC. We called it, with a nod to Engels, *The Classic Soil*. Engels had described Manchester as ‘the classic soil … where capitalism flourished.’ By recording much of the programme in Salford flea market among an odd little group of families who lived in a condemned warehouse in Pollard Street, we proved to our satisfaction and everyone else’s intense annoyance that basically Manchester was unchanged since Engels wrote his famous denunciation of the city in 1844 (Shapley 1996: 54).

One of the staff trainers was Felix Felton who had been assistant to Laurence Gilliam on the Kent hop-picking program of 1934. Orwell was surrounded and nurtured by an agitational and creative culture that accommodated him like a glove made for a prince. One of his fellow trainees was Douglas Cleverdon who would go on to be one of the BBC’s most innovative radio feature and drama directors of the 1950s and 60s and was responsible for commissioning and producing *Under Milk Wood* (1954) by Dylan Thomas. Orwell and Cleverdon were in direct contact with Harding and Felton and, as part of their training, had to work on model scripts in order to learn the process of feature research, narrative and production. These scripts included *Dr Johnson Takes It* by the poet and producer Louis MacNeice and *Arctic Excursion* by the Director of Staff Training himself Archie Harding. (Orwell, *Collected Works*, Vol. 13: 5-9).

The poet and scholar William Empson was another trainee who had, unfairly, condemned it as ‘a liar’s course’ (ibid). But the course schedule and many of the papers and resources used and annotated by Orwell have survived and been archived at University College London. The documents show that most of the training was concentrated on the art of producing dramatic and documentary radio programs with guidance and inspiration from the leading radio professionals of their day. Felix Felton would consolidate and publish his producing and program-making philosophy in *The Radio Play*, in 1949. On the basis of the course of instruction Orwell took part in, it is very likely he had an opportunity to hear Felton’s sophisticated ideas on the use of ‘actuality’ and location sound recordings (Felton 1949: 103). For Felton advocated a range of narrative and dramatic structuring techniques for documentary that included latent dramatic conflict and musical ‘rondo form.’ He explained latent dramatic conflict in relation to a program he made on how the Post Office transported a postcard from Euston to the Orkneys:

Here and there I brought the conflict to the surface by putting the signals against the mail-train, or by giving the pilot some uncomfortable weather; but I did not develop it to such a pitch of intensity that the aeroplane nearly crashed, or the postcard’s arrival just averted a human catastrophe (ibid: 104).

Felton used musical ideas and rhythms to pattern and counter-point his script. The construction of the ‘rondo form’ was achieved by:

A principle tune ‘A,’ followed by another tune ‘B.’ ‘A’ is then repeated; then comes a third tune ‘C;’ then ‘A’ again; then a fourth tune ‘D,’ and so on (ibid).

It is clear that during the first two weeks of his time in the BBC program-making culture rather than bureaucracy, Orwell was engaging with a vast range of narrative and story-telling ideas, concepts and techniques that may well account for the sharpening of narrative and dramatic focus in his two last and most successful novels *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949).

**Radio language and poetry**

It is perhaps no coincidence that Orwell’s two years of toil, industry and creativity at the BBC were followed by the writing of two seminal essays that have had such a powerful influence on radio journalistic writing and the presentation and communication of poetry on the radio. ‘Politics and the English Language,’ first published in *Horizon* in April 1946, underpins the professional ethic of impartial, clear, and unpretentious writing in radio news. I believe the stripped down, cautious and spoken word style of broadcasting English reverberated with Orwell’s desire to resist the propagandizing and politicization of English communication.

His enduring struggle against academic gobbledygook and determination to fight staleness of imagery and lack of precision is the stalwart aim of anybody writing scripts in spoken English style for the radio. His criticism of a quotation from Professor Harold Laski’s essay in *Freedom of Expression* was exquisitely ironic as Laski’s constipated expression undermined his purpose in writing it in the first place (Orwell, *Collected Works* Vol.17: 422). Again it is no coincidence that good broadcasting writers avoid ‘dying metaphors,’ ‘verbal false limbs,’ ‘pretentious diction,’ ‘meaningless words,’ and phrases and unnecessary expressions in foreign languages. As Orwell said, these ‘perversions and swindles’ debase the language (ibid: 425).

Orwell’s aphorism ‘But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought’ is the kind of professional homily present in journalism writing books the world over (ibid 428). Orwell’s writing six rules that he thought would ‘cover most cases’ can be extrapolated from, for example, the *BBC’s News* *Styleguide* of 2003 by John Allen:

1. Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.

4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.

5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous (Orwell, *Collected Works*, Vol 17: 430).

Points 1. 3. and 5. are covered in Allen’s sections on ‘troublesome words,’ ‘vogue words,’ and ‘superfluous words and phrases’ (Allen 2003: 68-77). They are also clearly referenced in the pages on ‘foreign phrases’ and ‘jargon’ (ibid: 47-50). Point 2. is covered by Allen’s page on ‘simple words.’ (ibid: 67). No. 4. is covered in the section on ‘active and passive’ (ibid 17-18). On page 23 of the BBC guide, Orwell, its former Eastern Service talks producer, is given pride of place in a quotation on clichés and journalese: ‘By using stale metaphors, similes and idioms, you save much mental effort, at the cost of leaving your meaning vague, not only for your reader but yourself’ (ibid: 23). This section is one of the longest in the booklet running to eight pages. In 2003, it could be argued that the BBC’s then-Director of News, Richard Sambrook, was conscious of Orwell’s rule 4 when he wrote ‘Clear story-telling and language is at the heart of good journalism’ (ibid: 3).

Davison argues convincingly in the *Collected Works* that Orwell’s seminal essay ‘Poetry and the Microphone,’ first published in *The New Saxon Pamphlet* in March 1945, was probably written while he was still at the BBC producing the discursive and spoken word based poetry program strand called *Voice* (Orwell, *Collected Works*, Vol. 17: 74-80). This was an essay almost evangelical about widening the cultural appeal of poetry by having poets communicate their poems to ‘an audience of *one*. Millions may be listening, but each is listening alone, or as a member of a small group, and each has (or ought to have) the feeling that you are speaking to him individually’ (ibid 76-77). Orwell expresses a fundamental understanding of the radio imagination in this passage.

Orwell’s writing and producing of fluid and conversational poetry programs to listeners in the Far East challenged his delightfully expressed metaphor ‘Poetry on the air sounds like the Muses in striped trousers’ (ibid: 79). In the sixth *Voice* program, he managed to persuade T. S. Eliot to speak his verse to the microphone for the first time. It is a bizarre irony that the recording of a part of his 43-line poem ‘Journey of the Magi’ (1927) has survived, but not one recorded word of Orwell himself exists to connect his voice with our radio imaginations.

Orwell’s thoughts on poetry and radio endure in the present age of broadcasting where poets still find a happy home in the audio medium which has dispersed exponentially online through podcasting. In 1949, Milton Allen Kaplan published the seminal US text *Radio and Poetry*,published by Columbia University Press. His vision of the future role of poetry in broadcasting would chime precisely with that of Orwell’s 1945 essay:

The fact that the radio is mentioned very often in connection with popular poetry is not accidental. Folk poetry is oral poetry. The rise of the radio verse drama is a happy portent that poetry will be presented once more to the public in a form which it can understand and appreciate. It would seem, therefore, that there is a great future for poetry on the radio, a public poetry that is simple, direct, and clear (Kaplan 1949: 255).

**The audiogenic dramatist?**

It is interesting to examine Orwell’s review of the BBC’s prestigious production and script publication of Edward Sackville-West’s *The Rescue*, (Orwell, *Observer* 1945). Orwell was interested in how the Homeric source had been dramatized rather than narrated:

…radio has made it possible to revive the soliloquy (no longer tolerable on the realistic stage) and to play tricks with space and time which would be difficult even in a film. On the other hand, the difficulty, in any broadcast involving more than two or three voices, of making the listener understand what is happening where, and who is speaking to whom, has not been fully overcome. It is usually done by means of a Narrator, who ruins the dramatic effect, or by making the characters drop explanatory remarks, which are likely to hold up the action and have to be managed very skillfully if they are to be convincing (ibid.)

Orwell’s analysis of *The Rescue* in 1945 is that of an experienced radio writer and former producer who, on reading a script, could quickly spot ‘one fact which the microphone brings out is that some stories are much more visual than others.’ He argued that the scene in which Odysseus shoots down the suitors with his bow could not be adequately presented unless it took place ‘off’ the dramatic sound stage (ibid). Orwell’s political antennae were also wise to what he saw as the pervasion of ‘official propaganda’ through the parallel of Ithaca being occupied by the suitors and Greece occupied by the Germans. (ibid).

Wrigley has analyzed the radiophonic significance of the BBC’s production of *The Rescue* as a literary and musical compositional collaboration between Sackville-West and Benjamin Britten: ‘The close association of words and music also suggests a reflective awareness of the affinity of radio with the ancient performance of Homeric poetry, whilst encouraging a deep level of interpretative understanding on the part of the radio audience’ (Wrigley 2010: 102). Orwell’s critical approach and artistic exploration of radio play dramatization rather prioritizes the literary and dramatic rather than musical and sound philosophical point of view.

Crisell has attempted to trace a unique history of radio drama drawn from the theatrical tradition in parallel with the world and medium of film, and inspired and informed by the modernist trends in 20th century prose and poetry.

1. The substitution of an inner landscape for the outer world and the adoption of a flexible attitude to time and space, which can expand or contract according to the subjective requirements of the characters.

2. The creation of a fluid, indeterminate environment in which the distinctions between fact and fantasy are often blurred.

3. The use of precise, terse language as a kind of weapon against the overwhelmingly problematic and disorderly nature of experience (Crisell 2009: 472).

George Orwell’s novels are not normally considered ‘modernist,’ though he was contemporary with James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Virginia Woolf, and an active reviewer of their work. Indeed, works by Eliot and Pound were dramatized and broadcast by the BBC in an identifiable modernist tradition of microphone play as explored cogently by Fisher (2002) Frattarola (2009) and Freer (2007). Huwiler has even sought, from a Dutch/German perspective, to theorize radio drama as ‘an acoustic art form in its own right’ and posit ‘a methodology based on semiotic and narratological theories that enables scholars to analyse a narrative radio play by integrating all of its acoustic features’ (Huwiler 2005). Accordingly, the sound texts of Orwell’s dramatized fiction and non-fiction can be evaluated with an emphasis on ‘music, noises and voices and also technical features like electro-acoustical manipulation or mixing’ (ibid). These are useful critical tools to ‘signify story elements’ (ibid).

However, Huwiler was not the first academic, practitioner and critic to engage with this methodology though it summarizes and adopts a convincing line and direction of audio-dramatic criticism that is clearly independent and separate from literary studies. She references mainly continental sources in her bibliography though Arnheim (1936) had an impact and influence through the English translation by Herbert Read that was published by Faber and Faber in London. Huwiler enthusiastically and most interestingly engages with the issues of audio dramatization in 2010. She pursues her quest to diverge and cut loose from literary narratology, arguing that ‘the positioning of signals within the acoustic space is not a feature with a fixed narrative function, either. Although throughout the history of radio drama production it has been used primarily to indicate the spatial positions of characters in a realistically represented setting, … it can be used in a much more varied way’ (Huwiler 2010: 138) She continues: ‘In recent works about English-speaking radio drama, the art form is still being called a literary genre: For Tim Crook it is ‘one of the most unappreciated and understated literary forms of the twentieth century’ (Crook 1999: 3), and Dermot Rattigan calls it ‘an aural literature’ (Rattigan 2002: 3)’ (Huwiler 2010: 131). Her conclusion argues convincingly for a separate disciplinary approach to the study of the sound text (as applied here to Orwell’s works). Sound drama has its own semiotics, cultural and aesthetic characteristics:

Regardless of the extent in which language is used in an adapted radio piece, it is never simply a literary work orally told, but always an artistic work in its own right, working with much more varied medial features than only language and creating a story world with its own intrinsic features of the auditive medium (ibid: 139).

Stanton to some extent anticipated Huwiler in arguing that the art of the audio storyteller rather than the sound playwright moves beyond the words on a page which ‘can give only an oblique or partial sense of the play in performance’ (Stanton 2002: 105) though this is true of all dramatic texts and musical scores. Stanton went on to stress that the audio play does have an additional radical power:

… a radio play – invisible yet aural, allusive, affective – seems to work like a memory trace, possibly like a dream. Its texts, borne on multi-layered aurality, effracts the barriers of perception and the unconscious and irrupts into words, into consciousness, where it engages our senses, memories, intellect and emotions. No one is present: neither actors nor audience. The radio play writes us, its auditors, just as it is written – not by the invisible author, but by the interaction of the voices of actors who have already disappeared and sounds that play across and within our memories (ibid).

All this ties in with Clive Cazeaux’s exploration of the phenomenology of audio/radio drama. Sound operates as an aesthetic metaphor that can be perceptually independent of sight reading:

Sound, instead of being a series of inadequate clues from an unlit world, becomes a medium that opens onto and generates a world and, as a part of this world-generation, enjoys interaction and conjunction with the other senses. And in manipulating sound to create a world, certain correspondences and tensions will be employed which, from a phenomenological point of view, are among the defining, structural characteristics of expression in art, whatever the medium. This ‘whatever the medium’ does not reduce all art forms, with their particularities, to a lowest common denominator, but merely reaffirms that the medium of an artwork, be it paint, film, language, or sound, is something that reaches out beyond its own constitution to participate in the invitational relationships at work in perception at large (Cazeaux 2005: 174).

An examination of Orwell’s dramatizations while as a staff producer and subsequently as a successful novelist does not reveal any propensity on his part to experiment with sound and voice consciousness as he did in his novel *The Clergyman’s Daughter*. For example his adaptation of the H. G. Wells short story ‘A Slip under the Microscope,’ produced by Douglas Cleverdon and broadcast on the Eastern Service 6 October 1943, has an orthodox exposition of traditional narrator and dialogue through characterization (Orwell, *Collected Works*, Vol. 15: 256-265) The narrative voice is deployed as a lens for the listener and indirect focus for a character’s thoughts and feelings:

Wedderburn: Nobody has read Karl Marx, my dear fellow. He is unreadable.

*(Laughter)*

Narrator: Hill was no good at this kind of conversation, and he knew it. It seemed to him cheap, unfair, and connected in some subtle way with Wedderburn’s well-cut clothes, manicured hands and generally sleek and monied exterior.

Hill: He’s got such a mean, sneering way of talking. He never really argues, only tries to raise a laugh. How I wish he’d come to the Debating Society one night! Then I’d smash him.

Orwell was a radio dramatist who preferred to write with clarity rather than play with his listener’s cognitive perception. The potential for experimentation with *Animal Farm* must have been great. The allegorical theme combined with the bitter-sweet comedy of a farmer being deposed by his animals who then turn in on themselves has a sound tapestry that could extend beyond the binary code of an all seeing narrative voice switching to and fro with dramatic dialogue and action. Orwell played safe with the narrative convention when adapting his best seller for the BBC in 1946-1947. He thus preserved the integrity of voice and style of the original book in the same way he had with the prose of H. G. Wells’s short story.

Bott writes that Orwell was an avid reader of Wells from the age of fifteen and the ‘influence of Wells was particularly strong and remained to shape even his last two books’ (1969: 5). Yet by the time Orwell worked on ‘A Slip under the Microscope’ they had become estranged in a bitter row over Orwell’s critical writings in *Horizon*, on the BBC and in *The Listener*. Inez Holden described in detail how Orwell’s written observation in early 1942 that Wells was ‘a shallow inadequate thinker’ in his interpretation of the threat posed by the Nazis was countered by Wells’s face-to-face verbal insult of Orwell that he was ‘a defeatist.’ (Holden 1972: 244). There had been a temporary reconciliation. But Orwell’s broadcast of his BBC talk ‘The Re-discovery of Europe: Literature Between the Wars’ with most of the script appearing in *The Listener* in March 1942 drew the public rebuke from Wells that Orwell had been guilty of ‘foolish generalizations’ about his views on science and mankind (Orwell, *Complete Works*, Vol.13: 209-218). In private, Wells penciled a note to Orwell saying: ‘Read my early works, you shit’ (Holden op cit).

Orwell succeeded in separating his admiration for Wells as a writer of fiction whose prose required professional adaptation faithful to the original text with his critical and polemical role as a public intellectual fully aware that ‘flattery is no part the job of a literary critic’ (Orwell, *Complete Works*, Vol.13: 219).

**Conclusion**

George Orwell’s adult writing career coincided with the beginnings and development of radio as a powerful and aesthetically pioneering medium for drama and documentary. In his reception of the developing story telling form in the context of modernist ideas I believe there was a radiophonic and audiogenic influence on his writing imagination that is evident in *A Clergyman’s Daughter*. His active and participant role in the radio medium as a professional producer and auteur accelerated his appreciation and expression of sound story-telling to the individual listener. Orwell’s experience at the BBC was the source of an evolution in his imaginative understanding of the poetical and political potential of story-telling that informed the allegorical *Animal Farm* and dystopian *Nineteen Eighty Four*. Broadcast writing and production heightened his literary discipline. He was able to focus on an economy and precision of language.

Far from being a bureaucratic grind of exhaustion and disillusionment, Orwell’s experiences at the BBC were predominantly a process of positive creativity and cultural enlightenment both for himself and his audience. The contrasting roles of scripting both factual and fictional programming for the radio served a writer who had the mind of a robust and independent public intellectual and the feelings of the common person. There is nothing particularly illogical in saying Orwell has helped make the BBC as the BBC helped make Orwell. For it was on a BBC Radio program in 1955 that Richard Peters described Orwell as the ‘lonely, courageous figure passing with detached honesty and without rancour across the mudbanks of corruption’ (*Radio Times* 1955).

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