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1

## The Audio Dramatist's Critical Vocabulary in Great Britain

Tim Crook

This chapter investigates how British audio dramatists and producers developed the notion and theory of practical sonic production narratology. They relied on and interrogated the traditions of theatrical and novelistic storytelling. Authors and auteurs such as Gordon Lea, Lance Sieveking, Tyrone Guthrie, Val Gielgud, Felix Felton, Donald McWhinnie, and William Ash offered little evidence that they fully engaged the theory of Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Vladimir Propp, Gérard Genette, Tzvetan Todorov, Mieke Bal, Claude Bremond, and Franz Karl Stanzel. These auteurs had confident ideas of what would constitute variously described successful sound, microphone, and broadcast and audio plays and dramas. The analysis explores how these authors developed their opinions on techniques and concepts that have given sound drama its unique literary as well as dramatic identity.

### Future Directions of Narratological Reflection

It is axiomatic that in the beginning, before academics began to discourse on narratology, practitioners of sound drama discussed and produced their own theory about this genre of storytelling. An analysis of the British tradition alone offers its own narrative of how they understood and valued any unique aspects of their practice. The stability of BBC Radio funding through sound broadcasting monopoly and from 1927 public corporation license fee taxation meant that audio drama had excellent conditions in which to develop content and build audiences during the twentieth century. In the result, it would appear radio drama was first published as dramatic literature in Britain in 1925. This is the case with Reginald Berkeley's full-length play *The White Chateau*, written and produced for Armistice night of that year and politically interrogating the Great War of 1914–1918 and advocating for peace. The script indicates a modernist use of music, and the characterization of the White Chateau building as a central metaphor for the play could arguably be intrinsically radiophonic. It is also the case that Berkeley's play was written and produced for radio first, with its stage and television drama versions following afterward and informing later, longer radio productions of the play. This is hardly the dynamic of what Val Gielgud dismissed as the Cinderella medium. This cultural case history emphasizes that sound drama developed and thrived before sound film and television drama.

Gordon Lea's *Radio Drama and How to Write It* of 1926 immediately sought to define sound drama's unique properties as a narratological medium. He began the journey of past practice and critical analysis that has engendered passionate and important debates about form, style, and the very nature of sound drama as an art form as well as a social and cultural phenomenon. Guthrie, Gielgud, Sieveking, Felton, McWhinnie, and Ash continued to recognize and take positions on some of the enduring oscillations in understanding audio dramaturgy and the listening experience. The narrator and self-contained methods were adopted, mixed, and attenuated in order to serve the purpose of successful listening. Similarly, Gielgud and Sieveking's argument over whether technology must be operated or played has often been resolved by the pressure and demand to connect with and be appreciated by the greatest number of listeners. Assertions about sound drama constituting a theater of the mind or imagined cinemascope have been balanced with poetic and intellectual

explanations of a more complex embodiment of perception where feeling, emotion, and conscious participation extends well beyond the limited notion of mere imagination.

Words, music, silence, sound effects, soundscapes, voices, and spatiality orchestrated to play upon the consciousness of the individual listener have certainly been identified as the essential tools and devices that constitute the elements of the greater whole in audio storytelling. This history is also marked by an enduring tension between experimentalists of the sound medium seeking to discover and explore a sonic intrinsic narratology that is powerfully creative and poetic, and production entertainers wishing to deploy storytelling strategies for the sound medium that give satisfaction for the greatest number of listeners.

The BBC in Britain was able to host a media institutional accommodation of the experimentalists and entertainers after the Second World War with the national networks branded as the Home Service (later BBC Radio 4) and the Light Programme (later Radio 2), which served the exigencies of entertaining growing popular audiences, and the Third Programme (later BBC Radio 3), which satisfied the need to culturally and artistically impress, and indeed, accentuate a separate literary tradition of radio drama.

The academic interventions in this volume have the potential to expand the creative and aesthetic boundaries of criticizing and understanding audio dramaturgy and narratology, and there is no doubt that the practitioner's critical vocabulary faces some transformative changes and inspiration in the years to come. The following chapters certainly serve to demonstrate whether the British practitioner's praxis was theoretically and philosophically limited and more intuitive than consciously deliberated. Did the how-to writers have the ability to communicate an equivalent skill set of enabling the cognitive, rhetorical, text-genetic, transmedial, and transgeneric dimensions of radio drama? There is no shortage of evidence that Lea, Guthrie, Gielgud, Sieveking, Felton, McWhinnie, and Ash believed that the writer and producer could intend meaning by exploiting the unique tools sound drama provided. But on the axis of the diegetic and non diegetic interplay of narrative streams of performance, how could they be sure of the construction of meaning and the experience of dramatic and cultural irony?

It might be argued that the sound dramatic medium in performing for hearing consciousness certainly made it easier for writers and producers to transcend time, place, space, and focalization. An individual identity could be dramatized with multiple perspectives, personalities, and positions, sometimes with no specifically signposted and rooted human voice at all. The listener could be given a greater intensity of imaginative participation. The changing technological context magnified, expanded, and extended the range and depth of that participation. Early radio drama was of the moment, incapable of being recorded and played back. Later radio drama became stereophonic and then surround sound. The *microphone play* was first mainly listened to through headphones, then via valve-powered speakers. The marketization of audio books via cassette, CD, computer, smartphone, and online sound meant the sound play could be paused, rewound, and reheard over and over again and with much more sophisticated experiences of sonic immersion conjured for the listener's imagination.

The purpose in starting with an analysis and elucidation of the practitioner's theory in one country where sound drama has been culturally significant, strong, and enduring—indeed is now said to be experiencing a revolution in fictional podcasting production and listening—is that it is a starting point for the academician. It provides a foundation to criticize, analyze, and discourse narratological strengths, lacks, and perhaps some aesthetic and intellectual epiphanies that can

provide feedback to the storytellers themselves and their listeners who constitute such a powerful participation in the determination of meaning.

### Founding British Radio Drama Narratology

The British how-to writers of sound drama explored key subjects specific to the sound medium such as the point of listening, telling, and showing; characterization; deployment of linking and performative voices; interior and exterior perspectives; spatiality; and sound symbolism and metaphor. These practitioners revealed their awareness of the creative process and their understanding of the techniques that they decided achieved more effective connection with their listening audience.

Some caution is needed in any discourse that relies on texts that operate as monuments or ornaments of oracle by men and for men in what was a patriarchal, imperialist society with entrenched racist and sexist attitudes. When radio drama began to be broadcast by the BBC, there was not an equal franchise for women in general elections, women were subject to humiliating and exclusionary discrimination in many aspects of their participation in society, and the prevailing media consensus represented the view that the United Kingdom was entitled to subjugate non white peoples as a form of civilizing enlightenment. Anything considered worthy in alternative cultures was “Orientalized,” to apply the key word in the theory of the late professor Edward Said. In our twenty-first-century analysis, the integrity of our academic analysis must pay heed to consideration of historicism and the historiographical context. Much is to be gained by identifying audio drama production that may have been hidden in plain sight, and rendered invisible by canonization and those who wielded the power and control of publication and broadcasting.

The first book on British radio drama and how to write it was authored by a BBC producer called Gordon Lea in 1926. Lea began with the prophesy: “We shall find, I think, a new sphere of art, achievement in which will react upon literature to its permanent enrichment” (Lea 1926: 23). He talked about a new literary form “which is full of possibilities,” observing that “here is the new clay for moulding” (91), and he invited the potters to come forward to take radio drama from its cradle and pioneer and experiment. Lea’s text is significant because it was prefaced and endorsed by the first director of drama productions, R. E. Jeffrey, and the BBC’s first managing director and later director-general, John Reith, instructed that a copy would be sent to all the BBC stations and centers of production throughout the country. This means the book was a potential and likely reference point and guide for anyone producing and directing radio drama from the time of its publication.

Lea immediately grasped the importance of the role of the listener by means of headphones or loudspeakers: “Objectively, they see nothing, but subjectively they can see everything. This is what the radio dramatist has to bear in mind” (38). Lea regarded the significance and participation of the listener as so crucial he devoted an entire chapter to it, titled “The Listener’s Part.” There is certainly a case for arguing that Lea may well have been one of the first radio drama philosophers or poets. This is because his pedagogy and criticism were philosophical and poetic in style. His language throughout emphasized the intrinsic over the instrumental: “All art is an expression of imagination — the radio-scene is beyond art. It is reality itself, not an isolated expression of imagination, but imagination itself” (40). He realized that radio drama offered the dramatist “a more spacious structure, whose architecture is more artistic and nearer truth” (33).

Gordon Lea exhorted the idea that radio drama liberates the imagination by scattering the problem of perspective and opening up a new world to the dreamer of dreams: “Anything that is conceivable in the imagination of the dramatist is capable of complete expression and interpretation to the imagination of the playwright’s world. If they wish to set their play in the heart of the buttercup, the imagination of the hearer will provide the setting” (41).

He recognized the special intimacy of radio work: “The listener is in direct touch with the player—there is no intervening convention—no barrier. Soul speaks to soul” (69). Lea’s text is a celebration of sound drama as an intense political, social, and cultural conjunction of human voice and word, the dialogic fusion of the spoken and written word, of everyday chatter and enduring literature. His understanding of the poetic aesthetic was beautifully expressed when he talked about the voices of the player in radio drama coming out of silence: “They were . . . like jewels against the background of black velvet” (72).

Lea thereby opened the debate about how best to write radio drama through finding a dramatic regulation of performed consciousness. For the auteur, or producing collaboration of playwright, director/producer, and performer, he connected the necessary bridges between orchestration of sound through the audio-dramatic score and its representation of reality and human consciousness through performance and production. When he wrote about the importance and value of music, it was in poetic rather than utilitarian terms: “From out this darkness grew green music, coloring the mind and pointing the emotions to their destined end” (21). He granted a cultural and artistic importance for the writer in radio drama: “The one real essential is something behind the text—the idea or dramatic purpose of the author” (32), and connected this with the importance of appealing to the individual listener: “The radio drama does not make its appeal to a crowd but to an individual . . . for what will appeal to a crowd will almost certainly appeal to the individual, but it is by no means certain that what will appeal to the individual will appeal to the crowd” (37). He recognized the significance of voice as the agency of characterization where an actor’s shape and physical characteristics are irrelevant: “What is written in the text will be given pure and untrammelled to the mind of the listener” (39). He realized that through what became a convention of interior voice and listener’s point of hearing, radio drama was the ideal medium for the aside and soliloquy: “In stage-work the ‘Aside’ and the ‘Soliloquy’ were incapable of sincere use. In radio-work they can be used with every appearance of sincerity and truth” (39).

Lea (1926) emphasized that in radio drama, the unstageable does not need a scene break or transition: “Illusion once created need never be broken in the radio-play. The dramatist can be as extensive as he likes, since the whole world or any part of it can be his setting” (42). The suspension of disbelief and art of illusion in sound drama is, therefore, much more fluid and not so much confined by the physical boundaries of the physical stage set or filmic location. The dramatist has direct access to the listener on the emotions of the play and they are therefore immune when “the house is made to ‘rock with mirth.’ In the quietude of your own room, you can react truly and naturally and so be sincere. All this makes for truth and reality” (42). He directed new practitioners of the craft to the need to adopt a professional attitude rooted in the sound medium. The radio dramatist need not write to communicate a crowd psychology: “In conversation with a friend you can use a direct method, an intimate method, which would not be suitable for an orator’s platform. The radio-play gains just this intimacy which a stage-play can never hope to have” (43).

Even as early as 1926, with the technological limits of sound production at that time being on the cusp between mechanical and electrical recording, he advised against an over-immersive indulgence of sound for sound’s sake. While “the horizon of the dramatist’s dreams is widened

beyond all knowledge, some restraint needs to be exercised in respect of sound-effects . . . these should be used sparingly. An ounce of suggestion is worth a ton of irritation" (43).

Lea set the course of debate on the ideal dramatic structure of storytelling in audio drama, and it has not changed much since 1926. He recognized and discussed the merits of the narrator method and the self-contained method. This is the binary of telling and showing. He accepted that using a narrative voice offers the chance to characterize an interesting angle and develop sympathy and tension in the way of Shakespearean drama. The narrator can create *mind pictures* and bridge dramatic action. Narrative voice is a good and convenient method of dramatizing prose and novel writing (44–53).

Lea made it clear that he preferred *the self-contained method*, as do most contemporary writers and directors. He said while the narrator method can knit together and make coherent long stage plays, "as a form for original radio drama, it is not good" (53). By removing the narrator, the writer creates a total mental vision so that the listener can effectively overhear the drama: "It can be made as startling and realistic as if the listener were overhearing something in the next room through a half-open door—with the advantage that the people in the next room obligingly let the eavesdropper know all about it" (54).

Lea (1926) advanced that in the self-contained method, the scenery and setting is indicated by the characters themselves and what they say: "This can be done quite naturally and effectively. The characters should be made to see everything objectively and to think of what they are doing objectively, so that this will appear in their speech . . . [and] produce an illusion of naturalness" (55). He advised writers to avoid making their characters give crude word pictures of where they are when the language is not natural to their personalities. The word picture needs to emerge gradually. Exposition needs to be subtle: "This illusion of appearance and costume is necessary . . . [and] should be done by means of the dialogue in a manner to stimulate the listener's imagination" (56–57).

He argued that dramatic action is better than witty dialogue: "I started out with the theory that plays which depended mainly on witty dialogue and very little on action would be more intelligible to the listener and so be more successful. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that the contrary was the case" (57).

It could be argued that Lea had an holistic multi sensory recommendation for playwrights conjuring the color, smell, touch, and texture of their characters' experiences. He was enthusiastic about establishing speed and distance through movement—known as kinesics (speed) and proxemics (distance) in drama (62–64). It might also be argued that Lea was rather postmodernist during a modernist time by articulating the radio drama experience as an embodiment of the relationship between performance and listening participation. There is something phenomenological about his observation that "by the very fact that the listener is called upon to give so much of his own personality to the radio-play is his enjoyment and appreciation of it intensified . . . and he gains through the medium of the human voice a mental pageantry of color and delight which no artist in the world can emulate" (71).

When discussing the technique of radio actors, Lea recognized that voice acting requires absolute control of the voice, and actors need to concentrate their thinking behind the voice enunciation and expression. Lea emphasized that in radio acting, the performer needs to concentrate on "his thinking and the regulation of his consciousness . . . his aim must be to radiate personality—the personality of his particular part—to convey atmosphere by co-operation with other radiating personalities and to do all this through the medium of the voice" (75–79).

## Phonographic Context and Erasing the Role of Innovation by Women Writers

Lea's book was strong on rhetoric but very short on successful examples of sound play that demonstrated how to write and produce for the new medium. It ignored the decades of successful sound montage and word-based drama developed by the phonograph industry through short descriptive sketches. Productions of *The Departure of a Troopship* (from 1902) and *The Battle of the Marne* (1914) by Russell Hunting, and Major A. E. Rees's *On Active Service* series for Columbia (1917) had pioneered sound-led dramatic exposition through self-contained montage and, indeed, in the case of *On Active Service*, an origination of the sound drama serial across six episodes.

The book failed to recognize that it was a woman writer, Phyliss M. Twigg, who had inaugurated and authored "the first specially written wireless play, *The Truth about Father Christmas*" (Burrows 1924: 74), which was performed live in the London studio of the BBC's London radio station 2LO at 5 p.m. on Christmas Eve 1922. Her script has not survived and there was certainly no sound of the production ever archived. However, the script of the first full studio production of a modern and original stage play from a BBC studio has survived. This was the achievement of another woman writer, Gertrude E. Jennings. *Five Birds in a Cage* may have been the first play to be broadcast from a BBC studio that was not Shakespeare, on November 29, 1923, but more importantly, it is clear from its previous provenance and content why it should have been discussed as writing that engaged so effectively with the listener's imagination. This one-act farce featuring five people trapped in a London Underground lift was later described as "brilliant" by the *Radio Times* in 1934: "possibly the best ever written by the best-known writer of one-act plays of modern times. It sparkles with wit and draws character with a deft hand" (Jennings 1934: 46). Lea utterly failed to recognize why a play originally produced at the London Haymarket Theatre for a special matinée in 1915 continued there in the evening bill for a further 285 consecutive performances and became one of the BBC's most popular radio plays.

Later histories on BBC Radio Drama and BBC History, all written by men, would perpetuate the trope that a male dramatist, Richard Hughes, originated the first successful play specially written for radio (Gielgud 1957: 20). Intriguingly, his script, *Danger*, seemed inspired by Gertrude Jennings's exploration of the comedy of trapping characters in a claustrophobic situation—in his case, it was a coal mine. *Danger* would subsequently have its canonization further confirmed by a production of the Columbia Radio Workshop live on CBS in the US in 1936.

## Advice for Radio Dramatists—Experts 1926 to 1934

In 1931, Tyrone Guthrie engaged thoughts about the microphone play with an introduction to the publication of three of his works written specifically for the medium. *Squirrel's Cage*, *Matrimonial News*, and *Flowers Are Not For You to Pick* were intended to be experimental, and he hoped "that they may have something to say" (Guthrie 1936: 8). He wrote that though the radio broadcast play is denied "all these sensual sops to Cerberus . . . the mind of the listener is the more free to create its own illusion" (8). Guthrie echoed Lea when he wrote:

Because its pictures are solely of the mind, they are less substantial but more real than the cardboard grottoes, the calico rosebuds, the dusty grandeur of the stage; less substantial and vivid, because not apprehended visually, more real because the impression is partly

created by the listener himself. From the author's clues the listener collects his materials, and embodies them in a picture of his own creation. It is therefore an expression of his own experience—whether physical or psychological—and therefore more real to him than the ready-made picture of the stage designer. (9)

Guthrie appreciated as a writer that the listener's impressions of the microphone play were more intimate and more subtle when received privately at home and "not coarsened by being flung into an auditorium, where individuals are fused together into one mass, which becomes a single crowd personality, easily swayed to laughter or tears, but incapable of the minute pulsations of feeling, the delicate gradations of thought which each member of the crowd experiences when alone" (Guthrie 1936: 10). The deployment of the developing multiple-studio technique in *Squirrel's Cage*—one for the actors, one for the chorus, one for the "noises," and one for the orchestra, all balanced by a mixing control panel—would bring to the sound play the effect of superimposed photography in films and endures in present-day technology through digital multitracking.

In 1933, the second BBC director of productions, Val Gielgud, like Guthrie, offered a triple bill of his own plays, but his introduction was rather apologetic and defensive. He described the radio play as the Cinderella of drama and an "infant in arms" (Gielgud 1933: 11) compared to stage theater. In the *How to Write Broadcast Plays* introduction, he devoted many paragraphs to emphasizing that his own plays included were not "artistic masterpieces" and were interesting more for "their shortcomings than for their merits" (Gielgud 1933: 13).

In contrast, Lance Sieveking's 1934 *The Stuff of Radio* was an explosion of creativity. He positively raged against Tyrone Guthrie's tendency to interpolate his reflections on the status of radio drama with an expression of stage theater's lack as an art form. As for his BBC colleague Val Gielgud's book *How to Write Broadcast Plays*, he found "a great many things with which I disagree violently. But that is only natural, for in life I disagree with him on almost every subject, even about the desirability of being alive at all" (Sieveking 1934: 57). Sieveking picked apart and debunked practically every aspect of Gielgud's guide to writing radio drama, but the essence of their cultural divide can be best explained in their respective attitudes to the role of the mixing desk, introduced to the BBC in the late 1920s, which was somewhat grandiloquently named "The Dramatic Control-Panel." Sieveking growled: "He thinks the instrument should be 'operated,' I think that it should be 'played'" (58).

Sieveking was an evangelist for sound drama in the context of modernism to break out of any prescribed literate straitjacket. Gielgud and other authors advising on a utilitarian approach to writing audio drama discouraged any scripting of the radiophonic or audiogenic—those aspects of sound-based drama that are artistically special and expressive of the sound medium. Sieveking (1934) conjured a new lexicon for writing the sound drama creatively and effectively: The Realistic, Confirmatory Effect; The Realistic, Evocative Effect; The Symbolic, Evocative Effect; The Conventionalized Effect; The Impressionistic Effect; and Music as an Effect (66). Sieveking argued that "It is axiomatic that every Sound Effect, to whatever category it belongs, *must* register in the listener's mind instantaneously. That is one of the primary considerations which should weigh with authors and producers continually" (66). Sieveking makes sound effects and music as much the artistic responsibility of the radio playwright as the director, producer, or sound designer, should any production have the luxury of all these additional roles.

Sieveking (1934) developed Gordon Lea's discussion when he led with the assertion at the beginning of his chapter 8, "Writing for the Microphone": "The art of writing plays for the wireless medium is an art, the practice of which may be treated in the same general terms as any other art,



since it is subject to the same aesthetic and emotional laws as any other art" (74). Sieveking tore up the terms and conditions approach of writing radio plays:

To begin at the beginning: the radio dramatist must ask himself, what are all the things that people see subconsciously? In his play, what are the things which, not seeing, they will desire to see? What are the things which, desiring to see, they *will*, in some form, see? Helped and prompted by him, to what degree? And the degree of his mastery of the technique by means of which those problems can be solved, may be estimated by the degree in which not only he but his audience is unaware of its presence. (74)

Sieveking explained that the radio dramatist is more like the composer of music rather than a novelist or stage playwright: "He *hears* what he writes, conceives and works out his play before his mind's ear. He is more like the composer than the theater playwright in this respect, for whereas the theater playwright has to see his play as it goes along and hear it also, the radio dramatist and the musician are dealing only with things to be heard" (74). Sieveking excitedly enthused that the radio dramatist has by far the greater orchestra to write for since the field of expression is not only the tone, pitch, volume, timbre, and general character of musical instrumentation but words and "every sound in the world which may be taken in its original form, or imitated; which may be used realistically or in some abstract way" (75). In short, Sieveking's grand principle of audio drama writing was that the world is your audience and orchestra, and this is an open-ended phenomenon.

#### The Missing Links: Modernist Innovation, Science Fiction, and Political Drama

If Lea's text can be criticized for being suffused with a surfeit of loose philosophical and poetic optimism, Gielgud, Guthrie, and Sieveking can be accused of excessive egotism and artifice. They all decided that the art of radio drama writing was best exemplified by referencing their own work, though in Gielgud's case with a disappointing mood of inferiority. Sieveking was somewhat preoccupied with impressive sonic frolicking with modernist artifice in mainly art for art's sake indulgences that tried the patience and understanding of listeners and colleagues. His most visceral and innovative writing never got to air and has largely gone unnoticed as a significant work of audio drama. This was his collaboration with the art photographer Francis Bruguière, published in book form as *Beyond This Point* in 1929, and may have been one of the first sound art installations presented in a London art gallery. Sieveking produced some of his text for phonograph playing in the exhibition, but the records he made have not survived.

His exploration of the nihilistic despair and consciousness of a man blowing his brains out with a revolver would have outraged and provoked the sensibility of BBC censors and listeners, but the challenge was never engaged. Lea, Gielgud, Guthrie, Sieveking, and all the how-to writers after them ignored the innovative and political radio drama landmarks created by Reginald Berkeley in his plays *The White Château* (1925), *The Quest of Elisabeth* (1926), and *Machines* (1927). Perhaps the origination fused with political agitation was too hot to handle, with the last being the most brilliant and significant play to challenge the failures of capitalism and the machine age. *Machines* was favorably compared with Fritz Lang's expressionist science fiction film *Metropolis*. Berkeley made sure it was published, like his two previous BBC plays, for the microphone, as radio drama literature. Sadly, though produced for a few performances in a London theater club in 1931, *Machines* was censored by the BBC and Britain's then theatrical state system of blue penciling known as the Lord Chamberlain.

Successful science fiction in the audio drama format was pioneered and experimented with at the BBC during the 1920s, and this has been neglected by scholars and writers on British radio drama as well as being ignored by the how-to authors. The first director of drama productions, R. E. Jeffrey, somebody largely criticized and dismissed by radio drama scholars as failing to develop the potential of radio drama during the 1920s, appears to have been the pioneer writer and innovator in this genre. Unlike Gielgud and others, he never got around to boastfully publishing his radio playwriting as models of experimentation and accomplishment. And because of the awkwardness at the BBC about producer/directors being auteurs as well, it may well be the case that he was responsible for two important science fiction plays originally written for radio that have designated authorship, continuing his ritual of using a pseudonym.

Jeffrey wrote *Speed* under the name Charles Croker; it was broadcast April 2, 1928, and described as “A Tragi-Comic Fantasy of Gods and Mortals” and conjured “specially for radio transmission” (Croker 1928: 12). The play was scheduled in the *Radio Times* with the modernist ritual of fast racing car, aeroplane, and speedboat illustration. Jeffrey self-consciously implored the audience to be in their listening chairs and plaintively hoped: “If the author has been successful, this fantasy of the gods on high Olympus and the speed-mad, self-destructive mortals below will tell its own story in its own way” (Croker 1928: 12). It is speculative though likely that Jeffrey also wrote *The Greater Power* under the pseudonym Francis J. Mott. It was broadcast September 18, 1928, and was about “a mad inventor of a death-ray such as science has only dreamed of, who from the island where he lives surrounded with strange apparatus and tended by a hunchback henchman threatens destruction to the civilized world” (Mott 1928: 26). The same can be said for *X*, by George Crayton, broadcast October 29, 1928, where “X” is the name given to an unknown radio station broadcasting the same program every night until the one occasion when it was interrupted by a desperate cry for help. The underlying theme of the play is “that unknown quality—that dangerous, incalculable ‘X’—that lurks in the machinery made by men” (Crayton 1928: 18). This is a significant pioneering canon of full-length science fiction modernist original writing specially for the radio drama medium hitherto unnoticed by radio scholars. The scripts of *Speed* and *X* have survived. Confirmation of Jeffrey’s possible authorship of all three merits further investigation.

#### Advice for Radio Dramatists—Experts 1949 to 1959

Felix Felton’s *The Radio Play* (1949) and Donald McWhinnie’s *The Art of Radio* (1959) presented radio drama as an artistic opportunity. The abiding departure and advance they both made was in presenting radio playwriting as a multiplicity of human participation on the part of writers, director/producers, performers, and listeners and embracing it as an experience. The limitations of the rhetoric of “Theater of the Mind” and “The Mind as a Stage” was that the play, which is certainly *the thing*, becomes confined or trapped in a notion of the mind rather than liberated as an experience that transcends human consciousness.

Felton was a producer, composer, teacher, and actor in the art form. His insight explained to writers what the form could aesthetically achieve by the experience of everyone involved in it. So when he observed that the “actor speaks to that microphone as if it were the ear of his listener” (Felton 1949: 10), we are inspired to reflect upon the question that actors who participate in the production are listening, too, in the radio drama studio or on location should the play be produced like film in situ. Felton used metaphor and symbol to explain an artistic and, in modern philosophical

terms, phenomenological experience. The journey from microphone to loudspeaker was a conversion of sound waves, with the speaker “like a microphone in reverse.” The waves have become “the exact replica of those which entered the microphone in the studio” (10). This metaphor can be extended to appreciate the idea of words and writing as waves and rhythm participating with the consciousness of the listener.

In Felton’s text, “the mechanics of production” were given a dramatic purpose, whereas in Gielgud’s 1948 handbook on discouragement, the writer was offered a chapter actually labelled “A Glimpse of the Machine” — that which Gielgud believes was only what the writer should be given and allowed to see. Felton (1949) enthusiastically explained in a broadcast of *Blithe Spirit*: “I gave Elvira’s voice a ghostly quality by getting her to work on a microphone of her own placed inside an opened grand piano, with the sustaining pedal pressed down, so that her voice picked up a faint aeolian rustle from the strings” (2).

It is significant that in 1949 Felton made it perfectly clear to writers that “it is also possible to record certain scenes out-of-doors or in other buildings” (Felton 1949: 2). He liberated the imprisonment of sound drama as an art form in the studio. Unlike television drama’s migration to film location and a specially constructed set, radio drama production has been largely confined to the studio, and this is true of most present-day BBC practice. There are some inspiring and elegant exceptions. The work of John Dryden at Goldhawk Productions and Roger Elsgood for Art and Adventure has been aesthetically emancipating by taking performance, production, and listener to authentic locations in recent years.

Felton (1949) described Tyrone Guthrie’s more positive and much quoted observations that listeners provide their own moonshine and make their own décor as the art of serving a writer’s radiophonic or audiogenic intention. He explained:

There was a beautiful example of this in John Cheatele’s production of a radio-play by Robert Kemp, called *The Country Mouse goes to Town*. The mouse, and his wife, find themselves in a vast metropolitan pantry, where the holes in the Gruyère cheese are as big as railway tunnels. The problem was to make the listener see the scene through a mouse’s eyes. It was swiftly done. One mouse said: “It’s so quiet in here you could hear a pin drop,” and immediately a large iron crowbar was sent crashing down upon a slab of concrete. (43)

In his chapter on “The Use of Music,” Felton urged that engaging its power for dramatic purpose must also respect the discipline of its artistic integrity. He quoted the composer Arthur Bliss, who before a meeting of radio producers advised: “If, then, they wished to quote a piece of musical prose, they would surely treat its grammar and syntax, that is to say, its phrasing, with similar courtesy” (120). In Felton’s text, the working playwright discovers that the art of music can inform the very rhythm and overall structure of the sonic prose script. In the chapter on documentary, he described how he adopted the musical *Rondo Form* for a feature about the journey of a postcard to the Orkneys: “This consists of a Principal 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” (105).

In “The Interpretation of the Script,” Felton’s experience as a radio actor and director richly informed an explanation of the necessary art of interpreting the playwright’s score, the very words upon the page: “He must broadcast, not with his voice, but with his mind. If the microphone is a lens focused on the voice, the voice is another lens focused on the speaker’s brain” (Felton 1949: 123). In the process, Felton’s interrogative checklist for the actor’s necessary imagining provides the writer with a cross-section of understanding: (a) the mental state, (b) the emotional state in which his character is involved at the time of the surprise, (c) the nature of the surprise, and, therefore, (d) the

degree of mental and emotional shock likely to be produced. Also, if he is wise, (e) he thinks backwards and forwards in continuity to help “place” his acting in proper sequence and size and shape (133). In understanding the creative art of radio acting, the radio writer better practices the art of writing.

Donald McWhinnie began by giving his 1959 volume the right title: *The Art of Radio*. He then approached the subject with broad approaches for analysis: “The Nature of the Medium,” “The Participants,” and finally, “The Art As It Exists.” All three sections were connected by analyzing the art form of radio drama as an experience and an art form that can be considered existential. He selected examples to show and play rather than tell and operate. In the process, sound storytelling becomes a narrative intertextuality. He quotes from play scripts and authors who are timeless with their artistic achievement and what can be defined as a specific literature in radio drama. The radio plays of Giles Cooper or Samuel Beckett, whom McWhinnie produced, have certainly been academically analyzed and criticized in Britain as significant literature and dramatic literature.

McWhinnie (1959) understood the synthesis of realism and surrealism in audio drama, a medium that has the potential to communicate “subtle and varied patterns, emotions and ideas” (93). He explained:

To achieve the radio “integrity” they must be blended into an artistic unity. There are no immutable rules governing this transformation, and I should not envy the new-world Aristotle who tried to extract rules from current practice. There is one simple and vital fact governing radio form, which I have already indicated: the radio act comes out of silence, vibrates in the void and in the mind, and returns to silence, like music. (93)

McWhinnie articulates a vital principle for the writer: “There is no limit to the aural magic” (108), but “the quicksand of radio lies between its need for absolute clarity and its fascinating capacity for complexity” (108). The very use of its communication means that it is not blind, but at the same time it is not solely an experience of imaginative spectacle. McWhinnie talks about the writer and creator of sound storytelling giving a “blind” medium a guiding hand so that any listener in the dark has illuminated signs put up to help him find his way, and he properly advises that the most vivid signposts will be those that simultaneously inform on character and plot without awkward superimposition (109). His quotation from Giles Cooper’s *Without the Grail* offered up an example of radio drama as significant and high-quality aural literature:

*(Fade in Car running: It slows and stops.)*

*(Pause.)*

INNES: What’s the matter?

INDIAN DRIVER: Stop to cool engine.

INNES: Okay, you’re the driver *(Pause.)* So this is the jungle.

DRIVER: Yes, all jungle here.

INNES: H’m. . . . Very dusty looking.

DRIVER: The road is making it dusty. Inside is green.

*(Pause.)*

INNES: There’s a railway line over there. Where does it go?

DRIVER: No place into the jungle, stop.

INNES: Eh? . . . Why?

DRIVER: Military reasons. Now abandoned.

INNES: Wartime?

DRIVER: Yes, wartime. In Assam there were armies all the time. Now in the jungle here live all things.

INNES: Er—animals, you mean?

DRIVER: No, *things*. Wheels and chains gone rusting. Old guns and tanks not moving. In one place were fifty thousand teeth-brush, abandoned. All Abandoned.

(Pause.)

(*Car starts and moves off. Fade out.*) (McWhinnie 1959: 52)

McWhinnie offered this extract as an opportunity to demonstrate how writing pared to the bone when performed can be so rich in overtones. In a very short period of time, heat and exhaustion permeates the world of anyone experiencing the play as a listener. We are in the location. There is insight into the leading character and there is diversion of humor and suspense in the dialogue. By the way, what do fifty thousand abandoned toothbrushes in the jungle look like? The answer is the kind of aural magic that every listener can conjure. McWhinnie explained throughout his book that the answer also lay in the experience of the radio play's happening, its very existence as an art form: "The art of radio cannot be reproduced on the page except as a pale shadow: it is as uncapturable as a half-forgotten song" (151).

Despite the large, almost industrial scale and extent of BBC production of radio plays then, and in the contemporary age, now accompanied by the online distributed podcast or *audio fiction*, McWhinnie advocated intrinsic confidence in pursuing artistic ambition for the art form rather than complacently sustaining some form of managerial and institutional survival: "For me, any radio performance which does not compel attention and belief, inevitably and irresistibly, is so much wasted effort. And better a thousand failures which try to explore new recesses of the medium than a dozen supremely competent reproductions" (182).

### The BBC's Arrogant Silo—Audio Drama Nationalism and Imperialism

The how-to texts covering this period render invisible the contribution and significance of origination audio drama authoring and production by women. There are no reference points to the work of Mabel Constanduros, who founded the sitcom in British radio with her live short story multi-voiced performances of *The Buggins Family* through the late 1920s, '30s, '40s, and '50s, until her death in 1957. She was a prolific dramatist and dramatizer. Her friend Ursula Bloom was also a significant original writer of radio drama through the 1940s, '50s, and early '60s. They worked closely with accomplished, experimental, and originating producer/directors such as Mary Hope Allen, Barbara Burnham, Nester Paine, Betty Davies, and Audrey Cameron. The significance and performance of political radio drama is another silence, despite the pioneering drama-documentary and feature output of the BBC Manchester School under the editorship of E. A. "Archie" Harding, who included the brilliant modernist verse playwright D. G. Bridson and the impactful social producer-writer team of Joan Littlewood and Olive Shapley.

I would argue that the how-to books reflect a cultural silo of arrogance. Too many of the practitioners and proponents of British radio drama were nationalistic in their creative mindset and conceived British radio drama as being a superior, almost imperialist source of authority and practice — something to be exported and taught. In the result, British audio drama writing was not fully informed or inspired by American sound dramatists such as Lucille Fletcher, whose *Hitchhiker* (1941) and *Sorry Wrong Number* (1943) were acknowledged and in one case actually reproduced as models of innovative and successful radio scriptwriting in US how-to books (Mackey 1951: 271, 378).

African and Asian writers were excluded from commissioning and production because of racism. A variety program, *The Kentucky Minstrels*, replicated the derogatory ventriloquizing of Black Americans by Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll's *Amos 'n Andy*, with the irony of actual African American performers Harry Scott and Eddie Whaley “blacking up” for BBC Radio. They were promoted as starring in a “Black-faced Minstrel Show” running from 1933 to 1949, and the *Radio Times* used the appallingly offensive N-word to promote the program when it started. If US drama was to be heard in Britain, it would be a celebration of high culture, such as Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones*, starring the British Guyanese Black actor Robert Adams in the title role (May 1937); Archibald MacLeish’s *The Fall of the City* (October 1937); or the plays written by Norman Corwin. Morton Wishengrad’s *The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto* (NBC 1943) and Langston Hughes’s *Booker T. Washington in Atlanta* (1945) have never been produced or heard on British radio though published in Erik Barnouw’s edited volume *Radio Drama in Action* in 1945. In fact, Langston Hughes’s script was commissioned by the Tuskegee Institute and CBS network but never produced because of Black-listing pressures from the House Committee on Un-American Activities starting in October 1944.

Langston Hughes’s collaboration with D. G. Bridson in 1944 on a ballad opera exploring the friendship between African Americans going to war with the people of Britain, titled *The Man Who Went to War*, was produced from New York and live broadcast by shortwave to listeners in Britain; it has been archived by the Library of Congress. It would appear to be the first original play by a Black American writer to be heard in Britain and was certainly celebrated as a significant cultural and artistic event in the development of radio drama by D. G. Bridson in his autobiography, *Prospero and Ariel* (Bridson 1971: 109–12).

US scholars of radio drama recognize that Richard Durham at NBC’s WMAQ in Chicago originated and wrote the series *Destination Freedom*, with the scripting and production of ninety-one episodes between 1948 and 1950. The series dramatized Black achievers such as Sojourner Truth, Denmark Vesey, Ida B. Wells, Ralph Bunche, and indeed, Langston Hughes. One episode, *The Heart of George Cotton*, was reproduced for the CBS Radio Workshop in 1957 and won a national award. It has been accepted that *Destination Freedom* is a significant series and event in US radio drama history, but, in my opinion, it needs to be elevated and recognized as one of most important audio drama achievements in world radio history. Durham’s achievement and output transcends any pigeonholing or ghettoization as one of the important Black American writers. He is one of the world’s most outstanding dramatists across all media par excellence.

The publication and appreciation of fifteen of his scripts by Professor J. Fred MacDonald in 1989 began to amplify that the radio world had its middle twentieth-century equivalent of William Shakespeare toiling in Chicago’s Bronzeville (MacDonald 1989; Williams 2015). There are no authors in the English-speaking world who have researched and written this breadth, depth, and quality of drama that addresses so many key aspects of the human condition. Durham’s output was the equivalent of over thirty full-length stage plays or films. Their appeal, relevance, and thematic interest extends beyond Black American history to what were also at the time of writing and

production key and urgent matters of world current affairs. He combined history, art, journalism, culture, politics, human rights, and drama to make a contribution in storytelling that had impact and represents a milestone in the literature of human struggle and progress.

In technique and artistic and literary expression, he demonstrated, advanced, and enhanced the creative possibilities of the audio drama genre. In *The Heart of George Cotton* (1948), Durham gave characterization and voice to the human heart, and this offered a unique creative perspective on the medical technique in surgery pioneered by Drs. Williams and Dailey. Durham also orchestrated the rhythm of heartbeats with cross-fading and coruscating of dialogue in different languages to bring a global outlook and understanding of the story. *Anatomy of an Ordinance* (1949) dramatized the struggle by Alderman Archibald Carey to improve housing conditions, and Durham characterized with voice and political and philosophical ontology the force of the Chicago slums. He made them metaphysical, gave them a single personality and a consciousness that became menacing, cunning, and the force of indifference, cynicism, injustice, and indeed evil. His ability to invest dramatic identity, characterization into inanimate forms, musical instruments, and social and biophysical phenomena shows how his understanding of the radio dramatic medium was supreme and originally creative. Durham could write for sonic imaginative reception and understood the phenomenology of the listener. His writing art in the sound medium was utterly exceptional, varied, and wide-ranging. The life of Louis Armstrong would resonate through the jazz characterization of trumpet sound; the story of baseball player Satchell Paige would be centered with musical exposition through folk ballad by Oscar Brown Jr. Now is the time to liberate the curriculum of radio and audio drama writing and scholarship to reference and draw inspiration from Durham's work.

#### Advice for Radio Dramatists—Experts 1985 to Present Day

William Ash's *The Way to Write Radio Drama*, published in 1985, set the scene for a series of books that to the present day explain and assert a confidence and explanation of how to achieve the best possible in a dramatic form now fast approaching its British centenary if we take the BBC's London station 2LO in the early 1920s as the starting point. His structured journey picks up on practical and theoretical concerns originated by Gordon Lea in 1926, Lance Sieveking in 1934, Felix Felton in 1949, and then Donald McWhinnie in 1959: Narrative and Dramatic form (Lea's self-contained or narrative play); The Nature of Radio Drama Compared with Visual Drama; Beginning the Radio Play; Characters, Dialogue, Sound Effects, and Music; Radio Drama Construction; The Script of Your Radio Play and What Happens to It; and Some Radio Plays. He finished with a few pages looking at other forms of radio dramatic writing in adaptation, features, and serials and politically discussed radio drama's future in the cultural and media industrial context. Intriguingly, one of the subtopics was "radio drama on cassette," a technological form now long redundant, though being independent of radio transmission and providing the listen-again performance of literature. This section in a way did prophesize the potential of internet plays and podcasting.

Ash's curriculum dovetails with critical narratology of drama and literature. It is not difficult to pinpoint and relate his advice on how to write radio plays with the theories of focalization (Bal 1996: 115–28), Ricœur's thoughts on "The Time of Narrating and Narrated Time" (Bal 1996: 129–44), and Hayden White's "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" (Bal 1996: 273–85). Ash (1985) shows precision in his highlighting of post-structuralist, textual, and narrative possibilities in audio drama through his consideration of Harold Pinter's *A Slight Ache*:

Listening to this play we have no difficulty in accepting that the old match-seller is not only a figment of the husband's and wife's imagination but also that this same fantastic creature is, at once, the shabby, menacing figure that threatens to replace the man and the sexually attractive figure that appeals to the woman; and furthermore, that man and woman have called this shadowy being into monstrous life by digging, under the most civil and urbane surface, into each other's and their own subconscious. Such a creature, the produce of the author's, the character's and our own imagination, all in dramatic relationship with each other, cannot be reproduced in any other medium—as attempts to stage this play have shown. (3)

Ash was the first how-to author to reference women radio dramatists and include extracts from plays by Rose Tremaine, Shirley Gee, Fay Wheldon, Gaie Houston, and Jennifer Philips, and he also discussed Bloke Modisani's *The Quarter Million Boys* as an example of how radio drama can deploy ridicule as a weapon in political writing that denounces racist tyranny (Ash 1985: 116). As a dramatist himself, he was the first writer to adapt some of the leading novels of Nobel Prize-winning Nigerian author Chinua Achebe for BBC Radio production with *Things Fall Apart* in 1984 and *Anthills of the Savannah* in 1995.

The future direction of academic and aesthetic analysis in Great Britain seems to be in the growth of synoptic practice and theoretical writing, with the intention of establishing a symbiotic relationship of theory informing practice and vice versa. That was certainly the intention of Crook's *Radio Drama: Theory and Practice* (1999), which predicted the potential of audio drama by internet and online distribution, and engaged narratological literary studies to the potential practice of ironic transposition in audio drama writing. Rattigan's *Theatre of Sound: Radio and the Dramatic Imagination* (2002) explored the interdisciplinary possibilities of studying the medium. A consideration of his diagram on "Transcodification of textual codes through performance and production into aural codes" (Rattigan 2002: 9) offered a remarkable diagrammatic representation of the relationship between playwright and listener as well as discussing the complexity of the bridging journey between audio-dramatic text and audio-performance text.

Guralnick retrieved Gordon Lea's appreciation of radio drama's potential as poetic literature in her 1996 study of Beckett, Pinter, Stoppard, and other contemporary dramatists on radio, *Sight Unseen*. She saw a constellation of dramatic expression that challenged the radio play in its ability to represent the visual, realized its limitation as an imperfect eye, celebrated its musical dimension, occupied and performed comfortably as the theater of the mind, and undoubtedly existed as a more worldly phenomenon linking the experience of the writer, producer, performer, and listener:

From the delicatest ear in the mind of a playwright, a radio play repeats words as that ear wants to hear them: articulated, inflected, hence powerfully animated, yet safe from eclipse by theatrical apparatus. And at the sound of these words, an invisible audience listens intently, not only to the play but also to itself as expressed in the play's events and gestures, which perforce bear the stamp of whoever envisions them. Thus do the audience and the playwright become one, united in their effort to realize a work that, existing as a mutual "act of the mind," is what Stevens [a reference to Wallace Stevens's 1942 poem "Of Modern Poetry"] denominates poetry. (Guralnick 1996: 192)

Dr. Paula Knight in her 2006 thesis "Radio Drama: Sound, Text, Word; Bakhtin and the Aural Dialogue of Radio Drama" related the medium to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, polyphony, and heteroglossia. More recently, Dr. Farokh Shirazi (2018a, 2018b) has been investigating phenomenological understanding of intensively realized contemporary podcast audio fiction and the



problem of what he calls a “semantic paradigm” in critically accounting and evaluating radio/audio drama’s practice. Shirazi has successfully investigated how past practitioners and critiques of the medium have been hidebound by an over-preoccupation with visual metaphors for what is a listening experience. His development and expression of an original phenomenological discourse informs creatively about the artistic potential of podcast production of what has been regarded as radio drama, but may now require a new definition that combines sound and fictional storytelling with listen-again properties.

### Decolonizing the Curriculum

Claire Grove and Stephen Wyatt’s *So You Want to Write Radio Drama?* (2013) is regarded as the current go-to book and essential guide for aspiring sound and radio dramatists in the UK. The authors are rightly highly respected and award-winning practitioners in their field, underpinned with the authority of their outstanding BBC careers. They selected six landmark radio plays for reading and listening: *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells, adapted by Howard Koch and Orson Welles (CBS 1938); *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas (BBC 1954); *Albert’s Bridge* by Tom Stoppard (BBC 1967); *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams (BBC 1978); *Cigarettes and Chocolate* by Anthony Minghella (BBC 1988); and *Spoonface Steinberg* by Lee Hall (BBC 1997). Few would argue this selection of worthy and significant canons of radio drama history.

Unfortunately, their ethnicity, class, and social and cultural hierarchy strikes the soundings of privilege. They are all high-achieving and elitist white men. Future how-to discussion and audio dramatic narratological scholarship needs to cast a much wider investigative, culturally expansive, and theoretically progressive approach. Much more needs to be done to elevate writing and production that has been neglected and gone unrecognized and analyzed in the past. Present BBC output now celebrates a mainstream of audio dramatic writing by Black and Asian playwrights such as Bonnie Greer, Winsome Pinnock, Kwame Kwei-Armah, Roy Williams, Lenny Henry, Benjamin Zephaniah, and Tanika Gupta. These and others are multiple new voices advancing and experimenting through the medium with new and thought-provoking political and sociopsychological imperatives, and exciting and innovative transcultural and sonic rhythms of speech and communication.

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