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**Radio Texts: The Broadcast Drama of Orson Welles, Dylan Thomas, Samuel Beckett, and Tom Stoppard**

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**Radio Texts: The Broadcast Drama of Orson Welles, Dylan Thomas,  
Samuel Beckett, and Tom Stoppard**

**by**

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Radio drama developed as a genre as new media proliferated and challenged the cultural primacy of print. The methods of production and distribution and the literary genres that developed during the age of print provided models for radio playwrights to follow but also cultural forces for them to challenge. This dissertation considers these dual influences of print on the radio drama of four playwrights: Orson Welles, Dylan Thomas, Samuel Beckett, and Tom Stoppard. Each playwright “remediates” the printed page in radio plays by adapting or evoking the form of various literary texts, including novels (Welles), travel writing (Thomas), diaries and transcribed speech (Beckett), and historical writing (Stoppard). By representing written texts in an electronic, primarily oral medium, these authors examined the status of literary expression in an age of ascendant electronic media. Welles’s *The War of the Worlds* and *Huckleberry Finn*, Thomas’s *Under Milk Wood* and other broadcasts, Beckett’s *Rough for Radio II* and

*Embers*, and Stoppard's *In the Native State* highlight defining features of the print tradition and reveal how practices of writing and "reading" changed in the radio environment. These plays suggest that radio prompted writers to reconsider the literary author's creative role, the text's stability, and the audience's interaction with the work. "Radio Texts" ultimately argues, therefore, that radio drama's significance transcends its place in media history and dramatic criticism; the works I examine also point to radio plays' important role in authors' re-evaluation of literary expression in a changing twentieth-century media ecology.

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## **Introduction: Radio Voice and Radio Text**

Discussing his 1991 radio play *In the Native State*, Tom Stoppard lamented the limitations of dramatic form. Reflecting on his attempt in the play to explore the complexities of the colonial past and post-colonial present in India and England, Stoppard told an interviewer that a play is not “the best place” to weigh the complex “arguments and counterarguments” about imperialism. “One of the built-in ironies of being a playwright,” Stoppard said, “is that one is constantly trying to put into dramatic form questions and answers that require perhaps an essay, perhaps a book, but are too important and subtle, really, to have to account for themselves within the limitations of what’s really happening in the theater, which is that the story is being told in dialogue” (qtd. in Goreau 260).

The playwrights I examine in this dissertation all exhibit sentiments like the ones Stoppard expresses here: a desire to expand the capabilities of dramatic form and yoke it to the signifying resources of non-performative genres. In fact, as I argue in my chapter on *Native State*, Stoppard did manage to muster some of the resources of the book. By having one of his characters recite footnotes from an imagined book of selected letters—some of which provide historical details that help inform the “arguments and counterarguments” that Stoppard alludes to in the interview—Stoppard suggests the presence of the book in the radio play. As I explore radio plays by each of the other playwrights in this study—Orson Welles, Dylan Thomas, and Samuel Beckett—I suggest that this is a significant feature of radio drama: its ability to evoke the presence and

shaping influence of texts. By taking advantage of this ability, each playwright discovered new possibilities for dramatic form while also using the text's contingent presence in the broadcast to examine the status of traditional literary genres in an age of ascendant electronic media.

My use of the term *playwright* requires some explanation. Of the four figures I examine, only Beckett and Stoppard are conventionally considered playwrights, each having written original scripts for the theater, as well as radio, television, and film. Welles wrote at least one original stage play in his teens and wrote screenplays and some radio-play scripts. My examination of Welles's radio work, however, focuses on the adaptations of others' original works—particularly the dramatizations of *The War of the Worlds* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—for Welles's *Mercury Theatre on the Air* radio series. Most of these scripts, including the ones for *War* and *Huckleberry Finn*, were written by other scriptwriters whom Welles employed. Thomas's status as a playwright is also complicated. Like Welles, Thomas wrote many film scripts. His radio broadcasts, however, are more properly classified as “features,” a genre that employs dramatic form loosely and in conjunction with other artistic and journalistic resources such as music, narration, and interviews. Although Thomas's best known work for radio, *Under Milk Wood*, is subtitled *A Play for Voices*, it was produced by the BBC Features Department. As its producer Douglas Cleverdon reports, Thomas struggled with the work for years until he “drifted from the dramatic form [...] to the feature form” for his impression of the fictional Welsh town Llareggub (18). Therefore, Welles defies the description of *writer*, while Thomas's creations resist a classification as *plays*.

The term playwright, however, captures the formal complexity of the works I

discuss. A playwright is as much a craftsperson as a writer, as suggested by *wright*: a worker or maker. The conception of the playwright as one who makes plays by gathering and assembling a range of materials aptly describes the construction of the radio plays I study. Stoppard, as discussed above, compiled a dramatic product from dramatic form and the apparatus of a footnoted volume of letters. Each other playwright similarly playwrites by a process of compilation. Welles's most significant creation, perhaps, was his construction of a radio play format that blended a novelistic narration with dramatic enactment. By following this format, his scriptwriters dramatized novels in a way that seemed to retain many of the books' original characteristics as novels. These plays, as a result, highlighted a friction between the experiences of reading and listening. *War and Huckleberry Finn* used novelistic narration to examine not only that literary convention but also the role of radio in creating new and different communities of reader-listeners. Thomas inserted speaking texts into his features and radio talks to scrutinize a variety of written texts, from his own poetry to the genre of travel writing. By vocalizing these texts on the radio, Thomas revealed the submerged presence of writing in BBC features that purported to achieve documentary accuracy through unmediated speech. Beckett similarly focuses on the interdependence of writing and speech on the radio. Portraying painful intersections of speech and writing—such as one play's depiction of a tortured character, whose confession is transcribed by his captors—Beckett expressed doubts about the signifying potential of texts, but he also productively explored the necessary interplay of script and interpretation in dramatic performance. Each author, therefore, creates hybrid works combining dramatic form and non-dramatic, textual genres.

The “radio texts” of my title are the texts depicted in these radio plays: the novel,

poem, travel book, transcript, and annotated edition. I have taken the title from Beckett's letter to his American publisher prohibiting a theatrical adaptation of his first radio play, *All That Fall*. Beckett prohibits the adaptation because *All That Fall* is "a specifically radio play, or rather radio text, for voices, not bodies" (qtd. in Zilliacus, *Beckett* frontispiece). The formal distinction between a radio play and stage play is significant. As I will argue below, the focus on voices in radio drama paradoxically gave texts a weighty presence in radio plays. Debates over whether radio was antithetical or complementary to print culture created a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, as an oral medium, radio was seen as the antithesis of textual expression. On the other, because radio was so often defined in opposition to print, print was always present on radio, if only as the other that radio asserted its independence from. This tension between the printed text's presence and absence helps explain the force and significance of the texts in the plays that I examine. Playwrights represented texts in their plays to explore a rhetoric of radio's essential orality. This exploration was clearest in the case of Thomas's challenges to the orality-literacy binary that BBC features tended to enforce. Thomas's engagement with the feature genre illustrates one effect of radio texts: they encourage reflection on the medium of radio and its dramatic genres. A second effect is encouraging reflection on the radio text itself. For example, the recreated novels in Welles's plays occasioned re-examinations of not only the novel's narrative form but also the figure of the novelist. Thomas scrutinized travel writing, Stoppard historiography, and Beckett playtexts. Thus, on the one hand, the radio texts in these plays facilitated experiments with dramatic form. On the other, as familiar literary genres transplanted into unfamiliar contexts, they allowed the playwrights to examine those genres afresh.

## RADIO AND THE REMEDIATED TEXT

By representing texts within their plays, each of these authors practiced remediation, media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's term for "the representation of one medium in another." A familiar example of remediation in literature is ekphrasis—representing visual art in literature, as in the description of Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* in W.H. Auden's poem "Musée des Beaux Arts." As well as a description of such formal characteristics, remediation is a theory of how people make sense of new media by comparing them to older, more familiar ones (45). As I have suggested, this is a significant feature of the radio drama I explore—their tendency to draw comparisons to print expression.

Welles's adaptations of novels for *The Mercury* illustrate the type of remediation that I examine in the following chapters. As Bolter and Grusin write, adapting a work from one medium to another does not in itself constitute remediation. Radio plays, films, and other new-media works frequently adapt novels without "any overt reference to the novel on which they are based." In such cases, "[t]he content has been borrowed"—the plot, character, and settings—"but the medium has not been appropriated or quoted" (44). A work becomes a remediation when it overtly appropriates another medium, and in the *Mercury* productions that I examine, Welles not only adapted novels' plots but also quoted the novel genre's form, creation, and material qualities as a printed text. In his production of *War*, the infamous first act with its fake newscast is followed by a second act in which a narrator first appears "set[ting] down [...] notes on paper" about the Martian invasion and ends the play in his "peaceful study [...] writing down this last

chapter” on the war’s resolution. As I discuss in the second chapter, this remediation of the memoir and novel replicates a similar remediation in the source text, in which H.G. Wells employs newspaper headlines and articles to create an impression of frenzied activity during London’s evacuation. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Welles remediates the novel genre and the material book more directly than in *War* by discussing Mark Twain’s creation of the novel and calling attention to the book’s title page. He then carries on a dispute throughout the play with the actor playing Huck over who will read the narration. By employing these devices, Welles’s play not only tells the story contained in Twain’s novel but also cites the novel’s generic and textual conventions: its use of first-person narration and its paratextual components.

By remediating these texts, Welles’s plays, like the others included in this study, function according to the “double logic of remediation” by which new media alternately obscure and emphasize their mediation of the world (Bolter and Grusin 5). One component of this double logic is an ideal of “immediacy” that new-media artists seek to achieve by presenting illusions of unmediated reality. Artists have sought immediacy through techniques such as perspective painting and media like photography that impress viewers with their apparently objective visual representations. In contrast to these artistic practices that provide illusions of immediacy, another tradition offers not immediacy but “hypermediacy,” the other half of remediation’s double logic. Hypermediacy characterizes collage, for example. Viewers are aware of a collage’s mediation of reality, its hypermediacy, as they might not be when viewing a single photograph. The photographic portrait may be seen as an objective, transparent, unmediated depiction of a person, but a collage openly mediates reality through its heterogeneous materials and the

artist's obvious manipulation of them. This is not to say that a photograph is more accurate or provides a less mediated experience than collage, but only to distinguish between how viewers experience the two types of visual art. The double logic of remediation suggests that media products often are not characterized by either immediacy or hypermediacy alone. Indeed, Bolter and Grusin suggest that collage combines elements of immediacy and hypermediacy. The viewer oscillates between "looking at" the collage's assembled objects as a diverse collection of media and "looking through" those materials to see what they depict (41). The paradox of remediation is that works may present impressions of immediacy through hypermediacy. This can be the case with windowed computer displays that remediate multiple media. A computer desktop may contain separate windows with text, still images, moving video, and sound, and the computer user can cycle through these windows or experience them simultaneously in separate sectors of the screen. Each window individually may seem to offer transparent, immediate depictions of reality—in, for example, a streaming video of a live sporting event—but the windows themselves foreground hypermediacy by making users aware of the computer's mediation of what is represented. Experiences of hypermediacy like this, even while they "multiply the signs of mediation" and thus emphasize one's distance from immediate experience, nonetheless promise immediacy by "reproduc[ing] the rich sensorium of human experience" through their diversity of mediated forms (34).

Without using Bolter and Grusin's terminology throughout this dissertation, I have examined how each playwright's radio drama remediates writing and texts. The double logic of remediation helps explain not only the effect of radio texts in these plays but also the greater cultural and institutional contexts behind these remediations. The

remediation of an older medium in a newer one often serves an argument that the newer medium can provide previously unattainable levels of immediacy. Beginning at least in the 1930s, broadcasters frequently depicted radio programs in opposition to the older medium of print, with sound being figured as more natural and immediate than print's mediated expression. The next section will explore some of these arguments for radio's greater immediacy compared to the printed page, as well as the contrary depictions of radio as a medium that in some ways reproduced the experience of reading.

### **RADIO AND THE PRINTED PAGE**

In *Print and the Poetics of Modern Drama* (2005), William B. Worthen examines a preoccupation with the printed word that he finds in much twentieth-century drama. Worthen writes that drama has always been “an anomaly in print culture” because its artistic products cannot be identified completely with printed, reproducible texts (3). As Worthen writes, “[p]rint production cannot fully determine the identity of dramatic writing because drama also takes shape elsewhere, in the incommensurate practices of the stage” (5-6). Yet, Worthen argues, “dramatic performance has increasingly come to be understood on the model of print transmission” as performances are seen as “reproduction[s] or reiteration[s]” (8) of the text and playwrights increasingly use the play's published text “as an alternative and authentic site of the play's identity as a play” (9). Worthen suggests, therefore, that these two identities of the play—as text and performance—overlap, with the printform of the play “performing” for readers and performances increasingly directed by the printed text. The plays that Worthen examines self-consciously reflect on their dual identities, and Worthen argues that the plays express

“a tension, perhaps even an anxiety not only about the persistence of print, but about a persistent desire to assert print’s ongoing, changing cultural meanings relative to the embodied regimes of performance” (156).

I would argue that radio drama, even more than the theatrical drama that Worthen examines, reveals these cultural tensions between anxiety over print’s persistence and a desire to assert its ongoing cultural significance. Radio drama, like stage drama, has a dual identity on the printed page (the script and, occasionally, a published text) and in performance. Yet radio has intensified the perceived distance between these two identities because radio’s orality has so often been understood in opposition to print. In this section I will explore an ongoing tension between denying and acknowledging the shaping influence of print on broadcasting—a tension with great significance for radio plays that remediate literary texts.

An American radio play, *Public Domain* (1937), illustrates how radio was portrayed as an innovative and valuable medium because it departed from characteristics of print culture. Broadcast on CBS’s *Columbia Workshop* program and written by English-born actor Eustace Wyatt (then acting in the United States, where he would soon appear in stage and radio plays with Welles’s Mercury Theatre), the play dramatizes a fantasy in which entry into the public domain frees the characters of classic literature from the books that had bound them. As an announcer explained before the play began,

At some time or other, everyone has felt a keen desire to change his luck, to break away from his accustomed routine and embark on an entirely new mode of living. For the purpose of our story, we assume that this same urge is felt by characters who are purely fictitious and that the immortals of

literature who exist only between the well-worn covers of books yearn for release from monotony, even as you and I.

Wyatt's play remediates the medium of the book by not only adapting characters from classic fiction but also quoting the medium, describing the "well-worn covers of books" from which the characters have sprung. This depiction of the aged book suggests that radio, more than copyright law, has freed the characters and enabled their "entirely new mode of living." Depicting old, faded, worn texts was a common trope in the 1930s and 1940s for representing radio's greater immediacy. American radio playwright Norman Corwin's 1941 play *We Hold These Truths*, for example, which dramatizes the American Constitution's ratification, contrasts the document's current state—"the manuscript is aging, [...] its words are worn as though from use. The writing's dim"—with the play's action, which returns listeners to the pre-ratification period, when the document "was shining parchment—when the text was easier to read—when the ink was not yet dry" (Corwin 60). Such tropes did not simply serve radio writers' and performers' self-promotion; they also expressed a common view of radio's greater immediacy in comparison to print. Writing in 1945 about radio's potential role in education, William B. Levenson expressed this view; citing *We Hold These Truths* as a model of historical representation, Levenson wrote that "[c]old print could not have created so keen a feeling of participation" as Corwin's play did (8).

According to Jonathan Sterne, sound reproduction technologies like radio have inspired such enthusiasm because of what he calls the "Christian theology of listening" (14). Sterne describes a "sprit/letter distinction in Christian spiritualism" that derived from Plato's *Phaedrus* and has been transmitted through the Gospel of John and the

writings of St. Augustine (16). According to this distinction, “The spirit is living and life-giving—it leads to salvation. The letter is dead and inert—it leads to damnation. Spirit and letter have sensory analogues: hearing leads a soul to spirit, sight leads a soul to the letter” (16). This binary of hearing-spirit and sight-letter explains why performances on radio, even more than those on stage, have been seen in opposition to writing. One of radio’s earliest theorists, German media critic Rudolf Arnheim, defined radio through this sight-sound binary, writing in *Radio* (1936) that the medium’s “specialties [...] of expression” depend on its “presentation of the aural without the visual” (276), and the theological tone of his analysis is clear in his much-quoted speculation that radio could make listeners “feel [them]selves back in that primeval age when the word was still sound, the sound still word” (35). Belief in the spoken word’s primacy—critiqued as “logocentrism” by Jacques Derrida (3)—endured in appraisals of radio decades after Arnheim’s pronouncement. Thus, Charles Parker, a producer of a sub-genre of features called the “radio ballad,” which compiled recordings of non-professionals singing and telling stories, claimed in the 1960s that his programs were “reasserting oral tradition after five centuries of submergence by the printed word” (qtd. in Whitehead 124). Parker’s celebratory tone echoes a similar proclamation in 1933 from BBC Talks Department director Hilda Matheson, who evoked the Christian spirit/letter binary when writing that “[b]roadcasting is clearly rediscovering the spoken language, the impermanent but living tongue, as distinct from the permanent but silent print” (74). Both Parker and Matheson implicitly associate speech with natural, immediate communication, which has been suppressed by print. Both also elide the mediation of radio by focusing on print as the imposed form of mediation and (radio) speech as the

natural, unmediated state.

These views of radio and print's dichotomous relationship naturally led to studies of the new medium's impact on literacy and literary expression. Titles of several such studies from the 1940s—*Radio and Reading* (1941), *Radio and Poetry* (1949), *Radio and English Teaching* (1941), and *Radio and the Printed Page* (1940)—convey the then-insistent questions concerning radio's influence on existing cultural institutions and values. In *Radio and the Printed Page*, Princeton University psychologist Paul Felix Lazarsfeld explored whether radio might fulfill the same informational and pedagogical functions that print historically had. At times, Lazarsfeld produces versions of the logocentric discourse that I explore above. In one passage, Lazarsfeld considers radio's ability to educate a type of person for whom reading is a burden; such a reader, Lazarsfeld writes, "is like a person learning a foreign language who must pay so much attention to the mere act of translation that he can give little attention to what he reads as literature. Thus reading becomes less efficient than listening, in terms of the final purpose of engaging in the act of communication" (140). In Lazarsfeld's description, listening provides immediate access to information, which reading makes available only in mediated form; as Lazarsfeld's translation metaphor suggests, to get at the information in printed texts, readers must first decode this mediated form. Elsewhere, however, Lazarsfeld draws parallels between reading and listening, challenging the view that print mediates information and experience more than radio does. Discussing the comments made by two groups of participants in a survey—one of which reported preferring radio listening, and the other reading—Lazarsfeld wrote that the two groups "speak in similar terms about their subjective reactions to two media which are *physically different* but

*psychologically equivalent* for the two groups” (144; emphasis added). Lazarsfeld notes that people who preferred listening to the radio over reading said they felt more absorbed in and convinced by what they heard than by what they read, and those who preferred reading reported experiencing printed material in similar ways. Seeing that radio and print, though physically different, could yield psychologically equivalent experiences, Lazarsfeld essentially argues against seeing radio through the perspective of technological determinism—the view that technologies have essential characteristics and will influence society in inevitable ways. Noting that print “did not raise the intellectual standard of living just because it was invented” but rather because it was used by schools and promoted by other cultural institutions, Lazarsfeld writes that, similarly, “serious broadcasting will have to become linked with the whole plexus of educational and cultural institutions before it can contribute substantially to the enlightenment of the American community” (46).

As the BBC and American radio networks deployed the medium in concert with civic and cultural institutions, radio’s interdependence with print became clear. Both American and British broadcasters produced programs that supplemented students’ reading in school, and the broadcasters also frequently produced their own printed materials to complement on-air offerings. Lazarsfeld wrote that “serious” programs often provided printed materials related to the programs’ content. The program *Town Meeting of the Air*, for example, encouraged group listening and discussion by sending listeners packets of materials with information about upcoming programs, a handbook for discussion leaders, a pamphlet on methods of discussion, and a book describing the aims and operations of *Town Meeting* (111-12). The coordination of such programs and their

supporting materials illustrates the complex modes of communication that radio fostered, which included simulated and actual personal communication (the broadcast simulacrum of the town hall meeting and the optional discussion group) mediated by oral and written content. A broadcast, consequently, was not always experienced as an independent entity but often had an extended or expanded existence in print. The BBC's periodical *The Listener* published many of the talks that the corporation broadcast, along with articles written for the magazine. Occasionally plays and other popular broadcasts were published in other periodicals, as excerpts of *Milk Wood* were in two issues of *The Observer* shortly after the play's first broadcast. These examples of print and listening complementing each other suggest a situation less like the radical break from the print tradition and phenomenology suggested by theorists like Arnheim and producers like Parker and more like a germinal version of what Henry Jenkins calls "convergence culture": "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (2).

The next section will discuss some of the formal characteristics of radio drama that inspired comparisons between radio plays and some literary genres. In considering radio drama form, however, it is important to remember Lazarsfeld's observations about institutions' influence on the form and uses of broadcasts. While each of the playwrights I examine experimented with radio drama's formal capabilities, they also attended to the institutional contexts in which they worked. Welles turned his focus on the radio network and newscast in *War* and the radio celebrity (a role he filled aptly) in

*Huckleberry Finn*. While participating in programs broadcast both domestically and internationally, Thomas reflected on how features like his both projected the culture of London around the world and depicted the British periphery for metropolitan listeners. Beckett's *Rough for Radio II*—with a cast of characters who have been compared to a radio studio's producer, secretary, and technician—explored the tensions between the writer and his or her collaborators, which were a persistent concern in BBC divisions, especially its Features Department. In his radio play about India, Stoppard, like Thomas, considered the BBC Foreign Service's role in projecting British culture internationally, and he compared this international broadcasting to the roles of literature and historiography in defining the relationship between colonizer and colonized.

### **RADIO PLAYS' GENERIC HYBRIDITY**

Above I have explored conflicting views of radio. Radio has alternately been seen as a break from and an interdependent part of print culture. Attempts to define radio drama as a genre have generated similar disagreement: does this product of a new medium represent a radical break from both dramatic and literary traditions, or do radio plays merely transfer elements of older genres to a new technological context? One prominent strand of radio drama criticism compares radio drama to older literary genres (most notably the novel). Proponents of such views often stress radio plays' similarity to print-based literary genres by downplaying radio drama's connections to the theatrical stage. Irish poet and BBC Drama producer Donald McWhinnie, who produced Beckett's first two radio plays, wrote in *The Art of Radio* (1959) that "the affinity between stage

drama and radio drama is superficial” (174) and instead compared the genre to prose fiction and poetry. Like the former, he wrote, radio plays evoke images for listeners rather than providing them explicitly as film and television do, and he argued that radio drama functions as “a bridge between poetry or music and reality” (37). With its foregrounding of the sound of spoken language, radio drama often inspired comparisons to poetic forms. In *Radio and Poetry*, Milton Allen Kaplan asserted that radio was connecting poetic language and dramatic form to an extent that had not been heard since the Elizabethan era (232), and Arnheim wrote that “poets should emphatically be brought into the wireless studio” (208). The novel, however, seems to have offered the most common point of comparison to the radio play genre. Critics and broadcasters have compared these two forms’ great flexibility, with the radio play’s heterogeneous use of dialogue, narration, music, and sound effects compared to the novel’s combination of dialogue and various narrative modes (first, second, and third person omniscient or limited narration). McWhinnie wrote that the novel, like the radio play, “is a free and fluid form” that “may have elements of drama and poetry in it which can effectively be resynthesized in terms of sound alone” (173; 175). Radio drama’s frequent use of narrators—an element present in the radio plays of each playwright whom I study—also prompted comparisons to novels. Ian Rodger traces the radio narrator’s origins to “the novel in the days when novels were written to be read aloud” (28). As Rodger’s comment suggests, the adaptation of the novelistic narrator from a printed to an oral form implied that a permeable boundary separated literary texts from oral performance. In a survey of classic fiction adapted for radio, Donald A. Low noted the ease with which

narrators were adapted from novels to radio plays and concluded that “[t]oo much can be made of the kinship between literary tradition and print, and of the differences sometimes alleged to amount to incompatibility between the novelist’s commitment to writing, and by implication to silent reading, and the medium of sound broadcasting” (140). As Low notes, not long before radio’s invention, Victorian writers such as Dickens had written novels with their oral performance in mind. By replicating novelistic narration, radio plays reminded listeners of this historical association between the novel and oral performance.

An alternative view, however, defined radio drama in opposition to older literary genres, and this perceived opposition could be cause for either celebration or concern. Poet Cecil Day Lewis expressed anxiety over radio drama’s break from literary tradition in a 1935 BBC radio talk titled “The Revolution in Literature.” Discussing how radio and film had begun to change writing, Day Lewis speculated on the impending effects of television and yet-unrealized electronic media:

When television is perfected—and possibly Mr. Aldous Huxley’s “feelies” introduced—they will provide us with an unreality far more unreal or a realism a hundred times more devastating than the most frenzied ambitions of the entertainment writers can rise to. I can even envisage the day when we shall put a book onto a mechanism as now we put on a gramophone record, and the whole thing will be enacted for us. Sitting in our armchairs at home, we shall see and hear and smell the author’s characters. But whether this performance could be called “literature,” or

our share in it “reading,” are questions quite beyond my reeling imagination. (*Revolution* 15)

While Day Lewis discusses media that combine sight and sound (and even other senses such as smell), he draws a key opposition between “performance,” on the one hand, and “literature” and “reading” on the other. Placed on the imagined mechanism, the book in this vision is transformed to the point of annihilation, much as it is in Wyatt’s *Public Domain*. Day Lewis’s response in this talk to the convergence of literature and new media is to shore up generic boundaries and preserve a distinct place for literary expression. Electronic media, he said, would most likely usurp the domain of “entertainment” fiction that “appeals either through a startling realism or by taking us into a world totally unreal” because “cinema and radio can already do this much better.” In response, literature would concentrate on what Day Lewis saw as its particular strengths: epic fiction and poetry (15-16).

While Lewis looked suspiciously on radio and other electronic media from a literary author’s perspective, professional BBC producers and writers celebrated a radio-driven break from literary tradition. This excitement was particularly prevalent in the Features Department, which produced the flexible genre of programs that Thomas often wrote. As mentioned above, features producers experimented with new, radio-specific forms of factual and fictional programs that combined elements of drama, music, documentary reportage, and other modes of representation. Distinguishing the feature from older forms, Laurence Gilliam, the founding director of the BBC’s Features Department, called the genre “pure radio, a new instrument for the creative writer and producer” (qtd. in Whitehead 113). Kate Whitehead writes that Gilliam’s department

prided itself on creating “a new art form specific to radio and no longer parasitic on preceding literary genres” (113). Features programs were often fictional, but the genre developed with a strong emphasis on documentary reportage. Because of the documentary emphasis of many programs, features producers often stressed the accuracy and immediacy that resulted from their programs’ lack of textual mediation. Features produced in the BBC’s various Regional Services beginning in the 1930s often presented the words of working-class and other “real men and women, in their natural setting,” as Gilliam put it (qtd. in Whitehead 115), and these programs were advertised with promises that “no BBC voice will intrude at all” and that they had been “made without script or rehearsal” (qtd. in Scannell 26, 21). Particularly as sound recording equipment became more easily portable, features producers could, in Gilliam’s words, “go direct to the source, photograph it in sound, and then edit and shape it” (qtd. in Whitehead 115).

Gilliam’s depiction of the feature’s production points to the difference between a features *producer* and a literary or dramatic *writer*. The distinction helped Gilliam and others distinguish features from older literary genres. For example, Douglas Cleverdon, who produced *Milk Wood* for Features, described the genre by portraying the typical producer as someone whose collaborative, frenetic activities contrasted starkly from an author’s solitary and leisurely work. Defining features by their currentness, Cleverdon wrote that the programs “were frequently topical and written at the last moment, or partly re-written during rehearsal. Production methods were therefore much more fluid and impromptu, and subject to alteration, as fresh ideas occurred to the producer. Consequently, even on transmission, the Programme Engineer was still subject to a running stream of directions” (qtd. in Whitehead 117). While using the terminology of

authorship to describe features' being "written" and "re-written," Cleverdon portrays this writing as so rapid and hectic that it approaches the immediacy of speech. In Cleverdon's description, the "running stream of [spoken] directions" from producer to engineer becomes the defining factor in the feature's creation; the genre thus becomes characterized by orality rather than literacy and its creator with speech rather than a literary model of composition. Whitehead notes, however, that large numbers of features producers were literary writers. As she discusses, creative writers tended to be ideal candidates for the features producer's job of selecting and "restructuring [...] material" gathered through field recordings (118). And Whitehead discusses the delicate balance between seeing features as "corporate effort[s]" that departed from literary traditions (117) and the need to recruit and retain writers, many of whom were uninterested in "drop[ping] many of their literary habits in order to create radio's own art form" (Whitehead 134). Frequently the producer's dream of a new radio-specific art form "no longer parasitic on preceding literary genres" had to accommodate the writer's competing vision of authorship, and Whitehead notes that "most of the innovative successes within Features Department were in the form of individual productions" (134) that were strongly associated with individual authors—Louis MacNeice, Joan Littlewood, Thomas, and others.

In this dissertation I have been influenced by the position that both radio drama and features contain important formal similarities to literary genres. Listeners do not experience the narrators that each playwright employs as purely oral storytellers who demonstrate radio's transcendence of the written word, though there are certainly elements of the improvisational, oral storyteller in many of them, particularly the First

and Second Voice of Thomas's *Milk Wood* and Henry of Beckett's *Embers*. Rather, these voices descend, more or less explicitly, from print-based forms—as in the cases of Stoppard's footnote-reciting professor and Welles's narrator of *Huckleberry Finn*, who alternately represents author, reader, and protagonist. And the plays represent the tension between a logocentric view of radio (as an oral medium that transcends writing) and the persistence of texts and literary models of authorship. This tension drives Beckett's *Rough for Radio II*, for example, in which the tortured character, Fox, speaks an oral narrative for Animator, who is at once a radio man (his name is a translation of the French *animateur*—a term for a radio producer) and a former book reviewer. As these playwrights draw on literary forms and represent texts in their plays, they provide evidence that “[p]rint and nonprint media evolve in mutual inextricability,” as Lisa Gitelman writes (13). This inextricability can be forgotten sometimes due to an “overemphasis” in radio theory “on the spoken qualities of transmission” (Campbell x), but it is inescapable in the works I discuss below. Each playwright worked or has worked in a wide range of performance-based and non-performance media, and each playwright's work illustrates his interest in relationships between media. Having written for a range of literary genres, each was well prepared to reflect on a new medium's contribution to literary traditions. The final section of this introduction will briefly discuss each playwright's work across media and summarize the chapters that follow.

### **THE RADIO TEXTS OF WELLES, THOMAS, BECKETT, AND STOPPARD**

The diversity of media that Welles worked in—and often mastered—is striking. His activities as a director and actor on Broadway, radio, and film are best known.

Welles also wrote an original play (an historical drama about John Brown, *Marching Song*), collaborated with English stage director Peter Brook on a CBS television adaptation of *King Lear* (1953), was a columnist for *Free World* magazine and *The New York Post* during the 1940s, and co-wrote a book on performing Shakespeare's plays, *Everybody's Shakespeare* (1934; reprinted in 1939 as *The Mercury Shakespeare*). Welles's career exhibits another feature shared by the playwrights in this study: a tendency to "translate" works between media. His adaptations of Shakespeare's plays for radio, film, television, and phonograph records provide the best example of this tendency.

Welles's *Mercury Theatre on the Air* began in a decade characterized by an intense convergence culture, as literary and other artistic works circulated among newly developed media hungry for material. An exemplary case is *The Front Page* (1929), a play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur that was quickly adapted to film (1931), radio (1937 on *Lux Radio Theatre*), and television (1945). The play's cinematic adaptation was also an example of a common form of remediation in the 1930s and 1940s: the "newspaper picture," which revolved around news reporting and reporters (*Citizen Kane* is one of many examples from the period). The 1930s and early 1940s in the United States comprised a period of great media convergence, and this period in Great Britain was similarly defined by increasing "intertextuality between writing and the media" (K. Williams ix). Given the significance and volume of literature-media convergence in this period, I have seen fit to devote my first three chapters to Welles's adaptations of literary works between 1938 and 1940, which reveal the tension between radio drama's ostensible novelty and its extension of significant elements of the print tradition.

Chapter One examines Welles's answer to a question implicitly raised by Day

Lewis's "Revolution in Literature" and Wyatt's *Public Domain*: What happens to the book when it is transferred to the immaterial airwaves? Welles frequently addressed this question in the broadcasts' opening moments, when he introduced the evening's play and commented on its original literary source. I focus in this chapter on a frequent component of these introductions: Welles's brief biographical sketches of the authors whose works he and his scriptwriters adapted. By interrogating the status of "the 'author' as a determining element of literary identity"—a value Worthen associates with the rise of print (5)—Welles exposed a tension between the literary model of solitary authorship and his new-media role as a celebrity performer. Welles did this by foregrounding the construction of his own authorial performance and by reminding listeners of the collaborative efforts that produced his broadcasts. By comparing his dramatizations' collaborative creation to the products of literary factories and other collective writing projects, Welles suggested that the solitary author's identity was sometimes a convenient fiction. And by relating his radio-based oral storytelling to the public performances of actor-authors like Dickens, Welles suggested that the literary text existed not in a single, consistent form but rather in multiple textual and performative incarnations.

Chapter Two compares Welles's 1938 "panic broadcast" to its source, H.G. Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds*. On its surface, the broadcast seems to illustrate perfectly the dissolution of textual expression on radio. Hearing of Welles's translation of his story into the play's emergency-broadcast format, Wells complained that the radio adaptation had rendered his novel unrecognizable, and contemporary commentators cited reports of duped, panicking listeners as evidence of radio's visceral impact, in contrast to cold, sober print. As I discuss, however, such responses to the broadcast in its own time

and since have ignored formal and thematic similarities between the novel and its radio dramatization. If the broadcast seems to dissolve the written text in a flurry of broadcast voices, it also replicates the novel's representation of late-Victorian culture, in which accelerated communication had made many texts nearly as ephemeral as the voices emerging from the radio in Welles's day. In addition to this thematic similarity, the radio play's form is not as different from the novel's as it might seem. The first act's newscast gives way to a second act dominated by narration taken from the novel. And the play's division between the first act's newscast of events and the second act's largely interior monologue replicates the novel's alternating subjective and objective representations of events. The *War* broadcast, therefore, illustrates radio's paradoxical relationship to printed literature by seeming to destroy its source novel while replicating its form.

Novelistic form is at the center of Chapter Three, which examines another experimental dramatization with an unexpected resemblance to its source. In adapting *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Welles fragmented Twain's single, first-person narrator into multiple storytellers who compete for narrative control. In the play, as Welles playfully spars with the actor playing Huck and tries to read the novel's narration whenever possible, the play's fragmented narration can seem to alter Twain's novel radically. As in the *War* broadcast, however, underlying similarities belie the apparent differences between novel and play. I argue that the play's divided narration in fact derives from the novel's strong division between narrator and implied author. By retaining this formal characteristic of the novel, Welles also captured its moral complexity and challenged listeners' complacency concerning racial justice.

Thomas also worked in a wide range of media during his life. First published as a

poet during his teens, when he also had a short-lived career as a newspaper reporter, Thomas later worked as a screenwriter for documentary films. As his poetic output declined in his thirties, Thomas's fame increased through his reading tours in the United States, phonograph recordings of his readings, and broadcasts for the BBC. Many of his radio talks and features were occupied with a question that his public readings raised: did the identity of Thomas's poetry reside in its printed or oral form? In these broadcasts, Thomas explored the idea that radio gave a more authentic expression to poetry than print could. Thomas's broadcasts expressed his ambivalent response to this idea, and, in some of them, Thomas challenged common assumptions about the primacy and authenticity of oral expression on radio.

Chapter Four examines Thomas's nuanced view of radiophonic orality in the context of his domestic and international broadcasting. I explore Thomas's talks and features that consider the orality-literacy binary in two contexts: in relation, first, to poetic expression and, second, to the common logocentric rhetoric in documentary features. Focusing on *Milk Wood*, Thomas's most famous feature, I examine how he uses speaking texts (such as *Milk Wood*'s pompous "Voice of a Guide-Book") to challenge assumptions about speech's authenticity and thus undermine features' representation of both metropolitan London and peripheral British places.

The range of Beckett's artistic activities rivaled Welles's—he wrote scripts for radio, television, and film and also occasionally helped direct his works in the latter two media—and like Thomas he wrote poetry, novels, and short fiction. Beckett's early involvement with new media preceded by only a few years his first experiences directing his own plays, which changed his view of the relationship between a play's text and its

performance. Before directing, Beckett saw the playtext as an authoritative prescription for the performance, but as he directed his works he became open to letting the conditions of performance dictate changes to the plays. Similarly, Beckett re-imagined his plays as he adapted them from the stage to other media (or saw others' adaptations of them), and alterations to works for a new medium often influenced his subsequent stage productions. A television adaptation of Beckett's *Not I*, for example, removed one of the play's two characters—the Auditor who listens and responds to Mouth's speeches—and this character was subsequently dropped from many stage productions. As in the cases of Thomas adapting his poetry for on-air performance and Welles novels for radio dramatizations, translating works from one dramatic medium to another helped Beckett create a new work while reconsidering the original.

Chapter Five suggests that Beckett's remediation of written texts in *Rough for Radio II* and *Embers* similarly helped him revise his views on the text's authority over performance. By inserting written texts in radio plays, Beckett focused attention on intersections of writing and oral performance. These intersections of text and performance model the process of the playtext's realization through dramatic production. As I have discussed, in one of these plays the tension between text and performance is staged, so to speak, in a setting resembling a radio studio. In the other, a little book, whose appearance concludes the play, alludes to a long tradition of writers reluctantly releasing their works to the public. In both plays, Beckett explores writers' doubts about relinquishing authority over their creations. The plays, therefore, may be seen as precursors to Beckett's own gesture, in later years, of releasing his texts to the mutability of theatrical performance.

Chapter Six examines Stoppard, another writer who has worked in the theater, television, and film and has also written a novel and worked as a journalist and theater critic. Like Welles, Stoppard has often translated works between media; he has adapted others' work for the stage, radio, and film; and he has frequently adapted elements from his radio plays for later stage plays. The play that I interpret in this chapter, *In the Native State*, centers on translation—between artistic forms and cultural identities—as well as historical interpretation. Alternating between two time periods, the play's story depicts a 1930 meeting in India between an English poet and an Indian painter and a late-1980s meeting in England between the poet's sister and the painter's son. Both pairs struggle to commune across cultural differences and to agree on historical accounts of the colonial past. Linking the themes of translation and history are the footnotes of Professor Eldon Pike, mentioned above. Many critics have seen Professor Pike as primarily a comic device; indeed, his footnotes are humorously pedantic and minute in detail. But I argue that Pike's value in the play lies in his reporting historical details about the colonial past (including some that provide valuable context for the play's two interpersonal stories) without presuming to describe that past completely and definitively. As a result, by translating a device of historiography into a component of radio play narration, Stoppard allows listeners to imagine a form of historical writing that combines academic curiosity and rigor with the fluidity and allusiveness of dramatic performance.

As the final case study in this dissertation, Stoppard's play exhibits many of the themes that arise in earlier chapters. Like Welles, Stoppard translates conventions normally found in books into the radio play, and Pike's footnotes serve as the Stoppardian equivalent of Welles's radio narrators. Like Thomas's features, Stoppard's

play explores the fraught politics of cultural representation from a metropolitan perspective; and Stoppard's play, like Thomas's features, engages with a form of cultural imperialism executed via the BBC's foreign broadcasting. The similarities between Stoppard's radio play and Beckett's plays, not surprisingly, lie in a failure of verbal expression. Like the transcript and diary in Beckett's radio plays, Stoppard's historical footnotes in *Native State* generally fail to fulfill their communicative purpose. Yet these failures allow both writers to expand the potential of dramatic form. Beckett's failed texts represent his characters' anguish while also helping him explore his doubts about relinquishing texts to the shaping influence of performance. Similarly, the text in Stoppard's play fails to convey much historical information, but it points to new ways of representing history. This dialectic of silence and expressiveness is the condition of radio texts in these authors' works. Reflecting the tension between radio's effacement and extension of textual expression, these plays at once express the text's absence and its enduring and insistent presence.

## Chapter 1: A Library on the Air: Literary Dramatization and Orson Welles's *Mercury Theatre*

As I discussed in the introduction, media convergence in the 1930s raised questions about radio's relationship to literature of the printed page. Did radio represent a more immediate and natural means of communication than books? Or did radio and print facilitate psychologically equivalent experiences, as parts of Lazarsfeld's study suggested? In other words, does radio represent an extension or a fundamental departure from print culture? Such questions could be especially relevant to radio's adaptations of literary works. Wyatt's *Public Domain* and Day Lewis's "The Revolution in Literature" depicted radical alterations of literary works that resulted from electronically mediated performance replacing the work's print-based physical existence. But formal similarities between certain types of literary genres and radio programs allowed listeners to experience some broadcasts as the audible equivalents of printed literature. For the broadcaster, radio could be "a new medium for a new kind of novel that he writes nightly," as Marshall McLuhan described Jean Shepherd's broadcasts on New York station WOR in the 1950s and 1960s (*Understanding* 303). McLuhan compared Shepherd's radio work to writing in the early days of print culture: "just as Montaigne was the first to use the page to record his reactions to the new world of printed books, [Shepherd] is the first to use radio as an essay and novel form for recording" his culture's experiences with the ascendance of electronic media.

McLuhan's comparison of Montaigne and Shepherd depends on not only the similarity of their products—essays existing either on paper or on the airwaves—but also

Montaigne's and Shepherd's similar status as individual creative agents. Shepherd's new-media creations can be incorporated into a longer tradition because he resembles the individual authors characteristic of that tradition. Many broadcasts, however, were not easily identified with individual authors. This chapter examines Welles's *Mercury Theatre on the Air* series (1938-40), which highlighted tensions inherent in adapting literary works for radio. In the series, which dramatized many novels while also adapting plays and short stories, Welles asserted the broadcasts' connection to the literary tradition by equating himself with the figure of the novelist. Yet Welles also undermined this image at times by revealing the distinctions between literary authorship and his role as the celebrity face of highly collaborative productions. Looking at how Welles positioned himself as a double for the literary author over the course of the series' two-year run can help us see how he defined his radio drama in relation to non-dramatic literary genres. It will also contextualize the focus of my next two chapters—the *Mercury* adaptations of *The War of the Worlds* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—each of which made social and political arguments by manipulating listeners' expectations about an author's role and responsibilities.

Radio historian Howard Fink has called *Mercury*, the first radio series Welles produced, “perhaps the most innovative of the American serious radio drama series” (196). Welles was only twenty-three when he and his theatrical partner John Houseman created the program as a “sustaining” (i.e., unsponsored) series for CBS in 1938. The network was willing to give the young Welles his own show and support it financially because of his growing fame on the Broadway stage and as a radio actor. Welles and Houseman had enjoyed a string of theatrical successes as producers for the Federal

Theatre and with their own Mercury Theatre, and Welles had become a famous radio actor on *The March of Time* and *The Shadow* series. Having adapted *Hamlet* for the airwaves in two episodes of *Columbia Workshop* and *Les Miserables* in seven parts for the Mutual Broadcasting System, Welles had already successfully translated literary classics onto the radio (Wood 78). The new series would emphasize similar adaptations of literature. *The Mercury Theatre on the Air*—also called *First Person Singular* during its first nine broadcasts and, later, the *Campbell Playhouse* when the soup company began sponsoring the show in late-1938—adapted a different work each week for one-hour broadcasts. The plays used an inventive and dramatically effective technique that mixed narration with enacted scenes. Welles, the show’s star, typically played both the narrator and the lead character. In *Treasure Island*, for example, Welles was both the narrator—in the persona of the adult Jim Hawkins reminiscing about his childhood experiences—and Long John Silver, one of the chief characters in the younger Jim Hawkins’s adventures. Before Campbell’s sponsorship, the properties adapted tended to be nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century “classic” novels heavy on adventure, sentiment, or both. These respected yet accessible works included novels and novellas by Dickens (*A Tale of Two Cities*, *Oliver Twist*, *The Pickwick Papers*, and *A Christmas Carol*), Charlotte Brontë (*Jane Eyre*), Booth Tarkington (*Clarence* and *Seventeen*), and G.K. Chesterton (*The Man Who Was Thursday*), and occasional stage plays (Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* and John Drinkwater’s *Abraham Lincoln*). When the show became sponsored, the Campbell Company sought high ratings through a greater emphasis on recent novels (e.g., Daphne Du Maurier’s *Rebecca* and Pearl S. Buck’s *The Patriot*) and Broadway plays (e.g., Elmer Rice’s *Counsellor-at-Law* and Noel Coward’s *Private*

Lives), though some older novels like *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* remained on the schedule.

After co-writing several of the earliest *Mercury* scripts, Welles delegated most of the writing duties to Houseman and several of the *Mercury* actors and scriptwriters. This fact engendered a bitter dispute with one of the scriptwriters, Howard Koch, over the writing credits for the Mercury Theatre's most famous broadcast, *The War of the Worlds* (Heyer 108). In an argument that would foreshadow similar struggles over screenwriting credits for *Citizen Kane*, Welles claimed that his role in conceiving the adaptation's format and producing its performance outweighed Koch's contribution in writing most of the text. Welles's argument came in response to Hadley Cantril's 1940 study of the broadcast and the resulting panic, *The Invasion from Mars*, which included the *War of the Worlds* script, attributed to Koch. Welles protested the attribution, writing to Cantril, "Now it's perfectly true that Mr. Koch worked on *The War of the Worlds* since he was at that time a regular member of my writing staff. To credit the broadcast version to him, with the implication that its conception as well as execution was his, is a gross mistake" (qtd. in Geduld 265). According to Welles, scriptwriting was but one relatively minor component of authorship, and it was overshadowed by the earlier act of conception and the later execution of the performance.

The evidence is fairly clear that Koch did, indeed, write the adaptation of H.G. Wells's novel after receiving general instructions from Welles. The radio audience, however, would hardly have disputed Orson Welles's claim to authorship, as his name and the sound of his distinctive voice were inextricably linked to the series. Listeners would as frequently say they were listening to "Orson Welles" as that they were tuned to

the Mercury Theatre on the Air.<sup>1</sup> Those involved in the series have confirmed this perception of Welles's authority over the broadcasts. Houseman, for example, corroborates Koch's claim to having written the famous "panic" broadcast, but he asserts that "first and last, it was [Welles's] creation. If there had been a lynching that night, it is Welles the outraged populace would have strung up—and rightly so. Orson was the Mercury. 'The War of the Worlds,' like everything we did, was his show" (*Entertainers* 229). Houseman and others who credited Welles with ultimate responsibility for the broadcast seem to have subscribed to a philosophy of the director as *auteur*, a view expressed by Harry M. Geduld: *The War of the Worlds* was Welles's "adaptation just as *Stagecoach* was John Ford's film, even though the screenplay was by Dudley Nichols" (267).

A concern with authorship has dominated critical assessments of the Mercury radio series, but critics have rarely moved beyond the question of what makes an author (and whether Welles lives up to this definition) to the question of how Welles positions himself within and against the tradition of literary authorship. Critical treatments of

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<sup>1</sup> This fact becomes clear in the interviews cited in Cantril's study of the panic, which quotes listeners saying they had their radios tuned to "Orson Welles," never to "The Mercury Theatre." See, for example, *Invasion* 55, 89. Some listeners even attributed to Welles statements made by other actors. One man, for example, recalled in an interview, "I believed Welles's statement that he was interrupting the program for a news flash" (80). The statement this interviewee refers to was made by another actor, whose voice is clearly distinct from Welles's.

Welles's radio series have generally mirrored the opposing views suggested by Houseman and Koch. Some follow Houseman in seeing Welles as the dominant force and creative genius behind the broadcasts—essentially their author or, at least, *auteur*. Others have discussed the contradiction between this perception of Welles's creative control and his limited role in writing the plays. Among the former group is Fink, who suggests that the Mercury Theatre was exceptional for “centraliz[ing] the creative power of a dramatic production in a single innovative mind” (220). Other critics link Welles's great influence over the broadcasts to his performances in them, particularly as the narrator. Erik Barnouw, for example, comments on Welles's skill at “putting the aural spotlight fully on one character and often producing narration as charged with emotional richness as any dialogue scene” (2:85).

A representative example of Welles's integration of narration with enacted scenes can be heard in the October 9, 1938 broadcast of *Hell on Ice*, which was adapted from Edward Ellsberg's historical novel of the same name. Welles played George Melville, the play's narrator, who recalls his time as chief engineer on the *Jeannette* and also appears in dramatic scenes of the ship's doomed journey to the North Pole. As the play begins, Melville's narration alternates with flashback scenes in which he speaks as his younger self:

MELVILLE. My name is Melville. As retired chief engineer of our navy, a fair share of honors come my way. [...] But [...] as I look back over my life, I can only humbly hope that the name of George Melville may be a little remembered as one who served under Captain DeLong on the last voyage of the steamship *Jeanette*. I still read and re-read my

log of that trip, though the ink's been dry near thirty years. Here's the first entry: July 8, 1879. 3:40 PM, Pacific Time. Jeanette weighed anchor. Destination: the North Pole.

[*Sound of ship's horn.*]

FIRST SAILOR. All ready below.

[...]

CAPTAIN DELONG. Ready, Chief?

MELVILLE. Ready, Captain.

Immediately after responding to Captain DeLong, Melville again narrates, describing the *Jeannette* before introducing another dramatic scene with the reminiscence, "I remember the first roll call on deck." That roll call is then enacted, with Melville both responding when his name is called and interjecting brief reminiscences about each other sailor who answers the call. By using a participant in the events as the narrator (a device derived, in this case, from Ellsberg's novel), Welles blends narration and dialogue seamlessly. Since Melville has already spoken in the 1879 scene, his narrated comments about the sailors hardly seem to intrude on the roll call, even though he reminisces about them from a later historical moment. This opening also notably makes Welles's narrator an author of sorts who reads from the text of his log. While the log is not a literary work, there is nevertheless a subtle connection between it and the literary text that has been adapted for the broadcast. Before the play begins, announcer Dan Seymour introduces it as "Orson Welles's own adaptation of *Hell on Ice* by Commander Edward Ellsberg" (the novel was, in fact, adapted by Koch). Therefore, Welles's role as the writer Melville seems to be an extension of his work as the play's ostensible writer. Both figures produce texts that

enable the broadcast: Welles's adaptation creates the play, which is also an enactment of Melville's log—in a conventional radio gesture, the dried ink in the log is translated into the more vital voices of the performance, which bring the log to life.

As James Naremore writes, this skillful use of narration and dialogue created a strong sense of connection between Welles's radio plays and the literary genres they adapted: "passages of pure dramatic dialogue were introduced selectively" within the narration so that "novels adapted for the program came out in something very close to their original form, moving effortlessly between pure narration and dialogue" (14). While the broadcasts' use of ensemble acting, sound effects, and music distinguished them significantly from a novel's "original form," Welles's radio dramatizations rejected the presiding practice of eliminating narrative passages from the literary works being adapted. By retaining a novelistic blend of narrative and dialogue, Welles replicated a mode of storytelling that was conspicuously distinct from typical radio plays of the day, and his familiarly literary approach undoubtedly strengthened audiences' perceptions of Welles as an authorial figure resembling the authors whose works he adapted.

In contrast to popular and critical perceptions of Welles as a dominant creative figure, Michele Hilmes argues that Welles's authorial role was exaggerated both by CBS's promotion of Welles as an artistic genius and by the young actor-director's self-promotion. Hilmes writes that CBS, seeking the prestige accorded by highbrow shows like *Mercury*, presented Welles as a genius figure on a par with a novelist. The network promoted Welles as the genius behind all aspects of production—writing, acting, directing, and producing—following "the fundamental tenet of cultural hierarchy: that a work of art possesses a sole creative author from whose individual genius the work

stems” (212). As Hilmes writes, however, these demands for an authoritative genius were unrealistic, given the intense challenges of producing weekly radio programs, and the public’s impression of Welles’s creative control was belied by the “complex and diffuse conditions of broadcasting production” (212). The dispute over *War*’s authorship exposed the contradictions inherent in Welles’s creative role: “the very conditions that made his authorial persona possible worked at every moment to undercut it; his artistic viability rested on an artificial construction of singular genius, from the beginning an impossible mongrel creation of inherently oppositional circumstances” (227). According to Hilmes, therefore, Welles’s attempt to embody the literary author’s persona failed due to obstacles like radio’s collaborative mode of production, the sponsor’s efforts to limit Welles’s creative agency, and the demands of a weekly radio series.

Taken together, these two critical perspectives illustrate the tension regarding authorship in Welles’s broadcasts. I do not seek to assign authorial credit for the Mercury Theatre’s broadcasts. The authors cited above have covered that debate thoroughly, particularly in the case of *The War of the Worlds*. Instead, I wish to explore how the contentious question of Welles’s authorial contributions intersected with the series’ thematic focus on literary authors and their works. The series, after all, was conceived and marketed as a showcase for great books by famous writers, and most broadcasts began by acknowledging the original author’s creative work. In opening remarks similar to those that later introduced television programs like Masterpiece Theater, Welles provided brief biographical sketches of authors. While the conditions of production behind the scenes raised questions about Welles’s authorship, with these introductory remarks within the broadcasts Welles explored similar questions by

weighing his dominant presence as the program's master of ceremonies against the formidable force of the classic author who had written the original work.<sup>2</sup>

### **MERCURY THEATRE ON THE AIR**

A key to the authorial identity Welles developed in the *Mercury* series was the program's format, which resembled the novel form in its use of narration. It is important, however, to describe this format accurately by comparing Welles's descriptions of the program in publicity materials with the structure of the broadcasts themselves. In press releases and interviews Welles drew parallels between the genre of the novel and his radio plays. In making this link, he downplayed connections between the new series and

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<sup>2</sup> As opposed to the plays' scripts, which were often written by Houseman or by playwrights like Koch and Herman Mankiewicz, the introductions appear to have been written by Welles in most cases. Welles's archives at the Lilly Library contain many draft scripts that do not contain the introductory and closing remarks. Correspondence to Welles from Houseman and representatives of Campbell's advertising agency, urging Welles to send his (almost invariably late) copy for these parts of the broadcast, suggests that Welles often contributed these lead-ins after the play had been written. Even when Welles had begun spending most of his time in Hollywood to work on his first film, he sent telegrams to New York with the text of his introductions, suggesting that, even as he became too busy to help prepare the plays' scripts, he continued to write copy for his role as the program's host.

his work in theater. Nonetheless, his fame as a Broadway director and actor inevitably provided a major selling point for the new series, and the broadcasts incorporated dramatic scenes performed by actors from Welles and Houseman's Mercury Players. Thus, while the broadcasts created the feel of a novel or short story, they can more appropriately be described as hybrids of narrative literature and dramatic performance.

The series' narrative-heavy approach is reflected by its initial title, *First Person Singular*. In contrast to the two later titles' allusions to the stage (*Mercury Theatre on the Air* and *Campbell Playhouse*), *First Person Singular* seems chosen deliberately for its non-theatrical—even anti-theatrical—connotations. Radio drama series of the time typically presented listeners with the illusion of attending a Broadway play. The program *First Nighter*, for example, claimed to originate from “The Little Theatre off Times Square” and featured the voice of an usher who would show listeners to their seats before the play and request at intermission that audience members smoke “in the downstairs and outer lobby only” (Callow 372-73). In contrast, Welles's series eschewed any devices that would evoke a theatrical environment. He prefaced his first broadcast for Campbell Soups by reminding listeners that they would not hear a recreation of a stage play. To announcer Edwin C. Hill's request for some introductory words on *Rebecca*, the evening's “play,” Welles responded,

Gladly, Mr. Hill. But if you'll pardon me, it's not a play; it's a story. You see, I think that radio broadcasting is different from motion pictures and the theater, and I'd like to keep it that way. The Campbell Playhouse is situated in a regular studio, not a theater. We have no curtain, real or imaginary, and, as you see, no audience. There's only one illusion I'd like

to create: the illusion of the story. (*Rebecca*)

The First Person Singular title, therefore, suggested Welles's rejection of common approaches to dramatization in favor of a new, narrative-based format.

Press releases preceding the first broadcast also indicated the series' departure from theatrical models, with Welles promising to "treat radio itself with the intelligence and respect such a beautiful and powerful medium deserves" (Columbia 6/11/38). Doing so would involve recognizing the connections between the genre of the radio play and the novels that provided the Mercury Theatre's content. Two years later, the *Mercury's* last on the air, Welles argued that "[t]he less a radio drama resembles a play the better it is likely to be," and he asserted that "radio drama is more akin to the form of the novel, to story telling, than to anything else of which it is convenient to think" ("Progress"). Welles argued that narration was best suited to accommodate the distinct "nature of radio." Lacking the visual aids available to theatrical audiences, radio listeners needed a narrator to set the stage for them. A press release announcing the series' inception parodied radio-drama speech, which awkwardly handles exposition through dialogue alone: "[Welles] feels it is uninteresting to hear a character say, 'Good evening, Jarvis, here it is five o'clock in our lovely home in Sussex. Let's all sit before our huge fireplace and have tea'" (Columbia 6/15/38). In place of this stilted approach, Welles proposed a narrator—"the first person singular technique, heretofore neglected by radio"—to handle the "problem of introducing other characters" and "weld the various episodes together" (Columbia 6/15/38). This approach offered narrative storytelling on the model of the novel or short story.

Nonetheless, *Mercury* hardly abandoned dramatic elements, and its programs are

far from single-actor readings from texts as one hears in audiobooks. Dramatic action comprises an integral component of the broadcasts, as a press release announcing *Treasure Island* as First Person Singular's second broadcast indicates: "Welles himself serves as narrator of the story, taking the part of the hero. Dramatic highlights are enacted by a large cast of Mercury Theater actors and actresses" (Columbia 7/13/38). The two sentences notably separate the roles of the "narrator"/"hero" and the ensemble's "enact[ment]" of "[d]ramatic highlights." In practice, however, narration and enactment—or, diegetic and mimetic components—blended together, since the narrator was often a character in the play.<sup>3</sup> Even before the first broadcast, the publicity releases hinted at the difficulty of separating novelistic narration and dramatic enactment in Welles's approach to dramatization. Thus, the same press releases announcing that "Welles disclaims any attempt to 'try to bring the theater to radio'" (Columbia 6/15/38)

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<sup>3</sup> At extreme ends of a spectrum, diegesis and mimesis in radio drama are fairly easy to distinguish. A third-person narrator establishing exposition for, or continuity between, dialogue scenes performs a diegetic function. Scenes of dialogue between characters (as well as sound effects accompanying such scenes) are typically mimetic. As we will see in the next chapter, however, Welles's plays often employed scenes blending the two functions. A character reading a diary entry or letter might provide narrative content but in a manner that mimetically represents his or her mental state through tone of voice. On the other hand, the narrator might periodically engage in dialogue with a character in the story, or two narrators might converse with each other. In such instances, diegetic function mingles with mimetic manner.

also emphasize the similarities between Welles's stage innovations and the "storytelling" he will perform on radio. In one, Welles announces, "we plan to bring to radio the experimental techniques which have proved so successful in another medium [i.e., the stage] and to treat radio itself with the intelligence and respect such a beautiful and powerful medium deserves" (Columbia 6/8/38). Thus, in this series with the conservative goal of presenting "classics" (Columbia 6/15/38) of literature using the narrative techniques of the relatively old medium of print, Welles will introduce "experimental techniques." These experimental techniques derive from experience in another relatively old medium: the theater.

These publicity materials, therefore, express a tension inherent in the series. On the one hand, they assert the principle of respect for the unique characteristics of distinct media. Radio is a "beautiful and powerful medium" that excels at storytelling. On the other, CBS promoted Welles's series for its experimental, boundary-crossing nature and refusal to respect established rules. The network's publicity department made generous use of the already burgeoning mythology of Welles as an *enfant terrible* who went his own way in spite of conventional wisdom and established authority:

Welles is only 23. He ran away from his Wisconsin home as a boy to paint in Ireland. When he got there the urge for the theater dominated and he fibbed his way into star roles at the Gate Theater in Dublin by describing himself as a New York Theater Guild actor. Later he acted at the Peacock and the famous Abbey Theater and returned to Manhattan after the Labor Ministry refused to allow him to work in London. (Columbia 6/8/38)

In this account, Welles struggled against authority (“the Labor Ministry refused to let him work in London”) with a brazenness (“he ran away from [...] home” and “fibbed his way into star roles”) that enabled him to overcome societal and institutional restraints. Welles’s tendency to experiment and his fresh artistic approach are represented in a press release describing the “carte blanche” Welles will be given “to choose his own medium and his own subjects,” the “free hand” he will have “in the selection of material and in technique,” and the theatrical company that will be at “Welles’s disposal” (Columbia 6/8/38). The force of the personality described here, and its urge to shape the art form to the artist’s unique vision, might seem to contradict the publicity’s alternate focus on respect for a medium’s distinct, traditional character.

Welles’s introductory speeches before the plays proper illustrate the symbolic weight assumed by the author. The speeches typically include biographical anecdotes about the authors of the works being presented, though they usually avoided chronological accounts of the authors’ lives. More often, Welles discussed the author’s creation of the work or intentions for it. In his introduction to the first of two annual productions of *A Christmas Carol*, for example, Welles spoke of Dickens indirectly by quoting from prefatory materials in his text: “‘I have endeavored,’ writes [*A Christmas Carol*]’s] author on its title page, ‘I have endeavored in this ghostly little story to raise the ghost of an idea which shall not put my readers out of humor with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly and no one wish to lay it.’” The author’s text speaks for him or her in such cases, as when Welles similarly reads from the author’s “Notice” that precedes *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In these introductions, the author’s creative agency is recovered from his text, as Welles

connects with the intentions behind the work. As a result, Welles appears to share a special understanding with the authors and to be well qualified, therefore, to recreate their works. Another typical strategy that Welles employed in the introductions is to establish a sense of mystery around the author's identity. In the *Christmas Carol* broadcast, Welles refers to the author's declaration on the story's title page but does not name him until the end of the introduction, when he says that that title page is "signed, 'Your faithful friend and servant, [*pause, then forcefully*] Charles Dickens.'" Similarly, in an introduction to an adaptation of *Heart of Darkness*, Welles tells a story of "a man called Korzeniowski, an agitator for Polish freedom" in the 1850s whose boy became ill as they fled from the Tsar's government. Only after describing the boy's illness in some detail does Welles first name him, revealing that "little Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski lived to drop his last name and to learn that careful, fortunate English which he practiced to the everlasting glory of our literature." Revealed just before the play starts, the author's name in these cases becomes an intense focus of attention at the very moment that Welles takes over with his own creation, the play derived from the author's text.

Another broadcast that combines these two strategies of recreating the novel's creation and mystifying the author's identity is *Treasure Island*, in which Welles's introduction blurs the distinction between himself and the author. Welles focuses on Robert Louis Stevenson's writing of the text but withholds the author's name until the end of the introduction. The introduction begins with the feel of a story: "Once there was a small boy who asked his stepfather, who had written a number of books, please to write something interesting." Welles then describes how the story was originally serialized as *The Sea Cook* and credited to the pseudonymous Captain George North, and he discusses

the story's collaborative creation: "The small boy himself helped a lot, even though Captain North got the credit, and so did a third and equally incurable small boy, the author's father." Welles then describes the trio's invention of the story's famous places like Spyglass Shoulder and Skeleton Island.

Welles next turns from a discussion of the story's creation to a meditation on the author's death, while also seeming to summon Stevenson from the grave. Adopting a philosophical tone, Welles reflects that "[i]t's foolish to guess who's tuned in on this broadcast." Nonetheless, Welles speculates that Stevenson may somehow be listening. Without referring to Stevenson by name, Welles remarks that "we who are retelling this story hope devoutly that he, whom the Samoans laid to rest in the hills of their own faraway treasure island and who [was] still known out there only as the great teller of tales would not wish tonight, as he did so unaccountably at first, to suppress the real name of Captain George North." After repeating the author's pseudonym, Welles finally reveals his name: "The small boy, of course, should have been decorated. It's a better world because he asked for something interesting. But then he was lucky. There are millions of small boys. But only one of us had Robert Louis Stevenson for a stepfather." With this, the close of Welles's introduction, Seymour names the Mercury players who will perform the play, and Welles begins his narration, following Stevenson's opening sentences almost exactly:

Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey, and the rest of the gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen

in the year of grace 1783 and go back to that time nineteen years ago when my father kept the Admiral Benbow Inn and the brown old seaman with the saber cut first took up his lodging under our roof. I was fourteen, but I remember him as if it were yesterday.

The last few sentences set up the first of many dramatic scenes that will be interspersed with the narration, as Billy Bones approaches the inn singing “Fifteen men on the dead man’s chest—Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!”

As in the *Christmas Carol* and *Heart of Darkness* introductions, the author’s mysterious identity becomes a focus of the audience’s attention until the moment that Welles slips into character as the narrator Hawkins, another author who “take[s] up [his] pen” to tell his story. The blending of the identities of speaker and writer creates confusion over who is the true author of the story that is being broadcast. Earlier, as Welles superimposes his own storytelling (“Once there was a small boy [...]”; “we who are retelling this story”) over Stevenson’s, a complex structure of authorship begins to emerge. It may even seem that “this story” is not owned by any one author but is, like part of an oral storyteller’s repertoire, something that can be performed by multiple tellers, each of whom will put his or her particular mark on it. The question of authorship is complicated further by Welles’s description of the collaborative writing process involving the young boy, the stepfather (Stevenson), and the stepfather’s father. The work was not originally the solitary effort suggested by *Treasure Island*’s traditional attribution to Robert Louis Stevenson. Instead, that attribution is established only in stages—from this group invention, through the work’s pseudonymous publication, and finally to the book’s contemporary publication under Stevenson’s name. This progress of

the story through multiple textual incarnations and its attribution to multiple identities further suggests Welles's right to appropriate it temporarily as an object of his own creative efforts.

Many of Welles's introductions similarly challenged the individual author's ownership of the literary text. By doing so, Welles sometimes compared the collaborative authorship of the *Mercury* broadcasts to the ostensibly solitary efforts of literary authors. In the *Treasure Island* introduction, Welles describes the threesome of Stevenson, his father, and his stepson who invented the pirate story. Similarly, his introduction to *The Count of Monte Cristo* wryly describes the "literary factory" that Alexandre Dumas, père, maintained to produce many of the works ascribed to him. As Welles notes, "the Chateau Monte Cristo was haunted by many ghost writers and [...] its owner signed his name to more books than anyone could ever write." This introduction emphasizes parallels between the author and Welles. For example, the latter archly comments near the beginning of his speech, "We note with interest that [Dumas] went bankrupt in the theatre." And Welles mischievously implies further connections between Dumas's "literary factory" and his own exaggerated projection of authorship when he defends Dumas: "It is not expected of Pharaoh that he build with his own hands his own pyramids." Welles focused on false attributions of authorship in other broadcasts, including sustained discussions of pseudonyms in *I Lost My Girlish Laughter*, which I discuss below, and *Jane Eyre*, in which Welles recalled that "The authorship of this scarlet indignity to English letters was variously attributed to almost everyone who could write, except a certain Miss Charlotte Brontë, of Yorkshire, who did write it, in spite of the pen name Currer Bell." These introductions convey an interest in the invention and

public reception of literary works, but they also suggest that the authorship of even “classic” works of fiction is open to reconsideration.

As Campbell shifted the series’ focus to newer works, Welles increasingly interviewed live authors either before or after the plays. The adaptation of *I Lost My Girlish Laughter*, a satirical novel about Hollywood by Jane Schor and Silvia Schulman (but published under the pseudonym Jane Allen), again allowed Welles to explore misleading attributions of authorial identity. Welles’s interview with the reputed Jane Allen focused on the publishing industry’s role in defining the literary work and its author. And, with his program increasingly serving to promote authors and guest actors, Welles also suggested that his broadcasts played a similar role in creating and perpetuating false authorial identities. Following the *Lost* dramatization, Welles and his cast spoke by telephone with the novel’s purported author. Before the conversation, Welles played up the author’s mysterious identity, as he had in the *Treasure Island* broadcast: “We only know that *I Lost My Girlish Laughter* was credited on its title page to somebody who calls herself or himself or themselves Jane Allen.” This reference to the name on the book’s title page follows Welles’s declaration that the author’s actual identity is “a well-kept secret with its publishers”—“a good trick if Random House Incorporated can do it.” Welles promises to reveal the truth and enlists each listener as “a full member of our special secret service sworn to unmask all authors and authoresses to the last poison penname.” Naturally, however, this mystery’s preservation makes for engaging radio, and Welles pursues the author’s identity lightly and with tongue in cheek. The play’s actors assume the roles of “inspectors” but without delivering the “unrelenting efforts” that Welles promises to listeners: one, playwright George Kaufman, first asks

facetiously if the author is “animal, vegetable, or mineral” and then whether she has seen any good plays lately, a question clearly designed to elicit praise for his latest play, *The American Way*, rather than uncover her identity. Instead of undermining Random House’s publicity efforts, therefore, Welles’s mock investigation actually amplifies them. Welles further mystifies the novelists’ identities while publicizing both their book and Kaufman’s work. The broadcast, therefore, not only reveals the construction of the authors’ false public persona but also contributes to it.

Like the *Treasure Island* lead-in, this later broadcast’s conclusion suggests that behind the image of a single author lie multiple people’s combined agency: the writer or writers, performers like Welles, and publishers like Random House. The work’s being owes not only to the person whose name appears in the title page but also to the book’s extended paratext, which encompasses the part that Welles’s broadcasts play in the publisher’s marketing efforts. The next example I will consider further complicates not only the concept of authorship but also the conception of the literary work when another agent is involved: Welles’s sponsor. As I will discuss, Welles’s and Campbell’s competing definitions of both authorship and the audible literary artifact emerged during the production of Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* and revealed the high stakes over claiming creative control of the broadcasts.

### **WELLES VS. CAMPBELL: THE TEXT AS PERFORMANCE OR PRODUCT**

As a new and unstable concept, radio authorship was open to contention. In addition to Welles and a number of his primary collaborators, the sponsor also could claim ultimate responsibility for the broadcasts. Once *The Mercury Theatre on the Air*

became *Campbell Playhouse*, Campbell's advertising agency, The J. Walter Thompson Company, kept a close watch on how Welles represented his authorial role. The periodic disputes emerging from this power struggle between Welles and Campbell focused attention not only on differing views of authorship but also on differing conceptions of the dramatizations. While Campbell defined the broadcast adaptations of literary texts as static artifacts, Welles defined them as dynamic works resulting from the intersection of text and performance.

We can see the struggle for control of authorship in a dispute over Welles's lead-ins about Charles Dickens, whose texts Welles adapted more than any other author's. Five of the series' seventy-eight broadcasts adapted Dickens works: *A Tale of Two Cities* (July 25, 1938), *Oliver Twist* (October 2, 1938), *The Pickwick Papers* (November 20, 1938), and *A Christmas Carol* (December 23, 1938, and December 24, 1939). In introducing these broadcasts, Welles made a characteristic rhetorical move in which he balanced tradition and innovation by deftly transferring the author's respected, even legendary, achievements to his own quickly growing artistic legacy. Dickens provided an apt analogy to Welles because he was a performer as well as an author. In discussing Dickens on the air, therefore, Welles could explore the mix of narrative voice and dramatic performance that characterized his radio series. While this opportunity allowed Welles to define his innovations through the legacy of the literary past, the stakes of this definition extended beyond Welles's artistic self-interest. The *Christmas Carol* broadcasts especially display the influence that Welles's sponsor was trying to exert at the same time that it maneuvered to define the limits of authorship in its broadcasts.

A typescript in the Welles manuscript collection at the Lilly Library, containing

biographical information about Charles Dickens, appears to be Welles's draft introduction to the 1938 broadcast of *A Christmas Carol*, which was the first of two under Campbell's sponsorship. In the event, Welles dropped his typical biographical introduction for this broadcast, instead reading the account of Christ's birth from the book of Luke and briefly discussing Christmas stories before making a quick statement about Dickens and his *Carol*. In contrast to this broadcast version of the introduction, the alternate draft focuses on facts about the author's life, many of which seem to reflect on Welles also.

The primary connection that Welles draws between Dickens and himself concerns their similar combinations of writing and performance. Welles begins by noting that "Many of our grandfathers' [sic] may have heard Charles Dickens read his 'Christmas Carol.' He did it often enough." This opening provides a concise yet multi-layered comparison between Dickens's nineteenth-century readings and Welles's twentieth-century broadcasts. Dickens, we are told, gave these readings "often enough." Welles's audience can infer, then, that Dickens's performances reached a large audience, much like Welles's mass-media listenership. But this large audience—so big that "[m]any of our grandfathers" may have been included—is also personalized by the very intimate word "grandfathers." The combination of the individual image of one's grandfather with the suggestion of a mass audience encapsulates Welles's vision of his own storytelling project on the radio. As he once stated, the "invisible [radio] audience should never be considered collectively, but individually" (qtd. in Naremore 13). In his introduction of Dickens, therefore, Welles initially legitimized his mass-media combination of broad dissemination and intimate address through the figure of Dickens and the Victorian

nostalgia that the author and his Christmas story represent.

Not only did Dickens recite his story before audiences, but he was also “an actor of no little ability.” Welles’s draft states that Dickens “authored a few comedies” and “engaged in private theatricals for many years.” Like Welles, who had continued through the mid-1930s to think of himself first as an author and only secondarily as an actor and director, the Dickens of these draft remarks is an author who also acts.<sup>4</sup> Or, rather, as Welles once told Peter Bogdanovich, Dickens “was not a writer who acted, he was an actor who wrote” (Welles and Bogdanovich 262). The second half of this draft, which is less polished, uses the language of the West End and Broadway to discuss Dickens’s public readings: Dickens “was a box office hit from the start. In 1867 he came to America for the second time, causing great excitement ... people slept in line all night to get tickets ... ticket brokers very active ... triumphs in Boston, New York and other cities....” Dickens not only performed to sold-out theater crowds as Welles was doing in the late 1930s, but in this depiction he does so in several American cities that also saw Welles’s early stage success with Katharine Cornell’s touring company and later with Welles’s own Broadway theater.

Following this description of Dickens’s mass appeal, the draft ends with Welles’s typical gesture in which the author seems to disappear just before the play begins. Welles

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<sup>4</sup> Heyer notes that Welles’s writing of original plays and contributions to writing and editing *Everybody’s Shakespeare* in the early 1930s led him “to think of himself more as a writer than an actor” and to introduce himself as such when he met Thornton Wilder in 1933 (12).

quotes from the end of the “touching speech” with which Dickens concluded what would be his final reading of *A Christmas Carol*: “Ladies and gentlemen, in but two short weeks from this time I hope that you may enter, in your own homes, on a new series of readings, at which my assistance will be indispensable; but from these garish lights I now vanish forevermore, with a heartfel [sic], grateful respectful and affectionate farewell.” As he had done in the introduction to *Treasure Island*, in this draft Welles emerges as an authorial surrogate when the primary author “vanish[es].” By readings “in your own homes,” Dickens means readings centered on a book rather than the public performance that his statement concludes. As Welles implicitly assumes the Dickensian mantle, therefore, he equates his broadcasts with textual artifacts. Welles’s new (media) series of readings represents a substitute for Dickens’s books. These radio-based texts, however, retain the performer’s presence as well as the dynamism and unpredictability of performance. Combining the author’s role and the text’s function, Welles creates a new artifact that he can shape to his image and interests.

Welles was not alone in trying to associate himself with Dickens, as we can see from another outline for the broadcast’s introduction, which is also in the Lilly Library’s Welles archive. This “Suggested Carol Opening,” apparently generated by Campbell’s advertising agency, Ward Wheelock, suggests that, just as Welles attempted to use the Victorian author to highlight his own distinct combinations of narrative and performance and of tradition and innovation, Campbell intended to position itself as an innovator with a link to tradition. Like Welles, the Campbell Company presented the broadcast as an artifact and asserted its control over it.

The suggested opening proposed by Campbell associates its product with the

Christmas traditions evoked by Dickens's story and its annual theatrical adaptations. Rather than provide a script for Welles's opening statements—as it does for Lionel Barrymore, the guest star who was to play Ebenezer Scrooge but backed out at the last minute because of illness—the document suggests in a general sense his “planting [the] fact that this is Campbell's Christmas present to the listener—that it's the fourth year of its presentation, etc.” As Hilmes writes, during the run of the *Campbell Playhouse*, Welles “increasingly distanced himself from even [a] limited role in promoting the sponsor's product” (224). And though this production of *A Christmas Carol* was only the third Mercury broadcast under Campbell's sponsorship, it appears that Welles may already have been attempting to minimize his role as a pitchman. In the broadcast, Welles does not mention the history of Campbell's productions of *A Christmas Carol*, letting announcer Ernest Chappell remark on the four-year tradition of Christmas broadcasts. Though four years may not seem like a longstanding tradition, the suggested opening charges Barrymore with subtly linking this short history to much longer ones. The actor, born in 1878, provides part of this link, and the suggested opening includes Barrymore's recalling “the first time my mother read [the story] to us—to John and Ethel and myself, as children” and using Victorian imagery in reminiscing about “tripp[ing] all over one of my father's frock coats” during a family dramatization of the story. The account of the *Carol's* place in this familial setting provides an unspoken connection to the radio audience's contemporary act of listening. In the broadcast, Chappell states that, “throughout the country today in thousands of homes it has become an important and beloved Christmas custom to *listen* to this story” (emphasis added). Past and present meet through the person of Barrymore. The document suggests that Welles make “use of

the phrase we have used for three years, in describing [Barrymore as] ‘America’s grandest character actor.’” Barrymore then was to return the compliment and describe Welles as “Radio’s grandest actor.” Thus an image of tradition emerges through the artistic genealogy of Dickens, Barrymore, and Welles.

Campbell surely evokes these Christmas institutions in order to associate its product with family traditions. Many of Campbell’s advertisements before and during the intermissions of the *Campbell Playhouse* aimed to reassure housewives that it was acceptable to make soup from a can rather than from scratch. By associating their new, innovative, mass-produced product with warm family traditions of Christmastime, Campbell could assuage families’ concerns over serving industrialized food at meal times. At the end of his remarks before introducing Welles in the 1938 broadcast, Chappell balances evocations of traditional family gatherings with reminders of the canned soup’s modern convenience:

Women like to have plenty of good soups on hand all through the holidays so that they can serve piping-hot, nourishing platefuls at any family mealtime. The youngsters are on the go all day long, making the most of the Christmas vacation, and soup can be ready for them in a jiffy. There’s health and happiness in good, hot soup. Your grocer has Campbell’s soups—twenty-one delicious kinds awaiting your selection.

Campbell and its advertising agency draw a connection here between the literary tradition embodied in Dickens’s story and the choice and convenience represented by modern commerce. In the 1938 introduction, Chappell tells listeners, “Four years ago the makers of Campbell’s soups went shopping for a Christmas present to give to all their friends.

They found it in this story—Charles Dickens’s embodiment of the very spirit of Christmas.” Dickens’ story, it seems, can be shopped for like a can of soup. In the following year’s *Christmas Carol* broadcast, celebrations of convenience shopping give way to more traditional connotations of Christmastime, but Chappell’s introduction retains the sense of the broadcast as a physical artifact. In that broadcast, the gift has not been picked off a shelf but appears like a present under a Victorian Christmas tree: “Off come the wrappings, off come the tags that say, ‘Please do not open till Christmas,’ out comes the card, ‘To you, from Campbell’s.’ And here’s the gift itself”—that is, the play, which begins immediately after this announcement.

To maintain this feeling of tradition, Campbell needed to control Welles’s role carefully. After all, when First Person Singular was awaiting its debut, Welles had been promoted as an innovator above all—an artist with a proven “spirit of adventure” (Columbia 6/15/38) and “experimental techniques” (Columbia 6/8/38). Like the canned soup company, Welles sold a classic product (great literature) in an innovative package (radio-based storytelling). The danger for Campbell, however, was that his experimentation would go too far and distract from their attempt to balance tradition and innovation.

Indeed, in his part of the introduction to the 1938 broadcast of *A Christmas Carol*, Welles provides his own image of innovation that builds upon tradition. He focuses many of his remarks on American society’s tendency to improve upon a deep cultural and artistic heritage. Drawing on the metaphor of America as a cultural melting pot, Welles announces, “Every nation according to its character and its taste by some gift of gaiety has enriched the tradition of this, our solemnest festival. And because America is what it

is, we are the fortunate heirs of the accumulated customs of almost 2,000 years of keeping Christmas.” Americans have not merely absorbed these traditions but have chosen the best ones to perpetuate; therefore, “the best stories ever told are ours to tell.” Welles implicitly connects his innovation of broadcast storytelling to this heritage of selectively retaining and combining the best traditions of multiple cultures, noting that “story telling has persisted as a Christmas ritual in spite of the printing press.” Here Welles echoes the sentiments of T.S. Eliot, Rudolf Arnheim, and others who saw radio as a return to a pre-print age of oral storytelling. Such assertions represent the balance of tradition and innovation (or innovation as a validation of tradition) that Welles attempted to convey over the radio.

The effort to control perceptions of Welles’s role is evident in Campbell’s suggested opening for *A Christmas Carol*, which also includes a brief suggestion for the play’s closing. The draft states that “[a]t the end of the play Barrymore does not again step out of character” and delivers his last lines as Scrooge before Welles “comes in again [...] to sign off.” As the document notes, “[t]his preserves Welles as Campbell’s spokesman—personalizes Barrymore before the play starts, and does not break the mood at the end.” We can see here how crucial these peripheral components of the broadcast were in defining each actor’s role in relation to the play as an artistic creation and as a commercial product. The sponsor’s attempt to delineate rigidly the role of presenter (Welles) and actor (Barrymore) seems the opposite of Welles’s strategy of blurring the distinctions among his multiple roles. Since such protean performances allowed Welles to cross the line between performer and author, it is understandable that Campbell would attempt to control the boundaries between the play and its ancillary components.

Indeed, these framing moments in the broadcasts—the introduction and post-play remarks—sparked disputes later in the Campbell Playhouse series. Following the October 8, 1939 broadcast of *Algiers*, the Ward Wheelock agency’s Diana Bourbon, who had been assigned to work with Welles and Houseman on the radio series, wrote to Chappell objecting to his on-air identification of the play as “the Orson Welles production of *Algiers*.” Copying Welles on her letter, Bourbon wrote to Chappell,

Orson asked me last week if, *in one place where ordinarily we say “starring Orson Welles,” we could say—“adapted and produced by Orson Welles”* [...], to this I agreed. But at no time should we change phrases having to do with “Campbell Playhouse presentation” to “Orson Welles production.” [...]

Client wants to sell the idea of the *Campbell Playhouse* –with Orson as star, producer, and chief writer—but *not* to sell the idea of “Orson Welles production,” leaving the Campbell Playhouse with its nose out of joint.

(Bourbon)

In an eight-page response to Bourbon, Welles asserted his central contributions to the series’ success. Discussing the importance of his commentary in the programs’ opening and closing moments and responding to another of Bourbon’s critiques—that his closing interview with guest star Paulette Goddard devoted too much time to promoting the new film of Goddard’s husband, Charlie Chaplin—Welles wrote to Bourbon,

Remember please, that whatever gives our format individuality beyond the regular interest attaching itself to our guests is my own extremely personal and rather particular style, which must needs express authentically my

own enthusiasms and my own taste. It is wrong and unfair to expect me to speak nothing but that calculated to enhance the effectiveness of our stars or of myself, and if some short excursion of mine away from the straight institutional and star build-up does not in any way distract from either of these, then I question the validity of the 'policy' which you invoke.

(Welles, Letter)

This struggle to define the limits of Welles's role in the program reveals a deeper contention over the definition of authorship—a term missing from this particular debate but driving it nonetheless. Bourbon and her client will grant Welles the status of “star, producer, and chief writer”; somehow, however, Welles's being the producer does not make the broadcast an “Orson Welles production.”

The disputed ground, therefore, appears to lie somewhere in the space between these two iterations of the word “to produce.” For Campbell, production is seen in an industrial sense. The broadcast is a product akin to the soup cans the show marketed—an item that listeners figuratively take from a shelf. Welles, meanwhile, argues for the Wildean conception of the single artist whose persona is, in fact, identical to the artistic product. Thus, in his response to Bourbon he mentions his “extremely personal and rather particular style, which must needs express authentically my own enthusiasms and my own taste.” In arguing that this self-expression “gives our format individuality,” Welles argues that he is the program's main producer. Both parties, of course, had self-interested motives behind their arguments. Campbell's profit motive was perhaps more transparent, but Welles's stake in winning the argument became clear when he successfully translated the genius reputation he had established on radio into a highly

favorable contract to make his first Hollywood film.<sup>5</sup> We might call production, as Welles defines it, *authorship*, but it is an author function that differs from that of the literary author—and clearly differs from the inferior role of “chief writer.” Welles’s notion of authorship, instead, is of the author as a celebrity. Here the author’s self-expression is quite literal. The work of art presents the self of the author; his very person

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<sup>5</sup> Welles received his famous Hollywood contract from RKO in 1939 when he was twenty-four-years old. Frank Brady has demonstrated that initial publicity—since accepted as fact by many Welles scholars—exaggerated the “total freedom” that the contract granted Welles (200). In fact, as Brady reports, RKO retained the right to refuse Welles’s story ideas and to view rushes of the film and confer with Welles on its editing (200). Nonetheless, the contract provided Welles with a rare freedom under the studio system to write, produce, direct, and star in his first two films (Brady 199-200). The contract, therefore, perpetuated perceptions of Welles’s multifaceted artistic genius. The opening lines of Gene Lockhart’s comic song from the time, “Little Orson Annie,” represented the scorn with which many in Hollywood greeted the newcomer and his reputation as an artistic jack-of-all-trades:

Little Orson Annie’s come to our house to play

An’ josh the motion pitchurs up and skeer the stars away

An’ shoo the Laughtons off the lot an’ build the sets an’ sweep

An’ wind the film an’ write the talk an’ earn her board-an’-keep. (qtd. in Callow 458)

is the broadcast's subject. Though his physical presence remains concealed by the various personae he adopts vocally, Welles's personality and will conspicuously shape the broadcast.

### **THE AUTHOR ON THE SCREEN: THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS**

As I have discussed, a crucial prerequisite to Welles's adaptation of the authorial role involved setting himself alongside the primary author—rather than simply ignoring the author's contribution and presenting the story as Welles's own. We can see Welles engaging in a similar multiplication of authorship in his second film, *The Magnificent Ambersons*. This film—the first in which Welles adapted a literary work to the screen—echoes the Mercury Theatre introductions by treating the author as a simultaneously immediate and tenuous presence. As in the radio introductions, Welles deftly steps into the author's position, even while questioning the legitimacy of the title.

Having adapted Booth Tarkington's novel for the *Campbell Playhouse*, Welles chose *The Magnificent Ambersons* for his second film, gaining RKO president George Schaeffer's approval after playing a recording of the radio play for him (Leaming 223). In the film, Welles does not introduce the story and author ahead of time, as he had in his radio broadcasts. Instead, he acknowledges Tarkington along with the actors and crew in the end credits. In these credits, Welles names each actor individually, as was common at the end of the Mercury radio broadcasts. *Ambersons* runs a few seconds of footage of each actor looking straight at the camera as Welles speaks his or her name in a voiceover. Before these credits for the actors, the behind-the-scenes crewmembers are represented visually by iconic images of their crafts. Thus, in the first credit, Welles announces

cinematographer Stanley Cortez while a still image of a camera appears on the screen. Shots of an architectural drawing and an armchair follow as Welles continues, “Mark-Lee Kirk designed the sets, and Al Fields dressed them.” These iconic credits visually emphasize the various individual contributions to the film. Many of the images are closely cropped and fragmented; we see, for example, a quarter-segment of a film reel for film editor Robert Wise and the top half of script pages for assistant director Freddie Fleck. These fragmented images point both to the artificial nature of the artistic product and to the many constituent parts that make up a film.

Bracketing all these credits are two that represent author and *auteur*—Tarkington and Welles. The first image in the credits shows the cover of a contemporary edition of Tarkington’s novel rotated clockwise roughly thirty degrees. The top half of the dust jacket prominently identifies the book as “A Pulitzer Prize Novel.” As Welles begins his voiceover in this credit sequence, he introduces the novel with the tone of his master-of-ceremonies persona from radio—the audience’s obedient servant: “Ladies and gentlemen, *The Magnificent Ambersons* was based on Booth Tarkington’s novel.” After the subsequent credits for crew and cast, the final shot of the credit sequence represents Welles as the film’s behind-the-scenes creator: a microphone appears in a close-up with Welles’s voiceover: “I wrote the script and directed it. My name is Orson Welles. This is a Mercury Production.” The two “authors” of the film are represented by iconic images of their artistic media—book and microphone, respectively. Each of these objects sits in the middle of the screen, a solitary presence that represents a single creator. But, significantly, neither man appears. The microphone standing in for Welles makes his absence particularly pronounced. As Welles speaks, viewers confront the incongruous

combination of a voiceover and an unoccupied microphone. Thus, Welles sends his audience mixed messages. On the one hand, by bracketing the credits with images representing Tarkington and himself, Welles identifies his auteur role with that of the literary author. But, on the other, Welles curiously depopulates the frames that represent these two prominent creators of the film. It seems, therefore, that, rather than taking full credit for inheriting the author's function from Tarkington, Welles playfully questions the legitimacy of the concept of authorship, particularly as he represents his own filmmaking role. As the narrator/author, Welles suffuses the credits as he introduces each member of the cast and crew. Yet the suggestion of his god-like influence is undermined not only by the visual information that seems to contradict it (the unifying aural effect of Welles's ubiquitous voice is undermined by the visual credits, which break the movie into its constitutive creative functions), but also by the microphone that represents Welles visually. The image suggests that he is only the voice. The author ("I wrote the script") is a ventriloquist who speaks for the others—for Tarkington and for those actors who stare dumbly at the screen that frames them in the closing credits. Welles, it seems, has it both ways in these credits: he replicates the false modesty of his "obedient servant" pose on radio by acknowledging his debt to his cast; yet he is also the puppet master controlling the actors who stare mutely at the camera. In the radio plays Welles similarly has it both ways, paradoxically asserting his authorial role by suggesting the instability of the category "author."

By focusing on the author and his or her writing, Welles also highlights the contrast between the moment of original creation and the present when he broadcasts the adaptation. Like Welles's film version of *The Magnificent Ambersons*, which was based

on a 1918 novel depicting turn-of-the-twentieth-century America, Welles's broadcasts frequently adapted properties from past eras—typically the Victorian period or the early twentieth century. In the next chapter I will examine two of these—*The War of the Worlds* and *Huckleberry Finn*. With these works the question of authorship becomes more complex, as their scripts were drafted not by Welles but by Howard Koch and Herman Mankiewicz, respectively. As I will argue, however, the plays build on the format and approaches Welles developed—chiefly the alternate focuses of, on the one hand, the author and the original text and, on the other, the innovative creation of the radio play. This oscillating focus on the two components of the adapted text allows Koch and Mankiewicz to turn the original stories into contemporarily relevant examinations of the role of authority in narrative. Through this examination, the two writers (and Welles in his role of producer and star) extend the examination of authorship begun by Welles in his introductory speeches, and they engage with two political concerns preoccupying Welles: the danger of fascism and the importance of racial equality.

## Chapter 2: Wells and Welles: *The War of the Worlds* and the Text Under Siege

Critical examinations of Orson Welles's radio broadcast *The War of the Worlds* as an adaptation of H.G. Wells's 1898 novel have proved remarkably similar since the novelist's own response to hearing of (though not hearing) the infamous "panic broadcast" in 1938. Through his New York representative, Wells protested that the dramatization was "made with a liberty that amounts to a complete rewriting of *The War of the Worlds* and renders it into an entirely different story" (qtd. in Hughes and Geduld 244). Wells objected on the grounds of infidelity to the original text's plot ("an entirely different story"), and this issue of fidelity on the level of plot has similarly occupied later commentators. Harry M. Geduld, for example, in an insightful analysis of the similarities between source text and broadcast, limits his focus to content, noting conjunctions in both story and theme. Some critics, indeed, have engaged in comparative formal analysis, in contrast to Geduld's focus on content, but these readings tend toward an extreme view of the broadcast's departure from novelistic form into the realm of pure radio. Critics like Edward D. Miller, who argues that the broadcast exposes the illusory nature of radio voices, focus on the play's apparently radical transformation of Wells's first-person, novelistic narrative into a fake newscast featuring a chaotic medley of voices. These two responses to the confrontation of literature and radio illustrate patterns similar to those identified by new-media scholar N. Katherine Hayles, who writes of the "Scylla [and] Charybdis" that often sink literary approaches to a new medium: "ballyhooing its novelty or failing to see the genuine differences that distinguish it from

print” (*Electronic* 30-31). Through a consideration of Welles’s adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*, this chapter will attempt to answer Hayles’s challenge to explain how a new medium “both extends and disrupts print conditions” (*Electronic* 30).

As I discussed in the last chapter, Welles emphasized his series’ indebtedness to print conventions by comparing the plays’ narrative-heavy format to that of the novel. This characteristic remediation of the novel in the broadcasts is a key to understanding *The War of the Worlds* as an adaptation of Wells’s book. Probing beneath the level of content while still attending to the conjunctions between novel and play, we find that the broadcast represents formally its textual origin in Wells’s novel. Its infamous first act, structured as a fake newscast, apparently effaces the novel’s form but actually extends Wells’s investigation into the limits of print communication. The less-studied second act, meanwhile, offers a clearer example of the radio play’s remediation of the novel, with an opening reminiscent of epistolary novels and an ending in which a belatedly present novelistic narrator completes his memoir of the Martian invasion. And, as I will discuss below, the play’s manipulations of traditional novelistic form—particularly scriptwriter Howard Koch’s decision to delay the narrator’s entrance into the story—crucially contributed to listeners’ panicked response to the play.

### **THE REMEDIATED TEXT IN “THE WAR OF THE WORLDS”**

In a dissertation on Welles’s “[r]emediation of American Shakespeare,” Daniel Francis Yezbick writes that “radio’s absorption and alteration of past sources remains vastly under-appreciated” (11). This may be most true, paradoxically, of some of radio’s most-appreciated broadcasts. *The War of the Worlds*, one of the best-known radio plays,

has generated far more interest among historians and media theorists for its innovative employment of newscasting techniques than for its remediation of the novel on which it is based. Examining *War* as a remediation requires studying not only the play's adaptation of Wells's plot but also, more importantly, its incorporation of elements that evoked genres and forms from older media—particularly the novel. Episodes of *The Mercury Theatre on the Air* before *War* had frequently evoked such elements. The introductions' preoccupation with novelists was the most conspicuous example, but many of the plays themselves also reminded listeners of the broadcasts' textual origins by making their narrators and other characters writers, such as the elder Jim Hawkins of *Treasure Island*, who “write[s] down the whole particulars about Treasure Island” at the beginning of the play, and the multiple diarists of *Dracula*. These characters are writers in the source novels as well, but Welles and his collaborators could easily have ignored this detail in translating them into radio-play narrators. In Welles's plays, however, remediations of writing and the written text assume significant thematic importance, as we will see with both *The War of the Worlds* and *Huckleberry Finn*.

On its surface, *War* hardly seems to remediate its source, for it appears at first to translate a novel into a work that is perfectly aligned with radio conventions. Its first act radically alters the novel's form, turning a narrative purportedly written retrospectively by its homodiegetic narrator into a newscast that describes events as they occur. With this formal contrast between novel and play, both Koch and Wells saw the broadcast as a re-writing rather than an adaptation (Koch, *As Time* 3). While Geduld has demonstrated significant correspondences in terms of plot, both works' remediations of print-based genres reveal additional similarities. For example, the novel's first-person narrator

appears, belatedly, in the play's second act, and the play—like the novel—represents him as a writer “set[ting] down [...] notes on paper” (68).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, while the play's first act seems to depart radically from its novelistic origins, it is acutely attuned to Wells's remediation of print media in the novel. Initially published in serialized form in *Pearson's Magazine*, much of the novel's narrative is punctuated by newspaper stories and headlines. Published in one type of periodical, it borrows the form of another (newspapers). The novel also reflects on its own form, with the narrator alluding to his act of writing his recollections of the Martian invasion. Wells's *War*, therefore, combines the immediacy of scientific romance with an artistically self-aware hypermediacy, to use Bolter and Grusin's terms. In adapting the novel to the airwaves, Welles and Koch not only retained significant portions of Wells's plot; they also expanded on the novelist's awareness of mediation. As I will argue, the broadcast's self-reflective focus on electronic media and radio newscasting is not a radical departure from the source text, but rather an extension of the novel's similar investigation of print media.

## **THE BROADCAST**

In contrast to Welles's common strategy of foregrounding the literary work's adaptation, in many ways *The War of the Worlds* broadcast appears to obscure its origins as a novel. Welles's introductory opening monologue departs from his typical practice of beginning out of character to introduce the adapted literary work and discuss its author. Here Welles begins in character, reading a statement drawn from the novel's opening in

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<sup>6</sup> Citations of the script are to Koch, *The Panic Broadcast*.

the gruff voice he will use when portraying the protagonist, astronomer Richard Pierson. Following *War*'s first page almost verbatim, Welles ominously intones, "We know now that in the early years of the twentieth century this world was being watched closely by intelligences greater than man's yet as mortal as his own" (33). After elaborating on the Martians' invasion plans, Welles's opening concludes with brief, topical allusions to the Depression and the recent "war scare" in Europe as well as a final statement that "[o]n this particular evening, October 30, the Crossley Service estimated that thirty-two million people were listening in on radios" (36). As Heyer writes, these contemporarily relevant additions to Wells's opening put "the narrative in a dynamic present by implying that what follows is not past tense, a story previously written and now being recounted, but one that occurs during the telling" (83).

This brief prologue sets up the fictional radio broadcast dramatizing Wells's Martian invasion tale. The play develops tension slowly, beginning with a program of dance music (originating from hotel ballrooms in Manhattan and Brooklyn, according to the fictional announcers, but actually performed by Bernard Herrmann's in-studio orchestra) that is periodically interrupted by newsbreaks announcing mysterious explosions on Mars and disturbances in the Earth's atmosphere. Soon, the in-studio announcers cut to roving reporter Carl Phillips, who interviews Professor Pierson, "famous astronomer" of Princeton, before traveling with Pierson to Grovers Mill, New Jersey, where mysterious cylinders have landed (38). From the landing site, Phillips presents listeners with an increasingly alarming "word picture" of events (43). Actor Frank Readick, playing Phillips, modeled his panicked delivery on Herbert Morrison's eyewitness reporting of the Hindenburg crash, which had been broadcast the previous

year (Callow 400). Through the bystanders' increasingly audible panic, the Martians emerge from their spacecraft, turning their heat ray on the crowd and ending Phillips's report with a "[c]rash of microphone ... then dead silence" (52).

After Phillips's death, the play's narrative voice becomes increasingly fragmented among multiple speakers. The in-studio announcers cut, in turn, to a state militia commander; Professor Pierson, who reports on the Martians' weapons; and the radio network's "vice-president in charge of operations," who cedes control of the broadcaster's facilities to the state militia. Listeners soon overhear dispatches from military field commanders and transmissions from bomber pilots futilely attacking the Martians. The Secretary of the Interior—played by Kenneth Delmar, imitating President Roosevelt's cadence and mannerisms—urges listeners to "continue the performance of our duties [...] so that we may confront this destructive adversary with a nation united, courageous, and consecrated to the preservation of human supremacy on this earth" (58). The Martians' poisonous smoke, however, soon spreads across New Jersey and Manhattan, claiming an announcer on the roof of Broadcasting Building as he bravely makes what he says "may be the last broadcast" (66). With this final network representative silenced, a lone ham-radio operator fills the void: "2X2L calling CQ ... New York. Isn't there anyone on the air? Isn't there anyone on the air? Isn't there anyone ... 2X2L" (67). After six seconds of dead air and forty minutes of the hour-long broadcast, CBS announcer Dan Seymour reminded listeners that they were hearing "an original dramatization of *The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells (67).

This first act has received the most attention in media histories and criticism because of its effects on credulous, frightened listeners. The play's second act has

received far less. After the brief station break, Welles, as Professor Pierson, delivers a long monologue beginning in the form of a diary entry: “As I set down these notes on paper, I’m obsessed by the thought that I may be the last living man on earth” (68). As in an epistolary novel, external events soon intrude on Pierson’s writing, and Pierson dutifully notes the action for listeners: “The smoke still holds the house in its black coil ... But at length there is a hissing sound and suddenly I see a Martian mounted on his machine” (69). With Pierson’s writing now synchronized to present events, the play shifts to a dramatic scene with the professor meeting another survivor, the “Stranger,” who plans to seize the invaders’ weapons and turn them on Martians and fellow men alike. This second act, therefore, follows the series’ common method of integrating narration—often represented as the recitation of a letter, diary entry, or other text—with dramatic scenes. With a fascistic plan to “get a bunch of strong men together” and weed out the “weak ones,” the Stranger declares to Pierson, “You and me and a few more of us we’d own the world” (76; 77). Pierson rejects this plan, however, makes his way into Manhattan, and discovers the corpses of the Martians, who have been infected and “killed by the putrefactive and disease bacteria against which their systems were unprepared [...] slain [...] by the humblest thing God in His wisdom put upon this earth” (79). As the play ends, Pierson reports from his “peaceful study at Princeton writing down this last chapter” (79) of the invasion, which has ended with Martian war machines in museums and normal human life apparently restored. The play achieves this quick shift from panic to calm not only through the *deus ex machina* of the deadly microorganisms but also with a now-explicit remediation of writing: the first act’s chaos of war and radio transmissions gives way to the tranquility of a writer’s study.

## WELLES'S INFLUENCE

The *New York Daily News* headline on October 31, 1938 proclaimed, “Fake Radio ‘War’ Stirs Terror Through U.S.” (qtd. in Koch, *Panic* 17). *The New York Times*’ front-page story reported panicked listeners tying up phone lines with calls to police stations and newspapers, covering their faces with wet towels against poison gas, and scanning the sky for Martians (qtd. in Koch, *Panic* 18-20). Psychologist and radio researcher Hadley Cantril, who began composing questionnaires for listeners almost immediately, estimated that 1.7 million listeners assumed that the play was a real news broadcast and 1.2 million “were excited by it” (Cantril 58). Michael J. Socolow has recently argued persuasively that both Cantril’s study and contemporary news reports exaggerated the panic’s extent. Nonetheless, the broadcast frightened many listeners and challenged commentators to explain its causes. Some speculated that the panic resulted from listeners’ tension over the Czech situation—Welles’s network, CBS, which was known for frequent news “break-ins,” had extensively covered the past month’s Munich negotiations between Hitler and Chamberlain (Heyer 102)—and fears over the Japanese threat (Koch, *Panic* 18, 95). When Cantril published his study’s results, he acknowledged that these tensions made listeners susceptible to reports of a devastating military invasion. His study of the panic, however, focused on underlying causes of listeners’ “susceptibility-to-suggestion-when-facing-a-dangerous-situation,” which he speculated was heightened among listeners experiencing economic hardship, racial oppression, and other factors creating feelings of helplessness (203; 132).

The broadcast’s notoriety encouraged Welles to promote himself as the play’s creator. Cantril’s book challenged Welles’s authorship claim, however, by including the

play's script under Koch's name. When Welles disputed the attribution, the resulting controversy—which extended several decades through interviews with Welles, memoirs by Koch and Houseman, and critical appraisals—often centered on the relationship between the broadcast and the source novel. Koch, for example, claimed to have retained “very little” from H.G. Wells's original (*As Time 3*), and the novelist's outraged response to the “complete rewriting of *The War of the Worlds*” seems to confirm Koch's assertion. This contention, however, is a main target of Geduld's, who argues that the adaptation of the novel “was not as free as Koch would have us believe” and that “the adaptation should be considered Welles's rather than Koch's because Welles's involvement with the project was at every stage as much or greater than Koch's” (266-67).

Some arguments that the broadcast “should be considered Welles's” address the importance of his role as director and performer. Callow writes that Welles made minimal changes to Koch's script but “play[ed] it for all it was worth” (400). Controlling the performance's pacing, Welles drew out the length of the opening scenes, demonstrating both his skill at taking theatrical effects “far beyond their normal point of tension” and radio's ability to get “audiences to accept the telescoped reality of dramatic time” (Houseman, *Entertainers* 239, 240). Thus, it could be argued that Welles crucially contributed to the performance's impact on listeners. As Houseman has recalled, Welles typically participated minimally in broadcasts' preparation until the day of the performance, when “Orson really took over” with his approach to radio-drama performance, which “was essentially one of spontaneity” (*Run-Through* 391, 366). Thus, we might consider Welles to have “re-written” Koch's script in performance, and even Koch later admitted that Welles “took over at rehearsals and worked his particular

magic” on *War*, which was “undoubtedly Orson’s conception” (*Panic* 12; *As Time* 7).

This “conception” began with Welles’s vision for adapting Wells’s novel.<sup>7</sup> Koch recalls receiving the assignment to adapt the novel “with instructions from Orson to dramatize it in the form of news bulletins and first-person narration” (*As Time* 3). Since the first part of the form Welles suggested—the news bulletins—incited the panic, it has dominated discussions of the play. The addition of first-person narration, however, aligns the play with Welles’s initial conception of the series’ broadcasts—and the series’ original title, *First Person Singular*—as combinations of narration and dramatized scenes. Welles’s instructions to combine the novel’s first-person narration with the modern device of the news broadcast also encapsulated a consistent tension in Welles’s work across media—a simultaneous desire to transmutate a text faithfully and a willingness to alter it. This tension emerges in the interviews Bogdanovich conducted with Welles, who, on the one hand, laments that no cinematic adaptations of Joseph Conrad’s novels have paid “some attention [...] to the original book” and, on the other, compares his film adaptations to operas and asks, “[w]hy is a movie supposed to be more

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<sup>7</sup> It is unclear whether it was Welles’s choice to adapt *War*. Houseman writes that the decision emerged from discussions he had with Welles as they both sought “something of a scientific nature” to add variety to other broadcasts in the first season (*Unfinished* 192). According to Houseman, he and Welles discussed Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Lost World* and other science fiction books before choosing Wells’s novel, “which neither Orson nor I remembered at all clearly. It is just possible that neither of us had ever read it” (*Unfinished* 192).

respectful to a play [or novel] than an opera?” (32; 228). Welles displayed these simultaneous desires to follow literary and dramatic originals and to alter them for his purposes in his enduring tendency to rewrite his and others’ texts (Leaming 185). His lifelong practice of returning to texts by Shakespeare and other authors—often adapting texts multiple times in various media—demonstrated both a reverence for those texts and an urge to alter them through his own artistic contributions.

One way Welles balanced fidelity to a source with free interpretation was to shorten a work to focus attention on one or two themes. Much like Beckett’s, Welles’s impulse in revising texts was to pare them down to essential parts. The principle is at work in Welles’s 1937 stage production of *Doctor Faustus*, which he trimmed to less than ninety minutes and played without intermission, and his verbally sparse film adaptation of *Othello*, in which the first spoken dialogue summarizes the story to come—Iago’s direct statement, “I hate the Moor” (Thomson 68; Welles and Bogdanovich 229). The methods Welles used to focus attention on a few chosen themes—such as dressing actors in fascist-style uniforms to explore themes of authority and corruption in the 1937 stage production of *Caesar*—can suggest that Welles projected “wild new concepts” onto older material (Yezbick 48). Usually, however, Welles simply turned necessity (such as the revisions needed to condense a novel into an hour-long radio adaptation and an Elizabethan play into a stage production without intermission) into an opportunity to draw parallels between his contemporary concerns and themes inherent in the adapted works.

The two most prominent themes in the *War* broadcast—the dangers of fascist incursions and misleading new media—reflect Welles’s preoccupations at the time.

Geduld suggests that Welles was responsible for adding a passage to the play's second act that emphasized the fascism theme. In this short passage, the Stranger explains his plan to appropriate one of the Martians' machines: "Imagine having one of them lovely things with its heat ray turned wide and free! We'd turn it on Martians, we'd turn it on men. We'd bring everybody down to their knees" (Koch 76-77). Pierson promptly leaves the Stranger, who calls after him, "Say, what's the matter? Where are you going?" Pierson replies, "Not to your world ... Goodbye, stranger" (Koch 77). This definitive rejection of the Stranger's plan aligns the play with contemporary anti-fascist works. Welles had been intrigued by other plays criticizing American complacency over developments in Europe, including a Federal Theater adaptation of Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, about a fascist takeover of an American town (Geduld 270). According to Geduld, three days before *War*'s broadcast, Welles listened "with especially rapt attention" (265) to Archibald MacLeish's radio play, *Air Raid*, which was inspired by Picasso's *Guernica* and portrayed the bombing of a nameless town (MacLeish 97-98). MacLeish's later description of the play and its inspiration in Picasso's painting suggests *Air Raid*'s similarity to *The War of the Worlds*. MacLeish describes *Guernica* as a work that sees "a new world of war. [...] A war waged not by armies against armies but by machines in the blind sky against cities" (98). When he first saw the painting, MacLeish says, "I *heard it*—began to hear it: the women's voices at their work, the calling children, the radio crew on the roofs somewhere watching the sky to the northeast, the scene with which the play begins" (98). Much like *War*, *Air Raid* tells the story of military invasion through personifications of the radio medium—in *Air Raid*'s case, a "Studio Director" and an "Announcer" who report on the planes' assault on the city and the residents'

disbelief that an army would deliberately attack civilians.<sup>8</sup> A year and a half earlier, in MacLeish's radio play *The Fall of the City*, Welles had played a news commentator reporting a tyrant's conquest of another anonymous city. That play's fascist dictator does not conquer with armed force but rather by manipulating citizens' desires for a strong leader. As the play nears its end, the conqueror lifts his visor, and Welles reports, "There is no one. [...] / The helmet is hollow" (MacLeish 92). In a *Campbell Playhouse* episode broadcast seven months after *The War of the Worlds*, Welles warned listeners of citizens' susceptibility to similar temptations. *The Things We Have*, an original play written by Welles and the Mercury staff and broadcast in partnership with the *Cavalcade of America* series, dramatized the struggles for freedom throughout the country's history by various groups of Americans. With a conceit of two parents explaining America's political structure to their European-born, adopted son, the broadcast dramatized several such stories, including the American Revolution, the "Lament" of Native American warrior Logan of the Mingos, John Brown's rebellion, and Susan B. Anthony's fight for women's suffrage. After describing these historical episodes, Welles, as the father, tells his son of the "few million Americans who haven't worked for years" and the "several hundred

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<sup>8</sup> Welles did not perform in *Air Raid*, but the Announcer in MacLeish's play was Ray Collins, a *Mercury Theatre* regular and the voice of the Announcer who dies atop Broadcasting Building in *The War of the Worlds*. Along with several other Mercury Theatre actors, Collins followed Welles to Hollywood in the early 1940s. He appeared in *Citizen Kane* as Boss Gettys and acted also in Welles's films *The Magnificent Ambersons* and *Touch of Evil*.

thousand” poor tenant farmers who “might settle for the wrong kind of freedom” and “trade their vote for a decent meal.” As in the works discussed above, fascism is implied as the potential temptation but not mentioned directly.

Michael Denning writes that Welles was fascinated by fascism and that all his great works, including *The War of the Worlds*, “are allegories of fascism” (365). The play fits a narrative of Welles’s early career in which he repeatedly expressed this personal political conviction in his works. Welles’s conception of the play as a series of news reports suggesting an immediate military threat and his directing of the play to maximize dramatic tension helped express the immanent totalitarian threat. Welles’s personal role, however, should not overshadow Koch’s significant contributions to the play’s impact—particularly since it is impossible to establish the exact extent of Welles’s intentions and influence. Koch amplified themes inherent in the *Mercury Theatre*’s format, which always kept narration and dramatization in an uneasy balance. In the process, deliberately or not, Koch worked with the novel’s thematic concerns with imperialism and communications media, on the one hand, and the *Mercury* audience’s expectations on the other, to create a play that insightfully interpreted both Wells’s text and the contemporary media ecology.

#### **FROM WAR TO “WAR”: ADAPTING BOOK TO BROADCAST**

The *War* broadcast expressed its anti-fascist message without significantly altering the novel’s thematic concerns. As Geduld points out, the subtext of Wells’s novel was “the Day of Judgment for British imperialism” (268). Through the story of a technologically superior conqueror destroying Britain, Wells “turned the tables on the

colonialists” who had recently exterminated the population of Tasmania (Geduld 268). Several critics have also observed that the novel contains Wells’s meditations on the ethical implications of evolution and arguments against English complacency at a time of both unprecedented imperial power and increasing military threats from abroad.<sup>9</sup> Koch generally abandons the former theme but retains the latter by emphasizing the danger of a complacent and overly confident America (exemplified by the play’s arrogant state militia captain, who reports after the initial heat-ray attack and the militia’s first counterattack, “All cause for alarm, if such cause ever existed, is now entirely unjustified” [56]).

The radio play’s anti-fascist warning arose naturally from Wells’s chapter “The Man on Putney Hill.” In this chapter, Wells’s anonymous narrator meets an artilleryman (Welles and Koch’s “Stranger”), whom critics David Y. Hughes and Harry M. Geduld see as Wells’s representation of the “survivalist-authoritarian response” to the invasion (Wells 9). The artilleryman also propounds a type of eugenics, proclaiming that men like him “are going on living—for the sake of the breed” and that he sees no hope—or use—

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<sup>9</sup> Mark R. Hillegas, John Huntington, and Patrick Parrinder each discuss the influence of T.H. Huxley’s philosophy of ethical evolution on *War* and Wells’s other scientific romances. Recently, John S. Partington has analyzed Wells’s Huxleyan inheritance as it is expressed in his later, political writings, and Todd Avery takes a similar approach to Wells’s BBC radio talks. Bernard Bergonzi reads *War* as part of a *fin de siècle* English fad for novels imagining devastating foreign invasions, while Parrinder sees the novel as an attack on “Victorian self-conceit” (29).

for the masses of people who “haven’t any spirit in them—no proud dreams and no proud lusts” (173, 174). These general sentiments appear in both the novel and the *Mercury* adaptation, and in both the narrator rejects the man’s plans. The two narrators have different reasons, however, for rejecting the artilleryman/Stranger and his vision of a new society of “able-bodied, clean-minded men” (Wells 175). The novel’s narrator never rejects the artilleryman’s plans, but instead doubts his ability to realize them. The artilleryman’s “imaginative daring” contrasts with his reluctance to work, and the narrator begins to see “the gulf between [the artilleryman’s] dreams and his powers”: “[h]e was no longer the energetic regenerator of his species I had encountered in the morning” (177, 179). Since it is the artilleryman’s commitment rather than his ideology that the narrator rejects, Wells scholar Bernard Bergonzi asserts that “the Artilleryman’s views are those of Wells himself, or at least they are based on ideas which Wells was prepared to consider very seriously” (138). John S. Partington argues convincingly that interpretations like Bergonzi’s reflect an unjustified Cold-War-era tendency—fueled by distrust of authoritarian communism—to see Wells’s thought as “verging on authoritarianism” (10). And other critics plausibly represent the Putney Hill episode as part of Wells’s exploration of the competing forces of ethics and evolution and suggest that Wells’s beliefs lie somewhere between the artilleryman’s embodiment of the evolutionary impulse and another character, the curate, who represents an ethical response to the invasion.<sup>10</sup> Whatever Wells’s position on the authoritarian and evolutionary ideas that his novel raises, however, the book gave Welles and Koch a

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<sup>10</sup> See Huntington (78-84) for a very convincing example of this argument.

ready-made analogy to the eugenic philosophy and imperialist goals of 1930s European fascism.

Along with the Putney Hill episode, the two works share a concern with communications media, making the broadcast a less radical revision of the novel than it initially appears to be. Many of the events described in the novel's Book I—those translated into the play's newscast portion—are filtered through newspaper reports. The prominence of news reports and a generally journalistic style led a contemporary reviewer in the American journal *The Critic* to criticize the novel's "slipshod style, which betrays all the haste of the daily 'leader' to get into type" and reads as a mere "Associated Press dispatch" (qtd. in Parrinder, *H.G. Wells: The Critical Heritage* 68, 69). As the Martian invasion proceeds, the often-misleading dispatches in London's many daily newspapers contrast with the narrator's eyewitness recollections. The first mention of a newspaper, on the novel's third page, anticipates the way Wells will use news media to represent the population's mistaken sense of security. At this early point in the novel, although astronomers have observed "a mass of flaming gas" speeding toward Earth from Mars, the daily papers ignore this occurrence, except for "a little note in the *Daily Telegraph*, and the world went in ignorance of one of the gravest dangers that ever threatened the human race" (53). Similar events near the radio play's opening warrant brief on-air announcements before the studio returns to the program of dance music. In the novel, subsequent mentions of news stories or headlines—roughly fifteen in the first sixty pages—contain insufficient or inaccurate information, exhibit naive optimism, or

fail to excite the insular Londoners to action.<sup>11</sup> Much as the news break-ins did for the radio play's audience, the many allusions to news reports in the novel expand its scope from the narrator's limited vantage to the broader picture of events around the metropolitan area. These news reports also, however, point out the journalists' inaccuracy and failure to rouse readers to action.

Like the play's newscasts, the novel's newspaper reports escalate and finally alarm the populace. Wells's use of newspapers to supplement the narrative peaks when the narrator describes his brother's escape from London. Focusing on the brother's experience within the mass exodus allows Wells "to combine the largeness of design that he was obviously seeking with the immediacy of first-person narration" (Bergonzi 126), and the frequently quoted news headlines and reports contribute to the feeling of immediacy in these chapters. During London's evacuation, newspaper updates occur more frequently, until events and their mediated representation become nearly synchronized. Wells's narrator calls attention to the merger of events and their journalistic representation when he describes his brother's flight from London amidst panicked cries of "Black Smoke!" as crowds around him flee the poisonous gas (113). Seeking the latest news of the invasion, the brother purchases a newspaper from a vender who is "running away with the rest, [...] selling his papers for a shilling each as he [runs]" (113). While the narrator calls the news vender's act "a grotesque mingling of profit and

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<sup>11</sup> For examples of inaccurate reports or newspapers' failure to pursue information sufficiently, see 74, 79, 106. At other times, reporters fail to take threats seriously (73), or readers take news reports too lightly (75, 107).

panic,” the sight also mingles the event with its nearly simultaneous mediation; the narrator’s brother reads the newspaper’s report of the same poisonous gas that the surrounding crowd flees (113). The telegraph newspaper’s near synchronization of event and mediated representation approaches a limit of simultaneity that only live broadcasting can reach. As the newspaper nears this limit, it begins to break down, its material substance becoming at once more pronounced and more tenuous. The newspaper’s fragility appears most clearly when the narrator’s brother sees a single-page insert in a late newspaper edition. The inserted announcement, which assures readers that London authorities are taking all measures necessary to protect citizens, “was printed in enormous type on paper so fresh that it was still wet, and there had been no time to add a word of comment. It was curious, my brother said, to see how ruthlessly the usual contents of the paper had been hacked and taken out to give this place” (110).<sup>12</sup> As events and their textual representation merge, the broadsides themselves—still wet and with many of their contents “hacked and taken out”—seem also to represent the Londoners’ vulnerability. Soon, with the flight in full swing and the newspapers obsolete, printed page and body become nearly indistinguishable as the page itself symbolically dissolves. Wells describes the fleeing citizens through an aerial

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<sup>12</sup> In their edition of the novel Hughes and Geduld point out that the wet paper in this description (from the novel’s original, serialized publication) is an anachronism. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century paper was no longer dampened before being imprinted. Welles revised the passage for the novel’s first edition to read, “in enormous type, so fresh that the paper was still wet.” See Wells 213.

perspective, with the London area spread out like a map and the fleeing population appearing “as if some monstrous pen had flung ink upon the chart” (131). After the rushed announcements with their still-drying ink, Wells symbolically destroys the newspapers as surely as Koch would destroy the radio network during the play’s first act.

The radio adaptation’s newscast format, therefore, had thematic and narrative origins in the novel, which symbolically pushes the print medium past its breaking point. In Wells’s story, print fails to inspire action until it approaches the simultaneity that Welles could simulate on radio. We may, therefore, read novel and broadcast as two stages of a single project to deliver a message with an urgency lacking in traditional uses of the printed word. Wells did so in the novel by remediating an accelerated form of print communication—the almost-instantaneously updated telegraph newspaper—while Welles transferred the printed text (Wells’s novel and the play’s script) to the airwaves in a broadcast that suggested the simultaneous convergence of event and representation. Both Wells and Welles attempted to alert audiences to threats that print media had failed to impress on them. The Victorian novelist emphasized the dangers facing imperial Britain and called, in response, for a “commonweal of mankind” and “pity for those witless souls that suffer our dominion” (Wells 192, 169). Four decades later, Welles drew attention to the danger that unemployed Americans might succumb to fascism’s appeal.

Radio writers and performers in the 1930s often championed oral performance’s ability to reinforce messages traditionally disseminated through writing. This was especially true among American radio’s “sustaining people,” radio historian Erik Barnouw’s term for the group of writers, performers, and producers of artistic or public-

service programs that networks offered without commercial sponsorship (Barnouw, *A History* 89). Barnouw writes that a journalistic impulse united the otherwise diverse group of poets, journalists, and aural experimenters so that a “straight line ran through MacLeish’s city [in the verse dramas *The Fall of the City* and *Air Raid*] through [newscaster H.V.] Kaltenborn’s [... dispatches from] Vienna—through Munich—to the New Jersey flatlands” of Welles’s *The War of the Worlds* (*A History* 89). “The sustaining people,” Barnouw writes, “worked by preference in the tensions of their time” and “tended to be journalists even when writing drama or poetry” (89). Often they expressed the urgency of these contemporary tensions by contrasting radio’s immediacy with the supposedly lifeless written word. One of the most inventive and influential programs to play on this contrast was *We Hold These Truths* by prolific radio writer and producer Norman Corwin. Broadcast live to more than sixty-million American listeners on December 15, 1941—150 years after the adoption of the Bill of Rights and eight days after the Pearl Harbor bombing—the play brought the Bill of Rights to life by dramatizing the Constitution’s composition and ratification.<sup>13</sup> The play takes listeners through an aural tour of Washington, D.C., concluding in a visit to the Constitution manuscript in the Library of Congress. As the tour guide (the “Citizen,” played by Jimmy Stewart) says, “the manuscript is aging, [...] its words are worn as though from use. The writing’s dim; it’s hard to make out ... it’s getting on in years” (Corwin 59). Although the writing on the document has faded, the broadcast’s historical dramatization

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<sup>13</sup> Corwin cites the figure of more than sixty-million listeners as the Crossley Service’s estimate (Corwin 55).

returns listeners to a time when, as the Citizen says, “this was shining parchment—when the text was easier to read—when the ink was not yet dry” (60). More than simply a historical docudrama, *We Hold These Truths* represents a paradigmatic remediation of the written word, which was a common way in which broadcasters emphasized their offerings’ immediacy. The Citizen’s narration links the present and past by shifting between contemporary scenes in Washington and episodes from post-Revolution America. The play’s broadcast added to this temporal synthesis a geographic reach facilitated by broadcasting technology: actors in Hollywood (including Welles, along with Walter Huston, Edward G. Robinson, and others) were joined on the air by Leopold Stokowski’s Philharmonic Orchestra in New York and President Roosevelt in Washington (Corwin 55).

Radio’s perceived ability to give both historical and current events a feeling of immediate presence for listeners intrigued the many educators who explored radio’s pedagogic potential. William B. Levenson, for example, in *Teaching through Radio* (1945), wrote of radio’s “direct and intimate [...] appeal” and of the timeliness of news broadcasts that became “the last page of the newest textbook” for students who listened to them in class (4, 6). The 1930s and 1940s saw many books and articles exploring radio’s educational potential and debating the relative merits of reading and listening. In books like Levenson’s and Max J. Herzberg’s *Radio and English Teaching*, teachers and policy-makers debated whether radio should be used only to encourage reading or whether listening might provide some of the same benefits as reading or even additional

ones.<sup>14</sup> Programs like *We Hold These Truths* and debates over radio in education often celebrated radio's expressive potential in contrast to the stale written word. Such discourse, however, does not constitute a rejection of writing or a prediction that radio would supplant print. The written word served as a convenient symbol for a range of characteristics and values—often some variation on calcified, inherited beliefs or old modes of artistic expression in need of updating—against which radio practitioners and proponents positioned themselves. The artists and educators contrasting radio's freshness and immediacy to these unfavorable characteristics were, nonetheless, deeply invested in the literary tradition. Their attitude toward the written word, therefore, resembled Welles's promotion of the *Mercury Theatre* series: claiming the novelty and innovative nature of radio art through appeals, paradoxically, to the literary past. And broadcasts like *War*, with its alternation between effacement and remediation of literary texts, exemplified the tension inherent in broadcasters' promotion of radio as a unique medium.

The sensationalized publicity over the *War* broadcast thrust the play into discussions concerning the relationship between radio and print. Some observers related the ensuing panic to the purported decline of literacy due to new media. An editorial in *The Nation* two weeks after the broadcast attempted to explain the panic in relation to the

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph Mersand provided one of the most direct arguments for using radio to promote reading: "Radio programs encourage reading," aiding teachers in their goal of having students "read many books, and preferably good books" (193, 194). For the divergent view that listening might replace reading in some lessons, see MacAndrew, O'Steen (221), and Reid.

American public's "sea of insecurity and actual ignorance over which a superficial literacy and sophistication are spread like a thin crust" (qtd. in Slide 91-92). The editorial implicitly blames this poor literacy on radio, which blunts listeners' critical thinking abilities: "if casual listeners casually turning the dial [...] had stopped to think they would have discovered their error at least within a few minutes" (92). While this comment may appear to blame listeners, it reveals an underlying distrust of the medium. With its frantic pace and frequent jumps between commentators and locations, the *War* broadcast produced a relentless flow of information that seemed to epitomize the medium's ability to absorb listeners and prevent them from pausing to reflect on what they heard. *The Nation's* editorial proceeds to link radio's powerful influence to Nazism by contrasting broadcasting's force with print's lesser impact: "The disembodied voice has a far greater force than the printed word, as Hitler has discovered" (92). In this view, print appears to be superior to radio, which threatens to mislead listeners.

Other commentators, following *The Nation's* impulse to contrast broadcasting with written works, drew opposite conclusions concerning the two media's merits. The influential *New York Herald Tribune* columnist Dorothy Thompson, for example, defended Welles in her November 2 column, helping to quell criticism that his broadcast was irresponsible (Heyer 106). Claiming that Welles deserved "a Congressional medal" rather than censure for the broadcast's "contributions to the social sciences," Thompson wrote that the play and its aftermath "made a greater contribution to an understanding of Hitlerism, Mussolinism, Stalinism, [and] anti-Semitism [...] than all the words about them that have been written by reasonable men" (qtd. in Slide 93). Like *The Nation's* editorialists, Thompson associates print with dispassionate sobriety ("words [...] written

by reasonable men”). Yet her argument suggests that cool reason cannot express the danger of contemporary terrorisms. Her appraisal of the broadcast’s impact, therefore, recalls the first section of Wells’s novel, in which printed reports of the invasion alarm readers only when they merge with the terrifying Martians’ advance and approach the simultaneity of broadcasting.

### **THE RADIO PLAY AND DEFERRED NARRATION**

Many critical appraisals of the play relate it to radio’s dangerous power and potential to facilitate demagoguery by amplifying authoritative voices. For example, Koch’s account of the panic relates Welles’s “resonant, throbbing voice” in the broadcast to “the privileged voice” of a politician who uses radio “to create an image of himself and of the world that suits his purposes” (*Panic* 155, 158). This comparison of the broadcast to demagogic politicians’ proclamations, however, seems driven by unfounded attempts to relate *War* to broadcasts by Hitler and Mussolini. In fact, the play does the opposite of upholding a dangerously privileged voice. Two days after the broadcast, *The New York Daily News*’s editorial seemed to recognize the distinction. In rejecting other commentators’ calls for increased censorship, the editorialists argue that the play “is evidence of how dangerous political control of radio might become” (qtd. in Koch, *Panic* 17). The danger of government-controlled radio—represented by the “dictators in Europe [who] use radio to make their people believe falsehoods”—is far greater than that of an occasional incident like the *War* broadcast, which “misled unintentionally” (qtd. in Koch, *Panic* 17). Because the play’s first act failed to establish a clear narrative center and therefore to privilege any single voice, *War* “misled unintentionally,” in contrast to

dictators' willful manipulation through radio.

The broadcast's delayed introduction of an authoritative narrative voice again displays the combined influences of Welles and Koch. Welles had instructed Koch to dramatize the novel as a combination of a news broadcast and first-person narration. Koch divided these two modes between the play's two acts rather than integrating them throughout the broadcast, a decision that demonstrated a sensitive understanding of the novel. Wells's anonymous narrator frequently experiences a divided consciousness, with alternating feelings of immersion in his surroundings and analytic detachment. He confesses that, in his detached moods, "I seem to watch it all from the outside, from somewhere inconceivably remote, out of time, out of space, out of the stress and tragedy of it all" (Wells 72). At one such moment, he uneasily notes "the black incongruity of [his feeling of] serenity and the swift death flying yonder, not two miles away" (72). Wells's narrative frequently expresses this duality of perspective. At times the narrator describes events from within their midst, immersing readers in the action. Such moments, however, alternate with the narrator's distanced perspective on the same events. During one Martian advance, for example, the narrator relates how he "rushed towards the approaching Martian, rushed right down the gravelly beach and headlong into the water" (97). The next paragraph draws back from this scene cinematically, describing from afar how "the Martian machine took no more notice for the moment of the people running this way and that than a man would of the confusion of ants in a nest

against which his foot has kicked” (97-98).<sup>15</sup> Alternating between these two perspectives, Wells invites an analytical reading of the Martian invasion. Readers both experience the invasion’s excitement and examine from a greater distance its significance, which Wells connects to British imperial abuses. At the novel’s beginning Wells draws an explicit connection between the Martians’ English victims and the “Tasmanians [who], in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants” (52). By combining some passages that convey an immersive experience with others that invite analytical reflection, Wells encourages readers to understand both intellectually and emotionally the parallels he draws between the panicked Londoners and the victims of British imperialism.

Koch delays this analytical perspective until his brief second act, making the bulk of the play an immersive experience. Only after the station break does Pierson speak as the story’s narrator-author and raise existential questions like those troubling Wells’s narrator throughout the novel: “I look down at my blackened hands, my torn shoes, my tattered clothes, and I try to connect them with a professor who lives at Princeton” (Koch, *Panic* 68). Before this second act, the play divides narration among various speakers—the in-studio announcers, reporters, and military and government officials. Although Pierson appears as a prominent character in the first act, so many characters compete for airtime that he never becomes definitively identified as the narrator. Rippy argues that

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<sup>15</sup> Bergonzi remarks on the novel’s representation of events in an “intensely visual fashion that frequently anticipates cinematic techniques” (126).

the audience's identification with Welles, established over the weeks of broadcasts before *War*, led them to turn to the character he portrayed, Pierson, for guidance. When Pierson "dissolved into panic," the audience's anxiety reflected Pierson's fear (*Orson Welles* 25). Rippy's argument, however, seems to assume listeners' foreknowledge that Pierson would become the play's narrator in the second act. Welles had frequently played minor characters as well as narrators in previous broadcasts, so even those listeners who recognized Welles's voice in Pierson would not have attached any more significance to his character than to the announcers and officials who occupy as much of the first act's airtime. Koch's treatment of Pierson's character did, in fact, influence the audience's response, but it did so by deferring Pierson's entry as narrator rather than setting him up as an unreliable guide from the beginning.

By not organizing the plot around a single narrator, Koch's script subverts Welles's stated approach to literary adaptation. At the *Mercury* series' inception, Welles had discussed the narrator's crucial role in guiding listeners by "introducing [...] characters" and "weld[ing] the various episodes together" (Columbia 6/15/38). Welles's practice, however, frequently scuttled his declared approach. In the adaptations he wrote independently or in collaboration with Houseman and others, Welles often frustrated the narrator's ostensibly helpful purpose by fragmenting the narrative voice or delaying the narrator's entry into the play. The former can be seen in the *Mercury Theatre's* first broadcast, *Dracula*, which—like Bram Stoker's novel—unfolds through multiple first-person accounts. As we will see below, the adaptation of *Huckleberry Finn* also splits a single, first-person narrator into at least two (and perhaps more) characters who tell Huck and Jim's story.

In an adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Welles had practiced something like *The War of the Worlds*'s combination of fragmented and delayed narration. Welles heavily revised an earlier version of this play's script, which follows a typical *Mercury Theatre* approach by turning Dickens's third-person narration into a story told by one of the characters, Jarvis Lorry. The original script, written by Houseman, begins with Lorry introducing himself and providing listeners a clear frame of reference for understanding ensuing events:

LORRY. This is a history of events that took place in London and across the Channel in France in the years immediately preceding and during the great French Revolution. My name is Jarvis Lorry. Most of the characters in this history are people whom I first encountered in the course of business on behalf of Tellson's Band [sic], London and Paris, of which I have been for many years a partner. (*Tale 3*)

Narrative theorist Gerard Genette calls this kind of framing narration "extradiegetic" (229). Genette associates the extradiegetic narrator with the "fictive author" who, like Lorry in this passage, appears to be composing the story. Extradiegetic narration may contain additional narrators operating at what Genette describes as higher levels or degrees. These narrators within the extradiegetic narration tell stories within the framing story. In the original *Tale* script, Dr. Manette functions in this way as an "intradiegetic" narrator (Genette 228-29). Following Lorry's opening words, the script indicates the sound of chains and a pen scratching on paper, signaling a shift of scene to Dr. Manette's prison cell:

MANETTE. Paris 1767. I, Alexander Manette, unfortunate physician,

native of Bauvais and afterward resident in Paris, write this melancholy paper in my doleful cell in the Bastille. (*Tale 3*)

This original draft, therefore, establishes a clear hierarchy of narrative levels: [Lorry's narration (Dr. Manette's narration [events described by Dr. Manette])]. The revised script no longer includes Lorry's framing narration. In the version that was broadcast, it is only on the script's twelfth page that Lorry—identified in the script merely as the “Narrator”—initially speaks; shortly after that he delivers the explanatory speech that originally was to open the play. After the play begins with the diarist Dr. Manette appearing to be the fictional author, Lorry enters belatedly as the extradiegetic narrator and rival to Dr. Manette. As Rippy observes, the relocation of Lorry's opening speech and the later entry of Sydney Carton as another prospective storyteller create “a sense of three competing ‘authors’ of this tale” (“Orson Welles” 145).<sup>16</sup> In the series' earliest broadcasts, therefore, Welles was experimenting with narrative approaches that challenged audiences far more than his declared approach to adaptation suggested he would.

In *War*, Koch expanded these techniques, refusing to integrate narrated and dramatic scenes in the first act. His doing so confused listeners, but not by turning the play over to misleading, authoritative voices. Rather, with the play's central narrator

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<sup>16</sup> Rippy perceptively observes that Welles's revision of the *Tale* script “shifts interest from the exterior observer to the writer-within-the-narrative, particularly exploring the struggle to control meaning within the courtroom and the individual fear of being ‘misread’ by the masses” (“Orson Welles” 147).

withheld from listeners longer than Welles had previously done in plays like *A Tale of Two Cities*, the broadcast excited listeners by creating a vacuum of authority and a profusion of characters who failed to explain events for listeners. As Miller writes, the Martians' existence seems real to listeners, paradoxically, because of characters' inability to describe them:

The commentator's [i.e., Carl Phillips's] breakdown of language and his confession that words cannot, at least initially, describe the Martian [who emerges from the first cylinder], serve as proof to the listening public that he is not tricking them: the alien exists. [...] Located inside the few seconds of dead air (a cardinal sin for radio) in which Phillips scrambles in silence for words, is the ontological origin of the alien. [...] Empirical proof of otherworldly existence is found in the breakdown of language, in a delay of linear narrative in a fearful, silent moment. (123-24)

Literal silence and the failure of the anticipated Wellesian narrator to assume control reinforce each other as conspicuous absences in the play.

Delaying the narrator's appearance exaggerated a pre-existing tension in the series between Welles's statements about a radio narrator's ideal function and the series' actual employment of this figure. Commenting on his preference for narration in radio drama, Welles once compared a radio-play's narrator to the Chorus of Greek tragedy—as Welles put it, “the fellow who used to come out between the acts and explain what was going to happen next and why” (qtd. in Callow 373). Welles's comparison implies that his narrator would maintain a certain distance from events that would allow for objective explanations of them. Unlike the classical Chorus that would “come out between the

acts,” however, Welles’s narrators were typically immersed in the plays’ action. Arnheim suggests that a combination of separation from and involvement in the action was typical of radio plays’ narrators and announcers. Like Welles, Arnheim compared these figures in radio plays to the Chorus, but he also noted medium-specific differences:

The announcer [...] is at once the most abstract and unnaturalistic and the most natural and naïve wireless-form. There is no contradiction in this. The contradictory features only result from considering the matter in two different ways: if wireless is regarded as primarily the mediator between the ear and a stage with corporeal actors (scenes from a dramatic radio play), then the soliloquizing, uncorporeal announcer is the most radical abstraction imaginable; but if one conceives of the broadcast as a flow of mere sounds through the ear of the blind listener, then the announcer (with music) is the most direct and simple form of expression in wireless. (202-3)

Arnheim’s description of radio drama captures the characteristic fluctuation in Welles’s plays between dramatic scenes and narration—components that correspond, respectively, to “wireless [...] regarded as primarily the mediator between the ear and a stage with corporeal actors” and “the broadcast as a flow of mere sounds through the ear.” Fluctuating between these two conceptions, the narrator is alternately abstracted from the story he tells and dissolved in it as an irreducible component.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For another discussion of radio narrators’ relation to the classical Chorus, see Rodger, who analyzes their Brechtian, pedagogic function (27-38).

Welles frequently emphasized the narrator's dual functioning by plunging his storytellers into the plots that they expounded. An instinctual understanding of the medium may have suggested this practice to Welles, but he may also have been influenced by his performance in MacLeish's *The Fall of the City* in 1937, the year before the *Mercury Theatre's* debut. Peter Conrad writes that the radio announcer Welles portrayed in *The Fall of the City* was caught up in the events but also isolated temperamentally from the crowd around him, making his character the opposite of the classical Chorus: "the Greek chorus was an ensemble, representing the consensus of a community, whereas [MacLeish's] Announcer is a solitary, powerless individual, aghast at the irrationality of a crowd which lacks the gravity and judicial conscience of the assembled citizens in Sophocles or Aeschylus" (115). Conrad's description of this announcer resembles Arnheim's discussion of radio announcers who are both integrated in and abstracted from what they describe. Perhaps having noticed the impact MacLeish achieved by reversing the traditional function of the Chorus in a play about the breakdown of civilized society, Welles later replicated the effect in his radio series. He did so by integrating his narrators into the story through his "First Person Singular" technique, which frequently turned non-narrating literary characters into the dramatizations' narrators, as in the case of Jarvis Lorry in *Tale*. When it came to novels already narrated in the first-person, Welles was drawn to works whose narrators commented on events that tested their objectivity and reliability, like Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. After dramatizing the novella for radio along with Koch, Welles began drafting a cinematic adaptation of Conrad's classic for his first Hollywood feature. The unrealized project was to have the camera represent Marlow's point of view, a

technique through which Welles intended to erase the distance between the narrator's and viewers' experiences of the story.<sup>18</sup> The Marlow of Conrad's novel increasingly resembles MacLeish's narrator as Peter Conrad describes him—"a solitary, powerless individual, aghast at the irrationality" he descends into (115). As a narrator, therefore, he also resembles the frantic announcers of Koch's *War* adaptation who struggle to report from the midst of increasingly chaotic events.<sup>19</sup>

Far from presenting a dictatorial, privileged voice, therefore, *The War of the Worlds* radio play subverts the authority and reliability of the narrator, whom listeners would have depended on for guidance in understanding and interpreting the broadcast.

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<sup>18</sup> Discussing the influence of Welles's radio series on his screenplay for *Heart of Darkness*, Robert Spadoni writes, "Welles was seeking a filmic equivalent of the kind of identification that novels can effect in readers, and that his own Mercury radio show [...] routinely evoked in listeners" (80).

<sup>19</sup> While Welles frequently used narrators to challenge as much as guide his listeners, several of the *Mercury Theatre's* radio adaptations followed Arnheim's model of the announcer as a Chorus-like figure commenting on events from a distanced perspective. One of the best examples was the May 12, 1939, broadcast of *Our Town*, in which Thornton Wilder's Stage Manager is a natural fit for a radio play. As he does for the theatrical audience, which sees the play open on a bare stage (Wilder 5), the Stage Manager in the radio play fills in visual details for the audience and comments philosophically on the action.

The play begins with a semblance of guidance with its in-studio announcers unifying the broadcast's many dispatches from their centralized, authoritative positions. Soon, however, the play's increasing confusion serves to "peel away the layers of broadcasting" (Miller 133). As the play moves into what Miller calls its "Emergency Broadcasting" portion, control shifts from the studio to the various battlegrounds where militia commanders and pilots have commandeered the airwaves. The various quasi-narrator figures responsible for informing the audience—such as reporter Phillips or "famous astronomer" Pierson—soon either die or go into hiding, and by the first act's close, the poisonous gas has incapacitated those in the Broadcasting Building itself.

Cantril's psychological study of the panic revealed that the vacuum of effective information and commentary in the play provided listeners with an opening to interpret and experience the play in widely varying ways. As Cantril writes, the play forced listeners to rely on their own "standards of judgment" because it failed to provide sufficient guidance for them:

The bewilderment of the listener is shared by the eyewitness [in the play].  
[...] No explanation of the event can be provided. The resignation and hopelessness of the Secretary of the Interior, counseling us to "place our faith in God," provides no effective guide for action. No standards of judgment can be applied to judge the rapid-fire of events. (74)

Cantril concluded that this situation made panic "inescapable," although he found it difficult to correlate listeners' susceptibility-to-panic to such factors as education or socio-economic level (74). Instead of focusing on these as predictors, Cantril stressed the combined factors of an individual's "particular environment" and "particular

capacities”—a combination of one’s innate capabilities and temporary circumstance.

Some of Cantril’s most illuminating findings concern the widely varying circumstances in which audience members heard the broadcast, many of which encouraged or compelled listeners to contribute actively to their own and others’ experiences of the play. Cantril reminded his readers that the broadcast’s audience should be considered neither as a single mass nor as isolated individuals but rather as “thousands of small, congregate groups” (xxviii). Within these groups, listeners were exposed to an “enormous variety of stimulus-configurations” (140). Cantril described normally calm and skeptical listeners panicking when listening to the broadcast in public places or among friends, spouses, or family members who became scared. Listeners also reported dynamic listening conditions, such as the police officer who tuned in at the station and became frightened only after receiving panicked calls from other listeners. In another case, a young man listening in his car, who stopped in a drugstore to call family members living near the Martians’ supposed landing site in New Jersey, became increasingly frightened by the drugstore patrons’ comments on the broadcast. He then drove off to rescue his girlfriend while continuing to listen to the play (141, 168). These and other vignettes in Cantril’s book reveal that the already dynamic social circumstances prevailing in everyday listening—in which audiences might listen distractedly during a party or family gathering and listen actively only when someone called attention to the broadcast—increasingly influenced the responses of listeners denied adequate information by the broadcast.

The broadcast of *The War of the Worlds*, therefore, revealed an important distinction between the experience of reading a novel and hearing its dramatization. The

ostensibly stable text consumed by sober, isolated readers in the former circumstance seemed to become transformed into its opposite in Koch and Welles's adaptation. This apparent reversal, however, depended on an insightful understanding of Wells's novel and a largely faithful adaptation of its themes and narrative structure. These connections to the adapted text and Welles and Koch's ambition to express an old story in new ways combined to create an exemplary demonstration of remediation. Like other plays in the *Mercury Theatre* series, *War* incorporated elements that evoked the novel, such as the first-person narration that eventually appears in the second act. The play also cited print-based authorship through references to writing, notebooks, telegrams, and other symbols of the written word. And it deliberately reshaped these adopted elements for a new medium. Koch pushed Welles's experimental narrative methods farther than Welles had done, and listener panic resulted primarily from the story's being separated from its narrative mooring. Koch's narrative inventions, however, derived largely from themes expressed in Wells's novel. The play's gradual unraveling of news broadcasting corresponded to print journalism's similar disintegration in the novel. When the narrator finally emerges in the figure of Professor Pierson, Wells's exploration of scientific and imperial themes becomes Welles and Koch's anti-fascist warnings.

Publicity over the play-induced panic provided a focus for weeks of national discussions over both media manipulation and totalitarian dangers. As effective as the play was at inspiring these discussions, however, criticism of its impact, as well as panic victims' pending legal claims, precluded any repeats of such a sensational adaptation. When the newly sponsored and renamed *Campbell Playhouse* series debuted six weeks later, announcer Edwin C. Hill opened the broadcast by lauding Welles and the *War*

broadcast, which “made radio history and [created] a national sensation” (*Rebecca*). Hill also, however, prudently informed listeners that this sensation had been a “totally unexpected result—a result Mr. Welles, of course, greatly regrets” (*Rebecca*). As the series proceeded under Campbell’s sponsorship, Welles and the Mercury staff continued to experiment with their characteristic combination of narrated and dramatized scenes.<sup>20</sup> Only in the series’ third-to-last broadcast, however, would Welles and company again approach *War*’s combination of experimental technique and socio-political message with *Huckleberry Finn*, the subject of my next chapter.

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<sup>20</sup> Some standouts in this regard included *Mutiny on the Bounty*, adapted by Koch, Houseman, and Welles’s wife, Virginia Nicolson; *Algiers*, which included scenes in which the protagonist’s progress through the Kasbah was indicated through sound effects alone; and *The Magnificent Ambersons*, which used a chorus of townspeople that would resurface several years later in Welles’s film version of Tarkington’s novel (Welles and Bogdanovich 103).

### Chapter 3: Narrative Conflict: Race and Readers in *Huckleberry Finn*

The *Campbell Playhouse* production of *Huckleberry Finn* dates from a period when, by all accounts, most of Welles's time was absorbed by *Citizen Kane*, then being written under the working title *American*. If some of his radio plays suffered from Welles's distraction during the series' last few months in late 1939 and early 1940, *Huckleberry Finn* probably benefited from the intense work going into Welles's first Hollywood feature. Broadcast on March 17, 1940 as the third-to-last *Campbell* production, the play was written by Herman Mankiewicz, who was also drafting the *American* script along with Welles and Houseman.<sup>21</sup> *Huck* was the fifth script Mankiewicz had written for the radio series, and he had clearly become familiar with Welles's approach to literary adaptation. As Koch had done with *The War of the Worlds*, in *Huck* Mankiewicz manipulated familiar elements of the *Mercury Theatre* format to express prominent themes in the source text and demonstrate a subtle understanding of

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<sup>21</sup> Mankiewicz, who had begun writing scripts for *Campbell Playhouse* in November 1939, had signed a contract with Welles's Mercury Theatre on February 19, 1940 to help write Welles's first film for RKO Radio Pictures (Thomson 138). Richard Meryman's biography of Mankiewicz summarizes the conflicting accounts of *Kane*'s composition, including Houseman's and Welles's claims to have written significant portions of the script (245-61). Meryman states concisely that "Herman Mankiewicz wrote *Citizen Kane*" (256).

the novel's narrative form.

Mankiewicz's *Huckleberry Finn* adaptation resembles *Citizen Kane* in its focus on the act of storytelling as much as its subject. *Kane* follows the reporter Thompson's quest to understand Charles Foster Kane's dying word, "Rosebud." In the process the film presents the reminiscences of five people who knew Kane, creating a kaleidoscopic view of the late media magnate—or a "labyrinth without a center," in Jorge Luis Borges's assessment (qtd. in Leaming 311)—which fails to provide a single, definitive representation of Kane.<sup>22</sup> In *Huckleberry Finn*, the introductory speech that Mankiewicz wrote for Welles implicitly discusses this type of ambiguous, multivalent storytelling.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Welles and Mankiewicz shared an interest in building dramatic works around multiple eyewitness accounts. As a teenager, Welles had written *Marching Song*, a play about John Brown in which an antebellum reporter encounters conflicting views of people who knew the abolitionist (Leaming 54-55). Mankiewicz used a similar device for an unproduced play about John Dillinger, *The Tree Will Grow*, which consisted of "a complex and contradictory portrait" developed through family members and acquaintances' recollections (Beryman 246).

<sup>23</sup> Archival evidence suggests that Mankiewicz wrote the play's introductory remarks, which Welles usually wrote for other broadcasts. The introductions that Welles wrote are typically not included with the rehearsal scripts composed by his scriptwriters. In contrast, the "Huckleberry Finn" rehearsal script held in the Lilly Library's Welles

Welles begins the broadcast by telling listeners,

Last week we said that this week we'd broadcast Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn." Well, you're expecting then a dramatization—curt, clear, concise—ladies and gentlemen, you will hear no such thing. We're sorry but we think "Huckleberry Finn" is too good a book to be dramatized, exactly speaking, and so we won't. We won't even try a nicely plotted version of the story. We couldn't do it anyway—we don't even have to. For one thing, the story hasn't got what you'd call a nice plot. The principal part of it, of course, relates the deathless saga of a voyage down the Mississippi by the most celebrated raft the world has ever known. We're going to tell most of that story and as many of the others as we can and as nearly as possible in Mark Twain's own words.

Welles's speech about Twain's novel and its radio adaptation—neither "curt, clear, concise," nor "nicely plotted"—could equally describe the labyrinthine film that he and Mankiewicz were concurrently writing.

In addition to the resonance it had with the emerging film project, this speech echoes Welles's statements from his *Mercury Theatre's* early days. The main point of contact is the word "dramatization," which Mankiewicz uses to mean something more

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archive includes the text of Welles's opening statements, suggesting that Mankiewicz wrote it along with the dialogue for the play that follows.

specific than an adaptation of a literary work to a dramatic format. Rather, the word's faintly disparaging use in the *Huck* introduction recalls statements Welles had made around the series' inception, such as a promise in *Newsweek* to take radio beyond the "cut-and-dried dramatic technique" of the theater (qtd. in Rippy, *Orson Welles* 24). Welles here condemns not the theater but rather radio drama that mimics stage plays by including dramatic scenes (i.e., scenes of dramatic dialogue that evoked what one would see on the physical stage) exclusively. To distinguish his brand of radio drama from those depending exclusively on dramatization in this sense, Welles argued that his plays, featuring first-person narration mixed in with dramatic scenes, were "more akin to the form of the novel, to storytelling, than to anything else" (Welles, "Progress").

In keeping with these early manifestoes, Mankiewicz's *Huck* focuses attention on narration by contriving an ongoing dispute between Welles and Huck over the right to tell the story. Continuing his introductory remarks, Welles addresses rumors supposedly circulating in recent days that he would play Huckleberry Finn. Welles denies these rumors rather unconvincingly, introducing teenage actor Jackie Cooper as the evening's Huck but also expressing his regret: "It must be said," Welles remarks, "in all candor that I restrained myself none too easily. To be Huckleberry Finn even for an hour—This was not lightly to be put to one side—however [*sighs*] I am happy [...] to welcome to the Campbell Playhouse that gifted and very young performer who *will* be Huckleberry Finn and who is actually Jackie Cooper." Throughout the play, Welles periodically succumbs to this longing to narrate, and Huck responds by asserting his rights as the novel's narrator. At the beginning of the play proper, for example—though the boundary

between the introductory remarks and the play is indistinct—Welles briefly assumes his customary role as narrator. To Huck’s comment that “Mr. Twain did right proud by me in his story,” Welles responds,

WELLES. Right proud is a bit of an understatement, Huck. Why, when I think of the very beginning of the book—[*quoting*] “You don’t know about me without you’ve read a book by the name of ‘The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,’ but that ain’t—”

HUCK. I thought you wasn’t going to play Huckleberry Finn, Mr. Welles.

WELLES. Pardon me. [*Sighs.*] All right, Huck.

HUCK. You don’t know about me without you have read a book by the name of “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,” but that ain’t no matter. That book was, ah, that book was made by Mr. Mark Twain and he told the truth, mainly.

This dialogue provides another example of Welles’s radio-based remediation of literature. The novel’s words are not simply included in the broadcast without an acknowledgement of their source. Instead, Welles not only performs the novel’s words but also alludes to the novel itself, as he refers to the “very beginning of the book” by “Mr. Mark Twain.” The direction “*quoting*” in the scripts describes the exaggeratedly declamatory delivery that Welles gave to these lines as he self-consciously recited Twain’s words. Like Koch’s *War of the Worlds*, therefore, Mankiewicz’s *Huck* script remediates the novel and creates a hypermediated experience for the audience, who

become aware of the process of its adaptation.

Also like *War*, Mankiewicz's *Huck* alters its source's narrative form. *War*'s first act had turned the novel's first-person narrative into a heteroglossic newscast, and *Huckleberry Finn* splits the book's first-person narrator into two: Huck and Welles. As in the case of *War*, however, *Huckleberry Finn*'s seemingly radical transformations derive from the novel's underlying structure. As I will discuss, dividing the narration between Huck and Welles represents sonically a distinction that the novel makes textually between protagonist and implied author. The force of Twain's anti-racist critique depends on the verbal irony generated by this distinction, which alerts readers to the implied author's criticism of Huck's socially constructed slaveholding morality. In adapting the novel's irony to Welles's *Mercury Theatre* format, Mankiewicz combined Twain's anti-racist theme with the political and aesthetic concerns—Kane's proto-fascism and the semi-autobiographical portrait of Welles, the talented but domineering *wunderkind*—that occupied him and Welles as they created *Citizen Kane*.

## **BACKGROUND AND PLOT**

Scholars of Welles's radio broadcasts commonly place *Huckleberry Finn* among the more remarkable episodes of *The Mercury Theatre on the Air*. Heyer, Bret Wood, and Jonathan Rosenbaum—along with Frank Brady, the most extensive chroniclers of Welles's radio career—discuss the play's narrative format, which created one of “the more formally playful of [Welles's] radio shows” (Rosenbaum 359) and helped the play recapture “the spirit of those halcyon days before sponsorship cramped [Welles's] radio

imagination” (Heyer 147). Wood sees the play’s dual narration as “an extension of [Welles’s] past manipulation of the role of narrator” (110), and Heyer writes that “one might even be tempted to call the technique postmodern, in that the declared format of the production is part of the performance” (148). Both Wood and Heyer note that Welles’s periodic intrusions on Huck’s narration create an intimate atmosphere in the broadcast, drawing audiences into the story and making a “listener feel more like a participant than an audience” member by “opening another door to the listener” after earlier *Mercury Theatre* episodes had begun to break down “the barrier between dramatic characters and the omniscient narrator/announcer” (Wood 110). Perceptively relating this intimacy to “the style of such a homespun, casual narrative” as *Huckleberry Finn*,” Wood claims that through the play’s narrative format “the relaxed style of Twain’s writing is represented more noticeably, so that within an hour not only is the plot interpreted, so is Twain’s prose and the overall impression of the novel” (111). These brief commentaries begin to explore the relationship between Twain’s text and its interpretation in the *Mercury Theatre* broadcast. Despite these critics’ enthusiasm, however, neither media critics nor Twain scholars have engaged in extended interpretations of the play, which has been available since its 1974 release as an LP recording (Rosenbaum 359).

Archival evidence suggests Welles’s strong interest in adapting Twain’s novel. His plans to adapt *Huckleberry Finn* began at least six months before the broadcast. Minutes from a September 29, 1939 meeting among Welles, Houseman, and Ward Wheelock, the head of Campbell’s advertising agency, rate one hundred properties for possible adaptation. Both Welles and Houseman rated the novel “A plus,” while

Wheelock judged the book's prospects "Plus, plus" (Ward Wheelock). Wheelock may have appreciated that the novel was in the public domain, for a week later he wrote to his *Mercury Theatre* liaison, Diana Bourbon, suggesting adaptations of "Public Domains" such as "Rip Van Winkle" and "Huckleberry Finn" (Wheelock). Nevertheless, Campbell had to secure permission to adapt the novel after MGM's 1939 film version, and several letters from Bourbon in October and November of 1939 apprised Welles of negotiations for the radio rights. In one letter, Bourbon wrote, "Huck Finn is out. MGM have acquired it," and she suggested, "Do you fancy Tom Sawyer?" (Bourbon, Letter 10/25/39). The Lilly Library's archive contains no reply from Welles, but the fact that *Huckleberry Finn* ended up in the *Campbell Playhouse's* schedule suggests that Welles had a special interest in that particular Twain novel.

*Huckleberry Finn* was Mankiewicz's final assignment for *The Campbell Playhouse* (Heyer 153). His first, an adaptation of Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, was broadcast on November 12, 1939 and was followed by adaptations of Robert Hitchens's *The Garden of Allah*, Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth*, and William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. A former newspaper reporter, a sometime member of the Algonquin Round Table, and *The New Yorker's* first drama critic, Mankiewicz had gone to Hollywood in the 1920s to write for films. By 1938, when he first met Welles at the restaurant "21" in New York, Mankiewicz had worked on roughly sixty films (Brady 233). The following year, Mankiewicz was fired by MGM's Louis B. Mayer for gambling in the studio's commissary and left for New York, but he returned to Los Angeles after breaking his leg in a car accident while heading east (Brady 234). Welles, working in California under his film contract with RKO, reencountered the recuperating

writer and hired him to write radio plays (Brady 234). As Callow writes, Welles enjoyed Mankiewicz's "lack of compromise [and] incorruptible subversiveness," and he appreciated Mankiewicz's scripts, which improved quickly under Houseman's editing (483). A master of humorous, pithy dialogue and a specialist in "punching up" the scripts of less witty writers, Mankiewicz produced radio dialogue that was "crisp, alliterative, and thoroughly lively" (Meryman 158; Brady 234).

With *Huckleberry Finn*, Mankiewicz followed the series' general practice of faithfully reproducing the source's plot with judicious cuts to condense a novel into a forty-five-minute play. Mankiewicz retained scenes depicting Jim and Huck's raft voyage down the Mississippi in flight from slavery and Huck's Pap, respectively, while cutting most of Twain's satirical depictions of frontier towns along the river. As MGM's 1939 film had done, the broadcast devoted much time to the Duke and King, the con artists who appear midway through Huck and Jim's journey posing as disinherited heirs of the English Duke of Bridgewater and Louis XVI, respectively. The two tramps, who provide humorous highlights in Twain's novel, seemed to offer mid-century dramatizers irresistible opportunities for vaudevillian humor. The rehearsal script in the Lilly Library's archive includes handwritten additions to these characters' scenes, which augment their already-generous representation in the typescript. Welles, who played the King, quite possibly added the lines, which appeared in the broadcast.

The play quickly establishes its central theme as Huck's quest for freedom. Living with the Widow Douglas, Huck one day kills a spider accidentally and consults with "Miss Watson's slave, Jim," fearing that this bad omen portends the return of

Huck's drunken Pap.<sup>24</sup> The next night Pap abducts Huck from the Widow Douglas's house. After a short captivity in Pap's cabin, Huck fakes his death, alights on a raft, and soon encounters Jim, who has also run off. Initially shocked that Jim has escaped slavery, Huck nonetheless quickly agrees to help the runaway. After traveling for twelve days, they plot for Huck to disguise himself as a girl and investigate the nearest town. In one of the broadcast's few departures from the river, the audience hears the humorous scene in which Huck visits Judith Loftus, who quickly sees through the boy's disguise and also informs him of a \$300 reward placed on Jim, who is suspected of killing Huck. This news sets up the climax of the play's first act, when a boat with two armed men approaches Huck and Jim's raft. Narrating, Huck describes the moral dilemma he faced between reporting Jim to these two men—his "bond and duty" to Miss Watson and the slave-holding society—or protecting his friend. Asked if he has any "colored" men with him, Huck lies that he does not.<sup>25</sup> As the narrator, Huck again explains that he "was stuck" as to whether to help Jim or do "right and give Jim up," and decided that he "wouldn't bother no more about it, but after this, always do whichever comes easiest at the time" (42). With Huck's decision to act against the dictates of his conscience—while, crucially, not recognizing their fundamental immorality—a triumphant surge of music leads into the station break.

After Huck's assertion of independence closes the first act, the play's second act

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<sup>24</sup> The broadcast replaces the N-word, which Twain uses in the novel, with the word "slave," as MGM's 1939 film had done.

<sup>25</sup> The rehearsal script reads "black" rather than "colored."

introduces two powerful restrictions on Huck's autonomy: the first is the pair of con men, the Duke and King; the second is Tom Sawyer. The Duke and King share their invented stories of fallen grandeur and their experiences of swindling townsfolk along the river. The Duke invites the King to collaborate with him on a Shakespeare revival consisting of the comically garbled Shakespearean soliloquy in Twain's Chapter 21, which the Duke and King perform repeatedly until townspeople gather with buckets of tar and Huck slips back to the riverbank where he had left Jim. When he arrives there, however, Huck learns that Jim has been captured and imprisoned at the nearby Phelps plantation. This plot turn begins the broadcast's final episode, which corresponds to the controversial "evasion" sequence in Twain's novel. Huck arrives at the Phelps's house when the family is expecting a visit from Tom Sawyer. Huck and Tom quickly develop a scheme to free Jim. Seeing minimal security around Jim, Huck advocates a simple approach, but Tom insists on more complicated methods modeled on imprisoned heroes' "evasions" in romantic novels. Following Tom's plan, the boys free Jim from his makeshift prison but also stir up a vigilante mob that shoots Tom and recaptures Jim. At that point the injured Tom reveals that the Widow Douglas had actually emancipated Jim weeks earlier. The play ends with Jim freed and Huck vowing to "light out for Indian territory" lest Aunt Sally adopt and "civilize" him.

This plot description may suggest a light adventure story, which was the prevailing interpretation of Twain's novel in 1940. Brady suggests that the novel was an example of the "amiable classics" that Campbell preferred Welles to adapt—"lightweight stories that would take the listener's mind off all the talk of war" (221). In fact, as Wood argues, Mankiewicz's adaptation of Twain's novel "is not purely entertainment, as much

as it may seem” and deals with the serious themes of Jim’s persecution and Huck’s dilemma over whether to help or betray him (111). As a treatment of the novel’s more serious themes, the broadcast may have gone against the grain of contemporary views, which rarely considered *Huckleberry Finn* more than adolescent boys’ entertainment. As Carl Dolmetsch writes in an overview of the novel’s first century of criticism, “before the 1940s, *Huckleberry Finn*’s well-established popularity was principally as a book for children, like *Tom Sawyer*, with the result that most readers came to it too early to see more than its adventure-story surface” (Dolmetsch 90).<sup>26</sup> Welles’s audience, therefore, likely would have understood the story as an offering along the lines of other *Mercury Theatre* episodes such as *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Treasure Island*.

Film adaptations of *Huckleberry Finn* in the 1920s and ’30s range from the earlier tendency to treat the novel as light adventure fare to increasing engagement with its serious themes. Paramount’s 1931 film (following the same studio’s 1920 silent adaptation) demonstrates the former tendency. Featuring Clarence Muse, the African-American actor who played Jim in both that film and Welles’s radio version, the film reflected contemporary critical and popular understandings of the novel as a companion

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<sup>26</sup> A few critics before the 1940s countered this narrow definition of the novel. These efforts included H.L. Mencken’s “campaign to enshrine *Huck Finn* as a classic of our national letters” during Twain’s lifetime, Ernest Hemingway’s statement in *Green Hills of Africa* that “[a]ll modern American literature comes from [...] *Huckleberry Finn*,” and John Erskine’s assertion that the novel is “a masterpiece” to be distinguished from *Tom Sawyer* (Dolmetsch 90; Hemingway 22; Erskine 304).

to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Building on the success of Paramount's 1930 adaptation of that earlier novel, director Norman Taurog focused on Huck's relationship with Tom and largely removed Jim from the story (Haupt 27-32, 44-45). Eight years later, in 1939, MGM's film, directed by Richard Thorpe and starring Mickey Rooney as Huck and Rex Ingram as Jim, attempted to capture some of the moral gravity of Twain's novel and its critique of African-Americans' persecution. As a result, Clyde V. Haupt suggests that it is "one of the best [adaptations] to date, mainly because of its mature treatment of Huck's interpersonal relationships"—primarily with Jim, who appears in the film far more than he had in Taurog's version—"and its alertness to much of the book's spirit" (68). As Haupt writes, MGM's film made Huck "an unequivocal abolitionist" (58), a decision that addressed the novel's racial theme directly though fairly simplistically. Indeed, as Laurie Champion notes, cinematic adaptations of *Huckleberry Finn* from this and subsequent eras have generally failed to represent the novel's complex moral vision and reconcile the novel's dark view of American society with the audience-friendly tone of a boy's adventure story (241-42). One challenge was to translate the novel's complex first-person narrative to a film representing Huck in the third person. The *Mercury Theatre's* use of first-person narration combined Thorpe's socially progressive message with the formal and moral challenges Twain had presented to readers.

Critical interpretations of the novel since World War II examine Twain's treatment of race with increasing sophistication. The novel's controversial "evasion" episode presents one of the book's greatest interpretive challenges. In 1953 Leo Marx influentially critiqued this concluding sequence in which "the most serious motive in the

novel, Jim's yearning for freedom, is made the object of nonsense" (294). Marx's argument attacked earlier interpretations by Lionel Trilling and T.S. Eliot, who had also noticed a tonal shift in the novel's closing episode but justified the stylistic disjunction on formal grounds. A later reading by Neil Schmitz modifies Marx's view by interpreting Jim's humiliations during the evasion as a representation of African-Americans' suffering in the post-Reconstruction period, during which Twain completed the novel (having begun it roughly a decade earlier). This view allows critics to read the conclusion as a continuation—rather than abandonment—of the novel's earlier concern with Jim's quest for freedom. Nonetheless, the evasion has continued to trouble critics for the way it "minstriliz[es]" Jim (Morrison 388). As Toni Morrison writes, making Jim "so complete a buffoon" in the end "solves the problem of 'missing' him that would have been unacceptable" for both readers and Huck (388). For an adaptation like Mankiewicz and Welles's, which engaged seriously with both the themes of slavery and racism and the ironic and morally complex tone of Twain's writing—the novel's "ability to transform its contradictions into fruitful complexities" (Morrison 386)—the evasion sequence would be a defining moment.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Welles demonstrated a strong commitment to racial justice. As a teenager he had written a play, *Marching Song*, about the abolitionist John Brown (Leaming 54-55), and he later dramatized part of Brown's trial in the 1939 *Campbell Playhouse* broadcast, *The Things We Have*. One of his first jobs as a professional theatrical director was with the Negro Theatre division of the Federal Theatre Project, for which he directed an all-African-American cast in *Macbeth* (1936) at Harlem's Lafayette Theatre (Wood 31-33). The production, set in nineteenth-century

Haiti, was influenced by accounts of slave revolts against the French, making it “an allegory of anti-colonialism” (Denning 396). Welles used African-American actors in later productions, casting his Macbeth, Jack Carter, as Mephistophelis in the Federal Theater’s *Doctor Faustus* (1937) and another member of his *Macbeth* cast, Canada Lee, as Bigger Thomas in a stage adaptation of Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1941) (Leaming 119; Brady 295-96). Michael Denning writes that Welles’s work with the Negro Theatre and Houseman’s experience directing that Federal Theatre unit gave “the Mercury [...] closer ties to the black theater than any other white theater group” had (372). Welles also used several radio broadcasts to promote racial equality. The broadcast “His Honor, The Mayor,” which Welles wrote for the CBS series *The Free Company* while editing *Citizen Kane*, anticipated his later film *Touch of Evil* by portraying a Texas border town in which “White Crusaders” try to stir up race hatred. The play demonstrated the link in Welles’s mind between racism and fascism: a priest in one scene says of the white supremacists, “‘Those nuts’... that’s what they said about the Nazis a while ago when Adolph Hitler was still on a soapbox” (qtd. in Wood 114). For Welles, *fascism*’s definition extended beyond its application to certain twentieth-century political structures; he argued in a January 1945 speech, “history itself has widened the meaning of the word. I think that long after the last governments that dare to call themselves Fascist have been swept off the face of civilization, the word ‘fascism’ will live in our language as a word for race hate” (qtd. in Denning 395).<sup>27</sup> Several years

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<sup>27</sup> See Denning (394-402) for a convincing argument that “narratives of race and racism were central to [Welles’s] anti-fascist aesthetic” (395).

later, Welles devoted five broadcasts in his short-lived ABC series *Orson Welles Commentaries* (1946) to the case of Isaac Woodward, Jr., an African-American veteran who had been blinded in a police beating (Leaming 329-31). As he informed listeners of the NAACP's attempts to identify Woodward's attacker, Welles presented himself as a Shadow-like vigilante helping to hunt the perpetrator: "Officer X—after I have found you out, I'll never lose you. If they try you, I'm going to watch the trial. If they jail you, I'm going to wait for your first day of freedom. You won't be free of me.... You can't get rid of me.... Who am I? A masked avenger from the comic books? No sir. Merely an inquisitive citizen of America" (qtd. in Leaming 330).

Like Welles's, Mankiewicz's politics were solidly liberal—he was pro-union and an early supporter of the ACLU (Meryman 98)—but by no means radical. As a young reporter he had infiltrated and documented the Ku Klux Klan's activities in the Northeast (Meryman 69). International affairs interested him perhaps more than domestic race relations, however, and he shared Welles's anti-fascist sentiments and tendency to link oppressive social institutions to international fascism. Having lived in Berlin after World War I, Mankiewicz had an early insight into the Nazi threat, and in 1933 he had written an anti-Hitler short, *The Mad Dog of Europe*, which no studio would produce for fear of losing the German film market. While Welles's anti-fascist aesthetic equated fascism and racism, Mankiewicz's anti-fascism tended to merge with a generally contrarian, anti-establishment ethos. Welles described Mankiewicz's essential contribution to *Citizen Kane* as a "controlled, cheerful virulence" and a sense that the film was "finally telling the truth about a great WASP institution" (Meryman 260).

Mankiewicz's "cheerful virulence" in cutting down figures of authority and

privilege resembles Twain's iconoclastic writing, and Welles's assessment of the screenwriter could equally describe Twain's biting wit: "Mank's humor certainly didn't come from the fact that he found the world irresistibly entertaining and funny. He simply could express his hatred best and most elegantly in terms of humor" (qtd. in Meryman 165). Feeling "marooned on an island populated by political idiots," as Meryman puts it, Mankiewicz often channeled his anger toward the nearest authority figure. Meryman suggests that Mankiewicz was "pouring into *Kane* his vitriol against all bosses" (263), picking fights with Welles and inserting subtle digs at him into the script. In his capacity as the *Campbell Playhouse's* host and producer, Welles personified this target even more clearly than in *Kane*. The domineering narrator Welles plays in *Huckleberry Finn*, for example, builds on the persona he had established earlier in the series, and Mankiewicz exaggerated the familiar Wellesian characteristics to create a vaguely fascist authority figure who represented corrupt, entrenched values.

#### **"MIGHTY PROUD TO MEET YOU, MR. WELLES"**

Like the previous year's film, Mankiewicz and Welles's *Huckleberry Finn* clearly advocated racial equality, but its multi-layered narrative format captured the complexity of Twain's tone far better. Critics like Heyer and Wood have noted the novelty of the play's narration, which created an impression of intimacy between audience and performers. Neither critic, however, explores how Mankiewicz's dueling narrators replicate the novel's crucial verbal irony.

Noticing an ironic distance between Huck's words and the implied author's attitude toward them helps one understand the significance of Twain's novel. Wayne

Booth's term, the "implied author," characterizes "the implied image of the artist" that is projected by the fictional work and leads the reader to "construct a picture of the official scribe who writes" the text (73, 71). Booth suggests that the narrator, the "'I' of a work," is "seldom if ever identical with the implied image of the artist"; and thus, "the chief value to which *this* implied author is committed" may be very different from that of the narrator (73). The gap between the words of the "I" of the novel and the implied author's values accounts for what Wolfgang Iser describes as the reader's process of "discover[ing] the meaning of the text" (xiii). According to Iser, nineteenth-century novels forced readers into "the role of a critic" by "refrain[ing] from explicitly telling [them] what to do and thereby inviting them to scrutinize 'the fact that society had imposed a part on' them (xiii-xiv). "Implied readers" of Twain's novel must engage in this process of discovery, becoming critics of Huck's socially imposed thoughts and behavior. Meanwhile, Twain engages in the nineteenth-century novelist's "cunning stratagems [designed] to nudge the reader unknowingly into making the 'right' discoveries" (Iser xii, xiv).

Many interpretations of *Huckleberry Finn*, therefore, examine Twain's implicit judgment of his protagonist-narrator's perspective. Henry Nash Smith's influential interpretation, for example, studies Huck's complex moral layering. As Smith writes, Huck's morality has been partially corrupted by his society's racist values:

The novel's satire of a decadent slaveholding society gains immensely in force when Mark Twain demonstrates that even the outcast Huck has been in part perverted by it. Huck's conscience is simply the attitude he has taken over from his environment. What is still sound in him is an impulse

from the deepest level of his personality that struggles against the overlay of prejudice and false valuation imposed on all members of the society in the name of religion, morality, law, and refinement. (122)

Because Huck has, in part, internalized these values and expresses them in his narration, a reader must recognize the novel's irony in order to see the implied author's underlying condemnation of slave-holding culture.

More recently, Henry Wonham has expanded on this view “that *Huckleberry Finn* is really two stories—one narrated by Huck, the other reconstructed by readers—and that the distance between these two stories is the source of Twain's power as an ironist and a humorist” (Wonham 10). According to Wonham, Huck's efforts to join an interpretive community fail because “[t]here is no folk community available for Huck to join; the community is displaced onto the relationship between the implied author and the reader” (4, 7). We can see Huck's quest in the novel in part as “a quest for the authority of membership in [the] interpretive community” between author and reader (Wonham 4). Huck's aspirations create the impression of a Pirandellian, permeable boundary between author and character by suggesting that he might cross over from one narrative level to another—an act of narrative metalepsis, to use Genette's term for “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narratee into the diegetic universe [...] or the inverse” (234-35). As we will see, the *Mercury's* adaptation foregrounds Huck's attempt to navigate this semi-permeable boundary between author and audience.

Wonham also reveals the influence of performance on Twain's establishment of an interpretive community between audience and implied author. Drawing on Fred W. Lorch's research on Twain's lecture tours, Wonham notes that in public performances

Twain's understated, deadpan style made him, like Huck, "appear 'innocently unaware' of the humor and hypocrisy" that could be perceived by the "cultural insiders" in his audience (8-9). Unlike Twain's stage performances, however, which combined the poses of the unknowing humorist and the wry satirist in a single person, the novel divides these two figures between the knowing implied author and the character-narrator who "enjoys no access to the perspective of the implied humorist and [whose] solemn performance is never posed" (9). Wonham's reading of Huck's lack of authority may be exaggerated: Huck's performance at times is indeed "posed"; for example, he humors the purported Duke and King while recognizing their deceptions. Nonetheless, Wonham astutely identifies the underlying dynamics in Twain's narration.

Adapting the novel to performance presents the challenge of translating these multiple narrative levels. As noted above, critics have speculated that cinematic versions of *Huckleberry Finn* often fail to capture the novel's ironic tone and the darker themes such a tone expresses. In contrast, one of the most highly acclaimed adaptations of the novel, Hal Holbrook's one-man show, *Mark Twain Tonight!*, captured the complex relationships among author, narrator, and implied author. In the LP recordings made in 1959, Holbrook reads passages from the novel "in a tour de force performance of Twain-as-Huck, acting as an old man imitating a young boy's voice" (Britton 235). Conspicuously performing the act of narrating and storytelling, as many of the *Mercury* broadcasts had, Holbrook alerted audiences to the complex divisions and convergences of these two personae: Twain and Huck. Much as Mankiewicz's divided narration does in the *Mercury* broadcast, Holbrook avoided a performance-related problem faced by authors, which Welles once identified in conversation with Peter Bogdanovich: "All great

writers are actors. They have the actor's faculty of entering the skin of their characters, and transforming them—murderers or whatever—with what they give of themselves. This leads often to the fact that the protagonist of a story seems to speak for the author, even when he stands for things the author hates" (233-34). By playing Twain in a way that revealed the author's performance, Holbrook displayed clearly the gap between author and protagonist.

By dividing the narration between Cooper and Welles, the *Campbell* production of *Huck* revealed the novel's irony in much the same way that Twain's and Holbrook's performances did. Ever attuned to the relationship between source text and broadcast, Welles and Mankiewicz drew on paratextual elements in Twain's novel to enact this crucial division between the protagonist-narrator, Huck, and the implied author, represented by Welles. Early in his customary introduction as the series' master of ceremonies, Welles draws attention to the play's quotation of its material, textual source. Before beginning the play, Welles proclaims, the actors "would like me to read to you in a loud clear voice the words printed on the title page of tonight's story. I quote"—Welles then reads Twain's "Notice" preceding *Huckleberry Finn*'s first chapter—"Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot. By order of the author" (Twain 27). Shelley Fisher Fishkin writes that this notice warns readers "not to expect an easy read" from this ostensibly humorous book and that the notice is one of several paratextual elements alerting readers to the "distinction between [Huck] and the author Mark Twain" ("Challenge" 186, 187). The notice and Twain's "Explanatory" statement concerning his use of frontier dialect alert

readers to this distinction by emphasizing the presence of an author behind the narrative, which otherwise appears to be attributed to a young frontier boy. Fishkin also points out that the novel's first edition included a frontispiece photograph of sculptor Karl Gerhardt's marble bust of Twain and, on the opposite page, E.W. Kemble's drawing of Huck, in ragged dress, holding up a dead rabbit by its hind legs (185). These opposed images further distinguish author and narrator before the novel begins. With Welles having established himself in the series as a pseudo-author figure, listeners would easily have imagined him in the role of Twain, in contrast to Huck's subordinate role as the author's creation. Welles also presents himself as the reader, "quot[ing]" from "the words printed on the title page" of Twain's book. As the story unfolds in the broadcast, these dual roles of the devious, obfuscating author and the curious, diligent reader will alternately diverge and overlap. Through this process, Mankiewicz and Welles increasingly align the listeners' interpretive challenges with Huck's efforts as both a storyteller and a figurative reader who must interpret social dictates through his developing pragmatic morality.

**“JUST ONE MINUTE, HUCK. DID YOU SAY, ‘TOM SAWYER’?”**

Both Huck and the play's audience must evaluate several other characters, particularly those who—like Huck—combine a charismatic, humorous facade with a serious function in Twain's satire. These include Tom Sawyer and the Duke and King, whose crowd-pleasing antics can obscure their serious functions in Twain's underlying critique. Tom's role in the novel is especially complex and difficult to interpret, and the different treatments of Tom in the radio play and the previous year's film reflect those

works' contrasting engagements with Twain's complex moral tone. By removing Tom from the story, MGM's film avoided depicting the troubling "evasion" events, which Tom engineers in the novel. In contrast, Mankiewicz and Welles retained the evasion scenes centering on Tom, presenting them with ironic humor that suggests the episode's dark undercurrents.

Tom's earliest appearance in the novel seems to continue the light humor and adventurous tone of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, as he organizes the first meeting of Tom Sawyer's Gang, modeled on his idiosyncratic understanding of Romantic adventure novels. When Tom reappears, however, the adventures he contrives for the "evasion" assume a much darker color than his earlier enterprises had.<sup>28</sup> Trying to make Jim's escape resemble the romances that had inspired Tom Sawyer's Gang, Tom hurts and humiliates Jim by, for example, filling his cell with snakes and rats on the belief that a "prisoner's *got* to have some kind of a dumb pet" (238).

In making their socially progressive cinematic adaptation of *Huckleberry Finn*,

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<sup>28</sup> Tracing *Huckleberry Finn*'s nearly decade-long composition, Smith argues that Twain began with a humorous conception reflected by its opening chapters. The novel became increasingly serious through a developing narrative identification with Huck's inner turmoil. The evasion sequence represents a "partial shift of identification from Huck to Tom" (134), but this return to the novel's initial focus and humorous tone only partially obscures Twain's "recognition that Huck's and Jim's quest for freedom was only a dream: [Twain] attempted to cover with a veil of parody and farce the harsh facts that condemned it to failure" (134).

Thorpe and screenwriter Hugo Butler faced the problem of dealing with Tom. Echoing the humor of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Tom could appeal to audiences seeking light, adolescent adventure stories. Paramount's 1931 sequel to its *Tom Sawyer* had all but eliminated Jim from the story and focused on Tom and Huck's friendship and on "Huck's teenage problems of social adjustment, especially the conflict that girls bring to male companionship" (Haupt 28). The resulting, primarily humorous treatment of Tom's character belied Twain's cynical treatment of him in the novel.

By excluding Tom's character from its plot, Thorpe's 1939 *Huckleberry Finn* also removed the ambiguity that Tom introduces to the novel. The filmmakers instead focused their anti-racist critique on the Duke and King, making the film's message seem trite. With the Duke and King established as its chief villains, the film does not challenge its audience—as the novel does—to distinguish Huck's socially constructed racism from his more humane impulses, nor does it force audiences to reconcile their delight in Tom's antics with his cruel treatment of Jim. Rather than impose such interpretive challenges, the film polarizes the moral questions it raises between caricatures of evil and virtue: on one side the unscrupulous Duke and King and on the other a noble abolitionist, Captain Brandy, invented for the film. This dichotomy expresses the filmmakers' anti-racist sentiments clearly, but at the cost of the novel's moral complexity and challenges to its audience.

With its first-person narrative format, the *Mercury's Huckleberry Finn* retains some of these challenges by filtering the story through Huck's perspective. That perspective is layered with several others, creating a multivalent narrative with several ironic counterpoints to Huck's point of view. One of these competing or complementary

narratives is Bernard Herrmann's musical score, which contributes significantly to the broadcast's ironic tone. As the story begins, following Welles's first of two sets of introductory comments, Herrmann's live, in-studio orchestra evokes light adventure with a jaunty mixture of deep-toned brass and high-toned string instruments suggestive of a nineteenth-century Mississippi steamboat. Soon, however, the music's humorous and nostalgic tone sounds as if it is at odds with the serious events it accompanies. The scene of Huck being kidnapped by Pap, for example, jars with the music's incongruously humorous tone. The sounds of Pap lashing Huck verbally and physically—the latter signaled by the sound of a blow and the thud of Huck hitting the floor—precede a rapid series of violin notes that mimic Huck's fall with the jaunty, colorful sound that characterizes much of the broadcast's score. Quickly following these oddly humorous, staccato notes is a single, drawn-out note of a much lower octave, which concludes the scene in a suddenly ominous mood. This musical transition provides a brief but complex commentary on the action. The humorous-sounding music mimics the action (Huck's collapse), but the concluding note suggests the fallout of that action: the danger Huck now faces as Pap's captive. This last note, therefore, comments on both the scene's incongruity and the inappropriateness of Welles's consistently amiable tone in guiding listeners through the broadcast.

The music's ironic counterpoint becomes especially significant during the evasion, which begins with Huck asking Tom to help him free Jim. The radio broadcast represents Huck's request and Tom's response in about twenty-five seconds of airtime, which the music helps to pack densely with complex plot twists and mental calculations. After initially protesting Huck's plan, Tom quickly progresses from outrage to

excitement and eager support:

HUCK. I know what you'll say. You'll say it's a dirty, low-down business. But what if it is? I'm low-down and I'm a-goin' to steal him and I want you to keep mum and not let on. Will you?

TOM. I'll do more than that, Huck. I'll help you steal him!

Mankiewicz draws this exchange from the novel verbatim. But only because of its musical accompaniment—which, as I discuss below, shifts rapidly from suspenseful to humorous to farcical—does this short exchange approach its original significance.

This short scene's significance depends also on preceding events. By this point in the novel, Huck has already undergone the climactic crisis of conscience in Chapter 31. In that chapter, Huck writes a letter to Miss Watson informing her of Jim's imprisonment at the Phelps's plantation. Having decided to do what society has taught him is right—to give up Jim—Huck feels “good and all washed clean of sin for the first time” and reflects on “how near I came to being lost and going to hell” by helping Jim (Twain 200). Before Huck sends the letter, however, feelings of friendship for Jim overcome him, and he renounces the inner voices that he takes for his conscience. In the climactic moment, Huck declares, “All right, then, I'll *go* to hell” and tears up the letter to Miss Watson (201). Huck's decision resembles the close of the broadcast's first act—from a similar moment in Twain's Chapter 16—when Huck declares he will “bother no more about [doing what is right], but [...] always do whatever comes handiest at the time.” After these decisions, therefore, when Tom appears at the Phelps's plantation, Huck's intentions with regard to Jim have changed dramatically.

Yet Huck's moral beliefs remain unchanged. He still believes he will go to Hell

for protecting Jim, which he sees as a fundamentally immoral but now compelling act. Even near the end of the novel, when Jim generously cares for the injured Tom rather than fleeing the vigilantes, Huck sees Jim's magnanimity as proof that Jim "was white inside," indicating that Huck's thinking remains tied to Southern cultural assumptions concerning whites' superiority. Huck's reaction to Tom soon after Chapter 31 confirms the continuing influence of Huck's social environment on his thought. After Tom agrees to help Jim escape, Huck puzzles over Tom's decision. In the novel Huck says, "Tom Sawyer fell, considerable, in my estimation. [...] I couldn't believe it. Tom Sawyer, a *nigger stealer!*" (210). Huck sees his own antisocial behavior as a natural result of his lower-class background. As he tells Tom in both the novel and the broadcast, "*I'm low down; and I'm agoing to steal him.*" His amazement at Tom's willingness to help him "steal" Jim demonstrates his respect for Tom's place in the social order of middle-class Southern culture.

In fact, his respect for Tom leads Huck to agree to the latter's evasion scheme, despite his own much easier plan. Tom rejects Huck's plan as not "romantical enough," and Huck admits that Tom's schemes were "worth fifteen of mine, for style, and would make Jim just as free a man as mine would, and maybe get us killed besides" (215, 216). While humorously portraying the boys' youthful recklessness, Twain also soberly contrasts Huck's pragmatic morality and suspicion of inherited beliefs with Tom's reverence for the traditions perpetuated by romantic novels. Whenever Huck objects to an escalation of Tom's plan, Tom quells Huck's objections by appealing to literary authorities: "It don't make no difference how foolish it is, it's the *right* way—and it's the regular way. And there ain't no *other* way, that ever *I* heard of, and I've read all the

books that gives any information about these things” (224). Tom and Huck fail morally in the evasion episode because they are overly credulous readers. By letting his audience see this fault, Twain welcomes them into an interpretive community of superior readers who recognize the boys’ wrongheadedness.

The novel’s implicit commentary seems to be lost in Tom’s first appearance in the radio play if we judge from the dialogue alone. The music’s complementary role, however, very economically expresses the complex relationship of the two characters, implied author, and audience. The script in the Lilly Library’s archives suggests that Welles may have added the music cues after he had heard a rehearsal. While other cues are typed into the script, several caret marks (^) indicating music cues have been penciled in to the page with this exchange between Huck and Tom. After Huck’s first line, in which he asks Tom “to keep mum and not let on,” a horn or wood-wind instrument (possibly a bassoon) plays slowly and deeply a theme iterated throughout the conversation. Initially, after Huck asks Tom for secrecy, the music develops suspense over Tom’s response. After Huck asks, “Will you?”, the same melody plays, only lighter and more upbeat, played by an instrument in a higher register, possibly a clarinet. This music seems to anticipate Tom’s response, as if leading the characters forward. Rather than commenting retrospectively on Huck’s cautious question and awaiting Tom’s response—which would seem to call for a suspenseful mood—the music seems to prompt Tom’s answer, much as Beckett’s Music impels Words’s speeches in the radio play *Words and Music*. Tom’s surprisingly enthusiastic response matches the preceding, mischievous-sounding music: “I’ll do more than that, Huck.” The music preceding Tom’s line acts like a Wellesian narrator, introducing an event that is then enacted

dramatically. The music that follows combines the high and low notes of the two previous musical interludes. The low notes repeat the theme but now with some syncopation, creating a humorous mood. Then a chorus of horns plays a short burst of regal-sounding notes that anticipate Tom's grand, surprising announcement immediately after: "I'll help you steal him!" Two very short, low notes from a horn then crash together cacophonously. The music before this final line of Tom's has combined the notes of suspense and humor heard earlier in the scene. Then the jarring sound after Tom's announcement both provides a transition out of the scene and anticipates the farcical events that will result from Tom's plan. In keeping with the play's ironic tone, light humor on the surface precedes discordance, undermining the previously lighthearted tone. This musical discord challenges not only the listener's uncritical enjoyment of the broadcast but also Huck's credulous trust of Tom's authority.

By taking over Huck's efforts to free Jim, Tom becomes the latest in a series of characters—including Pap and the Duke and King—who restrict Huck's ability to form and express a personal morality. In the play, the most restrictive force upon Huck's autonomy is Welles, the competing narrator who periodically wrests the narration from Huck. Though these exchanges usually have a humorous tone that matches the play's generally light feel, occasionally they express a sinister undercurrent. After the station break, for example, Huck begins narrating the second act, but Welles interjects after two sentences, "You better let me take over a while, Huck. I'm sure you're tired." Huck responds, "Oh, I'm not tired, Mr. Welles," but Welles insists in a forceful, almost threatening tone befitting his occasional guise as the dictatorial director: "I'm sure you're tired, Huck." Welles then repeats the sentences from the novel that Huck had

begun with and adds roughly a paragraph of Huck's narration. Finally, Huck imploringly asks, "Please, Mr. Welles," and the older man relents. Such moments, when Welles's insistent intrusions appear aggressive rather than playful, recur frequently. Welles's interjections often seem to position him as a surrogate for the audience, modeling a reader or listener's response, such as when he asks at a suspenseful moment, "What'd you do, Huck?" But Huck's frustrated responses make Welles seem more overbearing than curious: "Ain't you gonna let me tell?"; "I thought you wasn't gonna play Huckleberry Finn, Mr. Welles"; "Oh, you ain't fooling anybody, Mr. Welles. You just want to read some of Mr. Twain's book yourself." At one point, Welles even challenges Huck's performance within the story, telling him, "If I'd been in your spot with [Mrs. Loftus], Huck, I think I could have done better, but we'll just forget about it." "You could not have done better, Mr. Welles," Huck responds. Welles's insistent control of the narrative and Huck's consistently respectful addresses of "Mr. Welles" and "Mr. Twain" link Welles to the actual or implied author. This particular example of narrative metalepsis, however—joining that observed earlier in which Huck crosses the boundary between diegetic and extradiegetic levels—not only helps raise Welles to the level of the extradiegetic implied narrator, but it also associates Welles with the intradiegetic characters in Huck's story. In his domineering attitude, Welles resembles the many adults who constrain Huck's physical actions and verbal expression (although Welles, twenty-four years old at the time of the broadcast, was not much older than the seventeen-year-old Cooper).

With this conflict between Huck and Welles established, the play's final sequences portray not only Tom's farcical evasion plot but also Huck's emerging

narrative authority. When Tom first appears, Welles interrupts Huck's narration to ask, "Just one minute, Huck. Did you say, 'Tom Sawyer'?" Huck now responds to Welles more assertively than he has earlier in the play. Rather than begging Welles's permission to speak, he simply talks over the *Mercury's* host and interrupts Welles's next question. Huck's authority and confidence increase further at the end of the play, when Jim has been freed and Huck learns that his Pap is dead. Following a pattern developed in the broadcast, Welles follows a question about the story with a more assertive statement. This time, however, Huck rebuffs him:

WELLES. A happy ending, eh, Huck?

HUCK. Well, that depends on what you call happy, Mr. Welles.

WELLES. Well, I should say you all ought to be happy.

HUCK. Well, that's just it. You should say. It just so happens that I'm Huckleberry Finn, and Mr. Twain wrote the book about me. And I'm the one to say.

WELLES. Hmm. Alright, Huck. You say.

Welles now defers to Huck's judgment, acknowledging his right to interpret the story's ending. Significantly, Huck's newfound narrative and interpretive agency appears at the end of the controversial evasion sequence. Huck's ambiguous response to this episode contrasts with Welles's confident interpretation of the story's "happy ending." Despite Huck's assertion that he is "the one to say" whether or not there is a happy ending, he avoids Welles's question and instead closes the play with a speech reproducing the novel's last paragraph nearly verbatim:

Well, Tom's most well now. He got his bullet around his neck on a

watch-guard for a watch, and is always seein' what time it is. So, there ain't nothin' more to write about, and I'm a-rotten glad of it because if I'd a-known what trouble it was to make a book, I wouldn't a tackled it and ain't gonna no more. But I reckon I got to light out for Indian territory pretty soon 'cause Aunt Sally's gonna adopt me and civilize me, and I can't stand it—I been there before.

Despite Tom's recovery and Jim's freedom, Huck's pessimistic statements focus on Tom's self-satisfaction and Huck's tortured experience as a writer and poor prospects for evading the suffocating force of civilization. Welles's optimistic statements concerning the dénouement seem to represent the untroubled response typical of pre-war readings of the novel, while Huck's failure to support this view anticipates later, more critical interpretations.

Huck's growing confidence signals his willingness to interpret events for the audience and join the interpretive community between author and reader that Wonham sees as Huck's ultimate goal. Indeed, Huck represents himself in his final commentary on the story as a writer who has learned "what trouble it [is] to make a book." This self-presentation contrasts with the novel's opening—also included in the radio play—in which Huck defers to Twain's authority: "You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,' but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain" (Twain 32). Claiming the authorial role in the end, however, Huck also disavows it, as he decides not to write any more books ("if I'd a-known what trouble it was to make a book, I wouldn't a tackled it and ain't gonna no more"). Similarly, his attempt to answer Welles's question about the happy ending

provides only another evasion. The facts concerning Tom's recovery and Huck's plans provide no answers concerning the ending's significance, thus requiring readers—and listeners—to interpret it on their own.

Huck's wrap-up also conspicuously excludes Jim, who figured more prominently in the 1939 film's ending, whose final scene showed him on a riverboat, sailing off to freedom (just before Huck returns home with the Widow Douglas, who survives to the end of this version; while Huck accedes to the Widow's guardianship in the film, he leaves his shoes behind on the dock in a sign of his resistance to being civilized). Jim's absence at the radio play's ending does not indicate Mankiewicz's lack of interest in the novel's racial politics. On the contrary, as I have suggested, the play's critique of racism is more complex than the film's, with its treatment of Huck as a staunch abolitionist. Instead of having Jim sail off to freedom in a happy ending, Mankiewicz retains the novel's ambiguity, which suggests that African Americans' quest for freedom remains unresolved despite nominal emancipation.

One could legitimately object that Mankiewicz's investigation of a racist ideology's influence on Huck fails to consider adequately that ideology's effects on Jim, its true victim. Mankiewicz misses many opportunities to develop Jim's character, omitting, for example, the heart-rending moment in the novel when Jim recalls angrily berating his daughter for ignoring his calls, unaware that she had been rendered deaf and dumb by scarlet fever. As David L. Smith writes, such moments in Twain's novel distinguish Jim from dehumanizing, Reconstruction-era stereotypes of African Americans by portraying him "as a compassionate, shrewd, thoughtful, self-sacrificing, and even wise man" (364). According to Smith, Twain also humanizes Jim by making

him “an author”—a talented storyteller who “writes himself a new destiny” through his narratives for fellow slaves (369). Maintaining his focus on narrative mechanics, Mankiewicz similarly humanizes Jim by strategically giving him narrative control. Just before the station break, Jim leaves the raft for what he thinks is Cairo, Illinois, says goodbye to Huck, and then remarks, “Dar you goes, de ole true Huck, de on’y white genlman dat ever kep’ his promise to ole Jim.” Mankiewicz draws Jim’s words here from the novel, but their context is different in the broadcast. In the novel, Jim speaks his tribute directly to Huck, as the latter pushes off from the shore (102). In the play, as Jim says good-bye to Huck, the music swells to indicate the scene’s conclusion, and Jim then speaks the lines above as a soliloquy—as if he has momentarily become the play’s narrator. Coming at a key moment, just before Huck’s crisis of conscience before the station break, Jim’s declaration of trust in the “ole true Huck” seems one of the most perceptive statements in the play. While Huck spends the play (as he does the novel) doubting himself and swayed by inhumane societal dictates, Jim expresses the play’s moral statement clearly and authoritatively, recognizing that Huck has Jim’s interests at heart even if Huck sometimes fails to realize this fact himself.

In the end, the *Huckleberry Finn* broadcast does not focus on Jim—or on Huck. Like *Citizen Kane*, *Huckleberry Finn* turns out to be more about storytelling than its eponymous hero. Its focus is less the experiences of its characters than the audience’s reaction to and interpretation of events. As much as a character and narrator, Huck is a symbolic reader who interprets the claims of characters like Tom and the Duke and King. Welles similarly functions as an audience surrogate, navigating the space between Huck and the implied author even as he attempts to derail or usurp Huck’s storytelling

role. By laying over Huck's story a metafictional focus on the audience's interpretive challenges, the play exhibits Welles's preoccupation at this period of his career with "how to transcend the first-person singular as a personal event and tie it instead to its multiple cultural and social contexts" (Rippy, *Orson Welles* 21).

As in his earlier broadcast of *The War of the Worlds*, Welles in *Huckleberry Finn* denies his audience a reliable narrator. Having promoted the author-narrator early in the series as an ideal instrument for helping blind listeners through dramatizations, Welles again—with the help of Mankiewicz's script—subverts listeners' expectations and challenges them to form their own interpretations. Welles's seemingly negligent performance as the audience's guide finds its best expression not in his role as the competing narrator but in his other part as the impostor "King." As Henry Nash Smith writes, the King and the Duke personify "the theme of fraudulent role-taking" and are "not even given names apart from the wildly improbable identities they assume in order to dominate Huck and Jim" (118). Welles's assuming the role of the theatrical con artist would undoubtedly have reminded listeners of his reputation for pulling off media hoaxes. The King and Duke mislead gullible audiences with their performance of Shakespearean soliloquies, as Welles had misled listeners with his adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*. The two con artists' garbling of Hamlet's soliloquies (along with speeches from *Macbeth* and other Shakespearean plays) recalls the liberties Koch took in adapting H.G. Wells's novel and Welles's amalgamations of the bard's plays, such as his omnibus theatrical production of the *Henriad*, *Five Kings* (1939). Indeed, even before Koch's revisions to Wells's story, Welles had been known for his free treatment of source properties. A story on the panic broadcast in London's *Evening News* cited the

“energetic direction and ruthless manhandling of the classics” that had helped Welles’s Mercury Theatre flourish on Broadway (qtd. in Callow 407).

As if to reinforce the connection between Twain’s con men and Welles’s reputation for media hoaxes, in the broadcast’s final moments Welles returned to his portrayal of the King. As in its opening, at its close the broadcast fails to distinguish clearly between the play and its ancillary content. Cooper remains in character as Huck (and never speaks out of character during the broadcast), while Welles returns to his role as the program’s host. At one point, however, Cooper/Huck apologizes to Welles for “that little misunderstanding we had over who was to read the book,” and Welles responds in the avuncular, subtly condescending voice of the King, “That’s alright, my boy, quite alright.” The return of this fictional character, who represents Welles’s tendency to mislead listeners, further confuses an already ambiguous ending. The play’s closing moments, therefore, provide two false emergences of reliable authority figures. First, Huck fails to interpret definitively the story’s chaotic ending. Then Welles releases listeners from the confusing story by resuming his guise as the audience’s “obedient servant,” only to return to his role as the fraudulent impostor.

Although Welles’s performance as the King might recall his earlier revisions of literary and dramatic works, Welles and Mankiewicz did not manhandle Twain’s novel. As I have indicated, they captured the book’s formal and moral complexity better than earlier dramatizers had. Twain’s complex work provided a platform for Welles to express his commitment to racial equality without reducing his message to a homily. Welles’s characteristic insistence on pointing out the limitations of the form in which he worked might seem, ultimately, to undercut *Huckleberry Finn*’s progressive message.

Returning to his role as the King, Welles seems to undermine the preceding story, which may be little more than the impostor king's hoax (with either of two famous con men ultimately responsible—Welles or Twain). In his discussion of Welles's uncompleted 1942 film *It's All True*, which Welles began at the American government's request, Mark A. Wollaeger suggests that Welles's attention to formal nuance compromised the project's efficacy as propaganda intended to secure South American support for the Allies. Wollaeger writes that Welles's approach to documenting the lives of poor Brazilians was at once "[t]oo tendentious politically and too visually self-conscious," as Welles imbued his footage with his "affection not only for the villagers [...] but also for the rudiments of filmmaking, the cutting, shaping, and splicing that transform raw materials into a mode of transport" (250, 249). Becoming fascinated with the formal similarities between boat-making and filmmaking distracted Welles from his project's propagandistic potential. Similarly, *Huckleberry Finn* might seem to end with Welles questioning the narrative's ability to bear truth, thereby undercutting the play's message.

What saves Mankiewicz and Welles's socially progressive message in "Huckleberry Finn" is the convergence of form and theme. The lack of reliable moral authorities in the novel and the need for careful and humane interpretation shape Twain's message, and the *Mercury* adaptation captures these important elements in its formally innovative dramatization. Just as the novel *Huckleberry Finn* "is the argument it raises" (Morrison 386) and *Citizen Kane* is "a meditation on propaganda that also functioned as propaganda" (Wollaeger 243), the *Huckleberry Finn* broadcast combines form and function, narrating a boy's interpretive struggle while forcing similar challenges on its audience.

*Citizen Kane* again provides a helpful analogy for Mankiewicz and Welles's collaboration on "Huckleberry Finn." Pauline Kael has suggested that Mankiewicz's *Kane* screenplay presents the title character as a caricature of Welles as much as of William Randolph Hearst. Mankiewicz knew both men well and, Kael argues, made a "submerged" theme of the film "the linking life story of Hearst and of Mankiewicz and of Welles—the story of how brilliantly gifted men who have everything it takes to do what they want to do are defeated. It's the story of how heroes become comedians and con artists" (8). If we accept Kael's claim, then "Huckleberry Finn" provides further evidence that Mankiewicz was using the early months of 1940 to write about Welles's art and artistic persona. In this radio play, Mankiewicz wrote specifically about the persona and role Welles created for himself in the *Mercury Theatre on the Air*. Therefore, we see the performer and impresario who poses as an author, albeit with humorous self-awareness; the master-of-ceremonies' humble pose, which morphs occasionally into a tyrannous if usually unsuccessful need for control; and the frequent acknowledgment of the process of dramatization itself. By emphasizing the format Welles had established for the series, Mankiewicz created a complex and remarkably faithful interpretation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and an insightful commentary on a consistently inventive series of literary dramatizations.

## Chapter 4: Utopian Voices: Dylan Thomas' Audible Landscapes

VOICE OF A GUIDEBOOK. Less than five hundred souls inhabit the three quaint streets and the few narrow by-lanes and scattered farmsteads that constitute this small, decaying watering-place which may, indeed, be called a 'back-water of life' without disrespect to its natives who possess, to this day, a salty individuality of their own. [...] Though there is little to attract the hillclimber, the healthseeker, the sportsman, or the weekending motorist, the contemplative may, if sufficiently attracted to spare it some leisurely hours, find, in its cobbled streets and its little fishing harbour, in its several curious customs, and in the conversation of its local 'characters,' some of that picturesque sense of the past so frequently lacking in towns and villages which have kept more abreast of the times. (*Under Milk Wood* 25-26)<sup>29</sup>

Welles's dramatizations made books and the act of writing into components of heteroglossic performances that also incorporated elements of news writing and reporting, Hollywood filmmaking, and theatrical drama. Dylan Thomas's creation of a speaking Guide-Book in *Under Milk Wood* (1953), his well-known "Play for Voices" (as its subtitle characterizes it), suggests that his radio drama was similarly heteroglot. Few critics, however, have noted this formal hybridity. One of the few to do so, Henry W. Wells, picked up on the play's combination of oral and textual forms, describing *Milk Wood* in one of its earliest critical appraisals as "*phonographic* poetic drama" because it joins "lyricism, which [Thomas] conceived as a vocal art, to fiction" (440; emphasis added). By suggesting an inextricable connection between speech and writing,

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<sup>29</sup> All citations of *Under Milk Wood* refer to the 1954 New Directions edition, unless otherwise specified.

*phonographic* concisely describes *Milk Wood*'s underappreciated generic fluidity. Seizing on the play's vocal elements and defining it as a distinctly "radiophonic" creation, critics have focused on its oral nature while neglecting its thematic focus on the written word. This conjunction of oral and written modes of expression characterizes much of Thomas's radio writing. And this formal hybridity, as we will see, has important connections to other work by this culturally hybrid poet, many of whose radio broadcasts explored the relationship between the metropolitan center of London (not only as a political but also as a cultural center of publishing and broadcasting) and the regional periphery of Thomas's Wales.

Interpretations and evaluations of this play about a single day in the quaint, fictional Welsh town of Llareggub often focus on genre. Even critics who consider the work one of the best—if not the best—radio play ever written, qualify their praise by unfavorably comparing *Milk Wood* to print-based literature. Jacob Korg, for example, after celebrating Thomas's early poetry and fiction, calls *Milk Wood* "essentially slight," "like most of Thomas's writing about Wales" (141). Much of the later work about Wales was written for radio, and its perceived "slight[ness]" is often related to the medium. Walford Davies, for example, asserts that, despite the play's "essentially low-key ambitions," it is, "quite simply, the best radio play ever written" (68). Davies's implicit assumption, which many critics share, is that radio drama is necessarily less ambitious and complex than literature for the page. Thus, in praising Thomas's radio play, critics frequently derogate the genre, even when they attempt to avoid comparing the play to print-based literature. Peter Lewis argues against such comparisons, which are made "as

though [*Milk Wood*] were a literary text existing as words on the page or an orthodox drama” (76), while Raymond Williams insists that *Milk Wood* creates a “new convention” dependent on radio and not comparable to other literary genres (91).<sup>30</sup> But these critics, too, compare Thomas’s play unfavorably to print-based literature. Lewis closes his examination of Thomas’s work as a radio-specific genre with the claim that “*Under Milk Wood* is literature, though not great literature, but it is great radio” (110). We see, therefore, a recurring tension between viewing *Milk Wood* as *sui generis* and seeing it as transcending its particular medium and genre and therefore inviting comparison with literature written for the page. This tension focuses critical attention on the relationship between radio as an oral medium and literature as a written form.

This preoccupation with the relationship between radio and written literature may represent another manifestation of the orality-literacy binary that many critics evoked when assessing Thomas’s writing during his lifetime. As an English-speaking Welsh poet, Thomas often played a “mediatory role,” in biographer Andrew Lycett’s words, between “England and Wales or, alternatively, [stood] on the cusp of empirical Anglo-Saxon and mythic Celtic traditions” (1). Despite having achieved literary fame with his

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<sup>30</sup> Lewis seems to direct his complaint implicitly at Richard Holbrook’s book-length attack on Thomas, *Llareggub Revisited*, in which Holbrook compares *Milk Wood* unfavorably with *Ulysses* (another work depicting a single day; Holbrook argues that Joyce’s novel inspired the verbal style of *Milk Wood*). Lawrence Lerner has directly rebutted Holbrook’s argument in “Sex and Arcadia: ‘Under Milk Wood.’”

precocious poetry collections of the mid-1930s (when he was in his early 20s), Thomas remained a cultural outsider, with his connection to a supposedly mythic, oral Celtic culture separating him, in some minds, from the English literary mainstream. For many, especially after Thomas began performing on radio and engaging in public reading tours, the poet's work was inseparable from oral performance, which, at best, partially redeemed his confusing and unorthodox printed verse. Shortly after Thomas's death, Geoffrey Moore remarked that "when Thomas read his work [aloud] what had seemed to a number of interested but puzzled people merely lively gibberish became, suddenly, moving and meaningful poetry" (259). While Moore offers a moderately positive view of oral performance, others criticized Thomas's works' perceived orality. Early English reviews of Thomas's poetry referred to his "Welsh oral trickery" and "conjuring tricks with words," while English author Robert Graves dismissed Thomas as "a Welsh demagogic masturbator" (qtd. in Wigginton 75). Favorably or unfavorably, therefore, Thomas was seen as "the bardic Other of thin-lipped London literati" (Goodby and Wigginton 96), distinguished from mainstream authors by his ties to the oral Celtic culture.

By combining qualities of oral performance and literary writing, Thomas's phonographic radio works allowed him to challenge the orality-literacy binary that defined him culturally and artistically. The Guide-Book in *Milk Wood* provides the clearest example of this subversion of the orality-literacy binary. This unusual character's speech combines written and spoken forms by suggesting both "a [...] pastiche of the sort of travel writing appearing in *The Times* in the 1920s and 30s" (Jones

8) and the “Received English register” of BBC announcers (Benjamin 63). Moreover, as a metropolitan perspective on a peripheral town, the Guide-Book’s speech represents the cultural establishment’s view of its Other. This is the Guide-Book’s second significant feature in *Milk Wood*: its role in documenting regional places from the metropolitan point of view. Having written many radio documentaries on places ranging from Swansea and London to Tehran and Abadan, Thomas had frequent occasions to reflect on radio’s role in representing both the metropolitan center and the national and imperial peripheries. In fact, as both Thomas’s broadcasts and the history of radio documentary programs reveal, the issue of orality/aurality was tied to the BBC’s representation of these two categories of place. In broadcasts that documented people and places throughout Great Britain and the Empire, orality functioned at times as an ethnographic marker and at others as an epistemological value. Some peoples were defined culturally, in the metropolitan view, by their oral nature (e.g., the Welsh, the Irish). Meanwhile, radio producers promoted the authenticity of broadcast documentaries based on logocentric assumptions concerning the natural relationship between the spoken word and its referent. In radio documentaries representing supposedly oral peoples, therefore, the spoken word was seen as doubly authentic.

Indeed, the frequently contentious assessments of *Milk Wood*’s documentary status often focus on the voice’s claim to representing the truth. Reacting to the copious criticism asserting correspondences between Llareggub and real Welsh towns such as Laugharne and New Quay, Lewis has objected to the “bogus issue of [the play’s]

realism” (110).<sup>31</sup> As Lewis rightly points out, *Milk Wood*’s many fantastical elements—its many characters who speak from the dead, for example—clearly mark it as fiction. Yet there are legitimate reasons to compare *Milk Wood* to documentary reportage. Like many of Thomas’s earlier broadcasts, *Milk Wood* was produced by the BBC’s Features Department, the innovative source of programs that blended factual content with creative modes of representation, and the work’s form reflects a common Features Department approach to documentary. Kate Whitehead observes that, although Thomas’s view of Llareggub is “clearly not intended as an unbiased factual account, [...] its chronological format and its air of ‘eavesdropping’ [on the town’s residents] can clearly be seen as deriving from the documentary form” (121). As we will see, BBC radio documentary relied heavily on the suggestion that “eavesdropping” on conversation provided greater

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<sup>31</sup> Several critics have explored geographical similarities between Llareggub and various Welsh villages. John Ackerman makes the most thorough case for Laugharne (the Welsh seaside village where Thomas lived for his last five years) as the inspiration for Llareggub (see *A Dylan Thomas Companion* 263-64). Nonetheless, Ackerman acknowledges that the play is “a work as much of imagination as of experience,” and therefore is not an accurate depiction of a real town (243). David N. Thomas asserts the minority view that *Under Milk Wood* was inspired by (and largely written in) Newquay, Wales (see “Dylan the Cardi” and “*Under Milk Wood*’s Birth in Exile”). Cleverdon also writes that Llareggub’s topography “is based not so much on Laugharne [...] but rather on New Quay” (4).

access to truth than more obviously artificial programs could.

The question of documentary voices also has an ethnographic element in relation to *Milk Wood*, and serious critiques of the play often hinge on how its voices depict general characteristics of rural Welsh culture rather than whether the play represents any specific people and places. Praise for the play often reflects the assumption that *Milk Wood* captures something essentially Welsh through its accurate depiction of national speech. We see this assumption, for example, when William Greenway praises a staging of the play in the United States, which was as “authentic as laverbread” because its all-Welsh cast could express “the magic of Thomas’s wordplay to American ears” (23, 25). In this view, authenticity resides in the voice, which preserves the Welshness of Thomas’s “magic [...] wordplay,” with all its implications of stereotypical Celtic mysticism. Stephen Knight critiques such views when he claims that Thomas’s late writing created “a charmingly written, engagingly humorous Welsh version of the Black and White Minstrel Show” (159). According to Knight, Thomas’s ostensible documentaries of Wales perpetuate stereotypes of the Welsh as “a poor, ill-educated, coarse, shifty, garrulous and untrustworthy people” (C. Williams 5).

Thomas’s affectionate but gently satirical portrayal of Llareggub is certainly open to attacks like Knight’s, and some of the characters in *Milk Wood* do manifest the stereotypical Welsh qualities that he mentions. I would like to suggest, however, that the play’s form exhibits Thomas’s significant critical awareness of radio documentary technique and challenges many of the culturally essentializing assumptions that underlay metropolitan depictions of the cultural Other. Thomas’s awareness of these techniques

and assumptions had developed during his earlier work with the BBC, beginning in the 1940s. To understand *Milk Wood's* engagement with the two interconnected themes described above—the orality-literacy binary and the representation of place through documentary sound—I will first, therefore, consider Thomas's earlier radio broadcasts in the context of developments in BBC radio drama and documentary. Before beginning this survey, however, I will briefly consider Thomas's cultural situation within Great Britain in the period immediately after World War II.

### **THOMAS'S HYBRID NATIONAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES**

While I have referred to Thomas as a cultural Other of metropolitan London, it is clearly problematic to use such vocabulary, derived from postcolonial theory, to describe a Welshman like Thomas. Though Michael Hechter once described Wales (along with Ireland and Scotland) as an “internal colony” of England, such views have not withstood scrutiny, as Chris Williams writes (8). Some may argue that Wales became a post-colonial nation in 1999, upon devolution of legislative control from Great Britain to the National Assembly for Wales. As Williams writes, however, in an essay opening the recent collection *Postcolonial Wales*, Wales effectively became post colonial with the 1536 and 1543 Acts of Union that incorporated Wales into Great Britain and gave its residents far greater autonomy and better living conditions than non-whites in Africa, South Asia, South America, and the Caribbean have experienced in subsequent centuries (4-5, 7). Nonetheless, Williams suggests, even if one rejects Welsh nationalists' definitions of Wales as a post-colonial nation, some postcolonial theory can help

illuminate Wales's position with respect to England. Quoting Neil Evans, Williams characterizes Wales as a "dependent periphery" and suggests that postcolonial concepts such as post-nationality, hybridity, and ambivalence can aptly describe the Welsh condition in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (8, 13).

The use of such concepts has invigorated Thomas scholarship in recent years, particularly in John Goodby and Chris Wigginton's explorations of Thomas's "hybrid" modernist writing.<sup>32</sup> Portraying Thomas as a regional outsider in the metropolitan, late-modernist literary culture—when Thomas achieved his first literary success in the 1930s, members of the so-called "Auden generation" alternately praised him and represented him as a monstrous Other—Goodby and Wigginton claim that Thomas was an artistic version of the hybrid colonial subject that Homi Bhabha describes: one who mimics conventions of the dominant cultural establishment and thereby disturbs the supposedly essential binary of cultural insiders and outsiders. Thomas's identity is equally hybrid in relation to his native Wales. Thomas's grandparents lived in largely Welsh-speaking, rural western Wales and his parents were bilingual, but Thomas spoke English only, which increasingly alienated him from the developing Welsh-nationalist political and artistic movements. Poet Saunders Lewis, the official and spiritual leader, respectively, of the nationalist political party *Plaid Cymru* and modern Welsh-language literature, rejected Thomas's claim to Welsh identity, writing that "there is nothing hyphenated [i.e.,

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<sup>32</sup> See Goodby and Wigginton, "Shut, too, in a tower of words," and Wigginton, *Modernism from the Margins*.

Anglo-Welsh] about [Thomas]. He belongs to the English” (qtd. in M. Thomas 48). More recent literary criticism, however, has portrayed Thomas’s cultural and artistic identity more complexly. Employing postcolonial concepts, Jane Aaron discusses Thomas’s “ambivalent” attitude toward traditional Welsh literary forms; as she writes, Thomas alternately claimed to know nothing of *cynghanedd*, the alliterative meter of Welsh bardic poetry, and emphasized the tradition’s influence on his poetry. Aaron writes, “whether or not the effect was deliberate, the persistent chime of the *cynghanedd* in his alliterative English-language verse leaves it sounding ‘other’ and hybrid, a combination of two cultures” (145). Like Goodby and Wigginton, therefore, Aaron represents Thomas as a hybrid figure with ambivalent ties to both Wales and England.

As we have seen, critical responses to Thomas’s writing during his lifetime often aligned these two cultures with an opposition of oral (Celtic, Welsh) and literate (English) values. It is overly simplistic, however, to classify even traditional, Welsh-speaking peoples as members of an oral culture, at least regarding their literary heritage. The tradition of Welsh bardic poetry, for example, which played an important role in establishing a shared national history, combines elements of both orality and literacy: the poetry was written but emphasized aural qualities. In *cynghanedd* verse form, “harmonized or contrapuntal sound patterns [are] prioritized to an unusual degree,” and the generic Welsh term for such poetry, *cerdd dafod*, translates as “a music of the tongue” (Aaron 140). Although, as a non-Welsh speaker, Thomas did not participate in this bardic tradition directly, his radio broadcasts—many of which documented places in Wales for a Welsh radio audience and, therefore, continued the bardic tradition of

representing the country for its people—reflected the interplay of orality and literacy that characterized traditional Welsh poetry.

Representations of Welsh culture on the radio and in discussions of the medium, however, often failed to reflect that phonographic interplay. Often, discourse on and about literary radio programs emphasized the perceived oral facility of Celtic writers like Thomas, as literary figures speculated on radio's promise to reacquaint literature with the sound of spoken language. In *The Art of Radio* (1959), BBC drama producer McWhinnie lamented that “what is currently accepted as ‘good writing’ is not necessarily effective when spoken,” and he argued that radio, by putting “the spoken word into close focus,” was exposing the shortcomings of much literature, which translated poorly from text to speech. Significantly, McWhinnie suggested that Celtic writers, such as Thomas, could reconnect speech and writing: “O’Casey, O’Neill, Joyce, Beckett, Dylan Thomas, among others, are supreme speakers. Is the Celtic predominance significant? Almost certainly. English hardly exists any longer as a spoken language except in certain regional forms; its literature is more often than not divorced from its life, and therefore emasculated” (48). In celebrating radio's potential to reunite sound and sense, McWhinnie's views resembled those of T.S. Eliot, who had delivered over 80 BBC talks and, according to Michael Coyle, respected radio for presenting “speech unmediated by writing,” and Arnheim, who had predicted a radio-driven return to “that primeval age when the word was still sound, the sound still word” (Coyle 144; Arnheim 35). While the literary-minded McWhinnie saw radio orality ultimately benefiting literature in its printed form, views like Eliot's and Arnheim's suggested that the medium might recreate a purely oral

form of verbal art more vital than the written word.<sup>33</sup>

Many expected Thomas, a poet with a striking voice and a poetic style that evoked an ancient bardic tradition, to use radio to contribute to this verbal art that seemed to be at once modern and primeval. One can see this expectation in the introduction to one of his BBC talks, for the program *Poets on Poetry* (1946), which featured Thomas in conversation with Irish poet James Stephens. Before their conversation, moderator Gerald Bullett prepared the audience for anticipated oral showmanship: “These two are going to discuss poetry together [...] or at least that’s the idea. But when you get a Welshman and an Irishman together, both poets and both good talkers, you never know what’ll happen” (56).<sup>34</sup> Defining these two Celts as oral creatures, Bullett echoes the

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<sup>33</sup> While Eliot compared radio speech to oral performance in a pre-literate era, he also acknowledged the interconnection of writing and speech in broadcasting. On the one hand, Eliot contrasted on-air talks with the written word: “There is [. . .] an excitement of interest in listening to the voice of a good broadcaster which the printed word cannot arouse” (qtd. in Coyle 152). On the other hand, he recognized that most talks on radio were as scripted as most public lectures: “Any argument against the broadcasting of talks on the ground that they ought to be read, is indeed an argument against all lectures from a full script” (qtd. in Coyle 152). According to Eliot’s view, a good broadcaster or lecturer will enliven a written text rather than abandon writing.

<sup>34</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, citations of Thomas’s broadcasts other than *Under Milk Wood* refer to *Dylan Thomas: The Broadcasts*, ed. Ralph Maud.

early critical responses to Thomas's poetry that linked its aural character to a semi-mystic Welsh primitivism.

Thomas's broadcasts often implicitly challenged such primitivist discourse while also questioning the possibility of a return to an oral culture such as writers like Eliot and Arnheim imagined. Thomas challenged the association between Welsh culture and primeval orality most inventively in his opening remarks to *Swansea and the Arts* (1949), a program in which he moderated a discussion among several other Swansea-born artists. Thomas opened the program, which was broadcast on the BBC's Welsh Service, with a humorous allusion to the Welsh Home Service's Swansea studios:

We speak from the Grove of Swansea. But if anyone in the deep damp caverns of the rustic dead, in some Welsh tenebrous regional, should have seen this program announced in the Radio Tombs, turned on his badger's set, tuned in on a long-forgotten gravelength and caught that opening statement, let me hasten to tell him that he, alas, would hardly recognize the Grove at all. Where once, on the swain-littered grass, to the music of the jocund rebeck and the cries of nymphs on the run, shepherds piped, elves pucked, goats panned, dryads hama'd, milkmaids were merry, satyrs busy, centaurs forward, now stands the studio of the B.B.C. Here notices, cold as ice-cream, say, Silence, Please, where once you could not hear a Phyllida drop for the noise of the Corydons. And here where the microphones disapprove, like sneering aunts, amorous dianas of the golden uplands stopped at the old pagan whistle. Everything in the Grove

has changed. Or nearly everything. I know where the satyrs go by night, but that would be advertising.

Five of us, then, sit in this desecrated Grove, on chairs, not hillocks; our little cloven feet are shoed; our shirtcuffs fray where flowery bangles once budded; some of us wear glasses; and the mead is off. (218)

Thomas's playful introduction strongly connects sound and a sense of place, with the old Grove defined by the noise of Corydons and piping shepherds and its current incarnation by silence. Significantly, in Thomas's account the BBC has imposed this silence on the mystical, indigenous scene, rather than reviving a primeval din, as Eliot and Arnheim would have it. Thomas's punning references to "Radio Tombs" (for the publication *Radio Times*) and "gravelength" (for radio wavelengths) inverts the trope of "liveness" often found in early responses to radio.<sup>35</sup> By replacing liveness with morbid puns, Thomas subverts the idea that radio enlivens literary expression by setting free the voices that have been trapped in the page. If Thomas seems to blame the BBC for ruining the old Grove, the passage also reveals his cultural ambivalence. His romantic image of the Grove seems to parody Welsh-nationalist fantasies of pre-English Wales. Moreover, Thomas attributes the Grove's demise as much to the "sneering aunts" of Welsh

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<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey Sconce writes that the trope of "liveness" has accompanied the development of each electronic medium (9), though it is often joined by a more morbid sense of the medium's being "haunted," due to its uncanny projection of disembodied voices across space.

Puritanism as to the English broadcasting corporation. Thomas's hybrid identity is clear in the passage's final sentence, in which Thomas depicts his fellow artists and himself as Anglicized satyrs who combine the primeval and the civilized with their "cloven feet [...] shoed."

Thomas's introduction to *Swansea and the Arts*, therefore, complicates what appears at first to be a simple contrast between Welsh orality and an imposed English culture that stifles native speech. A significant factor in this complex relationship between place and speech is the "disapprov[ing]" microphone, which anticipates Thomas's similar description of the microphone as a "cold utensil" in an on-air readings reading the next year titled *Three Poems* (1950). By calling attention to the "cold utensil," Thomas suggests that radio mediates verbal expression as much as writing does. Thomas's on-air poetry readings and meta-poetic discussions—in broadcasts such as *On Reading Poetry Aloud* (1946), *Poets on Poetry*, and *On Reading One's Own Poems* (1949)—invited him to consider the relationship between the written and spoken word and the microphone's mediating role. In such broadcasts, Thomas occasionally assumed the conventional attitude regarding on-air poetry, celebrating the vitality of spoken poetry, in contrast to the silence of the written word. In a broadcast titled *The English Festival of Spoken Poetry* (1948), for example, Thomas referred to poetry as "noise-on-paper" that is "let [...] out" when put into speakers' "chests and throats" (198). In the same broadcast, however, Thomas made an important distinction between the live, unmediated voices heard in person at this festival and those filtered through microphones and speakers in radio broadcasts. Introducing the first- and second-place winners from

the Oxford Festival of Spoken Poetry, who reprised their winning performances at the end of the *English Festival* broadcast, Thomas noted that they would not “adapt their voices to the microphone” (200). Thomas also complained, “The microphone’s mucked up the music-hall. But never, I hope, the Oxford Festival of Spoken Poetry” (200).

While such comments celebrate voices unmediated by the microphone, Thomas hardly envisioned a purely oral poetry independent of the written word. Instead, his broadcast discussions of reading poetry aloud pointed to the inevitable interplay of text and voice. In the talk *On Reading Poetry Aloud*, for example, Thomas argues that “a reader of poems should [...] use *his* voice in the place of *your* eyes,” so that listeners receive “an idea of the ‘shape’ of the poem” (52). Here Thomas emphasizes the visual, material essence of poetry read on the air. In other broadcasts he inverts this conceit by suggesting that material texts can adopt qualities of the spoken word. In the talk *Three Poems*, before reading several of his poems-in-progress, Thomas humorously mentions that two had been published in earlier versions. His description of these poems as material texts lingers on their palpable qualities so much that they finally seem, paradoxically, to be as immaterial and ephemeral as Thomas’s broadcast voice:

One [of the poems], called “In Country Sleep,” appeared first in a magazine which raised its hands in despair of philistine apathy so beseechingly high and often it has since lain down from fatigue, and later was published in a limited edition, ten copies of which are on vellum, available only to the rich [...]. One of the two other poems, “Over Sir John’s Hill,” has been printed in a handsome and richly appointed palace

of a quarterly erected in Rome. And the third poem is in manuscript, waiting for someone who prints strikingly few copies, at impossible prices, on fine soft Cashmere goat's hair. (224)

Here Thomas represents these journals in embodied, human form, with “raised [...] hands” and “[lying] down from fatigue.” The image recalls Welles’s biographies of authors, which seemed, paradoxically, both to reinvigorate authors and emphasize their mortality; similarly, Thomas’s evocation of the material text here stresses both its solidly palpable qualities and its mutability and impermanence. The imagined third journal, for example, printed on “fine soft Cashmere goat’s hair,” is conspicuously tactile, but it is also clearly an impossible literary creation and must therefore be imaginary and immaterial. As a result, Thomas’s comments suggest a kind of writing that exists somewhere between the supposed stability of print and the ephemerality of radio speech. When compared to print, the ephemeral nature of radio speech is often seen as a shortcoming, as McWhinnie suggests when noting that radio cannot convey as much information as the written word because listeners cannot “turn back the page” to review dense, challenging passages (49). In McWhinnie’s view, as in Matheson’s, cited earlier, one must choose between the relative advantages and disadvantages of “permanent but silent print” and “the impermanent but living tongue.” Thomas subverts this opposition by imagining a material text that fails at print’s ostensible advantages of stability and permanence. He suggests that on-air recitations like *On Reading Poetry Aloud* may, in fact, provide greater access to these poems than their expensive and rare publications can. Thomas, therefore, argues for radio’s literary advantages, though not by appealing to

Eliot's idea of a primeval orality or McWhinnie's notion that radio excels at conveying emotion and print at transmitting information (51). Instead, Thomas portrays radio literature as a type of aural manuscript, somewhere between the impossible ideals of printed permanence and a vital but fleeting performance. Thomas evokes this intermediate quality of radio-based writing in the opening to another broadcast, *How to Begin a Story*, which he describes as "notes in the margin of a never-to-be-written treatise [...] free as the London air, though not so smutty" (122). Text and air meet here in writing that seems, from Thomas's description, to exist neither as written word nor oral form, but as a combination of the two.

Thomas's BBC talks, therefore, challenge the notion of a pure, unmediated orality that had been applied to both on-air literature and the work of Celtic writers like Thomas. Before *Milk Wood*, Thomas was exploring a phonographic radio art. He also examined the relationship between the microphone's mediation of voices and radio's depiction of regional places, as his introduction to *Swansea and the Arts* suggests. In his work for the BBC's Features Department, the relationship between voice and documentary—and writing's mediatory role in that relationship—became a recurring concern. Thomas focused on this relationship not only because of his aesthetic preoccupations but also in response to discourse typical of the radio feature genre. As we will see in the next section, the Features Department that would ultimately produce *Milk Wood* had a history of creating regional documentaries built on a complex interdependence of text and voice.

## **PHONOGRAPHIC RADIO FEATURES AND THE INSCRIBED ORAL LANDSCAPE**

Discussions of the radio feature inevitably mention the difficulty of defining this hybrid genre, which combines elements of plays, talks (with their frequent employment of oral narrative), and documentary. The features genre developed from the BBC Talks Department in the 1920s and was then institutionally linked with drama, largely because features often employed the same actors who performed in dramatic productions. After the end of World War II, at the same time that Thomas began broadcasting frequently, the BBC created separate Features and Drama Departments. Features producers achieved much of the BBC's technical and artistic innovation in the 1930s, while drama productions followed a conservative track under director Val Gielgud, who generally based dramatic offerings on adaptations of established stage plays, and thus limited experimentation with plays written specifically for radio and its unique formal capabilities (Whitehead 111). Gielgud argued for a strict distinction between the feature, as a primarily factual program, and drama, as the domain of creative works (Whitehead 111-12). Features producers, however, challenged such distinctions with programs that combined artistic and journalistic techniques. Douglas Cleverdon, who produced the BBC's posthumous production of *Milk Wood* in 1954, distinguished radio plays from features by associating the former with the formal characteristics of the stage (such as the employment of distinct scenes) and the latter with radiogenic characteristics (such as the use of montage to create more fluid transitions between scenes and between moments of external representation and exploration of characters' thoughts) (17). In many cases, such formal distinctions based on the technical capacities of radio were all that separated features from plays. Features like Edward Sackville-West's *The Rescue*, a retelling of the

final episodes of *The Odyssey*, and Louis MacNeice's *The Dark Tower*, which was inspired by Robert Browning's poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," could hardly be called factual or documentary. These features can be distinguished from plays only because of their creative deployment of music (Sackville-West's play featured a score by Benjamin Britten) and elements like interior monologue that can be integrated into a radio feature more easily than into a stage play.

A tradition of documentary features that combined literary and radiogenic techniques with an emphasis on regional reportage developed in the BBC's Northern Region during the thirties. Wishing to document the early 1930s depression's effects on average English citizens (Scannell 1-2, 7), the Northern Region's A.E. Harding, along with other regional-service directors, embraced "the task delegated to the regions—of reflecting the life and the variety of the area they served" (Scannell 14). Some of the Northern Region's most inventive features during the thirties came from Manchester poet D.G. Bridson, whom Harding recruited to write for the series *Harry Hopeful*, which depicted a fictional, working-class character, Harry Hopeful, interviewing real people describing their lives. In producing the broadcasts, Bridson and Frank Nicolls, who played Harry, chose various scenic Northern locations for the episodes' settings, visited those places, and interviewed local people, with Bridson taking notes (Scannell 15). The episodes based on these notes were then performed in the studio by Nicolls and other actors. In addition to its combination of fact and fiction, therefore, *Harry Hopeful*, like many similar features at the time, exhibited complex intersections of reportage and art, as well as spontaneous, "authentic" speech and scripted performance.

To some extent, the documentarian's ideal of authentic speech conflicted with these pre-scripted production methods, which technical and political constraints required. Features producers, particularly in the regional services, often sought to counter the perceived authority of what Debra Rae Cohen has called the BBC's "oracular voice"—an autocratic voice of cultural authority representing the hegemony of London and the Arnoldian principles of the BBC's early director general John Reith (147). By letting people speak for themselves, features producers sought to challenge the preponderance of "official forms of talk" on the radio as well as the "dehumanizing effects of institutional discourse" (Scannell 10). Features like *Homeless People* (1938) were advertised with the promise that "no BBC voice will intrude at all" (qtd. in Scannell 26). Writers, however, necessarily mediated the presentation of speech in documentary programs because portable recording technology had not advanced sufficiently to be used widely until the 1950s. Producers, therefore, typically transcribed interviews and reproduced them in the studio with actors. Pre-scripting also suited BBC policies restricting spontaneous speech. As Bridson wrote in his memoir, *Prospero and Ariel*, "The microphone was regarded as such a potentially dangerous weapon that nobody was allowed to approach it until it was fully known what he intended to do with it" (qtd. in Rodger 45). Thomas's BBC appearances, like most talks programs through at least the 1940s, were almost always scripted and rehearsed before recording, with the occasional result that ostensible dialogues sounded to listeners more like "one irreconcilable monologue impinging upon another in a discordant *friction*," as Vernon Watkins wrote of one broadcast (qtd. in Thomas, *The Broadcasts* 55).

Despite the actual limitations on spontaneous speech, features producers frequently asserted the authenticity of the voices in radio features. On the one hand, creative writers, actors, and engineers acknowledged that the constructed nature of features mediated reality but argued that these artificial techniques enhanced listeners' access to subjective, if not objective truth. Bridson attempted to represent reality through hypermediated documentaries like his early feature, *Steel*, which portrayed Sheffield industry through an impressionistic mix of poetic narration, music, choral verse, and “actuality” sound recorded in factories and around the city (Scannell 17). On the other hand, particularly as sound-recording technology advanced, producers echoed Eliot's suggestions that radio essentially bypassed mediation to provide a more immediate access to truth than older media could. In an historical survey of features, Kate Whitehead writes of the department's pride in creating “a new art-form specific to radio and no longer parasitic on preceding literary genres” (113). With portable recording equipment, the features producers, in the words of the BBC's longtime Director of Features, Laurence Gilliam, “no longer had to imitate reality. It was in his power to go direct to the source, photograph it in sound, and then edit and shape it” (qtd. in Whitehead 115). Gilliam's implicit assumption that audio reproduction provided the “immediate reality” that writing could merely “imitate” was more explicit in other statements that directly compared radio speech with print-based expression. Producer Charles Parker, for example, touted a sub-genre of features called the “radio ballad”—a medley of songs, stories, and other contributions performed by ordinary people—as, “potentially at least, a new art form” that was “reasserting oral tradition after five centuries of submergence by

the printed word” (qtd. in Whitehead 124).

This discourse of authentic cultural representation through sound recording developed alongside technological advances beginning during World War II, when British radio was used for openly propagandistic purposes. As Gerard Mansell has documented in his history of the BBC’s foreign broadcasting, *Let Truth Be Told*, the war spurred the British government to expand overseas broadcasting. While the government pressured the BBC to put a positive spin on England’s early military struggles, the BBC fought throughout the war to maintain the ideal of objectivity that Reith had established in his long tenure as Director General (Mansell 56). While the BBC’s “steadfast and consistent attachment to the truth, often against considerable pressure” from the government, may seem like a stand against propaganda, an appearance of objectivity had been a key strategy of the massive propaganda efforts overseen by C.F.G. Masterman during World War I. Remarking on this time, Mark Wollaeger writes of “British propaganda’s commitment to empirically verifiable information,” which, when presented selectively and with a subtle rhetorical finesse, could be more effective than more clearly tendentious approaches to propaganda (21). Wollaeger also writes, however, that Masterman’s efforts “contributed enormously to the increasingly equivocal status of facts” and that propagandizers realized quickly that “factual accounts must be tailored to suit different audiences around the world, and that the power of facts to make an impression varies according to the media through which they are disseminated” (21). While film, with its appearance of reproducing empirical reality objectively, played an increasingly important role in propaganda during World War I (Wollaeger 19-21), radio

during World War II offered new modes of objective representation and access to large international audiences. The skillful use of actuality sound recording for distinct national audiences can be seen in many of the BBC's broadcasts to the United States, which increased as the English government attempted to secure that country's military support. Mansell emphasizes the influence of documentary programs such as *London After Dark*, which allowed American listeners to hear sounds of the Blitz, including "the sirens and the unhurried footsteps of the crowd at Trafalgar Square [...] making its orderly way to the shelters. 'That combination of sounds,' Ed Murrow wrote afterwards, 'did more than pages of print or hours of radio news reporting to convince Americans that Londoners took their air raids without excitement or panic'" (191). Such programs, with their subtle representations of national character, illustrate the role of ostensibly objective reportage in the "projection of British culture" abroad, a goal of Reith's that guided the earliest external broadcasting during the mid 1930s (Mansell 42). After World War II, as Britain's economic and military power declined and the Cold War intensified, projecting British culture became an increasingly important way to maintain England's international influence. Thus, the post-war BBC Director General William Haley resembled Reith in seeing the purpose of overseas broadcasting, in Mansell's description, as "displaying the British way of life, projecting British enterprise and activity and demonstrating the British sense of values" (216).

The features genre and documentary techniques for overseas cultural projection were well established when Thomas began writing extensively for radio, after World War II. Like *London After Dark*, many of Thomas's features—including *The Londoner*,

*Margate*, and *Laugharne*—documented places with distinct cultural valences (a working-class suburb in *The Londoner*, seaside pleasure village in *Margate*, and quirky Welsh village in *Laugharne*). And many of Thomas's broadcasts were sent to overseas BBC services in Asia and Africa. While Thomas's broadcasts, therefore, participated in the BBC's mission of cultural projection, his features often examined the genre of the radio documentary critically, revealing its artificiality and pose of objectivity. *Margate—Past and Present* (1946) provides an early example of Thomas gently challenging the genre's implicit assumptions. Produced for broadcast on New York radio station WOR in exchange for a program on Coney Island, *Margate* resembles many of Thomas's subsequent features, including *Milk Wood*, in its chronological depiction of a single day. The linear narrative in such programs provides an impression of objectivity and factuality, which can be diminished by other narrative approaches. Thomas's contribution to the program *Return Journey* (1947), for example, contrasts with *Margate* in its more subjective treatment of Thomas's hometown of Swansea; following Thomas backward in time—as he imaginatively regresses from his initial identity as a visiting radio reporter to a small child playing in a suburban Swansea park—the narrative structure of this later broadcast undermines its documentary purpose. In contrast, *Margate*'s form facilitates an ostensibly empirical representation of the town, as the feature follows a fictional American ex-serviceman, Rick, as he returns to England to meet his fiancée, Molly, whom he met during the war. The feature begins with Rick on the train approaching Margate. He shares his impressions as the train approaches the town and as he meets Molly at the station, lunches with her parents, and explores the

entertainments around the pier. As Lewis writes, Thomas adeptly uses dramatic form “to convey aspects of contemporary English life to foreign listeners” (85) by treating “potentially dramatic scenes as opportunities for documentary exposition” (86). During the train’s approach to Margate, for example, Rick reacts in an interior monologue to the unfamiliar sights and smells: “Washing hanging by the graveyard; muddle of roofs and cranes and trains; a bit of a castle, bridges, ships in the mud; warehouses, chimneys [...] can’t smell the sea yet, only smoke and tobacco and scent” (106). Such passages illustrate the feature’s documentary function.

At the same time, Thomas self-reflectively attends to the artist’s manipulations of factual reportage through literary and radiophonic techniques, a concern that is particularly clear in the broadcast’s opening, which, like *Milk Wood*, employs two disembodied narrators:

1ST VOICE. Well, where do we begin? Got to begin somewhere...

2ND VOICE. Begin in a railway carriage.

[*Background train noise*]

1ST VOICE. Is the train moving?

2ND VOICE. Of course it’s moving – are you deaf? The fuming, snorting iron steed with her attendant gallimaufry...

1ST VOICE. ...wrong word...

2ND VOICE. ...of green gay coaches is racing proudly along the glistening rails, her wreaths of tasselled smoke garlanding the... sorry, it’s an electric train.

1ST VOICE. Where's it going?

2ND VOICE. Margate, stupid. (104)

Thomas uses verbal ornament (with a writing style somewhere between poetry and prose, which Lewis has called Thomas's "radio prose" [78]) to describe a train traversing English countryside, much as W.H. Auden had done in poetry written for the 1936 documentary film *Night Mail*. Thomas's humorously antagonistic dual narrators register a conflict in this opening between aesthetic and documentary goals. The 1st Voice's focus on harmonious sound leads him—after establishing a pattern of alliterative consonance with "green gay" and "glistening rails"—to the *g*, *r*, and *l* sounds of "smoke garlanding," before he remembers that an electric train does not spew garlanding smoke. Thomas's dialogue also recognizes the artificial nature of the documentary in its opening question of how to begin, which, as Lewis has observed, recurs in *Under Milk Wood's* opening line: "To begin at the beginning" (Lewis 89; Thomas 1). Even an ostensibly objective documentary requires an artist's shaping hand in choosing when to begin and end the program. *Margate's* Voices acknowledge the feature's radio-specific conventions as well when 2nd Voice alerts 1st Voice to the presence of sound effects ("are you deaf?"). Such meta-fictional (or meta-documentary) devices seem appropriate in this broadcast, whose subject matter exhibits similar artificiality. Margate, after all, is filled with actors, carnival barkers, and the "distorting mirrors" that Rick and Molly stand before at one point. Rick's description of the mirrors provides a nice radio effect, as listeners, having no visual stimuli to contradict verbal suggestion, are encouraged to imagine the quickly shifting sights: "I'm Humpty Dumpty! [...] I'm spherical, I'm a

void—no, I’m not, look at me now, I’m a drainpipe. Hold me, honey, I’m dwindling!” (115). In *Margate* Thomas presents language as a mediating influence, like the distorting mirrors, that necessarily shapes empirical information. Yet the subject to which Thomas applies his art appears, even before the application of language, to be multiform and to elude representation.

While *Margate* explores the writer’s role in constructing documentary representations of places, in other broadcasts Thomas pointedly exposes the larger, cultural myths that shape popular perceptions of symbolic English places. For example, in the 1951 talk *The Festival Exhibition*, Thomas’s cynical exploration of nationalist propaganda as it shapes images of London belies the broadcast’s ostensibly jovial tone. Martin Armstrong, in his review of the talk in *The Listener*, complained that Thomas “was too continually determined to delight or amuse,” but Armstrong’s focus on the talk’s “audible decoration” seems to miss its serious critique of the 1951 Festival of Britain (qtd. in Thomas, *The Broadcasts* 245). In describing the many themed pavilions at the South Bank Exhibition in London (the main branch of a nation-wide festival), Thomas does, as Armstrong put it, indulge in “fine careless raptures” and “pentecostal outbursts” (245). Yet Thomas’s purple patches seem calculated to parody the festival’s representation of British culture, as in this excerpt:

In ‘The Lion and the Unicorn’ [exhibit] is celebrated, under flights of birds, the British Character, that stubborn, stupid, seabound, lyrical, paradoxical dark farrago of uppishness, derring-do, and midsummer moonshine all fluting, smug, and copper-bottomed. Justice, for some

reason, looms in the midst of the Hall, its two big wigs back to back, its black and scarlet robes falling below. (249)

Here Thomas notes the carefully staged presentation that reinforces prevailing cultural narratives, and his verbal excess seems to mimic the construction of national character that he describes. Thomas's satire is even sharper earlier, when he summarizes his general impressions of the festival: "Perhaps you will go on a cool, dull day, sane as a biscuit, and find that the Exhibition does, indeed, tell the story 'of British contributions to world civilization in the arts of peace'; that, and nothing else" (248). Quoting the organizers' official description of the exhibition here, Thomas follows the comments about the British devotion to peace with a sarcastic expression of his increasingly strong anti-war sentiments ("that, and nothing else").<sup>36</sup>

Thomas concludes the broadcast equally sarcastically, pretending to be taken in

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<sup>36</sup> John Goodby argues that Thomas's postwar poetry grapples with "a crisis in *writing*" brought about by the threat of nuclear annihilation ("Very Profound" 205), and Thomas's broadcasts often refer to this danger of global destruction. In his talk on Welsh poet Edward Thomas (1949), for example, his introduction veers into questioning whether Edward Thomas will be read in the future "or whether, because of the powerful insanity of rulers and the apathy or persecution of the innumerable ruled, there is nobody left to read them" (208). The South Bank Exhibition's timing, coinciding with England's involvement in the Korean War, would have made Thomas's skeptical response to the festival's pacific motto particularly pointed.

by the festival's carefully staged mythology. In contrast to an earlier reference to London as "the Capital punishment" (248), Thomas now feigns a sudden rapture:

This is the first time I have ever truly seen that London whose sweet Thames runs softly, that minstrel mermaid of a town, the water-streeted eight-million headed village in a blaze. *This* is London, not the huge petty mis-shapen nightmare I used to know, as I humdrummed along its graceless streets through fog and smoke and past the anonymous unhappy bodies lively as wet brollies. This Festival is London. The arches of the bridges leap into light; the moon clocks glow; the river sings; the harmonious pavilions are happy. And this is what London should always be like, till St. Paul's falls down and the sea slides over the Strand. (251)

Thomas's "radio prose" here takes on the parodic, "mimic" quality that Goodby and Wigginton attribute to the poet's writing in general. The passage's verbal ornament seems to reenact linguistically the festival's creation of a mythic London and, by extension, England. But while Thomas undercuts the embroidered marketing copy that he parodies ("that minstrel mermaid of a town") with blunt, bitter speech ("*This* is London, not the huge petty mis-shapen nightmare I used to know"), Thomas's enthusiasm promotes as much as criticizes the Festival. And, perhaps in spite of himself, he creates a truly attractive, romantic image of the city, with phrases in the this passage's penultimate sentence that rival his best writing in *Milk Wood*. Ultimately, therefore, *The Festival Exhibition* represents Thomas's ambiguous feelings toward London. Nonetheless, Thomas's controlled shifts from blunt realism ("anonymous unhappy

bodies”) to soft-focus romanticism (“the moon clocks glow”) and back again (“till St. Paul’s falls down”) emphasize that the broadcast is not an objective representation of London. Rather, the city emerges through the broadcaster’s conscious verbal manipulations and appears radically different depending on the particular balance of cynicism or abandon that Thomas expresses at any given moment.

### **VOICE AND TEXT IN *UNDER MILK WOOD***

As I have mentioned, on its surface *Milk Wood* hardly seems to resemble Thomas’s earlier, documentary broadcasts. Covering a single spring day in Llareggub, the play presents an impressionistic collection of voices, many of which belong to characters who are either dead (such as the five drowned sailors and the dead prostitute, Rosie Probert, who speak in Captain Cat’s memory, and Mr. Ogmores and Mr. Pritchard, who visit the twice-widowed Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard) or inanimate (the Guide-Book). Beginning with the pre-dawn dreams of Llareggub’s sleeping residents and continuing through daytime and the return to sleep at nightfall, *Milk Wood* introduces listeners to an impossibly eccentric collection of characters in an unbelievably quaint town. These characters include the Reverend Eli Jenkins, who greets each sunrise and sunset with a poem inspired by Welsh bardic verse; Polly Garter, whose love of her babies and fondness for their many fathers provide the play’s moral center; and the lovers Mog Edwards and Myfanwy Price, who come in contact only in their daily love letters. While these characters give the play a light and even frivolous feeling, a darker impression derives from others like the puritanical cobbler Jack Black, whose imprecations against

“naughty couples” stem from his own barely suppressed lusts, and Mr. and Mrs. Pugh, whose marriage is sustained only by Mrs. Pugh’s love of criticizing her husband and Mr. Pugh’s fantasies of poisoning his wife. As Linden Peach has pointed out, such characters connect *Milk Wood* to Thomas’s early fiction, with its critiques of the conventional morality and hypocrisy that he saw in Welsh Nonconformity (36).

The Guide-Book in *Milk Wood*, whose single speech is excerpted at the beginning of this chapter, can seem to intrude incongruously on the rest of the play as a rogue text in a “Play for Voices.” I will argue, however, that, as a text, it is not as singular as it may seem; in fact, Llareggub is constructed through phonographic expression as much as the subjects of Thomas’s earlier features had been. Nonetheless, the Guide-Book is conspicuously at odds with the rest of the play in several respects. In his production of the play for the BBC, Cleverdon omitted the Guide-Book’s speech because he found it “out of key with the narration” (44).<sup>37</sup> Not only is the Guide-Book’s pompous tone at

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<sup>37</sup> The Guide-Book’s part had been performed earlier, in the staged readings of *Milk Wood* under Thomas’s direction at the Young Men’s and Young Women’s Hebrew Association in New York in May 1953. The Guide-Book’s speech also has been preserved in printed editions of the play, including its first publication in full, in *Mademoiselle* magazine in February 1954. The Guide-Book’s part also remains in the theatrical adaptation first performed at the Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh (Acting Edition 26) and in the BBC’s 2003 radio production of the play, which combined the original

odds with the whimsical and folksy mood of the rest of the play, but its dismissive attitude toward the town also distinguishes the Guide-Book's speech from the play at large. The Guide-Book uncharitably refers to Llareggub as a "small, decaying watering-place which may, indeed, be called a 'back water of life'" and only condescendingly admits that "the contemplative may, if sufficiently attracted to spare it some leisurely hours," find some interest in the town's "cobble streets," "curious customs," and "local characters" (26). The rest of the play, however, spends an entire day with the town's eccentric characters, treating them with warm respect and, at times, attaching a mythic significance to this day in Llareggub, a place described later in the play as "the chosen land" (54). This contrast between the Guide-Book's attitude and that of the rest of the play suggests the Guide-Book's incongruity within it.

One distinguishing characteristic of the Guide-Book is its distanced vantage point from the town and its residents, and this perspective marks the Guide-Book as a representative of print culture, which Walter J. Ong and McLuhan have associated with a detached rationality. Ong discusses the "dissecting tendencies" (73) introduced by print and its strengthening of the analytical visual sense. McLuhan similarly argues that print increases the cultural importance of the visual sense, which in turn creates subjects with a "private point of view," a sense of viewing the world around them from a distance:

Psychically the printed book, an extension of the visual faculty, intensified

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recording of Richard Burton's performance of *First Voice* with new performances by contemporary Welsh actors such as Siân Phillips.

perspective and the fixed point of view. Associated with the visual stress on point of view and the vanishing point that provides the illusion of perspective [in Renaissance painting] there comes another illusion that space is visual, uniform and continuous. The linearity, precision and uniformity of the arrangement of movable types are inseparable from these great cultural forms and innovations of Renaissance experience. The new intensity of visual stress and private point of view in the first century of printing were united to the means of self-expression made possible by the typographic extension of man. (*Understanding* 172)

We see a dissecting tendency, a fixed perspective, and a “uniform and continuous” depiction of space in the Guide-Book’s description of Llareggub, which provides a far more visually precise and organized picture of the town than the play’s dual narrators, First Voice and Second Voice, do. The Guide-Book centers the listener spatially, as if constructing a grid outward from central coordinates: “The main street, Coronation Street, consists, for the most part, of humble, two-storied houses many of which attempt to achieve some measure of gaiety by prinking themselves out in crude colours and by the liberal use of pinkwash, though there are remaining a few eighteenth-century houses of more pretension, if, on the whole, in a sad state of disrepair” (26). This view of the street and houses from a fixed, photographic perspective is by far the play’s most objective visual presentation of the town.

The Guide-Book’s view from a fixed, all-seeing vantage recalls the trope in colonial travel writing that Mary Louise Pratt calls the “monarch-of-all-I-survey scene”

(197). In such scenes—emblemized for Pratt by the “discovery” of Lake Tanganyika that Richard Burton describes in *The Lake Regions of Central Africa*—a male, Western explorer creates a “verbal painting” of a foreign landscape that symbolically marks “the peak moments at which geographical ‘discoveries’ were ‘won’” for the explorer’s colonial homeland (197). In such symbolic moments in travel narratives, usually set atop a promontory overlooking an expanse of land below, “the relation of *mastery* predicated between seer and the seen” depends on the scene’s being “deictically ordered with reference to [the explorer’s] vantage point, [which] is static” (200-1). According to Pratt, the writing of the travel narrative confirms the mastery of the “seeing man” (9) over the colonial landscape; by transforming the passive act of seeing into the active occupation of writing, the explorer-author converts existing “native knowledge”—Africans had, after all, “discovered” Lake Tanganyika and similar landmarks long before—“into one’s own way of codifying and presenting knowledge” (200). As these travel narratives do, Thomas’s Guide-Book codifies knowledge about Llareggub into the culturally privileged form of the *Times* newspaper travelogue.

In much of his earlier radio writing, Thomas had challenged similar depictions of places by privileged outsiders. His feature *The Londoner* anticipated *Milk Wood’s* Guide-Book with the “Voice of an Expert” who dismisses a street in the working-class neighborhood Shepherds Bush as “a grey-bricked street of one hundred houses. Built in 1890. [...] Ugly, inconvenient, and infinitely depressing” (76). A “Voice of an Old Resident” immediately challenges this description: “No, no. You got it all wrong. It’s a nice, lively street” (76). The rest of the feature then explores the street from the

residents' perspective. By the time he wrote *Milk Wood*, Thomas's strategies for responding to these disembodied voices of official experts had become more sophisticated than the Old Resident's blunt rebuttal. Rather than planting a character to answer the Guide-Book's perspective directly, Thomas uses the play's narrators and characters to present alternate modes of representing Llareggub that contrast with the Guide-Book's visual bias and fixed, distant perspective. The difference between the Guide-Book's perspective and that of the play's narrators is evident in *Milk Wood's* opening, when First Voice presents his view of Llareggub:

[*Silence.*]

FIRST VOICE. [*Very softly*] To begin at the beginning:

It is Spring, moonless night in the small town, starless and bible-black, the  
cobblestones silent and the hunched, courters'-and-rabbits' wood  
limping invisible down to the sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack,  
fishing boat-bobbing sea. (1)

This opening, with its Genesis-like initial phrase, seems to construct from a void of "silence" a clear landscape, complete with such distinct, visualizable features as cobblestones, woods, and sea. Unlike the Guide-Book's visually precise verbal painting, however, here objective descriptions of visual space are undermined by adjectives whose visual functions are secondary. The darkness conveyed by "bible-black" is redundant after "moonless" and "starless," and the adjective, therefore, connotes religious devotion more than darkness. The "hunched," "limping" wood is difficult to picture. And the redundant descriptions of the adjectival phrase "sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack

[...]”privilege sound over visualizable sense. Such descriptions, which treat visual stimuli as minor components of the town’s essential character, recur throughout the First and Second Voices’ narration.

The narrators’ descriptions of Llareggub, however, are not anti-visual but, rather, synaesthetic; gestures toward visualization are often followed by non-visual information. Early in the play, First Voice positions listeners above the town, as if placing them behind a camera lens for a view of the town below:

Stand on this hill. This is Llareggub Hill, old as the hills, high, cool, and green, and from this small circle of stones, made not by druids but by Mrs. Beynon’s Billy, you can see all the town below you sleeping in the first of the dawn.

You can hear the love-sick woodpigeons mooning in bed. A dog barks in his sleep, farmyards away. The town ripples like a lake in the waking haze. (25)

In this moment that resembles Pratt’s “master-of-all-I-survey” scene, despite First Voice’s invitation to view the town (“you can see”), the difficulty of picturing what the narrator describes belies the initially documentary, cinematic feel. The objects either are impossible to see—a hill-top viewer could not “see all the town [...] sleeping” within the houses—or produce predominantly aural, non-visual stimuli, such as the sounds of the “love-sick woodpigeons” and the dog barking “in his sleep, farmyards away.” From an apparently detached, objective vantage point atop the hill, the listener is imaginatively projected into places that must be penetrated—suggesting the exploratory act of *sounding*

sub-surface depths—to be experienced (as opposed to seen superficially from above).

The narrators' perspective seems to be characterized, therefore, by a greater reliance on the aural than the visual sense. And, in fact, the narrators' descriptions of settings often suggest the artistic practices of oral, non-literate cultures described by Ong. As opposed to literate cultures, in which the visual quality of print has been abstracted from speech, Ong argues that oral cultures remain under the profound influence of sound and its "centering action" (72). As Ong writes, "[w]hereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer. [...] I am at the center of my auditory world, which envelops me, establishing me at a kind of core of sensation and existence" (71). Ong writes that, for oral cultures, "the cosmos is an *ongoing event* with man at its center" (72; emphasis added). Thomas's style, with its frequent privileging of sound over visual and spatial precision finds its greatest expression in the narrators' positions at the center of the "ongoing event" of Llareggub's creation.

We might see the aural nature of these descriptions as "alternative conventions of representation," which Pratt depicts as a strategy for challenging the monarch-of-all-I-survey trope in Western travel writing (218). Again, we must be careful not to equate Thomas, a Welsh author responding to English depictions of Wales, with the colonial subjects whose resistant "autoethnograph[ies]" Pratt examines (9). Nonetheless, Pratt also explores how "hyphenated" writers have often created alternative modes of travel writing that challenge the tropes employed by authors like Burton, and the culturally hybrid Thomas resembles many of these authors "whose national and civic identifications were multiple and often conflicted" (207). One of the alternative travel narratives that

Pratt cites is Richard Wright's *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (1954). According to Pratt, Wright challenges the "seeing-man" pose by rejecting a twentieth-century version of Burton's Victorian-era promontory view: the travel writer's first view of a city from a hotel-room balcony. Finding the view from his hotel balcony in Accra, Ghana, to be unsatisfactory because it reveals little of the city's character, Wright plunges into the city. Wright's rejection of a distanced view for immersive experience suggests, according to Pratt, that "one can only represent and judge what one is *in*" (218). The importance of immersion in Wright's alternative travel writing parallels *Milk Wood*'s auditory landscape; the ability of sound to penetrate surfaces that block sight (represented in *First Voice*'s early address to listeners, "From where you are you can hear [the] dreams" of the sleeping townspeople [3]) creates an experience that Ong ascribes to the audible sense: "sound pours into the hearer" and puts him or her "at the center of [his or her] auditory world." The play's response to the Guide-Book's visually focused report resembles Wright's narrative also in its attempt to "abdicate the *a priori* relation of dominance and distance between describer and described" (Pratt 218). Pratt suggests that Wright "finds himself at home in the night, when the alienation of the seer-seen relations is suspended" (218). Similarly, *Milk Wood* disrupts the relationship of seer-seen, most clearly in the night scenes that open and close the play, when sight and hearing are most confused, as in this early passage that alternates between the two senses and thereby confuses both: "Only you can hear and see, behind the eyes of sleepers, the movements and countries and mazes and colors and dismays and rainbows and tunes and wishes and flight and fall and despairs and big seas of their dreams" (3). Such

descriptions, in which aural and visual senses run together (“hear and sea,” “rainbows and tunes”), counter the strictly visual bias represented in the Guide-Book’s speech. Significantly, this alternative convention of representation does not reject the Guide-Book’s visuality outright; rather, Thomas creates an audio-visual hybrid that allows listeners a deeper understanding of the town than the Guide-Book offers.

Nor does Thomas portray Llareggub’s residents as part of a purely oral culture in contrast to the printed text of the Guide-Book. Instead, as in his earlier talks and features, in *Milk Wood* Thomas explores the interplay between writing and speech in the representation of place. The play’s phonographic documentation of Llareggub is clearest in regards to Willy Nilly Postman, who delivers the town’s mail—but only after he and Mrs. Willy Nilly steam open the letters and read their contents. In a work with little dramatic action and comprised primarily of disembodied, separate voices, Willy Nilly is one of the few characters who moves about the town during the play; as a result, he connects otherwise isolated individuals. As Willy Nilly makes his morning rounds, Captain Cat, the blind man who serves at times as a third narrator, listens to the postman’s progress and describes it for listeners. Thus, we can follow Willy Nilly’s route from Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard’s Bayview House to a delivery for Mrs. Rose Cottage and his stops at Mr. and Mrs. Pugh’s School House and Mog Edwards’s Manchester House (43-45). By charting Willy Nilly’s rounds, Captain Cat provides a rare orientation to Llareggub’s geography, one of the few alternatives to the Guide-Book’s verbal map. As a blind listener and stand-in for the radio audience, Captain Cat also eavesdrops on the contents of the letters, which Willy Nilly recites and even turns into conversations with

their recipients. For example, when visiting Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard, the compulsively clean innkeeper, Willy Nilly assumes the role of the prospective boarder whose letter he delivers:

WILLY NILLY. Here's a letter for you [...] all the way from Builth Wells.

A gentleman wants to study birds and can he have accommodation for two weeks and a bath vegetarian.

MRS. OGMORE-PRITCHARD. No.

WILLY NILLY (*Persuasively*). You wouldn't know he was in the house, Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard. He'd be out in the mornings at the bang of dawn with his bag of breadcrumbs and his little telescope...

MRS. OGMORE-PRITCHARD. And come home at all hours covered with feathers. I don't want persons in my *nice clean* rooms breathing all over the chairs.

WILLY NILLY. Cross my heart, he won't breathe. (43-44)

As a character who helps delineate Llareggub's geography, Willy Nilly recalls the Guide-Book's precise laying out of the town for its readers. The postman's dialogizing of written texts, however, subverts the written word's tendency to create isolated, fixed identities. As further examples of the hybrid voice-text common in Thomas's broadcasting, these dialogized letters also redefine the spatial relationships within Llareggub by joining otherwise isolated characters. Although each of the residents along Willy Nilly's route remains alone in his or her house, by reporting on his deliveries' contents the postman connects each person with news of the others. Thus, at his last stop

he delivers a letter to Mog Edwards and also reports, “Very small news. Mrs. Ogmores-Pritchard won’t have birds in the house, and Mr. Pugh’s bought a book on how to do in Mrs. Pugh” (45-46). Willy Nilly turns discrete written communication between individuals (a letter sent from one person to another) into something resembling a broadcast that links all the houses on his route in a broader network.

This complex spatial relationship between characters is partially facilitated by the unique formal characteristics of radio drama. Because listeners cannot see the characters and the environments they inhabit, *Milk Wood* can repeatedly establish connections between characters who would be separated on the stage but are joined by virtue of their juxtaposed speech; as Lewis notes, “It is the nature of radio to establish connections that do not exist in space: such connections are entirely aural and not in the least visual, since they depend on a contiguity of voices, not of speakers” (103). The overlapping of these voices may, in fact, be a purely aural phenomenon, but the play also frequently depicts written texts that help form spatial and social connections between individuals. This is clearest in the case of Mog Edwards and his lover, Myfanwy Price. Always “happily apart from one another at the top and the sea end of the town” (93), the two lovers spend their lives physically separated from each other, communicating only through their daily letters. By juxtaposing their letters and speeches, however, the play redefines their spatial relationship, apparently joining them aurally. Their dialogue and letters give Mr. Edward and Ms. Price an intimate, even coital connection. During the pre-dawn segment at the play’s beginning, the lovers’ respective dreams merge in a climactic dialogue that concludes with Ms. Price echoing Molly Bloom’s interior monologue at the end of

*Ulysses:*

MISS PRICE. I will knit you a wallet of forget-me-not blue, for the money  
to be comfy. I will warm your heart by the fire so that you can slip it  
in under your vest when the shop is closed.

MR. EDWARDS. Myfanwy, Myfanwy, before the mice gnaw at your  
bottom drawer will you say

MISS PRICE. Yes, Mog, yes, Mog, yes, yes, yes.

The implicitly physical nature of such connections, in spite of the immaterial medium in which they occur, seems to be embodied in the many visual-tactile texts in the play, which include the red, rubber stamp—“Shop at Mog’s!”—on Mr. Edwards’s letters to Ms. Price and the “plain brown-paper[-covered]” book Mr. Pugh receives (55; 68). The palpable nature of these texts symbolizes the physical connections and hungers that pervade the fecund, spring-time atmosphere of Llareggub: Mr. Edwards implores Willy Nilly, “Here’s my letter. Put it into [Ms. Price’s] hands now” (46), as if imagining the letter as an extension of his own touch; and the Reverend Eli Jenkins, writing while indulging in morning sweets, accidentally “dips his pen in his cocoa” (36). Therefore, while the broadcasting of voices connects isolated individuals, the written word in Thomas’s work adds a physical connection across space and a material element to the communication in this predominantly oral play.

Along with the physical, almost organic, nature of writing in *Milk Wood*, the play explores the relationship between writing and speech in representing the landscape of rural Wales. The bardic preacher Eli Jenkins is that landscape’s chief chronicler. At

first, Jenkins's poetry appears to spring spontaneously from his surroundings, as an oral creation that exhibits a natural identity between the spoken word and its referent. Introducing Jenkins's morning poem, *Second Voice* reports that the preacher "stands in the doorway and, looking out at the day and up at the eternal hill, and hearing the sea break and the gab of birds, remembers his own verses and tells them softly to empty Coronation Street" (27). That he simply "remembers" and "tells" these verses after seeing the hill and sea suggests a natural connection between a timeless landscape and its expression in speech. Both oral poetry and a vision of a mythical, unchanging landscape dominate Jenkins's morning poem, which surveys storied places across Wales—"Plinlimmon old in story, / [and] mountains where King Arthur dreams"—while admitting that there are "sweeter bards than I to *sing* / Their praise this beauteous morning" (27; emphasis added). Coming soon after the *Guide-Book*'s speech, Jenkins's poetry can seem like the oral counterpart, and corrective, to the book's cold, unfeeling print. We later learn, however, that Jenkins's literary endeavors go beyond the oral and bardic. His life project, the "White Book of Llareggub" (81), though alluding to the medieval Welsh manuscript known as the Black Book of Carmarthen, seems to replicate the *Guide-Book*'s modern concerns and point of view in many ways. *First Voice* explains that the book describes the "Population, Main Industry, Shipping, History, Topography, Flora and Fauna" of Llareggub (81). These descriptive chapter titles place this book firmly within the rational tradition of the printed word and modern bureaucracy. When *First Voice* says, therefore, that the White Book "tells only the truth," he does not suggest that the White Book's truth is a radically different, mystical truth in contrast to

the Guide-Book's more prosaic one. Like Thomas the radio documentarian, Jenkins aspires, at least in part, to a documentary accuracy resembling the official version of truth promoted by the Guide-Book's metropolitan consciousness.

Significantly, Thomas played both Eli Jenkins and First Voice in *Milk Wood's* initial ensemble performance, at the YMYWHA in New York (Cleverdon 25).<sup>38</sup> These two roles, the disembodied voice and the writer, represent Thomas's dual identities as a radio personality and author, and their interplay in *Milk Wood* illustrates the complex convergence of voice and text in radio features. By revealing the submerged presence of writing in the documentary voice, Thomas does not produce a work without any elements of reportage. As Ackerman and others have demonstrated, Thomas does document Laugharne (and/or New Quay), Wales, in *Milk Wood*. Thomas, however, uses *Milk Wood* as he had many of his earlier features and talks: to expose and challenge the radio documentary's equation of speech with authentic truth and to demonstrate the influences of institutional writing behind and within the voices. Moreover, by foregrounding the dialectical working of speech and writing on documentations of place, *Milk Wood* proposes an alternative version of radio's representation (or creation) of places. Like the

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas also portrayed Second Voice and Fifth Drowned in the two stage-readings at the YMYWHA, May 14 and 28, 1953. Before these performances, on May 3, Thomas had given a solo reading of the script at Harvard University (Cleverdon 24-25). Caedmon Publishers recorded the May 14 performance and later released the recording in a two-LP set.

poems in progress that Thomas read and discussed in his talks, the landscape of Llareggub is continually being written and revised in writing and speech that inform and alter each other. There is little formal distinction between the phonographic Guide-Book and the play's other voices, therefore. The difference between its voice and Eli Jenkins's, however, is one of perspective and institutional positioning. While the Guide-Book speaks with the voice of definitive truth and about an essentially fixed and knowable town, other voices speak of a place constantly being re-inscribed, and they speak as authors of that process.

In another broadcast, featuring another guide book, Thomas portrayed people similarly writing their own figurative scripts in contrast to officially sanctioned versions. As I have described, the England and London of *The Festival Exhibition* were formed by an official narrative told in the Festival's displays. A Festival-issued guidebook instructed visitors in how to navigate through these exhibits, and thus how to construct the intended narrative individually. As Thomas remarked near the broadcast's beginning, most people "who wish [...] to make some sense of the Exhibition, follow the course indicated in the official Guide-book [...] and work their way dutifully right through the land of Britain [...] out at last into the Pavilion of Health" (246). In Thomas's observation, however, many more visitors make their own way through the exhibits, ignoring the official narrative and instead seeming to "like most [...] the gay, absurd, irrelevant, delighting information that flies and booms and spurts and trickles out of the whole bright boiling" (248). Here Thomas celebrates those who take their own course through the Festival, enjoying it with carnivalesque revelry rather than reverence for the

orderly guidebook. *Milk Wood* similarly represents Llareggub's residents writing back against the play's Voice of a Guide-Book and thereby making the town their own creation. In creating this story, Thomas did not reject an inexorably corrupt print culture in favor of an imagined populist, oral one. Instead, Thomas used radio to imagine a more flexible means of writing than textual expression alone could offer. By representing figurative texts in dramatic form—in the distinctive shape of the radio feature, with its impressionistic mixture of diverse voices and its ready accommodation of multiple narrators—Thomas envisioned the possibility of a heteroglossic, phonographic form to counter officially sanctioned, monoglossic texts. Seen in this way, radio provided Thomas a new way to conceive of textual production, distribution, and reception.

## Chapter 5: Samuel Beckett's Radio Anti-Texts

A common starting point for considering Samuel Beckett's radio pieces is the author's 1957 letter to his American publisher, Barney Rosset, urging him to prevent theatrical adaptations of the radio play *All That Fall*. Critics frequently cite Beckett's insistence that "we [...] keep our genres more or less distinct" and that staging this radio play "will be destructive of whatever quality it may have and which depends on the whole thing's coming out of the dark" (qtd. in Zilliacus, *Beckett* frontispiece). In a less-frequently noted passage from the letter, Beckett carefully describes his first work for radio: "*All That Fall* is a specifically radio play, or rather radio *text*, for voices, not bodies." In the juxtaposition of "*text*" and "voices" Beckett significantly highlights two essential components of radio plays. In one sense, these two components—the script, corresponding to the text, and the actors' performances, corresponding to the voices—are so obvious as hardly needing to be mentioned. As we will see, however, text and voice conspicuously oppose each other in several of Beckett's radio plays, with orally performing characters confronting texts that torment them and threaten their performances. These confrontations between voice and text suggest that Beckett's radio plays consciously examine the relationship between the text that determines performance and the voice that manifests the text on radio.

This chapter will focus on two of Beckett's seven works for radio, all of which were written between 1956 and 1963: *Pochade Radiophonique* (written in French in the early 1960s and translated into English in 1976 as *Rough for Radio II*) and *Embers*

(written in English between 1957 and 1959, when it was first broadcast on the BBC).<sup>39</sup> Written texts play important roles in both *Rough II* and *Embers*. In the former, a captive character, Fox, is whipped and forced to speak while his captors transcribe his words. In the latter, the protagonist, Henry, reads from a mysterious “little book” at the end of a play that has otherwise been preoccupied with oral narrative (210).<sup>40</sup> Each play, therefore, explores intersections of voice and text, oral and written storytelling. In each, moreover, these conjunctions of text and performance torment the protagonist, suggesting the tension between these two elements of a dramatic work. *Rough II*'s Fox is literally tortured as his captors extract his words from his body and appropriate them to produce a written record. For *Embers*'s Henry, the “little book” ends his oral performance and, possibly, his life. Critics usually interpret the texts in these plays as metaphors: for the writer's agonizing artistic process in *Rough II* and for the end of life in *Embers*. Martin Esslin's influential reading of Beckett's radio drama links *Rough II* to Beckett's radio plays that explore the writer's “need, even compulsion, to listen to his inner voice and to shape its utterance” (*Mediations* 147). *Embers*' similarities to *Endgame* have led critics to read it as an expression of the dying process, and the nearly blank little book at the

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<sup>39</sup> As Ruby Cohn notes, “The date of *Pochade Radiophonique* is problematic” (274). *The Complete Dramatic Works* describes the play as “Written in French in the early 1960s” (274). This dating would accord with the theory that *Pochade* is an early draft of the radio play *Cascando*, which was written from 1961 to 1962. For convenience, I will refer to the play's English translation by the shortened title *Rough II*.

<sup>40</sup> All citations to Beckett plays are to the Grove Centenary Edition, Volume 3.

play's end can thus communicate that "life ends in the anticlimax of death" (Avila 202). While I agree that these interpretations identify important themes in the plays, I would argue that Beckett also has a more direct interest in the dramatic elements—performance and text—that he juxtaposes in *Rough II* and *Embers*.

Beckett's interest in the relationship between oral performance and writing may reflect his perception of the changing media ecology in the age of broadcasting. Both of these plays express the alienation that some observers perceived in a culture experiencing the transition from a print to a post-print era. While this alienation is an overwhelmingly negative experience for his characters, Beckett uses these scenarios of conflict between spoken and written expression to imagine texts that combine elements of the material text and mutable performance. In doing so, Beckett seems to advance his understanding of the relationship between script and play, preparing for his subsequent development from a dramatic writer to a writer-director who became increasingly comfortable seeing his scripts transformed in rehearsal and performance. The shifting connection between orality and literacy, therefore, may have suggested new ways for Beckett to conceptualize the relationship between his written texts and his plays' manifestation in performance.

Beckett's radio plays were written and broadcast during a period when McLuhan was developing his theories concerning media's influence on consciousness. McLuhan argued that communications technologies alter what he called the "sensorium" or a "ratio" of the senses. Individuals in a predominantly oral society, for example, might have a heightened sense of hearing and rely more on sound to interpret experience than people in a literate society would. Cultures collectively develop a stable ratio of more and less developed senses, McLuhan argued, but the sensorium can be changed by

developments in communications technology: “cultural ecology has a reasonably stable base in the human sensorium, and [...] any extension of the sensorium by technological dilation has a quite appreciable effect in setting up new ratios or proportions among all the senses” (*Gutenberg* 35). According to McLuhan, alphabetic writing and especially print had privileged and sharpened the visual sense of literate Westerners. With the development of non-print media beginning in the late nineteenth century, a culture that had long privileged print and been “locked in the sleep of [...] one sense” (i.e., sight) was suddenly “awake[ned] when challenged in [...] other sense[s]” (*Gutenberg* 73). Such an awakening stimulated twentieth-century artists, who began translating their culture “from one radical mode [...] into another,” just as artists had done during the Renaissance’s translation from oral to print culture (72). If artists benefit from changes in the media ecology, however, their important role as translators highlights the confusion that most individuals feel as their culture shifts from one dominant medium to others. McLuhan, therefore, saw the twentieth century as a time of great alienation, “the early part of an age for which the meaning of print culture is becoming as alien as the meaning of manuscript culture was to the eighteenth century” (135). People used to the old regime of print would necessarily feel alienated from a new culture that de-emphasized that old medium.

As if illustrating McLuhan’s observations, Beckett’s radio plays often portray characters alienated from their surroundings by rapid advances in technology, changes in the types of expression demanded of them, or both. In *All That Fall*, for example, manifestations of recently developed technologies highlight the incongruity of the play’s aged heroine, Maddy Rooney, in the play’s rapidly changing contemporary setting. During Maddy’s walk to the Boghill train station, passing vehicles of increasingly recent

invention (a horse cart, a bicycle, and two automobiles) contrast with the backward-looking Maddy, whose husband describes her as “struggling with a dead language” (182). A similar alienation between characters and their technologized surroundings characterizes *The Old Tune* (1960), Beckett’s translation of Robert Pinget’s radio play *La Manivelle*. In the play, a modern soundscape of street noises, punctuated frequently by the “Roar of [a] motor engine” (260), contrasts with the “old tune” (259) played by a barrel organ and the reminiscences of the play’s elderly characters, Gorman and Cream, who become distinctly Irish in Beckett’s translation and recall a long-ago Dublin. Like Maddy, who struggles with a dead language in an insistently modernizing world, Gorman and Cream vainly seek out the past, but their many disagreements highlight their memories’ failures and thus their inability to recapture former times. In both plays, therefore, characters struggle to communicate effectively and to interact with environments filled with threatening new technologies.

Characters in Beckett’s radio plays who are forced to express themselves in unfamiliar ways experience a similar alienation. Beckett’s radio play *Words and Music* (1962) depicts such a situation, with a character named Croak compelling performances from entities called “Words” and “Music.” The former noticeably falters when he is commanded to perform “Together” (336) with Music; the best Words can manage, according to a direction that occurs sixteen times in the script, is “*trying to sing*” with Music’s accompaniment (336-40). Confident in his oratorical skills when he speaks alone, Words loses his bearings when forced to unite with Music. Words is therefore a verbal specialist alienated from the environment created by a new medium, radio, that excels at uniting words with music and thereby requires their cooperation. Two decades

before Beckett began writing for radio, Arnheim identified this characteristic of radio to merge verbal and musical arts: “[w]hat hitherto could exist only separately now fits organically together [on radio]: the human being in the corporeal world talks with disembodied spirits, music meets speech on equal terms” (195). Beckett’s unfinished *Rough for Radio I* makes this connection between medium and content explicit through a similar merging of verbal and musical elements (this time identified as “Voice” and “Music”). Having heard Voice and Music emerge in turn from a radio-like device, a female guest, She, asks her male host, He, “What is it like together?” (312), and the latter obliges by turning a knob on the device. Suddenly, as if the radio has been tuned between two stations, Voice and Music sound together. While their convergence delights She, it has ominous implications for He. After his guest leaves, He frantically calls a doctor’s office to complain that the sounds are playing “together ... TOGETHER” and also that they are “ending” (315). Again, a technological invention that changes the nature of expression threatens an individual’s familiar perception of the world. Such plays reinforce McLuhan’s observations, based on Beckett’s earlier work, that the playwright perceptively identified the alienation resulting from a changing media dynamic. Relating Beckett’s drama to what he saw as the end of an era of personal specialization that had begun with the invention of alphabetic writing, McLuhan asserted that

The Theater of the Absurd dramatizes [the] recent dilemma of Western man, the man of action who appears not to be involved in the action. Such is the origin and appeal of Samuel Beckett’s clowns. After three thousand years of specialist explosion and of increasing specialism and alienation in

the technological extension of our bodies, our world has become compressional by dramatic reversal. (*Understanding* 5)

After becoming accustomed to specialization as “Words” or “Music” (a division of functions that resembles similarly fragmented Beckettian characters, such as *Endgame*’s Hamm, who can only sit, and Clov, who can only stand), these characters suffer in a medium that joins them and requires them to work together.

The tension between alternative modes of communication is focused in Beckett’s radio plays on the conflict between text and performance, which Worthen has identified as a recurring concern of Beckett’s drama. As Worthen writes, because of Beckett’s famously rigid control over his plays’ interpretation on stage—such as his famous objection to JoAnne Akalaitis’s 1984 production of *Endgame*, which set the play in a dilapidated subway station (Knowlson 607)—his works “now frequently emblemize the conflict between the authority of print and the mutability of the stage” (166). Beckett’s objections to free adaptations of his work can suggest that he favors the printed text’s authority over the mutability of performance. Citing Beckett’s late stage play *Ohio Impromptu*, however, Worthen argues that Beckett’s dramatic works do not represent a strict opposition between text and performance but rather “illustrate a more salient truth: that both the page and the stage provide the material conditions enabling Beckett’s plays” (166). In *Ohio*, a book rests on a table flanked by two characters—a Reader and a Listener. Like a script, the book directs the play’s speech, but the Listener, like an actor or a theatrical director, shapes the performance with gestures that signal the Reader to stop reading, continue, or repeat a just-spoken line. In combining a prescriptive text with the shaping influence of performance, the play “allegorizes the situation of modern drama

itself, the interdependence of the arts of writing and performance in the age of print” (Worthen 3). Such self-conscious juxtapositions of text and performance illustrate how playwrights have appropriated print as “an alternative and authentic site of the play’s identity as a play” and an alternative stage on which the play’s performance can occur (Worthen 9). And they exhibit the printed text’s influence on theatrical expression.

Worthen writes that, while Beckett’s drama frequently “theatricalizes narrative, *staging* speech as the figure of human agency,” *Ohio* “is unique in Beckett’s work for materializing this narrative onstage as a text, a book” (2). While *Ohio* may be the only Beckettian stage play to materialize narrative as a book, both *Rough II* and *Embers* place great importance on written texts that appear in the plays. These texts are created vocally—they are imagined objects evoked by verbal suggestion—and in the plays’ stories they are also records of speech or speechlessness (a transcription of one characters’ speech and the blank representation of another’s silence). The texts, therefore, represent an intersection of speech and writing and illustrate the interdependence between “the arts of writing and performance in the age of print” that Worthen identifies. This interdependence can torment Beckett’s characters, who often represent specialized modes of expression: Esslin writes of *Rough II*’s central figure that “Fox surely equals Vox” (*Mediations* 148), and this character therefore anticipates not only the specialist “Words” and “Voice” characters of Beckett’s radio plays such as *Words and Music* and *Cascando* (1963) but also other “speech” characters such as Mouth in *Not I* (1972) and V (for “Voice of Bam”) in *What Where* (1983). When forced out of their expressive specialty, they can resemble McLuhan’s individuals who have been “locked in the sleep of [...] one sense” before being rudely awakened. The torment these

characters experience results from the “fissure” that Beckett’s plays open “between the materiality of writing, [...] the materiality of scripted dialogue, and the embodiment of performance” (Worthen 175). In the radio plays Beckett isolates and holds up for inspection each of these elements and focuses particular attention on the moments when they converge.

Both Fox of *Rough II* and Henry of *Embers* experience painful transitions in which their narratives, associated with their bodies and their individual identities, are translated into texts that become externalized, alternative bodies. Trapped between modes of expression, these characters represent “borderm[e]n,” as Zilliacus calls a common Beckettian character type (*Beckett* 77). Their pain in moving between expressive modes and communications technologies may represent Beckett’s anxiety over releasing his scripts to the mutability of embodied performance. If so, however, Beckett may have been reassured by writing these plays, for the texts in both *Rough II* and *Embers*, while failures for their characters, are made highly expressive for audiences by their combination of textual and vocal qualities. As the materiality of writing joins the embodiment of performance in the radio text, Beckett seems to imagine a new mode of writing that is enabled by radio but transferrable to dramatic writing in other media.

### **EMBODIED PERFORMANCE AND TRANSCRIPTION: *ROUGH FOR RADIO II***

*Rough II* portrays a trio of specialists who illustrate the tension between text and performance. As mentioned above, Fox represents voice, but he also stands for the performing body (anticipating P in Beckett’s *Catastrophe*, another captive performer)

that his captors must control as they attempt to create a purely textual record of his speech. Led by Animator, Fox's captors also include Stenographer, who records Fox's speech with a pencil, and the mute Dick, who whips Fox when he stops talking. Animator, in turn, answers to overseers whose "dicta" Stenographer reads near the play's beginning but who remain offstage during the play, so to speak. Both Animator and Stenographer are associated strongly with textuality. "Every inch a bookman" (Worth 215), Animator is a former book reviewer who relates events in the play to Dante's *Purgatory* (322) and "the works of Sterne" (324). Meanwhile, Stenographer, as I will discuss, is exceptionally scrupulous in following the overseers' dictum to transcribe Fox's speech down to "the meanest syllable" (320). While this team of functionaries appears particularly bookish, Animator's name suggests not the world of books but of radio: in French, the language of the play's initial composition, *animateur* denotes a radio or television producer, and Esslin writes that the team of Animator, Stenographer, and Dick resemble "the team of producer, secretary, and technician which Beckett must have encountered in his contacts with production teams at the BBC or the French radio" (*Mediations* 146). This allusion to radio, with its suggestion that Animator is conducting an oral performance as much as overseeing transcription, is the first hint that the play will not consistently oppose voice and text.

Esslin has speculated that *Rough II* is a "preliminary [sketch]" for Beckett's last radio play, *Cascando* (1963) (*Mediations* 146), and the two plays exhibit some clear similarities. Like *Rough II*, *Cascando* portrays compelled narration: an Animator-like character named Opener activates and silences Voice, who narrates the life of a man named Woburn. Voice's commentary on his story indicates that he can abstain from

speech only after completing the “Woburn story”: “... it’s there ... somewhere ... you’ve got him ... follow him ... don’t lose him ... Woburn story ... getting on ... finish ... then sleep ... no more stories ... no more words” (344). Like this description of “follow[ing]” Woburn and seeking the reward of “no more words,” Fox in *Rough II* describes a journey that he anticipates will end in release: “[...] Oceans too, that too, no denying, I drew near down the tunnels, blue above, blue ahead, that for sure, and there too, no further, ways end, all ends and farewell, farewell and fall, farewell seasons, till I fare again” (323). Like Voice’s in *Cascando*, Fox’s hope for release lies in finding the words that will set him free. Animator describes the situation in his advice to Fox:

Be reasonable, Fox. Stop [. . .] jibbing. It’s hard on you, we know. It does not lie entirely with us, we know. You might prattle away to your latest breath and still the one . . . thing remain unsaid that can give you back your darling solitudes, we know. But this much is sure: the more you say the greater your chances. (326)

The major difference between *Cascando*’s Voice and *Rough II*’s Fox is the greater attention paid to the latter’s body. Voice is a disembodied character whom Opener activates as if switching on a radio. In contrast, *Rough II* conspicuously depicts Fox’s body while emphasizing Animator’s goal of neutralizing Fox physically and restricting his performance to the verbal abstraction that can be contained in a transcript.

The play evokes Fox’s body by depicting Animator’s attempts to control its limits. The surface of Fox’s body is suggested by the sound of Dick’s whip landing on his skin and by Animator’s early comments, which convey that Fox remains blindfolded, plugged, and hooded between the torture-confession sessions. When Dick removes the

hood at the beginning of the play, Animator comments on Fox's "[r]avishing face" and instructs him to "open your eyes, readjust them to the light of day and look about you" (319). Descriptions of Fox's body, therefore, accompany references to the apparatus that controls it, as if Animator and his crew must guard against the voice's tendency to evoke physical being even without visual stimulation. Other vivid references to Fox's body include "exhortations" from Animator's employers regarding the "rigid enforcement of [Fox's] tube-feed, be it per buccam or be it on the other hand per rectum" (320); a grotesque image in Fox's story of carrying a brother inside him and being "opened up" (323) to birth this brother; and, finally, Animator and Stenographer's lengthy discussion of Fox's tears after he has begun crying. These descriptions portray Fox's body as a border between inner and outer worlds, a collection of surfaces and orifices (the mouth, rectum, and tear ducts) that regulate various emissions and thus serve as media of expression. Again, while these details emphasize physical expression, descriptions of his body are tied to objects that constrain it and prevent communication and sensation. Rather than descriptions of Fox's eyes, ears, and head, the audience hears references to the blind, plugs, and hood placed over them. These items, along with the tube-feed discussed in the exhortations, regulate the borders of Fox's body that facilitate his interactions with the outside world.

Controlling these borders serves Animator's attempts to appropriate Fox's speech by severing it from his body and materializing it as text. As a double for Fox's body, the text is almost as palpably present in the play as Fox is. The first objects mentioned in the play—Stenographer's "fresh pad, spare pencils" (319)—help transform Fox's spoken words into text. These old-media recording devices that create a visually readable text

seem incongruous in a radio play, particularly after the centrality of sound-recording equipment in Beckett's earlier stage play *Krapp's Last Tape*. Writing, however, fulfills the overseers' exhortation to Animator and Stenographer, "kindly to refrain from recording mere animal cries," which, the overseers say, "serve only to indispose us" (320). Just as radio allows Beckett to present Fox's physical features selectively, writing can filter sounds. The overseers' object may be to appropriate Fox's language from him by giving it a physical existence independent of his person. Often, therefore, characters describe Fox's words as objects that take on physical properties as they depart his mouth. One of the overseers' dicta, for example, concerns the potential importance of "the least word *let fall* in solitude" (321; emphasis added), a formulation echoed later by Animator, who complains that Fox has failed to say the mysterious word that might free him: "you have failed so far to let it *escape* you" (326; emphasis added). While these phrases portray Fox's words as if they were objects that can "fall" or "escape" from him, Stenographer's conspicuously material transcription reifies Fox's thought into a text possessed by Animator and his taskmasters, as if the words, having escaped Fox, land in the transcript. Stenographer stresses the material production of texts by focusing on the smallest detail of typography when reading out the "dicta" issued by their overseers: "'Thus rigid enforcement of the tube-feed [. . .] is *absolutely*'—one word underlined—'essential. The least word let fall in solitude and thereby in danger [. . .] of being no longer needed *may be it*'— three words underlined" (320–21). By vocalizing these typographic details, Stenographer calls attention to the performance of textual symbols; the overseers' printed correspondence becomes a speaking text like Thomas's Guide-Book. The typographic details also stress the visible and physical qualities of the record

created by transferring words from a living, human body to an inert, textual one that represents “a visual enclosure of non-visual spaces and senses [and] an abstraction of the visual from the ordinary sense interplay” of the holistic body (McLuhan, *Gutenberg* 43). Sound effects in productions have further materialized the written word by producing the noise of crinkling paper when Stenographer reads the “report on yesterday’s results” (320) and of Stenographer’s pencil scratching on her notepad.<sup>41</sup> Beckett’s script does not prescribe these sound effects, but they accord with the play’s generally realistic *mise-en-scène* as well as its thematic attention to the physical text as a second body contrived from Fox’s degraded one.

Controlling Fox’s speech and limiting his emissions to Animator and Stenographer’s recording sessions offer the promise, as in other Beckett plays, of an exhaustively transcribed consciousness. In *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958), for example, Krapp’s annually recorded tapes materially represent his memory. The play dramatizes his reminiscences by having Krapp listen to past years’ tapes, on which his younger selves reflect on the events of now-distant years. One can imagine this conceit extended so that a continuously operating tape recorder transcribes each moment of Krapp’s life for a total record of his consciousness—an analog version of digital-era self-documentation projects. In a time before digital storage capacities, however, these material representations of memory would take up an immense amount of space—far

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<sup>41</sup> The former sound effect can be heard in the production directed by Everett C. Frost for the Beckett Festival of Radio Plays in 1989; both effects are heard in a recent performance as part of Washington, D.C.’s 2006 Beckett Centenary festival.

more than the volume of Krapp's small room on a spatially limited stage. Not being bound by spatial limitations, however, Beckett's radio plays can perfect the conceit by expanding Krapp's limited annual reflections into the endless streams of speech that characterize continuous broadcasting. *Cascando's* Voice and other radio-play characters who are switched on midstream, as if a listener has tuned in late for a program, suggest that their briefly heard speech continues indefinitely, regardless of whether the audience hears it. One can imagine, therefore, an infinite archive of speech being released on the airwaves. Beckett's *Rough for Radio I* connects such streaming speech to radio's transmissions, which continue with or without listeners: as He tells She, both Words and Music, which the play's characters hear while He's radio is turned on, are present "without cease" (312) in some mysterious place from which their communications originate. *Rough II* seems to combine a hint of this streaming voice with *Krapp's* suggestion of a total archive of speech. While Fox, unlike the logorrheic Voice in *Cascando*, speaks reluctantly and in brief outbursts stimulated by Dick's whip, Stenographer's transcription resembles *Krapp's* recordings, which give speech a material presence independent of the body that produced it. As Hayles writes, *Krapp's* tapes demonstrate that one's voice "can persist through time outside the body, confronting the subject as an externalized other" ("Voices" 78). Moreover, without the stage's physical limitations (or any indication of when Fox's inquisitions began or when they will end), the written record of Fox's speech can imaginatively comprise an infinite archive, even while it remains small enough for Stenographer to place on the desk before her.

Without the physical limitations of the theatrical stage, the exhaustive text in *Rough II* can seem to transcend the limits of physical space. Yet the text at the heart of

*Rough II* exhibits other physical limitations, for, as the play progresses, the text becomes inseparable from the bodily processes that created it. The transcript, therefore, falls short of Animator's goal of a verbal record isolated from the "animal cries" and other manifestations of Fox's physical being. Fox's ambiguous speech challenges Animator and Stenographer, who debate how literally to interpret it and, in the process, reveal the narrative's inherent connection to Fox's body. One of Fox's most perplexing emissions, late in the play, concerns his progress through a rocky environment with "my brother inside me," a phrase with tantalizing literal and figurative implications. Indeed, Animator and Stenographer hope that this anatomically and sexually suggestive detail hints at a story interesting enough to satisfy their overseers and free all four characters from their toils. The phrase appears in Fox's last extended speech in the play:

—fatigue, what fatigue, my brother inside me, my old twin, ah to be he  
and he—but no, no no. [*Pause.*] No no. [*Silence. Ruler.*] Me get up, me  
go on, what a hope, it was he, for hunger. Have yourself opened, Maud  
would say, opened up, it's nothing, I'll give him suck if he's still alive.  
(323)

Animator and Stenographer then discuss whether the story can have any literal significance:

S. [*Scandalized.*] But it's quite simply impossible! Inside him! *Him!*  
A. No no, such things happen, such things happen. Nature, you know ...  
[*Faint laugh.*] [...] No, that is not what troubles me. [*Warmly.*] Look  
you, miss, what counts is not so much the *thing*, in itself, that would  
astonish me too. No, it's the word, the notion. The notion brother is

not unknown to him! [*Pause.*] But what really matters is this woman.  
(325)

Stenographer's "scandalized" tone registers the story's physical monstrousness, which similarly motivates Animator's discussion of "monsters" in nature. In a move that recalls the overseers' exhortation to isolate spoken words from "mere animal cries," however, Animator tries to downplay the physical implications of Fox's speech by focusing on its more abstract level: "the word, the notion." He succeeds only partially, for Fox's words inevitably raise physical associations, particularly in conjunction with the mother figure, Maud. Once Fox alludes to birth, Animator and Stenographer immediately consider bodily images related to childbirth and sex—that this Maud, who will "give suck" to the brother inside Fox, is necessarily "in milk" (325) and that, therefore, "someone has fecundated her" (328). These images lead Animator to exclaim, "The breast! One can almost see it!" (328). Guralnick writes that such moments in *Rough II* demonstrate the persistence of narrative in all but the most nonsensical verbal formulations. Although Fox's narrative lacks coherence (Guralnick compares it to Beckett's attempts to give language the narrative-less quality of music [*Sight 93*]), Animator and Stenographer construct a germinal story concerning Maud's imagined pregnancy, which demonstrates that "words, in making sense, make narration, if only by a kind of innuendo" (*Sight 93*). Similar to Guralnick's assertions about the persistence of narrative, I would argue that Fox's narrative and the response it elicits demonstrate the persistence of bodies even in a medium that would seem to efface them and even in a play that emphasizes Fox's physical neutralization. Despite Animator's best efforts, Fox's words evoke irresistible associations with human bodies and their internal processes, as if Animator's attempt to

regulate the surface of Fox's body draws him into its depths.

Despite the overseers' exhortations to produce a "strictly literal transcript" that excludes "mere animal cries," Animator and Stenographer sense that their desired narrative is inseparable from the physical contact of bodies it describes and the physical process of its production, illustrated at this point by Fox's tears—"the human trait" (325), as Stenographer describes them, and another form of physical performance. When Fox refuses to speak after this last outburst, Animator tries to re-engage the captive by having Stenographer kiss Fox. Animator suggests that her doing so may "stir some fibre" in Fox, to which Stenographer responds,

S. Where, sir?

A. In his heart, in his entrails—or some other part.

S. No, I mean kiss him where, sir?

A. [*angry.*] Why on his stinker of a mouth, What do you suppose?

[*Stenographer kisses Fox. Howl from Fox.*] Till it bleeds! Kiss it white! [*Howl from Fox.*] Suck his gullet! (327)

To penetrate the meaning of Fox's words, Animator realizes he must seek the inner recesses of Fox's body, "his heart [...] his entrails" or even just "his gullet." Those inner reaches, however, are not directly accessible. When Fox subsequently faints, Animator abandons his attempt at the strictly literal transcript requested by his employers and orders Stenographer to amend Fox's speech with the words "between two kisses" so that Stenographer reads out the amended transcript: "Have yourself opened, Maud would say, *between two kisses*, opened up, it's nothing, I'll give him suck [. . .]" (284; emphasis added). Animator's textual amendment keeps the focus on the mouth that Stenographer

kisses, while suggesting with the word “between” both textual and physical violation. Everett Frost writes that, by forcing his interpolated words into Stenographer’s mouth at this moment, Animator is “in the disembodied context of this radio play raping and sodomizing her” (319). While I agree that Animator’s amendment represents a physical violation, Frost associates this violation with the wrong body. Animator’s amendment departs from the overseers’ attempt to abstract and reify Fox’s words by neutralizing his body. Now Animator sees that Fox’s words can be understood only in association with his body in its most visceral sense, and he tries to force his way into Fox’s physical depths to attain the mysterious truth within them.

Ultimately, therefore, Animator’s attempts to control Fox’s emissions fail to isolate text from embodied performance. In staging the confrontation of performance and text, the play represents Fox’s as the most obviously painful experience since his words are drawn out by force and transcribed against his will. The old bookman, Animator, however, is perhaps most alienated by the convergence of media in *Rough II*. The book-reviewer-turned-radio-*animateur* seems unprepared for the new-media situation in which writing’s “visual enclosure” and abstraction of sensual data gives way to speech’s “outering (utterance) of all of our senses at once” (McLuhan, *Gutenberg* 43). As a result, instead of maintaining the “full neutralization of the subject” demanded by his overseers, Animator is figuratively forced into Fox’s body. Finding it impossible to maintain the detachment required to turn Fox’s speech into a written document, Animator dooms both Fox’s oral narrative and Stenographer’s translation, as the latter’s kiss, intended to “stir some fibre” in Fox’s body and thereby prolong his narrative, instead causes Fox to faint (327).

The play ends with a sense of Animator and Stenographer's hopelessness, therefore, as the former consoles his assistant, expressing an optimism that barely conceals his desperation: "Don't cry, miss, dry your pretty eyes and smile at me. Tomorrow, who knows, we may be free" (329). Stepping back from the characters' failed efforts, however, we can see what Beckett gains by combining writing and embodied performance in the play. In effect, the play produces two texts: first, the literal transcript that Stenographer and Animator create, which expresses very little; and, second, the same text as it is sonically manifested for listeners. This latter text is much more expressive than the former since it combines Fox's words with his "animal cries" and other indications of his bodily presence. This text created by performance therefore reverses the familiar relationship between the prescriptive dramatic script and the prescribed performance. Rather than the performance realizing the pre-existing text, the text as an alpha-auditory creation follows and is shaped by Fox's performance. The performer, therefore, achieves some control over the text—an unusual twist for a playwright who typically "required actors who would disappear into his scripts (Friedman 148). Nonetheless, this reversal may foreshadow the changes in Beckett's theatrical philosophy as he moved from treating his dramatic scripts as absolute prescriptions of performance to seeing the text as an object that "remained in flux—finished, then 'created' in production, then susceptible to changes from that production, and so on" (Friedman 148). As an immaterial, fluid "object," the radio text may have prepared Beckett for this greater dramatic flexibility.

## **“WHITE WORLD. NOT A SOUND”: ORAL IMPROVISATION AND TEXTS IN *EMBERS***

While a textual object drives *Rough II*'s plot, *Embers*' "little book" emerges only at the conclusion of a play otherwise focused on oral storytelling and poetic narrative. According to Clas Zilliacus, *Embers* can be considered a "pattern poem," a genre often "decried as a tasteless formal mannerism when intended for the printed page" but that has "never become clichéd in radio" (*Beckett* 95). Zilliacus writes that Beckett's radio works use the medium's verbal focus to highlight their poetic qualities, which sometimes take precedence over plot and character: "Whether their shape even approaches that of drama is debatable," Zilliacus writes. "Some of them could preferably be called radio poems, or radio pieces" ("Samuel Beckett's *Embers*" 224-25). Such observations stress the play's privileging of sound over sense and poetic language over plot, which sets up a sharp contrast with the silent book at the end of the play.

Highly poetic radio pieces like *Embers* can seem to confirm many radio practitioners' faith that the medium would increase literary writing's attention to the sound of the spoken voice. We see this faith in books like Matheson's *Broadcasting* (1933), in which the early BBC Talks Department director comments that "most people would probably agree that the divorce between ear and eye [has] gone too far [...] When they read, [most people] do not hear what they read. Literature, both prose and poetry, is thus largely robbed of its beauty and significance" (73-74). Radio, however, rights the imbalance between text and speech:

Broadcasting is clearly rediscovering the spoken language, *the impermanent but living tongue*, as distinct from the *permanent but silent print*. It is reminding us that speech is the basis of language; that writing

and printing are only convenient symbols and as such invaluable accessories. It is making us conscious of the fact that writing and printing are incomplete symbols; they indicate words, but not accent, cadence or rhythm, which speech alone can show. (74-75; emphasis added)

These comments assert the written word's unfortunate limitations and oral performance's greater expressiveness. We see similar suggestions in comments from radio playwright Emerson S. Golden, whom Milton Allen Kaplan quotes during a discussion on poetic language on radio: "written words are usually accepted in their original or primary meanings, but when the same words are spoken they assume secondary meanings and connotations" (157). Such statements, like Matheson's contrasting "the impermanent but living tongue" with "permanent but silent print," portray speech as more vital than writing. Nonetheless, as Matheson admits, writing and printing are "invaluable accessories." In these authors' perspectives, therefore, by "rediscovering the spoken language" radio improves writing without obviating the written word.

By juxtaposing oral performance and the play-ending "little book," *Embers* explores the tension between Matheson's "impermanent but living tongue" and "permanent but silent print." The play's protagonist, Henry, resembles *Endgame*'s Hamm in obsessively repeating and extending a story as a way of staving off death, which he nonetheless has begun to crave. Henry's story is filled with word play and poetic variation reminiscent of Hamm's rhyming of words like "thermometer," "heliometer," and "anemometer"; but, unlike Hamm's, Henry's story ends with a text, the "little book" that transforms his fluid, oral story (told in the "living tongue") into the silent written word. As in Dylan Thomas's radio works, however, Beckett does not

simply celebrate vital speech and derogate writing. The demise of spoken narrative into a silent book represents a failure for Henry, who resembles the “performing remnants” that populate Beckett’s later plays, according to Friedman (146). Like these characters, Henry seems to struggle “to recall an oral performative tradition that has died out” (150). As I will discuss, however, Beckett turns Henry’s failure, represented by the seemingly inexpressive little book, into his own artistic success, as the object helps him represent Henry’s end, much as Fox’s radio text embodies his performance in *Rough II*.

Henry’s poetic story, which he tells intermittently throughout the play, concerns the late-night visit by a doctor, Holloway, to an old friend, Bolton. Their meeting is nearly speechless: Holloway briefly complains about being summoned to Bolton’s cold, dark house—the fire in Bolton’s chamber has burned down to embers—and Bolton refuses to say what he wants from Holloway beyond the word “please” (210). Holloway offers Bolton an “anaesthetic” (209), but Bolton responds only by gazing out the window before approaching Holloway and staring into his eyes. Bolton seems to need companionship more than medical treatment, but his “old friend” (200) Holloway merely “covers his face” (210), turning away from Bolton and bringing Henry’s story to a close. The poetic story emphasizes not only Henry’s verbal facility but also his deftness in oral performance, as he both narrates Bolton and Holloway’s encounter and performs each character’s dialogue.

The rest of the play’s plot, though it represents several other characters’ voices, seems to be as much Henry’s invention as the Bolton-Holloway story is. Apparently alone on a beach, Henry summons in turn his father and his wife, Ada, both of whom likely are dead. His father is silent throughout; and, although Ada speaks, unlike Henry

she makes no sounds when walking or sitting, suggesting that she exists only in Henry's memory. Henry also calls up three scenes involving his and Ada's daughter, Addie, as well as various sound effects associated with these and other scenes: the sound of a horse's hooves and musical notes during Addie's riding and piano lessons, for example, and a door slammed by Henry's father after a fight. These scenes, sounds, and words seem intended to cover the one sound Henry cannot control: the "sucking" (206) sound of waves on shingle, which haunts Henry, apparently because his father drowned in the sea after "that evening bathe [he] took once too often" (198). The sounds Henry creates temporarily cover the sea's noise, but the waves ominously seep into each of the play's many pauses, suggesting an implacable force threatening Henry's creative and vital endurance.

Two events dominate Henry's consciousness. The first is his father's death, which Henry relives with the help of Ada (the last person to see Henry's father alive) and which he may be trying to represent in his story.<sup>42</sup> The other event is Addie's impending pubescence, which is subtler in the play and not as frequently noted by critics—indeed,

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<sup>42</sup> Most interpretations relate the Bolton-Holloway story in some way to Henry's relationship with his father. Zilliacus argues that Bolton and Holloway represent Henry and his father, respectively (*Beckett and Broadcasting* 85-88). Cousineau and Perloff identify Bolton with Henry's father but do not compare Henry to Holloway (Cousineau 314; Perloff 261). Prince, meanwhile, speculates that the tormented Bolton may represent either Henry's suicidal father or Henry, whose own torments are the sea and his inability to finish his story (274).

Henry himself is apparently only beginning to see his daughter as a sexual being. He has long ignored Addie, whose birth he blames for the decline of his marriage. Following Ada's death, Henry has neglected his duties to Addie, whose demands distract him from the stories he compulsively creates and revises. Now Addie is approaching puberty, a jolting change for her and her father, as indicated by consecutive scenes in which Henry imagines Addie at her music and riding lessons. Rhythmic noises link the two scenes, with the music master's cylindrical ruler, tapped lightly during Addie's playing, fading into the hoof-beats of her horse. These hoof-beats accelerate ominously from trot to canter to gallop as Addie's frightened "wail" is "*amplified to paroxysm, then suddenly cut off*" (203-4). The tapping rhythms and Addie's despairing cries anticipate similar sounds in another scene that apparently depicts Henry and Ada's first sexual encounter. In a flashback we hear the sea "*suddenly rough*" and Ada "*imploring*" "Don't! Don't!" while Henry "*urgent[ly]*" begs her and apparently prevails: sound effects suggesting his sexual triumph also mimic the end of Addie's riding lesson: "*Rough sea. Ada cries out. Cry and sea amplified, cut off*" (205). The associations between Ada's apparent ravishing ("*Cry and sea amplified, cut off*") and Addie's sexually inflected lessons ("*wail amplified to paroxysm, then suddenly cut off*") are strengthened by Henry's description of his and Ada's efforts to conceive Addie: "Years we kept hammering away at it" (207). The similarity of Henry's metaphor for heterosexual sex ("hammering away at it") to the tapping and pounding during Addie's lessons strengthens the erotic suggestions in the riding master's insistently repeated, "Now Miss! Now Miss!" (204). Two sounds, therefore, signify Henry's two obsessions: the sucking wave sounds, which recall his father's death or disappearance, and the rhythmic sounds suggesting Addie's pubescence.

Ada guides Henry between these two preoccupations, alternately coaxing him to follow his drowned father's example (she urges him to surrender to the sea's "lovely peaceful gentle soothing sound" [206]) and reminding him of his worldly responsibilities toward Addie (when Henry proposes that she accompany him on "a row," implying his wish to drown himself, Ada replies, "A row? And Addie? She would be very distressed if she came and found you had gone for a row without her" [207]). Facing these two options—death or life's intolerably banal responsibilities—Henry imagines a more attractive alternative involving Ada and the sexually charged origins of their relationship. Henry suggestively tells her that "[t]he hole is still there [...] [w]here we did it at last for the first time" [206]), yet such youthful recreations are now impossible with the ghostly Ada: as Henry tells his father earlier in the play, with a possible double meaning to the word *know*, "no one'd know [Ada] now" (201). Without a rejuvenating relationship with Ada, therefore, Henry is resigned to two unattractive options: fulfilling his paternal responsibilities toward a resented daughter or his filial duty toward the dead father who awaits his arrival. Each threatens Henry with a kind of oblivion: death and the emptiness of a world with "Not a sound. All day, all night, not a sound" (207) or a paternal existence in which Henry stops authoring his own stories and instead submissively listens to mundane conversations about the "[p]rice of blueband now!" (201). The symmetry of Henry's preoccupations with Addie and his father seems at odds with Ruby Cohn's remark that Beckett inserted Addie's lessons in a later typescript "as afterthoughts" (245). These scenes complement the ones involving Henry's father and illustrate Henry's dilemma of being caught between death and a barely endurable life.

The empty future Henry faces is indicated by the contrast between his Bolton-

Holloway story's poetic richness and the image of the silent "little book." Before the book appears, the play's penultimate episode, Holloway's turning away from Bolton, concludes Henry's story.<sup>43</sup> Henry then trudges to the water's edge, apparently takes out a book, and says,

Little book. [Pause.] This evening.... [Pause.] Nothing this evening.  
[Pause.] Tomorrow ... tomorrow ... plumber at nine, then nothing. [Pause.  
*Puzzled.*] Plumber at nine? [Pause.] Ah yes, the waste. [Pause.] Words.  
[Pause.] Saturday ... nothing. Sunday ... Sunday ... nothing all day.  
[Pause.] Nothing, all day nothing. [Pause.] All day all night nothing.  
[Pause.] Not a sound. (210-11)

Other than concisely indicating the barrenness of Henry's life, this little book offers a confusing coda, and few critics have satisfactorily explained its role in the play. Hersh Zeifman interprets "plumber at nine" as a reference to the crucifixion, which occurred in the ninth hour of a Friday; Jesus, then, is the plumber, who plumbs the depths and redeems the waste of words spoken by Henry and his father (or, who most likely will fail to come, since there is "nothing" scheduled for Sunday, the day of resurrection) (qtd. in Lawley 27). Also recognizing Henry's forsakenness, Wanda Avila sees Henry's little book as an embodiment of the "anticlimax of death" (202). While these interpretations

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<sup>43</sup> While most commentaries on *Embers* call Henry's story unfinished, Wanda Avila argues convincingly that Henry "does finish the story, that the climax of the story is the climax of the play, and that the story focuses the experience of despair, which is the aesthetic purpose of the play" (193).

help us understand the book's resonances at the end of the play, they do not relate the book to *Embers*' formal and thematic focus on storytelling and oral performance. Given these thematic focuses, why does the play end with this mysterious textual object?

In relation to the fluid oral narrative comprising most of the play, the book's materiality is one of its most significant qualities. The play has previously depicted a series of disembodied voices. Alongside the various ghosts he summons, Henry is the character who most clearly suggests physical presence (for example, through the sounds of his feet trudging on the shingle), but even his presence is precarious enough that Zilliacus labels him a "borderman" poised between life and death (*Beckett* 77). The little book significantly materializes Henry's previously ephemeral words. Upon noting his appointment with the "plumber at nine," Henry exclaims, "Ah yes, the waste. [*Pause.*] Words" (211). As Zeifman comments, the "waste" refers to Henry's words (and possibly his father's before him) (qtd. in Lawley 27). But "waste" suggests not only the figurative connotation of dissipation, which Avila identifies when she writes that "Henry's tale, like his life, is truly full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (202); more literally, *waste* suggests the material substance that a plumber would remove, the excrescence that Beckett alluded to when telling Alan Schneider that "My work is a matter of fundamental sounds (no joke intended)" (qtd. in Zilliacus, "Samuel Beckett's *Embers*" 216). Given Beckett's well-known fondness for scatological humor, it is easy to associate the fundament[al] sounds at the end of *Embers* with sludge—the mixture of liquid and solid, of nourishing water and excremental "waste"—that results from the "impermanant but living tongue" meeting "permanent but silent print." Like the radio text in *Rough II* that unites text and performance, Henry's little book symbolically joins his ephemeral and

fluid speech to an object that materializes his words in more permanent form.

If we see the little book representing oral storytelling's subjugation by the permanent written word, then we can recognize Henry's earlier attempts to avoid a print-like fixity in his stories. Near the play's beginning, Henry suggests that his stories' lack of closure has helped him maintain a cherished independence. Telling his father about the Bolton-Holloway and other stories, Henry says, "I usen't to need anyone, just to myself, stories, there was a great one about an old fellow called Bolton. I never finished it, I never finished any of them, I never finished anything, everything always went on for ever" (198). In the play's first BBC production, Jack MacGowran spoke "everything always went on for ever" sorrowfully, suggesting that Henry regrets never having finished his stories. But the line can be read with a happier delivery that celebrates the stories' endurance. Indeed, Henry calls his Bolton story "a great one" (198), and its going on forever is the ideal quality for one's bulwark against both loneliness and the tormenting, sucking sound of the sea.

Judging from Henry's narratives in *Embers*, he extends his stories by repeating them with variation, a process resembling the one by which bards create epic narratives in oral societies, according to Ong (57-67). An early hint of this narrative strategy of varied repetition comes early in the play, when Henry berates his father concerning his drowning: "We never found your body, you know, that held up probate an unconscionable time, they said there was nothing to prove you hadn't run away from us all and alive and well under a false name in the Argentine for example, that grieved mother greatly" (198). While this lack of a body grieves Henry's mother and delays a legal resolution, it fortuitously allows Henry to sustain the story of his father's

disappearance by continually changing its details. As “in the Argentine *for example*” indicates, without evidence about his father’s end, Henry’s speculations allow for repeated variation. In fact, this detail varies in the play’s composition and performance history. Zilliacus notes that “‘for example’ should be taken literally. The French translation has ‘au Perou,’ the B.B.C. MS., ‘South America,’ and the [BBC] production, ‘Venezuela’” (“Samuel Beckett’s *Embers* 218-19). Even without this information about the intertextual fluidity of Henry’s story, “for example” seems to comfort Henry, who might well use the same phrase to qualify “Ecuador” or “Chile” or any other hypothetical country.

Henry’s Bolton-Holloway story illustrates his strategy of extending his narration through varied repetition, as we see in the first part of the narrative included in the play:

Bolton! [*Pause.*] There before the fire. [*Pause.*] Before the fire with all the shutters ... no, hangings, hangings, all the hangings drawn and the light, no light, only the light of the fire, sitting there in the ... no, standing, standing there on the hearthrug in the dark before the fire with his arms on the chimney-piece and his head on his arms, standing there waiting in the dark before the fire in his red dressing-gown and no sound in the house of any kind, only the sound of the fire. (198-99)

In addition to the words, phrases, and syntax repeated in this passage with slight variations (“There before the fire,” “Before the fire with all the shutters”; “no light, only the light”; “no sound [...] only the sound”), are hints of the sort of binary code that Kenner identifies as a structuring principle of much of Beckett’s novel *Watt* (*Mechanic* 96-97). Just as *Watt* contains long passages on such questions as whether or not the dog

that eats Mr. Knott's leftover food will be fed on a given day (and then on the binary possibilities stemming from each of the two possible results), Henry seems to extend his story by replacing one possible fact with another: "shutters ... no, hangings" (198), "sitting there in the ... no, standing, standing there" (198), "Standing there in his old red dressing-gown might go on fire any minute like when he was a child, no, that was his pyjamas" (199). The sheer number of these binary variations suggests a conscious strategy. Henry seems to acknowledge what he's doing in a later installation of the story, as he describes Bolton's "playing with the curtain, no, hanging, difficult to describe, draws it back no, kind of gathers it towards him and the moon comes flooding in, then lets it fall back [...] then towards him again, white, black, white, black, Holloway: 'Stop that for the love of God, Bolton, do you want to finish me?'" (209-10). Playing with the hanging, Bolton alternates light and dark, creating a binary variation resembling the many others in Henry's story. Holloway's exasperated response, therefore, sounds like a critique not only of Bolton's worrying of the hanging but also of Henry's stock storytelling technique. Holloway's complaint, "do you want to finish me?", is particularly relevant to this moment in Henry's story, which has become a repetitive, closed system. As long as Henry can draw from a store of untapped details (e.g., the Argentine, Venezuela, Peru, and so on), he can extend his story. In contrast, the light and dark binary of black/white—which suggests both a printed page and the opposing sides on a chessboard—draws Henry's story near endgame.

Anticipating the silent, nearly blank little book that represents his final narrative impasse, Henry's story begins to lose its variations late in the play, thereby demonstrating the limits of Henry's narrative priority on varied detail over plot. As mentioned above,

Guralnick argues that Beckett's work in radio resembles attempts by composers like Anton Webern to create pure music through a lack of narrative progression. Guralnick writes that "the more conspicuously [Beckett's] radio plays aspired to the condition of music, the shorter they grew. And why? Precisely because, in emulating music, they sought to relinquish the primary means by which length is conferred on a purely verbal text [...]: the element of narration" (*Sight* 80). With its resemblance to a pattern poem, Henry's story initially advances more through varied detail than a developing plot. Two common features of Beckett's works, however, doom this narrative strategy. One is that, as Kenner has argued, the linguistic iterations and permutations of details in Beckett's works always function as closed systems with finite variations (*Flaubert* 81). By creating hermetically sealed fictional worlds in which a limited number of characters and objects can interact in a limited number of ways, Beckett could "empty a field of its possibilities" (*Zilliacus, Beckett* 52). This type of closed system operates in *Molloy* when the protagonist meticulously describes how he sucks each of sixteen stones in turn, while rotating them among his pockets, without putting the same one in his mouth twice. Once Molloy has described the last stone being sucked, the field has been exhausted of its possibilities, and nothing remains to be said. The second common feature of Beckett's work derives from this first one: with the exhaustion of possibilities in a closed system, Beckett's work approaches the static condition of painting. Expanding upon Guralnick's observations concerning the anti-narrative, musical structure of Beckett's radio plays, H. Porter Abbott writes that Beckett's twin loves, painting and music, "provided a model" in many of his works "for the resistance of narrative. Beckett created an artful retardation of story's linear march 'from funeral to funeral'" (22). Often in Beckett's plays, a

painting-like stillness punctuates the exhaustion of narrative, as we see, for example, in *Ohio Impromptu*, the ending of which is signaled first by Reader's twice stating, "Nothing is left to tell," and then by a tableau held for ten seconds in which Reader and Listener "*raise their heads and look at each other. Unblinking. Expressionless*" (476). As I will discuss, Henry's improvised story ends with a very similar tableau that represents the inevitable settling of Beckettian narrative into the circularity of music and, ultimately, the stasis of a painting and the permanence of print.

Several metaphorical, verbally constructed tableaus appear near the end of *Embers*, and each challenges Henry's ability to continue his story. These word-pictures thus anticipate the textual enclosure facing Henry at the play's end. The first is Ada's description of Henry's father in the moments just before his death, "sitting on a rock looking out to sea [...] as if he had been turned to stone" (208). In contrast to Henry's characteristic narrative variation, Ada's description uses consistent details to depict a notably immobile pose:

He was sitting on a rock looking out to sea. I never forgot his posture. And yet it was a common one. [...] Perhaps just the stillness, as if he had been turned to stone [...] just the stillness of the whole body, as if all the breath had left it. (208-9)

This description's internal consistency enforces its static impression: in place of Henry's proliferation of details, Ada repeats phrases and varies her descriptions only slightly without altering the initial impression that she creates: "the stillness" of Henry's father is described first "as if he had been turned to stone" and then, similarly, "as if all the breath had left" his body. After Ada leaves Henry, he briefly tries to extend her description into

a Bolton-like story of Ada's tram ride home following the encounter. This attempt to animate the still-life of his father fails, however, when Henry uncharacteristically repeats his final phrase exactly: "Very unhappy and uneasy, hangs round a bit, not a soul about [...] goes back down path and takes tram home. [*Pause.*] Takes tram home" (209). In response to Ada's authoritative portrait, it seems, Henry can no longer continue altering and extending his stories.

Henry's Bolton-Holloway story then takes on a similar sense of inevitability, as if the exchanges between his characters have become scripted rather than improvised. Henry's description of another tableau suggests this inevitability, as he describes Bolton holding a candle over his head and staring into Holloway's eyes: "Candle shaking and guttering all over the place, lower now, old arm tired takes it in the other hand and holds it high again, that's it, *that was always it*" (210; emphasis added). The tableau is fixed as Bolton stares into Holloway's tearful eyes—"Holds it high again, naughty world, fixes Holloway, eyes drowned, won't ask again, just the look" (210)—before Holloway turns away, effectively turning the page to an empty sheet, or to the empty "little book" that is to follow, as Bolton is left in the "white world, bitter cold, ghastly scene, old men, great trouble, no good" (210).

The "little book," then, symbolizes the end of Henry's oral storytelling and possibly of his life. As mentioned above, the book represents the "impermanent but living tongue" meeting "permanent but silent print," and the book is, in fact, almost silent: "Saturday ... nothing. Sunday ... Sunday ... nothing all day." This book, then, appears as a third and final portrait, the still-life of Henry's moribund story. With its nearly blank pages giving Henry very little to recite, the book combines visual and auditory silence, a

combination that echoes Henry's audio-visual description of Bolton and Holloway's final face-off: "not a sound, white world [...], ghastly scene" (210). Yet despite such suggestions of its silence and visual emptiness, the book is not entirely unexpressive. The days of the week ("Saturday [...] Sunday"), presumably printed at the top of each otherwise-blank page, assert narrative time in a work that has avoided it. Its treatment of time, however, is paradoxical, with the promise of a future ("Saturday [...] Sunday"), on the one hand, confronting that future's emptiness ("nothing all day"), on the other. This temporal paradox complements an artistic one: the book enters the play at a moment of silence and blankness ("not a sound, white world"); yet, like Thomas's speaking Guide-Book, this text's presence is asserted aurally, and it is a rarely solid and visualizable material object in a play of ghostly bodies and shifting visual details. In reading the nearly blank book, Henry expresses its silence; in his word-picture describing it, he visualizes blankness. Therefore, while the little book represents Henry's artistic collapse, its expressive silence helps Beckett depict Henry's descent into oblivion. For a writer who once proclaimed that "nothing is more real than nothing" (2: 186), the book in *Embers* is a curious but real artistic success, as Beckett aurally represents nothingness through a material object that stanches the vital flow of Henry's words.

The "little book" of "waste[d]" words alludes to a long literary tradition of authors expressing anxiety as they relinquish creations to audiences and intermediaries. The epilogue formulation "go, little book" dates back to early manuscript culture, when authors often discussed the hazards of entrusting one's writing not only to readers but also to scribes (and, later, to printers), who could accidentally or intentionally alter the

author's words.<sup>44</sup> In the envoy that concludes *Troilus and Criseyde*, for example, Chaucer worries that his poem may be marred by scribes, private readers, and performers:

And for ther is so greet diversitee  
In English and in wryting of our tonge,  
So preye I god that noon miswryte thee,  
Ne thee mismetre for defaute of tonge.  
And red wher-so thou be, or elles songe,  
That thou be understonde I god beseche! (V, 1793-98)

By twice using “tonge” in connection to writing and by rhyming the word with “songe,” Chaucer suggestively links writing and embodied performance—the scribe may “mismetre” the book “for defaute of tonge,” as the performer may similarly misunderstand the poem and thus sing it improperly. In both cases, the book becomes embodied not merely as an anthropomorphized entity (one that Chaucer instructs to “kis the steppes, wher-as thou seest pace / Virgile, Ovyde, Omer, Lucan, and Stace” [1791-92]) but also in the physical traits (the tongue) of both writer and performer. As R. J. Schoeck demonstrates, the “little book” epilogue has endured remarkably long, having been passed down from Chaucer to his late-medieval successors and on through Spenser,

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<sup>44</sup> Karl J. Holzkecht surveys medieval variations on this literary theme (116-23), while John S. P. Tatlock, in examining Chaucer's famous use of the “Go, little book” formula in *Troilus and Criseyde*, notes that the convention dates back to Ovid and Horace (627-30).

Bunyan, and even twentieth-century American poets such as Ezra Pound and William Meredith (371). As a onetime scholar of medieval literature, Beckett doubtless would have been familiar with the trope, and it is therefore possible that Henry's little book intentionally alludes to this long tradition of authors tremulously releasing their works into the world.

By citing the "go, little book" formulation in a radio play, Beckett adapts this trope from manuscript and early print cultures to another moment of media transition. Like Welles, therefore, Beckett links his new-media plays to a long tradition of printed literature. And, as Welles's plays and introductory remarks had done, Beckett's play uses this link to explore the role of authorship in the context of radio. As I have mentioned, *Rough II*'s setting resembles the radio-studio team of producer, secretary, technician. Such collaborative teams were an important characteristic of BBC production and a significant factor in the Features Department's claim to having transcended earlier literary traditions by dispensing with the individual author. The dictatorial Animator, who coordinates the team's efforts, also resembles a theatrical director, and his domination of Fox anticipates the similarly domineering Director in Beckett's late play *Catastrophe*. In *Catastrophe*, for all the director's dominance and even torture of the actor (identified as Protagonist in the play's *dramatis personae*), the actor arguably prevails, "rais[ing] his head" defiantly at the end of the play and "fix[ing] the audience" with his gaze (489). In each play, Beckett explores a theme like the one Worthen identifies in *Ohio Impromptu*—the tension between text and performance. Significantly, in both *Embers* and *Rough II* the text's control over performance is incomplete. Henry's oral narrative is squelched by the book at the end of *Embers*, yet the book has little to say for

itself, however much it expresses Henry's existential despair. In *Rough II*, Fox faints away, but Animator's dependence on him is clear; if Animator wishes to be freed, he must work with the actor. Neither play depicts a performer's victory as the end of *Catastrophe* does, or a symbiosis of actor and text like we see in *Ohio Impromptu*. But the radio plays' engagement with the intersection of text and performance suggest that at this stage in his career Beckett was beginning a re-evaluation of the dramatic text that he would continue in subsequent years.

## Chapter 6: Radio Paratext: Stoppard's Footnotes on Colonial History

To date, Tom Stoppard has written eight original radio plays, and a large number of them have been transferred to the stage or television. His first contributions to BBC radio were short plays, the first two of which were only fifteen minutes long: *The Dissolution of Dominic Boot*, (1964), *'M' Is for Moon Among Other Things* (1964), *If You're Glad I'll Be Frank* (1966), and *Where Are They Now* (1970). A longer play from the same period, the sixty-minute *Albert's Bridge* (1967), won the international Italia Prize for best radio play of the year. During these early years of his career, Stoppard also wrote a number of scripts for serial radio drama programs, most notably composing seventy episodes of *A Student's Diary*, an Arabic Service program about an Arab medical student in London. *If You're Glad* and *Albert's Bridge* were both staged at the 1969 Edinburgh Festival (and the latter was again adapted for the stage thirty years later as a "musical play" [Nadel 524]), and Stoppard expanded *Dissolution* for a televised version in 1970. Following these early works, Stoppard wrote three more full-length radio plays, each of which has served as a model for a later stage play. The radio play *Artist Descending a Staircase* (1972), which centers on three avant-garde artists, anticipates the focus on modernist art in Stoppard's *Travesties* (1974), and *Artist* itself was also adapted for a stage production in 1988. Stoppard's next radio play, *The Dog It Was That Died* (1982), introduced a spy named Blair, a possible double agent, and philosophical discussions of relativity, all of which would figure in the stage play *Hapgood* (1988). Stoppard also wrote a television version of *Dog* in 1989. His most recent original radio

play and the subject of this chapter, *In the Native State* (1991), was the precursor to his stage play *Indian Ink* (1995), which retained much of *Native State*'s dialogue while adding characters and scenes. Of the eight original radio plays, therefore, four have been staged, whether through Stoppard's initiative (in the case of *Native State/Indian Ink*) or the efforts of theatrical companies; and Stoppard has written teleplays for two others.

It is tempting to see Stoppard's radio plays as laboratory projects for future, more fully realized works. Examining the radio plays as precursors to the theatrical plays can certainly provide insights into the evolution of Stoppard's career, but the radio plays should also be treated as significant works in their own right. After all, several of the plays attracted great critical interest upon their initial broadcast, particularly *Albert's Bridge*, *Artist*, and *Native State*. And these and other radio plays have had extended lives beyond their first broadcasts, not only in their adapted form on stage and television but also in re-broadcasts, including comprehensive reprisals of Stoppard's radio drama on the BBC in 1990 and 2007. *Native State* is an important precursor to Stoppard's subsequent stage plays—not only *Indian Ink* but also Stoppard's other historical plays from the past two decades (*Arcadia* [1993], *The Invention of Love* [1997], *The Coast of Utopia* [2002], and *Rock and Roll* [2006]). As I will argue, one of the most significant features of *Native State* is its examination of the potential for representing history in dramatic form. In this chapter, however, I will mainly examine *Native State* individually, as the significant independent work that it is. One reason for avoiding extensive comparisons between this play and Stoppard's theatrical work is that *Native State*'s thematic focus on historiography is crucially connected to its form as a radio play. Like the works I have examined in previous chapters, the play evokes a written text—in this case, a work of

history, complete with footnotes and appendices. When Stoppard adapted the play to the stage, he weakened this conceit of including a text within the play. Therefore, while many of the plays after *Native State* represent the past on the stage, *Native State* is exceptional in its examination of how history is written.

Despite *Native State*'s popular success and critical acclaim after its first broadcast on April 21, 1991, Stoppard's public comments around the time of its premier suggest that he failed to address its primary themes adequately. Describing his initial desire to write about "the ethics of empire," Stoppard admitted that the play only succeeded at being "some sort of introduction to the subject for me" (qtd. in Allen 240). The question of how thoroughly Stoppard addressed his chosen theme has driven much of the play's criticism (as well as interpretations of *Indian Ink*), with John Fleming and Nandi Bhatia faulting Stoppard for glossing over British abuses of power in India and other critics, such as Josephine Lee and Richard Rankin Russell defending the playwright.<sup>45</sup> While these and other scholars have valuably discussed whether Stoppard perpetuates or subverts cultural stereotypes and how thoroughly he presents the historical context around the Raj's origins and aftermath, the key to understanding *Native State*'s engagement with the "ethics of empire" may be in examining another kind of failure that Stoppard perceived in the play.

This other failure, though related to his treatment of *Native State*'s specific concern with empire, suggests Stoppard's broader doubts about his vocation of writing plays of ideas. A year after *Native State*'s first broadcast, Stoppard recalled his initial

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<sup>45</sup> See Fleming 217-19, Bhatia 221-22, Lee 45-50, and Russell 15-16.

desire to write a play in which “arguments and counterarguments [about the history of the Empire] were properly weighed” (Goreau 260). Stoppard admitted, however, to feeling constrained by dramatic form: “I don’t think a play’s the best place to do it, frankly. One of the built-in ironies of being a playwright at all is that one is constantly trying to put into dramatic form questions and answers that require perhaps an essay, perhaps a book” (Goreau 260). This comment offers a key to interpreting *Native State* and understanding its significance in relation to Stoppard’s many historical plays. As an author who draws much of his dramatic content from his reading (Katherine E. Kelly has compared his working method to that of a book reviewer, whose writings take shape from extensive reading), Stoppard understandably assessed *Native State* in relation to essays and books, which formed most of his source material—Stoppard estimated having read fifty to sixty books, mostly non-fiction, for his research (Gussow 138). While this amount of research is not unusual for a Stoppard play, *Native State* is exceptional for how explicitly it juxtaposes two constitutive elements of Stoppard’s works: the factual books from which his creations usually originate and the dramatic performance that represents the end of his research. By allowing Stoppard to evoke textual characteristics within the performance, *Native State*’s radio-play format played a crucial role in the author’s critical examination of his dramaturgical method.

Both *Native State*’s form and the context of its composition explain why it encouraged Stoppard to compare the expressive capabilities of his historical drama to other modes of representation. Formally, the play evokes a printed volume of history through a curious device in which one character recites footnotes appended to the letters that another character writes. The play, therefore, resembles the radio-text hybrids I have

discussed in previous chapters, and this formal hybridity perhaps encouraged Stoppard to compare his dramatic form to other modes of writing about the past. Written at a time when Stoppard was working intensively in film—and often navigating between media, adapting a J.G. Ballard novel for Steven Spielberg’s *Empire of the Sun* (1987) and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* for his first self-directed film (1990)—*Native State* also helped Stoppard explore a range of intersections and translations between media and art forms. We see his interest in artistic boundary-crossing not only within the play, which depicts cultural and aesthetic exchanges between an English poet and an Indian painter, but also in his plans for the play’s life after radio, as he weighed requests to stage *Native State* against a possible cinematic adaptation that would allow the play’s footnotes to “turn into captions that just stutter across the screen” (Twisk 255).<sup>46</sup> All of these hypothetical and actual translations across media undoubtedly alerted Stoppard to

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<sup>46</sup> Director Tim Luscombe wrote to Stoppard on June 18, 1991, to “put in [his] bid to do a stage version” (Luscombe). Stoppard declined this request to stage the play as well as a request the next year from Dan Crawford of the King’s Head Theatre in Islington. Responding to Crawford, Stoppard wrote, “I have spent a couple days trying to think it through as a stage piece, and it won’t do to stage it in its radio-script form. I want to write it again as a stage play without trying to ‘save’ the radio play. I don’t quite know how to do it [...]. I think it could end up very different” (Stoppard, Letter to Dan Crawford).

the gains and losses accompanying such transformations.<sup>47</sup>

The play's most striking instance of translation—the bibliographic footnotes transported to an aural medium—suggests how much can be lost in relocations across media. The footnotes come from Eldon Cooper Pike, an American professor of English who mediates between the play's alternating scenes set in past and present time periods. The past scenes depict fictional English poet Flora Crewe's 1930 visit to India and her brief stay in the fictional town of Jummapur, where she meets and is twice painted by Indian artist Nirad Das. The present scenes, set in a London suburb, portray a meeting between Flora's surviving sister, Eleanor Swan, and Nirad Das's surviving son, Anish. In the play's present-day story, Professor Pike has just edited an edition of *The Selected Letters of Flora Crewe*, but the radio audience only hears Pike during the past scenes, when his footnotes from the volume intrude on Flora's letters to her sister in 1930. Although Pike is an English professor and his footnotes often elaborate on Flora's literary allusions, he also provides historical information. In one letter, for example, Flora

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<sup>47</sup> Stoppard's comments on his cinematic adaptation of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* illustrate his awareness of the differing aesthetic capacities and limitations of various media. Observing that he had “left half of the play out of the film,” Stoppard commented that much of the play's dialogue was “unnecessary, it's not what you'd do if you were writing a film” (Allen 245). It was this willingness to sacrifice his original work to the demands of a more visually oriented medium that led Stoppard to direct for the first time; as Stoppard put it, he was the only director “prepared to do the necessary violence to this supposed modern classic” (qtd. in Nadel 395).

responds to her sister's inquiries about the Indian independence movement, and Pike adds historical context:

FLORA. "darling, you mustn't expect me to be Intelligence from Abroad [...]—you obviously know much more than I do about the Salt March—"

PIKE. Gandhi's "March to the Sea" to protest the salt tax began at Ahmedabad on March 12th. He reached the sea on the day this letter was written.

FLORA. "—nobody has mentioned it to me—and you'd better explain to Josh that the earthshaking sensations of Lord Beaverbrook's new Empire Party, etc.—"

PIKE. See Appendix G.

FLORA. "—cause little stir in Jummapur." (227)

Footnotes like these illustrate potential limitations to translating historiography into dramatic form. The humorous request to "See Appendix G"—clearly impossible for a radio audience to follow—seems to represent concisely all of Stoppard's historical research that the two-hour broadcast necessarily excludes. Pike provides several other dead-end cross-references, which suggest a phantom, inaccessible text around the play's figurative margins and emphasize the limited, fragmentary nature of the play's historical revelations.

I would argue, however, that Pike's limitations allow Stoppard to envision alternative, potentially valuable modes of historiography that might emerge somewhere between the printed page and dramatic performance. The new representation of history

that Pike's footnotes suggest combines the values associated with printed reference works and footnotes—scholarly rigor and accuracy—with the flexibility that Stoppard often cites as one of theater's greatest virtues.<sup>48</sup> By limiting the historical information that Pike conveys, Stoppard preserves the historian's virtues without imposing the kind of authoritative interpretation that Stoppard typically avoids in his plays (Kelly 1-2). Pike's failure, therefore, becomes a dramatic success for Stoppard. And if Pike's contributions do not help *Native State* thoroughly examine the ethics of empire, Stoppard's radio text at least suggests the possibility of new ways of writing about and dramatizing such important historical issues.

To examine Pike's significance, I will first discuss Stoppard's many examinations of cross-media exchanges in *Native State*. Pike's translation of the book into radio speech is only one of many instances of cross-media translation in the play, many of which either facilitate or frustrate communication across cultures. The broader topic of communication across media will provide context for my analysis of the play's remediation of historical texts. I will discuss how Pike contributes crucial information

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<sup>48</sup> Stoppard has frequently contrasted theatrical performance's dynamism with the fixity of printed texts. He describes a play, for example, as “an event rather than a text that one is trying to convey” (qtd. in Nadel 295), and a similar sentiment underlies his notes in an acting edition of his first major play: “there is no definitive text of ‘Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead.’ This is not an omission but a statement of principle” (qtd. in Nadel 188). At least in relation to his plays, therefore, Stoppard associates a text with immutability and dramatic performances with openness to change.

that contextualizes the play's personal drama even while the play circumscribes the historical context that Pike provides. By limiting Pike's historical discourse, Stoppard explores open-ended forms of history that respect the complexity of the colonial past and its ongoing legacy in the present and future. The final section, then, will consider a final translation: *Native State's* adaptation as *Indian Ink*. As I will discuss, by turning Pike into an embodied, on-stage character who travels to India seeking clues about Flora's travels (this time for a biography, rather than a volume of letters), *Indian Ink* loses much of the professor's significance, which depended on the formal characteristics of radio drama to suggest a text's presence behind the character's voice. The stage play retains a significant connection to radio, however, and I will examine how an allusion to the BBC's World Service expands *Native State's* focus on Victorian-era cultural imperialism into an examination of more recent cultural influence exercised via British radio in India.

### **CROSS-TALK AND CONNECTIONS ACROSS ART FORMS**

*Native State's* first broadcast on BBC Radio 3 drew unusually extensive media coverage for a radio play. A cover story in the periodical *Radio Times* suggested that public interest derived equally from the event of a new Stoppard work and curiosity over Stoppard's relationship with the play's star, Felicity Kendal. The *Radio Times* cover, which featured a photograph of Kendal, coyly played on rumors of a Kendal-Stoppard romance with the teaser "Felicity Kendal on her great love affair"; readers hoping for gossip were undoubtedly disappointed to learn that the affair in question concerned India, where Kendal spent much of her childhood. The play was well received, with John Tydeman, who has produced most of Stoppard's eight radio plays, including *Native State*,

calling it “the best thing [Stoppard]’s ever written” (qtd. in Donovan 5.1), and most reviewers were similarly enthusiastic. Some dissented, however, that the play was “unremarkable” (“In the Native State”) and “a wayside shrine to the art of historical biography” rather than the “monument” the BBC had hoped for (Cropper).

Several reviewers were surprised that Stoppard would waste his first original play in three years on radio since he no longer needed the modest BBC payments that had helped support him as a young writer. Introducing a 1994 collection of his radio drama, however, Stoppard wrote that the decade-long gaps between his three most recent radio plays resulted from “a matter of circumstance rather than a conscious withdrawal from radio. Even so, ten years is an embarrassing gap for a writer who is enthusiastic for BBC Radio drama and in debt to it” (*Plays 2* viii). A comparison between *Native State* and Stoppard’s earlier works suggests that his debt to radio was creative as well as financial. Many of Stoppard’s earlier radio plays appear to have inspired elements of *Native State*. Its alternating time periods, for example, recall the flashbacks in *Where Are They Now?* (which depicted boys at a boarding school during World War II and later as adults at a school reunion dinner) and *Artist*. Indeed, a preoccupation with time unites almost all of Stoppard’s radio work. *The Dissolution of Dominic Boot* depicts the title character’s losing race against time, beginning with a taxi ride he cannot afford and continuing through visits to various banks and friends as Boot attempts to withdraw and borrow money to cover the ever-increasing fare. The continually ticking taxi meter in *Dissolution* anticipates the regular “pips” and beeps in *If You’re Glad I’ll Be Frank*, which features a man convinced that his wife is trapped in the telephone as the “TIM” girl (the speaking clock that tells callers the current time). And *Albert’s Bridge*

dramatizes a time-related algebra problem: if it takes four painters two years to re-paint a suspension bridge, why not employ a single painter (Albert) to do the job over eight years? These radio plays' manipulations of dramatic time may represent their greatest influence on Stoppard's stage practice: with *Arcadia*, his next play after *Native State*, Stoppard began the series of historical stage plays, each of which moves fluidly between time periods. *Native State* also follows several of the earlier radio plays' focus on relationships between art forms and media. *Artist* features three creative characters who work in different media: tape recording, paint, and unusual sculpting materials such as sugar. The germinal image in *Native State*, therefore—of a poet writing while having her portrait painted—resembles *Artist*'s comparisons of different art forms, and much of *Native State*'s dialogue follows *Artist*'s in evaluating different artistic philosophies. Pike's talking footnotes, meanwhile, may owe something to the encyclopedia entries at the center of "*M*" *Is for Moon, Among Other Things* (1964), in which a middle-aged woman's bed-time reading consists of items roughly as informative, brief, and dry as Pike's footnotes in *Native State*.

Setting *Native State* in alternating time periods allows Stoppard to examine the "internal contradictions" he saw in the received views of colonial history as well as the complexity of English identity in a post-colonial era (qtd. in Goreau 260). The 1930 scenes contain many familiar components of Raj-related historical fiction, such as Kipling-reciting Anglo colonials who long for the Victorian past and exclude "natives" from their clubs. Stoppard complicates this familiar view of the Raj, however, by setting the play in one of India's many "native states," which were controlled by local rajahs, though with considerable English oversight. Rather than simply portray a binary

opposition of England against India, therefore, Stoppard represents a complex network of interests and influences: the English colonial government equally distrusts Indian nationalists and the British socialists behind the local Theosophical Society; the latter group, while anti-imperialist, is persecuted not by the Raj but by the Rajah, the “only capitalist” in Jummapur (233). While alluding to this complicated factional power struggle, Stoppard focuses the complexities of the colonial situation in Flora and Das’s relationship. Each character represents the contradictions Stoppard sought to explore in the play. Das, the painter, sympathizes with Indian nationalism but is reluctant to act on his convictions; meanwhile, he loves British culture—especially Dickens, Macaulay, and the Pre-Raphaelite painters—more than the average English person does. Flora, meanwhile, rebels against lingering Victorian sensibilities with her sexually forward modernist poetry, and it is not surprising, therefore, that Flora, rather than Das, most vocally opposes British imperialism through a philosophy of aggressive self-assertion. As she tells Das, “If you don’t start learning to *take* you’ll never be shot of us” (244). The play’s present period, meanwhile, pairs Anish Das and Eleanor Swan in scenes that represent the aftermath of Independence and South Asians’ large-scale migration to England. As Flora’s twenty-something sister in 1930, Eleanor was an idealistic socialist critic of Empire, but sixty years later she defends the British against Anish’s complaints, perhaps reflecting the anti-immigrant mood of “the Thatcher years when the other was interpreted as a sign of violence, danger, and threat to British society” (Bhatia 221). Anish’s role, meanwhile, resembles Flora’s in the earlier time period. An experimental artist like Flora (he tells Mrs. Swan that he “can’t *describe*” his paintings [216], anticipating Flora’s comment that she is “not much good at talking about” her poetry

[220]), he also shares Flora's view that colonialism is ultimately a manifestation of power imbalances rather than a beneficent enterprise, as Mrs. Swan has come to insist: while Flora, during colonialism, discusses the power that England exercises over India ("It's your country, and we've got it," she tells Das, "Everything else is bosh" [244]), Anish indicates the residual power concealed in contemporary histories of the Raj as he insists, before trailing off, that "imperial history is only the view from..." (207). History, he seems about to say, is written by the victors. Rather than associate one political position with the Indian characters and another with the English, therefore, Stoppard circulates pro- and anti-colonial sentiments among them to demonstrate the "internal contradictions" in overly simplified colonial histories.

With its alternating scenes spanning roughly sixty years, the play focuses closely on competing interpretations of the past. Was the conflict that began in 1857 the "First Uprising" (263), as the Rajah of Jummapur calls it (or, similarly, the "First War of Independence," in Anish's words [207]), or is it "The Mutiny," to use Flora's and Mrs. Swan's words (207, 263)? Should Indians be grateful for British contributions to India's legal system and physical infrastructure ("We were your Romans," Mrs. Swan asserts to Anish [207]), or is the situation reversed ("*We* were the Romans!" Anish responds, citing India's record of cultural and scientific achievements that predated the English Renaissance by centuries [207])? Such conflicting interpretations within each historical moment anticipate the questions facing the present-day characters who look back on Flora's 1930 visit. In 1930, Das painted Flora twice—once clothed and once nude—and one of Flora's letters alludes to an affair with an unnamed man. In the present-day scenes, Anish and Mrs. Swan examine the nude portrait as "evidence" (238) concerning

the object of Flora's affections. On this question, too, Mrs. Swan and Anish disagree: Anish believes that clues in the painting prove that Flora slept with his father, but Mrs. Swan finds the evidence inconclusive. The past affair has symbolic weight in the present as Mrs. Swan and Anish try to achieve a cultural rapprochement four decades after Independence. Did Flora and Das achieve a cross-cultural communion boding well for contemporary Anglo-Indian relations? Or was Flora's affair, in fact, with the Rajah of Jummapur or the British Army captain David Durance? Her sleeping with either man would have betrayed Das, who protested against the British shortly after Flora's visit and was subsequently jailed by the Rajah's government.

While historical interpretation connects events between the past and present scenes, various forms of art facilitate the characters' communication within each time period. Sometimes discussions about art emphasize the cultural and ideological divisions between characters. Tensions emerge between Flora and Das, for example, in one of the several scenes depicting him painting her portrait as she writes. Responding to what she sees as Das's fawning, forced wit, Flora demands that he be "more Indian, or at any rate *Indian*, not Englished-up and all over me like a labrador" (204). Flora's humorously delivered request sparks an argument, and Das signals the suddenly altered mood between them by observing that "[t]he shadow has moved," requiring him to correct his painting. In the scene's last speech, Flora replies, "Yes, it has moved. It cannot be corrected. We must wait for tomorrow. I'm so sorry" (205). An artistic impasse, therefore, results from Flora's naïve belief that Das can be authentically "Indian" by discarding the English influences that have become an integral part of his identity. The scene follows directly after a similar exchange in the present-day period when Mrs. Swan

asks Anish whether he is “an Indian painter” like his father and Anish’s confused response reveals the complexity of his hybrid identity: “An Indian painter? Well, I am as Indian as he was. But yes. I suppose I am not a particularly *Indian* painter ... not an Indian painter *particularly*, or rather...” (201). Anish’s difficulty in answering this questions implies his belief that national identities like *Indian* and *English* have become less meaningful than a common identity shaped by experiences of British imperialism around the world (when Mrs. Swan later asks Anish if he married an “English girl,” he responds, “Yes. Australian” [223]). Mrs. Swan’s difficulty in defining Anish, who has lived half his life in London, as anything other than Indian suggests the distance that separates the characters’ conceptions of English identity. A fusion of two art forms has brought Anish and Mrs. Swan together—through Das’s portrait, which appears on the cover of Flora’s volume of letters—but their disagreement over Anish’s identity as an “Indian artist” suggests art’s limited ability to bridge cultural divides.

*Native State* nonetheless suggests that “aesthetic exchanges” might “heal the distrust fostered by decades of English colonial rule in India” (Russell 1). In some scenes, multiple art forms figuratively translate between characters who otherwise talk at typically Stoppardian cross-purposes. In a discussion of the Indian aesthetic concept of *rasa*, Stoppard suggests art’s potential to unite people of different cultures. As Das paints Flora writing a poem, their simultaneous artistic efforts seem to form a psychic bond between the characters. When Flora inquires about Das’s painting, he responds that it is “[a]ltered. Your face ... I think your work was troublesome” (220). Flora confirms Das’s impression, telling him that her poem’s “emotion won’t harmonize. I’m afraid I’m not much good at talking about it” (220). Das’s painting registers Flora’s artistic difficulties,

therefore, suggesting that art functions as an alternate mode of communication between them. Nonetheless, Flora struggles to discuss her work with Das. The painter clears this impasse by introducing *rasa*, which he describes as an art work's "juice. Its taste. Its essence. [...] *Rasa* is what you must feel when you see a painting, or hear music; it is the emotion which the artist must arouse in you" (221). Significantly, because the aesthetic principle applies to multiple art forms, including painting and poetry, *rasa* gives Das and Flora a common language for discussing the progress of their respective art works and other previously inexpressible topics (Das, uncomfortable with Flora's sexual double entendres earlier in the play, becomes suddenly expansive in describing Shringara, the *rasa* of erotic love [221]). In a sense, then, *rasa* mediates and translates between the characters' private modes of artistic expression and removes communication barriers. The play's greatest example of art overcoming cultural difference is Das's second portrait of Flora, which combines typically Western approaches to portraiture with techniques drawn from the tradition of Rajput miniature painting.

Such instances of communion celebrate the triumphs of exceptional individuals—artists—without considering how average Indians resisted English colonialism and have asserted their identities in contemporary England. Stoppard's individualistic protest against the Empire, therefore, resembles similar gestures in his anti-communist plays, which object to communism's use of "rules to inhibit *individual* behavior rather than to allow the expression of free will" (Bull 142; emphasis added). Critical responses to the play (and to *Indian Ink*) have been divided between those who celebrate Stoppard's formal artistic achievements (and perhaps sympathize with the play's focus on artistic self-expression) and others who object that Stoppard slights the larger historical and

cultural contexts behind the play's focus on exceptional individuals.

Significantly, many of the play's most favorable reviews focused on *Native State's* trans-media and related formal elements, which reviewers related to the play's thematic focus on empire. One of the most significant links between the play's form and its content lies in its investigation into uses of "language as a means of colonialism" (Hanks). Stoppard's characteristic wordplay emphasizes language's potential to deceive and control people, and, as reviewer Robert Hanks pointed out, a radio play's verbal focus foregrounds this element of Stoppard's drama. Form and content converge more specifically in the radio play's evocation of the literary genres that Stoppard associates with colonial control in both the past and present. The play illustrates language's use "as a means of colonialism" through references to the Victorian novels that Das adores as a result of his "proper British education" at Elphinstone College (206). Hanks writes that the play associates literature with colonial control, and he suggests that Pike's footnotes reinforce this association: "while the India of 1930 is colonized by English culture, English letters in 1990 are colonized by America" (Hanks). Pike's footnotes suggest the apparatus of an American book of literary criticism that contributes to the colonization of British letters, while elsewhere Stoppard's play evokes the novels that colonized 1930s India: as Miles Kington wrote in a review, *Native State* has "all the overtones and tendrils of a good length novel," and Kington echoed the late-1930s comments of radio dramatists like Welles who asserted the formal similarities between radio plays and prose fiction. Such reviews suggest that *Native State's* form, which combines Stoppard's characteristic dramatic cross-talk with occasional gestures toward the scholarly edition and the Victorian triple-decker, reinforces its focus on political and cultural colonization. Just as

Flora and Das momentarily commune through exchanges across artistic forms, Stoppard's amalgamation of literary genres aids his investigation into the ethics of empire.

Several of the play's later scholarly appraisals, however, have critiqued Stoppard's depiction of colonialism, generally faulting his excessive focus on individual characters to the detriment of the broader historical context. According to John Fleming, the play suggests that Stoppard was more interested in the play's English characters than its Indian ones, and Fleming argues that Stoppard "seems unwilling to engage fully the ethical issues surrounding the means by which the British exerted control in India" (218). Instead, Stoppard nostalgically recollects the Raj "from a privileged perspective [...] that regrets Britain's leaving India" (Fleming 219). Nandi Bhatia echoes Fleming's critique, though she credits Stoppard with attempting to "destabilize colonialist myths, examine contradictory outcomes of colonialism, and interrogate the 'impartial' claims of a historian's history" (221). While Stoppard's play portrays characters whose hybrid identities challenge "monolithic constructions of the nation," Bhatia argues that Stoppard's elision of temporal and geographic boundaries (especially in the stage play, with its sets that characters in multiple time periods share) "obscure[s] the hierarchies generated by colonial policies" (221, 222). Fleming's and Bhatia's critiques, therefore, echo Stoppard's self-assessment that he failed to examine adequately the ethics of empire. As Fleming puts it, "offering himself the opportunity to critique the ethos of empire, Stoppard has seemingly passed" (217).

Can this sense of failure be reconciled with the play's predominantly positive initial reviews, many of which praised the play's complex examination of English

imperialism and Anglo-Indian relations? It is worth noting that Fleming's critiques center on *Indian Ink* and director Peter Wood's premier production, which cast a nostalgic glow over the play's depiction of colonial India. Fleming concurs with Jane Edwardes's assessment in a *Time Out* review that with *Indian Ink* Stoppard transformed "a near-perfect radio play [...] into a so-so stage play that lacks the delicacy and mysteriousness of the original" (Fleming 211). With *Indian Ink* considered a minor play, Stoppard's adaptation of his radio play perhaps has retroactively harmed the original work's reputation. Some critics, indeed, use the later, expanded stage play to portray the radio play as a first draft that incompletely covers its thematic focus. We see this tendency in Laurie Kaplan's comment that *Indian Ink* engages more fully with the colonial theme than *Native State* had because the stage play is "deeper and more allusive than its original incarnation" (339). Kaplan praises *Indian Ink*'s investigation into the connections between culture and imperialism, for which she credits the stage play's greater expansiveness: Stoppard not only "extends the smaller geographical scale of the radio play" (340) by depicting Pike's investigative travels in India, which give the play "a more politicized subtext" (341); he also promotes "Professor Pike from pure voice into fully realized academic presence, and it is Pike's quest for details rather than the larger picture that provides the catalyst for the decoding of the past" (338). Kaplan's assumption seems to be that Stoppard's investigation into the ethics of empire succeeds to the extent that the play provides more "details" about colonial history and covers a wider geographic range and a broader cast of characters. Pike, expanded from "pure voice into fully realized academic presence," exemplifies the stage play's greater coverage and development.

While I agree with critics like Kaplan and Lee that Stoppard's pair of India plays insightfully interrogate the colonial past, I would argue that Kaplan's logic can be reversed: instead of favoring *Indian Ink's* greater attention to the details of the colonial past, one might see Stoppard's depiction of that past—particularly in the form of Pike's fragmented history—as *Native State's* great success. It may seem that the expanded historical inquiry and Pike's more vigilant fact-gathering in *Indian Ink* grant audiences a greater understanding of the colonial past. For Stoppard, however, as Ira Nadel writes, “irresolution has the ring of truth” (381), suggesting perhaps that a higher truth might emerge—or at least be glimpsed—from the incomplete information that Pike's short notes contain in the radio play. At first glance, this patchwork book that Pike constructs in *Native State* is a failure. As noted above, Pike alludes to a textual apparatus of appendices and other cross-references that fail to communicate historical information to his audience. At the same time, however, Pike represents an important tendency that Innes identifies in Stoppard's other historical plays, in which the playwright uses postmodern irony to write new kinds of creative histories that challenge the narrative historiography perfected in the Victorian era (Innes 100). In the next section, therefore, I will explore how *Native State* uses Pike's footnotes and radio's formal intersections with textual expression to imagine a new kind of historical writing based on open-endedness and indeterminacy.

#### **ELDON PIKE'S RADIOPHONIC REMEDIATION OF HISTORIOGRAPHY**

In considering Pike's significance in *Native State*, it is important to recognize his character's underappreciated indebtedness to longstanding radio drama conventions.

Elissa Guralnick has written that “*In the Native State* is not self-consciously ‘radio,’” in the sense that its meaning does not depend on its medium (“Stoppard’s Radio” 78). This may be true of much of the play but not of Pike, whom Stoppard’s script explicitly associates with radio. In the playtext, before Pike’s first speech, Stoppard describes his vocal delivery as “intimate and slightly hushed” and compares it to “the manner of the continuity voice which introduces live concerts on the radio” (226). By acting as a continuity announcer who interrupts and comments on the broadcast’s content, Pike fulfills a role that one can trace back to Welles’s announcer-narrators, Thomas’s various voices-of-experts, and Beckett’s Animator, Opener, and other voices derived from radio conventions. Like these other characters, Pike functions as a meta-fictional voice that occupies a narrative level above the play’s primary story. Stoppard has related Pike’s role in the radio play to a common device in his works (seen in the theater critics-turned-performers in *The Real Inspector Hound*, for example) of “having a voice outside the play, though belonging to a character in the play” (Gussow 121). Such devices have appeared in radio drama at least since Welles’s homodiegetic narrators in the *Mercury Theatre* broadcasts, who introduced and narrated the plays before becoming protagonists in their own stories; and, like Welles, Stoppard takes advantage of the ease with which narrator characters like Pike blend into the story when their voices are juxtaposed with the other characters’. Pike’s essential function in the play, therefore, has a long history in radio drama and calls attention to *Native State*’s medium of transmission. As I will discuss, Pike’s explicitly radiophonic identity is crucial to Stoppard’s remediation and re-envisioning of historical writing.

Most scholarly commentary on Pike, however, has been overly influenced by his

“stoogelike” manifestation on stage in *Indian Ink* (Fleming 221). In turning Pike into an embodied researcher in India, Stoppard’s stage play mocks Pike’s awkward interactions with Indian characters and his conjectures about Flora’s life, most of which the play’s 1930 scenes clearly disprove. As a result, many critics rightly point out Pike’s role as an unreliable narrator (Andretta 37) and as a “superficial and privileged cultural tourist who becomes an object of ridicule because of his literalism [...] and limited knowledge of India” (Bhatia 232). Stoppard has described Pike’s interpretive incompetence in the stage play as a foil to the audience’s more informed judgments: “The footnote man ought to be saying that the only thing he found out was that Flora went to bed with the Rajah, which is not in fact true. I think it’s very nice when the audience is ahead of the character” (qtd. in Gussow 121). In *Indian Ink*, indeed, Pike’s inaccuracies emphasize that the truth can only be found in life itself and, occasionally, in its artistic representation—not in academic historical accounts.

In *Native State* Stoppard parodies Pike for very different reasons, pointing out his pedantic focus on minutiae rather than his historical inaccuracy. To be sure, Pike lacks highly significant information in the radio play: he has neither identified Flora’s Indian portraitist (he attributes the portrait on the *Selected Letters* cover to an “unknown Indian artist” [278]) nor discovered the second, nude portrait. Rather than censure his ignorance, however, the play critiques Pike for his excesses. Mrs. Swan, for example, calls Pike’s footnotes “[f]ar too much of a good thing” (216). And, as the radio play’s reviews often noted, the footnotes’ humor comes from their satirical portrayal of “leaden American literary academics” who focus too closely on details and put the “footnotes to the fore” (Arnold-Foster). The meticulous precision of Pike’s footnotes draw the laughs

in *Native State*, as in this example explaining one of Flora's letters, in which she describes being asked about Gertrude Stein during a lecture in Jummapur:

FLORA. “—and I can't bring myself to say she's a poisonous old baggage who's traveling on a platform ticket—”

PIKE. FC's animosity towards Gertrude Stein should not lend credence to Hemingway's fanciful assertion (in a letter to Marlene Dietrich) that Stein threatened to scratch FC's or (the possessive pronoun is ambiguous) Alice Toklas's eyes out. If FC over-praised the chocolate cake, it would have been only out of politeness. (See “Bunfight at 27 Rue de Fleurus” by E.C. Pike, *Maryland Monographs*, UMP, 1938). (229-30)<sup>49</sup>

In addition to their excessive detail, such notes, with their allusions to additional publications, satirize “the sheer disproportionate scale” of American academic publishing, which Stoppard discussed in a 1980 interview: “there's just so much writing about writing, it's just a major industry and there's something wrong about the scale of it all” (qtd. in Fleming 297). Pike's footnotes in *Native State* implicitly criticize this excess of American academic publishing specifically without questioning Pike's accuracy and

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<sup>49</sup> Stoppard's holograph drafts in the HRC reveal that Stein was a late replacement for Dylan Thomas. On a draft page dated August 18, 1990, Flora calls Thomas “a grubby little lecher with nicotine-stained fingers who smells like a bar-cloth.” A reference to another author was necessary once Stoppard settled on an early 1930 setting for the past scenes, when Thomas would have been 15 years old.

thereby discrediting historiography in general.

Some critics, indeed, have defended Pike by noting his contributions to audiences' understanding of the historical and cultural contexts behind the play's story. For example, regarding his role in *Indian Ink*, Kaplan suggests that Pike's distance from the past scenes and his status as a cultural outsider help him uncover the past for the theatrical audience. Kaplan speculates that Stoppard was intrigued by Pike's "American pragmatism," which allows the scholar to ask "the questions that, naïve as they are, cross cultural and personal boundaries" (339). Indeed, while Pike gets many details wrong in the stage play, he succeeds notably in both *Native State* and *Indian Ink*. In the stage play, for example, Pike correctly surmises that Das had painted a nude portrait of Flora (Anish and Mrs. Swan have kept this second portrait a secret from Pike). In the radio play, meanwhile, though Mrs. Swan calls Pike's footnotes to the *Selected Letters* "[f]ar too much of a good thing" (a statement she elaborates in *Indian Ink* by remarking that "*biography* is the worst possible excuse for getting people wrong" [5]), she also cites Pike's research in a later dispute with Anish; as Mrs. Swan says, Pike was "spot-on" in assuming that she would have disapproved of Flora's sleeping with a British Army officer (273). In his research into the play's personal drama, therefore, Pike provides important information on the central mysteries involving Flora's love life.

Perhaps more important in terms of the play's thematic concern with the colonial past, Pike provides significant historical details related to the play's interpersonal story. As Lee writes, this historical information often balances the play's otherwise disproportionate focus on its English heroine by describing Indians' active resistance to colonial rule. In a convincing argument that Stoppard seriously addresses his intended

theme of the ethics of empire, Lee argues that Stoppard challenges stereotypes of India as “incomprehensible, erotic, irrational, unsophisticated, and childlike” by reporting events, including Das’s anti-British protest and Gandhi’s march to the sea, that “testify to an emergent national identity” (48-49). Significantly, these and other anti-British demonstrations occur off stage, so to speak, in both *Native State* and *Indian Ink*. Pike is crucial in narrating these off-stage events, and his more confined role in the radio play, which lacks the distractions of his awkward tour through India, emphasizes this function of his character.

*Native State*’s ending illustrates the importance of Pike’s historical annotations, which crucially inform the play’s most explicitly political statement. The play’s final speech falls to Emily Eden, a Victorian-era traveler through South Asia whose letters Flora has been reading in the volume *Up the Country: Letters Written to Her Sister from the Upper Provinces of India* (1866). Like Flora’s, Eden’s letters from India to a sister in England were later collected and published, and Stoppard had considered emphasizing parallels between Eden’s travels in the 1830s and the fictional scenes set in 1930, possibly by dramatizing Eden’s travels.<sup>50</sup> Ultimately, Stoppard reduced Eden’s role to

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<sup>50</sup> A page of handwritten notes dated May 21, 1990, in the HRC’s Stoppard Collection sketches the connections between Flora, Eden, and Flora’s daughter Jennifer, whom Stoppard later removed from the play:

[...] Flora aged 36 in 1937

[...] Emily aged 40 in 1837

Jennifer aged 40 in 1987

the play's final speech, in which an actress recites Eden's letter written on Victoria Day 1839. The letter, in which Eden describes her party celebrating the queen's birthday while encamped at Simla, ends with a question that occupies much of the play—why did Indians submit to the rule of a relatively small number of British imperialists:

EDEN. Twenty years ago no European had ever been here, and there we were with a band playing, and observing that St. Cloup's Potage à la Julienne was perhaps better than his other soups, and that some of the ladies' sleeves were too tight according to the overland fashions for March, and so on, and all this in the face of those high hills, and we one hundred and five Europeans being surrounded by at least three thousand mountaineers, who, wrapped up in their hill blankets, looked on at what we call our polite amusements, and bowed to the ground if a European came near them. I sometimes wonder they do not cut all our heads off and say nothing more about it. (283)

This conclusion encapsulates the play's focus on the ideological control that a miniscule number of British civil servants and army officers exercised over a vastly larger Indian population. The depiction in Eden's letter of the mountaineers docilely observing the

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In modern day Jennifer is involved in interpreting the painting.

In 1937 Flora is being painted.

In 1837 Emily on her travels.

In the play's final state, Flora dies childless in 1930, and Das's son, Anish, attempts to interpret the painting, along with Mrs. Swan.

Europeans' "polite amusements" to some extent justifies Bhatia's critique that Stoppard "reduces empire to an enterprise that pushed the colonized into a permanent state of hypnotic stupor and fascination with the colonizer" (225). In this view, Stoppard ignores the power dynamics behind India's colonization by focusing exclusively on its people's enthrallment to British culture. Pike's footnotes, however, alter this scene's significance and deepen the characterization of South Asian peoples. When Flora mentions Eden's book in a letter several scenes earlier, Pike explains that Eden had written the book's letters while accompanying her brother on a diplomatic mission upcountry. Pike then notes that the expedition's "diplomatic and strategic accomplishment was to set the stage for the greatest military disaster ever to befall the British under arms, the destruction of the army in Afghanistan" (251). This information about the expedition's fate complements Eden's letter, presenting Asians as less acquiescent than the Victoria Day scene suggests. The significance of this British defeat in Afghanistan is indicated by another of Stoppard's abandoned ideas, which involved calling attention to the play's present-day setting in 1989. A note in the HRC's Stoppard archive dated July 7, 1990, reads "Connect Mrs. Sw[an] period with Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan." Given Stoppard's strongly anti-Soviet sentiments, his plan to draw parallels between the British Raj and the occupation of Afghanistan would have been a strong statement against English imperialism.<sup>51</sup> While Stoppard eventually abandoned this statement about the politics of colonialism, Pike's reference to the British defeat in Afghanistan retains the

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<sup>51</sup> Stoppard has protested against communist restrictions of free will in several plays, including his two 1977 works *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* and *Professional Foul*.

implicit comparison between Indian Independence and contemporary anti-Soviet insurgents. Via Pike's footnotes, the defeated Afghan expedition becomes another span in the historical timeline that the play draws, from the Mutiny/Uprising through the independence movement and the reshaping of Indian and English identities during the postcolonial diaspora.

Such contributions by Pike, of course, are rare. His few serious, historically relevant notes can be overshadowed by the centrality of Das and Flora's personal relationship and by Pike's inadvertently humorous literary commentary. Nonetheless, if Pike's minimalist history, limited to the minutiae contained in a few footnotes, fails Stoppard's ambition to "properly [weigh]" debates about the colonial past, its incompleteness may also be a virtue according to Stoppard's philosophy. Kelly has written that Stoppard distrusts straightforward, definitive political statements and tends to undercut any polemical positions that his characters assert, resulting in plays that resist "monolithic stagings of 'truth' and 'meaning' through the conventions of satire and parody" (2). Because he suspects ideologies that claim certainty about "truth" and "meaning," Stoppard vigilantly avoids making definitive statements in his plays. John Bull sees such an evasion in Stoppard's use of Pike in *Native State*, which illustrates "Stoppard's wish to ally himself with a narrator uncertain of the exact components of the story he is telling" (148). Rather than a failure to represent the colonial past and its legacy fully, Pike may represent Stoppard's success at *limiting* the scope of the conclusions one can draw from the play's colonial history.

Pike's function in limiting rather than revealing information can be seen in what is perhaps the character's origin. Several undated pages of notes that appear to contain

some of Stoppard's earliest ideas for the play sketch out a scenario in which a film crew records the conversation between a painter and a poet. At the top of one such page, Stoppard has written the questions, "Editing—film-edit? Woman writing a poem?" The film crew's ability to edit the conversation and thus shape its interpretation seems to have intrigued Stoppard. Another note begins,

A woman is writing a poem.

A painter is painting her.

A person is speaking to the painter.

All three are being filmed.

The poem develops.

the painting develops.

The film is edited—

It seems likely that Pike developed in part from this early idea since he similarly functions as an editor—in the sense of selectively choosing to present certain pieces of information and exclude others. In the margin of a page of notes from July 7, 1990, Stoppard has scribbled an idea that highlights Pike's role as an editor—"Not collected but selected *letters*"—and an early conversation between Anish and Mrs. Swan in the completed play similarly calls attention to Pike's work in selecting and culling the letters chosen for publication, when Anish asks, "'Edited with an introduction by Eldon Cooper Pike.' What does it mean—edited—exactly? Are there more letters that are not in the book?" (216). Therefore, despite his identification with an overly prolific American academic publishing industry, Pike also limits the flow of information. And rather than

provide authoritative interpretations of the past, through his cross-references to non-existent appendices and to monographs and other articles he has written Pike alludes to an open-ended historical record, one that is flexible enough to promise a greater understanding but limited enough not to promise definitive truths about a period of history that is still being written.

Here is where Pike's origin in an instance of trans-media representation is significant. An extension of Stoppard's original idea to enclose the poetry-painting intersection within a film, Pike's footnotes represent yet another exchange between media. Pike translates the past into bibliographic conventions, and Stoppard inserts the textual product of Pike's fictional efforts into a radio play. The resulting radio text is a failure of historiography because the textual apparatus required to document history thoroughly—symbolized by Pike's missing appendices—are incompatible with radio broadcasts. Yet this failure of Pike's can be seen as Stoppard's success. Pike's circumscribed history guards against definitive statements while also modeling historiography that is more open-ended and flexible than traditional historical narratives. If the appendix fails to signify, it might still be written and re-written in conjunction with the still-to-be-composed legacy of the colonial past. Like the radio texts Beckett depicted in plays like *Cascando* and *Rough for Radio II*, Stoppard's historical text seems to be both inexpressive and potentially inexhaustible. As such, this radio text represents the combined qualities of the written word and the radio broadcast, with the capacious but immutable text meeting the ephemeral but flexible and immediate broadcast voice.

In adapting the play for the stage and turning Pike into an embodied character, Stoppard sacrificed these significant intersections between text and radio. An addition

that Stoppard made for *Indian Ink* retains some focus on radio, however, even if only briefly. In the next, final section of this chapter, I will explore the continuing relevance of radio in Stoppard's investigation into the "ethics of empire," even after that investigation left the airwaves.

### **A FINAL TRANSLATION: RADIO TO STAGE**

Stoppard's theatrical adaptation of *Native State* makes one brief but significant allusion to radio. This comes during one of the present-day scenes set in India that Stoppard added for the stage play. In the second act, Pike and Dilip, Pike's Indian guide, discuss Madame Blavatsky and mention Irish poet Louis MacNeice's reference to her in "Bagpipe Music," which Dilip says is his "favorite poem in the Oxford Book of English Verse" (58). Pike then teasingly accuses Dilip of being "crazy about English, and Dilip's humorous response alludes to the BBC World Service's London headquarters at Bush House:

Yes, it's a disaster for us! Fifty years of Independence and we are still hypnotized! Jackets and ties must be worn! English-model public schools for the children of the elite, and the voice of Bush House is heard in the land. Gandhi would fast again, I think. Only, this time he'd die. It was not for this India, I think, that your Nirad Das and his friends held up their home-made banner at the Empire Day gymkhana. (59)

Dilip's speech not only asserts that English literature and education continue to colonize many Indians' minds after Independence—through popular school anthologies like the *Oxford Book of English Verse*, which have now added Modernist literature to the

Victorian authors studied in Nirad Das's time—but it also suggests radio's role in extending British literature's influence in India.

Stoppard's reference to the World Service alludes to a shift in British cultural influence in India beginning in the 1930s, just after Flora's fictional visit to Jummapur. As its political influence in India waned, England steadily increased its radio broadcasting in the subcontinent. The BBC's longtime Director-General Lord John Reith, who led the creation of the Empire Service (the predecessor to today's World Service) had a special interest in the Raj and later in life aspired to become Viceroy (Mansell 6-7). As I mention in Chapter Four, Reith's interest in foreign broadcasting reflected his belief that radio could reinforce a shared identity throughout the Empire that would tie the colonies to England (Mansell 2, 7). As early as the mid-1920s, Reith urged the London and New Delhi governments to develop broadcasting in India, but the Empire Service did not begin broadcasting until 1932 (Mansell 1). After World War II, Reith complained that if "broadcasting had been taken seriously in 1924, subsequent events in India might have been very different" (qtd. in Mansell 7).

The Empire Service's early broadcasts targeted British expatriates living in the colonies; a 1929 BBC memo justified the "exclusion of people of other colours [...] at least presently," and the broadcasts focused on apprising European-descended colonials of events in England (Mansell 12-13). By the mid-1930s, however, it became clear that large numbers of educated Indians were also listening in (Mansell 27). Around the same time, Reith reluctantly agreed to begin broadcasting programming in non-English languages, as he recognized the need to reach native populations and counter the influence of Fascist broadcasts aimed at French and British colonial subjects (Mansell

35). As the BBC increasingly courted non-Anglo audiences, the tone of its broadcasts changed from open celebrations of the Empire to a subtler promotion of English culture. Lionel Fielden, who had helped develop broadcasting to India at the Viceroy's request, advised BBC announcers in a 1937 memo to avoid using the word *empire* and delivering "sentimental twaddle about Big Ben"; instead, he wrote, the BBC should "concentrate on giving the world the best of England's writers, poets, musicians, engineers, actors, playwrights, philosophers, etc. This surely is the best propaganda that any nation could do for itself" (qtd. in Mansell 36). The BBC took this new approach most directly in India, where, according to Gerard Mansell, a recent director of the World Service, the BBC's World-War-II-era broadcasting resembled "an early version of the Third Programme"—the BBC's highbrow platform for arts and intellectual content that began broadcasting in England in 1946—"designed for Indian ears" (208). The new strategy of projecting British culture to Indians included literary talks tied to English-style school curricula, as poets including Stephen Spender, Hebert Read, and T.S. Eliot delivered talks about English poetry for Indian students, and E.M. Forster and Desmond McCarthy reviewed new books (Mansell 208). Dilip's mention of Bush House in *Indian Ink*, therefore, alludes to a history of radio-based cultural influence that began in the 1930s and expanded during World War II and the Cold War. Moreover, the cultural broadcasting to India, aided by the English curricula in upper-class schools, extended the influence of English literature in India, which lends added weight to Dilip's juxtaposition of the *Oxford Book of English Verse* and the "voice of Bush House" heard throughout India.

Dilip's complaint about Bush House's influence, however, oversimplifies the

cultural landscape in postcolonial India, leaving Stoppard open to critiques that he exaggerates Indians' childlike "fascination with English language and culture" (Bhatia 226). Dilip's speech represents Bush House as an unchallenged, monolithic voice that is "heard in the land," suggesting passive Indian recipients with no alternative but to listen. His speech ignores the fact, of course, that an Indian broadcasting service, All India Radio (AIR), had operated since 1936 and had more recently added its own robust foreign broadcasting (Chatterji 43). P.C. Chatterji reports in *Broadcasting in India* (1991) that by the early 1990s AIR's External Services were broadcasting 75 hours of programming daily in twenty-three languages—including Arabic, Russian, and Swahili—with broadcasts reaching Australia, several regions of Africa, and Western Europe, among other parts of the world (149). By the present-day period in which Stoppard's India plays are set, therefore, cultural influences flowed in both directions, with India having developed formidable broadcasting resources, albeit ones that had developed on the model of the colonial-era BBC.

While this history of Indian broadcasting suggests that Stoppard exaggerates the force of the BBC's influence in contemporary India, in many ways *Indian Ink* reflects the complex cultural exchanges that define the two countries' relationship. In *Indian Ink* Stoppard charts a development from British cultural hegemony to intercultural dialog that the history of BBC broadcasting in India also reflects. As Mansell has written, the Empire Service's broadcasts under Lord Reith in the early 1930s aimed to enforce a common sense of Englishness throughout the empire by focusing on London as the political and symbolic imperial center. Broadcasts, therefore, stressed the wonder of "being able to listen to London over vast distances," which conveyed "the strength of the

spirit of empire which was still at large” (Mansell 20-21). As BBC foreign broadcasting developed, however, its explicit emphasis on maintaining the Empire diminished, and a more international focus emerged through programs like Z.A. Bokhari’s that brought together artists and intellectuals from the former colonies and dominions (Mansell 208-9).

Stoppard’s *India* plays similarly present a development from London’s cultural centrality to a more de-centered paradigm. In the play’s 1930 scenes, London’s central influence is evident in the fact that Das can say, “I have the whole of London spread out in my imagination,” despite his never having visited England (*Indian Ink* 35). Significantly, Das’s mental map of London focuses on landmarks of British painting, reflecting art’s role in projecting London’s central position in the empire. Das tells Flora, “I hope to visit London one of these days. The Chelsea of Turner and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood! — Rosetti lived in Cheen Walk! Holman Hunt lived in Old Church Street! ‘The Hireling Shepherd’ was *painted* in Old Church Street! What an inspiration it would be to me to visit Chelsea!” (*Indian Ink* 7). These cultural artifacts project the idea of London to the colonies much as it was beginning to be projected in the early 1930s by the BBC’s Empire Service. Stoppard indicates, however, that such influences traveled in both directions, with the idea of India also powerfully affecting the English. Mrs. Swan tells Anish that when she lived in India she decorated her home with tokens of English country life, but “now I’ve landed up in Shepperton I’ve got elephants and prayer-wheels cluttering up the window ledges, and the tea table is Nepalese brass” (*Native State* 215). *Indian Ink*’s staging emphasizes these bi-directional influences visually through the fluid relationship between scenes in India and in England. In the published text based on the

play's first London production, Stoppard writes, "It is not intended that the stage be demarcated between India and England, or past and present. Floor space, and even furniture, may be common." The staging emphasizes the mutual cultural influences illustrated by Das's second portrait of Flora, the nude that combines European conventions of portraiture with a Rajasthani style for the surrounding environment (*Indian Ink* 67-68).

Russell writes that such instances of "shared participation in the arts," according to the play, "can overcome the often-rigid boundaries of national identities and perform a unifying function" (7). Depicting the ongoing influence of colonial India on a multi-racial contemporary London, the stage play "suggests that the metropole of modern London where Mrs. Swan and Anish Das meet is a site where Indian identity can flourish—so much so that it can deconstruct calcified conceptions of English identity" (Russell 15-16). From a central, imperial origin of art and literature radiating outward as if from a single radio transmitter, London becomes as much a recipient of diverse influences as a source of hegemonic culture.

## CONCLUSION

Like the other authors in this study, Stoppard experiments with the intersections between radio drama and print forms by combining the intimate voice of the announcer with bibliographic conventions. As with Welles's transformation of the novelistic narrator into a radio performer, Stoppard's new take on footnotes revises an old convention by faithfully replicating it in a new medium. On the one hand, Pike mimics conventional footnotes, down to their full bibliographic citations. On the other hand, the

play's medium emphasizes the failure of Pike's footnotes to communicate as much as they would in their "native state," in which a reader could follow Pike's various cross-references. Yet Pike's failure—and Stoppard's failure to write instead a book or an essay exhaustively depicting the various arguments on colonialism and its legacy—can appear as successes at least to imagine new kinds of historical works that might be both as capacious as a scholarly volume and also as fluid and current as a radio broadcast. Such a hybrid history would be well suited to representing the past's complexity and influence on the future's ongoing composition.

Like Beckett's radio texts, Stoppard's generally fails at conveying information—with some significant exceptions in Pike's important, but incomplete allusions to the Indian independence movement—but succeeds at evoking written forms at once infinitely expressive and nearly empty. With *Native State's* footnotes, Stoppard, like Beckett, takes advantage of radio's ability to evoke printed texts while reminding listeners of the text's absence on the airwaves. Suggesting the text's limitations—both in its material manifestation and its radio-based remediation—in these cases becomes a successful failure, a way to "fail better," to use Beckett's words (4: 471).

Stoppard's radio text also resembles Thomas's cautious representations of place on the air. While Stoppard does not continue Thomas's inquiries into the nature of radio-based documentary, his radio footnotes echo the various voices of experts in Thomas's broadcasts. Both writers, therefore, explore how authorities shape representations of space, particularly in the context of center-periphery relations. As Thomas does in his features, Stoppard challenges the voice of authority encoded in print—for example, in his suggestion that the printed reference work can be rejoined and challenged—and

encourages new interpretations of the highly symbolic places where *Native State*'s scenes are set.

Like the authors examined in previous chapters, Stoppard exhibits a strong interest in and sensitivity to the distinct characteristics of dramatic media. Not every radio playwright has duplicated these writers' uses of radio to examine the printed word's status in the age of electronic media. Nonetheless, *Native State* demonstrates that the interest in print-performance intersections continued to be seen in radio plays written near the end of the twentieth century. One might argue that the early instances of this phenomenon, such as Welles's self-conscious remediations of print forms in the 1930s, were distinctive of emergent media, part of the inevitable attempts by artists to understand a new medium's formal characteristics in relation to older, more familiar art forms. The longstanding fascination with the written word on the immaterial airwaves, however, suggests that both the symbolic weight of written texts and the expressive capabilities of the various genres and devices developed for them will provide fodder for auditory literature as long as print retains a prominent place in the cultural imagination.

## Conclusion: Back to the Old Time Radio

As I have worked on this dissertation, people have often asked me why I am interested in radio drama. It usually seems that I am implicitly being asked why I am interested in this genre whose time had so clearly passed, at least in the United States, by the time I was born in the mid 1970s. Accepting this logic behind the question, I have typically responded that radio drama intrigues me because of what I consider its novelty, because I did not grow up with it but discovered it only recently, during graduate school. I felt compelled to study radio drama, I say, because it is so foreign to my experience.

In this conclusion I would like to explain my interest in radio plays differently, by suggesting how radio drama has remained relevant beyond the 1950s when television supposedly killed the genre. My experience of growing up in subsequent decades illustrates radio drama's continued existence in somewhat altered forms as it has migrated into different media. If I did not tune into dramatic programs on the radio during my childhood and adolescence, I did hear recorded radio plays and other audible drama on cassette tapes and records. On visits to my grandfather—an organist and music professor whose sensitive ear, if not his musical talent, I like to think I inherited—I listened to cassette recordings of *Fibber McGee and Molly*, *The Burns and Allen Show*, and *The Shadow*. At home, records such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Ghost Stories for Young People* and *The Amazing Spiderman* often filled the time before my parents' bedtime reading. While I vividly remember certain sounds from these recordings—the Shadow's laugh and

the cacophony of objects pouring from Fibber’s closet, for example—I experienced these recordings tangibly as much as sonically. The Hitchcock record was one of many library discoveries, and I remember the sticky feel of the nylon sleeve over its album cover. The tape recorder on which I played *The Shadow* and other old programs had textured stickers on its buttons—green felt on *play*, slick red tape on *stop*—to aid my grandfather after a stroke had worsened his sight. As I recall listening to those programs, I also remember feeling the circle of felt on my fingertip as I pressed the button that set the tape spools turning. I also remember following the comic book that accompanied the Spiderman record (“It’s fun to read as you hear!” the album cover proclaimed) and being terrified by their second dramatized story: “The Mark of the Man-Wolf.” Frightened but still compelled to re-hear the play and follow the illustrations in the accompanying book, I devised a plan—never carried out—to bury both book and disc in my backyard. As I listened, the stories merged in my mind with the material objects and apparatus that stored and played them.

I believe these interactions with radio plays and other audible drama, which overlapped with my early reading experiences, have shaped my approach in this dissertation. Listening to plays on tape and record players and, more recently, on my iPod has allowed me to stop, rewind, and replay dramatic programs as a reader would pause or revisit a complex or enjoyable book passage. Radio plays for me have not been ephemeral, immaterial transmissions but rather objects to retrieve from a chest or check out from a library, and I have read along with plays and experienced them as I did the books that my parents read to me. This experience of radio drama in recorded form is

anachronistic and excludes essential characteristics of broadcasting, such as the temporally specific nature of radio programs; the flow of contents that surround a radio play with advertisements, announcements, and other programming; and broadcasting's tendency to form a community of listeners who hear a program simultaneously. In this dissertation I have considered how these specific conditions of broadcasting influence radio plays' production, transmission, and reception, but I have never completely divorced my approach to radio plays from my experiences of books and other texts. Though my literary bias may have led me to neglect important features of radio, I believe it has helped me interpret the radio plays of Welles, Thomas, Beckett, and Stoppard, all of whom attend to convergences of reading and listening, text and performance, book and broadcast.

Moreover, audio-recording technologies shaped these playwrights' experiences with radio plays as much as they did mine. Welles's *Mercury* broadcasts were transmitted live, as they were being performed, but Welles's first act as producer each week was to listen to a rehearsal that had been recorded in his absence. All of Thomas's, Beckett's, and Stoppard's plays were recorded for later transmissions, and the more popular of their works often had repeat broadcasts on multiple BBC stations and foreign services. Beckett's stage play *Krapp's Last Tape* exhibits the influence that these recordings could have on a radio dramatist's work. James Knowlson writes that Beckett first saw a tape recorder in operation just before he began *Krapp*, when he visited the BBC's Paris studios to hear a recording of Patrick Magee reading excerpts from his novels (Knowlson 398-99). Beckett's experience of "[s]taring at the reels that held his

own words” gave him a textual conception of audio reproduction, replicated in *Krapp* as the title character obsessively replays and skips ahead to significant passages in his recordings (399). Krapp’s tapes allow him to experience speech as texts, and his tapes are cross-referenced in a ledger that materially manifests the connection between voice and book.

The work for radio by each of the playwrights I discuss focuses closely on books, and it appears that radio helped them re-envision features of print culture that they may otherwise have taken for granted. The radio plays that I have examined display the “secondary orality” characteristic of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the “orality of telephone, radio, and television, which depends on writing and print for its existence” (Ong 3). That is, these radio plays are oral creations that depend on print not only because the plays initially existed as scripts, but also because they depict literary genres that are typically experienced in printed form. If these plays exhibit a secondary orality characteristic of twentieth-century electronic media, they also participate in longstanding literary and performative traditions. Welles’s radio storytelling implicitly—and sometimes explicitly—alludes to the Dickensian tradition of public readings. Thomas’s talks about reading poetry aloud are influenced by the Welsh bardic tradition, with its history of sonically rich written poetry, and to the *eisteddfodau*—the festivals of poetic and musical performance that Eli Jenkins dreams of in *Milk Wood*. And Stoppard’s speaking footnotes in *Native State*, for all their formal originality, relate to the academic lectures—the papers read in classrooms or at conferences—that he dramatizes in *Jumpers*, *Arcadia*, and several other plays.

The case studies included in this dissertation contextualize radio drama in relation to particular developments in broadcasting. These include the American commercial broadcasting that was becoming established during Welles's early career in radio; the development of "features" and documentary programs, to which Thomas contributed; the BBC's collaborative productions involving writer, producer, and technician, which Beckett represents in *Rough for Radio II*; and the growth of international broadcasting, which Stoppard comments on in *Indian Ink*. Working in these contexts caused these playwrights to reflect on features of literary expression. The collaborative conditions in the radio studio and the networks' marketing apparatus challenge the literary ideal of the autonomous author. Live broadcasting and international transmission gave authors new conceptions of their audiences, which could seem more immediately present than the audiences of printed works and more distant and dispersed than theatrical audiences. And the idea of the literary work itself was open to scrutiny when the radio plays' remediated texts were dialogized (in, for example, the fragmented novelistic narrative of Welles's *Huckleberry Finn*) and attenuated (in Stoppard's historical text in *Native State*). My examination of radio drama over a roughly fifty-year period (1938 to 1991) has predominantly concerned how several radio plays reflect the medium's role in scrutinizing and redefining these three constitutive components of the literary work: author, text, and audience.

My aim has been to assert radio drama's importance during this period when new media challenged the primacy of print and encouraged authors to assess the strengths and limitations of literary form. I would also like to suggest, however, that radio drama's

significance transcends this historical period because it has been renewed by the Internet and digital technology. Many radio plays have outlived their original incarnations, as my experiences with cassette and phonograph recordings illustrate, and the genre endures to this day. The Internet has made it easy for listeners to hear recordings of old radio plays (on sites like *The Old Time Radio Network* [www.otr.net], *RadioLovers.com*, and *Old Time Radio Catalog* [www.otrcat.com]) and new ones (with both the BBC's *Saturday Play* and the American series *L.A. Theatre Works*, for example, streaming plays online after initial radio broadcasts). And online syndication has made it easy and inexpensive to produce oral plays that bypass radio completely. The syndication feature of iTunes and similar software allows listeners to subscribe to and follow serial audible drama programs much as nineteenth-century readers followed serialized fiction. For example, fans of *We're Alive* (a zombie serial that was the second most popular audio podcast in iTunes's "Performing Arts" category as of June 1, 2010), like other podcasts' followers, can store episodes (referred to as "chapters" in *We're Alive*'s case) in their iTunes libraries and replay selected passages or entire episodes, as desired. With digital downloads and audio players, therefore, the listening experience resembles that of reading, much as DVD players have turned movie watching into "something like a print-based experience" by allowing "for non-linear reading [and] replay, and even [...] deliver[ing] the text in chapters" (Rowe 39).

Considering radio drama's new online existence, I am also struck by similarities between the contemporary ascendance of the Internet and the rise of radio a century ago. A similarly utopian rhetoric greeted both new technologies, which enthusiasts claimed

would improve not only interpersonal communication but also democracy and international cooperation. In 1932, the president of the University of Wisconsin, Glenn Frank, proclaimed his “exalted conception” of radio’s potential “to unify us as a people [and] debunk our leadership” (qtd. in Levenson 33), and the next year BBC producer Hilda Matheson described radio as “a means of enlarging the frontiers of human interest and consciousness, of widening personal experience, of shrinking the earth’s surface” (14). These claims that radio would enhance democracy, diminish international conflict, and level social distinctions anticipated such late-twentieth century celebrations of online communication as John Perry Barlow’s “Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace” (1996), which calls the Internet “a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth.”

Radio drama’s production and reception also anticipated phenomena that new-media theorists associate with digital technologies. One of these contemporary phenomena is the development of what Henry Jenkins calls “convergence culture,” in which narratives transcend individual works and media. Fans of *The Matrix*, for example, can follow its characters’ adventures not only in a trilogy of films but also in companion video games, comic books, and websites that elaborate on the franchise’s ever-expanding mythology. Similar “transmedia storytelling” (Jenkins 96) occurred in the repurposing of novels, films, and plays for radio in the 1930s. Some radio adaptations of works from older media, such as Welles’s *Huckleberry Finn*, critically examine the original work, much as *Matrix* fans in Internet chat rooms debate the films’ mythology and thus develop the franchise’s stories beyond what the films contain.

The convergence culture that Jenkins describes depends on audience participation through which consumers collaborate with artists (by generating fan fiction, Internet posts, and other audience-created content) in collective acts of “world building” (Jenkins 114). Such audience participation redefines both the artistic text and the author. Jenkins writes that authorship “has an almost sacred aura in a world where there are limited opportunities to circulate your ideas to a larger public. As we expand access to mass distribution via the Web, our understanding of what it means to be an author—and what kinds of authority should be ascribed to authors—necessarily shifts” (179). The redefinition of authorship attending the Internet results not only from the collaborative creation of transmedia stories but also from the collective authorship of sites like *Wikipedia*, which thousands of writers and editors help to create. Before the Internet “expand[ed] access to mass distribution,” radio similarly diminished the “sacred aura” of authorship. The BBC features programs that were built around interviews with nonprofessionals made the interviewees the broadcasts’ authors, even if professional writers and producers controlled the final product (the control that a small number of editors exercise over *Wikipedia* similarly weakens the democratic nature of such digital era collaborations [Baker]). The collaborative creation of many radio plays—which resulted from the combined efforts of writers, actors, directors, musicians, producers, advertisers, and others—similarly de-centered authorship, as many of Welles’s broadcasts suggest.

Artistic creation in digital media, as well as on the radio, often involves compiling materials from older sources of media. The impulse behind computer-generated “mash-

ups”—digital creations that borrow content from existing works and may combine still and moving images, text, and sound from different sources—can be seen in the plays discussed in this dissertation, which remediate literary genres that preexist radio. Just as a digital mash-up might combine an audio file of a pop song with a teenager’s do-it-yourself video of herself lip-syncing to the song, the radio plays I have examined mix dramatic dialogue with the forms of other literary genres. Formal heterogeneity is no more an invention of radio plays than it is of the Internet. The novel genre similarly accommodates diverse modes of communication; narration, written correspondence (as in epistolary novels), dialogue, and poetic language, to name but a few, all coexist comfortably in many novels. The radio plays I have studied display a particular variety of such bricolage—one that focuses on the written word and explores its occasional tension with oral performance. Ultimately, the heterogeneity of these plays illustrates how new and old media cooperate rather than compete with each other. Jenkins writes that studies of digital media are replacing a “digital revolution paradigm” (which presumed that “new media would replace old media”) with a “convergence paradigm [that] assumes that old and new media will interact in ever more complex ways” (6). The radio plays that I have discussed illustrate this model of media convergence, which today’s digital technologies are accelerating.

Future work might analyze these similarities between digital media creations and literary radio programs. In this dissertation I have focused on intersections between radio drama and literature written for the page. My aim has been to demonstrate that radio plays are not merely attenuated versions of theatrical drama but flexible works that grant

playwrights a wide range of expressive means. By emphasizing the hybrid composition of radio drama, the works of Welles, Thomas, Beckett, and Stoppard reveal the complex form of radio plays and illustrate how early electronic media encouraged re-examinations of the printed word that continue with the media of more recent times.

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## Vita

James Roslyn Jesson was born in San Francisco, California, where he attended George Washington High School. He received a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of California at Berkeley in 1998. During the following years he worked for several law firms and legal services companies in California, Arizona, and Texas. In August, 2003, he entered the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin, earning a Master of Arts in 2005 and a doctorate in 2010. James will begin teaching as an Assistant Professor at La Salle University in August 2010.

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