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This thesis concerns itself with the popular radio dramas of America in the early days of radio (1920s – 1950s). Popular radio dramas were heard during the peak hours of American radio. They appealed to the largest audience with their social and moral relevance and were sponsored by a variety of companies and products. The distinction is made between these radio dramas and those that were considered “serious”. As well, a brief discussion occurs as to their relationship with the radio dramas of the BBC.

The questions analyzed within this thesis concern the text of American radio dramas. Unlike those of the BBC, American radio dramas have not been examined as readable texts for two reasons – their lack of availability and their low position in the hierarchy of literature. What this thesis seeks to do is present American radio dramas as readable texts that elicit a similar, though not identical, experience to listening. To accomplish this, two evaluative criteria are employed – cultural indicators and radio theory. The first explores the impact of radio on the culture of the time, considering questions of liveness, escapism and imagination. The second addresses the ways in which radio functions and if it is indeed a blind medium. Radio theorists examine the codes of radio – words, music, silence and noise.

Both cultural research and radio theory are applied to the sound recording and text of the American radio drama to be examined, the Suspense mystery play “The House in Cypress Canyon” originally presented in 1946. An analysis ensues that strives to answer the question, “is reading the same as listening?”
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DEDICATION

To my own little family

Sean and Roan
INTRODUCTION

Popular American radio dramas have intrigued people of various backgrounds for many years. As opposed to serious radio dramas, these serial plays were written from the 1920s to the 1960s, to appeal to the majority of the population and maintain an interested audience week after week. In the past decade there has been a resurgence of interest due to the introduction of the Internet and the World Wide Web. People who have been fans for many years are now connecting with other fans and accessing materials, such as recordings and scripts, that previously have been in the possession of only a privileged few. This renewed interest in what some have termed “Old Time Radio” has led to restagings of original plays, and conventions where favorite stars of the radio era appear. Popular culture has embraced radio dramas, producing books, articles and web sites dedicated to the forty-year period. Academia, though, has turned away from this phenomenon. Most consider these radio programs a form of popular culture and leave the analysis to media critics. Others, though interested in the material, consider popular American radio programming not worthy of academic attention.

In the realm of radio, academic attention firmly plants itself in Britain and the programming of the BBC, most notably, the Third Programme. As radio became the medium for the masses in America, so too did it in Britain. The difference between the two countries lies in the perceived quality of programming – the BBC standing for quality, innovation and excellence while American radio dramas were considered commercial, frivolous and lightweight. The names of notable British radio playwrights are bantered about, while American radio playwrights cannot be called to mind. The standard in academic writing is not to speak of one (American) without the other.
Another realm of American radio dramas that has not been addressed is their viability as a text. Volumes of books hold the radio plays of Beckett, Pinter and Stoppard, but few hold the works of Fletcher, Richards or Bradbury. The American radio playwrights Norman Corwin and Arch Oboler may have their plays in books, but they are considered "serious dramas" and are the exception and not the rule. How does one, if interested, approach these texts? Are they to be read like a play? Like a television script? Is reading a play the same as listening to it? Little has been done to answer these questions. What this thesis seeks to do is contend with the final question – can reading a script of a popular American radio drama elicit the same response as listening to it? The obvious answer is no, but there is a response to reading the text in the imagination. Two premises at play in both the printed and recorded texts allow the imagination to respond.

The two approaches that address radio dramas are cultural research and radio theory. Cultural research focuses on the impact of radio, while radio theory investigates the medium in terms of blindness and codes. Each approach sheds new light on American radio dramas, though they have never been applied simultaneously. To narrow the discussion down further, a specific genre has been selected, along with a program that represents its highest standards. The mystery genre encompasses a number of variables that make it a representative of the popular American radio drama. First, it was popular in terms of ratings and was always a favorite of sponsors. The scripts that were produced
followed a formula so that choosing one to analyze would represent the genre’s general structure. And finally, the mystery genre is responsible for producing two of the most well-known programs in American radio history – Orson Welles’ “The War of the Worlds” and Louise Fletcher’s “Sorry, Wrong Number”. The latter was produced eight times for the program whose dramas best represent the mystery genre, Suspense. The program’s run, twenty-two years, attests to its popularity and quality. Moreover, it was popular within the industry, attracting the contributions of the best actors, writers and technicians.

For many, old radio plays elicit a personal response to the medium. Those who grew up with them long for the “good old days” before television, when the family gathered around the radio as they would gather around the dinner table - a time when the best entertainment was in using the imagination. Those who have come to them after their “golden age” can only listen and use their imagination – to experience the play and to comprehend what life was like before the bombardment of mass entertainment that has consumed modern life. As renewed interest brings American radio plays back into the spotlight, it is worth exploring the medium that was a phenomenon – then and now.

“Popular” Radio Drama

The term “popular” has multiple connotations in the broad spectrum of media. Within radio drama itself the term takes on many forms. David Wade in his essay “Popular radio drama”, dealing with the radio plays of Radio 4 of the BBC (formerly the
Home Service\textsuperscript{1}), investigates the many different interpretations, citing the following as possible characteristics: being followed by the largest audiences radio can currently assemble; being accessible – a play should not put up any barriers of language or production technique; dealing with social or moral issues in a recognizably topical way in a contemporary setting; and above all else being high on relevance (91). Howard Fink in his essay “The sponsor’s v. the nation’s choice: North American radio drama” places popular radio drama in opposition to serious radio drama, which comprised a small portion of programming, was largely unsponsored and “was a conscious attempt at contemporaneity and aesthetic experiment, an effort to create radio drama as an art form specifically for the medium…On the other hand, the largest number of sponsored popular programmes took on a dramatic form of some kind, such as mystery and adventure dramas, variety-comedy programmes, soap operas, dramatised documentaries and the news” (192).

Popular radio dramas included a variety of genres whose foremost concerns were quite different from those of serious dramas. Numbers were the primary interest of popular dramas – ratings as well as the amount of the sponsor’s product sold. Of secondary importance was the ability to communicate, amuse and translate ideas into dialogue and consequently into a clear situation for the radio audience (193). Wade and

\textsuperscript{1} Horst P. Priessnitz cites the \textit{BBC Yearbook 1946} as having the following definitions for the Home Service: “It sets out to be not an exclusive but an inclusive programme – one which reflects as much as possible on the life of the community in which we live, and does what it can to satisfy the tastes and curiosities and mental and spiritual needs of the members of that community” (39).
Fink’s descriptions help develop a guiding definition of the term for American popular radio dramas—they are followed by the largest radio audience as well as being accessible by having social and moral relevance clearly presented to the radio audience. Fink, however, touches on the element that separates British and American forms of radio drama and what ultimately reflects an American program’s popularity—sponsorship.

Unlike the BBC which received its funding from the British government, American radio networks relied on private companies to fund their radio programming. The first commercial announcement came in 1922 with the Hawthorne Court apartment complex in New York City paying $100 for a commercial on WEAF (MacDonald 18). From this first commercial an industry grew that saw gross air-time sales increase from a few thousand dollars in 1925 to $100,000,000 in 1935 and to more than $400,000,000 in 1945 (White 67). However, it was not the case that a sponsor would simply supply adequate funding. They were interested in a more controlling relationship. The role of the sponsor took on various forms depending on the wishes of the company involved. Some chose little involvement, leaving the program in the hands of those qualified (director, producer, writers) while others insisted on a more hands on approach.

To begin with, the sponsoring company was frequently recognized in the title of the program—*The Eveready Hour*, *Lux Radio Theatre* or *Kraft Music Hour*. If not in the title, the sponsor was mentioned at the top of the show as the presenter (“The greatest name in rubber, Goodyear, invites you to meet America’s greatest western star, Roy Rogers”). The program stars worked the sponsor into their routine as well—Jack Benny
greeted his audience with “Jell-o again” when sponsored by the company. Bob Hope introduced himself as “This is Bob ‘Pepsodent’ Hope”. Still, the control of programming went deeper. As Leonard Maltin explains in his book *The Great American Broadcast,*

[It might be hard for a modern-day television executive to grasp, but in the heyday of commercial radio, sponsors (not networks) controlled the medium and the shows they bankrolled. Networks were merely the facilities through which the programs were broadcast...when the sponsor talked, everyone listened, even if they grumbled under their breath. (147)]

The involvement of the sponsor in American radio affected programming and content enormously. Along with the network, advertising agencies and the FCC (the Federal Communications Commission which issued and renewed broadcasting licenses), the sponsor possessed the power of censorship. Because much of what was on the radio was live, “the theory behind such censorship maintained that since a program entered a listener’s home without his foreknowledge of its content, it must contain nothing that might insult his personal attitudes” (MacDonald 104). Network censorship was reflected in program policies that banned offensive references to physical afflictions and diseases, unpleasant odors or bodily functions, the Deity, profanity and race or religion (104). Although they alienated some sponsors’ products through these policies, they also curbed the potential content of radio dramas. Samuel Beckett’s radio play *All That Fall* would never be considered for American airwaves because of its content – derisive references to church and cynical quotes from the bible, talk of killing children and a scene in which the main character, Mrs. Rooney, a large woman, attempts to get in a vehicle with the help of an elderly man, followed by a series of suggestive grunts and groans.
Along with network policies and complete control of the show they funded, sponsors yielded power over the content of their programs. Maltin relates the following case of sponsor control as told by Elliot Lewis:

We not only did a transcription disc on Friday night, we shipped the disc to the advertising agency nabobs and the sponsor in New York. They would listen to it and call the agency guys that were sitting in the office waiting for their comments on Saturday, and they would discuss what we had been rehearsing and what they heard on the disc. (154)

American radio drama writers were mindful of the sponsor and the image they wished to project, though at what detriment to the content and quality of the final product?

RADIO THEORY

Radio drama is a category unto itself although it borrows and transcribes various aspects of other disciplines and literary genres. No exclusive source can be found for this fascinating form that co-exists between multiple genres. Radio-theory studies, primarily a British undertaking, examine the signs and codes of radio as one might find them in literature or the theatre. Words, music, noise and silence are the aural codes replacing visual codes of the other genres. A fundamental question posed by radio theorists is whether or not radio is a blind medium. Most go on to defend it as being a medium in which the eyes do not see the product itself, but experience it as visions in the mind. What is problematic is that radio codes, theories of time and space and all else that “radio theory” encompasses applies not only to radio drama, but music broadcasting, phone-in shows and talk radio. Is it that theorists have cast too big a net over the medium,
applying theories that are too general in an attempt to cover the most ground?

Contemporary radio theorists work in a contemporary time frame, taking for granted that the beginnings of radio were in the pre-television/mass media era.

Employing radio theory for American radio plays poses another predicament. With Arnheim’s book as the exception, radio theory is a relatively new frontier, manifesting itself in the late 1960s. Consequently what radio theorists do not account for when considering radio’s blindness is the lack of visual references of the pre-television/mass media era – the radio listening audience. The medium of radio is something listened to and not seen, but how is this complicated further when the audience does not have visual imagings to support the stories that they hear?

When listening to music on the radio, contemporary imagination may recall a number of images associated with the piece: the music video, a picture of the composer, at the very least an image viewed somewhere in the media of who is the musician, singer or composer. The hourly news broadcasts on the local radio station act as a continuation of the previous night’s television newscast. For modern day listeners of radio, original imagings are secondary to recollections of what has already been seen through television, film and more recently the Internet. For listeners of early radio, visual images came from magazines or literature, the theatre and the relatively new invention of film. Even then, not many had access or money to patronize them. Film was attracting approximately ten million audience members weekly by 1919 (Fink 188) and the theatre, considerably less.
More than any media of the time, print was the most available and comprehensive. The visual references early radio listeners had were limited, as was their access to them.

The limited availability of these three genres of entertainment to some of the American public in the beginnings of radio and radio drama leads one to question, "What did the public see in the theatre of their imagination?" If they had never seen a movie or been to the theatre, where was their reference point in using their imagination? In contemporary society where children are exposed to thousands of hours of television before they begin school, how can we comprehend the magnitude of the average American citizen's first encounter with radio? Contemporary theorists supply and impose their various theories in an age where everything heard on radio is referenced somewhere in the visual media. It is unclear whether consideration has been given to this fact in radio theory literature. Radio theory addresses the codes of radio, verbal and non-verbal - theoretical concerns important to understanding and explaining the medium. Can they, though, explain its popularity?

**British and American Radio**

Another complication that radio theory poses is the ties that bind it to Britain and the BBC. One of the earliest books written on radio is Rudolf Arnheim's *Radio*, first published in 1936. A more recent publication is *Radio Drama: theory and practice* by Tim Crook, published in 1999. Both theorists, along with the majority of the field, are British, applying their theories to the BBC. Can radio theory thus be effectively applied to American radio drama when they are an ocean apart? Will these theories be useful in
the realm of American radio plays, the majority being sponsored serials, when they are likely to be considered a sub-species - in the same family as, but not equal to the radio plays of the Third Programme and later Radio 4 of the BBC? Though the BBC did have their equivalent to the American serial in the form of their Light and Home Programmes, they are not often addressed in academia, and are ridiculed for their simplicity when addressed:

Primacy of the material element, the Stoff, was perhaps the characteristic mark of radio drama on the Light, which over and above this, however, was often conducted in a day-to-day language of grinding monotony. Scarcely a sentence was spoken that revealed more sense than could be expressed in the bare conjunction of subject and predicate...Despite this, it would be unjustifiable to consign the drama production of the Light without more ado to the realm of the trivial. (Priessnitz 39)

What was popular and meaningful to the American audience was clearly not a source of national pride as were the radio plays of the Third Programme.

There are many differences in the two forms of radio drama, though not necessarily confined to form and content. The BBC commissioned their plays from radio and theatre playwrights, while in America, CBS and NBC had a staff of writers employed who mainly wrote for their network. Sponsors heavily financed American network programming, each program being brought to you by products ranging from corn flakes to spark plugs. The case was not the same with Britain which did not see the growth of commercial radio stations until 1973 and, as Horst P. Priessnitz observed in his 1981 essay “British radio drama: a survey”,

the competitive struggle that they inaugurated and that is being conducted at the present time does not appear to have endangered the role of radio drama in Britain as 'a vehicle for a serious poetic exploration of the human mind' and to have led to its decline, as it has in the United States, into an intermezzo between the ads. (42)

The focus of American networks was the serial program, a program that listeners tuned into on a daily or weekly basis, programs such as Burns and Allen, Lux Radio Theatre and The Lone Ranger. The Third Programme featured such notable playwrights as Beckett, Pinter and Dylan Thomas writing plays specifically for the genre, which were to appear only once on the Third Programme. American radio also included their playwrights in the medium, most notably Arthur Miller, but the motivation was usually financial and not artistic, as he states: "It was an easy dollar and allowed me to continue working at plays and stories and took less time than teaching or some other job" (Maltin 54). When comparing the British and American approach to radio drama there is a sense that the former is decidedly high-brow, whereas the latter is a middle-brow affair.

Radio Codes

All programming on radio uses the same codes, "formal strategies employed by radio broadcasters and the inherent features of radio as a broadcasting medium" (Shingler and Wieringa xiii), though how they approach them varies greatly. The codes fall into two categories – verbal (words, speech, voice) and non-verbal (music, noise, silence). In most cases, verbal codes are mainly employed by radio, though they vary between being a primary and secondary code. Stations that focus on music with little commercial interruption use verbal codes minimally, whereas stations that are 'talk radio' use them exclusively. However, stations often have a variety of programming that fluctuates in its
use of verbal codes. For example, a music radio station may devote some programming to phone-in shows that suit the lifestyle of their audience (sports or advice). Radio dramas employ all the codes as well, though their purpose is to communicate a story, which is different from programs that use them to communicate information. The codes and their application to radio dramas have been rarely explored. Examining them will begin to answer some of the questions radio theory leaves us asking.

The dialogue and actors’ voices illustrate verbal codes in radio drama. Words, as one of these codes, are represented in the writing or the actual text of the script. Writing radio dramas is problematic in that the medium is aural and not visual. The problem lies in the ability of the ear to retain information, as the eye does when observing a play or a film. Recalling details and information that have been seen is a great deal easier than recalling what has been heard. Shingler and Wieringa attribute this to the ear’s short-term memory:

...that is, the fact that it’s harder to remember words and phrases than images. Radio, as it has often been noted, has an evanescent quality. This comes from the fact that its programmes exist solely in terms of time: that is, it’s heard and then it’s gone; and what has gone cannot be retrieved by the listener unless they have recorded the broadcast. Because of this, the listener must be constantly reminded of what is important. As a result, radio speech must not only be simple and to the point but also repetitive and predictable. (38)

Radio drama addresses this issue in several ways. By following a formula appropriate to the genre the audience can have a general recollection of what has happened and how the program will evolve. For example, the mystery’s formula of introduction, complication and resolution guides the listener who may forget some of the more complicated details.
The format, though predictable, ensures that a listener can follow the program, arriving at the conclusion simultaneously. Soap operas help the ear’s short-term memory by using the same characters and continuous plots. They also deal with simple themes that their largest audience (the American housewife) can identify with, making recollection easier. As well, sponsors of the program take up a great deal of the short amount of airtime with their product advertisements, interrupting “the structure and continuity of the story line, necessitating an extremely slow plot development and frequent repetition” (Fink 204). Radio drama dialogue is kept simple to be retained easily; and within the script itself, writers will use the narrator or one character to summarize what has just happened. Both adaptations are represented in the following passage from the Suspense radio play “The Game”:

FX: STEPS – CHAIR SCRAPING ACROSS THE FLOOR
RED: Thirty-eight, and that’s the best gun. Wanna hold it?
PENN: No.
RED: (Snort) I figured you wouldn’t. It’s OK. We’ll forget it.
PENN: Uhm mm. Go ahead – take out the bullets.
RED: OK. Take out five – leave one. Huh, Penny?
PENN: Yeah. Take out five – leave one.
FX: CYLINDER TURNING AND BULLETS HITTING
TABLE ONE AT A TIME (CLOCK TICKING IN BACKGROUND)
RED: One bullet – for you or for me. OK?
PENN: OK.
FX: CYLINDER CLICK – GUN PLACED ON TABLE
MUSIC: (SINISTER MUSIC PLAYED UNDER ANNOUNCER)
ANNOUNCER: The gun. The gun rested muzzle to the wall in the center of the table bearing scratches made by a three-year-old in a forgotten moment of high experience. The boys sat opposite each other looking down at the gun. And the gun waited. (7)

The phrasing is short and repetitive, the language unadorned. These modifications continually emphasize the key events without interrupting the story’s progression.
The code of words must take into account its audience and must be written for them if it is to be effective. There are a variety of factors – age, sex, class, education - to be regarded when writing words for the medium as language and scenarios must be accessible to the majority. In writing American radio dramas, writers had to consider their audience, which mainly consisted of the middle class.² Most popular programming sought to appeal to the masses, so their language was not complicated and their subject matter simple. If a writer or producer wished to indulge in a variation on this concept, they did so in serious, non-sponsored programming, outside the peak listening hours. There were a few exceptions to this rule such as the work of Norman Corwin and Arch Oboler, whose artistic radio programming found popularity with the general audience. Daytime programming was geared towards the housewife, thus the introduction of the soap opera, which dealt with family and domestic situations. In the late afternoon, students returned home from school, so the majority of children’s programming was presented at these hours. Writers for these programs and time slots tailored their scripts to be accessible and accepted by the majority of listeners.

As the writing in a radio drama represents the verbal code of words, the way the drama is performed displays the codes of speech and voice. Words on a page may suggest one thing, but once vocalized, the meanings may change. Much can be implied

² For further discussion, see “Audience” section.
in the vocalization of the words on a page, and factors such as tone, speed, stress and volume can all contribute to the multitude of connotations of each phrase. Shingler and Wieringa cite the example “I love you”:

Thus, “I love you” expressed in a hard, loud and rapid manner would imply one thing (e.g., desperation, jealousy or possessiveness) whilst the same words expressed softly, quietly and slowly would imply something quite different (i.e., reassurance or a deep, unshakeable devotion). (39)

Radio drama’s extensive use of these codes stems from the fact that the writings are dramatic and must be interpreted that way. A flat reading of the words as written on the page with little emotion would not be well received by the audience. It is imperative to the text that the abilities of the voice are exploited to produce an interpretation that will not only entertain, but engage the audience. Additionally, these factors can indicate emotional intensities or emotional or psychological states (39), an essential trait of radio drama. Though the text supplies these clues through the dialogue and directions, it is the voice’s interpretation that gives life to the words. Finally, characteristics that are observed in visual mediums, race defined by skin color or native dress, may become obvious through vocalizations. Ethnicity may appear in the adoption of an accent or vocal mannerisms. Speech and voice communicate visual images in a non-visual medium and convey the emotion of the words written on the page. Equally important to the radio drama is the use of non-verbal codes. Music, noise and silence each plays an important role for the audience’s interest and enjoyment of radio productions.

Music is an integral part of radio in both the broadcasting and drama realm. For many stations it is the main purpose of their existence whether playing classical, jazz or
rock. For this type of radio, non-verbal codes are the main format with verbal codes being secondary. In the domain of radio dramas (outside of musical programs) however, music functions differently. Music takes the place of visual clues as might be found in the opening credits of film or the dimming of the house lights in the theatre. At the beginning of a program, it indicates the commencement of the show, capturing and focusing the attention of the audience. Many American radio dramas opened with a signature piece of music or musical notes that listeners could easily identify the program with. The closing theme can then mirror the opening, or a show may choose an alternative piece to mark the program’s conclusion. Music’s other role is to be incidental, or in the background performing multiple tasks: “such music is chosen in order to reflect and enhance the character and setting of the programme” (65). First, it is used as an indicator. As a scene changes, music signals this instead of another non-verbal code – silence. It provides a seamless transition that supports the mood of the play, yet does not disturb the listener’s engagement with it. In addition to being a transition, music can re-establish or denote a time or location. For example, a representative type of music may reference a foreign location (tribal drum beats for Africa) or an era (swing music for the thirties).

Secondly, music can enhance characterization or help illustrate a character’s emotions. The music may suggest physical characteristics - if the character is larger in size, deeper sounding instruments such as a tuba or a bass drum may signify this; flutes and light piano keys may accompany slimmer characters. At times they will have a musical accompaniment that listeners will recognize in anticipation of their entrance.
Music also operates as a wordless representation of the characters’ emotional state or may embody emotions they are unable to express. There are a multitude of musical conventions to represent various emotional states from the harp chords that convey love to the screech of violins that signify terror. As the characters’ emotions swell, the musical undercurrent crescendos, hitting its peak along with their powerful reaction.

Comedies had their own use for the musical code - the three strike drum solo (ba-dum-dum) signaled to the audience a joke’s punch line, yet often received the laugh because of the convention. Music is an integral part of radio dramas that works in conjunction with dialogue to help create the play in the mind of the listener.

Silence, comments acclaimed BBC radio producer Don McWhinnie,

as a calculated device is one of the most potent imaginative stimuli; prepared for correctly, broken at the right moment, in the right context, it can be more expressive than words; it can echo with expectancy, atmosphere, suspense, emotional overtones, visual subtleties. (qtd. in Shingler and Wieringa 54)

Silence shares a similar function with music, as a “boundary demarcation” (54). Whereas music can indicate the transition in between scenes, so too can silence. It is often used to signal the end of one segment and the beginning of another. For example, it can follow the closing credits of a radio drama, signaling the end of the program as a whole and indicating that a transition to another program is occurring. Or within a drama itself, silence can signify that the activities at one location or time are complete and that the action is moving elsewhere in time or space. Silence’s equivalent in the theatre would be the blackout – a dimming or complete extinguishing of lights to conceal a scene change in process or indicate a change in time. In the cinema, the fade out between scenes or
before the final credits serves this purpose, though both mediums do not use these techniques exclusively. But using silence as a code requires a delicate balance and must be closely monitored. If it continues too long listeners may mistake it for radio malfunction; too little may not create the desired effect of its second function - suspense and anticipation.

Silence within the text of the program itself operates to increase anticipation of what is about to be said, what is being thought or what has happened to stop the dialogue. It is in these silences, more pauses than dead air, that the imagination performs at its peak to compensate for the visual deprivation that radio provides. The physical actions that fill in the gap of silence in a visual medium can only be imagined listening to the radio. What this inspires in the listener is a moment of unbridled imagination, a time when there are few clues as to what is happening and where all action must be constructed in the mind. What came before the pause – the words or the sounds – may indicate what is taking place in the soundless space, but the listener hangs in the balance of the unknown until the next words are spoken. This moment in unknown territory, waiting in anticipation, is limitless in possibilities. Such moments are illustrated in the *Suspense* episode, "The Man Who Thought He Was Edward G. Robinson":

EDWARD G. ROBINSON: Yes, well, now, you want to kill your wife, is that it? You want me to help you.
HOMER: If you would Mr. Robinson. If you could – If you could spare the time. I can’t tell you how grateful I’d be.
EDWARD G. ROBINSON (after a pause): Well, you know, Mr. Hubbard, you look like a pretty nice guy. Your wife must really be an old battle-axe to have got you in a frame of mind like this. All right, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I will help you.
HOMER (delighted): Oh, Mr. Robinson. (8)
The character Homer wants to kill his wife and asks his idol, the real actor Edward G. Robinson – notorious for playing a tough-guy character – for help, not realizing that the man and his movie characters are not the same. The literal pause is written into the script as such, but the use of commas in the first sentence of Edward G. Robinson’s dialogue functions the same way. By writing commas into the script the writer is indicating pauses, which in turn are used to build tension and anticipation in the listener as to what his reaction to murder might be. Is Robinson going to help Homer? Is he going to call the police? What will his reaction be to being asked? All these questions alternate in the mind of the listener. The actual pause is the turning point in the script, a moment of high tension as Robinson makes his decision as to what action he will take. Within the pause, the whole course of action can go either way – Robinson can help Homer or he can call the police. Those few seconds of silence decide the fate of Homer’s life. What takes place in the imagination of the listener in those few seconds has endless possibilities.

The pauses that occur within the text are significant because they are what keep radio dramas a predictable yet unpredictable, or fluid, medium. The writer can write them into the script, the director and performer can decide on appropriate pausing within the production, but pausing is a part of human nature – unpredictable in real life and equally so on the radio. Whether constructed by the writer and performer, or done on instinct in the process, they fill radio dramas with suspense and anticipation. They engage the imagination to fill in the blanks and keep audiences listening and returning for more.
The "noise" of radio dramas functions in two distinct manners. Its main role, and what is most often associated with the phrase "sound effects", is the use of sounds to represent an object or action in the scene. The most classic examples within radio dramas are footsteps, opening and closing doors and telephones ringing. What audiences fail to recognize in the moment they are confronted with the effect is that what they visualize when they hear the noise is rarely what is happening. Most sounds heard in radio dramas are symbolic – that is, they are created to sound like the real thing, but are not. Rarely do real objects sound like themselves on the radio, so technicians must devise other methods to generate the effects. For example, in the early days of radio, coconut shells were used to represent horses' hooves and drumbeats for heartbeats or footsteps (Shingler and Wieringa 53). Certain meanings are also associated with some symbolic sound effects. One of the more obvious illustrations of this is the rooster crowing to symbolize early morning. Seldom does a rooster crowing mean that the action is taking place on a farm or even more rare, that a rooster is central to the action. On this unusual occasion, the effect is then iconic, not symbolic.

The second, and less recognized noise codes are acoustics and perspectives:

The term acoustics...is used to designate the various treatments of speech and noise which distort natural sounds for dramatic effect (e.g., fades and echoes). In addition to 'acoustics', we can also use the term 'perspectives' to designate the spatial qualities of sound: for instance, whether they are heard close-up or from a distance. (56)

While most listeners take these codes for granted, not giving them credence as they do sound effects, they are central to producing environments on the radio. Acoustics create
space on the radio, which in turn creates a variety of locations. If a scene is taking place in a large space, such as a train station, the voices must echo and reverberate in the vastness of the building for the scene to be believable. Little echo or resonance indicates that the location is somewhat more intimate, an office or bedroom. Though these small details are in the background for listeners, they contribute to their imaging as they eavesdrop on the scene. The situation is similar with perspectives. As background noise, they receive little attention, but radio dramas would sound vastly different without them. Take, for instance, two characters talking to each other from different rooms. One character's voice would be in the foreground, louder and clearer than the other. The character in the other room would sound muffled and quieter. Without using perspectives, there would be no indication that they were not in the same space. Every conversation on every radio program would sound as if they were talking face-to-face. The noise of radio dramas is often overlooked, but the details and nuances they contribute to the overall effect are essential.

CULTURAL INDICATORS

Where radio theorists leave off, a second array of researchers enter with questions of significance, both historical and cultural. Cultural researchers approach radio and radio drama with questions of liveness, escapism and imagination.

Cultural Concerns

Radio presented the American public with a situation that previous media had not offered them before – a live connection, “an account of what is happening, rather than an
account of what *has* happened” (qtd. in Douglas 7). Other media such as newspapers, magazines and newsreels at the movies reported events that had already occurred, but sometimes long after their impact was felt. Radio was finally a medium that transmitted current events to the public as they were happening. While liveness may seem more relevant to programming that conveyed information - news, religion, sports - the liveness of radio drama brought forth an element of reality: that what was being listened to was actually happening. The liveness of radio suggested that there was a world beyond someone’s city or town, a world changing from minute to minute that listeners could tune into by just turning their radio on. In addition to connecting with the world beyond, people turned on their radios to escape their environments, retreating into their own imaginations.

Escapism was the motive for the development of many forms of entertainment and their ensuing popularity with middle class audiences:

[I]n enjoying certain forms of entertainment, sport or other activities, an economically deprived audience seeks ‘escape’ from mundane pressures and anxieties into a world of fantasy, daydream, wish-fulfillment, or simply an obliteratingly colourful and spectacular excitement. (Sharratt 277)

Radio, originally invented as a form of communication, soon became a method of escapism for citizens of America in the early days of its inception. Its accessibility coupled with the economic and political conditions of the country supported its rise in significance. Radio was introduced to the American public a few short years after World War I, saw its Golden Age come about in an economic depression, and reached full fruition during World War II. It is not difficult to theorize that the cause of this was
Americans’ inability, economically, to seek out other forms of entertainment (movies, sporting events, theatre) as there was little money to do so. But they had the ability to escape from “mundane pressures and anxieties” by turning on their radio. Radio dramas were particularly suited to this endeavor as they occupied listeners with more than just facts – they presented stories they could relate to and that carried them to far away destinations. They could involve colourful characters, witty dialogue, suspenseful music, make you laugh or make you jump out of your seat. Listeners could participate by even talking back to the radio, or they could just relax and daydream in a different world. Radio program producers realized the power of escapism for their listeners, even creating a program to do just that – escape. The series Escape opened with the following question posed to its listeners:

Tired of the everyday grind? Ever dream of a life of …romantic adventure? Want to get away from it all? We offer you – ESCAPE!

Other programs became aware of this need of the American public, especially the soap opera. Specifically created to be a break in the day of the housewife, soap operas were a way to escape from her chores for a short time and become involved in a different life. Radio provided an inexpensive medium which a person could retreat to, escaping from their daily routine without leaving the house.

When speaking of radio and more specifically radio drama, both radio theorists and cultural researchers agree the most important characteristic that a listener possesses is imagination:
For what radio exploits, in full, is not the passive power of the eye to behold, but the versatile genius of the mind to create. Radio gives voice to words and energy to sound and then, because no scene is drawn, leaves the mind unfettered to envision not the things it must, but rather those it will. (Guralnick 80)

In the cultural dimension, imagination is one element of the relationship that the audience has with their favorite radio dramas. The capacity to stimulate images in a listener’s head to coincide with what is heard, is radio’s strongest tool. Radio dramas exploited this need to actively engage and use one’s imagination when first introduced to the American audience. Up until their creation most of radio was talk or music, requiring some degree of visual imagery but not to the extent that dramas demanded. Radio dramas required that the audience be an active participant. Other popular forms of entertainment such as movies or the theatre were visual, audiences did not have to engage their imaginations the same way, they could be a passive participant, just observing, and still be entertained. Previous to radio, the only medium that challenged a person in the same manner was literature. The written word offered the reader a chance to use their imagination as they composed characters and locations from the details provided. It is in the details though that literature and radio vary immensely.

Whereas literature presented details in the form of words, radio presented details in the form of sounds. Characters in literature are frequently explicitly detailed, thus visual images are more easily created. Physical and psychological aspects outlined in the text generate images close to the intention of the author. A key aspect of writing creative literature is the creation of visual images for the reader. Radio, however, must rely on its accurate representations through sound. In literature an act of aggression may be
conveyed through the phrase “he rolled up his sleeves and threw the first punch”. On radio it could be represented through a line of dialogue followed by a sound effect (SFX), “Once I take off this jacket you’re going to get the pummeling of your life! (SFX – fighting, punching, men groaning and gasping for air)”. To communicate the proper image, an appropriate sound must be used. Not only must the sound effect be appropriate to the situation, it must be appropriate in terms of audience understanding. What they hear depends on how the sound is coded.

Cultural Codes

Similar to the radio theorists, cultural researchers have developed their own system of codes, found in the themes, plots and narratives of radio dramas. Don Druker in his essay “Listening to the Radio” suggests, “that what we hear when we listen to the radio or to sounds depends a great deal upon how these sounds are coded – and coding in this sense involves social, intellectual, geographic, and even physiological factors” (334). Applying Druker’s theory to American radio dramas may be the key to illustrating why this particular form of entertainment so readily captured the attention of America in the early decades of the century.

Radio’s first strategy that contributed to its rise in popularity was its influence on families. Radio and radio dramas brought the American family together like no other form of entertainment at the time. Families that could not access or afford the movies or theatre could gather around the radio for hours of entertainment:
...the family radio was the center of most people's lives. We could only afford one radio because the Depression was still evident in the small farm town where I lived. But we really didn't need more than one because listening was a family affair. (Barfield 22).

Multiple accounts in Ray Barfield's book *Listening to the Radio 1920-1950* document the importance radio played in everyday family life: “I grew up in Kaukauna, Wisconsin, when radio was an integral part of my family's life and lifestyle” (110).

My family - mother, father, brother, sister and I - listened to our Philco console situated prominently in the living room. My father pretty much controlled the programming, but he enjoyed a wide variety of shows, so there was something for everyone. (160)

Radio programming became a staple in the lives of American families as well as a form of socialization within the community. Purchasing a radio in the early days meant buying parts to piece together. Before they became self-contained units and more readily available to the public, the community gathered to hear the latest that radio had to offer:

Each day the druggist would take a ten-foot stepladder and place it out in front of the drugstore, take his crystal set, and sit on top of the ladder, put his earplug in his ear, and listen to the game (the World Series), telling the group of people gathered around the play by play of the game as it went along. (9)

Until the advent of television no other entertainment medium impacted on American citizens' interaction as dramatically as radio, bringing communities and families together in ways not experienced before. The American culture began to perceive a more unified country. Radio brought the population together at a variety of levels - family, community, regionally and nationally - as people gathered around the Philco daily.
Intellectually the radio drama presented an everyday challenge to the radio listener – use your imagination. Radio dramas provided an environment where your entertainment was limited only by your imagination. Listening did not require special skills or education; the imagination became engaged the moment the radio was turned on. As a medium for the masses available to most in terms of convenience and content, it continually stimulated the intellect like no other form of popular entertainment. Other forms required that a person seek to engage with it, such as going to a movie or picking up a book; radio was accessible with the turn of a dial and played continually until turned off. Additionally, there was no guarantee that books and movies would stimulate the intellect as the content might not be appropriate (too difficult or too easy). Radio, too, could not offer the guarantee of constant stimulating content, but unlike other mediums until television, the radio dial could be turned until intellectual stimulation was found. But other mediums did not engage the participant like radio did. Or, rather, the participant did not engage with radio as they did other mediums. The audience of early radio could not be a passive participant, they had to actively interact with it. When watching a movie or the theatre, the audience need not be actively involved, they are there to be entertained by the mostly visual spectacle. They could sit passively and still have an experience. With radio, unless the listener initiated and maintained an active role – supplying full focus, concentration and attention – the impact of the medium would be lost. To connect intellectually with radio dramas required only that you focus and let your mind wander outside the borders of everyday life.
Geographically, radio connected America, not in a physical sense, but as a community. Listening expanded the community’s frame of reference to include places they had heard of, but never been. It also connected them to the people who lived there. Radio dramas transported people out of their homes and to a variety of geographic locations – some that existed, some that did not. During the Depression and war eras, it provided an opportunity for listeners to escape from the confines of their own home. Listening to the radio took the audience places they had never been. It introduced them to countries and cultures they may have never known and took them across America to explore the vast landscape that they may not have otherwise explored. As well, a sense of community developed out of knowing that there were people similar to you, listening to the same programs at the same time. One program that unified the country on a regular basis was *Amos n’ Andy*. Countless books on radio drama mention the program and its impact on America, from children skipping dessert to hear it play, to stopping movies in the theatre for its fifteen minute run. The whole country stopped for the time it played, and it was guaranteed that most of the country was listening:

> By the early to mid-30s our family schedule was dictated by the ‘Amos n’ Andy Show’ from 7 to 7:15 each evening. My father refused to miss it. All activities had to be arranged for either before or after. (Barfield 42)

People could identify themselves with the programs they chose to listen to, and in turn, identify themselves with others who listened. Looking back on the program in a contemporary framework raises questions, though. The racial stereotyping of the characters appealed to the audience of the era, but how would audiences respond now? Furthermore, who made up the audience for the program is unaccounted for. Sources
point to the middle class as being the greatest consumers of radio dramas, but they do not provide any further information as to the ethnicities that composed this section of society. It can only be assumed that most of the audience was European-American, thus the show's popularity might not take into account the African-American population the show depicts. Leaving a contemporary analysis of the program for another time, *Amos n' Andy* did find an audience across the country that was devoted to them.

**Audience**

A significant element of the cultural approach to American radio dramas concerns itself with the audience — who was listening, how frequently and to what programs. A ratings system was fully operational in the early 1930s, the C.A.B or Cooperative Analysis of Broadcasting ratings. This ratings method involved phoning listeners in different cities and asking them what programs they listened to that day. In 1935, this method was replaced by the Hooperatings (developed by C.E Hooper, Inc.) that produced more accurate results as operators telephoned during the day enquiring about programming in progress. Eventually, the A.C Nielsen Company bought out the aforementioned company and established the Nielsen ratings in 1949 that still exist to this day in radio and television. The accuracy of the ratings improved as monitors were installed in radios to record when it was turned on or off and the dial was changed. Rating systems, though, did not always accurately represent the listening audience and their preferences.
What was initially unaccounted for in the C.A.B ratings was the ability of the telephoned listener to accurately recollect their listening habits of that day. This involved recalling not only the programs but also the sponsors and their products. An attempt was made to remedy this early on by telephoning at more regular intervals throughout the day and was finally resolved with the Hooperatings. However, ratings systems based on telephone inquiries had their own problems. In the early days of radio 41 percent of households had telephones, the Depression saw that number decline to 31 percent and as late as 1948 only 58 percent of homes had them (Douglas 137). What these numbers indicate is that the picture the ratings service painted is not an exact one. In the early days of radio it was difficult to ascertain what the American audience was listening to and how often. For a better understanding of their listening habits alternative sources to the ratings must be considered.

In her book *Listening In*, Susan Douglas referenced a study done in the 1930s that revealed a key factor in understanding radio’s audience. *Psychology of Radio* by Hadley Cantril and Gordon Allport was the first report of its kind to look at the new medium of radio, dissecting it in a variety of categories and making speculations about its impact. The study uncovered that the middle and lower income earners, while owning fewer radios than the upper-income people, listened the most. What this indicates was that radio was the medium for the masses. Not everyone could afford a movie or the theatre, but radio listening was accessible to almost everyone – seventy-eight million Americans were habitual listeners at the point of the study (Douglas 131). Equally fascinating is the
speculation as to why radio was so popular, what it contributed to the daily lives of citizens beyond entertainment.

Cultural researchers pose two thoughts about the popularity of radio and radio drama. First, it contributed to a sense of nationhood in decades when turmoil in the forms of war and depression swept the country. Not only did the American public get their most up-to-date information from radio broadcasts, it provided a relationship to other citizens whether they were across the street or across the country. As Douglas writes:

It allowed the listener to cultivate a love-hate relationship with both regionalism and nationalism, homogeneity and difference. Cultural unity, while reassuring could also be boring. Cultural diversity, when discomforting, could be exciting and entertaining. Imagining a nation, and one’s place in it, consisted then not only of conceiving of some unity; it also involved picturing difference and imagining that the difference of which you were a part of was superior to – or at other times inferior to – that supposed unity (76).

What was heard on the radio may have been something a listener could relate to or not, a belief that they could agree with or an idea that they abhorred. The most important factor was that somewhere else in the country there was something happening that they could be a part of - radio provided this community. What drew people together across the nation was not necessarily what they had in common, but also a sense of diversity. For many listeners, it was the first contact with different ethnicities, religions, politics and classes. What radio was able to provide to its listeners was an easing of the sense of alienation that living in a vast country can create.
Second, radio reflected the morals and ethics that middle-class America deemed valuable. To some extent it was due to the content being strongly regulated by the networks and the sponsors. However, networks in a variety of capacities wanted to give their listeners characters and situations that they could relate to. For example, the hero of the story was often someone that they could find similar qualities in. Some heroes did have extraordinary powers, but the majority were average citizens finding themselves in unexpected situations. In the case of mystery, detective or western programs, the main characters were in circumstances in which they had to make a choice, sometimes between right or wrong or good or evil. Inevitably the right choice was made and the character became a better person because of it. In this way radio drama modeled behavior that middle-class America considered acceptable. Soap operas were another example. Though dramatizing domestic life, they often provided an accurate reflection of women’s changing role in society. The 1940s saw soap opera plots become more realistic as they examined the new role of women and family in relation to the war (Fink 204). While identifying with the characters and the situations involved, the listening audience could also identify with the products that the characters used. Sponsors heavily padded their shows hoping that the domestic female audience might want to live the soap opera life vicariously through their products. American radio dramas not only entertained the listening audience, they appropriated cultural conventions and reflected them back to the public.
RADIO TEXT

A final area of exploration in the realm of radio theory and cultural studies concerns the text of radio dramas; not the auditory output, but the words on the page that are transmitted onto the airwaves. How do we read the scripts of radio plays? Do we approach them as literature, dramatic or otherwise? Are the codes and signs that are heard when a drama is broadcast written into the script or are they only revealed when the text is realized in its proper medium? Radio drama has been called many times “theatre of the mind” because listeners construct images within their own mind of what is heard on the radio. Reading the text of a radio play lends itself to being theatre of the mind just as the reading of a play text meant for the stage does.

Analysis of radio play text has taken place previously, with focus on the many radio play publications of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard and others who contributed to the BBC. Structurally they are presented as play-texts, encouraging the reader not necessarily to approach them in the same manner, but not to be afraid to approach them as text at all. Academia has provided an abundance of analysis on the content of these plays, but little analysis as literary texts. Peter Lewis in his essay “Radio Drama and Literature” proposed two theories as to why this examination had yet to take place in the early 1980s in Britain. First, it was due to the “ephemeral” quality of radio, which for British radio drama he blames on limited access:

One of the most common descriptions of radio drama is “ephemeral” but this so-called ephemerality is not a necessary, inherent and inevitable feature of radio drama, as it is often assumed to be, but a direct consequence of its inaccessibility. If you could borrow records, cassettes and texts of radio plays from your public library, as you can of poetry and stage plays, radio drama would immediately cease to be
“ephemeral” – or, since most art is ephemeral (*ars brevis, vita longa*), it would be no more ephemeral than any other medium or genre. (171)

He believes a critical look at radio dramas as literature has not been done in Britain because of radio’s perceived ephemerality. More importantly, it is because radio drama is considered very low on the literary hierarchy – or, as Lewis asserts, many literary critics believe “the place for radio drama is not the bottom of the literary hierarchy, but the scrapheap” (177). What is interesting is that Lewis’ synopsis of literary critics’ approach to radio dramas is based on their analysis of Dylan Thomas’ *Under Milk Wood*, and other works by previously mentioned playwrights/radio dramatists for the BBC. Further arguments from these critics go on to assume that the radio dramas of these writers are acceptable only because of their work in other literary genres. Where, then, does this situate the American radio drama as literature? Possibly so far down the literary hierarchy it has fallen off?

Previous studies have not looked at the American radio drama as a literary text. American radio playwrights Norman Corwin, Arch Oboler and Orson Wells have been studied, but again for the content of their scripts, not as literature. An examination has not been done for similar reasons to Britain’s - questions about radio texts’ literary genre and lack of availability. Literary critics’ adverse response to radio dramas is partially due to their considering it as mass media, not literature, and believing it best left to media critics. As definitions of literature expand to encompass a variety of new forms, surely there is opportunity for the radio drama to carve out its own niche.
As for availability, unlike play-texts that may have many drafts and revisions before a final copy is published, the radio plays of an American serial program could number in the hundreds and are written in a short time span, being revised and edited in the rehearsal process on the original copy. They were certainly not of great importance to anyone once the show was finished. The scripts that are currently available are mainly located on the Internet and have been transcribed from the few original copies that remain. Though these texts are accessible, it may be difficult to analyze them because the original intention of the writer may be skewed in the translation from original to web versions. This limitation should not be a great hindrance in investigating radio dramas as literary text as all the essential components (dialogue, sound effects, stage directions) are present.

There are conditions that a reader must meet to have a full experience of a radio play in the mind. Similar to the reader of a play text who must be familiar with the conventions of the theatre, the reader of a radio drama should have experience with listening to radio drama and know its different principles. Of greatest importance is consideration of the type of radio drama listened to. American dramas have a specific structure for each of the genres (comedy, detective, variety or soap operas are examples). Knowing these structures when reading a radio play supports the recreation of it in the mind. The accompaniment of music colors the story as well. A reader must analyze the situation in the script and when “music” is called for, must decide what would be appropriate. When other sound effects are required, the reader again must decide what to create in the theatre of the mind. Familiarity with what radio has typically employed to
symbolize certain sound effects will assist the reader. Most importantly, different codes must be understood, both theoretical and cultural, that have been developed specifically for the medium. Reading radio drama may not be as satisfactory as listening to it, but a different level of creativity is required for the challenge.

**LISTENING TO AND READING SUSPENSE**

*The Mystery Genre and Suspense*

Most mystery radio dramas follow a formula that was developed by their predecessor, the pulp fiction mystery. The protagonists, usually regular people, manifest extraordinary qualities when they find themselves in a dilemma; the situation builds and complicates until “the inevitable solution of the mystery by the protagonist, bringing the antagonist to justice and recreating, in effect, universal order – until the next week’s assault” (Fink 195). The middle class audience could relate to this version of a moral code - that justice would be served and that good would prevail over evil. The mystery formula reinforced their own value system and guided them towards society’s ideals for acceptable behavior. *The Shadow*, one of the most famous and well-respected mystery radio dramas, strictly followed this formula each and every week. The protagonist, Lamont Cranston, and his alter ego the Shadow, had the power to control the minds of others. With this extraordinary ability he and his companion Margo Lane would intervene in cases that the police found difficult and use his powers to solve the crime. At the end of every program the Shadow issued his enduring final remark – a warning for the audience, “The weed of crime bears bitter fruit. Crime does not pay. The Shadow
knows!” This maxim endured for the almost twenty-five year span of the program, a fine example of radio drama’s ability to mirror society’s values.

Through innovative production values the mystery genre sought to replace the narrative with action, observed in the dramatization of dialogue and use of sound effects. The author, provided with a relatively simple task of following a formula, was now at liberty to experiment with these elements. In a 1932 essay on how to write a good radio mystery, aspiring writers were advised, “The radio audience for detective and mystery fiction wants stories dramatized – not read, to them. Therefore, you have to translate thinking into action.” (Maltin 30). The fast paced presentation of introduction, complication and resolution to follow the mystery formula dictated that action through dialogue or effects was necessary to communicate in a short time what words could not. Instead of a character describing a break-in, sound effects would portray the breaking of glass, the click of the door opening and the quick footsteps of the escape. Sound effects that the audience could relate to and recognize became the hallmark of certain programs – the lone, echoing thirteen note whistle of *The Whistler* or the creaking door of *Inner Sanctum*. Writers of radio plays thrived in the medium and relished all it had to offer. Louise Fletcher, author of two of the most famous radio dramas in American history, “Sorry, Wrong Number” and “The Hitchhiker”, observes:

The suggestions you could make just by a note, by a sound, by the handling of the material...the swiftness of it...and you had such a short time, twenty-two minutes. The audience provided a good part of it; if you could excite their own imagination, they filled the rest, so that the sparseness of the medium was to its advantage. (Maltin 35)
Characters, as well, came to life in the mystery genre through colorful descriptions in the dialogue and their own vocalizations. For example, The Shadow opened the program with his signature “eerie laugh, and filtered voice to match: ‘Who knows…what evil...llllurks...in the hearts of men? The Shadow Knows!’” (Dunning Tune in Yesterday 543). The character was described in this way:

The Shadow, Lamont Cranston, a man of wealth, a student of science and a master of other people’s minds, devotes his life to righting wrongs, protecting the innocent and punishing the guilty. Using advanced methods that may ultimately become available to all law enforcement agencies, Cranston is known to the underworld as the Shadow – never seen, only heard, as haunting to superstitious minds as a ghost, as inevitable as a guilty conscience... (543)

Characterization of this nature allowed the listener to construct images through aural information in place of visual cues. The abstract nature of radio, interpreting sound into images in the mind, facilitated the flourishing of the mystery genre. It concentrated on action-driven stories, not simply told to the audience, but lived in the moment. They were alive with sounds and colorful language that the audience took in and turned into wild imaginings. What Howard Fink writes about The Shadow, can be applied to the mystery genre as a whole: “The sound records of Shadow productions show how they surmount the simplicity of plot and characterization by their technical excellence; the radio medium is expertly utilized in both text and production” (196).

Suspense was a thirty-minute anthology that was produced from 1940-1962, one of radio’s longest running dramas. The program had a variety of sponsors over the years, most notably Roma Wines and Autolite spark plugs, though several years were sustained (unsponsored). Under producer-director William Spier the show succeeded as an
excellent example of the mystery genre. Spier’s approach towards *Suspense* ensured a quality, forward thinking program that did not indulge his audience with mediocre stories solely produced to entertain. *Suspense* presented the listeners with tales enfolded in morality, involving realistic situations that they could possibly find themselves in: “*Suspense* was mainly concerned with an ordinary guy caught up in a situation that intensified and soon became unbearable” (Dunning *On the Air* 647). Spier avoided science fiction, detective stories and tales of horror, maintaining his focus on everyday circumstances that spin out of control. Within these boundaries he upheld one steadfast rule – the murderer rarely got away. Justice always prevailed whether it was through the efforts of the law or through “cosmic” intervention. Established early in the story was the life-or-death situation, “then, through characterization and audio coloring, little touches were added to heighten the sensation of impending doom. That was what suspense was all about: The slow tightening of the knot” (Dunning *Tune in Yesterday* 585).

*Suspense* also brought to the airwaves the finest contributors to radio drama. First, it appropriated the best actors from other forms of entertainment. Cary Grant stated, “If I ever do any more radio work, I want to do it on *Suspense*, where I get a good chance to act” (Dunning *On the Air* 647). What appealed to them was the opportunity to act against type, which *Suspense* offered – Ozzie and Harriet Nelson played a couple who would rather kill than wait for an uncle’s inheritance and Danny Kaye portrayed a killer (Bareiss 370). The quality of the scripts also drew high profile actors. CBS used their best scriptwriters, allowing experimentation and personal style to be expressed. Louise Fletcher’s play “Sorry, Wrong Number” was produced eight times and heralded in 1947
as “Radio’s Most Perfect Script” in the *Saturday Review of Literature* where it declared “it has been repeated half a dozen times over a medium that is usually content to let a script pass into an instant oblivion after one performance” (Van Horne 51). With top sound engineers working in tandem with the other creative forces, *Suspense* produced quality mystery radio dramas for many years.

The series ran for twenty–two years on CBS. It earned respectable Hooper ratings and garnered several prestigious prizes for its excellence, including a Peabody award in 1947. Over its extensive run, 945 *Suspense* dramas were produced, the recordings of the majority of them now available to the public. Unfortunately, the scripts are limited in their availability, though a small number can be found on the Internet. The web site *The Generic Radio Workshop*, which was selected by the online Encyclopedia Britannica as one of the best sites on the Internet, “when reviewed for quality, accuracy of content, presentation and usability” (“Generic”), have the only offering of *Suspense* radio scripts, five in total. The web site claimed the following as well:

As periodic presenters of Old-Time Radio show recreations, we have long sought out scripts from the Golden Age of audio drama. (Roughly speaking 1930-1960.) They turn out to be few and far between. Why? Surely every radio thespian didn’t drop his or her pages onto the floor to be swept into the trash after the broadcast. And yet, few survive – if you want to explore OTR further than just listening to the shows themselves – if you want source material, you have a few options. You can transcribe the show yourself. A laborious process. (We’ve done it.) Or you can scour used bookstores to hunt down half-century old books on radio acting in hopes they have a script or two. (After years, we’ve located several dozen.) Or you can hang out here. We’re simply providing a scholarly resource in the best tradition of the Internet, making more available what once was scarce. (“Generic”)
The five scripts available are “Sorry, Wrong Number” (5/25/43), “The Man Who Thought He Was Edward G. Robinson” (10/17/46), “The House in Cypress Canyon” (12/5/46) “The Game” (3/15/55) and “The Zero Hour” (4/5/55). When deciding to undertake an analysis of both listening to and reading Suspense to see if they elicit a similar experience for the participant, it seemed logical to pick one episode for intense examination. The first criterion for choosing an exemplary episode involves deciding which one best illustrated the standards established early on by Suspense. John Dunning contends that it entered its “golden age” a short time into its run in 1943, under the direction of William Spier (On the Air 647). With his departure in 1948, Suspense saw its golden age come to an end shortly after, though it still attempted to retain its high standards. Most critics of American radio dramas would agree that choosing an episode from Spier’s time frame would encompass numerous qualities that made the program successful. The second criterion in choosing an episode is its array of radio and cultural codes. To reveal a variety of verbal and non-verbal radio codes, the episode should incorporate the two following factors: multiple speakers to discern vocal styling, and a balance of words, noise, silence and music to fully exploit the medium. Cultural codes will be inherent in any script chosen.

Two representative scripts are “The House in Cypress Canyon” and “The Man Who Thought He Was Edward G. Robinson”. Neither script, though, fully meets the criteria. The problem posed by “The House in Cypress Canyon” is the supernatural element of the story - a couple encounters a werewolf in their rented home - which is something that producer/director Spier avoided. He was, as Dunning claims, “one of radio’s most
flexible directors, and he occasionally broke his rules with great effect" (Tune in Yesterday 585). "The Man Who Thought He Was Edward G. Robinson" well represents Spier's ideal circumstances of an average man getting caught up in a difficult situation. The protagonist of the play enlists the help of his favorite tough-guy actor, Edward G. Robinson, to help kill his wife. The problem with using this script is more technical.

"The Man Who Thought He Was Edward G. Robinson" was produced twice for Suspense, once in 1946 under the direction of Spier and sponsored by Roma Wines; the other presentation was in 1948, produced by Anton M. Leder and sponsored by Autolite. The script that is available is of the original production in 1946, but the only obtainable recording is the 1948 production. The text of the play itself is identical in both; the discrepancy lies in the scripting for the sponsor. The earlier production, which is the script, promotes Roma Wines; the recording promotes Autolite spark plugs. Since the analysis to be undertaken examines whether reading the script brings forth a similar response as listening to the program, it would be advantageous for the script and the recording to be identical.

The script and subsequent recording of the program that best fits the initial criteria and whose flaw can best be overlooked is "The House in Cypress Canyon" written by Robert L. Richards and produced by William Spier. It aired on December 5, 1946 and starred Robert Taylor. The play begins with a real estate agent being given a manuscript found in the rafters of a house being built. He had put it aside for several months, rediscovering it the same day he puts up the finished house’s "For Rent" sign. He
consults a friend, a police officer, about its contents. Written by a man named Jim, it outlines his experience in the house he and his wife, Ellen, had rented.

The first day in the house, while unpacking, they find a solid, locked, closet door that they have no key for. That night they hear an animal-like wailing which they attribute to a tomcat or other such animal. Later, while in bed, they hear the noise again, this time more human than animal and discover it is coming from their closet along with blood oozing out onto the floor. They appeal to several people for help, but alas, nothing is found wrong with the house. After going to bed that evening Jim awakens to find his wife missing. He searches the house and finds her in the closet in a trace-like state. Jim discovers that his wife has been transformed into a werewolf. Ellen, though unaware of her new supernatural status, subsequently kills a milkman. Jim knows that if he does not stop her, the killing will continue. As he writes the last account, hearing the werewolf’s cries closing in on him, he seals the manuscript in an envelope, hoping someone will find it, “and give credence to these dark and terrible events”. Along with the manuscript, a newspaper clipping is found relating a case of murder in which a man named Jim has killed his wife and then himself. The real estate agent and his friend brush off the incident as a coincidence or a hoax. Convinced the account is untrue, the agent drives to the house to put up the “For Rent” sign. All is well, until a man and his wife appear, interested in renting the house. They introduce themselves – “My name is James A. Woods and this is my wife, Ellen”.

Cultural Codes

Because of the quality of its construction, listening to and reading an episode of *Suspense* is an exercise of the imagination like no other. The multiple radio and cultural codes embedded in it convey fully developed images, clear story lines, intriguing plot developments and allow the audience to engage their imagination from the opening credits. It is a cultural landmark within American radio dramas as Warren Bariess notes in his entry in *The Historical Dictionary of American Radio*: “The program’s continued success, decades after its initial run, suggests that it, along with a relatively few other series such as *The Shadow* and *The Lone Ranger*, will strongly influence how radio drama is imagined by generations who grew up during the television era” (379).

Analyzing the play through contemporary cultural codes offers insight as to why it remained popular and how it was constructed so an audience could relate to it. Cultural codes in the script read the same way that they are heard, though they best apply when their context is considered - it is necessary to be mindful of the cultural conditions of the era when reading it in a contemporary framework.

In conjunction with an analysis of how the codes function when we listen to the play, how they apply when we read the script will also be examined. Thus, when the term “audience” is employed, it refers to both listeners and readers; at times they will also be analyzed independently. To read this episode of *Suspense* effectively takes a comprehensive knowledge of the program’s conventions. An inexperienced approach to the text may not yield as intense a response in the imagination as that experienced when listening. Certain elements are innate to the program and are consistently repeated,
episode after episode. A familiarity with these would elicit a similar response to listening. The codes, both radio and cultural, embody these elements and contribute to the construction of the story in the imagination.³

The *Suspense* theme opens “The House in Cypress Canyon” - a single, sustained note, followed by the title of the program, two church bells sounding once each, and a swell of music. If readers are familiar with the theme, the imagination accompanies each musical tone and phrase in the introduction. Following this brief introduction a significant element of the program is revealed – the sponsor. Within one minute, Roma Wines is mentioned six times. Since radio was a medium for the masses, sponsors of radio dramas had an enormous impact on culture. Barfield’s book relates the following story, demonstrating how sponsors became interchangeable with their programs and ingrained in the culture of the time period:

I remember that ‘The Whistler’ was sponsored by the Signal Oil Company. It moved from station to station here in the Bay Area. I tried to get my dad to buy that kind of gas for our family car. I thought it would be easier than getting him to drink Roma Wine, from the sponsor of ‘Suspense.’ (168)

With the whole family gathered around the radio and subjected to the phrase “Roma Wines” at least ten times in a thirty-minute period, sponsors were guaranteed to get their product name across. They were also hoping to make their product a part of the radio listening culture. By commencing the program with their advertisement - “That’s R-O-M-A, Roma Wines, those better tasting California wines, enjoyed by more Americans

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³ Citation of the script and sound recording of “The House in Cypress Canyon” take on two different formats. References to the script have page numbers that coincide with the online version, while the sound recording has been transcribed by the author, using her own interpretation and punctuation.
than any other wine. Yes right now a glass would be very pleasant” - perhaps the sponsors were anticipating that the mention of the company’s name might inspire listeners to go to their fridge or pantry and pour themselves a glass to sip while listening, if not before the program, perhaps during, when the announcer reiterates the product, or at the end when Roma Wines is mentioned again. Sponsoring a show guaranteed that millions of listeners would hear a product’s name every week, rooting them in the social and community conscience.

*Suspense* capitalized on the radio drama objective of giving the audience an escape from their everyday reality. The program provided a situation that could be related to, but formatted it so that audience members would not be overwhelmed when the circumstances went out of control. “The House in Cypress Canyon” was such a play. It was accessible to the audience in many ways, but varied enough from daily life that it provided an escape. The characters all had occupations that were common in everyday society – real estate agent (Jerry), police detective (Sam), chemical engineer (Jim) and schoolteacher (Ellen). This positioned the audience so that the characters could be them, or someone they knew. The situation was one that was familiar - a man and his wife move to a new town for business and must find somewhere to live - it could happen to anyone. This was what audiences found so intriguing about *Suspense*. Then, as Dunning says, comes “the slow tightening of the knot” (*Tune in Yesterday* 585). In this particular play, the house is stalked by a werewolf, which in turn haunts its inhabitants, attacking and transforming the wife, Ellen, into one. Granted, the audience knew this could not happen, but that might not occur to them until after the program. Escaping was a
temporary state of daydreaming, a momentary avoidance of the anxieties of life through a foray into a different world.

Geographic cultural codes are prevalent in "The House in Cypress Canyon". While this code reminds the audience that they are part of a bigger community than the one they live in, it also seeks to expose them to places they have not been. "California" is repeated several times throughout the play, a reminder to them that they are no longer in their own community, unless they live there, in which case they can further relate to the location. It releases them from the four walls of their home and transports them to a different location. Consistent repetition of the locale maintains them in the new setting. The play makes numerous references to this new landscape to support the construction of it in the imagination, particularly of Cypress Canyon, where the home is located: "There's a view of the canyon through these front windows", "...a wildcat or mountain lion, or something. I hear they have them here", "noises up in these canyon at night", and "the curves of the canyon seemed endless". Through these clues, a listener or reader can create images of the setting, whether they have been there or not.

From the moment the drama begins, the foundation is laid for the audience's intellectual and creative imagination to be fully activated. The opening credits successfully lay the groundwork for the listener by introducing music, vocals and text as a precursor to the actual play. The music - low, slowly paced, foreboding notes, and church bells - signal the imagination that the coming events are serious, not light-hearted. The announcer's voice, belonging to Ken Niles, is stern and clear, with a hint of
immediacy – intimating that what is about to occur is significant and must be tended to immediately (“...after a word from our sponsor” – of course). The repetition of key words in the text and key phrases innate to the program reminds and reinforces what the audience have agreed to participate in – “Suspense”, “radio’s outstanding theatre of thrills” and “a remarkable tale of...Suspense”. For readers producing the play in their mind, the punctuating of the lines helps to set the opening pace and re-create the patterns of the announcer:

ANNOUNCER: Suspense! Radio’s Outstanding Theatre of Thrills is presented for your enjoyment by Roma Wines. That’s R-O-M-A, Roma Wines...(1)

In the script, each “Suspense” is followed by an exclamation mark and the spelling out of “R-O-M-A” mimics how it is heard on the program. Before the first word of the play has been spoken, the scene has been set in the imagination of the audience.

It is in the imagination that radio codes and cultural codes meet. Their relationship is reflected in Susan Douglas’ statement on the imagination of listeners:

...radio invited them to participate actively in the production of the show at hand. A listener could ornament a radio broadcast, whether it was a political speech, Inner Sanctum, Fibber McGee and Molly or the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, with appropriate visuals. This meant more than imagining the people and their expressions, the setting and its architecture and decor. It also meant that with words and tone of voice as your only clues (often reinforced by sound effects and music), you conjured up people’s emotional states, their motivations, the tenor of their interactions with others. (4)
As individual as a fingerprint, the images a person creates in their mind are stimulated by
the codes of radio. Cultural and radio codes do not function to the exclusion of each
other, rather there is a camaraderie that contributes to the popularity of radio dramas.

Radio Codes

When listening to and reading “The House in Cypress Canyon”, the play’s adherence
to the minutest details and subtleties of radio codes justifies critics’ accolades of
Suspense’s quality and superiority over other dramas. The codes of words, music, noise
and silence work in tandem to create a seamless drama, which situates the audience in a
perpetual state of...Suspense.

Words

The words of “The House in Cypress Canyon”, written by Robert L. Richards, take
into account the many complications that make writing for the radio a challenge. First,
the dialogue allows for the ear’s short term memory. If listeners were to see this play,
they would need only to observe it once to remember its main characters and themes, as
the mind retains visual information more easily. Since the ears cannot remember as
acutely as the eyes, the dialogue of radio plays must be repetitive with its crucial points.
One of the initial points vital to the unfolding story is that the manuscript the real estate
agent, Jerry, has received was from the beams of a house that had not been completed
yet. Listeners must clearly understand and remember this information for later, so it is
expounded upon and repeated by Jerry: “those places were started before the war and
never finished”, “before, when the men went back to work on it, about three months
...the foreman on the job brought me a shoebox that he had found up on a beam”,
“this thing was found in an unfinished house in Cypress Canyon, house was only just
started building”. Another detail that is repeated throughout the play is the location of the
story – California. The protagonist of the story, Jim, continually reminds listeners of
their location: “Three months ago I was ordered by my firm to take charge of a rather
minor project in Los Angeles, Hollywood to be exact”, “we’d been living in the cramped
quarters of one of those characteristic California motels”, “just an ordinary little
California house”, “I hear they have’em in California” and “two stalwart Los Angeles
policemen”. Location is important and bears repeating for two reasons – to support
listeners in their imagings (if they have ever been to or seen pictures of Southern
California) and repetition constantly re-situates them in the location.

Reading this code, in some instances in the script, is not the same as hearing it.
Because a visual element is now incorporated into the scenario, repetition functions
differently. Having a text to refer back to makes repeating important facts unnecessary
for readers, but it makes Jerry seem more desperate to convey this information.
Characters in theatrical play texts often repeat themselves because they believe they are
not being understood. This is the case with Jerry. By constantly reiterating that the
manuscript was found, “in an unfinished house in Cypress Canyon, house was only just
started building”(2), the text reveals him to be desperate to get his concerns across to his
friend. The code operates in a similar manner in the “California” references. As in
listening to the play, the repetition of location constantly reveals more of what the setting
may look like and re-situates readers there.
Words often reveal what the ear cannot see. The dialogue that is written must include all information that can be seen visually, and must relate it aurally. Similarly, readers must be presented with details in the dialogue, as they, too, must create images from what is read. The clichéd example is the ever-mocked radio phrase, “watch out, he’s got a gun” to indicate the actions of a character. While dramas often employ the obvious, such as the previous phrase, those more adept at writing will convey the details more subtly. Within minutes of meeting the first two characters in “The House in Cypress Canyon”, their occupations are not revealed directly, but in conversation: Sam asks Jerry, “How’s the real estate business?” and Jerry later states why he wanted to meet with Sam about the manuscript, “you’re a detective and you my pal”. Radio programs, which are mainly thirty minutes long, divulge just enough information in a short time as to stimulate the imagination, but not overload it. By learning just their occupations, listeners or readers can already begin to sketch a composite of the character. Later in the play, when Jim and his wife receive a tour of the house they may rent, details are given so the audience can create the house in their mind: “here’s your living room, furniture’s a little dusty”, “Over here is a little den, paneled you see” and “everything is all on one floor, you understand”. Reading these aspects in the text elicits the same creation of the house in the mind. The description builds the house layer upon layer so when events take place, like the blood oozing out from under the closet, the mind can refer back to the image it formed earlier.
Similar to words facilitating the construction of images in the listener's imagination, so, too, do the radio codes of speech and voice. For readers, though, this code does not apply. The voices they hear in their imagination to coincide with the characters in the text are of their own creation. Readers can, however, gather clues from the character descriptions in the dialogue. The difficulty arises when constructing voices for an abundance of male characters. What readers often lean on are stereotypical voices associated with certain characters, or voices they have heard before. An example is the character of Sam or the police officers. Readers, learning their occupation, may assign them a typical "police-officer" voice from television or radio – low, gruff, possibly with a New York accent. Or they may appropriate the voice from another character such as Joe Friday from Dragnet. Using the imagination differently from listening does not hinder the process, but guides it in a variety of directions.

The performer’s vocalizations heard in a radio drama can convey a multitude of information: elements such as physical characteristics, class, ethnicity, emotional and psychological states. Observing a character’s physical appearance on stage or in a movie leaves little work for the imagination. Their dress, build, mannerisms and ethnicity are presented within these visual mediums. Radio dramas, however, must construct these characteristics through voices alone. "The House in Cypress Canyon" has a total of eleven different character voices heard in its broadcast - ten male and one female. To develop a physical form for each character requires taking clues from the vocalizations, as well as verbal descriptions. How listeners choose to interpret the voice as a specific physical image varies, but the performance tries to impose some characteristics. For
example, the character of Sam, the detective introduced at the beginning of the play, employs vocal traits that a listener may associate with his position and stature. Already identified in the text as a police detective, his voice is deeper than the other character in the scene (Jerry) and his pacing is slower. The deep vocal range adopted by Sam is a standard interpretation to represent masculine authority. What he specifically looks like cannot be described, but some physicalities can be assumed — larger build, not slight; hard, not delicate features; dark, not fair complexion; possible facial hair to validate his masculinity. Being identified as a detective clothes him in the attire associated with a man of his title — suit, tie, badge, possible gun in side holster. The pacing of his speech gives insight into his personality, indicating that he is a man of patience, a quality essential to his job. The slow, thoughtful pace of his questions and responses denotes a gathering of facts before making assumptions. From his vocalizations alone, the listener’s imagination can assemble the character of Sam, complete with a physical appearance and personality.

Vocal differentiations become imperative in the scenes where more than one character of the same sex speaks. The inability to have large cast productions is one of radio drama’s disadvantages. What they lack in numbers, though, they make up for in creative vocalizations. Reading the script, however, simplifies this problem as the characters are each identified before they speak. Like the text of a theatrical play, the character’s name is located on the left side of the page in capitals, followed by a colon, indicating when they are speaking. Listeners must rely on the codes of voice and speech. The voices of all characters must have unique qualities that differentiate them from one
another. Two particular areas in “The House in Cypress Canyon” where overlapping voices could be a problem involve scenes with multiple male voices. After finding blood oozing out from under the closet door, Jim and Ellen enlist the help of two policemen. With Jim contributing to the dialogue as well, there are three male voices in the conversation. By now the listener is used to the voice of Jim and can recognize it, but the two policemen can pose a challenge. Their voices have different qualities, but they do not go to the extreme opposite of each other. The pitch of the second officer’s voice is slightly deeper than the second, and it is noticeably different when they speak back-to-back. The first officer speaks at a slightly slower pace and his voice is somewhat more jovial than the second.

Further along in the program, a situation arises where the milkman has been murdered out on the street; Jim comes upon the incident while a crowd gathers around. Two new voice are added for the scene, their lines overlapping. They have very short lines, but because they overlap each other and have different vocal pitches, it is understood that they are two separate men. When the policemen from earlier in the play arrive at this scene, they identify themselves to Jim, and their voices are recognizable from their previous appearance. These scenes present a challenge to listeners, while readers can easily identify who is speaking and when by the presentation in the text. By having characters employ a variety of vocal characteristics, though, and overlapping their lines, the play can incorporate multiple characters of the same sex in a single scene.
The final example of voice and speech codes communicates the emotional and psychological state of the protagonist, Jim, as well as his physical actions. Midway through the play, Jim awakens in the middle of the night to find his wife missing:

JIM: I opened the bedroom door and started through the house, putting on every light that I could find. There was not much to search, but I searched thoroughly, the living room, the kitchen, bathroom, den, even the garage. And all the time the dread of looking where I knew at last I must look.

The pace of this passage mimics the action of Jim’s searching throughout the house. Particularly rapid is the vocal presentation of the words “the living room, the kitchen, bathroom, den, even the garage”. What listeners envision is a panicked man, frantically running about his house, throwing open doors, turning on lights and searching for his wife. There is an undercurrent of panic in his voice, raising the pitch slightly. As he approaches the door to the closet, his vocal pace slows down and his pitch deepens; his apprehension about “looking where I knew at last I must look” is sensed.

Readers of this scene experience Jim’s emotional and psychological state through the words chosen to convey the images, and by the punctuation. The scene begins with the image of Jim in his bed:

JIM: (narrates) It was sometime after midnight when I was suddenly wide awake, staring into the darkness. In some way, I—I knew at once and instinctively what had awakened me. Ellen was not in her bed, nor in the room. The nameless thing I had feared gripped at my heart until I could scarcely breathe. (10-11)

The readers’ mind visualizes Jim, alone in the darkness, terrified to the point he cannot move. His breathing is shallow as he gathers his strength to look for his wife. The
powerful statement, “The nameless thing I had feared gripped at my heart” communicates
the intensity of the situation and Jim’s mounting fear. Later, as he searches for his wife,
the punctuation in the text illustrates his apprehension:

JIM: …I searched thoroughly, the-the living room, the kitchen, bathroom, den, even the garage...And, all the time, the dread of looking where I knew at last I must look. (11)

Listeners to this passage sense his urgency, readers perceive his apprehension. Both are accurate representations of Jim’s emotional state.

Jim’s final narration in the play finds him exhausted, yet resigned to his fate. His wife, who now has turned into a werewolf, will come for him tonight and he must take action. Listening to this, his voice is calm, as he has reconciled himself to the fact that he must stop his wife. His voice takes on a lower pitch, a slower pace, and his words are less articulate as he sits, “waiting for the end”. The only variation in vocalization comes when he describes the pain in his arm where his wife had bitten him earlier: “My arm is horribly swollen and turning black, but... that’s nothing”. As he describes the swelling, there is a quivering in his voice. The listeners hear this pain, perceiving a moment of vulnerability, a time when a normally stoic Jim is truly frightened. His emotional and psychological states are transparent in his voice as he waits for his eventual demise. Reading the passage, it is apparent that the pace has slowed as well. The phrases above read as if he has accepted his fate and will not fight what comes next.
Music

The music codes heard in “The House in Cypress Canyon” serve as an introduction and conclusion, a transitions in time and space, to punctuate and heighten tension and as background continuity. The importance of music to Suspense was recognized by producer William Spier, who was knowledgeable about all aspects of producing radio drama. Suspense composer Lucien Moraweck said of Spier, “He knows everything about music, sometimes he even knows more than the musician” (On The Air 647). Dunning goes on to explain, “Each week Spier and Moraweck conferred over the music for the coming broadcast. Spier would plot it out, giving each small piece of score a job to perform” (647). Each segment of music in the drama was carefully considered as to its suitability for the task. Transitional music was subtle and not overwhelming, mood music accurately reflected the previous events while foreshadowing what was to come, and music to heighten tension did so at a steady pace.

The first piece of music heard on Suspense is the introduction. As stated earlier, it begins with a single note, followed by a musical swell and the ringing of two church bells. The music is as familiar as the phrase “...and now, a tale well calculated to keep you in...Suspense!” The introductory theme quickly establishes the mood, somber yet enthralling, shifting listeners into the proper frame of mind to become engaged with the program. Over its history, the introductory theme of the program remained constant, easily recognized from its opening note. Equally as interesting as the introduction, is the concluding music. It underscores the closing credits combining the signature church bells with the slow drone of a cello. As the program draws to a close the music lingers,
which is the hope of the producer for the listeners – that they will take time to ponder what they have heard, re-visit the story in their minds and anticipate next week’s episode.

The music codes read in the play are only found in the musical bridges acknowledged in the script. If the readers are familiar with the music that introduces and concludes each Suspense program, though, they may include them. The introduction could play in the readers’ imagination under the announcer’s dialogue written in the script, while the concluding music would play under Ken Niles’ closing remarks:

KEN NILES: Produced by William Spier for the Roma Wine Company of Fresno, California. This is CBS, the Columbia Broadcasting System.

Experienced listeners reading the script would know that the droning cello plays under the final words, while the church bells ring after the last word is spoken. The inexperienced readers would forgo the music altogether until the first musical bridge is encountered.

Throughout the play, when listened to and read, transitions in location and time are marked by musical bridges. The purpose of this is two-fold. First, it is an indicator for the audience that the previous scene is complete. When listening, the music often fades in under the final words of the dialogue to not break the continuity of the play. It provides a seamless transition that does not cause a disruption in their imagination. The music is also appropriate to the mood of the scene. In the initial stages of the play, Jim and Ellen drive past a house with a “For Rent” sign out front. They are in desperate need
of housing, but debate whether this house is too good to be true. They hesitate, but decide to turn back for further investigation:

ELLEN: Oh darling, come on, cheer up, how do you know? Maybe our luck has changed. Maybe fate’s going to give us a nice new house for Christmas. (Musical bridge)

The music that fills the transition as they drive to the house uses clarinets and violins in an optimistic crescendo. It reinforces the listeners' interpretation of the scene, yet does not disrupt their focus. If a musical transition used inappropriate music (too loud, too sharp, wrong mood) the imagination could disengage, and the dream-like state of listening to radio dramas could be broken. When reading the script, encountering the musical bridge situates readers as producers and musical arrangers. Taking clues from the previous scene, readers can assemble appropriate musical accompaniment. For the scene mentioned previously, the text offers key phrases such as “maybe our luck’s changed” to indicate the optimistic mood of Jim and Ellen and the musical bridge that should follow. The minds of the readers will then play music to suit the mood.

Musical transitions read and heard in the play also indicate a change in time and/or location. They are effectively placed within several of Jim’s narrative monologues to signal the passing of time, usually several hours. For instance, the following excerpt from Jim’s narration:

JIM: Ellen seemed tired and listless. Several times during the day I noticed her washing her hands with a brush, scrubbing the one that had touched the blood. That night we each took a sleeping pill and went to bed. (Musical bridge)
It was sometime after midnight when I was suddenly wide-awake and staring into the darkness. In some way I knew at once and instinctively what had awakened me.

It is understood by the audience that Jim remains in his home, but that time has passed while he slept. For the listener, the music can highlight the action that is taking place within this transition as well. The above musical bridge represents a travel in time period; so, too, does the choice of music. Harp strings strum in a repetitive, swirling pattern symbolize this passage of time. In addition to time, music signals a change in location. Musical bridges occur as Jim and Ellen move from the real estate office to the house to view it, and as Jim returns home from visiting the doctor to look at his arm, and after he leaves the scene where the dead milkman lay. The music chosen for these transitions, by the composer and the reader, maintains the mood of the play and the audience’s imagination.

Background, or incidental, music fulfills a variety of functions in the play, contributing a significant dramatic element to the listening experience. What is interesting about this type of music is that the listeners sometimes do not hear it at all. Similar to the background music while shopping, or the musical score under the dialogue of a movie, incidental music becomes a part of the moment, not separate from it. Underscoring segments of the dialogue, music can add tension to further heighten the moment. As Jim narrates throughout the play, there is a musical score that complements his emotions of the moment. The low notes of a cello, similar to the introduction and conclusion, reinforce the tone and mood of the story he is relating. This experience, unfortunately, is not replicated when reading the script. The readers do not have a
continuous soundtrack playing, and is only stimulated to add music to the play when
dictated in the script. The readers, though, can share in the moments of high intensity
through the musical bridges. Written into the script and in the recording of the play,
these moments set in motion a musical swell that crescendos to reinforce the tension
within the audience. The following scene exemplifies how music in the play punctuates
the moment:

ELLEN: Jim...there's...there's something wet...
JIM: What? Wet?
ELLEN: Running from under the closet door...sticky.
JIM: Ellen don't...don't touch it
ELLEN: I had to...Jim...it's blood.
(Musical bridge)

When heard, the musical bridge (high-pitched violins) acts as a literary exclamation mark
to the discovery of the blood. If the listeners are not sufficiently terrorized by the blood,
the music should push them to that point. The readers, through the punctuation in the
scene, sense Ellen's apprehension and subsequent horror at discovering what the
substance is. The musical bridge played in the imagination should emphasize and
enhance the emotions. Musical codes in the play work within the audience's imagination
to support the images produced by the verbal codes.

Silence

The code of silence is not frequently employed either in listening to or reading "The
House In Cypress Canyon", but tempering its usage makes the silent moments more
significant. The majority of boundary demarcations in the recording are filled by music,
using the code to heighten and enforce mood and emotions. Silence is found most often within the dialogue itself, as characters struggle to tell an unbelievable and startling story. When listening to the program, silence is represented by dead air, when reading the script, by punctuation, mainly ellipsis. The play is divided into three segments, each paced slightly differently in the recording. The opening and closing involve Jerry relating the story of the manuscript to his friend Sam. The middle is the re-enactment of the manuscript story in the voice of Jim, the man who supposedly wrote it. The pace of the entire play is quick because of the characters’ immediate need to tell the story. By disclosing this information, they hope to “give credence” to the events that occur. In the opening segment of the recording, Jerry needs the advice of his friend. They greet each other with the usual pleasantries, but there is a sense of urgency, perceived by the listeners, as the characters overlap their lines:

SAM: Merry Christmas Jerry. How’s the real estate business?
JERRY: Kind of early with your greeting, aren’t you Sam?
SAM: Well I gotta get them in sometime. I may not see you again until next Christmas.
JERRY: If this real estate racket gets any crazier I’ll be dead by next Christmas.
SAM: (Laughs)
JERRY: I’m glad you could get up here though, Sam.
SAM: What’s on your mind Jerry?
JERRY: Uh…you’ll…you’ll probably shoot me when you hear it Sam, because I am probably nuts, but…but doggone it, you’re a detective and you’re my pal, and…I just had to tell somebody.
SAM: Well, you sound like it’s serious.
JERRY: That’s just it, I don’t know what it is, Sam, but…

In this passage from the play, the listeners can sense Jerry’s urgency to relay the information. The lines are delivered over each other and the gaps that might be filled by silence are filled by minor vocalizations from the characters. Because of this constant
stream of sound, the silences that do emerge are more poignant and telling. This pace, though, is innate to the recording. Reading the play does not elicit it or the urgency to tell. Because of its format, a quick pace cannot be deciphered in the text unless characters’ lines overlap, which they rarely do. What the script and the recording do convey is Jerry’s hesitation to tell, in the recording indicated by pauses, in the text by ellipsis. Perhaps he worries his friend may not believe him, or may question his sanity. Whatever his motivation, the subtle pauses within his dialogue entice the audience to pay careful attention to what he has to say.

The pace of the middle section, Jim’s account of what happened, builds through to a climax that occurs as he realizes his fate and that of his wife. Both approaches to the play function similarly, though reading the script does not accurately portray the pacing. Silences are interjected at key moments, short pauses in the momentum build anticipation within the audience. As with the first section, activity and dialogue overlap each other to maintain pace, thus highlighting the significance of when the pace is broken. While unpacking late at night in their new home, Jim and Ellen hear an animal-like cry outside. They are slightly alarmed, but continue about their business. When the cry becomes louder and more human-like, their uneasiness and trepidation are apparent in their dialogue:

SFX: (Loud, animal/human cry in the distance)
ELLEN: Jim...
JIM: Some tomcat.
ELLEN: Jim, it...sounded...in the house.
JIM: How could it be in the house Ellen? We’ve been over every inch of the house.
ELLEN: Except...that closet.
Along with the characters, the audience, influenced by the pausing in dialogue, begin to realize that something is not right with the house. In the moment between Ellen’s final words, the imagination works at its peak to compensate for what it cannot see, providing conclusions as to what follows “except...”. When Ellen confesses her fear of “…that closet”, it becomes the porthole to many unsavory things in the audience’s mind. As she quickly contemplates what may be behind the closet door, so does the audience. The developing pace of this section grasps the imagination of the audience early on, pausing only briefly to build anticipation for what may come.

The longest and most intense pause comes between the middle and final sections in the recording alone, as the transition is made back to Jerry reading the story to Sam:

JIM: As for myself, I feel no longer any fear or even sorrow, only the desire that the end and the thing that I must do, may come soon. And it will be soon, I know.
SFX: (Door creaking open)
JIM: Yes, for there is someone at the door.
SFX: (Loud, human/animal cry)
(Musical bridge)
JERRY: ...someone at the door. Huh, what do you make of it Sam?

The intense musical bridge fades out, and there is silence for five seconds. The pause is perfectly balanced in length - long enough to create countless scenarios of Jim’s demise, yet short enough for the listeners to remain engaged with the story. It is also a moment for them to catch their breath, thinking they have just surmounted the climax of the story. When Jerry fades in after the silence, reading the remainder of the story to Sam, the steady pace of the opening is revisited. The silences in this play provide the listeners with a moment to investigate the various alternatives of what may be occurring in the
silence. Clues given before the pause facilitate this creation in the imagination. The silences also present fleeting moments of anticipation, a time to briefly question what has happened and predict what may happen next.

**Noise**

Sound effects, a noise code of radio, when used effectively, are scarcely used at all in this radio play. By using them economically, confusion does not result when the listeners try to differentiate between sounds. “The House in Cypress Canyon” abides strictly by this rule, employing effects minimally, all symbolic in nature. The play opens with the roar of thunder. Symbolically, this effect conveys a range of meanings, but within this play, its purpose is very clear. Each time the thunder occurs, five times in total, it reinforces the ominous atmosphere that runs throughout the play. It also indicates stormy weather, which in turn sets the sinister mood. There are two other predominant sound effects, the opening and closing of doors and the human/animal cry. The sound of the doors is important in this non-visual medium because it takes the place of exits and entrances as seen on stage or in the movies. It conveys the information that additional characters are joining or leaving the scene without writing it into the dialogue. Also, the sound gives clues as to the location. Listeners can surmise that the scene is taking place within a building or just outside of one. Details in the dialogue will expound on the exact location, but the effect begins the imaging.

The dialogue begins after the door opens as Sam enters Jerry’s real estate office. He greets Jerry, then the door is closed. Without the effects, the listeners may be uncertain
as to the location. If the scene had commenced with his greeting, it could be assumed that they were already in the same room or building. The effect is important to the scene, because Jerry has specifically asked Sam to come and see him to discuss the manuscript he has found. There has also just been a roar of thunder. The door opening and closing indicates to the audience that they are indoors and not having the conversation outside in the stormy weather. This is a small detail, but establishing the physicalities of the scene through sound effects can direct the listeners’ attention to more important information found in the dialogue. The opening or closing of a door is such a simple sound, yet it communicates a great amount of information in a short amount of time. In the listeners’ imagination, the noise is not a focal point, but contributes to the flow of action through the scene.

The script contains, as does the recording, minimal sound effects for the same reason. A text that presents too many effects would clutter the mind, as hearing too many clutters the ear. What is challenging when reading the text is choosing an appropriate sound accompaniment. Within the text, though, there are clues. The following passage provides several indications of what the effects may sound like:

AGENT: Got this key in the mail along with the authorization to rent. Only one there is. Of course, you can have a duplicate made.
SOUND: (Key JIGGLES in the lock.)
AGENT: Seems to stick a little.
SOUND: (The door UNLOCKS.)
AGENT: Oh, well, there it is.
SOUND: (The hinges of the door CREAK noisily as it opens.)
ELLEN: Doesn’t sound as though that door has ever been opened.
AGENT: Well, a little oil on the hinges’ll fix that all right.
ELLEN: Oh, sure.
SOUND: (Jim, Ellen and the agent WALK around the house.) (4)
These clues assist the readers in producing appropriate imagings in the mind. If the clues are not enough help, the readers can always appropriate sounds they have heard on the radio, or television and the movies. However, these references are not the only ones available. Unlike listening to the play, when we read it, the sounds the imagination employs may be iconic and not symbolic. For example, the thunder roaring at the beginning can be, in the readers' mind, the actual sound of thunder, and not a representation. Sound effects are the only noise code that is inherent in the script. Acoustics and perspectives are a feature limited to the recording.

The human/animal cry situates itself in all three "noise" categories, an effect and an excellent example of acoustics and perspective. The sound, first heard while Jim and Ellen are unpacking the first night in their rented home, is initially in the far distance and distinctly animal-like. The second time it is heard, a few minutes later, it is closer, with human characteristics. The final occurrence that evening wakes them from their sleep, its proximity as close as in their room. Acoustics and perspectives make the sound more realistic by adding dimensions to the effect. The first cry, though far off, echoes slightly. The second time it is heard, it reverberates off the walls of the canyon. The appearance of the sound a third time is as loud, but does not echo as much, giving the impression it is in a more confined space, perhaps the house. With little indication in the dialogue, the listener can gauge that the sound is moving closer. A similar scenario occurs at the end of the middle segment, as Jim waits for Ellen, now a werewolf, to reappear. Three times the horrid cry is heard, each time drawing closer in proximity. Acoustics and
perspectives aid in creating the physical scene in the listeners’ imagination, though they draw little attention to themselves as a technique of the production.

Subsequent scenes use acoustics and perspectives to convey a sense of space. At one point, Jim and Ellen are having a conversation in two different rooms – Ellen is in the bedroom, Jim in the bathroom. The scene is set in the bathroom, with Jim’s voice in the foreground. The conversation continues, Ellen’s voice quieter and more muted than Jim’s, his voice with a slight echo as it bounces off the tiles and porcelain of the bathroom. The listeners can perfectly create the image of the two completing their tasks in separate spaces of the house. Ellen’s voice softens even further, the listeners assuming she has gone into yet another, more distant room. The “noise” of radio, when used effectively, is not noticed at all. It provides the backdrop for the action to occur in the dialogue.
CONCLUSION

The popularity of American radio dramas cannot be explained by theory alone. The medium appeared in American culture at the optimum moment, in the midst of a depressed economic time. Radio dramas offered entertainment that could be accessed by anyone, didn’t require leaving home, and was an activity that could be enjoyed by the whole family. These are the keys to its popularity. What cultural indicators reveal are what radio dramas provided that the audience could relate to – stories that made them laugh, cry and experience every emotion in between. They brought families and communities together. Radio dramas connected people across the vast territory, contributing to citizens’s sense of themselves as part of the national landscape.

Exploring radio theory offers a variety of insights as to how dramas are constructed, providing a template for measuring and analyzing the quality of programming. The medium is a “blind” one, but the ear functions at peak performance under these conditions. Supporting the ears is the imagination, and both work in tandem to produce the visual element that make the blind able to see. What radio theory still takes for granted, though, is the process for dispelling the “blind” label. The question remains as to what the first listeners of radio visualized in their minds, minds that were not tainted by the mass visual media of contemporary society. It can only be assumed that the codes of radio functioned at peak performance to convey the images, and the measure of this success is in the millions of listeners who tuned in daily from the first moments of radio’s inception.
Approaching the texts of American radio dramas is the next step in the relationship with these plays, for fans and for academics. The fan is responsible for keeping the scripts alive and circulating. The academic is responsible for bringing them out of the corner and into the light of day. An institution that affected the daily lives of so many needs to be examined further, but as an independent contributor, not as a footnote to the BBC. It is time that American radio dramas, popular and serious, received academic attention, a validation for those who relied on them so heavily before the years of television, blockbuster movies and the World Wide Web.

Another factor in the limited academic pursuit is the current realm where the majority of information is available – the Internet. A variety of web sites dedicated to the survival of American radio dramas exist. Academics in the fields of Theatre and English observe American radio dramas, a form of popular media, maintained through another form of popular media, the Internet. They assume, then, that any academic pursuit should be left to media theorists, the most appropriate field. In doing so, there are many aspects of the medium that go unaddressed – how do American radio scripts situate themselves as literature, what role do radio plays have in relation to theatre and how can the two fields collaborate to bring attention to these unanswered questions? Until the fields of academia open themselves up to these possibilities, American radio dramas will remain a pop culture phenomenon, explored only as precursor to the television era and always with a sigh of nostalgia for “the good old days”.
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