

Radio

Between text and sound

Pim Verhulst

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/chlel.xxxv.36ver>

 Available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.

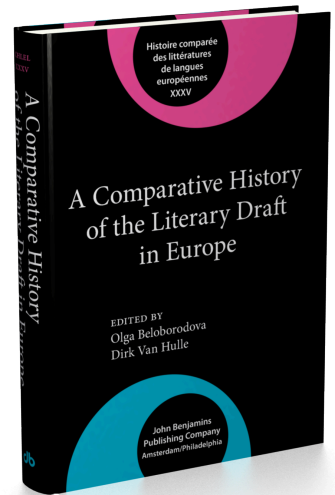
Pages 514–526 of

A Comparative History of the Literary Draft in Europe

Edited by Olga Beloborodova and Dirk Van Hulle

[Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages, XXXV]

2024. xiv, 550 pp.



© John Benjamins B.V. / Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material, beyond the permissions granted by the Open Access license, written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

For further information, please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website at benjamins.com/rights

2.3.5 Radio

Between text and sound

Pim Verhulst

After contextualising the radio medium in relation to theatre, television and film, and then distinguishing between different types of radio drama, this chapter argues that radio plays are a hybrid (text/sound) art form, as opposed to a “purely acoustic” one, that needs to be researched from an archival perspective, which includes not only drafts, production scripts and recordings, but also ancillary materials such as letters and documents preserved at broadcasting services. In order to illustrate this point, it uses genetic criticism as a methodological framework and four case studies broadcast on the various networks of the BBC: Dylan Thomas’s *Under Milk Wood* (1954), Harold Pinter’s *A Slight Ache* (1959), Caryl Churchill’s *Identical Twins* (1968) and Andrew Sachs’s *The Revenge* (1978).

Keywords: genetic criticism, radio drama, radio play, feature, transmediality, BBC, Dylan Thomas, Harold Pinter, Caryl Churchill, Andrew Sachs

Genetic criticism and radio drama

According to French genetic critic Daniel Ferrer, in his book *Logiques du brouillon*, “Le brouillon n’est pas une oeuvre, mais un protocole opératoire en vue de la réalisation d’une oeuvre” [A literary manuscript is not a text but a protocol for making a text] (2011: 43). While this logic applies to prose and poems, because these genres are commonly published as books, it becomes more problematic for drama. Especially in the case of broadcast media, we can ask the question: what exactly is the manuscript of a radio play a protocol for? On the one hand, radio drama is meant to be heard by listeners on a “wireless” receiver, which is the main reason why some critics regard the art form – somewhat misleadingly – as “purely acoustic” (Lutostański 2016: 120) or “purely aural” (Ryan 2021: 223) and are reluctant to qualify it as “literature” (see Huwiler 2005). On the other hand, all radio plays are either performed live or – increasingly since the postwar period – pre-recorded from a production script, based on an author’s clean copy, which in turn is preceded by multiple working drafts that may encompass notes, manuscripts, typescripts, etc. Only a very small number of plays find their way into print, so most often the radio premiere, followed by one or more “repeats” when a production is successful, signify their only public appearance. Some broadcasts are distributed commercially on LP, cassette, CD or, more commonly nowadays, the Internet, but the majority of scripts and audio recordings are left to gather dust in the archives of broadcasting services. This makes radio an elusive medium, or, as Pamela Hansford Johnson described it, “like shouting into a deep hole in the ground” (qtd in Whitehead 1989: 86).

Unlike what the vocal aspect of this metaphor suggests, radio drama is not a wholly immaterial or ethereal art form. It would be more accurate to consider the genre as “hybrid” or “trans-medial”, one that exists in both text *and* sound, moving gradually from one state into the other. This evolution also brings about a shift in authority. As Kate Whitehead points out, “once a script has been handed to a producer it becomes a team effort; the writer must to some extent bow to the judgment of the professional broadcaster” (1989: 39). After the relatively solitary act of writing – although authors may already be coached or receive feedback at this stage, depending on their level of experience with the medium – a radio play makes its way into the more collaborative realm of production. This always involves a producer – not called director, as in television, film or theatre – but also one or more technicians, depending on the sound design, a composer, if music is involved, and actors to play the parts. The broadcasting script serves as a watershed between the two levels: based on an authorial version, yet typed up by someone else, often a secretary. This document may then be further annotated by actors or producers, sometimes surviving in multiple copies. Authors can still be involved at this stage, either by attending rehearsal sessions or through correspondence, which makes the archives of broadcasting services such a rich source of information, but they rarely produce their own radio plays because they lack the technical knowhow – unless they are full-time employees of a broadcasting service. Whereas scripts usually remain the intellectual property of an author, the ownership of the production is shared with the broadcasting institution, and this copyright status complicates the public circulation of radio drama.

Because historically – and particularly in Europe before the rise of commercial radio, though not in the USA – broadcasters were state-funded, not owned by studios, radio drama lacks a tradition of dissemination similar to VHS, DVD and Blu-Ray for cinema or television, and it is just finding its way to streaming services like Audible or Spotify. Stage productions are now increasingly filmed and shared on theatre companies’ own platforms or in databases such as Drama Online, but they freeze in time a performance that is transient, whereas radio plays are often recorded only once and played back repeatedly. Some are remade or existing works are newly adapted for the medium, and while this creates a plurality of versions, the recordings themselves are more enduring or at least less fleeting than stage performance, so in this respect radio drama is akin to television or film. Similar to theatre, scriptwriters are also typically seen and acknowledged as the authors of a radio play, unlike screenwriters of films and – to a lesser extent – television drama, where directors usually have this status, especially in the case of “auteur cinema”, mainly because the entire process from page to screen requires greater transformation and the visual aspect prevails. Yet as with cinematographers in film, the contributions of producers and sound engineers to radio drama are often underplayed.

Like those related media and art forms, radio plays stretch some basic concepts and questions of genetic criticism. What is the *bon-à-tirer* or “pass for press” moment for a genre that rarely appears in print and, consequently, when does its *epigenesis*, or “the continuation of its genesis after publication”, begin (Van Hulle 2014: 14)? Because all radio drama is given a broadcast but not necessarily published, one could argue that its “premiere” on the air comes to signify the moment of transition from the private into the public sphere, with publication as a

book – if at all – trailing behind and constituting radio drama's genetic afterlife. Again, the situation is perhaps not so different as that of stage plays, the exception being that many more find their way into print, though by no means all. Asking the question if genetic criticism can be applied to the performing arts, Jean-Louis Lebrave speaks of a "twofold genetic process" characterised by an "intertwining of text genesis and performance genesis" (2009: 78, 72). In theatre, "the creative process is constantly geared toward performance, even at the early stage of textualization" (77), meaning stage directions and authorial notes on acting, blocking, etc. Much the same holds true for radio drama, except "the stability and durability of texts and the precariousness of performance", owing to "the inescapably ephemeral nature of theater" (78). Lebrave argues that "the necessary incompleteness of theatrical works condemns any form of theatrical genetic criticism to remain incomplete" and thus that "the existence of the finished work as a fully autonomous object[, granting the status of *avant-texte* to the traces of the creating process, makes genetic criticism possible" (80). Then again, it can be deceptive to regard the recording of a radio play as the "complete" or "finished" object, which prompts the question what its "*avant-texte*" or "genetic dossier" consists of exactly. So, even though radio shares some characteristics with theatre, film and television, it does not fully coincide with any of these and also has unique traits.

I have been using the terms "radio play" and "radio drama" interchangeably, but that is not entirely accurate. So, before we proceed with our case studies to illustrate some of the issues that have been raised above, a few terminological clarifications are in order. Different national broadcasting contexts have varying traditions and names for their radiophonic output. The 1920s and 1930s saw a proliferation of labels to describe or classify the types of fictional broadcasts that could be heard on early radio (see Gabriel 2023), which after the war usually consolidated into oppositional pairs. In Germany, for example, the traditional *Hörspiel* was fenced off from the more unconventional *O-Ton* and *Neue Hörspiel* (see Cory 1992). A main distinguishing factor between these subgenres is always their distance from theatre towards a new, quintessentially radiophonic form of expression that foregrounds sound, music and even the musical treatment of sound or language, which is reflected in terms like *radiodramma* and *arte radiofonica* (see De Benedictis 2004) or radio drama and radiophonic art, the latter also called *ars acustica* (see Sánchez Cardona 2020). In the context of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), from which all my examples are taken, critics generally distinguish the "radio play" from the "feature", which could be subsumed under the umbrella term of "radio drama". BBC producer Douglas Cleverdon has usefully defined the two as follows:

A radio play is a dramatic work deriving from the tradition of the theatre, but conceived in terms of radio. A radio feature is, roughly, any constructed programme (that is, other than news bulletins, racing commentaries, and so forth) that derives from the technical apparatus of radio (microphone, control-panel, recording gear, loud-speaker). It can combine any sound elements – words, music, sound effects, in any form or mixture of forms – documentary, actuality, dramatized, poetic, musico-dramatic. It has no rules determining what can or cannot be done. And though it may be in dramatic form, it has no need of a dramatic plot.

(1969: 17)

While features are generally factual, they use elements derived from fiction. This sets them apart from the “documentary”, which since the 1960s has been “morphing and hybridising into new and dynamic forms of contemporary radio practice” (Madsen 2010: 391). Another subgenre is the “radiophonic poem”, the most famous example of which is likely Frederik Bradnum’s *Private Dreams and Public Nightmares* (1957). Intended to showcase radio’s technological possibilities, on the borderline of radiophonic art and electroacoustic music, “[i]t was produced through close collaboration between the author, producer, actors and sound team” (Eichenberger 2021: 57). To express the “three roles that represent the inner voices of a sleeping person during a nightmare: the dozing, the anxious and the rational self”, voiced by both men and women, the script lists the text of Bradnum’s poem on the right-hand side and impressionistic descriptions of the desired sound effects on the left, in two columns, further annotated by hand (59). Quite tellingly, it has never been published. Also, only one volume of BBC features ever appeared in print, producer Laurence Gilliam stating in the introduction:

It may at first seem perverse to attempt to transform material originally created to be heard into material to be read. [...] There seemed little point in reprinting these programmes in their original radio scenario form, as prepared for the actors and producers. All the pieces printed here have been rewritten by their original authors at considerably shorter length than the original broadcast. It is hoped that the essence of each has been retained.

(1950: 13)

As is suggested by Gilliam, publishing a feature as text requires significant adaptation of the script for the purpose of reading instead of listening, which distances it from the recording or broadcast that seems to be its ideal embodiment.

For this reason, and also for the fact that they constitute the majority of the BBC’s original output over the years, excluding adaptations, my chapter focuses on case studies of radio plays – although the distinction with features became obsolete during the 1960s, as the Feature Department was dissolved and the two genres merged increasingly. Dylan Thomas’s *Under Milk Wood* (1954) is an early example of this trend, a mongrel form of “feature drama” or “A Play for Voices”, as per its subtitle. As much as it resists generic definition, it thwarts publication, similar to Harold Pinter’s *A Slight Ache* (1959), so that researching the seemingly straightforward or conventional genre of the radio play is not without pitfalls, even when draft versions, published editions and recordings are (publicly) available. *Identical Twins* (1968) by Caryl Churchill and *The Revenge* (1978) by Andrew Sachs exemplify the standard situation of most radio drama: unpublished as a text or recording – commercially, at least, but sometimes circulating on the internet – they live on as archival artefacts, taking the form of broadcasting scripts, tape reels, discs or audio files, when the original has been digitised. For Churchill and Sachs we currently have no access to their private papers. So, until these come into the public domain, the scripts and audio materials at the BBC Written Archives (WAC) in Caversham, Reading, as well as the BBC Sound Archive at the British Library (BL) in London, are two invaluable resources for genetic research.

I end my case studies deliberately in the 1980s. Around this point in time, the use of computers, email, the Internet and digital formats like mp3s, podcasts or streaming services such as BBC's iPlayer began to drastically reshape the broadcasting landscape, and thus the archival nature of radio studies. Audiobooks have likewise assimilated many of radio drama's key components, such as voice acting, music and sound effects (see Rubery 2016). This has given rise to the term "audio drama", which encompasses a much more diversified range of sound-based cultural expression not necessarily broadcast on radio in the traditional sense.

Dylan Thomas – *Under Milk Wood* (1954)

Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*, a loosely structured polyphonic collage of thoughts and conversations set in a fictional Welsh seaside town called "Llareggub", is probably the best-known original radio play in the English language. It is also one of the most accessible ones for readers and listeners. Ever since the first edition by J.M. Dent came out in 1954, selling an impressive "13,000 copies in Britain in its first month, and over 53,000 in its first year" (Lycett 2004: 442), it has never been out of print and various audio recordings exist on LP and CD. Still, in spite of its fame and commercial success, the textual history of *Under Milk Wood* is complicated and controversial. Going back to ideas that Thomas started mentioning to some of his friends in the 1930s, first envisioned as prose and then as theatre, it did not take shape as a radio play until the 1940s, after he had done a few successful short documentary-style features for the BBC, which landed him an invitation to write a longer work of fiction for radio. The going was slow at first, Thomas struggling particularly with finding a narrative structure, largely due to his inexperience with devising sustained plots as a writer of mostly stories and poems. Yet, in late 1950, he submitted to Douglas Cleverdon a (still unfinished) thirty-nine-page fair copy manuscript, which in October 1951 he also forwarded to Princess Marguerite Caetani, who in February 1952 published it in her journal *Botteghe Oscure* under the preliminary title "Llareggub: A Piece for Radio Perhaps".

This adverb hints at the precariousness of the project ever seeing completion, in view of the writer's block that Thomas was experiencing, as much as it conveys uncertainty about its intended genre or medium. Around the same time, he started touring the United States, where in May 1953 he took part in the first of several staged readings from *Under Milk Wood*. As the text written so far had originally been conceived for radio, Thomas revised it significantly when completing the second half, to better suit its dramatic performance. This entailed that "many of the sound effects (which in radio would have proved most evocative) were deleted or turned into narration" (Cleverdon 1969: 31), so the actors would not have to constantly read out the audio cues or "stage directions" – a term common in radio parlance, although it is an obvious misnomer (see Hauthal 2021). As a result of these interventions, the play had become much more theatrical than radiophonic, which Thomas realised all too well, promising John Malcolm Brinnin on 16 June 1953 that he would soon "revise Milk Wood for publication and broadcasting" (Thomas 1966: 33). After another staging in Wales, and ahead of a second tour in the USA that featured two more readings, an updated version of *Under Milk Wood* reached Cleverdon in

October 1953 – in fact, he recovered it from the floor of a pub where Thomas had “misplaced” it. Far from a “final” version, the text appeared to be in an “extremely disordered state” (Cleverdon 1969: 31), consisting of new fair copy manuscript and typescript bits – not all typed by Thomas and partially overlapping – with ink and pencil annotations, as well as handwritten addenda to chase up further, held together with Sellotape. Because this was Thomas’s only copy of the script, he needed it back before departing to New York, so a BBC typist made duplicates. To complicate matters even more, Thomas continued to tinker with the script in the States, further “replacing some sound effects by narration, and adding some production notes” (39). Finally, several actors’ copies circulated with different emendations that may not all have been authorised, in addition to a corrected script that was put together by Elizabeth Reitell and Ruthven Todd from the author’s working draft.

Thomas’s sudden passing on 9 November 1953 left Cleverdon with the task of having to piece together a production script from the textual mess that *Under Milk Wood* had by now become. He decided to base himself on the BBC script made prior to Thomas’s leaving for New York, while incorporating the corrections on the Reitell/Todd script. Daniel Jones, the composer of the songs for the radio play, was appointed as the literary trustee and editor of the published edition by Dent, but he eventually decided to follow Cleverdon’s script almost to the letter. Still, it cannot be considered the “final” version of the radio play, and this for a number of reasons: it was not compiled by the author himself and partially based on scripts that others had typed, marred by intractable transmission errors; it was largely repurposed for theatrical performance, not radio; Reitell and Todd added a note saying that “Dylan intended to work over the play again before it was printed” (qtd in Cleverdon 1969: 41); and Thomas sent another abridged version, with minor revisions, to the magazine *Mademoiselle*, where it appeared in February 1954. Looking back on his experience, Cleverdon wrote:

I think I ought to then have radically revised the manuscript for broadcasting, restoring the radio elements and deleting the narrative insertions; but at the time I did not realize the extent of the alterations involved in the stage-readings; and I was also respectfully reluctant to alter any of Dylan’s words. (42)

Others have been less prudent. While the content of the radio play does not differ much, for their so-called “definitive edition” of *Under Milk Wood*, first released in 1995 to supplant the edition by Dent, Walford Davies and Ralph Maud made a peculiar alteration that affected the entire text. They merged into one single entity the two narrators, “First Voice” and “Second Voice”, who are responsible for transitioning between the individual voices of the characters – yet they still retained the name of “First Voice”, an awkward choice in absence of a second one. Davies and Maud motivated their decision as follows:

It became clear that the purpose of the division of the narration into a First Voice and a Second Voice was to alleviate the burden on the [stage] actors taking those parts and to achieve limited effects of variation through the different timbre of their voices. [...] It is not as if Thomas had made the First and Second voices distinguishable through traits of speech patterns, imagery, personality, or depth of soul. (Thomas 2014: xi)

In a footnote, they dismiss a claim by Cynthia Davis (1975) – who argued that the voices do have different functions, the first concentrating mainly on exterior surroundings, the second on the thoughts of the characters – claiming that it “does not make a convincing case” (xlvii). Admittedly, the dichotomy is inconsistently realised overall, but it does hold up in many parts of the radio play, and the same sense of imperfection characterises other draft material that has surfaced since the appearance of the first edition. For example, two sets of handwritten notes or “worksheets”, now preserved at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre (HRC) in Austin, Texas, contain a list of ideas that remained unrealised.

In view of *Under Milk Wood*'s multilayered genetic history, mediated by both stage performance and radio broadcast, as well as curtailed by the author's untimely death, any attempt at establishing a “definitive” edition is futile, not to say potentially harmful from a hermeneutic point of view. It is an extreme example of what John Bryant (2002) – although he does not consider radio – calls “textual fluidity”, a trait inherent to most literary works, yet to varying degrees. While the need for a “stable text” is understandable from the perspective of broadcasting and publication, if the goal is to study *Under Milk Wood* as a radio play, or as a transmedial work, the draft versions need to be considered as much as the published editions and recordings. Both hide what lies “underneath” *Milk Wood*, even if the Cleverdon account and the critical introduction by Davies and Maud draw our attention to it. Apart from small collections at Yale University and the Rosenbach Museum in Philadelphia, the bulk of Thomas's notes, manuscripts and typescripts are at the HRC, which recently made available high-resolution scans in an online Dylan Thomas Digital Collection.¹ This enhances the visibility and accessibility of the material, but to avoid not seeing the forest for the trees in a digital archive, we need critical guidance and signposts that help users to navigate the maze of variants and versions whose teleology is anything but straightforward.

Harold Pinter – *A Slight Ache* (1959)

In addition to the fact that no recordings of his work are commercially available, even though some can be found on websites such as YouTube and UbuWeb, in Harold Pinter's case it is often hard to determine with absolute certainty the original or intended medium of his plays. Critics generally regard *A Slight Ache*, *Family Voices* and *The Dwarfs* as plays for radio, but the latter is based on an abandoned novel and they were also performed on the stage and/or television. Others premiered on the air for reasons of censorship or because radio drama took less time to produce than theatre or television plays, which contributes to an overall merging of genres as well as media.

Pinter adopted a transmedial approach to playwriting quite early on in his career (see Stulberg 2015), partly out of necessity, as he was still in the process of making a name for himself in the West End and thus turned to radio for additional revenue. Since broadcasting did not pay handsomely and still required considerable creative effort, it was tempting to just recycle material or to adapt it. However, this often proved more difficult than it seemed, the visual dimension

1. <https://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15878coll98>

of the stage not always transferring well into the acoustic nature of radio. Pinter experienced this first-hand when submitting *The Room*, *The Birthday Party* and *The Dumb Waiter* to the BBC, which were all rejected out of hand in 1957. After a failed attempt to write a play that could be staged as well as broadcast, *The Hothouse*, Pinter landed his first success with *A Slight Ache* in 1958, soon followed by other transmedial plays like *A Night Out* and *Night School*, both from 1960. While the story in each medium remains largely the same, Pinter deftly exploits the visual or acoustic affordances of theatre, television and radio to convey the narrative information in slightly different ways. It is impossible to study this process based on the texts as published by Faber and Faber in their four-volume edition of Pinter's plays. For obvious practical reasons, they only print one version, yet the choice of medium is not always consistent. For example, *A Night Out* was first broadcast on radio, but the published text is clearly that of the televised version. *Night School*, by contrast, first went out on television, but Faber printed the radio script.

A Slight Ache is an even more intriguing case, revolving around a matchseller who is silent for most of the play. Despite its premiere on radio (1959) before it was staged (1961) as well as shown on television (1967), the published text is the theatrical one. Although the radio and television scripts in the WAC differ in some of their textual details and "stage" directions, they all include one particular passage that seems to draw attention to the transmedial nature of the play, irrespective of its format. At one point, Edward tells the matchseller: "Seeing you stand at the back gate, such close proximity, was not at all the same thing" (Pinter 1991: 37). If this can be read as a reflection on the immediacy of a theatre versus a television performance, then radio and its disembodiment effect may be alluded to in the following line: "You looked quite different without a head – I mean without a hat – I mean without headcovering of any kind. In fact every time I have seen you you have looked quite different to the time before" (37). All three media are invoked through Edward's perception – and that of the audience – alluding to radio's metaphorical blindness, the screen of television and theatre's directness: "sometimes I viewed you through dark glasses, yes, and sometimes through light glasses, and on other occasions bare eyed" (37). Each of these media offers a unique aesthetic experience, as theatre critic and biographer Michael Billington points out:

When the play was later televised and staged – highly effectively – it became a more obvious study of territorial takeover and psychological displacement. On radio, one was left with the teasing possibility that the matchseller might simply be a fantasy-figure, an expression of Edward's subconscious fear, guilt and insecurity, and of Flora's overwhelming need for sexual and maternal fulfilment. (2007: 96–97)

Adding an interesting twist to this multiplicity of media is the fact that Pinter co-produced and starred (as Edward) in a re-recording of *A Slight Ache* for BBC Radio 4 in 2000.² Not only is this a more "authoritative" version of the radio play, it also builds on the theatre and television performances in that it revolves less around the actual presence of the matchseller and more

2. See "A Slight Ache". UbuWeb. https://www.ubu.com/media/sound/pinter_harold/Pinter-Harold_A-Slight-Ache_2000.mp3.

around the shift of power or agency from Edward to him, here realised by means of sound rather than visuals.

The surviving manuscripts and typescripts often provide a glimpse into how Pinter revised his plays for different dramatic outlets. Yet, because the draft versions of earlier plays from the 1950s–1960s, including *A Slight Ache*, are not in the Harold Pinter Archive at the BL, nor in Indiana University’s small ancillary collection, the broadcasting scripts and even the synopses at the BBC WAC are crucial to filling in gaps of the genetic record.

Caryl Churchill – *Identical Twins* (1968)

While most of Caryl Churchill’s plays for radio – *The Ants* (1962), *Lovesick* (1967), *Abortive* (1971), *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* (1971) and *Schreber’s Nervous Illness* (1972) – have appeared in print, either as part of the volume entitled *Shorts* (2014), published by Nick Hern Books, or a Penguin collection on *Radio Plays* in their “New English Dramatists” series (Wardle 1986), *Identical Twins* (1986) never has. The reasons for this are unclear, but it may have something to do with the nature of the radio play, which is also peculiar in the sense that it was never billed as such in magazines like the *Radio Times* or *The Listener*, but rather as an “interior duologue” – the subtitle of the BBC production script.

As the title indicates, it is about two brothers, Clive and Teddy, who each relate their life’s stories, which overlap in many details but still give them distinct characteristics. When they speak alone, they do not say exactly the same things but use similar phrasings. When they do speak together, their lines are identical, except for the names of their wives and children or when they refer to each other. Adding to this confusion of identities and voices, the twins are both played by Kenneth Haigh. BBC producer John Tydeman explains why it was such a technical feat to make the production:

It is a fact that we had to record twin A and then sync [synchronize] twin B, who was played by the same actor. He had to wear head caps to keep in sync with himself because the two twins had different personalities. You could not use the same tape and double it up because one is more forceful than the other, so although they are saying the same thing at times, they have to say it in a slightly similar way but in two different voices.

(qtd in Fitzsimmons 1989: 15–16)

As is clear from this interview, voice quality is crucial for the listener’s understanding and experience of the radio play, something that is almost impossible to replicate in a text, even with the addition of “stage” directions. Another obstacle was the simultaneity of the lines. Identical parts uttered together by the twins are assigned to them collectively, with a forward slash to distinguish deviating words such as names. Whenever they speak in unison but say different lines, these are displayed in two adjacent columns. It is not so much that their speech cannot be captured in text, which is an issue for any play that is transferred into print, but that the effect of simultaneity is lost. The entire point of the radio play is that listeners relive the confusion of identities that Clive and Teddy experience by making it near impossible for the audience to

keep the two brothers apart in sound. Unique details about their lives offer clues to help distinguish them, but this requires a strong retentive memory. A script makes it easier on the reader, as the synchronised parts can be read sequentially and the lines are given as belonging to one of the brothers. Perhaps this is part of the reason why the radio play was never published, as it would clarify textually what has to be construed and negotiated when listening to a broadcast. Even a recording would diminish the effect, as it could be paused or wound back and forth.

The audio recording, preserved at the BL, offers the next best thing to experiencing the original broadcast of *Identical Twins*, but we should be wary of it for another reason. It uses a stereophonic effect whereby Clive's voice is coming from the left and Teddy's from the right speaker. While this still causes confusion when the brothers speak together, causing a reverberating echo, it does make it easier to separate the two whenever they speak alone. There is no evidence in the surviving material at the BBC WAC that stereo was part of Churchill's original intention for the radio play. In fact, all available documents suggest that it was a decision made by the producer to facilitate the listening for audiences. The production script also reveals that cuts were made. At 19 minutes into the radio play, as some sort of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* that self-reflexively deconstructs Clive and Teddy's stream of consciousness itself as a recording, Churchill inserted a handful of "stage" directions that called for the overlapping speeches of the twins to be sped up like tape, making what they are saying incomprehensible. Again, it is not clear who was responsible for their removal from the broadcast, but seeing as they tone down the experimental nature of *Identical Twins*, the BBC was most likely responsible again. This is a good reminder that radio drama is always produced in an institutional context with a cultural politics that can affect the result significantly.

Andrew Sachs – *The Revenge* (1978)

Mostly known as a stage and screen actor, especially for his role as the clumsy Spanish waiter Manuel in the iconic British television series *Fawlty Towers*, Andrew Sachs also wrote a few plays for radio, one of them using no words at all. In addition to shouting, panting, sighing, grunting, drinking and chewing, *The Revenge* (1978) tells its narrative entirely by means of sounds, all recorded on site – also known as "actuality" – using a "binaural" technique. The audio, relived from the first-person perspective of the protagonist, played by Sachs himself wearing a microphone in each of his ears, factors in vertical and horizontal distance from the source as well as vibrations in the sound waves caused by the actor's physique. This surrounds listeners in an experience that is more realistic and immersive than mono or stereo with only left and right audio channels, especially when listening on headphones. During an interview with Peter Reed, Sachs explained the reason behind his play:

One of the things I had about radio, as much as I loved it, I thought people talk too much on radio drama, they never stop talking, and that radio is not just a medium of words, but a medium of sound. So surely it might be possible to write something where actual sounds take a greater part in the proceedings. (Sachs 2010)

The Revenge is nearly impossible to render as a text, not just because there is no speech, but also because the sound *is* the experience, so only a recording, available at the BL, can do it justice. Nevertheless, as with all radio plays, a script was necessary to produce it. According to Sachs himself, again in the interview with Reed, “it was just one page, two pages I think”. Ronald Mason, then the Head of BBC Radio Drama, stated in a talk preceding the original broadcast that “the script is a funny thing, it’s a sort of series of stage instructions”, but the script filed at the BBC WAC is in fact twelve pages long (Sachs 2010).³

The “plot” is broken down into 136 scenes, each briefly describing the action and the audio cues. The script disambiguates many of the elements that are open to interpretation in the recording. For example, in the opening scene, its setting “moorland”, the noise is said to be a “prison siren”, the barking dogs “alsations” [sic], and the muffled voices in the distance “indistinct calls from the police”, which reveal from the beginning that the man is an escaped convict. Similarly, when he breaks into the house of the person he intends to take revenge on, and listeners are left to wonder where he hides when the owner comes home, the script clarifies that the man goes to the curtains and hides behind them breathing very quietly into the fabric, something that is left unclear in the sound design. Yet the biggest reveal comes at the very end. After the man has drowned his target in the bathtub, he picks up the telephone and dials three digits, given as the emergency number 999 in the script, strongly suggesting that he turns himself in. So, on the one hand, the textual manifestation of *The Revenge* curbs the listener’s imagination. On the other hand, as we saw with Churchill, we should be careful in assigning primacy to the recording. Here, too, the script has genetic value in that it contains abandoned ideas not featured in the broadcast. For example, just before he hides underwater from the guard dogs, the man stumbles to a bank and pulls at long-stemmed plants. He tears one away, breaks it in half and blows through the stem. Satisfied that he can suck in air through the stem, he takes a deep breath and submerges himself. The recording, however, omits the straw-like stem. The script also includes a deleted scene in which the man uses loose change in the pockets of an anorak he stole from a motorcyclist to buy a packet of cigarettes from a vending machine, only to discover that he is out of matches, after which he is pursued on foot in the street and quickly jumps a bus to get away.

As the BBC’s Audience Research Report shows, some listeners praised *The Revenge* as a new form of pure radio, whereas others dismissed it on the grounds that radio was the medium of the human voice. Sachs does not so much abandon the voice as focus on its non-linguistic aspects. So, the further a script deviates from the standard radio play form, in the sense that it relies more on sound than on language, or, in other words, becomes more avant-garde and experimental, the harder it is to represent as text. Cases such as *The Revenge*, which are deeply collaborative, also dilute the concept of authorship. While Sachs is credited for writing the script, alongside Glyn Dearman as producer, Lloyd Silverthorne is listed for his technical realisation, which is of course essential to the whole experience.

3. For the interviews and a recording of *The Revenge*, see “The Revenge”. YouTube. 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsAdYGdZc88>.

Conclusion

As the examples discussed above have aimed to show, because of its hybrid nature as text and sound, as well as the ephemerality of the medium, it is difficult to study radio drama without archival research. While more experimental subgenres like the feature or radiophonic art are best represented in sound, a radio play never fully coincides with any of its manifestations, be it a printed text, an audio recording, a production script or a broadcast. It exists somewhere in between and needs to be reconstructed through a combination of materials, published and unpublished, such as drafts, letters and ancillary documents kept in private as well as public archives, not least those of broadcasting services. Radio studies are highly interdisciplinary, combining methodologies from philology, genetic criticism and textual scholarship with insights from audionarratology, musicology and sound as well as media studies. The field would also benefit from the Digital Humanities and their ability to integrate large amounts of information into environments that can be manipulated by users to suit their needs. Digital scholarly editions (DSEs) of radio plays, databases, timelines or chronologies that incorporate sound materials alongside handwritten, typed and printed sources, including magazines such as the *Radio Times* or *The Listener*, are ideal for the multimedia experience that the art form represents and the transmedial processes that have shaped it. Through an increased access to and visibility of this so-called “sightless” medium, it will become clear just how big a blind spot it still is. Not only is the history of radio drama, both on the local/national and the global/international level, still waiting to be written, it also has the potential to rewrite the history of contemporary literature. Especially in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the borders that traditionally separated artistic genres have become increasingly porous, with adaptation, intermediality and transmedial storytelling emerging as dominant cultural phenomena.

References

- BBC WAC, Dearman, Glyn, Productions 1978, “The Revenge”, Andrew Sachs.
- Billington, Michael. 2007. *Harold Pinter*. London: Faber and Faber.
-  Bryant, John. 2002. *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Churchill, Caryl. 2014. *Shorts*. London: Nick Hern.
- Cleverdon, Douglas. 1969. *The Growth of Milk Wood*. London: Dent.
- Cory, Mark E. 1992. “Soundplay: The Polyphonous Tradition of German Radio Art.” In *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde*, ed. by Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead, 331–371. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Davis, Cynthia. 1975. “The Voices of ‘Under Milk Wood’.” *Criticism* 17 (1): 74–89.
- De Benedictis, Angela Ida. 2004. *Radiodramma et arte radiofonica. Storia e funzioni della musica per radio in Italia*. Torino: EDT.
- Eichenberger, Tatiana. 2021. “Radiophonic Art and Electroacoustic Music: An Aesthetic Controversy During the Establishment of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop and the Radiophonic Poem *Private Dreams and Public Nightmares*.” In *Tuning in to the Neo-Avant-Garde: Experimental Radio Plays in the Postwar Period*, ed. by Inge Arteel, Lars Bernaerts, Siebe Bluijs, and Pim Verhulst, 46–66. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

- Ferrer, Daniel. 2011. *Logiques du brouillon: modèles pour une critique génétique*. Paris: Seuil.
- Fitzsimmons, Linda. 1989. *Churchill on File*. London: Methuen.
-  Gabriel, John. 2023. "From Acoustic Scenery to Sonic Dramaturgy: Music in Radio-Specific Drama of Weimar Republic Germany." In *Word, Sound and Music in Radio Drama*, ed. by Pim Verhulst and Jarmila Mildorf, 19–44. Leiden: Brill.
- Gilliam, Laurence (ed.). 1950. *B.B.C. Features*. London: Evans & BBC.
- Hauthal, Janine. 2021. "'Stage' Directions in the Radio Script: A Transgeneric Approach." In *Audionarratology: Lessons from Radio Drama*, ed. by Lars Bernaerts and Jarmila Mildorf, 41–62. Nebraska, OH: Ohio State University Press.
-  Huwiler, Elke. 2005. "Storytelling by Sound: A Theoretical Frame for Radio Drama Analysis." *The Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media* 3 (1): 45–59.
-  Lebrave, Jean-Louis. 2009. "Can Genetic Criticism Be Applied to the Performing Arts?" In *Genetic Criticism and the Creative Process: Essays from Music, Literature, and Theater*, ed. by William Kinderman and Joseph E. Jones, 68–80. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.
-  Lutostański, Bartosz. 2016. "A Narratology of Radio Drama: Voice, Perspective, Space." In *Audionarratology: Interfaces of Sound and Narrative*, ed. by Jarmila Mildorf and Till Kinzel, 117–132. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Lycett, Andrew. 2004. *Dylan Thomas: A New Life*. London: Phoenix.
-  Madsen, Virginia. 2010. "A Call to Listen: The 'New' Documentary in Radio – Encountering 'Wild Sound' and the 'Filme Sonore.'" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 30 (3): 391–410.
- Pinter, Harold. 1991. *Plays One*. London: Faber and Faber.
-  Rubery, Matthew. 2016. *The Untold Story of the Talking Book*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure. 2021. "Coda: Radio Drama between Mimetic and Diegetic Presentation." In *Audionarratology: Lessons from Radio Drama*, ed. by Lars Bernaerts and Jarmila Mildorf, 215–223. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press.
- Sachs, Andrew. 2010. "I Did It My Way." Interview with Peter Reed, BBC Radio 7, 24 April 2010.
- Sánchez Cardona, Luz María. 2020. "The Making of a Nomenclature: José Igeze on Radiophonic Art." *Radio Art and Music: Culture, Aesthetics, Politics*, ed. by Jarmila Mildorf and Pim Verhulst, 9–31. Lanham, MA: Lexington.
-  Stulberg, Jacob. 2015. "How (Not) to Write Broadcast Plays: Pinter and the BBC." *Modern Drama* 58 (4): 502–523.
- Thomas, Dylan. 1952. "Llareggub: A Piece for Radio Perhaps." *Botteghe Oscure* 9: 134–155.
- Thomas, Dylan. 1954. *Under Milk Wood: A Play for Voices*. London: Dent.
- Thomas, Dylan. 1966. *Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas*, ed. by Constantine FitzGibbon. London: Dent.
- Thomas, Dylan. 2014. *Under Milk Wood: A Play for Voices*, ed. by Walford Davies and Ralph Maud. London: Phoenix.
- Van Hulle, Dirk. 2014. *Modern Manuscripts: The Extended Mind and Creative Undoing from Darwin to Beckett and Beyond*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Wardle, Irving (ed.). 1968. *Radio Plays*. New English Dramatists 12. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Whitehead, Kate. 1989. *The BBC Third Programme: A Literary History*. Oxford: Clarendon.