

## Sound Stories: Audio Drama and Adaptation

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From the first wax cylinders through to digital downloads, from network output captured on crystal sets through to Digital Audio Broadcasting, audio listeners have consumed culture entirely mediated by technology. These audiences have enjoyed music on vinyl records, transistor radios or iPods and in so doing have determined the evolution of music, sharing and propagating its popularity. Audiences, however, have also used their audio technology to listen to the spoken word. Early broadcasters realised the potential of radio technology to disseminate news and sports for its listeners to consume in immediacy and simultaneity. The pleasures of radio would subsequently encompass book readings which would evolve into *drama*. Although it is one of the most neglected fields of performance culture, throughout its history audio drama has been prolific and impactful. Early in the advent of broadcasting, radio drama proved itself to be enormously flexible, creating different formats of drama from serializations to standalone works, as well as inventing genres such as the soap opera and developing distinctive forums for science fiction, fantasy, whodunits and other popular narratives. In the twentieth century, radio featured adaptations of fiction which were as (in)famous as *Mercury Theatre on the Air's* 'War of the Worlds' broadcast (1938) and as monumental as the BBC's adaptation of the complete *Sherlock Holmes* (1989-98). In the twenty-first century, the internet has created a new era of audio drama: there has never been a more fluid range of options through which we can consume network or independent radio and, in addition to this, there are websites streaming archival materials as well as podcasts of experimental or amateur work. In short, with a plethora of available works from past and present, there has never been a richer time to be a 'listener'.

Adaptation has been a central practice since the beginning of radio drama: indeed, the creation of ‘original’ plays for radio is a trend that emerged sometime after plays began to appear on radio. Initially, radio drama was essentially the recitation of stage plays: in the US, Eugene Walter’s popular stage melodrama *The Wolf* (1908) was arguably ‘the first “on-air” drama’ (Blue 2002: 1) when it was broadcast in August 1922; in the UK, short extracts from Edmond Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897) were broadcast in October 1922 (Crook 1999: 4) and in the following year the BBC broadcast extracts from Shakespeare before airing a full-length version of *Twelfth Night* in May 1923. After the success of broadcasting stage plays on the air, radio dramatists turned to fiction as a source for audio drama. For the BBC this commenced with an audio dramatization of Charles Kingsley’s 1855 novel *Westward Ho!* in April 1925 (Briggs 1985: 63). Audio drama has continued this close relationship with adaptation to the present day. As well as reworking stage plays and prose fiction for the airwaves (very often using works which are safely – and appealingly – out of copyright), radio drama will also present significant subgenres of other adaptive processes including a close relationship with cinema (in which audio versions of film are produced) and fact-based dramatization (including distinctive examples of biographical drama and docudrama). In addition to the wide range of source materials selected, the format of these plays has been as diverse as the genres that have been chosen. From readings and audiobooks to the complexity of binaural and interactive productions, audio listeners have experienced one-off dramas and serializations, differing in length and ambition. In terms of strategy, audio adaptation can be found to use the techniques of allusion or hybridization as much as a more conventional or ‘completist’ approach. In this chapter, we will explore different types of adaptation in audio drama. A range of case studies will be used for analysis to ensure that the topic is explored in the most diverse way: as well as classic works of radio drama and output from the major

radio networks, the essay also features analysis of independent podcast audio drama and examples of ‘experimental’ sonic culture.

This essay will focus on examples of audio drama from the UK and US. Radio drama has been comparatively disregarded in academic study, above all non-Anglophonic work which (despite outstanding output in, for example, German and Italian contexts) represents an overlooked but rich critical mass worthy of exploration. Indeed, the academic neglect of radio drama as a field of performance culture is an interesting phenomenon. It cannot be for lack of material (the BBC has always produced vastly more radio drama than television drama) or lack of ambition (the BBC’s 1981 *Lords of the Rings* totals thirteen hours in duration compared to the eleven hours of Peter Jackson’s combined ‘extended versions’ on screen (2001–3)). Neither is radio hard to access: indeed, the potential of radio to be consumed while we do something else makes it the perfect medium for contemporary, ‘multitasking’ life. Admittedly, however, the general perception of radio might be that it is a forum for music, news, sports broadcasting and ‘talk radio’. Perhaps most critically for audio drama is its ‘visionlessness’: it is an ‘invisible’ medium that might suggest for some that it somehow ‘lacks’ the richness or sophistication of the visual. This is exacerbated further when it comes to adaptation: as Sibylle Bolik (1999: 154) observes, despite the fact that it is the mode in which radio drama began, the ‘radio adaptation of literature is regarded as subordinate to the “true”, the original acoustical play’. Radio adaptation is thus impugned for both its lack of visuals and its lack of originality. Furthermore, in writing about radio adaptation, Linda Hutcheon (2006: 41) assesses that ‘most radio plays concentrate on primary characters alone and therefore simplify the story and time-line’: this implies that as an adaptive medium, radio ‘simplifies’ the comparative ‘richness’ of both the reading and the viewing experiences. In many ways, such debates reveal what Tim Crook (1999: 54) describes as the ‘sensory

hierarchy' in contemporary culture that assumes that sound is always inferior to vision. In fact, auditory culture is not only extremely sophisticated – in many ways we need to 'learn' *how* to listen – it has an almost limitless potential (one that is, perhaps, not hampered by the four corners of a flat screen). Audio drama is ideally suited to the epic and the intimate: therefore the complex comic universe of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1978-2005) is ideally realised as radio as is the sophisticated interiority of Samuel Beckett's *All That Fall* (1956) as well as, in popular genre, Lucille Fletcher's thriller 'Sorry, Wrong Number' (1943). Furthermore, although radio drama is not *cheap*, it is *economical*. Radio writers have long appreciated being able to create narratives completely unrestricted by geographical location, historical period or dramatic canvas.

If we return to radio's appropriateness for a culture of multitasking, the consideration of *where* and *how* we listen to audio is profound. Hugh Chignell coins the word 'secondariness' (2009: 70) to describe how audio tends to be an art form we uncontroversially consume while we are doing something else. Certainly, it is worth acknowledging that a radio listener is not enthralled by a screen and may well be travelling, exercising, trying to sleep or even writing on a laptop while they experience an audio narrative. Although we may have an assumption (reinforced by countless marketing images) that early radio listeners crowded as a family around their wireless receiver by the fireside, it is worth noting that car radios became increasingly popular from the 1930s and, before that, the amateur receiver that revolutionised and popularised radio listening – the crystal set – was a strictly 'in-ear' (hence personal) device. In this regard, the potential 'spaces' of the audio listener are significant: compared to the experience of listening to radio, the consumption of theatre, cinema and even television, can seem somewhat conventional. Arguably, many of the best examples of audio drama are aware of the challenge of the countless ways of listening. This is part of the reason that

despite the efficacy and versatility of audio drama as a form, it can be extremely difficult to create. As Hand and Traynor (2011: 103) write, there is ‘a peculiar dichotomy in audio drama between its *constraints* and its *limitlessness*’: despite the scope of its potential it can face a particular challenge in ‘hooking’ the (typically multitasking) listeners to make them ‘see’ and hold the unfurling story in their mind’s eye. In this regard, Tim Crook (1999: 156) is uncompromising when he warns radio writers that ‘Boredom is not listed as one of the seven deadly sins, but [...when] this happens you do not exist as a dramatist’. Audio drama needs to be engaging and lucid, a thoroughly co-creative process between artist and audience.

Radio drama at its best succeeds in an efficient assimilation of script, voice and sound: it can deploy lucid and simple techniques to create profound and complex narrative experiences. To return to Hutcheon, perhaps it is more apposite to stress that radio drama *streamlines* more than ‘simplifies’. To illustrate this, let us consider examples from two particularly renowned shows we have already mentioned. In the *Mercury Theatre on the Air*’s ‘War of the Worlds’ (1938), the perfect imitation of ‘breaking news’ broadcasting (a comparatively new form in the 1930s) mediates a carefully crafted script so that by the time the cylinder of the alien craft begins to creak open (in fact, merely a manhole cover being dragged across the concrete floor of a CBS studio), the experience is compelling and (so the reception legend goes) believable. In this respect, H. G. Wells’ Victorian work of scientific romance is adapted into the language of a contemporary medium: in other words, the novel is appropriated by radio drama and retold using conventions of another radio medium: news broadcasting. It is perhaps easier to retell the source *radiophonically* rather than *theatrically*, but the impact is vastly more potent. Similarly in the realms of science fiction, halfway through the opening episode of *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (1978), the listener hears the total destruction of planet Earth (in fact, a sustained sound effect created by the BBC Radiophonic

Workshop). This is not a multimillion dollar movie but an inventive example of radio: through a simply realised narrative moment, the audience holds the concept of an 'Earth-less' universe as we follow the playful pan-galactic adventures of the surviving earthling Arthur Dent.

As we have already indicated, early radio drama developed distinct formats for drama, ranging from standalone to serialized works. These can vary enormously in duration. BBC Radio continues to feature slots for forty-five minute (or longer) self-contained plays to serialized dramas in daily fifteen-minute or longer weekly instalments. Within these different formats, adaptation is recurrent. British radio has tackled a vast amount of nineteenth-century fiction on the air. The English novel (as well as numerous examples of French, Russian and other literature in translation) offers rich source stories with well-developed characters and evocative periods and locations. Appropriately enough in the case of the dramatization of Victorian fiction, the popular Classic Serial format which adapts the source texts into instalments ties in appositely with the original context's serialization of fiction.

A novel such as Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) has been consistently popular in radio adaptation with versions as far back, at least, as *The Lux Radio Theater's* post-Hollywood film-to-radio version in September 1939 and with new versions more or less in every decade since. The appeal of the novel is clear: it is an intense tale of love and revenge set evocatively in the Yorkshire moors. However, despite the fact that the novel spans several decades (principally two generations and the life of Heathcliff from young childhood to his death in his late thirties), adaptations have tended to focus on the dramatic core to the first half of the novel: the relationship between Cathy and Heathcliff, which is probably second only to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* as one of the greatest tales of tragic love in English

literature. Notably, radio has attempted to rectify this adaptive decision in dramatizing Brontë's novel. Lucy Gough's adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* for BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* in 2003 is a comprehensive and inventive audio adaptation. The dramatization is a serialization, breaking the novel into fifteen instalments (all fifteen-minutes in duration) played each weekday morning over a three week period. In writing the adaptation, Gough wanted to come further in adapting the fuller scope of the novel while, at the same time, being determined to avoid it becoming the poorest type of adaptation: 'a book on legs' (Gough 2013: 158). *Wuthering Heights* is, however, a book of many challenges for reasons of style, story and popular reception: 'Apart from the obvious challenge of adapting such an unwieldy uncompromising novel with numerous characters with confusing names and a time scale which is tricky, it is everyone's favourite novel.' (Gough 2013: 158).

Lucy Gough's solution is to consider the potential of radio: what can audio give its audience that other media cannot? She focuses on 'Wuthering Heights' itself: i.e. the *house*. This anthropomorphist decision focuses all action in the central context and *character* of the house, resolving complicated issues of timespan and the many people who pass through the location. For those who love the novel, Gough provides a refreshing 'take' on this classic novel in a substantial total duration of nearly four hours. The adaptation opens with the house and the bleak, wintry surroundings:

*(A wind and snowstorm are buffeting around the house.  
The house talks as if it is full-face to the wind and being  
buffeted hard.)*

HOUSE: High up.  
I stand.  
High up.  
Weathered walls jut the storms  
Narrow deep set eyes defend interior thoughts

*(Beat)*

In my hearth, my heart.  
And in the space of each room.  
My Soul.

*(A man is walking up the snow covered path, struggling against the wind.)*

A visitor.

*(The man stops at the door and knocks. The dogs inside start barking, the wind is howling)* (Gough 2013: 163)

Gough immediately creates for the listener an intimate relationship with the house and a sense of narrative interiority. The house is going to lead us through this epic drama: it will be the constant, focal point for the audience, while generations of characters in the story come and go. This short example demonstrates the efficacy of radio drama: the soundscape of the winter storm creates a mood and narrative context while the lyrical voice of the house locates an evocative, otherworldly perspective that will capture the emotional intensities of the novel. In so doing, Gough ‘solves’ the adaptive challenge of Brontë's novel, placing the listener, as it were, ‘inside’ the constancy of the house.

In her two-part adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) for BBC Radio 4 in 2012, Michelene Wandor also ‘rethinks’ a much-loved classic of English fiction. In many respects, Woolf's modernist narrative is an ideal source and style for radio drama: its use of the interior monologue is a perfect strategy for radio; and it also a novel which is structured by and through sound (especially the chimes of Big Ben); while the First World War veteran Septimus Smith's hallucinations (which melt reality into traumatic visions that only he can see) have the potential to be powerfully realised in a solely auditory medium. In fact, it is worth noting how some of the pioneering examples of radio drama have exploited these modernist advantages. For example, in Dalton Trumbo's antiwar novel *Johnny Got His Gun* (1939) the focal character is Joe Bonham, a severely injured soldier who lies in a hospital



bed. Joe is unable to communicate, but the reader is placed within the mind of Joe and we experience his stream-of-consciousness existence as we are led through his memories, his fantasies and the despair and agony of his miserable present condition. In 1940, Arch Oboler adapted the novel into a radio version on NBC featuring a virtuoso performance by James Cagney. The audio dramatization works extremely successfully, the medium placing the listener 'inside the head' of Joe and creating a powerfully intimate experience somewhat different to the 1971 film version (directed by Dalton Trumbo himself) and the 1982 stage adaptation written by Bradley Rand Smith. Although the film and stage play are effective works that capture Trumbo's passionately held antiwar sentiments and arguments, their respective media can nonetheless seem 'distanced' when compared to the intense interiority of the source novel and the radio dramatization of it. The film and stage versions can evoke the pathos of the viewer, but the novel and radio play seem to thoroughly implicate the reader/listener in the narrative. In this regard, *Johnny Got His Gun* and its adaptations demonstrate that the interior monologue can reveal the closest affinity that can exist between the media of prose fiction and audio drama.

To return to Wandor's Woolf adaptation, a central approach has been to rework the voices of the characters, above all the central figure of the protagonist, Clarissa Dalloway. Just a few paragraphs into Woolf's novel we read:

For having lived in Westminster — how many years now? over twenty, — one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh... (Woolf 1925: 8)

The writing is allusive and experiential, placing personal perspectives within a public forum.

Wandor appropriates some of the material contained within this is to construct the opening of the radio play:

MORNING

*(Music: Erik Satie: Gymnopedies)*

#### SCENE ONE

CLARISSA *(over)* A June morning in London. Soft blue grey air. I build my London around me, creating it every moment afresh. I am at peace in the midst of carriages and motor cars, omnibuses and vans. I am at ease among the triumph and the jingle, the shops and parks. In this moment of summer, there is a solemnity, a suspense, a hushed moment just before Big Ben strikes.

*(Music continues, and Big Ben begins to strike eight o'clock.)*

CLARISSA *(over)* Big Ben strikes, on a June morning in London. The leaden circles dissolve in the air

*(Music fades, and Big Ben mixes into a silvery clock in dining room. Breakfast)*

As we can see, Wandor takes key concepts such as ‘building London’ and the ‘leaden circles’ as well as the setting of the city street within earshot of Big Ben. In addition, the possibilities of audio drama language are used: the appropriately impressionistic/modernistic music of Satie and the morphing of Big Ben into a dining room clock. What is most radical, however, is the way Wandor rewrites the voice of Clarissa. We encounter the character through an intimate ‘I’, in contrast to Woolf’s novel in which the narrator mediates the thoughts and feelings of Clarissa: Woolf undoubtedly gives the reader an ‘interior’ experience, albeit presented in a third-person style. Although the differences in style are radical, Wandor arguably captures the ‘feel’ of Woolf’s narrative very authentically. While the construction of language and point-of-view are fundamentally rethought, this nonetheless demonstrates an effective translation of prose fiction into a wholly different medium. In short, Michelene Wandor completely ‘rethinks’ Virginia Woolf’s story into the performance medium of radio.

Broadcast radio is not the only source for audio drama and adaptation. Since the advent of the World Wide Web in the 1990s and other advances in digital technology, we have entered into a realm of unprecedented access to audio. We can access websites that stream recordings of radio plays from the past or sell them to us as MP3s. We can subscribe to a host of production companies that are producing all-new audio drama that we can listen to on a regular or in an equivalent to televisual 'box-setting' consumption. Some contemporary companies such as Chatterbox Audio Theater and the Wireless Theatre Company recreate the classic practices of 'live' radio drama with Foley artists and an ensemble of voice actors. In contrast, others use the advanced technology afforded by complex editing and digital mixing. One noteworthy technological approach is in the area of binaural recording. Although this technology was pioneered in the earliest days of sound recording, it has increasingly come into its own in the digital age. Binaural audio creates an extremely high quality of stereophonic sound with a depth and gradation of recording detail that is, effectively, three-dimensional. This has opened up opportunities to take recording out of the studio and to 'capture' distinctive and remarkable spaces. For instance, ZBS Foundation's 1998 adaptation of Karl Edward Wagner's short story *Sticks* (1974) is a thirty-minute horror play set in an abandoned farmhouse and the ritual chamber discovered beneath it. Although the short story is a somewhat conventional 'post-H. P. Lovecraft' narrative, by using the binaural recording of suitable locations, the audio drama is an intense experience that can make the listener 'be present' amongst the doomed characters in the play. The ZBS Foundation has produced audio drama since 1970 and along with *Sticks* its adaptive binaural repertoire has also included a version of Carlos Fuentes' *Aura* (1962) in 2008. Fuentes' novel is eerie, lyrical and even erotic, alluding to Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861) as well as the broader literary traditions of the Gothic and the ghost story. The novel is set inside a house of near total

darkness, a challenge for the screen but ideal to be translated into the immersive experience of binaural audio.

As part of its 2015 Halloween season, BBC Radio 4 included an adaptation of Nigel Kneale's television play *The Stone Tape* (1972) in both conventional and enhanced binaural versions. Adapted by Peter Strickland – writer/director of the film *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012), itself a vivid exploration of horror and sound – with Matthew Graham, the play retains the 1970s context of the source. The story is about a 'haunted' mansion and a group of sceptical scientists who strive to explain the phenomenon rationally. While the screen version can include visual phenomena, the radio adaptation can wholly emphasize the auditory. The scientists' 'torture' of the building in their attempts to unleash the sonic 'memories' they assume are captured within the literal stones of the walls – and their protracted analysis and manipulation of screeds of tape – turn Kneale's post-Lovecraftian technophobic parable into a compelling experience about sound and horror. In a theatrical experience before the official broadcast of *The Stone Tape*, the audio drama organisation *In the Dark* arranged a site-specific airing of the play on 23 October 2015: a limited number of audience members entered the crypt of a church in Holborn in London where, after walking past 1970s reel-to-reel tape machines and radios, the audience sat in darkness in a catacomb chamber and experienced the play through wireless binaural headphones. The only consciously theatrical effect during the listening was at the end of the play when eerie green lights began to pulse against the walls of the crypt. However, the experience as a whole was highly theatrical inasmuch as the listener/spectator is acutely aware of the environment they have been placed in: the voices and reverberations and the uncanny soundscape the scientists are trying to unlock mapped, seamlessly, onto the walls and pitch-black corridors of the vault. A vivid

dramatization in its own right, the communal listening experience in such an evocative underground space enhanced the adaptation.

The radio adaptation (and theatrical shared listening) of *The Stone Tape* reveals a particular aptitude of the medium: namely that audio can work better than any other performance medium in realising the neo-Gothic and horror genre experiences of total darkness. It can also create uncanny environments and moods through sound design and narrative suggestion, both of which can work very effectively in combination with the imagination of the listener. While the light-based oblong of the television or cinema screen has a physical delineation, the experience of audio drama can place us central to the experience (above all, if we listen on earphones), unfurling a narrative between our ears in darkness or mapping invisibly but potently onto our physical environment. In regard to making an environment uncanny and strange, the very corridors of the BBC itself have been a locus for experimentation. In a powerfully symbolic experiment during the impending closure of the BBC's Bush House (home of the BBC World Service from the 1940s) in 2012, sound producer Robin The Fog recorded the empty hallways, rooms, stairwells and elevators of the building before editing and mixing them into soundscape compositions. The subsequent album – *The Ghosts of Bush House* (2012) – is an eerie experience, its echoes and reverberations (occasionally combined with fragments of World Service broadcasts or automated elevator announcements) create a sonic (re)construction of a location which was once in the business of producing *sound*. *The Ghosts of Bush House* is, in effect, an example of hauntological adaptation: a unique and literal physical space with a significant history is captured, appropriated and reworked into an uncanny audio experience.

It is an easy but mundane task to compare and contrast the poetics of audio with those of video. After all, in the simplest terms of reception it has to be acknowledged that although the fact there is ‘nothing to look at’ with radio may be its greatest advantage (in terms of its concomitant effect on the imagination), it is for many people its greatest deficiency.

Regardless of this – or maybe because of it – there has always been a significant relationship between radio and cinema. As well as *The Stone Tape*, the 2015 BBC Radio 4 Halloween featured Anita Sullivan’s *The Ring*, an adaptation of Koji Suzuki’s novel *Ringu* (1991).

Similarly, the previous year’s Halloween offerings on BBC Radio included Robert Forrest’s adaptation of William Peter Blatty’s novel *The Exorcist* (1971). Although there is no doubt that Sullivan and Forrest turned to the original novels as their adaptive sources, the radio plays undoubtedly drew on the popularity of the film adaptations (directed by Hideo Nakata in 1998 and William Friedkin in 1973 respectively) which are commonly regarded as classics of horror cinema. However, the radio/cinema relationship has a much longer history. One of the most prominent examples is *The Lux Radio Theater* (1934-55).

*The Lux Radio Theater* aired fully live one-hour adaptations of Hollywood movies in front of a studio audience. The broadcasts were contemporaneous with the release of the movie it was adapting and featured the film’s cast reprising their roles for the airwaves. For example, in 1951 *Lux* presented *All About Eve*, an adaptation of Joseph L. Mankiewicz’s 1950 film (itself based, albeit not credited, on Mary Orr’s 1946 short story ‘The Wisdom of Eve’). The *Lux* version featured Bette Davis, Gary Merrill and Anne Baxter reprising their roles (although Reginald Gardiner replaces George Sanders as the ‘narrator’, Addison DeWitt). Similarly, on Christmas Day 1950, *Lux* listeners experienced a seasonal special with (an admittedly maturely voiced) Judy Garland recreating her role of Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939). The *Lux* broadcasts functioned as an important part of movie publicity equivalent to a trailer

or magazine coverage. This was particularly evident as the broadcasts would sometimes feature an interview with members of the cast and, for nearly a decade of its run, *Lux* featured the epitome of the larger-than-life Hollywood director, Cecil B. DeMille, as host. In addition, the *Lux* plays were also a forerunner to video/DVD/Blu-Ray release, effectively offering audiences ‘a slice of Hollywood to be enjoyed in your own home’ (Hand 2006: 44). In this regard, *Lux* represents a significant example of marketing and (for writers, actors and other members of the production team) copyright-led income-generation in the pre-digital culture of popular adaptation. At one hour, the *Lux* radio adaptations are shorter than their source films but they remain exemplary demonstrations of audio adaptation, rethinking their visual narratives into efficient audio drama.

Shorter lived but in the same style as *Lux* was *Academy Award Theater* (1946), which aired live adaptations of successful films in even shorter thirty-minute versions. This included Humphrey Bogart, Sydney Greenstreet and Mary Astor reprising their roles from John Huston’s 1941 film version of Dashiell Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon* (1929); and Cary Grant (albeit with Ann Todd replacing Joan Fontaine) recreating for the airwaves his role in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1941 film *Suspicion*, based on Francis Iles’ novel *Before the Fact* (1932). The repertoire of *Lux* and *Academy Award Theater* reveal a popular subgenre of adaptation that existed on radio, drawing on the ‘dream factory’ of Hollywood to create – and retain – millions of radio listeners who wanted to relive (or had not had the opportunity to experience) popular motion pictures. However, the relationship between radio and cinema may be even more symbiotic. Focusing on Arch Oboler’s radio series *The Adventures of Mark Twain* – commissioned by Warner Brothers to adapt and promote the contemporaneous film *The Adventures of Mark Twain* (Irving Rapper, 1944) – Matthew A. Killmeier demonstrates how intricate the marketing and publicity links between cinema and radio really were. The Twain

biopic was implicitly ‘intertwined with the film’s origination rather than simply a part of the post-production promotional campaign’ in a way that reveals that ‘Contemporary media convergence and synergies are not a simply a recent practice tied to industry consolidation, conglomeration and integration, but go back to the early days of broadcasting.’ (Killmeier 2015: 19).

A final notable category of adaptation in audio that will be considered here is the biographical and fact-based drama. Sometimes the ‘docudrama’ form in a visual context can be problematic. The formal strategy in television documentary wherein dramatic ‘re-enactments’ are interpolated between interviews has become something of a cliché, almost self-parodic in nature. In contrast, in the context of audio the strategy continues to be effective: BBC radio works such as *The Presence* in 2009 (Dannie Abse’s account of the car accident that killed his wife), *Black Roses: The Killing of Sophie Lancaster* in 2011 (about a 2007 hate crime with a cycle of poems by Simon Armitage) and *Well, He Would, Wouldn’t He?* in 2013 (about Mandy Rice-Davies and her involvement in the 1963 Profumo affair) are all examples wherein authentic testimony from those directly involved is interwoven with dramatic (re)interpretation to great effect, creating an adaptation of fact that is arguably more profound than either standalone documentary or dramatization. The genre of docudrama is not uncontroversial. Guy Starkey (2014: 229) writes that as soon as a docudrama strays beyond the personal experience of the contributors, ‘someone’s imagination begins to take over, and “actuality” begins to lose its authenticity’. This was evident in the reaction to a pioneering example of radio docudrama: the BBC’s 1946 production *The Man from Belsen*, an adaptation of Harold Le Druillenc’s testimony as the only British survivor of the Belsen concentration camp. The play steps back and forth between autobiographical narration and dramatic action, a strategy which creates a powerful experience but upset some contemporary



reviewers who were deeply troubled by the ‘mixing of the fact and the fictionalised’, a strategy in which, in the words of *The Listener*’s Philip Hope-Wallace, ‘One always kills the other.’ (Hand 2014: 38).

As we have seen in this chapter, adaptation has had a central place in audio drama from its beginnings through to the present day. Whether it is dramatizing prose fiction or actuality, audio adaptation can be efficient and economical, able to create and capture narratives of all dimensions and demands. In this regard, there are obvious advantages to what we might call audio technology’s *visionless spectacles*, but there are major challenges too: audio drama relies on the listener to actively participate in co-creating these narratives and to hold them in their mind’s eye. In some cases, adaptation can help to build and sustain a narrative: perhaps it is easier to follow a story already familiar to us, no matter how radical the audio interpretation of it is. Overall, the flexibility of audio and the wealth of technology that affords us multifarious ways in which to be listeners means that there has never been a richer time in which to experience ‘sound stories’. At its best, audio adaptation has always been able to immerse and implicate us in its interiority; it has been able to span galaxies or place us in the claustrophobic confines of complete darkness. To hear narratives unfurl in the space between our ears can be a subjectively intense experience and an unparalleled way to experience an adaptation.

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*All That Fall* (1956) writer Samuel Beckett. BBC. Radio.

*Aura* (2008) prod. ZBS Foundation. Digital download.

*Black Roses: The Killing of Sophie Lancaster* (2011) writer Simon Armitage. BBC. Radio.

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*Maltese Falcon, The* on *Academy Award Theater* (1946) writer Frank Wilson. CBS. Radio.

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