

PAPER TITLE: Noise, narration and nose-pegs: adapting Shakespeare for radio.

When the BBC mounted its first Shakespeare production in 1923, there was no template for radio drama. The British Broadcasting Company, as it was then, was only six months old, and other than readings or short scenes from plays, no production offering anything comparable in length or content to that which listeners might have experienced in the theatre had been attempted. No-one could have known that this first foray into putting Shakespeare on radio would lead to more than four-hundred productions on the BBC alone and the development of an art-form that would need to negotiate not just the complexities of drama in sound only, but the translation of a visual medium into an audio one, and the perceptions of critics, many of whom had very particular ideas of what should and should not be done to Shakespeare's texts. This paper will examine that development, looking at some of the many techniques used over the last century and reactions to them.

From very early in the BBC's history it was recognised that the lack of pictures on radio did not need to be a disadvantage. In 1924, John Reith, the BBC's managing director at the time, later its first director general, wrote that 'radio dramatic art is being developed, and is proving extraordinarily effective', adding that 'with a little concentration and imagination we perceive the scenes as vividly as in a theatre' (Reith 1924: 165-66). Two years later, producer Gordon Lea stated that 'in radio drama the scene is built up in the imagination of the listener [...] at the best a stage-scene is a second-hand affair—whereas the radio-scene is beyond art—it is reality itself' (Lea 1926: 40). Decades before academics such as Tim Crook and Neil Verma were debunking the idea of radio being 'blind', those working in the field were already highly aware of the power of radio to create 'images that are conjured up by the sounds' heard by listeners (Cazeaux 2005: 157). As Cazeaux states: 'Sound, instead of being a series of inadequate clues from an unlit world, becomes a medium that opens onto and generates a world' (Cazeaux 2005: 173). However, the business of creating such worlds is not

always straightforward, and producers have found a variety of creative ways of helping their listeners to both understand Shakespeare's plays and create vivid pictures in their heads.

In the early days of the BBC, it was assumed that Shakespeare's plays would easily transfer to radio. Reith was among those trumpeting them as being ideal for the medium:

The plays of Shakespeare fulfil to a great extent the requirements of wireless, for he had little in the way of setting and scenery, and relied chiefly on the vigour of his plot and the conviction of the speakers to convey his ideas [...] It is not at all unlikely that wireless will render a highly important service in popularizing Shakespeare.

Reith 1924: 168.

One of the BBC's first producers, Cecil Lewis, wrote in the same year:

So far, we have largely contented ourselves (I think wisely) with Shakespeare, whose amazing beauty lies almost entirely in the spoken word as a means of presenting character and situation. No better plays for broadcasting could have been written.

Lewis 1924: 61-622.

Humourist and listener, L. du Garde Peach, believed firmly that 'Shakespeare wrote the best broadcast plays' because 'Shakespeare is his own scenic artist, because the things the characters say and their reactions to the environment in which Shakespeare's fancy has placed them, *suggest* the scene to you in a way which makes painted canvas an offence' (Peach 1927: 549). Even after the Second World War, the same suggestions and assumptions were being made, with the *Observer* critic, W. E. Williams writing: 'Shakespeare wrote for a bare stage; and he therefore incorporated in the text every single clue his audience needed to possess' (Williams 1949: 2). In many ways these assumptions were correct.

The plays frequently feature scenes that can feel as if Shakespeare was deliberately writing for a sound-only medium, either directly or indirectly. In *Richard II*, when Richard appears on the walls of Flint castle, Bolingbroke and York exchange the following lines:

BOLINGBROKE See, see, King Richard doth himself appear [...]

YORK

Yet looks he like a king. Behold his eye,
As bright as any eagle's, lightens forth
Controlling majesty [...]

Shakespeare 2016, *Richard II*, 3.3.62-70.

The description here is ideal for radio, indicating Richard's entrance ten lines before he speaks, as well as the fact that he looks 'like a king', when he knows his days are numbered.

In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Falstaff's vivid description of his off-stage ducking in the Thames paints not only a visual picture but also gives a sense of what he has been put through:

They conveyed me into a buck-basket. [...] It was a miracle to scape suffocation. And in the height of this bath—when I was more than half stewed in grease, like a Dutch dish—to be thrown into the Thames and cooled, glowing hot, in that surge like a horseshoe! Think of that—hissing hot—think of that!

Shakespeare 2016, *Merry Wives*, 3.5.73-103.

And then there are the direct appeals to the audience to use its imagination, like the Chorus in *Henry V*:

Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts; [...]
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them [...]
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings

Shakespeare 2016, *Henry V*, 1.0.23-28.

However, these sorts of textual hints to the listener were used by some critics to fight any suggestion of amending the script to help an audience understand what was going on. One of the most vociferous, Herbert Farjeon, believed that 'the more you cut Shakespeare, the harder he becomes to follow and the more (not less) strain he puts on concentration' (Farjeon 1935: 13). As far as Farjeon was concerned, a 'cut performance' entailed 'incomprehensibilities'. He even had the opportunity to put his theory to the test; the 1944 production of *As You Like*

It is credited as being 'arranged for broadcasting' by him (Farjeon 1944: 16). However, it is difficult to see what arranging he actually did, as it is virtually full text, uses no sound effects and the narration is simply the stage directions. It may largely be comprehensible, but it is not necessarily the most enjoyable version of the play the BBC has produced. As Edward Sackville-West stated: 'Confusion must be avoided at all costs, yet the action must not be held up' (Sackville-West 1945: 9). While Farjeon may not have felt much 'arranging' was required, other producers did, recognising that a radio play is far more than just a collection of words. Farjeon's contemporary, Felix Felton, points out that radio 'must paint for us the essentials of the visual scene', not just through dialogue but also with sound effects and music (Felton 1949: 41).

Shakespeare's plays do frequently include lines indicating what is happening on stage, or has happened off, but there are many occasions where the lack of the visual is a problem. Take, for example, mistaken identity between twins. *The Comedy of Errors* makes it doubly hard with two sets. This led radio producers to avoid it for decades – it was the last of Shakespeare's plays to be adapted for the medium, forty-five years after the first. Producer Raymond Raikes came up with two ploys to try to make it comprehensible to listeners. First, he had one actor play both Antipholuses and the same with the Dromios, thereby ensuring that the twins sounded the same (although for the introduction and *Radio Times* listing, the audience is told each character is played by different actors; keen word puzzle fans would notice that the names of the actors playing the Ephesians are anagrams of those playing the Syracusans). But to avoid the characters sounding absolutely identical, Raikes asked the actors to wear 'a specially made nose-clip' when playing the Ephesian twins, giving them a nasal tone of voice (Horsfield 1978: 34). In addition, in the final scene where the two sets of twins meet, Raikes used stereo to put one set of twins on the left, and the other on the right.

These two devices do help to a certain extent, but anyone who did not know the play would undoubtedly still find it all pretty confusing, although that is perhaps the point of the play.

In *Twelfth Night*, twins Sebastian and Viola are not identical, but are sufficiently alike that when Viola is dressed as a boy, the two are mistaken for each other. Perhaps surprisingly, bearing in mind the potential difficulties this poses on radio, it was the play chosen as the BBC's first ever drama production in 1923. Cathleen Nesbitt and Cecil Lewis, who were responsible for the broadcast, came up with two solutions, just as Raikes had done in the 1960s. Firstly, Nesbitt played both Viola and Sebastian – again ensuring that the twins sounded the same. However, the option to use stereo as Raikes would later do was not yet available; although the principle was already known, it would be another three decades before it was embraced by BBC radio drama. So Nesbitt and Lewis used what a reporter from the *Daily Telegraph* described as 'an interlocutor' for the 'full understanding of the story' (Anon. 1923e: 12). This was fulfilled by Lewis, who was billed as 'Chorus' and acted as narrator. The actors' trade paper, *The Stage*, reported that the 'matter that links up the scenes has been either specially written for this purpose or adapted from Lamb' (Anon. 1923c: 8). In other words, taken from the popular nineteenth century collection of Shakespeare's stories written for children by Charles and Mary Lamb: *Tales from Shakespeare*. The original preface for this states that it is intended for 'the young reader as an introduction to the study of Shakespeare' and that 'diligent care has been taken to select such words as might least interrupt the effect of the beautiful English tongue in which he wrote' (Lamb 1922: 1). Unfortunately the script of this production no longer exists, and recordings were not made at this time, so it is not possible to see exactly how this was done.

Nesbitt and Lewis did use one other technique in their adaptation: editing. The play features a clumsy duel between Viola, disguised as the boy Cesario, and Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Rather than trying to convey this on radio, reports state that they simply cut it.

The *Belfast Telegraph* commented that this might have made the play difficult to follow, was it not for the musical interlude that gave people a chance to find their place in the text (Anon. 1923f: 5). Because that is how at least some people listened, following the text, ‘skipping nimbly from page to page’ as the paper wrote. This was an advocated practice for several years. *Observer* radio critic Joyce Grenfell anticipated many of her readers would have been reading along with performances (Grenfell 1938: 9). As did an unnamed writer in the *Manchester Guardian* who stated that some listeners ‘check the play by the Shakespearean text as it is broadcast’ (Anon. 1935: 14).

Despite the idea that the audience would be following along in their copies of the *Complete Works*, narrators, announcers or choruses were frequently, although not always, used for many decades. This was a much-debated issue. Frank Hauser, producer of the 1950 *Antony and Cleopatra*, wrote in the *Radio Times* that ‘there is precious little good in critics wailing against the use of the narrator in principle, unless they *can* suggest an alternative’ (Hauser 1950: 6). He justified its use in his adaptation not only because it was necessary to ‘introduce *new* places or characters’ but also because the text was ‘taken from North’s Plutarch, which is where Shakespeare got his material from in the first place’. The following year, a letter from listener K. Simmons in the same publication seemed to be asking for more narration: ‘I think it would only be necessary to preface each scene with a phrase such as “A room in Angelo’s house” or “The prison,” to localise the scene and make the action more readily understood’ (Simmons 1951: 35). It was a plea that had been voiced some years earlier by Grenfell who wrote: ‘A brief announcement of the setting “A room of State” or “In Polonius’ House” would have made things easier. Trying to recognise the characters takes up time, and detracts from speech and action’ (Grenfell 1938: 9). In fact, this sort of narration was frequently used, often in the guise of Shakespeare’s own stage directions read aloud, although they were not always completely faithful to the text. By the late 1960s this

technique was going out of fashion, although narration was still used in the 1971 productions of *Henry VI*. And when it was missing, its loss was felt by some. In 1975, a repeat of the 1948 production of *Hamlet* that had had its original narration edited out, prompted reviewer Chris Dunkley to write:

At crucial moments the radio listener is left to guess what is happening. [...] no doubt this restored some lost purity to the play. I think the removal was a mistake, nevertheless, tending to reduce the comprehending audience to dedicated initiates.

Dunkley 1975: 74.

This clearly suggests that in some cases narration was felt essential for wide audience understanding.

But narration was also generally accepted as having a negative impact. Sackville-West wrote that ‘the introduction of the Narrator’s voice [...] always makes for a drop in temperature of the programme’ (Sackville-West 1945: 9). A similar sentiment was expressed by Felton: ‘Narration, inopportunistly used, can equally petrify the action of the play’ (Felton 1949: 91). And Elkan and Dorotheen Allan suggested ‘the narrator of radio-drama is an intruder [...] preventing the listener from thoroughly immersing himself’ (Allan 1951: 100). Producer Donald McWhinnie acknowledges that in plays such as *Under Milk Wood*, narration is never criticised ‘because [Dylan] Thomas knew how to use it’ (McWhinnie 1959: 115). However, this may have been the problem with radio Shakespeare: the narration was not written by the author, but added many centuries later, often by a producer rather than a scriptwriter. McWhinnie adds that it is ‘a device which is frequently criticized—and with justice—for such an obvious trick has been used too often as an easy answer: when it is difficult to achieve a real integration of scenes, the storyteller will come to the rescue’ (Ibid.). In this way, the use of narration in these productions regularly contradicts Crook’s assertion that ‘narration is more than a technical convenience. It is recognised as an ideological

mechanism' (Crook 1999a: 174). Perhaps because of narration's use as 'technical convenience' in productions of Shakespeare on radio, it eventually fell out of favour.

The 1948 *Hamlet*, with John Gielgud in the lead, became arguably the most celebrated production of the play and, as mentioned above, used narration. Generally it does little more than give the stage directions, although at times it does provide what John Drakakis describes as 'an almost photographic visualisation of the scene for the listener' (Drakakis 1981b: 124). In particular he suggests an unusually lengthy passage of ninety words at the start of act one, scene two describing the entry of Claudius and courtiers in some detail may have been a direct reference to Laurence Olivier's film of the play in the same year. However, there is nothing in the narration that can be exactly matched to the film, and it differs in several ways, including the narrator expressly stating that Claudius enters, when in the film he is already sitting as the camera pans over to him. But the narrator does at times give an almost photo-realist picture of the scene about to begin, as one might find in a book; exactly the sort of 'badly digested novel narrative' that McWhinnie considered a misuse of radio (McWhinnie 1959: 115).

Narration is also used in the 1948 *Hamlet* to deal with the problem of the visual, in particular in the duel at the end. Hamlet and Laertes swap swords, but there is nothing in the characters' lines to indicate this directly. Alongside the clashing of foils, the sounds of exertion and the murmuring of the court, producer John Richmond inserts the following:

NARRATOR Laertes takes Hamlet off his guard. He disarms and wounds him.

FX – brief clash of foils

Hamlet leaps in and wrests Laertes' sword from his hand and Laertes picks up Hamlet's. They've exchanged swords.

Hamlet 1948: 3:11:58.

However in 1971, producer John Tydeman, in his version of the play, inserts just five words of dialogue to explain the same situation:

FX – clatter of foils on the floor

LAERTES My sword!

HAMLET *My sword now!*

Hamlet 1971: 2:57:04.

This sort of simple textual addition translated the visual into the aural without interrupting the action as narration does and without too much obvious tinkering with the text, something radio critics generally disliked.

Hamlet not only dies on stage, but has both a death-bed speech and a two-line eulogy from Horatio. But not every character is so lucky. It is not uncommon for a radio audience to miss the fact that a character has died. In the 1954 *Antony and Cleopatra* it is quite hard to tell what has happened to Antony. There is just a quiet, short sigh from Michael Redgrave under one of Cleopatra's speeches, delivered by a belligerent Peggy Ashcroft (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1954: 1:53:20). It is only when she says 'We'll bury him' that it is clear to the audience he is dead. Similarly, in the 1939 *Othello*, the murder of Desdemona is silent (*Othello* 1939: 0:05:40). Neither Henry Ainley nor Hermione Hannen, who play the couple, make any noise, and there are no sound effects or music to give any indication that he has smothered her. The same scene is treated quite differently in the 2010 production. Jessica Harris as Desdemona fights desperately for her life, with muffled screams, as Lenny Henry's Othello grunts with the exertion of killing her (*Othello*, 2010: 1:43:50). The audience is left in no doubt of what has happened.

There could be a number of reasons for this change in attitudes to the way death is presented in Shakespeare's plays on radio. Firstly, there may have been an assumption that

audiences knew that a character had died because, as it was Shakespeare, they were either familiar with the play or were following along in the text. There may also have been issues around the use of sound. In the early years of the BBC, there was a belief that sound effects should be kept to a minimum, that ‘the less they are used, the more effective they are’ (Felton 1949: 44). It might have been that a death was considered more affecting if it was not accompanied by effects or other noises. There may also have been concerns about taste and decency; whether it was appropriate to aurally depict a death. Whether this was the case or not, there was a change during the 1970s when Martin Jenkins started producing Shakespeare’s history plays, as well as the series *Vivat Rex*. His development of spot effect techniques graphically captured the sound of murder and mutilation, such the use of ‘a cabbage, a knife and a cup of water, for the spurting blood’ to create the sound of decapitations (‘Vivat Rex’ 2012: para. 7).

Of course, in Shakespeare, not all dead characters stay dead! Several of Shakespeare’s murder victims return as ghosts. In *Hamlet*, the ghost of Hamlet’s father can pose a particular problem in the ‘closet scene’ (act three, scene four) when, apparently, Hamlet can see it, but Gertrude cannot. In the 1971 production, its appearance is signalled by sound effects from the BBC’s Radiophonic Workshop (*Hamlet*, 1971: 1:48:55). The BBC’s former Head of Radio Training, Elwyn Evans, thought these sorts of effects were ‘particularly useful for the heightening of tension’ (Evans 1977: 131). And producer John Tydeman employed them effectively here both to indicate the ghost and to accentuate Ronald Pickup’s performance as Hamlet. *Macbeth* also features a ghost that no-one but the protagonist can see. When the dead Banquo enters the feast in act three, scene four, he has no lines and never speaks. The 2015 production uses the same principle as *Hamlet*, but takes it a stage further. As well as discordant music to indicate the ghost’s appearance, there is the sound of laboured breathing (*Macbeth* 2015: 1:02:10). In addition, the acoustic of the rest of the characters is distorted and

muffled, almost as if Macbeth's head is under water. His own breathing is heightened and his voice is clear. To a regular radio drama listener, the combination not only lets the audience know that Banquo's ghost has appeared, but also the effect it has on Macbeth, when his reaction cannot be seen. However, those less familiar with the conventions of radio may not find this as comprehensible. A recent paper investigating the use of Enhanced Audio Description over film soundtracks for those with visual impairments found that 'a technique often used to indicate hallucinatory states (cacophony of voices, reverberation) failed to deliver the desired effect' (Lopez et al. 2020: 17). Therefore, while this technique does seem to negate the need for narration, it is possible that for some listeners it may simply leave them confused, unless they already know the plot.

Unseen reactions are not an uncommon problem. At the end of *2 Henry IV*, Hal, now King Henry, rejects Falstaff, but Falstaff has no reply (Shakespeare, *2 Henry IV*: 5.5.45-69). In the 1964 production, Robert Hardy as the king delivers his speech scathingly, but Joss Ackland's Falstaff only gives a brief murmur at the start, giving the audience no clear sense of how well or badly he has taken his former friend's rejection (*The History of Henry the Fourth, Part Two* 1964: 2:39:06). During Falstaff's subsequent conversation with Shallow, Ackland's voice is brittle and there is some suggestion that Falstaff does not believe, as he claims, that the king's attitude is 'but a colour' (Shakespeare, *2 Henry IV*, 5.2.82). But it is difficult to discern exactly how he is affected.

However, the unnamed adaptor does a better job of clarifying another highly visual scene in the play. At the end of act two, scene two, Poins suggests to Hal that they should 'put on two leathern jerkins and aprons, and wait upon him [Falstaff] at his table as drawers', so that they can watch Falstaff without him being aware (Shakespeare, *2 Henry IV*: 2.2.148-49). But it is more than fifteen minutes before this is played out for the radio audience and

there is no verbal indication in the text of their entrance. Therefore, two lines are added so the audience knows Hal and Poins are watching:

Music rises then falls.

POINS (*quietly*) Now art thou the very prince of drawers, Hal.

PRINCE (*quietly*) Straighten thy apron, Ned. Shh, Shh. Listen.

The History of Henry the Fourth, Part Two 1964: 0:57:30.

This serves to both indicate their presence and remind listeners that they are not dressed as themselves. It is particularly important that the audience knows they are there but not seen because of the conversation that follows between Doll and Falstaff, in which he speaks disparagingly of both Hal and Poins (Shakespeare, *2 Henry IV*, 2.4.209-26). It also helps establish the convention that the asides that follow between Hal and Poins are unheard by Doll and Falstaff.

Disguise is often used in Shakespeare's plays. Like Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Rosalind in *As You Like It* pretends to be a boy. While this is made clear in the text, it varies from production to production as to whether the actor playing Rosalind chooses to also disguise her voice. In 1944, in the earliest full production of any Shakespeare play to survive in the BBC's archive, Edith Evans did nothing to alter her voice, using the same high, feminine register when adopting the persona of Ganymede as she did earlier in the play. She could easily have spoken in a lower register, as she did when she played the Nurse in the production of *Romeo and Juliet* in the same year, but either chose not to, or perhaps it had not occurred to her or her producer. In later radio productions, such as those in 1978 and 1997 with Sarah Badel and Imogen Stubbs as Rosalind respectively, the actor playing the female lead shifts her voice deeper when playing Ganymede, making it easier for the audience to understand that the character is pretending to be male.

Vocal character is particularly important in radio. It not only enables listeners to distinguish who is talking, but also how they might look and what their personality might be like. The reviewer in the *Manchester Guardian* said of Evans' performance in *As You Like It* that although she was 'a brilliant actress' she did not have 'the right voice for a broadcast of Rosalind' (Anon. 1944: 6). Evans was fifty-six at the time, but this is not necessarily the reason why she was not suited to the part. In radio, age of performer is immaterial, it is the voice that counts, so that fact that Evans was somewhat older than the average Rosalind was probably not the most significant factor. Michael Redgrave was fifty-two when he, quite successfully, played Hamlet on air – but only forty-five when he played Lear. Hardy and Ackland were thirty-eight and thirty-five respectively when they played Hal and Falstaff. In neither case did age matter; Ackland believably sounds considerably older, full of sack and rotund, although he was relatively slim. Hardy's voice is lighter and less affected than he can sound in later television appearances and comfortably passes for ten or fifteen years younger than his actual age.

From the earliest days of radio, there was a recognition that the reliance on voice rather than appearance also gave producers an opportunity to cast actors that might not normally be considered for certain roles. Peach wrote: 'a radio actor or actress has no need to *look* his or her part, only to *sound* like it; the nimble, efficient, superbly fitted theatre which we all of us carry in our minds will do the rest' (Peach 1927: 549). Elwyn Evans later stated that 'in radio you cast for voice, not appearance' but also warned that while that may be the principle, in practice actors can be overlooked because of their physical appearance, even if they have 'superb vocal control' and can sound like anyone (Evans 1977: 129). Writing about American radio, Jennifer Lynn Stoeber comments on the 'rise of standardized radio speech' after the Second World War when 'the white listening ear increasingly demanded conformity to white middle-class sonic norms' (Stoeber 2016: 230-32). The motivation behind the

BBC's choice of voices is unclear, but Shakespeare's plays on radio were populated with white, male Received Pronunciation voices for many decades, conforming to similar norms as those identified by Stoeber in America. This may have been exacerbated by Shakespeare's plays, which are dominated by male characters, dating as they do from an era when women did not appear on the stage and any female character had to be portrayed by a man. Cross-gender casting was highly unusual until the late twentieth-century, and even genuine regional or international voices were rare, with only the occasional 'yokel' or 'stage cockney' used for 'low' characters. In plays with large casts, it was a creative producer who sought out men with different timbres. Colour-blind casting was also very unusual and did not happen often until much later in the BBC's history. For example, the Royal Shakespeare Company cast black actor Edric Connor in the role of Gower in *Pericles* in 1958 (Darlington 1958: 10). It was almost another five decades before BBC radio would do likewise, with Benjamin Zephaniah taking the part in 2005 and Willard White in 2017. This lack of vocal variety was used by Hauser to justify his use of narration, especially as Shakespeare frequently had very long lists of characters:

Few of Shakespeare's plays have less than twenty speaking parts. Many have forty or more. It is perfectly true that many of these 'parts' consist merely of a few lines, but nevertheless they have to be spoken, and spoken so that the listener can find out who is supposed to be talking.

Hauser 1950: 6.

However, other producers worried less about identifying individual minor characters, and used more creativity in casting major ones, enabling voice and vocal technique to replace narration, alongside the insertion of character names in greeting as they entered or left a scene.

Some of the plays have many and various locations. *Pericles* in particular travels all over the eastern Mediterranean, affording a producer many opportunities in sound to 'move

the listener swiftly from one apparent state to another' (Rodger 1982: 123). Felton likened radio specifically to the Elizabethan stage, stating that it 'relies not on physical scenery, but on imagination' (Felton 1949: 58). In the same year as that RSC production, a radio adaptation starring Paul Scofield used music highly effectively to differentiate the varied locations. There are around sixty music cues and a wide range of musical styles. The play opens with a drum roll, fanfare and dramatic music, before moving on to something more Elizabethan in style. This might suggest a sixteenth-century setting, but the music changes with each new location. In the opening scene alone the listener hears something almost military, then a romantic, orchestral piece for the entrance of Antiochus' daughter and, when the riddle is read, the music turns mystical, almost sci-fi in style (*Pericles* 1958: 0:02:34-0:07:17). When the action moves to Tarsus in act one, scene four, the music features woodwind heavily and sounds sinister, reflecting the starvation in the city (*Pericles* 1958: 0:21:05). After Pericles' shipwreck, it is dramatic with brass, cymbals and timpani (*Pericles* 1958: 0:28:30). Simonides' court in Pentapolis is introduced with brass, drums and fanfares, and each knight has his own musical motif (*Pericles* 1958: 0:36:26). When the story moves to the Mytilene brothel, the music becomes pseudo-Middle Eastern, using what sounds like a traditional flute and drum (*Pericles* 1958: 1:25:05). At the start of act five, when Pericles is aboard his ship, the scene opens with a 'halliard shanty', and the final location, the temple of Diana at Ephesus, is represented by a chorus of women singing a modal song of worship, again in a pseudo-Middle Eastern style, with drum and tambourine (*Pericles* 1958: 2:07:42). These evocative pieces help the listener to quickly comprehend each new location, 'communicat[ing] information in some symbolic form', as Drakakis states, rather than simple incidental music to 'evoke a particular mood' (Drakakis 1981a: 26).

Another key feature in the play is Gower, as chorus. It might be thought a great advantage to anyone adapting the play for radio to have a ready-made narrator, but his

speeches are often long and accompanied by dumb shows, neither of which work well dramatically on radio. Adaptor and producer R. D. Smith not only removes the dumb shows but also substantially cuts Gower's lines and frequently rewrites them, compressing the script. In the chorus at the opening of act two, lines five to sixteen are reduced to the un-Shakespearean 'Prince Pericles at Tarsus stays / But letters come him to amaze' (*Pericles* 1958: 0:27:38). And a more elaborate version of this practice can be found in the chorus in act four, scene four, where more than twenty lines are cut, seven are substantially rewritten, and eight, from Marina's epitaph, are given to Pericles. This practice of reallocating lines happens throughout the play. Pericles would normally read Antiochus' riddle at the start of the play, but instead he says: 'let me *hear* the riddle', and a female voice recites it (Shakespeare *Pericles*: 1.1.65-72; *Pericles* 1958: 0:07:23). And when Pericles arrives at the jousting tournament, he is not announced by Thaisa. Instead the lines are subtly changed and he announces himself. All this breaks up what can sometimes be long passages of speech into more radio-friendly soundbites. However, it is worth noting that the textual editing of Shakespeare's plays for BBC radio is rarely to fit a specific duration. Plays vary in length from eighty minutes (*Comedy of Errors*, 1968) to four hours (*Hamlet*, 1992). In the majority of cases, producers seem to have been allowed the time they think fit for the production they are making.

The jousting in *Pericles* is done off-stage – as is the shipwreck – but, like travelling to different locations, radio gives a producer the opportunity to create such scenes in sound. As Felton states, 'the radio-play has the same freedom' as the cinema, enabling it to present scenes impossible on the stage (Felton 1949: 57). Neither the jousting nor the shipwreck is presented in the 1958 production, but the 2017 *Pericles* features both (*Pericles* 2017: 0:21:24 and 0:32:54). Likewise, *The Tempest* in 2012 opens with a vivid audio recreation of a storm; a mix of effects, musical sounds, shouts from sailors and the voice of Ariel treated with

effects (*The Tempest* 2012: 0:01:02). On stage, such scenes cannot be created, at least not realistically, but radio is much more flexible. Twenty-first-century producers in particular have taken advantage of the sophisticated digital technology unavailable to their predecessors to help bring alive these scenes with multi-layered sound in ways that only expensive visual effects could do on stage or screen.

Something else radio arguably often does better than the stage is crowds. In his introduction to the 1959 production of *Coriolanus*, Ivor Brown tells listeners: ‘The mob may, on the stage, seem only to be a group, but with a varying volume of sound, we can imagine ourselves to be right in the hurly-burly’ (Brown 1959). It is particularly evident in this production in act three, scene three, where the plebeians turn on Coriolanus. Producer John Gibson uses his cast of more than twenty to create a baying mob as the tribunes call for Coriolanus’ death (*Coriolanus* 1959: 1:17:30). The use of multiple voices can also be used to create atmosphere in court and group scenes. In the 1948 *Hamlet*, the voices of the ensemble are combined with sound effects to make Laertes’ entrance after the death of his father particularly impressive (Shakespeare *Hamlet* 2016: 4.2.95.1-110). First there is a crowd shouting from a distance (*Hamlet* 1948: 2:24:35). This builds to louder shouting, followed by banging and finally wood splintering. All this continues under the dialogue of the King, Queen and Messenger, who have to shout towards the end to make themselves heard. Again, radio has the advantage here over stage productions, where literally smashing a door to pieces would be impractical. The effects enable the listener to picture the scene more vividly than could be represented in a theatre. Similarly, in the 1949 production of *Macbeth*, after Macduff discovers the murdered Duncan, there is the increasing noise of confusion, as well as the constant sound of a bell (*Macbeth* 1949: 0:43:15). This heightens the sense of what has happened and the chaos it will lead to. Battles can also sound vast on radio, with the right

combination of recorded effects, sword clanking, trumpets, drums and live actors. For an example, listen to the penultimate scene of the 1985 *Richard III* (*Richard III* 1985: 2:22:47).

It is not just crowds that radio can do more effectively. Asides and soliloquies also work very well. Janet Clare states that ‘the soliloquy becomes a still more potent dramatic device, establishing a close relationship between character and listener’ (Clare 1986: 4). W. H. Auden suggests this is because radio ‘makes us hear what characters say’ (Auden 2015: 346). And Sackville-West believes that:

Never since the turn of the sixteenth century has a dramatic medium been discovered so ideally suited to the individual meditation. The intimacy of the microphone—the fact that the speaker is addressing each listener personally—the absence of that awkwardness, which is nowadays felt in the theatre when an actor addresses the audience.

Sackville-West 1945: 14.

Soliloquies can be presented in two ways; as thoughts in the speaker’s head or as quiet reflections spoken aloud. The latter is used in the 1949 *Macbeth*. Stephen Murray delivers both ‘If it were done when ‘tis done’ and ‘Is this a dagger which I see before me’ virtually in a whisper, as if talking to himself, thoughtfully and quietly (*Macbeth* 1949: 0:24:35 and 0:31:28). However, in the 2010 *Othello* during Iago’s first soliloquy ‘Thus do I ever make my fool my purse’, the acoustic is ‘deader’ than the scene moments before and Conrad Nelson as Iago is close to the microphone, creating a more intimate sound and giving the impression Iago is thinking rather than speaking the lines (*Othello* 2010: 0:17:24). Drakakis states that ‘while it is generally agreed that intimacy is a feature of the medium and that a device such as soliloquy works well on radio, it must be said that the aside [...] is, by contrast, ineffective’ (Drakakis 1981b: 120). However, practitioners disagree, arguing that the ‘very intimacy of radio, the fact that we are only as far from the speaker as he is from the microphone—in other words that he is speaking secretly into our ear—means that we may have acutely the sense of

sharing his thoughts and experiences' (McWhinnie 1959: 57). They felt that the focalisation of the microphone can make asides clearer and less jarring than in the theatre. Felton singles out 'the scene before Flint Castle' in *Richard II*, mentioned above, as a case in point:

The King, on the castle walls at the back of the stage, must speak to Aumerle in tones apparently inaudible to Bolingbroke in the forecourt immediately below, but clearly audible everywhere else in the theatre. The stage-actor has always to use the technique of the megaphone; in radio he can use the technique of the microphone.

Felton 1949: 12.

John Gielgud, in his 1961 radio performance as the King, adjusts his voice and microphone technique between his authoritative address to Northumberland and his quiet confession to Aumerle. To Northumberland he is haughty and projects his voice, almost as if he is in a theatre (*Richard II* 1961: 1:21:43). But talking to Aumerle his voice is soft and he speaks close to the microphone, creating an intimate atmosphere (*Richard II* 1961: 1:24:00).

Radio is also able to present Shakespeare's supernatural worlds very effectively. The BBC's long-term head of radio drama, Val Gielgud, said that the plays that worked best were 'in general terms the plays of fantasy and imagination', adding that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* 'might almost have been written for the "insubstantial pageant" of "thin air"' (Gielgud 1965: 180). This was echoed by radio critic David Wade who believed 'fairy-stories, allegories, legends, myths [...] are *par excellence* the worlds of drama in which, if they are to act upon us as they might, radio holds a virtual monopoly' (Wade 1981: 231). Combinations of effects, music and voice have been used to help create Shakespeare's fairies and witches on radio. Raikes enlisted the help of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop to tweak the voices of the fairy king and queen, Oberon and Titania, in his 1970 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1970: 0:23:52). This is in contrast to the music, which was written in the 1930s for the Stratford Memorial Theatre, the forerunner to the RSC. Raikes' version creates a strange hybrid of old-fashioned and new, but

it does at least make clear the fairy folk are not quite the same as the Athenian mortals. The 1949 production of *Macbeth* takes a simpler approach, opening with wind and thunder effects, which continue under the three weird sisters (*Macbeth* 1949: 0:00:45). Echo is used on their voices, which are exaggerated, almost pantomimic. The scene creatively uses sound effects, microphone effects and the human voice to create an unearthly atmosphere.

Of course, there can sometimes be benefits from not being able to see things. Auden wrote that ‘the disembodied voices of radio’ could be very convincing because ‘the listener is not spoiled by any collision with visual reality’ (Auden 2015: 346). When all three *Henry VI* plays are performed together, there is always the problem of casting Henry. The character ages by decades across the trilogy, so do you cast a young actor and age them up or an older actor and age them down?¹ Or more than one actor? None of these options is particularly convincing. In radio, an actor can simply adjust their voice, as Nigel Lambert does in the 1971 productions of the plays. Literary critic Harold C. Goddard felt that ‘it takes rare acting to rescue [Falstaff] from being physically repulsive’ (Goddard 1951: 179). On radio, it is up to the listener’s own imagination to decide quite what a ‘monster of flesh [...] and greasy beefiness’ he is (Ibid.). And who really wants to see Gloucester’s eyes put out in *King Lear*? Although, in the 2001 production, the sound effects used on this scene are perhaps more disturbing than watching it acted on stage or film.

During the course of the last century, BBC radio producers have developed a range of techniques for adapting Shakespeare’s plays for broadcast. While the plays do lend themselves to audio production in many ways, with lines frequently signalling actions and appearance, additional work is required to make them comprehensible to all listeners, regardless of their prior knowledge. Some methods, such as narration, have fallen out of favour, possibly due to its perfunctory rather than embedded nature. Others, like sound effects, have increased in use and complexity, as techniques for creating them and for

layering them in recordings have developed. Acting techniques have also changed. While it would be wrong to suggest the ‘RP’ voice had totally disappeared, listeners can now expect to hear a much wider range of distinct voices than they would have done in the past. Strict adherence to Shakespeare’s text has been relaxed, with scripts edited to create pacier productions with greater interaction between characters and the subtle addition of extra lines to assist the audience. Not all the methods of adaptation have been welcomed by all critics, but as the BBC approaches its one-hundredth birthday, the art of presenting Shakespeare’s plays on radio continues to evolve, with developments such as the first binaural production (*Richard II*) in 2017. Felton wrote: ‘We want to take the listener not to the “Garrick”, the “Lyric”, or the “New”, but to fair Verona [or] the shores of Illyria’ (Felton 1949: 14). The best Shakespeare on radio does exactly that.

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¹ The first option was employed in the BBC television adaptations in 2016, under the banner *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses*. The second option was used in the BBC television adaptations in 1983.