

"Tuning In: The Sound of Literature from the Radio Play to Podcast"

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Graduate Level Comparative Humanities (in English)

Throughout the twentieth century, the radio has been a key transmitter of literature. Due its eclectic blend of sounds and technological ability to reach audiences differently than books or other forms of print, the radio drama became a popular literary medium consumed less by reading as by turning on and tuning in. Authors such as Samuel Beckett, Walter Benjamin, and H.G. Wells created new sounds and formats for literature that had a large literary impact on society, but also a significant audial one. Today, radio dramas tend to be often over-read and under-heard. To refurbish the practice of listening, this course will listen to radio dramas from the early 1920s up to the present-day in order to hear how sound mediated the genre and helped transform literature. To accompany our listening, we will also read the radio dramas in translation in order to assess the aesthetics of radio and contextualize the relationship between audial and written literature. In addition to examining literary radio dramas, we will situate their acoustic tradition into theoretical discourses of radio and sound.

This course is designed as an interdisciplinary course for general humanities credits. To record the listening interpretation, students will be asked to keep a written journal that will be collected every two weeks. In the journal, students will answer a set of questions about the sound and translated text of the radio drama; they will also contribute to a collective class list of theoretical concepts. Each student will also be asked to conduct a verbal presentation that addresses a question of production or of sound in one radio play. By highlighting the interaction between sound and literature, students will be asked to contextualize the sound of radio drama against the background of its narrative. In the final project, students will work in small groups to produce their own recording that analyzes one of the radio dramas featured in class and submit a four-page written paper that frames their individual argument and contribution for the recording. Group recordings will be published as a podcast and, where possible, broadcast on-air at a community radio station or other online platform.

Required Radio Dramas and Texts

Each week features one radio drama and background texts, which can be purchased in a coursepack from the bookstore or found on the course website.

Grading:

15% Class Participation and Course Preparation

15% Individual Presentation

40% Radio Play Journal

15% Group Podcast

15% Four-page paper

Week 1: First Waves

**Listen/Read*: Pierre Cusy and Gabriel Germinet: "Marémoto" ("Seaquake") (1924); Heinrich Heine and Peter Ihle: "Seegespenst" ("Sea Ghost") (1923)

Read: Tim Crook, readings from *Radio Drama*; Peter Jelavich, readings from *Berlin Alexanderplatz*; Cecil Lewis: "G.B.S. Lectures the B.B.C." (1924)

Week 2: Sound Fiction

Listen: Bertolt Brecht: "The Flight Across the Ocean" (1929); Ronald Knox: "Broadcasting from the Barricades" (1926)

Read: Bertolt Brecht, "The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication"; Rudolf Arnheim, readings from *Radio*

Week 3: Didactic Radio

**Listen/Read*: Walter Benjamin, episodes from "Enlightenment for Children"

Read: Sabine Schiller-Lerg, readings from *Radio Benjamin*

Week 4: War Words

Listen: H.G. Wells: "War of the Worlds" (1938)

Read: Howard Blue, readings from *Words at War*

Week 5: Sound Drama

Listen: Lucille Fletcher "Sorry Wrong Number" (1943); Wolfgang Borchert, "The Man Outside" (1947)

Read: Andrew Crisell, readings from *Understanding Radio*

Week 6: Dreams

Listen: Ingeborg Bachmann "The Business with Dreams" (1952); Aldous Huxley: "A Brave New World" (1956)

Read: John Mowitz, readings from *Radio*

Week 7: Staged Listening

Listen: Samuel Beckett: "Krapp's Last Tape" (1958)

Read: Joe Milutis, "Radiophonic Ontologies and the Avantgarde"

Week 8: Listening Stage

Listen: John Arden, "Pearl" (1978)

Read: Elissa Guralnick, readings from *Sights Unseen*

Week 9: Live

Listen: Garrison Keillor, *A Prairie Home Companion*; Jonathan Goldstein, *Wiretap*

Read: Charles Larson and Christine Oravec, "'A Prairie Home Companion' and the Fabrication of Community"

Week 10: Drama

Listen: Michael Frayn, "Copenhagen" (2013)

Read: Daniel Gilfillan, readings from *Pieces of Sound*

Week 11: Digital Air Waves

Listen: Aeschylus, "The Suppliants" 470 B.C.; Pejk Malinovski, "Everything, Nothing, Harvey Keitel" (2015)

Read: Jonathan Sterne, readings from *The Audible Past*; Marshall McLuhan, readings from *Understanding Media*

Week 12: Group Project

Group Podcast Project

* *Original audio recording not available.*