Introduction

London Calling

In the three short decades between the advent of the BBC Empire Service in 1932 and the emergence of television as a global channel of communication in the 1960s, radio ruled the air.[1] During this period, wireless was the most encompassing, and the most ephemeral, medium of empire. It travelled further, faster, and more extensively than newsprint, letters, books, and periodicals. Its seemingly boundless coverage was unprecedented. But it was also an invisible, radiant technology, more obscure than the flimsiest of little magazines, as impalpable as the air through which it moved. A fugitive form that has proved difficult to capture or pass on within disciplines traditionally dominated by models of textuality and inscription, radio has persisted, until quite recently, as the most attenuated medium of the mid-century world.

During its first decade, the Empire Service grew from a staff of ten to 4,000, from speaking in one language to nearly fifty.[2] Advances in shortwave broadcasting across the 1920s and 1930s created a veritable scramble for the overseas airwaves. For the first time, Holland fell within ear shot of the Dutch West Indies; Italy could be heard in Abyssinia; France in Algeria; Germany in India and West Africa; North America in Europe, Australia, the Caribbean, Africa, and the South Pacific.[3] Through the outposts of the British Empire, listeners caught the words of the inaugural King's Speech on the BBC: 'I speak now from my home and from my heart to you all. To men and women so cut off by the snows, the desert, or the sea, that only voices out of the air can reach them.'[4] Radio's heyday also coincided with the dying

[1] On 26 May 1965, *Calling Nigeria* reported on the first use of the Early Bird Satellite, the Intelsat 1, for transatlantic television broadcasts, making the Muhammad Ali v Sonny Liston fight a simultaneous experience in both London and New York, if not yet in Nigeria.

[2] J. B. Clark, 'Through 21 Years', *London Calling*, 10 December 1953, 2.

[3] See Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Gerard Mansell, *Let the Truth Be Told: 50 Years of BBC External Broadcasting* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982).

[4] Tom Fleming, *Voices Out of the Air: Royal Christmas Day Broadcasts* (London: Heinemann, 1981), 11.

Scripting Empire. James Procter, Oxford University Press. © James Procter (2024).
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198894179.003.0001

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

days of colonialism.[5] During those turbulent years of late colonial transition, broadcasting did much more than service the missionary zeal of sonic extension associated with the BBC's first Director General, John Reith.[6]

Among the most extensive communications networks in the world by the mid-twentieth century, the BBC was also subject to the tectonic shifts in global power associated with decolonization and the Cold War. During the Second World War, the steady chimes of Big Ben were regarded as the herald of the Empire Service, a resounding echo from London's imperial heart of unity and connectivity across a world falling apart.[7] By October 1947, a West Indian listener was complaining that the clock's clanging interruption of literary broadcasts meant a more appropriate name for overseas programmes might be 'For Whom the Bell Tolls'.[8] As early as 1942, Alfred Zimmern, the political scientist credited with coining the terms 'British Commonwealth' and 'welfare state', delivered a message on *Calling the West Indies* that carried ominous overtones for the BBC: 'organisations have a way of outliving their usefulness … The same is true of words', and at least two, 'sovereignty' and 'colonial', should be consigned to the 'scrapheap'.[9] By the early 1960s, Bush House was becoming better known as a Tower of Babel.[10]

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Empire Service was renamed the Overseas Service. Political unrest, and the stirrings of nationalism, along with ever-louder calls for independence, meant that the corporation could ill-afford to take colonial loyalty for granted. The situation required a genuine accommodation of the voices of overseas speakers. At stake in these developments was a recognition that the BBC could no longer guarantee the consent of overseas territories through the older discourses of imperial sovereignty. Late colonial broadcasters seized upon the growing bandwidth available as the BBC conceded airtime in the face of Britain's dwindling centrality. From the lips of these speakers, West Africans and West

[5] See Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism: Freedom for Algeria*, translated by Haakon Chevalier (1959; London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1980), with its influential account of Radio-Alger, 'This is the Voice of Algeria', 47–75.

[6] See Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: The Birth of Broadcasting, Volume 1* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 322–324 for an overview of Reith's early ambitions for the Empire Service.

[7] On the symbolic role of Big Ben in empire broadcasting, see Emma Robertson '"I Get a Real Kick Out of Big Ben": BBC Versions of Britishness on the Empire and General Overseas Service, 1932–1948', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 28/4 (2008), 459–473.

[8] BBC Written Archives Centre (BBC WAC), E1/1308/1 Gladys Lindo, File 1, 1947–1948, Monthly Report, October 1947.

[9] BBC WAC, *Calling the West Indies*, 20 September 1942.

[10] BBC WAC, *Calling the Caribbean*, 25 January 1961.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

Indians first heard Kwame Nkrumah being congratulated on his 'sweeping victory in the polls' in 1954, and the latest reports on the 'winding up' of empire: 'What a tumultuous era it has been! Malaya and Ghana independent; Singapore self-governing; the West Indian Federation born'.[11] These 'imperial encores' represented forms of diffusion in a double sense: spreading the word of 'constitutional progress' and Commonwealth reform, even as they registered the dissipation and diminution of empire.[12]

African Caribbean artists and intellectuals were not only among radio's earliest and most avid listeners; they actively serviced, and repurposed, the airwaves, as canteen staff, sound engineers, editors, announcers, producers, comperes, scriptwriters, guest speakers, readers, and performers.[13] The conspicuous presence of so many colonial staff by the end of the war led to the BBC being dubbed a 'microcosm of the Empire itself'.[14] Along with freelance writers who contributed remotely from across the colonies and dominions, this diasporic enclave in central London, scattered between BBC's Bush House, the Langham Hotel, and 200 Oxford Street, included Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, Africans, South Asians, and West Indians.

Research on this crowded international community of writers and broadcasters has substantively documented the role of the dominions, and the now legendary literary collaborations of the Eastern Service, where T. S. Eliot, George Orwell, and E. M. Forster shared the microphone with novelists Mulk Raj Anand and G. V. Desani, and the Tamil poet, editor, and critic, M. J. Tambimuttu.[15] With the notable exception of 'Caribbean Voices',

[11] See BBC WAC, *Calling West Africa*, 'West African Diary', 23 June 1954, and *Calling the Caribbean*, 'Postmark London', 1 August 1959.

[12] See Caroline Ritter, *Imperial Encore: The Cultural Project of the Late British Empire* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2021). On the slippery historical associations of 'Commonwealth' in this period see Stuart Ward, ed., *British Culture and the End of Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

[13] V. S. Naipaul, with characteristic sensitivity on such matters, referred to the West Indians working in the kitchens of the BBC cafeteria as 'the blackroom boys'. Patrick French, *The World Is What It Is: The Authorised Biography of V.S. Naipaul* (London: Picador, 2012), 145. As A. K. Ramanujan notes in a different context, 'No idea, invention, or technological device … is the unaided invention or property of a single person or culture, though we often choose to think so'. A. K. Ramanujan, 'Some Thoughts on "Non-Western" Classics, with Indian Examples', *World Literature Today*, 68/2 (1994), 331–34, 331. See also Simon Potter, 'The Colonization of the BBC: Diasporic Britons at the BBC External Services, c.1932–1970', in M. Gillespie and A. Webb, eds., *Diasporas and Diplomacy: Cosmopolitan Contact Zones at the BBC World Service, 1932–2012* (London: Routledge, 2013), 40–56.

[14] Antonia White, *The BBC at War* (London: BBC, 1947), 39.

[15] See, for example, Douglas Kerr, 'Orwell's BBC Broadcasts: Colonial Discourse and the Rhetoric of Propaganda', *Textual Practice*, 16/3 (2002), 473–490; Daniel Ryan Morse, *Radio Empire: The BBC's Eastern Service and the Emergence of the Global Anglophone Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020); Susheila Nasta (ed.), *India in Britain: South Asian*

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

far less is known about the West Indian and African Sections of the BBC, where over 300 writers participated between the outbreak of the Second World War and the 1960s.[16] Among them were a remarkable range of figures whose singular and collective contribution to the anglophone cultural world is still being recovered: C. L. R. James, Derek Walcott, V. S. Naipaul, Chinua Achebe, George Lamming, Louise Bennett, Una Marson, Samuel Selvon, Sylvia Wynter, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka, Roger Mais, Stuart Hall, Wilson Harris, Andrew Salkey, Cyprian Ekwensi, and Vic Reid. Through the BBC offices in New York, African Americans such as Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and Le Roi Jones contributed further to this considerable pool of talents. Viewed collectively, their transmissions reveal a triangulated chain of communications that moved from the Americas and West Africa to Europe, before being beamed back again, in a circuit that has recalled the Middle Passage and the trajectory of that precious commodity of empire: sugar.[17]

It is with this diffuse group of African Caribbean writers at the BBC, probably the most substantial network of black Atlantic artists across the twentieth century, that *Scripting Empire* is centrally concerned. The unlikely camaraderie that emerged between these broadcasters and the BBC has been variously explained in terms of the 'bonds' of empire, the aesthetics

Networks and Connections, 1858–1950 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); and Ruvani Ranasinha, 'South Asian Broadcasters and the BBC: Talking to India (1941–1943)', *Journal of South Asian Diaspora*, 2/1 (2010), 57–71.

[16] On 'Caribbean Voices' see, for example, Laurence Breiner, 'Caribbean Voices on the Air: Radio, Poetry, and Nationalism in the Anglophone Caribbean', in Susan Squier (ed.), *Communities of the Air: Radio Century, Radio Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 93–108; J. Dillon Brown, *Migrant Modernism: Postwar London and the West Indian Novel* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013); Rhonda Cobham, 'The *Caribbean Voices* Programme and the Development of West Indian Short Fiction: 1945–1958', in Peter O. Stummer, (ed.), *The Story Must be Told: Short Narrative Prose in the New English Literatures* (Bayreuth: Königshausen und Neumann, 1986), 146–160; Alison Donnell, 'Rescripting Anglophone Caribbean Women's Literary History: Gender, Genre, and Lost Caribbean Voices', in J. Dillon Brown and Leah Reade Rosenberg (eds.), *Beyond Windrush: Rethinking Postwar Anglophone Caribbean Literature* (University Press of Mississippi, 2015), 79–96; John Figueroa, 'Flaming Faith of these First Years: *Caribbean Voices*', in Butcher (ed.), *Tibisiri* (Aarhus: Dangeroo Press, 1989), 59–80; Glyne Griffith, *The BBC and the Development of Anglophone Caribbean Literature, 1943–1958* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Peter Kalliney, *Commonwealth of Letters: British Literary Culture and the Emergence of Postcolonial Aesthetics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Gail Low, *Publishing the Postcolonial: Anglophone West African and Caribbean Writing in the UK, 1948–1968* (London: Routledge, 2011); and Philip Nanton, 'What Does Mr. Swanzy Want? Shaping or Reflecting? An Assessment of Henry Swanzy's Contribution to the Development of Caribbean Literature', *Kunapipi*, 20/1 (1998), 11–20.

[17] George Lamming, 'The Coldest Spring in Fifty Years', *Kunapipi*, 20/1 (1998), 4–10.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

of literary modernism, and the shared values of middle-class elites.[18] It also congealed around the unwritten homosocial assumptions of that paternalistic mid-century institution. The role of women was exceptional in this period, both uncommon and extraordinary. As the African American journalist Roi Ottley noted in a radio interview with Una Marson in 1944, 'Americans will be thrilled about you, because no woman—or for that matter, no man—holds an equivalent position with any broadcasting chain in America.'[19] Beginning with Marson's late lyric poetry and the early dramatic monologues of Louise Bennett, the opening chapters of this book reassess the pioneering role of women within the gendered public sphere of the 1940s and 1950s, not just as 'firsts' at the BBC, but as formal innovators whose work at the junctions of radio, writing, and the spoken word reverberates throughout the postwar world.[20]

More than a study of individual authors, and remarkable literary talents, the chapters that follow establish a wider understanding of the underlying forms, idioms, and modes of address that took shape through the channels of radio at the end of empire. Operating at the intersection of a range of communication technologies, including airborne projectiles (Chapter 1) recording devices (Chapter 3), print periodicals (Chapter 4), and visual media (Chapter 5), *Scripting Empire* exposes the need to rethink this period of cultural production at the interface of books and broadcasting, script and sound, and the fraying edges of a range of related media. At stake in these crossovers, it contends, is more than the blur of intermediality, or the technological rivalry of remediation, terms that tend to 'treat media as the self-acting agents of their own history'.[21] In the friction and disjunctions between different media, *Scripting Empire* reveals West Indian and West African writers as participants, and protagonists, within a vibrant but

[18] See for example, Kalliney, *Commonwealth of Letters*; Anne Spry Rush, *Bonds of Empire: West Indians and Britishness from Victoria to Decolonization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire 1939–1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[19] BBC WAC, *Calling the West Indies*, 'Close-Up', 17 September 1944. For Ottley's personal reflections on his meetings with Marson see *Roi Ottley's Word War II: The Lost Diary of an African American Journalist*, edited by Mark Huddle (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2011).

[20] If, as Alexander G. Weheliye argues, black and Afro-diasporic sound production continue to be regarded as 'inherently Luddite and therefore situated outside the bounds of Western modernity', then the burden of that dubious boundary has historically rested most heavily upon the shoulders of black women. Alexander G. Weheliye, *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 2.

[21] Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 9.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

highly segregated public sphere where the episodic, infinitely interchangeable formats of radio, magazines, and newspapers proved dynamic sites of literary, and political, refashioning. During the seismic global realignments associated with the Second World War, mass migration, and the Cold War, these discombobulating, disorderly settings eloquently capture the 'chaos of identifications' associated with living through decolonization.[22]

Episodic Media: Shortwave and the Short Form

Scripting Empire spans the junction of the so-called communications revolution and the rise of revolutionary anti-colonial movements between the 1930s and the 1960s. Recovering the role of late colonial broadcasters as they traversed the overlapping platforms of an increasingly episodic media environment, it yields new insights into decolonization as a *daily* story, rather than as a decisive event. Episodic forms increased exponentially during the boom era of shortwave broadcasting, when the segmented structures of programming, together with the mosaic forms of the modern metropolitan periodical acquired a new intensity.[23] The European little magazine was approaching its expiry date in the early postwar years, just as its West African and West Indian counterparts were coming of age. During the same period a boom in mass circulation newspapers and magazines was providing ready content for radio programmes.[24] 'Episode' refers both to a programme or

[22] Stuart Hall, *Familiar Stranger: A Life between Two Islands*, edited by Bill Schwarz (London: Penguin, 2017), 63. If the scale of BBC broadcasting was a measure of the corporation's power, it also created a chaotic, disorderly working environment in which the right hand rarely knew what the left hand was doing. As the prominent Empire Service producer Lionel Fielden wrote, 'The elemental fact about broadcasting is its tremendous output. You may have all the authorities and restrictions and committees and regulations: but they are all defeated by the rapidity of successive programmes'. Lionel Fielden, *The Natural Bent* (London: André Deutsch, 1960), 104.

[23] Richard Hoggart, who bemoaned the 'bittiness' of the modern media, noted that in Britain the circulation of daily papers increased by half between 1937 and 1947, while the circulation of Sunday newspapers doubled. Magazines and periodical circulation increased from 26 to 40 million between 1938 and 1952. Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), 216 and 331.

[24] At the mid-century, the writers considered in this book appeared on radio stations across Europe, the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean. Their work circulated simultaneously in regional print magazines such as *West African Review*, *Black Orpheus*, *Okike*, *West Indian Review*, *Bim*, and *Kyk-over-al*. Pamphlets, local newspapers and their literary supplements provided further outlets, including Nigeria's *The Daily Times*, the Jamaican *Gleaner*, *Public Opinion*, and the *Trinidad Guardian*. In Paris and London, their work is scattered across pan-African and black interest magazines such as *Présence Africaine*, *Tropic*, *Flamingo*, and *Savacou*. Some found temporary homes within metropolitan little magazines on both sides of

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

magazine instalment and a brief, irregular interval of time. Unlike the book, the broadcast did not have to envisage its own end. Everything said on radio was part of an incessant narrative, unfolding in 'real time'. Any given episode was subject to constant revision, and modification by the ceaseless traffic of transmissions that surrounded it. The stuttering continuity of broadcasting undoubtedly served the structural contradictions of empire, including the stagist models of decolonization through which independence was indefinitely postponed. Yet however prescriptive or self-contained, the episode did not have a political outcome already inscribed into it. It was also a space-clearing setting through which writers proved themselves to be astonishingly agile operators. An articulated structure, and a site of trial and error, the episode was a remarkably flexible and adaptable unit of literary production at the mid-century. Along with repeated opportunities to begin again, or start over, the episode was geared towards the next instalment—'to be continued … '.

As a unit of literary production, the episode has proved elusive: small enough to seem inconsequential, pervasive enough to remain invisible. *Scripting Empire*'s working hypothesis is that the microstructures of the episode may also afford key insights into the macrostructures of transnational literary form at the end of empire. The episode allows for a more integrated and more *disorderly* account of the relationship between, for instance, the romantic lyric, the Victorian dramatic monologue, the modernist short story, and the late- or post-colonial novel, not simply as the constituent parts of a narrative of progress, but as a history that unfolds in fits and starts, across different forms, genres, and media. As Matthew Garrett argues in his narratological account of post-constitution America, the episode is a *relational* structure that insistently raises 'the question of the part's relationship to the whole'.[25] These relations carried a particular resonance during the mid-century decades of mass migration to the metropole when empire was being reimagined as 'accidental and external' to the holistic unity of the nation (see Chapter 5).[26]

the Atlantic: *Encounter*, *Life and Letters and the London Mercury*, *Chicago Review*, *Evergreen Review*, *The London Magazine*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Transatlantic Review*, *Les Temps Modernes*, *Merkur*. Others appear episodically in political monthlies, photo-journals, pulp periodicals, and adventure magazines: *Lilliput*, *Punch*, *John Bull*, *Boy's Own Paper*, *Wide World Magazine*, *New Statesman*.

[25] Matthew Garrett, *Episodic Poetics: Politics and Literary Form after the Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

[26] Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality, Britain 1968–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 71.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

Shortwave revolutionized long-distance radio communication by bouncing signals between the earth and the ionosphere. It was notoriously susceptible to atmospheric interference. Early broadcasters like Una Marson responded by harnessing the lyric's concision and lack of temporal progression to create island 'spells' that were less prone to interruption for their effects. The evanescence of radio, and its dependence on the dissolving element of time loosened the tongues of writers. The 'present tense' of delivery licensed speech acts that were often impossible in print. From the breathless monologues of Louise Bennett, and the frugal economies of short fiction, to the radical compressions of the radio feature, and the vignette, *Scripting Empire* recalibrates mid-century literary space in relation to the short, serial formats that pulsed with a new frequency through radio and related media during the decades of metropolitan contraction. It discovers in these small acts a distinctive repertoire of forms without which, it argues, the late colonial novel is unthinkable.

Scholarship has established an axiomatic link between the end of empire, mass migration, and the rise of the anglophone African Caribbean novel.[27] A key barometer of cultural nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, the long form remains the preeminent model of literary expression, almost uniquely suited to the panoramic *scale* of transnational change at the mid-century. Among the most compelling cultural histories of this period focus on the history of the book, the duration of the Bildungsroman, the geopolitics of the Anglophone novel, and what Mariano Siskind calls the 'novelization of the global'.[28] *Scripting Empire* seeks to bring the same kind of analytical focus to bear on the short form. The prevalence of what Peter Hitchcock calls narratives of extension (trilogies, tetralogies, sequels) at the end of empire needs, this book argues, to be set alongside the constricted settings that were proliferating across the burgeoning mass media of the same period.[29]

It would be surprising if the profound global upheavals associated with decolonization were only registered within a single literary form, or genre.

[27] The pioneering, metropolitan-published works of West African and West Indian writers have been given due prominence in this regard, including Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City* (1954), Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958).

[28] Mariano Siskind, 'The Globalization of the Novel and the Novelization of the Global: A Critique of World Literature', *Comparative Literature*, 62/4 (1 September 2010), 336–360, 341. See also Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), and John Marx, *Geopolitics and the Anglophone Novel, 1890–2011* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[29] Peter Hitchcock, *The Long Space: Transnationalism and Postcolonial Form* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

The point is not to pit forms against one another: long versus short. The short form, and the media platforms associated with it, are often characterized as ephemeral, but they were far more enduring than is often supposed. Repetition, reproduction, and re-versioning ensured the short form's shelf life was often longer than the book. When Bernth Lindfors described Amos Tutuola's fiction as 'concatenated', 'like boxcars on a freight train, they are independent units joined with a minimum of apparatus and set in a seemingly random and interchangeable order', he might have been describing any number of Tutuola's contemporaries.[30] Often regarded as structural weaknesses or flaws that retard the conventions of the novel, the episodic forms that cut across the output of this generation reveal that the gap between radio literature and the emergent novel form was often, quite literally, paper-thin (see Figure 0.1).

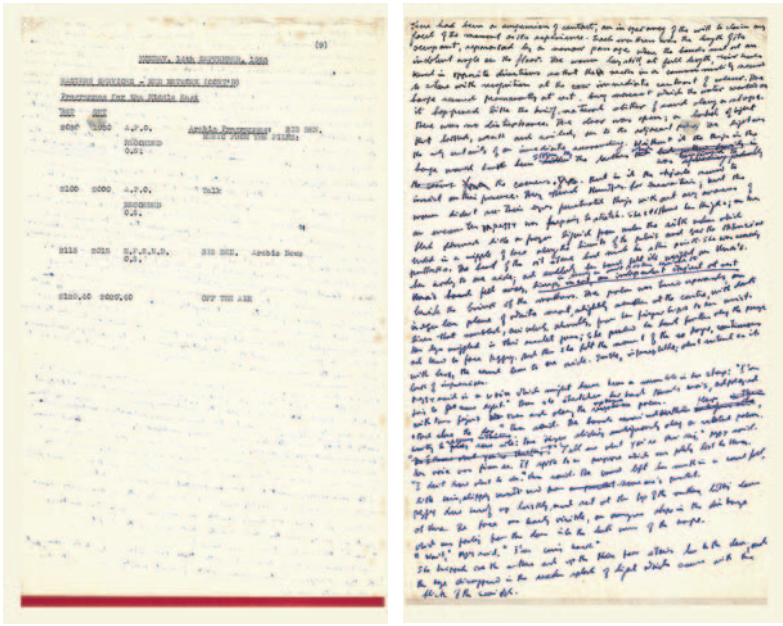


Figure 0.1 Page from the manuscript of George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954) written on the reverse of a BBC Eastern Service radio script (14 September 1953).

[30] Bernth Lindfors, 'Amos Tutuola: Debts and Assets' *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 10/38 (1970), 306–334: 313.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

George Lamming was by no means alone when he composed sections of his second novel, *The Emigrants* (1954), on the reverse of radio scripts. Such examples capture something of the material conditions of writing in postwar London during the paper shortages, and the wider resourcefulness of this generation of writers working in straitened circumstances. Lamming's manuscript also registers the extent to which radio and the novel shared the same time and space, as two sides of the same coin, or as parts of a whole. In his account of the Eastern Service, Daniel Ryan Morse makes a compelling case for focusing more squarely on the novel form in order to explore the wider reverberations of radio beyond its immediate 'listening publics'.[31] But to read radio as a backstory that is only fully realized 'in later print fiction' also risks reducing their relations to one of cause and effect. Rather than treating the novel as a culminating form, *Scripting Empire* persists with the 'minor' settings of radio production to argue that broadcasting was more than just a nursery for the book, a platform for its early audition, or a gateway to the publishing industry. A vigorous site of innovation in its own right, radio reminds us that the literature left over from this period was in many ways more about process than end-product.

Long before their paths crossed at the BBC, Caribbean intellectuals like C. L. R. James and Stuart Hall had begun to respond seriously to the aesthetic and political implications of the new media, and what they independently termed 'the popular arts'. Working on *American Civilization* in New York during 1949–1950, James became fascinated by serial formats: the comic strip, the detective story, radio soap operas, cinema, television instalments, jazz records. He saw in the mechanical reproduction of these short forms, repeated on a nightly or weekly basis, both an emerging aesthetic that made the modern American novel appear moribund by comparison, and a mode of expression with the capacity to transform social relations. Writing on the same forms in postwar London, Stuart Hall came to strikingly similar conclusions in his early coauthored volume, *The Popular Arts* (1964):

> We often write and speak as if the new media—the cinema, television, radio, record, popular printed-matter—had simply extended the means available for communicating between groups of people … But when the means of communication are extended on this scale … People are brought together in a new relationship as audiences, new kinds of language and expression are developed, independent art forms and conventions arise.[32]

[31] Morse, *Radio Empire*, 18.
[32] Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel, *The Popular Arts* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), 45.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

Hall and James were intrigued by the interpenetrating character of the new media: the novel processes of reproduction, and creative conjugation they afforded through the 'transcription from one medium to another'.[33] Rejecting the determinism that understands media as 'end-products of a simple technological revolution', they explored mass communication's capacity for articulating new alignments among otherwise atomized audiences, generating innovative techniques, and modes of expression.[34] *The Popular Arts* dwells on the radio feature as a form occupying 'the borderland between documentary and drama'.[35] Condensing hours of actuality recordings drawn from everyday life, the radio feature juxtaposed ordinary speech patterns with music and song to create compressed, composite arrangements that generated 'a new art form out of the tape recorder'.[36] C. L. R. James was fascinated by the radio script *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1943), a noir thriller involving an overheard telephone conversation featuring the voice of Agnes Morehead. Aired repeatedly due to 'public demand' on CBS radio's 'Suspense' series, it became a screenplay and film in 1948 starring Barbara Stanwyck, who went on to play the lead role in further radio adaptations.[37] James is struck by the life cycle of *Sorry, Wrong Number* as it moves between sound broadcast and screen, reverberating with new publics as it is episodically reinvented.

These early responses to a putatively metropolitan media industry were inextricable from the unravelling dynamics of decolonization. Denis Mitchell, whose radio ballads are singled out in *The Popular Arts*, first came to prominence in Africa. At the South African Broadcasting Corporation, Mitchell experimented with wire recorders to capture the speech of agricultural workers. He went on to work at the BBC's Features Department alongside D. G. Bridson, whose collaborations with Langston Hughes and Andrew Salkey are considered in Chapters 1 and 5 respectively. Wire recorders were an early form of analogue audio storage which made magnetic recordings on steel strips. Mitchell, who was repurposing technology left behind by the US army, typifies the techniques of improvisation and bricolage that emerged as late colonial cultural production seized upon the

[33] Hall and Whannel, *The Popular Arts*, 48. Noting that radio was already a declining medium by the 1960s, *The Popular Arts* observes how the vinyl record still relies on repeated air time to become a hit, adding '[r]ecognizing this link between repetition on the air and commercial advantage, the BBC has made the ruling that comperes should not choose their own records on popular radio programmes'. Hall and Whannel, *The Popular Arts*, 293–294.

[34] Hall and Whannel, *The Popular Arts*, 45.

[35] Hall and Whannel, *The Popular Arts*, 261.

[36] Hall and Whannel, *The Popular Arts*, 259.

[37] C. L. R. James, *American Civilization*, edited by Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 131.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

increasingly affordable read-write technologies of the mid-century media. Such developments have an enduring legacy in the work of James and Hall. While C. L. R. James is best known for his love of the long form, from literary leviathans like *Vanity Fair* and *Moby Dick* to the longueurs of cricket, it was in the tight, episodic structures of magazines and test matches that he discovered what he called 'significant form' (see Postscript). Stuart Hall's antipathy towards the monograph, and his affinity for the essay were, I would argue, more than the instinctive preferences of a public intellectual. The short form was an enactment of his wider intellectual project, and ultimately inseparable from his irreverence towards the tyranny of 'consistency', his abiding emphasis on conjuncture, and his ethics of modesty.[38]

From the 1880s, the mechanical printing press helped create, in West Africa and the Caribbean, a homegrown, highly improvised literature centred around the newspaper and the magazine. The everyday techniques of African newspapermen, and West Indian editors—'cutting-and-pasting, summarization, citation, excision, juxtaposition'—made the printed page not only 'forcing-houses for new political solidarities', but 'incubators for the creation of literary genres'.[39] Scissors, glue pots, and scrapbooks were among the low-tech tools that made the self-contained units of the printed page, or the broadcast segment, ripe for the techniques of recombination.[40] The space-shrinking technologies of the portable transistor during the 1940s and 1950s inspired a generation of far-flung amateur radio fanatics and DIY electronics enthusiasts. Among them was the 'untutored' talent of West African novelist Amos Tutuola, whose literary repurposing of the transistor is considered in Chapter 3. Jacob Edmond's wide-ranging global study of iterative poetics from the 1950s shows how the work of the Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite variously harnessed the reproductive technologies of reel-to-reel recording, reprographics, and the programmable possibilities

[38] David Scott's sense that for Stuart Hall, cultural studies may have been 'less an experiment with new content, though there was plenty of that too, than an experiment with a novel thinking-form' is particularly suggestive within this context. David Scott, *Stuart Hall's Voice: Intimations of an Ethics of Receptive Generosity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 4. See also David Morley, 'General Introduction: A Life in Essays' in Stuart Hall, *Essential Essays Volume 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, edited by David Morley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 1–26.

[39] Derek R. Peterson, Emma Hunter, and Stephanie Newell, eds., *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and Their Publics in the Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 1. See also Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: 'How to Play the Game of Life'* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

[40] Edward Baugh, 'Frank Collymore and the Miracle of Bim', *New World Quarterly*, 3/1–2 (1967), 129–133.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

of the Apple Mac.[41] Brathwaite's innovative 'Sycorax video style', like George Lamming's invocation of Caliban and Prospero in *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) self-consciously repurpose the BBC's own Shakespearean analogues for broadcasting in order to curse them (see Chapters 3 and 5).[42]

Short form media have no transhistorical value or inherent quality. It is the uses to which they were put at any given moment that matters in what follows. Shortness was neither a panacea through which writers triumphantly overcame their minor status, nor was it intrinsically more radical than the novel. Even its most successful exponents were hampered by the precarity of the hand-to-mouth economy it tended to sustain, finding themselves diverted from book-length projects whose greater prestige might have earned them long-term security. The crowded platforms on which short, episodic forms flourished at the mid-century were themselves being co-opted through covert state sponsorship as Cold War protagonists sought to assert control and influence over what was still a relatively disjointed arena of cultural production. Andrew Rubin has shown how technical developments in magazine and radio were harnessed by a range of Cold War institutions to manage public discourse by making forms like the essay, the short story, and poetry available for simultaneous 'literary replication' across diverse media platforms.[43] The advent of wireless literary magazines at the BBC posed a challenge to regional literary autonomy, drawing West African and West Indian authors into their ambit through the combined gravitational pull of patronage, metropolitan projection, and prestige (see Chapter 4).

Yet claims that the 'redisposition' of materials transformed mid-century writers into mere 'representatives and cultural emissaries' overestimates the presiding authority of these institutions, and the considerable ingenuity of artists and journalists in navigating their platforms.[44] BBC staff described the 'twinges' at the corporation as 'verbatim reporting' of programme output in the West African and West Indian press became commonplace.[45]

[41] Jacob Edmond, *Make It the Same: Poetry in the Age of Global Media* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

[42] George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960; London: Pluto Press, 2005).

[43] Andrew N. Rubin, *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture, and the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 21.

[44] Rubin, *Archives of Authority*, 49. Certainly, the movements of a figure like C. L. R. James, whose story unfolds episodically across the pages of *Scripting Empire*, were less prescribed than Rubin's account seems to suggest.

[45] BBC WAC, E1/1308/1 Gladys Lindo, File 1, 1947–1948, Edmett to Williams, 15 January 1948.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

Abridged, or augmented beneath newly invented headlines, and inserted alongside local news stories that the corporation could barely contemplate, these repurposed metropolitan transmissions often spoke to the very tensions that the broadcaster hoped to dispel.

Writers proved remarkably deft at decoupling and rearticulating their literary work across an astonishing range of otherwise unconnected and apparently incommensurate venues: from anti-colonial periodicals to sensationalist adventure magazines, from obscure regional journals to transnational broadcasts, from avant-garde reviews to tabloid newspapers. Others used the art of excerption not just to multiply their audiences, but to modify the meaning and associations of their work across time, and according to shifting political horizons.[46] As Deborah Cohn suggests, the tentacular forces of Cold War institutions should not obscure "the skewed lines of cause and effect" they inadvertently facilitated, or the fact that the writers who operated in them 'had their own literary and political agendas' and 'rightly viewed themselves as agents of their own cause'.[47] The burgeoning sections and segments of different media channels presented more than 'fillers' and routine sites of standardization. The shared narrative footprint of what I call the 'short space' created infinite and highly unpredictable possibilities for substitution, transposition, and extemporization across these outlets.

Eric Bulson's sense that the 'littleness' of the little magazine refers to more than the periodical's diminutive design, short life-span, or limited audience, and is also 'a condition of being in the world' of twentieth-century letters, captures something of the wider import of the short space in what follows.[48] Bulson argues that the little magazine was a '*decommercialised*, *decentred*, and *decapitalised*' setting that created a relatively unregulated site of cultural production, one I argue allowed writers to navigate or side-step metropolitan institutions such as the BBC with a freedom rarely enjoyed by longer forms.[49] Yet no single medium or vehicle captures or owns the qualities of shortness at the mid-century: neither the little magazine nor the radio broadcast. Radio was an important channel through which these forms moved; it undoubtedly accelerated and consolidated the movement of literary production across media, but it does not contain them. The episodic

[46] Kathleen DeGuzman, 'The Pleasures of Excerpts: George Lamming, *New World Quarterly*, and the Novel', *Anthurium*, 11/2 (2014), 1–16.

[47] Deborah Cohn, *The Latin American Literary Boom and U.S. Nationalism during the Cold War* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), 32.

[48] Eric Bulson, *Little Magazine, World Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 4–5.

[49] Bulson, *Little Magazine, World Form*, 14.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

formats considered in what follows display little respect for discrete media platforms, or conventional distinctions between high and popular culture.

Radio scholarship routinely invokes the Arnoldian values of the founding Director General John Reith, and the BBC's conspicuous birth in modernism's annus mirabilis (1922) to confirm the corporation's essentially elite, modernist milieu. More recently, the term late modernism has helped revivify our understanding of the middle years of the twentieth century, wresting it from the fissures and indifference of period boundaries, while revealing the lingering effects of an aesthetic that in turn helped animate late- and post-colonial writing from the 1950s and 1960s. *Scripting Empire* builds upon this work by exploring the innovative and experimental forms that emerged from the physical and imagined interactions between African Caribbean artists and celebrated BBC modernists such as D. G. Bridson, Douglas Cleverdon, Dylan Thomas, Elisabeth Lutyens, Louis MacNeice, and T. S. Eliot. Peter Kalliney argues persuasively that such collaborations were underpinned by a shared commitment to the modernist aesthetic of autonomy: '[t]he notion that a literary text could or should be free from external considerations—that a work of art should transcend economic calculations, political partisanship, or racial tensions'.[50] The findings of *Scripting Empire* suggest that modernist autonomy is better understood as one among a range of competing dispositions, or tendencies at the corporation by the outbreak of the Second World War, when Reithian values were being jettisoned in favour of 'lighter, quicker, and in the eyes of some, more "American."' programming.[51] It approaches the BBC as both a modernist institution *and* a mass medium. We will see that an abiding preoccupation of this generation of writers was precisely one of economics, not simply as venal or commercial calculation, but as a vital and pragmatic issue of artistic survival within the austere, racially-charged environs of postwar London. The frugality of the short form was in this regard irreducible to a modernist aesthetic of autonomy, and proved critical to sustaining the livelihoods of black metropolitan settlers intent on pursuing their noble ambitions as artists.

The view that literature 'formed a distinct autonomous zone' among late colonial writers at the BBC only holds if we understand series like

[50] Kalliney, *Commonwealth of Letters*, 5–6. Kalliney's is a supple and compelling account of how metropolitan institutions, epitomized here by the BBC, allowed black artists temporarily to negotiate social and racial inequalities through their literary production and wider cultural affiliations.

[51] Thomas Hajkowski, *The BBC and National Identity in Britain, 1922–53* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 12.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

'Caribbean Voices' in turn as autonomous literary magazines, separate from the noisy continuum of other programmes that surrounded them. The hallowed ground that has become synonymous with the Sunday evening broadcasts of 'Caribbean Voices' was beset on all sides by a busy programme schedule that faded between news and current affairs, sports coverage, light entertainment, interviews, musical request shows, one-off talks, and countless other occasional series. While this much larger rump of daily and weekly transmissions has been largely overlooked in literary scholarship, for reasons that are clarified in Chapter 3, it was here that black Atlantic artists and intellectuals made their most substantial, and arguably most significant, contribution. Putting aside poems, radio plays, and embryonic novels to cover breaking news items, topical subjects, and random commissions, they contributed many thousands of scripts concerning every conceivable aspect of daily life in Britain and the colonies, from stamp collecting to the Suez crisis.

The countless connections that these arrangements established between late colonial literary aesthetics and cultural politics speak volumes in relation to the broken continuities between black settlement and the New Left.[52] Stuart Hall's intellectual career tends to be compartmentalized into discrete phases: the Rhodes scholar and Oxford University literature student; the New Left editor; the Birmingham director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS); the Open University professor. It is customary in histories of cultural studies to note both Hall's and the Centre's relatively late engagement with race and empire. Yet these emergent strands of New Left thinking were already irrevocably entangled in Hall's overlapping work at the BBC. In the year of the Suez Crisis, itself a major event in Hall's early intellectual formation, the Jamaican intellectual prompted what was identified at the time as a 'sociological' turn on 'Caribbean Voices' by introducing the then novel literary theme of immigration. Months before the Notting Hill riots, he chaired an incendiary Third Programme debate that turned on the question of Caribbean cultural nationalism. He delivered numerous Home and Overseas Service talks on immigration and race relations, the emergence of youth subcultures, counter cultural movements, consumerism, and the role of the new media. When he was first tipped for the newly established Hoggart Fellowship at Birmingham University in 1964, it was fellow Jamaican Andrew Salkey who was assigned to cover the

[52] Hall famously said of cultural studies that it has 'no "absolute beginnings" and few unbroken continuities'. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms' (1980) in David Morley (ed.), *Essential Essays Volume 1 Foundations of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 47–70, 47.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

story for *Calling the Caribbean*. If the BBC was anathema to the CCCS in many regards—not least as part of the latter's ongoing critique of the British media—it was also among the few settings during this period to generate sustained cross-cultural traffic between black diasporic artists and key architects of what became cultural studies. Alongside Hall, founding figures including Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams were regular broadcasters at the postwar BBC.[53] The analogues between their early ethnographies of Englishness, and the oblique 'ways of seeing' that took hold among West Indian and West African broadcasters at the corporation, are considered further in Chapter 5. Distinguished outliers of cultural studies in its institutionalized disciplinary form—including Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) and James' *Beyond a Boundary* (1963)—offer not only acute observations of a national culture in these decades of decline; they were also, I argue, acutely radiophonic texts.

Scripting

As its title suggests, *Scripting Empire* confronts the rich cacophony of transmissions and soundtexts that brought volume and vibration to twentieth-century letters by focusing primarily on script. The double-barrelled explosion of sound studies and radio studies during the last decade has greatly expanded understanding of the sonic dimensions of broadcasting in relation to music, the spoken word, listening, and noise. Meanwhile the radio script, as a distinctive object of study, has not been treated with the specificity and attention it deserves, perhaps because of the awkward silences it appears to confront us with.[54] The *sonic* history of radio would appear compromised when confronted with the silence of its *written* archive. Sound recordings from this period were rarely preserved due to the considerable costs involved. What started out as an aural and immaterial medium of the air is now largely accessible only in a physical form that was never envisaged for a *reading* public: as type, as page, as print, and as script. A potential pitfall of singling out the literary discoveries it yields is that we reduce our findings to the atomizing effects of selective citation, and close analysis, with its stress on textual self-sufficiency and interiority. As 'live' transmission is preserved in written form, what once circulated as part of a sonorous

[53] See John Mowitt, 'Birmingham Calling', in *Radio: Essays in Bad Reception* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 144–177.

[54] See Debra Cohen, 'Wireless Imaginations' in Anna Snaith (ed.), *Sound and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 334–350.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

narrative in progress, stitched into a segmented but continuous narrative loop of daily broadcasts, is arrested on the page which becomes capable of carrying significance in and of itself.

What might be involved in looking at, rather than through, the mute scripts left behind by West Indian and West African speakers on the BBC's rustle-free paper? 'Rustle-free' is a revealing term. It preserves a wider ambition of radio to silence the whispering materiality of paper in favour of the frictionless, non-textual universe of pure sound. If, at the time of its transmission, the noise of mid-century radio went hand in hand with the silencing and suppression of script as a physical object, the contemporary researcher can only *hear* the vast majority of programme output by proxy, in relation to reams of paper, reels of microfilm, and the flat transparencies of microfiche. By focusing on the format and material conditions through which broadcasts came to life, this book argues that script is not merely a matter of making do with what was left over.

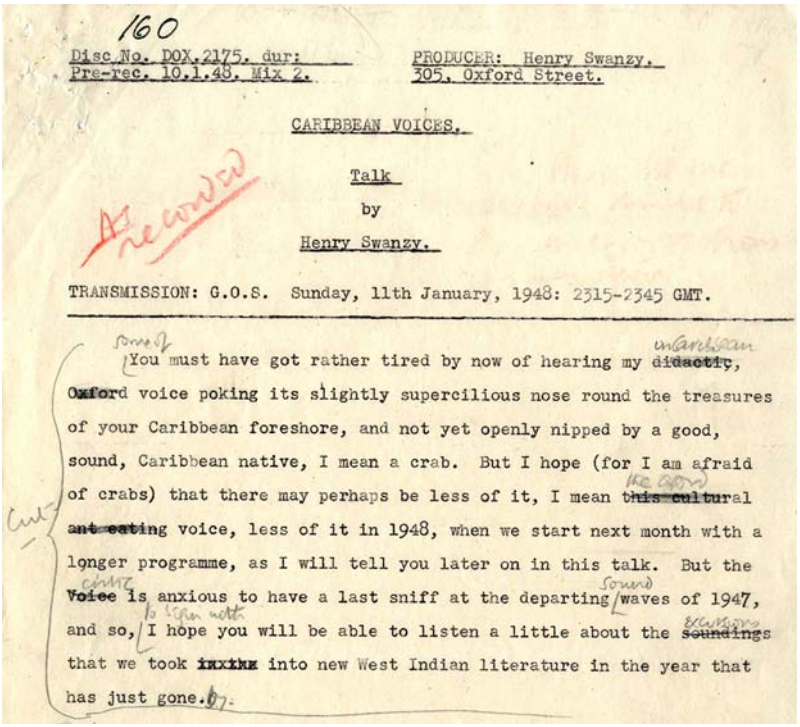
Attending to the cuts, cues, mark ups, and other textual scaffolding that augment the radio script gives access to the competing and often conflicted voices that were inaudible at the moment of transmission. Script is more than a supplement to a lost sound archive, or a written trace of the live event. It is a dynamic document, a palimpsest with its own layered and dramatic story to tell. The graphic surface of the radio script contains more than a silent inventory of noisy clues that serve as constant reminders of a lost sonic history. Script also spells out what could not be heard during the original delivery. The spidery annotations of scriptwriters and readers; the blue pencil marks of producers and editors; the thick red cuts and redactions of the censor's crayon; hastily scribbled exchanges between artists; the last-minute substitution of words; the reworking or revoking of delicate subjects. Even purely pragmatic omissions to meet the strict time limits of transmission betray a series of value judgements, emphases, and preferences for this over that. Such markings are not merely degraded clues to what was once pure, phonic presence. More faithfully than the live sound recording, these scripts preserve instances of the unsaid.

Henry Swanzy's stuttering prevarication in the opening of a 'Caribbean Voices' broadcast from 1948 captures something of the wider texture of these scripts: '[*Some of*] You must have got rather tired by now of hearing my [*uncaribbean*] ~~didactic, Oxford~~ voice poking its slightly supercilious nose round the treasures of your Caribbean foreshore, and not yet openly nipped by a good, sound, Caribbean native, I mean crab …' (See Figure 0.2).[55]

[55] BBC WAC, *Calling the West Indies,* 'Caribbean Voices', 11 January 1948.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.



160

Disc No. DOX.2175. dur:
Pre-rec. 10.1.48. Mix 2.

PRODUCER: Henry Swanzy,
305, Oxford Street.

CARIBBEAN VOICES.

Talk
by
Henry Swanzy.

As recorded

TRANSMISSION: G.O.S. Sunday, 11th January, 1948: 2315-2345 GMT.

You must have got rather tired by now of hearing my ~~didactic~~ unCaribbean Oxford voice poking its slightly supercilious nose round the treasures of your Caribbean foreshore, and not yet openly nipped by a good, sound, Caribbean native, I mean a crab. But I hope (for I am afraid of crabs) that there may perhaps be less of it, I mean ~~this cultural ant eating~~ voice, less of it in 1948, when we start next month with a longer programme, as I will tell you later on in this talk. But the ~~Voice~~ is anxious to have a last sniff at the departing waves of 1947, and so, I hope you will be able to listen a little about the ~~soundings~~ that we took ~~in~~ into new West Indian literature in the year that has just gone.

Figure 0.2 'Caribbean Voices' script with Henry Swanzy's edits and redactions in pencil (11 January 1948).

None of these words were said. As the left-hand margin confirms, the entire paragraph was cut on delivery. Yet the script preserves the editor's suspended uncertainty in a series of restless revisions that say a great deal about the conditions under which the broadcast took place. Swanzy was preparing his broadcast at a time when, as the Head of the African Service put it, 'the voices for the programme are still giving Mr Swanzy trouble'.[56] Swanzy's decision to substitute the voices of the BBC Repertory Company for West Indian readers had proved controversial among some of his more vocal listeners in the Caribbean, who questioned his editorial emphasis on 'local colour' more generally (see Chapter 5). These complaints turned the whole question of voice and vernacular speech into something of a hot potato. Striving to strike the right note in addressing this complaint head on, Swanzy adopts a self-mocking tone that deliberately divests the

[56] BBC WAC, E1/1308/1 Gladys Lindo, File 1, 1947–1948, 23 August 1948.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

metropolitan voice of its authoritative overtones. Hedging about supercilious, intrusive, ant-eating, crab-fearing, didactic, and 'Oxford' voices, his behind-the-scenes edits suggest more than a performance for the benefit of his listeners. They appear to involve genuine vacillation. Swanzy's handwritten embellishments, parenthetical asides, and redactions preserve the anxieties of an editor keen to avoid the impression of imperiousness.[57] As T. O. Beachcroft noted in his early booklet on the Overseas Service, *Calling all Nations* (1942), "there is an endless danger in becoming vocal".[58]

For all the repressive associations of the archive, script preserves the return of the repressed in the form of crossings out, retracted statements, last-minute rewrites, and anxious editorializing. These inaudible inscriptions say a great deal about the forms of equivocation, hesitancy, and censorship (both self—and institutional) during a period of profound uncertainty about the future of empire. Even with the end of wartime censorship, and the rise of 'ad lib' and taped inserts during the 1960s, voice was never as free as it might have sounded (see Chapter 3). 'Scripting' empire refers in this context to the performative dimensions of radio, and its intimate associations with staging, auditioning, and rehearsal.[59] Typically existing in multiple carbon copies, the radio script was a collaborative document shared among script writers, performers, readers, and sound engineers to ensure all involved were on the same page. The script serves on one level as a reminder that radio was less a singular site of authorship than of coproduction and collaboration.

Crucially, the radio script is an incomplete form, defined as much by potentiality as prescription. It is an anticipation of vocalization, and of sound that has yet to be *actualized*. The script is a plan of action. As an interview between Andrew Salkey and the author of *The Art of Radio* (1959), Donald McWhinnie, once put it to Caribbean listeners, 'the radio writer is writing not to be read, not for the eye'.[60] The rhythms, pace, tone, and

[57] Swanzy began instead on safer ground, with a numerical breakdown of regional submissions to the programme for the previous year, only to return to the question of his own authority a few sentences later. Asking rhetorically about the 'quality' of the voices on the 1947 programmes, Swanzy says it is 'risky' for him to speculate, 'and anything I say must be taken with a pinch of salt, for no one person can set up as a universal critic, least of all a kind of synthetic critical megaphone, or rather microphone like myself'. Swanzy's self-deprecating modulation, elaborating before contracting what he will say, and his disavowal of universal voice through the foregrounding of vocality as a mediated, mechanical, and artificial device is explored further in Chapters 2 and 3.

[58] Thomas Owen Beachcroft, *Calling all Nations* (London: BBC, 1942), 7.

[59] Tsitsi Ella Jaji argues more broadly that music and sound have played a significant part in the 'rehearsal' of transnational black solidarity. *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music, and Pan-African Solidarity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

[60] BBC WAC, *Calling the Caribbean*, 'Caribbean Literary Magazine', 12 November 1959.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

stresses of the script are all realized at the 'special … moment' when they are 'spoken'.[61] If this means that the script is never an empirical record of the unique moment of delivery, it also offers an important blueprint that requires delicate excavation.

Scripting Empire is, unapologetically, an archival project. It proceeds on the assumption that archives are themselves mediated rather than neutral sites of investigation; that as Michel-Rolph Trouillot states in *Silencing the Past* (1995), 'Archives assemble'.[62] Archives may also expose, as Figure 0.2 suggests, how broadcasters dissemble. To remain attentive to the repressions, distortions, and fictive authority of the archive is not merely to conclude it was fabricated. One of *Scripting Empire*'s main aims is to substantially extend the archival terrain covered within existing scholarship. It is based on over a decade's research, in more than a dozen archives, conducted on both sides of the Atlantic. It brings to light an extensive body of undocumented materials by many of the leading artists and intellectuals of the anglophone world. Most of these materials are without an inventory, and remain absent from even the most comprehensive bibliographies, scholarly monographs, and Complete Works currently available. Methodologically, *Scripting Empire* adopts a transarchival approach, one which reads *across* the fault lines of institutional repositories and the papers of individual authors and editors, including undeposited materials held in private collections, and not yet in the public realm. By articulating these far-flung archives, *Scripting Empire* seeks to better understand the silences, frictions, and contingencies that surround any given source. Among other things, the surviving records reveal the haphazard movements of broadcast materials across multiple platforms, disrupting the broadly unilateral world view of the BBC that emerges from within the BBC Written Archive itself.

Pneumatic Print

West African and West Indian writing at the BBC takes us beyond the institutional confines of the corporation and the specialized disciplinary limits of radio studies into a wider consideration of transatlantic literary culture at the end of empire, when the printed page took flight and words entered the air. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* takes the soundings of diaspora

[61] BBC WAC, *Calling the Caribbean*, 'Caribbean Literary Magazine', 12 November 1959.
[62] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1995), 47.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

at sea. Its now familiar organizing chronotope is of the ship as a mobile 'micro-system' circulating 'tracts, books, gramophone records and choirs' across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[63] The fluid horizons of the Atlantic not only fringe, lap, and link the otherwise landlocked continents of Africa, the Americas, and Europe, but, as Gilroy reminds us, a series of artists and intellectuals who journeyed between them: Frederick Douglas, Marcus Garvey, C. L. R. James, George Padmore, Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes. Gilroy's project has fuelled a generation of studies which extend the senses of diasporic modernity beyond the haptic, textual, and ocular orientations of earlier research.[64]

To Gilroy's maritime ocean-going vessels that cross and connect the Atlantic, we need to add airwaves. If, as Ian Whittington rightly observes, the 'transatlantic flow of bodies, goods, texts and ideas—finds its mid-century echo in the shortwave radio beam', what specific forms did an aerial black imaginary take during the Second World War, when air itself was charged with the kinds of elemental force and artistic or affective investments more typically associated with oceanic space?[65] West Indian and West African broadcasters were quick to seize upon the creative capacities of radio for the reinvention of writing as a specifically *sonic* technology: not just as pure sound, but as the speed at which it travels through the medium of air. Airborne, air-animated, and aerodynamic events are among the most insistent tropes across the chapters of this book: hurricanes and electrical storms, winged creatures and aircraft, echoes, sonic booms, and sound barriers, Shakespearean sprites and Yoruba spirits, projectiles and bombs. Being 'pon de air', in Louise Bennett's felicitous phrase, was a source of poetic inspiration.[66]

What critics have termed in an extension of Gilroy's landmark work, the 'Print Atlantic' deserves further consideration within the light of

[63] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 4.

[64] See for example, Weheliye, *Phonographies*; Edwin Hill, *Black Soundscapes White Stages: The Meaning of Francophone Sound in the Black Atlantic* (Baltimore MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2013); Jaji, *Africa in Stereo*; Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan, eds., *Audible Empire: Music, Global Politics, Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

[65] Ian Whittington, *Writing the Radio War: Literature, Politics and the BBC, 1939–1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 154.

[66] BBC WAC, *Calling the West Indies*, 'Caribbean Carnival', 4 June 1946. Bennett's dramatic monologue, 'Pon de Air', is considered in Chapter 3.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

the airborne formats of shortwave.[67] Brent Hayes Edwards and others have shown how a circulating periodical print culture was critical to the ventilation of black internationalism, and coalition building during the early twentieth century.[68] The advent of radio, far from rendering print obsolete, prompted a proliferation of paperwork. Bureaucratic systems of filing, transcription, and retrieval required sustained investment in secretaries and stenographers. All that was solid did not melt into air so far as radio was concerned.[69] Broadcasts lived multiple lives as they were projected over the airwaves, printed in the pages of BBC periodicals such as *The Listener* (1929–1981) and *London Calling* (1939–1993), or debated within the local West African and West Indian press.[70] Perhaps as many overseas audiences *read* as listened to the BBC during these decades. The prolific Guyanese novelist and radio contributor, Edgar Mittelholzer, captured something of the ironies of this situation in a piece of personal correspondence from 1946:

> I read in the [Trinidad] *Guardian* on Saturday that the BBC had decided to drop Caribbean Voices for the time being, and so last Sunday evening (yesterday), for the first time for weeks, I did not bother to listen in to the programme. What was my surprise when on my way along Tragarete Road

[67] See Joseph Rezek, 'The Print Atlantic: Phillis Wheatley, Ignatius Sancho, and the Cultural Significance of the Book', in Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (eds.), *Early African American Print Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 19–39, and Nathan Suhr-Sytsma, *Poetry, Print, and the Making of Postcolonial Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Penny Von Eschen has argued that the press and print journalism galvanized activists and intellectuals in wartime Britain, the US, and Africa, as 'innovations in mass communications radically altered the boundaries of the possible'. See *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 4.

[68] See for example Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Francesca Orsini, Neelam Srivastava, Laetitia Zecchini, eds., *The Form of Ideology and the Ideology of Form: Cold War, Decolonization and Third World Print Cultures* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2022); and Toral Jatin Gajarawala, Neelam Srivastava, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Jack Webb, eds., *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Postcolonial Print Cultures* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023).

[69] If, as Benedict Anderson notes, the invention of radio 'made it possible to bypass print and summon into being an aural representation of the imagined community where the printed page scarcely penetrated', then broadcasting remained one of 'print['s] allies'. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; New York: Verso, 2006), 54, 135.

[70] See Debra Rae Cohen 'Intermediality and the Problem of the Listener', *Modernism/modernity*, 19/3 (2012), 569–592. As I have suggested elsewhere, regional print periodicals in the West Indies did not just provide neutral reports of BBC coverage, but bear the imprints of vernacular inflexions within local media. James Procter, 'Una Marson at the BBC', *Small Axe*, 48 (2015), 1–28.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

> I heard a radio announcing the fact that my story *Something Fishy* was about to be read: By the time I got home I was just in time to hear the last *four* words and the announcement that 'that was a story by Edgar Mittelholzer etc … ' I could have shot the fellow at the *Guardian* who writes the radio notes.[71]

It is not just that an understanding of radio's effects requires a better understanding of how broadcasting ripples through other media. As Mittelholzer's anecdote underlines, broadcasting and periodicals often provided alternative versions of the same event. The abrasions that emerged in the gaps between the encoding and decoding of broadcasts are testimony to the fact that radio was never an airtight medium, entirely in control of its own destiny. The distinctiveness and specificity of different platforms require as much attention as their reciprocal relations.

On 10 September 1953, the masthead of the BBC's overseas journal, *London Calling*, carried a stylized depiction of overseas radio transmission (Figure 0.3). Condensed within a gigantic cumulus nimbus, the magazine's title appears suspended over the River Thames. But as the swirling eddies of a weather front in the top left corner and the slanting smoke from belching chimneys suggest, the broadcaster's words are destined for overseas. For all the naturalistic suggestion of atmospheric movement and propulsion, this is a coal-driven scene. Like the electricity pylons in the background, the BBC's output is being driven through the skies on an industrial scale, its innumerable sections and departments ordered with a Fordist efficiency. By this

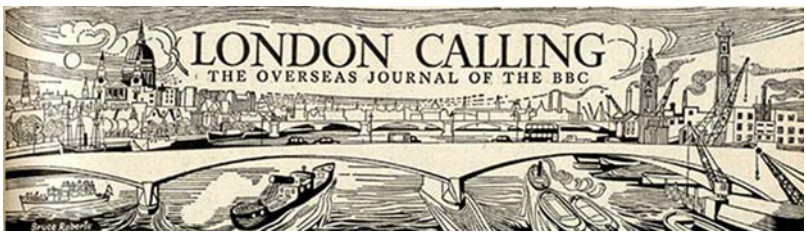


Figure 0.3 Masthead for the BBC's overseas journal, *London Calling* (10 September 1953).

[71] Barbados National Archives, Frank Collymore Collection, Mittelholzer to Collymore, 12 February 1946.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

point in its history, the General Overseas Service was 'on the air for 24 hours per day, non-stop, world without end'.[72] Swanzy once described 'Caribbean Voices' as 'a kind of mechanical harvester laid on from a foreign factory', while George Orwell announced 'Voice', his slightly earlier wireless magazine for India, as a pneumatic periodical: 'pumping words into the ether'.[73] Extending his metaphor, Orwell continued, 'it doesn't use up any paper or the labour of any printers or booksellers. All it needs is a little electrical power and half a dozen voices'. The 'wireless waves don't merely circle our planet, but travel endlessly through space at the speed of light, in which case what we are saying this afternoon should be audible in the great nebula in Orion nearly a million years hence.'[74]

Black Atlantic artists approached the imperious overtones of airborne communication with considerably more circumspection. Langston Hughes once described radio as 'Hitler's airplane for the Jews', while in a wartime radio interview Una Marson pressed George Orwell on the absence of West Africa and the West Indies from his Blitz-inspired essay, *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941). The associations of transatlantic connectivity that the BBC hoped to amplify through radio were constantly beset by turbulence, and radio's aerial technologies were rarely smooth sites of deterritorialized transmission. In the very years Marson was greeting listeners over the airwaves in the Caribbean, Ezra Pound was delivering his anti-Semitic broadcasts from Rome (1940–1943). Mid-century radio was both buoyed by images of flight, connectivity, and freedom, and freighted with anxieties of totalitarianism, demagoguery, and colonial control. If this meant West Indian and West African broadcasters shared many of the reservations associated with their white European contemporaries, and the Frankfurt School in particular, what emerges across the scripts and broadcasts of this period is the ongoing fascination of African Caribbean artists with the medium, in spite of this fact. For all their doubts and concerns, writers remained strikingly *receptive* to radio, perhaps because they recognized they had more to gain—and to lose—from its advance. The shared derivation of 'broadcasting' and 'diaspora'—to sow or scatter widely—was implicitly understood among these

[72] BBC WAC, E2/468/2 Foreign General: Overseas Service, 22 June 1948.

[73] BBC WAC, *Calling the West Indies*, 'Caribbean Voices', 31 August 1952, and George Orwell, 'Voice, 1: A Magazine Programme', in Peter Davison (ed.), *The Complete Works of George Orwell Volume 13: All Propaganda is Lies 1941–1942* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2001), 459.

[74] Orwell, 'Voice, 1: A Magazine Programme', 459.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

artists.[75] Speaking on the future of the West Indies following independence, Lamming argued that it was 'precisely' broadcasting's eighteenth-century etymology that explained 'what we would like this enterprise of radio to achieve across the entire Caribbean soil'.[76]

In the interval between John Reith's autobiography, *Into the Wind* (1949), and Harold Macmillan's 'Wind of Change' (1960) speech, dispersed members of the African diaspora were beginning to pursue a more autonomous, regional role for radio in the post-independence era. Visiting West Africa during the 1950s, West Indians including Kamau Brathwaite, George Lamming, and C. L. R. James looked on enviously at the existence of a national broadcasting infrastructure that sustained fellow writers like Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, and Amos Tutuola miles from the metropolitan centre. By the 1960s Lamming was declaring radio as 'the most powerful single medium of communication among our people'.[77] He dismissed the neocolonial overtones of commercial radio in the Caribbean—which he noted 'conquers the ear' and 'crushes your hearing'—advocating instead for a more participatory model of public service broadcasting linking 'the ends of any island and the mainland'.[78] His words were taken up by C. L. R. James, who claimed that radio was 'key for unlocking the sense of a national Caribbean community that is bottled up (and ferociously corked down)'.[79]

Organization

Chapter 1 explores the lyrical allure of airborne media in the wartime broadcasts of Una Marson and Langston Hughes. From London and New York, the transmissions of Marson and Hughes crossed the Atlantic in opposite directions via the networks of the BBC's North American Service and

[75] This connection is engrained within the very fabric of Broadcasting House, where the main reception houses Eric Gill's sculpture 'The Sower', installed in 1933.

[76] George Lamming, 'The West Indian People', *New World Quarterly*, 2/2 (1966), 63–74, 70.

[77] Lamming, 'The West Indian People', 70.

[78] Lamming, 'The West Indian People', 70.

[79] C. L. R. James, 'Tomorrow and Today: A Vision', *New World Quarterly*, 'Guyana Independence Issue', 2/3 (1966), 86–88, 87. These connections between radio communication and flight appear over twenty years earlier, in James' dazzling wartime letters to Constance Webb: 'I can see at the other end of the sound the *aeroplane* hangar of the Vanderbilts. I shall go into the village and use the *telephone*, I'll take the *train* in; and *bus or subway* home, where I'll turn on the *electric light* and the radio'. C. L. R. James, *Special Delivery: The Letters of C. L. R. James to Constance Webb, 1939–1948*, edited by Anna Grimshaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 144.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

Home Service. Their parallel trajectories formed part of a shared antiphonal investment in pneumatic techniques that reveals previously unexplored connections between the two mid-century poets. Powered by incendiary devices, air raids, aviation, and airwaves, their broadcasts mark a pivotal moment in black Atlantic poetics as West Indian and West African writers began to depart from the prevailing, page-based conventions of lyric poetry. Piloting radio features, ballad operas, and programmes of poetry and music, they embarked upon a series of aesthetic innovations that reimagined the typosphere for the atmosphere. Marson and Hughes were, this chapter argues, among the first to recognize that speaking on air was akin to lyric address in its ambiguous bordering on forms of prosopopoeia. The act of giving voice to another, or speaking in the name of another became, in their hands, part of an audacious, utopian appeal to black transatlantic solidarity.

Chapter 2 argues that long-standing misconceptions of the radio archive have obscured the historical origins and organizational dynamics of African Caribbean cultural production at the BBC in ways that significantly underestimate the contribution of West Indians and West Africans to mid-century literature. To read *across* the daily programme schedules of the corporation is to encounter a major body of undocumented work that requires a substantial scaling-up of our approach to cultural output in this period. Specifically, these schedules reveal the degree to which literary voice was being forged during these formative years, at the crossroads of a dizzying continuum of programming genres, from news bulletins and message programmes, to talks and variety formats. Focusing on the radio work of the Jamaican Louise Bennett and the Nigerian Wole Soyinka, this chapter explores the deployment of the dramatic monologue as a form which spoke to broadcasting's *own* structural principles of communication as a system of one-way exchange. It contends that the novel uses to which literary forms were being put among this generation of writers requires further engagement with the exhilarating array of para- and non-literary genres that once surrounded them on radio. More immediately, it provides a working methodology for the book as whole, which proceeds by working across seemingly discrete programme formats.

Far from foregrounding the fidelity of voice, the mechanical reproduction of speech and the separation of sound from source had a range of defamiliarizing effects that prompted suspicion and invention among West Indian and West African writers. Chapter 3 pursues the peripheral devices of radio—transistors, dictaphones, microphones, amplifiers, loudspeakers, and tape recorders—as they became tools of the writer's trade during the

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

1950s and 1960s. The Nigerian novelist Amos Tutuola used the analogue, read-write technologies of transistors and tape recorders as creative tools, and as literary devices which he fused with the Yoruba-folk tale to create the surreal, nightmarish worlds of his fiction. The St Lucian poet Derek Walcott repurposed the possibilities of radiophonic reverberation to inaugurate what subsequently evolved into his abiding aesthetics of mimicry. Focusing on the recurring trope of the echo, this chapter considers the by turns estranging and enabling effects of sound's ricochet in relation to the boundary conditions of postwar literary production. If received wisdom suggests broadcasting helped to 'oralize' the written word, this chapter argues counter-intuitively that the medium's distortion of voice played a critical role.

During their years at the BBC, West Indian and West African artists positioned and repositioned their work both locally and transnationally across a staggering range of venues, from commercial magazines, newspapers, and the printless, page-free periodicals of wireless, to obscure or avant-garde literary reviews. What connects these serial, episodic settings are the shared economies of what I call 'the short space'. Chapter 4 works to recalibrate mid-century literary production in relation to the tightly bound, enveloped venues towards which so many writers gravitated during these decades. It examines the short form's often overlooked existence as an interstitial, iterative document, sandwiched between adverts, essays, and artwork, compressed into the carefully measured columns of magazines, locked into pre-set layouts of newspapers, and the strict, sectional time limits of broadcasting. Focusing on key practitioners including Cyprian Ekwensi, V. S. Naipaul, and Sam Selvon, it argues the short space still has a great deal to teach us about the material and aesthetic conditions of literary activity in this period. Rather than simply extending prevailing accounts of literary networks and circuits, it suggests the multiple ways in which writers short-circuited the presumed destinations and directions of travel associated with their work, while confounding distinctions between high and popular forms.

Chapter 5 considers a staple format of overseas broadcasting, which presented 'word pictures' of Britain 'at work and play', delivered from the oblique points of view of its late colonial residents. Combining the genres of travel writing, ethnography, and literary fiction, these formats were the obverse of programmes such as 'Caribbean Voices'. Scriptwriters were actively engaged in the imagination of the metropolitan centre as a rich repository of local colour. Considered together, these previously unexplored broadcasts present unique, daily insights into the domestic history of

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

metropolitan decolonization, from postwar reconstruction and the arrival of the Windrush (1948), to the Festival of Britain (1951), the Queen's Coronation (1953), and the aftermath of the Notting Hill riots (1958). As the BBC's early imperial mission of metropolitan projection became, in the hands of overseas broadcasters, subject to forms of cultural translation, the corporation's own unambiguous distinctions between Home and Overseas Services were drawn into question.

A concluding 'Postscript' returns to some of this book's overarching concerns through the transmissions of one of the twentieth century's towering intellectuals: the revolutionary Trinidadian thinker C. L. R. James. A regular wireless listener, and an occasional broadcaster between the 1930s and 1970s, James' thinking reveals an abiding interest in radio as an imperializing force, a decolonizing medium, a stylistic device, and a mode of political communication. Placing *Beyond a Boundary* (1963) into conversation with his test match radio commentaries and related broadcasts of the period, this final chapter argues that not only did James' landmark volume on cricket and colonial culture evolve in close conjunction with radio; his written appreciation of the game as an episodic art form was indebted to the spoken form of radio commentary.

Covering a quarter of a century, from the outbreak of the Second World War to the late 1960s, *Scripting Empire* traces a broad historical arc that moves from the end of empire broadcasting and the emerging Cold War concerns of the postwar era, to the first announcements of post-colonial independence. By the late 1960s, the modern, egalitarian forms of Commonwealth unity and togetherness that the BBC hoped to forge from the 1940s had audibly exhausted themselves. As innumerable programme scripts testify, Britain was rapidly realigning itself with Europe during this period, and government budgets for other Overseas Services were dwindling accordingly. Meanwhile, and in the aftermath of the Notting Hill riots (1958), deteriorating 'race relations', and the increasingly restrictive Immigration Acts of the 1960s, the harmonic ideal of cross-cultural communication first espoused on African and Caribbean Services during the Second World War sounded increasingly hollow.

Many of the first generation of black metropolitan artists and intellectuals that thronged the corridors of the BBC during the 1950s and 1960s were moving on, having outgrown the regional overseas services. While some transitioned on to the Home Service, and what became the World Service, there was a growing sense of malaise and frustration surrounding the inertia and indifference of the British media. In stark contrast to the postwar

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

years, when any writer 'worth the name' came to London, and where over one hundred books and thousands of radio scripts flowed from the 'typewriters and pens' of African Caribbean artists, Kamau Brathwaite summed up the diminished media scene in 1968 as follows:

> I didn't see West Indian writers, painters and only a very few actors (and these in stereotyped parts) on British Television … I was not hearing their voices or the sound of their work on radio. They didn't seem to be participating in the literary and arts pages of the newspapers and magazines that were concerned with these things in this country. This was a remarkable change from the 50s when West Indian writing was the 'new thing'.[80]

The contraction in specialized regional services to the West Indies and West Africa, along with the politicization of Britain's black communities, served as a stimulus for the establishment of a grassroots black arts scene in Britain. The Caribbean Artists Movement (1966–1972), which was cofounded by Brathwaite, assembled many of the prominent figures who had first come together on the airwaves of the BBC. It also ushered in a new generation of artists—from Linton Kwesi Johnson and Althea McNish to Errol Lloyd.[81]

For others, the declining opportunities at the BBC marked the beginning of the end of their literary adventures in London. Andrew Salkey, one of the few remaining regulars at the corporation during this period, recalled in his obituary for Sam Selvon that it came as no surprise when the author of *The Lonely Londoners* emigrated to Canada in the late 1970s: 'By then, much of the freelance work at Bush House had dwindled considerably'.[82] As Lamming added poignantly in personal correspondence with Salkey:

> That was the fate of all West Indian writers, including myself. We had our seasons of great popularity when West Indian writing was fashionable in England, and we were the darlings of the salons for a season; but then we had to live through this period of neglect, and only those with creative integrity stayed the course.[83]

[80] Kamau Brathwaite, 'The Caribbean Artists Movement', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 14/1–2 (1968), 57. For a wide-ranging discussion of race in relation to BBC television, see Darrell Newton, *Paving the Empire Road: BBC Television and Black Britons* (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

[81] Swanzy, who once hosted regular African Caribbean get-togethers at his home in the early 1950s now appeared at CAM meetings as an honorary guest.

[82] British Library, Add MS 89377 Andrew Salkey Archive.

[83] British Library, Add MS 89377/7/40 Andrew Salkey Archive, Lamming to Salkey, 2 February 1978.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.

Writing shortly after the closure of the Caribbean Service in 1974, Lamming could not have anticipated that these same short-lived seasons would eventually be remembered for generating one of most remarkable and transformative periods of cultural production of the twentieth century. Radio's rapid ascendency and steady decline during the same period was more than a coincidence in this regard. If broadcasting had set out to annex West Indian artists and intellectuals, then the literature it produced would also become among the medium's most enduring legacies.

Copyright © 2024. Oxford University Press, Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Procter, James. Scripting Empire : Broadcasting, the BBC, and the Black Atlantic, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ncl/detail.action?docID=31200711.
Created from ncl on 2024-04-16 07:17:29.