Sounds Like Murder: Early 1980s Gothic on North American Radio

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Abstract:
Horror and the Gothic have long been staple genres of radio drama Among the radio drama revival series of the late 1970s-early 1980s was, *CBS Radio Mystery Theater* (1974-82) During the same time period, the Canadian government, recognising an emergent national-identity crisis in relation to its southern neighbour, invested heavily in original programming on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). This resulted in the popular horror series *Nightfall* (1980-3). which Danielle Hancock argues presented "murder as a Canadian national narrative" (2018). While *CBSRMT* occasionally adapted existing stories from other media, the majority of the output for both series were original, written-for-the-air dramas. Embodying Gothic returns of the past upon the present and the effects of transgressive conduct in society, murder is examined as a Gothic trait in episodes of *Nightfall* and *CBSRMT.* Radio's ambiguities and intimacies provoke listeners to these programmes to confront disjunction. The differing worldviews—American masculine nationalism and neoconservatism subverted; Canadian polite and tolerant masculinity turned upside down by a nihilistic rejection of these values—focus Gothic spotlights on each country's anxieties.

Keywords: Gothic Radio, *Nightfall*, *CBS Mystery Theatre*, Canadian identity, murder.

Introduction
'*Tonight's story has a definite destination. I hope you're still with us when we get there.'*
Donald Dickinson and Alan Guttman, 'Welcome to Homerville' (1980)

Humans have no ear-lids, so our survival instinct seems to be predicated on our hearing. As David Hendy notes in his book about *Noise,* 'almost without noticing it, we tend to use subtle cues such as variations in loudness and variations in the time of arrival at our ears of different echoes to very swiftly 'localise' sound – to navigate, in fact, a bit like bats in the night sky.'[1] The parallel with bats is telling, given the way Gothic literature can reproduce some of the effects that we read about; when the characters' hearts race, so do ours.[2] I would argue this effect is even more profound with sound media. 'Ghosts are eminently audible in Gothic', as Isabella Van Elferen argues, for 'sound without source suggests spectrality.'[3] Furthermore, 'paranormal happenings seemingly involve noise, particularly of the infrasonic and ultrasonic variety', as Gothic and horror film has been quick to recognize.[4] Clearly, sound can move easily from quotidian to Gothic.

Equally, Gothic on radio has a long history.[5] The invention of the phonograph by Thomas Edison 'marks the beginning of an interpretation of sound technology as a vehicle or conduit to the supernatural, the other-worldly and the paranormal.'[6] Hancock suggests that 'The history of recorded sound may well then be considered as a history of modern media culture', and argues that radio often 'engages with the discomforting and unhomely, or unheimlich, aspects of radio's domestic history.'[7] Early observers of radio noted its ability to 'permeate walls and transfix listeners,' its 'sublime' paradox of distance.[8] Hand has argued that the scream of a character was 'a mainstay of stage melodrama' and had been 'safely contained within the stage of the theatre.'[9] This enclosure was broken with the invention of radio, when, as evidenced by the anecdote recorded by Howard Blue, a passing policeman rushed into a house when hearing a scream, not realizing it emanated from a radio.[10] Needless to say, thrillers, mysteries and the uncanny figured greatly in early radio output.[11] Sound

drama's 'rich textures,' Angela Carter argued, are 'capable of stating ambiguities with a dexterity over and above that of the printed word,' one explanation for the popularity of Gothic/horror in Old Time Radio (OTR).[12] Radio's intimacy, too, is clearly one of its assets.[13]

While the Gothic as a formalized genre crystallizes around the visual in the form of architecture and language/texts (novels), nevertheless, the interplay between sight and sound existed from the beginning. This is evident from the novels of Ann Radcliffe (1790s-1820s) which admitted a disjunction between the visual – rotting mansions, remote castles and convents, and putrefying waxworks – and the aural – the supposedly spectral sounds which, more often than not, turned out to be ordinary living people. Mary Shelley's creature in *Frankenstein* represents the limits of the dramatizable, with most adaptations opting for a monosyllabic monster, emphasising his hideous physical form, conceived and composed of resurrected flesh, rather than giving him the eloquent and humanizing voice from the novel. For every Gothic horror text of the late nineteenth century whose focus seemingly elevates the visual over the aural (*Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* [1886], *The Picture of Dorian Gray* [1896]), there is another for which the aural sense is as important as or more important than the visual (*Dracula* [1897], *The Turn of the Screw* [1898]). Nineteenth-century Gothic's 'internalised world of guilt, anxiety, despair' masked emotional and inner truth onto the aural, 'interrogating the uncertain bounds of imaginative freedom and human knowledge.'[14] Then, in the late nineteenth century, urban Gothic suggested 'a profusion of discourses ready to spawn diverse narratives of degeneration, be they imperial, social, or psychological.'[15] In comparison with the volumes of analysis of their contemporaries on screens large and small and in print literature, radio's history in the Gothic 1980s is occluded. Nevertheless, the undeniable vein running through programmes like *CBS Radio Mystery Theater* and *Nightfall* in the medium that still followed people like a shadow in domestic spaces (the car and the home) suggests that the anxieties voiced in these dramas would be familiar to their listeners – and therefore part of the fabric of the Gothic 1980s – the Gothic 'living past.'[16] Murder in a sound-only medium assumes the silencing of a voice. Gothic suggests the return of the past to haunt us and a lifting of the veil on transgressive conduct. Murder as a Gothic trait introduces the 'unhomely' into the quotidian. This is persuasively accomplished through a domestic, intimate medium like radio. In this article, radio dramas from the 1980s react counter to prevailing national narratives in the US and Canada. With the former, narratives where the heroic prevails are undercut, and with the latter, the agreed national identity of rational, unaggressive politeness is shattered. Murder as disruptive, transgressive, haunting, and Gothic typifies these narratives. Gothic explores negative, irrational, and immoral practices, providing cautionary examples of what happens when social rules are disregarded.[17]

As such, Gothic pervades episodes of the *CBS Radio Mystery Theater* and *Nightfall*, two radio drama series broadcasting their respective national anxieties and telescoped fears in the late 1970s and early 1980s. *Nightfall* in particular deals with issues of masculinity that link it with other Gothic and horror of the 1980s. For example, Mattson contrasts the 'broken homes' and high divorce rates of the 1980s with a vociferous incarnation of American masculine nationalism in the media.[18] Masculinity materialized through slasher films, and the 1980s 'are widely thought of as the golden era of slasher films.'[19] However, the overt crises of masculinity in *Nightfall* are very different from the masculinity evinced in the slashers: A. Dana Ménard, Angela Weaver, and Christine Cabrera cite Roger Ebert as criticizing late 1980s slashers as 'These films hate women.'[20] Some of the episodes of *Nightfall* seem to engender a similar sort of misogyny while being vastly different in tone and narrative to the slashers. Many of *Nightfall*'s episodes are atmospherically Gothic, exploring what takes place under the surface, while only hinting at outward manifestations that are visible in the excess

of the slashers. Because the characters and narratives of radio drama are necessarily unseen, the medium provides an apt vessel for the seething issues briefly and traumatically revealed in Gothic.

Linnie Blake questions why Gothic texts are produced at specific times for specific audiences.[21] This article suggests that counter-narratives to the mainstream ones for the United States and Canada were reflected in episodes of *CBS Radio Mystery Theater* and *Nightfall*, provoking listeners to confront disjunction and ambiguity in the midst of the confident 1980s. For listeners of *Nightfall*, this results in a bleak nihilism that is only weakly hinted at in *CBS Radio Mystery Theater*. This article will discuss national contexts for radio during the 1980s, how these were informed by the medium's past, with particular emphasis on the similarities and differences between the United States and Canadian national systems and traditions. Next, the article explores differing worldviews manifest in *CBS Radio Mystery Theater* and *Nightfall*, one backward-facing, the other forward-facing, analysing episodes of each series that consider issues of murder, national identity, and masculinity.

National contexts for radio in the US and Canada

By the 1980s, the medium of radio was far from new. As a form of entertainment and mass media, it had been eclipsed throughout the English-speaking world in favour of television. Where once it had co-existed with cinema, one evoking glamour and the other domesticity, radio still had its functions – mainly as a source of music and companionship. Nevertheless, radio was not dead. It was, and perhaps always would be, undead.

Radio, like all telecommunications, was linked with the uncanny, a bridge between modernity and the Victorian era, which saw a clash between 'science, spiritualism, and psychical research.'[22] Ambiguity and the occult were clearly embedded in early radio use, with 'many domestic radio users' regarding 'wireless technology as beyond their full control and understanding.'[23] The almost supernatural aspect of radio communication, because many people did not understand how the medium worked, meant that it needed to be conquered and domesticated. In the US, after experimental beginnings technologically advanced during the First World War,[24] the medium of radio was quickly linked with commercial advertising as a source of funding, and large radio networks emerged, such as the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and the Columbia Broadcasting Company (CBS). Pamela Thurschwell argues that the 'supernaturally enhanced intimacy' of modernism both embraced and was threatened by 'technological and cultural disjunctions.'[25] As radio became domesticated, it, too, existed uneasily among these disjunctions. This uneasiness was manifest in the narratives and content of radio programming. From the 1930s onwards, peaking during the late 1940s, thrillers and Gothic or horror 'shockers', almost always anthology programmes, were a highly popular and influential genre, titles including *The Hermit's Cave* (WJR Detroit/KMPC LA, 1935-44), *Inner Sanctum Mysteries* (NBC/CBS, 1941-52), *Dark Fantasy* (WKY Oklahoma City, 1941-2), *Suspense* (CBS, 1942-62), *The Weird Circle* (MBS/CBS, 1940s), *Quiet, Please* (1947-49), and *Nightmare* (1953-4). As Hand makes clear, shockers/thrillers like *Suspense, The Whistler,* and *Escape!* 'would generally feature crime or adventure stories but would occasionally broadcast full-blooded examples of the macabre or uncanny.'[26] The shockers 'foregrounded issues of gender, sexuality, family, and consumption.'[27] Neil Verma argues that 'because they were skimpy on substance but heavy on suggestion, the shockers became rich in feeling.'[28] This tendency recalls the way eighteenth-century Gothic literature excited rather than informed.[29] The shockers were widespread on the most popular entertainment medium of the time, radio.

By the 1960s, most radio drama had disappeared from American airwaves. However, by the mid-1970s, a wave of nostalgia brought radio dramas with a familiar format – and

familiar commercial sponsorship – back to networks like CBS in what Eleanor Patterson calls the 'post-network era.' Most of these revivals – Including *Earplay* (1971-81) on the emergent public service broadcasting station NPR and *The Zero Hour* (1973-4) – favoured stories of suspense, while at the same time maintaining a clear link to the stage as an inspiration.[30] The longest-running was *The CBS Radio Mystery Theater* (1974-82), masterminded by radio veteran Himan Brown, which shared with its predecessors a 'horror host', in this case E. G. Marshall (aside from the last year, when it was hosted by Himan Brown himself). These programmes clearly appealed to an older audience nostalgic for the imaginative interaction radio drama had provided earlier in their lives.

Meanwhile, Canada's radio landscape differed from that of its southern neighbour, with a number of commercial stations (many owned by newspapers) competing in the 1920s. Canada's radio landscape was 'neither British Broadcasting Corporation-style monopoly nor US-style open market. The two styles coexisted.'[31] By 1932, a feeling of national identity led to the formation of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission which resembled the British radio system, in competition with commercial entities like CFRB Toronto. In 1936, a more unified, better funded, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC, and in French-speaking Canada, Radio-Canada) arose, funded by a licence fee.

> Whether commentators portrayed [radio] as the salvation of Canada or as a 'government monopoly', many expected the organization to do more than broadcast popular fare, essentially because its early supporters and creators had not intended it to be a creature of the commercial marketplace.[32]

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, the way radio could collapse distances in the geographically vast Canadian landscape, as well as its ability to mimic human contact, was remarked upon. The CBC functioned as a 'tool for protecting Canadians from the feared cultural imperialism travelling via the airwaves from the United States.'[33]

Between 1975 and 1982, during the so-called 'tax shelter years', the Canadian government attempted to challenge the pervasiveness of American films in Canadian cinemas, influencing the career of David Cronenberg.[34] During this same period, CBC radio received government funding which they poured into a drama series, *Nightfall,* which Danielle Hancock argues presents 'murder as a Canadian national narrative.'[35] This tied into an undeniable flowering of Canadian literary production in the 1960s and 1970s, which, 'together with the growth of cultural nationalism, led to an intense preoccupation of what made Canadian literature distinctive.'[36] *Nightfall* was clearly situated to contribute to this debate. Certainly 'no single image of landscape or society' could ever unite the diverse regions of Canada.[37] For this reason, *Nightfall's* stories were set across various regions of the country, and despite a predominance of British-Canadian culture, inspirations come from Irish, German, Scottish, and French traditions – though horror from Indigenous traditions is glaringly absent.[38] In production terms, during the first two years, *Nightfall* was produced not only from Toronto but also Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Halifax, Montréal and St. Johns (eventually settling in Vancouver). While information about its audience is not readily accessible, *Nightfall's* legacy points to a wide and engaged audience, one which responded to its rebuffing of 'denial regarding Canadian murder and violence'.[39] (*Nightfall* inspired two other radio drama anthology series, sharing its Gothic/horror/thriller themes, *Vanishing Point* (1984-6) and *Mystery Project* (1992-2002)). Furthermore, *Nightfall* may have been a reaction against the paternalistic and protective attitude of Canadian radio of the past, which 'plainly balanced' gentler programming with commercial thrillers of American origin.[40] It is certainly the case that *Nightfall's* dramas are thematically adult in terms of violence (against humans

and animals) and sexuality. While *CBSRMT* dealt frequently with murder, its coverage of sexual themes was frequently sublimated, much like the OTR (Old Time Radio) tradition from which it arose.

By contrast, *CBSRMT* focused a great deal more on Gothic and horror stories in the first years of its run.[41] By the 1980s its preferred genres were straight mysteries and thrillers. It also began to adapt more material rather than commissioning for-the-air dramas. *Nightfall*'s stories, on the other hand, were generally created for the programme (there were some adaptations from literature), and this reflected, of course, the creation of a unique Canadian identity.

Nightfall was produced and broadcast on CBC (though also heard on some CBS network affiliates in the US), a public service, non-commercial broadcaster. Therefore, it was conspicuously lacking in 'waste' materials and 'drivel' such as advertisements and uninterrupted by DJ spiels or even public service announcements.[42] By contrast, *CBSRMT's* curiously theatrical structure, guided by the host, E. G. Marshall, frequently jars a listener today, as any sense of atmosphere quickly evaporates in the presence of ads with the subtlety of 'jackhammers'.[43] Format is a key concept in radio, producing a 'standardised and predictable output for listeners', usually in association with commercial broadcasting.[44] *Nightfall* episodes, unpunctuated by ad breaks, are therefore shorter than *CBSRMT* episodes. The musical palette in *Nightfall* is considerably more up to date than that of *CBSRMT*, where an orchestral feel echoes the OTR tradition from which it emerged. Synthesizers reminiscent of John Carpenter's self-composed horror film scores provide further confirmation for listeners – as if any were needed – that this anthology series 'would push the boundaries' of their listening experience.[45]

What both series share, however, is a radio host. While the hosts of *Nightfall* were more explicitly framed in the 'horror host' mould, and E. G. Marshall in *CBSRMT* appeared as himself, Marshall often functioned in a similar way to the horror host, as will become clear. The radio host, according to Hancock, 'recalls OTR's "frame conventions" or "boundary rituals", by which the medium's "invisibility" and connected stream of form were demarcated.'[46] *CBSRMT*'s ritualistic opening featured firstly producer Himan Brown's famous sound effect of a 'creaking door,' a Gothically-sonic boundary-marker, telling the listeners they were leaving their everyday existence for some other realm. This was followed by the signature theme tune, a dark and mysterious sequence played on low strings and brass instruments. The first words uttered by Marshall are, 'Come in. I'm your host, E. G. Marshall.'

By contrast, *Nightfall's* ritualized opening involved an unidentified narrator narrating a dream sequence accompanied by the sound of a man screaming while eerie yet contemporary, synthesized music played. *Nightfall's* narrators were personas constructed in the vein of OTR horror hosts. The 'mysterious Luther Kranz' was played by Henry Ramer in the first two series; Bill Reiter played the second host, Frederick Hende.[47] Both Kranz and Hende were more likely to interact with the story rather than merely comment on it. This recalled the two permutations of the Man in Black, from John Dickson Carr's US series, *Suspense* (CBS, 1942-62), where the Man in Black remained an announcer, and the British Man in Black, heard in the BBC's *Appointment with Fear* (1943-48, 1955, 2009-), *The Man in Black* (1949), and *Fear on Four* (1988-1997). This Man in Black, played by three different actors over more than fifty years, became increasingly disposed to address his audience and even interact with characters in the dramas he presented – a character-host. The language Hand uses to describe the Man in Black also defines the two hosts of *Nightfall: '*a carefully constructed persona provided an ironic view of the play we are about to hear, lending morbid humour to a story-world which is usually fearful, doomed and lethal.'[48] This is certainly in

keeping with *Nightfall's* nihilistic tonal qualities, rejecting outright Canada's national stereotype of inoffensive blandness, and in so doing, critiquing prevailing images of masculinity. Warwick argues that the dominant tropes of Canadian filmmaker David Cronenberg are 'abjection, horror, and dystopia',[49] which are all seen in *Nightfall.* Warwick argues that Cronenberg's cinema deals with both Canadian and American impulses—the former 'quiet, controlled, and receding' and the latter 'violent, chaotic, and brash'.[50] These impulses are frequently in conflict in *Nightfall* as well, thus prefiguring Cronenberg's body horror in *Videodrome* (1983) and *The Fly* (1986). These contrasting impulses are examined in detail in the next section in a series of episodes from *Nightfall* and *CBS Radio Mystery Theater*

Kid Brother and Big Brother: Differing Worldviews in *Nightfall* and *CBS Radio Mystery Theater*

CBSRMT was, in essence, a more backwards-facing conception of radio drama than *Nightfall*. In some senses, it fit more easily into the neoconservatism of the American 1980s[51] , with its 'Christian, family oriented values'.[52] One factor that influenced this was the budgets of the productions. *Nightfall* was well-funded whereas *CBSRMT* struggled to attract support in terms of writers and performers. The tension between radicalism and the reactionary, as embodied in the medium of radio itself, is evident in *CBSRMT* and *Nightfall.* Botting has suggested that 'Gothic atmospheres – gloomy and mysterious – have repeatedly signalled the disturbing return of pasts upon presents.'[53] This discourse adeptly summarizes radio drama's death-in-life (or afterlife). Verma explains,

> When the radio play went (almost) extinct, it also entered an unusual afterlife. ... Broadcasts persist *only* because they were transformed before dispersing in space, plucked from the air and mineralized like fossils.[54]

Nevertheless, as Verma goes on to argue, dwelling on the past is counterproductive in audio drama and is even against the 'spirit' of radio. Similarly, Gothic styles 'retain a double function in simultaneously assuaging and intensifying the anxieties with which they engage', associating Gothic with modernity.[55]

Modernity figures much more prominently in *Nightfall* but is also evident in *CBSRMT*. Hancock has argued very persuasively that *Nightfall* frequently presents its protagonists as part of a rhetoric of Canadian 'colonial victim,' in keeping with the tradition of Canadian literature, suffering from 'younger brother syndrome' with its southern neighbour. Jim Leach argues that 'a strong "Gothic" strain runs through Canadian literature,'[56] Yet, ignominiously perhaps, in the 1970s, 'American-produced horror was not only exporting first and foremost to Canada, but was now filming there for tax breaks.'[57] Although emerging from Canada, slasher horror films of the late 1970s 'were not Canadian films.'[58] Meanwhile, shocking and well-publicized murders were rocking the Canadian consciousness, and homicides increased rapidly in Canada between 1965 and 1975.[59] 'Canada was becoming a dangerous place where nightmarish things could happen', as it recognised its urban, modern environment.[60] However, the stereotypical Canadian reserve permitted 'no consistent voice for those fears.'[61] This feeling of hopelessness, of being lost in the wilderness, of impotent anger and humiliation mingled with an ominous sense of doom, is reflected in many *Nightfall* titles. It is particularly well-illustrated in *Nightfall*'s 'Weather Station Four', whose setting is both quintessentially Canadian and quintessentially Gothic.

In the episode 'Weather Station Four', Devlin, a young urbanite, college graduate has taken a job in the remote outpost in the far north of Canada, in part because he can't find any other work with his Humanities degree and in part because of 'That "Go North, young man" garbage.' The drama is about his failure to adhere to the convention of Canadian manliness, personified in McNab, a veteran of the job for over 30 years. Devlin has grown to despise McNab and his Malamute dog, Thrasher. A true Canadian man like McNab is never frightened, even by imminent death, only 'concerned.' Kertzer suggests that Canadian literature is a lexicon of maturation, and Devlin seems not only unable to reach this point of maturation as determined by the conception of masculinity as personified by McNab, but the narrative also suggests this lexicon of maturation is outdated.

As is a common theme in these dramas, Devlin's loss of sanity seemingly has a supernatural catalyst – he hears the voice of a woman, Mira, over the radio, urging him to survive at any cost – but is ambiguously presented as a possible symptom of madness. There is a longstanding link between radio drama and the depiction of madness.[62] Devlin connects the wilderness with his sense of stress and isolation, which is unsurprising given that 'the woods'' Hammill argues of Canadian literature, 'are threatening because they are illegible.'[63] This taps into a long tradition of 'wilderness' literature in Canada, starting with *Wacousta; or The Prophecy: A Tale of the Canadas* (1832). The wilderness could signify the forested areas of eastern and western Canada, but also the prairies of central Canada and the frozen Arctic of 'Weather Station Four'' Ultimately, whether he has been influenced by some malign being or simply having a mental breakdown, Devlin follows the advice of Mira 'to survive' and kills Thrasher and then McNab and walks out into the wilderness to certain death from exposure.

Kertzer argues that Canadian literature is haunted by a ghost that 'cannot be captured since it is a spectre of thought, banished by the same reflex that seeks it; but it cannot be exorcized either.'[64] This conception of the haunting/haunted nature of the Canadian nationalist literature is embodied in the tension of 'Weather Station Four'. If we take Botting's conception of the Gothic as simultaneously assuaging and intensifying the anxieties with which it engages, 'Weather Station Four' personifies this profoundly. Was Devlin the irrational one or was McNab? The drama suggests that both the traditional and modern Canadian masculinities are overwhelmingly incompatible and destroy not only each other but all life. It seems significant, as well, that the only female presence is not a verifiable presence at all. As heard only as a voice by Devlin and the listener (McNab never hears her), Mira may exist only as a figment in Devlin's (and our) imaginations. This is an unmistakable motif of OTR thrillers/shockers, but also a frequent feature of *Nightfall's* episodes, which are generally deeply masculine in outlook. Indeed, the absence/presence of both women and children are emblematic of *Nightfall*. While Balanzategui argues that 'the child character who symbolically functions as the site of the adult protagonist's past traumas and repressed anxieties' is key to horror films of the 1980s – *The Shining* (1980), *The Changeling* (1980), and *Poltergeist* (1982) – few of *Nightfall*'s episodes feature children.[65] Important exceptions include 'Child's Play', and 'Gerald', which seem to respond to this cinematic lineage.

We can contrast the nihilistic sentiment of 'Weather Station Four' with a more traditional and stereotypically US American narrative, where good triumphs over evil; young, heroic man triumphs over old, ugly woman; and where the vigour of the New World blots out the horror of the Old, in 'The Ghost-Grey Bat' from *CBSRMT*. Interestingly, the college-educated man here prevails (a professor in Philosophy at Gotham University, no less). The narrative would easily be at home within the pages of the original *Dracula*, though with its combination of witchcraft and vampire conventions, it presents an interesting variation on the theme. 'The Ghost-Grey Bat' is narrated retrospectively by its hero, Professor Alec Grant,

though this is no indication at the opening that he has survived the encounter – the monologue from the protagonist is a favourite device of the story's author, Glasgow-born Ian Martin (who wrote more than 243 scripts for *CBSRMT* and acted in over 100 of them). In the story, New York-based Dr Grant and his wife, Moira, house-swap with a couple in Austria. Part and parcel of their idyllic chalet is the housekeeper, Frau Zauber ('Zauber' is German for 'magic'). When Moira falls victim to a strange sleeping sickness, Alec bravely stalks through the cellars to find the giant grey bat that attacked her. While Moira begins the narrative as active agent and as impervious as Alec to irrational behaviour, she quickly devolves into damsel in distress with a far less active role than even Mina under hypnosis in *Dracula.* Alec fits perfectly within the traditional masculine role taken on by the Crew of Light in *Dracula.* As McRobert suggests, 'Gothic narratives are predicated on the complex interaction of reality and fiction.'[66] Accordingly, 'The Ghost-Grey Bat' teeters on the verge of the plausible, with Frau Zauber fabricating the Austrian couple who were supposed to do the house swap by playing upon American indulgence for the backwards ways of Europeans, who can apparently live in quainter times when telephone contact can still be eschewed.

E. G. Marshall, fulfilling in this case the horror host role, consistently undercuts Alec's masculine certainty and heroism by questioning his sanity. As Gothic is the exploration of negative, irrational, and immoral practices, then quite clearly Frau Zauber is guilty of subversive behaviour. She ceases to act like the kindly, subservient housekeeper speaking in broken, charmingly accented English; she does not fit her gender, age, and social role. Witchcraft and the innocuous-seeming old lady were a favourite theme of Martin's, which he had explored earlier in 'Triptych for a Witch' (1975). Yet, by the end of 'The Ghost-Grey Bat,' the remaining questions about Alec's sanity suggest that he is also acting aberrantly. This can be seen as a subversion of the drama's seeming endorsement of 'status quo'/conservatism. Yet, disaster is avoided, and life returns to equilibrium. Other episodes of *CBSRMT* offer more startling subversion. Episodes like 'Star Sapphire' suggest that the family values of the neoconservative 1980s – 'class mobility and domestic femininity'[67] – may be part of a disturbing undercurrent. Nevertheless, this tendency is much more pronounced in *Nightfall.*

'Weather Station Four' was not the only way the series represented Canadian masculinity. Hancock goes on to argue, '*Nightfall* was not only the direct product of shared anxieties over "Canada's tenuous identity," but also offered the means to develop those fears into something solid and identifiable: to achieve shared direction and empowerment.'[68] Thus, *Nightfall* depicts not only a struggle to reconcile the Canadian national character – the belief that 'people are basically decent' – with that of its more aggressive 'big brother', the United States, but also, and much more subversively, a brutal revenge narrative. With clear references to classic Gothic literature such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde,* 'Reverse Image' tantalizes its protagonist – and the listener – with 'All the things you are not ... but perhaps would like to be'.

'Reverse Image' taps into the Cronenbergian warring impulses mentioned earlier, while rejecting/anticipating the late 1980s American 'greed is good' mentality.[69] This episode is the story of mild-mannered research chemist, Norman Laramie, who gamely endures not only the constant criticism of his alcoholic wife, Madge, but also the belittlement of her friends. Even when he finds out that Madge is having an affair, and in spite of her constant, savage and blunt verbal emasculation of him, he does not take any kind of action, but instead wishes to talk this situation through with her. Norman has recently bought an antique mirror, and when his situation seems unbearable, he is addressed by his reflection in the mirror, a being that identifies itself as 'Namron'. Namron convinces Norman to trade places with him. Norman goes from 'issuing nervous instructions' – a trait all too common in English-

Canadian literary history[70] – to Namron going on the rampage, seducing Madge and inviting all of her friends to a party. Namron then expresses everything that Norman could not ('Could it be because I am as ruthless, cynical, hateful, decadent as any of you?') before gassing and dismembering all of Norman's tormenters. Interestingly, when Norman, trapped inside the mirror, finds out what Namron has done, he isn't triumphant or even accepting of this act of revenge: 'You tricked me! … You're evil!' Norman escapes from the mirror, only to impale himself and Namron on the shards of the broken mirror. The paramedic who finds Norman/Namron even echoes the end of *Jekyll & Hyde:* 'I thought I saw two bodies there ... like twins.' For Norman and Namron, however, existence has continued on another plane: 'Now we are one', says Namron. 'The final reflection of ourselves ... forever.'

Certainly, Norman stands for Canadian identity, 'civil, communitarian, cautious, and conservative.'[71] Despite, therefore, the clear subversion of the Canadian masculine identity as one of forbearance and reason as opposed to aggression and passion, both aspects of Norman's character destroy themselves and then remain forever linked. This complex resolution manages to satisfy all possible outcomes. While unquestionably the guilty are punished (Madge and her friends represent negative, irrational, and immoral practices), the fact that a supernatural means is the only way to intervene represents an only slightly less nihilistic outcome than 'Weather Station Four'. Nihilism, the Canadian national character, and masculinity are the crux of *Nightfall's* output. Even the episode 'Harris and the Mare', which is neither Gothic nor a horror story, features a Canadian 'conchie' of the First World War driven to violence and ultimate dissolution when a jealous veteran attacks his socially rebellious wife. Despair and nihilism are the result, in *Nightfall,* of the Gothic confrontation of transgressive conduct within society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while radio remains critically neglected – compared to cinematic Gothic of the period, North American audiences were keen consumers of Gothic radio drama. Whether such original dramas reinforced or subverted gender roles or national identities, they frightened and absorbed listeners in their thousands if not millions. The scope of this article cannot do justice to the vast output of *Nightfall* and even the latter years of *CBSRMT* in the early 1980s, and therefore only a fraction of episodes are discussed and only a few key themes picked out. Two distinct patterns arise out of *Nightfall* and *CBSRMT,* where Canadian and American society, respectively, are critiqued, the darkness revealing what was made dazzling by the light of day. Indeed, with darkness/blindness as a recurrent metaphor for the uncanniness of radio, radio seems an effective medium for conveying the eerie. The Gothic here disturbs the United States' 1980s mainstream neoconservatism, aggressive masculine nationalism, and family-oriented values. However, the result of transgression destroys the masculine Canadian national character, demonstrating a nihilistic worldview. Murder in these narratives serves to provoke listeners to confront disjunction and ambiguity in their societies. While the cinematic slasher cycles of the early 1980s may have warned against falling asleep, we have no earlids – and therefore there was little protection against the insidious horrors of 1980s Gothic in North America.

Notes

[1] David Hendy, *Noise: A Human History of Sound and Listening* (London: Profile Books, 2013), 4.

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