

DEFINITION OF A RADIO PLAY

Suryya Sarkar

A radio play is for broadcast. The word, 'broadcasting' has been defined as the transmission through space, by means of radio frequencies, of signals capable of being received aurally. That means—the radio play is for listening and not for viewing. This statement does not define a radio play nor does it help us understand its written form as different from the produced form. After listening to a play a listener can recollect several elements from what he has heard. These are: the dialogue of different characters, sound effects or appropriate noises, music—both vocal and instrumental, if used, and silent moments or pauses allowed very cautiously. These elements help to erect an edifice of an aural art around a story, theme or an idea. The exposition of the plot begins in the style of a narration, as Val Cielgud has put it, "qualified by proper and practical consideration of both the advantages and limitations conferred upon the author by the use of the microphone, as opposed to the use of the printed page, the camera or the stage of a theatre".

From the technical point of view acting is offered to the microphone, inside the studio, which in turn, offers it to the listeners. But acting is not everything in a radio play. It has to be ornamented with the help of sound, music and pauses. Again, acting is not something whimsical. It is in accordance with the direction of the producer who 'visualises' the whole art keeping in mind how to beautify it with sound, music and silence. The producer requires a script, provided by a playwright.

That means the play which is addressed to the ear and not to the eye has a written form. What is that form? Does it conform to the stage play in respect of different acts or stages of a full-fledged five-Act or one-Act play? As we know the plot of a whole stage play is generally divided into five acts or stages. They are: exposition of the plot in the beginning, a series of crises in the middle, a climax at the heightened moment of crisis, a resolution for ending and lastly, the end itself or the conclusion. One has to examine these

stages, one by one, to understand clearly the structural differences between drama and radio-play.

Exposition : W.H. Hudson defines it thus: "The purpose of the introduction or exposition is to put the spectator in possession of all such information as necessary for the proper understanding of the play he is about to witness. "The beginning of a radio play is very important. Listeners' attention must be caught within a few minutes of the start, otherwise they may switch off their sets or turn the knob to another radio station for a better programme! The presentation announcement of the radio play may be regarded as the introduction.

Crisis : Conflict of ideas or clashes or interests among the dramatic personae create a crisis in the plot. Crisis creates tension and suspense and thus the motives become distinct. These basic elements of drama should be skilfully depicted in a radio play also. One single difference between the two is that in the latter, minor crisis in the sub-plots stand in the way of quick understanding and appreciation of the main issue simply because, the act of listening is always at a stretch. The listeners have no immediate relief of their grievances caused by obscuring the main theme by the sub-plots.

So the conflict must not spread out branches, but it should be very tense, deep and lingering. Here the current of tension is sharp and sharpness can be guaranteed only when it flows through a single channel.

Climax : Hudson writes, ".....every dramatic story sooner or later reaches a stage in its development at which the balance begins to incline decisively to one or the other side." This is called crisis. A play to be so-called—stage, screen, radio or TV—must have a culminating point of events. And for this, in a radio play, we may have to wait till the end.

Resolution : Dramatic conflict has to be brought towards the concluding stage. The treatment of this stage depends upon the conclusion of the play which may be happy as in a comedy or sad as in a tragedy. This is a very delicate stage in a radio drama. It may be a slow-moving act like unfolding chignon of an accomplished lady or a quick-moving act through the flash back of past events as in the case of crime drama or melodrama.

Conclusion : This is the ultimate stage of the plot. As Hudson says, here 'the imagination is willing to rest with a sense of finality and completeness.' A play may end abruptly giving birth to new imagination or with a sense of finality and completeness, but every play has an ending. The end of a stage play may be extended to a greater extent as in the case of mythological plays. But in a radio play resolution and conclusion move in close succession and move so quickly that they fade out with intimate friendship.

We are now in a position to extract the following factors from the foregoing deliberations :

- There is a script specially written for the sound media.
- There is a producer well conversant with the radio technique.
- There is acting within the closed—door studio under the direction of the producer.
- There is dialogue, sound effects, music and silence artistically employed on the stage of the imagination.

The first three factors just build up the body of the play. The fourth one actually breathes life into it. We shall not be able to arrive at a definition of a radio play without discussing the elements in the fourth factor.

Dialogue : Dialogue or conversation between two characters at a time is the soul of a radio play. Here persons are not seen but heard. So the character cannot be revealed without dialogue. If the character is not established the situation cannot be imagined. It is the enacted dialogue that gradually unfolds the entire plot. Even the entrance and exit of characters cannot be indicated unless some body utters some words. For all these reasons, Val Cielgud remarks that, 'The play of discussion is probably far nearer to what may be called, for lack of better expression, "Pure Radio", than any play of action can be.'

Word plays a dual role in a radio play. It adds force to dialogue as a part of speech and sometimes acts as the substitute for sound-effects, e.g. a man is chanting *sloka* from a distance. Here the words could be substituted by the chirping of birds or dialogue expressing the fact that it is morning.

Sound-effect: The sound of living or inanimate objects creates a natural atmosphere and the surroundings, e.g. tik tik sounds indicate the passage of time and chimes indicate the hour of the day. The ultimate object of sound effects is to amplify the story. In the words of Ralph Milton, "The sounds must tell a good story, and every sound must help story grow and live."

Music : Music may be necessary as a means of entertainment as well as to establish the mood of a particular character or situation. About the application of music, Louis Macneice remarks that 'In radio it is used in two ways —(1) by itself, before, between, after the spoken passage, (2) as an atmospheric background to a speech.'

Silence : Silence in a radio play is never for nothing. It contributes something positive. It may mean movement of a person from or to a little distance, or the process of thinking in a person. Practically, silence for a while can be used as a scene change, 'if used with telling effect' as remarked by James Whipple.

SANGEET NATAK

The logical conclusion of the discussion on the story-structure and inner elements of a radio play made clear so far can be turned into a definition thus : *A radio play is an acted story, produced with the help of dialogue, sound effects, music and silence for the sole purpose of listening.*

The word 'acted' implies that the story has been adapted into a radio play according to the technique of writing for transmission through space.