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Reuse of Scripts During the Golden Age of Radio

Or
From Jeff to Sam to Johnny
 by Stewart Wright

NOTE: Many of the specific episodes mentioned in this article can be found in the RHAC Tape and/or CD Libraries.

A Sense of Déjà Vu

At some time you might have experienced the following situation. You are listening to an Old-Time Radio show that you have never heard before. But, as you listen, the story seems increasingly familiar and you begin to feel a sense of déjà vu. Could you be wrong and maybe you actually have heard it before?

There is another possibility. You may be listening to a radio program that used a script that was previously produced. During the Golden Age of Radio, scripts were sometimes reused for new productions either on the same series or on another series.

Some Repeats

There were some repeat broadcasts during Radio's Golden Age. Many radio series had separate, live or transcribed broadcasts of the same episode for East and West Coast audiences. Individual episodes of popular syndicated radio series might have been aired two or more times on a single station. Networks aired repeat episodes of a few popular series such as *The Jack Benny Show* and *Dragnet* after the initial network run of new shows for those series had ceased.

Gunsmoke was unusual in that many of the episodes of this popular series had repeat airings during its 1952-1961 CBS network run. These non-prime time, repeat broadcasts were aired on Saturdays at 12:30 PM Eastern Time (9:30 AM Pacific Time) by CBS between mid October, 1954 and early February, 1959. They were, with a very few exceptions, simply repeat transcribed airings of the most recently aired prime-time network episode.

New Productions of Previously Used Scripts

During Radio's Golden Age, a more common practice than simply replaying previously aired transcriptions was reusing previously broadcast scripts for new productions. The reuse of scripts probably had been an industry practice since the late 1930's, but definitely became more common as the fortunes of network radio began to wane in the early 1950's.

When a script was reused on its original series, there were usually at least a few crew and/or guest cast differences from the original production. Additionally, title, dialog, and scene changes might have been made to the script. If the new production was in a different length time slot, changes could be substantial and entail the addition or deletion of entire scenes and characters.

If the script was reused on a different series, modifications could be minor or significant. Series specific changes such as opening, closing, and between acts segments and locale and characters' names were to be expected. Cast and crew changes were made. Episode title changes were common. Dialog alterations might be made. If the newer series had a different air time length than the original

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series, changes might be quite extensive as mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

Why Were Scripts Reused?

In some cases, script reuse was a simple economic expedient. Radio networks often had a limited-time option to reuse a script on its original series or on another series. Under this arrangement the writer was paid a reduced fee for the multiple uses of a script. As network radio was in its last decade, broadcast budgets became increasingly tight. Reuse of scripts allowed directors to save money while still airing a quality show.



Agnes Moorehead performing "Sorry, Wrong Number"

In a few cases, script reuse was recognition of popularity. Positive listener feedback was recognized with new productions of a popular script such as "Sorry, Wrong Number" on Suspense and "Three Skeleton Key" on Escape. The five "most popular" Gunsmoke episodes, as requested by listeners, were reproduced during the summer of 1957: "Home Surgery," "The Buffalo Hunter," "Word of Honor," "Bloody Hands," and "Kitty Caught."

Director/producer/writer Jack Johnstone, in a 1983 interview by John Dunning, provides indirect insight into the reuse of radio scripts. Johnstone mentioned that he started writing radio scripts because "as the fees for writing for TV shows got bigger and fatter, these fellows (writers such as Les Crutchfield and John Dawson) all moved over to TV. I found it increasingly difficult to get scripts of the sort that I wanted." To get those scripts, Johnstone added writing to his directing and producing duties on Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar.

This same problem was faced by other radio directors and producers: finding scripts for their shows that would attract listeners. A few wrote scripts as Johnstone did. Some directors used less

experienced writers. Many directors recycled quality, previously-written scripts that were still under network option. Also, directors may have reused scripts with which they were familiar because it gave them the opportunity to use a script of known quality or to tweak something that didn't quite work in its first production.

Many writers authored scripts for multiple radio series and the need to produce quality scripts led to reusing some of those that had been successful. On occasion, a writer would take a script that he wrote for one series and reuse the basic plot line and dialog for a new script on the same or another series. Also, script reuse may have given the writer a chance to make dialog, plotting, and/or characterization improvements to that script. It was not unusual for writers to use pen names when they recycled scripts.

Examples of Script Reuse

By looking at a few radio series, we can get an idea of the frequency of script reuse during the Golden Age of Radio. As previously mentioned, scripts not only were reused on the series for which they were originally written, but also were used on other series on the same network and even moved to series on competing networks.

Gunsmoke and Fort Laramie

Extensive research has uncovered a great deal of information regarding reuse of scripts on Gunsmoke.

Reuse of Gunsmoke scripts was quite common: 66 scripts from this landmark series were recycled as new productions including seven scripts that were each reused for two new productions. All of these new productions of reused scripts involved dialog and/or cast and crew changes and sometimes involved title changes. The script for the 07/12/52 episode, "The Boughten Bride" was reused for the 05/14/55 episode, "Robber Bridegroom;" modifications included dialog changes and the renaming of characters. Another 1952 script, "Overland Express," was extensively modified when it aired as "Trust" in 1955 and included series co-stars Georgia Ellis and Howard McNear appearing in uncredited supporting roles rather than playing their regular roles as Doc and Kitty. The 1954 script "The Feud," was renamed "Twelfth Night" in its later productions. A 1953 script, "How To Kill A Friend," was produced in 1954 as "Old Friend" and again in 1957 under its original title. A script first used in 1952, "Carmen," was reproduced

in 1955 as "Good Girl - Bad Company" and reproduced again in 1959 under its original name. The two productions of "The Cast" are unusual in that Paul Frees filled in as Doc Adams in the 1953 effort; while in the 1958 production, Howard McNear played his usual Doc Adams character.

There was script sharing between Gunsmoke and Fort Laramie, another Norman Macdonnell produced and directed series. Three scripts written in 1956 by Kathleen Hite for Fort Laramie were reused during Gunsmoke's 1959-60 season. The Fort Laramie scripts "Assembly Line," "Hattie Pelfrey," and "Woman At Horse Creek" were produced on Gunsmoke as "Busted Up Guns," "Nettie Sitton," and "Solomon River" respectively. An additional Hite Fort Laramie script, "Little Girl," was not aired on that series before its cancellation and became the Gunsmoke episode "Little Girl." In their migration from Fort Laramie to Gunsmoke, all four scripts received modifications of locale, characters, and dialog.

Earlier John Meston Gunsmoke scripts seem to have been adapted for Fort Laramie. The Gunsmoke episodes "Gunsmuggler" and "No Indians" are quite similar in plot to the Fort Laramie episodes "Boatwright's Story" and "Playing Indian."

For more information on the reuse of scripts on Gunsmoke, see the series of posts on the MYTH OF THE PRIME-TIME REPEATS at The Nostalgia Pages Gunsmoke Forum on the Internet starting with the post at:

<http://forums.oldradio.net/ftopic1506.html>

Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar, Jeff Regan - Investigator, Night Beat, & The Adventures Of Sam Spade



Bob Bailey as Johnny Dollar

On the series featuring "The Man With The Action-Packed Expense Account," Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar, a minimum of thirty scripts, originally written for the series and other series, were later reused for new productions. Because of missing episodes and titles changes that were made to some reused scripts, it is difficult to pin down a more exact number of reused scripts for Johnny Dollar.

Multiple scripts from early in the run that were written by Gil Doud were reused without the change of episode titles. Some initial performances of these scripts starred Edmond O'Brien and some later performances starred John Lund. All new productions of these earlier, Doud-written Dollar scripts had at least some dialog, cast, and crew changes.

At least sixteen multi-part episodes that aired during the 1955-56 portion of Johnny Dollar's run reused earlier 30-minutes Dollar scripts and scripts from other series that were written or co-written by E. Jack Neuman. Neuman used a pen name, John Dawson, for those 1955-56 efforts. It was necessary to approximately double the length of the original, half-hour scripts for the five nights a week, 15-minute format. Episode titles, locales, and character names were altered, and scenes and dialog were added.

A few examples of half-hour Johnny Dollar scripts by Neuman which became multi-part episodes by Dawson are: "The Story of the Big Red Schoolhouse," (co-written by John Michael Hayes) and "The Thelma Ibsen Matter" which became "The Clinton Matter" and "The Broderick Matter" respectively. "The Story of the Big Red Schoolhouse" also became The Adventures Of Sam Spade episode "The Civic Pride Caper" by Hayes.

Two scripts, an NBC Nightbeat episode, "Big John McMasters," by Neuman and Hayes and the Johnny Dollar episode "The San Antonio Matter" by Neuman, were merged to produce the multi-part script for "The Valentine Matter" with Dawson credited as the writer.

Remember the article's title reference to "From Jeff to Sam to Johnny?" Four Jeff Regan - Investigator scripts by E. Jack Neuman which aired between July 17, 1948 and August 21, 1948 later became multiple-part Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar "Matters" with Neuman's alter ego, John Dawson, receiving the writing credits. Additionally, Neuman retained the writing credits when two of these Regan scripts were also recycled on The Adventures Of

Sam Spade. The first was the "The Story of the Prodigal Daughter," which was reused as "The Pearling Matter" on Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar June 18 - 22, 1956. Next was the August 7th episode, "The Story of the Man Who Liked Mountains," which was expanded for its use on Johnny Dollar on April 2nd through 6th 1956 as "The Salt City Matter."

A third multiple use Regan script by Neuman has some mystery about it: the August 14th episode, "The Story of the Diamond Quartet." Next, it was reused for The Adventures Of Sam Spade broadcast of July 24, 1949 as "The Tears Of Night Caper." (At the end of this broadcast Gil Doud and Bob Tallman are credited as the writers. However, the script for "The Tears Of Night Caper" lists Neuman as the writer. It is basically the same radio play as "The Story of the Diamond Quartet.") The script had its second reuse as "The Tears Of Night Matter" on Johnny Dollar, May 21 - 25, 1956 by John Dawson.

The fourth Jeff Regan script, "The Story of the Man Who Came Back" was also reused on Sam Spade and twice on Johnny Dollar. The Sam Spade version aired as "The Champion Caper," on 08/07/1949. On Yours Truly Johnny Dollar it was first produced as the December 12, 1952, half-hour episode "The Elliott Champion Matter" with Neuman as the writer. It was expanded to fit the multiple-part, Johnny Dollar format on 12/12 - 16/1955 as "The Bennett Matter" with Dawson receiving the writing credits.

A Bob Tallman and Gil Doud script from the Mutual series, Voyage of the Scarlet Queen, "The Queen Anne Pistols and the Dealer on King George Road" was later reused on the CBS detective series as "The Queen Anne Pistols Matter." Doud made the necessary locale and characters modifications to the script and received writer credit for the Johnny Dollar production. It is quite surprising how much of the Scarlet Queen dialog survived in tact when it was used for Johnny Dollar.

Other Neuman-written half-hour Johnny Dollar scripts underwent less extensive revision were when they were reused during the half-hour shows starring Bob Bailey. For example, the episode "The Eighty-Five Little Minks" by Neuman and Hayes became "The Templeton Matter" by Dawson. They shared a basic plot line and much dialog: a \$100,000 theft during which thieves unlocked the safe and killed a security guard. Cast, character names, and items stolen changed in the two productions. The mink coats stolen in the first production became diamonds in the second.

21st Precinct

Reuse of scripts was also common on 21st Precinct, a Stanley Niss written and directed CBS police drama, which aired from 07/07/1953 to 11/01/1956. Forty episodes were new productions of reused scripts from earlier in the series run. These new productions included some dialog and character name changes and/or cast and crew differences. Nearly half of the episode titles were changed for the second or third productions of a script. A few examples of title changes include "The Bartender" becoming "The Substitute" and "The Book" becoming "The Manual."

The vast majority of new productions of previously used 21st Precinct scripts occurred after the precinct Captain's name was changed from Kennelly. Since the titles of 21st Precinct episodes were not announced during the broadcasts, recognition of the precinct Captain's name can be an important aid in determining the initial use of a script from its later production. The Captains' name was: Kennelly in episodes 1 through 109 and episode 135, Cronin in episodes 109-144, and Keough in episodes 145-159.

Much more information on 21st Precinct can be found in a detailed broadcast log that was compiled and written by this researcher. The most recent version of this log can be found at:

<http://www.old-time.com/otrlogs2/index.html>

In Conclusion:

This article is by no means exhaustive; there are many more instances of script reuse than space allows. It is obvious by the examples presented that reuse of scripts was not uncommon during the Golden Age of Radio.

So the next time you get a sense of déjà vu when listening to an unfamiliar radio program, you might just be listening to a different production of a script you have previously heard.

Acknowledgment:

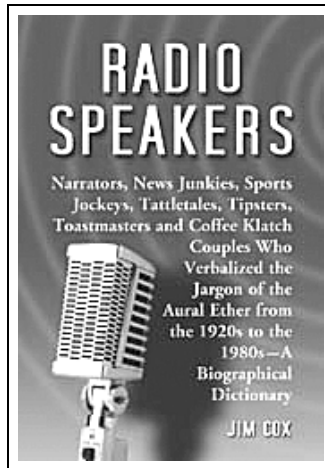
I would especially like to acknowledge Jeanette Berard, Special Collections Librarian, Thousand Oaks Library, for her help in providing definitive proofs for several of the shows mentioned in this article

Radio Speakers:

**Narrators, News Junkies, Sports Jockeys,
Tattletales, Tipsters, Toastmasters and Coffee
Klatch Couples Who Verbalized the Jargon of
the Aural Ether from the 1920s to the
1980s—A Biographical Dictionary**

By Jim Cox

A Review by Stewart Wright



They were some of the most familiar voices during the Golden Age of Radio and beyond, but, in many cases, were also some of the most anonymous. They were the announcers, news and entertainment reporters, sportscasters, show hosts, and others or as author Jim Cox refers to them, the "Radio Speakers."

In his new book of the same title, Jim provides Old-Time Radio fans with a wonderful new resource. He has compiled an extensive body of information on an important segment of Golden Age of Radio talent; a segment that has received relatively little coverage in Old-Time Radio literature. The reader will find that much new enlightening and fascinating information has been included in this volume.

The work is truly extensive and includes profiles of 1,161 "Radio Speakers." The main portion of the book, The Dictionary, supplies detailed biographical sketches of some 569 announcers; narrators; newscasters reporters, anchors, commentators, analysts, and correspondents (News Junkies); sports reporters and sporting event broadcasters (Sports Jockeys); show business reporters (Tattletales); self-help advisors and advice consultants (Tipsters); masters of ceremonies (Toastmasters); and breakfast show hosts (Coffee Klatch Couples.) These entries include birth and death information, series worked,

personal and career information, and numerous entertaining anecdotes. In the Appendix, there are very brief entries for another 592 network and syndicated radio personalities for whom little information exists on their careers and/or their performances on radio were relatively minor compared to their other activities in various other entertainment venues.

With the publication of **Radio Speakers**, Jim Cox has greatly expanded the body of knowledge on an important group of people who made vital contributions to Radio's Golden Age. This book is a significant reference work that should find its way in the libraries of scholars and fans of Old Time Radio.

Radio Speakers

Narrators, News Junkies, Sports Jockeys, Tattletales, Tipsters, Toastmasters and Coffee Klatch Couples Who Verbalized the Jargon of the Aural Ether from the 1920s to the 1980s—A Biographical Dictionary

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