The Shadow Knows: The Counter-Fantasy of the American Antihero and Symbolic Divergence in Golden Age Radio

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Various radio and pulp incarnations of The Shadow *have played a pivotal role in shaping American superhero mythology and cultural unconscious. This essay explores* The Shadow*'s origins within the 1930s, and then utilizes Fantasy Theme Analysis to uncover mythic tensions and conflicts within* The Shadow*'s transition from noir-like dystopian antihero into the more romantic utopian superhero of Orson Welles' 1937 radio program. We conclude by contemplating rhetorical implications for* The Shadow*'s ''symbolic divergence,'' a fantasy evolving into contradictory counter-fantasies and rhetorical visions in radio and pulps, as a provocative illustration of theoretical debates regarding the psychodynamic functions of rhetorical fantasy.*

''Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows!'' These chilling words, followed by eerie laughter and the haunting organ music of ''Omphale's Spinning Wheel,'' were first heard over the airwaves of the Columbia Broadcasting System late Thursday evening on July 31, 1930. Street & Smith, the world's largest publisher of pulp fiction magazines, had gambled that the new medium of radio would boost sales of their *Detective Story Magazine* but soon discovered that listeners were instead rushing to newsstands for the magazine adventures of the program's mysterious announcer, The Shadow (Tollin, 1979, p. 75). Street & Smith swiftly pounced on the unexpected opportunity, little aware that this accidental character would quickly become a cultural phenomenon for Depression-Era America. With more than a third of the population out of work, radio programming offered soothing entertainment for a troubled nation. In 1930, the first year *The Shadow*

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was heard on radio, an estimated 14 million American radio sets listened mostly during evenings on average of almost 4 hours, although 44 million radio sets would explode into 33 million American homes on average of 5 hours daily by the end of the decade (Godfrey, 1998, p. xxviii–xxx). Even those in less urbanized or rural areas ''not owning radio receiving equipment'' were known to ''gather in central places of the community, such as a store, or the cotton gin, to listen'' (Salisbury, 1935, p. 142). Americans of all races and creeds were for the first time united by their shared diet of popular radio programs, which would ''band the country into a universal network of sound'' as ''the greatest democratizing agency in history'' (Lowell, 1937, p. 80).

The Shadow was one of the most popular and widely recognized figures of the 1930s and 40s, a darkly mysterious antihero epitomizing the complex anxieties of an increasingly urbanized America united by radio's ''theater of the mind'' (Cooney, 1995). Fred McDonald (1979) writes that ''as a source of fictional characters and popular culture,'' the emergent medium of radio produced some of the most enduring fictional heroes of a generation and thus forever ''placed its imprint upon American society'' (p. 172). MacDonald identifies The Shadow as a pivotal figure in radio's evolution from the hardboiled ''realistic detective'' dramas of early years to the more fantastic ''glamorous detective'' stories that would epitomize the Golden Age of radio. The impact of radio and its incarnations of The Shadow, as we shall argue, played a significant role in rearticulating the American hero mythology as well as our popular unconscious. In what follows, we will employ a Fantasy Theme Analysis to reveal how radio's commodifications created rhetorical tensions and competing rhetorical communities for The Shadow, an archetypal antihero called forth to fulfill both social and commercial interests. This essay will first explore The Shadow's beginnings and historical evolution within the social context of 1930s radio dramas and pulp fiction. Next, Fantasy Theme Analysis will be used to uncover latent tensions and conflicts within The Shadow's transition from ''realistic detective'' radio shows to the ''glamorous detective'' radio programs pioneered with the Orson Welles shows. We will then conclude by considering the rhetorical implications of The Shadow's *symbolic divergence*, the fantasy's mutation into counter-fantasies with competing rhetorical visions across different audiences and media, which offers a provocative illustration of contemporary theoretical debates over the nature and psychoanalytic functions of rhetorical fantasy.

As it turns out, The Shadow of radio articulated conflicted and conflicting fantasy types that would influence competing fantasy themes within what Lawrence and Jewett (2002) identify as the ''Monomyth of the American Superhero.'' Since 2007 marked the 70th anniversary of *The Shadow's* 1937 debut of Orson Welles' definitive characterization for Golden Age radio audiences, we feel it a fitting tribute to revisit the rich radio lineage of this influential American hero and radio legend. Surprisingly little scholarship outside fandom has examined in any detail the archetypal debt owed to The Shadow, an oversight we attempt to correct with a retrospective of this icon's lasting rhetorical impact and importance.

The Shadow of Radio and the Pulps

Robert Weinberg (1985), in his preface for *Gangland's Doom: The Shadow of the Pulps*, finds that "strangely enough, while one of the most popular characters ever in American literature, as well as one of the most famous radio characters ever, very little has been written about The Shadow" (p. 5). The Shadow, a character virtually synonymous with the medium of radio itself, has indeed remained a figure of mystery whose origins prove every bit as enigmatic as the character himself.[1] The mysterious announcer for *Detective Story Hour* was known only by his sinister laugh until a young writer named Harry Charlot, who adapted the mystery stories of Street & Smith for radio, spontaneously christened this occasional phantom host as "The Shadow" (Tollin, 1979, p. 75). Sponsorship of the radio show was intended to bolster dwindling sales of Street & Smith's *Detective Stories* magazine, but the program's producers and sponsors were shocked when listeners found the ominous voice of the mysterious novelty host so much more memorable than the radio stories themselves that they flocked to newsstands seeking the as-yet-nonexistent pulp adventures of The Shadow.

Responding to the unexpected popular demand, publishers Street & Smith quickly approached young writer-for-hire Walter Gibson to invent pulp novels featuring the character so the copyrights could be secured. To publicize the new magazine, Street & Smith featured a Shadow contest over the air during "Detective Story Hour" from January through April of 1931 and cross-promoted the event in *Detective Story Magazine* to capitalize on the popular imagination and audience demand which had given birth to the character. The contest invited readers to guess The Shadow's identity based only upon a few mysterious yet very specific clues that were run between February 7 and April 11 of 1931. CBS cloaked the program in secrecy, with officials claiming that The Shadow's true identity was unknown even to other cast members. "Around the studio The Shadow was almost as much a myth as on the outside," observes Tollin (1979), "Only his voice was known" (p. 76). James La Curto voiced The Shadow on radio for only a few weeks before leaving to appear on Broadway, so it was Frank Readick who would don a mask and cloak in the studio for the successful cross-promotion. It wasn't until July 8 of 1931 that The Shadow was revealed by the *Boston Post* as Frank Readick and the air of mystery breached. Readick voiced The Shadow as radio announcer for *Detective Story Hour*, *Blue Coal Radio Revue* and, curiously enough, *Love Story Hour* between 1930 and 1932.

The emergent industry of advertising played heavily into the marketing of the character and programs as cross-promoted across both his radio and pulp incarnations. The program's representatives from Ruthrauff & Ryan Advertising Agency would soon suggest that The Shadow's popular role as program announcer be expanded to that of narrator for the radio dramas as well. Robert Hardy Andrews briefly stepped in during the 1932 premiere season for the self-titled radio program now featuring stories narrated exclusively by The Shadow, but Readick soon returned as the distinctive voice of The Shadow in seasons two and three from 1932–35. Readick was so closely associated with the early radio incarnation of The Shadow

that an interview in the October 16, 1932 issue of *Radio and Amusement Guide* was intended ''to show you still further that I'm perfectly harmless,'' that his ''best likes are not for blood and thunder as you might expect,'' and to insist he was ''not black and blood-stained in real life'' (Readick, 1932, p. 77). The radio shows soon moved to earlier timeslots to attract larger audiences, including growing legions of Shadow Club members and young pulp fans who translated secret messages from emphasized words during closing announcements ''as agents of The Shadow do when on the trail of crime'' (Tollin, 1979, p. 78). What began as a disembodied announcer known only by his chilling laugh, The Shadow had quickly taken on a life of his own as both fan favorite and mysterious narrator for several radio dramas.

The Shadow of the pulps, however, began to develop his own complex mythology separate from the radio persona under the prolific writing style of ''Maxwell Grant,'' a pseudonym for writer and amateur magician Walter Gibson (Murray, 1980; Shimeld, 2003). With the premiere of *The Living Shadow* in April of 1931, coinciding with the end of the radio contest, Robert Weinberg (1985) notes that ''evidence seems to point to Street & Smith not expecting great things from this new magazine'' (p. 3). The cover haphazardly selected by the publisher, featuring a ''menacing Chinaman'' recycled from Street & Smith's file illustrations, forced Gibson to rewrite Chinatown into the inaugural story. Reader response to *The Shadow* pulps was phenomenal, however, surprising everyone when *The Living Shadow* immediately sold out and was quickly reprinted while orders for the next pulp novel, *The Eyes of The Shadow*, instantly doubled and the character quickly became ''one of the best selling pulps ever'' (Weinberg, p. 3). Eisgruber (1985) notes that Gibson's innovative storytelling drew from ''classical'' detective literature in the tradition of Sherlock Holmes, the ''thriller school'' of bizarre enemies and monstrous foes, and the ''hard-boiled school'' of vicious gangsters and death-dealing retribution. Although most pulps of the day featured the exploits of a central hero, Gibson did just the opposite so that ''The Shadow was left mysterious'' (p. 56). Stories were instead uniquely told from the viewpoint of The Shadow's numerous recruited agents, hapless victims, and the conniving criminals themselves, while The Shadow himself only intermittently made melodramatic interventions and equally mysterious disappearances to confound friend and foe alike (Steinbrunner & Penzler, 1976). The Shadow's assumed secret-identity was not established until Gibson's third novel, 1931's *The Shadow Laughs*, wherein the mysterious crime-fighter strikes a deal to impersonate Lamont Cranston when the wealthy globetrotting playboy is out of town. The Shadow's true identity, however, was intentionally left open. It was not until 1937 when Gibson's 131st novel *The Shadow Unmasks* revealed that The Shadow was vanished daredevil aviator Kent Allard, although fans note clues that Allard was perhaps just another of the many disguises adopted by The Shadow. Even today, ''his past and motivations still remain fairly wide open,'' observes Eisgruber (1985), and thus ''The Shadow is still a mystery'' (p. 14).

Most fascinating about these formative years of The Shadow is the degree to which both commercial and public interest blurred the boundaries between fiction and reality. The Shadow of the pulps relied solely on the cover of darkness, blazing .45

pistols, and illusionist trickery to thwart evil within the hardboiled noir melodramas. Gibson, himself an amateur magician who ghosted material for famous illusionists like Houdini and Blackstone, drew upon his knowledge of misdirection and a fascination with fantastic gadgetry to provide The Shadow with plausible gimmicks for resolving plot twists. This gritty realism was quite central to the marketing of the character as well. Inside the front cover of the very first *Shadow Detective Magazine* was a signed note from The Shadow himself endorsing the authenticity of accounts therein while revealing that one of The Shadow's many assumed identities was that of a radio announcer, thereby further heightening the cross-promotional potential of print and radio incarnations. Gibson (1979) recalls in *Introducing The Shadow* that "the editors decided to treat The Shadow as a real rather than fictional character," so Gibson put his Knight of Darkness "in direct conflict with the Chicago mobs, which were then at the peak of their power" (pp. 5–9). In his forward to 1931's *The Living Shadow*, Gibson ominously claimed that "the underworld had gone so far as to make determined efforts to unravel The Shadow's identity," hinting that gangsters were spying on radio stations and cast members since "those without the law had to be sure" that this menacing figure was indeed a mere radio announcer (Harmon, 2001, p. 40). One wonders to what degree such realism influenced Frank Readick to portray himself so harmlessly in the *Radio and Amusement Guide* article of 1932, a period in which organized crime was assuming alarming proportions and possibly monitoring his movements. Tollin (1979) concedes that "Gibson's fictional account of the mystery surrounding the radio broadcasts was not far from the truth" (pp. 75–76). Whether Readick's interview was motivated by genuine concern for personal safety, or done for shameless promotional hype, only The Shadow knows.

On the heels of his skyrocketing popularity in the pulps and as radio narrator, however, The Shadow suddenly disappeared from radio in March of 1935 for nearly two years because Street & Smith became entangled in legal disagreements with radio sponsor Blue Coal over expanding The Shadow's role to that of leading man in radio adaptations of his pulp adventures. "Blue Coal had misgivings about featuring the mystery man as the central figure in the radio plays," Tollin (1979) explains, "preferring to continue the already successful format" wherein The Shadow merely narrated unrelated mystery stories (p. 78). A compromise was finally reached to try a new Shadow-centric format in September of 1937 by starring 22-year-old Broadway wunderkind Orson Welles as The Shadow, but the adapted Street & Smith radio stories would also introduce Lamont Cranston's "friend and companion, the lovely Margo Lane" as an ongoing romantic interest and marketing tool for female audiences (Tollin, p. 78). During its first year in the new format with Orson Welles, these more fantastic adventures of *The Shadow* secured its status as both household name and breakaway commercial success through exotic encounters with a "bizarre assortment of homicidal maniacs, ghouls and werewolves" (Tollin, p. 80). Orson Welles would establish the successful Golden Age Radio formula in his single season with the program, which Bill Johnstone and Bret Morrison then continued for a generation of radio audiences.

It is also no small irony that Orson Welles would go from playing a hero who ''clouds men's minds'' to a full-blown media sensation when his infamous ''War of the Worlds'' broadcast on Halloween night of 1938 would muddle public perception and trigger panic, further demonstrating the uncertain boundaries of fact and fiction during the ''theater of the mind'' radio era (Dunning, 1998; Harmon, 2001). Tollin (1979) crows, ''How could there be a more perfect radio hero than an invisible man, as ethereal as the airwaves themselves?'' (p. 79). Radio broadcasts of ''The Shadow'' continued until 1954, nearly 25 years after America's most mysterious hero had been introduced in ''Detective Story Hour.''

Sadly, the early radio dramas announced and narrated by The Shadow in the era of glass disks were never adequately preserved, and precious few records of The Shadow programs prior to the 1937 Welles program are known to exist outside of oral histories. Scripts from early radio dramas are similarly fragmentary, although the internet has made ''The Golden Age of Radio'' more accessible now than ever and created somewhat of a nostalgic Renaissance. As a cloaked mystery man with a secret identity and superhuman abilities in a crusade against macabre criminals and monstrous supervillains, this ''new'' Shadow of 1937 pre-dates Superman's 1938 debut as perhaps the first costumed superhero whilst his gritty pulp incarnation influenced many later vigilante antiheroes like 1939's Batman. With this historical sketch in mind, we now turn to the evolving fantasy themes of The Shadow of Golden Age radio.

Fantasy Theme Analysis and the Shadow of Depression America

Fantasy Theme Analysis is a form of rhetorical criticism that highlights the ways groups construct shared symbolic realities leading to what Ernest Bormann calls *symbolic convergence*, or ''the way two or more private symbolic worlds incline toward each other, come more closely together, or even overlap during certain processes of communication.'' It is ''when events become confusing and disturbing'' that people are likely to ''share fantasies that provide them with a plausible and satisfying account that makes sense out of experiences'' (Bormann, Cragan, & Sheilds, 2001, p. 282). The shared identifications used to establish, reinforce, or challenge powerful cultural myths thus negotiate some sense of shared values, beliefs, ideals, and norms by offering dramatic understandings of lived social realities (Bormann, 1983). ''When a speaker selects and slants the interpretation of people's actions he or she begins to shape and organize experiences,'' explains Bormann of this human impulse for sharing stories (Bormann, 1992, p. 368). Fantasy Theme Analysis has been a particularly valuable analytic method because it can ''account for the development, evolution, and decay of dramas that catch up groups of people and change their behavior'' (Bormann, 1985, p. 213). Not unlike Kenneth Burke's (1966) Dramatism, which emphasizes rhetorical identifications as the psychodynamic symbolic action of humans who use (and are used by) language, rhetorical

fantasy thus becomes the foundation of Bormann's ''Symbolic Convergence Theory'' for the formation of a shared group identity.

Bormann provides a specific vocabulary to guide Fantasy Theme analysis, identifying a *fantasy theme* as a ''creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need'' (Bormann, 1985, p. 8). As fantasy themes for characters, action, and setting are repeated and elaborated upon, they are narratively ''chained out'' across various discourses and interpretations. Fantasy Themes are in fact a ''mythic shorthand,'' since ''if myths are the prized tales of humankind in general, fantasy themes are the local variations wrought on these themes'' (Hart, 1990, p. 251). Nimmo & Combs (1980) confirm this ''constant restatement of myth'' in the narratives of politics and popular culture, and Fantasy Themes might be fairly characterized as rhetorical ''attempts to revitalize old myths for present purposes'' (p. 63). Fantasy themes are thus often variations of some master myth or *fantasy type*, ''a recurring script in the culture of a group'' which is ''essentially the same narrative frame but with different characters and slightly different incidents.'' (Bormann, 1983, p. 110). Avenging vigilantes like The Shadow and Batman, for example, are derived from the archetypal material of earlier mythic antiheroes such as Odysseus or Zorro. Bormann finds shared fantasy themes cultivate in people ''a sense of community, to impel them strongly to action'' and ''provide them with a social reality filled with heroes, villains, emotions and attitudes'' (Bormann, 1985, pp. 212–213).

When people come to share narrative clusters of interpretive fantasies, a coherent and collectivising *rhetorical vision* of their social reality may emerge to provide ''a unified putting-together of the various shared scripts that gives the participants a broader view of things'' (Bormann, 1992, p. 368). Rhetorical visions, whether emerging cooperatively or articulated by some individual speaker, attempt to spark symbolic convergence by providing ''a composite drama that catches up large groups of people in a symbolic reality'' (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, p. 285). Group identity, then, is the result of shared fantasies and the *symbolic convergence* of an interpretive rhetorical community. Fantasy themes often appropriate mythic fantasy types from the past, yet do so to offer a dramatizing rhetorical vision that articulates a compelling interpretation of present social realities or cultural conditions for the rhetorical community sharing a narrative worldview. The Shadow, not unlike later violent antihero fantasies of Dirty Harry or Rambo, thus provides insights into counter-cultural desires and anxieties even as these shared mythic fantasies play an active role in constructing public perceptions of their social reality and the political status quo. Symbolic convergence of fantasy, then, is inherently constitutive of group ideology.

When considering fantasy themes within The Shadow, it is therefore important to distinguish its mythic re-articulation of an enduring *fantasy type* or ''master analogue'' across subsequent discourses and revisions (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, p. 286). Steinbrunner (1979) illustrates this point rather elegantly:

> Menacing figures dressed in black had long been popular characters in mystery
> stories, films and plays, objects of terror reaching out of the darkness to confront
> the forces of good. Gibson took this terrible, dread shape that had hitherto been the

hero's nemesis and made it a hero. The Shadow was both the force for good and lurker in the darkness. In the unstable and turbulent times in which he flourished, a time not without despair, it was somehow right for him to operate completely outside traditional institutions and methods of justice. Radical, a people's hero, a gritty, sober Scarlet Pimpernel translated into a bleak urban setting, he belonged to his Depression world and was its champion. (p. *v*)

The Shadow of early radio and the pulps may therefore be more accurately characterized as an ambiguous *Antihero*, a protagonist lacking traditionally heroic traits or motives as a conflicted victim of societal conditions or tragic fate. Unlike romantic heroes who uphold and champion traditional social values, the liminal antihero often acts outside accepted values, norms, roles, and behaviors as a hapless everyman, a charismatic rebel, or a roguish outlaw who challenges the status quo in their often morally ambivalent quest (Brombert, 1999; Cuddon, 1991; Hassan, 1959). The Shadow himself owes much to a longtime archetypal lineage of masked vigilantes with secret identities who fight for revenge and justice, not the least of which directly or indirectly include The Count of Monte Cristo (1844), The Scarlet Pimpernel (1905), and other pulp figures like Zorro (1919). Placing this dark antihero within a noirish urban setting where greed, brutality, and treachery are major driving forces behind impotent institutions and emergent criminal empires during The Depression and Prohibition, however, proved an innovative synthesis with hardboiled detective fiction of the day such as Sam Spade (1929). While most commentators give renowned pulp writer Walter Gibson due credit for developing the popular mythology of The Shadow, we firmly maintain that it was the needs and imagination of Depression radio audiences which called this mysterious Knight of Darkness into being and re-legitimated the archetypal impetus for avenging vigilantes and urban antiheroes still prominent within American entertainments today.

In fact, one reason The Shadow emerges as such a commanding fantasy is because his battle with evil was also a reflection of social anxieties regarding the medium of radio itself. In the early years of radio, "to have human voices and music emerge from a small jumble of wires and crystals or tubes was well nigh incomprehensible," Bormann (1997) reminds us, and "came close to magic." Yet Bormann confirms the very real fear that radio might prove a "dark magic" able to "bypass the normal checks and balances of democracy and create a totalitarian state by using radio propaganda to go directly to the people to create mass support," with much contemporary debate pointing to "the rise of Mussolini in Italy and the use of radio in Germany by the Communist Party and the Nazi Party" (p. 95). Political demagoguery thus seems inextricably linked to these fantasies of superheroic salvation and extralegal redemptive violence (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). Nimmo and Combs (1980) similarly note that the movies of the 1930s often "presented authority figures as insensitive, evil, oppressive, against the people" and "reflects the mood of the Depression and the sense of the failure of authority" (p. 134). In the traumatic wake of World War One, and amidst deteriorating international stability and American economic uncertainty, The Shadow reflected the grim anxieties of the Depression-Era 1930s.

The notion that masses might be duped by corrupt authorities or brainwashed by conspiratorial villains has proven a persistent fantasy type for the dystopian

antiheroes of American culture, but not one without an antithesis. The Shadow who would become virtually synonymous with the Golden Age of Radio evolved into an American icon who championed a very different worldview than The Shadow of early 1930s radio and pulp noir. ''It is in this sense of participation in a common activity which not only draws the listener to the program in the first place, but which also motivates the actual purchase of the product,'' Lowell (1937) enthuses, epito-mizing the unbridled optimism of many Americans as commercial radio developed during its Golden Age; ''The very fact that radio is accessible to such a great number of people and that it penetrates all social and economic strata, clearly indicates that it is a powerful democratic agency knowing no class distinction, no color or creed, no politics or partisanship, no race or religion'' (pp. 75–80). Here we get a sense of how closely patriotic nationalism and mass commercialism were associated as the American economy slowly marched toward recovery. Much 1930s radio comedy functioned to relieve ''social tensions'' by validating if not overtly supporting the same utopian values of hard work and brotherhood being affirmed by Roosevelt and his ''New Deal'' (Van Hise, 1994). Radio programs offered a powerful source of identification for Americans struggling through The Great Depression and facing the global threat of Fascism but, as the isolationist country came into its own as a world superpower with WWII, so too would The Shadow shift in the mythic values he championed. By 1941, Street & Smith touted that ''in an age where bandits wear uniforms and medals,'' The Shadow's commercial appeal as ''the most successful character of an era'' was due to ''his honest belief in democratic principles'' and a genuine reflection that ''the fancy of the American people favors justice'' and, of course, ''his simple cloak is glamorous'' (Gibson, 1979b, p. 118). The mysterious pulp vigilante had by then become not only a bankable commodity, but also a bonafide American hero who championed the mythic values of ''The American Dream'' (Bormann, 1985). This more idealistic and superheroic incarnation of The Shadow suggests very different fantasy elements and assumptions than the sinister blood-stained avenger of his early years.

The Shadow thus may prove a curious source of *symbolic divergence*, rather than the symbolic convergence which Fantasy Theme Analysis so often explores. Bormann (1997) allows that collectivizing dramatizations, when shared as fantasy themes, could indeed contribute to ''diverse groups of shared fantasies that, in turn, created rhetorical visions that became the group consciousness of different rhetorical communities'' (p. 91). A closer look at symbolic divergences in the reformatted program starring Orson Welles might offer an illuminating glimpse into the evolution of an enduring yet profoundly conflicted American hero mythos.

The Shadow as Golden Age Fantasy Type in *The Death House Rescue*

The Shadow that would emerge in the Golden Age program is so strikingly different from the antihero of early radio and pulps that he could easily be mistaken

for another character altogether. After sponsor dispute over the format and direction of the radio program reached a tentative agreement in 1937, the new series featuring Orson Welles would herald the height of the program's popularity and The Shadow's transition ''from an interesting novelty to an American institution'' (Tollin, 1979, p. 79). The Dark Knight of the pulps and ominous disembodied voice of early radio would become transformed into a superpowered savior who evolves ''from mere heroism to superheroism'' during the crucial monomythic development of ''the axial decade'' (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002, p. 36). Lawrence and Jewett (2002) go on to sketch the ''monomyth'' emerging from this formative period as an enduring American fantasy type quite distinct from other messianic archetypes and mythic heroes of the past:

> The monomythic superhero is distinguished by disguised origins, pure motivations, a redemptive task, and extraordinary powers ... His identity is secret, either by virtue of his unknown origins or his alter ego; his motivation is a selfless zeal for justice. By elaborate conventions of restraint, his desire for revenge is purified ... When he is threatened by violent adversaries, he finds an answer in vigilantism, restoring justice and thus lifting the siege of paradise. In order to accomplish this mission without incurring blame or causing undue injury to others, he requires superhuman powers ... In these conventions the monomyth betrays an aim to deny the tragic complexities of human life. It forgets that every gain entails a loss, that extraordinary benefits exact requisite costs, and that injury is usually proportionate to the amount of violence employed ... The American monomyth offers vigilantism without lawlessness, sexual repression without resultant perversion, and moral infallibility without intellect ... It gives America a fantasy land without ambiguities to cloud the moral vision, where the evil empire of enemies is readily discernible, and where they can vicariously (through identification with the superhero) smite evil before it overtakes them. (pp. 47–48)

The mythic payoff and psychological price of such an idealized fantasy for vigilante violence via superheroic redemption, therefore, is a comforting simplicity that compensates for social ambiguities or soothes collective anxieties. Remarkable for our purposes here, then, is The Shadow's transformation into a utopian superhero fantasy during Welles' inaugural season.

The 1937 change in format after a 2-year hiatus, ironically the same year Gibson's pulp adventures revealed The Shadow's ''true'' identity as Kent Allard, brought significant innovations in The Shadow, his methods, and his crusade for social justice. The September 26 premiere episode, *The Death House Rescue*, featured Orson Welles' debut as The Shadow in suspenseful stories only loosely based upon the pulp novels of Walter Gibson. *The Shadow* would achieve its highest ratings when Orson Welles took over the character during the 1937 season, making the program's rise roughly concurrent with radio's ''Golden Age,'' the period of broadcasting's initial popularization in America during the mid-1930s until the revolutionary introduction of television in the early to mid-1940s (Godfrey, 1998, p. 181; Lackmann, 2000, p. 507). No longer functioning as mere announcer or mysterious narrator for the adventures of others, The Shadow of Golden Age radio

was now the program's heroic protagonist and would exhibit several noteworthy alterations. The more superhuman Knight of Darkness for Golden Age radio was now able to become completely invisible and also possessed the quasimystical hypnotic power to ''cloud men's minds'' in order to dispense bloodless justice. This stark discrepancy between The Shadow of pulps and the more superheroic Shadow of Golden Age radio would forever cause conflict among pulp purists and radio enthusiasts over his differing depictions. Cox (1988) explains that ''contrary to what is often believed, Gibson had little to do with the radio show'' and the more fantastic radio incarnation ''was not the version which his creator would have preferred to linger in the public mind'' (p. 294).

These narrative alterations were directly related to The Shadow's commercial success on radio as a marketing strategy for products and the expanding industry of advertising. Ad revenue had increased almost fourfold during the 1930s to a staggering $155 million and, as illustrated by the sponsor disputes that took The Shadow from the airwaves between 1935 and 1937, it was advertising agencies who controlled much of the programming (Godfrey, 1998, p. 119). Both McDonald (1979) and Lavin (1995) note that programming genres of early radio evolved in large part from commercial interest in advertising specific products; daytime radio ''soap operas'' provide an obvious example, as do the children's afternoon adventure programs which promoted clubs with tie-ins to sponsor products. Most adult listeners, however, were attracted to mature themes of late-night detective mysteries and suspense programs such as *The Shadow* and *Inner Sanctum* (Godfrey, 1998, p. 181). A brief survey of the air times of different radio venues for The Shadow demonstrates that early radio programs were during more adult-oriented timeslots of 9:30 or 10 p.m. before jumping to an 8:30 time during the 1932–33 seasons, but by the time The Shadow premiered in his own adventures under Welles during the 1937 season, the program was being aired during the decidedly more kid-friendly time of 5:30 p.m. Such a drastic change in marketing audiences, transitioning from gritty tales of late-night suspense to more optimistic family-friendly fare, inevitably brought with it some dramatic changes in the characters and plots encountered by The Shadow of Golden Age radio. These changes in The Shadow can be charted as shifts in the fantasy themes being expressed through the characters, setting, and actions of the Golden Radio plotlines. Welles' premiere episode, *The Death House Rescue*, introduces several revisions to the character that would subsequently become generic conventions, not only for Golden Age radio programming but also for successive television shows and the superhero comic books evolving from pulp fiction adventures. In what follows, we rely upon the script reproduced in *The Shadow Scrapbook* (Gibson, 1979b, pp. 94–111) and transcripts of the 1937 radio program as aired to trace the narrative contours of The Shadow's Golden Age fantasy.[2]

The Death House Rescue opens with death-row convict Paul Gordon desperately pleading innocence in the murder of a policeman during a bank robbery. Gordon, unemployed husband and father of a sick daughter, was tricked by two unscrupulous thugs into driving their getaway car and then left to take the fall as they killed the cop while escaping with the loot. The Shadow mysteriously arrives in Gordon's

cell and, after telepathically establishing the hapless dupe's innocence in the actual series of events, the invisible avenger sets out to prove the desperate everyman's innocence before his electrocution the next day. Using Margo Lane as go-between messenger with Police Commissioner Weston, The Shadow uses mind-reading and psychological trickery to swindle the skittish bank robbers into returning to their hide-out. The Shadow's telepathic probing reveals that one of the hoods inadvertently left a fingerprint on a rear-view mirror of the getaway car, evidence which leads to the capture of the true criminals at their hidden lair and the Governor's subsequent pardon of Paul Gordon.

The dramatic plotline and narrative flow of *The Death House Rescue* illuminates what would become formulaic elements in the Fantasy Themes for characters, setting, and action for subsequent radio episodes of The Shadow. While The Shadow of early radio was little more than a mysterious disembodied voice, and the pulp Shadow earned his sinister reputation with illusionist trickery and increasingly bloody retribution upon the underworld, this new Golden Age radio counterpart would instead demonstrate superhuman mental powers as he conducted his war on crime in the light of day with minimal violence. Coogan (2006) has noted such a ''heroic polarity'' within the superhero genre itself, distinguishing the more romantically idealistic superhero from what we are suggesting here is a more tragic and conflicted dystopian antihero. But whereas Coogan identifies this ''heroic polarity'' by contrasting the motives and methods of The Shadow with The Man of Bronze Doc Savage, we find this duality internal to the differing media incarnations of The Shadow himself and thus indicative of a significant ''symbolic divergence'' in the Fantasy Themes and Rhetorical Vision being offered.

The character themes of Welles' far more kid-friendly 1937 Shadow program retains a vaguely ominous presence, but it is now more a consequence of the superpowered savior's miraculous mental abilities rather than the brutal violence and trickery of an avenging vigilante. The Shadow in *The Death House Rescue* is more unambiguously heroic in his crime-fighting mission and methods, his secret identity of Lamont Cranston evoking at once the wealthy playboy secret identity of Bruce Wayne/Batman and also the conflicted secret identity love triangle of Superman/Clark Kent/Lois Lane. The innovation of Margot Lane would function as The Shadow's ''Girl Friday'' love interest/assistant or occasional damsel-in-distress for later shows and, with rare guest appearance exceptions, she largely replaced The Shadow's secret legion of recruited agents. The Shadow of Golden Age radio also enjoyed a far more cozy relationship with the institutions of law and order, and Police Commissioner Weston specifically, who often did little more than unquestioningly show up in closing scenes at Margo's behest to obligingly arrest the revealed wrongdoers for swift incarceration. The criminals and victims of ''The Death House Rescue'' are more consistent with the hapless everyman and small-time hoods or deviants The Shadow encountered in pulps and early radio, but gone are the corrupt officials and wealthy underworld crime kingpins, soon to be replaced by more fantastic supervillains and monstrous threats in later Welles episodes and subsequent seasons.

The setting themes that correspond with these revisionary changes of *dramatis personae* reflect a more optimistic "American Dream" Metropolis rather than the noirish nightmare Gotham of the pulps. Officials and law enforcement institutions are portrayed as well-meaning and honest (if also a bit inept) rather than corrupt or nihilistically indifferent, and thus the socio-cultural context within which Welles' Shadow operates betrays an optimism rather than cynicism towards authorities and institutions. Whereas The Shadow of early radio and pulps was a fantasy response to the cultural anxieties and institutional skepticism of Depression Era audiences, The Shadow of Golden Age Radio is here transformed and commodified into an escapist fantasy solution for policing individual deviants who disrupt the idyllic social order. Both crime and its solutions are portrayed as individual rather than social, with audiences and criminal adversaries alike inevitably discovering that "the weed of crime bears bitter fruit" by the program's end due to The Shadow's superheroic interventions. While The Shadow of early radio and pulps was grim witness to "the evil that lurks in the hearts of men" and a corrupt social order, The Golden Age Shadow presumes criminality and social ills are the consequence of individual deviance rather than characteristic to a human condition and social scene that is both flawed and fallen. The societal and metaphysical scene is now romantic rather than tragic, more traditionalist than agonistic, and more idealistic than cynical.

The action themes characteristic of The Shadow's Golden Age Radio incarnation would consequently shift from a focus upon punishing the guilty and corrupt to instead saving the innocent and redeeming the failures of social institutions. Transformed from violent vigilante into super-powered savior, The Shadow of Golden Age Radio became an escapist fantasy melodrama wherein magical abilities were guaranteed to secure justice quickly and bloodlessly by every program's close. As inevitable as a guilty conscience, The Shadow as Glamorous Detective relied upon telepathic manipulations instead of violent retribution, and the Old Testament avenger thus becomes redemptive messiah for the innocent and hapless. At one point, Margo Lane dutifully delivers much-needed money to Gordon's distraught wife and sick daughter, assumedly from the kind-hearted anonymous philanthropist Cranston, and later acts as his liaison with police. Also notable within this narrative shift is The Shadow's superteam of secret agents who consolidate their unique skills or access to collaboratively aid the Knight of Darkness in his bloody quest to punish otherwise untouchable crimelords. Within the new Golden Age radio formula, however, The Shadow is a lone hero whose unique superpowers secure lawful resolutions, while collaboration with "sidekicks" like Margo Lane or Commissioner Weston is limited to minions who unquestioningly carry out the hero's bidding out of awe or loyalty. Bloody retribution is transformed into bloodless justice, and the coordinated action from The Shadow's superteam of agents morphs into the redemptive intervention of the telepathically superhuman Shadow. Collective action is thus subordinate to superheroic intercession.

The unified and unifying rhetorical vision offered to Golden Age audiences, therefore, articulates a radically different narrative worldview for popular audiences

who would embrace The Shadow's successful new radio show. The rhetorical vision offered within The Shadow's Golden Age Radio programs, and as suggested by shifting timeslots to more family-friendly target demographics, embraces The American Dream and distances itself from the urban nightmare of flawed institutions and a corrupt society. The vigilante outlaw of pulps and the ominous antihero narrator of the early 1930s now becomes within the wildly successful Golden Age formula a bonafide American Superhero, evoking very different political ideologies and conflicting heroic fantasy types. The Golden Age Shadow would shed his sinister critique of human corruptibility and flawed social authorities to instead become a commodified pitch-man who overtly extols the virtues of Goodrich tires and sponsor services during commercial breaks, a far cry from the cynical antihero called forth by Depression Era audiences. Fantasy themes for characters, setting, and action together suggest a more romanticized, escapist fantasy for superheroic salvation alongside the transformational power of commodities.

The Shadow for Golden Age radio audiences and fan clubs, in short, evolves from a grim challenger of a corrupt and corrupting status quo into a swashbuckling status quo champion who idealistically defends society from deviant individual threats through magically superhuman solutions. It is this transitional Golden Age Shadow who would leave an indelible impression upon young fans and post-Depression Baby Boomers, not to mention the American cultural unconscious, as it encountered the international totalitarian threats of World War II and domestic paranoia over race and communism (Lane, 2001; McCann, 1997; Rowe & Casey, 1997). Whereas greed and corruption are the societal status quo for the Depression Era antihero, the Golden Age superhero instead epitomizes a romantic glamorization of American Dream capitalism and commodity fetishism vis-à-vis both narrative tone and commercial practice.

Conclusion: The Symbolic Divergence of Phantasy

The Shadow's evolution into a Golden Age Radio icon seemingly offers an illustrative example of the psychodynamic functions of rhetorical fantasy because of the significant *symbolic divergence* evidenced within this hero's very different pulp and radio incarnations. As suggested in our preceding historical genealogy, The Shadow began as little more than an ominous voice over the radio airwaves when the imagination of Depression Era audiences spontaneously created an unexpected demand for the mysterious character. Pulp development of The Shadow as a mysterious and violent vigilante would greatly differ from the vaguely sinister yet increasingly family-friendly radio announcer, largely due to conflicting commercial interests and market demographics across different media. The Shadow of Golden Age Radio that emerged from tensions and conflicts between creators and sponsors, however, seems an archetypal precursor for what Lawrence and Jewett (2002) have identified as the "Monomyth of the American Superhero." Traversing the superhero's formative years during the "axial decade," The Shadow exemplifies the

paradoxes and perils of superheroic salvation and vigilante violence that have come to characterize a significant segment of our American hero mythos. In Lawrence and Jewett's critique, lurking just beneath the utopian veneer of a superpowered savior who saves the community with miraculous attributes and vigilante justice, the superhero fantasy offers a secular messiah whose moral crusade against evil necessitates both antidemocratic methods and redemptive violence, qualities which possess alarming affinities with fascism and totalitarian authoritarianism. ''Although American superheroes consistently strive to redeem corrupted republics,'' Lawrence and Jewett observe, ''the definition of their roles and means of their triumphs reflect fascist values that ultimately undermine democratic processes and hollow out the religious faith of the enchanted'' (p. 282).

The Shadow's evolution within Golden Age Radio is therefore suggestive of some interesting implications for understanding recent theoretical debates over the nature and function of Fantasy Theme Analysis and rhetorical fantasy more generally. Addressing psychoanalytic criticisms regarding Fantasy Theme Analysis, Gunn (2003, 2004) revisits charges that Bormann's rhetorical method jettisons the unconscious psychoanalytic dynamics of Freudian ''phantasy'' by conceptualizing rhetorical fantasy as a predominantly rational, conscious, and intentional activity. Yet unacknowledged and largely repressed within such logocentric rationalizations, Gunn observes, are psychoanalytic understandings that emphasize fantasy as deceptive or repressive misdirections since manifest content often inherently conceals or disguises the latent content of unconscious motives or unacknowledged desires, drives, and motives. Gunn's (2003) psychoanalytic perspective reminds us that ''individuals are motivated by inchoate desires that spring from the unconscious'' as well as the affective and preconscious structures of ''creative imagination'' (p. 43). Following Lacan's view of the unified Self as a ''trick'' of these desirous unconscious processes in productive tension with socio-linguistic structures of ideological subjectification, Gunn extrapolates Althusser's view of ideology as ''the representation of the subject's imaginary relationship to his or her real conditions of existence'' (p. 44). Gunn critiques Bormann's dogmatic insistence that symbolic convergence is an entirely conscious and rational endeavor by instead positing an understanding of fantasy as produced from inherited social structures of cultural ideology in productive tension with the unconscious drives, desires, and motives of individuals. Because rhetorical theory and communication studies have been reluctant to integrate psychoanalytic understandings of the unconscious, he observes, little work has been done to address the role of the public imaginary. ''Hence, what is needed,'' Gunn concludes, ''is a theoretical reconceptualization that admits and incorporates determining social structures [of ideology] and psychical structures simultaneously'' in order to better theorize unconscious or preconscious influences and rhetorical effects (p. 55).

The product of these tensions between ideological and psychical structures, and the rhetorical function of fantasy broadly conceived, is subjectivity or identity both individual and collective. ''The effect of ideology in general, subjectification, operates largely unconsciously,'' Gunn and Treat (2005) argue, ''but subjectification

is also a continuous process that is always prone to failure and contradiction'' and hence the continual need for reconstitutive fantasies and rhetorical fantasizing (p. 164). The ideological functions of rhetorical fantasy thus reflect our conflicted cultural unconscious even as it informs and shapes and interpolates individual self-consciousness, which in turn develops in tension with the individual unconscious. As a consequence, rhetorical conceptualizations of fantasy should both acknowledge and recognize that the ''dark side'' of rhetorical fantasizing is often self-deluding and self-serving idealizations, so-called psychological ''defense mechanisms'' that often betoken the unconscious ideological functions of self-aggrandizing facework or dangerously unreflective groupthink (Gunn & Treat, 2005; Nimmo & Combs, 1980). The antidemocratic ethos of the American superhero seems suggestive of the dangerous rhetorical potentialities for this fantasy when unreflectively advocated or enacted as viable political demagoguery.

The Fantasy Theme Analysis offered here thus suggests two intriguing rhetorical implications of The Shadow's mythic evolution as fantasy within radio programming, one conscious and another unconscious. First, ''The Early Shadow'' as an ominous disembodied radio announcer who becomes developed as a hardboiled noirish antihero in pulps is indicative and symptomatic of American audiences' subtle transformation—through the medium of radio and then television—into segmented markets and commercial demographics for commodity fetishism. Marketed to adults and then families and children to sell products through programming, The Shadow of Golden Age Radio morphs into a utopian hero of the ''American Dream'' and the transformational magic of commodities. As target demographics expanded, so too would The Shadow change in his motives and methods. As he oscillates between a crime-busting antihero who violently challenges a corrupt status quo and the American Superhero who idealistically redeems an Edenic social system using magical superpowers, The Shadow develops into a fantasy salesman who invites audiences to ''buy into'' (both literally and figuratively) an idealized capitalistic system of commodity fetishism. Overtly, The Shadow was an accidental yet wildly successful advertising ploy that resonated with audiences, which not coincidentally also served commercial goals by shaping desire for products.

Secondly, the symbolic divergence of ''The Golden Age Shadow'' is also illustrative of how the character was ''used'' by different rhetorical communities for very different ideological purposes, and in often unconscious ways. The Shadow is perhaps virtually synonymous with the power of radio because the character seemingly embodies the nigh-magical enchantment of the commercial medium. ''Radio's imaginative spectacle presents a powerful dynamic which is rarely prioritised by alternative electronic media,'' notes Tim Crook (1999); ''By giving the listener the opportunity to create an individual filmic narrative and experience through the imaginative spectacle the listener becomes an active participant and 'dramaturgist' in the process of communicating and listening,'' and such ''participation is physical, intellectual and emotional'' (p. 66). Akin to Althusserian interpolation and Burkean identification, this dramatistic participation perhaps best explains The Shadow's unexpected eruption into the collective imaginary. While

The Shadow began as a spontaneous articulation of popular anxieties regarding mass consciousness and political demagoguery via radio, he would simultaneously and subsequently become exploited as a commodity vehicle for shaping audience desires via the ''consciousness industry'' of advertising. That is, The Shadow subtly mutates from fantasy response to mythic critique of civic ills into an escapist fantasy solution—a manufactured commodity—that misdirects socio-political critique.

The Shadow's Golden Age fantasy of superheroic redemption, we suggest, dangerously if unconsciously flirts with fascistic sympathies and antidemocratic values even as it overtly critiques them. The phantasy ''dark side'' of this superhero mythos is a messianic melodrama that potentially subverts the American democratic ethos of due process, logical deliberation, and a system of checks and balances which curbs demagogic abuses of power (Lawrence & Jewett, 2002). As communities and civic groups are transformed into market demographics, and citizens become consumers, a public and ''The People'' dangerously teeter on spectator democracy (Corbin, 1998). Little wonder, then, Depression-era audiences craved an avenging antihero who would protect them from becoming exploited masses duped or terrorized into compliance by unscrupulous demagogues or unseen cabals. Such desire for a benevolent sovereign, however, unconsciously perpetuates the antidemocratic yearning for charismatic rescue. The Shadow, as both vigilante antihero and redemptive superhero, demonstrates remarkable flexibility in negotiating these mythic tensions and conflicted values as almost two distinct and divergent characters. Although The Shadow began as a realistic avenger blurring boundaries between fact and fiction for Depression Era audiences, a far more benign and benevolent Shadow would become marked and marketed as escapist melodrama for Golden Age Radio demographics. Within this tension, the dystopian pulp antihero would conflict with and at several points contradict the utopian superhero of radio in the ideologically charged rhetorical vision being offered. If the pulp vigilante navigates some of the more sinister potentialities for our cultural superhero worship of violent outlaws as crusading terrorists who bring bloody retribution to evil-doers, then the idealized superhero of Golden Age Radio is only able to secure bloodless justice because magical superpowers and an idealized moral purity tacitly perpetuate a naïve paternalistic melodrama of political power and social justice via messianic hero worship.

The Shadow is in fact two Shadows for radio and pulp fans, both cynical social critic and idealistic civic redeemer, antihero and superhero, myth and commodity, a shifting signifier who resonated with multiple audiences and needs as America entered the ''axial decade'' and children gravitated to his heroic exploits during radio's Golden Age. This same monomythic fantasy of superheroic redemption continues to inform our cultural unconscious as a dangerously powerful political mythology, one which arguably underlies the Bush administration's unprecedented ''war on terror'' and the continuing American occupation of Iraq (Jewett & Lawrence, 2003). As an illustrative case study in the psycho-ideological functions of rhetorical fantasy, The Shadow of Golden Age Radio somberly reminds us that rhetorical visions are often deceptively self-aggrandizing stories that we tell and sell ourselves

about whom we collectively wish we are. And absent critical reflexivity upon the mythic payoff and price of these seductive fantasies of superheroic salvation, who knows for certain what evils may potentially lurk therein?

Notes

[1] In fact, it seems The Shadow's mysterious origins are even more indeterminate than previously believed. Randy Duncan in *The St. James Encyclopedia of Pop Culture* (2000) notes: ''Although no actual link has been established between the two characters, a seeming prototype of The Shadow appeared in the February 1929 issue of Street and Smith's *Fame and Fortune*. In that story, a character named Compton Moore, with glittering eyes and a mocking laugh, donned a green shroud to fight evil as The Shadow.'' Comic book legend and provocateur Jim Steranko details the numerous striking similarities in *The Steranko History of Comics 1* (Steranko, 1970). Others, however, attribute such similarities to unintended or perhaps unconscious borrowing, a trend repeated with subsequent comic book icons like Superman and Batman. ''Maybe 'The Shadow of Wall Street' laid some sort of subconcious template, later to be used,'' suggests Philip Schweier (''Scorn & Ridicule,'' *The Comic Book Bin*: 18 August 2006. http://comicbookbin.com/bubble081.html, last accessed 25 September 2006). For further reading, see Severin and Holt (1995), Larson (1995), and Toth (1999).

[2] The script included in *The Shadow Scrapbook* was actually rewritten by Edward Hale Bierstadt, with some creative embellishments from Walter B. Gibson, due to the loss of pages from the original script (Tollin, 1988). In this reproduced first draft of *The Death House Rescue*, Shadow agent Harry Vincent was featured from the pulp adventures but replaced when Margo Lane was invented for the radio program in the final script that was altered by radio writers and producer Clark Andrews. The transcript used here, therefore, is from the actual radio program as it aired and as preserved in the audio collection *The Shadow: The Lost Shows* (Radio Spirits, Inc., 2002).

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