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‘I’ve got my eyes open and I can’t be crooked’: Race, female virtue and national identity in *Terry and the Pirates*

ABSTRACT

The Second World War-era US network radio programmes augmented nationalist propaganda by connecting American national identity to white patriarchal gender norms. Juvenile adventure radio serials like Terry and the Pirates (TATP) joined this effort and countered criticism of their negative influence on children by promoting their ability to teach young audiences socially sanctioned values like respect for established authority and cultural norms. Within this cultural and industrial context, characters like April Kane became ‘discursive “relay station[s]”’ through which wartime debates over women’s changing cultural and economic status were circulated, contested and produced. TATP tested April’s dedication to an idealized American way of life by pairing and contrasting her with queered and exoticized racial others, including sexually deviant female criminals and subservient foreign men. April passed this inquisition by identifying with Burma, the series’ other white heroine, and adhering to traditional feminine values like honesty, passivity and deference to white patriarchal authority. These comparisons reaffirmed a gendered

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hierarchy that prioritized white men and simultaneously diminished and divided white women and foreign men.

In March of 1942, three months after the United States declared war on Japan and its Axis allies, April Kane was kidnapped in French Indo-China (modern-day Vietnam). This was not unusual. One of the adolescent Southern belle's major functions on the radio adaptation of *TATP* (1937–48) was being kidnapped: her peril advanced the popular juvenile serial's plot by forcing her male friends, Pat Ryan and Terry Lee, the programme's titular teen hero, to rescue her. But this kidnapping was different. First, April was kidnapped by Sanjak, a deep-voiced French woman and thinly veiled lesbian. Second, Sanjak saw April as more than just an attractive hostage. Unlike April's other, mostly male kidnappers, who used the girl as a bargaining chip in larger conflicts with Pat and Terry, Sanjak hoped to make April her apprentice, promising to teach April to use hypnosis to control people and fool 'the stupid men' (25 March 1942).

Based on Milton Caniff's popular newspaper comic strip of the same name (1934–73), *TATP* followed Terry, 'a wide awake American boy' adventurer, as he explored China and its neighbouring countries (Caniff 2007: 115). *TATP* was ostensibly Terry's bildungsroman, but the radio narrative was equally concerned with April's development into the type of mature American woman who would make Terry's future self a good wife and his children a caring mother: kind, compassionate and independent enough to be interesting without threatening Terry's masculine authority. In this article, I analyse how *TATP*'s radio adaptation defined, tested and (mostly) normalized this ultimately passive, emphatically heterosexual ideal of white femininity through April. Following John Fiske's analysis of media figures like Murphy Brown, I argue April functioned as a 'discursive "relay station"', a character through which the Second World War-era debates over the changing cultural and economic status of women, children and racial and sexual minorities were circulated, contested and produced (1996: 24). April's loyalty to the American way of life was questioned and tested through pairings with queered non-Americans, including masculinized female villains like Sanjak and the Dragon Lady, and feminized male allies like the group's Chinese servant, Connie. Sanjak's implied offer to liberate April from her gendered economic and moral dependence on her male companions evoked contemporary fears that young women's increasing economic and social freedom would disrupt the patriarchal power structures underpinning American social norms.

Mobilizing conflicting discourses surrounding women's changing wartime roles and cultural distrust of Southern belles and teenage girls, *TATP* positions April as a suspect heroine requiring constant monitoring. The child of a rebellious region of the United States, April must prove her Americanness by adhering to patriarchal and racialized gender norms through passive combat with her morally, ethnically and sexually suspect kidnapper, Sanjak. The result of this combat was never in real doubt, especially in the radio serial; producers might flirt with sensational storylines to attract listeners, but the commercial broadcast industry's economic realities ultimately restricted the range of socially acceptable outcomes to a small subset of conservative outcomes. April's potential to find common cause with either Sanjak or Connie threatened to destabilize her allegiance to the white patriarchal power structure

embodied by Terry and Pat, but such alliances were depicted as impossible to sustain. Ultimately, April rejected Sanjak's offer of independence. Instead, she chose to emulate a more limited model of feminine independence that fit within American heterosexual ideals embodied by the series' other major American heroine, Burma, from whom April learned that it was enough to be 'free, white, and over 21' (30 December 1941). Nevertheless, by acknowledging April might choose otherwise, the series undermined efforts to establish a consensus vision of American values that imagined the nation's diverse constituencies uniting under the guidance of a unified white patriarchal authority.

1. Approximately 115 transcribed episodes still exist.

TEACHING KIDS TO JUST SAY NO TO JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

While the *TATP* comic strip and radio serial were produced separately, the serial presented itself as a faithful adaptation, claiming 'Terry fans [...] both young and old alike, are unanimous in [writing to say] that the voices and adventures of this radio programme are exactly what they expected and what they want' (17 November 1941). Both versions drew on the classical western genre, using Asian locales to evoke the legendary wildness American audiences identified with the historical American frontier. Asia, which Caniff described as the 'last outpost of adventure', became an exoticized 'symbolic landscape' upon which white American heroes acted out their Manifest Destiny, proving their moral and physical superiority by encountering, subduing and/or civilizing primitive natives (Cawelti 1976: 193; Hayward 1997: 96). Much of this civilizing activity was carried out by Terry, a young, clever urban youth whose Asian adventures help him grow from a skinny young boy with a head of curly blonde hair to 'a husky lad [...] just packed full of vitamins' (27 November 1941). Terry's most frequent comic and radio companion was his mentor, the tall, dark, and handsome 'two-fisted adventurer' and writer Pat Ryan (27 November 1941). Ryan acted as patriarch for the ad hoc family of adventurers that gathered around Terry, with Terry as his second in command (27 November 1941). In addition to his American friends, Terry relied on two Chinese men, George Webster 'Connie' Confucius and Big Stoop, a mute, gentle giant. Big Stoop was especially helpful in Terry and Pat's battles with their chief adversary, the iconic Dragon Lady, a coldly beautiful Eurasian woman who controlled a shadowy network of criminal organizations.

Scholarly work on juvenile-oriented radio serials has focused on their role in children's economic and fantasy lives and adult concerns over their impact on children's moral development (Jacobson 2006; Wang 2006). Avi Santo argues serial producers answered criticism over sensational storylines and commercialism by promoting their ability to teach socially 'positive' values like resourcefulness, deference to adult authority and respect for the conservative gender norms so visibly disrupted by economic and social upheaval during the Great Depression and the Second World War (2011: 13). Individual characters might challenge these norms, but the usual price for continued rebellion was expulsion from society or death (Grundmann 2012; McCracken 2002).

TATP's western genre and wartime context made it an ideal vehicle for broadcasters eager to assert their pro-social and educational bona fides. Prolific serial producers Frank and Anne Hummert's 'reason-why' advertising strategy employed 'repetitious, simplistic language, idealized character types, and the intertwining of serial narrative and advertisements within an overarching problem/solution paradigm' that effectively promoted

2. Like the Hollywood studios, the major US radio networks, NBC and CBS, had good reason for cooperating with OWI propaganda efforts. Worried the government might repeat its First World War takeover of the industry and eager to mitigate the impact of the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) investigations into broadcasting monopolies, the networks integrated subtle wartime messages and direct public service announcements into their sustaining and commercial programs.
3. Dunning notes three radio adaptations of *TATP*: NBC Red/Blue (1937–39), WGN Midwest (1941–42), and NBC Blue and ABC (1943–48) (1998: 656). WGN was also owned by the Chicago Tribune Syndicate and was home to many prominent radio serials, including several based on the syndicate's comic properties.

sponsors' products and simple, unambiguously patriotic treatments of complex geopolitical issues (Meyers 1997: 114). In the months before the United States entered the Second World War, WGN promoted *TATP* as part of 'a world tour' of juvenile serials that would acquaint young listeners with international issues (Anon. 1941: S4). By early 1942, *TATP* mingled Office of War Information (OWI) messages about home front mobilization issues like war stamps and the importance of good nutrition with regular commercials for the programme sponsor, Libby's fruit juices.² Never subtle about selling anything, *TATP*'s writers enhanced these explicit messages by integrating propaganda-inspired sentiments into storylines. Coyly referring to 'the Invader' threatening China, radio episodes depicted Terry and his friends confronting Japanese and German spies sent to undermine one of the United States's major allies (28 November 1941). Surviving episodes feature extended discussions about the Burma Road's strategic importance to China, the meaning of individual lives in the middle of a war zone, and even subtle digs at those selfish enough to resent wartime sugar rationing, in the form of a crook complaining about peppermint candy shortages (29 December 1941–19 January 1942; 29 January 1942; 2 February 1942).

Many Second World War-era crime and adventure films, radio series and comic strips adopted the classical western formula to explore male wartime heroes at odds with an evolving, increasingly international social order (Cawelti 1976: 247). Still, white women and girls like April played crucial roles as heroines in such chronicles of social formation and change, simultaneously serving as resilient spiritual guardians of the home and innocent justification for the white patriarchal power wielded by characters like Terry and Pat (Hamilton 1987: 22). April was one of many rotating female characters and potential love interests for Terry in the comic, but one of just two sympathetic white female characters given major roles when WGN revived the afternoon radio serial in 1941.³ The other was Burma, a sexy blonde bombshell. In the Caniff comic, Burma is an independent con artist with a heart of gold and potential romantic interest for either Pat or Terry. On the radio, Burma remained capable but became a more reliable and maternal figure with possible romantic ties to Pat. Like other juvenile serials, *TATP* incorporated female characters to attract young girls and adult women listening to afternoon radio with their children (Jacobson 2004: 196). Such characters were usually confined to secondary roles, however, and they rarely challenged dominant gender roles. Caniff incorporated more independent recurring heroines into his comic as women became a larger portion of the newspaper audience and their purchasing power increased during the Second World War, but most of *TATP*'s independent women were villains like the Dragon Lady and Sanjak, Asian or both; Caniff characterized most white American women through passive virtues like loyalty and honesty (Hayward 1997: 116).

This white female passivity reflected contemporary, racialized tensions around women's changing wartime roles. The image of Rosie the Riveter dominated the public face of the Second World War propaganda, but continuing concerns about white women abandoning conservative feminine ideals demonstrate how discomfort with women's increasingly public roles dominated the national discourse. Newsreels, films and even the evolving personas of Hollywood stars all reinforced a definition of femininity rooted in domestic occupations and an emphasis on white beauty standards, even as they entered the wartime workforce (Shingler 2008). Radio and newspaper propaganda endorsed similar themes. Jason Loviglio has shown how the popular audience

participation programme *Vox Pop* (1932–48) emphasized women's domestic roles by framing interviews with servicewomen within the context of their future roles as wives and mothers, frequently glossing over those women's stated interest in continuing to work after the war (2005: 56–57). While the black press promoted wartime labour as a means of economic advancement for black men and women, the white press emphasized white women's domestic contributions to the war effort (Yang 2000: 252). This focus reinforced the idea that even if white women enlisted or worked in war industries, their ultimate contributions came through their private labour in transforming their households into model patriotic families 'with every member a soldier for democracy' (Yang 2000: 326).

The most problematic of these democratic soldiers were children, and especially young girls. Historians and media scholars like Gary Cross (2004) and Kristen Hatch (2015) argue that social concern over protecting children's innocence and purity from external threats increased in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Children – and media representations of children – faced growing pressure to epitomize society's pure self-image, a burden they shared with women through the advent of Second-wave feminism and arguably beyond (Cross 2004: 6). However, emerging teenage cultures had already begun to challenge this image (Schrum 2004). Children were a crucial source of wartime labour, and their more adult wartime roles provoked intense resistance from adults, who became increasingly concerned with juvenile delinquency (Ossian 2010: 103). Pressure groups like the Catholic Legion of Decency, whose members feared radio would pervert children's moral development, lobbied radio networks and the FCC to rein in the 'blood and thunder stuff' associated with crime and adventure programmes (O'Ritchie 1947). These anxieties, and the threat of consumer boycotts, influenced juvenile serial producers to temper the fantasy worlds that serials provided children with adult mores and values (Jacobson 2004: 196). One can see this influence in the post-war radio and television adventures of *Tom Corbett*, *Space Cadet* (radio, 1952, TV 1950–55), where young listeners learned the law enforcement techniques and credo of Corbett's futuristic Space Patrol. Likewise, Terry's desire for adventure was redeemed from the implication of rebellion by his obedience to Pat's adult authority. April ostensibly served the same function for young girls, though, with the exception of her missed opportunity to become Sanjak's apprentice, she enjoyed fewer viable avenues for adventure.

Still, young white girls like April were pulled out of 'childhood's creative and imaginative places of play' and thrust into 'the adult spaces of employment and homemaking' during the war (Ossian 2010: 163). Even as many girls found increased agency in war work, however, gendered norms increased demands upon their time and labour. Daughters were expected to help their working mothers at home, and concerns about young white women's sexual purity restricted girls' wartime roles. British child psychologists warned that 'late-night air raid duties or' entertaining servicemen would expose girls to moral or physical threats (Ossian 2011: 44). Instead, they recommended 'more appropriate girls' responsibilities' like 'child care, farm work, gardening, knitting, sewing, and salvage duties' (Ossian 2011: 44). Even wartime play was gendered, and young girls, influenced by their own or their parents' ideas about appropriate feminine roles, were frequently relegated to supportive roles like nurse while their brothers played at being soldiers (Ossian 2011: 61). Such gendered divisions extended to American radio advertising. *TATP*'s commercials imagined a significantly more active role for boy listeners: one

advertisement compared purchases with voting, predicting that ‘some of you boys and girls, particularly the boys, will someday want to run for public office’ (18 December 1941). Another, promoting a premium offer for the ‘Terry Adventure Game Book’ emphasized a wide range of games for boys before adding ‘my, but you girls will have fun with the Terry and Burma paper dolls!’ (20 January 1942). Despite female audiences’ demonstrated interest in adventure narratives and adult-oriented themes, producers continued to represent white girls as predominantly innocent and asexual into the 1950s (Schrum 2004: 6; Basinger 1993; Stamp 2000). Girls of colour were seldom depicted in any context.

SOUTHERN BELLE MEET WILD EAST

Comics historian Bruce Canwell credits April and her brother Dylan with bringing ‘a more middle class familial sensibility to Caniff’s narrative after four years in which he tied ‘the concept of family to wealth and aristocracy’ (2008: 9). April’s apparently modest economic situation and unassuming charms resonated with broadcasters’ projected image of their audience as predominantly white, hardworking and middle class. April’s all-American status was complicated by her position as another quintessentially American archetype, however. As a Southern belle, April was at once the epitome and antithesis of idealized American femininity. As Anya Jabour points out, the flawless figure of the graceful, beautiful, white southern woman, who remained strictly chaste and innocent despite her flirtatious demeanour, holds mythical status in American culture (2007). Contemporary belles like Scarlett O’Hara, protagonist of the 1939 hit film *Gone With the Wind*, united common wartime tropes like feminine perseverance, loyalty to fighting men, and the need to protect women from foreign invaders. Even as wartime propaganda encouraged women to work, it framed such labour as the patriotic ‘obligation of American women to the men fighting to protect them’ (Yang 2000: 332). Popular wartime anthems like ‘Keep the Home Fires Burning’ encouraged women to remain strong and remember that ‘There’s a silver lining/Through the dark clouds shining’ (Guilbert Ford and Novello 1915).

Caniff drew clear parallels between April and Scarlett when she made her comics debut in 1939. The loose connection implied by April’s phonetically transcribed Southern drawl and dark hair was reinforced by extratextual materials that explicitly referenced the film. One *Chicago Tribune–New York News* Syndicate advertisement depicted April wearing Scarlett’s garden party dress while she cheered for Harvard’s crew team as ‘A 1940 Scarlett for the 1940 Crimson’ (Canwell 2008: 18). Even though April frequently wishes she were more like Scarlett, or at least that she were as brave as her grandmother, who ‘hid three o’ General Lee’s wounded men from th’ whole Yankee Army durin’ th’ retreat from Gettysburg!’, her actions ultimately mark her as a ‘good belle’ (Caniff 2008: 64 [originally published 18 March 1939]). Like other ‘good belles’, April’s hyperfeminine virtues include passivity, loyalty, trust, and self-sacrifice, as opposed to ‘bad belle’ Scarlett’s calculating charm (Entzminger 2002). However, April also lacks Scarlett’s resourcefulness and resilience.

As Scarlett O’Hara’s case indicates, however, the Southern belle’s associations are not all positive. Her overt, hyperfeminine performance of beauty, grace, and perseverance foregrounds femininity’s socially constructed nature and introduces the threatening idea that it could all be a manipulative masquerade (McPherson 2003: 21). Caniff invokes this potential throughout the story

of April's kidnapping, which was also her introduction to the strip. She initially appears as a damsel in distress. Even before we see her on the page, we are alerted to her presence when Pat hears a woman sobbing in the fake Madame Sud's Lào Cai hotel (Caniff 2008: 32 [originally published 1 January 1939]). Left helpless and friendless after her brother Dylan's sudden disappearance, April turns to Pat for a shoulder on which to cry. In an exchange that could be read either as diffidence or the cool masquerade of a femme fatale, April assures Pat that she trusts his appearance as 'a sympathetic American' because she needs 'sympathy somethin' awful!' and is grateful for the chance to relax her 'tired ol' brain' (Caniff 2008: 33 [originally published 2 January 1939]). Ever the gallant gentlemen, Pat and Terry quickly agree to help her find her brother. While the men never doubt April's honesty, Caniff left readers subtle hints that the apparently helpless teen girl might not be trustworthy. After Pat and Terry also disappear, Sanjak drops her disguise as Madame Sud, the owner of Lào Cai's only hotel and kidnaps April while executing a complicated plan to steal gold from Baron De Plexus and his employer, the Dragon Lady. Seeing great potential for duplicity in April's flirtatious self-deprecation, Sanjak takes the girl to her island compound in hopes of recruiting her. In one panel of the newspaper comic, Sanjak looks approvingly as April cries: 'See! The cherie weeps so beauteefully! That well be an asset een what ees to come! [...] Ah, Sanjak has found the so rare jewel, eendeed!' (Caniff 2008: 64 [originally published 16 March 1939], original emphasis). April was presented as less potentially suspect in the radio serial, where she was already an established part of Terry and Pat's loose family of adventurers by the time Sanjak takes her. In fact, radio Pat orders her to meet him and Terry in Lào Cai to help smoke out the criminals who caused her brother's disappearance, suspecting it is linked to shadowy criminal events on the nearby De Plexus plantation, secretly controlled by the Dragon Lady.

Beyond their potential duplicity, Southern belles are also linked to domestic rebellion, decadent plantation-style wealth and the United States's tortured racial history, all associations that contemporary popular media sought to avoid. Beyond the basic needs of wartime production, OWI messages integrated into public service and entertainment programmes emphasized national unity and cohesion across racial and ethnic groups, with varied success. Broadcasters took an active role in the government's pre-war buildup, substituting 'commercially sponsored "morale-building" programmes' for 'outright political commentary and debate' (Hilmes 1997: 230). Racist representations, from *Amos 'n' Andy's* (1928–60) aural minstrel show to *The Shadow's* (1937–54) isolationist battles against yellow peril, were an integral part of radio programming from its inception, but broadcasters took some limited steps to answer criticism from vocal minorities (Loviglio 2005: 115). Worried that African Americans would reject national calls for unity against Germany and Japan's racism and fascism, the OWI pushed broadcasters to produce more inclusive public affairs programming during the war (Savage 1999). However, Gerd Horton has shown how the OWI's attempt to promote a unified vision of loyal Americanness through domestic propaganda programmes on German- and Italian-language radio stations mostly prompted backlash. Many foreign-language listeners rejected 'a prescribed vision of ethnicity that' pressured them to adopt American values and politics by replacing the nostalgic folk music programmes that had dominated foreign language stations with modern classical music, overt propaganda programmes, and progressive political talks from refugees (Horten 2002: 85, 76). Similarly, many were uncomfortable with

the Southern belle's genteel whiteness, which simultaneously foregrounded and obscured the nation's growing racial diversity (McPherson 2003: 3).

While German and Italian Americans could choose to integrate into a larger cultural American whiteness, Japanese Americans could not. As Mae Ngai points out, US wartime policies created very different outcomes for the nation's two major Asian populations. Chinese Americans found their presence in the United States legitimized for the first time by the 1943 repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Acts. Meanwhile, Japanese Americans were stripped of their rights and imprisoned under the mantra that 'A Jap is a Jap' (Ngai 2004: 169, 175). This mentality also pervaded radio programming, including fictional series like *The Green Hornet* (1936–52), where Kato, the vigilante hero's Japanese valet, was gradually rewritten as generically 'Oriental', then Filipino between 1938 and 1941 (Russo 2002: 268). The Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor challenged 'Orientalist stereotypes of incompetence' rooted in white supremacy and forced white Americans to re-evaluate their understanding of Asian nations (Russo 2002: 269). US broadcasters divided Asian characters into the good and the Japanese, with the assumption that even if Asians were not all the same, they were at least similar, and similarly in need of regulation and supervision from white Americans. Despite their presumed incompetence, Chinese characters were often depicted as allies. Even the hated Dragon Lady, arch-villainess throughout much of *TATP*, joined the war effort when she saw her native China threatened by the Invader. Other foreigners, including the French Sanjak, capitalized on the war to increase their criminal profits.

Like other Southern belles, April's femininity is simultaneously self-effacing and conspicuous. She frequently minimizes her presence and opinions both in the comic and on radio, referring to herself with diminutives like 'li'l ol' me', and deferring to her male friends' judgment in important situations, doubtfully fretting that 'I guess I'm not very smart' (17 March 1942). Unlike her more experienced and jaded Yankee companions, whose backgrounds and experiences aligned them with cosmopolitan, worldly ways of understanding the chaotic Asian nations they explore, April represented an almost antebellum ideal of rural life, innocence and feminine dependence. However, April's femininity also demands recognition, accommodation and protection. This child-like feminine ideal was explored in the radio serial through frequent pairings with other characters, including Connie, Sanjak and Burma. Each of these comparisons accentuated different elements of April's personality, highlighting her strengths and weaknesses both as a character and as a supposedly realistic depiction of white American femininity.

April and Connie

April's frequent association with Connie, a heavily stereotyped Chinese man and the group's loyal attendant, emphasized her naivety and inexperience. As an adolescent white woman and a fully grown Asian man, April and Connie were closely situated on the hierarchy of white patriarchal power: they must be simultaneously cared for and dominated by white men. However, instead of finding common cause with each other and resisting this control, April and Connie both appeared to accept it as a matter of course.

April and Connie were directly linked through their diminutive stature, simplistic worldviews and distinctive speech patterns. April's small size emphasizes her vulnerability. Hardly a head taller than her own massive steamer trunk, she comes midway up Pat Ryan's tall, muscular frame in the

comic (Caniff 2008: 33 [originally published 2 January 1939]). She is almost a full head shorter than Terry as well, and her tiny stature and slender physique are emphasized by large-shouldered dresses that taper down to a narrow waist, in marked contrast to Pat and Terry's broad chests. April's stature was further underscored through her placement in the frame, where she only appears as the tallest or largest object when drawn in extreme close-up. Her shoulder-length hair is dark and curled, with a bow placed at each temple, framing a white face accented by long dark lashes, a button nose and a small red mouth. April's size was also a frequent preoccupation on radio, where she is described as 'little', 'cute' and having 'a doll's face' (13 January 1942). These physical attributes were in keeping with her typically child-like and frequently emotional responses to danger.

Like April, white male characters dwarfed Connie: as tall as Terry, Connie's stature was usually reduced by his crouching posture (Caniff 2008: 38 [originally published 15 January 1939]). Terry and Pat used many of the same words to describe both April and Connie, including 'funny' and 'little' (28 January 1942). Connie was further queered through his feminized traditional Chinese changshan, a long tunic that fell to his feet, emphasizing his ethnic difference. Connie's foreign status and inferior intellect were further emphasized by his reliance on colloquial wisdom, expressed through Chinese proverbs. Likewise, April's habit of speaking through clichés from the Old South betrayed a similarly simplistic world-view and inability to analyse and synthesize knowledge. Their old-timey sayings occasionally inspired solutions in their friends, but Connie and April's colloquial wisdom was usually treated as evidence that they lacked a nuanced understanding of their situation.

April and Connie's inability to break free from their idiosyncratic, culturally rooted ways of understanding the world prevented them from forming a true partnership. April occasionally reached out to Connie for help within the radio serial, but these efforts failed. Trying to trace the kidnapped Pat and Terry with the help of a cryptic note left at Madame Sud's hotel, April encourages Connie to join her in adopting their lost friends' personas in hopes of accessing their reasoning abilities (13 March 1942). Connie proves unequal to the challenge, however, and quickly derails April's train of thought. Like Shakespeare's lower-class characters, April and Connie regularly provided comedic interludes that lightened the radio serial's more dramatic moments, as when they spent most of an episode attempting to ski, apparently unperturbed by their friends' recent escape from death (Draudt 2002). However, these moments never led to deeper cultural exchange or understanding between the pair, and while April often chafed at her friends' mockery, she never seemed to recognize that Pat and Terry treated Connie in a similarly dismissive manner. Instead, she joined Terry and Pat in treating Connie as an esteemed but ultimately inferior servant. Significantly, where April proved unable to connect to Connie on an equal level, Terry and Pat succeeded by approaching him as an inferior, thereby affirming the white patriarchal privilege on which Terry and Pat's authority was based.

April and Sanjak

April's second option for a foreign alliance is Sanjak, a powerful female villain introduced as a sworn enemy of the series chief antagonist, the Dragon Lady. Terry and Pat initially dismiss Dylan Kane's belief that the mysterious Sanjak engineered his kidnapping, 'inclined to scoff at the idea that any other woman

would attempt to match wits and daring with the Dragon Lady' (17 March 1942). Even with Sanjak's existence confirmed, the men remained incredulous that any woman could continue to outsmart them, as she repeatedly did. This refusal to acknowledge Sanjak underscored the depth of the existential threat that she posed to men like Pat and Terry. Where the Dragon Lady operated directly, and mostly through male subordinates, Sanjak was harder to pin down. She operated in the shadows, and almost always by herself, manipulating people indirectly through her powers of disguise and hypnosis. Unlike Connie, Sanjak resolutely rejected Terry and Pat's patriarchal authority. In its place, she offered April the power to control her own destiny by embracing her potential to manipulate others. However, tempting this prospect might have appeared to listeners at home, it was couched in terms of threat and domination. Gaining Sanjak's power required submitting to her implied sexual domination.

TATP presented Sanjak in opposition to April's 'good belle' persona. Having rejected April's warm, supposedly natural femininity, Sanjak adopted femininity only as a criminal masquerade, and only incompletely. Sanjak's covert methods inspired indignation in Terry, Pat, and the serial's authoritative announcer. After Terry and Pat received a mocking note from Sanjak, the announcer summarized: 'Yes, the deep-voiced danger Sanjak got away! And even had the nerve to send our friends a note about it! By now they should realize they're dealing with a woman fully as clever as the Dragon Lady!' (23 March 1942). Continual references to her deep voice – more typical of masculine performance than the more emotive, uncontainable intonations identified with women – and other gender non-conformity foregrounded her inability to appear truly feminine (Smith 2008: 23). Sanjak's gender trouble was more pointed in the comic, where we see her dowdy, grandmotherly Madame Sud disguise is built directly onto a wire frame. Shedding this false skin, Sanjak revealed herself as a tall, angularly thin woman with short, dark hair, dressed in a suit jacket, tie and an incongruous pencil skirt resembling a pair of slacks (Caniff 2008: 50 [originally published 12 February 1939]). Back at her hideout, Sanjak donned a white dressing gown and red cravat that further enhance her masculine appearance (Caniff 2008: 65 [originally published 19 March 1939]).

Sanjak was further alienated through her suspect sexuality. Caniff later admitted Sanjak's homosexuality by naming her after an island near Lesbos (Canwell 2008: 9). Though Caniff doubted his audience would have recognized the reference, adult radio audiences were keenly attuned to signs of sexual difference in programming (Murray 2002). *TATP* signalled Sanjak's sexual difference through her deep voice and descriptions that emphasized her status as a 'daring, strangely different woman', forcing listeners to attend to her threateningly transgressive proclivities (25 March 1942). Even if audiences did not interpret Sanjak's attempt to hypnotize April as sexual seduction, she was clearly marked as transgressive and monstrous. On the page she appeared much more like a feminine man than a masculine woman, and over the radio her voice was deep and tightly controlled, ready to be changed at will with her disguises.

April's link to a hyperfeminized, white-washed fantasy of lost antebellum innocence distanced her from her masculinized, foreign kidnapper and tied her to the soil of her Virginian – and more importantly, American – homeland (McPherson 2003: 39). Still, the same hyperfemininity made April an appropriate match for Sanjak's butch persona and linked the pair through their ties to economic systems built on violent racial subjugation

(Kennedy and Davis 1993). April and Sanjak were further connected geographically through Sanjak's initial disguise as Madame Sud, French for south. Sanjak's uncertain ethnicity and sexuality represented the clearest threat to April's Americanness, but the future she offered April was unstable. Significantly, Sanjak was a woman without a state. Her heavy French accent and connections to the declining colonial order in French Indo-China linked her with the old-world decadence that had fallen out of favour in American popular culture by the mid-1930s (Gates 2008). Furthermore, her manipulative approach to crime, wherein she tricked others into stealing for her rather than stealing herself, aligned her with the exploitative imperialism to which the United States had long defined itself in opposition. Sanjak used this extracted wealth to live as a feudal lord in opulent secluded island compound. Echoing the serial's emphasis on Asian men's need for benevolent white supervision, the need to stop Sanjak's colonialized exploitation becomes an argument for further American involvement in international affairs (Williams 1962).

Sanjak hoped to create a dangerous chameleon: a criminal bearing all the physical and behavioral markers that associate white American femininity with sincerity, goodness and purity. While Sanjak relied on trickery to fool 'the stupid men', she used hypnosis to control and seduce April into her life of crime. This hypnosis played out as a figurative rape in the comics, which depicted Sanjak brutally grabbing April's arm as April tries to flee, then leaning over her innocent victim to force April to attend to her hypnotic gaze (Caniff 2008: 71 [originally published 2 April 1939]) (Figure 1). April's terrified cry of 'No! No! No! No!' trailed off as she falls under Sanjak's power, signified by her protests' shrinking font size (Caniff 2008: 71 [originally published 2 April 1939]). Similarly, in the radio series Sanjak's voice grew soft and tender as she ordered April to come close and look into her eyes, framing this first hypnosis as restful sleep. When she heard April slowly parroting back her words in a deeper, softer voice that mimicked Sanjak's own tones, Sanjak acquired a note of excited anticipation. Continuing in this tone, she anticipated April's future success as 'a fit student to absorb the knowledge I have learned'. Finally, after April responded to Sanjak's exhortation to confirm who she works for with a steady 'It is Sanjak', Sanjak emitted a satisfied sigh (17 March 1942).

Despite her best efforts, April was never able to effectively fight Sanjak's hypnotism. Still, its effects were not permanent, and April's voice continually reverted to the uncontrollable, breathy sincerity that signalled her deeper inability to lie. Unlike her duplicitous captor, April was truthful to a fault.



Figure 1: Sanjak's efforts to hypnotize April are depicted as a rape in these frames from the TATP comic strip (2 April 1939). © Tribune Content Agency, LLC. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.

This truthfulness hurts her initially, but became a source of, helping her to resist Sanjak's dangerous allure. At the same time, Sanjak's corrupted desires become fatal weaknesses. Her need to brag, and especially her desire to have April to brag to, undid all her careful planning. Even after hypnotizing April, Sanjak failed to seduce the incurably honest American girl, who solemnly informs her captor that 'I've got my eyes open and I can't be crooked' (25 March 1942). April's assertion exposed the invisible power hidden behind the 'good belle's' apparent simplicity. This feminine strength – hinted in April's appeal to her Civil War-era grandmother and her proclivity for comforting songs – was most often expressed through April's ability to find something to comfort her in any situation. Even when sailing down a river threatened by Invader bombs, April finds a silver lining: 'I've always wanted to ride in a riverboat, and here I am!' (24 February 1942). Providing a stalwart example for her listeners at home, April possessed the inner resources to remain strong and maintain her principles against all attacks. Pat foretold April's successful trial when he argued 'she's so helpless almost everybody drops their guard around her. People think because she's young and wide eyed and slow on the uptake she's easily fooled. But you and I know better' (9 March 1942). Pat's belief in April's inner feminine strength was borne out in her ability to resist Sanjak's advances. While Sanjak identified this strength in her desire to make April her protégée, she failed to understand that it would also prevent April from bowing to Sanjak's will.

April's actions and dependent nature justify Pat and Terry's implicit trust in her sincerity, one of the chief attributes that is specifically identified with white Americanness throughout *TATP*. Just as April's mental capacity is marked as inferior through comparisons to her Asian companions, her virtues are reinforced and explicitly identified with her status as a white American woman through repeated comparisons with other overtly raced women like Sanjak. *TATP*'s radio producers prompt such comparisons to such a degree that they seem to have anticipated Richard Dyer's critique of normalized whiteness (1988). The serial also echoed earlier, more nativist programmes like *The Shadow*, which presented 'national, racial, or ethnic outsiders as villains' to be defeated – and their destabilizing influences rejected – by vigilante detectives (Loviglio 2005: 115). Sanjak's attempt to seduce April into becoming a tool to manipulate white men invoked a long history of moral panics about white girls' increasing independence and sexual agency, including the white slave panics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. April's response left no doubt as to the proper response to such a threatening temptation, even if listeners might have disagreed. April resolutely rejected Sanjak's isolated wealth and fear-based power, which conflicted with her common-sense notions of right and wrong, as well as reality and artifice. Even Sanjak's offer to improve April's singing through hypnosis fell flat because – as April pointed out – how would she know she's singing if she's hypnotized (25 March 1942)? By positioning Sanjak's attempted seduction as a rape, Caniff and the radio serial link April's sexual and moral purity, further stressing the depth of Sanjak's violation.

April and Burma

At first, Sanjak is amused by April's self-deprecation and homespun wisdom, but the criminal mastermind rapidly angers when April resists her calculated flattery. Sanjak had no trouble tricking men because she speaks the language

of masculine ambition, but April's unpretentious simplicity cannot be complimented away. Not even her great desire for April was enough to keep Sanjak from protecting her own interests. When De Plexus reached her island and threatened her gold, Sanjak set off a chain of rigged dynamite to destroy the entire island and fled in her motor boat, leaving April, hypnotized and helpless, inside her compound. Luckily, Terry arrived just in time to carry her to safety. Despite this harrowing adventure, April suffered little lasting damage, although it was a few days before she was willing to sing (6 April 1942). She also found a more enduring role model in the radio serial's other major white female character, Burma. While April represented idealized femininity marked by blissful, childlike innocence, Burma provided a more complicated, cosmopolitan illustration of sustainable white womanhood. By repeatedly contrasting April's pure, innocent femininity and Burma's mature understanding through their physical descriptions, actions, and voices, the radio serial highlighted these shared values and outlined a path for April to progress from her childlike purity into mature adulthood without compromising herself.

Unlike diminutive April, whose sexuality was still emerging in the comic and obscured on the radio, Burma was depicted as a tall blonde who exuded power, confidence and competence through her sex appeal in the comics and, to a lesser extent, on the radio. April's interactions with Burma further infantilize April, but they also indicate her potential for growth. More importantly, Burma shared many of April's core feminine values, thereby proving the enduring and universal importance of American white womanhood. Notwithstanding Pat's frequent assertion that women are 'as unpredictable as the weather', Burma, April, and other sympathetic women in the radio serial were united by their commitment to honesty, domesticity and the understanding that appropriate aggressive power could only be accessed through proper masculine authority, no matter how much they might protest to the contrary (16 February 1942).

Like Terry and Pat, Burma was a city girl. This experience meant that Burma enjoyed significantly more freedom of movement than the childish April, who required almost constant supervision. April's need for masculine protection was continually reinforced through her repeated kidnappings, which establish April's thorough dependence on her male friends. The radio series even goes so far as to position April as a danger to herself. In one case, April exposes herself to danger by running off in anger after Pat teasingly called her 'kitten' and questioned her ability to take care of herself (18 February 1942). In Sanjak's case, April was not wary enough to recognize the subtle warning signs about her mysterious host. April might wish that she shared Burma's bravery and resourcefulness, but she was clearly still a young girl with much to learn.

April's comparative innocence and inexperience were also clear from the tenor of her voice. Where Burma's soft voice often hardened and dipped into deeper registers to emphasize her determination and independence, April's remained hesitant and, as she described it herself, 'squeaky' (17 March 1942). April's high-pitched voice demanded listeners' attention, even if she was simply singing while she works, and it foregrounded her mercurial emotional states. Burma's carefully modulated tones occasionally betrayed the guarded fear and uncertainty of a woman considering her options, but April's rapid descents into piercing panic made her vulnerability evident to the listening audience. Learning that Madame Sud was actually the criminal mastermind Sanjak, April's voice rose in fear; she began tripping over her words with

increasing terror and disbelief as Sanjak outlined her full plan to use Pat, Terry and Dylan in her plan to 'get the gold and make fools of all the men' (17 March 1942). April's high-pitched panic was further emphasized by Sanjak's deep, steady, overly determined tones, which underscore her resolution and duplicity.

Lacking clear direction, April looked to her companions to guide her from place to place throughout her radio adventures. April frequently adopted Burma as a surrogate mother and guide, telling Terry 'I'm gonna do what Burma decides. She knows best' (30 December 1941). However, despite this resolution to learn from her older female friend, both April and Burma typically defer to their male friends. April usually embraces this arrangement, but Burma frequently resists Pat's patriarchal authority, justified by the conviction that 'I'm free, white, and over 21, so I'm deciding my own future' (30 December 1941). Nevertheless, Burma's most successful rebellions against Pat's authority were conducted to achieve stereotypically feminine aims, as when she resisted being sent off to 'take up knitting' in Chungking and became an unofficial army nurse caring for orphans along the dangerous Burma Road (29 December 1941). The announcer sanctioned Burma's resolve to become a 'battle-axe' in service of these children, telling listeners that 'Burma did the right thing when she took charge' (16 February 1942). Conversely, her more aggressive, less maternal moments of daring and self-reliance were minimized. When no Chinese soldiers were available to rescue Terry, Pat and April from the Dragon Lady, Burma led a rescue mission herself, only to be captured and rescued by Terry and Pat (5 February 1942). While they commend her bravery, the men dismissed her to safety before proceeding to rescue April without her, implying that she would be in their way. Burma's contributions are further diminished in the next episode, when the announcer's narrative of the previous day's events only acknowledged that Burma joined a search party, erasing her leadership role (6 February 1942).

The programme's male announcer frequently lingered over descriptions of Burma's body, but he rarely described April's physical appearance, apparently preferring to focus on her emotional state, be it joy, fear or confusion. This emphasis on April's emotions de-sexualized her, but it also partially disembodied her, departing from contemporary radio programmes' inclination to contain women's voices by binding them to distinct physical and mental images of their physical bodies (McCracken 2002). In two successive episodes, the announcer introduced 'beautiful Burma' as displaying 'plenty of good, American nerve' in the face of danger, in contrast to 'wide-eyed April Kane', who became 'bewildered and confused' (25–26 November 1941). By partially obscuring April's physical presence, *TATP*'s producers left her open as a potential point of identification for young female listeners – an avatar to which they might attach their own emotional responses to the series. However, by emphasizing April's intense emotional reactions to events, the programme also strove to prescribe a dependent and passive subject position for female audiences, effectively telling young girls that even as they aspired to become Burma, April was who they were.

Burma's physical presence grants her power that April lacks, but Burma's embodiment also restrained her. In what is perhaps the radio serial's greatest departure from the newspaper comic, the announcer undercut Burma's authority and abilities by invoking the disparity between her physical beauty and her attempts at masculine action, undermining one of the key sources of Burma's influence in the comic. In one episode, the announcer told listeners

that Burma looks grim as she holds 'an ugly-looking gun' on a criminal (26 November 1941). This physical disjuncture between the beautiful woman and the ugly gun was further reinforced when the crook took the weapon. Despite all her knowledge of the world, the radio serial appeared to argue, a woman so kind and beautiful as Burma could never actually shoot a man. Where Burma was introduced to scenes through physical description, April was often introduced through the sound of her clear, high voice singing American folk or popular songs. April's cheerful airs helped her cope with difficult situations, but they further marked her as a child who seeks solace in escapism: April sang 'to keep from gettin' scared' (17 November 1941). April's singing occasionally annoyed and distracted her friends, who only join her in song when they are trapped in a snow-bound, broken-down truck. Recognizing that even they cannot fight the weather, they embrace April's coping mechanism to keep their spirits up while waiting for Terry and Pat to rescue them (3 December 1941).

CONCLUSION

The Second World War proved a boon for many American manufacturers, but Pearl Harbor undoubtedly damaged *TATP*'s WGN sponsor, Libby's, business in Hawaiian pineapple juice. Libby's dropped its sponsorship in May of 1942. *TATP* returned to NBC's Blue Network in February 1943, sponsored by Quaker Puffed Wheat and Rice cereals, but April's role was reduced to occasional appearances. Unlike Terry, who aged and matured into a responsible young man over the course of the series, April was never depicted evolving beyond her childish innocence, at least on the radio. Despite her potential to grow into any number of things – a femme fatale, a screwball heroine or a calm, capable adult woman – April remained frozen in time. The radio serial's insistence on foreclosing most of her more interesting potentialities likely limited April's appeal, and she was largely replaced within the narrative by Elita, a female flyer developed especially for radio. Elita was more capable but no less virtuous. Elita was doubtless a better fit for the wartime serial, especially as Pat and Terry became more involved in official military missions and had less time to spend rescuing April. Like Burma, Elita defined herself not through her own personal ambition and accomplishments, but by how she could help others. In one 1944 episode, she assured a superior officer that the only thanks she needs after leading a successful rescue mission is knowing that her friends are safe (3 February 1944).

Still, the fact that so many of April's attributes remained integral to the programme's female representations only reaffirms the limitations that social pressure placed on radio serials ability to present the same interesting and varied options for girls as they did for boys. Even if April's extreme innocence was unrealistic and even unappealing to contemporary female audiences, her brand of femininity continued to circulate as the yardstick for white women in postwar American containment culture. Her idealized femininity was one of many conflicting messages that young postwar women struggled to balance daily (Breines 1992). It also fed white supremacist and imperialist discourses by equating American nationality with whiteness and uniting white Americans from North and South to defend white women's purity from foreign attack (Higginbotham 1992: 269). This elevation of white femininity has also had a lasting effect on social reform movements in subsequent decades, discouraging many white women from finding common cause with other marginalized

ethnic and sexual minorities. Alliances between white and minority women occur frequently, but, as feminist theorists like bell hooks have pointed out, they often remain hampered by mutual distrust and a failure to recognize the ways in which intersectional social factors like race, class and sexuality shape women's experiences and needs differently (1984).

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