

The Twilight Zone: Rod Serling's Stage for Social Criticism

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Nearly fifty years after its television premiere, Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone* remains pertinent, ground-breaking television. When it arrived on the CBS network in 1959, Serling's show was only one of two Science Fiction or Fantasy programs to premiere on television that year. This same year saw the production of eight new Private Detective shows and a massive twelve new programs from the Western genre. Facing these staggering numbers, a show presenting Science Fiction and Fantasy elements stood out in a crowd of otherwise uniform television programs. In addition, besides their thematic connection, the majority of shows featured on television were joined by another common thread: commercial driven censorship.

Television in the mid 1950's primarily consisted of realistic television dramas performed live. Such programs as *The United States Steel Hour* and *Playhouse 90* dominated the prime time airwaves. It was toward the end of this movement that Rod Serling emerged as a writing talent for television and achieved a fair amount of success in that realm. In fact, by the time "Rod Serling created *The Twilight Zone*, he was one of television's hottest writers. He had already won Emmy awards for his dramatic teleplays for *Patterns* (1955) and *Requiem for a Heavyweight* (1956)," two teleplays he wrote to be performed in this live format (Phillips and Garcia 467). However, Serling and other writers were faced with a similar plight: not with a lack of creative source material for their writing, but with pressures by networks and sponsors to alter their scripts prior to airing in the economic interest of the products being advertised. Laurence Venuti, Professor of English at Temple University describes this phenomenon:

Since the networks were dedicated to pursuing the most profitable course with this new mass medium, the sponsors and ad agencies exerted a dictatorial control

over programming [...] their power in television was comparable to that in radio, where not only did they decide where and when a commercial would be run, but agencies actually created many programs as vehicles for their commercials (360)

The fact that some shows were created by product companies specifically for the purpose of advertising speaks to the cheapness and lack of depth in a portion of the medium.

By and large, television was still relatively young as a medium and lacked the identity that both radio and film had attained. As a halfway house between the two mediums, having the mass availability of radio and the visual elements of film, television struggled to find its own middle ground between the purposes of its parent presentation methods. Whereas radio had primarily placed advertising in the forefront of its business, major motion pictures usually had entertainment as the primary focus, with ticket sales being the market commodity. As of the mid-1950-s, the commercial purpose of television dictated the content of the medium, as "[the] TV studio executives of the time saw themselves primarily as promoters of their advertisers' products. Entertainment was a second criterion, with public service lagging behind as a distant third" (Wolfe 17).

With television in this deplorable state, it was considerably challenging for a writer to discuss current political or social issues. Put simply, the view of most "sponsors and ad agencies [was to] regard a program not as a work of art or a vehicle of responsible social criticism, but primarily as another device which could be useful in selling a product. To the sponsors and ad agencies, a program is merely another commercial" (Venuti 361). Most companies were so fixated on pushing a product or series of products in their formulaic shows that they did not even consider contemporary issues. However, for the shows that featured serious writers, another reason surfaced for wanting to disallow or at least veil the issues presented. Bringing current social issues literally in front of the eyes of millions of Americans, though undeniably an effective way of transmitting a message, was thought by sponsors to have the potential for controversy and unpleasantness among consumers. No agency or sponsor of a product line wanted potential offensiveness, or a problem of any kind connected to their product in the minds of their consumers. Making people realize that they were unhappy with the state of the world around them would not positively influence consumer buying.

It would stand to reason that the television writer and the sponsor would want to work together, considering that they have a common goal. Success for both parties meant achieving

and keeping an audience, because "[television] is both an art and a popular industry. Whereas the stage dramatist writes for an audience measuring in the hundreds, the TV playwright has to please millions. His very career depends on his ability to win mass appeal" (Wolfe 17). It can be argued that the same is true for commercial sponsors. Should they fail to present their product to the consumers in an enticing manner, the company would fail. However, rather than create camaraderie, these difficulties set writers against the advertising agencies and sponsors. This struggle between a group determined to appeal to the status quo versus another group attempting to write criticism about the dire state of society was much too large to recount here; suffice to say that the sponsors of television shows had the upper hand with monetary backing, such that "[writers] were torn between the desire to present compelling and timely plays and the fear of incurring the wrath of sponsors and network executives" (Cochran 196).

Television sponsors gained additional leverage when live teleplays began to be replaced by serial situational comedies and anthology shows. The reason for this is that the writing on a sit-com or anthology show generally consisted of formulaic writing, to which most self-respecting writers would decline to commit because of the lack of creative and artistic freedoms. Part of the reason for this shift from live drama to pre-recorded TV was due to significant network management changes. Specifically, the Vice Presidency of CBS changed, as James Aubrey took the position, a man described as "an executive firmly dedicated to the bottom line [...] one who at once set about canceling everything that was not the sort of light, sitcom amusement he thought the viewers wanted" (Rabinowitz par. 4). Not only were television shows being reduced to mere parodies of each other, but the network staff from the top purposefully made the effort to make viewing TV as unsophisticated as possible, perhaps pandering to the lowest common denominator of society.

The push away from live TV dramas took with it a good deal of the writing talent of the era. Rather than abandon the medium, Rod Serling decided to stay in the arena in which he had gained his acclamation and fame. However, because of writer's limitations, this proved to be challenging: "when those live plays disappeared from television, a writer like Serling soon became subservient to everyone else on the production line. The programming became less ambitious – and, with the emphasis on crime shows, Westerns, and parable sitcoms, it soon became far less dependent on words" (Stark 88). Whereas the live dramas displayed the abilities of both the actors and the writers, the networks viewed pre-recorded TV programs as a means of

further watering down entertainment, in an attempt to highlight the sponsors. Also, with only a few cliché genres dominating the broadcast time, writing became even more mediocre.

Perhaps one reason for the success of Serling's *Twilight Zone* was its difference from contemporary and past shows. Most notably, "[in] a TV era where the most popular shows were westerns, *The Twilight Zone* offered a refreshing switch" (Phillips and Garcia 470). Rather than maintaining focus on the past, antiquated and untouchable as it was, Serling chose to study the present and future. This shift would mark the beginning of the end for the idolization of the American past and the declaration of pressing issues that needed addressing in the present. By selecting a genre not typical of mainstream television audiences, Serling was taking a risk in order to receive attention. Luckily for him, this risk paid off. Another dangerous decision that Serling made in creating the *Twilight Zone* was to make it an anthology show. This means that each episode is an independent story from other episodes, and generally there are no recurring characters. In a TV era in which the conservative and realistic were celebrated, this was another huge risk that paid unseen dividends, making "[the] series was one of the few successful anthology shows, with no common character, writer, or plot running through the episodes" (Bertonneau and Paffenroth 132).

Just as the switch from live TV drama to pre-recorded shows had run off a good number of the talented writers of the era, so too did a good number of the famous actors and actresses begin to refuse to do a television series. The result, of course, was two-fold: poorer overall acting and the rise of previously unknown stars. Since the show was created as an anthology series, "*Twilight Zone* [...] attracted a wide range of top stars, including Ida Lupino, Ed Wynn, Robert Cummings and Mickey Rooney," because being featured in one episode required far less acting commitment than signing on for a full series (Phillips and Garcia 468). The appearance of such stars undoubtedly would have attracted audiences to watch *The Twilight Zone*, as they could view film quality acting at no additional cost from the comfort of their own homes. Because of the decrease in quality parts in television, many actors and actresses feared that accepting a television role would be the equivalent of being demoted. However, the quality of Serling's *Twilight Zone* proved to be such that celebrity actors and actresses gladly accepted the invitations to be part of a show. The anthology format of the show also "benefited from offering such a wide variety of premises and experiences to its viewers," unlike the ceaseless Westerns and crime dramas, which featured clichéd plot lines (Bertonneau and Paffenroth 132).

In addition, the cinematography of Serling's *Twilight Zone* drastically differed from its contemporaries, while differing even from itself in every week's episode. The show used a wide variety of camera techniques for filming, taking many artistic risks for the goal of achieving a series of quality and rising above the sea of mediocrity that television had been allowed to become. Also, the set design can only be described as radically different from most other shows on television at that time. The series as a whole incorporated set designs from multiple genres, including: contemporary urban environments, crime show film noir, Western fantasy, and science fiction. As the show's set differed from week to week, a wide range of resources, as well as a creative staff were a necessity. In comparison, "[hammering] together a set for a crime show is simple: Go to the studio's storage lockers and pull out a used table, desk and chair. In *The Twilight Zone*, set 'between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge,' the crew had to make not only their own props, but often their own worlds" (Phillips and Garcia 467). This required that the set designers understand the storyline that Serling was creating in order to accurately portray the episode's message. In doing so, these designers were given a fair amount of creative freedom to explore their own gifts in a nurturing environment. The result was an overall noticeable increase in quality and effectiveness of set usage for the series.

Although all of the preceding differences were important in making Serling's series stand out from amongst its competition, arguably its great thematic difference proved most problematic to sponsors and network executives. Rather than shying away from contemporary issues, "many *Twilight Zone* [...] episodes exude the dominant political ideals and broad social anxieties of their time" (Worland 104). While he could have chosen to create a unique anthology series of speculative fiction that dealt with otherworldly or nonsensical subject matter, Serling intentionally chose to address contemporary issues, albeit under the veil of fiction. In many ways, while being artistically deceptive, Serling's show did not hide the truth from or talk down to his audience, but engaged them in the themes and motifs that other shows and networks compulsively avoided. Though this may seem like a diminutive accomplishment, virtually no other television programs of the era were willing to address either directly or indirectly, contemporary social and political issues. Sponsors and network executives were extremely hesitant to delve too deeply into the existing problems for various reasons, including a network belief that people watched television merely for simple and light hearted entertainment. Also at risk by discussing these issues were the reputations of the sponsoring companies and, product

sales. Sponsors simply wanted to offer a mildly entertaining commercial to their consumers, with bland and often repetitive programming. Rod Serling saw two problems with this: members of the audience were not being personally engaged by the current television programming and, therefore, they were not being entertained.

So how was it that *The Twilight Zone* was able to break the sponsor barrier in conveying social and political messages to the audience? The answer to this question rests in the experience of the show's creator. Rod Serling had had several negative encounters with sponsors and network executives in the years of live, realistic television dramas, prior to *Zone*. In fact, Serling found that sponsors held little regard for him "[as] a television playwright," and because their primary concern was not for the quality of the show but rather for their products; "he was constantly forced to run the gauntlet of corporate sponsors, who directly financed the show and, concerned that no segment of the buying public be alienated, took a close interest in the content of the programs" (Cochran 196). That his scripts retained any quality at all is a testament to Serling's constant defense of his work. His two Emmy awards, while bringing in more writing opportunities, also garnered interest from network executives and sponsorship, who knew that Serling's talent would draw a large audience. As a result of this gratuitous sponsor interest, Serling was often forced into alterations of his scripts. These alterations could range from the immense, which changed the entire message of the story, to the most insignificant miniscule details, which to all appearances were benevolent. What bothered Serling was that the censorship he was forced to work under "was not based on morality and did not involve deletions of objectionable material like obscenity and sensational violence. Rather, the grounds for complaint were purely economic: network executives, advertising agencies and sponsors often forced him to alter scripts they thought would offend American consumers and decrease the sale of products" (Venuti 354). This would later prove an important distinction, as sponsors, being so interested in maintaining economic integrity, would overlook the deeper messages in Serling's *Twilight Zone* episodes.

Several examples of this flagrant censoring of Serling's early television writing exist, and have been heavily documented. For instance, in Serling's teleplay, "Requiem for a Heavyweight," which consequently won an Emmy, the line, "Got a match?" was removed from the final cut of the show because the sponsor happened to be Ronson lighters (Zicree 14). Though the line does reflect a preference for matches over lighters, the reference seems minute

enough not to have warranted censorship from the sponsor. When the press leaked that Serling's "Noon on Doomsday" was to be loosely based on the Emmett Till case, the sponsor, the United States Steel company, ordered heavy revisions to be made due to the delivery of thousands of letters threatening to boycott. When Serling questioned the company, he was told that United States Steel was not concerned about the possibility of boycott, but rather a strain on their public relations (Zicree 14). Extensive changes were made to the teleplay, including the change of setting from nonspecific to New England, as well as changing the personality of the murderer in the story from a "vicious" and "neurotic killer" into "a good, decent, American boy momentarily gone wrong" (Zicree 14). However, with these monumental changes, the sponsor also chose to alter ridiculously obscure references to the south, such as removing all Coca-Cola bottles from the set. The alterations were so extensive that when the show "was finally aired in April of 1956 [it] was so watered down as to be meaningless" (Zicree 14).

Altering the personality of a show's characters would certainly seem like more than enough hassle, but the sponsors continued to meddle. Serling also became the victim of sponsor interference of the very actions his characters were scripted to do. For instance, in perhaps the most fantastic stretch of reasoning for alteration thus far recounted, the sheriff of Serling's 1958 script, "A Town Has Turned to Dust" was not allowed to commit suicide. The reason for this was that one of the sponsors, an insurance company, claimed that suicides led to complications in settling their policy claims (Zicree 15). Though this may very well be true, the relevance of the sponsor's problem in relation to the show's usage of the incident is so far removed as to be laughable. Serling was infuriated with this degree of needless censorship. As Pulitzer Prize winning American Journalist, Dorothy Rabinowitz, states, "There had always been trouble with sponsors worried about controversial subject matter, trouble that ended with Serling in a fury over enforced revisions that mangled the entire point of his script. Sponsors, Serling learned, did not want scripts to have any point in the first place, and they certainly wanted none that dealt with political or similarly delicate matters" (par. 5). His frustrations mounted with each mutilated script, and it was not unforeseeable that he would search for an alternative to the ludicrous demands of network executives and sponsors.

With the pressures from sponsors and network executives to revise his scripts continually, as well as pressure by companies offering him writing work on shallow and ultimately unfulfilling shows, Rod defied both parties, by creating and producing his own show.

However, because other great television writers had retreated to film and Broadway, “Serling’s decision to begin working on his own series in 1959 was widely derided as a sellout” and a concession to the television medium (Cochran 204). Even before *The Twilight Zone* premiered, Serling was questioned and doubted about his daring decision to step away from mainstream television and realistic fiction in order to write a science fiction and fantasy based anthology show. Most major critics felt that this new series would be much weaker in theme and quality than Serling’s earlier work and that *Twilight Zone* may even have been his sign of giving in to the mediocrity surrounding television.

To answer these growing concerns, Serling agreed to be featured on the *Mike Wallace Interview*, which proved to be a very telling meeting. Wallace assumes the role of critic, appraising Serling’s decision to work with science fiction and fantasy as a step down from the quality of writing that had won him three Emmy awards. After discussing the censorship and position of sponsors in television, Wallace asks, concerning Serling’s new project, *The Twilight Zone*, “Who controls the final product, you or the sponsor?” to which Serling replies, “We have [...] a good working relationship, where, in questions of taste, in questions of the art form itself, in questions of drama, I’m the judge, because this is my medium and I understand it. I’m a dramatist for television [...] the sponsor knows his product, but he doesn’t know mine” (Serling). This stern answer by Serling indicates both his previous stresses of working with sponsors and his determination to be victorious in his newest writing endeavor. By stating that the medium belongs to the television writers and not sponsors, Serling is indicating a power shift that he aims to accomplish with the quality of his new series. Also, by calling himself a television dramatist, Serling reiterates that he holds his position in high regard and would not damage his reputation on a show he did not believe would help his career.

Later in the interview, Serling states, “I don’t want to have to *battle* sponsors. I don’t want to have to push for something that I want and have to settle for second best. I don’t want to have to compromise all the time, which, in essence, is what a television writer does if he wants to put on controversial themes” (Serling). Here, Serling’s stress over sponsorship confrontations is brilliantly illustrated with the tone of a man who has become weary of his failure at achieving greatness because of the mistakes of others. To this emotional diatribe, Wallace poses the question, “Why do you stay in television?” which Serling responds to as soon as the words have left the interviewer’s mouth, “I stay in television because I think it’s very *possible* to perform a

function. Of providing adult, meaningful, exciting, challenging drama without dealing in controversy necessarily. [...] I think it's *criminal* that we are not *permitted* to make dramatic note of social evils as they exist, of controversial themes as they are inherent in our society" (Serling). In a sense, this response highlights Serling's artistic goals for his upcoming series, *The Twilight Zone*, as well as for his overall career.

In the closing minutes of the interview, Wallace begins to discuss the issue of money with Serling. When he asks how much money Rod anticipates making with *The Twilight Zone*, Serling replies with the following explanation:

This sounds defensive and it probably sounds phony, but I'm not nearly as concerned about the money to be made on this show as I am with the quality of it and I can prove that. I have a contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer which guarantees me something in the neighborhood of a quarter of a million dollars over a period of three years. This is a contract I'm trying to break and get out of so I can devote time to a series which is very *iffy*, which is a very problematical thing. It's only guaranteed twenty-six weeks and if it only goes twenty-six weeks and stops I'll have lost a great deal of money. But I would rather take the chance and do something I like, something I'm familiar with, something that has a built in challenge to it. (Serling)

These comments cement Serling in place as a writer who was driven by lack of fulfillment to create a show of quality, with depth and meaning beyond the reach of the shallow, financial and career-oriented sponsors. In this statement, Serling illustrates a deep understanding of the risks he is undertaking by producing *The Twilight Zone*. Throughout the interview, he makes it very clear to Wallace that as creator, writer, and executive producer Serling has undertaken a tremendous amount of work for this project. Consequently, by stating the amount of money he has given up in order to pursue artistic freedom, Serling is demonstrating an immense degree of faith in the quality of his work on the fledgling *Twilight Zone*. Add to this the risk of writing in an under-explored genre and it becomes clear that Serling was staking his career, both his financial stability and his reputation, on the work he put into creating this series.

Rod Serling understood that with three Emmy awards in his favor, he could have lived comfortably off of his reputation, coasting through the rest of his career with low quality shows and films and thereby maintaining a comfortable standard of living. However, Serling likely

would have seen such actions as those of a tired sellout. Serling's decision to make his own show was so unprecedented that critics stumbled to understand his intentions, other than monetary, for leaving the realm of realistic fiction in favor of science fiction and fantasy. Lawrence Venuti sheds further light on the misunderstanding by critics in an article for the *Western Humanities Review*:

What was so difficult for his critics to accept was his sudden and bewildering shift from realistic drama, in which social commentary and moral issues were the writer's main concern, to fantasy, which seemed pure escapist entertainment devoid of serious import. The fact is that *The Twilight Zone* was Serling's calculated response to the growing oppressiveness of television censorship, and in many of his screenplays for this series he continued his critical examination of American society – but in an oblique and perhaps more inventive way. (355)

Before viewing *The Twilight Zone*, critics were ready, because of thematic precedent, to denigrate Serling's work. Previous entries in the science fiction and fantasy genres for television and radio had, indeed, been primarily escapist and commercial products, lacking the thematic depth of live teleplays. ABC's show, *Alcoa Presents One Step Beyond*, aired nine months before and shared the thirty minute anthology structure of *The Twilight Zone*. Although the show presented tales of the supernatural, it did so in a straight forward style and ultimately lacked the character depth, audience connection, and relation to current social themes of its successor. Also, *One Step Beyond* shied away from presenting the Science Fiction motifs that had made a name for the genre, such as alien invasions and space travel. Its creators chose instead to look at the past for mysteries and disasters to explain and explore theatrically. As a result, the episodes became less Science Fiction and more like a predecessor of *Unsolved Mysteries*.

Lack of a successful precedent led critics to misjudge *The Twilight Zone* in that before its creation, no other program of speculative fiction had been implemented as a vehicle for contemporary social criticism. Serling's earlier television dramas had relied on their realism and character development to convey social messages to the audience. For *The Twilight Zone*, while the importance of character development remained, “[instead] of relying on realism to convey his message, Serling embodied it in fantasy and managed not only to avoid the censorship which had plagued his earlier writing, but also to maintain his integrity as a socially concerned writer”

(Venuti 355). He managed to write a commercially acceptable product while clearly slipping moralistic elements and social commentary into his scripts.

That *The Twilight Zone* was allowed to become a groundbreaking series for television was primarily the effect of Rod Serling's tedious work to become a groundbreaking television writer. Venuti goes so far as to claim that *The Twilight Zone* was "Serling's greatest achievement," stating that "its combination of sophisticated dramatic techniques with social criticism has rarely been equaled in the history of television" (355). By combining interesting and different dramatic and cinematographic methods with meaningful storylines, Serling created a stylish show in an era of mediocrity. Truly, if Serling had not become "a master hand at getting around sponsors" in order "[to] ward off [sponsor] leeriness about works dealing with the supernatural," the series would have never been possible (Rabinowitz par. 6). However, even with an economically acceptable vehicle to transport his social message, without believable performers for his scripts, Serling's show could have flopped.

In spite of the fictional genres employed in creating *Twilight Zone*, the depth and believability of Serling's characters allow the audience to become personally involved with each episode, a powerful effect of vital necessity in transmitting his subtle social commentaries. A factor paramount to the show's popularity was Serling's development of "characters firmly in the everyday world – which tactic also served, of course, to produce a series of unique power" (Rabinowitz par. 6). Serling's political and social observations had a varying range: from small, seemingly insignificant details to wide-ranging and daring social statements.

A detailed analysis of Serling's episodes reveals the specific social commentaries intended. In "Walking Distance," Serling introduces the audience to Martin Sloan, a middle-aged business man shown to be exceptionally stressed over the way his life has turned out. The first time the viewer sees Sloan he is violently backing into a gas station and repetitively honking his horn for service, as if in an extreme hurry. Though he immediately apologizes for his rude actions, the audience has witnessed the pace and mannerism of the lifestyle from which Sloan is fleeing. Sloan reveals that he is from the nearby town, Homewood, and that he has not been back in twenty-five years. When he learns that his oil change is going to take an hour or so, Sloan decides to walk to Homewood in order to pass the time. It is at this moment that the creative cinematographic technique, vital to this episode's meaning, commences. Instead of pointing toward Sloan, the camera is focused on his reflection from the glass in the cigarette

vending machine, and it is from this vantage point that the viewers witness Martin's trek up the road towards Homewood. Though extremely subtle, this cinematographic technique is implemented to convey Sloan's journey into his own past. "Rather than using a time machine," by "employing a visual allusion to *Through the Looking Glass*," the show becomes fantasy rather than science fiction (Zicree 43). This camera choice selection by Serling connects the audience with the story and character to a greater degree with simplicity. The view from a mirror image "cuts to [another] reflection of Martin in a drugstore mirror in the past, just as he enters," though this is not immediately revealed to be a reflection (Zicree 43). By these irresolute camera visuals, Serling seems to be indicating that appearances cannot always be trusted.

To be sure, though he seemed to be near the verge of a mental break down as he pulled into the gas station, Sloan's "mile-and-a-half walk to Homewood rejuvenates" him such that "[when] he's next seen, downing a three-scoop chocolate soda in a soda fountain he had recalled from his youth, he's sharp and bright" (Wolfe 57). Serling shows a different side of Sloan in this soda shop, a side that remembers and longs for the better days of his youth. Rather than sympathizing with his mistreatment the audience is encouraged to identify with Sloan in this episode. For instance, as Sloan enjoys a three-scoop ice cream soda, the camera is in extreme close-up of his face so that it dominates the screen. In this way, the audience is invited to share the moments of remembered joy that Sloan is feeling.

Though Sloan does not catch on to the hints, the audience is early and often invited to speculate that Sloan has indeed traveled into his childhood past. From his recollection of the soda jerk's appearance to the unchanged price of the ice cream soda, Sloan's missed hints at his travel through time build suspense. It is not until Sloan departs from the soda shop that his travel through time is revealed. A comment that Sloan makes about remembering the deceased owner of the shop is given as evidence of his journey, as by "[violating] the established point of view (Sloan's) for a single shot, the camera remains inside, Charlie ascends rickety stairs and speaks to his elderly boss, fanning himself in a stuffy office. If we have guessed that Mr. Wilson awaits before Charlie arrives at the dark at the top of these stairs, our shared premonition adds to the impact" (Brode and Serling 3). Interestingly, though Serling's show often stunned its viewers with revelations, in this case the revealed fact is positive: someone thought to be dead is actually alive. In a television series that generally hides information from the audience, this rare moment

is provided by Serling to allow viewers to know the truth far earlier than the protagonist, thus endearing Sloan to audience.

Sloan's moment of revelation comes when he sees his younger self carving his name into the bandstand, just as he has described to a young woman in the park. Though he chases his younger self in an attempt to have a conversation, the middle-aged Sloan appears no match for the young Martin. After going through such an amazing incident, "Sloan [is left] with one option: to confront his parents. He approaches the house where he was raised only to be rejected by his father and mother (Brode and Serling 4). The screen door which separates the two parties is shown by the camera from both sides, another clever usage of cinematography. Serling shows his knowledge of complex camera work in this scene, because when Martin Sloan first rings the doorbell, the camera is pointed facing him such that he appears blurred by the screen door, while his parents, with their backs to the audience, appear clear. This texturing suggests that Sloan is an unreal apparition from the future and that his parents are rightful beings in their own present time. However, when the camera is reversed the audience views Sloan's parents "behind the screen door, its hazy surface lending an other worldliness to their presence," as if they are specters from Sloan's past (Brode and Serling 4). While remaining realistic, this technique provides another fantasy element to Serling's story, maintaining its dream-like subtlety.

"Walking Distance" also made hazy some of the standard structural elements that comprised *Twilight Zone* episodes. Rod Serling's prologue and epilogue narrations were standard to every episode of *The Twilight Zone*. In addition to these, Serling also provided a middle narration for this episode, a rarity for the series. This narration is implemented to advance the storyline from day to night and imply that Sloan has wandered around the town thinking before returning to his childhood home to confront his parents for a second time. He does so this time from the backyard rather than a direct approach to the front door. Much like his travel through time has allowed him access to the setting of his childhood, this change in approach gains Sloan direct access to his parents, removing the hazy barrier. As he tries to convince his mother of his identity with his identification cards, she slaps him, which momentarily stupefies Sloan. Critics have said a good deal about this violent action, particularly that it "happens so unexpectedly, yet seems so right in its wrongness that it never fails to shock a first-time viewer. [...] But this vaguely familiar stranger threatens the fragile order of her world. She does so not because she still believes him to be an imposter, but because, on some

unconscious level, Mrs. Sloan senses that he speaks the truth” (Brode and Serling 6). If she does sense truth in his words, Mrs. Sloan’s action suggests a vulgarity in Martin’s return to his childhood past. Though he somehow mysteriously was able to return to the past, Mrs. Sloan’s defense mechanism poses the question from Serling, “Does he have a right to return?” Through the remainder of the episode, the actions and consequences of Sloan serve to answer this question.

After he recovers from the shock of being slapped by his mother, Sloan hears the distant music of a merry-go-round and decides to follow it, hoping to corner his younger self. Spotting himself on the ride, he boards and a chase ensues. Here, again, the cinematography shifts “from simple camera set-ups to oblique angles, turning a relatively realistic setting into something quite surreal” (Brode and Serling 7). Each shot in this sequence is at an off-balanced angle, as if Serling is commenting that Sloan’s desire to converse with his younger self is crooked and unjust. Certainly, should Sloan discuss his stress-filled, unhappy future with his childhood self it would likely taint the boy’s existence. As it happens, Sloan is not rewarded this chance, as the chase results in young Martin falling off of the merry-go-round and injuring his leg. Both men’s agony upon this occurrence is conveyed through screams of pain. When the boy is being carried away by the merry-go-round attendant, the camera still tilted in an oblique angle, Sloan stands spot-lighted in the background as the shadowy figures of children pass by him. This effectively highlights Sloan as the cause of the boy’s injuries. Sloan’s mere presence has caused his younger self a considerable amount of pain. Serling’s original script symbolizes this injury further than the actual televised version, having young Martin’s leg caught in the machinery of the merry-go-round (Walking 29). By attempting to warn his young counterpart of the stresses he is to face in the future from societal machines, in this alternate script Sloan has succeeded only in bringing those injuries on much sooner.

Arguably the most touching portion of this nostalgic episode occurs when Sloan’s father approaches his emotionally exhausted son, convincing him to return to his own time. His father, being the first person in the episode who admits knowing his son is who he claims to be, warns Sloan that he must leave the past behind him and look to the future for his joy and relief. It is this lesson that Serling wants Sloan, and the audience, to take from his negative exploration of his past. Bertonneau and Paffenroth explain in describing this hard-earned lesson:

Martin limps back into the present, but there is hope that the chance he's been given to see the past has done something more than just physically maim him: it has alerted him to the beauty that has been all around him all along, but which a sick combination of cynicism and nostalgia have dulled or obscured. Our reveries about the past may not be as literal and physical as Martin's, but if reminiscing about the past sensitizes us to the present's beauty and the infinite possibilities for happiness therein, then it is not too incredible to call it a graced moment. (149)

The lesson to be taken from "Walking Distance" is to enjoy the present pleasures of existence around one self, understanding that traveling to the past is futile in changing the conditions of the present. Here Serling punishes a likable protagonist in order to teach the audience a lesson.

Sloan has retained a slight limp to remind himself of the dangers of living in the past. A message the audience should understand with ease, as Martin Sloan was a character with which the viewers could sympathize and identify. His desires are those of humanity: to return to an easier, more enjoyable existence and escape the stressful adult world. Serling's portrayal of Sloan's past as realistic, rather than the idealistic one most people envision when recalling their own past, adds power to his story and conviction to his message. While both men are punished for their methods of escapism, Serling is less severe with Sloan's penalty because of the all-too-human motivation behind it.

Unlike the previous episode featuring a character study of a singular protagonist, Serling's "The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street" features a collective protagonist, namely the residents of a street. These residents are shown performing various normal activities on a summer afternoon at the onset of the episode. When a flashing light passes in the sky over the street, the residents of Maple Street take notice and stop their activities. They soon learn that all of their machines and appliances requiring a power source have stopped working. As Serling says in his opening narration to the episode, this is "Maple Street in the last calm and reflective moment...before the monsters came" (*Monsters* 3). Though the residents of Maple Street are at first only mildly annoyed by the power failure, when they learn that cars, telephones and portable radios have stopped working as well, a few decide they should go to other parts of the neighborhood to search for the reason behind these events. One man in particular is shown departing the street to go one block over and see if Floral Street shares their dilemma. Serling

provides a close-up shot of a hammer on his belt loop, which will later provide the audience with information unknown to his cast of characters, much like he did in “Walking Distance.”

Two characters, Steve and Charlie, decide to walk downtown to look for information. Before they can leave the street, however, a young boy makes the insidious suggestion that aliens were responsible for shutting all the power off and these aliens do not want the citizens of Maple Street to leave. At first, this suggestion itself is taken as ridiculous – one woman even comments, “He’s been reading too many comic books or seeing too many movies or something” – but when he continues his explanation by stating that aliens always send human look-alikes ahead of their invasion, the street’s occupants look uneasy (*Monsters* 8). The camera pan shows close-ups of each person’s worried reaction to the boy’s outlandish claim. This camera movement works to convey the overall sense of uneasiness setting in, but their expressions also make the audience suspect that perhaps one or more of these people may indeed be an alien, human look-alike. Rather than creating an endearing protagonist, as in the previous episode, here Serling invites the audience of this episode to join in on the mystery and suspense created in the witch-hunt-like atmosphere boiling over on Maple Street.

When another of the street’s inhabitants, Les Goodman, has his car crank by itself, the group of people goes through a quick barrage of confusion, anger, and irrationality in mere moments. Goodman has not shown interest in the flying object, and after hearing Charlie’s comment, “He always was an odd ball. Him and his whole family,” the irrational insistence that Goodman and his family are outsiders has the group ready to confront Les as a mob. The group’s hasty descent into a mob is highlighted by camera angles that show the group from the waist down. This thematically represents the loss of personal identity and morality in the chaotic mob structure, as no one’s face, arguably the identifying feature of a person, is depicted. It is here that “‘Monsters’ portrays most unforgettably the suddenness with which fear can lurch into hysteria and violence” (Wolfe 128). The fact that it took such small accusations and bizarre occurrences to turn the group of people collectively against an individual is shocking. Steve’s quick warning to calm the crowd is enough to stop the complete formation of the mob at this point, but the group’s sudden magnetism to chaos will inevitably lead to destruction.

When Les is unable to provide an explanation as to why his car starts by itself, coupled with an accusation from the crowd that Goodman often stares anxiously at the sky at night, the group becomes fearful and suspicious of him. Serling uses the commercial break to indicate a

lapse in time, as when next the viewer sees Maple Street, darkness has fallen. Though Serling could have done this simply to add suspense to the story, more than likely this darkness is symbolic of the light of truth leaving the occupants to their own darkness. On a shot of Mr. and Mrs. Goodman, low-key lighting is used to make their appearances frightening and different than the well-lit figures of their neighbors in the background. This suggests that the Goodman family is still under suspicion by their neighbors, but also that Serling wants the audience to suspect this couple is different from the group as well. Instead of enlightened and rational individuals, the neighborhood has deteriorated into a status akin to “the dark ages,” which Charlie inconsequentially invokes in a conversation with his wife (*Monsters* 16). Without their technologies, the citizens of Maple Street have fallen back on suspicion and the supernatural as a form of government, feeling that those who differ from the group must somehow be evil. When word gets out that Steve has been working on a radio that no one else has seen, each person’s face is shown to be half lit and half in darkness, suggesting that the residents of Maple Street are on the verge of falling into violent chaos. Up until this point of the episode, Steve has been the voice of rationality and reason on Maple Street, stifling the mob’s early outbreak. The fact that Steve is under suspicion himself suggests a hint of misplaced trust to the audience in understanding the motive of Steve’s previous actions. If Steve were an alien invader it would stand to reason that a calm neighborhood would make invasion easier. Steve’s angry, sarcastic rant that he talks to aliens on the radio in his basement does nothing to help his case, only serving to remove suspicion from the Goodman family.

The flow of blame and doubt is about to change again on Maple Street, as a shadowy figure approaches the group from the other end of the street. His distance from the group, as well as the darkness that cloaks all but his feet, identify this figure as an outcast: the scapegoat for which the crowd has become hungry. One of the neighbors hands Steve a shotgun, which he refuses to use, to repel what is perceived as an invading enemy. Charlie, arguably highlighted as Serling’s antagonist in this episode, grabs the gun and aims it at the figure. It is at this point that Serling provides the viewer with a camera close-up shot of a hammer hanging from the figure’s pants. For the first time in the episode, rather than having the viewer play along with the “blame game,” Serling reveals the horror and chaotic power of the mob, as Charlie kills his returning neighbor, Pete Van Horn. Of course, by killing an innocent man, Charlie places the mob’s

suspicion on himself. The mob members think that Pete may have come back with information about the turn of events and, knowing this, Charlie killed him before they could receive it.

Chaos dominates the episode from this point forward, as lights go on and off in various houses, and suspicion of being an outsider is tossed about in rapid succession to various members of the community. The audience, no longer preoccupied with solving the mystery is now subjected to the chaotic outbreak that the rising suspicions have created, and “[while] the story appeals for social reform by condemning irrational fears and intolerance, the penultimate scene describes total social breakdown. Lit for night, the tale’s final minutes convey a chaotic nightmare rendered with madly tilted camera angles, rapid cutting, and distorted close-ups of screaming faces in a stampeding frenzy of violence” (Worland 107). Normalcy and everyday activity which began the episode, have now completely left the citizens of Maple Street. At the mere suggestion of the presence of an outsider and the inexplicable flickering of lights and appliances, the people of Maple Street have degraded from rationality to hateful distrust of their neighbors and finally into chaos. By this slow and steady decline, “Serling comments effectively on the human condition here, saying that man’s worst enemy is not necessarily bombs and explosions, but himself” (Presnell and McGee 54).

Whereas the previous episode dealt with rather small issues, making comment about individual human behavior in relationship to society, this episode deals with the nature of society itself. Should this episode have been created under a realistic premise of a communist invasion, which no doubt Serling had in mind when writing the episode, the sponsors and network executives would have heavily scrutinized and edited its content. Therefore, on a larger scale, Serling’s “The Monsters Are Due on Maple Street” illustrates an artistic freedom to discuss social evils as he is able to construct “a fantastic plot to communicate a theme that he would have treated realistically in the fifties; he uses a science-fiction device, the alien invasion, not as a source of pure excitement, but rather as a tool to reveal the existence of blind hatred and cruelty where they might not be expected – in suburbia” (Venuti 364). Not only are we the unexpected monster of our own nightmare in this scenario, but the episode proves that once the seeds of suspicion and doubt have planted, chaos will rule the day.

Serling’s epilogue to this episode further exemplifies that science fiction has been implemented as a vehicle by which to arrive at a real world social and political lesson. In Serling’s script for this episode, the epilogue reads as follows:

The tools of conquest do not necessarily come with bombs and explosions and fall-out. There are weapons that are simply thoughts, attitudes, prejudices – to be found only in the minds of men. For the record, prejudices can kill and suspicion can destroy and a thoughtless, frightened search for a scapegoat has a fall-out all of its own for the children and the children yet unborn. (a pause) And the pity of it is... that these things cannot be confined to ... The Twilight Zone. (26)

The fact that Serling admits his science fiction tale cannot contain the irrationality and prejudice that exists in the real world suggests an existing social problem. After hearing this epilogue, it is hard not to imagine Serling's "intent to link domestic politics to the larger dangers of the Cold War through the explicit mention of bombs and fallout" (Worland 106).

In connection with his shift from discussing small social ills to large national issues, Serling also abandons the singular protagonist formula he is known to be loyal to in order to provide an individual antagonist, Charlie. Douglas Brode, Professor of Film at Syracuse University, actually goes as far as calling Charlie a "reactionary bigot," and claiming that he physically "looks like Senator Joe McCarthy" (169). Charlie prompts others to follow his example because he acts on impulses rather than cowering in fear. Everything about his character makes Charlie the episode's antagonist: "[his] stoutness, his loud, tasteless sport shirt worn as an emblem of defiance, and a voice that wavers between a simper and a screech convey his zeal for quick, easy answers; his melodrama and his loss of control are both functions of his insecurity" (Wolfe 130). The truly sad part about this episode is that the rest of the street's population, with the exception of Steve, are not strong enough in their own convictions to deny Charlie's method of handling situations. Rather, they join his illogical witch hunt out of "their common 'fear of the unknown,'" and with "no firm political beliefs" they fall victim to "rabble rousers and [are] manipulated by demagogues with strong prejudices but weak minds" (Brode and Serling 169). The mob of Maple Street fails to see Serling's message about people like Charlie until it is too late, that sometimes having no answer to a problem is better than the consequences of choosing the wrong one. The date of the episode's first airing comes a few years after the McCarthy trials, making an interpretation of this episode a tale of warning against a future "Red Scare." Though this reading does help to put a character like Charlie into social perspective, the chaos created on "Maple Street" need not have something as complex as

political dogma as its primary cause. The chaos was created from simple, common causes, with the smallest pieces of doubt and suspicion snowballing into an uncontrollable force.

Though a formula common to *The Twilight Zone*, Serling does not *always* seek to relate the audience to a single character through shared emotions. In “The Obsolete Man,” Rod Serling places two individuals against one another in an intellectual quarrel, a rare one-on-one conflict for *The Twilight Zone*. Serling does this in order to display the two opposing ideologies that each man symbolizes. The Chancellor, a character named only by his occupational role, symbolizes unforgiving fascism and close-mindedness. Romney Wordsworth, a librarian by profession, symbolizes free will and the individual human spirit. Also, with the religious undertones of the episode, his self-sacrifice, and because his secondary occupation is revealed to be carpentry, Romney Wordsworth can also be considered a Christ figure (Brode and Serling 197). In addition to these, the character’s connection to English Romantic poet, William Wordsworth, should not be overlooked either. Both Romney and William show the poetic individualism and refusal of conformity which causes this episode’s conflict.

The episode takes place on only two relatively basic film sets, which are representative of the two characters. For instance, the show’s opening scene is in a vast and exaggeratedly tall court room, where the Chancellor’s state tries people on charges of obsolescence. Marc Zicree describes this room in his *Twilight Zone Companion*, stating that it “is quite unlike anything seen before on *The Twilight Zone*. The walls are completely covered with black velvet. There is a single, long, narrow table. At the end of it is an immensely tall, narrow lectern, behind which the Chancellor stands elevated and apart” (209). Serling defines the court room in this way to coincide with the nature of the Chancellor himself. The state’s Chancellor is not accepting of lifestyles deviant from those socially accepted to be of value. He is as oppressive and aloof as the podium from which he addresses the court room. His socially high position is physically manifested in the degree of height his podium is above everyone else, and no one below him, physically and socially, speaks or moves without his consent.

The two settings featured in this episode are vital, as the man who is in his own corresponding set has the upper hand in the intellectual battle between them. The cinematography used in this opening scene to express the dialogue between the two men is so rich with meaning that it is challenging to recount every detail. The court room scene “manipulates distance and perspective to create the bleak and gloomy atmosphere,” for both

Wordsworth and the audience (Presnell and McGee 98). For instance, while in the court room, the Chancellor is a high ranking state official with supreme power. In this setting, though, Wordsworth is nearly defenseless. The Chancellor sits perched high above Wordsworth with a microphone nearby to create an artificially loud voice. Wordsworth, on the other hand, stands roughly fifteen feet lower on ground level at the end of a long table. The way in which the table and podium are shot in this scene creates an interesting parallel between the two characters: while visually maintaining the Chancellor as higher than his adversary, there are a few moments in which the podium and table look nearly identical from the angular perspective given.

The camera angles featured in the men's argument scenes are used by Serling to dictate their feelings and reactions toward each other at that given moment. For instance, when Wordsworth is speaking in his own defense, the camera angle is generally close-up at eye level, creating a sense of individualized humanity for his character's predicament. The Chancellor's response to Wordsworth's argument can be noted by the camera angle implemented in the given situation. When his response to Wordsworth's defense is a close-up and eye-level camera shot, the Chancellor is attempting to explain rationally the fallacy of a part of Wordsworth's defense that the Chancellor has taken personally. This sequence of camera angle dialogue occurs both when the two men are discussing books and the existence of God.

The more common sequence of camera angle dialogue between the two characters involves a close-up eye-level shot of Wordsworth's defense met with a low-angle shot of the Chancellor looking down on him. By being physically above Wordsworth, the Chancellor creates a sense of his dominance over their mutual setting. In these shots, the Chancellor is generally calling Wordsworth names to express worthlessness or denying the truth of his defense in order to make an example of him. The distance between the two men indicates that his verbal abuse is meant to be callous and impersonal. At the end of this scene, the Chancellor feels that he has won the dispute, as the court finds Wordsworth to be obsolete with a punishment of death forthcoming. However, the creative freedom allowed to the condemned in method and location of his own execution will prove fatal to the state in the episode's concluding scene.

In the small apartment where he has chosen to be executed at midnight, Wordsworth quickly gains the upper hand on the Chancellor. Like the man, the apartment is small in size but filled with knowledge and creativity, physically manifested in the form of shelves filled with books and artistic sculptures. Also, the haphazard placement of his books indicates a free will

not shown in the extremely structured courtroom. Besides being smaller in square feet, Wordsworth's room is also much shorter, and he and the Chancellor are on an even level with each other. Without his large podium to hide behind, the Chancellor is forced to share the same floor with Wordsworth. This levelness coincides with Wordsworth's system of belief: all men are equal, and no man is obsolete. The high-ranking state official decides to comply with Wordsworth's request to meet with him before the hour of his death is to occur. Here, as previously stated, both men are literally on the same level and their intellectual argument continues. The Chancellor continues his attempt to belittle Wordsworth, going as far as saying that the condemned man should cry to the camera because some government official may take pity on him. Wordsworth reveals at this point that his chosen method of execution was to have a bomb go off in his room, a quick and rather sad ending for the only humane character in the episode.

Though it seems that all is lost for him, Wordsworth finally reveals his plot, asking the Chancellor the hypothetical question, "And yet... knowing that you are going to be blown to smithereens in twenty minutes is not the happiest of thoughts, is it?" to which the Chancellor replies, "That depends on the individual, Mr. Wordsworth" (*Obsolete* 24). The Chancellor's response reveals a costly betrayal to his chosen ideology, as in the state's totalitarian form of government there should be no individualized thought but rather a mechanized collective process of thinking. It is ironic that he should make such a statement illogical to his ideology just before learning that he is to share in Wordsworth's demise.

Despite the fact that the door is locked, the Chancellor mistakenly believes that he retains the upper hand, calling for guards or anyone around to come to his aid. Wordsworth explains that people scheduled for termination are isolated from others. The only ones that can hear his pleas are the television audience tuning in for Wordsworth's termination, which, Wordsworth is quick to point out, would find it embarrassing to have to save a high ranking state official from an obsolete librarian. Only now does it become clear to the Chancellor that he "overreached himself by visiting the man he condemned to death in order to make him grovel" (Wolfe 73). The Chancellor had belittled Wordsworth so much that he underestimated, in his own mind, Wordsworth's intellectual abilities. Perhaps if he had known of Wordsworth's resourcefulness, the Chancellor would not have become trapped, or even declared the man obsolete. It stands to reason that "[the] reluctance of the Chancellor's colleagues to save him shows that his duping by

the lowly Wordsworth has made him obsolete. The creed he serves demands his death. He has become the obsolete man of the teleplay's title" (Wolfe 74).

While the clock ticks toward midnight, Wordsworth reads his Bible and the Chancellor is shown to be a nervous wreck, smoking cigarettes and sweating. Finally, a minute before midnight, the Chancellor loses all composure and begs "in the name of God, let me out" (Obsolete 29). By invoking the name of God, the Chancellor has gone against his ideology once again, this time affirming the existence in God he had outright denied while in his court room. When he gives the Chancellor the key, Wordsworth becomes the ultimate victor. Peter Wolfe, Professor of English at Bowling Green University, describes this event as the official statement of Wordsworth's superiority to the Chancellor, as he states:

Enacting a perfect stroke of justice, Wordsworth gives the desperate Chancellor his key, allowing his foil to flee the room that will explode within seconds.

Wordsworth meanwhile stays put. He dies a hero's death, dignifying his last minutes by reading aloud from the 23rd Psalm. The Chancellor's atheism, on the other hand, has made him Wordsworth's inferior. Sweating and panicky, he shrinks in dignity as his death moment approaches, begging Wordsworth to spare his life and then grabbing Wordsworth's door key so that he can flee. (74)

But fleeing does not save the Chancellor. When he returns to the court room, the Chancellor discovers that he has been removed from office and has been found obsolete. The Chancellor has become a victim of his own inhumane ideology. His system of beliefs is so rigid and unforgiving that all people under its power find themselves equally dominated.

The Chancellor's plea for his own life in the name of God exemplifies Serling's message in this episode: the strength of an individual is not based on their socially accepted beliefs, but rather on their personal ability to pursue truth and liberty. When both men are tested on the area of personal faith in something greater than their individual lives, Wordsworth's religious and social morality proves stronger than the Chancellor's belief in his domineering tyrannical government. Although there are strong political overtones in the episode, Serling's message can also be seen in a non-political manner. Metaphorically, his portrayal of Wordsworth as victorious over the Chancellor's all-powerful government can be interpreted as Serling's illustration of his own triumph over his powerful and impersonal enemies: network sponsors.

Rod Serling's ground-breaking series, *The Twilight Zone*, survived five seasons and 156 episodes on CBS. Though he would eventually win two more Emmys for his series, perhaps his greatest success with this show was his ability to succeed with the notion of quality writing that involves the television audience mentally. Because the nature of his scripts were speculative and used elements of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Serling found artistic space in which to create memorable and quality works of television, something he had not had in his early television career. His *Twilight Zone* scripts ran the gamut from critique of too much individuality to too much conformity. To some extent, the episodes chosen for discussion are representative of the early years of the series. They each deal with social and political themes in a round-about way in order to entertain the audience while educating them. For the first three seasons of the show, Serling wrote the majority of the scripts and the quality was kept at a relatively constant level; however, the fourth and fifth seasons were much weaker than the previous years of the show because Serling had much less involvement with each intricate part of the episodes, and he had actually gone back to teaching at Antioch College.

Rod Serling made several creative choices in the series that were not genre related, but whose significance is worthy of discussion. Being not only a writer for the show, but also its creator, 40% owner, and final editing executive, Serling held power over even the episodes he did not write. In the episode, "The Invaders," Serling encouraged writer Richard Matheson's selection of a single woman cast for his script. In their era of television, to have a woman as not only the lead role but also the *only* role on a show was unheard of. Serling's entire crew was comprised of these types of innovators and risk takers, adding to the series' overall quality. In addition to the crew, the quality of the acting also helped the series maintain its position in television history. While showcasing the big-name stars, like Mickey Rooney and Ed Wynn, the series would also feature virtually unknown actors, such as William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, James Doohan and George Takei. This group of men would continue their careers in Science Fiction, starring in the original and highly influential *Star Trek* series. In this way, not only can the *Twilight Zone* be remembered for its outstanding merit as show of serious drama, but it also retains its place in Science Fiction history for spawning consumer interest in the genre and starting the careers of those who would continue the evolution of the genre.

The Twilight Zone is far from dated, unlike the majority of television programs that its era produced. The issues and themes explored in Serling's series continue to be relevant to this day.

Perhaps this is because, unlike the writers of Westerns, Serling chose a genre that was willing to erase the idolization of the past. The majority of *Twilight Zone* episodes are set either in the contemporary present or the future. Because of this, the issues discussed were not those resolved in the past, but those that Serling foresaw as being pertinent for the future of mankind's existence. When episodes were set in the past, the past itself was not the focus of the episode, but rather the deeper human concerns. The human element has not become outdated in Serling's show, as two reincarnations of the series, one in 1985 and the other in 2002, were created, indicating a continued fan base for the type of series that Serling pioneered. The fact that they were less successful than the original series is a testament to Serling's standard of quality and the readiness of his television audience to see something new and different. These reincarnations merely rehashed the ideas that Serling and his crew had already breeched, going as far as redoing some of the episodes in color with a new cast. If imitation is the greatest form of flattery, the fact that imitators do exist gives the original series additional merit.

Rod Serling's creation, *The Twilight Zone*, redefined the genre of Science Fiction, placing it in the conversation for meaningful television drama. His understanding of the human condition was far reaching and universal, as fifty years after its original broadcast, *The Twilight Zone* retains its critical acclaim and can still be seen in syndication. Serling's hard work and dedication to the high quality and audience appeal of his series have ensured it a place among the greatest television programs ever made. To this day, Serling's series is shown in syndication on various television stations and is sold at roughly the same price as DVD box sets for current television programs. The term, "Twilight Zone" has seeped into the popular culture to identify an odd or creepy occurrence in an otherwise routine life. It is only one of two television shows to have won both an Emmy Award and an Academy Award. Perhaps more telling is the Unity Award that Serling won in season two of *The Twilight Zone* for "Outstanding Contributions to Better Race Relations." It indicates that although Serling was unsuccessful in illustrating the social ills that created the Emmett Till case in his early work for television, his Science Fiction series was recognized as attempting to better society, an achievement Serling was proud to obtain. In addition, his series was not critically rejected as television garbage, or even slighted for being Science Fiction. The series won three Hugo Awards for "Best Dramatic Presentation," becoming the only three time recipient in the award's history. Though the show did have its

share of gimmicky, strictly-for-entertainment Science Fiction episodes, *The Twilight Zone* shone brightest when Serling wrote about contemporary social ills.

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