

Attuning our ear to the voice of the book: The possibilities for audiobooks in literary studies

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Why is it that some audiobook narrators' voices work to pull the listener-reader in, while others repel or leave us cold? Voice vibrates through the teller and these vibrations are powerfully felt by the attentive, attuned listener.

As literary studies teachers based in Melbourne/Naarm, we predict that audiobooks will be routinely used for teaching and learning purposes in future. However, we have encountered multiple barriers to setting them as texts on university reading lists, partly due to the lingering view of audiobooks as a threat to 'real reading' (Magner and Daley 2021).

Once audiobooks are widely accepted in educational contexts, literary studies teachers like ourselves will need to develop nuanced ways of talking about voice with our students. In order to do this, teachers/scholars will require a vocabulary and a repertoire of terms for more precisely analysing how the narrator/performer's voice functions. For meaningful conversations about audiobooks and how they work on us, we need to find language to express the ways in which a narrator uses their voice, what effects it has on us as listeners, and how it contributes to the affects the book may engender.

Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski, Toril Moi have argued that literary studies as a discipline should to refocus on character and characterisation in order to revitalise itself and engage with so-called 'ordinary' people (Anderson, Moi, Felski 2019). To be memorable, the voicing of an audiobook must create an affective bond, or 'attunement' with the reader-listener to breathe life into fictional characters. This elusive bond between narrator and listener - and the possibilities it offers for the teaching of literary studies - is at the centre of our speculative presentation.

References

Amanda Anderson, Rita Felski and Toril Moi (2019) *Character: three inquiries in literary studies*, University of Chicago Press 2019.

Brigid Magner and Linda Daley (2021) 'Yes audiobooks count as real reading' *The Conversation* 30 Aug: <https://theconversation.com/yes-audiobooks-count-as-real-reading-here-are-3-top-titles-to-get-you-started-166097>

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Sitzung Einordnung: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Audiobooks