

Applying Creative Practice to the Literary Audiobook

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Regardless of the increasing prevalence of audiobooks in literary culture, many traditional literary scholars appear reluctant to embrace the form. Even within the discipline of digital literary studies, the digital audiobook is often excluded in favour of screen-based visual texts (Murray, 2018; Grigar and O'Sullivan, 2021) despite theoretical resonances between the disciplines, such as the impact of historical and contemporary media on the production, distribution, and reading of these digital works. There is some existing literary research in which audiobooks are read critically, often alongside their text editions (see Rubery, 2011; Van Maas, 2018; Hsy, 2016), but their methodologies are primarily rooted in comparative literature and close reading/listening. In this paper I will workshop one of the other methodologies from literary studies that I am applying to a broader audiobook research project, through which I intend to contribute to the practice of literary audiobook research and demonstrate the merits of treating audiobooks as literature.

My research methods include a dual approach of practice-led research and close listening, the former of which I will consider in this paper. Practice-led research is an increasingly established method of research in the arts (Schön, 1983; Nelson, 2022; Smith and Dean, 2009) including within literature and creative writing specifically (Flower and Hayes, 1981; Barrett and Bolt, 2010). Though practice-led research methods have yet to be applied to the audiobook, they have been applied to other digital literatures (see Skains, 2016; Wright, 2022), and as such I expect to encounter further resonances between research in digital literature and audiobook studies as I pursue this methodology. The final research products will include an original audiobook that I will write, record, and produce, accompanied by a dissertation that will exegetically reflect on the creative process and synthesize these findings with close listenings of existing audiobooks. This reflexive creative praxis will allow me to examine the processes and decisions involved audiobook creation (including writing, performance, and audio production) and their impacts on the audiobook as a literary object.

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