

# Unreliability and Infrastructural Meaning-Making in Storytelling Podcasts

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This paper will explore strategies of aural meaning-making and the presumably innate unreliable narrative structure and content of audio narrations. The three chosen case studies, 'Midst' (2020-24), 'Welcome to Night Vale' (2015-) and 'Silt Verses' (2021-24) are free-to-access narrative podcasts featuring a mixture of horror, science-fiction, and fantasy elements and offering diverse blends of scripted and improvised practices of storytelling. It is their contextualisation of unreliability and utilisation of aurality to present stories about ambiguity that this paper intends to foreground. 'Midst,' for instance, is mediated by three anonymous voices who tend to question and semi-improvise their respective contributions, which is tied into the moral contradictions governing their storyworld. Despite being presented by a single fictional radio host, 'Welcome to Night Vale' likewise utilises its soundscape and biased authoritative instance to present questionable information as irrefutable facts. The 'Silt Verses,' similar in its Lovecraftian tonality to the previous examples, intertwines the narrative practices of unreliable narrators with theological and ethical discourses.

The uttered word is in all three cases presented as flexible and bound to shift, bend, and be entirely negated, along with everything that can be assumed about the podcasts' fictional worlds. How can audio narratives that are inherently unstable and transformative convey a cohesive narrative and how do they adapt similar practices of unreliable narration present in written texts? I will argue that these podcasts are permeated by contextual, narratological and socio-spatial infrastructures that constitute their stories while still maintaining their invoked orality and spontaneity. Following, among others, Brian Larkin's (2013) and Kelly M. Rich et al.'s (2023) recent approaches to adapting infrastructures for the humanities, I will define them as deliberately constructed entities through which relations are made possible. The podcasts' infrastructures then are essential means of meaning-making, that work with and through their narratives' heterogeneity and paradoxes, instead of mitigating their potentiality.