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# Radio and Audiobook Acting. Comparative Analysis of Two Audio Productions of *The Master and Margarita*

Tomáš Bojda

## Abstract

This study analyses the differences and commonalities of acting in traditional radio production and audiobooks. Using the examples of two adaptations of Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita*, a radio dramatisation directed by Jiří Horčíčka (1987) and an audiobook by Natálie Deáková (2021), it deals with the differences between the two audio treatments, noting the ways in which the literary subject is creatively concretised through the audio medium and the relationship between the literary text and its vocal interpretation. The aim of the study is to define the specificities and name the typical practices of actor-interpretation within radio and audiobook production. Methodologically, the analysis is based on the structural semiotics of acting, as proposed by Jiří Veltruský for the context of drama acting.

## Key words

radio production, audiobook, radio acting, radio dramatisation, *The Master and Margarita*, Mikhail Bulgakov

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The aim of this study is to name the common characteristics and creative differences of acting in two types of audio productions: traditional radio production and audiobook. The article focuses on two audio productions of Mikhail Bulgakov's masterpiece *The Master and Margarita*: the radio dramatisation is from 1987 (dramatisation by Jan Vedral, dir. Jiří Horčíčka), and the audiobook was published in 2021 (dir. Natálie Deáková). However, taking into account two adaptations of the same novel is not intended to lead to analyses of the whole productions, nor to detailed analyses of individual actor performances; rather, this assignment serves as a starting point and a basis for a broader reflection on the development of Czech radio acting and audio acting in general, since it is not only radio in which the actor presents the character exclusively through the voice. The two adaptations of *The Master and Margarita* provide a useful ground for this research, as these are two representative audio productions that have significantly enriched the expressive potential of the given medium.

At a time when original radio production is overshadowed by audiobooks, at least in terms of media publicity, I think it is appropriate to reflect on the relationship between radio production and audiobook production and to examine to what extent audiobook production can be seen as a relevant artistic discipline with its own creative potentials or whether it is rather a derivative practice of radio production. Additionally, it is worth focusing on how and to what extent directing and especially acting differ between radio and audiobook productions, when in both cases listeners repeatedly encounter the same literary works and the same actors and directors. When examining radio acting, the methodology applied here stems from the structural semiotics of acting as applied by Jiří Veltruský in the context of theatre. However, I subsume acting work within the broader perspective of the actor's creative collaboration with the director, as I postulate the hypothesis that the former cannot be fully explored without the latter.<sup>1</sup> The focus of the study is therefore mainly on the analysis of the aesthetic regularities and relations between radio and audiobook acting. The research should reveal to what extent and in what ways audiobook interpretation differs from traditional radio acting, and where the shared and contradicting aspects of acting lie, sometimes called '*invisible*'<sup>2</sup> (STRAKOVÁ 1988). For methodological clarification, I emphasise that due to minimal existing theoretical background, some basic aspects of the given problem have yet to be discussed and clarified terminologically.

## Czech radio tradition and Mikhail Bulgakov

Before addressing the acting itself, it is necessary to say a few words about the literary work, its author, and his presence on Czechoslovak Radio.

The works of Mikhail Bulgakov are widely available in the Czech Republic, mainly thanks to the translations of Alena Morávková, who is also the author of the

1 I have discussed this thesis in detail in my book *Herec a režisér v rozhlase: Kapitoly z tvorby Jiřího Horčíčky a Josefa Melče* [Actor and Director in Radio Drama: The Case of Jiří Horčíčka and Josef Melč], see (BOJDA 2020).

2 Unless indicated otherwise, all translations of the sources are mine.

monographic study *Křížová cesta Michaila Bulgakova* [The Way of the Cross of Mikhail Bulgakov] (MORÁVKOVÁ 1996). First radio adaptations of Bulgakov's works appeared in the country before 1989: the most famous being Vedral and Horčíčka's (1987) production of *The Master and Margarita* in Czech. The fact that Vedral and Horčíčka's productions could be broadcasted can be seen as an example of the easing of the Normalisation censorship in the late 1980s; Mikhail Bulgakov's works were not published in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s. The productions were carried out by drama producers on the radio, where such demanding adaptations were otherwise produced, and, – paradoxically, given the type of subject matter – by a team responsible for children and youth programmes. Such an approach was a dramaturgically significant symbol of the advent of a more politically daring dramaturgy. In general, productions of the original works, as well as literary adaptations and dramatisations, rich in political metaphors and symbols were put on air towards the end of the 1980s. In the 1960s, the Brno editorial team produced Bulgakov's drama about the life of the Russian poet Pushkin, *The Last Days* (dir. Vladimír Vozák, 1964); it was the first Czech radio adaptation of one of Bulgakov's works. In the 1990s and after 2000, a number of adaptations of Bulgakov's works appeared on the radio: *Notes on the Cuffs* (dir. Jan Tůma, 1990), *Heart of a Dog* (dir. Pavel Linhart, 1990), *The Fatal Eggs* (dir. Jaromír Ostrý, 1992), *Pontius Pilate* (dir. Hana Kofránková, 2002), *Theatrical Novel* (dir. Hana Kofránková, 2011).

*The Master and Margarita* had three productions in total: the first is the aforementioned Vedral's three-part stereo dramatisation from 1987; the second is an unabridged monologue reading directed by Hana Kofránková with Jiří Ornest as the only reader from 2011<sup>3</sup>; and in 2021, an unabridged audiobook was published by Audiotéka, directed by Natálie Deáková and featuring sixty actors. Horčíčka's production and Deák's audiobook were based on Alena Morávková's translation (BULGAKOV 1969), while Hana Kofránková's reading was based on Libor Dvořák's translation (BULGAKOV 2005).

I see the publication of the audiobook of *The Master and Margarita* as an impulse for theoretical-analytical reflection on the development of audio production, especially with regard to the development and specification of the possibilities of audio acting. I consider the audiobook adaptation of Bulgakov's novel to be in many ways a groundbreaking work of Czech audiobook production, as this production, in terms of the sound and the participation of a large acting team, indicates the extent to which audiobooks are expanding their creative potential from 'ordinary' one-voice readings towards audio narratives that resemble radio plays or series. Interestingly, although Bulgakov's novel had already had two radio adaptations, the audiobook publisher

3 The monologic reading with Jiří Ornest does not strive for a sonically plastic representation of the literary subject, as is the case with the other two productions, which I will discuss next. Its dominant feature is naturally the performance of a single performer. Jiří Ornest was one of the most frequently cast performers of radio readings, for example, he has long collaborated with director Hana Kofránková. Also in *The Master and Margarita*, the actor demonstrated his ability to sensitively shade positions of meaning. His delivery is characterised by a calm temporality; it is internally engaged and convincing, but not expressive. He does not attack the listener in the first place with vocal stylisation; he is able to make even an epic and thought-intensive plot present in a refined delivery.

nevertheless entered the market with a new production that takes a markedly different approach than previous radio adaptations. It is also worth noting that by adapting *The Master and Margarita*, audiobooks are to a certain extent breaking away from the rather lighter genres that have dominated the audiobook market so far, typically detective stories, thrillers, fantasy novels, science fiction, or romance stories.

## The novel and its modifications

Bulgakov wrote *The Master and Margarita* in 1928–1940, making the final touches shortly before his death, when he was already seriously ill, and dictated the text to his wife Yelena.<sup>4</sup> The novel is an unusually layered work in terms of composition, plot, as well as thought horizons, numerous religious, philosophical, and literary references, metaphors, symbols, but, among other things, the novel should be seen as an allegory of Stalinist Russia in the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> It is probably due to the wide interpretive possibilities that Bulgakov's novel has become one of the most frequently adapted literary works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the world, and there have been numerous film, television, theatre, and radio adaptations. Provocative is the very grotesque setting of the novel, the constant intermingling of real and fantasy motifs, which makes the novel often perceived as a representative of magic realism. However, at the heart of the plot is the simultaneous development of the Faustian and Pilatean myths, which frame a series of ironic details, humorous puns, lyrical images, and subtle satire.

The central theme of Bulgakov's work, the conflict between the artist and the totalitarian world, is also at the heart of Jan Vedral's script.<sup>6</sup> Vedral's radio dramatisation is composed in three parts: each part has a running time of approximately one hour, so the total length of the production reaches three hours. It is a textual adaptation that not only accommodates the particular directorial nature of Jiří Horčíčka, with whom Vedral had long collaborated, but also directly presupposes a directorial completion, especially with regard to the stereo realisation. In this vein, Vedral also wrote for Horčíčka, for example, a nine-part dramatisation of Werfel's novel *Čtyřicet dnů* [Forty Days] (1999), as well as his other plays and adaptations of literary works from the 1980s and 1990s (*Urmefisto*, 1987; *Delfy* [Delphi], 1989; *Dabér* [The Dubber], 1996; and others). In this sense, Vedral, as a representative of the emerging young generation of dramaturgs in the mid-1980s, was following a long-standing creative convention in which radio dramaturgy faced the substitution of more demanding original works by adaptations of classic works of the world and Czech literature, especially dramatisations of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian novels. Dramatisations of lengthy novels such as Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (dir. Jiří Horčíčka, 1978),

4 For other circumstances regarding the creation of the work and the end of Bulgakov's life, see (BULGAKOV and BULGAKOVA 2013).

5 On the overlapping ideas and contexts of the novel, see e.g., (MIKULÁŠEK 2004: 163–190).

6 See Milan Uhde's preface to the collection of Vedral's plays *Dramatik* [Dramatist] (VEDRAL 2017: 24).

Goncharov's *Oblomov* (dir. Josef Melč, 1979), Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don* (dir. Jiří Horčíčka, 1982), Dostoyesky's *Crime and Punishment* (dir. Josef Melč, 1981) and *The Idiot* (dir. Josef Melč, 1982), and Gogol's *Taras Bulba* (dir. Alena Adamcová, 1983) were always textual adaptations that, on the one hand, did not eliminate the specific epic aspect of the given work, but, at the same time, aimed at dramatic condensation, concentration of the plot with respect to key situations, accentuation of the characters' development, their conflicts, and character arcs. Jan Czech has aptly called this type of radio dramatisation the *epic-dramatic type* (CZECH 1987: 172–173). He has emphasised the parallel coexistence of both literary types, epic and drama, whereby the radio production preserves the epic framework of the subject matter, but at the same time reduces its subplots, concentrating on the novel's basic themes, which it develops in sound. These dramatisations, whose most prominent creator was undoubtedly the dramaturg Jaroslava Strejčková, relied on the figure of the narrator, who usually represented the author's point of view, but was also a functional principle of the directorial concept: the narrator represented the dynamising subject of the narration; his lines symbolised the editing, segmented the plot, and helped to clarify implied plotlines. Although Vedral's adaptation of *The Master and Margarita* seemingly followed previous adaptations of the Russian classics, his dramatisation differed from them in many ways, too. For instance, Vedral adapted not a 19<sup>th</sup>-century work, but a modern author, a politically exposed one, whose works were not allowed to be published in the Soviet Union for many years. Vedral's dramatisation did not rely on a narrator: his role was 'dissolved' among other actors. He took advantage of the specific structure of Bulgakov's novel and differentiated various acting plans, whose integrating factor he made the editing that rhythms the narrative. Moreover, Vedral stylised Jerusalem and Moscow, the two basic spatio-temporal planes of the novel, differently in terms of the language of the characters and the scenic sound design.

Horčíčka's direction emphasises the structured nature of Vedral's script, adds a plastic sound component, and relies on the performances of top Czech performers of the time, such as Miloš Kopecký as Woland, Ladislav Frej as the Master, Helena Friedrichová as Margarita, Josef Vinklář as Behemoth, Jan Teplý as Azazello, Eduard Cupák as Pontius Pilate, and Viktor Preiss as Yeshua Ha-Notsri. An important stylistic aspect of Horčíčka's direction is the interpretive differentiation of the storylines: While Woland is stylised grotesquely, appearing half-civil, half-ethereal, and eloquent, Kopecký's lines are punctuated by a constant alternation of expression, from ornamental intonation and articulatory whims – Kopecký's characteristic stress on the first syllable, a sweet timbre accentuating Woland's diabolical power – to a matter-of-fact diction suggesting the gravity of the words, distinguishing him from civilian characters such as Bezdomny or Berlioz. Conversely, in the apocryphal narrative concerning the trial of Yeshua/Jesus, the characters tend towards historicising stylisation.

Following the great acclaim of the radio production and also at the request of Miloš Kopecký, Vedral subsequently adapted the script for the Vinohrady Theatre, where he was then head dramaturg and Kopecký was one of the leading members of the

ensemble.<sup>7</sup> While Vedral adapted the text in some respects to the stage production, he preserved the polyphonic framework of the dramatisation, which, like the radio production, intertwined the time-spaces of 1930s Moscow and Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' trial. The stage production,<sup>8</sup> directed by Jaroslav Dudek, was subtitled '*revuální pašije*' (the Passion Revue), but it too was based on the performance of Miloš Kopecký, who also saw the character of Woland as a personal reckoning with his own political transgressions (e.g., in 1984, participation in the strongly pro-regime television programme *Krok do neznáma* [Step into the Unknown], which was directed against emigrants) and accentuated the ambivalence of the character of Woland.<sup>9</sup> With his conception of the character, Kopecký developed Vedral's plan to perceive Woland as a metaphorical representative of an invisible but omnipresent power, thematising the manipulative practices of the totalitarian power apparatus through him. Alena Morávková highlights Kopecký's ability to interpret Woland as 'an ironic sceptic, a wise judge, a demonic ruler, and a clown who loves to play' (MORÁVKOVÁ 1996: 177).

As for the radio production of the novel, although Vedral's dramatisation and Jiří Horčíčka's stereo sound direction necessarily shifted Bulgakov's text in terms of meaning and by changing the accents also modified the aesthetics of the work, the stylistic and ideological principles of the text were mostly preserved. Vedral transposed the epic motifs of the novel into dramatic situations, condensed the plot, and wrote the individual dialogues with a sense of dynamic and the clash of individual characters and plot or plotlines.

In the case of the audiobook edition of *The Master and Margarita*, we cannot speak of a dramatisation of the novel, as the epic literary text has not been adapted into a dramatic script. The text of the novel was only read out in an unabridged form, i.e., performed by a total of sixty actors; the total length of the audiobook is fifteen and a half hours. In addition to an unusually large cast, the director Deáková has added an impressive musical and sound design. This method of audiobook production is what the publishing house itself calls 'superproduction'<sup>10</sup>: it has its roots in Poland, where Audiotéka has already released several literary works in this way, including *The Master and Margarita*. The Czech audiobook is based on the Polish version, taking over the sound design and effects created by Stereotyp Studio.<sup>11</sup> However, the acting remains original, with each character created by a different actor. This trend is still not quite common on the audiobook market, but one of the reasons for this is the cost of such recordings, which involve the participation of many actors.

In this version of *The Master and Margarita*, we can hear Jiří Lábus as Woland, Martin Myšička as the Master, Anna Fialová as Margarita, Viktor Preiss as Pontius Pilate, Petr

7 For the text of the dramatisation, see (VEDRAL 2017: 239–347).

8 Prem. 3. 5. 1989.

9 Due to Miloš Kopecký's serious health problems, the role of Woland was eventually taken over by Ilja Racek, and towards the end of the staging was played by Ladislav Frej.

10 See <https://audioteka.com/cz/audiobook/mistr-a-marketka-audioteka>.

11 See <https://audioteka.com/cz/audiobook/mistr-a-marketka-audioteka>.

Čtvrtníček as Behemoth, and Leoš Noha as Azazello. The whole audiobook is narrated by Petr Lněnička, who represents the objective function of a literary narrator. He is not biased for any of the acting characters and reads the text as an objective speaker.

Deáková's audiobook was widely acclaimed, won the Audiobook of the Year award, and drew attention to certain tendencies in production and, most importantly, to the possibilities available to the producers of contemporary audiobooks.<sup>12</sup> Despite the positive reception, a critical analysis and, above all, a reflection on the presentation of the work itself is in order. The term 'superproduction' aims to convince the listener that he or she is about to listen to 'something great' and unprecedented. In a way, the listener could accept this marketing ploy, because such a demanding audiobook production is really unprecedented on the Czech market. However, similar terms can be used to describe a number of other radio productions, including Vedral and Horčíčka's dramatisation of the same novel, which is also a demanding production, undoubtedly more demanding in terms of artistic complexity (dramatisation of the work, directorial concept, acting, sound and musical component) than the audiobook one. We see here a typical product of marketing culture, which needs to sell itself, suggesting to the listener a special category to which it aims to belong.

Let us define the extra quality that the audiobook version of *The Master and Margarita* has to offer. These are (1) a large ensemble of leading actors, and (2) a challenging sound design. The acting, of course, is subject to the choice and direction of Natália Deáková; in this case, it is the original quality of the new production. Its sound design, however, is taken over by the production and director from the Polish original, so it is, for all the imaginative execution, a kind of *licensing franchise*. Deáková worked with an existing sound effects bank from the Polish audiobook, which she used with Czech actors.<sup>13</sup> The sound design already existed prior to Deáková's audiobook, thus undoubtedly foreshadowing the director's consideration of the actors' direction and the overall sound structure of the work. The format of the audiobook, reproducing the literary text in its unabridged form, is not only limited by the necessity not to digress from the original text, but also from the given sound design.

The pivotal difference in the two productions, the radio and the audiobook, lies at first glance in the way they work with the text: while the 1987 radio production aimed at a significant abridgment of the novel and its new dramatic composition in the form of three one-hour parts (broadcasted with intervals in between, not all at once), the audiobook consists of fifteen hours of unabridged work, which the listener can stop and resume again at will. These production differences anticipate all the other creative problems the directors of the works in question have to face. Similarly, the format of the work itself also fundamentally influences the acting.

12 See <https://naposlech.cz/audiokniha-roku/vitezove-cen-audiokniha-roku-2021>.

13 See <https://audioteka.com/cz/audiobook/mistr-a-marketka-audioteka>.



## The production conventions of audiobooks

Compared to classical audiobooks, which tend to be based on the narration of a single narrator, the participation of many actors allows for a greater subjectivisation of individual characters, their psychological profiling, more expressive acting, and in some cases, for example, the deliberate accentuation of multiple points of view or the differentiation of narrative perspectives. On the other hand, it is not statable that an audiobook with a single narrator is necessarily less expressive and less plastic than a 'super-production' with many actors. The key role here is played by the directorial concept, which is, of course, anticipated by the literary genre of the subject matter, the typology of the characters and also the technical disposition of the actor. In the now iconic audiobook production of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001), for example, Jiří Lábus distinguished the voice-acting characters so distinctly that the audience not only did not miss the presence of other actors, but also appreciated Lábus's vocal virtuosity. His acting performance, differentiating modulation and timbre positions, transitions from deeply sonorous timbre to stylised falsettos provided for a sense of comedy and credibility of the fantasy genre. In the immediate transitions between characters, the actor can engage his ability of vocal gesture and mimicry, which he achieves primarily through vocal modulation and intonation. However, specifically in the fantasy genre, some of the characteristics deliberately tend towards a caricatural hyperbolisation of the character, in which a similarly pronounced stylisation is to be expected (supernatural characters such as the dwarf, the giant, etc.).

The audiobook market is nowadays a dynamically developing sector of audio production. Its development and prestige are rooted in the participation of radio-trained professionals; in terms of working with literary subject matter, radio and audiobooks share a number of creative aspects. In particular, the need to give an actor's voice to a literary work, i.e., to enrich an artistically significant or otherwise attractive work (most often a novel) with the performance of a suitably selected actor. In 2022, the first monograph on audiobooks was published in Czech, reflecting the history, technical and creative process of the creation of audiobooks and including numerous actors' impressions on individual productions (see VAVREČKA and SMOLÍKOVÁ 2022). Yet, the publication by Lukáš Vavrečka and Klára Smolíková *Nečtu! Poslouchám* [I Don't Read! I Listen] does not have the ambition of an academic monograph. It is a popularising, sometimes too vague, sometimes surprisingly inspiring mosaic of various observations on the issue of vocal interpretation of literary works. At the same time, this book also suggests that the ambitions of audiobooks are shifting considerably; their creators no longer aspire to the mere marketing link of 'famous subject - famous actor', but attempt more challenging realisations that count on original sound design, sound effects, and actor-styled parts for individual roles. The interpretation of the characters is no longer meant to be just a 'reading' of the text, but rather an actor's rendition - a reading enriched with psychological motivations to be revealed by vocal expression.

Nevertheless, audiobook productions can look very different, from unabridged readings of lengthy novels to dramatised readings; they can feature a single narrator, two actors (actor – actress), several actors, even dozens of actors. The quality of sound design also varies widely; some audiobook productions rely solely on the voice of the actor and its connection to the text, with the voice framed at most by an opening and closing musical motif; in other cases, the director works with combinations of music, sound, silence, and spoken word. The tendency towards plasticity and sound design, which nearly equals to the cinema production and aims for the most comprehensive listening experience, is undeniable in the current development of audiobooks. However, despite the increasing importance of directorial intervention, audiobooks remain based on the voice performance of the actor interpreting the text. Compared to radio acting, the role of the audiobook actor is paradoxically reduced to the text itself. Whereas the radio actor *creates* the character, mimetically illustrating the character's actions, conflicts, and dramatic arc, the audiobook performer rather vocally *illustrates* the text. But even this definition cannot be fully satisfying; it applies generally to the two varying auditory formats rather than delivering a definitive perspective of the whole issue. If we look at the encyclopaedic entries on 'acting' and the academic reflections on this important part of the dramatic arts, we find that different authors agree on the same thing: acting cannot be understood only as the traditional *portrayal* of a role, where the actor's character denotes the actions of the dramatic person; acting is understood as a broad field of creative performance art, and it must be seen *universally*. Petr Pavlovský (2004) also counts singers, musicians, or dancers who perform in musical or dance theatre, stage performers (hosts, presenters), and others among actors. Just as the visual means (movement, gesture, mimicry) are the material of the actor in the case of stage work, the vocal components are also important. These become dominant in the case of audio production (Pavlovský (2004: 112) uses the term 'phonography'). Although the actor of an audiobook like *The Master and Margarita*, in which he coexists with sixty colleagues, is forced to follow the original literary text rather than the script of the radio adaptation and has less possibilities of expression, this mode of audio performance also fulfils aspects of *acting*: the actor works with the same means of expression as in the case of a radio production, *portraying* a specific role, *creating* a character profile through, for example, characteristic colouring of intonation, diction, or timbre. However, his endeavour is restricted by the production itself, especially the framework of the unabridged reading.

When Balzac died, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, the most respected critic of French literature at the time, wrote that 'three things must be analysed in a novel: characters, plot, style' (SAINTE-BEUVE 1969: 141). There is no doubt that these three components of a literary work represent the core of the adaptation problem and the base for dramaturgical conception and creative production of a novel, not only in radio but in any medium. In the case of dramatisation, however, it is always the three aforementioned components in particular that radio creators have to represent in the production, to give them, in the words of Jan Lopatka, a corresponding '*sound objectivation*' (LOPATKA 1964: 61). According to Lopatka (1964), the radio creator should

not go beyond the creative principle/artistic style of the subject matter. In radio, which is a logocentric medium, actors, their stylisation, and the directorial direction that composes the sound structure of the production through and around the actors is central. In a dramatisation, and consequently in a radio production, the characters are created by the actors, who are also the carriers of the plot; the speech of the characters, the expressive and semantic quality of the speech, contributes significantly to the exposition of the style of the work. But can similar claims be made for audiobooks, and for reading in general, which does not allow actors to create characters in an actorly way, but directs them to merely read the direct speech of the characters externally? It has already been said that the creative possibilities of radio reading and audiobooks are many, and far from being a schematic discipline where the actor simply reads the text, however fluently and sophisticatedly, enriching it with his or her distinctive vocal delivery and unique colour, to which listeners like to return.

The reading in continuation, of which the audiobook is also a specific form, is based on a literary text that is unabridged, i.e., dramaturgically unedited. It is subject to a fixed literary form as intended by the writer who *tells* the story to the readers in his work. Even if we do not subsequently read the text in an intimate setting for ourselves, but listen to it performed by a professional actor, we still only hear the same story *told* differently; the overall mode of audio narration could be examined through the lens of audio-narratology (HUWILER 2005). This narration, however, is spiced up in comparison to the original text precisely by the way it is performed by the actors. As much as the actors may meticulously adhere to the text and its emotional and semantic colouring, they nevertheless enrich it in a certain way expressively, they complete it and therefore *portray* it. Here the narrative is *presented, performed*, a new artistic artefact is created. Although the actor's work is limited by short sections of individual lines that the actor performs, even these are accompanied by appropriate expressive stylisation. It is thus an interpretive art, close in nature to acting in traditional radio productions, although the actor is not given such a wide range of performative opportunities. It is, however, hypothetically possible that an actor, even with a limited text material in an audiobook, can create a more vivid character, more accurately profiling and psychologically depicting it in immediate detail, than another actor in the wider field of radio production might otherwise. But these possibilities will always remain hypothetically possible; no universal axioms about the possibilities of acting make much sense in this regard. Generally speaking, radio productions usually offer more opportunities for detailed characterisation, building the character's dramatic arc and exposing the character's development within the work; the audiobook has these possibilities greatly reduced by its close connection to the text, where the direct speech delivered by the actor is interrupted by the narrator with comments such as 'said Pilate', 'answered Yeshua', etc. One of the crucial structural changes in the dramatisation of the novel, nevertheless, is the dialogisation of the text, which accommodates the actor's action, reducing epic parts in favour of dramatic ones; the plot is segmented into a scene sequence, which creates a more direct narrative construction. The audiobook, however, does not count on these modes of realisation; its starting point is the epic, in which

dialogue or monologue forms only one of many constitutive components, not the dominant one.

## Structural Semiotics and (not only) voice acting

Although research on acting was not one of the key research areas of Czech theatre structuralism, there are works by at least two theoreticians that are still inspiring today. These are structural analyses by Jan Mukařovský, in particular his study *Pokus o strukturní rozbor hereckého zjevu* [An Attempt at Structural Analysis of the Actor's Appearance] (MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1971), in which the author used the tools of structural semiotics to analyse Charlie Chaplin's acting in the film *City Lights*, and Jiří Veltruský's extensive study *Příspěvek k sémiologii herectví* [Contribution to the Semiology of Acting] (VELTRUSKÝ 1994), which is part of a larger collection of Veltruský's writings published under the title *Příspěvky k teorii divadla*<sup>14</sup> [Contributions to the Theory of Theatre].<sup>15</sup> However, although the various acting disciplines are strictly distinguished by their specific creative requirements (live action in theatre, visual perspective in film, emphasis on the voice as the actor's only instrument in radio, etc.), I have attempted to demonstrate elsewhere, following Veltruský and Mukařovský, that on a theoretical level, radio acting can also be perceived as a specific structure of components, as a sign. Just as in the case of theatre Veltruský's thesis '*everything that is on the stage is a sign*' (VELTRUSKÝ 1994: 44) applies, this assumption can also be made in the case of radio production (CROOK 1999; SCHMEDES 2002). The creator of a radio production is the director, who composes the sound structure around the acting component. The director guides the actors to an adequate acting of the dramatic person. The actor has at his disposal for his interpretation the means of expression, in Veltruský's words '*the components of the actor's character*' (VELTRUSKÝ 1994: 77), whose creative involvement, rearrangement and deliberate dynamics in favour of the dramatic expression creates specific situations, emotional states of the character, characterises the characters, reveals their motivations and creates a dramatic arc by thoughtfully layering their speech. An actor's means of expression in radio include timbre, modulation, diction, intonation, articulation, intensity of voice, breath, phrasing, tempo-rhythm, expiration, and hesitation sounds. The actor handles these devices semantically, using them to denote specific meanings: the actor may express the character's annoyance typically by expression, for example, by increasing the intensity of the voice, by moving to shouting, but equally functionally in other cases, for example, by lowering the voice, aggressive diction, intonational stresses or combinations of these components. Structural analysis of an actor's character can reveal the means of expression used by the actor to portray the character. Through observing which means of expression they

14 Veltruský formulates stimulating theses on the semiotics of acting in the book.

15 In *Actor and Director in Radio Drama*, I postulate a way of applying Veltruský's approach to the semiotics of acting for the purpose of analysing radio acting performance (BOJDA 2020: 32–64).

use most often and how, we can determine the dominance of the actor's interpretation and observe the differences in the actor's conception of different characters, the counterpoints of the actor's component with other components of the sound structure (sound, music, silence), the directorial organisation of this structure, as well as the directorial manipulation of the actor's performance – adding details, panoramas, capturing movement on the stage, and working with depth of field.

Structural analysis of acting has already been tested in the field of radio production (see CZECH 1987; BOJDA 2020), but academic reflection on acting in audiobooks has not been published in the Czech Republic or abroad. English-language books on radio acting tend to focus on practice: they are mainly textbooks of proper microphone delivery (BERRY 1973; BECK 1997). In German theory, the semiotics of radio production was developed, for example, by Götz Schmedes (2002), but he was not primarily concerned with acting. If the actor is a key part of a radio work, and the listener focuses primarily on them and their acting, this is perhaps even more true in the case of audiobooks. There is, however, a difference in the structure of radio production and audiobook: in a radio production, the actor interprets, *acts* as a character; in an audiobook, the role of the performer becomes somewhat ambivalent – the narrator of the work, i.e., the voice of the author, is seemingly only the narrator. On the other hand, the performers of the individual characters read the parts of their characters, but at the same time they make them more expressive, i.e., also seemingly *act*. The difference between this acting is about the same as between the narrator of a radio production and the narrator of an audiobook. Whereas in a radio production the listener perceives that the narrator is a character of their own, attributed by the dramatist for specific narrative and compositional reasons, and their stylisation is highly variable, ranging from objective descriptions of the plot to an expressively stylised character who actively intervenes in the plot by interacting with other characters (e.g., as in Melč's production of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*), in an audiobook the narrator represents the author and the authority of the text. In a sense, the narrator of the audiobook replaces the listener's eyes: if the listener was not listening to the work but reading it, they would perceive exactly the same text, objectified by a fixed literary form. Since the actor's interpretation of audiobooks and radio productions relies solely on the vocal resources of the actor, the actors in both cases work with the same means of expression; the difference lies in the degree and possibilities of their functional artistic activation.

The listener perceives the reading of a literary work solely through the voice of the performer, so it is important *how* the actor interprets the subject. This applies not only to audiobooks, but also to the traditional radio genre of monologue readings. In the 1950s, when readings were one of the mainstays of literary and dramatic broadcasting, radio relied on the popularity of the actor, but also on his or her technical availability and inner passion for the work presented in the radio reading. Here, the actor's expression was always subject to the genre stylisation of the work, its language and literary style, which the actor had to encompass and vocally transpose so that the listener was not deprived of the specific qualities of the literary subject. Therefore, as for František

Filipovský in Poláček's humorous novel *Bylo nás pět* [We Were a Handful] (1953), he chose a voice stylisation corresponding to an adolescent boy who tries to sound older and wiser than his age. Filipovský's ability to vocally represent a child's world does not come across as violent to this day; it is not a parody or a caricature, but a subtly refined and appropriate vocal characterisation that offers the listener a plastic projection of the given fictional world. Karel Höger gave a similarly stylised performance in Těsnohlídek's *Liška Bystrouška* [The Cunning Little Vixen] (1962), where the Brno dialect became a functional part of the vocal stylisation, which Höger mastered and made a source of affectionate humour and rhythm in his reading.<sup>16</sup> This principle, however, also applies outside of similarly stylised materials on the Czech market: for example, in 2012, director Ivan Chrz filmed a monologue reading from Chateaubriand's *Memoirs from Beyond the Grave*, where the director needed to vocally typify a reflective nobleman looking back on his life. He cast Alfred Strejček as the reader, an actor with an unmistakable, characteristically deep, soothing, meditative timbre. Strejček's vocal typification of the old Chateaubriand as a refined diplomat at the end of his life's journey is, moreover, supported by a musical motif from Chopin's *Funeral March* right at the beginning, thus suggesting the author's final accounting, a look back at the work he has done. The combination of Chopin's music and Strejček's vocal delivery creates an effective synergy, through which the listener better perceives the aristocratic milieu that Chateaubriand describes, imagining his participation in the major political events of his time. Monological reading leads to economy, the choice of precisely nuanced characterisation, anchoring the genre and style of the work; there is no place for ostentatious interpretive gestures.

With the arrival of dialogised and dramatised readings, the genre definition of the reading itself became problematic, since the aesthetics of the work is no longer shaped by the personality and expression of one performer, but by several actors. In this sense, the development of audiobooks seems to follow the development of radio practice – from the elementary presentation of one actor to more demanding productions with many performers. However, while it is not customary to present unabridged versions of novels in radio readings, audiobooks are based precisely on this one-to-one representation. I agree here with Pavlovský's understanding of the universality of acting: Pavlovský (2004) is of course talking mainly about theatrical acting, in our case a similar conception of acting can also be applied to radio acting. In this case, I see the performance of readings or audiobooks as an actor's creation *sui generis*, having its own peculiar creative rules, which, however, by their nature and especially by the technological conditionality of the audio work, correspond to the specificity of radio acting.

From a certain point of view, we can perhaps perceive the monologic reading of an audiobook or a traditional radio reading in one voice as an actor's task only partially, and a comparison with the issue of artistic performance and radio interpretation of

16 See Michal Čunderle's inspiring analysis in *Dialogy řeči* [Dialogues of Speech] (ČUNDERLE 2013: 27–30).

poetry is obvious here. The actor/performer here is not obliged, or even expected, to *portray* a literary work, poem, or novel, in an actorly manner. At the same time, however, *portrayal* is not the only definitory characteristic of acting; we understand acting as a broad field of artistic activity (various kinds of auteur theatre, new circus, or performance art do not work with acting in the sense of portraying a character). An actor does not perform a text without any artistic participation, but in fact, on the contrary, he or she *portrays* it, enriches it with his or her own artistic qualities: through his or her performance, he or she can emphasise certain characteristics of the text, such as melody, euphony, rhythm, accents, linguistic composition. These aspects of the poetic text, on the other hand, fundamentally prefigure the performer's delivery, since a poetic text always possesses specific sonic qualities that should be taken into account by the performer.<sup>17</sup> Of course, reading a novel is not a comparable acting task to the performance of Andrei Bolkonsky in the dramatisation of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* or Gobseck in the dramatisation of Balzac's short story of the same name; simultaneously, it is a distinctive performative task for which the performer must master the technique of vocal (and radio-specific) expression.<sup>18</sup> There are actors who are renowned as excellent performers of poetry, even those whose performance of a poet's works has created a lasting connection between the actor and the poet: many Czech readers still think of Luděk Munzar's performance when reading the poems of František Hrubín (1910–1971), just as we think of Radovan Lukavský when reading the works of Jan Zahradníček (1905–1960) or Vladimír Holan (1905–1980), and of Jiří Adamíra in case of Arthur Rimbaud (1854–1891). Similarly, Karel Höger and František Filipovský have managed to deliver in such an adequate way (given their poetics) that their performance remains permanently etched in the minds of the audience. However, the choice of the performer is always a decision for the director, who should be able to find possible intersections in the poetics of the author and the creative possibilities of the performer. The same applies, as mentioned above, to one-voice readings. However, when a reading or performance of poetry is composed for multiple voices, dramaturgical and directorial intent must be considered in the first place. Why is a given work planned for this number of actors, what does the director want to achieve in relation to the performance of the original text?

In 2011, Jitka Škápíková, one of the initiators of Czech audiobook production, directed the audiobook of Reginald Rose's original play *Twelve Angry Men*. The dramaturgy (in the case of audiobooks, rather the production) was based on the attractiveness of the subject, which was made famous by Sidney Lumet's 1957 film adaptation. Škápíková chose twelve top actors for the twelve characters of the jurors, on whose

17 See Jan Mukařovský's well-known study *O recitačním umění* [On the Art of Recitation], in which the author turns to Boris Ejchenbaum and Otakar Zich, and elaborates on the issue of recitation from a structural point of view, in relation to the sound properties of the text (MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1948: 211–221).

18 Josef Durdík, an aesthetician, was the first to write in Czech about the problem of artistic performance and the relationship between the poetic text and the technical possibilities of its performance. He formulated his theses at a time when neither audiobooks nor radio existed, but many of his findings remain surprisingly stimulating to this day. See (DURDÍK 1997).

dialogues the whole drama is based, for whom, moreover, it was possible to count on the fact that the listener would immediately identify the actor in voice: their attention would not be overwhelmed by the problem of perceiving many typologically related characters, who, moreover, are united by the same motivation – the verdict. The choice of the play seems to be advantageous precisely because it is staged with an appropriate number of actor-protagonists, who differentiate the individual jurors of the courtroom drama vocally; the recording itself confirms this assumption (the audiobook features famous Czech actors Josef Somr, Viktor Preiss, Petr Kostka, Michal Pavlata, etc.). The situation is different, however, with a large-scale epic novel like *The Master and Margarita*, in which dozens of characters are featured, the work is complexly composed, far from being a compact, dramatically compressed space of one courtroom, but rather several spatiotemporal narrative planes. It is clear that Natálie Deáková's directorial intention here was not based on the need for dramatic condensation, differentiation of characters for the possibility of their clashing and the gradation of the plot, but for the preservation of the epic, polyphonic structure of the novel. The common denominator of the two audiobooks is the importance of appropriate casting, i.e., the *casting of the individual roles* and the *way the work is presented*. In its dramatic conception and staging, *Twelve Angry Men* fulfils all the attributes of a radio production; an ordinary listener would not be able to discern that/why it is not a radio production/adaptation of a play, but an audiobook. The audiobook format here is 'just' a marketing material, a medium for which the creators have produced the work in question with the commercial purpose of 'selling' the work thus produced (a well-known theme, the participation of famous actors); the result of the work in the technical sense (how the production 'sounds' to the listener) is comparable in its execution to a classical radio production. Casting and marketing form a communicating vessel, as it is the casting of popular actors that sells the product on the market.

As mentioned earlier, the audiobook of *The Master and Margarita* has an extraordinarily impressive, evocative sound design, the aim of which is to create plastic images of individual scenes, to arrange the environment on the principle of film narration, where the listener does not have a visual perspective, but the plot unfolds in the mind plastically, like a spectacle in lavish costumes. In this sonic framework, the acting is not the only dominant feature, but part of the overall soundscape. Unlike traditional audiobooks, where the voice of the selected performer is not accompanied by other sound components, at most by symbolic soundtracks at the introduction or partial conclusions of chapters, in 'superproductions' like *The Master and Margarita*, the overall tuning of the audiobook, including the actor's performance, is subject to the sound design. However, sound imagery can also be distracting, as an *over-ornamentation* of digital sound effects, as a proof of what can be expressed in sound. However, in the layered soundscape of an audiobook that is not a dramatisation but an unabridged reading of the entire novel, there is little room for deeper characterisation for the performers. The performers of the individual characters are more or less forced into immediate characterisation of the character, merely vocalising the moods and emotional colouring of individual lines. Paradoxically, deeper characterisation is prevented by



the constant alienating principle of the narrator present, who, after any emotionally expressive line, finishes the rest of the text as ‘answered the Master’, ‘cried out Margaret’. If the listener is constantly reminded that the work is being *read* to them, they are subject to the technology of the medium much more than in the case of a radio production. The ideal purpose of any performance should be for the listener/viewer to be completely absorbed by the work being performed, to accept the laws of its fictional world, to follow the fate of the characters with suspense, and to actually *forget* that they are a part of the illusion and the specific language of the medium. A monologue reading may achieve this effect through the suggestiveness of the delivery of a single performer, but in audiobooks like *The Master and Margarita* we must look for this suggestiveness in the overall organisation of the auditory effect, that is, not just in the unity of the actor’s delivery and the poetic text, but in the combination of the sound design and the actor’s performance. This second option, however, in many ways implies the practice of radio productions, which are expressed not only in words, but in the composition of words, music, sounds, and silence, i.e., the organisation of all the sound components. This implies tasks for the director, whose work on an audiobook of this type (superproduction) is akin to working on a challenging stereo radio production. However, the situation is different in the case of acting. This will now be analysed with specific examples from the two audio productions of Bulgakov’s novel, to see exactly what the difference between acting in the case of a radio production and in the case of an audiobook is.

Before I get to the specific micro-analyses, it is worth pointing out again the importance of casting. Audiobook performers such as the *The Master and Margarita* have a very limited space for more layered character portrayals. This makes the need for an immediate typological connection between performer and their role all the more apparent, so that the individual characters are given appropriate vocal protagonists. Thus, a significant part of Natália Deáková’s directorial task consisted precisely in the casting of the individual parts. Deáková used the possibility to punctuate the listener’s idea of a given character by casting a specific actor with distinctive, typologically unchangeable acting individualities, whose involvement naturally awakens the listener’s horizon of expectations, the specific expressive position to which he/she is accustomed from a given actor.

## Performance, reading, acting, interpretation

The novel *The Master and Margarita* opens with a scene at the Patriarch’s Ponds in Moscow, where a discussion between the poets Berlioz and Bezdomny is interrupted by the sudden appearance of a foreign scholar, Woland, telling the history of Jesus’ trial by Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem. Woland’s narrative continues into a second chapter entitled ‘Pontius Pilate’, which reconstructs the apocryphal story of the trial. While the opening scene is intended to show for the first time the magical personality of Woland and to demonstrate his abilities, integrating the fantastical motifs accompany-

ing Woland into a realistic picture of 1930s Moscow, the following scene in Jerusalem is clearly distinguished by spatio-temporal identification and implies a differentiation of sound stylisation. Let us now compare the two opening scenes in their respective audio productions:

### The scene at the Patriarch's Ponds

In the audiobook, there are no modifications of the text: the parts not belonging to any of the characters are spoken in a neutral tone by the narrator (Petr Lněnička), Bezdomny (Václav Neuzil), and Berlioz (Jan Sklenář) are characterised in a civil manner, and even Woland (Jiří Lábus) does not stand out just yet – the listener perceives his exclusivity from the text rather than from the actor's stylisation. Soon, however, Woland's place in the hierarchy of characters is emphasised by Labus's embellishment of his lines. Unlike the narrator, who remains emotionally distant, Lábus characterises Woland as a knowing, ironic glossator in the very first part. As strictly as the actors adhere to the text, Lábus is able to semanticise in a small space, marking the opinions and intentions of Woland in a manner of expression that contrasts his speech with the other characters. When Woland explains to Berlioz what the ability to control and dominate someone entails, he accompanies his lines with chuckles; he is informal, deliberately fluctuating in tempo, indicating his superiority already by the way he utters each sentence. The structuring of sentences, the phrasing, becomes here an important semantic element of the actor's speech. Although these are details and the listener may not immediately realise why and how the actor creates the situation in particular, he or she gets an adequate actorly representation of the literary subject matter that fixes such a relationship between the characters. Unlike Jiří Horčíčka's production, in the case of the audiobook the actors perform their characters in combination with the part of the narrator. Before the listener hears Woland himself speak, he already learns from the narrator what Woland looks like or how Berlioz and Bezdomny perceive him. The task of the actor-performer is merely to *illustrate* this characterisation, to *represent* it aptly in the immediate situation. On the other hand, all the scenes of the audiobook are logically preserved in their full text, i.e., for example, the opening scene is almost 33 minutes long, whereas the radio dramatisation portrays the same situation in approximately 5 minutes. At the same time, nevertheless, in the radio production the actors are not 'kept' by the narrator's part, the characters react directly to each other, thus having much more space to *act* in individual situations and carry out deeper profiling of the characters. From the beginning of the production, Kopecký's Woland takes on a much more demonic form than in the case of Lábus. What seems more important here is the language itself, namely the vocal rendering, where Kopecký articulates each word with exaggerated care, his diction and the very colouring of his voice suggesting the meaning Woland puts into the words. The paucity of acting in audiobook 'superproduction' cannot be seen as an acting deficiency; it is a specificity of audiobook acting as such.

## The scene at Pontius Pilate's

The typical production plan of the entire audiobook can be observed in even greater detail in the scene at Pontius Pilate's. This scene is also significantly longer than in the radio dramatisation, with a running time of 59 minutes; in the radio adaptation, the same scene is 15 minutes long. In terms of the suggestiveness of the performance, however, there is a problem concerning the whole comparison between the audiobook and the dramatisation: in the audiobook we appreciate *Bulgakov's* text, its method of compositional construction, narrative method, and with them, of course, the method of acting and directorial objectivation; in the radio dramatisation we hear *Vedral's* dramatisation, which condenses Bulgakov's text, concentrates the plot towards its meaning foci and dramatic punch. This is matched by the acting. In the audiobook, Viktor Preiss characterises Pontius Pilate as a tired, sickly man; his speech based on a slow tempo and hoarse timbre, which the actor uses to indicate the physical condition of Pilate, who complains of headaches and fatigue. In contrast, Eduard Cupák's Pilate in Horčíčka's production offers a much more plastic profile and is more emotionally suggestive because it *creates* the situations in question, rather than simply performing, however skillfully, the direct speech in the prose *narrative* being read. I stress that this is not about the quality of the actors' performance, but about the intrinsic possibilities available to them. A performer of one of the sixty roles of the reading cannot create a character as vividly and plastically as an actor of a radio production can create a character that has been written directly for radio – the actors in radio do not, strictly speaking, deliver Bulgakov's, but *Vedral's dramatisation*; they work with *Vedral's* text, which takes into account sound/voice aspects and accommodates them through compositional arrangement, structuring of dialogues, monologues. During the interrogation of Yeshua, portrayed in the radio adaptation by Viktor Preiss (who, after more than thirty years, appears in the opposite role to that of Horčíčka's production), Eduard Cupák uses a whole range of expressive means to portray the situation; the scene is composed as a specific *acoustic image* in which the director presses the actors to advanced expression. Cupák moves across a wide range of vocal intensity, from a strangled half-whisper to an angry scream. He manages to achieve a palpable rage in the character in short periods, but then steers towards a more conciliatory tone, slowing down the vocal expression to a calm tempo. The range of emotions hints at Pilate's doubts and his sense of power and sovereignty, but also marks his physical suffering.

## Character creation vs evocation

In spite of the considerable plot dynamics and the variety of characters, it can be said that the suggested method of interpretation is similar for both audio productions. The opening two scenes, however, establish a production convention, and both recordings subsequently continue within these contours. While the radio production allows the

actors to build the characters in dramatic situations, which the actors act out and organically transform their own vocal expression, the audiobook is more about the immediate vocal gesture, the expressive convention of the voice in which the character moves, however some of the characters experience changing characterisation on the surface of the story. In his review of the audiobook, Přemysl Hnilička wrote:

Above all, however, Jiří Lábus as Woland stands out as an actor. His characteristic and changeable voice manages to express all levels of Woland's strange existence: he is demonic, timid, funny, and terrible. In the second story plane – the apocryphal story of Pontius Pilate and Yeshua Ha-Notsri – Viktor Preiss excels as the tired, exhausted, and knowing Pilate. (HNILIČKA 2021: 20)

The changes in Woland's characterisation are exposed by Labus in the changes in timbre, intonation range, and tempo of speech. However, these changes are more likely to illustrate the text; the changes in the state of mind or motivation of Woland (and other characters) are signalled by the *text* spoken by the narrator, the actor merely *complements* it with the appropriate voice position.

One of the book's climactic passages, the Great Ball at Satan's, is performed in the audiobook as a riveting frolic: the soundscape suggests a swarming crowd in the hall, the rapid pace heightens the nervousness and anticipation that an inevitable tragedy is about to occur. The dynamism of the action is mainly created by the soundscape and the increased pace of the narrator's delivery; the plot suddenly unfolds very quickly, and director Deáková skilfully creates the atmosphere of a magical evening, but the acting itself has little effect on this atmosphere. In contrast, in a comparably sonically and musically plastic radio production, the interaction, the clashing of characters, the dynamics of their dialogues are also the focus of this scene; here the symbolic clash of Woland's magical suite with the 'civil' life of 1930s Moscow reaches its climax.

Returning to Veltruský's classification of the components of an actor's character, we find that while in a radio production an actor can achieve the characterisation by very different means, in the case of audiobooks it is the other way around, the exclusive factor being timbre and diction. Since performers of audiobooks of this type, i.e., 'superproductions' based on the participation of many actors, where each character in a literary work has its own performer, must identify the character immediately, are dependent on direct speech delivered and glossed by the narrator, and are subject to the overall narrative arc of the literary subject, it is essential that the characters are distinguished by characteristic timbre, language, and diction. Here, the manner of delivery, the adequacy of diction to the specific situation of the work, forms the basis of the actor's interpretation, leaving little room for the semantic development of a deeper character profile.

Jiří Lábus manoeuvres between the different positions of Woland, especially at the level of diction and timbre, indicating the current state of the character, but above all he relates to the text that anticipates each line. In the radio production, on the other hand, the actors' performances are based on the dynamics of acting, with the actors

acting out longer passages with more text. Kopecký's Woland is based on the constant mobility and flexibility of the actor's diction and articulation, as well as on the vocal modulation of shorter sections and the virtuoso intonation details with which Kopecký suggests the magic of the character. Eduard Cupák defines Pontius Pilate and his emotional states and motivations mainly through the fluctuations in vocal intensity, in his work with the tempo of speech. The acting in Horčíčka's production of *The Master and Margarita* follows the radio acting of the adaptation dramaturgy of other great novels, which is characterised by the internal contouring of the characters, the changing manner of acting within the work, when the character experiences psychological development, is not just typified but created plastically. Eduard Cupák has to *illustrate* Pilate's power in the radio production, whereas Viktor Preiss *evokes* it in the audiobook vocally: because the listener has the information about Pilate's power *conveyed by the narrator*, whereas in the radio production the actor has to *express* it, illustrate it.

The hierarchy of the characters is built in a similar way: while in the radio production the actors act out the situations, and from their vocal expressions it must be clear where each character is coming from and where he is going, what position he occupies in the whole story, in the audiobook we learn this continuously from the narrator. In the audiobook, the actors *accompany* the situations vocally, *concretising* the characters' states and the meanings of the lines expressively. Anna Fialová or Martin Myšička can nuance the psychologically different situations of Margarita and the Master only by external voice modifications, while Helena Friedrichová personifies the suffering devotion of the character in the radio dramatisation: in her speech we find hesitation sounds, lamentation, joy, pain; the actress works semantically with a pause, a quiver of the voice, by which she balances dramatic and lyrical images. Ladislav Frej captures the Master's determination and bitter apathy in the dynamics of his speech, in the intensity of his voice, and the alternation of the tempo: the actor expresses his passionate enthusiasm in a faster tempo, when he fragments his speech into shorter sections, emphasises parts of the general message, his voice is urgent, enthralling in the passion with which he speaks. After all, even the secondary characters, who are Bulgakov's symbolic personifications, have a much more variable space in the radio production, they are not bound by the text. At the same time, Bulgakov hardly approaches characterisation or analysis of motives, he hardly makes any judgement; the characters and their partial motivations and actions are typically ambiguous. However, while in the radio production the actors can 'draw' these characters, revealing the meanings of their actions in appropriate expressive performance, in the audiobook we are left with condensed images, which, although they allow us to perceive individual characters in a differentiated way, at the same time lead to a somewhat tiresome interpretive stereotyping over the vast surface of the work.

The actor is faced with a difficult task in multiple-voice readings, namely to enrich the written text with appropriate expressive performance in a small space of short lines: to *typify* a character, but at the same time to create it only on a very limited surface. Just as the actor does not create the character, but rather illustrates it, the direc-

tor does not compose the narrative of the work, for example, as this has already been established by the novelist; the director only realises narrative sonically, *concretising* it with specific sound devices (including the voices of the actors). On the contrary, in the case of a radio production, the director determines the narrative scheme according to the dramatisation, consults the solution with the author of the dramatisation, has the final say in deciding how the text will be realised, whether some parts will be omitted, others added, etc. The freedom of the director is thus much greater in the case of a radio production than in the case of an audiobook, where the director primarily monitors the tempo and expressive continuity of the actor's speech. In the case of sound-intensive productions (such as *The Master and Margarita*), they also work with the sound design and effects, but cannot manipulate the text, change its accents, and thus update the text. Although an actor's performance may elevate a character in an audiobook, making it more interesting than another, it will be an exception, but one that will be noticed more by the connoisseur of the work than by the ordinary listener. For the actors are interpreting the complete text of the literary subject, the individual characters have the meaning in the story that the writer has given them. On the contrary, the dramatiser may reduce many of the novel's plot motifs, omit or add characters, completely relativise the original intention of the draft by narrative conception, the presence of a narrator or, for example, by changing the accents of individual characters.

## Audio-mediated literature

With the title of my concluding section, I refer to Jan Lopatka (1995), whose study 'Literatura rozhlasem prostředkovaná' [Radio-Mediated Literature] deals with the issues of radio adaptation of literary works. In his texts, Lopatka has repeatedly stressed the importance of interpretation in radio adaptations. Interpretation in a broader sense, i.e., not only acting, but also interpretation of the original work, since according to Lopatka, every adaptation automatically implies an *interpretation* of the original work (LOPATKA 1995: 70–78). One of the functions of audiobooks, but also of radio, is the preservation of the artistic word. Audio recordings allow one to record the creative production of a work of art, to cultivate and entertain one's audience. Much has been written about the importance of radio productions of literary works, but little thought has yet been given to the question of how much audiobooks can influence listeners' tastes. I am inclined to think that they do, as do other dramatic arts and their distinctive adaptations: film, television, theatre, and radio. Of course, given that audiobook productions do not stand on the same creative level as the aforementioned other branches, mainly because, in comparison with them, the audiobook relies, and actually has to rely, on the quality and laws of the literary text itself; in comparison with other productions, it is most *reproductive* in nature.

The theme formulated in the introduction of this study, i.e., the commonalities and differences in acting in a classical radio production and in an audiobook, can be

summarised as follows: both disciplines are united by the same material, that being the actor's voice and its technical possibilities. The actor's task is diametrically different in both formats of audio production, leading to a different technique of acting – as for the audiobook to a densification and immediacy of the depiction of a particular emotional state. Also, casting, typological concretisation of the characters and their guidance within the sound design, acquire special significance here. From the point of view of the theory of auditory acting, audiobook production of this type offers a new acting task, posing the actor with the necessity of economy and concentration of expression. The limitation of the actor's parts is not a matter of the actor's creation, but a matter of the direction and composition of the whole work.

In spite of the artistic aspirations that every audiobook director should naturally have, one cannot ignore the fact that the audiobook market is a competitive environment in which the number of copies sold is the main goal. Audiobook publishers must strive to make their products attractive, so they take care to advertise appropriately, combine the purchase of an audiobook with a printed book, offer downloads of audiobooks to mobile apps, and conform to modern trends. Almost no audiobook has a front cover where we can find out who the director is; instead, we always find out the name of the artist – their name sells the product. Perhaps there is nothing wrong with this fact alone; even artistic and non-mainstream work needs to generate financial profit, especially if it is the product of a commercial company. On the other hand, it seems difficult to reconcile the artistic ambitions of the creators with the mass tastes of the public, to preserve the often very demanding ideological qualities of the subject matter, and at the same time not to refer the work to a handful of discerning listeners. Přemysl Hnilička discusses this in his review of Deáková's audiobook of *The Master and Margarita*:

What is it about the audiobook format that attracts listeners so much? Why is it no longer enough to sit in a chair with a book? There are several appealing plus points: you can listen to audio during other activities – while cooking, cleaning, or in the workshop, reading is useful for truck drivers on long journeys... Crucial is also our feeling of having less and less time, of having no time to concentrate on reading... and audiobooks help us with that too. Last but not least, there is the added value – the artistic performance of the actor or actress. (HNILIČKA 2021: 20)

Hnilička attempts to understand the tendency, which responds to the global phenomena of audience habits, in their demands on form and interpretation, not yet paying attention to the content, i.e., the choice of the subject matter itself. It is true that the audiobook market is dominated by lighter and popular genres, with much less frequent representation of philosophically or artistically demanding works. If audiobook makers count rather on passive listening, during which the listener does not use active perception, they must necessarily choose an appropriate method of staging and a suitable title itself. The not inconsiderable importance of audiobooks lies in making

often canonical literary works accessible to younger audiences or, in short, to people who (for many reasons) would never read the book.

It is worth noting that when an audiobook is publicly discussed, this success is always linked to the manner of performance, the adequacy or ingenuity of the actor's interpretation is appreciated, but most often the expressive harmony of the actor with the poetics of the subject. In 2017 in the Czech Republic, Oldřich Kaiser's performance of Hašek's *Švejk* was highly acclaimed; earlier, Lábus's performance of the first part of *Harry Potter* was similarly praised. In both cases, however, the praise was linked to a particular actor, not to the directorial concept, the updating of the work, its reinterpretation in any direction. Reading audiobooks is certainly a demanding acting task, which requires an actor's preparation, a good knowledge of the literary work, and an understanding of its creative poetics; it is undoubtedly an acting discipline on its own. At the same time, however, the performative interpretation of an audiobook is not a discipline that can be compared in terms of creative possibilities (nor in terms of difficulty!) to acting on stage or in a radio studio, where the actor actually creates the character. The performative interpretation of audiobooks becomes all the more important the less people read, and are therefore dependent on a mediated knowledge of the work. In this sense, audiobook adaptations cater precisely to those listeners who are unfamiliar with the literary text: it is delivered to them literally, without interfering with the text itself, and, ideally, enriched by a congenial actor's performance.

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## Full cast of radio production

**Author:** Mikhail Bulgakov. **Translation:** Alena Morávková.

**Dramatisation:** Jan Vedral. **Dramaturgy:** Marie Říhová. **Director:** Jiří Horčíčka.

**Music:** Jiří Váchal, Vladimír Truc, and Leoš Kosek. **Sound engineer:** Karel Nedorost.

**Music cooperation:** Pavel Nikl.

**Charaters and cast:** The Master (Ladislav Frej), Margarita (Helena Friedrichová), Woland (Miloš Kopecký), Behemoth (Josef Vinklář), Korovyev (Josef Langmiller), Azazello (Jan Těplý), Hella (Sylva Turbová), Pontius Pilate (Eduard Cupák), Mark the Ratslayer (Milan Neděla), Ivan Bezdomny, poet (Jiří Ornest), Yeshua Ha-Notsri (Viktor Preiss), Caiaphas (Zdeněk Kutil), Secretary (Josef Velda), Mikhail Berlioz (Ilja Prachař), Likhodeyev, director of the Variety Theatre (Vladimír Brabec), Rimsky, treasurer of the Variety Theatre (Svatopluk Beneš), Doctor Stravinsky, psychiatrist (Pavel Pípal), Writer (Antonín Hardt), Writer (Milan Klásek), Nepremova (Blanka Maršálková), Zagrivov (Jiří Pleskot), Dvubratsky (Svatopluk Skládal), Matthu Levi (Tomáš Töpfer), Varenuška, house manager of the Variety Theater (Karel Sejk), Geroge Bengalsky, master of ceremonies (Jan Faltýnek), Sokov, manager of the buffet (Zdeněk Martínek), Lastochkin, bookkeeper (Jan Skopeček), chairman of the Acoustical Commission (Steva Maršálek), secretary (Jana Drbohlavová), important voice (Jiří Pleskot), voice from the variety show (Roman Hemala), singing girl (Iveta Dušková), postwoman, voice in the variety show (Drahomíra Fialková), sister (Jana Hermachová), Natasha, Margarita's house servant (Simona Stašová).

*Recorded by Czechoslovak Radio in October 1987.*

## Full cast of audiobook

**Author:** Mikhail Bulgakov. **Translation:** Alena Morávková.

**Director:** Natália Deáková. **Dramaturgy:** Ilona Smejkalová.

**Sound engineer of the Czech version:** Bojan Bojič. **Assistant director:** Marta Menes, Michal Sieczkowski. **Postproduction:** Stereotyp Studio. **Head of postproduction:** Beata Marciniak. **Sound:** Agata Nowicka. **Synchronous effects:** Tomasz Bogacki, Agata Nowicka. **Sound design:** Jacek Szczepanek. **Sound mix:** Kamil Sajewicz. **Music and dialogue:** Paweł Szaliński. **Music:** Aleksandra Gryka. **Vocals:** Maniucha Bikont, Tetiana Zaczykiewicz. **Wind instruments:** Sebastian Wielądek. **Percussion:** Daniel Moński. **Production of the Czech version:** Marta Menes. **Production cooperation:** Denisa Burešová, Lucie Laňková, Dita Hasalová. **Executive producer:** Michal Sieczkowski.

**Characters and cast:** the Master (Martin Myšička), Margarita (Anna Fialová), Woland (Jiří Lábus), the narrator (Petr Lněnička), Ivan Ponyrev as Bezdomny (Václav Neužil II.), Azazello (Leoš Noha), Behemoth, the Cat (Petr Čtvrtníček), Korovoyev (Jakub Žáček), Berlioz, the chairman of Massolit (Jan Sklenář), Rimsky, the director of Variety Theatre (Jan Vondráček), Varenuška, house manager of Variety Theatre (Ondřej Rychlý), Likhodeyev, director of the Variety Theatre (Václav Kopta), Bosoy, chairman of the tenants association (Arnošt Goldflam), master of ceremonies (Jiří Maryško), Sokov, buffet manager (Dušan Sitek), Ryukhin, poet (Jan Nedbal), Hella and Nissa (Veronika Lazorčáková), Mark the Ratslayer, Archibald Archibaldovich (Jan Holík), Yeshua Ha-Notsri (Pavel Neškudla), Pontius Pilate/Doctor Stravinsky (Viktor Preiss), Aphranus, the head of the secret police (Marek Němec), Matthu Levi (Jan Hajek), Judas Iscariot (Sebastian Jacques), Praskovya Fyodorovna (Taťjana Medvecká), Professor Kuzmin (Karel Heřmánek), Caiaphas (Jan Vlasák). Also starring Sofia Adamová, Matěj Anděl, Vojtěch Bartoš, Michal Bednář, Natálie Deáková, Dan Dittrich, Natália Drabiščáková, Richard Fiala, Jakub Gottwald, Jan Horák, Jan Hušek, Bořek Joura, Radovan Klučka, Anita Krausová, Irena Kristeková, Anežka Kubátová, Magdaléna Lážňovská, Kryštof Lněnička, Hana Marie Maroušková, Jan Meduna, Marta Menes, Matěj Nechvátal, Aleš Petráš, Týna Průchová, Václav Rašilov, Anežka Ruševová, Natálie Řehořová, Michal Sieczkowski, Ilona Smejkalová, Daniela Šišková, Jiří Štrébl, Barbora Šupová, Diana Toniková, Vojtěch Vávra a Marta Vítů.

*Recorded for Audiotéka in the BeLoud, Bread and Games Production s.r.o. studio in 2020.*

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