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## THE “PODCAST” AS A LIVING LITERARY ARCHIVE: REIMAGINING PRESERVATION, ACCESS, AND INTERPRETATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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**Abstract:** The rise of podcasting has introduced new dimensions to how literature is preserved, circulated, and interpreted. Traditionally, literary archives have been housed within institutional frameworks like libraries, museums, and research centres, where access is often restricted by geography, expertise, or institutional affiliation. In contrast, podcasts create an alternative literary archive that is widely accessible, fluid, and participatory. This paper examines the podcast as a living literary archive that both preserves and reinterprets literature for twenty-first-century audiences. Drawing on analysis of prominent literature-based podcasts, such as *Poetry Unbound*, *The New Yorker: Fiction Podcast*, *The History of Literature*, *LeVar Burton Reads* and *Literary Friction*, the study investigates how podcasts serve as repositories of texts, authorial voices, and critical discourses. These audio archives not only capture readings and discussions of literary works but also frame them within contemporary cultural, political, and social contexts, thereby shaping interpretation and reception. Unlike static print archives, podcasts are episodic, dialogic, and ongoing. This allows them to continuously expand and adapt to audience engagement. Methodologically, the paper employs a combination of content analysis and reception studies to explore how podcasts democratise access to literary knowledge and provide platforms for marginalised or underrepresented voices. The analysis highlights the podcast’s role in challenging conventional notions of permanence and authority in archival practice, raising questions about ephemerality, digital sustainability, and the politics of literary preservation. Thus, the paper argues that podcasts must be recognised not merely as media of dissemination but as active agents in constructing cultural memory. By reimagining what counts as an archive, podcasts contribute to a more inclusive, participatory, and dynamic understanding of literature in the digital age.

**Keywords:** *podcast, literary archives, digital age, authorial voice, literary preservation*

The archive has long served as both a repository and a metaphor for cultural memory. In the literary sphere, archives have traditionally been associated with the physical preservation of manuscripts, letters, drafts, and recordings housed in libraries or special collections. Such institutions promise permanence, but they also function as gatekeepers and mediators who have access to what materials and under what interpretive frameworks. However, the digital revolution has re-engineered these dynamics. In the twenty-first century, the rise of podcasting has introduced a form of literary curation and dissemination

that operates outside institutional walls. Podcasts are not simply entertainment; they are evolving ecosystems of storytelling, commentary, and affective engagement that together constitute a new kind of living archive. Thus, this essay explores the podcast as a literary archive in motion, one that challenges the binary between preservation and ephemerality.

Where the traditional archive aspires to stability, the podcast thrives on circulation, reiteration, and renewal. A podcast episode is rarely final; it is part of an ongoing conversation among hosts, authors, readers, and listeners. In this sense, podcasting enacts what Walter Ong called a “secondary orality”, a technologically mediated return to oral exchange that nonetheless bears the marks of literacy and print culture (11). The literary podcast becomes a site where literature is not only discussed but performed, interpreted, and archived through voice. To approach the podcast as an archive requires rethinking what constitutes literary preservation. The term “archive” derives from the Greek word *arkheion*, which means the house of the superior magistrates, the *archons*. Thus, the archive is simultaneously material and conceptual, a space that holds the authority of origin and the anxiety of loss. In podcasting, this duality is reconfigured. The digital archive is decentralised and perpetually expanding. Its order is algorithmic, not hierarchical. What counts as “literary” in this new environment is no longer limited to canonical texts but extends to readings, interviews, analyses, and even casual conversations about books. This essay thus positions the podcast as an emergent literary institution, one that democratises access, multiplies interpretive voices, and complicates the very notion of the archive as static. It draws on podcasts such as *Poetry Unbound*, *The New Yorker: Fiction Podcast*, *The History of Literature*, *LeVar Burton Reads* and *Literary Friction* to illustrate how podcasts function as living repositories of literary culture. These audio archives preserve not only texts but also the acts of interpretation that animate them through their dialogic and affective qualities.

Traditional literary archives are built upon the principle of preservation through material fixity. Manuscripts are boxed, catalogued, and rendered stable for future consultation. Yet, as Michel Foucault argued, the archive is not merely a storehouse of documents but “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements” (97). In other words, the archive is an active field of discourse that determines what can be said, remembered, and forgotten. In the digital era, the podcast exemplifies this transformative capacity of the archive. Each episode generates a sonic document, an assemblage of voices, pauses, laughter, and tone, that both preserves and transforms literary meaning. When *Poetry Unbound* host Pádraig Ó Tuama reads a poem aloud, the act of reading becomes an interpretive event. His inflection, pacing, and commentary produce a new version of the poem that coexists with its written form. The archive, in this sense, is not the poem itself but the relation between text, reader, and audience as mediated by sound.

Scholars of media archaeology like Jussi Parikka have emphasised that digital archives are characterised by constant updating and decay, a paradoxical blend of persistence and

fragility (117). Podcast platforms exemplify this instability. Files are hosted on servers that may vanish, while at the same time, episodes can be downloaded, mirrored, or remixed infinitely. The podcast archive is thus distributed rather than centralised, relying on a network of listeners who participate in preservation by subscribing, sharing, and archiving files on personal devices. This participatory dimension challenges the authority of the institutional archivist. The listener becomes both curator and conservator. Henry Jenkins's concept of participatory culture (3) is instructive here: in a media landscape defined by convergence, users no longer consume passively but contribute to meaning-making. Literary podcasts depend on this feedback loop. Comment sections, social-media threads, and fan-produced transcripts extend each episode's life beyond its original broadcast. The archive is animated by conversation.

To understand how podcasts operate as literary archives, it is useful to triangulate three interrelated concepts: the archive, the voice, and the living text. Following Derrida, the archive is inseparable from the drives of memory and forgetting. He notes that "there is no archive without consignment in an external place which assures the possibility of memorisation, of repetition, of reproduction" (8). In podcasting, that external place is not a building but a server, a feed, an app, which is an infrastructure of digital circulation. What Derrida calls consignment becomes streaming: a technological repetition that enables access while also exposing data to obsolescence. Moreover, the podcast redefines the authority of the archive. If traditional archives are curated by experts who decide what deserves preservation, podcast archives are collectively constructed through algorithms, user ratings, and cultural trends. The authority of inclusion shifts from institutional gatekeepers to networked publics.

Sound studies scholars such as Jonathan Sterne have shown that the human voice occupies a peculiar status in media history; it is both ephemeral and recordable, intimate and repeatable (16). The podcast harnesses this paradox. It preserves the grain of the voice (Barthes 8) as a trace of embodied interpretation. In literature-based podcasts, the act of reading aloud revives the ancient connection between orality and literature, collapsing the divide between performance and criticism. When authors read their own works, as in *The New Yorker: Fiction Podcast*, where writers select and read stories by others, the voice becomes a site of intertextual memory. Each reading produces a genealogy of influence and admiration, recorded for future listening. The archive thus becomes polyphonic, echoing Mikhail Bakhtin's "notion of dialogism" (17). Voices overlap across time: the original author, the guest reader, the host, and the audience form a chorus of interpretation.

Finally, the podcast archive enacts what might be called the living text: literature that is continually rewritten through collective reception. The living text resists closure; it is open to re-performance and re-contextualization. This aligns with Jerome McGann's argument that the textual condition is inherently social and material (10). Podcasts materialise that condition through sound; they embody literature's circulation as experience rather than as

artefact. In this framework, the literary podcast is not ancillary to the written word but an extension of its life. It renders visible (or audible) the processes of interpretation usually hidden within reading. Each episode is both a critical essay and an artistic act.

One of the most significant consequences of podcasting as an archive is the democratisation of access. While physical literary archives are often bound by institutional or geographic constraints, podcasts are globally accessible, usually free, and available on demand. This shift represents a radical re-distribution of cultural capital. Cultural memory exists in both canonical and functional forms (Assmann 14). Canonical memory preserves what societies deem worth remembering, whereas functional memory comprises the active uses of the past in present life. Podcasts blur this distinction. They canonise by curation, which is selecting authors or texts to feature. They also functionally reinterpret those works through contemporary discourse. For example, *The History of Literature* juxtaposes canonical figures like Shakespeare or Tolstoy with episodes on overlooked women writers or non-Western traditions, thereby expanding the boundaries of what constitutes literary heritage. This democratisation is not merely about access but also voice. Podcasts such as *Literary Friction* and *Between the Covers* foreground authors from marginalised backgrounds, feminist and queer perspectives, and global literatures. By recording and circulating these conversations, they contribute to an inclusive archive that contests the homogeneity of institutional collections.

A central paradox of podcasting lies in its temporality. Episodes are released in sequence, often weekly, mimicking the rhythm of “serialised literature” in the nineteenth century. This episodic temporality creates anticipation and community, encouraging listeners to follow along in real time. At the same time, the digital format allows for asynchronous listening; past episodes remain available, forming an archive of accumulated discourse. The coexistence of the transient and the durable marks podcasts as archives in motion. Each new episode re-contextualises earlier ones, altering their significance. The archive grows by reiteration rather than by completion. This dynamic mirrors Derrida’s insight that the archive is always future-oriented (18), that is, animated by the desire to return to what has been recorded yet haunted by the possibility of loss. Furthermore, the affective immediacy of the voice fosters intimacy between speaker and listener. Scholars like Kate Lacey describe listening as a political act, one that constructs publics through shared attention (3). In the literary podcast, this intimacy produces a form of distributed reading: listeners collectively engage with texts through the medium of the ear. The archive is not a silent repository but a resonant field of affect and memory.

If we understand the literary podcast as a living archive, an ongoing record of reading, interpretation, and cultural conversation, then its richness lies not only in what it preserves but in how it performs preservation. The podcast is a double practice: it records by creating traces of literary memory and interprets by offering new readings and contexts. Literary podcasts like *Poetry Unbound*, *The New Yorker: Fiction Podcast*, *The History of*

*Literature*, *LeVar Burton Reads*, and *Literary Friction* demonstrate how podcasts enact these archival functions differently, reflecting diverse relationships between literature, sound, and audience.

Pádraig Ó Tuama's *Poetry Unbound* exemplifies how the podcast medium can transform the experience of reading poetry into an intimate act of listening. Each episode, typically under fifteen minutes, features a single poem followed by Ó Tuama's reflective commentary. The format is minimalist, yet its archival significance is profound. The host's reading and interpretation become embodied documents, preserving not just the text but an effective engagement with it. Ó Tuama's soft rhythm, pauses, and recurring invitations to "take a breath" or "listen again" foreground the temporal dimension of the archive. Each reading is a performance that captures emotion and thought in real time, transforming the poem into what is called an affective encounter (Ahmed 52). In this way, *Poetry Unbound* bridges the gap between the solitary act of reading and the communal act of listening. The listener's ear becomes the new reading room of the archive. Moreover, the podcast's production choices, like ambient sound, careful editing, and thematic curation, construct a sonic atmosphere that functions like the ordering principles of an archive. Episodes are grouped by emotional or thematic resonance, like grief, joy, and belonging, creating an evolving catalogue of human experience. Yet unlike traditional archives, the order is fluid; listeners can enter at any point, navigating through mood or curiosity rather than chronology. Critically, *Poetry Unbound* reclaims the voice as an interpretive tool. By emphasising oral delivery, the podcast restores poetry's historical foundation in orality while simultaneously acknowledging the modern mediation of digital technology. It thus creates the concept of "secondary orality", which is a technologically enabled return of the spoken word that depends on the literate culture it extends (Ong 11). In Ó Tuama's readings, the voice becomes an archive of feeling, a reminder that preservation in the digital age may be as much about emotion as about data.

If *Poetry Unbound* archives intimacy, *The New Yorker: Fiction Podcast* archives tradition. Each episode invites a contemporary author to select and read a story previously published in *The New Yorker*, which is hosted by the magazine's fiction editor, Deborah Treisman, followed by a discussion between the guest and Treisman. The series, which began in 2007, now forms an extensive digital collection, hundreds of recordings that together chart a century of literary evolution. Here, the archival act is one of reperformances. When Jhumpa Lahiri reads William Trevor, or Allan Gurganus reads Grace Paley, the reading is both homage and reinterpretation. The guest's voice mediates between past and present, reviving stories for new audiences while embedding them within fresh cultural and critical contexts. Each episode thus becomes a palimpsest of literary memory: the original text, the reader's inflection, and the ensuing dialogue overlay one another in an ever-thickening archive. The podcast also demonstrates how the institutional archive adapts within digital culture. *The New Yorker* as a brand has long symbolised literary prestige, its fiction section functioning as an arbiter of taste. This authority becomes participatory through podcasting.

Listeners can hear, replay, and share the readings, interacting with what was once confined to the printed page. The *Fiction Podcast* transforms the magazine's static archive into a dynamic audio database. Moreover, the act of conversation between Treisman and her guests foregrounds interpretation as an archival process. They discuss authorial choices, narrative techniques, and emotional resonances, producing critical discourse that becomes part of the story's recorded history. The podcast, therefore, enacts a living criticism, an archive not of documents but of interpretive voices. In Derridean terms, the *Fiction Podcast* exemplifies the archive's "fever", its desire to both preserve and reanimate. Each performance seeks to keep the canon alive by voicing it anew. The archive, far from being a static repository, becomes an engine of repetition that ensures continuity through transformation.

Jacke Wilson's *The History of Literature* takes a broader approach, positioning itself as an audio encyclopedia of literary history. Through hundreds of episodes covering authors, movements, and themes, from Homer and Jane Austen to Toni Morrison and global literatures, the podcast constructs a chronological and thematic record of literary culture. Yet its mode of presentation is not strictly academic. Wilson's tone is conversational, anecdotal, and self-reflexive. This combination of scholarship and storytelling gives the podcast an archival hybridity. On one hand, it functions as a pedagogical resource. Each episode curates historical knowledge, complete with quotations, contextual explanations, and occasional dramatisations. On the other hand, it captures a subjective, emotional relationship to literature. Wilson's digressions and personal reflections reveal how the archive is always mediated by the archivist's voice. Unlike institutional archives, *The History of Literature* does not aspire to completeness or neutrality. Instead, it performs what is called the "repertoire", which is the embodied practice of remembering and transmitting cultural knowledge (Taylore 20). Each episode is an act of performance that records affective and intellectual investments. *The History of Literature* exemplifies how podcast seriality structures memory. Episodes accumulate over years, creating a temporal depth similar to serialised literary publications of the past. Listeners participate in this accretion by following the podcast longitudinally, experiencing literature not as isolated works but as an unfolding continuum. The series becomes a collective archive of engagement, mapping the evolution of literary discourse in real time. From an archival theory perspective, Wilson's project underscores the shift from the closed archive bounded by acquisition policies and physical space to the open archive of digital media, where accumulation is potentially infinite. Each new upload extends the borders of what literature can mean, situating the podcast within an economy of ongoing expansion.

LeVar Burton's *LeVar Burton Reads* brings a different energy to the idea of the literary podcast. Known for his iconic role as the host of the educational television program *Reading Rainbow*, Burton extends his mission to adult audiences, selecting short stories, often from speculative or underrepresented genres and reads them aloud with immersive sound design. Here, the podcast becomes an archive of inclusive storytelling. Burton's

selections highlight authors of colour, women writers, and emerging voices who may not yet be canonised. His readings are richly performative. Voice modulation, music, and ambient effects transform the literary text into an audio drama. In doing so, Burton redefines what counts as “archival value” (Pearce-Moses 35). Rather than preserving the already celebrated, he archives the potentially forgotten. The affective charge of Burton’s delivery underscores the democratising ethos of podcasting. His introductory remarks often emphasise empathy and curiosity, inviting listeners to take a break from the world and enter the story. The archive here is “built through care”, a term that feminist archivists use to describe alternative archival practices that centre emotion, inclusivity, and justice. Burton’s curation of diverse narratives embodies this ethic (Caswell and Cifor 24). Furthermore, the use of high-quality soundscapes situates *LeVar Burton Reads* within a long lineage of oral storytelling traditions. By integrating modern audio techniques with oral performance, the podcast collapses temporal boundaries between ancestral storytelling and digital modernity. The result is a living archive of narrative voice, where each episode contributes to a pluralistic record of literary expression.

Hosted by Carrie Plitt and Octavia Bright, *Literary Friction* combines author interviews, thematic discussions, and book recommendations. Its conversational style situates it within the growing genre of critical dialogue podcasts, which foreground relational modes of thought. Unlike the monologic format of *Poetry Unbound* or the formal institutionality of *The New Yorker: Fiction Podcast*, *Literary Friction* builds an archive of dialogue as methodology. Each episode centres on a theme such as friendship, loneliness, madness, or bodies, and features authors whose works intersect with that topic. This thematic structure produces an archive organised not by chronology or genre but by idea. The result is a web-like structure of connections across literature, culture, and theory. In feminist terms, this podcast enacts the politics of conversation. The archive it builds is dialogic, inclusive, and emotionally intelligent. The hosts’ self-reflexive approach, frequently acknowledging their own positionality and reading experiences, destabilises the myth of the detached critic. The podcast thus models a feminist epistemology of archiving: one that values subjectivity, relationality, and the situatedness of knowledge. By recording and distributing these conversations, *Literary Friction* performs the dual archival task of documentation and dissemination. Each episode captures not just the author’s voice but the relational space between interlocutors, which is the laughter, hesitations, and overlaps that mark human conversation. These sonic traces constitute an archive of encounter, preserving the social life of literature as it unfolds in the present.

Taken together, these podcasts reveal the capacity of podcasts to produce distributed archives of literary culture. Unlike the centralised repositories of traditional institutions, these archives are collectively maintained across multiple platforms like RSS feeds, streaming services, transcription databases, and listener communities. Preservation becomes a networked phenomenon, dependent on the actions of users as much as on creators. In this sense, the podcast archive exemplifies the concept of “communicative

memory,” a living, short-term social memory maintained through everyday communication rather than formal institutions (Assman 126). The listener community becomes the medium through which the archive endures. Fan-made transcripts, reviews, and online discussions all extend the life of episodes, ensuring that meaning circulates beyond the original broadcast. Moreover, these podcasts collectively challenge the notion that literary preservation must be visual or textual. The voice itself becomes an archival medium. Each recording captures accent, tone, affect, and the embodied temporality of reading, elements that conventional archives rarely register. The result is an archive that privileges listening as a mode of knowing. The cultural implication is significant: the podcast archive not only records literature but also reshapes the practices of literary interpretation. Scholars can now study how literature is performed, received, and reinterpreted in sound. The podcast, then, is both a medium of preservation and an object of literary analysis in its own right.

The temporality of the podcast archive differs from that of the traditional literary canon. Episodes may fade from visibility as new ones appear, yet they remain retrievable, awaiting rediscovery. This layered temporality mirrors “performing remains”, which is the persistence of performance through its traces (Schneider 11). Each podcast episode, though ephemeral in its live release, becomes a “remnant” that carries forward the resonance of the original moment. Affective continuity further binds these archives. The shared intimacy between speaker and listener creates a collective emotional history. When Ó Tuama speaks of grief, or when Burton reads a story about resilience, listeners form attachments that transcend geography and time. These attachments are forms of archival belonging, a sense that the archive includes not only texts but also feelings.

The emergence of podcasts as living literary archives also challenges the long-standing assumptions about authorship, authority, and ownership. Traditional literary archives, whether institutional or private, often privilege a single, “authorised” voice: the author, the editor, or the archivist. By contrast, podcasts distribute authority across multiple participants: hosts, guest readers, interviewees, producers, sound engineers, and even audiences through participatory feedback. This hybrid authorship problematises conventional intellectual property frameworks. For example, when a guest author reads a story written by another, or when a podcast integrates ambient sounds and edited commentary, the resulting audio artefact becomes a co-creative work. As Aufderheide and Jaszi have argued, remix culture complicates traditional copyright norms (9). Podcasting archives exemplify this tension: they preserve literary works while simultaneously transforming them, raising questions about rights, reuse, and fair access.

While podcasts offer unprecedented accessibility and interpretive richness, they also confront acute challenges of digital preservation. Unlike physical manuscripts, which may endure centuries if carefully stored, podcast episodes are vulnerable to server failures, platform obsolescence, and changing software standards. The phenomenon of “podfade”,

the informal discontinuation of a series due to host withdrawal, shifting interests, or technological changes that illustrates the fragility inherent in these archives. Scholars of digital media have increasingly observed that the rapid pace of technological change produces a paradox: even as digital production multiplies cultural artefacts exponentially, their lifespan may be shorter than that of their analogue predecessors. Digital decay, broken links, and inaccessible file formats are all symptoms of the materiality of the digital, a reminder that even the most immaterial-seeming data exist on physical substrates that can fail, corrode, or be lost.

Institutional and grassroots responses to this fragility have begun to emerge. Initiatives like PodcastRE at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, collaborative archival projects at libraries and humanities centres, and community-driven repositories seek to preserve both audio content and accompanying metadata: transcripts, production notes, episode descriptions, and listener engagement records. These initiatives are aligned with the broader goals of digital humanities archiving, which prioritise contextual completeness over mere data storage. The preservation of metadata, which is the “aboutness” of an artefact, has become central to how scholars and archivists understand digital culture. Metadata captures not only what was said, but how and why it was produced: the social, temporal, and technological circumstances that shape each recording.

Such efforts recognize that archival value is not only in the content itself but also in the context of its creation and reception. Metadata thus becomes as critical as the audio trace, allowing future scholars to study podcasts as both literary artefacts and social phenomena. A podcast episode, viewed through this lens, is a layered cultural object: a script, a performance, an audio file, and a distributed event mediated by algorithms and platform interfaces. The work of preservation must account for each layer. Without metadata, an archived MP3 becomes an orphaned relic; with it, the file transforms into a node in a living network of cultural meaning.

The transitory nature of podcasts, however, resists the fixity that traditional archives seek to impose. Podcasting thrives on immediacy, conversation, and seriality. Listeners often experience episodes in the flow of daily life: during commutes, chores, or solitary walks. This mobility shapes how meaning is made and remembered. The archive of the future, therefore, must grapple with preserving not just content but *experience*. The challenge is how to document the lived temporality of listening—the social rhythms and affective attachments that define podcast culture. Some archivists experiment with capturing listener comments, social media interactions, and user-generated playlists as part of a broader “social metadata” framework. These records turn the podcast archive into a site of public memory, echoing oral history traditions but expanded into the digital sphere.

Podcasts like *LeVar Burton Reads*, *Literary Friction*, and *Poetry Unbound* actively foreground diverse perspectives, bringing attention to marginalised authors, underrepresented genres, and global literatures. In doing so, podcasts contribute to what

can be called a reparative archive, an evolving record that seeks to counteract historical erasures in the literary canon. This reparative impulse resonates with feminist and postcolonial scholarship that critiques the selective memory of institutional archives. Traditional archives reproduce structures of power, so too can digital archives, if left unchecked, replicate existing inequities. Podcasts, through their decentralised and low-barrier publishing model, appear to challenge this hierarchy by allowing diverse voices to enter the literary discourse. For instance, *LeVar Burton Reads* continues the ethos of *Reading Rainbow* but adapts it for adult audiences, merging nostalgia with inclusivity by featuring speculative fiction and short stories by Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ authors. *Poetry Unbound*, hosted by Pádraig Ó Tuama, offers meditative close readings that democratize access to poetry through intimacy and accessibility of tone. *Literary Friction*, meanwhile, showcases global writers and thematically driven conversations that foreground intersectional analysis. Each of these podcasts extends the literary conversation beyond the printed page, creating a space where storytelling and critical reflection coexist in sound.

However, the model is not without its limitations. Access to podcasts still presumes internet connectivity, technological literacy, and language proficiency. The promise of democratisation is tempered by the reality of the *digital divide*, the structural inequities that determine who can participate in digital culture. Moreover, algorithmic gatekeeping on platforms such as Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Audible can privilege popular or commercially viable content over experimental or minority voices. Algorithms function as invisible curators, shaping discovery and circulation in ways that often remain opaque to both creators and audiences. As a result, the supposed openness of the podcast medium is mediated through economic and technological hierarchies. This raises pressing ethical and curatorial questions for digital archivists and scholars. Who decides which podcasts deserve preservation? How can grassroots projects ensure that marginalised creators' work is not erased by the churn of platform updates or metadata loss? Community-driven archiving efforts such as the *Internet Archive's Audio Archive* or activist collectives that store podcasts independently of commercial platforms offer one possible answer. These decentralised repositories preserve not just the files but also the *autonomy* of the creators.

Podcasts also engage questions of authorship and collective production in new ways. The auditory medium highlights voice, literal and figurative, as both an expressive and political act. A podcast episode might be co-created through interviews, listener submissions, or soundscapes recorded in public spaces. Such practices expand the notion of the literary to encompass sonic narrative, affective atmosphere, and participatory authorship. In this sense, podcasts blur the boundaries between literary criticism, creative writing, and performance, offering a democratised and hybrid form of literary production. Yet even as podcasts perform this inclusivity, they exist within infrastructures that remain uneven. The most popular podcast directories are owned by tech corporations whose priorities may not align with the ethics of open access or cultural preservation. The tension

between corporate hosting and archival sustainability mirrors broader debates within digital humanities about the privatisation of digital memory. Thus, while the podcast archive democratises in principle, it reproduces inequities unless combined with broader digital literacy and equitable access initiatives.

Emerging technologies promise to extend the archival and aesthetic capacities of podcasts even further. AI-driven voice synthesis, interactive storytelling, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) offer the potential for multimodal archives that engage multiple senses. These innovations can transform listening from a passive activity into immersive participation, allowing audiences to navigate literary worlds dynamically. For example, VR adaptations of audio dramas allow users to enter the narrative space visually, while AI-based recommendation systems can tailor listening journeys based on thematic or emotional resonance. However, technological affordances introduce new ethical and practical questions. Synthetic voices may enhance accessibility, allowing text-based archives to be read aloud in customizable voices, but risk erasing the unique human qualities central to oral heritage. The tone, accent, and rhythm of a human narrator often carry cultural and affective meaning that no algorithm can reproduce. The question, then, is whether a synthetic reproduction of voice can preserve the authenticity of storytelling or whether it contributes to a homogenization of digital soundscapes.

Interactive platforms could also collect detailed data about listeners, raising privacy concerns and shifting the archival focus from content to user analytics. The temptation to quantify engagement risks transforming cultural artefacts into data commodities. Scholars, producers, and institutions must therefore negotiate these tensions, ensuring that archives remain both inclusive and authentic. The ethics of consent, ownership, and cultural representation will increasingly shape how podcast archives are designed and maintained.

Furthermore, multimodal archives may redefine pedagogical practice. Educational podcasts increasingly blend sound, video, and interactive elements, offering students a multidimensional approach to literary study. This trend aligns with the principles of multimodal literacy, which recognise that meaning is constructed not only through text but through sound, image, and movement. Podcasts can thus cultivate critical listening, an analytical practice that trains students to attend to tone, pacing, silence, and other sonic features as interpretive cues. Academic institutions have begun integrating podcasts into curricula as both learning materials and creative assignments. For example, literature students might analyse narrative voices in audio fiction or produce their own podcast episodes as interpretive responses to texts. Such practices blur the line between reading and creation, emphasising the dialogic nature of interpretation. Podcasts become not only objects of study but also tools of scholarship, enabling new forms of dissemination and engagement. In this pedagogical context, podcasts function as both cultural and educational archives, expanding their impact across societal domains. They preserve stories, voices, and discussions that might otherwise remain transient, while also fostering

new modes of intellectual exchange. The future of the podcast archive, then, may lie not in static preservation but in dynamic renewal, an archive that listens, speaks, and evolves alongside its audiences.

Thus, the literary podcast represents a profound transformation in the practice of archival preservation, interpretation, and dissemination. Unlike traditional repositories, which privilege material stability and hierarchical authority, podcasts cultivate living archives that are fluid, participatory, and affectively resonant. They preserve not only texts but also the acts of reading, interpretation, and listening that give literature its cultural vitality. Podcasts like *Poetry Unbound*, *The New Yorker: Fiction Podcast*, *The History of Literature*, *LeVar Burton Reads*, and *Literary Friction* illustrate how podcasts extend the literary archive in multiple directions. They preserve canonical works while amplifying underrepresented voices. They transform textual authority into hybrid, distributed authorship. They also foster affective, communal, and dialogic memory and therefore challenge traditional notions of permanence, demonstrating that archives can be dynamic and evolving. However, the podcast archive is not without challenges. Fragile digital infrastructures, ephemeral hosting platforms, algorithmic bias, and complex copyright issues threaten sustainability. Addressing these concerns requires collaborative, interdisciplinary, and ethical approaches to ensure that these archives remain accessible, authentic, and inclusive.

A distinctive feature of podcast archives is their affective dimension. Unlike visual or textual media, audio recordings preserve the human voice, a medium inherently intimate, ephemeral, and emotionally resonant. Listening involves both cognitive and affective engagement, creating a sense of co-presence between speaker and listener. In literary podcasts, affective listening serves as a mechanism for community formation. For instance, Ó Tuama's empathetic delivery in *Poetry Unbound* or Burton's narrative warmth in *LeVar Burton Reads* fosters shared emotional experiences that extend beyond the text itself. These sonic traces become part of the archival record, capturing not only literary knowledge but also relational and emotional memory. The archive thus evolves into a living social space, where memory, literature, and community intertwine. Podcast episodes are not isolated artefacts but nodes in a network of dialogue. Listener feedback, online discussions, and repeated performances create layers of meaning that extend the reach of the archive. Literary memory, once considered the province of institutions, is now networked, participatory, and affectively rich.

Podcasts encourage a reconceptualisation of literary culture itself. They remind us that literature is not a static object but a living practice which is performed, interpreted, and remembered through voice, dialogue, and community. In the digital age, the literary archive is no longer confined to shelves or institutional walls. It resonates in the ears, minds, and hearts of listeners worldwide. Podcasts exemplify the potential for archives to be living, participatory, and transformative, securing literature's presence not merely in

memory but in the ongoing act of cultural engagement. In recognising podcasts as active agents of preservation, interpretation, and community formation, scholars of literature and digital media must expand the frameworks through which we understand archives. The living literary archive is an emergent, dynamic space where the past, present, and future of literature converge. It is a space where texts, voices, and listeners co-construct meaning, ensuring that the literary canon and its counter-narratives remain vibrant and accessible for generations to come.

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