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THE HYPOSTATIC UNION OF MULTIMODALITY AND PRAGMATICS
Exploring the Auditory Mode in Dorothy L. Sayers' Radio Plays *The Man Born To Be King*

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Abstract – *The Man Born to Be King* is a cycle of 12 radio plays, based on the biblical gospel narratives, written by Dorothy Sayers and first produced by the BBC in 1941-2. The present study examines the multimodal and pragmatic features of the 1975 production, focusing on characterisation and the auditory construction of overlapping, interconnected meanings and implicatures. The plays, written for serial radio production, employ verbal and auditory semiotic modes to present the character of Jesus as a captivating, extraordinarily human and divine presence throughout the plays. The disciples, the Pharisees, and historical figures such as Pontius Pilate, King Herod, and others come to life through the dialogues. Suprasegmental auditory features such as prosody, together with audio effects, music, diatopic, diastratic, and diaphasic variation, are employed to communicate on both intra- and extra-diegetic levels (between characters and with the hearer). The current study, therefore, aims to combine core concepts in pragmatic and stylistics, such as Conversation Analysis (Sacks *et al*. 1974) and interactional storytelling (Bowles 2010; Norrick 2000, 2007) with studies in multimodality, both foundational (Kress and van Leeuwen [1996] 2020) and focused on the auditory mode (Chion 2016; van Leeuwen 1999) to examine the interplay of the verbal and auditory modes in this, hitherto understudied, cycle of radio plays. Pragmatic and stylistic features of the auditory mode are analysed through an integrative multimodal stylistic approach. Results of this exploratory, qualitative study point to a sort of "hypostatic union" or symbiosis between the semiotic modes in their construction of the human and the divine.

Keywords: Pragmastylistics; multimodality; auditory mode; Dorothy L. Sayers; radio drama.

I say! I ought to know that voice! […]
That's the voice that brought the light to me
that sat in darkness.
(Sayers [1943] 2022, p. 254)

1. Introduction to *The Man Born to be King*

Dorothy L. Sayers' *The Man Born to be King* is a cycle of 12 radio plays, based on the biblical gospel narratives. It was first produced and aired by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) during the Second World War, in 1941-1942. Unfortunately, the recordings of the original wartime production have been partially lost. However, the later 1975 BBC Radio production is available in its entirety on the digital audiobook platform Audible.com (Sayers 1975). Thus, the 1975 production is the primary object of the present analysis, due to both its availability and its integration within a contemporary digital platform. The plays, or parts of them, have continued to be performed by churches, religious communities, and amateur drama groups over the past 80 years. Some recent performances[1] are available online, while others were performed live in person (without being recorded).

Sayers was a popular novelist, dramatist, essayist and translator. Nowadays, she is, perhaps, most well-known for her detective fiction and the enduringly entertaining amateur sleuth, Lord Peter Wimsey, or, indeed, for her critically acclaimed translations[2] of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. However, in 1940, she was invited by Rev. Dr. James Welch, Director of Religious Broadcasting at the BBC, to write "dramatic features [...] dealing with the life of [Jesus]" (Wehr 2022, p. 1). She acquiesced, on the condition that she be allowed to use "modern speech and a determined historical realism", in order to "produce the desirable sense of shock" that she felt the gospel narratives should elicit from the audience (Sayers [1943] 2022, p. 28). Thus, she endeavoured to write a cycle of plays that portrayed the characters in the biblical gospel narratives as realistically and as relevantly as possible, "keep[ing] the ancient setting" while giving "the modern equivalent of the contemporary speech and manners" (Sayers [1943] 2022, p. 29). However, in dealing with matters of the divine, the language of the text needed to be able to "lift itself without too much of a jolt into the language of prophecy", thus juxtaposing "the sublime and the commonplace" (Sayers [1943] 2022, p. 30). I argue here that such stylistic aims, openly expounded by the author in her foreword to the published play texts, are achieved not only through the interactional use of language within the plays, but also through the soundscape, the actors' voices, and their accents. Indeed, the tone and tenor of the auditory qualities of the recorded performance work alongside the

[1] The BBC website lists several Radio 4 broadcasts over the past two decades, usually around liturgical events such as Easter or Christmas (https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b008fhr9), while community, or church, live performances can be found on YouTube.com (e.g., https://youtu.be/OoodnG850EY?si=8lLgXxptgMPFPKl1).

[2] Her translation of *Hell* was published for Penguin in 1949, *Purgatory* followed in 1955, while Paradise was published posthumously, having been completed by Barbara Reynolds.

verbal mode of the play texts to produce a continuous fluidity between the divine and the human, which I argue to be a sort of hypostatic union of pragmatics and multimodality. Hypostatic union is a term borrowed from Christian theology; the tenet holds that the *divine nature* of Jesus coexists with his *human nature* (see Blackburn 2016; Murtoff 2025). Similarly, in multimodal studies, the various modes coexist and interact to produce meanings in an almost hypostatic fashion. Thus, the text was selected as a case study that highlights how the auditory and verbal modes can coexist and co-create meanings that multiply together

Radio drama, as a medium, has been significantly understudied, particularly in comparison to its more critically acclaimed counterparts – cinema and stage theatre. Some notable exceptions include critical works such as *Radio Drama: Theory and Practice* by Tim Crook (1999), and Richard Hand and Mary Traynor's *The Radio Drama Handbook* (2011). Crook's text draws on Michel Chion's seminal taxonomy of sound and voice in cinema (Chion 1994, 1999), adapting the vocabulary to span the critical void regarding radio drama. The critical framework applied to radio plays here will draw on both the aforementioned texts and more general studies in sound theory and voice studies, such as *Speech, Music, Sound* (van Leeuwen 1999), *Sound* (Chion 2016), and *Voice* (Neumark *et al*. 2010). Audio drama, whether transmitted via radio broadcast or accessed digitally, relies on *language*, *voice* and *sound* to convey its aesthetic and narrative meanings. Language refers to the lexical, syntactic and pragmatic content of the utterances spoken by the performers; voice refers to the vocal qualities of the actors using their vocal apparatus and performative techniques; sound refers to the overall soundscape, which encompasses background noise, music, sound effects (SFX) and any post-production qualities (such as layering or alteration of pitch or speed).

1.1. Scene selection

The twelve plays in the cycle constitute 8 hours and 28 minutes of audio, each single play lasting between 40 and 45 minutes. Therefore, this brief study can, by no means, aim to offer a comprehensive analysis of the entire production, but rather to highlight some key auditory and linguistic features as examples of the text's overall style and function in terms of speech and sound. The following scenes were selected for qualitative analysis:

A. 'Divine Domesticity', an extract from the first play, *Kings in Judea.* (00:01-02:30)
B. "Follow me", an extract from the fourth play *Heirs to the Kingdom* (02:31-07:35)

C. “Now I Can See”, an extract from the seventh play *The Light and the Life* (07:37-16:30)

The scenes chosen portray Jesus both as the topic of conversation (scenes A and B) and as a participant in the conversation (scene C). The transcriptions provided in Section 3 are intended merely to make the present paper more readable and to facilitate references to the verbal mode in the analysis. They should not be considered an attempt to provide a complete transliteration of all features of the auditory mode present in the recording (music, SFX, prosody, accent, phonetics, distance, volume, tone, pitch, pauses, silence, etc). A “full” transcription, if such a thing were possible, would have become an unwieldy monstrosity, potentially undermining the view that the auditory mode is communicative in its own right. Transcription is always a subjective process of reducing data and presenting what is relevant for the purposes at hand (see Bonsignori, 2009, for a fuller discussion). Thus, in this paper, I provide partial prosodic transcriptions, that is, certain foregrounded prosodic features (e.g., laughter, music, SFX, pauses) are included. This is intended to focus the analysis on selected phenomena present in the audio recording; however, the audio itself should accompany them. For this purpose, the segments analysed have been extracted and uploaded to the following website: https://audio.com/aoife-beville/audio/manborntobeking-analysis. The following simple prosodic annotation system has been used:

=	signals overlapping speech or interruption
(laughs)	includes non-speech-related human vocal interactions or prosodic details of speech (volume, tone, etc.)
[gavel]	indicates music, SFX or other non-vocal sounds or noises
…	signals a pause or hesitation
I-I-I’m	signals stuttering, false starts, or self-correction
‘e is	signals particular phonetic features (h-dropping) while preserving an overall orthographic readability

2. Pragmastylistics and multimodality

2.1 Premises of pragmastylistics

The nuanced relationship between pragmatics and multimodality has been exhaustively explored in the introduction to this issue (pp. 5-19). Here, I wish merely to underline the key premises which underpin the methodological framework of the study. Firstly, the artefact being studied is a fictionalised historical drama; therefore, the interactions between characters in the text are

not naturally occurring dialogue but rather aim to reproduce and represent fictional intercharacter dynamics.[3] Furthermore, at an extradiegetic level, the text constitutes a communicative act in which the author, cast, directors, and producers collaborate, using various linguistic and auditory semiotic resources to produce a text that is received and interpreted by the audience. Thus, the interactional focus of pragmatics is complemented by the aesthetic focus of stylistics, enabling an understanding of how the text constructs and conveys meanings, both between characters and towards the audience. Key notions that will be drawn on throughout include: studies in Conversation Analysis (Drew 2018; Sacks *et al*. 1974), which focus on features of turn-taking and the management of the interaction; conversational storytelling (Bowles 2010; Norrick 2007), which examines the interactional dynamics of storytelling in dialogue; characterisation and (im)politeness (Culpeper 1998, 2001), which analyses the interpersonal use of strategies of politeness and impoliteness and their import in terms of the construction of characters in fictional texts; pragmatic accounts of discourse markers (Fraser 2009; Norrick 2009), and socio-pragmatic aspects such as linguistic variation.

2.2. Premises of multimodality

Quite simply, multimodality recognises how multiple "modes" (means of making meaning) work together and interact in human communication. (see Jewitt *et al*. 2025, pp. 1-2). The three key premises of the field, as outlined by Jewitt *et al*. (2025, p. 2), are the following:

1. People combine semiotic resources to make meaning.
2. Each semiotic resource makes meaning in distinct ways.
3. If we want to study meaning, we need to attend to all semiotic resources being used to make a complete whole.

There are, according to Jewitt *et al.*, three main methodological approaches to multimodality: systemic functional linguistics (SFL), the subsequent and related development of social semiotics (SS), and the ethnomethodological field of Conversation Analysis (CA), which is also widely employed by scholars of pragmatics. The present study will draw on SS and CA to map possible points of contact with the pragmatic framework illustrated above. As succinctly summarised by Jewitt *et al.*:

> The aim of social semiotics is to understand the social dimensions of meaning, its production, interpretation and circulation, and its implications. [...] Its basic

[3] For more on pragmatic and stylistic analysis of fictional texts see: Chapman and Clark 2014; Locher and Jucker 2021.

> assumption is that meanings derive from social action and interaction using semiotic resources as tools. It stresses the agency of sign-makers, focuses on modes and their affordances, and on the social uses and needs they serve. (2025, p. 45)

Thus, the underlying focus on the interactional aspect of meaning-making is regarded here as an inherent connection for addressing the pragmatic dimensions of language across various modes, and specifically with reference to the auditory mode. As succinctly summarised by O'Halloran *et al*:

> The goals of multimodal studies and pragmatics are closely related; that is, both areas of research adopt a context-based approach to the study of language to investigate how linguistic resources are used to achieve particular communicative purposes. However, multimodal studies moves beyond a focus on language to theorize the functions of resources other than language (e.g., visual, actional and audio resources) and to investigate how choices from these systems combine with linguistic choices to create meaning in communicative acts and events. (2014, p. 240)

The present study focuses on the pragmatic purposes of both verbal and audio resources, on how choices in these modes combine, overlap and interact to create meaning, in the communicative events which occur both between the characters and between the collective sender (author, actors, producer, sound technicians, among others) and the audience. Radio drama is, in its essence, the *acousmatic* experience *par excellence* – that is to say, it is "a listening situation in which one hears a sound without seeing its cause" (Chion 2016, p. 265). It entails both *causal listening* – whereby the hearer seeks to understand the phenomenon, its source and its behaviour – and *figurative listening* – whereby the hearer seeks to understand what the sound phenomenon represents (Chion 2016, p. 266).

The integration of a pragmatic perspective into the multimodal framework provides an important analytical asset which purely formal multimodal analyses may overlook. Following Nørgaard's (2010) call for a 'happy marriage' between stylistics and semiotics, this study proposes that pragmatics is a natural bedfellow. While multimodal studies typically map the inventory of semiotic resources – a fundamental and necessary area of linguistic inquiry – a pragmatic approach aims to investigate the *strategic use of such resources* and their interactional dynamics within a given communicative event. Specifically, the focus on (im)politeness, conversational dynamics, and interpersonal narration reveals how voice and sound are a kind of "auditory action". Verbal and non-verbal features of sound alike do not merely accompany the dialogue; they perform specific pragmatic actions, such as managing facework, reinforcing or, indeed, subverting interpersonal power dynamics. Similarly, the pragmatic framework draws on and benefits from the broader scope offered by a

multimodal perspective, which embraces prosody, SFX, music, and more as semiotic resources which contribute to the construction of meaning. Thus, a multimodal, pragmatic and stylistic approach – which Payrató (2017) terms "multimodal pragmastylistics" – embraces the complexity of layered auditory communicative acts within a context-situated communicative event such as a radio play.

3. Multimodal pragmastylistic analysis

3.1. Scene A: "Divine domesticity" (from the first play, Kings in Judea*)*

Dialogue	Annotations
SHEPHERD'S WIFE: ... Now, Mother Mary, let me take the Baby and lay him in the cradle while you have your bit o' supper. Come along, lovey, aren't you a beautiful boy, then? There! Now off you go to sleep like a good boy. But he's always wonderful good, ain' he? Never cries hardly at all. Happiest baby I ever seen.	*SW* has a "country" accent; prosodic features of tone and manner in addressing the baby. Use of non-standard syntax. M is very soft-spoken, with features of standard BBC English pronunciation, lexis and grammar.
MARY: He is happy in your kind home. But when he was born, he wept.	
WIFE: Ah! they all do that, and can you blame them - poor little things, seeing what a cruel, hard world it is they come into? Never mind. =	
JOSEPH: = (*in distance*) Mary? =	*Spatial* features of audio
WIFE: = Oh, here's your good man. (*louder*) Come along, Carpenter Joseph. Here's a nice dish of broiled meat for you. (*moving away*) I'm sure you need it, working so late, too. I wonder you could see what you were doing.	J has a thick West Country accent, typical vowels and ng-dropping.
JOSEPH: (*moving closer; laughing/smiling*) It's a fine night. That great white star shines nearly as bright as the moon—right over the house, seemingly. I mended the fence.	
WIFE: Isn't it a real bit of luck for us, you being such a fine carpenter? And so kind, doing all these jobs about the place.	Prosodic features. Non-standard syntax
JOSEPH: (*laughing/smiling*) Well, that's the least I can do, when you been so generous and shared your home with Mary and me. Isn't it Mary?=	
MARY = Yes Joseph.	
WIFE: = Well, we couldn't leave you in that old stable over in the inn. We'd never a-slept easy in our beds, knowing there was a mother and baby without no proper roof to their heads—especially after what my 'usband the shepherd told me about seein' them there angels, and the little boy bein' the … blessed Messiah and all ... Now Mother Mary, you take and eat that, it'll do you good.	Non-standard syntax; h-dropping
MARY: Oh, thank you.	
WIFE: D'you think it's really true? What my 'usband the shepherd said? About him bein' the promised Saviour as is to bring back the Kingdom to Israel?	H-dropping; Ng-dropping
MARY: I know it is true.	
WIFE: Oh, how proud you must feel. Don't it seem strange, now, when you look at him and think about it?	
MARY: Sometimes—very strange. I feel as though I were holding the whole world in my arms—the sky and the sea and the green	Diaphasic variation; register shift

earth, and all the seraphim. And then, again, everything becomes quite simple and familiar, and I know that he is just my own dear son. My sweet Jesus, whom I love – nothing can ever change that. WIFE: No! No more it can't...	

Table 1
Scene A.

This first extract constitutes the first (non-verbal) "appearance" of the character of Jesus in the play. The scene, which begins at around 17'40" in the first play in the cycle, *Kings in Judea*, follows scenes in Herod's court and among the Wise Men, where ample reference has been made to the Messiah, but he has not been "on stage", so to speak. This first play emphasises an important theme throughout the cycle, that of kingship and authority, certainly a topic of keen relevance during the plays' original wartime transmission. Possible kinds of kingship are juxtaposed, from Herod's ruthless violence and tyranny to the Magi's spiritualistic wisdom, and finally, focusing on the God-child, who moves the angel chorus to sing despite his humble, lowly birth. These threads will be taken up again and explored further in the later plays, particularly as they move towards the Passion scenes.

Scene A was selected for analysis as it reveals, in a relatively brief exchange, some of the range of diatopic variation present among the characters. Both Joseph and the Shepherd's wife use non-standard syntactical constructions and speak with rural British accents, described by Sayers herself as "country" or "provincial" accents in the character notes (Sayers [1943] 2022, p. 58), that is to say, diatopically marked by their features of pronunciation. The Shepherd's wife chatters good-humouredly as she bustles about, tending to and soothing the baby Jesus, serving food to his parents, and reflecting on the spiritual identity of Christ. Her accent contains widely used features of informal, conversational English, such as h-dropping and ng-dropping, although I am unable to identify a specific region in her performance, it is perhaps best assimilated to a Midlands accent. Joseph's voice has a deep, rich quality; he seems to be smiling as he speaks. His accent displays some features typical of the West Country, such as rhoticity and West Country vowel positioning, while retaining the clarity of diction necessary for BBC audio performance. Mary is soft-spoken and uses a more standard accent and register than her husband and her hostess, using primarily features typical of Standard Southern British. The Shepherd's Wife and Joseph also use non-standard syntactical constructions, such as the double negation of "never cries hardly at all" and "without no proper roof". These, along with the presence of discourse markers, including interjections ("ah"; "oh"), organisational markers ("well") and question tags (then?, ain't he? isn't it, Mary?) contribute to the socio-cultural landscape of the play world.

The characters are positioned within a specific linguistic community: their use of rural and working-class dialects reinforces their identities as individuals belonging to regional agricultural and trade communities, reflecting Sayers' desire to shock her audience by "tear[ing] off the disguise of the Jacobean idiom[4], go[ing] back to the homely and vigorous Greek of Mark or John, translat[ing] it into its current English counterpart" with the intent of making the gospel narrative immediate and relatable for her English wartime contemporaries, so that "there every man may see his own face" (Sayers [1943] 2022, p. 29).

In addition to the features of diatopic variation mentioned above, the auditory mode and the specific nature of the radio play, invite a reflection on diamesic variation, that is, how style and sense may alter according to means or media through which it is conveyed. The radio play's auditory mode allows a perspective that conveys the characters' movement. Sound studies have variously referred to this perspective layering of sound, often borrowing terms from the visual arts, such as "foreground", "midground" and "background", or "figure", "ground" and "field" (see van Leeuwen 1999, pp. 15-18 for a discussion of the origins and use of the terms). Indeed, there is a three-dimensional quality to the scene as Joseph approaches (comes from the field toward the ground), and as the Shepherd's Wife turns to serve dinner or shouts 'outdoors' (moving from figure to ground). Thus, the actor's performance of the piece, their control of volume, pacing and pitch, and their regulation of their physical distance from the recording apparatus all help to construct the scene's immersive quality, effectively positioning the audience as ear-witnesses to the unfolding drama.

Jesus' first "stage presence", as it were, is silent; the audience can imagine the baby as present from the prosodic variation in how others address him (the Shepherd's Wife coos and soothes him), but his own voice is not yet heard. The nativity scene is re-presented to the audience as a tableau which exists beyond the weary clichés of Christmas carols, but rather – shockingly – within a scene of ordinary domesticity, among speech communities such as agricultural workers and craftspeople of regional areas - the everyday accents of the radio audience in the UK, rather than the transatlantic or RP dialects commonly used in radio transmissions in the mid-20th century. Thus, the stylistic and sociopragmatic features outlined above foreground the very human, very humble beginnings of the character of Jesus of Nazareth. However, there is an upshift in the diaphasic variation in Mary's final turn. She moves to a higher, more poetic (or, perhaps, *prophetic*) register. This more elevated register will be mirrored and magnified in the following scene,

[4] A reference, by no means oblique, to the prominence of the King James Version (or Authorised Version) in English religious discourse, and its supporters' claims that it is "the sacred English original", for Sayers' witty and scathing response to such detractors, see p. 22.

during the visit of the Magi – eloquent, exotic, kingly characters who use poetic language to foretell the events of Jesus' life and ministry. Thus, the humility of Jesus' birth is immediately contrasted with his nobility and divinity.

3.2. Scene B: The calling of Simon Peter and Matthew (from the fourth play Heirs to the Kingdom*)*

Dialogue	Annotations
SIMON: I remember the very first time I realised that he wasn't like other men.=	Request to tell
JUDAS: =Tell me Simon	Conceding the floor / invitation to tell
SIMON: He'd been sitting in the boat with Andrew and me – you remember Andrew?	Invitation to co-tell / request to verify
ANDREW: Oh I do, yeah =	
SIMON: =And talking about the love of God. We'd had a bad night with the trawls, and were feeling a bit downhearted, but we forgot that, listening to him. And, all of a sudden, he said, you know, quick and cheerful: "Simon, Andrew, let down the net on this side if you want a catch." So I said, "It's not much use! We've toiled all night and taken nothing=	Describing Jesus' speech
ANDREW: =And I said, "but we'll have a try if you say so."	Overlapping / co-telling
SIMON: So, we did—and the weight of the fish broke the net!	
ANDREW: We had a job to get 'em aboard.	
JUDAS: Oh, that's marvellous..	Audience evaluation / backchannelling
SIMON: And then I lost my head, it seemed so queer, and – oh, I was tired, and I fell on my knees and said: "Sir, go away and leave us! I'm a sinful common man, and I can't bear it." And he laughed, and said, "Have courage; follow me and I'll teach you how to catch men."	
ANDREW: Of course, that's nothing to the things we've seen since…Matthew, tell Judas your story.	Invitation to tell / conceding the floor
MATTHEW: You – uh, you don't know me, mister, well, I'll tell you. I am Matthew, and I was a tax-gatherer. (*others murmur)* Eh, you know what to think about that; I can see it in your face. "One of the dirty dogs that works for the government and makes his profit out of selling his countrymen" (*murmurs)* Oh, that's so, you're dead right. …Well, see here, I shan't forget my first sight of him. When he came down our street the other day, I don't mind telling you I'd had a pretty good mornin'. Patting myself on the back, I was, thinking how I'd managed to put the screw on some of those poor devils of farmers and salt away a tidy bit for a rainy day. And I looked up—and there 'e was! "'Allo!" I thought, "here's the Prophet. I s'ppose he'll start calling me names like the rest of 'em. Well, let him! Hard words break no bones!" (*disciples' laughter*) So I stared at him, and he stared at me. It seemed as though his eyes was going straight through me – and through me ledgers, and reading all the bits as wasn't for publication. And somehow or other he made me feel dirty. (*murmurs*) That's all. Just dirty. I started shuffling my feet. And-And 'e smiled— you know the way he smiles sometimes all of a sudden—	Involving others Diatopic / diastratic variation in lexis h-dropping non-standard syntax
DISCIPLES: We know!	Audience participation
MATTHEW: And he says, "Follow me." I couldn't believe my ears! I tumbled out of my desk, and away he went up the street, and I went after him. I could hear people laughing—and somebody spat at me – I didn't seem to care. =	

JOHN: = It wasn't any of us, Matthew.=	Interruption
MATTHEW: =Oh no=, I know that! Well, when he got to my house, he-he stopped and waited for me. I said, "Will you come in?" And 'e said, "Yes, please." And I-I said, "I'd ask you to dine with us, but, well, you mightn't like our company." And he said, "Why not?" And I said, "Look here, this isn't a fit place for you to come to. You know 'ow I get my living." And 'e says, "Yes, I know. It doesn't matter." So, 'e came in and sat down, (*laughing*) and all these lads 'ere came with him. And nobody seemed surprised, only me.	Hesitation H-dropping
ANDREW: (*laughing*) We gave up being surprised some time ago!	audience evaluation
PHILIP: Some of the Pharisees were rather surprised. Remember that bunch at the door as we came out? "Really, my good man, your Master should know better than to hob-nob with all this riff-raff."	co-telling impersonation of Pharisees
MATTHEW: Yeah (laugh) – and he turned on 'em sharp: "Healthy men don't need the doctor," says he, "but the sick do. I've no message for respectable people – only for sinners." And I said to him, "Master, I'm coming with you." And he said, "Come along"—and I walked straight out of the 'ouse, and here I am.	description of Jesus' speech
JUDAS: What happened to all your belongings?	
MATTHEW: Oh I never gave 'em a thought—not for a week. Then my brother hunted me up and asked me what I thought I was doing. "Sell the whole lot up," I said, "or do what you like. I've done with it." ... And I'm having a wonderful time—hearing him talk and seeing the good 'e does. Ooh – now, you remember that poor chap by the pool of Bethesda? (*disciples murmur in assent*) You must listen to this, Judas! Paralysed thirty-eight years, he was. Lay there all the time on a mattress. "Stand up," says the Master: and he stood straight up on his feet. Jesus said, "Pick up your mattress and go home." And he slung the mattress over his shoulder and off he went. And, oh dear, that started something dandy didn't it?	Request to tell (to keep the floor) Justification of tellability Non-standard syntax

Table 2
Scene B.

The second excerpt is an example that highlights particular pragmatic and multimodal strategies in Sayer's adaptation of the source material from the gospel narratives, rendering the text a more 'choral' piece suitable for a full-cast performance and well-suited to the medium of radio drama. To achieve this choral quality, the third-person narration of the evangelists[5] is transposed

[5] Sayers' source material, the four biblical gospels, each contain accounts of the calling of Simon and Andrew. The most detailed account is found in the Gospel of Luke, which includes the miraculous catch, the dialogue reported in the play and Simon Peter's confession: "[2] and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. [3] Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. [4] And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." [5] And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." [6] And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. [7] They signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. [8] But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." [9] For he

into the immediacy of conversational storytelling, utilising the familiar dynamics of eyewitness accounts and anecdotes. In the extract above, the disciples are recounting their experiences with Jesus to the newest recruit, Judas. Firstly, Andrew and Simon co-tell their experiences of being called to follow Jesus, and the miraculous catch. Simon's incipit "I remember…" is a request to tell; he seeks consensus from the group to hold the floor. Having been granted permission to tell (Judas' "Tell me"), he then invites his brother Andrew to co-tell the story with him. Andrew was also present and can verify and flesh out the tale. Indeed, he interjects with details and takes turns telling the story alongside his brother. This sort of dynamic storytelling not only allows Sayers to rearrange the chronology of the well-known story to best fit her thematic divisions but also helps hold the audience's attention. The rapid, interactional negotiation of storytelling rights mimics patterns observed in authentic conversation (Norrick 2000). This collaborative, interactional style of storytelling also serves a broader purpose: it establishes a human and 'choral' identity, against which the singular authoritative voice is later brought into relief. Furthermore, the pragmatic negotiation of storytelling rights and turn-taking reveals the interpersonal dynamics at play within the group: the disciples are intimate friends, and the brotherly dynamic is not limited to Andrew and Simon (the biological brothers) but manifests itself at a group level.

Subsequently, Matthew's story is told, if not quite in a monologue, at least with Matthew as the sole teller. Andrew directly invites him to share his story – a common occurrence in a friendly setting where anecdotes or eyewitness accounts are exchanged – and he launches into a humorous and self-deprecating tale. While Simon and Andrew use conversational language (including contractions and other common features of spoken language), their accent and syntax are not particularly notable (closer to the "standard"). Matthew, on the other hand, speaks in a kind of 'stage cockney' dialect, which could perhaps be considered a kind of 'mockney' *ante litteram*. Some phonetic features include h-dropping and ng-dropping. His lexicon, too, features slang expressions such as "put the screw on" and "salt away a tidy bit". Syntactically, he uses constructions typical of the East London sociolect "me ledgers", "'e says", etc. These aspects of sociolinguistic variation, specifically diatopic and diastratic variation, among the characters in the play have a socio-pragmatic import. Matthew's marketplace register and dialect

and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, [10] and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." [11] And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him" (ESV Bible, 2001 Luke 5:2-11). For a comparative view of all four gospel accounts, see: https://www.esv.org/Matthew+4:18-;Mark+1:16-20;Luke+5:2-11;John+1:40-42/.

not only display the variety in provenance, class and socio-economic background among the disciples as a cohort, but they also contribute to the humour of the segment. Matthew, through both the lexical content of his speech ("bits as wasn't for publication") and his use of swindler's slang ("put the screw on"), is portrayed as a formerly dishonest, greedy person who has been transformed by his encounter with Jesus. His accent, background, and narrative style position him as an outsider; however, he has been welcomed into the community of the disciples, who have also been radically changed by meeting and following Jesus. The layering of diastratic and diatopic markers with the interactional dynamics of conversational storytelling is used to paint the characters – each semiotic and pragmatic layer giving rise to meanings and implicatures which give depth and resonance to the portraits. Thus, Matthew, while maintaining his distinctive idiolect, has been transformed from a social pariah to a member of a community with a shared narrative; this transformation is rendered audible through the alignment of his idiolect with the choral backdrop of the disciples' group storytelling dynamics.

In terms of the characterisation of Jesus within the text, the two tales are intended to present him to Judas; of course, they also function similarly as a presentation of his character to the audience. Both anecdotes focus on dialogical encounters with Jesus and report his speech; however, they also provide qualitative evaluations of his speech style. Simon describes Jesus as addressing him "quick and cheerful" and states that he "laughed", thus he is perceived as jovial and pleasant in his communicative style. However, in Matthew's tale, it becomes evident that Jesus' speech style is context-dependent; he shifts register and tone depending on his interlocutor. When the Pharisees judge him for consorting with the tax collector, he "turn[s] on 'em sharp" to rebuke their shallow spiritual understanding and their self-righteousness. Thus, from these accounts, Jesus emerges as a pragmatically proficient speaker.

3.3. Scene C – "Now I can see", an extract from the seventh play The Light and the Life

Dialogue	Annotations
JAMES:..I say, Master—you know that blind man you healed yesterday?	Request to tell
JESUS: Yes—what about him?	
PETER: The man's up before the Synagogue Court!=	Conceding the floor /
MARTHA: =Come and have supper, do—you can talk afterwards=	invitation to tell
PETER: =They've questioned him about what happened,=	
MARY = Come along Lazarus=	Overlapping
PETER: =They've asked him all about you...= they're even suggesting...(*talking energetically to fade*)	
[*Musical scene transition*]	
1ST ELDER: Now, let us get this straight – Shall I handle this?	Begins series of adjacency pairs (question; answer)

(*murmur of assent*) You say you are Jacob ben-Issachar, blind from birth, and you get your living by begging?	Accent and non-standard syntax features
JACOB: That's right. Blind from me birth 'til yesterday. Everybody knows me. I've had my pitch on the corner of the Temple steps this thirty years.	
1ST ELDER: Now tell us exactly what happened.	Directive, invitation to tell
JACOB: Well, I was sitting in my old place yesterday afternoon as usual=	
2ND ELDER: =Yesterday; that was the Sabbath?	Interrupting
JACOB: Yes, that's right. I was sitting there, and I hears a party of men come along. Might have been ten or a dozen of 'em. One of 'em puts a penny in my bowl, and says to another one: "Rabbi Jesus, why was this poor man born blind? Was it to punish some sin of his parents, or did he commit sin himself in a pre- a pre-" – something or the other.	Correction/repair
1ST ELDER: (*exasperated tone*) "In a previous existence?"	
JACOB: Ah, that's right. Before I was born, I took him to mean. And the other gentleman answers him and says, "Neither he nor his parents are to blame. But it was ordained that the works of God should be shown in him." And then he says: "I must work the works of Him that sent me while the daylight lasts, because the night's a-coming, in which no man can work." Oh, rather sorrowful-like, he says that. And he goes on: "So long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."	Prosodic features such as tone convey emotion and attitude Description of Jesus' speech
3RD ELDER: What did he mean by that?	Dispreferred response in the adjacency pair (question; answer)
JACOB: How should I know?... Then this same gentleman – him they called "Jesus," – comes up close to me and puts something on my eyes, like clay, or summat of that. And he says: "Now go to the Pool of Siloam and wash yourself."	
2ND ELDER: Nothing more?	Dispreferred response in the adjacency pair (question; answer).
JACOB: Not a word.	
1ST ELDER: Did he say you would get your eyes opened?	
JACOB: No. Nothing only what I've told you.	
2ND ELDER: Then why did you go?	
JACOB: I don't know. But I sort of made out by his voice there was something good coming. Voices mean a lot when you're blind, y'see. I knowed as that voice meant well by me. So off I goes to the Pool and washes careful—and when I'd got the clay all off, I found I could see! Lord, mister, that was queer, that was. I'd never seen in my life, you know. At first, I didn't know what to do with myself – I blundered about all over the place. But I soon learnt. Ah! It's a beautiful thing to be able to see the people, and the city, and the blessed sky, and the trees. You sighted folk don't know how lucky you are =you simply don't=	Description of Jesus' speech Non-standard syntax Interrupting
1ST ELDER: =Quite so, (*increased volume*) QUITE SO=... This happened on the Sabbath, you say.	
JACOB: That's right. And a blessed Sabbath it was for me.	
2ND ELDER: A clear case of Sabbath-breaking.	
1ST ELDER: This Jesus seems to go out of his way to affront all decent feeling. He could perfectly well have cured the man some other day of the week.	Positive impoliteness – associates the other with a negative aspect
JACOB: The better the day, the better the deed, ain't it?	
4TH ELDER: Nonsense. That's a very wicked thing to say.	
2ND ELDER: All work is a sin on the Sabbath, however beneficial its effects. This man Jesus is a notorious Sabbath-breaker and a very bad man.	Positive impoliteness, Jacob challenges the Elder's judgement of Jesus as "bad", thus questioning their religious and moral authority.
JACOB: Ho! Is he? I wish there was a few more like him.	
3RD ELDER: I must say that if the miracles are genuine – I don't say they are – but if they are, where does Jesus get his power, if not from God?	

2ND ELDER: From the devil, for all I know. The man's probably a sorcerer.	Threatening Jesus' positive face – associating him with negative aspects
1ST ELDER: Plenty of sorcerers profess to perform cures.	
2ND ELDER: And half the time the thing's a fake. I shouldn't wonder if this Jacob was a confederate. (*murmurs)* I don't believe he ever was blind at all.	
1ST ELDER: Now, Jacob, listen to us. I adjure you solemnly, in the Great Name of God – speak the truth! Were you ever really blind?	Positive impoliteness
JACOB: (*loudly, defiantly*) I WAS BLIND! Jesus of Nazareth opened me eyes, an' that is the truth before God.	Shouting- shows both defiance and frustration
1ST ELDER: It is our considered opinion that the man Jesus is an impostor. Do you question the decision of the court?	Dispreferred response in the adjacency pair "question; answer"
JACOB: Well, sir, all I know is, I USED to be blind and NOW I CAN SEE!	Emphasis and tone convey defiance and frustration.
2ND ELDER: But how do you know Jesus had anything to do with it? How did he open your eyes?	
JACOB: I've told you all that already. Weren't you listening? You seem dead set on 'earing about the Rabbi Jesus. Are you thinking of becoming his disciples?	Irony; mock politeness Emphasis and tone convey anger and resentment.
2ND ELDER: How dare you speak like that? It's contempt of court.	
3RD ELDER: Look here, my good man, YOU may be a disciple of Jesus. WE follow Moses. We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, nobody knows who he is or where he comes from.	
JACOB: Well, now, that's a queer thing, ain't it? You don't know where the man comes from—and yet he knew how to open my eyes. He's a bad man, you say. All right. Does God hear the prayers of bad people? "No," says you, "of course He don't." Does He hear the prayers of good people? "Yes," you says, "Yes, he does." Well, look-ee here. Here's a thing never heard on since the world began, that somebody should open the eyes of a man was born blind. Nobody can't do a thing like that, only by God's help, stands to reason.	Positive impoliteness – challenging their judgement and defying their moral and religious authority. Features of prosody (emphasis) Non-standard syntax; sociolect.
1ST ELDER: You are altogether BORN IN SIN!. Have you the effrontery to preach to us? You shall be excommunicated for this. [*gavel*]	Positive impoliteness.
2ND ELDER: Cast out of the synagogue. [*gavel*]	
4TH ELDER: And cut off from the congregation. [*gavel*]	High, or official, register; legal and religious specialised lexis; variation of synonyms
JACOB: Well! 's a funny world, ain't it? Turned out of 'ouse and 'ome at this time o' night… All very well to talk about gettin' a job, but 'oo's goin' to employ a bloke what's been kicked out o' the synagogue? Still, no use grousin'. I got my sight, and you never know your luck!– 'Ere, right...I'd better get outta here. (*moving away*) I'll try this door. [*heavy door*] – Oh, Lord! What a lovely thing the moon is! To think I never seen it 'til last night… Ooh – I beg your pardon, sir – I didn't hear you comin'. =(*Jovial laughter*)= Here, I say! I ought to know that voice! I can't see your face all that clearly by night, but faces mean nothing to me! – But you look the way you ought to look, if you're the man I take you for.	Syntax and lexis of a lower-class sociolect Accent features: h-dropping; n-dropping Adjacency pair (begging pardon; granting it): laughter as non-verbal response
JESUS: Jacob ben-Issachar, are you glad of the gift that you found in the Pool of Siloam?	
JACOB: That's it! That's the voice that brought the light to me that sat in darkness. I couldn't be mistaken. You are Jesus of Nazareth. Oh, sir=	Interruption
JESUS: =Not so loud, Jacob.	
JACOB (*hushed tone*): Oh yes, yes, that's right. You're in danger in Jerusalem. Why did you come?	
JESUS: To look for you. They said that for my sake, you had been	

cast out of the synagogue. JACOB: Yes, and that's just what's happened. (*laughs*) But never you fret for that, sir. I'll make shift somehow... JESUS: Tell me Jacob, do you believe in the Son of Man? JACOB: Do you mean the Messiah, sir? =Yes= Of course, I believe in his coming. JESUS: Are you ready to trust him? JACOB: Why yes, sir, if I knew who he was...You spoke as though he was here. Tell me where to find him and I'll trust him right enough. JESUS: (*Laughing jovially*) You have seen him already, =What?= He's speaking to you now. JACOB: You, sir? Indeed, I might a-known it. = (*Jesus chuckling)*= If ever a man came straight from God, sir, it's you. Say no more, Rabbi, I trust you. I'd follow you to the world's end. You-you won't send me away? JESUS: If anyone comes to me, I will never cast him out.	Regional expression, diatopic variation Begins a series of question-and-answer adjacency pairs Laughter as a partial response, explicated verbally Laughter as a form of amicable back-channelling

Table 3
Scene C.

The third segment selected for analysis spans the end of one scene and most of the following section. This is evident in the musical transition, a scene-dividing device used throughout the cycle of 12 plays, often, as above, to demarcate a change of location and players. This segment was chosen for analysis, in part to include a dialogue in which the character of Jesus is present, and also because of its own particular emphasis on *voice* as a medium. The text closely follows the source material (ESV Bible 2001, Gospel of John Chapter 9), omitting only the Pharisees' interview with the now-sighted man's parents (John 9:18-23) and the final confrontation between Jesus and the disciples (John 9:39-41). Both of these segments are present in the published text of the plays (Sayers [1943] 2022) and may have been included in the 1940-41 recording, but are omitted from the 1975 recording, which is being analysed here.

In terms of Conversation Analysis, the dialogue contains several interesting turn transitions. In the 'incipit', which consists of a linking passage from the previous scene to contextualise the dialogue following the musical transition, there is a sequence of overlapping utterances. Martha speaks over Philip to the group; Philip continues speaking to Jesus; and Mary chimes in to call her brother to the meal. This cross-talk is not marked by any prosodic features of frustration or irritation; rather, the friendly chatter reflects the good-natured chaos of group dynamics, much like conversation among family and intimate friends. Meanwhile, Jacob's interrogation before the Elders reveals a more sinister, threatening dynamic of overlap and interruption. The Pharisees, particularly the First Elder, control the topic of conversation and display the power dynamics typical of an interrogation. There are numerous adjacency pairs throughout the scene, mainly question-answer pairs, with Jacob initially answering cooperatively and providing the preferred response (i.e., the answer to the question posed: "yes, that's right

..." "Ah, that's right ..."). Jacob's accent is markedly rural and working-class, with similar features to that of Joseph in Scene A: h-dropping, n-dropping, and vowels typical of a rural Southwest English accent. The Elders speak in clipped Received Pronunciation, echoing the accent of administrative authority, education and upper-class prestige. Jacob uses non-standard syntactical constructions ("I knowed*"; "he don't*") and regionally marked lexical items ("bloke"; "grousing"). These features, both pragmatic and auditory, highlight the vast diastratic chasm between the Pharisees, played as proud, snub-nosed Oxbridge toffs, and the sympathetic simplicity of the healed man. This audible contrast functions as a multimodal index of power: the Pharisee's sociopragmatic dominance (interruption, topic control, power dynamics, etc.) is challenged and subverted by the embodiment of emotion, tone, and raw lived experience in Jacob's performance.

Eventually, Jacob becomes frustrated with the Pharisees' interrogation style. They interrupt his experiential account of what it means to be able to see when one has been blind since birth ("QUITE SO"), and they question him about details he has already fully divulged ("Were you ever really blind?"). According to Culpeper's framework of pragmatic (im)politeness (1998, 2011), they threaten his positive face by showing disinterest in the fundamental story of his healing and shifting the topic to legal matters, such as the Sabbath law; they also associate him with negative aspects ("a wicked thing to say"). However, Jacob seems to be more concerned with the continuous threat to Jesus' positive face throughout the dialogue and begins to give less cooperative, dispreferred responses to their questions ("How should I know?"; "I don't know"; "I've told you all that already. Weren't you listening?"). The Elders accuse Jesus of being a "notorious sabbath-breaker" and a "bad man", and they imply his association with the "devil" and "sorcerers". This damage to Jesus' face is too much for Jacob to bear; he defends his healer and helper more readily than he defends himself, sarcastically asking the Pharisees if their curiosity is due to a desire to follow Jesus, and eventually challenging the hypocritical and flawed reasoning in accusing a holy miracle worker of bad conduct ("Well, now, that's a queer thing, ain't it?"). In the scene's dramatic climax, he is banished from the religious (and, consequently, social) community. The resounding sounds of the gavel bangs punctuate the threefold sentence of excommunication, in which the Elders use an elevated register and synonyms from religious and legal discourse. The sentencing, and its dramatic gavel SFX, display a dreary, despondent finality and, perhaps, foreshadow the hammering of the nails into Jesus' body on the cross in the plays to come. However, Jacob's story does not end in the darkness in which it began, as an outcast. He encounters Jesus once again, this time as a sighted man, both physically and spiritually.

Jacob's first encounter with Jesus provides a form of meta-reflection on the diamesic features of the auditory mode, as he states, "Voices mean a

lot when you're blind, y'see. I knowed as that voice meant well by me". Indeed, he correctly recognises Jesus' benevolent intentions through his voice. In their second encounter, he hears Jesus laugh before he hears him speak, and that jovial chuckle sparks a first, partial recognition (I ought to know that voice!). Jacob then recognises Jesus when the latter speaks to him and makes reference to the miracle at Siloam. Jesus, through a series of question-answer adjacency pairs, guides him to a fuller knowledge of his divine nature, granting him spiritual sight along with his healed physical sight. The question-and-answer structure is an inversion of the previous biased and vicious interrogation which Jacob had undergone before the Elders. The consequence of the interview is inclusion rather than excommunication. Jesus promises to "never cast out" those who seek him, a deep comfort surely for the ex-blind man who had been "Turned out of 'ouse and 'ome at this time o' night" as a result of his convictions.

Jesus' laugh has communicative value throughout the scene, announcing his presence, granting Jacob's pardon, and, later, in his knowing chuckle, revealing his divine identity. His laughter functions as a partial response to Jacob's question, "Tell me where to find him". Jesus is portrayed as having authority over sight and blindness, in contrast with the Pharisees, who are blinded by their own desire for authority and power. Therefore, through the interplay of the audio drama's pragmatic and auditory features, Jesus is presented to the audience as both approachable and authoritative. Ultimately, such features foreground the hypostatic union of Jesus' identity: his divinity is underscored through his pragmatic authority and divine knowledge, yet his humanity is audible in his jovial and humane qualities.

4. Evaluating the hypostatic union of pragmatic multimodality

As mentioned in the Introduction, in Christian theology, the term "hypostatic union" refers to the doctrine that holds Jesus to be both fully divine and fully human, with the two natures (God and man) coexisting within his one, unified person. This philosophical and theological notion of two co-existing natures within one person may seem far from semiotic theories of meaning-making. However, I propose that multimodal communication conveys meaning according to a kind of hypostatic unity. The communicative modes (natures), in this case linguistic and auditory, co-exist and co-create meanings across the text, which is both *fully linguistic* and *fully auditory*. That is to say, the seemingly auditory aspects, such as accent, tone, prosody, music and sound effects, must be understood in terms of their impact on the interpersonal dynamics within the plays – both between the characters and in the audience's pragmatic understanding of the text. Analogously, in the

context of radio plays, the sociopragmatic features, such as (im)politeness, conversational narrative and sociolinguistic variation, are made manifest through the auditory mode: they are utterly dependent on the actors' embodied performances in order to be *given voice*, as it were.

The Man Born to Be King seeks to convey the life, miracles, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, as recorded in the gospel narratives and the traditional Christian creed. Thus, it foregrounds both his divine and human natures throughout, seeking to enact – through sound and speech – the doctrine of the hypostatic union. As demonstrated in the analysis, this is achieved through a systematic layering of auditory semiotic resources. The scenes examined here reveal how the use of the medium of sound (understood to include elements such as soundscape, prosody, diatopic variation, music, and so forth) co-exists with the linguistic medium (understood to include elements such as pragmatics, syntax, lexis, cohesive devices, and so forth) to produce the textual whole of the radio plays. The choral nature of the disciples' interactional storytelling, the contrasting sociolects of the Pharisees and the blind man, and other such features identified here contribute to the text's auditory and pragmatic complexity and its intercharacter dynamics. Furthermore, the scenes chosen endeavour not only to show the fully divine and fully human nature of the protagonist, but also, within that essence, to portray his intricate and contrasting character: the Servant-King, the Prince of Peace, the Victorious-Victim, and so on. The character is constructed both through his own speech and interactions and through other characters' impressions, judgments, and retellings of his words and deeds. Thus, the modes of sound and speech – and their pragmatic import – constitute the brushes and paints which outline, flesh out, shade, blend and highlight to produce the portrait of the multi-faceted and multi-dimensional character of Jesus of Nazareth.

While this study provides a qualitative foundation, it is necessarily limited by its focus on a single production (the 1975 recording) and on restricted extracts from the plays. Certainly, a broader analysis comparing different extracts and any other available archival recording, or indeed comparative studies with other religious dramas, broader corpus-based stylistic analyses, or response and perception studies aimed at measuring listener alignment with specific auditory markers of authority could all build on this exploratory analysis. Despite its necessary limitations, this study reveals the utility of focusing on the auditory mode and its narrative and dramatic functions within audio plays, which currently suffer from a paucity of linguistic and semiotic studies of their meaning-making processes. I believe it would be fruitful to continue studying *The Man Born to Be King* and, indeed, other audio plays through the complementary lenses of pragmatics and multimodality.

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