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Anna Snaith, ed.

# SOUND AND LITERATURE

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Sound is inclusive in all spheres of human existence, serving varied functions in language, music, technology, films, and literature, and has been studied extensively across disciplines such as neuroscience, psychology, acoustics, linguistics, media studies and cognitive science, among others. It is mainly with R. Murray Schafer's *The Tuning of the World* (1977)<sup>2</sup> that literature began to be witnessed as an archive of sound systems and their reception. Studying literature through sound has commonly been done through metaphors. Anna Snaith's edited volume, published in the series Cambridge Critical Concepts, offers a comprehensive and vast understanding of the most recent studies around sound and soundscapes and their application to literature and calls "for more explicit engagements with the symbolic registrations of sonic modernism in textual forms."<sup>3</sup> The collection is interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, with the aim to merge the sonic and the literary. It comprises eighteen chapters divided into three distinct parts—Origins, Development and Application. The collection examines the juxtaposition of the aural and the written, combining the audio (sound) and the visual (writing). The edited volume certainly has

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<sup>2</sup> R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977). The book is pioneering in the sense that it not only captures the growth of acoustic environments from rural to post-industrial age but also demonstrates the acoustic design of different soundscapes.

the scholarly charm to be bracketed with the other publications in the field.<sup>4</sup>

The first part, *Origins*, concerns the relation between the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century literary traditions with the sonic and aural theories of music, the senses and voice. For example, Chapter 1 discusses how sound is received and processed by organs and stored in the brain and can be recalled from memory through “sense impressions,”<sup>5</sup> while Chapter 4 discusses the influence of music on literature, specifically by creating a parallel between Wagner’s “infinite melody”<sup>6</sup> and the stream of consciousness technique used by modernist writers, especially Virginia Woolf.

The second part deals with the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by addressing the influence of modernism (scientific, technological, media and visual arts) on the literary landscapes. For example, Chapter 7 reviews how discourses about noise have given rise to anti-noise discourses due to sound pollution created by modernism.

The third part is a miscellaneous collection of chapters that ranges from the cultural analysis of sound to the dichotomy of hearing/seeing. This shift challenges the traditional method of silent reading towards a way of reading through listening as offered by audiobooks, while Chapter 15 sheds light on the relation of gender to sonic cultures and the quasi-absence of women in this field.

This collection’s contribution of the sonic aspect to literary studies touches upon topics that have hardly been touched upon before. “Deafness” by Rebecca Sanchez is an excellent example. Adopting a deconstructive approach, Sanchez annihilates the dichotomy of deafness and hearing by elaborating on the reception of sound achieved through the auditory and through all the other senses, thus adopting a methodology wherein the “acoustic phenomenon” is a “multisensory and multimodal sensory perception.”<sup>7</sup>

Apart from dividing the chapters into *Origin*, *Development* and *Applications*, they can be categorised in the following way: 1. The relation between music and literature (4, 5, 8, 12, 18); 2. The fusion of media and literary studies (9, 10, 16); 3. The associations of sound waves and the senses (1, 13, 14, 15). In Chapter 4, Gemma Moss discusses the philosophical and metaphysical impact music had through discussions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century theorists of art like Wagner, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Looking at the studies of these theorists, she examines the effects of classical music on memory, the senses and language. Music and language both have the power to induce affect and emotions by accessing the labyrinthine depths of consciousness, and thus

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<sup>3</sup> Snaith, 8.

<sup>4</sup> See Michael Bull, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019); Marcel Cobussen et al., *The Routledge Companion to Sounding Art* (London: Routledge, 2017); Trevor Pinch et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Gavin Steingo et al., *Remapping Sound Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); and Jonathan Sterne, *The Sound Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Snaith, 41.

<sup>6</sup> Snaith, 94.

<sup>7</sup> Snaith, 283.

musical techniques inspired modernist literary forms. In Chapter 5, Brad Bucknell explores Luigi Russolo's book *The Art of Noises*, where he attempts to give music to the commotions of modernity, bestowing an aesthetic perspective to the dissonance of modernism. Paul Gilroy in Chapter 8 examines how Black Atlantic music, previously considered noise marked by race, has become cosmopolitan as in the case of music such as Salsa, Reggae, Samba and Blues. Discussing Amiri Baraka, he deliberates how Black Atlantic music was created from the tragedies of the black experience on the one hand, and uncovered the relation between music and freedom on the other.

While in Chapter 9, Julie Beth Napolin discloses the entangled relation of slavery with sound technologies, in Chapter 10, Edward Allan discusses the constraints of the phonograph or the "talking book."<sup>8</sup> Some fields, such as psychology and neuroscience, believe that reading is not soundless; on the contrary, reading creates sound in the brain. Sound, therefore, should not be considered in opposition to reading but rather as inherent in the act of reading. Chapter 16 reviews the literary radio studies to examine how literature has taken over and silenced the sonic, as in the case of recording and radio broadcast.

Chapter 1 explores the "sound-sense dialectic" categorising poetry in two ways—some to be read silently (the relation of inner ear with the outer eye) and other to be read aloud (the relation of outer ear with the inner eye). Therefore, orthography, an external expression, cannot direct the inner meaning, a theory central to Saussure's linguistics of "sensuousness and semantic value."<sup>9</sup> In Chapter 13, Rebecca Sanchez challenges the normative view of deafness as the absence of sound. For her, "deaf people's sound experience is multisensory and multimodal, prosthetic, and interdependent."<sup>10</sup> She believes that the soundscape of deaf people is guided both by sensory and cultural experiences.

All the chapters in this collection offer inter and transdisciplinary perspectives on the dialogue between sound and literature, highlighting areas of literary theory such as feminism, gender studies, linguistics, race studies, sound studies, film studies, performance studies, media and visual studies, cultural studies and disability studies. However, no book can provide a comprehensive analysis of sound and literature, given the vastness of the corpus on sound and the panoply of literary genres. Given that this edited collection *Sound and Literature* by Anna Snaith discusses and adopts various theoretical approaches to sound studies, this collection is a must-read for all the scholars interested in technological developments around the sonic and the audio. □

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<sup>8</sup> Snaith, 212.

<sup>9</sup> Snaith, 39.

<sup>10</sup> Snaith, 276.