
STEREOPHONY AND LITERATURE: RESONANCE AND REVERBERATION IN THE *CHANSONS DE GESTE* AND ROMANCES OF THE 12TH AND 13TH CENTURIES**Jean-Marie Fritz**

Université de Bourgogne

e-mail: jean-marie.fritz@u-bourgogne.fr

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Résumé

Les cançons de gesta i els romans cavallerescos dels segles XII i XIII són un fidel testimoni de la realitat del seu temps, i d'entre aquests testimonis s'hi compten les percepcions sensorials. La literatura no només narra un fets descriptius i objectius sinó també les impressions que percep i transmet qui escriu, sensacions de les quals cal que s'impregni el lector per tal de fer-se seva la narració. Els esments respecte a efectes sonors i a les qualitats sonores dels espais són remarcables, i un buidatge d'aquestes cites en els textos literaris permet analitzar els sons, les ressonàncies o els espais en què el fet sonor pren protagonisme en l'esdevenir del discurs, ja siguin espais tancats com sales i palaus o bé espais oberts com el bosc o les escenes de batalla o de cacera. La veu, el crit, el toc d'instruments, el gest sonor o la vivència sonora de l'espai prenen així un caràcter teatral que forma part de la lectura, i els autors evocuen sovint l'efecte de la ressonància, l'eco, la reverberància i l'efecte estereofònic, conferint al text les qualitats emocionals d'una banda sonora.

Mots-clés: Chanson de geste, roman courtois, paysage sonore, chasse, bruit**Abstract**

The chansons de geste and chivalric romances from the 12th and 13th centuries are a faithful testimony of the reality of their time, and sensory perceptions are among these testimonies. The written word provides not only descriptive and objective information, but also the impressions perceived and conveyed by the author, which are the sensations the reader has to get acquainted with in order to make the story their own. Mentions to sound effects and the sound features of a particular space are remarkable, and a compilation of these references from various texts allows us to study the sounds, resonances, and spaces through which the sound event gains prominence in the narrative. These include confined spaces such as halls and palaces, and open spaces such as woods, and war and hunting scenes. The voices, cries, sounds of instruments, sound gestures, and sound experiences of spaces thus acquire a theatrical quality that becomes part of the reading experience. The authors often evoke the effect of a resonance, an echo, a reverberation or a stereophonic effect, thus endowing the text with the emotional qualities of a soundtrack.

Key Words: Chanson de geste, chivalric romance, sound landscape, hunting, noise

The Swiss Dominican Félix Fabri, who travelled the Holy Land in the 1480s, did not content himself with merely following the steps of Christ. Not only did he see, touch, and walk the Holy Land, but he also experienced its voice by studying the nature of resonance and echo in the churches and caves of Jerusalem. Visiting the cave of the Holy Cross, he noted that “in this cave the sound and echo (*sonus et resonantia*) are so good that I have never heard such in a choir or church” (MEYERS, CHAREYRON 2002: 186). Furthermore, in the church of the sepulchre of the Virgin, he claims that he “never heard a resonance as gentle and good in any church (“tam suavem et bonam resonantiam”) (MEYERS, CHAREYRON 2002: 84). Pilgrims’ accounts are not just a category, but the testimony of a singular experience, which in this case is acoustic. At the end of the Middle Ages, when landscape appeared in painting and literature, space was also a sound space; it was made up by lines, colours, shadows and lights, but also by sound and by the way in which it resonated.

The true novelty in Félix Fabri is not so much the fact that he takes into account the acoustic dimension, but the need to emphasize it, to share it with his readers and to present himself as the receiver. Earlier, literary texts had already used resonance to account for a space and to construct it, in short, to create a work of ‘fiction’. In the *Chanson de Roland*, it is the sound of the horn of the hero and its reverberation in the passes of Roncesvalles that grants the scene its sublime colouring: sound shapes the space, so to speak. The space-time (or chronotope) where the fictional characters of romances, epic poems and short stories alike, move, speak or act is also the framework in which the voices of the characters and the sounds of nature resonate and spread. The sound, whether high or low, loud or weak, is inscribed in a space where it unfolds, spreads with more or less intensity, and moves. It can move closer or farther away, and it can also rise to the sky, for the horizontal and the vertical dimensions complete each other. Authors play on this close relationship between sound and the setting in which sound carries. For instance, the sound of the horn does not have the same resonance in a palace hall or in open air, and outside, an uneven space like the passes of Roncesvalles offers more effects than a flat space. Each text ultimately builds a certain resonant space, a *Klangraum*. The categories of ‘high’ and ‘low’ are closely related to space: high instruments such as trumpets or horns are most often meant to sound in the open air, while low instruments like strings fall within the sphere of intimacy.

In Old French, the term for resonance is *bondie* (sometimes *rebondie*) (LECOY 1965-1970: 1. 15463), which expresses quite well the dynamics of sound and its kinetic nature. More simply, it can also appear as *oïe*, as we see in *Aliscans* in reference to a horn call:

Plus de .ii. liues l’oïe” en ala. Their sound carried over two leagues.¹

Resonance essentially takes two forms: either sound is deployed in a closed space and resonance becomes ‘reverberation’, or it unfolds in open air and uses space as the sound box of a musical

¹ RÉGNIER 2007: 1. 5239. Note the exceptional succession of vowels in hiatus: *o / i / e / en / a*.

instrument. Medieval texts favour exterior resonance, for it presents many more possibilities than the closed place. Fanfares and battle cries often provide occasion to evoke the components of the landscape through which these powerful sounds travel. As a result, the presence of the intimate space is significantly reduced.²

The Palace

The reverberation of noises and voices in a closed space appeared first in the context of epic (*chansons de geste* and Matter of Rome). This space is generally the ‘palace’, that is, the great hall of the castle and its generous acoustics. The author of the *Eneas* insists on the marvellous properties of the Capitol of Carthage. Beautiful, spacious, and formed by two hundred vaults and arches, the hall reproduces sound with fidelity:

Ja n’i parlast hom tant an bas, Ne fust oïz eneslopas Par tot lo Capitoille entor.	One could never speak so softly that he would not be instantly heard in the whole Capitol. ³
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A hall in the palace of Porus in Thomas de Kent’s *Roman d’Alexandre* is even more extraordinary. It is surrounded by marble walls, covered with a cypress vault, and it can easily accommodate sixty thousand men; moreover, even the words uttered in the softest voice can be heard from anywhere in this hall. This exceptional acoustic probably explains why this space is called ‘theatre’.⁴

Resonance allows the theatricalization of the narrative. Thus, in the same romance of Thomas de Kent, when Alexander enters Philip’s palace to offer him the crown of Nicholas, the hall where the powerful lords are gathered is an immense resonance box, a feature lexically supported by verbal redundancies: Alexander hears “le paleis fremir qe [‘qui’] bonde e resone” (FOSTER, SHORT 2003: l. 750). A similar expression can be found in reference to the palace of Orange that Guillaume discovers, amazed, in the *Prise d’Orange*.⁵ The words of the hero are highlighted through this motif, for they are so powerful that they make the walls of the palace tremble, as in the cases of Raoul and Guerri in *Raoul de Cambrai*:

Raous l’oï, desor ces piés sailli, Si haut parole qe li palais <i>fremi</i> .	At these words, Raoul jumped on his feet, And he speaks so powerfully that the hall <i>trembles</i> . ⁶
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² Few studies pay attention to this notion of resonance in literary texts: see the analysis of the *Klangraum* in the German *Prosa-Lancelot* in RUBERG 1965: 85-86, and the elaboration by WENZEL 1995: 142-148. See also our study (FRITZ 2011).

³ DE GRAVE 1925: ll. 537-539 (this passage does not appear in MS D edited by PETIT 1997).

⁴ FOSTER, SHORT 2003: l. 4324: “Se li meindres i parlast, le plus lontein l’orreit.”

⁵ LACHET 2010: l. 558: “Guillelmes ot le palés retentir.” Sometimes the author remarks the harmonious dimensions of the hall; see ARMSTRONG 1994: v. 1228: upon Alexander’s death, there is “demaine tels glas / Que la sale en tentist qui fu faite a compass.”

⁶ KAY, KIBLER 1996: ll. 490-491, 5091-5092: “Gueris l’oï, s’a la coulor noircie; / Si haut parole la sale est ‘estourmie’.”

The mention of the palace accentuates any decisive event in both *chansons de geste* and romances. It can be a voice as in the preceding examples, but also a fight like the one between Rainouart and Chapalu in the *Bataille Loquifer*—a *chanson the geste*⁷—or the combat between the Fair Savage and King Julien in the romance of *Floriant et Florete*:

Sor lor hiaumes grans cos se donnent,	The blows on their helmets were so powerful,
Que tout le chastel en estonnent,	That the whole castle resounded,
Quar molt sont de fiere maniere	Because they are formidable fighters. ⁸

It can also emphasize a simple gesture, as in the *chanson Gui de Bourgogne*, where the pagan king Huidelon possesses a golden sceptre with golden rings. When he hits the table with it in front of all his knights, he makes the whole palace vibrate and resonate.⁹ This gesture of authority can also be found in the Christian world in the case of Aymeri de Narbonne:

Fiert sor la table par si ruiste fierté	He hits the table with such force and violence
Que le palés en a tot retinté;	That the great hall has mightily resounded;
Ce senefie qu'i doit estre escouté.	Which means that he must be listened to. ¹⁰

Here, unlike in the case of the pagan king, the *trouvère* takes care to explain the *senefiance*: he seeks to make himself heard. Garin le Lorrain proceeds in the same way with a staff of green pine with which he hits a table.¹¹ As for parodies, the *Roman de Renart* depicts King Noble who, moved by an intense anger, waves his tail and “se debat par tel destrece / Que tout li palais en resonance” (STRUBEL 1998: v. 1986-1987);¹² and still in a later branch, *Renart magicien*, it is a fart of the bear Brun that makes the whole hall resonate provoking the laughter of the audience.¹³

Finally, the setting also allows to highlight musical instruments. A fine example appears in *Huon de Bordeaux* regarding the harp of the minstrel: “A .xxx. cordes fait sa herpe sonner, / Tout li pallais commance a retinter” (KIBLER, SUARD 2003: ll. 7648-7649). Thus, space fully participates in the beauty of the performance; in a sort of shift of meaning, the palace becomes an extension of the instrument, which resonates melodiously. In the *Roman de Troie*, Benoît de Sainte-Maure ensures the transition between interiority and exteriority in this way, suggesting a transparency or at least a sound porosity between both spheres. In the final assault of Hector against the Greeks,

⁷ BARNETT 1975: l. 3766: the monster Chapalu made the hall tremble and the windows rattle; moreover, the *laisse* ends with a remark about the sound (“Tot li palais en tentist anviron,” l. 3827).

⁸ COMBES, TRACHSLER 2003: ll. 7123-7125.

⁹ GUESSARD, MICHELANT, 1859: l. 1848: “Trestout fait le palais fremir et gresloier.”

¹⁰ SUCHIER 1898: ll. 66-68.

¹¹ IKER-GITTLEMAN 1996-1997: ll. 11277-11279: “En sa main tint .i. baston de vert pin; / Fiert sor la table, tote la fait tantir, / Ce senefie que l’an pais li feïst.”

¹² Cf. br. Ia, l. 379-380.

¹³ STRUBEL 1998: ll. 1789-1790: “Toute la sale en rebondist, / Chascune des bestes en rist.”

the fanfare of horns and olifants is singularly powerful: “Tuit li murail en rebondissent, / E li palais en retentissent” (BAUMGARTNER, VIELLIARD 1998: ll. 16069-16070). The sound comes from outside, but the walls, thanks to the echo, multiply its intensity and make it reverberate even inside the palace.

The Forest

The forest is a kind of hyperbolic palace whose acoustic properties can be compared to those of a closed space, as is done for the temple of the Grail in Albrecht’s Germanic romance *Der Jüngerer Titurel* (l. 1270):

Some profane voice resonated in the temple, and because of the nobility of the jewels, the echo carried in height and width and transformed into a clear and soft sound, as if a May ‘forest’ returned the song of the bird that salutes it.¹⁴

This merging of nature and culture is based on a sense of awe.¹⁵ The forest is indeed rooted in the sense of hearing, for therein one hears more than sees, and is heard more than seen, as suggested by an old proverb mentioned by St. Bernard: “Fields have eyes, and woods have ears” (RAYNAUD, LEMAÎTRE 1914: l. 27466).¹⁶ Many heroes find their way through the forests of Brittany by ear: in the *First Continuation of Perceval*, King Caradoc advances blindly following the sound of a horn, while Gawain follows the cry of a goshawk (VAN COOLPUT-STORMS 1993: ll. 2882, 5846). In Marie de France’s *lai Le Fresne*, the handmaiden of the twins’ mother goes deep into the forest with the infant before finding her way to a town thanks to the noises of dogs and cocks.¹⁷

Romances and *chansons de geste* largely exploit the sound potentialities of the forest. However, they highlight human sounds and cries rather than the rustle of the wind through the branches—the famous “Waldrauschen” of German Romantics. In his *Georgics*, Virgil had already played on the acoustic properties of this immense resonance box: the forests and Mount Olympus resound echoing the fights of bulls—“reboant’ silvaeque et longus Olympus” (III, 223 et 45). In the *Eneas*, the woods echo the cries of pain of the men of Turnus:

[...] si forment s’en escrierent
que tuit li bois en retinterent.

They uttered such cries
that all the woods resounded.¹⁸

¹⁴ STANESCO 2006: 1060-1061.

¹⁵ The parallel between the church and the forest, the pillars or columns and the trees is commonplace in Romanticism. “The vaults of the old churches make the same noises as the depths of the old forests, when the foot of the solitary passer-by interrogates the sonorous echoes of the nave, and the air outside slips through the badly joined planks, and rattles the broken windows, adding strange chords to the deaf echo of his steps” (CASTEX 1961: 115).

¹⁶ On BERNARD DE CLAIRVAUX, see *Epistulae*, 42, § 21: “Expositio vulgaris proverbii: *Campus habet oculos et nemus aures*” (LECLERCQ, TALBOT, ROCHAIS 1957-1977: 117). On Latin examples, see WALTHER 1963: p. 204, n° 1786, 1787.

¹⁷ RYCHNER 1971: ll. 147-148: “Cele part vet a grant espleit, / U la noise des chiens oieit.”

¹⁸ PETIT 1997: ll. 9813-9814.

In *Garin le Lorrain*, “toz li bois et li gaus” are like loudspeakers for horns and trumpets.¹⁹ By synecdoche, the forest becomes a sound object, as in this epic formula of the *Roman de Thebès*:

Lors oïssiez le bois tentir,
La gent de toutes parz venir.

Then you could have heard the wood resound
And people rush from everywhere.²⁰

In Arthurian romances, the forest is the natural space for the cry of distress of both the attacked or desperate maiden and the anguished knight. In the mid-fifteenth century, Jacques Milet entitled his allegorical poem *Forêt de Tristesse* because of the cries of lovers crazed with despair that the narrator hears through the forest.²¹ In the same way, the author of the romance *Perceforest* called the forest haunted by the braying Beast *Forest du Glat*, that is, the “Forest of the Cry.”²²

Hunting scenes are an ideal opportunity to showcase the reverberating power of the forest. The examples are innumerable and appear from early on (a scene quite rich in sound references can already be found in the first Carolingian epic, *Karolus Magnus et Leo Papa*) (BEUMANN, BRUNHÖLZL, WINKELMANN, PADERBORN 1966). Sound is frequently associated with the tactile sensation of trembling, as in the *Vie de saint Gilles* by Guillaume de Berneville, where all the forest “tentist e tremble” due to the dogs’ barks and the horn calls (LAURENT 2003: ll. 1848, 1902). This force is not synonymous with noise. The art of hunting and the art of music are often closely related, as stressed by Gottfried of Strasbourg’s *Tristan*, where King Marke’s gift of a small horn to Tristan and his initiation to hunting with hounds run parallel to his learning to play the harp.²³ The sounds of the hunt are a true musical spectacle, which, according to Benoît de Sainte-Maure, is far superior to the tune of a crwth:

La chace comença si bele,
Lais de rote ne de vïele
Ne vausist tant a escouter :
La grant forest retentist cler.

The hunt began with such grace,
That one would not enjoy so much
Listening to the tune of a crwth or a vielle:
The immense forest resounded brilliantly.²⁴

At the end of the Middle Ages, Michaut Taillevent would concur with this view in his *Débat du cœur et de l’œil* when talking about the dogs barking in “joyous harmony” with the horns:

¹⁹ IKER-GITTLEMAN 1996-1997: l. 9749. moreover, the *laisse* ends with a remark about resonance.

²⁰ PETIT 2008: ll. 2645-2646.

²¹ Illec n’oÿ que criz et plaints
Sans cesser le jour et la nuyt (...).
Le soleil a paine y reluit
Et n’y pleut que pluye de lermes.
Tonnoirre de regretz y bruit
De gens malades et infermes
(VÉRARD: l. 1501).

²² Voir ROUSSINEAU 1992: 216.

²³ Voir MARCHELLO-NIZIA 1995: 434-438.

²⁴ CONSTANS 1904-1912: ll. 29305-29308.

Et tant doulx estoit leur conduys
 Que leur ton qui retentissoit
 En la forest estoit deduis
 Plus que d'instrument quel qui soit.

So sweet was their accompaniment
 That the notes they made resounded
 In the forest causing a livelier pleasure
 Than any instrument (37-40).²⁵

Horn calls and barks resonate harmoniously. In his treatise on hunting, the *Livres du Roy Modus et de la Royne Ratio*, written before 1376, Henri de Ferrières emphasizes the woodland framework to this harmony, for not all forests offer the same acoustics:

Se la forest est bele et douche
 Et il y a de chiens foison,
 Il donnent molt merveillex son
 Et si plesant a escouter
 Que nul ne le pourroit conter.

If the forest is beautiful and gentle
 And the dogs are many,
 They produce an extraordinary sound
 So nice to hear
 That it cannot be expressed.²⁶

All these examples refer to hunting with hounds as opposed to falconry (*volerie* in old French) or hunting with falcons. The hunting treatises written by Henri de Ferrières and Gace de la Buigne are built around this contrast. By comparing the respective merits of these two types of hunting in depth, the authors discuss the priority of sight and hearing. Of course, sight is traditionally nobler than hearing and therefore falconry, essentially silent, prevails.²⁷ Moreover, the dog does not have the nobility of the bird. However, the supporters of hunting with hounds defend themselves by insisting on the variety of the pleasures which it procures: it is a total and harmonious spectacle that requires using eyes and ears which only makes the 'enjoyment' more intense.²⁸ In Gace de la Buigne's work, not without humor, the passage "Passion for Dogs" will go as far as to compare the *noise* of the hunt—and especially the varied barking of dogs—to the most subtle alleluias at the royal chapel. Moreover, he uses all the technical language of polyphony—*motet*, *hoquet*, *teneur*, *contreteneur*, *diapenthé*, *diapason*—to account for the intensity of this pleasure.²⁹

The Cosmos

To the enveloping space and natural architecture of the forest, we must oppose the great spaces in which the sound carries generously: land, sea, and air, all the elements and all directions of space are included. The trumpet (*tuba*), the epic instrument par excellence, is precisely defined,

²⁵ DESCHAUX 1975: 193. In the Middle Ages, the term *conduit* also designates a musical genre.

²⁶ TILANDER 1932: 249 (*Le Livre des deduis*, 118, ll. 500-504).

²⁷ HENRI DE FERRIÈRES, *Les Livres du Roy Modus* (TILANDER 1932: l. 304 et seq.). Falconry is not silent due to the bells the falcons wear, see STRUBEL, DE SAULNIER 1994: 154.

²⁸ "Deulz choses valent miex que une," claims a lady who supports hunting with hounds in HENRI DE FERRIÈRES (TILANDER 1932: l. 603). See also BLOMQUIST, KARLSHAMN 1951: l. 11093 et seq.

²⁹ BLOMQUIST 1951, l. 8073 et seq., l. 10537 et seq. See a detailed presentation of the various arguments put forward in this debate between hunting with hounds and with falcons in Henri de Ferrière and Gace de la Buigne in the Blomquist edition of Gace's treatise (pp. 11-12). On this comparison between the pleasure of sight and the pleasure of hearing, see STRUBEL, SAULNIER: 1994: 144-154.

according to Isidore of Seville, by this ability to occupy the space in which it resonates in its entirety: “Clear sounds are those which spread farther, so that they completely fill the space, like the brilliance of the trumpets.”³⁰ The author of *Partonopeu de Blois* repeatedly insists on this saturation of sound in the hunting scene, where the hero blows the horn:

La noise a le contree “emplie”,	The din ‘spread’ across the land,
Dis liues en respont l’oïe (...).	The echo carries over ten leagues (...).
Trestos li bos est <i>raplenis</i>	All the wood is <i>filled</i>
De bele noise et de beaus cris.	Of a beautiful tumult and beautiful cries . ³¹

Space is here a container, a receptacle that filled by the *noise*. Epic texts take advantage of the great fanfares to create a wider landscape. In the *Roman d’Alexandre*, the three hundred horns of Alexander’s men resound in the plain (“par le plain”), but were also heard through the valleys, the mountains and caves as far as Babylon:

Ces valees resonent, cil mont et cil cavain,
Desi q’en Babilone l’oënt li citoiain.³²

The inhabitants of Babylon understand that the hostile army is approaching their city, thus, sound is acting as a threat. The relationship between sound and space can be reversed in this kind of military and obsidional context: it is not so much the space that contains sound and carries it, but sound that encircles a space, locking it up to a point of constriction. Thus, Gautier de Châtillon uses the Virgilian verb *circumsonare*, surrounded by sound, to describe the siege of Thebes by the army of Alexander: the city is trapped within a sound barrier (COLKER, PADOUE, 1978: l. 310).³³

The trumpet is not alone in enjoying this exorbitant power of enveloping the whole landscape with its sonorous force. The *noise* of armies on the march or in combat extends horizontally and vertically. As for the horizontal dimension, *trouvères* rely on two main settings: the land and the sea. In the *Roman d’Alexandre*, the deserts of India offer a generous acoustic (ARMSTRONG 1994: ll. 1221-1222, 1481),³⁴ and the *chanson de geste Garin le Lorrain* portrays the moor and the expanses of sand that resonate with the noises of the army of Lorraine:

La oïssiez les granz landes tentir,	There you would have heard the vast moors resound,
Et le sablon remuer et guenchir,	and the sandy expanses be stirred up and turned over. ³⁵

³⁰ ISIDORE DE SÉVILLE, *Etymologies*, III, 20, § 10 : “Perspicuae voces sunt, quae longius protrahuntur, ita ut omnem impleant continuo locum, sicut clangor tubarum” (LINDSAY 1911).

³¹ COLLET, JORIS 2005: ll. 1815-1816, 1837-1838.

³² [The valleys resound, all the mountains and caves, and their sound reaches the inhabitants of Babylon] ARMSTRONG 1994: ll. 6058-6059.

³³ Cf. VIRGILE, *Enéide*, VIII, 474.

³⁴ ARMSTRONG 1994: ll. 1221-1222, 1481.

³⁵ IKER-GITTLEMAN 1996-1997: ll. 7008-7009.

In another *chanson de geste*, *Bataille Loquifer*, the sea comes into play and the liquid element seems agitated and stirred up by the fanfares of the Saracen fleet:

Sonent cil cor, molt est grant la bondie,	The horns sound, and the sound carries far away,
La mer engroisse et escume et fremie.	The sea grows rough and foams and agitates. ³⁶

The sea is no longer a mere passive setting or a resonance box: it stirs up to resonate in unison with the *noise* of men.

Verticality produces an even more striking effect that combines the earth and the sky in a sort of cosmic expansion. Under the *noise*, the ground trembles and the air quivers signalling war:

Fremist li ciex, fremist la terre,	The ski trembled, so did the earth:
Bien resemble des or mes guerre.	Everything exudes war. ³⁷

The earth vibrates at first under the stamping feet of armed men, a sound that the *Chanson d'Aspremont* describes with a rare and suggestive term, *pativement*, derived from *pistillum*, pestle (BRANDIN 1919-1922: l. 5149). In *Aliscans*, the pagans literally occupy the whole plain and make such a noise that they shake the earth.³⁸ The trembling of the earth is often connected with the neighing of horses, as in the Occitan *chanson Roland à Saragosse*: Roland's mount, seeing his master, began "to neigh so loud that the earth trembled around him" (GOUIRAN, LAFONT 1991: ll. 194-198). *Trouvères* also exploited this chthonian character of the horse: in *Raoul de Cambrai*, Guerri's destrier wallows on the ground, gets up, and neighs so loudly that "the earth sounded" (KAY, KIBLER 1996: ll. 3227-3229).

The sky is even more present, and the epic noise is a kind of reverse thunder that rises towards it. In the *Aeneid*, the clamour of men and the brilliance of the trumpets are directed towards the sky.³⁹ Gautier de Châtillon's *Alexandreis* maintained this trope and gave it an aggressive colouring: the terrifying cries of the fighters of Arbèle struck the stars.⁴⁰ The conclusion of *Ysengrimus* resumes this cosmic crash in a parodic fashion: the cries of the abbess Salaura, the pig, at the death of Ysengrin, "reached the eleventh sphere to the point that a deaf man could not have endured her speech."⁴¹ Vernacular literature relied mainly on Roland's model. Many epic texts and romances evoke the effects and the reverberations of echo on uneven terrain, mountains, valleys, and passes:

³⁶ BARNETT 1975: ll. 1057-1058.

³⁷ PETIT 2008: ll. 4895-4896.

³⁸ "Adont commencent Sarrazin a venir, / Toz Aleschans en veissez covrir; / Tel noise meinment la terre font fremir" (RÉGNIER 2007: ll. 54-56). See the biblical account in 1 Samuel: 4, 5.

³⁹ "It caelo clamorque virum clangorque tubarum" (*Enéide*, XI, 192; see also VIII, 526); in the *Georgics* it is the buzzing of bees that rises towards the sky (*Géorgiques*, IV, 78-79).

⁴⁰ COLKER 1978: l. 152 ("erit horrifera astra boatus").

⁴¹ VOIGT 1884: 661-662: "Auribus ut surdis foret intolerabile verbum, / Clamor ad undecim venerat usque polum."

Des huz, des criz et des menees
Sonnent cil mons et ces valees.

Calls, cries, and fanfares
Resound across mountains and valleys.⁴²

Plus de mil grailles sonent tot contre val la pree, More than a thousand trumpets sound over the meadow,

La montagne tentist, resone la valee. The mountain resounds, the valley resonates.⁴³

In the most elaborated texts, sound literally creates a landscape. In *Moniage Rainouart*, the rattling of the swords of Guillaume and his men on the shields of their opponents makes it possible to evoke valleys, hills, mountains, and moors (BERTIN 1973: ll. 2775-2780). In *Parfait du Paon*, a late extension of Alexander's *chanson* by Jean de Le Mote (ca. 1340), all the elements of space are used to convey resonance:

Si tres grant noise font que terre, bos et mer, They make such a din that earth, woods, and sea,
Roche et riviere et tours en ot on resonner. Rocks, rivers, and towers resonate.⁴⁴

The variety of the landscape mirrors the intensity of the *noise*.

Space ultimately allows to describe the intensity of sound through a metonymic play. The intensity of a noise is measured by the distance over which it carries. The author of *Aliscans* never ceases to accompany sound references with spatial details: the *noise* and the cries of the combatants can be heard over five leagues, then over two, and at last, over a league and a half. This gradual shortening of distances is perhaps related to the decline of the fight, and in fact it is used to describe it.⁴⁵ In the mountainous setting of the *Chanson de Roland*, resonance multiplies: the noise ("rimur," l. 817) of the army of Charles crossing the Pyrenean passes to reach France is heard over fifteen leagues, and the sound of Roland's olifant carries over thirty leagues:

Halt sunt li pui e la voiz est mult lunge, The mountains are high and the sound carries far away,
Granz .xxx. liwes l'oïrent il respundre. The echo was heard well over thirty leagues.⁴⁶

The horn of Aubéron has a so-to-speak unlimited range, for it is even heard at the Dry Tree and the Red Sea (KIBLER, SUARD 2003: l. 3244). In *Lohengrin* (end of the thirteenth century), the sound of Elsa of Brabant's bell carries all the way to the court of King Arthur (CRAMER 1971: stanza 31). Distance is often estimated from sound, for instance, in terms of earshot (*huchiee*)

⁴² PETIT 2008: ll. 9663-9664.

⁴³ ARMSTRONG 1994: ll. 6611-6612.

⁴⁴ CAREY 1972: ll. 2465-2466.

⁴⁵ RÉGNIER 2007: ll. 64, 261, 504. On the dawn of the second battle, the horns of the Christians carry over two leagues, whereas Saracens' horns carry over five (5238, 5415).

⁴⁶ SEGRE 2003: ll. 1755-1756.

or the reach of a horn call (*cornee*).⁴⁷ In the *Conte du Graal*, according to Perceval, the castle of the Grail is within a cry's reach from the place where he meets his cousin, and in the ruined city in *Bel Inconnu*, the towers are within earshot of each other (MÉLA 1990: l. 3424; PERRET, WEILL 2003: l. 2870). Sound indicates distance, but also power. Renato Bordone notes that Italian cities competed for the most powerful bells that were to rule over a vast "sound territory" (BORDONE 2002: 144). Moreover, the high towers of the cities certainly allowed to see in the distance, but also the possibility to post trumpets whose sound would carry. Jean d'Arras insists on this point in his aetiological account of the Tour Trompe of Lusignan (VINCENSINI 2003: 264). Reality confirms fiction here. In his late thirteenth-century praise of Milan, Bonvesin da la Riva emphasizes the exceptional power of the six trumpets of the city, which are unparalleled in the rest of the world according to the chronicler. The terrible force of these instruments ("tubarum clamor terribilis") symbolizes the sublimity and power ("altitudinem simul and fortitudinem") of the Lombard city (PONTIGGIA 1974: 66).

The *chansons de geste* and romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are built around violent actions; pitched battles, duels, combats against giants, monsters, and other hostile figures punctuate the narration. Every violent gesture involves noise; every fight is sonorous. Only allegorical fiction allows to imagine a fighter whose blows do not make any sound, as *Bien celer* who, in the *Roman de la Rose*, acts in the shadows, with felted feet, "sans fere noise" (LECOY 1965-1970: ll. 15457-15464). Only a cunning character such as Renart advances on the sly to surprise his prey; he always moves discretely without "noise ni bruit" (STRUBEL 1998: l. 352). The term *noise*, which subsumes the whole sphere of sound in literature, can certainly be applied to the chirping of birds, to instrumental music or even to the music of the spheres (the *Echecs amoureux* includes the expression "melodieuse noise," ABERT 1904: 901, l. 619), but the prevailing medieval connotation of the term was already linked to conflict, which is also the only extant sense in modern French and is manifest in one of its possible etymologies, *noxia*, harm. This close relationship between sound and violence was also based on a scholarly background that defined the sound phenomenon as striking or hitting air, that is, as a shock. Even words themselves stemmed from this violent perspective, if we recall that Isidore of Seville etymologically associates words (*verba*) with the verb 'to strike' (*verberare*). But this *noise* cannot be conceived without a framework in which to project and spread. This framework in turn grants sound a stronger impact and more intensity, drawing attention to key events in the narration.⁴⁸ It can be an enclosed space like the palace, where the words of authority of men of power such as the sovereigns of the *chansons de geste* resound, or a semi-open setting, as the forest where the cries of distress of knights being attacked or young maidens being raped are a call for the heroes of romances to come and save them. It can also be a cosmic framework

⁴⁷ The term *cornee* is rare, it appears in the manuscripts AP of the *Roman de Thèbes*: see "varia lectio" in line 5934 of the edition of CONSTANS 1890: 289.

⁴⁸ ISIDORE DE SÉVILLE, *Etymologies*, III, 20, § 2.

that suggests an apocalyptic atmosphere, as when Arthur embarks for Sicily in the romance of *Floriant et Florete*:

Toute la mers en vait crollant.
Sonent buisines et fretiaux
Et flâutes et chalumiaux,
Toute la mers en estormist
Et li airs du ciel en noircist,
Se samble touz li mons isoit.

The whole sea is shaken.
The trumpets sound, as well as the pipes,
Flutes and fifes.
The whole sea resonates
And the sky darkens,
It seems that it is the end of the world.⁴⁹

All the directions of space—the horizontality of the sea and the verticality of the sky—are here claimed to give the impression that the world is ending. The sounds of nature go hand in hand with the music of wind instruments, and the effects of resonance and stereophony are multiplied by means of chromatic notes: the sky turns black. Sound thus comes into play in a poetic depiction of fear and terror. Both the *trouvères* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and Dante in his *Inferno*, with its thunders, gnashing of teeth, and the barking of Cerberus, or some more unusual sounds such as the clattering of storks' beaks, the buzzing of hives, and the creaking (*cigolar*) of scales, had understood it many centuries before cinema played on soundtracks to create an impression of anguish or to signify the end of the world.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ COMBES, TRACHSLER, 2003: II. 2686-2691.

⁵⁰ DANTE, *Inferno*, XXXII, 36, XVI, 3, XXIII, 102.

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