

## Sonic Images in Flavian Epic

Privileging the visual over sound is a reflex with a long tradition in Western aesthetics (Fisher 1999, O'Callagan 2011). This paper inventories environmental and human-generated sounds in Flavian epic, compares their reception by internal characters and external readers, and invites broader reflections on the ancients' auditory experience. Investigating the aural aesthetics of the *Argonautica*, the *Thebaid*, and the *Punica*, serves as an introduction to the subsequent papers on individual authors.

Flavian epic is permeated by the sounds of physical phenomena and of living things: skies thunder, winds howl, seas roar, fires crackle, birds flap, mammals groan. These geo-sounds and bio-sounds variously enhance their local contexts. For instance, the "sound effect" in a simile closes the gap in the experience of the comparandum by the internal characters and the external audience. Comparing soldiers' crashing bones to the sound of falling trees (Val. *Arg.* 3.165-169) turns an elusive and violent event into a tactile, and uncomfortably familiar, reality.

Sound also energizes scenes by virtue of its indirectness: hearing demands a greater inferential effort than vision, since sounds are often disembodied or dislocated. Thus, claims Silius, the straits between Italy and Sicily are so narrow that dog barking and bird songs carry through (*Pun.* 14.20-22). Here, the audience is invited to visualize space in terms of sound: that is, to recall themselves in a space where they have heard barking or bird song, and to place Sicily in that distance and direction. Both dog barking and bird song infuse geography with time, and suggest a human presence within the scene and without it. As such, they exact a cooperation from the reader that is more active than receiving an image of mute space *ante oculos*.

Cumulatively, I argue that sound in Flavian epic is not ancillary to vision, adding "dramatic effect," but a crucial means by which authors challenge the perceptual boundary

between the material and the imaginary. Such a reading contributes to scholarship on ancient soundscapes and ponders differences between ancient and modern acoustic sensibilities.