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Acoustic Encounters: The *Ezan* in Nineteenth-Century Constantinople through Anglophone Travel Writing

Abstract I: Questo articolo esamina l'*ezan* (il richiamo islamico alla preghiera) come dispositivo acustico urbano che organizza spazio, tempo e relazioni sensoriali a Costantinopoli. Attraverso la teoria del paesaggio sonoro e il concetto di territorio acustico, il saggio analizza resoconti di viaggio anglofoni nella Istanbul dell'Ottocento. Piuttosto che avvicinarsi all'*ezan* come segnale religioso esotico, l'articolo propone il concetto di incontro acustico per descrivere come la differenza culturale venga negoziata attraverso l'ascolto.

Abstract II: This article examines the *ezan* (the Islamic call to prayer) as an urban acoustic device that organises space, time, and sensory relations in Constantinople. Drawing on soundscape theory and the concept of acoustic territory, it analyses Anglophone travel narratives in nineteenth-century Istanbul. Rather than approaching the *ezan* as an exotic religious signal, the article proposes the concept of *acoustic encounter* to describe how cultural difference is negotiated through listening.

Keywords: *Ezan*, soundscape, acoustic encounter, travel writing, Constantinople.

1. Introduction

For centuries, the muezzin's call to prayer, *ezan* in Turkish, has permeated both urban and rural spaces, weaving sound into the fabric of collective life and producing soundscapes that are at once cultural, social, and political[1]. In these acoustic territories (LaBelle 2010), listening itself becomes a practice of belonging and, as contemporary debates over religious sounds in European public space reveal, a site of cultural and political contestation. Particularly over the past two decades, several European countries – including the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, France, and the United Kingdom – have been negotiating whether, when, and at what volume the *ezan* may be broadcast from mosque loudspeakers (Allievi 2010; Becker 2020; Elger 2020). As a culturally marked sound external to dominant Western European soundscapes, its diffusion into public space is often perceived as an alien or

[1] In terms of terminology, *adhan* is the standard Arabic transliteration commonly used in Islamic Studies, while *azan* is a variant widely used in Persianate and South Asian contexts. Since this article focuses on Istanbul and the specificities of the Turkish urban soundscape, the Turkish form *ezan* is adopted throughout.

intrusive presence, evoking anxieties about Islamic visibility. This tension was temporarily reversed during the COVID-19 pandemic, when over a hundred mosques in Germany and the Netherlands broadcast the call to prayer into public space, in some cases alongside church bells, in what Elizabeth Becker (2020) described as "an unfamiliar and evocative symphony" of societal support. Nor are such debates confined to Europe: similar tensions have also emerged in Türkiye itself, where the verses of the Turkish national anthem, *İstiklâl Marşı*, reaffirm the significance of the prayer: "Bu ezanlar-ki şehâdetleri dînin temeli / Ebedî yurdumun üstünde benim inlemeli" ("These calls to prayer, whose testimony forms the foundation of the faith, / must forever resound above my eternal homeland") (Ersoy 1921)[2].

The call to prayer, described as the "pulse of the city" (Karayigit 2026), is not merely a sound[3]; it is simultaneously a text, a vocal performance, a ritual, a temporal marker, and a spatial practice. As a religiously and culturally situated sonic act, it helps to organise collective life. Yet the same call that functions as protected cultural heritage in one context, or for some listeners, may be perceived as a source of potential noise disturbance by others. It is this asymmetry – i.e., the fact that the same sound may be heard differently across bodies, cultures, and histories – that the present article sets out to investigate. Ottoman Istanbul offers a privileged vantage point for this inquiry. Straddling Europe and Asia, the city has functioned for centuries as a contact zone among multiple cultural and religious traditions[4]. This proximity has generated extensive representations of intercultural encounters, even through sound[5]. To inhabit Istanbul is, in Tim Ingold's terms (2000), to dwell within a living network of relations between the sacred and the secular, the local and the foreign ear.

Building on the sensorial turn, which foregrounds embodied experience and perception, scholars have increasingly explored listening practices, sound, and soundscapes as productive lines of inquiry. This shift has prompted scholars to focus on aurality in modern and postcolonial contexts (Jouili & Moors 2014: 980). Drawing from Carl Thompson's definition of travel writing as a record of the encounter and negotiation between self and other (2011: 10), this article argues that such negotiation also unfolds acoustically.

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[2] The *ezan*'s presence in the national anthem reflects its political and cultural dimensions. Historically, it becomes the voice of the Turkish nation through its mosques and a foundational element of both religious faith and national belonging, Aydar (2016: 24). Debates about the public audibility of the *ezan* have also reached the Turkish courts: on 30 June 2016, the Constitutional Court considered an application by an İzmir resident who complained that the amplified early-morning call to prayer disturbed their sleep. The Court declared the application inadmissible as manifestly ill-founded, finding that the domestic authorities had adequately considered the competing individual and public interests. See Turkish Constitutional Court, *D.Ö. application*, no. 2014/3977 (2016).

[3] Hakki Ozan Karayigit (2026) defines "the pulse of the city" as the space-time moment produced when religious sound is atmospherically and auditorily materialised in everyday urban life. These rhythmic, recurring moments are not merely acoustic events but sites where the politics of national identity and nation-building become tangible in embodied, contested, and negotiated experience.

[4] In the middle of the seventeenth century, European explorers were familiar with Constantinople. See Moussa (1995) and Mahjoub (2017) for travels from the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries.

[5] The theoretical complexity of applying Edward W. Said's orientalist framework to Ottoman contexts has been noted by Bryce (2013: 99), who observes that the Ottoman Empire occupied an ambiguous position, simultaneously European and exteriorised Oriental space, that Said's critique does not fully theorise.

Historically, from the fifteenth century onward, the Ottoman Empire structured daily life around the *ezan* and the times of prayer. These were initially embedded within a traditional, prayer-based temporal structure, which became increasingly synchronised with the adoption of standardised Western-style timekeeping following technological and administrative changes (Karayigit 2026: 2). The call to prayer can be understood both as a Schaferian signal and as a soundmark. As a signal, it functions as a sound whose primary purpose is to elicit an immediate behavioural response from a group (Schafer 1977: 10); as a soundmark, it operates as a recurrent sonic marker that contributes to a specific acoustic identity and a shared experience of time (1977: 23). Complementarily, it can also be understood as an instance of acoustemology, as sound is not solely perceived but constitutes a culturally situated means of knowing place, time, and social relations (Feld 2015). The acoustic alterity, evident in contemporary debates over its public audibility, recurs in the writings of European travellers to Constantinople, a city that occupied a central place in Western cultural imagination. Although travel writing has traditionally privileged sight over sound, auditory traces remain embedded, albeit often marginally, in these narratives, shaping travellers' sensory experience of place.

In this article, "acoustic encounter" refers to the relational and interpretative process through which a culturally situated listener perceives and narratively interprets a culturally marked sound. The concept is particularly useful for travel writing because the process does not end with perception: the traveller translates the sonic experience into narrative, thereby attributing meaning to the selected sound. Three dimensions are to be taken into account: the sonic event and its spatial-temporal setting; the traveller's response to and interpretation of the sound; and its subsequent narrative representation. While soundscape theory draws attention to the organisation and perception of the sonic environment (Schafer 1977), acoustemology examines the forms of knowledge produced through listening (Feld 2015). Acoustic territory foregrounds the spatial and political dimensions of sound (LaBelle 2010), while the contact zone emphasises the asymmetrical negotiation of intercultural relations (Pratt 1992). Acoustic encounter, in turn, focuses on the moment and process through which these dimensions converge in the listener's experience and narrative mediation of cultural difference.

The primary corpus comprises five Anglophone travel accounts of Constantinople by four writers, selected for their descriptions of, or responses to, the *ezan* and other culturally marked sounds, as well as for the ways in which these sounds are represented narratively. The corpus ranges chronologically from Julia Pardoe's *The City of the Sultan* (1837) and *The Beauties of the Bosphorus* (1838), through Alexander Kinglake's *Eothen* (1844) and Lady Emelia Bithynia Maceroni Hornby's *Constantinople during the Crimean War* (1863), to Edwin Augustus Grosvenor's *Constantinople* (1895)[6]. These accounts register the acoustic persistence of the *ezan* across shifting geopolitical frameworks: Pardoe visited Constantinople in 1836, three years before the Tanzimat reforms; Hornby wrote during the Crimean War; Kinglake travelled at the height of British imperial confidence; and Grosvenor wrote during the final

[6] All quotations from the primary corpus are taken from the editions listed in the bibliography; subsequent parenthetical references give page numbers only.

decades of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman soundscape encountered by these writers was therefore not static. Across accounts, the *ezan* emerges as a form of acoustic continuity that persisted through political, economic, and social transformations[7].

The analysis adopts a purposive sampling approach and examines passages in which the call to prayer is heard, described, evaluated, or situated within the urban and social environment. Each occurrence is examined through the three dimensions outlined above, allowing acoustic encounters to function as an analytical category rather than simply as a descriptive label. This approach also includes cases such as Kinglake's, in which the sonic event is registered through the traveller's refusal to describe the sound itself.

2. Acoustic Encounters in the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth-century fascination with Constantinople needs to be contextualised within a longer European history of representation of the Ottoman culture. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, *turquerie* – the European fashion for imitating and appropriating aspects of Ottoman art, dress, and culture – had already contributed to establishing an enduring interest in the Ottoman world in Western Europe. This influence continued to shape the cultural landscape of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Girinon 2017), although its forms and modes of engagement changed significantly. In nineteenth-century travel writing, the city on the Bosphorus occupied a prominent place, represented variously as an aesthetic and exotic urban space and as a site through which travellers negotiated Ottoman society and culture. The city was frequently depicted by British travellers as picturesque and labyrinthine (Schiffer 1999: 136, 151-152), while its increasing accessibility transformed the conditions under which visitors could experience it.

The first steamer reached Constantinople in 1840 (Hastaoglou Martindis 2004: 47), and the expansion of steamship connections and railway networks gradually transformed travel to the Ottoman capital. Safer and faster means of transport made such journeys considerably easier (Acar 2017: 668). Likewise, guidebooks became instrumental in facilitating travel and shaping visitors' practical experience of the city. Described as a "novel form of travel literature", Murray's *Turkey*, for instance, helped determine how visitors navigated Constantinople and how they were encouraged to perceive and interpret its urban landscape (Hastaoglou Martindis 2004: 48-52).

Among British travellers, Julia Sophia H. Pardoe visited Constantinople in 1836, three years before the Tanzimat reforms (1839-1876), conventionally initiated with the Edict of Gülhane, which marked the beginning of a process of modernisation and administrative reorganisation within the Ottoman Empire. During this period, legal, bureaucratic, and urban life were reshaped according to increasingly Western-oriented models (Gürpinar 2012: 349)[8]. Miss Pardoe draws on her literary skills to recount the city's countless mosques in

[7] This study also acknowledges the gendered dimension of acoustic perception in Ottoman and early Republic urban space. Access to specific environments, patterns of mobility, and practices of sonic presence could differ according to gender. The *ezan*, however, could traverse some of the spatial boundaries that structure urban life along gendered lines.

[8] During the early Tanzimat period, British observers often viewed the Ottoman Empire positively as a modernising state aligned with European models. By the late nineteenth century, however, growing

The Beauties of the Bosphorus (1838). Describing Santa Sophia, the English traveller and poet writes that "the slender minarets stood out like silver wands from an atmosphere of brass" (1838: 100). The image combines visual description with a potentially acoustic association: "brass" evokes both a warm metallic colour and the material of wind instruments. This synaesthetic resonance allows the passage to be read across visual and auditory registers, although the scene itself remains primarily visual.

In *The City of the Sultan, and, Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1836* (1837), Pardoe provides a more direct account of the call to prayer. During an *iftar* dinner in Ramadan, the *ezan* functions as a Schaferian signal, that is, as a sound whose primary purpose is to trigger an immediate collective behavioural response (Schafer 1977: 10): "The cry of the muezzin from the minarets proclaimed that one of the out watchers [...] had caught a glimpse of the moon. Instantly all were in motion" (21). Pardoe does not describe the acoustic qualities of the call; instead, and most importantly, she conveys what it does, showing how it reorganises bodies, space, and time in an instant. Yet what makes this passage theoretically rich is not the signal function alone but the position of the listener. Pardoe notes that she and her companions have chosen to fast "according to their own fashion" (21), suggesting a degree of participation in the temporal rhythm activated by the *ezan*. The call to prayer does not appear simply as an external religious marker: within this particular scene, it also becomes part of a shared temporal experience that crosses, or at least complicates, the boundary between the traveller and the local community.

Pardoe records another scene at the same event that crystallises the differential nature of listening within a single domestic space. As the call to prayer rings out from a neighbouring mosque – "a cry from the minarets announced the hour of prayer" – the master of the house withdraws into devotion, while his guests continue to "laugh, chat, and smoke quite unconcernedly" (27). Again, Pardoe does not describe the acoustic qualities of the sound itself. Instead, the generic term "cry" captures the moment in which listening becomes an encounter with alterity. The same sound, heard in the same room, at the same moment, prompts radically different responses: an immediate embodied reorientation towards the sacred for the host, an unremarkable background event for the Western visitors. The attentive traveller's account reveals an acoustic encounter in its most compressed form. Her attempt "to prove an honest chronicler" (x) allows her to register not a confrontation between cultures at a distance, but a contact zone as a space of asymmetrical relation (Pratt 1992). The scene may therefore be read as suggesting two culturally situated responses to the same sound, which coexist without necessarily converging.

If Pardoe's acoustic encounter unfolds in miniature, Hornby, writing almost three decades later, expands the frame. Her account of a Ramadan evening in *Constantinople during the Crimean War* (1863) immerses the listener in a multi-layered soundscape[9]. Hornby's narrative belongs to a different historical context, shaped by Ottoman-British rapproche-

disillusionment with the reforms contributed to increasingly critical representations shaped by imperial and Christian moral assumptions. See Gürpinar (2012).

[9] Hornby resided in Constantinople between 1855 and 1858, accompanying her husband, appointed British financial commissioner to the Ottoman government during the Tanzimat reforms, Çapar İleri & Mat (2024).

ment consolidated during the Crimean War (1853-1856), and by the Turcophile current that gained momentum from the 1850s onwards (Gürpinar 2012: 349). Neither a tourist nor a literary traveller, Hornby remarks on the inability of language to convey the atmospheric experience of the mosque: "the simple grandeur of some of these masterpieces of Eastern architecture is only to be felt, not to be described" (344). What follows, however, is precisely an attempt to render that excess in words. The prayer itself is described not through its sounds but through its effects on the worshippers: "[…] that solemn abstraction from all surrounding earthly objects […] rises to a kind of stern enthusiasm which strikes even the most sceptical with awe" (334). Although the *ezan* is not named, its temporal function is structurally present. The unfolding soundscape is dense: "Everywhere you hear chanting, singing, and music"; the voices of vendors, "a thousand 'Buyouroun' invite the passer-by to the shops", mix with "the hum of the busy crowd" (344). Lamps in various shapes (flowers, animals, birds, and ships) swing between minarets, transforming the visual field just as sound transforms the acoustic one. This is the Ottoman city as a total *sensorium*: not a single dominant sound, but a layered assemblage of human voices, commercial calls, music, and ambient noise[10]. Yet this multivocal soundscape does not produce cacophony: "And all this host, without anybody to direct its movement, is orderly and quiet; no pressing or jostling, no acute noise or excess" (344). The coexistence of multiple sounds instead contributes to a form of collective self-organisation that Hornby seems almost to find uncanny. Nevertheless, the passage closes with a retreat into the Orientalist imaginary: "an air of mystery, which impresses you almost with the belief that you are witnessing the thousand and second of the Arabian Nights" (334). This latter reference translates the unfamiliar into a culturally legible frame of Oriental fantasy. Hornby occupies an intermediate position between etic and emic perspectives[11]. This passage, however, reveals the limits of her etic listening. Whereas Pardoe's contact zone stayed unresolved, Hornby's listening ultimately gives way to pre-existing cultural conventions.

During a visit to a harem, Hornby notes: "The plaintive chant from a neighbouring minaret announced the hour for prayer" and "Hasan Bey rose, and with elaborate parting salutations, departed off to his devotions" (353). The bodily response is automatic and almost socially choreographed. As in the episode observed in Miss Pardoe's *iftar* account, the *ezan* elicits a visible reorientation of the body; here, however, it also acquires a distinct spatial dimension. The sound traverses public and private spaces alike without recognising the social cartography that organises space along lines of gender; it dwells everywhere bodies are.

If Miss Pardoe and Hornby register these acoustic encounters marginally, without fully elaborating or resolving their cultural significance, Alexander Kinglake's *Eothen* (1908) of-

[10] What Ingold (2000) calls the meshwork of relations between human voices, commercial calls, ambient noise, and the architectural forms that carry and transform them, is here rendered visible through sound.

[11] The terms etic and emic derive from linguistic anthropology, Pike (1967), where they designate, respectively, the external observer's analytical framework and the internal perspective of cultural participants. In travel writing studies, the etic/emic distinction maps onto the traveller's outsider gaze and the host culture's self-understanding; Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the contact zone (1992) offers a related but distinct model, foregrounding the relational and asymmetrical dimension of cross-cultural encounter rather than the epistemological position of the observer alone.

fers a case of acoustic silence. "Even if we don't take a part in the chant about mosques and minarets", Kinglake writes, "we can still yield praises to Stamboul" (23). As "indispensable accessories" to mosques[12], minarets are architectural landmarks that also implicitly conjure the sonic practice associated with them. They can therefore be considered infrastructures of acoustic mediation. Travellers' fascination with the Ottoman landscape frequently extended to these tall, slender towers, whose elevated position offers not only access to the spatial locus of the muezzin's call but also a privileged panoramic viewpoint. The elevated position of minarets inspired both the practice of ascent recorded by Lady Mary Montagu (1861: 325) and the panoramic imagination of Byron's *Don Juan* (1819-1824)[13]. Applied to Kinglake's refusal, the three levels of analysis outlined above yield an inverted result: the sonic event is textually absent; the traveller's position as an etic listener is registered precisely through withdrawal rather than through interpretation or affect; and the narrative mediation consists in naming the convention only to decline it. Kinglake's meta-textual remark can therefore be interpreted as a negative imprint of acoustic encounter; it testifies to the cultural construction of listening (Erlmann 2010), which becomes visible precisely through the choice not to recall, or not to write about, the sound.

Where Kinglake's silence stages the acoustic encounter as a refusal, Edwin Augustus Grosvenor's *Constantinople* (1895) offers its structural opposite: cumulative documentation. Published in 1895, after several decades of European-inspired technical, administrative, judicial, and educational reforms, Grosvenor's account belongs to the broader period of transformation that preceded the establishment of the Turkish republic in 1923 (Çelik 1992: 6). In the work, the *ezan* is a systemic sonic presence that organises the Ottoman landscape: "Cities with mosques dotted the wide expanse, and from every direction muezzins with melodious voices called to prayer" (61)[14]. The American historian's distribution of sound maps the city as an acoustic territory, where "the voice of its muezzin, as he calls from its minaret to prayer, is unusually sonorous, and his accents float over the hills like organ-music" (151)[15]. This

[12] "Three accessories are indispensable to a mosque — a clock, a fountain, and a minaret; the clock determines the hour of prayer — the fountain enables the Faithful to perform their ablutions — and the minaret supplies the gallery whence the muezzin warns the pious to the temple of Allah", Pardoe (1837: 403).

[13] "Giant's Grave": "'T is a grand sight from off 'the Giant's grave' / To watch the progress of those rolling seas / Between the Bosphorus, as they lash and lave / Europe and Asia […]", Byron (1859: 144). In the analysed corpus, this quote can be found in Pardoe (1838: frontispiece) and Grosvenor (1895: 213). Byron's *Don Juan* constitutes an influential pre-formation of Constantinople as a site of sublime liminality in the Anglophone literary imagination, supported also by the author's early readings, which may be the source of his oriental romanticism and revelries. See Umunç (2012).

[14] Grosvenor's account occupies an intermediary position within the etic-emic perspective on Istanbul because the professor had lived in Constantinople as a tutor at Robert College, an experience that granted him an unusually prolonged and direct acquaintance with the city.

[15] A comparable acoustic encounter appears in Italian writer Edmondo De Amicis's *Costantinopoli* (1878), where the muezzin's voice, intoned "in a high, tremulous voice, and very slowly, with a solemn and lamenting accent", connects a peripheral Constantinopolitan quarter to vast, synchronised sacred geography spanning Africa, Asia, and Europe (1896: 63-64); its emotional immediacy – "no tolling bell has ever touched my heart like this" (64) – frames the prayer as an affective, collective mode of inhabiting urban space beyond religious affiliation. In French Pierre Loti's *Aziyadé* (1879), by contrast, *ezan* is experienced as atmospheric immersion, the voice assembling with animal calls, sacred time, and architectural resonance to saturate the air of Istanbul

sonic event is constructed through a strong aesthetic and metaphorical transfiguration. The muezzin's voice is framed as musically organised and harmonious, perceived as possessing an unexpectedly ("unusually") rich acoustic quality, which draws particular attention to it and prompts its metaphorical elevation into musical terms. The human call is assimilated to the timbre of an organ, a Western liturgical instrument capable of filling space and expanding sound. This merging of images and sounds results in a hybrid soundscape in which the Islamic religious voice is perceived through European musical categories in an act of intercultural acoustic negotiation. This processing of unfamiliar sounds through known cultural forms is not unique to Western listening, but in this instance, it produces a specific effect: the Islamic religious voice is rendered legible through a European sacred register, the organ, which shares with the prayer both its spatial resonance and its liturgical function. The translation is not one of distancing but of analogical recognition that bridges cultural boundaries. Grosvenor's listening contrasts with Hornby's earlier reference to the *Arabian Nights*: both writers convert an unfamiliar sound into a culturally recognisable form, but where Hornby reaches for a *topos* of Orientalist literary fantasy, Grosvenor draws on a Western liturgical instrument – exoticisation in one case, acoustic domestication by musical analogy in the other.

Across the accounts examined, the *ezan*, both signal and soundmark (Schafer 1977), is an acoustic event that each traveller negotiates. The variation lies not in the encounter itself but in the cultural resources brought to interpret and describe it: a form of auditory habitus[16], acquired through socially and culturally situated experience, shapes how the prayer is heard and represented. From Pardoe's partial participation in its temporal rhythm to Grosvenor's musical analogy, the travellers render the same recurring sound into different forms of cultural meaning.

3. Conclusion

The Anglophone travel accounts examined trace a varied yet consistent pattern of acoustic encounter with the *ezan* in Ottoman Constantinople. Given the small and heterogeneous corpus, these findings should be understood as text-specific tendencies rather than as a comprehensive account of Western listening practices or of the historical Ottoman soundscape. The call to prayer crosses cultural and spatial boundaries, demanding some form of negotiation. It is not ignored; it is reported, interpreted, aestheticised, or, in Kinglake's case, deliberately left undescribed. It functions, as this article has argued, as an acoustic encounter – a moment in which cultural difference is not merely perceived but actively experienced and mediated through the act of listening. As a Schaferian soundmark, the chant does more than identify a place acoustically. It organises collective and private spaces into an acoustic territory, orienting bodies, structuring time, and producing forms of shared experience that are simultaneously spatial, temporal, and relational.

(1895: 207). French writer Théophile Gautier's muezzins, described as ghost-like figures, "jetant, avec leur voix d'une tonalité étrange, la formule sacramentelle de l'islam", stage a triple sensory negation of the surrounding "maisons muettes, aveugles et sourdes" (1853: 220). The verse seems to descend from the sky, producing what Voegelin (2010) calls charged silence.

[16] In Pierre Bourdieu's sense, a set of durable, socially acquired dispositions that structure perception (1977: 72-95).

The authors examined here register this encounter with varying degrees of awareness and resolution: Pardoe's precise registration of the signal captures the reorganisation of a single domestic space; Hornby's layered, multivocal post-prayer soundscape enacts an Orientalist domestication via the *Arabian Nights*; Grosvenor's systematic distribution of muezzin voices across urban space is translated into the register of Western liturgical music; Kinglake, by contrast, refuses the encounter altogether, invoking its conventional representation only to decline it. Taken together, these strategies constitute an inadvertent archive of the *ezan*'s role as urban soundmark, not simply as an exotic sound but as a recurring element of Ottoman urban life. Similarly, they show that acoustic encounter is shaped by the cultural categories through which unfamiliar sounds are interpreted.

Beyond this corpus, treating the acoustic encounter as a distinct analytical unit offers Sound Studies a finer-grained and more explicitly transcultural category than either soundscape or acoustemology. For travel writing, it offers a means of tracing cultural difference through the ear rather than sight alone. For intercultural literary criticism more broadly, it provides a method for reading listening as narrative mediation, where perception, affect, and cultural translation intersect within a single textual moment.

This dichotomy between auditory formation and acoustic encounter also speaks to the contemporary debates surveyed in this article's introduction: ultimately, it concerns the cultural construction of listening and which sounds are deemed to belong to a shared acoustic environment. The nineteenth-century travel writers examined did not resolve this tension; they inhabited it, each in their own way, leaving behind fragments of acoustic encounter that remain, in their unresolved negotiation between familiarity and alterity, surprisingly contemporary.

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