

Unbox Your Words: Sounds Inspired!
writing workshop
Oct 6th 2026

Materials

Tania Hershman
www.taniahershman.com

MUSIC

Concerto in D Minor for Two Violins

I never thanked you for teaching me.
We were always in harmony playing Bach:

I began – you followed, your *ritornello* the counterpoint
to each of my phrases, or was mine to yours,

our notes mirrored each other like a murmururation,
birds on a page, recurring themes playing over

in my head. Your great grandfather's Stradivarius
pinched between your chin and shoulder,

mine never had a sound as rich but still, we managed
to chalk the air with our bows, rosin billowing

on alternate chords, top D flying off E string.
No part dominates in this duet, arpeggiating

to a resolution that got me each time and stuck
in my chest, a cathedral of repressed notes.

Some days, father, I hear it still but can't remember
which part you played, or where you came in.

Ostinato in Something Minor

I find my violin wasting in felt-lined coffin-
quiet, dreaming of rich, unplayed chords.
Rosin crumbles at my touch, makes ash
of our music now grainy between my fingers,
my bow a slack mess of untamed hair.
Bach's notes lie scattered, some I think
might be missing –

it's a puzzle. Hard to imagine a resolution
to these patterns that keep repeating.
But just imagine Dad, if I could re-string, piece
together harmonies, how they might tune
in to your register, disrupt whichever
progression is at play: I was your daughter,
I was your daughter should have been the refrain.

Rebecca Cai

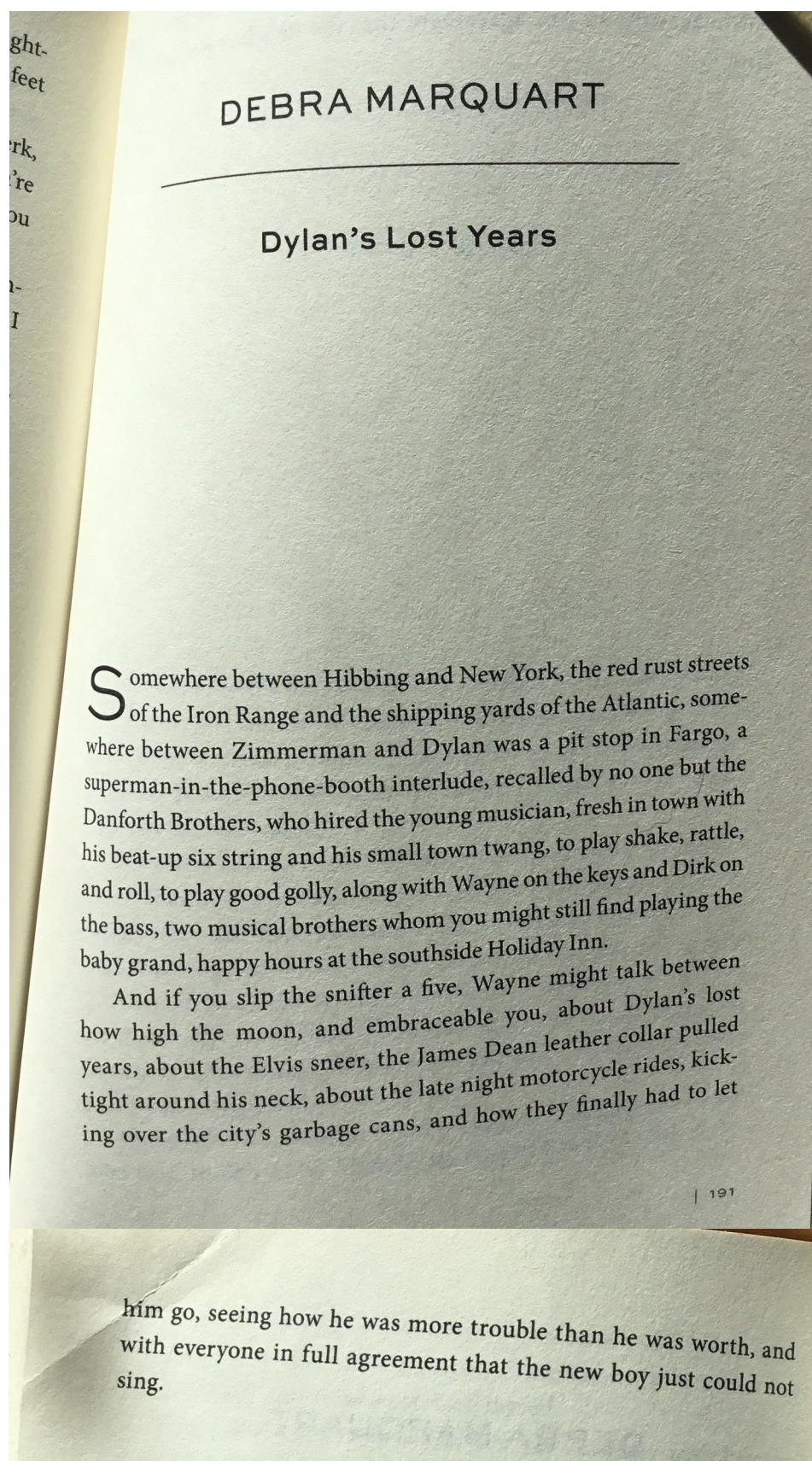
(One of Foyle Young Poets winners, 2025)

Tip before your lesson: vibrato covers off-tune notes

While I am a child, I imagine that I can build anything from my body.
I play violin seven days a week so the edges of my fingers are tough and square.
I clip the skin down into little dead pieces that pile high to the ceiling.
Once I have enough I knead the skin into a dough to make a new finger
or a toe. Ma keeps brushing me into the trash, and she shortens me,
the body that I try for. She licks her lips while I play. My fingers swell until
they are almost bursting. I pop. She is there to suck the tomato out of me,
my sour bits. She takes and packs my violin when I am done. Then I am
clipping again & she is sweeping. She unzips my case & untucks the
metronome pendulum & sets it on 160 bpm, so I am playing, playing, playing, playing
until I have enough skin to make myself some new feet, some new knees, new hands,
new ears that can't hear the beat-beat-beat-beat of
what she asks for & what I cannot give.

Debra Marquart, Dylan's Lost Years

(published in New Microfiction anthology, 2018)



Geraldine Clarkson, You taught me a new way of singing

(Published in Monica's Overcoat of Flesh, 2020)

You taught me a new way of singing—

the words thick in my throat—

like birds' carolling, cat calls, badger
jazz, and all manner of tunes squirreled away
for the future. The lessons burned in my gullet
until in my turn I had taught them to others—

and then two, three, four, seven of us
were singing together and jamming—
thrumming and humming, stipple-
tonguing in clots and gobs of sound—

dribbling and sliding, colliding in chords
and climbing, seven-handed, a knotted
bat's-cradled tree-house skirling with hymns—
us busking in Basque, arabesque—

you bosky, you buzzing, you clopping in time.

Words and Music

She moves about in the tiny flat
with the long strides of a goddess,
fixing this, or watering that,
mixing the books up, wearing my shirt.

She dials the little radio
through crashing waves of static,
through 'words, words, words!'
and finds a hidden symphony

then moves a chair to occupy
the single square of morning sun,
basks in the full length of herself,
ankles hooked on the window sill,

feet conducting sky. She asks me
if I love her. I wouldn't quite
go that far. It's just that
if she leaves me, I'm done for.

Congrats
2026 Micro Madness
June 22
FIRST PLACE

Kate Horsley
Manchester, UK

**HOW THE STRASBOURG DANCING PLAGUE OF
1518 BEGINS**

A barmaid named Aurélie begins with a Gavotte, shimmying off the horror of those years, and punters, their last orders slopping from tankards, stare slack-jawed as Sabine draws Aurélie into a Pavane, then the next day, hundreds dance Voltas, the streets running red with Courante priests showering holy water on hidden demons, while Guillaume, a baker whose mouldy grain will one day be blamed for the dance of four hundred deaths, Gavottes a three-foot baguette around and around, screaming laughter, and quite unseen, Aurélie and Sabine Minuet, trading soft kisses they never could back when the world was sane.

The Sound of Julies

by Mackenzie McGee

(published in Cease Cows journal)

This is what a Julie knows: she has perfect pitch and a four-octave vocal range; she is between the ages of twenty and thirty-four; she is a successful actor, singer, and author; and her name is Julie Andrews.

One of my favorite things to do is to take a Julie with me to the grocery store. I iron her pinafore before we go so she looks just like the VHS cover. We rarely make it through the produce section before someone's mother stops us and says, wow, you look just like Julie Andrews.

The Julies get a kick out of this. They don't respond. They don't talk much in general, but they smile plenty, and that's all people really want. Their smile that says: I like to play guitar in the mountains with my seven adopted children and run through the streets of Salzburg teaching them music theory, before I go home to my husband, Christopher Plummer at the height of his sexual powers.

When I get sad, I like to imagine the Julies in their natural habitat. In some remote mountain valley, there roams a flock of wide-brim hats chanting Do-Re-Mi. At dusk they lay their lovely heads on a bed of wildflowers—buttercups in summer, edelweiss in spring—and wrap slender arms around one another to guard against the alpine chill. They close their eyes and sleep a dreamless sleep, safe in the knowledge that if they were to stray too far from home, they could seek refuge with me. They could trickle into my one-bedroom apartment in twos and threes, filling it with enough singalongs and homemade dresses to make it a home.

Sometimes the Julie's presence fills another stranger with vein-popping rage. He marches over with his phone held aloft, brandishing Wikipedia and IMDb to expose this charming imposter. The real Dame Julie Andrews, he says, is an eighty-six-year-old superstar. Odds are she's in her home in California or Switzerland and not a Kroger in Ohio.

In a way, a Julie is a delicate creature. One time, a Julie tried to go play an open mic in Cincinnati. I found what was left of her outside my building the next morning: a pile of goo on the sidewalk, framed by a canvas bag and a modest guitar case. Cause of death: unrequited splendor. How many strangers turned from her gaze? Cranked the volume on their earbuds against her song?

But right now, at the grocery store, the Julie is immortal. It's the stranger who melts down. They yell fraud, fake, phony, and all she hears is Oscar, BAFTA, Grammy, Tony. They blubber while she twirls away down the ice cream aisle, arms outstretched, singing "The Hills are Alive." She pours her heart into the crowd as it gathers and we pour in kind, and we don't even notice the snowflakes falling between us until they catch on our eyelashes. For a single moment, we don't have to be unique. We don't have to be real. We are part of something extraordinary, and that is enough.

The Night Chorus

by Lindsey Pharr • May 16, 2025

(published in Brevity journal of flash non-fiction)

Sure, sex is great, but have you ever clocked out of a waitress shift on a night when everything went right instead of wrong and at the exact moment you're pulling out of the parking spot you performed laborious geometry to fit into someone yells "I love your truck!" and you drive home with the windows down blasting Tori Amos and you find that you don't care, not even a little, if you're hitting the notes because it's a warm, wet night in deep spring and every frog in the world sings along with you until your voice is a part of a huge, swelling chorus and you suddenly remember the girl you fell in love with when you were fifteen. Her name was Miriam, pronounced Mee-ree-AHM, and you remember how your guts twisted when she pressed the henna into your scalp and how, after, your hair looked just the same but you felt transformed as you watched her strip *oh god* pearl-skinned-naked, red-bush-burning, and splash, grinning, into her family's fancy salt-water pool. And you realize it doesn't hurt anymore, this memory and the shame you always carried with it. You hurtle through the night like a rattling, rusted-out meteor, prodding all your old wounds like a tongue in a row of bloody sockets and you think *this can't be right* and you wonder what's wrong with you, but then the musk of full-blown roses fills the cab of your loveable old truck and nothing, nothing, nothing hurts at all.

The coal thieves

Frankie McMillan

(published in Eddie Sparkle's Bridal Taxi, 2025)

We whistle like men as we push the wheelbarrows, and those without barrows sling a burlap sack over their shoulder, and away we go hauling ourselves up the slag heap and as the soot thickens, blackens our moving shapes – watch out, one of us cries, wary how the slag can suddenly shift, swallow whole a woman with a barrow – while another grunts as she lifts a lump of coal closer to her eyes, places it in the wheelbarrow, as tender as any baby.

We whistle like men until our throats are clagged with soot, our necks bridled by the strain, our faces lost in the black, until one of us slips as she sorts through the breakers and we scramble blindly towards her, haul her up, put her hands to the barrow, the fire will burn tonight, we say, or don't say, but it's there in our eyes and then straight down we come from the slag heap, calling out to each other, pushing the heavy coal, the creaky wheels a lullaby of sorts.

We whistle like men when we hear the patrol, the company police who take our sacks, break our barrows, send us running, but mostly on the way home, our backs aching, our eyes streaming, the only whistling we do is the noise between our teeth, the crooning noise of old women coming home in the dark, fondling a lump of coal in each pocket.

Ernest Hemingway's Typist

Richard Brautigan

(published in *Revenge of the Lawn*, 1970)

Ernest Hemingway's Typist

It sounds like religious music. A friend of mine just came back from New York where he had Ernest Hemingway's typist do some typing for him.

He's a successful writer, so he went and got the very best, which happens to be the woman who did Ernest Hemingway's typing. It's enough to take your breath away, to marble your lungs with silence.

Ernest Hemingway's typist!

She's every young writer's dream come true with the appearance of her hands which are like a harpsichord and the perfect intensity of her gaze and all to be followed by the profound sound of her typing.

He paid her fifteen dollars an hour. That's more money than a plumber or an electrician gets.

\$120 a day! for a typist!

He said that she does everything for you. You just hand her the copy and like a miracle you have attractive, correct spelling and punctuation that is so beautiful that it brings tears to your eyes and paragraphs that look like Greek temples and she even finishes sentences for you.

She's Ernest Hemingway's

She's Ernest Hemingway's typist.

SOUND

Sound Escapes Podcast: Gordon Hempton – Transcript

<https://www.20k.org/episodes/soundescapes>

Gordon Hempton: I think the first time I listened to a natural soundscape, was when I was a child. And I would dive into the pool [SFX] and I would let the air out so I would sink to the bottom of the pool [SFX]. And I really enjoyed the pressure around my whole body, it was the swaddling effect. And when I was down there I felt a calmness and isolation. You know, had I been a fish, it would not have been a silent experience - but with terrestrial ears not much sound goes in. So it was that silence of the natural underwater world for me, where I truly listened and didn't criticize it, didn't evaluate it. I simply took it all in.

...

He was in his 20s, driving non-stop from Seattle to Wisconsin to start grad school in plant pathology. He's young, he's full of himself, he thinks he's got it all figured out. And on this long drive he pulls over somewhere in the middle of Iowa, completely exhausted.

Gordon Hempton: I just laid down in a corn field to get some rest during a long drive, and a thunderstorm [SFX] rolled over me, and I simply took it all in. And I had such a vivid description of the valley as the result of the echoes of the thunder and the textures of the rain and the insects. It was so overwhelmingly informative about where I was, but the question that remained was "Who was I?"

[SFX: Thunderstorm rolls in, builds, rolling peals then trail off...]

Gordon Hempton: And it was at that moment that I truly listened. That I understood that I didn't know who I was. That I had been living someone else's life, as if there was some invisible set of instructions. And that the first step that I would take in trying to discover who I was, was to become a listener.

...

Gordon Hempton: And isn't it surprising, and perhaps not surprising that bird song is the number-one indicator of habitats prosperous for humans? That if the birds are singing, there's food, water, shelter, and there's also a favorable season to get the young off the nest. And I believe that the ability of our distant ancestors as nomadic tribespeople, to be able to hear faint birdsong, guided them as a sonic beacon towards prosperity. And we are here today. Isn't that great? That birdsong, more than any other sonic element of nature, appears in our classical music? Appears through the ages? That birdsong is music to our ears.

Monica Gagliano, ecologist, plant behaviour and cognition, author of *Thus Spoke the Plant*:

From *Thus Spoke the Plant*

“It was in late 2011 that bright yellow kernels of corn decided to break the silence with their vibratory signals. Their conversation sprouted inside a university laboratory in Bristol, England...and for the first time, their loud and chirpy vegetal clicks were heard by our ears and recorded by our sensitive scientific laser instruments. And it was official—plants emit sounds, they hear them, and on the basis of what they hear, they modify their behavior”

YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m-lq4sTMCqg>

Plant bioacoustics (Wikipedia)

Plant bioacoustics refers to the creation of sound waves by plants. Measured sound emissions by plants as well as differential germination rates, growth rates and behavioral modifications in response to sound are well documented. Plants detect neighbors by means other than well-established communicative signals including volatile chemicals, light detection, direct contact and root signaling. Because sound waves travel efficiently through soil and can be produced with minimal energy expenditure, plants may use sound as a means for interpreting their environment and surroundings. Preliminary evidence supports that plants create sound in root tips when cell walls break. Because plant roots respond only to sound waves at frequencies which match waves emitted by the plants themselves, it is likely that plants can receive and transduce sound vibrations into signals to elicit behavioral modifications as a form of below ground communication.

Sound sensors

Buzz pollination, or sonication, serves as an example of a behavioral response to specific frequencies of vibrations in plants. Some 20000 plants species, including *Dodecatheon* and *Heliamphora* have evolved buzz pollination in which they release pollen from anthers only when vibrated at a certain frequency created exclusively by bee flight muscles. The vibrations cause pollen granules to gain kinetic energy and escape from pores in the anthers.

Similar to buzz pollination, there's a species of evening primrose that has been shown to respond to bee wing beats and sounds of similar frequencies by producing sweeter nectar....It has been discovered that *O. drummondii* flowers produce significantly sweeter nectar within three minutes when exposed to bee wingbeats and artificial sounds containing similar frequencies. A possibility for this behavior is the fact that if the plant can sense when a pollinator is nearby, there is a high probability another pollinator will be in the area momentarily. In order to increase the chance of pollination, nectar with a higher sugar concentration is produced. It has been hypothesized that the flower serves as the "ear" which contains mechanoreceptors on the plasma membranes of the cells to detect mechanical vibration. Petal velocity was shown in response to a honey bee and moth sound signal as well as low frequency feedbacks, but not high frequency feedbacks.

Sound generation

Plants emit audio acoustic emissions between 10–240 Hz as well as ultrasonic acoustic emissions (UAE) within 20–300 kHz. Evidence for plant mechanosensory abilities are shown when roots are subjected to unidirectional 220 Hz sound and subsequently grow in the direction of the vibration source. Using electrograph vibrational detection, structured sound wave emissions were detected along the elongation zone of root tips of corn plants in the form of loud and frequent clicks. When plants are isolated from contact, chemical, and light signal exchange with neighboring plants they are still able to sense their neighbors and detect relatives through alternative mechanisms, among which sound vibrations could play an important role. Furthermore, ultrasonic acoustic emissions (UAE) have been detected in a range of different plants which result from collapsing water columns under high tension. UAE studies show different frequencies of sound emissions based on whether or not drought conditions are present. Whether or not UAE are used by plants as a communication mechanism is not known.

Let the Parts of the Flower Speak

Mona Arshi (*Wild Court magazine*)

i. pedicel

You think you have illumed me
because you have translated me?
Please read me variantly with
a green fevered mind.

ii. ovary

There's nothing sharp in
this house. All my terrors
my crowded out babies, half/half-
trembling little faces of gold.
I have no other vision than this.

iii. filament

I have certain tendencies and these
tendencies may conflict with your
tendencies most certainly.

iv. petal/izaat/respect

what would a faithful
rendering have demanded?
Petal etiquette;
How does one bear it?
bharish/bimaree
This is my dharma
turning yellow after
initial growth.

v. stamen

The curse: almost certainly mis-
pronounced by a man.
Draw me faithfully-bitch, stable-witch
What does my ambiguity permit?

vi. style

I am not observant,
Why are you bringing
God into this?
And this my love
is going nowhere.

vii. sepal

My little bastard verses
tiny polyglot faces
how light you are
how virtually weightless.

viii. anther

Speak into me with your
mouth close to my
humming surface
beyond flower memory
piercing
leaf and loam
past rootlets
through the
aortic arch
glinting hearts of the
rosy-tipped worm.

Frances Gapper, The Leaf that Wouldn't Fall

(Published in In the Wild Wood, 2017)

According to a branch message, one of our leaves is upset at the prospect of being let go. Tell it fallen leaves turn into compost, so it'll give nurture and life to future generations. If it likes to look at things that way. But no (sap reports back from twig to branch to central core), leaf still hanging on grimly. Sigh. There's always one. Tell it leaves must fall, separate, depart – that's why they're called leaves, ffs. Off it twirls, convinced by our spurious patter. And now we feel strangely sad. Bereft. It's like this every autumn, but we forget.

A Bird on a Cow

My brain is like a bird on a cow
that's singing in her ear about a universe
where gravel drives have yet to be invented
and birds and beetles answer to their names.

To a Doctor

I expect you hear a lot of hearts –
know human pulses like a map,
the sort where blinking lights flash up
the shortest route from *you are here*;

your stethoscope must daily read
which parts are clogging, flaccid,
dead, so you must have known,
and should have said, when

I laid my head on your starched chest
that all the things I thought I heard –
glad thump of an unlikely catch,
an antique horseman at full stretch,
the lift of train tracks changing route
from tunnelled dark to open sky –
were in fact the brisk mechanic click
of a searchlight checking empty fields.

Or less – a valve, a tiny door
switched briefly open, swiftly shut.

Genevieve Carver, Dolphins: echolocation click
(Published in Birds / Humans / Machines / Dolphins, 2024)

~ *echolocation click* ~

this is the sound

of listening

the language of call

and response

rippling through

the whole body

leaving like a streamer

returning like trumpets

from the gallery

in the knave

musical map vibrating

in a guitar-belly head

softened by pillows

of held breath

ocean as orchestral score

seaweed as tangle

of earworms squirming

questioning

probing

searching

the song in the mirror

fathoming

foraging

the voice in the cave

Genevieve Carver, Dolphins: whistle

~ whistle ~

hello

or I miss you

or go left

or I'm here

or I'm myself, my own dolphin and no other

or I'm tired

or go away

or let's play

or dare you to rub your belly on the beach

or do you ever feel like an empty razor clam?

or good one

or nice flippers

or do you ever dream of swimming in air?

or do you surface gasping, rock-scars searing your flanks?

or I like you

or here come the shore-walkers, finless and stiff

or the cloud-beasts grazing the hill, so graceful when they leap!

or eat my slipstream

or my blowhole's clogged with storm scud

or salmon steak!

or mine!

or it's like the legends say, above the surface only silence

Holly Corfield Carr, Intro & owl and nightingale
(published in Subsong, 2018)

What follows are poems, field notes and songs for being alone, which were all started while exploring the coastline between Bolt Head and Bolt Tail where outcrops of serrated glittering schist are the oldest rocks in Devon and among the very oldest in the South West. In this deep and deeply holey landscape, I found sound and vision tumbled together and, as a result, these are poems alive to the music and rhythms of geology as much as birdsong.

The saw-tooth profile of the East Soar headland conjures up a birder's sonogram, a picture of sound where the frequencies are split into scribbly layers, the darkest of which – the fundamental – records the note we hear (or we think we hear) while, almost inaudibly, the voice is splitting at vertical intervals into harmonics. Just as schist means 'to split', these are poems for two voices, both of them yours, written to be read aloud to yourself, a slow sing-a-long accompaniment for being outdoors.

At this time, which is sometime between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a poet is hiding in a hedge somewhere between Dorset and Devon to transcribe an argument between an owl and a nightingale.

The nightingale, from behind a spray of blossom, is shouting at the owl for wailing her all-winter-night-long song of

woe!

woe!

what a woe!

what a woe!

The owl, from inside a green knot of ivy, listens to the nightingale's complaint, is upset, says yes yes her beak is fat and difficult but it is the nightingale whose spitty snare beats on and on all day all night who should be the one to put aside some time to listen (and the poet writes in the hedge the owl's exact words):

ich singe efne mid fulle dreme & lude stefne

which says something stout and proud like

I sing even with full dream & loud voice

Heidi Williamson, Hellbox

(published in The Valley Press Anthology of Prose Poetry, 2019)

Hellbox

My mother had two mouths. One was for saying. The other was for not saying. She kept a budgerigar padlocked in a tarnished cage in the attic. At dusk she would climb to the top of the house with a lime green feather boa on her bony resurrected shoulders. She would sing to the bird and watch its confusion. Later, she would preen it with her bird-cat tongue. She would tell it: *Listen, can't you? After all this, someone, somewhere still calls out to me in prayer.*

Heidi Williamson

Hellbox: where 'bad' characters go: a receptacle for broken and battered letters.

NOISE

Twenty Thousand Hertz Podcast: Do Not Disturb – transcript

<https://www.20k.org/episodes/donotdisturb>

Dr Judy Edworthy, a professor of applied psychology at the University of Plymouth: *Hearing and vision work together, and because your ears are all-round sense, really they're there for directing your ears to face the right way so that you then use your eyes.*

Judy: *When people wanted to attract attention, the obvious way to do that is to make a sound, and there's a whole history of things that make very loud sounds, across mountains and all sorts of things.*

Those ancient alarms would sound in times of crisis, to forewarn and call for help, and they play a big part in fictional and historical accounts of war. *[SFX: War ambience begin]*

One such alarm is the Gjallarhorn, which translates literally as the “yelling horn”. It’s from Norse mythology. At Ragnarok - the coming apocalypse - the horn would be blown *[SFX: Horn Blow]* and would be heard in all the worlds, where it would awaken the Gods for their last stand.

Judy: *When society became more industrialized, of course you needed to announce the end of a factory shift or things like that, and the only ways you could produce sound was either to hit something or to pass air through something. So, you had a range of bells [SFX: single large bell] or klaxons [SFX: Vintage Klaxon sound] and very little else, really. Anything that made a loud sound, really. Because you couldn't do it any other way.*

So, historically, alarm sounds have been used when someone really really needed to get your attention. We heard relatively few of them, and as a result, many of them are burned into our collective consciousness.

Judy: *A very good example would be the air raid siren from the Second World War [SFX: Air Raid Siren] . Everybody knew what that sound was. It had a particular characteristic, because you had to literally wind it up. Everybody knew what that meant. It was very, very loud, so it could spread across the whole town. And as soon as you heard it, you knew what you had to do.*

...

Judy: *From the time you get up, you have your clock on [SFX: clock sound]. You have a phone as well [SFX: phone alert sound]. And then you've got the microwave that beeps [SFX: beeping microwave]. And then you've got your car that will beep about all sorts of things [SFX: car beeps]. And then you get to work and you open your computer and that beeps at you as well [SFX: PC alert sounds]. And so it goes on.*

The *[alert]* constant *[alert]* interruption is *[alert]* unlike anything preceding generations *[alert]* have *[alert]* had to cope with.

[music in]

Alarms have historically been about action, emergency, a call to arms.

With that ingrained into our basic psyche, today we're finding ourselves pulled in all kinds of directions by the simple tones that come out of our devices. The alarms assault us throughout the day, and we're struggling to keep up with the unconscious instinct to react.

Not only are they making us more distracted, but the acoustic intrusion is doing things to your mind and body that you might not expect.

[music out]

Judy: You make a response to a sound on the basis of its acoustic structure in the first instance. So, a shrill, loud sound will stimulate more nerve cells than a quieter, lower-pitched one. So, it will increase your attention levels or your stress levels or your arousal level more than a sound that's not like that. So, you can't really avoid that.

But, even the most innocuous sounds can mess with your mind - if they mean something to you. In psychology it's called stimulus-response behaviour.

Judy: You hear a sound, and you learn a response. It doesn't require any real thought. You just learn an association between the two.

Judy: So, if you've learnt that, let's say, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star *[SFX: Twinkle Twinkle Little Star on music box]* is the alarm that your submarine uses *[SFX: submarine explosion with Twinkle Twinkle little Star alarm tone]* if it's just about to be flooded. Now, that will be an urgent sound to you, because you've learnt its meaning. It's not an urgent sound psychoacoustically or acoustically, but because you've learnt its meaning, then it will produce a similar response to the shrill, loud sound, in you, because you know what it means

Definition of Noise: Undesired sound

"Trying to differentiate between sound and noise, Former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. William H. Stewart wrote, "So when does sound become noise? There is no simple answer to that question. There is no clear dividing line. There is no point at which an increase in decibel levels automatically turns sound into noise. One person's sound can be another person's noise. The beat of the background music in a department store, for example, is enjoyed by some shoppers but drives others to distraction."

Article: On The Definition Of Noise

Noise has plagued mankind and has been studied for many years. The first ever complaint about noise was recorded in the second millennium BC as part of the Mesopotamian epic Atrahasis, which refers to noise disturbance depriving people of sleep. Noise, a common law nuisance, was reported in England in the 18th century and included the continuous ringing of church bells (day and night), which severely disrupted people's sleep. Besides, the industrial revolution introduced industrial machinery noise, and the rapid growth of many cities around the Second World War enhanced noise problems.

Twenty Thousand Hertz podcast Sonic Happiness: transcript

<https://www.20k.org/episodes/sonichappiness>

So Dallas, tell me about ASMR.

So ASMR stands for Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response. And I didn't even realize I had this until I did a show about it. But what it is is when you, listen to very delicate sounds, traditionally, like somebody whispering or just like really like whispering in your ear really nicely and sweetly.

What that can trigger internally is this tingling sensation that starts kind of at the base of your neck and goes up into your head and down shoulders. I am literally having it right now because I can trigger it at any point.

[music in]

So there's all these ASMR artists on YouTube, doing everything from like whispering very quietly, like sweet, happy things, *[Gibi ASMR clip]*

To someone who might just be like manipulating an object that just crackles or something, to in the case of somebody that I spoke with, um, eating pickles into a microphone, *[sfx pickle]* uh, and that, and that triggers this kind of like tingle response.

Giulia Poerio: What's interesting about ASMR is that it's a stimulus in one modality, like sound, that is producing a tactile sensation.

That's Giulia Poerio, a psychology researcher studying ASMR at the University of Sheffield.

Giulia Poerio: So you are experiencing almost the feeling of being touched through sound.

The Long Waiting Noise

By [Matthew Kabik](#)

(published in Cease, Cows journal)

You're twelve and kissing a neighbor's daughter. She tastes like chlorine and something sweet, cola maybe. She is cool under your nervous hands and you want nothing but to not mess up. Her hair is wet and heavy, your jaw is getting tired.

Her father opens the basement door and there is just enough time to separate before he comes down the old steps. He's too interested in something to ask why you are both sitting in the basement on a summer day. The something distracting him was heard in the Pacific Ocean. The something is on the news right now.

The something is a pop, really, and you don't get why the father is so excited. Between his yellow smile and the news anchor's perfectly white one you find out the noise was sped up sixteen times by scientists, to make it audible to humans. Those scientists can't figure out what made the noise, the father says. Some people think it could be a living thing, the disinterested anchorwoman states. You listen to it again when they play it accelerated only half as much as the pop, and it sounds like a moaning animal. You feel scared walking back to your house.

That night you dream about the ocean, about hearing the noise. Through the saltwater you try to see where it's coming from. The noise is low and drawn out, something like a whale but not as peaceful as someone would think a whale song to be. The noise is coming from everywhere, the blackness of the water is the noise itself—slick and immeasurable the body of the noise glides past.

When the alarm goes off you're crying and it frightens your mother. In trying to explain the dream, you realize she won't understand. Instead, you make something up about being attacked by a monster. She knows you're lying but doesn't say it. Both of you are silent during breakfast.

Later that day you're back in the basement and your neighbor's daughter tastes like gum. She put on too much makeup and you feel it getting stuck on your cheeks and nose. Both of you are keeping an ear focused on the basement door, but you're more distracted. She asks you if it feels good and the quick answer of yes is enough to keep her kissing.

Whenever she closes her eyes you look at a dark corner of the room. One of four bulbs in the ceiling fan is blown and it makes a corner seem distant and cool. You can't stop looking at it, wondering how cold it might be, trying to understand how anything could live in that darkness.

In bed you try to find a repeat of the newscast to hear the noise again, but soon enough the sun is out and your mother is at your door, asking if you're sick.

On Saturday you and a friend are at the town's public pool. The water is light blue and clear, enough for both of you to look for lost quarters in the deep end and loose bikini tops after high school students jump from the diving boards. You wait for the friend to get bored and swim away before diving to the bottom of the 12 foot area. The water fills your ears.

Looking up you see the blurry bodies of swimmers hugging to the sides or pushing ferociously off of one side, then the other, sleek and powerful.

The scream comes as a deafening howl. For a moment you don't think you're the person who made it. You keep screaming, letting the noise shake through the water. You remember the fear of standing too close to a train or in the middle of a thunderstorm. Your lungs are running out of air, you'll need to push off the bottom and suck in air awkwardly. You know all of this but don't stop the scream. Looking up, you are surprised no-one is reacting. Nobody hears you through all the water.

As loud as you can be, nobody notices.

Nine One One

Sarah Freligh, winner, 2025 Welkin Mini Prize

The birds in my head are yakking again so I ask the orderly to give me something please that will shut them up please but he says honey you know I can't so the birds go on flapping like they do when something terrible is about to happen only there's no window to slip out of like the man did the woman did they held hands they did I saw them step into thin air and fly like birds from a fire a big squawk of them lifting off and flapping their useless wings all those people trying to fly.

QUIET, SILENCE AND THE ABSENCE OF SOUND

RadioLab podcast: Where the Sun Don't Shine <https://radiolab.org/podcast/sun-dont-shine>

Merav Opher, astronomy professor at Boston University, part of the Voyager team. Voyager space probe becoming first human-made object to leave the Solar System

MERAV OPHER: Something changed, and the something is the sound we were hearing.

JAD: Around the time of these arguments, the Voyager was sending back sound.

MERAV OPHER: The Voyager doesn't have a lot of energy on board, right? So they have a tape recorder.

JAD: Wait, there's a tape recorder? Really?

MERAV OPHER: Yes. I think it's an 8-track.

JAD: What? Like an 8-track 8-track?

MERAV OPHER: Jad, I think.

JAD: It turns out it's true. There are 8-tracks on both of the probes that are capturing ultra low frequency plasma waves.

MERAV OPHER: Two to three kilohertz.

JAD: Which you can actually hear. Now that whoosh ...

MERAV OPHER: That is just the background of the power supply.

JAD: That's just the sound of the Voyager itself idling, basically cruising through empty space. But she says when you listen to the following recording, this what you're about to hear is eight months of time from late 2012 into 2013, eight months collapsed into a tiny clip. What you hear are these little swells.

[tape hiss and whistle]

JAD: Like, there's one.

[tape hiss and whistle]

JAD: There's another.

MERAV OPHER: You have those ramps.

JAD: Now this part gets kind of confusing, but essentially, Murav says those swells, that's the Voyager spacecraft colliding with some new galactic stuff.

MERAV OPHER: So you're hearing there is a ramp of density as you go into the interstellar space.

JAD: I had thought that those sounds, one of those two sounds is the Voyager bursting out of our solar system. But she told me ...

MERAV OPHER: No. No.

JAD: What it is is the sound of the Voyager already on the other side. It's the Voyager basically saying, "I'm in a new space now." And after some analysis—and this part I cannot explain—NASA pinpointed the ejection moment, the crossover moment, to just before the first of those two swells. So if this is the first swell ...

[tape hiss and whistle]

JAD: ... it's just before that. Maybe right there.

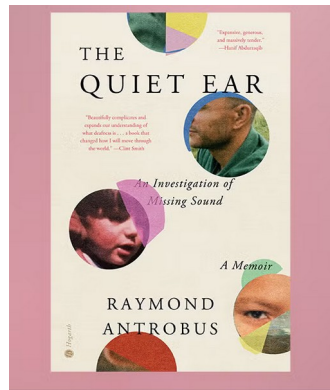
[tape hiss and whistle]

JAD: Like, right there.

[tape hiss and whistle]

JAD: That's when we left.

MERAV OPHER: It's so undramatic.



<https://commonreads.com/2025/09/15/excerpt-from-the-quiet-ear/>

Raymond Antrobus was first diagnosed as deaf at the age of six. He discovered he had missing sounds—bird calls, whistles, kettles, alarms. Teachers thought he was slow and disruptive, some didn’t believe he was deaf at all. *The Quiet Ear* tells the story of Antrobus’s upbringing at the intersection of race and disability. Growing up in East London to an English mother and Jamaican father, educated in both mainstream and deaf schooling systems, Antrobus explores the shame of miscommunication, the joy of finding community, and shines a light on deaf education. Throughout, Antrobus sets his story alongside those of other D/deaf cultural figures—from painters to silent film stars, poets to performers—the inspiring models of D/deaf creativity he did not have growing up.

Excerpt

There were so many sounds that existed that I would not hear until I was fitted with hearing aids at the age of seven. Until then, I existed in my own kind of noise.

For the first seven years of my life, it was assumed I was just slow or perhaps dyslexic. I would miss vital details in teachers’ instructions, which kept getting me into trouble, like being told I could play outside but missing the “come back in five minutes”; then, during the subsequent detention (a harsh punishment but the teachers thought I was deliberately disobedient), being told to write about why “punctuality was important” and composing a wonky-lined misspelled essay on the value of punctuation. I was constantly told that what I was hearing was wrong without understanding why, which meant I couldn’t trust myself or the world around me. How does a child make sense of words or the world when they seem slippery and untrustworthy? What new perspectives and sensibilities might open up during this formative period?

No one knew I was deaf until my mother bought a large, exceptionally loud, cream-colored telephone that sat in her living room like a pet. The phone rang and rang, and my mother looked at me, unresponsive to the shrilling.

This is how I was diagnosed as deaf....

Shortly after, I was fitted with my first hearing aids. In a school photo taken at the time, you’ll see I’m not wearing hearing aids. I would whip them out whenever my photo was being taken, mainly out of shame. In my childhood journals, I wrote that “hearing aids don’t suit me” because they highlighted my vulnerability and made me feel ugly, incapable, and “disabled.”

It was around this time that I began discovering my missing sounds: anything high-pitched—whistles, birds, kettles, alarms; “sh, ch, ba, th” sounds in speech—the slow vibrating wavelengths that were meant to be picked up by small hair cells in my inner ear; all of it missing.

Echo

By Raymond Antrobus

Listen to Raymond reading the poem:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/92375/echo-589363f95ef54>

1

My ear amps whistle like they are singing
to Echo, goddess of noise,
the raveled knot of tongues,
of blaring birds, consonant crumbs
of dull doorbells, sounds swamped
in my misty hearing aid tubes.
Gaudí believed in holy sound
and built a cathedral to contain it,
pulling hearing men from their knees
as though atheism is a kind of deafness.
Who would turn down God?
Even though I have not heard
the golden decibels of angels,
I have been living in a noiseless
palace where the doorbell is pulsating
light and I am able to answer.

2

What?

a word that keeps looking
in mirrors like it is in love
with its own volume.

What?

I am a one-word question,
a one-man
patience test.

What?

What language
would we speak
without ears?

What?

Is paradise
a world where

I hear everything?

What?

How will my brain
know what to hold
if it has too many arms?

3

The day I clear out my dead father's flat,
I throw away boxes of molding LPs, Garvey,
Malcolm X, Mandela, speeches on vinyl.
I find a TDK cassette tape on the shelf,
smudged green label *Raymond Speaking*.
I play the tape in his vintage cassette player
and hear my two-year-old voice chanting my name *Antrob*
and dad's laughter crackling in the background
not knowing I couldn't hear the word "bus"
and wouldn't until I got my hearing aids.
Now I sit here listening to the space of deafness —
Antrob Antrob Antrob

4

And no one knew what I was missing
until a doctor gave me a handful of Legos
and said to put a brick on the table
every time I heard a sound.
After the test I still held enough bricks
in my hand to build a house
and call it my sanctuary,
call it the reason I sat in saintly silence

during my grandfather's sermons when he preached
the good news, I only heard
as Babylon's babbling echoes.

5

*And if you don't catch nothing
then something wrong with your ears —
they been tuned to de wrong frequency
— Kei Miller*

So maybe I belong to the universe
underwater, where all songs
are smeared wailings for Salacia,
goddess of saltwater, healer
of infected ears, which is what the doctor
thought I had, since deafness
did not run in the family
but came from nowhere,
so they syringed in olive oil
and saltwater, and we all waited
to see what would come out.

The drowned are always silent

Frankie McMillan

(published in Eddie Sparkle's Bridal Taxi, 2025)

Imagine a boy waking to find a huge white swan at the end of his bed. Imagine the boy does not understand the nature of floodings, the big benevolent creature squatting on his bed, bringing with it the smell of lake water, and him feeling a flap and fury in his heart and with no one to call, only the moon flitting past his window. Imagine the boy telling the swan to get lost, to get back to the lake, to get its great webbed feet covered in gunk right off his bed. But imagine the alternative, the boy singing to the swan, the boy remembering what his mama told him about swan song, about endings and beginnings, and imagine the sound, the boy's high voice on the verge of breaking.

Ada Limon, The Quiet Machine
(published in Bright Dead Things, 2015)

I'm learning so many different ways to be quiet. There's how I stand in the lawn, that's one way. There's also how I stand in the field across from the street, that's another way because I'm farther from people and therefore more likely to be alone. There's how I don't answer the phone, and how I sometimes like to lie down on the floor of the kitchen and pretend I'm not home when people knock. There's daytime silent when I stare and nighttime silent when I do things. There's shower silent and bath silent and California silent and Kentucky silent and car silent. And then there's the silence that comes back a million times bigger than me, sneaks into my bones and wails and wails and wails until I can't be quiet anymore. That's how this machine works.

Adrienne Rich, Cartographies of Silence
(published in Dreams of a Common Language, 1978)

1.

A conversation begins
with a lie. and each

speaker of the so-called common language feels
the ice-floe split, the drift apart

as if powerless, as if up against
a force of nature

A poem can being
with a lie. And be torn up.

A conversation has other laws
recharges itself with its own

false energy, Cannot be torn
up. Infiltrates our blood. Repeats itself.

Inscribes with its unreturning stylus
the isolation it denies.

2.

The classical music station
playing hour upon hour in the apartment

the picking up and picking up
and again picking up the telephone

The syllables uttering
the old script over and over

The loneliness of the liar
living in the formal network of the lie

twisting the dials to drown the terror
beneath the unsaid word

3.

The technology of silence
The rituals, etiquette

the blurring of terms
silence not absence

of words or music or even
raw sounds

Silence can be a plan
rigorously executed

the blueprint of a life

It is a presence
it has a history a form

Do not confuse it
with any kind of absence

4.

How calm, how inoffensive these words
begin to seem to me

though begun in grief and anger
Can I break through this film of the abstract

without wounding myself or you
there is enough pain here

This is why the classical of the jazz music station plays?
to give a ground of meaning to our pain?

5.

The silence strips bare:
In Dreyer's *Passion of Joan*

Falconetti's face, hair shorn, a great geography
mutely surveyed by the camera

If there were a poetry where this could happen
not as blank space or as words

stretched like skin over meanings of a night through which two people
have talked till dawn.

6.

The scream
of an illegitimate voice

It has ceased to hear itself, therefore
it asks itself

How do I exist?

This was the silence I wanted to break in you
I had questions but you would not answer

I had answers but you could not use them
The is useless to you and perhaps to others

7.

It was an old theme even for me:
Language cannot do everything-

chalk it on the walls where the dead poets
lie in their mausoleums

If at the will of the poet the poem
could turn into a thing

a granite flank laid bare, a lifted head
alight with dew

If it could simply look you in the face
with naked eyeballs, not letting you turn

till you, and I who long to make this thing,
were finally clarified together in its stare

8.

No. Let me have this dust,
these pale clouds dourly lingering, these words

moving with ferocious accuracy
like the blind child's fingers

or the newborn infant's mouth
violent with hunger

No one can give me, I have long ago
taken this method

whether of bran pouring from the loose-woven sack
or of the bunsen-flame turned low and blue

If from time to time I envy

the pure annunciation to the eye

the visio beatifica
if from time to time I long to turn

like the Eleusinian hierophant
holding up a single ear of grain

for the return to the concrete and everlasting world
what in fact I keep choosing

are these words, these whispers, conversations
from which time after time the truth breaks moist and green.