

Fyxen

Lydia Davies

When I lay down, when I lay down a word on a page, it never rests. It lives vicariously in the mouths of others, slipping off tongues, sliding its meaning over sounded syllables, emphatically, ecstatically, brimming out of the oral cavity. Specifically, your voice, and their voice, and my voice, and this voice, and this voice, and this voice.

Adriana Cavarero says, ‘the pleasure rooted in the acoustic sphere has above all a subversive function; that is, it destabilizes language as a system that produces the subject.’ⁱ

When I lay down, when I lay down at night, I never rest. I peel off my clothes, and I bury my head in thoughts of your skin, I bottle you up and when I get close, close, close – that's when I climb in. That's when I climb in. That's when I –

And a voice swills in a bottle, high-pitched, angelic, and pure. Just as clear-cut as glass, as sharp as cut glass, a shrill piercing pitch, screeching old fishwife, cackling hen, unscrupulous bitch. And that's how the word comes in, that's how the word hems you in, that's how the word bottles you up, and corks you in.

And now you've laid down, laid down your word on a page, planted in your handwriting, exposed and bare, with nothing around. Which I read, and read, and read, because it is set in my ear. A resounding word that refuses change, that doesn't let me in, or doesn't let me out, that lays me down to rest like a cooked slab of flesh, and just as the word, ‘in its consonants, like a skeleton to dissect.’ⁱⁱ

Cathy Lane says, women's voices are repeatedly likened to animals in the English language.ⁱⁱⁱ Women's voices are stripped by a low-pitch authority, as yipping and yapping, as laughing hyenas, squealing like pigs, silly old moo, and “baa”, and “cluck”, with the “speak up”, aligned to the venial and lowly, with the “I don't know what she's on about”, with the other-worldly, untamed sounds which get dismissed under linguistic imperatives and rhetoric. But it is the phonic feral pleasures of vocality that allow the word to move. Demonised voices that disorganise language, are the ones that challenge meaning. There's the dictionary, and then, there's screaming^{iv}.

And this large sheet of fabric, this plane of fabric, this fabricated pain, this curtain that covers me, this curt, painful shame, this veil hanging over my face, this vile mourning, this –

On this cold restless evening, I wrap my scarf around once and then once again, and that's when I sniffed your scent wrapped around my neck,
How heavy,
Slung heavily,
The smell hung heavily,
Circling and circling –

Perhaps even, it's holding me, embracing me.
Perhaps even, I place the moment on pause, and I stop to breathe you in.
Perhaps even, I pick up my perfume bottle, and marking my territory, in a single spray, I flow into you.

And this word moves, it keeps moving, it is *ever so moving*, swaying with the musicality of mouths, from your voice, to their voice, to my voice, and this voice, and this voice, and this voice.

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ⁱ Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) 132

ⁱⁱ Stéphane Mallarmé, "Les mots anglais" in *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996) 901, cited in Cavarero *ibid.*, 134

ⁱⁱⁱ Cathy Lane, "Women as Animal, Women as Alien: Reclaiming Women's Demonic Voices" in *Grounds for Possible Music: On Gender, Voice, Language, and Identity*, Ed. Julia Eckhardt, (Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2018) 98-103

^{iv} See Jean-Jacques Lecercle's discussion of language, the body, and the concept of *délire*, in *Philosophy through the Looking Glass: Language, nonsense, desire* (London: Hutchinson Publishing, 1985) 39-45