

# Writing sound : ekphrasis and elemental media

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Lawrence Kramer

## Writing Sound: Ekphrasis and Elemental Media

Contrairement à sa contrepartie visuelle, qui est ancienne, l'ekphrasis acoustique – la description littéraire d'un son – ne date que de la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, moment où l'ekphrasis spécifiquement musicale commence à apparaître comme base pour l'analyse et le jugement esthétique. Son émergence est liée au développement du concept de média. De nombreux cas d'ekphrasis acoustiques dépendent de la possibilité de rendre perceptible le médium par lequel le son, et en particulier le son musical, parvient à l'auditeur. Ces mêmes descriptions ekphrastiques tendent fortement à répéter le processus qu'elles décrivent. Ce qui signifie qu'elles rendent également perceptible le médium par lequel la littérature parvient au lecteur. Ce médium littéraire, cependant, n'est pas l'écriture, du moins pas en premier lieu : il s'agit plutôt d'une condition de résonance que l'écriture partage avec le son qu'elle décrit – une condition à la fois matérielle et émotive. Le mouvement de perception conduisant des phénomènes auditifs et littéraires vers leurs médias permet d'attribuer une signification ontologique à l'esthétique du son et de sa représentation. Deux poèmes issus de mondes culturels différents, de même que leurs mises en musique, serviront à illustrer les dimensions formelles et affectives de ces relations : « Meeresstille », poème de Goethe (1787) et sa mise en musique par Schubert (1815), puis « Far--Far--Away », poème de Tennyson (1893) et sa mise en musique par Ned Rorem (1963).

This paper has three points to make. The first is that many literary descriptions of sound depend on making perceptible the medium through which sound reaches the listener. The second is that these same literary descriptions tend strongly to repeat the process that they describe. They make perceptible the medium through which literature reaches the reader. This literary medium, however, is not writing, at least not at first, but a condition of resonance that writing shares with sound, especially musical sound—a condition that is both material and emotive. The third point is that this movement of perception from phenomena to their media provides a means of finding ontological significance in the aesthetics of sound and its representation.

As a preliminary, it is necessary to spend a few moments discussing the concepts linked to sound in my title, musical ekphrasis and elemental media.

Ekphrasis in its classic literary form, the verbal description of a pictured scene, is ancient. It famously traces its lineage to the description of the shield of Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*. In turn the fame of that description became a touchstone of aesthetic theory in the eighteenth century when Lessing, in his *Laocoön*, introduced the distinction between the spatial and temporal arts. The eighteenth century also saw the extension of ekphrasis to the

description of sound, in the first instance to the description of music. There are few earlier examples—I am tempted to say none, although if one goes outside the context of what the era called the fine arts, an exception of sorts can be found in Sir Francis Bacon's efforts to give an empirical account of sound in his *Novum Organum* (1620). One of Bacon's descriptions is worth quoting here at the outset, because its elements will (just as it says that sound will) recur throughout the discussions to follow:

Though sounds are troubled as they pass through their medium by winds, as if by waves, yet it must be carefully noted that the original sound does not last all the time the resonance goes on. For if you strike a bell, the sound seems to be continued for a good long time; whereby we might easily be led into the error of supposing that during the whole of the time the sound is as it were floating and hanging in the air; which is quite untrue. For the resonance is not the same identical sound, but a renewal of it; as is shown by quieting or stopping the body struck. For if the bell be held tight so that it cannot move, the sound at once comes to an end, and resounds no more; as in stringed instruments, if after the first percussion the string be touched, either with the finger, as in the harp, or with the quill, as in the spinet, the resonance immediately ceases.<sup>1</sup>

This passage is not fully ekphrastic because it describes how sound behaves, not how it strikes the ear: how it sounds. But it is nonetheless evocative, and it anticipates later developments in at least two ways. First, its description of sound evolves into a description of music, as if to recognize that acoustic ekphrasis is only musical ekphrasis waiting to happen. Wind and wave yield to the bell and the bell in turn yields to strings and keyboard. Second, the description identifies the allure of resonance “floating and hanging in the air,” an allure that persists, and persists as a perceptual truth, even if, like Bacon, we suppose on second thought that our impression of resonance as presence is an “error.”

Musical ekphrasis in the narrow sense begins to develop in earnest only in the nineteenth century, when it becomes a tool of musicological study as much as, or even more than, a small literary genre or technique. The musical and literary types, however, cannot be sharply distinguished, any more than musical and acoustic ekphrasis can be, nor is there any compelling reason why they should be. There are also two different types of musical ekphrasis itself, or so it seems at first. Siglind Bruhn has proposed using the term

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Francis Bacon. *Novum Organum*. Trans. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath. (London, 1858, II: 227-27). Project Gutenberg. URL: [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Novum\\_Organum/Book\\_II\\_\(Spedding\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Novum_Organum/Book_II_(Spedding)) [accessed 09/06/2019]. For more on Bacon's treatment of sound, see: Lawrence Kramer. *The Hum of the World: A Philosophy of Listening*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2019. P. 53-56.

*musical ekphrasis* to refer to the description *by* music of something non-musical. Others, myself among them, prefer to use the same term to refer to the verbal description *of* music, and more particularly the verbal description of an individual musical work or performance.<sup>2</sup> But as will quickly become clear below, these two types cannot be firmly distinguished either. Literary and musical ekphrasis, musical and acoustic ekphrasis, ekphrasis by music and of music, all flow into one another, troubling each other as they pass through their media as sound is troubled (and doubled) by Bacon's winds. Their overlap suggests that ekphrasis is not so much a single type of utterance as it is a relay from one type of utterance to another. The relay has a bias toward music, or something in common with it. Its aim might be described in musical terms as the "setting" of the object it describes, in the sense that the music of an art song "sets" a poetic text.

One reason for this derives from another overlap. Ekphrasis sometimes evolves into a related type of speech act which I have proposed calling constructive description.<sup>3</sup> A verbal description is ekphrastic if it represents with some fullness a work or action in a non-verbal art. But a description of any kind becomes constructive only if it partly creates what it describes and thus assumes or projects a close association with the object described. Ekphrasis is defined by its function, constructive description by its effect. A convenient if simplistic illustration is afforded by the inauthentic nicknames that have become attached to certain famous works of classical music. Chopin did not call his Etude in C Minor, Op. 10, no. 12, "Revolutionary," but once the nickname stuck, hearing or describing the music in other terms became nearly impossible. Constructive description, which need not be ekphrastic, might thus be regarded as the condition to which ekphrasis aspires.

This aspiration, together with the relay that supports it, is perhaps partly responsible for the rise in the status of ekphrasis as a theoretical concept. Ekphrasis is not simply what it was long thought to be, a literary subgenre of specialized focus and limited concern, but a basic use of language. As W. J. T. Mitchell, who was among the first to recognize this wider value, put it, ekphrasis is not "a special or exceptional moment in verbal or oral representation" but a speech genre that is "paradigmatic of a fundamental tendency in all linguistic expression."<sup>4</sup> In the quarter century since Mitchell

2 Siglind Bruhn. *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting*. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2000; Lawrence Kramer. *Interpreting Music*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2010. P. 247-257.

3 On constructive description (with more complex examples than the one offered here) see: Lawrence Kramer. "Subjectivity Unbound: Music, Language, Culture". *The Cultural Study of Music*. 2nd edition. Ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert, and Richard Middleton. New York: Routledge, 2011. P. 395-406; and Kramer. *The Hum of the World* (as note 1). P. 14-16.

4 J. W. T. Mitchell. *Picture Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. P. 153.

made this observation, the awareness of the role of media in culture has risen exponentially. With a little hindsight, accordingly, we can add that the fundamental tendency exemplified by ekphrasis is grounded in the multiplicity, and the multiplication, of media. Ekphrasis is the process by which language negotiates with and across the field of other communications media.

This last observation brings us to the second titular concept, elemental media. The concept originates in the work of John Durham Peters. In his book *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media*, Peters suggests that media are not merely bearers of messages nor even also messages in their own right.<sup>5</sup> Instead, media are phenomena with a distinct sensory presence of their own. Media form part of the experience that they help to communicate. The concept of media thus expands to include the full infrastructure of experience where nature and culture meet. This expansion allows us to understand the primary elements of that infrastructure, especially the classical four elements of earth, air, fire, and water, as what Peters calls elemental media. One of my purposes in adopting this concept from Peters is to expand it further into elemental areas not commonly recognized because the older concepts of media have tended to keep them hidden.

It is now possible to live up to the word “and” in my title. Ekphrastic descriptions of sound lead to the disclosure in sensory form of the elemental medium of hearing. The process begins with a concentration on quasi-musical qualities conveyed by a familiar elemental medium, most often air or water, elements that resonate literally and figuratively with the fluidity of musical sound. But the process proliferates. These media become the phenomena transmitted by a yet more elemental medium, distance, which in turn is carried by what I will call vibrancy, that is, the potential of vibration, the promise of resonance. This potential is understood not as an abstract principle but as a material reality. Although it is not usually taken as a matter of perception, it becomes so here. (I use the term “matter of perception” rather than the traditional “object of perception” to avoid problematical subject-object binaries and also to emphasize the materiality of certain elemental media that might not at first seem to have a material form.) This proliferation of media is not surprising. If Peters is right about elemental media, this sort of pan-synesthesia would be more the rule than the exception. What media reveal, he argues, are other media. Literary language evokes this phenomenon, which escapes its grasp, and reconciles the difference by making discernible, and even perceptible, its own basis in vibrancy.

Examples follow.

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5 John Durham Peters. *The Marvelous Clouds: Towards a Theory of Elemental Media*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

In 1787, Goethe wrote a little poem entitled “Meeresstille” that sought to describe the state of mind of a sailor whose ship is becalmed at sea:

Tiefe Stille herrscht im Wasser,  
Ohne Regung ruht das Meer,  
Und bekümmert sieht der Schiffer  
Glatte Fläche ringsumher.  
Keine Luft von keiner Seite!  
Todesstille fürchterlich!  
In der ungeheuern Weite  
Reget keine Welle sich.<sup>6</sup>

One of the most striking things about this poem is its assimilation of the lack of motion to the lack of sound. Its “Todesstille” is both paralysis and silence—dead calm. The felt lack of a wave is an experience of hearing nothing as well of seeing nothing. The poem’s auditory element is especially marked by the meter of its verses, which is absolutely regular, an unchanging alternation of strong and weak stresses, with no exceptions. The forward progress of utterance or reading goes nowhere; the motion is itself a kind of stillness, continually recreated like a Baconian resonance. The poem thus performs both a physical description and an acoustic ekphrasis: the latter by means of the former. It seeks to show how language, whether spoken or read, can become a representation of silence—not of quiet or of words in the mind’s ear but of absolute silence, the existential condition that language in general and poetry in particular are supposed to relieve.

Even read silently, the poem turns its speech against itself. The short lines, clipped and cramped, the twists of word order, the strange anonymity of the speaker, who is not the sailor yet who seems to be something like the voice of the sailor’s senses—everything conspires to prepare for loud shouts, the exclamations in the third couplet, that cannot be heard. Unable to be silent, the poem conveys the effect of being beset by silence, of having speech invaded by the silence everywhere around it. Not only is the poem’s language minimal, but its descriptions are no more able to make progress than the ship is; the verses are condemned to make the same observation over and over. The third couplet’s exclamations momentarily cancel even the very ability to make a statement, to speak in a full sentence. The second exclamation, especially with its wrenching inverted word order, pinpoints exactly what this ubiquitous silence and its verbal damages communicate: it is death. The word *Todesstille* means just what it says.

But the missing element in this poem is not just sound. It is also air, the medium of sound that Bacon sees as responsible for producing the effect,

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<sup>6</sup> J. W. Goethe. *Gedichte* (1766-1832). URL: <https://www.textlog.de/18378.html> [accessed 15/06/2019].



error or not, of sustained resonance. The sea is calm because the wind does not blow. The calm is dead because breath is lacking. The poem's acoustic ekphrasis thus brings the resonant medium to awareness by means of negation: "Ohne Regung," "Keine Welle," "Keine Luft." Self-stifled, the poem paradoxically gives voice to the loss of the enveloping resonance, the medium of life as well as of sound, on which both the poet and the sailor depend.

This acute feeling for sound may have something to do with the poem's musical career early in the next century. In 1815, Schubert set "Meeresstille" for voice and piano; in the same year Beethoven paired it with its companion piece, "Glückliche Fahrt" in a brief cantata; and in 1828 Mendelssohn (for whom Goethe had been a mentor, and who knew Beethoven's piece) composed a concert overture, "Meeresstille und Glückliche Fahrt."

My concern here is primarily with Schubert. His "Meeresstille" does with music what Goethe's poem does with words; it shows that music too can describe the effects of a silence that it breaks in the act of description. The song exists in two versions, the second of which, published in 1821, is canonical. Both, however, constrict their piano accompaniment in much the same way that Goethe constricts the language of his poem. The accompaniment operates like Goethe's meter; it consists of one and the same thing continuously recreated, and thus continuously stalled. In Schubert's case the one thing is an arpeggio (a chord played one note at a time); every measure of the piano part consists of one such arpeggio, played in keeping with an enervatingly slow tempo. (The music has to go forward, but it can seem not to. The tempo should be uncomfortable.<sup>7</sup>) The series of arpeggios is less a form of motion than an audible cancellation of the rich variety of motion normally available to music. It is motion as monotony.

The song, moreover, portrays dead calm not only by the way it sounds but by the way it *looks*. Even for those who do not read music, the score, shown below, creates a vivid image of emptiness, motionlessness, and sound muffled, even strangled. The arpeggios are written in whole notes, leaving much of the score to white space; the notes, in their procession of columns, project an image of an expanse without motion, wind, or wave, while the vocal line floats forlornly on its surface.

This impression does not remain merely visual; one can hear it. The vocal line of "Meeresstille" is set for the most part in the lower range of the voice, as if literally downcast by its predicament. The voice is also notably constricted in motion: it mostly dwells within the fifth between E and A on the treble staff, and lapses back to that region when it briefly rises higher—or falls lower.

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7 In the original edition, the tempo marking (reproduced in the example) is quarter-note equals 27, which is impossibly slow. It is not clear whether the mistake is Schubert's or the publisher's, but it does convey the essential idea: this music should drag.

Sehr langsam, ängstlich. ♩ = 27

Singstimme.

Tie - fe Stil - le herrscht im Was - ser, oh - ne Re - gung rult das Meer,

Pianoforte.

*pp*

und be - küm - mert sieht der Schif - fer glat - te Flä - che rings um - her.

17 Kei - ne Luft von kei - ner Sei - te! To - des Stil - le fürch - ter lich!

25 In der un - ge - heu - ern Wei - te re - get kei - ne Wel - le sich

More telling still, perhaps, is the relationship between the voice and the accompaniment. At the start of each measure, the voice sustains a word as the arpeggio rises, but (in most performances) the word continues after the arpeggio ends. Half or more of each measure finds the voice “accompanied” only by the aftermath of a sound, the resonance of the finished arpeggio “floating and hanging in the air” halfway between a presence and an absence. Thus under-sound is the equivalent in music of Goethe’s series of evocative negations. On one hand the sound is a denial of sound, the deadness of the dead calm. But on the other hand it gives by negation the sense of the very



thing on which both music and language depend, the resonant medium that carries sound to all places at all times. The effect is more pronounced for being directly physical: we hear this sound on which so much depends precisely in the continually recreated act of its disappearance.

Beethoven, it might be added, will not let this equivocal resonance stand. His own "Meeresstille" is mostly hushed, but it releases the loud outcry that both Goethe and Schubert forestall, though the outcry occurs out of place. It does not come on Goethe's exclamations, which Beethoven too stifles, and stifles dramatically, with *forte* attacks on the first syllables of "keine" and "*fürchterlich*" that immediately fall to *piano*. The outcry ensues with a crescendo to *forte* on "Weite," the word that designates the broader negation against which the music rears up in protest. The sound is shocking, propelled by very wide melodic leaps in all the voices and stinging high notes for the sopranos and tenors. The word rings out for a full four measures, slowly rather than abruptly sinking to *piano*. But then the whole thing happens again, as if the dead calm could not be banished by just one outburst. And the calm does prevail, and prevail many times over, as Beethoven concludes by repeating the first couplet of the poem, and then just the second line, along with detached repetitions of "ruht das Meer." The music goes nowhere; it ends with the absence that begins it.

The nexus of musical or acoustic ekphrasis, the perception of elemental media, and ontological significance of sound has remained remarkably consistent in different cultural circumstances. Alfred Tennyson in 1889 had little to do with the cultural world of Goethe, Schubert, and Beethoven, and his acoustic world was much more modern than theirs, long penetrated by the sounds of industry, the telegraph, and the railways, and lately by the telephone and the typewriter. Yet Tennyson continues or reinvents the same ekphrastic relay exemplified by the various iterations of "Meeresstille."

His lyric "Far—Far—Away (For Music)" is a case in point, highly sonorous, deeply nostalgic:

What sight so lured him thro' the fields he knew  
As where earth's green stole into heaven's own hue,  
Far--far--away?

What sound was dearest in his native dells?  
The mellow lin-lan-lone of evening bells  
Far--far--away.

What vague world-whisper, mystic pain or joy,  
Thro' those three words would haunt him when a boy,  
Far--far--away?

A whisper from his dawn of life? a breath  
 From some fair dawn beyond the doors of death  
 Far--far--away?

Far, far, how far? from o'er the gates of birth,  
 The faint horizons, all the bounds of earth,  
 Far--far--away?

What charm in words, a charm no words could give?  
 O dying words, can Music make you live  
 Far--far--away?<sup>8</sup>

As its subtitle says, and as its immediate turn after the first stanza from sight to sound shows, this poem is fundamentally musical in conception. It is also fundamentally ekphrastic. The poem seeks to describe an elemental sound that carries other sounds and becomes audible through some of them. As Peters' conception would lead us to expect, the elemental sound is an elemental medium. The sounds that reveal it are both its gateways and its surrogates.<sup>9</sup> They in turn are to be grasped as media for a yet-unwritten music that will give their audibility a durable, reproducible form. Tennyson's Ur-sound springs from an irreducible origin that may also be an end. Its whisper from "the dawn of life" may suggest a Platonic anamnesis of cosmic harmony, the lost maternal voice of infancy, or something like Julia Kristeva's quasi-Platonic chora, all preverbal babble and impulse.<sup>10</sup> It is impossible to know; the sound can be heard only in metaphor, yet it is still, undeniably, a sound.

The poem concentrates on two of its manifestations, and so will I: the sound of the bells, as in Bacon the sound par excellence of sustained resonance, and the sound of the title phrase, which according to Tennyson "had always a strange charm" for him.<sup>11</sup> The poem was originally written in the first person; in its third-person form it reads like an elegy by one half of a divided self for the other.

The force of Tennyson's onomatopoeic "lin-lan-lone" for the sound of the bells is not imitative; it is ekphrastic. The soft *l* sound carried over form

8 Alfred Lord Tennyson. *Selected Poetry*. Ed. Erik Gray. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadwood Press, 2014. P. 310.

9 Such sounds have a long but largely neglected history. For a full account of them, see *The Hum of the World*.

10 On the chora, see Julia Kristeva. *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. P. 25-27. Tennyson's "dawn of life" probably alludes to William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," which represents the earliest days of conscious life as bathed in a "celestial light." Tennyson, between his first and second stanzas, replaces the light with its parallel in sound.

11 Tennyson. *Selected Poetry* (as note 8). P. 310n.

“mellow” and the widening vowel sounds of the “lin-lan-lone” sequence preserve the difference between the description and its object. There is no metal in the voice. The liquid phonetics render the sound of the bells harmonic rather than percussive, as if the bells had sounded with the soft resonance of a vibrating string. The resonance intensifies as one passes (even silently; more on this shortly) from the short vowel in *lin* to the longer, more open vowel in *lan*, to the fully open vowel in *lone*. The latter also echoes the closing *o* of *mellow*. The sequence, and the line, describes the mystic sound by playing on the reader’s vocal apparatus, tracing the course of an opening of mouth and throat capable of prolonging the musicality of the vowel. In doing so, *lin-lan-lone* anticipates what the title phrase will do on a larger scale.

Two features of that phrase are essential to its effect. The first is the difference, present only implicitly, between the common English phrase “far away” and the more evocative “far, far away.” The first is neutral, the second emotive; “far away” is usually elided into a single breath, whereas “far, far, away” requires pauses that separate its words from each other, intimating a nostalgic yearning to cross the distance. The second essential feature, the use of em-dashes to punctuate the written phrase, intensifies this separation and inhibits any elision between “far” and the first syllable of “away.” The vocalic sequence of the phrase carries the intensity further. Each word in the title phrase can be sustained as a long vowel, but the iterations of *far* cannot take advantage of this potentiality because of the em-dashes. The dashes impose the need to curtail the vowel sound on a short *r*. *Away* brings relief and release, as the quasi-vowel sound of its closing syllable allows for a full and sustained utterance.

The title phrase thus describes the Ur-sound by once again by tracing a path from shorter to longer vocalization, more closed to more open vowels. If one were reading the text aloud, the vocalization of *-way* would draw back one’s lips and cheeks and widen the opening of the mouth. The elemental sound that comes from the distance would become equally present in the space thus formed to catch the vibrations of the reader’s throat. The elemental medium draws the imagination outward by resonating inwardly in the cavity of the body.

Reading silently necessarily attenuates these effects, but it also emulates them. The poem affirms that the experience of sound is not limited to acoustic forms. It invites the reader to perform the verses, to intone their music, to *hear* them, in the mind’s ear. Like Schubert’s score to “Meeresstille,” Tennyson’s visual design for the text of “Far—Far—Away” suggests a sound that one can apprehend even in nominal silence.<sup>12</sup> The layout of the text on the page redoubles the effect of the em-dashes by isolating the title phrase as

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12 *The Hum of the World* examines these sounds under the rubric of “the half-heard”; see p. 58, 68-69, 197-98.

a refrain and always following it with a question mark—a sign of opening rather than of closure.

In 1963, Ned Rorem took Tennyson at his word and composed a short musical setting of “Far—Far—Away.” The song is of interest for several reasons. Its tempo is surprisingly fast, suggesting the modern anxiety that registers in the text only as pervasive nostalgia. Its form is quasi-strophic, except for the penultimate stanza, where the mystery of the elemental sound’s origin confounds the music, again suggesting an underlying worry or urgency that the text half-acknowledges with the poem’s only genuine enjambment: “a breath / From some fair dawn beyond the gates of death [?]” Most pertinent to the concerns of this essay, however, the setting of the title phrase consistently articulates the vocalic drama induced by the poem’s em-dashes. The voice moves from a relatively short single note for the first *far*, to a similarly paced two-note melisma for the second, and then to a sustained note for the second syllable of *away*. The singer’s throat does what the reader’s throat is invited to do. It vibrates with a surrogate for the elemental sound. Sung for the most part to the same melody each time, the phrase in this form becomes the essential feature of the song.<sup>13</sup>

To these variations on a theme, let me add a brief coda. My argument here has been that acoustic ekphrasis opens our senses to sound as a network of elemental media, and that the most elemental of these extends into the elemental medium of writing. That medium in turn makes itself heard—not heard acoustically, but nonetheless heard—in what we call silent reading, but which we should perhaps call something else. Reading has a voice.

Before the invention of audio technology, the written text was the only available form of voice recording. It was the means by which writing preserved not only articulate utterance but also the tone, the music, of the utterance, so that reading to oneself could feel like a direct encounter with the writer’s voice. Perhaps writing can no longer do that in a world where voice recording is pervasive, or perhaps it still can, but only as a kind of nostalgia, to be enjoyed in secret. Unlike the spoken voice in its transience, the non-acoustic voice was endlessly retrievable in the act of reading. It appeared, not as an imaginary sound that the reader subvocally ventriloquizes, but as a reproduction that harmonizes with the vibrancy of speaking aloud. Nietzsche bore reluctant witness to the intimate force of this voice in his intellectual autobiography *Ecce Homo*. He was reluctant because he wanted to avoid the contact that others were seeking: “When I am hard at work you will not find me surrounded by books: I’d beware of letting anyone near me

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13 In 1995, I composed a setting of the poem for mixed a capella chorus, without knowing Rorem’s solo song. My setting is more complicated than his, but it too preserves the effect of lengthening intonation between the double *far* and *away*.

talk, much less think. And that is what reading would mean.”<sup>14</sup> Thinking in these circumstances is louder than speaking. Books, though mute, are noisy. Like Schubert’s arpeggios they form a resonant surface on which speech spreads out. Like Bacon’s bells, and Tennyson’s, they call for an empathetic response by letting their voices ring and resonate from far–far–away.

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14 Friedrich Nietzsche. *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Ecce Homo*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1969. P. 242.