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- 1 What is the nature of reference to hearing in the poetry of Emily Dickinson? And what is the role of this reference? These questions arise when reading a poet who conceives “the fine Ear” (Fr414), “God’s Ear” (Fr623), “the Ear inordinate” (Fr1394 B), and “Being, but an Ear” (Fr340).¹ The questions are crucial to Dickinson’s poetic and to her reader, who hears in her poetry not only a wide array of sounds in the world, but also the powerful, agile rhythms and keenly resonant sounds of her language.
- 2 A way to seek answers to the questions is to read as a set all Dickinson poems with the singular noun *Ear*, capitalized or not. Dickinson’s *Ear* is an elegant, often spellbinding figure of aural perception. Reading the poems with it lets us build a model of her *Ear*, and the model illuminates the interiorizing motion and the signature resonance in her poetic of hearing. To develop the model and the poetic, we follow a path whose steps in argument go from the handling of linguistic sound and the figure of the *Ear*, to reflection on sources of sound and their correlate sorts of hearing, to the reciprocity of perception and cognition in exemplary poems with *Ear*. The path starts in a locus of hearing in Dickinson’s poetry, and it ends in the Dickinson auditorium, a space for hearing the sounds in her poetry. On its way, the path takes the measure of Dickinson’s deeply aural senses of the world and of language, as they arise in poems evoking a wide range of experience.²

1. A Path of Reading

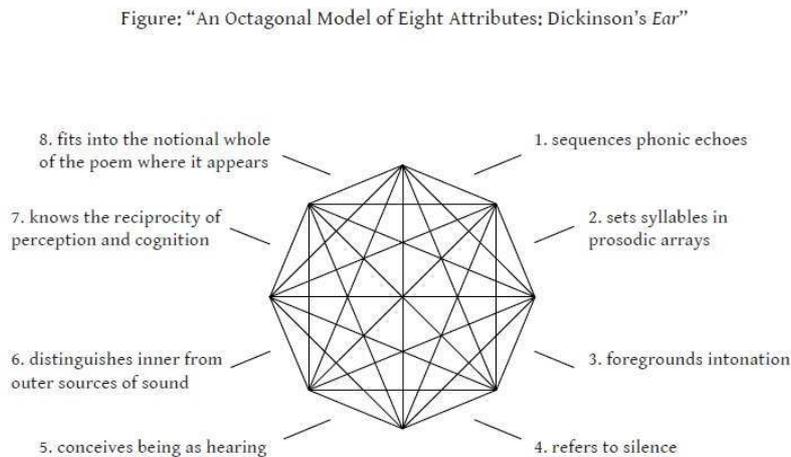
- 3 We begin in “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain” (Fr340), whose fourth stanza is a locus of hearing in Dickinson’s poetry:

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race
Wrecked, solitary, here -

- 4 This stanza is a locus of hearing for at least two reasons. First, it deftly handles linguistic sound, as in the clear phonic echoes of “*Bell*, / And *Being*, *but* an *Ear*,” “*I*, and *Silence*,” and “*strange Race* / *Wrecked*.”³ The clearest phonic echo is the rhyme of *Ear* with *here*, whose first term denotes the organ of hearing and second, deictic term makes hearing present. Consider also the stanza’s arrays of syllables and intonational phrases. The first two lines and much of the third sway in 868 iambic meter, but then we find the stress cluster “some strange Race / Wrecked, solitary,” a sequence of five beats in a row marked by the intonation of enjambment.⁴ These percussive beats relate to the prior reference in the poem to “A Service, *like a Drum* - [emphasis added],” and they foreground in their beating, along with the intonational fall on *Wrecked*, the speaker’s pain at being broken and *solitary*, in the company of a *Silence* that alone forms with the speaker *some strange Race*. These several sorts of linguistic sound underscore the deeply *felt* experience (“I felt a Funeral”) of thought (“in my Brain”) announced by the poem’s first line. In their superimposed levels, the sounds also exhibit the signature resonance in Dickinson’s poetic of hearing.⁵
- 5 Beyond its linguistic sound, the stanza above is a locus of hearing for a second reason as well: the speaker conceives two vast dimensional reductions that refer to hearing. The first, “As all the Heavens were a Bell,” turns all celestial space into a single, ringing *Bell*. The second, “Being, but an Ear,” turns all being into the hearing of sound and silence. This second reduction uses *Ear* in a transferred sense. The noun does not point to the smooth curves and folds of the external ear, but rather to aural perception. Enhanced by the rhyme of *Ear* with *here*, the vast reduction of *Being* to an *Ear* is spellbinding, and it leads to the study of all the Dickinson poems with *Ear*.
- 6 If its start is simple, the path of reading below quickly turns complex, for two reasons. First, single Dickinson poems are often elusive in their meanings, and looking at 45—the total number with *Ear* in Franklin’s *Variorum Edition* (1998)—multiplies these meanings greatly.⁶ Secondly, there are many ways to study the sounds and hearing in Dickinson’s poetry.⁷ While I am deeply attuned to Dickinson’s aural sense of language, my focus here is also on her sense of sounds in the world, and on the fusion of these senses in her poetic of hearing. The conceptual framework I adopt draws on Stewart’s *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002) and Miller’s *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (2012), and the path to follow has three steps in argument.⁸ The first step looks at “The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -” (Fr718), where Dickinson draws a clear distinction between sound coming from inside the subject and sound coming from outside it. As we will see, these sources of sound correlate with two sorts of hearing. The second step ties a noteworthy phonic echo in “The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -”—its twofold rhyme of *Ear* with *Hear*—to “To hear an Oriole sing” (Fr402), where the rhyme reappears. In this step, we see what Dickinson says about the reciprocity of perception and cognition, along with the interiorizing motion in her poetic of hearing. And the third step moves to other exemplary poems with *Ear*, where Dickinson hears a wide array of sounds as she evokes a wide range of experience.
- 7 The path of reading ends in the Dickinson auditorium, a space for hearing the sounds in her poetry, conceived with a model of her *Ear* in view. This model (see the Figure below) is an octagon whose eight sides stand for eight attributes. Lines drawn inside the octagon link each of its angles to other angles in the figure, thus reflecting the interrelated nature of all the attributes. Given the discussion above of “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,” five of these attributes are already clear. Dickinson’s *Ear* sequences phonic echoes, sets syllables

in prosodic arrays, foregrounds intonation (as in enjambment), refers to silence, and conceives being as hearing.

Figure: An Octagonal Model of Eight Attributes: Dickinson's *Ear*



2. Two Sources of Sound

- 8 "The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -" (Fr718) draws a clear distinction between two sources of sound, and these sources correlate with two sorts of hearing. The poem has the same rhyme of *Ear* with (a now capitalized) *Here* noted above in the fourth stanza of "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain." The rhyme thus newly makes hearing present. Also twice rhyming *Ear* with the verb *Hear*, a homophone of *Here*, and thus multiplying its attention to hearing, the poem says:

The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -
 We actually Hear
 When We inspect - that's audible -
 That is admitted - Here -

For other Services - as Sound - [5]
 There hangs a smaller Ear
 Outside the Castle - that Contain -
 The other - only - Hear -

- 9 Along with "The saddest noise, the sweetest noise" (Fr1789), this poem stands out in the set of poems with *Ear* by including the noun twice. We see at line end in quatrain one "the Conscious Ear" (l.1), and at line end in quatrain two "a smaller Ear" (l.6). The identical metrical placement of *Ear* clearly foregrounds it.⁹
- 10 Quatrain one and its *Conscious Ear* evoke an inner voice of thought and feeling "that's audible" (l.3) and "That is admitted - Here -" (l.4), inside the lyric speaker. With Dickinson's signature resonance, the threefold rhyme of *Ear*, *Hear*, *Here* (ll.1, 2, 4) places

the voice and its hearing inside the speaker, and the poem's inclusive *We*, only found in quatrain one, also makes this evident: "We actually Hear" (l.2) what is within "When We inspect" (l.3) what is said there.¹⁰ The sort of hearing to correlate with this source of sound has three features: it is preeminently the hearing of speech coming from "The Spirit" (l.1), the animating principle of a life; it is solitary, for the sound is heard only by the subject speaking it within; and it is constitutive of lyric subjectivity.¹¹

- 11 Quatrain two and its *smaller Ear* evoke "Sound ... / Outside the Castle" (ll.5-7), that is, sound coming from outside the subject. This is foregrounded by the second attribute in the model of Dickinson's *Ear*: it sets syllables in prosodic arrays.¹² The falling word stress of *Outside* in "Outside the Castle - that Contain -" (l.7) is the poem's one metrical anomaly, for it reverses, and is the exception to, the poem's 8686 iambic meter. The sort of hearing to correlate with this source of sound has two different features: it hears both the speech of others and non-linguistic, ambient sounds in the world; and it is public, for these sounds move through the air, and anyone willing and able to listen can hear them.
- 12 To draw this distinction between two sources of sound, Dickinson adopts the trope of the body as "Castle" (l.7), with its sense organs, as Vinge writes in *The Five Senses: Studies in a Literary Tradition* (1975), "posted in the citadel of the head as the reporters and messengers of the outer world" (32).¹³ "The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -" thus reflects on sense perception, whose relation to cognition of the world is immanent. Sense perception mediates between the subject and the outer world, granting access to what is there. Perception, however, is not a one-way street, but rather engages the subject in a reciprocal process of knowing. With deep insight, Dickinson names the reciprocity of perception and cognition and its role in representation in the third stanza of "The Outer - from the Inner" (Fr450), a poem without *Ear*:

The Inner - paints the Outer -
The Brush without the Hand -
It's Picture publishes - precise -
As is the inner Brand -

- 13 The reciprocity here of "The Inner" and "the Outer" develops the poem's main point, that "the inner Brand" of the perceiver determines how s/he perceives.¹⁴ "To hear an Oriole sing" (Fr402), discussed below in section three, enacts this reciprocity, while Vinge describes it thus: "Perception of an idea is not to be understood simply as the reception of impressions from outside on the mind, but as an act of the mind grasping the intelligible in the sensible fact" (136).
- 14 In view of its twofold *Ear*, identically placed at line end in its two stanzas, "The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -," as we have seen, thus draws a distinction between two sources of sound and their correlate sorts of hearing. One source is the voice of thought and feeling inside the lyric subject. The other is sound coming from the outer world. Several designs in the poem underscore the distinction: the twin quatrains; the twofold rhyme of *Ear* with *Hear* (ll.1, 2; 6, 8), one rhyme for each source; and the double *other* (ll.5, 8), which implies dual options. It is important to point out here that different values are given to the two sources of sound. The poem looks over its shoulder at sound coming from outside the subject. It is demoted to the rank of mere "other Services - as Sound" (l.5). The adverb "only" (l.8) downplays its import. The modifiers assigned to the two instances of *Ear* reveal differing values. *Conscious* in the *Conscious Ear* dwarfs *smaller* in a *smaller Ear*, and the alternative for *smaller* in manuscript is "minor." In the poem's first line, moreover, *the Conscious Ear* is the predicate nominative of no less a phrase than "The Spirit," the

animating principle of a life. The greater value given to sound coming from inside the subject makes sense if we assume that this source leads to the writing of poems. Stewart defends this premise in *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, where she finds that “even in its written form, it [poetry] evokes aspects of aurality in production and reception” (60). Dickinson, for her part, often points to sound in her poems on poetry, as in “I would not paint - a picture -” (Fr348), discussed below in section four. Her aphorism “A word is dead, when it is said / Some say - / I say it just begins to live / That day” (Fr278 A.2) is her rule of thumb.

- 15 Three observations are germane to conclude this reading of “The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -.”¹⁵ First, the two sources of sound converge in the 45 poems with *Ear*, and in the section below, the distinction drawn between them helps us see the interiorizing motion in her poetic of hearing. Secondly, the role of speech in both sources underscores attributes one to three—the phonic echoes, prosodic arrays, and intonation of language—in the model of Dickinson’s *Ear*. And thirdly, the distinction adds a sixth attribute to the model: Dickinson’s *Ear* distinguishes inner from outer sources of sound.

3. Reciprocity in Lyric Perception

- 16 The twofold rhyme of *Ear* with *Hear* in “The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -” is a cue to look for other instances of the same rhyme and for all other rhymes where *Ear* appears. This is so for three reasons. First, rhyme is a primary element in the signature resonance of Dickinson’s poetic, as Small’s *Positive as Sound: Emily Dickinson’s Rhyme* (1990) amply demonstrates.¹⁶ Secondly, the word *Ear* denotes the sense organ perceiving rhyme, and when *Ear* rhymes with *Hear/hear*, semantic emphasis on aural perception multiplies. And thirdly, the other rhymes with *Ear* relate it to such concepts as presence (*Here/here*), proximity and distance (*near* and *there*), clarity (*clear*), beauty (*fair*), air (*Air* and *Atmosphere*), and reverence (*revere* and *Prayer*).¹⁷ In sum, focusing on the poems with *Ear* in rhyme lets us see what else Dickinson says when she foregrounds hearing, especially what she says about perception and cognition.
- 17 Among the 19 other poems with *Ear* in rhyme, “To hear an Oriole sing” (Fr402) stands out. It renews the rhyme of *Ear* with *Hear/hear* in “The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -.” In Dickinson’s fascicles, the string-bound booklets in which she copied her poems in fair hand from 1858 to 1864, it stands amid a cluster of five poems with *Ear*.¹⁸ And it enacts the reciprocity of perception and cognition, along with the interiorizing motion in Dickinson’s poetic of hearing. The poem says:

To hear an Oriole sing
May be a common thing -
Or only a divine.

It is not of the Bird
Who sings the same, unheard, [5]
As unto Crowd -

The Fashion of the Ear
Attireth that it hear
In Dun, or fair -

So whether it be Rune - [10]
Or whether it be none

Is of within.

The "Tune is in the Tree -"
 The Skeptic - showeth me -
 "No Sir! In Thee!"

[15]

- 18 Three end rhymes above point or allude to hearing: *sing* with *thing* (ll.1, 2), *Bird* with *unheard* (ll.4, 5), and the rhyme of interest, *Ear* with *hear* (ll.7, 8). The presence of hearing is also salient elsewhere. Consider the infinitive "To hear" (l.1)—subject of the poem's first sentence and the antecedent of "It" (l.4), subject of the second sentence—and the lexis of music, as in "Who sings the same" (l.5), "Rune" (l.10), which may denote a song or poem, and its distant rhyme with "Tune" (l.13).¹⁹ In fine, the phonic, syntactic, and lexical foregrounding of sound evidences Dickinson's love of birdsong, to which a recent anthology of her poetry, *A Spicing of Birds* (2010), is in part devoted.²⁰
- 19 The distinction in "The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -" between two sources of sound is germane to the reading here of "To hear an Oriole sing." The dialogic correction in the second poem—in its closing triplet, the speaker energetically corrects "The Skeptic" (l.14)—disputes the location of the song. Answering the implied question, Where is the oriole's song?, the speaker's closing exclamations—"No Sir! In Thee!" (l.15)—place the song inside the hearer, thus setting right the skeptic's saying "The 'Tune is in the Tree -'" (l.13). This correction draws on the distinction between sound coming from inside the subject and sound coming from outside it. To this distinction, "To hear an Oriole sing" adds another: that between sound coming from outside the subject and the nature of its hearing. The initial source of the sound is clear: an oriole, whose "rich, whistling song," as the Cornell Lab of Ornithology puts it, is "a sweet herald of spring in eastern North America." In Dickinson's singular irony, it is the skeptic who says the *Tune is in the Tree*, as if only one given to doubt would locate the song in a bird. The gesture implied by "The Skeptic - showeth me -" (l.14) points to the oriole's location in the tree.
- 20 The dialogic correction, with the signature resonance of its exclamative intonation and the last triplet's *Tree, me, Thee* monorhyme (the previous triplets, by not completing the rhyme, prefigure its completion here), disputes not the song's origin, but rather *where* it is heard. *How* the song is heard elsewhere stands out in three disjunctive options. Again in singular irony, given Dickinson's love of birdsong and the wry adverb *only*, the oriole's song "May be a common thing - / Or only a divine" (ll.2-3). The song may be "Dun, or fair" (l.9). And it may be "Rune - / Or ... none" (ll.10-11). These options owe to "The Fashion of the Ear" that "Attireth that it hear" (ll.7, 8) in dress of its own making. Webster's *Dictionary* (1844) includes these among the senses of *fashion*: "Manner; sort; way; mode."²¹ It is the manner or mode of the *Ear*, as it takes cognizance of sound in the world, that determines how the oriole's song is heard. This role given to the *Ear*, enhanced by its rhyme with *hear*, reveals the two-way street of sense perception, the reciprocal process of knowing in perception and cognition. It does so by placing the oriole's song inside the perceiving subject. The two sources of sound distinguished in "The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -" converge in "To hear an Oriole sing" in the inner nature of all hearing.²² This insight illuminates the interiorizing motion in Dickinson's poetic of hearing. Sound may originate in the world, but it is taken into the subject's inner life, where it is recast anew, in the poet's sense of sound and language, so as to reveal the subject's life within. In the interiorizing motion, perception thus *becomes* cognition, as hearing sound in the world turns into hearing the sound of "The Spirit" (Fr718). The insight accords with Hegel's assertions, in *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (1835), that the artist sets on "external things

... the seal of his inner being," that to "a deeper mind, what is alive in the outside world is dead unless through it there shines something inner and rich in significance as its own proper soul," and that in lyric subjectivity, "feeling and reflection ... draw the objectively existent world into themselves and live it through in their own inner element, and only then, after that world has become something inward, is it grasped and expressed in words" (I: 31; II: 975, 1133).

- 21 In "To hear an Oriole sing," then, the *Tune* is not in the *Tree*, where *The Skeptic* locates it, but rather is inside the hearer. The trimeter-to-dimeter reduction (664) in the parallel ends of the poem's two last triplets—"Is of within" (l.12) and "No Sir! In Thee!" (l.15)—makes the inner space of hearing clear. This reading adds a seventh attribute to the model of Dickinson's *Ear*: it knows the reciprocity of perception and cognition, their dovetailed interrelation. No less significantly, the reading points to an eighth attribute detailed just below.

4. Sorts of Experience with *Ear*

- 22 When we read a Dickinson poem with *Ear*, at least three questions arise. What is the nature of the poem's reference to hearing? What is the role of the reference? And how does the reference fit into the poem as a whole? The latter two questions owe to the reciprocity of perception and cognition and lead to a last attribute in the model of Dickinson's *Ear*: it fits into the notional whole of the poem where it appears. By *notional whole* we mean an integral cognitive take on the facet(s) of life a poem apprehends. In "The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -," the poem's notional whole reflects on sources of sound and their correlate sorts of hearing. In "To hear an Oriole sing," the notional whole locates the origin and nature of hearing inside the perceiving subject, and reveals the interiorizing motion in Dickinson's poetic of hearing. It is important to underscore here two things. First, the notional whole of a Dickinson poem often has a deeply felt emotive tone, one infusing its sense of hearing as light infuses the sky. And secondly, sense perception in poetry differs from sense perception in life.²³ Sense perception in life is often aleatory, while in poetry it is always intentional, part of the poem's projected world of reference. The reciprocity of perception and cognition deepens in the notional whole of a poem, to such a degree that the poem's acts of cognition determine its perception. What the speaker hears follows from what s/he conceives. Or as Hegel sees, the role of sense perception in lyric is to reveal the subject's inner life, "so that as inner life it may find expression," when "the inwardness of mood or reflection ... expatiates on itself, mirrors itself in the external world" (II: 1111, 1115).
- 23 The first question above—the nature of the reference to hearing—lets us identify a wide array of sounds in the poems with *Ear*. In them we hear birdsong and wings taking flight; voices, speech, and laughter; the "sounds of Eden" (Fr146); wailing; bells, drums, and music; time ("The Second" [Fr440 B]); boots; the "sounds of Welcome" (Fr389); a coin; brooks and moving water; a fire; the wind; "A Deed" (Fr1294); bees; and a frog. The latter two questions above—the role of the reference to hearing and how it fits into a poem as a whole—let us discern a wide range of experience in the poems with *Ear*. In incremental steps, Dickinson's *Ear* fits into the notional whole of a single poem, and the poem fits into larger sorts of experience in lyric subjectivity. "The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -" and "To hear an Oriole sing" focus on the experience of hearing itself. In the present section, we look at other exemplary poems with *Ear* where the reference to and role of hearing stand

out. The poems are arranged in topical subsets by the sort of experience they apprehend, and we note in passing others that fit the notional patterns. Throughout we develop the model of Dickinson's *Ear* and bring out what is distinctive to her poetic of hearing.

4.1. Loss and Defeat

- 24 "Success is counted sweetest" (Fr112 C), a widely though anonymously printed poem in Dickinson's lifetime, is one of five with *Ear* in fascicles 4 to 7.²⁴ The poem foregrounds hearing at its close, where a "forbidden ear" rhymes with "clear" and echoes in the silence after:

Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple Host [5]
Who took the Flag today
Can tell the definition
So clear of Victory

As he defeated - dying -
On whose forbidden ear [10]
The distant strains of triumph
Burst agonized and clear!

- 25 Acts of cognition inhere in this poem's aphoristic, definitional nature. "To comprehend a nectar" (l.3) and "Can tell the definition" (l.7) indicate that concepts are being clarified. The concepts are the poem's first word, "Success," lexically tied to the verb "succeed" (l.2), and the last word in the second quatrain, "Victory," which ties to the noun "triumph" (l.11). These are best understood and "counted sweetest" (l.1), the speaker says, by those who experience loss and defeat, namely "those who ne'er succeed" (l.2) and the "defeated - dying" (l.9) one at poem end. A deeply felt emotive tone of defeat infuses the poem's two opposed superlatives ("sweetest" [l.1] modifying *Success* and *sorest* in "sorest need" [l.4]), its participle "agonized" (l.12), and the intonation of its closing exclamation.²⁵
- 26 In this experience of loss and defeat, a sound is heard. The last two lines of the poem say: "The distant strains of triumph / Burst agonized and clear!" (ll.11-12). Though *distant*, these *strains of triumph* are heard distinctly. This is underscored by the verb *Burst* and by the fact that the poem's last word, *clear*, rhymes with *ear* (l.10) and also appears in line 8, which opens, "So clear." Aural perception is crystalline. Attributes one and three in the model of Dickinson's *Ear*—it sequences phonic echoes and foregrounds intonation—enhance the resonance and the recognition of these *strains of triumph*.
- 27 In light of such aural clarity, it is important to focus on the modifier given to the *defeated - dying* one's *ear*: "whose forbidden ear" (l.10). The *ear* is not *forbidden* from hearing the sound. It is *forbidden* from experiencing *Victory*. This is how the *ear* fits into the notional whole of the poem, and the role of the reference to hearing is to seal defeat. The *strains of triumph* come from outside the subject, and as these sounds enter the subject's inner life, a reciprocity of perception and cognition signals their meaning. This is emphasized in the poem's last line by the participle *agonized*. In the syntax of its occurrence, *agonized*

modifies how the sound *Burst*, but we easily see that it aligns with the pain of the hearer, the *defeated - dying* one who knows the sound to seal his loss.

4.2. Being, Art, and Suspect Display

- 28 Two poems with *Ear* develop attribute five in the model of Dickinson's *Ear*: it conceives being as hearing. Reflection on being and art guides "I would not paint - a picture -" (Fr348), whose stanzaic design unfolds in three octaves, one each for the arts of painting, music, and poetry. Octaves one and two begin:

I would not paint - a picture -
I'd rather be the One
It's bright impossibility
To dwell - delicious - on -
....

I would not talk, like Cornets -
I'd rather be the One [10]
Raised softly to the Ceilings -
And out, and easy on -

- 29 These octaves envision the "bright impossibility" (l.3) of the speaker's being the viewer, rather than the painter, and of her being sound, rather than the person or instrument producing it. In the second octave, the speaker takes the sound so deep into her inner life that she is "Raised softly to the Ceilings - / And out, and easy on -."
- 30 The polarity and parallelism opening the first two octaves—"I would not . . . / I'd rather be the One"—alter slightly in the third, which completes the poem's tripartite design and, starting with the phrase "Own the Ear," deepens its sense of sound:

Nor would I be a Poet -
It's finer - Own the Ear -
Enamored - impotent - content -
The License to revere, [20]
A privilege so awful
What would the Dower be,
Had I the Art to stun myself
With Bolts of Melody!

- 31 Dickinson's sly wit opens and ends this octave, for the speaker's not being a poet is a conceived possibility, and the counterfactual "Had I the Art" (l.23) is true. The speaker does "stun myself / With Bolts of Melody!" In Dickinson's art, that is what poetry does: it stuns. It is ear-minded, ear-directed, and ear-stunning. Only a poet with a keen sense of sound, in poems with *Ear*, would say of grief, "Grief is a Thief - quick startled - / Pricks his Ear - report to hear / Of that Vast Dark -" (Fr753), or say of death, "Invest this alabaster Zest / In the Delights of Dust -" (Fr1406). These sequences exhibit the signature resonance in Dickinson's poetic of hearing: it foregrounds unmistakably the sounds of language.
- 32 In its last octave, "I would not paint - a picture -" is about reluctantly being a poet, and five elements in the stanza's sense of sound stand out. In "It's finer - Own the Ear -" (l.18), the speaker implies that a poet does not *Own* her *Ear*, presumably because inspiration takes it over. This is the reason adduced not to be a poet. It would be *finer* to have one's own *Ear* back. Secondly, the intonation of enjambment delays the modifiers in "the Ear - / Enamored - impotent - content -" (ll.18-19). In the set of 45 poems with *Ear*, this is the sole instance of threefold modification, and aural perception is here portrayed as helpless

and happy in love. Thirdly, the sound that ends the octave is imposing, for these “Bolts of Melody!” (l.24), which gave the title to the volume *Bolts of Melody: New Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1945), are proper, Vendler says, to “an art that, like Jove’s thunderbolts, can stun” (149).²⁶ Fourth, the *Bolts of Melody!* instance sounds the speaker hears within, as the reflexive verb *to stun myself* implies. And fifth, the enhanced semantics of rhyme aligns *Ear* with *revere* (ll.18, 20) and, at poem end, *be* with *Melody* (ll.22, 24), in praise and reverence for the aural being of poetry.²⁷

33 A different relation of being to suspect display arises in “Inconceivably solemn!” (Fr414), where Dickinson strikingly names “the fine Ear.” A present contemplation poem, since all but one of its finite verbs are in the present simple, the poem sees a parade pass by, replete with “Pomp,” “A pleading Pageantry,” and “Flags,” the parade likely owing, given the poem’s composition about “autumn 1862” (*Variorum* 437), to the Civil War. As the parade draws near, the sense faculty perceiving it shifts from sight to hearing, and the poem is one of eight that place, often at line end, a singular *Eye/eye* in the proximity of *Ear*—in the present case, “order on the eye” and “no true Eye” alongside “the fine Ear.” These poems compare the sense faculties for which the *Eye/eye* and *Ear* are elegant figures.²⁸

34 Dickinson’s distrust of showy display accounts for two aphoristic assertions in the poem. “Flags, are a brave sight -,” the speaker says, “But no true Eye / Ever went by One - / Steadily -.” In the metrical promotion and archaic rhyme of *Eye* with *Steadily*, we hear the verb *lie*.²⁹ And perception shifts to hearing in the aphoristic last quatrain, where the rhyme of *Ear* with *near* ends the poem, echoing in the silence after:

Music’s triumphant -
But the fine Ear
Winces with delight
Are Drums too near -

35 Enhanced by the stress cluster in “the fine Ear / Winces,” this instance of hearing shows how *the fine Ear* hears and, as it takes sound into the subject’s inner life, what it feels: “delight” in “Drums,” but one that *Winces*—the alternative for *Winces* in manuscript is “aches”—if they are “too near,” and implied delight in subtler music, less strident and showy. The alternative last line in the quatrain above—“The Drums to hear -”—renews the rhyme of *Ear* with *hear* and multiplies its sense of hearing. The subtler music sought, in turn, infuses the poem’s first line, *Inconceivably solemn!*, whose phonic echoes and intonation underscore amazement laced with irony, and enact the fine-grained resonance everywhere in Dickinson.

4.3. Aural Bliss

36 Three poems with *Ear* conceive aural bliss, thus revealing sounds in the world that Dickinson loved. Through the interiorizing motion in her poetic of hearing, her speakers recast the sounds anew, so as to reveal the subject’s bliss within. “The Trees like Tassels - hit - and swung” (Fr523), for one, turns a modifier noted above in “I would not paint - a picture -”—*the Ear* - / *Enamored*—into a present participle in “Enamoring the Ear.” The poem’s second stanza says:

Far Psalteries of Summer -
Enamoring the Ear
They never yet did satisfy -
Remotest - when most fair

- 37 The rhyme here of *Ear* with *fair* signals aural beauty, the archaic “Psalteries of Summer” evokes stringed music, and the sounds that inspire bliss in the poem are leaves rustling in the wind, “a Tune / From Miniature Creatures,” presumably crickets, and “A Bird” who “gossiped in the Lane.” Along with “They never yet did satisfy -,” which also implies bliss, the two superlatives modifying *Psalteries*—“Remotest - when most fair”—are worth noting, for they correlate distance (*Remotest*) with beauty (*most fair*), recall above the “Drums too near” in “Inconceivably solemn!,” and draw attention to the alternative for *fair* in manuscript, the paradoxical “near.”
- 38 “It’s thoughts - and just One Heart -” (Fr362 B), secondly, lists several sources of bliss, among them birdsong marked by the internal rhyme of *clear* with *ear*: “A Bird - if they - prefer - / Though winter fire - sing clear as Plover - / To our - ear -.” This rhyme recalls the crystalline aural perception and rhyme of *ear* with *clear* at the end of “Success is counted sweetest.” And in a third poem, the sense faculties of sight and hearing perceive a bird in “A Mien to move a Queen” (Fr254), where hearing the bird sing “on the ear” inspires a version of its song:
- A Voice that alters - Low
And on the ear can go
Like Let of Snow -
Or shift supreme -
As tone of Realm
On Subjects Diadem -
- 39 The darting motion of birdsong infuses these lines, which bear the signature resonance in Dickinson’s poetic of hearing, and instance how “Dickinson’s poetry achieves its thinking and effects through the work of its music, or rhythms and sounds” (Miller, *Reading* 37). Iambic rhythm briskly shifts from trimeter to dimeter (664446), and phonic echoes turn from resonant monorhyme (*Low, go, Snow*) to oblique partial rhyme (*supreme, Realm, Diadem*). Of the sounds that Dickinson loved, birdsong, evident in all three poems on bliss, in “To hear an Oriole sing” above, and in “Heart not so heavy as mine” (Fr88 C) below, is foremost.

4.4. Speech and Silence

- 40 In the locus of hearing where we began, the fourth stanza of “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,” we noted the lyric pathos of “I, and Silence, some strange Race” (Fr340). Dickinson’s poetic of hearing also focuses on silence and on the construal of speech in three other poems with *Ear*. The poems develop attributes one to three—the phonic echoes, prosodic arrays, and intonation of language—and attributes four and seven in the model of Dickinson’s *Ear*: it refers to silence, and it knows the reciprocity of perception and cognition. This reciprocity arises whenever we hear speech or see writing, and construe meanings through them. It is also in play when we recursively perceive writing as speech, and a feedback loop within literacy moves from the seeing of writing to the hearing of speech. This recursive motion informs most encounters with written poetry, and it leads to “the recursive and patterned dimensions of form” (Stewart, *Poetry* 82) that yield a poem’s meanings. The experience of silence, moreover, entails a distinction to add to those drawn above in “The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -” and “To hear an Oriole sing.” Dickinson distinguishes silence as the absence of sound from silence as absent hearing, even in the midst of sound. The latter is evident in poems where the dead do not hear, and when Dickinson’s speakers address inanimate entities.³⁰

- 41 “Like some Old fashioned Miracle” (Fr408 B) stands medially between the sorts of silence distinguished. Sent to Susan Dickinson, “addressed ‘Combined Girl’ and signed ‘Emily’” (*Variorum* 433), the poem remembers a summer, the season most expressive of bliss in Dickinson. “Summertime is done,” leaving the speaker with the “Miracle” of “Summer’s Recollection / And the Affairs of June.” The poem’s memory of hearing is limited to “Her Bees have a fictitious Hum -” until the final quatrain, where summer is newly personified, reference to hearing multiplies, and the speaker’s *Ear* is “numb”:

Her Memories like Strains - Review -
 When Orchestra is dumb -
 The Violin in Baize replaced -
 And Ear - and Heaven - numb -

- 42 Amid present silence, summer’s “Memories” are like the “Strains” of a silent “Orchestra,” its “Violin” stowed in a “Baize” covering. The resonant rhyme of *dumb* with *numb* underscores this silence. Giving the *Ear* the modifier *numb*, however, also points to an *Ear* that lacks sensation, one that, dazed by loss, cannot hear. The loss, presumably of love, is grievous, in light of *Heaven* in the pairing of “Ear - and Heaven - numb -.”³¹

- 43 Speech is literally clearest in “Baby -” (Fr198), one of the nine poems to which Dickinson gave titles (*Variorum* 1545). Sent “to Mary Bowles shortly after the birth on 19 December [1861] of a son” (*Variorum* 232), the poem ends with “Emily”:

Teach Him - when He makes the *names* -
 Such an one - to say -
 On his babbling - *Berry* - lips -
 As should sound - to me -
 Were my Ear - as near his nest - [5]
 As my *thought* - today -
 As should sound -
 “Forbid us not” -
 Some like “Emily.”

- 44 The image here of a baby speaking with glistening, cherry-like lips—“to say - / On his *babbling* - *Berry* - *lips* -” (ll.2-3)—evokes delight in incipient speech, the *babbling* to become intelligible language. Clear phonic echoes foreground these lips, in the signature resonance of Dickinson’s poetic of hearing. Also an apostrophe to the mother, the poem is a plea for the baby’s learning to say the quoted “Forbid us not” (l.8) and “Emily” (l.9).³² This explains the opening imperative “Teach Him” (l.1) and the reference to “when He makes the *names* - / Such an one - to say” (ll.1-2). The speaker seeks a discursive reciprocity in future dialogic exchange. This, in turn, accounts for the parallel “my Ear” (l.5) and “my *thought*” (l.6) and for the twin “As should sound - to me” (l.4) and “As should sound” (l.7), all implying the hearing and construal of speech.

- 45 The dubious construal of speech stands out in a third poem, “Prayer is the little implement” (Fr623), where the faithful “fling their Speech // ... in God’s Ear,” despite doubtful results. Reducing its even lines to spare dimeters and renewing the rhyme of *Ear* with *hear* to spotlight God’s hearing, the poem says:

Prayer is the little implement
 Through which Men reach
 Where Presence - is denied them -
 They fling their Speech

By means of it - in God’s Ear - [5]
 If then He hear -

This sums the Apparatus
Comprised in Prayer -

- 46 This depiction of “Prayer” (ll.1, 8), the word that begins and ends the poem, sees it in skeptical, secular terms, first as a “little implement” (l.1) and then as an “Apparatus” (l.7). The former is a tool, and the latter, suited to the scientific cast of Dickinson’s mind, alludes to the anatomy of the ear—to the sound-collecting outer ear, the transmitting middle ear, and the sensory inner ear. The skeptical tone of the poem leaves *Prayer* bereft of all efficacy and divine aura. The discursive exchange envisaged above in “Baby -,” moreover, is here called into question. Those who pray “fling their Speech” (l.4), and the rhyme of *reach* with *Speech* (ll.2, 4) foregrounds its arrival somewhere, but construal “in God’s Ear - / If then he hear -” (ll.5-6) is cast in doubt.³³

4.5. Sources and Origins

- 47 “The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -,” discussed in section two, distinguishes two sources of sound, and “To hear an Oriole sing,” discussed in section three, locates the origin of hearing inside the perceiving subject.³⁴ A third poem on sources and origins is “I think that the Root of the Wind is Water” (Fr1295), where *Ear* rhymes with “Atmosphere” at poem end:

I think that the Root of the Wind is Water -
It would not sound so deep
Were it a Firmamental Product -
Airs no Oceans keep -
Mediterranean intonations - [5]
To a Current’s Ear -
There is a maritime conviction
In the Atmosphere -

- 48 This poem takes its cue from The Gospel According to St. John, where Nicodemus questions Jesus about his precept, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus asks, “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” Jesus answers with an allegory of the wind: “Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and wither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3.3-8).³⁵ The allegory points to the mystery of the wind as *pneuma* or spirit—we hear its sound, but we do not know where it comes from, or where it goes.
- 49 “I think that the Root of the Wind is Water” takes as its lexis of belief “I think” (l.1) and “a maritime conviction” (l.7), and as its lexis of sources and origins “the Root” (l.1) and “a Firmamental Product” (l.3). This last noun phrase recalls a guarantee of origin, like “Product of New England.” In a neat reciprocity of perception and cognition, saying *the Root of the Wind is Water* leads to the poem’s two moments of hearing. What the poem perceives, that is, follows from what it conceives. The steps in finding the wind’s origin are three, and they unfold in a quasi-argument. The first two steps are negations. In lines 2 to 3, an origin in the sky is discarded. A *Firmamental Product* “would not sound so deep” (l.2). This predicate plays with the senses of *sound so deep*: the phrase points to the sound of the wind, and also to taking the sound, as *pneuma* or spirit, deep into the subject’s inner life, where the interiorizing motion in Dickinson’s poetic of hearing recasts it anew in language. In the second step, “Airs no Oceans keep” (l.4), the wind’s origin is not

evident in its outcome. After these two negations, the third step is an assertion. In lines 5 to 8, an instance of the wind is adduced, the polysyllabic splendor of “*Mediterranean* into *nations*” (l.5), ten syllables in two intonational phrases enhanced by phonic echoes and assigned to the sea. In this third step, the *intonations* are intelligible: “To a Current’s Ear - / There is a maritime conviction / In the Atmosphere -” (ll.6-8). The wind alone knows its *maritime* origin in water. If we recall that, in response to Nicodemus’s question, Jesus also answered, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3.5), then Dickinson says that we are born of water alone, the water of childbirth, and that the spirit’s birth has its origin in this water.

- 50 Three aspects of this last step in argument are worth noting. First, the *Ear* is given to an inanimate entity, to moving air or water, a *Current’s Ear*.³⁶ This figure also reveals the reciprocity of perception and cognition. It is no surprise that a *Current’s Ear* knows a *maritime conviction*, if the nature of a perceiving entity determines how it hears. Secondly, “I think that the Root of the Wind is Water” hears the wind in phonological terms. Intonation, whose phrases are breeze-like in motion, moves through the air bearing its *conviction*. Thirdly, the rhyme of *Ear* (l.6) with *Atmosphere* (l.8) unites lines that are, amid surrounding variation, isometric, and the rhyme is set at poem end, where it echoes in the silence after, as in eight other poems that rhyme with *Ear*.³⁷

4.6. Sudden Encounter

- 51 In the chapter “Meeting” in *The Poet’s Freedom: A Notebook on Making* (2011), Stewart writes: “The poetry of meeting involves a lived encounter or exchange and so includes an open possibility of transformation by means of language” (166). A related encounter, suddenly transforming, arises in “Heart not so heavy as mine” (Fr88 C), where a bobolink soothes the speaker’s “irritated ear”:

Heart not so heavy as mine
Wending late home -
As it passed my window
Whistled itself a tune -

A careless snatch - a ballad - [5]
A Ditty of the street -
Yet to my irritated ear
An anodyne so sweet -

It was as if a Bobolink
Sauntering this way [10]
Carolled and mused, and carolled -
Then bubbled slow away -

It was as if a chirping brook
Upon a toilsome way
Set bleeding feet to minuets [15]
Without the knowing why -

Tomorrow - night will come again -
Perhaps - tired and sore -
Oh Bugle, by the window
I pray you stroll once more! [20]

- 52 The identity of this “Heart not so heavy as mine” (l.1) is not instantly clear. We infer the *Heart* is “a Bobolink” (l.9) in light of several cues. “Whistled itself a tune -” (l.4), “Carolled and mused, and carolled -” (l.11), and “a chirping brook” (l.13) all point to birdsong. The noun *tune* brings to mind “The ‘Tune is in the Tree -’” in “To hear an Oriole sing.” And the vocative “Oh Bugle, by the window” (l.19) would not be spoken to a human addressee. Quatrains three and four, which open with the parallel, metrically identical “It was as if a Bobolink” (l.9) and “It was as if a chirping brook” (l.13), and where phonic echoes tie a *Bobolink* to a *chirping brook*, thus name the source of the song and then how the perceiving subject hears it.
- 53 In its narrative, the sudden encounter with the bobolink occurs across two spaces. The placement of *window* at line end in the first and last quatrains—“As it passed my window” (l.3) and “Oh Bugle, by the window” (l.19)—sets the speaker in a room, likely Dickinson’s at the Homestead, outside which the bobolink alights and sings. At line end in quatrains three and four, the placement of *way*—“Sauntering this way” (l.10) and “Opon a toilsome way” (l.14)—foregrounds the bird’s motion, tracked from the speaker’s room. The bobolink was “Wending late home - / As it passed” (ll.2-3), and it then came “Sauntering this way” (l.10). It paused to sing “A careless snatch - a ballad - / A Ditty of the street -” (ll.5-6), after which it “Then bubbled slow away -” (l.12). The closing apostrophe to the bobolink—“Oh Bugle, by the window / I pray you stroll once more!” (ll.19-20)—is a plea for a future encounter.³⁸
- 54 As it sounds in the subject’s life within, the role of the bobolink’s song is threefold. First, the song inspires deep relief and joy. These are evident in “An anodyne so sweet -” (l.8) and “Set bleeding feet to minuets / Without the knowing why -” (ll.15-16). Hearing the song produces a joy so great it leads the speaker to dance. Secondly, the song cancels the speaker’s inner pain. The latter is evident in “my *irritated ear*” (l.7), a reverse rhyme enclosing the phonemes of *ear* in the first syllable of *irritated*, its modifier.³⁹ The sounds that chafe the *ear* come from inside the speaker, whose anguish stands out in “Heart ... heavy as mine” (l.1), “a toilsome way” (l.14), the allusion to Jesus in “bleeding feet” (l.15), and “tired and sore” (l.18). Thirdly, the song instances an affinity of poet and bird. This arises in “a ballad - / A Ditty of the street -” (ll.5-6), where the lexis of poetry is applied to birdsong. The affinity is implied by “Whistled itself a tune -” (l.4), if we envision the poet writing in solitude. And the affinity explains the poem’s existence, for the bobolink’s song, as it suddenly transforms the subject’s inner life, inspires the writing of another.

4.7. Impossible Love

- 55 Two poems with *Ear* refer to playing a lute, in instances of what might be called Dickinson’s troubadour poems, and the two tell of impossible love in deeply felt emotive tones of longing.⁴⁰ In both poems, the speaker casts herself as a troubadour or a psalmist, and in this role seeks to charm the beloved, but in each case her music is futile.
- 56 “Although I put away his life -” (Fr405) names a love that could not be in its first three lines, only to devote the remaining thirty lines to what the speaker would have done, had the love occurred. “This might have been the Hand,” she says, that

played his chosen tune -

On Lute the least - the latest -
But just his ear could know

[10]

That whatso'er delighted it,
I never would let go -

57 The dense phonic echoes in "Lute the least - the latest" (l.9), along with the resonant rhyme of *know* with *go*, foreground the "chosen tune" (l.8) that "just his ear could know" (l.10). The implausible, archaic *Lute*, belied by the superlative *Latest*, aligns with impossible love, and there is a further irony in the adverb *never*—"whatso'er delighted it [his ear], / I never would let go -" (ll.11-12)—when the love could not be.⁴¹

58 Impossible love also guides "Put up my lute!" (Fr324), whose speaker is a psalmist, and whose opening stanza names "the sole ear I cared to charm":

Put up my lute!
What of my music!
Since the sole ear I cared to charm -
Passive - as granite - laps my music -
Sobbing - will suit - as well as psalm! [5]

59 Impossible love stands out here in three designs. The playing of music, foregrounded at line end in "my lute" (l.1), "my Music" (l.2), "my music" (l.4), and "psalm" (l.5), leaves the beloved's *ear* cold, "Passive - as Granite" (l.4). The *ear* "laps my music" (l.4), but it is not moved. A second design is the dense echoing in "Sobbing - will suit - as well as psalm" (l.5). These phonic echoes underscore and equate the speaker's pain (*Sobbing*) and her music (*psalm*). Together with the previous poem's *Lute the least - the latest*, the echoes evidence the signature resonance in Dickinson's poetic of hearing, as it foregrounds unmistakably the sounds of language. The third design is the stanza's sustained intonation: its three exclamations convey the pain of knowing the love will go nowhere. Stewart sees "the enunciation of pain at the origin of lyric" take enduring form in "the mastery of pain through measures and figures" (*Poetry* 46). Showing this mastery, the music Dickinson names and plays in these poems on love is a sound that she hears—in a poem with *Ear* on the air—"in Life's faint, wailing Inn" (Fr989).

4.8. Death

60 Two last poems with *Ear* reflect on "The Question of 'To die' -," as "Did you ever stand in a Cavern's Mouth -" (Fr619) puts it just below. A sustained apostrophe to the reader, the poem sets the question of death "Extemporizing in your ear":

Did you ever stand in a Cavern's Mouth -
Widths out of the Sun -
And look - and shudder, and block your breath -
And deem to be alone

In such a place, what horror, [5]
How Goblin it would be -
And fly, as 'twere pursuing you?
Then Loneliness - looks so -

Did you ever look in a Cannon's face -
Between whose Yellow eye - [10]
And your's - the Judgment intervened -
The Question of "To die" -

Extemporizing in your ear
As cool as Satyr's Drums -

rhythm of being, thus guides the contrast, as it is taken into the subject's inner life. Emerging out of the slightly irregular short meter and slant rhyme in quatrain one, the perfect 6686 iambic meter in quatrain two, along with its full rhyme of *Peace* with *release*, privilege the second half of the rhythm, where "corporal release" (l.8) alludes to the freeing of a soul. It is fitting to end here with "the Ear inordinate / For corporal release -" (ll.7-8). The two phrases imply that the *Ear* is able to hear an imperceptible *corporal release*, the soul leaving a body for the air. The phrases point to deep desire and to an *Ear* that exceeds all limits, one that is beyond all order. And the phrases reveal the abiding nature of Dickinson's *Ear*, so intricate and immanent in her poetic of hearing as to be beyond all measure.

5. The Dickinson Auditorium

- 66 If the poems with *Ear* give us clear evidence of how Dickinson conceived hearing, it is also true that no single essay or book can adequately explicate her *Ear*. In the poetry, it is everywhere. It is responsible for every phonic echo, syllable, foot, and line in every rhymed stanza, for every intonational phrase within or across metrical lines or stanzas, and for every reference to and role of hearing, whether of sounds in the world or of sounds in language.
- 67 An elegantly simple figure of aural perception, Dickinson's *Ear* has not been lost on scholars, but so far as I know, no study has read the poems with *Ear* as a set, leaving no lexical stone unturned. Reading the poems with it lets us build a model of her *Ear*, and the model illuminates the interiorizing motion and the signature resonance in her poetic of hearing. To develop the model and the poetic, we began in "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" (Fr340), whose fourth stanza exhibits signature resonance and two vast dimensional reductions conceiving aural ontology: "As all the Heavens were a Bell, / And Being, but an Ear." In "The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -" (Fr718), we drew a clear distinction between sound coming from inside the subject and sound coming from outside it, as well as between their correlate sorts of hearing. And in "To hear an Oriole sing" (Fr402), the sorts of hearing converge in the reciprocity of perception and cognition, which places all hearing inside the perceiving subject. In this poem, the interiorizing motion in Dickinson's poetic of hearing takes sound in the world into the subject's inner life, and then recasts it anew, so as to reveal the subject's life within.
- 68 When set in other exemplary poems, Dickinson's *Ear* hears a wide array of sounds, as the poet reflects on a wide range of experience. These poems show the versatility of her poetic of hearing, as it turns to reflection going from loss and defeat to being, art, and suspect display; from aural bliss to speech and silence; from sources and origins to sudden encounter; from impossible love to death. Along with its signature resonance and interiorizing motion, Dickinson's poetic of hearing focuses here on silence and on the construal of speech, and it reverses its typical motion when "The Question of 'To die' -" becomes "As cool as Satyr's Drums -" (Fr619).
- 69 Dickinson's *Ear* and her poetic of hearing, lastly, lead us to conceive the Dickinson auditorium, a space for hearing the sounds in her poetry. Beyond the occurrence of *Ear*, the reference to and role of hearing in the Dickinson corpus is often very striking, as in "I cannot dance upon my Toes -" (Fr381 B), whose speaker, when "A Glee possesseth me," imagines dancing "Till I was out of sight, in sound, / The House encore me so -." As I see

them, the design and building of a Dickinson auditorium entail at least three steps. The first is to gather all poems with primary or secondary reference to hearing. The second is to divide the poems into those whose reference is to one source of sound, such as the birdsong in the poems with *Ear*, and those whose reference is to sounds coming from more than one source. The third step is to identify the sorts of experience guiding the poems in each group, particularly the experience, as in “The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -” and “To hear an Oriole sing,” of hearing itself.

- 70 The design and building of a Dickinson auditorium are daunting, but there are reasons to be encouraged.⁴⁶ A love of Dickinson’s verse sustains: “This - would be Poetry - // Or Love - the two coeval come -” (Fr1353). Dickinson herself was a builder: “Myself was formed - a Carpenter -” (Fr475) succinctly ends, “We - Temples build - I said -.” And given her keenly aural senses of the world and of language, Dickinson’s readers are aware of their own auditoriums. The task is not to design and build *the* Dickinson auditorium, but rather to assemble one, informed by sustained and sensitive hearing, without scholarly rhapsody, but with “the Art of Boards / Sufficiently developed” (Fr475).

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NOTES

1. The poetry of Emily Dickinson is quoted from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition* (1998), edited by R. W. Franklin. Following scholarly convention, I cite the poems parenthetically by the abbreviation "Fr" plus the numbers Franklin assigns them. When a poem has more than one version, I note the version quoted by adding the capital letter Franklin gives it.
2. I am grateful to two anonymous readers and to Cristanne Miller for numerous improvements to my manuscript.

3. I take the term *phonic echo* from Corn's *The Poem's Heartbeat: A Manual of Prosody* (1997). Corn uses the term to denote any array of phoneme repetition that "becomes clearly audible and relevant to other constructive aspects of a poem" (65).
4. I use the term *stress cluster* on the analogy with *consonant cluster*. If a consonant cluster is a sequence of two or more consonants before or after the vowel that constitutes a syllable, a stress cluster is a sequence of two or more stressed syllables.
5. The sorts of linguistic sound I hear in Dickinson's poetry are the phoneme, the syllable, the foot, the verse line, and the intonational phrase. Especially but not only in enjambment, Dickinson's *Ear* is finely attuned to the motions and meanings of intonation, which modulates "the varying height of the pitch of the voice over one syllable or over a number of successive syllables" and falls into "recurring pitch patterns, each of which is used with a set of relatively consistent meanings, either on single words or on groups of words of varying length" (Cruttenden 2, 7).
6. To avoid *Ear/ear*, I simply write *Ear*, taken to comprise all instances of both *Ear* and *ear*. One further instance of *Ear*—that in "God gave a Loaf to every Bird -" (Fr748 B)—refers to an ear of grain or corn, and not to the sense organ. I leave this poem out of consideration.
7. For instance, the fifth chapter of Mitchell's *Measures of Possibility: Emily Dickinson's Manuscripts* (2005) sees the poems in manuscript obscure rather than reveal the aural designs that shape them. Other recent studies are Shoptaw's "Listening to Dickinson" (2004), Luxford's "Sounding the Sublime: The 'Full Music' of Dickinson's Inspiration" (2004), Peterson's "Surround Sound: Dickinson's Self and the Hearable" (2005), and Petrino's "Allusion, Echo, and Literary Influence in Emily Dickinson" (2010). Leyda's *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson* (1960) notes sounds heard in Amherst during Dickinson's life, especially musical instruments (organs [1: 37, 171, 333, 374]; a double bass viol [1: 54, 171]; bands [1: 278, 285, 2: 30]), singing (1: 52, 53, 54, 204-05, *passim*), bells (1: 6, 17, 24, 32, *passim*), and guns and cannon (1: 232-33, 273). And Miller's "The Sound of Shifting Paradigms, or Hearing Dickinson in the Twenty-First Century" (2004) compares the sounds in Dickinson's life with those we hear today and focuses on period-specific modes of sense perception, especially in "dominant paradigms for constructing and perceiving poetry" (205). Attenuating claims that Dickinson is "a poet writing within the concerns of the twentieth-century, primarily visual paradigm," Miller argues that "for Dickinson, hearing was the key artistic response," and that "for Dickinson, sound emphatically grounds the poem" (217, 202, 206).
8. Stewart's *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* explicates "the transformation of sense experience into words, the mark of the human," as it occurs in "poetic forms—forms arising out of sense experience and producing, as they make sense experience intelligible to others, intersubjective meaning" (26, ix). Drawing on a range of reflection and poetry from ancient Greece to contemporary America, Stewart traces the poetic history of the senses, highlighting their role in our access to inner and outer reality, their relation to memory, abstraction, and imagination, their singularity, and their synaesthetic blending. In particular, chapters 2 and 3, "Sound" and "Voice and Possession," focus on the "aural dimension of poetry," taking this as their premise: "To speak of the aural aspect of poetry is to begin to speak necessarily of its linguistic dimension, but we will also need to consider the prelinguistic and extralinguistic dimensions of sound embedded in the language of poetry" (60). This premise accounts both for Dickinson's sense of linguistic sound and for the reference to and role of hearing in her poetry. Miller's *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* is a trove of insight on aurality in Dickinson. Three of its seven chapters focus on aurality, and they draw the conclusion that, at least through 1865, "Dickinson regarded the poem as an essentially aural structure, which could be performed or mapped in distinct and various ways in writing—a conclusion supported by ways that Dickinson writes about poetry, about the poet, and by the extreme significance of aural or sonic features to her verse" (12). Miller looks at several instances of *Ear*, among them "Being, but an Ear" in Fr340

(19, 38-42, 45-46), “the Conscious Ear” in Fr718 (37), “Own the Ear” in Fr348 (37), “By ear unheard -” in Fr132 (141-2), and “the rare Ear” in Fr945 (194). This last occurrence appears in the book’s penultimate paragraph. Not long before, the scholar points in a single phrase to the sort of study I endeavor, that of “the deepest ways she [Dickinson] thought about perception and being” (191).

9. “For Dickinson,” Miller writes, “the end of the line is a more significant consistent point of emphasis than the beginning, as even a cursory glance at the poems composed in any year reveals. Line-end words are the basis for her rhymes and are typically words of semantic force; in contrast, many lines begin with an article, conjunction like ‘And,’ or preposition” (*Reading* 108-9).

10. Greenbaum and Quirk distinguish inclusive and exclusive *we* thus: “The pronoun for the 1st person plural is a device for referring to ‘I’ and one or more other people. The latter may be INCLUSIVE of the addressee(s). . . . The obverse of this occurs in the *exclusive* use of the 1st person plural where ‘you’ the addressee is not included” (113-14).

11. Relating “the situation of the emergence of subjectivity” to *poiēsis*, Stewart ties the hearing of a voice within to “the situation of the person spoken by sound who becomes the person speaking,” and later says of Sappho’s speaker in *phainetai moi*: “She moves, as do all lyric speakers, from being spoken to *speaking*, from pain to articulation, from private sensation to intersubjectivity” (*Poetry* 15, 50-51).

12. “Reportless Subjects, to the Quick” (Fr1118), a poem with *Ear*, refers to prosody when it names “Reportless Measures, to the Ear / Susceptive - stimulus -.” The “Measures” in the poem are those of common meter, and the intonation of enjambment—“the Ear / Susceptive”—highlights the metrical “stimulus” to which Dickinson’s *Ear* is deeply drawn. As prosodic templates, the *Measures* are likely *Reportless* because they lack semantic reference.

13. For discussion of the trope of the body as castle in Plato, Cicero, and Spenser, see Vinge 32-3, 87-93.

14. Dickinson makes similar claims in Fr922, which begins, “The Sun is gay or stark / According to Our Deed -,” and in Fr1219 B, which says, “The Table is not laid without / Till it is laid within.”

15. For another reading of the poem focusing on aurality, see Loeffelholz’s chapter “An Ear outside the Castle” in *Dickinson and the Boundaries of Feminist Theory* (1991). The chapter looks at poems with “the organizing idea of a sound, usually melodic, overheard from within a human shelter that draws a fluid boundary for consciousness” (119), and it reads “The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -” as a parody (121-4, 138). See also Fuss’s chapter “Dickinson’s Eye” in *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms that Shaped Them* (2004), which also considers the poet’s *Ear* (38, 49-51, 56-57).

16. Small’s study pursues more than its title says, for it considers “the aural aspect of Emily Dickinson’s poetry generally, with particular emphasis on her rhyme” (27), and faces squarely the true complexity of Dickinson’s ways with linguistic sound, particularly “the sort of problems one confronts when seeking out correlations between meaning and sound” (8). The study looks in varying depth at fourteen poems with *Ear*, beginning and ending with Fr340, “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain” (8-10, 11, 219). In-between it refers to Fr905 (38, 177, 187), Fr718 (53, 159), Fr120 (54, 190), Fr146 (54), Fr523 (54), Fr440 (58), Fr402 (68-9, 83, 100, 215), Fr1118 (69), Fr945 (70, 165, 215-6), Fr389 (232-3n12), Fr783 (153-4), Fr1406 (177), and Fr623 (191).

17. In addition to “The Spirit is the Conscious Ear -,” the rhyme of *Ear* with *Hear/hear* arises—in end or internal rhyme—in Fr389, 402, 414, 623, 753. The rhyme of *Ear* with *Here/here*, noted above in Fr340 and Fr718, also appears in Fr124 B, 1406. Whether in full, partial, end, or internal rhyme, *Ear* is also set in relation to the concepts of proximity and distance (*near* and *there*) in Fr146, 389, 414, 523, 1789; of clarity (*clear*) in Fr112 C, 362 B; of beauty (*fair*) in Fr402, 523; of air (*Air* and *Atmosphere*) in Fr1053, 1295; and of reverence (*revere* and *Prayer*) in Fr348, 623. The other rhymes with *Ear* are *severe* (Fr361), *Before* (Fr440 B), and *spear* (Fr1789). It is worth noting as well the poems where *Ear* and the verb *hear* (in any of its forms) coincide, though they do not rhyme. These poems are Fr132 B, 340, 361, 945, 996.

18. "To hear an Oriole sing" appears in fascicle 20, along with "Although I put away his life -" (Fr405) and "Like Some Old fashioned Miracle -" (Fr408 A). In fascicle 19, Dickinson copied "Me - Come! My dazzled face" (Fr389), and in fascicle 21, "I - Years - had been - from Home -" (Fr440 A). In varied ways, Dickinson seems at this point to focus on aural perception. See Miller's reading edition of *Dickinson's Poems* 208, 214-15, 216, 218, 221.

19. In its entry for *rune*, n.², the *OED Online* gives as sense 2.b: "Any song, poem, or verse, esp. a cryptic or magic verse, a spell, an incantation; (also) a lament." The first cited example of this sense is an 1841 use by Emerson.

20. This beautiful volume interleaves 37 poems with illustrations of birds to which the poems refer. The poems selected include three with *Ear*: Fr402, discussed here, "Split the Lark - and you'll find the Music -" (Fr905), and "The saddest noise, the sweetest noise" (Fr1789).

21. These appear in sense 5 of the noun *fashion*, as transcribed in the *Emily Dickinson Lexicon*.

22. Dickinson makes similar points in two other poems. "You'll know Her - by Her Foot -" (Fr604) names a "Robin in your brain" distinct from the robin in the world: "She squanders on your Head / Such arguments of Pearl - / You beg the Robin in your brain / To keep the other - still -." The alternative for "Head" in this stanza is "Ear," and it is fitting that Dickinson conceives *Head* (cognition) and *Ear* (perception) as interchangeable. "Perception of an Object costs" (Fr1103 B), in turn, sees the reciprocity of perception and cognition first in terms of subjective apprehension ("Perception of an Object costs / Precise the Object's loss -") and then attenuates this claim ("The Object absolute, is nought - / Perception sets it fair").

23. Stewart says of the difference between sense perception in poetry and sense perception in life: "Whereas the immediacy of mere sense certainty overwhelms us with its 'here and now,' *poiēsis* creates, by means of the senses, other versions of the 'here and now' under conditions of human ends and needs" (*Poetry* 197). And in *The Poet's Freedom: A Notebook on Making* (2011), Stewart writes: "The sensuous dimension of a work is not derived from a single impression but is rather emergent in a sequence of relations—to the boundary of the work and to the patterns arising in its apprehension" (129).

24. Miller cites four printings of the poem before 1886 (*Dickinson's Poems* 745-46n40). In fascicle 5, Dickinson copied both "Success is counted sweetest" (Fr112 B) and "As Watchers hang upon the East -" (Fr120 B). At like manuscript distances, "Heart not so heavy as mine" (Fr88 C) appears in fascicle 4, "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers -" (Fr124 B) in fascicle 6, and "All overgrown by cunning moss" (Fr146) in fascicle 7. This cluster of poems holds striking modifiers of the *Ear* (*my irritated ear, whose forbidden ear, a stolid Ear, her puzzled ear*), indicating that Dickinson early sought to specify the nature of aural perception. See Miller's reading edition of *Dickinson's Poems* 63, 69-70, 75, 83, 86-7.

25. Four other poems with *Ear* deal with loss and defeat. "It did not surprise me" (Fr50) speaks of twofold loss. "I Years had been from Home" (Fr440 B) tells of the grievous loss of a prior self. Loss and grief converge in "The saddest noise, the sweetest noise" (Fr1789). And loss is clear in "Grief is a Mouse" (Fr753), where grief is given an *Ear* to catch the news of death.

26. Similar metapoetic reference to thunder appears in Fr1353 B, which opens: "To pile like Thunder to it's close / Then crumble grand away / While everything created hid / This - would be Poetry -."

27. Dickinson copied "I would not paint - a picture -" in fascicle 17, amid a cluster of five poems with *Ear*. "Like Flowers, that heard the news of Dews" (Fr361) also appears in fascicle 17, while fascicle 16 includes "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" (Fr340), with its *mise en abyme* of *Being, but an Ear*, and fascicle 18 includes "It's thoughts - and just one Heart -" (Fr362 B) and "I envy Seas, whereon He rides -" (Fr368). See Miller's reading edition of *Dickinson's Poems* 179, 184, 191, 192, 195-6.

28. The seven other poems that pair a singular *Eye/eye* with the singular *Ear* are Fr132 B, 254, 362 B, 619, 752 B, 753, 996.

29. Garrett Stewart raises this sort of phonemic finding to an interpretive art in *The Deed of Reading: Literature, Writing, Language, Philosophy* (2015). In both (largely Romantic and Victorian) poetry and prose, this study finds new words by combining the phonemes and syllables of those given, the new words apparent to “the alert ear found anew, brought out, in what it finds to hear by reading” (39).

30. Six other poems with *Ear* focus on speech, silence, or both. The hearing of inner speech against a backdrop of silence guides “‘Secrets’ is a daily word” (Fr1494). “Never for Society” (Fr783) also points to speech within. Two poems portray

40. Dickinson refers to troubadours in five poems, the first as early as “I had a guinea golden -” (Fr12), the last as late as “The Bible is an antique Volume -” (Fr1577). The poems in-between are Fr75, 79, and 1520.

41. Like the two troubadour poems here, “I envy Seas, whereon He rides -” (Fr368) tells of impossible love. The poem’s design in five “I envy” assertions, each at line beginning and thrice at stanza outset, includes envy of “The happy - happy Leaves -.” In one pun, the *Leaves* “Have Summer’s leave to play -,” and in another, they are so deeply valued that even “The Ear Rings of Pizarro / Could not obtain [them] for me -.” These *Ear Rings* point to jewelry, to the gold plundered by the Spanish conquistador Francisco de Pizarro, but we also sense that Dickinson’s *Ear* rings with the sound of *Pizarro*, whose syllables dazzle her. Also bearing *Ear*, “I think To Live - may be a Bliss” (Fr757), a moving poem on impossible love, imagines “No start in Apprehension’s Ear” and ends: “How bountiful the Dream - / What Plenty - it would be / Had all my Life but been Mistake / Just rectified - in Thee.” A third poem, “Because ’twas Riches I could own” (Fr1053), opposes the impossible to the materially attained and ends aphoristically, “Possession - has a sweeter chink / Unto a Miser’s Ear -.”

42. This pairing of *eye* and *ear* alludes to 1 Corinthians 2.9, as do an effusive letter of love to the unmarried Susan Gilbert—“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor can the heart conceive’ my Susie, whom I love” (L92)—and a letter to Dickinson’s Norcross cousins (L401). Paul in 1 Corinthians 2.9 takes the notion of an *eye* and an *ear* of unprecedented perception from Isaiah 64.4: “For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.”

43. The two poems with *likest* are “Of Being is a Bird” (Fr462) and “The Moon was but a Chin of Gold” (Fr735).

44. Dickinson copied “Did you ever stand in a Cavern’s Mouth -” in fascicle 29, near two other poems with *Ear*, “Prayer is the little implement” (Fr623) and “What care the Dead, for Chanticleer -” (Fr624), which appear one after the other. The theme of death guides the third, where the dead listen with *their Mortised Ear*. Reading the second in its fascicle placement lets us relate the plausibility of *God’s Ear* and of salvation to the issue of death. See Miller’s reading edition of *Dickinson’s Poems* 304, 306, 306-7.

45. Similarly grim doom arises in “Praise it - ’tis dead -” (Fr1406), an apostrophe whose guiding design is its three imperatives. The second of these refers to “this inclement Ear” and rhymes *Ear* with *here*. The third imperative, quoted before and especially grim, begins wryly with these phonic echoes: “Invest this alabaster Zest / In the Delights of Dust -.” Among other poems with *Ear* that reflect on death, “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain” stands out, as do four that liken it to puzzled arrival, to being pursued, and to a line that is crossed. The first is in “All overgrown by cunning moss” (Fr146), an elegy for Charlotte Brontë. Being pursued arises in “The waters chased him as he fled” (Fr1766). Seeing death as a line crossed arises in “Grief is a Mouse” (Fr753) and “Just lost, when I was saved!” (Fr132 B).

46. I am grateful throughout this essay for the insight and encouragement of Luis Gómez Canseco and Elizabeth Simons Durant.

ABSTRACTS

This essay pursues the reference to and role of hearing in Emily Dickinson's poetry. To do so, it studies the 45 Dickinson poems with the singular noun *Ear*, in its transferred sense as a figure of aural perception. Reading these poems as a set lets us build a model of Dickinson's *Ear*, and the model illuminates the interiorizing motion and the signature resonance in her poetic of hearing. The essay develops the model and the poetic in explication of the poems with *Ear*, and in its last section conceives the Dickinson auditorium, a space for hearing the sounds in her poetry. As it unfolds, the essay takes the measure of Dickinson's aural senses of the world and of language, as they arise in poems evoking a wide range of experience.

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Keywords: Dickinson, hearing, sound, poetics, perception, experience