

# *Etheric Bodies<sup>1</sup> are Moving in Response to the Speech Sound Etudes*

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For most of this last year, I have not only been continuing my work of sounding our language through intensive speech-work with the speech sound etudes, I have also been deeply involved in preparing the etudes for publication and in writing the detailed sections of text that accompany them in the book I have brought out, *The Speech Sound Etudes, Volume I* (see at end below). In the midst of my focus on the book, a shift came about in the scope of my activities: I realized that without my being aware of it, this work with the etudes had quietly developed in me all manner of the skills that are so necessary for fathoming the structures, rhythms, soundings and key features of poems. Finding this new-found treasure within myself, I set about to share this richness by preparing poems for speaking, and I have called upon the etudes to evoke **sound-moods** as frames around them. I have been presenting this work at poetry gatherings in my local area. It has been deeply gratifying to find that at every gathering, a number of people have responded strongly and have come to tell me what it was like for them to hear what I gave voice to. I gather from what they say and how they speak, that they have felt it as nourishment; and since that is how I feel about it, I'm not at all surprised! We are all delighted, though for their part they admit that they don't quite know why – but I do: their etheric bodies have been moved.

So I am reporting that modern people possess etheric bodies that can still be moved – that are even eager to be moved – with adequate prompting. One man told me that he was brought to the edge of his seat by my recitation. I already knew that because my work is by heart and I look at my audience. But it was deeply moving for me to hear him say so. The poem I had prepared was Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Conscientious Objector." As with all of my presentation preparations, I had perceived the sound moods that hold sway in the poem, and these led me to accompany it with etudes in the keys of **D** and **M**. Eurythmists present speech sound gestures during their silent Vortakt (prelude) and Nachtakt (postlude), to lead into the poem and draw it to a close. In like manner, I speak a set of etudes before the poem I present and another after. I've found that these sound-mood settings have a profound affect on everyone. For me, I know that I have made an effective selection when the etudes set me in the right vocal-sound-mood to enter the poem and speak it well, and this is in spite of the fact that

the images in the etudes do not usually relate to the poem – and for this reason, I give the poem room with a sense of musical timing when moving between the etudes and the poem. The set afterward carries reverberations of the poem's soundings and prepares the release. I alert my listeners that they will hear sound-moods before and after in the form of poetic miniatures on the speech sounds; I offer them this opening to move with me into the mode of listening to the soundings, consciously.

The four opening **D** etudes of my presentation of this poem by Millay build up by steps from the gentler "Dim dew-dots ..." to "Diligent dedicated divas do delicate daring deeds – dilettantes don't." The **M** etudes afterward begin with "Mightily maddened ..." and calm to end with "Misty moonlit mizzle ... magnificent!" The man who spoke to me was rightly riveted by the many **D**, **M**, **H**, **B**, **W** and **wh** sounds and the iterations of **ai** (e.g., eye) – and a few of potent **P** – that shape the poem with muscular strength. For anyone who wishes to get a sense of the courage and determination it would take to serve in something like the Underground Railroad, this poem conveys that moral resolve.

But this man – and others – was not responding solely to the nature of these sounds as we usually understand them to be: he was responding to the fact that I am not wielding my powers of speech to form the sounds and make much of them. Hence, I do not call what I do, 'speech formation.' I believe that this name is misleading as regards the nature of artistic speech. I call what I do, 'speech-work.' Through the etudes, I have learned how to experience the sounds from within and to lead their inherent gesture-impulses into my speech ... or into gesture through my body, as eurythmy. Because of this, I have no need to take an active role in forming the speech sounds mechanically or in pressing them forth: simply and with inward poise, I *cooperate* with them. My sense is that this man was able to receive the experience of all of these key sounds directly, i.e., he experienced the sounds themselves rather than witnessing me as a speech-form-maker and feeling-producer. Of course, my development of this work is ongoing.

In my book, in the APPENDIX on the gesture-impulses of the sounds I pointed out the following:

When the gesture-impulse of **o** is evoked from within through speaking, there is no need to fill the emerging movement with feeling: it comes forth filled with feeling. When the gesture-impulse of **B** is evoked from within, there is no need to endow it with form: it announces its formative activity and its form. Our task is to perceive these objective facts and follow them where they lead us.

And Rudolf Steiner said that it is through our hearing activity that our speech organs are adjusted.<sup>2</sup> This is exactly what

I have found in my speech-work: the sounds find their forms and resonance of their own accord.

And in his *Speech and Drama* lectures, Rudolf Steiner told actors and speakers that a good knowledge of eurythmy would help them in their work.<sup>3</sup> I believe I know what he meant, because when I experience the *H* as I do now, the space behind me and zones in my body are alive with it. When speaking, I do not move as in eurythmy to express these experiences, yet I have had it confirmed that my onlooker does in fact perceive my experience of the *H* right along with me, instantly. Speech-work and eurythmy are sister arts that nourish each other. Artists who awaken to these inner gesture-impulses and become adept at following them can easily choose which direction they will take them – into speech or into eurythmy movement. And I believe that good eurythmy needs to begin with good speech as experienced from within. I wrote the etudes to ground my eurythmy work; but the beauty of this body of speech-work is that through the etudes these impulses can be stirred awake by anyone. All speakers literally ‘have it in them’ to experience the spoken word from within.

In her poem, Millay described Death’s activities:

I hear him leading his horse out of the stall; I hear the  
clatter on the barn floor.

He is in haste; he has business in Cuba, business in the  
Balkans, many calls to make this morning.

My speaking of these lines comes alive with the movement of my consciousness during these *H*, *B* and *M* words. When I say, “I hear him,” *H* takes my attention into the space such that I am in fact one with the concept, ‘hear.’ And though I have not moved a eurythmy form for ‘him’ in space,<sup>4</sup> I do convey the inaudible quality of ‘he-ness’ – which is so integral to this poem – through the manner of my expression of *H* and *i* (ee) in full awareness of ‘he.’ And the “loving living-within speaking, a speaking that bears thinking itself on its wings” is restored to speech activity.<sup>5</sup>

The rhythmic and phrasing flexibilities which the etudes have cultivated in me hold me in good stead in my first approaches to poems; for I find that in each one, my first task is learn its rhythmic and phrasing architecture and flow. Many factors come into play when fathoming these. The **sounding-meanings** give clues as to which words receive the stresses. For example, in the repetitions of “I will not” in the Millay poem, we can sense when the stress falls on *ai*, “I,” (first full stanza) and when it falls on *W*, “will” (second and third full stanzas) – and also when it falls on *D*, “do,” rather than *ai* in “... I shall do” (second stanza) – and this makes all the difference when bringing out the poem’s **sounding-meaning-movement**. And the qualities of the personal pronouns lead us to find the emphasis on “you” in the last line; and this governs the critical phrasing

transition to that line, “... never through me / Shall you be overcome.” I close the poem with the final *M* unreleased.<sup>6</sup>

In preparing Matthew Arnold’s poem, “Dover Beach,” for presentation, I found the poem to be rather prose-like at first. It is so irregular: irregular line lengths, broken lines, irregular rhymes, irregular stanzas, no set rhythm and soundings that go all over, from frontal vowels and labial consonants to the dental sounds, to full middle sounds and to the guttural consonants. The poem seemed to lack musical qualities. But I persisted; and now I know why the poem has always drawn me: though the soundings wander, I found that they wash forward and backward in large and small cycles, outward and inward; and they eddy in smaller movements within the larger ones, just like the waves that Arnold was depicting! The whole poem is awash with the tidal movements of the speech sounds. And the soundings make magnificent cycles between the personal feeling of the lyrical, the conversation of the dramatic and the grandeur of the epic styles.<sup>7</sup> The larger, whole-line impulses of lines 6 through 10 stream forward, backward, forward, backward, forward:

Come to the window, sweet is the night air!

Only, from the long line of spray

Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,

Listen! you hear the grating roar

Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling, ...

And line 12 moves in smaller eddies that circle around, forward, back and middle: “Begin, and cease, and then begin again....” One can feel the gently-repeated iambic of the unreleased *N* as it gathers to itself a new wave impulse.<sup>8</sup>

Mastering the irregular, broken-line structures is crucial. I have found that in these broken lines, an impulse begins, unfolds and subsides, and then, with wonderful timing, another begins and streams to the end-rhyme. Each line is one whole breath, one whole gesture. The first few lines of the poem set this tidal mood. In order to express these within-the-line breaks, I have found it oddly essential to still my breath and make the transitions through the power of conscious intent and timing, not punctuated by the breath. And there is magic in this: I have found that the quickened stillness that is present in all transitions manifests itself – just as it does in cycles of waves. And the rhymes sing out as I connect each one with their past or future repetitions. The complexity of tidal shifts grows with these diverse cycles and gathers unrushed momentum; and the rhythms of the sounds and syllables pulse with the wealth of movement. I can feel and smell the sea when I work on the piece well, and I feel the sadness of the retreat of the “Sea of Faith.” I find that the key lines are: “Let us be true / To one another ...” – they hold the fulcrum, the place of resource and stability within all of this “turbid ebb and flow.”

The principle quality of the sounds is resonance, and this quality knits the poem together. In it, nearly all of the resonators resound: *N*, *M*, *L*, *ng*, *V*, voiced *th* and *R*. These sounds take us into the time element of the waves and the mood is sustained without effort. I sense that the strongest of these sound-moods are *L*, *ng*, unreleased *N*, and – with its quality of fullness – the vowel *ô*, e.g., awe. I have called upon the larger body of etudes that I have composed, to recreate etudes in *ô* and in *L* that include words that also sound the *ng*, *N* and *M*, e.g., dawn, song, calm, linger, lonesome, etc. These etude sound-moods open and close the poem well. In my speaking of the poem, I also sustain the mood by favoring the *ô* in the words, “upon,” “*Sophocles*” and “*melancholy*,” etc., instead of sounding them with the open and brighter *ō*, e.g., hot.

Presenting this speech-work of poems and etudes and discovering that my listeners do in fact perceive the subtleties of my experiences and expression – just as Rudolf Steiner said they can and would<sup>9</sup> – is an inspiration to me. In response to my presentation of “Heaven-Haven,” by Gerard Manley Hopkins, a member of my audience declared to me, “You must keep on doing what you’re doing!” I feel heartened to know that my foundation work in the arts of speech and eurythmy can already bear this worthy fruit.

Here is a log of the poems that I’ve presented thus far (to spring 2016), with the etude sound-moods that I’ve chosen, that set up and frame them before and after:

John Keats, “Ode to Autumn,” with *S* before and voiced *th* after, with keen attention to its many *S*-related sounds and its pentameter of five feet (see my full report on the poetic 5-stress-4-beat structure of pentameter, *Revealing the Music of Pentameter*, posted in 2021). With persistence and sensitivity, its musical, structural flow of four beats per line (i.e., per breath) can be discerned and gracefully followed, with the fifth pentameter stress dancing between the four beats where it will.

James Whitcomb Riley, “When the Frost is on the Punkin’,” with *ê* (e.g., rest) before and *H* after. It is more musical when its finer rhythmic nuances and rhythmic exceptions are brought out, and when the stresses of the regular iambic feet alternate as heavier and lighter, rather than being given equal weight.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Pied Beauty,” with *G* before and *F* after – the mood of *G* leads in beautifully!

Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Heaven-Haven: A Nun Takes the Veil,” with *ai* before and *S* after.

Edna St. Vincent Millay, “Conscientious Objector,” as described in this article, with *D* before and *M* after, no pressing on *M*.

Matthew Arnold, “Dover Beach,” as described in this article, with *ô* before and *L* after, with both sets sounding words that include the resonators *ng*, *Z*, *N*, *M* and *L*.

Michael Finn, ‘The secret of the world is this,’ with *i* before and *Y* after, and with attention to the vowel sound connections that can be found to link each couplet to the one that follows (in most cases).

Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, “General Prologue,” the first twelve lines in Middle English, with *R* before and *G* after, and with attention to the musical pentameter structure of five stresses and four beats per line, as in Keats’ “Ode to Autumn,” above. (I introduce it with my own translation in Modern English.)

Emily Dickinson, ‘A bird came down the walk,’ with *ô* before and *i* after, with both sets sounding words that include the *glottal stop* *t* (e.g. the stopped *T* in catnip), and with attention to this glottal sound throughout the poem – including where it normally occurs before the vowel in words that begin with a vowel – and with attention to the gentle freeing in the last six lines.

Edna St. Vincent Millay, “Song of a Second April,” with *ai* before and *u* after, with attention to the inward, sighing quality throughout.

Edna St. Vincent Millay, sonnet, “Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink,” with *N* before and *oo* (e.g., book) after, and with attention to its humor, and to discerning and expressing the musical pentameter structure, as in Keats, above.

William Shakespeare, sonnets, all with keen attention to their musical pentameter rhythms (again, as in Keats, above):

“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?” with voiced *th* before and *L* after, with both sets sounding words that include the resonators *ng*, *Z*, *N* and *M*.

“Let me not to the marriage of true minds,” with *M* before and *V* after, and including words that sound the vowel *ê*.

“When my love swears that she is made of truth,” with *ĩ* before and *i* after.

Clement Moore, “A Visit From St. Nicholas,” with keen attention to the mounting excitement and amazement conveyed by the anapest rhythm (with colorful exceptions), to the vowels sounding out from their shapely consonant frames, and to linking the couplet rhymes

Dylan Thomas, “Fern Hill,” with *ou* (e.g., house) before and *W* after, with attention to the shifts between rising and falling rhythms, to the faster and slower paces of the longer and shorter lines, to the play of the sounds, and to the linking of the subtle end-of-line assonance that substitutes for true rhymes.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Note for p. 1, title. Our etheric body is that part of our human constitution made up of the formative or etheric forces, which are in continual movement. Our astral body works upon these

etheric, formative forces to build, govern and maintain the shape and functioning of our physical body, which is made up of the elements of the mineral kingdom. Our life-filled physical body is therefore evidence of the existence of the etheric body, though this ‘body’ itself is only perceptible to supersensible perception. (For descriptions of the bodies and functions, see Rudolf Steiner’s books: *Theosophy: An Introduction to the Supersensible Knowledge of the World and the Destination of Man*, GA 9, 1904, Ch. 1, a bit more than 3/4 in, and *Occult Science – An Outline*, GA 13, 1909, Ch. 2, first 5 pages).

<sup>2</sup> Note for p. 1, right. See in *Creative Speech: The Formative Process of the Spoken Word: a Selection of Lectures, Exercises and Articles by Rudolf Steiner and Marie Steiner-von Sivers*, GA 280, p. 37, pp. 67-68 and p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> Note for p. 2, left top. See 3 pages from the end of Lect. 11 in *Speech and Drama*, GA 282, by Rudolf Steiner; nineteen lectures between September 5 and 23, 1924, Dornach.

<sup>4</sup> Note for p. 2, left. See *Eurythmy as Visible Speech*, GA 279, Rudolf Steiner, fifteen lectures, Dornach, June 24 to July 12, 1924, translated by Vera and Judy Compton-Burnett; Rudolf Steiner Press, London, 1931, 1944, 1956, 1984; Lect. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Note for p. 2, left. See pp. 4-5 in Rudolf Steiner’s lecture, “The Lost Unison Between Speaking and Thinking,” GA 162, Dornach, July 18, 1915; published together with “The Realm of Language,” Mercury Press, Spring Valley NY, 1984.

<sup>6</sup> Note for p. 2, left bottom. In the unreleased *M*, we simply stop our resonant sounding of the *M* while keeping our lips closed. We typically keep *M* closed like this when it comes before most other consonants, e.g. hamper; but if a vowel follows we open our lips and release it with its characteristic style of release, e.g. make.

<sup>7</sup> Note for p. 2, right. See pp. 76-96 in *Creative Speech*, where Rudolf Steiner spoke about our experience of the movement of the speech sounds within our speech organization in poetic speech.

<sup>8</sup> Note for p. 2, right. See Endnote 4. In the unreleased *N*, we stop our sounding of the *N* while leaving our tongue in place behind the teeth. We typically do this when another consonant follows it, e.g., into, instead of releasing the *N* in its characteristic way, e.g., now.

<sup>9</sup> Note for p. 3, left. See the discussion of the onlookers’ experience, in several places in Rudolf Steiner’s lecture, “Veils, Dresses and Colours,” Dornach, August 4, 1922, and the lecture material contained in “The Eurythmy Figures,” drawn from lectures given in Dornach, August 4, 1922, and Penmaenmawr, August 26, 1923; included in the 1984 edition of *Eurythmy as Visible Speech*. And also see his remarks about how the onlooker experiences what the eurythmist feels (hence also, I am certain, what the speaker feels in the case of poetic speech), shortly into Lect. 1 of his *Eurythmy as Visible Singing* cycle.

## REFERENCES

*Revealing the Music of Pentameter: Putting Shakespeare Through His Paces*, Kate Reese Hurd; posted at the Eurythmy Association of North America website (EANA.org), artistic category, September 2021; revised July 2024.

Note: For the following as booklets, inquire at the Rudolf Steiner Library in Hudson NY or the Turose Gift Shop in Ghent NY.

*The Speech Sound Etudes, Volume I: Revelations of the Logos*, subtitled, *Poetic miniatures for sounding our language: a body of speech-work for speakers, actors, eurythmists, poets, writers, singers, teachers, therapists and philologists*, Kate Reese Hurd; published by the author-composer, Philmont NY, 2016.

*The Speech Sound Etudes: Feeling the Gestures and Finding the Figures, A Detailed Research Report on Evoking the Movement of the Logos Through Intensive Speech-Work with Poetic Miniatures on the Speech Sounds*, Kate Reese Hurd; posted at the EANA website, 2014, and revised and published by the author as a companion booklet to *Volume I* of the etudes, Philmont NY, 2016.

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