‘Thou art like a punie-Barber (new come to
the trade) thou pick’st our eares too deepe’:
barbery, earwax and snip-snaps

Eleanor Decamp

Why is there a barber in Ben Jonson’s *The Epicoene*? Two comments about the play are my springboard to this chapter. William Kerwin explains that Cutbeard, the barber, ‘is remarkable to the characters for his relation to sound [...] in a profession known for its garrulousness, he is able both to find a woman quiet enough [...] and to comport himself noiselessly enough’.¹ Writing on historical soundscapes, Emily Cockayne discusses the play’s ‘sonic theme’ as a means to examine contemporary advice about seeking out ‘aural ease’.² Kerwin highlights the barber’s relationship to talkativeness, leaving unexplored ‘sound’ as a non-verbal concept; Cockayne focuses on the play’s exploration of ambient city and domestic noise without reference to the barber.³ But the barber is the linchpin in Jonson’s satirical exploration of loquaciousness *and* sonority in the city, the impact of both verbal and non-verbal sound.

Jonson’s choice of a barber character in *Epicoene* is a pertinent, dramaturgical one. In a play that satirizes aural experiences, the soundscapes of early modern London and those persons affected by noise, barbery and the barber are contextual and contextualizing constructs. Similarly, to underline the convention of gossip-mongering in *The Staple of News*, Jonson makes an ironic trailblazer out of Tom the Barber, who helps launch the news agency. Kerwin’s dramaturgical point is that ‘by making [Cutbeard] a barber, Jonson places him at the center of London’s culture of appearances’.⁴ But by making Cutbeard a barber, Jonson also places him at the centre of London’s culture of sound where he functions as a sound control.

Morose asks Mute, ‘And you have been with Cutbeard, the barber, to have him come to me? – Good. And, he will come presently?’ (2.1.15–17). Morose is not waiting to have his beard trimmed. He is contemplating how to defend and distract himself from ‘the labour of speech’ (2.1.2), ‘the discord of sounds’ (l. 3) and ‘noise’ (l. 12). The irony of this ‘Cutbeard’ is that he is never connected to cutting beards; later he is a loquacious lawyer. Throats in *Epicoene* are not portrayed as places of hair-growth. When a horn is blown offstage Morose cries,

'What villain ... cut his throat, cut his throat!' (ll. 38–40), applying a murderous barbery threat which analogizes how to exterminate offensive sound. In the next scene, Morose complains of Truewit, 'Oh Cutbeard, Cutbeard, Cutbeard! Here has been a cutthroat with me' (2.2.147–48).

Cutbeard is associated with the misogynistic default that females talk too much, in particular supplied by Truewit: 'Why, you oppress me with wonder! A woman, and a barber, and love no noise!' (1.2.34–35). The barbery context can transpose the female voice into a musical instrument. Morose declares, 'I have married [the barber's] cittern, that's common to all men' (3.5.60): sound is prostituted in the shop.⁵ When Epicoene begins to 'speak out', Morose calls, 'Oh immodesty! ... What, Cutbeard!' (3.4.39) blaming, 'That cursed barber!' (3.5.58). Referring to the racket he has endured at his antimasque-like wedding (as Truewit describes it, a cacophony of 'spitting', 'coughing', 'laugh[ing]', 'neezeing', 'farting', and 'noise of the music' (4.1.7–8), as well as chatty, 'loud and commanding' (l. 9) females), Morose despairs, 'That I should be seduced by so foolish a devil as a barber will make!' (4.4.3–4).

This chapter examines the barber's shop as a sound-marked, cultural site of acoustic performance and practice and investigates how ears were treated, entertained and abused in barbery settings. Contemporary anthitheatricalists' condemnation of the theatre as a frivolous acoustic space corresponds to critiques of the barber's shop as an inevitably noisy environment, and I am interested in the connections between the site specificity and the 'earwitness' ('one who ... can testify to what he ... has heard') of the theatre and the shop.⁶ My explorations are in dialogue with the growing body of criticism that investigates the ways in which sounds (noise, music and 'soundmarks')⁷ can help us to think about identity, both individual and communal. Soundscape theorists such as R. Schafer and Barry Truax have provided a technical language for sonic studies, and have questioned how we view the relationship between humans and the sounds they encounter in their environment.⁸ Bruce Smith, Cockayne, Wes Folkerth, David Garrioch and Bruce Johnson have drawn on these theorists and the language of acoustemology in their attempts to reconstruct the sound maps of the early modern past with reference to literary works: urban and rural acoustic landscapes, bell ringing, rough music, reverberating architectures, and the anatomy and experiential nature of the ear are the subject of some of their investigations.⁹ I draw on the theory and historicity of these studies defining my own dramaturgical, and socially and medically situated acoustic field to uncover how barbery informed cultural conceptions of the early modern listening world.

The practitioners responsible for daily ear cleaning were the barbers: inventories and fictional sources reveal that the ear-pick[er] was one of the basic tools of the trade. In the museum at the Mary Rose Trust, one of the display items for the

Barber-Surgeon is of bone and ivory ear-scoops ‘found behind the [medicine] chest’ with barbering objects.¹⁰ (The Trust’s term ‘ear-scoop’ is modern.)¹¹ The ‘Earepicker’ is listed on the page devoted to an inventory of the ‘Barbers Case’ in John Woodall’s *Surgions Mate* and the ‘Instruments of the Barber’ in Randle Holme’s *Armory* include ‘A pair of Tweesers, or Twitchers: with an Ear pick at the other end of it’ which ‘cleanse[d] the eares from waxe, which often causeth a Deafness in the party’.¹² John Eliot deems ‘An eare-picker, and a tooth-picker’ (‘Une cure-dent & une cure-oreille’) useful vocabulary for a barber’s shop in his French handbook.¹³ In John Lyly’s *Midas*, the barber protests by his ‘earpick’ (5.2.178).¹⁴ The order of faux-ritualized events in Phillip Stubbes’s portrayal of the barber’s shop, is telling: ‘pleasant harmonie[s]’ which ‘tickle [ears with] vaine delight’ are heard *after* the client’s ears have been picked.¹⁵ In conceptual terms, therefore, the barber and his effective picking of ears is symbolic in enabling the *earwitness*. Cutbeard exposes Morose to unwelcome sounds by arranging his marriage: he has, figuratively speaking – although with a literal consequence – unblocked and therefore successfully picked Morose’s ears.

While the early modern barber’s responsibility with ears is not a controversial practice (and often takes comic paths), their association with them can be provocative because of the vulnerability and sensitivity of these organs. Over-exuberant digging in the ear with an inflexible instrument can puncture the delicate eardrum. Mrs Corlyon’s household book (1606) describes several methods which tackle ear complaints, including a steam cure for the deaf made from Malmesye and cloves, and an extraction for earwigs from the ear using warm apples.¹⁶ However, her book advises against common technique in ear treatment: ‘lett those that will preserve theire hearing that speciall care that they picke not theire eares’.¹⁷ In a metaphor in *Sir Thomas More*, ‘Nor does the wanton tongue here screw itself | Into the ear, that like a vice drinks up | The iron instrument’ (13.20–22), the instrument inserted into the ear, which conceptualizes the flatterer and his patron, easily takes on the qualities of a torture weapon. In barbering terms the ear-pick is a trivial version of the more intimidating razor: a barber – unskilled or malicious – might be a threat to customers’ ears. Mocking the activities in a barber’s shop, Stubbes writes, ‘next the eares must be picked, and closed together againe artificially forsooth’, hinting at the potential perversions, or the perceived perversion, of barbering activities.¹⁸ He suggests that barbers pick their customers’ ears so vigorously that they actually pick them apart. Pick can mean ‘to probe and penetrate ... to remove extraneous matter’, but it can also mean ‘To pierce, indent, or dig ... as to break up’.¹⁹ Stubbes’s reference to an artificial procedure suggests that the ear is not as it was before the barber sets to work upon it. The barber lingers in theatre’s most renowned depiction of usurpation through the open-access ear: it was a barber-surgeon who admitted to the murder of the Duke of Urbino in 1538, which is widely believed to have inspired Old Hamlet’s murder, by pouring poison into his ears.²⁰

Responding to the scripted '*Lowde Musicke*' in the late Elizabethan play *Blurt Master-Constable*, the courtesan Imperia complains to the musicians, 'Oh, fie, fie, fie, forbeare, thou art like a punie-Barber (new come to the trade) thou pick'st our eares too deepe.'²¹ The effects of some sounds, as Imperia suggests, are equivalent to bad ear-picking practice as well as bad playing. The courtesan objects to noise as an audience member and reminds us that audiences' ears should, like barbers' customers' ears, be handled with care. Her analogy has a reflexive effect: audiences might become more aware of what is demanded of their own ears in the theatre as the loud music for them too is intrusive. Hamlet knows that the groundlings' ears can be 'split' (3.2.10). Stephen Gosson's allusive reference that in the theatre there is 'Such masking in [the audience's] eares, I knowe not what', raises questions significant to my discussion.²² Did, as the *OED* states, early modern people have a means to regulate, improve or deaden sounds in the theatre (or elsewhere) using materials or a substance?

Moreover, the probing action during ear-picking unsurprisingly relates to the sexually charged climate of barbers' shops. The barber's chair was sometimes synonymous with the prostitute, as the furniture that, according to one of Shakespeare's clowns, 'fits all buttocks' (*All's Well*, 2.2.16), and hair-plucking and trimming could encode acts of rape.²³ Imperia's objection to the uncomfortable picking-effect of sound occurs during some heavy petting. Tryphon the barber – a pathetic figure in Gervase Markham and William Sampson's *Herod and Antipater* – apostrophizes his ear-pick when fantasizing about Salumith:

TRYPHON: Tooth-pick, deare Tooth-pick; Eare-pick, both of you
Have beene her sweet Companions; with the one
I've seene her picke her white Teeth; with the other
Wriggle so finely worme-like in her Eare;
That I have wisht, with envy (pardon me)
I had beene made of your condition.²⁴

In this play, the ear-pick is likely to be a stage property. If sound can be conceptualized as a sexual encounter with the ear, a physical equivalent exists in representations of the barber's ear-picking. If we regard Epicoene as Cutbeard's figurative ear-pick, we find that the play's gender politics are further interlaced: sodomitic notions of Epicoene as a penetrative object handled by a barber are suggestive before Epicoene is revealed to be male.

Morose's extreme hatred of noise, and his general gloom, is characterized as a humoral imbalance that needs treatment. Michael Flachmann discusses Morose's 'humourous ailment', although without specific reference to his ears. Taking his cue from Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), he diagnoses Morose with melancholy verging on madness which 'can force a person into silence and seclusion'.²⁵ But Morose is not silent and he continues to seek out company (so long as it is mute), making Flachmann's melancholia reading

questionable. Hudson Hallahan suggests that it is difficult for an audience to be particularly sympathetic to Morose because of his hypocrisy in speaking.²⁶ But his hypocrisy also lies in the fact that he does not seem to hear himself speak. The Boy suggests that if Morose's ears were not exercised properly, 'He would grow resty ... in his ease' (1.1.165–66). Holdsworth glosses 'resty' with 'sluggish', but given the next sentence's reference to 'rust' and Jonson's appetite for gritty depictions of urban and human filth, 'resty' in this context also refers to rancidity.²⁷ The Boy is commenting on Morose's physical complexion as well as his demeanour. The adjective is especially linked to grease and oil. Morose's ear canal is the subject of the Boy's attention, which is particularly foregrounded by the phonic similarity between 'ease' (in the text) and 'ears' (implied in the context). The homophone for the phrase is 'greasy in his ears'. In George Peele's *Old Wives' Tale*, Huanebango is, according to stage directions, '*deaf and cannot heare*'.²⁸ Zantippa cannot get his attention other than by breaking a pitcher over his head and exclaims, 'Foe, what greasie groome have wee here?' (E1'). Additionally in *Epicoene*, the Boy's description of the 'street ... so narrow' (1.1.161) in which Morose lives, corresponds architecturally to the anatomy of intricate aural passages. Cutbeard is employed as picker and emulsifier of the excessive lipid-like substances in Morose's festering ears. To appease Morose, who does not appreciate the exposure, Truewit hopes that the barber will have to 'Eat ear-wax' (3.5.87) in order to stay alive after calamity has – in Truewit's imagination – struck the barber shop: Cutbeard's punishment should fit his crime.

Early modern writers often characterize the excrement of the ear by its bitter taste and generally explain earwax in terms of it being waste matter; its beneficial properties, which I discuss in the next paragraph, are usually portrayed by writers as secondary to the wax's execratory quality.²⁹ A French historiographer, Scipion Dupleix, questions the cause of wax's bitterness, concluding, 'It comes from a putrified and corrupt humour, which gathered together, thickens and heats there within, and being such, can bee no other then bitter; as are all things overcocted and rotten.'³⁰ Similar descriptions explain hair growth in the period, confirming the barber's trade as one that deals in bodily excrements.³¹ Beard growth was even likened to the production of seminal excrement, associated, too, with heat.³² One of Thersites's typically corporeal insults in *Troilus and Cressida* is that Agamemnon has 'not so much brain as ear-wax' (5.1.51–52): he applies the 'brains between legs' catchphrase, substituting one discharge for another.

Moderated removal of wax is usually deemed a necessary procedure. Filthy ears, states Pierre de La Primaudaye, 'must be oftentimes looked unto and cleansed'.³³ But writers do not always portray wax-free ears as a healthy condition. Various spelled – with obvious innuendo – Cockadillio/Cockadilio/Cockadillia (and 'Cock' in speech prefixes) is the barber courtier in *Noble*

Soldier and a typical lackey.³⁴ In the following extract, the noble soldier, Baltazar, quickly detects corruption in court which threatens the monarch's bodily and political health.

BALTAZAR Signeor is the King at leisure?
 COCKADILLIO To doe what?
 BALTAZAR To heare a Souldier speake.
 COCKADILLIO I am no ear-picker
 To sound his hearing that way.
 BALTAZAR Are you of Court, Sir?
 COCKADILLIO Yes, the Kings Barber
 BALTAZAR That's his eare-picker: your name, I pray.
 COCKADILLIO Don *Cockadilio*:
 If, Souldier, thou hast suits to begge at Court,
 shall descend so low as to betray
 Thy paper to the hand Royall.
 BALTAZAR [...]
 These excrements of Silke-wormes! oh that such flies
 Doe buzze about the beames of Majesty!
 Like earwigs, tickling a Kings yeelding eare
 With that Court-Organ (Flattery)

(C2^r)

Baltazar characterizes Cockadillio as 'all ear-picker': 'To sound' means to probe and pierce. If the king is exposed to constant picking, no wax is left to protect his ears from, in physical terms, flies, and, in conceptual terms, flattery. Suggestively, Baltazar's outburst associates the barber with one colour in particular: a 'yellow hammer', a gold digger (as in Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*) but also a wax-tipped tool.

Of the flatterer (or 'willing slave[s] to another mans eare') Grey Chandos explains, 'his art is nothing but delightfull cosenage [...] In short he is the mouth of liberall mens coates, the earewig of the mightie'.³⁵ In a sermon on slander and flattery, Jeremy Taylor preaches that dangerous and smooth tongues, whisperers, tale-bearers and sycophants are 'like the earwig creeps in at the ear, and makes a diseased noyse, and scandalous murmur'.³⁶ Troublesome voices are characterized as non-verbal disturbances in the ear. Writers concede, therefore, that wax – like hair – is not without benefit to the body. Pierre de La Primaudaye explains that the 'yellow humour purged by the eares ... defendeth them against fleas, little flies and other small wormes and beastes, that might otherwise enter within them'.³⁷ Scipion Dupleix clarifies that:

[earwax] is not unprofitable within the eares, but being thickened, fleas, and other little flies which many insinuate within the eares, may trouble us, are there taken by this conglutinate humour.³⁸

Baltazar suggests that the king's ears have been picked so much that the royal ear now harbours 'wormes', 'flies' and 'earwigs'. In Richard Brome's *Love-Sick Court*, Tersules, once a tailor and – like the play's barber, Varillus – embracing the role of courtier, accuses Varillus: 'Your instruments are sharp as mine [...] you can pick more out of your Lords ears | Then I take from his Garments with my sheers.'³⁹ Careless, overly probing barbery activities leave the king's ear in *Noble Soldier* defenceless and vulnerable to infection. Royal ears are in danger of being open only to gratification (Baltazar recognizes the sodomitic undertones); ultimately this king faces civil war, the penalty for not keeping attentive to his subjects' grievances.

Morose tries to protect his ears in *Epicoene*. Truewit says that he has 'a huge turban of nightcaps on his head' (1.1.139–40). But total interference with ears' openness is contrary practice to that circulated by Protestant sermons which prioritized auricular concentration over ritualized practice. If 'faith cometh by hearing', God wanted discerning hearers.⁴⁰ The image of the blocked ear in early modernity is a troubled one because truth is also barred from it. Bloom highlights that the presiding lesson for women as well as good Christians was to be wary of the blurry line between 'constructive defense' and 'destructive deafness'.⁴¹ Thomas Adams, a clergyman, despairs 'that the eare which should be open to complaint, is ... stopped up with the eare-waxe of partiality. Alas poore truth, that shee must now bee put to the charges of a golden eare-picke, or shee cannot be heard.'⁴² Good barbery, ultimately, is good religious practice. The barber's need to strike a balance in ear-picking was the physical realization of the ideological balance that the listener was expected to achieve.

The early modern pulpit and the stage, as Bryan Crockett asserts, are comparable theatrical performing spaces which encourage aural alertness and instil the period's 'cult of the ear'.⁴³ Of church-going, Robert Wilkinson observes, 'Some come not to have their lives reformed, but to have their eares tickled even as at a play.'⁴⁴ Smith describes the South Bank theatres as 'instruments for producing, shaping, and propagating sound'.⁴⁵ The barber's shop is a similar nodal image of a sound-making site. In a Roman barber's shop a magpie hones its polyphonic skills: she would 'prate, and chatte [...] counting the speech of men [...], the voice of beasts, and sound of musicall instruments', and 'in deepe studie and through meditation [she] retired within herselfe, whiles her minde was busie and did prepare her voice like an instrument of musicke, for imitation'.⁴⁶ A shop, of course, is architecturally enclosed and, to some degree, separated from the polyphony of street cries and urban noises that intermingle outdoors: for Plutarch's magpie, the barber's shop is a place to filter, interiorize, rehearse and interpret sounds.⁴⁷

The barber's shop not only contains sound but reverberates with it. When Rafe enters Barbaroso's lair in *Knight of the Burning Pestle* a particular acoustic

delineates the scene: 'Knock, squire, upon this basin till it break | With the shrill strokes, or till the giant speak. [Tim *knocks*]' (3.320–21).⁴⁸ Earlier in the scene, the Host describes how 'Without [Barbaroso's] door [...] hang[s] | A copper basin [...] | At which no sooner gentle knights can knock | But the shrill sound fierce Barbaroso hears' (ll. 238–41). Celebrating the play's 'happy reconcilements' (5.2.386), the barber declares in Thomas Middleton's *Anything for a Quiet Life*, 'My basins shall all ring for joy' (ll. 383), indicating also theatrical finality.⁴⁹ The basin is both doorbell and church bell announcing the subject of barbery both inwards and outwards. Unlike a soundmark that refers simply to a 'community sound', these threshold sounds are, in Schafer's term, 'sound signals', 'sounds to which the attention is particularly directed' and which 'constitute acoustic warning devices'.⁵⁰ Indeed, the chiming barber's basin was acoustically tagged to denote something other than barbery practice: it was code for prostitution, the acoustic equivalent of a red light. In *Epicoene* Morose says, 'Let there be no bawd carted that year to employ a basin of [Cutbeard's]' (3.5.83–84). When Rafe knocks on Barbaroso's basins, he signals to the audience the subject of sexual indiscretion but he does not understand the social meaning of the sound he creates and misreads his purpose in the barber's lair.

Music-making is also a nodal image of activity in the barber's shop for which instruments – citterns, gitterns, lutes, virginals – were part of the furniture.⁵¹ Characters perform songs in barbery settings in *1 Promos and Cassandra*, *Damon and Pithias* and *Midas*.⁵² According to *The Trimming of Thomas Nashe* (a pamphlet produced in the wake of the Nashe–Harvey disputes), barbers have a 'great facilitie attaine to happiness': 'if idle, they passe that time in life-delighting musique'.⁵³ Intending 'to tickle with ...vaine delight', as Stubbes makes clear, barbers claim an audience.⁵⁴ But, as with many well-established traditions, music in the barber's shop is subject to mockery. The competition between Pan and Apollo staged in John Lyly's *Midas* provides us with a blueprint: medicine's harmonic notes (represented by Apollo) supposedly produce one acoustic effect which is pleasing and associated with the God of healing; 'barbarous noise' (4.1.178) from the 'barbarous mouth of Pan!' (l. 20) produces another and is set against the play's barbery subplot in which the first song of the play is performed. A Latin song, translated by Henry Bold, envisages that barbers will form a musical society, beginning, 'In former time 't hath been upbrayded thus, | That Barbers Musick was most Barbarous', and playing on the nexus of etymological associations between 'barber' and 'barbarous', explored by Patricia Parker.⁵⁵ Stubbes's reference to 'pleasant harmonie[s]' is ironic: in his satire, these are 'barbarous notes'.

In *Midas*, music associated with barbery rarely seems to be conventionally musical and this contributes to the perception that the barber's shop is somewhere where ears are under attack. One of the main lessons of *Midas*

might be ‘listen carefully’ (to advice as well as to playing), but its subplot tests and ridicules this maxim: centred on the barber, it concentrates on sounds which, in non-theatrical settings, we might wish to filter out. Cries of pain, rattling, knocking, out of tune instruments, verbiages, slander and protests make a noisy soundscape. The given ‘tune of “My Teeth Do Ache!”’ (3.2.148, in the quarto as well as the 1632 edition) for the barber’s song plays into the scene’s parody of dentistry but it also ridicules the nature of the barber’s shop music: the tune is not tuneful.

Smith reflects:

The soundscape of early modern London was made up of a number of overlapping, shifting acoustic communities, centered on different soundmarks: parish bells, the speech of different nationalities, the sounds of trades, open-air markets, the noises of public gathering places. Moving among these soundmarks – indeed, *making* these soundmarks in the process – Londoners in their daily lives followed their own discursive logic.⁵⁶

But if trades are ‘soundmarked’, and thereby have specificity in this acoustic form of representation, how do these identification tags function autonomously? In one seventeenth-century ballad barbery is characterized by sound alone: ‘The Barber goes snip snap.’⁵⁷ This soundmark is not the creative device of a single balladeer. In the period, this barbery soundmark echoes across different literary media in a range of contexts, making it culturally stable. ‘Snip snap’, ‘snap’, ‘snip’, ‘snipsnap’, ‘snip-snap’, ‘snipping’ and ‘snapping’ as well as associative ‘knacking’ sounds are commonplace. ‘Snip-snap’ and ‘knack’ hover between various acoustic contexts and their flexibility as soundmarks corresponds to the linguistic slipperiness of the language generally attributed to barbers.

Barbery instruments (mainly scissors and razors) inherently produce sounds: the trade cannot be silent. In the catalogue of barbers’ equipment recovered from the wreck of the *Mary Rose*, archaeologists list the variety of razors found: ‘it is possible that any razor without [provision of arms] was opened simply by shaking the blade free’.⁵⁸ Although this implied action would not specifically constitute a ‘snip snap’, it suggests the noise made by metal scraping against metal. In his examination of ancient barbery tools, George Boon cites Plutarch, who comments on the barber’s need frequently to ‘strop the razor’ and a customer’s desire to have something to ‘soften [his] stubble’, writing, in addition, on Juvenal who ‘recalls a young man’s stiff growth “sounding” under the blade’.⁵⁹ In Charles Hoole’s Latin dictionary a section on barbery defines the practitioner as ‘one that snaps with the scissers’.⁶⁰ Drawing on Truax’s description of soundscapes, Smith explains, ‘the impinging of non-human sounds, all contribute to a given community’s sense of self-identity’.⁶¹

For the most part writers do not suggest that these are solely incidental sounds from barbery work, but make clear that they are the result of barbers’

affectations and rehearsed mannerisms. In *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier*, Greene implies that verbal communication can be matched with non-verbal sounds in the barber's shop, and that scissor sounds endorse faux penal gestures and rhetoric. He describes a barber lavishly waiting on Velvet Breeches: 'begins he to take his sissars in his hand and his combe, and so to snap with them as if he meant to give a warning to all the lice in his nittie lockes' (more infestations).⁶² Excessive sound (even if these are not loud notes) associated with the practice of barbery appears frivolous and performance-driven. Motto reminds Dello in *Midas*, 'Thou knowest I have taught thee the knocking of the hands, the tickling on a man's hair, like the tuning of a cittern' (3.2.36–38). Often when sounds trouble us we characterize them as wholly unnecessary. In recent studies on early modern soundscapes, critics focus on the loud, iconoclastic sounds that characterize and organize the 'noisy' city, its bells and its street cries, for example. But intrusive sounds are not only the loud ones: the nature and the context of the sound affects people's reaction to it. Cockayne notes that 'the honourable Roger North explained that some sounds, such as the "clapping of a door", annoyed the hearer because, in contrast to musical sounds that have "equal time pulses", they have "unequal movements" and "uncertain periods"'.⁶³ If barbery sounds are like the 'tuning of a cittern' then they are not the predictable notes of a tune.

We seem particularly sensitive when body parts are responsible for the sound. In one production of *Titus Andronicus* (RSC, 1955) Peter Brook unlocked a greater potential to unnerve the audience. 'During the run, the *Express* reported: "Extra St John Ambulance volunteers have been called in. At least three people pass out nightly. Twenty fainted at one performance." A spokesman for the theatre pinpointed the "nice scrunch of bone off-stage when Titus cuts off his hand" as the crucial moment.'⁶⁴ Barbers' knocking fingers, rather like cracking knuckles, get too near the bone. Morose's satisfaction that his barber 'has not the knack with his shears or his fingers' (1.2.36–37) is not as peculiar as it initially sounds. Jonson's irascible protagonist might be associated with fanaticism, but he also parodies common human intolerances.

Sounds can also function beyond their immediate sonic impact; nails on a chalkboard, for example, codify unpleasant sound but also, more generally, a sensation of fleeting discomfort. A sound's effect can inform rhetorical and stylistic device, punitive gestures and onomastic choices. Barbery sounds are hardly deafening. However, if not the volume, then the nature of the sound, its sonic consistency, nettles the nerves. Moreover, objections to the noise are often explained by the proximity of its source to the ears of the client, as Bacon explains, and so the murmuring earwig is irritating. Of the giant barber in *Burning Pestle*, the Host proclaims: 'with his fingers and an instrument | With which he snaps his hair off, he doth fill | The wretch's ears with a most hideous noise' (3.249–51). This 'hideous noise' could be an allusion to the persistent

chattiness of barbers, but given the references to ‘fingers’, ‘instruments’ and ‘snaps’, it is most likely to be a disturbance caused by non-verbal sounds. The sound produced by the barber is his vulgar, laboured proof that he is at work. Stubbes criticizes elaborate show in a barber’s shop, emphasizing, ‘what snipping & snapping of the sycers is there’, which, in part, justifies the barber’s extortions.⁶⁵

Barbers’ hands are a source of acoustic – as well as gesticular – performance. When Nashe refers to the ‘*knack*’ of [the barber’s] occupation’ in *Have With You to Saffron-Walden*, he includes an addendum in the margin: ‘*Barbers knocking their fingers*’.⁶⁶ ‘Knack’ the skill is undermined by ‘knack’ the irritating noise, and the ‘sounds’ play off each other on the page. The literal mirroring of sounds in the barber’s shop between instruments and fingers corresponds to the linguistic mirroring (puns and homophones) in the word. Today we would call ‘knacking’ ‘clicking the fingers’, the action which John Bulwer describes: ‘knacking’, is ‘to compresse the middle-finger with the thumbe by their complosion producing a sound so casting out our hand’. Bulwer later makes ‘knacking’ analogous with ‘percussion’.⁶⁷

In his entry on ‘knacking’ which constitutes a ‘Contemno Gestus’, Bulwer also refers to dancing in a ‘Barbarian fashion’ which he identifies as ‘knacking ... with ... fingers’ performed over the dancer’s head.⁶⁸ Although Bulwer never specifically mentions barbers in *Chirologia*, the homophone in ‘Barbarian’ in this sentence is suggestive, reminding us of ‘barbarous’ Pan. Bulwer concludes that knocking ‘*expresse[s] the vanitie of things*’.⁶⁹ Attending to the vanity of customers by fixing their complexions is part of the barber’s professional activity, and so the trade’s soundmark sonically encapsulates this pursuit. This doubling-up is suggested in the tailor’s comparison between garments and ears in *Love-Sick Court* and the ‘vaine delight’ that music carries, according to Stubbes, in the barber’s shop, both discussed earlier. In *Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio says of the sleeve the tailor has made for Katherine, ‘Heers snip, and nip, and cut, and slish and slash, | Like to a Censor in a barbers shoppe’ (TLN 2075–76; 4.3.90–91).⁷⁰ Laurie Maguire has demonstrated that the original reading of ‘Censor’ (changed by many editors to ‘censer’ and by editors of *Complete Works* to ‘scissor’) was ‘*cittern* (or a variant spelling of that noun)’.⁷¹ The itinerant sounds of barbering (which double-up with some soundmarks of the tailor, who also wields scissors), the implied musical instrument and the context of Petruchio’s dissatisfaction at the fussiness of the garment, which is like an over-elaborate cittern-neck’s engraving, here conflate. Although the context is sartorial, Petruchio’s criticism plays out across onomatopoeias – barbering soundmarks (in that the tailor’s scissor action is defined in terms of another context) – which provide an acoustic effect of excess. The point of the scene is that excess does not lie with the item (the sleeve) but with Petruchio’s reaction to it: his argument based on acoustics supplants one based on vision. I

began this chapter by separating the concepts of the culture of appearance and the culture of sound in *Epicoene*, but they are related.

In some references, the barber's finger movements signal the conclusion of the trimming process which constitutes a separate acoustic sign-posting: barbery is bounded by – as well as articulated through – soundmarks, which are structural. In *Damon and Pithias*, Snap is the porter at whose gates Wyll and Jacke 'be come ... trimme Barbers'.⁷² Snap's two entries around this scene encapsulate the trimming process (F1', G1'). Finales are not described as a knocking-noise but as a single snap, an acoustic anti-climax after clanging basins herald a client's entrance. In 'New Trimming', the rhymmer refers to 'the snap of [the barber's] Finger [that] then followes after' (stanza 6, line 4) the trimming routine as a rather pathetic flourish. Similarly, Stubbes describes how a barber concludes his services: 'Then snap go the fingers, ful bravely god wot. Thus this tragedy ended.'⁷³ Given the mundane subject, Stubbes's criticism of the excessive performances in barbers' shops easily emerges through his portrayal of an overly emphasized and trifling gesture as something heroic ('bravely') and within a grandiose context (a 'tragedy'). Both knocking and snapping are irritating and intrusive but, most significantly, they are not robust sounds: in their very nature they are incongruent with sounds we associate with grand matters (in performance contexts), such as alarums, thunder, drums, trumpets and bell chiming. Through the barber, therefore, we have a parody of sound, also exemplified earlier in this chapter by the effect of chiming basins. Stubbes and others construct this parody by playing with notions of volume, scale, context and the instrument which make a sound seem ridiculous; in the example of the ringing basin, parody is a matter of re-contextualization.

More generally, the noises associated with barbers are associated with coarse forms of expression. In Bulwer's *Chirologia*, 'certain Prevarications against the Rule of Rhetoricall Decorum' state that 'To use any Grammaticall gestures of compact, or any snapping of the *Fingers* ... is very unsuitable to the gravity of an Oratour.' Elsewhere, *Cautio XXVIII* instructs, 'Avoyd knockings, and superflitious flextures of the *Fingers*, which the Ancients have not given in precept.'⁷⁴ The sound by which barbers are characterized informs the regular joke that barbers are terrific gossipmongers, but not necessarily great orators. Coarse, non-verbal sounds epitomize rough rhetoric (captured by Greene's description of a barber who 'at every word a [made a] snap with ... [his] sissors'), and so this soundmark critiques oral expression.⁷⁵ Having noted that ex-barber Crispino is not thought to have many manners, Volterre declares that Crispino's 'fingers speake his profession' in James Shirley's *Humorous Courtier*.⁷⁶ Earlier I quoted from Smith on the soundmarks of trades who produce a discursive logic in a cityscape. More specifically, barbery's soundmark has a discursive logic in that it corresponds to barbers' oral habits and characterizes utterance.

At the end of *Trimming of Thomas Nashe* the author instructs, 'if heere I

have been too prodigall in *snip snaps*, tell me of it, limit me with a Falt, and in short time you shall see me reformed'.⁷⁷ Lichfield suggests that his own writing might have snip snapped immoderately in chopping back Nashe's discourse wherein reproving '*snip snaps*' replace rhetorical attacks.⁷⁸ But the italics also highlight its intertextuality and parodic function: Lichfield adopts his reference to performing 'snip snaps' from the pamphlet to which he is responding. In his mock dedication to Lichfield, Nashe suggests that Lichfield should 'deal ... *Snip Snap* snappishly' with the Proctor of Saffron-Walden, indicating that if barbery and therefore barbers are characterized in terms of rhetorical prowess, the result is a rather feeble clicking of scissors and fingers which lacks efficacy.⁷⁹ '*Snip Snap* snappishly' is childish and over-alliterated.

Finally, the soundmark ('snip snap') is also supplied for onomastic purposes in literature. Disguised Young Franklin speaks in French, in his ludicrously poor disguise, and refers to Sweetball as '*ce poulain Snip-snap*' ('this young colt, Snip-snap'), replacing the barber's official name with an epithetical sound bite; the 'Snip-snap' is comic and does not need translation.⁸⁰ In *The Fancies Chaste and Noble*, Spadone refers to the barber as 'a snipper-snapper', transforming Secco into a minimizing onomatopoeia.⁸¹ An epithetical use of 'snip' is also applied by the balladeer of 'The Northern Ladd'. The song tells of a female who is wooed by a number of different tradesmen, all of whom she refuses in favour of a ploughman. One of the maid's suitors is a mischievous barber:

But I repell'd his rude address,
and told him 'twas my greatest-cares,
If wa'd a lowsie A-Snip, alas,
when he's incens'd should keep my ears.⁸²

As it did in *Quiet Life*, so 'Snip' ('A-Snip') in this quatrain can function as an antonomasia for the barber (i.e. 'if he were only a lousy barber').⁸³ However, it can also be an epithet for 'rude address', whereby the 'Snip' is a cutting or exposing remark (i.e. 'if his address was a rotten insult or intrusion').⁸⁴ In both senses the soundmark 'snip' is derogatory. The final line of the stanza suggests that the female's ears are under threat from the barber: 'should keep my ears' means 'should cover my ears'. The line means that when the barber becomes vulgar, or – to use Nashe and Lichfield's phrase – too 'prodigal in snip-snaps', the maid must plug her ears. Once again, the ears, figured here through the fraught status of the female ear which Bloom explores, are considered a vulnerable organ in the presence of the barber – moreover, a 'lowsie', lice-ridden, barber who by over-picking leaves the ear open to an unwelcome infestation. The performing 'Snip' in line three and reference to ears in line four of the stanza makes the connection in the ballad between barbery, sound-making and offence to the ear.

The barber and his trade supplied early modern culture with a particular acoustic currency and aural tropes which were absorbed into and shaped contemporary idiom and metaphor through a series of culturally stable signifiers: the tangibility of the ear-pick and the barber as the ‘ear-picker’, earwax as excrement, recurrent soundmarks, noisy instruments, practitioners’ affectations, and the acoustically defined spatiality of the barber’s shop. Sounds in early modernity had, as Smith argues, exceptional social meaning, and the figure of the barber – as a surrogate sound control and a parody of the courtier, preacher, musician and rhetorician – could help to characterize what it might mean to regulate or disturb aural experience. The barbers’ ear-picking practices informed the whole concept of what it meant for something – material or otherwise – to enter the ear.⁸⁵

Notes

- 1 William Kerwin, *Beyond the Body* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), pp. 126–27.
- 2 Emily Cockayne, *Hubbub* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 106–30 (pp. 109–10).
- 3 Sounds other than the human voice offend Morose, including bearward’s dogs, a fencer’s drum, bells, snoring and creaking shoes. Some tradesmen (‘chimney-sweepers’, ‘broom-men’, ‘any hammerman’, ‘brazier[s]’, and ‘pewterer[s]’s prentice[s]’ (1.1.146–153)) are particularly irksome to him because of the tools or street cries they employ. (Quotations are taken from Ben Jonson, *Epicoene*, ed. by Roger Holdsworth, New Mermaids (London: A & C Black, 2005).)
- 4 Kerwin, p. 126. Cf. Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 111–26.
- 5 See Laurie Maguire, ‘Cultural Control in *The Taming of the Shrew*’, *Renaissance Drama*, 26 (1995), 83–104 (pp. 92–93).
- 6 R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), p. 272.
- 7 The term soundmark is ‘derived from *landmark* to refer to a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded’ (see Schafer, pp. 271–75).
- 8 See Barry Truax, *Acoustic Communication* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2001) and the Special Issue of Landscape Ecology: Soundscape Ecology (11/2011).
- 9 Bruce Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Emily Cockayne, ‘Cacophony, or Vile Scrapers on Vile Instruments’, *Urban History*, 29 (2002), 35–47; Wes Folkerth, *The Sound of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 2002); David Garrioch, ‘Sounds of the City’, *Urban History*, 30 (2003), 5–25; Bruce Johnson, ‘*Hamlet*: Voice, Music, Sound’, *Popular Music*, 24 (2005), 257–67; Allison K. Deutermann, ‘“Caviare to the general”: Taste, Hearing, and Genre in *Hamlet*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 62 (2011), 230–55. Cf. Matthew Steggle, ‘Notes Towards an Analysis of Early Modern Applause’, in *Shakespearean Sensations*, ed. by Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 118–37.

- 10 Three 'ear-scoops' numbered 80 A 1577, 81 A 1276, and 80 A 1524 at the Mary Rose Trust.
- 11 The *OED*'s first reference to 'Ear Scoop' is from 1895 (*ear*, n.1, III.16). See entries for 'Ear[e] [-]pick[e]' in dictionaries by Richard Huloet (1572), sig. P1v, and Charles Hoole, *An Easie Entrance to the Latine Tongue* (1649), p. 244.
- 12 John Woodall, *The Surgions Mate* (1617), A4r; Randle Holme, *Academy of Armory* (Chester: [1688]), pp. 127, 427.
- 13 John Eliot, *Ortho-epia Gallica* (1593), I1r.
- 14 John Lyly, *Midas* in *Galatea/Midas*, ed. by George K. Hunter and David M. Bevington, *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
- 15 Phillip Stubbes, *The Second Part of the Anatomie of Abuses Containing the Display of Corruptions* (1583), H1r.
- 16 London, Wellcome MS 213, fo. 33–35. Cf. Cockayne, 'Experiences of the Deaf in Early Modern England', *The Historical Journal*, 46 (2003), 493–510 (esp. p. 498).
- 17 Wellcome, MS 213, fo. 33–34.
- 18 Stubbes, H1r.
- 19 *OED*, 'pick, v.1', I.2.a, I.1.c.
- 20 See Jennifer Rae McDermott, "'The Melodie of Heaven": Sermonizing the Open Ear in Early Modern England', *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Wietse de Boer and Christine Göttler (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 181.
- 21 Thomas Dekker, *Blurt Master-Constable* (1602), G3r.
- 22 Stephen Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), C1v. See *OED*, 'masking, n.2, †1'.
- 23 My thesis, 'Performing Barbers, Surgeons and Barber-Surgeons' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2012), explores Shakespeare's use of barbering metaphor for Lavinia's rape in *Titus Andronicus* (pp. 191–215).
- 24 Gervase Markham and William Sampson, *Herod and Antipater* (1622), G2r.
- 25 Michael Flachmann, 'Epicoene: A Comic Hell for a Comic Sinner', *MaRDiE*, 1 (1984), 131–42, see pp. 132–34 (esp. p. 132).
- 26 Hudson D. Hallahan, 'Silence, Eloquence, and Chatter in Jonson's *Epicoene*', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 40 (1977), 117–27 (pp. 120–21).
- 27 Richard Dutton makes the same comment in his earlier edition for *The Revels Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1.1.170–171n. See *OED*, † resty, adj.1. A variant of 'resty' is 'reasty', which also is etymologically linked to 'reasy' and 'rusty'.
- 28 George Peele, *The Old Wives Tale* (1595), s.d. E1r.
- 29 See Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia* (1615), p. 576; Walter Charleton, *Natural History of Nutrition, Life, and Voluntary Motion* (1659), p. 97.
- 30 Scipion Dupleix, *The Resolver* (1635), P2v. Cf. Pierre de La Primaudaye, *The French Academie* (1618) p. 127.
- 31 See Crooke, pp. 66–70.
- 32 Will Fisher, 'Staging the Beard', in *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 230–57 (p. 234).
- 33 Pierre Primaudaye, *The Second Part of the French Academie* (1594), p. 127.
- 34 *The Noble Souldier* was authored, according to the Stationers Register by Thomas Dekker, but with the initials S. R. [Samuel Rowley] on the title page of the quarto,

- 1634.
- 35 Grey Brydges Chandos, *A Discourse Against Flatterie* (1611), C2r–v.
 - 36 Jeremy Taylor, *XXV Sermons Preached at Golden-Grover* (1653), p. 312 (Sermon XXIV, Part III).
 - 37 Primaudaye (1618), p. 399.
 - 38 Dupleix, p. 316. Cf. Ambroise Paré, *The Workes*, trans. Th[omas] Johnson (1634), p. 190.
 - 39 Richard Brome, *The Love-Sick Court in Five New Playes* (1659), sig. I6r.
 - 40 Cockayne, ‘Experiences of the Deaf’, pp. 495–97; Folkerth, *Sound of Shakespeare*, pp. 44–51.
 - 41 Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 111–59. Cf. Keith M. Botelho, *Renaissance Earwitnesses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); McDermott, pp. 177–97.
 - 42 Thomas Adams, *The Happiness of the Church* (1619), p. 266. Cf. Thomas Taylor, *Peter his Repentance Shewing* (1653), I2r; Robert Wilkinson, *A Jewell for the Eare* (1610); William Harrison, *The Difference of Hearers* (1614); Stephen Egerton, *The Boring of the Eare* (1623).
 - 43 See Bryan Crockett, *The Play of Paradox* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Crockett, “‘Holy Cozenage’ and the Renaissance Cult of the Ear”, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 24 (1993), 47–65.
 - 44 Wilkinson, p. 34.
 - 45 Smith, p. 206.
 - 46 Plutarch, *The Philosophie*, trans. by Philemon Holland (1603), see pp. 966–67.
 - 47 See Smith, pp. 63–70. Cf. Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum* (1627), G2r (138).
 - 48 Francis Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, ed. by Michael Hattaway, 2nd edn, New Mermaids (London: A & C Black, 2002).
 - 49 Thomas Middleton, *Anything for a Quiet Life*, ed. by Leslie Thomson in *The Collected Works*, general editors Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).
 - 50 Schafer, pp. 10, 275.
 - 51 See Maguire, pp. 88–93.
 - 52 Music in Lyly’s plays has been the subject of debate since the early twentieth century. The quartos of his dramatic works include stage directions for singing, but song lyrics are absent. These were not published until Edward Blount’s edition of Lyly’s plays, *Six Court Comedies* (1632). Cf. Anon, ‘The Rimers New Trimming’ (c. 1614), a ballad.
 - 53 Richard Lichfield[?], *Trimming of Thomas Nashe* (1597), B4v. On authorship, see Benjamin Griffin, ‘Nashe’s Dedicatees’, *Notes and Queries*, 44 (1997), 47–49; Charles Nicholl, *A Cup Of News* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 233–36.
 - 54 Stubbes, H1r.
 - 55 Henry Bold, *Latine Songs With their English* (1685), sig. M4v–N1r; Patricia Parker, ‘Barbers and Barbary’, *Renaissance Drama*, 33 (2005), 201–44.
 - 56 Smith, p. 56.
 - 57 Anon., ‘A Merry New Catch of All Trades’ (c. 1620), stanza 5, line 2.
 - 58 Gardiner, Julie, Michael J. Allen and Mary Anne Alburger (eds), *Before the Mast: Life and Death Aboard the Mary Rose* (Portsmouth: Mary Rose Trust, 2005), p. 217.

- 59 George C. Boon, 'Tonsor Humanus', *Britannia*, 22 (1991), 21–32 (p. 27). *OED*, 'strop, v.1: To sharpen or smooth the edge of (a razor) with a strop. Also *transf.* and *fig.*'
- 60 Hoole, p. 299.
- 61 Smith, p. 47.
- 62 Robert Greene, *A Quip for an Upstart Courtier* (1592), C3v. Cf. Sweetball's exclamation in *Quiet Life*: incensed by Franklin's pranks, the barber declares, 'To him boldly; I will spend all the scissors in my shop, but I'll have him snapped' (3.2.15–16).
- 63 Cockayne, *Hubbub*, p. 36.
- 64 Quotations are from Samantha Ellis writing for *The Guardian*, 25 June 2003, on the production of *Titus Andronicus*, dir. Peter Brook for the RSC (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre: 1955).
- 65 Stubbes, G8v.
- 66 Thomas Nashe, *Have With You to Saffron-Walden* (1596), A3v; Lichfield[?] quotes directly from Nashe ('I espied *barbers knocking of their fingers*' (B3v)).
- 67 John Bulwer, *Chirologia* (1644), M8v, H3r (also N1r).
- 68 Bulwer, N1r.
- 69 Bulwer, part two, G1r.
- 70 Through Line Numbers follow the Norton facsimile of the 1623 text *The First Folio of Shakespeare*, ed. by Charlton Hinman and Peter Blayney, 2nd edn (London: Norton, 1996).
- 71 Maguire, 'Petruccio and the Barber's Shop', *Studies in Bibliography*, 51 (1998), 117–26 (esp. pp. 117–18). Editor Barbara Hodgdon, for *The Arden Shakespeare Third Series* (London: A & C Black, 2010), adopts Maguire's emendation.
- 72 Richard Edwards, *Damon and Pithias* (1571), F3v.
- 73 Stubbes, G8v.
- 74 Bulwer, part two, H1r, K8r.
- 75 *Upstart Courtier*, C4r.
- 76 James Shirley, *The Humorous Courtier* (1640), I3r.
- 77 Lichfield[?], G4v.
- 78 Italicization of '*snip snaps*' in the printed text highlights its performative role.
- 79 Nashe, *Saffron-Walden*, B2r.
- 80 *Quiet Life*, 3.2.136–37.
- 81 John Ford, *The Fancies, Chast and Noble* (1638), B1r.
- 82 Anon, 'The Northern Ladd' (1670–96), stanza 10.
- 83 Perhaps the capitalization of the 'A' suggests the proper noun.
- 84 In this instance that remark is bawdy with its innuendo, 'he would prick my master-Vein' (stanza 8, line 4).
- 85 This chapter emerges from my studies on barber-surgeons as a doctoral student at the University of Oxford. I am particularly grateful to Professor Laurie Maguire for her inspired supervision, to the Schools Competition Act Trust who funded my research, and to Pembroke College for a generous scholarship. With particular thanks also to Joy Thomas at Barbers' Hall and Simon Ware at the Mary Rose Trust.