

You shut out the sounds. They are only irritating to the ears. Fanon refers to such people as oppressed and ignorant. If only they knew. Your mission is one of redemption. Bobby must own you. He must call your name again and again and again.

Grace Danquah is a writer living and working in Accra-Ghana. She believes in writing about 'ordinary people'. They are the real creators of magic. She can be found on LinkedIn as Grace Danquah.

Screaming for Champions

by Jane Carroll & Beatrix Carroll Kinsella



My daughter Beatrix was born an expert screamer. She is a contender for the world all-comers' screaming championships. She has the endurance and the skill and the volume to win. Her screams have range. And resonance.

She is the noisiest baby in Ireland.

That is not to say that she does it often. Beatrix is an expert, not a dilettante. She bides her time and releases the scream with the precision and force of a champion hammer-throw.

An amateur might think that screaming is something you do with your mouth. This is wrong. A good scream involves the whole body. Beatrix knows this. When she really gets going, every inch of her tiny body gets in on the action. She balls her fists and arches her back. The little birthmark on the crown of her head flares red, darkening with blood. Her mouth gapes wide and her tongue vibrates in the space between her bare, hard gums. This isn't mere crying, but ululation, a fierce keening that strips my brain of any rational thought except to comfort her.

Beatrix was born a champion screamer. Unlike other babies who come into the world mewling and puling, she did not cry when she was born. At all. She came out into the world silently, staring around her with huge, slow-blinking eyes, curious and mute. It was only when she'd had a good look that she figured "fuck this", drew in a breath, and started screaming.

Her discipline impressed me because on that day, the day that my daughter was born, I was a champion screamer too.

**

When I was pregnant, people fell over themselves to tell me their horror stories about labour and delivery. These stories were all about pain and blood and crude stitches in delicate places. There were whispered stories about prolapses and about epidurals, little anecdotes about hours of tedium and hasty surgery passed along furtively like sweets passed along between friends at the theatre.

Nobody talked about the screaming. I get the sense that people are deeply embarrassed by screaming, that it is somehow so base and so bestial that we do not want to acknowledge it. That it is a sort of embarrassing side-effect of labour, like doing a poo on the delivery table.

**

And so, on that day, the day my daughter was born, my screaming shocked me. It was unexpected and huge. I was so loud and so horrible that people – nice professional people in scrubs – stepped smartly away from me. At one point, a midwife told me that I was screaming so hard it was maybe stopping me from pushing. I yelled at her too.

On that day, the day my daughter was born, I realised that labour wasn't merely to deliver me of a baby. It was to deliver me of all the screams that I had hidden deep inside me for the past nine months. To release all of that pent-up rage and wrath out into the air.

You see, I had spent a lot of my time not screaming.

I didn't scream when the lockdowns started. I didn't scream when I was told my husband couldn't come to the scans, nor when I found out there would be no antenatal classes or visitors to the hospital. I didn't scream when I was wretched with pregnancy and couldn't have a hug from my mam. I didn't scream when I wasn't able to buy clothes to fit my distorted body or to choose a new pair of shoes that I could put on and take off all by myself rather than cramming my foot like one of the Ugly Sisters into trainers I couldn't lace up anymore because I couldn't reach my own stupid feet.

But when labour started, the screaming started; the two yoked perfectly together.

On that day, the day my daughter was born, I discovered I was a champion screamer. I learned that I could scream for hours and hours and not get tired of screaming. That I could lean out of the car window on the way into the hospital and roar obscenities at other drivers who were just too fucking slow. That I could go up on all fours like a cow and create deep, bellowing screams that more properly belonged in a slaughterhouse. That the gas and air they gave me just made sure I had a really good lungful of air to get the next scream ready.

Jane Carroll is an assistant professor in children's literature at Trinity College Dublin. Her teaching and research interests centre on landscape, spatiality, and material culture in children's fiction. She writes things in between reading endless rounds of Where's Spot? to Beatrix.

Beatrix Carroll Kinsella is 16 months old. She is very interested in yoghurts, staying up all night, and Dipper the octopus.

I screamed with pain. I screamed with rage. I screamed because when we finally got to the hospital I had to go in alone so that someone with a clipboard could check that I was actually in labour. The screaming, apparently, wasn't enough of a fucking clue.

But when my daughter was born, there was a moment of perfect silence. The midwife put Beatrix's tiny, damp body on my chest and she breathed in and out silently and looked at me and I breathed in and out silently and looked at her. And then I passed the baton. And my daughter balled her little fists, threw back her head, opened her mouth and screamed.



Phyllis Diller by Allan Warren (1973)

Donating Your Scream to Cinema

by Emily O'Connor

What color is the one-eyed, one-horned, flying people eater? A close listen to the lyrics suggests that the song does not in fact specify, but rather refers to a people eater who prefers his dinner be violet or lavender in shade. But generally, this is not a song to whose lyrics we listen very closely.

Another familiar sound that often fails to attract our full attention is the cinematic scream. We've all heard cinema screams in hundreds of movies made over the past half century and more, but what we tend to miss is that there is unity to the sound of sudden pain or fear, especially induced by falls and bullets, and especially suffered by the relatively insignificant. The way that a character often sounds when these things happen is the way a soldier named Private Wilhelm sounds when shot in the leg with an arrow, which is in turn the way that the singer of the novelty song "The Purple People Eater," Sheb Wooley, sounds when told to stand in front of a microphone and scream – specifically to make the sound of a human being in the agony of being dragged by an alligator under muddy waters; to call upon the primordial fear of swamps, of being sucked back into the proverbial place whence we came by a living dinosaur. It is a brief, high-pitched shriek.

Much like the novelty songs of the 1950s, the scream is fun, and the scream is strange.

What came to be known as "the Wilhelm Scream" (or, more properly, "Screams," as there are a few yells from the recording which sometimes make their auditory appearance) was recorded in a studio for the movie Distant Drums (1951) for a scene in which a cowboy is attacked by an alligator (one might say, a people-eater). This same effect was subsequently used in the film The Charge at Feather River (1953), in which the character who is the namesake for the effect, Private Wilhelm, appears and screams. As documented by Steve Lee, although it was added to Warner Bros. sound effect libraries and used for a few decades, it might not have become a pop culture legend had not sound designer Ben Burt noticed the repetitive yell and began to use it in his own work – including Star Wars (1977), among many other films.[1]

From there, the scream became a sound design easter egg, an inside joke within the industry. The films containing it range from Toy Story to Kill Bill. Many use the scream to comedic effect.

[1] Steve Lee, "The WILHELM Scream," May 17, 2005, <http://www.hollywoodlostandfound.net/wilhelm/>