

Neighbor dog's calling

by [Muriel Nelson](#) in the [March 2, 2016](#) issue

I'm trying to love you, Riley, neighbor, as  
you try nonstop to woof flip-flop (*whip-whop*,  
*hip-hop*, *rip-rop*, *bip-bop*)—just let me  
count the ways—but can't master that *fl*.

Your master, Neighbor Pug, absent or deaf  
like mine, doesn't notice your wakefulness,  
your dogged practice—*Wachet auf*,  
*git-eff*, *auf-up*—or alarming faithfulness

as you lift your voice—*ruft uns die Stimme*—bow  
to the four corners of your echoing fence, *ruf-ruf*,  
and with all your God-given strength, wow  
the *slip-slop*, *sleep-sop*, *ninny-nap* neighborhood.

Riley, you remind me that the psalmists  
favored repetitions. *God has gone up*  
*with a shout*, and his dog has raised a refrain  
like a trumpet—oh, please refrain—as I lie down

and hope to dream of still waters, *lip-lap*. Let me  
hear your difficult pug breaths more than your din.  
As you imitate the difficult humans  
who dog me, I could *half* love you. Could you just breathe *in*?