

Reverberations of Silence

Reverberations of Silence:
Silenced Texts, Sub-Texts and Authors
in Literature, Language and Translation

Edited by

Márta Pellérdi and Gabriella Reuss

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P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-4326-1, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4326-3

To the memory of Kathleen E. Dubs

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INTRODUCTION

“His silence is more eloquent than words.”
—Thomas Carlyle

Compared to the cheerful bustle of the student crowds in early September, late August afternoons on the picturesque Piliscsaba campus are rather quiet. Small groups of eager freshmen and lazy tourists are just about the only people to be found at this time of the day and season. They are probably unaware of the former function of the Pázmány Faculty of Humanities site; silence prevails over the past. The abandoned former military camp that housed pre-war Hungarian garrisons and post-war Soviet occupying troops in Piliscsaba, Hungary is a part of history; it no longer stirs up unpleasant feelings of fear and anxiety in the students, professors, and employees studying and working in the architectural marvels¹ reconstructed upon the barrack ruins. The unique site itself served as a source of inspiration for the international Sounds of Silence conference hosted by the Institute of English, Pázmány Péter Catholic University on 25-27 August 2010, at Piliscsaba, Hungary. Pázmány’s rural campus, hiding in a peaceful valley amidst the Pilis mountains, exhales a refreshing academic atmosphere that invited a wide variety of approaches to silence within English and American Studies: literary, linguistic, cultural, historical, political, and psychological.

Just as the view of Pázmány’s Piliscsaba campus today offers a stark contrast to the former military camps, so silence itself can be best described through opposing entities. Without such opposites silence can never become meaningful. The vibration of shrieking colors, the voicing of boundaries, the incessant flow of insignificant rattle, the dark expression of physical and existential threat frame and intensify silence for us in order to capture our attention. To describe and give voice to the expressions of silence and to be able to face the fear (or solace) deriving from pervasive absences, we must see beyond them and examine their different varieties and sources. Silence, interestingly, also indicates “plenitude,” according to Susan Sontag, an “impenetrability and opaqueness”; thus the artist and the

¹ Imre Makovecz’s design.

work of art “opens up an array of possibilities for interpreting that silence, for imputing speech to it.”²

The texts in this collection intend to fulfill the purpose of interpreting silence in a work of art, and also the “speech,” or the text that is assigned to it. Thus the essays included in the volume aim towards “plenitude” rather than absence, but represent only a selection of the wide-ranging material presented at the conference. The collected writings deal with various aspects and interpretations of silence: absence and loss; fragmented, lost, hidden and deleted texts; failures in communication, representations of detectable empty categories and spaces in mainly literary texts, but also in cultural narratives, translations and speech.

The literary essays in the present volume are grouped in chronological order according to common features that bind them together and the period in which the texts discussed were published. Thus the “curious” Renaissance reverberations of silence are captured in the first four essays which focus on texts mainly from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Kinga Földvály’s literary-historical investigation of William Harrison and his *Description of England* disperses the silence around the “garrulous Tudor’s” role in the second edition of *Holinshed’s Chronicles*. Silence in *Description of England* written by Harrison hangs heavily over what it seeks to conceal: the social and cultural discrepancies of Elizabethan society. Gabriella Reuss’ paper brings a pseudo-Shakespearean play back from oblivion: the reading of *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* places the drama in the naval and socio-political context of the Spanish Armada attack, and assumes the much debated composition date around 1588. Ágnes Strickland-Pajtók follows the hero, Sir Guyon, in the Bower of Bliss in her essay on Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, and interprets with insight the sensuous silence of the enchantress Acrasia and the temptations Sir Guyon has to battle against; words seem to be ineffective in overpowering her silence and seductive powers. Annamária Fábián’s analysis of two adaptations of *King Lear*, one from the seventeenth century (Nahum Tate, 1681), and the modern feminist adaptation entitled *Lear’s Daughters* (1987), attempts to reveal and give voice to the motivations of the female “repressed or missing characters” in Shakespeare’s play.

Part II of the volume is centered round the theme of silenced women and “Fragile personalities” in the nineteenth century. János Barcsák’s “A Voice is Wanting: The Unspeakable in Shelley and the Case of Browning’s Duke,” addresses the problem of articulating and confessing

² Susan Sontag, “The Aesthetics of Silence,” in *Styles of Radical Will*, (New York: Picador, 2002), 16.

sin in the dramatic monologue “My Last Duchess.” The silence of the Duke and his inability to articulate his feelings can be considered the origin of all that is expressed in the poem, including the Duke’s position concerning the Duchess’s smile, the “spot of joy” on her cheek. Judit Kónyi’s paper, “Emily Dickinson’s Pseudo Silence” offers a biographical approach to the interpretation of a select group of poems which reveal Dickinson’s attitude to her vocation, from the sense of shame at first, to the conscious choice and pride connected to writing in the latter half of her “silent” poetic career. The third essay, Ildikó Dömötör’s “Gentlewomen in the Australian bush,” is about nineteenth century English women in the Australian wilderness. Looking at little known letters, diaries and travelogues by women, she illuminates the emotional obstacles and social restrictions genteel women had to face, and those aspects of early colonial life about which mainstream writings remained particularly silent.

“The art of our time is noisy with appeals for silence,” Susan Sontag argues.³ The artist who “appeals for silence” through his work of art, however, is clamoring for the attention of the reader. Perhaps that is the reason why, moving into the twentieth century, the various manifestations of silence in literary texts become even more pronounced, as the number of essays pertaining to this period demonstrate. Thus, the third part of the volume is dedicated to texts discussing mainly “traumatic silences” and the motivations behind the silence of the authors or characters. Tamás Demény’s careful analysis of Richard Wright’s and Zora Neale Hurston’s autobiographies focuses on the silent African American mother figures, revealing the oppressions, contradictions and complexities of their lives in a minority environment. His study also demonstrates the writers’ ambivalent attitudes toward the mothers who were so influential to their artistic expression.

“How, through what devices can the sounds of silence become audible—; is it, and in what sense is it possible to talk about songs that voices never share, and what hearing aids can we think of in order to perceive them?” This is the question raised by Katalin G. Kállay’s essay which explores the world of muteness in Carson McCullers’ *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, and tries to show how symbolic gestures are used to struggle against the problem of alienation and human loneliness. The gestures eventually become examples of silence and anxious attempts at reaching out for understanding. Although Paul Auster’s novels are not directly concerned with minority or Holocaust issues, Katalin Szlukovényi’s essay on the American writer’s *The Book of Illusions* and *The New York Trilogy* sounds the “The Voice of the Dead,” and reveals the

³ Susan Sontag, “The Aesthetics of Silence,” 12.

many, thus far unnoticed parallels with Holocaust literature. Szlukovényi's aim is to show how texts like Auster's are silently and imperceptibly present in contemporary Jewish American literature through certain motifs which evoke the Holocaust. Ildikó Limpár goes back into the past and present lives of Amy Tan's characters in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* in trying to interpret the two motifs of silence and the shooting star, and the patterns they weave in the author's work, highlighting the conflicting multicultural and generational issues that are addressed in the novel.

Three contributions include writers whose first language is other than English, for whom silence becomes not only a psychological or linguistic, but a prominent historical, socio-political issue. Maria Cristina Ghiban Mocanu's writing on Ana Castillo's poetry focuses mainly on the Chicana poet's new identity, the "unheard voice of the poet" which, however, rises above the ethnic and feminist labels attached to the poet's earlier work. Ágnes Györke's "Tropes of Silence in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*" is concerned with the ingenious ways in which the political thematization and enactment of silence is presented in Rushdie's postmodern historical narrative on Pakistan. Eva Szederkényi offers an interpretation for the "provocative silences" in the narratives of the British Kazuo Ishiguro's repressed and unreliable narrators in *A Pale View of Hills* and *The Remains of the Day*, revealing some of the information they withhold. The last essay in the twentieth-century batch is mysteriously entitled "The location and nature of liminal silences in *The Sheltering Sky* by Paul Bowles." Váradi-Kalmár sets out to explore the "liminal" and transgressive territories of consciousness and sounds, and especially, the silences connected to different trance-like states which can be considered rites of passage.

We have grouped four essays addressing the "silence of the language" in the last part of the volume. Although the texts used as examples in Kristina Kočan's "Translating Silence: Absence in African American Poetry" are also literary, the major problematical issue in this case is translating the silent gaps, the intentional grammatical errors and unusual typography used in African American poetry into the Slovene language. According to Kočan, "the translator, who is initially a reader," has the special role in interpreting these absences and offering solutions in order to provide an adequate translation of the original poem. How foreign language skills can deteriorate in elderly Finnish-Americans is the focus of Päivi Pietilä's pioneering research in this field. The hesitations, silences in L2 speakers' speech provide the basis for the detailed analysis. Katalin Balogné Bérces approaches the problem of emptiness in phonology from a partly theoretical point of view which seems to be valid for all languages,

although the examples are mainly English. The last paper, Evelyn Gandón Chapela's work on verb-governed ellipsis studies the syntactic phenomenon of ellipsis and a variety of contexts in which it occurs, offering a taxonomy of the different types and drawing the tendencies of the most frequent occurrences in British English.

The editing of the essays and studies in the volume was a long time in making and the editors are grateful to the contributors for their hard work and patience, their promptness in replying and their willingness to comply with various, sometimes untimely requests. With the editors now withdrawing into the background the reader is finally welcome to enjoy and study the subtle reverberations of silence recorded in this volume.

Márta Pellérdi and Gabriella Reuss
November 2012
Piliscsaba, Hungary

PART I.

CURIOUS REVERBERATIONS: SILENCE IN THE RENAISSANCE

THE TELLING SILENCES
OF A GARRULOUS TUDOR:
WILLIAM HARRISON
AND THE *DESCRIPTION OF ENGLAND*
(1577, 1587)

KINGA FÖLDVÁRY

William Harrison, a Tudor antiquarian, writer and Anglican clergyman may be safely described as a practically unknown author for twenty-first century readers, with the exception of a small circle of early modern literary historians. As history is often unjust, Harrison has also received his share of unfair silence instead of the thunderous applause he would have deserved for the arduous and challenging work he did in order to collect and preserve the treasures of his country. In his case, the reason for this near anonymity is nothing less than the huge enterprise he was involved in, which is known today as Holinshed's *Chronicles*, first published in 1577, then in an extended form in 1587. Although the *Chronicles* came into existence as a result of the collaborative effort of a team of contributors, the only name the work is associated with today is that of Raphael Holinshed, despite the fact that he died in 1580, not long after the first edition was published, and had practically nothing to do with the second edition (the one that most modern, compiled editions are based on).¹ Nevertheless, the title page of the first edition makes no reference to anyone else apart from Holinshed, announcing only "*The Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irland. [. . .] Faithfully gathered and set forth, by Raphaell Holinshed.*"² The name of William Harrison, who compiled and

¹ The differences between various editions, with a special focus on copies held in the Huntington Library are described in detail by Clegg, "Which Holinshed? Holinshed's "Chronicles" in the Huntington Library," 559–77.

² Holinshed, *The Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irland*, 1577, vol. 1, title page. Throughout the essay, quotations retain the original spelling, except for the long *f*, which is substituted by the common *s* everywhere.

authored the part known as the *Description of England*³ for both editions, and also contributed a translation of Hector Boethius's *History of Scotland*,⁴ is thus shrouded in silence, although in the few existing scholarly references to his work he is often praised as an authoritative voice in Elizabethan studies because of his eyewitness account of many details of Tudor life and society.

Nonetheless, it has to be admitted that his "authorial voice" has to be treated with some caution, since most of what he writes comes from second-hand sources, summarized, translated or copied from other texts. Still, his work is anything but negligible or irrelevant even today, and even within this mixed texture we can find the golden thread of originality, the most valuable passages being those which bear the mark of his own personal opinion and vision concerning his own times. His descriptions of the apparel and attire of the English, of the way a noble feast is organized, of the manner of building and furniture of houses, including the development of living conditions as witnessed by the elderly of his age, abound with documentary evidence regarding one of the most exciting periods of English history.

While I do not wish to deny the importance of his words, it appears to me that it is not only his voice that provides us with the best insights into Tudor social affairs but his silences as well, the details that he fails to mention, the descriptions that he omits, the remarks that he avoids, which also convey messages that are just as significant for us today as the topics he chatters about. In this essay I argue that these silences, if we listen to them carefully, tell us at least as much, if not more, of Tudor society than his words, his often garrulous and anecdotal passages on Elizabethan life.

It is true that at first sight, the adjective "garrulous" fits Harrison's work considerably better than the word "silent," and the derogatory terms C.S. Lewis used to sum up the prose of the mid-Tudor period, the "drab

³ Although Harrison himself identifies his work as *The Description of Britaine* both on the first page of his work and in the running headlines, the title page of the whole volume refers to this part of the *Chronicles* as a description of England, to distinguish it from the independent chorographical descriptions of Scotland and Ireland. Since this latter form is the one more frequently used by secondary literature as well, this essay is also going to refer to Harrison's work as the *Description of England*, to avoid confusion.

⁴ In fact, the original Latin text was translated into Scottish by John Bellenden in 1530–33, and this Scottish version was what Harrison translated into English in 1577, as he claims: within "three or foure dayes" (Holinshed, *Description of Scotland*, Dedication to Thomas Sackford, 1577, vol. 2, sig. *b. ij.*). Cf. Furnivall, "Harrison, William (1534–1593)," 46.

age,” calling these writings “clumsy, monotonous, garrulous”⁵ appear to be more than true about Harrison’s *Description* as well. The garrulous features of the text could be exemplified by several types of stylistic and narrative solutions. On the one hand, some of Harrison’s chorographical descriptions of the actual landscape consist mainly of verbal(ized) translations of Christopher Saxton’s maps, which could speak for themselves to the beholder equally eloquently in their original visual form. Even though Christopher Saxton’s *Atlas* of the counties of England and Wales appeared only in 1579, two years after the first edition of Harrison’s *Description* was published, Saxton had been working on his survey since 1570 and individual county maps had been available as early as 1574, the whole set being printed from 1574 to 1578.⁶ It seems evident that Harrison had at least some of these maps at his disposal already when working on the first edition. In the *Description*, he refers to Saxton’s maps in the first chapter of the second book, entitled “Of ryuers and waters that lose their names before they come at the sea” with the following words: “as I haue bene informed by Christofer Saxtons Card late made of the same and all the seuerall shyres of England at the infinite charges of sir Thames Sackforde knight,”⁷ and later, on the same page: “as Saxton hath set it downe” (*DE*, 1577, 51r). Ironically, Saxton’s accurate maps have not only helped Harrison to provide reliable geographical details of parts of the land he never had a chance (or desire) to see, but they also worked against his own project in the long run, as Georges Edelen implies: “the maps [. . .] were to render obsolete the type of topographical description over which Harrison took such pains in the first book of his work for Holinshed.”⁸ In this case, therefore, keeping silent on otherwise commonly known subjects might have helped his readers to find the golden treasures which are now slightly overshadowed by these abundant words.

Another example of verbal superfluity is caused by Harrison’s working method (which we could equally describe as work ethics): a considerable proportion of the *Description* is in fact copied and compiled from other

⁵ Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century: Excluding Drama*, 1.

⁶ Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood. The Elizabethan Writing of England*, 108–10; for a detailed biography of Christopher Saxton see also Gardham, “Atlas of the Counties of England and Wales” on the University of Glasgow Special Collections Book of the Month Website for June 2002: <http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk/exhibns/month/june2002.html> [accessed 5 July, 2011].

⁷ Harrison, *Description of England*, 1577, 51r. All references to Harrison’s text are hereafter given in parentheses as *DE*, followed by the year of publication (1577 or 1587) and the page numbers in the form found in the original text.

⁸ Edelen, “William Harrison (1535–1593),” 268.

texts, most notably from John Leland's manuscript collections that came to be known as his *Itinerary*. However, as Oliver Harris shows, despite the fact that Leland undertook his work in the 1530s and 1540s, and was forced to cease his labor in 1547 on account of his mental collapse,⁹ these were not available to the public until much later. Nevertheless, a small circle of primarily London-based antiquarians, including John Stow and temporarily William Harrison as well, had access to them and made ample use and reference to Leland's findings in their own chorographical accounts of the country. While these parts of Harrison's work should not be called superfluous or even unnecessarily garrulous in the same way as the verbal transcriptions of Saxton's maps can be described, it is nonetheless true that these (rather numerous) words should and possibly could have been disseminated with their true author identified on the title page, rather than implying that the voice they find utterance through is the one that should claim credit for them. It would be unjust to state that Harrison denied Leland's influence or refused to identify his collections as a source, but especially in the first edition, Leland's name appears far less frequently than it could, seeing how much Harrison relied on him. It is certainly safe to say that Harrison would have escaped the charge of plagiarism that he was also attacked with, had he edited Leland's unfinished work with the same zeal as he used for copying large portions from it.¹⁰

Nonetheless, it must be admitted that however loquacious Harrison's writing seems when looking at the above-mentioned passages, the discerning eye of the modern reader will also discover instances when the text falls guilty of silence rather than verbosity, and if we make the effort and reveal the silences hiding among the clumsy and garrulous passages, we may find at least as much food for thought, if not more, than in the many words of the talkative Tudor clergyman. At the same time, the search for silence in a 400-year-old prose narrative of more than 250 pages seems to be an endeavor doomed to fail, or impossible to fulfill without being extremely ambitious or utterly hypocritical. Otherwise how could we claim that what is silent, absent, not there, can be accounted for? What we cannot hear is not for us to hear, and that is where the investigation should cease—were it not the case that the text often signals the absence of something that is missing, something that could or even should be there. This reading of Harrison's *Description* therefore attempts to find these traces in the text, where either the author's choice of words or certain grammatical constructions point at some underlying message.

⁹ Harris, "Motheaten, Mouldye, and Rotten," 460–61.

¹⁰ One such instance is related by Harris, 475.

Even with this approach, focusing on textual traces rather than simply contrasting the text with a twenty-first century reader's expectations of what issues such a volume should talk about and which topics it should leave unsaid, it is easy to see that there are many ways in which silence can be found in Harrison's *Description*. The tales these silences tell us are also manifold, revealing everyday habits of people, ones that Harrison finds commendable and others that he deplors, and hinting at details of the social system, classes and their lifestyles, while also passing moral judgments on his contemporaries. Moreover, we may also glimpse at the propagandistic messages Harrison was trying to (or possibly had to?) relay, exaggerating the immaculate perfection of everything in and around the royal court and especially the Queen, and covering up, even denying the existence of anything that may be threatening the stability of the kingdom.

To begin with, the most straightforward way silence appears in the text is as content, when the word "silence" is mentioned and its reference explained. There are not particularly many instances of this topical silence: three occurrences in the 1577 edition, and only one more, altogether four appearances in the 1587 edition.¹¹ One of these occurrences, in fact, the only one which seems to be more than a rhetorical filler, since the expression does not refer to the writing process, can be found in the chapter on the food and diet of the English. Here we can read about "the great silence that is used at the tables of the honourable and the wiser sort" of people, that is, "the noble man, merchant, and frugall artificer," as opposed to "the meaner sort of husbandmen, and country inhabitaunts" (*DE*, 1577, 95r). This silence during mealtime suggests commendable behavior in other ways as well, since it appears to go hand in hand with moderate eating and drinking habits; the babbling of lower classes shows how they are unable to separate merriment from drunkenness and unnecessary speech. This tiny instance of criticism is undoubtedly rooted in the Puritan attitude of the author, an Anglican clergyman dedicated to his religious vision, for whom food and drink is daily sustenance for which one needs to be grateful to God, but which is no cause for ribald festivities.

At the same time, however, this short passage is clearly more than simple criticism of lifestyle—we can also see the social bias of the description, as the difference between people is not based on a religious or national distinction, but on social classes, distinguished from each other by adjectives that would be anything but politically correct today: the

¹¹ Based on several searches within the electronic texts of the Holinshed Project, using all the eight spelling variants of the word listed by the *OED*.

“honourable and wiser” sort comprises the upper classes, whereas the “meaner” sort refers to the lower groups of society. It is certainly easy for an educated clergyman, the chaplain safe under the wings of a sympathetic Baron with similarly radical Protestant views to feel elevated and distant from the lower classes, and this is what the text makes us feel at many points—a desire to be closer to the nobility than to those at the bottom of the hierarchy. But are all members of the upper classes wiser and more honorable than the rest of society? It is highly doubtful, and we may suspect that Harrison could also have brought examples to the contrary, if he had wanted to, but on this topic his opinion is once again shrouded in silence.

The other two occurrences of the word “silence” in the 1577 text and even the single addition in the 1587 version appear to have little interest for our search at first sight, since they are all rhetorical commonplaces with reference to the author’s decision to cut his matter short and not go into more detail than it is absolutely necessary. The immediate contexts and expressions in which the word appears are the following: “for breuities sake I doe passe ouer in silence” (*DE*, 1577, 92v); “certaine other pointes which y^e Prophet shutteth vp in scilence” (*DE*, 1577, 97r); and finally “I am the more willing to passe them ouer in silence” (*DE*, 1587, 36). However, on closer inspection it becomes obvious that even these idiomatic, apparently empty phrases contain such moral implications that give them significance beyond their immediate first references.

In the first example mentioned, the author is listing the names of places where various antiquities, ancient Roman coins and other such treasures have been found in the country, and even though his lists seem to be lengthy as they are, at one point he refuses to go on listing more geographical names, with the explanation that what is not mentioned, “for breuities sake I doe passe ouer in silence” (*DE*, 1577, 92v). This rhetorical aside therefore makes it clear that brevity is a virtue he believes in, and he attempts to avoid committing the sin of garrulousness. While the sin of talking too much may not be listed in traditional religious conduct books, if we use another, more general expression: “excess”, we can easily see how saying too much of anything is a moral issue, since an excess in anything was classified as sinful for a devout Puritan in the late sixteenth century.

The next example refers to another authorial decision, that of the Prophet Ezechiel, to leave a number of sins and errors of Sodom and Gomorrah unsaid: “certaine other pointes which y^e Prophet shutteth vp in scilence” (*DE*, 1577, 97r), but it is not too difficult to find the connections between the Prophetic opinion and the moral judgment of Harrison

himself. The transition the description makes from the abuses practiced in Sodom and Gomorrah to the monstrous and unnatural way of clothing seen in his contemporaries is rather unclear, and the reader may wonder whether it is the Biblical sins or the Tudor practices which would prevent any Commonwealth from flourishing. What is clear, though, is that excess (the word is in fact mentioned in the chapter, once in connection with dress, as “excesse and vanitie,” and once referring to “excesse of diet,” *DE*, 1577, 97r) in anything leads to destruction, not only of the sinner’s body and soul, but of the whole community as well. The condemnation of such sins, and the praise for the silence that covers up such abominations, is reinforced once again at the very end of the chapter, when Harrison repeats how much better it is to stay silent when there is no constancy in the object of his study, the apparels and attires of his fellow countrymen.

The last example, which we can only find in the 1587 edition, in the chapter “Of such Ilands as are to be seene vpon the coasts of Britaine” again appears to be no more than a simple reference to the author’s decision to leave out some unnecessary details, but the explanation Harrison gives for his passing over some matters in silence speaks for itself. He claims that he must not give more details for the following reason:

bicause the true name hereof, as of manie riuers and streames are to me vnknowne, I am the more willing to passe them ouer in silence, least I should be noted to be farther corrupter of such words as I haue no skill to deliuer and exhibit in their kind (*DE*, 1587, 36).

Ignorant verbal excess is again associated with corruption (although there appears to be a hint that he is already guilty of the above mentioned charge), still, he tries not to make the case worse than it really is. What makes this high moral stance slightly controversial, or even hypocritical is the fact that the details he is willing to omit in order to remain morally impeccable, are actually data that he is ignorant of, therefore it does not seem to be such an unbearable sacrifice on his part to give up their detailed description.

Despite the diversity of the topics the word “silence” appears in connection with, and also despite the fact that most of these occurrences seem superficial rhetorical devices, it is easy to see that all of these instances are connected by a strong moral judgment, the conscious condemnation of excess, which is nothing less than the archenemy of Puritanism, threatening to corrupt man’s body and soul in the form of too many words. Moral issues, and a strong inclination to protect the reader’s soul from corruption leads us on, nonetheless, to the following group of

examples, since a similarly controversial or even hypocritical attitude is often displayed by those parts of the text in which silence appears not as subject matter but in the form of straightforward omissions.

This structural silence is used by the author when he does not want to talk about things he considers irrelevant or unimportant, even though it is not always easy to find on what grounds he dismisses certain things. In one instance, he lists the earlier historical names of 23 towns, sometimes 5-7 items for a single town, and gives estimated numbers of market towns and 17 shires; but in the next chapter, he concludes an exceptionally brief discussion of castles and holds with the following words, without naming a single castle in the country:

And thusmuch briefly for my purpose at this present. For I néede not to make any long discourse of castels, sith it is not the nature of a good Englishman to regarde to be caged vp in a coope, & hedged in with stone walles, but rather to méete wyth hys enemie in the playne fieldes at handstrokes, where he may trauaise his grounde, choose his plot, and vse the benefite of sunne shine, winde & wether, to his best aduantage and commoditie. (*DE*, 1577, 83r)

Palaces not belonging to the “good Englishman” but to the Prince (as Queen Elizabeth was often referred to), however, are of a completely different matter, and Harrison dedicates a whole chapter to their description—the possible reason we will come back to below. Yet even when looking at the issues Harrison deemed irrelevant and consequently left out of his description, we may see that most of these are no small matters in general. In several chapters Harrison is silent about whole social classes, even though there is no question of his knowing or not knowing about them and their lifestyles.

Such an instance can be found in the chapter “Of the foode and diet of the Englishe”¹² when Harrison claims to give a detailed and all-round picture of national eating habits, and his text covers the nobility, gentlemen and merchants, together with artificers and husbandmen, but ignores those who are lower on the social scale, the vast groups of people without any privileges, status or wealth.¹³ This silence is especially striking, as in numbers the poor may have constituted as much as one half of the population at times during the sixteenth century. There are no fully reliable data from the period, especially as the vagrant part of the poor

¹² A more detailed study of eating habits and social inequality can be found in my essay “A Colourful Diet for a Drab Age—Feasting and Fasting in Harrison’s *Description of England*”.

¹³ Kwass, “Equality and Inequality,” 318.

were considered criminals and were therefore eager to remain in hiding, and even guessing their numbers on the basis of the relief provided by statute is difficult. As Steven Hindle mentions, it is “clear that a far greater proportion of the population were in need than were ever on relief,”¹⁴ and A.L. Beier argues that “the numbers of the settled poor varied according to time and place, generally ranging from a fifth to a third of the population.”¹⁵

At the same time, Harrison’s text repeatedly implies that he is aware of more problems than he would care to admit. He knows what miserable substitutes the poor resort to when they have no proper cereals to make bread of; he is aware of the long lines of beggars waiting at the doors of the nobility for the leftovers from meals (which have already been sampled twice, first by the aristocrats and their guests, then by their servants, who get the leftovers from their masters’ meals, and what the beggars get is in fact what remains after both of these groups have already filled their stomachs). Still, he considers it to be wiser to keep silent about these issues, apart from a few subtle hints at his position as an almost omniscient but slightly manipulative narrator.

In many other parts of the volume, we can also read plenty of times phrases such as “I could if I would” or “I might” talk (more) about certain things, and these are the silences that appear to be the most consciously constructed, the most intentionally placed, and the least silent among all. These phrases suggest at some points that the subject Harrison decides not to tell more about is well-known by his readers, such as the magnificence of the Queen’s palaces we have already referred to. His description “Of Pallaces belonging to the Prince” begins with such a humble and apologetic defense of his endeavor to try and talk about something so much above his sight.

It lyeth not in me to set downe exactly the number and names of the palaces, belonging to the Prince, nor to make any description of hir Graces Court, sith my callyng is and hath béene such, as that I haue scarcely presumed to péepe in at hir gates, much lesse then haue I aduentured to serch out & know the estate of those houses, and what magnificent behaiour is to to [sic] séene wythin them. (*DE*, 1577, 83r)

The above apology is, however, controversial: he claims to refuse to go into details because of not being the right authority, because of his position as a humble servant of the crown, and also because of the safe distance he

¹⁴ Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England 1510–1750*, 13.

¹⁵ Beier, *The Problem of the Poor in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, 5.

keeps from his subject both physically and as a writer (who does not “péepe in at hir gates”). Nevertheless, the description of some of the palaces that follows is longer and more detailed than the whole chapter on “Castles and Holds,” even though he makes sure to mention how many others he could talk about, were he trying to describe the true wealth of the English monarch:

There are beside these moreouer dyuers other, but what shal I néede to take vpon me to repeate all, & tell what houses the Quéenes maiestie hath, sith all is hirs, and when it pleaseth hir in the sōmer season, to recreate hir selfe abroad, and viewe the estate of the countrey, euery noble mans house is hir Pallace, where shee continueth during pleasure, and till shée returne againe to some of hir owne, in which she remaineth so long as pleaseth hir. (*DE*, 1577, 83v)

In the second half of the same chapter, we can read about the ways of the Court, and here again, there is a clear attempt at hinting at what he is unable or unwilling to describe, in order to make it look even more magnificent—beyond words, in a sense.

I myght finally describe the large allowances in offices, and yerely lyueries, & thervnto the great plentie of Golde and Syluer Plate, the seuerall péeces whereof, are cōmonlye so great and massye, and the quanty therof so abundantly seruing all the housholde, that if Midas were nowe liuing and once againe put to his choise, I thinke hée coulde aske no more, or rather not halfe so much, as is there to be seene and vsed. But I passe ouer to make such néedelesse discourses, resoluing my selfe, that euen in this also the excéeing mercy and louing kindenesse of God doth woonderfullye appeare towards vs, in that he hath so largely indued vs with these his so ample benefites. (*DE*, 1577, 84r)

The belief in divine Providence and the perfect order of worldly affairs is therefore apparent when Harrison is justifying the ways of the court (although the same attitude is missing when he describes either the criminal activities of lower classes, or the abuse of power that he can witness at fairs and markets). What is most probably somewhat exaggerated, however, is the moral and diligent behavior of courtiers (compared to the “lewde behaiour,” “whoredōe, swearing, rybaldry atheisme, dicing, carding, carowsing, drunkennesse, Glotony, quareling, and such lyke inconueniences” (*DE*, 1577, 84r) that are used in the courts of other, foreign Princes. Nevertheless, one might wonder why a quarter of the chapter (almost an entire page) is dedicated to the description of the severe punishment of those who act against the peace within the court, with gory

details of who and how shall chop off the right hand of the trespasser, in the presence of how many officials, how the hot iron, the vinegar and cold water, the red wine and the seared clothes are used, and how the Sergeaunt Surgeon sears “the stump when the hande is taken from it” (*DE*, 1577, 84r–v). The emphatic description of the punishment of offenders implies that behind the idealized façade, there may still be imperfections, but it is probably reality that is silenced, for the sake of an educational purpose or a higher order. Such prescriptive rather than descriptive passages display the enthusiastic Puritan minister’s wishes rather than the real affairs at court—or, what is also possible, they may be telltale signs of a strong censorship that makes the author cautious when describing such touchy matters.

Censorship is certainly a relevant matter when talking about silence in a text, since this is the institutional practice through which silence may become a political issue. While it is clearly speculative to trace censorship behind such isolated sentences, it is also known that the publication of the first edition of Holinshed’s *Chronicles* had to be “halted” and certain “offending pages excised”¹⁶ from the work because the authorities were annoyed by the way some events during Henry VIII’s reign were treated. Not even the second edition could avoid a similar fate; Sarah A. Kelen’s case study on censorship and the general “politics of control” offers detailed illustration from the third volume of the *Chronicles*, during the printing of which “160 pages from the records of the later years of Queen Elizabeth’s reign were cancelled.”¹⁷ Although Cyndia Susan Clegg argues that not all historical writing was considered as suspicious by either Elizabeth or James I, neither does she deny the fact that Holinshed’s *Chronicles* were certainly treated as such,¹⁸ and in this way confirms the influence of censorship shaping Tudor chronicles.

We could go on listing chapters in Harrison’s *Description* in which he avoids the discussion of certain sensitive or controversial topics, sometimes with the excuse that his vocation makes him unfit for such discourses, as for instance a clergyman should by definition not know much about laws: “for asmuch as I am no lawier, & therfore haue but lyttle skylle to procéede” (*DE*, 1577, 99r) in such a description (but then he does proceed for several pages, of course¹⁹), or about armor and its use:

¹⁶ Hager, ed., *Major Tudor Authors*, 245.

¹⁷ Kelen, “It is dangerous (gentle reader),” 709.

¹⁸ Clegg, “Censorship and the Problems with History in Shakespeare’s England,” 48–69.

¹⁹ As I have suggested in my essay “Outlaw or Above the Law? Legal Issues in William Harrison’s *Description of England*” at I believe Harrison’s long

I would write here of our maner of going to y^e wars, but what hath the long blacke gowne to doe with glistering armour, what acquaintance can there be betwixt Mars and the Muses, or how should a man write any thing to the purpose of that, wherewith he is nothing acquainted (*DE*, 1577, 87r).

The list of such asides, comments and explanatory (or apologetic) remarks would be almost endless, nonetheless the above mentioned examples are sufficient to illustrate if nothing else then the strangely uneven but often suppressive authorial attitude that characterizes William Harrison's *Description of England*, resulting in a text whose silences also resonate with meaning.

What seems to be clear is that the silences in the text, in whatever form they appear, tell us many exciting tales about the religious and political allegiances of the author, together with his views on contemporary society, and even about the official version of the state of affairs that he was supposed to—or that he decided to—disseminate in his *Description of England*. And where there are striking differences between the official and the personal images of Tudor society, how shall we know which of these is closer to the truth? Perhaps the most helpful approach is the assumption that the truth is always silent, and can only speak through a multitude of individual voices, one of which is that of William Harrison.

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