Vanishing Voices

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Silence(s) in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot and R. S. Thomas

By

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NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS AND REFERENCES

References to the analysed works by Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot and R. S. Thomas use the abbreviations listed below and are given to the following editions:

CLP	R. S. Thomas, *Collected Later Poems, 1988–2000* (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 2004).
CP	R. S. Thomas, *Collected Poems, 1945–1990* (London: Phoenix, 2000).
CPP	T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004).
Journals	Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Journal and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Humphrey House (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).
SE	T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).
Sermons	Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Christopher Devlin (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).
PW	Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Norman H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

All Bible quotes are from the *Authorized (King James) Version.*

INTRODUCTION

How remarkable is Your silence in everything
– John Paul II, *The Roman Triptych*

Great poetry is a mosaic inlaid into silence
– Max Picard, *The World of Silence*

In his 1948 book *The World of Silence*, the Swiss phenomenologist Max Picard, noted: "one cannot imagine a world in which there is nothing but language and speech, but one can imagine a world where there is nothing but silence."[1] Paradoxically, even the first sentence disrupts the immaculate whiteness of the page and breaks what the present study intends to approach and define, namely silence. When words occur, silence disperses. Or, perhaps the words occur because silence is there, preceding every sound and falling after them. Silence's very nature makes it ungraspable. It reveals the tension between the cognisable and non-cognisable, logical and illogical, rational and irrational. There is the silence of presence and of absence, the silence of consensus and of intimidation. While it is possible to close one's eyes, it is not possible to close one's ears. A human being always has the potentiality for listening.

Currently, this potentiality has become a prison – our sense of hearing is constantly besieged by voices and noise. Sara Maitland observes that "in our noise-obsessed culture it is very easy to forget just how many of the major physical forces on which we depend are silent – gravity, electricity, lights, tides, the unseen and unheard spinning of the whole cosmos."[2] Western culture has started to see silence as a dangerous and oppressive absence, which needs to be instantly filled or escaped from.[3] There is a growing indifference to silence, which, strikingly, has developed parallel to the modern insensibility to mystery. In the ongoing process of the demystification of the world, silence has lost its place as the vanguard of the mystery of the inexpressible. And though science has invalidated some questions as insolvable, human agitation keeps on asking about the origin and causality: "Yet – as Heidegger observes – we never know a mystery

[1] Max Picard, *The World of Silence* (East Douglas: Eight Day Press, 2002), 18.
[2] Sara Maitland, *A Book of Silence* (London: Granta, 2009), 20.
[3] Ibid., 117.

by unveiling or analyzing it to death, but only in such a way that we preserve the mystery as mystery."[4]

The uprooting of mystery has accompanied a decline in religiosity. According to Czesław Miłosz, Polish poet and Nobel Prize winner, Christianity is in the process of erosion.[5] We have lost the Word, but we have not gained silence in its place. On the contrary, both the Word and silence have been lost. Today's claims about the silence of God usually concern the prevalence of atheism. As a result, the only silence advocated is the silence of absence and nothingness, a Godless silence; or, to put it differently, a Word-less silence. George Steiner in his *Real Presences* tries to give another interpretation of the abhorrent silence of nothingness. He points out that the spirituality of the modern world is the spirituality of the Easter Eve, one that is suspended between the passion and trauma of Good Friday and the yet uncertain glory of Easter Sunday. This is the longest day in the history of the West. In the Liturgy, Holy Saturday is the only day when no service of Holy Communion is held. It is a day of silence and waiting in the dark, because this is the day when God himself is silenced.

The title of this book refers to both voices and silences. First and foremost, there is the vanishing voice or silence of God. In the course of Judeo-Christian history, various silences have been attributed to God. The present day equates the vanishing voice of God with the vanishing of God. Even the silence of God has been silenced. The three poets Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot and R. S. Thomas belong to the culture of, as Steiner puts it, Easter Eve, in which God seems to be dead. Strikingly, God might also be claimed to be dead as the subject of poetry. The vanishing voice may also suggest the voice of a poet, who attempts to express the inexpressible. The voice, or a poem, may verge on silence, trying to either relegate or embrace it. At times, the voice of the speaker disperses to give way to the voice of the Other, which may come in unexpected guises. Finally, there is an almost visible shift and change in the voices and poetical practice of the three poets in question – from Hopkins's complex verbal construction via Eliot's intellectual meditations, to Thomas's ascetic lines vanishing in silence. The plural form of silence(s) in the title indicates the complexity of the phenomenon and suggests a necessity to approach silence from multiple directions.

The aim of this study is hence to analyse the motives of silence in the poetry of the Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, the representative of High Modernism T. S. Eliot and the contemporary Welsh poet R. S.

[4] Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), 43.
[5] Czesław Miłosz, *O podróżach w czasie* (Kraków: Znak, 2004), 19–31.

Thomas. It seeks to not only contribute to the understanding of the three poets, but also explore the idea of silence in the poetry of religious experience as well as the dynamics of a literary text striving to express the ineffable. Special attention will be placed on the dynamics between thematic and structural manifestations of silence – forms of silence, and silence as a form. After Elisabeth Marie Loevlie, these may be referred to as first and second-degree silence, respectively.[6] The material for this book includes chosen poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins, mainly post-conversion poems by T. S. Eliot and selected poems by R. S. Thomas. Regrettably, since Thomas was the author of more than fifteen hundred poems, some omissions are unavoidable.

The question about the relationship between silence and religious poetry gives rise to many difficulties. It is uncharted territory that in fact may be inscribed in the space delineated by some more troubling questions: what is religious experience? How can it be communicated in language? What is the relationship between words and the Word? What is the relationship between experience and expression, and between religion and literature? What is the relationship between silence and religious experience? Additionally, an attempt to analyse the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot and R. S. Thomas causes yet another difficulty by placing this already abstruse question of silence and religious poetry in the specific context of a post-Christian[7] climate. Contemporary poetic endeavours in their search for silence no longer look for transcendence but rather substitute the Real Presence with real absence. How is the shift towards the poetics of silence reflected in religious poetry? Each of these questions is a separate knotty problem and, though it will be impossible to deal with them all, they will frame further investigation determining the path of analysis. My approach is based upon the conviction that silence is a creative element of language, rather than its opposite. Poetry can make silence speak, and hence silence may become a constitutive part of a poetic text. Consequently, I wish to undertake the task assigned by Merleau-Ponty, namely to "uncover the threads of silence that speech is mixed together with,"[8] and to present Hopkins, Eliot and Thomas as literary (poetic) ministers, practitioners and producers of silence. This

[6] Elisabeth Marie Loevlie, *Literary Silences in Pascal, Rousseau and Beckett* (Oxford: Clarendon Press Oxford, 2003), 30–4.

[7] A term used by Jean Ward in her book *Christian Poetry in the Post-Christian Day: Geoffrey Hill, R. S. Thomas, Elizabeth Jennings* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009).

[8] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," in *Signs*, trans. Richard McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 46.

book is aimed at being an alternative to existing studies undertaking the analysis of silence in the perspective of nihilism and nothingness. It will try to defend silence against silence, i.e. the silence of the mysterious and inexpressible against the silence of the fragmentary and illusive. The poetry of Hopkins, Eliot and Thomas defends the conviction that at the core of existence there is a mystery, an inexpressible wonder.

The choice of the poets who are the focus of this study has been mainly dictated by their particular interest in silence and the inexpressible, and their attempt to find a new language to talk about the Ineffable God and one's experience of the divine. Their poetic activity spans a period of roughly one hundred and fifty years (from Hopkins's birth in 1844 to R. S. Thomas's death in 2000), in which dramatic changes in poetry, but also religion, took place. All those transformations are often dated back to the second half of the nineteenth century, hence the idea to start this study with Hopkins. Taken together, Hopkins, Eliot and Thomas offer an example of unity in difference. Hopkins and Eliot underwent conversion, while Hopkins and Thomas share the experience of not only being poet-priests, but also ministering in Wales – a place they both treasured. Additionally, the Welsh language helped them to acquire their poetic character. Despite the fact that they belonged to different denominations – Hopkins was a Catholic Jesuit, Eliot converted to be a High Anglican churchman and R. S. Thomas was a priest in the Church in Wales – they all drew from a common Christian tradition centred on the Word made flesh. As a result, a religious framework is of great importance in their poetry: it is a source of imagery, symbolism and particular wording.

The poetry of Hopkins and Thomas, and Eliot's post-conversion verse, are fuelled by similar religious questions and doubts. One of the central themes of their poetry is "the experience of man in search of God," a subject recognised by Eliot as a very important one among the usual subjects of poetry and devotional verse, and still very much unexplored by modern poets.[9] Sacred Scriptures, nature, philosophy, theology, the teachings of the Church, the writings of the Church Fathers – these are the sources which often inspired their lines. Another important topic of common interest is that of incarnation – the impossible union, an intersection of the timeless with the temporary. This subject seems to have greatly influenced not only the religious sensibility of the three poets but also their poetic language, which is caught in the movement of word becoming flesh and flesh becoming word. Even though only Hopkins, as a Catholic, had a faithful devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and his poetry

[9] Ronald Bush, *T. S. Eliot: a Study in Character and Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 131.

is often presented as sacramental, Eliot and Thomas seem also to show some signs of longing for the Real Presence.

The poets also shared the experience of living in the sphere of the in-between; their lives were marked by a tension between belonging and not belonging – not only in terms of their religiosity. Hopkins was a Catholic convert among Protestants, and, after moving to Ireland, an Englishman among the Irish. Eliot, among other things, had to contend with double national identity; Peter Ackroyd noted that "he was a 'resident alien' – an appellation to which in various circumstances he attached himself."[10] R. S. Thomas, an ardent Welshmen writing mainly in English, felt estranged from his native language. Rogers says of the poet: "He didn't belong anywhere."[11] Most importantly, it seems that the three poets showed a strong inclination towards silence. Strikingly, the biographers of Hopkins, Eliot or Thomas often describe them as reticent and aloof. R. S. Thomas's confusing taciturnity has become notorious. Eliot was dedicated to his family motto *tace and fac* (be silent and act), and Hopkins's life of a Jesuit was punctuated by the rhythms of silent meditations and retreats. What is of greater concern to this study however is the authors' poetic interest in silence. Even a cursory glance at their works shows that they dedicated some of their verse directly to the problem of silence; they considered it an important element of the human-God relationship. Hopkins's elected Silence, Eliot's Lady of Silences, the unheard music or the Word without a word, Thomas's images of empty churches and *Deus Absconditus* – these are only some of many examples which require systematic analysis and ordering. Furthermore, the three poets constantly struggle against the limitations of a fallen language in order to be able to reach towards the inexpressible,[12] or, to use Eliot's phrase, the "raid on the inarticulate" (EC II *CPP* 179). For that reason, their poems very often touch upon the paradoxical relation between the ineffable Word and impossible words.

Leaving aside the complex issue of literary influences, let me only say that R. S. Thomas, after the death of W. H. Auden and T. S. Eliot, was believed to be the major English poet writing on religious matters. He himself listed Hopkins and Eliot among his favourite poets, along with

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[10] Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot* (London: Cardinal, 1988), 24.

[11] Byron Rogers, *The Man Who Went Into the West: the Life of R. S. Thomas* (London: Aurum, 2006), 64.

[12] The extensive references to *via negativa* and the use of negative language are reasons why critics readily turn to mysticism while analysing the work of any of the three poets. Whereas, undoubtedly, some elements of mystical tradition are present in their works, none of them ever claimed the title of mystic. On the contrary, particularly Eliot and Thomas renounced having any such experience.

Yeats, Stevens and Blake. In a conversation with Molly Price-Owen, Thomas admitted that "reading people like Gerard Manley Hopkins" made him "become interested in the unseen God, the unknown God and link this up with life in a rural area."[13] As to Thomas's view on Eliot, he learned to appreciate him only later in his life;[14] he particularly liked *Four Quartets* and "Ash-Wednesday." In a letter to Simon Barker, Thomas states that what appealed to him primarily were Eliot's tone and rhythms.[15] Interestingly, Eliot refused to publish Thomas's collection of poems (1951), but expressed his hope that someone would.[16] With regard to Hopkins, Eliot recognised his growing importance but was reluctant to give him a prominent place among English poets. The Victorian poet seemed to him to be coloured too much with Jesuitism, that is psychologism and subjective orientation. In *After Strange Gods*, Hopkins is pronounced as a fine but not major poet[17]: "less than classic, less than great."[18] Eliot enjoyed the beauty and passion of his poetry, but believed Hopkins to be too idiosyncratic to become an example to follow.[19] Despite all that, we have to bear in mind that Eliot was always very careful with assessing any new poetry. Perhaps in this light, his rather reserved view of Gerard Manley Hopkins (and also R. S. Thomas) might be understood. For balance, it is notable that, in the years to come, there appeared several other articles[20] in *The Criterion* numbering Hopkins among the major poets. Some further writings by Eliot also show that he learned to appreciate the Victorian poet. In a letter concerning an anthology of modern verse for Faber and Faber, he stated that "Hopkins and Auden are admittedly men who need a good deal of space to get their full effect … I don't think that 20 pages is at all too long for either of them,"[21] and in

[13] "R. S. Thomas in conversation with Molly Price-Owen," *David Jones Journal* 3, no. 1–2 (2001): 94.
[14] Ibid.
[15] R. S. Thomas, "Letters to Simon Barker," in *Probing the God-space: R. S. Thomas's Poetry of Religious* Experience, PhD dissertation (University of Wales, 1991), 294.
[16] Rogers, *The Man Who Went Into the West*, 184.
[17] T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1933), 47–9.
[18] Lesley Higgins, "T. S. Eliot and the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins," in *Essays from The Southern Review*, ed. James Olney (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 135.
[19] T. S. Eliot, "The Music of Poetry," in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 33.
[20] The authors of these were *inter alia* T. Sturge Moor, Michael Roberts and W. H. Auden.
[21] Quoted in Higgins, "T. S. Eliot and the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins," 137.

"Types of English Religious Verse" he acknowledged Hopkins's innovative poetics: "His technical innovations, in form and in vocabulary, are very considerable … they can make him seem a poet rather of the twentieth than of the nineteenth century."[22]

For the sake of clarity and coherence, the three poets Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot and R. S. Thomas are discussed in separate chapters organised chronologically. Such an order helps to show the diversity of each poet's conception and use of silence, yet at the same time the parallel division into subchapters shows the points of contact and some reoccurring themes. Methodologically, the emphasis is always on a literary text and its most immediate context. It seems only appropriate to examine the poems by Hopkins, Eliot and Thomas from a religious perspective, since it allows for, I believe, not only an accurate but also a deeper understanding of the poets' (speakers') experience of silence in the human-God relationship. In each part, I try to develop the method related to the chosen topic, which seems to be required by the analysed poems themselves. Following the traditional exegesis of a religious text I apply close reading, which involves not only a detailed examination of the motives of silence, but also a survey of the various formal aspects of the analysed poems. At times, the texts are approached from the perspective of philosophers who deal with the subject of silence, mainly Max Picard, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Luc Marion, but also Simone Weil. Some readings are also indebted to the theological perspective of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger. The analysis will be underlined by further questions: what is the signifying potential of poetic silence? What forms does silence take within poetic texts? By careful and close study, I thus hope to determine the interrelations between thematic and structural (rhetorical choices, punctuation, idiosyncratic syntax, reticence of style, etc.) manifestations of silence(s). Reading silence(s) in the poetic texts of the chosen authors will, I hope, open an alternative experience to the one offered only at the level of meaning accessible through words. As I assume, silence may be an important and constructive element of a poem, even if it is not its direct subject.

George Steiner underlines that the preoccupation with silence is "historically recent."[23] Nevertheless, silence has already been discussed from a number of perspectives. Researchers have attempted to analyse the meaning of silence within a single author, genre or social practice. Taking

[22] Quoted ibid., 141.

[23] George Steiner, "Silence and the Poet," in *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 46.

into consideration the multiple uses of silence in different traditions, from the metaphysical, epistemological, to cultural, political or psychological, it becomes evident that many theories of silence cannot be discussed in this book and, consequently, certain omissions are inevitable. The following short literature overview will limit itself to presenting the most influential studies on silence with an emphasis on those works which largely contribute to the present work.

Among the collections presenting interdisciplinary approaches to silence, one of the pioneering studies is *Perspectives on Silence* (1985), edited by Deborah Tannen and Muriel Saville-Troike. This is a grand piece of research in the fields of anthropology, psychology and sociolinguistics. The authors emphasise not only that silence does not have to be defined as an absence of sound or that it has a crucial role in the theory of communication, but also that the concepts of silence and sound are relative. A similar approach is presented in two volumes edited by Adam Jaworski: *The Power of Silence: Social and Pragmatic Perspectives* (1993) and *Silence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (1997). Each volume is a collection of essays exploring silence as a powerful means of communication, presenting it in relation to other realities and phenomena. The experience of silence in communication is likewise discussed by Colum Kenny in *The Power of Silence: Silent Communication in Daily Life* (2011). The author's wide approach stretches from analysing silence in literature and religion to the use of silence in therapy or even sport. Though the study seems to lack coherence as Kenny moves freely across subjects, traditions and cultures, it is, beyond doubt, a rich source of references and perspectives on silence. Among other studies theorising silence, two volumes of *Semantyka milczenia* [*The Semantics of Silence*] (2002), edited by Kwiryna Handke, also deserve attention. These collections of essays examine silence in contexts as varied as music, literature and architecture. Dennis Kurzon's *Discourse of Silence* (1998) analyses silence in various discourse types. A concentration on silence as a rhetorical art is presented particularly in the works of Cheryl Glenn and Krista Ratcliffe. *Unspoken: a Rhetoric of Silence* (2004) by Cheryl Glenn explores the way silence and silencing deliver meaning, particularly in the perspective of social and gender studies. Ratcliffe and Glenn's *Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Arts* (2011) recovers women's long-silenced voices. Each of the studies presents Western culture as talkative, with speech being the tool of power and authority.

Importantly, the latter book salvages not only silence as a meaningful subject for theorising, but also its long-ignored counterpart – listening. According to Ratcliffe, listening is not a passive act, but a powerful and

perceptive rhetorical tool, particularly useful in understanding otherness. Recently, there have been several studies devoted solely to the subject of listening, recovering its importance. In her book *The Other Side of Language: a Philosophy of Listening* (1990), Gemma Fiumara shows that the power of discourse has been built at the expense of listening. By referring to such philosophers as Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Gadamer, she shows that listening is indispensable in a fuller understanding of logos. In his poetic meditation *Listening* (2007), Jean-Luc Nancy tries to think listening anew. Among other things, he distinguishes the inwardness of listening from the outwardness of seeing. Contrasting the regime of the visual with listening is also present in Salome Voegelin's *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (2011). The author underlines that listening, unlike sight, bridges the gap between subject and object. Listening is an act which demands commitment.

An attempt to create a philosophy of silence was made by the Swiss philosopher, Max Picard, and his ground-breaking study *The World of Silence* [*Die Welt des Schweigens*] (1948). This book might be approached as either a contemplative philosophy or a philosophical contemplation of silence. It is both poetic and imaginative. For Picard, silence is much more than the absence of sound. On the contrary, it is an autonomous phenomenon: "silence is the firstborn of basic phenomena …"[24] A more systematic approach is presented in Bernard Dauenhauer's *Silence: the Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance* (1980), which is an attempt to systematise various features of the phenomenon of silence under three main profiles: intervening silence, fore and after silence and deep silence. For Dauenhauer, as for Picard, silence and discourse are inseparable. Importantly, he refers to other philosophers who pondered the meaning of silence, namely Heidegger, Sartre and Derrida.

Silence, as an interdisciplinary phenomenon, encouraged many studies to combine the disciplines of philosophy and theology. The two-volume monograph *From Word to Silence* (1986) by Raoul Mortley has been particularly important to this work. It traces the development of negative theology within the context of the Greek term *logos*, which itself underwent several permutations. The timeframe spans from the Presocratics to medieval philosophy. The subject of negative theology seems to be very attractive to (post-)modern philosophers (i.e. Derrida or Marion) and their critics. One of the works which offers a vast range of perspectives on silence and apophatic tradition is Davies Oliver and Denys Turner's *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation* (2008). Undoubtedly, there are countless works devoted to negative

[24] Picard, *The World of Silence*, 21.

theology as well as the Christian practices of silence. I would like to give special credit to a very recent book by Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Silence: a Christian History* (2013), which seems to be exhaustive in its attempt to discuss the depiction of silence in the Bible, negative theology and silence in Christian worship as well as the history of the church. MacCulloch also reveals less favourable silences like those surrounding slavery, the Holocaust or sexual orientation. Among the theological approaches to silence, the most prominent is Hans Urs von Balthasar's analysis of Christ's silences in the chapter "The Silent Deed" from his *Theo-Logic: Truth of God* (1985). Joseph Ratzinger's approaches the silence of the Word, of the Father and the Virgin Mary as well as silence in the liturgy and prayer in the apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* (2008), while Shannon Craigo-Snell examines the motifs of silence in the theology of Karl Rahner (*Silence, Love and Death*, 2008).

Another large field of study is the analysis of silence in literature. Among more general works devoted to the subject of silence and literature is George Steiner's ground-breaking book *Language and Silence* (1967). In Steiner's view, the devaluation of silence in the twentieth century comes as a result of political inhumanity and the advancement of technology leading to mass culture. The two most influential essays from this collection are "The Retreat from the Word" and "Silence and the Poet," which present scientific, literary and religious perspectives on silence. A different approach to literary silence is presented in Richard Bradford's *Silence and Sound: Theories of Poetics from the Eighteenth Century* (1992), which explores textual silences by showing the tension between different types of reading poetry – the poem for the ear (spoken performance) and for the eye (silent poetics).

Silence has been recognised as a particularly suggestive element of drama. Silvia Montiglio in her study *Silence in the Land of Logos* (2010) analyses silence as a theatrical signifier in Greek drama. She presents varieties of silences employed by the ancient dramatists, which form a rhetoric of silence. The subject of rhetorical silences and staged silences is also brought up by Małgorzata Grzegorzewska in her analysis of *King Lear* ("The War of 'Nothings' in *The Tragedy of King Lear*," 2013). The exploration of silence in modern drama (mainly in the examples of Maeterlinck, Chekhov, Beckett and Pinter) is presented *inter alia* by Leslie Kane in *The Language of Silence: On the Unspoken and the Unspeakable in Modern Drama* (1984) and Ewa Wąchocka in *Milczenie w Dwudziestowiecznym Dramacie* [*Silence in the Twentieth-century Drama*] (2005).

In most cases, the studies of silence are devoted to tracing silence in any of its guises (the inexpressibility, the fallibility of language, negations, the ineffable) in the works of particular authors. In my research, I was mainly interested in the studies which deal with either silence in contemporary poetics or poetry facing the inexpressible. My pursuit of poetic silences has been to a large extent shaped by Dianna C. Niebylski's *The Poem on the Edge of the Word* (1993), which discusses the limits of language and the uses of silence in the poetry of Mallarmé, Rilke, and Vallejo; Roy Schwartzman's analysis of silences in William Wordsworth's verse ("The Mother of Sound: a Phenomenology of Silence in Wordsworth's Poetry," 1987), Clodagh J. Brook's *The Expression of the Inexpressible in Eugenio Montale's Poetry: Metaphor, Negation and Silence* (2002), Piotr Śniedziewski's *Mallarmé-Norwid: Milczenie i poetycki modernizm we Francji oraz w Polsce* [*Mallarmé-Norwid: Silence and Poetic Modernism in France and Poland*] (2008), Ewa Borkowska's "Eventide of Words. Paul Celan – a Worshipper of Silence" (1993), Zofia Zarębianka's *Zakorzenienia Anny Kamieńskiej* [*The Roots of Anna Kamieńska*] (1997) and the collection of essays *Semantics of Silence in Linguistic and Literature* (1996) edited by Gudrun M. Grabher and Urlike Jessner (in particular, the essays on Emily Dickinson). All these works try to detect both thematic and structural silences in the poetry of the given authors.

The present book also relies on the vast body of criticism devoted to Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot and R. S. Thomas. Its novelty, however, lies in the absence of studies devoted collectively to the three authors. The interpretative potential of the comparative analysis of the three poets is nevertheless visible in the existing critical works, in which the three poets come in pairs in various configurations, mainly Hopkins-Thomas and Hopkins-Eliot. No doubt, the most natural seems to be the coupling of Hopkins and Thomas, who shared the experience of being poets as well as priests. Such comparative work was undertaken by Tim McKenzie in his *Vocation in the Poetry of the Priest-Poets George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and R. S. Thomas* (2003). McKenzie sees vocation as one of the most dominant elements influencing the three priests' poetry writing. All three encode in verse their pastoral experience of wrestling with God as they struggle to be heard in an age of scepticism and decline of faith. Their vocation as well as language are presented as *Logos*-centric.[25] Apart from just a few articles comparing Hopkins and

[25] It is important to note, however, that McKenzie does not show subtle differences between being a priest in the Catholic Church, High Anglican Church and Church in Wales.

Thomas, e.g. "Comparisons: 'Dover Beach' by Matthew Arnold, 'God's Grandeur' by Gerard Manley Hopkins and 'Here' by R. S. Thomas" by Andy Golding, there seems to be no other study devoted strictly to the two poet-priests. In other critical works on Thomas, Hopkins is mentioned only occasionally. Jean Ward, in her study *Christian Poetry in the Post-Christian Day*, traces some of these comparisons, particularly those regarding the two poets' sacramental view of the world. However, she also provides her own explanation for why Hopkins might be important to Thomas, and presents the latter as the former's disinherited heir.[26]

Strikingly, there are more studies which set together Gerard Manley Hopkins and T. S. Eliot. In *New Bearings in English Poetry: a Study of the Contemporary Situation* (1932), F. R. Leavis forwards a thesis that Hopkins and Eliot, together with Ezra Pound, introduced a new quality into English poetry by revising old traditions. The significance of Eliot is in fact seen in the light of Hopkins's and Pound's innovative character. An emphasis on verse form but also the spiritual preoccupations of Eliot and Hopkins is undertaken in David Morris's *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins and T. S. Eliot in the Light of the Donne Tradition: a Comparative Study* (1953). Consequently, the acknowledgement of Eliot and Hopkins as the most renowned religious poets of the latest period of English literary history, led, *inter alia*, to a study by Philip M. Martin, *Mastery and Mercy: a Study of Two Religious Poems* (1957). Regrettably, this work simply sets aside the analysis of the two poems, without providing any comparative instances or conclusions. In *Studies in Structure: the Stages of the Spiritual Life in Four Modern Authors*, Robert Joseph Andreach shows that Hopkins's poetry is concerned with spiritual growth, and Eliot's with spiritual awakening. One of the most recent works concerned with Hopkins and Eliot as religious poets is *Reading the Underthought: Jewish Hermeneutics and the Christian Poetry of Hopkins and Eliot* (2010) by Kinereth Meyer and Rachel Salmon Deshen. By seeing the two poets as expatriates and religious converts standing between two traditions, the study itself takes a cross-cultural approach and reads their poetry through the strategies of the rabbinic hermeneutic tradition. In a 2011 study by Glenn Hughes, *A More Beautiful Question: the Spiritual in Poetry and Art*, Hopkins and Eliot are again put together as authors whose poetry carries spiritual meaning.

Eliot's lack of enthusiasm for Hopkins may be a stumbling block for the scholars attempting to demonstrate affinities between the two. To elucidate the complex relationship between Eliot and Hopkins , Lesley Higgins's essay "T. S. Eliot and the Poetry of G. M. Hopkins" (1988)

[26] Ward, *Christian Poetry in the Post-Christian Day*, 237-38.

presents a full range of Eliot's published and unpublished comments about Hopkins. According to Higgins, Eliot, even though he never pronounced his recognition of the Jesuit poet, came to appreciate his new poetic patterns, especially the mood and musicality of Hopkins's verse, which he himself grew more fond of in his own writing. Still, in a 1991 essay, "Subtle Souls and Dry Bones: Hopkins and Eliot," Shyamal Bagchee continues to ask whether there is any point in studying the two poets together. His article, analysing not only the dynamics of literary differences but also tracing possible similarities, e.g. compact pattering, seems to come as an affirmative.

As to the analysis of the subject of silence in the works of the three poets, critics of R. S. Thomas most frequently examine this concept. One may even have the impression that every work on Thomas has to inevitably touch on the subject of silence. Very often, however, silence is treated thoroughly but one-sidedly, or discussed with reference to a fairly limited range of poems. Silence is thus discussed as an attribute of the absent God, a characteristic of an empty church, or a condition of the human-God relationship (D. Z. Phillips, *R. S. Thomas: Poet of the Hidden God*, 1986; *From Fantasy to Faith*, 1991; Julian Gitzen, "R. S. Thomas and the Vanishing God of Form and Number," 1983; William Virgil Davis, *R. S. Thomas: Poetry and Theology*, 2007). Recurrently, it is equated with inadequate language or an aspect of negative theology (Vimala Herman "Negativity and Language in the Religious Poetry of R. S. Thomas," 1978; D. Z. Phillips, *R. S. Thomas: Poet of the Hidden God*, 1986, David Lloyd, "'Articulate to the End': R. S. Thomas and the Crisis of Language," 1999; Christopher Morgan, *R. S. Thomas: Identity, Environment and Deity*, 2003). In "The Discipline of Watching and Waiting: R. S. Thomas, Poetry and Prayer" (2002), Barry Sloan touches upon the silence of prayerful waiting.

Nevertheless, there are few studies which try to investigate systematically the varieties of silence which occurred in Thomas's poetry and formed it over the years. Such an attempt was made by Tony Brown in his in-depth article, "Language, Poetry and Silence: Some Themes in the Poetry of R. S. Thomas" (1987). The essay explores poems from different stages of Thomas's poetic career, and points to various silences, starting from the figure of a poet as the silent watcher, the inarticulateness of country people and the fallibility of language, to silence in one's attempt at communicating with God, including God's hostile silence but also God's contact via nonverbal signs, gestures or nature. Importantly, Brown underlines that Thomas's main concern is always the relation between language and an inexpressive ultimate reality. Extensive references to

silence are made by Elaine Shepherd in her book *R. S. Thomas: Conceding an Absence. Images of God Explored* (1996), where she explores both positive and negative images of God and the way they are rendered in poetic speech. She also focuses on formal aspects of poetic language and the way a poem is displayed on the page, and discusses *via negativa* as a linguistic strategy. Even though the subject of silence is not discussed separately, it often surfaces in Shepherd's close readings of Thomas's poems. A similar approach is taken by Przemysław Michalski in his study *"No friendly God …"? (Self-)Manifestations of the Divine in the Poetry of R. S. Thomas* (2016), in which he addresses the question of how the divine becomes manifest in the world. As Michalski seeks the divine imprints, his "gracious donation of being,"[27] in history, nature or in some privileged places (e.g. churches), he inevitably faces the enigma of God's silences, his hiddennes and elusiveness. A comprehensive study of silence is Richard McLauchlan's recent book *Saturday's Silence: R. S. Thomas and Paschal Reading* (2016), which approaches R. S. Thomas's poetry in the context of the paschal dimension of silence – the elusive and bleak silence of the Holy Saturday that defies understanding and resists expression. McLauchlan traces various silences present in the content and form of the poems, and shows how they are all rooted in the paschal silence. He also tries to demonstrate how reading poems and confronting its silences may become a spiritual exercise in itself, transforming the reader and their theological language. My book is particularly indebted to Daniel Westover's *R. S. Thomas: a Stylistic Biography* (2011), one of the few works analysing the various prosodies and literary techniques of the poet-priest. Since Westover follows the chronology of Thomas's poetic development, his study highlights the poet's gradual turn to silence as an inevitable and creative element of his poetics.

In the case of Gerard Manley Hopkins, there are few studies which make silence a starting point of critical analysis. On the other hand, there are so many works which only touch upon silence in its different guises, while discussing related subjects, that it is impossible to account for even some of them. Within Hopkins's criticism, these relevant topics are his Jesuit vocation, meditative poetry, inscape/instress and the incommunicability of the self, mysticism and the experience of the absent God. Among the works which guided me in my own search for thematic and structural silences in Hopkins's poetry are studies providing in-depth analyses of individual poems, particularly Aleksandra Kędzierska's *On the*

[27] Przemysław Michalski, *"No friendly God …"? (Self-)Manifestations of the Divine in the Poetry of R. S. Thomas* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, 2016), 252.

Wings of Faith: a Study of Man-God Relationship in the Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins (2001) and Paul L. Mariani's *Commentary on the Complete Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1970). I am also indebted to W. H. Gardner's *Gerard Manley Hopkins: a Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Tradition* (1948), David A. Downes's *Gerard Manley Hopkins: a Study of His Ignatian Spirit* (1960), James Finn Cotter, *Inscape: the Christology and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1972), John Delli-Carpini's *Prayer and Piety in the Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1998), Ewa Borkowska's *Philosophy and Rhetoric: a Phenomenology Study of Gerard Manley Hopkins Poetry* (1992) and *From Donne to Celan: Logo(theo)logical Patterns in Poetry* (1994), James Milroy's *The Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins,* John T. Netland's "Linguistic Limitations and the Instress of Grace in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'" (1989), James I. Wimsatt's *Hopkins's Poetics of Speech Sound: Sprung Rhythm, Lettering, Inscape* (2006) and Brian Willems's *Hopkins and Heidegger* (2009).

Some motifs of silence, which are present in Eliot's poetry, are discussed by William Harmon in his article "T. S. Eliot's Raid on the Inarticulate" (1976). Silence may suggest the loss of articulateness, but also the stillness beyond words. Harmon believes that there is a progression within Eliot's poetry from one type of silence to another. In his analysis, he points to nonverbal utterances, verbal utterances by nonhuman agents and different modes of unutterability. In Viorica Patea's essay "A Study of Questions and Silences in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot" (in *Semantics of Silences in Linguistics and Literature*, 1996), Eliot's verse is presented as a combination of voices and silences. One of the questions the author tries to answer is which voices are silenced and which silences are voiced. The types of silences, both thematic and linguistic, that Patea discusses are the silences of failed questions and the fragmentary nature that underscores communication, silence as moral evasion, silence as death and absence ("Gerontion," "Hollow Men"), as well as the silence of hope and presence (*Four Quartets*). There are thus the meaningless silences of those who avoid speech and the encounter with the divine, but also the significant and purposeful silence of the Ineffable God, who himself cannot be expressed. The various forms that the word unheard takes in Eliot's poems are likewise discussed by Harry Puckett in his article "T. S. Eliot on Knowing: the Word Unheard" (1971). The word unheard is the knowledge one either overlooks, ignores or is unable to speak; this might also be a silent gesture. Silences of spiritual meaning and unmeaning are brought up by George A. Knox in his article "Quest for the Word in

Eliot's *Four Quartets*" (1951), which is also devoted to the subject of Incarnation.

The possibility of approaching silence as a purposeful poetic practice uniting the word and the Word is suggested by Michael Edwards in his insightful study exploring Christian poetics in light of a biblical interpretation (*Towards a Christian Poetics*, 1984), where he offers a meditation on Eliot's language from the vision of its fall in Eliot's early poetry to the attempt at redeeming it in his post-conversion verse. Reflections on poetic silence are particularly evident in Edward's analysis of "Ash-Wednesday" and its central theme – *Verbum Infans*. The incomplete statements and whiteness of the page, he notes, leave space for the Word, which in this way is literally unheard in the poem. Even if language fails and poetry cannot speak of God, it may at least diminish its noise and, as a result, poetic silence may become the promise of the redeemed tongue. A similar observation is made by Ronald Bush, who tracks the stylistic changes in Eliot's poetry and notes that the poet's employment of liturgical language starting from "Hollow Men" brings a new quality to his verse (*T. S. Eliot: a Study in Character and Style*, 1985), as well as Daniel Albright, who suggests that the role of the biblical passages in Eliot's poems are to stabilise the disintegrating world and words (*Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot and the Science of Modernism*, 1997).

Silence in Eliot's post-conversion poetry – which is of interest for this study – is often approached as the question of the ineffable and negative theology. Shira Wolosky, in her work *Language Mysticism: the Negative Way of Language in Eliot, Becket and Celan* (1995), shows that Eliot's theological commitments shaped his linguistic ones and that the poet followed the path of negation in his search for the Inexpressible. Wolosky examines various moments and strategies of negation, and finally turns to silence as a figure transcending linguistic failure. She thus elevates silence over language. Apophatism and, indirectly, silence are referred to when Eliot's poetry is discussed against the mystical tradition, as for example in Eloise Knapp Hay's *T. S. Eliot's Negative Way* (1981), Paul Murray's *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism* (1994) or Barbara Sudal's *Mystical Elements in the Poetry of T. S. Eliot* (2008).

Finally, there are several figures who more or less directly evoke the idea of silence, e.g. the Word unheard, the Lady of Silences, the still point, unheard music and dance. Yet, each of these motifs has attracted many critical responses for various reasons, with silence referred to only in passing. In my approach to these motifs and images, I am mostly indebted to the analysis of Helen Gardner (*The Art of T. S. Eliot*, 1976), John Gatta ("Spheric and Silent Music in Eliot's *Four Quartets*," 1980), Ronald Bush

(*T. S. Eliot: a Study in Character and Style*, 1985), Paul Murray (*T. S. Eliot and Mysticism*, 1994), Ludmiła Gruszewska (*Wizje i re-wizje w poezji Thomasa S.* Eliota [Vision and Re-visions in the Poetry of Thomas S. Eliot] (1996), Michael D. G. Spencer (*Understanding Four Quartets as a Religious Poem*, 2008) and G. Douglas Atkins ("Ash Wednesday: Six Poems. Facing the Truth, Accepting the Silence" in *Reading T. S. Eliot*, 2012).

As the above survey has shown, despite numerous works from different fields, the importance of silence in the output of the English poets of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries has not yet been the focus of systematic interest from critics. I believe that the novelty of this book lies in its correlating the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, T. S. Eliot and R. S. Thomas, as well as its systematic approach to the thematic and structural silences in each poet's verse.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FABRIC OF SILENCE

Defining Silence

"Speech is silver, silence is golden," the well-known proverb goes. Its origins are obscured by the mist of time; however, the first person believed to have written this phrase in English was Thomas Carlyle, a nineteenth-century writer and philosopher.[1] In Book III of *Sartor resartus* (1831), Carlyle's main character speaks extensively of silence:

> Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together; that at length they may emerge, full-formed and majestic, into the daylight of Life … Speech is too often not … the art of concealing Thought; but quite stifling and suspending Thought, so that there is none to conceal. Speech too is great, but not the greatest. As the Swiss inscription says: *Sprechen is silber, Schweigen is golden* (Speech is silver, Silence is golden); or as I might rather express it: Speech is of Time, Silence is of Eternity.[2]

This passage is in praise of silence, presenting it not only as antagonistic to speech, but excelling it in every respect. Silence is equated here with discretion, wisdom, control. Despite the fact that the proverb crowns silence with the religiously tainted gold, it seems to shimmer with more colours and meanings. Silence as something insubstantial resists being measured or divided into smaller units. Max Picard suggests that "silence reveals itself in a thousand inexpressible forms,"[3] and Michel Foucault argues that: "There is not one but many silences."[4] Silence is elusive yet pervasive. It is omnipresent, yet unattainable.

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[1] Colum Kenny, *The Power of Silence: Silent Communication in Daily Life* (London: Karnac, 2011), 4.
[2] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: the Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1831), 174.
[3] Picard, *The World of Silence*, 26.
[4] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 27.

Is silence thus subordinate or superior to language? The troubling existence of silence complicates the relationship between spheres of language, knowing and experience. In the Western tradition, it is speech that has been widely recognised as the distinguishing feature of human beings. Consequently, defining silence in negative terms – as the lack of words, or the lack of sounds – comes as something natural. Silence is often regarded as the background to language. Still, language, which might be threatened by silence, preserves many idiomatic phrases referring to silence. There is the "dead silence" of no sound; the strict, often furtive, secretiveness of the "wall of silence"; there is yet the "pregnant silence" filled with the wealth of meaning; one may "break silence" in order to interrupt a period of soundlessness or conspiracy ("to break the conspiracy of silence"), but one may also "be reduced to silence" – to a state of sullenness and alienation. Silence is equated with acquiescence ("Silence gives consent") or is treated as an ornament which may seem enforced ("Silence is a woman's best garment"). There are paradoxical questions concerning the "sound of silence" – can silence be "deafening"? What does it reveal and what does it conceal? Silence is contrasted with sound and language, but also noise. However, while language and noise may be hushed or deafened, it is not possible to shut one's ears to silence. Its synonyms vary from quiet, stillness, and taciturnity via muteness, dumbness to inexpressibility, ineffability, the unsaid and unspeakable. Various languages differentiate the unintentional silence of the absence of sound (e.g. Latin *silentium*, Polish "cisza") and the intentional silence in a communicative situation (e.g. Latin *tacere*, Polish "milczenie"). Silence might be conceptualised or practiced. It may be nurtured, desired, or rejected. It might be the source of encounter or fright.

Semantic indeterminacy thus seems to be the prime quality of silence. Elisabeth Loevlie warns that "for the critic to approach and define silence is to approach a seductive concept,"[5] all the more that silence withstands empirical observation. However, it is impossible to keep silent on the subject of silence, just as it is impossible to give it a voice. Currently in the academic world there is no argument about the fact that the act of communication consists equally of sound and silence, and the latter should be given as much attention as the former. The researchers, taking into consideration various contexts and modalities of silence, try to find some recurrent features and patterns in the texture of silence(s). Saville-Troike and Tannen, in their *Perspectives on Silence*, classify more than twenty types of silence clustered into several groups, such as institutionally

[5] Elisabeth Marie Loevlie, *Literary Silences in Pascal, Rousseau and Beckett* (Oxford: Clarendon Press Oxford, 2003), 9.

determined, socially-determined, individually determined and non-interactive.[6] Kenny distinguishes and analyses the silences of daily experience – silence may be wise or virtuous (a rule reflected cross-culturally by similar sayings, such as "those who know more, speak less"), modest, cunning ("He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction," Prov. 13:3; 21:23), eloquent, dumbfounded (being lost for words), culpable, strong, weak (silence as a way of suppressing the voices of women or some minorities), ceremonial (silence in liturgy), satisfied, idle, or dead (absolute silence, silence of the dead).[7] Korpel and de Moor attempted to create a classification of reasons for silence in human-divine communication – silence may be the result of offence, of awe or fear, of forbearance, prudence, or incapacity. Finally, there is the incomprehensible divine silence which resists any explanation.

In their study, Korpel and de Moor suggest that, "Silence has to be interpreted to acquire meaning."[8] My aspiration in this chapter is to show the reader how silence has been interpreted in the fields of philosophy, literature and theology so it may acquire some meaning before we move on to its analysis in the works of particular authors. This overview will present not so much a detailed history as some sense of the evolution of the concept. Such awareness is required to place the works of Hopkins, Eliot and Thomas within their rightful context. The knowledge of various tropes and themes and the possible ways of conceptualising silence will be further probed and developed in our interpretation of literary texts.

Silence and Discourse: Philosophical and Literary Approaches

Silence in the land of Logos

In Western culture, the understanding of the term "silence" draws heavily on the narrative of Judeo-Christian and Greek tradition. In general, two approaches to silence might be discerned: negative and positive. The former presupposes the dialectic character of the language-silence relationship, claiming that silence is opposed to language and can only be defined in terms of the cessation of sound. According to this line of thinking, silence begins where philosophy or literature ends. A positive

[6] Muriel Saville-Troike and Deborah Tannen (eds.), *Perspectives on Silence* (Norwood: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1985), 16–17.
[7] Kenny, *The Power of Silence*, 5–46.
[8] M. C. A. Korpel and Johannes C. de Moor, *The Silent God* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 55.