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Introduction

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- 1 This volume offers a selection of the papers delivered at the annual FATHOM (French Association of Thomas Hardy Studies) conference organized by Annie Ramel at Université Lumière-Lyon 2 / École Normale Supérieure de Lyon, on October 22-23, 2010. The subject was “Silence in Thomas Hardy’s Work”.
- 2 The first article of this volume, “Thomas Hardy’s Silences”, by **Jean-Jacques Lecercle**, begins with a philosophical analysis of the concept of silence, offering a subtle and thorough taxonomy of the various types of silences one may find in literary texts. The article is in itself a brilliant introduction to the question of silence, which makes pointless any attempt at exploring the concept at length. The article then goes on with examples taken from Hardy’s works, illustrating the definitions given in the section entitled “a garland of silences”.
- 3 So our introduction will be brief: any work of art, one might say, is constructed around a core of silence. Silence may be what punctuates a text and causes the emergence of meaning. It may be the enigmatic silence of the unsaid, the secret, the unavowed, those gaps in a text that open space for interpretation, against the flaunted meaning which the narrative voice would have us believe. Both forms would be classified as “linguistic” by Lecercle. But then, there is also the silence of the unspeakable, the ineffable (Lecercle’s “aesthetic silence”), the point where voice jettisons sense and becomes loaded with affect, turning into a jubilatory, vibratory substance. Michel Poizat, in *The Angel’s Cry*, distinguishes between two silences:

There is the silence that cuts the phonic continuum with its presence, that, through repetition, rhythmic pulsation, sets off the scansion of presence and absence and brings forth the signifier, the Word. But it may also cease to work away at the sonorous material; it may cease to beat, may yield its place entirely to the sonorous real in all its continuity without cutting it apart. The drive to effacement, this death instinct—for it is indeed a matter of the death instinct—will itself disappear and become silent—the silence of the drives—abandoning the field, after experiencing

the emptiness of its object, to the continuous 'real', which, escaping all symbolizing processes as well as all naming, is cast out forever into absolute, deadly silence, supreme fascination and horror. (Poizat 1992, 92)

- 4 In that perspective, silence may appear not just as “a negation of noise” in a system of signifying oppositions, but as “a positive entity”—to use Hardy’s own words in *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (Hardy 127).
- 5 Those fundamental distinctions being made, our brief introductory words will raise a few questions, to be developed along four thematic axes: silence and literature, silence and vision, silence and faith, silence and society. The writers in this volume have addressed the questions pertaining to silence by following one or several of those axes.
- 6 The relation between literature and silence is a crucial question, since the voice of the text is *a priori* silent: it becomes resonant only if the reader lends it his/her own voice. And as Lecercle argues, a narrative calls a world into being, and is wrested out of the pre-existing silence—a silence to which it returns when the narrative has been concluded and read. In a narratological perspective, the question of silence is of course essential, for the Hardyian text is riddled with stylistic silences of all kinds.
- 7 If we accept that the task of a writer is, by the power of the written word, “to make you hear, to make you feel, [...] to make you *see*” (Conrad 147), how does silence relate to vision? Some of the scenes in Hardy’s novels are purely visual, “and therefore silent” (Lecercle). Does the silent voice of a text help conjure up those “moments of vision” so essential to Hardy’s writing, and to the reader’s pleasure? Do such moments work as climaxes of revelatory intensity, in which silence is meaningful, or do they fill us with awe as they make us hear “the silence of infinite spaces”?
- 8 For in the major incidents of the characters’ tragic destinies, or in Hardy’s poetry, the natural world—though not truly hostile—remains essentially silent, under skies emptied of any transcendence. One is by necessity led to question the ambiguous status of Nature in Hardy’s work. The eternal silence of infinite spaces may then be related to the crisis of faith, in a world where men are deprived of any divine interlocutor, and of any “guardian Angel”.
- 9 One may ponder over the socio-economic forces which impose silence on some social categories in the diegesis of Hardy’s fiction. The “violence of language” (Lecercle) at work in Hardy’s texts is often the violence inflicted on women in a society that does not allow them to speak. In a Lacanian perspective, the repression of the feminine voice can be understood as the need to repress the disturbing, dangerously attractive vocal object—for “the voice beyond sense”, the voice which “detains in its innermost reaches that inaudible and unbearable object-voice” is equated with femininity (Dolar 16-17). Do Hardy’s writings bear witness to that fascination with the feminine voice, or rather with the *silencing* of the feminine voice?
- 10 **Tomomi Nagatomi**, in “The Narrative Silence in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*”, starts from Elaine Showalter’s remark about a gap in the novel (Elizabeth-Jane is never seen confronting Henchard with his selling his wife and child to a sailor), and she sets out to show that the narrative blanks concerning three characters usually considered shallow or “flat”—Elizabeth-Jane, Farfrae, and Lucetta—are not due to the author’s negligence but

are a form of narrative silence in a carefully contrived textual structure. The difficulty for Hardy was to veil the awkward fact of Elizabeth-Jane's illegitimacy, and to make it acceptable for her to be promoted to a central position in her community, through her marriage with Farfrae. The construction of the character as Lucetta's double serves that purpose, through a complex process of both identification and differentiation. Thus the unsaid, the unavowed, when probed into by a perceptive reader, turn out to be linguistic signs loaded with meaning.

- 11 **Michel Morel** is another perceptive reader who, in "Narrative Silences in *Far from the Madding Crowd*", investigates three typographical figures: "2m rules", simple "m rules", and ellipses (or "spaced dots"). The article offers a thorough study of those figures, whether they are in the form of aposiopesis or interruption, whether their function is conventional, mimetic, actorial or auctorial, etc. Probing into sudden suspensions of speech, it shows how they create suspense, ironic understatements, eloquent undertones or dialogic impulses. Surprisingly, the article comes to the conclusion that those blanks, left for the reader to fill in, work subliminally in an axiological direction and tend to articulate the Victorian consensus. The spaces seemingly left open for interpretation are in fact saturated with meaning as they achieve "a maximum effectiveness in the guidance of the reader".
- 12 **Gildas Lemardelé**, in "Silence, Secrecy and Sacredness in Hardy's Fiction: the example of *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*", focuses on intensely visual scenes in Hardy's fiction, the baptism of Sorrow in *Tess*, and the scene in which Bathsheba opens Fanny's coffin, two episodes steeped in silence that revolve around a baby's death and that have a powerful iconoclastic, as well as iconographic tension. The scenes may be read either as a subversion of the sacred, pointing ironically to the silence of God in a designified universe, or as pivotal moments of revelatory intensity, where silence can signify the birth of a new meaning. Silence then may be construed either as emptiness or as the apex of sacredness. For, as Lemardelé points out, Hardy is an agnostic who can never quite give up the sacred, appropriating mystical images and patterns in his fiction.
- 13 **Nathalie Bantz**, in "The Silencing of the Attempting Pen in Four of Hardy's Works: Towards a Hardyan Conception of the Writing Artist", starts from the silence imposed on "the attempting pen" by Victorian publishers (who silenced Hardy's own voice when they refused his first novel), and by the all the keepers of Victorian propriety. Drawing a parallel between the plight of the writer and that of women writers as silenced voices, she focuses on three women in Hardy's fiction who make (unsuccessful) attempts at writing: Elfride (*A Pair of Blue Eyes*), Ethelberta, whose writing hand turns into the hand given in marriage, Lizzie ("The Distracted Preacher"), and Ella ("An Imaginative Woman"). Then, basing her analysis on the concept of the "Neutral" developed by Barthes, she sets out to show how irrelevant and wrong it was to discriminate against woman writers (as Victorian publishers so often did) because the artist's voice is ungendered.
- 14 **Annie Ramel** in "The Sound of Silence in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*" chooses to study silence not as "the mere negation of noise" but as "a positive entity". In Hardy's texts sound is often muted, displaced to the visual register—as though it aspired to the condition of silence. Voice, especially when feminine, is frequently hushed, choked, throttled, stuck in the throat. The suppression of voice raises a question: while it is certainly a form of social oppression, an effect of "the violence of language" exerted by a dominant culture, one may also ponder over the fascination of the writer for "the sound of silence", for those dull, subdued, muffled sounds so characteristic of his

fictional world. Perhaps the appeal of Hardy's texts lies in those delicately poised states of quasi-audibility that his poetic prose makes us hear with our eyes, in an attempt to make audible the inaudible object-voice.

- 15 **Laurence Estanove's** article, "'Pensive Mutes': Thought and Silence in Thomas Hardy's Verse" follows in a similar vein, raising the crucial issue of the relation between silence and poetry. Indeed, silence is the subject of the poems analysed by the author: the silence of things inanimate in Nature (the "pensive mutes" that are speechless yet feel and think), the silence of the dead, the silence that could be part of Lecercle's "metaphysical silence" (the silence of God who fails to respond to the call of human voices), and the silence of the "few" who hold the truth but will not profess their unconventional opinion publicly—one of them being the poet, who cannot voice his agnosticism. Yet the poems do precisely what they claim to be unable to do, as they somehow succeed in saying what cannot be said, and silence is their very mode of expression. What the article demonstrates is the point made by Maurice Blanchot, quoted by Jacques Rancière, for whom a literary work is "a rich resting-place of silence" (Rancière 2011, 32)¹.

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NOTES

1. "un riche séjour de silence" (Rancière 1998, 9).

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