Editors' Preface

Little words that broke up the thought and dismembered it said nothing. "About life, about death; about Mrs Ramsay" – no, she thought, one could say nothing to nobody. The urgency of the moment always missed its mark. Words fluttered sideways and struck the object inches too low.

<div align="right">

Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

</div>

Literature's engagement with silence as well as with the pitfalls and imperfections of communication has a long tradition. In the early twentieth century, a preoccupation with the limits and limitations of language was one of the hallmarks of modernist poetry and fiction. Subjectivity, emotional and mental solitude, the centrality of inner life and the inevitable impediments to intersubjective communication were constant components of the modernist paradigm; Virginia Woolf had a special interest in literature's capacity to represent, or hint at, the unsayable and the unsaid, the missing and the absent. And few twentieth-century writers were as concerned with this part of the modernist legacy as Samuel Beckett. His writings consistently and relentlessly probe the limits of language, expose gaps in knowledge and breakdowns in communication, oscillating between the dichotomies of logorrhea and silence, persistent presence and absence.

In *Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett* (1967), Ihab Hassan acknowledged Beckett and Miller as representatives of a new kind of writing which contained its own ironic denial; Hassan stated that "Miller stretches literature beyond its usual limits and Beckett shrinks it to naught; but expansion and contraction end by serving the same purpose, which is to alter drastically the function of words within any given literary form. The alteration tends toward an entropic state that I have metaphorically called silence" (1967: 31).

In that same year, George Steiner published another seminal book, *Language and Silence*, which placed the phenomenon in a historical and cultural context. Steiner observed that muteness, or the failure of language may be an individual or collective response to trauma, tragedy and liminal experiences. Writing in the aftermath of the Second World War, he argued that in view of language's inability to address atrocities such as those humankind had recently witnessed (and committed), silence, paradoxically, may be more eloquent: "The 'silence' in the title of this book is that which seemed the only adequate, the only decent, response to the violations of humane speech, to the political bestiality and mockery of man

that had come over Western Europe (and which had its immediate counterpart in Stalinist Russia)" (1985: 15).

However, objecting to Hassan's influential coinage "literature of silence", Edith Kern claimed that literature cannot literally fall silent (1971: 69–70); instead, she invoked and emphasised Claude Mauriac's description of the more likely response of writers to the un-sayable: "the writer who pits himself against the unsayable must use all his cunning so as not to say what the words make him say against his will, but to express instead what by their very nature they are designed to cover up: the uncertain, the contradictory, the unthink-able" (qtd. in Hassan 1967: 120).

Indeed, the contemporary English novelist Graham Swift contends that "the spaces between and around words can have their unspoken resonances" (2009: 103). Words are literature's prior medium, but, paradoxically, literature communicates meaning, as Swift suggests, also through what is not said; and in between words and a complete lack of com-munication there lies an obscure zone of what has been erased, what remains concealed or half-concealed. The figure of ellipsis seems especially apposite to describe that which is, paradoxically, communicated through concealment, erasure or obfuscation. In its basic sense, ellipsis is defined as "the omission from a sentence of a word or words that would be required for complete clarity but which can usually be understood from the context" (Bal-dick 2004: 77). In a broader sense, ellipsis in a literary text may signify inarticulacy, failures of communication, deficiencies of knowledge and memory, the tabooing of a subject, or the suppression of a voice.

The articles published in the present volume are extended versions of papers which were originally presented at a seminar on "Ellipsis: Silence, Absence and Noncommunica-tion in Contemporary Literature", which took place at the Institute of English Studies, Jagi-ellonian University in Kraków, on 18th May 2019. The participants were asked to consider the figure of ellipsis in literature from a variety of perspectives, and this collection of es-says offers a spectrum of how the absent, the unsaid, the unsayable, or "that frail partition between the ill-concealed and the ill-revealed, the clumsily false and the unavoidably so", as Beckett defined silence in *Murphy* (1957: 257), are represented in selected Anglophone twentieth- and twenty-first century texts.

Through her reading of Pat Barker's recent novel *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), Iza-bela Curyłło-Klag examines the omitted episodes and suppressed voices in the *Iliad*, one of the foundational texts of Western literature. The contemporary English novelist tries to recover the traumatic stories of women that are "ill-revealed" in Homer's original. Barbara Klonowska investigates the extensive use of ellipsis in Peter Carey's historical fiction, espe-cially his neo-Victorian novel *The Chemistry of Tears* (2012). In her article, she traces nar-rative gaps and omissions, pointing out the strategies by means of which the novel forges connections between the Victorian age and contemporaneity.

Two articles in the volume address Beckett's writings. Kinga Jęczmińska analyses the voice in *The Unnamable* and relates it to the question of the definition and mode of exis-tence of the mind in *The Trilogy*. Aleksandra Kamińska examines Beckett's use of silence in drama, focusing particularly on *A Piece of Monologue*, and compares it with the treatment of the theme of death in *Here We Go*, a play by the contemporary British playwright Caryl Churchill. Referring to Leslie Kane's distinction between "silences" and "Silence", she com-pares the employment of both in the drama of Beckett and Churchill.

Krystian Piotrowski analyses Christine Brooke-Rose's probing of the limits of thought and language in her experimental novel *Amalgamemnon* (1984). Mark Haddon's 2003 novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* also addresses the issue of the limits of language and signification, but from a very different perspective – its narrator is an autistic boy struggling to understand his world and narrate his story. In his discussion of the novel, Tomasz Dobrogoszcz emphasises the protagonist's employment of graphic elements to compensate for the deficiencies of his language.

In her analysis of *Her Body and Other Parties* (2017), a collection of stories by the American writer Carmen Maria Machado, Katarzyna Więckowska argues that in Machado's debut volume the omnipresence of the motif of story-telling is contrasted with omissions, silences and narrative incompleteness. Marta Goszczyńska examines two collections of short stories by the Irish-born writer William Trevor, in whose fiction secrecy and silence, as she claims, are both thematic preoccupations and narrative strategies.

Three papers are concerned with the meaning of silence, secrecy and suppression in a specifically Irish context. Beata Piątek reads Anna Burns's Man Booker Prize-winning novel *Milkman* (2018) as a linguistically innovative way of writing about the political tensions and divisions in Northern Ireland. Leszek Drong's article addresses the cultural and political legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, especially the "culture of silence", which imposed a code of secrecy on the paramilitaries. In particular, the author considers The Belfast Project, aimed at breaking the code and recording for posterity the concealed, the tabooed and the unsayable in recent political history. He also indicates how this aspect of life in Northern Ireland is reflected in the writings of Seamus Heaney, David Keenan, Seamus Deane and David Park. The third text on Irish themes is Katarzyna Bazarnik's interview with Gerard Mannix Flynn and Maedhbh McMahon, creators of *Land Without God*, a documentary about the institutional abuse of children by the Irish State and Church, and the history of the tabooing of the subject.

Teresa Bruś demonstrates the use of ellipsis in the representation of personal experience in her discussion of Brian Dillon's essays, while suggesting that for him ellipsis is also a form of aesthetic indeterminacy.

Wojciech Drąg offers an in-depth analysis of the combination of visual and textual material in literary collages, Graham Rawle's *Woman's World* (2005) and Tom Phillips's *A Humument* (2016), paying special attention to the interplay of the presence and absence of the original sources in collage novels.

Finally, Bożena Kucała reviews a book by Duncan White, *Cold Warriors: Writers Who Waged the Literary Cold War* (2019), in which the author recounts in detail writers' involvement in the ideological struggles of the twentieth century. It is argued that the fact that literature was promoted, or conversely, silenced and suppressed, depending on the political purpose for which it was used, testified to its power and genuine influence on people's minds.

Bożena Kucała, Beata Piątek

Bibliography

Baldick, Chris 2004. *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Beckett, Samuel 1957. *Murphy*. New York: Grove Press.

Hassan, Ihab 1967. *Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Kern, Edith 1971. Review: *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller & Samuel Beckett* by Ihab Hassan, *Comparative Literature* 23, 1: 68–70.

Steiner, George 1985 [1967]. *Language and Silence: Essays 1958–1966*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber.

Swift, Graham 2009. *Making an Elephant: Writing from Within*. London: Picador.