

Silence

Often characterised as merely “the complete absence of sound”; silence, the prohibition of commotion and unrest often carries an unknown cause, and one little questioned. Silence exists per se, and yet variations of responses towards an impending noiselessness is often seen to send people grappling for stability, one sought after and obtained from noise.

This text explores the phenomenon behind silence in literature and religion, a general rejection of silence, and the emptiness that lacks a proper response. The following will introduce the theme of an absence in truth and purpose behind silence, made evident in the coming texts: *The Great Gatsby* and *Othello*, and the presence of religion.

In *Great Gatsby*, the narrator Nick shows the loud noise of the raucous American 1920s party to be shallow. The narrator describes the party at Gatsby’s residence as follows, “[...] the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music, and the opera of voices pitches a key higher. Laughter is easier minute by minute, spilled out with prodigality, tipped out with a cheerful word.” In this passage voices are characterised as a performance, implying dramatized emotion and artificiality. Their laughter also indicates a desperation to fill the silence, as it is seen to be fuelled by giddiness. The frequency of laughter is increased and amplified, yet it is not paralleled by an increased humor in its nature, which then reflects their detachment from reality as they are willing to laugh without purpose or objective. The nature of their laughter is then compared to liquid, and while its volume suggests vocality, its fluidity further portrays its lack of objective. This reflects the reckless spirit of the 1920s which while it was fuelled by consumerism and prosperity, also seemingly had an absence in direction. Until the end, what buries this silence is a pandemonium without substance.

However as *The Great Gatsby* nears its end, in face with silence, Nick realizes the artificiality of the society around him, and thus feels bleak. As the season of disarray and mayhem eventually recedes as a lore, Nick receives a moment of clarity, of truth, yet becomes disoriented. A significant moment of the plot owes to Myrtle’s car accident, with its ending none other than Gatsby atoning for Daisy’s grave error, leading onto Gatsby’s murder; tragic but without purpose. However, what eventually surfaces is Daisy’s inability to make a phone call, which shows her lack of effort made to inquire for Gatsby’s funeral or to admit her faults. She responds to her fatal mistake, whether a mishap or intentional, with nothing but silence. Nick’s sentiments are then unveiled as he states “Gatsby’s house was still empty when I left...”, before going on to call it a “huge incoherent failure of a house.” This statement is monotone yet oozes with Nick’s disconcertment towards this morose and abrupt changes made to an environment once ornamented with vibrant hues and amplified chaos, now draped in a silent devastation and hollowness. This house had accommodated large scale parties and noise, yet it all disintegrates into silence after his death. The house emerges as an “incoherent failure” as Nick questions the purpose of Gatsby’s goal behind the house and the parties. It fails because the goal of his aspirations Daisy is ultimately shallow and unable in reality to fulfill his yearning, and so silence is left. Nick rounds up his disillusioned universe with “Most of the big shore places were closed now... the inessential houses began to melt away...” The absence of substance in these housing units is made so evident following the perishing of main characters, each devoid of truth and justification. This is Nick’s last night

in Long Island and he chooses to leave as he is haunted by the abrupt transformation in this place. He is sickened by the superficiality the silence has revealed.

On the other hand, 'noise' in the lengthy soliloquies in Othello is portrayed as influential, yet masks the insecurities of characters. Iago states, "I'll pour this pestilence into his ear:" "Pour" again creates the idea of fluidity, possibly showing that there is a lack of truth beneath his eloquent rhetoric. "Pestilence" then describes his lies to be of a corrupt substance, indicating his ability to manipulate others. However albeit the heart of the matter is fabricated and false, he still possesses the ability to influence people's minds. Most lines belong to Iago, and his lust for audience demonstrates how the "noise" created from his eloquent rhetoric is the veil to an improper motive. The only motives we are provided with are jealousy - flimsy excuses with no inherent meaningfulness behind the noise and by its nature.

Iago is then portrayed to have a lust for audience, as seen by his ability to control and manipulate others throughout the entire course of the play, as he paints sceneries of lust, betrayal and jealousy that originated solely from his foul descriptions.

He says,

"I know not if't be true;
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety."

His confession towards having a "mere suspicion" highlights an obliviousness towards truth, and his impulsive declaration to execute his plan "as if for surety", reaffirms the meaningless nature per se. What is behind Iago's excuses is in fact his need to fill in an impending silence as seen towards the end of the play; one absent of truth and purpose. He is lacking in an objective and rationale, yet his confidence veils his uncertainties, the reassurance he obtains from the awareness towards the existence of an audience feeds on the intricate patterns on his theatrical mask, and enshrouds a calculative massacre void of legitimate reasoning. appears to be lacking in an objective doesn't seem to have a reason for what he's doing, but needs to pretend as if he does.

For this reason, Iago rejects silence. And yet excuses eventually meet ends, and Iago submits to the impending silence beneath his reckless impulse; and as his lengthy soliloquies recede into an unexplained silence near the play's close; the implication of terror is evident due tomorrow to his unknown, unexplained intentions. Yet although Iago is presented with the most lines, the "great speaker" of the play ends his speech almost instantly, thus leaving the audience hanging and in a state of bewilderment. Silence leaves the audience in confusion and desperate for answers, as the silence hints at the harrowing meaninglessness of the conclusion of the tragedy. There is no explanation towards the massacre he had created, and there is silence in tragedy as there is the element of unnerving sadism, the cause of the heartbreaking element of the play.

Last but not least, modern day psychologists and also Christians identify 'noise' as a mechanism to distract ourselves from a feeling of emptiness, and yet to recoil as such emptiness eventually catches up to our yearning for noise.

Their belief in a higher power, one that leads to an internal serenity that transcends standard meditation, fills themselves with solace and tranquility that could be obtained from a

room for imagination, reflection and repentance. We see that often times silence is obtained and uncovered from solitariness and seclusion, and yet from above texts, a 'lack of higher power' appears as an intriguing factor to characters' inability in finding repose - as seen in the Great Gatsby, the only god is imprinted on a commercial advertisement, and although the play Othello carries a religious element, "God" is never brought to light nor has an active role, thus offers no comforting answers.

From this we question if the presence of God is a necessity in reaching soundlessness. It is made evident that what offers the religious moments of serenity is their willingness to allow another force, another source of comfort to take over the harrowing meaningless in minds. This break from stimulus and activity is an opportunity for God to resolve their feeling of emptiness, leading to a sense of serenity rather than bleakness and frustration. Thus ones who are not religious opt to adopt another approach, such is to seek solace by embracing the existing silence, a method dissimilar to "letting God enter". However, what makes this serenity obtained from silence differ from the bleakness and desolation in former examples is in fact the addition of unsaid answers, thus the change in nature of surroundings. The answers that are acquired, in this matter, originates from self-reflection and retrospection, or in other cases, consolation from external, quiet forces.

As simple and vague the subject of silence might appear, it is often difficult to label this quietude as one that extend towards webegone ends. And as one implores for a solution in face of the daunting truth of a seeming lack of care, a lack of answers; in the face of this silent confrontation, whether to get lost in it or to embrace it carries a mark of uncertainty. Thus as silence enshrouds its tumultuous crowds, what remains for those are underlying hues of lugubriosity, and for others, a melodious ode to serenity.

