

CALL FOR PAPERS – INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
SOCIÉTÉ D'ÉTUDES ANGLO-AMÉRICAINES DES XVII^e ET XVIII^e SIÈCLES
(SÉAA XVII-XVIII)

15-16 JANUARY 2016

Université Paris Diderot – Paris 7
(Exact location to be specified)

Modes of Silence in the Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Anglo-American World

Defining silence seems to pose a challenge to lexicographers in the contemporary period as it did in the early modern era. According to *OED*, silence is a “complete absence of sounds; the fact or state of abstaining from speech”, while Phillips’s *New World of Words: Or, A Universal English Dictionary* (1700) suggests that silence is “oppos’d to noise, crys and tumult”, as if silence could only be understood negatively in its relation to sounds or speech. Silence is ineffable; it imposes itself on us. It is celebrated by popular wisdom: virtuous men know how to keep silent whereas vain wits engage in endless prattling. The way the two Roman goddesses of silence, Angerona and Tacita, are typically represented can be read as a warning to all those who cannot remain silent: the former is often shown with a finger on her lips, urging us not to speak, while the latter is depicted with her tongue ripped off as a punishment for her garrulity.

The Bible presents silence in an ambiguous fashion: the Psalmist orders liars and slanderers of all stripes to be silent but begs God not to hold his peace. For the congregation silence is a prelude to the reception of the Word of God as mediated by those who have been entrusted with it: John Donne’s sermons, like Paul’s, it seems, had the power of imposing silence. *Ecclesiastes* says that there is “a time to keep silent, and a time to speak”. It is common knowledge that monastic silence was a rule of thumb as well as a living ideal, making it possible for contemplation to emerge from the exertions of an active life.

Not holding one’s peace, however, is sometimes a moral or political necessity, when it comes to thwarting conspiracies or denouncing misdeeds. In that case, silence is more dangerous or more reprehensible than speech. When speech becomes subversive and threatens institutional order and existing hierarchies, silencing political or religious opposition as well as dissenting voices becomes a priority for established authorities, sometimes even to the point of obsession. The repression of dissent is carried out in a number of ways, not least through censorship.

The aim of this conference is to explore modes of silence, understood as the voluntary or involuntary renunciation of speech, in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Anglo-American world. Various approaches covering a wide range of disciplines are welcome: literature, art history, history of religion, politics and science, history of the book. The organisers will especially value papers that study the dynamics of silence and speech. Silence may be a voluntary renunciation of speech when in sermons or sacred poetry it gives way to the voice of God. It may also result from the realisation that language is inherently flawed, thus making it possible for speakers to challenge the linguistic and rhetorical conventions of their time. Censorship may impose silence and may sometimes lead writers to try and elude or circumvent the censors.

Papers may address – though not exclusively – the following topics:

- -silence and speech in scientific books, notably treatises on the passions of the mind;
- -silence and speech in rhetorical treatises (role of the body, mute eloquence);

- silence and speech in commonplace books, educational treatises, conduct books, notably regarding the place given to women;
- silence and speech in religious writings (sermons, bible commentaries, handbooks of devotion, etc.) and spiritual practices (of a Catholic or Protestant nature);
- expression(s) and function of silence in literature: tropes, stylistic devices and discursive strategies (ellipsis, aposiopesis, covert messages, omitting truths, etc.), typography (punctuation, blank page); silence as a literary game;
- representation and expression(s) of silence in art: painting, emblem books, music; speaking silence;
- institutional repression of speech and the effect this had: censorship, self-censorship, clandestine speech, open resistance;
- silence and speech in political and social rituals.

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Proposals, plus a selective bibliography and bio-bibliographical CV, should be simultaneously submitted to:

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Deadline for abstract submission: 24 April 2015

Decision of the scientific committee: 26 June 2015