



THOUSAND FACES OF SILENCE: AN INTERTEXTUAL READING OF ILYA KAMINSKY'S *DEAF REPUBLIC*

SESSİZLİĞİN BİN YÜZÜ: ILYA KAMINSKY'NİN SAĞIR CUMHURİYET ESERİNE METİNLERARASI BİR BAKIŞ

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Makale Bilgisi

Türü: Araştırma makalesi
Gönderildiği tarih: 2 Mayıs 2023
Kabul edildiği tarih: 7 Temmuz 2023
Yayınlanma tarihi: 25 Aralık 2023

Article Info

Type: Research article
Date submitted: 2 May 2023
Date accepted: 7 July 2023
Date published: 25 December 2023

Anahtar Sözcükler

Sessizlik; Direniş; Şiir; Ilya Kaminsky; Sağır Cumhuriyet

Keywords

Silence; Resistance; Poetry; Ilya Kaminsky; Deaf Republic

DOI

10.33171/dtcfjournal.2023.63.2.13

Abstract

The power of silence in literature lies in its transcending and enriching characteristic which renders it possible to grasp a deeper meaning by way of telling the things that cannot be told by words. In this respect, born in 1977, Ilya Kaminsky uses polysemous silence as a narrative technique in his semi-autobiographic poetry collection, *Deaf Republic* published in 2019. Silence is primarily used as an instrument of insurgency by the townspeople who reject to hear consciously and revolt against the authoritarian government. With this unusual resistance, the meaning of silence expands. The ongoing power relations between the public and the state gets destabilized. Relatedly, stripped of its primary meaning in all the poems, silence becomes an important part of the dialogue and turns out to be a significant component of the language. Another layer is that metamorphosing the concept of silence that has been used against them as a tool of oppression for centuries, women use it this time to raise their voices. Lastly, it is seen that in most of the poems, Kaminsky creates absences with various forms and once again silence takes its place in these absences, visibly loaded with meaning. Hereby, consciously refusing to hear with a kind of resistance that can be called an act of civil disobedience in certain aspects, the citizens resist against tyranny and thus silence gets positioned at the centre of the narrative, which allows the phenomenon of silence to be analysed with the aforementioned aspects. In this respect, the aim of this study is to analyse the phenomenon of silence in *Deaf Republic* as a multilayered field of meaning with its theoretical dimensions.

Öz

Sessizliğin edebiyattaki gücü sözün sınırlarını aşan zenginleştirici özelliğinde yatar ve kimi zaman sözle ifade edilemeyen anlatacak çok daha derin anlamlara kavuşulmasını sağlar. Bu bağlamda, 1977 yılında doğan Ilya Kaminsky 2019 yılında yayımlanan *Sağır Cumhuriyet* isimli yarı otobiyografik şiir derlemesinde sessizliği çok anlamlı bir anlatım aracı olarak kullanmıştır. Bunlardan ilki bilinçli olarak duymayı reddeden halkın mevcut otoriter rejime karşı sessizlik aracılığıyla direnişe geçmesidir. Bu alışılmadık direnişle birlikte sessizliğin anlam alanı genişler. Halk ve devlet arasındaki süre gelen güç ilişkilerindeki denge bozulur. Bununla bağlantılı olarak sessizlik şiirlerin tamamında birincil anlamından sıyrılarak diyalojinin önemli bir parçası haline gelir ve dilin önemli bir bileşenine dönüşür. Bir diğer katman kadınların, yüzyıllardır baskı aracı olarak kendilerine karşı kullanılmış olan sessizlik kavramını metamorfoza uğratarak onu bu defa ses yükseltmek için kullanmasıdır. Son olarak Kaminsky'nin çoğu şiirde çeşitli biçimlerle boşluklar yarattığı görülür ve sessizlik bir kez daha bu boşluklarda anlam yüklü olarak gözle görülür bir şekilde kendine yer edinir. Sonuç olarak görülmektedir ki belirli yönleriyle bir sivil itaatsizlik eylemi olarak adlandırılacak türden bir direnişle bilinçli olarak duymayı reddeden halk, tiranlığa karşı direnişe geçer ve bu sayede sessizlik anlatının merkezinde konumlanır. Bu da sessizlik olgusunun yukarıda bahsi geçen yönleriyle irdelenmesine olanak tanır. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın amacı *Sağır Cumhuriyet* eserindeki sessizlik olgusunu çok katmanlı bir anlam alanı olarak kuramsal boyutlarıyla çözümlemektir.

“The rest is silence.”

William Shakespeare, Hamlet

Introduction

Speech versus silence? Can we talk about such a dichotomy or perhaps the question should be that has there ever been such a division? Questions can surely be multiplied: Which one is more important or valuable? Which one is superior to the other? Which one is prioritized? There is not a consensus about it. However, it would not be wrong to assert that silence surrounds speech. When no one speaks, it is very likely that this silence is active, alive and productive since it is liberating, unbounded, and encompassing. It refuses to be demarcated. Speech and silence complete each other. They are not opposites, but rather counterparts though *“for long, silences have been understood as placeholders whose main function was to signal the absence, e.g., of audible sound, linguistic signs, readable matter, or authority”* (Mayar and Shulte, 2022, p. 3). Other connotations of silence are as follows:

it is associated more often with sleep than waking, with night than day, with death than life, with solitude than companionship, with sorrow than joy, with distance than proximity, with ends rather than beginnings. Other traditionally associated states link silence to tranquility, meditation, reverence, secrecy, abandonment, paralysis, grief, the solitary landscape (sea, desert, or empty space) (Perez, 1984, pp. 111-112).

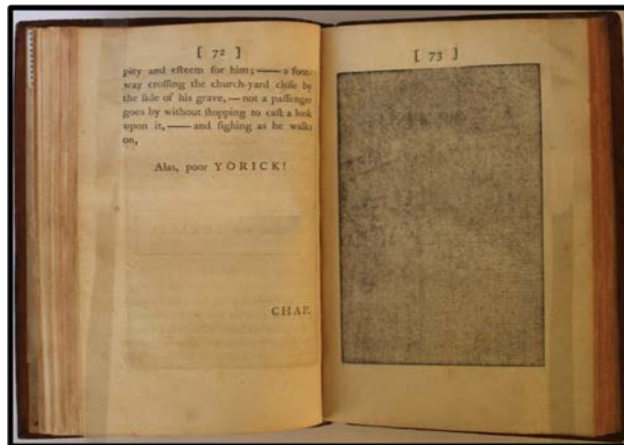
Though it mostly connotes passivity and state of minds that may not be called very cheerful, silence never ceases to exist. Indeed, as two interrelated phenomena, speech and silence cannot exclude each other. *“There is something silent in every word, as an abiding token of the origin of speech. And in every silence there is something of the spoken word, as an abiding token of the power of silence to create speech”* (Picard, 1988, p. 24). They are always in dialogue possessing the potential to create one another. Perhaps this is the most significant trait of their relationship, which can be said to be a very fruitful one. For instance, Tannen and Troike (1985) say that *“the significance of silence can usually be interpreted only in relation to sound, but the reverse is also the case, with the significance of sound depending on the interpretation of silence”* (p. 3). Kalamaras (1994) notes that *“as an authentic mode of knowing, silence is not opposed to language [...] Rather, silence and language act in a reciprocal fashion in the construction of knowledge”* (p. 8) and supporting this, Glenn (2002) also notes that:

Neither speech nor silence is more successful, communicative, informative, revealing, or concealing than the other; rhetorical success depends upon the rhetorical situation. Just as a blurted-out statement or an alleged misstatement can reveal us positively or negatively, so can our silence, whether controlled, instinctive, or imposed. Just as we use words to obfuscate meaning or to buy time, we use silence, sometimes productively, sometimes not---just the way we use speech (p. 263).

It can be understood that considering silence the opposite of speech or vice versa is not likely to be valid since they refute the boundary tried to be set between them.

Silence has been the concern of various fields ranging from architecture to music. Like its liquid existence, it is always there but in different forms: “[...] *silences and acts of silencing are spectral, unfolding in degrees, context-bound, and plural; and, consequently, that the exploration of their plurality and mutability hinges on conversations across, but also beyond, disciplines, including linguistics, musicology, literary studies, cultural studies, history, politics [...]*” (Mayar and Shulte, 2022, p. 3). To illustrate the point, some examples from literature, architecture and music will be given.

*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*¹



The first one is the famous blank page in *Tristram Shandy*. Here, Laurence Sterne puts an end to the speech and offers the reader some time for contemplation through silence which is visible, alive, and full of meaning. Yet it is not only the blank page that shows us the power of silence. Telling a lot without the words, the dashes on the previous page seem to create some vivid spaces of silence, as well. Another

¹ <https://www.laurencesternetrust.org.uk/>

example is from Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*. It is the silent scream of the mother telling a lot about the pain she feels for the loss of his son. This is perhaps one of the moments where one sees that words are not capable enough to tell such an intense feeling. The third example is an architectural silence. At Fallingwater, Frank Lloyd Wright creates a visible silence in the structure of the building. Davie (2013) notes that "[...] spaces or gaps like these are the spatial counterpart of temporal silences, deliberately creating voids where solids are expected" (pp. 8-9). Offering a new perspective about the rhetorical usage of silence in architecture by placing layered window panels in the corner where traditional architecture would have placed a solid column, Wright creates an unanticipated bond between the building and the outdoors. Yet the effect becomes much greater when the windows are all opened which entirely eradicates the spatial confinement (Davie, 2013, pp. 8-9).

Fallingwater²



It is seen that silence is more than an aural phenomenon. It has *"its visual, tangible counterparts: physical gaps, spaces, absences"* (Davie, 2013, p. 5). The last example is from music. It is John Cage's composition named *4'33"*. In this four minute and thirty-three seconds, no instrument is played. Players stay silent and only ambient sounds are heard. Beeman (2006) notes that "[...] *in the absence of specific sounds designated as music, the ambient sound in the performance environment becomes the acoustic content of the work—in essence that which audience members were disposed to designate as "silence" is reframed as "sound"*" (p. 24). Actually, there seems to be a similarity between Fallingwater and *4'33"*

² <http://www.wright-house.com/frank-lloyd-wright/fallingwater.html>

regarding their usage of silence. Indeed, both Wright and Cage seem to be blurring the boundaries. Wright achieves that by creating an unusual void in the structure of the building. This absence exists as a rhetorical silence among all the other tangible and concrete parts of the structure. What Cage tries to do is to show that there is no silence even when no instrument is played or when no one speaks while listening to 4'33". The way of perceiving what is silence and what is sound get problematized by making a piece only of silence and by showing that what is conceived to be silence when the music stops is indeed not a silence at all. These four examples show that from literature to music and architecture, silence is a counterpart of speech, of word, of sound, of a construction material and of dialogue in the most general sense. "[...] *ambivalent, awkward, ambiguous, intentional, morbid, integral [...] material, linguistic [...] visual vs. acoustic [...] performative, rehearsed, and calculated, archival and documentary, complicit and consensual vs. oppressive vs. dissenting and subversive, human vs. non-human vs. planetary, metaphorical [...]*" (Mayar and Shulte, 2022, p. 4) silences point that this phenomenon has a great liberating diversity. By creating intersections with different disciplines, it refutes the boundaries and opens into question the established separations while offering new perspectives.

THE NATURE OF SILENCE IN *DEAF REPUBLIC* BY ILYA KAMISKY

*"Silence can be a plan
rigorously executed [...]"*

*Do not confuse it
with any kind of absence"*

Adrienne Rich, Cartographies of Silence

In *Deaf Republic* published in 2019, silence has a polysemic nature. Loevlie (2003) notes that silence is not very likely to be demarcated within certain definitions and/or descriptions. It refuses to be empirically observed. It is so slippery that it cannot be grasped even if it is the focal point of its own critical discourse. It is the very nature of silence that makes it so flexible. In other words, since it always stands in betwixt, it is quite capable of leaving the door ajar for different understandings. As a domain of meaning making, it is a bountiful resource. It may come to mean various things depending on its purpose (p. 9). This sheds some light on the role of silence in *Deaf Republic*. In the chaotic atmosphere of the poems, silence serves a lot. Parrott (2012) says that "*choosing silence can represent a location of empowerment*" (p. 384). The citizens of Vasenka get empowered with their silent resistance. Being silent is their conscious choice and it is full of meaning. Primarily, it serves as a mechanism

of resistance against dictatorship, and by way of that, shows how the power relations between the citizens and the state change in the face of such an unexpected and an unusual reaction. In the form of sign language, it serves as a particular kind of dialogue between the inhabitants. Another aspect of silence is related to women. The long-established silent role of women is turned upside down by way of using silence against authority. Women still remain silent and yet this time to raise voice. The last meaning layer of silence takes place in the open-ended lines. With the suddenly interrupted lines introduced with the dashes, Kaminsky creates spatial silences, in other words meaningful voids for contemplation. Considering these, Eagleton's (2008) views about the silences in a literary text should be noted:

The work's insights, as with all writing, are deeply related to its blindnesses: what it does not say, and *how* it does not say it, may be as important as what it articulates; what seems absent, marginal or ambivalent about it may provide a central clue to its meanings (p. 155).

It is clear that the untold in a literary work is as important as the written; that everything cannot be transmitted through words. In this respect, what is absent may represent so many things. In *Deaf Republic*, the people of Vasenka live under a tyrannical regime. Since their voice is silenced, they create a new language for themselves through which they reject the language of the power. It is ambivalent that they respond to being silenced by being silent and perhaps precisely for this very reason, silence gets laden with so many meanings throughout the work.

Resistance

Silence is primarily used to resist against tyranny by the citizens of Vasenka who live under oppression for some time. The following poem named *Deafness, an Insurgency, Begins* shows how the townspeople begin the silent insurgency when the soldiers kill the deaf boy, Petya:

Our country woke up next morning and refused to hear
soldiers.

In the name of Petya, we refuse.

At six a.m., when soldiers compliment girls in the
alleyway, the girls slide by, pointing to their ears. At
eight, the bakery door is shut in soldier Ivanoff's face,
though he's their best customer. At ten, Momma Galya

chalks NO ONE HEARS YOU on the gates of the soldiers' barracks.

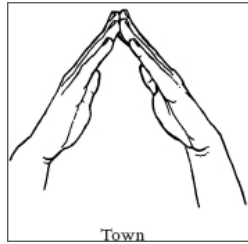
By eleven a.m., arrests begin.

Our hearing doesn't weaken, but something silent in us strengthens.

After curfew, families of the arrested hang homemade puppets out of their windows. The streets empty but for the squeaks of strings and the *tap tap*, against the buildings, of wooden fists and feet.

In the ears of the town, snow falls (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 26).

After that, they begin communicating through a sign language.³



Lacking their freedom, the citizens are under the control of the military powers. They are forced to live under oppression. The tension reaches the highest level when the deaf boy Petya gets killed by the soldiers. Then, the citizens take action and refuse to hear. Up to a certain point, this can be considered as an act of civil disobedience⁴ which Rawls (1991) defines “as a public, nonviolent, conscientious yet political act contrary to law usually done with the aim of bringing about a change in the law or policies of the government” (p. 104). It is clear that they raise voice against the ongoing injustices of the government, which perhaps takes its last shape with the killing of Petya. They perform it publicly to show that they do not accept it anymore. “By acting in this way one addresses the sense of justice of the majority of the community and declares that in one’s considered opinion the principles of social cooperation among free and equal men are not being respected” (Rawls, 1991, pp. 104-105). Nothing other than being killed on the street in broad daylight by the military forces of the government shows clearer the fact that the social contract

³ All the pictures of sign language used in this article are taken from *Deaf Republic*, 2019.

⁴ Henry David Thoreau’s “*Resistance to Civil Government*” (1849) is the primary work in the field.

binding everyone (including the government officials) to each other in a society is shattered in the foundation. As another trait of civil disobedience, the silent resistance is publicly carried out. It addresses to the majority since the problem is “*the infringement of the fundamental equal liberties*” (Rawls, 1991, p. 106) and that is why, it concerns everyone. This is also related to the point that “*civil disobedience cannot be grounded solely on group or self-interest. Instead one invokes the commonly shared conception of justice that underlies the political order*” (Rawls, 1991, p. 106). Petya’s killing can be regarded in this respect. It highly injures the conception of injustice which is a prerequisite that bonds people to each other in a given society. Arendt (1972) says that:

Civil disobedience arises when a significant number of citizens have become convinced either that the normal channels of change no longer function, and grievances will not be heard or acted upon, or that, on the contrary, the government is about to change and has embarked upon and persists in modes of action whose legality and constitutionality are open to grave doubt (p. 74).

This is the situation that the people in Vasenka go through. Perhaps as a last resort they pretend to be deaf and refuse to hear the oppressors. They reject the illegal and the inhuman ways of the regime. They “*protest the operation of some unjust law or policy*” (Bedau, 1991, p. 50). According to Bedau, when civil disobedience is undertaken to *protest* rather than to *prevent* the operation of some law or policy, it is carried out as an *indirect* resistance since “*some injustices are inaccessible to direct resistance by some who would protest them*” (Bedau, 1991, p. 50, 52). In this respect, the townspeople’s silent resistance can be seen as a kind of indirect resistance. They protest the regime, the government, the military oppression since perhaps this is the only way for them to resist the oppression and to defend their right to live. They do not have direct access to the main source of the problem and that is why, they appeal to the silent insurgency. However, the only aspect of this insurrection that does not fit in the definition of civil disobedience is that at some point some people, not the whole town, carry out some violent actions. For instance, in the poem *Above Blue Tin Roofs, Deafness*, Alfonso, the husband of Sonya who gets arrested and killed, kills a soldier:

Our boys want a public killing in the sunlit piazza. [...]

The boys have no idea how to kill a man.

Alfonso signs, *I will kill him for a box of oranges*. [...]

Alfonso jumps on the soldier, embraces him, cuts him
to the lung (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, pp. 65-66).

And in the poem *Galya's Puppeteers*, the women working in Galya's puppet theater kill some soldiers:

When finally he passes out, she strangles him with a puppet-string.
As the soldiers lined up downstairs raise a toast to Momma Galya,
they don't see the puppeteers drag the body out back" (*Deaf Republic*,
2019, p. 87).

Actually this is where it gets problematized with regard to this insurgency's being a civil disobedient act since "*civil disobedience is nonviolent. It tries to avoid the use of violence, especially against persons [...] any interference with the civil liberties of others tends to obscure the civilly disobedient quality of one's act*" (Rawls, 1991, p. 106). By the acts of Alfonso and the puppeteers, this quality is damaged. One other reason why such acts need to be away from violence is that "*the law is broken, but fidelity to law is expressed by the public and nonviolent nature of the act, by the willingness to accept the legal consequences of one's conduct*" (Rawls, 1991, pp. 106-107). It means that civil disobedience is not an attempt to overthrow the government or an overall rejection of the laws. Rather, by staying away from violence and in this way remaining civil, it protests the illegalities and at the same time accepts the outcomes of the action. This seems to be privileging the laws above everything since the constitution is the most crucial thing for a society of equality and justice. That is why, fidelity to law is very important and it shows that "*the act is indeed politically conscientious and sincere, and that it is intended to address the public's sense of justice*" (Rawls, 1991, p. 107). In this respect, "*it stands for that form of dissent at the boundary of fidelity to law. Civil disobedience [...] is clearly distinct from militant action and obstruction; it is far removed from organized forcible resistance*" (Rawls, 1991, p. 107) since otherwise it may not address to the entire citizens or to the majority.

After having discussed the main traits of civil disobedience and its reflection on *Deaf Republic*, the question can be asked: why is it that much important? Being contrary to law, civil disobedience stands out as a powerful way of demonstrating the malfunctions of a state policy or of a constitutional regime. It aims to bring about a change in the law or in the policies of the government, especially whose wrongdoings are overdue. In this respect, such acts of resistance are very important for maintaining the legitimate constitutionality. Rawls (1991) argues that the violation of the principle of equal liberty is an object of civil disobedience acts. When this principle

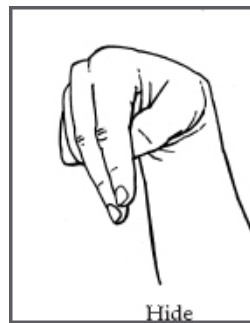
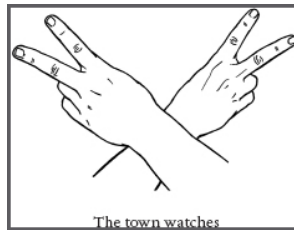
is properly fulfilled, other types of injustices that may occur afterwards can somehow be dealt with. The point Rawls emphasizes here is the significance of the principle of equal liberty and that its violation is an extremely valid reason for acts of civil disobedience (p. 109). Habermas (1985) calls it a “Litmus Test for the Democratic Constitutional State” and notes that any self-confident constitutional regime regards civil disobedience as a normalized –as it is necessary- part of its political culture (p. 99). He continues as follows:

The constitutional state as a whole appears [...] not as a finished product, but rather as a susceptible, precarious undertaking which is constructed for the purpose of establishing or maintaining, renewing or broadening a legitimate legal order under constantly changing circumstances. Because this project is incomplete, the constitutional organs [...] themselves are by no means exempt from this precariousness (p. 104).

In this regard, acts of civil disobedience seem to be of importance for constitutional regimes to see their malfunctions and to improve themselves. It helps to pave the way for a further sophisticated version of constitutionality and in this sense, an ever-essential component of democracy.

Silence as a Form of Dialogue

Pretending to be deaf as a resistance against tyranny, the citizens of Vasenka create a sign language to communicate with each other.





Glenn (2004) notes that “silence [...] is the only phenomenon that is always at our disposal. Silence permeates our every moment, its identity a stretch of time perforated by sound. Thus silence remains inescapably one form of speech and an element in every dialogue” (p. 5). It is understood that silence can be seen as perhaps the only indestructible form of dialogue. That is, putting aside all the other forms of speech and ways of communication, silence always maintains and preserves its place. It requires no condition for its existence. It is not dependent on anything. One way or another, it encircles each and every form of dialogue. Jaworski (1997) notes that if silence is used as a metaphor, it can be related to numerous communicative phenomena:

[...] a pause in discourse, a question left unanswered, a refusal to greet someone, a whisper which is not to reach a third party, avoidance of a topic in conversation, deafening noise, irrelevant talk, or a frozen gesture of an artist on stage are all different instances of "silence" (p. 3).

It is noted that silence never ceases to exist since it is an inseparable part of almost any kind of communication. Mayar and Shulte (2022) assert that silence is no longer regarded as simply dependent on speech, but rather it is viewed as speech’s essential counterpart. In this way, silence ceases to be seen merely as a void but is perceived as “a presence of meaning, communication, intention, and power” (p. 2). Also, while questioning the methodologies and the disciplines that need to be adopted in studying silences, Mayar and Shulte (2022) present quite helpful categorizations:

“silences as occurrence (accidental, passive, or natural, or a state of being pristine or original [...]), as construct (socio-cultural performatives that result from complex power relations and negotiations” (p. 4) and “silencing, keeping silent, or breaking silences (as a range of practices that are performative of various degrees of resistance or violence)” (p. 4). As a multi-layered field of meaning, silence maintains its presence in different grounds and is always an integral part of the dialogue. Surely, its meaning changes depending on the situation and the people exchanging it, but it always remains as an indispensable counterpart of the word. So much so that, it takes full responsibility for communication when there is no trace of the speech. In short, silence always maintains its existence loaded with meaning.

As this part of the study is dedicated to the dialogic characteristic of silence, particularly one theoretician and literary critic essentially needs to be mentioned: Mikhail Bakhtin. While discussing novel, Bakhtin (1981) states that unlike other genres, novel is unfinished, constantly developing and transforming (p. 3). Another point that he notes is the diversity of the languages used in the novel. He defines this variety as polyglossia which is, together with heteroglossia, has an important place in Bakhtin's terminology. While polyglossia points to language diversity, Bakhtin (1981) explains heteroglossia as follows: “closely connected with the problem of polyglossia and inseparable from it is the problem of heteroglossia within a language, that is, the problem of internal differentiation, the stratification characteristic of any national language” (p. 67). The fact that the people of Vasenka refuse to speak as a means of resistance and begin to use sign language (i.e. evolving silence into language) and make it a part of the dialogue makes the phenomenon of silence a part of polyglossia/heteroglossia. Bakhtin (1981) says that:

We are taking language not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life (p. 271).

Language is seen as a living organism. So much so that, as in almost every field of life, which is always changing and transforming, language is surely affected by all these changes. Ideologies and discourses shape language as well as many other things. Rejecting the language of power, the people of Vasenka transform silence into a language of rebellion, equality and justice, which can be explained by Bakhtin's "ideologically saturated" view. This silent language emerges as a product of the

political and social chaos, that is, the ideological turmoil. Also, in his definition of the novel, Bakhtin (1981) refers to the diversity of language and person-based discourse, along with the types of social speech, and states that the novel brings all these together artistically:

The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases)—this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre (pp. 262-263).

The fact that the people of Vasenka, who revolt against oppression, injustice and tyranny, create a language of their own renders it possible to apply the views of Bakhtin to poetry in this study. The language of the authority is rejected and the citizens suggest a new language in line with their own sociopolitical aims. The fact that “[...] *the centripetal forces of the life of language, embodied in a "unitary language," operate in the midst of heteroglossia*” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 271) may also be applied to *Deaf Republic*; in a somewhat rhetorical and metaphorical sense, though. The embodiment of the definition of a unitary language is the dictatorial regime. It endeavours to impose its own language, its own interests and wishes, its own way of life at the cost of people's lives. If silence is considered as a stratification within the given language, it stands closer to heteroglossia. Yet if it is regarded as a new language, it can be called as a part of polyglossia. To shed light on that and for a more comprehensive understanding, it should be noted that:

At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word [...] but also [...] into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, "professional" and "generic" languages, languages of generations and so forth. From this point of view, literary language itself is only one of these heteroglot languages—and in its turn is also stratified into languages (generic, period-bound and others). And this stratification and heteroglossia, once realized, is not only a static invariant of linguistic life, but also what insures its dynamics: stratification and

heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 271-272).

In *Deaf Republic*, silence can be seen as a part of the language diversity. This is a result of the dynamism of the current sociopolitical situation. Life rejects centralisation and uniformity, and language, as a part of it, constantly creates layers within itself and this layer is called silence in *Deaf Republic*.

Power Relations

So far it has been seen that having the leading role, silence acts as a figure, not as a background. It is not a representative of an ordinary absence. Quite the contrary, it challenges the authority and shatters the power dynamics in the society. It objects to the conventional norms of communication and in a broader sense the discourse of power relations. Soldiers go into a kind of frenzy in the face of this silent resistance as they do not know how to deal with it. Silence is something ambiguous for them since it is not a standard mode of raising one's voice. *"All silence has a meaning. [...] Expected silence can carry meaning, and unexpected silences, silences delivered instead of language, carry meaning too. Expected silences can go unrecognized, but unexpected silences are quickly labeled"* (Glenn, 2004, p. 11). Power – governmental power, patriarchal power and so on- conventional norms, and the deep-rooted discourse referring to patriarchy, get bewildered in the face of a respond to which it does not know how to react. This unexpected silence is seen to be quickly labeled in the poem *Checkpoints*:

DEAFNESS IS A CONTAGIOUS DISEASE. FOR
YOUR OWN PROTECTION ALL SUBJECTS IN CON-
TAMINATED AREAS MUST SURRENDER TO BE
QUARANTINED WITHIN 24 HOURS! (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p.
40).

Merleau-Ponty (1964) says that *"when we hear a foreign language which we speak poorly; we find it monotonous and marked with an excessively heavy accent and flavor, precisely because we have not made it the principal instrument of our relations with the world"* (p. 55). Here, the power does not mark it in the way Merleau-Ponty states but more harshly prefers to lock it down as perhaps this is the only thing that it can do. Glenn (2004) notes that *"employed as a tactical strategy or inhabited in deference to authority, silence resonates loudly along the corridors of purposeful language use. [...] Silence can deploy power; it can defer to power. It all depends"* (p.

18). Silence goes through a kind of transformation. Its established passive status is destroyed. This time silence becomes the one that holds the power. This time not the speech but the silence talks and the result happens to be shocking for the soldiers. This seems to be an outcome of a change of perspective. Touching on Gestalt principles of perception, Davie (2013) says that silence may change the way things are generally perceived by reversing figure and ground. That is, while speech is foregrounded as a figure, silence is mostly considered as a ground which becomes more indistinct compared to speech. In the end, silence does not get as much attention as speech. However, a rhetorical use of silence swaps the situation, and makes silence the figure. When this is the case, it may be that *“the silence results in ambiguity, uncertainty, an uneasy feeling in the listener, and the silent person may use this unsettling effect to his or her advantage”* (p. 2). Indeed, the rhetorical use of silence shows itself as a metaphor for the relation between the state which is the symbol of power/oppression and the citizens who use silence to resist its fascist executions. Silence is something ambiguous for the soldiers as it is not a conventional nor a standard way of raising one’s voice. That is why, while they get disturbed by the forceful silence that surrounds them, the citizens use it to their own advantage. Consequently, silence gets the leading role and turns out to be a significant figure while speech loses its usual importance.

Surely, this is also related to the matter of discourse. In society, certain notions, ways of behaving, modes of living and thinking, certain attitudes, conventions, and mindsets are established in the course of time. Perhaps it is the language that has the utmost importance to maintain such abstract phenomenon among the members of a given society. It is through the language, the words, the statements, the speeches that the power remains intact with its controlling mechanisms and consolidates its power. Foucault (1972) says that:

“[...] in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality (p. 216).

In *Deaf Republic*, the tyrannical regime’s desire to maintain its reign of terror seems to be shattered in the face of society’s silent resistance, which can be called the chance event here that occurs totally unexpectedly for the power. Perhaps at this point, what is meant by ‘power’ needs to be clarified better. Indeed, it is used for

various fields of institutions that govern a society. All these organizations are built on certain mindsets and one way or another have a claim to 'truth', which can understandably be quite controversial. Relatedly, Foucault (1980) discusses about some assertions about power which suggest that it is not mainly the preservation and recreation of economic relations but more than that, it is a relation of force. Then, he continues with contemporary evaluations which put forward that power is fundamentally repressive; repressive on nature, the instincts, classes or individuals. In the end, he questions the relation between power and the mechanisms of repression (pp. 89-90). Hence there seems to be a correlation between forms of power and the phenomenon of oppression. Foucault (1980) also states that power is not static, it is constantly in circulation; that it can never be limited to a certain area, in other words, it is not localised. However, while individuals are the targets of power, they are also the instruments that keep power in circulation. In this way, power continues to exist everywhere (p. 98). How does power relate to truth? For Foucault (1980):

'Truth' is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements.

'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'regime' of truth (p. 133).

Foucault (1980) notes that power constantly subjects truth to questioning, keeps it under scrutiny and ensures its registration. In addition, it also ensures the institutionalisation and professionalisation of the truth and does not fail to reward it. People are once again subjected to truth when it legislates and also produces the true discourse which, even if only partially, decides what the effects of power will be, ensures their transmission, and becomes stronger thanks to them (pp. 93-94). He continues as follows: *"in the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power"* (p. 94). It is obvious that there are highly strong links between discourse, truth, power, institutions, pressure and control mechanisms. Returning to *Deaf Republic*, it is seen that the government in power controls and manipulates the truth discourse as it says that *"TROOPS ARE FIGHTING FOR YOUR FREEDOM"* (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 56). Regarding that, Foucault (1980) states that truth is a concept that belongs to this world, that every society has its own regime of truth, its general policy of truth. In

other words, it is the discourse that society accepts and operationalises as true (p. 131). Once again, all these shed light on the constant relation between truth, power, and discourse. Regarding the stance of silence in this subtle network of relations, Dauenhauer's assertion seems to be of importance:

Rather than being that which thwarts language, silence is that which opens the way for language's potency[...] speech is born from silence and seeks its conclusion in silence [...] Silence, then, is required for the intelligibility both of what is said in discourse and of discourse itself as discourse (cited in Mazzei, 2007, p. 28).

In order to be able to understand this complex web of interactions and to properly analyse how discourses are formed, the significance of silence needs to be recognized, as well.

Transformation of the Silence(d) Women

Women have a special place in the story. For example, Alfonso's wife Sonya gets arrested by the soldiers and is killed. While the following first two poems are about her, the last two present a portrayal of the situation women go through. In *The Townspeople Circle the Boy's Body*, it says:

We watch Sonya stand [...]

Someone has given her a sign, which she

holds high above her head: THE PEOPLE ARE DEAF" (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 32).

In *Central Square*:

For an apple a peek, soldiers display Sonya, naked,

under a TROOPS ARE FIGHTING FOR YOUR FREEDOM

poster. [...]

The town watches. Around her neck a sign: I RESISTED ARREST" (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 56).

In *Above Blue Tin Roofs, Deafness*:

Our boys want a public killing in the sunlit piazza.

They drag a drunk soldier, around his neck a sign:

I ARRESTED THE WOMEN OF VASENKA" (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 65).

In *Firing Squad*:

Tonight they shot fifty women on Lerna Street” (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 101).

In addition to these, the puppet theatre owner Momma Galya and her girls have an important role in the resistance. So much so that, the second part of the work is titled “The Townspeople Tell the Story of Momma Galya” where it is seen that they actively take part in the resistance leading to detentions, bombardments, and killing of women.

Silence has an annoying ancient history for women. Regarding it, Glenn (1997) says that:

For the past twenty-five hundred years in Western culture, the ideal woman has been disciplined by cultural codes that require a closed mouth (silence), a closed body (chastity), and an enclosed life (domestic confinement) (Stallybrass 127). [...] Men have acted in the polis, in the public light of rhetorical discourse, determining philosophic truth, civic good, the literary canon, and the theories and praxes of rhetoric. [...] As enclosed bodies, the female sex has been both excluded from and appropriated by the patriarchal territory of rhetorical practices and displays (p. 1).

However, it is seen that when they use this age-old oppression to raise voice, it goes through a metamorphosis and ends up as a strategy of resistance. This time silence becomes their own choice rather than an oppression imposed upon them. Glenn (2004) notes that throughout Western social history, feminine gender or the ones that considered to be weaker have been exposed to a systematic mutation if not silenced. Silence is regarded as a kind of ornament of the female sex. She gives the example of Virgin Mary as the model of feminine silence (p. 10). Then, she refers to Jean Bethke Elshtain (1981) who notes that:

Those silenced by power -whether overt or covert- are not people with nothing to say but are people without a public voice and space in which to say it.

Of course, years and years of imposed inaction and public silence strangle nascent thoughts and choke yet-to-be spoken words, turning the individuals thus constrained into reflections of the sorts of beings they were declared to be in the first place (p. 15).

It is seen that though the whole townspeople take place in the insurgency, women are seen to stand out. They use silence, the long-established weapon directed at them for ages, to resist to the oppression, to the tyranny this time. Yes, they are silent, perhaps as expected from them, but this time to raise their voice. They challenge the role given to them by the society. They refuse to be silenced by being silent which seems to be a seminal ambivalence. This can also be explained with the views of bell hooks (2015) who says that:

[...] “back talk” and “talking back” meant speaking as an equal to an authority figure. It meant daring to disagree and sometimes it just meant having an opinion. [...] To speak then when one was not spoken to was a courageous act— an act of risk and daring (p. 5).

Communicating in silence, women raise their voice against dictatorship, tyranny, oppression, authority, and patriarchy. Together with the other citizens, they create their own language and refuse to talk through the medium of the power. In other words, they refuse to talk with the ideological language of the authority. A tide rises in the society thanks to this new language against which the dominant discourse gets defenseless since it is not familiar with it and does not know how to oppress it. Power relations go through a change on women’s part, as well. Laurence (1994) states that the fact that women writers continue to give place to feminine silences in their works is found noteworthy in a new turning point of feminist criticism. Not indicating the traditional view of women’s submission to the oppressive conditions or to cultural exclusion, these silences are seen as a divergence of opinion, a different code of “truth” or, occasionally, a show of anger as the only kind that would be socially tolerable. “*Women’s silence, that is to say, may be read as a strategy of resistance and choice—a ritual of truth*” (pp. 156-157). This is exactly what happens in *Deaf Republic*. Along with the other townspeople taking a part in the insurgency, the women of Vasenka taking action in the resistance deploy silence to refuse the submission to the oppressor, to reject the truth imposed by the power in control.

Glenn (2002) states that the concepts of silence and silencing also challenge the traditional understanding of rhetoric and that these concepts transform it. If rhetoric is expressed only in words and used for the construction of power, the transformative power of silence may not be recognized, “*but when the delivery of purposeful silence is considered a strategic choice, its presence resonates with meaning and intention—just like that of the spoken word*” (p. 282). The dictatorial regime says, “TROOPS ARE FIGHTING FOR YOUR FREEDOM” (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 56) and it is a rhetoric;

rhetoric of tyranny, dictatorship, oppression; rhetoric of regime of terror. Written on a poster, it uses words/speech. Yet, women develop their own rhetoric and refuse to talk to it through its speech-based medium. Foregrounded both as a real and rhetorical communicative method, silence refutes the established oppressive position of speech (analogues to power), emerges as an insurgent and ceases to be “*an unexamined trope of oppression*” (Glenn, 1997, p. 176). Hence, the fact that “*rhetoric always inscribes the relation of language and power at a particular moment (including who may speak, who may listen or who will agree to listen, and what can be said)*” (Glenn, 1997, pp. 1-2) loses its validation here since the conventional norms of rhetoric gets shattered in its foundation. Ratcliffe (1996) says that “[...] *a woman's silence need not be read as simple passivity. Indeed, her silences may take many forms and serve many functions [...]*” (p. 122) and this clarifies the stance of women in Vasenka. “*Silence is not necessarily an essence; it can also be a position- a choice. We all can deploy silence as a linguistic strategy to demonstrate power or domination, regardless of our gender*” (Glenn, 1997, p. 177), and the women in Vasenka, along with the other citizens, deploy silence to resist the oppression.

Silence as a Void

One of the salient aspects of *Deaf Republic* is that Kaminsky offers highly meaningful spaces to think about the present situation in Vasenka and more than that, to contemplate on similar situations going on all over the world. How does Kaminsky achieve that? What is the importance of the voids created in these spaces? The answer is that these voids, or in other words, the absence of the words, are all tangible active semiotic entities. To illustrate the point, some poems need to be given at this point. In the poem *Anonymous*, it says:

There were too many bodies and
not enough people—
too many ears and no one attached to them (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 108).

In *In Bombardment, Galya*:

This body I testify from is a binoculars through which
you watch, God—
a child clutches a chair (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 89).

In *Such Is the Story Made of Stubbornness and a Little Air*:

Such is the story made of stubbornness and a little air—
 a story signed by those who danced wordless before
 God (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 75).

In *Eulogy*:

You must speak not only of great devastation—
 we heard that not from a philosopher
 but from our neighbor, Alfonso— (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 73).

In *To Live*:

To live is to love, the great book commands.
 But love is not enough— (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 69).

In *A Widower*:

Alfonso Barabinski, a child in his arms, spray-paints on
 the sea wall:
 PEOPLE LIVE HERE— (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 59)

In *A Cigarette*:

Watch—
 Vasenka citizens do not know they are evidence of
 happiness (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 51)

In *In a Time of Peace*:

The body of a boy lies on the pavement exactly like the
 body of a boy—
 It is a peaceful country (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 114).

What all these poems have in common is that they contain open-ended and unfinished lines. It is like an *aposispesis* which means “*becoming silent*” and is defined as follows: “*stopping suddenly in midcourse --- leaving a statement unfinished*” (Lanham, 1968, p. 15). They are like interrupted sentences as if the poet wanted to say something but could not. Instead of the words, Kaminsky creates such voids and offers valuable spaces to contemplate in silence and he achieves that with the help of the dashes. They create a kind of vortex where it vacuums the life, digests it, and gives it back as something reborn; with a different face, voice, body and soul. Mazzei (2007) calls silences as “*the words between words*” and defines their ontological

status as “*absent presence*” (p. 38), which seems to be fitting for the voids created in *Deaf Republic*. Telling as much as the words, the presence of these silent moments is heavily felt though they are nonexistent. These voids are the pauses where one can stop and think about the dread fascism pours down over people. Sontag (1987) says that “*if only because the artwork exists in a world furnished with many other things, the artist who creates silence or emptiness must produce something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence*” (p. 11). Silences in the above-mentioned poems support Sontag's idea. These are not barren moments devoid of meaning. On the contrary, they serve to create maelstroms to ponder about the fascism and its terrible effects. Perhaps for this reason, these voids are full, enriching and resonating as Sontag describes them.

Paul Peters (2013), in his study *Power of the Void: Fascism and Silence in the Poetry of Bertolt Brecht and Paul Celan*, which deals with the theme of void in the poetry of these poets, states that these two poets depict the destruction caused by World War II and especially the Hitler regime not with the conventional ways of poetry but through void. Peters (2013) states that:

[...] a poetry which absorbed and deflected the threatening engulfment through Fascism's destructive powers; and finally— “a terrible beauty is born”—a poetry that went on, in fact, to derive new and unprecedented resources of lyric expressivity from the very agon, from its, as it were, mortal combat and harrowing duel with the forces of destruction themselves (p. 68).

In the poetry of Brecht and Celan, it is seen that silence is born out of destruction. The annihilation of war and fascism is depicted in a language of this very annihilation itself. Peters (2013) says that rather than applying descriptions and graphics, both poets try to evoke the annihilation as void and absence (p. 69). Actually, this is also what Kaminsky achieves by terminating the lines with sudden interruptions. It is as if things were left unfinished because of the war-like situation in Vasenka, and indeed in a sense, this happens to be the case since people get killed. Regarding the feature of silence, Peters (2013) notes:

[...] in their poetry silence, absence and the void are rendered tangible, emerge from invisibility, inaudibility and impalpability, and become presences that one cannot only sense, but which take on dimensions of the poetic sign such as to become active semiotic, and indeed almost semantic entities. They mean something (p. 71).

Having such a character, silence in the above-given poems reveals what cannot be told with words in a visible way. Sentences left unfinished with the dashes create voids and in these voids one can see the impacts of war-like situation in Vasenka. Perhaps that is why, gaining a deeper meaning as the language of the destruction, silence is the only way to describe the absences fascism creates in human life. Hence where words are insufficient, silence suddenly appears loaded with a great number of meanings. Regarding it, Peters (2013) notes that:

Brecht here uses the unspoken, silences and the void not only to generate, in a particularly gripping way, a specific meaning, but indeed a conflicting multiplicity of meanings. Silence is here semic but also polysemic, and Brecht can generate not one, but multiple and contrasting meanings from the void (p. 72).

Kaminsky does the same and silence forces the one to look into the abyss, into the void. In this respect, the following part from the poem *In a Time of Peace*

The body of a boy lies on the pavement exactly like the
body of a boy—

It is a peaceful country (*Deaf Republic*, 2019, p. 114).

serves as an excellent example. While describing a very bleak scene, all of a sudden it stops, and leaves the reader at the edge of the abyss with hundreds of questions: which boy? where on the earth? what pavement? what is going on? why did he die? and so on. Then, that gloomy picture goes away and a peaceful country comes which can also be read as a criticism of the society that does not do enough, does not say enough or does not act enough (in real life) in the face of such dreads and remain *silent*. Considering all these, this is one of the poems where the above-mentioned *aposiopesis* occurs and in the gulf it creates, silence appears with an abundance of meaning.

Conclusion

In *Deaf Republic*, silence expands from the centre of the narrative to the periphery multiplying layer by layer and gaining depth. Born as a mechanism of resistance, silence changes the power relations, becomes a part of the language diversity, transforms the image of the silent woman and becomes a void full of meaning.

In *Deaf Republic*, form and content work in harmony. Kaminsky describes the silencing and the destruction of fascism through the silence itself. Throughout the narrative, disrupting the power relations between the people and the power, silence creates a new discourse while rendering it possible to envisage a new power and truth relationship. It becomes a part of the linguistic diversity. It transforms the image of the silent/silenced woman and finally shows how it gets loaded with plenty of meaning where it is formally visible in a line of a poem. Considering all these, it is seen that silence resonates in a variety of silences while form and content reflect each other.

As a result of this study on *Deaf Republic*, it is aimed to assert that perhaps paradoxically to its ontological presence, silence exists as an unbounded phenomenon and that in literature it can be highly transcending and enriching in different ways.

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Summary

Having an important place in literature, music, architecture and many other fields, silence constitutes the focal point of this study as in Ilya Kaminsky's semi-autobiographical work *Deaf Republic*, the phenomenon of silence appears as a multi-layered field of meaning. While the narrative is mainly built upon a silent resistance, silence appears with different meanings throughout the work.

By consciously refusing to speak, people begin a silent insurgency against the existing authoritarian regime and it can be called an act of civil disobedience in some certain aspects. The first of these is that the violation of rights in question concerns the whole society. People's sense of justice gets damaged. In this regard, the action has a conscientious aspect. Secondly, the action is carried out publicly as only in this way the public's sense of justice can be appealed to. The action is taken with the interests of the whole society, not of a particular group. In doing so, the greatest denominator, i.e., the sense of justice, is emphasised. Another characteristic is that the people of Vasenka do not have access to the main source of the problem, i.e., the government and that's why they begin such a resistance as a last resort. The only point where the action deviates from civil disobedience is that some of the participants kill some soldiers. This kind of action is surely unacceptable for acts of civil disobedience which need to be non-violent. Yet this silent resistance can be said to bear some particular traits of civil disobedience.

Dialogue is another layer of meaning that silence creates. In *Deaf Republic*, a sign language is used when the people refuse to speak and this language becomes a part of the dialogue. At this point, it is noted that this is also related to speech diversity. More than being a sign language, silence itself is seen to exist as a speech genre. This part of the study is analysed with the concepts of polyglossia and heteroglossia used by Mikhail Bakhtin to explain the language diversity in novel.

When silence emerges as a means of resistance and a language of revolt, it also causes upheavals in existing power relations. While the people gain power through silence, the dictatorial regime loses its power since it cannot describe this silence and does not know how to react. From a broader perspective, discourse changes. This is closely related to knowledge, power, and the construction of truth. Through silent resistance, the public rejects the discourse of truth put forward by the government in order to maintain its power, and in this way, a change in power relations takes place.

Another layer lies in the fact that women metamorphose the phenomenon of silence. As a tool of oppression used against them for centuries, silence is used this time to show resistance. The phenomena of silence and silencing of woman are transformed through this new rhetoric. Here again, a change in power relations is observed. The oppressive language of power, oppression, tyranny, authority, patriarchy based on speech, language, word etc. is rejected. In this way, the silencing of woman is transformed in an ambivalent way through silence.

Finally, in many of the poems Kaminsky creates gaps in various forms, and once again silence visibly asserts itself in these voids loaded with meaning. In this respect, the most obvious form is the use of dashes at the end of some lines. When sentences are abruptly interrupted and left unfinished, voids are formed. These absences, which take the place of words, serve to tell a lot. In a sense, they show the destructiveness of fascism and the gaps it creates in human life. Going beyond the expressive capacity of words, silence once again appears loaded with different meanings.

As a result, it is seen that consciously refusing to hear as an insurgency, people resist against tyranny and hence silence is positioned at the centre of the narrative in *Deaf Republic*. As an unbounded phenomenon with its transcending and enriching traits, silence is analysed as a multilayered field of meaning with its theoretical dimensions. It is asserted that describing the silencing of people through the silence itself shows that form and content work in harmony in *Deaf Republic*.