

## **Being Inside Her Silence: Silence and Performance in Lynne Ramsay's *Morvern Callar***

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Silence as an aesthetic strategy has characterized the work of a number of female filmmakers. From Claire Denis to Moufida Tlatli, the silence of women in the cinema has been remarked upon extensively. Initially, the absence of women (as both active characters and directors) was lamented by feminists who sought to advance a new kind of women's cinema that departed from the conventions and traditions of melodrama. With the emergence of directors such as Agnes Varda, Denis and Sally Potter and the discovery and reclamation of the work of Dorothy Arzner and Alice Guy Blâché, the voices of female directors in the cinema have not only emerged but diversified tremendously. The deployment of silence as a strategy, as opposed to silence as absence, has frequently been a part of the work of directors that emerged from an avant-garde art practice (such as Potter). However, silence and how it is deployed within the narrative may also be considered a profound feminist intervention that underscores the long history of women's silence as absence or lack of agency within filmmaking practice and within the diegesis of narrative cinema. Other critics such as Des O'Rawe have remarked on silence in the work of particular auteurist and avant-garde directors:

[T]he creative way in which [certain filmmakers] were separating the 'colours' of silences (a complete dead space on the sound track, studio silence, silence in the country, and so forth) [...] [and] rediscovering the spectrum of silence assisted in the creation of new aesthetic modalities, new ways of configuring alienation and fragmentation, absence and the asynchronicities of Being. (O'Rawe, 2006: 402-403)

While this is undoubtedly an important consideration in the deployment of silence and different technical and aesthetic strategies for creating an audible space for silence in cinema, there is a considerable difference between the "dead space on the soundtrack" common to Jean-Luc Godard's work and the rich subtleties of the texture of silence in Lynne Ramsay's *Morvern Callar* (2002), which is profoundly concerned with conveying a sense of being inside its protagonist's silence. Samantha Morton's performance as Morvern, alongside the film's use of music, allows the viewer to experience something of what it is like to experience silence as an individual, personal state of being. Here, we are invited into a variety of silences, particularly the sensuous enjoyment of silence in nature, as well as the contemplative silence of the quiet or taciturn person. The portrayal of the introverted individual's silence is somewhat rare in cinema. Here, we experience the world not just as Morvern Callar

sees it, but the way she hears it and speaks into it, and those times when she chooses not to hear it or speak into it. Music and performance work in tandem to offer a kind of architecture of the individual's silence. These elements create a structure that allows the viewer to inhabit a world where speech is not paramount. In this sense, music and performance work to privilege silence as something to be experienced, rather than an awkwardness to be overcome. Morvern's silence is not the numb absence of thought, but rather the rich and imaginative world of the introvert. O'Rawe also revisits the work of Bela Balazs on silence, and certain ideas are worth highlighting here, particularly in relation to performance:

[T]he physiognomy of men [sic] is more intense when they are silent. More than that, in silence even things drop their mask and seem to look at you with wide-open eyes. If a sound film shows us any object surrounded by the noises of everyday life and then suddenly cuts out all sound and brings it up to us in isolated close-up, then the physiognomy of that object takes on a significance and tension that seems to provoke and invite the event which is to follow. (Balazs, 1952: 206-207)

Balazs's comment on the power of objects in the frame when surrounded by silence is particularly significant for *Morvern Callar*, where not just the face of the protagonist but also her body takes on this significance he suggests. Balazs's work, first published in and translated from Russian in the early 1950s, conveys the unthinking gender bias of that period in its focus on the phrase "the physiognomy of men is more intense when they are silent." However, this phrase also resonates with some of the writing that exists on stars and performance, particularly the work of male Method actors such as Al Pacino. Although female stars have been examined for their facial performances (Roland Barthes' essay "The Face of Garbo," for instance), their bodily performance is not always examined unless it is a sexual one, such as the focus on the body of the femme fatale in film noir and the bodily performances of desire as displayed by actors like Rita Hayworth and Barbara Stanwyck. Any discussion of performance naturally includes a discussion of facial expression, but crucially, Samantha Morton's performance as the central character in *Morvern Callar* does not rely solely on the face for expression.

In *Morvern Callar*, the titular protagonist's silence is a defining quality of the narrative in both Alan Warner's novel and in Ramsay's film. Samantha Morton's performance as Morvern imbues silence with a richness and diversity that goes beyond the deep focus on the face of the actor common to classical melodrama. Instances of silence or near-silence on the soundtrack of the film itself recalls the deliberate discomfort of the powerful uses of silence in postcolonial cinema such as Tlatli's *Samt el-qusur/The Silences of the Palace* (1994) or Denis' *White Material* (2010). Silence in *Morvern Callar* therefore takes on several potential levels of meaning and constitutes a technique that is both

feminist and postcolonial in its intervention. Produced in the wake of Scotland's increasing devolution, *Morvern Callar* may be seen to deliberately draw on forms of representation that are common in postcolonial cinema. **[1]** Yet the film is very much an exploration of the deeply personal silence of a single individual. Both Morton's performance and the film's varied use of silence envelop the viewer in a world that is rich in different kinds of silence.

In "The Aesthetics of Silence," Susan Sontag discusses silence in the work of art: "A good deal of contemporary art is moved by this quest for a consciousness purified of contaminated language and, in some versions, of the distortions produced by conceiving the world exclusively in conventional verbal (in their debased sense, 'rational' or 'logical') terms" (1969: 22). This idea of contaminated language coincides with John Caughie's comment on Ramsay's film: "perhaps the most scandalous transgression of all in the adaptation from novel to film [...] the translation of Morvern Callar herself, emphatically Scottish in speech and lineage in the novel, into an English interloper" (2007: 106). Yet, the film's deployment of silence both in the sense of Morvern's taciturnity and the filling up of the acoustic space with music (something that occurs in both the novel and the film) rather than speech can be seen as an act that transcends accent and speech. We need only consider the subtitling of Danny Boyle's film adaptation of *Trainspotting* (1996) for its North American release to realize the significance of subtitling accented speech. While subtitling different languages for global markets enables understanding, the subtitling of "Englishes" for an anglophone audience remains contentious as it categorizes accented speech as a foreign language. The issue of "translation" in the sense commented upon by Caughie is a fraught one for Scotland. However, Morvern Callar's silence may be viewed as a silence that conveys multiple riches – her silence is mystical, sullen, confused, contemplative, and joyful. The significance of Morvern's differing silences (and in turn, the way that these silences are conveyed through Samantha Morton's performance as Morvern in the film) may be seen as an example of other ideas raised by Caughie in relation to Scotland and its literature and film in a post-devolution era. Morvern Callar's silence may in fact allow for a representation of "a space for difference [...] not just trying on national identities but imagining not having one" (Caughie, 2007: 103). It is this quality of a protagonist who is willingly without a country or a nationality that makes Ramsay's film appealing in a transnational era and potentially aligns her work with that of directors like Tony Gatliff and Fatih Akin. Where Gatliff and Akin are proponents of the transnational and the transplanted, Ramsay's proposal of a protagonist without a country is radical and exciting. The fact that her protagonist is a woman makes this doubly so. It is the film's very lack of easy specificity in its use of silence (rather than the emphasis placed on Scottish dialect in *Trainspotting*, for example) that make it both a liberating and troubling text for those who see Ramsay's film as a

possible emblem of Scottish cinema. Later in the same article, Caughie asks us to

consider the blank stare of Morvern fading up from and out of the strobe in the final clubbing scene: a blank stare which invites us to put meaning on it – despair? realisation? awakening? – without giving us the means of determining which meaning to put. It is not that between novel and film, one closes down on meaning and the other does not but that each uses the resources of its language to hold open the ambiguities, experimenting to the end with the play of subjectivities and identities and their uncertain realisation in language. (2007: 114)

This acknowledgment of the uncertainty of language coincides with Sontag's assertion that language can be a potential contaminant in the work of art. In this light, Morvern Callar's silence becomes significant as an artistic strategy within the film – a strategy that is underpinned by Samantha Morton's performance.

### **Silence**

In her recent article for the journal *Framework*, E. Ann Kaplan discusses the role of silence in the film work of Marguerite Duras and Susan Sontag. Kaplan states that her purpose is to discuss silence as a strategy. Kaplan's argument in relation to the film work of Duras and Sontag posits that silence in cinema (particularly silence as it is performed and accompanied by the look, even the stare) functions in several possible ways: as related to "trauma [...] a way to communicate pain" (2009: 159), as an "intimidating presence [...] a method to avoid the deception of words" (2009: 166), and finally "as a decision and also as a punishment" (2009: 167). In *Morvern Callar*, we begin with the near total absence of sound – there is a barely discernible hum from the flashing Christmas lights, but there is no music and only the subtle sounds of Morvern's occasional movement as she caresses the dead body of her lover. The first wholly audible sound we discern is the tap of a keyboard as Morvern begins to read James' suicide note. The absence of dialogue and music in this sequence adds weight to this idea of silence in relation to trauma. Not only is Morvern herself silent, she is surrounded by a silence that virtually blots out everything else – a silence that is potentially both isolating and insulating. The deployment of total silence in this opening sequence recalls the deliberate silencing of protagonist Alia in *Silences of the Palace*. In Tlatli's film, the women fill the palace with their speech, dancing and singing. The silence refers to their unspoken status as virtual slaves who must service the aristocratic family as cooks, servants and concubines. When Alia realizes the helplessness of her mother Khedija, who must submit to being raped by her lover's brother in order to protect her daughter from a similar fate, Alia rushes to the gates of the palace and screams – into nothing. Her scream is totally silenced by the

blotting out of all sound. Morvern is also traumatized but for her the event is the discovery of her lover's body at the beginning of her story, rather than Alia's realization part way through her extended revisiting of her girlhood. Morvern's silence is markedly different from Alia's, though – Morvern's is a silence that is chosen rather than imposed.

Kaplan is particularly concerned with the "color" of silence in cinema by women as well as the silence of individual female characters, and this is particularly relevant to *Morvern Callar* and Morton's varied ways of using silence in her performance to convey a range of emotions. O'Rawe is more interested in the history of debates around the use of silence in the cinema and its relationship to the art house, experimental and avant garde – modes that Ramsay draws on in her filmmaking. While the directors O'Rawe mentions towards the end of his article are specifically either experimental or art filmmakers (such as Michael Snow and Chris Marker), the other filmmakers he discusses are well-established arthouse directors such as Dreyer, Antonioni and particularly Godard. O'Rawe's piece is useful in situating Ramsay's work within a tradition of auteurist filmmaking with some relationship to the experimental style but whose practitioners remain concerned with narrative on some level, alongside explorations of different textures of silence within their films. Crucially, O'Rawe deals only with the work of male directors who are extremely well-established auteurs. Although female directors often use silence deliberately, even Varda is omitted from O'Rawe's discussion. Whether this is merely an omission or a signal that the work of women in film continues to be treated as a separate category is another matter. Ramsay is therefore a particularly interesting case. Her previous work is characterized by an exploration of a variety of silences. Both Ramsay's previous feature, *Ratcatcher* (1999), and her short film *Gasman* (1998) contain long sequences without dialogue and with near silence. Even her most widely-seen film to date, the critically lauded *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2011) contains powerful uses of silence in terms of soundtrack and the performances delivered by Tilda Swinton and Ezra Miller. Her early short *Gasman* experiments with the texture of silence as a way of conveying children's experiences of the adult world and specifically the experience of young, female children. In a remarkable sequence, the young father is seen taking his son and daughter to a party. On their way across a field, the father encounters another young woman with two children – also a boy and a girl of similar ages. The girls glance warily at one another in complete silence and we note their pronounced physical similarities. We overhear snatches of the conversation between the two adults that imply that the man is in fact father to all these children, but the children have been unaware of their half-siblings. Even though the man brings all four children to the party, no explanation is offered as to the possible biological relationship between the children. It is instead through silence, observation, and the sense of overhearing conversations

as would a child that we experience the daughter's troubled recognition of her half-siblings in *Gasman*.

In *Morvern Callar*, Morvern's body and its place in the landscape – both Scottish and Spanish – assume significance, and this significance is frequently not about the performance of desire and sexuality. Instead, this significance is encapsulated in the latter part of the film where Morvern first begins to explore Spain beyond the resort. In a slightly surreal sequence, Morvern hires a taxi and directs its driver further and further into the hills. Though she has no idea of her final destination, Morvern is shown standing in the foreground and pointing authoritatively in the direction she wishes to go. Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli remark that "Ramsay illuminates only the positive sides of 'venturing into wilderness' for her heroine, but at the price of representing wilderness as less dangerous" (2006: 195). This contrasts with other films that depict solo women traveling – even Agnes Varda's *Sans Toit, Ni Loi/Vagabond* (1985) shows its willful protagonist Mona as highly vulnerable on her journey. In this sense, Morvern is closer to the competent urban flaneuse Laure in Claire Denis' *Vendredi Soir/Friday Night* (2002) – another story where a woman ventures into the (urban) wilderness but where the city is not presented as a danger to her. Though, again, Morvern departs from Laure in the sense that her performance and her journey are not primarily concerned with desire and sexual expression. Wilderness, whether it be the highlands where she buries her lover's corpse, or the wilderness of Ibiza nightlife, or rural Spanish villages, is not seen as holding any danger for Morvern Callar, much like the unfamiliar streets, hotels, and restaurants of certain areas of Paris hold no danger for Laure. Silence does not equal passivity here but instead indicates an openness and a sensual appreciation of the landscape.

In many ways, Morvern's silence is the fulfillment of Sontag's argument in "Against Interpretation" – Morvern's experience is one of "erotics" rather interpretation (Sontag, 1961: 14). But again, while experience and her bodily performance of this experience may be sensual, it is not about a woman's journey towards sexual fulfillment. Instead, Morvern occupies a less confrontational role than Mona in *Sans Toit, Ni Loi* and a less sexual role than Laure in *Vendredi Soir*. Morvern's journey is personal, but it is about traveling to a place inside the self, a place that is without limits and without borders – an inner journey that mirrors her physical journey of fearless exploration.

Rather than feeling frustrated at being unable to communicate in Spanish, Morvern's natural comfort in silence and her capable gestures allow her to enjoy travel and experience Spain differently. In this way, she becomes the antithesis of the stereotype of the British in Spain. Rather than the imperious gesture of the colonial official who may gesture and shout loudly in English, Morvern's own silence transforms the pointing gesture into one of individual rather than national authority. Kaplan also argues

that silence may act as a form of resistance, “offering complexity, nuance, depth in human interaction” (2009: 164), and it is in this sense that we may view Morvern’s authority as traveler. This is also certainly one of the key ways that silence is deployed throughout Ramsay’s film and the way that Morton’s performance is perceived.

Samantha Morton has previously offered the kind of largely silent performance that Christine Geraghty in her chapter “Re-examining Stardom” (2000) suggests are normally associated with male actors and particularly Method acting – here quoting Frederic Jamieson on Al Pacino in *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975) as a notable example: “the inarticulate becomes the highest form of expressiveness [...] the agony over uncommunicability suddenly turns out to be everywhere fluently comprehensible” (Geraghty, 2000: 193). Morton also offers these kinds of performances: in her first feature-film role as Iris Kelly in *Under the Skin* (1997), as Hattie in *Sweet and Lowdown* (1999), and even as Deborah Curtis in *Control* (2007). In *Morvern Callar*, rather than Iris’ silence of trauma in *Under the Skin*, the effervescent silent communications of the mute Hattie in *Sweet and Lowdown* or the anguished Deborah in *Control*, Morton’s silence is markedly different. In *Morvern Callar*, Morton’s performance explores the silence of someone who describes herself in Alan Warner’s novel as “taciturn” (1995: 36) but who is far from inactive. Ramsay’s film shows us Morvern’s trajectory as she leaves Scotland after her lover’s suicide to embark on a journey through Spain that begins predictably enough in a resort and ends far off the beaten path. Although many of her activities (including her job at the local supermarket) do not necessarily require speech, Morvern remains an enigmatically silent yet active female protagonist. At the party near the beginning of the film, we see Morvern dancing, watching other guests, laughing with her friend Lana and eventually wandering off alone in a sequence where she stands on a riverbank in complete darkness and silence. A passing boatman shines his high-beam flashlight onto Morvern, and in response, she lifts her skirt. Ian Goode suggests that Morvern is “more drawn to nature than she is to other people” (Goode, 2007: 4), and this sequence illustrates how although Morvern longs for more silence and perhaps more solitude, that this is largely impossible in a small community where everyone knows each other and where one may be seen at any moment. Warner’s novel offers some measure of explanation for Morvern’s action of lifting her skirt:

The man on the deck stared at me. I sumley supposed he thought I was bad luck or something cause a girl in black, like the dark water round his boat and the wet rocks where the saltiness had melted the snow. Quickly I lifted the little black number to show him the pale skin above the laddered stockings with the black lines of straps on my thighs. (Warner, 1995: 28-29)

This implied association of femininity with bad luck and destruction shows the lifting of the skirt as a kind of offering of proof – proof that she is not a supernatural apparition, one of the many monstrous incarnations of women that lure sailors to their deaths. Silence is part of what makes sequences like this one so intriguing – there is no dialogue, not even any music to contextualise her actions. Ramsay films this sequence from a distance – we are not treated to a voyeuristic close-up of Morvern’s naked thighs, and instead she remains a mysterious, even slightly daring figure at a distance, and her ambiguity remains intact. She is neither the pin-up nor the mermaid. Largely silent sequences such as this one ultimately contribute to the richness of Morvern’s silence and the film’s refusal to offer closure and concrete explanations.

### **Performance**

This view of silence as a distinct component of the depth and nuance of performance fits closely with ideas raised by Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke in their book *Reframing Screen Performance* (2008). Particularly relevant is the notion of memorable emotions or what they term “intensities” – moments in cinema where “performance details are crucial [...] with the depth and intensity of the character’s feelings conveyed largely by...[the actor’s] selection and combination of physical gestures” (2008: 77). One of the most important sequences where silence plays a significant role is where Morvern meets her publishers in Spain. Here, Morvern’s silence appears as reticence, as her refusal to disclose the subject of her next work. This use of silence helps to construct her artistic image (in the eyes of the publishers) as someone who is a master of inner life, of words on the page, but who may be uncomfortable with new people and public life. The look that Morvern/Morton gives in this sequence is crucial. The way her expression moves from a blank stare to an impish smile as she downs her champagne charms the publishers utterly – it is the moment where Morvern becomes a fascinating and ambiguous figure for them. This is followed by a strange, silent sequence where Morvern leads the publishers into a graveyard. As with the film’s opening sequence, there is no music or soundtrack noise as Morvern holds her finger to her lips for quiet. Eventually we begin to hear birdsong, and the sequence appears to take place in the very early morning – Morvern holds a red flower and rights a small statue as the publishers look on. This sequence breaks the 180-degree rule by having Morvern appear on the left side of the camera and then the right. Mazierska and Rascaroli argue that “the scene constructs Morvern as a supernatural apparition” (2006: 193) because of this startling shot. This forms a parallel with the earlier sequence where Morvern is observed on the riverbank by the passing boatman. This time, she is firmly linked with the supernatural via a distinct filmmaking technique whereas in the earlier sequence she remains distant and incomprehensible to the man observing her. In the Spanish graveyard, the publishers appear puzzled, and yet this is the kind of strange incident

that builds up the image of Morvern the author as an eccentric artist magically in touch with other aspects of the world. The total silence – the lack of dialogue or music to shape this sequence in other ways – adds to Morvern’s mystery, but it is also an instance of her deliberately using silence, instilling and commanding it with a gesture. Here, Morvern successfully masquerades as an artist, and her silence may be aligned again with Sontag: “silence then is both the precondition of speech and the result or aim of properly directed speech. On this model, the artist’s activity is the creating or establishing of silence; the efficacious art work leaves silence in its wake” (Sontag 1969: 23). Morvern seems to “create” an event for the publishers that further establishes her as author and artist. While she has not in fact written the novel she has submitted, she creates an image for herself where silence begins to take on a different meaning from what it had for her in Scotland. In Scotland, meaning is imposed on her silence from outside – the interpretation of the girl in black as bad luck – while in Spain, Morvern is free to impose meaning on her own silence and her silence is readily accepted.

In re-examining the work of Lev Kuleshov, Baron and Carnicke identify camera movements that “give audiences time to examine the actor’s facial expressions for cues that illuminate meaning and dramatic significance” (2008: 50). We can see this kind of camera work in evidence in the same sequence where Morvern meets her publishers and she offers the charming smile – the expression, in lieu of words. This moment, followed by the silent sequence in the graveyard lends Morvern a mysterious quality, but she has always been so, as evidenced by the sequence at the start of the film where she lifts her skirt to the boatmen. In the graveyard, Morvern’s intra-diegetic audience of the upper-middle-class publishers adds something to the film audience’s engaged spectatorship (what Carnicke and Baron term “concentrated attentiveness” [2008: 50]) to interpret Morvern’s behavior as being a performance for this intra-diegetic audience. At this moment Morvern seems to shift from slightly gormless supermarket clerk to a true chameleon, realizing as Mazierska and Rascaroli suggest, that “with money in her pockets, you can go anywhere you like, and – we would add – be anybody you like” (2006: 198). Here is the moment when Morvern realizes that not only does she have the physical mobility to travel, she can also access emotional and social mobility through the manipulation of her own silence in different contexts. In the supermarket, her taciturnity insulates her from the mundanity of her work. In Spain, this same silence separates her from the decadence of the resort activities. Others seem happy to fill in words and noise in the space created by Morvern’s silence. With the publishers, her silence is finally accorded its own status – they become the audience for her silence, and it is no longer a gap that must be filled but is instead allowed to exist as a performance in its own right. Morton’s performance of silence warrants this “concentrated attentiveness” advocated by Baron and Carnicke, where close viewing of

performance details such as facial expressions are charged with meaning, particularly when underscored by an absence of dialogue, thus “framing and editing choices in the cinema do not mute the expressive power of performance but instead concentrate attention on the connotatively rich features of actors’ performances” (2008: 58). The slow, meditative camera work, alongside the silence of these sequences, encourages this attentive focus.

Further to this, Baron and Carnicke cite research into the brain’s mirror neurons that account for emotions aroused in the audience, which allows audiences to then respond “to gestures and expressions that serve as the locus of meaning” (2008: 59). This moment in the graveyard is therefore key to Morvern’s transformation – even more so than the moment when she leaves Lana in the desert and strides off alone. Here, Morvern begins to orchestrate silence, creating an atmosphere, an event for her intra-diegetic audience. As Sontag comments: “Silence is the artist’s ultimate otherworldly gesture: by silence, he [sic] frees himself from servile bondage to the world, which appears as patron, client, consumer, antagonist, arbiter and distorter of the world” (1969: 6). The section of the scene where Morvern appears on the left side of the shot, then on the right, underscores Morvern’s orchestration of this sequence. In this instance, silence becomes a key aspect of the scene’s otherworldly qualities. In slow transition from total silence to near silence, we can see the sequence within the context of the film as a kind of deliberate performance by Morvern, which is observed by the publishers as further evidence of her artistic credibility.

## Music

In spite of the film’s deployment of total silence, near silence, and absent dialogue, music plays an important role in further shaping Morvern’s silence as an artistic performance. In many instances, the music Morvern chooses creates silence, in the sense that it provides a kind of isolating sphere for her, blotting out other sounds or surroundings. In their discussion of *Morvern Callar*, Mazierska and Rascaroli argue that Morvern’s “experience of places and landscapes, both at home and abroad is *multi-sensory*. She inhabits space in a sensual way and makes it her own, particularly through touch and hearing. When in Scotland, she goes everywhere with her Walkman, listening to the music [...] recorded for her as a Christmas present. *The music shapes and transforms her experience of place*” (2006: 196; my emphasis).

Although she rarely speaks, Morvern’s silence is often lent particular qualities through her sensual gestures in relation to nature and in her relationship to music, specifically the music chosen and recorded for her by her dead lover. Perhaps the most significant moment in which music “shapes her experience of place” is in the final moments of the film, where Morvern wanders a dark nightclub, immersed in her own sonic

world. The tender music (the Mamas and the Papas' "Dedicated to the One I Love") indicates that what may have begun as a journey into decadence has since become something else – something more akin to Iris' journey in *Under the Skin*. It has become a journey that has led to greater freedom, maturity, and mourning.

In their discussion of the work of Michelangelo Antonioni, Baron and Carnicke note that in *Blow Up* (1966) props, staging, design elements, and music play key roles in shaping what appear to be quite silent and minimalist performances from the actors (see Baron and Carnicke 2008: 39). In *Morvern Callar*, the music soundtrack acts as a kind of "aural performance" to complement and enhance physical performance. In this sense, Morvern's gestures and her sensual relationship to nature displayed in her caressing of the branches and streams in the Scottish hills, and her feeling the Spanish earth, becomes something akin to dance. This remains an intriguing idea considering that the film is also set in a decadent Spanish resort where young people attend raves – an experience that is perhaps less about dance and more about sensual abandonment. The final moments of the film can thus be seen as an alternative, individual, aural and performative space for the female character, as Morvern completes her transformation into the flaneuse/traveler – an evolution of both Laure in *Vendredi Soir* and Mona in *Sans Toit Ni Loi*. What is refreshing about this sequence is its satisfying evocation of a world of the self that is sufficient. Morvern is sutured in to herself by her choice of music. Rather than presenting the viewer with an unambiguous image that presents the woman as powerful and independent or alone and open to danger, the poignant tone of the song and its lyrics ("While I'm away from you my baby/I know it's hard for you my baby") suggests that Morvern is perhaps still mourning for her dead lover, but that she will continue to travel and explore. Perhaps she will "be brave," as James' suicide note urges her to be.

### **Being Inside Her Silence**

One question that does arise in relation to the film's use of music is: does Morvern "speak" via the music? Does this mean that her silence is not really silence? There are many overt instances of silence in the film, such as Morvern's turning away from Lana in the bed after the admission of the affair with James. This is a classic, aggressive use of silence as punishment. Morvern's sparse dialogue with the publishers, on the other hand, is mysterious, and perhaps deliberately so if we accept her growing awareness of how silence can be manipulated and performed. Morton's performance is suffused with a sense that Morvern is a careful, sensual observer and shows us that silence can have many qualities – that much can be conveyed without speaking. The way that music is used in the film helps to make the audience more receptive to Morvern's silence – the music makes the film progressively less unnerving than the overwhelming silence of both the opening sequence and the graveyard sequence.

Moreover, the way the soundtrack moves from extra- to intra-diegetic, the way in which we hear music as if overheard from Morvern's Walkman, then fully laid over all other sound, then gradually fading back into the tinny fuzz of headphones, and finally stopping with the click of a "stop" button, constantly reminds us that this is music with which Morvern chooses to fill her life. It is far more than simply a carefully chosen compilation soundtrack. The click of the button on the computer keyboard is the first sound we discern in the film, and the click of the stop button is the final noise we hear before the end credits. This is a sound motivated by touch – the touch of Morvern's hand, a physical movement we see performed in the film. It is crucial that it is Morvern's actions that frequently activate and deactivate sound, whether it is musical or technological. The controlling touch of the button can also be compared to Morvern's fanciful but authoritative pointing in Spain when she and Lana engage the taxi driver. Martine Beugnet argues that "a cinema of the senses [is] a cinema that relies, first and foremost, on the sensuous apprehension of the real, on a vivid and tactile combination of sounds and images that expands cinema's primarily visual powers of evocation" (2004: 133). While Beugnet is commenting on the work of Claire Denis, this notion of the expansion of the cinema's visceral powers is important when considering sound and silence in *Morvern Callar*.

Silence as we experience it in Lynne Ramsay's *Morvern Callar*, as it is performed by Samantha Morton, has a richness infused by mysterious gestures and evocative expressions and has an aural texture through the use of popular (largely electronic) music, which is frequently seen as being "selected" by the protagonist. It draws on strategies and techniques held in common with work that centers on the subjectivity of a single female protagonist, as well as work that engages with issues of postcolonial discourse. The film's slow pacing emphasizes the importance of focusing on silent elements of the actor's performance. By allowing the viewer to inhabit the space that is created for Morvern's silence, whether it is the total silence of the complete absence of sound, or the contemplative absence of speech accompanied by listening to carefully curated music, we come to understand Morvern's introverted world. As Sue Thornham suggests in her recent book on women's cinema, Morvern's use of the cassette Walkman in the film "acts to sever her connection with the everyday [...] [whilst] liberat[ing] her own power to see, to touch and to journey" (2012: 111). Watching and appreciating this film expands our understanding of how silence may be used and performed in cinema as a way of understanding a character's interiority – how silence itself can be a way of representing individual freedom that goes far beyond the expression of trauma or sexuality.

## Notes

[1] It is difficult to discern whether a film like *Morvern Callar* may be considered an example of postcolonial cinema. There is a good deal of debate amongst critics, academics, and activists with regard to Scotland's status as a postcolonial nation. Some consider Scotland as being in a state of transition towards the postcolonial that will only be accomplished once complete devolution is achieved. Others regard the application of the term "postcolonial" to be problematic since historically Scotland has been involved in the former British Empire's colonization projects.

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