Abstract: This essay explores the use of ellipsis in Joyce’s major works in light of the notion of the unsaid. Joyce’s writing explicates itself through an endless negotiation between what is said and made typographically visible, and what is unsaid and therefore invisible. On the one hand the unsaid, as the unvoiceable and the unnameable, refers to something that cannot be revealed; on the other hand it expresses an urge to communicate by using other means than language. By virtue of its oxymoronic nature, whereby the repetition of the dots indicates suspension as well as a need of completion, ellipsis perfectly epitomises such a kind of writing, becoming one of Joyce’s most compelling stylistic hallmarks.

The interruption of the incessant is what is proper to fragmentary writing.

– Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*¹

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exclamatory sentences and suspensions that do away with all syntax in favor of a pure dance of words. The two aspects are nonetheless correlative: the tensor and the limit, the tension in language and the limit of language.

– Gilles Deleuze, “He Stuttered”

...there appear instants
Between no word and no word
When there are gaps between things.

– Louis Zukofsky, “A”

1 Introduction

The word ellipsis comes from Greek *elleipsis* and means “a falling short, defect”. From a linguistic point of view, the phenomenon of ellipsis involves a complex interplay at the syntactic, linguistic and pragmatic level. The default interpretation of ellipsis usually corresponds to what linguists properly call “syntactic ellipsis”, i.e., the “nonexpression of a word or phrase that is nevertheless expected to occupy a place in the syntactic structure of a sentence.” However, one should not neglect another crucial form of ellipsis, perhaps more difficult to detect: “semantic ellipsis”, which could be defined as the “nonexpression of elements that, while crucial for a full semantic interpretation, are not signalled by a syntactic gap.”

As punctuation, ellipsis denotes a series of marks (suspension dots or points of suspension) that usually indicates an intentional omission of a part of the text, or an unfinished thought, which causes a temporary suspension of the narrative flow. The use of ellipsis might be considered a sort of *aposiopesis*: the author’s silence expresses an unwillingness to continue, tell or write any further. Such a reticence implies a necessary reassessment of the relationship between the author and the reader. The reader is invited to take part in the creative process in order to fill, or at least try to fill, the (meaningful) gap left by the author. In his study on ellipsis and Maurice Blanchot, Michael Naas observes:

5. McShane, A Theory of Ellipsis, p. 3.