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The Uses of Silence

**A Twentieth-Century Preoccupation in the Light
of Fictional Examples, 1900-1950**

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and
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For my family
and Haemish

Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Declaration	vi
Thesis Abstract	vii
Introduction	1
1 Cultures of Silence	17
I – The tradition of silence in fiction	19
II – Social silences	29
a) Socio-economic theories of silence	29
b) Feminist theories of silence	42
c) Postcolonial theories of silence	49
III – Aesthetic implications of silence	57
IV – Psychoanalysis and speaking silences	68
V – Poststructuralism: the muting of the subject	77
Part One: Social Silences	
2 Socio-Economic Silences	92
I – Eagleton and <i>The Secret Agent</i> : determinate silences	96
II – Benjamin and <i>Howards End</i> : voices lost in the void of history	111
III – Benjamin and <i>Mrs Dalloway</i> : incommunicable experience	126
3 Woman/Women and Silence	139
I – Kristeva and <i>The Waves</i> : the presence or absence of women's silence	144
II – Irigaray and <i>Asphodel</i> : speaking from 'elsewhere'	162
III – In history or outside of it?: the dilemma of <i>To the North</i>	177
4 'Race' and Silence	188
I – Morrison and <i>The Awakening</i> : Africanist presence and the construction of the white female individual	193
II – Spivak and <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> : narrating away black voices	206
III – bell hooks and <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> : surmounting silence	222

Part Two: Ontological Silences

5	The Limits of Language	237
	I – Wittgenstein and <i>Lord Jim</i> : uttering the unutterable	241
	II – Hassan and <i>A Passage to India</i> : silence as plenum or void	256
	III – Brown and <i>St Mawr</i> : the redemptive signifying capabilities of silence	271
6	The Illimitability of Language	289
	I – Derrida and <i>The Sacred Fount</i> : the abyss of presence and the production of superabundant discourse	295
	II – Lacan and <i>Nightwood</i> : the role of lack in the engendering of discourse and desire	311
	III – Blanchot and <i>Molloy</i> : interminable discourse and the impossibility of silence	328
	Conclusion	344
	Abbreviations	372
	Bibliography	377

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Declaration

This thesis is the candidate's own work and has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

Thesis Abstract

A striking feature of twentieth-century Western cultural history was a preoccupation with silence. This thesis is a survey of the phenomenon across a broad range of literary and theoretical discourses actively engaged in the period in exploring and exploiting silence's expressive and philosophical potential. Its focus, and unifying principle, is the dynamic resourcefulness of the motif—the diversity of its uses and significations. The meaning of silence shifts according to its context and the discourse deploying it. By analysing an array of novels and theoretical formulations—by writers as diverse as James, Chopin, Conrad, H. D., Forster, Lawrence, Faulkner, and Wittgenstein, Benjamin, Blanchot, Hassan, Macherey, Irigaray, Spivak, Derrida—the mobility of silence as a construct is exposed.

Silence is identified in the fiction of the period 1900-1950, and its implications are assessed in the light of the various ways in which its uses were understood and interpreted by twentieth-century theorists. Theory provides a heuristic device for the comprehension of the fiction selected for scrutiny whilst further highlighting the extent of the past century's dedication to the motif. Fiction and theory are regarded as two different manifestations of a fascination with silence: fiction dramatizes a commitment to the motif which comes to be formally registered in theoretical discourse as the century progresses.

After an introductory chapter outlining the expanse of the phenomenon to be studied, the thesis is divided into two parts illustrating the discrete implications attaching to the motif: 'Social Silences' and 'Ontological Silences'. The project questions whether the multiplicity of silence's usage may work to depotentiate its signifying power; in particular, whether its role in abstract 'ontological' formulations diminishes its force for emancipatory 'social' discourses. In conclusion, by means of the synchronic organization of the thesis, silence's import is shown to lie in its resourcefulness rather than in any intrinsic characteristic it might be thought to possess.

Introduction

A characteristic feature of twentieth-century Western cultural history was a preoccupation with silence. An expanding constellation of literary and theoretical discourses, from Henry James to Samuel Beckett, Ludwig Wittgenstein to Jacques Derrida, exhibited an intense interest in its expressive and philosophical attributes. This thesis is a survey of such discourses. Its central subject is not fictional representations of silence or its theoretical formulation but, more extensively, the phenomenon of a cultural prepossession with the motif. It is the dynamism and resourcefulness of this motif—the multiplicity of its uses, the diversity of its significations—that is to provide the primary focus and unifying principle of this project. Silence is not a fixed category, it is not identified with a single unitary meaning over which there is widespread consensus, and it is inextricably related to the issue of silencing. It is a mobile construct whose import shifts depending upon the discourse utilizing it and the context conditioning it. Amongst the array of roles and meanings ascribed to silence it is seen as a transcendental signifying system, a pre- or post-verbal idyll that is foreclosed by consciousness, an intimation of language's inefficacy, and a sign of the historically repressed and disarticulated.

In a century which institutes language as a central and conspicuous concern, silence becomes a companion preoccupation. It provides a means of signifying the underside of prevailing cultural practices. As language's status is increasingly elevated, for example, in poststructural thought, a conceptual set of tools, or a vocabulary, is required to comprehend its conditions of possibility along with its omissions and limitations. The prevalence of a fictional and

theoretical recourse to silence in the twentieth century is therefore concomitant with the period's cultural and philosophical investment in language.

In this thesis, silence is identified in the fiction of the period 1900-1950, and its implications are assessed by means of the multiform ways in which its uses are understood and interpreted by twentieth-century theorists. The function of silence within fiction differs depending upon its narrative context and upon the analytical mode employed to explicate it. Theory both provides a heuristic tool for the comprehension of the fiction selected for study, and, concurrently, further discloses the degree to which the century is engaged with the motif. Fiction and theory afford two different manifestations of a preoccupation with silence: fiction dramatizes a commitment to the motif which comes to be formally theorized with increasing precision and vigour as the century progresses.

This thesis is not a chronological account of the motif's narrativization and formulation. Although the existence of a literary and philosophical interest in silence preceding the twentieth century is an unquestionable influence upon its expression in the period under scrutiny, a detailed historical contextualization of the motif is not the ambition of this project. Instead, it seeks to chart the array of transactions with silence. Whilst significant shifts in the twentieth-century's application of silence will be signalled, such observations will remain peripheral to the thesis's overall focus. It is synchronic and topological rather than diachronic in perspective, organization, and procedure. In the process of tracking correspondences amongst historically discontinuous texts what is brought to the fore, by the appearance of its very ubiquity, is something like a 'culture' of silence.

While novels from the latter half of the twentieth century by, amongst others, William Burroughs, John Barth, Angela Carter, and Margaret Atwood are explicitly invested in the narrative, philosophical, and social implications of silence and can be fertile ground for analysis, for practical reasons it has been necessary, and has made conceptual sense, to confine this particular, initial study to the examination of twentieth-century fiction from its inception down to 1950. In this period, the appearance of silence is often subtle and discreet in contrast to its conspicuous institution as a prevailing motif in the literary and critical theory and their fictional counterparts following the mid-twentieth-century. It is hoped that in meeting here the unusual challenge thus presented, an interest may be spurred in the exploration along similar lines of the ensuing fiction as it unfolds in subsequent decades.

Early evidence of literary criticism's explicit interest in the motif is to be found in the work of George Steiner, Susan Sontag, and Ihab Hassan written in the 1960s. All three critics, in singular ways, establish a literary tradition defined by its turn to silence.¹ They account for such an aesthetic phenomenon by delineating literary predecessors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who also employ the motif. For example, Hassan distinguishes two strands within 'the literature of silence': one (exemplified in the twentieth century by Henry Miller) striving towards plenum and the other (represented by Samuel Beckett) towards absence. Miller is figured as having Blake, Rimbaud, and Whitman as literary antecedents whilst Beckett is situated in a tradition associated with Sade, Mallarmé, and Valéry. For such critics, silence's literary expression is

¹ See George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays, 1958-1966* (London: Faber, 1967), Susan Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence', in *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1966; repr. 1969), pp. 3-34, and Ihab Hassan, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett* (New York: Knopf, 1967; repr. 1969).

inseparable from its conceptual implications. As Hassan says, ‘silence shifts in the perspectives of various thinkers yet remains ever at the threshold of awareness. It is a category of the intelligence of the twentieth century, and particularly of its avant-garde imagination.’² This study, taking as a leading vantage point the motif’s adoption as it unfolds in the literary criticism immediately following the period of the fiction discussed here, proceeds by means of concrete analysis to explore its practical applications within specific narratives and within the critical formulations themselves. Multiple reasons behind the deployment of the motif are thus exposed and qualities characteristic of silence are revealed which go some way towards accounting for its widespread use.

Hassan, along with Steiner and Sontag, concentrates attention upon avant-garde writers, such as Kafka and Beckett, by whom silence and absence are given dramatic status. By examining twenty different novels in the period 1900-1950, a project different from those of Steiner, Sontag, and Hassan is established in this thesis. Rather than delineate a literary tradition, which would track developments in the motif’s appearance, or attend merely to fictions in which silences are foregrounded, this project aims to reveal the still more expansive aspect of the phenomenon by uncovering the uses of silence within fiction in which the motif is not always an explicit narrative or thematic concern. As a more pervasive phenomenon than has been discriminated to-date, a ‘culture’ of silence is to be distinguished from previous mainly local projects (like those of,

² Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), p. 12.

for example, Hassan and Sontag) seeking to establish a ‘literature’ or an ‘aesthetics’ of silence.

In this thesis many novelists are to be analysed who have not been formerly associated with a ‘literature of silence’. Novelists such as Henry James, Kate Chopin, Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, H. D., Djuna Barnes, Zora Neale Hurston, William Faulkner, and Elizabeth Bowen are to be studied in the light of the functions theorists accord to silence. Novels traditionally conceived as canonical are to be explored alongside those considered ‘marginal’. This is in keeping with the intention to expose the widespread nature of the phenomenon whilst also facilitating an investigation of the influence of social and cultural positioning upon the application of the motif.

As an illustration of this, when addressing the correlation between ‘race’ and silence, tracing the effects of white racial domination whereby ‘others’ are represented as sub-human and inarticulate, the range of novels selected permits the observation of the motif’s active role in literature concerned with imperialism and racial oppression.³ Silence may be widely deployed within discourses signalling the existence of racially and culturally subjugated and muted groups but each instantiation of the motif is discrete. It does, however, work to link discourses that share in the ambition of revealing oppressive hegemonic practices. This thesis seeks to capture both the broad correspondences between fictional and critical positions, such as the use of silence in expressions of—and

³ The case of imperialism is outlined in Chapter One and the issue of ‘race’ within an American context is assessed in Chapter Three. In this thesis, greater time and space is devoted to racial silencing as it is represented in American fictions by Chopin, Faulkner, and Hurston. This is not to reduce or undermine the significance of the motif in British fiction depicting colonial outposts and the colonized. It is merely an example of the thesis’s determination by a pragmatic impulse to select concise examples at the same time as endeavouring to show the varied uses and meanings ascribed to silence. The term ‘race’ will be enclosed within inverted commas throughout this thesis to indicate its problematic nature, and as a means of theoretically obtaining distance from its negative inscriptions.

debates about—‘race’ and cultural domination, and the very singular manner in which the motif is applied. It is by virtue of such a topographic study that an overview of the phenomenon can be attained, identifying silence’s use within one discourse relative to its adoption within another, concurrent with an explication of the distinct roles given to the motif in individual discourses.

In the novels selected, silence’s appropriation as a ‘conscious’ narrative device, with manifold expressive possibilities, is assessed alongside what appear to be unwitting silences that may be viewed as signs of texts’ ideological agendas. Examination of the motif can aid the discovery of meanings that the text forecloses or appears oblivious to. Reading H. D.’s *Asphodel* in conjunction with theory by Luce Irigaray, for example, elucidates the socio-political import of the protagonist Hermione’s inarticulacy. Her muteness is a central theme of the novel and Irigaray’s work advances cognizance of its dynamic in the light of gendered identity construction and power relations.⁴ In contrast, an analysis of Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* alongside the critical practice of Terry Eagleton serves to uncover the repressed operations of capitalism made manifest in the novel’s silences; processes which the novel occludes and fails, revealingly, to account for.⁵ Previous formulations of literature’s turn to silence have omitted to scrutinize these two discrete ways in which silence appears in fiction. Attention has been centred on the philosophical and linguistic significance of literature’s commitment to the motif. Critics such as Steiner, Sontag, and Hassan suggest that a recourse to silence in the twentieth century is indicative of a heightened consciousness of language’s inefficacy and contingency. They claim that silence

⁴ See Chapter Three, section II.

⁵ See Chapter Two, section I.

can signify a condition of cultural alienation by intimating the possibility of an unmediated mode of communication; it exposes, and magnifies, the limitations of language. This project continues to address silence's role in narratives voicing frustration with language's inadequacy, and accompanying epistemological and ontological themes. However, it is also concerned with assessing the motif's expression of more concrete material concerns such as class, gender, and racial domination. Silence can be charged with socio-political significance, by reason of its ability to denote or uncover sites of oppression, at the same time as it can be invested with the capacity to subvert habitual modes of communication. It is the diversity of silence's possible significations—its utilization to convey multiple themes in fiction and its adoption by thinkers from a variety of theoretical approaches—that is to preoccupy this thesis.

In order to reflect silence's role in the expression of, on the one hand, social, economic, and political issues and, on the other, linguistic, epistemological, metaphysical, and ontological themes, this thesis is composed of two principal parts. After an introductory chapter, whose contents are briefly described below, the thesis will be divided into two sections: 'Social Silences' and 'Ontological Silences'. This provides a pragmatic method of displaying in a coherent manner the array of approaches to the motif and highlights their correspondences and distinctions. When considering the work of thinkers as diverse as Wittgenstein, Benjamin, Blanchot, Norman O. Brown, Lacan, Hassan, Eagleton, Kristeva, Irigaray, Derrida, and Spivak, it became evident that they could be grouped into two apparently mutually exclusive positions according to the import that they attribute to silence. In the 'Social' section, the motif is seen to be useful as a consequence of its potential to denote ideological contradictions

and signal the existence of the disarticulated, the historically repressed, and oppressed. Amongst the thinkers to be reviewed in this section are: Benjamin, Eagleton, Irigaray, Kristeva, and Spivak. In contrast, theorists who grant to the motif certain 'ontological' functions are interested in the limits of language, and subsequently silence's capacity as a transcendental signifying system, as well as language's muting of the subject. Instead of focusing on muteness, aphasia, and inarticulacy as culturally specific phenomena, conditioned by geographic location, class, ethnicity, and gender, they can be conceived as symptoms of the subject's determination by linguistic processes.⁶

Whilst the category 'social' will seem familiar in this context, the category 'ontological', as it is employed in this project, requires qualification. This thesis takes the widest and most common definition of 'ontology' as given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, that which 'relates to the being or essence of things'.⁷ The term 'ontology', in contradistinction to 'social', provides a tool by which to register certain distinct functions and meanings awarded to silence in fictional and theoretical discourses. However, it is a category of thought which many of the theorists explored in the 'ontological' section, such as Blanchot, Lacan, and Derrida, specifically challenge. Their work, in discrete ways, both contests and resists notions of grounded thought, essence, and presence symptomatic of 'ontology'. This inquiry seeks to register the various modalities of silence's utilization within their formulations to dismantle traditionally received

⁶ The issue of the muting of the subject is theorized variously by Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida. See Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Flamingo, 1984), pp. 142-148; Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author', trans. by James Venit, *Partisan Review*, 42 (1975), 603-14; Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2001); and Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, corrected edn (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976; repr. 1998), especially the chapter entitled 'That Dangerous Supplement', pp. 141-164.

⁷ *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), I.

ontological conceptions. What will be revealed by an examination of silence's mobilization to question ontological thought is its inextricable relation to it. The category 'ontology' also provides an apt method of denoting more typically modernist fictional applications of the motif where being, consciousness, and knowledge are subject to scrutiny. Conrad's *Lord Jim* and Forster's *A Passage to India* are texts exemplifying an interest in such philosophical themes and their concomitant anxieties.

The categories 'social' and 'ontological' are to operate as umbrella terms to demarcate the socio-political deployment of silence from an engagement with what are sometimes conceived as its transcendental properties. The definitions only apply to the uses to which silence is put in particular formulations. This project is interested in the way that silence is appropriated to produce specific meanings or effects; it does not aspire to classify or assess in a panoptic fashion the novelists' or thinkers' overall critical positions. Whilst the categories appear to suggest silence's application for mutually exclusive purposes, this is largely a product of late twentieth-century theory's tendency to conceive ontological concerns, particularly within cultural, gender, and postcolonial studies, to be incompatible with socio-political interests that are built around ideas of agency and access to language. The categories therefore work to emphasize the differences in literary and critical theory's transactions with silence; this is significant for an understanding of the implications of the motif—the reasons for its mobilization as well as its effects—in the twentieth century. The boundaries separating these two dominant attitudes to silence are, in practice, continually breached. Irigaray, situated at the intersection of the categories, adopts

'ontological' formulations for 'social' purposes.⁸ Consequently, she has been challenged by feminists for universalizing the female subject and eliding material, economic, and historical factors conditioning women's experience of oppression.⁹ Irigaray's work highlights the provisional nature of the thesis's overarching distinctions between 'social' and 'ontological' conceptions of silence; in doing so, it also paradoxically underlines the validity of the categories. The debates about her work dramatize the tension that is proposed in this thesis to exist between 'social' and 'ontological' uses of the motif. The hostility that Irigaray's formulations encounter in feminist studies is symptomatic of the divisions within the wider field of literary and critical studies.

Within the thesis, the 'Social' section is to be explored first. This is not to be viewed as a means of prioritizing one category over another as the order could easily have been inverted. Locally, the positions developed in each chapter and section are to be understood in relation to each other and, in turn, on a macro-level a 'social' preoccupation with silence is to be assessed in the light of an 'ontological' engagement with the motif and vice versa. Analysis of each critical approach towards silence is achieved by means of positioning rather than by the assumption of a formal stand in regard to the function granted to the motif; this will provide the primary critical method of the thesis. The significance of apposition will be discussed further below in connection with the relation between the fiction and theory within each chapter.

⁸ This is made particularly evident in her early work. See Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985; repr. 1989). Similarly, work by Derrida could also have been discussed in the 'Social' section which has been placed in the 'Ontological' section.

⁹ See Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988; repr. 1999), Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), and Alison Assiter, *Enlightened Women: Modernist Feminism in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1996).

The first chapter, 'Cultures of Silence', demonstrates the pervasiveness of the twentieth-century's preoccupation with silence by a brief précis of the relevant formulations discovered in the field, and the dual implications, 'social' and 'ontological', ascribed to the motif. The various theoretical transactions with silence are grouped into 'cultures' to highlight the way that the motif is regarded in a particular light depending upon the critical approach. For example, Macherey, Bourdieu, and Jameson, can be studied collectively because of their shared socio-economically orientated agenda; however, the specificity of silence in each postulation is always registered. This chapter also provides a model of the methodology to be put into practice throughout the thesis: the citation of narrative instances of silence alongside theoretical formulations invoked by the narrative's particular properties. Critical work is adopted that accords to the motif functions in keeping with, and clarifying, the narrative's intentions and procedures. The chapter's exploratory nature is emblematic of the thesis as a whole. This project is an investigation into the effects produced when silences within fictions are regarded from multiple different perspectives. It reveals the extensiveness of silence's use for expressive purposes in fiction at the same time as announcing its multifarious conceptualization by theory. The combined project works to reveal in its fullness the complex import of the motif in Western cultural history.

The 'Social' section comprises three chapters: 'Socio-Economic Silence', 'Woman/Women and Silence', and "'Race" and Silence'. By locating instances of oppression, signified by silence, the operations of the hegemonic culture can be delineated and sites of difference exhibited. In this section a wide spectrum of critical positions are assessed, from Benjamin to bell hooks. The aim in each of

the three chapters is to exemplify the diverse 'social' uses of silence by virtue of reference to certain thinkers associated with a particular theoretical approach whose relevance is dictated by the evident parameters and orientation of the fictional texts at hand. A comprehensive study of each approach considered is not the objective here. Novels by, amongst others, Joseph Conrad, Virginia Woolf, Zora Neale Hurston, William Faulkner, and Elizabeth Bowen are investigated in the light of a body of thought which regards silence as a tool for comprehending ideological practices and analysing gender and ethnic identity constructions. By this means, the gaps and silences in novels are seen as charged with socio-political significance: the occlusion of history, the forceful erasure of voices, and the preclusion of certain groups from attaining access to the discursive sphere.

The 'Ontological' section is composed of two chapters, 'The Limits of Language' and 'The Illimitability of Language', whose content is informed by characteristic features of a number of novels of the period: an increased sensitivity to the limitations of language and a propensity towards superabundant discourse. These narrative phenomena are registered by both characters and narrators alike. This section analyses communicative dilemmas manifested in the silences and absences of modernist fiction and its consequences for an understanding of being. Increasingly, in the twentieth century, a gap is registered between the world and language. Linguistic problems can produce philosophical problems to do with 'being-in-the-world'. Inextricable from such linguistic and ontological dilemmas is the issue of epistemological uncertainty. Novels by Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and E. M. Forster, in which communicative difficulties are indissociable from problems of knowledge, are to be scrutinized.

That which resides beyond cognition is figured as inarticulable. Silence, therefore, can be associated with an experience of frustration occasioned by an intuition of the limits of consciousness and language. Prolix discourse, the apparent obverse condition from silence but actually inextricable from it, is another symptom of an inability to express intended meaning. Communication is repeatedly frustrated by language's failure to transport such meaning. Nevertheless, the persistence of a desire to convey thought results in potentially illimitable discourse. Novels by Henry James, Djuna Barnes, and Samuel Beckett evince this narrative phenomenon. Silence and excessive speech can be expressions of the same ontological dilemma; they are both signs of communicative difficulties and, within narrative, work to problematize communication. Theory by Wittgenstein, Hassan, Norman O. Brown, Derrida, Lacan, and Blanchot is elected to assist in the comprehension of the fictionalization of these linguistic, epistemological, and ontological themes.

Each chapter within both the 'Social' and 'Ontological' sections consists of an examination of three novels alongside three theoretical positions. This engagement with a constellation of narrative and critical discourses in the space of each chapter is necessary to draw attention to this thesis's subject: a twentieth-century preoccupation with silence. It is the movement amongst both cultural products, fiction and theory, that enables the full significance of the phenomenon to be disclosed. Whilst this movement through an extensive array of fictional and theoretical examples could be viewed as an unstable or 'shifting' project, it is conditioned by a consistent method. All of the discourses explored are linked by their use of, and interest in, silence. The thesis systematically assesses the appearance of the motif within fiction in conjunction with the functions accorded

to it by theorists. The selection of fictional and theoretical texts to be compared is largely determined by a pragmatic impulse: the mode of analysis is chosen that provides the most effective tool by which to uncover the import of silence in each fiction, and is consequently granted the most appropriate position within the thesis whereby its conception of silence can be best displayed. There are times when there is a historically established connection between the fiction and theory, and those moments will be signalled.¹⁰ In other cases the juxtapositions arise out of an intuition as to the resonances to be found by such a procedure. The appropriateness of each juxtaposition, and the motivations conditioning it, should become apparent in the proceeding chapters.

Fiction and theory are to be considered alongside each other rather than alternately. The procedure of analysing a novel in proximity with a theoretical formulation is to be practised three times in each chapter. This is a tactic of ‘counterpositioning’ and not an arbitrary movement from one theoretical position to another. Dilemmas and limitations of each formulation’s construal of silence are elicited not by direct analysis but in the process of its application to fiction, its juxtaposition with other positions within the chapter, and its relation to other approaches to silence articulated in surrounding chapters. This thesis manifests an experimental interest in observing the effects produced when one reading of silence meets another: for example, when a socio-economic approach encounters the poststructural ideas that dominate Chapter Six or when feminist theory encounters thought concerned with the matter of ‘race’. By this technique of objective positioning, observations about the local functions of the motif as well

¹⁰ As an illustration of this, in Chapter Two, Eagleton’s notion of ideological contradictions is investigated alongside Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* which he himself singles out as a literary example of his argument, and, in Chapter Six, Beckett’s *Molloy* is assessed in relation to theory by Blanchot which explicitly relates to Beckett’s novels.

as its broader cultural significance can be obtained. What is to be exhibited is the feature of a constellation of competing and interlocking, interlocutory positions and perspectives of silence in the twentieth century.

Many twentieth-century theoreticians addressing silence are not discussed in this thesis: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Theodor Adorno, and Jean-François Lyotard are well known examples.¹¹ Because of the pervasiveness of the phenomenon, it is impossible to include all literary and critical thought expressing an interest in the motif and omissions are inevitable. However, the perceived absence of thinkers who could have been reviewed in association with silence only serves to emphasize further the extent of a twentieth-century preoccupation with the motif. Equally, many novels are not studied which could have illustrated the motif's narrative deployment: such as texts by Gertrude Stein, Malcolm Lowry, and John Steinbeck, along with narratives by more marginal novelists such as Gwendolyn Brooks, Carson McCullers, and Nella Larsen.¹² The texts selected to demonstrate the phenomenon are offered merely as representative examples; the thesis is not to be construed as a comprehensive account of all fictions and theory in which silence significantly appears. As is invariably the case in a broad-ranging, and essentially experimental, investigation into the widespread discursive usage for expressive and philosophic purposes of a given motif, problems will inevitably arise with the selections and comparisons made. But it is hoped that by exposing the persistence of such a

¹¹ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. by Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1964), Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 1997), and Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. by Georges Van Den Abbeele (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988).

¹² See Gertrude Stein, *Three Lives* (New York: Penguin, 1990), Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano* (London: Penguin, 2000), John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row* (New York: Penguin, 1994), Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1993), Carson McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (London: Penguin, 1961), and Nella Larsen, *Quicksand & Passing* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1989; repr. 1995).

feature in twentieth-century discourse, and in the process of attempting to assort and assimilate the array of discursive patterns in which it is manifest, an assessment of its implications can be secured that will provide a foundation for further inquiry.

Chapter One

Cultures of Silence

The pervasiveness of the appearance of silence in twentieth-century fiction is recognized; numerous critics have been attentive to the possible meanings and implications of such a phenomenon. George Steiner considers the extent of the preoccupation with silence 'by the most articulate' to be 'historically recent'.¹ Maurice Blanchot, George Steiner, Ihab Hassan, and Susan Sontag are exemplary thinkers concerned with explicating literature's recourse to silence as a peculiarly modern feature. Theoretical discourse of the twentieth-century, as distinct from literary criticism, also manifests an interest in silence. Theory accords to the motif functional properties. Its import differs depending upon the objectives of the specific discourse mobilizing it. The array of theoretical discourses demonstrating a concern with silence stem from various academic disciplines: philosophy, psychoanalysis, linguistics, and literary theory. This chapter serves to exhibit the manifold conceptualization of silence and the subsequent diversity of its uses. By surveying a broad range of discourses prepossessed with silence, a theoretical context is developed in which this thesis is to be situated. The following chapters will go on to analyse in greater depth many of the interpretive approaches only cursorily discussed here. As well as discriminating the extent and multifariousness of a literary and theoretical turn to silence, this chapter provides an illustration of the thesis's methodology: it

¹ George Steiner, 'Silence and the Poet' in *Language and Silence*, pp. 55-74 (p. 66).

locates silence in the fiction of the period 1900-1950, and assesses it by means of the diverse ways in which its uses are understood and explicated by twentieth-century theorists.

It would be impossible to explore the full extent of the array of discourses relating to silence in this chapter; accordingly, only an outline of the primary arguments will be given. In the endeavour to maintain concision and clarity, four sub-headings have been constructed to assimilate the material here discussed into a more approachable format. At the same time as specifying categories, attention will be given to the inter-connections between them; this will prove invaluable to an understanding of the phenomenon of silence in general. The categories of theoretical discourses formulated are: ‘aesthetic silences’, ‘social silences’—consisting of socio-economic, feminist, and postcolonial theory—‘psychoanalysis’, and ‘poststructuralism’. Henceforth, in this chapter, these will be referred to as ‘cultures of silence’.

I – The tradition of silence in fiction

In order to discriminate and comprehend the uses of silence in fiction of the first half of the twentieth century it is necessary to be alert to the presence of silence in the literary tradition preceding it. This chapter begins by illustrating the appearance, and use, of silence in fiction by Laurence Sterne, Jane Austen, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville. A literary fascination with silence existed long before the novel form: Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, and numerous dramatic works from Shakespeare to Chekhov could have been analysed to expose both the significance and diversity of silence's deployment. However, whilst always cognizant of the wider historical and philosophical implications that a concern with silence intimates, as this thesis is concerned with the issue in twentieth-century fiction, this section will be limited to a study of the application of silence in the novel and short story. The texts to be examined are: Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Austen's *Mansfield Park*, Poe's 'Silence: A Fable', and Melville's 'Bartleby, The Scrivener' and 'Benito Cereno'. By exploring historically, geographically, and culturally heterogeneous narratives, a broad cross-section of literary applications of the motif is uncovered. The selection is representative of a widespread phenomenon which can only be signalled here.

Tristram Shandy is a novel that explicitly seeks to represent silence by graphic and typographical means. The use of dashes, asterisks, blank pages, and missing chapters is part of the text's construction to subvert the reader's desire to reach a climax, as well as the means by which the reader is drawn into creative dialogue with the text. For example, Tristram chooses to elide details concerning the nature of the injury he sustained from Susannah's accident thereby leaving

the reader imaginatively to complete the silence.² In Volume IV, the reader anticipates an account of the visit to Didius to seek information about changing Tristram's name, but is met with an absence as the chapter providing that information is missing. Tristram's decision to omit this chapter derives from his inability to depict the event combined with his sense that it would disrupt the balance of the book maintained by the juxtaposition of chapters. However, despite the appearance of silence achieved by the space left where Chapter Twenty-Four should be, Tristram is not actually silent on the issue that he intends to omit. Chapter Twenty-Five succeeds in providing a summary of what he chose not to say in the preceding chapter. The gap between the typographical rendering of silence and Tristram's verbosity produces irony; although silence can be typographically represented, it appears impossible to achieve in discursive practice. A disjunction between the textual omissions and Tristram's compulsion to write points to the potential interminableness of his narrative project.

Much is left unsaid in *Tristram Shandy*, and is often indicated by the use of the dash or asterisks, in the endeavour to accord with social propriety. The conversational style adopted by Tristram highlights this:

Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation: As no one, who knows what he is about in good company, would venture to talk all;----so no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all. (*Tristram*, 127)

² Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 418-419.

The typographical marks have a paradoxical function: they represent the conversational voice, which is imitative of social life, and subvert such a project by highlighting the text's existence as an artefact. This can be seen in Volume III where asterisks and a dash mark the place where Dr Slop gets his forceps out of his bag (*Tristram*, 195). This incident reveals the gap between writing and life. The text cannot, with decorum, represent the actions of Dr Slop by any means other than a narrative ellipsis. *Tristram Shandy's* typographic rendering of silence could be seen as a precursor to its use in modern fiction by authors such as Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and Malcolm Lowry.

In contrast to the sociable and playful silences of *Tristram Shandy*, which to a certain degree are a result of conscious decisions by Tristram and display his control over his self-narrative, the presence of silence in *Mansfield Park* is of a very different nature. The moral centre of the novel is the taciturn protagonist Fanny. Her quietness is exemplary, especially in juxtaposition with the other noisy youthful characters, such as the Crawfords. The novel equates noise and restlessness with thoughtlessness and poor judgement, whereas silence is associated with clear perception and right judgement.³ Fanny is positioned as a passive listener and observer rather than an active participant in the events of the novel, and this enables her to develop intelligent and undistorted opinions of the figures that surround her. Speaking freely poses a threat to the harmony of the social community. Miss Crawford is frequently shown to speak her mind without restraint, ignoring the rules of propriety: 'Edmund was sorry to hear Miss

³ The significance of the relation between the pairs noise and motion and silence and immobility are explored by Tony Tanner in *Jane Austen* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986; repr. 1987), pp. 142-175.

Crawford, whom he was much disposed to admire, speak so freely of her uncle. It did not suit his sense of propriety.’⁴

At the same time as instituting Fanny as an ideal moral figure whose clear perception and judgement is indissociable from her reticence, the novel invites scrutiny of the roots of her silence; unlike others in the novel who have a degree of freedom in their mode of conduct, Fanny does not. Her socially inferior position within the Bertram household is conditioned by a network of factors: she is a poor relative, sickly, and the youngest at Mansfield Park. She is highly conscious of her subordinate place in the family and this leads her to feel insecure and reticent: ‘Fanny could have said a great deal, but it was safer to say nothing’ (*Mansfield*, 214). It is only when she is with her brother, William, that she is able to take part in ‘fearless intercourse’ (*Mansfield*, 243). Fanny’s silence is partly a product of her fear of speaking out of place. Austen’s creation of a model heroine who is predominantly silent gives rise to complex issues that cannot be satisfactorily addressed in this section. Nevertheless, what is unquestionable is the manner by which silence here offers a stable and fixed challenge to the threat posed to social harmony by outspoken behaviour, and a pretext for the investigation of social and ideological issues, as well as facilitating the exploration of a character’s interiority.

In Poe’s short story, ‘Silence: A Fable’, silence is regarded with terror. It is a fantastic, archetypal tale in which an unnamed narrator imparts a story told to him by the figure of a Demon who occupies and controls the desolate land of Libya. The Demon describes the topography of the region and, by remarking

⁴ Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966; repr. 1972), p. 88.

upon a single man's sojourn there, gives voice to the human experience of such a location. Contrary to *Mansfield Park's* exploration of the social implications of silence, Poe's symbolical story contemplates the transpersonal significance of silence. It depicts noise and silence as fundamental forces of Nature whose function exceeds personal and social boundaries. Silence is a reality that cannot be contested or altered by a realignment of social relations, as is the case in *Mansfield Park* and will be seen in both 'Bartleby, The Scrivener' and 'Benito Cereno'.

Libya is presented as a realm that possesses all of the attributes of pandemonium: there is no silence or stillness but perpetual noise and motion. Desolation and life are inextricably woven together:

'It was night, and the rain fell; and, falling, it was rain, but, having fallen, it was blood. And I stood in the morass among the tall lilies, and the rain fell upon my head – and the lilies sighed one unto the other in the solemnity of their desolation.'⁵

The Demon tells of his watching over an unnamed man who exudes, in his meditation upon a landscape inspiring hopelessness, "a longing after solitude" ('Silence', 222). The man's thoughts cause him to tremble, yet he does not alter his maintenance of a fixed position of sitting upon a rock—a position which the Demon's narrative reiterates. It is the man's stasis that disturbs the Demon as it is a condition alien to his own restlessness. This directs him in the attempt to force action out of the passive man. He first accelerates the aspects of pandemonium,

⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, 'Silence: A Fable', in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by James A. Harrison, 17 vols (New York: AMS Press, 1965), II, pp. 220-224 (p. 221).

tumult and noise, upon the man in the hope that it will discompose him, but it fails to stimulate a response. He then ““cursed, with the curse of *silence*”” (‘Silence’, 223). ““And mine eyes fell upon the countenance of the man, and his countenance was wan with terror. (...) And the man shuddered, and turned his face away, and fled afar off, in haste, so that I beheld him no more”” (‘Silence’, 224).

The narrative suggests that mankind has the capacity to survive in a realm of incessant noise as sound affords a subject for meditation. In contrast, silence intimates nothingness, and is therefore met with fear. When Libya is transformed into a silent region there is an end to signification and companionship is rendered impossible. In a world of noise solitude can never be absolute, whereas a place of complete silence offers nothing but the discovery of the vacuity within the self, with all the horror that that implies. The inscription on the rock, read by the Demon, reveals a slippage in meaning as it changes over time from signifying ‘desolation’ to ‘silence’; this intimates a relationship between the two terms. Although the temporal movement of the tale creates a distinction between desolation and silence, on a symbolic level it is the inaudible that produces the human experience of absolute desolation.

‘Bartleby, The Scrivener’ also explores linguistic issues relating to silence, along with addressing its social and economic implications. The story situates silence in historically determinate conditions in contrast to Poe’s focus upon the motif’s archetypal meaning. The silence of the character Bartleby is ambiguous. The difficulty of reading Bartleby is established by the narrator: ‘I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature. Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing

is ascertainable.’⁶ The first-person narration contributes towards the narrative’s equivocality; a definitive interpretation of Bartleby’s silence is unavailable.

The narrative examines the alienation of the worker whilst presenting the possibility of silence as resistance. The bourgeois narrator maintains that if there were any normal human and rebellious qualities about Bartleby he would have no qualms about dismissing him (‘Bartleby’, 11, 13). It is by virtue of Bartleby’s active refusal to obey and communicate that he is able to pursue a life of inaction, a mode of existence which the narrator finds profoundly disturbing because it contravenes his work ethic. In his utilization of silence for specific, active, purposes Bartleby is similar to Fanny in *Mansfield Park*. Silence can denote both agency and the obverse condition of passivity.

The narrator can only comprehend Bartleby’s conduct by regarding him as deranged (‘Bartleby’, 32). Bartleby is the spectre who haunts the narrator’s consciousness, causing him to experience guilt as a consequence of the mode by which he maintains dominance. The narrator’s sense of paternal responsibility for his employee—arising from his conception of Bartleby as a pitiable silent figure—conflicts with his horror and disgust at such abnormal behaviour and uncanny silence:

What does conscience say I *should* do with this man, or rather ghost. Rid myself of him, I must; go, he shall. But how? You will not thrust him, the poor, pale, passive mortal – you will not thrust such a helpless creature out

⁶ Herman Melville, ‘Bartleby, The Scrivener’ in *Melville’s Short Stories*, ed. by Dan McCall (New York: Norton, 2002), pp. 3-35 (p. 4).

of your door? you will not dishonor yourself by such cruelty? ('Bartleby', 27)

In spite of the narrator's attempt to depict Bartleby as the passive object of his pity he is highly aware of the power that his mute employee has over him. He feels 'unmanned' by Bartleby's tranquil way of asserting his desires and ignoring his authority ('Bartleby', 16). The narrator transposes his social and economic relation to Bartleby onto a moral and religious plane, thereby obscuring the actual cause of Bartleby's alienation and resistance: 'I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach' ('Bartleby', 19).

The narrative also offers the possibility that Bartleby's silence stems from his previous occupation as a clerk in a dead-letter office. This would suggest that he has been saturated with examples of signifiers failing to be converted into signifieds, causing him to lack the linguistic skills necessary to function in the social world. His presence in the text alerts the reader to the underside of signification: the problems in meaning and textual production. Bartleby's silent existence provokes the narrator to question the process of representation, although it fails to lead him to explore the conditions of possibility of his power.

In 'Benito Cereno' silence is also considered in the context of power relations. The story scrutinizes the processes of ideological production, the factors underlying the representation of ethnic others as silent. It is narrated from the perspective of an American captain, Delano, who boards a stray Spanish slave transportation ship called the San Dominick. The relations he observes on board the San Dominick, between the Spanish crew and black slaves, challenge his traditional understanding of the superiority, and authority, of whites over

blacks. What appears to be a ship commanded by a Spanish captain, Benito Cereno, turns out to be under the control of the blacks led by the character Babo. Delano and his crew succeed in suppressing the mutinous men, and, after an investigation, Babo is sentenced to death.

Delano's perceptions of the strange activity on board the San Dominick are shown to be problematic by virtue of a disjunction between his observations and the objective narrative. Delano is regarded ironically; thus the reader is directed to see that his notions are informed by racist ideology. His purview reflects that of dominant history. The blacks that are figured as silent by Delano are also denied the opportunity to give testimony at the deposition and are disregarded as historical witnesses. The narrative's alertness to the perpetuation of racist stereotypes and discourse is inextricably linked to its representation of the processes by which dominant history is constituted. Such history is shown to be constructed, and maintained, by silencing and erasing ethnic others from the socio-cultural text.

Delano misreads the events on board the San Dominick as a result of his inability to conceive of the black slaves in any way other than inarticulate and devoid of consciousness. Babo's construction of a plot in which the Spanish are subordinated by black domination in an insurrection is inconceivable to Delano. In particular, he depreciates the black seamen's capacity to comprehend and converse in Spanish. 'Benito Cereno' disrupts the possibility of any essential relation between blackness and muteness as Benito is figured in the same inarticulate terms as the slaves. Benito is coerced into silence by the power of the blacks' hold over him. The narrative, therefore, tells a different story of 'race' relations from that which is advanced by Delano, and also posits a contrary

interpretation of silence; rather than figuring the black crew as passive and harmless, as Delano does, the narrative intimates the opposite. The blacks who appear silent are actually in a position of power. The narrative's ending manifests Babo's influence over Benito, despite the absence of Babo's testimony at the deposition:

Dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black met his voiceless end. The body was burned to ashes; but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites; (...) and across the Rimac Bridge looked towards the monastery, on Mount Agonia without; where, three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader.⁷

Melville's short story shows the complexity of the relation between power and silence; the motif has the capacity to signify the opposing conditions of oppression and domination. The contingency of silence, and the socio-economic and racial issues explored in this narrative are to be further developed in much of the fiction of the first half of the twentieth century.

⁷ Herman Melville, 'Benito Cereno' in *Melville's Short Stories*, ed. by Dan McCall, pp. 34-102 (p. 102).

II – Social silences

Under this subtitle, theories considering cultural, economic, and political conditions to be the overarching determinants in the production of fictions' narrative events are reviewed. The silences in fiction are to be analysed in terms of their social and political implications; in particular, linguistic dispossession is to be exposed. Silence is a primary indicator of individuals and groups who are denied the means of self-articulation. This section examines silence in a context of social practice. It investigates the functioning of ideologies thought to consolidate the culturally dominant by positioning subordinate groups as inarticulate. The themes and concerns termed 'cultural silences' are divided into three sub-sections: 'socio-economic', 'gender', and 'postcolonial' theories of silencing. However, it is important to recognize the inter-connection between these theories of silence as a result of their common interest in dismantling hegemonic practices and signalling the existence of oppressed groups.

a) Socio-economic theories of silence

In order to address the way in which socio-economic factors can be conceived to determine the production of literature the following perspectives are examined: George Steiner's reflection upon language's devaluation in an age of political inhumanity following the Second World War; Pierre Macherey's theory of literature as ideological, with the social contradictions that constitute it inscribed in the margins of the text; Fredric Jameson's critique of Macherey's approach; and Pierre Bourdieu's formulation of the literary field and the struggle for linguistic capital. Bourdieu's theory is applied to Elizabeth Bowen's *The*

Heat of the Day as it illuminates the novel's representation of an inarticulate working class female character.

In *Language and Silence* Steiner regards language's devaluation in the twentieth century as a consequence of political inhumanity, particularly that of Nazi Germany, and technological developments which have served to create a mass-culture: 'There is a widespread intimation, though as yet only vaguely defined, of a certain exhaustion of verbal resources in modern civilization, of a brutalization and devaluation of the word in the mass-cultures and mass-politics of the age' ('Poet', 65). The manipulation of language to serve inhumane causes, such as Nazism, severs it from its moral roots and leaves it in a state of atrophy. The language used by mass-culture also reflects the reduction of value given to the word; the advertising culture and popular press influence the whole of society, saturating the tools employed by the writer. Steiner considers literature's movement into silence to be a result of the corruption of language, a 'retreat from the word'.⁸ This movement is understood to be a peculiarly twentieth-century phenomenon: 'This election of silence by the most articulate is, I believe, historically recent' ('Poet', 66).

Steiner claims that literature in pursuit of silence is estranged from language. Writers are unable to find a complete mode of expression and with only a corrupt and limited instrument at their disposal, they endeavour to reveal truths in the realm that, supposedly, transcends language: silence. The devaluation of language as a consequence of the over-production of literature, as well as political inhumanity, means that silence offers a purity and integrity

⁸ George Steiner, 'The Retreat from the Word', in *Language and Silence*, pp. 30-54 (p. 46).

lacking in language. However, for Steiner, the writer's movement into silence is indicative of a cultural crisis: 'Silence *is* an alternative. When the words in the city are full of savagery and lies, nothing speaks louder than the unwritten poem' ('Poet', 74). In an ideal culture the Word should be privileged over silence. He esteems writers such as Joyce and Durrell who attempt to elevate language and affirm its potential to reflect the truths of experience, writers who aspire to 'keep literature literate' ('Retreat', 53). Silence should have a secondary role in relation to language; it is the precondition of hearing the value inherent within the Word ('Poet', 73).

Macherey considers literature's silences to be a product of material relations rather than a sign of language's devaluation. Capitalism's existence rests on the necessity of concealing the conflict between the dominated and the dominant. Exploitation is hidden from view; the worker is kept oblivious of the real operations that determine his value. Macherey suggests that this social conflict forms the foundation of a literary text, however unified and coherent its appearance. The key to criticism is to locate gaps or silences in a text, as they can often denote the contradictions that the text attempts to reconcile. The unifying ambition of literature parallels the objectives of ideology: both work to create coherence and overcome contradictions, negating the reality that they embody.

Macherey formulates his argument in *A Theory of Literary Production* in relation to modes of literary interpretation which claim that meaning is inherent in the work and that its complexities can be unproblematically interpreted, thereby upholding the work as unified and autonomous. In contrast, Macherey emphasizes the need for the critic to stand apart from the text in order to discriminate its incompleteness:

The structure of the work, which makes it available to knowledge, is this internal displacement, this caesura, by which it corresponds to a reality that is also incomplete, which it shows without reflecting. The literary work gives the measure of a difference, reveals a determinate absence, resorts to an eloquent silence.⁹

What is to be explained in the work is not its unity but its disparities, as they intimate the conditions of its possibility. The work cannot articulate the antagonisms constituting it, its silence is a means of ‘displaying’ that reality (*Production*, 84). Utterance is only able to take place by means of silence: ‘This moment of absence founds the speech of the work’ (*Production*, 85). Accordingly, it is silence that should be the object of the critics’ investigation, the unspoken that reveals the conditions of appearance of the work. Despite Macherey’s insistence on the importance of not completing the incompleteness of a text, he claims that silence can be explained. Nevertheless, his argument is fundamental in situating a text in the historical context that enables its structure and meaning. A sophisticated reading, applying Macherey’s practice in *A Theory of Literary Production*, would be able to ascertain the way in which history functions inside the text, at its margins:

Thus, it is not a question of introducing a historical explanation which is stuck on to the work from the outside. On the contrary, we must show a sort of splitting within the work: this division is *its* unconscious, in so far

⁹ Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. by Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 79.

as it possesses one – the unconscious which is history, the play of history beyond its edges, encroaching on those edges: this is why it is possible to trace the path which leads from the haunted work to that which haunts it.

(Production, 94)

Regardless of a text appearing autonomous and unified, contrived by such formal means as a coherent narrative plot, Macherey claims that it will be found fundamentally fractured. Dehiscence marks its relation to history. He uncovers the presence of history, with its concomitant tensions, in the interior of the work itself.

The works of Jules Verne, according to Macherey, exemplify the way that the unifying ideological project of a work can be contravened by its very transference into narrative form. He focuses on the gap that opens up between the ideological theme and the manner in which it is expressed. It is this gap that instigates the need for explanation as it points towards the circumstances preceding its realization in narrative form: the contradiction inherent in the ideological project, and beyond that, social opposition (*Production, 192*). Macherey defines the ideological theme governing Verne's novels to be that of the conquest of nature by industry. Yet his analysis of the novels from the stage of representation to that of figuration, a term used to describe the mode by which the themes are managed in narrative form, reveals the novels' 'other' project, one contradicting its overtly delineated intentions. In spite of the attempt to present progressive heroes, free from their past in the pursuit of the future, the novels actually show them always to be only retracing the steps of those who have journeyed that way before. The forward movement of the characters coexists

with the contrary backward movement of the search for lost origins: ‘The advance, in its literal form, is like a return’ (*Production*, 189). The future can only ever be expressed by means of images evoking the past. Verne’s adoption of the fable form leads to inevitable contradictions arising in relation to the progressive objectives of the fiction: ‘This contradiction between the form and the content in Verne’s work would be the reflection, term for term, of the contradiction in the ideological project’ (*Production*, 191). The work’s attempt to express ideology results in necessary modification:

The interest in Verne’s work lies in the fact that, through the unity of its project – a unity borrowed from a certain ideological coherence, or incoherence – and by the means which inform the project (or fail in this enterprise), by specifically literary means, it reveals the *limits*, and to some extent the *conditions* of this ideological coherence, which is necessarily built upon a discord in the historical reality, and upon a discord between this reality and its *dominant* representation. (*Production*, 238)

The ideological contradictions evidenced are a consequence of historical class conflict. The attempt to achieve coherence and unity elicits the contrary, the fundamental discord of historical reality.

In a later essay, written collaboratively with Etienne Balibar, attention is given to the role that literature, as an ideological form, plays in a system of social

practice that works to maintain the dominant bourgeois ideology.¹⁰ Literature silently attempts to erase the contradictions constituting it by engendering a cohesive appearance and producing the myth of its creation independent of history, thus perpetuating the inequalities that precede and inhere within it. The text is not just a product of determinate processes, but is itself part of the system that produces ideological ‘effects’ (‘Ideological Form’, 94). This essay redresses some of the limitations of *A Theory of Literary Production* by emphasizing the dialogic qualities of a literary text.

Regardless of this, Fredric Jameson signals a number of problems in Macherey’s form of Marxist reading. He challenges Macherey’s tendency to locate contradictions only to reunify them:

The Althusserian/Marxist conception of culture requires this multiplicity to be reunified, if not at the level of the work itself, then at the level of its process of production, which is not random but can be described as a coherent functional operation in its own right.¹¹

Instead, Jameson posits history as the absent cause that can only be approached through its composition in textual form. He problematizes the possibility of attaining unmediated access to the social contradictions preceding the text. *The Political Unconscious* places the emphasis upon the coexistence of several conflicting modes of production—as opposed to one system—and highlights the complexity of texts as a result of their constitution by multiple and divergent sign

¹⁰ Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, ‘On Literature as an Ideological Form’, trans. by Ian McLeod and others, in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. by Robert Young (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981; repr. 1987), pp. 79-99.

¹¹ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 56.

systems all competing in one space. Jameson's formulation is equally concerned with silences inscribed within texts as indications of historical reality, but behind the complexity of a text, he attests to the problems of depicting a coherent set of operations at the level of the means of production. Jameson also makes explicit the inequality of literature by indicating the suppression of voices inimical to the 'single voice' of literature:

The cultural monuments and masterworks that have survived tend necessarily to perpetuate only a single voice in this class dialogue, the voice of a hegemonic class, they cannot be properly assigned their relational place in a dialogical system without the restoration or artificial reconstruction of the voice to which they were initially opposed, a voice for the most part stifled and reduced to silence. (*Political*, 85)

In 'On Literature as an Ideological Form', Macherey and Balibar describe a basic division in language underlying the appearance of a common language, indicating the conflict that forms the foundation of capitalism. Bourdieu also examines the concept of a divided language which lies beyond the appearance of universality. He explores the linguistic differences and inequalities that form a single linguistic community by investing in the notion of a linguistic field in which subjects compete for linguistic capital. The idea of 'the' language is, accordingly, a construct: 'To speak of *the* language, without further specification, as linguists do, is tacitly to accept the *official* definition of the *official* language

of a political unit.’¹² The constitution of a single linguistic community is an ongoing process achieved by the dominant group’s production of the idea of a linguistic norm, against which all other linguistic practices are judged. The educational system is fundamental to the imposition and normalization of the official language. In relation to this model, regionalisms and popular forms of expression are condemned as ‘slang’ and ‘gibberish’ (*Symbolic*, 49). The differences of social uses of language replicate the hierarchy of social groups. Those in a position of social dominance possess linguistic capital which they preserve by maintaining a system that devalues those who are without linguistic competence:

Speakers lacking the legitimate competence are *de facto* excluded from the social domains in which this competence is required, or are condemned to silence. What is rare, then, is not the capacity to speak, which, being part of our biological heritage, is universal and therefore essentially non-distinctive, but rather the competence necessary in order to speak the legitimate language which, depending on social inheritance, re-translates social distinctions into the specifically symbolic logic of differential deviations, or, in short, distinction. (*Symbolic*, 55)

In Bourdieu’s formulation, groups are defined as inarticulate not because they are literally, or essentially, silent, but because they lack competence in the official

¹² Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992; repr. 1997), p. 45.

language. Their potential to communicate is frustrated by their subordinate position in a hierarchical system.

The linguistic market, in which those with linguistic competence maintain positions of power, is sustained by a form of ‘silent violence’ (*Symbolic*, 52). Dominated speakers are condemned for their ill-use of language by a code of tacit suggestions rather than explicit judgements. This indirect mode of domination leads to the self-regulation of speaking subjects who are able to acknowledge their own linguistic failings. Whilst access to the official language is dependent upon position in the social class system, ‘recognition’ of the value and status attributed to this language is uniform within the linguistic community (*Symbolic*, 62).

Bowen’s novel, *The Heat of the Day*, can be read in the light of Bourdieu’s formulation of a conflictual linguistic field. It provides an illustration of the difficulties faced by those on the margins of society who are denied access to cultural capital. It represents a female character, Louie, who is lacking in linguistic competence as a result of her low social status in a hierarchical class system. Her inarticulacy and social gracelessness is emphasized by virtue of her juxtaposition with Stella, an articulate, middle- to upper-class socialite: ‘Everything ungirt, artless (...) about Louie was to the fore: all over herself she gave the impression of twisted stockings.’¹³ Louie is conscious of being socially inadequate because of her failure to access linguistic capital. In her awareness that the dominant form of communication is the legitimate one, she can be seen as a fictional example of Bourdieu’s theory of self-regulating subjects:

¹³ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 235.

‘Often you say the advantage I should be at if I could speak grammar; but it’s not only that. Look the trouble there is when I have to only say what I *can* say, and so cannot ever say what it is really. Inside me it’s like being crowded to death – more and more of it all getting into me. I could more bear it if I could only say. Now she tonight, she spoke beautifully.’ (*Heat*, 245)

Louie sees Stella as a model that she aspires to emulate. Her lower class status and lack of education means that she has been unable to access the norms necessary to secure her social advancement. Instead she is a figure of ridicule, disparaged for her ‘bad grammar’. The characters, Connie and Harrison, mock her linguistic incompetence, although her apparent oblivion to their witticisms proves deceptive when she acknowledges her own linguistic limitations.

Louie’s inability to obtain the legitimate language leads her to be easily dominated. She appears passive and subservient. Her husband Tom, Connie, Harrison, and Stella all have mastery over her. In conversations between Louie and Connie about the ongoing Second World War, Louie is frequently silenced. For example, any views that she might hold in regard to the cause of the War are quickly quashed by the outspoken Connie (*Heat*, 155-156). Louie’s attraction to figures whom she can imitate, such as Connie and Stella, causes her to appear absent to herself. Unable to constitute her own subjectivity by means of language, she is presented as a void: “‘From on and on like this not being able to say, I seem to get to be nothing’” (*Heat*, 246). Her obsession with reading the papers brings her an element of tranquillity; it gives her the words and opinions that she lacks, providing her formless consciousness with a semblance of shape

(*Heat*, 151). Louie's desperate attempt to assimilate linguistic capital is in accordance with Bourdieu's formulation:

The *competitive struggle* which leads each agent, through countless strategies of assimilation and dissimulation (...) constantly to change his substantial properties (here, pronunciation, diction, syntactic devices, etc.), while maintaining, precisely by running in the race, the disparity which underlies the race. (*Symbolic*, 64)

Louie's adoption of strategies to enable her to obtain linguistic capital, such as her imitation of the ideas and language of the popular press, provides the very means by which the legitimate language is able to perpetuate its dominance, and thus the hierarchical class system that is foundational to it.

However, whilst Bourdieu's formulation assists in elucidating the socio-economic significance of Louie's inarticulacy, the fiction advances other contributing factors that are not reducible to his theory. Bourdieu proposes the possibility that those lacking access to the official language are able to communicate and represent themselves, although in an illegitimate fashion, whereas Bowen's novel signals the psychological problems concomitant with linguistic incompetence; it explores the human experience of linguistic inadequacy. Louie's interiority is represented as a vacuum (*Heat*, 149). The novel also intimates the existence of a realm of meaning residing beyond language which eludes even the most adept speakers. Articulate and socially successful characters, such as Roderick and Stella, are frequently defeated in their attempts to communicate their experiences. The word 'something' appears throughout the novel as an empty and meaningless sign. At the end of the novel it

is taken up by both Roderick and Stella: “‘Because of course there is something to be said. There must be. There’s *something* to be said’” (*Heat*, 299). Finally, the novel leaves uncertain whether there is ‘something’ meaningful beyond language that exceeds articulation or whether life is as meaningless as language can appear. Despite Louie’s attempts to obtain social capital, the novel signals the worthlessness of such acquisition because it is “‘dead currency’” (*Heat*, 268).

Bourdieu’s formulation offers insight into Louie’s inarticulacy, but the novel itself poses a multiplicity of explanations for her silence, her social position is not the only factor conditioning her linguistic competence. Her gender is undoubtedly an inhibiting element in her social and linguistic progress: she possesses the qualities stereotypically associated with women, such as silence and passivity. Louie’s relation to language may reflect women’s alienation from an order that is traditionally associated with patriarchy; thus her detachment from legitimate language must be considered in relation to her gender as well as her social class. Stella’s generation is presented as the locus of the inhumanity and meaninglessness connected with the War: ‘the fatal connexion between the past and future having been broken before her time. It had been Stella, her generation, who had broken the link’ (*Heat*, 176). Louie’s condition is a product not only of her situation in a hierarchical and patriarchal society, but of her historical moment: she is an orphan, severed from her family roots, and geographically displaced. She is a victim of the horror of war brought about by the generation preceding her. An event propelled by patriarchal and imperial-capitalist interests. Linguistic capital holds little value in the novel. History is considered to have tainted language and emptied it of its potential to communicate and establish meaning.

However, although Louie may lack the potential to acquire the dominant language, she does show signs of visionary understanding. The novel closes with her fascination with birds' elevation and detachment from the world. She is able to pass this image onto her son, expressing herself by a code distinguishable from the linguistic norm. This final hopeful vision, located in the most socially displaced character in the novel, appears to transcend issues associated with socio-economic inequality. Such an aesthetic move to escape material conditions, following the thought of Macherey, Jameson, and Bourdieu, is indicative of hegemonic culture's perpetuation of its dominance by concealing the contradictions constitutive of society. Whilst *The Heat of the Day* can be conceived as complicit in preserving bourgeois hegemony, it also can be seen to explore language's relation to the constitution of subjectivity, the referential limitations of language, and gender alienation. Yet, when analysing the novel within a socio-economic framework, it becomes difficult to extricate the issues narrativized from the operation of ideology which unifies its contradictions and conceals the determinate conditions that form the means of its production.

b) Feminist theories of silence

Feminist theories concerned with the presence of silence in texts are not to be viewed in isolation from the socio-economic issues examined above. Women of low social class are positioned as doubly silenced: subordinated by patriarchy and capitalism. This condition is exemplified by the character of Louie in *The Heat of the Day*. In this section, the phenomenon of silence in literature of the twentieth-century is to be considered in terms of the exclusion of women from the circumstances necessary to enable literary production; the inequality of access to the dominant language; and Western metaphysics' formulation of

woman as inarticulate. Work by Tillie Olsen, Elaine Showalter, and Luce Irigaray, serves to illustrate the variety of ways of reading and interpreting women's silence. A fictional text that dramatically evinces women's disarticulation within patriarchal society, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper', is to be studied in the context of Showalter's feminist theory. While the theory assists in the elucidation of the story's equivocal meanings, the story in turn provides a challenge to the rigidity of Showalter's reading of silence.

In contrast to Steiner's exploration of silence as a valid form of expression when language has become inhumane and devalued, or the condition necessary for the reception of the Word, Tillie Olsen concentrates upon silence as an indicator of voices unable to find expression. She draws attention to those who are mute because they lack, or are denied, the appropriate circumstances to foster creativity:

Literary history and the present are dark with silences:
 some the silences for years by our acknowledged great;
 some silences hidden; some the ceasing to publish after
 one work appears; some the never coming to book form
 at all.¹⁴

Olsen's exploration of 'unnatural silences' highlights issues of social inequality ('Silences', 6). She addresses the voices which remain mute as a result of gender, race, and class. Her examination of the content of literature courses in the essay

¹⁴ Tillie Olsen, 'Silences', in *Silences* (London: Virago, 1980; repr. 1985), pp. 6-21 (p. 6).

'One Out of Twelve', published in 1971, makes manifest the silencing of female voices and the privileging of male.¹⁵

Olsen's essays have been influential in addressing the imbalance of the traditional canon and literary courses. She has worked to uncover women's texts that have been largely unread or under-valued whilst registering the fact that female voices continue to go unheard:

We must not speak of women writers in our century (as we cannot speak of women in any area of recognized human achievement) without speaking also of the invisible, the as-innately-capable: the born to the wrong circumstances—diminished, excluded, foundered, silenced. ('One Out of Twelve', 39)

Elaine Showalter further scrutinizes these female silences—regarding them as denotative of women's cultural absence—by concentrating attention upon the specificity of women's writing. Women are denied the most appropriate conditions in which to write at the same time as they are withheld from complete access to the dominant mode of communication:

The appropriate task for feminist criticism, I believe, is to concentrate on women's access to language, on the available lexical range from which words can be selected, on the ideological and cultural determinants of expression. The problem is not that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that

¹⁵ Tillie Olsen, 'One Out of Twelve: Writers Who are Women in Our Century', in *Silences*, pp. 22-76.

women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, or circumlocution.¹⁶

In the literature of women she observes absences: ‘The holes in discourse, the blanks and gaps and silences, are not the spaces where female consciousness reveals itself but the blinds of a “prison-house of language”’ (‘Feminist Criticism’, 256).

In the essay ‘Feminist Critics in the Wilderness’, Showalter appropriates a cultural anthropological model to explain women’s position in society, and to account for their different discourse. Culture is constituted by a dominant and a muted group: those in the muted group, such as women, have access to the dominant structures, and express themselves within it, but they also maintain their own culture which is separate from the dominant. In this marginal space, articulation can take place without engendering the sense of alienation that occurs in the dominant culture. This formulation accounts for the frequency of the appearance of a dual discourse in women’s literature, reflective of both the dominant and muted aspects of a culture.

‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ exemplifies Showalter’s cultural model. It depicts a ‘double-voiced discourse’, a dominant and a muted narrative (‘Feminist Criticism’, 266). The narrator of ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ comes to observe an outside pattern and a sub-pattern in the oblique text of the wallpaper: ‘At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern, I mean, and the woman behind

¹⁶ Elaine Showalter, ‘Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness’, in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986; repr. 1992), pp. 243-270 (p. 255).

it is as plain as can be.’¹⁷ The outer pattern imprisons the woman. This parallels the narrator’s social position whereby she is confined by the structures of patriarchy. Forbidden to write for the sake of her health, unable to maintain an active role, and completely disempowered, she is confined to her room to rest whilst her husband manages her situation and provides the words that she falters over. As a result of being denied any form of expression, the wallpaper becomes her text. She is both the reader and producer of its meaning as she identifies herself with the trapped woman. Her voice, creativity, and imagination are projected onto the paper; yet the paper remains a silent text, unfathomable to everyone but her.

The narrator maintains a dual discourse, dominant and muted, just as the wallpaper has an outer and inner meaning. She often speaks in the same language as her husband John, internalizing his opinions and vocabulary: ‘It is as airy and comfortable a room as anyone need wish, and, of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim’ (‘Wallpaper’, 1151). Her interpretive skills echo the scientific rationality of her husband. She is preoccupied with making sense of the wallpaper, reducing it to rational terms, and comprehends John’s and Jennie’s suspicious behaviour towards her by proposing ‘just as a scientific hypothesis’, that they are ‘queer’ (‘Wallpaper’, 1158). At the same time as she displaces herself onto the figure of the woman in the paper, she can be seen to adopt, or usurp, the position of superiority occupied by John. Her duality is evident: she shares aspects of both a dominant linguistic male culture and a subversive inarticulate one. As a consequence of this, she both

¹⁷ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’, in *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, ed. by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New York: Norton, 1985), pp. 1148-1161 (p. 1156).

desires to free the trapped woman and maintain her imprisonment, just as she wants both to liberate and restrain herself:

As soon as it was moonlight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her.

(‘Wallpaper’, 1159)

I’ve got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her! (‘Wallpaper’, 1160)

The narrative ends in an impasse: it remains uncertain who is silenced, John or the narrator. The text appears to both maintain and problematize the categories of dominant and muted cultures discriminated by Showalter. The silent realm is an indeterminate and complex one, and therefore a reading of silence—which this narrative exemplifies through the narrator—involving self-projections and assumptions must be subject to scrutiny. Although women may find expression by virtue of silent texts, such as the wallpaper, it is not always possible to determine their meaning.

Luce Irigaray, and other theorists associated with *écriture féminine*, consider female absence in relation to male dominated culture. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray examines the way that prevailing Western discourses are predicated upon the absence of women. The philosophical tradition she scrutinizes discloses woman as the condition of possibility of male subject constitution:

Is she unnecessary in and of herself, but essential as the non-subjective sub-jectum? As that which can never

achieve the status of subject, at least for/by herself. Is she the indispensable condition whereby the living entity retains and maintains and perfects himself in his self-likeness? (...) Thus, this 'lack of qualities' that makes the female truly female ensures that the male can achieve his qualifications. (*Speculum*, 165)

According to Irigaray, the elimination of women from culture and history has been fundamental to the construction and preservation of the Western metaphysical tradition. Such a masculine economy seeks to banish maternal origins, and, in so doing, creates the illusion of self-authorship.

Following Irigaray's formulation, Steiner's valorization of the Word could be seen to be paradigmatic of Western culture in its elision of discourse's precondition, the generative matter traditionally gendered female. Plato spatially formulates the reality preceding articulation by means of his concept of the *chora*. In the view of Irigaray as well as Julia Kristeva, it is a feminine space that is associated with lack and absence.¹⁸ This elementary matter is not given the ontological status that it deserves, its existence as the condition of possibility of articulation is not culturally recognized. This feminine space does not have any association with the Word but 'offers, unawares, an all-powerful soil in which the logos can grow' (*Speculum*, 162). Western tradition endeavours to erase these origins or permits the analysis of this space only by virtue of its teleology: 'Every utterance, every statement, will thus be developed and affirmed by covering over the fact that being's unseverable relation to mother-matter has been buried'

¹⁸ Julia Kristeva considers the *chora* as maternal in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. by Thomas Gora and others (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982; repr. 1987), pp. 124-147 (p. 133).

(*Speculum*, 162). Nevertheless, Irigaray charges women's silence, and their marginal position, with a disruptive potential capable of unravelling the masculine economy which subordinates women; therefore, she does not conceive women's silence as a sign of their vacuity. Rather, their silence provides an insight into the workings of the dominant, masculine, culture.

c) Postcolonial theories of silence

A review of the pervasive qualities of patriarchal ideology, leading to the silencing of women and the formulation of woman as silent, cannot be detached from an exploration of the violence of an imperialist ideology that also necessitates the construction of a silent other, and from issues associated with racial silencing. *Heart of Darkness* provides a fictional enactment of many of the themes and issues central to late twentieth-century postcolonial theory. An examination of the relationship between the silent colonized and the discursive colonizers in *Heart of Darkness* will lead into a consideration of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in which she discusses the subject-position of the subaltern. The debate surrounding colonial subjects' capacity for voice and agency is to be briefly intimated by outlining Benita Parry's response to Spivak's essay in 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse'.

Heart of Darkness represents the polarized vision of imperialism whereby articulate colonizing subjects are juxtaposed with inarticulate racial others who are foreclosed from possessing any of the trappings of consciousness. Marlow's perception of the wilderness is informed by imperialist ideology that consolidates racial and cultural superiority by recourse to scientific ideas of evolution and

cultural advancement. As he travels through the bafflingly alien landscape he situates himself as a witness of the primitive origins of mankind. His conception that the natives lack civilization and culture allows him to figure them as primeval:

‘The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse.’¹⁹

The above metaphor contributes to the construction of the natives as inarticulate and other to the colonizing subjects. The discourse of the natives is described by Marlow as a “violent babble of uncouth sounds” (*Darkness*, 38). The voices of Marlow and Kurtz, imbued with meaning and power, are positioned in opposition to this incomprehensible ‘noise’ (*Darkness*, 73). Kurtz’s eloquence enables him to write a compelling report for the ‘International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs’ which is made up of a “magic current of phrases” (*Darkness*, 83). By stripping indigenous groups of any discursive capacity and rendering them bestial and uncivilized, the West aspires to legitimize its imperial project. Marlow’s traducing of native speech and culture arises partly from his sense that there can be only one valid discourse: “An appeal to me in this fiendish row – is there? Very well; I hear; I admit, but I have

¹⁹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 62.

a voice too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced”” (*Darkness*, 63).

Marlow’s experience of terror at the thought that his narrative could collapse into silence leads him to silence others. However, despite his attempt to position the natives as completely alien to himself, it is evident that the Western voice contains traces of the incomprehensible otherness of the natives. In Marlow’s memory, Kurtz’s voice is conflated with the natives’: ““He was very little more than a voice. And I heard – him – it – this voice – other voices – all of them were so little more than voices – (...) impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber”” (*Darkness*, 80). The conception of the natives as prehistoric—allowing the West to maintain its myth of progress—exposes a contradiction in imperialist ideology: in the process of inscribing the natives as ‘primitive other’ there remains the suggestion that the trace of the other inheres within themselves (*Darkness*, 63). Marlow’s narrative is implicated in the polarized vision of imperialism, and thus also displays its inherent contradictions.

The landscape, and by extension the native, is represented as silent. Its muteness evokes transcendent meaning for Marlow at the same time as it bars him from access to it: ““The woods were unmoved, like a mask – heavy, like the closed door of a prison – they looked with their air of hidden knowledge, of patient expectation, of unapproachable silence”” (*Darkness*, 93). Whilst he is frustrated at being kept on the threshold of such a dense and mystical knowledge, his discourse serves to postpone further the possibility of meaningful interaction with the natives. Marlow’s perception of the environment as mute, concealing knowledge from him, intimates his refusal to discern in the alien voices the same discursive capacity as his own. His mystification of the natives, by associating

them with a pre-verbal realm, occludes the processes by which they are silenced: both by considering their articulation as babble, thus refusing to hear them, and by derogating and exploiting them, ensuring their weakness: “nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation” (*Darkness*, 35).

Marlow is able to recognize the travesties of imperialism at the same time as he aspires to its ideals (*Darkness*, 20). He is both a critical observer and an upholder of imperialism: he condemns the savagery of Kurtz’s tyranny over the natives yet lies to Kurtz’s intended, shielding her from knowledge of her beloved’s corrupt practices. Marlow’s ambiguous position in relation to imperialism—concurrently as sceptic and as collaborator—leads him to be perceived with ironic detachment by the reader; thus *Heart of Darkness* succeeds in scrutinizing the pervasive operations of a destructive social, political, and economic system. However, as Marlow’s narrative is incorporated within the narration of an unnamed figure, who is more explicitly aligned with imperialism, the novel offers no hope of attaining a position uncontaminated by imperialist interests.

The silence of the natives in *Heart of Darkness* provides a narrative illustration of the subaltern issue theorized by Spivak. In the essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, Spivak posits the difficulty of retrieving the voices of dominated subjects who are denied a position of enunciation. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow’s narrative obtains its dominance by disabling the possibility of meaningful native articulation. Spivak addresses the problem of the Western subject formulating itself in relation to an other. She challenges Foucault and Deleuze for maintaining agendas which decentre notions of the subject whilst simultaneously constructing an other that validates the European subject. They

neglect ideological issues and the processes of international capitalism; their lack of intellectual self-consciousness, Spivak claims, assists in the reproduction of imperialist values.²⁰ The subaltern is a figure who is so enclosed by the various discourses determining its position that ‘voice-consciousness’ is precluded (‘Subaltern’, 80). Spivak maintains the impossibility of retrieving the voice of silent subalterns: ‘On the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside *and* outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, *can the subaltern speak?*’ (‘Subaltern’, 78).

Spivak regards the idea that the dominated are able to speak for themselves, upheld by Foucault and Deleuze, as utopian and an evasion of the expansiveness and pernicious nature of imperial discourse. The subaltern group are subjugated by the elite of the native state as well as by Western patriarchy and imperial-capitalism, and thus are constituted by discursive formations from multiple different groups. Spivak focuses on the subaltern woman who is ‘doubly in shadow’, as the product of both imperialist and patriarchal discourses (‘Subaltern’, 84). The subaltern woman occupies the site of an aporia, a space between the discourses that constitute her, and therefore lacks a position from which to speak. The object of theory is not to attempt the impossible task of retrieving the voice of the subaltern, but to recognize subject-positions. Spivak explores the practice of *sati* as an extreme case of the silence of the gendered subaltern. The self-immolation of widows on their husband’s pyre assures their

²⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1993), pp. 66-111 (p. 75) (first publ. in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 271-313).

spiritual elevation in the after-life, and thereby the possibility of liberation from their culturally subordinate status. The practice suggests that the women have free will and individual agency whilst being the ultimate reflection of woman as object of her husband. The narratives about *sati* perpetuate the myths of it being a heroic act; thus the ‘task of recovering a (sexually) subaltern subject is lost in an institutional textuality at the archaic origin’ (‘Subaltern’, 99). The colonial power condemned the practice of *sati* and figured themselves as rescuers of native women from the hands of barbaric native men. Spivak constructs a sentence that evidences the erasure of the woman subaltern in her appropriation by two contrary discourses: “‘White men are saving brown women from brown men’” (‘Subaltern’, 92). The accounts of *sati* do not include the testimony of women. A project to retrieve their voice, according to Spivak, is futile: ‘Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the “third-world woman” caught between tradition and modernization’ (‘Subaltern’, 102).

Spivak’s formulation of discursive practice that is constitutive of the Western subject highlights the omissions ensuing from theoretical procedures. The subaltern is defined by its position of difference: ‘For the “true” subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself’ (‘Subaltern’, 80). Instead of the retrieval of silenced voices, Spivak posits the necessity of the intellectual acting as the subaltern’s representative. Rather than maintaining a romantic belief that the female subaltern has the capacity to speak for herself, she intervenes to speak on her behalf. The story of Bhuvanewari Bhaduri’s suicide provides an example of

the way that the intellectual can represent the voice of the subaltern. Bhaduri's suicide is interpreted by her family as a 'case of illicit love', but is read by Spivak as an interventionist action that rewrites the narrative of *sati* ('Subaltern', 104). The model of Bhuvanewari could indicate the value of representation, yet it is equally a model that addresses the problems associated with interpreting silence. The mode by which Spivak comes to see the suicide as interventionist is problematic without an account from Bhuvanewari herself; the comment that the 'subaltern as female cannot be heard or read' seems invalid in the context of her attempt to 'read' the intentions of Bhuvanewari ('Subaltern', 104). Her adoption of *sati* as an example of the woman subaltern has also been criticized.²¹ The *sati* is a figure that only comes into existence at the moment of death; therefore such a case cannot be representative of the subaltern in general.

Benita Parry challenges Spivak's emphasis upon subaltern silence, neglect of native agency, and reification of the intellectual ('Colonial Discourse', 34). Parry's counter-argument evinces the fundamental problems arising from theorizations of silent subaltern groups: in depicting the extent of the epistemic violence of imperialism the dominated can appear weak and voiceless, as is the case in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. Parry questions Spivak's erasure of native voices and neglect of anti-colonial nationalist movements ('Colonial Discourse', 35). Whilst Spivak offers a critique of Western discursive practice that reproduces the tenets of imperialism, she fails to consider a place of resistance outside of that discourse. Parry is invested in establishing a theoretical position that is detached from poststructuralism's focus on discourse: 'The labour of

²¹ See Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 235-236 and Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', *Oxford Literary Review*, 9 (1987), 27-58 (p. 35).

producing a counter-discourse displacing imperialism's dominative system of knowledge rests with those engaged in developing a critique from outside its cultural hegemony, and in furthering a contest begun by anti-colonial movements' ('Colonial Discourse', 55). However, Spivak would suggest that the subaltern is precisely that figure which falls outside of such institutions as nationalist organizations.²² 'Subaltern' is a term used to identify those who are unable to represent themselves and remain outside of the discursive sphere—figures who are denied the possibility of speaking for themselves.

The issues raised in regard to postcolonialism's struggle to discern the constitution of such a silent group, along with the problems of knowing and representing its interests, will be important in the first half of this thesis which investigates fictional representations of, and critical thought about, social silences and the position of groups subordinated because of class, gender, or race.

²² Gayatri Spivak, 'Gayatri Spivak on the Politics of the Subaltern', an interview with Howard Winant, *Socialist Review*, 20 (1990), 81-97 (p. 90).

III – Aesthetic implications of silence

This section focuses on twentieth-century literary criticism and theory that registers a connection between an intuition of language's inefficacy and the development of an aesthetic of silence: the pursuit of a means of expression dissociated from language's contingency. The import accorded to the motif in this section is to be juxtaposed with that granted it within the previous section. Instead of discerning texts' silences in a socio-political context, whereby they are charged with the capacity to reveal both ideological operations and the location of the oppressed, the thought to be explored here views the motif in a predominantly aesthetic and linguistic light. Literature is perceived in autonomous terms. Work by Susan Sontag, Ihab Hassan, and Maurice Blanchot that pertains to art's turn towards silence is discussed, together with Woolf's novel *Between the Acts* as a narrative illustration of an aesthetic of silence. Whilst this novel evinces many of the issues variously theorized by Sontag, Hassan, and Blanchot, it also offers an alternative conception of the motif's implications. This selection of writers is intended as representative, and it should be noted that further works such as John Cage's *Silence* and Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero* could have been discussed here. Owing to space limitations, this chapter must confine itself to the brief introductory indication of their association with this section's topic.

Susan Sontag addresses modern art's spiritual project, its exploration of issues of consciousness. Art no longer aspires to express consciousness but to eliminate it. This is a consequence of an acute sense of language as a mediatory code, loaded with—and corrupted by—the burden of history:

In the end, the radical critique of consciousness (first delineated by the mystical tradition, now administered by unorthodox psychotherapy and high modernist art) always lays the blame on language. Consciousness, experienced as a burden, is conceived of as the memory of all the words that have ever been said. ('Aesthetics', 23)

Art strives to transcend the contamination of language, and the implications that that has for consciousness, by pursuing silence and becoming anti-art, rejecting the very foundations of its existence. As language is inextricable from history, art's retreat from language must be viewed as an ahistorical project. Anti-art is also reluctant to be communicative: it desires to flee from dependency upon an audience that has the capacity to distort its meaning: 'Silence is a metaphor for a cleansed, non-interfering vision' ('Aesthetics', 16). The value attributed to silence is a consequence of the 'absoluteness' of modern art's objectives, not a result of the application of silence in art itself ('Aesthetics', 31). There can only ever be a pursuit of silence: 'A genuine emptiness, a pure silence are not feasible—either conceptually or in fact. (...) Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech (...) and an element in a dialogue' ('Aesthetics', 11).

Art evoking silence engenders a paradoxical relation to language: it highlights the historically corrupted nature of language whilst simultaneously idealizing language, as it longs for an uncontaminated mode of expression. Rather than negate language, silence actually esteems it. This is made particularly apparent by art's failure to remain literally silent: 'silence can exist only in a cooked or non-literal sense' ('Aesthetics', 10). Sontag observes that the

'aesthetic of silence' is frequently coexistent with a horror of the void. Beckett's fiction is exemplary of a literature that develops an interminable discourse with the intention of staving off silence, and filling up the gaps stimulating fear: 'the "silence" of things, images and words is a prerequisite for their proliferation' ('Aesthetics', 28).

Sontag delineates two styles amongst the artists who adopt silence as a literary strategy: loud and soft. Art embracing the loud style often has an apocalyptic perspective and is constructed upon a precarious relationship between the 'plenum' and 'void'. The plenum is always in danger of collapsing into its opposite, 'negative silence' ('Aesthetics', 32). In contrast to this dramatic and overt style, the 'soft' style is subtle and reticent. Sontag associates it with traditional classicism, only with 'didactic seriousness' being replaced with 'ironic open-mindedness' ('Aesthetics', 32). Both styles are equally absolutist although they adopt different voices to make their claims. Ultimately, Sontag prefers the 'soft' style as the mode that is most likely to have a long term impact upon literature and culture, the 'loud' style being self-destructive: 'Indeed, it could be argued that silence is likely to remain a viable notion for modern art and consciousness only if deployed with a considerable, near systematic irony' ('Aesthetics', 33). Irony offers a mode of assessment whilst remaining rooted in a sense of truth; it can challenge and interrogate from a position of stability. However, 'The Aesthetics of Silence' concludes by envisioning a despairing future for art that continues to pursue silence by means of irony:

It seems unlikely that the possibilities of continually undermining one's assumptions can go on unfolding indefinitely into the future, without being eventually

checked by despair or by a laugh that leaves one without any breath at all. ('Aesthetics', 34)

Ihab Hassan's formulation of the 'literature of silence' maintains a more optimistic perspective of the future than that presented in 'The Aesthetics of Silence'. Like Sontag, he attributes to literature associated with silence an apocalyptic vision, but one that offers greater prospects for language and consciousness: 'Mystics have always maintained that the way down is also the way out and that the end of things heralds a new beginning—negative transcendence, as we call it today, is a form of transcendence nevertheless' (*Literature*, 3-4). He identifies a new form of art that has emerged within the modern literary tradition: one that has its origins in the duality of the myth of Orpheus, a figure whose dismemberment results in the separation of flesh and spirit, body and voice. Hassan envisages the 'literature of silence', a phenomenon of the present, to have a positive effect on the literature of the future. The bleakness of contemporary literature is necessary for advances to take place in the future: "Art is rehearsal for the orientation which makes innovation possible." Silence, it has been my theme, is such a rehearsal, and its outcome may be an innovation in consciousness, not merely in art' (*Literature*, 216).

Hassan's view corresponds with Sontag's in his postulation of two major strands in the 'literature of silence': he sees one, following in the tradition of Novalis and Rimbaud, to pursue silence as the intimation of plenitude, whilst another strand, associated with Mallarmé and Kafka, implicates silence with notions of the void. In *The Literature of Silence*, Hassan places Henry Miller in the tradition of silence as fullness, whilst Samuel Beckett is exemplary of

literature's movement towards vacancy. Both modes of conceptualizing silence are figured by Hassan to stem from the modern condition of alienation:

The negative, then, informs silence; and silence is my metaphor of a language that expresses, with harsh and subtle cadences, the stress in art, culture, and consciousness. The crisis is modern and postmodern, current and continuous, though discontinuity and apocalypse are also images of it. Thus the language of silence conjoins the need both of autodestruction and self-transcendence. (*Orpheus*, 12)

Two modes of transcendence are implicit in the new 'literature of silence': that which moves upward, and is connected with apocalypse, and that which moves downward, and intimates outrage. In the pursuit of silence the dual reactions of apocalypse and outrage are given strong voice. Literary transactions with silence do not denote a complete collapse—or disillusion with the possibility—of meaning, but are the expression of an attempt to find alternative meaning-making procedures. As Sontag suggests, the adoption of silence provides a method of critiquing language, consciousness, and civilization. The art of absence is resonant. The discrimination, by both Sontag and Hassan, of two ways of appropriating silence in literature highlights the difficulty of formulating silence. Although both ascribe the preoccupation with silence to a specifically modern condition, arising from the experience of alienation and introversion, they are unable to impute to it a univocal function or meaning; thus they discover 'literatures' of silence.

For Hassan, like Sontag, silence is a metaphor, it cannot literally be represented but is indicative of a vision and a set of motifs. Hassan views silence as a metaphor for anti-literature and accords to it the function of synthesizing the disparate elements of modern consciousness (*Orpheus*, 14):

The point is this: silence develops as the metaphor of a new attitude that literature has chosen to adopt toward itself. This attitude puts to question the peculiar power, the ancient excellence, of literary discourse – and challenges the assumptions of our civilization.

(*Literature*, 15)

Silence provides a paradigm for a particular strand of modern literature that is in reaction against its own contaminated operations; it embraces both the outward reaching art of Miller and the introverted, potentially solipsistic, fiction of Beckett. Ultimately, the expansive and contracted visions of Miller and Beckett are reduced to the same goal of challenging the possibility of literature itself: ‘whether the literature of silence proves a passing fashion or a phase of literary history, it is a judgement of the Western conscience, and of its unconscious, upon ourselves’ (*Literature*, 31).

Maurice Blanchot is also concerned with the aesthetics of a literature that negates itself. A literature that comes into being by striving towards its own absence: ‘the work is the movement which takes us towards the pure point of inspiration from which it comes and which it seems it can only reach by

disappearing.’²³ The objective of the writer is to pursue the point of literature’s disappearance: ‘the neutrality which every writer deliberately or unwittingly seeks, and which leads some to silence.’²⁴ Literature’s motivation to achieve its own disappearance derives from its sense of the contaminating influence of everyday language. Art aspires to transcend communal and historical language with the intention of discovering an incorruptible silence at the point of the work’s origin.²⁵

As a consequence of Blanchot’s extensive work on silence both in fiction and theory, a full account of which would be difficult to accommodate to the objectives of this chapter, his short essay, ‘Mallarmé’s Experience’, will serve here as a concise illustration of his interest in the relationship between literature and silence. Blanchot works out his critical agenda in the light of Mallarmé’s aesthetic. Mallarmé distinguishes two forms of language: crude, or immediate, and essential. Both are associated with silence. Crude language is silent because it is conditioned by the principle of exchange and, accordingly, is meaningless because it produces nothing. It represents things and is inextricably linked to the physical world: ‘Immediate language is perhaps in fact a relation with the immediate world, with what is immediately close to us, our environs.’²⁶ Crude speech provides an illusion of immediacy, concealing language’s foundation in

²³ Maurice Blanchot, ‘The Disappearance of Literature’, trans. by Ian Maclachlan, in *The Blanchot Reader*, ed. by Michael Holland (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp.136-142 (p.137) (first publ. as ‘Où va la littérature (I)’, *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 7 (1953), 98-107).

²⁴ Maurice Blanchot, ‘The Pursuit of the Zero Point’, trans. by Ian Maclachlan, in *The Blanchot Reader*, ed. by Michael Holland, pp. 143-150 (pp. 147-148) (first publ. as ‘Plus loin que le degré zéro’, *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 9 (1953), 485-495).

²⁵ Blanchot’s theorization of the phenomenon of literature pursuing silence, resulting from a perception of language as a corrupted form, shares similarities with the observations of Steiner outlined in section II, as well as those of Sontag and Hassan.

²⁶ Maurice Blanchot, ‘Mallarmé’s Experience’, in *The Space of Literature*, trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982; repr. 1989), pp. 38-48 (p. 40).

the absence of objects; that which appears spontaneous is merely habitual. In this language, essential reality is silent: 'In the language of the world, language as the being of language and the language of being keeps still' ('Mallarmé', 41). In contrast, essential language is non-referential and thus, in its mode, the world falls silent. Blanchot accords to poetry a peculiar ability to express the essential because it allows the word to speak for itself: 'The poetic word is no longer someone's word. In it no one speaks, and what speaks is not anyone. It seems rather that the word alone declares itself' ('Mallarmé', 41). At the moment when the work becomes an end in itself Blanchot terms it 'being' ('Mallarmé', 42), the 'complete realization of language coincides with its disappearance (...) everything is word, yet the word is itself no longer anything but the appearance of what has disappeared' ('Mallarmé', 44). The work has its reality only in its own negation:

Thus it seems that the point to which the work leads us is not only the one where the work is achieved in the apotheosis of its disappearance – where it announces the beginning, declaring being in the freedom that excludes it – but also the point to which the work can never lead us, because this point is always already the one starting from which there never is any work. ('Mallarmé', 46)

In order to achieve art in which the world is made silent the artist must already belong to the art work's aspirations; he must have already escaped from the world of objects and utility. The world cannot be transformed into art. Writing can only begin when it articulates the essential silence of its origin: 'the murmur

of the incessant and interminable which one has to *silence* if one wants, at last, to be heard' ('Mallarmé', 48).

Blanchot construes a mode of art that is autonomous, dissociated from the world, history, and common language. Virginia Woolf's aesthetics of silence, developed in *Between the Acts*, shares similarities with Blanchot's elevation of the art object, whilst also offering a critique of its ahistoricism. In *Between the Acts* there is an account of two paintings hung upon the wall of the dining room in Pointz Hall: one is a picture of a lady, bought by the character Oliver (the inheritor of the house) who admired it, and the other is of a male ancestor. What is significant is that the picture of the woman has no history in contrast to the picture of the man who has a place in the family history, and has an accompanying anecdote. The picture of the relative exists in the realms of both discourse and image: 'He was a talk producer, that ancestor. But the lady was a picture.'²⁷ The ancestor is given a voice in the text whereas the lady is associated with silence. She comes from silence, having no history or story, and entices others to pursue her into a silent realm: 'The picture drew them down the paths of silence' (*Acts*, 29).

Silence has narrative and thematic import in *Between the Acts*: it is deployed to address linguistic, aesthetic, and cultural issues. The pictures provide a key to understanding the novel's construction of silence. The picture of the woman was chosen by the male consumer, Oliver, for aesthetic reasons. She is an object of desire:

²⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 24.

In her yellow robe, leaning, with a pillar to support her, a silver arrow in her hand, and a feather in her hair, she led the eye up, down, from the curve to the straight, through glades of greenery and shades of silver, dun and rose into silence. (*Acts*, 24)

Painted by a man for a masculine market, the woman as subject is erased as she becomes a pure object of desire. Formulated and narrated by men, women have been absented from history and the discursive sphere. The picture of the woman is therefore indicative of women's cultural history. She is incorporated within an aesthetic whereby silence is her essence. However, *Between the Acts* offers another reading of the silence which the painting both signals and invites. The aesthetic object is given the potential to lead others into silent contemplation. In the novel creativity is seen to emanate from silence. The ending explores Miss La Trobe's struggle to discover the first words of her new play: 'Words of one syllable sank down into the mud. She drowsed; she nodded. The mud became fertile. Words rose above the intolerably laden dumb oxen plodding through the mud. Words without meaning – wonderful words' (*Acts*, 125). Art emerges out of silence. The final lines of the novel indicate the extent to which silence has dominated the narrative: 'Then the curtain rose. They spoke' (*Acts*, 130). The picture's ability to lead the gazer 'into the heart of silence' invests the motif with the capacity to stimulate creativity and transcend language—a desired condition in the novel given the prevalence of the intuition that language intrudes upon, and fractures, conscious experience (*Acts*, 32). The picture does not differentiate anyone. It attributes anonymity to the onlookers and brings them to a common

goal: 'The picture looked at nobody. The picture drew them down the paths of silence' (*Acts*, 29).

The presentation of the pictures in *Between the Acts* remains ambiguous, permitting the coexistence of interpretations: the evocation of the silencing of women from culture, and the possibility of the aesthetic object inducing a condition of transcendent silence which fosters creativity. Whilst the critical thought in this section manifests a tendency to regard silence in 'ontological' terms, the novel's deployment of the motif invites assessment of its dual implications: 'social' and 'ontological'.

IV – Psychoanalysis and speaking silences

In some psychoanalytic thought, silence is associated with the processes of desire and the unconscious. Although this approach, like that of the thinkers examined in section II, largely construes silence as a determinable phenomenon, it is less attentive to the way that political and economic conditions inform the subject. Nevertheless, the subject is situated in relation to movements equally outside of his/her control: the unconscious and language. Here, as in previous sections, fiction is employed which exhibits the functions accorded to silence by theorists and elucidates the predominant themes under discussion. The role that Freud awards to silence in the production of uncanny effects is assessed in conjunction with Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, a narrative that dramatically links silence to experiences of the uncanny. Following Freud, silence can also be seen to signify the unnameable within society. John T. Matthews's reading of Faulkner's *Sanctuary* is discussed as it uncovers narrative ellipses' ability to point to the communal as well as the individual unconscious. Additionally, silence is granted an important role in the analytical situation and Freud's and Lacan's conceptions of the motif's utility in this context will be addressed. Norman O. Brown's idiosyncratic psychoanalytic study, *Love's Body*, accords to silence a redemptive role. His formulation of the motif further reveals the extent and diversity of its applications in an area broadly conceived as psychoanalysis.

In Freud's essay, 'The "Uncanny"', silence, along with darkness and solitude, is charged with the capacity to produce an uncanny effect.²⁸ Freud suggests that silence is a factor stimulating fear in children, a fear which most adults have overcome; but if the anxiety is repressed, its reappearance can lead to an uncanny experience, one that concurrently evokes the familiar and the unfamiliar. In *The Turn of the Screw*, moments of uncanny quietness are associated with the simultaneous presence of life and death:

It was as if, while I took in, what I did take in, all the rest of the scene had been stricken with death. I can hear again, as I write, the intense hush in which the sounds of evening dropped. The rooks stopped cawing in the golden sky and the friendly hour lost for the unspeakable minute all its voice.²⁹

This narrative use of silence is comparable with Freud's perception that primitive attitudes towards death have failed to be completely surmounted; certain impressions have the power to instigate feelings about death that are usually negated by reason. In the above scene, when the governess encounters Quint for the first time, her repressed anxieties about death resurface and are made evident in her representation of her environment. Normal gestural and linguistic codes are absent in her relation with the spectres, and this causes her to feel terror:

It was the dead silence of our long gaze at such close quarters that gave the whole horror, huge as it was, its

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', in *Art and Literature*, ed. by Albert Dicksen, The Pelican Freud Library, 24 vols (London: Penguin, 1985), XIV, pp. 339-378 (p. 369).

²⁹ Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw*, in *The Turn of the Screw and Other Stories*, ed. by T. J. Lustig (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), pp. 113-236 (p. 136).

only note of the unnatural. If I had met a murderer in such a place and at such an hour we still at least would have spoken. Something would have passed in life, between us; if nothing had passed one of us would have moved. (*Screw*, 171)

This meeting is peculiarly unsettling as a result of its appearing simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar to her. It is both familiar in its intimacy, leading her to anticipate speech, and unfamiliar in the persistence of its silence. This duality leads to the intuition of an obscure and alien reality lying just beyond the familiar, threatening boundaries and challenging knowledge. Throughout *The Turn of the Screw*, what appears most horrifying to the governess is the fact that the children do not speak: “Not a word—that’s the horror” (*Screw*, 156).

In Freud’s *Totem and Taboo*, silence is also of importance but is awarded a radically different role. Freud is concerned with communal prohibitions put in place to control instinctual desires—desires threatening to destroy the community, such as incest. However, instead of removing the desire altogether, the introduction of a prohibition invites its repression: ‘A situation is created which remains undealt with – a psychological fixation – and everything else follows from the continuing conflict between the prohibition and the instinct.’³⁰ A taboo desire, such as incest, is unnameable. To name it would be to inscribe it within civilization and thereby instigate the dissolution of civilization itself. This problem is played out in Faulkner’s *Sanctuary*, a novel in which the instincts threatening to disrupt the forms of civilization are elided from the text. The gaps

³⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), p. 29.

and silences in the narrative point to those primitive desires conceived to pre-exist the institution of language. Silence can therefore be seen to have a mimetic function in rendering the processes of repression and displacement, both individually and communally. John T. Matthews draws attention to the significance of the text's omission of the central scene of Temple Drake's rape. He considers this mode of elliptical presentation to be paradigmatic of the narrative as a whole.³¹

The incestuous longings of the character Horace are figured elliptically rather than directly named. Matthews argues that 'the evasion is crucial because to name Horace's desire as incest would be to raise the spectre of impurity and brutality within the sanctuary of civilization' ('Elliptical', 248). Silence signals the existence of Horace's illegitimate desires for Little Belle. The telephone call that he makes to her, towards the end of the novel, serves as an illustration: "It's me, Horace. Horace. I just wanted to----.""³² In *Sanctuary*, silence marks the place of nature and instincts in contradistinction to culture which is inextricable from language. The way that language can quickly slip into silence highlights the provisionality of the boundary separating culture from nature. Matthews explores the novel's portrayal of nature as interior rather than anterior to culture. His study of *Sanctuary* applies Freud's theory of the coexistence of prohibition and instinct. Horace comes to recognize that the 'mechanisms of repression and sublimation for the individual and of social institutions for the community are informed by the very violence and savagery that they are designed to exorcise' ('Elliptical', 253). The blurring of the boundaries between nature and culture

³¹ John T. Matthews, 'The Elliptical Nature of *Sanctuary*', *Novel*, 17 (1984), 246-265 (p. 246).

³² William Faulkner, *Sanctuary*, rev. edn (New York: Vintage International, 1993), p. 250.

demonstrates the impossibility of defining an original state: whether nature precedes culture or whether culture formulates nature.

The omission of Temple's rape may also be a consequence of the difficulty of rendering what is unrepresentable. At the time of the event's happening, unable to confront the moment, Temple undergoes a series of displacements: she imagines herself either in the past or dead and envisages herself as male. The narrative structure imitates Temple's consciousness which represses and displaces the horror of the event by representing the incident in fragments. No account of the rape is given at the time of its occurrence, it is prefigured and later related by Temple to Horace and Miss Reba. Rather than screaming at her abuser, Popeye, Temple cries out to the old man sitting in the sun outside the barn in which the act takes place: 'she screamed, voiding the words like hot silent bubbles into the bright silence about them' (*Sanctuary*, 102). In the subterranean world of violence and perversion language has no place. It is incapable of rendering the instinctual, or the pain and terror resulting from such primitive behaviour. The role of silence in *Sanctuary* highlights its multiple possible applications with psychological, cultural, and linguistic implications: it is appropriated in the mimetic project of representing individual and collective consciousness; it is foundational to the formation and maintenance of civilization; and exposes the limitations of language in representing the unrepresentable.

Another distinct psychoanalytic use of silence is within the analytic situation itself. The silences of the analysand disclose meaning to the analyst. In 'Fixation to Traumas — The Unconscious', Freud states that the gaps in dialogue

have the potential to communicate the origins of the analysand's symptoms.³³ These silences may denote a point of resistance maintaining the repression and therefore indicate a fuller narrative that remains unarticulated. It is the unsaid, resulting from repression, that Freud aspires to articulate. He considers any gaps in the analysand's narrative to be disruptive to continuity, the final objective being the uncovering of a coherent narrative: 'We do not regard an analysis as at an end until all the obscurities of the case are cleared up, the gaps in the patient's memory filled in, the precipitating causes of the repressions discovered.'³⁴ However, cognizance and interpretation of the silences may result in the imposition of a projection onto the analysand's story which contravenes its specificity. Clara Mucci reads Freud's *Dora* as an example of a narrative 'betrayed'.³⁵ She claims that Freud fails to acknowledge the otherness of Dora's story by imposing his own design upon it. Instead, Mucci would draw attention to the specificity of each analytic narrative, suggesting that it is in the silence that difference lies.³⁶

Lacan attributes to the silences arising in the analytic situation a contrary significance to that found by Freud. He regards the analyst's primary aim as the direction of the analysand towards the naming of their desire: 'Desire, a function

³³ Sigmund Freud, 'Fixation to Traumas — The Unconscious', in *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), pp. 273-285 (p. 282).

³⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'Analytic Therapy', in *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, pp. 448-463 (p. 452).

³⁵ Clara Mucci, 'The Blank Page as a Lacanian "Object a": Silence, Women's Words, Desire, and Interpretation between Literature and Psychoanalysis', *Literature and Psychology*, 38 (1992), 23-35 (p. 30).

³⁶ See Sigmund Freud, *Case Histories I: 'Dora' and 'Little Hans'*, trans. by Alix and James Strachey, The Pelican Freud Library, 24 vols (London: Penguin, 1977; repr. 1990), VIII.

central to all human experience, is the desire for nothing nameable.³⁷ That unnameable desire is death, the recognition of the other within oneself: ‘This life we’re captive of, this essentially alienated life, ex-isting, this life in the other’ (*Ego*, 223). In acknowledging this desire, the subject is able to perceive him/herself as decentred. A silence within analysis could be seen as an ‘object *a*’: a remainder of that which stimulated desire and, consequently, a figuration of the unconscious, understood as that which is omitted in the act of speech. Unconscious discourse is therefore represented in these silences; the gaps and lacunae of narratives point towards a fuller tale. Mucci describes this process: ‘If we are able to listen to the decline of the narrating voice, the silence will not be emptiness, but will give voice to the discourse of the Other speaking a desire nearer and nearer to death’ (‘Blank Page’, 33). In contrast to Freud’s explicative project which seeks to fill in the gaps of discourse, Lacan would wish to let the silences speak for themselves so as to expose the processes preceding and escaping language.

In spite of their discrete formulation of silence, both Freud and Lacan grant to silence the potential to signify a more meaningful reality than that which is consciously articulated. The silences within the analytic situation suggest plenitude rather than absence. Freud’s and Lacan’s theories have important implications for comprehending the motif’s application in fiction. They address the possibility of silence possessing its own particular signifying system, albeit an ambiguous one.

³⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Sylvanna Tomaselli, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), p. 223.

In juxtaposition with Freud's and Lacan's formulation of silence as a phenomenon discrete from language—although a product of its operation—Norman O. Brown's theorization of a cosmic consciousness posits the coexistence of both presence and absence in language. Thomas Carlyle's notion of the symbol, which incorporates speech and silence, is foundational to Brown's ideal of unification.³⁸ In contrast to Freud's endeavour to bring the unconscious into discourse, Brown states that the 'true psychic reality, which is the unconscious, cannot ever be put into words, cannot ever be translated from the silence into words. The unconscious is and will remain forever ineffable'.³⁹ His objective is to unite discursive consciousness with the silent unconscious, following the paradigm of the symbol; thus words are to be filled with silence:

Speech, as symbolism, points beyond itself to the silence, to the word within the word, the language buried in language; (...) the primordial language from before the Flood or the Tower of Babel; lost, yet ready to hand, perfect for all time; present in all words, unspoken.

(*Body*, 258)

Brown delineates a project for language that has implications for consciousness. In order to be able to regain a prelapsarian language, Brown claims, it is necessary to die and be reborn: 'The virgin womb of the imagination in which the word becomes flesh is silence; and she remains a virgin' (*Body*, 264). His application of the image of a silent female origin, enabling the rebirth of the word as flesh, must be considered in relation to the work of Irigaray, as well as

³⁸ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus and Selected Prose* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970), pp. 234-242.

³⁹ Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 257.

that of Freud and Lacan. *Love's Body's* concern for a language that has been devalued also shares similarities with the theories of Steiner, Blanchot, and Sontag. The theoretical hybridity of Brown's work links it with other cultures of silence and should not be treated as confined to the discourse of psychoanalysis alone. The interrelation between the cultures is to be explored further in the following section.

V – Poststructuralism: the muting of the subject

Socio-economic, feminist, postcolonial, and psychoanalytic discourses can all be connected to poststructuralism by virtue of their shared interest in decentering the subject, although the forces they conceive to be active in disrupting the subject's centrality and autonomy are distinct: variously, history, ideology, economic systems, discourse, and the unconscious. Consequently, this chapter's endeavour to discriminate cultures of silence—an overview of the array of discourses demonstrating an interest in the motif—can appear reductive in the light of the ongoing traffic between critical positions and analytical approaches. Throughout, this thesis is self-conscious of the interrelations amongst thinkers and approaches and the misleading effects that may arise in a cultural study that, in the process of rendering intelligible a heterogeneous collection of cultural products, seeks to trace categorical patterns within intricately interwoven materials.

Lacan serves as an exemplar of a critical thinker who bridges cultures of silence. His work is affiliated with both psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, but also, in his influence upon feminist critics such as Luce Irigaray and Jane Gallop, is associated with feminism. His work posits the constitution of the subject in language and thus jettisons traditional notions of the subject accrediting it with an existence prior to and exceeding language. According to Lacan, entry into the symbolic world of language marks the moment of the subject's alienation from itself: 'I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think' (*Écrits*, 183). The subject is unable to occupy a position outside of the signifying system—a system which both forms the structure of the unconscious and makes subjectivity possible. The subject is therefore seen to be muted as a

result of the elevated status given to language, its transcendent processes. Sean Burke articulates this silencing process: ‘The symbolic order would condemn the subject to derelict inarticulacy, to being a muted emissary of his language rather than its master, an agent of the letter rather than its signatory.’⁴⁰ This leads to problems for the poststructural intellectual: How is it possible to get outside of discourse in order to theorize its functions? How can the intellectual escape passive subjection to the determining processes of language?

This section considers these questions along with the silencing of the subject with reference to Roland Barthes’s essay, ‘The Death of the Author’, Jacques Derrida’s formulation of there being nothing outside of the text together with his notions of *différance*, ‘spacing’, and the ‘trace’, and Michel Foucault’s construction of an archaeology of the silence of madness. This section, noticeably, does not analyse a fiction whose silences can be comprehended in the light of the critical thought discussed. The abstract nature of the selected formulations, given such a limited space, do not easily lend themselves to the elucidation of specific works of fiction. It is the purpose of Chapter Six to demonstrate the way that poststructuralist thought can be deployed to make sense of fictional silences. Instead, here, attention will be given to uncovering the diverse functions accorded to silence as they are to be found in critical approaches regarded as poststructuralist.

‘The Death of the Author’ conceives the structure and meaning of a text to be founded upon its multiple and indeterminate discourse rather than its author. It challenges modes of literature and criticism that focus on the author as both the

⁴⁰ Sean Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1992), p. 100.

originator and nexus of meaning in a text, elevating his person to the status of 'Author-God' ('Death', 146). The silencing of the author precludes the emergence of a new textual agency: 'The modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate' ('Death', 145). The absence of the author leads to the reception of texts as products of the pure play of language. Writing is elevated as it becomes the primary source of meaning; traditional ontological concepts, such as origins, grounds, and being, are unravelled as language 'ceaselessly calls into question all origins' ('Death', 146). The removal of the author's dominance coincides with the end of a mode of criticism that had sought to decipher a text's hidden meaning by disclosing its author as the 'final signified' ('Death', 147). Instead, language comes to be established as the source and structuring principle of both text and 'scriptor':

Succeeding the Author, the scriptor no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt: life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred.

('Death', 147)

The author is silenced and replaced by a textual construct who is a vessel of language. The new 'scriptor' imposes no final meaning upon the text in contrast to the 'Author-God', and allows Barthes to assert the new anti-theological activity of '*writing*' ('Death', 147).

However, 'The Death of the Author' can be seen to be a problematic essay because it silences the author only to reify the reader. The argument for the prevalence of discourse over the subject collapses once the reader is perceived as an integral and non-discursive reality existing outside of the play of language: 'a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination' ('Death', 148). The reader's function is not considered to be God-like, and yet he/she is granted by Barthes the capacity to hold 'together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted' ('Death', 148). His construal of the author as a 'dead' figure, who had previously tyrannically controlled the meaning and production of the text, presupposes that language's determining power is only a recent phenomenon, and that the author had been able to elude such a reality until the advent of the modern text which is conditioned by '*writing*'. Whilst Barthes does elevate the role of language in the production of the modern text, occasioning the erasure of the subject as person, he does not explore its domination of consciousness to the same extent as Lacan and Derrida.

Derrida claims the impossibility of B/being outside of the laws of the general text. Subjectivity is conditioned by the same movement enabling language and meaning. The notion of the self-presence of the subject is overturned.⁴¹ Barthes rejects the author as the final signified, refusing it as the text's referent, but establishes the reader in his place. In contrast, Derrida envisages both author and reader to be as subjected to textual effects as Barthes's 'scriptor'. He refuses any appeal to a stable referent, unaffected by the operations of the general text, whether it is metaphysical, historical, or psychobiographical

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), p. 16.

(*Grammatology*, 158). He regards texts by Rousseau, that demonstrate an impulse to repress the primacy of writing, as symptomatic of a Western metaphysical tradition that asserts the presence of the voice over writing:

There has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the 'real' supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement; (...) what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence. (*Grammatology*, 159)

Presence is replaced by the oscillation between presence and absence—or an absence masquerading as presence—and the possibility of finding a position from which to speak outside of the structuring principles of language is rendered a fantasy. Like many poststructuralist theories, this elevation of textual processes implies that literal silence is unthinkable; however, silencing occurs amidst the interminable processes of voicing/writing.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault attempts to develop a style, and mode of analysis, which escapes collusion with conventional reason and dominant historical discourse: 'We must renounce the convenience of terminal truths, and never let ourselves be guided by what we may know of madness. None of the conceptions of psychopathology (...) can play an organizing role.'⁴² Foucault tracks the changes in the representation and treatment of madness from

⁴² Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Routledge, 1989; repr. 1999), p. xi.

the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. In particular, he observes reason's movement towards the complete cessation of dialogue and exchange with the mad so as to protect itself from signs of otherness. Foucault contends that this discrimination between mad and non-mad inaugurates the classical age of the mid-seventeenth-century: 'By a strange act of force, the classical age was to reduce to silence the madness whose voices the Renaissance had just liberated' (*Madness*, 38). *Madness and Civilization* endeavours to write the 'archaeology of that silence' (*Madness*, xiii):

In our era, the experience of madness remains silent in the composure of a knowledge which, knowing too much about madness, forgets it. But from one of these experiences to the other, the shift has been made by a world without images, without positive character, in a kind of silent transparency which reveals—as mute institution, act without commentary, immediate knowledge—a great motionless structure; (...) it is the point where history is immobilized in the tragic category which both establishes and impugns it. (*Madness*, xiv)

Foucault's observation of the diverse conceptions of madness since the Renaissance exposes the silent functioning of a historical process. The representation of madness changes with the movement to a new era: Renaissance, to classical, to modern. These shifts are silent—and almost imperceptible—alterations of reason's attitude towards madness. The work's focus upon tracking the silence of madness does more to uncover the practices of the dominant culture than to reveal the experiences of the mad. Whilst—albeit

problematically—history's silent processes are rendered transparent to Foucault, the mad remain an unrecoverable silence, whose elision can only be pointed to.

Foucault argues that the modern age's establishment of a psychiatric discourse that categorizes madness as 'mental illness' results in the termination of communication with the mad (*Madness*, xii):

Silence was absolute; (...) the language of delirium can be answered only by an absence of language, for delirium is not a fragment of dialogue with reason, it is not language at all; it refers, in an ultimately silent awareness, only to transgression. (*Madness*, 262)

Madness is removed to the perimeters of culture by the institution of the asylum. The classification and treatment of the mad in the asylum was based upon a 'silently organized' system, with the intention of aiding the mad to recognize their own non-reason (*Madness*, 243). Silence is one procedure adopted by the keepers to master madness in the asylum. In Pinel's asylum, one of Foucault's historical examples, a particular patient is given freedom only to be confronted with absolute silence following orders for no one to discourse with him. In his solitude he becomes self-aware:

Henceforth, more genuinely confined than he could have been in a dungeon and chains, a prisoner of nothing but himself, the sufferer was caught in a relation to himself that was of the order of transgression, and in a non-relation to others that was of the order of shame. (*Madness*, 261)

The social alienation resulting from silence initiates the patient's interiorization and self-analysis, eventually leading to his/her self-regulation. The patient comes to recognize his/her moral failure and difference from the rational norm. Any dialogue with the mad that had existed prior to the modern age comes to a halt. The mad are not only erased by the techniques of rational discourse but are punished with silence.

In spite of unreason's reduction to silence as a consequence of the development of psychology in the nineteenth century, in the conclusion to *Madness and Civilization* Foucault points to the possibility of the mad communicating with the non-mad in a work of art. Artists conceived to be mad, such as Nietzsche and Artaud, have often been understood to transmit the experience of madness—its truth—in their works. However, Foucault claims that madness is not part of the work's content but is disclosed by its very absence. The moment when Nietzsche proclaims himself Christ and Dionysos is the point of the work's annihilation, 'the point where it becomes impossible and where it must fall silent' (*Madness*, 287). The work's silences, occasioned by the intrusion of madness, are a mute appeal to the non-mad: 'By the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself' (*Madness*, 288). In a similar way to that of the mad in the asylums of the nineteenth century, the world is to be made aware of its guilt; although the agency becomes the voids of the work of art rather than the systems of moral consciousness practiced in the asylum. The world is compelled by art to 'a task of recognition, of reparation, to the task of restoring reason *from* that unreason and *to* that unreason' (*Madness*, 288).

In the essay ‘Cogito and the History of Madness’ in *Writing and Difference*, Derrida treats Foucault’s project to write an archaeology of a silence with scepticism, and, in doing so, uncovers Foucault’s complicity with the silencing procedures he himself describes. He questions Foucault’s ambition to create a space for madness to speak for itself without recourse to the language of reason:

Is there a history of silence? Further, is not an archaeology, even of silence, a logic, that is, an organized language, a project, an order, a sentence, a syntax, a work? Would not the archaeology of silence be the most efficacious and subtle restoration, the *repetition*, in the most irreducibly ambiguous meaning of the word, of the act perpetrated against madness.⁴³

Derrida highlights the universality and pervasiveness of reason—exhibited unwittingly in *Madness and Civilization*—and thus the impossibility of escaping its procedures. The silence of madness cannot be spoken without being objectified and made complicit with reason. Madness exists as a category by virtue of its silence; to speak of it is to reconceptualize it in reason’s terms. Derrida considers traditional views of language to be predicated on its difference from silence and madness, seeing madness to coexist with reason prior to its mythical exclusion in the *logos*. Silencing madness is a necessary procedure enabling discourse itself:

⁴³ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1978; repr. 1998), p. 35.

Silence plays the irreducible role of that which bears and haunts language, outside and *against* which alone language can emerge (...). Although the silence of madness is the absence of a work, this silence is not simply the work's epigraph, nor is it, as concerns language and meaning, outside the work. Like nonmeaning, silence is the work's limit and profound resource. (*Writing*, 54)

This proposition manifests reason's attempt to exclude madness from discourse, whilst also indicating their inextricability. Silence is coexistent with language, residing at its core, and is not simply its other.

The process which Derrida terms '*différance*' is crucial to an understanding of the interrelation of language and silence.⁴⁴ *Différance* is that which makes language and the illusion of presence possible. It exists outside of categorization as it is 'literally neither a word nor a concept' (*Margins*, 3). The graphic appearance of the word is distinguishable from 'difference', but if pronounced the distinction cannot be recognized; the word itself is indicative of its silent function. The graphic reality of *différance* subverts the notion of phonetic writing: 'So-called phonetic writing, by all rights and in principle, and not only due to an empirical or technical insufficiency, can function only by admitting into its system nonphonetic "signs" (punctuation, spacing, etc.)' (*Margins*, 5). The silent 'signs' coexist with the verbal/written. The condition of the possibility of signification, the play of difference, is 'in itself a silent play', the distinction

⁴⁴ Throughout this thesis, Derrida's term '*différance*' will be placed in italics and an acute accent will be used despite some critical discourse's decision to omit it.

between two phonemes being an inaudible one (*Margins*, 5). *Différance* works in the space between differences: whilst producing presence, it remains neither present nor absent, enabling the space in which discourse can appear. But as a ‘playing movement’ it cannot be considered originary in the usual fixed sense (*Margins*, 11). *Différance* also carries within it the process of deferral, which further emphasizes its non-presence, on a temporal as well as spatial plane. It silently works to deconstruct the oppositions instituted by philosophy that provide the foundations of Western culture, and, as such, eludes articulation and conceptualization:

‘Older’ than Being itself, such a *différance* has no name in our language. But we ‘already know’ that if it is unnameable, it is not provisionally so, not because our language has not yet found or received this *name*. (...) It is rather because there is no *name* for it at all, not even the name of essence or of Being, not even that of ‘*différance*’, which is not a name, which is not a pure nominal unity, and unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions. (*Margins*, 26)

This unnameable movement enables ‘nominal effects’ (*Margins*, 26).

Alongside *différance* emerge two other correlative terms which have associations with silence. ‘Spacing’ refers to the interval that arises in the ‘movement of signification’, whereby each allegedly present sign contains both the trace of its past element and an intimation towards its future sign (*Margins*, 13). A space, or an interval, has to exist in order for the present to be differentiated from that which it is not. However, this results in the division of

presence itself: 'thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present', such as the subject (*Margins*, 13). Spacing is inseparable from the process of *différance* and also moves inaudibly, both behind and within signification. The 'trace' is similarly inextricable from *différance* and spacing. It has no existence or Being, but is part of the play and process of signification that disables the possibility of ontological Being: 'Always differing and deferring, the trace is never as it is in the presentation of itself. It erases itself in presenting itself, muffles itself in resonating, like the *a* writing itself, inscribing its pyramid in *différance*' (*Margins*, 23). The trace can never be present, offering only the 'simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself' (*Margins*, 24); just as it appears it disappears: 'erasure belongs to its structure' (*Margins*, 24). It allows contradictions to coexist by containing intimations of both life and death, absence and presence. This intimates the nature of language's relationship with silence whereby silence is regarded as preceding language whilst also being simultaneously within and outside of it, as *différance*.

Language, with its processes, dominates poststructuralist discourse and is granted the capacity to overturn intuitive notions of the subject and further concepts foundational to the Western metaphysical tradition. As language is instituted as the condition of possibility of subjectivity, the notion of a silent intuitive consciousness pre-existing discourse is considered mythical (*Margins*, 16). However, the suggestion of there being nothing outside of the text leads to manifold dilemmas for the poststructuralist attempting to theorize the absolute status of language, as has been seen particularly with Barthes and Foucault who assume positions close to meta-critics. Derrida is conscious of the impossibility of obtaining a theoretical position outside of reason and language and thus

concentrates on developing strategies by which to disrupt hegemonic operations from the inside.

The 1960s is exposed in this chapter as a crucial moment in the production of formulations according to silence a striking role. Sontag, Steiner, Hassan, Lacan, Brown, Foucault, and Derrida are all writing about silence in the same period. Significantly, the motif is appropriated for discordant theoretical purposes: for example, Steiner's fundamentally humanist application of silence stands in contrast to Lacan's and Derrida's utilization of the motif to decentre the subject. The extensive and multiform output of literary criticism and theory which mobilizes silence is to be seen as coincident with the elevation of language. The period is noticeable for its prepossession with language; silence remains its equal but more covert other. An investigation into the role of language—its progressive historical devaluation for Steiner in contrast to its immeasurable status for Derrida—inevitably results in a consideration of its, traditionally, opposing condition. For Steiner, the depreciation of language in the twentieth century is made manifest in the literary turn towards silence. The role of language is conceived in relation to the meanings ascribed to silence. Derrida's theory of *différance* works to undo the oppositions underlying the Western metaphysical tradition; consequently, silence is to be understood no longer in dialectical relation to language but as a force active within it.

The degree to which silence is reified in the mid-twentieth century is distinct from but markedly analogous to the weight of the motif's presence in the majority of fiction to be explored in the period 1900-1950. The disintegration of language represented in early twentieth-century texts, such as Conrad's *Heart of*

Darkness and James's *The Turn of the Screw*, generated a condition of trauma. This response to the inadequacies, or absence, of language must be radically distinguished from later twentieth-century theorists' tendency to adopt silence for conscious aesthetic and theoretic purposes. The extent of the motif's appearance in theoretical and critical discourse—to such a degree that it appears commonplace—occasions a debate about whether its significance is diminished.

All of the theoretical positions explored within this chapter are to be subjected to further scrutiny in subsequent chapters. Alongside Irigaray, Spivak, Hassan, Brown, Blanchot, Lacan, and Derrida, the following chapters consider thinkers not mentioned in this chapter in proportion to the evident significance of their contribution to the culture of silence, and to their resonance with similar and competing contributions in the fiction of the period under review.

Part One

Social Silences

‘If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar that lies on the other side of silence.’

(George Eliot, *Middlemarch*)

Chapter Two

Socio-Economic Silences

The previous chapter of this thesis introduced some of the basic concerns of socio-economic theory as posited by the theorists Steiner, Macherey, Jameson, and Bourdieu. The primary concepts explored were: political inhumanity's devaluation of language, texts' silences denoting ideological conflict, and the inequality of access to the dominant mode of communication. This chapter builds upon the work of the one preceding it in order to demonstrate in more detail the various ways in which silences in fiction are determined by socio-economic conditions, and can be utilized by Marxist theorists to challenge the dominant system. Silence can signify capitalism's conflicting ideology as well as the absent voices of the oppressed; therefore readings of silence are a crucial part of the Marxist project to dismantle capitalism and expose its barbarous practices. In this perspective, the absences and margins of a text are invested with the potential to denote the repressed and oppressed of capitalism: the reality of history and the silenced voices of the exploited. Paradoxically, capitalism's attempt to silence and erase the signs of its materiality provides the manifestation of its mystifying and oppressive procedures which can be appropriated for radical purposes.

This chapter addresses Terry Eagleton's development of Macherey's work on the relation between silence and ideology. Eagleton considers history to be fundamentally absent from the text as a result of its transformation by ideology

which is, in turn, aesthetically recast in the text. The contradictions between ideologies and between ideology and history are marked by silence.¹ According to this formulation, the Marxist critic's project is to chart the ideological necessity of history's reduction to the margins of a text. The first section examines Eagleton's reading of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* as a demonstration of the production and function of ideology in literature, with particular regard for the silence of the character Stevie. Following a discussion of Eagleton's concern with the relation between literature and other social practices, Walter Benjamin's conception of dominant history and the mode by which it perpetuates itself by exploitation, as articulated in the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', is analysed together with his call for the recovery of the voices of those who have been silenced by history. Benjamin's philosophy of history is explored alongside E. M. Forster's *Howards End*, a novel that presents two views of history, the Schlegels' and the Wilcoxes', at the same time as constructing its own mythical temporality. This chapter also addresses the impact of the First World War upon the capacity to communicate by means of Benjamin's essay 'The Storyteller' and Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs Dalloway*, as both philosopher and novelist chart a correspondence between the witnessing of atrocities and a condition of speechlessness.

The review of theory from the early and latter parts of the twentieth century assists in the project to disclose the range of the motif's deployment.² Benjamin and Eagleton mobilize silence, in distinct ways, for critical and political

¹ See Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1978; repr. 1990), p. 95.

² The Benjaminian essays discussed in this chapter were written between 1930-1940 and the Eagleton texts referred to were written in the 1970s.

purposes. The application of such theory to comprehend the silences within *The Secret Agent*, *Howards End*, and *Mrs Dalloway* facilitates the exposure of antagonisms which the novels aesthetically attempt to conceal. This chapter is therefore interested in fiction's unconscious or unwitting silences. The difference in the cultural contexts in which Benjamin and Eagleton write influences the significance awarded to silence by their formulations. Whilst both thinkers are linked by their shared theoretical investment in silence's determination by socio-economic conditions, their thought pursues widely different courses. Benjamin's essays are affected by the imminence of the Second World War. They forecast the carnage awaiting humanity as a consequence of capitalism's corrupt practices. The force accorded to silence reflects such exigencies. In marked contrast, Eagleton's construction of a scientific literary theory is less impelled by the critical urgency and instability of the historical moment.³

Both Benjamin and Eagleton are concerned with situating themselves in positions of enunciation outside of the dominant system in order to avoid collusion with its silencing and oppressive methods. The relation between Marxist theory and practice is to be considered in conjunction with their readings of silence. If Marxist theory is to achieve its ambition of catalysing radical political action, a synthesis is necessary between theory highlighting the contradictory operations of capitalism and political practice that has the potential to overthrow it. Intimations of contradictions in the dominant system show that it

³ His conception, and utilization, of silence is influenced by, and positioned in an antagonistic relation to, Marxist thinkers writing after Benjamin's death, Althusser and Macherey.

is far from monolithic and that there are spaces in which opposition can exist and thus can be mobilized for revolutionary action.⁴

The relationship between the theory and fiction chosen is a pragmatic one: the examination of *The Secret Agent* in proximity to Eagleton's critical thought is determined by his own selection of that particular work as an illustration of his theory of the ideological production of literary texts; the aesthetic strategies and ideological moves of *Howards End* exemplify the techniques of liberal historicism derided by Benjamin; and Benjamin's 'The Storyteller' and *Mrs Dalloway* are both accounts of, and attempts to assimilate, the shock and trauma of the First World War, written within memory of the event itself.

The novelists Conrad, Forster, and Woolf could be described as socially privileged liberals. Their texts appear radical in questioning the existing order—revealing both contradictions in bourgeois life and social inequality—at the same time as they produce ideology which consolidates it. Acknowledgement of bourgeois culture's flaws is a necessary precursor to its valorization in new and vitalized ways; it is this procedure that guarantees the dominance of capitalism. Reading the novels *The Secret Agent*, *Howards End*, and *Mrs Dalloway* alongside the theory of Eagleton and Benjamin enables the discrimination of the processes by which capitalism maintains itself: its concealment of the conflict between the forces and relations of production. Articulating silences is a means of disclosing the underside of capitalism.

⁴ This view is postulated by Jochen Schulte-Sasse in 'Foreword: Theory of Modernism Versus Theory of the Avant-Garde', in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* by Peter Burger, trans. by Michael Shaw (Manchester: Manchester UP; Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. vii-xlvii. His argument is considered further at the end of section I.

I – Eagleton and *The Secret Agent*: determinate silences

This section focuses on Eagleton's conception of silence as the manifestation of a text's ideological contradictions, and therefore its real relation to history which it had sought to conceal. The utility of his theory for social practice is considered: its revelation of ideology's deceptive processes, and the degree to which the application of that knowledge releases subjects from false consciousness. In order to articulate a text's silences, Eagleton advocates a scientific mode of criticism that is independent of the text: 'Its task is to show the text as it cannot know itself, to manifest those conditions of its making (inscribed in its very letter) about which it is necessarily silent' (*Ideology*, 43). This formulation will be delineated by means of an analysis of his reading of Stevie's silence in *The Secret Agent* as 'ideologically determinate'.⁵ Eagleton's study of ideology's erasure of history and its resulting contradictions 'incarnated in the idiot Stevie' ('Form', 26), is situated in the context of the novel's other silences—overlooked by Eagleton in his concentration upon Stevie—which also appear to have socio-economic implications.

Eagleton posits ideology as the production and assimilation of history, rendering absent that which both precedes and determines it. History is doubly absent from literature: texts draw upon ideology, which is in itself a representation of history, and then distance history further by aesthetically recasting received ideology. A text does not merely re-present ideology but reconfigures it in the course of its own aesthetic composition. It is the nature of ideology, and in turn, literature, to create the illusion of autonomy from the real

⁵ Terry Eagleton, 'Form, Ideology, and *The Secret Agent*', in *Against the Grain: Essays 1975-1985* (London: Verso, 1986), pp. 23-32 (p. 26).

social conditions that are its precondition. This notion of independence from material origins is implicated in the capitalist myth of individual freedom. A text's appearance of aesthetic autonomy is a sign of its relation to history according to Eagleton:

It is because the text's materials are ideological rather than historical—because, as it were, the text exists in a 'hollow' it has scooped out between itself and history—that it lacks a real particular referent, and displays that lack in the relative autonomy of its structuration.

(Ideology, 80)

History is figured as the 'ultimate signifier' by virtue of its significant silence (*Ideology, 72*). Textual production involves the interplay of history, ideology, and aesthetic form. It is in the gaps that are instituted between ideology and its transformation in literature, and between ideology and history, that the real nature of ideology—and therefore capitalism's mystifying tendencies—can be discerned. The aesthetic procedure to resolve ideological conflicts unwittingly creates lacunae which prove illuminating to the Marxist critic. In the process of achieving resolution other contradictions necessarily occur as ideological conflicts are always overdetermined by the aesthetic practices which translate them (*Ideology, 88*). It is this '*necessity*' of literary procedures which Eagleton claims should be the object of literary study ('Form', 32):

This process, whereby aesthetic elements constantly *displace* and *recast* ideological elements as they are displaced and recast by them, is the very process of the text's 'self-determination', in which each proposition,

each 'problem' provisionally 'solved', produces a fresh problem, and that another. ('Form', 32)

Eagleton applies his scientific literary theory to *The Secret Agent*, a novel that explores the relation between political anarchists and bourgeois culture. The narrative is set in London and revolves around the significantly absent scene of a bomb explosion—an event requested by a foreign embassy of its employed spy, Verloc, to initiate a policy of decisive action against anarchists in England. In his indolence, Verloc prevails upon his wife's 'peculiar' brother, Stevie, to activate the bomb.⁶ Whilst setting about Verloc's delegated task, Stevie inadvertently blows himself up. The authorities struggle to recover and reprimand the real 'agent' of the atrocity, a foreign power outside of their jurisdiction. The novel makes a clear distinction between the game played by both British criminals and law enforcement agencies and an alien threat to British sovereignty.

The process of resolving ideological tensions occasions textual dissonances that can be observed and measured (*Ideology*, 72). Eagleton perceives the tensions within *The Secret Agent* to derive from its attempt to aesthetically recast ideology. In particular he focuses on the ideological contradiction emanating from its naturalistic form. The novel depicts the materiality of the world at the same time as it ascribes to it metaphysical significance. This tension results from the manner by which its naturalism intensifies and mystifies the material: for example, 'in fetishizing the material world' subjectivity is eradicated and therefore made oblique and equivocal ('Form', 24). This contradiction, within the very form that had been selected in order to resolve contradictions, reveals a

⁶ Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (London: Penguin, 1986; repr. 2000), p. 156.

fundamental ideological dilemma: the form chosen to validate the “naturalness” of the material world against the idealism of the anarchists does so only by mystifying subjectivity (‘Form’, 24); as the material world is given metaphysical connotations the text’s viewpoint aligns itself with the anarchists that it had sought to condemn:

The forms of the text, then, produce and are produced by an ideological contradiction embedded within it – a contradiction between its unswerving commitment to bourgeois ‘normality’ and its dissentient ‘metaphysical’ impulse to reject such ‘false consciousness’ for a ‘deeper’ insight into the ‘human condition.’ (‘Form’, 25)

The naturalism of the novel is elevated to a level of metaphysical symbolism as the indestructibility of matter is charged with cosmic import; what was a project to support bourgeois ‘normality’ becomes a hopeless metaphysical vision. This leads to problems for Conrad in working out a space for humanitarian action: he employs naturalism to undermine the inhumanity of bourgeois society whilst imbuing it with a metaphysical significance rendering human sympathy equally futile. According to Eagleton, the novel’s condemnation of both anarchy and bourgeois inhumanity disintegrates because of the contradictions within its form—contradictions that he sees to be embodied in the inarticulate Stevie.

For Eagleton, Stevie’s silence is a result of the ‘mutual cancellation of the text’s ideological contradictions’ (‘Form’, 27). His muteness is therefore ‘ideologically determinate’, conditioned by the text’s struggle to resolve conflicting meanings (‘Form’, 26). Eagleton claims that this silence is ‘symbolized’ in Stevie’s mystical drawing of circles (‘Form’, 27):

Innumerable circles, concentric, eccentric; a coruscating whirl of circles that by their tangled multitude of repeated curves, uniformity of form, and confusion of intersecting lines suggested a rendering of cosmic chaos, the symbolism of a mad art attempting the inconceivable.

(Agent, 76)

The silence of Stevie is a means of both demonstrating the dilemma that the novel faces in seeking to criticize bourgeois inhumanity but failing to find a method of communicating value—because naturalism and its (paradoxical) metaphysical aspect signify only futility—and an ideological solution to the problem: value is located outside of the text and Stevie’s mystical communications point to it. The silences resulting from ideological conflicts are ‘themselves ideologically rendered so as to be accommodated’ (‘Form’, 28). Value can only be intimated as residing beyond the text, it cannot be represented; this results in the preservation of the status quo and the production of the ‘illusion’ of resolution (‘Form’, 31).

However, Eagleton’s preoccupation with the ‘mutual cancellation’ of the ideological conflicts of the novel, causing value to be located beyond it, leads to the omission of irony’s role in the production of value in the text. Although irony works to undermine the characters and action of the novel, it also functions to unite a community of readers. Whilst an inhumane and valueless society is depicted, a community where value is possible is achieved by virtue of irony whereby the events of cruelty are observed from a position of superior knowledge; this effect is achieved in the following passage in which Verloc tries to justify his actions to Winnie:

‘You have a devilish way of holding your tongue sometimes. (...) Enough to make some men go mad. It’s lucky for you that I’m not so easily put out as some of them would be. (...) This isn’t the time for it. (...) Don’t make any mistake about it: if you will have it that I killed the boy, then you’ve killed him as much as I.’ (*Agent*, 231)

The reader knows of Verloc’s selfish and brutish actions resulting in Stevie’s death, and thus comprehends the irony of this speech that seeks to implicate Winnie in his crime. The significance of a narrative procedure that situates the reader alongside the narrator in an elevated position of knowledge in relation to the characters needs to be considered in socio-economic terms. The extent to which irony causes the reader to be detached from the bourgeois inhumanity depicted in the narrative must be addressed in order to fully comprehend the ideological operations of the novel.⁷ By depicting inhumanity in a valueless world the novel occludes the real issue of barbaric practices coexisting with value in society.⁸

Wittgenstein’s theory, that language cannot speak of the metaphysical but can show it by keeping silent, is appropriated by Eagleton to advance his analysis of the unspoken in *The Secret Agent*.⁹ Eagleton argues that the novel cannot ‘speak of its contradictions’, because to do so would be to admit to its

⁷ See Paul B. Armstrong, ‘The Politics of Irony in Reading Conrad’, *Conradiana*, 26 (1994), 85-101, for a discussion of the problems associated with irony in *The Secret Agent*.

⁸ Eagleton explores modernist fiction’s tendency to ‘bracket off’ the ‘real social world’ in ‘Capitalism, Modernism, and Postmodernism’, in *Against the Grain*, pp. 131-147 (p. 140). However, in ‘Form, Ideology and *The Secret Agent*’ he does not explore in any depth the significance of *The Secret Agent* as a modernist text.

⁹ See Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 1922; repr. 2000).

determination by history, nevertheless it 'shows' them in the silence of Stevie ('Form', 27). He assumes that silences and textual dissonances can be read unproblematically and that a text's absences are 'measurable' (*Ideology*, 72). However, his interpretation of 'determinate' silences is limited to a single narrative instance; he does not attempt to address the import of the other silences in the novel that are in need of explication: Why should the text's ideological contradictions be signified by Stevie's silence but not by Winnie's silence? What are the implications of the resemblance between Winnie and Stevie when accounting for their silence? What is the significance of the taciturnity of the members of the Verloc household's being the means to their accord? Eagleton's formulation of a conflict between anarchism and bourgeois normality also overlooks one of the key ironies of the novel: the similarity between the anarchists and the protectors of the bourgeois state.

The election of Stevie as the determined embodiment of the novel's contradictions appears problematic in the light of the fact that the character Winnie seems to signal the same ideological tensions. The metaphysical force of her materialist outlook is demonstrated in her silence. Her systematic refusal to examine the 'inwardness of things' suggests that she is coterminous with a naturalist concentration upon materiality and methods (*Agent*, 155); such indifference to the existence or non-existence of meaning in (or behind) the surface reality of things leads to the mystification of herself: 'Curiosity being one of the forms of self-revelation, a systematically incurious person remains always partly mysterious' (*Agent*, 216). If Winnie's outlook is coextensive with naturalism and, in turn, metaphysics' absence of human value, as Eagleton contends with the case of Stevie, what is to be made of her resemblance to her

idealist brother? The novel repeatedly states the physical likeness between the two (*Agent*, 167, 234, 160), most significantly just before Winnie murders Verloc:

Mrs Verloc was coming. As if the homeless soul of Stevie had flown for shelter straight to the breast of his sister, guardian and protector, the resemblance of her face with that of her brother grew at every step, even to the droop of the lower lip, even to the slight divergence of the eyes. But Mr Verloc did not see that. (*Agent*, 234)

The commonality between Winnie and Stevie is evidenced in their silence as well as in their action against instances of injustice: Stevie refuses to ride in the cab and be complicit in inflicting pain on the old horse and Winnie kills Verloc, avenging his exploitation of the innocent Stevie (*Agent*, 158, 234).

The collapse of difference suggested by Winnie and Stevie's resemblance challenges Eagleton's concentration upon the text's contradictions. *The Secret Agent* is preoccupied with the way in which identity teeters on the verge of disintegration. The city is frequently described as enveloping the characters that walk its streets. The Assistant Commissioner is disquieted by his experience of dissolution whilst on his journey towards Brett Street:

And he himself had become unplaced. (...) He advanced at once into an immensity of greasy slime and damp plaster interspersed with lamps, and enveloped, oppressed, penetrated, choked, and suffocated by the blackness of a wet London night, which is composed of soot and drops of water. (*Agent*, 152)

In a novel in which categories continually dissolve it becomes difficult to, unarbitrarily, posit the existence of ideological conflicts: for example, the novel consistently asserts the similarities between the anarchists and those protecting the bourgeois state. The real threat to society comes from the foreigner who is situated outside of its games, Vladimir. Eagleton's interpretation of *The Secret Agent* omits to address the theme of form's verging on formlessness as would be necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the novel's ideological formations. The modernist preoccupation with the relation between form and its disintegration would need to be investigated so as to understand its obfuscation of social conflict, and therefore the reality of history, by collapsing oppositions.¹⁰ The ease with which Eagleton assumes that history can be uncovered 'as a presence determined and distorted by its measurable absences' is problematized by fiction that works to disable such a procedure (*Ideology*, 72).

Stevie and Winnie are united in being the disruptive forces of the text. Ironically, despite the novel's concern with anarchists, it is a mentally disadvantaged adolescent and a housewife who are figured as the most subversive characters, and, as a consequence, are silenced. Stevie's inarticulacy and Winnie's taciturnity are inextricably related to their socio-cultural positions. Winnie's quietness must be considered in gender terms. She marries Verloc in order to ensure the safety not only of herself but of Stevie. Her docility and taciturnity within marriage are necessary to guarantee both Stevie's and her economic security. Verloc views her silence as specifically female: 'If she would go on sulking in that dreadful overcharged silence – why then she must. She was

¹⁰ John Rignall comments upon the novel's concern with the issue of form as a modernist motif in *Realist Fiction and the Strolling Spectator* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 137-151.

a master in that domestic art' (*Agent*, 231-232). Stevie's silence should be regarded in connection with the docility forced upon him by a violent father, and not purely a symptom of his 'idiocy' or mystical thinking. Eagleton tends to disconnect Stevie's silence from its narrative context so that it can be figured as 'the "hollow" scooped out by the clash of its contradictions' ('Form', 28), and thereby to disregard the full force of the novel's concern with socio-cultural silencing. Significantly, Stevie is not completely silent. He has a social conscience and struggles to articulate his indignation at the signs of capitalism's barbarism:

'Shame!' Stevie was no master of phrases, and perhaps for that very reason his thoughts lacked clearness and precision. But he felt with great completeness and some profundity. That little word contained all his sense of indignation and horror at one sort of wretchedness having to feed upon the anguish of the other – as the poor cabman beating the poor horse in the name, as it were, of his poor kids at home. And Stevie knew what it was to be beaten. He knew it from experience. (*Agent*, 168)

Stevie's firsthand experience of violence intensifies his awareness of acts of cruelty; it also accounts for the way in which he has been forced into docility to keep his subversive passion in check. Accordingly, he is easily silenced: 'Mr Verloc had a great opinion of Stevie's loyalty, which had been carefully indoctrinated with the necessity of silence in the course of many walks' (*Agent*, 211). Stevie's response to barbarism is contrary to the indifference that capitalism requires in order for its practices to go uncontested. His fragmented

body becomes a sign of the ruthless means by which capitalism silences critical voices. Eagleton mitigates the force of this by interpreting the anarchists as the agents behind Stevie's death in the bomb explosion ('Form', 26). Rather, it is Vladimir, the protector of market capitalism, who instigates the necessity for the destruction in the endeavour to introduce repressive legislation to prevent anarchist activity. The tragedy is that the anarchists pose no threat to society but are coextensive with its values.

Winnie is also presented as a danger to society's boundaries. She shatters notions of domestic femininity as she commits a brutal act of violence in the name of maternal instinct. Her act destroys the boundaries separating masculinity and femininity and public and private domains.¹¹ It is unclear whether the narrator—and indirectly Conrad—is implicated in the suppression of oppositional forces or is instituted as a detached commentator, and therefore suggests a site of value existing outside of the bourgeois valuelessness represented. The relationship between the novel's radicalism and its conservatism needs to be further examined: for example, bourgeois exploitation and oppression is criticized on one level but is validated on another. The condemnation of a corrupt civilization may stem from a position that places the highest value upon civilization and its culture.

The Verloc household is a profoundly taciturn one; this is in keeping with the naturalism of the novel whereby subjectivity is erased and therefore made opaque, following Eagleton's reading ('Form', 24). The narrator of *The Secret*

¹¹ Rishona Zimring describes Winnie as a threat to bourgeois order in 'Conrad's Pornography Shop', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 43 (1997), 319-348. She argues that 'ultimately, the novel disposes of its most disruptive characters (Winnie and her stammering brother, Stevie) and closes with its most dogmatic: the Professor, who polices—or spies on—the streets' (p. 321).

Agent comments ironically on the Verlocs' marriage's establishment upon 'decent reticence':

Except for the fact that Mrs Verloc breathed these two would have been perfectly in accord: that accord of prudent reserve without superfluous words, and sparing of signs, which had been the foundation of their respectable home life. For it had been respectable, covering by a decent reticence the problems that may arise in the practice of a secret profession and the commerce of shady wares. (*Agent*, 235)

Such a stringent method of preserving the status quo is emblematic of the mode by which society is able to function. Throughout the novel speech is represented as a threat to the social order. Stevie's expressive stutterings signal an attempt to articulate the cruelty of society's practices which the other characters refuse to utter. The anarchists are only able to engage with social inequality in an abstract discourse (*Agent*, 79-80). They pass over the material consequences of oppression in their capitalist aspiration to obtain, or preserve, quiet and comfortable existences: for example, even the nihilist Professor is described as having a convenient domestic situation (*Agent*, 89). Stevie's disjointed articulations disrupts the silence and indifference necessary to ensure bourgeois society's perpetuation—the concealment of its atrocities—and, in so doing, brings such practices to the fore. Eagleton conceives Stevie's muteness to be expressive of value that cannot be articulated in a naturalist or metaphysical discourse because both are emptied of the capacity to challenge bourgeois

inhumanity, whereas the text suggests that Stevie's articulations dismantle bourgeois concealment and therefore are loaded with meaning.¹²

The novel elides the two most violent events: the bomb explosion and the murder of Verloc. This could suggest that the novel's exclusion of disturbing events colludes with the repressive procedures of capitalism. Eagleton contends that these incidents cannot be directly represented as they intimate forces threatening to bourgeois normality which can be 'shown' but not articulated because of the ideological limitations of the novel: 'Both events reveal sinister forces capable of destroying the quotidian forces which must be 'shown' at the same time as the novel proclaims the impossibility of attesting textually to their authentic existence' ('Form', 25). In comparing the absent bomb explosion with Jim's jump from the ship in *Lord Jim*, Eagleton stresses the novel's mystification of the event in order to be reconciled with it ideologically (*Ideology*, 138). However, the absent incidents in *The Secret Agent* may be seen precisely as the products of the quotidian world: Verloc's selfishness and ineptitude and Winnie's maternal instinct. They may have been elided to dramatize the power of the material to destabilize society. A striking feature of the novel is the indeterminacy emanating from the narrative elision of the events; this works to conceal or problematize the endeavour to determine its meaning.

Eagleton criticizes *The Secret Agent* for its situation of value beyond the text, creating the illusion of resolution by leaving the world exactly as it was

¹² This is in accordance with Ludwig Wittgenstein's assertion that 'the tendency represented by the running-up against *points to something*'; although such a manner of expression does tend to mystify an oppositional stance and thereby disable material resistance. See 'On Heidegger on Being and Dread', in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy: Critical Essays*, ed. by Michael Murray (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1978), pp. 80-81 (p. 81). This formulation is discussed further in Chapter Five, section I.

(‘Form’, 31). Yet his theory—whilst demonstrating ideological contradictions and the process by which history is produced and occluded—could be regarded as not being sufficiently radical in furthering social transformation.¹³ Jochen Schulte-Sasse advocates the possibility of utilizing the silences resulting from ideological conflict for emancipatory purposes. The presence of gaps within capitalism’s structure questions its monolithic status and intimates a space in which oppositional thought can be articulated: ‘The ideological ruptures in every historical situation enable us to develop alternatives of thought that do approximate an understanding of experience’ (‘Foreword’, xxix). Eagleton discriminates gaps between ideologies and between history and ideology but does not address the existence of, or strive to locate, alternative experiences which could be organized to form sites of resistance to capitalist domination. Instead he posits that the project of uncovering the dominant system’s deceptions will bring enlightenment: ‘Fiction is not *truer* than illusion; but by establishing a transformative relation to ideology, its own deceptions begin to betray and uncover the more radical deceptions of ideology itself, and in so doing contribute to our deliverance from them.’¹⁴ This formulation is problematic in its preclusion of the possibility of alternative consciousness existing within capitalism’s gaps; it assumes that all are equally subject to capitalism’s deceptions and neglects conceivably subsisting unarticulated experience: ‘if material, unarticulated experiences exist, and if their effect is a psychic tension or contradiction of some

¹³ Eagleton formulates the importance of literary theory’s role to reinsert texts into the field of cultural practice and ‘articulate its “cultural” analysis with a consistent political intervention’ in *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: Verso, 1981), p. 98. He construes feminist theory as a paradigmatic critical approach maintaining a balance between practice and theory.

¹⁴ Terry Eagleton, ‘Macherey and Marxist Literary Theory’, in *Against the Grain*, pp. 9-21 (p. 16).

kind, then different degrees of verbal approximation and, thus, of conscious understanding are possible' ('Foreword', xxvii-xxviii). When scrutinizing silence's utility for instigating social change, it is necessary to consider combining Eagleton's account of ruptures with a critical perspective that grants to social and textual spaces the capacity to provide a site from which other, oppositional, experiences can be voiced.

The discrimination of other narrative silences in *The Secret Agent* challenges the extent to which Stevie is the sole emblem of ideological contradiction. The novel's diverse deployment of silence for expressive effects requires further analysis in socio-economic terms. Eagleton's omission of the importance of Stevie's discourse attenuates the latter's narrative role. Stevie's clumsy utterances are disruptive of a repressive system that enjoins reticence regarding its heinous practices. For capitalism to advance its interests unopposed, indifference is upheld as the ideal response to its acts of inhumanity and its subjects are denied the resources necessary to make sense of and articulate their experiences. A comprehensive Marxist reading of the novel would also need to address the relation between Conrad's critique of bourgeois culture and his reevaluation of it. However, any attempt to discern limitations in Eagleton's reading of ideological contradictions risks making itself vulnerable to the charge that it is complicit in the dominant system's concealment of the fundamental conflict forming the foundation of society.

II – Benjamin and *Howards End*: voices lost in the void of history

The previous section outlined Eagleton's conception of history as the fundamental reality underlying all social practices—a reality that is occluded by ideology's production of it. This section focuses on Benjamin's historical materialism, as formulated in the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', which regards the dominant history as maintaining its existence by virtue of the silencing of the oppressed. Although Benjamin does not explicitly refer to history as an ideological production, his formulation's concern with the discourses and techniques facilitating the perpetuation of bourgeois history shares similarities with Eagleton's construal of ideology. Both Eagleton and Benjamin contest the practices of domination, but they assign different emphases to the term 'history': Eagleton applies the term to the conflict between the forces and relations of production whereas Benjamin appropriates it to signify the procedures by which the dominant culture ensures its existence. In contrast to Eagleton, Benjamin does not posit a single notion of history: he juxtaposes historical materialism, which seeks to give voice to the unrecorded and exploited, with official (hegemonic) history:

For every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth).¹⁵

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 245-255 (p. 247).

The processes by which the official history guarantees its dominance are understood by Benjamin to be predicated upon the expunction of contending voices and experiences. These silenced voices constitute history's underside and are charged with the power to overthrow the existing exploitative system. The task of the historical materialist is to 'brush history against the grain' ('Theses', 248), reconfiguring it as the site of conflict.¹⁶

Benjamin's theory combines a materialist and supra-historical approach in contrast with Eagleton's scientific materialism: he fuses dialectical materialism with theological concepts of the Messianic and of redemption. This section investigates Benjamin's formulation of history—both the procedures of official history and historical materialism—in conjunction with *Howards End* in order to demonstrate the means by which official history silences the experience of the oppressed, along with the transformative role he grants to those silences. *Howards End* provides an apt illustration of Benjamin's understanding of the silences of history. It is a class-conscious novel that is overtly concerned with the production of history. Whilst it offers an oppositional voice to the forces of modernization and technological capitalism, it can also be shown to be complicit in the preservation of dominant history. The novel's unconscious silences disclose the operations of hegemonic culture, and, in so doing, enable the recovery of sites of oppression. Francis Barker's theory of occlusion and silencing, ensuing not only from the omission of but the foregrounding of culture's atrocities, is to be analysed in relation to *Howards End* and the themes

¹⁶ Michael P. Steinberg discusses Benjamin's temporal construction as conflictual in juxtaposition with the official culture's focus upon continuity in 'Introduction: Benjamin and the Critique of Allegorical Reason', in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, ed. by Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996), pp. 1-23.

developed in this section. Barker is influenced by Benjamin in exposing a converse mode of concealment to that delineated by Eagleton. Instead of seeing silence as a privileged sign of real social relations within literary texts, Barker claims that we need to attend to a cultural strategy of flaunting barbaric practices in order, paradoxically, to silence the economically oppressed.

Benjamin establishes a complex relation between the past, present, and future in contrast to the present orientation of official historicism. His radical conception of history, whereby dialogue takes place between different temporalities, is precipitated by the present being ‘a moment of danger’ (‘Theses’, 247): ‘The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes’ (‘Theses’, 247). From a perilous position, correspondences are made with specific moments of the past; it is by means of a dialectic between past and present that a solidarity of the oppressed is achieved. The silenced are redeemed by the present in an act aiming to ensure a future free from the carnage wreaked by the official culture. The present generation has a responsibility to remember the suffering and exploitation of past generations, along with the possible conditions of future generations. Jürgen Habermas, writing on Benjamin’s philosophy, makes this aspect of remembering explicit: ‘The anamnestic redemption of an injustice, which cannot of course be undone but can at least be virtually reconciled through remembering, ties up the present with the communicative context of a universal historical solidarity.’¹⁷ Benjamin’s subversive temporal formulation has political implications as it posits the

¹⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1987), p. 15.

necessity for moments of the past to be violently wrenched from their subjected position within a flattened history. The past is figured as having a greater transformative energy than the future: the conception of the oppressed of the past is more likely to produce a radical consciousness than concentration upon a utopian future ('Theses', 252). The silenced are therefore charged with a disruptive potentiality in his recuperative theory. Benjamin's historical materialism is developed in reaction to the dominant history which he conceives as 'homogeneous, empty time', impelled by a concept of progress ('Theses', 252). It is a historicism that utilizes and represents the past so as to justify and perpetuate the capitalist system.

Benjamin laments the loss of the specificity of the past that results from historicism's totalizing methods. His 'now' time is a radical response to the repressive and oppressive tendencies of official history. It is constituted as a disruptive moment invested with the ability to 'blast open the continuum of history' ('Theses', 254). 'Now' time is not a transitional moment but a static point incorporating the whole of history for revolutionary practice. History is retrieved for the present:

Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops and in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation

of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance
in the fight for the oppressed past. ('Theses', 254)

The construction of the monad evidences the crucial role of difference and plurality in the redemption of the subordinated. The extent to which the image of the past projects itself to be easily retrieved by the dialectical materialist, or is constructed by the materialist, remains ambiguous;¹⁸ however, what is evident is the urgent necessity of finding a radical strategy capable of overthrowing the historical procedures that serve the ruling classes.

Howards End charts the lives of two ideologically and culturally distinct families, the Schlegels and Wilcoxes, and their connection by virtue of marriage. The two families signify the two models of bourgeois history formulated by Benjamin; although they appear to be in conflict within the novel they are actually obverse sides of the same oppressive historicism. The Schlegels are orientated towards the past and maintain a nostalgic outlook that valorizes the continuity of tradition in contrast with the future-and-progress-orientated perspective imaged in the Wilcoxes. The Schlegels' desire for an endless repetition of traditional values and culture is under threat in a metropolitan space determined by technology; their culture, therefore, could be viewed as residual whilst the Wilcoxes' is dominant. The Schlegels' focus upon the remembrance of the past is threatened by the constant motion of the modern world. The Wilcoxes' possession of a car associates them with the new technology that jeopardizes the

¹⁸ The ambiguity in Benjamin's theory about the agency given to the image or the historical materialist is delineated by Max Pensky in 'Tactics of Remembrance: Proust, Surrealism, and the Origin of the Passagenwerk', in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, ed. by P. Steinberg, pp. 164-189.

practices of the past which Forster figures as crucial for the preservation of value:

The tide had begun to ebb. Margaret leant over the parapet and watched it sadly. Mr Wilcox had forgotten his wife, Helen her lover; she herself was probably forgetting. Everyone moving. Is it worth while attempting the past when there is this continual flux even in the hearts of men?¹⁹

The function attributed to remembrance in *Howards End* is very different from its application in Benjamin's formulation: in the novel remembrance preserves connection and continuity with the values of the past, whereas for Benjamin remembrance sabotages it. Benjamin contends that it is only by means of the dislocation of past and present that a dialectical relation between them can be instituted whereby the past influences the present and the present informs the past. A historicism advocating continuity erases the voices of the past and their capacity to disrupt the present, as well as the responsibility of the present to redeem the cruelties of the past:

In 'blasting open' the continuum, *Eingedenken* [memory] inaugurates repetition as the return of that which strictly speaking never happened: it announces the redemption of a failed revolutionary opportunity at the moment of most pressing danger. (...) Such repetition arrests the apparent

¹⁹ E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 143.

continuity of inherited power relations by remembering precisely what official historiography had to repress.²⁰

For Benjamin, remembrance announces the re-entry into history of all those who have been silenced from it. Although a historical consciousness is suggested by virtue of the Schlegel family, especially Margaret, it is one which fosters sameness rather than heterogeneity.

Howards End's idealization of the rural past generates a mythological discourse which has the effect of emptying history of its material and specific content. This is indicative of bourgeois homogenization according to Benjamin.²¹ The rendering of the past for the justification of the present yields a static conception of history; this is made evident at the close of the novel when the Schlegel sisters share a night at Howards End surrounded by possessions binding them to their ancestors: 'And all the time their salvation was lying round them – the past sanctifying the present; the present, with wild-heart throb, declaring that there would after all be a future, with laughter and the voices of children' (*Howards*, 292).

In seeming juxtaposition with the Schlegels'—and the narrative's—orientation towards the past, and its perpetuity, is the Wilcoxes' progressivist perspective. The Wilcox consciousness is configured around the principle of capital accumulation which obtains its meaning and value in the present, with the hope of further profits in the future. Whilst the Schlegels have a sentimental

²⁰ Rebecca Comay, 'Benjamin's Endgame', in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 251-291 (p. 266).

²¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian', in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: Verso, 1979; repr. 1998), pp. 349-388 (p. 352).

relation to their possessions, that is concomitant with their connection to the past, the Wilcoxes are devoid of nostalgia and purchase and sell their acquisitions according to market dictates: for example, the house at Oniton is quickly sold the moment it loses its purpose for the family (*Howards*, 255-256). Henry Wilcox's temporal sense is described: 'He lived for the five minutes that have passed, and the five to come; he had the business mind' (*Howards*, 245). The progressive future-orientated perspective represented in the novel is characteristic of modernity which Forster's liberal imagination condemns for jeopardizing its revered, arguably static, image of culture and Englishness.²² Although a progress-directed outlook appears to reject the past and its import, for Benjamin it is actually another strategy whereby the continuity of the dominant history is ensured. Progressive history assumes that the present is fulfilling the directives of the past and that the future will be a consummation of the ambitions of the present. The end product of such a philosophy is the same as that of the Schlegels' preoccupation with tradition: an undifferentiated homogeneous history that silences the oppressed and conceals the relations of domination underlying it.

Forster's focus upon the difference between the Schlegels' and the Wilcoxes' attitude towards the past—although privileging the Schlegels' perspective—diverts attention from their commonality, their complicity in pernicious acts. The Wilcoxes' association with the brutality of imperialism is briefly alluded to:

²² Peter Widdowson discusses Forster's rendering of liberal values which are in contention with society in *E. M. Forster's 'Howards End': Fiction as History* (London: Sussex UP, 1977).

The room suggested men, and Margaret, keen to derive the modern capitalist from the warriors and hunters of the past, saw it as an ancient guest-hall, where the lord sat at meat among his thanes. Even the Bible – the Dutch Bible that Charles had brought back from the Boer War – fell into position. Such a room admitted loot. (*Howards*, 167)

In contradistinction to the Wilcoxes' home, the Schlegels' house is associated with femininity, and, rather than the savage displacement of possessions, continuity and natural transmission (*Howards*, 56, 154). The attempt to discriminate between the sentimental affiliation the Schlegels have towards their property and the Wilcoxes' 'looting' does nothing to alter their shared reality; despite attributing to the Schlegels a more meaningful and personal connection to their possessions than that evidenced by the Wilcoxes, their acquisitions remain products of the same cruel practices. The Schlegels' father's sword provides an image of the violent imperial warfare that has been undertaken in the name of the culture that they seek to secure.

The novel simultaneously, and paradoxically, charts culture's dependence upon and distantiation from, capital. The connection achieved between Schlegels and Wilcoxes, culture and commerce, is concurrent with a narrative endeavour to separate culture from its economic roots, resulting in its fetishization. Such an ideological manoeuvre can be seen at work within Margaret Schlegel's assessment of her economic position:

'I'm tired of these rich people who pretend to be poor, and think it shows a nice mind to ignore the piles of money that keep their feet above the waves. I stand each

year upon six hundred pounds, and Helen upon the same, and Tibby will stand upon eight, and as fast as our pounds crumble away into the sea they are renewed – from the sea, yes, from the sea. And all our thoughts are the thoughts of six-hundred pounders, and all our speeches.’ (*Howards*, 72)

Although Margaret is able to articulate her thought’s dependence upon capital, her abstract method of conceptualizing the economic process serves to distance her from the material consequences of such a process. The mode of production of capital is naturalized. The narrative mythologizes the connection between culture and capital even as it attempts to bespeak the material reality of it. In the light of Benjamin’s philosophy, this procedure is indicative of the erasure of the acts of barbarism and ‘anonymous toil’ constitutive of cultural history (‘Theses’, 248). Benjamin attests to the dangers inherent within abstract discourse by signalling the material reality occluded from it, human labour and suffering:

The historical materialist understands that the abstract mode in which cultural history presents its material is an illusion, established by false consciousness. He approaches this abstraction with reserve. He would be justified in this reserve by the mere inspection of the actual past: whatever he surveys in art and science has a descent which cannot be contemplated without horror. It owes its existence not just to the efforts of the great geniuses who fashioned it, but also in greater or lesser degree to the anonymous drudgery of their

contemporaries. There is no cultural document that is not at the same time a record of barbarism. ('Fuchs', 359)

The conclusion of *Howards End* provides a narrative example of the imposition of abstractions that work to conceal the existence of the oppressed. Benjamin condemns such discursive strategies because of the silencing that emanates from them. The house Howards End is dislocated from its material and historical context. Its personification, the concentration upon its symbolic meaning, effaces the labour that produced it: “the house has a surer life than we” (*Howards*, 293). The characters' dependence upon the profits of imperial-capitalism, guaranteeing them a life free from labour, is elided from the final chapters as something like a pastoral idyll is created, and property rights are naturalized as Margaret becomes the spiritual heir of the house (*Howards*, 107, 332). The continuity and stability achieved at the novel's close is made possible only by the expunction of the disruptive forces of the Basts. Leonard dies by Charles Wilcox's use of the Schlegel sword associated with imperialism and Mrs Bast completely disappears from the narrative. The novel's liberal valorization of personal relations as the site of meaning, and the means to social reform, collapses when Leonard Bast is silenced for the sake of the plot. Despite all of Margaret's and Helen's protestations of the importance of personal relations and the remembrance of the past, the end of the novel shows them forgetting Leonard, along with all of the issues of social injustice that he invokes, and elevating the world of 'things':

She [Margaret] had outgrown stimulants, and was passing from words to things. It was doubtless a pity not to keep up with Wedekind or John, but some closing of the gates

is inevitable after thirty, if the mind itself is to become a creative power. (*Howards*, 258)

‘I ought to remember Leonard as my lover,’ said Helen.
 (...) ‘I tempted him, and killed him, and it is surely the least that I can do. I would like to throw out all my heart to Leonard on such an afternoon as this. But I cannot. It is no good pretending. I am forgetting him.’ (*Howards*, 326)

Connection is inconceivable between the Basts, Wilcoxes, and Schlegels because of the extent to which the Basts are contaminated ‘by odours from the abyss’ (*Howards*, 124). Following Benjamin’s understanding of the workings of dominant culture, the novel systematically eradicates those heterogeneous elements which cannot be incorporated in its unifying vision. Margaret repeatedly expresses her anxiety about close encounters with the working class, represented by the Basts, and seeks to distance herself from them; a procedure also enacted by the narrative: ‘She feared, fantastically, that her own little flock might be moving into turmoil and squalor, into nearer contact with such episodes as these’ (*Howards*, 121-122). The novel defers and displaces its struggle to reconcile the class gap: Helen and Leonard’s child becomes a symbol of a future harmonious culture whereby a synthesis between the working and middle classes is achieved. The narrative’s mode of forgetting and silencing the destructive practices of which it has itself been a witness is indicative of official history: ‘Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate’

(‘Theses’, 248). The narrative transcends the material issues of inequality, poverty, and violence by means of its construction of a ‘dehistoricised past’. The continuity between past, present, and future—intimated by Margaret, Helen, Henry, and the heir’s occupation of Howards End—eliminates heterogeneity and temporal differentiation, dynamics crucial to historical materialism, and thereby the recovery of silenced voices.²³

Howards End foregrounds issues of social inequality by its examination of the capitalist system’s ruthless treatment of Leonard Bast. The socio-political implications of such a mode of representation are discussed by Francis Barker in *The Culture of Violence* in his analysis of Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. Barker’s approach elicits the possibility that *Howards End*’s exposure of exploitation, in its representation of the Basts, actually works to occlude it. The presentation of Bast demonstrates the novel’s awareness of inequality in terms of both the distribution of wealth and access to cultural forms. Yet, in the light of Barker’s study, such a controlled presentation of social oppression functions only to perpetuate the dominant culture. Barker claims that the representation of social injustice can divert attention away from the real extent of exploitation; it is a form of remembering ‘in order to forget’ (*Violence*, 205). In contrast with Eagleton’s focus on silence as the intimation of a text’s unconscious, Barker suggests that the unconscious is disclosed in the complex representational procedures which do not ‘entail a simple suppression of the occluded material’ (*Violence*, 192). Rather than the gaps in the text signalling that which it wishes to

²³ See Francis Barker, *The Culture of Violence: Tragedy and History* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993), especially Chapter Two, ‘Nietzsche’s Cattle’, for an account of official history’s tendency to be ahistorical in juxtaposition with a radical historicity which maintains a dialectic relationship between the past and present, pp. 93-115.

conceal, for Barker utterance may serve as a technique of silencing: ‘an utterance which disarticulates’ (*Violence*, 191). Forster self-consciously announces the silencing processes of his own narrative: ‘We are not concerned with the very poor. They are unthinkable, and only to be approached by the statistician or the poet’ (*Howards*, 58).²⁴ But what he fails to articulate is the relation between his exclusion of the impoverished masses and the culture that he valorizes and consolidates: ‘Texts which are by their own definition the most civilized, must most occult the barbarism of which it speaks. It is thus that they are documents of violence, as they occlude the violence which is culture’ (*Violence*, 205).

Both the realist and mythical discourses of *Howards End* are engaged in the bourgeois project to de-historicize history: ‘the elision from history of the ongoing crisis which history actually is’ (*Violence*, 111). The totalized vision of the novel’s ending excludes voices which would compromise its dominance: for example, Mrs Bast, a figure representative of the abyss throughout the novel, who is made a widow as a consequence of Wilcox brutality, is erased (*Howards*, 122, 229). Benjamin formulates the methods culture employs to conceal its deleterious effects, and, in so doing, uncovers silenced histories that are charged with a revolutionary capacity when reconfigured in the present. By shattering the continuum of history a space is, potentially, created in which other voices can be heard. Although Benjamin makes explicit the necessity for radical action by articulating the extent of exploitation in the past and present, and which will

²⁴ Fredric Jameson also draws attention to the significant absence of colonial subjects from representation in modernist novels. When writing on *Howards End*’s refusal to represent the poor connected with the abyss (Leonard is described as being on the edge of the abyss, not in it) he notes: ‘This internal subsumption is sharply to be distinguished from the exclusion of an external or colonized people (whose absence is not even designated).’ See ‘Modernism and Imperialism’, in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, by Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, and Edward W. Said (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp. 43-66.

occur in the future unless the process is brought violently to a halt, he does not specify the role of political institutions in organizing agency: 'The political, one might say, is the black hole at the centre of Benjamin's work.'²⁵ Eagleton suggests that the transcendental aspects of Benjamin's theory undermine its revolutionary potential, as change can only take place as a consequence of real material conditions (*Benjamin*, 90). But despite the political limitations of Benjamin's theory, it provides a tool for understanding the official discourse and the extent to which it maintains itself by virtue of silencing procedures; this is evidenced in its application to literature by Francis Barker. However, Benjamin's and Barker's formulations are problematic in their tendency to conceive the dominant system as monological, collapsing contending practices into one discourse. A straightforward assimilation of varied discourses as 'official history' by both Benjamin and Barker omits explication of the complexity of dominant discourses and their conflictual relation to each other.

²⁵ Peter Osborne, 'Small-scale Victories, Large-scale Defeats: Walter Benjamin's Politics of Time', in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy*, ed. by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne, pp. 59-109 (p. 96).

III – Benjamin and *Mrs Dalloway*: incommunicable experience

A thorough assessment of the socio-economic consequences of the First World War within the confines of this chapter would be impossible; the import of the theme can only be pointed to here. This section concerns the impact of a war, fought in the name of imperial-capitalism, upon the survivors of its atrocity and the community that received them home. The difficulty of communicating the experience of war is posited by Benjamin in ‘The Storyteller’ and narrativized by Woolf in *Mrs Dalloway*. Both texts endeavour to make sense of its devastation and speculate on the possibility of transforming its horrors into narrative. The relationship between silence and war conceptualized by Benjamin provides a context in which to analyse *Mrs Dalloway*’s figuration of the First World War’s muting effects. Whilst there are striking similarities in the connections they draw between the experience of trauma and a condition of muteness, the differences between their positions will be registered. Although this section concentrates on texts by Benjamin and Woolf, the extent of the issue is intimated by brief reference to some of Ernest Hemingway’s stories which are exemplary of the correlation between the experience of war and taciturnity.

Benjamin testifies to the end of the art of storytelling in his essay ‘The Storyteller’. The essay is problematic in its simultaneous attribution of the cause of the collapse of storytelling to a specifically modern process commencing with the First World War and to a process that was instituted long before it, one of its symptoms being the development of the novel.²⁶ Because of the epistemological difficulty of this essay—along with its typical Benjaminian equivocality—it is

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov’, in *Illuminations*, pp. 83-107 (p. 82 and p. 86).

impossible to assert categorically the extent to which Benjamin regards the First World War as an original point in the disintegration of narration. What remains indisputable, however, is his correlation of a breakdown in meaningful communication with the rise of bourgeois culture whose corrupt economic, political, and social practices are made dramatically apparent in an event such as the First World War. Benjamin claims that storytelling, defined as the transmission of oral narratives to a community of listeners, is an activity of the past, no longer possible in the modern world. He cites a number of reasons for this phenomenon distinct from the War: the technological transformation of the work place, and its resulting dissolution of memory, and the 'dissemination of information' as a narrative mode that always already contains explanation and therefore obliterates the listener/reader's role as interpreter, a vital element in storytelling ('Storyteller', 89). Nevertheless, the War is postulated as having had a devastating impact upon the signifying capacity of humanity, not only in terms of the ability to express and interpret experience, but as a consequence of the travesty of experience itself. Life is reduced to a contradictory, senseless, and intractable field:

With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? (...) For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral

experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body. ('Storyteller', 83-84)

After this articulation of a correspondence between muteness and the dehumanizing experience of the First World War, the essay drops the subject to explore the impact of the decline of epic wisdom and oral tradition upon storytelling. The dramatic change of focus from modern technological warfare to the epic is jarring, it is indicative of the collapse of narrative itself according to Shoshana Felman: 'The utterance repeats in act the content of the statement: it must remain somewhat unassimilable.'²⁷ Benjamin keeps silent about issues that cannot be transmitted.

Benjamin posits continuity as the precondition for narration.²⁸ The essay's sudden movement from modern concerns to the work of a nineteenth-century author, Nikolai Leskov, is an instance of the discontinuity theorized. It announces a nostalgic longing for both a lost art which could transmit existence and meaningful experience itself. Continuity is enabled not only by the speaker, but by the ability of the listener to remember and therefore communicate the story to future generations. Benjamin charts the modern disruption of both telling

²⁷ Shoshana Felman, 'Benjamin's Silence', *Critical Inquiry*, 25 (1999), 201-334 (p. 206).

²⁸ The valorization of the continuity of tradition by Benjamin in 'The Storyteller' should not be read as approbation of the continuity of history. Benjamin's 'tradition' is associated with maintaining memories and transmitting them so that a solidarity of the oppressed can be assured.

and receiving narratives. The War, along with modernization and information culture, is central to the dislocation of continuity.

The character of Septimus Smith in *Mrs Dalloway* is a fictional testament to this reality as he is unable to integrate himself back into the community he left to fight for. The gap between his pre-war and war experience is irreconcilable. The alienation that he experiences is accentuated by his having fulfilled all of the goals society expected of him as a soldier: he rises through the ranks, ‘develops manliness’, and is suitably unemotional:²⁹

When Evans was killed, (...) Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognizing that here was the end of friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. The War had taught him. It was sublime. He had gone through the whole show, friendship, European War, death, had won promotion, was still under thirty and was bound to survive. He was right there. The last shells missed him. He watched them explode with indifference. (*Dalloway*, 113)

Septimus’s mental degeneration is occasioned by the very qualities that are valorized by bourgeois society. The idealization of emotional restraint is necessary to ensure military success but, in intensified form, is disabling. His inability to feel means that he cannot engage with society or maintain continuity with his past experiences. The result is his sense that ‘it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning’ (*Dalloway*, 115). In accordance with

²⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992), p. 112.

Benjamin's essay, 'The Storyteller', *Mrs Dalloway* evinces the way in which the War provokes both the sense that language is inadequate to the task of expressing the carnage witnessed and an awareness that 'communicable experience' is vitiated ('Storyteller', 84). Both of these conditions are manifested by silence.

Septimus's alienation from his past contributes to his failure to articulate his experiences, and, in turn, his silence compounds his trauma as the narration of it is crucial to the process of recovery.³⁰ He cannot successfully assimilate his experiences into a comprehensible communicable form even as he mentally acknowledges the need for his trauma's expression: 'Communication is health; communication is happiness' (*Dalloway*, 122). Septimus is not only muted by his own fractured reality—his alienation from his past self, society, and language—but is disarticulated by his community's refusal to listen to him and assist in transforming his experience into meaningful narrative. According to Shoshana Felman, his 'trauma must remain a private matter that cannot be symbolized collectively. It cannot be exchanged, it must fall silent' ('Benjamin's Silence', 207). The medical figures in *Mrs Dalloway*, Bradshaw and Holmes, are representative of a community striving to silence the witnesses of its barbarity. Bradshaw's prescription of a rest cure for trauma sufferers is a method of absenting disruptive figures from the community; thereby repressing manifestations of its exploitation and ensuring the preservation of the status quo. Combined with the containment of trauma victims in asylums is a programme that exhibits the mad as a sign of the reality awaiting those who stray from bourgeois strictures. Septimus witnesses such a warning:

³⁰ Karen DeMeester posits the necessity for the narration of traumatic experience in order to guarantee recovery and discusses Septimus's failure to communicate in 'Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 44 (1998), 649-763.

A maimed file of lunatics being exercised or displayed for the diversion of the populace (who laughed aloud) ambled and nodded and grinned past him, in the Tottenham Court Road, each half apologetically, yet triumphantly, inflicting his hopeless woe. And would *he* go mad? (*Dalloway*, 117)

The dominant culture employs both concealment and display in the obscuration of its practices.

Throughout the narrative Septimus and Clarissa are juxtaposed; although their stories are interrelated they remain discrete, and physically they never encounter each other. Yet, at the novel's close, they are imaginatively identified as Clarissa reconstructs Septimus's death, an event she discovers in party gossip (*Dalloway*, 240). She reconciles herself to the tragedy of his suicide by transcending it and incorporating it within her own vision:

A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate. (...) There was an embrace in death.

(*Dalloway*, 241-242)

The materiality of Septimus's experience is lost in Clarissa's abstract appropriation of it.³¹ The narrative appears to collude with Clarissa's perspective as it sympathizes with her imaginative consciousness which has the capacity to

³¹ Her discourse is similar to that of Margaret Schlegel's which was discussed in the light of Benjamin's critique of the dominant culture's use of abstract language in the previous section.

create harmonious form out of disparities; her party is indicative of this aesthetic ability.³² Septimus's death, resulting from his participation in atrocities, is transformed by Clarissa and, in the process, its disruptive potential is defused. His death is no longer a sign of culture's barbarous practices and attending repression but a valorization of life: 'She felt somehow very like him—the young man who had killed himself. She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living' (*Dalloway*, 244). Clarissa's life and creativity is made possible by virtue of Septimus's silence and thus could be construed as emblematic of culture's dependence upon the victims it sacrifices. Clarissa does not recuperate Septimus's experience for transformative purposes as Benjamin would advocate; instead, she defuses it of its radical potentiality in the act of representing it so as to imbue her own life with meaning. The way in which Septimus's trauma and death is subsumed by Clarissa's life is indicative of the methods deployed by culture to guarantee its perpetuation.

Mrs Dalloway depicts the transformation of relations resulting from the War which Benjamin attests to in 'The Storyteller' whereby 'the ability to exchange experiences' is lost ('Storyteller', 83). All of the characters are isolated and this is made evident in the use of interior monologues with infrequent direct discourse. The characters are presented as dwelling more upon what they would wish to say than what they actually say: Richard's love for his wife, Peter's rejection by Clarissa, and Rezia's suffering remain unarticulated. Woolf's focus upon interiority rather than transmissible experience is a sign of the collapse of

³² Deborah Guth contends that Woolf endorses Clarissa's vision which appropriates Septimus's death in "'What a Lark! What a plunge!': Fiction as Self-evasion in *Mrs Dalloway*", *The Modern Language Review*, 84 (1989), 18-25 (p. 24).

the old mode of storytelling; however, it is also a means of surmounting the creative dilemmas of modernity by instituting a new style of narration.

The collapse of meaningful discourse enabling the exchange of experiences, as well as the devaluation of experience itself, is illustrated in a range of fiction written after the First World War.³³ A classic case is the fiction of Ernest Hemingway. In the aftermath of the First World War, Hemingway was specifically invested in developing a literary code of reticence. Many of his protagonists testify to the struggle, or refusal, to articulate their traumas. The dying male protagonist of 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro' is preoccupied by his failure to convert some of the key moments of his life into narrative. As death approaches the desire for stories' repetition and transmission intensifies. Benjamin formulates the relationship between narrating and dying; in particular he delineates the wisdom and authority of the dying:

It is, however, characteristic that not only a man's knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life – and this is the stuff that stories are made of – first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death. (...) In his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him. This is at the very source of the story.

('Storyteller', 93)

³³ This thesis is concerned with highlighting the appearance of silence in fiction before as well as after the impact of World War in the twentieth century. A loss of confidence in language's capacity to transmit experience is an issue, albeit an incipient one, before 1914. As this thesis evidences, the effects of war compound an existing disillusion with language and initiate new concerns about inhumanity's misappropriation of the tools of communication.

Hemingway's dying man fails to transmit his knowledge. He dramatizes Benjamin's assertions about the modern inability to tell a story. The gulf between the protagonist's unexpressed thoughts and the dialogue that he participates in with his wife is given narrative emphasis by the use of italics. His reminiscences and fears are kept silent from her and any discourse he does engage in is empty; its value lies in its faculty to divert attention from the terror of dying rather than in its ability to transmit experience. Experiences are no longer communicated but silenced through dialogue: "Talking is the easiest. We quarrel and that makes the time pass."³⁴ He is conscious of his repression of the brutality he witnessed in the War, and of the incommunicability of such experiences:

Later he had seen the things that he could never think of
and later still he had seen, much worse. So when he got
back to Paris that time he could not talk about it or stand
to have it mentioned. ('Kilimanjaro', 21)

The short story collection *In Our Time* also displays the difficulty of narrating the experiences of war: accounts are reduced to fragments beginning the stories predominantly concerned with civilian life. The collapse of meaningful discourse presented in the stories cannot but be connected with the larger theme of war encapsulated in the narrative fragments enclosing the stories. Shoshana Felman writes of the disarticulating effects of war:

The First World War is the first war that can no longer be
narrated. Its witnesses and participants have lost their
stories. The sole signification which 'The Storyteller' can

³⁴ Ernest Hemingway, 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro', in *The Snows of Kilimanjaro and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963; repr. 1973), pp. 7-33 (p. 8).

henceforth articulate is that of mankind's double loss: a loss of the capacity to symbolize; a loss of the capacity to moralize. ('Benjamin's Silence', 207)

Whilst the War cannot be coherently articulated because of the alienation of witnesses from their society and their past, combined with society's repressive practices, silence can signify its atrocities. The disintegration of narrative and the inarticulacy of war victims, theorized by Benjamin and fictionalized by Woolf, demonstrates the extent of the devastation wreaked by imperial-capitalism. However, Benjamin's essay, 'The Storyteller', establishes the modern collapse of narrative upon a mythic conception of history whereby continuity, repetition, memory—all of the factors necessary to storytelling—are presumed once to have been available. His mourning of a lost era of storytelling is a product of a view of the past constructed in the present.³⁵ His tendency to figure the past as an unproblematic site of unity, devoid of disruptive violence which dispossesses and disarticulates, differs from his radical historical method formulated in the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' where the past is represented as a potentially subversive force; if the past is seen as a site of turmoil, violence, and dislocation, how can the transmission of experience remain unaffected? Following Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' in which the past

³⁵ Andrew Benjamin challenges the depiction of the past in 'The Storyteller' as a consequence of its dissociation from the present in 'Tradition and Experience: Walter Benjamin's Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 122-140.

and present are figured as crises, trauma is a permanent condition in imperial-capitalism.³⁶

War is just one example of the relationship between silence and trauma. Although the First World War was formative in altering novelists' ideas about language and the communicability of experience—therefore informing their application of silence—such concerns were present in fiction prior to the war and are explored in fiction by, amongst others, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Gertrude Stein.

Eagleton and Benjamin are both alert to silences within the dominant culture as manifestations of ideological conflicts and oppressed histories, and in distinct ways unravel the methods of cultural and textual production. Their respective formulations of silence facilitate their expression, and criticism, of hegemonic domination. Consequently, in their application to the selected novels, they evidence practices which the texts, both consciously and unconsciously, work to conceal. Silence provides a tool to expose texts' implication in economic, discursive, and cultural processes which they often overtly deride. All three of the novels analysed are self-conscious of the horrors perpetrated by bourgeois culture; yet, they have been proven to be active—albeit unwittingly—in the maintenance of that culture.

Silence not only signifies the limitations and brutalities of capitalism but can be, potentially, appropriated for transformative purposes. Eagleton's conception that a text's silences point towards its real relation to history

³⁶ Francis Barker states that 'in Benjamin's figuration of historical time, the past is that disturbing, critical irruption into the present that even if it fans the spark of hope, also signals the present state of emergency' (*Violence*, 108).

discriminates the deceptive procedures of ideology, implying that an unmediated relation to history is realizable and thus the possibility of a consciousness that has not been completely informed by capitalism's ideological practices. The revolutionary function attributed to the past by Benjamin is dependent upon the recuperative role of the oppressed of the present; silence is always subject to the possibility of violation and misapprehension by its reader/interpreter. Benjamin and Eagleton discretely highlight the gaps, absences, and silences in the dominant culture and its history so as to disclose its conflicts and de-mystify its unifying aspirations. Their formulations assist in the exposure of the textual production of ideology and the mode by which dominant cultural forms erase oppositional experience. However, the degree to which they utilize the gaps—made manifest by silence—that they perceive within the dominant system for transformative purposes can be questioned. Eagleton's theoretical preoccupation with developing a scientific literary criticism by which to obtain a position of detachment from capitalism can appear disengaged from real experiences, whereas Benjamin's theory is explicitly concerned with articulating the experiences of the oppressed and exploited but lacks political application.

Benjamin's formulation can also be challenged for its ethnocentric, monovocal depiction of the oppressed. The universalizing of the experience of oppression results in exclusions as it neglects the specificity of cultural and gendered exploitation even as it attempts to posit heterogeneity over hegemonic culture. Marxist theory's awareness of the voices muted by an exploitative economic system does not consider the full extent, or the diversity, of oppression experienced under imperial-capitalism. Its failure to recognize this means that it is complicit in the practice of silencing. Postcolonial and feminist theory point to

other instances of exclusion and disarticulation elided by Eagleton and Benjamin. They are attentive to groups muted within the social and literary text because of their ethnicity, culture, and gender. The reduction of social conflict to that between the forces and relations of production neglects other cultural conflicts which cannot be comprehended purely in economic terms: for example, women from the third world might experience oppression by native patriarchy, Western discourses and representations, and global capitalism. The dichotomy of domination and subordination affords a limited understanding of inequality and agency. By emphasizing the power of a dominant system, and conflating all forms of conflicting experience into the category of ‘the oppressed’, the possibility of sites of resistance and agency existing in the present is disregarded. Theories resting upon extreme polarities inevitably result in silencing. The succeeding two chapters attempt to redress some of the absences evidenced in this study of socio-economic silence—although inextricably related to the concerns adumbrated here—by considering the cases of gender and ethnic oppression.

Chapter Three

Woman/Women and Silence

In the first chapter of this thesis the linguistic dispossession of women was briefly discussed with reference to Tillie Olsen, Elaine Showalter, and Luce Irigaray. The silence of women was regarded as a consequence of patriarchal discourse which maintains its dominance by means of the erasure of other voices. Showalter claims that the cause of women's silence is their unequal access to language rather than language's failure to express their desire: 'The problem is not that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, or circumlocution' ('Feminist Criticism', 255) In this chapter, the focus will be upon that which Showalter perceives to be unproblematic: that language is 'insufficient' to express women's reality. Theory is analysed which refuses the notion that language is a neutral form and contends that it is phallogentric; accordingly, the extent to which women experience alienation by speaking and writing (in) it will be assessed. Theoretical formulations that posit language, or the symbolic, as masculine and associate the preverbal, and silence, with the feminine provide a means of comprehending the repeated appearance of mute women in fiction by women in the period 1900-1950. Novels to be studied which exemplify this condition are Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, H. D.'s *Asphodel*, and Elizabeth Bowen's *To the North*.

Writing before feminism and poststructuralism's preoccupation with silence and absence, the women fictionalists discussed in this chapter, Woolf, H. D., and Bowen, explore issues of silence and silencing. They variously utilize the motif as a mimetic expression of women's oppression within patriarchy, experiment with the possibility that it might offer an alternative form of communication, and appropriate it as a subversive strategy with the potential to disrupt phallogocentrism.¹ French feminist thought provides an analytical tool by which to gain cognizance of women's linguistic dispossession and erasure from the social text. Theory supplements the narrative expression of, and inquiry into, women's inarticulacy and alienation in language. In turn, the tensions arising from the application of theoretical formulations to novels by Woolf, H. D., and Bowen uncovers limitations in such critical thought.

The Waves and *Asphodel* are experimental novels which can be seen to practice many of the subversive textual strategies that are theorized, and valorized, by Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray. Kristeva's notion of the signifying subject, particularly the functioning of the pre-articulate semiotic modality that is gendered female, provides a conceptual vocabulary by which to make sense of the experience of the character Rhoda. *Asphodel* is to be read in the light of Irigaray's construction of woman as 'elsewhere' and her proposition that woman's adoption of the role of mimic permits her to be, simultaneously, both

¹ When referring to masculine discourse as 'phallogocentric' the definition outlined by Shari Benstock will be followed as stated in *Textualizing the Feminine: On the Limits of Genre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), p. 6. She defines phallogocentrism as the primary signifying system in the West which privileges the visual and phallic and erases sexual difference.

inside and outside of patriarchal discourse.² *To the North* has been selected as a realist narrative to counterpoint the chapter's predominant focus on women's silence in textual and linguistic terms. It is thus positioned to critique Irigaray's and Kristeva's abstract preoccupations. The dangers of unquestioningly elevating both the radical capacity of experimental form and silence's role as a specifically feminine, and transgressive, expression will be registered.

The selection of theoretical and fictional texts permits a discussion of a broad range of issues associated with woman/women and silence: from the formation of 'woman' as a signifying subject to the role of 'women' as experiencing subjects constructing strategies for survival inside patriarchy. This chapter strives to obtain a balance between the abstract theoretical figuration of woman's position within phallogocentrism and the experience of women as represented in fiction. Although Kristeva's and Irigaray's thought is linked in this chapter as a consequence of their shared theoretical investment in gendering language and silence masculine and feminine respectively, their work is widely divergent. Significantly, Kristeva does not align herself with the feminist movement; whilst she writes against the tyranny imposed by a masculinist-humanist construction of identity, she does not utilize such thought specifically for the liberation of women from oppression. In contrast, Irigaray's work is impelled by the necessity of developing modes of expression which can escape patriarchal domination and so preserve female specificity, and is therefore fully imbricated with feminism as a socio-political movement.

² The concepts of both woman as 'elsewhere' and woman as mimic are developed by Luce Irigaray in *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. by Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985).

Silence has a complex relation to feminist studies due to the multiform way in which it can be construed: following Olsen and Showalter it denotes women's cultural absence; it is valorized as a particularly female space and mode of expression by Patricia Ondaatje Laurence; and it is conceived by Kristeva and Irigaray to be a singularly female modality that has a disruptive and subversive effect on the masculine symbolic.³ Whilst silence is claimed as a specifically female domain or form of communication, with the capacity to subvert the current symbolic order, it is also inextricably connected to the binary oppositions upholding the system it seeks to dismantle: language/silence, male/female, and culture/nature.

Kristeva's and Irigaray's psychoanalytically oriented theories could have been employed in the second half of this thesis which is concerned with 'ontological' applications of silence. Kristeva's formulation of the subject on trial has ontological implications and Irigaray's preoccupation with Western metaphysics' need to erase the female subject in order to manufacture the masculine subject suggests that she is the ontological condition of subjectivity whilst being denied her own. However, in this chapter their theories are tactically deployed to address the issue of women's socio-cultural silence. Their concern with the relation between a maternal pre-articulate realm and a masculine symbolic one has social import: it determines the production of speaking subjects and their situation with regard to the dominant mode of discourse. Feminine desire, which is repressed within a masculine economy, is perceived to be

³ Xaviere Gauthier also makes claims for silence as a female domain but for the purposes of this chapter the discussion will be restricted to focus upon the formulations of Kristeva, Laurence, and Irigaray. See 'Is There Such a Thing as Women's Writing?', trans. by Marilyn A. August, in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester, 1981; repr. 1985), pp. 161-164 (p. 164).

socially, and culturally, disruptive. It is a modality that manifests itself in a peculiarly fluid discourse.

The terms 'woman' and 'women' are contentious and will be used self-consciously as silencing emanates from the very application of them. 'Woman' suggests an abstract essential subject of theory, whereas 'women' implies a homogenized group of historical and experiencing subjects which neglects racial, cultural, and class difference. In this chapter the gap between the terms is bridged by applying theories predominantly concerned with 'woman' to issues concerning 'women' expressed in fiction. This chapter recognizes both the theorists' and fictionalists' tendency to articulate gendered concerns in the context of a community that is primarily white, Western, and middle class. The signifiers 'woman' or 'women' have a white Western woman as their referent. The ideas and themes delineated here must be viewed in relation to the chapters that precede and succeed it which engage with silencing as a consequence of class and 'race' differentiation. When analysing women's subjected position within patriarchy it is necessary to be wary of ignoring other oppressed groups.⁴ However, the tactics and concepts outlined in this chapter referring to the interpellation of the female subject will prove resourceful when considering the relationship between 'race' and silence in the following chapter; they also work to critique the previous chapter's omissions by demonstrating the necessity of inserting into any socio-economic analysis the specificity of women's oppression within patriarchal-capitalism.

⁴ Kristeva and Irigaray have been challenged for omitting to register the existence of other materially subjugated groups. The silencing that ensues from their formulations may be an effect of any oppositional formulation. This problem was articulated in the previous chapter in connection with Eagleton's and Benjamin's subsumption of particular sites of oppression.

I – Kristeva and *The Waves*: the presence or absence of women's silence

The rhythmic form of *The Waves* is an aesthetic expression of its engagement with the processes of identity formation; consequently, it is a novel that lends itself to the theory of the signifying subject developed by Kristeva. The literary critic Makiko Minow-Pinkney reads the novel according to Kristeva's terms, perceiving it to mediate a position between 'identity and its loss' and 'the symbolic and its unrepresentable Other'.⁵ The connection between Woolf's novel and Kristeva's thought is therefore critically established. This section assesses Kristeva's theory in the light of Minow-Pinkney's study. It situates its interest in the correspondences between Woolf's and Kristeva's texts in the context of Minow-Pinkney's literary criticism but, by putting the three texts into dynamic relation, challenges Minow-Pinkney's reading and uncovers problems with Kristeva's conception of silence for an emancipatory discourse such as feminism.

Although Kristeva does not associate herself with the feminist movement, and has been greatly criticized by feminists for failing to address literature by women, this section employs her theory of the subversive potential of the pre-verbal semiotic modality, which is maternally connoted, in order to make sense of the character Rhoda who struggles to access, and maintain, a position of enunciation. Kristeva's formulation of the abject will also be subject to scrutiny in gender terms: Are women more likely to experience abjection as a consequence of their struggle to obtain a secure identity in the symbolic? Kristeva does not provide a direct answer to such a question, but her attention to

⁵ Makiko Minow-Pinkney, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), p. 155.

the correspondence between signification and the body invites a theoretical investigation into the way that gender affects discursive positioning.⁶ Her work dismantles humanist notions of the subject and therefore forges a space in which new conceptions of subjectivity and power can be developed. These issues are explored as they are narrativized in *The Waves*. This section concentrates on Rhoda's inarticulacy and criticism's variable understanding of it as denotative of either cultural absence or presence. As an example of such critical interest in the significance of her silence, Patricia Ondek Laurence's critique of Minnow-Pinkney's contention that silence signifies absence is examined. Finally, the application of the female body as a silent signifying system, and the possibility that it might operate independently of the symbolic, is analysed in connection with the characters Rhoda and Jinny. Throughout this section's preoccupation with the silent semiotic realm, speaking positions, and body signification, attention will be granted to cultural positioning, remaining aware that the subject is informed simultaneously by psychological processes and historical and socio-political contexts.

The Waves, in summary, is an experimental novel that investigates the constitution of the subject, suggesting that it must always be thought of in intersubjective terms. The narrative is comprised of the alternating monologues of six characters, three female and three male, interrupted intermittently by a narrative voice rhythmically rendering the passage of time. The boundaries defining individual characters' utterances are subverted by the recurrence of motifs and phrases common to all. This highlights the way that the characters are

⁶ See Elizabeth Gross, 'The Body of Signification', in *Abjection Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*, ed. by John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 80-103.

concurrently individuated and undifferentiated. The novel closes with the character Bernard's assumption of an androgynous and 'representative' voice which articulates issues to do with the relationship between language, consciousness, and identity formation that had beset all of the characters throughout the narrative. The distinctions between the various characters—their discourses, attitudes, and ideas as well as their respective fates—and their position in relation to language, culture, and society are gender determined.

Rhoda is a character who struggles to obtain a stable subject-position within the symbolic and, therefore, can be identified with Kristeva's pre-verbal semiotic realm. She is always on the periphery of the social group of six friends and is regarded as a social outsider. Although all of the other characters are involved in examining the processes behind the constitution and maintenance of subjectivity, it is Rhoda who appears the most vulnerable as she is always teetering on the verge of her own dissolution to the extent that she experiences abjection. Kristeva associates the signifying mode of the semiotic with the site Plato defines as a *chora* in *Timaeus*: 'unnameable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming, to the One, to the father, and consequently maternally connoted to such an extent that it merits "not even the rank of syllable"' (*Desire*, 133). This realm is dominated by the drives and their stases; its articulations are therefore rhythmic, pre-verbal, and anterior to the ordering of space and time. The semiotic precedes language but can only be conceived by means of it. The semiotic and symbolic are relational terms that cannot be understood in isolation.

The notion of a feminine space that functions according to processes distinct from the masculine symbolic can be applied to the experiences of Rhoda who is alienated by both language and time:

But I cannot write. (...) The figures mean nothing now. Meaning has gone. The clock ticks. (...) Look, the loop of the figure is beginning to fill with time; it holds the world in it. I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join—so—and seal up, and make entire. The world is entire, and I am outside of it crying.⁷

Rhoda's exteriority from the world that she regards as meaningful and ordered demonstrates the chaos of her own reality. If the signifying modality most conditioning Rhoda is the semiotic it is nonetheless mediated by the symbolic and is defined according to that which the symbolic lacks. Minow-Pinkney considers Rhoda to be firmly situated within the 'locus of a feminine space, that non-symbolizable Other that must be repressed but none the less exist for a normative existence to be installed' (*Woolf*, 183). However, when assessing the transgressive effects of the semiotic she does not acknowledge the imposition of the symbolic on the semiotic which problematizes the location of a purely 'feminine space'. The semiotic *chora* is gendered female but is not independent of the symbolic which informs it. Kristeva posits the mother—who is determined by socio-historical conditions and is part of the social organization—as the ordering principle of the drive orientated semiotic *chora*.⁸ Consequently, it is impossible to conceive of a feminine realm unmediated by the masculine symbolic:

⁷ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992; repr. 1998), p. 15.

⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), p.26-30.

We emphasize the regulated aspect of the *chora*: its vocal and gestural organization is subject to what we shall call an objective *ordering* [*ordonnancement*], which is dictated by natural or socio-historical constraints such as the biological difference between the sexes or family structure. We may therefore posit that social organization, always already symbolic, imprints its constraint in a mediated form which organizes the *chora* not according to a *law* (a term we reserve for the symbolic) but through an *ordering*. (*Revolution*, 26-27)

When assessing Rhoda's relation to the symbolic it is necessary to be alert to the two-way movement between the symbolic and semiotic. It may be that she is paralysed at the thetic site of threshold between the two signifying modes, the moment of splitting and repressing the semiotic, unable to advance to a stable position from which to navigate a positive and creative dialectic. This would suggest that Rhoda has not undergone the Oedipal stage and accepted the dominance of the phallus; whether her occupation of the pre-Oedipal maternal semiotic is due to a refusal to adopt masculine forms or a consequence of the difficulty of obtaining this position remains uncertain. Castration has to have occurred 'so that the semiotic can return through the symbolic position it brings about' without causing the dissolution of the subject (*Revolution*, 51). The practice of signification involves the perpetual institution and rupturing of the thetic. It is this destabilizing process of alternation which Rhoda is unable to maintain.

Rhoda's silence cannot be understood simply to result from her location in the feminine semiotic as at times it is evident that it is the symbolic that she aspires to and tries to maintain, especially when confronting the rupturing chaotic forces of the semiotic and abject. Silence is more a condition of her paralysis, and of an inability to sublimate the destabilizing processes which signification depends upon, than an expression of the semiotic.⁹ Rhoda confronts the elements associated with the semiotic with a feeling of terror. It is the stability and order of the symbolic that she pursues as the ideal. She envisages a world in which form can be created and imposed upon matter:

‘Now that lightning has gashed the tree and the flowering branch has fallen and Percival, by his death, has made me this gift, let me see the thing. There is a square; there is an oblong. The players take the square and place it upon the oblong. They place it very accurately; they make a perfect dwelling place. Very little is left outside. The structure is now visible; what is inchoate is here sated. (...) This is our triumph; this is our consolation.’ (*Waves*, 134)

The position that Rhoda maintains in this fantasy allows her to observe a process whereby form is constituted out of inchoate matter. This resembles Kristeva's postulation of the symbolic's secondary relation to the semiotic *chora*. Rhoda does not locate herself in the space escaping form; she plays a constitutive role in form's production. Rhoda's fantasy of the implementation of form—albeit with

⁹ It is to be examined whether the alternation between the semiotic and symbolic, which Kristeva perceives to be foundational to the formation of a subject in process and, consequently, radical signification, is a particularly masculine dynamic that is alien to, or foreclosed from, women.

the agency of its construction transposed to the players at a music concert—helps her to make sense of the way in which existence is made habitable. She is conscious of the necessity of the symbolic to guarantee survival at the same time as being aware that it is ever-receding from her grasp, a fantasy that she chases:

‘I am thrust back to stand burning in this clumsy, this ill-fitting body, to receive the shafts of his indifference and his scorn, I who long for marble columns and pools on the other side of the world where the swallow dips her wings.’ (*Waves*, 85)

Rhoda wants to sublimate her experience of dissolution by the imposition of the symbolic which she views to be fundamental to the constitution of stable subjectivity.

Minow-Pinkney appears to disregard Rhoda’s complex relation to the symbolic when she states: ‘The extreme enactment of the negative aspects of rejecting the symbolic and the thetic are seen in Rhoda, who suffers a dispersal of the self of pathological proportions’ (*Woolf*, 183). In Kristevan terms, Rhoda has failed to be fully appropriated by the phallus and thus cannot obtain a stable position in the symbolic. However, this is not simply because she ‘rejects’ the phallus, rather it is the phallus that she desires. Rhoda should not be viewed as a heroine who triumphantly refuses the masculine symbolic, but as a subject unable to gain access to its forms. She is locked in a suspended state between the semiotic and symbolic; it is this liminal condition that results in her inability to find a position from which to speak. The unquestioning assignment of Rhoda to the semiotic leads to her silence being essentialized and ignores the complex

interrelation between the semiotic and symbolic that implies socio-cultural determination.

Kristeva's formulation of abjection provides a key to understanding Rhoda's relation to the symbolic—a useful theoretical construction to bring to bear on *The Waves* which Minow-Pinkney omits to explore.¹⁰ A theory concerned with borderline states and the provisionality of subjectivity gives meaning to Rhoda's recurring sense that her identity is under threat. Abjection accounts for her contradictory position of being concurrently both in the symbolic and outside of it. Rhoda is horrified by that which destabilizes her because it reminds her of her own corporeality. Such a reaction suggests that she is inscribed in the symbolic, but that it is a fragile and tentative inscription. The abject is the underside of a stable speaking position. For the symbolic to function the abject must be expelled, although a residue always remains. To guarantee survival the subject has to achieve dominance over the abject and maintain borders to prevent its intrusion. The abject is an abyss where meaning collapses: 'a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me' (*Horror*, 2). Rhoda's frequent experience of abjection highlights the provisional nature of her identity:

'I came to the puddle. I could not cross it. Identity failed me. We are nothing, I said, and fell. I was blown like a feather, I was wafted down tunnels. Then very gingerly, I pushed my foot across. I laid my hand against a brick wall. I returned very painfully, drawing myself back into

¹⁰ See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).

my body over the grey cadaverous space of the puddle.

This is life then to which I am committed.' (*Waves*, 50)

The abject facing Rhoda, imaged in the puddle, is death. The awareness of her physicality—ultimately to be obliterated—causes her to feel alienated from her own body. Throughout the narrative, until her death, a pattern recurs in which she teeters on the edge of an abyss, intimating her dissolution, only to regain her identity in the symbolic through an act of mastery. She navigates a world of chasms that threaten to engulf her. The possibility of Rhoda maintaining a stable discursive position is disabled when the abject irrupts into the symbolic, dislocating its ordering logic.¹¹

Rhoda is unable to develop a successful method of keeping the abject at bay. As a consequence of frustration and exhaustion in the face of the continual dissolution and reconstruction of her identity, she is impelled to commit suicide. In contrast, Bernard provides a positive model of the containment of the abject by virtue of his ability to sublimate it through his linguistic aptitude, thereby controlling, and mitigating, its disruptive effects. Kristeva states that the capacity to articulate the abject reduces its power and ensures the preservation of a speaking position (*Horror*, 11). Bernard is conscious of the subterranean world located beneath language and desires it to enter into his speech: “I need a howl; a cry. (...) I need no words. Nothing neat” (*Waves*, 246). It is Bernard’s ability to command a successful dialectic between speech and silence, identity and its dissolution, that enables his voice to achieve dominance and subsequently outlast

¹¹ Elizabeth Gross delineates this condition. She states that abjection ‘testifies to the precarious grasp of the subject on its own identity, an assertion that the subject may slide back into the impure chaos out of which it was formed. (...) A movement of undoing identity’ (*The Body of Signification*, 90).

or ‘out-voice’ the other characters; although the extent to which he sustains this position requires further scrutiny. Rhoda has no choice but silence because of her failure to obtain mastery over the abject and sustain a dialectic between the semiotic and symbolic, whereas Bernard actively chooses silence: “‘I have done with phrases. How much better is silence’” (*Waves*, 246).

Minow-Pinkney considers Bernard’s capacity to oscillate between identity and its dissolution and language and silence to be the very condition of an androgynous discourse that permits feminine silence to be heard:

His androgyny is necessary for a feminine discourse to be heard at all. To make the feminine ‘white spaces’ conspicuous, to make silence heard, the letter and voice are necessary, even though they also threaten to quell what they enable. (*Woolf*, 184)

Feminine language, understood in terms of silence, can only be symbolized in a mediated way.¹² Whilst this rehearses Kristeva’s ideal of a bisexual discourse, thereby utilizing silence to disrupt the masculine symbolic, it is highly problematic both in terms of the narrative of *The Waves* and the specificity of women’s sexuality.¹³ If ‘a feminine discourse of the white spaces remains strictly a contradiction, impossible except as silence’, it is equally impossible to think that it can survive its incorporation within patriarchal discourse (*Woolf*, 183). Female silence and masculine discourse are instituted as polar opposites. The notion that a feminine language can only be made possible through androgyny means that the specificity of woman, her discourse and desire, is erased. The

¹² Rhoda, significantly, is foreclosed from access to such a hybrid discursive modality.

¹³ See Julia Kristeva, ‘Oscillation Between Power and Denial’, in *New French Feminisms*, pp. 165-167.

conceptualization of silence as a distinctly female expressive modality is problematic for women if it can only be accessed via the masculine symbolic. The novel resists Minow-Pinkney's reading of Bernard's androgyny as it ends with Bernard's view of silence as a desideratum. Although he maintains a dialectic between silence and language throughout the novel, ultimately he rejects language. His choice of silence is connected with his desire for symbiosis and freedom from language's contingency:

‘I need a little language such as lovers use, words of one syllable such as children speak when they come into the room and find their mother sewing and pick up some scrap of bright wool, a feather, or a shred of chintz.’

(*Waves*, 246)

Unlike Rhoda who desires language and phallic form, Bernard denounces it. His election of silence suggests that he embraces the maternally connoted semiotic. His yearning for linguistic dissolution must be radically distinguished from Rhoda's experience of trauma and annihilation in the face of such a reality.

Silence's potential to be the locus of multiple conflicting meanings tends to problematize any construal of it as gender specific. However, though silence cannot be ascribed a particular gender, and is a phenomenon which always resists essentializing imputations, a gendered relation to silence is apparent: Bernard idealizes it whereas for Rhoda it is a condition imposed upon her as a consequence of her failure to obtain a subject-position. Bernard's culturally successful position enables him to endure the oscillation between signifying modalities and hold a utopian conception of silence which remains untenable for a marginal character like Rhoda. Following Kristeva's formulation, silence can

be subversive only when accessed from a symbolic position. Mastery must first be obtained before it can be traversed ('Oscillation', 165).

Minow-Pinkney's reading of Woolf in conjunction with Kristeva's theory highlights the problems associated with gendering an inarticulate realm as feminine. The abject and semiotic are conceived as the repressed underside of the symbolic; whilst both realms are dependent on each other—the symbolic is only possible by means of its emergence out of the pre-verbal maternal realm which in turn can only be defined by way of language—the symbolic is privileged by being a cultural form. The feminine is ontologized as inarticulate and lacking in agency, visible only by the mediation of the symbolic. The semiotic is acknowledged by Kristeva to have a subversive force but it is primarily within male signifying practices that this is made evident:¹⁴ 'Only men can transgress the symbolic because only they are subjects with a position to subvert.'¹⁵ The semiotic's rupturing function is always conditioned by the thetic; this explains why Rhoda is unable to appropriate silence purposefully. Rhoda embodies the problems associated with reaching a 'symbolic disposition' without which radical discourse cannot take place.

The exploration of Rhoda's silence in Kristevan terms, in relation to the pre-verbal semiotic, followed by the postulation that she is unable to access a position of enunciation as a result of her stasis at the thetic stage, results in her appearing culturally absent and lacking in agency. This seemingly negative view of silence as absence is criticized by Patricia Ondek Laurence who postulates

¹⁴ Kristeva demonstrates her thesis's claim by recourse to a selection of literary texts by writers such as Stéphane Mallarmé, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Antonin Artaud, and James Joyce.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p. 68.

silence's power to signify presence. She attributes to silence a significant role in the expression of the inner reality of women and rejects claims that it is indicative of passivity or oppression:

She [Woolf] marks a discourse of silence more often in women than in men, not as mimesis, a representation of their absence from society or the unattained 'symbolic' modes of language, but as a sign of their self-presence and self-resistance: 'a source of insight and power rather than merely of powerlessness.'¹⁶

Laurence takes the focus away from an assessment of woman's relation to the symbolic, and her constitution as a subject, by advocating silence as a pragmatic mode whereby women can demonstrate their difference and power. Their silence can be an act of choice rather than an essential attribute of femininity or a consequence of their marginality. Laurence regards Rhoda as having triumphantly escaped the alphabet by operating according to silent, interior, and visionary codes—indicative of a feminine space—which are given narrative presence by body metaphors. In contrast to Jinny and Susan, Rhoda refuses to adopt conventional feminine roles, preferring to retreat into an inner imaginative world. Rhoda's transcendence of her corporeality by means of her visionary capacity is, Laurence argues, concurrent with Woolf's endeavour to represent mental states with body imagery. Rhoda is both disembodied and embodied simultaneously. This procedure gives presence to her consciousness whilst marking her bodily absence: "That is my face," said Rhoda, "in the looking-

¹⁶ Patricia Ondek Laurence, *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1991; repr. 1993), p. 41.

glass behind Susan's shoulder—that face is my face. But I will duck behind her to hide it, for I am not here. I have no face” (*Waves*, 32). Once removed from the constraints of her body and social position she is free to engage in imaginative fantasies in which she is always elsewhere: ““Out of me now my mind can pour. I can think of my Armadas sailing on the high waves. I am relieved of hard contacts and collisions. I sail on alone under white cliffs” (*Waves*, 20). Rhoda's desire to escape her body could be read as a correlative of her abjection discussed above. A Kristevan interpretation might regard this as an indication of her adherence to the symbolic in an attempt to master the sense of dissolution occasioned by the abject, whereas Laurence reads it as a moment of silent female presence suggestive of inner creativity not culturally acknowledged.

Rhoda's visions are frequently represented with the use of body metaphors; thus, according to Laurence, the body is given voice: ‘Body gestures and images are the means by which silence becomes externalized and visible in others: silence is embodied in women’ (*Reading*, 123). By symbolizing Rhoda's consciousness with body imagery Woolf establishes the body as a silent signifying system operating independently of language:

‘Now my body thaws; I am unsealed, I am incandescent.

Now the stream pours in a deep tide fertilizing, opening
the shut, forcing the tight-folded, flooding free. To whom
shall I give all that flows through me, from my warm, my
porous body?’ (*Waves*, 44)

The appropriation of the body by women as a strategy for communication allows them to express themselves without suffering alienation in language. The extent to which Rhoda articulates her psychological condition through her body means

that she could be identified as a hysteric. Hysteria has been adopted by feminists as a radical silent signifying modality enabling women to both withstand and disrupt patriarchal domination. Hélène Cixous is one such feminist thinker who theorizes hysteria's transgressive properties:

Silence: silence is the mark of hysteria. The great hysterics have lost speech, they are aphonic, and at times have lost more than speech: they are pushed to the point of choking, nothing gets through. They are decapitated, their tongues are cut off and what talks isn't heard because it's the body that talks, and man doesn't hear the body. In the end, the woman pushed to hysteria is the woman who disturbs and is nothing but disturbance.¹⁷

The subversive quality that Cixous attributes to silence shares similarities with Kristeva's construal of the semiotic. But the distinguishing feature of her view of a silent language is its independence from the masculine symbolic. Laurence's reading of silence as a form of resistance is in keeping with the above formulation by Cixous. Hysteria and somatic signification are posited as signs of female presence rather than absence; a mark of their difference.

Laurence omits to discuss the significance of Jinny's somatic signification in *The Waves*. Whereas Rhoda's body is utilized to communicate interior mental states, Jinny is conscious of the sociality of her body and makes controlled use of it in keeping with her desire:

¹⁷ Hélène Cixous, 'Castration or Decapitation?', *Signs*, 7 (1981), 41-55 (p. 49).

‘He reads his paper. But we have exchanged the approval of our bodies. There is then a great society of bodies, and mine is introduced; mine has come into the room where the gilt chairs are. (...) But behold, looking up I meet the eyes of a sour woman, who suspects me of rapture. My body shuts in her face, impertinently like a parasol. I open my body, I shut my body at my will.’ (*Waves*, 50)

Instead of expressing itself in language, desire articulates itself on the surface of Jinny’s body. She highlights the existence of a corporeal discourse underlying verbal intercourse. She is aware of the process of interpreting bodily signification and positions herself accordingly. Her place within the narrative establishes the crucial role of the reader in relation to silent signification. Her desire appears subversive in the above passage as she shocks the ‘sour’ woman, nevertheless she operates in concordance with patriarchal codes and successfully positions herself as the object of male desire: “‘Men, how many, have broken from the wall and come to me. I have only to hold my hand up’” (*Waves*, 184). She is aware that her body is situated in a patriarchal economy, but manages to preserve something of herself: “‘I make you believe that this is all’” (*Waves*, 105). The representation of Jinny in *The Waves* therefore challenges feminist thought that unquestioningly accords to female somatic signification a subversive role.

Laurence’s formulation elevates the reader who is required to interpret the female characters’ silence as a sign of presence, yet she fails to consider the possibility of the reader’s location within, and determination by, patriarchal structures. Rhoda’s retreat from language into silence is infringed by the reader’s re-absorption of her into the discursive domain. The silent protagonist’s relation

to the reader/interpreter is similar to that of the hysteric's relation to the psychoanalytic gaze. Laurence actively identifies herself with the male psychiatrist Breuer: 'Because of the "absences", "lapses", and "silences" as well as disorganization of conventional speech, we, like Breuer, must learn to read the unconscious through symbolic dreams, delusions, and body gestures' (*Reading*, 139). In the attempt to give authority to a reading of silence as presence, Laurence ultimately locates herself in a position that contravenes women's silence. Resembling Freud and Breuer, readers of mute women, she does not address the violation of the subject occasioned by their being (mis)represented. The attempt to render women's silence an 'enlightened presence' results in their enclosure within a discourse that defines them.¹⁸

Any discussion concerning the signifying capacity of the body must be attentive to the way that the body is culturally inscribed. Laurence's neglect of Jinny—a character aware of her body's social reception—is symptomatic of her assumption that the body can communicate in an unmediated way. This is a practice criticized by Jane Gallop in *Thinking Through the Body*:

The attempt to talk about the body so easily slips into thematics of the body, or—worse yet—talk about the 'body itself', as if it were transparently available there in a text, as if there were such a thing as a 'body itself', unmediated by textuality.¹⁹

¹⁸ Patricia Ondek Laurence, 'Women's Silence as a Ritual of Truth: A Study of Literary Expressions in Austen, Bronte, and Woolf', in *Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Elaine Hedges and Shelley Fisher Fishkin (New York: Oxford UP, 1994), pp. 156-167 (p. 156).

¹⁹ Jane Gallop, *Thinking Through the Body* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988), p. 93.

Laurence's discrimination of Rhoda's silence as a sign of her conscious and unconscious reality does nothing to diminish the character's absence from the socio-cultural domain. Rhoda is disembodied and imaginatively inspired but inarticulate and socially disengaged. Living in the 'white spaces' outside of time and language Rhoda is unable to find a position of enunciation. Textually, Rhoda's silence has a subversive effect as it questions meaning-making and representational procedures and habitualized notions of identity, but materially it points to the problems of women finding a voice by which to contest male domination and actively inform history. In the following section, the possibility of speaking from the interstices of culture is to be further explored by examining the character Hermione's negotiation of a discursive position in *Asphodel*.

II – Irigaray and *Asphodel*: speaking from ‘elsewhere’

In this section, the implications of Jinny’s comment in *The Waves*, that her body and its significations are not ‘all’, are to be further analysed (*Waves*, 105); it introduces the possibility that women can be socially and culturally present and absent (elsewhere) simultaneously. Instead of discussing absence and presence as alternatives, they can be construed as coexistent. Irigaray grants to this ambiguous and heterogeneous site occupied by women a radical force. It is a subversive strategy for women which is both theoretically formulated and practiced by Irigaray in *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which is Not One*. Its tactical deployment allows women to participate in the patriarchal socio-cultural sphere while preserving a sense of their own sexual specificity. Irigaray’s notions of woman as mimic and ‘elsewhere’ are adopted as analytical tools by which to comprehend *Asphodel*’s narrative strategies and the socio-cultural position of the female protagonist Hermione (*This Sex*, 76). The correspondences between Irigaray’s feminist thought and H.D.’s novel make the juxtaposition a productive one, *Asphodel* narratively enacts a number of themes theorized by Irigaray.²⁰

Asphodel is a non-canonical text that was silenced by its author: written in 1921-22, its publication was forbidden by H. D.. This may have been a form of self-censorship as her autobiographically inspired novel is concerned with lesbian and illicit relationships. In the novel, the character Hermione comes into conflict with a repressive society represented by a series of relationships with

²⁰ Unlike the case in the previous section, whereby the links between *The Waves* and theory by Kristeva are critically recognized, the correspondences between *Asphodel* and Irigaray’s theoretical formulations have not been discussed by literary critics to-date.

men. Accordingly, she develops strategies to ensure her survival and delimit the experience of self-violation. Irigaray claims that in the Western metaphysical tradition 'woman' has been ascribed a marginal position as a consequence of the masculine economy's repression of its other so as to guarantee both its authority and the identity of the male subject. This conception of the repressive practices of the dominant masculine economy, its mode of subject constitution, and the subsequent removal of woman to a site of exteriority along with the transgressive discursive strategies she develops there, is to provide the theoretical context in which to analyse *Asphodel*. Although Irigaray's theory offers an insightful vocabulary by which to make sense of Hermione's silence and oblique utterances, charging them with subversive potentiality, the juxtaposition of texts uncovers limitations affecting her argument. This section attends to the problems arising from the conceptualization of silent signification as a disruptive force capable of rupturing the masculine economy in terms of women possessing agency and obtaining culturally inscribed positions of enunciation. The presupposition that women have been pushed to the cultural margins, informed by the representation of woman as the matter out of which the masculine economy is created and maintained, ignores any possibility that women are—and curbs the possibility of their being—active producers of the socio-cultural text.

Asphodel is narrated by a third-person narrator whose voice is so closely associated with Hermione's consciousness as to make differentiation impossible. As such, narrative movement is determined by the associative and rhythmic processes of Hermione's consciousness. Yet, while she clearly dominates the narrative, the emphasis upon her thoughts—what remains unsaid—only serves to highlight her social disengagement, passivity, and muteness. The novel charts the

process by which Hermione comes to find a degree of autonomy and freedom from enclosure within patriarchal narratives. This progression is dramatized by her increasing awareness, and acceptance, of her lesbian desire.

Hermione's situation within the interstices of culture is occasioned by a complex of factors: her gender, her sexuality, and her nationality. As an expatriate she is deracinated; therefore she is doubly alienated due to phallogocentrism—which elides female sexuality—and geographical and cultural displacement. When considering Hermione's silence in relation to her gender it is necessary to be aware of the multiple elements contributing to her linguistic dispossession. Whilst this section concentrates on the degree to which gender determines women's silence, it recognizes that other systems of differentiation are also constitutive of women's experience of oppression. Gender should be acknowledged as one system of differentiation in a network of interrelated discourses resulting in subjugation.

Hermione is seen to occupy a subordinate position in a series of relationships with men. For example, Walter regards Hermione as his muse and the means of production of his music. She is sensitive to his utilization of her:

Morse code. I am a wire simply. (...) But you Walter, they put you to school when you were three and don't you see, all my life it's killed me, this that they didn't teach me something when I was three. But it doesn't matter. Things don't just happen and if I can't play it makes it better for you, for just this moment. I am

crucified for you and you for the thing that is beyond me
that is getting through to you.²¹

Following Irigaray's thought, Hermione's exclusion from the forms of expression available to men is the means by which Walter is able to achieve social success. Her silence facilitates Walter's creative expression. This pattern of the silencing of women to further the creativity of men is posited by Irigaray as the foundation of the masculine economy—an economy that erases its female origins in order to perpetuate a desire for the same (*Speculum*, 27). Hermione denotes women's cultural erasure. When she articulates herself it is always from a site of exteriority. In Western culture, 'woman' is represented as the silent non-subject and when she speaks it is from a location 'elsewhere' to the dominant mode. She is viewed as the guarantee of male subjectivity at the same time as being denied her own. As a non-subject how is it possible for her to speak other than silently and obliquely?: 'how can women analyze their own exploitation, inscribe their own demands, within an order prescribed by the masculine?' (*This Sex*, 81). Women's subordinate position is maintained by their foreclosure from the means of representation, but even if they could speak within the dominant discourse they would be alienated from their own desire. This is the double bind confronting women. Entry into the discursive sphere does not ensure self-expression. The masculine economy erases woman's sexuality and her relation to other women so as to secure its domination and perpetuation.

Hermione's relationship with George demonstrates her linguistic and cultural alienation. He seeks to contain her otherness by subjecting her to a

²¹ H. D., *Asphodel* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1992), p. 28.

process of acculturation. Throughout the novel Hermione identifies with historical women who have been silenced by men because of their refusal to conform to masculine codes. George's attempts to curb Hermione's difference can be seen in relation to her imaginative conception of the oppression of Joan of Arc:

And they had caught her. Caught her. Trapped her with her armour and her panache and her glory and her pride. They had trapped her, a girl who was a boy and they would always do that. They would always trap them, bash their heads like broken flowers from their stalks, break them for seeing things, having 'visions' seeing things like she did and like Fayne Rabb. (*Asphodel*, 9)

Hermione fears that her subversive sexual desire will lead her to a similar fate. In the face of such violent suppression of voice, creativity, and sexual difference she favours silence: 'I don't want to be burnt, to be crucified just because I "see" things sometimes. O Jeanne you shouldn't ever, ever have told them that you saw things' (*Asphodel*, 10). In silence she can preserve her desire and indulge in imaginative fantasies that would be deemed socially unacceptable if communicated. Taking into account Irigaray's argument, Hermione can be seen to preserve her desire 'elsewhere' to the masculine economy and therefore maintain an identity distinct from dominant ascriptions. However, as Hermione's marginality and alienation are conditions imposed on her, forcing her to discover a silent space of her own, the extent to which such a position can be valorized as a strategy of resistance to phallogocentrism is to be scrutinized; particularly as a consequence of silence's traditionally negative position in the binary opposition

language/silence. Hermione's construction of a position outside of the socio-cultural order, and her sense of consciously adopting silence as a method of survival, could be construed as assisting in the maintenance of the binary opposition ensuring phallogocentrism's existence.

Hermione struggles to express herself in a language that erases female desire by its imposition of order and linearity—forms which Irigaray claims contravene a feminine fluid modality (*This Sex*, 106-118). Alienated by the teleological nature of masculine logic that requires the positing of meaning in an utterance, Hermione appears inarticulate: “I don't know what I think George. It seemed a matter of—of” “Why don't you ever achieve your utterances?” (*Asphodel*, 39). George's concentration on the utility of language differs completely from the way that language is narratively employed in *Asphodel*. The repetition and rhythm of the narrative creates diffuse and fluid effects, intimating the possibility of a discourse that operates according to procedures contrary to masculine logic. Irigaray argues that women's syntax resembles somatic signification; it is an embodied language (*This Sex*, 134). Such an articulation of a feminine language provides a way of considering Hermione's language and consciousness in oppositional and radical terms. It suggests that she has experiences outside of masculine domination and is capable of devising a form of expression which does not violate her sexual specificity. In *Asphodel* there is no clear distinction between speakers in dialogue or between Hermione's consciousness and the narrator's voice. The boundaries determining inside and outside are problematized. The discursive modality that George attempts to impose on Hermione is juxtaposed with both her idiom and the form of narration. Hermione is not a judging, rational character; her experience of the world is

conditioned by her body in a similar way to that of Rhoda and Jinny in *The Waves*: ‘Hermione did not judge them by the intellect. Something seemed to flow in her, about her’ (*Asphodel*, 62). Concurrent with George’s questioning of Hermione’s use of language, causing her to stutter, is a project to suppress her lesbian passion and challenge her dress and social behaviour (*Asphodel*, 62, 76). The signs of her cultural difference are condemned along with her failure to conform to masculine notions of femininity. She baffles George’s regulatory discourse with silence, she neither repels his comments nor embraces them but maintains an indifferent demeanour exhibited in silence.

Hermione’s relationship with Darrington further intimates her silencing within patriarchal culture, despite his encouragement of her writing career in contrast with the condemnation she receives from George: ‘*You are a poem though your poem’s naught*’ (*Asphodel*, 74). She capitulates to the conventional role of wife by marrying Darrington after the suicide of Shirley, a character unable to gain entry into the dominant culture as a result of her spinster image. Shirley’s fate is indicative of that which could also be Hermione’s were she not to marry. The double bind experienced by women is made evident: Hermione can remain single with the risk of solitude and exclusion, or marry to maintain a socially sanctioned position but sacrifice her sexual identity and autonomy. As a result of the prevalence of phallogocentrism, both options lead to silence and madness. Madness always looms as the fate awaiting women who enter the masculine domain of discourse. In *Asphodel* the Dalton woman intimates this fate. Hermione is struck with terror and disgust at her first encounter with the Dalton woman who lacks the traditional attributes of femininity to the extent that she escapes definition and is denied a name. Her creativity and difference is

suppressed by her husband. Any expression of her voice is met with restraint (*Asphodel*, 50). Hermione is alert to society's ascription of madness to articulate and active women, those posing a threat to masculine domination: 'if a clever woman does speak, she must be mad. She is mad' (*Asphodel*, 113). Two kinds of female madness are registered in *Asphodel*: it is a condition diagnosed by men as a result of their failure to accommodate the difference of women's identity, desire, and discourse—an attempt to subjugate such active women and subdue their threat to the masculine economy—and it is also a reality befalling women who are unable to survive in a society that represses their specificity. Hermione appears 'somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason' and therefore 'inaudible' (*This Sex*, 29), but she also teeters on the brink of mental disintegration as a consequence of her linguistic and cultural alienation in a similar way to the character Rhoda.

In her marriage to Darrington Hermione has the feeling of being buried in the role 'Mrs Darrington': 'Hermione in Mrs. Darrington turned and festered, was it the spirit simply? Trying to get out, trying to get away, worse than having a baby a real one, herself in herself trying to be born' (*Asphodel*, 145). The image of Hermione wrestling against her confinement in a masculine identity is analogous to the metaphysical position of 'woman' formulated by Irigaray. Hermione tries to overcome her subordinate position in a masculine economy by constructing an identity for herself that is independent of it—an identity enabling her to feel proximity to herself rather than distance. Her utilization of maternal imagery is central to this process. The intimation of an aspect of herself that is 'elsewhere' from the masculine demonstrates the possibility of escaping its

strictures. Yet, as language is conceived to be phallogocentric, the problem for Hermione is in giving voice to her difference.

Mimicry is a practice that is theorized as well as enacted by Irigaray. It is accorded a radical role, enabling women to act in the dominant culture without violating their specificity. Women's mimicry of masculine forms indirectly challenges and disrupts them, and thereby the conditions legitimating the dominant economy. In *Asphodel*, mimicry is a technique that permits Hermione to occupy a speaking position in society without violating her sense of self. Consequently, she can be conceived to be culturally present and absent simultaneously. It allows her to manipulate masculine discourse and identity constructions whilst safeguarding female particularity in silence. In the light of Irigaray's work, Hermione's situation in the interstices of culture does not necessarily preclude speech. The extent to which she has been silenced and sentenced by a masculine economy has been explored above; however, despite attempts to suppress her feminine desire, creativity, and voice, she has not been completely erased, something of her subsists. Irigaray develops a discourse that aspires both to escape phallogocentrism, by its oblique procedures of silence, mimicry, and hysteria, and to disrupt its logic. The narrative voice of *Asphodel*, in the degree to which it employs similar devices, can also be construed as a method of combating patriarchal domination. In this context, silence is accredited a radical potentiality. It can be appropriated so that it is no longer the placid matter out of which form is possible but the mode of its disintegration:

Insist also and deliberately upon those *blanks* in discourse
which recall the places of exclusion and which by their
silent plasticity, ensure the cohesion, the articulation, the

coherent expansion of established forms. Reinscribe them hither and thither *as divergencies*, otherwise and elsewhere than they are expected, in *ellipses* and *eclipses* that deconstruct the logical grid of the reader-writer, drive him out of his mind, trouble his vision to the point of incurable diplopia at least. (*Speculum*, 142)

This reading of silence empowers it. The motif can be utilized within a female discourse for transformative purposes. Accordingly, it is not to be envisaged, necessarily, as a mimetic signification of women's cultural absence and passivity. The application of Irigaray's formulation of female expressivity to *Asphodel* enables the logic conditioning the narrative, and Hermione's discourse, to be regarded as other to that of the masculine economy. It is a logic that scrutinizes phallogocentric procedures and demonstrates the provisionality of its dominance by exposing a reality that it seeks to efface: for example, teleology is challenged by the circular, repetitive, and rhythmic use of language.

Mimicry is a role traditionally assigned to women and is a symptom (or practice) commonly associated with hysterics. It highlights the repressive and silencing procedures of phallogocentrism whilst simultaneously intimating the possibility of 'another mode of "production", notably gestural and lingual' (*This Sex*, 138). Irigaray advocates woman's adoption of a subordinate role to enable her to 'try to recover the place of her [woman's] exploitation by discourse without allowing herself to be simply reduced by it' (*This Sex*, 76). Mimicry means that women can participate in culture at the same time as being elsewhere, permitting them to preserve their feminine desire. It is a tactical method of granting agency to women—albeit oblique—otherwise conceived as absent and

passive. The miming of masculine language by women results in its being parodied and thus subverted. The names Dryad, Astraea, and Undine, ascribed to Hermione by George and Darrington, impose a feminine ideal upon her which she escapes in her fantasies of identification with more transgressive women who defy male classification, such as Joan of Arc and Morgan le Fay. Her identification with the shape-shifter Morgan le Fay is suggestive of her own mimicking procedures. Hermione's engagement in social dialogue shows her operating according to codes that are radically distinct from those governing her inner world. The following represented discourse with Vane, her male partner at the beginning of the First World War, exemplifies this:

‘Well, what did the doctor say?’ She wouldn't tell Vane what the doctor said. She would smile at a painted annunciation angel who was now nothing, no one, someone who could conceivably help her. She said, ‘O things seem to be going jolly well.’ Affectedly, using a word she never used, smiling at him, being an imitation of something ‘county’ that he must have hated. Smile at him, let your lips curve over your hard skull for you were a queen two thousands of years ago and it's still *noblesse oblige* and queens' children are very precious children.

(...) Are you a queen, Morgan le Fay? (*Asphodel*, 165)

The rhythmic and associative movement conditioning Hermione's inner experience and interpretive procedures suggests that two logics are operative: a masculine one, which is associated with social discourse, and a feminine one; this accords with Irigaray's codification.

The mimicry practised by Hermione can be compared with Irigaray's use of the same strategy in *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Irigaray recognizes the impossibility of obtaining a position outside of phallogocentrism by which to deconstruct its processes. Consequently, she situates herself self-consciously, and tactically, within it and incorporates masculine discourse so as to parody and subvert it. However, this dual position for women—both inside and outside of culture at the same time—cannot be sustained without difficulty. In *Asphodel*, Hermione's role-playing often causes her to feel disorientated. The gap between her speaking voice and her interior reality leads to the fracturing of her consciousness: 'Who had said what? Who was she? Where was she? (...) Her thoughts were not her thoughts. They came from outside' (*Asphodel*, 125).²² Although mimicry enables her to sustain, tentatively, a socio-cultural position, it results in a split sense of self and the degree of disruption produced by her silence and mimicry is negligible within the narrative. Irigaray's conception of mimicry suggests that a subordinate role can be appropriated affirmatively, but the character of Hermione proves this formulation to be highly problematic in practice. Hermione's discourse is able to be other to the dominant mode only at the expense of her sanity: 'she knew she was mad, it was all over everything and no one saw it. Out damned spot. What was there to do? Soul beating and tearing, why don't you get born?' (*Asphodel*, 146).

²² This experience of alienation from the speaking voice, and of language's determination of thought, is to be explored further in Chapter Six in the light of a poststructuralist interest in the way in which language speaks the subject rather than vice versa. In this chapter, however, the issue is engaged with in gender terms. In the thought of Derrida, Lacan, and Blanchot, delineated in Chapter Six, assessment of gendered positioning within language is either a marginal concern or is omitted entirely from discussion.

The duality of mimicry theoretically facilitates the preservation of female desire in a location ‘elsewhere’ to that of the masculine economy. It allows women to be both present and absent simultaneously. An active role is granted to silence as it is utilized for disruptive purposes. Yet, despite the resemblance between Irigaray’s theory and *Asphodel*’s practice, Hermione ultimately chooses to detach herself from the social arena and occupy a position which is literally, rather than just conceptually, ‘elsewhere’. The pregnancy and birth of her child leads her to seek the companionship of her young neighbour, Beryl. The increasingly rhythmic and repetitive style of the narrative is indicative of Hermione’s movement away from society, and normative behaviour, and into a lesbian relationship:

Weave, that is your métier, Morgan le Fay, weave subtly,
weave grape-green by grape-silver and let your voice
weave songs, songs in the little hut that gets so blithely
cold, cold with such clarity so that you are like a flower
of green-grape flowering in a crystal globe, in an ice
globe for the air that you breathe into your lungs makes
you too part of the crystal, you are part of the air, (...)
and the voice that rises to some impossible silver shrill
note in this empty little hut is a voice of silver, you are
nothing. (*Asphodel*, 169)

Although her language can be valorized for its evasion of a masculine narrative logic, such ‘feminine’ utterance, in turn, disengages her from the field of cultural production and thus mitigates its interventionist properties.

Hermione is far removed from the material concerns of war by virtue of her absorption with her bodily rhythms, the process of producing life, and weaving dreams for herself: 'she daren't think, had morganlefayed it, made herself a dream within a dream to sustain herself' (*Asphodel*, 177). Her feminine syntax is made possible only by her detachment from society. In contrast, Irigaray maintains dialogue with masculine discourses. She rejects the possibility of speaking a purely feminine language without relation to a masculine modality and acknowledges the problem of obtaining a position outside of the dominant economy (*This Sex*, 135). Within Irigaray's theoretical framework, as delineated in *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which is Not One*, female agency is only possible in refracted ways. The effect of women's exclusion from cultural forms and their maintenance of specificity outside of the masculine economy is a fractured subjectivity; the experience of such fragmentation is dramatized by Hermione. Irigaray's formulation of mimicry, which establishes a subject-position premised on being, simultaneously, inside and outside of the masculine economy, is problematic when assessed in the light of the potentiality of women obtaining speaking positions within culture. The duality of Irigaray's mimicry results in difficulties similar to that of Kristeva's dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic: it invites problems with negotiating a position between two dimensions without occasioning a loss of subjectivity. Irigaray may traverse a route enabling her to challenge masculine discourse from the inside but she does so at the risk of being implicated in the reproduction of those discourses.

Irigaray's formulation can be subject to scrutiny because of its failure to address the 'elsewhere' to women's 'elsewhere'. This problematic is articulated by Judith Butler: 'And there will be no way finally to delimit the elsewhere of

Irigaray's elsewhere, for every oppositional discourse will produce its outside, an outside that risks becoming installed as its nonsignifying inscriptional space.'²³ Irigaray's theory analysed in this chapter does not address the existence of other groups who are silenced by the dominant economy. The construction of a universal notion of 'woman' as the silent precondition of the masculine marginalizes other groups who then become the 'elsewhere' of 'woman'. Feminists have criticized Irigaray, and French feminism in general, for abstractly formulating 'woman' and, subsequently, neglecting the material conditions of women's oppression.²⁴ Her work omits to examine the particularity of culturally and ethnically determined systems of patriarchal domination or of women's interpellation by multiple subordinating discourses. Neither 'woman' nor 'patriarchy' can be conceived monolithically. In the following section, the relation of women to silence is to be further explored by moving away from abstract conceptions of silence, disclosed in Kristeva's and Irigaray's work, towards a more realist assessment.

²³ Judith Butler, 'Bodies that Matter', in *Engaging With Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. by Carolyn Burke and others (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), pp. 141-173 (p.164).

²⁴ Toril Moi exemplifies such a sceptical reception of Irigaray's work. She states that 'the material conditions of women's oppression are spectacularly absent from her work'. See *Sexual/TextualPolitics*, p. 147.

III – In history or outside of it?: the dilemma of *To the North*

Irigaray's formulation of 'elsewhere' and mimicry has theoretical force but poses problems when addressing women as historical and political subjects as it has utopian and futurist resonances. Unlike the narrative experimentalism of *The Waves* and *Asphodel*, novels that have been seen to develop specifically feminine discourses, Elizabeth Bowen's *To the North* has coherence and linearity which, adopting Kristeva's and Irigaray's vocabulary, associates it with the masculine symbolic. By examining a text employing traditional narrative devices, the extent and diversity of silence's use in fiction by women is intimated. Such a text is to be utilized to question both Kristeva's and Irigaray's critical investment in linguistic and narrative experimentalism; in particular, their valorization of madness, hysteria, and unreason. The association of the feminine with—albeit in reclaimed ways—the preverbal, acultural, irrational, and hysterical can be construed as perpetuating longstanding cultural representations of women and affirming a condition of marginality, thereby leaving the dominant culture uncontested.²⁵ This section provides an arena in which to explore a different perception of women's silence to that so far considered, one influenced by realist, historical, and materialist issues exemplified by feminist thinkers such as Toril Moi, Rita Felski, and Alison Assiter. A contrary view of women's silence, that is historically and socially informed, can only be intimated here; accordingly, something of the pervasiveness of the motif in feminist discourse, the array of distinct functions granted to it, is evinced.

²⁵ Such criticisms are levied at Kristeva and Irigaray by a number of feminist thinkers, Rita Felski and Alison Assiter are exemplars. See Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics* and Assiter, *Enlightened Women*.

To the North is to be studied in the light of the particular problematic of the double bind that women experience within culture which is exposed in their relation to, and use of, silence. This dilemma for women has been made apparent in the previous two sections and is succinctly articulated by Xaviere Gauthier:

As long as women remain silent, they will be outside the historical process. But, if they begin to speak and write *as men do*, they will enter history subdued and alienated; it is a history that, logically speaking, their speech should disrupt. ('Women's Writing', 162-163)

To the North explores the effects of this double bind by virtue of its representation of the two female protagonists, Cecilia and Emmeline. However, Gauthier, like Kristeva and Irigaray, grounds her discourse in the presupposition of dual logics and languages. By drawing attention to women's silence, even when they have the facility to speak within the dominant discourse, the extent of their subjugation is more fully exposed whilst allowing for the possibility of women accessing the tools necessary to oppose domination.

To the North counterpoints the experience of two women in London society in the 1930s. In contradistinction to *The Waves* and *Asphodel*, *To the North* probes the referential capacity of language but does not suggest, or enact, the collapse of a referential order. As such, the characters are firmly situated in a socio-historical context that is shown to inform the identities available to them. Rather than focus predominantly on language as an alienating masculine order that silences the women who speak it, the novel addresses a complex of material factors conditioning women's sense of alienation and consequent disarticulation. The dual protagonists symbolize two distinct modes by which women might

achieve a degree of emancipation. Cecilia's mobility is a product of her widow status, although her wealth and identity are derivative she can be seen to have financial independence, whereas Emmeline works for a living and seeks financial autonomy. Both protagonists struggle to author their own identities in a society privileging men. Yet, despite men's appearance of controlling the forms enabling domination they are actually seen to be impotent and lacking the capacity to dominate. *To the North* demonstrates women's alienation in a patriarchal society, whereby economic and representational systems function to dispossess women, whilst at the same time intimating that such a society is devoid of both meaning and value.²⁶

The dual protagonists of *To the North* are emblematic of the two primary paths available to women. Cecilia maintains a socially acceptable role and aspires to marriage in contrast with Emmeline who is taciturn and perceived as 'elsewhere' by other characters regardless of her ability to maintain social and economic independence—or may be precisely because she is independent and therefore unfathomable to those informed by patriarchy. Cecilia experiences social success and Emmeline silence and suicide. Cecilia is attracted to other socially successful women such as Lady Waters, in spite of complaining about her unwelcome advice and meddling involvement in her life:

While Emmeline simply said, gently and not very often,
that she wished Georgina'd been dead for a hundred
years, Cecilia daily declared her to be a scourge and

²⁶ Emmeline gives voice to this reality when she claims “there's no truth left.” (...) “There seems to be no truth anywhere” in Elizabeth Bowen, *To the North* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 239.

menace. Yet it was Cecilia who telephoned, who was magnetized to Rutland Gate. (*North*, 29)

Lady Waters is the central authority figure of the novel. Her empowerment is made possible through her husband's social and economic position but also his passivity. Cecilia is fixated by this image of female power and is reconciled to the need for a successful marriage in order to attain it; consequently, her socio-cultural advancement is obtained at the expense of her sexual specificity and autonomy. Her acceptance of the dominant culture, emblemized by her attempt to fulfil the social obligations expected of women in marriage, results in a dislocation of self. Her perpetual motion is an indication of her alienation in the present because in solitude and silence she experiences dissolution (*North*, 132). She both embraces the values associated with the dominant patriarchal culture, in order to maintain a successful social position and stable identity, and unconsciously tries to escape from them by perpetual motion. The means of achieving a stable, socially sanctioned, identity is unwittingly the cause of her fractured sense of self. The stratified social system, combined with women's culturally dependent position, creates anxiety for a character conditioned by upper-class society. Cecilia is therefore placed in the contradictory position of acting to ensure an elevated social status at the same time as expressing the valuelessness of her culture.

In contrast, Emmeline's financial independence, taciturnity, and resistance to culturally prescribed roles, means that she is situated at the perimeters of society. Such a position of exteriority estranges her from language and allows her to perceive it as a hollow form, empty of meaning and reduced to pure mechanics: 'she had seen spinning sentences, little cogs interlocked, each

clicking each other round' (*North*, 98). Disconcerted by the vacuity of language she craves another form of communication:

Though she might love him, she must dread at all times to hear him speak of their love: it was not in words he was writing himself across her. She might be said to be drawn, with a force of which she was hardly aware, by what existed in Markie in spite of himself. 'We should be dumb,' she thought, 'there should be other means of communication.' (*North*, 71)

Emmeline figures silence as a signifying system that does not violate the self or emotional intimacy but permits self-presence and transports meaning without the need for endless supplementation. She associates language with discontent, meaninglessness, and vacuity. She envisages silence in relation to this view of language; it becomes its polar opposite, a site of plenitude: "words twist everything; what one agrees about can't be spoken. To talk is always to quarrel a little, or misunderstand. But real peace, no points of view could ever disturb" (*North*, 194). Her own experience of silence is, however, distinct from her articulated conception of it. She adopts silence to withstand the alienating effects of language, but it unwittingly comes to serve as a device enabling her to elude others' representations of her which threaten her autonomy.

Emmeline's detachment from the discursive sphere leads to her appearing equivocal and mysterious and hence more susceptible to interpretation and analysis, and her election of silence as a form of communication proves ineffective without others to engage in her utopian fantasy. She is conscious of the theory that Cecilia has constructed to account for her quietness:

Feeling how Cecilia's idea of her must persist, unchangeable as a ghost, that idea of an Emmeline like a cat, disengaged and placid, she knew she would not have the heart to say: 'That was never me'; and pain began to attend this birth in her of the woman. (*North*, 148)

Emmeline's endeavour to escape from language, therefore, leads to her being more firmly enclosed within a system of representation that contravenes her sense of self; this in turn intensifies her need to keep silent as a form of resistance to others' attempts to define her. Markie repeatedly experiences a feeling that Emmeline eludes his attempts to understand her: 'Something escaped the senses, something broke through the hard intellectual frame of his idea of her' (*North*, 182). Her success in evading the interpretations of the other characters is achieved at the expense of participation in the social sphere.

Emmeline's utilization of silence as a form of expression does not advance socio-cultural change. She is able to preserve a sense of identity that exceeds Markie's patronizing perception of her, but she does nothing actively to contest the representations oppressing her; this could be due either—or concurrently—to her experience of alienation in language or her feeling of powerlessness. Unable to mediate a position in society, like Rhoda and Hermione, Emmeline seeks the oblivion of silence and suicide. Although she does nothing to alter the consequences of her linguistic dispossession in life, in her pursuit of death she subjects Markie to silence in a manner that reflects her experience of subjection to his representations: 'His old recurring dread of her, latent and long disregarded, must have pointed to this: his dependence, this moment, for life on these long ignorant fingers and silent brain' (*North*, 245). Just as Emmeline was

unable to negotiate a legitimate subject-position, Markie cannot engage in dialogue with the silent Emmeline to alter his fate, his dying with her.

In *To the North* compromise is impossible: women either maintain socially inscribed roles and experience violation or retreat from society into silence and death. The relationship between Emmeline and Markie demonstrates the absence of any intervention by which change could be made possible. Whilst Cecilia possesses the capacity to occupy a position in the social sphere it is not without occasioning a dislocation of self. *To the North* illustrates the difficulty for women to both preserve their sexual specificity inside a masculine socio-cultural sphere and have agency. In this narrative, silence is only successful in offering a mode of escape from oppressive forms; despite Emmeline's futuristic hopes, it fails to yield a method of communication free from the contamination of language and does nothing to disrupt or disable the discourses interpellating her. Cultural agency is realized only by virtue of masculine forms or the passive acceptance of a position of social dependence. Yet, significantly, in *To the North* masculinity lacks potency and patriarchal culture is presented as being insufficient. Although women are deprived of the means to achieve social transformation, constrained by both dominant representations and economic relations, patriarchal culture appears vacuous, meaningless, and impotent. The problems played out in the novel over language's value, or lack of it, reflects wider issues to do with the status of culture itself. Silence might offer the only means by which to escape the banality of everyday life. By reconfiguring gender questions in terms of broader cultural issues that are inextricably related to the disillusionment of late modernity, a space is created in which change might be possible. The delineation of culture's meaninglessness, of patriarchy's

impotence, indirectly challenges its potential to oppress women and forges a space for an alternative configuration of social relations. The novel highlights patriarchy's historically evolving form—refuting monolithic formulations of it—and therefore the impossibility of comprehending women's silence in any univocal way.

The differing uses of silence demonstrated in the novels by Woolf, H. D., and Bowen highlight the various constructions of patriarchy and women's position in relation to it. The theoretical discourses examined invest silence with the power to challenge patriarchy's monological status by signifying alternative economies and sites of resistance. The multiform and complex manner by which silence can be appropriated emphasizes the difficulty of advancing it as an indication of women's cultural absence or presence. It can have a mimetic role in denoting women's marginality and alienation within language but it can also be employed to contest patriarchy. It can signify passivity and oppression or resistance and challenge. However, the application of silence as a mode of escape from discourse or as a tool to catalyse the overthrow of the dominant economy is problematic due to the institution of the reader as the site of meaning production. The reader is elevated to the position of speaking for the voiceless protagonists by designating their silence as either absence or presence; this has been seen in the case of Rhoda in *The Waves* whereby Minow-Pinkney considered her to mark female absence whereas Laurence viewed her as an example of 'enlightened presence'. In commenting on the cultural significance of silent female protagonists the reader is in danger of being situated in a position with all of the attributes associated with patriarchy. In order to escape this theoretical

dilemma—resulting in the violation of silence as it is re-absorbed into discourse—self-consciousness is necessary.

In the struggle for women to obtain a position of enunciation which does not result in their being compromised, the theoretical impasse for women has not been satisfactorily resolved; rather, in each case, theory has been complicit in the reproduction of the impasse. Kristeva's formulation of differentiation whereby the subject is in process and is constituted by both the semiotic and symbolic domain unravels humanist notions of identity and overcomes the bipolar optic of feminists who are concerned with language and silence as opposites. Instead she postulates the presence of the inarticulate semiotic within the symbolic and thus institutes a system of difference over one of binary oppositions. However, whilst this theory elevates the silent and repressed dimension of culture, it does nothing to advance the possibility of women occupying discursive positions in the socio-cultural sphere.²⁷ In her formulation it is men who are best able to engage in the necessary dialectic between the two signifying systems, thereby assuring their cultural dominance. Kristeva's maintenance of traditional gender constructions of language as masculine and silence as feminine reduces the transformative potential of her theory, while the prevailing cultural form is associated with the masculine and the marginal and repressed with the feminine silence remains weighted with implications of cultural absence. Irigaray also valorizes silence as a female domain that has the power to disrupt the masculine and therefore pave

²⁷ Lois McNay is critical of psychoanalytically informed theory which tends to understand agency in terms of pre-social forces 'whose ahistorical, self-identical dynamic forecloses a recognition of the historically determinate nature of action. It also results in the problematic attribution of an inherently radical status to the pre-conscious realm'. See *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), p. 20.

the way for a new economy founded upon the principle of sexual difference rather than self-identity. But this too remains problematic as male poststructuralist theorists preoccupied with the unrepresentable of culture also figure this domain as female and incorporate it within their systems of representation.²⁸

The mute characters in the fiction explored can be regarded mimetically, as signs of women's exclusion and subjugation, but their silence can also be deployed as a strategy of resistance, which is the case with Hermione and Emmeline. However, as has been suggested, there are numerous dilemmas associated with the adoption of silence as a radical practice, mobilizing it as a form of expression which is granted the ability to disrupt the dominant culture. The experiences of the female protagonists in the fiction studied demonstrate the problems of relying upon silence as an interventionist strategy. Their mute communications are either not heard or subject to representation: for example, their equivocal and indirect utterances are conceived as mad or hysterical (*Asphodel*, 50; *North*, 210-212). A way out of the impasse for women could be made possible if language were seen differently. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar dismiss feminism's preoccupation with women's alienation in language and concentrate on women's ability to appropriate language to advance their agency and creativity.²⁹ However, they assume that the attainment of a position of enunciation is unproblematic and omit discussion of language as a contested site.

²⁸ For an in-depth study of the masculine formulation of feminine space as the precondition of meaning see Alice A. Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985; repr. 1989).

²⁹ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar formulate the need for women to reconsider their relation to language rather than conceptualize it as a masculine form which alienates women in 'Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality', *New Literary History*, 16 (1985), 515-543.

It is important to beware of the danger that a discussion of female silence can become too abstract and removed from the concerns of living women and therefore be complicit in the act of silencing. The theoretical valorization of silence as a subversive practice is far removed from the experience of silence by oppressed groups as it is access to language that enables presence in the discursive sphere, and thus the possibility of reform. The fictional protagonists manifest the implications of silence for women in a culture dominated by the masculine, but their existence intimates a contrary story whereby voice and creativity are possible.³⁰

³⁰ Contemporary feminist discourse shows signs of shifting its focus so as to redress some of the dilemmas exposed to view in this chapter. Postfeminism and transnational feminist cultural studies, for example, recognize the silencing effects of feminist theory and are conscious of the culturally and historically diverse experience that is implied by the terms 'woman', 'women', and 'patriarchy'. See Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms* (London: Routledge, 1997) and Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, 'Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies: Beyond the Marxism/Poststructuralism/Feminism Divides', *Positions*, 2 (1994), 430-445. Such critical positions are preoccupied with silencing but do not award to silence the kind of active role in the transformation of the existing socio-cultural order—which has been the focus here—as is seen in Kristeva's and Irigaray's formulations.

Chapter Four

'Race' and Silence

This chapter builds on the theoretical contexts developed in the previous two chapters; although its focus is the relation between 'race' and silence, it is situated at the intersection of both socio-economic and feminist debates, and therefore exposes the limitations of separating the social issues explored by this thesis into three distinct chapters. The term 'race' has been adopted by dominant groups as a signifier of absolute difference, and has been mobilized to naturalize the structure of social relations. The way in which this term's social and political production and application has led to the silencing and subordination of some cultures, to guarantee the constitution and perpetuation of the dominant, is to be scrutinized here.¹

In order to engage with the relationship between 'race' and silence, this chapter concentrates upon the racial domination of African-Americans by whites as it is represented in fiction from the United States.² The experience of racial oppression is global and could have been considered in a postcolonial or

¹ The term 'race' is a contested site: it has been appropriated for positive socio-political reasons by African-American thinkers, such as Toni Morrison, as well as by hegemonic discourses. Whilst the term will be employed critically, others' use of the word is not to be analysed in this chapter. The term 'ethnicity' is used in contradistinction to the violence of cultural inscriptions associated with 'race' as it offers a more positive sense of difference and diversity, along with the possibility of self-representation, following Stuart Hall's understanding of the term in 'New Ethnicities', in *Black Film, British Cinema* ICA Documents 7, ed. by Kobena Mercer (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1989), pp. 27-31.

² This chapter's attention to the subjugation of blacks by whites is not to be taken as suggesting that whites are the unraced human norm against which other ethnicities are defined; rather, the object of analysis is the way in which an American white ethnicity is fabricated in relation to black difference.

transnational context. African-American experience serves here as a special case to illuminate this issue. However, this analysis does not take place in a vacuum from postcolonial theory which has explicated and formulated the experience of racial silencing, particularly the silencing arising from negative representations. Numerous postcolonial critics have tracked the possibility of colonial subjects obtaining strategic positions of enunciation from which to contest colonial and imperial practices.

The chapter examines the representation of African-Americans by two white fictionalists, Kate Chopin and William Faulkner. An examination of *The Awakening* and *Absalom, Absalom!* demonstrates the process whereby black figures are fabricated by whites, and consequently emptied of consciousness, the precondition of voice.³ An assessment of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a novel which is a testament to African-American articulateness, follows a reading of *Absalom, Absalom!* Hurston's text, to a certain degree, challenges the ascriptions narrativized by both Chopin and Faulkner.

The application of theory to this selection of fiction assists in the project of revealing the multiform appearances and functions of silence. The theorists referred to are all committed to explicating silences as a matter of socio-political import. *The Awakening* is scrutinized in proximity to Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* so as to discern the utility of a seemingly marginal black presence for white consciousness. Morrison investigates the significance of the silencing and erasing of blacks within dominant American fiction for the service of a white

³ This selection of texts from traditionally conceived marginal and dominant cultural positions displays the pervasiveness of a racialized discourse which situates whites as superior to blacks.

literary imagination.⁴ *Absalom, Absalom!* is analysed alongside Spivak's work on the figure of the subaltern in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' and *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Spivak's theory addresses a specific postcolonial context but is appropriated in this chapter to comprehend the social text of the United States; in particular, to examine the mode by which the production of racializing discourse forecloses the possibility of African-American voice in *Absalom, Absalom!* With the case of Faulkner's novel, Spivak's theory is especially revealing as the narrative charts imperialist endeavours—and its consequences—as well as the particularity of Southern plantation slavery and its legacy.⁵ *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is read in association with theory by bell hooks, and is situated in this chapter so as to critique the dominance of racializing discourse which denies African-Americans cognitive capabilities in *The Awakening* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. Hurston and bell hooks fictionalize and theorize respectively the experience of being silenced and assert the possibility of voice. In turn, the basis upon which this voice is established will be examined.

In addressing the relationship between 'race' and silence, this chapter focuses its attention on the experience of African-American women. This is made evident in both the choice of fiction and theorists. In the fiction, it is African-American women who frequently appear the most subjugated and

⁴ Morrison's attribution of a determinate function to silence shares similarities with the theories of Macherey and Eagleton. The links between Morrison and Macherey's understanding of silence are evidenced in the essay 'Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 28 (1989), 1-34.

⁵ Whilst there are critical advantages in transposing postcolonial theory for the explication of interior colonization in the United States, some of the problems ensuing from such a project will be discussed.

consequently have been formulated as the other of the other.⁶ Discussion of gender and racial oppression has traditionally been centred on white Western women and black men. The elision of black women from theoretical and critical debate mirrors their socio-cultural absence: oppressed by white racial supremacy and African-American patriarchy. As African-Americans, Morrison and hooks speak from the cultural margins and are actively engaged in contesting a culture of racial discrimination. This chapter does not claim to assert African-American women's silence as a universal model of the experience of racial oppression, and subsequently subsume the historical specificity of different racisms. It is posited as a very specific case which exposes in their fullness a number of issues pertaining to the relation between 'race' and silence. This particular case, whilst limited in scope, succinctly illustrates the matter of hegemonic culture's need to constitute a racial other, who is subsequently repressed and foreclosed access to the discursive sphere.

This chapter—in a similar fashion to that of the previous two chapters—is concerned with plotting silenced histories and discovering the traces of forcefully erased voices and, in so doing, disclosing the ideological practices of hegemonic culture. A black presence informs white consciousness within American culture, it haunts it; to subdue its threatening features, a set of repressive and oppressive strategies are mobilized.⁷ It is crucial that this two-way process is recognized in

⁶ Michelle Wallace formulates the discursive elision of black women as they are situated in the 'unspeakable position of the "other" of the "other"' in *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 227.

⁷ The term 'black' will be utilized to define a collectivity in conjunction- and juxtaposition- with the term 'African-American'. Both are culturally constructed terms, but as 'African-American' is a relatively recent term, enabling American blacks to obtain a degree of positive self-definition regarding their ethnicity and nationality, it does not encompass the more negative classifications evident in both *The Awakening* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. Accordingly, the term 'black' will primarily be adopted in sections I and II, and 'African-American' in section III.

order to oppose a tendency to neglect the active cultural presence of blacks in the United States. As was shown in Chapters Two and Three, the dominant's attempt to expunge the material conditions of its production paradoxically provides the sign of its barbaric practices; although the extent to which silence offers a means of challenging and resisting oppressive forces—or whether silenced voices can be recovered—requires scrutiny. This chapter does not seek to represent the silenced (speak on their behalf). The ambition is merely to chart the materiality of the racially silenced in fiction, and to explore how theory offers ways of reading such silence.

I – Morrison and *The Awakening*: Africanist presence and the construction of the white female individual

An examination of *The Awakening* in the light of critical work by Toni Morrison highlights the female protagonist's—and the narrative's—muting of blacks. The novel has been adopted by Western feminism as a radical account of women's struggle against, and liberation from, patriarchy. Although white female writers, such as Kate Chopin, have positioned themselves in opposition to patriarchal hegemony they 'have all but ignored the racialized constructedness of the mythic they set out to dissect or to counterwrite and have actually partaken in the American national consensus's foundational fiction of racially innocent origins'.⁸ Morrison's critical text, *Playing in the Dark*, insists on the necessity of situating literature in its racialized social context. She argues that the fabrication of racelessness is in itself a racist act;⁹ the silencing of a black presence is a manifestation of repressive and oppressive procedures. As a result of Morrison's formulation, the role of a black presence in fiction, and by extension, American culture, is moved from the margins to a position of centrality: it is seen to have a formative function in the white literary imagination. She refers to an American black presence as 'Africanist' (*Playing*, 5-6). This term is mobilized to uncover the cultural processes conditioning it: 'I use it as a term for the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify' (*Playing*, 6).

⁸ Sabine Brock, *White Amnesia – Black Memory?: American Women's Writing and History*, Bremer Beiträge Zur Literatur – Und Ideengeschichte, Band 25 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 15.

⁹ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (London: Picador, 1993), p. 46.

Playing in the Dark concentrates on the need for a re-examination of the American literary canon in the light of a formative Africanist presence. *The Awakening* has not been traditionally conceived as a canonical text, but by reading it alongside Morrison's work, the extent to which fabrications of blacks and blackness have influenced ideas of identity, individualism, and freedom, even within texts charting the experience of dispossession, becomes evident. Morrison directs attention away from a theoretical preoccupation with the victims of racism so as to attain cognizance of a system requiring the perpetuation of racist ideology (*Playing*, 11).

The Awakening articulates the protagonist Edna's movement from confinement in the patriarchal society of New Orleans, in which she is pressured to conform to the roles ascribed to her as wife and mother, towards psychological and social emancipation. This is expressed by her attempt to attain economic and social independence from her husband—and coincidentally her role as mother—by living in her own home and participating in an extramarital affair with the character Robert. The novel closes with her swimming out to sea alone which could also be read as an emancipatory gesture. The characters that surround Edna attain significance largely as they inform her world, as either oppressors or models to be emulated.

There are few black figures in *The Awakening* and those that do appear do not advance the narrative action, are given no speaking roles, and are without agency. Their presence, therefore, could be regarded purely as part of the cultural setting of the South at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁰ But following

¹⁰ *The Awakening* is set in two locations: Grand Isle and New Orleans. Consequently, traces of French colonialism and slavery pervade the novel.

Morrison's assertion of the crucial role of blacks for the writerly imagination, it is necessary to question the apparent marginality of black figures in *The Awakening*:

Explicit or implicit, the Africanist presence informs in compelling and inescapable ways the texture of American literature. It is a dark and abiding presence, there for the literary imagination as both a visible and invisible mediating force. Even, and especially, when American texts are not 'about' Africanist presences or characters or narrative or idiom, the shadow hovers in implication, in sign, in line of demarcation. (*Playing*, 46-47)

The seemingly insignificant black characters of *The Awakening* can be seen to provide the condition of possibility for Edna's emancipation: they are utilized to assist the self-definition of the protagonist; their domestic labour liberates Edna from the confines of the home and motherhood; and the intimation of their history of slavery is appropriated as a rhetoric to articulate the experience of white female oppression by patriarchy.

Edna seeks to overthrow the cultural ascriptions that bind her so as to discover her 'essential' self. The novel deploys the discourse of an individualistic ideology to articulate Edna's rebellion against a society that interpellates her: 'she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world.'¹¹ The juxtaposition of Edna's self with society dissociates her from complicity with the

¹¹ Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, in *The Awakening and Other Stories*, ed. by Pamela Knight (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), pp. 1-128 (p. 64).

dominant processes of cultural production. The assertion of her self-sufficiency occludes her dependence upon blacks, even as she identifies with their experience to further her sexual liberation. Edna's contemplation of her sexual awakening and desire for autonomy takes place against the background of a black presence largely made up of her own servants. She is given the time and space to discover her inner reality as a consequence of black labour: for example, her children are nursed by a quadroon who performs the maternal functions eschewed by Edna. When the quadroon shows signs of negligence Edna is quick to condemn her:

Edna tapped her foot impatiently, and wondered why the children persisted in playing in the sun when they might be under the trees. She went down and led them out of the sun, scolding the quadroon for not being more attentive. (*Awakening*, 53)

Edna projects onto the quadroon all of the contempt that patriarchal culture has for herself as a result of her relinquishment of the responsibilities of motherhood.

The quadroon lacks any sign of subjectivity, she is defined purely by her racial characteristics and labour power:

She [Edna] inhaled the odor of the blossoms and thrust them into the bosom of her morning gown. The boys were dragging along the banquette a small 'express wagon,' which they had filled with blocks and sticks. The quadroon was following them with little quick steps, having assumed a fictitious animation and alacrity for the occasion. (*Awakening*, 60)

In this passage, a distinction is made between the agency and intention of Edna's and her children's actions, and those of the quadroon. Whilst Edna and the boys are purposefully engaged in activities that absorb them, and therefore intimate consciousness, the quadroon is represented as a site of vacuity. She is playing a role. There is no suggestion of the quadroon asserting a self, she merely follows in the path of her mistress's children and assumes behaviour to satisfy privileged white onlookers. Subversive mimicry is not intimated here, only obedience to convention. In contrast, Edna is charged with a disruptive capacity: her sexuality and wilfulness pose a threat to patriarchy which requires women to maintain object-status. The sensuous representation of Edna in this passage, which is juxtaposed with that of the quadroon, challenges traditional associations of white women with restraint and black women with sexuality and transgression.¹² *The Awakening* disables blacks of any radical potential by displacing their subversive somatic significations onto the female protagonist. They are positioned as part of the culture that oppresses Edna, so that she appears to stand alone as an oppressed subject contesting patriarchy.¹³

The Awakening demonstrates the 'parasitical nature of white freedom' which Morrison posits as a central reality of white fabrications of an Africanist presence (*Playing*, 57). Edna's quest for freedom and autonomy is dependent upon the blacks around her. The expression of self-sufficiency exposes the

¹² Edna is described later in the narrative responding to 'the animalism that stirred impatiently within her' (*Awakening*, 87).

¹³ Michele A. Birnbaum articulates Edna's identification with the subversive qualities traditionally associated with blacks in "'Alien Hands": Kate Chopin and the Colonization of Race', in *Subjects and Citizens: Nation, Race, and Gender From 'Oroonoko' to Anita Hill*, ed. by Michael Moon and Cathy N. Davidson (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995), pp. 319-341. However, Birnbaum does not see as problematic the racist assumptions behind the stereotypes of black women's sexuality, or the violence of Edna's usurpation of their marginal status for her own purposes.

working of ideological machinery to erase dependency, and thus indirectly highlights a relation to black oppressed subjects (*Playing*, 17). When Edna hosts a dinner party—termed a *coup d'état* by Arobin (*Awakening*, 94)—celebrating her decision to live independently of her husband in the ‘pigeon-house’, she is described as being triumphantly autonomous: ‘There was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and spread her arms, which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone’ (*Awakening*, 98). Edna’s autonomy is grounded on the subjugation of racial others. Her sense of self-authorship is, accordingly, an illusion. Her decision to move to the ‘pigeon house’ and live off her own income, in order to be self-sufficient, intimates the extent to which she has erased her dependency upon black production. Edna sees herself to be financially independent because of her own winnings at the races, the sale of her paintings, and also from money inherited from her mother’s plantation. Yet, such capital accrued from a plantation undermines her claims to self-sufficiency. She is implicated in an economic structure which has its roots in slavery, exploitation, and racial violence. Edna is free to make the choice to escape her husband’s patronage and can resolve ‘never again to belong to another than herself’, as a consequence of the labour of others (*Awakening* 89). The choices available to her are untenable for the ‘darkies’ that populate the novel (*Awakening*, 78); their subjection and enclosure within structures of domination is made all the more apparent by Edna’s ability to attain voice and selfhood.¹⁴

¹⁴ Edna’s inability to sustain her newfound autonomy because of the restrictions of her society does not weaken the force of her utilization of racial others.

The move to the 'pigeon-house' is prompted by Edna's wish to be free of her husband's authority, and the social expectations of being a wife and mother, so that she can pursue her own interests, especially her art. She speaks practically of the domestic arrangements of her new house:

'I can live in the tiny house for little or nothing, with one servant. Old Celestine, who works occasionally for me, says she will come stay with me and do my work. I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence.' (*Awakening*, 88)

She is able to assert her independence even whilst acknowledging her reliance upon Celestine's labour. No contradictions are recognized in this project, either by the protagonist or the narrative itself, because of the naturalization and normativization of the subordinate position of blacks. The refusal to credit such a collectivity with subject-status means that they pose no threat to Edna's autonomy.

An Africanist presence, Morrison argues, can be appropriated to maintain narrative and subjective cohesion but can also serve to critique those objectives. It is a complex presence which always exceeds narrative control. Morrison articulates the disruptive potentiality of an Africanist presence within a text: 'Is the text sabotaged by its own proclamations of "universality"? Are there ghosts in the machine? Active but unsummoned presences that can distort the workings of the machine and can also *make* it work?' ('Unspeakable', 13). The application of such questions to *The Awakening* assists in eliciting the text's racial unconscious. The silencing of blacks, and the foreclosure of their attainment of subject-positions, enables the female protagonist's (partial) emancipation from

patriarchy;¹⁵ but their material silence also demonstrates the operation of racial ideology. The cluster of contradictions arising from narrative instances of an Africanist presence subverts the surface objectives of the novel. Edna's assertion of independence is problematized by her relation to her black servants. Their presence functions to invalidate her claims and expose her collusion with the structures of patriarchal domination which maintain racial inequality.

The process whereby Edna comes to voice, discovers her 'essential' self, and reacts against patriarchy, takes place in a racialized social context in which she is surrounded by 'violently silenced black bodies' whose history and continued subjugation intimates all that it means to be unfree (*Playing*, 38). She makes no attempt to connect her experience of oppression with that of the blacks serving her so as to achieve solidarity against the dominant; instead, she adopts the particularity of their history in order to work out her own emancipatory discourse. Morrison bespeaks the need to study such narratives to uncover the cultural procedures operative to erase black histories: the mode of, as well as the necessity for, their occlusion:

We need to analyze the manipulation of the Africanist narrative (that is, the story of a black person, the experience of being bound and/or rejected) as a means of meditation—both safe and risky—on one's own humanity. Such analyses will reveal how the representation and appropriation of that narrative

¹⁵ Following the previous chapter's examination of the pervasiveness of patriarchy, especially its domination of language, Edna's appearance of attaining freedom from enclosure within, and interpellation by, patriarchy is not to be regarded necessarily as a sign of her actual liberation. However, this chapter is focused on racial oppression and not the scrutiny of her position within patriarchy.

provides opportunities to contemplate limitation, suffering, rebellion, and to speculate on fate and destiny.

(...) Criticism of this type will show how that narrative is used in the construction of a history and a context for whites by positing history-lessness and context-lessness for blacks. (*Playing*, 53)

The narrator's identification with Edna by virtue of indirect and free indirect discourse, without any apparent ironic distancing, means that the narrative appears to collude with Edna's appropriation of a rhetoric of bondage: 'The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days' (*Awakening*, 127). The analogy between motherhood and slavery functions to obliterate the specificity of black oppression. It erases all of the factors distinguishing her experience from that of a people who have been transported, disarticulated, and subjugated to the point of animalization. The transposition of a black history to a white context also works to augment the silence of the racially oppressed.¹⁶ The rhetoric of slavery assists in the white woman's assertion of her voice and rights, distancing her further from those unable to articulate themselves in the discursive sphere because of the production of racial ideology which denies them not only rights but subjectivity; this is made

¹⁶ For an explication of the use of a rhetoric of slavery in novels concerned with white female liberation see Carl Plasa, "'Silent Revolt': Slavery and the Politics of Metaphor in *Jane Eyre*", in *The Discourse of Slavery: Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison*, ed. by Carl Plasa and Betty J. Ring (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 64-93 and Karen Sanchez-Eppler, 'Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolitionism', *Representations*, 24 (1988), 28-59.

apparent in the narrative itself—and its own figuration of such ideology—whereby blacks are refused any direct speech.¹⁷

The final scene of the novel, in which Edna swims out to sea alone, asserts whiteness, and in so doing, erases the black presence which has been so formative in constituting her identity:

The water of the gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. (*Awakening*, 127)

This narrative moment provides an example of Morrison's observation that the evocation of whiteness frequently follows an encounter with blackness: 'these images of blinding whiteness seem to function as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow that is the companion to this whiteness' (*Playing*, 33). Following her critical formulation, whiteness signifies cultural transcendence but also nullity and death. The erasure of racial difference provides Edna with a more complete and ecstatic experience of liberation (in death), because it rids her of the signs of dispossession and bondage which she has been dependent upon: black bodies.

The elevation of whiteness signals the end of Edna's consciousness, as well as the possibility of narrative. Morrison claims that an Africanist presence provides an imaginative resource for American writers to address issues

¹⁷ Black discourse is always represented by the narrator (*Awakening*, 66, 111).

concerning identity, freedom, desire, taboo, and restraint: ‘Whiteness, alone, is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable’ (*Playing*, 59).¹⁸ *The Awakening*’s closing scene is emblematic of the narrative and ideological contrivances that have to be undertaken in order to expel blacks from both culture and history. Edna’s final memories of her childhood on a Kentucky plantation are symptomatic of this repression (*Playing*, 9):

Edna heard her father’s voice and her sister Margaret’s.

She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air.

(*Awakening*, 128)

The blacks that populate her domestic space and work on the land are removed from this nostalgic vision of the past. Nevertheless, a trace of the oppression of blacks, and the social order necessitating it, subsists in the images of the restrained dog and the spurs of the cavalry officer: the suggestion of physical confinement and patriarchy.

Morrison’s critical work has contributed towards bringing ‘race’ to the foreground of the analysis of American literature. The absence and silence of blacks has been re-conceptualized:

We can agree, I think, that invisible things are not necessarily ‘not-there’; that a void may be empty, but is

¹⁸ Whiteness is connected with a trans-lingual dimension, metaphysical silence and absence, whereas blackness is associated with material silencing—the forceful erasure of voices and repression.

not a vacuum. In addition, certain absences are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose, like neighbourhoods that are defined by the population held away from them. ('Unspeakable', 11)

For Morrison, silences are articulations: they simultaneously signal the existence of the racially oppressed and the repressive operations of the dominant system. However, whilst her formulation redresses the imbalance of a critical focus upon the objects of racism by investigating its subjects, as has been demonstrated in its application to *The Awakening*, it is in danger of emptying an Africanist presence of any significance in itself: 'The subject of the dream is the dreamer. The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self' (*Playing*, 17). Although Morrison does posit a disruptive potentiality to blackness, *Playing in the Dark's* concentration upon the fabrication of blackness suggests that it is merely a malleable resource for the service of white creative subjects (*Playing*, 66). There is no discussion of blacks representing themselves, or of their cultural productions having influenced hegemonic apparatuses which, in turn, leads to their being appropriated by white fictionalists. An unwitting consequence of Morrison's formulation which endeavours to analyse the procedures behind literary whiteness is that an Africanist presence appears as the sole product of the white writer's imagination. *Playing in the Dark's* tendency to neglect black resistance in its concentration on dominant representations, which may be signalled by literary silences, is a theoretical limitation and a dissipation of its political force. In the following section, Spivak's proposition of native withholding, as a means of resisting dominant productions, is investigated in

order to assess the degree to which the racially oppressed can escape or subvert the inscriptions that are produced to assimilate them. This reading also questions whether it is possible to get outside of racializing discourse. Despite Morrison's acknowledgement of the naturalization of such discourse when speaking of 'how language arrives', its implications for her own theoretical position are not developed (*Playing*, 17). Spivak problematizes the possibility of intellectuals, even from marginal ethnic groups, attaining speaking positions which do not compromise further those spoken of who are located in even more marginal positions.

II – Spivak and *Absalom, Absalom!*: narrating away black voices

Absalom, Absalom! evinces a dual process whereby history is narrativized and racial ideology is produced; in so doing, the erasure of black voices and history is brought to the fore. Faulkner's fictionalization of black figures haunting the minds of its white characters, and the text itself, shares resemblances with Morrison's project to search 'for the ghost in the machine' ('Unspeakable', 11). He articulates the repressive psychological processes of the South and 'the convolutions of memory to bury the image of the black man deep in the white mind'.¹⁹ In the reconstruction of Sutpen's history, which forms the basis of the novel, by the characters Rosa and Compson, the role of blacks is omitted. Quentin and Shreve perceive the significance of this ellipsis and reinsert the figure of the black in their reworking of Sutpen's story, therefore giving it greater cohesion, but they are forced to confront the horror of dependency that the other narrators, and Sutpen, had sought to repress. *Absalom, Absalom!* is self-consciously aware of the discursive and imaginative procedures undertaken by whites to silence blacks; however, this does not preclude complicity with such practices.

Spivak's theorization of imperialism's production of the subaltern figure provides a constructive heuristic tool by which to investigate the representation of marginalized black figures in *Absalom, Absalom!*. Spivak is particularly concerned with the (im)possibility of the postcolonial intellectual recovering subaltern voice-consciousness. She situates subalterns on the other side of the

¹⁹ Eric J. Sundquist, 'Faulkner, Race, and the Forms of American Fiction', in *Faulkner and Race: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*, 1986, ed. by Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), pp. 1-34 (p. 26). This sentence is in itself indicative of the silencing of black women in criticism investigating 'race'. This phenomenon will be considered further in both this section and section III.

international division of labour ('Subaltern', 78). Despite her theory's grounding in a very specific socio-political context, its adoption for the explication of Faulkner's fictionalization of racial domination in the American South yields productive analyses of both Faulkner's text and Spivak's theoretical project. Following her own eclectic theoretical procedures, elements from her discourse are employed which elucidate the strategies of *Absalom, Absalom!*.²⁰ Although Spivak states the importance of not conflating 'internal colonization' in the United States with territorial imperialism in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, as, she warns, to do so serves the interests of the dominant groups and alienates the subaltern further, *Absalom, Absalom!* undermines any assertion of clear-cut categories in its depiction of both Haitian and Southern slavery.²¹ The novel's account of the transportation and dispersal of blacks from the site of imperialism (Haiti) to American Southern plantocracy challenges the imposition of strict definitions separating the economic structures conditioning racial domination.

Spivak uses the term 'subaltern' to refer to 'the sheer heterogeneity of decolonized space' (*Critique*, 310). She argues that: 'Simply by being postcolonial or the member of an ethnic minority, we are not "subaltern"' (*Critique*, 310). However, by delimiting her application of the term she neglects to consider the way that racializing discourse is utilized to keep its objects—those who are rigorously denied subject-positions—on 'the other side of

²⁰ As an illustration of this critical practice, when speaking of her application of Freud in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Spivak states that she is 'attempting to borrow the general methodological aura of Freud's strategy' ('Subaltern', 92). This comment could be applied to my use of Spivak's theory.

²¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999), pp. 168-173.

difference' (*Critique*, 309).²² The term will be deployed in reference to those in *Absalom, Absalom!* who are denied a position from which to speak as a result of racist formulations inextricably related to the dominant economic system, plantocracy; in particular, the dispossessed Southern black woman. Spivak's formulation of the epistemic violence of imperialism can be transposed to a Southern context in which the dominance of racializing discourse functions to constitute the black as other to consolidate the white self and to preserve an agrarian economy.

Absalom, Absalom! concerns a series of narrators who are prepossessed with the past, and attempt to make sense of it by discursively (re)constructing it. Rosa, Compson, Quentin, and Shreve all strive to account for the events pivoting around the elusive character Sutpen who is an alien to the Southern community, a migrant from the mountains of West Virginia. He establishes himself as a plantation holder with the aid of imported Haitian slaves. His apparent self-institution in the position of land-owner, his marriage to Rosa's sister, Ellen, the actions between himself and his children, and his subsequent demise, provide the material for gossip amongst the Jefferson community and for analysis by the narrators. The constant need within the community, and amongst the narrators, to make sense of themselves in relation to Sutpen's often illegitimate actions, especially miscegenation, marks the white subject's endeavour to consolidate its position in a society that rigorously demarcates racial characteristics. The narrators are all haunted by the figure of the black they work to repress. Their

²² Spivak argues that imperialism is not identical to chromatism (*Critique*, 291); whilst this is a crucial characteristic of imperialism which intimates its geopolitical power, it cannot justify a complete neglect of the role of 'race' in the epistemology of imperialism and the subsequent discourse of subalternity.

utterances testify to this attempt to absent the black; paradoxically, such silences—denoting the black’s space and thereby occlusion—disclose the tactics deployed to eradicate black existence. Tracing the location of the black in the Southern consciousness fictionalized by Faulkner shares similarities with Spivak’s project to uncover the traces of the subaltern in the discourses of Foucault and Deleuze. Spivak’s interest in Western subject formation resembles Faulkner’s narrative inquiry into the process of white Southern subject formation.

Rosa’s and Compson’s narratives provide examples of the operation of racializing ideology. Their representation of blacks as animals or savages positions them as subalterns, and forecloses the possibility of speech. Rosa’s report of Sutpen’s organized fights with his slaves shows this violent discourse in operation:

‘Ellen seeing not the two black beasts she had expected to see but instead a white one and a black one, both naked to the waist and gouging at one another’s eyes as if they should not only have been the same color, but should have been covered with fur too.’²³

Her narrative de-humanizes blacks and refuses them consciousness. The horror of this scene for Rosa’s imagination is not that two Haitian slaves could be set to fight each other for entertainment, but that a white slave owner could participate in practices that undermine his whiteness. The bodily contact that Sutpen engages in as a means of asserting his mastery is narrativized by Rosa as a sign

²³ William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (London: Vintage, 1995), p. 29.

of his barbarity. Her attribution of black characteristics to Sutpen serves to disparage and demonize him. Rosa's narrative is motivated by a psychological trauma of her own, Sutpen's proposing marriage to her and then subsequently rejecting her. Her construction of blackness is thereby a method of consolidating her own subjectivity: by limiting Sutpen's cognitive capabilities she attenuates the psychological damage caused by his rejection of her.

The narrator of *Absalom, Absalom!* obtains a degree of detachment from the production of overt racialized discourse by highlighting its fabricated nature and its historical specificity; this is exemplified in 'the legend of Sutpen's wild negroes' (*Absalom*, 36). The myths about Sutpen's Haitian blacks arise out of a need to subdue a people associated with insurgence. Haiti's native rebellion of 1791—anachronistically rendered by Faulkner as an event that took place in 1827—was significant in the South. Richard Godden argues that 'Haiti is synonymous with revolution'.²⁴ It necessitated the production of ideology to render blacks incapable of independent action. *Absalom, Absalom!* self-consciously demonstrates the mobilization of such ideology. Sutpen's contemporaries are involved in a discursive project to rid his Haitian blacks of subjectivity, thus rendering rebellion unthinkable:

So the legend of the wild men came gradually back to town, brought by the men who would ride out to watch what was going on, who began to tell how Sutpen would stand beside a game trail with the pistols and send the negroes in to drive the swamp like a pack of hounds; it

²⁴ See Richard Godden, 'Absalom, Absalom!', Haiti and Labor History: Reading Unreadable Revolutions', *ELH*, 61 (1994), 685-720 (p. 686).

was they who told how during that first summer and fall the negroes did not even have (or did not use) blankets to sleep in, even before the coon-hunter Akers claimed to have walked one of them out of the absolute mud like a sleeping alligator and screamed just in time. (*Absalom*, 36)

Faulkner narrativizes the mode by which racial inequality comes to be normative in the South. There is no trace of black consciousness here, only the process of their assimilation. The Haitian black is posited as the other of the white Southern subject and therefore can be construed as subaltern. The discursive production of such otherness renders subaltern speech impossible: ‘One cannot put together a “voice”. The most one can sense is the immense heterogeneity breaking through’ (*Critique*, 287).

Absalom, Absalom! can be compared with *The Awakening* in its depiction of a white aversion to dependency upon black labour, although Faulkner’s novel is self-conscious of such Southern realities and subjects them to scrutiny; a persistent ironic voice is one device effectuating this. Sutpen’s design to become a plantation owner, the inheritance of which, by his progeny, requires white racial purity, is paradigmatic of the Southern aspiration to escape contamination by blacks. As a boy in West Virginia, Sutpen undergoes the traumatic experience of being silenced by a black slave. He fails in his task of delivering a message from his father to the plantation owner because the black who opened the front door to him “told him, even before he had time to say what he came for, never to come to that front door again but to go around to the back” (*Absalom*, 232). This incident, in which he is seemingly disarticulated by a black, is figured by

Sutpen as the primary reason for his construction of a design enabling him to occupy the authoritarian position of plantation owner. It causes him to go to Haiti to acquire both wealth and slaves. This symbolic moment is also accepted as the original cause of Sutpen's ambitions by the narrators of his history (Compson, Quentin, and Shreve) following Sutpen's account of his experiences to General Compson. However, despite Sutpen's claim to be innocent of social stratification until he first encounters it in the plains of West Virginia, his reaction at the doorstep shows that he was always already both economically and racially informed (*Absalom*, 227). His disgust at the reality of a black occupying a position of superiority over him evidences the extent to which he is embedded in a racialized society that views blacks as the inferior 'race'.²⁵ But the full implications of the encounter exceed his mere humiliation: it is the acknowledgement of a white dependence upon blacks regardless of the position occupied in Southern plantocracy:

‘The nigger was just another balloon face slick and distended with that mellow loud and terrible laughing so that he [Sutpen] did not dare to burst it, looking down at him from within the half-closed door during that instant in which, before he knew it, something in him had escaped (...) and [he] was looking out from within the balloon face just as the man who did not even have to wear the shoes he owned (...) looked out from whatever invisible place he happened to be at the moment, at the

²⁵ The issue of Sutpen's dependency upon black labour is more fully examined in Richard Godden's essay, '*Absalom, Absalom!*, Haiti and Labor History.'

boy outside the barred door in his patched garments (...),
 he himself seeing his own father and sisters and brothers
 as the owner, the rich man (not the nigger) must have
 been seeing them.' (*Absalom*, 234-235)

Quentin's formulation of Sutpen's experience shows that white reliance upon blacks is intrinsic to a plantation economy. However, despite Godden's claim that 'ethnically speaking the black has entered all available subject positions', it is more apparent that subjects are violently appropriated by patriarchal plantocracy ('Haiti', 694). The figure of the black is emptied and occupied by both the boy Sutpen and the plantation owner; reduced to a receptacle, his function is merely to facilitate the explication of the Southern economic system. The black figure is voided of subjectivity and utilized as a vantage point to enable white subjects to make sense of themselves and their social status. The absent plantation owner determines the actions and social position of both the 'nigger monkey' and the boy Sutpen. Sutpen is able to respond to this domination by aspiring to occupy the same position of dominance, but such agency is untenable for the 'nigger monkey' who is denied a subject-position.

Spivak argues that the subaltern woman occupies a position of aporia. She demonstrates this through the example of *sati* whereby women are constituted, and subsequently erased, by native patriarchy and masculinist imperialism:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution
 and object-formation, the figure of the woman
 disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a
 violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the

‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization. (‘Subaltern’, 102)

This formulation could be applied to the character of Charles Etienne Bon who occupies a site of aporia as a result of his racial indeterminacy. He is situated between two cultures defined by their skin colour. In the South, his mixed ‘race’ means that he defies categorization, he can only shuttle back and forth between black and white inscriptions. Compson articulates Charles Etienne’s uncertain location:

‘Yes, sleeping in the trundle bed beside Judith’s, beside that of the woman who looked upon him and treated him with a cold unbending detached gentleness more discouraging than the fierce ruthless constant guardianship of the negress who, with a sort of invincible spurious humility slept on a pallet on the floor, the child lying there between them unasleep in some hiatus of passive and hopeless despair.’ (*Absalom*, 197)

Even as Compson speaks he is consolidating the cultural absence of Charles Etienne: the language he employs to describe him foregrounds his vacuity (*Absalom*, 196). It is not until Charles Etienne is defined—or defines himself—as black that he is able to act. However, at no point is he attributed any voice; he merely plays out a stereotypical role ascribed to a black man, and thereby moves from a position of stasis to one of overdetermined physicality. Violence becomes his primary mode of expressivity. The gap between his conduct, which is coded black, and his skin pigmentation, which is white, causes exegetical problems in the novel. This is exemplified at his court hearing when he is tried for physical

assault. The judge, Jim Hamblett, says to Charles Etienne: “that you, I say, a white man, a white -----” (...) “*What are you? Who are you and where did you come from?*”” (*Absalom*, 203).

Whilst Charles Etienne can be associated with Spivak’s notion of subalternity because he occupies a position of aporia that precludes voice, it is his wife who is the quintessential subaltern figure in *Absalom, Absalom!*. This follows Spivak’s assertion that ‘if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow’ (‘Subaltern’, 83). Charles Etienne’s nameless wife—as she is represented by Compson—lacks any of the signs of consciousness: agency, volition, or voice. Compson’s narrative rids her of any human characteristics at the same time as it foregrounds her blackness: ‘the ape-like body of his [Charles Etienne’s] charcoal companion’ (*Absalom*, 206):

‘The woman, who, even a year later and after their son was born, still existed in that aghast and automaton-like state in which she had arrived, did not, possibly could not, recount but which she seemed to exude gradually and by a process of terrific and incredulous excretion like the sweat of fear or anguish: how he had found her, dragged her out of whatever two dimensional backwater (...) her mentality had been capable of coercing food and shelter from, and married her, held her very hand doubtless while she made the laborious cross on the register before she even knew his name or knew that he was not a white man.’ (*Absalom*, 205-206)

According to Compson, Charles Etienne's selection of a black wife is a means of provoking hostility amongst whites (*Absalom*, 206). Her body is utilized in order for Charles Etienne to work out his own identity, or his frustration at a lack of one. This narrative eradicates the possibility that she may have actively chosen to be with Charles Etienne. The agency described in the passage is unquestionably male. Her place of origin is even emptied of material reality; she is firmly situated 'on the other side of difference' (*Critique*, 309). Spivak formulates the female subaltern to be doubly effaced by her constitution by native patriarchy and masculinist imperialism. Charles Etienne's wife exemplifies the effects of being imbricated by a multiplicity of discourses in the South. She is subjected simultaneously by Compson's patriarchal racializing narrative which is informed by plantocracy, Charles Etienne's will, and *Absalom, Absalom!*'s irony. The degree of her blackness, combined with her gender, situates her at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Her otherness, attributed to her as a means of consolidating the male subject, ensures that there is no possibility of her attaining a position of enunciation. In this case, as with Charles Etienne's occupation of a site of aporia, 'race' is firmly instituted as a factor in the production of subalternity.

The preclusion of Charles Etienne's wife from attaining voice-consciousness alerts the critic to the nature of racial ideology and the process of subject constitution influencing Compson's discourse. The ideological effects of the racialized South disable black agency and oppositional practices. However, despite the production of such discourse, in *Absalom, Absalom!* Haiti remains as a signifier of native insurgence, and, therefore, the possibility of blacks obtaining subject-positions. Quentin narrates Sutpen's experiences as a colonizer in Haiti, the events of which were transmitted to him via his grandfather and father. He is

conscious of imperialism's pernicious treatment of blacks and considers Haiti to have 'a soil manured with black blood from two hundred years of oppression and exploitation' (*Absalom*, 251). Sutpen's encounter with insurgent slaves, during his time as an overseer on a sugar plantation, is a formative experience that accounts for his need to enforce his authority ruthlessly as a slave owner in the South. Quentin's narration of this occasion testifies to black agency at the same time as it displaces it by the use of figurative language:

'And he overseeing it, riding peacefully about on his horse while he learned the language, (...) not knowing that what he rode upon was a volcano, hearing the air tremble and throb at night with the drums and the chanting and not knowing that it was the heart of the earth itself he heard.' (*Absalom*, 251)

Black subjects are not the agents but nature. Quentin's tropological moves empty the incident of revolutionary import by reconfiguring it in abstract terms so that Sutpen 'fired at no enemy but the Haitian night itself' (*Absalom*, 253). A historical moment which is a testament to black agency is stripped of its radical significance by a discourse that recasts the events so as to erase black consciousness, and in so doing, reduce the threat of rebellion in the South. Quentin considers Sutpen to have silenced the revolt by asserting his whiteness:

'He (...) walked out into the darkness and subdued them, maybe by yelling louder, maybe by standing, bearing more than they believed any bones and flesh could or should (...); maybe at last they themselves turning in

horror and fleeing from the white arms and legs.’

(*Absalom*, 254)

The necessary qualities by which to combat revolt are seen to inhere in whiteness: authority and power.

Quentin’s narrative highlights the way that native insurgence is incorporated within hegemonic discourse. Silences mark the site of opposition, Spivak claims, but cannot be recovered as consciousness (‘Subaltern’, 82). *Absalom, Absalom!*’s use of the Haitian rebellion can also be viewed critically: it adopts procedures which displace insurgency in a similar way to Quentin’s discourse and has the same result of silencing native voices. Faulkner empties the 1791 Haitian rebellion of its historical specificity by fictionalizing it as occurring in 1827, and utilizing it for the explication of Southern concerns. Although the narrativization of the rebellion does link imperialism with American internal colonization, it does so only to advance an understanding of Southern racial inequality and plantocracy. The anti-colonial moment has no importance in itself.

Despite the attempts to repress blacks by means of ideological and discursive manoeuvres, *Absalom, Absalom!* makes evident their intractable presence. The black figure disrupts and subverts not only the process of narration but the possibility of meaning. Jim Bond looms at the end of the novel as a sign of the recalcitrance of blacks to the white imagination. His inarticulate cry haunts the white male subject:

They could hear him; he didn’t seem ever to get any nearer and maybe in time they could not even locate the direction any more of the howling. (...) The house

collapsed and roared away, and there was only the sound
of the idiot negro left. (*Absalom*, 376)

Following Spivak's formulation of native withholding articulated in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Jim Bond's howling could be read as an instance of resistance to interpellation. This infuses the cultural margins with active agency and grants to silence a subversive force. Spivak theorizes native withholding in reaction to a postcolonial preoccupation with the retrieval of the native voice:

There is a space of withholding, marked by a secret that
may not be a secret but cannot be unlocked. 'The native',
whatever that might mean, is not only a victim, but also
an agent. The curious guardian at the margin who will not
inform. (*Critique*, 190)

This theory can be transposed to the context of *Absalom, Absalom!*: Quentin and Shreve seek to access meaning from Jim's howling but their inability to do so fills them with horror. His cry is suggestive of meaning even as it refuses it; consequently, he exceeds their definitions. Whilst this theory invests the marginalized with the capacity to resist oppressive discourse by refusing its attempt to 'represent' or comprehend marginal subjects, in the novel Jim's howling has significance only as it influences white consciousness. Jim is oblivious of the meaning, or meaninglessness, that Quentin and Shreve extract from his utterance. He operates purely as a signifier.²⁶

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, the reconstruction and transmission of the past is figured as crucial to Southern identity. The elision of blacks from this process

²⁶ This reading of Jim Bond has been influenced by Jenny Sharpe's interpretation of the figure of the punkah wallah in *A Passage to India* in her essay 'Figures of Colonial Resistance', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 35 (1989), 137-155 (pp.147-151).

emphasizes, and sustains, their cultural absence and preclusion from attaining subject-positions. Faulkner's text is self-conscious of this omission and scrutinizes the discursive processes occasioning it, but it refuses to credit blacks with any discursive capabilities. Philip Weinstein registers this phenomenon: 'blacks are represented by Faulkner as truncated figures.'²⁷ The novel appears to offer no suggestion that blacks have their own history or subjectivity which is constituted in relation to whites. The novel's exploration of relational identity is centred on the white subject's dependency upon blacks. Blacks are explored purely as they reveal the experience and history of white subjects, or as they disrupt and impede the white narrative process. Taking into account Spivak's argument by which the subaltern is constructed according to the requirements of the Western subject, blacks in *Absalom, Absalom!* obtain their significance only in relation to whites, they are not attributed with any meaning in themselves. The narrative refusal to credit blacks with consciousness, and subsequently agency, means that it is implicated in the silencing procedures represented.

Spivak's work has created a theoretical context in which to review the cultural production of representations that disable black voice-consciousness in *Absalom, Absalom!*. However, her work in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' is open to similar charges as those levelled against *Absalom, Absalom!*. Its focus on dominant discourse and Western subject constitution elides sites of insurgency and native expressivity.²⁸ Although Faulkner's novel offers an apt example of white hegemonic discourse's production of negative figurations of blacks—and Spivak's formulation proves illuminating in this context—it may be important

²⁷ Philip M. Weinstein, *Faulkner's Subject: A Cosmos No One Owns* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), p. 44.

²⁸ Benita Parry's criticism of Spivak's essay was noted in Chapter One.

not to reify the capacity of dominant discourse. Blacks can be figured as silent as a consequence of their suppression and repression by white consciousness, but it does not necessarily follow that they are literally silent within the socio-cultural field.

III – bell hooks and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: surmounting silence

Absalom, Absalom! explores a system of racial exploitation but only as it affects the dominant group. The racially subordinated are signified by silence. Hurston's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, published one year after *Absalom, Absalom!* in 1937, provides a response to the negative figurations and consequent silence of blacks in *The Awakening* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. It gives voice to black experiences and assesses the ideological effects of a racialized society from the perspective of the oppressed.

Their Eyes Were Watching God charts an African-American woman's struggle to surmount silence and subjection and come to voice and self-definition. The novel, and the protagonist's experience, has been appropriated by many critics, particularly black feminists, as a positive model whereby the silencing occasioned by racial domination and patriarchy is overcome.²⁹ However, although Hurston's text challenges hegemonic objectifications of African-Americans, it does not escape complicity with the practice of silencing. The novel is concerned with representing subaltern consciousness in an ambition to establish African-American authenticity.³⁰ The delineation of an essential identity, based on folk culture, is a method of occluding the diversity of black American experience and the particularity of their history of transportation and slavery. Hurston's concentration upon myth, which mutes the full extent of

²⁹ Amongst the critics who have celebrated Janie's experiences and regarded her to have journeyed from silence to voice and self-realization are: Alice Walker, Nellie McKay, Molly Hite, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Barbara Johnson, and Barbara Christian.

³⁰ Hazel V. Carby speaks of Hurston having a colonial imagination in her anthropologist's relation to the folk in 'The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston', in *New Essays on 'Their Eyes Were Watching God'*, ed. by Michael Awkward (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990; repr. 1995), pp. 71-93 (p. 80).

blacks' experience of racial violence, must be critiqued along with criticism that valorizes the protagonist's voice without analysing its discursive context. This section adumbrates both the positive and problematic nature of Janie's voice. The themes of this section are developed in the light of Spivak's postulation of the difficulty of speaking without silencing, as well as work by bell hooks which considers the struggle for black women to escape silence and achieve subject-status. By reading *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in conjunction with hooks's critical work, complexities in the appearance of silence in the narrative are exposed and, therefore, the functions accorded to it. hooks testifies to her own experience of disarticulation and posits the necessity of finding a position from which to speak that does not collude with the dominant.

A series of people dominate and subsequently mute Janie: Nanny, Logan Killicks, and Jody Starks. She is finally released from this pattern of subjection within relationships by her romance with the character Tea Cake. Nanny represents the brutality of racial oppression, and Logan and Jody intimate patriarchy. Whilst in a relationship with these people she is disarticulated and alienated from her self: Nanny refuses to hear Janie's desires and coerces her into marriage with Logan; Logan strives to subject her to manual labour; and Jody situates her on a pedestal, thereby removing her from the site of linguistic exchange. Janie continually struggles against Nanny's negative inscription that "de nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see".³¹ The folkloric symbol of the mule is utilized by the novel as a means of expressing the socio-

³¹ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (London: Virago, 1986; repr. 1998), p. 29.

cultural situation of African-American women, the way in which they are dehumanized and denied positions of enunciation:

Throughout the first half of the novel, Janie's voice often goes unheard or is stifled before it has a chance to reach others. The image of the mule is frequently linked to these acts of silencing, while the absence of the mule indicates the potential for speech and communication in Janie's life.³²

The violence of the inscriptions forced on Janie resemble those represented in *Absalom, Absalom!*. However, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* offers an exploration of the effects of such inscriptions on black subjects, as well as the possibility of rejecting or exceeding them.

Janie flees the physical subordination she experiences with Logan by virtue of her attachment to the socially superior Jody only to endure further silencing. Jody's voice is dominant within the black community of Eatonville. Its superiority is predicated on the silencing of others; this is imaged in his utilization of 'the distended belly of the mule for a platform' for his oratory (*Their Eyes*, 95). Jody selects a black settlement in which to establish himself as a powerful figure, knowing that his voice would remain unheard by white groups: 'He had always wanted to be a big voice, but de white folks had all de sayso where he come from and everywhere else, exceptin' dis place dat colored folks was buildin' theirselves' (*Their Eyes*, 48). He objectifies Janie, regarding her as his possession, and withholds her from any occasions of cultural exchange

³² Julie A. Haurykiewicz, 'From Mules to Muliebrity: Speech and Silence in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*', *Southern Literary Journal*, 29 (1997), 45-60 (p. 46).

in order to guarantee the preservation of his authority. Her linguistic dispossession is the condition of possibility for his 'big voice': "mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home"" (*Their Eyes*, 69). Despite stating that Janie's place is in the home, he actually uses her as an un-waged labourer in his shop. On public display as shop assistant she is paraded as his attractive mulatto wife as a method of establishing his masculine potency. Janie contests the position that Jody prescribes for her and resists her silencing:

Time came when she fought back with her tongue as best she could, but it didn't do her any good. It just made Joe do more. He wanted her submission and he'd keep on fighting until he felt he had it. So gradually, she pressed her teeth together and learned to hush. (*Their Eyes*, 111)

Janie is denied access to the cultural sphere and is rendered mute, but this does not signify her absence in the narrative. She is able to preserve a self that escapes alienation by means of self-division, maintaining an inner and outer self (*Their Eyes*, 112-113). The application of free indirect discourse ensures that Janie's consciousness is rendered, and thus the psychological implication of her silencing is examined.

Janie rebels against Jody's attempts to undermine her, physically and mentally, within the public space of the store. She moves from her position of silent subordinate to occupy a speaking position: 'Janie took the middle of the floor to talk right into Jody's face, and that was something that hadn't been done before' (*Their Eyes*, 122). This incident, which has been read as the foundational moment of Janie's coming to voice, also functions to determine the nature of her

preceding silence.³³ It suggests that Janie was silent as a consequence of a gendered inequality of access to language combined with her passive acceptance of the role Jody ascribes to her. Her entry into the discursive sphere is, seemingly, not foreclosed. Once occupying the central space of the floor, Janie assumes an authoritative voice:

‘You big bellies round here and put out a lot of brag, but
 ’tain’t nothin’ but yo’ big voice. Humph! Talkin’ ’bout
me lookin’ old! When you pull down yo’ breaches, you
 look lak de change uh life.’ (*Their Eyes*, 123)

This moment signals her refusal to be dominated and implies a degree of empowerment; nevertheless it is necessary to question the means by which it is achieved. Janie comes to voice by usurping Jody’s position. She occupies a masculine site from which she is able to ridicule Jody by feminizing him. Traditional gender roles are maintained in this interchange of positions. Janie does not subvert patriarchy by speaking out and challenging the authority of her husband, but operates according to its terms. Jody never recovers from Janie’s verbal assault. His muting, coincident with his emasculation, leads to his death. Her voice is conditional upon the silencing of an other. Her complicity with the system that muted and alienated her limits the radical potentiality of her voice.

bell hooks posits the importance of establishing a location from which to speak that permits radical voice: a marginal site that is charged with transformative capacities and is distinct from the space of exclusion resulting

³³ See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ‘The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey’, in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Methuen, 1984), pp. 285-321.

from oppressive forces.³⁴ By speaking from a marginal site that acknowledges its foundation in silence, it might be possible to evade silencing, and collusion with hegemonic structures, and to oppose domination (*Yearning*, 150). Although hooks's theory may be untenable in practice, its application to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* uncovers some of the problems with Janie's voice. The triumphalist assertions of literary critics such as: 'Janie has finally escaped the bondage of silence that Joe sought to impose on her. She is free, and she is born again as a new woman and a speaking subject', must be subject to scrutiny if hooks's formulation is to be accepted ('Mules to Muliebrity', 58). In this conceivably naïve 'critical' perspective, an unquestioned celebration of Janie's voice could result in minimizing the extent of African-American dispossession and the power and pervasiveness of racist discourses, thereby disabling the need for emancipatory action.

Janie is instituted as the narrator of her own story in the novel's first chapter, although her authorial voice is subsequently displaced by a third-person narrator who recounts and assimilates her experiences. In the final chapter Janie states to Pheoby, the recipient of her narrative: "' Now, dat's how everything wuz, Pheoby, jus' lak Ah told yuh'" (*Their Eyes*, 284). This assertion only serves to highlight the lack of authority she has over the narrative as a whole. The novel does not represent Janie's narrative to Pheoby in the first person; instead, her subjective experience is recast by a third-person voice. Despite her narratorial absence, in the framing chapters she is attributed with the capacity to transmit her story to Pheoby as a consequence of her self-defining experiences and economic

³⁴ bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End; London: Turnaround, 1991), pp. 145-153.

position.³⁵ As the owner of her own porch, and independent from men after the loss of Tea Cake, Janie is able to relate her experiences. Separated from the community as a result of her middle-class status, she selects a sympathetic recipient to ensure that her story is not expropriated by its dissemination: “mah tongue is in mah friend’s mouf” (*Their Eyes*, 17). However, whilst this may ensure that her narrative is transmitted without distortion, it mutes Pheoby and precludes a critical dialectic.

Janie is also implicated in the silencing of her community. Although she had participated in folk culture in her time upon the Florida muck with Tea Cake, and had desired to be involved with the porch-talkers in Eatonville—and had resented Jody for forbidding her from doing so—upon her return to Eatonville she is dismissive of folk discourse, and defines her utterance in relation to it:

‘Talkin’ don’t amount tuh uh hill uh beans when yuh can’t do nothin’ else. And listenin’ tuh dat kind uh talk is jus’ lak openin’ yo’ mouth and lettin’ de moon shine down yo’ throat. It’s uh known fact, Pheoby, you got to go there tuh *know* there.’ (*Their Eyes*, 285)

Janie’s narrative is considered authoritative, in contrast to the empty utterances of the community, on the basis of her experience. Such a concentration on the value of experiential knowledge leads to a silencing of difference, and an empowerment on that basis. The evident tension between Janie’s discourse and folk culture questions a simplistic valorization of her voice. Janie is aligned with

³⁵ For a discussion of Janie’s wealth as the condition of possibility of her voice see Houston A. Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 56-60.

hegemonic structures as a consequence of her separation from the folk, as well as with her superior economic position. Hazel Carby articulates this problematic:

The text here echoes Janie's grandmother's demand for a place like the white woman's, a place on high. The fact that Janie does indeed mount and own her own porch enables the story, but also permeates it with a bourgeois discourse that differentiates her from the folk as community. ('Politics of Fiction', 86)

A racialized ideology may be at work here. Janie is conscious of racial inequality informing black discourse and diminishing its power (*Their Eyes*, 92, 117); therefore, in order to invest her voice with authority she must operate according to white structures.

hooks posits the limitations of fiction by black women which represents black women's struggle to resist oppression and obtain subjectivity: 'though black women may make themselves "subject" they do not become radical subjects. Often they simply conform to existing norms, even ones they had resisted.'³⁶ The aim of questioning Janie's expressivity is not to undermine her achievement in escaping narratives of victimization, such as that expounded by Nanny, but to discriminate the power and pervasiveness of structures of domination that subordinate blacks. Self-consciousness about the position from which one speaks, as is practised variously by Spivak and hooks, is a method of circumventing the silencing that results from collaboration with the dominant.

³⁶ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End, 1992), p.47.

Janie's acquisition of a speaking position is predicated upon the silencing of her history. She dismisses the events of her past: such as her conception by rape and the racial terror that her mother and grandmother had been subjected to. Nanny's labour has ensured that Janie can have a life superficially independent of whites and thus free from the kind of racial violence that she herself has experienced (*Their Eyes*, 37). Although the novel does recount Janie's life with Nanny, its concentration upon Janie, a character who represses her past, means that the past's significance goes unexplored. Janie comes to hate Nanny and reject her negative perception of life: 'Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon (...) and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her' (*Their Eyes*, 139). Janie's figurative and mythic sensibility is juxtaposed with Nanny's historical consciousness. Her reluctance to engage in a dialectic relationship with her history is indicative of the narrative's focus.³⁷ It may be that Janie's severance from her past enables her to achieve utterance and subject-status, whilst concurrently limiting her radical potential. hooks bespeaks the need for a 'politicization of memory' to transform a system founded on racial inequality (*Yearning*, 147).³⁸ Although the novel closes with the image of Janie recouping her past experiences, her memories are for the edification of her self:

The kiss of memory made pictures of love and light
against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her

³⁷ Hazel V. Carby discusses Hurston's displacement of the contemporary issue of African-American urban migration by means of her nostalgic focus on rural folk in 'The Politics of Fiction'.

³⁸ Paul Gilroy also speaks of an African-American movement to try and evade the past in order to escape associations with black victimage: 'slavery becomes a cluster of associations that are best left behind.' See *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993; repr. 1999), p. 189.

horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see. (*Their Eyes*, 286)

This form of memory has a tranquillizing rather than transformative effect, and it is also withheld from the subaltern collectivity figured in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as the folk community.

A critical celebration of Janie's capacity to surmount her silencing by oppressive structures and achieve self-definition and voice is problematic in its assumption of black identity. A paradigm of voice risks identifying utterance with power whereby the material conditions, and consequences, of discourse are ignored—factors which hooks considers paramount for the possibility of social and political reform. By bringing hooks's critical method to bear on *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the necessity of assessing Janie's strengths alongside her limitations is made apparent, as well as the structures in which she operates, because the failure to do so can result in the occlusion of the real issues of African-American women's dispossession and exploitation. hooks posits the danger of figuring African-American women as already liberated, and in possession of the capacity to liberate themselves, because it mitigates the need for change (*Black Looks*, 47). The representation of powerful and articulate black women, whilst offering positive models, could conceivably turn attention away from the material reality of their dispossession and the urgency of political,

social, and economic reform.³⁹ Celebratory readings may encourage complacency and suppress the oppositional thinking promulgated by hooks.

Their Eyes Were Watching God manifests the difficulties associated with obtaining a position of enunciation that is not implicated in hegemonic silencing. Janie's experience makes evident the oppressive environment encountered by African-American women and their subsequent orchestrations to ensure that their narratives are heard: Janie has had to disconnect herself from her heritage and the community, and the single sympathetic recipient that she selects is precluded from critical interaction. Janie is able to overcome her silence within the narrative, although not by the narrative, whereas the figure of her absent mother, Leafy, as articulated by Nanny, looms as a sign of the impossibility of speech for those subjected to ruthless racial violence: "after you was born she took to drinkin' likker and stayin' out nights. Couldn't git her to stay here and nowhere else. Lawd knows where she is right now" (*Their Eyes*, 37).

The fictions and theoretical debates explored in this chapter demonstrate the way constructions of 'race' are mobilized to ensure the perpetuation of the dominant. Negative figurations simultaneously disarticulate ethnic others and establish white racial supremacy. By refusing to credit certain ethnic groups with cognitive capabilities, a history, and socio-political responsibilities, their absence from the cultural sphere is assured. Whilst Spivak's critical work, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' and *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, has been deployed in a chapter investigating 'race', it is, significantly, not explicitly concerned with the

³⁹ Michelle Wallace discusses the problems associated with reifications of black women in *Invisibility Blues* and *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (London: Calder, 1979).

construction of racist ideology whose purpose is to ensure the derogation of ethnic groups different from, or other to, the dominant white culture. Yet, correspondences have been drawn between her conceptualization of the epistemic violence of imperialism, the power of discourses to erase the subjectivity of others to guarantee hegemonic subject-positions, and the situation of internal colonialism in the United States, in terms of the oppression of African-Americans to ensure the identity and economic system of the dominant. Despite placing Spivak's theory alongside that of Morrison and hooks, and utilizing it to elicit the hegemonic practices of the American South as represented by Faulkner, this chapter does not seek to suggest that they share a critical agenda. Rather, it is the divergences among the theories discussed that aids in exhibiting the array of uses of silence, the multiplicity of ways in which it can be interpreted, and thus the particularity of the exigency granted to it.

The ascription of too much power to hegemonic forces, being over-attentive to their capacity to silence, can prove to be problematic from the perspective of the marginalized. Whilst Janie's experience in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is a testament to the difficulty of occupying a position of enunciation which can escape complicity with oppressive structures, the novel's representation of African-American 'Signifyin(g)' intimates a mode of expressivity which can escape—or exceed—collusion.⁴⁰ In the context of Henry Louis Gates's formulation, the folk in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* can be seen to practice a mode of 'Signifyin(g)' that is empty of semantic content and rooted in pure rhetoric (*Their Eyes*, 105-109). This form of discourse asserts

⁴⁰ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988), p. 46.

black difference and critiques prevailing forms of signification. Such radical expressivity is disparaged by the protagonist, and is not situated as oppositional in the narrative yet intimates linguistic dissonance, thereby challenging theories such as Spivak's which attend mainly to hegemonic discourse and its capacity to silence. However, at the same time, the novel can be seen to uphold her theory as it exposes the difficulty of recovering such signification; in particular, because the folk community are represented as lacking valuable conscious experience.

Although there is a danger of over-emphasizing hegemonic discourse's ability to obliterate expression, the valorization of African-American voice may also vitiate reform. Focusing on black expressivity, without assessing the nature of the cultural sphere receiving it, neglects the extent of racial oppression and the complexity of a society necessitating both the constitution and subordination of a racial other. The presence of the oppressed, along with the cultural practices that suppress them, can be signified by silence; readings of silences can make marginality visible, and therefore instigate radical debate, but must be aware of the difficulty of recovering voices, or of simply charging such silences with a presence capable of subverting hegemony. According to Morrison and hooks, before marginal voice can be heard the dominant culture—which depends upon fabrications of otherness—must be reformed, and the representations keeping African-Americans in a subordinate position overthrown. By recognizing and forging gaps in the existing exploitative system, a space is created in which the oppressed can potentially be heard.⁴¹ Theoretical discourse tracking such silences must negotiate the danger of elevating the margins, a critical strategy which

⁴¹ This resembles Jochen Schulte-Sasse's formulation discussed in Chapter Two, section I.

Spivak cautions against in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. hooks's formulation which strives to centralize the margins has been challenged in this context by Robyn Wiegman.⁴² Marginal spaces and silences offer a site of resistance; nevertheless, the reclamation of that territory by the infusion of the logic of presence and identity risks assigning it the qualities that occasioned black women's cultural erasure. These important debates constitute a difficult field that the cultural critic concerned with silences must traverse. This chapter has not sought to posit theoretical solutions, but merely to outline the arguments and their political urgency.

⁴² See 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness', in *Yearning*, pp. 145-153 and Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995). Wiegman is suspicious of claiming the margins as 'unqualifiably transformative' because it leads to the 'fetishization of marginality'. He also claims that that there can be no assurance that such a critical position is capable of retrieving 'the black woman from her historical erasure' (p. 77).

Part Two

Ontological Silences

‘If only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then *nothing* gets lost. But the unutterable will be – unutterably – *contained* in what has been uttered!’
(Ludwig Wittgenstein, in Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Wittgenstein*)

Chapter Five

The Limits of Language

The section of the thesis of which this chapter forms one part is concerned with the ‘ontological’ significance of silence. Silence is frequently employed in texts with ontological and metaphysical preoccupations because of its capacity to elicit impersonal and transcendent meanings. It is a phenomenon which obtains its significance in relation to language, and, in turn, it is against silence that language defines itself. In the fictions selected for study in this chapter, the ontological role awarded to silence is inextricably related to a perception of language as inadequate.¹ This is in accordance with Sontag’s claim that ‘as the prestige of language falls, that of silence rises’ (‘Aesthetics’, 21). The construal of language as a limited and contingent form, incapable of transporting meaning and disloyal to intention, leads to a transcendental conception of silence. The turn to silence is indicative of a hope of discovering a more authentic signifying mode. Concurrent with such linguistic scepticism is a feeling of loss; dissatisfaction with language is not the same as its outright condemnation. A literary move towards silence—viewed either as an inexorable consequence of language’s inadequacy or a signifying mode chosen as a way of escaping contingency—paradoxically has the effect of elevating language. The motif is accredited with many of the functions traditionally presupposed of language, such as unmediated expression and self-presence. It is an alternative to language,

¹ In contrast, in the following chapter, ‘Illimitable Language’, it is language that is granted an ‘ontological’ status and this has implications for the meaning and the utility of silence.

not necessarily the ideal.² This tension between silence and language is realized in the novels' complex, and sometimes contradictory, expressions of attitude towards language and applications of the motif. In the process of highlighting language's deficiency, and the subsequent function of silence, a nostalgia for the word is evinced. However, although linguistic issues are brought to the fore, this is a consequence of epistemological, metaphysical, and ontological agendas and not a contemplation of language in itself.

Instead of regarding silence's utility as a cultural indicator of the linguistically dispossessed, and/or as a sign of the operations of the dominant economic and political system, this chapter considers the motif as a possible condition—or consequence—of language produced in fiction having 'ontological' concerns. Central to this inquiry is the question as to whether silence ensues from an ontological condition, is its cause, or merely a metaphor for it.³ This does not preclude silence's potential 'social' import. Although its critical deployment appears to have mutually exclusive implications, in fiction the motif can be utilized coextensively for 'social' and 'ontological' purposes. The novels to be scrutinized in the 'ontological' section of this thesis could equally have been selected to demonstrate the 'social' uses of silence.

In Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, and D. H. Lawrence's *St Mawr*, all of the primary protagonists are positioned on the brink of the known and intuit, or encounter, an unseen, silent, and 'mystical'

² This follows George Steiner's conception of literature's turn towards silence ('Poet', 74).

³ Ihab Hassan deploys silence as a metaphor for 'a language that expresses, with harsh and subtle cadences, the stress in art, culture, and consciousness' (*Orpheus*, 12). He does not consider silence as necessarily intrinsic to a mode of art which articulates a crisis within language and consciousness, but a mode of representing the condition.

reality situated beyond the limits of articulable experience.⁴ This chapter investigates *Lord Jim*'s characters' preoccupation with the mystical and with a subsequent disillusion with language for its failure to express mystical experience; the significance of the Marabar caves and the omission of the central dramatic event of *A Passage to India*; and the invocation of pre-linguistic wholeness in *St Mawr* which is figured both in the horse, St Mawr, and the landscape of New Mexico. Novels by authors such as Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald could also have been engaged to elucidate the themes of this chapter. However, the texts to be studied were selected because of the explicitness of their application of silence. In both *Lord Jim* and *A Passage to India* this is made apparent in the elision of the central dramatic events which has given rise to multiform critical interpretations.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's formulation of the limits of language, developed in the *Tractatus*, provides the initial theoretical context for this chapter. The concept that what cannot be said can be shown by what is said will be fundamental to an understanding of the way in which silence, in fiction, intimates a mystical or unseen dimension: it is shown forth rather than explicitly described.⁵ When language reaches its limits in the face of the inexpressible, when stuttering begins, silent showing comes into operation. Wittgenstein's formulation is outlined in conjunction with *Lord Jim*, a novel in which the narrator, Marlow, persistently comes up against the limits of language. *A Passage to India*'s transactions with silence are examined in the light of Ihab

⁴ This chapter adopts the term 'mystical' in accordance with Wittgenstein's use of it to signify that which he denotes as the inexpressible: the ethical and metaphysics (*Tractatus*, 6.522).

⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein articulates this concept most clearly in propositions 4.115-4.1212 of the *Tractatus*.

Hassan's delineation of a literary tradition associated with silence in *The Dismemberment of Orpheus*. *St Mawr* is read alongside Norman O. Brown's *Love's Body*. Both Lawrence and Brown attribute to silence a redemptive capacity. The juxtaposition of *St Mawr* with *Love's Body* exposes the significance of silence in radical ontological critiques of society and consciousness.

By means of the novels and theory investigated, the limits of language will be variously formulated as a mode of elucidating the diverse functions of silence and the manifold modes of its conceptualization. This chapter highlights the way in which silence as an entity eludes description. Whilst its effects can be articulated, and its dynamism signalled, it is not an essence to be explicated. The fiction chosen brings this aspect of the motif to the fore. By exploring the limits of language, silence is made manifest but not accredited identity or essence. The formulation of the motif in this chapter is therefore distinct from that developed in the previous three chapters of the 'social' section where it was viewed as a relatively determinate phenomenon.

I – Wittgenstein and *Lord Jim*: uttering the unutterable

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein is concerned with eradicating linguistic confusion from philosophical discourse by delineating what can meaningfully be said. To achieve philosophical clarity he makes a distinction between the world as the ‘totality of facts’, that which can be said, and the mystical, which cannot be said: ‘What can be said can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent’ (*Tractatus*, 27). Propositions only make sense if they correspond with the world and, therefore, those which aspire to speak of matters ‘outside of the world’, such as ethics, the subject, the content of the world itself, and metaphysics, are construed as nonsense.⁶ It is only by means of discriminating the limits of the thinkable and expressible that the mystical can be ‘shown’ forth.⁷ That which is articulable therefore contains the inexpressible, the mystical. Following Wittgenstein’s early work, the mystical is not simply a realm which resides beyond, or outside of, linguistic constructions, but is a reality made visible only within such constructions. The fact that the mystical is figured as recalcitrant to articulation in the *Tractatus* is not a sign that Wittgenstein devalues it, rather it is a method of preserving its truth. The articulation of limits is the condition of possibility of the mystical’s manifestation and the form by which significant value is revealed.

Wittgenstein’s attention to the surface, evidenced in the proposition that ‘the world is everything that is the case’ (*Tractatus*, 1), can be metaphorically associated with *Lord Jim*’s scrutiny of the characters’ confrontation with the

⁶ Henry Le Roy Finch articulates these four aspects of the unutterable in *Wittgenstein – The Early Philosophy: An Exposition of the ‘Tractatus’* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1971; repr. 1982), pp. 215-216.

⁷ Wittgenstein uses the terms ‘ethical’ and ‘mystical’ interchangeably. In this chapter, the term ‘mystical’ will be employed to encompass the ethical, and that which cannot be spoken.

facts of the Patna case concerning Jim's abandonment of his ship. The novel revolves around endeavours to make sense of the event of Jim's jump from his ship which is, significantly, not given narrative representation. The facts of the case throw up ethical dilemmas which preoccupy the narrator of Jim's experiences, Marlow. The inquiry held to investigate the case establishes the facts, and in so doing, according to Marlow's perception, intimates a sphere of ethical and moral significance existing behind/outside/beyond them. In both the *Tractatus* and *Lord Jim* the surface is all that is available to knowledge, and consequently utterance; yet it is precisely that which lies outside of the world of facts that is imbued with value:

The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen.

In it there is no value—and if there were, it would be of no value. (*Tractatus*, 6.41)

Wittgenstein's elaboration of significant meaning residing 'outside the world' assists in the comprehension of Marlow's investment in the inarticulable and 'invisible' suggested by the facts of the case.⁸ However, whilst productive correspondences between Wittgenstein's philosophy and Conrad's novel can be drawn, their disparities are readily apparent. Language produces the kind of philosophical problems in *Lord Jim* which the *Tractatus* strives to forestall, it unravels 'everything that is the case' which Wittgenstein works to delimit.

This section draws a parallel between Jim's nature and Wittgenstein's world as objects of knowledge. This analogy, whilst useful in comprehending the

⁸ Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983; repr. 1996), p. 31.

limits of cognition and the inexpressible situated beyond, behind, or outside of them, ultimately cancels itself out. Jim's nature and Wittgenstein's world are not strictly comparable objects. *Lord Jim* is concerned with the impact of language's inefficacy upon consciousness and the subsequent production of obfuscating discourse and silence, whereas the *Tractatus* does not consider limitations to be indicative of deficiency; instead it proclaims the necessity of delineating language's structure, which corresponds with that of the logical form of the world, so as to communicate all that lies outside of it (*Tractatus*, 2.022, 2.1511, 2.161). Silence is thereby a function of language in Wittgenstein's formulation. He gives the following injunction in a letter to Engelmann: 'If only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then *nothing* gets lost. But the unutterable will be – unutterably – *contained* in what has been uttered!'⁹ His pragmatic philosophy dissolves the kind of problems and riddles that abound in Conrad's fiction as a result of the characters' attempts to make sense of their place in a seemingly enigmatic world without the sufficient tools by which to orientate themselves.

In *Lord Jim* the experience of the limits of language is repeatedly registered. It is both a demonstration of an ontological problem—that should, and could, be avoided according to Wittgenstein—and, indirectly, a manifestation of meanings which cannot reside in language. The discrimination of limits, paradoxically, enables their supersession. Marlow encounters language's inadequacy when narrating the inscrutable Jim. His enigmatic nature is what simultaneously impels Marlow's utterance and thwarts it. Marlow is situated on

⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein in Paul Engelmann, *Letters From Wittgenstein: With a Memoir* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), p. 6.

the brink of the disclosure of an essential reality that is always withheld from him:

‘The views he let me have of himself were like those glimpses through the shifting rents in a thick fog—bits of vivid and vanishing detail, giving no connected idea of the general aspect of a country. They fed one’s curiosity without satisfying it; they were no good for purposes of orientation. Upon the whole he was misleading.’ (*Lord Jim*, 76)

Marlow makes sense of Jim’s obscurity by comparing it to that of the natural world; in doing so, the epistemological dilemma is broadened: both the subject and the world are figured as exceeding and eluding comprehension. Problems of language arise out of problems of knowledge. Language is not an inhibiting medium per se in *Lord Jim*. It is Marlow’s construal of the world as unknowable that causes him to reach the limits of expressivity and produce obfuscatory discourse; his frustration with language is part of a wider problematic. His epistemological dilemmas, precipitating linguistic difficulties, are precisely those which Wittgenstein claims should be eradicated. For him, ‘*the riddle does not exist*’ (*Tractatus*, 6.5). Questions should not be asked where answers cannot be found. The sceptical stance endemic in *Lord Jim* is rendered senseless by Wittgenstein: ‘For doubt can only exist where there is a question; a question only where there is an answer, and this only where something *can be said*’ (*Tractatus*, 6.51).

Marlow’s preoccupation with the obscurity of the world is impelled by a dualistic conception of reality. Surface facts are regarded as signifiers of an

unseen but more significant dimension. Truths lurk beyond appearances and are not readily accessible to interpretation. Marlow only ever achieves a fragmentary understanding of Jim. The recurrence of the image of the veil—behind which Jim and the meaning of his being resides—is indicative of this dualistic tendency. A veil only exists in its capacity to conceal that which lies behind it. Marlow's repeated use of the figure is both a consequence of a dual perception and the means of its perpetuation: "In the rifts of the immaterial veil he would appear to my staring eyes distinct of form and pregnant with vague appeal like a symbolic figure in a picture" (*Lord Jim*, 133). Jim is imbued with a symbolic presence because of his capacity to signify meaning beyond his superficial form. However, like the qualities of truth and beauty, it results in his obliquity: "we [Marlow and Stein] had approached nearer to absolute Truth, which, like Beauty itself, floats elusive, obscure, half submerged, in the silent still waters of mystery" (*Lord Jim*, 216). Being, residing beyond the perceived, can only be momentarily intuited; therefore communication is frustrated as subjects remain fundamentally inscrutable to each other (*Lord Jim*, 128).

The novel follows Wittgenstein's double gesture whereby the said contains the inexpressible. The calculated articulation of that which can be said enables the signification, by silence, of significant value—although, in practice, such a procedure proves to be highly problematic, as is evidenced by the novel. The path from the seen and said to that of the unseen and unsayable is not a direct one; it is riddled with interpretive difficulties. The whole novel is concerned with attempting to recover the significance that Marlow perceives to lie concealed within the facts of the Patna affair. That which exceeds knowledge, and thus utterance, stands within the formulation rather than beyond it. Jim cannot

articulate the motivation behind his jump from the Patna because he cannot fathom it. The inquiry into Jim and his fellow crew's desertion of the ship and the pilgrims in their charge also fails to throw any light upon the impulse behind his actions. Marlow and Jim are both frustrated by the factual and material focus of the inquiry and its apparent failure to offer any answers to the ethical questions that the case prompts. Nevertheless, the third-person narrative voice suggests that the events recounted at the inquiry signal some other meaning:

The facts those men were so eager to know had been visible, tangible, open to the senses, occupying their place in space and time, requiring for their existence a fourteen-hundred-ton steamer and twenty-seven minutes by the watch; they made a whole that had features, shades of expression, a complicated aspect that could be remembered by the eye, and something else besides, something invisible, a directing spirit of perdition that dwelt within, like a malevolent soul in a detestable body.

(Lord Jim, 30-31)

The 'something invisible' that exceeds the human grasp, and speech, does not lie beyond the facts of the world but inheres within them. The mystical is contained within utterance but remains intractable in *Lord Jim*. This narrative moment marks a point of metaphorical correspondence between the *Tractatus* and *Lord Jim* at the same time as it signals their theoretical divergence. Both texts are interested in the limits of articulation and the import of omissions; yet whereas Wittgenstein develops such concerns for philosophical discourse, Conrad's novel is invested in the human experience of such a phenomenon. The facts of Jim's,

fundamentally unrecoverable, jump and the investigation's refusal to consider its moral and ethical import precipitates anxieties for both Jim and Marlow. The narrative also offers the possibility that the inquiry omits to address ethical issues not out of an awareness of their ineffability but because of the materialism of their imperial-capitalist objectives.

Despite the evident similarity between Marlow's double vision and Wittgenstein's discrimination of that which can and cannot be said, the two views remain distinct by reason of their position in relation to language. In his 'Lecture on Ethics' Wittgenstein articulates the senselessness of speaking of the mystery of the world and of the nature of being:

I see now that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the correct expressions, but that their nonsensicality was their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just *to go beyond* the world and that is to say beyond significant language. My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics and Religion was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless.¹⁰

Wittgenstein transposes a concern with the inadequacy of language onto a pragmatic regard for language's determination by the facts of the world. Value and significant meaning cannot reside in the world (*Tractatus*, 6.41); if they did

¹⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Lecture on Ethics', *Philosophical Review*, 74 (1965), 3-12 (pp. 11-12).

they would no longer hold any value. Only the facts of the world can be expressed (*Tractatus*, 6.43). Whilst Wittgenstein would concede that Marlow's confrontation with the limits of language is a noble one, it remains unproductive as a mode of communicating the mystical. However, 'there is indeed the inexpressible. This *shows* itself; it is the mystical' (*Tractatus*, 6.522). It is this indirect form of communication that is practiced in the *Tractatus*. The meanings that it is most concerned with expressing are precisely those which are excluded:

My book draws limits to the sphere of the ethical from the inside as it were, and I am convinced that this is the ONLY *rigorous* way of drawing those limits. In short, I believe that where *many* others today are just *gassing*, I have managed in my book to put everything into place by being silent about it.¹¹

Encounters with the ethical engender two possible responses: silence or nonsense.¹² Despite gesturing towards the mystical by means of silence, the *Tractatus* does not altogether escape bespeaking the ineffable. The closing propositions acknowledge the nonsensicality of that which preceded them. The totality of propositions comprise an enabling structure that requires its supersession in order for the world to be seen 'rightly' (*Tractatus*, 6.54); therefore, the *Tractatus*'s failings manifest that which it seeks to express.

Concurrent with Wittgenstein's project to delimit language, to enable the signification of the unutterable, is a recognition that the tendency to run up

¹¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, in letter to Ludwig von Ficker quoted in William Warren Bartley III, *Wittgenstein* (London: Quartet Books, 1974), pp. 31-32 (p. 32).

¹² Thomas C. Singer makes these two alternatives explicit in 'Riddles, Silence, and Wonder: Joyce and Wittgenstein Encountering the Limits of Language', *ELH*, 57 (1990), 459-483 (p. 465).

against the limits of language ‘*points to something*’ (‘On Heidegger’, 81). Marlow and Jim’s repeated experience of the circumscription of expressivity is paradoxically both a signal of their failure to communicate the inexpressible and a means of disclosing it: ‘the tendency represented by the running-up against *points to something*. St. Augustine already knew this when he said: What, you wretch, so you want to avoid talking nonsense? Talk some nonsense, it makes no difference!’ (‘On Heidegger’, 81). Although Jim is frustrated by his inability to communicate the full nature of the Patna affair at the inquiry, his failure to do so evinces something (*Lord Jim*, 33). His account is sufficient to engage Marlow in a pursuit of “the obscure truth” which is “momentous enough to affect mankind’s conception of itself” (*Lord Jim*, 93). Jim’s factual utterance points towards another reality—one that he is not aware of—whilst his frustration ensues from his failure to recognize the essence of language: that facts comprise the sum total of what can be uttered. Stutterings are a double gesture which both alert the reader to the limits of language and signal that which exceeds utterance, the mystical. However, the indirect meaning communicated by Jim is not available to those conducting the inquiry, only to Marlow, and subsequently Marlow’s listeners and the reader. This illustrates the unreliability of indirect signification. How is that which is ‘shown’ by silence to be understood? The apparent ability of failed expressions to communicate the unutterable elides the distinction between carefully constructed formulations which Wittgenstein perceives to be a philosophical necessity. Running up against the limits of language and clarity of expression can have the same result.

Whilst the limit of utterance is a source of meaning for Wittgenstein it is viewed with anxiety by Marlow. Marlow experiences a fundamental uncertainty

as to whether anything meaningful lies beyond language: it could be equally a transcendent realm of value or an abyss. After a conversation with the Frenchman who challenges Jim's want of honour, Marlow states: "Hang the fellow! he had pricked the bubble. The blight of futility that lies in wait for men's speeches had fallen upon our conversation, and made it a thing of empty sounds" (*Lord Jim*, 148). Far from silence being a function of language that has the capacity to 'show' the mystical, here silence destabilizes the linguistic structure. Language is seen to coexist with another reality which is devoid of value and appears to encroach at its limits, and, in so doing, threatens to eradicate meaning. Later in the novel, in an encounter with the enigmatic Jewel, Marlow once again experiences a space beyond language that appears to be its absolute antithesis:

'I seemed to have lost all my words in the chaos of dark thoughts I had contemplated beyond the pale. These came back, too, very soon, for words also belong to the sheltering conception of light and order which is our refuge.' (*Lord Jim*, 313)¹³

For Marlow, language is coterminous with the knowable and orderly world; but a move beyond the parameters of language—which here appears to exceed the subject's conscious control—results in the dissolution of cognition. This is contrary to the *Tractatus* whereby silence, as a mode of 'showing', is an aspect of a rational structure.

¹³ Max Picard's formulation of an elemental and demonic silence that has the capacity to attack language resembles Conrad's presentation of a dark, silent space usurping language. Like Marlow's conception in *Lord Jim*, it is the Word that tames the silent chaotic realm and restores order. This is in keeping with the perennial idea of the Logos as a universal organizing principle. See *The World of Silence*, trans. by Stanley Godman (London: Harvill, 1948), p. 51.

The significance of Marlow's understanding of light and dark, and its implications for language, are developed more overtly in the central chapter in which he discusses Jim's fate with Stein. As in the above passage, light is associated with rationality and darkness with intractable matter resistant (and threatening) to articulation. Stein gives his assessment of Jim in twilight; subsequently Marlow is unable to see him clearly and "his voice, heard in that remoteness where he could be glimpsed mysteriously (...) was no longer incisive" (*Lord Jim*, 213). After discoursing upon the nature of being Stein moves into the light whereupon Marlow states that: "There were things (...) that perhaps could never be told, only he had lived so much alone that sometimes he forgot—he forgot. The light had destroyed the assurance which had inspired him in the distant shadows" (*Lord Jim*, 214). In the darkness Stein speaks the unspeakable whereas in the light of rationality he practises Wittgenstein's precepts and keeps silent. Following Wittgenstein, the uncertainty that Marlow experiences as a result of Stein's enigmatic twilight utterances could have been circumvented if Stein had remained silent and 'shown' his meaning:

'The whisper of his conviction seemed to open before me a vast and uncertain expanse, as of a crepuscular horizon on a plain at dawn—or was it, perchance, at the coming of the night? One had not the courage to decide.' (*Lord Jim*, 215)

In the clear light of rationality the saying-showing formula is possible, but in the unfathomable darkness speech encounters its limits and produces ambiguity. As has been seen throughout the novel, the mystical simultaneously inspires utterance and disables it.

Marlow's awareness of the limits of expressivity foregrounds the problem of consciousness which Wittgenstein absents from his conceptualization of the metaphysical subject who marks the limits of the world but is not a part of it (*Tractatus*, 5.632-5.64):

‘My last words about Jim shall be few. I affirm he had achieved greatness; but the thing would be dwarfed in the telling, or rather in the hearing. Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust but your minds. I could be eloquent were I not afraid you fellows had starved your imaginations to feed your bodies.’ (*Lord Jim*, 225)

By introducing the role of the listener, the meaning of the utterance becomes subject to factors beyond that of clarity of expression. Marlow's confidence in his own articulating ability indicates the complexity of the meaning-making process. Regardless of the irony resulting from his self-important assertion, his comment highlights the capacity of consciousness to vitiate language. Language is circumscribed not only by its inherent structure, but by the condition of being of its users. Meaning is often grasped by the characters despite inadequate phrasing because of the way language operates as a ‘form of life’ with shared implicit conventions:¹⁴

‘I [Marlow] couldn't think of leaving him [Jim] under a false impression of my—of my—I stammered. The stupidity of the phrase appalled me while I was trying to

¹⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963; repr. 2000), p. 226e. Wittgenstein came to reject the totalized form of language which provided the basis of the *Tractatus* in the *Philosophical Investigations* by concentrating upon the use of language; this is evinced in his terminological switch from ‘forms’ to ‘rules’.

finish it, but the power of sentences has nothing to do with their sense or the logic of their construction. My idiotic mumble seemed to please him.' (*Lord Jim*, 75)

Silences are explicated by means of both intuition and imagination.

However, such adaptability to language's limitations does not forestall Marlow's longing for a 'full utterance'. His frustration with language, along with the problems of interpretation and reception, is defined in relation to his idealized conception of language:

'Are not our lives too short for that full utterance which through all our stammerings is of course our only and abiding intention? I have given up expecting those last words, whose ring, if they could only be pronounced, would shake both heaven and earth.' (*Lord Jim*, 225)

Marlow's linguistic scepticism arises from an elevated view of language whereby he attributes to it the capacity to render the fullness of experience. In contrast, Wittgenstein's pragmatism forecloses such idealization and therefore delimits scepticism. In contradistinction to the clarity of Wittgenstein's saying-showing distinction, *Lord Jim* often appears contradictory in its representation of the limits of language; this is primarily a consequence of the dominance of Marlow's first person narration, and his uncertain posture with regard to objective reality, language, and silence. The novel presents manifold reasons for the perceived sense of language's inefficacy, and oscillates between them: it is variously conceived as a product of the existence of a transcendent realm exceeding articulation, a devalued condition of consciousness, and epistemological uncertainty. The limits of language are not confidently asserted and reasoned as

they are in the *Tractatus* in which Wittgenstein postulates the world as a ‘limited whole’ (*Tractatus*, 6.45). *Lord Jim* represents the experience of limits, and consequently silence. Its speculative stance is symptomatic of much modernist fiction, and is evident in the following two novels, *A Passage to India* and *St Mawr*. The saying-showing distinction is a fundamental principle of literature, and, in particular, of Conrad’s impressionistic style which evokes much that is left unsaid. However, the novel challenges the stability and determinacy of the relationship between saying and showing. The mystical intimated by the facts of the Patna affair, when complicated by Jim’s and Marlow’s utterances, remains inscrutable. Both the reading of surface facts as signifiers of a reality beyond the known and a persistent gesturing towards that dimension are depicted as highly problematic because of the resistance of silence—and the condition producing it—to explication. Silence, and the meaning it signifies, fails to disclose itself; any significance attributed to it is a projection of consciousness. It also remains unresolved whether silence fosters an inquisitive predisposition and dualistic conception of reality or whether certain subjects are predisposed to observe and thus illuminate silences.

Marlow’s ontological pairings of light and dark, order and chaos, language and silence, are fundamentally distinct from Wittgenstein’s saying-showing formulation which—whilst maintaining an ontological claim that the world and language share a corresponding form—is concerned primarily with linguistic problems. Wittgenstein transposes the epistemological and ontological dilemmas that beset Conrad in *Lord Jim* to a purely linguistic sphere, and, in so doing, eradicates the surface-depth dynamic that is central to the novel’s assessment of

language.¹⁵ For Wittgenstein, attention to the surface is the only way for anything to be known:

This sphere of apodictic certainty is seen no longer as all-inclusive; what lies beyond this sphere cannot be put into clear language, yet it is here, outside the world of facts, where we find what is worthy of thought, and needful for thought. But we also learn that there is *nothing* ‘behind’ appearances. Therefore knowledge rests solely on the ordering and presenting of what happens.¹⁶

He does not try to explicate that which is not given—although he assumes that the ‘shown’ is accessible to knowledge. By keeping silent about the mystical, Wittgenstein is able to imbue it with greater presence; it is made manifest (brought forth) as the ‘thing in itself’. In *Lord Jim*, surface facts and appearances generate meanings beyond themselves. Yet, instead of silences yielding their meaning they invite interpretation; meaning is always withheld from the characters. The motif’s ambiguity contributes towards the unstable context in which the characters try and judge and know the world. Whilst Wittgenstein and Conrad both attribute to silence the capacity to signify value and ethics where language and the facts of the world fail to, they differ over the ease by which cognizance of silence can be attained.

¹⁵ Henry Le Roy Finch articulates Wittgenstein’s philosophic shift to focus upon the problems of language in *Wittgenstein – The Early Philosophy*, p. 252.

¹⁶ Steven L. Bindeman, *Heidegger and Wittgenstein: The Poetics of Silence* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1981), pp. 35-36.

II – Hassan and *A Passage to India*: silence as plenum or void

The uncertainty as to the production and signification of silence in *Lord Jim* is also evident in *A Passage to India*, although not to the same degree. Rather, *A Passage to India* exposes a confidence in language which affects its use of silence. In Conrad's novel an acute anxiety as to the significance of silence was evinced. The motif was deployed to probe language's efficacy, its capacity to express value. In *A Passage to India* silence assumes a more prominent and conscious role within the text, emblemized in particular by the representation of the Marabar caves. The silent space resulting from, and appearing to exceed, language's limitations is intuited by the characters, and a posture of waiting for its meaning to be disclosed is persistently registered. But the final meaning of silence is always withheld and unresolved: silence is interpreted variously as intimating an abyss or a transcendent presence. The narrative vacillates between a metaphysical impulse, which envisions universal wholeness, and a scepticism which regards the world as fundamentally contingent.¹⁷ The cultural and material discordance intimated by India could signal beyond itself to a unifying force, or merely attest to the random and discontinuous nature of being. Like *Lord Jim*, *A Passage to India* explores the transcendent by means of a vast and alien landscape. The representation of space is consistent with the novels' ontological, epistemological, and linguistic themes. The alternating narrative vision of *A Passage to India*, combined with the various responses of the characters to the silence and resistance of India to European

¹⁷ Benita Parry writes of the novel's juxtaposition of a cosmic and pessimistic vision in 'The Politics of Representation in *A Passage to India*', *A Passage to India: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. by John Beer (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 27-43 (pp. 30-31).

knowledge, foregrounds the way that the unseen dimension is diversely formulated depending upon perspective.

At the centre of *A Passage to India* a significant event occurs which is not given narrative representation. The narrator omits to dramatize or describe the encounter supposed to have taken place between Adela and Aziz in one of the Marabar caves. Whilst the event itself, in principle, might be available to articulation and representation, its meaning is not. However, the narrator's silence about the nature of the occurrence—or non-occurrence—in the caves 'shows' forth meaning although it remains fundamentally unrecoverable, thereby exemplifying silence's indeterminacy.¹⁸ In this novel explicitly concerned with the limits of expressivity, the caves are both a figure of silence and the site of literal silence: the narrative's unrepresented event.

Ihab Hassan's formulation of a literary tradition of silence is comprised of two strands: one moving towards fullness and the other towards nothingness. In spite of the fact that Forster is not a novelist referred to by Hassan in his delineation of the two movements because his focus is primarily upon avant-gardist literature, as *A Passage to India* is a novel demonstrating an explicit interest in silence and the void it proves valuable to examine it in the context of the literary tradition divulged by Hassan. His inquiry into silence's role in the signification of the obverse conditions of plenum and void affords a constructive conceptual vocabulary by which to investigate *A Passage to India*, particularly in

¹⁸ The elision of this event has led to a proliferation of literary critical discourse seeking to attribute meaning to the silence. From the array of criticism the following exemplify the diverse response to the narrator's silence: Wilfred Stone, *The Cave and the Mountain: A Study of E. M. Forster* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP; London: Oxford UP, 1966), Vasant Shahane, 'Mrs Moore's Experience in the Marabar Caves: A Zen Buddhist Reading', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 31 (1985), 279-286, and Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

the light of the caves' various formulation as intimating either a plenitude or an abyss. Hassan's work centres on silence's deployment in narratives that are in retreat from language and seek their own destruction;¹⁹ accordingly, it does not investigate the wider implications of silence's usage. By means of discriminating silences in fiction such as *Lord Jim*, *A Passage to India*, and *St Mawr*, that does not (as Hassan's favoured fiction does) aspire to its own dissolution, the extent to which silence is a preoccupation is made manifest, along with its multiform functions. Forster speculates upon a void and the limits of language and knowledge without instituting a loss of narrative cogency or a disintegration of his referential project. Analysis of such a novel in conjunction with Hassan's research into fiction's construction of apocalyptic visions, which silence is formative in producing or signalling, engenders questions about how a narrative is able to incorporate a silence or void at its core without destabilizing itself. It puts under scrutiny the presumption that texts engaged with silence and the abyss are escaping from language.

In the opening section of the novel, 'Mosque', dialogue predominates. This creates the effect of loquacity which seems far removed from the theme of the limits of language. However, despite the abundance and apparent command of language, there are signs of its inefficacy. The counterposition of dialogue—either direct or reported speech—with third person narration works to illustrate the hollowness of social discourse:

Some kites hovered overhead, impartial, over the kites
passed the mass of a vulture, and, with an impartiality

¹⁹ Hassan terms literature seeking its own end: 'anti-art' (*Orpheus*, 12-14).

exceeding all, the sky, not deeply coloured but translucent, poured light from its whole circumference. It seemed unlikely that the series stopped here. Beyond the sky must not there be something that overarches all the skies, more impartial even than they? Beyond which again....

They spoke of *Cousin Kate*.²⁰

The narrator's speculative stance institutes the matter of limits as a subject for concern and gestures towards the possibility of a transcendent presence. It is against the background of this intuited greater reality that the characters are defined in the narrative, and, for the 'enlightened' characters, is the mode by which they come to understand themselves and their world. Characters persist in their routines as a ballast against the unknowable perceived to lie beyond cultural forms: 'She [Mrs Moore] must needs pronounce His name frequently, as the greatest she knew, yet she had never found it less efficacious. Outside the arch there seemed always an arch, beyond the remotest echo a silence' (*Passage*, 71). Language does not seem meaningless until it is accorded that status by juxtaposition with the immeasurable. This differs from *Lord Jim*, whereby the characters discover language's inefficacy when trying to express the unutterable, as Mrs Moore is not trying to communicate the unseen. Contemplation of infinity disables the epistemological systems that she has access to. Whilst it remains unclear as to whom to attribute the conception of a meta-silence—the narrator or Mrs Moore—it incontestably exhibits language's inadequacy. Unlike

²⁰ E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (London: Penguin, 1989), pp. 59-60.

Wittgenstein's theoretical approbation of the contemplative position 'sub specie aeterni' (*Tractatus*, 6.45), which enables the world to be seen as a limited whole in order for value to be imposed from without, Mrs Moore's perception of the world's limits leads to a sense of futility.

The Marabar caves and their environs are resistant to knowledge and language. They foreground the epistemological and linguistic dilemmas that are only implicit in the first section of the novel, 'Mosque'. The caves' literal centrality in the novel—they also provide the title of the second section of three—highlights their import both to the narrative and narration. However, their pivotal role produces ambiguity: What is the force of a symbolic silence at the novel's core? Does the existence of an intractable site destabilize the novel's meaning-making procedures? The symbolic function of the caves is evident despite their enigmatic status in the novel as a whole. They enable the expression of vacuity: 'Nothing is inside them, they were sealed up before the creation of pestilence or treasure; if mankind grew curious and excavated, nothing, nothing would be added to the sum of good or evil' (*Passage*, 139). The caves are a topographical and narrative void. Both Mrs Moore's and Adela's encounter with this space has negative results: Mrs Moore's nihilism and Adela's alleged sexual assault by Aziz.²¹

Adela's and Mrs Moore's perceptual purviews are baffled by the landscape surrounding the Marabar caves:

²¹ Noticeably, Aziz's cognitive processes are not disturbed by the caves themselves, but only indirectly by the effect that they have on Adela. Fielding also escapes any resulting trauma from his brief visit to the caves, although he does dwell on the implications of the echo, and, hence, is linked to its signifying effects (*Passage*, 251).

As the elephant moved towards the hills (...), a new quality occurred, a spiritual silence which invaded more senses than the ear. Life went on as usual, but had no consequences, that is to say, sounds did not echo or thoughts develop. Everything seemed cut off at its root, and therefore infected with illusion. (*Passage*, 152)

Silence disables the senses; thus, the characters are unable to discern the identity of objects that come into sight: confusion arises, for example, as to whether they observe a snake or merely a stick (*Passage*, 152). It is in this destabilizing context, whereby the laws of causality, difference, and identity are subverted, that the characters encounter the caves.

The caves elude narrative comprehension and articulation, as does the noise it generates in response to human intrusion:

Whatever is said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed into the roof. 'Boum' is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it, or 'bou-oum', or 'ou-boum' – utterly dull.
(*Passage*, 159)

In the face of absolute silence and nothingness, humans make sounds as a means of circumscribing the horror that it instils. 'Ou-boum' is not a noise produced by the cave itself but a signification elicited from the interaction of humans with absolute silence. The echo that Mrs Moore and Adela speak of is a persistent reminder of their experience in the caves; it is a sign of the impotence of their language and epistemologies. The narrative voice also reaches its linguistic and cognitive limits when attempting to describe the caves and their signifying

effects (*Passage*, 137-39, 159). However, the narrator's confession of impotence in the face of the inexplicable and inexpressible does not induce the complete disillusionment that Mrs Moore is fated to experience. The caves extirpate her world views, and, consequently, render her language inept: 'At the edge of her mind, Religion appeared, poor little talkative Christianity, and she knew that all its divine words from "Let there be light" to "It is finished" only amounted to "boum"' (*Passage*, 161). This nihilist vision fills her with terror and precipitates her withdrawal from the world. Mrs Moore does not have the epistemological resources to encompass absence. In contrast, the narrator has a broader purview which prevents scepticism from disabling cognitive and cultural practices.

Hassan gives voice to a tendency in modern fiction to embrace the void or seek plenitude in response to 'the stress in art, culture, and consciousness' (*Orpheus*, 12). Both impulses—towards the void and plenitude—are associated with silence, and silence is Hassan's metaphor for the modern crisis in literature (*Orpheus*, 12). The centrality of the void in *A Passage to India* raises questions about the novel's relationship to the literary tradition that Hassan identifies; especially as it is contemporaneous with novels by authors cited as examples: Kafka and Hemingway. In turn, Forster's complex representation of the void, which refuses to enunciate a discrete system of significations for silence, problematizes Hassan's elaboration of two distinct apprehensions of it:

Art, language, and consciousness may seek transcendence in a state that we can evoke, anagogically, in the plenum of silence. But art, language, and consciousness may also seek to empty themselves as man recoils into a pure

intuition of his subjectivity, recoils into a negative state
of silence. (*Orpheus*, 4)

A Passage to India is a novel 'haunted by the transcendent' which contains within itself the dual potentialities of plenitude and nothing.²² The caves signify nothing and thus could be construed as a void, but equally could be a part of the novel's representation of a transcendent being. The novel does not resolve these dual significations which are a product of epistemological uncertainty and silence's indeterminacy. It explores the human experience of an encounter with the silent and incomprehensible. In his assessment of silence, Hassan omits to observe the oscillation between factors informing the production of silence that are explored in *A Passage to India* (*Orpheus*, 13-14).

Mrs Moore's sense of language's inefficacy derives from her experience of the annihilation of meaning in the caves. In contrast, Godbole's Hinduism enables him to encompass both presence and absence.²³ Fielding is baffled by Godbole's paradoxical assertion that 'absence implies presence, absence is not non-existence' (*Passage*, 186). In the narrative purview of *A Passage to India*, his ability to hold contradictory terms in conjunction is untenable to a Western perspective. For Godbole, the caves—and the incident that takes place in them—should not be attributed greater significance than anything else. The novel's representation of multiple perspectives and responses to the caves is indicative of its refusal to assert a final position regarding the import of the extra-linguistic. The variety of world views evinced allows the novel to adopt an investigative

²² Benita Parry, 'Materiality and Mystification in *A Passage to India*', *Novel*, 31 (1998), 174-194 (p. 176).

²³ G. K. Das outlines the way that Hindu mythology attributes value to 'not-being' in 'E. M. Forster and Hindu Mythology', in *E. M. Forster: Centenary Revaluations*, ed. by Judith Scherer Herz and Robert K Martin (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 244-256.

stance with respect to the possible meaning and experience of silence. *A Passage to India* thematizes the very tendencies that Hassan formulates—towards plenitude or nothing—whilst maintaining articulacy and stability of form (*Orpheus*, 7). Accordingly, it does not intimate the kind of apocalyptic and transformative vision that Hassan argues is symptomatic of a fiction committed to silence and expressing a crisis in consciousness. At the point where the literature of silence exhausts itself, ‘after the pride and revulsion of anti-art will have gone their way, art may move toward a redeemed imagination, commensurate with the full mystery of human consciousness’ (*Orpheus*, 258).

The Hindu festival at Mau enacts the dissolution of language in the endeavour to encompass plenitude: ‘the chaotic flux of reality, aspires to All’ and consequently language is pushed to its limits (*Orpheus*, 7). The Hindus’ misuse of language, manifested in the phrase ‘God si Love’, does not necessarily imply language’s impotence in the face of transcendent being (*Passage*, 283); instead it is affirmative and expressive. In this carnivalesque world, language cancels out its own inadequacy and is charged with significance. It points towards transcendent being and oneness. The abundance of the festival does, however, exceed the narrative voice in a similar way to that of the nothingness of the caves:

But the human spirit had tried by a desperate contortion to ravish the unknown, flinging down science and history in the struggle, yes, beauty herself. Did it succeed? Books written afterwards say ‘Yes’. But how, if there is such an event, can it be remembered afterwards? How can it be expressed in anything but itself? Not only from the

unbeliever are mysteries hid, but the adept himself cannot retain them. He may think if he chooses, that he has been with God, but, as soon as he thinks it, it becomes history, and falls under the rules of time. (*Passage*, 285)

The linguistic nature of thought means that it is incommensurable with physical experience. The narrator meets the Hindu attempt to embrace 'All' with a scepticism conditioned by this incommensurability. Hassan contends that the dual tendency towards fullness or nothingness may be a product of language (*Orpheus*, 5). Yet, in *A Passage to India* it is not language itself which appears to condition the dual movements; rather, it is the confrontation with (or intuition of) those realities that instils a sense of language's insufficiency. In this novel—as well as in *Lord Jim* and *St Mawr*—language and meaning are, intrinsically, ontologically disjunct.

The narrative voice encounters its limits when confronting the nothingness of the caves and the abundance of significations at Mau, but it also falls silent over the incident Adela alleges to have taken place in the caves. This silence can be regarded variously as an indication of representational limits or of narrative control.²⁴ Whilst the extra-linguistic phenomena of the caves and the Hindu festival are products of Indian topography and culture, the narrative silence about the occurrence in the caves is contrived to induce epistemological uncertainty; it is a reproduction of the uncertainty evinced by the alienness of Indian forms. Cognitive processes are confounded in the caves, and, consequently, Adela has no means by which to know or speak her experience in them. Her

²⁴ Bette London suggests that the silence about the incident in the caves could be a sign of narrative authority rather than inadequacy in *The Appropriated Voice: Narrative Authority in Conrad, Forster, and Woolf* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), p. 106.

hallucination/fabulation/confusion results from the disorientation produced by the sound and space of the caves. The narrator's refusal to explicate the event appears to derive from the caves' confounding effects.

Adela's inexplicable experience leads her to pursue irrational explanations which she discusses with Fielding:

'It will never be known. It's as if I ran my finger along that polished wall in the dark, and cannot get further. I am up against something, and so are you. Mrs Moore— she did know.'

'How could she have known what we don't?'

'Telepathy, possibly.'

The pert, meagre word fell to the ground. Telepathy? What an explanation! Better withdraw it, and Adela did so. She was at the end of her spiritual tether, and so was he. Were there worlds beyond which they could never touch, or did all that is possible enter their consciousness? They could not tell. (...) Perhaps the hundred Indias which fuss and squabble so tiresomely are one, and the universe they mirror is one. They had not the apparatus for judging. (*Passage*, 261)

The characters encounter the limits of their language as a consequence of reaching the limits of their understanding. Adela's conception of Mrs Moore having a transcendental knowledge and extra-linguistic communicative capacity

arises from her awareness of her own limitations.²⁵ The narrative's silence about the incident in the caves does not disrupt what can be said, but merely intimates all that cannot because of the circumscription of knowledge.

The narrator explicitly articulates a preference for silence over discourse at the beginning of the chapter recounting the visit to the caves:

Most of life is so dull that there is nothing to be said about it, and the books and talk that would describe it as interesting are obliged to exaggerate, in the hope of justifying their own existence. (...) There are periods in the most thrilling day during which nothing happens, and though we continue to exclaim 'I do enjoy myself' or 'I am horrified' we are insincere. 'As far as I feel anything it is enjoyment, horror'— it's no more than that really, and a perfectly adjusted organism would be silent.

(*Passage*, 145)

Critics have regarded Forster's recourse to silence to be a sign of his disillusionment with language.²⁶ Referring to the above passage, Francesca Kazan posits that 'Forster openly subverts his own text because language is fundamentally meaningless if a "perfectly adjusted organism would be silent"'.²⁷ Whilst the narrator does attest to the meaninglessness of much discourse, it is

²⁵ Within the narrative, whether or not Mrs Moore 'knows' what happened in the caves is left ambiguous.

²⁶ A number of deconstructionist critics focus on the novel's critique of language and valorization of silence without considering the complex way by which a turn to silence can elevate language. Two such readings are: Robert Barratt, 'The Caves of Deconstruction', *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 23 (1993), 127-135 and David Dowling, 'A Passage to India through "The Spaces between the Words"', *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 15 (1985), 256-266.

²⁷ Francesca Kazan, 'Confabulations in *A Passage to India*', *Criticism*, 29 (1987), 197- 214 (p. 198).

important to recognize that it is not language itself which is ‘fundamentally meaningless’; rather, it is a condition of being that renders language empty and insignificant: ‘most of life is so dull that there is nothing to be said about it.’ Language’s insufficiency—and the resulting recourse to silence—is a sign of a deeper and wider problem.

Hassan describes a peculiarly modern ‘changed consciousness’ that finds its expression in silence (*Orpheus*, 4). He delineates the crisis of consciousness reflected in literature—marking its effects in a disillusion with language and art—but does not offer reasons for the transformation. *A Passage to India*, on the other hand, intimates that problems with contemporary consciousness arise from a superficial condition of being which forecloses a pursuit of higher knowledge and leads to alienation from the unseen. The conversation between Adela and Fielding, in which they discuss the significance of the incident in the caves, makes evident their disconnection from each other, and from a higher reality:

They spoke the same language, and held the same opinions (...). Yet they were dissatisfied. When they agreed, ‘I want to go on living a bit,’ or ‘I don’t believe in God,’ the words were followed by a curious backwash, as though the universe had displaced itself to fill up a tiny void, or as though they had seen their own gestures from an immense height – dwarfs talking (...). Not for them was an infinite goal behind the stars, and they never sought it. (*Passage*, 262)

In contrast to Adela and Fielding’s narrow perspective, the narrative juxtaposes the characters with the unseen, suggested by the spaces and cultural forms of

India. It also evokes a transcendental presence following Wittgenstein's precepts: running up against the limits of language and preserving silence is a means of manifesting the immaterial. By signalling the emptiness of the characters' being and language, a fuller existence is disclosed. However, it remains equivocal as to whether such a reality can be brought into relation with contingent forms and be anything other than an intuition. As was the case with *Lord Jim*, the seen and the unseen are irreconcilable.²⁸ It is only possible to gesture (silently) towards a transcendent presence.

The turn to silence in *A Passage to India*, along with its concern for the limits of expressivity, paradoxically functions to valorize language rather than disparage it. Kazan says of *A Passage to India*, 'there is no valorization of a transparent full speech within a metaphysical hierarchy of writing; silence is fullest of all' ('Confabulations', 198). Yet, as has been explored above, silence can signify either plenitude or absence; its indeterminacy disables any possibility that it can be associated only with pure presence. The silence preferred by the narrator, as a consequence of the dullness of being, is an alternative to discourse because there is nothing worth articulating, it is not necessarily denotative of a total disillusion with language.

A crucial trope that assists in explicating *A Passage to India's* uncertainty with regard to the unseen, and subsequently the meaning to be attributed to silence, is that of the 'double vision': 'She [Mrs Moore] had come to that state where the horror of the universe and its smallness are both visible at the same time – the twilight of the double vision' (*Passage*, 212). Mrs Moore is able to

²⁸ See James McConkey on the division between the seen and unseen worlds, 'The Prophetic Novel: *A Passage to India*', in *E. M. Forster: 'A Passage to India', A Casebook*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury (London: Macmillan, 1970; repr. 1978), pp. 154-164.

occupy a position beyond the limits of the world by which she can simultaneously observe its enormity and insignificance. The novel echoes Mrs Moore's dual perspective: it construes language and consciousness as contingent whilst also intuiting a transcendent reality. Although silence offers a way by which a transcendent presence can be made manifest without being subjected to language's limitations, it is always conditioned by the consciousness interpreting it: 'as soon as he thinks it, it becomes history, and falls under the rules of time' (*Passage*, 285). This is the human condition evinced by the novel. The existence of a transcendent reality cannot be affirmed or expressed; the posture of uncertainty is the only one available. Given epistemology's inextricable entanglement with the instabilities of language and consciousness, in *A Passage to India* the determination of the conditions of the production of silence is rendered problematic.

III – Brown and *St Mawr*: the redemptive signifying capabilities of silence

Like Conrad and Forster, D. H. Lawrence invokes the existence of a more meaningful reality lying beyond the limits of language. He explores strategies of self-transcendence alongside a recognition of the significance of language as a code enabling social participation and the means by which the subject's consciousness is given representation:²⁹

In his adventure of self-consciousness a man must come to the limits of himself and become aware of something beyond him. A man must be self-conscious enough to know his own limits, and to be aware of that which surpasses him. What surpasses me is the very urge of life that is within me.³⁰

The psychological development of the protagonist Lou Witt in *St Mawr* performs Lawrence's formulation above in 'Pornography and Obscenity'. Lou's recognition of her limits coincides with her perception of an otherness exceeding her particularity. Her psychological development is inextricably linked to her spatial movement: she progresses from the restrictions and inhibitions of London life to exile in the vast landscapes of New Mexico.

The epistemological concerns that predominate in both *Lord Jim* and *A Passage to India* are transposed to a primarily ontological plain in *St Mawr*.

²⁹ A problem arises when considering the transcendence of language if the self is constructed in language: exceeding the parameters of language would logically result in the dissolution of self. Aidan Burns considers the implications of the transcendence of language and conceptual frameworks in *Nature and Culture in D. H. Lawrence* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980), p. 122.

³⁰ D. H. Lawrence, 'Pornography and Obscenity', in *Phoenix*, ed. by Edward McDonald (London: Heinemann, 1936; repr. 1970), pp. 170-187 (p. 185).

Lawrence makes explicit the relation between language, silence, and being which remained implicit in the other texts. Silence is not only a condition produced in the encounter between the subject and the intuited transcendent, but is a sign of the vital source of being. The bafflement instilled by silence generates a tendency to fathom its import, and both *Lord Jim* and *A Passage to India* present a preoccupation with explicating it. However, for Lawrence, the mystery of silence should be preserved rather than scrutinized. *St Mawr* evinces a Lawrencian confidence in the capacity of silence to signify an unseen presence and condition of being. The novel also imbues the motif with redemptive qualities. Silence should not be deciphered—to do so is to reincorporate it into rational, conscious, and linguistic structures—but should be listened to so that it may speak for itself.³¹ Lawrence's vision, worked out in both his fiction and critical work, resolves many of the dilemmas that faced both the characters and narratives of *Lord Jim* and *A Passage to India*.

Lawrence's philosophical project is developed in his fiction and in extensive non-fictional writings. In this section reference will be made to those essays that elicit his understanding of the limits of language and the function of silence. Although Lawrence and Norman O. Brown are from different historical and cultural moments, their conceptions of language, silence, and being have much in common, and each regarded in the light of the other can highlight the significance of silence within texts with ontological preoccupations. Both Lawrence and Brown view language as rendered inauthentic and degraded by

³¹ This resembles Martin Heidegger's formulation of the disclosedness of Dasein. Keeping silent within the discursive situation suggests that Dasein has something to communicate: 'one's reticence makes something manifest, and does away with "idle talk."' See *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962; repr. 2000), pp. 203-210 (p. 208).

contemporary life. Lawrence in particular conceives language's emptiness to be concomitant with a condition of being that lacks wholeness. Language's limitations signal a state whereby the self is alienated from a greater transpersonal reality. They are both apocalyptic in their aspirations, seeing the dissolution of civilization as a necessary precursor to the rebirth of consciousness.³² By means of fiction, such as *St Mawr*, Lawrence pragmatically investigates modes of being. Fiction offers a forum for testing his philosophical thought; visionary ideals are checked by circumstance. In contrast, *Love's Body* combines the thought of Marxism, psychoanalysis, and poststructuralism to orchestrate a radical theory of cosmic consciousness.

Conrad and Forster intuit the void as a space outside of the self, whereas Lawrence employs the term to refer to a peculiarly modern condition of being by which the subject has become mechanized and alienated from the unseen presence. The void is immanent: 'What do we find at the core of our hearts?—a want, a void, a hollow want.'³³ Nihilism dominates the contemporary scene and is associated with the mind and its tendency to reduce and fragment experience. Lou's husband, Rico, exemplifies this null existence:

Poor old Rico, going on like an amiable machine from day to day. It wasn't his fault. But his life was a rattling nullity, and her [Lou's] life rattled in null correspondence. (...) She would go on rattling her bit in the great machine of human life, till she collapsed, and

³² Lawrence's and Brown's apocalyptic use of silence therefore accords with Ihab Hassan's observations on the motif's role in twentieth century texts.

³³ D. H. Lawrence, 'The Crown', in *Phoenix II*, ed. by Warren Roberts and Henry T. Moore (London: Heinemann, 1968), pp. 365-415 (p. 366).

her rattle rattled itself out, and there was a sort of barren
silence where the sound of her had been.³⁴

The destructiveness of this form of being is impelled by a fundamental lack (*Mawr*, 32). Cut off from the vital source, life is emptied of meaning and purpose. Such a life is associated with ‘barren silence’; this is to be contrasted with the potent and enabling silence that Lou encounters in the stallion, St Mawr, and the American West.

St Mawr sets up an antagonistic relationship between these two discrete instances of silence. Whilst Rico remains oblivious of his vacuity, Lou gains enlightenment by means of St Mawr. The vitality of the horse makes present to her all that is lacking in both her husband and society. As an agent from a seemingly other world, St Mawr engages Lou in tacit intercourse. She regards him as the possessor of superior knowledge to herself, and thereby positions him as her interrogator:

What was it? Almost like a god looking at her terribly out
of the everlasting dark, she had felt the eyes of that horse;
great, glowing, fearsome eyes, arched with a question,
and containing a white blade of light like a threat. What
was his non-human question, and his uncanny threat? She
didn't know. (*Mawr*, 31)

Whilst the horse is, to a degree, personified in its interaction with Lou, such personification is immediately placed under erasure. St Mawr signifies a nonverbal and irreducible otherness. Lou mirrors Jim, Marlow, Adela, and the

³⁴ D. H. Lawrence, *St Mawr*, in *St Mawr and Other Stories*, ed. by Brian Finney (London: Penguin, 1997), pp. 19-155 (p. 94).

narrator of *A Passage to India*, in her occupation of a position of uncertainty in relation to silence, and her intuition of a more meaningful reality exceeding the known. Unlike the narrative symbol of the caves in *A Passage to India*, St Mawr is attributed a symbolic significance only by Lou; although he signifies subversive vitality to the other characters, she alone is transformed by her relation to him which generates pregnant silences in contrast with the 'barren silence' of her social life. The non-verbal dialectic between Lou and St Mawr, albeit a product of her own consciousness, is indicative of the dynamic otherness that Lawrence seeks to represent. Her relation to St Mawr invites the question of how receptive consciousness, such as Lou's, is constituted in the first place.³⁵ What has enabled her to escape mechanization and be responsive to absolute value signified in St Mawr?

In contrast to the vitality of St Mawr—his silent otherness stimulating Lou to seek a new mode of living—the language of society appears empty and false. It is conceived as a limited order only by those characters critical of contemporary life: Lou and Mrs Witt articulate dissatisfaction with language and culture (*Mawr*, 60-61, 92-93) and Lewis and Phoenix manifest their discontent by keeping silent, thereby resisting collusion with nihilist practices (*Mawr*, 48, 53, 72, 95). From their enlightened positions, Lou and Mrs Witt are able to discern that one of the problems with society, in particular that of men, is its saturation by language which forecloses receptivity to otherness:

'You say they are too animal. But they're not, mother.

It's the animal in them has gone perverse, or cringing, or

³⁵ Lou's relation to St Mawr also, significantly, exhibits the inextricability of self and world. For an examination of this aspect of Lawrence's ontological project see Michael Bell, *D. H. Lawrence: Language and Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992).

humble, or domesticated, like dogs. I don't know one single man who is a proud living animal. I know they've left off really thinking. But then men always do leave off really thinking, when the last bit of wild animal dies in them.'

'Because we have minds—'

'We have no minds once we are tame, mother. Men are all women, knitting and crocheting words together.'

(*Mawr*, 61)

Severed from any intuitive connection to their own being, men are unable to acknowledge their own limits and therefore the existence of an otherness that surpasses their consciousness. A recognition of limits—both of self and language—is necessary to envisage a 'beyond', engage in a dynamic communion with the irreducibly other, and initiate the process of transformation ('Crown', 390-391).

Brown also advocates dialectical processes over fixity and literalism and, like Lawrence, he regards the closure of the ego as destructive ('Crown', 390-397; *Body*, 82). His conception of language as a deadened form derives from his formulation of the ego, and, subsequently, his desire to recover a condition of dynamic flux for consciousness is mirrored in his ambition to connect language with silence (*Body*, 264). However, whilst Lawrence condemns civilized life—and indirectly language—as meaningless, Brown actively seeks to 'get the nothingness back into words' (*Body*, 259). Despite their shared ambition to collapse oppositions and expose impersonal dynamic forces, they attribute differing meanings to similar concepts and imagery: Lawrence utilizes the void

to evoke all that is destructive in contemporary being, whereas Brown valorizes it and imbues it with the potential to disrupt the modern illusory state of being: ‘The world is the veil we spin to hide the void’ (*Body*, 261). In both cases the notion of the void is utilized for interventionist purposes. Lawrence associates the modern world with it and seeks a presence foreclosed from it, whilst Brown paradoxically charges the void with presence, a site in which language and consciousness can be reborn: ‘A pregnant emptiness. Object-loss, world-loss, is the precondition for all creation. Creation is in or out of the void; *ex nihilo*’ (*Body*, 262).

The nihilism that *St Mawr* associates with contemporary life precludes creativity; fecundity is discriminated in opposition to the void. In contrast to *Love’s Body*, *St Mawr* depicts two forms of silence: one associated with the insubstantiality and nullity of modern life—the ‘barren silence’ which Lou fears could be her fate—and the other an abundant, or pregnant, silence intimating a wholeness surpassing language. Lawrence’s fertile silence and Brown’s void are both sites beyond the limits of utterance and the superficiality of the world. Their conception and utilization of silence claims a meta-position by which to critique language and being. In *St Mawr*, Lou’s knowledge of the silent unseen world, purchased through the agency of St Mawr and New Mexico, allows her to gain a vantage point from which to observe society’s inadequacy. Her position is always viewed as relative, just one of many possible perspectives, and therefore escapes the problems that beset Brown’s position in *Love’s Body*. His formulation of life as a womb or dream, out of which subjects have not yet

emerged, can only be constructed on the presumption that he has escaped such a reality (*Body*, 52-53).³⁶

Silence has a revelatory capacity in *St Mawr*. It signifies a site of absolute value in contradistinction to contemporary nihilism:

What made him [Lewis] perhaps the only real entity to her [Mrs Witt], his seeming to inhabit another world than hers. A world dark and still, where language never ruffled the growing leaves, and seared their edges like a bad wind.

Was it an illusion, however? (...)

But then, when she saw Phoenix and Lewis silently together, she knew there *was* another communion, silent, excluding her. And sometimes when Lewis was alone with St Mawr (...) she had realised another world, silent, where each creature is alone in its own aura of silence, the mystery of power. (*Mawr*, 104)

Mrs Witt's attribution of symbolic agency to Phoenix and Lewis parallels Lou's construction of St Mawr. The mystery of being, an otherness that is inextricably associated with silence, is manifested in the two servants. Whether silence is an effect of a greater mystery or a factor in its production remains undetermined; yet its role in *St Mawr* is crucial: it opposes the modern analytic tendency that undoes the mystery of living relatedness. The novel counterpoises Lou's and Mrs Witt's intuitive knowledge of the unseen world, signified by silence, with their

³⁶ A similar problem also arises in Lawrence's 'The Crown'. In speaking of 'the null walls of the womb', he assumes a position outside such a limited condition of being ('Crown', 390).

foreclosure from it. They are always spectators of 'another world' but never participants in it.

Brown also values the mystery and indirect signification of silence. He strives to fuse it with words in order to redeem them:

The meaning is not in the words but between the words, in the silence; forever beyond the reach, the rape, of literal-minded explication; forever inviolate (...). The virgin womb of the imagination in which the word becomes flesh is silence; and she remains a virgin. (*Body*, 264)

Lawrence's preoccupation with being predominates over linguistic concerns, but language is indirectly affected by connection with the silent mystery of life. As the self becomes sufficient within itself, as is seen with both Phoenix and Lewis, the need for expression abates. Speech is associated with lack unlike pregnant silence which intimates completeness. Lawrence's fiction practises, and thereby pre-empts, much that is theorized in *Love's Body*. Brown's formulation of symbolic consciousness, which conjoins words and silence and operates according to a process of correspondence rather than distinction, resembles the New England woman's perception of living relatedness in the narrative's culminating description of New Mexico: 'The landscape lived, and lived as the world of the gods, unsullied and unconcerned. The great circling landscape lived its own life, sumptuous and uncaring. Man did not exist for it' (*Mawr*, 146). However, *St Mawr* demonstrates the problem of human relation to, and dependence upon, the natural world of New Mexico. The New England woman, Lou's predecessor, has been defeated in her goal to live in connection with

Dionysian natural forces, and it therefore remains uncertain whether Lou will be able to sustain her exilic life there. Lawrence spatializes Dionysian forces whereas Brown advocates their incorporation in symbolic language: ‘Pass beyond ordinary language into a truer, more symbolic language (...). The language of *Finnegans Wake*. James Joyce and his daughter, crazy Lucia, these two are one. The god is Dionysus, the mad truth’ (*Body*, 160). Language has an ontological status in *Love’s Body*: both being and the nature of things are products of language. This is the fundamental feature distinguishing Brown’s work from Lawrence’s. In *St Mawr*, language and being, whilst interrelated, are never coterminous.

Lawrence’s exploration of silence is a means of conveying the ‘vivid relatedness between the man and the living universe that surrounds him’.³⁷ It is a manifestation of a pre-linguistic shared vitality, the ‘life-flow’, and an otherness that exceeds the self. He declares the need to recover ‘the old Adam’—man untamed—in order to obtain the absolute value lying within:

In the very darkest continent of the body there is God.
And from Him issue the first dark rays of our feeling,
wordless, and utterly previous to words: the innermost
rays, the first messengers, the primeval, honourable
beasts of our being, whose voice echoes wordless and
forever wordless down the darkest avenues of the soul,
but full of potent speech. Our own inner meaning.³⁸

³⁷ D. H. Lawrence, ‘Pan in America’, in *Phoenix*, ed. by Edward D. McDonald (London: Heineman, 1936; repr. 1970), pp. 22-31 (p. 27).

³⁸ D. H. Lawrence, ‘The Novel and the Feelings’, in *Phoenix*, pp. 755-760 (p. 759).

Lawrence's formulation of speech rooted in silence resembles Brown's symbolic consciousness (*Body*, 264-265). God, feelings, and language are inextricably related; thereby each term is imbued with meaning and value. Wholeness is unquestionably asserted. The self's movement towards the depths of being mirrors the natural world's downward trajectory to connect with the silent life flow ('Pan', 25), a primal correspondence imperilled by the nullifying practices of mechanization.

The novel's introduction of the Pan theme dramatizes the contemporary dislocation from the unseen presence, and provides a conceptual field by which to understand the existence of a primal oneness lying beyond cognizance but accessible to human communion. The character Cartwright imparts his knowledge of Pan to Lou—a purely academic knowledge severed from any real experience of the great God—which gives her a vocabulary whereby to express her own relation to St Mawr, and later helps her to make sense of the landscape of New Mexico:

'Pan was the hidden mystery—the hidden cause. That's how it was a great God. Pan wasn't *he* at all: not even a great God. He was Pan, All: what you see when you see in full. In the daytime you see the thing. But if your third eye is open, which sees only the things that can't be seen, you may see Pan within the thing, hidden: you may see with your third eye, which is darkness.' (*Mawr*, 65)

In 'Pan in America', Lawrence posits the destructiveness of verbalizing the unseen presence. Enunciating it vitiates its otherness. In discriminating a native American connection to Pan he emphasizes the authenticity of native Americans'

silence and refusal to ‘utter one word of the mystery. Speech is the death of Pan, who can but laugh and sound the reed-flute’ (‘Pan’, 27). Real knowledge of the great God Pan is intuitive; it exceeds and resists communication. At the close of the novel, Lou struggles to articulate her sense of commonality with the New Mexico landscape; her iterations are indicative of this:

‘I can’t tell you what it is. It’s a spirit. And it’s here on this ranch. It’s here, in this landscape. It’s something more real to me than men are, and it soothes me, and it holds me up. I don’t know what it is, definitely. It’s something wild that will hurt me sometimes and will wear me down sometimes. I know it. But it’s something big, bigger than men, bigger than people, bigger than religion. It’s something to do with wild America. And it’s something to do with me.’ (*Mawr*, 155)

An unseen unity, denoted by the great God Pan, and intimated through the agency of St Mawr, Lewis, Phoenix, and New Mexico, is fundamentally inarticulable. Lawrence’s recourse to silence to signal the vitality within all things highlights its inscrutability and absolute otherness to the superficial world of language: ‘The tree has its own aura of life. (...) It makes a silence within a silence. (...) And the tree is still within the allness of Pan’ (‘Pan’, 24).

Brown also postulates unseen unity as silence, although he diverges from Lawrence in his claim that it can be recovered by means of symbolic consciousness (*Body*, 210):

Real unity is in the unseen unity, unity at the unconscious level, at the level of symbolism. Pentecostal spirit is a

principle of unspoken, unconscious unity, behind the diversity of conscious tongues; a unity which is impersonal or supra-personal, a unity in which personality is dissolved. (*Body*, 253)

Lawrence's concentration upon the living connection between things does not result in the complete dissolution of form that Brown advocates. Brown elevates the process of merger in his conception of cosmic consciousness, whereas Lawrence valorizes the quality of relatedness ('Crown', 410); he does not favour the Dionysian principle over the Apollonian but preserves the dialectic. Although the notions of cosmic consciousness and living relatedness are ontologically disparate, they are both engaged in the critique of literalism and analysis. Both also turn to a body-consciousness and sensual language as a means of subverting Cartesian dualism and the reductiveness of language. The qualities of immediacy and dynamism are accredited value but are undermined by the tendency of language to fix and close processes. Brown seeks to 'return the word to the flesh. To make knowledge carnal again; not by deduction, but immediate by perception or sense at once; the bodily senses' (*Body*, 224). Lawrence puts into practice in *St Mawr* much that Brown advocates theoretically in *Love's Body* in terms of making 'knowledge carnal'. In the representation of the characters' interaction with the world, their mode of interpreting and projecting it, knowledge is shown to be indistinguishable from bodily reality. For example, St Mawr's vitality is made real for Lou through her physical sense of him, the horse is pure body: 'She paused, as if thinking, while her hand rested on the horse's sun-arched neck. Dimly, in her weary young-woman's soul, an ancient understanding seemed to flood in' (*Mawr*, 30). The novel closes with her sensual apprehension of the

landscape and anticipated vital relationship with the unseen presence (*Mawr*, 155).

Following Brown, the way in which Lawrence introduces the body into language and conscious processes could be a means of bringing silence and language together: 'To recover the world of silence, of symbolism, is to recover the human body' (*Body*, 265). Lawrence is interested in non-verbal, gestural, and embodied communication: an interrelation, emblemized by Lou's connection with St Mawr, facilitating greater mutual understanding than can be acquired in language. But unlike Brown in his radical traducing of language's literality and subsequent idealization of 'nonsense' (*Body*, 258), Lawrence does not reject language outright and its limitations do not appear to impinge radically upon his project. Whilst language does circumscribe authenticity, it is able to signal the silent and unseen, and thereby a site where wholeness and immediacy is possible. Silence must be listened to so that its meaning may be disclosed rather than explicated, its mystery left inviolate. Coming up against the limits of language and the world does not necessarily occasion uncertainty or destabilize being, and it can assist in the revelation of absolute value.

Silence is appropriated by both Lawrence and Brown as part of their radical projects to critique society and contemporary consciousness. The tactical deployment of the topos of a site beyond limits promotes discussion on the condition of being, language, and knowledge. Yet, in *St Mawr*, access to silence and the being associated with it is reserved only for those fortunate enough to discover the means by which to elude the nullification ensuing from mechanization and instrumental rationality. The vital life forces evoked by St Mawr and New Mexico are presented only as the characters are able to realize

them; the New England woman's failure to maintain a life alongside the dynamism of New Mexico suggests that the maintenance of connection with the unseen presence, intimated by silence, is practically untenable. Whilst the correspondences between Lawrence and Brown assist in the comprehension of silence's use for ontological purposes, and apocalyptic ones, the areas where they part company need to be established. Lawrence's idea of irreducible otherness is distinct from Brown's delineation of 'unseen unity'. Brown seeks to bring mysterious forces into the linguistic field, and makes sense of them accordingly. His elevation of the symbol is contrary to Lawrence's perception that the value of otherness lies precisely in its recalcitrance to linguistic forms.

Silence ensues when the limits of language are reached; but silence can also be self-consciously instituted as a site for the disclosure of limits and be appropriated for exigent purposes. In the fictions discussed in this chapter, the difference between the two occurrences of silence is made evident in the distinction between the characters' encounter with the limits of expressivity and the novels' speculative positions with regard to language and silence. Characters' repeated assertions of the inefficacy of language are juxtaposed with highly articulate narrative structures. Mrs Moore's desperate cry, "say, say, say (...). As if anything can be said!" (*Passage*, 205), is far removed from the linguistic adroitness of the narrators of *A Passage to India* and *St Mawr*. In *Lord Jim*, *A Passage to India*, and *St Mawr*, silence resulting from the perceived limits of being and language is thematized. Impalpable worlds are conceived to provide the ground for critique of the known social and linguistic world. *Lord Jim*'s and *A Passage to India*'s pervasive uncertainty as to the existence of a silent

'beyond' does not gainsay the efficacy of the novels' representation of the contingency of language and consciousness. The novels are primarily concerned with the subject's experience of language's inadequacy and the effects of silence. Marlow's assertion, "the thing would be dwarfed in the telling, or rather in the hearing. Frankly, it is not my words that I mistrust but your minds", introduces the difficulty of determining whether expressivity is problematized by linguistic or by epistemological or by ontological factors (*Lord Jim*, 225). There is a perpetual oscillation between the three orders as they are variously employed to explain language's inefficacy. In *St Mawr*, uncertainty also predominates as to silence's status: whether it is a metaphor for an ontological condition that resists articulation, or is a product of the condition itself.

All of the novels explored demonstrate the ways in which silence—and the unseen presence that it may signify—is subject to language and its limitations despite its utilization to resist devaluation by contingent forms. Whilst Wittgenstein's saying-showing discrimination appears to offer a means of expressing the mystical without running up against the limits of language, it also highlights the inextricability of language and silence. It is language that produces silence. Although *St Mawr* and Lawrence's non-fictional writing asserts the primacy of silence over language, so that the landscape of Arizona, envisioned for Lou by Phoenix, can be conceptualized as 'silent desert that still is virgin of idea, its word unspoken' (*Mawr*, 86). In practice, such silent space is always foreclosed from consciousness, and, concomitantly, the immediacy the landscape evokes. Lou can envisage a silent world but cannot realize it for herself. However, *St Mawr*'s representation of the experience of the limits of language and silence can be distinguished from *Lord Jim*'s and *A Passage to India*'s

because of the way in which it precipitates self-development instead of inculcating confusion and horror. There are problems moving from the mechanized world towards a dynamic relation with that which is irreducibly other, but there is no doubt as to the existence of a plenitude lying beyond language and consciousness.

The novels share in a disillusion with contemporary consciousness and cultural forms; their recourse to silence is continuous with that vision. Along with the novels selected, the theorists analysed in this chapter add to the sense in which an interest in silence is ‘an emergent intuition’ (*Orpheus*, 22). Hassan points to both Wittgenstein and Brown as examples of an intellectual preoccupation with silence. In particular, Hassan values Brown’s mobilization of silence to envision a radically transformed humanity.³⁹ The evacuation of language of its present devalued meanings theoretically opens up a space in which a new humanity can emerge. Both Hassan and Brown reify silence for its potential to redeem language. This approach towards silence is to be radically distinguished from the anxiety it induced within both *Lord Jim* and *A Passage to India*.

Although Wittgenstein employs silence pragmatically to surmount philosophical problems, both Hassan and Brown situate silence within a discourse which is critical of contemporary—and indeed philosophical—modes of being. A recurring motif, in the fiction and theory, is the location of value beyond the limits of language and the world. It remains frequently uncertain whether it is the perception of language and the world as devalued which leads to

³⁹ See Ihab Hassan, *Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1975), pp. 173-175.

the construction of transcendent value, or whether a notion of transcendent being informs the view of the world and the linguistic structure. The peculiar condition of silence means that it is simultaneously dependent upon limits—complicit with contingent forms—and has the capacity to transcend them. The following chapter moves from a concentration upon the thematization of silence as an ontological reality to an exploration of texts in which silence is realized as an ontological reality as a consequence of the illimitability of language; instead of instituting the motif as a form, or attribute, exceeding language—however diversely conceived—it is figured as inhering within language itself.

Chapter Six

The Illimitability of Language

In the previous chapter, communicative difficulties and concern with language's inefficacy were evidenced through taciturn discourse or speakers' experience of the limits of language. Silence was imbued with value and ascribed a signifying capacity in relation to language. Such preoccupations, with their ensuing anxieties, arise from the presupposition that the world can (or should) be captured in language. The ideas explored in this chapter challenge this presupposition; instead, language's disruptiveness and intractability to the representation of reality is given precedence. Silence is conceived to be inherent within language. Rather than purely being the condition of possibility of language—which would give it ontological priority and therefore distinguish it from language—or a reality obtaining definition only in opposition to language, silence is envisaged as a fundamental aspect of language itself. The thought of Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Maurice Blanchot, regarding the absence residing within language, is to be addressed. Whilst this chapter considers certain concepts and themes shared by these three thinkers, theirs is not to be viewed as a unified body of thought, as the discrete ways in which they extend the century's theoretical interest in the illimitability of language and silence reveals.

In contradistinction to Wittgenstein's epigrammatic assertion, 'whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent', Blanchot would advocate the necessity

of speaking in order to be silent (*Tractatus*, 7).¹ Silence is inextricably related to conceptions of an absence residing at the heart of language; yet its incorporation into language forecloses the possibility of literal silence. When language includes its own absence, its cessation becomes impossible.² Whilst only Blanchot refers explicitly to the silence of language, the key terms and concepts employed by the theorists are indissociable from silence: absence, margin, lack, erasure, nothing, abyss, and void. Much of their thinking is preoccupied with the silent processes underlying and conjoined with language. Derrida and Lacan, in particular, deploy their theories to dismantle traditional ontological notions.³ In spite of this, according to Derrida, Lacan's work remains enclosed within an ontological system of thought.⁴ Discourses mobilized to unravel traditional philosophical traits unwittingly show themselves to be implicated in them. Derrida, markedly, invests in a theoretical project that is, theoretically, irreducible to ontology by virtue of its appeal to a movement or force which is anterior to the truth of Being. Nevertheless, all three theorists variously grant an important role to the notion of absence which is, potentially, charged with ontological significance: 'Absence is Being's own withdrawal, drawing us out of ourselves, (...) into the abyss, into the power which overpowers us, by which we are delivered over to a movement

¹ See Maurice Blanchot, 'Idle Speech', in *Friendship*, trans. by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1997), pp. 117-128.

² Leslie Hill registers this phenomenon: 'But where does language cease, if the limits of language necessarily include silence? If language includes its own absence, this can only mean that literature too is synonymous with the presence *and* absence of words.' See *Bataille, Klossowski, Blanchot: Writing at the Limit* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), p. 217.

³ Their respective refutations of any ontological construal of their projects pervades their work. The following references serve as illustrations: Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* and Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans by Alan Sheridan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Bk XI* (New York: Norton, 1981; repr. 1998), p. 29ff and *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. by Bruce Fink, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX* (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 70.

⁴ See Jacques Derrida, 'The Purveyor of Truth', *Yale French Studies*, 52 (1975), 31-113.

over which we have no lordship.’⁵ As a consequence of this, along with the elevated status they grant to linguistic processes as the condition of possibility of subjectivity and meaning, the thinkers to be explored here are to be viewed as granting to language something resembling a discrete autonomous, ‘ontological’ status.⁶

The theoretical preoccupation with limits, demonstrated in the previous chapter, is superseded as limits become the source of theories engaged with the limitless. Here, language’s finitude, its lack or deficiency, results in the production of interminable substitutions. The perceived absence of a transcendent signifier or stable referent means that language is without a centre which could forestall this ‘movement of supplementarity’. The concentration upon limits, seen previously, resulted in a persistent interest in the mystical and transcendent. In contrast, Derrida’s and Lacan’s thought negates such observations by construing all meaning to be the product of linguistic processes.⁷ Blanchot’s literary theory, despite its elevation of language, does, however, maintain an overtly transcendental methodology in its conception of literature’s capacity to manifest Being.

In keeping with the thought influencing the interpretation of silence in this chapter, the focus will be transposed from linguistically dispossessed characters and narrative ellipses to prolix discourse. Superabundant narration is a common feature of much modernist fiction whereby the impulse to communicate

⁵ John D. Caputo, ‘From the Primordially of Absence to the Absence of Primordially: Heidegger’s Critique of Derrida’, in *Hermeneutics & Deconstruction*, ed. by Hugh J. Silverman and Don Ihde (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 191-200 (p. 199).

⁶ As outlined in the thesis’s introduction, the term ‘ontological’ is to be employed in its widest sense referring to ‘the nature of being’ or ‘the nature of things’.

⁷ This thesis recognizes that with the case of Derrida’s work it is difficult to posit categorically his elevation of language or linguistic processes as his interest lies in a force or movement preceding and exceeding language. Nevertheless, that force or movement, following the essay ‘Differance’ in *Margins of Philosophy* which is the focus here, is described in linguistic terms.

coincides with its frustration. Susan Sontag construes this peculiar modality as ‘a kind of ontological stammer’ (‘Aesthetics’, 27). This paradox is formative in the production of incessant discourse. The posture of anticipation becomes interminable and irrevocable. In accounting for this linguistic phenomenon Derrida, Lacan, and Blanchot propound logics conditioning its production which can be perceived to be in operation in the fictions selected for study. Illimitable utterance has an effect analogous to muteness in its problematizing language’s communicative capacity. The fictions and theoretical postulates of the previous chapter—though significantly not within the chapters comprising the ‘social’ section of this thesis—intimated that silence could be a condition chosen, an alternative means of signification. The subject was thus placed in a position of mastery, not necessarily of knowledge (which was scrutinized by the epistemologically uncertain novelists Conrad and Forster), but of communication. Theories examined in this chapter overturn such notions of a masterful self. The subject is regarded as muted by reason of its very constitution in and by language, rather than because of language’s incapacity to render states of consciousness.

In this chapter, Derrida’s silent (non-) concept of *différance* is to be analysed in relation to Henry James’s *The Sacred Fount*, Lacan’s formulation of lack and desire is considered alongside Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood*, and Blanchot’s understanding of interminable language is to be viewed in the light of Samuel Beckett’s *Molloy*. The fiction is to be studied in chronological order as it manifests a clear development towards the themes and methodologies embodied in poststructural theory with which the thinkers addressed here have been largely associated: the impossibility of meaning existing outside of language and the

dissolution of the subject. The theoretical material is engaged with not chronologically but as it correlates most fully with the modes and motifs of the fictions. Whilst other poststructural theorists could have been reviewed in this chapter, those selected for scrutiny provide the most succinct illustrations of a mid-twentieth-century interest in the illimitability of language and the related issue of silence.

Divergences will inevitably arise between the primarily epistemological concerns of the modernist novels, *The Sacred Fount* and *Nightwood*, and the respective philosophic and psychoanalytic agendas of Derrida and Lacan. However, by disclosing the dynamic relationship between the fiction and theory, the constitutive power of signifying operations within the novels is exposed and the theoretical formulations are critically assessed. The novels provide a platform for the perspectival critique of the claims that the theorists make for language.

In Derrida's and Lacan's formulations, silences effectively reveal the repressed operations of language and culture. Following Derrida, in the philosophical and literary tradition of the West, the syntactic processes that make meaning and subjectivity possible are subordinated in favour of semantic content. This procedure shares similarities with the theory reviewed in the 'social' section of this thesis which regarded the repression of the socio-economically oppressed, women, and ethnically marginal groups as necessary to hegemony's perpetuation. However, this chapter seeks to emphasize the difference between the thought of Derrida, Lacan, and Blanchot and the theorists analysed in the 'social' section as a consequence of the roles they each attribute to language and to silence. The 'utility' of silence is reduced as it becomes an ineradicable condition of language. The chapter's prevailing concern is therefore

the muting of the subject as a consequence of the illimitability of language and the role of silence in the signifying process.

II – Derrida and *The Sacred Fount*: the abyss of presence and the production of superabundant discourse

The Sacred Fount is a novel that explores play: the play between observation and imagination in the production of knowledge. The unnamed first-person narrator attempts to make sense of his experiences at a weekend house party by articulating them. He narrates both the peculiar relationships and interchanges that he observes and his formulas for comprehending them. His attendance at the house party at Newmarch fosters his hyper-imaginative sensibilities: ‘The air of the place itself, in such conditions, left one’s powers with a sense of play.’⁸ The narrator is self-conscious and analytical about the incessant nature of both his voyeurism and his quest for knowledge, but his situation within the narrative structure makes him subject to further scrutiny. The narrator’s objectives are ironized; as such, the operations of play, set in motion by the narrator’s obsessive personality, are circumscribed and contained.

In *The Sacred Fount*, the narrator’s desire for the totalization of meaning, manifested in his conception of the sacred fount analogy, along with his interest in play and artistic production, makes this text distinctly amenable to Derridean analysis. The difference between the novel’s explicit epistemological engagement with play and Derrida’s formulation of the covert—and fundamentally unnameable—silent operation of play at the margins of the text will be investigated here. In accordance with this, the notions of *différance* and supplementarity (as they are developed with most immediate relevance in Derrida’s early texts, *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, and *Margins of Philosophy*) are examined in terms of their relation to language’s transactions

⁸ Henry James, *The Sacred Fount* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 55.

with silence, in general for Derrida, and in particular for *The Sacred Fount's* narrator.

This section seeks to exhibit the silent logic dictating the novel's narrative and conceptual practices so as to expose its metaphysical assumptions and, for reasons of affinity that will become apparent, a reading strategy eminently suited to the task is that of deconstruction. Derrida's formulation of *différance* and the supplement provides an illuminating vocabulary by which to make sense of *The Sacred Fount's* narrator's presumption that he himself is the author of meaning and the master of signification. Following Derrida's logic, such presumptions are to be regarded as illusory. This section is not to be construed as practising, or advocating, deconstruction as a critical method. Derrida's strategies are to be employed only as they refer to, and develop, the theme of silence.

The Sacred Fount is a first person narrative involving the unnamed narrator's attendance at a house party. On the journey to this party, and throughout the course of it, he observes physical and behavioural traits of the other guests which he struggles to comprehend. Consequently, he establishes a theory to account for such apparently strange physical and mental appearances. In order to substantiate this theory, which requires the observation and knowledge of others, the narrator draws a number of fellow guests into his confidence. There is a perpetual exchange of information amongst the characters given access to his interpretation which produces conflicts of interest. Finally, despite his struggle to reduce all physical and psychological phenomena to his theory, he is defeated by a female guest, Mrs Briss.

The narrator of *The Sacred Fount* is obsessed with obtaining a position of mastery over contingent processes. His early encounter with the material signs of

lability, evident in the characters he meets whilst travelling to Newmarch, occasions a quest to discover (or recover) an explanation. His utilization of the analogy of the sacred fount is a means of minimizing the processes of transformation and difference that he witnesses. In order to account for Mrs Briss's youthful appearance and Briss's premature ageing, the narrator advocates her 'extraction of youth' from her husband, who, in turn, 'extracts' from the sacred fount:

Mrs Briss had to get her new blood, her extra allowance of time and bloom, somewhere; and from whom could she so conveniently extract them as from Guy himself? She *has*, by an extraordinary feat of legerdemain, extracted them; and he, on his side, to supply her, has had to tap the sacred fount. (*Sacred*, 19)

The extent of her youthfulness is in direct proportion to Briss's appearance of having aged. Subsequently, the perceived relationship of extraction and exchange between the Brisses is utilized as an analogy to comprehend Long's transformation from dullness to acuity. The sacred fount analogy, therefore, comes to hold the central place in the narrator's theoretical structure, and it propels the interpretive procedures that follow its discovery. The analogy instigates the play explored within the text but, in itself, is outside of the movement of play when considered in the light of Derrida's work:

The concept of centred structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring

certitude, which is in itself beyond the reach of play.

(Writing, 279)

The implications of the novel's institution of a ground that forestalls the movement of play are assessed in this section. This ground, in the first instance associated with the sacred fount analogy, will emerge as more broadly linked to the narrator's subjectivity.

The narrator seeks a totalized theory which would account for all of the evidence of mutability, free of the duty to inquire into the specificity of each sign of transformation—physical in the case of the Brisses and mental in the case of Long:

I felt from the first that if I was on the scent of something ultimate I had better waste neither my wonder nor my wisdom. I *was* on the scent – that I was sure of; and yet even after I was sure I should still have been at a loss to put my enigma into words. I was just conscious, vaguely, of being on the track of a law, a law that would fit, that would strike me as governing the delicate phenomena.

(Sacred, 15)

In the process of his utterance, the narrator swiftly moves from supposition to absolute certainty that a law determining the transformation of the characters exists, and has only to be discovered. The analogy of the sacred fount comes to provide the universal principle sought. However, the analogy and the process of totalization produces an absence, a missing term: the source of Long's transformation. The narrator's theory is simultaneously constitutive of a lack—and will be seen to be in itself lacking—and the means to the attainment of

coherence and wholeness. The analogy instituted to resolve uncertainties is paradoxically a factor in their production. Once the law is in place, the narrator is then in search of ‘the piece wanted to make all my other pieces right – right because of that special beauty in my scheme through which the whole depended so on each part and each part so guaranteed the whole’ (*Sacred*, 132). The narrative is generated by the narrator’s quest to discover Long’s victim. In keeping with the analogy of Briss and Mrs Briss, he requires a woman who shows signs of depleted intelligence in proportion to Long’s increased possession of wit.

The narrator is prompted to discover a determining law as a consequence of his conception of truth/meaning residing in the world independent of both his subjectivity and rhetorical constructions. It is this ideality that results in the proliferation of visual and linguistic signs to be read, understood, and assimilated to the narrator’s theory. The silence of the material world and the unsaid of discourse are persistently deemed by the narrator to be resonant with meaning and tractable to the requirements of his theory. For example, sharing in the knowledge of Long’s transformation and the compulsion to discover the individual on whose self-sacrifice he depends, Mrs Briss and the narrator observe Mrs Server—the character believed by Mrs Briss to be Long’s victim—from a distance with an indiscernible companion:

Incontestably, while not yet aware of us, Mrs Server confessed with every turn of the head to a part in a relation. It stuck out of her, her part in a relation; it hung before us, her part in a relation; it was large to us beyond the breadth of the glade. (*Sacred*, 51)

The narrator imbues all that is absent and non-substantial with presence. His sense of mastery is achieved by his manipulation of the yielding and indeterminate silent signs that abound around him. It is May Server's silence, physical distance from him, and relation to an unseen companion, that leads the narrator to the conclusion that she is part of an alliance determined by the economy of the sacred fount. The gap between the material evidence represented and the narrator's conclusions produces irony. He becomes the unwitting victim of the narrative itself. As a consequence of the dual epistemological methods at work in *The Sacred Fount*—the narrator's and the narrative's—the text demonstrates the abyss of meaning occasioned by the reading of silence (*Sacred*, 89).⁹ The narrative framework circumscribes the vertiginous effects of language ensuing from the narrator's project, and, as such, intimates a signifying practice which can foreclose the processes that the narrator sets in motion.

The narrator's analogy is established as an ultimate law by which to comprehend the changes observed in the characters; however, it necessitates the construction of further analogies in order to maintain its intelligibility in view of new information. His observations and interpretations appear to follow the principle of correspondence and similarity and yet, according to Derrida, are actually propelled by the contrary logic of difference and deferral. Derrida's formulation of the supplement, as a force operative within language, finds parallel in the narrative's movement and the superabundant nature of the narrator's discourse. The narrator's recourse to other tropes in order to preserve the structure of his original analogy is a consequence of its fundamental lack:

⁹ *The Sacred Fount* associates silence with the abyss and indeterminacy, features which Derrida posits as intrinsic to language (*Grammatology*, 162).

This movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of *supplementarity*. One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence—this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a *supplement*. The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified. (*Writing*, 289)

Despite the narrator's claims of the totality of his structure (*Sacred*, 183), it is its deficiency which necessitates his constant additions and moderations (*Sacred*, 95). Meaning is achieved only in this process of differing and deferring.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida develops his theory of the supplement on the basis of writing's traditionally conceived subordinate and supplementary role in relation to the presence of speech in Western culture. The supplementary process of writing is shown to be always already operative within speech, creating the illusion of presence, and constituting meaning:

The supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place*. As

substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. (*Grammatology*, 145)

The supplementary movement in *The Sacred Fount* is operative as a result of a fundamental lack in the narrator's foundational metaphor. It can also be seen at work in the narrator's dialogues with the other characters. For example, in a conversation with Obert:

‘Well, I’m afraid I [Obert] *can't* take anymore—’

‘Of the sort of stuff,’ I laughed, ‘you’ve already had? Sorry stuff perhaps – a poor thing but mine own! Such as it is, I only ask to keep it for myself, and that isn’t what I meant. I meant what flower will you gather, what havoc will you play—? (...) Among superstitions that I, after all cherish *Mon siège est fait* – a great glittering crystal palace. How many panes will you reward me for amiably sitting up with you by smashing?’

(...) ‘How on earth can I tell what you’re talking about?’ (*Sacred*, 121)

The illimitability of signification's supplementary movement is made manifest. In order to articulate his meaning—left fundamentally obscure—the narrator resorts to allusions and a series of metaphors. The inadequacy of his first metaphor necessitates a chain of them: ‘the indefinite referral of signifier to signifier (...). Its force is a certain pure and infinite equivocality which gives signified meaning no respite (...) it always signifies again and differs’ (*Writing*,

25). Supplementarity is here seen to produce a discourse that is paradoxically both compressed and protracted, its density and verbosity engenders extreme ambiguity. Obert's bafflement in the face of such an utterance is indicative of the experience of the narrator's other interlocutors (*Sacred*, 27, 73). Communication between the narrator and the other characters is repeatedly problematized.

The narrator frequently revels in the sense of his mastery of rhetoric and control over the proliferating evidence (*Sacred*, 62, 75, 77, 126, 153, 183). He perceives his theoretical structure to be 'a perfect palace of thought' (*Sacred*, 183). However, his claims of mastery over the signs presented to him are undermined by his descriptions of his determination by observational and interpretive procedures. When considering the 'momentum' of observation, the narrator recognizes the possible impertinence of his investigations into the private relationships of others (*Sacred*, 54). These ruminations initiate 'an inevitable train' of other thoughts: 'A whole cluster of such connections, effectively displacing the centre of interest, now surrounded me, and I was – though always but intellectually – drawn into their circle' (*Sacred*, 54). The novel depicts the contradictory impulses at work in the narrator's narrative in order to critique his objectives and methods. His perceived sense of the structural autonomy of his theory—as well as his own personal autonomy—is undercut by his manifest dependency upon external processes such as his rhetoric, material signs, and the other characters' perceptions. The narrator's 'perfect palace of thought' is far from the hermetic construction that he perceives it to be.

The narrator's interpretive methods highlight the dangers of hyper-
 imagination.¹⁰ The vertiginous effects of his analogy are commented upon by
 Obert: "“You've given me an analogy, and I declare I find it dazzling. I don't see
 the end of what may be done with it”" (*Sacred*, 39). It is the interminableness of
 the narrator's interpretive project that subjects him to critique by the novel. It
 prevents him from regarding anything outside of his theoretical constructions,
 and creates an abyss between self and world, sign and referent.¹¹ The semantic
 and epistemological dilemmas provoked by the narrator's narrative are a product
 of his determination by his analogy/theory/imagination (the novel enacts a
 slippage between these terms). These problems are indicative of the narrator's
 hyper-imaginative subjectivity, they do not affect others in the same way, and are
 not a condition of language.¹² In contemplating his protective behaviour towards
 May Server, the narrator asserts:

It little mattered to me now that Mrs Briss had put it to
 me – that I had even whimsically put it to myself – that I
 was perhaps in love with her. That was as good a name as
 another for an interest springing up in an hour, and was
 moreover a decent working hypothesis. (*Sacred*, 57)

The apparent void between the sign and referent is specific to the narrator's
 mode of discourse. Although pronominal ambiguity is evident within the

¹⁰ William R. Goetz discusses the dangers of imagination in *The Sacred Fount*, particularly its
 role in situating the narrator upon an interminable path, in *Henry James and the Darkest Abyss of
 Romance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1986).

¹¹ See Ralf Norrman, *The Insecure World of Henry James's Fiction: Intensity and Ambiguity*
 (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 182.

¹² Henry James's literary criticism attests to his discomfort with the first person narrative form
 because of its 'terrible fluidity'. See the Preface to *The Ambassadors* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985;
 repr. 1998), p. xliii. First-person narratives dramatize the disintegration of the borders defining
 subjective and objective worlds. William R. Goetz discusses James's scepticism of the fluidity
 arising from first-person narration in *Henry James and the Darkest Abyss of Romance*.

discourse of the other characters—problematizing the identity of the referent—it is the narrator's tendency to subordinate everything to his theory that leads to such an insecure semantic world.

By means of the narrator's narrative, *The Sacred Fount* explores the radical and disruptive nature of signification, its interminableness, equivocality, and supplementarity, from a distance. It assumes a position outside of the literary processes which constitute the narrator's prolix discourse. The narrator's dangerous discourse, its potential limitlessness, is circumscribed and contained by the narrative and viewed with detached ironic scepticism: 'I risked the long laugh which might have seemed that of madness. (...) I remember just wondering whether I mightn't be' (*Sacred*, 163). It is the novel's attempt to foreclose dissemination, and its assumption that it can escape the processes operative in the narrator's discourse, that is to be interrogated by means of Derridean strategies. The novel's foregrounding of ambiguity and linguistic indeterminacy, which has led a number of critics to assert its narrative radicalism, serves to obscure the traditional nature of its philosophical position.¹³ The narrator's abundant discourse is represented as being peculiar to his subjectivity; therefore, linguistic operations are subordinated to the subject. In the same way that the narrator's sacred fount analogy serves as the centre of his theoretical structure—making play possible whilst anchoring it to a foundation removed from play—the novel grounds play in the subject. The narrator makes play possible but his subjectivity, as foundation, is outside the movement of play.

¹³ A number of books and articles have been written that declare the radical nature of *The Sacred Fount*. The following are examples: Shlomith Rimmon, *The Concept of Ambiguity: The Example of Henry James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) and Sergio Perosa, *Henry James and the Experimental Novel* (New York: New York UP, 1983).

Derrida's formulation of subjectivity as an effect of *différance* deconstructs any notion of the foundational subject. *Différance* is the non-foundational foundation of signification (*Margins*, 11), the unnameable (non-) concept which 'makes possible nominal effects' (*Margins*, 26). It is the 'silent play' of difference and deferral that enables meaning and the illusion of mastery and presence experienced by the narrator in *The Sacred Fount* (*Margins*, 5). Subjectivity must be viewed as radically dispersed following Derrida's assertion of its constitution in the economy of *différance*:

Nothing—no present and in-different being—thus precedes *différance* and spacing. There is no subject who is agent, author, and master of *différance*, who eventually and empirically would be overtaken by *différance*. Subjectivity—like objectivity—is an effect of *différance*, an effect inscribed in a system of *différance*.¹⁴

There can be no conception of meaning outside of, or prior to, the silent movement of *différance*; nor can there be any kind of subjectivity. The appearance of subjectivity evident in *The Sacred Fount* is therefore, taking into account Derrida's theory, a product of the incessant work of *différance*.

The novel's ending highlights the narrator's constitution by textual effects. It disrupts the novel's representation of his prolix discourse as a peculiarity of his consciousness. Instead, play can be seen to be operative at all levels of the text: constitutive of subjectivity, narrative, and meaning. This subverts the novel's attempt to anchor the movement of play in the subject. In their final conversation, Mrs Briss challenges the narrator's totalized theory by virtue of her

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Athlone, 1981), p. 28.

knowledge that May Server, the supposed missing term and source of Long's acuity, does not show any signs of a loss of intelligence. Mrs Briss obtains this knowledge from her husband who alleges that May Server attempted to seduce him and thus cannot be construed as the source of Long's transformation; according to Briss, "she's awfully sharp" (*Sacred*, 186). The effect of this information on the narrator highlights his non-presence:

Such a last word – the word that put me altogether nowhere – was too unacceptable not to prescribe afresh that prompt test of escape to other air for which I had earlier in the evening seen so much reason. I *should* certainly never again, on the spot, quite hang together, even though it wasn't really that I hadn't three times her method. What I too fatally lacked was her tone. (*Sacred*, 187)

The narrator's narrative, his need to articulate his theory and the events of the house party, is generated precisely by his lack of foundation. His situation 'nowhere' leads to the interminable narrative project to create the illusion of substance (*Grammatology*, 69). The narrator's subjectivity cannot be distinguished from the textual effects of supplementarity evident in his narrative. His sense of dispersal at the novel's close presupposes an original wholeness: 'I *should* certainly never again, on the spot, quite hang together' (*Sacred*, 187). Derrida would posit such a sense of coherent identity to be the product of *différance*: 'What defers presence (...) is the very basis on which presence is announced or desired in what represents it, its sign, its trace ...' (*Positions*, 8). The narrator's dispersal and subsequent narrative production intimates that he

was always already the subject of a movement of presence and absence, difference and deferral. It is fundamentally language, ‘the word’, that renders the narrator absent to himself and in possession of only the illusion of presence, brought about by the same process which diffuses him (*Sacred*, 187). Paradoxically, the word that renders him silent, the literal end of the narrative, is also the source of the narrative. This contradiction is the condition of the self’s location in language, according to Derrida: concurrently muted and impelled by discourse. The fact that the narrator is unnameable—like Derrida’s *différance*—adds weight to the construction that he is absent-to-himself.

The Sacred Fount represents the narrator’s project to totalize the evidence that abounds around him as egotistical and impossible. It manifests epistemological anxieties in its depiction of the limitations of the narrator’s cognizance and gaze in relation to the proliferation of external signs. In contrast, Derrida condemns the project of totalization, not because of the limitations of the knowing/seeing subject in relation to the limitless field of signs, but because the field—in its very constitution—precludes totalization:

If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field—that is language, and a finite language—excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a

center which arrests and grounds the play of
substitutions. (*Writing*, 289)

In the previous chapter, frustration at language's inefficacy, which resulted in the unwitting production of silence or recourse to silence as an alternative mode of signification, was occasioned, in part, by the inadequacy of consciousness to grasp the immeasurable nature of the field. In accordance with the experience of the narrator of *The Sacred Fount*, significant meaning was intuited to lie in the world, or beyond it, but subjects were found wanting in the resources by which to fathom and articulate it. Derrida transposes such subject-centred epistemological preoccupations onto language to which he attributes an epistemological capacity. It is not consciousness that is lacking, but the signifying process itself—its very nature—which is constitutive of both subjectivity and meaning.

The notion of *différance* has been employed to evince the muting of the subject and explain the superabundance of the narrator's discourse in *The Sacred Fount*. Silence is indissociable from language because a silent process inheres within it. As a consequence of Derrida's prepossession with unnameable operations active within language, he could be considered to be 'the theologian of the unsayable power of whatever we say'.¹⁵ A study of *The Sacred Fount* in proximity to the thought of Derrida gives evidence of the deployment of the motif of the unsayable for widely divergent purposes—for supporting an ontological purview, and for dismantling it. The novel conceives the narrator's obsessive reading of silent signs and ensuing verbosity to be a condition of his consciousness as ground. In contrast, the motif is mobilized to strikingly

¹⁵ Joseph Margolis, 'Deconstruction; or, the Mystery of the Mystery of the Text', in *Hermeneutics & Deconstruction*, ed. by Hugh J. Silverman and Don Ihde, pp. 138-151 (p. 149).

different effect in Derrida's theoretical discourse whereby effacement is anterior to any conception of ground and the condition of its possibility.

II – Lacan and *Nightwood*: the role of lack in the engendering of discourse and desire

Derrida's formulation of language institutes absence at its core. An absence—produced by the silent logic of *différance*—generates the ceaseless movement of supplementation. Comparable with Derrida's notion of supplementarity, is Lacan's postulation of 'the incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier' as a consequence of the absence of a transcendental signified capable of anchoring signification (*Écrits*, 170). Both formulations seek to explicate the illimitability of language, and in the process might be conceived to universalize and hence ontologize that peculiar condition. Lacan's concept of lack is accorded a formative role in the production of both discourse and the subject.¹⁶ Lacan also understands the subject to be fundamentally muted as a consequence of its constitution in, and by, signifying operations:

The signifier, producing itself in the field of the Other, makes manifest the subject of its signification. But it functions as a signifier only to reduce the subject in question to being no more than a signifier, to petrify the subject in the same movement in which it calls the subject to function, to speak, as subject. (*Concepts*, 207)

¹⁶ This must be construed as radically distinct from Derrida's notion of the fundamental absence of a ground following his essay 'The Purveyor of Truth' in which he perceives Lacan to establish lack as a final signified: 'Something is missing from its place but the lack itself is never missing' (p. 63).

The chain of signifiers is the unconscious (*Concepts*, 149). The dominance of the signifier over the signified mirrors the unconscious's mastery over the ego, thereby reversing the traditional hierarchy.¹⁷

Communication is problematized by Lacan as a result of the subject's alienation in language which always either says too little or too much. The gap between the speaking and spoken subject is absolute (*Écrits*, 330).¹⁸ However, whereas Derrida views silence as always already operative within language, Lacan does invest silence with a degree of specificity. This is evident in the linear movement of the subject's accession to language, from the silent real to the linguistic symbolic. Silence and frustrated, non-communicative, discourse are charged with an expressive capacity. They can reveal the processes at work in the constitution and dislocation of the subject and denote the unconscious and inexpressible: for example, in the engendering of desire. It is in the spaces between the words that desire is operative; it is unsaid whilst fundamental to the determination of the subject and of discourse.

Nightwood is concerned with the underside of culture and history in its depiction of lesbian erotics, sexual inverts, and Jews. Its characters are marginalized and disarticulated as a consequence of their sexual and ethnic difference. Its thematic juxtaposition of night and day, the cultural unconscious and the rational dominant order, demonstrates its self-conscious interrogation of hegemonic discourse's silencing and repressive procedures. The characters are

¹⁷ It is important to note that Lacan's formulation never attributes to the unconscious the unity and presence associated with the ego. The unconscious is unquestionably a site of disruptive and discordant processes. However, the reversal of the hierarchy is not necessarily a sign of philosophical radicalism. The unconscious could be construed as occupying the same foundational position as the ego.

¹⁸ Lacan's primary concern is the speaking subject in contrast with Derrida's and Blanchot's focus on writing.

conditioned by their sense of loss, which is both realized and represented in language, and develop various strategies by which to manage their experience of deprivation. This section concentrates on the verbosity of Matthew O'Connor and the silence of Robin as alternative modes of ameliorating the experience of absence, although it is never eliminated. Lacan's theory is appropriated as a heuristic tool by which to comprehend the operations of the novel and, in particular, the foundational linguistic effect of metonymy which disrupts the establishment of meaning, the role of desire in the production of discourse, and the subject's experience of alienation. Lacan's conception of the metonymic and metaphoric processes of signification—the dual effects of language that respectively thwart and create the illusion of meaning—is investigated as a means of apprehending in a characteristically twentieth-century manner the novel's dense and equivocal figurative style. Here, Lacan's early work, published as *Écrits* and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, particularly exemplifies his theoretical treatment of silence. Tensions will arise between *Nightwood's* concern with the human experience and expression of absence and alienation and Lacan's objective theorization of the condition. The phallogentric and heterosexual focus of Lacan's theory is analysed by means of its application to a text preoccupied with sexual and ethnic difference; the ontological status accredited to language will be seen to further silence characters already disarticulated by their cultural marginality.

Nightwood is structured around the dialogues that take place with Matthew, a character who postures as a medical doctor. The significant events that occur between the central lovers, Nora and Robin, are rarely represented directly by the third person narrator but are disclosed in the various conversations with

Matthew. Nora and Felix are his primary interlocutors. They ostensibly turn to him for advice about their relations with Robin and her enigmatic character, yet in reality require him to function as a listener to their personal dilemmas. The relationship that the novel sets up between Matthew and his various interlocutors parodies the analytic situation. Matthew is awarded the role of analyst by the characters as he is invited to perform the functions of listener and adviser. However, ironically, it is not the analysands, Nora and Felix, who practice the ‘talking cure’ but Matthew. The questions that they direct to Matthew, along with their pleas for help, instigate his self-orientated utterances. Rather than advancing Nora’s and Felix’s understanding of their desire, Matthew is impelled to rehearse his own anguish and unfulfilled longings. The parodied analytic relationship foregrounds communicative difficulties along with the impossibility of a subject in possession of knowledge of desire.

Matthew is the primary narrator figure in *Nightwood*. His discourse, at both semantic and syntactic levels, expresses ‘the self’s radical ex-centricity to itself’ (*Écrits*, 189). He gives voice to the experience of cultural marginalization, as a consequence of his sexual difference, whilst also demonstrating his alienation in language. The gap between his speaking and spoken self is ineradicable. This disjunction is manifested in the lies he is compelled to utter because of psychological and linguistic processes beyond his control.¹⁹ Matthew’s inflated fabrications of himself exposes the impossibility of representing the self in discourse; discontinuity is exhibited. Towards the close of the novel, Matthew attempts to articulate his difference by recounting stories to an ex-priest. Propelled by his rhetorical question ‘what am I?’, he relates a series of

¹⁹ Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (London: Faber, 1996), pp. 81-82 and p. 122.

discontinuous events which he alleges he was witness to (*Nightwood*, 147). His narrative both thematizes and enacts the dislocation of the speaking and spoken self:

‘Once upon a time, I was listening to a quack hanky-panky of a medicine man saying: “Now, ladies and gentlemen, before I behead the small boy, I will endeavour to entertain you with a few parlour tricks.” He had a turban cocked over his eye and a moaning in his left ventricle. (...) Well, he began doing his tricks. (...) A priest, standing in his crowd began to laugh, and a priest laughing always makes me wring my hands with doubt. The other time was when Catherine the Great sent for me to bleed her.’

(...) ‘For heaven’s sake,’ the ex-priest said.

‘Remember your century at least.’ (*Nightwood*, 147)

Matthew’s recourse to lies throughout the novel performs Lacan’s postulation of an unbridgeable gap between the speaking and spoken subject; it also exemplifies the abyss of the subject in speech (*Concepts*, 139): ‘the *I* of the enunciation is not the same as the *I* of the statement, that is to say, the shifter which, in the statement, designates him’ (*Concepts*, 138). Paradoxically, lying is the only means of expressing the truth (*Concepts*, 144; *Écrits*, 190). By lying, the subject’s position of noncoincidence in language is evidenced and the illusion of self-presence in language is dispelled. Earlier in the novel, Nora interrupts Matthew and his interlocutor, Felix, with the question “‘are you both really saying what you mean, or are you just talking?’” (*Nightwood*, 16). Unwittingly

her remark is a comment upon the subject's place within language. Language's fundamental emptiness, and interminableness, is revealed in the process of speaking. Saying what is meant becomes an impossibility; yet speaking (language) 'goes on'. Nora's discrimination of a choice, therefore establishing the potentiality of saying what one means, is illusory if Lacan's formulation of the inalienable condition of the subject in language is to be accepted.

According to Lacan, the subject is not only fractured in the process of utterance—as a consequence of the disjunction between the speaking and spoken self—but is alienated in its determination by the operations of language:

This passion of the signifier now becomes a new dimension of the human condition in that it is not only man who speaks, but that in man and through man *it* speaks (*ça parle*), that his nature is woven by effects in which is to be found the structure of language, of which he becomes the material, and that therefore there resounds in him, beyond what could be conceived of by a psychology of ideas, the relation of speech. (*Écrits*, 315)

The subject is silenced by its subjection to an external structure/process that pre-exists it. The constitutive role of lack, or absence, in Lacan's formulation results in the 'incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier' (*Écrits*, 170):

The signifier is a sign that doesn't refer to any object, not even to one in the form of a trace, even though the trace nevertheless heralds the signifier's essential feature. It, too, is the sign of an absence. But insofar as it forms part of language, the signifier is a sign which refers to another

sign, which is as such structured to signify the absence of another sign.²⁰

This process, by which one signifier is displaced by another because of its lack, is perceived to be metonymic. The movement to recover a lost signified is interminable and fundamentally futile. Metonymy, like supplementarity, is occasioned by lack and sustains it, it is the very process that forestalls completion. However, unlike Derrida's concept, Lacan does offer an anchoring point in the signifying chain, the phallus, without which psychosis would ensue.

The abundance and obliquity of Matthew's discourse can be seen as a product, and sign, of the metonymic effects of signification. Meaning is displaced in the potentially ceaseless chain of allusive associations. For example, in the process of describing the character of Jenny to Nora, and recounting the night in which Robin and Jenny betrayed her, he continually digresses; he can only 'come by degrees to the narrative of the one particular night' (*Nightwood*, 88). After a detour—one of many—in which his description of Jenny's apartment leads him to relate a story about the procurement of his own possessions, he adopts a metaphor supposedly to elucidate his opinion of Jenny's eclectic objects:

'So I looked at Jenny's possessions with scorn in my eye.

It may have been all most "unusual", but who wants a toenail which is thicker than common? And that thought came to me out of the contemplation of the mad strip of the inappropriate that runs through creation, like my girl

²⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses*, trans. by Russell Grigg, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 167.

friend who married some sort of Adriatic bird who had
 such thick ones that he had to trim them with a horse file
 – my mind is so rich that it is always wandering! Now I
 am back to the time when that groom walked into my life
 wearing a priest's collar.' (*Nightwood*, 93-94)

The metaphor has the obverse effect of enlightening and grounding meaning according to the principle of correspondence. Matthew, rather obscurely, establishes a resemblance between his condemnation of Jenny's disparate collection of objects and a common dislike of preternaturally thick toenails. However, the metaphor is appropriated by a metonymic displacement of meaning. The metaphor impels a train of contiguous thought: the image of uncommonly thick toenails triggers the remembrance of a friend's partner which then leads to the remembrance of a groom. This indirect mode of discourse is incommunicative. It is utterly tangential to the information Nora requests of him eight pages earlier: "What is she [Jenny] like?" (*Nightwood*, 87). Matthew's utterance is conditioned by the linguistic operation of metonymy which is extraneous to the needs of dialogue, the shared transmission of meaning between interlocutors. His 'wandering' mind is dictated by the law of the signifier and its lack. Taking into account Lacan's postulation of the subject's entry into language, his compulsion to narrate is, paradoxically, an attempt to fill up the ontological lack at the core of being.²¹ Matthew exemplifies the futility of the project to fill a lack with a structure that is also lacking.

²¹ Lack is a foundational category. The experience of lack is universal and is instituted at the point of accession to language. Anika Lemaire describes the status of lack in Lacan's work: 'lack is the void, the zero, that which lies before the instinct.' See *Jacques Lacan*, trans. by David Macey (London: Routledge, 1977), p. 162.

Matthew's awareness of the absurdity of his discursive project is concomitant with his proclamation of its necessity. Language is construed as fundamentally empty but is adopted as a strategy—albeit an impossible one—to ameliorate the suffering occasioned by loss and unfulfilled desire. He says to Nora:

‘Do you know what has made me the greatest liar this side of the moon, telling my stories to people like you to take the mortal agony out of their guts, and to stop them from rolling about, and drawing up their feet, and screaming, with their eyes staring over their knuckles with misery which they are trying to keep off, saying, “Say something, doctor, for the love of God!” And me talking away like mad. Well that, and nothing else, has made me the liar I am.’ (*Nightwood*, 122)

The subject is silenced by its determination in language and, in turn, language can be figured as silent by reason of its fundamental vacuity. Communication is rendered meaningless as subjects are spoken by an essentially vacuous language.

The appearance and utilization of metaphor in Matthew's discourse, as explored above, appears to contravene Lacan's assertion that metaphor can anchor the incessant movement of the signifier and so produce meaning: ‘metaphor occurs at the precise point at which sense emerges from non-sense’ (*Écrits*, 175). Metaphor is capable of crossing the bar dividing the signifier and signified (*Écrits*, 181). The application of metaphor in *Nightwood*, in contrast to

Lacan's claims for it, highlights difference, incongruity, and ambiguity.²² It defers coherent meaning as a consequence of its dictation by metonymy. Although Lacan does situate the operations of metonymy as ontologically prior to metaphor, and ascribes to them the conditions of metaphor's possibility, he does not consider metonymy's displacing procedures to be disruptive of metaphor's propositional function.²³ Lacan's conception of metaphor is thereby a means of circumscribing the subversive effects of metonymy. *Nightwood's* third-person narration exhibits metaphor's usurpation by metonymic processes in a similar fashion to Matthew's discourse. The predominance of metonymic processes in the novel has the effect of disabling the attainment of coherent meaning. The movement from metaphor to metaphor is impelled by lack:

The woman who presents herself to the spectator as a 'picture' forever arranged, is, for the contemplative mind, the chiefest danger. Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human. Such a person's every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience; a mirage of an eternal wedding cast on the racial memory; an insupportable joy as would be the vision of an eland coming down an aisle of trees. (*Nightwood*, 33)

The process of displacement and substitution layers meanings to the point of extreme obliquity; metaphor does not work here to ground meaning but to diffuse

²² Alan Singer comments on the 'dispersing' effect of metaphor in *Nightwood* in 'The Horse Who Knew Too Much: Metaphor and the Narrative of Discontinuity in *Nightwood*', *Contemporary Literature*, 25 (1984), 66-87 (p. 75).

²³ Gilbert D. Chaitin views metaphor as secondary to the operations of metonymy in Lacan's formulation. He also considers Lacan's metaphor to be a response to the problem of metonymy; metonymy empties meaning whereas metaphor enables predication. See *Rhetoric and Culture in Lacan* (Cambridge: Cambridge, UP, 1996), pp. 37-53.

it. *Nightwood's* portrayal of language's incapacity to transport meaning exposes the contradictions in Lacan's theory of metaphor. Lacan attributes to metaphor the ability to anchor meaning, and yet it is 'somehow dependent on a metonymy which flatly contradicts the possibility of determinate meaning' (*Rhetoric*, 44). In spite of Lacan stating that metaphor's ability to fix meaning is only an 'effect' (*Écrits*, 181), merely the appearance of the cessation of the incessant sliding of the signifier, it is charged with a capacity to communicate meaning which is called into question in *Nightwood*.

The characters' experience of isolation and frustration in the face of Matthew's discourse suggests that not even the illusion of meaning can be discovered. Nora and Felix, Matthew's primary interlocutors, are not only baffled by his verbose and densely figurative utterances, but are alienated by them. Communication is problematized: "I have a narrative but you will be put to it to find it" (*Nightwood*, 87). The disparity between the questions addressed to Matthew and his responses are indicative of the communicative impasse evidenced throughout the novel. Nora turns to Matthew for succour. She is taken up with her desire to know Robin, along with the transgressive night that informs her equivocal behaviour, and perceives Matthew to be a source of knowledge. In answer to Nora's question "she is myself. What am I to do?", Matthew says: "Make birds' nests with your teeth, that would be better" (*Nightwood*, 115). Nora's compulsion to seek knowledge in the other is frustrated by her inability to comprehend Matthew's narration and the figurative logic driving it. Instead of being a tool enabling the connection between individuals, language alienates. As a consequence of the perceived futility of life, manifested in language, silence is a condition desired but always foreclosed: "Can't you be quiet now?" the doctor

said. (...) “Can’t you be done now, can’t you give up? Now be still, now that you know what the world is about, knowing it’s about nothing?” (*Nightwood*, 112). Silence is impossible for both Nora and Matthew because of their compulsion to fill up their lack with discourse.

Despite the communicative dilemmas arising from the illimitability of language, for Lacan, the experience of frustration in the face of such a phenomenon is meaningful. It points towards the operations that are constitutive of the subject. Empty discourse is communicative in the analytic situation:

We must bring everything back to the function of the cut in discourse, the strongest being that which acts as a bar between the signifier and the signified. There the subject that interests us is surprised, since by binding himself in signification he is placed under the sign of the pre-conscious. By which we would arrive at the paradox of conceiving that the discourse in an analytic situation is valuable only in so far as it stumbles (...) or to the extent that the discourse succeeds in emptying itself as speech, in being no more than Mallarmé’s worn coinage that is passed from hand to hand ‘in silence’. (*Écrits*, 331)

Silence and indirect, frustrated discourse are expressive. That which appears meaningless reveals a level of meaning—the operations of language and the unconscious—that transcends the subject.

The silence and ceaseless movement of the character Robin are analogous to the operation of the signifier, and, subsequently, desire. She both enacts desire’s processes and exhibits the symptoms of desire’s affect. Lacan considers

desire to function metonymically, in accordance with the logic of the signifier (*Écrits*, 184). It is fundamentally inarticulable (*Écrits*, 335). Judith Butler attests to this:

Desire, then, appears as a gap, a discrepancy, an absent signifier and thus only appears *as that which cannot appear* (...). Hence, desire is never materialised or concretised through language, but is indicated through the *interstices of language*, that is, what language cannot represent.²⁴

Desire finds its articulation in demand, but Robin is unable to discover the necessary mediation by which to materialize her desire (*Concepts*, 154). Nora, her only hope of anchoring the ceaseless metonymical movement bespeaking her, cannot forestall the restless operation that impels her (*Nightwood*, 50). The essence of desire is to be unsatisfied: ‘desire, a useless passion’ (*Écrits*, 343). Robin’s processes’ correspondence with those of desire is further illustrated by her association with a primordial and pre-articulate domain. Desire is both a trace of a remembered union and its impossibility; it is created only in the process of repression and alienation. Robin signifies a lost condition: ‘she laughed, out of some hidden capacity, some lost subterranean humour’ (*Nightwood*, 42). Felix in particular associates Robin with a lost plenitude (*Nightwood*, 40, 106, 107).²⁵ This echoes the contradictions of desire: it is associated with a lost plenitude,

²⁴ Judith P. Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987), p. 193.

²⁵ For example, Felix is described as feeling that ‘her attention, somehow in spite of him, had already been taken, by something not yet in history. Always she seemed to be listening to the echo of some foray in the blood, that had no known setting’ (*Nightwood*, 40).

prior to individuation, and with lack—the impossibility of obtaining original wholeness (*Subjects*, 187).

Robin is absent to herself and yet is the object sought by Felix, Nora, and Jenny to stop up their lack. Her silence, ‘she opened her mouth but no words came’, makes her accessible to the projections that the other characters seek to place upon her (*Nightwood*, 43). She generates the discourse and plot of the novel: ‘Whatever animates, that which any enunciation speaks of, belongs to desire’ (*Concepts*, 141). However, Robin’s perpetual movement and silence means that she always exceeds their significations. She eludes representation. The characters, Felix, Nora, and Jenny, all demand the love of Robin as a way of fulfilling desires that remain unarticulated and unrepresented. Their requests for her are dictated by the silent operation of desire (*Nightwood*, 51, 62, 107).²⁶

Lacan refers to the subject as ‘fading’ to signal the effect of its constitution in language (*Concepts*, 208; *Écrits*, 347). The subject appears only in the movement of its disappearance; it is non-essential: ‘There where it was just now, there where it was for a while, between an extinction that is still glowing and a birth that is retarded, “I” can come into being and disappear from what I say’ (*Écrits*, 332). The character of Robin dramatizes this vacillating process, as well as the nature of desire, by virtue of her perpetual movement and absence. The narrator describes her as ‘fading’ (*Nightwood*, 37). For Felix, ‘thinking of her, visualizing her, was an extreme act of the will; to recall her after she had gone, however, was as easy as the recollection of a sensation of beauty’ (*Nightwood*, 37). Robin is disclosed in the process of her disappearance. Only traces of her are

²⁶ For example, Nora’s desire for Robin is perpetuated because her identity is inextricable from Robin: ‘In Nora’s heart lay the fossil of Robin, intaglio of her identity, and about it for its maintenance ran Nora’s blood. (...) Robin was now beyond timely changes, except in the blood that animated her’ (*Nightwood*, 51).

evident; she can never be present (*Nightwood*, 55). The extremity of Robin's vacillation, alienation, and disarticulation attests to the destructive effects of 'fading' on the subject. Throughout the novel, her perpetual movement, absence, and silence precludes her from the attainment of a stable subject-position. The cumulative impact of such experience results in her linguistic and physical dissolution at the novel's close:

Then she began to bark also, crawling after him – barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching. The dog began to cry, running with her, head-on with her head, as if to circumvent her (...). He ran this way and that, low down in his throat crying, and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, (...) until she gave up. (*Nightwood*, 153)

Robin performs Lacan's theorization of the impossibility of the subject discovering a signifier which can represent it: 'The subject tries to articulate himself in a signifying representation, and the representation fails; instead of a richness we have a lack, and this void opened by the failure *is* the subject of the signifier.'²⁷

Lacan ascribes to lack a 'positive condition' according to Slavoj Žižek ('Object as a Limit', 96). Consequently, he can be seen as omitting to consider the destructive effects of alienation exemplified in the cases of Robin and the other characters of *Nightwood*. The novel's representation of language's incapacity to transport meaning, the futility of narration, the division of the

²⁷ Slavoj Žižek, 'The Object as a Limit of Discourse: Approaches to the Lacanian Real', *Prose Studies*, 11 (1988), 94-120 (p. 96).

subject in speech, and the impossibility of attaining the object of desire, contribute towards a depiction of extreme human suffering. This is demonstrated by Matthew's final words, "“now *nothing, but wrath and weeping!*”", as well as by Robin's dissipation. Linguistic dispossession and alienation are ontologized by Lacan as they are understood to ensue from the subject's formation in language whereby it is both spoken by language and fragmented in the process of utterance. The possibility of the culturally marginalized achieving a stable position of articulation by which to instigate change is therefore diminished. Lacan universalizes the experience of inarticulacy by establishing it as an inexorable condition of being.

Whilst connections can be evinced between Lacan's construal of the signifier and desire and the character Robin, ultimately both Lacan's theory and Robin elude coherent assimilation. Lacan's theory is 'abstruse' and 'vacillating'. It evades the simplistic application that this chapter has sought to achieve in the process of exemplifying its use of silence. Robin is associated with both the enigmatic night and a community that has life only during the hours of darkness and is presented as being outside of history, unintelligible to hegemonic thought.²⁸ When trying to account for Robin's behaviour to Nora, Matthew posits the need for an alternative epistemology to enable cognizance of the cultural unconscious, the community of the night: "“the Great Enigma can't be thought of unless you turn the head the other way, and come upon thinking with the eye that you fear, which is called the back of the head”" (*Nightwood*, 74). *Nightwood* both

²⁸ As a consequence of Robin's enigmatic and silent characterization she must also be identified with Lacan's formulation of feminine *jouissance*. The restrictions of this chapter, its focus being the metonymical operations of the signifier, has prevented a developed discussion of the relationship between *jouissance* and silence. See Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, trans. by Bruce Fink, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX* (New York: Norton, 1998). In particular, Chapters VI and VII.

attests to the suffering coincident with disarticulation and alienation, and establishes the dangers of representing and appropriating difference. Accordingly, the application of Lacan's universalizing formulation of the subject of language to the experience given expression in the novel must be subject to scrutiny. *Nightwood's* representation of the particularity of experience and silence's resistance to interpretation can be contrasted with Lacan's ontological focus and confidence in the comprehension of silence. Taciturn and inarticulate discourse is expressive to Lacan but a source of much anguish for the characters of *Nightwood*—both listeners and speakers—and an obstruction to social transformation. Lacan's portrayal of alienation as an essential reality forecloses the possibility of surmounting it. *Nightwood* intimates the existence of an alternative mode of articulation and being beyond the cultural marginality imposed on the characters. Discourse frequently seems problematic because of the characters' cultural exclusion; this linguistic phenomenon cannot necessarily be seen to derive from the foundational lack postulated by Lacan. The desires of the characters are transgressive and unspeakable in conventional society and, therefore, they are impelled to employ strategies of silence and indirection. The tensions between *Nightwood* and Lacan's theory enact the discrepancies identified in this thesis between the 'social' and 'ontological' uses accorded to silence.

III – Blanchot and *Molloy*: interminable discourse and the impossibility of silence

Blanchot's understanding of literary discourse dissolves the problems raised by *Nightwood* in the previous section. In *Nightwood*, the emptiness of abundant language thwarted communication between characters and resulted in extreme alienation. In contrast, Blanchot valorizes such interminable and non-communicative discourse: 'They [the words] may be imbued with emptiness—but this emptiness is their very meaning.'²⁹ Illimitable discourse, which was given fictional representation in the 'insistent hum' of Matthew's words (*Nightwood*, 25), becomes a condition of language formalized by Blanchot as 'the inexhaustible murmur' ('Idle Speech', 126). His unequivocally ontological theory explores literature's capacity to express not only its essence but Being itself. Blanchot elides the distinction between meaning and being that is maintained by Lacan: literature is meaningful because it is.³⁰ Epistemological concerns—that are transposed to language by Derrida and Lacan—are jettisoned. In Blanchot's theory, silence and language are inextricable: silence is made manifest in language. This formulation must be differentiated from Derrida's convergence of language and silence in *différance*. For Blanchot, silence functions to express the truth of literary utterance and its source whereas the logic of *différance* undoes such ideality. It is also important to recognize, in

²⁹ Maurice Blanchot, 'Literature and the Right to Death', in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, ed. by George Quasha, trans. by Lydia Davis (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 1999), pp. 359-399 (p. 368) (first publ. in English in *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, trans. by Lydia Davis (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 1981), pp. 21-62).

³⁰ Maurice Blanchot, 'The Essential Solitude', in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, pp. 401-415 (p. 402) (first publ. in English in *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, trans. by Lydia Davis, pp. 63-77). Stephen Adam Schwartz articulates Blanchot's diversion from the philosophical tendency to keep being and meaning distinct in 'Faux Pas: Maurice Blanchot on the Ontology of Literature', *Substance*, 85 (1998), 19-47 (p. 23).

contradistinction to the theory of Derrida and Lacan, that Blanchot's focus is literary language and not the universal operations of language.³¹

Contrary to the conjunction of theory and fiction in the previous two sections, an association between the literary theory of Blanchot and the novels of Samuel Beckett is historically established. Blanchot's essay 'Where Now? Who Now?' specifically addresses Beckett's fiction, and critics, such as Simon Critchley, have articulated the correspondences between their respective projects.³² Their writings are also contemporaneous, and, as such, do not precipitate the contradictions previously seen to arise from the chronological discrepancies between the fictional and theoretical contexts. Beckett's *Molloy* narrativizes many of the themes theorized by Blanchot: the impersonal murmur of language, the muting of the subject, and mimetic foreclosure. *Molloy* can therefore be employed as a tool by which to support Blanchot's claims for the nature of literary language; but it can also be mobilized for the critique of such assertions. *Molloy* appears to pre-empt much of Blanchot's thought and is thus peculiarly accessible to interpretation following his precepts. However, *Molloy*'s indeterminacy—an effect which silence is formative in producing—contradictorily works to invite and thwart the critical readings imposed on it. This section is attentive to the uses Blanchot awards to silence, exemplified by their manifestation in *Molloy*, as well as to the novel's resistance to them.

³¹ The essays referred to in order to explicate Blanchot's use of silence, and its connection with interminable discourse, are: 'From Dread to Language', 'Literature and the Right to Death', 'The Essential Solitude', 'Idle Speech', and 'Where Now? Who Now?'.

³² See Simon Critchley, *Very Little ... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997).

Blanchot attributes a paradoxical condition to the writer: he has nothing to write, no means of writing, and yet is under a compulsion to write.³³ Beckett also asserts that art should be ‘the expression that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express’.³⁴ In Blanchot’s thought, this state is a consequence of the writer’s privileged experience of, and encounter with, dread. Dread does not transport or reveal meaning, and does not seek expression as it is fundamentally inarticulable (‘Dread’, 354), but is a force which can lead the writer towards an ontological reality whereby the need to make oneself the subject (agent) of speech is obliterated (‘Dread’, 253). In contrast to the experience of the characters of *Nightwood* in which the representation of self is sought, and Lacan’s formulation of that dilemma, Blanchot abjures any attempt to become the subject of speech. Instead, the writer is to sacrifice himself (always a male subject for Blanchot) to the impersonal movement of language. Dread images the nothingness of literary origins towards which the writer must direct himself. In saying nothing, the writer demonstrates his absorption by the ambition of dread, and, in turn, the condition of literature’s possibility:

Language can only begin with the void; no fullness, no certainty can ever speak; something essential is lacking in anyone who expresses himself. Negation is tied to language. When I first begin, I do not speak in order to

³³ Maurice Blanchot, ‘From Dread to Language’, in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, pp. 343-358 (p. 345) (first publ. in English in *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, trans. by Lydia Davis, pp. 3-20).

³⁴ Samuel Beckett and Georges Duthuit, ‘Three Dialogues’, in *Proust and Three Dialogues*, by Samuel Beckett (London: Calder, 1965; repr. 1970), pp. 94-126 (p. 103).

say something, rather a nothing demands to speak, nothing speaks, nothing finds its being in speech and the being of speech is nothing. This formulation explains why literature's ideal has been the following: to say nothing, to speak in order to say nothing. ('Right to Death', 381)

Blanchot charges the traditional philosophical notion of language as negation with ontological significance: language's inhabitation by the death and absence of things gives it a privileged access not only to the essence of literature, but to Being itself as the Nothing.³⁵ Whilst there are intimations of language as negation in *Nightwood*, in *Molloy* such a condition finds overt dramatic realization. Subjectivity is spoken by the impersonality of language; there is no cognizance that is not conditioned by language:

And even my sense of identity was wrapped in a namelessness often hard to penetrate (...). Yes, even then, when all was fading, waves and particles, there could be no things but nameless things, no names but thingless names. I say that now but after all what do I know now about then, now when the icy words hail down upon me, the icy meanings, and the world dies too, foully named. All I know is what the words know, and the dead things.³⁶

³⁵ This resembles Heidegger's conception of the Nothing. See Martin Heidegger, 'What is Metaphysics?', in *Basic Writings: From 'Being and Time' (1927) to 'The Task of Thinking' (1964)*, ed. by David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 95-112.

³⁶ Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, in *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: Calder, 1959; repr. 1994), pp. 7-176 (p. 31).

Molloy is continually aware of the chasm between the time of the narrative and the time of narration. The discrepancy between the 'I' that thinks and the 'I' that speaks is also enacted; as a consequence, the effacement of the subject in language is exposed. This disjunction evinces a worklessness, or failure, at the narrative's core. It echoes Blanchot's formulation that the writer must be annihilated in the literary endeavour: 'The work he makes signifies that there is no work made. The art he uses is an art in which perfect success and complete failure must appear at the same time' ('Dread', 347). According to Blanchot, therefore, the paradoxical logic conditioning Molloy does not forestall his success but guarantees it: it enables the revelation of the nature of literary language, its condition of impossibility, and the existence of Being.

Both Molloy and Moran are enjoined to write. Molloy is compelled to write by 'this man who comes every week' and Moran is given the task of writing a report by his employer, Youdi (*Molloy*, 7, 176). Molloy, in particular, illustrates Blanchot's idea of the writer being under an obligation to write without the knowledge of what to write or possessing the resources by which to write. This is an aporetic position. Molloy is taken over by a discourse that he cannot understand and cannot stop. Blanchot theorizes this state:

Words that are not meaningless but are focusless; that neither start nor stop (...); and will never stop; nor could we bear them to stop because then we would be faced with the horrifying discovery that when they are not speaking they continue to speak; when they stop they go

on; are never silent, for in them silence ceaselessly speaks.³⁷

Whilst both Molloy and Moran figure silence as a reality distinct from language, and seek silence as an end to their alienation in language (*Molloy*, 13, 122), the narrative suggests that silence resides in language. A perceived distinction between language and silence is a product of language itself. The characters are spoken by linguistic processes pre-existing and external to them. The ceaseless operation of language, and its absolute exteriority to the subject, produces the effect of a continual murmur. Molloy describes the murmur that is interminably present, although often latent and imperceptible, as ‘something gone wrong with the silence’ (*Molloy*, 88). The murmur of language is an empty and indistinguishable noise devoid of communicative function: ‘this continuousness of speech (...), is precisely the profound nature of a silence that talks even in its dumbness, a silence that is speech empty of words, an echo speaking on and on in the midst of silence’ (‘Right to Death’, 387). Molloy’s closest encounter with silence is achieved by the posture of obliviousness towards the murmur’s perpetual intrusion into his consciousness:

But I will listen no longer, for the time being, to that far whisper, for I do not like it, I fear it. But it is not a sound like the other sounds, that you listen to when you choose, and can sometimes silence, by going away or stopping your ears, no, but it is a sound which begins to rustle in your head, without your knowing how or why. It’s with

³⁷ Maurice Blanchot, ‘Where Now? Who Now?’, in *The Siren’s Song: Selected Essays*, trans. by Sacha Rabinovitch (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), pp. 192-198 (p. 192).

your head you hear it, not your ears, you can't stop it, but it stops itself when it chooses. It makes no difference therefore whether I listen to it or not, I shall hear it always, no thunder can deliver me, until it stops. (*Molloy*, 41)

In contrast to the Cartesian cogito, subjectivity and knowledge are realized in the process of hearing rather than thinking (*Molloy*, 61). Thought and meaning inhabit language, not consciousness. Both Molloy and Moran bear witness to a struggle to comprehend and obey the strictures of the voice they discern. The nature of the voice, and its location, remains inscrutable to them.

Unlike the characters' experience of the impersonal murmur's exteriority to themselves, and the novel's situation of the imperative voice outside of their consciousness, Blanchot conceives the writing subject to contain the tension of activity and passivity, commander and follower. He images the aporia conditioning the writer—the compulsion to write coincident with a desire to be silent—in the discrepancy between the ambitions of their hands. The hand that seeks to write ceaselessly is posited as 'sick' in contrast to the passive hand which is, contradictorily, imbued with the mastery to silence the hand that would write interminably ('Essential Solitude', 405). The illimitable voice is to be silenced if it is to be made meaningful and given form:

To write is to make oneself the echo of what cannot stop talking—and because of this, in order to become its echo, I must to a certain extent impose silence on it. To this incessant speech I bring the decisiveness, the authority of my own silence. Through my silent mediation, I make

perceptible the uninterrupted affirmation, the giant murmur in which language, by opening, becomes image, becomes imaginary, an eloquent depth, an indistinct fullness that is empty. ('Essential Solitude', 407)

The effacement of the writer, his silence, is necessary for the creation of meaning. However, Molloy's and Moran's relationships to the murmurs they hear, and the voices that dictate their actions, suggest their failure to impose silence on the interminableness of language. The characters lack the capacity to silence language and are in thrall to its arbitrary commands; at times it is the external voice which falls silent:

These imperatives were quite explicit (...) until, having set me [Molloy] in motion at last, they began to falter, then went silent, leaving me there like a fool who neither knows where he is going nor why he is going there.

(*Molloy*, 86)

Moran introduces the possibility that he misunderstands and misapplies the commands he hears. Consequently, the conception of the writer as a conduit for the being which speaks is placed under scrutiny: 'in the end I understood this language. I understood it, I understand it, all wrong perhaps' (*Molloy*, 176).

Molloy and Moran's muting and effacement in language does not give rise to the positive effects theorized by Blanchot. Their physical and linguistic disintegration and the futility and failure of their respective quests disables the possibility of meaning—or at least its communication in language. For Blanchot, the writer's annihilation and merger with the objective impersonality of language enables the revelation of Being. The conveyance of nothing is the literary ideal

(‘Right to Death’, 381). Molloy’s and Moran’s discourses can be regarded as empty, incommunicative, and driven by the murmur which is a ‘nothing’ that ‘demands to speak’ (‘Right to Death’, 381). There are all of the signs of an encounter with dread, yet their experience in language signals the contrary to that which dread would seek to reveal.

The silence and nothingness of *Molloy* could be conceived to be resistant to the attribution of essence that Blanchot ascribes to literature exhibiting those qualities (‘Right to Death’, 366). The negation of reality in language does not necessarily vouchsafe the revelation of Being articulated by Blanchot (‘Right to Death’, 392). The murmur that is heard by Molloy could equally be understood to evince a world devoid of Being and essence:

I listen and the voice is of a world collapsing endlessly, a frozen world, under a faint untroubled sky (...). And I hear it murmur that all wilts and yields, as if loaded down. For what possible end to these wastes where true light never was, nor any upright thing, nor any true foundation, but only these leaning things, forever lapsing and crumbling away, beneath a sky without memory of morning or hope of night. (*Molloy*, 40)

Following Theodor Adorno’s understanding of Beckett, the endless process of dying enacted in *Molloy* remains intractable to the imposition of transcendental meaning.³⁸ The temporality, and theme, of dying discloses a fundamental

³⁸ Adorno writes on the implications of the extirpation of meaning from Beckett’s literary worlds. For example, he claims that the meaning of Beckett’s *Endgame* is ‘the fact that it has no meaning’. See Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Trying to Understand *Endgame*’, in *Notes to Literature*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholson, 2 vols (New York: Columbia UP, 1958; repr. 1974), I, pp. 241-275 (p. 243).

materiality that resists transfiguration in the realm of meaning. The novel's accessibility to philosophical and critical interpretation is also the method by which it critiques the fixing of meaning (*Very Little*, 150). Blanchot's promulgation of a literature that turns towards silence to reveal its essence, its fundamental impossibility, is a means of theoretically detaching art from the contingencies of the world, commodity exchange, and utility ('Dread', 347-348). An autotelic work that employs non-referential language 'is the only thing that gives language its full value' ('Right to Death', 379). Although *Molloy* rejects the realist precepts of representation, and problematizes referential discourse, its utilization of silence is not solely put to the service of its anti-realist agenda; rather, the experience of language's interminableness—with the concomitant loss of self and the preclusion of silence—is explored as it affects consciousness. In a similar way to *Nightwood* in relation to Lacan's formulation of the subject in language, *Molloy* scrutinizes the experience of a world devoid of meaning and value. Blanchot figures nothing as communicative of everything whereas in *Molloy* ('Right to Death', 375), according to Adorno's claims of Beckett's literature, nothing means nothing. The final conversation with Gaber that Moran renders, in which Youdi's platitudinous knowledge is relayed, is indicative of the novel's subversion of meaning and the possibility of communication between subjects: 'He said to me, said Gaber, Gaber, he said—. Louder! I cried. He said to me, said Gaber, Gaber, he said, life is a thing of beauty, Gaber, and a joy for ever' (*Molloy*, 165).

Despite the seeming dissolution of the subject in Blanchot's literary theory, he maintains a humanist vision and accords to silence a redemptive role akin to Norman O. Brown's application of the motif. By virtue of the writer's

disappearance ‘he increases the credit of humanity, and thus his own, since he is still a man (...); he transforms into forces of consolation the hopeless orders he receives; he saves with nothingness’ (‘Dread’, 348). Although the silence of ordinary language is recognized—he adopts Mallarmé’s discriminations of ordinary and literary silence—it is only the silence of literary language that is charged with the capacity to express Being.³⁹ This distinction between the operations of ordinary and literary discourse distinguishes Blanchot’s ambitions from both Derrida and Lacan who analyse the constitutive processes of language itself. *Différance* and the incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier are inalienable processes active within all signification. The decentring of the subject is an effect of language itself and not a consequence of the writer’s sacrificial endeavours nor a specific kind of utterance. *Molloy*’s representation of the muting of the subject in language, as well as language’s illimitable and empty nature, intimates that it is a condition of language rather than a peculiar feature of literary discourse. Instead of silence being the ambition of literary language (‘Right to Death’, 387), it is envisaged as an inextricable aspect of all language; not a goal to be obtained but an ontological fact:

Not to want to say, not to know what you want to say, not to be able to say what you think you want to say, and never to stop saying, or hardly ever, that is the thing to keep in mind, even in the heat of composition. (*Molloy*, 28)

³⁹ See Maurice Blanchot, ‘Mallarmé and Literary Space’, in *The Siren’s Song*, pp. 110-119.

Pure silence is inconceivable: ‘Yes, I was never silent, whatever I said I was never silent’ (*Molloy*, 34).⁴⁰ The impossibility of this phenomenon is utilized in *Molloy* to illustrate the experience of the subject in language. Whilst the narrators, Molloy and Moran, produce meaningless narratives and undergo futile quests, they are enclosed within a structure that is expressive of the ontological condition of language. Instead of the revelation of Being—the disclosure of some primordial Nothing—the disappearance of the subject exposes the transcendence of language. Language no longer makes Being manifest but is being.

In the fiction explored in this chapter, a progression is marked from the concealment of the margins and operations of language—limitless play—in *The Sacred Fount*, to the self-reflexive and indirect interrogation of language in *Nightwood*, to the overt exposure of the processes of language that determine meaning and the subject in *Molloy*.⁴¹ The movement exemplified by the chronological arrangement of the novels selected parallels a line of philosophical development of the twentieth-century: from the predominant epistemological concerns of the modernist novel to the ontological focus of the mid-twentieth-century, and the cultural preoccupations of postmodernism.⁴² The changing relationship towards language evidenced in the novels is concomitant with the historical diversification of the uses of silence. The mode by which language is

⁴⁰ Although Moran acknowledges the silence of the material world ‘beyond the fatuous clamour, the silence of which the universe is made’, he is aware of the difficulty of hearing that silence, but claims ‘he desired that advantage for my son’ (*Molloy*, 122).

⁴¹ Stephen Barker discusses literature’s movement towards the revelation of play in the ‘paramodern’ with reference to Beckett. The ‘paramodern’ demonstrates what it conceals: ‘its movement toward and play with its own disappearance in silence, at the threshold of discourse.’ See ‘Nietzsche/Derrida, Blanchot/Beckett’, *Postmodern Culture*, 6 (1995), paragraphs 1-35 (paragraph 19).

⁴² Brian McHale sees the development from modernist to postmodernist fiction as a movement from the epistemological concerns of modernism to the ontological focus of postmodernism. See *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1989; repr. 1991).

conceived by Derrida and Lacan serves, theoretically, to unravel traditional ontological notions. Yet, in practice, such elevation of language invests it with something like an 'ontological' significance. Derrida's idea of *différance*, and associated concepts, works 'as if' it were ontological, even as it disavows such interpretations of it, and consequently could be construed as 'quasi-ontological'.⁴³

In contradistinction to the theory studied here, the fictions variously represent being's location as inside or outside of language: *The Sacred Fount* unquestionably grounds meaning, language, and action in the subject; *Nightwood* regards language's emptiness as a reflection of the state of the world, not necessarily a sign that it is, in itself, lacking; and *Molloy* envisages subjectivity and knowledge as determined by language. In both *The Sacred Fount* and *Nightwood* prolix discourse is investigated alongside other linguistic models; ceaseless utterance is not the only linguistic mode available. Circumlocutory discourse, given representation in the narrator of *The Sacred Fount* and Matthew in *Nightwood*, is a product of the specific psychological constitution of the characters. In contrast, in *Molloy*, interminable utterance is the only course available to the subject. Beckett transforms the motif and accords to it an 'ontological' significance. The difference between the earlier modernist novels and *Molloy* replicates the distinctions between modernism and poststructural theory. *Molloy* can be conceived to be a text at the intersection of philosophical

⁴³ Derrida's concept of *différance*, and associated textual processes, works to account in an overarching way for everything that is describable; accordingly, it becomes difficult to distinguish it from an ontological theory of things. Jürgen Habermas sees Derrida's work on 'writing' as unreservedly ontological in 'Beyond a Temporalized Philosophy of Origins: Jacques Derrida's Critique of Phonocentrism', in *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity*, pp. 161-210. However, the term 'quasi-ontological' signals Derrida's concepts' complex relation to ontology: their deployment to unravel ontology combined with their appearance of being ontological.

movements. It combines the modernist perceiving subject with the elevation of language coincident with poststructural thought.

The theory addressed diversely understands the subject to be fundamentally muted as a consequence of its determination by the operations of language or, in Derrida's case, a force at play within in:⁴⁴ Derrida is concerned with writing or the general text disabling ideas of self-presence; Lacan views the subject as spoken by processes outside of itself; and Blanchot postulates the erasure of the writing subject. The role attributed to language is utterly distinct from that accorded to it by subject-centred epistemological texts. Foucault articulates the decentering of the subject, its 'non-existence', as a result of the increased functions, and domain, granted to language:

In short, it is no longer discourse and the communication of meaning, but a spreading forth of language in its raw state, an unfolding of pure exteriority. And the subject that speaks is less the responsible agent of a discourse (what holds it, what uses it to assert and judge, what sometimes represents itself within it by means of a grammatical form designed to have that effect) than a non-existence in whose emptiness the unending out-pouring of language uninterruptedly continues.⁴⁵

The disappearance of the subject announces the being of language itself. The location of all possibility of meaning and subjectivity in language leads to the

⁴⁴ Although Derrida discriminates between the writing and speaking subject in order to invert the traditional prioritization of speech, his claims that the same processes are operative within each form undoes such distinctions.

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, 'Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside', in *Foucault – Blanchot*, trans. by Brian Massumi (New York: Zone Books, 1990), pp. 9-58 (p. 11).

transferral of epistemology's authority from the subject to language. As the sphere of language enlarges to such an extent that silence resides within it, silence's utility as a mode of signification is circumscribed. The theory discussed in this chapter evinces a historical shift in the conceptualization of silence. Although textual silences and stuttering discourse can intimate the functioning of repressed signifying processes and assist in the overturning of cultural dominance, thereby demonstrating a degree of utility, fundamentally the inextricability of language and silence disables silence's radical properties. In the theory analysed, silence is construed as an ineradicable aspect of language and not a sign of oppression, disarticulation, or site of opposition. A disjunction in twentieth-century theorizations of silence is therefore disclosed in this chapter as a consequence of the conceptual import accredited to silence: there appear to be mutually exclusive ways of reading silence as having either 'social' or 'ontological' implications.

However, despite Derrida's, Lacan's, and Blanchot's attempts to situate silence at the heart of language, a silent meaningful realm does appear to subsist beyond language within their respective formulations. For Derrida, there is something beyond language: the other which summons it.⁴⁶ In Lacan's theory, the cut, resulting in alienation, institutes a distinction between the realms of being and meaning. The subject's constitution in the signifier causes the 'disappearance of being' (*Concepts*, 211). Lacan's aphoristic further revision of the Cartesian cogito, 'I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think', gives rise to the existence of a mode of being exterior to the linguistic

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, 'Deconstruction and the Other', in Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984; repr. 1886), pp. 107-26 (p. 124).

sphere (*Écrits*, 183). Blanchot argues that the writer's goal, along with the work's truth, lies beyond the work itself ('Right to Death', 366). A trans-lingual dimension is invoked. The tendency of theorists' constructions to postulate a sphere of meaning outside of discourse disrupts the ambition to locate silence on the inside of language. This effect of their methodologies must be seen to have implications for discourse itself as it provokes the question as to whether a condition of language's possibility is silence, despite Derrida's and Blanchot's protestations, in particular, to the contrary. This would, therefore, make silence's utility indubitable. What remains uncertain is whether this condition of discourse is necessarily transcendent of cultural specificity.

The disparity between the experience of trauma in the face of communicative difficulties represented in the fiction, and the theorists' confident assertions about language, is evident. The concept of language's illimitability is itself a sign of their presumed understanding of it—a presumption intimating a kind of mastery with which they might find themselves philosophically ill-at-ease.⁴⁷ The cultural and linguistic estrangement of Henry James, Djuna Barnes, and Samuel Beckett—perhaps resonant of their shared states as expatriates—finds its expression in their deployment of silence and incommunicative prolix discourse. In contrast with the theory engaged, the condition is exhibited without the confidence that it can be coherently understood.

⁴⁷ Jane Gallop questions whether Lacan's mastery over language's operations means that he can no longer be regarded as language's subject. See *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1985), p. 43.

Conclusion

This conclusion performs an experiment to explore the possibility that the juxtaposition of texts in this thesis could have been otherwise; that different selections and counterpositions of fictional and theoretical texts might have evinced alternative results. It thus aspires to overcome any impression created by the methodology—the examination of a range of fictions alongside different critical theorists—that the force of selected novels’ application of silence is disclosed only by means of some unique theoretical perspective. For example, that the silences evident within *Asphodel* can only be understood in the light of Irigaray’s theory or that the implications of silence in *The Secret Agent* are only exposed by virtue of Eagleton’s formulation. In the preceding chapters the silences of a specific novel are analysed in conjunction with the uses accorded to the motif by virtue of the most patently apt theoretical formulation. This closing section’s experiment illustrates the way in which more than one of the critical approaches delineated in the preceding chapters can be brought to bear upon a single novel. This reading makes dramatically apparent the extent to which, while silence’s significance is not diminished, its operation changes depending upon its narrative context and the interpretive apparatus employed to comprehend it. Accordingly, its discursive dynamism and the richness of its thematic potential—which are this study’s subject—are brought to the fore.

Conrad’s novel *Victory* explicitly adopts silence for narrative and philosophic purposes. It contains multiple instances of the motif, located in different narrative contexts, and thereby attributes to it a range of functions. As such, the novel provides an ideal test case to show how all of the critical

positions explored in the previous five chapters can assist in the comprehension and supplementation of a single work's use of silence. In particular, the tactical deployment of socio-economic, feminist, postcolonial, and poststructuralist thought assists in the elucidation of the novel's veiled silences which can be seen to signify its unconscious ideological and textual practices. Further, because in *Victory* silence is ascribed 'social' as well as 'ontological' meanings, it creates a positive space for the experimental scrutiny of the boundaries that the thesis has thus far imposed between these categories.

Victory's complex narrative mobilization of silence is not easily reducible to the distinctions instituted. Instead of the implications, 'social' or 'ontological', being considered alternately, a single narrative silence can signal them both concurrently. In what follows, the diverse analytical modes are applied initially to advance the understanding of singular manifestations of silence in the novel. However, on occasions, the same narrative instance of silence is analysed from different critical perspectives. The assessment of the same silence from divergent critical positions elicits the motif's further indeterminate and irreducible characteristics. This experiment announces the central features of the motif, which have been suggested throughout the thesis, and thereby highlights its resourcefulness for narrative and theoretical discourse.

In the interests of concision, this exercise confines itself to drawing for heuristic tools upon the critical practice of one representative from each theoretical approach; that is, those of Fredric Jameson, Luce Irigaray, Homi Bhabha, Ihab Hassan, and Jacques Derrida. The selection of the five thinkers' critical formulations is conditioned by a pragmatic impulse to consider works according to silence roles similar to those dramatized in *Victory*, or which

provide constructive methods of comprehending lacunae and exclusions resulting from the processes of its ideological and textual production.

Victory is set in the Malay Archipelago and concerns events on and around the island of Samburan. A series of distinct narrators, personal and impersonal, articulate the experiences of the protagonist Heyst who strives to follow his deceased father's philosophy and maintain a position of critical detachment from the perceived valuelessness and inhumanity of the world. Heyst struggles to put into practice his father's axiom to "look on – make no sound" as he twice engages in action and intervenes in the events of the world:¹ firstly he enters into a relationship with the character Morrison which leads to his investment in, and management of, the Tropical Belt Coal Company based on Samburan; secondly he rescues a woman, Alma (whom he later names Lena)—a player in an orchestra temporarily located at Schomberg's hotel in Sourabaya—from persecution by her manager and the lecherous Schomberg. Heyst retreats with Lena to the island of Samburan, his so-called 'home', but is pursued by three agents of Schomberg's jealous wrath, Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro. The island and its inhabitants are indissociable from silence: 'Heyst said nothing. Wang also said nothing. Perhaps he had always been a taciturn man; perhaps he was influenced by the genius of the locality, which was certainly that of silence' (*Victory*, 199). The figures in pursuit of Heyst represent the intrusion of the world into his sanctuary as they, seemingly, violate the island's tranquillity. The novel's identification of Samburan with silence produces a metaphysical landscape for the narrative's events.

¹ Joseph Conrad, *Victory: An Island Tale* (New York: Penguin, 1996), p. 194.

Victory opens by probing the operations of imperial-capitalism: its mystifying practices are described and, concomitantly, their resistance to representation: ‘The Tropical Belt Coal Company went into liquidation. The world of finance is a mysterious world in which, incredible as the fact may appear, evaporation precedes liquidation’ (*Victory*, 57). However, the circumstances surrounding Heyst’s establishment of this company, and its subsequent dissolution, are omitted. The narrative begins with a discussion of the company only to explain Heyst’s attachment to the island of Samburan. The processes of production, the transportation of labour, and the distribution of capital are all figured as preceding the time of the narrative. Samburan merely bears the traces of Heyst’s imperial enterprise: the coal mines, the administration and accommodation buildings, and one single remaining Malay worker, Wang.

Jameson’s readings of Conrad’s *Lord Jim* and *Nostramo* highlight the mode by which aesthetic practices work to obfuscate or erase political, economic, and historical processes.² This critical perspective can be applied to *Victory*. Attention to the text’s silences facilitates the exposure of the process of the occlusion of history and, as a paradoxical consequence, history is brought to the fore. The narrative does not represent the two occasions upon which Heyst acts, the imperial venture with Morrison and the rescue of Lena, as it is concerned only with his reflection upon those moments: ‘There is no present tense of the act, we are forever always before or after it, in past or future tenses, at the stage of the project or those of the consequences’ (*Political*, 264). These narrative silences—the inability or refusal to represent action—signify the text’s

² See Chapter 6, ‘Romance and Reification: Plot Construction and Ideological Closure in Joseph Conrad’, in *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 206-280.

problematic relation to historical processes. Heyst's ambition to attain a position outside of the world of action replicates the impulse exhibited by the narrative omissions. He perceives himself to be detached from social practice and ideological production, a posture assumed so as to preserve value in a world of increasingly reified social relations. Jameson interprets this move towards autonomy to be indicative of modernism and a direct result of reification (*Political*, 236). Although the narrative regards Heyst's perceived autonomy with critical detachment, the significant omission of the events determining his life on Samburan is complicit with his notion that one can stand outside of history and merely contemplate its operations.

In this perspective, the representation of the sea as a horrifying abyss is an illustration of the mobilization of aesthetic procedures to erase any traces of labour (*Victory*, 208). The construal of the sea as a vacuous space contrasts radically with Jameson's conception of it as a site of human productivity:

For the sea is the empty space between the concrete places of work and life; but it is also, just as surely, itself a place of work and the very element by which an imperial capitalism draws its scattered beachheads and outposts together, through which it slowly realizes its sometimes violent, sometimes silent and corrosive, penetration of the outlying precapitalist zones of the globe. (*Political* , 213)

The figuration of the sea as abyss and the island as silent are coextensive with the novel's metaphysical and existential agenda, the effect of which is the occlusion of the world of work and history.

An examination of the novel from a (Western) feminist perspective also assists in the disclosure of the novel's ideological operations; but, following Irigaray's, the focus becomes the aesthetic and discursive techniques working to ensure the self-sufficiency and perpetuation of the masculine subject. Women's muteness, their foreclosure from subject-positions, provides the foundation for masculine subjectivity and discourse. Irigaray's postulation that women provide 'the "matter" from which the speaking subject draws nourishment in order to produce itself, to reproduce itself; the *scenography* that makes representation feasible' provides a means of comprehending the relationship between Heyst and Lena (*This Sex*, 75). Lena serves as a narrative illustration of Irigaray's formulation that women are denied being, and are absent as subjects, as a result of their object status within a masculine specular economy (*This Sex*, 89, 95): 'Outside of this volume already circumscribed by the signification articulated in (the father's) discourse nothing is: *awoman. Zone of silence*' (*This Sex*, 113). Lena is self-conscious of her vacuity: "Do you know, it seems to me, somehow, that if you [Heyst] were to stop thinking of me I shouldn't be in the world at all!" (*Victory*, 205). Her identity is literally constructed by Heyst in the act of his naming her (*Victory*, 205). In his fantasy of her she is rendered mute. He evacuates the semantic content of her utterances:

He was moved by the vibrating quality of the last words.

She seemed to be talking low of some wonderful enchantment, in mysterious terms of special significance.

He thought that if she could talk to him in some unknown tongue, she would enslave him altogether by the sheer

beauty of the sound, suggesting infinite depths of wisdom
and feeling. (*Victory*, 222)

Heyst transposes Lena's speech, referring to overheard rumours about Heyst's relation to Morrison, onto a transcendental plane, and, in so doing, diffuses the combined threat of its intended content and Lena's physical, and antagonistic, presence. This mystification of her is emblematic of woman's representation in Western metaphysical discourse according to Irigaray. Lena is precluded from attaining a subject-position; in a masculine economy the only position available to her is that of an object. She is denied subjectivity in order to guarantee Heyst's subject constitution. Her silences, as well as her utterances, are subsumed by his metaphysical consciousness: 'She made no sound. Her still, upward gaze had a patient mournfulness which troubled him like a suggestion of an inconceivable depth' (*Victory*, 291).

Taking into account Irigaray's argument, Lena's status in the text is that of a commodity. She is an object of exchange passed from Zangiachomo (the orchestra's manager) to Heyst, and is competed for by Schomberg and Ricardo. As an object, expressivity is denied her:

In our social order, women are 'products' used and
exchanged by men. Their status is that of merchandise,
'commodities.' How can such objects of use and
transaction claim the right to speak and to participate in
exchange in general? (*This Sex*, 84)

However, despite Heyst's idea of her, and her apparent object status, Lena acts when Heyst fails to. By a strategy of dissimulation she is able to be 'elsewhere' (*This Sex*, 76). Irigaray's formulation appropriates traditional notions of woman

as mystically ‘elsewhere’—evidenced in Heyst’s conception of Lena—for radical theoretical purposes. Lena preserves her role as a passive woman, giving Heyst the illusion of being her protector, while she actively undertakes to disarm the men that come to Samburan to harm him. She plots to obtain Ricardo’s knife and dies in possession of it, believing that she has saved Heyst. Nevertheless, her activity is of importance only as it provides a foil to his passivity. Lena is therefore awarded agency by the narrative to highlight problems with Heyst’s election of detachment. Both the male protagonist and the narrative itself situate Lena in a position that serves to consolidate the male subject. Whereas Heyst pursues a course of silence, retreating from the world, according to his own volition—the implications of which provide the basis of the narrative—Lena has such a condition imposed upon her by an economy that refuses her subject status and thus voice.

The issue of Western women’s silence is explicitly addressed by the novel, albeit serving, obliquely, to further their linguistic dispossession. Mrs Schomberg’s muteness is narrativized as well as is the process of Lena’s disarticulation by Heyst. The personal narrator of part one describes Mrs Schomberg as ‘an It – an automaton, a very plain dummy’ (*Victory*, 87). In contrast to this overt inquiry into the effects of masculinist discourse and gendered identity construction there are groups in the novel, such as the indigenous population of Samburan, who are marginalized to such a degree that their erased voices are not regarded as a subject for concern. The novel is attentive to silencing ensuing from racial stereotyping, which is made apparent in its representation of Pedro, at the same time as it is implicated in such practices.

Bhabha's theoretical formulation of colonial signification as articulated in *The Location of Culture*, 'the inscriptions of an uncertain colonial silence that mocks the social performance of language with their nonsense', assists in the explication of *Victory's* explicit use of silence to evince the subordination of racial others and the text's complicity in colonialist discourse.³ Bhabha, like Irigaray, mobilizes a notion of mimicry—a silent and indirect challenge to cultural hegemony—to draw attention to the failure of colonialist discourse to completely dominate and interpellate its subjects. Mimicry is a practice infused with subversive potentiality. Within Irigaray's thought, silent signification and mimicry are strategies exclusively deployed to expose women's position in a masculine economy. Bhabha applies a comparable conceptual vocabulary to articulate dominant culture's attempt to erase colonial difference and, in its failure to do so, colonial enunciations are shown to disrupt cultural authority. Seen in proximity to Bhabha's perspective, silent signification and oblique utterances within, or in the interstices of, the dominant cultural text are charged with significance similar to that Irigaray might find there, despite the two thinkers' different purposes: the expression of gender and imperial concerns respectively.

Victory scrutinizes the brutality of racist stereotyping in its representation of the character of Pedro. He is attributed with simian characteristics by all of the characters in the novel and the various narrators and, consequently, is denied voice and all of the trappings of consciousness: 'The fellow was a Dago of immense strength and of no sense whatever. (...) Reasoning was beyond him'

³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 124. Chapter 7, 'Articulating the Archaic: Cultural Difference and Colonial Nonsense', is to provide the focus for the reading here, pp. 123-138.

(*Victory*, 245). Pedro is figured as the other of the other. This is evidenced by Wang's (Heyst's 'mine coolie turned houseboy' (*Victory*, 334)) comprehension of Pedro:

The Chinaman had seen wild men. He had penetrated, in the train of a Chinese pedlar, up one or two of the Bornean rivers into the country of the Dyaks. (...) But a hairy brute like Pedro, with his great fangs and ferocious growls, was altogether beyond his conception of anything that could be looked upon as human. The strong impression made on him by Pedro was the prime inducement which had led Wang to purloin the revolver.

(*Victory*, 304)

It is Wang's confrontation with Pedro that impels him to revolt against Heyst. Pedro's absolute otherness enables the subject constitution of Wang, Heyst, Lena, Mr Jones, and Ricardo. Against his primitiveness they define themselves as sentient beings, and legitimate the imperial-capitalist domination which is ideologically invested in scientific narratives of evolution.

Wang is also associated with silence, although in a manner distinct from the characterization of Pedro. The reactions of Heyst, Lena, Jones, and Ricardo towards him echo his own response to Pedro. Like Pedro, Wang is denied consciousness by the white characters. Ricardo expresses this: "The Chink, he's nothing" (*Victory*, 273). His existence, for Heyst and the other white island inhabitants, is predicated upon his utility; this is narrativized by the fact of his appearance only at the time of service (*Victory*, 300). Such an ideological purview disables them, and Heyst in particular, from observing his machinations

to command the structures of power on Samburan. Wang, much the same as Lena, acts in a converse way to that supposed by Heyst. In the light of Bhabha's formulation, Wang can be seen to mimic colonial authority. Gradually, and silently, Wang comes to dominate the island: he manages his land to sell produce to Heyst, forges an alliance with the indigenous population through marriage, and finds the means to quell the threat imposed to his status quo by the intrusion of Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro. Wang's assumption of a position of colonial authority, his occupation and performance of Heyst's role, has the effect of challenging colonialism:

For the repetition of the 'same' can in fact be its own displacement, can turn the authority of culture into its own non-sense precisely in its moment of enunciation. For, in the psychoanalytic sense, to 'imitate' is to cling to the denial of the ego's limitations; to 'identify' is to assimilate conflictually. It is from between them, where the letter of the law will not be assigned as a sign, that culture's double returns uncannily – neither the one nor the other, but the impostor – to mock and mimic, to lose the sense of the masterful self and its social sovereignty.

(Culture, 137)

Confusion is produced between the subject-positions of colonial and colonizer, servant and master, in Wang's appropriation of the tools of power.

The narrator of Part IV circumscribes Wang's insurgency by racial stereotyping. His agency in the novel is given tacit expression because it resides outside of the articulated cognitive fields. As an illustration of this, the narrator

perceives Wang as lacking the consciousness necessary for the construction of the kind of values upholding the Western imperial project:

His chinaman's mind, very clear but not far-reaching, was made up according to the plain reason of things, such as it appeared to him in the light of his simple feeling for self-preservation, untrammelled by any notions of romantic honour or tender conscience. (*Victory*, 301)

By means of such racist representations, the narrative voices and the characters omit to acknowledge Wang's radical usurpation of power. At the novel's close, a white presence is eradicated from Samburan and he is left in the position of colonial mastery over the indigenous Alfuro people. Wang's narrative function is similar to that of Lena's. Their mute agency is juxtaposed with Heyst's silent detachment and passivity. As such, Wang, like Lena, has import only as he reveals the contradictions inhering within a Western philosophy of detachment: as an extreme manifestation, that is, of modernity's aspiration for autonomy taken up, paradoxically, in response to cultural devaluation brought about by modernity's technological progress. Disengagement cannot disable the barbarity ensuing from modernity's progressive logic; there appears no end to the nightmare wreaked by imperial-capitalism as colonial subjects such as Wang come to occupy the sites evacuated by disillusioned Westerners unable to exercise their authority.

The novel's identification of Samburan with silence erases the voice of the Alfuro community: 'Heyst (...) had a taste for silence. (...) The islands are very quiet. (...) A sort of smiling somnolence broods over them; the very voices of their people are soft and subdued, as if afraid to break some protecting spell'

(*Victory*, 110). Its metaphysical discourse subsumes cultural particularity. As a consequence of the obliteration of native voice, consciousness, and culture, the island is conceptualized as Heyst's to be purloined by Wang because of Heyst's weakness. At no point are the Alfuros accredited the capacity to overthrow Heyst's occupation of their island. Their silence within the narrative is so extreme that they are never characterized and function purely as the backdrop against which Western philosophical problems and imperialist precepts are reviewed.

Nevertheless, *Victory's* identification of the geographical space of Samburan with silence can be imbued with significance distinct from postcolonial theory's interest in the operation of imperial discourse to erase native consciousness and concomitant strategies of resistance. In contrast to the socio-political analyses of the motif so far examined, the novel's application of silence can be considered in 'ontological' terms. Assessment of *Victory's* deployment of the motif from the perspective of a critic such as Hassan, who views silence as inextricable from 'the stress in art, culture, and consciousness' endemic to modernist literature, evinces the disjunction this thesis has disclosed between 'social' and 'ontological' uses of silence (*Orpheus*, 12). By scrutinizing the same narrative instance of silence, such as the representation of Samburan as silent, from a theoretical perspective that accords to the motif a widely divergent meaning, the mutually exclusive nature of the two critical positions is dramatized. Instead of discriminating silences as signs of the operation of ideological and discursive practices to dispossess certain groups, the text's silences can be seen to signify aesthetic, epistemological, and ontological themes.

Hassan conceives of two strands within the literature of silence: one which displays a tendency towards plenitude and another which strives towards absence. Conrad's novel can be distinguished from the avant-garde examples adopted by Hassan because it thematically explores problems of language and consciousness rather than formally enacting them. *Victory* narrativizes many of the issues that Hassan articulates in its representation of Heyst's retreat from the world of speech and action into that of silence and contemplation. In the novel, silence is associated with presence and plenitude:

A great silence brooded over Samburan – the silence of the great heat that seems pregnant with fatal issues, like the silence of ardent thought. (*Victory*, 229)

The forceful stream from the pipe broke like shattered glass on the boat's gunwale. Its loud, fitful, and persistent splashing revealed the depth of the world's silence. (*Victory*, 244)

Heyst seeks to transcend the contingencies of the world, and, in isolation and silence on Samburan, discover value and meaning. The philosophical legacy he inherits from his father, the injunction to silence, imposes a condition of social, cultural, and linguistic alienation (*Victory*, 194). Hassan argues that the turn to silence, performed out of frustration with language's limitations, works to further instantiate the emptiness of language:

Silence implies alienation from reason, society, and history, a reduction of all engagements in the created world of men, perhaps an abrogation of any communal

existence. Its radical empiricism resists and even disrupts systems, and elicits the babble in everyday words.

(*Orpheus*, 13)

Heyst has an acute sense that language interferes with his existential and metaphysical thought. Seen in this way, his tendency, explored above, to obliterate the semantic content of Lena's speeches is indicative of his desire to discover a transparent mode of communication; it is also suggestive of his constant search for meaning perceived to reside beyond existing cognitive forms (*Victory*, 315). Language, as a mediatory code, is unable to communicate any significant truth or represent states of consciousness with fidelity. Consequently, silence is invested with all that language is conceived to lack: depth, meaning, and presence: 'Silence presupposes, at times, apocalypse, the dissolution of the known world, its history and persistence, and sustains a millennial vision of non-human perfection' (*Orpheus*, 14). Hassan argues that literature which is committed to silence has the capacity to intimate a redeemed or transformed humanity, a radically altered state of being (*Paracriticisms*, 97-117).

Hassan discriminates a literary phenomenon by showing the common themes inhering within literature preoccupied with silence. Whilst he points to possible reasons behind its inauguration, his ambition is to highlight the existence of a phenomenon and not to provide a comprehensive analysis of its diverse deployments. Derrida's understanding of a metaphysics of presence, on the other hand, goes some way towards accounting for literature's identification of plenitude with silence; although it does not explain the historical particularity of the phenomenon observed by Hassan. Derrida's theory facilitates a reading of

Heyst's valorization of voice over writing and the novel's representation of silence as a signifier of depth and plenitude.

In the light of Derrida's work, Heyst's elevation of voice over writing in *Victory* is reflective of a Western tendency to subordinate writing and its processes. Heyst exhibits this ideality both in his conception of Lena's utterances and in his relation to his father's philosophical legacy. He considers himself to have been a privileged receptor of his father's knowledge: 'They read his books, but I have heard his living word' (*Victory*, 213). Paradoxically, Heyst is both cynical about language's expressive potential, preferring instead to maintain silence (as has been suggested above), and imbues it with the capacity to transport meaning. He rigorously distinguishes textual production from verbal utterance, a practice Derrida posits as both common and deluded. Derrida argues that writing is not merely a supplement to speech but a process or force always already operative within it. This process resists articulation. Deconstruction uncovers such an inarticulable and unrepresentable movement, the play of difference and deferral formulated as *différance*:

'Older' than Being itself, such a *différance* has no name in our language. But we 'already know' that if it is unnameable, it is not provisionally so, not because our language has not yet found or received this *name*, or because we would have to seek it in another language, outside the finite system of our own. It is rather because there is no *name* for it at all, not even the name of essence or of Being, not even that of *différance*. (*Margins*, 26)

The silent movement of *différance* is figured as always operative within writing and speech, undoing the distinctions between them. Attention to the text's contradictions and dehiscence opens up a space in which the disruptive work of this (non-) concept becomes apparent.

In the novel, silence is a supplement to language (writing and speech). Heyst turns to silence because he perceives language to have failed him. Whilst the novel critiques the possibility of Heyst ever escaping the discursive community, and the notion of an 'outside' (*Victory*, 220, 221), its figuration of silence perpetuates the protagonist's conception that it is a signifying mode capable of conveying meaning/truth where language fails to. Hence its association with depth, plenitude, and potentiality. According to Derrida, meaning is achieved only by virtue of the movement of *différance*: 'Meaning must await being said or written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning' (*Writing*, 11). Meaning is infinitely deferred as a consequence of the movement of *différance* and supplementarity. Heyst's bewilderment in the face of Lena's silence dramatizes the experience of such deferral:

It was impossible to read the thoughts veiled by her steady grey eyes, to penetrate the meaning of her silences, her words, and even her embraces. He used to come out of her very arms with the feeling of a baffled man. (*Victory*, 315)

However, whereas the novel presents bafflement as a condition ensuing from silence's enigmatic and indeterminate signification, Derrida would argue that it is a product of language itself. The novel preserves distinctions between language

and silence which are collapsed in Derrida's formulation of *différance* whereby silence is located within linguistic processes.

Derrida's formulation of *différance* unravels the novel's very inquiry into the issues plaguing Heyst about value, autonomy, and legitimation. It is a silent (non-) concept that not only disables the presence of meaning in language but disperses the self: 'Thus one comes to posit presence—and specifically consciousness, the being beside itself of consciousness—no longer as the absolutely central form of Being but as a “determination” and as an “effect”' (*Margins*, 16). The silent force of *différance* is therefore constitutive of all appearance of meaning and of consciousness itself. Heyst intuits something of this dispersal when he says to Lena: “I don't think. Something in me thinks – something foreign to my nature” (*Victory*, 336). Yet, even as he bespeaks the reality of an other that decentres him, he manifests an obliviousness to the activity underlying the very possibility of self and other, of difference. He cannot envisage identity in terms of alterity as specified by Derrida whereby the self is simultaneously self and other by virtue of the incessant interplay between the two. This process of oscillation is inarticulable and can be signalled only by its effects, here registered as Heyst's sense of an other, residing within, in possession of the agency that he perceives himself to lack.

This experiment, whereby different modes of analysis are employed to elucidate the significance of silence within a single novel, can be seen as yielding a warrant for the diverse 'social' and 'ontological' critical deployments of the motif explored in this thesis—and the suggestion that they seem mutually exclusive—at the same time that it demonstrates their provisionality. The

examination of all approaches in close proximity draws attention to the effects produced by their juxtaposition. For example, Hassan's delineation of a 'literature of silence', which is frequently apocalyptic in tone, could be charged with eliding the significance of groups whose voices are violently erased when scrutinized in relation to postcolonial or feminist thought. Critics enunciating the concerns of economically, gendered, and ethnically marginalized groups would be wary of any aestheticization of silence which might depotentiate the sense of its radical social import and transformative capacity. Theories that have been construed as 'ontological' appear to have socio-political effects arising with the very assertion of silence's trans-social (ontological) motivation; this substantiates the discrimination of two distinct approaches towards silence. However, the experiment also highlights a breaching of the categories imposed. Bhabha's postcolonial study which attributes to colonial subjects' silence and ambivalent significations a disruptive force was utilized as an instance of the 'social' significance of silence. Yet his formulation appropriates the Derridean notion of *différance*, which this thesis has considered in 'ontological' terms, for socio-political purposes. Bhabha's application of Derrida's concept of a universally operative movement shows that it can have significant social consequences. The observation of *différance* can be mobilized to manifest the ruptures within the social text and therefore signal sites of cultural difference. But, fundamentally, the import granted to silence in Bhabha's theory is programmatically 'social':

From those dark corners of the earth, there comes another, more ominous silence that utters an archaic colonial 'otherness' (...). It is a silence that turns imperial triumphalism into the testimony of colonial confusion

and those who hear its echo lose their historic memories.

(*Culture*, 123)

The antagonisms existing amongst the various critical applications of the motif analysed expose its 'multifocal' implications within theoretical discourse.

A synchronic study of silence's appearance and utility in the twentieth century forges links between historically and culturally disparate texts so as to demonstrate its resourcefulness, its utilization for diverse fictional and theoretical purposes. Resemblances in the manner of deploying the motif are uncovered amongst apparently incongruous texts, such as Lawrence's *St Mawr* and Brown's *Love's Body*. By observing and tracking such correspondences, tensions are made apparent which intimate something of the historical and narrative/theoretical specificity of each application of silence. Consequently, the diversity of silence's uses and its characteristic dynamism is further established. A synchronic and topological inquiry also facilitates the discernment of the discrete implications accorded to the motif in the twentieth century that are not reducible to a singular historical moment or event. Silence frequently appears in fiction, 1900-1950, to signify the derogation of characters and groups. Of the novels analysed, numerous characters are mute as a result of the distinct way that they are oppressed by hegemonic culture: Septimus in *Mrs Dalloway*, Rhoda in *The Waves*, Hermione in *Asphodel*, and Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* are examples. But silence is also appropriated by fiction to probe conditions of being or the nature of language itself. *Lord Jim*, *St Mawr*, and *Molloy*, are novels that illustrate such preoccupations. The mobilization of the motif in theory is comparable with its use in fiction by reason of the multiple implications awarded to it: its institution to signify 'social' or 'ontological' meanings, to reveal

ideological contradictions and social repression or to illuminate being, consciousness, and language and its operations.

The juxtaposition of fictional and theoretical texts as cultural products instantiating the divergent significations of silence also recalls the necessity of observing the discrete ways in which each discourse—fictional and theoretical—uses the motif. Traditionally, the genre of fiction has been demarcated from that of critical/theoretical discourse; in this sense, appeals to the topos of silence are distinct in each such setting. Certainly, as has been suggested above, the motif serves a particular purpose in each theoretical discourse: for example, for Eagleton it denotes ideological contradiction; Irigaray conceptualizes it as a specifically feminine signifying modality; Spivak associates it with subalterns denied subject-positions within imperial-capitalism; Wittgenstein utilizes it to establish the limits of philosophical discourse; and Blanchot grants to it the capacity to disclose Being. Conceivably, in contrast, fiction adopts the motif differently for multiple expressive purposes. Within a single novel, as has been demonstrated in the case of *Victory*, there can be numerous distinct instances of silence, along with unconscious silences brought to light with the aid of critical theory.⁴ It might be argued that whereas theory ascribes to the motif a determinate role, in fiction its meaning frequently remains irreducible and indeterminate; hence the possibility of interpreting the same narrative occasion of silence in a variety of ways, illustrated by the above reading of *Victory*.

Whilst the majority of theorists scrutinized in this thesis invest in accounting for and explicating silence, fiction, noticeably, is more concentrated

⁴ In turn, by means of the counterpositioning of material, this thesis has endeavoured to expose the unwitting silences of the theories analysed. By situating formulations alongside each other what is omitted becomes apparent.

upon uncovering the variety of human experiences of silence which must be differentiated from any drive to comprehend it. In novels such as *Lord Jim*, *Nightwood*, *St Mawr*, and *To the North*, attempts to interpret silence's meaning are met with scepticism; subsequent theory could thus be construed as a cultural response to the manifest uncertainties and anxieties, indicative of modernism, which give place to silence. By transposing the problem of silence, its equivocality and indeterminacy, from a predominantly epistemological sphere to an ontological, linguistic, and discursive one, the uncertainties it—or the condition for which silence is merely a metaphorical expression—engenders are curtailed.

Although ostensible differences between fictional and theoretical transactions with silence can be traced, and require elaboration, the two discourses are fundamentally inextricable.⁵ Theory may award to silence a very specific and determinable role or meaning, but the effects produced by the utilization of the motif can be the same as that of fiction; that is, its import can in sum be indeterminate. Discourses striving to account for silence generate, albeit unwittingly, ambiguous meanings. Lacan's work on lack, absence, and silence provides a notorious example of this effect. Concomitantly, all of the various theories explored in this thesis could be subjected to the same kind of analyses as the selected fiction so as to uncover the significance of their usage of the motif in a similar way to that of the fiction. This has been intimated throughout but brought to the fore in the above reading of *Victory*. The critical discourses addressed must be considered in the light of each other; in the process, the

⁵ The relation between the two modes of discourse can best be thought in terms of reciprocity as literature is inherently critical and critical theory manifests literariness.

silences arising out of their respective conceptual practices, critical agendas, and ideologies are exposed. As this closing section demonstrates, Jameson's study of Conrad disregards the specificity of gender or ethnic oppression; Irigaray's focus upon gender issues elides the matters of 'race' and imperialism; and Hassan omits to consider the implications of disarticulation. Attentiveness to the silences accompanying, if not directly engendered by and sustaining certain critical theories and their apparatus has, in part, influenced the structure and methodology employed by this thesis. It is hoped that by such a widespread examination of the motif's application, its occurrence as an effect of this particular discourse—a sign of its omissions and occlusions—can be discerned and, to some degree, delimited.

What is beyond the scope of this project, but in need of future analysis, is the idiom adopted to communicate silence in each fictional and theoretical discourse. The mode by which silence is connoted female in Western culture is briefly registered in Chapter Three. Norman O. Brown's construal of the motif is emblematic of this proclivity: 'The virgin womb of the imagination in which the word becomes flesh is silence; and she remains a virgin' (*Body*, 264). However, further work is required into the way in which silence is racially encoded. Language and silence are interchangeably associated with darkness and light depending upon the critical agenda. This loaded language is especially apparent in the literary critical studies of the mid-twentieth century voicing art's discontent with language. A few examples will serve to signal the need for such an investigation. Steiner juxtaposes literature that embraces silence with other more spiritual appeals to non-verbal communication. Accordingly, literature which turns to silence 'borders not on radiance or music, but on night' ('Poet',

66). Similarly, Blanchot elects a discourse of darkness and light to express the absence of language. In 'Literature and the Right to Death', literature's concern with the silence of material existence, its deadness, is connected with darkness which is invested 'with aimless passion, with lawless violence, with everything in the world that seems to perpetuate the refusal to come into the world' ('Right to Death', 386). Sontag appropriates a rhetoric of bondage and liberation to disclose modern art's alienation from language, history, and consciousness: 'To compensate for this ignominious enslavement to history, the artist exalts himself with the dream of a wholly ahistorical, and therefore unalienated, art' ('Aesthetics', 15). Such formulations need to be examined further to appraise the degree to which Western culture's conceptions of 'race' and nation inform ideas and enunciations of language and silence.

A topological analysis brings these issues to light, and, in so doing, indicates the need for a cultural-historical inquiry into the full implications of such ideologically charged idioms. The recurrence of Western cultural discourses' election of a gendered and raced language when referring to silence highlights the urgency of declining to view them purely as products of their own internal forces and logics. It is clear that, rather, they are intricately caught up in the network of cultures, 'with those hidden traditions both residual and emergent, that are global or at least transnational and international in nature.'⁶ Silence has been seen to possess, in this thesis, a certain synthesizing force linking heterogeneous texts. Yet, at the same time as registering the existence of a relatively coherent cultural phenomenon—a preoccupation with silence—

⁶ Paul Gilroy, 'Cultural Studies and Ethnic Absolutism', in *Cultural Studies*, ed. by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 187-198 (p. 193).

attention needs to be given to the instances of its disruption. At the margins of the phenomenon observed lies a pervasive and discontinuous culture, one which is characterized by dispersion and subjugation. The culture of silence outlined here, therefore, points towards the existence of other groups whose conception of silence has, thus far, not been considered but will provide the topic of a subsequent project.⁷

Despite the fact that this thesis is primarily a synchronic study of silence, the counterposition of fictional and theoretical texts from different moments in the twentieth century exposes a historical development. This is a progression from the motif's adoption as a discreet expressive device to its institution as a cultural topos: for example, from its implicit role in *Lord Jim* to reveal the subject's increasing sense of alienation in language to Blanchot's explicit promulgation of silence as the condition towards which the writer must aspire. There is a noticeable development from the experience of discomfiture in the face of silence as evidenced in, amongst others, Conrad's and James's novels, to the active adoption of it in reaction to the perceived devaluation of language. A particularly salient illustration of such a response is Brown's assignment to silence of a redemptive role, where it can operate to restore language and consciousness from its atrophied and corrupted state. The analysis of such a constellation of discourses suggests that the motif is ascribed an increasingly reified role in the twentieth century. Beckett's *Trilogy* offers a narrative expression of this cultural tendency. The final novel, *The Unnamable*, institutes silence as the speaking subject's desire, and goal, at the same time as it performs

⁷ Paul Gilroy's conception of the black Atlantic as a diasporic culture, as articulated in *The Black Atlantic*, has informed the necessity of contextualizing this study of silence.

its impossibility: 'I'll wake, in the silence, and never sleep again, it will be I, or dream, dream again, dream of a silence, a dream silence, full of murmurs, I don't know, that's all words, never wake, that's all words, there's nothing else.'⁸

Whilst such an explicit historical development in the status accorded to the motif must be recognized and is in fact further exposed to view by virtue of a synchronic and topological methodology, an account of its qualitative shifts as a discursive resource from decade to decade would far exceed the limits of this thesis. It is the 'lateral' expansiveness of the role it has played as a cultural repertoire, extending as it has across the traditional boundaries between fictional and theoretical discourses, that commands the attention here. In both such modes, a distinction can be drawn between an interest in silence as a thematic motif and a recourse to silence for the production of certain discursive effects. Its role within each formulation differs, along with the meanings granted to it, depending upon the particularities of the text's agenda. The conspicuousness of silence in critical and literary theory of the mid-twentieth-century, exemplified by Blanchot, Brown, Sontag, Steiner, and Hassan, must be distinguished from—and counterpointed with—more subtle instances of its utilization. Comparison of work by Blanchot and Benjamin provides an illustration of this discrimination. For Blanchot, silence has a conspicuous thematic and conceptual role: he is alert to a tradition of silence within literature, exemplified by Mallarmé, and, further, accords to silence expressive and philosophic functions. By instituting 'silence and nothingness' as 'the essence of literature, "the Thing Itself"', Blanchot is able to give voice to art's privileged relation to, and disclosure of, Being ('Right

⁸ Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, in *Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, pp. 293-418 (p. 418).

to Death', 366). In Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' silence is not explicitly formulated but is implicit in his articulation of the historically repressed:

For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth.) ('Theses', 247)

Silent sites within the historical text are charged with a disruptive and transformative capacity. Silence is therefore understood to be a determinable phenomenon and a conceptual tool. Both Blanchot's and Benjamin's formulations demonstrate the motif's resourcefulness: its expressive possibilities and its mobilization for exigent purposes; and, by its use in widely divergent discourses, culturally, historically, and politically, its mobility is also evinced. However, the motif's role as a conceptual and expressive resource, its functionality, has to-date been largely omitted from critical analysis. This omission is especially significant in a century in which, post 1960, silence comes to occupy a status akin to that of a cultural topos.

As a result of the extent of silence's usage—its increasingly dramatic narrativization and its multifarious adoption within theory—questions arise as to whether the force of its meaning is mitigated. Can the motif be adopted for the array of fictional and theoretical purposes exhibited without losing the power of its signification? Does the fact that it can be employed for apparently mutually exclusive theoretical purposes—'social' and 'ontological'—depotentiate it and, subsequently, the discourses employing it? For example, antagonisms exist

between 'social' theory intent on revealing particular silenced groups and poststructural thought's tendency to assert that all subjects are muted by language; if all subjects are muted how can those silenced as a consequence of oppression be articulated, 'described', and the conditions causing such disarticulation be comprehended? If silence is a condition of language itself, is its force for specific radical and transformative purposes diminished? The speculative answers to such questions may provide an insight into the conceptual role of the motif in the current century. It is possible that the extent of silence's usage in the twentieth century has circumscribed its resonance. If this logic is to be followed, might the disclosure of the multiform manner by which it has been applied in the twentieth century presage its dynamic inevitable dissolution in the twenty-first century?

Silence has been a major twentieth-century discursive resource possessed of manifold potential functions, and—as the evidence of the array of voices bespeaking it outside the anglophone world suggests—may prove to be a feature of Western culture at large. It provides a notable reserve of concepts and strategies for both fiction and theory and—though theorists make use of the motif as though it did have particularity—its value and import seems to lie precisely in that resourcefulness or plenitude of energy and intimation, rather than in any intrinsic characteristic it might be considered to possess.

Abbreviations

Fiction

<i>Absalom</i>	Faulkner, William, <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>
<i>Acts</i>	Woolf, Virginia, <i>Between the Acts</i>
<i>Agent</i>	Conrad, Joseph, <i>The Secret Agent</i>
<i>Awakening</i>	Chopin, Kate, <i>The Awakening</i>
'Bartleby'	Melville, Herman, 'Bartleby, The Scrivener'
<i>Dalloway</i>	Woolf, Virginia, <i>Mrs Dalloway</i>
<i>Darkness</i>	Conrad, Joseph, <i>Heart of Darkness</i>
<i>Heat</i>	Bowen, Elizabeth, <i>The Heat of the Day</i>
<i>Howards</i>	Forster, E. M., <i>Howards End</i>
<i>Mansfield</i>	Austen, Jane, <i>Mansfield Park</i>
<i>Mawr</i>	Lawrence, D. H., <i>St Mawr</i>
<i>North</i>	Bowen, Elizabeth, <i>To the North</i>
<i>Passage</i>	Forster, E. M., <i>A Passage to India</i>
<i>Sacred</i>	James, Henry, <i>The Sacred Fount</i>
<i>Screw</i>	James, Henry, <i>The Turn of the Screw</i>
'Silence'	Poe, Edgar Allan, 'Silence: A Fable'
<i>Their Eyes</i>	Hurston, Zora Neale, <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>
<i>Tristram</i>	Sterne, Laurence, <i>The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy</i>
'Wallpaper'	Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, 'The Yellow Wallpaper'
<i>Waves</i>	Woolf, Virginia, <i>The Waves</i>

Literary Criticism and Theory

'Aesthetics'	Sontag, Susan, 'The Aesthetics of Silence', in <i>Styles of Radical Will</i>
<i>Benjamin</i>	Eagleton, Terry, <i>Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism</i>
<i>Black Looks</i>	hooks, bell, <i>Black Looks: Race and Representation</i>
'Blank Page'	Mucci, Clara, 'The Blank Page as a Lacanian "Object a": Silence, Women's Words, Desire, and Interpretation Between Literature and Psychoanalysis'
<i>Body</i>	Brown, Norman O., <i>Love's Body</i>
'Colonial Discourse'	Parry, Benita, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse'
<i>Concepts</i>	Lacan, Jacques, <i>The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis</i>
'Confabulations'	Kazan, Francesca, 'Confabulations in <i>A Passage to India</i> '
<i>Critique</i>	Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, <i>A Critique of Postcolonial Reason</i>
'Crown'	Lawrence, D. H., 'The Crown', in <i>Phoenix II</i>
<i>Culture,</i>	Bhabha, Homi K., <i>The Location of Culture</i>
'Death'	Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author', in <i>Image Music Text</i>
<i>Desire</i>	Kristeva, Julia, <i>Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art</i>
'Dread'	Blanchot, Maurice, 'From Dread to Language', in <i>The Station Hill Blanchot Reader</i>
<i>Ego</i>	Lacan, Jacques, <i>The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis</i>
'Elliptical'	Matthews, John T., 'The Elliptical Nature of <i>Sanctuary</i> '
'Essential Solitude'	Blanchot, Maurice, 'The Essential Solitude', in <i>The Station Hill Blanchot Reader</i>
'Feminist Criticism'	Showalter, Elaine, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness'

- 'Foreword' Schulte-Sasse, Jochen, 'Foreword: Theory of Modernism Versus Theory of the Avant-Garde'
- 'Form' Eagleton, Terry, 'Form, Ideology, and *The Secret Agent*', in *Against the Grain*
- 'Fuchs' Benjamin, Walter, 'Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian', in *One Way Street and Other Writings*
- Grammatology* Derrida, Jacques, *Of Grammatology*
- 'Haiti' Godden, Richard, '*Absalom, Absalom!*, Haiti and Labor History: Reading Unreadable Revolutions'
- Horror* Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*
- 'Ideological Form' Balibar, Etienne, and Pierre Macherey, 'On Literature as an Ideological Form'
- Ideology* Eagleton, Terry, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*
- Literature* Hassan, Ihab, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett*
- Madness* Foucault, Michel, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*
- 'Mallarmé' Blanchot, Maurice, 'Mallarmé's Experience', in *The Space of Literature*
- Margins* Derrida, Jacques, *Margins of Philosophy*
- 'Mules to Muliebrity' Maurykiewicz, Julie, 'From Mules to Muliebrity: Speech and Silence in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*'
- 'Object as a Limit' Zizek, Slavoj, 'The Object as a Limit of Discourse: Approaches to the Lacanian Real'
- 'On Heidegger' Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 'On Heidegger on Being and Dread', in *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy*
- Orpheus* Hassan, Ihab, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*
- 'Oscillation' Kristeva, Julia, 'Oscillation Between Power and Denial'
- 'Pan' Lawrence, D. H. , 'Pan in America', in *Phoenix*

<i>Paracriticisms</i>	Hassan, Ihab, <i>Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times</i>
<i>Playing</i>	Morrison, Toni, <i>Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination</i>
'Poet'	'Silence and the Poet', in <i>Language and Silence: Essays, 1958-1966</i>
<i>Political</i>	Jameson, Fredric, <i>The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act</i>
'Politics of Fiction'	Carby, Hazel, 'The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk'
<i>Production</i>	Macherey, Pierre, <i>A Theory of Literary Production</i>
<i>Reading</i>	Laurence, Patricia Oudek, <i>The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition</i>
'Retreat'	Steiner, George, 'The Retreat from the Word', in <i>Language and Silence: Essays, 1958-1966</i>
<i>Revolution</i>	Kristeva, Julia, <i>Revolution in Poetic Language</i>
<i>Rhetoric</i>	Chaitin, Gilbert D., <i>Rhetoric and Culture in Lacan</i>
'Right to Death'	Blanchot, Maurice, 'Literature and the Right to Death', in <i>The Station Hill Blanchot Reader</i>
<i>Speculum</i>	Irigaray, Luce, <i>Speculum of the Other Woman</i>
'Storyteller'	Benjamin, Walter, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov', in <i>Illuminations</i>
'Subaltern'	Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'
<i>Subjects</i>	Butler, Judith, <i>Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France</i>
<i>Symbolic</i>	Bourdieu, Pierre, <i>Language and Symbolic Power</i>
'Theses'	Benjamin, Walter, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in <i>Illuminations</i>
<i>This Sex</i>	Irigaray, Luce, <i>This Sex Which is Not One</i>
<i>Tractatus</i>	Wittgenstein, Ludwig, <i>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</i>

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- Very, Little* Critchley, Simon, *Very Little...Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*
- Violence* Barker, Francis, *The Culture of Violence: Tragedy and History*
- 'Women's Writing' Gauthier, Xaviere, 'Is There Such a Thing as Women's Writing?'
- Woolf* Minow-Pinkney, Makiko, *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject*
- Writing* Derrida, Jacques, *Writing and Difference*
- Yearning* hooks, bell, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*

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