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**The Silence at the Interface:
Culture and Narrative in Selected Twentieth-Century Southern African
Novels in English**

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The primary intention of this study is to establish the theoretical significance of silence within the sphere of the twentieth-century Southern African novel in English. Clearly a feature of recent writing, silence is less overtly thematised in earlier work. Since relatively little critical and theoretical attention has been paid to silence as a positive phenomenon, however, modes of reading it are sought within the broader sphere of the social sciences, and specifically its tradition of social constructionism. Care is taken to address the pressures of the local context, identified in terms of the postcolonial paradigm as relating to language and to culture. A deliberate theoretical innovation is the renunciation of the trope of penetration in favour of the notion of an interface between intact language-culture systems, given an understanding of culture as existing between subjects in relations of power. Fictional narrative which addresses cross-culturality is thus read as a process of cultural translation, and the volitional deployment of silence as an act of resistance to its power. The significance of language is registered in the use of speech-act theory, in the insistence on meaning as generated in spatially and temporally situated conversation, and in the exploration of the influence of pronominal relations on identity. Emerging from my investigation is a recognition of the measure offered by silence of the autonomy of character as subject, and a corresponding recognition of the constitutive capacity of the reader to site the power of narration amongst the polyphonic voices within the culture of the text. The postcolonial paradigm indicates the need for a regional rather than a national perspective; thus the

interfaces considered in the case studies include, in Plaatje's *Mhudi*, orality and literacy, tribal membership and non-sectarianism, Tswana and English; in Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope* the private domain and *apartheid* as public hegemonic discourse, narration as possession, and the tragic as structuring textual relations; and in Head's *Maru* the constitution of a postcolonial identity that resists and transcends the discursive hostility of racism, and the dislocation, displacement and alienation of exilic refuge from *apartheid*.

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The whole dissertation, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work.

The reference system I have used is a modified version of the Harvard system. A comprehensive list of references is to be found at the end of the dissertation. This includes only works cited and so does not represent the extended reading undertaken for this study.

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Gift

You tell me that silence
is nearer to peace than poems
but if for my gift
I brought you silence
(for I know silence)
you would say
This is not silence
this is another poem
and you would hand it back to me.

(Cohen 1969:24)

For it is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity.

(Bhabha 1990:320)

THE AUTHORITY OF SILENCE

1.1 *Foe*: The Story of Silence

In J.M. Coetzee's fifth novel, *Foe* (1986), the issue of silence is foregrounded explicitly. The frequent use of the word within the narrative is echoed at a structural level as the character-narrator Susan Barton seeks to find ways of telling her story of shipwreck on an island, a story which includes the slave Friday who is mute because tongueless. As Williams asks, in an important article on the novel, "How can she find the story of silence by using words, consciousness, language or even a novel?" (1988:34). In conversation with *Foe*, the professional writer whom she tracks down on her return to London with Friday, and who she hopes will tell her story, Susan herself comments, "if the story seems stupid, that is only because it so doggedly holds its silence. The shadow whose lack you feel is there: it is the loss of Friday's tongue" (1986:117). An argument ensues between the two about how the story is to be told, and she asserts, "You err most tellingly in failing to distinguish between my silence and the silences of a being such as Friday the silence of Friday is a helpless silence. He is the child of his silence, a child unborn, a child waiting to be born that cannot be born. Whereas the silence I keep regarding Bahia and other matters is chosen and purposeful: it is my own silence" (1986:121-122).

The silence which Susan insists is "chosen and purposeful" is by no means as straightforward as she believes. For one thing, it is at least part of the reason why her story constitutes what Carusi has termed a "failed narrative" (1989:135). Susan is unable to induce *Foe* to accept her terms of reference, to write her story the way she wants him to. He refuses to respect her silence about the four remaining "parts" he sees as constituting her story (1986:174), pressing her again and again for details. In a debate that becomes quite trenchant, *Foe* relates to her another story, that of an Irishwoman on the brink of death whose 'confession' is cut short "over all her protestations" by the priest called to shrive her:

"You are free to give to the story what application you will", Foe replied. "To me the moral of the story is that there comes a time when we must give reckoning of ourselves to the world, and then forever after be content to hold our peace."

"To me the moral is that he has the last word who disposes over the greatest force ..." (1986:124).

In Foe's view, the time for volitional silence is after and not during our "reckoning of ourselves" - the story we "give" to the world. Susan should, he implies, be content to surrender her story and then to hold her peace. As Susan points out, however, his formulation conveniently overlooks the fact that giving reckoning is not the end of the story: the "last word" is, ultimately, a matter of power. In the Irishwoman's case, the 'end of the story' is execution and this fate is the reason why she tries to prevent the priest from bringing her confession to a close. Silence, for her, is quite literally death. In Susan's case, Foe's resistance to telling her story the way she wishes it to be told represents a denial of her narrative authority; the consequence is not death, but a failure to achieve ontological status as a character within her story. In Dovey's words, "Susan Barton's story is the story of a woman seeking to authorize her own representation" (1989b:122). It is a consequence she circumvents, ultimately, by electing to tell the story herself.

Susan has touched on the matter of power in the distinction between her own "chosen and purposeful" silence, and the silence of Friday, which is "helpless". Fighting consciously (both against Foe and through Foe) to secure ontological status for herself, she nevertheless refuses, for much of the novel, to accord such status to Friday. Thus, while she acknowledges the power of Friday's silence, she insistently conceptualises it as avolitional, non-agentic:

"Mr Foe ... when I lived in your house I would sometimes lie awake upstairs listening to the pulse of blood in my ears and to the silence from Friday below, a silence that rose up the stairway like smoke, like a welling of black smoke. Before long I could not breathe, I would feel I was stifling in my bed. My lungs, my heart, my head were full of black smoke. I had to spring up and open the curtains and put my head outside and breathe fresh air and see for myself that there were stars still in the sky" (1986:118).

As it is described here, the "silence" of Friday exerts sufficient power over Susan to force her into a string of actions designed to buttress her connection with the 'world out there' against the claustrophobia that threatens to choke it: she gets up, opens the curtains, puts her head outside to breathe fresh air and look for stars. Powerful as it is, Friday's silence can be resisted successfully by opening the window into the world outside. It can be resisted in this way because Friday's silence is, unlike hers, not his "own": it is not volitional. This is how, for most of the novel, Susan sees Friday's silence. However much it may become her focus and her preoccupation (as Dovey has pointed out it comes to supplant her own story, 1989b:124), the threat it poses can be contained.

At times Susan has to confront an alternative possibility, however. She describes watching Friday dance, for example, thus:

Tears came to my eyes, I am ashamed to say; all the elation of my discovery that through the medium of music I might at last converse with Friday was dashed, and bitterly I began to recognize that it might not be mere dullness that kept him shut up in himself, nor the accident of the loss of his tongue, nor even an incapacity to distinguish speech from babbling, but a disdain for intercourse with me (1986:98).

If Friday's silence is indeed "a disdain for intercourse" with her, it is elective. And if Susan is hurt by his rejection of her, she is influenced more significantly by the encroachment of this rejection upon her 'project': her conceptualisation, through narrating them, of events, of her history. Friday does not exist simply as a backdrop to the play of her interpretation, he is not the *tabula rasa* upon which she can inscribe their reality. Indeed, in a subsequent response to Susan's attempt to teach him to write, Friday cleans the slate himself.

I reached out to take the slate, to show it to Foe, but Friday held tight to it. "Give! Give me the slate, Friday!" I commanded. Whereupon, instead of obeying me, Friday put three fingers into his mouth and wet them with spittle and rubbed the slate clean (1986:147).

If Friday must be taught to make "writing of a kind" (1986:152), the act of erasure is his own. If Friday must be given the word, he nevertheless retains the ability to choose not to 'speak' it.

It is upon the intentionality of Friday's silence that Susan's own narrative flounders. As a first-person retrospective, her narration is subsequent to her functioning as a character in her story. Her story is, amongst other things, an attempt to render, to give meaning to, to do justice to this functioning, and so to constitute herself as a character. To the extent that such constitution depends upon the silence of Friday, her narrative, too, is predicated upon it. Yet Susan must, as I have shown, face the possibility that her reading of this silence is inaccurate. Friday's silence can only remain the subject of her narrative so long as it is a "helpless" silence, because as soon as it is recognised as volitional it becomes interactive, reactive, implicating her power over him as part of the condition of its existence. The confrontation with alternate possibilities at the diegetic level (to use Rimmon-Kenan's term, 1983:92) thus undermines her narrative because, as Foe has done at the extradiegetic level, it challenges her authority: her right to tell the story.

Pivotal as Friday's silence is to the power relations that inhere in the novel, we can infer from it some of the political implications of the narrative. As the subject of her story, Friday is also subject to the process of her narration: Susan's narrative authority derives from the subjection of her character, Friday. Yet if Friday's silence is volitional then he is himself a subject, autonomous, entire unto himself, and therefore antipathetic to her attempt to turn him into a character in her story. The relation that exists between narrator and character, in this case, is an oppositional, an adversarial relation. It also mirrors, in important ways, the relation between herself, as character, and the narrator she initially chose to tell her story, Foe. In that instance the opposition was based on his masculine authority and her feminine resistance to the terms of his willingness to narrate; in this case, the narrative status of the relationship between Susan as narrator and Friday as character serves to underline the political status of the relationship between Susan as Englishwoman and Friday as African slave:

Long and hard I stared at him, till he lowered his eyelids and shut his eyes. Was it possible for anyone, however benighted by a lifetime of dumb servitude, to be as stupid as Friday seemed? Could it be that somewhere within him he was laughing at my efforts to bring him nearer to a state of speech? I reached out and took him by the chin and turned his face toward me. His eyelids opened. Somewhere in the deepest recesses of those black pupils was there a spark of mockery? I could not see it. But if it were there, would it not be an African spark, dark to my English eye? (1986:146).

The insight that such a moment brings to Susan has to do not only with a recognition of her power (and Friday's subjection), but also with a recognition of its inefficacy. However much she might exert her will over him - by reaching out and taking him by the chin and turning his face towards her - her attempt to tell her story is ultimately frustrated by the possibility of the "spark", in the "deepest recesses of those black pupils", that she cannot reach. In Marais's reading, much of the narrative process in *Foe* has to do with freedom (1989a:192). He represents what he terms the "equivalences and escape routes" in the novel in the form of an "equation":

<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>FATHER</u>	=	<u>AUTHOR</u>	=	<u>MASTER</u>	=	<u>READER</u>
OBJECT	CHILD		CHARAC-		SLAVE		TEXT
			TER/STORY				

C escapes F S escapes A Sl escapes M T escapes R.

Susan chooses Foe to tell her story, but then disagrees with him about the terms of its telling. Unlike Susan, Friday does not choose his narrator. What is common to both, however, is their resistance to the process of being narrated. As Susan escapes the control of Foe, her intended narrator, so Friday escapes the control of Susan, his unintended narrator. Hence the 'failure' of the narrative: its "escape" from its readers.

The example of Coetzee's novel has been deliberately chosen in order to illuminate the concerns of the study that will follow. As a highly self-conscious work of fiction it problematises many issues that are less explicitly significant in other and earlier works of Southern African fiction. The cultural interfaces to be found in the three-way

relationship that exists between Friday, Susan, and Foe include cross-racial relations, colonial-imperial relations, and cross-gender relations; and through the play with and upon narrative interfaces, Coetzee's consideration of silence comes to grips also with matters of narrative authority and power. It is not my intention in this study to conduct a comprehensive survey of silence in the 'twentieth-century Southern African novel in English'. Before moving on to a theoretical introduction, however, I would like to contextualise the discussion of *Foe* - and indeed of the case studies that will follow in the second part of this dissertation - by essaying briefer considerations of other instances of the functioning of silence in texts within this domain of our literature.

1.2 Some Other Silences

Njabulo Ndebele's *Fools* was published in 1983, three years before *Foe*. Written in exile, it provides the retrospective perspective of a black writer on township life in South Africa during the 1960s. The narrative offers a crucial concatenation, on two important occasions, of silence and laughter. The relationship between Teacher Zamani and his wife is characterised by his silence about his rape, several years before, of Mimi, a pupil of his, and the subsequent birth of a child. Associated with this illicit 'fertility' (1983:196), as he terms it, is the impoverishment of his marriage. At the beginning of the novella he meets the young Zani, Mimi's brother, who, having completed his education in Swaziland, has returned to Charterston township "to bring light where there has been darkness" (1983:164). Zamani is forced to rescue Zani later in the day when he is stabbed in a drunken argument, and to take him home. He subsequently asks his wife Nosipho, who is a nurse, to look at Zani's wound. An argument ensues:

"... Carry your own sin, but do not use me as your holy water."

"I thought we had long put that matter behind us", I said.

"When we never even talked about it? The only language I recognised in you was your degeneration", she said.

"What you do not realise is that I degenerated a long time ago. It was all inside. Then it came out", I said.

"What do you mean?"

What meaning could I give her? She was doomed never to know. I had cared enough for her all those years never to let her know. The secret lay in the breasts of a young woman; in the letter she wrote to her brother, and in the restless mind of her brother (1983:199-200).

Although she recognises the "language" of his "degeneration" ("the women ... the drinking ... night after night of absences"), she has plainly not noticed the 'silence' he has maintained about himself, the secret he has kept from her because he cares for her. Her perception of his degeneracy is corroborated by his own scrutiny of himself naked before getting into bed, and his recognition of the "truth" of her prescription, "To sympathise with you would be to destroy you further. No. You should be given what you have most desired: contempt. And then your greatest salvation: the contempt of your woman" (1983:200).

Her words, he says, are like "the truth of rain falling after a long drought. But the drought had been too long: very little would grow again". Nosipho is thus unable by herself to bring about his "salvation". It is the effect of the return of Zani that the language of degeneration should be replaced by a language of regeneration, and that this should happen most crucially in his disclosure of Zamani's secret to Nosipho. Once she knows, she challenges Zamani: "'Why didn't you tell me?' she asked. 'All those years! I could have left.' I have never been able to face crucial moments. I just kept quiet. 'I could have left,' said Nosipho again" (1983:257). The glass of water she brings echoes the image of rain, and he calls her gesture "the first act of kindness in years that Nosipho had shown towards me which was not done out of a sense of duty". She goes on to recognise, explicitly, "But I will not leave now ... I have invested too many years of my life in what has all along been the inexplicable discomfort of living with you. No, I will not leave now" (1983:258). It is at this point that his continuing quiet gives way to laughter:

Yes, I have never been able to face crucial moments. Instead, I suddenly felt like laughing. I wanted to laugh very deeply. Not because there was something funny, but because laughter would express total understanding. Crucial moments have always deprived me of words, and I've always resorted to visions And I laughed. I went into a great fit of laughter. And tears started flowing from my eyes. And

once, when I wiped them off, I saw a smile on Nosipho's face, and she was shaking her head (1983:258).

The second occasion on which silence is replaced by laughter occurs when Zamani goes again to rescue Zani from the consequences of his outspoken political idealism - in this instance the attempt to break up "the picnic in the wood at Rand Nigel" on "Dingane's Day", the "Day of the Covenant" against which Zani has earlier been protesting. Zamani stumbles into a confrontation between three people: the principal of his school, who has organised the picnic, Zani, who is challenging the principal's exploitation in charging full-day prices at 4:30 p.m., and a Boer whose car the principal accidentally stonks instead of Zani. The Boer's response is to pull out his whip, and, frustrated in his efforts to beat Zani or the principal, to turn it upon Zamani. Zamani recognises that the Boer's "absolute power", his "essence of contemptuousness" is little more than a veneer: although the Boer is forced to 'appeal' to his voice, "his whip was all there was to him ... no amount of violence against me would give him any self-respect". The logic of the confrontation is that if Zamani can beat the whip he can beat the man. And this he does:

I offered no resistance as he lashed at me. I just stared at him. I struggled hard to absorb the searing pain, trying to subject my body to the total control of my mind. I wanted to scream. It was as if my skin was peeling off and boiling water was being thrown over the exposed, lacerated inner flesh. But my silence was my salvation; the silence of years of trying to say something without much understanding; the silence of desperate action. This would be the first silence that would carry meaning I felt in the depths of me, the beginning of the kind of laughter that seemed to explain everything. And when the sound of laughter came out, it filled my ears, shutting out the pain even further. It seemed to fill out the sky like a pounding drum. And that is when the Boer started weeping (1983:276).

Although the regeneration Zamani achieves is significantly qualified by subtle correspondences between himself and the white man, and his implied reconciliation with his wife by his recognition earlier that he doesn't love her (1983:240), the silences that have been described are positive in bringing the story to a hopeful resolution. Ndebele's focus

is the relations that Zamani has within his community, rather than those he has with white people outside it. Since Zamani's silence has offered him a mode of dealing with his degeneracy, the shift from silence to laughter, particularly in the encounter with the white man but also in the conversation with his wife, serves the redemptive function of enacting his reclamation of self-esteem. This function marks a substantial contrast with the silence in Coetzee's *Foe*, which is characterised not only by the isolation of its characters and their dislocation out of community, but also a stasis which debars prospects of transformation or liberation into meaningful human relationship.

By contrast with both, the silence at the heart of Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* is one associated with death, both of the white woman, Mary, through whose consciousness much of the novel is focalised, and of the black man who kills her. Published some thirty-five years before *Fools*, the novel is set during the 'high colonialism' of the 1930s and 1940s in rural Southern Rhodesia. Although the story announces itself as a "murder mystery", the "mystery" is one experienced rather by its readers than by the community in which the murder occurs:

they did not discuss the murder; that was the most extraordinary thing about it. It was as if they had a sixth sense which told them everything there was to be known, although the three people in a position to explain the facts said nothing The most interesting thing about the whole affair was this silent, unconscious agreement (1950:10).

Given the structure of the novel - Chapter 1 stands as what Rimmon-Kenan calls a prolepsis (1983:46), which specifies the ending to which the action will come - it is the quest of the narrative to explore the mystery. Strikingly, however, this exploration is directed towards the consciousness and the memory and the past experiences of the victim of the murder, Mary, and not its perpetrator, Moses. In fact, it is the silence of Moses which constitutes the story as a mystery despite the exploration it undertakes and the revelations it makes about Mary. Although he is mission-educated, and although considerable intimacy develops between him and Mary in the close confines of the house in which he is servant, he speaks on very few occasions, and then briefly, and ambivalently, given the reactions of those who hear him. When he

offers to take care of Dick who is suffering from fever, Moses is "wounded, even reproachful" at her attempted refusal, and "the half-humorous, half-reproachful voice left her disarmed against him" (1950:196). Towards the end of the novel, by contrast, their neighbour Charlie Slatter is appalled at the "rudeness", "surly indifference", "self-satisfaction" and "conscious power" with which Moses speaks to Mary (1950:219). The intervening consciousness of Charlie (and subsequently that of Tony Marston, the English assistant Charlie brings in) is important in admitting an outsider into the closed world of the relations between Mary, Dick, her husband, and Moses, and hence defamiliarising what have become accepted modes of interaction between the three.

Yet if the range in interpretations given Moses's speech alludes to an interiority at stark odds with the silence in which he generally contains himself, the patterns of focalisation in the novel offer approaches to this interiority which are scarcely less ambivalent. His absence of speech on the two crucial occasions of violence in the novel allows only mediated access to his consciousness, and, significantly, it is Mary through whom these events are focalised. On the first the violence is enacted by her against him:

And she saw in his eyes that sullen resentment, and - what put the finishing touch to it - amused contempt. Involuntarily she lifted her whip and brought it down across his face in a vicious swinging blow Then she saw him make a sudden movement, and recoiled, terrified; she thought he was going to attack her. But he only wiped the blood off his face with a big hand that shook a little (1950:147).

Although, in her words, "the man looked at her with an expression that turned her stomach liquid with fear", he says nothing, and obeys her instruction to get back to work. The second occasion of violence occurs when, at the end of the novel, he kills her:

She felt she had only to move forward, to explain, to appeal, and the terror would be dissolved. She opened her mouth to speak; and, as she did so, saw his hand, which held a long curving shape, lifted above his head; and she knew it would be too late. All her past slid away, and her mouth, opened in appeal, let out the beginning of a scream, which was stopped by a black wedge of hand inserted between her

jaws. But the scream continued, in her stomach, choking her; and she lifted her hands, clawlike, to ward him off. And then the bush avenged itself; that was her last thought. The trees advanced in a rush, like beasts, and the thunder was the noise of their coming. As the brain at last gave way, collapsing in a ruin of horror, she saw, over the big arm that forced her head back against the wall, the other arm descending. Her limbs sagged under her, the lightning leapt out from the dark, and darted down the plunging steel (1950:254).

Focalisation shifts, at the point of her silencing by death, to Moses, allowing the narrative to impute various emotions and purposes to him. Yet its attempted invocation of his consciousness stops short of anything approaching certainty. Although the occasion is said to be "his final moment of triumph, a moment so perfect and complete that it took the urgency from thoughts of escape, leaving him indifferent", the novel ends in thwarted speculation:

Though what thoughts of regret, or pity, or perhaps even wounded human affection were compounded with the satisfaction of his completed revenge, it is impossible to say. For, when he had gone perhaps a couple of hundred yards through the soaking bush he stopped, turned aside, and leaned against a tree on an anheap. And there he would remain, until his pursuers, in their turn, came to find him (1950:256).

The arrest which ensues is focalised through the consciousness of Tony Marston, the outsider. Although, in the estimate of the narrator, "For the sake of those few lucid moments, and his present half-confused knowledge, it can be said that Tony was the person present who had the greatest responsibility that day", we also learn that "He could not even begin to imagine the mind of a native" (1950:33). It is a combination of such failure of imagination and the silence Moses maintains about himself which contains him within the "murder mystery".

Moses' silence is thus differentiated from Friday's in being associated more explicitly with agentic power. On the one hand he is able, by murder, to terminate the relation of servitude in which he is located for much of the text. On the other his evident refusal of narrative access to his story echoes the autonomy which has, paradoxically, characterised this relation of servitude 'within' the text. If he goes to his death he takes his story with him.

Given these two examples, we might begin to identify and investigate the functioning of silence in a range of texts by black and white writers, by women and by men. In other novels published during the 1980s, for example, we might recognise the silence that Tambu, narrator-protagonist of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1989), feels she must accord her uncle Babamakuru, despite the severe illness of Nyasha, her friend and his daughter. We might note the ways in which music and silence interact, in Ménan du Plessis's *Longlive* (1989) to evoke the "silent extra part" of the fourth member of a 'quartet' who share a house in Cape Town, and whose suicide at the end of the novel is left unfixed, like "a melody, like another voice, breathing through the piece. As though it had a soul" (1989:58). We might consider the silence of the black women, in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981), who are confronted with the presence of Maureen Smales and her family to whom July has extended refuge; or the elliptic communication between Maureen and July, and subsequently between herself and her own family; or indeed the 'silence' into which she disappears as the helicopters circle above her, ambivalent augurs of fate or rescue. Looking to earlier periods, we might notice the silence of Mabongo, in Modikwe Dikobe's *The Marabi Dance* (1973), when approached by his employer to return to the job from which he has been dismissed, or Martha's silent resistance towards her parents over the matter of the marriage they have arranged for her. We might recall the silence in which Willieboy dies in the back of a police van in Alex la Guma's *A Walk in the Night* (1967), or the inarticulacy with which Michael Adonis explodes into violence. We might think of Paul's injunction to Selena "not to tell anybody" about their sexual relationship in Daphne Rooke's *Mittee* (1951). We might explore the secrecy Andrina maintains about herself, in Pauline Smith's *The Beadle* (1926), as she packs for the Englishman who has seduced and then abandons her, or indeed the long silence Aalst Vlokman maintains about his fatherhood.

Two important qualifications should emerge from this brief survey: first, that whereas silence can be recognised as a feature of texts in our literature it is by no means exclusive to this literature, and

second, that a study of silence need not restrict itself to texts which use the term or invoke the concept explicitly. In order to emphasise this second point I would like to conclude the survey by considering a text in which the functioning of silence is quite implicit, and which thus sets up points of contrast as well as comparison with Coetzee's novel. Published some sixty years before *Foe*, William Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe* (1926) broke important ground in offering a positive representation of an evidently successful 'miscegenous' relationship in Zululand in the 1920s: that between Zachary Msomi, a Zulu man who is "going to be a parson" (1926:29), and Mabel van der Horst, the Dutch housekeeper of a dissenting widow (1926:28). The ironic counterpart to their relationship is the unconsummated desire felt by Wolfe himself, an Englishman, for Nhliziyombi, a Zulu girl. Three conversations take place between these two. The first occurs on a narrow path in the Native Reserve where Wolfe has taken to walking, after seeing and falling in love with Nhliziyombi:

"Greeting", she said.

"Greeting", I answered. "Where are you going?"

"I am just going."

These words were a formula, but my heart was in torment, and I could hardly keep my hands and lips from hers.

On a sudden impulse I took a gold pin that I wore in my tie, and pinned it to her clothing, where it gleamed in the sun.

"There you are", I said. "There's a present for you."

"Are you giving it?" she asked incredulously.

"It is yours."

She was alarmed at being favoured by a man she had come to know as Chastity, and exclaimed softly:

"Oh, white men!"

Then she ran down the path, checkered with shadows. Nor did she look back (1926:35).

The innocence he then attributes to her is clearly confirmed by her 'incredulity' and 'alarm', and yet her parting comment seems informed by more experience than Wolfe is willing to recognise. The second "slight and ordinary" conversation occurs when she comes to his shop: the "kindness" he notices in her nature then (1926:38) is borne out in the third and final encounter between them:

There was a banana-grove about a mile from the house. That was the place where I happened on Nhliziyombi, not quite by accident, on a warm clear afternoon. I told her that I loved

her intensely, but that my name forbade me to go any further than a confession of my love. I felt a coward. She was puzzled and alarmed at first, but warmed into sympathy. She took my head for a moment between her lean brown hands. We sat in the banana-grove, frankly content, without moving or uttering a word for more than an hour.

It was one of the saddest, happiest days of my life (1926:39).

As we discover at the outset of Wolfe's narrative, he has come home to England, to recount his story to a school-friend, the frame narrator, and then to die. He is thus set in stark contrast with Mabel and Zachary who, together and happy, remain in Africa. The root of Wolfe's failure, it seems to me, is not his "chastity" *per se*, but rather his mode of perception of Nhliziyombi. The descriptions he offers of her are intriguing in two respects: first, that they are almost entirely visual, and second, that they give rise to a great deal of brooding and emotional intensity on his part. She functions, in significant ways, as an icon, onto whom he can project the qualities he finds desirable: "dignity", "taste", "all that beauty (it might be called holiness), that intensity of the old wonderful unknown primitive African life - outside history, outside time, outside science. She was a living image of what has been killed by people like Flesher, by our obscene civilization" (1926:31). The silence in which Nhliziyombi is contained by the narrative (and in which he joins her for "more than an hour") is such that Wolfe only discovers after his profession of love that she is in fact betrothed to her cousin at Hlohloko, and that she will proceed to marry him (1926:40).

Of course such a representation of a black woman is by no means exclusive to Plomer, as this study will go on to show. Before moving on, however, I would like to focus briefly on the counterpoint Plomer's text offers Coetzee's, because it will provide a point of entry into the discussion of postcolonial theory that will follow. Unlike the explicit problematisation of silence in *Foe*, the functioning of silence in this novel is implicit: Turbott Wolfe does not use the term silence in regard to Nhliziyombi, nor does the narrative draw attention to it in other ways. Compared to the self-consciousness and sophistication of Coetzee's postmodern narrative strategy, Plomer's modern one is relatively simple,

despite the frame narrator, and the papers and poems of Friston which are included in 'appendices'. Although both texts make use of first-person narrators, *Turbott Wolfe* offers a reversal of the relations between narrative and gender that we found in Coetzee's novel: in place of Susan Barton, Plomer's narrator is a man, and (in my reading) the significant silence that of a woman, not a man. The points of contact between the two novels are, nonetheless, important. In both instances the narrator attempts to accord meaning to the silence of the 'other', but fails: Susan Barton is perplexed by the physical muteness of Friday, Turbott Wolfe discovers the 'real truth' about Nhliziyombi only after he has both declared his love and decided not to pursue it. In both texts possibilities exist of the characters' deliberate resistance to being narrated: in Nhliziyombi in the privacy of a life of her own despite the narrator's vested interest in her, in Friday in the privacy of his dancing, and his ritual of spreading petals on the water, and in the spark which might exist in the depths of his eye. In both texts the narrators, and the writers, are white, English-speaking, and aligned with colonial power, and the people characterised by silence are black and colonised.

Whereas Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* follows a similar pattern of textual relationship, the pattern is significantly modified, in Ndebele's *Fools*, by the fact that the writer and the narrator-protagonist are both black, and, indeed, that there is no significant black-white relationship within the story. The nature of silence in these four texts is quite varied. Unlike Friday's silence which he is effectively unable to break, Susan in the end tells her own story. Nhliziyombi's silence is associated both with the narrator's iconic construction of her and the self-contained life she goes on to lead. Moses' silent agentic power ends in his death. Zamani's shift from silence to laughter signals the regeneration not only of his self-esteem but also, prospectively, of significant relationships he has within his community.

1.3 Critical Responses to Silence in Our Literature

This brief survey has been conducted in order to indicate both the existence of silence as a feature of our literature, and something of the variation in meaning it can have; hence to provide grounds for the study that follows. Later in this chapter I will come back to these readings in order to establish the significance of the postcolonial paradigm for a theorisation of silence in our literature, and indeed for a delineation of what I mean by 'our literature'. At present, however, I would like to pose a question: given that silence seems to exist as a feature of our literature, what critical attention has been paid it? The answer is, regrettably, not much. Since silence has been an interest of mine over a number of years, I have myself published three articles relevant to my thesis here, and to which reference will later be made: "Paton and the Silence of Stephanie" (1989, on *Too Late the Phalarope*), "The Renunciation of Voice and the Language of Silence: Pauline Smith's 'The Schoolmaster'" (1991), and "Two Sides of Empire: *Heart of Darkness* and *Mhudi*" (1992b). I have quoted in passing from Williams's 1988 article, "Foe: A Story of Silence" which critically established this concern of Coetzee's. Another important source for the conceptualisation of my interest has been McCormick's 1983 "Strangeness and Familiarity in the Little Karoo", a brief but seminal article which considers the accommodations of narrative strategy to the social and economic status of the main characters, and concludes, "speech is not a powerful weapon or tool in the lives of the bywoners, each of whom is characterised explicitly as being silent" (1983:176). Some attention has been paid to silence in other spheres - autobiography (van Wyk Smith 1991) and women's poetry (Lockett 1990; Chapman 1990) - but by far the greater interest has been in language and related issues. Even a casual examination of titles of critical articles for words relating to this sphere produces an impressive list: dialogue (Eglinton 1960, Voss 1990), discourse (Dovey 1989b, Wicomb 1992), expression (Chapman 1988), language (Brink 1992, Coetzee 1981 and 1988, Cornwell 1989, Marais 1989b, Mpe 1992, Ndebele 1986, Nkosi 1981, Wylie 1991), oral influence (Mzamane 1984), talk (Horn 1989), voice (Mzamane 1991), and words (Lockett 1992). This interest is, of course, in line with international trends: in citation indices the category of "silence" features only

rarely, yet interest in language has grown tremendously since the 1960s with the various influences of Continental theory, deconstruction, and linguistics. The interest of postcolonial theory in language will be considered in greater depth later in this chapter, but mention might be made at this point of Bhabha, who has written extensively on "colonial discourse", and Spivak, whose seminal article posed the question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988).

1.4 The Problem of Theory in Our Criticism

As we might recall, Marais found, in the novel *Foe*, the following "equivalences and escape routes", which reflect processes of freedom and control (1989a:192):

<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>FATHER</u>	=	<u>AUTHOR</u>	=	<u>MASTER</u>	=	<u>READER</u>
OBJECT	CHILD		CHARAC-		SLAVE		TEXT
			TER/STORY				

C escapes F S escapes A Sl escapes M T escapes R.

The last of these "routes" reflects Marais's belief that the text escapes the authority of the reader, and alludes, I think, to the 'impossibility' of final knowledge in a postmodern condition. Yet in a study of narrative as performance, Maclean takes up in a rather different way the dynamics of power in reading. She observes:

The advent of the named author, the titled and genre-labelled text, the imprimatur of printing and publication, have all tended to turn the previously fluid relationships of narrative performance into a static relationship of possession. Even Iser [in *The Implied Reader*] sees the reader very much as a puppet whose strings are pulled by the text. Naomi Schor acutely observes that this sense of proprietorship, of owning the text and controlling the rules of the game, has merely passed from the author to the critic in recent years. The most recent studies respond to her demand (1980) that narrative be seen not as a matter of ownership but of negotiation, and concentrate on the interplay between telling and hearing (1988:19).

In the case of *Foe*, the attempt at critical 'ownership' can perhaps be indexed by the seminar hosted, shortly after its publication, by the Department of Theory of Literature at UNISA in Pretoria in March 1988, and the journal volume that ensued, dedicated to exploring if not

identifying the meaning of the novel (*Journal of Literary Studies* 1989 5(2)). The effect of such critical interest has been to privilege and even to impose certain readings of the text; readings that have their roots in imported metropolitan theory. On the one hand, so specific a focus on one novel has tended to isolate it from the body of Coetzee's previous work. On the other, so specific a focus on Coetzee as the postmodernist writer of international standing, as one of a "growing band of international political metafictionists" (Marais 1989a:183), has highlighted his affinities with mid-Atlantic theory at the expense of his connections with the local or regional corpus out of which his concerns have, to some extent at least, come. My contextualisation of Coetzee's concern with silence was an attempt to demonstrate these conceptions; and his own critical work - *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa* (1988) is an obvious case in point - attests to the local aspect of his literary allegiances.

This attempt at critical ownership can perhaps be read as an act of recuperation, given some of the harsh reviews received by *Foe* on publication ("Postmodern Games While Soweto Burns" is one cited by Dovey 1989b:119), and which evidence the difficulties faced by regionally-minded critics in claiming him for their own. At what might be termed the 'metadiegetic' level of critical and theoretical commentary, the political implications of distance and engagement with social realities have been particularly acute: the starting-point of Dovey's Introduction to the NELM Bibliography, for example, is "the question of the political relevance of Coetzee's writing, a question which has been the source of an ongoing debate amongst scholars and critics within South Africa" (1990a:1). It is my impression that the debate is less acute following the publication of *Age of Iron* (1990), which engages rather more directly with South African political realities. Yet my own interest in Coetzee has less to do with the tensions between distance from and engagement with the local context, than the broader significance of his writing (and *Foe* is a particular example) for a positioning of South Africa as a 'postcolony' of the Empire.

These critical responses to *Foe* reflect in important ways a problem that has, certainly in the past, bedevilled criticism in our region, a problem that might help to explain the relative absence of theoretical interest in silence, beyond the metafictional readings of Coetzee that have been mentioned. The emphasis on Coetzee as postmodernist writer of international standing is in line with a trend, in our criticism, of importing theories from Europe and from America and applying them to 'local' texts. Much of the theory that informs critical writing here stems from the works of, for example, Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Frederik Jameson, Jean François Lyotard. This trend has been particularly, though by no means exclusively, apparent in the work of Departments of Literary Theory housed in some of our universities, and of the South African Society for General Literary Studies and its *Journal of Literary Studies*; within wider academic circles it may well have to do with the practice of conducting postgraduate work abroad and returning to local positions from which to disseminate research findings. Perhaps the apogee of this trend is Dovey's *The Novels of J M Coetzee*, which sets out to describe Coetzee's "strategy as, not simply criticism-as-fiction, but as (Lacanian) psychoanalytic criticism-as-fiction" (1988:11).

A charitable reading of this trend might view it as a response to another trend, earlier though still established, of largely non-theoretical practical criticism of works by local writers, frequently in an attempt to establish their "value" or "significance" - or their lack of these things. In regard to Pauline Smith, for example, the titles of Eglinton's "'Quaintness' in Pauline Smith: Observations on her Style and Dialogue" (1960), Haresnape's "'Pauline Smith's 'Desolation' and the Worthwhile African English Text" (1977), and Dale's "Art or Artifice: Some Thoughts on *The Beadle*" (1979) reflect the orientation of the trend towards reading the text 'as a thing in itself'. Current debates about the "value" of politically committed poetry serve as a more recent example. So, too, does MacKenzie's contention, within the context of his substantial and important work on her, that the early novels of Bessie Head are "flawed" (1989:35). Motivations underlying this trend probably include the wish to gain recognition for texts and writers by

establishing their value in orthodox critical terms; the concerted efforts towards explication that follow inclusion of texts in high school syllabuses; and the attempt at reclamation of writers from obscurity, often associated with specialist expertise or postgraduate study. The field has been new, and hence wide open to territorial claim-staking. A different, though related, manifestation of this tendency has been a call for the complete "africanisation" of syllabuses. It is perhaps a danger for any literature developing within a particular region¹ that the regional should loom so large as to value what is close at hand because it is close at hand. In our context solipsism and alienation from the mainstream "out there" have been exacerbated both by our geographic distance from the metropolitan Centre and by the cultural and academic boycott that had its roots in the 1960s.

My own argument is not with the two trends *per se*, of importing theory or doing without: merely with the exclusiveness and the entrenchment that has bedevilled them, the hegemonies within Southern African critical circles not being limited to either side. In the breach that has developed between the two trends, much illuminating work falls into the domains of social history or biography: the work of Couzens on Dikobe, and of Couzens, Gray and Willan on Plaatje stand as particularly good examples. Yet such work tends to be broadly marxist or atheoretical in orientation, and the need for theoretical development now seems to me a matter of urgency. In a call first made in 1979, Maughan Brown spelt out the need for a "black aesthetic":

Firstly, it is essential that the critic be as conversant as possible with the traditions, mythology and art, in short the culture, of the community from within which the writer comes Secondly, critical standards should not predate the literature they are attempting to assess; they should, as far as possible, grow out of that literature

¹ I am conscious of two different senses in which the term "region" might be understood: as a subsidiary unit within a country or nation, or, as here, a broader corpus of literature; and, following Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989:17) as a geographic entity comprising several countries. My use of 'Southern Africa' subsequently will follow the latter sense.

Thirdly, aesthetic response is culturally determined (1982:50).

The impact of black critics has been slow to register itself (Ndebele stands as a significant exception), and even then their work often reflects the complex effects of exile. Although I have some quibbles with the last of Maughan Brown's criteria, his injunctions about context have a value that extends beyond "black" criticism, and so they remain important.

Read positively, the two critical trends might be recognised as attempts to identify the relations that ought to exist between our literature and the Centre. If the balance remains to be achieved, the route to be taken is not to abandon or discount European and American theories. Rather it is to work from an understanding of the pressures of context, to a specification of the theoretical requirements of this context, to a consideration of what extant theory can offer. In my view an important corrective is available in postcolonial theory, which, despite its (paradoxically) metropolitan origins, has been developed by people like Bhabha, Said and Spivak, whose roots at least are in 'postcolonial' cultures.

Before moving on to a theorisation of silence, I would like briefly to recapitulate the position we have thus far reached. Firstly, if we recognise silence as a feature of our literature, we need to recognise too that a theoretical approach to it is not available within the sphere of local criticism. Secondly, if a theory is not available and needs to be developed, then this theory ought to be directed by the pressures of our context if it is to avoid the problems detailed above. Thirdly, and for these reasons, in the theory we develop we will need to consider the ways in which silence reflects the pressures of context. Finally, it should be clear from this recapitulation that the approach to be followed in this study will not be a purely literary one, but will draw on insights from the broad sphere of the human sciences.

1.5 The Postcolonial Paradigm

In their groundbreaking study, *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin offer a passing recognition of the significance of silence:

The post-colonial text therefore does not 'create meaning' through the mere act of inscribing it, but rather indicates a potential and shifting horizon of possible meanings. Its capacity to 'mean', though, is circumscribed finally by that post-colonial silence ... which cannot be overwhelmed by any interpretation.

It is this concept of silence, not any specific cultural concept of meaning, which is the active characteristic linking all post-colonial texts (1989:187).

This "potential and shifting horizon of possible meanings" is amply clear in *Foe*, which, as I have demonstrated, takes as one of its primary premises the indeterminacy of meaning. Yet the formulation warrants one substantial extension; that silence frequently offers a "potential and shifting horizon of possible meanings" of its own. My reading of Coetzee's novel in relation to other novels within the corpus of Southern African fiction thus sought to demonstrate that his concern with silence is neither exclusive nor radically new. It also sought to establish the broader significance of Coetzee's writing for a positioning of South Africa as a 'postcolony' of Empire: to read his work back to the past as well as to the Centre.

Although it is not my intention to undertake a comprehensive exploration of postcolonial theory, it seems pertinent at this point to consider some of the meanings of the term "postcolonial" which the study by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin supplies. They use the term, in the first instance,

to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day What each of these [post-colonial] literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial (1989:2).

The prefix 'post' is thus equivalent to 'from the beginning of' rather than, as might be expected, 'after' the end of the colonial process. This meaning of the prefix allows the term to be applied to "the first texts produced in the colonies in the new language [which were] frequently produced by the 'representatives' of the imperial power" and which therefore "can never form the basis for an indigenous culture nor ... be integrated in any way with the culture which already exists in the countries invaded" (1989:5). Although the authors do go on to delineate a "second stage of production within the evolving discourse of the post-colonial" (the "literature produced 'under imperial licence' by 'natives' or 'outcasts'"), the prescriptive nature of this application seems to me contentious. One of the problems of theoretical categories (and the exclusions and prescriptions that arise from them) is that, being static, they tend to cope indifferently well with transition and with change. Another is that, being exclusive, they generally give scant recognition to possibilities of integration and synthesis. There seems little reason, for example, why comparisons between the first colonial writings and indigenous narratives from an oral tradition might not in the future form the basis of an integrative focus on common experiences from different perspectives. These issues will be explored in my study of *Mhudi*, the first novel written in English by a black South African.

Such prescriptiveness arises from the attempt to use the term "postcolonial" as an attribute of certain cultures and literatures; to use it exclusively. To be fair, the writers do offer a second use of the term as critical practice, as a "reading strategy" (1989:189). They say:

The idea of 'post-colonial literary theory' emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of post-colonial writing. European theories themselves emerge from particular cultural traditions which are hidden by false notions of 'the universal'. Theories of style and genre, assumptions about the universal features of language, epistemologies and value systems are all radically questioned by the practices of post-colonial writing. Post-colonial theory has proceeded from the need to address this different practice (1989:11).

Two "major paths" may be discerned within such a critical practice:

on the one hand, via the reading of specific post-colonial texts and the effects of their production in and on specific social and historical contexts, and on the other, via the 'revisioning' of received tropes and modes such as allegory, irony, and metaphor and the rereading of 'canonical' texts in the light of post-colonial discursive practices (1989:194).

Since my own study will fall within the broad sphere of a postcolonial reading, it seems worth specifying a third possible use of the term, which is as a paradigm (one which I read as underlying Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's investigation). Fundamental to the paradigm is the notion of a metropolitan Centre which in the days of Empire had control over vast areas of the world. So powerful has been the impact of this Centre on the economy, politics and culture of these former colonies, that even after independence they continue to experience a substantial orientation towards it. The process of colonialism has of course been a historical one; yet the mythology of the postcolonial paradigm is sufficiently general to offer terms of approach both to specific countries, and, more importantly for my purposes, to the regions into which they fell under the auspices of specific colonial powers. The relations between the "postcolonies" (as we might now term them) and the Centre are characterised by at least two important features: linguistic connection and geographic distance. Whereas the first of these supplies both a common heritage and a communicative medium, the second exerts a pressure towards isolation, and, together with the historical legacy of domination, towards inequality. In my reading of Bessie Head's "autobiographical novel", *Maru*, these pressures will be seen to take a distinctive form in the double isolation of racial marginalisation and exile.

In Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's version, the postcolonial paradigm is by no means value neutral. The Centre is necessarily oppressive, and postcolonial texts properly resistant. They say of their own study: "the discussion of post-colonial writing which follows is largely a discussion of the process by which the language, with its power, and the writing, with its signification of authority, has been *wrested from* the

dominant European culture" (1989:7-8, my emphasis). And it is with evident approval they note that the second of the "two major paths" cited above "has begun, more recently, to produce *powerfully subversive* general accounts of textuality and concepts of 'literariness'" (1989:194, my emphasis). Despite these oppositions they identify in the present, the writers do elsewhere indicate potential resolutions in the future:

The post-colonial world is one in which destructive cultural encounter is changing to an acceptance of difference on equal terms. Both literary theorists and cultural historians are beginning to recognize cross-culturality as the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group 'purity', and as the basis on which the post-colonial world can be stabilized (1989:36).

And indeed the model has demonstrable application. The first of these is the recognition of "cross-culturality", since a definitive, though not an exclusive, feature of our literature is that it so frequently represents interaction across cultures. In the terms of ethnography which will be explored in Chapter 2, "cross-culturality", and specifically the concept of "cultural translation", allows a replacement of the trope of 'penetration' which has characterised much writing about postcolonial Africa by that of the 'interface' which accords autonomy to the two cultures in contact. The "termination point" which it thus represents offers a way of addressing both the political processes which South Africa is currently undergoing, and its past history.

The applicability of the postcolonial model in this regard might become more readily apparent if we recognise that, in our case, as elsewhere, it must accommodate the specificities of local history. Certainly to recognise *apartheid* as the cultural dominant of our society, established with the accession to power of the Nationalist government in 1948 and its uninterrupted sovereignty since then, is necessarily to recognise the equation of colonialism here with *apartheid* as an oversimplification and an inaccuracy. I see three reasons for this: that neither Nationalist rule from 1948 nor Republic status from 1961 can be viewed as the kind of "independence" from Empire that occurred in other

"postcolonies"; that the claim of the Afrikaner power bloc to indigenous status has been recognised by at least those parties that don't subscribe to the dictum "one settler one bullet"; and that, February 1990 notwithstanding, *apartheid* is by no means yet dead.

And yet *apartheid* can be read in postcolonial terms. Dorsinville's model of dominating-dominated societies that can exist within one postcolony (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989:32) can help to explain the hegemonies of Afrikaner power. Furthermore, despite the rampant iniquities that followed 1961, "the *apartheid* régime" owed much to the colonial structures that preceded it, and indeed had much in common with colonial régimes elsewhere. Finally, account must be taken of linguistic and cultural divisions amongst the settlers: so that a postcolonial inquiry might focus as productively on the culture and literature of Afrikaans-Nederlands as that of English - or, indeed, those of a number of other settler languages.

Applying postcolonial terms in a revisionist reading of policies regarding 'miscegenation' and '*apartheid*' might help us see such policies as responses to the pressures of cross-culturality rather than (or in addition to) acts of exclusion and oppression. We might, then, find it easier to resist the "received tropes and modes" in which such policies were registered in fiction. The two laws which represented the apotheosis of high *apartheid* were, as I see it, the Immorality Act and the Mixed Marriages Act. My discussion of Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope* will attempt to contextualise these laws as discursive practice, and to read the 'tragedy' of the protagonist, which depends on the silence of his counterpart, a black woman, as a failure to constitute an identity outside of their prescriptive force.

The second contribution of postcolonial theory is in regard to language. I mentioned above, in passing, that linguistic connection with the Centre supplies both a common heritage and a communicative medium. Neither of these is unproblematic. The "Englishness" of South African literature and criticism may well be a source of connection with the Centre, but it also serves to position this literature as that of an

outpost. Our sense of alienation, of what Jacobs refers to as standing "in the sign of imaginative exile" (1990:123), is by no means gratuitous. On the one hand, the only South African writers widely represented in bookshops in England in July 1992 appeared to be Gordimer and Coetzee. On the other, critics writing from our particular "postcolony" have had relatively little impact on metropolitan critics of texts either in metropolitan canons or in "third-world" or "postcolonial" literatures (or, as they are now termed, the "new literatures in English"). This was particularly evident, for example, at the eighteenth annual Conference of the Joseph Conrad Society (United Kingdom) held in London in July 1992: though the problem there seemed to me one of access rather than choice. It is also noteworthy that eight of the thirteen writers Ward considers in his recent *Chronicles of Darkness* (1989) are Southern African - yet his consultation of Southern African critics is little more than slight. It will take concerted efforts for such an impact to be made: and perhaps in this context recognition should be given to the South African Society for General Literary Studies (mentioned already) for its continued affiliation to the International Comparative Literature Association, to the Cape Town journal *Pretexts* for its reciprocal publishing arrangement with the American journal *Social Text*, and to the Durban journal *Current Writing* for its deliberate inclusion of work by international as well as local scholars.

The communicative medium supplied by linguistic connection with the Centre is problematic for many writers, and particularly so for those who use English as a second language. To write in English, after all, is to use the medium of the Centre. In a keynote address to the 1988 11th Annual Conference on Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in German-Speaking Countries, Nkosi, for example, asserted:

... today the dispute between the hegemonic North of the coloniser and the exploited South of the colonised is no longer mainly about political rights, but about the control of discourse. The privileged texts of the dominant culture are being challenged by the underprivileged texts of the oppressed culture(s) as the colonised and excolonised of this world assume full responsibility to speak for themselves. In the Southern African context, then, this

opposition between privileged and underprivileged texts constitutes the basic framework for Writing Black as distinct from Writing White (cited in Welz 1991a:97).

Outside South Africa the reaction to this problem has been most acutely focused in Ngugi's decision to return to writing in mother tongue and subsequently translating his work into English. A similar pattern has been followed by South Africans both in exile (Mazisi Kunene), and at home (Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali). From at least one viewpoint this reaction cannot be said to solve the problem, however: "syncreticist critics argue that even a novel in Bengali or Gikuyu is inevitably a cross-cultural hybrid, and that decolonization projects must recognize this. Not to do so is to confuse decolonization with the reconstitution of pre-colonial reality" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989:30). South African "syncreticist" critics have agreed. Asvat, at the same conference as Nkosi, points out that the polarities Nkosi offers lead, in the long run, to a dead end. Welz reports:

Asvat is of the opinion that what Black South Africa needs is a "writing that comes out of the furnaces of our indigenous consciousness" and is equally far removed from the constraints of English writing and thinking as from the traditions imposed upon it by contemporary African and Third World literature "where the oppressed are heroes, and the colonizers villains". In other words, Asvat objects to the imposition of a framework upon Black writing that is based on the dialectic of oppression, because it has become a cliché that stifles the life of the word and the literary imagination. All it creates are liabilities, inhibiting imaginary resourcefulness and creativity (1991a:99).

A year after Asvat, Ndebele expressed himself along similar lines, as, subsequently, have Sachs (1990) and Oliphant (1990), amongst others. In Ndebele's words:

the greatest challenge of the South African revolution is in the search for ways of thinking, ways of perception, that will help to break down the closed epistemological structures of South African oppression. Such structures can severely compromise resistance by dominating thinking itself. For writers this means freeing the creative process itself from those very laws. It means extending the writer's perception of what can be written about, and the means and methods of writing (1989:45).

Both the call for writing "out of the furnaces of our indigenous consciousness", and the call for "extending the writer's perception of what can be written about" seem to me praiseworthy objectives. And yet Nkosi's concatenation of discourse and power is too important to be theoretically wished away; as might become apparent if we recognise that breaking down the "closed epistemological structures of South African oppression" is to take place in what has been for many one of the languages of oppression. Nor is the problem limited to those who are or consider themselves oppressed. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin distinguish in their account between "the 'standard' British English inherited from the empire and the *english* which the language has become in postcolonial countries" (1989:8, my emphasis). They do this because, in their view, like Nkosi's, "One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' as impurities" (1989:7). An important section of their study is devoted to the ways in which postcolonial writing defines itself "by seizing the language of the centre and replacing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonial place". Plainly, processes by which metropolitan power over the means of communication is rejected ("abrogation"), and the language is captured and remoulded to new uses ("appropriation") are experienced by all writers in English (or "english") in the postcolonies (1989:39).

The "control of discourse" thus necessarily goes beyond literary medium to the domain of criticism: to the acceptance of texts as literature; to the priorities accorded genres and styles; to the issues with which criticism should concern itself. In a special issue of the *PMLA* devoted to black aesthetics, for example, Gates argues:

Opposing the essentialism of European "universality" with a black essentialism - an approach that in various ways characterized a large component of black literary criticism since the black arts movement - has given way to more subtle questions. What is following the critique of the essentialist notions that cloaked the text in a mantle of "blackness", replete with the accretions of all sorts of sociological clichés, is a "postformal" resituation of texts, accounting for the social dynamism of subjection,

incorporation, and marginalization in relation to the cultural dominant (1990:19).

Although his reference is to black American rather than black African writing, his final point has substantial application for South African literature, and indeed for all postcolonial literature: because it addresses the terms in which criticism is to take place. If the cultural dominant in South Africa is that of *apartheid*, I have pointed out above that *apartheid* is not itself a discrete phenomenon, but rather an outgrowth (pernicious as it may be) of imperial and colonial structures. My choice, following Nkosi, of a "Southern African" as opposed to a "South African" perspective is thus an advised one. Even granting Gates's implied injunction against "essentialist notions that [cloak] the text in a mantle of 'blackness'", it seems to me that colonial experiences within the Southern African region have been similar enough to motivate an attempt to find a single theoretical framework to account "for the social dynamism of subjection, incorporation, and marginalization". And if, sadly, the determination with which the frontline states have established and enforced the cultural boycott gives the concept of "Southern Africa" a putative rather than an actual significance, one of the more effective ways in which "the privileged texts of the dominant culture" might be challenged is by recognising, theoretically, South Africa's location *in Africa* rather than its location as an outpost of Empire.

Since silence is being used, in this study, as an issue around which theoretical explorations can be undertaken, we should recall the requirement I specified above that a theorisation of silence should address the pressures of context. This consideration of postcolonial theory has enabled us to assess the extent to which it can contribute to an examination of silence within our literature and a resolution of problems within its criticism. Its contribution to this point has been to supply terms for a reading of these pressures of context: as culture and as language. Its subsequent contribution will be to offer a basis for the delineation of the scope of this study, towards the end of this chapter.

1.6 Broader Critical and Theoretical Responses to Silence

It was my contention above that relatively little attention has been paid, in the international sphere, to silence. Nevertheless, having specified the pressures of context which should direct a theorisation of silence in our literature, thereby positioning our literature in relation to the Centre, I would like to consider briefly some critical and theoretical studies that have been made in the past in order to define my own point of entry to such a theorisation.

Although the title of his *Language and Silence* (1967) is promising, Steiner's treatise conceives of silence in largely negative terms. In his chapter on "The Retreat from the Word", he undertakes a broad analysis of aspects of Western culture: perceiving a decline in the confidence that "truth and realness ... can be housed inside the walls of language" (1967:32), a significant "submission of successively larger areas of knowledge to the modes and proceedings of mathematics" (1967:33), a "pronounced and startling" retreat from the word in philosophy (1967:38), a tendency in "the writer of today" to use "far fewer and simpler words" (1967:44), and a "retreat from vitality and precision" in "the language of the mass media and of advertisement in England and the United States" (1967:45). In "Silence and the Poet", he recognises silence as both a temptation facing the poet (1967:58), and a solution to the debasement of the word: "A civilisation of words is a civilisation distraught", and "It is better for the poet to mutilate his own tongue than to dignify the inhuman either with his gift or his uncaring" (1967:73). Since Steiner's study aims itself at a broad analysis (and exposé) of Western culture, and since it reads silence in negative or residual terms, its application for my specific study of silence is limited.

In his *A Theory of Literary Production* (1978), Macherey concerns himself with the broader relations between literature and society; nevertheless in his concept of "determinate absences" he identifies a specific literary effect. In doing so, he goes rather further than Steiner does towards recognising silence as a positive phenomenon:

The speech of the book comes from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it traces a figure. Thus the book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a *certain absence*, without which it would not exist. A knowledge of the book must include a knowledge of this absence.

This is why it seems useful and legitimate to ask of every production what it tacitly implies, what it does not say. Either all around or in its wake the explicit requires the implicit: for in order to say anything, there are other things which *must not be said* (1978:85).

Macherey draws attention to the fact that expression always has what is termed in economics 'opportunity costs': that is, the value (or expense) of all that is not said so that what is said can be said. In Macherey's reading of silence expression always involves a selection (conscious or not, determined or not) amongst possibilities, and so in silence is represented all the possibilities of expression that have not been chosen. Yet his formulation does not restrict itself to a negative version of silence. He proceeds to discuss the impact of silence upon speech:

Yet the unspoken has many other resources: it assigns speech to its exact position, designating its domain. By speech, **silence** becomes the centre and principle of expression, its vanishing point. Speech eventually has nothing more to tell us: we investigate the **silence**, for it is the **silence** that is doing the speaking (1978:86).

It is of course the notion of "silence doing the speaking" which has motivated my thesis: which might otherwise be a rather futile study of, in Donne's powerful famous words, "absence, darkness, death; things which are not" (1971:72). Silence *is*: silence is a thing in itself. Despite this recognition, Macherey conceives of silence from the point of view of those reading it, not those using it: his focus is on the text and not the human subject.

Sontag's study, "The Aesthetics of Silence" (1983), by contrast, does confront the 'humanness' of silence. Posing the question, "How literally does silence figure in art?", she proposes several answers:

Silence exists as a *decision* Silence also exists as a *punishment* Silence doesn't exist in a literal sense, however, as the *experience* of an audience. It would mean that the spectator was aware of no stimulus or that he was unable to make a response Nor can silence, in its

literal state, exist as the *property* of an art-work There is no neutral surface, no neutral discourse, no neutral theme, no neutral form As a property of the work of art itself, silence can exist only in a cooked or non-literal sense. (Put otherwise: if a work exists at all, its silence is only one element in it) And, finally, even without imputing objective intentions to the art-work, there remains the inescapable truth about perception: the positivity of all experience at every moment of it. As Cage has insisted, "There is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound.".... "Silence" never ceases to imply its opposite and to depend on its presence Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech ... and an element in a dialogue (1983:185-187).

Sontag's insistence that silence cannot exist as "the *property* of an art-work" is an important one, in drawing attention to the metaphoric nature of our particular study. Although I will go on to challenge Cage's assertion that "there is no such thing as silence", Sontag's suggestion that we view silence as "a form of speech ... an element in a dialogue" provides a rationale for the speech-act approach that will be followed here.

In a study entitled *The Language of Silence: On the Unspoken and the Unspeakable in Modern Drama*, Kane offers a delineation of the expressive dimensions of silence, which, as he points out, cannot be limited to the "absence of language":

The retreat from the word encompasses not only nonverbal symbolism, but also many forms of connotative, indirect dramatic expression such as innuendo, intimation, hesitation, reticence, and bivalent speech that implicitly conveys more than it states When I refer to *silence*, I am employing the term in its broadest sense, encompassing both the absence of speech and implicit expression (1984:15).

Plainly "innuendo, intimation, hesitation, reticence and bivalent speech" are all highly context-dependent, and the intentions that might be said to motivate them cannot be divorced from the social or cultural location of the person intending - nor, indeed, of the person or persons who interpret them. The distinction Kane draws between silence as the "absence of speech" and as "implicit expression" is an important one, for reasons that go beyond the specification he offers subsequently of some of the qualities that silence might 'convey':

The dumb silence of apathy, the sober silence of solemnity, the fertile silence of awareness, the active silence of perception, the baffled silence of confusion, the uneasy silence of impasse, the muzzled silence of outrage, the expectant silence of waiting, the reproachful silence of censure, the tacit silence of approval, the vituperative silence of accusation, the eloquent silence of awe, the unnerving silence of menace, the peaceful silence of communion, and the irrevocable silence of death illustrate by their unspoken response to speech that experiences exist for which we lack the word (1984:18).

Although our urge, like Kane's, might be to delineate the range or compass of meanings that silence can have, it remains an inherent paradox that, 'lacking the word', we should yet try to fix in words the meaning of specific instances of silence. Can silence really be translated into the terms of language?

Maclean doesn't use the term silence, but in her consideration of *Narrative as Performance: The Baudelairean Experiment* she offers a sharper - and more contentious - sense of the ways in which silence might function in drama and in narrative:

The theatrical model ... helps in giving an account of the essentially iconic nature of much narrative representation. While popular wisdom suggests that a picture is worth a thousand words, it is also true that words present us with a thousand pictures In narrative, as on stage, one action must represent a whole series of actions, the words spoken stand for words unspoken, what we are allowed to see becomes metonymic of the unseen (1988:16).

In this reading Maclean takes up Kane's distinction between the absence of speech and implicit expression and contends that what is present in performance (and hence in narrative) 'stands for' what is absent, so that silence is 'represented in' the words that are spoken. The implications of incomplete specification will receive detailed consideration in regard to Leitch's conception of character as trope in Chapter 3 ("how many characters are said to have armpits?" he asks, 1986:158). Yet Maclean's almost Derridean play upon absent presences indicates a focus not upon silence *per se*, but on what is said that represents it.

Within the domain of poetry, and specifically Australian poetry, Zwicky begins a consideration of "Speeches and Silences" by referring to Donne's 'Songs and Sonnets', in which "there are two characters present. The second is certainly mute. Or rather, the words are not articulated but the reader can usually tell how the character behaves and what the character would say if granted speech" (1986:27). Zwicky's example coheres with my own study of the poetry of Donne. In many of his love poems, the presence of the implied listener is registered through the modulations of the speaker's address to her: in his paraphrases of remarks she makes; in his comments on her appearance, gestures and actions; in the shifts in his argument as she responds to it or reacts against it; in his self-conscious or reflexive reinterpretations of the nature of the address, given her non-response to it. Read in the terms Kane offers, her silence develops resonances which are crucial to the meaning of the poems. Read more resistantly, the address of the speaker can begin to be seen, as Zwicky suggests, as dialogic, as one of two voices even though the other is seldom if ever raised (Hooper 1990a).

In regard to narrative, Cheung's "Imposed Silences in *The Color Purple* and *The Woman Warrior*" falls into the domain of feminist criticism. In her article she delineates the "psychological imperative to expression" (1988:162) which motivates the development of the two heroines of these novels. The following excerpts provide an outline of her position:

Celie and Maxine feel the spell of verbal power at an early age, but it takes time for them to learn to fight and create with words. In the process, they use words to describe wordlessness; writing is not the chosen but the desperate alternative to speech (1988:165).

For someone besieged by silence, self-expression is a heroic act, an offensive with verbal artillery (1988:166).

"I thought talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity. Insane people were the ones who couldn't explain themselves" (Kingston, cited in Cheung 1988:164).

That the injunction to silence should provoke expression is not so paradoxical as it might seem, for the relief sought by those frustrated by silence - forbidden or unable to speak - can only come through articulation (1988:172).

Since Cheung begins her article with the rather ironic observation that "women authors and feminist critics have been unduly vocal on the theme of silence", we might read her conceptualisation of silence as originating within the framework of theories of empowerment which are both didactic and dynamic. Silence is imposed on the individual by a source of power outside her. It is only with the development of the individual's own power that the injunction to silence can be resisted; such power taking the gradual form of 'learning and fighting and creating' with words. Cheung's emphasis, then, is on silence as a condition to be fought against, because it represents powerlessness.

Also within the sphere of narrative, Hampson has offered a reading of "'Heart of Darkness' and the Speech that Cannot be Silenced", to which extensive reference will be made later. In it, he shows how African languages are "presented consistently as pre-verbal, pre-syntactic sound - as sound that is the direct expression of emotion, as sound that is pure sound (akin to music), as sound that is utterance without meaning ..." (1990:17). Although we cannot refer to the literal silence of the Africans in *Heart of Darkness*, therefore, their effective silence provides a ground upon which Marlow's self-defining narrative can figure. In this case a resistant reading might deliberately reverse the figure-ground resolution, muting the power of Marlow's narrative in order to "hear" the silence of the Africans he encounters.

1.7 Preliminary Definitions

Given the range in responses to the issue of silence surveyed above, and the difficulties we might therefore recognise as being inherent in writing about it, it seems important now to essay some definitions. The *Concise Oxford* offers the following:

1. Abstinance from speech or noise, being silent, non-betrayal of secret etc., fact of not mentioning a thing, not communicating any message, etc. ...
2. Absence of sound, stillness ...
3. Oblivion, state of not being mentioned ...
4. *v.t.* Make silent by force, superior argument, etc.

One root of the difficulties of writing about silence is, I think, apparent in the second sense of the word, to which Sontag alludes: "Absence of sound, stillness". Perhaps the most commonplace usage and

the most widespread understanding, it nevertheless reminds us that silence is related to the domain of sound, of what is audible, and so to write about it, to seek for silences in words on the page, is to undertake a quest that is metaphoric at the outset. And to seek for silences in works of literature is inevitably to come to grips with a range of problems of textualisation. These problems will receive detailed consideration in Chapter 3 in regard to character.

On the other hand, this definition is both more straightforward and less applicable to my study than the remaining three, because it makes no reference to people or to their communication. The fourth sense, "Make silent by force, superior argument etc." is likewise a common usage: its importance for my purposes has to do with the human activity it implies. We might be reminded, for example, of the silence that Mary imposes on Moses by whipping his face in *The Grass is Singing*, or the priest's silencing of the Irishwoman in *Foe* by shoving her before she is ready.

In the first and the third senses of the word we find highlighted, respectively, the agency ("Abstinence from speech or noise, being silent ...") and the passivity ("Oblivion, state of not being mentioned") that can inform silence. The last might remind us of the "long silence" that awaits all speakers, and the concomitant concern of writers with the 'immortality' of their work - a concern which reached an apotheosis in the sonnets of Shakespeare. Intrinsic to my study will be an understanding of silence as a human phenomenon, and, although some attention will be paid to the transitive meaning of the verb, and to the silences, fortuitous and deliberate, that are written into texts, attention will especially be directed to silence as abstinence from speech.

1.8 Silence and Language

Our consideration of postcolonial theory above provided terms in which to recognise the pressures of context which, in my view, should direct a theorisation of silence in our literature. These were specified as culture and as language, plainly both human phenomena. In taking up the lead suggested by Sontag, I would like to focus, first, on language. If

to recognise silence in human terms is to recognise the relations between silence and speech, then our theoretical starting point should clearly be the field of linguistics. Obvious as this might seem, linguistics has in fact paid relatively little attention to silence as a positive phenomenon. Rather it uses silence, most importantly, to define the fundamental unit of linguistic analysis which is, following Lyons, the utterance: "any stretch of talk, by one person, before and after which there is silence on the part of that person" (Harris, cited by Lyons 1968:172). Lyons goes on, "It must be remembered that we are not dealing here with the formal definition of some linguistic unit, but with a pre-scientific description of the linguist's data. 'Silence' and the other terms used to characterize and delimit utterances are to be understood with the tolerance customarily granted to everyday non-scientific discourse" (1968:172). In a text entitled *Speaking*, Levelt distinguishes three sorts of "moments of silence" which a conversation can contain: pauses, which interrupt one unit of a speaker's speech, gaps, which occur after the completion of a unit when nobody 'claims the floor', and lapses, when the silence between units is particularly extended (1989:32-33). Such 'definitions' clearly occur within the sphere of descriptive linguistics, and as such at a level of analysis that will need augmentation if it is to be useful in this study. Since linguistics will contribute substantially to our theoretical orientation, however, it seems worth pursuing a little further the definitions it can offer.

'Utterances', as we have seen, are units of analysis, as opposed to syntactic or grammatical units. Lyons's description of the "situation of utterance" is one which will receive fuller attention in Chapter 3 in regard to the model of narrative as discourse. For the present it is important to note that "speech acts" are a specific form of utterance. Following the delineation Lyons offers (in a later text), the theory of speech acts has its roots in Austin's *How to Do Things With Words* (1962), in which "performative utterances ... are [specified as] those in the production of which the speaker, or writer, performs an act of doing rather than saying". Austin's theory of speech acts, then, "insofar as it is a theory at all ... is a theory of pragmatics (in the

etymological sense of 'pragmatics': "the study of action, or doing"). Furthermore, it is a theory of social pragmatics: a theory of social institutions and conventions. This aspect of Austin's theory has not always been given the emphasis that it deserves" (1981:172-175). Fowler's description usefully supplements Lyons's: "The most important approach to speech as action is the theory of *speech acts* or *illocutionary acts* originally proposed by J.L. Austin, and developed by J.R. Searle. The basic insight is that language-use has an extra dimension which has been somewhat neglected by logicians and linguists: a performative dimension ...". This performative dimension is most apparent in "utterances containing performative verbs such as *promise, declare, name, baptize, request, order, guarantee*. [In these instances] the utterance of the sentence actually constitutes the action referred to. It is literally a speech act, not just saying something but doing something through speaking ...". The important thing to note, concludes Fowler, is the "prevalence of speech acts in discourse: the fact that speakers in dialogue continuously engage in a series of illocutionary acts such as requesting, undertaking, challenging, asserting, warning, and so on. This is the chief mechanism by which conversation is maintained as a practical interaction as well as a channelling of ideas" (1986:104-106).

In his reading of speech-act theory Lyons suggests, but does not insist upon, a refinement that is important for an application of the theory to literature: "'Language act' would be a much better term It must constantly be borne in mind ... that 'speech act' like 'utterance', on the one hand, and 'inscription' or 'text', on the other, is intended to cover the production of both written and spoken language" (1981:172). If silence can be read within a speech-act framework, this qualification helps address the problem raised earlier as regards the metaphoric nature of silence in literature.

This brief overview of speech-act theory has been undertaken in order to establish its relevance for a study of silence. It seems important to specify, however, that I will be drawing upon the theory not for specific applications of individual concepts, but rather for the broader

reading it suggests of narrative as speech act, hence as performed utterance. In doing so I will be following in the line of Pratt's *Toward a Speech-Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (1977), Lanser's *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (1981), and Maclean's *Narrative as Performance: The Baudelairean Experiment* (1988), as well as more theoretical studies like Chatman's "The Structure of Narrative Transmission" (1975), Genette's *Narrative Discourse* (1980), Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (1983), and, most recently, Petrey's *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (1990). In Rimmon-Kenan, we encounter the following basic definition:

the term narration suggests (1) a communication process in which the narrative as message is transmitted by addresser to addressee and (2) the verbal nature of the medium used to transmit the message (1983:2).

Drawing on the work of other writers, Lanser offers several refinements: "By situating literary communication within a speech act framework, a concept of the text as message/object gives way to a more dynamic and fruitful notion of the text as a specific kind of communicative and aesthetic act" (1981:62). She cites the distinction drawn by Genette between "voice ('who speaks?') and vision ('who sees?')", and notes, "The concept of voice encompasses distinctions about the narrator's relation to the story, the time of narration, and narrative level; a separate set of indices is necessary for describing the mode of vision or 'focalization' the narrative entails" (1981:37). She also cites a comment by Pratt, that speech-act theory offers "perhaps for the first time ... a description of literary discourse that answers the need for a contextually based approach to texts" (1981:68).

Before leaving the field of linguistics, we should note some of the philosophical consequences of an application of speech-act theory to literature, and, by extension, into which fields it leads us. In his recent review, *Speech Acts and Literary Theory*, Petrey emphasises the importance of context: "Other linguistic schools address the structure of language in itself; speech-act theory examines the power of language in communities. Language's communal power is the effect of its 'performative' capacity" (1990:3). Elsewhere Petrey insists on

"collective acceptance" or "accord", "audience uptake", "multilateral participation", "sociality" (1990:5-6). He comments, "Much of the excitement of speech-act theory is its demonstration that entities often taken as incompatible are instead thoroughly interactive ... The theory also brings together the inner self and the outer world, the individual and the communal, but it does so only when we participate *perceptibly* in communal life" (1990:6). These links will be taken up subsequently in regard to character and identity, and particularly in the case study of Head's *Maru*. The implication here is that, "Before there can be performative language, there must exist a social body that recognizes and accepts the conventional procedure in which the language functions" (1990:7). We will note the same understanding of Austin as motivated Lyons's insistence on "social pragmatics", "social institutions" and "conventions" cited above (1981:175); Lyons offers another important corrective. He concludes his chapter "Worlds Within Worlds: The Subjectivity of Utterance":

When I talk about the *subjectivity of utterance*, I am referring to the locutionary agent's expression of himself in the act of utterance and of the reflection of this in the phonological, grammatical and lexical structure of the utterance-inscription. Two points need to be emphasized in connection with the notion of self-expression to which I am appealing in this definition of 'subjectivity'. First, I want the term 'self-expression' to be taken literally Second, the self which the locutionary agent expresses is the product of the social and interpersonal roles that he has played in the past, and it manifests itself, in a socially identifiable way, in the role that he is playing in the context of utterance (1981:241).

Apparent in this delineation, and seminal to speech-act theory, is a focus upon the individual self, socially produced, but nevertheless existing as subject, as agent within a communicative framework. This insistence sets the theory at direct odds with the decentring of the subject that has occurred in poststructuralist approaches. Some of the consequences of this insistence will be pursued in greater depth in Chapter 2 in regard to culture as it exists between subjects in relations of power, and in Chapter 3 in regard to character as a textualisation of the human subject in cultural terms. The agentic nature of communication is intrinsic to my study, and one of its most

important implications is that if we decide, in certain circumstances, to read silences as 'speech' acts it is incumbent upon us to recognise that people 'own' the silences they enact.

From the dual emphases upon the social and the subjective, it should be plain that we are venturing into the terrain of the social sciences. Concepts that will prove important in this regard, and to which I would like to make anticipatory reference, are Giddens's structuration theory (1987), Berger and Luckmann's social construction of reality (1967), and Berger's social construction of identity (1963), and, in what Harré has termed "new paradigm psychology", Shotter's analysis of pronominal relations in the construction of the self (in Shotter & Gergen 1989:22). The relevance of these concepts will become clear later; the question that might need addressing now is a broader one about the contribution these fields are equipped to make to a study of silence in literature. In the first place, the most immediate "pressure of context" which I experience myself is as a white teacher of predominantly black students. Given the reflexivity which has become an intrinsic characteristic of these fields, as well as literature, they allow a theoretical conceptualisation of this 'racial interface' in linguistic and in cultural terms: thus they are in important ways compatible with the postcolonial paradigm outlined above. In the second place, and despite this reflexivity, a major tradition exists within these fields of social constructionism which has not succumbed to what Nash terms "Literature's Assault on Narrative" (1990): its decentring of the subject, and its exacerbation of the adversarial conception of culture which has been the legacy of post-Romanticism. In the third place, there has developed within these fields an increasing focus upon narrative and its significance in the constitution of various domains of knowledge and in the construction of the self, as might be apparent in the concepts to which I referred above, and to which I will pay further attention in Chapters 2 and 3. To summarise then, the broad contribution these fields will make to my study is to facilitate a recentring or reconstruction of the postcolonial subject, which, as I will go on to show, becomes incumbent upon us once we recognise the silence of this subject in positive terms.

1.9 Silence and Culture

Culture and language are an obvious concern of the social sciences. My interest in these fields has been stimulated by the specific contributions of cultural anthropology, or ethnography. Interpretive anthropology, in particular, takes as its 'subject' of study "culture", given the understanding of culture as

always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, *between* subjects in relations of power (Clifford 1986:15).

For this reason, ethnography, and specifically an ethnographic study of American Indians conducted over twenty-five years ago, has offered the most useful delineation I have encountered of the ways in which silence functions in human interaction. It is also strikingly compatible with the insights and philosophical underpinnings of speech-act theory specified above. In "'To give up on words': Silence in Western Apache Culture", Basso identifies six social contexts characterised by what he terms "acts of silence" and "silence behaviour". These are: "meeting strangers", "courting", "children, coming home", "getting cussed out", "being with people who are sad", "being with people for whom they sing". Basso advances the hypothesis that "keeping silent in Western Apache culture is associated with situations in which participants perceive their relationships *vis à vis* one another to be ambiguous and/or unpredictable" (1972:81). He is cautious about the generalisability of his findings: "The question remains to what extent the foregoing hypothesis helps to account for silence behavior in other cultures. Unfortunately, it is impossible at the present time to provide anything approaching a conclusive answer". He points out, specifically, that "keeping silent amongst the Western Apache is a response to uncertainty and unpredictability in social relations", and so it is triggered by quite specific contextual cues (1972:83).

Despite Basso's caution about the context-specificity of his findings, his concepts of "silence behaviour" and "acts of silence" seem to me to have profound significance for a study of silence in relation to culture and narrative. This significance has to do with the recognitions they

demand: first, of the deliberacy or volition which can motivate silence, and second, of the autonomy of the party who uses silence thus deliberately. These recognitions plainly cohere with Lyons's insistence on the agency of the subject in a communicative framework; they will also be seen (in Chapter 2) to be aligned with the renunciation of the trope of penetration in favour of the concept of the interface in both cross-cultural and narrative interaction. The volitional nature of silence is thus intrinsic to the theoretical recognition within this study of the autonomy of the subject.

The implications for "reading" culture are profound; they are no less so for reading literature. If we consider again the discussion of *Foe* with which this chapter opened, and the briefer discussions of *Fools*, *The Grass is Singing*, and *Turbott Wolfe* which followed, we will recognise the silences in these novels as the silences of black people. Now, whereas a common-sense conception of silence might encourage us to condone the appropriateness or realism of fictional depictions of silent women, or lower-class or black people, the concepts offered by Basso force us to foreground their silence, and to read it from their point of view. Most crucially in regard to character, as I will show in Chapter 3, these recognitions facilitate a resistant reading of silence.

1.10 The Scope of this Study

The delineation of speech-act theory and ethnography thus far has established a point of entry to a theorisation of silence in our literature. The major theoretical problem which remains is that of textualisation: how do we read silence as a manifestation of cross-cultural interaction in the narrative text? It will be the concern of Chapters 2 and 3 to grapple with this problem. Major concepts that will be introduced in order to address it will be those of "cultural translation", and specifically the narrator as "cultural translator", and character as a textualisation of the subject. The role of the reader, and particularly the "cross-border reader", will be considered in both these regards: as "reviewer" of the translation, and as party to the "construction" of the identity of characters. The volitional silence of characters will nonetheless be read as resistance to the power

relations inherent in the act of narration, and by implication the act of reading.

The task that remains for this chapter is a delineation of the scope of the study. I should insist at the outset that my intention is not to be exhaustive, comprehensive, or even representative. Since a major part of this work is to establish the theoretical significance of silence in our literature, the texts selected for consideration are designed to stand as case studies for the testing, refinement and elaboration of the thesis. Given these limits, the thesis is likely, if successful, to serve as a basis for extended and comparative studies in the future.

I have said above that the consideration of postcolonial theory had been undertaken both in order to assess its potential value for a theorisation of silence in our literature, and in order to provide a basis for the selection of texts. Although the following two chapters constitute an extension and development of the theoretical approach to be followed, I would now like to anticipate Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and motivate this selection in terms of the theoretical framework of the first three.

In the first place, the domain from which they have come is, as my title specifies, "Twentieth-Century Southern African Novels in English". The regional perspective, as I explained above, is an attempt to subvert the hegemonic polarities identified by Nkosi (of "dominant" and "oppressed" culture, of "privileged" and "underprivileged" texts, of "coloniser" and "colonised") by emphasising South Africa's location *in* Africa rather than its location as an outpost of Empire. This perspective will be particularly apparent in regard to the geographical migrations that occur in *Mhudi*, and in the complexities of Head's position as an exile: it is evident also in the fact that these texts are broadly rural in location and not explicitly political. And yet the medium that links us with the Centre can hardly be ignored: and so consideration will be directed to the ways in which "Englishness" comes into contact, in *Mhudi*, with oral traditions of indigenous languages, in *Too Late the Phalarope*, with the dominant discourse of Afrikaner cultural

nationalism, and in *Maru*, with an emergent "Africanness". The pressures of cross-culturality are strongly reflected in all three texts. In important ways these pressures construct each of the protagonists as a transitional figure, and hence draw attention to the relations between individual and community or communities. Also significant is the historical change that sees cross-culturality translated first into the imperial terms of segregation and miscegenation, and subsequently into Afrikaner cultural national terms of *apartheid*. Thus we witness Mhudi's dislocation out of a settled traditional existence and her subsequent contact with people from three different communities (Qoranna, Boer and Matabele); we see a sexual relationship constituting Pieter (though not significantly Stephanie) as transgressor of the "iron law" demarcating the boundaries between black and white in *Too Late the Phalarope*; and we witness the racial prejudice endured and resisted by Margaret Cadmore in *Maru*.

Since, as I will go on to show in Chapter 3, the issue of silence has to do with the textualisation of the human subject as character in cultural terms, and since, therefore, the relations between writer, narrator and character will receive some attention, it is perhaps apposite here to explain the decision to focus on texts which include a significant textualisation of a black woman. The issue of gender is a large one, reflecting an interface of its own, and my concerns in this study are not primarily feminist. My attempt has rather been to choose a subject whose race and gender serve as a constant around which variations in narrative treatment can be compared. Although the issue of alterity is one that affects all subjects whose silence in literature might be considered realistic, and the study could, therefore, have focused on white women characters, or black men, the black woman stands as "double other" to the white man who is the dominant figure in cultures of the Centre and many of the postcolonies, and so her silence in particular has become a matter of record (see, for example, Clayton 1990:27, Lewis 1992:50, Driver 1992:457).

The question of the voice of the black woman is one that this study will consider. The more important questions to which it will direct itself

are these: if she were to speak, would we be able to listen to her? if she chooses not to speak, should we not listen to her silence?

CULTURE AND NARRATIVE

I began, in Chapter 1, to examine some of the ways in which the postcolonial paradigm might be drawn on to address the theoretical requirements of the Southern African context. One of the pressures of this context was identified as language, in a range of forms: as common heritage with the Centre, as medium of communication, as critical discourse. In a society characterised by cultural diversity, another of the pressures of context is cross-cultural interaction. Few if any novels in our literature do not deal with it, and at the level of criticism the hegemonic "control of discourse" to which Nkosi alludes can plainly be read in cultural terms. The endeavour of this chapter is to investigate the role played by culture in the narrative textualisation of the subject: it is important nevertheless to bear in mind the interrelatedness of language and culture, which will receive further attention in Chapter 3.

2.1 Two Readings of *Heart of Darkness*

Accepting the commission from Gates to find a theoretical approach to "the social dynamism of subjection, incorporation, and marginalization in relation to the cultural dominant" (1990:19) within the sphere of Southern African literature, we might direct attention to culture in two ways: to the influence of cross-culturality on narrative, and to the contributions that readings of culture can make to readings of narrative. Given also the implied commission from Nkosi that the privileged texts of the dominant culture should be challenged (in Welz 1991a:97), I would like to begin by considering two recent articles on a work that still identifiably falls into this category. Although *Heart of Darkness* concerns itself not with Southern but with Central Africa, it stands as an important instance of cross-cultural narrative, and one whose invocation of alterity can fruitfully be addressed in postcolonial terms. It is this alterity, I think, that has stimulated a polemical debate between critics with, respectively, African and metropolitan allegiances, a debate that is taken up in both the readings that follow. Since it offers a significant textualisation of a black woman, the novel

stands as a point of comparison particularly for the discussion of *Mhudi* in Chapter 4, but also for the novels to be considered in Chapters 5 and 6.

The two critiques that follow perhaps also need an introduction. In the first place they are written by critics whose positioning, with regard to the postcolonial paradigm, is recognisably different. Bowker is a South African, yet her comparative reading of Conrad, Achebe and Lessing stands as an instance of the use of 'imported' theory in our criticism noted in Chapter 1. Hampson is based in London, and the theory he draws on might likewise be classified as metropolitan. If both critiques address the issue of cross-culturality, the theories that inform them equip them differently, however, because the ethnography Hampson draws on has been developed in conjunction with research in the 'postcolonies' (and elsewhere), and hence has had a major interest in cross-cultural contact *per se*. By contrast, the postmodernism Bowker invokes in her article is substantially at odds with the postcolonial theory I have delineated, and, in my view, demonstrates the difficulties that postmodernism has with cross-culturality. Her article is useful in addition because it introduces the concept of the boundary, and so provides a basis for a discussion of 'the interface'. Hampson's study is important for different reasons. The most useful definition of silence in Chapter 1 came from the domain of ethnography. Hampson's application of the concept of cultural translation both establishes in highly suggestive ways the value of ethnography for literary analysis, and stands as a comparative basis for the kind of study that will be undertaken in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. On a structural level, his use of the ethnographic model sensitises him to the discursive situation in the novel, and to the relations that exist between writer, narrator, character and reader. On a broader level, his use of the ethnographic model invokes the context of early exploration and travel writing which had a seminal influence on conceptualisations of the 'other', and which has thus become the subject of recent work such as Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), Mason's *Deconstructing America: Representations of the Other* (1990), and, within our criticism, van Wyk Smith's Introduction to his *Shades of Adamastor* (1988), and

Lockett's "The Black Woman in South African English Literature" (1988) which draws in turn on Gray's delineation of the Adamastor myth in *Southern African Literature: An Introduction* (1979). Hampson's use of cultural anthropology also provides a point of connection with related concepts in other fields in the social sciences, some of which will be discussed here and some in greater depth in Chapter 3.

2.2 Bowker on *Heart of Darkness*

Bowker titles her article, "Textuality and Worldliness: Crossing the Boundaries. A Postmodernist Reading of Achebe, Conrad and Lessing", and in it draws the following distinction:

A non-African such as Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* who uses African space as a foil in order to strengthen the boundaries of his own culture, writes an "outside of Africa" text; whereas a non-African (in the sense of being European) such as Doris Lessing in *The Grass is Singing* who does not use African space to emphasize her own cultural boundaries, but investigates the very nature of boundaries, the nature of the worlds which they enclose and what happens when different kinds of worlds (in this case white Southern African and African) are placed in confrontation in Africa, writes an "out of Africa" text (1989:61-62).

The implications of this distinction for a postcolonial paradigm seem to me substantial, though Bowker, regrettably, does not explore them in such terms. Drawing on the work of Said, her theoretical alignment is nevertheless with postmodernism and not postcolonialism: and so her distinction between Conrad and Lessing is based less on their position in regard to Africa than on their respective modernism and postmodernism. Rebutting Achebe's charge of racism, she couches an invocation of the narrative frame of *Heart of Darkness* in Said's terms of filiation and affiliation. In doing so she asserts: "Conrad ... has to demarcate his cultural boundaries in order to protect that to which he belongs and that which he possesses. In view of Conrad's contextuality it is a textual imperative that he imperialistically perform an imaginative expropriation of a space of otherness, such as Africa ..." (1989:61, Bowker's emphasis). Following McHale's thesis that "the dominant of modernist fiction is epistemological and that of postmodernist fiction ontological" (1989:62), she goes on: "Lessing the postmodernist does not use the discursive situation to confirm and

reinforce boundaries; she investigates the nature of boundaries and the way discourse operates to confirm and reinforce them" (1989:66).

The interpretive differences I have with Bowker must be reserved for later: at present it seems important to specify something of the theoretical significance of her argument. It is possibly a deliberate attempt to escape the pressures of context upon which I have been insisting that leads to her (rather incidental) reading of Africa as a "space of otherness" which Conrad can imaginatively expropriate in order to fulfil the "textual imperative" towards imperialism which demarcates his "cultural boundaries". To test the validity of her assertions about Conrad's use of African space one would need, presumably, to compare it with his use, in other novels, of Malaysian or South American or even English space; one might need to investigate the relations between his experiences of Russian imperialism in Poland as a child and his exposure to British imperialism in various parts of the world as an adult. This exercise plainly falls outside the compass of Bowker's article. Yet without such a validation her reading of Africa comes perilously close to that of the Scottish student (whom Achebe so reviled) who saw Africa as "merely a setting for the disintegration of the mind of Mr Kurtz" (1978:8).

So incidental a reading of Africa is teasing, given that Conrad and Achebe are both writing quite emphatically of Africa; and, more importantly, given the reflexive possibilities of the theoretical mode of postmodernism in which Bowker chooses to write, given her own position as a critic writing "out of Africa", and given the fact that she does not explicitly recognise this position. Her sense of a poststructural loosening of boundaries (1989:56) proceeds, she says, in terms of the mandate of "critics such as Said [that] the function of postmodernist criticism is ... to resist a philosophy of pure textuality and critical non-interference, by engaging with social reality through the investigation of the connection between texts and the existential actualities of human life, politics, societies and events" (1989:58-59). Yet it is only in regard to Lessing that she attempts any engagement

with the social realities of Africa, and this engagement, too, is incidental.

In the second place, Bowker gives relatively little emphasis to discourse, and the ways in which, if we follow Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, language can be said to

[constitute] reality in an obvious way: it provides some terms and not others with which to talk about the world Worlds exist by means of languages, their horizons extending as far as the processes of neologism, innovation, tropes, and imaginative usage generally will allow the horizons of the language itself to be extended. Therefore the english [sic] language becomes a tool with which a 'world' can be textually constructed (1989:44).

Bowker's non-emphasis on discourse is curious, given the "typical postmodernist questions" she cites from McHale: "What is a world? What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?" (1989:63). It is curious, too, given her references to Said's reading of Conrad as the type of author "who deliberately conceives the text as supported by a discursive situation involving speaker and audience", and of the Conradian encounter as "persistently, the encounter between speaker and hearer" (Bowker 1989:58). If Bowker makes no attempt to explore her position as a critic "out of Africa", neither, here, does she explore the reflexive implications of her position as "audience" or "hearer", whom Said identifies as intrinsic to Conrad's sense of the text.

Her relative uninterest in these aspects of the discursive situation is associated, I think significantly, with what might be termed an adversarial conception of culture. She draws on Said's use of "the word *culture* to suggest an environment, process and hegemony in which individuals (in their private circumstances) and their works are embedded, as well as overseen at the top by a superstructure and at the base by a whole series of methodological attitudes". Culture, Bowker goes on, "designates something to which one belongs, and something which one possesses, as well as demarcating a boundary 'by which the concepts of what is extrinsic or intrinsic to the culture come into forceful play' (Said). These kinds of pressure which culture exerts suggest that

resistance to culture has always been present" (1989:59). The 'embedding', the 'overseeing', the 'possession' and the continuous "resistance" allude to a relation between individual and culture at once threatening and oppositional.

Although her focus at this point is on the critic, the relation is apparent also in regard to the writer: hence her reading of *Heart of Darkness* in which its author acts out the "textual imperatives" prescribed for him by his "contextuality". We thus see Conrad "creating an affiliative order in his text to compensate for a failed filiative order in his context" (1989:60). If the sight is a hollow one, it is perhaps because the concept of "context" is applied only to Conrad the writer, and not to Bowker the critic. Are we not entitled to ask, after all, which "textual imperatives" are prescribed for her, and which she is acting out? It is also perhaps because, interesting as are the distinctions and the relations between "textuality" and "worldliness", they do not, finally, constitute a theory of narrative. Given the cross-culturality reflected in Conrad's text, such a theory cannot in fact be generated in terms of the adversarial conception of culture held by Bowker, and behind her Said, and behind them both Trilling's "opposing self", with its "certain powers of indignant perception" which it directs to the "terrible principle of culture" (1955:x-xi). As I will go on to show, in this and the next chapter, a theory that takes sufficient account of the relations between culture and narrative must be rooted in a more sophisticated sense of what Giddens terms the "recursive" nature of language, of the ways in which individual and culture are mutually constitutive (1987:163).

I have explored Bowker's essay in some depth because the circumstances of its author and its publication might lead one to expect to find in it a "South African" reading of *Heart of Darkness*, and in order to investigate the reasons why one doesn't. I have explored the essay also in order to consider some of the things a "postmodern reading" of Conrad, Achebe and Lessing might well not consider. My own endeavour is to break out of the categories that have contained metropolitan and colonial literatures, in search of a theoretical framework that can

address both. In pursuing this endeavour, it will be necessary to move beyond Bowker's distinction between "out of Africa" and "outside of Africa" texts. Yet the distinction remains an important one, for at least two reasons. In the first place, it can sensitise us to the predominant trope in much writing "outside of Africa": which is that of penetration. The trope is ancillary to processes of "discovery" and "exploration" engaged in by early travellers and later imperialists: it is perhaps most obvious in Van der Post's *Venture to the Interior* (1952), it is certainly plain in *Heart of Darkness*. We might, for this reason, refine Bowker's category slightly by speaking of "into Africa" texts. We might also redirect these categories to the sphere of criticism and ask whether, despite her position as a South African, Bowker's reading, and the postmodernism it represents, should not be classified as an "outside of Africa" reading of Africa.

In the second place, underlying these categories is the concept of the "boundary"; a concept to which Bowker pays some attention. In the definition she derives from Said, it is one of the functions of culture to demarcate a boundary between what is extrinsic to it and what is intrinsic to it (1989:59). Conrad's creation of "an affiliative order in his text to compensate for a failed filiative order in his context" (1989:60) serves to "strengthen the boundaries of his own [sic] culture" (1989:61). Again, from Said, one of the most important functions of criticism is to "guard against entrapment within rigid boundaries" (1989:58), and in this it is supported by the relaxing of boundaries "between different disciplines, between different discourses" (1989:56) which characterises our current poststructural period. (It is a trend that will be actively pursued in this dissertation).

For the purposes of my study the concept of the boundary will need further development. For example, the biographic emphasis Bowker gives the concept leads her away from a full consideration of the relations between self, discourse and reality. So, too, do the dicta she adopts from McHale, that

the dominant of modernist fiction is epistemological and that of postmodernist fiction ontological. According to

McHale, for a modernist like Conrad the existence of his world is taken for granted; he accepts that there is a knowable and ascertainable reality beyond the text and the question for him is *how* to reach this world through his text (1989:62).

It is more than my impatience with categories that makes the distinction seem inept; even a slight acquaintance with the stylistic feature Watt (1979:178) calls "delayed decoding" should be sufficient to challenge the judgement. Conrad's sense of reality is by no means as taken-for-granted as this: he has a profound sense of how "words" can construct a "world", how in the case of Marlow as well as Kurtz the "voice" might constitute the "man". Without a more sophisticated and less adversarial sense of culture Bowker cannot recognise these things: and so her concept of the boundary does not go as far as it might. It is a concept to which I shall return.

2.3 Hampson on *Heart of Darkness*

In the terms of my thesis, the major problem with Bowker's reading of Conrad's text is its inability to deal effectively with cross-culturality. This problem takes several forms, including her failure to position herself in terms of her context; her failure to factor the reader in to her reading, and so to apply the terms of postmodernism to herself; hence her failure to recognise the constitutive force of her own condonation of Conrad's appropriation of African space. Most significant, for my purposes, is the inadequate attention she pays to language, discourse, and, particularly, silence. These issues will receive comprehensive attention in the course of this chapter. A different perspective on them is available in another recent article on Conrad's text, entitled "*Heart of Darkness* and 'The Speech that Cannot be Silenced'" (1990), in which Hampson applies the insights of "modern dialogic or reflexive anthropology" (and specifically the work of Clifford, Marcus and Asad) to concerns similar to Bowker's. It might be pertinent to point out that my reading of Hampson is, in its insistence on the criteria of contextuality, intended to stand as a corrective to Bowker's reading of Said. Despite Hampson's location at the metropolitan Centre, his use of ethnographic theory sensitises him to the cross-culturality that is represented in Conrad's novel, and allows him to

address many of the issues that Bowker doesn't. It is particularly his use of the concept of "cultural translation" which offers a mode of approach to the textual complexities of relations between cultures, including relations of power, and which thus renders his reading amenable to application within the sphere of Southern African literature, to "out of Africa" as well as to "outside of Africa" texts.

Like Bowker, Hampson begins his reading of *Heart of Darkness* by engaging with Achebe's allegations about its racism. Finding for Conrad, Hampson sees in the narrative method of the text evidence of far greater insight into processes of cultural contact, and the ways in which these can be represented in works of fiction, than Bowker (or Achebe) would be willing to allow. Because of this he pays a great deal more attention to narrative audience in *Heart of Darkness* (and indeed to all four parties to the "situation of narrative utterance" - writer, narrator, character and reader - if I might collapse the terms of Lyons and of Genette, in anticipation of Chapter 3).¹ Such attention is important because of two recognitions which underlie it: that communication is a human system, and that representation is a communicative act.

Hampson cites the observation by Asad that, "When anthropologists return to their countries, they must write up 'their people', and they must do so in the conventions of representation already circumscribed ... by their discipline, institutional life, and wider society" (Hampson 1990:26). In *Heart of Darkness* we witness just such a process: Marlow returns to London to recount his tale on a boat on the Thames. His representation (of Kurtz, of Africa) is a representation for a specific audience, and is thus circumscribed by the conventions he shares with this audience. "Marlow's audience, like the readership of *Blackwood's Magazine*, is made up of males of the colonial service class", says

¹ John Lyons's "situation of utterance" includes spatial and temporal features; it includes, typically, a distinction between speaker and hearer, with the speaker at the "centre" of the "deictic system"; and it includes reference to an object or person as the "subject of discourse" (1969:275-276). Gerard Genette, of course, titled his theorisation of the novel *Narrative Discourse* (1980).

Hampson (1990:26). In this regard they are very like the readership for whom Conrad was writing: his "original constituents [were] the subscribers to *Blackwood's* and *New Review*, an audience still secure in the conviction that they were members of an invincible imperial power and a superior race" (Parry, cited in Hampson 1990:26).

The link (between the returning anthropologists, Marlow and Conrad) is the "conventions of representation" which circumscribe the telling of the tale. It is, I think, generally accepted that Conrad's use of the narrator Marlow is a highly self-conscious one. His use of Marlow's audience is no less so: "Conrad shows his understanding of the parameters within which he was writing by mirroring them in Marlow's relations with his audience" (Hampson 1990:26). Plainly, the cultural location of any narrator exerts a pressure on the kind of narrative that can be told, and by inscribing these parallels into the structure of his story Conrad is both demonstrating his awareness of these pressures, and interpolating an imaginative distance for himself from them.

It is Hampson's critical innovation to read not only Conrad but also Marlow as an ethnographer, as a "cultural translator". He says, "Conrad is not 'pretending to record scenes', he is not presenting an account of Africa: he is presenting Marlow's experience of Africa and Marlow's *attempt to understand and represent that experience*" (1990:22, my emphasis).

2.4 Cultural Translation

The metaphor of the narrator as cultural translator seems to me a profound one. Yet before considering its implications for a postcolonial theory of narrative, we need to explore the concept of cultural translation in more detail, within the framework of ethnographic studies. The concept is by no means an unproblematic one. In an essay entitled "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation", for example, Bhabha points out, "Cultural difference emerges from the borderline moment of translation that Benjamin describes as the 'foreignness' of languages" The 'foreignness' of language is the nucleus of the untranslatable that goes beyond the transparency of

subject matter" (1990:314). If, as Bhabha implies, the attempt to translate in effect serves to emphasise differences, it would appear to be self-defeating. The question he does not here pursue is *for whom* differences are emphasised.

Before addressing the question, I would like to clarify the problem by relating cultural to linguistic translation. In *The Linguistic Construction of Reality*, Grace distinguishes between two different views regarding the way in which languages represent reality. "The basic epistemological assumption of the mapping view might be stated as follows: there is a common world out there and our languages are analogous to maps of this world. Thus, the common world is represented or 'mapped' (with greater or less distortion) by all languages". Crucial to this view is what Grace terms the "intertranslatability postulate ... [that] all languages and all things that can be said in any of them must be commensurable because this universally-shared world is their common measure" (1987:6-7). Grace opposes to this view a second, the "reality-construction view of language". Grace devotes his book to delineating this view and so it cannot easily be summarised; its most crucial aspect, for our purposes, is its opposition to the intertranslatability postulate. Since "a language is shaped by its culture, and a culture is given expression in its language, to such an extent that it is impossible to say where one ends and the other begins" it follows that, "what can be said, and what can be talked about, may be quite different from one language-culture system to another", and hence, "it is *not* the case that anything which can be said in one language can also be said in any other language" (1987:10-11).

It might be apparent already that the "mapping view of language" is inadequate for the purposes of this study. Conversely, the "reality-construction view of language" can contribute in important ways to an application of the model of cultural translation to literature. Although the Latin root of the term "translation" suggests a bearing- or carrying-over of meaning, Grace's distinction entails sacrificing the notion of spatial movement in favour of a concept of semantic or epistemological compatibility between two language-culture systems. The

need for this shift will be argued in greater depth later in this chapter in the identification, within the notion of cultural translation, of the interface.

At present I would like to take up the question that Bhabha doesn't pursue, which is, *for whom* are differences emphasised? The question is an important one because its answer helps to position us as readers in relation to the narrator as cultural translator. In order to address this question, we need to consider the degree to which translation can be considered as narration. We might, in this regard, recall Rimmon-Kenan's basic two-part definition: "the term narration suggests (1) a *communication* process in which the narrative as message is transmitted by addresser to addressee and (2) the *verbal* nature of the medium used to transmit the message" (1983:2). The model of narrative as utterance will receive fuller attention in Chapter 3. For the moment we might recall the refinements that Lanser offers and adduces from different critics (1981:62): that speech-act theory allows us to see the text not just as "message/object" but as a "specific kind of communicative and aesthetic act", that the Genettian concept of "voice" establishes the narrator's relation to story, time and level of narration (1981:37), and that, following Pratt, speech-act theory "answers the need for a contextually based approach to texts" (1981:62). There are obvious complexities involved in translation which are not necessarily present in narration which arise from its relations to two distinct language-culture systems. One of these is its orientation or directedness; another is the problem of accountability (which applies also to novels of cross-cultural relation). Since translation is clearly both communicative and verbal, however, and since it can thus be viewed as a speech act, it is probably safe to read it as a specific form of narration if we bear such complexities in mind.

By reading it as a form of narration, we might then infer the following about cultural translation. In the first place, although translation is always intentional or directed, it will generally be *for the translator* that differences are emphasised. Asad distinguishes, in this regard, between processes of criticism and translation, pointing out that, "for

criticism to be responsible, it must always be addressed to someone who can contest it" (1986:156). Translation, plainly, is very seldom "addressed to someone who can contest it", and hence is not accountable to those "translated". This gives the translator tremendous power. Asad exemplifies this power in regard to "unconscious" or "implicit" meanings: "If the anthropological translator, like the analyst, has final authority in determining the subject's meanings - it is then the former who becomes *the real author* of the latter" (1986:162). In the second place, as we saw in Hampson's discussion of Marlow and his audience, translation always entails a negotiation with the "conventions of representation" of those for whom the translation is being made. The intersubjectivity that characterises translation is thus generally with the target readership or audience, not with those whose culture is being translated. These two features might be demonstrated by reference to Marlow, and specifically to what might be termed the psychological functions of his narrative. As I showed in Chapter 1, we cannot refer to the literal silence of the Africans, but their effective silence provides a ground upon which Marlow's self-defining narrative can figure. "In telling his story Marlow is attempting to recuperate his experience into the terms of his own culture: attempting to make it apprehensible both to his audience and to himself". His "figuration of Africa predominates because he is constrained by no medium with Africa. He is not accountable to the Africans for his representation of them" (Hooper 1990b).

In the third place, Asad points out that "there are asymmetrical tendencies and pressures in the languages of dominated and dominant societies" (1986:164). Although 'good translators' are willing to break down and reshape their "own language" in the process of translation, the language itself might not be amenable to such a transformation.

To put it crudely: because the languages of Third World societies - including, of course, the societies that social anthropologists have traditionally studied - are "weaker" in relation to Western languages (and today, especially to English), they are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around. The reason for this is, first, that in their political-economic relations with Third World countries,

Western nations have the greater ability to manipulate the latter. And, second, Western languages produce and deploy desired knowledge, more readily than Third World languages do (1986:157-158).

Thus cultural translation frequently has conferred upon it not only the authority of the translator but also the authority of the target medium. *Mhudi*, which will be considered in Chapter 4, provides an interesting case in point, because in some ways it deviates from these patterns. Although Plaatje undertakes a "translation" of tribal culture into the medium of English for an imperial readership, his narrative accountability is still directed substantially towards the community of whom he writes, and this accountability exerts a pressure on both the novel form and the representation of the central protagonist. In addition his "appropriation" of the imperial target medium (to use Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin's term, 1989:39) has received rather qualified critical approval. The authority of this medium, in other words, has been only partially available to him.

Although it might be difficult for those who are "translated" to challenge or to resist the translation, it is clearly true that translation is culturally and temporally located. As Bhabha has it, "cultural difference emerges from the borderline moment of translation", and so subsequent, or alternative, readers may have greater distance both from the authority of the translator and from the authority of the target medium. As critics it is incumbent upon us to be aware of our positioning in relation to text, writer and Centre. It is incumbent upon us, in other words, to exploit this distance, and thus to escape, in Bowker's terms, the "textual imperatives" that might otherwise arise from our "contextuality". Our positioning as "reviewers" of the "cultural translation" of the narrator will receive further consideration in relation to the concept of "the cross-border reader" towards the end of this chapter.

2.5 Recent Developments in Ethnography

It is a recognition of problems such as these which has characterised the development of ethnography in recent years. Their impact has been effectively to transform conceptions of both ethnography's "object of

study", culture, and the ethnographic enterprise itself. Replacing the "famous definition" of culture that Asad cites from Tylor - "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Asad 1986:141) - is a new view of culture as "always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, *between* subjects in relations of power" (Clifford 1986:15). Such a subjectification of anthropology's "object" of study is associated with new ways of seeing anthropology and, indeed, science. Like literary studies, anthropology too has registered the impact of a shift in "conditions of knowledge" to a "postparadigm" present, as Marcus and Fischer point out. They follow Lyotard in witnessing

[a] loosening of the hold over fragmented scholarly communities of either specific totalizing visions or a general paradigmatic style of organizing research. The authority of "grand theory" styles seems suspended for the moment in favor of a close consideration of such issues as contextuality, the meaning of social life to those who enact it, and the explanation of exceptions and indeterminants rather than regularities in phenomena observed ... (1986:8).

If anthropology can no longer speak "with automatic authority, as it did in the past, for others defined as unable to speak for themselves ('primitive,' 'pre-literate,' 'without history')", this is because science itself is now "construed as a social process", and "the authority of a scientific discipline ... will always be mediated by the claims of rhetoric and power" (Clifford 1986:10-11).

The impact of such recognitions has registered in a range of ways. Characterising the ethnographic research process in the past was a search for the field site that approximated "pristine culture, 'where they still do it'" (Marcus & Fischer 1986:35). This "disappearing object" is now read by Clifford at least as "a rhetorical construct legitimating a representational practice: 'salvage' ethnography in its widest sense" (1986:112-113). Governed, nevertheless, by the continuing quest of ethnography to elicit the "native point of view" and to elucidate "how different cultural constructions of reality affect social action", "problems of description" have thus been turned into "problems of representation" (Marcus & Fischer 1986:25,6). And so "the research

process itself, ... for fields such as cultural anthropology and history, is, significantly, a matter of representing in narrative form social and cultural realities" (1986:15).

Before pursuing the implications of these developments within ethnography (the emphasis on narrative and the subjectification of the object of study), I would like to consider their relations with similar trends in the broader sphere of the humanities and the social sciences. The increasing predominance of narrative in these fields can be inferred from the titles of Kreiswirth's "Trusting the Tale: The Narrativist Turn in the Human Sciences" (1992), Nash's *Narrative in Culture: The Uses of Storytelling in the Sciences, Philosophy and Literature* (1990), and Polkinghorne's *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (1988), as well as three contributions in Shotter and Gergen's *Texts of Identity* (1989): "Narrative Culture and the Motivation of the Terrorist", "Narrative Embodiments: Enclaves of the Self in the Realm of Medicine", and "The Construction of Identity in the Narratives of Romance and Comedy". Kreiswirth's opening comment might be taken as representative: "As anyone aware of the current intellectual scene has probably noticed, there has recently been a virtual explosion of interest in narrative and in theorizing about narrative; and it has been detonated from a remarkable diversity of sites, both within and without the walls of academia" (1992:629). Toolan offers an ingenuous preface to his *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*:

What is it about narrative that makes it such a pervasive and fascinating phenomenon? And how can one begin to answer such a question without entering into a narrative of one's own? The fact is, as my opening sentence announces, narrative are everywhere. Or are potentially so. Everything we do, from making breakfast to making the bed to making love (and notice how those - in any order - make a multi-episode narrative) can be seen, cast, and recounted as a narrative - a narrative with a beginning, middle and end, characters, setting, drama (difficulties or conflicts resolved), suspense, enigma, 'human interest', and a moral. (The moral of the story of my making breakfast this morning could be summarized as "Don't clean the toaster while cooking porridge.") (1988:xiv).

In "Slaughtering the Subject: Literature's Assault on Narrative", Nash positions himself quite clearly within the "fraternity" of "Derridean deconstructionism" and identifies the dismantling, the decentring, the indeterminacy of the subject that is associated with it. Nevertheless, he notes with considerable wryness,

One of the greatest disappointments in late twentieth-century sceptical literary theory and the fiction it has produced, for those of us who were so excited about it, has occurred not in writing's failure to represent "the outside world", but in its failure, no matter how hard it has tried, not to represent it. Writing's utter inability to stay out of the world, out of readers' thoughts about the world; writing's inability to avoid implicating itself, its reader, and its writer, by its very utterance, in the world - to avoid getting its hands dirty (1990:212).

He points out that "radical indeterminism in literature ... postmodernist, poststructuralist forms of indeterminism" is no longer "radical" but "by all standards, middle-aged ... it's not quite so nimble as it once appeared, it's developing the suggestion of a metaphysical paunch, and it shows signs of a mid-life crisis; it does break out in unexpected hot flushes, hoarse hysteria, myopia, and the general display of nervous defence mechanisms and tics of an idea no longer quite sure of its own sex-appeal" (1990:213-214). Underlying the humour is an important point: that even radical indeterminism cannot "stand outside history", and that its "incapacity to lay responsibility at society's door without finding a rationale for denying its own responsibility" is in the end simply debilitating. His conclusion (the 'implication' of writing by its "utterance" in the world) is important for my purposes in preparing the ground for the recuperation or recentring of the character as subject that will be essayed in Chapter 3; it is important here for its relevance to ethnography's reconstitution of itself. He says:

within the frame of reference drawn when indeterminism is claimed to provide a tool of critique, it's literally legitimate for me to say that with any forthright and consistent obliteration of the idea of the experiencing, acting subject - of discrete persons as agents of discrete events and intentions - or with any description of the subject as simply a manifestation of impersonal collective forces, we can't hope either to account intelligibly for change, explain to ourselves how we feel ourselves to be in

disagreement with someone else, or hold anyone responsible for his or her acts. Not only do social interaction and political action become incomprehensible; so - if watched closely - does the notion of indeterminacy itself (1990:216).

Within the field of ethnography, the shift from description to representation is clearly related to the subjectification of its "object" of study, and to the concomitant recognition that cultural translation necessarily involves textualising the human subject. Having lost the "automatic authority" with which it spoke in the past "for others defined as unable to speak for themselves", ethnography has also become aware of the partiality, the intentionality and, in Clifford's term, the fictionality of its accounts of such people: "Ethnographic writings can properly be called fictions in the sense of 'something made or fashioned,' the principal burden of the word's Latin root, *fingere*. But it is important to preserve the meaning not merely of making, but also of making up, of inventing things not actually real" (1986:6). Asad makes a similar point in his claim that "the historian is *given a text* and the ethnographer has *to construct one*" (1986:144). Clifford observes: "It would be interesting to analyze systematically how, out of the heteroglot encounters of fieldwork, ethnographers construct texts whose prevailing language comes to override, represent, or translate other languages" (1988:112n). The process of "overriding, representing and translating" is not limited to cultural translation, as I will go on to show, but characterises all narration. Cultural translation is, nevertheless, particularly marked by the need for a "sophisticated epistemology that takes full account of intractable contradictions, paradox, irony, and uncertainty in the explanation of human activities" (Marcus & Fischer 1986:14-15).

The textualisation of the human subject in ethnography is a dual process: on the one hand, cultural translation issues in texts, and on the other it reads culture as text. In regard to the first aspect, we will recognise that the production of texts makes them available not only to the observer, but also, ultimately, to the observed: in Marcus and Fischer's term, "the actors in relation to one another" (1986:26).

One outcome is the disappearance of the culturally "pristine": the textualisation of their culture has engendered "an ethnography in reverse among many peoples who not only can assimilate the professional idioms of anthropology, but can relativize them among other alternatives and ways of knowledge" (1986:37). A similar effect is apparent in the field of literature, which will be examined in relation to Nkosi's notion of the "cross-border reader" later in this chapter.

It is a concatenation of both aspects of the process that has led to the development of reflexivity, of "the present dominant interest in interpretive anthropology about how interpretations are constructed by the anthropologist, who works in turn from the interpretations of his informants" (Marcus & Fischer 1986:26). Referring to Geertz and to Clifford, Rabinow has commented thus on the trend:

... anthropologists, or some of them in any case, are now discovering and being moved to new creation by the infusion of ideas from deconstructionist literary criticism Although there are many carriers of this hybridization ... there is only one "professional", so to speak, in the crowd. For whereas all the others mentioned are practicing anthropologists, James Clifford has created and occupied the role of ex officio scribe of our scribblings. Geertz, the founding figure, may pause between monographs to muse on texts, narrative, description, and interpretation. Clifford takes as his natives, as well as his informants, those anthropologists past and present whose work, self-consciously or not, has been the production of texts, the writing of ethnography. We are being observed and inscribed (1986:242).

Rabinow goes on to accuse Clifford of parasitism, of "feeding off others' texts", of pursuing "textualist meta-anthropology", of sounding a "voice from the campus library", of being an "ethnographer of ethnographers" (1986:243). He concludes: "The metareflections on the crisis of representation in ethnographic writing indicate a shift away from concentrating on relations with other cultures to a (nonthematized) concern with traditions of representation, and metatraditions of metarepresentations, in our culture" (1986:251).

Pertinent as Rabinow's critique might be, there is some irony in his pique at being treated as an anthropological "object of study", as well

as in his insistence on the distinction of being a "practicing anthropologist". Nor is the charge he goes on to level at Clifford, of failing to "use self-referentiality as anything more than a device for establishing authority" (1986:244), entirely just, because the consequences of the reflexivity upon which Clifford insists are far-reaching. Bhabha, in the article referred to earlier, cites Levi-Strauss's description of the ethnographic act, which

demands that the observer himself is a part of his observation and this requires that the field of knowledge - the total social fact - must be appropriated from the outside like a thing, but like a thing which comprises within itself the subjective understanding of the indigenous. The transposition of this process into the language of the outsider's grasp - this entry into the area of the symbolic of representation/signification - then makes the social fact "three dimensional". For ethnography demands that the subject has to split itself into object and subject in the process of identifying its field of knowledge; the ethnographic object is constituted "by dint of the subject's capacity for indefinite self-objectification (without ever quite abolishing itself as subject) for projecting outside itself ever-diminishing fragments of itself" (1990:301).

Significant implications for the critic as well as for the narrator as cultural translator, to which I will return, include the importance of self-positioning and accountability. Clifford's formulation is rather simpler, though it coheres with Bhabha's: "It has become clear that every version of an 'other,' wherever found, is also the construction of a 'self,' and the making of ethnographic texts ... has always involved a process of 'self-fashioning'" (1986:23-24).

Neither is Clifford alone in privileging dialogue as a mode of response to the "implicatedness" of the ethnographer. In a consideration of "post-modern ethnography", Tyler goes a great deal further than Rabinow in rejecting representation, in favour of what he terms "evocation", which is "neither presentation nor representation ... [as] the discourse of the post-modern world" (1986:123). He goes on, "because post-modern ethnography privileges 'discourse' over 'text', it foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the

ideology of the transcendental observer" (1986:126). The ethnographic text, he concludes,

will thus achieve its purposes not by revealing them, but by making purposes possible. It will be a text of the physical, the spoken, and the performed, an evocation of quotidian experience, a palpable reality that uses everyday speech to suggest what is ineffable, not through abstraction, but by means of the concrete. It will be a text to read not with the eyes alone, but with the ears in order to hear "the voices of the pages" (St. Bernard) (1986:136).

Tyler's final emphasis on "voices" is characteristic of the movement away from description towards a "metaphor of dialogue, which more literally suggests the actual situation of anthropological interpretation in fieldwork" (Marcus & Fischer 1986:29). It is also associated with a rejection of what Clifford terms "visualism". As he points out, "once cultures are no longer prefigured visually - as object, theaters, texts - it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances" (1986:12). The metaphor of dialogue is particularly useful in allowing that cultural interpretations are located "in many sorts of reciprocal contexts", and writers are therefore obliged "to find diverse ways of rendering negotiated realities as multisubjective, power-laden, and incongruent" (1986:15). Clifford emphasises the polyphonic nature of such renderings: "As Bakhtin ... has shown, dialogical processes proliferate in any complexly represented discursive space (that of ethnography, or, in his case, a realist novel). Many voices clamor for expression" (1986:15). Elsewhere he points out, "as written versions based on fieldwork, these accounts are clearly no longer *the* story, but a story among stories" (1986:109).

Tyler's and Clifford's emphasis upon "voice" takes us back to Hampson's "modern dialogic or reflexive anthropology" with which our discussion of ethnography began. It might also remind us of the first ethnographic study cited in this thesis: Basso's investigation of "acts of silence" and "silence behaviour" in Western Apache culture. If we imagine the principles which Basso had to follow in order to discover the "reciprocal contexts" and the "negotiated realities" which gave rise to

silence we might have some sense of the "situation of anthropological interpretation in fieldwork". Suspending our judgement of the power relations of the scientific collection of data, for the moment, we might see that what Basso brought back was the 'story of silence', and that he did so because, predominant among the many voices clamouring for expression, was the 'voice of silence'.

2.6 Applications: Ethnography and Narrative

In beginning a consideration of the applicability of ethnography for a study of narrative, it seems worth recalling, briefly and for purposes of contrast, Bowker's "adversarial" conception of culture. In Clifford's view, "'culture' is always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, *between* subjects in relations of power" (1986:15); it is also necessarily "contested, temporal, and emergent" (1986:19). Since "the ethnographic experience involves a state of being in culture while looking at culture" (1988:93), it is inherently ontological as well as epistemological. And since, as Marcus and Fischer claim, "the research process itself, ... for fields such as cultural anthropology and history, is significantly a matter of representing in narrative form social and cultural realities" (1986:15), the recognitions ethnography has come to about its own textuality have substantially been recognitions of the reactivity of narration. Anticipating the discussion of Chapter 3 and the poststructuralist claim that the subject is constituted in and through language, we will see that Grace's formulation is informed by a similar insight, "a language is shaped by its culture, and a culture is given expression in its language, to such an extent that it is impossible to say where one ends and the other begins" (1986:10).

Given the problematic nature of the model of cultural translation, there remain several reasons why it can contribute substantially to a postcolonial theorisation of the novel. The first is the point of contact between cultural and literary studies indicated above: in important ways translation *is* narration. And the disappearance of the culturally "pristine" and the concomitant recognition of the reactivity of cultural translation has had a parallel in the domain of literature.

We might in this connection recognise Nkosi's challenge to the privileged texts of the dominant culture, or Achebe's critique of *Heart of Darkness*, as instances of the development of new readerships amongst people who have in the past been "translated".

The second is the observation already cited from Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin that "cross-culturality" is beginning to be recognised by literary theorists and cultural historians "as the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group 'purity', and as the basis on which the post-colonial world can be stabilized" (1989:36). Since the concept of cultural translation developed specifically in order to address the issue of cross-culturality, in the full sense of culture which Clifford supplies, and since, as I have shown above, translation is a form of narration, the concept can fruitfully be used to address cross-culturality in literature.

A third reason for retaining the model is that the relevant qualifications arising from recent ethnographic rereadings can sensitise us to the existence and nature of narrative authority, and more broadly to the relations between language, knowledge and power. This is directly related to the matter of silence. Clifford's invocation of Bakhtinian polyphony, his insistence that the ethnographic account is only "a story among stories", one voice amongst the many clamouring for expression, is linked, in his view, to the renunciation of visualism. Within the sphere of literature I have referred already to the iconic mode in which Plomer's black woman is represented in *Turbott Wolfe*. In Chapter 4 a contrast will be drawn between the silent black woman in *Heart of Darkness*, and the strongly-voiced *Mhudi*. More pointedly, to conceptualise stories in vocal terms entails a critical mode of approach that is aural rather than visual, and thus one that will encourage us to hear and to listen to their silences.

In Chapter 1 I considered the significance of medium in the postcolonial paradigm: a fourth reason for the retention of the model of cultural translation is the topicality of translation *per se*. A call has been

made recently by Daniel Kunene for a "massive translation project" of Southern African texts, in order to expand their audience and so give access to them to readers who would otherwise not have it. This is clearly a laudable endeavour. Especially given the interrelatedness of language and culture on which Grace insists, however, the problems to which it might give rise are substantially greater than those involved in getting "literature specialists" and "comparative linguists of Southern African languages" to "link hands", as Kunene has suggested they should (1989:16).

2.7 Boundaries, Interfaces and the Cross-Border Reader

The fifth and most important reason for retaining the model of cultural translation is its relevance to the concept of the boundary, the border, the margin, and specifically its positioning of readers and critics. It was Bowker's failure fully to explore the value of this concept that led us to a consideration of Hampson's application of ethnography to Conrad. In the domestic and the ideological life of white South Africans, of course, the concept of "the border" has had a particularly pervasive (and invasive) power. In broader theoretical spheres the concept has attained some predominance: Spivak begins her "Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's *Foe* Reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*" with a reference to the title of the President's Forum at the Modern Language Association annual conference, "Breaking Up/Out/Down: The Boundaries of Literary Study"; and the special theme of the 1988 International Language and Literature Association Conference in Munich was "Borders/Boundaries in Literature". Bhabha's essay has been referred to already: its title is "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" (1990). In his phrase, "the borderline moment of translation" (1990:314), we have seen an attempt to confront the problem of cultural differences in temporal terms. It seems important now to focus on the spatial aspect of the metaphor.

In my discussion, earlier, of Grace's "linguistic construction of reality", I argued the need to sacrifice the sense of translation as a bearing- or carrying-over of meaning, in favour of a concept of semantic compatibility between two intact language-culture systems. To read

translation - and narrative - as existing or taking place at a margin or boundary is, critically, to renounce the trope of penetration, and so to conceptualise cultural contact as something other than venturing in to other people's world and venturing out again, and, in Conrad's ironic terms, 'carrying off the loot' of our discoveries (in Kimbrough 1988:192). In theoretical terms, to recognise the boundary is to accord epistemological autonomy to the two cultures between which translation takes place. It is in such a sense that I have elected to use the term "interface" in this study, defined by the *Concise Oxford* as

1. Surface forming common boundary between two regions.
2. Place, or piece of equipment, where interaction occurs between two systems, processes, etc.

Located, Janus-faced, at the interface of two cultures, the translator carries out an action which might be specified, prepositionally, as "translation of X by Y for Z". As Asad reminds us, translation is unlike critique in not generally being "addressed to someone who can contest it" (1986:156). The onus then falls on us, as "subsequent or alternative readers", to exercise our critical distance from the authority of the translator and of the target medium in order to "review" the "translation". Although we may not have access to the meaning systems of both cultures (X,Z), recognising the interface allows us at least to see these respective meaning systems as extant and intact.

Various implications arise from such a theoretical recognition. As I have suggested, to see translation as taking place at the interface is to see it not as a carrying-over of meaning, but as the engendering of compatibility between two meaning systems. On the other hand, part of the force of the notion of "conventions of representation" is its insistence that meaning is not an inherent property but is always "meaning for" someone (the translator, or the reader or hearer of the representation). Thus the orientation or direction of the translation becomes important. To the extent that translation is always directed, it always entails a negotiation with the "conventions of representation" of those *for whom* the translation is being made, and which thus circumscribe the 'telling of the tale'. Such direction is also important in relation to the issue of narrative accountability, as we will see

particularly in the case of *Mhudi* in Chapter 4, but also in the case of *Too Late the Phalarope* in Chapter 5. Yet the state of "being in culture while looking at culture" is not the sole property of the translator. While the reflexive awareness which characterises the ethnographic experience might more commonly be associated with the narrator, it can also characterise the reader. As I will go on to show, this condition is probably most apparent when the "current" readership of a text differs markedly from that to which it was first directed.

For the model of cultural translation to be applied to an analysis of narration, therefore, the cultural location and cultural consciousness of all four parties to the situation of narrative utterance are plainly crucial. In a society as culturally diverse as that of Southern Africa, what might be termed the "ethnographic addresses" of any given set of writer, narrator, character, and reader may vary tremendously, and so give rise to a highly complex set of cultural interfaces within a reading of any one novel. Particularly if narration, like culture, takes place between "subjects in relations of power", then the goal for the critic is to be aware of the polyphony of the text, of the narrative as "a story among stories", of the multiple voices 'clamouring for expression'.

It is perhaps because literature has had less trouble coming to terms with its own textuality than ethnography that a goal like this does not seem to be a radically new one. Literature has been less successful, however, in coming to terms with the ontological status of the character as human subject. Since it is particularly the power relations amongst narrators and characters that will receive attention in my next chapter, it seems important now to consider some of the ways in which narrative contends with a boundary of its own: that between textuality and worldliness (to borrow the terms Bowker borrows from Said). To do so we will need to return to the domain of literary studies.

Part of my rationale for including Head's novel *Maru* in this study is her positioning as an exile, and the influence this exerts on her textualisation of the character Margaret, and on the narrative and

cultural relations in which Margaret is located. In a fascinating study of *Exile and the Narrative Imagination*, Seidel has used the idea of exile "as an enabling fiction, or at least a fiction enabling me to address the larger strategies of narrative representation" (1986:xii). Exile by definition involves boundaries: between where one is, and where one used to be or wants to be. In Seidel's words, "an exile is someone who inhabits one place and remembers or projects the reality of another" (1986:ix). Seidel draws on Kierkegaard's parable of the imagination as a mental borderland, "controlled by the generative notion that the line marking the end of the familiar is the same as that marking the beginning of the unknown. The line that limits is also the line that dares The imagined outland is a version of the inland; the possible a version of the previous" (quoted in Seidel 1986:3).² In Kierkegaard's concatenation of "familiar" and "unknown", the "outland" and the "inland", the "possible" and the "previous", we can identify distinct worlds; and in the "line" that 'marks', that "limits" and "dares", the interface at which narrative is located. It is important to recognise, however, that the text-world interface is never fixed. In a consideration of "Intertextuality and Ontology" Frow offers an interestingly similar conception of what he terms, following Derrida, the "general text":

² The full text reads as follows:

If I imagined two kingdoms adjoining one another, with one of which I was fairly well acquainted, and altogether unfamiliar with the other, and I was not allowed to enter the unknown realm, however much I desired to do so, I should still be able to form some conception of its nature. I could go to the limits of the kingdom with which I was acquainted and follow its boundaries, and as I did so, I should in this way describe the boundaries of this unknown country, and thus without ever having set foot in it, obtain a general conception of it. And if this was a task that engrossed my energies, and if I was indefatigable in my desire to be accurate, it would doubtless sometimes happen that, as I stood sadly at my country's boundary and looked longingly into the unknown country, which was so near me and yet so far away, some little revelation might be vouchsafed to me (quoted in Seidel 1986:3).

In this sense the general text is both the structure of textuality itself ... and that edge or margin of textuality ... which problematises its self-containedness, opens it out constantly to an 'outside' which is never properly external to it [it is] not a *limitless* text but a principle of textuality that subverts the edges between inside and outside, symbolic and real, signification and reference The double movement of this text involves a simultaneous textualisation of the real and recognition of the limits of textuality; and it is the incompatibility or undecidability between these two moments that is governed by the problematic of the edge, the margin, the limit (1990:48-50).

Frow's problems with the notions of the general text and of intertextuality lead him finally to accept the "hard resistance to discourse of an ontologically distinct domain of factuality" (1990:54). It should be apparent already why I cannot in this study contemplate a similar acceptance. It is particularly in regard to readership that the concept of the text-world boundary, and the motility of this boundary, is theoretically indispensable.

I claimed above that the reflexive awareness which characterises the ethnographic experience is not the sole preserve of the translator, or narrator; further, that it is probably when the "current" readership of a text differs markedly from that to which it was first directed that such awareness is most crucial. It seems to me that Achebe's rereading of *Heart of Darkness*, "An Image of Africa", is a case in point, and that the debate that followed from it can usefully be reviewed (and perhaps adjudicated) in these terms. In a recent article on South African literature, Nkosi has offered a mode of conceptualising differences in readership. He says:

South Africa is a country of borders, both internally and separated from the outside by international borders, a network of geopolitical lines carving up geopolitical spaces. My own interest begins at the point where the South African subject of discourse attempts to interpellate the reader across these borders, from the confines of his or her own community, with its own specific values and cultural interests, in order to define his or her own unique identity. This "cross-border" reader seems to me to be of great importance as one of the constitutive principles in the shaping of South African literature (1990:12).

Of course Nkosi's concerns are fairly specific. It is possible to argue, he goes on to say, that "the character and identity of South African

literature is determined somewhere else, by people outside the community in whose name the writer claims to be speaking". Thus Nkosi's formulation of the "cross-border reader" insists on the possibility that the translator may be translating his or her "own" culture for an "alien" culture, rather than vice versa. In the broader terms of the postcolonial paradigm, local writers who "write back" to the Centre might be seen as doing just this (in this study Plaatje is a case in point). Unlike Nkosi's "South African subject of discourse", Conrad was not directing his writing to "cross-border readers", and so Achebe's reaction - and the counterreactions by Western critics - can be read as a collision between different conventions of representation, as a failure of compatibility between different meaning systems.

As the title of Achebe's critique ("An Image of Africa") shows, it is Conrad's representation of Africa and particularly of Africans that gives him most trouble. In a description which is for me a seminal statement of postcolonial consciousness, Achebe asserts: "*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as 'the other world', the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization ..." (1978:3). He goes on, "the most interesting and revealing passages in *Heart of Darkness* are, however, about people" (1978:4). What bothers Achebe is the "limbs and rolling eyes", the "savages clapping their hands and stamping their feet ... in their place", "Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor", the "dehumanization of Africa and Africans" (1978:5-9). Perhaps Achebe's most telling point is his observation that "these people must have had other occupations besides merging into the evil forest or materializing out of it simply to plague Marlow and his dispirited band" (1978:12). It is a similar sense of 'the way things really were' that informs Head's wry remark: "Africa was never 'the dark continent' to African people" (1981:xiv).

In Achebe's critique of *Heart of Darkness* we find a particularly good example of challenge to "the privileged texts of the dominant culture". As a "cross-border reader" it is his cultural location and consciousness that supplies the critical distance which leads him to resist the conventions of representation largely shared by Conrad, Marlow and the

Western critics who have leapt to the defence of *Heart of Darkness*. It is what Achebe 'knows of' Africa that is opposed to what Conrad 'does with' Africa. More specifically, at least part of Achebe's challenge is directed at the "control of discourse" which manifests itself in Conrad's text as the "withholding of [human expression]" from the African woman in particular and the Africans in general. Recalling Asad we might recognise a failure adequately to translate the speech that is heard, or, more seriously, a "translation" of speech into silence. In Marlow's comment about himself, "I have a voice too, and for good or evil mine is the speech which cannot be silenced" (1973:52), we see the stark opposition that exists, in this regard, between the narrator and the Africans he depicts.

The complexities, in this instance, of the interplay between narration, cultural translation and review might perhaps be clarified if we structure it in terms of the "subordination relations" or "narrative levels" (1983:94) which Rimmon-Kenan derives from Genette. If, in our reading of criticism of Conrad, we are positioned at the "extradiegetic" level, then Achebe's critique (and others') might be seen as the diegesis we are reading. Conrad is located at the hypodiegetic level which Achebe reads, and Marlow, whom Conrad writes, at the hypohypodiegetic level, with "Africa", then, at the centre. We might represent these levels thus:

us	Achebe	Conrad	Marlow	Africa
	Bowker			
	Hampson			
	etc.			

This might seem both crude and clumsy: it is useful if we recognise that the interface between each of these levels is a cultural as well as a narrative interface. It is also useful if we recognise that the 'frame interfaces' (if I might introduce the term) between, say, us and Marlow, or Achebe and Africa are similarly distinguished.

It has been the endeavour of this chapter to "discover" the cultural and textual interfaces at which narration as cultural translation is located. If, as I claimed earlier, a recognition of the cultural interface supplies a theoretical mandate to accord epistemological autonomy to the two cultures between which translation takes place, it is a recognition of the motility of the textual interface that puts the onus on us, as "subsequent or alternative readers" to "review" the "translation". In regard to the cultural translation that takes place in *Heart of Darkness*, we can choose not to condone Marlow's use of African silence as "a *tabula rasa* onto which he may project the interpretations and figurations of his own narration" (Hooper 1990b:113). We can choose deliberately to reverse the figure-ground resolution, muting the power of Marlow's narrative in order to hear the silence of the Africans he encounters. We may choose to read this silence, in Basso's terms, as an act of volition, with a symbolism of its own.

It is with the issue of silence, therefore, that I would like to conclude. Having drawn, in this chapter, on the insights of ethnography to explore the model of narrator as cultural translator, the quest remains to find or develop a critical conceptualisation of its textual complement, character. I pointed out above that literature has had limited success in coming to terms with the ontological status of the character as human subject. Although it is not the intention of this analysis to be normative or prescriptive, my exploration of the realm of ethnography has also been undertaken in order to develop a framework that will give recognition to this status. The developments that have taken place in ethnography - its recognition of the reactivity of narration and, related to this, the subjectification of its object of study - seem to me to offer particularly important guidelines for a mode of approach to the narrative textualisation of the human subject in cultural terms. For the purposes of this study, it is a crucial characteristic of silence that it exists both as a cultural and as a narrative phenomenon. If in the volition that can motivate silence we recognise resistance both to ethnographic authority and to narrative power, in silence itself we can recognise a measure of the ontological status of the character as human subject. It will be the specific

concern of Chapter 3 to examine this dynamic in terms of the narrative and cultural interfaces now identified.

CHARACTER AND TEXTUALITY

The endeavour of the previous chapter was to identify and examine the cultural and textual interfaces at which narrative is located, and to explore some of the implications arising from the model of narrative as cultural translation. It is my intention in this chapter to investigate the relations between character and narrative, and so to develop a theoretical conceptualisation of character as the textual complement of the narrator.

3.1 Character and Subject

I have alluded already to the need for a recentring or recuperation of the subject in a postcolonial theory that attempts to address cross-culturality in narrative. This need has reflected itself theoretically in several ways thus far. In Lyons's delineation of speech-act theory, we encountered an insistence on the "subjectivity of utterance", and, despite the view of the self as the "product of the social and interpersonal roles that [one] has played in the past", a further insistence that the term "self-expression" be taken literally (1981:241). Recent developments in ethnographic theory have included a recognition of the reflexivity of fieldwork accounts, and the subjectification of the object of study. In Clifford's definition, culture is "always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, *between* subjects in relations of power" (Clifford 1986:15). This view is coherent with Grace's conception of the interrelations of language and culture. His "linguistic construction of reality" has, of course, substantial roots in the social constructionism first delineated by Berger and Luckmann in the 1960s and which continues to register itself in a range of fields. Since the human being as agent capable of 'constructing' is intrinsic to both linguistic and social constructionism, these theories have important implications for the notion of the subject as constituted in and through language, and will be considered in greater depth later in this chapter. Nash's capitulation to the importance of the subject was a pragmatic one: without it, he said, "we can't hope either to account intelligibly for

change, explain to ourselves how we feel ourselves to be in disagreement with someone else, or hold anyone responsible for his or her acts" (1990:216). Of course the importance of individual responsibility is not exclusive to postcolonial societies, but in my view it is particularly acute in our context at present.

The recentring or recuperation of the subject that is required by applications of the ethnographic model to narrative is thus mandated by a broader theoretical context in which the human subject has remained significant. The particular development we need to essay now is an investigation of the relations between such recentring of the subject and a theorisation of character in postcolonial terms. Following ethnographic trends we might see this as a deliberate 'subjectification' of our object of study, which is character.

As I pointed out at the end of Chapter 2, a revisionist reading of silence is intrinsic to such 'subjectification'. Positioned as cross-border readers by the motility of the text-world boundary, we have an onus placed on us to review the 'translation' that is narration. Recognising silence as both a cultural and a narrative phenomenon, we are enabled to read the volition that motivates silence as resistance both to ethnographic authority and to narrative power. Read so, silence supplies two directions for our discussion: to the ontological status of the character as human subject; alternatively, to the textualisation of the human subject in cultural and narrative terms.

My exploration of recent trends in cultural anthropology was motivated by a recognition of culture as an insistent pressure of context which must be addressed in a postcolonial theorisation of the novel. The view of culture towards which the argument of Chapter 2 led us was that it exists "*between* subjects in relations of power". In our approach to the textualisation of the subject, now, we need to consider some of the ways in which it reflects the other pressure of context identified in the earlier chapter, language. In doing so I would like to broaden our perspective on culture and continue our response to the call made

recently by the sociologist Giddens for the promotion of "a convergence of social and literary theory" (1987:173).

3.2 Subjectivity and Language

We should perhaps be aware that Giddens's own work stands in substantial relationship to Grace's conception of the interrelatedness of language and culture, though it offers developments and refinements which are significant for the 'identity' of characters and for the conventions of representation which influence our reading of them. Giddens's essay, "Action, Subjectivity and the Constitution of Meaning", is included in a collection entitled *The Aims of Representation: Subject/Text/History*. Beginning with the decentring of the subject which has taken place in contemporary theory, Giddens notes a dichotomy between what he terms "subjectivist" and "objectivist" approaches. "One of the problems with subjectivist approaches", he points out, is that "subjectivity is taken as a given ... not a phenomenon to be explicated but ... the basis of what it is to be a human agent" (1987:163-164). "Objectivist approaches", on the other hand, give priority to the social object, that is society, over the individual agent, and regard social institutions as the core component of interest to social analysis. Doing so they have "typically not been very adept at demonstrating the qualities which ... have to be attributed to human agents: that is to say, self-understanding, intentionality, acting for reasons" (1987:160). In Giddens's view, structuralist perspectives in the social sciences and literary criticism fall into the category of objectivist approaches; and it is in regard to language that their impact on the subject has registered most strongly: "the decentring of the subject in structuralism and post-structuralism leads to the insertion of the subject in language, conceived of in a particular way - signs constituted through difference Structuralism and post-structuralism promote a 'retreat into the code'" (1987:164). Acknowledging that the terms of human subjectivity are in fact linguistic terms "like any other, which therefore [have] to be understood in relation to the remainder of the terminology built into the language", Giddens nevertheless insists that, "Terms like 'I' and 'me' ... gain their significance from the context of activities in which human agents are

implicated. They are part of the practical mastery of social relations, and of the continuity of social context which human agents display" (1987:164).

Although we can accept with poststructuralism the insertion of the subject in language, in Giddens's view our conception of language itself needs closer and more sophisticated scrutiny. Giddens does not concede the structuralist proposition that society is like a language; rather he stipulates that "language is such an important feature of social activity that it expresses some of its most generic qualities" (1987:163). It is in this context that the "structuration theory" he has developed has its importance. The seeming opposition of objectivist and subjectivist perspectives in fact disguises complementarity: "this dualism should actually be represented as a duality, a duality that I call 'the duality of structure'" (1987:161). He specifies as follows:

According to the notion of the duality of structure ... structure is not as such external to human action, and is not identified solely with constraint. Structure is both the medium and the outcome of the human activities which it recursively organizes. By the recursive character of social life I mean that social activity in respect of its structural properties exists in and through the use of the resources which agents make in constituting their action which at the same time reconstitutes those structural properties as qualities of the systems in question (1987:163).

The interactive nature of "structure" and "human activities" renders them mutually constitutive: and in language we find an instance of the duality of structure. "Language exists only insofar as it is produced and reproduced in contingent contexts of social life" (1987:163). It is in this (recursive) sense that we need to understand the subsequent contention that "language is the medium of social practice" (1987:168). Language is nevertheless not exclusively constitutive of meaning, because "intervening between the unconscious and the conscious is practical consciousness, the underlined center of human practical activity". Giddens explains:

Here there is a set of ties not just between discourse and 'the other side of language [the unconscious]', but between the individual as an agent and the institutions which the

individual constitutes and reconstitutes in the course of the duration of day-to-day activity. A good deal of what we do is organized knowledgeably in and through practical consciousness; it follows that the way in which we make sense of our own actions and the actions of others and the ways in which we generate meaning in the world are in an elemental sense methodological. What I mean by this is that the sense of words and the sense of actions does not derive solely from the differences created by sign codes, or more generically by language The origins of meaning are not to be traced to the referent, and not to the system of differences that constitutes language as a semiotic system, but to the methodological apparatus embedded in a practical consciousness of the routines of day-to-day social life (1987:167).

Practical consciousness is differentiated from language as a constituter of meaning in being not "necessarily available to the discursive awareness of the social actor" (1987:165). It is the inaccessibility to discourse of practical consciousness that disqualifies a purely linguistic motivation either for the subject *per se*, or for the decentring of the subject. In another essay in the same collection as Giddens's, Weimann offers a useful and elegant corroboration: "as soon as language is viewed as annihilating the subject, as soon as the subject is viewed purely as a function of discourse but discourse not, simultaneously, as a function of the subject, the whole question of representation cannot be reconsidered at the crossroads of structure and event, system and history" (1987:177).

The significance of Giddens's duality of structures will be considered in some depth during the course of this chapter. Before proceeding, however, it might be worth identifying two implications which have motivated my reference to his theory. On the one hand, although the reading of character might generally fall into the domain of practical consciousness, our quest as critics is to become discursively aware of the processes that inform such reading. On the other hand, and particularly if we read resistantly, a critical conceptualisation of characters as subjects must acknowledge the possibility of their agency if it is to be sufficiently sensitive to their silences.

3.3 The Decentring of Character

At this point it might be worth applying Giddens's discussion of language and the subject to a theory of character developed by Docherty in relation to postmodern fiction. Docherty begins with a rejection of the "mimetic conception of character in fiction", which, he claims, "brings with it some unnecessary critical baggage" (1983:xi-xii). Most redundant amongst the baggage is the tendency towards essentialism which makes this conception of character appropriate to allegory and inappropriate to twentieth-century fiction. "In this approach to reading character, we make the leap from an understanding of the meanings of singular characters to the truth or message being expressed by their author; the characters are simply the *porte-parole* of an author, and it is his or her meaning which we readers seek" (1983:xii). The problems Docherty has with the conception of characters as "simply the *porte parole* of an author" might be understood in terms of Giddens's category of subjectivism, whereby the agent is "preconstituted subjectively" (1987:164), so that the character simply expresses the subjectivity of the author. Docherty's opposition to this author-given conception of character takes the form of a laudable insistence on "real interaction in a dialogic form, or common production of meaning by the writer and reader working together" (1987:xiii). The theory of characterisation which he proceeds to elaborate is, he says, a contribution to a "new tradition of writing" which takes cognisance of the "self-consciousness as written compositions" that characterises "writerly" texts, and "the linguistic interplay between writer and reader which goes on in the production of the text as it is read" (1983:xii). His attempt is to decentre the "monological authorial voice" and enter the reader into "a kind of collaborative dialogue with the fiction" (1983:15).

Although this might seem to accord with the communicative and intersubjective conception of narrative which I have been advancing, it is in regard to the question of 'selfhood' that Docherty's understanding departs substantially from mine. Speaking specifically about Beckett, Docherty offers the following comment:

Clearly, then, the self is no longer being equated with the mind, and the body is thus no longer a gateway to it. The

self is rather a surface with no depth; more correctly, it is that which is constituted in language. In a world of relative and unstable human words, where characters are but 'word-masses', then the characterological self becomes that which mediates between the author and reader through the words; that is, it is the implied voice (1983:34).

The constructions "that which is constituted in language", and "word-masses", should remind us of Giddens's "retreat into the code", the "insertion of the subject in language". Concentrating as it does on processes rather than products, Docherty's conception of character sheds some light on the fragmentation and intermittence that results from experimentation with the notion of "self":

... the naïve assumption, upon which all of the subsequent experimentation in fiction in this respect depends, goes as follows: if I am a new self at every moment, at every saying of 'I', then why fix myself in one named self ... and more radically, why retain the notion of the self at all? Why not become so fully liberated as to be able to assume whatever personality and name I wish at any moment; why not become a series of discontinuous manifestations of different 'selves', none of which need ever relate to themselves nor to any previous manifestation of a self? ... Another way of regarding this would be to say that the notion of the coherent and unified self has been replaced with that of the surface subjectivity: we have not a series of 'selves' as such but rather a series of instants of subjectivity, a series of instantiations of the 'I' (1983:75-76).

Yet although he calls it *naïve*, Docherty takes such experimentation seriously enough to conclude: "we may in some sense still have 'character', but the question of the humanity, or re-cognizable humanity, of such 'character' is raised" (1983:77). By emphasising the expressive functions of narrative over the communicative, by concurring in an ahistoric and decontextualised substitution of the id for a social identity, Docherty is in effect, despite his disclaimers, proclaiming the death of the character.

Before proceeding to a theoretical engagement with Docherty, some of the implications of his claims might become apparent if we refer them, briefly, to three examples. In *Foe*, with which this thesis began, we saw the quest of Susan Barton to constitute herself in language by engendering herself as a character in her narrative. This quest, in my view, arose from her unwillingness to be simply a "series of

discontinuous manifestations of different 'selves' ... a series of instants of subjectivity ". In *Too Late the Phalarope*, which will be considered in Chapter 5, a 'tragic' tension is set up between the hegemonic discourse of *apartheid*, and the attempts of the masculine protagonist Pieter van Vlaanderen to define a self in opposition to its terms. Powerful as his 'I' might be, it is ultimately thwarted by its failure to achieve recognition by the 'you's' around him. In *Maru*, the efforts of the central character to constitute a self must contend with the pressures of cross-culturalism that take the form of extremely hostile racism. The initially discursive self she constitutes, "I am a Masarwa", is, however, one that she ultimately leaves behind in favour of a broader African identity which can incorporate human and non-discursive qualities and modes of relationship.

In my view, three distinct problems militate against the incorporation of Docherty's postmodern theory of character into a postcolonial theorisation of the novel. Firstly, by focusing on fragmentation and intermittence *per se*, he fails to offer a positive reading of 'omission'. Secondly, in eroding the ontological autonomy of the reader, he discounts the constitutive power the reader has over the meaning of the text. And, thirdly, by ignoring the social construction of identity, he fails to balance his sense of character as an element of the text with a recognition of character as a (textualised) human subject. Distinct as these problems are, they are also clearly related, and the relations between them can be identified, as I will go on to show, in the terms of the cultural and the social.

3.4 Omission and Implicature

In regard to the first problem, Docherty's failure to offer a positive reading of 'omission', we might well recall the feature of structure which Giddens identified, that it "presumes the idea of an absent totality". This feature can be seen as particularly important for language, if we recognise language as the kind of structure as absent totality that Giddens proposes. He says, for example: "To understand the sentence which the speaker utters means knowing an enormous range of rules of a syntactic and semantical kind, which are not contained within

the speech act, but are nevertheless fundamental to understanding it, or to producing it" (1987:162). Giddens is of course not alone in seeing language this way: in regard to narrative (and hence character) this particular feature has received specific attention from critics working in other fields and paradigms than Docherty.

Maclean's observations on the representative nature of action in narrative and in performance were cited in Chapter 1: I would like to refer to her comments again here specifically in regard to characterisation. She says,

The theatrical model ... helps in giving an account of the essentially iconic nature of much narrative representation. While popular wisdom suggests that a picture is worth a thousand words, it is also true that words present us with a thousand pictures In narrative, as on stage, one action must represent a whole series of actions, the words spoken stand for words unspoken, what we are allowed to see becomes metonymic of the unseen (1988:16).

Metonymy offers an explanation of omission that takes into account the selective nature of narration. By allowing a minimal, fragmented and intermittent presentation of character to "stand for" what is unseen because unrelated, we may recognise the reading of character as the completion of a *gestalt*. The 'presence' of a character is thus not limited to what 'is presented of' that character, but can include, in Giddens's words, "relationships of absences and presences embedded in instantiation of language, in speech, or in text" (1987:162).

As we have seen, Lanser's study, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction*, situates literary communication within a speech-act framework, and so comes to a notion of the text "as a specific kind of communicative and aesthetic act" (1981:62). One aspect of point of view which she identifies is that of 'absence'. In doing so she cites questions posed by the philosopher Merleau-Ponty: "But what if language speaks as much by what is between words as by the words themselves? As much by what it does not 'say' as by what it 'says'?" (1981:41-42). These questions might recall the "certain silence", the "silence doing the speaking" cited from Macherey in Chapter 1, and the "rules of a syntactic and semantical kind" identified by Giddens. Lanser goes

further; developing her ideas along lines similar to Giddens when in place of 'omission' or 'absence', she introduces Grice's notion of "implicature".

Very frequently, a considerable breadth of context is necessary to determine the specific nature of an illocutionary act, for a great deal of speech activity operates through *implicature*, that is, through context-related and rule-governed assumptions and calculations that communicators employ in order to give meaning to speech Grice's concept provides a tool for acknowledging, naming, and studying the "gaps" in discourse - the unspoken assumptions and messages upon which meaning depends [in the words of Schaubert and Spolsky] "it is in the nature of language and literature that much of what is needed for understanding will never be said"... (1981:76-77).

The links with Giddens's 'structure as absent totality', and "relationships of absences and presences" embedded in the text are plain. Although Lanser doesn't say so explicitly, it seems to me safe to infer that our reading of character will operate as much as our reading of the text as a whole through "context-related and rule-governed assumptions and calculations", and in response to "unspoken assumptions and messages".

If this is the case, then the concept of implicature can be related to the claim made in Chapter 2 that cultural translation (and narration) is always directed by conventions of representation. Although in this instance the cultural dimension of conventions of representation is not predominant, such conventions can still be seen as intrinsic to the act of reading. Lanser expands on the notion of conventions by citing Culler's assertions about the completion of meaning:

The ur-convention of novelistic discourse is that the text will permit the creation of a coherent and human, if hypothetical world. As Jonathan Culler says, "the basic convention governing the novel is the expectation that readers will ... be able to recognize a world which [the text] produces or to which it refers" These conventions are not, however, always easy to uncover; like the rules for language, they have been learned not as abstract regulations but through use, that is, through listening to, reading, and telling stories (1981:112-113).

The notions of implicature and of the conventions that direct interpretation of it can, furthermore, be understood in terms of

Giddens's "practical consciousness". From Lanser's description we can see that conventions are learned "through use"; that they are not always easy to uncover; and that they provide a (shared) basis for recognising and hence dealing with a "world".

I will, a little later, consider the broader significance of implicature for the identity and the ontological status of character. At present, however, I would like to apply the notions of implicature and of conventions to the reading Docherty offers of the character Charles Bovary:

The 'meaning' of 'Charles Bovary' is located in the reader. In the process of 'character development', it is the reader who changes. The 'meaning' of a character is understood in terms of evaluations located in the reader; the reader then of course confers these evaluative judgements back upon the character in terms of a sense, significance, or meaning (1983:10).

In the interplay between reader and character mooted here, the character has no 'real existence' apart from the reader's grasp of him. In terms cited already from Docherty we might see "Charles Bovary" as, simply, a "word-mass" constituted in language to "mediate between the author and the reader through the words" (1983:34). The proviso does occur a little later in Docherty's discussion that it is characters' "freedom to change which contributes in no small measure to the illusion of the character's real ontological existence" (1983:44-45). From this we might infer that the "meaning" of the character is the "illusion" of its "real ontological existence" which is "located in the reader".

3.5 The Constitutive Power of the Reader

Such a conception of character is plainly at odds with the terms of implicature and conventions developed above. To treat character as a "word-mass" is to limit its 'presence' to 'what is presented'. It is thus to disallow the effects of either metonymy or implicature, the "relationships of absences and presences" out of which the *gestalt* of character is completed. In terms of Lanser's conviction, we might recognise the (conventional) expectation of readers that characters, like texts, should be "coherent and human, if hypothetical". In my view

at least, for characters to 'work' they must have an existence beyond the words that constitute them. To demonstrate this we could begin by assuming the reverse. If characters did not 'exist', we might well take reading character to be a process of making evaluations and conferring them back upon characters, as Docherty proposes. Much as a scientist might employ the hypothetico-deductive method, or an aphasic use explicit subsumption to arrive at the meaning of words or things, reading character would be a procedure of linking characteristics together in order to fabricate or construct them. Each new observation would supply new evidence that would demand fresh hypotheses as to the nature of characters. Yet the phenomenological inauthenticity of this claim is obvious. What we experience is not just the signs of characters, but their presence, their ontological reality. Although analysis might dwell on the fragmentariness and intermittence of postmodern characters, in reading them we do not experience an accumulation of hypotheses, but the shock of interruption or destruction of their presence.¹

To assume that the "real ontological existence" of characters is an "illusion" is, in important ways, to run counter to the phenomenology of the reading process. In my view, this is an instance of Docherty's denial of the existence of conventions, independent of both author and text, which might condition or direct the reading of character. The consequences of such a denial are farreaching; leading, in terms of the second problem identified earlier, to an erosion of both the ontological autonomy and the power of the reader in constituting the meaning of the text. Docherty's stated purpose was to decentre the "monological authorial voice" and enter the reader into "a kind of collaborative dialogue with the fiction" (1983:15), and so to emphasise the "common production of meaning by the writer and reader working together" (1983:xiii). And yet as early as his introduction we see evidence of a substitution of the authority of the text for the authority of the

¹ For these insights I am grateful to my colleague, Dr Eldon Wait, who has a strong interest in phenomenology, and specifically the work of Merleau-Ponty.

author as definitive of the reading process. "It is in the interaction of the writer's language with the position *it affords the reader* that the element of the text which we call 'character' is produced", Docherty asserts; and, "the theory will allow for the possibility of change or mobility in the meaning of character (and equally of the writer and reader) as the text *is reproduced in the reading*" (1983:xiii-xiv, my emphasis). The 'text-driven' theory of reading which Docherty advances results in the extension of the decentralisation of the self in fiction from character to reader. "The reader's own position, his or her very existence as an existentially effective subjectivity, can be subsumed under the same kinds of discontinuity of characterization as the fictional selves in the novel" (1983:83). The bent of Docherty's attitude to such processes can be inferred from his references, in the passage cited above, to "*liberation*" (1983:75), and, in his introduction, to the "possibility of *escape* from a fixed selfhood, into an existence as a series of subjectivities" (1983:xv-xvi, my emphases).

I am, of course, rather less enthusiastic about the subsumption of the reader's position (indeed existence) under "the same kinds of discontinuity of characterization as the fictional selves in the novel". Once the subject positions of the reader are effectively dictated by the text, then the breakdown of the ego boundaries between character and reader is theoretically irresistible: and the erosion of the 'self' of the reader follows from the erosion of the 'self' of the character. In the terms I have been developing, a crisis of representation has become a crisis of ontology.

Again, the limited autonomy and power Docherty accords the reader is at direct odds with the position of critics working within other theoretical paradigms. In her application of the model of performance to narrative, Maclean, for example, remains far more aware than Docherty of the ways in which, "Audience feedback, without which no live production is complete, is transformed in the case of the printed book and becomes the individual interpretation of the written text". For this reason she claims "there is no 'true' proprietorial interpretation", and concludes:

Control of people's minds is not a simple thing. Just as a teller endeavours to use audience feedback to control audience reaction by modifying the performance, so the text endeavours to construct its own reader. However, while narrators and narratees are and remain textual constructs, there is never any guarantee that the virtual reader/audience will obey the promptings of the text (1988:19).

Toolan offers a reading of narrative within the framework of "critical linguistics". He, too, observes that, unlike the "fiction" that is the "writer's audience", "real readers, real audiences, can apprehend stories in quite unpredicted ways, seeing a different point to them, and picturing quite dissimilar authors for them" (1988:80). Plainly, Docherty's decentralisation of the self and erosion of the "existentially effective subjectivity" of the reader demands a containment of the degrees of freedom accorded the position of the reader by other critics.

The ontological crisis of the reader which arises in Docherty's theory of character introduces the third of the problems specified above. I would like to trace the implications of this crisis in two directions: firstly, the significance for a reading of character of the social construction of identity, and secondly, the concomitant theoretical exigency of balancing character as a (textualised) human subject and character as an element of the text.

3.6 The Social Construction of Identity

In following the first of these directions we can resume our consideration of the nature of identity. One of my objections to the 'death of the character' engendered in Docherty's theory was that it stemmed from an ahistoric and decontextualised substitution of the id for a social identity. This was most apparent in the emphasis given to the expressive functions of narrative by experimentation with the notion of the self. Although he remarked on the *naïvete* of such experimentation, Docherty failed to supply answers to the questions it posed:

if I am a new self at every moment, at every saying of 'I', then why fix myself in one named self ... and more radically, why retain the notion of the self at all? Why not

become so fully liberated as to be able to assume whatever personality and name I wish at any moment; why not become a series of discontinuous manifestations of different 'selves', none of which need ever relate to themselves nor to any previous manifestation of a self? (1983:76).

The 'naïvete' informing these questions has to do with their solipsism, their disregard for relationship. And indeed in a discussion of first-person narrative, Todorov draws attention to the general semiotic law according to which an 'I' always implies a 'you' (1981:40). This might be rephrased to say that to speak is generally to expect to be heard.

In order fully to address Docherty's questions, in order to get a better sense of the relations between individual identity and social context, however, I would like to return to the domain of the social sciences, and specifically to two studies within the fields of sociology and psychology. Although Berger is perhaps more famous for the work published jointly with Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), (whose impact within the social sciences is evidenced by the name of the series in which the later psychological study has been published: "Inquiries in Social Construction"), it is to his earlier book, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* (1963), that I would like to refer. In it he offers a clear delineation of identity in terms of the relations between what he terms "man in society" and "society in man", and, in doing so, provides an interesting measure of the anti-humanism of Docherty's position. Berger puts it this way: "in a sociological perspective, identity is socially bestowed, socially sustained and socially transformed" (1963:116). He elaborates, "identity is not something 'given', but is bestowed in acts of social recognition", so that "to be human is to be recognised as human" (1963:117). Although the one-directional nature of this delineation needs modification to take into account Giddens's duality of structures, a less cognitive definition of identity found in various languages and cultures throughout Africa offers a material corroboration: "a person is a person because of people".

3.7 The Linguistic Constitution of Identity

In a more recent study, within the field of "new paradigm psychology", Shotter provides a specification of such processes. His article is particularly useful because it offers a substantial development of the 'pronominal' understanding of identity apparent in Docherty, Todorov, and Giddens. Entitled "Social Accountability and the Social Construction of 'You'", it is prefaced with an epigram from Nietzsche: "The thou is older than the I" (1989:133). I would like to discuss Shotter's article in some depth, because, in addition to clarifying the relations between language usage and the constitution of identity, his pronominal analysis accords with recent studies in the sphere of autobiography (Bruss 1980, Cox 1980, Renza 1980, Eakin 1985, Eakin 1989, Lejeune 1989) to which reference will be made in passing.

Shotter begins by noting an increasing concern, in social and developmental psychology, with "personhood, with persons, agency and action", which has been directed

mostly towards the analysis of grammatical first-persons, towards what it is to be an active agent, an 'I', a subject doing something to something or someone else. Little attention has been paid to people's existence as the persons 'addressed' by first-persons, to whom or what it is one is embedded in when one is rooted or embedded in communicative activity. And thus the nature of the grammatical second-person has been ignored (1989:135).

Shotter's article is an attempt to redress the balance: to "render the 'I' problematic, and to show how little of substance can be said about it, and also, perhaps surprisingly, to show how much of importance can be said about 'you'" (1989:135). After considering the appearance and disappearance of the 'I' in Cartesian and in Jamesian philosophy, he takes up Benveniste's specifications of the non-referentiality of 'I'; its characteristic functioning, together with 'you', within a "positional field" which is "constructed, moment by moment, in and through one's utterances" (1989:140). Despite the addition of an implied relationship with 'you', such shifting signification might well remind us of Docherty's "instantiations of the 'I'".

Shotter's quest, however, is to account for "why we feel so strongly that there *must be* somewhere such an entity" as an 'I' (1989:140). He relates this to the duality of structure, since "communally shared ways of, or means for, making-sense are constitutive of people's social and psychological being in quite a deep way". On the one hand, "one learns the nature of other people as 'you's', as certain kinds of 'you', who afford different kinds of opportunities for one's action - who 'motivate' or 'invite' one to act in some ways rather than others" (1989:142). On the other hand, a sense of identity is related to what he terms "addressivity" and "the attribution of personhood":

From our beginning as children, and continuing on into our lives as adults, we are dependent upon being addressed by others for whatever form of autonomy we may achieve; thus, in this sense we can say that, as persons, we are always 'you's', always essentially second-persons. The 'thou' is older than the 'I' in the sense that the capacity to be addressed as a 'you' by others is a preliminary to the ultimate capacity of being able to say 'I' of oneself, of being able to understand the uniqueness of one's own position in relation to others, and to take responsibility for one's own actions.

In other words, in this view, people are not eternal, unchanging entities in themselves (like isolated, indistinguishable atoms), but owe what stability and constancy, and uniqueness, they may appear to have - their identity - to the stability and constancy of certain aspects of the activities, practices, and procedures in which they can make their differences from those around them known and accountable (1989:143).

Shotter has elsewhere written on "'Duality of Structure' and 'Intentionality' in an Ecological Psychology" (1983). Giddens's influence is apparent here as well: if people are constituted in language, it is in language as social practice.

Following this, Shotter offers what might stand as a direct reply to Docherty: "my action in being thus 'situated' takes on an ethical or moral quality. I cannot just relate myself to the others around me as I myself please: the relationship is ours, not just mine" (1989:144). One of the conclusions he comes to is that,

when small children are addressed as 'you', rather than merely having information reported to them upon which to base (or not) their individual actions, they are being 'in-

structed' in how to be. This is another sense in which human communication cannot be seen simply as a matter of information transfer from one location to another, it must be seen as ontologically formative, as a process by which people can, in communication with one another, literally inform one another's being, that is, help to make each other persons of this or that kind (1989:145).

An acute literary example of these processes is the developing consciousness of Margaret, in Head's *Maru*, to whom I have referred already. Subjected as a child to the taunts and torments of being "a Bushy", it is part of her achievement of identity to acknowledge of herself, "I am a Masarwa". Less explicit, perhaps, though equally interesting, are the patterns of second-person address in *Too Late the Phalarope*: although, for example, both his aunt and his wife speak to Pieter as 'you', Stephanie uses the third-person, "baas". Stephanie herself, of course, is referred to as 'you', both by Pieter and by the magistrate who tries her. Shotter comments thus on the distinctions between the use of second- and third-person:

Grammatically, at least, to be related as a second-person, rather than as a third-person, to a first-person is both to be situated quite differently and to be assigned a quite different set of privileges and obligations First- and second-persons (plural or singular) are, even if in fact non-personal or inanimate, always personified (with all that implies for the 'personal' nature of their relation) and are thus, so to speak, 'present' to one another, in a 'situation'. By contrast, third-persons need not be personified (they can be 'its'); nor are they present as such to other beings or entities; nor are they necessarily 'in a situation' (1989:135).

The particular acuteness of Shotter's account of the pronominal relations that help to constitute identity is its concatenation of the phenomenologically experienced 'reality' of identity and the conditionality that stems from its basis in social exchange. Some of these implications might become clearer if we extend the range of application of Shotter's account. We might infer, for example, that the development of identity from childhood takes place particularly in I-you relationships. And so we might expect the impact of "addressivity" and the "attribution of personhood" to diminish with the attainment of adulthood, or more precisely with the 'achievement' of identity. Yet

given the conditionality of identity, the fact that it is "socially bestowed, socially sustained and socially transformed" (Berger 1963:116), such constitutive force is unlikely to disappear.

Although a full consideration of the textualisation of the subject will follow, it seems important to note at this point some of the implications for literature of the linguistic constitution and the social construction of identity. I have referred above to relations between characters; here we might consider other textual relations. On the one hand, we should be aware, from the earlier discussion of Giddens, of the constitutive power of readers who bring conventions to bear on their construction of the identity of both characters and writers. On the other hand, we might draw on Shotter's insights to recognise the writing of character as an "attribution of personhood". If we do so, the case of autobiographic writing should prove particularly illuminating for an examination of the respective 'selves' or identities of writer and character.

It is perhaps not surprising that autobiographic studies should have made much of Benveniste's recognition of the "combined double instance ... the instance of *I* as referent and the instance of discourse containing *I* as the referee" (cited in Shotter 1989:140). Lejeune follows Benveniste in this distinction, but uses the capacity of the subject of reference to be designated by a noun to formulate his concept of the "autobiographical pact" (1989:8. Cox refers rather humorously to "that shifty pronominal shifter, the 'I' of discourse" (1980:124), and Renza pursues Benveniste through Barthes:

"When a narrator [of a written text] recounts what has happened to him, the *I* who recounts is no longer the one that is recounted." Even this recounting "*I*", composed of what Barthes after Emile Benveniste calls "the instance of discourse", is not the self who writes as long as we take this self to be "an interiority constituted previous to and outside language" (1980:276).

Renza goes on to recognise autobiographical writing as entailing a "split intentionality: the '*I*' becoming a '*he*'; the writer's awareness of his life becoming private even as he brings it into the public domain

and putatively makes it present through his act of writing" (1980:279). Bruss, by contrast, notes the way in which

Autobiography simply exploits more general conventions that apply to language as a whole, especially the established structure of participation that defines the relevant roles of those who use language Thus the structure of autobiography, a story that is at once by and about the same individual, echoes and reinforces a structure already implicit in our language, a structure that is also (not accidentally) very like what we usually take to be the structure of self-consciousness itself: the capacity to know and simultaneously be that which one knows (1980:300-301).

Eakin recognises that "the origin of the self as the reflexive center of human subjectivity is inextricably bound up with the activity of language" (1985:198), yet in his foreword to Lejeune's book he makes an important point which takes up both Renza's and Bruss's formulations: "if the premise of autobiographical referentiality that we can move from knowledge of the text to knowledge of the self proves to be a fiction, the text becomes paradoxically not less precious but more: in making the text the autobiographer *constructs a self that would not otherwise exist*" (1989:xxiii, my emphasis).

The crucial question that seems to me to arise, then, is whether the same is true of character in fiction: does the writer of a novel, for example, 'construct a self that would not otherwise exist'? The qualifications that would be necessary for an affirmative answer serve to illuminate the relations between the 'selves' or identities of writer and character. First, despite the "autobiographic pact" which aligns them, the 'self' created by the writer in autobiography is not substantially less a character than that engendered by textualisation in fiction. Second, the 'self' of the character created in fiction is not to the same extent a 'self' of the writer as is created in autobiography. And yet the role of the reader in 'identifying' character is equally significant in both.

These relations might be specified in the following way. We may infer from Benveniste's "combined double instance" that to say 'I' is to represent oneself. And then to inscribe an 'I' is to constitute a

(represented or textualised) subject who is susceptible to the constitutive force of others. To put this another way, the represented 'I' must also negotiate the duality of structure which might be rendered as an 'I'-you relationship. And if we recognise with Thoreau that "it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking" (cited by Eakin 1985:9), then the narrative choice of third person for a character might be seen as a displacement or a deferral of 'personal representation' in order to avoid the constitutive force that would be brought to bear on an 'I'. Although I am anticipating the investigation of textualisation which will follow, it is my claim, here, that the 'constitutive force of others' is that brought to bear on the 'I' - or the 'he or she' - of the text by readers.

Returning to a consideration of Docherty's "instants of subjectivity", his "instantiations of the 'I'", we will recognise the extent to which he discounts the constitutive force of the 'you'. And so the "liberation", the "escape", the 'self-murder' of which he speaks is finally a flight of rarefied egotism, because it attempts to discard the domain of the social (and the cultural) by denying its influence on definitions of self and identity. More importantly, the formulation whereby the text supplies the subject positions of the reader effectively erodes the power of the reader - and it is a crucial and a constitutive power - to "recognise" and hence to "bestow" identity upon characters.

3.8 Character and Text

The second of the directions specified above was that of responding to the theoretical exigency of balancing character as a (textualised) human subject with character as an element of the text, in a way that will thereby secure the constitutive power of the reader. In doing so we can return to our earlier consideration of the issue of omission. In a book entitled *What Stories Are: Narrative Theory and Interpretation*, it has been Leitch's claim that omission is theoretically intrinsic to characterisation. Beginning with the simple observation that "characters differ from people in being incompletely specified" (1986:158), he cites Braudy's postulate that "the basic nature of character in film is

omission Film character achieves complexity by its emphasis on incomplete knowledge" (1986:159). Likewise, if we "never know everything about any fictional character" (1986:160), then omission must be an inherent factor in our reading of character in literature (and indeed in autobiography). Thus, "We recover the characters precisely by generalizing or extrapolating the exemplary thoughts we are given to cover the passage of years, the subjects which arise only briefly or not at all ..., or the dimensions of experience which are not specified but which we take for granted ..." (1986:160). The links with the notion of implicature are fairly plain: given that the 'provision' of characters in postmodern fiction is minimal, fragmented and intermittent, the notion of 'recovery' offers a better version of the reading act than the dehumanisation of both character and reader. Unlike Docherty's, Leitch's theory of character incorporates the role of the reader and hence is able to take into account the sociocultural construction of identity. Leitch perhaps goes further than Lanser in implying that the process of 'recovery' depends on the conventions, the shared sets of interpretations that allow writer (or specifically narrator) and reader a common understanding of what to "take for granted".

This intersubjectivity is perhaps most apparent in the development of the concept of the recovery of character into that of character as trope. In Leitch's formulation, "As plot is a trope for human experience, [so] character is a trope for human identity" (1986:146). Given the qualifications made in regard to autobiography, we should note that such identity is not necessarily that of the writer. Yet the concept of character as trope is important in linking social processes of identity construction with the conventions that guide our responses to and reading of character: by demonstrating how characterological identity might be "bestowed", "sustained" and "transformed" in the reading process. In invoking processes of sociality, it thus addresses the issue of the textualisation of the human subject.

It is in the nature of tropes that they should be at once both grounded in a shared sense of reality and highly artificial. Rhetorical play always takes for granted an apprehension of reality in common; thus that

the need to share conventions is fundamental. The example Leitch supplies of "stories of all kinds [which] are filled with characters who are defined by ironic analogy to what they are not" (1986:159) is a case in point: clearly the recognition or apprehension of such characters depends on the appreciation of the irony. In regard to artifice, Leitch contends that if "the tendency of poststructuralist critics like Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan to question the authority of the human subject has rendered the philosophical basis of character suspect, this suspicion of character seems based on a confusion, or at least too close an association, between characters and people" (1986:148). Leitch explains:

... characters differ from people in being incompletely specified (how many characters are said to have armpits?) and intentionally intelligible, as human behavior is only among highly histrionic people or people performing for an audience. We might be said always to be acting ourselves, but characters are always on display in a more radical sense: They are designed to be apprehended, and that is all they are designed for. The identity of narrative characters, unlike that of real people, is a uniquely discursive function (1986:158).

Although I have reservations about Leitch's final assertion, in regard to the issue of "display" it seems worth consulting again the way in which Todorov takes up Benveniste's formulations in relation to first-person narrative: that to say 'I' is always to represent oneself (1981:39). "I run", for example, introduces a distinction (if not a bifurcation) between the 'I' who runs (subject of the discourse) and the 'I' who speaks (subject of the speech act). Even when characters do not speak in first-person, their 'representedness' (and hence their artifice) is still definitive. It is a quality that Docherty, like the poststructuralist critics Leitch rebukes, overlooks. The "instants of subjectivity" of which he speaks, the "series of instantiations of the 'I'", are in fact not 'selves' as such, but representations of a self; even, perhaps, postures assumed by a self. Reflexive as they might be, it is only with the collusion of the social context into which they are projected that such postures can be seen as constituting - or eroding - the self who is projecting them. A trope can only work with the condonation of its readers.

It is for a similar reason that the final remark in the passage from Leitch needs scrutiny. If the identity of narrative characters is a uniquely discursive function, if "stories ... and the people in them are made of words" (Gass, cited in Leitch 1986:154), it is in Giddens's sense of language as the "medium of social practice" that characters should be seen as constituted in this way. As I demonstrated in my critique of Docherty, characters are more than a literary device, a "discursive function", an "element of the text". Leitch himself goes on to supply a corroboration: "The modern notion of character ... is nuclear in structure, implying some residual quality neither required by nor expended in the action, some resistance Todorov's narrative-men lack to exhaustion by their situation, plot function, or public action" (1986:149). It is the "residual quality", the "resistance" that intrigues me, and that necessitates a qualification of the notions of implicature and trope. Recognising that characters are "designed to be apprehended", that readers and narrators must share the understanding that they will respond to characters as human, characters would still plainly not 'work' if they did no more than fulfil this design, if they were unable to lay claim to some kind of 'reality'.

It is in part for this reason that I would like to return now to a consideration of the textual interface. In Leitch's notion of character as trope we saw an approach to the textualisation of the human subject as character; in Todorov's addendum and the studies of autobiography cited earlier we saw a move towards a recognition in the narrator of the textualised subjectivity of the writer. It has been my own endeavour to this point to establish the constitutive importance of the reader both for textual meaning and, more specifically, for characterisation. At least part of my resistance to Docherty's conception of character was the sense that a postcolonial theorisation of the novel must take account of the humanity of all the subjects involved in the act of narration: writer, narrator, character, reader. On the other hand, since narration is an act not only of expression but also of communication, then, like it, the reading experience is located at the interface between text and world. If in Docherty's theorisation of character a

crisis of representation has become a crisis of ontology, it has done so because of a failure to acknowledge the existence of this textual interface, motile as it might be.

3.9 Narrative Utterance

In order to find a way of incorporating into a theory of character both the textual interface and the humanity of the participants in the act of narration, I would like to return to an important observation that Giddens makes about language and textuality. It is characteristic, he says, that structuralist and poststructuralist thought

inevitably leads toward the text, or more generically toward writing If meaning is constituted through difference, and difference derives from the overall nature of the code, then the text, in which differences are most directly displayed in a sort of visual sense, appears to be the prime vehicle of meaning. It was, therefore, quite logical for Derrida to take the step of regarding writing as the prime modality of signification. However, if the approach I have suggested here is correct, we have to accept that it is *temporally and spatially situated conversation*, not the text, and not writing, which is most essential to explaining what language and meaning are (1987:169-170).

As we might expect, the reasons why Giddens makes this claim have to do with the fact that, "meaning is (a) contextual, and (b) methodological". The precision of the meaning that is embedded in sequences of talk is directly related both to "practical consciousness as a medium of the constitution and re-constitution of meaning in the day-to-day context of activity", and to the "methodological nature of the knowledge which [practical consciousness] involves" (1987:170). The consequences for social theory of such a conception of meaning include "rescuing the knowledgeable agent as the conceptual center for social analysis" (1987:170). The implications for the "theory of the text" include recognitions of intentionality, in "recast" form; of the constitutive significance of form for the (writer) agent; of the "distanciation" of texts from their authors, and hence the significance of the "unintended consequences of action"; and, finally, of the "conditions of knowledgeability" of texts as the relations between practical consciousness, discourse, and the unconscious (1987:170-173).

It seems sufficient, for the purposes of my discussion, to note these specific implications without exploring them here in detail. Rather, the pre-eminence Giddens gives "temporally and spatially situated conversation" can be marshalled as support for a model of narrative as utterance. This being the case, our attention can be directed to the "situation of narrative utterance" to which anticipatory reference was made in Chapter 2.

In 1968 Lyons offered a delineation of the "situation of utterance" which, though it might today seem both emphatically structural and conservatively referential, remains quite compatible with Giddens's insistence on the centrality of "spatially and temporally situated conversation ... to explaining what language and meaning are", and thus also of the "context of activities in which human agents are implicated" (1987:164). For this reason it will be useful, for purposes of comparison at least, to examine Lyons's description.

Every language-utterance is made in a particular place and at a particular time; it occurs in a certain spatio-temporal situation. It is made by a particular person (the speaker) and is usually addressed to some other person (the hearer); the speaker and the hearer, we will say, are *typically* distinct from one another (there may of course be more than one hearer) and moreover are *typically* in the same spatio-temporal situation. (There are many common situations of utterance which are 'untypical' in these respects: it is possible to 'talk to oneself'; and, if one is speaking on the telephone, the hearer will not be in the same spatio-temporal situation.) We will further assume that the typical utterance includes a reference to some object or person (which may or may not be distinct from the speaker and hearer, cf. *Have you finished yet? Has he finished yet?* etc.); for the present, we will call this object or person to which reference is made in the utterance the 'subject of discourse'. The utterance will therefore contain as many 'subjects of discourse' as there are lexical items in the utterance which refer to objects and persons (1968:175).

Plainly, choosing to use the "situation of utterance" as a model for analysis of textualised narrative, entails recognising the displacement of the 'real' spatiotemporal dimensions which define it. In this regard Lanser cites a qualification insisted on by Ricoeur:

In spoken discourse ... the subjective intention of the speaking subject and the meaning of the discourse overlap each other in such a way that it is the same thing to understand what the speaker means and what his discourse means With written discourse, the author's intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide. This dissociation of the verbal meaning of the text and the mental intention is what is at stake in the inscription of discourse The tie between the speaker and the discourse is not abolished, but distended and complicated (Ricoeur, cited in Lanser 1981:116-117).

Three distentions and complications seem particularly pertinent to our discussion. In the first place, as Toolan points out, if (inscribed) narratives are characterised by displacement, they can also be seen as "richly exploitative" of this "design feature of language". Since human language is able to be used to "refer to things or events that are removed, in space or time, from either speaker or addressee", narratives in particular "involve the recall of happenings that may be not merely spatially, but, more crucially, *temporally* remote from the teller and his audience" (1988:5). This formulation might well serve to recall Seidel's reference to Kierkegaard's parable of the imagination as a "mental borderland", and the discussion of the textual interface that followed, in Chapter 2. In the second place, it is the "distanciation" (as Giddens calls it) that occurs when the "author's intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide" that creates a space for interpretation and validation by the reader. It is because of this "distanciation" that "there is no 'true' proprietorial interpretation" (Maclean 1988:19); it is because of this "distanciation" that "real readers, real audiences, can apprehend stories in quite unpredicted ways, seeing a different point to them, and picturing quite dissimilar authors for them" (Toolan 1988:80). In the third place, if narratives exploit the displacement that characterises their inscription, it is worth remembering, as Giddens points out, that "in a general way there is nothing distinctive to texts here. It is a characteristic of social life generally that its products escape the intentional input of their creators. In other words, one of the most distinctive qualities of social activity concerns the significance of the unintended consequences of action" (1987:173).

Some of the ways in which the concept of the textual interface can relate to the distentions and complications of the model of narration as utterance might be apparent already. Yet it is through a deliberate exploitation of the conception of our reading as an "unintended consequence" of the action of writing that I would like to examine the theoretical positioning of character that might be accomplished within this model. If the distanciation that occurs with the inscription of narrative opens up a space for interpretation and validation, the conventions that direct our reading nevertheless exist within the domain of practical consciousness. And if, as I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, acknowledging the existence and the motility of the text-world boundary places an onus on us to review the 'translation' that is narration, such a review must take the reflexive form of bringing these conventions into the realm of discursive awareness and scrutiny and ultimately into the realm of choice. This, it seems to me, becomes our critical mandate.

3.10 Voices and Silences

The reading of silence advocated at the end of Chapter 2 might be recognised now as a less explicit version of this process. Since silence is both a cultural and a narrative phenomenon, the volition that motivates it can be read as resistance both to ethnographic authority and to narrative power. It is thus towards these issues of authority and power that I wish to direct our evaluation of the model of narrative as utterance in regard to the textualisation of the subject. In the first place, in its incorporation of Toolan's delineation of deixis, the model can be seen to offer a level of phenomenological authenticity which Docherty's reading of character lacked. Toolan points out:

The very presence in any discourse of features such as *I* and *you*, of tense choices, and of discriminating adverbs and adjectives such as *here*, *there*, *this* and *that* (all of which can be brought together under the label of deixis), means that discourse is consequently interpreted as grounded, or anchored, coming from a particular speaker at a particular place at a particular time. Any text, then, that contains deictic information is thereby understood as oriented from the spatiotemporal position that those deictics imply (Toolan 1988:67).

In the second place, the model is consistent with the two-part definition cited from Rimmon-Kenan in Chapter 2: its groundedness in social interaction with her sense of a "communication process in which the narrative as message is transmitted by addresser to addressee", and both its spoken utterance and its inscribed text with the "verbal nature of the medium used to transmit the message" (1983:2). In the third place, the model addresses a distinction insisted on by Toolan between focalisation in narrative and what he prefers to term "orientation" - because "'cognitive, emotive and ideological' perspectives, in addition to the simply spatiotemporal one, may be articulated by a narrative's chosen focalization" (1988:68). Highlighted in the two questions he poses, "Who sees?" and "Who speaks?" (1988:69), the distinction should serve to remind us of the rejection of visualism which accompanied the shift from description to dialogue in ethnography. In Clifford's words, "once cultures are no longer prefigured visually - as object, theaters, texts - it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances" (1986:12). The same, plainly, is true of the participants in an act of narration.

It is this last point that is most crucial to the issues of authority, power and silence. In applying Lyons's concept of the situation of utterance to narrative, we can recognise the four 'parties' to a putative situation of utterance as writer, narrator, characters, reader.² Our initial inclination then might well be to read narrative as

² In his discussion of Chatman's model, Toolan (whose choices I am following here) dispenses with three categories:

The implied author is a real position in narrative processing, a receptor's construct, but it is not a real role in narrative transmission. It is a projection back from the decoding side, not a real projecting stage on the encoding side the narratee position is not properly part of the framework of the telling, but an integral device in narrational strategy Narratees, then, are real enough textual entities, but they are not an extratextual participant in the way that narrator and reader are. But when we come to assess the status of the so-called 'implied reader' I rather doubt whether this animal is real even in a textual-strategic sense Accordingly, I will dispense with the implied reader the way I dispensed with the implied author, regarding it, similarly, as the inescapable *version*

the "utterance" addressed to the reader in which characters constitute "subjects of discourse". Yet the significant question, as Toolan reminds us, remains, "Who speaks?": who is making this utterance? To the extent that 'the writer' has a discrete historical existence, we recognise the utterance as having emanated from him or her in the historic past. Yet Shakespeare is by no means alone in his unwillingness to renounce 'ownership' of his writings, in his concern with their 'immortality', in his desire for a 'continued existence' through them. And certainly commonplace wisdom would insist that, the death of the author notwithstanding, great writers 'live on' in their works. As a matter of strategy - and convenience - we may choose rather to recognise the text as the "utterance" of 'the narrator' whose historical location is not biographically fixed, as the writer's is. If we choose to do so we should acknowledge the displacement reflected in the manoeuvre. Then again, there seems no reason why Giddens's comments about the intentionality of form should not apply to the inscription of the subjectivity of the writer in his or her work. He points out, "*the creation of form is known to the agent to be constitutive of what the work is*" (1987:172; Giddens's emphasis), and cites as an example the commonplace characteristic that "a novel has 'an author' and this is known to those who produce novels Although there is no doubt, therefore, that what it is to be 'an author' is culturally variable, this does not mean it is not relevant to the explication of texts ..." (1987:172). If novels have narrators (as critics and theorists say they do), it is surely feasible that writers should, albeit not explicitly, recognise in narrators textualisations of their own subjectivities. It is also feasible that such recognitions should not be restricted to postmodern writing. To recognise in the narrator the position assumed by the writer at the textual interface is thus to reach a preliminary answer to the question, "Who speaks?".

The further (and perhaps more difficult) question that arises, however, is, 'Who else speaks?'. In a paper on Bakhtin, Emerson has written as follows:

of a reader that we can assume an author to have in mind (1988:79-80).

But the writer of novels has an implicated voice. He can enter and manipulate, fuse or distribute his voice among characters. Or he can - and this requires an extra measure of commitment to freedom - grant autonomy to his characters; he can create not just objects but full-fledged *subjects*. This was the "Copernican revolution" that Bakhtin had, in 1929, attributed to Dostoevsky. In Dostoevsky's novels, the author is no longer the creator around whom characters are forced to revolve but is, so to speak, himself but a planet among planets. By the end of his life, Bakhtin had come to see this freedom as characteristic of all true novels (1986:35).

The implications of this "Copernican revolution" for the ontological status of characters are profound. It was, of course, a Bakhtinian impulse that motivated the similar injunctions of postmodern ethnography to recognise the polyphony of the text. In observing these injunctions, we must concede that "utterances" may be made not just by two but by three of the parties to the situation of narrative utterance: writer, narrator and characters. In this sense we might say that the text has multiple narrators; Clifford's "many voices [clamoring] for expression" (1986:15). Alternatively we might choose to hear "the narrative voice" shifting from one party to another, as each gets (or takes) the chance to tell "a story among stories" (1986:109), as each speaks.

A similar Bakhtinian influence is registered in the works of some of the critics already considered. Maclean, for example, cites his observation that we hear in the text not only the voices of characters and narrators, but also "the voices of language, of narrative tradition, of ideology, of the whole social context. In the spoken subject we have the whole range of voices of the tale itself and its various actors" (Bakhtin, cited by Maclean 1988:6). Lanser, too, sees works of narrative as having the capacity to be "multi-discursive - that is, to integrate the discourse of any number of personae within a single text - [and so to] involve numerous subject-system relationships" (1981:14). In this last phrase, as in Maclean's later "linguistic dynamics, a dialogism such as that found by Mikhail Bakhtin in the multiple voices of the text" (1988:22), we might find cues leading us back to Clifford, to the "communicative processes that exist ... *between* subjects in relations of power" (1986:15), to the 'culture' within the text.

It is in this context that the silence of characters takes on ontological significance. Following the ethnographic shift from description to dialogue should sensitise us to the vocal expression of the culture within the text. We might then add another question to the two posed by Toolan: 'Who hears?'. Within a polyphony of multiple voices clamouring for expression some will inevitably speak louder and longer than others: and so contestatory relations will be set up amongst them. Yet if our ear is attuned to the voices of the text, we will listen for the silence of those who do not speak. We will be aware that some have silence forced upon them. We might hear narrators attempting to tell the story of characters' silence (to borrow Williams's by-line on *Foe*). We will also be aware that some are choosing not to speak; that their silence is volitional. We might understand characters' silence as a (mute) commentary upon the stories that are clamouring around them; we might see it as an act of resistance to the attempt to narrate them. We might remember Macherey's dictum, "it is the silence that is doing the speaking"; we might understand their silence as offering a 'story' of its own.

Such a 'reading' would clearly result from the deliberate choice of readers who have become discursively aware of - and attempted themselves to direct - the conventions that generally direct reading. As such it offers resistance to the intersubjectivity which the text invites, even demands. As Lanser points out, "successful speech activity ... depends for its realization on the sender's authority and the receiver's validation of this authority" (1981:82). In the resistant reading I am advocating, such validation of authority becomes a matter of interpretive choice. To recognise the narrative voice as one among many voices is to shift from choosing to validate the authority of the narrator or not, to choosing whose authority to validate, choosing whose voice should have authority 'conferred upon' it. That this authority is usually conferred upon the narrator does not mean it cannot be conferred elsewhere. If contestatory voices exist within the narrative, it is up to readers to arbitrate; it is part of the reading process, in other words, to site the power of narration.

Before concluding, it seems worth remembering Basso's conceptualisation of silence, because, as a reflexive ethnographer, his attempt was to understand the meaning of behaviour in the terms of those enacting it. With a heightened awareness of our own constitutive role in the reading of character, we are attempting something similar in addressing the textualisation of the human subject. In doing so we might take a last liberty with Toolan's distinctions, and add the question, 'Who overhears?'. Earlier I pointed out in regard to Docherty that his "instants of subjectivity", his "series of instantiations of the 'I'", are in fact not 'selves' as such, but representations of a self; even, perhaps, postures assumed by a self. More recently I have said that in the narrator we can recognise a textualisation of the subjectivity of the writer. To the extent that we concur with Leitch in identifying "display" as an essential attribute of characters, we might also begin to see that in representations of selves, in textualisations of subjectivity, in the display of characters, we have instances of directed performance. If, within the culture of the text, there are those who engage in performances because of their consciousness of audience, we may speculate at least that there are those who refrain from performance because of the same consciousness, because of a resistance to being heard. I have elsewhere examined these dynamics in relation to the poetry of John Donne (1990a). Although the "utterance" in his poems typically takes the form of an 'I-thou' address, this address is nevertheless often influenced by the consciousness of its participants of an audience 'external to' the situation of utterance. In these instances it is resistance not to being heard, but to being 'overheard' that motivates the silence of the woman listening to the speaker's address. Although in narrative the two-party situation may be more rare, the concept of audience consciousness should be retained as a possible explanation of silences within the polyphony of voices in the text.

It is with the notion of power that I would like to end my discussion of character. The theory of character as one of many voices in the text seems to me to address in important ways the dual pressures of language and culture in our society, because, in my thesis, the multiple voices

of the text are inextricably bound up with the cultural location or 'ethnographic addresses' of their owners. The implications of 'characterological resistance' in particular are extensive. Although we might not wish to go so far as to see characters as a disadvantaged minority, it seems to me that siting authority with characters - especially those who are silent - allows us to challenge or even to reverse the power relations of narration. Incorporating into a theory of character the possibilities of resistance to narrative as well as collusion with it, allows us to incorporate choice into the characters we read. Such a conceptual framework can sensitise us to the resistance (and collusion) that exists as much in real cross-cultural situations as in representations of them in fiction. Docherty's attempt to decentre the "monological authorial voice", to enter the reader into "a kind of collaborative dialogue with the fiction" (1983:15) fails, finally, because he embarks from the position that characters do not exist - that, as it were, everyone knows characters don't exist - and in doing so he denies readers the power to confer identity upon characters. More importantly, he forgets that to narrate is, in Toolan's formulation, "to make a bid for a kind of power" (1988:3), to venture a version of the subject narrated, to run the risk of a loud, "No I didn't! No I'm not!". Docherty makes no provision for characters to have quite different versions of themselves from those offered by narrators, for characters to answer back at the voices that narrate them. If we as readers choose to accept either one of these versions we nevertheless need to remain conscious of the possibility of the others.

In the following chapters three 'case studies' will be undertaken: that is, an analytic approach will be made to three different novels in the terms of the theoretical framework developed in the opening chapters. We might therefore find a point of entry to these applications by recapitulating certain aspects of the framework.

The instance of cultural translation we might recall and which I will follow is that of Basso, whose ethnographic work amongst the Western Apache allowed him to recognise and to render the 'story' of their 'silence'. The choice of the model of cultural translation has been motivated by a need to respond to cross-culturality as a pressure of the Southern African context. One consequence of choosing the model is the need for a reflexive awareness of the position of "being in culture while looking at culture". For the moment, therefore, I should perhaps dispense with my inclusive use of 'we': if one of its effects has been to project a coherence of purpose in my writing and your reading of this thesis, such coherence may well be influenced now by differences in our 'ethnographic addresses'.

Positions need specifying. If the rise of the "cross-border reader" has introduced with some force the issue of narrative accountability into the domain of criticism, and if the adoption and application of postcolonial theory means that writers are to be analysed in terms of their relation to the Centre, then my own position might be clarified as a white, English-speaking teacher of predominantly black students, and the theoretical framework I have developed as one that attempts to take into account both my teaching and their reading at a cultural and linguistic interface. Part of my critical interest in the texts to be examined thus stems from my experience of teaching these texts in such circumstances over several years; and the 'review' of their cultural translation will, in substantial if implicit ways, be directed towards accommodating the reader-response (or indeed reader-reaction) of black students. My location at the 'historically black' University of Zululand positions me, as well, on the margins of a different kind of 'Empire':

the hierarchy of academic institutions in this country, whose 'Centre', certainly in the field of English, remains firmly located with the large and largely white metropolitan universities. Such positioning, while it might direct my urge towards affiliation outside the institutional sphere, also offers a unique perspective on developments within the mainstream: 'writing back to the Centre' is thus a local as well as an international affair.

It is such positioning that has made the 'problem of theory in our criticism' particularly acute for me because of its failure to register the experience of groups such as black students. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, silence is "being used, in this study, as an issue around which theoretical explorations can be undertaken". It is being used thus in order to make a claim for a theoretical recognition of pressures of context as well as to address them in theoretical terms. My endeavour is towards redirection as well as clarification.

For these reasons, my use of areas of theory with different agendas has been cautious. Although Spivak, for example, has written on the 'silence' of "subaltern women", her narrative accountability seems directed, with some ambivalence, towards the academy, and particularly women in the academy, at the Centre: indeed it is part of her project to demonstrate the difficulties of "speaking of (or for) the subaltern woman" (1988:271). Aside from the specificities of "the Indian case [which] cannot be taken as representative of all countries, nations, cultures, and the like that may be invoked as the Other of Europe as Self" (1988:281), there seem to me problems inherent in the notion of "subalternity", compounding as it does the concepts of subordination and alterity. The motivation underlying my careful 'recentering' of the postcolonial subject is not to deny but to defy the forces of history: to confront them with a deliberate revisioning of possible ways of seeing, or more to the point, hearing this subject. Although my project is critical and theoretical rather than creative, it is substantially like the one delineated by Ndebele and cited in Chapter 1:

the greatest challenge of the South African revolution is in the search for ways of thinking, ways of perception, that will help to break down the closed epistemological structures of South African oppression. Such structures can severely compromise resistance by dominating thinking itself. For writers this means freeing the creative process itself from those very laws. It means extending the writer's perception of what can be written about, and the means and methods of writing (1989:45).

Even though the 'silence' of the black woman might be apocryphal, there remains something faintly insulting in asking whether she *can* speak; certainly to do so is to run counter to my recognition of the potentially volitional nature of silence.

Nor should the deliberacy of this recognition disguise an important distinction. Following the ethnographic model, I am choosing to recognise character as a subject, and the volitional silence of character as resistance to the 'cultural translation' that is narration. My intention in doing so is less to make a directive and categorical insistence on subjectivity, volition and autonomy, than, reflexively, to extend the range and develop the finesse of the responses that may be made to character, and thus to such subjectivity, volition and autonomy as may in fact exist. Tyler's comment in regard to similar processes of reflexivity in ethnography perhaps bears repeating: "The ethnographic text will thus achieve its purposes not by revealing them, but by making purposes possible" (1986:136).

Since character as subject is intrinsic to a resistant reading of silence, it seems important to come to a working definition of the subject. Is the key to such status the exercise of choice? Certainly choice informs the character's ability to act. Another more elusive though more seminal feature of the subject is the power to constitute a self. This power seems to me functionally more definitive because, if the self is constituted in language, it is in language as part of a language-culture system. And so self-constitution always exists in a certain tension with construction by others. Since such processes are apparent in the language of the text, they are also more amenable to analysis than the exercise of choice. It is possible, therefore, to

explore the ways in which language functions to constitute identity: both in the character's own language, and particularly his or her 'representations' of the 'I, and in the 'constructions' of others, the relations in which a character functions as a 'you'.

The questions that might inform the discussions that follow, then, are, what narrative functions does this character fulfil? what purposes does she carry out? what narrative options are open to her? Addressing such questions might clarify the narrative range in which the character can exercise her freedom and her autonomy as a subject. Silence can then be recognised as part of the character's response both to being narrated, and to the broader hegemonies of discourse that structure the 'culture' of the text. This culture, in Clifford's terms, is "always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, *between* subjects in relations of power" (1986:15). In the novels selected for discussion these relations are particularly pertinent because in important ways each figure of the black woman is a cultural transitional, and so her positioning in regard to community serves to structure her positioning within the narrative: Plaatje's *Mhudi* by the Mfecane, Paton's *Stephanie* by colonisation and urbanisation, and the *Immorality Act*, and Head's *Margaret* by the tensions between her racial origins, her education and cultural affiliations, and her ultimate alignment with an African totem. In the first and third of these cases, such transitionality is related to the biographic situation and experiences of the writer. In Paton's novel the interpolation of a first-person narrator complicates the narrative relations, and also, in my view, reflects in interesting ways upon his narrative endeavour and hence his positioning in relation to the Centre.

It should be clear from this delineation that our 'review' of the 'cultural translation' that takes place in each text also involves a resistant reading of narrative which, as a strategy to structure a polyphony of voices in the novel, must inevitably contend with this 'culture' within the text. On the other hand, the 'reviews' that will be undertaken will also seek to position themselves in relation to specific

debates that have arisen in the criticism of the novels: in relation, perhaps, to the 'culture' around the text. Such positioning is important because all of these texts have had somewhat troubled receptions, and their place in the canon of Southern African literature (if one can be said to exist) is by no means secure. The readings that I will offer, then, will also constitute acts of critical validation, in insisting that these texts are both interesting and important.

For this reason, another major interest of these studies will be the positioning of the writer (and his or her critics) in terms of the postcolonial paradigm, that is, in terms of alignment with the Centre and distance from or integration with the local context. Such positioning is important in identifying and explaining the accommodations of narrative strategy to cross-culturality in the text, especially as it evinces itself in linguistic polyphony and discursive relations, including the influence of culturally dominant codes on the lives of the characters. Such positioning is also important in locating the critical debates.

The first of the studies to be undertaken is of Plaatje's *Mhudi*, which was written in the early years of this century and which offers a retrospective view of the impact of the Mfecane on local tribes on the South-Eastern borders of what was then Bechuanaland, as well as on the Boers who were making inroads from the South. The central protagonist of Plaatje's novel is a black woman, who serves as a principle of coherence in an otherwise apparently fragmented novel. Both her voice and her silence will receive attention; other concerns of the chapter will be Plaatje's position at the interfaces of oral and literate, Tswana and English, and tribal membership and non-sectarianism, and the ways in which these impact both on his narrative strategy and on the textual relations in which his central character is located. His purposes and his position as a writer will thus be related in broader terms to his positioning within the postcolonial paradigm.

SOL T. PLAATJE: *MHUDI*

4.1 The Matter of Style

An important critical debate about *Mhudi* (1930)¹ has centred on Plaatje's use of language. In a 1980 commentary on the novel, Christie, Hutchings and MacLennan took up the line of Jahn's criticism of Plaatje's "padded Victorian style" (cited in Couzens 1978a) in what amounted to a resounding denunciation:

Interesting though the novel is as a traditional historical romance, the language is incapable of doing precisely what a reader looks for in a serious work, i.e. capturing the shifting texture of awareness and presenting the very feeling and quality of experience. The language is stuffy, learned (albeit impeccably) from nineteenth and possibly eighteenth century fiction. There is a presupposed moral fixity of meaning in the language, a set of moral attitudes which makes it incapable of aesthetic discovery.

To put the whole matter simply, Plaatje's style has resonances which run counter to the novel's political import. The organising power of the old patina of romance and the historical inertia of a language associated with Sir Walter Scott in effect get in the way of Plaatje's attempt to penetrate the quality of 'the Native mind' (1980:81-82).

It seems curious in retrospect that these writers should not have registered the thorough consideration given Plaatje's language by Couzens in his Introduction to the Heinemann edition (1978a), based in turn on two earlier articles. Couzens notes that Plaatje was a linguist who could speak at least nine languages; and finds 'sensitivity to register' in Plaatje's use of Biblical and epic language, and 'creativity' in his introduction of proverbs and the fable into the novel form (1978a:12-13). He points out, too, that Plaatje was, "at an early stage, encountering the same problems which later African writers in English have confronted: the tension between what they want to say and a language which has 'foreign' and often oppressive connotations, and how to translate the registers of one language into those of another language" (1978a:13). Elsewhere, Couzens comments, "Plaatje was fully

¹ Plaatje, S.T. 1978. *Mhudi*. London: Heinemann. All further references are to this edition.

aware of all the problems of 'translation' which still beset the African writer, but once his decision was made [to write in English] he did not fuss unnecessarily about it" (1978b:61).

Before pursuing these comments in regard to the theoretical framework thus far developed, we should perhaps address some of the problems implicit in the judgements of Christie, Hutchings and MacLennan. In the first place, their criterion "aesthetic discovery" cannot simply be taken at face value, since it comes equipped with neither a specification of meaning nor a delineation of the ways in which such "discovery" ought to occur. In the second place, the non-reflexivity of the judgements renders them now rather prescriptive and naïve. The question being begged is, Can a reader who is not a "Native" adequately judge the success of the attempt to "penetrate ... the Native mind"? In the third place, the fact that I do not share the writers' sense of a "presupposed moral fixity of meaning in the language" is less significant in itself than as an estimate of their failure to recognise the range in perspectives that might be taken by readers - let alone the 'constitutive power the reader has over the meaning of the text' upon which I have been insisting. Like Achebe's attack on *Heart of Darkness* this critique of *Mhudi* represents a "cross-border reading", and one that is not redeemed by a sense of cross-cultural positioning. Couzens's use of the term "translation", by contrast, demonstrates an awareness that, since Plaatje was a member of one of the tribes of which he writes in *Mhudi*, his novel offers a rendition of his own culture for members of others. In this sense our own reading will be as much a cross-border reading as that of Christie, Hutchings and MacLennan.

In theoretical terms, recognising the cultural interface allows us to see as extant and intact the respective meaning systems at which it occurs, and mandates us, as "subsequent or alternative readers", to exercise a critical distance from the authority of both the translator and the target medium in order to 'review' the 'translation'. Recalling Maughan Brown's injunctions that the "critic should be as conversant as possible with ... the culture of the community from within which the writer comes", and that "critical standards should not predate the

literature they are attempting to assess" (1982:50), we might notice that the debate about the novel's style is characterised by an application of extraneous standards to the languages of the text - an application apparent in Couzens's 'sensitivity' and 'creativity' as well as in Christie, Hutchings and MacLennan's "presupposed moral fixity of meaning" and "historical inertia". Perhaps my insistence is simply that the consequences of the judgements need explication: rather than dismiss the novel as an "interesting ... traditional historical romance", for example, we need to become reflexively aware of the conventions of reading that we are bringing to bear on it, and, if these are insufficiently sensitive to its purposes, to develop new modes of response.

We might, therefore, refer these conventions to the postcolonial paradigm, and its delineation of linguistic "appropriation" as "the process by which the language is taken and made to 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural experience, or, as Raja Rao puts it, 'to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own'" (quoted in Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989:38-39). A judgement of Plaatje's stylistic successes and failures should not precede an awareness of his cultural and narrative purposes. We might also take up their terms to explore whether this text falls into the category of "literature produced under imperial licence by 'natives' or 'outcasts'" (1989:2), or whether it constitutes a rather more positive "cross-cultural hybrid" as suggested by 'syncreticist' critics (1989:30).

In the third place, we might notice the novel's structural and thematic foregrounding of language and discourse *per se*, and in doing so listen to the polyphony of voices in the text. One of the reasons for this foregrounding was Plaatje's location at the interface of oral and literate culture and his concomitant search for ways of textualising oral tradition and experience; another was his attempt to incorporate multiple language-culture systems into his text and thus to manage cultural translations amongst them. Both these reasons demonstrate the influence of cross-culturality 'within' Plaatje's text, and so militate against a critical review of *Mhudi* in purely literary terms.

Nor should we ignore another aspect of the novel which has received critical attention: its relations to history. The views Mazisi Kunene has expressed in this regard have been quite as scathing as those of Christie, Hutchings and MacLennan: "*Mhudi* itself is a second-rate, badly organized hodge-podge of semihistory, semifiction, shoddy allegory - a pastiche combining fact and fiction in a most illogical manner" (cited in Gray 1980:247). These views run directly counter to those of "the Rand School", as Kunene slightly dubs Couzens, Gray, and Willan (in Gray 1980:245), whose critical reclamation of Plaatje has focused on the significance in contemporary terms of his 'rewriting' and 'reinterpretation' of history. Gray in particular offers the following comment which, if patronising, is still perhaps acute: "for the black critic and writer within South Africa the legacy of oral culture is often taken as a reminder of the 'primitive' past which he or she is trying to escape" (1979:162). Given Kunene's status as a black South African critic, his critique might be seen as reflecting the "cross-border" effects of history rather more significantly than those of culture which qualified the views of Christie, Hutchings and MacLennan.

4.2 Plaatje's Purposes and Position as a Writer

Recognising our own cross-border positioning might lead us more easily to recognise also the interface between 'official' and 'tribal' versions of history at which Plaatje is located, and hence the ways in which his 'rewriting' and 'reinterpretation' of history might be read as an attempt to establish and to develop a fictional voice. Since I have argued above against 'extraneous standards', our theoretical approach now to the issues of language, history and cultural translation should perhaps begin with a consideration of Plaatje's purposes and his position as a writer. In his Preface to the Original Edition, Plaatje specifies as his two "objects" in writing the book: "(a) to interpret to the reading public one phase of 'the back of the Native mind'; and (b) with the readers' money, to collect and print (for Bantu Schools) Sechuana folk-tales, which, with the spread of European ideas, are fast being forgotten" (1978:21).

A crucial distinction between Christie, Hutchings and MacLennan's sense of Plaatje as a writer and his own is signalled by his use of "interpret" as opposed to their "penetrate". The epistemological dimension of Plaatje's term is crucial because it reflects his quite frank awareness, and indeed acknowledgement, of writing *Mhudi* in reaction to white versions of history. It also reflects the multiplicity of 'interpretations' that take place between the four major language-culture systems represented in the novel. It is this term in particular, therefore, that offers a mandate for a reading of his work as cultural translation.

This means, in the first place, that the directedness of his work should be recognised. As a founder member and international representative of the South African Native National Congress, as a journalist and pamphleteer, and as the author of *Native Life in South Africa* (1987), Plaatje quite clearly construed himself as a spokesman for his people, whose duty it was to lobby their cause. It is Couzens's contention, in this regard, that *Mhudi* is an implicit attack on the Native Lands Act of 1913 (1978a:17). It seems to me likely, at least, that Plaatje's decision to use English for his fiction (made, as Couzens had it, "without fuss") was strongly motivated by the access it allowed him to the "reading public" he mentions, which, predominantly white at that time, would have included sectors of the colonial hierarchy with decision-making power. On the other hand his hopes are unlikely to have stopped short of being read by later generations of educated black people. Thus we might recognise his endeavour as being both commemorative and celebratory.

In the second place, Plaatje reveals in his reference to what he will be 'interpreting' a clear sense of the sophistication of his project. His inverted commas for "the back of the Native mind" draw attention to the use of terminology not his own: terminology devised to describe the 'other' which he is applying, ironically, to himself. The category "Native" cannot be read as a simply racial one. The context to which it refers is a colonial one, which has now in some senses irrevocably gone, and so its use here very neatly reveals Plaatje's consciousness of

'rewriting' imperial versions of the Mfecane of the 1830s. Hence his account of "collecting stray scraps of tribal history" which challenge the official construction of the Matabele as "fierce", "unreasoning" and "actuated by sheer lust for human blood" (21). The identification of a *casus belli* has a dual significance. On the one hand, it shows Plaatje's "Native" to be non-sectarian: indeed, the tension between the interiority with which the Matabele camp is depicted and the graphic violence suffered by the Barolong at their hands is one of the major structural achievements of the novel. On the other, it demands a recognition of the interiority of all "Natives": it insists that their psychology be respected, that their actions be read in human and not in objective terms. Plaatje's textualisation of these subjects is one that endeavours as far as possible to take their humanity into account. It is in this sense that we might read his text as an attempt not simply to find and raise a voice of his own, but in doing so to render the voice of "Native" people.

In the third place, and for these reasons, we might be led to evaluate in fresh terms claims that have been made about the influence of orality that is reflected in *Mhudi*. In the second of Plaatje's stated objects we see evidence of his explicit concern with the preservation of oral culture against the inroads of British colonialism. Impressive as this concern might seem, it should also remind us of Clifford's allegory of salvage:

Ethnography's disappearing object is, then, in significant degree, a rhetorical construct legitimating a representational practice: "salvage" ethnography in its widest sense. The other is lost, in disintegrating time and space, but saved in the text I do, however, question the assumption that with rapid change something essential ("culture"), a coherent differential identity, vanishes. And I question, too, the mode of scientific and moral authority associated with salvage, or redemptive, ethnography. It is assumed that the other society is weak and "needs" to be represented by an outsider (and that what matters in its life is its past, not present or future). The recorder and interpreter of fragile custom is custodian of an essence, unimpeachable witness to an authenticity. (Moreover, since the "true" culture has always vanished, the salvaged version cannot be easily refuted) (1986:112-3).

To apply this description to Plaatje we need to draw certain distinctions. Although he might be recognised as "custodian of an essence, unimpeachable witness to an authenticity", he is not strictly an "outsider", as ethnographers typically are. Thus even if the "authority" he possesses "cannot easily be refuted", it might more easily be condoned, and indeed has been by several critics, as I will go on to show. Yet the problems of textualisation which characterise Plaatje's cultural translation are in many ways both more acute and more complex than those of the typical ethnographic situation, and so serve to qualify both his position and his purposes as a writer.

Although Plaatje is separated from the events of his story by time, and although the roots of this story are not personal experience but history, his narrative position is that of an insider to one of the communities of whom he writes. The history which informs his story is mediated to him through the "stray scraps" (Preface, 1978:13) he has collected from older members of the tribe, and his access to this history is dependent on his position as a "full-blooded member of the Barolong tribe" (Couzens 1978a:1). Both this position and the access it allows him can thus be seen as setting up tensions with the claim to non-sectarianism implicit in his "one phase of the 'back of the Native mind'", and explicit in his membership and representation of the South African Native National Congress. We see evidence of these tensions in the numerous cultural interfaces in the novel, and in the explicit 'interpretation' of many 'others', on both a general and an individual level, in response to questions such as, "What kind of people are the Matabele?" (86), and "What are Boers?" (90).

A second set of tensions exists between his position as a tribal member and his distinction of being "the first to put memory to paper" (Plaatje, cited in Couzens 1987:50), in having, as Voss has proposed, "a fair claim to the title of the first South African man of letters" (1989:13). From the realm of autobiography, Lejeune offers a pertinent insight:

An author is not a person. He is a person who writes and publishes. Straddling the world-beyond-the-text and the text, he is the connection between the two. The author is defined as simultaneously a socially responsible real person, and the producer of a discourse. For the reader, who does not know the real person, all the while believing in his existence, the author is defined as the person capable of producing this discourse, and so imagines what he is like from what he produces. Perhaps one is an author only with his second book, when the proper name inscribed on the cover becomes the "common factor" of at least two different texts, and thus gives the idea of a person who cannot be reduced to any of his texts in particular, and who, capable of producing others, surpasses them all (1989:11).

This transition to the status of 'author' doubtless characterises all who write and publish. In Plaatje's case, his authorship, and the literacy which precedes it, work to distance if not to alienate him from oral culture. Although we don't see Plaatje, in Gray's terms, trying to escape a 'primitive' past, such distancing is apparent in his non-sectarian perspective, in his deployment of irony and humour, in the Christian values which inform his presentation of events, and in his exploitation of the literary resources of an English cultural heritage.

Indeed this distancing works in two ways, because the formal shift from oral to inscribed is compounded by the linguistic shift from Tswana to English. A third set of tensions thus exists between the oral medium in which such storytelling would have taken place, and the 'target medium' into which Plaatje translated them - the medium in which he had already become a "man of letters". If his quest is to render the voice of "Native" people, we might recognise with Voss that "one of the significant silences of *Mhudi* is the comparative lack of reference to Britain" (1989:21). Yet if Plaatje's concern is to preserve Tswana culture against the inroads of British colonialism, the paradox remains that his preservation takes the form of translation into English. It is doubtless to his credit that he is able fruitfully to exploit the literary resources of this cultural heritage, as Gray (1979, 1981), Couzens (1978a, 1987), and most lately Walter (1992) have shown. The reservations of Christie, Hutchings and MacLennan notwithstanding, such exploitation is an important instance of the appropriation of the medium of the Centre. And yet we might recall the warning note from Asad cited

in Chapter 2: "there are asymmetrical tendencies and pressures in the languages of dominated and dominant societies" (1986:164), and, since "the languages of Third World societies - including, of course, the societies that social anthropologists have traditionally studied - are "weaker" in relation to Western languages (and today, especially to English), they are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around" (1986:157-158).

4.3 Complexities of Textualisation

These tensions will receive consideration in the course of the discussion that follows: they should certainly serve to remind us of the significance of our task of 'reviewing' the translation. The implications of such complexities of textualisation seem to me broadly threefold. In the first place, Plaatje's participation in an oral tradition gives him a fundamentally communal conception of narrative, yet it is a conception which is tested in his act of narration. It is in the nature of oral narratives that they both belong to communities and are constitutive of communities - hence that they serve essentially conservative functions. The telling and retelling of stories that are the property of, for example, the clan serves to reinforce and to perpetuate the clan's identity. One of the ways it does so is by passing this identity on into the care of its younger members. It is to such a process that Plaatje alludes in the second of his stated objects: "with the reader's money, to collect and print ... Sechuana folk-tales, which, with the spread of European ideas, are fast being forgotten" (1978:21). By contrast, the individualism which informs the status of "author" is strikingly apparent both in the definition cited from Lejeune above, and in this comment from Giddens which was referred to, in passing, in Chapter 2:

Now a text which has a particular form - for example a novel, a play, a poem, or a painting - in contrast to casual talk is a phenomenon into which an individual pours effort in order to achieve form. It is not just that the producer puts effort into what is produced that distinguishes a work from a casually produced outcome of mundane day-to-day activity. It is that *the creation of form is known to the agent to be constitutive of what the work is* In this respect, for instance, there is a major set of discrepancies

between a novel and, say, myths, which are produced through repetitive oral communication, and may have no individual author who lays claim to the prime role in the production of the story. A novel has "an author" and this is known to those who produce novels, who do so in the light of such knowledge as part of their generalized cultural experience (1987:172).

There is an important sense in which to tell a story about people is to distance oneself from them: in Rimmon-Kenan's schema, to insert a narrative level between oneself and them. In Plaatje's case, such distancing is compounded by the inscription of the stories contained in his novel, which thus lays claim not only to the 'authority' of narration but also to the 'authority' of the text. This point will be taken up again shortly.

In the second place, given the communal nature of narrative in an oral society, Plaatje's act of literary inscription impacts back upon the oral tradition from which it derives. The telling and retelling of stories reinforces and perpetuates the clan's identity by passing it on into the care of its younger members; it does so also by delimiting access to these stories. By his membership of his clan, Plaatje has inside access to the oral history he seeks to inscribe. Yet in writing and publishing *Mhudi* Plaatje directs himself to a "reading public" far removed from the communities in which the events of the story might have taken place. The transition he brings about in doing so, from audience to readership, disturbs the balance of narrative power: because once a story is inscribed it becomes a text that is no longer subject to the limits of access that define the act of oral storytelling. Although Plaatje might claim to be preserving - or conserving - an essential and authentic oral culture, although he may be attempting to capture the craftsmanship of oral narratives, his act of inscription constitutes a radical cleaving of the barrier that would normally exclude members of the group who formed his "reading public", because the text it produces no longer depends on the spoken word for its existence.

In the third place, therefore, we witness in *Mhudi* a modal transition from orality to inscribed literature. The significance of this transition again seems to me broadly threefold: its elements might be

considered in relation to critical debates about the narrative strategy of the novel, its foregrounding of language, and the symbolic terms in which Mhudi herself has been read.

4.4 Narrative Strategy

Especially given my comments above about 'authorship', it seems both a misrepresentation and a reduction to see the text as simply mimicking an instance of oral narration, with Plaatje as its scribe, as some critics have done. Couzens claims, for example, that "the form of the novel is ... that of a *spoken story* told to the writer by Half-a-Crown, almost certainly, the son of Ra-Thaga" (1978a:15). Gray goes further. The novel, he says, is "a document of living oral narrative" whose narrator, Half-a-Crown, "could quite legitimately have gathered every phrase of the work that is *Mhudi* from one or another source personally and faithfully". Although he is "the single narrator of all of *Mhudi*", Half-a-Crown "is no omniscient narrative mouthpiece devised to lend verisimilitude and colour to a mixture of historical research and imaginative speculation ... he is none other than the actual son of Mhudi and Ra-Thaga" (1979:176-177).

We might address these claims, in the first instance, by considering Half-a-Crown's position in the narrative structure of the novel. In my reading, his 'existence' as a "narrator" is shaky indeed, because (even in the Heinemann edition) he makes so few narrative emergences; when he does so he usually represents himself in third-person; and as a Morolong he is scarce likely to have had the substantial inside access to the Matabele camp that is offered in the novel. It is these facts, rather than the insensitivity of a readership "which denies his oral heritage any literary status" (1979:177), that render problematic the attempt to read him as "the single narrator of all of *Mhudi*".

This might become more apparent if we consider two such 'narrative emergences'. One occurs in a commentary on the relationship between Mhudi and Ra-Thaga: "That exactly is how my father and mother met and became man and wife My father being a trained hunter, they had plenty of venison" (59-60). In the introductory qualifying phrase, and

particularly in the insistent "exactly", attention is paradoxically drawn to the fiction, to the 'situation of narrative utterance', in which Half-a-Crown is located. Another more significant emergence serves to introduce the Matabele subplot:

Half-a-Crown may be permitted to digress and describe the beauty and virtue of one of King Mzilikazi's wives - the lily of his harem, by name Umnandi, the sweet one. She was a daughter of Umzinyati (the Bison-city), the offspring of a lineage of brave warriors with many deeds of valour to their credit. Such was the description of her given to Half-a-Crown, the hoary octogenarian, that it reminded him of a remarkable passage in the Song of Songs and when he changed 'vineyards' into 'cornfields', he thought he could visualize her appearance in his mind's eye with accuracy (91-92).

Gray makes much of the distinction implied here between author and narrator: "... what the Lovedale text, in deleting the appearance of 'Half-a-Crown', omitted to give evidence of was that Plaatje viewed himself not so much as a novelist but as a scribe, whose role was to record the story told him by an intermediary, this missing link between those who knew the history of the 1830s at first hand and who in his eighties was handing it on to Plaatje" (1979:175). It seems unfortunate that Gray's (probably valid) attack on the interventions of the mission press should lead to a loss of narrative perspective, and particularly to an elision of Plaatje's definitive role as author, which I have described above in terms adopted from Lejeune and from Giddens. The element of narrative choice needs emphasis: if Plaatje did plan to use Half-a-Crown as his narrator in *Mhudi*, the intention seems incompletely realised even in the "original manuscript".

In addition, even granting Gray's contention that "for Plaatje the acceptance of the novel form was merely the acceptance of a flexible enough medium which he could use for his own ends" (1979:175), the fact that the novel form exerts pressures of its own (as I will go on to show) should surely lead us to recognise Plaatje as an 'interpreter' not a 'scribe', and hence the importance of other textual choices he makes. Pre-eminent amongst these is the use of a broadly omniscient narrative structure which allows him to offer interior perspectives of two

directly opposing camps (Barolong and Matabele). Rimmon-Kenan provides a useful reminder:

'Omniscience' is perhaps an exaggerated term, especially for modern extradiegetic narrators. Nevertheless, the characteristics connoted by it are still relevant, namely: familiarity, in principle, with the characters' innermost thoughts and feelings; knowledge of past, present and future; presence in locations where characters are supposed to be unaccompanied ... and knowledge of what happens in several places at the same time (1983:95).

Within the predominant omniscience there are important variations. One of the most important is Mhudi's analeptic recounting of the Matabele raid in Chapter 3. Although this analepsis will receive attention subsequently, I should point out here that it constitutes an early instance of, on the one hand, her function as a principle of coherence in the novel, and, on the other, the rendition within the narrative of her "voice".

A second variation is the figural narration which allows us access to the interiority of several camps. The conspiracy aimed at Ummandi stands as a case in point, focalised as it is through the consciousness of one of its perpetrators:

Umpitimpiti laughed aloud, rather with his teeth than with his feelings. At that moment he cared not what became of Nomenti, who stood petrified with fear as she overheard the conversation. He was only anxious to get away from the place before his alarm was noticed; so he left the two men to continue their conversation. Hardly knowing where he was going, Umpitimpiti walked through the courtyard into the open space where the assemblies are held and cases tried. There he found himself in the midst of a large crowd of men ... (128).

Such focalisation is important in examining the human consequences of Mzilikazi's power, hence its insistence on a moral frame applicable to both Matabele and Barolong. This works, in my view, to counter the process of 'othering' that takes place when different groups are 'translated', for example in answer to questions such as "what are they like?". (This process will receive further attention later.)

A third is the use of proverbs and folk-tales to reflect the polyphony of tribal voices: the "folk-tales, legends and oral history" of Matabele, Qoranna, Boer, Barolong. In a more moderate claim for the novel's links with oral culture, Couzens cites Molema's report that Plaatje called *Mhudi* his "evening reader". Couzens comments:

[Plaatje] seems to have regarded *Mhudi* as analogous to folk-tales, legends and oral history passed from one generation to another, around the fireside at night. It could thus contain the wisdom and history of his people, the very core of his own culture. *Mhudi* is very close to the spoken word because that is the way Plaatje learnt much of the history and fable he recounts in the novel (1978a:15).

We should perhaps note that Couzens's final assertion elides Plaatje's acquaintance with Shakespeare and particularly the use of dramatic dialogue which Plaatje would have examined at close range in his translations of the plays into Tswana. Yet Couzens's description is important for its attention to the commemorative and celebratory impulses that formed part of Plaatje's quest to conserve an essential and authentic oral culture. Elsewhere Couzens cites a comment by Ruth Finnegan that proverbs are "just one aspect of artistic expression within a social and literary context" (Couzens 1978b:62). Using proverbs in his text, Plaatje is allowing the communal voice to speak. On the other hand, such 'allowing' is typically marked in the narrative. In the first speech of Gubuza to the Matabele, for example, two proverbs occur: "*Wiseacres of different nationalities are agreed that cheap successes are always followed by grievous aftermaths. Old people are equally agreed that individuals, especially, nations, should beware of the impetuosity of youth*" (54). The italicised phrases serve two separate functions. Within Gubuza's speech they invoke an oral tradition whose authority is accepted by both speaker and hearers. Within the narrative, they draw attention to the language-culture system of the Tswana which is distinct from the 'English' (and, in the first instance, the 'American') of the text. They draw attention, in other words, to the 'cultural translation' that is taking place.

My primary purpose in considering the Couzens-Gray claims about the 'orality' of *Mhudi* is not to attack a relatively atheoretical, and

certainly polemical, analysis of the novel: rather it is to insist on the existence of a textual interface between oral and inscribed narrative. Since communities are represented in this novel substantially through their discourse, as I will go on to show, we need to recognise the significance of who has 'taken over narrating' at any given point, and in so doing to open our ears to the "multiple voices of the text" (Maclean 1988:6,22). And since the "distanciation" that occurs in inscription renders Plaatje's narrative susceptible to interpretation by readers, the most useful framework for such interpretation must be a recognition of the text as a literary representation of oral representations of history, with due emphasis given to each of these terms and the distinct pressures of context they reflect.

4.5 Foregrounding of Language

The second broad effect of the oral-literary interface is evident in the foregrounding of language in the novel. If we recall the judgements with which this chapter opened, we might recognise in them an intuitive awareness of, and unease at, Plaatje's "appropriation" of the imperial medium, as delineated by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989:38). The unease might become more apparent if we consider, by comparison, the critical latitude Voss brings to Plaatje's use of language: "The reader coming to *Mhudi* for the first time will be surprised and perhaps delighted by Plaatje's idiom, by a style which announces itself as a style. Only the individuality of a particular sensibility at a particular moment of class and history could unify the wide range of tone and register that *Mhudi* contains" (1989:19). My particular interest is less the successes or failures of Plaatje's syncretic style than the various influences it reveals: on the one hand an oral heritage, and on the other the cultural heritage and the authority of the target medium in which his act of inscription and translation takes place.

The first of these influences relates in significant ways to the issue of narrative accountability and hence to the treatment of the figure of the black woman which will, later, constitute a major focus of this chapter. For this reason I would like to offer a brief outline of the second influence here, as well as consider its relations with the first

in the course of the discussion that follows. At the beginning of this chapter I cited Couzens's observations that Plaatje was a linguist who could speak at least nine languages. His acquaintance with English literature included substantial knowledge of the Bible, of Shakespeare and of Bunyan, as well as the contemporary popular fiction of Rider Haggard. These literary resources were tapped for "dramatic techniques, monologues, puns and other language devices, the chronicle-history, the lions and comets of *Julius Caesar* allegory, parable, dreams and travel" (Couzens 1978a:14). Walter has more recently taken up Couzens's passing comment that "*Mhudi* is a kind of winter's tale of loss and regeneration" (1978a:9) in an examination of the novel's "romance patterning" and "romance vision" (1992:1).

Such critical awareness of literary sources has not, however, been matched by a sense of the foregrounding of spoken language in the novel. In this regard we might recall Giddens's insistence on the model of "temporally and spatially situated conversation, not the text, and not writing, ... [as] most essential to explaining what language and meaning are" (1987:170). Plainly Plaatje's knowledge of literature and his translations of it give him a heightened consciousness of medium, and so help to shape the specific form language takes on different occasions and in different circumstances in the novel: from the Edenic description of the marriage of Mhudi and Ra-Thaga, to the Solomonic wisdom of the judgement of some of the chiefs, to Gubuza's military speeches which are reminiscent of Shakespeare's Roman soldier heroes, to the construction of Mhudi as 'heroine', to the lyric mode into which several of the poems which punctuate the narrative are transcribed. Yet in my view the foregrounding of spoken language stems significantly from Plaatje's communal context of orality. Positioned as he is at the oral-literary interface, his narrative strategy represents language, and especially spoken language, as a powerful constitutive force within the world of the Bechuana and Matabele tribes that is his retrospective fictional target.

Perhaps nowhere is the constitutive power of discourse more apparent than in the ceremonies described in the novel, which take place in three

of the four communities in the novel. Writing almost forty years after Plaatje, Chinua Achebe made similar use of the mass salute to demonstrate the unity of the tribe: "Umuofia kwenu!" (1958:63). In Plaatje's novel the mass salute of "thousands of leather-lunged Matabele" (50) takes place after the soldiers return from war. The range of discourse on this occasion includes both praise speeches in honour of Mzilikazi and his warrior son, and the oration of Gubuza who counsels prudence and restraint, and earns himself the disfavour of the crowds in doing so. Although we might be aware of Shakespearean echoes, the detailed 'transcription' of the formal speeches and the inclusion of a contestatory voice give us a sense of interior access to the formal functioning of the tribe. This sense, it seems to me, is strengthened rather than diminished by the narrator's transcription of Matabele idiom ("leather-lunged") to describe the power of their communal voice. Even his irony concedes admiration because it acknowledges the autonomy (if not the propriety) of Matabele values.

An important counterpoint to this ceremony is the Barolong council which decides to support the Boers against the Matabele. The chief, Moroka, is characterised on this occasion in linguistic terms, in a description which includes the nature of the man, the quality of his thought, his relations with communal tradition, and his standing in the tribe. Although "not as great an orator as most of the Native chiefs", Moroka excels in philosophy, his expressions being witty and his humour dry. "He spoke in a staccato voice, with short sentences and a stop after each, as though composing the next sentence. His speeches abounded in allegories and proverbial sayings, some traditional and other [sic] spontaneous. His own maxims had about them the spice of originality which always provided his auditors with much food for thought" (111). Participant as he is in a communal field of wisdom, he is yet able to marshal it to his purposes, and also to take initiatives which are condoned and respected by his listeners. The democratic accountability of his manner is reflected in the respect and reciprocity of the proceedings, which are thus sharply contrasted with those of the Matabele: the "announcement so momentous" (110) cannot be made until all the chiefs are present, and Moroka demonstrates an awareness that he has

no right to join hostilities without the consent of the tribesmen. His presentation of the case takes the form of a long speech which, "while leaving no doubt as to his personal sympathies, left the main decision in the hands of the assembly" (111). His deliberate naming of the several sections of the tribe at the end of this speech is successful in eliciting enthusiastic verbal support. The decision is thus made with the endorsement of the tribe; and the importance of communal sanctioning is explicitly acknowledged in Moroka's use of a proverb to conclude his speech: "*Old people say the quarry of two dogs is never too strong*" (113; my emphasis).

If it is Plaatje's narrative strategy to foreground spoken language in his representations of these two communities, we should be aware both of the values which inform these representations, and of his Barolong allegiances. And if, as I claimed above, one value system is being brought to bear on both communities, Mzilikazi is characterised by none of the positive qualities which serve to identify Moroka, and the wisdom of the individual voice of Gubuza is effectively dismissed in the meeting of the Matabele chiefs that follows.

Of course, communal discourse is not restricted to the ceremonial. Within the Matabele camp, the range of verbal activity includes espionage (135), prophecies by wizards (138) and by Mzilikazi himself (174-175), and the policy-generating speeches of the powerful Gubuza (54, 103, 150). Within the Barolong camp we encounter a major courtcase (121-124), and "wrangling and arguing" that leads to a military pact (141-142), as well as the more domestic pursuits of matchmaking (159), and commentaries on topical events such as the "resurrection" of Mhudi and Ra-Thaga (83), and the arrival of the Boers (87-88). Indeed on several occasions Plaatje's dramatises the process whereby stories develop. The arrival of Mhudi and Ra-Thaga amongst the Qoranna is a case in point:

... Mhudi also became the talk of the people and many were the yarns spun concerning the two supernatural Bldis, as the Qorannas call the Bechuana. Anecdotes in the history of the strangers were related and exaggerated with each repetition. Gossipers wagged their tongues and twisted the story about.

Some reported that Ton Qon's party had returned with ten hides of lions killed single-handed by Mhudi, while the hunters could not bring back the pile of skins of other lions and tigers killed by Ra-Thaga. One chatterer had had ocular testimony of what he said, for he "saw the lions' skins in a hut at the chief's court.".... Such were the wild stories that circulated in the Qoranna huts, which the strangers unacquainted with the Qoranna tongue were unable to correct (73).

The scepticism of the narrative voice in this account of oral fiction-making offers an interesting perspective on Plaatje's positioning in relation to oral culture: as an author he produces a text which, although perhaps modified in subsequent editions, is not subject to the "wild" retellings that occur here. Given that the Barolong stories of their "resurrection" which follows the reunion of Mhudi and Ra-Thaga with their clan are not "wild", we might also notice here how attention is being drawn to the difficulties of cross-cultural interaction in the absence of a common medium.

Since Plaatje is dealing with four different communities in his novel, this problem is a significant one. In the replies to questions such as "What kind of people are the Matabele?" (86), and "What are Boers?" (90), we have instances of the linguistic construction of 'others', since in the pronominal (and nominal) relations that are set up we see emphasised points of difference from the culture of the speaker and indeed of the hearer. In answer to the first, for example, posed by the Boers to their Barolong hosts, we hear: "*They* are nearly all much blacker than *ourselves*. *Their* men go about stark naked even in the presence of *their* children. The women are well-dressed just like *ours* if you examine individual footprints, you will find that the *Matabele* feet are much shorter, yet half as stout again as *Barolong* feet" (86, my emphasis). The man Rantsau is strategically important to the Barolong because he is multilingual. As Chief Moroka describes him:

"You are Rantsau, son of Thibedi, are you not? A much travelled young man of considerable experience at home and abroad! You understand the language of the Basuto, and of the Qoranna and the Hlubis, and the Boers down in Graaff Reinet, don't you, Rantsau? You must speak Setebele too? I would like to send you as a spy to Inzwinyani before we proceed to attack Mzilikazi. You will go? I know you will when I command you" (107-108).

Rantsau is exceptional in the number of languages he speaks; yet the matter of intertribal communication affects others as well. We might recall, for example, how Mhudi's sense of the grotesque is triggered by hearing the Qoranna speak (72). And the friendship of Ra-Thaga and de Villiers develops thus: "They made up their minds to learn each other's language, so de Villiers taught Ra-Thaga how to speak the Taal and Ra-Thaga taught the Boer the Barolong speech. They were both very diligent and persevering and, having ample opportunities for practice, they both made very good progress" (114). Unfortunately individual understanding does not safeguard relations on a broader scale, as de Villiers discovers when billeted amongst Mogale's people on a spying expedition ("They distressed him very much by telling one another that the broken Sechuana he spoke was probably the Boer language", 120) and Ra-Thaga has forcefully brought home to him when he dares to drink water from a Boer cup after a long and tiring journey ("Soon a number of Boers were scrambling towards the pool, gesticulating so rapidly and loudly that his Boer vocabulary proved useless to him", 118). In addition to emphasising the cultural interfaces that exist in the novel, such instances draw explicit attention to the difficulties of cultural translation.

In considering, now, the foregrounding of discourse on a personal level, I would like to focus on two women, Umnandi and Mhudi, because they reflect in important ways Plaatje's concern with the position of women in different communities. Mhudi is significant for two major reasons in addition. Firstly, although she is a central character around whom the narrative coheres, her dislocation out of a settled traditional culture makes her a transitional figure. Secondly, Plaatje's choice of the novel form sets a communal conception of narrative in tension with the rendition of individual experience. Both of these features are particularly apparent in the discursive relations in which she is located.

4.6 Language and Silence: Umnandi

If, as I claimed earlier, Plaatje's identification of a *casus belli* demands a recognition of the interiority of all "Natives" and if, as Couzens claims, the use of proverbs and folk-tales offers a shifting perspective ... that there are two sides to every argument" (1978b:62-64), it is particularly through the subplot that centres round Umnandi that our interior view into the Matabele community is developed. Since the predominant values of this community are, in the terms of the narrative, military, the position this community accords women in general, and its own women in particular, serves both to subordinate and to silence them. The involvement of women in the Feast of Welcome, for example, is restricted to cooking, singing and dancing; and any personal distress they feel at losses sustained in the battle of Kunana is expected to be suppressed or discounted. In the narrative rendition, they are certainly not to ask any awkward questions, of the kind Gubuza poses:

No one, much less a woman, cared to know the cause of the raid, for the end had amply justified the means. They knew, and for them the knowledge was enough, that Prince Langa had raided the Barolong cattle-posts, killed the owners and captured every beast. Hence their joy was too great to consider the relatives of their own young fighters who fell at the point of the spears of the Barolong defenders (51).

The partiality of the narrative rendition of the Matabele is evident, I think, in the derisive phrase "much less a woman" which seems to be a deliberate and ironic adoption of a Matabele point of view. It is also evident in the valuation of military prowess over human life which is ascribed to them, and which renders the contrast with Umnandi's 'pacifism' that much sharper.

Unlike these women, Umnandi is individualised. She has several attributes that secure her position as favourite of the king, her husband, and of the people in the city. Not only is she fair, stately, and excellent at cooking and beer brewing, she is also a "mother to all the attendants at court" (94), providing for their needs at her own expense. Her childlessness undermines her position, however, and her husband's favouritism and his verbal indiscretion particularly lay her

open to the machinations of her co-wives. Knowing she has consulted a medicine man in secret, they attempt to incriminate her for adultery. She is forced to flee. Delayed for ten chapters, her ultimate return to Matabele society has substantial narrative significance because only then is she accorded explicit recognition. The narrative identifies, in retrospect, "the gap created by Umnandi's disappearance, so painfully evident in the domestic life of the nation [which] seemed to overshadow all other troubles" (176). Mzilikazi speaks to himself about her:

"That daughter of Mzinyato ... was the mainstay of my throne. My greatness grew with the renown of her beauty, her wisdom and her stately reception of my guests. She vanished and, with her, the magic talisman of my court. She must have possessed the wand round which the pomp of Inzwinyani was twined, for the rise of my misfortune synchronized with her disappearance. Yet she was not the only wife in my harem. How came it about that all was centred in her?" (172).

Later he names her publicly the "central pillar of the life of Mzilikazi and the Matabele nation" (180).

Powerful as she may be as a feminine principle in Matabele society, it is only by her absence that her importance is recognised, not by her speech. It is characteristic of Matabele society, within the novel, that men speak, not women; and even in an informal context the only individual Matabele women beside Umnandi whose words we hear are the rival wife Nomenti, and the maid Nomsindo. Umnandi herself speaks on only two occasions. The first occurs just before her flight. The conversation between her and Nomsindo ends thus:

Suddenly waking to the full meaning of her perilous situation, Umnandi exclaimed: "But child, I have done nothing, except for the best."

Nobody, however, heard these words because the girl had swooned (97).

The silence into which her words fall here prefigures both her disappearance from Matabele society, and her disappearance from the narrative. In Chapter 19 after meeting and befriending Mhudi, she lends support to a resounding condemnation of war:

"What will convince [men] of the worthlessness of this game, I wonder?"

"Nothing, my sister," moaned Umnandi with a sigh, "so long as there are two men left on earth there will be war" (165).

In doing so she raises an individual voice against the backdrop of all the Matabele women who asked no questions about the raid on Kunana. Since she is still in exile, however, her words are not heard by the people who most need to hear them.

4.7 Language and Narrative: Mhudi

We might again be conscious of the pressures of narrative allegiance if we compare the representations of the two significant individual women in the novel. If Umnandi is foregrounded within Matabele society, it is one of Mhudi's textual functions to provide a centre around whom the narrative can cohere, as the action of the novel moves amongst different societies. In fulfilling this function she is set in stark contrast with Umnandi. Not only does she speak more frequently; her words resound through the narrative as her judgements are gradually confirmed by it.

Her outspokenness stems in part from her Barolong origins, because, in the terms of the novel, the recognition given women in Barolong society is substantially greater than that in the other three communities. At a formal level, for example, women are able to participate fully in the processes of law. In the court case between Mrs Noko and Mrs Poe, the Boer Cilliers and his friends are "amazed" by the number of women who enter into the proceedings (123). Moroka's judgement is offered after representations by all concerned, and is one which satisfies the individuals, including the women, who are involved in the case. At an informal level, Plaatje's description of the reunion between Mhudi and her cousin Baile might be seen as representative: "Now, good health and a sound pair of lungs go hand in hand, and a Chuana woman in moments of excitement can generally give full play to these organs" (82). Yet Barolong women are not only vocal: their speech is effective. We see evidence of this in the story Mhudi recounts of her youth, in which it is the "shouts of girls' voices" that chase away a lion. (The association between Mhudi and lions of course occurs elsewhere and is illuminating for the ways in which it marshals folklore to define her in "heroic" terms.) We see evidence of this also in the tale of Tlholo, the

timid, who flees the Boers. Instead of following suit, Tsetsanyana, Matsitselele, and Maupenyana argue away their fear and find a rational solution to the "riddle" of his "apparitions in the air, devils in space and a boggard in every tree". Much to his regret, Tlhlole is unable subsequently to "seal the lips of those chatterboxes who saw him running" (90).

Thus we might see in the condemnation of war Mhudi offers in conversation with Umnandi the culmination of several judgements passed by her. Like this one, those that precede it are clearly condoned or confirmed by the narrative. Her wholesale condemnation of the Matabele to her husband at Re-Nosi, for example, is repudiated by him at the time, but before the end of the novel he is participating actively and enthusiastically in the war against them. The torment of the Hottentot maid which Mhudi witnesses when she visits the Boers leads her to name these Boers, with heavy irony, "my husband's friends" (117). In this instance the power of her judgement is confirmed by the fact that the term becomes established usage amongst the other Barolong women. It is also borne out by subsequent events: the excessive and unwarranted beating of Dancer and Jan (162), and the perfidious attempt to claim all the land in the division of the spoils of war (141). Clearly the Boers are not to be trusted. Mhudi also warns her husband about Ton-Qon, the Qoranna headman. In Ra-Thaga's reaction to this warning we see an interesting tension between his personal experience of her wisdom, and a communal "common sense" which leads him to ignore it.

With regard to manly occupations ... he recalled a Sechuana proverb which his comrade used to quote, viz., "Never be led by a female lest thou fall over a precipice". And so when Mhudi warned him against this powerful headman he put it down to some idiosyncrasy, peculiar to women, which would no doubt wear off in time (74).

He is quite wrong to do so, and so endangers both Mhudi and himself. She is able, however, to resist Ton-Qon's "highly objectionable" propositions, to secure her husband's well-being, and to bring about their own reunion in the face of extreme threat to it. In this she is contrasted with Umnandi, whose life was similarly set at risk by the intrigue of others, yet whose only recourse was to run away. More

importantly, it is by means of verbal skill as well as resourcefulness in exploiting communally defined gender roles that she does so, hoodwinking Ton-Qon into letting her go, and then seeking the assistance of other women:

Ton-Qon did the talking in the light of the wood-fire on the hearth while she did the thinking.

"The fire is burning low," she said at length, "and we need more wood. Let me go for some!" Leaving Ton-Qon to cogitate by the fire, Mhudi resolved not to return to her hut that night. She hastened to the chief's harem where by means of signs to aid her imperfect knowledge of the language, she informed the ladies that her husband being out hunting she was afraid to spend the night alone in her hut. She at once found refuge with one of the chief's wives (75).

It is perhaps a measure of the solidarity Mhudi manages to establish between her own experience and that of other women that the language barrier does not work to her disadvantage, as we have seen it do for both her husband (118) and his Boer friend de Villiers (120).

Coming as they do from a Barolong woman, and condoned as they are by the narrative, we might see the judgements Mhudi passes on the other communities as expressing a Barolong point of view. Yet, bearer of oral culture and wisdom that she may be, she is also importantly a transitional figure. It is significant, for example, that these judgements frequently occur in her conversations with her husband. Dislocated out of her original community, it is within her relationship with Ra-Thaga - probably the most important personal relationship in the novel - that her individual voice is heard most clearly. It seems appropriate, therefore, that a consideration of the discursive relations in which she is located should focus upon this relationship.

In the first place, even though Mhudi is a forthright and outspoken woman, she nevertheless respects the communal conventions that govern conversation between a man and a woman. She says to Ra-Thaga shortly after their meeting in the wilderness, "No ... though I have lost my people I have not lost my manners. Men first, you have the right-of-way" (39). This explicit deference to Ra-Thaga as a man is frequently reflected also in her thoughts about him and her attitude to him,

sometimes to ironic effect. After Mhudi has herself killed the lion which Ra-Thaga is holding by the tail, they go into their hut,

where he skinned his buck while sunning himself in the adoration of his devoted wife. Her trust in him, which had never waned, was this evening greater than ever. She forgot that she herself was the only female native of Kunana who had thrice faced the king of beasts, and had finally killed one with her own hand. Needless to say, Ra-Thaga was a proud husband that night (66).

The irony of the narrative here emphasises how her concentration on his achievements diminishes her sense of her own. This pattern of interpretation is not invariably followed, however. When she deals with Ton-Qon, the narrative registers a greater awareness on her part of the balance of their respective contributions. "Ra-Thaga was noble, but a man like the rest of them, or he would never have joined this wicked man's party against her advice ..." (74). Such awareness does not lead to point-scoring; rather to an even greater determination on her part to "get him home at any cost" (75). Lastly, after her encounter with the Boers, she subjects her husband to "interrogations [which continue] almost to the small hours of the morning". Nevertheless, with her "love for the Boers ... shattered as quickly as it had been formed, [Mhudi] retained a strong confidence in the sagacity of her husband who apparently had the sense to make friends with the one humane Boer that there was among the wild men of his tribe" (117). Although her own judgements are generally proved accurate in the course of events, she deliberately defers to her husband and concentrates on his positive achievements rather than her own or his failures. Such a line of response might reflect *naïvete* on her part, were it not for the marginality of their position. Given this, her endeavour might more fruitfully be read as a conscious attempt to maintain allegiance to communal conventions and so to structure their relationship in socially rather than just individually meaningful ways.

The grounds for this attempt can be traced to the timing and the location of their marriage which are symptomatic both of the destruction of their community and of the transitional nature of their relationship. Half-a-Crown describes their union thus:

That exactly is how my father and mother met and became man and wife. There were no home ceremonials, such as the seeking and obtaining of parental consent, because there were no parents; no conferences by uncles and grand-uncles, or exhortations by grandmothers and aunts; no male relatives to arrange the marriage knot, nor female relations to herald the family union, and no uncles of the bride to divide the bogadi (dowry) cattle as, of course, there were no cattle. It was a simple matter of taking each other for good or ill with the blessing of the 'God of Rain'. The forest was their home, the rustling trees their relations, the sky their guardian, and the birds, who sealed the marriage contract with their songs, the only guests (61).

In an oral community, all the arrangements for marriage are made verbally, and it is one of the more poignant features of their relationship that their marriage takes place without communal negotiation or communal sanction. It is left to nature, and specifically the song of birds, to seal the marriage contract. (This offers another instance of the foregrounding of language in the novel: elsewhere, too, Mhudi's affinities with nature allow her access to the "speech" of animals (doves, 48, and monkeys, 76), though it is not always access she appreciates or enjoys.) Revealingly, the next ceremonial recognition given their marriage occurs amongst the Qoranna, after the threat posed to it by Ton-Qon has been overcome when Chief Massouw passes judgement against him. The marriage receives communal sanction by their own people only when the couple are reunited with the remnants of the tribe at Thaba Nchu.

The absence of a community at Re-Nosi influences their relationship in significant ways. Both their isolation, and the exclusive bond that results, are apparent in the name they give their home, "Re-Nosi" meaning "we are alone". In contrast to the standard polygamous relationship, Mhudi is, in her terms, "singled out for [the] exceptional favour" of monogamy (60): "Did they not say that man is by nature polygamous and could never be trusted to be true to only one wife? But here is one as manly as you could wish, and I have never, never seen a husband of any number of wives as happy as mine is with me alone!" (61). Ra-Thaga acknowledges explicitly that the intense bond between them derives at least in part from their evidently residual status: "He could not withhold his veneration from - as far as he could see - the only

living Morolong beside himself, lest the change should reverse his fortunes" (73). Each must be "sufficient for the other's company until they should have children of their own" (60). Being man and woman they can do so, as the narrative indicates with sly humour after their first meeting: "Each of them thought it rather fortunate that the other was of the opposite sex" (38). The narrative distance implied by such irony, the monogamy of the relationship, and the Edenic terms in which their marriage is described might draw our attention to the value system inherent in the narrative, and thus the active 'interpretation', rather than simple 'inscription', of experience that is taking place. Yet the significance of 'oral experience' is, I think, plain.

Since Mhudi and Ra-Thaga are both Barolong, the exclusiveness of their bond takes a verbal form as well. Their individual isolation immediately after the destruction of Kunana is reflected quite explicitly as a linguistic exile, of which each is conscious, though in different ways. Ra-Thaga, for example, experiences his loneliness thus:

Each of his mornings was but the resumption of his fruitless search for the company of human beings, which it seemed he was never to find in this world. As he dragged his feet through the dewy grass he seemed to have no particular destination in view. He wondered how much longer this solitude would last. With a drooping spirit he mused over the gloom of existence and asked himself if he still could speak his own language; or, if, supposing he met anyone and was addressed, he could still understand it (34).

Mhudi is less explicit about her sense of verbal isolation, but it is reflected nevertheless in her recounting of her experiences. At the end of her first-person narrative in Chapter 3, she observes,

My only living friends were the turtle doves whose language I thought I could almost understand. I think that if this solitude had been prolonged for another month, I should have been able to sing their songs and learn to converse with them; yet I longed for the company of a man, like the one who appeared in my dream (48).

The man she has dreamed about is characterised as having "treated me to the joy of hearing our language uttered once more in the beautiful voice of a wellspoken man" (48), and her dream is realised when she meets Ra-Thaga: "In fact, I am not quite certain that you are a man, but if you

are a dream, I will stay with you and dream on while the vision lasts; whether you are man or ghost I have enjoyed the pleasure of a few words with you" (35). It is thus in contact with one another that the linguistic exile they have each suffered is brought to an end: "it naturally followed that when she was alone, he too was alone; and when she had company, he too had company. There being no third person, she spoke only to him and he to her" (61). Marginal and transitional as it might be, their relationship is also both idyllic and ideal: no linguistic interface exists between them, and so no 'translation' is necessary.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the development of Mhudi's individual voice is registered most powerfully in the context of this relationship, as I have claimed above. The compass of Chapter 1 is a broad sweep into the past history of the Barolong; it also begins to focus upon Ra-Thaga as masculine protagonist who will meet the 'heroine' Mhudi in Chapter 2. This meeting in the wilderness provides the occasion for a retelling of their respective stories: though of the two it is only Mhudi who is given the opportunity of a first-person recapitulation. In Rimmon-Kenan's terms, her narrative is both intradiegetic - because intercut into the first narrative - and homodiegetic - since she is present in the story she narrates (1983:94-94). This analepsis is most significant because Mhudi's retelling of the Matabele raid upon Kunana foregrounds the point of view of the women who suffered it. It is this retelling, for example, that reveals the vicious attack upon women and children to have been carefully premeditated (41). It is also this retelling which challenges the initial representation of women as victims: by giving them voice, and by emphasising their resistance to their attack and their heroism in enduring it.

"Kill me, you coward, go back and brag that you have killed a woman in kirtles. If that be your Zulu prowess, I admire the Bechuana trait of measuring strength with bearded men, and never defiling their spears with women's blood" (40).

Encapsulated in this report of the words of Mhudi's cousin Baile we can identify important aspects of both orality and textualisation. Heard by a woman who has herself been attacked, Baile's words are passed on by

this woman before her death to Mhudi, and so incorporated into the account Mhudi offers to Ra-Thaga. In inscribing the story, Plaatje passes these words on to us, his readers, reconstituting in his fiction events that evidently occurred. Within an inscribed fictional mode, then, he modulates the narrative to allow several voices to speak, and dramatises the process of storymaking.

Similar polyphony is apparent in the comment and question with which Ra-Thaga draws attention to the significance of audience. Before he invites Mhudi to speak of her experiences he says, "On seeing you, I did not believe that you were a Morolong. But it turns out the two of us, at any rate, are left alive to tell the story - to whom? Ah, yes, to whom?" (38). The reflexive implications of this rather plaintive question seem to me profound. While the sharing of stories in isolation intensifies the bond between Ra-Thaga and Mhudi, it also makes him conscious of the loss of any other audience to hear their stories. Heartfelt as his sense of loss might be, we at a critical remove can recognise other influences it registers. If a story is told, then whom it is told to will affect its meaning. If there is no-one to tell it to, the story itself is 'silenced'. Plaatje's act of inscription works to prevent such silencing, and that is one of its purposes. And if his endeavour is in this way to circumvent such "loss" of the oral mode, then dramatised here is not loss *per se* but the "distanciation" which occurs when "the author's intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide" (Ricoeur, cited in Lanser 1981:117). Concomitant upon such "distanciation" is the replacement of a communal audience with a (cross-border) readership. In Ra-Thaga's case these are transient effects: once reunited with the remainder of his tribe his access to a communal audience is renewed. For Plaatje the transition is a permanent one: positioned as he is at the interface between orality and inscribed literature, his narration produces the text to which we have access today.

Although Plaatje is able to modulate the novel form to accommodate several voices, and indeed several discourses, this form nevertheless exerts pressures of its own on his act of inscription. The most

influential of these is the pre-eminence it generally accords individual experience, and the tension so set up with a communal conception of narrative. Plaatje's 'history' is 'rewritten' very much in terms of a woman. Mhudi's voice is strongest, and it is an individual and a feminine voice. And yet Kunene's "second-rate, badly organized hodge-podge of semihistory, semifiction, shoddy allegory" (in Gray 1980:247), might alert us to the fact that individual experience itself does not here supply an organising principle, as it might in a more conventionally structured novel. And if "Mhudi acts as a centre around whom the potentially random, fragmented, episodic narrative coheres" (Hooper 1992), it seems to me incumbent upon us also to listen to the polyphony of the text, the 'many voices clamouring for expression'. If we recognise in the narrative the textualised subjectivity of the writer, as I proposed in Chapter 3, we should appreciate also Plaatje's attempt to accommodate the demands of other voices within the novel form.

4.8 The "Symbolism" of Mhudi

It is in this context that I would like to address a third critical failure to recognise the modal transition in *Mhudi* from orality to inscribed literature: the "symbolism" of the character Mhudi. This issue seems to me a particularly important one because it takes up both the positioning of Mhudi as an individual in relation to community, and the textualisation of the human subject discussed in Chapter 3.

The attempt to read Mhudi in symbolic terms has become something of a critical commonplace. Couzens likens her to "the other heroines of the book, Umnandi and Hannetjie" in being "a symbol of purity, courage, of 'Mother Africa' (1978a:18). Gray comments,

Mhudi, Plaatje's central character, is something of a Mother Africa figure within the novel, the first in a gallery which informs the entire sequence of black Southern African literature through Abrahams's *Wild Conquest* to the Soweto protest poetry of today. She motivates and tests the novel's characters; she is life-giving, unconquerable, firm, never to be cheated nor to be manipulated unjustly (1979:181).

Certainly both the meaning of Mhudi's name (the Harvester) and the "stature" and "grandeur" Bessie Head finds in the book (blurb) might support a symbolic interpretation, and if it is one of her functions to act as a principle of coherence in the novel, this function might be served as well by a symbol as by a character.

Yet, associated as it is with a concentration on the 'literary' qualities of the novel, the attempt to read Mhudi in symbolic terms is both a problematic and, finally, a restrictive one. In the first place, Couzens's claim that all three "heroines" are "Mother Africa" figures is critically ingenuous in failing to account for the variations that exist amongst them, and hence their relations of structural counterpoint. Although Hanneljie's impact on the course of events is minimal, we should recognise her as the prototype of a young Boer woman. In the "winter's tale" of Umnandi's exile and return (Couzens 1978a:9), we see the suffering and prospective regeneration of Matabele society through the withdrawal and restoration of its feminine principle. In Mhudi we have a bearer of Barolong culture, yet one who is distinguished by her dislocation out of community and her concomitant transitional status. Reflected in the lives of these three women is a range of experience which individualises the history Plaatje is rewriting.

This individualisation is most apparent in the transitional status of the character Mhudi, a status which works to undercut a simple reading of her as "Mother Africa". Dislocated out of Barolong community, out of a potentially fixed and settled existence, she never completely belongs to a community again. Indeed, in the periods of isolation she undergoes we see the conception of community tested by the individual qualities of courage, determination and enterprise she must draw on in order to rescue her husband, and sometimes herself, from danger. Although the domain of the personal receives relatively little attention in *Mhudi*, her determination to be with her husband at all costs reflects both the closeness of the bond that exists between them, and the ways in which this has come to replace communal affiliation. On the other hand, Mhudi experiences reinstatement into not one but two different communities. If she is reunited with the Barolong at Thaba Nchu, the duration (and

harmony, after Ton-Qon is punished) of her stay with the Qoranna would seem to argue for the importance of community *per se* over and above its particular identity. In Mhudi's words:

"What a treat to hear again the hens cackle by day, the cocks crow at night, the raucous bark of the sheep dog, to say nothing of the jabbering of the children even if one knows not their language. It makes my heart swell with joy" (74).

Her experiences might not have detribalised her, but, together with this non-sectarian emphasis on community *per se*, they supply her with an individual perspective that allows sympathetic encounters and relationship with women from several camps: the Qoranna woman who offers her a refuge from Ton-Qon, her Barolong cousin Baile who shared her suffering at Kunana, the Hottentot woman abused by the Boers, the 'angel' Hannetjie, and the refugee queen of the Matabele, Umnandi. Her emergent individualism is apparent also in the innovations she makes and initiatives she takes: her ability to brew beer from berries in the absence of corn (72), her warning to her husband about the dangers of the Qoranna (73) and the Boer (117), her solitary quests to rescue him from danger (75, 152). Finally, the emblematic power Mhudi gains in her encounters with lions (Couzens 1978:14) is an original marshalling of folklore in feminine terms, since Plaatje has deliberately substituted a woman for a man in traditional tales.

4.9 Mhudi: Voice and Silence

I have devoted some attention already to the significance of Mhudi's voice. Its quality and power seem to me most definitive of her character, and offer, in the third place, most resistance to subsumption under the category "symbolic". In seeking to attune ourselves to Mhudi's voice, we might consider, for purposes of comparison, the symbolic "woman of darkness" represented in Conrad's novella.

'... from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman.

'She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knees, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable

necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul.

'She came abreast of the steamer, stood still, and faced us. Her long shadow fell to the water's edge. Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir, and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose. A whole minute passed, and then she made a step forward. There was a low jingle, a glint of yellow metal, a sway of fringed draperies, and she stopped as if her heart had failed her. The young fellow by my side growled. The pilgrims murmured at my back. She looked at us as if her life had depended upon the unswerving steadiness of her glance. Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head, as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer into a shadowy embrace. A formidable silence hung over the scene.

'She turned away slowly, walked on, following the bank, and passed into the bushes to the left. Once only her eyes gleamed back at us in the dusk of the thickets before she disappeared (Conrad 1973:87-88).

The woman is an "apparition", whose context, appearance, dress and ornamentation are described in visual detail. The scene is landscaped as background, which is relatively static, and foreground, across which she moves, as an isolated figure, "from right to left along the lighted shore". This figure in particular is characterised by metallic qualities of "bronze" and "brass" which flash, glitter, glint and gleam. Apart from the jingling of her ornaments, the entire encounter takes place in silence: a "hush" having "fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land", and a "formidable silence" hanging over the scene. Although some attempt to penetrate her experience is evident in the modality of Marlow's description at a few points - "*with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose*", "*as if her heart had failed her*", "*as if her life had depended upon the unswerving steadiness of her glance*", "*as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky*" (my emphasis) - the

evaluations implicit in such terms as "fantastic", "warlike", "statuesque", "wild", "gorgeous", "measured", "proudly", "barbarous", reveal a personal reaction to a predominantly iconic scene. The image of the woman is on the one hand material, so "she must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her", and on the other hand spiritual, "the image of [the] tenebrous and passionate soul" of "the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life". The woman we have here is a symbol, a "woman of darkness", described by a man who can by no means apprehend her as a woman or a human being because he can neither speak to her nor hear her (see also Hooper 1993).

If we follow Hampson (1990:22) in reading her narrator, Marlow, as a cultural translator, the iconic mode in which he presents her is plainly one which predates the explicit rejection of visualism associated with postmodern ethnography. Mhudi, by contrast, presents herself, and she does so most powerfully in the long analepsis Plaatje grants her in Chapter 3. I have attempted already to demonstrate both how individual and personal is Mhudi's voice and how it derives much of its strength from the mandate and sanction of community. This might become clearer if we consider her own act of 'cultural translation' in a later context. Although some references have been made already to the following interchange with her husband after her visit to the Boers, I would like to examine it in a little more detail here as a counterpoint to the Conrad's 'woman of darkness' considered above.

Mhudi, whose love for the Boers was thus shattered as quickly as it had been formed, retained a strong confidence in the sagacity of her husband who apparently had the sense to make friends with the one humane Boer that there was among the wild men of his tribe. And when they left, she shook the dust of Moroka's Hoek off her feet and vowed never to go there again.

That night Ra-Thaga could scarcely go to sleep. Mhudi pestered him with questions about the Boers and her interrogations continued almost to the small hours of the morning. "What sort of people are these friends of yours?" she would ask. "Have not the Boers got a saying like ours: aye ne modiga (a plea for someone chastised)?"

All next day callers were told of the cruel episode of the previous afternoon. Every now and then she would exclaim: "My husband's friends! They looked at the girl squirming with pain, with her ear between two irons and they

peacefully smoked their pipes like a crowd of people watching a dance. Give me a Matabele rather. He, at any rate, will spear you to death and put an end to your pains. *My husband's friends!*"

After this the Boers occasionally heard themselves referred to as 'Ra-Thaga's friends.' The Barolong women using Mhudi's own words called them 'my husband's friends.' Not knowing the origin of the phrase, the Boers thought that they had made a fresh impression of friendliness among their hospitable black benefactors, and so took it as a compliment (117).

Focalised through the consciousness of Mhudi, the passage offers a perspective on the Boers ("the wild men of his tribe") that is starkly contrasted with any perspective they are ever likely to have had of themselves. The name she goes on to give them, "my husband's friends", becomes accepted usage amongst the rest of the Barolong women, demonstrating her power within her community to define and identify those outside it. The Boers' misinterpretation of this name highlights several things: the communication gap that exists between black and white; the Boers' failure to recognise that the woman who visited them might have a point of view - and force of judgement - of her own; and their complete absence of conscience over the abuse of a Hottentot slave. In the passage Mhudi's "interrogation" of her husband, "almost to the small hours of the morning", is evidence of the community's tolerance and condonation of women's voice, (as well as her husband's). On the other hand, it is Mhudi's sense of the relations between men and women that are accepted within her community (as well as personal loyalty) that sees her finding reasons to continue to respect and believe in her husband, despite his noxious friends. It is communal wisdom that informs her questioning and judgement of the action she has seen: she says, "Have not the Boers got a saying like ours: aye ne modiga (a plea for someone chastised)?" The community in which such wisdom has arisen is represented most directly in the "callers" who come to visit Mhudi, who listen to what she has to report of the Boers, and who pass on her judgement of them.

In Marlow's narrative of the African woman we saw a translation of culture that issues in a 'text': the woman is substantially a function of his discourse. In Plaatje's rendition of Mhudi we hear the

foregrounding of her voice. The more significant parallel, however, is perhaps that between Marlow and Mhudi who function, at this point, at a similar diegetic level. Her account of the Boers, like Marlow's account of the African, becomes a 'text' circulated amongst her community that fixes the 'nature' of the Boers. In this instance, however, the 'text' paradoxically serves as an instance of the engendering of meaning within temporally and spatially situated conversation that Giddens delineated: its appropriateness derives from its location in an 'oral' community.

4.10 Communal and Textual Relations

Indeed, my final reason for rejecting a reading of Mhudi in symbolic terms is its failure to recognise the respective communal positioning of character, writer and narrator and hence the textual relations that exist among them. Although the oral tradition upon which Plaatje draws in order to rewrite history is inherently conservative, his attempt to preserve it through inscription substitutes a cross-border readership for its primary communal audience and thus engenders a radical cleavage with it. In particular the novel form he chooses to recount communal experiences is one which privileges an individual, personal and feminine voice. If we recall that "to narrate is to make a bid for a kind of power" (Toolan 1988:3), to venture a version of the subject narrated, to open up the possibility of characterological resistance, the questions we might then ask are what kind of narrative voice is generated in the process, what kind of narrative voice commandeers the story that is to be told? It seems to me important to recognise that the 'radical cleavage' engendered in Plaatje's inscription is in some ways echoed in the figure he writes, who is dislocated out of a traditional settled existence and ventures forth to make a life of her own. There are ways in which Mhudi's experience might be seen as metaphoric of Plaatje's discovery of literate culture, the development of his political awareness, and its concomitant emphasis on individualism.

Having rejected symbolism as an adequate mode of approach to the textualisation of Mhudi as a human subject, we might consider again Plaatje's stated purposes in writing the novel. Is she simply a woman subjected to history: history in the form of the events through which

she lives, and history in the form of the narrative that tells her story? It is striking that the substantial and significant narrative analepsis she is allowed is balanced by several quests she undertakes in isolation through the wilderness; quests characterised by the same 'silence' we saw in the first linguistic exile she and Ra-Thaga suffered. (Unlike her, he is never completely isolated again.) More importantly, if we recognise Mhudi as the central protagonist of the novel, we must recognise also that several chapters of the novel have little or nothing evidently to do with her. Like Umnandi, she is "silenced" for large parts of the narrative. Are we to view Mhudi, then, as simply an authorial mouth-piece, who speaks on cue, and holds her peace when bidden?

Given the conceptions of silence and the textualisation of the human subject developed in earlier chapters it might be plain already that my answer to these questions will be, No. But let us address them by first reformulating them: do we find characterological resistance or collusion, do we need to insist on an alternative version Mhudi might have of herself? Reading her silence as volitional is likely to give us a broader range of response within which to recognise her reactivity as a character. That is, if we try to understand her silence from her own point of view we might have a more sympathetic sense of her reactions to being narrated, to having her story told, and having it told the way it is. Referring to the concept of the cultural interface should also lead us to consider the respective ethnographic addresses of Mhudi and of Plaatje. We might speculate, then, that her response to the Barolong man narrating her would follow similar patterns of courtesy as those which marked her first conversation with Ra-Thaga. Her sense of her place in the scheme of things might be similar in relation to community and in relation to narrative. She would expect to be heard when she speaks, but would not expect her story to dominate the story as a whole; she would be content to enter the narrative domain from time to time, but would get on with her own life while the narrative focuses elsewhere. In this sense what Mhudi has to deal with is verbal frugality rather than silencing, and this frugality in fact works to her advantage. Although she speaks more than many other characters, she is silent for large

parts of the narrative, and this silence highlights her speech when it occurs. In Macherey's words, "the unspoken has many other resources: it assigns speech to its exact position, designating its domain" (1978:86). It is perhaps for this reason that Mhudi's voice is so powerful: in my "hearing" of the novel her judgements ring, her pronouncements echo, her opinions resound. In the instances when "silence" might be imposed on her, when her husband, for example, does not "listen to" her, it is striking that the narrative "hears" her, bearing out her predictions in the course of the events that follow.

Silence therefore does not function in this novel as a narrative barrier because it does not seem to offer an instance of characterological resistance. Unlike the black woman of darkness in Conrad's novella, Mhudi has a life of her own, and one of which the narrative takes cognisance. For these reasons, she does not need to use silence to oppose the encroachments of the narrative. Nor, having verbal power, does she need to resist the silences in which she is left, as a character, to get on with her own life. The control she has over her communication, as well as the attention that is paid to it, shows the narrative condoning and confirming her autonomy. By equipping her with a voice and allowing her to use it, Plaatje ensures that Mhudi does not function simply as a Mother Africa figure, but registers the tensions and transitions that characterise his own narrative endeavour.

In a narrative that is sympathetic to the autonomy of characters, as described by Bakhtin (Maclean 1988:6), we are unlikely to find characterological resistance. In the case of Mhudi, her acceptance of the narration of her story is associated both with the closeness of her ethnographic address to that of her narrator, and with the transitional nature of their allegiance to an oral culture. It is also associated with the sensitivity and the condonation with which the narrative registers her voice. We might, in conclusion, recall Bhabha's point that "the transfer of meaning can never be total between differential systems of meaning" (1990:314), and hence that cultural translation both reflects and reinforces the epistemological autonomy of the cultures being translated. Even if Plaatje's explicit concern is the English

readership towards which his translation was directed, and even if his target medium is in many respects the literary English with which he was acquainted, we might estimate the extent to which Mhudi has an ontological existence of her own by noticing how much more she is a translation "of" an African woman than a translation "for" an English readership. And in this we might estimate too the implicit force of the accountability that goes with a communal conception of narrative. Unlike Marlow who "carried off" narrative loot for an audience ethnographically like himself, Plaatje continues to orient his cultural translation towards the community he is attempting to render in his fiction, towards those who might "overhear" it.

In the two novels that will be considered next, ethnographic address, cultural allegiance and narrative accountability remain important issues. It will be interesting, therefore, to see if the connections posited in this Chapter between the narrative recognition of the autonomy of characters and the nature and extent of their silence is sustained.

ALAN PATON: TOO LATE THE PHALAROPE

Plaatje's text was an indigenous reply to imperial versions of history. We found a mandate in terms of his position and purposes as a writer to apply to his text the model of cultural translation developed in the earlier chapters. This model needed significant modification to take into account the complexities of textualisation associated with the tensions between tribal membership and non-sectarianism, Tswana and English, and orality and literature. Substantial attention was therefore devoted to the text as an instance of modal transition from orality to inscribed literature, focusing specifically on the narrative strategy of the novel, its foregrounding of language, and the symbolic terms in which Mhudi has been read. The speculation with which the chapter ended was that the relative closeness of the respective 'ethnographic addresses' of writer and character, Plaatje's 'feminist' sympathies, and the Bakhtinian autonomy accorded the characters moderated the narrative relations of power and reduced the need for a resistant reading of her silence.

The text that will be considered in this chapter presents an extremely different case, and not least because its writer belongs to the dominant culture which subordinated Plaatje's. Paton's first novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, brought him fame and fortune, led him into public life, and marked a watershed in South African literature in exploring "the central social and political dilemmas of South Africa in greater depth, detail and passion than any of [his] predecessors" (Hutchings 1992:185). By contrast, *Too Late the Phalarope*¹ was published eight years later in 1953 and never achieved the critical reputation of his earlier work. In a 1982 article on Paton, Watson deals with the second text summarily in a footnote, and in 1985 Glenn evinces surprise at the outset of his article "to find how often the opinion occurs that *Too Late the Phalarope* is superior as a novel to *Cry, the Beloved Country*". Ward's

¹ Paton, A. 1971. *Too Late the Phalarope*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. All further references in parenthesis are to this edition.

chapter on Paton in *Chronicles of Darkness* (1989) makes no mention of it.

On the other hand, the text has been the subject of favourable attention from a small following of partisans. In "'A Hunger of the Soul': *Too Late the Phalarope* Reconsidered", Cooke offers what constitutes, effectively, a recuperation of the text into the terms of Romanticism, given the primacy his reading accords individual experiences of "psychic conflict", 'liberation' and 'joy'. "Running counter to the narrator's lamentations about the destructiveness of interracial sexual contact is what emerges as the novel's basic theme: the sense that only through such experience can a White South African achieve a fully integrated self", he claims (1979:38). Motivated by an attempt to establish the universality of the text, Thompson concludes his "Poetic Truth in *Too Late the Phalarope*" with the following judgement: "These, surely, are no mere African truths" (1981:44). Perhaps the most effective defence of the novel is included in a collection on South African literature whose publication this year comes after a substantial and regrettable delay. Comparing Paton's two early novels, Hutchings locates the writer within a "tradition of English Puritanism characterised by great moral earnestness, by a belief in moral imperatives that take precedence over the pursuit of happiness" (1992:184). Whereas this moralism is explicit in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, it is implicit in *Too Late the Phalarope*, and its "implicitness helps make *Too Late the Phalarope* a far more impressive work of fiction" (1992:185).

5.1 The Figure of Stephanie

Finding myself amongst this group who consider the novel significant and interesting, I would like, for several reasons, to begin this chapter with a consideration of the figure of the black woman represented in it. Comparing her with Mhudi will allow us to recognise changes in the linguistic and cultural context that have, by 1953, taken place since the publication of the earlier novel in 1930 (and even more markedly since the nineteenth century upon which Plaatje offers a retrospective view), and which provide a substantial rationale for the inclusion of this text in my study. Perhaps most prominent among these changes is the

rise of Afrikaans as a language and a cultural discourse. The strongly emergent white nationalism which in 1910 issued in Union, and to aspects of which Plaatje was reacting, has a parallel in the accession to power of the National Party in 1948. Focusing on this figure will allow us to 'read back' to the hegemonies of Afrikaner linguistic and cultural nationalism from 1948 to aspects of which Paton was reacting. Significant among these were *apartheid* legislation such as the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, and, more pertinently for this novel, renewed enforcement of the Immorality Act of 1927 (a revised version of which would be passed by Parliament in 1957). Given the concatenation of gender and racial interfaces in the novel, my own reading will be counterpointed to feminist readings of the figure of the black woman in this novel and elsewhere in our literature so as to position more clearly the agenda of my study. And Given the relatively limited critical attention that has been paid to the figure of Stephanie, such a comparison might help us to develop terms in which to understand her position in regard to the 'tragedy' of the novel, the critical debate that has focused upon it, and Paton's position in relation to the Centre. The questions towards which this consideration of the figure of the black woman will, ultimately, be directed are those specified in the Introduction to the Case Studies: what narrative functions does she have to fulfil? what narrative purposes does she carry out? and what narrative options are open to her?

Our first meeting with Stephanie occurs at the beginning of Chapter 2, which is marked by a shift from the first-person narrative of Sophie, the maiden aunt of the protagonist, to focalisation through the consciousness of her nephew, Pieter van Vlaanderen, who is a lieutenant in the police force. Stephanie is introduced running barefoot in the dark towards the "black people's location". She has evidently been running hard, since her breath comes "with a kind of moaning", and since, although she runs past Pieter "so close that he could have touched her", she is not aware of him. Intent on escaping her pursuer, she has sufficient awareness of her surroundings and sufficient presence of mind to hide in the same "shadows of the trees" in the "vacant

ground" as Pieter. She lies down and tries to "control her gasping" (11).

Before following this interlude through to its conclusion, we might consider some of its implications for the context of the novel and of the black woman figured in it. Her introduction as "the girl" (10) implies a certain inevitable connection between her action in its context and her gender; the fact that "bare feet running" in the dark in the direction of "the black people's location" are likely to be feminine, and the pursuer masculine. The term, "the girl", also alludes to a linguistic diminution typically directed, in white Southern African society, towards adult black men and women (we see subsequent instances of this term on pages 33-34 and 93, and of the term "boy" on pages 116, 125, 129). We might recall, by contrast, Hanneljé's invitation to Mhudi, the "noble mosadi", to take care of children she might have (1978:183). The use of the Tswana term and the fact that Mhudi was able to decline highlight the absence then of relations of servitude that have, by 1953, become well established in Southern Africa. These relations are echoed in the geographic separation of the "black people's location" from the named streets of Venterspan, although the darkness of this street which connects them is explained rather defensively by the narrative as characteristic of the whole (white) town. The lack of lighting indicates the town's setting in the rural areas (typically rendered in the narrative as the "grass country"), and the names of the town and its streets its predominantly Afrikaans population. A noticeable shift has taken place from the Boers who were one of the 'tribes' in *Mhudi*, displaced and marginal, to this established urban community which is part of a dominant political power.

"The lieutenant" does not speak to Stephanie when she lies down near him, but stops her pursuer, identifies him, and sends him to his home to deal with him there. Since this episode serves to foreshadow the relationship that develops between Pieter and Stephanie, we might note in Pieter's handling of Dick his 'charity' in not laying a charge, the boy's "Englishness" which emphasises the range in application of the Immorality Act (15), and Pieter's command of English as well as

Afrikaans (11). Having despatched Dick, Pieter turns his attentions to Stephanie. It is not obvious which language is used between them. We learn elsewhere that Pieter as a boy is both conversant and literate in the language of the black people on his father's farm. Stephanie's use of the modal "should" and the rather abstract "believe" indicate a level of sophistication which belies the simplicity of register as it is rendered here. Both these features are evident also in the conversation between her and the magistrate in court. Although on two subsequent occasions we will see her using Afrikaans in the incantatory "*Dis my enigste kind*" (45, 54), her use of "baas" here stems from a pattern of address sufficiently widespread to attest to the predominance of Afrikaans in the linguistic structuring of relations between black and white in South Africa, and so it does not identify the medium of exchange as being Afrikaans. (The language Paton gives his black characters has been the subject of attention by Ward, 1989:74-76, and Coetzee 1988:126-129, though they both focus on *Cry, the Beloved Country*.) If we recall that the apparently omniscient narration in *Too Late the Phalarope* is in fact a version of events reconstructed retrospectively by Sophie from her own observations and from diaries and letters written by Pieter probably in Afrikaans, we might have some sense of the narrative complexities of the rendition of dialogue in this novel. We should also recognise that Pieter is distinguished from Sophie in his understanding of the black language, and hence in his access to the language-culture system Sophie describes as "a separate world", of whose "joys and sorrows no one knows at all" (41).

The conversation between Pieter and Stephanie that follows provides an illuminating perspective on the relationship that develops subsequently. The two are already acquainted with each other, as we can infer from his "I did not recognize you, Stephanie" (12), and, in response to his "You know who I am?", her "Baas, I know well" (13). His authority over her is evident in the 'submissiveness' (12) and the 'obedience' (14) of her responses, and in the communicative initiative he takes, asking eight questions in the course of the interchange and concluding with an instruction. It is perhaps most evident in her deferent use of the third-person "baas" which recognises him as a white man. There is

nevertheless a certain deliberacy here in the way she withholds specific information by using the formulation "I know well", and by rephrasing his question as "What should I do?" (13). The concluding narrative comment, "So there she went with knowledge to destroy a man" (14) is, of course, not borne out in the case of Dick; equally it prefigures her subsequent power over Pieter.

This interchange should be read as a reconstruction by the first-person narrator, Sophie; that is, as constituting part of a complex narrative strategy which will receive comprehensive attention later in this chapter. I would here like to focus on the ways in which Stephanie is constructed by the narrative in the passage of commentary which is intercut into the exchange between her and Pieter.

She was twenty-three, or twenty-five perhaps, and her father and her mother were unknown, and there was a good deal of lightness in her colour. But she lived in the black people's location with the old woman Esther, who was said to be more than a hundred years old. Some said that Esther was a child when our white people first came trekking into the grass country, and it was true that she herself told of it, but I think it was only an old woman's vanity. Stephanie looked after her, and kept her alive by brewing and selling liquor, which is against the law, and brought her often into the courts. She was a strange creature, this girl Stephanie, with a secret embarrassed smile that was the mark of her strangeness. She took her sentence smiling and frowning, and would go smiling and frowning out of the court to the prison, and would come out from the prison smiling and frowning, and make more liquor, and go back smiling and frowning to the court. She had a child whose father was unknown, and she kept it at some place in the reserve, in Maduna's country, and she had a queer look of innocence also, though she was no stranger to those things which are supposed to put an end to innocence (13).

Evident in this passage is certain information which is presented as factual: the absence of her parents, the lightness of her colour, the presence of a child "whose father was unknown", her support of the old woman Esther, her liquor-brewing, her appearances in court and her consequent sojourns in prison, her promiscuity. There are points on which the narrative offers judgements: the fact that Esther is kept "alive" by Stephanie, the association between supporting Esther and breaking the law, Stephanie's "strangeness" which is marked by a "secret

embarrassed smile", her resigned acceptance of entrapment within a cycle of poverty, crime, and imprisonment, and her "queer look of innocence", despite her experience. Evident in these judgements is the ambivalence of the narrator towards Stephanie, instanced most acutely, perhaps, in the concatenation of her "smiling and frowning".

This broad construction of Stephanie is borne out by her subsequent appearances in the narrative: we discover that she is extremely hardworking when she gets a job, that her loyalty to the old woman is exceeded only by her love for her child, that she is willing to accept imprisonment but not the loss of her child. We can infer certain things about Stephanie, too: her lack of education, her illiteracy, her alienation from a legal system that is punitive rather than provident to someone in her position. We also infer a certain ruthlessness underlying her "innocence", since she is also willing to entrap Pieter once her child is taken away from her by the "white women" of the Women's Welfare Society (169).

It will be immediately apparent that the narrative uses to which Paton is putting the figure of the black woman are substantially different from those of *Plaatje*. Recognising this, it may yet be illuminating to juxtapose an outline of similar 'facts' of *Mhudi's* existence with this representation of Stephanie in order to highlight some of the 'losses', 'absences' and 'presences' that have resulted from changes in their respective social, political and cultural contexts. Unlike Stephanie, *Mhudi* lives in several different places, dislocated out of her initial home, *Kunana*, by the military attack of the *Matabele*. She is nevertheless substantially integrated into both the "hospitable *Qoranna*" group (81) with whom she lives, and the *Barolong* people with whom she is reunited at *Thaba Nchu*, deriving much of the strength of the 'voice' which so definitively characterises her from the mandate and sanction of community. *Mhudi* finds and marries *Ra-Thaga* in the wilderness; the relationship that develops is close, longstanding, and mutually supportive, and so obviates the need for other sexual relationships (she actively resists the propositions of *Ton Qon*, and neither she nor the only white man with whom she comes into contact, *de Villiers*, have any

romantic interest in each other). Mhudi has two children, but her attachment to them is subordinate to her devotion to her husband. Given her integration into the community she is able to leave them with her cousin when she follows him to war. As 'the Harvester', Mhudi is not dependent on employment to support herself and her family: we might recall the description of life at Kunana which is replicated at Thaba Nchu:

woman's work was never out of season. In the summer she cleared the cornfields of weeds and subsequently helped to winnow and garner the crops. In winter time she cut the grass and helped to renovate her dwelling. In addition to the inevitable cooking, basket-making, weaving and all the art-painting for mural decorations were done by women. Childless marriages were as rare as freaks so, early and late in summer and winter, during years of drought and of plenty, every mother had to nourish her growing brood, besides fattening and beautifying her daughters for the competition of eligible swains (25).

Even given the idyllic nature of Plaatje's reconstruction, its invocation of community serves as a point of contrast for the circumstances of Stephanie's life. She has, evidently, neither parents nor husband, and her attachment to Esther seems not to be based on blood relationship. Lost to Stephanie is the autonomy of tribal life. The absence of parents and the "lightness in her colour" indicate white sexual involvement amongst her forebears. Her current existence is in significant ways residual: it is dependent upon white society and structured by it. As we will see she is tried in terms of its laws, she is forced to seek employment in domestic service because her customary means of livelihood is illegal, and her "say" over her child is taken away from her by its Women's Welfare Society. Significantly, such power as she does have stems from this same residual position: since miscegenation laws have defined her as taboo, Pieter's attraction to her can be exploited and used against him.

Of course this attraction is in many ways the focus of Paton's novel, and one which must be considered even in a resistant reading of Stephanie. The relationship between them will receive detailed consideration subsequently. At present, I wish to focus on the broader

narrative treatment given two specific aspects of her characterisation which are significant within the narrative and seminal to the representation of her relationship with Pieter: her discourse and her smile.

5.2 Her Discourse and Her Smile

Some consideration was given above to the first conversation between Stephanie and Pieter. The only other person whom we see her address directly is the magistrate before whom she appears in court. From the comparison with Mhudi we might be inclined to recognise Stephanie's "brewing and selling liquor" (13) as having its roots in tribal custom. As such it is communally accepted within the location, it pays better than domestic work (93), and it allows her to care for "the old woman [who] is very old" (53). Yet this activity is defined by the law as illegal, and it is the duty of the court to enforce the law. The equivocation of the narrative voice is apparent also in the depiction of the magistrate. We are offered evidence of his impartiality when he gives her "the usual two weeks", but decides "there was no proof that she had meant to run away from Venterspan, nor any proof that she did not mean to return" (53). Nevertheless it is he who introduces the "matter of the child", and in questioning her makes a "jest" at her expense:

- You have a child, he said.

At the mention of the child, she was immediately another woman, and she looked round the court with wary eyes, as an animal might look round when it is hunted.

Then she said, I have a child.

- And you are always in prison?

- Not always, she said.

- How often have you been in prison?

She tried to count the times, even using her fingers, and smiled and frowned, but at last shook her head and gave it up.

- Many times?

- Yes, many times.

Then she said urgently, but not so many.

The magistrate wrote it down, and then he read it out, not always, but many times, but not so many.

She could see it was a jest, and that the magistrate and others were amused by it, and she looked round the court as if to be on guard the better (53).

In addition to the system of laws, the power relations of court procedure work quite clearly against her. It is the magistrate who defines what is relevant to the case, it is he who asks questions and so delimits the information she can supply. In this instance, the "jest" is shared by "the magistrate and others" but excludes her. Part of the power and most of the cruelty of this "jest" stems from his inscription of her words so that they are available to be read aloud and so used to mock their simplicity and apparent contradictions.

In recognition of these power relations, she refrains, on this occasion, from use of the familiar "baas". During her second court appearance she uses a formal version of third-person address, "the magistrate":

She did not stand there smiling and frowning, nor did she play with her fingers, but she stood there silent and watchful, till the magistrate asked her if she had anything to say.

- The magistrate said I must work, she said.

- Yes.

- So I got work with *Baas Willemse*.

- Yes.

- Then they heard I had been in prison, so they sent me away.

- Yes.

She turned and looked at Japie.

- Then the *baas* got work for me.

- Yes.

- And the *Oubaas* died.

- Yes.

- So I lost that work also.

- Yes.

Then she was silent, having no more to say.

- Then you did no work?

- No.

- You made more liquor?

- Yes.

- Therefore I must sentence you to two weeks in prison.

- What about the child.

- We will tell you about the child when you come out of prison.

- I could get no work, she said.

Then when the magistrate made no answer, she said to him, I cannot lose the child.

And the magistrate said, fortunately or unfortunately, that will not be for you to say.

So she said to him again, I cannot lose the child (164-165).

The structure of this interchange, and particularly its patterns of question-and-answer, is likewise revealing of the power relations between the two speakers. It is in response to the magistrate's invitation that Stephanie recounts her experiences. Her rendition of the different stages of her 'career' is stilted, but facilitated by the magistrate's affirmatives. At the point in her story at which she has run out of opportunities for employment these affirmatives stop. He then asks two questions, and bases his sentence on her replies, effectively discounting her preceding account of her experiences. In response she poses a question of her own, and since he offers no real reply, emphasises it by repeating the two aspects of her 'case' which should militate in her favour. The magistrate's first response is to make "no answer"; his second is to affirm his own power over her by denying her the right "to say" what will happen to her child.

A point of significance in regard to these court hearings is the fact that the magistrate is given a narrative opportunity to justify his position, but she is not. On the second occasion, he summons Pieter's mother and his aunt, Sophie, for a consultation on the "matter of the child" (165). He says to them:

This is the twelfth time that the girl has been sent to prison. When she comes out again, and if Mr Grobler finds her a job, and if for some reason or other she loses the job, she will think again, as she so obviously thinks now, that she has some kind of right to break the law. And how will the child grow up? Obviously to think that if he is not fed with a spoon, then he too has a right to break the law. If such a child is to be taken away, it should be done soon, for the longer he stays with his mother, the more likely is he to grow up into a *skelm*. I should say too, that Mr Grobler has already done more than he was obliged to do, for as far as I know, he is not obliged to find employment for such persons (166).

The narrative balance of sympathies in this matter is fairly plain, because neither Stephanie's enactment of this 'crime' nor its possibly pernicious consequences are confronted in the narrative. Revealed in the magistrate's comments is rather more ignorance than knowledge of the circumstances of Stephanie's 'case'. Since her son does not, in fact, stay with her in the 'location', but in "Maduna's country" which is

beyond Bremerspan, we might be led to question the nature of the jurisdiction of the white magistrate and the white Women's Welfare over the 'reserve', and certainly its intervention, in this case, in the "separate world" it represents. The magistrate's comments thus offer a clear delineation of the marginality of Stephanie's position: those who have the right to sentence her do not have an obligation to help her avoid repeating her 'crime'.

Her silence following her first sentencing and the first threat to her child stands in counterpoint to the magistrate's explication of his position:

She left the dock and followed the policeman to the door, but half way there she halted, as though she would not go, as though something must be done or be said, as though it were unbelievable that her offences, for which she had been willing to pay without complaint, should suddenly threaten her with such a consequence. She turned and looked at me and my nephew as though she would say something to us, but she knew that she could not do such a thing in a court

So then she went out (54).

Of course, Sophie's sympathetic interpretation serves effectively to focalise the event through Stephanie's consciousness. It remains striking, however, that Stephanie is unable to speak on her own behalf, and that nothing she might have to say is likely to be effective against the due processes of the law.

It seems fairly plain from the discursive encounters that do, and do not, take place in court, that Stephanie's power in relation to official procedures is minimal. More significantly, her lack of power in the discursive situation of the court provides a context for her relationship with Pieter. The discursive relations in which she is located can, I think, be clarified by a reference to a second significant aspect of her characterisation: her smile.

In the passage of narrative commentary cited earlier, Stephanie is described as having "a secret embarrassed smile that was the mark of her strangeness". This smile is particularly prevalent in court: "she took her sentence smiling and frowning, and would go smiling and frowning out

of the court to prison, and would come out from the prison smiling and frowning, and make more liquor, and go back smiling and frowning to the court" (13). The ludicrous description highlights both her deference to the 'due processes of the law' and her resignation to her fate. It also reflects the ambivalence of the narrative voice noted above. In her encounter with Pieter in the Kloof (which will be considered in greater depth later) her smile is described variously as "secret", sheepish, "strange and secret", and irresponsible (44-45). Significantly, in that encounter, her smile disappears when she speaks of her child.

On the occasion of the first court case Sophie goes on to speculate about its origins:

... the girl stood in the dock, smiling her secret smile. Then she would think it not right to smile, or perhaps her smile had some time angered someone in authority, for she would frown as though by that she would show respect for the law and the court, and would show that she was not careless and indifferent. So she went between smiling and frowning, so that unseeing persons might not have known that was the sign of her nervousness, and might not have believed it had they been told, thinking that she must by now surely be used to being in the court (52-53).

The "smile and the frown" are concatenated, in Sophie's response, with "the strange innocence that made me pity her, though innocent she could hardly be". Confronted with the threat of losing her child, she stops smiling ("the smile was gone from her now", and she "did not smile any more" (54)). On her second appearance in court she "did not stand there smiling and frowning, nor did she play with her fingers, but she stood there silent and watchful" (164).

The disappearance of the smile is associated both with some fairly forceful questions on her part as to the fate of her child, and a disappearance of the term "innocence" in Sophie's description of her; indeed, Sophie sees her as being "like a tigress for the child" (165), and "not like one on whom sentence is passed, but like one who passes it" (169). In important ways her smile encapsulates the qualities that the narrative requires of her: submissiveness, deference, irresponsibility, secrecy, and strangeness. Of course, as I will go on

to show, Stephanie's smile is one of the more potent aspects of her attraction for Pieter, yet in her final encounters with him she does not smile, but evinces "respect" (162, 163), and humility (163, 170).

My discussion of Stephanie thus far has been undertaken with certain ends in mind. It has been an attempt to challenge the critical trend (which will be discussed later) that takes her and her textual position in *Too Late the Phalarope* for granted. It has thus constituted a resistant reading which deliberately emphasises her humanity in order to demonstrate that she does have a story to tell, even if it is not, in this narrative, explicitly told. This reading has thus been an attempt to establish terms in which to read critical debates that have developed in regard to her, and, more substantially, in regard to the novel as 'tragedy'. The most basic term I have established, I hope, is the possibility of a recognition of her as subject. Since it is not my intention simply to take this term as read, however, the issue that will be addressed in the discussion of critical debates that follows has to do with the converse of her humanity and her subjectivity: the extent to which she is, to use Leitch's words, "a uniquely discursive function" (1986:158), the extent to which she is simply a construct of Sophie's narrative. In my consideration of Stephanie I have already given attention to her discourse. Given an understanding of the interrelations between discourse and culture, given Weimann's corrective that "as soon as the subject is viewed purely as a function of discourse but discourse not, simultaneously, as a function of the subject, the whole question of representation cannot be reconsidered at the crossroads of structure and event, system and history" (1987:177), the discussion that follows will focus on discourse in various forms: critical discourse, narrative discourse, especially as it invokes and positions itself in relation to the broader sphere of Afrikaner cultural hegemony and the discourses of *apartheid*, and the constitutive force of Pieter's discursive relations with those around him.

5.3 A Feminist Critique

In a recent article entitled "The Black Woman in South African English Literature", Lockett has delineated three broad categories in terms of

which representations of this figure can be read: "untouchables", "unattainables" and "destroyers". These categories have their roots in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travel writing. "Since the first travellers and explorers in Africa were inevitably white, male and European, their descriptions of black women are often distorted reflections of the cultural prejudices of such men concerning gender and race: black women, together with black men, are the 'other', yet their sex alienates them still further from those who write them" (1988:21).² In Lockett's reading, the destroyer figure emerges after the promulgation of the Immorality Act of 1927:

In post-1927 South African English fiction the black woman thus takes on an altered character in her relations with white men (for this continues to be her major fictional role). Like the unattainable she is a sexual temptress, often attractive, but with physical qualities that recall her descent from the untouchable. In this guise she becomes a destroyer figure, for by consorting with her the white man faces the danger of prosecution under the Immorality Act and, as a convicted criminal, his life and that of his family is destroyed it is the black woman, and equally the law itself, which function as instruments of destruction (1988:29).

Lockett's reading of Stephanie as a "destroyer" appears to be based on Pieter's view of "his developing illicit attraction to Stephanie as a form of psychotic illness", and "the relationship as evidence of his own debased character ... [and] his dealings with the black woman ... a descent into filth" (1988:31). Of course the term 'destroy' is, conveniently, very pervasive in the novel. Yet a striking difference between Lockett's reading and my own is her acceptance of the predominance of masculine experience. Stephanie can really only be read as a destroyer if we condone, as we are supposed to, the narrative focus upon Pieter.

² Perhaps Lockett's first assertion needs some qualification, for Mary Louise Pratt, in her *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, identifies what she terms "exploratresses" in both America (Flora Tristan and Mary Callcott Graham) and Africa (Alexandra Tinné, Mary Kingsley, and Florence Baker). Their travels were, however, undertaken in the nineteenth century rather than earlier, and certainly their impact on evolving literary renditions of the other was slight compared to that of men.

Although it is perhaps surprising that a feminist reading of the novel should uncomplicatedly accept the predominance accorded masculine experience, Lockett's reading in fact follows a fairly well-established critical trend which has been described in an article entitled "Women and Nature, Women as Objects of Exchange: Towards a Feminist Analysis of South African Literature", in the same collection as Hutchings's. In it, Driver identifies what she terms (following Ellman) a "phallic stance" within our dominant literary critical tradition. Although it has "particularly to do with the reception of texts written by women", this stance is broadly characteristic of "the male-centred mythologising that forms the basis of South African literature and literary criticism" (1992:455), in which the "female perspective is ignored" (1992:457). This is especially true of the black women's perspective.

5.4 *Too Late the Phalarope as Tragedy*

In relation to *Too Late the Phalarope*, this trend takes the overall form of condoning the narrative foregrounding of the experiences of the masculine protagonist and the narrative 'silencing' of Stephanie's story, and the specific form of viewing the novel as 'tragedy', with Pieter as 'tragic hero'. Gordimer's 1961 commentary on "The Novel and the Nation in South Africa" offers an early and useful delineation of this view:

In terms of tragedy as the rest of the world knows it, there is a tragedy in Alan Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope* - the private tragedy of a man of fine instincts in conflict with an instinct that seems misplaced from some earlier, brutish existence. The writer takes care to endow his hero with noble attributes and virtues, and provides that he shall bring about his own downfall, thus fulfilling the classic conditions of tragedy, that the hero shall topple from a height, and that the fall shall be brought about by a fatal flaw in his nature (1973:41).

Gordimer goes on to question and to resist the novel's 'tragic' aspect:

Van Vlaanderen regards his own lust not as lust, but specifically as something connected with black flesh. It is not the awfulness of lust that shocks and shames; but the awfulness of its object - a black woman. The moral focus of the book ... is off-centre.... the morality of the novel - the morality of South Africa - claims tragedy on the wrong

count. The thunderbolt misses; the explosion, like the moral truth, is off-centre. For lust can be a tragedy for a man, but it is not a national disaster (1973:41-42).

Gordimer's ability to appreciate and to resist the tragedy has a significance greater than her dismissal of "lust" as a putative "national disaster" - though it is revealed in this dismissal, as I will go on to show. For the moment, we can recognise in her comments a specification of the issues that are central to a reading of the novel as tragedy: the distinction between the private and the public domain, Pieter's endowment with "noble attributes and virtues" to make him a 'tragic hero', his "downfall" through a sexual relationship with a black woman, because of a "fatal flaw in his nature", his location in "the morality South Africa has built on colour" (1973:39).

Apparent in Gordimer's commentary is a sense of unease at Paton's choice of the tragic mode; unease which has its roots, I think, in uncertainty and suspicion as to the nature and the possibilities of tragedy in the Southern African context. Such unease is apparent in her first qualification, "tragedy as *the rest of the world knows it*", and in her association of "the morality of the novel" with "the morality of South Africa" in claiming "tragedy on the wrong count" (my emphasis). The view towards which my analysis will proceed is that Paton's use of tragedy is an act of alignment with "the rest of the world" rather than with "the morality of South Africa", and so Gordimer's polarities offer a useful point of entry to a postcolonial positioning of the writer and his novel.

Not surprisingly, other critics as well as Gordimer have evinced unease at Paton's use of the tragic mode. Although Watson's article focuses on *Cry, the Beloved Country*, it offers a provocative and compelling explanation of Paton's choice of tragic mode in terms of his liberalism. I shall deal at some length with this article because the implications of Watson's critique for *Too Late the Phalarope* deserve more detailed attention than they generally receive (perhaps because he relegates the later text to a footnote). In beginning his argument he enlists Coetzee's observations that tragedy has been "a favoured mode among White South African writers Tragedy is typically the tragedy of

inter-racial love: a White man and a Black woman, or vice versa, fall foul of the laws against miscegenation, or simply of White prejudice, and are destroyed or driven into exile" (in Watson 1982:31). Paton uses the mode, in other words, partly because it is available to him. In doing so he is effectively cheating, however, because through the processes of identification and catharsis, in Watson's view, "tragedy affords a solution, both artistic and otherwise, to that which in reality has not been solved at all" (1982:31). And yet it is not only "because of its apolitical nature that tragedy becomes a mode which results in mystification rather than revelation". As he points out, citing Steiner, "a tragedy *without* God, a tragedy of pure immanence, is a self-contradiction. Genuine tragedy is inseparable from the mystery of injustice, from the conviction that man is a precarious guest in a world where forces of unreason have dark governance" (1982:31). Paton's use of tragedy is illegitimate because it falsifies South African realities:

the series of misfortunes which his novel relates are definitely not the results of the obscure workings of gods (or of God) whose ways and whims cannot be discovered by man. Like the law which has been formulated as an expression and defence of the interests of white South Africa alone, and which therefore has no credibility as an impersonal god, these misfortunes are quite explicable in terms of the man-made reality and historical conditions of South Africa in the first half of this century. *Cry, the Beloved Country* is thus a tragedy of 'pure immanence' on top of which a mystifying Christian concern with suffering and joy has been imposed. In short, it is not genuine tragedy at all (1982:33).

On the whole I find Watson's delineation of the problems associated with Paton's use of the tragic mode in his novels compelling. Support can certainly be marshalled for it from several sources. Gordimer, for example, notes that *Too Late the Phalarope*, like Millin's *God's Stepchildren*, is "written within the accepted framework of the South African morality [and hence is] part of what one might call the literature of victims We are shown what people suffer under the imposition of a particular policy, a way of life, a particular morality". Characteristic of this literature, Gordimer points out, is a textual absence of figures responsible for the laws and the policies

which is clearly related to the "technique of mystification" Watson identifies in Paton's writing (1982:33). In addition, the "victims" are never "shown in anything but a passive role - what is done to them, rather than how they take it, is the subject-matter of the book" (Gordimer 1973:43). Although, as I will go on to show, the separation of "how they take it" from "what is done to them" is an oversimplification, it is indeed Paton's representation of victims which has drawn reactions from more radical critics, and black critics in particular. In Mphahlele's reading of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, message supersedes character, and Paton fails "to study the characters of people in a process of change" (1962:159). Ngugi wa Thiong'o, as might be expected, goes further, repudiating the "good Christian souls in Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, who suffer without bitterness, and move through an oppressive system without even being stirred to anger". Paton's imaginative failure is an inability to see the African "in an active causal-effect relationship with a significant past" (1972:43).

The broader questions left to us by both Gordimer and Watson seem to me implicitly to invoke the pressures of context which ought to be taken into account in an assessment of the possibilities of tragedy in Southern Africa: the ways in which, for example, Paton's novel responds to and reveals the interrelations of discourse, at a range of levels, and the reaction to cross-culturality that takes the form of *apartheid*. More immediately, if we are called upon to read Paton in political terms, it seems only fair to read his critics in the same way. Finn has rather ingenuously observed, "Both liberalism and Alan Paton might be considered passé by some and disregarded by political and academic radicals and reactionaries of whatever ilk today" (1988:315). Yet the debate between Watson and Rive that preceded Finn's paper by five years shows just the reverse. In a paper entitled "The Liberal Tradition in South African Literature" Rive takes up Watson's critique, allowing himself the adroit critical manoeuvre of citing Paton's own words:

I hold in contempt those young white Radicals who sneer at liberals and liberalism. Who were their mentors? If it had not been for the Jabavu's, Marquard's, Hoernle's, they would have been in darkness until now. One cannot measure past labour in terms of present demands. One expects black power

to sneer at white liberals. After all white power has done it for generations. But if black power meets white power in headlong confrontation, and there are no black liberals around, then God help South Africa. Liberalism is more than politics. It is humanity, tolerance and love of justice. South Africa has no future without them, least of all white South Africa (1983a:30).

Of course a further deconstruction might read Paton's reaction to "young white Radicals who sneer" as further evidence of his liberalism, because it is couched in individual, in human, and in Christian terms. This is not the form Watson's reaction takes, however. In a letter to the editor of *Contrast* after its publication of Rive's article, Watson claims he is "very far from wishing to take issue with Paton himself". He chooses, rather, to direct the force of his attack at Rive, whose "coffee-table chat masquerades as criticism", claiming "Rive does Paton a disservice - in fact does just the opposite of celebrating his life and work - by so clearly failing to appreciate the real nature of the liberal tradition in South Africa" (1983:89). Yet, as Rive points out in his reply, it is more than "peevishness and petulance masquerading as counter-criticism" that shows up Watson's refusal explicitly to locate his own political predilections: it is a failure to recognise the "colour-caste emphasis" built into South African liberalism which gives it its "peculiar quality", and which explains why "[it] is not acceptable to most blacks and liberal writing is not popular in the townships" (1983b:92-93).

It is perhaps this refusal, more than the apparent difference in political priorities, that leads Watson largely to overlook the issue of readership, and hence to focus on the vagueness and obscurity rather than the potential value of the category of "protest" fiction that Rive delineates. Using this category Rive manages to explain, in rather more sympathetic terms than Watson, what liberal writing cannot be expected to reflect or to do. Comparing the respective writers of *Cry, the Beloved Country* and *Path of Thunder*, he observes, "Paton, through no fault of his own, talks about oppression, Abrahams, at least while he was in South Africa, lives with it" (1983a:27). Hence the shift away from the liberal concern with "the victim" to protest at "victimisation", so that "the perpetrator comes into his own as a fully-fledged character. The novel is not intended to call out the reader's

mere sorrow for the suffering black hero; it is also a condemnation of those people who cause his suffering" (1983a:27-28). Thus Rive's category offers a refinement and amplification of Gordimer's characterisation of the "literature of victims". We do not need, here, to follow the further development of Rive's argument. My endeavour has simply been to indicate that, despite Watson's ungraciousness towards Rive, the criticisms Watson levels against Paton and the liberal vision may well have been met in different kinds of fiction to which he pays little attention.

Emanating from Rive's debate with Watson, to summarise, are several important points. First, Watson's reading of Paton and liberalism in political terms is necessarily influenced by his own political predilections which, within this debate, he declines to specify. Second, if *Too Late the Phalarope* is to be classified in terms of Paton's liberalism we should bear in mind the range of narrative possibilities within which it is located. Third, the link Watson seeks to establish between tragedy and liberalism is a significant one. Fourth, tragedy in Southern Africa nevertheless needs to be read in terms of pressures of context. And finally, both Paton's liberalism and his use of tragedy in *Too Late the Phalarope* must be read in relation to his postcolonial positioning, as distancing him from the hegemonies of *apartheid* and as aligning him with the Centre. The last three of these points will be taken up in the discussion that follows.

5.5 *Too Late the Phalarope* as Moral Tragedy

The broader questions left to us by Gordimer and Watson had to do with the possibilities of tragedy in the Southern African context. This issue has received substantial, though implicit, attention in the recent article by Hutchings to which I have referred already. Written shortly after the Watson-Rive debate, its reference to the central terms of this debate is somewhat oblique, perhaps because its primary purpose was to locate Paton within the corpus of South African literature. And yet Hutchings's characterisation of Paton as a "Puritan" offers a delineation of the possibilities of tragedy within the domain of liberalism that directly challenges Watson's dismissal (in fact shows up

Watson's refusal at the outset to read Paton in Paton's own terms). For this reason I would like to bring Hutchings's argument to bear on Watson's critique of *Too Late the Phalarope*, and in this way provide a critical context for my own reading of the novel. The footnote Watson gives the novel reads as follows:

Paton creates exactly the same form of mystification in his later novel, *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953). Apart from the fact that it also uses a spurious form of tragedy (the Immorality Act is no substitute for the gods), Paton also sees the problem here as being a tyranny of fear and a lack of love. He does not seem to realize that the rigid Afrikaner Calvinist mentality that he portrays in this novel (and which is exemplified by Pieter Van Vlaanderen's father), its lack of warmth and spontaneity, its many obsessional traits (such as love of Discipline and order, which manifests itself in strict parents and, particularly, in authoritarian fathers) operates as a defence mechanism among the ruling whites, especially the Afrikaners, against a basic national anxiety, arising from a basic national insecurity. In other words the Calvinist gives evidence of an obsessional and authoritarian national character in an attempt to compensate for an abnormally high level of anxiety originating in a deep sense of national insecurity. His rigid nature, therefore, is due as much to his *political* position in South Africa as to any supposedly inherent traits. But in *Too Late the Phalarope* Paton, through the mouth-piece of Tante Sophie, suggests that the tragedy might have been avoided if sufficient love had been forthcoming. This might, of course, have been true. But in so far as this novel is a study of Afrikaner Calvinism in general, it is to be doubted whether the love, the true love as opposed to the twisted, which he advocates is any solution at all. Once again Paton is attempting to solve what is at root a *political* problem through personal love (1982:43-44).

The first question that arises, it seems to me, is whether the Immorality Act is really a "substitute for the gods" in *Too Late the Phalarope*, and hence whether the novel uses a "spurious form of tragedy". In Hutchings's view the tragedy is "conceived within a Christian, rather than an Aristotelian, world-view" (1992:188). In other words we should not seek a "substitute for the gods" in the novel, because God himself is represented in it. His effect, in Hutchings's reading of Paton, is to make "morality ... a practical matter of daily living, not a theoretical, nor primarily a philosophical matter. It involves human choice, and the proper moral choice is seen as a rational

one" (1992:184). Hutchings thus follows and amplifies Gordimer's distinction between the public and the private domains in the novel, arguing against an over-emphasis on the former, and specifically against the view that "the private is wholly determined by the public" (1992:188). "It seems to me", he says, "that the strength of the novel lies neither in any scathing denunciation of the Immorality Act, nor in an indictment of male child-rearing practices in the Afrikaner community, but rather in Paton's ability to tell compassionately the tragic story of a man's internal division wrought in part by the ills of his community" (1992:195).

The existence of the private domain certainly seems to me crucial to any responsive reading of the novel. It is regrettable, therefore, that Hutchings fails to examine in greater depth the nature of the moral imperatives associated with this private domain, or to specify the relations between public and private beyond noting their ironic coincidence:

The protagonist, a figure of some eminence and status within his community, is split within himself by an evil that derives from the community, and of his own free will, makes an immoral, adulterous choice which has disastrous consequences. That the immoral choice also involved a legal offence against an iniquitous law, iniquitously named The Immorality Act of 1927, is part of the multiple irony of the novel, because it links the evil in the community with the evil in the man, although the community comprehends neither evil (1992:189).

What is the nature of this "evil"? who defines it as "evil"? in what ways does it derive from the community? and can it still be recognised as "evil" if the law that prohibits it is also "iniquitous"? These are questions which Hutchings does not explicitly address, though perhaps some answers are implied in support of his assertion that "the interesting action, and certainly the tragic action, takes place within the private domain". He proceeds:

The outer, public story concerns Pieter's fall from a position of fame and respect to notoriety and contempt. His breaking of a social taboo which is legally entrenched is a public event in the domain of the community. His consciousness of the value that the community will put on the event and of the event's consequences is certainly part

of his anguish, but his real failure is a betrayal of self, a betrayal influenced by his community but operating within his private domain and proceeding from a split so profound that he can risk those public consequences both for himself and for his loved ones. His brutal exploitation of a poor black woman is an assertion of his potency over the most vulnerable, most exploited class of human beings in South Africa. Yet it is but the dark side of the aggressive strength his community - including his father - has always demanded of him he declines to make love to Anna and screws Stephanie: the assertion of masculine aggression which, when discovered, is calculated to wreak the greatest havoc within the community that has driven him to it (1992:196).

The "evil" Pieter commits, it seems, is to enact the "dark side" of the aggressive strength which is valued by his community, and thus to assert the bivalence of its nature. Yet to accept this enactment as "evil" without questioning the term is to surrender critical distance from the consciousness of Pieter and the values of the community; both of which, it seems to me, need to be approached with some circumspection.

The problem might be couched in terms of a second question that arises out of Watson's reading of the novel: specifically his accusation that Paton "fails to realize that the rigid Afrikaner Calvinist mentality that he portrays in this novel ... operates as a defence mechanism among the ruling whites, especially the Afrikaners, against a basic national anxiety, arising from a basic national insecurity" (1982:44). Even if we are willing to condone Watson's analysis of a society in the terms of the psychological (the typecasting evident in his identification of a "Calvinist ... national character"), it seems to me problematic to elide, as he does, the historical origins of the "mentality" he identifies. Do they postdate, as he implies, the existence of the South African national state? The first version of the Immorality Act was in fact passed in 1927, and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, though promulgated in 1949, had substantial origins in a private bill led by a Major F.J. Roberts of the United Party in 1936 (Furlong 1983:2-4). It seems particularly disingenuous to accuse Paton of failure to recognise the political dimensions of personal qualities when Watson himself simply takes as read the direction of the relationship between them. The false psychologism of the manoeuvre might be highlighted if we refer it

to Hutchings's insistence that "the tragic action [of the novel] takes place in the private domain", that Pieter's "real failure is a betrayal of self". While I do not agree with Hutchings's location of the tragedy, the dénouement, and the liberation within the sphere of the private, it seems to me to offer an important alternative to Watson's dismissal of Paton's use of the tragic form as "spurious". Unlike Gordimer who was able both to appreciate and to resist the tragedy, Watson's reading does not appear to engage on the level of the human or the experiential at all.

This lack of engagement is revealed in, and perhaps can be explained in terms of, a third aspect of Watson's reading that is questionable: his sense that Sophie is Paton's "mouth-piece". We might have reservations in this regard if we recall that Paton gives Sophie a hare-lip, which underlines physiologically the narrative ambivalence I have noted above. Hutchings is certainly quite decided: "the three voices through whom the story is told, those of Aunt Sophie, of Pieter and of his wife Nella, are distinctly characterised, and none, not even the aunt's, is the voice of Alan Paton" (1992:190). To substantiate the point, Hutchings says of Sophie: "In building up her narrational reliability, Paton gets her to delineate her own character [and] gets her to distance herself from some of the orthodoxies of her community..." (1992:190). One of these orthodoxies is the Immorality Act. As Hutchings has pointed out a little earlier, the term used to describe this Act originates within the community itself: "Almost disingenuously, given Paton's known social and political opinions, he simply presents the community's view that Pieter van Vlaanderen breaks 'the iron law ... of a people of rock and stone in a land of rock and stone' (p.18)". In fact the term occurs in a long passage focalised through the consciousness of Pieter, and hence gives added support to Hutchings's contention that the tragic action is located within the private domain of Pieter's psyche. And certainly Pieter cannot be read as Paton's "mouth-piece".

Hutchings's reading of the novel as tragedy and Pieter as tragic hero has served as an instance of the critical trend noted above. It has been useful in challenging Watson: since Hutchings reads Paton in Paton's

terms, he recognises, as Watson did not, the existence of the private domain, with its emphasis on the individual and personal reality of tragedy. Yet a loss of critical distance is apparent in the failure to examine the nature of the moral imperatives associated with this domain and the concomitant failure to specify the relations between public and private. The result, for example, is the contradiction of claiming on the one hand that Pieter's "real failure is a betrayal of self", and on the other that it is his community that 'drives' him to the "masculine aggression" of 'screwing' Stephanie. Nor, I think, can we accept Hutchings's claim that Paton "simply presents the community's view that Pieter van Vlaanderen breaks 'the iron law ... of a people of rock and stone in a land of rock and stone' (p.18)", because it elides both the complexity and sophistication of the narrative strategy, and the problematic nature of tragedy in the Southern African context, given the discursive relations and the cross-culturality in which it must be located. Although Hutchings hints at the significance of textual and communal relationships when he speaks of "Paton's authorial detachment and his narrator's compassion" (1992:195), we need to recognise more definitely two preconditions for reading the novel as tragedy: Paton's distance from the tragic action, and the narrative focus upon Pieter. The first of these entails an examination of the narrative strategy of the novel and particularly the first-person narrator Sophie; the second a recognition that the focus upon Pieter is predicated upon the silence of Stephanie. Each of these will receive comprehensive attention in the remainder of this chapter.

5.6 Narration and Community

Unlike Plaatje who is positioned, in significant ways, as a narrative insider to the community he narrates, Paton distances himself from the community in his novel by interposing a first-person narrator who is quite distinctly characterised. The structure that results presents something of a challenge to the model of the narrator as cultural translator, since the model must take into account the cross-culturality of the relationship that is being 'translated', and the motivations underlying the act of narration. Paton's position and purposes as a writer and the intentionality that characterises his writing of this

narrator will form part of a broader consideration of textual relations towards the end of the chapter. At present I would like to focus on Sophie, on her narration, on her position in regard to community, and on her relations with the characters in 'her' story.

The sensitivity of our mode of approach might be sharpened if we posit two questions: why does Pieter not tell the story? and, hence, what attributes are given the first-person narrator who is chosen to tell it? The first of these questions will also be addressed later, in a specific consideration of Pieter; at this point it is important to bear in mind that Paton chooses quite deliberately not to have him tell the story. The person who does so is Sophie, Pieter's aunt, who is physically deformed and has never married. Her deformity is, we infer, a harelip, which lends a certain irony to the fact that she is chosen to 'tell' the story, and works against a reading of her as Paton's 'mouth-piece'. A major effect of this deformity is to position her as something of an outsider within the community, with four consequences of significance for her narration: her status as an observer, her outspokenness, her ambivalent allegiance to its structure of values, and her excessive attachment to Pieter.

Being unmarried and childless she lives with her brother and his wife, and on the occasion of his birthday party goes to check on the kitchen, for "it's in the kitchen that the work is done". Feeling unappreciated she is overtaken by what she terms "*swartgalligheid*" (106), the black moods which both she and her nephew suffer. "I felt suddenly tired and old, and pitied myself, and remembered my lip and that no man had ever wanted me" (78). Being unmarried and childless she is marginalised within the socially important and emotionally close-knit Afrikaner family to which she belongs. The effect is to diminish her participation and to emphasise her powers of observation. As she says:

Yet because I am apart, being disfigured, and not like other women, yet because in my heart I am like any other woman, and because I am apart, so living apart and watching I have learned to know the meaning of unnoticed things, of a pulse that beats suddenly, and a glance that moves from here to

there because it wishes to rest on some quite other place (9).

Evident here is her sense of heightened awareness of the subtleties of personal interaction, which allow her to witness gestures and responses which might to others be invisible. Her textual position might thus be seen, for the most part, as that of an observer, and her participation in the course of events more vicarious than direct. If this is not consistently true, it nevertheless provides the ground upon which her action at crucial moments - or lack of it - can figure.

Also possibly because she is unmarried and childless, she is distinguished by the sharpness of her tongue. We see evidence of this in an encounter between her and Pieter's father-in-law who comes to fetch his daughter and grandchildren for a period of "rest and separation". Sophie describes the interchange thus:

Her father ... was a tall fierce old man, with a face like an eagle, and the bluest and most piercing eyes that I have ever seen. They came to my brother's house to say goodbye, but for all his piercing eyes he did not recognize me, but took me for my sister-in-law, although I wear no rings at all. He asked me how were my other children, and my brother snorted like a bull, and blew hard at his nose.

I said sharply, you had better ask my sister-in-law, she has some children.

And my brother snorted still louder, and blew still harder at his nose. For he always said of Nella's father that you could put his sense of humour into a match-box already full (84).

Despite her positive reading of her brother's amusement, we see evidence here of the difficulties and marginality of her status, and hence her need to protect herself verbally. We see evidence of this capacity in a second, rather more significant, encounter with the old man after Pieter's arrest under the Immorality Act, at the house of the police captain.

Nella's father was waiting for us, the tall and fierce old man, with the face like that of an eagle, and the blue and piercing eyes. To him the captain told the story of all, and when he had finished, the fierce old man struck the arm of his chair and said, I would shoot him like a dog.

Then, because no one spoke, he said to the captain, wouldn't you?

And the captain said, no.

- You wouldn't?

- No.

- But he has offended against the race.

Then the captain said trembling, *meneer*, as a policeman I know an offence against the law, and as a Christian I know an offence against God; but I do not know an offence against the race. B

So the old man turned to me and said, *mevrouw* ...

- *Mejuffrou*, I said.

Then he recognized me at last, for all his piercing eyes, and said, *mejuffrou*, I am sorry ...

Meneer, said the captain, if man takes upon himself God's right to punish, then he must also take upon himself God's promise to restore. If we ... B

- You are an Englishman, said Nella's father, fiercely but without offence. You do not understand these things.

- I am not an Englishman, I said, but I understand them.

The old man said, it will not help to stay any longer, and with a brief *goeie nag*, he went (196).

What is interesting in this interchange is not only Sophie's repeated need to emphasise her status, but also the fact that it is her comment which clinches the argument. Her rejection of the old man's judgement is an insistence on the need for a different kind of 'understanding' than the one he advocates, and hence an example of the liberal values which Hutchings admires in Paton, and which Watson censures. It is an understanding she manages because, like the captain and unlike the old man, she has access to two cultural codes.

This understanding alludes, on the one hand, to the range in positions that exist within the community in regard to apartheid, and, on the other, to Sophie's relative distance from the structure of values of this community. The punitive aspect of these values is demonstrated in the attitudes of Nella's father, the old man. Their most extensive manifestation occurs in the figure of Sophie's brother, Jakob van Vlaanderen, who believes that "the husband is the head of the wife, and that her true nature is to be obedient" (35), yet who is able to say in company, "that he had never touched a woman, as a man touches a woman, other than his wife, nor had he ever desired to do so" (67), who understands the word obedience better than he understands the word love (65), to whom "our Afrikaans language was a holy tongue, given by God in the wilderness" (65), and to whom "the point of living is to serve the

Lord your God, and to uphold the honour of your Church and language and people" (72).

Sophie's explicit recognition of these values in her brother serves to indicate both her alignment with them and her disengagement from them. Like Pieter's her name is inscribed in the family Bible, "the Book, the great one that came from the Cape in 1836, and has all our van Vlaanderen names" (82). Yet she is sufficiently distanced from communal values to render with substantial sympathy the experiences of Maria Duvenage, who goes off with a "worthless scamp" because her husband is a "hard and loveless man, who broke her spirit and enjoyed her flesh" (148). It seems significant that before doing so Maria should 'send for' Sophie to hear her story: because Sophie is able to listen, and subsequently record, without moralising or condemning. Certainly Sophie says of herself some way into the novel, "Yet I cannot judge, for where is the end of judging?" (149). In the self-commentary cited above she refers to herself twice as being "apart", and in doing so offers an ironic invocation of the broader hegemonies of Afrikaner discourse. Thus another observation she makes, that "I am one of a people who in this matter of white and black suffer no confusion" (35), must be read in light of her narrative attempt to deal with very real confusion brought about by her nephew's transgression of the "iron law ... of a people of rock and stone in a land of rock and stone" (34).

Yet the ambivalent allegiance she feels towards her community is compounded rather than resolved in her act of narration, since her translation of communal experience for an English readership inclines her to read her community in the terms of the external world. Such ambivalence is apparent in her description of Pieter's involvement in the Second World War and the divisions it caused: "divisions even in families, too, even our own, for my brother said it was an English war, and would not believe the stories of Hitler and the Jews; but his wife and I were for the English, as we have always been in our hearts, since Louis Botha and Jan Smuts made us so" (30). Such ambivalence is also apparent in her comments on the smallpox epidemic that hits the black people around the town: "And I tell you that my sister-in-law and I, and

Dominee Stander, and the captain's mother and the captain himself, and my nephew also, were ashamed of our location at Venterspan; for while it is true that we brought Christianity to the dark continent, we brought other things too" (157). Her atypical sense of responsibility for the condition of black people is evident also in her work with the Women's Welfare Society, which brings her into contact with Stephanie, and enables her to witness the effect Stephanie has on her nephew. In significant ways her representation of Stephanie is an invocation of Stephanie's 'otherness', this seems to me to stem less from her allegiance to the values of the white Afrikaner community than from her passionate attachment to her nephew.

A more immediate source of such ambivalence, then, is this attachment to Pieter and her sense of the destruction that is brought to "the house of his own flesh and blood" (200) by his transgression of the Immorality Act. Her personal involvement in this transgression takes two forms: clearly as part of his family she suffers its consequences, equally clearly she blames herself for not intervening to intercept them. At the end of her narrative she offers a displaced commentary on its events:

Yet my grief can still come back to me, when I read of some tragic man who has broken the iron law. Was he two men, one brave and gentle, and one tormented? And has he friends, or will he suffer his whole life long? And was there one perhaps, who knew why he had barred the door of his soul and should have hammered on it and cried out not ceasing? (200).

We might be reminded, by this recapitulation, of Gordimer's "literature of victims", of her separation of "what is done to them" from "how they take it" with which I quibbled. These are issues which I shall take up shortly. For the present we might observe that Sophie's 'implicatedness' in her cultural translation provides a substantial motivation for the mode of tragedy in terms of which the narrative is couched. She has said, "Yet I cannot judge, for where is the end of judging?" (149), and the mode of tragedy is functional in allowing her not to do so: in allowing her to condemn neither the man who transgressed the "iron law" nor the community which promulgated it. At this level of analysis, therefore, we might recognise some of the justice in Watson's problems with the tragic mode.

And yet "how [the victims] take it" is both a substantial concern of the novel and intricately interrelated with "what is done to them". Indeed Gordimer's attribution of passive suffering serves to obscure a significant aspect of what makes Pieter interesting as a character: which is the tension between Sophie's narration of him and Stephanie's seduction of him.

5.7 Narration and Possession

My discussion of the narrative structure of the novel thus far has concerned itself with the significance of the first-person narrator Sophie. In concluding this discussion I would like to focus now on the textual relations that exist between Sophie and Pieter, and so begin an address to the first question I posed in order to sharpen our approach to the narrative structure of the novel, which was, Why does Pieter not tell the story?

Given the acuteness of Sophie's power of speech, it remains a matter of personal failure and self-reproach to her that she was unable, even after her inklings of Pieter's situation are confirmed, to "speak to" him. The novel opens with her retrospective speculation:

Perhaps I could have saved him, with only a word, two words, out of my mouth. Perhaps I could have saved us all. But I never spoke them.

Strange it is that one could run crying to the house of a man that one loved, to save him from danger, and that he could say to one, *have I not told you not to come to this house?* And strange it is that one should withdraw, silent and shamed.

For he spoke hard and bitter words to me, and shut the door of his soul on me, and I withdrew. But I should have hammered on it, I should have broken it down with my naked hands, I should have cried out there not ceasing, for behind it was a man in danger, the bravest and gentlest of them all. So I who came to save was made a supplicant; and because of the power he had over me, *I held*, in the strange words of the English, *I held my peace* (7).

In Hutchings's view, Sophie is "a reliable narrator within her limits, for she tells her story with a decent compassion for all involved, and with understanding The documentation she uses to support her

observations consists of intimate personal testimony - letters and a confessional journal ..." (1992:190). This is certainly true, so far as it goes, but it does not attempt to account for the motivations that underlie Sophie's act of narration, nor, sufficiently, those of Paton who writes her. Most particularly, it does not account for the fact that Pieter's power over Sophie takes the form, on a crucial occasion, of silencing her: thereby thwarting her attempt to "save" him. The significance of this encounter seems to me substantial for what it reveals of the personal and the narrative relationships between Sophie and Pieter.

In an article on Pauline Smith's "The Schoolmaster" entitled "The Renunciation of Voice and the Language of Silence" (1991), I noted how the mature consciousness of the first-person narrator Engela highlights - at times quite explicitly - the earlier "acts of silence" and "silence behaviour" which have characterised the only significant romantic relationship she has experienced. It was my contention, therefore, that the act of narration constitutes a subsequent attempt to explain and to compensate for past silences. Given the similarity of its retrospective first-person narration, I would like, here, to posit a similar process at work in Paton's novel. Even if we accept the "reliability" of Sophie's narrative we should acknowledge that her vested interests might render questionable its 'validity', might lead us to recognise that it is as much 'her story' as it is Pieter's.

The 'crucial occasion' on which she is silenced occurs in the context of a family outing to the Long Kloof on the farm Buitenverwagting, which Pieter's father has suggested in order to show his son the phalarope. The physical contact that occurs between the two men represents an epiphany in their relationship, an epiphany which silences Pieter:

Then because the son could not see, the father went and stood behind him, rested his arm on the son's shoulder, and pointed at the bird. But the son could see no bird, for he was again moved in some deep place within, and something welled up within him that if not mastered could have burst out of his throat and mouth, making him a girl or child. Therefore he could neither see nor speak (160).

Pieter's silence here is ascribed by the narrative to his psychological androgyny, a sexual ambivalence that has all along complicated his relationship with his father. It thus serves to dramatise the patriarchal code which disallows difference, and which is challenged, in the novel by Pieter's relations with Stephanie. Indeed, by now, he has already had sexual contact with her, and so the sight of the phalarope - and the possibilities of 'redemption' it indicates - comes "too late". Yet Pieter's muted response to his father seems to me less significant for the 'tragedy' than his repudiation and silencing of his aunt that follows directly:

When it was time for our tea, I went to look for him, but could not find him. I climbed down over the rocks of the krantz, and looked down at the low country far below, where are the rocks and thorns and the hot red flowers. And while I stood there I saw a movement below, and it was a man's arms stretched out in front of him on a rock, not in the trees of the kloof, but amongst the grass and stones of the krantz. And I knew he was praying out of some distress. Therefore I climbed down over the rocks, and came to him, and he turned to watch me come.

- My child, my child, I said.

And he said to me with coldness, what do you want?

And I said to him, you were praying?

- Can't I pray?

- And I know what you were praying.

- You do, do you? That would please you, to know even what your favourite prayed. Then you could still more possess him. How you would love to possess him. Then you could say to his mother and father, his wife and his children, it is I that possess him. And now he is a man, I still desire to possess him. In God's name, have you no pride? Or must you be taught again? (161).

Pieter's prostration against a rock refers, symbolically, to the patriarchal code of "the people of rock and stone", and his rejection of the overtures of his aunt, by naming himself as "a man" and by invoking the name of God, constitutes a paradoxical application of this code. Although Sophie reproaches herself for not having "hammered on [the door], ... broken it down with my naked hands ... cried out there not ceasing" (7), it is clear that she would not have been able to reach him. In none of the diary entries that are included in the narrative does Pieter consider confiding in his aunt. Although she believes she

might have saved him, "with a word, two words, out of my mouth", his own testimony offers no corroboration.

This incongruence sheds an important light both on the nature of the 'tragedy' and on the constitutive force of Sophie's narration. In two important respects the passage cited above links Pieter's relationship with Sophie with his relationship with Stephanie. In the first place, it echoes, in ironic ways, his contact with Stephanie in the big kloof in Maduna's country: the natural context is similar, the encounter as fraught. In the earlier encounter Pieter pursues Stephanie with easy authority, but when he catches her is subdued by the impact she has on him: "he, shaking with shame, went and sat on a stone, and took off his cap and wiped his brow, hot and cold and trembling" (45). In the later encounter, Sophie approaches Pieter with confidence and is humbled by his harsh rejection: "And when at last I returned, I do not know if he looked at me, for I did not look at him" (161). In the second place, if we note the semantic charge that falls, in the latter passage, on the word "possess", we might recognise these two encounters as, respectively, the initiation and the repudiation of possession. Such a reading can be substantiated by reference to Sophie's simultaneous description and judgement of the consummation of the relationship between Pieter and Stephanie: "And there, God forgive him, he possessed her" (116).

^{linking}
The concatenation of occurrences of the term might lead us to consider again the motivations underlying Sophie's act of narration. She is, in fact, quite explicit about her narrative purposes:

All these things I will write down, yet it is not only that they trouble my mind; nor is it only that I may show that though one [man] neither entreated nor repented, the other did both entreat and repent; nor is it only that men may have more knowledge of compassion. For I also remember the voice that came to John in Patmos, saying, what thou seest, write it in a book, and though I do not dare to claim a knowledge of this voice, yet do I dare to claim a knowledge of some voice. Therefore I put aside my fears, and am obedient (10).

The functioning of the narrative as an act of ^{Yemouine} expurgation and exculpation is plainly related to Sophie's sense of responding to a moral if not holy injunction. On the other hand, the intensity of her desire to narrate that is expressed in the opening pages of the novel can be linked to the intensity of the relationship between aunt and nephew, and the failure she believes characterises it. Given Sophie's identification both with his mother and his wife, and given Pieter's reactions to her on two seminal occasions as a boy and as a man, this relationship might be read as approaching the incestuous. The power she acknowledges he has over her is the power to reject and to silence. Yet if we are willing to connect the personal and the narrative relationships that exist between Sophie and Pieter, we should note the reversal from being silenced by him to telling his story, to commandeering the narrative.

To put the matter simply, Sophie tells the story, and Pieter doesn't, because she has such powerful motives for doing so. And yet the matter cannot be left there. If one of my reasons for including this novel in my study is the complexity and sophistication of the textual relations between writer, narrators and characters in relation to community, another is the opportunity it gives to investigate the possibilities of the mode of tragedy in relation to the complex discursive and cross-cultural pressures of the Southern African context. And if one aspect of the tragedy is the distance Paton interposes along with his first-person narrator Sophie between himself and the tragic action, another is the narrative focus upon Pieter: a focus which is, in turn, predicated upon the silence of Stephanie.

In order to approach the tragedy of Pieter in a way that takes into account the pressures of context I would like to return to the consideration of Stephanie with which this chapter opened. The question we might then ask is, Would the story look like a tragedy from her point of view? And who would be at the centre of the tragedy? We have encountered a preliminary answer to this question, of course, in the conversation between her and Pieter about Dick and about the impact of

his potential 'crime' on his mother. In response to Pieter's, "What will you do?", Stephanie answers,

- What should I do, she said.

- You know who I am?

- *Baas*, I know well.

The lieutenant stood there and considered it.

- This would bring great trouble for the man, he said.

- Yes, *baas*.

- You know his mother?

- I know her well.

- It would kill her.

She made a noise of assent and sympathy, but he knew he was talking of things outside her world, for she had been often enough to prison, and no one had died of it.

- I can believe it, she said obediently.

- Go home, then, Stephanie.

- Good night, *baas*.

So there she went with knowledge to destroy a man. He thought he had perhaps been foolish. Perhaps he should have ordered her to keep her mouth shut, or he would make trouble for her. But the truth was that it was not in him to do such a thing (14).

In my earlier analysis of the encounter between the two, I noted in regard to the term used for her, "the girl", the inevitability of the connection implied between her action in its context and her gender: the fact that "bare feet running" in the dark in the direction of "black people's location" were likely to be feminine and the cause of the flight a man in pursuit. What is striking in this interchange is the bland expectation that Stephanie should consider the "trouble" that might ensue for Dick, and the 'destruction' it would bring to his mother, without any reciprocal obligation on Pieter's part to consider its consequences for Stephanie. Of course my own reaction to this expectation might have something to do with my positioning as a woman in the 1990s, yet it seems to me too that the effacement of Stephanie's point of view in Pieter's conception of their relationship is fundamental to his tragedy.

Of course it is in large measure his ingenuousness and sexual inexperience that leads him completely to overlook her intentionality. We, however, cannot. Nor, indeed, does Sophie, drawing as she does on her own observations and the retrospective reconstruction available to her in Pieter's diaries and letters. I have specified already something

of Stephanie's motivation is seeking to establish a relationship with Pieter: I would like here to consider some of its manifestations.

5.8 Silence and Intentionality

My discussion of Stephanie's smile above was intended to investigate a specific aspect of her characterisation which, like her discourse, is significant within the narrative and seminal to the representation of her relationship with Pieter. Within the context of her several encounters with Pieter, this smile takes on a certain power which marks his attraction to her, and makes sense of the 'strangeness' identified by Sophie. Despite the sensitivity of her observation, Sophie can clearly not be expected to respond, as Pieter does, to its invocation of intimacy. In Sophie's description of her the word "innocence" appears frequently. Pieter's sense of her, by contrast, is encapsulated in the word "knowledge".

Illuminating as it would be to trace in detail the development of the relationship between Pieter and Stephanie, I will confine myself to an examination of just three encounters between them. The first occurs when he is sent by his captain to locate Stephanie in preparation for the first court case. Failing to find her in the location, he traces her to "Maduna's country" where she keeps her child and which, in Sophie's description, "is a separate world all the same, and of its joys and sorrows no one knows at all" (41). Having sent his men to close off her other escape routes, Pieter himself follows her up into the "big kloof", where "suddenly ahead of him, under a little fall of water" he sees her.

When he was near her, she turned and looked at him, smiling the secret smile, and then submissively turned her eyes to the ground.

- Stephanie.
- Yes, *baas*.
- What are you doing here?
- I came to see my child, she said.
- Here? In the kloof?
- She smiled, sheepishly.
- Down there, she said, where the *baas* was.
- Why didn't you ask me if you could come?
- She looked to left and right, taking her time.
- I thought the *baas* would say no.
- And tomorrow you must be in the court.

- I would have been there, she said.
- How?
- I would have walked.
- Now you can ride (44).

The change in her smile from "secret" to 'sheepish' is evidence of her response to his mockery which, if not as brutal as the magistrate's "jest" nevertheless serves to assert the power relations between them. These are apparent also in his assumption of the communicative initiative: he questions her movements, reminds her of her obligation to be in court, checks up on her intentions, and concludes with an indirect command. At this point, however, she takes over the initiative by running away:

But seemingly she did not want to ride, for suddenly she had fled by a little path at the side of the fall, that came to another, with no way up except over the rocks of the fall itself, green and slippery. He followed her at leisure, and came to where she was standing.

- Why did you do that, he asked.

She made no answer, except to smile in her strange and secret way. Then she heard the sound of the men above, and drew back. And as she drew back she touched him. And he did not move.

He did not move, neither forward nor back, nor did she. It was all silent but for the sounds of the men above, and for his breathing, and the racing of his heart. Then she turned round and smiled at him again, briefly, and moved forward an inch or two, standing still with her eyes on the ground: while he, shaking with shame, went and sat on a stone, and took off his cap and wiped his brow, hot and cold and trembling. She did not turn to look at him, but went on smiling, with her eyes on the ground. Above them, the sounds of the descending men grew nearer and louder. She lifted her head and looked upwards into the kloof, waiting for them with a kind of forlorn enjoyment (44-45).

The shift we see taking place here is more than a shift in initiative: it is a shift from speech to action and a shift from verbal to physical 'discourse'. She runs away, he pursues her, she touches him, the physical contact is sustained by both of them. Although it seems to me reasonable to infer that at least some of his attraction to her is reciprocated, Stephanie remains completely undisconcerted by their contact, whereas Pieter is transformed from the easy confidence and authority of the policeman to the shaky knees and perspiration of the man. This transformation is underscored, with some narrative humour, when he takes off his cap. If Stephanie has run so that he will follow,

her continued control of the situation is apparent in the fact that she, not he, breaks off the physical contact she has accidentally initiated, that she goes on smiling, and that she remains aware of what is happening outside their immediate situation.

More significant, for my purposes, is the request that follows, which gives evidence of her capacity to recognise and to grasp opportunities as they arise, if not yet to engender them.

Then Vorster called out, are you there, lieutenant?

- I'm here, called the lieutenant, the girl's here too.

- Baas.

- Can I see the child before I go?

- Yes.

The smile of irresponsibility left her face, changing it and surprising him.

- *Dis my enigste kind*, it's my only child, she said.

She was filled with some hurt pride of possession, so that he, knowing her life, wondered at it.

- It's my only child, she said, and looked down at the ground again, waiting hopelessly. He, feeling pity for her, was suddenly purged of the sickness of his mind, and stood up and put on his cap (45).

The effect of her request to see her child is interesting: the reminder that she is a mother disperses his desire for her. His surprise at her attachment to her child seems to me to indicate his inability to see her as a person, whose motherhood is as intrinsic to her as her sexuality. The use of the word "possession" serves to link this passage with Sophie's attempt to communicate with Pieter in the Long Kloof. In its invocation of the passionate attachment of a maternal imperative, it also seems to me to indicate her attempt - successful here - to use her sexual effect on him towards securing her contact with her child.

One evening some time after this Stephanie seeks out Pieter to tell him that she has found work. He asks why she has come to him and not to Japie:

At that moment I was alone there with the girl, and she said to me in a low voice, because the baas would do it for me.

And the mad sickness came over me, that God knows I do not want, that God knows I fear and hate. And I did not say to her in a voice of every day, do not be foolish. I did not even say to her, how can you know such a thing? I said to

her quiet and trembling, how did you know? And she raised her head and smiled at me, not quite submissive nor quite bold (91).

Since Pieter is at his father's house, it is clear that she has tracked him down. Her approach to him is very indirect, since he is called by Sophie to speak to "old Isak" in the kitchen, who tells him there is a woman asking to see him. Her expectation that he will "tell the Government" might seem naïve, yet he is probably the only person in a position of authority whom she knows well enough to appeal to. The form his question takes, "How did you know?" is interesting because of its implication that he will intercede on her behalf (in fact he doesn't, 139); it is also interesting because of its explicit acknowledgement of her power over him. Her smile, "not quite submissive nor quite bold", is thus a response to the intimacy he has implicitly admitted exists between them. The encounter is interrupted at this point, however, by the sudden presence of Sophie who witnesses the smile. She comments, in retrospect, "I am a watcher, and knew that no such girl might look in such a way at such a man" (92).

The third encounter takes place shortly after, when Stephanie comes to Pieter's house to tell him she has lost her job. He opens the kitchen door to a knock, "and there was the girl Stephanie". Like the one above, the description that follows takes the form of a diary entry.

So I said to her, and my voice was trembling; what do you want? And she looked about her, and then she suddenly came past me into the kitchen. And I shut the door.

- Baas, she said.

- Yes?

- Baas, I have lost the work.

- Why?

- They sent me away.

- Why?

- They found out. About the prison. And the child.

And I said to her desperately, why do you not go to Baas Grobler?

- I came to the baas, she said (94).

The increased intimacy of this encounter might be indexed by the directness of her approach: his wife and children are away and her knock on the kitchen door comes after "the boy Johannes" has gone to bed. There is thus no-one to witness and little likelihood of interruption.

Stephanie comes into the kitchen uninvited, and initiates the conversation, though her first "Baas" constitutes a request for permission to speak. In recounting her problem she effectively involves him in it, and she does so on the basis of the informal contact they have had before.

Then she smiled at me, and the mad sickness that I hate and fear came over me, and she knew it, it being one of the things that she understands. I should have said to her, this is not my work, I should have said to her, go to Baas Grobler again. I should have said to her, let them take your child, and send you to prison, let them throw you into the street, let them hang you by the neck until you are dead, but do not come to my home, nor smile at me, nor think there can be anything between you and me. For this law is the greatest and holiest of all the laws, and if you break it and are discovered, for you it is nothing but another breaking of the law. But if I break it and am discovered, the whole world will be broken.

Then she said to me, where are the mistress and the children?

And I, knowing that she knew, said unwillingly, they're away.

- That's a pity, she said (94-95).

Her smile triggers his desire for her, and, despite the range of verbal responses he devises in retrospect, he says nothing. Despite his assertion that "this law is the greatest and holiest of all the laws", the extremity of these responses is evidence of the intensity of the desire this law was designed to contain and whose existence it thus paradoxically continues to invoke. It is this desire that gives her power over him; power which is revealed in her question about his wife and children. The boldness of the question is apparent in its elision of the term "baas" as well as its personal nature: the rhetorical intention underlying it is to emphasise the fact that they are alone. His offer of money is an attempt to buy her off rather than to assist her, yet it sets a precedent in their relationship which confirms her expectations of him. He says to her, "do not come any more to this house", and she replies, "when I am working, I go home at eight o'clock, past the place where the baas saw me running" (95). It is information he uses when subsequently he seeks her out (which happens, incidentally, on the same day he discovers from Japie that she has got work, 109). She then leaves him and he goes back to his stamps, "but I could not put my mind to

them. For God forgive me, my mind was on the girl, half with madness, and half with apprehension that she could think she could come to my house" (95). A rather pathetic contrast is suggested at this point with his wife who has said to him, "Sometimes I wish that I were a stamp Then you might look at me" (37). If his wife thinks she knows him better than he knows himself (105), if, in Sophie's view, she is "shocked into knowledge" only when the "hard hand of Fate [strikes] her across the face" (39), it is Stephanie who 'knows' and 'understands' his desire, and smiles in response to it.

I have referred already to Sophie's description of the sexual consummation that finally takes place, "And there, God forgive him, he possessed her" (116). Yet, given Stephanie's impact upon him here and earlier ("he, shaking with shame, went and sat on a stone, and took off his cap and wiped his brow, hot and cold and trembling", 44), it seems rather more apt to say she possesses him.

I began this investigation of Stephanie's effect on Pieter by posing the question, Would the story look like a tragedy from her point of view? It seems to me that to recognise her intentionality is in significant ways to render problematic the tragedy. To classify Stephanie as a "destroyer" figure is to focus on what she destroys to the exclusion of why she destroys it: to ignore the fact that she has motives of her own. In my earlier discussion of the critical debate of the novel as tragedy I cited Gordimer's sceptical view of "lust" as a putative "national disaster", a view which reflected, I thought, an ability both to appreciate and to resist the tragedy. After the first court case Sophie comments about Stephanie: "It's a lost creature ... that will go with any man that comes, but she has a passion for that child" (54). This discussion of Stephanie's effect upon Pieter has been undertaken to provide a basis for an investigation of the nature of his tragedy. It should also have revealed what might be termed the "covert plot"³ of *Too*

³ The term is one used by Cedric Watts in regard to the novels of Conrad: the "covert plot" of *Heart of Darkness*, for example, is the attempt by the station commander to engineer the death of Kurtz (1975 and 1988).

Late the Phalarope: the relationship which develops between Stephanie and Pieter is substantially instigated by her in an attempt to secure protection for her and her child.

I made the claim above that the effacement of Stephanie's point of view in Pieter's conception of their relationship is fundamental to his tragedy. Having given some consideration to Stephanie's role in their relationship, I would like to focus now on Pieter, in order to examine his position in the tragedy. In doing so I will pay some attention to the silences that occur around him in the narrative; I will also examine, in part for comparative purposes, the extent to which he is a "discursive function", that is, the extent to which he is constructed by the discourse of the community and of the narrative. This evaluation will involve a recognition of the respective significance of discourse and inscription in Pieter's life, and specifically in his attempt to constitute an identity.

5.9 Discourse and Identity

It is a characteristic of the narrative strategy of the novel that Sophie's predominantly first-person narrative has intercut into it several excerpts from Pieter's diary and letters, to which she is given access after his arrest, and out of which she recreates the course of events. The resulting narrative shifts, or heterodiegetic analepses (to use Rimmon-Kenan's term), function in important ways to remind us of the fiction, to jolt us out of the narrative to reflect upon the relations between the moral frame and the narrative frame, and hence upon the narrative construction of Pieter. The critical debates about the novel as tragedy which were outlined above have supplied terms in which to read Pieter as a tragic hero. Hutchings's investigation and development of the distinctions posited by Gordimer between private and public domains are of particular relevance here, because in significant ways these distinctions take up the relations between self and community to which I gave theoretical attention in Chapter 3.

In pursuing our investigation of Pieter as tragic hero, we might begin with a definition by Peck and Coyle that occurs in their introduction to the genres of literature:

What modern tragedy has in common with earlier tragedy is that it explores the painfulness of a world where fictions of a rational social order can no longer be maintained. Yet there is a difference The hero is as likely to be confronting the worst elements in himself as confronting the worst elements in the world (1984:98).

Their term "fictions of a rational social order" in my view serves to invoke Giddens's sense of the recursive nature of social life which was considered in Chapter 3. According to his notion of the duality of structure, by way of reminder, "structure is not as such external to human action, and is not identified solely with constraint" - rather a "set of ties" exists "between the individual as an agent and the institutions which the individual constitutes and reconstitutes in the course of the duration of day-to-day activity" (1987:163,167). In these terms our attention might be drawn to the relations between Pieter's 'private' action and the legislation that has been promulgated by the broader community of which he is a member. And yet it was my insistence above that the deployment (and analysis) of tragedy in the Southern African context must recognise the cross-culturality and the discursive relations which characterise this context and in terms of which tragedy must locate itself. Although the narrative construction of Pieter is extremely complex, the implications of this recognition are that we should focus on his position in regard to discourse and cross-culturality especially as they manifest themselves here in the form of *apartheid*.

In "On the Borders of Bakhtin: Dialogisation, Decolonisation", Pechey discusses the applicability of the concept of dialogism within the Third World, and offers an approach to *apartheid* in these terms. Considering first the issue of medium ("whether to decolonise writing in the coloniser's language or in a territorial vernacular which is itself ... only problematically a 'national' language") he advocates the recognition of a "multilingual field where the languages of coloniser and colonised are indelibly inscribed within each other". Such

'interinscription', he says, is to be found even "in the least likely of (African) places: the apartheid state itself". Although *apartheid* might seem to constitute a "clear case of monologism it is only with Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and Gramsci's concept of hegemony that we can understand how its power is at once held and resisted" (1989:63). The reason for this is that,

If the system's own self-description is (as Derrida suggests) 'untranslatable', exemplifying the *exclusion* it signifies, it is also true that the word *apartheid* cannot be deployed in a single sentence of the language from which it springs without recalling a linguistic miscegenation which accompanied its sexual counterpart in the early days of slave-ownership (1989:64).

Thus the word *apartheid*, like the system, contains within itself the elements of its own deconstruction, and it does so because it invokes the cross-culturality which it seeks to manage and to contain.

The significance of Pechey's observations for a reading of this novel lies in its insistence on the multiplicity, and the interinscriptedness, of language-culture systems within the Southern African context. In Pieter's case his knowledge of several languages gives him access to the 'worlds' that are encoded within them. It is nevertheless true that the dominant discourse in the novel is that of *apartheid* and the Afrikaner cultural nationalism of which it is an explicit manifestation. In important ways this discourse is epitomised in Pieter's father, and it is in large measure the patriarchal power that informs this relationship that serves to define for Pieter what must be kept private because it cannot be admitted in public. This is obviously true of his sexual relations, both with his wife and with Stephanie. Less obviously the "red oath" of allegiance to the British imperial army which Pieter takes leads his father, initially at least, to "bear no mention of his name" (72), and the term "Empire Day" must be translated into "the twenty-fourth of May" before his father will respond to it (101). The issue that is made of Pieter's stamp-collecting is particularly representative of both his relationship with his father and his father's powers of definition. At the age of fourteen for the first time he does not come top of his class, and he is forbidden "to go on with the stamps". His

response, in Sophie's words, to the "great hurt ... done to him that he had not deserved" is to armour himself, "against hurts and the world", so that even after the stamps are returned to him, "they were never mentioned again in his father's presence, nor I think did his father ever forgive him for having humbled him; for by now each had a strange power over the other, which made certain quite ordinary things impossible to speak of" (29). The stamps thus constitute a significant silence in the relationship between Pieter and his father: and his love of his stamps moves into the private domain. (An intriguing parallel exists, incidentally, between the disbelief Pieter evinces at the loss of his stamps and that shown by Stephanie at the threat of deprivation of her child, 54).

Of course Pieter achieves considerable communal recognition for his many achievements - his education, his military valour, his rugby-playing - so that the new young dominee who courts his sister invites him to become a *diaken* in the Church: "You're looked up to by the whole community. You've been given great gifts by the Lord. Shouldn't these gifts be given back to Him also? Mightn't some young fellow say, there's Pieter van Vlaanderen, and what he does I'll do too?" (153). And if we recall his comment about the Immorality Act, that "it is the greatest and holiest of all the laws", we might recognise in his choice of the police force for his career a deliberate alignment with the dominant code. Yet Sophie's comment at the beginning of the novel, "He was always two men" (8), and his mother's near the end, "from the years of childhood she had feared for him, and had known that he was hiding away, in some deep place within, things that no man might safely conceal" (189), attest to the enigmatic power of the private domain, suppressed as it might be.

In Hutchings's reading of the novel, "the interesting action, and certainly the tragic action, takes place within the private domain", and the "tragic centre of the novel [is located] in Pieter's division within himself" and specifically in his enactment of "the dark side of the aggressive strength his community - including his father - has always demanded of him" (1992:196).

In my reading, however, public and private domains are not intact, and the tragic action is located not in either one domain but at the interface between the two. This might be demonstrated in regard to the incident at the beginning of the novel which serves as a dramatic foreshadowing of Pieter's own case. In his 'arrest' of Dick we are offered an instance of his enforcement of the dominant code as it is represented in the Immorality Act. Such enforcement is clearly in the public domain since he is performing his duties as a policeman. Yet in sending Dick to his home he shifts the matter into the private domain: "I'm not talking to you as a policeman. I'm talking as your friend, your football captain" (15).

Of course it is in the nature of sexual relations generally that they should fall into the private domain, and the Immorality Act serves to demonstrate the encroachment of state legislation into the private lives of individuals that is a particular characteristic of *apartheid*. Thus the 'tragic action' of the novel can be seen as shifting from the public to the private domain and back again. If, initially, Pieter enforces and subscribes to the dominant code as it is manifest in the "iron law", the "greatest and holiest of all the laws", in his relations with Stephanie he defies it, and when once he is discovered and exposed he succumbs to it.

This dynamic might be clarified by reference to the respective significance of discourse and inscription in Pieter's life, and specifically in his attempt to constitute an identity. One of the major effects of his exemplary status in the community is to exacerbate the division between public acceptance and private experience. This dynamic is particularly acute in regard to the young dominee. He records in his diary: "*By asking me to be a diaken in the church, he silenced me forever. For at this time I had but one thought in my mind, and that was to tell one human soul of the misery of my life And yet, though my need was so great, I never spoke*" (64). It is a striking feature of his experience that he resolves, and indeed attempts, on several occasions to talk to people about it but fails: the young dominee, Japie (151),

Kappie (71, 97-99), his Captain (158). His desire for Stephanie and his relationship with her are thus, for him, literally as well as metaphorically "unspeakable" (123).

It is Pieter's failure to speak his experiences that renders him vulnerable to the power of inscription. Several instances of written communication in the narrative have a significant impact on the course of the action. His letter to his wife Nella attempting to explain his love for her and his need for sexual response fails to find a response. Her reply brings on an attack of "*swartgalligheid*", which together with the fact that his written instruction is "overlooked" (110) leads to an encounter with Sergeant Steyn which confirms his fateful enmity. The note from Japie saying "I saw you" has Pieter in terror for three days (118), during which he contemplates the enormity of the written charge that might be brought against him for contravening the Immorality Act. His anticipation of this event offers a dramatisation of both the process and the power of inscription to which he becomes subject:

And the greater fear came to him that the watcher would not go to the captain, but to the sergeant at the desk, and today it would be Sergeant Steyn And the story would be told to him there, and he would put it down, sentence by sentence, with a heart full of hate and joy. And when it was finished he would say to the watcher, wait here, and do not say a word. Then he would go to the captain and give him the report, and stand there like a soldier doing his duty as though he knew nothing of hate and joy. Then there could be no mercy, for when a charge is made, a charge is made, and once a thing is written down, it is written down; and a word can be written down that will mean the death of a man, and put the rope round his neck, and send him into the pit; and a word can be written down that will destroy a man and his house and his kindred and his friends, and there is no power, of God or Man or State, nor any Angel, nor anything present or to come, nor any height, nor depth, nor any other creature that can save them when once the word is written down (124).

In the shift from the story being told and 'put down' to the injunction not to say a word we see the transition from speech to the secrecy and irrevocable power of the written word. This power is emphasised when a charge is actually laid, and the captain says to Steyn, "may God forgive you for an evil deed" (182). A negative version of the constitutive

power of inscription occurs when his father "crosses out the name of Pieter van Vlaanderen from the Book, not once but many times" (185). This is the first stage in the systematic destruction of the signs of Pieter's identity within the home, so that subsequent references are not to his name or to his position in the family but to the anonymous "the man" and "him". In a similar way, the written charge impacts on discursive relations in the public domain, which we witness in the narrative change from "the lieutenant" to "the ex-lieutenant". It also gives rise to the "supreme contempt" of the word "jou" in the note Vorster writes returning the eighteen pounds. It is in reaction to this note that Pieter takes his revolver and goes out "into the darkness of the town". It is only in Kappie's 'renaming' of Pieter by using the name he could never bring himself to use before (192), that we see the beginnings of a redemptive reversal.

Such shifts in reference result from the 'translation' of his private experiences into the terms of the public code, once the charge is made. Pieter's own reaction to the charge and to the evidence marshalled in support of it is repeated denial. Curious as this might seem, we might understand it as arising from the fact that the dominant code exists most explicitly in the public domain and that the hostility of the terms of its 'translation', "guilty" or "not guilty" (181), serves to invalidate his private experience and to alienate him from it. His "lie", then, is less a denial of the truth than a rejection of the public terms; based, perhaps, on the sense that exposure has taken his experience away from him and so he is no longer responsible for it. Such resistance cannot endure; with its collapse he breaks down, and in Sophie's term is "destroyed" (197).

The disjunction and alienation Pieter suffers at the point of exposure is therefore transient, because his resistance to the public terms collapses. His failure to speak and his subsequent construction by the public domain in the terms of the dominant code thus lend a particular poignancy to the book he takes out from its hiding place, after he is charged, to give to his aunt. Sophie comments, "What he could not tell to any man, nor any woman, he had written in a book" (198). As I noted

above, excerpts from this book, and from his letters, are incorporated into the narrative. In this respect he is starkly distinguished from Stephanie, who is given no opportunity to represent herself. Yet the 'voice' he achieves in the process is displaced, because its 'audience' is the reader of Sophie's retrospective narrative who is external to his community as well as subsequent to the course of events. His act of writing thus serves as an impotent substitute for offering to people within his community a representation of himself that might challenge public orthodoxies by gaining sympathy and understanding.

We might press a little further on the reasons why Pieter fails to speak, fails to narrate himself. To do so we might recall the crude dichotomy of the terms of the charge brought against him: "guilty" or "not guilty". We might recall also the terms in which Pieter inscribes his desire for Stephanie: he calls it "mad sickness ... that God knows I do not want, that God knows I fear and hate" (91), and later "some mad desire of a sick and twisted soul" (123). The dominant code is manifest in legislation against his experiences, and yet the hostility of the terminology, here of 'madness' and elsewhere of 'dirt', 'disease' and 'degradation', identifies it as a communal terminology which Pieter has internalised and now brings to bear on his experiences. That is, it functions implicitly within the private domain. His desire for Stephanie is "unspeakable", because black women have been defined as taboo. As is the case with any taboo, the community has commandeered the interpretation of the experience. Since the communal interpretation is necessarily disjunct from as well as hostile to the experience, neither his self nor his desire can validly be represented in its terms. What we read, then, is a translation into a hostile medium.

I have noted above Sophie's comment that Pieter "was always two men", and his mother's that, "from the years of childhood she had feared for him, and had known that he was hiding away, in some deep place within, things that no man might safely conceal" (189). If these comments attest to the enigmatic power of his private domain, they also indicate that his psychological problems predate Stephanie. He acknowledges as much himself, after seeing and touching her in the Kloof:

If it shocked me to see myself, it shocked me no less to see my danger. It was like a kind of shadow of myself, that moved with me constantly, but always apart from me; I knew it was there, but I had known it so long that it did not trouble me, so long as it stayed apart. But when the mad sickness came on me, it would suddenly move nearer to me, and I knew it would strike me down if it could, and I did not care (46).

This archetypal formulation is interesting, as John Cooke has pointed out (1979:40). Desire for Stephanie is "mad sickness"; yet what threatens him is not "mad sickness" but "danger", which has been with him "so long that it didn't trouble" him. His danger is like "a shadow" of himself which moves closer when he succumbs to desire for Stephanie and threatens to strike him down. This perception should be enough to dismiss as misplaced Pieter's quest for "safety" in his wife's love (95). The "danger" is a part of himself, suppressed, projected outwards, and associated with desire for Stephanie. And yet this "danger" is not contained in his desire for Stephanie, both because it predates her, and because sex with her does not satisfy him. In his terms, "such desire could not surely be a desire of the flesh, but some mad desire of a sick and twisted soul" (123). The schism in his nature is one that can be healed only by integration - by his transformation into, as the captain has it, "quite another man" (196). As we see in his final despairing, "and why and why and why" (163), Pieter's desire for Stephanie is in important ways incidental, because the more fundamental and the more potent object of desire is, in Giddens's term, discursive awareness. If his problem is inherent in his psyche, it is not one he can himself resolve: the means for its solution, the catalyst for the integration and transformation, are external to him. They take the form of communal intervention, of public exposure. And because the terms in which his awareness may be made discursive are communal ones, and in this community extremely hostile ones, his transformation effectively alienates him from his past experiences: 'he' is destroyed. Herein, in my reading, lies his tragedy: his failure to sustain a self against the invasion of public definitions.

Given his failure to speak, we might now consider its effects. These, it seems to me, are principally two: in the first place it leaves him

vulnerable to seduction by Stephanie, and in the second it leaves him vulnerable to narration by Sophie. It is significant that the narrative should characterise his breakdown on two occasions as 'child-like', since this regression invokes the process of socialisation that affects all children, who must learn ways of accommodating the social terms given their behaviour. Pieter has failed to sustain a self against the invasion of public definitions, and so he must redevelop an identity.

His failure to speak also sheds a certain light on his relationship with Stephanie. Although this relationship constituted a challenge to the dominant code, its challenge was a muted one because it remained within the private domain. In an important sense, moreover, neither Stephanie nor his desire for her entered the realm of discursive awareness, and so his relationship with her remained an instrumental one. He neither involved himself with her plight, nor recognised her intentionality in seeking to resolve it by means of a relationship with him. It is this failure to relate to her as a human being, this failure to recognise her intentionality that means he fails to see himself in her terms. As Shotter might put it, he doesn't allow himself to be constituted as a 'you' by her. And so the recognition she gives his sexuality fails to augment or compensate for the paucity of his wife's response. Nor does he achieve the autonomy as a subject which would allow him to resist 'possession' by the narrative. He remains a discursive function. For this reason the textualisation of Pieter as tragic hero serves to erode and to undermine his autonomy as a subject. If Paton's purpose is to make a moral scrutiny of the Immorality Act from within the community most responsible for its promulgation, his constitution of Pieter as tragic hero is inextricably linked to the erosion and the undermining of Pieter's autonomy.

5.10 Liberalism, Tragedy and *Apartheid*

Yet in approaching the question of Paton's purposes and position as a writer, we need to address the textual relations that exist between all four parties within the situation of narrative discourse: him, his narrator Sophie, and the characters Stephanie and Pieter. I have recognised above that Sophie's 'translation' of a cross-cultural

relationship complicates the application of the ethnographic model, because of her closeness to the white man and her distance from the black woman. Although she is able to empathise with the maternal imperative which drives Stephanie, the racial interface is thus emphasised both by an apparent lack of discursive access to Stephanie's experiences and by Sophie's orientation. Stephanie neither speaks to her nor writes diaries for her to peruse. On the other hand, the marked construction of Stephanie as 'other' is related to an absence of narrative accountability towards her.

And yet, as I have sought to demonstrate, the existence of the "covert plot" of her intentionality serves to qualify this narrative construction. Recognising her intentionality we might notice, for instance, that Stephanie has none of Pieter's psychological need to tell the story of their relationship, or to have it told. Her child is far nearer to her interests than Pieter can ever be, and is thus far more significant as a referent for her actions. The ease with which she integrates private involvement (with him) and public awareness (of Sophie in the kitchen, of the other policemen in the kloof) shows her orientation to be different to his, her direction in fact not simply to seduce or destroy him but through him to protect and secure her bond with her child. The far greater range of meanings a sexual relationship might have for her than for Pieter might become apparent if we recall Gordimer's question as to why this should not simply be a "love affair" - why, for instance, Pieter should not follow the example of Maria Duvenage and decamp with Stephanie to another city, or another country, leaving behind wife, family and friends, and all the tragedy they entail. The preposterousness of this solution is written into the terms of the novel: specifically that Paton's moral and didactic purposes are centred upon Pieter, and not upon Stephanie. If Pieter's freedom of choice is repeatedly emphasised, it remains true that Stephanie has far greater narrative freedom, autonomy, and power than he does. She asserts a subjectivity which refuses to be the taboo.

And yet behind them both are the textual and narrative choices of Paton. In significant ways these reflect his position in relation to the

community about which he is writing, and in relation to the Centre. I have commented above on the distance he interposes between himself and the narrative action, in large measure by incorporating a first-person narrator who, although herself somewhat distanced from the value system of the community in which the action takes place, is nevertheless a member of it. We might, by comparison, recall the relationship between Mary and Moses in Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* which was construed by the narrative in terms of the absence rather than the presence of a moral code. Paton's choice of an Afrikaans community is motivated, I think, by the predominance of the patriarchal code which supplies terms for a moral scrutiny of the Immorality Act. Its consequence is the 'ethnographic' position Paton takes up, as a liberal Englishman writing of Afrikaans society, of translating the cultural 'other' for a readership like himself. Thus the 'hostile medium' into which Pieter's private experiences must be translated is not an English one, nor are the values in terms of which judgements are passed on miscegenous sexual relations like those of an English community. The 'hostile medium' is that of the conservative and religious Afrikaans community in which Pieter is located. Both the tragic mode and the concatenation of the aspects of 'innocent', 'mother' and 'whore' in the textualisation of Stephanie align the narrative with the Centre by invoking cultural and mythological conventions in which both Paton and his critics might be expected to participate (Cooke's reading of the Long Kloof as Eden is a case in point).

Some critics (Cooke, Glenn, Watson) have found Paton's own stance on the Immorality Act to be ambivalent, notwithstanding his "known social and political opinions" to which Hutchings refers (1992:189). It is a similar sense, perhaps, that motivates Gordimer's contention that the morality of the novel is "off-centre". Yet this ambivalence, too, can be clarified in terms of Paton's positioning. His liberalism facilitates imaginative access to the world of the Afrikaans community which would not be possible, say, for a protest writer. Although Sophie is interpolated between him and this world, she also stands as an embodiment of such access. The mode of tragedy which he chooses for his text is thus functional for both of them. It allows Sophie not to judge:

neither Pieter who transgresses the law, nor the law whose transgression destroys them all, nor the community which promulgated the law. It allows Paton to examine the workings of the "iron law" amongst the "people of rock and stone in a land of rock and stone". Even though the original promulgator of the Immorality Act, as I pointed out above, was a Major Roberts of the United Party, the mode of tragedy allows Paton to project responsibility for this law solely onto the Afrikaans community of whom he writes. We might, in this regard, recall Rive's comment: "Paton, through no fault of his own, talks about oppression, Abrahams, at least while he was in South Africa, lives with it" (1983a:27). The predominance of discourse in this novel might well be evidence of such 'talking about' the Immorality Act.

In mounting his moral scrutiny of the Immorality Act from within the community most responsible for its promulgation, Paton's constitution of Pieter as tragic hero is inextricably linked to the erosion and the undermining of Pieter's autonomy. In mounting this scrutiny, his choice of Sophie as narrator offers the textualised subjectivity of a white woman in addition to that of an Afrikaans man. One of the effects of this choice is to decentre the predominance of the masculine, to make possible a feminine narrative approach to Stephanie that might supplement the sexual 'approach' of Pieter. And yet Paton's choice of a white woman narrator serves to reinforce the predominance of white experience; and the construction of the text as tragedy is in fact predicated upon the effacement of the private domain of Stephanie. If Paton does recognise her intentionality (and, Watson notwithstanding, there seems no reason why the writer of *Cry, the Beloved Country* should be incapable of doing so) this recognition must remain implicit if his narrative designs are to be fulfilled.

A major interest in my study of this novel has been the nature of the silence of the figure of the black woman. The resistant reading I have undertaken has sought to reverse the apparent textual relationships in order to identify the covert plot of Stephanie's intentionality. Both the deployment of tragedy and the construction of Pieter as tragic hero are predicated upon the silence of Stephanie. Yet if, in Pieter's case,

silence works to prevent his achievement of textual subjectivity, in Stephanie's it works to protect and preserve. Sophie's narrative can be seen as cohering with Paton's moral and didactic purposes: the intensity of her love for Pieter blinds her to the common justices and injustices of Stephanie's case, the 'tragedy', for Stephanie, of losing her child. Both the absence, on Sophie's part, of any desire to 'possess' Stephanie, and Stephanie's construction as "unspeakable" are manifestations of the narrative failure to pursue her interiority. Unlike Pieter who is, to a large extent, defined by the discursive relations in which he is located, the intentionality represented in her smile escapes discursive containment. Nor is her private domain commandeered to serve narrative purposes. Unlike Pieter she doesn't participate in the moral frame Paton writes into the novel which Hutchings appreciates and Watson censures, and so her story cannot be recuperated into a moral scrutiny of the Immorality Act. Her disappearance from the narrative before the charge is laid can thus be read as an act of moral exculpation. Leitch's comment about character seems particularly apt for Stephanie:

The modern notion of character ... is nuclear in structure, implying some residual quality neither required by nor expended in the action, some resistance Todorov's narrative-men lack to exhaustion by their situation, plot function, or public action (1986:149).

It has been my endeavour, in this chapter, to investigate Paton's choice of the mode of tragedy for his novel. The questions I have addressed might be summarised thus: How does it come about that Paton can choose the genre? What in the public domain makes appropriate the rendition of private experience and private relationship in terms of tragedy? It was my insistence, in the first place, that the location of the tragedy has to be at the interface of public and private, and in the second, that its focus upon Pieter is predicated upon the silence of Stephanie. If the mode of tragedy is appropriate for a representation of his experience, it is inappropriate to her experience, because one of its contingencies is that she be defined as taboo. On a broader level, the choice of the mode of tragedy is evidence not of the generalisability of Pieter's experience, but of his location in a context in which it might

well occur. The attempt to legislate as 'immoral' sexual relations across races was at its most fundamental an admission that such relations existed and were likely to continue to do so: the law was an attempt to manage and to control an extant phenomenon. If Pieter is entrapped by the narrative whose rendition of his experiences as tragedy is an indictment of the system which has legislated against them, it is left to Stephanie, by her elusion of and resistance to the narrative, to question the choice of the mode. Amongst the voices of the text it is her silence that has a crucial role to play.

Set in direct contrast with Mhudi, whose relation with the narrative was one of co-operation, Stephanie stands, in my view, as a key rendition of the figure of the black woman within our literature: because of her elusiveness to narration and because of the reactivity of her silence. The novel which will be considered next is one written some twenty-five years after Paton's text by a woman positioned by the circumstances of her birth at the racial interface between black and white. Although her focus is the relationship that exists between two Batswana men of noble birth and a woman whose tribe is outcast throughout Africa, her identification and examination of the black woman figure is undertaken with clarity, sympathy and direction. Margaret Cadmore will be seen to be very different to Stephanie: educated, articulate, literate, artistically gifted, and equipped with a cultural heritage which receives substantial narrative recognition. She is also, however, the victim of racial prejudice that is both explicit and vicious, and if the role she plays out in her marriage to a chief echoes the happy ending of romantic fables it also reflects integration into a personal relationship which accommodates intuitive, spiritual and psychic dimensions. The novel is the only one in this study by a woman, and so the textual relations between character and narrator will be investigated in regard to questions of autobiography, in order to explore the writer's positioning as an exile and a refugee from construction in *apartheid* terms.

BESSIE HEAD: *MARU*

In the case studies of *Mhudi* and *Too Late the Phalarope*, some consideration was given to their representations of the figure of the black woman, to the communal and textual relations in which she was located, and to the positioning of the writers, Plaatje and Paton, in relation to the Centre and in relation to the local context. This consideration might now be recognised as informed by a perspective on the crucially postcolonial problems and issues within the Southern African framework that these texts address. In the case of *Mhudi*, our focus was on Plaatje's 'rewriting' of history in a way that responded to the tensions between orality and literacy, tribal membership and non-sectarianism, Tswana and English. In the case of *Too Late the Phalarope*, our focus was on the encroachments of the dominant code into the private domain of the masculine protagonist, and on the interface between the broadly Central mode of tragedy and the discursive and cultural effects of *apartheid* that characterise the local context. The predominant linguistic interface, in Paton's case, was that between the hegemonic code of the Afrikaans 'text' of *apartheid*, and English as the target medium of translation, although the cross-cultural relationship between Pieter and Stephanie invoked other language-culture systems that served to problematise both the narrative rendition of dialogue and the broader discursive relations within the novel. It was particularly in regard to *Too Late the Phalarope* that the issue of identity became important. The construction of Pieter as tragic hero was intrinsic to Paton's examination of *apartheid* and the Immorality Act which is perhaps its most explicit manifestation. Intrinsic to this construction, in turn, was Pieter's discursive failure to sustain a self against the invasion of public definitions, and so his textualisation served directly to erode and to undermine his autonomy as a subject. By contrast, the autonomy of Stephanie's private domain is left relatively intact by the narrative, in part because her intentionality escapes discursive containment, and in part because she doesn't participate in the moral frame of the novel and so her story cannot be recuperated into a moral scrutiny of the Immorality Act.

6.1 A Question of Identity

The issue of identity is an important one also in the case study that follows, but one that needs to be approached in rather different terms. *Maru* (1971)¹ is distinguished from the two novels considered thus far by the fact that its writer was a woman, and, in MacKenzie's terms, "a first generation child of bi-racial origins" (MacKenzie & Woeber 1992:1-2). She thus stands as the 'product' of a 'miscegenous' relationship such as formed the focus of *Too Late the Phalarope*, and, coming to adulthood during the early 1960s, was particularly vulnerable to the harsh application of *apartheid* policies in South Africa that followed the 'achievement' of Republic status in 1961. Born in 1937, Head began her writing career in this country, but achieved local and international recognition only after she left it, in 1964, with the publication of *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968). A second major feature of her life and work is thus her 'exile' in Botswana, which reflects, in my view, an attempt to escape definition and containment in the South African terms of *apartheid*. Her pan-Africanist sentiments lead to an alignment that is regional rather than national, although her lack of access to African languages cuts her off from the cultural heritage that informs the writing of other Africans. They also contribute, I think, to the problematic critical reception her novels have had, to the unease that has greeted the influence of romance and fable and to the implicit dichotomies set up between Englishness (as exemplified, in *Maru*, in the code of sensible simplicity of the missionaries) and Africanness (as Head understood it and tried to convey it in terms of myth, legend, fable, dream, music, art).

It is this positioning that stands as a first indicator for the significance of the issue of identity in discussions of her work. This is borne out, I think, by the critical trend, established by Ravenscroft (1976) and followed by numerous critics after him, of considering Head's first three novels as a trilogy. The line of argument generally taken is

¹ Head, B. 1971. *Maru*. London: Heinemann. All further references in parenthesis are to this edition.

that her development as a writer reveals a quest for identity within her writing. This quest is occasioned by the biographic features noted above: her birth to a white woman by a black father, and the exile she undertakes when she leaves South Africa to live in Botswana. Although broadly sound, the argument has become somewhat tendentious, and now stands in need of theoretical development. In my reading the combination of racially mixed origins, education into first-language use of English, and the alienating categorisation of *apartheid* in South Africa and racial prejudice in Botswana bring crucially postcolonial pressures to bear on her; pressures which her writing both reflects and resists. This is a point to which I will return.

The second indicator for a discussion of her 'postcolonial' identity is the ethnographic closeness that characterises the textual relations between herself as writer and her character Margaret² whose Masarwa origins and whose English upbringing give her an extremely marginal position within the communities in the novel. In *Black Writers from South Africa* Watts locates her commentary on Head in a chapter entitled "Autobiographical Writings". She begins this chapter by noting that whereas "some writers, particularly those who went into exile in the late fifties and early sixties ... embark on straightforward autobiography ... others have adapted other literary forms to the same purpose" (1989:108). In regard to *A Question of Power* (1974), this observation has had ample critical recognition; it is less standard, however, to acknowledge explicitly the "hybrid form" of "autobiography as novel" in *Maru*. Watts says,

Two writers [the other is Mphahlele in *The Wanderers*] have used the novel form to embody autobiography, and it is interesting to examine how their use of the form succeeds. Bessie Head used it twice: once indirectly autobiographically in *Maru*, where she draws upon a life-time of experience of prejudice against 'coloured' South Africans to create the story of a Basarwa girl, and again in *A Question of Power*, more directly, when she charts her own

² In order to avoid confusion I refer to the protagonist of the novel, Margaret, by first name only, and to her adoptive mother, Margaret Cadmore, by Christian name and surname.

mental breakdown in the story of Elizabeth, the heroine (1989:138).

Watt's comments are important for my purposes in foregrounding the relations that occur in autobiography between the writer as character and the writer as self, relations which are far more apparent in Head's work than in Paton's, for example, and which will consequently receive sustained and detailed attention in this chapter. Although, as Watts indicates, the issue of identity is one that concerns Head rather more explicitly in her third novel, *A Question of Power* (1974), my inclusion of *Maru* in this study has been motivated by its foregrounding of the linguistic construction of identity, its exploration of the personal effects of political realities, its attempts to engender a nondiscursive medium in which to express them, and its resolution of many of these issues through the cross-cultural marriage between Margaret and Maru.

The third indicator for a discussion of identity in regard to Head's work is her own explicit problematisation of the matter, at the 'metadiegetic' level of interview and critical commentary. It is at this level that I would like to seek a point of entry both to critical debates about her and her work, and to an application of my own theoretical framework to the novel. On the one hand, a major debate has focused on the nature of narrative authority and power, in ways that invoke the terms of Spivak's critique of "third-worldism" in autobiography and in depictions of the figure of the black woman. On the other, Head's attempt to constitute a self in relation and particularly in reaction to the postcolonial terms of *apartheid* and exile might well lead us to pose the question, What resolutions does she achieve in her text? or, If we have certain 'facts of the matter' (her birth, her exile), how are we to read these facts? Before proceeding to my own consideration of their textual implications, therefore, I would like to focus first on the broader sphere of the 'stories' Head told about herself, in interview and in correspondence, and on the specific debate that arose in regard to them.

6.2 The 'True Story'

This debate began with an article contesting Head's version of her birth. Entitled, "'Don't Ask for the True Story': A Memoir of Bessie Head", it was published in *Hecate* in 1986, the year of Head's death, by Susan Gardner, whose relationship with the writer dated from the compilation of the first NELM bibliography on Head, and the visits and interviews that it occasioned. Although the more personal, and the more contentious, aspects of Gardner's claims about Head were reserved for this article, it was based in large measure on her Introduction to the Bibliography (1986a), a revised and updated edition of which has been produced just this year, by MacKenzie and Woeber (1992). The critical credence given Gardner's claims might be inferred from the fact that the Introduction was itself a rewriting of an article published first in *Africa Insight* in 1985, and which has since been reprinted in Clayton's 1989 collection, *Women and Writing in South Africa*. Since it is the *Hecate* article to which Teresa Dovey responds, I will base my comments on it. In it, Gardner notes, and doubts, the "idiosyncratically inauspicious" circumstances of Bessie Head's life, concluding, "What Head certainly possessed was the 'ideal biographical legend,' a concept formulated by Boris Tomashevskij in his essay, 'Literature and Biography' in 1923" (Gardner 1986b:114-115). Tomashevskij identifies the emergence of the notion of individual authorship in Western European literature in the eighteenth century, and its 'canonisation' by the lyrical poets of Romanticism. For Tomashevskij, "the question of the role of biography in literary history cannot be solved uniformly for all literatures. There are writers with biographies and writers without biographies". Since Head falls into the former of these categories, Gardner claims, her "account of her origins, then, began to seem to me useful, but not necessarily credible. I realized it was crucially important for discussing her work, almost all of which, as I contend here, is an attempt to create a viable identity" (1986b:115).

There seem to me several problems inherent in Gardner's article, which include the equivalence in status she claims between herself and Head in her opening phrases: "Serowe. Botswana. January 1983. Two women are walking hand in hand One of them ..." (1986b:110); the exaggeration

of the claim that "every other critic who has ever written about" Head had visited her (1986b:111), perhaps in order to disguise the fact that the encounter and the relationship that followed were initiated by her; the projection of her own problems of categorising Head's fiction into the work itself, in order to bolster her assertions about Head's fabrication of her life story; the embarrassment which permeates her description of being with Head, including several allusions to Head's alcohol consumption; the overstatement and insincerity of the terms used to describe her responses to Head and the 'secret truth' she claims to have discovered about her ("uneasy", "terrible" (1986b:111), "disquieting" (1986b:112), "intolerable", "terrible" (1986b:113), "overpowering", "horrible" (1986b:115), "disastrous" (1986b:121), "bilious" (1986b:123) etc.); her opportunistic refusal to quote from Head's letters to her, because "copyright in the text belongs to her" (1986b:125); her exploitation of the power of the footnote to make non-specific allegations about Head's childhood experiences (1986b:119,128-9). Although Gardner's article offers an extremely problematic instance of cultural translation, I do not, here, wish to pursue my reservations about it: rather I wish to address it by examining a response which took up both its claims and its overall characteristics.

Dovey's 1989 "A Question of Power: Susan Gardner's Biography versus Bessie Head's Autobiography" was published in *English in Africa*, after being "not accepted by *Hecate*, the feminist journal which published Gardner's article, and which lists Gardner as a contributing editor" (Dovey 1989a:30). It seems important, in light of the reflexivity insisted on by the theoretical delineation offered in my first three chapters, to register the possibilities of undertaking the kind of deconstructive reading of Dovey's article which it offers of Gardner's. Certainly it is fascinating to follow the position assumed by Dovey in supplying a 'true vindication' of Head as opposed to the "vindication of Gardner herself" (1989a:30) from Head's accusation, mentioned in passing and towards the end of the article, of "professional misconduct" (Gardner 1986b:126). My purpose in examining the debate, however, is not to perpetuate it, but rather to assess the viability of an autobiographic reading of Head's fiction, and so it seems worthwhile

here to allow Dovey to answer Gardner. Dovey identifies the form taken by Gardner's "accounts of her biographical research procedures" as 'quest narratives' in which both "heroine/biographer ... and subject figure as characters" (1989a:30). She goes on,

Gardner has the best of both worlds as the biography is doubly authenticated: first by the presence of the biographer/narrator as character within the narrative, and then by the invocation of scientific evidence, that is to say references to critics, to 'experts' in the field of insanity, and to archival documents. By these means Gardner constructs the 'truth' or 'knowledge' of her biography.

The 'truth' of Gardner's biography is that Head's autobiography is false Commenting that this story "seemed almost too 'good,' in its horrible way, to be true" ... Gardner goes on to discount it (1989a:31).

The ensuing argument that denounces Gardner's testimony is both informed and compelling, and the recuperation of Head from the imputations of "madness" an important exercise in itself, in light of the "racial, sexual, and class taboos of the white middle class" which the label invokes (1989a:33). Again, I do not wish to examine this argument in detail, but rather to select those aspects which can contribute to the issue at hand.

There seem to me to be three points raised in the debate which are significant for an autobiographic reading of Head's fiction. Before enumerating them I should like, briefly, to contextualise Dovey's debunking of Gardner. In a study of ethnographic narrative entitled *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*, Geertz has drawn on his own experience as a research anthropologist to analyse the roots of the persuasive power of anthropological writing. He says:

The ability of anthropologists to get us to take what they say seriously has less to do with either a factual look or an air of conceptual elegance than it has to do with their capacity to convince us that what they say is a result of their having actually penetrated (or, if you prefer, been penetrated by) another form of life, of having, one way or another, truly "been there" (1988:4-5).

It is plain that Dovey recognises the similarity of Gardner's biographic claim to having "been there", though she couches it in terms of the biographer's figuring as a character in the 'narrative'. She quotes the

opening passage of this narrative to show this: "Serowe. Botswana. January 1983. Two women are walking hand in hand ..." (Dovey 1989a:30-31). My first purpose in referring to Geertz here has to do with the broader context he invokes for such 'truth claims': that they occur in ethnography as well as in the 'biography' under discussion. They also occur in other memoirs. In a 1991 review essay, Stephen Gray can scarcely be said to be motivated by the same need to vindicate himself as Gardner. Although he does not invoke the "scientific evidence" of "critics" and of "experts", Gray features as a character in his narrative as much as Gardner does in hers, and so his description makes the similar 'truth claim' of having "been there". Says Gray,

I first met Bessie Head the Easter fifteen years before, in Gaborone in 1976, when she had travelled to the capital to attend a writers' workshop on the deserted and spartan university campus Having come out of her seclusion, she was to stay that night in the Holiday Inn. I drove her there; even being driven was a treat. But once at reception with her meagre luggage, I was in for two astonishments ... (1991:100).

Yet if the broader context supplied by Geertz's observations qualifies Dovey's critique it also confirms specific aspects. The first of the three points significant for my purposes is thus the reminder Dovey offers of the ways in which narrative power renders problematic ethnography's textualisations of its subjects. Couching her argument in Lacanian terms, she points out:

The secret of Head's identity is ... that knowledge of the Other which has to be appropriated, taken from the Other. It can be argued that claiming to possess the secret of the Other's identity constitutes the ultimate gesture of power over the Other.

Gardner quotes Head as saying: "I have always been just me, with no frame of reference to anything beyond myself" This may be seen as Head's expression of an impossible but liberatory desire to be simply identical to herself, to avoid the passage of the self through the Symbolic system, in which the individual subject receives a name and an identity. Gardner's attempt to *name* her is a violation of this desire, and represents an attempt to locate Head *within* a system which she herself preferred to negate. It also implies a refusal to recognize the potential for resistance in that which may be considered *unnameable* in terms of the

system: Head is not white, not black, not feminist, not revolutionary (1989a:34).

In relation to the model of cultural translation, we might note that Head's wish to be "just me" evinces a resistance to being 'translated' into the terms of *apartheid*, and that Gardner's 'identification' of Head is a refusal to accept or to condone her 'silence' about her 'identity' in South African society.

A certain light might be shed on Gardner's activity if we consider Spivak's discussion of the constraints upon autobiography in "third-worldist criticism", in a 1989 article entitled "Imperialism and Sexual Difference". Seeking to animate "the perspective of the 'native informant'", she invites us to acknowledge "that access to autobiography, for whole groups of people, has only been possible through the dominant mediation of an investigator or field-worker. The 'autobiographies' of such people have not entered the post-Enlightenment European 'subjective' tradition of autobiography. They have gone, rather, to provide 'objective evidence' for the 'sciences' of anthropology and ethnolinguistics" (1989:521). Clearly Gardner is not working within the sphere of anthropology or ethnolinguistics, yet there are ways in which we might read her endeavour as an attempt to turn Head into the 'native informant' by assuming the position of "investigator or field-worker" (in Dovey's term "heroine/biographer"). As such it is an exercise in narrative power, a biographic contest. In a recent article entitled "Autobiographical Spaces and the Postcolonial Predicament", Nussbaum applies Spivak's terms to another, more oblique example of this 'contest': the request of Mabel Palmer, white patron of Lily Moya, that she "write an autobiographical essay of 2000 words entitled 'The Life of a Native Girl in a Native Reserve'" (1991:26). After a first, unaccepted, attempt, "Lily Moya's resistance is silence, and ultimately rejection of her patron's well-meaning but ill-advised assistance. Allowing her silence to speak reminds the postcolonial critic to tread with faint step to avoid providing the very taxonomies and mapping of the Other that are synonymous with colonialism and its Western measuring instruments" (1991:26).

It is a recognition of the 'biographic contest', I believe, that motivates Dovey's vindication of Head which emerges in the two remaining points which are important to my discussion. The first is Dovey's insistence, at the conclusion of the article, on the right of the writer to maintain what might be termed 'enabling fictions' about herself:

We all live by fictions: some are more innocent than others, just as some identities are harder earned than others. If Bessie Head's ability to survive, and to transcend in writing, the suffering she endured growing up in South Africa was in some sense made possible by the autobiography she constructed for herself, then surely this identity should not, and cannot, be taken from her (1989a:37).

The second is her conviction that this right must, if necessary, be actively safeguarded. "Bessie Head died in 1986, but even if she were still alive, it could be argued that her freedom as a writer, the freedom of her writing, is dependent upon the intervention of her readers" (1989a:35). Gardner's intervention, by implication, is inimical to such freedom, and Dovey's an attempt to secure it. Given the *fatwa* passed on Salman Rushdie for exercising this very freedom, Dovey's contention here certainly has wider resonances, even if what Head stands to lose by encroachments on her freedom as a writer is not her life but the identity she made for herself.

In my view Dovey manages to resist the temptation to challenge Gardner by offering a further and better version of Head. It is the tenets of her argument that enable her to avoid this trap of circularity: her insistence on the intervention of the reader when necessary to secure the narrative power of enabling fictions writers might maintain about themselves. In some respects such a reading is compatible with the theory that I have advanced. If we recall Clifford's use of the term "fiction" we will be aware of the sense of "something made or fashioned, the principal burden of the word's Latin root, *ingere*" (1986:6). We might also be reminded of the conventions in terms of which characters can be figured as tropes, in terms of which the subjectivity of the writer can be textualised. Yet there is an important sense in which Dovey underplays the social nature of identity-formation, and hence the reader's right and power to confer identity. Although she calls Head's

"desire to be simply identical to herself" impossible, Dovey minimises the extent to which Head's attempts (like anyone else's) to forge an identity by telling stories about herself require social validation if they are to succeed. Even if we are aware of the hostility and "violation" entailed in Gardner's attempt to "name" her, it does not seem feasible, or even fruitful, to recognise Head's singlehanded power to "negate" a system because she "preferred" to do so.

6.3 Identity and Fiction

In important ways the tension that exists between the social and the personal construction of Head's identity provides a basis for a discussion of the communal and textual construction of Margaret's identity in *Maru*. Yet certain questions need addressing before we proceed to such a discussion. The first of these is why Head made such clear attempts to assert a contestatory, non-social identity. Gray begins his review essay, "For several years before her awful death over Easter, 1986, rumours were that Bessie Head was writing her autobiography But it was *her* life; that was the whole point. No illuminating confession has surfaced among her prodigious literary remains" (1991:99). Towards the end of his essay he notes how "she liked to remain unclassifiable", continuing, "At the outset of her career she said: 'I have always been just me, with no frame of reference to anything beyond myself.' In other words, look to the work - no autobiography. The myth she had constructed about herself was more self-protective than revealing" (1991:101-102). Self-protection seems an ample reason to try to elude, especially, hostile or exploitative biographers. Thus Gray notes wryly, "No mercy was shown to scholars whom she, probably rightly, saw climbing on her strong shoulders to make their fortunes. Yet these same devotees saw to it that she was invited to Berlin, Denmark, London, Iowa, Australia ... " (Gray 1991:101). It is certainly "Bessie [as] nobody's fool" who observes in an interview "if people wish to place one into categories they do so for their own purposes" (cited in MacKenzie & Clayton 1989:7). Yet if Head's resistance to biographic interest erects barriers that enclose and protect, this seems to me to reflect also a broader sense of the

fragility of the private domain: the ways in which it might be damaged by the scrutiny - and the storytelling - of others.

The second question that needs addressing is why, despite reservations such as these, critics continue to make biographical investigations. In her review of MacKenzie and Clayton's *Between the Lines: Interviews with Bessie Head, Sheila Roberts, Ellen Kuzwayo, Miriam Tlali*, Dovey notes rather acerbically,

At a time when literary theory is telling us that the individual biographical details of the flesh-and-blood writer are not relevant to an interpretation of her writing, and that the writer's pronouncements on her own work do not carry more weight than those of anyone else, it is somewhat paradoxical to find a proliferation of the author-interview as a mode of literary commentary. This latter phenomenon is perhaps testimony to the role which curiosity - simple curiosity about how other people live and think - continues to play in the act of reading (1990b:95).

There is a sense in which Head's "ideal biographic legend" constitutes a challenge rather than an act of effacement, and if Dovey is content to obey the injunction against intrusion a better explanation than "simple curiosity" is needed to explain why others plainly are not. In fact Dovey's unease with "personal detail" (1990b:96) is motivated by a theoretical position as well as a scrupulous sense of tact, and, for my purposes, the consequences of her resistance to the biographic need to be recognised and challenged. In the terms of the speech-act model of narrative which underlies my study, her attempt, following Head's, is to block out one party to "the situation of narrative utterance", and to minimise the role of the conventions which inform readings of texts. The effect is to reduce the reader's power of conferring identity to that of condoning or validating the identities that are asserted by writers (or by characters). Even given Dovey's apparent endorsement of the 'death' of the "flesh-and-blood writer", the value of biographic interest in a writer surely remains the light it can shed on the writing. This is because, as readers, we do bring an awareness of 'the writer' as a sociohistorical entity to bear on our understanding and appreciation of his or her work. If, to take up her example, Sheila Roberts revealed a tendency in her fiction to set up polarities between good letter-writers

and women with bad tempers it may well be worth knowing "that one sister writes to her every week, and that the other sister has a very bad temper" (1990b:97).

In Head's case, the truth-value of her "ideal biographic legend" - indeed, whether it is a legend or not - is not at issue. What is important is her sense of the complexities and the difficulties of the relation between private and public, or, in terms that seem more pertinent here, personal and communal constructions of identity. Thus although Dovey's recognition of the 'unnameableness' of being "not white, not black, not feminist, not revolutionary" (1989a:34) stands as an important corrective to attempts to "name" (and hence contain) Head in *apartheid* terms, these negative attributes constitute no identity at all. My endeavour, nonetheless, is not to read her fiction simply as a quest for identity, but to recognise how identity is constructed at racial, political and cultural interfaces, and to investigate how the resistances and the assertions that arise from this positioning register in her fiction. It should not, therefore, constitute a further "violation" to quote more extensively from MacKenzie's specification of this positioning:

Her life story is one which encapsulates in microcosm the greatest social and political evils of the apartheid era in South Africa. The offspring of an illicit alliance between an upper-class woman and a black stable-hand, she is in many ways the physical and psychological meeting point of forces that have been in conflict with each other for centuries in Africa: the white colonists become permanent settlers and the indigenous peoples who bore the impact of the European invasion. In more contemporary terms, Head is the physical evidence of racial mingling, a first generation child of bi-racial origins, bereft of social support and identity (MacKenzie & Woeber 1992:1-2).

6.4 Exile and Allegiance

If the 'biographic legend' has been one focus of the critical debate about Head's work, a second point of interest has been her status as an exile. From as early as the Marquard interview for *London Magazine* (1978-9), it has been accepted that "her decision to leave the country

... was based on personal rather than political factors" (1978-9:51). Marquard quotes her:

Life has its ridiculous aspects. What really precipitated my move out of South Africa was the break-up of my marriage. I was offered a primary school teaching post in Botswana. I had nothing else and I accepted. In the process I was forced to renounce my South African citizenship and became a stateless person. This was not a blow to me. I did not care. I didn't like the country. I have liked Botswana very much although I have got nothing out of loving a country that didn't want me (1978-9:51-52).

Her own sense of her status as an "exile" is an ambivalent one. She has said: "I could not be considered as a South African writer in exile, but as one who had put down roots [in Botswana]. And yet ... certain themes I am likely to write about, have been mainly shaped by my South African experience" (cited in Gardner 1986a:9). Although, as Gardner asserts, "She cannot be viewed as Botswanan since she neither speaks nor writes Sechuana and refuses to associate herself with Botswanan writers' groups on the grounds that they are narrowly nationalistic and prescriptive" (Gardner 1986a:9), if we follow MacKenzie's thesis, at least her later fiction reveals these "roots" in a "new sense of allégiance to Botswana" (1989:35). In Daymond's reading, the "influence on her writing of her life in Botswana ... [indicates] the origins of many of the strengths and weaknesses of *Maru*", given the 'guidance' she receives from the "traditions, social and literary, within which she lives" (1989:249).

Despite the fact that she was finally awarded Botswanan citizenship, after she had made her name as a writer of international standing, there nevertheless seem to me significant ways in which the influence of her status as an exile never completely disappeared. She has said, for example, "nothing can take away the fact that I have never had a country: not in South Africa nor in Botswana" (cited in Gardner 1986a:8). Her position in Botswana was tenuous from the outset: once she lost her first job she became a refugee who, initially at least, had to register with the police on a regular basis. Her early letters to Vigne attest to her continuing schemes to "get out" of Botswana, indeed to "get out" of Africa, though none of them came to fruition.

It seems to me that this status helps in large measure to account for the 'apoliticism' of which critics have accused her. Ogungbesan, for example, claims that she despises and avoids political ideologies, such as African Socialism and political groups including the Black Power Movement (1979). Nkosi comments on her 'political ignorance' (1981:99) and complains of the "lack of precise political' commitment [which] weakens rather than aids [her] grasp of character" (1981:102). Yet both this comment and his description of "the coloured writer [venturing] across the borders of the republic, and [being] forced to assume a larger African identity" seem uncharacteristically ungenerous. In my own view, and that of other critics, her 'apoliticism' was more apparent than real. In a letter to Sarvan she describes her allegiances to Pan-Africanism even before she left South Africa: "I dearly loved Robert Sobukwe and the politics he expounded in the years 1958-60 ... Sobukwe's view was Pan African and generally included all things African, with an edge of harshness in it that forced one to make an identification with being African and a sense of belonging to Africa" (1987:84-85). And in a letter to Vigne she refers to herself as "B. Head, great Pan-Africanist on a soap-box" (1991:13), an image he confirms in his Introduction (1991:1). Certainly the ongoing concern she expresses in her letters to Vigne to be accepted as an "African writer" reflects a need for an identity larger than the national or tribal, but no less political for that.

The problems that arise from prescriptions about social and political commitment, as well as from overly autobiographical readings of her work, are perhaps exemplified in MacKenzie's suggested division of her work into "an 'inwardly-directed' phase (*When Rain Clouds Gather* 1969, *Maru* 1971 and *A Question of Power* 1973), followed by a period of more 'outwardly-directed' or 'socially-oriented' work (*The Collector of Treasures* 1977, *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* 1981 and *A Bewitched Crossroads: An African Saga* 1984)" (1989:19). Useful as this classification might seem, its impartiality is distinctly suspect:

The second phase of Bessie Head's output (what I have called her 'socially-oriented' period) represents a major break with what came before. *A Question of Power* proved to be a

turning point, and Head was able from this point on to explore more objectively her country of exile. Her work of this second phase evinces few of the disconcerting anomalies that flaw her novels. *The Collector of Treasures* and *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, particularly, have a symmetry and harmoniousness of form that testifies to the author's new sense of allegiance to Botswana, and, of course, to Serowe (1989:35).

Aspects of the judgement which seem to me troublesome in regard to *Maru* are the failure to recognise the number of different forms that might be taken by 'social orientation', the lack of specification of the relations between "symmetry and harmoniousness of form" and "allegiance", and, most acutely, the subjectivity of the sense of "disconcerting anomalies that flaw her novels".

Since MacKenzie is by no means alone in his reservations about the novel, however, and since his reading of the early novels is repeated in his Introduction to the new NELM Bibliography (MacKenzie & Woeber 1992), it seems worth considering his and other arguments in this regard. Given the location of *Maru* in the early, "inwardly-directed phase", MacKenzie sees the "critical flaw in [its] didactic purpose" as being "Head's inability at this stage in her artistic development to unite the sphere of public life and social commitment with that of the inner life and individual fulfilment". He says of the novel:

Maru is offered on one level as a way to end racial antagonism: there is a real sense that Head is concerned to engage with the real world, institute change, put an end to prejudice and reactionary codes of behaviour, establish genuine equality between the races and the sexes. On another level she seeks the liberation of the pure, creative, individual soul. These ideals are in conflict in *Maru*: *Maru*, at the highest rung in Batswana society is ideally placed to institute reform, yet in doing so he alienates himself from the people of his society. He achieves change at the expense of leadership of his tribe (1989:27).

Although the first set of concerns MacKenzie identifies in Head might seem rather ambitious, some corroboration is forthcoming in two comments Head herself made about the novel: "One is never sure the world will change, least of all the power of the written word. *Maru* upsets me. My writing is a real service, useful. *Maru* ought to liberate the oppressed Bushmen here overnight" (Vigne 1991:125), and "*Maru* is a MASTERPIECE! I

know it. It will liberate the Bushman" (Vigne 1991:132). Whether the Bushmen need liberating, and how her novel is to liberate them can remain unspecified for the moment. Certainly the anonymous reviewer in *Moto* offers a down-to-earth refusal to suspend disbelief on this matter:

When she finally marries Maru we are told that the Masarwa as a people jumped for joy at this sign of their approaching liberation and their entry into the future. But this belief of theirs has no other foundation than that provided by old-fashioned convention in the art of story-telling. Their jubilation has no more basis than that given it by the romance mode to which this story belongs. In a romance such things happen.

In its structure the concluding marriage stands for and manifests as triumphant enactment the reconciliation of opposing power factions in the state. But marriage has for a long time now been no longer an event capable of being used with such large symbolic import.

Bessie Head, for all her generous intentions, is trapped in the meanings her chosen story-structure generates. In the romance world Margaret can be whisked away by the prince who rides a white car instead of the traditional horse, and all right-minded people weep for joy. But in the real world of today after the marriage the Masarwa will go back to their jobs or their no-jobs without any idea that something important affecting their lives has somehow happened, because nothing has (1986:24-25).

Apparent in both critiques is a sense of unease about the novel's relations with reality. If Head is indeed "concerned to engage with the real world, institute change, put an end to prejudice and reactionary codes of behaviour, establish genuine equality between the races and the sexes" we might well ask how the mode of romance can help her to do these things. In the reviewer's reading, this mode is clearly invalid to address "real world" issues of racism, jobs and the lives of the Masarwa, because it traps Head within the meanings it generates.

The 'failures' of the novel "to unite the sphere of public life and social commitment with that of the inner life and individual fulfilment", to escape the trap of its "chosen story-mode" to impact on the real world, will be taken up later. Before addressing them, we might get some sense of their contentiousness by recalling Head's own enthusiasm for *Maru*. Besides the remarks cited earlier her 1979 comment has been reprinted on the back of the Heinemann edition: "With all my

South African experience, I longed to write an enduring novel on the hideousness of racial prejudice. But I also wanted the novel to be so beautiful and so magical that I, as the writer, would long to read and re-read it" (1979:23). Her conviction at the time of its publication was even more exuberant. In a letter to Vigne dated 16 January 1971 she writes,

you know *Maru* is my masterpiece God knows, that short bit of literature is so goddam beautiful, it is the best thing I've written so far, in very adverse circumstances. I mean I wrote it right in hell. It glorifies *friendship* between a man and a man and friendship between a woman and a woman. That is the base. Everything is worked out from there. I have the final product, the book right here. I keep on holding it to my heart. Randolph, it is a goddam beautiful book, like nothing else on earth. I am getting five copies from Gollancz this week, I think, and I shall air mail a copy to you right away. The major theme is racial oppression and a hard look at it but it is blended and blended and was written with a real glow (Vigne 1991:136).

At least one critic has been persuaded along with her: "With its delicacy of feeling and subtle evocation of character; above all, its proper sense of place, this is as nearly perfect a piece of writing as one is ever likely to find in contemporary African literature" (Nkosi 1981:101). The point is not that they are right and MacKenzie and others are wrong, but rather that to do justice to Head we may well need to find more sensitive ways of reading her novel.

6.5 Quests and Interfaces

The starting point for my discussion of MacKenzie's critique was Head's status as an exile which, I believe, influences in important ways her sense of the relations between public and private spheres. The "quest for identity" thesis is, in my reading, an attempt at a critical recognition of these relations; its potential danger is that in imposing a frame and in generating prescriptive categories it will fail to do justice to the early novels. My own endeavour, as I said earlier, is not to read her fiction simply as a quest for identity, but to recognise how identity relates to her positioning at racial, political and cultural interfaces, and to investigate how the resistances and the assertions that arise from this positioning register in her fiction. My discussion

of the Gardner-Dovey debate thus concluded by enumerating certain implications for the viability of an autobiographic reading of Head's work: first, that the issue of narrative power renders problematic textualisations of the subject; second, that the subject has a right to maintain 'enabling fictions' about herself; third, that this right must be actively safeguarded if necessary; and fourth, that attempts by the subject to forge an identity by 'telling stories' about herself nevertheless require social validation if they are to succeed.

If the many biographic similarities between Head and the figure of the black woman in her novel lead us to condone Watt's description of *Maru* as "autobiography as novel", certain further qualifications are nevertheless necessary before we proceed to a more detailed examination of Margaret. The first has to do with the fact that the title of the novel is not Head's own name, nor even Margaret's, but that of the man who becomes Margaret's husband (and, I would argue, is important mainly for this reason). This is an indication that Head doesn't enter into the "autobiographic pact" that has been specified as crucially characterising the genre. If the "proper name [which] seals a textual contract of identity between the actual author, the narrator, and the subject" has been displaced in the case of "many South African autobiographies ... [by] a characteristic qualification of identity" (Jacobs 1991:i, following Lejeune), in the case of Head's novel our focus might well shift from the nominal reference on its cover to pronominal references within it. In this regard, attention has been drawn by a reviewer in *Moto* to the 'us-them' relations in which we are invited to participate (1986:25) - my interest will be in Head's distinctive use of 'you'.

The second qualification is Head's choice of third-person as opposed to first-person narration. Although, given this choice, it will not be a specific concern of this study to investigate 'the narrator', we need to recall from earlier chapters that if character constitutes one textualisation of the subjectivity of the writer, 'the narrator' constitutes another, even though neither is represented in first person. The distinction is important for three related reasons. The complexities

associated with first-person narration have received comprehensive treatment in Chapter 5; we might note here that substantial parts of the narrative are focalised through Margaret's consciousness. The combination of figural and omniscient narration emphasises her autonomy as a subject, and diminishes the sense of her as a representation of the experiencing self of the writer that we might 'expect to find in autobiography. Furthermore, one of the more acute ways in which Head's own positioning at racial, political and cultural interfaces is reflected in the novel is in the positioning of her character in relation to community. This positioning will be discussed in more depth later: it is important to recognise at this point the tension that exists between the character as a textualisation of the subjectivity of the writer, and the constitutive force of the community in which she is located. Lastly, one of the ways in which the narrative relationship is played out is through a shift into the nondiscursive realm, which is related, I think, to Head's lack of access to black languages, although her knowledge of African history and custom was developed by considerable research.

The third qualification that needs to be registered is that the term "autobiography as novel" might not recognise precisely or comprehensively enough other dimensions of the text, and specifically the nondiscursive realm which is, in my reading, a crucial feature. Aspects of romance and fable have been identified as characteristic (by the *Moto* reviewer (1986) and by Daymond (1989), amongst others). Daymond points out, "many critics, commenting on the relationship between Head's life and her art, have concentrated on the ways in which her experiences of neglect and injustice in South Africa's racist society affected her". Not nearly as many have considered "the influence on her writing of her life in Botswana, and of the studies she has chosen to make of its history and its stories [which give rise to] many of the strengths and weaknesses of *Maru*" (1989:249). Another critic whose work seems to me seminal in this regard is Johnson, who has related the novel more broadly to myths and legends within African oral tradition (1985). The interest of Severac ("Beyond Identity: Bessie Head's Spiritual Quest in *Maru*") has been in the spiritual dimensions of her idealism: the

"syncretic messianism" and "complementary holism" which, in his view, "forbids [her] to falsify reality" (1991:63). In "Traditional Values in the Novels of Bessie Head", Heywood points out the "Afrocentric vision ... achieved by active choice and research", which includes both a use of "the African past" and an invocation of "a mosaic of values drawn from the traditions of the region and all its people" (1979:13-17).

Bearing these qualifications in mind, it seems to me that our discussion of Head's work might become sensitive enough to register her own sense of the immediacy as well as the complexity of relations between the communal and the personal, a sense developed in response to her experiences as an exile and her positioning at racial, political and cultural interfaces. In "Towards a Redemptive Political Philosophy: Bessie Head's *Maru*" (1990), Matsikidze defends Head against the charges of apoliticism referred to above. She says, of *Maru*, "its unique political vision is problematic, that is, if we choose to judge the success of an artistic proposal by its ability to imitate reality. The text re-creates a malfunctioning traditional social order. At the same time it fashions a political philosophy which provides an alternative to confronting the problems of contemporary Southern Africa" (1990:105). She concludes with a plea:

My argument then is that rather than dismiss Bessie Head's approach to politics in the novel, her readers ought to acknowledge that there are various ways to define politics. Head's political vision is also valid. For someone whose true history has been obliterated, someone trying to regain control of her own destiny, her achievement marks an important beginning (1990:109).

Unlike Matsikidze, Geurts is not concerned to specify the elements of a political philosophy, but embarks from a similar point: "Head and others may not consider her work 'political' but that may simply be a matter of semantics and how one defines that particular word" (1986:47). Since her novels deal mostly with ordinary people's daily lives and relationships, some people consider this a purely 'personal' affair. However, 'political' action is not limited to government officials or party members in national office buildings. Ordinary people, in their own homes and villages, can and do make political decisions all the time"

(1986:48). The contribution of these critics seems to me to consist in their attempt to develop readings of the novel sensitive enough to respond both to the issues Head is dealing with and the biographic facts of her life. In doing so they go some way towards addressing MacKenzie's sense that the novel fails "to unite the sphere of public life and social commitment with that of the inner life and individual fulfilment", and the *Moto* reviewer's complaint that it doesn't escape the trap of its "chosen story-mode" to impact on the real world.

6.6 The Figure of Margaret

I have claimed above that Head's attempt in her own life was to escape the terms of *apartheid*. We might, then, shift the orientation of the reviewer's complaint and ask, In what ways did this attempt impact on her text? More specifically, Is Margaret a 'story' that Head is telling about herself? And if so, does she succeed in establishing an identity that leaves the terms of *apartheid* behind? Having posed these questions, I would like to examine in some detail the presentation of Margaret, and specifically the communal and textual construction of her identity, before coming back to address the questions directly.

Two aspects of Margaret's characterisation which are fundamental to her identity are her Masarwa³ origins, and her English upbringing. Her art and her marriage to a Tswana chief, while important in themselves, are significantly related to these. The occasion of her birth is described thus:

Some time ago it might have been believed that words like 'kaffir' and 'nigger' defined a tribe. Or else how can a tribe of people be called Bushmen or Masarwa? Masarwa is the equivalent of 'nigger', a term of contempt which means, obliquely, a low filthy nation.

³ Although the correct singular form of the noun is, following Watts, "Basarwa", and the more neutral descriptive term for the people it names would be San or Khoi-San, for the sake of consistency I have followed Head's usage in this chapter. The speech-act of self-identification which she gives Margaret, "I am a Masarwa", is a deliberate defamiliarisation of the pejorative, as I will go on to show.

True enough, the woman who gave birth to a child on the outskirts of a remote village had the same thin, Masarwa stick legs and wore the same Masarwa ankle-length, loose shift dress which smelt strongly of urine and the smoke of outdoor fires. She had died during the night but the child was still alive and crying feebly when a passer-by noticed the corpse (12).

The passage occurs at the end of a narrative diatribe on racism in Botswana, and so the conferral of "the same thin, Masarwa stick legs", and "the same Masarwa ankle-length, loose shift dress" marks Margaret's mother as belonging to the tribe who suffers it most. The qualifying "true enough" nevertheless registers narrative resistance to the construction of the "tribe of people" in the terms that have been given, and, together with the unexpected if tenuous survival of the child, indicates the assertion of difference that will be offered in the story that follows.

The orphaned infant is adopted and educated by the English missionary, Margaret Cadmore, whose name she takes on. In significant ways, her Masarwa origins and her English upbringing contribute to the formation of her identity, though one that manifests itself when she is an adult. Her initial survival becomes a defining feature of her nature: given the "good sense and logical arguments" which Margaret Cadmore passes on to her, "almost anything could be thrown into her mind and life and she would have the capacity, within herself, to survive both heaven and hell" (16). Like Dikeledi later on, Margaret Cadmore is able both to see and to acknowledge the positive aspect of Margaret's cultural heritage, and so the distance she maintains between herself and Margaret is due in part to a respect for her origins, as is the expectation she expresses, "One day you will help your people" (17). It is thus left largely to Margaret to deal with the negative aspects of this heritage: the hostility and racial prejudice that comes her way, the pinching, the anger, the spitting, the dancing and the taunts. "There was only one thing left, to find out how Bushmen were going to stay alive on the earth because no one wanted them to, except perhaps as the slaves and downtrodden dogs of the Batswana" (18). The narrative assignment for Margaret is how to integrate, or at least to reconcile, not only her 'Bushmanness' and her Englishness, but also the positive and the

negative aspects of what it is to be 'a Bushman'. In significant measure, this reconciliation takes place in relation to her art.

Margaret's artistic ability is inherited, the narrative implies, both from Margaret Cadmore and from her "people" (88). Certainly Margaret Cadmore has an emphatic ability with "sketch pad and pencil", which prevents her from "hurling out a continuous stream of abuse" (12). Yet the psychological functionality of her art is balanced by a capacity to respond to and represent a range and depth of emotion she does not herself experience. She examines Margaret's dead mother from several angles, and "Maybe she really saw human suffering, close up, for the first time, but it frightened her into adopting that part of the woman which was still alive - her child" (15). Such response is encoded in the title she gives the picture she makes of the woman: "She looks like a Goddess" (15). It is this 'goddess' that balances the 'outcast' in Margaret's Masarwa heritage. When she meets Dikeledi, who will become her friend in Dilepe village, she shows her the picture and reveals the extent to which the joint heritage it encapsulates has become part of her identity:

"But I am not ashamed of being a Masarwa," the young girl said seriously. Let me show you something.'

She opened her handbag and took out a small, framed picture.

"My teacher made this sketch of my mother the day she died," and handed it to Dikeledi (24).

Margaret's sketches and paintings supply a medium through which she can enact her identity. Once they have become friends, Dikeledi compares this picture with a sketch that Margaret has made of her:

The styles of both artists were almost identical, almost near that of a comic-strip artist in their simplicity, except that the younger disciple appeared greater than the master. It was a difference in temperament. The older Margaret Cadmore had been essentially a cold and unemotional woman, insensitive to the depths and heights of life, and the young girl high-lighted these latter qualities, at the same time emulating her skill for rapid reproduction of life, on the spot (86).

The distinction, it is implied, has to do with Margaret's Masarwa origins, because the comment that chokes in Dikeledi's throat is, "your people were naturally gifted this way. There are all those rock paintings" (88). In the 'Goddess', in Margaret's rendition of the "depths and heights of life" (87), in the emerging "vigour of the goats and water-carriers" and new birth (108), we are offered images of the ability of art to envision potential selves, to render and return them to those who are represented. The reflexive implications of the artist within the text will be considered later. We should note here that it is the response of Dikeledi's brother Maru to Margaret's pictures, and specifically his verbal translation of the meaning he finds in them, that reflects how intrinsic is Margaret's Masarwa identity both to her artistic ability and to the relationship that develops between them:

the message of the pictures went even deeper to his heart:
"You see, it is I and my tribe who possess the true vitality of this country. You lost it when you sat down and let us clean your floors and rear your children and cattle. Now we want to be free of you and be busy with our own affairs" (108).

The man with whom she falls in love, however, is Moleka, friend of Maru, and himself "royalty, the son of a chief", who has "grown up making goats and people jump" (28). The impact of the bond that occurs between them, almost immediately after they meet, is registered in the "something" that goes "bang" in their chests (28,30). The love she feels for him is related to the fact that he makes her feel "as though she were the most important person on earth, when no one had ever really cared whether she was dead or alive, and she had been so lonely" (30). This love gives her "backbone" (30); it also takes her to a "point at which she was no longer a Masarwa but the equal in quality and stature of the woman who sat opposite her" (118), Dikeledi, who also loves Moleka and ends up marrying him. Significant as her love for Moleka is to Margaret, she believes that "He will never approach me, because I am a Masarwa" (94). The friendship that develops between her and Dikeledi is thus predicated on their respective silence about Moleka, whom both love. Towards the end of the novel Dikeledi comments on her peacefulness. The narrative comments, "Any other woman would have said:

'I am peaceful because Moleka loves me.' But then she was not any other woman. She was a Masarwa" (114). Maru concurs: "until the time he married her she had lived like the mad dog of the village, with tin cans tied to her tail. Moleka would never have lived down the ridicule and malice and would in the end have destroyed her from embarrassment" (9). These judgements are not confirmed directly by Moleka, and indeed the flamboyance with which he liberates his Masarwa slaves would contest them. And yet the fact that Margaret is Masarwa is plainly part of the reason she marries not him but Maru.

Maru's decision to marry her is instantaneous. He says to his sister after meeting Margaret for the first time, "I don't care whether she sleeps on the hard floor for the rest of her life but I am not going to marry a pampered doll" (67). He goes on to defend his decision in terms he thinks Dikeledi will understand: "A woman like that would ensure that I am never tempted to make a public spectacle of myself" (70). Yet Maru's response to Margaret goes a lot further than the instrumentality he verbalises to his sister. His recognition of her effect upon Moleka, "Who else made a god overnight but a goddess?" (67), echoes Margaret Cadmore's comment about her mother. It also confirms his sense of their kinship, and locates Margaret within the complex cosmology of the novel in terms of which he is himself defined. She becomes one of the "queens and goddesses Maru walked with all his days" (34). His friend Moleka is another: "There was no knowing what was behind the closed door of Moleka's kingdom. Maru had no key to it, but he knew of its existence because if he touched Moleka's heart with some word or gesture a cloud would lift and he would see a rainbow of dazzling light" (34). Of course it is not Maru but Margaret who unlocks the door, and so the two men become enemies. Maru 'arranges' the marriage between Moleka and his sister, abdicates his position as chief, and carries Margaret off to a village "a thousand miles away" (125).

6.7 Discursive Relations

As I have shown above, several critics have had problems with this ending and with the relations between reality and fictionality which it reflects. MacKenzie quibbles with what he sees as Head's failure "to

unite the sphere of public life and social commitment with that of the inner life and individual fulfilment" (1989:27). Yet it is on two feminist critiques that I would like to focus, since their observations offer a mode of approach to the self of the character and that of the writer, and the textual relations that exist between them.

The first critique is rooted in a search for "The Liberation of Female Consciousness in African Literature" and constitutes something of a denunciation of *Maru*:

Even female writers with some feminist commitment can backslide. Head begins *Maru* as an indictment of racism, and takes as a heroine a girl who, as a Masarwa, is herself a victim of racial prejudice in Botswana. Yet as the novel develops, the female victim fades progressively into the background, while the foreground is usurped by the male figures and male consciousness of *Maru* and *Moleka*. Thereafter the impact of the central theme is weakened by the author's failure to grant the oppressed heroine's consciousness the prominence which the opening seems to promise. It is as if the author has decided that the thoughts and feelings of a female victim of racism cannot be as interesting or as important as those of the males with whom she comes into contact. Head's indictment of racism is, in my view, much weaker by this decision (Metcalf 1989:24).

Daymond expresses reservations similar to MacKenzie's in a critique that takes up the matter of Head's idealism in regard to "a problem in her visionary fable". She points out that, "for all her recognition that these two claims, the personal and the general, may have to be made separately, Bessie Head does not seem to have managed to reconcile her protagonist's vision of freedom with the actual steps he takes to attain it" (1989:249). The instance on which Daymond focuses is Margaret's marriage to *Maru*, because it is "virtually an abduction and so denies her the very freedom of choice which the creation of new worlds seeks to provide" (1989:248). She explains, "Bessie Head seems to have felt that the rightness of *Maru* and Margaret for each other and for his cause would be enough to mask the question of how Margaret herself is to be persuaded of this rightness: by not depicting such persuasion, she has jeopardised her fable's power to demonstrate the very freedom for which new worlds are created" (1989:250-251).

The questions that arise from these critiques allude, on the one hand, to the balance of sexual power within the novel: Does Margaret fade progressively into the background? Is the foreground usurped by the male figures and male consciousness of Maru and Moleka? Does the author fail to grant the oppressed heroine's consciousness the prominence which the opening seems to promise? Such questions might be addressed by considering the extent to which the narrative is focalised through Margaret's consciousness, and the extent to which it is Head's purpose to focus on Margaret. In my reading of the novel Margaret is more important than Maru, and his power is significant largely in relation to her. And yet it is worth remembering Head's comments cited above: that the novel "glorifies *friendship* between a man and a man and friendship between a woman and a woman", and that its major theme is "racial oppression", but "blended and blended" (Vigne 1991:136). The focus of the narrative, in other words, is on not one but four people and the relations between them, and my concern with Margaret (and Metcalf's too, by implication) and the prejudice she endures is far less "blended" than Head's own. The question Daymond poses as to Margaret's apparent lack of choice in marrying Maru can thus be seen as alluding to the broader relations of textual and narrative power in the novel, and her suggestion that the claims of the personal and of the general "may have to be made separately" to communal constructions of identity. It is these sets of relations that I would now like to consider.

At this point it seems worth recalling Shotter's discussion of the constitutive force, for a sense of identity, of "addressivity" and "the attribution of personhood" (1989:143-5).

From our beginning as children, and continuing on into our lives as adults, we are dependent upon being addressed by others for whatever form of autonomy we may achieve; thus, in this sense we can say that, as persons, we are always 'you's', always essentially second-persons. The 'thou' is older than the 'I' in the sense that the capacity to be addressed as a 'you' by others is a preliminary to the ultimate capacity of being able to say 'I' of oneself, of being able to understand the uniqueness of one's own position in relation to others, and to take responsibility for one's own actions (1989:143).

In Chapter 3 I alluded to the developing consciousness of Margaret as an acute literary example of these processes. I would here like to address the questions identified above by considering the discursive relations and particularly the patterns of addressivity in which Margaret is located, in her marriage to Maru, in the first "remote village" in which she lives as a child, and in Dilepe.

6.8 Communal Constructions of the 'You'

Rather like *Too Late the Phalarope*, (and *The Grass is Singing*) the temporal structure of *Maru* is characterised by an initial prolepsis: we are presented at the outset with the resolution to which the plot will come. The emphasis this gives our reading of the novel, then, is rather 'how' things will come to this point, than 'what' will happen. The prolepsis provides Margaret with an achieved relationship of marriage which serves as a point of contrast for her position in the subsequent narration of her past. The marriage is characterised by discursive ambivalence: there are days on which her husband has "vicious, malicious moods when every word was a sharp knife intended to grind and re-grind the same raw wound" (9). If such a mood "was upon him, he would walk in through the door and say: 'I only married you because you were the only woman in the world who did not want to be important. But you are not at all important to me, as I sometimes say you are'" (10). We might recognise one source of the vicious effect of these words as their echoing of the childhood taunts she has suffered. Another is their reminder of the affirmation she received from Moleka soon after her arrival in Dilepe: "He had made her feel as though she were the most important person on earth" (30). By contrast, now, she is at a place "a thousand miles away" (125), and the isolation of the couple, their discursive community of two, emphasises Maru's power to "turn the world to ashes. All the fire and sun disappeared because his words were inwardly lived out in his deeds" (10).

The narrative shift, at the beginning of the novel, from proleptic time present to time past is signalled by the engaging use of 'you'. In a recent article entitled "Nation, Race and Ethnicity: Beyond the Legacy

of Victims", Wicomb reads this use as indicating Head's abandonment of the narrative

to speak directly to the reader. Stepping out of her role as narrator to address a topic beyond the fictive boundaries, she invites us to step outside our role as readers of fiction. We are confronted with the relationship between fiction and the world; we are addressed directly as 'you'. We are reminded: "you were a child yourself", forcing us to recognise ourselves as perpetrators of racial violence. But the sign 'you' also takes another meaning - 'you', the victim: "Children went a little further. They spat on you. They pinched you. They danced a wild jiggle, with the tin cans rattling: 'Bushman! Low Breed! Bastard!' Again the calling out, the articulation marked by the inverted commas of direct speech, a speech event recalled within this speech event where we are addressed by the author. Language as marker of difference is exploited: the pronoun 'you' has meaning only in opposition to and differentiated from 'they' (1992:17).

Wicomb's reading is illuminating in specifying the effects of what Warhol terms engaging narration: "Using narrative interventions that are almost always spoken in earnest, such a narrator addresses a 'you' that is intended to evoke recognition and identification in the person who holds the book and reads, even if the 'you' in the text resembles that person only slightly or not at all" (Warhol 1986:811). It also usefully reminds us of the effect of narrative shift which is to confront us with "the relationship between fiction and the world".

And yet the pronoun 'you' has meaning not only "in opposition to and differentiated from 'they'" but also in relation to Maru's patterns of address. The constitutive force of the first reaction Margaret anticipates from him includes both denigration and repudiation: "you are not at all important to me as I sometimes say you are". The pronominal shift of the endearment, "My sweetheart" (10), however, reveals possessiveness and affirmation which is both powerful and effective. Earlier we have heard that, "Most often she felt quite drunk and mad with happiness and it was not unusual for her to walk around for the whole day with an ecstatic smile on her face" (8). Now the endearment goes some way towards negating the suffering she has endured in the past, "They were the most precious words, if you only knew ..." (10).

And since the past that is then recounted is Margaret's, it seems to me an oversimplification to read this 'you' as that of the writer speaking "directly to the reader". The passage is plainly focalised through Margaret's consciousness: it is as if she is allowed an implicit 'I' in order to render her experiences. The engagement that takes place, then, is far more immediate than that of listening to 'the 'voice' of the writer 'speaking' on Margaret's behalf. Given her race, and the racism of her tormentors, the spheres of addressivity in which she has previously been located are far more vindictive and destructive than her current discursive relations with Maru, and it is part of the function of the 'you' to invoke our identification not with her tormentors but with their victim. The 'you' thus functions, implicitly, in the same way as an inclusively used 'we': it engenders the possibility of shared experience.

It might be worth clarifying at this point why I have insisted on an exact understanding of the narrative use of direct address in the novel. The major contribution of Shotter's formulations has been their recognition of the constitutive force of language and specifically address for the development of identity; their insistence that human communication is ontologically formative. Within a postcolonial analysis of narrative, and specifically in Margaret's case, the constitutive force of address coincides with several cross-cultural interfaces. If "the capacity to be addressed as a 'you' by others is a preliminary to the ultimate capacity of being able to say 'I' of oneself", addressivity is, in her case, particularly definitive of her capacity to say 'I' because she is an orphan with no Masarwa context to draw on for protection against the force of linguistic 'othering', and an 'English' background which exacerbates rather than ameliorates her 'otherness'.

I have claimed earlier that Head's attempt in her life was to escape the terms of *apartheid*. Given this, her location of Margaret at cross-cultural interfaces seems to me to be a specific linguistic and textual investigation of the problem of how to construct an identity in post-*apartheid* terms. The term is, of course, a problematic one: like the term *apartheid*, it invokes that from which it would separate itself. And

yet my use of it here is an advised one, because it seems to me that, though she tried, Head was finally unable to escape the discursive force of *apartheid*. Not to beg the question, however, I would like to respond to the invitation implicit in the 'inclusive' use of 'you', and follow Margaret's endeavours in this direction: by investigating the relations between construction by others and the assertion of identity that takes the verbal form, "I am".

The second discursive context in which we see the effects of addressivity is the remote village in which she lives as a child. The narrative describes these effects thus:

There seemed to be a big hole in the child's mind between the time that she slowly became conscious of her life in the home of the missionaries and conscious of herself as a person. A big hole was there because, unlike other children, she was never able to say: "I am this or that. My parents are this or that." There was no one in later life who did not hesitate to tell her that she was a Bushman, mixed breed, half breed, low breed or bastard (15-16).

The most acute instances of 'othering' are perhaps the direct labelling she endures, "Bushman! Low Breed! Bastard!" (11), whose effect is to make her "aware that something was wrong with her relationship to the world", to give her a "vantage point from which she could observe the behaviour of a persecutor. What did it really mean when another child walked up to her and, looking so angry, said: 'You are just a Bushman?'" (17). I have above referred to the joint English and Masarwa heritage which is encapsulated in her abilities as an artist. It is significantly Margaret Cadmore's intervention which allows her to find answers to this question, "what did it really mean". The code she learns from Margaret Cadmore is not "love of mankind", but "common sense", the recognition that "what is sensible is simpler than what is stupid" (12-13). The label Margaret Cadmore gives the drawing of her mother, "She looks like a Goddess", nevertheless alludes to a heritage quite distinct from the English code of sensible simplicity, as does the predictive observation, "One day you will help your people". If the intermittent repetition of this remark engenders a relationship in which "There was nothing she could ask for, only take what was given", it also creates "a purpose and burden in the child's mind" (17), which is emphasised by the "few

solemnly spoken words" Margaret Cadmore gives her after one particular episode of 'torture': "They are wrong. You will have to live with your appearance for the rest of your life. There is nothing you can do to change it" (18). Since her identity has become thus inescapable, it becomes a matter of survival: "No one by shouting, screaming or spitting could un-Bushman her" (18). Yet the counterpoint to the matter of survival is the underlying claim of the narrative that her people need to be helped, and that they can be helped by the assertion of their heritage which is symbolised in the 'goddess'. The linguistic outcome of this acceptance is an alignment with 'her people', so that when asked, in Dilepe village, "Is your father a white man?", and, more explicitly, "are you a Coloured?" she answers unhesitatingly, "I am a Masarwa" (24,40).

The effects of "addressivity" which she has experienced as a child continue in the community she meets in Dilepe. On the one hand, there is the powerful showdown with the children in her class, after one older boy, coached by the principal, asks her, "Since when is a Bushy a teacher?". The whole class roars, "You are a Bushman ... You are a Bushman" (46). On this occasion, Margaret is rescued from the principal's machinations by Dikeledi. On this occasion too, for the first time, Margaret feels anger. Yet the effect of the encounter is reflected in her response to Maru's demand a little later that her bed be returned: "Were they all saying, like the children: 'You are a Bushman?'" (62). For the most part, however, the effects of addressivity are comparatively positive. The kindly truck driver who brings her to the village responds to the "stricken, helpless look on her face" with a suggestion: "You must not be so afraid of the world, Mistress ... People can't harm you" (22). Maru's spy, Ranko, who follows Dikeledi in falling "head over heels in love" with her (52), uses her forgotten change as an introduction: "You are rich to throw away money, hey?" (51). Her response is to "cry quickly, with one eye" (52), as she frequently does when moved. Such kindness is apparent also in the men sent to recover her bed who find "They had never done anything so dreadful in their lives". The older man in particular is "shame-faced, embarrassed. He was part of the village life and knew about the mutterings concerning the

Masarwa teacher. Even so, she was a teacher of their children and deserved some respect. That was his opinion" (62). His attitude, it seems to me, is part of the potential world which Margaret is able in her paintings to envision; it indicates the gradual discarding of prejudice that is described in Ranko's account a little earlier as being "like the skin of an old snake. It has to be removed bit by bit" (53). His attitude issues in a plan of action: "If you present your case to [Moleka], he will surely let you keep the bed for a day or two more. Come, we will take you to him" (62).

6.9 Personal Relations and Identity

The courage Margaret takes from his attitude enables her to challenge the decision. I have referred above in passing to Moleka's response which makes her feel she is the "most important person on earth", because "He seemed to have said to her silently: 'You see, you don't have to be afraid anymore. First there was one of you. Now there are two of you" (30-31). It is thus Moleka, in the first place, to whom she refers a decision as to whether she should stay in the village or not: "Perhaps she did not care about the bed. She wanted to see him again. Perhaps she would be unable to stand alone against a whole village of people who did not want a Masarwa teacher. She'd see by his face and then make her own decision" (62). As it happens Moleka's face is "like stone and he did not look up. Should she even try to claim that she was human?" (59). This non-response plays a large part in her sense that, despite their love, he will not approach her because she is a Masarwa.

Maru steps forward to exculpate Moleka, and the brief encounter that follows is easily as definitive for her life as Moleka's non-response:

Suddenly she felt as if her throat were being choked. The man was Dikeledi's brother. Dikeledi spoke of him with reverence. And how much had Dikeledi invaded her own life without giving her these awful details - that she, Dikeledi, was related to someone like this who had slaves as part of his hereditary privilege? Did you ever sort out one thing from another with people, especially when you were a no-people? Did you trust intuition, and if you did, how did you explain Moleka and his talking heart - first there was one of you, now there are two of you? (63-64).

Margaret agrees to return the bed, and evidently decides to stay in the village. We should recognise here both the focalisation through her consciousness and the 'inclusive' use of 'you', which involves us in her predicament by invoking the humanity she has in common with us. The focalisation shifts, however, when she walks out, "as if she were facing her death", and the narrative questions, "How was she to know the true size and nature of this sudden adversary? Almost everyone grovelled before him, because of his position. But she had looked down at him, indifferently, from a great height, where she was more than his equal" (64). It is Maru who is left to ponder her effect on him.

The 'social construction' of Margaret's identity thus functions at a personal level, also, within the group of four people linked by the "friendship" to which Head alluded in the comment cited earlier, because in significant ways it is the fact that she is Masarwa that serves to structure their relations with her. After this encounter, Margaret doesn't speak directly to Moleka again. Moleka is contrasted with Maru in his inability to deal with the "voice" which moves in his heart and speaks to him: "But we are surely not strangers, Moleka?", and "Help me. Ought I to go away? It might be that my appearance this time prevents you from recognizing me?" (76). He fails to relate to her successfully in the nondiscursive realm. Although there "was no barrier of the spirit", although he "had talked straight to her heart", there remain "almost insurmountable barriers over the physical" (77-78). Moleka focuses on her legs; more crucial to her "appearance", as she realises, and as Margaret Cadmore has before her, is the fact that she is Masarwa. He is thus set in contrast with Maru who considers her appearance only in regard to its likely effect on other people (70). When, finally, he comes to the point of seeing her as a person "engaged in some activity such as eating or cooking or drinking tea", he is prevented from approaching her by Maru's spy, Ranko, and the threat of death that is Ranko's "terrible message" (79).

Margaret's friendship with Dikeledi is a particularly definitive one. We have seen Dikeledi rescue her from the machinations of the principal. She goes on, now, to offer Margaret her spare bed, and in doing so to

differentiate herself from her brother, and partly to negate his effect: "we live our separate lives and don't always agree. I don't want you to be angry with me". When Margaret doesn't immediately respond, she persists, "You would be small-minded if you did not accept my gift", to which Margaret replies, smiling, "I'm not small-minded" (86). Thus resolved, their relationship confers on Margaret a new identity, since she becomes known amongst the villagers as "the friend of Mistress Dikeledi" (93). Yet it is within this relationship that the effect of her love for Moleka becomes apparent, leading them both into the same pattern of enmity as the men:

They did not know how near they were to killing each other. One of them was the top dog, just then They had only to mention his name and one of them would die. Margaret, who was in the more powerful position at that time, compressed her lips. Any other woman would have said: "I am peaceful because Moleka loves me". But then she was not any other woman. She was a Masarwa. She thought Dikeledi would reply: "Don't be silly. Moleka can't possibly love you. You are a Masarwa and he's ... (114).

Although Dikeledi never explicitly says such words, she thinks them, as we have seen in regard to Margaret's sketch of her (88), and as we see when her brother says he wishes to marry Margaret: "She had to jerk her mind away from the words: 'But you can't marry a Masarwa. Not in your position.' How could she say that, when not so long ago she had said there was no such thing as a Masarwa?" (66). And yet it is in relation to this friendship that Margaret finally achieves a sense of identity that leaves race behind. It also leaves behind their friendship:

A few vital threads of her life had snapped behind her neck and it felt as though she were shrivelling to death, from head to toe There was a point at which she was no longer a Masarwa but the equal in quality and stature of the woman who sat opposite her. It was their equality which had given Dikeledi the unconscious power to knock her down with a sledge-hammer blow. No other woman could have killed her, but she knew Dikeledi through and through and her soul was a towering giant (118).

Margaret manages to get home, where "the remaining threads went snap, snap, snap behind her neck and she half-stumbled, half reeled to the bed and fell on it in a dead faint" (120).

When Ranko offers his first report on Margaret to Maru, he expresses an opinion about the prejudice of the community:

That very afternoon people were looking at each other with shock. They said: "Did you hear? The new mistress says she is a Masarwa." By evening they began to laugh: "The eye is a deceitful thing", they said. "If a Masarwa combs his hair and wears modern dress, he looks just like a Coloured. There is no difference." Those with children at Leseding school debated the matter. They were trying to accustom their hearts to their children being taught by a Masarwa. They said: "Prejudice is like the skin of an old snake. It has to be removed bit by bit" (53).

We have seen this maxim at work in both Moleka's and Dikeledi's relations with Margaret. It is possibly Maru's explicit recognition of Margaret's 'otherness' that enables him to come to terms with it and engender a relationship in which race finally seems to play no part. When he speaks to his sister about marrying Margaret, he says, "People would never get over it, the embarrassment: 'Why, she's only a Masarwa'" (70). He enlists the negative social construction of Margaret, the code of outcasting, in order to disguise his own sense of connection with her. He wonders, "Should he bother to explain to [Dikeledi] the language of the gods who spoke of tomorrow?" (68), the language of the "message" Margaret is later to paint (109). When his sister points out that Margaret may not wish to marry him, he formulates a proposal he might make, which reveals his sense of power, the urgency of his desire, and his determination:

"Dikeledi", he said, deadly serious. "If I came to you one day and said: 'Look here, I have long controlled the affairs of your life. You can't even cry unless I will it. Now, if you don't agree to marry me, you will stare at the moon for the rest of your days.' What would you do?" (72).

Of course this is a putative proposal, but his sense of the 'I-thou' relationship between himself and Margaret is emphasised when he wonders to himself later, "'What will I do if she does not love me as much as I love her?' A terrible reply came from his heart: 'Kill her'" (111).

6.10 Modulations of Medium

In the event he doesn't need to, but we might usefully examine the conversation that persuades her, as I believe it does, to marry and to

love him. When he finds her in the state of shock that follows the news that Moleka and Dikeledi are to marry, he remarks, "She's not dead, Ranko ... It's only her neck that's broken" (122). Seeing her response, he speaks directly to her:

"You think my neck was not broken a thousand times over like that because you did not love me", he said softly. "It's not an ailment you die of. Sometimes you recover in a moment, especially when the cause of it is a worthless man like Moleka. You think I don't know everything? Moleka did not want to approach you because he is such a tribalist. I watched everything, thinking you might see that I loved you. Dikeledi gave me all your pictures, except the last one."

He could quite clearly see the movement of her eyes in the dark and that she had begun listening intently, with surprise.

"I can show you the house you painted some time ago", he said. "Would you like to see it?"

Since she kept silent, he became impatient: "Self pity is something I don't like. Other people have suffered more than you. You must stop this self pity. There's nothing hurting you any more" (123).

Apparent in his second and third sentences is the 'inclusive' use of 'you' which construes her as human and thus invokes the humanity she has in common with him, as well as the experiences they have shared. Apparent in the rest of the passage is the force of his construction of her present state of shock: he calls it "self pity", and she finds this to be true. His reference to the house she has painted in particular serves to invoke the nonverbal communication that has taken place between them: his supplying her with paints, his interpretation of her pictures, the dreams he has projected into her mind and which only disappear when she paints them (103-104), and the companionship they offer him "between the present and the time when he was ready to live a different life" (105). He says to her before they leave, "We used to dream the same dreams. That was how I knew you would love me in the end" (124). Her response is an acknowledgement: "He was not just anything but some kind of strange, sweet music you could hear over and over again. She was beginning to listen. It was not strange. She had heard it before" (124). Indeed she has painted it into the prophetic vision of her pictures: when Maru looks at them, "It was as though he had fallen upon a kind of music that would never grow stale on the ear but would add continually to the awakening perfection in his own heart" (107).

Our investigation of Margaret's identity thus far has focused on the discursive relations in which she is located, in her marriage to Maru, in her childhood in a remote village, and in the communal and personal relations she finds in Dilepe. There is a significant context for these discursive relations, however, in the nonverbal communication which has been identified above. Although Moleka is uncertain how to deal with the voices in his heart, he also has "a feeling that he constantly held his heart against hers, or his mouth against hers, and that all human communication had now become superfluous and a sacrilege" (77). When Maru sends an assortment of art materials to Margaret she leaves behind the world of "coherent human communications" and enters an artistic 'fugue' which lasts two days (100). The pictures she paints are the dreams he has projected into her mind, and, in the proleptic opening section which follows her marriage to him, his dreams of an injured Moleka cause her to weep (8-9).

This nonverbal context posits a unique connection between "words" and "deeds" (10), "dreams" and "reality" (7), and helps to locate the criticism of MacKenzie, Daymond and Metcalf noted above. Although the discursive context is crucial for the construction and definition of Margaret's identity, there is a point at which she ceases to be "a Masarwa" and becomes the artist, the goddess, the woman, who responds to Maru's dreams and music. There is a point, as several critics have shown, at which the novel shifts into the realm of fable, of romance, of myth and legend, which draws on African history but is not constrained by a simple relation to its reality. This shift has important implications. While, in my view, the discursive encounter between Margaret and Maru towards the end of the novel does dramatise his 'persuasion' of her, the further question we might ask is, If the novel shifts into fable, can we reasonably expect to see a 'realistic' exercise of choice on her part? if the relations between them are substantially nondiscursive, can we expect to witness his persuasion of her? On the other hand, it should be apparent from my insistence on the communal construction of identity that the claims of "the personal and the general" cannot be "made separately", and although my emphasis has

been on the discursive, there seems little reason why they should not be made together within the nondiscursive realm as well. Metcalf's sense that "the foreground is usurped by the male figures and male consciousness of Maru and Moleka" seems to me to be inaccurate on two counts: first that we need to recognise the foursome with whom Head is concerned in this novel, and second that if Margaret's identity begins by taking the discursive form of saying "I am" Masarwa, it moves on to a point where she is "no longer a Masarwa but the equal in quality and stature" of Dikeledi. If such quality and stature takes the mythic form of a recognition of the 'goddess' within her, the relocation of identity out of the domain of realism is surely not a fading into the background, nor a failure of prominence.

In directing the question of identity to a recognition of the nondiscursive realm, furthermore, we find a point of entry to the problematic nature of the textual relations in which Margaret is located, and specifically the nature of the connection between her as character and Head as writer. We might gain a perspective for this discussion if we recall the character-writer relations in the two previous case studies. In regard to the first of these, I speculated that Mhudi's response to the Barolong man narrating her would follow similar patterns of courtesy as those which marked her first conversation with Ra-Thaga. Both the control she is given over her communication, and the voice with which she is equipped and which she uses to strong effect, ensure that Mhudi registers the tensions and transitions that characterise Plaatje's own narrative endeavour. Her acceptance of the narration of her story is thus associated with her 'ethnographic closeness' to Plaatje, on the one hand, and with the mutually transitional nature of their allegiance to an oral culture. In regard to the second case study, I sought to demonstrate that the construction of Pieter as tragic hero, and, indeed, the construction of the narrative as a tragedy, is predicated upon the silence of Stephanie. On the one hand, this prevents her from telling her story or having it told. On the other hand it protects her from recuperation, like Pieter, into a moral scrutiny of the Immorality Act; it enables her intentionality to escape discursive containment. In Margaret's case, the

narrative purpose which she is, as it were, assigned is to 'save her people'. Her success in doing so should be seen as taking place at the implicit level of "making purposes possible"; as residing, in significant ways, in the constitutive force of her 'example, within the interrelated spheres of the personal and the political. It should also be seen as taking place within the broader and more significant narrative function of investigating the possibilities of identity in post-apartheid terms.

I referred at the outset of this chapter to Watts's suggestion that we recognise the "hybrid form" of "autobiography as novel" in *Maru*. Watts elaborates,

The book is a passionate plea on behalf of the San tribe, long denigrated in Botswana and other parts of Southern Africa as 'bushmen', and reviled for their backwardness and their refusal to accept the impositions of so-called western civilisation. But the instances of prejudice which the writer draws upon are experiences of her own, as another kind of outcast in African society - a 'coloured'. In South Africa the 'coloured', the child of African and white, for all the disadvantages this brings in an apartheid society, at least belongs to a group and has a place. In Botswana, where tribes survive more or less intact, the 'coloured' is the despised outsider, only a little higher in the social scale than the San or Basarwa. Thus the younger Margaret Cadmore's experiences as a child, a student and a young teacher mirror the author's own (1989:139).

Although in principle Watts's comments are sound, there are two details which need clarifying. The first is that, despite longstanding denigration, the Masarwa do not necessarily share external perceptions of themselves as despicable outsiders, as Geurts (1986) has asserted:

Head describes the souls of the San as being shut in a "small, dark airless room ... for a long time". After reading Lee's work on the San I do not believe that they see themselves in such a downtrodden, oppressed way. Their identity as an ethnic group reflects a much more positive self-image. I might even say that they see themselves as the only truly free, spirited people. Head's narrative, in this particular passage, seems to be adopting the Tswana's negative attitude towards the San and it should not be mistakenly projected on to the San as their own self-image (1986:52n).

My point is not that Head got the Masarwa wrong, rather that her depiction of Margaret as a member of this tribe is informed by a quite specific narrative purpose. Her sense of herself is derived both from the negative constructions of racism and hostility and the positive recognition of her heritage of people with whom she has significant relationships.

The second detail is that, although 'coloured' by Watts's definition, Head neither belonged to a "group" nor had a "place", as Gardner has pointed out: "The 'Coloured' people form a community which has evolved its own characteristic language-use and cultural customs, especially in the Western Cape. Bessie Head does not speak Afrikaans fluently and did not grow up in a 'Coloured' community", having been rejected after a week by prospective white foster parents as being "too black", and being relocated from her 'coloured' foster home to an orphanage at the age of thirteen (Gardner 1986a:9).

For these reasons it seems more accurate to say that, rather than "mirror" her own experiences in her character, Head selected and foregrounded aspects she deemed relevant. A specific example of this is the classroom attack on Margaret instigated by the principal. In a letter to Randolph Vigne dated 27 October 1965, Head refers to an incident which Vigne reads as the "germ of *Maru*". She says:

There is a man here, the principal of our school - he sort of thought he could get started to sleep with me - just like a frenzied itch but as a woman I mean nothing - when he couldn't get rid of the itch he just turned on me - right to the point of manhandling me in front of the kids and twisting my arm. I had to bite his hand to let him let go. This happened Monday 25/10/65. I fled away from the school, screaming. He went and called the police - that I had gone out of my mind. They came to my home and took me to the charge office (Vigne 1991:10).

If Vigne is correct in taking this as the basis of a fictional rendition in *Maru*, it is worth noting which aspects were left out and which details were changed. Although, in Margaret's experience, the principal instigates the attack, he is not present, and a clear shift has taken place in the fiction from sexual to racial harassment. The outcome for

Margaret is far less damaging than it was for Head, who had no Dikeledi to intervene on her behalf - the charge of insanity being one that was with her for much of her life (as well as after her death, as we have seen). Of course other differences between Head and Margaret might be noted (Margaret is extremely thin; she is artistically gifted), but the example should suffice to demonstrate how much care we need to take in reading the character as a textualisation of the self of the writer, hence to what extent we need to recognise Margaret as a subject in her own right.

In order to do so we might consider again the discursive forms that the narrative relation can take. Recalling the insight from Todorov that to say 'I' is always to represent oneself, we might recognise in autobiography the form I-'I', and in third-person fictional narration the form I-'she'. In the autobiographic novel, as Watts describes it, the 'she' is in fact a third-person representation of the self, a closer representation of the self than we would normally assume character to be. Yet if it is generally true that to emphasise the autobiographic element is to privilege the 'I', it has been my endeavour, in this reading of *Maru*, to examine in some depth the construction of the character as 'you' by the community and the personal relationships in which she is located. In doing so I have drawn attention to the ways in which Margaret is constructed by the discursive relations that exist within the text and the ways in which she internalises, resists and transcends them. As I have attempted to show, however, her achievement of textual subjectivity is one that takes place beyond the discursive realm, and so it is that much more likely to elude analysis. And yet we should not assume from this that it is not there.

6.11 Silence, Narration and Cultural Translation

It has been my insistence, in this dissertation, that a postcolonial theorisation of cross-culturality in the novel has to retain the subjectivity of character, and hence that the textualisation of character must be seen as existing in tension with the humanity of character. Evidence of this tension, I have claimed, is the silence of the character as a volitional response to narration. The reading of

Margaret offered in this chapter has focused on the ways in which the narrative purpose specified for her, to 'help her people', is intrinsically related to her identity, and is revealed in her marriage to a chief of the people who have oppressed her people. The complexity with which this reading has had to deal has been the fact that the relationship between them is in large measure a nondiscursive one.

It is generally true of the novel, I think, that dialogue is minimal, and it is particularly true of Margaret, whose verbal contact with others is both rare and restricted. Lacking "weapons of words or personality" she has grown up with only a "permanent silence" to oppose to the torments she endures (17). This silence produces a "brilliant student", yet the brilliance is "based entirely on social isolation and lack of communication with others" (19). It is a pattern which continues in Dilepe: "She was not part of it and belonged nowhere. In fact, so quiet and insignificant were her movements that the people of Dilepe village almost forgot that there was such a thing as a Masarwa teacher" (93). It is this loneliness that renders "precious" the personal contact with Dikeledi, Moleka and Maru, yet even to the two men she is known as "that silent, isolated person on the old library hill" (106). Her silence is in fact metonymic of the silence of her people, as Maru comes to recognise: "for who knew how long, people like her had lived faceless, voiceless, almost nameless in the country" (108).

It is, nevertheless, a silence which Margaret transcends in two ways. In the first place, her declaration, "I am a Masarwa" challenges the established hierarchies of prejudice: "if the white man thought that Asians were a low, filthy nation, Asians could still smile with relief - at least, they were not Africans. And if the white man thought Africans were a low, filthy nation, Africans in Southern Africa could still smile - at least they were not Bushmen" (11). Her challenge takes a dual form. On the one hand, she exemplifies 'a Bushman' who is plainly neither "low" nor "filthy", and hence contradicts accepted 'truths'. On the other hand, her explicit assertion of her identity evinces pride which contradicts the process of othering which underlies the hierarchy. We see the effects of this challenge in the response of the principal,

Pete, to whom she has declared, "I am a Masarwa". His first reaction is shock, "so great that he almost jumped into the air" (40). Later in conversation he ruminates:

"There's a real mystery about the one at the school They don't look you in the face and say, 'I am a Masarwa'. It was like a slap in the face. The statement was so final, as though she did not want to be anything else. I had given her a loophole. Coloureds are just trash, but at least she could pass as one. It would have saved us an awful lot of bother" (44).

Her insistence on speaking her identity, her refusal to accept the "loophole", either from him or from Dikeledi before him, is in stark contrast to the silence she normally maintains about herself, and into which she returns.

In the second place, the only extended speech she makes is her description to Dikeledi of the inspiration for the three paintings of the dream sequence. Indeed, it seems to me that the failure of the medium of language to 'overcome' her alienness for other people, including, finally, Dikeledi and Moleka, goes some way towards explaining the narrative shift to new expressive media. The 'voice' she achieves is a paradoxically nondiscursive one: her communication with both Maru and Moleka takes the form of dreams, painting, music, mutual physical sensation - communication which abrogates human language. Her transformation of the old library into a studio registers the ways in which art comes to inhabit the place where words and texts once were, the ways in which it generates a new medium of its own. In the terms which I have defined, this is silence, yet it is silence that arises because language cannot renounce its categories. (We might be reminded here of Asad's comments about the intransigence of the target medium in cultural translation.) Margaret herself is "hardly African or anything but something new and universal, a type of personality that would be unable to fit into a definition of something as narrow as a tribe or race or nation" (16). If her paintings represent herself, and her people, they also represent a new future which carries a message to Maru's heart: "Look! Don't you see! We are the people who have the strength to build a new world! And his heart agreed" (108). It is a

message and an agreement which constitute the "very intangible substance" on which he makes his "bold moves" (107). The communication in fact works: because Maru is able to respond to it, to 'translate' its message, and to act upon it.

The effacement of the linguistic domain and its boundaries functions at the narrative level as well: one of the features of the narrative is that cultural interfaces are not represented in linguistic terms. The medium of the novel is English and there seem to me very few indications within it that characters are not speaking English to one another. One instance occurs in the opening section when Maru rebukes Ranko for 'breaking up clods': "Sudden, sharp words and the mention of his name threw him into confusion. Ranko meant 'big nose' in Setswana, and when had people not had vegetable garden soil raked in a fancy way?" (6). Such explicit references to cross-culturality as do occur are directed to the relations between Batswana and Masarwa: for example, the "expressions of disgust on the faces of the Batswana nurses as they wash the dead woman's body for burial" (14), the Bushmen as the "slaves and downtrodden dogs of the Batswana" (18), and "The Batswana [who] thought they were safer than the white man" (109). For the most part, the narrative refers not to racial categories but to the generic "people", and even the concluding remarks about prejudice are directed towards "People like the Batswana" (127, my emphasis). In a substantial way, the cross-culturality in the novel is encapsulated in the figure of Margaret, and what it means to be Masarwa within Tswana society.

The effacement or elision of linguistic difference is related, I believe, to the fact that Head did not know African languages, and that her access to African culture and traditions took place through the medium of English. It is also possibly related to her tenuous position within Botswanan society, which might have moderated an explicit attack on the racism of the Batswana. It seems to me, however, to be related most substantially to a narrative attempt to circumvent the need for translation. We might more easily recognise the narrative choice involved in this elision if we recall, in relation to the Gardner-Dovey debate, Head's resistance to being labelled or construed in *apartheid*

terms. Her comment about herself was, "I have always been just me, with no frame of reference to anything beyond myself". The statement can be recognised as reflecting a sense of achieved identity like Margaret's recognition that no one can "un-Bushman" her. Dovey speaks of this assertion as revealing "the potential for resistance in that which may be considered *unnameable* in terms of the system: Head is not white, not black, not feminist, not revolutionary" (1989a:34). In this context, we might also identify choice in the narrative refusal to acknowledge linguistically that cultural translation is taking place.

It has been my insistence, on the other hand, that these negative attributes ("not white, not black, not feminist, not revolutionary") constitute no identity at all, since identity is by nature socially constructed. My investigation of the figure of Margaret was thus undertaken in order to address the autobiographic question: Is Margaret a 'story' that Head is telling about herself? We might find an answer to this question in the reply that Margaret gives when asked whether her father is a white man, and whether she is Coloured: "I am a Masarwa". Margaret is differentiated from Head in this ability to define herself. She is also differentiated from Head in her ability to take the social terms of identity and make them her own, to transform them into something personally meaningful so that they are expressive of herself. It is one of the effects of her love for Moleka that she goes beyond this identity to be "no longer a Masarwa but the equal in quality and stature" of, effectively, anyone. She renounces the allegiances which have helped her to survive, and takes on a human rather than a tribal identity.

And yet processes of cultural translation clearly are taking place in the novel, not least in the figure of Margaret herself. If her primary narrative function is an investigation of the possibilities of identity at racial, cultural and political interfaces, she stands as a unique instance of postcoloniality. Born Masarwa, she is 'translated' into English: it is perhaps one of the profoundest ironies of the novel that the medium in which she asserts her tribal identity should be English, that she 'becomes Masarwa' in English. Yet if it is in and through

English that she is able to transform the "one thing left her", the pejorative term, into an identity that expresses herself, its discursive categories are finally too limited, too inflexible to accommodate her humanity. The 'voice' she achieves is displaced out of the discursive realm: it is through love for Moleka that she is able to recognise herself, it is through her art and her marriage to Maru that she is able to 'represent' her people. Since Maru is able to 'translate' the message of her pictures into words, she shifts from being defined, as 'you', to defining, through her painting: "You see, it is I and my tribe who possess the true vitality in this country" (109). The expressive and communicative mode which she deploys is thus one which includes but is not contained by language.

Head's writing of Margaret plainly reflects a cultural translation: of herself as 'Coloured' into Margaret as Masarwa. I have, above, recognised the use of 'you' as an act of engagement, as a mode of approach to the consciousness of Margaret, as the narrator's attempt to see things from her point of view. We might note here that this use also reflects Margaret's attempt to conceptualise herself in ways that are apprehensible to a putative listener. In this way the 'you' stands as a point of contact between narrator and character. The introduction to the condition of being Masarwa thus takes place in the context of the problems of representing the experience of being marginal, to those who are not. Head's choice of Masarwa as the tribal origin of her central character is thus a deliberate extremisation of her own experiences of racial prejudice within Botswana and South African society. Thus Margaret cannot simply be seen as an identification and projection of Head: she is offered as a model that leaves *apartheid* in Southern Africa behind.

The question that remains is, Does Margaret deploy silence as an act of resistance to being narrated? Certainly as a child she resists the negative constructions of labelling, maintaining silence about herself because she recognises that there is no 'story' beyond or beneath the label. She thus resists having 'her' story commandeered by the nasty children, just as she will later resist the category 'Coloured' as one

in which she might be contained. It seems to me, however, that in substantial ways the novel is her story: in the fact of her existence within it, in her representation of her people, in the fact that her 'voice' is not restricted to the discursive realm but can develop a medium of its own. If it is one of the functions of the narrative to orchestrate the relations that exist between Head and her, the task is surely nothing like the protective vindication extended by Dovey to Head herself, nor, indeed, the biographic contest entailed in Gardner's 'rewriting' of Head. If Margaret's speech is substantially silenced within the narrative, it is surely significant that her 'voice' finds other ways of expressing itself. From her initial position as an icon, she becomes an iconoclast by 'inhabiting' the icon and so destroying its constitutive force. The further step she takes, however, is to appropriate the iconic mode and become herself a representer and envisioner of reality.

If Margaret stands as a 'translation' of Head's identity into terms that leave *apartheid* behind, her art offers reflexive answers to Head who writes her. Positioned as she is at the textual interface, she also generates interfaces of her own: between words and art, between art and dreams and music, between the nondiscursive realm and the construction of identity.

For these reasons, the case study of the novel *Maru* might be recognised as having constituted the severest test to my model of narration as cultural translation, since this model so clearly locates narration within the discursive realm. Construed as she is as an educated, literate, and artistically gifted person, Margaret is equipped with an ability to express herself not only in words and in silence, but also in aesthetic, intuitive and metaphysical ways; ways which go beyond my own discussion of silence as a linguistic and a cultural phenomenon. If the discursive realm has proved finally inadequate for a complete discussion of 'silence' within the novel, the most important focus of this case study has nevertheless been its consideration of the question of identity. In the marginality of their respective communal positionings, both the writer, Head, and her central woman character, Margaret,

demonstrate the ways in which racial, cultural and political interfaces complicate communal and personal addressivity and attributions of personhood, and the ways in which such constructions of identity can be accepted, resisted and transcended. It is thus in their concatenation of racial origins, education into first-language use of English, and resistance to the alienating categories of *apartheid* that both Head and Margaret stand as instances of postcoloniality, and Margaret in particular an instance of post-*apartheid* identity.

A lot can be said about silence; a lot has been said. Having come to the end of this dissertation, it is perhaps time to essay some evaluations. The problem with which the last chapter concluded is in some ways exemplary. Given the exploratory nature of this study, it has ranged into and out of a number of fields, carrying off the kind of conceptual "loot" that Conrad collected in Africa, and not finding a domicile for intensive investigations or applications of particular theoretical lines. Autobiography, linguistics, translation theory, ethnography, narrative, feminism, travel writing, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and, dare I call it, 'identity theory' ... these are all areas that have been new to me, and which I would like to visit again. The model of narrative as cultural translation has, I think, been fairly tested; not least by its 'translation' of this range of 'cultures' and discourses into a theory of silence.

I have few regrets. One of the effects of these theoretical travels has been to open up the spaces so thoroughly colonised by postmodern literary theory, whose decline has been delineated so nicely by Nash in his "Slaughtering the Subject: Literature's Assault upon Narrative". New theoretical resources have been found, and the different issues and problems with which other spheres grapple have provided instructive and stimulating models for addressing our own. The grounding of theory in an address to the needs of our context remains an important manoeuvre, although less radically new than when I first formulated it as a requirement for my thesis. Language will always be related to literature, in more and less productive ways, and it does seem a good time for literature to pay more attention to its discursive and dialogic roots. The attempt to deal with culture, and particularly cross-culturality, is an important innovation because it presents ways of envisioning ourselves out of the hegemonic impasse of "conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group 'purity'" that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin denounce (1989:36). If the meeting place for cultures as well as for theories becomes "the civil imaginary, the

cultural space, the *kgotla*", as Voss (1992) has lately suggested, then perhaps narrative will learn to respect the silences that would resist it.

There are, of course, many areas remaining to be explored: most prominent amongst them, perhaps, is an intensive study of silence in 'the new South Africa', in what is beginning to be the post-*apartheid* era. And yet I would be reluctant to lose the regional perspective, and so the literature of other countries and of other languages should provide an important comparative context. The intensive and extensive study of individual texts is bound to become an act of validation if not reclamation: the comparative study of the figure of the black woman could, of course, be extended to the figure of the black man, or the white man or woman. Yet even this consideration has covered substantial ground in the textual relations within the culture of the texts, the relations between community, identity and narration. Positioning my model in terms of 'local' debates has served to test its application in the critical as well as the textual sphere.

My own home base supplies a vantage point from which to survey the ground, and directs my narrative accountability: the theory this conceptual exploration has brought back is necessarily translated into the terms of my specific context and the most immediate interface I face, that is, teaching black students English in English. It is instructive in its insistence on the importance of the subject, whose autonomy can very readily be expressed in silence. If the problem of silence has thus become a crucial category in terms of which I structure my own theoretical context, I hope this study has demonstrated why I consider its realm of application much more extensive as well.

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