INTRODUCTION

1. “Extradiegetic” and “diegetic” are generally accepted narratological terms defined by Gérard Genette (Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method, 228). Genette, however, calls the story-within-a-story the “metadiegetic” level, a label that I, like Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, find counterintuitive, since it suggests a transcendence over the diegesis. “Hypodiegetic,” which Rimmon-Kenan inherits from Mieke Bal, implies “a level ‘below’ another level of diegesis” (Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative, 92). See discussion of topographical mappings below.

2. The plot level is what Mieke Bal calls “fabula” (as versus “story” and “text”) and what Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan calls “story” (as vs. “text” and “narration”), a schema that corresponds to Genette’s “histoire,” “récit,” and “narration” (see Bal, Narratology, 5–8; Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative, 3).

3. The process I describe, though not the particular violence, is prefigured in what Teresa de Lauretis describes as narrative theory’s “methodological shift away from the notion of structure and toward a notion of process.” But although de Lauretis claims that narrative theory in general now “seeks to understand . . . the nature of the structuring and destructuring, even destructive, processes at work in textual and semiotic production,” she also remarks that theorists “fail to see that subjectivity is engaged in the cogs of narrative and indeed constituted in the relation of narrative, meaning, and desire” (105–6). One of my key points here is that narrative’s “structuring and destructuring, even destructive, processes” are precisely what constitutes the subject.

4. At first glance, the dynamic I am outlining might appear to resemble Tzvetan Todorov’s analysis of “the grammar of narrative”: the oscillation between construction and deconstruction might be heard as an echo of Todorov’s alternation between “equilibrium” and “disequilibrium.” But not only are Todorov’s terms descriptions of plot alone (Narrative “episodes,” says Todorov, either describe one of these states or trace the passage between them) (Poetics 111); they also name static elements rather than the perpetual motion of building and undermining I wish to emphasize—and are thus entirely compatible with an essentialist view of the subject. Jurij Lotman offers another sort of plot-level equivalent of the cycle I outline, as his mythological hero repeats (potentially endlessly) a chain of two functions: “entry into a closed space [a diegetic level?]—emergence from it.” In a further parallel to the subject-construction/deconstruction cycle, Lotman claims that entry into the closed space “is interpreted . . . as ‘death,’ ‘conception,’ ‘return home’ and so on; moreover all these acts are thought of as mutually identical” (Lotman 168).

5. This second model, however, seems to be one of the instances in which such narratologists as Mieke Bal and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan have revised Genette, for whom
“any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed” (Genette, Narrative Discourse, 228, emphasis mine; see, for the opposing hierarchy, Bal, Narratology, 140 and Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative, 91).

6. It may or may not be instructive to note that this topographical map and the inverted one envisioned by Genette correspond to the two maps one might derive from depth models of the subject. On the one hand, the very notion of “depth,” along with our wonted metaphors for the “true” or “inner” self—our essence, core, heart—paints a picture of the innermost circle as deepest, the opposite of superficial. On the other hand, that “level” would also be the most real, the least fictive, and so the “highest” ontologically. I’m not sure what to make of the optical illusion that results from looking at the cone as pointing simultaneously, or alternately, downward and upward, and, for what it’s worth, I stick with the downward-pointing model throughout, using “up” and “out” interchangeably, and “down” as coincident with “in.”

7. Peter Rabinowitz’s taxonomy of audiences, on which I rely for certain characterizations of my “extradiegetic reader” and “diegetic reader,” includes: the actual audience; the authorial audience, which is the audience the author thinks s/he is addressing (and which we try to join); the narrative audience, the one the narrator thinks s/he is addressing (which we pretend to join); and the ideal narrative audience, the one the narrator wishes s/he were addressing—the one that believes everything s/he says. I return to “reader” rather than “audience” as one way of indicating the active nature of a reader who participates in constructing meaning, rather than merely “discovering” it, as Rabinowitz’s audiences do. In order to emphasize the construction of these readers at various levels without attributing absolute control to the intentions of implied author or narrator, I label my readers for their levels rather than their corresponding “authors.” Of course, not only will some types of metalepsis blur these distinctions; the distinctions will already have been troubled by the assumptions of constructionism: if all levels of reader are constructions, what does it mean for one construction to “try” or “pretend” to be another construction? By the same token, the diegetic reader may be as capable of having (emotional, intellectual, ethical) responses as the extratextual reader—and so the “depth” and “surface” of projector and projection will already have lost some of their meaning. (See Rabinowitz 126–29.)

8. In practice, I find that it’s often difficult to separate the ETR from the EDR when discussing effects and responses. As Rabinowitz explains, “most novelists are concerned with being read and hence try to minimize the distance between the actual and authorial audiences.” Indeed, “the reader’s act of joining the authorial audience is not really a pretense in the same way that joining the narrative audience is. As good readers, we usually try to become the authorial audience as much as possible” (Rabinowitz 126, 130). So while, for purposes of clarity, I easily refer to the DR as “she,” although I try to use “he” for the EDR, I frequently slide into the “we” that I use to designate the ETR.

9. Just to complete the taxonomy, I shall call the internal reader-character the dramatized reader.

10. Beyond the first hypodiegesis, such embeddings cause terminological awkwardness; where necessary, I have simply appended more “hypo”s to indicate lower levels—so hypohypodiegetic or H²D, hypo-hypo-hypodiegetic or H³D, etc.

11. Corroborating my understanding of modernism, Linda Hutcheon argues that “its
focus was on the self seeking integration amidst fragmentation. In other words, its (for many, defining) focus on subjectivity was still within the dominant humanist framework, though the obsessive search for wholeness itself suggests the beginnings of what would be a more radical postmodern questioning” (Hutcheon 108).

12. Significantly, Vieth’s wording is strikingly similar to that used by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in describing Christine Brooke-Rose’s Thru (see chapter 2).

13. Fielding, in fact, seems to invite some rather postmodern readings. In a thought-provoking article, for example, Susan McNamara concludes that “because the internal story of Tom Jones depicts a reality created out of fictions, the reader turns to the external reality, if Fielding is successful, with a heightened suspicion that this reality also is composed of fictions. . . . The reader can only oscillate between the fiction-reality which is Tom Jones and the reality-fiction which Fielding takes to be life” (McNamara 383). In McNamara’s formulation, Fielding’s reader is subject to a perpetual undermining of reality not unlike that described by Christine Brooke-Rose; this reader is made to participate in both a game “and a serious exercise in learning to tolerate the alternation between doubt and affirmation of one’s reality” (374). S/he thus comes away with “the sensation that the fictional is swallowing up the real” (378), and an understanding that reality and fiction, both of which are “simultaneously convincing and elusive,” are “inextricably joined . . . in an infinitely regressive relationship” (382).

14. On postmodern fiction’s tendency toward metalepsis, see Musarra 216–17 and McHale, Postmodernist, 222–27.

15. As Christine Brooke-Rose argues similarly in A Rhetoric of the Unreal, the rapid collapse of the systems by which we make sense of reality leads to a blurring of the boundaries between real and unreal (10).

16. In this configuration, Freudian psychoanalysis may be reduced to one of many signifying systems by which we construct “selves.”

17. Whereas Rimmon-Kenan’s project requires a diachronic approach, as she follows representation and subjectivity from modernist humanism through postmodern constructionism to what she sees as a countermovement within the postmodern, mine rests on a more synchronic examination, a snapshot of the constructionist “moment.” This focus allows me to delve into the literary manifestations of constructionism, to discern their modus operandi, and to spin out their possible ramifications for the world beyond novels (if, theoretically, never beyond textuality itself). In her drive toward a reinstatement of representation and a rehumanization of subjectivity, Rimmon-Kenan seems to cast a wider net than I claim to do—to work both with broader subject matter (representation as well as subjectivity) and more numerous narrative devices (“undecidability concerning the narrator’s identity and structural position vis-à-vis the events narrated,” plus “multiplication” of narrative levels and “analogies among them” as well as metalepsis [Glance 4]). But although I try to focus in on metalepsis specifically and its role in the construction of the subject, I cannot keep these other related topics and devices entirely out of the picture, and Rimmon-Kenan’s argument raises some important issues for my own. For example, in order to have room to play with metalepsis, a novelist must multiply narrative levels, which, just by the nature of the beast, seem to breed analogies among themselves. At times I find myself exploring the intimate partnership between the building and the breaching of narrative boundaries, and indeed, the multiplication contributes to the cyclical or oscillating movement that I contrast with narrative’s teleological drive. Moreover, the unde-
cidability concerning the narrator’s identity and structural position vis-à-vis the events narrated is, at least in part, an effect of the games with narrative levels; it is certainly key in many of the texts I examine. On the other hand, my concerns lead me to extend this interest in undecidable identities to that of the reader. For whereas Rimmon-Kenan, in keeping with her aim of reclaiming some kind of higher or even final authority, attends primarily to the process of narration and to its agent, the narrator, I, in my effort to capture and explore the constructionist moment, attend more to the process of subject construction and its simultaneous agent and object, the reader.

18. Gabriele Schwab touches on something resembling this transformative effect when she argues that if a text, like Beckett’s The Unnamable, could insist we find new ways of “dealing with and retaining otherness” than our usual mode of mediating it through familiar patterns, then “the text would no longer be reduced to the status of a passive object used to confirm what we already assume about subjectivity in general. Reading would instead become an encounter with a true literary subject—character and text—able to challenge and transform our own subjectivity” (Schwab 168).

19. Moreover, if we expand the definition of metalepsis, as Brooke-Rose does, to include intertextuality and Bakhtinian heteroglossia (Rhetoric of the Unreal 334–35), we may form a broader conception of the way in which reality is “made of” language(s).

20. See Marcus, Butler, and my chapter 3.

21. Andrew Gibson argues that “the concept of narrative levels . . . involves a set of relations specifically implying domination and subordination. . . . The hypodiegetic narrative serves a certain purpose established by the diegetic narrative. We might rechristen them ‘master narrative’ and ‘servant narrative,’ except for the fact that, at the extradiegetic level, the master narrative is mastered itself. But here again the structure of the relationship between the two levels is the same as that between diegesis and hypodiegesis. For narratology, it is a relationship predicated on certain modes of control or of exerting power” (Gibson 216). De Lauretis describes “the work of narrative” as “a mapping of differences, and specifically, first and foremost, of sexual difference into each text,” a process whose effect, she says, is to “constrain” readers to one of two positions: “male-hero-human, on the side of the subject; and female-obstacle-space, on the other” (de Lauretis 121). Although de Lauretis is concerned here with the positioning of readers rather than with narrative’s internal subjects, she clearly sees narrative as establishing a hierarchy; moreover, she goes on to describe the positioning of the female reader as a sadistic act. Although Judith Roof, for her part, emphasizes various theories’ representation of narrative’s binary structure as “a marriage” rather than a hierarchy, she argues that our very definitions of narrative predetermine individual narratives’ reproduction of binary systems. “If narrative is understood as a structure and if structure is inevitably binary, then binary logic is bound to repeat itself in definitions of narrative. And if all attempts to define narrative are themselves finally also narrative, narrative cannot be defined except through its own binary terms” (Roof 55–56, 47–48).

22. “I only hope that nothing will happen to us,” says Orlick. “I don’t think the like of this has been done before” (O’Brien 301).

23. In Rabinowitz’s terms, these would be more layers of narrative audiences; Rabinowitz notes that “more complex works—novels-within-novels, novels with frames, epistolary novels, novels addressed to internal characters, novels with multiple narrators, certain ironic novels—may appear to have more than four [audiences], but these are only variations of these basic forms” (Rabinowitz 125–26). In a footnote on the possibility of
infinite regress in the audiences of *Pale Fire*, he labels the inner levels “Narrative Audience 2” and “Narrative Audience 3” (140).

24. Moreover, just as a visceral reaction to physical violence leads to an emotional and even moral response, the impact of intellectual confusion and destabilization, if it is powerful enough, will have psychological, emotional, ethical, and political repercussions.

25. “Metalepsis, the violation of ontological boundaries, is a model or mirror of love” and “aggression may be an integral part of the erotic relation. Postmodernist representations of sadomasochism function as models of the ‘sadistic’ relation between the text and reader” (McHale, *Postmodernist*, 226).

26. In *Come as You Are*, Judith Roof “track[s] this end fixation as it derives from our very sense of narrative itself and as it appears insidiously to determine narrative’s dynamic and our understanding of it” (Roof xxxiii). Roof exposes the teleological obsession of narrative theory as an ideologically informed drive toward a heterosexual norm and reproduction, and she wants to find “ways of shifting the very understanding of story” (xxv), beginning with the “radicality” of seeing “the patterns in narrative that have never counted because they did not lead to closure or production”—i.e., “the repetitions, accruals, alternations, and nonsense of maybe never getting there,” all of which (“the middle”) Roof paints as the territory of the perverse, the homosexual, and specifically the lesbian. Insofar as the drive toward the end suppresses those sexualities that the dominant ideology deems perverse, it might conceivably be seen as violent or sadistic, but Roof does not use such terms; nor does she seem to discern any violence in narrative’s repetitive middle.

27. De Lauretis glances at Lotman’s alternative text-generating mechanism, through which “human life itself is not seen as enclosed between birth and death, but as a recurrent, self-repeating cycle” (de Lauretis 116–17), but she sees Western narratives primarily as manifestations of the “plot-text” mechanism—requiring linear, temporal successions of events.

28. Like theorists of narrative sadism and violence, theorists of narrative subjectivity have tended to assume a depth-model subject. For instance, Mieke Bal, in her 1984 essay “‘The Rhetoric of Subjectivity,’” focuses on the relations among the three layers of narrative (which she labels “fabula,” “story,” and “text”) and the subjects of each (“actor,” “focalizer,” and “narrator”) in formulating a notion of narrative subjectivity whose tripartite structure is compatible with the depth model of psychoanalysis. Gabriele Schwab’s *Subjects Without Selves* does concern itself with the postmodern crisis in subjectivity and remains aware of “how the subject is intertwined with other things, such as language, culture, and the politics and aesthetics of representation” (2); but Schwab’s primary interest seems to lie in the ways in which literature, through “poetic language,” creates new variations on a depth-model subject. Barbara Ann Schapiro’s *Literature and the Relational Self* emphasizes intersubjective psychological theories, but Schapiro outlines the difference between the theories she embraces, which stress “the achievement of a cohesive self,” and “postmodern critical theories,” which she sees as denying “the meaning of self as subject” (4). Indeed, she specifically objects to poststructuralism’s collapsing of boundaries and expresses her intention of attending to “interconnections” rather than “disruptions” (5)—a strategy that places her work in direct contrast to my exploration of metalepsis.

29. Some critics systematize the (de)subjectification process by ascribing its “rules” to some metatextual project of Beckett’s, such as a concerted effort to challenge, one by one, all philosophical models of subjectivity (see Schwab).
30. In an effort to bring postmodernism face to face with feminism, Susan Suleiman raises some of the questions that Carter’s work attempts to answer: “Where is postmodernist practice going? Can it be political?—should it be? Does it offer possibilities for opposition, critique, resistance to dominant ideologies?” (*Subversive* 186).

CHAPTER ONE

1. See Abbreviations page for abbreviations of works by Samuel Beckett.

2. “The design behind all of Beckett’s works concerns the discovery and investigation of the linguistic nature of experience” (Locatelli 54).

3. In *A Glance Beyond Doubt*, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan inserts Beckett’s *Company*, at least, into her trajectory chronologically, placing it after Brooke-Rose’s *Thru* and using it to mark the beginning of an anti-postmodern movement in the grand procession of twentieth-century Anglo-American narrative, and in particular to stress a certain move toward the psychological integration of the self. When we instead place the novel before Brooke-Rose’s “prepositional novels,” in the context of the larger project of Beckett’s own fiction, we may see it as a continuation—even, in some ways, a distillation—of his earlier visions of the painful and inescapable subject-construction process.

4. As I clarify in the Introduction, my topographical map of narrative conceives narrative levels as rings of a cone, extratextual reality being the outermost, uppermost ring; from there, one must step *down* and *in* to reach the extradiegetic level (the narrative frame), which in turn surrounds the diegesis (the main story), which frames the hypodiegesis (story-within-a-story), and so on.

5. H. Porter Abbott outlines a similar coexistence of linearity and circularity in Beckett’s work when he describes the “continual recursive motion” with which Beckett’s texts recycle elements of his previous works, a motion that “puts into question the idea of the progress or development of an oeuvre,” but which is also, at least temporarily, at odds with the “Victorian trope of onwardness” that Beckett increasingly uses and, ultimately, abuses, successfully emptying it of its essential illusion of advancement (Abbott 32–39).

6. S. E. Gontarski demonstrates, through an analysis of Beckett’s revision process (from manuscript to published text rather than from early to late works), that this “intent of undoing” reaches even, or especially, to Beckett “himself,” as he “struggles to write himself out of the text” (Gontarski xiii–xiv). But, just as something always remains to be reborn, Beckett fails to erase himself completely: “While Beckett labors to undo that traditional structure and realistic content [the ‘psychologically realistic soil’ in which he sows his narratives’ first seeds], he never wholly does so. The final work retains those originary tracings and is virtually a palimpsest. What remains is the trace of an author struggling against his text, repenting his originary disclosure, effacing himself from the text, and thereby creating himself.” “The erasure of authorial presence creates an authorial presence erasing” (Gontarski 2, xvi, 17).

7. McHale stresses *Watt*’s preoccupation with “modernist issues of reliability and unreliability of narrators, radical subjectivity, and multiplicity of perspectives”—all symptomatic of a concern with the subject, the object, and the process of cognition, and so indicative of a belief in the existence of a knowable world and an identifiable position from which to know it. But aspects of the novel clearly focus, like later works McHale ascribes to the “postcognitivist Beckett,” “on the status of fictional worlds, the power (and impotence) of language to make and unmake worlds, and the relationship between fictional
being and elusive ‘real’ being”—all issues that bespeak a newfound uncertainty about where both subject and object begin and end, an uncertainty born in part of a perceived proliferation of worlds and identities continually under construction (Constructing 34). There has been intense debate over whether Beckett’s work in general is modernist or postmodernist; see Abbott for an overview.

8. Angela Moorjani sees Hackett as “a figure of the illusory, all-knowing subject,” one of the conventions of narrative that Beckett is dismantling in Watt (Moorjani 26). Later she says he’s “a double” of “the implicit author of Watt” (27). In the first capacity, he does and must disappear; in the second, however, he must continue to exist in some form at least as long as “his” story (the story he authors, that is) continues.

9. Rather than offering us “access to an intelligible reality,” notes David Watson, the novel “foregrounds its own role in constructing that reality” (21).

10. The circle has been interpreted much more cosmically, for example by such critics as Olga Bernal, who reads it as a metaphor of the novel’s attempt to center the subject and to dismantle the tradition of God, and then “man,” as center (Bernal 99–102), and Lucien Dällenbach, who argues that Beckett here alludes to Dante’s association between God’s circularity and centrality as well as “the return of poetic language to the origin to which it is summoned” (Dällenbach 104).

11. Rimmon-Kenan refers to Escher’s drawing hands in discussing Brooke-Rose’s Thru (Glance 76). Although Watt’s situation is less complex than that of Thru, the similarity between their reversibility and indeterminacy of levels, which in Thru plays a major role in the central deconstruction of subjectivity, might tell us something about Beckett’s vision even as early as Watt.

12. This seems to be the relation favored by Mathew Winston, for one, who calls Sam “the writer and arranger of [the] book” and sees Watt’s first footnote—which appears in the Hackett section—as “the first indication of [Sam’s] strangeness” (73).

13. Although I agree with Peter Rabinowitz that Nabokov’s Pale Fire fails to engage its extratextual reader (actual audience) fully because it never allows its diegetic reader (narrative audience) to be certain about what it is meant to believe and know (Rabinowitz 139–40), it seems to me that the sort of uncertainty cultivated in Beckett’s diegetic readers often has something like the opposite effect. It is as if the part of ourselves we send as an envoy into the diegesis had been momentarily erased, leaving us gasping, confused, and shaken. It may, to some extent, provide an amusing intellectual puzzle for us to solve and appreciate, but it also seems to have a disturbing emotional or psychological effect. In the case of Watt, the difference may lie in the fact that the DR starts out knowing what to believe, but then her “truth” changes; in Pale Fire, the “truth” is unclear from the outset. In later Beckett works, the difference may have more to do with a variable, and sometimes indiscernible, distance between DR and ETR, a gap that may well remain wider and steadier in Nabokov’s novel.

14. These two informants, however, appear in the diegesis as twin dwarves named Art and Con and thus raise themselves the question of their diegetic status: Are they and their brethren mere art? A con job? Is all art the twin of such con jobs—and easily confused, “even [by] those (and there were many) who knew and loved them most” (“the resemblance between them [being] so marked in every way” that many folks “would call Art Con when they meant Art, and Con Art when they meant Con” [W 101])? And do all Arts and Cons and their ilk measure a mere “three feet and four inches”—and so reside
physically as well as metaphorically on a lower level than the likes of Watt? If so, the metalepsis that allows them to meet Watt occurs painlessly and almost invisibly: one moment Watt is tabulating the number of objections to his proposed solutions, and the next moment he is chatting in the kitchen with the con-artist dog owners whose solution “seemed to have prevailed” despite the relatively large number (five) of objections Watt can conceive to its hopes of success.

15. Despite Sam’s paralysis, the narrator makes it clear that Sam is to be seen as the active party in these reproductive acts. First introduced as the prime suspect in the case of the impregnation of his cousin Ann—the one “who had done, or whom . . . Ann [had] persuaded to do, this thing to Ann”—Sam “made no secret of his having committed adultery locally on a large scale, moving from place to place in his self-propelling invalid’s chair.” Furthermore, it is his potency that determines the outcome of his adulterous encounters: it was Sam, not his varied partners, who “had never managed triplets, and this was a sore point with Sam” (W 106).

16. Indeed, all the Lynches participate in this reproduction of disease and pain; Kate and Sean, for example, reproduce despite their common affliction with hemophilia, though Watt notes that “it was very wrong of Sean, knowing what he was and knowing what Kate was, to do what he did to Kate, so that she conceived and brought forth Rose, and indeed it was very wrong of her to let him,” and ditto for daughter Cerise (W 103).

17. In articulating “the Beckettian tragic myth,” S. E. Gontarski quotes Nietzsche on the tale of King Midas’s search for Silenus; when found, Silenus tells the King, “What is best of all is beyond your reach forever: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing” (Gontarski 184).

18. As Andrew Renton puts it, “Worstward Ho . . . focuses in on the text-as-itself . . . . The text becomes not merely a reconstruction of bringing-into-being of the imagination . . . but it is being-in-itself . . . . The text is brought into being by its own state of writtenness” (100–101).

19. Gabriele Schwab, in an illuminating chapter entitled “Not-I Fiction of a First Person Narrator,” argues that The Unnamable draws on two divergent concepts of subjectivity: on the one hand, what I would call depth models, which “assume an absolute ground of being,” and, on the other hand, what I would call constructionist models, which “insist on the irrevocable contingency and embeddedness of all being in the world or in textuality” (136). Although Schwab sees Beckett as proposing, at times, a “literary subject [that] confirms undisputedly what theories of textuality claim in general: that there is no subjectivity beyond textuality” (167), she also sees The Unnamable as posing problems for “textualism” by situating the subject outside of his own discourse (152). On the whole, it seems, Schwab herself leans toward a depth model that accepts the existence of “a nonverbal core of self” (159), and, as such, her analysis tends toward the psychological. (In this context, see also Watson, who seems to believe that the Unnamable’s “true self” will appear only in silence [Watson 47].) My contrary leaning toward a constructionist model is guided in part by my interest in metalepsis (see Introduction) and in part by the Unnamable’s own awareness of his own fictionality, his knowledge that, as a product of language, he must be “continually producing new self-projections,” as Schwab puts it (153). As if acknowledging that even the supposed depths of the subject are mere projections, the Unnamable himself remarks, “I am good-hearted, on the surface” (TU 313, emphasis mine).
20. Although Schwab argues at one point that “those anonymous others from whom [the Unnamable] is trying all along to escape” are *readers*, she situates these readers in their writerly role, helping, through the reading process, to “concretize” the literary text (167). Moreover, her earlier description of “them” makes them sound more like writers than readers: “anonymous others who force [the Unnamable] to speak of himself, who determine the rules of his language games, who impute a self and a voice on him, and who want to define him as a living being” (Schwab 148). Eric P. Levy claims at one point that the antecedent of “they” “is always ‘words,’” but he later adds the inconsistent remark that “They are the ones who dictate the story, the narrator little more than a scribe” (Levy 58, 59). Watson’s equation of “them” with the Lacanian Other is consistent, on its own terms, with my argument that they not only “write” the Unnamable but dictate the rules of his discourse: “The subject is constituted in the Other; the place from which it speaks is not its own ‘proper’ space, but it is the space of the Other, the Symbolic order” (Watson 39).

21. The Unnamable must speak “their’ voice” and “submit to . . . ‘their’ law”—“His relationship to the voice is consistently cast in terms of persecution” (Watson 42).

22. “If I am Mahood, I am Worm too” (*TU* 338).

23. Of course, “the master” may well be “their” fiction, and if “they” are the Unnamable’s fiction, the master is already H²D and won’t need to be dragged down (but rather up?) in the “collapse into one” phase I outline below!

24. Even the Unnamable suggests the sexual nature of the sadomasochistic game, most clearly when he notes that using the singular pronoun for both “them” and “him” might cause the former to “get mixed up with his victim” (if only linguistically!): “That would be abominable,” he opines, “downright masturbation” (*TU* 360). Schwab ascribes the pleasure of sadism to the Unnamable himself, for she sees him as the author of the progressively maimed body: “The unnamable hardly conceals an uncanny pleasure in fragmenting and recomposing his imaginary bodies or in presenting them as obscene objects, often afflicted by infirmities” (Schwab 141).

25. Of course, in de Lauretis’s paradigm, the hero is simultaneously constructed as male. Although the narrator-protagonist of Beckett’s fiction almost invariably appears to be male, Beckett does not often foreground sexual difference in the texts I examine here. Instead, in the predicaments of both the narrator and the reader (of whom, see below), he seems to imagine again his universal human condition.

26. See the Introduction for a related description of the mutual invention of subjects in Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds.*

27. The narrator of *Company* follows suit; in the process, he reveals a jarringly human (“the old style!”) motive for the spinning out of sub-selves. For when he emerges from his diegesis and his hypodiegesis with a jolt, discovering (or admitting) that he has invented all, including himself, he marks his kinship to the “solitary child” posited by *Endgame’s* Hamm, “who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark” (*Endgame* 70): “Deviser of the voice and of its hearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company. Leave it at that. He speaks of himself as of another. He says speaking of himself, He speaks of himself as of another. Himself he devises too for company” (*Co* 26).

28. Rimmon-Kenan sees *Company’s* collapse as physical as well, calling it an “uncanny process of fusion” in which “the creator’s physical position gradually merges with that of his creature” (*Glance* 96–97).
29. If we accept Peter Brooks’s analysis of the functioning of narrative, we might read the passage about the audience as foregrounding the dynamics of all reading experiences: “The desire of the text is ultimately the desire for the end, for that recognition which is the moment of the death of the reader in the text” (Brooks 108, emphasis mine). In this case, we become analogous, for the duration of the text, to the Unnamable and to “Beckett”: our primary desire vis-à-vis the novel is to “die,” to stop the words that we cannot control because they come to us from elsewhere, but which become “ours” insofar as they define us-as-audience.

30. In keeping with her leaning toward a depth-model/psychological subject, Schwab follows a different route to a similar conclusion about the reader’s “absorption . . . by the text” (which, she says, “becomes a condition of its reception,” 165).

Samuel Beckett’s texts fascinate and threaten with experiences of primary undifferentiation. They elicit in the reader deeply rooted, often unconscious memories of such experiences. . . . It is the dissolution of language and subjectivity in _The Unnamable_ that has provoked the strongest reaction in readers and critics of this text. Its reception has been marked by our cultural ambivalence toward dissolutions of order and transgressions of boundaries, and especially toward primary processes, experiences of undifferentiation, and dissolutions of the self. . . . The more the first person narrator undermines the notion of an I, the more the reader, in order not to lose all imaginary ground, feels compelled to cling to whatever becomes manifest of this narrator. This produces the paradoxical effect of a loss of distinction in the reader. It seems impossible to maintain an aesthetic distance in relation to a text which, like its narrator, cannot ever really be grasped. . . . The process of having to follow [the Unnamable’s] self-reflexive flight from the self entangles the reader more intricately with the unnamable than if he were a bounded literary character. (164–66)

At the same time, Schwab notes, the reader is distanced by “the self-reflexive metalevel at which the text exposes itself as fictional with a fictional first-person narrator” (166), and I would add, again, that this oscillation in reader-text relations parallels interestingly the one in the Unnamable’s relation with narrative levels—the constant tension he maintains between inward and outward movements.

31. The shifting begins almost immediately upon entering this world. For although we think we know where we stand when, in the first line, “A voice comes to one in the dark,” by line two, “Imagine,” we can no longer be certain (Co 7). The speaker of “Imagine” might reside “within the narrator, an interlocutor in an internal dialogue,” as Bersani and Dutoit suggest (“Sociability” 10), but it could also assume an external addressee. If the latter is the case, either this reader is being told to imagine that voice and that one, or the voice is now coming to _the reader_ (now parallel to or identical with “one”) and saying “Imagine”—for, at least with respect to this new narrative’s universe, we are certainly “in the dark.”

By the next line, paragraph two, we can heave a sigh of relief as we remove ourselves from immediate danger of assault by the voice (unless we happen to be a he “on his back”), and by later in the paragraph we step out one more level: with “That then is the proposi-
tion,” the novel becomes a story of a story being told to some-one-not-us who is “in the dark” literally as well as figuratively (for although the story allegedly recounts his own past and present, he cannot verify most of its contents). Despite the narrator’s—or perhaps the narrated’s, for here the blurring continues—efforts to block out clear layers (“Use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first” [Co 8]), unmarked lines crop up to blur the boundaries and disorient the reader. When, for instance, “he” is told “You will end as you now are,” neither he nor we can know whether the next sentence, devoid as it is of a main verb—“And in another dark or in the same another devising it all for company” (8)—continues the prediction (and so identifies him [“you”] with the author and/or narrator, thus collapsing levels) or describes a current situation that involves neither him nor us (and so adds a level by creating a hypodiegesis that parallels the diegesis). The ambiguities continue to proliferate, and I must force myself to cease rehearsing them. As Enoch Brater argues, Company is “logically impossible, for it wants to be ‘read’ . . . on different levels all at once, each level enhancing the others without canceling them out” (Brater 116). Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, recognizing the affinity that I see between Company and Brooke-Rose’s Thru, explains that Company “subverts representation by a reversibility of the hierarchy between narrators and objects of narration” (Glance 46)

32. Thomas Morrison, a recent student of mine, encapsulated this disconcerting experience as a sense of being written by the text.

33. Or perhaps, given the evident pain of the narrator, the entire novel is the speech he is tortured into making (as he has tortured Pim into speaking)—hence the periodic repetitions of “I quote” and “I say it as I hear it.” At the very least, the tail end of part 3 seems to come close to a representation of a narrator so tortured—capitals mar the page, eliciting “screams,” followed by the sadistic remark “good” (e.g., HII 146–47).

34. Beckett’s victim here also resembles the tattooed woman as theorized by Frances Mascia-Lees and Patricia Sharpe: unlike the man whose tattoo marks his own identity, the marked woman generally becomes designated as the property of a man, as her body is made to tell his story rather than her own (Mascia-Lees and Sharpe, “Marked,” 153–54).

35. Recall, after all, Brooks’s argument that “the desire of the text is ultimately [always] the desire for the end” (Brooks 108).

36. As Locatelli describes it, the hypothesis seems to be that “a subject that is caused by language can, perhaps, be ‘restored’ by silence, as silence can be a subtraction, a subtraction of the signifiers that have played the role of his ‘alienated’ constitution.” But “a text like Worstward Ho reminds us of the fact that existence cannot really be suspended by the thought that suspends it, and that the enunciation cannot be revoked by a message that denies it” (Locatelli 184, 233). S. E. Gontarski writes, relatedly, that Beckett’s revision process “reveals an image of the artist caught in a web of cultural intertextuality, struggling to create with erasure.” In this formulation, “Beckett’s strategies of undoing are multiple, varied, even contradictory and finally unsuccessful. Something always remains, as Winnie insists. The intent of undoing, like all textual intentionality, fails to efface what is already inscribed in the text” (Gontarski 4, 21).

37. If this bodily reduction renders the shades eerily similar to Sam Lynch, or even to Worm, the narrator goes those earlier efforts one better (i.e., worse) by removing that mixed blessing of materiality, the penis: in an effort to worsen the solitary figure, he declares it female, in terms that recall Freud’s definition of femininity: “Nothing to show a
woman's and yet a woman's. . . . So better worse from now that shade a woman's" (WH 35, emphasis mine). With this move, the narrator not only repeats the traditional feminization of the victim, but also thereby includes in his destructive embrace all of humanity; man, woman, and child must all lose their subjectivity if their narrator is to relieve himself of the identity he continually reconstructs through the narrative process.

38. “‘Oh all to end’ is simultaneously resignation, a cry of despair, and a ‘final’ statement of fulfillment as problematic as ‘stirrings still’ itself” (Brater 161).

39. Brater sees the poem as proposing “two separate but related answers, one of which holds within itself the innocent mood of interrogative surprise at being taken off guard by such an unexpected self-discovery: ‘what is the word?’ [emphasis Brater’s]. And then the final definitive roar of the declarative in a line determined to stand apart, finally, from all the rest: what is the word” (171).

CHAPTER TWO

1. See Abbreviations page for abbreviations of works by Christine Brooke-Rose.

2. I borrow this triumvirate from Mieke Bal, who distinguishes usefully among these three narrative subjects (see Narratology). As will become clear, I see focalization as a key aspect of the games Brooke-Rose plays with her readers’ frameworks of understanding.

3. Although Rimmon-Kenan’s reading of Thru is very similar to mine, my placement of that novel within the context of Brooke-Rose’s previous works of experimental fiction allows me to demonstrate the author’s gradual acceptance of constructionism and the stages of her development of deconstructive narrative, transformative metalepsis, and a “freely metaleptic” postmodern subject. By reading Out and Between before we encounter the thoroughly deconstructive Thru, we receive some essential training in how to follow Thru.

4. This dissolution, if complete, would render the universal “we” of reader-response criticism essentially untenable, but, for lack of a better shorthand for this shifting positionality, I revert to the projection of a generic and substantial reader. Moreover, I justify the presumption in part by my own experiences as a reader, which correspond with the experiences of Brooke-Rose’s not-quite-dissolved focalizors, the experiences that compose both content and form of these novels. From “the focalizor and I,” I find the leap to “we” not such a precipitous endeavor.

5. Jonathan Culler offers a similar summary of the experiences of “professional” readers: “The experiences or responses that modern reader-oriented critics invoke are generally cognitive rather than affective: not feeling shivers along the spine, weeping in sympathy, or being transported with awe, but having one’s expectations proved false, struggling with an irresolvable ambiguity, or questioning the assumptions on which one had relied” (On Deconstruction 39, emphases mine). Admittedly, despite Beckett’s universalism (as versus Brooke-Rose’s more specific postmodernism), he often produces a similar effect on his readers. One of my students in a recent Beckett seminar, Wayne Logue, argued persuasively that Endgame (as a representative sample of Beckett’s work) is at root a satire on the reader, especially the academic reader, whom the text compels to generate meanings that it then repeatedly ridicules and undercuts.

6. Jeffrey Nealon calls deconstruction a “postmodern thinking” parallel to such fiction’s “postmodern writing” (86).

7. Nealon writes that Jacques Derrida’s thought, for example, “grows out of a postmodern consciousness: a consciousness of being a survivor, a consciousness of living on rather
than simply living or dying, of living on in the undecided—of not closing off possibility (difference) merely for the sake of actuality (sameness). Living on in the postmodern is living beyond (which is to say between, as there is no simple beyond) the oppositions or hierarchies that have allowed and validated the horrors of the twentieth century” (83).

8. The novelist has remarked that she capitalized on a certain “cliché” of sexist society in order to give Between the right “tone”: “this basic assumption . . . that women cannot create new forms,” or, in Between’s simultaneous interpreter’s terms, “that we merely translate other people’s ideas”: “No one expects me to produce my own” (STT 7; Friedman/ Fuchs 81; B 413, 426). Because such passivity has long been considered classically “feminine,” Brooke-Rose turned Between’s focalizor (whom she had originally conceived as genderless) into a woman, one whose subjectivity never actually stabilizes as she is tossed back and forth between the languages, jargons, ideas, and world views of others. The author has stressed that she used the female stereotype only to foreground a more general feature of postmodern subjectivity (see Garbero 110), and, guided primarily by my concern with Brooke-Rose’s uses of metalespsis, I focus on her postmodernism rather than her feminism.

9. Unlike modernist novels, which work hard to fend off such flux and strive to reconstitute proliferating diegeses within a firm superstructure, these novels accept the dissolution of boundaries, even if their focalizors—and readers—cannot. (“You must learn to identify with the flux,” says a temporarily authoritative voice in Out [63].)

10. See Introduction for a discussion of the various topographical mappings (“frames” vs. “levels”) of narrative structure.

11. When Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan tries to comment on the “mimetic function” of Thru’s narrative ambiguity, she finds that the novel “calls into question the notion of mimeticism” (“Ambiguity” 31). In A Glance Beyond Doubt, Rimmon-Kenan explains that “the very distinction between constative and performative [is] being problematized by this text’s radical narrative strategies” (76).

12. In service of her drive toward “rehumanization,” Rimmon-Kenan stresses this remainder, even recruiting to her cause de Man himself, whom she cites on the paradoxical persistence of “the Self as the relentless undoer of selfhood” (Glance 92).

13. The denomination “focalizor” seems peculiarly apt in this novel about vision and perspective.

14. As Erving Goffman has argued in regard to frameworks of understanding, “Taken all together, the primary frameworks of a particular social group constitute a central element of its culture” (27). As a cultural event, the onset of the malady resembles what Goffman calls an “astounding complex”: “An event occurs, or is made to occur, that leads observers to doubt their overall approach to events. . . . Certainly individuals exhibit considerable resistance to changing their framework of frameworks. A public stir—or at least a ripple—is caused by any event that apparently cannot be managed within the traditional cosmology” (Goffman 28–29).

15. “It is difficult to tell the exact colour. The knowledge of their normal silvery green interferes with the absolute result of being tinged. And yet the road is pink. Not underfoot, where the immediate familiarity with its normal greyness makes it grey, but further ahead, receding even, the pinkness of the road recedes beyond the greyness covered. The white house on the hill is pink. The pink house higher up is flame-coloured. . . . It was the glass that was blue of course, making the hat look purple and the face cave-blue and the
wide mouth mauve in the avenue of the mind. The hat inside the vehicle must be pink” (*O* 52–53; see also 57, 60).

16. Clearly, I cannot argue that this DR, like that of Beckett’s *Watt*, starts out knowing what to believe and so the ETR becomes engaged in the narrative in a way that (according to Peter Rabinowitz) *Pale Fire*’s reader cannot. Rather, here the DR is not expected to know what is “true,” for the struggle to discover the “truth” is what the whole thing is about. In other words, not knowing is not a hindrance to following or engaging in a story (about something else); it is engagement in/following of a story about the struggle to discover the truth.

17. Similarly, Rita Humboldt will remark in *Textermination* that too much that passes for feminism is “a mere reversal of male Grand Narratives that are contested as such by women” (*Te* 154).

18. There is a “chronological inversion, so that the cause enters consciousness later than the effect”; “the inferred and imagined cause is projected, follows in time” (Nietzsche 265, 271)

19. Although “shaken” seems an apt description of *Out*’s focalizor, I would argue that *Out* only hints at the possibility of the “arbitrary, open system” de Man outlines, and that Brooke-Rose achieves something much closer to it in *Thru*.

20. And yet, as Jonathan Culler points out, even the seemingly radical transformation inherent in the Nietzschean critique of causality cannot be sustained—the deconstruction itself relies on the (traditional) notion of cause: the experience of the effect, it claims, causes us to discover/produce a cause. Since “one must operate within the notion” one is attempting to deconstruct, since binaries have a way of reasserting themselves even in the critiques that undermine them, Derrida argues that as a strategic move, one must reverse hierarchies as a first step toward displacing the binary system entirely (Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 86–87, 172–73).

21. These retain an obstinate hold on subjects, as echoed in “the footsteps made by Dutch people walking in Dutch along the Dutch canal with a Dutch dog barking in Dutch” (411).


Although some of the world’s boundaries have been eradicated, its current subjects have already been constructed according to the categories those boundaries circumscribed. As Susan Rubin Suleiman points out, the *Between* focalizor’s own “broken up quality” is due, in part, “to the historical conditions that created her interlinguistic status”—to wit, World War II, during which she, a French girl trapped in Germany, translated for the German censorship office, and after which, still in Germany, she translated for the Allied occupiers (“Living” 100–101). Such border-defined enmities and alliances have been writ large in the cultural memory that informs this “nuclear age.”

23. With the exception of this novel, of course, but such an attachment can only be discerned from an outer level.
24. Given her profession as well as her non-being, the translator’s discourse becomes a pastiche of others’ discourses, and she resembles nothing so much as the novelist as conceived by Bakhtin: “The author does not speak in a given language (from which he distances himself to a greater or lesser degree), but he speaks, as it were through language, a language that has somehow more or less materialized, become objectivized, that he merely ventriloquates” (Dialogic 299). Even more distant perhaps than Bakhtin’s author, Between’s focalizor often plays not the ventriloquist but the dummy, letting languages speak through her. For Bakhtin, all of these languages “are specific points of view on the world”; but, like our focalizor, “the writer of prose does not meld completely with any of these words” (Dialogic 291–93). Frederic Jameson decries pastiche because he believes it requires no subject whose own language can ground it, no subject who controls language toward a political end rather than being controlled by it, and hence offers no basis for criticism or comparison of languages and their inherent world views. Pastiche, opines Jameson, “is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists” (Jameson 17). Although Brooke-Rose’s use of pastiche hardly seems “neutral,” she does parody the loss of “healthy normality” that Jameson bemoans. Although Between’s focalizor is not unhealthy in the sense that defined her predecessor in Out (the Ukayan who suffered from the metaphoric “malady”), she does, as I argue below, seem rather anemic as a subject and occasionally acknowledges that she is missing something.

25. The novelist has remarked, “No one ever noticed” the lack of “to be” verbs; of course, “there is no reason why anyone except a deconstructionist should notice the lack of something” (STT 7).

26. Although Brooke-Rose certainly does not always concur with Jameson’s negative valuation of postmodern culture, her novels do manifest an ambivalence toward it: on the one hand, they celebrate it by participating in postmodern fluidity and boundarilessness, sometimes apparently reveling in it; on the other hand, they communicate a certain remorse at the loss of the depth-model subject and of clear, stable, comprehensible structures. Perhaps this is why, despite Brooke-Rose’s explicitly political contexts, I find it difficult to pin down her politics—and why she seems to me more concerned with ambivalence and ambiguity in and of themselves than with choosing political sides.

27. As Mira tells Orion in T extermination, “I invented you too. Critics never seem to understand this, they keep writing about two couples, or even three, Mira and Willy, Cassandra and Orion, Andromeda and Orion. When in fact I am Cassandra and invent everyone” (Té 63).

28. Brian McHale suggests that “Thru is in a sense what Between would look like if it were fully ‘postmodernized’”—meaning, in McHale’s own terms, shifted from an epistemological to an ontological “dominant,” and hence far more radically destabilizing (“I draw” 199).

29. Rimmon-Kenan notes a similar effect of even horizontal games with letters: “Anagrams and palindromes play with the linear character of language and simultaneously emphasize, on the verbal level, the reversibility of the narrative structure” (Glance 86).

30. In the novel, the character named Larissa argues that “we have no surface narrative you and I, Armel, only the deep structures of competence, the show within the show, played out elsewhere, the text within the text which generates another text and so on ad neurotic infinitum” (Th 631).
31. This move parallels *Out*’s efforts to erase events retroactively or to render them hypothetical.

32. Although I cannot claim to have located quotations from all of its entries, a “Bibliography” that appears part-way through the novel (and which, in its own sort of metaleptic leveling of all subjects, includes some of *Thru*’s original characters along with outsiders both real and fictitious) might conceivably prove accurate:

*retrogradiens


**retroprogradiens


(623)

33. It is interesting to note that Brooke-Rose has categorized (at least some kinds of) intertextuality as a form of metalepsis (*RU* 334).

34. Although the varieties of discourses and modes of visual presentation may vary far more widely, these seem to me essentially the same as the juxtapositions of discourses in *Between* or of diegeses in *Amalgamemnon*.

35. Clearly Rimmon-Kenan assumes a literary-academic reader, and indeed I find it hard to imagine any other kind for this novel, although its audience is somewhat broader than the “few narratologist friends” for whom Brooke-Rose once claimed to have written it “almost tongue-in-cheek” (Friedman and Fuchs 88).

36. “Just as it collapses the hierarchy of narrative levels, so the novel un-builds the hier-
archy of metatextual discourses that has come lately to encrust itself around ‘metafictional’ novels. It does this by folding the entire structure back into the narrative” (Birch 102).

37. Rimmon-Kenan’s article and the book chapter into which it developed perform a thorough dissection of the narrative hierarchy and its reversibilities. Whereas the article’s primary concern is “descriptive poetics,” the chapter focuses on the way in which Thru “comes very close to a total deconstruction of both [representation and subjectivity]” (Glance 26). In building on my theory of metaleptic subject construction, I rely on some of Rimmon-Kenan’s concise and insightful summaries in the process of articulating my own reading not only of the way in which the novel extends the deconstruction of subjectivity begun in Out and Between, but also of the transformative effects of this deconstruction on the reader—a reader, ideally, prepared for the onslaught by the previous novels.

38. Of course, at some level, we recognize that, far from having no source, the text has many and diverse sources, but since all contributions come to us out of context, severed from their original perspective, and since Thru offers us no unifying perspective through which to systematize them, the effect remains the same.

39. Although, if we make it through Thru, we should be able to see through Thru, but only to more text.

40. “In Between it’s all filtered through one justifying consciousness, but in Thru I really tried to get away from that,” says Brooke-Rose. “There is no consciousness that the reader is aware of” (Hayman and Cohen 7).

41. Since the class discussion follows Armel’s written comment on a student paper, it seems (relatively) safe to assume that the professor is (now) Armel.

42. Interestingly, the diagram places “CODE” two steps below “MESSAGE,” but that may be neither here nor there—especially since, in A Rhetoric of the Unreal, Brooke-Rose reports that “the Jakobson diagram, in fact, has been exploded: no addresser, no addressee, no reference, no message, only (perhaps), a contact and a vast metalanguage, which is declared by Lacan not to be one” (49).

43. Damian Grant puts it thus: “As we read, we are forced to ask: are the teachers supervising the students . . . or are the students underwriting the teachers? Perhaps I should say ‘writing them up.’ . . . Or are both processes happening somehow simultaneously? Which, if one thinks about it, comes closest to what happens in a normal social—or indeed institutional—situation: we negotiate ourselves and invent each other all the time” (Grant 121).

44. Sarah Birch argues that Brooke-Rose’s “technique of discursive metaphor allows the individual to be depicted as both passively spoken through by language and actively involved in the discursive process of identity-construction. This conception of subjectivity paves the way for the contestation in Brooke-Rose’s later fiction of the hierarchical relations implicit in the conceptions of discursive identity by which we live” (75).

45. Here, I confess, I take advantage of an ambiguity of the phrasing: the Master may hesitate between texts (Thru, or, anyway, “this one” in which Jacques and the Master have this discussion, versus Armel-as-text) or between authors (Larissa vs. Armel vs. the narrator I). Since he has asked “which text?” I feel justified in proceeding as if he meant the former, but the latter seems more appropriate and must haunt my reading, the text, the Master, Larissa, Armel . . .

46. In Thru’s trademark convolutions, Larissa gets rid of Armel at this point by telling him her husband is on his way home, but her husband is either a hastily contrived fiction
or he is Armel or is also Armel or will be Armel. Jacques and his Master discuss the possibilities, when the Master points out that:

she has also acquired a sudden husband as a last minute escape.
He could be a polite lie.
Yes but he could be vero, no? [. . .]
Of course her husband if true would have to be Armel.
But she’s only just met him and told him
no that’s a coincidence. They do happen despite the critics.
I don’t think so [. . .]
well of course she could have changed whatever original name she gave
to the man she was inventing [. . .] and given him the name of the man
from Porlock, I mean from Timbuctoo [. . .] to get something out of the
interruption if only an unusual name. (645–46).

47. See, e.g., Th 631. Damian Grant notes that Larissa and Armel “share, anagramatically, the phrase ‘narrate loss,’” an intriguing clue one could follow in multiple directions (119).

48. Of course, as Rimmon-Kenan points out, even the “self” we present is a similar illusion: “As people (that is, as fictional characters at one level or another) Armel and Larissa are capable of relating to each other only by creating an image of themselves (a kind of persona) for the other and an image of the others for themselves” (“Ambiguity” 26).

49. Later, one student will ask another, “what are you talking about Ali this is the text we are creating it verbally we are the text we do not exist either we are a pack of lies dreamt up by the unreliable narrator in love with the zeroist author in love with himself but absent in the nature of things” (Th 733). Damian Grant notes that Thru’s characters “forfeit their integrity and independence,” becoming “simple etymologies, networks, functions of each other” (Grant 125).

50. And, if the reader’s attention can grant presence (as Textermination would insist that it can), the roster renders these characters even more present than those given present marks from α+ to γ-, for we must pause at the absence entries and ponder them.

51. “Portrait” serves as an image of subjective subject-construction that highlights the politics of academic grading, and “Body” both suggests the communal effort intrinsic to the concept of revolution and takes a stab at reversing the mind/body hierarchy.

52. From “the adding of the computer operand ANDOR, which means non-exclusive or, to the operand XOR, which means exclusive or” (Caserio 292–93)

53. One might define as a sort of trivial kind of metalepsis the way in which the two narrators’ discussion of how to tell the story shares space with the telling of the story.

CHAPTER THREE

1. Carter’s constructionism has long been recognized by critics, many of whom have focused specifically on her notions of the construction of gender identity. See, e.g., Jordan, “Edge,” 190, 194; Warner 248; Webb 304; Robinson 77, 105; Armstrong 271. Some readers extend their analysis to the performative identity of the author—or the implied author—herself: Warner remarks on “Angela Carter’s comic disguise, her performance as a bottle blonde with her slip showing” (Warner 254); Armstrong claims that Carter “writes
in a stylised, objectifying, external manner, as if all experience, whether observed or
suffered, is self-consciously conceived of as display, a kind of rigorous, analytical, public
self-projection which, by its nature, excludes private expression” (Armstrong 269); Sage
confirms this impression, noting that Carter “escaped the character expected of the
woman writer by . . . substitut[ing] work for inwardness. She’d once wanted, in adoles-
cence, to be an actress; when I talked with her in 1977, she insisted that writing was
public . . . [Carter said,] ‘If it’s not published it doesn’t exist’” (“Death” 245).

2. Many critics have remarked on the violence that pervades Carter’s texts (see, e.g.,
Kendrick 70; Sage, Women, 174; and Makinen, who sets out to analyze, through the fairy
tales of The Bloody Chamber, “Carter’s textual uses of violence as a feminist strategy” [3]).
Some critics have even noted that in certain instances the violence is intimately connected
with the construction of reality (e.g., Palmer: “Throughout [The Magic Toyshop], images
of mutilation and castration . . . advertise to the reader the elements of violence at the
heart of the patriarchal family unit. They also highlight the violent nature of the myths
which perpetuate its existence” [Palmer 184]).

3. Interestingly, in the reconstructive phase, Carter is most insistent in her reinforce-
ment of the boundaries between levels of readers as well as those surrounding her fic-
tional subjects. When she reaches Nights at the Circus and is at the height of her deconstruc-
tive metalepsis (though still incorporating the reconstructive), she begins to break down
the intrareader boundaries.

4. See Abbreviations page for abbreviations of works by Angela Carter.

5. Carter implicitly compares the voyeuristic gaze to the tools of the tattoo-master or
the rapist: like these weapons, the gaze penetrates a boundary, with or without its object’s
consent, in order to reconstruct that object. (On the power, violence, and/or sadism of the
gaze, see, e.g., Foucault, Discipline, 200–201; Mulvey 19–21; and de Lauretis 118–19.)

6. Grosz argues that “in feminist terms at least, it is problematic to see the body as a
blank, passive page, a neutral ‘medium’ or signifier for the inscription of a text. If the
writing or inscription metaphor is to be of any use for feminism . . . the specific modes of
materiality of the ‘page/body must be taken into account: one and the same message,
inscribed on a male or a female body, does not always or even usually mean the same thing
or result in the same text” (Grosz 156).

7. In the post-apocalyptic world of Heroes and Villains (1969), the Barbarian tribe
practices what Sáez calls “primitive” body inscription, producing one of Carter’s most
elaborate tattoos—a single image that manages simultaneously to endow men with social
status and to underwrite the oppression of women. Its creator, Donally, a member of the
Professor tribe, has taken it upon himself to reconstruct the Barbarians as a civilized cul-
ture. He therefore builds a hierarchy and a mythos and engraves them onto the flesh of
his human raw materials. His masterpiece is Jewel, whom he continually strives to render
as a new Adam, father of a race. Into Jewel’s back, Donally drills that race’s foundational
construct: an elaborate depiction of Eve, wearing a “perfidious smile,” offering Adam the
apple—frozen in the moment when woman has sinned and man has not yet joined her in
falling from grace. The tattoo establishes gender difference as it inscribes woman as the
first and ultimate evil, and thus legitimizes blame of women and the resultant need for
their subjugation. But such a lesson cannot be taught one time only, and therefore the
image is not static: “The snake on his back flicked its tongue in and out with the play of
muscle beneath the skin and the tattooed Adam appeared to flinch again and again from
the apple which Eve again and again leaned forward to offer him until it seemed that the moving picture of an endless temptation was projecting on Jewel’s surfaces” (Heroes and Villains 113). Like the gender identity that Judith Butler sees as “tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts” (“Performative” 270), the identities of woman as temptress and man as hero must be established and reinforced through an endless series of acts that project an illusion of a continuous “essence.” When Jewel dies, the image fossilizes at last, and Jewel is reduced permanently to Donally’s construct; but whereas he, at least, falls in battle defending his people, Eve/woman is doomed to fall while still—eternally—in the midst of original sin. These gendered constructions will remain the foundational myths of the Barbarians’ civilization.

8. The phallic nature of the knife or tattoo needle is strikingly apparent in Shadow Dance. Morris notices the correspondence—as well as the absurd power of the phallus—when, in a dance of homoeroticism with Honeybuzzard, he suddenly finds himself on the receiving end of “the little, murderous point of the knife”: “The same little point now pricking at his throat had once ripped up the soft flesh of the girl Ghislaine. He knew or thought he knew that it was the same knife. He had never seen it before but he had been curious to see it. He knew he was dreaming when he realized how silly it was that such a little bit of metal should have so much power in it.” The encounter proceeds in a blatantly mock-sexual manner: Morris is released from the “clutch of Honeybuzzard’s thighs as the frozen tenseness of the other’s flesh melted”; this is followed by a “gasp,” a “great paroxysm of . . . laughter,” and, interestingly, the return of the knife to Morris (a reciprocity that was surely absent in the heterosexual Ghislaine episode), which Honey refers to as “a marvelous anti-climax” (141–42).

9. Mascia-Lees and Sharpe argue that many men experienced just such a fear in the face of the sexual freedom of the 1960s and ’70s (“Marked” 150).

10. Since we, like Desiderio, cannot tell the fantasies from the realities here, Doctor Hoffman’s metalepses seem more “literal” than those in Carter’s other novels.

11. Although most critics seem to revert to a humanist notion of the subject in exploring the effects of rape on Carter’s characters, a number of them do comment on rape’s destruction of subjectivity. Paulina Palmer asks, “Is it possible to represent a female protagonist as a victim of sexual harassment or violence while, at the same time, portraying her as an autonomous individual?” (Palmer 185). She notes that in The Magic Toyshop and Heroes and Villains, for instance, Carter foregrounds this contradiction. Lorna Sage remarks that in Love, after the “mutual rape” of her husband Lee, Annabel’s “final gesture . . . is to make herself over into a parody-woman (a blonde, painted doll) and then, by a logical extension, a dead one” (Women 172). Elaine Jordan reminds us that, in Heroes and Villains’ “scene of threatened gang rape, . . . the heroine, Marianne, prepares to resist by pretending she doesn’t exist” (“Enthralment” 29). And Robert Clark, in discussing that scene, notes that “the usual response of the character to such situations is to abstract mind from body, a willed self-alienation that may imitate actual human behavior but which effectively means that the victim can offer neither physical nor moral resistance. The individual becomes very like one of those half-animate automata that recur throughout Carter’s work” (Clark 151).

12. Here Zero’s philosophy is implicitly supported by that of Monique Wittig, who argues that lesbians are not women. “Lesbian is the only concept that I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because lesbian societies are not based
upon women’s oppression and because the designated subject (lesbian) is not a woman either economically or politically or ideologically” (Wittig 53).

13. Merja Makinen argues relatedly of the fairy-tales in Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber*: “Read the beasts as the projections of a feminine libido, and they become exactly that autonomous desire which the female characters need to recognize and reappropriate as a part of themselves (denied by the phallocentric culture)” (12).

14. On the one hand, Carter may be holding Albertina up as a sort of feminist example, for her deconstructive reading practice seems to contain the potential to undermine certain key binary structures. But as some critics point out, Albertina ultimately “speaks the word of the father” (Robinson 107). According to Sally Robinson, “Albertina’s gender fluidity throughout the novel serves, not to blur the boundaries of sexual difference in order to liberate us from the tyranny of absolute division by gender, but to perpetuate the whole metaphysical apparatus as it works around the question of sexual difference” (107). Robinson argues that Dr. Hoffman’s “system” is “complicit in the same ideological agenda” as the system of the Ministry of Determination: “They both position Man as an imperialist subject whose desire gives free reign to exploitation and domination” (99).

15. Albertina’s reclassification of the event parodies Freud’s shift from a belief in actual sexual abuse of children to a notion of infantile sexuality predicated on a fantasy of seduction.

16. Albertina’s reality status has always been dubious: she can appear as a swan, as the doctor’s male ambassador, as the masochist Lafleur, and as a woman. In recounting his encounter with “Lafleur,” Desiderio remarks, “I did not know then that [Albertina] travelled with me for she was inextricably mingled with my idea of her and her substance was so flexible she could have worn a left glove on her right hand” (*DH* 142). Later Albertina confirms his suspicions: “You have never yet made love to me because, all the time you have known me, I’ve been maintained in my various appearances only by the power of your desire” (204).

17. Freud, for one, sees sadism as “masculine” and masochism as “feminine,” regardless of the sex of the practitioner. “As regards these masochistic men . . . in their masochistic phantasies, as well as in the performances they go through for their realization, they invariably transfer themselves into the part of a woman; that is to say, their masochistic attitude coincides with a feminine one” (“A Child Is Being Beaten” 197). As Susanne Kappeler argues in reviewing Carter’s *The Sadeian Woman*, Sade, too, draws these battle lines: “While his options are strictly binary—to suffer or to cause suffering, to belong to one half of ‘mankind’ or the other—these are not for [Carter] to choose from: they are gender specific” (Kappeler 135).

18. Roberta Rubenstein seems, to some extent, to agree, arguing that, “ironically, the presumed convergence of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ attributes in an androgynous whole,” as Carter figures it, “comes closer to reinforcing than altering the culturally loaded constructions of gender.” Rubenstein sees Carter’s narrative as deconstructing not gender but “the concept of androgyny” (115).

19. Symptomatic of Clark’s misreading is his belief that “notwithstanding Tristessa’s long masquerade of femininity, s/he is forced by Zero and his girls to rape Eve” (174). Clark’s inability to see that it is Eve who rapes Tristessa derives from his belief that Carter is operating under a conventionally rigid understanding of gender and sexuality. As Merja Makinen explains in refuting those critics who “argue that Carter . . . gets locked into conservative sexism,” “it is the critics who cannot see beyond the sexist binary opposition.”
When a patriarchal literary form, for instance, “is used to critique the inscribed ideology, . . . then the form is subtly adapted to inscribe a new set of assumptions.” Makinen stresses Carter’s use of irony which, she says, “enacts an oscillation that is itself deconstructive” of binary categories (Makinen 4, emphasis mine).

20. Interestingly, in a more recent article, Jordan herself argues that “through her speculative fictions Carter comes round to mocking modern Romantic fantasies of the restoration of unity and wholeness in the fulfilment of desire (as in the ludicrous halloowing of ‘Reintegrate the primal form!’ in The Passion of New Eve, p. 64)” (“Edge” 199).

21. Because Woman is a construction of male fantasy, Tristessa, the Hollywood icon, can perform his own fantasy of the ideal woman and not only “pass” for female (indeed be embraced as more perfectly feminine than any real woman) but, in a sense, become the quintessence of femininity. As one of Mother’s “daughters” assures Evelyn, a “change in the appearance will restructure the essence” (PNE 68). Both this proposition and Tristessa’s “essential” femininity require a radical redefinition, perhaps an evacuation, of the notion of “essence,” but this is a move that Tristessa is happy to make and that Eve eventually comes to understand. Before Evelyn becomes Eve and discovers Tristessa’s (essential) construction, he apostrophizes her, lauding “your beautiful lack of being, as if your essence were hung up in a closet like a dress too good to be worn and you were reduced to going out in only your appearance” (72). Later, Eve will realize that that “only” is all, and that Tristessa epitomizes the normal process of self-construction, rendering “herself” “an illusion in a void,” “the living image of the entire Platonic shadow show” that would vanish as soon as each movie ended (110). Tristessa, she explains, had “no ontological status, only an iconographic one” (129).

22. De Lauretis quotes Stephen Heath on this point: “‘What then of the look of the woman? . . . If the woman looks, the spectacle provokes, castration is in the air, the Medusa’s head is not far off’” (de Lauretis 135). See, also, Lacan on the relationship between the gaze and lack/castration (e.g., 72–73, 88).

23. Naomi Schor, for example, argues that the interpreting character or “interpretant” is the external interpreter’s “specular image” who “mirror[s] his confusions as well as his triumphs”; “via the interpretant the author is trying to tell the interpreter something about interpretation” (169, 170). Tzvetan Todorov agrees that “construction as theme” of fiction makes the study of reading “more convenient” (“Reading” 78). This correspondence between external and internal readers underlies Judith Fetterley’s project in her essay “Reading about Reading.”

24. Roland Barthes writes that unlike the work, which “closes itself on a signified,” “the Text is experienced only in an activity, a production”; “the Text . . . asks the reader for an active collaboration” (75, 80). For other explorations of the meaning-making activity of readers, see, e.g., the essays collected in Suleiman and Crosman’s The Reader in the Text. Todorov, for example, discusses “Reading as Construction”; Iser argues that “the text itself simply offers ‘schematized aspects’ through which the aesthetic object of the work can be produced,” and it is the reader who “sets the work in motion,” who “receives” the text’s message “by composing it” (106–7); and Robert Crosman claims that “the statement ‘authors make meaning . . . is merely a special case of the more universal truth that readers make meaning” (151). Suleiman contextualizes this belief as part of an evolution in the humanities “toward . . . making explicit . . . the investigator’s role in delimiting or even in constituting the object of study” (“Introduction” 4).
25. As described by Peter Schumann, director of the Bread and Puppet Theatre, puppet shows partake of the “subversive” nature of carnival (puppet theater “prefers its own secret and demeaning stature in society, representing, more or less, the demons of that society and definitely not its institutions” [Schumann 75]) and teeter, like carnival, on the edge of such boundaries as those between body and mind, individual subjectivity and communally defined identity, and reality and unreality. (See also Proschin 30; Bakhtin, Rabelais, 7.)

26. Morris, too, places faith in the transformative power of thought. Not only does he fear that his directive that Honeybuzzard “teach [Ghislaine] a lesson” (37) has effected her physical trauma; as an aspiring artist, he also attempts to affect the real Ghislaine through representations of her. First he digs up photographs of her in which “he intend[s] to blot out her face in each pose. . . . He [thinks] that would duly extinguish her”—but he cannot bring himself to do it (17). Then he contemplates putting her in a painting. “He could best accommodate the thought of Ghislaine as the subject for . . . a Francis Bacon horror painting of flesh as a disgusting symbol of the human condition; that way, she became somehow small enough for him to handle, she dwindled through the wrong end of the telescope of art.” Yet, unlike Honey, Morris knows that “he could only think in this way, never execute” (20).

27. In one of Carter’s short stories of the ’70s, “The Loves of Lady Purple,” the whorish puppet-woman attempts to cross the fiction-reality boundary in the opposite direction. But although Lady Purple does become “real,” she does not succeed in revising the script. “The mere repetition so many times of the same invariable actions” (LP 39) has turned Lady Purple into the character she has, albeit passively, played. She knows only the wicked whore’s role, and she can do nothing but make “her next performance . . . a variation upon a theme” (38). Still, there may be a feminist lesson in this “failure,” for in making it impossible for Lady Purple to achieve subjectivity, her master has also destroyed himself: the monster he has created plays out in earnest the story he authored, seducing and killing him, using him as the fictional Lady Purple “used her lovers”—“as the canvas on which she executed boudoir masterpieces of destruction” (LP 32). So the master has written himself to death, and both man and woman ultimately lose at this relentless game.

28. Fevvers does indeed seem to have some control over her self-construction, and Paulina Palmer sees her wings as symbols of “liberation and rebirth.” Palmer praises Nights at the Circus as a sign of Carter’s advancement from an analytic and demythologizing feminism to a more utopian one (Palmer 180). Sally Robinson writes that “Fevvers takes full responsibility for engineering herself as spectacle and, thus, resists victimization” (Robinson 125). Of course, even if she is her own author, Fevvers must and does draw heavily on conventions of femininity, not only in order to market herself but because she cannot escape the repetition of gender norms.

29. For a related argument, see Robinson, who notes that Nights at the Circus “works to displace this gendered opposition [subject/object] by the both/and logic which marks Fevver’s self-representation” (123).

30. “‘You’re fading away, as if it was only always nothing but the discipline of the audience that kept you in trim,’” says Lizzie (280).

31. Carter has said that “part of the point of the novel is that you are kept uncertain” (Katsavos 13).

32. Although Carter herself sees this move as “not postmodernist at all . . . [but] the
single most nineteenth-century gesture in the novel,” the blurring it enacts of the boundary between fiction and reality is in fact a typically postmodernist game.

33. Like Merja Makinen, Beth Boehm blames this sort of misreading, which she finds in two reviews of *Nights at the Circus*, on a failure “to understand the [novel’s] parodic, metafictional, and feminist intentions.” As Boehm explains, “To deconstruct a particular ideology and a particular set of conventions, it is necessary to invoke those very ideologies and conventions one hopes to subvert, but . . . the double coding of metafiction makes this a risky business for the feminist writer who hopes to show the connections between literary constructions and social constructions” (44).