Unlike *Absalom, Absalom!* and The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, which are torn between conflicting views of representation and subjectivity, Christine Brooke-Rose’s *Thru* explicitly and playfully opts for a postmodernist position. The novel denies the possibility of distinguishing between language and reality and is skeptical about reality’s ontological status: “Language is all we have to apprehend reality, if we must use that term” (64). *Thru* also negates representation (“this being a text not an imitation of life” [79], and “You are mad, all of you. You’re talking about all these people as if they really existed” [154]). Instead of a traditional self, it posits an indeterminate flux, “forever undefined, never coinciding with himself” (139), replacing the humanist concept by the relational notion of subject, “since subjects are the space of travelling semes the passage of a transformed decision” (158). The book consistently disconnects utterances from any human source to produce a depersonalized movement “from one disembodied voice to another” (59). This logically leads to “the troubled identity of the narrator” (13), “the disappeared narrator” (164), “the narrator as Zero”
Yet, while denying life to characters, narrators, and authors, it gives life to the very process of narration: “Narration is life and I am Scheherezade” (133).

All of these statements seem to have been drawn from a theoretical study rather than a novel, but this is precisely the point. Self-reflexive and metatextual, Thru uses the reader’s (or critic’s) metalanguage as its own object-language, subverting the distinction between the two. But in addition to these explicit statements, Thru also “performs” the destabilization it talks about. In what follows, I will analyze the relations between narration and representation as well as between narration and subjectivity as these emerge from Thru both constatively and performatively. I will do this in the full awareness that since the various statements are made by characters in the novel, they are—to a large extent—a part of the novel’s “performance,” the very distinction between constative and performative being problematized by this text’s radical narrative strategies.

Taking advantage of its pedagogical framework, Thru explicitly discusses the Platonic conception of mimesis: “For mimesis inevitably produces a double of the thing, the double being nothing a non-being which nevertheless is added to the thing, and therefore not totally devoid of value although, however resembling, never absolutely true. C Plato for yourself” (106; cf. also 143–44).

The absence-side of this doubling is emphasized in the quasi-epigrammatic “If mimesis exists non-being is” (14, 108) as well as by the allusion to both Lacan and Wallace Stevens: “For although every discourse presupposes a blind spot it never the less implies the absence of things as desire implies the absence of its object” (103; cf. also 143).

The reader acutely experiences the absence of things—or at least their undecidability—in a performative repetition, when trying to figure out what happens in Thru. As in Escher’s painting of two hands, each of which can be seen as drawing the other, so in
Thru what seems to be a narrating subject changes places with what may be understood as a narrated object, collapsing the hierarchy of narrative levels and suggesting that there may be no reality apart from its narration. However, before embarking on an analysis of the reversibility of levels in this text, a preliminary caveat is in order. Although the symmetrical interchangeability of narrator and narrated does indeed exist in Thru, it often disappears into “no narrator at all but a lacuna through which it is possible to fall into delirious discourse” (54). This is governed by “the principle . . . that you don’t follow the principle” (76), giving rise to the question repeatedly asked at all levels: “Who speaks?” (1, 22, 35, 42, 59, 89, 107, etc.).

Who, then, speaks in Thru? One could perhaps identify the speaker with the Master, borrowed from Diderot’s Jacques le fataliste and functioning here as a kind of dramatized narrator. Although the Master appears only three times in Thru, his conversations with his servant and alter ego, Jacques, concerning the composition of a text occur around the beginning, middle, and end of the novel (16–17, 60–70, 149) and can be understood as representing the overall act of narration. The text they compose is presumably the one we read, since its main characters, like Thru’s, are a couple by the names of Larissa Toren and Armel Santores. However, Larissa herself is also in the process of composing a text. “But which text?” asks the Master. “It looks mightily as if she were producing this one” (66). If both Larissa and the Master are said to be writing the text we read, their roles as narrators become interchangeable. Not only does this mean, as the Master jokingly puts it to Jacques, “that the narrator I transformed into Larissa am no longer your master but your mistress” (ibid.). It also means that the object of the Master’s narration is transformed into the narrator of the text we read, and possibly becomes the inventor of both Jacques and the Master. No wonder the Master is bewildered and enraged that “this woman Larissa has . . . usurped my place as narrator” (67).
Moreover, in the middle of writing her text, Larissa is interrupted by a visitor called Armel, a friend of her neighbor's, a black writer from Timbuctoo whom she does not know. This Armel gives her naive criticism of her previous book (61–65). Another Armel is Larissa's husband (later ex-husband), and there is an early suggestion, rejected later, that he may be black (46). If the interrupting Armel is identical with the husband, then the scene between him and Larissa is probably a flashback, perhaps their first meeting. Occurring where it does, this scene reinforces the blurring of fictional levels, since Armel, who formerly appeared as a character in the Master's narrative (like Larissa herself), is now promoted to the first degree of fictionality, where he converses with "Larissa Toren, author" (64), who may have invented Jacques and the Master (or rather borrowed them from Diderot) as dramatized narrators for her text. On the other hand, it is also possible that the whole scene between Larissa and Armel is part of the Master's text.

In order to bring the conversation with Armel to a close, Larissa "acquire[s] a sudden husband as a last minute escape" (67). The Master, who makes that comment, is also convinced that "Of course her husband if true would have to be Armel" (ibid.). This is confusing, in view of the fact that she tells Armel about a husband who—according to the Master—must be Armel. So perhaps the two Armels are not the same person: "That's a coincidence," the Master explains at this point to the perplexed Jacques. "They do happen despite the critics" (67).

In addition to the dramatized gentleman narrator, Thru is replete with references to "the omniscient unprivileged unreliable narrator" (32), whom the Master may have created to narrate the story of Armel, Larissa, and the others, but who may also be a narrator above that one, posing the Master and his servant as narrating agencies for his own narrative. Like the dramatized narrator, this disembodied voice is also confusingly equated with Larissa, either through analogies or through explicit identification. The minutes of a staff meeting state, "Larissa Toren is op-
posed to all horizontal coordination which, according to her, would degenerate into useless chatter” (96); later we hear, “the horizontal coordination degenerates, according to the narrator, into useless chatter” (147). And Armel accuses Larissa of having invented him and withdrawn, “indifferent, paring your fingernails” (25–26), a Joycean attribute of authors often applied in Thru to the unreliable narrator (cf. 87). Is Larissa then the narrator in whose narrative she appears as a character? She sometimes considers this possibility: “Whoever invented it is the absent narrator or you in love with the unreliable narrator who is in love with the implied author who is in love with himself and therefore absent in the nature of things” (137–38; see also 96–97).

Whoever the narrator is, one of the objects of his narration is a radical university, with students from all over the world, where Armel and/or Larissa seem to be teaching. This institution of learning is said (by whom?) to have been “dreamt up by the unreliable narrator of the moment who however will be tactfully dropped without scene or motivation” (55). Since that narrator often merges into his dramatized counterparts or into Larissa, she or they could, by the same token, have invented the radical university. But who, in that case, can tactfully drop the unreliable narrator without scene or motivation? If he is himself dreamt up by the dramatized narrator or by Larissa, one of them can obviously drop him. But if he is either equivalent to them or is their creator, who can dispose of him “from above”?

An interesting possibility emerges here, for the academic course the narrative most often focuses on is creative writing, where a collective text rather uncannily similar to Thru is being composed. It is quite possible that the class is the collective author, inventing and dropping the unreliable disembodied voice as well as Larissa and the Master as narrators. “After all it’s our text, isn’t it? for us only,” the teacher says (75). But if the class composes the text and sets up its narrators, how can it also be dreamt up by the very narrators it invents? One of the students is disturbingly aware of this double bind: “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, an etherised unauthorised other” (155).

Nor do the complications stop here. The creative writing class is probably taught by Armel, and Larissa’s name in the schedule as well as her comments at the staff meetings could be a part of the collective composition or of Armel’s own novel. But since Larissa herself also writes a text (*Thru*?), whether she teaches at the same university or at another, it is quite possible that she transforms Armel (and the class) into characters in her novel, or even that she transforms herself into Armel.

Armel and Larissa are both teachers and characters in the collective narrative composed by the creative writing students, making the students’ conversation at times particularly perplexing:

You’re mad, all of you. You’re talking about all these people as if they really existed.

Oh shut up Ali we’re having fun inventing. (154)

As characters in the students’ composition, Armel and Larissa do not really exist. As teachers they do exist, but—in another turn of the screw—even as teachers they exist only as fictional characters in *Thru*. Imagine Armel, the teacher, listening to (and perhaps even participating in) the lively exchange among the students about him as a character:

if it weren’t for that illiberal and catastrophic chapter in which you re-invented him as an ideal husband, articulate and cruel to be kind, in order to dialogue lunatically with yourself.

What do you mean? That was real.

... Already Myra slipped him into the wrong rectangle as a black man last term. (150–51)

Or about his ex-wife, Larissa:
So what do you think, should we kill off Larissa?
She sure asks for it. (150)

The collective narrative is not exclusively oral. Some of its sections are submitted by the students as written exercises, but the same interchangeability of levels that governs the oral composition operates here, too. Rather than signaling the nature of such segments in advance, *Thru* first presents them as if they were the narration of primary fictional events (possibly told by the absent or the dramatized narrator). Only later, when we reach the teacher’s comments or the class discussion, do we realize that these events are a fiction within a fiction, that is, parts of a student’s composition (45–48, 58–59, 71–73). Armel’s comments on these written segments reinforce the reversibility of levels, for they could be said of *Thru* with equal justification. “The narrator could in fact disappear entirely though you’ve woven him in quite well,” he writes to one student (48); and to another: “Very good. I like the mixture of levels” (73). Such remarks again promote the students’ compositions to the level of the text in which they appear and whose structural principles they share (or create). Armel’s comments are written by hand, the handwriting being that of Christine Brooke-Rose, author of *Thru*. This not only reinforces the analogy between *Thru* and the collective composition within it, but also inserts the biographical author—supposedly outside the interchangeability of narrative levels—into the text. The assumption of some inviolate level outside the game is completely undermined, and the author is no longer the origin of the text but one of its effects.

Armel and Larissa, we have seen, play two hierarchically incompatible yet interchangeable roles: They are both university teachers in *Thru* and characters in a collective narrative composed by Armel’s students. If we set aside this ambiguity of levels and examine the relations between Armel and Larissa at each level separately (though we can never know which is which), we soon realize that another form of reversible hierarchy is intro-
duced—even when the two should be on a par. This form of hierarchy is realistically motivated both by the kind of people Armel and Larissa are said to be (both as primary fictional characters and as inventions in the students’ narrative) and by their being writers who fictionalize each other in their work (again at both levels).

As a person (that is, as a fictional character at one level or another) Armel can relate to Larissa (and vice versa), only by creating an image of himself—a kind of persona—for her and an image of her for himself. In his letter to Larissa, Armel asks: “Have you not carefully invented the person you have become?” (26) and—at a different narrative level (unless the letter is also part of the collective composition)—the students ask the same question: “But Larissa? and our Larissa? Has she not carefully invented the person she has become?” (151). Armel realizes that he could also be said to have created Larissa, an invention she fully reciprocates: “And perhaps it was after all I who invented you though you would not admit this. Certainly you invented me and withdrew” (26). The students also see Larissa—now a character in their fiction—as creating an image of Armel for herself: “That’s precisely why one has to reinvent him all the time. I mean that’s why Larissa had to” (151). This mutual invention, with a few more characters added, is tabulated by one of the possible narrators of Thru before any of the characters have been properly “presented”:

unless Armel inventing Larissa
  or Larissa ” Armel
  ” Armel ” Veronica
  ” Veronica ” Armel
  ” Armel ” Larissa
  ” Larissa ” Marco (or is it Oscar?)
  ” Marco (?) ” Larissa
  ” Larissa ” Armel

(8. The table is then repeated in reverse.)
The table is, by its nature, endless: “It follows therefore that if Larissa invents Armel inventing Larissa, Armel also invents Larissa inventing Armel” (108), and so on ad infinitum.

Just as they fictionalize each other in their fictional lives, so they fictionalize each other in their fictional fictions. In what seems like the first tête-à-tête between Armel (future husband or stranger-interrupter?) and Larissa, various elements (“the man from Porlock,” the remark about the white lines formed on the black hands, among others) are repeated from the text Larissa composes as he enters. It is as if her text anticipates the “reality” between Armel and herself, just as—according to the students—it does in relation to Stavro, her lover after the separation from Armel: “They’d meet for a drink on the castle terrace [Larissa, Stavro, and his new girlfriend] and Larissa would say tell me how did you two meet closing the manuscript in which she’d be inventing the whole episode before she knew it would turn out that way” (153).

Larissa herself talks to Armel about Stavro both as her lover and as a character in a text she is writing: “That’s why I transferred the whole narrative to Rome, the International Theme you know, as well as the psychosis” (132). And just as she (re)invents both Stavro and Armel in her writing, so she encourages Armel to do the same with her: “Write your text and reinvent me in the present tense, which is a convention like any other tense. . . . Whoever you invented invented you too. That surely is the trouble, we do not exist” (53).

Larissa’s novels not only transfer her fellow characters to a further degree of fictionality; they also parallel the governing structural principles of Thru, in which they are contained. This is particularly evident when Armel (the husband or the other?) criticizes Larissa’s book in terms that could apply to Thru, and her answers become an inbuilt defense of Thru, disarming potential critics in advance. Two examples clarify this point. Armel wonders why the publisher advertises Larissa’s book as funny: “Of
course it’s not funny you are weeping all the time it is one long cry of anguish” (62), and she answers: “So, I’m weeping all the time and yet I’m merely amusing myself. But isn’t the only thing to do with a long cry of anguish to amuse oneself? In my country we never separate the two. I take it as a compliment. But you seem to utter these phrases as reproaches” (63). Like Larissa’s novel, *Thru* is a combination of witty self-amusement and a cry of anguish, and it is impossible to know whether its author is sad to be glad or glad to be sad—she certainly does not separate the two. Another aspect Armel attacks is the “fall into language”: “Why this flight? . . . What I mean is there are moments when you touch on the very essence of things and then brrt! you escape, you run away into language” (62). And Larissa answers—for herself and to all critics of *Thru*—“You mean that when I touch on the essence of things, in that text, it’s not by means of language? What is it then?” (ibid.), and “Language is all we have to apprehend reality, if we must use that term” (64).

With this parallel between Larissa’s text and *Thru*, we have come full circle to the possibility envisaged at the beginning of this chapter, namely—in the Master’s words—“It looks mightily as if she were producing this one and not, as previously appeared, Armel, or Armel disguised as narrator or the narrator I disguised as Armel, That’s not clear” (66). It is indeed unclear both because Larissa may be producing this text but may also be invented by its dramatized or undramatized narrator or even by the students’ collective composition, and because it deprives the reader of the possibility of distinguishing between narrating subject and narrated object, container and contained, outside and inside, higher and lower narrative levels, plunging him/her into a situation not far from Russell’s paradox of “the class of all classes which are not members of themselves.” The paradox can be illustrated by the amusing anecdote about the barber who shaves all—but only—only those villagers who cannot shave themselves.
Does the barber, then, shave himself? Either answer produces a contradiction. If he does shave himself, then he can, so disqualifying him from the class of villagers who cannot shave themselves. If, on the other hand, he does not shave himself, then there is one person in the village who cannot shave himself and whom the barber does not shave—which contradicts the premise contained in the first sentence. Russell solved his paradox by the theory of logical types, postulating that a class is of a higher type than its members and should not be confused with them (Russell and Whitehead 1964, 37–66). Thus the barber cannot be used to name both the class and one of its members. This solution is similar to the distinction between metalanguage and object-language, designed to prevent similar paradoxes in language. But the hierarchy that solves Russell’s paradox becomes ambiguously reversible in Thru, blocking all possible resolution.

The reversibility of hierarchies calls into question the notion of representation. Traditional views of literature as representation assume, in one way or another, a reality (or a fictional reality) that precedes the act of narration of which it is the object (see chapter 1). But transforming the narrated object into the narrating agency, and vice versa, as Thru constantly does, not only plunges one into a universe of paradox, infinite regress, and tight loop, but also puts in doubt the separation between reality and narration and questions the very notion of representation.

In dismantling representation, Thru displays a wide range of alternatives. As should be clear from the preceding analysis of the process of mutual invention, representation is replaced by presentation, reproduction by production, and re-creation by creation. To clinch the matter, however, let me reiterate a short passage already quoted, which emphasizes both the status of narration as creation and its correlative interrogation of “real existence”: “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, an etherised unauthorised other” (155).

“We are the text” recalls such similar expressions as “You are the sentence I write I am the paragraph” (145), foregrounding textuality as another alternative to representation. Textuality is reinforced by many explicit declarations, of which I shall quote only two: “A text is a text is a text,” (57) itself an intertextual variation on Gertrude Stein, and “within the grammar of that narrative the roles can be interchanged and textasy multiplied” (87). Textuality is also playfully “performed” by highlighting various aspects of “the materiality of the sign.” Acrostics (e.g., 6, 11) and other graphic patterns (e.g., 40, 85) foreground the visual aspect; alliterations and sound repetitions (e.g., the proximity of ‘Ruth’ and ‘Thru’ “for mixed reasons of phonemic contiguity” [17]) enrich the acoustic qualities; anagrams and palindromes play with the linear character of language and simultaneously emphasize, on the verbal level, the reversibility of the narrative structure. Larissa uses a near anagram to explain her personality, “I’m rotten through and through you know, my name is Toren” (135). A more complex game describes her relationship with Armel, as mirrored by their names. The inventor and the invention of the other, Armel Santores and Larissa Toren are again near anagrams whose few extra or missing letters foreshadow their incompatibility. Armel’s name contains an m and an e, absent from Larissa’s; hers includes an i not present in his. “Why ask what went wrong?” Larissa writes to Armel, “you can make up answers such as you didn’t find your ME in me or you kept it nor did I find my I in you but kept it” (53; see also 69, where the anagram is explicitly explained). What went wrong in a human relationship is reduced to missing letters in the lovers’ names, and the play of language reigns supreme.

Whereas anagrams create a different word by interchanging letters, palindromes are even closer to Escher’s drawing hands.
The hands look identical, being in fact reverse images of each other. They interact circularly, so that the right hand can be seen as drawing the left and vice versa. Palindromes are similarly two-directional, producing exactly the same word (or expression) when read forwards or backwards. Wishing to crown Larissa's fictional life with a banal death, the class is engaged in a language game: "What shall we do, kill her off? Eliminate her to Lima or let her die in Rome?" and their decision is a perfect palindrome: "But she must die in ROMA AMOR spelt backwards of course" (152). The two words are reversed mirror images, undermining the order of perception, just as Escher subverted its hierarchy. Appropriately, the text exits with a visual mirroring of its title and a performative declaration of its self-reflexiveness:

reflecting nothing but

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T
E
X
(I)
UЯНТHRU (164)
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Textuality in *Thru* is largely a matter of intertextuality, "a text which in effect is a dialogue with all preceding texts" (43; see also 121). My purpose here is to show that intertextuality does indeed become an alternative to representation in *Thru*, not to analyze the numerous allusions and quotations in this text, so I limit my examples to one string of quotations from literary texts and one playful interaction with a seminal theoretical study. Any distinction between the two types is, as I have already suggested, undermined in *Thru*. T. S. Eliot, Shakespeare, E. M. Forster, Dante, and Wallace Stevens meet in the following passage, creating through their contiguity a story of the failure of communication: "And if one settling a pillow by her head should say That is not what I meant at all That is not it at all, fill the air with quotations for the aisle is full of noises where angels fear to tread nel mezzo del
cammin because I do not hope to turn again where the lack of imagination had itself to be imagined for a flash of an hour” (44). The second example comes from one of the classroom situations in *Thru*. It begins with the teacher reminding the class, “We must not confuse the levels of discourse . . . I am not a function of your narrative and we are using a metalanguage” (50). This is followed by Jakobson’s six functions of language and an appended comment:

> There should be placards saying: Danger. You are now entering the Metalinguistic Zone. All access forbidden except for Prepared Consumers with special permits from the Authorities.

> M-phatically. (51; see also 126)

The passage above exemplifies not only intertextuality, but also metatextuality, since it becomes an indirect comment on *Thru*, especially by way of contrast. In opposition to the teacher’s warning, *Thru* does mix the levels of discourse, as well as the levels of narrative, and placards are precisely what it omits. Placards would operate like Russell’s theory of logical types or a clear demarcation between language and metalanguage, but there is no such comfort in *Thru*. In the absence of signposts around its metalinguistic zone, this complex text causes many readers to feel that they are not Prepared Consumers and therefore have little access to it. Larissa and Armel’s conversation about language (62–64), quoted earlier, can also be taken as metatextual commentary on *Thru*, on what Armel sees as a flight into language and Larissa as an amused acceptance (even exploitation) of its predominance. In addition to comments on itself, *Thru* is also characterized by metatextual statements about writing in general, as well as by a broader interrogation of the metalanguage of linguistics, literary theory, and psychoanalysis within its own object-language. The result is not only a “delirious discourse” (54) on discourse, but
also a transformation of the reader into an element of the text. In this way the reader loses her or his traditionally secure external position.

*Thru,* I have argued, is predominantly a text about texts. This statement, however, is less one-sided than it may seem, for *Thru* tends to expand the concept of text to make it refer to the whole world. It thus speaks of “a text like the world or the human body” (14–15; see also 55, 106–7) as well as “a text like love” (82; see also 143). If all the world is a text, then the textuality of literature reflects or dramatizes the textuality of the world, and a nonrepresentational text like *Thru* acquires an unexpected representational dimension.

One can detect representation of a more straightforward type in *Thru,* especially when the subject is the frustrating and castrating aspect of love and sex, the double standard and other gender inequalities, illness involving the removal of rotten organs (another form of castration, perhaps), radical universities, or racism. The representational effect of many scenic renderings of these themes is subsequently deconstructed by being revealed as a section from a character’s novel, a part of the collective composition, and so on (see, e.g., 45–48). But since the deconstruction is retrospective, a residue of the “realism” of the scene inevitably remains. Some readers may conceive of such glimpses of reality as no more than the bribes of traditional narrative. Others may see them as “touching on the very essence of things” (62), from which the “fall into language” is actually a fear-motivated flight. Still others may contend that, far from being nonrepresentational, the play with language in *Thru* is an attempt to represent the clichéd nature, the inescapable intertextuality, of all expressions of love, racism, and revolutionary ideas. All these are perhaps no more than ideological constructs, discursive practices that govern our existence even though (or because?) they are no more than mystifications masquerading as truths. I point out the possibility of
such interpretations in order to reflect on the persistence of representation in some form even in a highly nonrepresentational text. May not this persistence support a view of representation as an effect of the access function of narration in both postmodernist and earlier types of narrative? If such a rehabilitation seems to go against the grain of this text, Thru indirectly legitimizes it by saying, “Everything exists even the discourse you do not choose” (153).

As for the status of subjectivity in narration, one of the metatextual passages in Thru puts the problem in a nutshell: “which is why modern novels can be so disorientating despite the fact that through this chaotic freedom in the network of possibilities we fill the air with noises, twiddle along the timetable from left to right and back, from one disembodied voice to another. . . . Go forth and multiply the voices until you reach the undecidable even in some psychoasthmatic amateur castrate who cannot therefore sing the part” (59). Thru links narrators with indeterminacy and dissociates voices from any originating self.

Responsible for this dissolution of the traditional link between narration and “self” are various features discussed in the previous section from a different perspective. By turning narrating subjects into narrated (or invented) objects, the reversibility of narrative levels depersonifies narrators, making them into texts, stories, even fictions. And by creating a “confusion of voices” (116) and a quick, often unmarked, transition from one “tale-bearer” to another, the novel seems to answer its recurrent question “who speaks?” in the manner of Barthes: “The discourse, or better, the language, speaks, nothing more” (1974, 41). Finally, the abundant use of intertextuality also contributes to the effacement of the source of utterances, since the voice of the individual is swallowed up in the collective system of cultural discourse.

With a (parodic?) overtone of Marxist slogans and a playful allusion to Lewis Carroll, Thru executes the narrator: “There’s no more private property in writing, the author is dead, the spokes-
man, the porte-parole, the tale-bearer, off with his head” (29). But although the narrator is executed, the act of narration itself is alive and kicking. In class, the teacher develops the hypothesis that in Homer’s period, the community assumes both roles, emitting and receiving a discourse it addresses to itself: “Indeed, the community is the discourse” (28). The background lecture ends with an inscription on the board, accompanied by an explanation, and both are applicable in Thru far beyond Homer:

narration
you see not narrator for the reasons just given. (28)

Not only does narration supersede the dead narrator; it is also endowed with a life of its own: “Narration is life and I am Scheherezade” (133). The recurrent Scheherezade motif, however, suggests that some form of life may spill back from the act of narration to its agent: “Better known and more significant is Scheherezade, whose very life is to narrate and whose narration gives her life, with every new character in the same situation, not a character but a tale-bearer, whose life also depends on his narration generated by the surplus value left over from the previous tale and itself generating the next” (40). As long as she can tell she can live, and so she spends her life narrating.

But how does narration’s life-giving capacity tally with the “off with his head” attitude? I suggest that this seeming contradiction is precisely the drama Thru enacts: the narrator dies as an originating self only to give birth to the narrator as a speaking subject, but the newborn subject is a creature of paper, a signifier in the symbolic order. Something similar is Lacanically stated in Thru in relation to characters and authors: “In this way the construction of a character has to pass through a death, necessary to the structuring of the subject as subject of utterance, and for his insertion into the circuit of signifiers, I mean the narration. It is therefore the recipient, you Jacques, or anyone, the other, who transforms the subject into author, making him pass through this
zero-stage, this negation, this exclusion which is the author” (69). Authors, characters, and narrators are all subject(ed) to narration, or—more broadly—to language. They are dead as selves but alive as subjects. Yet the death of the narrator is “only a manner of speaking since the text has somehow come into existence” (32). And so there must be some originator who is not only an effect of the text or a signifier in the symbolic order (although, as Thru also remarks, “In some languages things do themselves”). Even a deconstruction may not be possible without a deconstructor, and the subversion of the traditional self in Thru is as paradoxical as de Man’s quoted allegory of the key (chapter 1). His final sentence can serve equally well as my conclusion: “This would imply the existence of at least one lock worthy of being raped, the Self as the relentless undoer of selfhood” (de Man 1979, 172).