Notes

A Note on Terminology

1. See Cadava, Connor, and Nancy 1991 for the non-uniformity of various uses of subject. My account here and in the book itself may well be contested by other theoreticians.

Introduction

1. See “A Note on Terminology,” above.
2. On the mutual generation of opposites in a different conceptual framework, see McCannel, 1975, 258.
3. Prendergast stresses both the connection between reference and a truth-claim and the problematic status of such a claim: “One can only refer to something that is held to exist in the world (or, in Frege’s terms, something in the world about which statements possessing truth-value can be made)” (1986:62-3).

Chapter I

1. Ricoeur has argued that mimesis in Aristotle does not mean an imitation of reality but an imitation of plot, an “articulated signification of action” (1983, 88).
2. Traditional here refers to a humanistic cast of mind, not a historical period.
3. One should note that Smith rejects the two-level model of narrative (fabula/sjuzet), explicitly arguing against a chronological or logical priority of the events. But her “transactional” model implies a view that, in this respect, resembles the view she rejects.
4. For a similar description, see Bal 1984, 343–44.

5. Indeed, *Representations* is the name of a distinguished New Historianist periodical.

6. For a brief review of such tendencies, see Gagnier 1991. See also Derrida’s present concern with agency, choice, and responsibility (1991).

7. As I have already suggested in the introduction, there are affinities between the question of representation in fiction and historiographical attempts to reconstruct a past—in spite of crucial distinctions between these discursive modes from other points of view (on some of the differences, see Cohn 1990, 775–804.)

8. De Lauretis makes a similar point about discourses on sexuality, emphasizing that the choice manifests an “investment,” “something between an emotional commitment and a vested interest in the relative power (satisfaction, reward, payoff) which that position promises (but does not necessarily fulfill)” (1987, 6).

9. I transform what Bakhtin says in the negative about authoritative discourse into positive statements about its opposite, i.e. the internally persuasive discourse.

10. De Lauretis makes a similar claim for a view of the subject, which emerges from current debates within feminism (1987, 10).

11. Nor is Genette unaware of the possibility of problematization. His model describes various techniques that subvert neat categories.

**Chapter 2**

1. All references are to the Vintage edition of 1972.

2. I say “predominantly” because the narrator sometimes changes within a single chapter and is sometimes unclear or ambiguous. I take up some problematic examples below.


4. See also pages 178, 181, 311, 326, 327.

5. See also pages 27–28, 147.
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6. See also pages 27, 140, 145.
8. Note that the few occasions on which Shreve does agree with Mr. Compson only emphasize the overall disagreement. For example, “And maybe this was one place where your old man was right” (342; see also 343, 374).
10. Felman’s by now classical analysis of James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1977, 94–207) dwells on the reader’s repetition of the mistakes of the characters.
11. For an emphasis on a literal reading of this statement as a hint that Bon is indeed Sutpen’s son, see Toker 1993, 159–60.
12. For an interesting interpretation of Rosa as the lover in *Absalom, Absalom!* see Kauffman 1986, 241–77.
14. Rosa is an exception, but she is more peripheral to the events than Sutpen, Henry, Bon, and Judith. Kauffman’s emphasis on Rosa’s values as those affirmed by the novel may partly explain why she is made a narrator.
15. See 353 of the novel for a similar statement about the mysterious workings of the “rapport of blood” between Sutpen, Henry, and Bon. Kauffman 1986 and McPherson 1987 offer detailed analyses of the “touch of flesh with flesh.”
16. Note that this is a different way of looking at the issue of nonverbal communication discussed earlier.
17. See Irwin 1975, 28, 78, and elsewhere for an explanation of the Henry and Bon that Quentin creates. Irwin relies for his explanation on *The Sound and the Fury*. Not all critics would agree with such a conflation of two novels.
18. For analysis of additional examples, see Brodsky 1978.
19. For additional comments on this italicized segment see Brodsky 1978, 252 and Toker 1993, 153–54.
20. Barthes (1970) sees this as part of the bourgeois emphasis on private property.

21. To support her hypothesis, Toker also adduces the occurrence of paralepses (the imparting of information that the character-narrator could not have) and of insights that are improbable from the point of view of the character concerned. I find Toker’s view difficult to accept, since Rosa, Mr. Compson, Quentin, and Shreve do tell their versions of the story, often in the first person, and always to a narratee. By definition, the one who tells is a narrator, whereas the focalizer is the one who perceives the events or through whose eyes we perceive them (cf. Genette 1972, 203). The combination of an extradiegetic narrator with a character-focalizer would take the form of third-person narration through the prism (but not the voice) of a character, as, for example, in James’s The Ambassadors. This is clearly not the case in Absalom, Absalom!

22. While Waggoner’s view can be supported by the initial image of the two Quentins (9), as well as by the snow on Shreve’s overcoat sleeve (173), it remains inconclusive, somewhat undermined by various shifters indicating the here and now of the first five chapters (e.g., 14).

23. See also page 367.

24. See also pages 335, 345, 346, 351.

25. This is said about Rosa, but it can, I think, also apply to the narrative efforts of the other characters. Kauffman takes the position that Rosa’s female discourse succeeds where the male discourses fail.

26. Other analogies, e.g., the parallelism between Bon’s status as a phantom in the lives of the various characters and the shadow realities created by narration were discussed above in a different context.

27. My emphasis on the success of the Quentin-Shreve creation requires some reservation, since at the end of the novel Quentin is close to a nervous breakdown.

Chapter 3

1. All references are to the Penguin edition of 1971.

2. See Rimmon-Kenan, 1976, 506–11 for an attempt to show how the novel blocks the possibility of choosing between the hypotheses.
3. This is the beginning from the point of view of the chronology of the story, not from that of the disposition of events in the text.

4. Note the difference between a literal identification (Abeson and Nosebag) and a figurative one (V and Sebastian).

5. The expression “false scent” is used in connection both with Success (80) and with V’s meeting with Goodman (50).

6. Uncle Black, named after the black chess figure, could write his name upside down, and the expression “upside down” recurs, albeit in a completely different context, in The Doubtful Asphodel: “physical growth considered upside down” (148).

7. Note the phonetic similarity of “Nussbaum” and “Nosebag.”


10. Note the repetition of v in “velvet.”

11. Note how the use of aural or visual alliteration, e.g., “sibilant slope” and “winding”—“writing,” enacts what it talks about.

12. In some sense it really does, since it is the author who decides to “kill” the character, but this causal relationship is denied in the quoted passage by the impression of unwittingness: the pause was fatal; it accidentally caused the man’s death.

Chapter 4

1. All references are to the Hamish Hamilton edition of 1975.

2. Larissa is listed in the schedule as teaching “The Novel as Intentional Object” (21), and her views are stated in the minutes of the staff meeting (96). Armel writes a letter to Larissa during another staff meeting (26); his comments appear on students’ compositions (48, 73, 74); and one of his courses, “The Beginnings of Narrative,” is listed in the file of a student named Saroja (34).

3. Note the ambiguity here: (a) she was producing Armel; (b) Armel was producing the text.

4. “Textasy” is the title of the first article published on Thru (Kaf-alenos 1980, 43–46).
5. Note also the repetition of the title word, though spelled conventionally, in this sentence.


7. In an interview, Brooke-Rose said that, for her, the real theme of Thru is castration (1976, 11), but she went on immediately to refer to the "découpage of reality" by "the very act of using language" (11–12), i.e., castration in a figurative, metalinguistic sense.

8. For a Lacanian interpretation of the shattering of the narrative voice into a multitude of surrogate "bearers of the tale," see Birch (1994).

Chapter 5

1. All references are to the Grove Press edition of 1980.

2. Here and elsewhere, Booth also wonders about the identity of the various addressers and addressees, but he does not analyse it in terms of narrative levels (1983, 445, 447).


4. Quotations from this text here and elsewhere in the chapter are from Beckett’s Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1965). The French original was published in 1952.

5. A similar fusion of two characters (if they are two) is dramatized in Nabokov’s The Real Life of Sebastian Knight. There too the merging is reinforced by a game of letters. This happens, we remember, when V, the narrator’s initial, is inserted into Sebastian’s name in Dr. Starov’s telegram.

6. See also Locatelli’s analysis, 1990:182 and elsewhere.

Chapter 6

1. See, for example, the near oxymoron in “the two did the best they could to create what really happened” (78). All references are to the Signet New American Library edition of 1987.

2. For this reason I use “self” (rather than “subject”) in my analysis of Beloved.
3. For a different discussion of the place of Beloved in postmodernism see Perez-Torres 1993, 659–707.

4. By near levels I mean phenomena that do not constitute narrative levels in the strict sense (i.e., when an object of narration becomes the narrating subject of a second-degree narrative) but are close to it in effect. An example is the embedding of second-degree focalization in a narrative whose narrator does not change.

5. On the difference between quoted and autonomous interior monologues see Cohn 1978, 14–15.

6. For a definition of scene both as detailed narration and as dialogue, see Rimmon-Kenan 1983, 54–55.

7. "First narrative" is Genette's term for the level narrated by the extradiegetic narrator (1972, 239). Most readers, of course, do not formulate their experience in these narratological terms.

8. The passage that follows this sentence is indeterminate as to voice and perspective. Is it told and focalized by the narrator, by Denver, by Sethe? Even tags like "said Sethe," while making it seem like her narration, can be construed as Denver's memories of her words or as the extradiegetic narrator's quotation of what Sethe said.

9. The near-identity between Sethe's age when giving birth to Denver and Denver's age when narrating her birth also diminishes the sense of distance.

10. Much later, after discovering Beloved's identity, Sethe associates the drinking of water with Beloved's behavior as a baby: "I would have known who you were right away because the cup after cup of water you drank proved and connected to the fact that you dribbled clear spit on my face the day I got to 124" (200).

In addition to the parallels, there is also a local contrast in the resurrection scene between Sethe's voiding and Beloved's drinking of water.

11. Beloved's return is not the only example in the novel of dead things coming back to life. Sethe returns to (sexual) life thanks to Paul D, while Paul D himself is reawakened by Beloved ("She moved him"). In both cases the return hurts.

12. Although this is narrated before the traumatic question, it follows it in the chronology of the story.

13. Even Sethe is said to have shaped the story, so there is creation in
every re-creation. There is a similarity between this view of narration as creation and, more important, creation by two, and the Quentin-Shreve narration in *Absalom, Absalom!*

14. The nonexistence of time for Beloved can also explain the difficulty of locating her two monologues in the temporal scheme of the novel: Do they occur in the narrative present? At the time of the separation from Sethe? Or at the time of their re-union? There are clues to support each possibility, and no decisive way of choosing among them.

15. Cf. “I am going to be in pieces” (212) and “after the bottoms of my feet swim away from me” (213). For a discussion of fragmentation see Ferguson 1991, 115.

16. “The body in pieces” (*le corps morcelé*) is a Lacanian expression (1966, 94) that I borrow without dwelling on all its implications for *Beloved*. The implications are highly interesting, but they lead in a direction that would blur the focus of this discussion.

17. Without love, there is a threat of disintegration. Therefore, when Paul D returns to Sethe after having left her, and wants to rub her feet, she thinks about the possibility of his washing her: “Will he do it in sections? . . . And if he bathes her in sections, will the parts hold?” (272).

18. Henderson uses the same pun in a slightly different context (1990, 71, 72).

19. For analyses of this lack of dissociation in terms of object-relations psychoanalysis, see Schapiro 1991 and Fitzgerald 1993. See also Wyatt 1993 for a Kristevan analysis of this phenomenon and a coining of the notion of a maternal symbolic.

20. Her need to have someone who would want her and would say her name is dramatized in the love scene with Paul D, where she asks him to touch her “on the inside part” and call her name (116). Note also that Beloved’s making love to her mother’s lover and later becoming pregnant (presumably) by him is one more manifestation of Sethe and Beloved as, in some sense, doubles. Interestingly, in order to break the spell Beloved has on him, Paul D says to Sethe that he would like to have a baby with *her*.

21. The word *Beloved* is half of the preacher’s speech in the funeral (“Dearly Beloved”), and Beloved’s name thus comes from the discourse
of the other. Names in this novel are an interesting subject in their own right, deserving a separate analysis.

22. House interprets the diamonds in the water as reflections of the sun (1990, 21).

23. Rather than conflicting evidence, House sees the differences concerning the iron collar as changes in Beloved’s perception of her mother during the sea voyage (1990, 19).

24. See McHale 1987, 74–76, for a distinction between the epistemological fantastic that characterizes modernism and the ontological fantastic operative in postmodernism.

25. In earlier interviews Morrison had said that she meant Beloved to be credible as a flesh-and-blood reincarnation of the dead baby. I am flattered that she agreed in retrospect that both readings are possible.

26. According to House, the epigraph is a hint that the returning young woman is not the baby called Beloved (1990, 22).

**Conclusion**

1. I am grateful to Moshe Ron for many discussions of this subject.

2. Such dynamic transformations are already implicit in Genette 1972.

3. For a vehement resistance to such stretching of boundaries, see Cohn 1990, 775–804.

**Appendix**

1. For convenience, I rely on my own explanations of Genette’s terms in Rimmon-Kenan 1983.