Techniques of the Living

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**Thru**

“CORPUS CRYISIS”

*Thru* (1975) is Brooke-Rose’s most self-consciously theoretical novel. Written in 1971 and 72, shortly after she moved to Paris to teach at the experimental University of Paris, Vincennes, *Thru* dialogizes theory. Theories are made to speak to one another, revealing theirblindnesses and emotional investments, like characters in a more conventional novel. In *Thru*, Brooke-Rose uses theory’s discourses to test the power and, finally, the limits of theory.

In the novel, Brooke-Rose historicizes theory as she fictionalizes it, locating her own fiction/metafiction in the specific context of circulating (and overlapping) structuralist and poststructuralist discourses. Paradoxically, the rampant intertextual theories dialogically presented function at once as the sign of fictionality and the sign of the “real,” the “time of theory,” a period roughly from the mid-’60s to the mid-’70s when, as Paul de Man has said, “linguistic terminology” was introduced in the metalanguage about literature. While the theory debates circulated in print and in person, Brooke-Rose acted as a kind of translator for the English reader interested in what was happening in French
intellectual culture. Her “Letters from Paris” were addressed to the English readers of the Spectator and she contributed short essays to the TLS. Brooke-Rose describes this time in Paris as a moment when French intellectuals “gang[ed] up” to form and reform critical circles associated with new outlets of publication like Tel Quel and Change. In these “letters” home, Brooke-Rose captured the excitement of theory and its character. As opposed to arid intellectual discussions, theoretical positions were already characterized, in a sense, circulating dramatically through Paris in the bodies of the budding and established masters of theory. As she wrote in the TLS in 1973, the “Nouvelle Critique, though largely emanating from the National Centre for Scientific Research and the independent Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, has spread far beyond these centers.” She goes on to say that “a public lecture by Barthes or Kristeva will fill a hall the size of a cinema, and when Roman Jakobson came to lecture at the Collège de France one had to be there at 8 am for 10 o’clock in order to get a place, and the lectures were relayed into several other halls. New books come out all the time and everyone rushes to buy them and use them. The discussion is alive and grows.” As an exile living in France, Brooke-Rose comments on the differences between her adopted and her home country: in France, discussions of theories of textual or linguistic analysis were matters of public excitement and wide cultural implication. The metatextual qualifies as an exciting fact of cultural life.

Greimas’s “Sémantique structurale” appeared in 1966 and Du Sens in 1970; Benveniste’s Problèmes de linguistique générale was published in two volumes in Paris in 1966 and 1974; Kristeva’s Séméiotiké was published by Tel Quel in 1969; Gérard Genette’s “Discours du récit” in 1972, and important work by Chomsky was translated into French during the sixties. In the pages of Tel Quel, avant-garde textual practice and theory coexisted as forms of cultural critique. Derrida’s “Freud et la scène de l’écriture” (TQ 26 [summer 1966]), “La Pharmacie de Platon,” (TQ 32–3 [winter/spring 1968]), and Kristeva’s “Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes” (TQ 29 [spring 1967]) appeared alongside fiction by Philippe Sollers and poetry by Roche and Pleyinet. Lacan’s Écrits, Derrida’s Dissemination and Écriture at la différence, Irigaray’s Speculum de l’autre femme and “Pouvoir du discours/subordination du féminin” (republished in This Sex Which Is Not One), and Cixous and Clement’s Newly Born Woman, are all avatars of what Kristeva dubbed in her important book, “the revolution of the word” (The Revolution of the Word, 1968). All provide intertexts in the narrative of Thru.

Engaged in teaching classes on structuralism and poststructural-
ism simultaneously, Brooke-Rose was attracted to elements of both: the systematicity of structuralism, particularly the precision of structuralist approaches to narrative, such as Genette’s, and the analytic power of poststructuralist critique, which punctured the scientific ambitions of a complete grammar or science of literature. As de Man points out in *The Resistance to Theory*, resistance is embedded in the language of poststructuralist literary theory. Its rhetoric leads to the undoing of the system of language and contributes to the abuses, as well as the uses, of theory in the text. In *Thru* Brooke-Rose represents the uses and abuses of theory, both theory’s desire to master the production of meaning and the recognition that mastery is an impossibility. In an essay entitled “Is Self-Reflexivity Mere?” in which Brooke-Rose offers an *explication du texte* of the first twenty pages of *Thru*, she says that *Thru* was written to “resolve” her own conflicted emotions about the relationship between her writing and her interests in theory. She describes this conflict as an “involvement with and parallel alienation from literary theory, involvement as craftsman, critic, and teacher, alienation as writer” (*Invisible Author* 63). Although the retrospective splitting of the roles of writer and critic, and of craftsman and writers, itself feels too neat, the pleasures and resistances of theory, its attractions and limitations contribute to the drama of *Thru*. The novel disrupts the distinction between text and metatext; craft and writing; and writing and theory. It stages theory and its discontents, engaging the ambitions, promises, and investments of particular theories. Thus, although theory’s “pompous pilot[s] and “pompous pirate[s] (*Thru* 686) are mercilessly mocked in *Thru*, the novel’s “techniques for living” draw deeply from the various mappings of the circuits of desire offered particularly in French theory during the late ’60s and ’70s.

For example, the promise and limitations of psychoanalysis are woven throughout Brooke-Rose’s text, reflecting psychoanalysis as both a paradigmatic reading practice and a source of multiple “phal-lusies.” The novel begins with someone in a car looking into a rearview mirror (the “rétro viseur” [*Thru* 579]), and acts of looking backward to move forward, a basic analytic practice, abound. The mirrors, frames, and vanishing acts in *Thru* owe much to what Brooke-Rose calls in her analysis of “The Turn of the Screw” “the mirror effect” in Lacanian theory. Lacan’s “Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious,” published in *Écrits* (in French in 1966), provides a crucial intertext and dialogic partner in Brooke-Rose’s novel. As Hanjo Berressem explains in “Thru the Looking Glass: A Journey into the Universe of Discourse,” Brooke-Rose makes use of Lacan’s mirror
in *Thru*, linking “the spatial image of a subject caught between images originating from behind which are projected forward by the mirror to Lacan’s notion of a decentered, barred subject which can recognize itself only by projecting its past into the future” according to what Lacan calls a “retroversion effect.”

In *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, Brooke-Rose points out the relevance of psychoanalysis as a reading process rather than a set text to be decoded: “For Lacan, as for Freud before him but ignored by most Freudians, the unconscious is not simply a text to be read and interpreted (i.e., limited, by exclusion, to one significance or set of significances), it is also a faculty of reading” (*Rhetoric of the Unreal* 46). In *Thru*, the looping of subjectivity through endless mirror images and linguistic representations draws on the discourse of psychoanalysis and leads to the territory of the unconscious. Like *Such*, *Thru* engages the linguistic techniques through which the unconscious is manifested in narrative. Along with Lacan’s mirror, deconstruction, though parodied in academic banter throughout the novel, imports crucial insights into what Brooke-Rose describes as deconstruction’s ability to “think otherness, to recreate it,” (*Invisible Author* 26). Along with psychoanalysis, deconstruction provides a reading practice modeled in *Thru*. Like Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, published in 1974, *Thru* deconstructs the blindnesses of Western discourse by demonstrating how these discourses occlude as they represent: “Eyelessness is not a provisional state but a structure, a blind spot in your own youdipeon discourse and discourse only occurs insofar as there is lack of (in)sight” (*Thru* 675). Graphically, punningly, Brooke-Rose demonstrates the blind spots in “youdipeon discourse” that Derrida’s project seeks to reveal. But turning the poststructuralist screw one more notch, she exposes the phallocentric blindnesses of western discourses in theoretical models of realism, structuralism, and poststructuralism alike. Combining Derrida’s deconstructive critique of phallogocentrism with the feminist insights of French feminism, she mimics the phallogocentrism of multiple stories and theories to expose the occlusion of Woman.

As always, Brooke-Rose’s focus is on the narrative and linguistic implications of her subject. In this regard, *Thru* is the quintessential Brooke-Rose novel, which she has described as a “narrative about narrativity” (*Stories, Theories and Things* 8), the novel of which she is most proud (*Invisible Author* 63). As in *Between* and *Such*, she makes use of the journey as a central trope of classic narrative. In *Thru*, the danger of the fictional terrain is marked: “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” (Thru 629). These tongue-in-cheek instructions to the reader reveal that the physical journey we begin at the start of the narrative is the journey of the narrative itself:

Through the driving-mirror four eyes stare back
  two of them in their proper place
Now right on
  ask us
  to de V elop foot on gas
how m(any how) eyes?
four two
of them correct
on either side of the
  nose
  O danger down
  (Thru 579)

Theory collapses into fiction and metanarrative into narrative; “self-reflection” of all kinds is built into the narrative. Discourse and story refuse their structuralist separation. During the course of the novel the rectangle of the driving mirror doubles as a rectangular classroom in a university, and functions again as a rectangular diagram, the geometry of a number of theoretical models including Greimas’s semiotic rectangle, Jakobson’s linguistic model of communication, and Lacan’s model of desire. The “course” of the narrative journey proliferates into “the hundred and fifty courses” offered in the university, a multiplicity “which would upset the balanced economy of the narrative whose arbitrariness (freedom) is not infinite” (Thru 735). Within the text itself, two of the narrative’s possible authors are university professors, Armel Santores and Larissa Toren, who teach creative writing and critical theory respectively, in different universities (and who are themselves almost anagrammatic versions of each other, albeit with the crucial letter “I,” missing in Armel’s name and “me,” missing in Larissa’s). They write each other letters and may be “inventing each other,” according to Brooke-Rose (Invisible Author 64.) In Thru, Brooke-Rose rewrites the classic picaresque journey from episode to episode, the “horse” on which the
picaro usually rides now punningly transformed into the “disc-horse.” A narrative voice notes that modern novels “twiddle . . . from one disembodied voice to another on this or that wave-length listening in to this or that disc-jockey and always the same disc-horse, a yea-yea and a neigh inserted into the circuit of signifiers, each discourse penetrating the non-disjunctive functioning of another” (Thru 637). Thru continues Brooke-Rose’s engagement in Between with the pleasures and dangers of the “writerly” text. However, in Thru, no central disc-jockey analogous to the female translator guides our journey along the overactive circuits of signifiers. Indeed, who “drives” the narrative is a question that is explicitly raised in the text in many forms. “Who speaks?” a question raised in texts by both Lacan’s “Subversion of the Subject” and Barthes’ S/Z (See Berressem 128–29), is the most insistent form of this fundamental poststructuralist inquiry. The slippery identities of the different “tale-bearers,” drivers and passengers present marked and unmarked “dangers” to the reader throughout the text. Indeed, punning on the idea of “character” as mark, the characters in Thru become migratory letters, “lost semes, vanishing away like gods into the other scene” (Thru 733).

The mirror, like the journey, both introduced at the beginning of the novel, is a central trope of classic narrative. If the preposition “through/thru” refers to the journey of narrative through space and time, it also refers even more insistently to the gaze through the medium of the mirror, that so-called reflector of reality. The “faulty” driving mirror distorts as it reflects, as Brooke-Rose interrogates the central trope of realism. In Thru the driving mirror offers the driver a ghostly backward glance at the dancing hoops (glaring lights) behind. As the narrative “drives the discourse into the future” (Thru 729), the traditional objects and subjects in realism’s mirror become spectral, haunted by a second sight. A second ghostly pair of eyes appears in the driving mirror:

Intensity of illusion is what matters to the narrator through a flaw in the glass darkly perhaps making four clear eyes stare back, two of them in their proper place at height of bridge of nose . . .

A second pair of eyes hidden higher up the brow would have its uses despite psychic invisibility or because of. (Thru 583)
The four pair of eyes signal a “problem” of representation. Brooke-Rose points out in her explication of the opening pages of the novel that the “correct” eyes, the “real” eyes reflected in the mirror, themselves pose a problem (“The eyes, which are in their proper place, are now right on cue, printed as the letter Q, then another long gap to ‘ask us,’ as if the correctly reflected eyes posed a problem, not the other eyes further up” [Invisible Author 66]). As she says in A Rhetoric of the Unreal, in the twentieth century, the real has itself become problematic, altering the conception of realism and its reflecting mirror. The second pair of eyes, the ghostly pair that haunts the reflection in the mirror, illustrates that the real is shot through with unreality. Thru begins with what is normally invisible, those “blind spots” traditionally occluded in realism’s scopic field, the ghostly eyes that do not see themselves reflect, what Lacan calls the “unspecularisable” objects associated with the unconscious of the subject. “It is to this object that cannot be grasped in the mirror that the specular image lends its clothes,”10 a phrase Hanjo Berressem quotes in his essay (130). This Lacanian notion surfaces in the narrative in one of the dialogues: “the truth as signifier being all the time non-specularisable except by a hidden representation of a representation” (Thru 732).

In “rehandling the signifiers” of narrative and theory, a Lacanian phrase she refers to in her analysis of “The Turn of the Screw” (Rhetoric of the Unreal 47), Brooke-Rose attempts to represent multiple ‘invisibilities’ in Thru. What Berressem’s analysis fails to emphasize adequately, however, is the way the novel foregrounds a particular occlusion in fiction and theory—the occlusion of woman as subject in “youdipean discourse.” In Thru, Brooke-Rose continues to explore feminist discourse as a “new logic” for narrative. Although she remains skeptical throughout her oeuvre of the shibboleths attached to “isms” of all stripes, certain texts of French feminist discourse, by Kristeva, Cixous, Irigaray, and Shoshanna Felman, provided her with fruitful models for rescripting the concept of desire. Luce Irigaray’s revisionary feminist mimicking of Lacan’s narratives of desire in This Sex Which Is Not One provides one such source text. By “rehandling” Lacanian signifiers, Irigaray attempts “to make ‘visible,’ by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible” (Irigaray 76). Brooke-Rose’s “rétro viseur” is linked to the term not only in Lacan, but in Irigaray’s rewriting of Lacan. In This Sex Which is Not One, published after Thru, “retraversée” is a term that refers to “the process of going back through social, intellectual, and linguistic practices to reexamine and unravel their conceptual bases, in analogy with Alice’s voyages of exploration in Through the Looking-Glass” (Irigaray 221, publisher’s note). In this flawed looking-glass, we
see the “eyes that do not exist” (Thru 605) even in psychoanalytic and other forms of poststructuralist models. The “gray eminence” (Thru 581)—the priests and analysts who have been the “sultans” (Thru 581) of the discourse, have missed something. The psychic invisibility of women in fiction and analytic discourse, the absence of their eyes/I’s, this hidden representation of a representation fights its way Thru the narrative.

How does one hold up a mirror to the unconscious? How adjust the mirror to represent that which is missing from view? And how to do so, particularly when the unnamed male driver at the beginning of the novel seems to control the “intensity of illusion” in the driving mirror. When the young, unknown “mistress of the moment” (Thru 582) who is a passenger in the car turns the mirror toward herself to see what the driver can see, the intensity of illusion disappears (“She shifts the mirror to her rearward glance. It doesn’t work for her the mistress of the moment” (Thru 582). “[S]he does not see by day the four lies in the retrovisor when shifted to her forward gaze nor dancing hoops by night” (Thru 586). Although we read that the mirror “needs adjusting” (Thru 587), it is at first only in dream form that the young woman’s desire finds representation. Now a magician’s assistant, she suddenly subverts the magical illusion by “losing” his phallic wand: “[A]nd suddenly a prop was missing I forget his stick I mean his wand anyway it was my fault he couldn’t Lift the white rabbit out of the hat” (Thru 587). An “unlearning” takes place (Thru 585) in which “I” and “O” (the subject and the object or Other) hypothetically change places and the sentence with male subject and female object is rewritten (“I me if it be possible despite non-equivalence to rewrite I as O and O as I” (Thru 585). The “I” changes places with the “O” in another sense in that the language of the unconscious, the Other within the subject, surfaces. This subversive act, expressed indirectly through the young girl’s dream, echoes throughout the novel, representing the “double standard or teleological fallacy” (Thru 685) structured into all sorts of narratives. The magician’s assistant refuses to play by the rules of enchantment, instead exposing the smoke and mirrors behind what Derrida calls the “phallogenocentrism” of Western discourse.

Thru exposes this “phallusy,” this assigned role-playing that marks not only the plot of fiction but the supposedly neutral analytic paradigms of theory as well. “Theory,” as Brooke-Rose defines it, is “a systematic statement of the principles involved, a speculation” (Rhetoric of the Unreal fn. 3, 390). Punning on this “speculation,” the rectangle of the driving mirror figures at least “a thousand and one” (Thru 580)
paradigms, which, despite their multiplicity, fail to represent female desire. *Thru* demonstrates how theories as well as fictional narratives “speculate,” but in doing so often cannot see the blind spots in their own acts of reflection. In these various mirrors, such as the semiotic triangle of Greimas, woman figures as desired object—sought, chased, and analyzed. The various “grey eminence[s],” both within and without the text, do the desiring, wanting to “grasp” and to know her. As Brooke-Rose glosses it, they seem to know her better than she knows herself (see *Invisible Author* 70). In an essay she wrote in 1985, “Woman as Semiotic Object” (reprinted in *Stories, Theories and Things*), Brooke-Rose refers to the way she telescoped the image of the driving-mirror in *Thru* with the semiotic rectangles of Greimas’s structuralist paradigm of four “I”s or “actants” and their objects of exchange (*Stories, Theories and Things* 239). She notes that the semiotic system of narrative signification created by Greimas is theory that is neither scientific nor neutral, as it purports to be, for it depends upon a certain “plot”—the exchange of women: “I wonder whether these formulae for perfect love have been programmed into the computers of matrimonial agencies instead of tastes, ages and social situations. I know they have been programmed into male and female consciousnesses for thousands of years, and are not likely to be truly effaced in the mere few centuries since women began to try and think of other possibilities for themselves” (*Stories, Theories and Things* 238). In *Thru* this voice of skepticism is taken over by Diderot’s Jacques the Fatalist, who broadens the critique to other phallogocentric discourses, even sophisticated poststructural narratives that recognize the existence of the unconscious, particularly psychoanalysis: “It is more difficult for a phallus-man to enter the I of a woman than for the treasurer of signifiers to enter the paradiso terrestre” (*Thru* 595).

But to use Brooke-Rose’s explication of her own intentions is to “cheat” a little, since the whole point of *Thru* is that it represents theory fictionally through linguistic and narrative techniques. Mimetically, dialogically, typographically, and, hence, metacritically, *Thru* stages these theoretical positions and what is at stake in maintaining them. Despite the parodies, the jokes, the cartoon chases and traveling semes, the stakes are high; indeed, these word games of *Thru*, like the translations in *Between*, suggest that life itself is at stake, à la Scheherezade: “Narration is life and I am Scheherezade,” Larissa tells Armel at one point in
the narrative. The incessant rehandling of the signifiers involves techniques for living, that is, narrative in survival mode. What is offered is dangerous, “delirious discourse,” a kind of “cancel ed” discourse that “will all get changed and transmuted”:

cancelled even, for it does not exist, except in my own boundless need and fear that will alter the signifiers into a delirious discourse through swift-footed Hermes with terrible letters. (Thru 711)

Like the dream of the “mistress of the moment,” Larissa’s “delirious discourse” may exist only within her own emotional narrative, but then, again, the novel plays with the idea that she may be the author of the discourse we read in Thru. (Jacques’s master surmises, “It looks mightily as if she [Larissa] were producing this one and not, as previously appeared, Armel, or Armel disguised as narrator or the narrator I disguised as Armel . . . . Of course she may be producing a different text” (Thru 644). Brooke-Rose deliberately destabilizes the notion of authorship, recording in the thousand and one images a plurality of possible authors, all of whom pass through a death, a zero point of nonbeing, thus sharing the status of the nonexistence (“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 etherized unauthorised other” (Thru 733). Whoever it is who writes, however, the “delirious discourse,” produced out of “need and fear,” is made up of “terrible letters.” This discourse somehow comes “through” the phallic god of communication (what Brigid Brophy calls “herm” warfare in her novel In Transit). These “terrible letters” produce a narrative more frightening than the lover’s discourse circulating in the fluid prose of Between, the “Misch-Masch of tender fornication inside the bombed out hallowed structures and the rigid steel glass modern edifices of the brain” (Between 447).

For in the very risky operation of translating theory into fiction, Thru functions as an hysterical text, a self-mutilated body of “terrible letters.” Barthes’s “writerly” text described in S/Z as a kind of “hemorrhage” (Barthes 105) is in Thru a full-blown wounding of the text. The text strikes itself blind and dumb. Playing upon a version of what Martin Jay, in Downcast Eyes, has called Enlightenment “ocularcentricism,”
which equates the “I” and the “eye” (284), Brooke-Rose’s *Thru* presents an alternative “hystery of the Eye” (*Thru* 584, 691) which mimes the mythical blindings that abound in “youdipeon discourse,” blindings that signal the threat of castration as punishment for the desire for the mother’s body. The novel presents the tragic relation between blindness and insight in the European tradition. As she weaves pieces of Oedipal narrative, with its images of castration—the blindings of Oedipus and King Lear, John the Baptist’s disembodied head on a platter—Brooke-Rose precipitates a new kind of “corpus crysis,” (736) as she cuts and dices and gouges her text:

So that now we have at last returned to the subject of discourse, while still of the moment before being thru and hurt (oo!) but who is we to dip royally no collectively into an age-old narrative matrix before we gouge out the I in order carefully to gauge its liquid essence? (*Thru* 595)

In an act that parodies the sacrificial self-blindings of Oedipus and Democritus of Abdera (who “tore his eyes out in a garden so that the spectacle of reality would not distract him,”) the narrative gouges out its own I’s/eyes. In the above passage the narrative voice asks skeptically about the “royal we” who “returns” to the discourse—the androcentric normative “we” who forms the consensus underwriting European discourse. This skepticism is punningly conveyed in transforming Oedipus into “you dip us” (*Thru* 592) and in the French word for Oedipus, “Oedipe” (*Thru* 592) which figures the male pen dipped into the eye/womb/thoughts of the woman. This “youdipeon discourse” that records so many stories of male fears and desires dips into the narrative “matrix” or womb.

This narrative “ma-trix” is the same one cut up into the “SIN TAG MA TRICKS” found at the beginning of the narrative (*Thru* 581). Through this self-inflicted pain, with its “terrible letters,” “Ma’s tricks” present a new “h Y s T e R y of the Eye” (*Thru* 584, 691). This new history demonstrates what “the omitter omit[s],” representing the objectification of the female body by the male gaze and pen in literary and theoretical discourse. Psychoanalysis is prominently featured: male castration anxiety, fear of the power of female sexuality is “grammed” and “programmed” on the body of the text by the “textcaliber” of the pen, a cruel drama which mimics mastery of the prostrate female body:
(but what does the omitter omit?)

The hystery of the eye
The cruel nails
grammed in the remote
parchment or stone
dry papyrus

with a fear of fusion that might extend explode the
I into r e

some Other sex u a 1 i t y (Thru 691)\(^{15}\)

As Charles Bernheimer observes in his introduction to essays on Freud’s *Studies in Hysteria*, “the oldest surviving Egyptian medical papyrus, dating from around 1900 B.C., deals specifically with recommended treatments for hysterical disorders” (2).\(^{16}\) In hysteria, the womb was thought to “wander,” and one of the more bizarre cures for this errancy was to place an ibis of the god Toth on the woman’s crotch to lure the womb back into place. Writing is a painful technology in “youdipeon discourse,” in which women are immured as they are inscribed, from classic texts to poststructuralist theory. Repeated references to the “moving finger” of the classic text appear, “piercing through the pregnant plenitude from idyll to castratrophy thus bringing about the end of the discourse (Thru 715).” The cruel “nails” further suggest the way modern, modernist, and ancient theories are deeply invested in the dialectics of desire and fear of the female body: the fingernails of the Joycean artist, so coolly pared above or beyond his handiwork are linked to the “cruel nails” of the Egyptians as well as the “nailings,” impalings, and gougings of the woman as object in narrative. The male pen “dips” in and out of the female “matrix,” omnisciently mastering all points of view, as phallus and logos are indissoluble in the technology of writing. (The more brittle and nervous modernist male anxiety reappears throughout the text in allusions to T. S. Eliot’s dysfunctional heterosexual pairs.)

In his book on the graphic elements of Brooke-Rose’s experimen-
tal fiction, Glyn White goes to great lengths to explain Brooke-Rose’s typological elements mimaetically, arguing that her typographic tricks serve a greater realist function. (White, *Reading the Graphic Surface: The Presence of the Book in Prose Fiction* 132) However, his analysis mutes the relation between writing technology and indelible pain. Writing hurts and haunts. This is the “message” of the sudden (presto) name change of the young passenger in the car who becomes the character “Ruth,” anagram of *Thru*. Jacques’s master says, “Ecco! In any case the mistress of the moment should be changed, and no doubt will be in another moment though perhaps she could meanwhile be called, Ruth, for mixed reasons of phonemic contiguity” (*Thru* 595). More than the anagrammatic couple of Larissa and Armel, this phonemic contiguity underwrites the narrative in *Thru*. It is this anagram that reveals the way lament materializes as narrative theory in this hysterical fiction. Brooke-Rose “blinds” and binds her own narrative, mimicking mythic, classic, structuralist, and poststructuralist discourses in creating a text that is symptomatic. Monique David-Ménard refers to the “speaking pain” of the hysterical body (46). As the creative writing students debate Larissa’s fate (she’s a loose end we can’t pick them all up” [*Thru* 732]), Brooke-Rose “organizes” her painful text through a series of operations performed on her text, which is like her female writer Larissa who “has had most vicious organs removed, dropping a vessel here there and in the other place which explains her non-existence and consonantal compensation, piecemeal metonymised, parcelled out, fragmented into synthetic synecdoche that organizes a chiasmus in a forgotten name to create the rejection that she proinjects” (*Thru* 687). In one of the dialogues between Larissa and her former husband, Armel—a dialogue which, it is suggested, is also a “discourse” being written by creative writing students in a class—Armel tells Larissa to “Please stop this hysterical rewriting of history” (*Thru* 654).

Playing with this “speaking pain” in the many lacerations of her hysterical text, Brooke-Rose represents the repetitions, reversals, reinterpretations of the unconscious. As Larissa insists, “we have to reinvent it [narrative] continually, rehandling the signifiers in constant reinvestment. Read Irigaray” (*Thru* 631). The Lacanian phrase “rehandling the signifiers” is itself “rehandled,” reinvented, and reinvested. In turning her text into an hysterical body Brooke-Rose tests the potential usefulness of psychoanalytic discourse by transforming it into hysteria as a discourse by women about women. Hysteria becomes a potentially disruptive discourse, the subject of the third section of Cixous and
Clément’s *Newly Born Woman*, in which they debate each other precisely on this point. By fictionalizing this theoretical discourse Brooke-Rose takes the chance of converting her own narrative into an hysterical text, complete with cuts, gaps, silences, and crazy repetitions that mime a narrative out of control, helplessly watching its own delirious projections. We read: “Neurosis has the cunning of stupidity, and stupidity is a dimension anyone can fall into, however intelligent, indeed, part of the intellect can rise suspended and watch, helpless and in pain, the misuse of its own projected trajectory struggling alone, as if cut off from itself, in a delirious discourse . . .” (*Thru* 592). The “cuts” in and through the text, the abrupt cutting off of narrative idylls, the often frantically hectic pace of the narrative as it rushes from fragment to fragment, writing to rewriting, contributes to the risky strategy of a symptomatic discourse.17

This risky, hysterical “corpus crysis” (736) heats up the temperature of the supposedly cool and distant, neutral theories that circulate through the text. While destabilizing and dissolving the realist idea of “character,” Brooke-Rose novelizes the supposedly distanced and logical position of “theory” and shows it to be a function of desire, like traditional romance plots of earlier texts. In taking Greimas’s rectangle as a major paradigm for the text, the classroom, and the metacritical terrain, Brooke-Rose transvalues the rhetoric of desire that underwrites both the structuralist and poststructuralist linguistic turns. In his Foreword to Greimas’s *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory*, Fredric Jameson describes semiotics as a “theory based on wanting” (xxxi), a theory of modality that has the notion of value at the heart of the theory. Semiotics as an “institution of the subject as a wanting subject and the object as an object of value, can be described in terms of modal utterances” (xxxi). According to Jameson, “Wanting is the first of a series of determined semantic constructions that specify actants as virtual operators of a doing” (xxxi). Elsewhere, he calls the ideologies behind this theory of wanting “buried narratives” (xiii).

*Thru* dramatizes the implication of theory in the circuit of desire in a number of ways. In arranging and rearranging the “operators of a doing” in Jameson’s terms, Brooke-Rose demonstrates that a “theory based on wanting” is never neutral. In the midst of a dialogue between Larissa and her student lover, who is trying to convince her to live with him and accept their relationship, an academic voice in the narrative offers the following view of the purely “linguistic” character of relations—even love:
Any agent can enter into a relation with any predicate. The notions of subject and object do not correspond to a difference in nature but to a place in the proposition uniting for instance two lovers. (*Thru* 703)

In *World Postmodern Fiction* Cristopher Nash uses this particular passage to illustrate that postmodernist fiction treats “narrative [as] nothing more than a string of linguistic signs.” Now, Nash is right to suggest the break with character here—the semes indeed travel as positions become pro-positions played first one way and then another. What is misleading, however, is the suggestion that this break reduces the text to a kind of neutral, linguistic play. This reading accepts the flat tone of the passage itself, along with its suggestion that the flexibility of grammatical placement in the discourse of desire is a matter of no great consequence. The lovers are only a “for instance” in a general proposition about subjects and objects. And yet, this decathedected, neutral “theoretical” position is embedded in a text wrought with highly charged, even lyrical movements of desire and fear. The narrative of *Thru* constantly plays with the “lettering” of emotion as it anagrammatically rearranges the subjects and objects of the discourse. “I me if it be possible despite non-equivalence to rewrite I as O and O as I” (*Thru* 585), we read at one point—this is a wish expressed in the narrative to rewrite the “I” of the narrative ego in the form of the “O” of the other, and this difference of a vowel matters: It matters who does what to whom, who seizes the “I,” who gazes at the Other. Indeed, the narrative plays with rearrangements of AEIOU to create varied postures of emotional debt and investment.

But *Thru* reveals as well that the drama of “wanting” and investment includes theorist and reader as well as the lettered (and interchangeable) characters within the narrative. In his Foreword to Monique David-Ménard’s *Hysteria from Freud to Lacan*, Ned Luckacher speaks of Freud’s desire to understand his hysterical patient, Elisabeth von R: “For Freud himself the presentation of the impossibility of satisfying his desire to understand the mystery of Elisabeth’s divided subjectivity becomes itself a kind of satisfaction that one calls theory. Through the hysteric Freud was led to the relation of desire to language.”* In Luckacher’s view, theory IS the analyst’s desire. As he points out, according to Lacan, another name for this in the analytic situation is “transference” (David-Ménard xiii). In writing about Freud’s “discovery” of the unconscious through his work on hysteria, Brooke-Rose similarly recognizes the way Freud was implicated in his discovery of the unconscious through treating his hysterical patients: “It was by listening to hysterical discourse that Freud discovered, not only that there was an unconscious, but that he
was deeply implicated, through reading that unconscious, in reading his own, in other words that this other discourse was itself an active reading of his own unconscious” (Rhetoric of the Unreal 46–47). In Thru, the grey eminences, the sultans, the mythologisers, the magicians, the conjugators, the “narrator’s omniscience that dips into many minds” (Thru 689)—all represent various figures who attempt to grasp the desired object, stand ins for the semioticians, the analysts and deconstructors as well. What Thru dramatizes is that this interpretive desire—theory’s desire—is, fundamentally, the desire of narrative itself, that is, to pursue the story to its conclusion, to go “thataway” to follow the rabbit disappearing down the hole until the truth of the whole is made manifest. Within the text this is called the reader’s “vulgar desire to know”:

Larissa’s vicious organs which are all verbal organs and all removed reduced to a mouth most vicious of all that establishes a specular relationship with the reader’s vulgar desire to know what happens next in an eternal game of vinciperdi between his demand which cannot reach its end by justifiable means and the author’s gift of a running curriculum vitae as object of exchange, the truth as signifier being all the time non-specularisable except by a hidden representation of a representation. (Thru 732)

To pursue the truth through all its feints and negations is the task of the reader, but this pursuit to get to the end of the story is fraught with danger, as we are warned at the beginning of the narrative journey. In her analysis of James’s Turn of the Screw, Brooke-Rose expands on the connection between reader and therapist and the potentially catastrophic consequences of the relentless pursuit of meaning. Quoting Shoshana Felman’s essay on James’s tale, she refers to the governess’s horrifying ‘triumph.’ The governess,

both as a reader and as a therapist, both as an interpreter and as an exorcist, is rendered highly suspicious by the death of what she had set out at once to understand and to cure. . . . It therefore behoves [sic] the reader to discover the meaning of this murderous effect of meaning; to understand how a child can be killed by the very act of understanding. (quoted in Brooke-Rose, Rhetoric of the Unreal 182; emphasis in original)

Continuing to endorse Felman’s Lacanian reading, Brooke-Rose quotes Felman’s view that: “‘the attempt at grasping meaning and at closing
the reading process with a *definitive* interpretation in effect discovers—and comprehends—only death” (*Rhetoric of the Unreal* 183; emphasis in original). This phallic attempt to master meaning occurs at a cost. Oedipus, of course, is its representative, a “reader” engaged in a quest that is “both liberating and catastrophic” (*Thru* 692) because it leads to the lacerating self-knowledge that the pursuer is the criminal, blindness being the price of insight.

At the end of the narrative, the students advocate “revolution” and at least one proclaims the obsolescence of the Oedipal narrative:

> Who do you think you are, bourgeois little boys dipped carefully into a bloody eye and swaddled in a castration complex to preserve the dirty little family secret that structures society each tale-bearer carrying his code in his mouth until he has eaten himself silly and soft and flabby? That way recuperation lies. We dip you you dip us in a permanent circulation of value-objects with always something added, ex nihilo, swelling out the portrait of the object instituted by itself as a value although its semes are false, with the moving signifier pointing to the falsehood but incapable of decoding it so that although long desired it is maintained in a pregnant plenitude, the piercing of which, both liberating and catastrophic, will bring about the end of the goldicondeological discourse. (*Thru* 726)

Yet as Brad Buchanan points out in a fine discussion of the centrality of the Oedipus theme in the novel, the Oedipal story is not rendered obsolete in *Thru*, as the above voice suggests. The “goldicondeological discourse” does not crumble. The classic texts of western discourse repeat again and again the story of Oedipus:

> Ainsi un doigt, de son mouvement désignateur et muet, accompagne toujours le texte classique: la vérité est de la sorte longuement désirée et contournée, maintenue dans une sorte de plénitude enceinte, dont la percée, à la fois libératoire et catastrophique, accomplira la fin même du discours; et le personnage, espace même de ces signifiés, n’est jamais que le passage de l’énigme dont Oedipe (dans son débat avec le Sphinx) a empreint tout le discourse occidental.

  (Portrait of the portrait by Roland Barthes) (*Thru* 592)

Brooke-Rose exposes the persistent and unavoidable “oedipianne” that is the refrain of western narratives with their “unintentional phallusies.” Revolution, too, as another romantic ideology, is debunked. But as in
“The Foot,” in Thru she “rehandles” the rhetoric of psychoanalysis, not to imagine its obsolescence, but to replay its insights about the relation between language, narrative, and desire. Here, too, castration serves as a powerful trope for narrative as “cut off” from any origin: “A head in a pool on a platter in a textured cloth, the head detached to re-present the word, a disembodied voice” (Thru 715). In “gouging out the I’s” of the text, in producing her new form of “corpus crysis,” Brooke-Rose replays narrative as longing. Although the creative writing class in Thru speaks of “degrees of presence” (playing off their attendance in the classes they attend or miss) (Thru 610), the narrative of Thru represents, like much of Brooke-Rose’s fiction, degrees of absence, that unbearable lightness of being. In the cuts, the “lacunae,” the hall of mirrors which form the narrative of Thru, Brooke-Rose continues the pursuit of what’s missing waged in her earlier texts:

This is a 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 etherized unauthorized other. (Thru 733)

Writing about Lacan in A Rhetoric of the Unreal, Brooke-Rose says that the “psychoanalytical situation, which is based on transfer, that is, love, or ‘the acting out of the reality of the unconscious’ . . . is a situation in which this constant reading, this constant re-interpreting, is done by love, by an interpreter caught up in the love-relationship that constitutes the transfer. It is done by love, but through language (speech, dreams, omissions, silences, resistance, forgetting to turn up, etc.)” (Rhetoric of the Unreal 47). In Thru, Brooke-Rose’s tools are theory’s discourses, with which she stages the love affairs of narrative. She parodies and mocks the language of poststructuralist theory, including psychoanalysis, “the transferutterance which can be interpreted at all levels as privation disjunction attribution conjunction thus representing the circulation of value-objects as an identification of the deictic transfers. . . . It has all been dreamt up by the lover of the moment but displaced, condensed, metonymised” (Thru 723). Yet Thru fictionalizes theory and theorizes about storytelling precisely through the “transferutterances” that Brooke-Rose parodies. The gendered dialogues of Between and Such, the long lover’s complaint in her stories in Go When You See the Green Man Walking, continue in the morsels of theory that cut across each other in the text of Thru. Theories of nonbeing, unreliable narrators, the death of the author, and even poetic diagnoses of the condition of modernity like
Eliot’s “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (the etherized patient) all play a role in the narrative. Paradoxically, however, in sabotaging the stable “I”s of narrative and staging the “deaths” that fiction passes through, Brooke-Rose creates a survival narrative—not a survival of theory (and therefore its dismissal or superceding) but survival through theory. As Larissa says at one point, “He’s weak and couldn’t stand it whereas I in theory can” (Thru 707). Larissa and Ruth, and other unnamed, psychologically “invisible” mistresses of the moment, come THRU “in theory,” with all its discontents. The “delirious” text is also a “delicious” text, a pleasure in the handling of signifiers of the kind that is evident in all of Brooke-Rose’s fiction. Finally, the “jouissance” which has become such a cliché of French feminist discourse is, nonetheless, an apt term for the pleasures in the text that exist, morce by morce, in this painful (that is, full of pain) narrative. These morsels of theory produce highly charged, even lyrical, movements of desire, fear, and pleasure. As bits of theory are made to co-exist in the text, they turn into a strange kind of poetry. Jacques’s master tells him to read Kristeva and offers a revision of Wallace Stevens’s “The Man with the Blue Guitar”: “she plays upon the blue guitar she does not play things as they are” (Thru 594). Poetry, fiction, theory are all surmise; invested with desire, personalized, none completely capture the way things “really are.”

In her essay on Thru in Invisible Author, Brooke-Rose addresses a question raised by Robert Caserio in an essay on Brooke-Rose and the fiction of J. G. Ballard. Caserio described Thru as a text “where stylized and parodied discourses of disjunction, displacement, and indeterminacy, from linguistics to Lacan, are turned into a sublime poetry. The curious aspect of Thru is the way it makes one feel that the free-for-all thruway of the text can become a roadblock, and that what the road blocks is more important than the formulas and forms of mobility” (quoted in Invisible Author 107). After quoting Caserio, Brooke-Rose says, “Well, I hesitantly (if delightedly) accept both the sublime poetry and the roadblock, but would ask, tentatively, and truly quite modestly: If the poetry is sublime, what sublime poetry does not have roadblocks? We learn to read poetry” (Invisible Author 107). Although Thru, like Between, can be regarded as staging a sometimes frantic mobility of language and theory, the text constantly reminds us that its pleasures are inextricable from its pains, like the “constraints” that bind all her fiction, like the constraints that bind poetic form and underwrite its lyricism.

In “Woman as Semiotic Object,” Brooke-Rose prefaces her critique of the phallocentrism of most semiotic paradigms with the following story of her own emotion, so casually dropped as to be easily ignored:
“There have been a few delightful moments, during my desultory and decidedly non-expert readings in semiotics, when the subject made me laugh out loud instead of terrorizing, or, same thing perhaps, boring me stupid.”22 This “laugh” is a laugh to free the mind from its bondage; the parodic, tongue-in-cheek tone of the critique of phallocentric semiotics begins by banishing both terror and boredom, emotions that might induce a kind of frozen passivity, even stupidity. The anecdote reveals something important about the survival of the female subject positions in Brooke-Rose’s novel. For, finally, Thru in the title refers to getting through, to coming through, to surviving with Scheherezade: “You’ll lacerate yourself,” Armel says to Larissa, and she answers, “Oh I’ll come through. I always do you know” (Thru 712).