Techniques of the Living
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The Final Novel of the Intercom Quartet, *Textermination* continues the jeremiad in *Amalgamemnon* warning of the dire predicament of literature and literary criticism in the postmodern age. Like *Thru*, *Textermination* conducts cultural critique in the form of metafiction. Creators and their characters strangely cohabit the same narrative levels, intruding on one another’s privacies. Less wild typographically than *Thru* and less radical linguistically than either *Thru* or *Amalgamemnon*, *Textermination* takes the intertextuality of both to new heights and includes a bizarre mélange of fictional and nonfictional personae. Appearing on its pages are literary characters from different periods and traditions, as well as authors, television characters, actors, and previous characters and creators from Brooke-Rose’s own texts (for example, Mira Enketei). Mira, who at one point is identified as the author of *Textermination* (*Textermination* 92), narrates the story for a while; but after the shock of locating herself on a list of forgotten characters, she promptly disappears from the text. Like Beckett’s “Unnamable,” she realizes that “[s]he can’t go on” (*Textermination* 105). She exits only to be replaced
by the “author” herself who rescues the storytelling enterprise (“If she can’t go on,” this new voice says in the following chapter, “I suppose I’ll have to” (Texteration 106).

In an essay entitled “Where Do We Go from Here?” Brooke-Rose offers a definition of metafiction, citing Mas’ud Zavarzadeh’s The Mythopoeic Reality—The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel (1976). Metafiction, she quotes, is “ultimately a narrational metatheorem whose subject matter is fictional systems themselves [. . . It] exults over its own fictitiousness, and its main counter-techniques are flat characterization, contrived plots, antilinear sequences of events, all fore-grounded as part of an extravagant overtotalization, a parody of interpretation which shows up the multiplicity of the real and the naïveté of trying ‘to reach a total synthesis of life within narrative’” (Brooke-Rose, “Where Do We Go From Here?” 161–62). By this definition, both Thru and Texteration are clearly examples of metafiction. They conform to Zavarzadeh’s definition in their extravagant fictitiousness, exposure of systemeticity, and parodies of totalizing interpretations.

Yet in exulting in its fictitiousness and unreality, Texteration also deliberately invokes the “real” by presenting itself as a response to cultural crisis. Not content to remain securely within playful quotation marks, Texteration warns of the loss of cultural memory in the form of a general “forgetting” of literature in the age of technology and popular culture. Here, as in Amalgamemnon, the prophetic urge is alive and well and living in women’s metafiction despite its skepticism toward grand models of interpretability and monuments of unaging intellect. Although richly comic, the novel participates in the rhetoric of witness and survival found in Xorandor. In its choice of title, Texteration, like Between, evokes shades of World War II and is another allusion to the chiasmic crossing of the real and the unreal in the twentieth century. In the rampant intertextuality of the novel, the “fantastic” returns to represent the memory crisis. The reminder that what literature “knows” is being forgotten is anything but a bid for a nostalgic return to the nineteenth-century novel. It is a brief for the relevance of fantasy and metafiction to represent reality and a counterexample to the assumption that metafiction is an exercise in literary narcissism. Texteration displays a faith in fantasy’s resources for evoking historical consciousness. The novel addresses the skepticism which is a contemporary form of Georg Lukács’s critique of the ideology of modernism as too inward and focused on individual consciousness to represent history.¹

Set mainly in the San Francisco Hilton, at an annual convention of literary characters from centuries of narratives in various, mostly Western,
traditions, the novel begins with Emma Woodhouse, Emma Bovary, and Thomas Mann’s Goethe sharing a carriage, as both conventional vehicles of the imagination (fiacres and carriages), and newer conveyances, such as the “aerobrain” (a plane), whisk the mélange of characters through time and space. Landing first in Atlanta from Europe, the characters wait in an airport lounge for the flight to San Francisco. Suddenly, the lounge becomes all airport lounges, and the travelers, looking through the airport windows, witness fictional scenes of burning houses and cities in literature throughout the ages: Atlanta, Troy, Manderley, Thornfield Manor, Moscow (Textermation 11). The conflagration then spreads to “books by the million” burning in the library in Alexandria “at Fahrenheit 451”—books that presumably “house” the characters themselves. The first chapter ends with this literary apocalypse (and death of literature), only to begin anew in chapter 2 at the San Francisco convention. The convention, which strangely resembles the one MLA Brooke-Rose attended, is a Convention of Prayer for Being to the Implied Reader, hoping, the narrator tells us, to “recover, after an unimaginable journey, to savour what remains of international ritual for the revival of the fittest” (Textermation 8). This ritual includes the reading of literary passages in critical papers, which give life to the characters, at least temporarily (at the reading of a passage, Emma, “revives” and “begins to feel the blood circulate in her veins again” (15). The Darwinian predication of the characters is symptomatic of the fate of reading and criticism in our time: the characters are “ghosts” (Textermation 19), languishing from “lack of involved attention” (Textermation 2) in an age of popular culture. They suffer as well from the effects of the hyperactive critical and ideological agendas of contemporary literary criticism, which have led to a dereification or “dissolution,” as Brooke-Rose called it in “The Dissolution of Character in the Novel.”

As the beleaguered characters begin to pray, they are interrupted by twelve turbaned terrorists, demanding equal time for their own Muslim rituals and threatening to kill the entire congregation. (Their main purpose, however, seems to be to assassinate Rushdie’s Gibreel Farishta, who attends the convention.) Calvino’s “Non-Existent Knight” (Textermation 31) saves the day by beheading the terrorists, further prayers are canceled, and the convention continues. Near the end of the novel the characters are subjected to another dual apocalypse: a book-burning that transforms the Hilton into a Towering Inferno, which, in turn, collapses when an earthquake hits the San Andreas fault. The unstable ground of the California setting only exacerbates the chronic vulnerability of fictional characters, who suffer the life and death consequences of
critical fashion and reader interest. However, like O. J. Simpson and others in the star-studded cast of the movie *The Towering Inferno* (and O. J. Simpson in his legal battles as well), characters miraculously appear from within the rubble, somehow surviving the apocalypse. Slowly, they proceed back to their textual homes, as the novel comes full circle with Emma entering her carriage.

*Texteration* presents the wild and crazy underside of T. S. Eliot’s “historical sense”; characters from past and present physically and dialogically jostle one another with both comic and unsettling results. Humbert Humbert leers at an unsuspecting Maisie; *Middlemarch*’s Casaubon goes to hear a paper on himself, only to discover, to his bitter disappointment, that the subject is the Casaubon from Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum*. As George Eliot’s Casaubon discovers, the canon is a zero-sum game. Realist characters from two hundred years of literature find themselves displaced by the more up-to-date “real” of popular culture, signaled by the invasion of television actors, as well as characters, at the conference (Peter Falk is the detective on the case of the terrorists). JR and Bobby and Steve McGarrett shout “we are eternal, we’re real! We’ll show’m. We are the ones people want and know and love! Down with all these dead people out of books nobody reads!” (*Texteration* 58). As Brooke-Rose says of the predicament of serious literature, “the human need for fictions has been channeled into the ‘popular’ genres” (“The Dissolution of Character” 191). Characters from contemporary fiction are even more threatened by the reader’s snub than poor Mr. Casaubon, since they have never become canonical. Mira Enketei’s jolting realization of her own fragility comes when her name appears on the index of names of characters forgotten by readers either from the nonavailability or noncanonicity of the works in which they appear or from a lapse in readers’ memories of their minor role in a canonical work.

In the thought experiments that are Brooke-Rose’s novels, criticism, character, and theory converge as points of speculation, as all engage in testing the imaginative life of ideas. In *Texteration* she brings literature to the brink of extinction, “testing” in fictional form the various “deaths” that have become critical commonplaces—of the author, of character, of the novel, and, even, of the reader, that absent god to whom the characters pray. In the process, the conventions of fiction, like the convention in California, are undermined. Unlike other Brooke-Rose texts, the novel begins in the third-person past-tense narration of traditional nineteenth-century fiction. The two famous nineteenth-century Emmas in their carriages are at first also carried along in their native narrative sentence. Like the characters who disappear during the novel,
however, this narrative sentence, too, suddenly vanishes, replaced by Brooke-Rose’s characteristic present-tense narratorless narrative. It is Brooke-Rose’s strength to reinvent, rather than to exhaust, the resources of fictionality; the illusion of art is subverted in order to save fiction and fictionality. In Textermination, she raids literature’s resources to explore the afterlife of textuality. Through her “ghosts” (Textermination 19) or “constellations of semes,” as they’re called at one point (Textermination 63), she focuses on the ontology of fictional being, a persistent theoretical concern since A Rhetoric of the Unreal. Textermination mines fiction’s resources to test theory’s preoccupations, in this case the “deaths” in fiction. It puns on “inquiry” and “ink-worries” (Textermination 67).

Before the apocalyptic climax, another quieter “textermination” is staged. It occurs in chapter 11, not an accident, I think, in a metafictional novel, for here, the novel is brought to the brink of bankruptcy. The last of two fictional (and female) narrative presences we have come to rely on disappears suddenly—first, Kelly McFadgeon, a young “Interpreter” attending the meeting, who bemoans her failure to master the right lingo of the profession, disappears in chapter 9. In searching for some names she does recognize through her reading, Kelly sees her own name in a list of forgotten characters and realizes that she herself is fictional. She reads: “McFadgeon, Kelly. From Textermination, by Mira Enketei” (Textermination 92). Suddenly, Kelly disappears from the novel. We feel her loss especially, for her bewilderment in the face of such rampant intertextualities mirrors our own predicament as readers. Unlike Rita Humboldt, “star” professor of Comp Lit and organizer of the conference, Kelly admits her inability to recognize every personage: “She feels ashamed and rattled. Gaps, so many gaps in her reading, she’ll never catch up” (Textermination 22). She expresses bewilderment about theories of fictionality: “I’m totally confused about fictional status” (Textermination 90). Despite her lack of complexity, or context, or individuality in a novel in which she is one name among many, she is our surrogate interpreter and we fasten onto her consciousness with relief; thus, her “textermination” is experienced as a loss. Next, her supposed “creator,” Mira, takes over in chapter 10, only to vanish from the novel herself, after she, too, sees her name on an Index of Forbidden Works and realizes that “[s]he doesn’t exist” (Textermination 105).

It is at this point that chapter 11 introduces the fictional voice of the author, who says, “If she can’t go on, I suppose I’ll have to. I am not Mira of course, though many readers think I am. For one thing I have little Latin and less Greek. Curious how one can invent knowledgeable people without possessing their knowledge” (106). The “eye-narrator,”
who has kept quiet up until this point, now takes over: “I too, like Mira, have no idea how to go on. I must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on (Beckett, The Unnameable [sic])” (*Textermination* 107). Strangely, the novel is “rescued” with a *deus ex machina* updated. The new technology is an old convention revised—authorial intrusion. Interrupting the narrative progress, the “author” discusses her relationships to the characters she has just invented and her difficulties as an author. The specter of Beckett hovers in every admission of defeat and renewed bid for control. “I have thus created a fiction too difficult for me to handle. So I omit what I don’t know. A double absence. All authors omit, texts are full of double absences” (*Textermination* 107). Characters, narrators, and authors all submit to the self-destructions of the text.

Sarah Birch writes that in *Textermination* “there is displacement of creative responsibility from author to reader. It is up to the reader to recognize the imported characters and thus to ‘actualize’ the discursive worlds the novel brings together” (*Christine Brooke-Rose and Contemporary Fiction* 138). As readers, we identify with the characters of Kelly and Mira since they act like fellow “readers” to guide us, like Virgil, through the text; we feel their loss as we struggle with each new guide to make interpretive sense of the text. Birch makes an important point. Within the fictional premises of the novel, the Implied Reader is accorded tremendous power. The god to whom the characters pray, the reader has the power to banish and to resurrect. Yet more powerful, I believe, in its marriage of theoretical focus and pathos is the novel’s exploration of the ontology of being, that is, the reality/unreality of the characters. These theoretical “deaths” are represented as if from the inside, on the pulses of “characters” who experience the earth-shaking events that occur. They stand in for forgotten texts, forgotten authors; it is they who test the viability of fiction in an age of technology and popular culture. Scheherezade is a crucial “femme-récit” with whom the “author” identifies, whose “every tale means a stay of execution” (*Textermination* 108).

This “rescuing” author who saves the text after Kelly’s and Mira’s departures offers her own critical commentary on the levels of fictional-ity of her characters:

So I must bring them back. Oh, not all of them of course. Kelly and Mira are on the Index and gone for ever. But they were real, on their different levels, Kelly being on the staff, Mira having (she says) invented everything. Rewrite the last two sentences, keeping both versions, for both are true. But they were unreal on their different levels, being invented by me, Kelly on the staff, Mira as inventor (she says) of everything,
No, I meant the real fictional characters, those not (yet) on the Index.  
(*Textermination* 108)

As the language of reality/unreality crosses in two sentences that the “author” claims are nonexclusive (both true), her language gets tangled in the problematic terminology of imaginary beings. “Real” means existent as characters in the novel we are reading (as opposed to those from other novels); the second sentence, with its adjective “unreal” acknowledges that they are still “invented,” by the author. In the last sentence “real” means something like characters in the text who are not on any of the “hit lists” that signal their textermination. (The terminology is further complicated by the distinction some of the Interpreters make between their own “real” selves and the existence of the literary characters at the convention [see 101].) *Textermination* enacts the continuum of being and nonbeing that preoccupy narratologists and some of the characters like Rita and Dr. Watson. Dr. Watson helpfully parses the categories of being for the other characters: “some of us are more present than others. It’s all a matter of degree. Absence is absolute, Mr Holmes once told me, but there are degrees of presence. I’m remarkably present, don’t you know, he adds with a rosy glow over his blond moustache” (*Textermination* 97). Jokes are made about the anonymous “I” narrators who fail to show up at the meeting. “Isn’t it in the nature of nameless I-narrators to be more or less absent? David Copperfield Senior asks . . . I hardly think so, says the governess. I have no name, yet I am as absolutely present as . . . those dire presences. She stops” (*Textermination* 96). Characters debate whether to take action on behalf of “these soaring and sinking pronouns” (*Textermination* 97), the rising and fading “I”s and “he”s of fiction. Metatextual references abound to the different permutations of nonexistent beings that are lost and found in fiction. These references include “dead” characters, like those who have already died in fiction and, hence, ironically, might have less far to fall into oblivion; imaginary beings, such as Calvino’s Non-Existing Knight (*Textermination* 35); characters who have less “being” to begin with in the intertextual universe of the novel because they are in canonical works but are minor; characters who have less “being” to begin with because they are in non-canonical works (like Mira); characters in noncanonical works who have even less being than Mira because they are flat characters (like Orion, who complains that he receives inadequate attention in *Amalgamemnon* [*Textermination* 67]). And on the other side of the spectrum of being are dramatic characters who are “incarnated” and therefore might be thought to have being more easily than characters who are equivalent
to words on a page (Textermination 36, 120), as well as characters who are existent in more than one fictional work, like Mira, who therefore might be said to have more fictional weight by virtue of their presence in at least two novels.5

The problem of survival for the characters, real and unreal, is a memory problem: no matter what their fictional “level,” they are all threatened with the loss of existence if their fictional texts are not read. Joyce once commented that his ideal reader was an insomniac. The characters in Textermination face the opposite situation. It is worth parsing the cultural conditions that threaten to banish them to oblivion: (1) literary characters who are upstaged by popular culture icons, both television and film characters and the actors who play them. Normally characters and actors exist on different fictional levels, but in Textermination, all are participants at the convention. (Interestingly, the reference to these television characters and their actors dates Brooke-Rose’s novel more than the literary characters.) According to this diagnosis, readers of literature are spending their time in front of the television and at the movies; (2) literary characters who are upstaged by the news, that is, the real has become unreal, sometimes beyond the wildest dreams of fiction. In A Rhetoric of the Unreal, Brooke-Rose emphasizes this chiasmic development in the twentieth century, as the real has become fantastic. Signaling this crossing, terrorists from the “real” world of news become characters in Textermination (as the news predicting their movements formed part of the narrative in Amalgamemnon). In further play with the unreality of nonfiction, many of the journalists in Textermination are fictional (Textermination 89) and there is a debate about whether the terrorists themselves are fictional, despite the fact that they seem “real enough,” according to Kelly, because they seem “political” and not “literary” (Textermination 37); (3) literary characters who have become irrelevant, no longer able to matter to readers. As Rita says, “It’s a goddamn miracle that fiction still has the power to offend, and maybe change things, as it used to” (Textermination 35); (4) literary characters who are not memorable to readers; (5) literary characters who are threatened by the deadening effect of academic critical practice, particularly, the narrow theoretical and political axes that critics grind. As one character puts it, characters read by teachers, scholars, and students are “analysed as schemata, structures, functions within structures, logical and mathematical formulae, aporia, psychic movements, social significances and so forth” (Textermination 26).

Of all Brooke-Rose’s novels, Textermination reminds us the most of the “unbearable lightness of being” that is always fiction’s link with death.
Describing the difference between a dramatic and fictional character and the greater difficulty of reviving the fictional one, Rita argues that fictional characters appear “gradually out of the reading process, the letters on the page, mere words, not made flesh but creating phantoms in the very varied minds of each solitary reader. It is in this imaginative build-up that we’re threatened, I mean that the characters of fictional narrative are threatened, in a way far more profound and more eroded by time than is possible with dramatic characters, at every moment made flesh before our eyes” (Textermination 120)

The speech suggests that the unbearable lightness of being pertains to all fictional characters, those in classic realist fiction as well as more postmodern types who exist in fictions that theorize their own vulnerabilities. Realism’s “mirror” is always the prop of an illusionist. Realism itself constructs such phantoms of the imagination who demand the reader’s faith. Although Rita is prone to pontificate and her academic jargon is sometimes mocked in the text, her description of the survival of the characters is poignant. In a meeting between Kundera’s Tomas (The Unbearable Lightness of Being) and Austen’s Emma Woodhouse, Brooke-Rose even stages an acknowledgment that reality and unreality are wed in both “realism” and “postmodernism.” Emma thinks: “Being seems to trouble him for some reason, and he calls it unbearably light. And to her astonishment she finds herself agreeing. She has never thought of it in that way, and it somehow relieves her of the oppressive feeling she has had ever since she arrived, that her certitudes are uncertain, that she no longer quite exists in them, no longer quite coincides with herself” (Textermination 109).

The most fundamental of literary “faiths” are challenged in the novel, including the self-identity of the self that is the basis of character in fiction. Not only oblivion but also radical uncertainty threatens the characters from within, the death of the subject now part of even Emma Woodhouse’s sensibility.4 The intertextual universe of Textermination is punningly “mortifying” (Textermination 108, 15) to Emma, who cannot count on the weight of nineteenth-century literary convention to anchor her survival. In this unstable fictional world, the characters seem to defy their own determined futures, living, like the speakers in Amalgameanmnon, in the “time of their options.” The freedom is dizzying. No longer tied to their fated futures, they float, becoming light-headed. Further complicating their predicaments are the fashions of critical interest and readers’ particular investments. Mira complains to Orion that the characters are altered at the convention, depending on the perspectives of the critical papers delivered: “So they do change times while here.
According to the papers on them I suppose” (Textermination 66). With no reliable authors or narrators in sight to help them in their exposure to critical fashion, the characters suffer from too much freedom. Brooke-Rose plays against the “problem” about which characters in modernist and postmodernist fiction complain at the iron hand of their respective authors (think of Molly Bloom suddenly apostrophizing “Jamesy” to “let me up out of this pooh” (Ulysses 633). Instead, the characters in Textermination suffer ontologically from the free-for-all at the convention. The rampant metalepsy confuses them even further.

Perhaps more than her other fictions, Textermination provides a significant corrective to Linda Hutcheon’s blithe enumeration of “principles” jettisoned in postmodern fiction, such as “value, order, meaning, control, and identity . . . that have been the basic premises of bourgeois liberalism” (Hutcheon 13). Textermination refuses such easy dismissals—identity, for one, has a stubborn resilience, despite the smart postmodern bombs hurled its way. The novel is neither a nostalgic bid to return to the good old days of realist fiction and its faithful readers, nor a blithe embrace of freedom from form and tradition. It is, rather, a call to recognize fiction’s vulnerabilities and limits and to revitalize fiction’s powers. CBR performs CPR on fiction through a number of techniques, including intertextuality, one means of reviving both the fittest and the “unfit.” In staging the “deaths” that afflict fiction in the twentieth century, paradoxically, Brooke-Rose revitalizes the genre of the novel. Life after textuality occurs through intertextuality, the living on of the text transformed. Like a parody of a Freudian dream in which all generations coexist, the novel stages unexpected interaction. The conceit allows Brooke-Rose to imagine all sorts of confrontations that implicitly explore, from the inside, how genre and convention constrain. Nineteenth-century novels habitually punish their convention-breaking heroines—Emma Woodhouse puzzles over Emma Bovary’s actions: “The lady in the fiacre? She [Emma Woodhouse] withdraws her arm. She is not leniently disposed. But she is struck by a curious query: why has this lady swooned at the idea of having swallowed a mouthful of oxblood, yet did not shirk from swallowing a good deal more arsenic? Then she pauses in sudden perplexity: where has this extraordinary thought come from?” (Textermination 32). Not only plot but also thought itself is shown to be constrained by the historical laws of genre. This is literary criticism conducted in fictional form.

In diagnosing the cultural situation, Brooke-Rose takes aim at readers who neglect the literary, a category that includes not only those who no longer read or forget what they have read, but those who insist on pass-
ing literature through the crucible of politics. The danger of confusing fiction and politics is represented by the machine-gun packing terrorists who search for Gibreel Farishta, Rushdie’s character from *The Satanic Verses*. More confining than the author’s authority over the characters’ fate, Brooke-Rose seems to say, is the straightjacket of fundamentalist readings. The threatened death of the author, Salman Rushdie, serves as a symbol of the seriousness of misunderstanding the status of fiction. He serves as the emblem of both the power of fiction in the world (“It’s a goddamn miracle that fiction still has the power to offend, and maybe change things, as it used to,” Rita Humboldt says [*Textermination* 35]), and the tragedy of a too literal confusion of fiction and politics.

In an essay that addresses precisely the threatened territory Brooke-Rose covers in *Textermination*, the threat to the novel and the confusion of fiction and politics, Salman Rushdie defends the hybrid reality/unreality of the genre of the novel. In “In Defense of the Novel, Yet Again,” Rushdie responds to a talk delivered by George Steiner which had bemoaned the moribund state of the genre of the novel in Europe. Castigating the plethora of such obituaries of the novel, Rushdie emphasizes that it is precisely its blend of fact and fantasy that ensures its durability: “In my view, there is no crisis in the art of the novel. The novel is precisely that ‘hybrid form’ for which Professor Steiner yearns: It is part social inquiry, part fantasy, part confessional; it crosses frontiers of knowledge as well as topographical boundaries” (Rushdie 50). Diagnosing “real” threats to the novel, Rushdie says:

There is another real danger facing literature, and of this Professor Steiner makes no mention; that is, the attack on intellectual liberty itself—intellectual liberty, without which there can be no literature. . . . Of the pressures of intolerance and censorship, I have personally, in these past years, gained perhaps too much knowledge. . . . The death of the novel may be far off, but the violent death of many contemporary novelists is, alas, an inescapable fact. In Europe and the United States as well, the storm troopers of various ‘sensitivities’ seek to limit our freedom of speech. It has never been more important to continue to defend those values which make the art of literature possible. (Rushdie 54–55)

In their fundamentalism and denial of intellectual liberty, the “storm troopers” of sensitivities, the cultural terrorists, are linked by Rushdie to political terrorists that put a fatwa on his life. *Textermination* makes such connections. Brooke-Rose comes close to the tenor of Rushdie’s belief
that fantasy can be trusted to merge with social inquiry in the novel. In the unreal/real mix that is Textermination, Brooke-Rose has faith in the “business” of fiction (Textermination 35) to conduct cultural critique. In an essay entitled “Palimpsest History,” she argues that it is the hybridity of the novel, its mixture of the real and the unreal, that is its secret to survival amidst the signs of its declining health. In the essay, Rushdie serves as an exemplar of what she calls a “palimpsest history,” in which there is a mixture of fantasy, reality, and unreality:

But the novel’s task, unlike that of history, is to stretch our intellectual, spiritual and imaginative horizons to breaking point. Because palimpsest histories do precisely that, mingling realism with the supernatural and history with spiritual and philosophical reinterpretation, they could be said to float half-way between the sacred books of our various heritages, which survive on the strength of the faiths they have created . . . and the endless exegesis and commentaries these sacred books create. . . .5

Pointing out that this kind of novel that has rejuvenated the novel tradition arises from writers outside the Anglophone tradition, Brooke-Rose emphasizes that the use of fantasy in this hybrid form counteracts the “narcissistic relation of the author to his writing” (Textermination 183). The Intercom Quartet uses the resources of fantasy—prophecy that resists predictability, science fiction, the magical appearances and disappearances of characters in an intertextual universe—to evoke the “real” in a century in which reality has become “unreal.” Both the title “Textermination” and the sudden disappearances of fiction’s phantoms are eerily reminiscent of other nontextual exterminations as well as the “unreality” that Gertrude Stein identified with the Second World War:

There is no point in being realistic about here and now, no use at all not any, and so it is not the nineteenth but the twentieth century, there is no realism now, life is not real it is not earnest, it is strange which is an entirely different matter. (Stein, Wars I Have Seen 44)

Yet Brooke-Rose also reminds us that the echo of “extermination” in “textermination” is only an echo: If the text mimics “unreal” disappearances in a century gone crazy, the “t” in textermination is nevertheless an important sign of a difference between fiction and life that it is dangerous to forget. Compelled toward the referential function of fiction, even metafiction, Brooke-Rose nevertheless ends her novel where
it began, with the departure of a fictional character. However precariously, she restores to one Emma Woodhouse her unbearable lightness of being: “So that Emma found, on being escorted and followed into the second carriage by Mr Elton, that the door was to be lawfully shut on them, and that they were to have a tête-à-tête drive” (182).