# INTRODUCTION

"Language and the word are almost everything in human life."
(Mikhail Bakhtin)

This is the way the story of the three baseball umpires goes. Two novice umpires compete in boasting how good they are, how they respect "truth" and the way things "really" are. One says, "I call them the way I see them"; the other, trying to trump this remark, responds, "I call them the way they are." Then enters the third, most seasoned umpire, who has been in the business for decades, saying, "They aren't, until I call them."

This story is loaded with implications, especially from a performative perspective. Even without much theorizing, one can read it as a narrative of how words make things; in this case, the umpire's "call" produces an action: a batter strikes out, a runner is "safe" at first base, a ball is judged foul. Only the young and naive umpires can seriously believe that their job is to "register facts"— strikes and balls. The older umpire knows that these events become meaningful on the field because his words assign significance to them: his "call" determines, for example, if a batter gets on base or not. Ultimately, then, victory is often determined by what the umpire calls.

But there is another issue here, too. He is not a good umpire because—like his younger colleagues—he is determined to call them the way he sees them or the way they "are"; conversely, his call does not "reflect" the "fact" that he is a good umpire, so his being a good umpire does not pre-exist his call. Rather, he calls because he understands the performative power of his rulings. He knows and uses the performative power of his words in bringing about a new reality, if only on the field and as part of the game, while the performative power of his act produces him as a subject, a good umpire who knows his trade. In short, both the game and the umpire are performatively brought about here.

This double, or contiguous, reading ties into two fundamental aspects of the way performativity will be understood in this book. The first is the original Austinian framework (further developed by other analytic philosophers, linguists, and pragmaticists),where the performative is treated within a coherent theory of speech acts, fully equipped with clear dichotomies, definitions, taxonomies, and conditions. The foundational dichotomy is that between the constative and the performative: while constatives are used to describe things or register events "out there," performatives are used to create things and events; as such, they can be considered vehicles of metalepsis, the jump from discourse to "reality," which

Rorty calls our "plain ordinary spatio-temporal existence" (*Consequences* 118). Taking for granted the signifier/signified dichotomy, this theory turns on the assumption that a reality of signifieds exists as the locus of both the speaker (as a presence with a self-aware "I") and the "thing" made by words. The second, the poststructuralist framework, does not operate with such clear-cut distinctions; binary terms show transitions and overlappings, boundaries are blurred, taxonomies destabilized, and definitions turned around. Moreover, the self-presence of the speaking "I" and the reality of the things brought about by speech acts are highly problematic. In this framework, it is not signifieds but other signifiers which are being performed by language, among them, speakers within discourse. Indeed, from this perspective performative acts allow speakers to construct themselves: subjects are created performatively, in the speaking and the doing. Performatives have "ontological" force, I will show, because they create new discourses which allow for new subjectivities. These new subjectivities will take their own metaleptic leap and, while retaining their discursive constructivity, may take their existence in the reality of our spatial-temporal world.

In foregrounding the ways discursivity might channel into and structure this spatial-temporal world, the tongue-in-cheek story about the three umpires seems applicable. But one could cite other, more serious examples, some taken from contemporary cinema. In the box-office hit film *Matrix* (1999, dir. Andy Wachowski, Larry Wachowski) reality has been absorbed by virtual reality, the hyperreal, a hi-tech version of the imagined or the fantastic. In the Spanish movie *Abre los ojos* (Open your eyes, 1997, dir. Alejandro Amenábar), the protagonist's alleged real life is seamlessly channeled into a virtual experience, without any signals of actual death or discontinuity. *eXistenZ* (1999, dir. David Cronenberg) is a film about a virtual reality game, the plugs of which are connected to one's spinal cord with the help of a bioport (which is quite like an umbilical cord); this game offers life-like experiences, wherein virtual reality is not only much more fun and full of life than "real" reality, but actually encompasses this "lived reality" too. What we see and experience as "real" seems to have completely lost its relevance in *Suture* (1993, dir. Scott McGehee and David Siegel), a movie about twin brothers of different races, where the issue of race remains unaddressed throughout the filmic narrative. In *The Truman Show* (1998, dir. Peter Weir), the protagonist lives his life among movie sets: everything around him is literally staged by actors, producers, and directors, who allow him too to perform, albeit unknowingly, his life. In a similar vein, *The Village* (2004, dir. M. Night Shyamalan) depicts the everyday life of a 19th century village, regulated by customs developed over time; this village then turns out to be an enclave carved out by a group of friends in the 1960s. Although the commune's founding generation knows theirs is a world made consciously and artificially, their children and grandchildren take this world for a lived 19th century reality.

The fleeting sense of reality that moves these films is, of course, a chief characteristic of postmodernism, as pinned down by Jean Baudrillard, among others. In this theoretical framework, literature will offer examples for where the "real" has been most spectacularly lost; where unobserved reality has lost its existence; where "facts" can only be approached in mediated forms, textual or otherwise; where the hypothetical and the provisional has taken over; where universes and selves have become plural; where the world cannot be read referentially but only as a series of signs and sign systems, or as interlocking signifiers without corresponding signifieds. As in this framework the literary work hesitates to refer to anything outside itself, literature can no longer be regarded as the "mirror of life," doubling reality through mimesis. Instead, reality becomes a shifting, moving entity, always crossing boundaries, until the difference assumed to exist between reality and imagination or construction will cease to make sense. With the idea of both external reality and its representation in literature destabilized, the very possibility of a pre-existent referent is also questioned. Everything is text and context; signs point only to other signs, not to pre-existent referents or stable signifieds. What we take as reality is fabricated, just as fiction is made, and the subject is created through a series of acts as well. Neither reality nor the subject will be understood as given, waiting to be captured, mirrored, and reflected in literature. Rather, elements of the real, including the self, will be taken as performed, created by acts, acts of language primarily.

Postmodern theories generally agree on the disappearance of reality and the signified. Already the first poststructuralist commentaries of the late 1960s and early 1970s—a transitory period epistemologically—discredited the notion of a system with a central signified. "There is no transcendental or privileged signified," Jacques Derrida proclaimed as early as 1966 ("Structure" 226). This critique of the signified has proved to be, as I have shown elsewhere ("Dangerous Liaisons"), a core component of what one might call the postmodern episteme. Within the world of Derrida's system of floating signifiers and Lacan's incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier, signification becomes an endless horizontal network avoiding any vertical connections between propositions and reality. Following the paradigm set up by Foucault, who defined the Renaissance episteme by its tertiary (word, object, symbol) relation and the classical episteme by its binary (signifier, signified) sign, one might proceed to define the postmodern episteme by having the signifier as its sole component. Both the tertiary and the binary structure of the sign having disappeared, "reality" and "things" give way to "mere" discourse: language and words. Ultimately, in the postmodern age "one remains," as Foucault puts it, "within the dimension of discourse" (*Archeology* 76). It is now impossible to write a history of the referent, for one always ends up engaged in the history of discursive objects—in how history is "fictioned," in the history of objects as they emerge in discourse. The very existence of a reality that precedes discourse—together with an

objective view of that reality, what Richard Rorty called a "God's eye view" ("Solidarity" 577)—is being questioned. "An age does not," Gilles Deleuze argues, "pre-exist the statements which express it, nor the visibilities which fill it" (48); "truth," he goes on, "is inseparable from the procedure producing it" (63). Or, as Derrida famously claims, *"Il n'y a pas de hors-texte"* (*Of Grammatology* 158).

Of course, we all know that there is a lot *outside* the text, except we don't quite know what. For it does not seem possible, as we have known since Werner Heisenberg formulated his uncertainty principle, to know the *hors-texte* apart from, or independent of, the *texte*. Even many of those things we thought to have been *hors-texte* have proven to be *texte*—and here performativity can function as a litmus test to signal the difference between *hors-texte* and *texte*, which is really one of my governing theses.

With this theoretical framework, language art (not just contemporary texts but earlier ones too, as I will demonstrate in connection with The Declaration of Independence, Mark Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger*, or Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," for example) can no longer be read as a representation of something outside itself, but as one of the many discourses that produce—performatively, I will show—what we perceive as reality.

This book, then, is about how acts are performed in (literary) texts while making "things," among them, subjects. In this way, it ties not only into theories of the performative but also into current subjectivity theories (poststructuralist, including deconstructionist, postmodern, feminist, queer, post-deconstructionist, and post-colonial), which deny the concept of the subject as essence and understand subjectivities inflected by gender, race, sexuality, class, ethnicity, etc. as constructed, discursively and performatively. I hope to shed light on how these "realities" and subjectivities, which we conceptualize as nominals, have come about through particular processes and should, therefore, be understood in active terms, as verbs rather.

The application of speech act theory to literary texts seems to follow the double trajectory described above in connection with theories of the performative. During the first phase of the history of the concept of the performative—dominated by the constative-performative dichotomy and the tripartite division of locutionary-illocutionary-perlocutionary acts—came the assumption that the performative powerfully tied together such binaries as word and deed, saying and doing, representation and presentation, mind and body, poetic and ordinary language, and speech and writing. It was also assumed that the performative received its validation, in a transcendental manner, from some outside authority, whose pre-existence and co-presence are necessary for conveying intention determining meaning. In the second phase, the performative was adopted by poststructuralist, especially feminist, deconstructionist, and post-deconstructionist theorists, exactly for the way it helped deconstruct the logic of

binary thinking. What were formerly seen as either/or binary opposites now became instances of undecidability and aporia, which worked together in the construction of meaning, reality, and the subject. As Sandy Petrey puts it, much of the "excitement of speech act theory is its demonstration that entities often taken as incompatible are instead thoroughly interactive" (6). Indeed, the theory which I call performative constructionism—showing both realities and subjectivities as discursively and catachrestically performed—will formulate its own arguments to discredit binary thinking. If all constructions are performative and the same performative processes can lead to either element of the old binaries, then neither the distinction nor the hierarchy between such binary elements seems to make much sense. Whether one one is female or male, black or white, gay or straight, is—or can be—a matter of choice and performance rather than biology, it seems. Furthermore, subjectivities, together with their identity inflections, will be constructed as discourse: not as signifieds that pre-exist discourse, but as signifiers structured by difference with relation to other signifiers. As Jeffrey T. Nealon aptly claims in connection with identities,

> any state of sameness actually *requires* difference in order to structure itself. Identity is structured like a language: we can only recognize the so-called plenitude of a particular identity insofar as it differentiates itself from . . . the ostensible non-plenitude of difference. Like Saussure's famous characterization of language, subjective identity knows only "differences *without positive terms.*" (4; emphasis in original)

Performative constructions are, in other words, catachreses, "misapplications," as *The New Princeton Encyclopedia* defines the term (Preminger and Brogan 172), because as discursive constructions they refer to nothing; lacking their signifieds, they are signifiers solely structured by difference with regard to other signifiers.

Radical category extensions will then characterize the binaries under investigation in this book. (i) If the real is as much created as is the imagined world (as in the case of *The Mysterious Stranger*) and the imagined is as real as the reality of here and now (as in the case of "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"), then the boundaries between the real and the imagined will be transgressed, and those categories will overlap. (ii) By the same token, if a man can perform womanhood, then *woman* can mean *man*, too (as in the case of *M. Butterfly*); (iii) if a black person can perform whiteness, then *white* can mean *black* (as in the case of *The Human Stain*); and (iv) if a gay person can perform heterosexuality, then *straight* can mean *gay* equally (as in the case of "In the Cage" or *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*). Therefore, the conclusion to these assumptions is at hand: performative constructionism will offer new arguments toward undoing the binarity of our fundamental logocentric categories and taking performative constructions as catachresis.

I have been interested in a particular set of genres, authors, and texts, whose interest derives not from representation but performance: the construction of realities and subjectivities. They seem to share a particular power that sets them apart from other texts. Some make such strong claims that they create a difference beyond the text itself; in others, words make things in very literal ways; in still others, words make people or types of people in particular ways too.

- The phenomenon commonly called "word magic" can be read as the logo-centric instance of the performative. Prominent among these instances, which I call strong performatives, are variations on the originary logocentric moment narrated in the Old and New Testaments. By the same token, declarations and manifestos gain their particularity from belonging to the performative genre *par excellence*. Such strongly performative texts as The Declaration of Independence, the *Dadaist* or the *Surrealist Manifestos* perform political and artistic events as they declare independence or announce the coming of an artistic revolution; moreover, they create (discursively) the subject who issues declarations or manifestos, and is, from now on, a free American, a Dadaist, or a Surrealist.

- Recent controversies about such American canonical texts as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* cannot be understood without taking into account the performative force—in this case the injurious power—of language. Readers have long been offended by the oppressive language of the novel, especially the aggressive use of the pejorative term *nigger*, which has evoked the memories of centuries of oppression and humiliation. Racial stereotyping emerges as a speech act phenomenon.

- Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* celebrates the black woman who found her voice and her self through the wounding power of the word and through being empowered by the word.

- The protagonist's performance in Norman Mailer's "The Time of Her Time" is both perlocutionary and illocutionary: he traumatizes her and puts her into a subordinate class. Denise, however, refuses to be victimized. Empowered by language, she unconstructs herself as a woman subjected to male sexual control, and reconstructs herself as a sexual subject on her own right.

- What the boys experience as real in Mark Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger* is created in a logocentric fashion: by word and will. As such, this piece could be read as an instance of strong performativity: Satan makes clay figures, which then come to life. But by making clay figures come to life, Satan constructs himself as creator too, as an extended arm of the Almighty. Moreover, in the final twist to the story, Satan the deconstructor moves the events into mere discourse when admitting to the boys that all this is a dream. Yet here he constructs himself as an even more powerful creator and knower, capable of controlling dreams too.

- Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" could also be read as an instance of strong performativity: Farquhar sets himself free by the

power of his will. His self-construction, however, occurs in discourse solely: it is by imagining his return home that he makes of himself a free man. In the final twist added to this story, the events are here moved into the discourse of dream as the dying man imagines his escape.

- Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* showcases the performative understanding of language as action and means of influence, while at the same time it openly deploys rhetorical and pragmatic processes that violate some basic rules and assumptions of communication. A complex marital fight is carried out in speech: words hurt, but also keep the big bad wolf away, while the imaginary son can be made and unmade, as the characters please.

Gender is read as constructed through stylized performances by dressing in texts by Henry James, Kate Chopin, Theodore Dreiser, and Edith Wharton.

- Henry James's *Daisy Miller*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, and *The Wings of the Dove* have women characters fully aware of how society inscribes its norms on the female body through stylized performances. Never being the subject to look, but always the object to be looked at, Daisy Miller accepts her female objecthood brought about by her choice of attire. Probably the first woman protagonist in American literature to recognize that clothes are imposed upon women by society, Isabel Archer insists that certain models of behavior (like the buying and wearing of "things") are prescribed by society, and as such originate in society and not in her self. Milly Theale is one of those Jamesian figures who "have character," which, James insists, pre-exists her socially constructed self.

- The protagonist of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* ultimately fails in surpassing her objecthood and attaining subjecthood in part because she misunderstands the meaning of clothes. Only at the end does she come to see her self as construction without any substance. She has to learn that representation is "false"; her constructed womanhood is but an empty signifier, a catachresis.

- Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* seems to hesitate between showing woman as having a self to be expressed by her dressing and presenting the construction of the catachrestic self through the call of social norms, especially dressing. Only in the final scene, when she walks into the ocean naked, does she recognize the emptiness of her catachrestic objecthood. The short story entitled "A Pair of Silk Stockings" is predicated entirely on the normative gender assumptions of culture; here Chopin presents womanhood as both process and product, as well as construction and self-construction.

- In Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, Lily Bart knows what duties society prescribes for women. Lily's social ambition shows in her wanting to be as smartly dressed as the rich women. With a passion for *tableaux vivants*, Lily will live moments of feminine objecthood to the full. Her performance will highlight the fact that she owns nothing of herself: body, beauty, even thoughts and ambitions belong to the role she plays.

Certain widely-known codes of conduct can be shown to underlie gender performances. This is especially true of the American South, where the ideal construct of the Southern white woman is predicated on the discourse of white and feminine supremacy, including the widespread acceptance of racialized and gendered social hierarchies and ensuing forms of behavior.

- The cultural perceptions of the South form the discourse underlying the performance of Miss Emily Grierson in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily." Expressive citationality is at work in the theatrics performed by both the town and Emily Grierson; these citations of norms of gender and race, womanhood and whiteness, together bring about the icon of the Southern woman.

- Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* is a text whose central topos is construction or constructedness. Gender and race participate in the making of the characters, especially Blanche and Stanley, while the issue of constructedness itself becomes the fundamental conflict of the drama.

- Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" focuses primarily on the grotesque self-construction of the grandmother into a Southern lady, where the ideal she hopes to be approximating in her theatrics is empty and wholly detached from reality. Her performance is manifold, with the citation and iteration of cultural values going on in her speech, dressing, and ways of dealing with people.

- In two misogynistic texts by Jonathan Swift and T. S. Eliot, the authors ironically reverse, in one way or another, the normative constructions of womanhood and trace the process whereby gender is unconstructed.

In some modernist women writers—notably Gertrude Stein, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), Djuna Barnes, Willa Cather, and Carson McCullers—the characters perform acts of identity which invalidate common ground assumptions about gender. While the performative acts revise these assumptions, the women construct themselves into new subjects.

- In Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives*, the characters resist gender norms by revising the love-and-marriage plots. Although they have various relationships, the three servant girls are autonomous beings, subjects who think and desire. Melanctha emerges as the heroine of a female *Bildungsroman* with a character as complex and dynamic as her male predecessors, among them Werther, Julien Sorel, and Raskolnikov.

- Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* subverts the heterosexual love plot. She appears as subject by performing a new kind of womanhood which rests on revised presuppositions, insisting, for example, that women too can be at home in open spaces, can be the subjects of their own life-stories, and their bodies may resist controlling regimes.

- Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* presents one of the most memorable androgynes in modernist fiction: both quester and desired other, autonomous yet produced in sexual relationships, Robin transgresses whatever boundaries she en-

counters. As woman quester, seeker, and wanderer, she is after selfhood and knowledge that lie beyond the bounds of patriarchy.

- *HERmione,* written by H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), portrays a woman's selfhood outside the bounds of both the heterosexual and the homosexual matrix. By the end, Hermione will find autonomy independent of relationships, a selfhood folding, as it were, in itself both subjecthood and objecthood.

- Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe* presents a complex case of gender performativity: here gender appears as multiple and transgressive, and in each case it is sexually negotiated, thereby dependent on the particular relationship and situation in which in it is performed. Gender is only evoked here, as a relative term, with vague suggestions of femininity and masculinity.

Henry James offers examples of how homosexual identity is being discursively produced as object of attention and desire. Homosexuality is performed in its ontological version in the subtext, while heterosexuality's performance happens in the text. This tension makes for a double narrative, where the text resists homosexual interpretation, but the underwriting, the coded subtext, insists on such a gay reading.

- "The Beast in the Jungle" produces a new discursive subject, the homo-sexual, in a performative manner. Preceding the conceptualization of gay identity, this performative process cannot refer to any citable model; rather, it performs a new entity, the identity, recently conceptualized, of the gay man. This gay construction seems to go on in the subtext, whereas heterosexuality is evoked on the text level.

- "In the Cage" is an example for mimetic or citational performance going on in the text; it presents subjectivity as discursively produced by hailing ide-ologies—through the replaying of existing scripts, in this case, the script of "compulsory heterosexuality." Its function is to hide the homosexual planted in the subtext and to have it evoked only by suggestion.

Performativity is involved not only when particular identities are affirmed or stabilized, but also when identities are transgressed, changed, or destabilized. Passing, a way of escaping metaphysical or logocentric binaries, whether be-tween genders, races, sexualities, or classes, is best understood as social performance in Mark Twain, Vladimir Nabokov, David Hwang, James Weldon Johnson, Nella Larsen, and Philip Roth.

Passing can be described either as *full passing*, which is always performance, or *play passing*, which is the interrogation and subversion of the binary system and, as such, is always the performative creation of new ontologies. While full passing will aim to deceive (to be altogether "the same"), play passing will want to reveal its transgression by constantly producing its own slippage. The first is a deadly serious game, where the stakes are high, while playfulness is a key factor in the second.

- Mark Twain's recently published play, *Is He Dead?* problematizes the undecidability of gender identity by emphasizing its theatricality. I discuss three plot elements: the painter Millet's passing as a woman, the foregrounding of "her" constructed body, and the plan to reintroduce Millet as his own imitator.

- Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* foregrounds an instance of gender passing usually not discussed under the heading of passing: in this case it is a pre-adolescent who turns into a "nymphet" or "girleen" in order to pass for a woman. This novel, subverting in other ways too the stability of identity, puts in its center the carnal desire of the grown man for the Dolores/Lolita, who is not a child any more but not a woman yet either.

- The transgressions between dichotomies are further problematized in David Henry Hwang's drama *M. Butterfly*, where discourses of gender, sexuality, race, and colonialism intersect, while imitation and reversal are foregrounded as dominant thematics. This thematic of imitation is exploited in a twofold manner: on the one hand, the French diplomat, René Gallimard plays out a performance of cultural imitation as he reenacts (or thinks he reenacts) the plot of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* (becoming both Pinkerton and Cio-Cio-San, actually), while on the other, a Chinese agent puts on a masquerade of Oriental womanhood as s/he gives the performance of Gallimard's ideal of the "Perfect Woman."

The primary marker of the subject performing race passing is not simply skin color—in many cases skin color is not even the determining factor—but the place the person occupies in the hegemonic system. Thus a particular imbrication of the categories of race and class is clearly observable in the instances where race is being performed, including instances where race passing is performed.

- In James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* race is foregrounded as pure construction, a catachresis lacking its referent. No matter what identity he may claim, the protagonist seems to be full passing— whether for black/woman/homosexual or for white/man/heterosexual—for the sake of some race, gender, or class privilege.

- Nella Larsen also presents a complex case of racial, sexual, and class transgression in her novel *Passing*. Employing not one but two passer protagonists who complement each other in many ways, Larsen is able to create a tension between racial subjects constructed by masking strategies and subjects informed by a catachrestic notion of race.

- In Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, the protagonist full passes from black to what we could call an ethnically marked version of white, Jewish. What is shared by the various passers in the novel (there are probably four) is that their performances involve uncommon, uninvited, or unreadable transgressions. These passers do not consider their biology or "birthright" as something given; rather, because their subjectivities have a catachrestic constitution, they move easily from one identity inflection to another, taking them on always by association.

I have taken my case studies from texts I greatly value, texts that I have read and taught with much enthusiasm over the past decades. I returned to most in various university lectures and seminars under different titles ("Performed Identities," "Boundary Crossings," "Passing," "Subjectivity Theories"); it was this sustained interest in reading and rereading them—together with an imperative to construct a usable theory, one that might offer a new handle on them—which really provoked this book. I wanted to test my theory on texts showing as wide a variety as possible, horizontally across time, across historical and cultural difference, as well as genre difference. Moreover, I think the way people construct themselves and each other ties into the *comédie humaine* we all enjoy. This is what human beings do: they act and perform, put on masks and toy with masquerade, play and replay, invent and imitate.

Governed by processes whereby things—realities and subjectivities—are made, my case studies have been selected according to how they exhibited different aspects of this performativity. Of course, performativity is demonstrably foregrounded in each; theory "happens" in all. What is common in the texts is that here realities and subjectivities are especially visibly created through performative processes; words make things happen. In the case of subjectivities, they come about either through the performance of existing scripts and norms or through their performative revision. My order of discussion does not follow chronology; instead, the texts are treated in an order that follows my unpacking of the theoretical issues. The diversity of the texts and their non-chronological discussion really reflects another governing thesis of this book, namely that performativity is not a historical category, but one identifiable in all texts and discourses: texts of fiction addressed to fictional readers, texts of fiction addressed to real readers, social and cultural discourses involving fictional audiences, or social and cultural discourses involving real audiences. Performativity, then, seems to be indistinguishable from writing and reading, textuality or discursivity, understood, in a very broad sense, to include literary, social, and cultural discourses alike.

The realities and identities created in these texts problematize such familiar dichotomies as man vs. woman, white vs. black, heterosexual vs. homosexual. Most of them make visible the processes that create the marked and concomitantly marginalized elements of dichotomies, such as the culturally imperialized groups (as opposed to groups in culturally hegemonic positions): women, persons of color, or gay persons. But the pragmatic tools employed in these readings are by no means restricted to how marked configurations are constructed; performative constructionism will reveal that reality and identity constructions rely on the same processes when unmarked configurations, or the privileged terms of the binaries, are being created: the male, the white, the straight. Performative analysis offers ways to understand that none of these terms are innocent or neutral but are the end-products of social-historical processes.

Indeed, they are created through the same processes, whether in privileged or marginal positions, unmarked or marked configurations. The boundaries between them often shift, as those too are constructions. Since it all proves to be a matter of performance—man is as much constructed as woman, black as much as white, straight as much as gay—the boundaries are themselves the reflections of power, and as such they will be crossed, too.

My interest in these texts goes beyond the performative construction of realities and selves, or even the challenges posed by their difficulty. Several of these texts have acquired new critical readings in recent years, and these readings now seem to be taken for granted just as much as contrary readings were before. I am interested, therefore, in the mechanics and background of such interpretive tidal changes. What is it that triggers revisionist readings of the American canon, and what is it that can overwrite or nullify readings previously agreed upon, readings which were considered as obvious at their time as the new readings are today? To answer these questions, I identify the performative processes in texts and their dynamic interactions, or dialogues, with presuppositions and other frame assumptions. These pragmatic processes will be seen to characterize both the literary text and its reception, hence the performative and the presupposition will be helpful tools in both exploring the nature of these difficult texts and understanding the reasons why competing readings have evolved.

Performatives and presuppositions, linguistic and pragmatic concepts I will define early on, are tools for exploring how meanings are produced by the interactions of text and context, as well as the dialogue of writer and reader. Indeed, textual acts brought about by such interaction account for a new readerly involvement, too. Texts will be meaningful for those who participate in the interactional process between reader and text, who respond to the textual acts and citations performed. Obviously, the reader's subject position will play an important role in this interaction, for every reader will have different responses to the acts and the citations. Not only do readers emerge as actively producing meanings (rather than just consuming them), but because they approach the text with different assumptions, different readers will produce different meanings in the same text. And these different responses to the text will create different experiences of the text too. As such, language becomes force and event that happens to the reader.

Some words on the terminology used in this book. Overall, the governing term *performative* is used to refer to the linguistic utterances defined originally by Austin and to the social-discursive processes captured by the same term when it came to be expanded in poststructuralist critical parlance (see my chapters "The performative: early history" and "Performativity in theories of the subject" for definitions). *Speech acts*, or acts performed in, by, and through language, will refer to the larger category within which performatives have come to be explored and classified by *speech act theory*. While near synonyms, I want to point out an

important difference between *speech act* and *performative* theory: a systematic account of the performative, *speech act theory* is anchored in Austinian-Searlian theory, while the *performative*, a concept not pulled down by the baggage of totalizing taxonomies, is capable of arching over to poststructuralist thought. *Performativity* will refer to the abstract concept which can be identified behind the various functioning of the performative, whether in the linguistic or the social-discursive sense. The verbal forms—*X performs Y*, *X performing Y*, *performing Y*, or *Y performed*—are used to retain this same basic sense, linguistic and social-discursive, only in this case the process or action aspects are emphasized; *performance*—used in its dictionary meaning as the nominal form of the verb *perform*—will refer to the product of performing. Apart from such standard usage of the terms, I introduce (in the chapter on "Perfor*mance* and perfor*mative* constructions of the subject"), with a synecdochic transference of meaning, two instances where usage is special: perfor*mance* and perfor*mative*, where both narrow down their standard or original meaning. Perfor*mance*—with the last syllable always italicized—will refer to a particular mode of performativity, characterized by a mimetic replaying of norms and the replaying of ruling ideologies when constructing the subject. Perfor*mative*—with the last two syllables always italicized—will refer to another mode of performativity, characterized by a resistance to ruling ideologies and the bringing about of new discursive entities in subject constructions.

Overall, the term *subject* is used in the (1) general sense of the person with a separate body, an 'I,' and a knowledge of this 'I' (the subject as person). Often (2) other elements of the dictionary meaning of the term are emphasized: (i) subject as linguistic or grammatical subject and a sentence position; (ii) subject as speaking-seeing-acting agent; (iii) subject as one who is subjected to another person, as in the phrases "loyal subject" and "subject to the crown." *Subjectivity* as a critical concept will be used to encompass the various interpretations of subjecthood, including those which derive from the above dictionary meanings (subject as person, grammatical subject, subject as agent, subject[ed] to another person), as well as those which specify the relationship between *subjectivity* and *identity*. The concept is understood as an abstract principle connecting multiple identities and multiplicities of the self; *subjectivity* is inflected by *identities*, while it also contains a higher degree of self-awareness about one's personality and its inflections (for definitions and distinctions see the chapter entitled "Performativity in theories of the subject").

*Discourse* is understood as that domain of statements through which reality is apprehended, setting the limits of knowing, thinking, and speaking. Moreover, discourse is that which systematically produces its objects, "the objects of which they speak," as Foucault puts it (*Archeology* 49). In this book I study a particular kind of discursive practices, the discursive production of realities and subjec-

tivities via performative processes (for the definition of discourse see beginning of Chapter Two).

I will employ the term *poststructuralism* to refer to literary and cultural theory grounded in critical thinking that not only came after structuralism but broke with the structuralist paradigm. I take poststructuralism not only to include the early radical theorists, the movers and shakers of the paradigm break (Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, etc.), but also the more recent schools and trends, which take particular directions—towards post-deconstructionist, feminist, post-colonial, queer thought, for example—without contesting the Derridian-Foucauldian-Barthesian framework, to use a simplifying label. I try to avoid using the term *postmodernism* interchangeably with *poststructuralism* (even though they often are used interchangeably in critical discourse); when I use *postmodern* and its derivatives, I refer either to a particular kind of writing that emerged after World War II, or to the particular Lyotardian-Baudrillardian line *within* the general heading of poststructuralism, or, indeed, to the larger epistemic condition which framed either of these.

In line with contemporary critical usage, my quotation marks—in cases other than around titles of texts—are meant to signal points of defamiliarization or semantic distancing, and not just places where only the near match—but not the *mot juste*—has been found. In these cases the innocent meaning of the word is questioned, together with the assumption that such meanings can be taken for granted. For example, when "realities" are discussed, the innocent meaning questioned by the quotation marks includes assumptions about certain planes of existence preceding discourse. By using quotation marks, the innocence and transparency of the term "race" get questioned, suggesting that in fact it is a misnomer. Or, when I speak of "the 'revelation' of truth," the assumption questioned includes the pre-existence of a truth to be revealed. Or, the phrase "the construction of 'truth'" suggests doubts about whether truth exists and is knowable.

This is the exploration of a critical concept and a study in literary critical analysis. It will use linguistic (performative/speech act) theories, as well as poststructuralist (especially deconstructionist, post-deconstructionist, and feminist) cultural and literary theories from both the U.S. and Europe. Each larger chapter will confine itself to a selected critical topic, will begin with the critical and contextualized elaboration of the topic and continue in subchapters exploring the various aspects of the larger topic. The chapters and subchapters will conclude with representative case studies taken predominantly from American literature (with the exception of one section discussing the Bible, another discussing a major text from American history, and yet another reading a poem by Jonathan Swift). I will use historical chronology as a framework within sections which are not otherwise chronological.

My readings are conducted reciprocally whether anchored in linguistic theories (Chapter One) or in poststructuralist theories (Chapters Three to Five). In other words, I first read the texts through linguistic performative theories, then continue reading them from the poststructuralist perspective, to conclude by reassessing the original framework (Chapter One). Similarly, I trace the expansion of the performative into poststructuralist thinking, then continue by importing some concepts from linguistic theory (for example, the presupposition), which will then allow me to reassess the original poststructuralist framework (Chapters Three to Five). By following these two trajectories of reciprocity, I hope to demonstrate the continuing relevance of the analysis.