BROOKE-ROSEAN LIPOGRAMMIC HYBRIDS: PUNS AND PORTMANTEAU WORDS

Noemi Alice BARTHA

Universitatea Tehnică din Cluj-Napoca
Centrul Universitar Nord din Baia Mare

Abstract

Consequent experimental novelist, Christine Brooke-Rose not only resorts to the reduction of the narrator as a function of the narrative, but she also plays on the ability of language to reconfigure the fictional universe. The Brooke-Rosean narrative thus orients readers' attention from the comfortable semantic reading process focusing on the plot to the puzzling play of language and discourses. A natural outcome is a hybrid narrative and a multitude of typical lexical hallmarks of the author: puns and portmanteau words. The author's interest in language can be traced down to three sources: firstly, her identity split as a bilingual and then the linguistic adoption as an exile; secondly, her wartime experience as an officer, and thirdly, her translation of Robbe-Grillet's novel In the Labyrinth. All these and each triggered Christine Brooke-Rose's interest in the ontological ability of language. The author followed this as her lifelong pursuit and made it the primary germinating force of all her novels, thus staying an original and consequent experimenter at all times.

KEY WORDS: *experiment, language, hybrid, pun, portmanteau*

British novelist and literary critic, Christine Brooke-Rose (1923-2012) enjoyed little recognition and critical appraisal for her highly experimental novels. Born in Geneva in a trilingual family, Brooke-Rose was educated in Brussels and London. The first split in the author's identity is genetically inherited as she grows up speaking two languages: the maternal French and paternal English. To these two, the maternal grandmother's German language is added. Despite the rich cultural and linguistic background, Brooke-Rose acknowledges these languages as sources of her split identity. The multidimensional identity of Christine Brooke-Rose will later be 'enriched' by her exile to London to pursue her studies. The Second World War is directly experienced by the author who works as a captain in "Women's Auxiliary Air Force" (Brooke-Rose, 1996: 99) where she decoded German messages for the British. The wartime experience is the spark triggering the author's interest in codes, language and its abilities.

Christine Brooke-Rose's experimental fiction explores the virtually infinite abilities of language materialised in narrative experiments. But the split in Brooke-Rose's life is not solely linguistic. Her twenty-year marriage to a Polish poet ends with a divorce, followed by Brooke-Rose's exile to France. The author's voluntary exile to France to pursue a teaching career only complicates her split identity. The geographical, cultural, and linguistic dimensions of exile make the author's definition of identity a blurry, fuzzy process. The experimental fiction of Christine Brooke-Rose explores dimensions of identity and its construction. Equally, the experimental strategies envisage the construction and deconstruction of identity through fiction.

Viewed in a chronological sequence, Christine Brooke-Rose's career as a writer could be integrated in the postmodernist frame. The postmodernist frame, can point to the author's narrative experiments. Christine Brooke-Rose's interest in language and its power has brought about deep change in the structure of her novels as they orient readers' attention to the surface of the texts, orienting attention away from the plot to language play. In *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel,* Dorothy F. Hale (2009: 11) places Christine Brooke-Rose in a Lubbokian predicting line of narrative development. This context refers to British authors who have contributed to the perfective improvement of the "genre through scientific invention" (Hale, 2009: 11), through unimaginable narrative experiments. Dorothy F. Hale presents Christine Brooke-Rose managing to rise to the Lubbockian predictive expectations, i.e., as an experimenter and a 'successor' of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce in renewing the British novel (Hale, 2009: 11). But this context would not be complete without Brooke-Rose's quoted disappointment (Hale, 2009: 12) with the English reader's "preference for content over form, the what over the how, even at a time of technical innovation." (Brooke-Rose, 2002: 13). In Dorothy F. Hale's words (2009: 12), the author's propensity to mingle theory and fiction materializes an awaited and predictable evolution of the novel.

The author does not only use language to envisage its abilities, but similarly to infuse the text with a self-reflexive dimension. Nevertheless, these modes of employing language in the author's narratives are not the only ones. Michela Canepari-Labib underlines on the one hand the playfulness in Christine Brooke-Rose's recourse to language, and on the other hand the innovative way in which the author uses various discourses in a *metaphorical* way:

> By jostling various languages together, she suggests that all languages, even the most technical and scientific, can and do originate poetic effects, and by exploiting the poetic potential inherent in all

> languages, she shows how all languages are fundamentally metaphorical. (Canepari-Labib, 2002: 157)

The metaphorical quality a specific discourse can attain is starkly evident in the author's experimental use of language, especially in the four novels from the Omnibus volume. Zoltan Kövecses (2005: 1) states that the metaphoric dimension of language results from its "ornamental" use. It would be a truism to state that in fiction language is clearly employed for aesthetic purposes. But more than its particular use, language can be moulded into the particular way one desires. In Christine Brooke-Rose's experimental fictional narratives language is used as a metaphor. A peculiar, specific way in which Brooke-Rose uses language is highlighting that "metaphors are based on embodied human experiences" (Kövecses, 2005: 2). Therefore, the Brooke-Rosean novels diminish the importance of plot, narrator, or literary character in order to stress the metaphoric quality of various jargons the author resorts to. In the author's recourse to scientific discourses one can notice the experimental dimension, to which I must add the resulting hybrid nature of her narratives. As Kövecses (2005: 8) points out, the nature of metaphors is varied (i.e., linguistic, bodily, or social-cultural). However, as Christine Brooke-Rose's narratives heavily rely and resort to the abilities of language (to envisage its ontological ability), I can state that the author's novels are global metaphors of language use (with different aims). Varying with every novel, the author uses language to construct identity (in Between or Remake), to reinstate the poetic dimension of scientific jargon (in Such), to underline the transformative relation between history and story (in Out), to accentuate the deconstructive dimension of language (in Thru), to highlight the didactic purpose of literature (in Textermination), or to contrast technology with artistry (in Amalgamemnon). In a generalizing statement, Paul Ricoeur (2004: 13) points out that metaphor can be associated with all forms of language expression.

In the same line of experimenters with the narrative, Andrzej Gasiorek mentions the hostility of post-war novelists to the limitations of realism found in social novels. Moreover, the critic states that Brooke-Rose is an anti-realist novelist who embraces "extreme linguistic and narrative innovation" (Gasiorek, 2009: 193). According to the same critic, Brooke-Rose is part of "a group of overtly anti-realist novelists that includes Brigid Brophy, B. S. Johnson, Ann Quinn, and Alan Burns" (Gasiorek, 2009: 193). This frame is one of the few forwarded possible contexts where Brooke-Rose's novels can be placed.

The experimental stage in the author's writing set off in the sixties after she translated Allain Robbe-Grillet's novel In The Labyrinth. The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Literature in English states that the offset of the experimental phase in the author's creation is due to illness.

Jenny Stringer summarizes author and critic Christine Brooke-Rose's work in phrases like "postmodernist influences", "detached objectivity […] linguistic play", or "playful construction of puns" (Stringer, 2004: 92-93). However, to these aspects we must add Christine Brooke-Rose's breaking away from other narrative conventions. This break with the past is noted by Gilles Deleuze (2005: 25) in twentieth-century British writers' tendency to operate with the logic of coordination by 'and' (as opposed to that of 'either/or'). These authors cast out foundations and extensively linger 'in the middle' as they refuse both beginnings and endings, denying depth. Jean Baudrillard (2005: 115) adds an even more dramatic connotation to this aspect stating that the textual play has grown to such extent that the discourse would only represent itself (and not convey the narrative's message). The experimental fiction of Christine Brooke-Rose heavily relies on questioning-challenging the canonicity of notions, concepts, or strategies of fiction in a somewhat militant gesture continuing previous women writers (such as Jane Austen or Virginia Woolf); connecting these aspects to the relation between women writers and the male dominant literary culture, Ellen G. Friedman notes:

> [t]wentieth-century women experimental writers have not required covert means to express their dissatisfactions. They explode the fixed architecture of master narrative, break – in the words of Virginia Woolf – 'the sequence' of traditional fiction, and open up a space, an alternate arena for the writing of what Christine Brooke-Rose calls 'utterly other discourse'. (Friedman, 1995a: 215)

The techniques employed by the author bring under the sign of doubt the totalizing strategies of male writers that have created, shaped, furthered, or strengthened the literary canon and all its (subsequent) implications: viewing women as 'the other', reducing them to mere character silhouettes, and denying them for centuries the access to the canon's index of authors.

The experimental dimension of author's narratives complicates the reading process adding to the plot (if there is any) other elements which used to be invisible to semantic readers, i.e., the workings of language, blending discourses into hybrid narrative structures, or juxtaposing calligrams into multiple, unattributed discourses. Especially in Brooke-Rose's texts this is all the more evident as she consistently pursues her interest in the capacities of language demonstrated through her diverse forms of narrative experiment. The author calls her experiments "lipograms". In her own definition, "[a] lipogram (from the Greek leipein, remove, + gramma, letter) is a self-imposed omission, and presumably the term can be extended to cover more than a letter, since *gramma* also means 'writing'" (Brooke-Rose, 2002: 2, original emphases). The lipogrammic restrictions the author imposes in the writing of her novels prove to be paradoxically enriching gestures. Thus, although the narrative lacks a structural element (be it a verb, a pronoun, a tense, or a mixture of various

discourses), the Brooke-Rosean lipogram unveils the semantic richness of the self-reflexive/metatextual level. The Brooke-Rosean novel is not structurally-disabled as it may appear, the self-imposed lipogrammic restriction is meant to underline the experimental dimension of the text, the hybrid/chameleonic nature of the narrative, and nevertheless the ontological power of language.

Starting with the early sixties when Christine Brooke-Rose published her first experimental novel, Out (the fifth novel written until 1964), the author breaks with the past tradition of semantically-comfortable (to read and easy to forget) narratives in a violent and unprecedented manner. However, history – whether in a personal or a literary form – is present in some of Christine Brooke-Rose's novels (i.e., Amalgamemnon, Textermination, or Remake), but they entail the transformational power of narrative experiment. In employing narrative experiment, Brooke-Rose does not aim to write a go-between type of fiction seeking to avoid categories. On the contrary, her fiction is profoundly original in the playful amalgamation of criticism and fiction. The non-reader friendly mixture of fiction and criticism could be seen as the predictable outcome of postmodernist amalgamation resulting in hybrid structures. Moreover, this hybrid narrative which incorporates criticism in itself proves accurate the statement "Postmodern fiction is linked to the language of critique." (Gasiorek, 2009: 194). In this light, the Brooke-Rosean narratives envisage a conjunction of fiction and criticism resulting in highly metatextual/self-reflexive novels. The constant interplay of the two deeply different discourses (critical and fictional) results in a hybrid, changing nature of her narratives. Another element rendering her novels *chameleonic* is the permanent change in narrative experiment.

The experimental formula it is always present in her novels, but each time in a different form. The chameleonic capacity of the Brooke-Rosean narratives denominates their ability to change. In the most experimental narratives (Out, Such, Between, and Thru) the chameleonic strategies point to the surface of the text; it is here where the lipogrammic experiments become 'visible'. The surface of the text (lipogrammic, self-reflexive use of language) undermines the deep layer of the storyline; while the outer layer of the text reflects the artful mastery of elements like discourse or language games, the deep layer reveals a volatile narrator, i.e., a narratorless narrative. The various forms of 'narrative constraints' (Brooke-Rose, 2002: 1) are seen as "salient features of her *irremediably* chameleonic work." (Samperi, 2008: 20, original emphasis). These chameleonic features can be noted in the author's desire to renew the novel through narrative experiments. As Andrzej Gasiorek (2009: 197) points out, Brooke-Rose carried out her narrative experiments by pinpointing the mechanics of storytelling. Thus the author's novels do either without a narrator, or

without a specific word (be it a pronoun or a verb). Besides highlighting the structure of the narrative to the detriment of the story they (each) tell, Brooke-Rose's narrative experiments should be seen as means to explore and stress the self-reflexive/metatextual dimension of the narrative. Andrzej Gasiorek's words accentuate the fact that "Brooke-Rose's experiments attempt 'anti-novels' that self-reflexively explore the nuts and bolts of literary textuality." (Gasiorek, 2009: 198).

Defining and circumscribing her type of narrative dismantled into new formula, Christine Brooke-Rose (2009: 103-04, 259) mentions two kinds of experiments indirectly pointing to the second as being hers. The one of Zola – whose main experiment resided in the thorough research of his novels' topics, which in a modern perspective would be called "documentary"; and that of Thomas Hardy – which is closer and dearer to Christine Brooke-Rose because it narrows down the attention of both author and reader on the problems of the female characters and on the new manner to operate with the point of view. As stressed, for Christine Brooke-Rose (2009: 259) the term 'experimental' has a strong feminist connotation as it grew to designate feminist 'themes', which derive from experiences specific only to women and which are in clashing opposition to the "'experience' of mines and slaughterhouses" – clearly restricted to men's experience.

As pointed out by Andrzej Gasiorek (2009: 199), the author's experiments pursue to defamiliarize in its exploration of meaning "woven and unwoven by stories and by language's arbitrariness". In pursuing their interest in language "Burns, Johnson, Brooke-Rose, and Brophy have never been widely read, but their texts develop recognizably postmodernist characteristics. The typographical and linguistic 'extremism' of some of their texts represents a 'radical postmodernism'." (Gasiorek, 2009: 199). Their extreme experiments account for their difficult relationship with the readership. Part of Christine Brooke-Rose's not being enjoyed by the large readership derives from her experimental narratives degree of difficulty – ever more understandable if we take into account the fact that these experiments are with language. Thus she has repeatedly been referred to as a difficult writer who became distanced from the general readership on account of her experiments with narrative structures (Samperi, 2008: 17); paradoxically enough, time she was acknowledged at the same as one of the "most innovative contemporary writers" (Birch, 1994: 1).

Typical Brooke-Rosean forms of experiment are the *lipogrammic* effacing of a grammatical category (pronouns or verbs), the annihilation of a narrative function (the narrator is eliminated, the character is reduced to an ambiguous voice), or the playful use of language. This language play can take the form of a pun or portmanteau word puzzling the reader in its lipogrammic unity of two signifiers to create a new, hybrid sign; it could mean that a scientific discourse is embedded in the discourse of a character,

or it could be a typographical play with the calligramic layout of the text on the page. The implication of the visual sign, overlapping with the verbal one, complicates the narrative and the reading process to an unprecedented degree. An essential role in this new type of reading was also played by the intertextual web of relations, which is invisible and connects texts. It is pointed out by Pia Brînzeu that "new novels are, of course, always old ones in disguise, and new authors cannot but linger in the shadow of their predecessors" (Brînzeu, 1997: 228). To a certain degree, indeed, one can easily notice the depreciation of the concept of 'new', especially in light of the fact that the old is coming back in a transfigured form sooner or later with a rhythmicity varying in speed; and in this light nothing genuinely new can even be said. In Brooke-Rose's case this is true to the extent that her Textermination is an overt link to many books from world literature; thus her novel can be a book of many books. Michael Riffaterre's (1994: 781) statement underlines that intertextuality can not be considered separately from textuality because they share pragmatic and practical aims in linking other texts ("sign-systems"). At the same time intertextual texts must guide the readers' processes of meaning production to the point where "what the text does not say, or says obscurely, the intertext spells out" (Riffaterre, 1994: 781) and implicitly the reader (mentally) creates.

Textermination (1997) must have been written resting on so many other fictional characters, originally belonging to other writers not only to teach readers to read in a new way; but also, another more plausible reason could be that the author went for the more reader-friendly narrative with a plot. Despite having a plot, *Textermination* is complicated in the typical Brooke-Rosean style with the metatextual implication of the reader. More than the semiotic agent producing meanings of the text, the reader of *Textermination* is turned into a character of the novel. The Implied Reader is called by the various characters with names ranging from "Our Implied Reader, Our Super Reader, Our Ideal Reader who gathers onto himself al readers" (26) or "the Reader as Creator of our world" (15). The intertextual relationship of a narrative with other texts (it may be related to) is seen by Graham Allen in Intertext as an inside-outside binary opposition that the elements and functions of the text manage to establish (with other texts). The plurality that the text rests upon is a threshold state of the narrative, which is simultaneously projected inward and outward:

> The text's plurality is neither wholly an 'inside' nor an 'outside', since the text itself is not a unified, isolated object upon which an 'inside' and an 'outside' can be fixed. (Allen, 2006: 67)

In Michael Riffaterre's reinstating of the same ideas, he states that it is intertextuality's ability to restructure the reader- generated network of personal associations between texts (Riffaterre, 1994: 781). Thus the reading of *Textermination* should be accessible to lovers of both readerly

and writerly texts. This aspect proves once again Christine Brooke-Rose's ability to construct a text that is biunivocally addressing polarized and totally different readership categories: she manages to encrypt in this novel messages that are decoded both to narrative and authorial audiences. Because the author places her text at a fertile crossroads, her own narrative, i.e., *Textermination,* becomes a link in the intertextual web.

Novels such as *Textermination* (1997), *Thru* (1986) – and some authorial comments from the autobiographical *Life, End of* (2006) – can be placed under Christine Brooke-Rose's professional interest infused in her narratives: as a critic and an author. An approach to these novels without bringing into discussion both aspects would be inequitable, one-sided and unfair. I consider this aspect important because the attempt to go beyond the surface of the texts (where readers would linger) and reveal their internal workings calls for such an approach. As stated by some critics (as Judy Little, Brian McHale or Ellen Friedman), almost all the texts by Christine Brooke-Rose play on something (be it the construction of the character, point of view or narrative constraint). Probably only her last novel *Life, End of* (2006) and her heterodiegetic autobiography *Remake* (1996), can be said to be, to a certain extent, more in the category of readerly texts (rather than in that of the writerly texts as is the case of the previously-mentioned novels).

The postmodernist, profoundly experimental novels of Christine Brooke-Rose feature, as a generic, recurrent narrative-technique, an ever present focus on the power of language and, implicitly, on the textuality of the narrative discourse. This aspect is highlighted by Terry Eagleton (1996: vii), who notes that the very language itself is awaited to be "consumable", like (almost) everything else in the postmodern consumerist, accessible paradigm (be it social, economic or artistic). Under the plurivocal sign of the postmodern, the novel cannot escape the peculiar use of language in the process of defamiliarization.

Underlining the constant interdependence of both critic/teacher and author in all novels, Christine Brooke-Rose resorts to language from the perspective of Roman Jakobson, namely as "organised violence committed on ordinary speech" (Jakobson as qtd in Eagleton, 1996: 2). Thus the narrative transforms, intensifies, and amplifies the capacities of everyday language; the aftermath of such a process envisages not only an unprecedented type of narrative, but it also claims and orients attention to the disproportionate balance of signifiers and signifieds in a metatextual/self-reflexive narrative.

The calligramic disposition of the text, or the inclusion of family trees in the narrative (in *Amalgamemnon*), sternly marks the author's propensity towards the self-reflexive/ metatextual dimension of her narratives. Christine Brooke-Rose herself states that what she desires is to

bring out the textuality of the narrative, and one means to achieve this is play on the use of linguistic signs, as she states: "more signifier, less signified" (Brooke-Rose, 2002: 15). This is the appropriate recipe when it comes to her choice of discourse. The author motivates this choice and traces it down to the facility to summarize/concentrate the content of the novel, which is one of no interest to her. What she wants is to challenge the reader's competence and productive skills in order to generate/create her narratives by reordering, reshuffling, investigating, or assigning certain types of discourse to the appropriate utterer. Both Christine Brooke-Rose's interest in language and the deriving self-reflexivity of her narratives are accentuated by critic Terry Eagleton: "literature forces us into the dramatic *awareness of language*" (1996: 3, emphasis mine).

Christine Brooke-Rose's complex professional life can be transposed into a metaphor; I call her interests/occupations a *triangular prism*. The three sides (triangles) of the prism that the *critic, teacher, and author* Christine Brooke-Rose makes up clearly show a ceaseless exploration of this new type of perspective on fiction. What becomes the material for the contortions Brooke-Rose's fiction undergoes is the referentiality of language. Critic Terry Eagleton goes further and defines literature itself employing the phenomenon this term encircles, stating that all literary/fictional productions are actually a type of language: "we mean by literature a kind of *self-referential* language, a language which talks about itself" (Eagleton, 1996:7, original emphasis).

The language which reflexively points to and speaks about itself and its nature/condition is merely drawing attention to a yet another double-facetted aspect: firstly there is *textuality* – as a natural consequence of the ontological power of language, secondly a superior level of the narrative is created: the *metafictional.* In this light, textuality and metafiction are inseparable, especially in the most experimental novel of Christine Brooke-Rose, *Thru,* as the narrative not only draws all attention to its form and surface texture (both extremely rich in structure), but it also provides a professional's view on the status, nature, and role of fiction. Therefore I strongly agree with Judy Little's (1996: 1) statement that the ego (either the writer's or that of the critic) dissolves in a "salty sea of puns". The narrator, both as a narrative construct and an essential voice in the discourse, dissolves under the disintegrating power of language. As previously stated, the author's focus is no longer on what is present/included or proposed in fiction, but all attention and effort are on the way in which those fictional 'facts' are presented. This clearly emphasizes once again the reflexivity of postmodernist fiction and its aim to focus observation on the act, type and formula of writing and not on the content of that writing. In Husserlian terms (as mentioned by Eagleton, 1996: 50), these two points of focus can be allotted to the philosophical concepts of 'being' and 'meaning'. But in a

Brooke-Rosean narrative the Husserlian 'being' (i.e., self-reflexivity/metatextuality) of the text is envisaged to the detriment of the diminished 'meaning' (i.e., plot). Therefore, the uncertainty and ontological hesitation come to the fore puzzling the reader. The very object of the narrative's hesitation rests on the language; this turning onto itself and its nature emphasizes the paradigm of doubtfulness, hesitation and questioning of the self in the author's novels. Both the narrative's ambiguous, (mostly) unattributed discourses, and the self-reflexive use of language reinstate what I call the *chameleonic* nature of the Brooke-Rose narratives. Thus textuality is created by the author's accentuation of the workings of language in her narratives.

Christine Brooke-Rose permanently manifests interest in textuality so as to reveal what is of paramount focus in her narratives: the structure and nature of the text both in its surface appearance as well as in its deep (linguistic) structures. But textuality cannot be seen separately from intertextuality as both terms enter a causal, reciprocal relation. As Michael Riffaterre stated, intertextuality "decontextualizes the text, focuses on its autotelism, and therefore its literariness." (Riffaterre, 1994: 786). This highlights the fact that however its structure, the fact that the novel was projected to convey a fictional world needs no justification and it brings to focus once again the self-reflexive, metatextual nature of the text.

The author's focus on the abilities of language (even as scientific jargon) can be reflected by Richard Bradford's statement highlighting that: "Novels, unlike poems, draw upon a *variety of linguistic registers* that we encounter regularly" (2005: 53, emphasis mine). Critic Ellen G. Friedman (1995b: 9) notes these aspects as being both relevant and essential to the fiction of Brooke-Rose, ascertaining that "for her, the text and only the text is germane". This could be interpreted in two ways: firstly, the critic's statement could stress Brooke-Rose's exaggerated attention oriented to the appearance of the narrative to the detriment of the content/'fabula'; secondly the writer would provide a reading path for a better, or appropriate approach and understanding of her narratives. Another reading of this could be done in the key forwarded by Roland Barthes (1974: 120, original emphasis), who states that the literality of "*[t]he text and nothing but the text*" has an adjacent role of intimidation. This intimidation mainly springs from the employed narrative devices and is aimed by the writer-critic at the reader in order to defamiliarize the formerly familiar (type of narrative and way of reading/decoding the narrative). This new formula of the literary text does not focus or make use of the plot so as to render something, but it rather dismisses these traditional facile constitutive elements to forward a new discourse and a new texture of the narrative's surface.

Most evidently the reader is a crucial element in this equation which creates the text. The new type of reading in this defamiliarizing process

claims the presence of yet another element: the inclusion of theory in fiction. As Judy Little identified it, this blending together of two distinct discourses would be a process implying "using theory as a reading strategy" (Little, 1996: xi). Could this mean that the readership has to undergo a process of selection intended by the writer? This is most certainly the case, just as all utterances involve an emitter and a receiver. In this case, the receiver is not arbitrary, the text claims a certain class of readership – mainly one who can make the distinction and justly operate with concepts used by narratologists (such as: point of view, narrator, narratee, ideal author, mode, focalisation – to mention a few). In other words, as Brooke-Rose states in an interview (in Friedman and Fuchs, 1987, web), the reader must have a certain reading competence, mainly involving knowledge of narratological concepts, so as to be capable to tackle the novels in the writerly manner intended by the author.

The hallmark of the Brooke-Rosean narratives can be condensed in an antithesis – persistence in change: the author persists in her adopted narrative style and it changes (slightly or radically) from one novel to the other, however, the experimental formula remains basically the same, only the variable form, i.e., lipogram, is changed. But where do all these chameleonic, ever-different fictional strategies spring from? Are they random, secondary outcomes of the fictional strategies and devices employed by Christine Brooke-Rose? But in this author's case they can be traced down to the manner in which a critic or a literary theorist may approach narratives. Such deep-structure (grammatical or narrative play) transformations cannot be the mere spontaneous result of an author at work, desiring nothing but novelty contrasted to the predecessors' or contemporaries' 'innovations'. All the employed linguistic choices and fictional devices employed have an origin in the thorough reading, knowledge, and (practical) mastery of the great narratologists' and theorists' concepts. A consubstantial aspect of these chameleonic strategies may be the most frequently recurring support of them: puns and portmanteau words. Puns, in the viewpoint of Jonathan Culler (1988: 8), are symptomatic appearances of twentieth century experiments in fiction. But what are they actually? Puns are newly-created words, as Skeat states (qtd in Culler, 1988: 1-2), by means of old ones pounded together into new senses. They are the fresh and peculiar outcome of hammering at forced similes. It basically involves a change of sounds or letters "so that *similar* words express *dissimilar* things" (Culler, 1988: 5, emphases mine).

The newly resulted *portmanteau word* (and the pun similarly) is of a new, unprecedented nature which imbues the narrative with originality, bearing the author's hallmark. Within the narrative, it may act as an element of defamiliarization which engages the reader even more in his interaction with the text. It could put forward a new term for a yet inexistent

terminological necessity, or it may as well be a playful manner of expressing something in ironic key.

Adding a new dimension to it, Jonathan Culler states that the *pun* is an element pertaining to and functioning within the structure of the narrative, while the action of punning is: "a structural connecting device that delineates action or explores the world, helping […] to offer the mind a sense and an experience." (Culler, 1988: 10). Far from being a common linguistic practice, neither among laymen, nor among writers, puns have a special status which is in strong connection with their cognitive origin. They spring from the thorough knowledge and mastery of language; to this I could add the author's desire to create a new structure so as to render something that has no lexical correspondent.

Puns originate in the author's mastery of language and they also require the same from the addressee, as they are not pointless or accidental creations. Consequently, puns are an indicator of high-degree intelligence, because they can become "the instrument of knowledge" (Culler, 1988: 15). In this context, we should understand knowledge in two senses: firstly it could be the prerequisite common set of information and skill shared by author and reader; secondly, puns can be a means to transmit new information, even if as a (rhetorical) question (the 'What is this supposed to mean?' kind). However, puns do pose a certain degree of difficulty because they dismantle meaning as known and suggest another hybrid alternative. This process is referred to by Roland Barthes who called this process "dystaxia" (Barthes, 1977: 117) which means a distortion of verbal signs.

This creative fusion of signs only occurs when "the signs (of a message) are no longer simply juxtaposed, when the (logical) linearity is disturbed" (Barthes, 1977: 117-18). So we can speak of 'dystaxia' at the level of the sign – evident in the process of punning, and at the upper level in the syntax of the narrative, where meaning production is slowed down because the linearity of the logical flow is obstructed. The process of signification is only partially obstructed because a sequence of the original meaning of the merged words remains attached to the pun and is fuses with the partial meaning of the newly-formed structure. For instance, in the sequence "craftswomanship", "handywomanship" (Brooke-Rose, 1984: 10), "streetscape" (12), or "unemployment-deployment-free zone" (13) – we can recognise in puns related to social contexts and clichés. The author's terms "craftswomanship", "handywomanship" play on lexical (and gender) clichés because these words replace the 'fixed' sequence 'man' from each term (exclusively referring to men), i.e., craftsmanship and handyman. Another possible reading could decompose these pun structures into an allegorical indication of the author's craftsmanship in language use. However, these puns could equally point to a feminist's approach and use of language in a creative way focusing on lexical terms gender-associated (i.e., to men).

Puns can be a textual source conveying the cast of ironic light on fixed structures. The result is an enhancement of the narrative's textuality – very typical of the author's postmodernist novels. The serious concepts of literature are virtually tackled seriously, but at infratextual level there is this effect of sarcasm that casts shade over the grand narratives. I can therefore assert that in the narratives of Christine Brooke-Rose the existence of puns is to be read in strict and strong correlation with her dual professions and with her explicit aim to create writerly texts for her readers. Therefore the practice of punning can be directly linked to that of experimenting in fiction. As it is the case of Christine Brooke-Rose, literary experiments are not easily perceived, understood, or accepted. In fact, puns are an earnest, essential practice meant as a joke (Ulmer, 1988: 165). In this frame we could see puns as a playful method of polishing the rough edges of experimental fiction. Being of an unpredicted nature, these experiments do not resort to the common or the familiar. On the contrary, puns turn to the opposite categories to achieve the author's aimed-at effect of novelty or uniqueness, and they sometimes grow into materializing the desire to shock the readers aware so as to make a lasting impression on them.

To pun – as Derrida stated (as qtd by Ulmer, 1988: 165) – is the equivalent of standing up for norms, in this case we could say for fictional strategies and tools used by Christine Brooke-Rose, following in the steps of the French nouveau roman authors. The most outstanding influence is that of Alain Robbe-Grillet (as qtd by Brooke-Rose, 2002: 2) who is mentioned in terms of having adopted the same (self-imposed) narrative constraints. Moreover, puns can be seen as "the complacent and slightly narcissistic relation to language" (Derrida as qtd by Ulmer, 1988: 165) – and in the case of Brooke-Rose this relation is a highly privileged one.

At all points in her novels, language manages to render Christine Brooke-Rose's transformations aiming at the characters, at the narrator and at the structure of the narrative itself. Thus we can see the practice of resorting to puns as an outcome of the tension between "form and possibility" (Ulmer, 1988: 172). The tension is given by the flexibility of the linguistic forms – they allow transformations, derivations, puns, and portmanteau words. Thus a manner of reading this tension between words' form and possibility is by the double-tiered structure: the first tier is the inherent/inner capacity of words to signify (something); the other layer is the ability to signify of the newly created term encapsulated in the pun.

In a more radical perspective, Umberto Eco regards puns as "metaphors for the process of unlimited semiosis" (Eco, 1984: 70), due to the fact that they create a multiplication of an already rich semiosis of the merged terms proper. The practice of punning can be viewed as a process of semiosis because the tangency of words releases "a series of possible readings – hence interpretations" (Ulmer, 1988: 173). At this point I could

underline the resulting transformations created by this process of punning in the narrative. To this capacity of boundary-free semiosis, we must add the "ambiguous deformation" (Ulmer, 1988: 173) caused by the contiguity of two or more words that are melted into the new structure of the pun. Therefore the hybrid character of the Brooke-Rose narratives can be traced to this practice of punning which is often resorted to.

The employment of puns, and taking them to new, unprecedented levels, results in the narratives' being "over-technically conscious" (Brooke-Rose, 2009: 12). Most obviously this over-technicality is both alluring and estranging for the reader. For the "authorial readers" (Rabinowitz, 1977: 130) these puns could open up a shy ludic dimension of the language play, while for the narrative readers the pun could complicate the already intricate narrative structure, diverting the attention from the story to its external layer. This is nonetheless another self-reflexive manner to underline the primacy of language and to force a double reading: one that follows the external, surface play of language, and the secondary one – the internal story-world that falls behind in importance.

To puns we must add the *portmanteau words* created and employed by the author in her narratives to complete the author's lipogrammic relation to smaller linguistic structures. Portmanteau words are, as I believe, smaller structures than puns as in a portmanteau word is a new hybrid created by forcing together two distinct words (while a pun can expand to phrases' or clauses' length, not only to words'). In the practice of creating portmanteau words I see another form of lipogram.

Christine Brooke-Rose's lipogrammic experiments draw upon the self-imposed exclusion of an element from the narrative. Similarly, Brooke-Rose's portmanteau words can be considered lipogrammic practices of creating new words by partial 'deletion': a part of each word is eliminated so that the two can be pounded together to form a hybrid portmanteau term. Richard Bradford refers portmanteau words' ability as

> always inventing unusual lexical and semantic constructions (connoting a vast framework of references) which will react with other equally unexpected projections along the syntagmatic, combinative chain. (Bradford, 2005: 162)

The author's interest in language goes to such lengths that she does not reduce it to the text's reflexivity or metatextual, authorial interventions.

Similarly, the portmanteau words created by the author actually highlight Christine Brooke-Rose's belief that language has more to tell than the stories it builds. The practice of constructing portmanteau words is also found the author's novels, however not in her contemporary writers' (mentioned in the first chapter of the thesis).

The portmanteau word is a feature of language as it accentuates the essential polysemic dimension of words (Attridge, 1988: 145). In a dynamic view,

the portmanteau word is defined having the ability to raise questions even to the most 'fixed'/stable structures: "the portmanteau problematizes even the most stable signifier by showing how its relations to other signifiers can be productive" (Attridge, 1988: 151). Similarly, in a Barthesian (2000: 30-31) definition, the portmanteau is a form of attack on the lexical structures of language. But more than being aggressive-creative forms of the author's relation to language, portmanteau words infuse the narratives with a certain poetic quality, because a portmanteau

> is poetic in that it constantly unsettles familiar, lexical and referential patterns with portmanteau words which connote geographical, mythical, literary and historical registers, and it supplements this with extra-syntactic sequences of assonance and alliteration. (Bradford, 2005: 161)

Nevertheless, Christine Brooke-Rose's creative, experimental ways to use language do not rest solely on puns, lipograms, and portmanteau words.

The technical accuracy of language use, conscious-type of narrative can originate in the author as well as in the critic. Christine Brooke-Rose states that there is a clear distinction between these two personas sharing the same "brain" (Brooke-Rose, 2009: 13) but otherwise functioning independently. An outcome of this biological, organic symbiosis (or could it be a parasitical type of cohabitation?) is the tendency to use "evasive tactics" (Brooke-Rose, 2009: 13). Why the need to use such ambiguous and misleading narrative manoeuvres? The reasons could be three: first, the wish to blur the trace of the real creator/utterer of the narrative; second, the (critic's) wish to render the text ambiguous to such a degree that it would turn neutral, utterly impersonal and unattributable; third, the text is the sole and primary interest and all attention should be focused on it, and not distracted by a voice. The voices within the text prove irrelevant to the author because the constructs of both the character and the narrator are exterminated in favour of the (experimental) text.

Christine Brooke-Rose's two mainstream 'occupations'/domains of activity (author and critic/teacher) and their corresponding fields, which seized most of her energy and materialised efforts, were "parallel professions" (Brooke-Rose, 2009: 10). Thus we can speak of a thick layer of residuary theory, which does not complete, explain or facilitate the understanding of the author's narratives; this theoretical intricate diagrid rather adds more difficulty to the already intricate structure of Brooke-Rose's novels. All her texts claim competence in a field of activity, mainly knowledge of narratology and literary theory. If I should identify a hierarchy of the most influential or most important contributor to the originality of the Brooke-Rose texts, contrary to what the author herself states (i.e. being a critic is the "second parallel profession", 2009: 13), I

believe that the theoretician/critic's is prevalent or steadfast. Despite the fact that the author places her career as a critic on a secondary level, I believe it has played an essential role in the author's manner to approach and use language in her fiction. Nevertheless, far from being a 'parallel profession', literary critic Christine Brooke-Rose influences the author at all times. This influence is most evident in the author's most experimental and difficult novel, *Thru* as it heavily resorts to and relies on concepts and techniques from the fields of narratology and literary criticism.

In all considered respects (lack of plot, character, narrator, puns, portmanteau words, lipograms, intertextuality, self-reflexivity, metatextuality, or themes), Christine Brooke-Rose's novels are profoundly and heavily infused with elements pertaining to narratology. This is reflected in the author's statement that theory – in this case, unleashes the creative forces of the author (Brooke-Rose, 2009: 14). In a generalizing perspective, the critic does not create independently original narratives as critical texts always rely on a source text in their hermeneutic approach. It can be stated that critics always rely on something already-made to express, analyse, criticise, observe, compare, or praise.

The narratologist coexisting with the author in the same body and brain of Christine Brooke-Rose perceives theory as "Mentor", "Law-Giver", "Forbidder" or as an

> opening and shutting door, the magic sesame accompanied by strict conditions, the mastery of the absent Master, the lure of constraints and difficulties all artists need, if only to break the rules. (Brooke-Rose, 2009: 15)

Yet the two personas (i.e., author and literary critic) organically coexist and both contribute to the chameleonic nature and mercurial instability of the narratives, showering them with new practices/experiments. In this confessing, divulging statement of the author we can notice the various meanings and hypostases theory has for the author. It could take the form of an opening door allowing glimpses into some novel realm only to close the door on it; by repeating this operation the author manages to arouse the interest of the reader.

The author's view envisages theory as a paradox: "the magic sesame accompanied by strict conditions" – referring to the abundance that paradoxically is limited by strict rules. And the author's crown-denomination of theory is that of "Master" – this means that theory has attained not only the supreme position, but its spelling in capital letter suggests it (literally and metaphorically too). To render another feature of narrative theory, the author a paradox: difficulties and needs managing to lure the artist, this is a Brooke-Rose typical formulation. It could mean the fact that Christine Brooke-Rose discloses the difficulty of the process that involves blending genuine creativity with dire, austere theory. Nevertheless,

the author is permanently in touch and up-to-date with the latest/well-known theories in narratology. Even more, she puts them to practice in her narratives. Such is the case of her experimental novels – each moulded starting from the Robbe-Grillet practice of writing 'without' something. The ultimate aim is, as stated by the author, to break the rules of fiction in a postmodern manner that forwards the "indistinguishable" (Brooke-Rose, 2009: 19) as critical and creative writing.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Attridge, Derrek. 1988. "Unpacking the Portmanteau, or Who's Afraid of *Finnegans Wake*?", in Jonathan Culler (ed.). 1988. *On Puns. The Foundations of Letters*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 140-55.

Baudrillard, Jean. 2005. *The Conspiracy of Art. Manifestos. Interviews, Essays.* Edited by Sylvère Lotringer, Translated by Ames Hodges. Semiotext(e): New York.

Birch, Sarah. 1994. *Christine Brooke-Rose and Contemporary Fiction*. Clarendon Press: Oxford.

Bradford, Richard. 2005. *Stylistics.* Routledge: London and New York.

Brînzeu, Pia. 1997. Corridors of Mirrors. The Spirit of Europe in Contemporary Romanian and British Fiction. Amarcord: Timişoara.

Brooke-Rose, Christine. 2002. *Invisible Author. Last Essays*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

—. 2009. *Stories, Theories and Things*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Canepari-Labib. Michela. 2002. *Word-Worlds. Language, Identity and Reality in the Work of Christine Brooke-Rose.* Peter Lang: Oxford. Bern. Berlin. Bruxelles. Frankfurt am Main. New York. Wien. (European Connections, Volume 4).

Culler, Jonathan. 1988. "The Call of the Phoneme: Introduction", in Jonathan Culler (ed.). 1988. *On Puns. The Foundations of Letters*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 1-16.

Deleuze, Gilles, Félix Guattari. 2005. A *Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Eleventh printing, Translation and foreword by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, pp. 3-25.

Eagleton, Terry. 1996. *Literary Theory. An Introduction.* Second edition. Blackwell Publishing: Oxford.

Eco, Umberto. 1984. The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts. Indiana University Press: Bloomington.

Friedman, Ellen G. 1995a. "Utterly Other Discourse: The Anticanon of Experimental Women Writers from Dorothy Richardson to Christine Brooke-Rose", in Friedman, Ellen G. and Richard Martin (eds.). 1995. *Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose.* Dalkey Archive Press: n.p., p. 214-227.

Gasiorek, Andrzej. 2009. "Postmodernisms of English Fiction", in Caserio, Robert L. (ed.). 2009. *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel,* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, pp. 192-209.

Hale, Dorothy F. 2009. "The Art of English Fiction in the Twentieth Century", in Caserio, Robert L. (ed.). 2009. *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel,* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, pp. 10-22.

Kövecses, Zoltan. 2005. *Metaphor in Culture: Universality and Variation.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

Little, Judy. *The Experimental Self: Dialogic Subjectivity in Woolf, Pym, and Brooke-Rose*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996, pp. 1-24; 122-199.

Rabinowitz, Peter J. 1977. "Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences", in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Autumn 1977, pp. 121-141.

Ricoeur, Paul. 2004. *The Rule of Metaphor. The Creation of Meaning in Language.* Translated by Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, SJ. Routledge: London and New York.

Riffaterre, Michael. 1993. *Fictional Truth.* Second printing. Foreword by Stephen G. Nichols, Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore and London.

Samperi, Ida Maria. 2008. Critical Fiction, Fictional Criticism: Christine Brooke-Rose's Experimentalism Between Theory and Practice. PhD thesis defended at The University of Edinburgh, 2008.

Stringer, Jenny (ed.) 2004. *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Literature in English.* With an Introduction by John Sutherland. Oxford University Press: Oxford, New York.

noemibartha@gmail.com