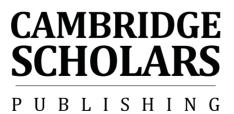# Christine Brooke-Rose

Christine Brooke-Rose:
The Chameleonic Text Between Self-Reflexivity and Narrative Experiment

By

Noemi Alice Bartha

This book is gratefully and lovingly dedicated to all my loving family.

To my angel mother Alexandra Constantin

"All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother."
(Abraham Lincoln)

To Johanna

""What wisdom can you find that is greater than kindness?" (Jean Jacques Rousseau)

To Timea

"So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (Corinthians 1:13)

CONTENTS

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I extend this gratitude firstly and especially to my mother Alexandra, who constantly believes in surpassing (self-imposed) barriers and whose encouragements are my supporting aid. Equally, I hereby thank my sisters Timea Odette and Johanna Gabriella for all their sincere, prompt, and unconditional support. More than ever, Johanna has continually surrounded me with most generous, loving encouragement, and understanding for which I am most indebted. Last but not least, I thank my father, Istvan-Csaba, whose generous help also supported the realization of this research. My family's help, abundant generosity, love, immediate assistance, and unconditional support came promptly and in much cherished ways, and they are organically linked to the existence of this work. I extend my true and most sincere gratitude to my family for everything and every thing.

INTRODUCTION

MOTTO: The path of an honest fighter is a difficult one. And when the fighter grows cool in the evening of his life this is still no excuse to retire into games and amusement. Whoever remains faithful to his decision will realize that his whole life is a struggle. Such a person does not fall into the temptation of proudly telling others of what he has done with his life. Nor will he talk about the "great decisions" he has made. He knows full well that at decisive moments you have to renew your resolve again and again and that this alone makes good the decision and the decision good (Kierkegaard, 2007:4).

The present work presents research on one of the most difficult and challenging contemporary British writers, whose oeuvre spans from the second half of the twentieth century to the first decade of the twenty-first century. Christine Brooke-Rose is enjoyed by scholars, but little known by a wider readership due to the difficulty of her narratives. This difficulty mainly derives from the author's interest in the possibilities of language. She experimented with this capacity of virtually infinite semiosis of language and transposed it into her novels in various narrative techniques. The present research underlines Brooke-Rose's narrative techniques using semantic as well as critical reading as analysis tools, along with the aid of a narratological analysis of the constituent elements of her novels. At the same time, this investigation attempts to stress the contact points between Brooke-Rose's novels and postmodernism, and to highlight features of her work that manage to make her novels difficult to label.

Christine Brooke-Rose (1923-2012) is a rather unknown British novelist and literary critic. A contemporary writer of mixed cultural/national origin, Brooke-Rose pursued her belief that fiction should have a didactic role. Brooke-Rose is not widely-known as a writer in her home land, nor in Eastern Europe, especially Romania. Her lack of fame is supported by the few books, theses, or articles written about her work. Critical approaches to Brooke-Rose's fiction can mainly be traced to the United States (Ellen J. Friedman, 1995; Brian McHale, 1995; Judy Little, 1996; Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs' interview, 1987), Australia (Andrew Williamson, 2010), and the UK (Michela Canepari-Labib, 2002; Sarah Birch, 1994; Ida Maria Samperi, 2008). To my present knowledge, this research is the first carried out by a Romanian critic on Christine Brooke-

Rose's work – another element that underlines the novelty infusing the work before you. The present research shall focus on the specificity of Brooke-Rose's fiction and on the narrative techniques employed in her various novels to emphasize the necessity of revaluating her work. What sets her apart from what one might expect from a woman writer is the focus on language, emphasis on identity, and ceaseless experimentation. However, this is not to say that Brooke-Rose does not indirectly advocate for stronger female writers' voices on the contemporary literary scene. Another element that singularizes this research on Christine Brooke-Rose's texts is the fact that none of her novels has been translated into Romanian (or into any other language – none of the quoted critics mentions this), and this is the case with her books of criticism as well (*A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic,* 1981; *A Grammar of Metaphor*, 1958; *A ZBC of Ezra Pound,* 1971; *Stories, Theories, and Things*, 1991/2009, *Invisible Author, Last Essays*, 2002). Neither Brooke-Rose's fictional, nor critical texts, are available in bookshops across Romania. The difficulty in finding Brooke-Rose's books is noted by Ida Maria Samperi (2008: 19) as well, and it is mentioned as true-to-fact in the UK, which is the linguistic homeland of her narrative discourses and few critical appraisals. My wish is to contribute via the present research to the incipient enriching of the knowledge of such an original, innovative, and representative author. My personal desire originates in the discomfort and discontent I feel about her being disregarded, overlooked, bracketed by the general readership and by academic critics in Romania and elsewhere. My first contact with the fiction of Christine Brooke-Rose occurred in 2004 when my BA paper supervisor (PhD Adrian Oțoiu) suggested *Textermination* as a reading and left me time to decide whether I would undertake the task of writing a paper on it. After a first enthusiastic reading, the next important decision I made was to focus on that novel in both a semantic and a critical reading, which materialized in my BA paper which was defended in 2004. Christine Brooke-Rose passed away on the 21st of March 2012, as *The Guardian Obituary* reads (Jeffrys, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books /2012/mar/23/christinebrooke-rose). Nevertheless I shall hereafter refer to her and her work in the present tense (not in the past), not only out of admiration, but because it is my strong conviction that, sadly enough, her death is the beginning of a tradition which cherishes great authors after their passing away.

Structurally, this work is divided into four chapters which follow what I consider relevant highlights of the author's texts, written after the 1960's, when Brooke-Rose embraced an experimental style. What this work aims

to envisage is the author's permanent quest for an identity and this is the main driving force behind all the narrative techniques and linguistic play she encapsulates in the organic structure of her novels. The author's literary debut with a volume of poetry and four novels written before 1960 are not included in the present research alongside her other novels; my selection criterion was the relevance and interconnectedness of concepts and techniques – these are related to the topic and personal choice. The present work's originality resides in its absolute novelty as the present research forwards insight into Christine Brooke-Rose's experimental fiction. She is an almost unknown author in Romania and this research can be seen as an open invitation to knowing her.

The richness of Brooke-Rose's fictional worlds has captured my attention and the heterogeneous, mercurial fictional worlds she creates have been transposed in the second, third, and fourth parts of this research. The second chapter highlights the author's forms of narrative experiments rather than an extensive, lexical analysis of the texts. The variety and diversity of the fictional universe of Christine Brooke-Rose's novels is what I call a *chameleonic text* (the aftermath of employed experimental narrative techniques). The chameleonic nature of the author's novels resides in the texts' capacity to play on *mercurial instability*, mobility and quickness in the use of language. Thus, the chameleonic nature of Brooke-Rose's texts is equally its mercurial characteristic, constantly requiring the reader to shift attention between the internal and external planes of the text for its limitless semiosis. This need to revisit the narrative is necessary because in the narrative's surface (the use of language) and its inner construction (plot and characters) there seems to be a perfect balance – both being equally important and relevant. This complexity present in the novels of Brooke-Rose would not encourage anyone to claim a complete and exhaustive analysis of her works; beyond the open, infinite semiosis that Umberto Eco postulates, the ever changing nature of her narrative experiments cannot justify such an exhaustive claim.

The first chapter of the present work aims at circumscribing a wider, theoretical sphere that will enable a contextual understanding of the concepts and techniques Christine Brooke-Rose employs in her experimental fiction. The concepts highlighted in this part are mainly deriving from those encountered in her fiction as well as more general ones that can be considered *theoretical diagrids*, i.e., conceptual guiding meridians in understanding the postmodernist hallmarks in her novels. As I suggest, these features and concepts can be considered *theoretical diagrids* that run across and support the entire edifice of Brooke-Rose's novels. The metatextual, self-reflexive nature of her texts requires the

theoretical charting of postmodern features that she employs. The theoretical infrastructure of Brooke-Rose's fiction is an essential dimension of her novels (whether fictional or autobiographical) transitively overarching to the reader, guiding him/her in his/her inferential walks. The author's parallel professions, i.e., writer and literary critic, are highlighted in the infrafictional cohabitation of both critic and writer; this is noticeable both in the didactic purpose of her novels, and in the metatextual/self-reflexive component of the novels. What becomes evident is that the author's constant shift in interest brings about various forms of narrative technique that alter and renew the structure of the text – at surface and deeper levels.

    The second chapter brings attention to the main forms of experimentation in the novels in question, with an emphasis on the first four experimental ones (in the *Omnibus* volume, 1986). Each of the four novels (*Out, Such, Between,* and *Thru*) rests on a different type of narrative experiment (i.e., lipogram) in trying to make a global point on the variety of language and ontological power. This is achieved both in a transitive and intransitive manner: firstly to create a fictional world, and secondly to point intransitively at the surface of the text in a self-reflexive, metatextual manner that underlines the ontological dimension of language. Brooke-Rose resorts to lipograms – technical constraints that force the attention of the author and reader to the surface of the text, to the possibilities of language. 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 these four novels prove to be paradoxically enriching gestures. Thus, although the narrative lacks a structural element (be it a verb, a pronoun, a tense, or being a mixture of various discourses), it unveils the semantic richness of the self-reflexive/metatextual level. Brooke-Rose's novels are not structurally-disabled, the restriction of the lipogram is meant to underline the experimental dimensions of the text, the hybrid/chameleonic nature of the narrative, and the ontological power of language.

    The third chapter envisages a poetics of reading forwarded by Brooke-Rose in a metatextual, didactic way – starting from one of her best known and reader-friendly texts (i.e., *Textermination*, 1997). The metatextual manner in which the reader is turned into an invoked literary character (the most important and absent in the novel) underlines the vital role played by readers in the existence of a literary work and its characters. This can be seen as the result of what I call *infrafictional symbiotic cohabitation of critic and author* – syntagm designating the permanent reciprocal influence

of Christine Brooke-Rose as critic on Christine Brooke-Rose the novelist (and vice versa). The intertextual appropriation of many characters from world literature underlines the postmodern nature of *Textermination* which can be read as an urge to read and re-read both readerly and writerly texts. *Amalgamemnon* on the other hand reveals the fragmented personal discourse of Mira Enketei, whose inner story is invaded and corrupted by external stories. The hybridity of the character's discourse resides in the invasive external discourses slowly appropriated, becoming hers. The plotless narrative's fragmentariness claims the reader's attention which is oriented to the surface of the text (i.e., language play).

The fourth chapter analyses Brooke-Rose's last two autobiographical novels, at the same time highlighting the author's constant pursuit of a clear identity (whether cultural, linguistic, or geographic). In this attempt to define and contour her identity, exile played an important role. The author's trilingual family background foregrounds her later geographical, linguistic, and cultural voluntary exile. The first autobiographical novel (*Remake,* 1996) is a shyer, rather distant, and highly fragmented narrative of various events in the author's life. However, what is not found in her autobiographical novels is any insight into her writing, either from the perspective of author or the critic's perspective. *Remake* is actually "autobiografiction" (Saunders, 2010: 7) because the fictional pact is evident in the distance Brooke-Rose puts between her *ventriloquised* past *selves* and the "old lady's" (Brooke-Rose, 1996: 1) *ventriloquising self*. In these two texts, as well as in the fictionalised account of the nameless translator from *Between*, Brooke-Rose's autobiographical novels envisage a split in her being by bringing into question the issue of identity construction. Being a construct that equally allows assemblage and deconstruction at any given moment (and this is what the author does through the virtuosity of language mastery), *identity* is configured as *a fractal structure* caused by exile.

What I have endeavoured to do in each and all parts of this work is give a glimpse into the most relevant and major structures of Christine Brooke-Rose's novels, as I consider her to be a very influential and important writer of the second half of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first. I tried to do this by bringing attention to some of her most difficult novels (the eight experimental ones published between 1964 and 2006), in an analysis that highlights semantic and metatextual complexity. All narratives are built in a similar way with the variable shift that language allows (doubled by narrative techniques to underline or deepen that aspect): firstly, language imposes a certain tone and constraint (voluntarily undertaken by the author who finds this equally

motivating and inspiring), and secondly the idea supports or plays on the structures of the text. The present work aims at highlighting the hallmarks of Christine Brooke-Rose's fictional universe. The *mercurial*, shifting *nature* of the narratives derives from the constant play with language, attention being given to the surface play of signifiers rather than to the deep semantic meaning of the narrative. The main structural diagrids that support the author's narratives are: *hybridity, the metatextual/self-reflexive* dimension, *the ontological power of language, fragmentariness* (of narrative and of the identity), *exile, the pursuit of identity,* or the slowly acquired *otherness* reflected in the construction of characters. Being reduced to voices, the characters are invisible (but audible) narrative structures reduced to functions. The dissolution of the Barthesian 'paper being' to a mere (sometimes unattributed) voice once again emphasizes the primacy of language over the overall meanings of the texts. The plotless narratives of Christine Brooke-Rose manage to paint the picture of an "orphan paradise" (Brooke-Rose, 2006: 119) that hosts the author.

The metaphorical grafting of Brooke-Rose's fiction onto new territories opened by language is the main hallmark of her fictional worlds. The author acknowledges Robbe-Grillet's influence in writing her first experimental novel (*Out*), but then she moves to the 'orphan paradise' of no literary influence. She relies solely on her interest in language (and its ontological power) to create an unprecedented fictional universe. What the author also does is circumscribe her own territory of originality through the explored labyrinthine possibilities of language. These are the strategies employed by Christine Brooke-Rose; they bring about justified claim to attention and a place in important literary history spanning over two centuries (the second half of the twentieth and the first decade of the twenty-first century). She is not only a British writer who went experimental after her exile to France; she can also be seen as a priceless and profoundly original writer of the world. Her fiction is new in all and every aspect and it is all the more to appreciate as she sheds any literary influence and pursues her belief in the power of language and narrative experiment. The ontic power of language is exactly what inscribes her fictional universe and her fictional legacy in a universal time-frame.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING CHRISTINE BROOKE-ROSE: A CIRCUMNAVIGATION AMONGST CONCEPTS

MOTTO: Referring only to itself, but without being restricted to the confines of its interiority, writing is identified with its own unfolded exteriority. This means that it is an interplay of signs arranged less according to its signified content than according to the very nature of the signifier. Writing unfolds like a game [jeu] that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its limits. In writing, the point is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is rather a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears (Foucault, 2000: 174).

Part I A Possible Context

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 grew up speaking two languages: the maternal French and paternal English. To these two, the maternal grandmother's German language was added. Despite this rich cultural and linguistic background, Brooke-Rose acknowledges these languages as sources of her split identity. The multidimensional identity of Christine Brooke-Rose would 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 the "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. 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 ended in divorce, followed by Brooke-Rose's exile to France. The author's voluntary exile to France to pursue a

teaching career only complicated her split identity. Geographical, cultural, and linguistic exile makes 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 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. However, I shall not chart the features of postmodernist narratives. Rather, I shall consider only those postmodernist features/ strategies found in Brooke-Rose's novels. Specifically, I will focus on fragmentariness (of narrative and identity), the play on presence-absence (or the lipogrammic play on "visibility/invisibility" through narrative experiments, Brooke-Rose, 2002: 3), hybridity (resulting from the conjunction of critical and fictional discourses in the author's novels), the metatextual/self-reflexive dimension, exile, the pursuit of identity, the ontological power of language, and slowly acquired otherness.

Brooke-Rose's interest in language brought about deep changes in the structure of her novels as they orient the readers' attention to the surface (the author's experimental use of language to the detriment of plot).

In *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel,* Dorothy F. Hale (2009: 11) places Brooke-Rose in a Lubbokian line of narrative development prediction. 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.

Hale (2009: 11) presents Brooke-Rose as managing to rise to Lubbockian predictive expectations, i.e., as an experimenter and a 'successor' of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce (in renewing the British novel). 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 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 Brooke-Rose's narratives are not the only ones. Michela Canepari-Labib underlines on the one hand the playfulness in 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 that a specific discourse can attain is starkly evident in Brooke-Rose'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 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 the various jargons the author resorts to. In Brooke-Rose's recourse to scientific discourses the experimental dimension is evident, to which must be added 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, because Brooke-Rose's narratives heavily rely on and resort to the abilities of language (to envisage its ontological ability), her novels are global metaphors of language use (with different aims). Varying with every novel, she 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 experimentation with narrative, Andrzej Gasiorek mentions the apparent hostility of post-war novelists to the limitations of realism found in social novels. Moreover, Gasiorek states that Brooke-Rose is an anti-realist novelist who embraces "extreme linguistic and narrative innovation" (Gasiorek, 2009: 193). Accordingly,, 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 Brooke-Rose's writing began in the 1960's after she translated Allain Robbe-Grillet's novel, *In The Labyrinth*. According to *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Literature in English*, the offset of the experimental phase in Brooke-Rose's creation was 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 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 textual play has grown to such an extent that the discourse can only represent itself (and not convey the narrative's message). The experimental fiction of Brooke-Rose heavily relies on questioning/challenging the canonicity of the notions, concepts, or strategies of fiction in a somewhat militant gesture, in line with previous women writers such as Jane Austen or Virginia Woolf. Connecting this aspect to the relation between women writers and male dominated literary culture, Ellen G. Friedman notes:

> Twentieth-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 Brooke-Rose bring into doubt the totalizing strategies of male writers who 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 access to the canon's index of authors.

Starting in the early 1960's, when Brooke-Rose published her first experimental novel, *Out* (the fifth novel written until 1964), the author breaks with the past tradition of narratives in a violent and unprecedented

manner. However, history – whether in a personal or literary form – is present in some of Brooke-Rose's novels (i.e., *Amalgamemnon, Textermination*, or *Remake*), but it entails 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 a predictable outcome of postmodernist amalgamation resulting in hybrid structures. Moreover, this hybrid narrative which incorporates criticism in itself is "Postmodern fiction…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 the hybrid, changing nature of her narratives. Moreover, the two professional fields of activity (i.e., literary critic and writer) animate the creation of another phrase: *infrafictional symbiotic cohabitation of critic and writer*. By this phrase I mean to underline the constant, organic reciprocal influence noticeable in a critical reading of the novels. Another element rendering her novels *chameleonic* is the permanent change in narrative experiment. The experimental formula 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 surfaces 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 deeper layer of the storyline; while the outer layer of the text reflects the artful mastery of elements like discourse or language games, the deeper 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 Gasiorek (2009: 197) points out, Brooke-Rose carried out her narrative experiments by pinpointing the mechanics of storytelling. Thus, her 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 a means to explore and stress the self-reflexive/metatextual dimension of the narrative.

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 placing her type of dismantled narrative into a new formula, Brooke-Rose (2009: 103-04, 259) mentions two kinds of experiments, indirectly pointing to the second as being hers. The first, in Zola – whose main experiment resided in a thorough research of his novels' topics, which in a modern perspective would be called a "documentary"; and secondly, that of Thomas Hardy – which is closer and dearer to Brooke-Rose because it narrows down the attention of the author and reader to both the problems of female characters and a new manner in which to operate with point of view. As stressed, for Brooke-Rose (2009: 259) the term 'experimental' has a strong feminist connotation, since 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" – which are clearly restricted to men's experience. As pointed out by Gasiorek (2009: 199), Brooke-Rose's experiments endeavour to defamiliarize in their exploration of meaning "woven and unwoven by stories and by language's arbitrariness." In pursuing an 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 what some critics call a 'radical postmodernism'" (Gasiorek, 2009: 199). Such extreme experiments account for each author's difficult relationship with their readership. Part of the reason Brooke-Rose has not been enjoyed by a large readership derives from the degree of difficulty of her experimental narratives – and her small readership is all the 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, at the same time she was acknowledged as one of the "most innovative contemporary writers" (Birch, 1994: 1).

In what some might call a predictable trajectory, Brooke-Rose made her debut as a writer in 1954 with a volume of poetry, *Gold* (Samperi, 2008: 25), later turning to fiction in prose. Before the experimental stage in her writing, Brooke-Rose published rather 'conventional' novels (Friedman, 1995b: 7): *The Languages of Love* (1957), *The Sycamore Tree* (1958), *The Dear Deceit* (1960), and *The Middlemen: A Satire* (1961). She also had a prolific career as a literary critic, publishing various studies,

with most of them focusing on the problem of language and its capacity to transfigure the narrative (*A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic,* 1981; *A Grammar of Metaphor*, 1958; *A ZBC of Ezra Pound,* 1971; *Stories, Theories, and Things*, 1991/2009; and *Invisible Author,* and *Last Essays*, 2002). It is the power of language that caught her attention both as a writer and a critic, and this is well illustrated by Gérard Genette's statement that:

> language becomes a vehicle for *mimesis*, that is, of representation, or rather of the *simulation* of imaginary actions and events; unless language serves to invent stories, or at least to transmit stories that have already been invented. Language is creative when it places itself at the service of fiction (Genette, 1993: 7, original emphases).

It is precisely this power and ability of language that most interested Brooke-Rose, and thus she turned to experimentation. Reiterating the same ability that language possesses, Paul Ricoeur states that "[e]vents vanish while systems remain" (Ricoeur, 1976: 9). The permanence of systems in time illustrates Brooke-Rose's favouring of language (and its contortions) in the narrative over the story, which semantic readers might expect. But beyond and beneath all and every story there is an abstract system that makes its existence possible; the system allows it to take the form it does so as to convey a message – be it explicit, implicit, or to speak about its very self. Brooke-Rose's narratives do just that: they claim to tell a story, and in a good mimetic way they do it (to a certain point, and in a particular way), but what is more important and overshadows this is the nature and structure of the language that is favoured. This can be seen as an implicitly stated hierarchy of Brooke-Rose's making. As her experiments envisage, the author favours the surface structure (word play) over deeper elements of narrative (plot); this is found in Paul de Man's statement:

> The texts draw their energy from tensions that can be substituted almost at will, but they could not come into being without an opposite against which they offer their own definitions and alternatives. They imply a fundamental misreading of literature which is always, systematically, a misreading performed by others (De Man, 1972: 183-84).

Nevertheless, misreading should be understood as a personalized form of reading – which is in its most basic understanding, a manner of communication with the author. Reading is more than the mere process of decoding the signs on a page, and this is why Brooke-Rose states that she does not only want to "teach people how to read" (Brooke-Rose, 1987, web). She also forces the offset of this new type of reading in the same

manner she constructs her narratives. The tension mentioned by Paul de
Man is not only the primary energy of a narrative, but it can be seen as a
multiple-entry process of reading. And it occurs because no two readers
will approach a text with the same reading experience or decoding
abilities. The differences between texts vary according to their nature,
type, and form/content ratio, which is why each text chooses its reader by
the formal/surface elements it was designed to carry. Brooke-Rose's
experimental strategies draw on this aspect: to make the reader surface
from the depths (the meaning construction/the semantic approach) and pay
attention to language play. This relationship between the signifiers and the
signified of the text emanates from the fuzziness of the text; the plurality
and diversity of meanings demands more than a simple act of decoding
from the reader – it has to be accompanied by an act of interpreting. Thus,
smaller parts enter a web of relationships with other elements to constitute
the bigger structure of the text. The text sequences do not only have to be
understood, they have to be created and re-integrated in the global
structure of the novel. This already complex reading paradigm (too) is
what makes Brooke-Rose's narratives difficult to analyse. Her novels'
difficulty is acknowledged by the author herself, in the form of a rhetorical
statement in *Invisible Author: Last Essays*:

> Have you ever tried to do anything difficult as well as you can, over a long
> period, and found that nobody notices? That's what I've been doing for
> over thirty years (Brooke-Rose, 2002: 1).

This self-acknowledged difficulty has resulted in reluctant readers,
puzzled perceptions, and estrangement. The distance thus created by her
not being understood somehow affects her ego as a writer and one assumes
she would enjoy some degree of fame and recognition. However, she
grows used to this state of being a special kind of writer, her books left on
the top shelf, neither read, nor understood, and even less appreciated. She
again formulates this as a rhetorical question imbued with a negative,
deceptive, and disappointing answer: "[W]hy do both praise and blame
often seem so irrelevant to what authors are actually doing?" (Brooke-
Rose, 2002: 1). Thus, Brooke-Rose is aware of the fact that there is a large
distance between her and the numerous possible readers that might even
misread what she has constantly and consistently done throughout her
writing career (at least starting with her experimental phase in the early
1960's, as she herself states, Brooke-Rose, 2002: 2). But this approach to
the reading process and the complexity of the Brooke-Rosean narratives
cannot be properly highlighted without a necessary outline of her
narratives' points of contact with postmodernism. The complex and

diverse phenomenon of postmodernism moves around a perimeter of features organically linked to her fiction in all and every aspect because, although she does not expressly state that she is a postmodernist writer, she points in that direction when she acknowledges her contemporaries' works and their influences on her fiction. What follows is a brief, theoretical preamble to other parts of the present work that supports the conceptual elements resorted to throughout this research.

Critics, as well as the author herself, have stated that Brooke-Rose's works resemble the experiments with language and the narrative forms of Alain Robbe-Grillet's novels (Samperi, 2008: 36; Brooke-Rose, 2002: 2; Williamson, 2010: 60; Birch, 1994: 191). The Brooke-Rosean experiments traced back to Robbe-Grillet are characterized by the use of "devices of the first-person-absent narrator, temporal ambiguity, camera-like observation of detail, psychological impoverishment, and narrative discontinuity" (Birch, 1994: 191). All these narrative techniques can be seen as both *theoretical diagrids,* as well as forms of violence inflicted upon the narrative structure so as to pose the same questions in a more dramatic and estranged manner. Narrative experiments are not a strange phenomenon to the postmodernist reader because through these violent changes narrative experiment manages to bring new structures and a renewed paradigm to the novel. Therefore, the postmodernist narrative is deeply transformed in its diegetic content as it will dispose of the hero, the dangers and adventurous experiences he/she undergoes, voyages in the world as well as inside one's inner universe (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv). What then remains to be moulded into a postmodernist novel? This could be a legitimate question for an avid semantic reader. What is still preserved and foregrounded, constituting the thick, opaque surface of the postmodern text is, as Brooke-Rose states, language in all its intricate splendour and infinite capacity. At the same time the narrative: "is being *dispersed* in clouds of narrative *language elements*" (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv, emphases mine). The fictional text shall submit itself to experimentation carried out through fragmentation, alienation, multiplication, segmentariness, ontological destabilization and questioning, reflection/self-reflection, metatext, and invisibility.

Part II Hallmarks of the Brooke-Rosean Texts

The present work sets out to chart, both via a semantic and critical reading, the fictional worlds in view in Christine Brooke-Rose's novels (the four experimental novels in the *Omnibus* volume, 1986: *Out, Such, Between, Thru*; *Textermination*, 1997; *Amalgamemnon*, 1984; *Remake*, 1996; *Life, End of*, 2006). In the context of the author's experimentations

with narrative structures, the focus of this research is Brooke-Rose's tendency to profoundly modify the inner-workings of the text through language. The present text highlights the ***chameleonic strategies*** employed by Brooke-Rose in her novels. In order to do this, I have created the following phrases by which I denominate the major features and strategies characteristic to the author's novels: *theoretical diagrids, fractal identity, ventriloquizing self, mercurial mobility/instability.*

The first phrase I put forward is ***theoretical diagrids*** – these support the structure of all her narratives and can be noticed in a critical reading of the novels with the aid of narratological concepts. Deriving from Brooke-Rose's parallel professional fields of activity (literary critic and writer), these *theoretical diagrids* are in fact a network of concepts by which I denominate the theoretical crossbeams that run across the infrastructure of her fictional worlds. In creating this phrase, I was conceptually inspired by the field of architecture. Applied to the field of a critical and semantic reading of her novels, it constitutes a research method adopted and applied by the present research in a charting of both the theoretical and applied reading of the novels. In the above-mentioned syntagm, the *theoretical diagrids* from all the narrative worlds of Brooke-Rose envisage a subterranean structure that both runs across her narratives (being a specific element, such as the lipogram), and proves the well-thought edifice of all her novels. One dictionary definition of *diagrid* reads that it is "(a portmanteau of diagonal grid) a design for constructing large buildings with steel that creates triangular structures with diagonal support beams. It requires less structural steel than a conventional steel frame. [… it] provides a better distribution of load in the case of a compromised building." (*The Free Dictionary*, 2012, http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary .com/Diagrid). A more concise, non-technical definition of *diagrid* is found in the *Oxford Dictionary,* which defines it as "a supporting framework in a building formed with diagonally intersecting ribs of metal or concrete." (*Oxford Dictionary*, 2012, http://oxforddictionaries.com/ definition/english/diagrid). Thus, what I call a ***theoretical diagrid*** is actually made up of the entire system of constitutive elements (of the narrative) and narrative techniques employed by the author. These diagrids run through all Brooke-Rose's novels, making her fictional worlds unitary in their variety. This unitary heterogeneity of the Brooke-Rosean narratives could be called the hallmark of her experimental narratives. In the context of her experimentations with narrative structures, the focus of the present work is Brooke-Rose's tendency to profoundly modify the inner-workings of the text through language. This altering process, of course, has a direct impact on the surface structure of the narrative,

nevertheless affecting deep structures (like plot, character construction, or narrative perspective). Mikhail Bakhtin underlines the historical evolution of narratives' deep structures "which determine the basic generic characteristics of artistic works" (Bakhtin, 1999: 83). This Bakhtinian statement underlines the profound changes that occur in the literary field; and in this case, what is relevantly linked to the Brooke-Rose narratives is their structural and internal difference from previous reference points in time. Being different is an inevitable derivative of each individual's uniqueness, but in the author's case, uniqueness should be applied to the unprecedented combination of fiction and criticism in her books. Ida Maria Samperi called the outcome of this mixture "critical fiction and fictional criticism" (Samperi, 2008: 88).

Emphasizing the intermingling of Brooke-Rose's professions – i.e., author and critic – I forward the theory of *theoretical diagrids* to denominate the metatextual layer found in all of her novels (including the autobiographical ones). But this heterogeneous mixture of two different discourses within a novel could be a way to underline the fact that organically "[p]ostmodern fiction is linked to the language of critique" (Gasiorek, 2009: 194). In Brooke-Rose's case, the *hybrid* blend of fictional and critical discourses is inevitable given the author's professions (i.e. professor of literary theory, critic, and writer). Nevertheless, the hybrid mixture of discourses in the Brooke-Rosean novels sustains the appropriateness of the syntagm I forward, i.e. *theoretical diagrids* highlighting the heterogeneous, self-reflexive/metatextual, and hybrid dimension of the novels.

Secondly, Brooke-Rose's concern with the impossibility of defining identity in categorical terms has brought about another syntagm which, in my view, befits her identity. Therefore, I consider the second phrase, *fractal identity,* fit to denominate Brooke-Rose's identity, as fractals display self-similar structures which replicate microelements in constituting a macrostructure. According to *Oxford Dictionary*, a fractal is "a curve or geometrical figure, each part of which has the same statistical character as the whole. They are useful in modelling structures (such as snowflakes) in which similar patterns recur at progressively smaller scales, and in describing partly random or chaotic phenomena such as crystal growth and galaxy formation." (*Oxford Dictionary*, 2012, web, http:// oxforddictionaries .com/definition/english/fractal ?q=fractal).

What most suitably applies to Brooke-Rose's manner of relating to herself or coping with her plurilinguistic identity and exile is the multiplicity of replicas perfectly mirroring a macro, germinating structure. In a graphical representation, the fractal presents itself in a geometric,

symmetrical disposition that reiterates the same structural element in a different layout. A graphic representation of this would be the following:

Elizabeth Morales

Image 1

The phrase *fractal identity/self,* which I put forward to define in order to characterize Brooke-Rose's narrative practices, along with *theoretical diagrids*, *ventriloquising/ventriloquised self,* or *mercurial instability,* is more than a terminological play on concepts.

A *fractal self/identity* shows, on the one hand, the same issue that underlies Brooke-Rose's coping with her multi-lingual identity (in a culture she had to adapt to in her late forties as a result of her voluntary exile), and the pursuit of a clear definition of her identity in all aspects (geographical, cultural, linguistic, bodily, intellectual, professional, or nominal). On the other hand, this coupling of terms emphasizes once again the paradoxical, heterogeneous unity of the concepts with which she operates at all times: whether big or small-scale, they pose the same questions and reinforce the same dilemmas without being able to provide a solution. Nevertheless, this syntagm is consistent with the others in their nature – i.e., they refer to grand structures or microstructures that are perfectly contained in one another, none being able to exist or function without the other. These phrases are consistent with the **chameleonic** nature of her narratives in the above-mentioned simultaneous unity and variety; at the same time they underline the complex nature of her fiction. The *mercurial,* ever changing, *chameleonic* narratives of Brooke-Rose mostly envisage the idea that identity is a construct and that its constitutive elements can be various. The European context in which Brooke-Rose was born and where she lived her life mirrors on an individual scale her own *fractal identity*. Whereas the European continent has its own cultural identity, so does an individual. However, the fractal identity best encompasses both types of identities: continental and personal. Europe is a place of cultural, geographical, and linguistic plurality and diversity; but this multiplicity of constituent elements in its diversity makes it unique. In a similar manner, the identity that Brooke-Rose constructs (in all of her personal and professional experiences) mirrors this variety of languages and cultures in a harmonious cohabitation.

The author's *fractal identity* relies on several languages, on her various novels, on her personal experience, on her professional fields of activity, as well as on the exile in which she lived. The exile experience proved most dramatic, especially because it occurred in temporal sequence following another shattering event: her divorce after a twenty-year marriage to the Polish poet, Janek Pietrkiewicz. The many small pieces that make up Brooke-Rose's fractal identity are diverse and troubling, but they are all her own constitutive particles. Brooke-Rose does not deny anything that makes herself so torn and painfully blurry, although this fuzziness is a conclusion read between the lines of her fiction (and autobiographical novels), and not specifically stated by the author.

More than a coagulation of elements or microstructures organized in a fractal layout, Brooke-Rose's identity is seen as a construct. Trying to define identity, beginning from her personal experiences, Brooke-Rose states that it is a blurry structure (Brooke-Rose, 2002: 49). She overlaps postmodernist deconstruction and the constructability of identity, and applies this 'recipe' in the composition of her characters. Similarly, ontological instability can be highlighted in the construction of Brooke-Rose's characters (i.e., the male protagonist in *Such*, the female protagonist in *Between*, or the character of Kelly McFadgeon from *Textermination*). What the author stresses is

> the idea of identity as a 'construct', as a product of our system of representation which is ineluctably affected by the language we live in, the idea that representation always implies a process of distortion of what we think as 'reality', the disruption of a temporarily consequential plot and the procedure of frustrating the reader's anticipations, of playing with the audience's conventional expectations (Samperi, 2008: 31).

In this line of conviction regarding narrative construction of identity, Brooke-Rose also proceeds to reinstate that: "Neither she nor others have one [identity]: we none of us have. Each of us is many; identity is wholly constructed and deconstructed by our world" (Brooke-Rose, 2002: 44). In *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative,* Monika Fludernik pinpoints the constructability of identity, placing it in a dynamic paradigm in which "identities are constituted in the interplay of individuals with other people in social contexts of family, work, study, leisure activities, etc." (Fludernik, 2007: 261). Echoing Brooke-Rose's statement, Fludernik reassesses the multiple facets that identity can subsume in as many contexts that a subject can find him/herself in. The plural, complex dimension of identity appears to underline the fractal nature I associate with it. In Fludernik's view (2007: 261) cooperation makes identity, thus it

cannot be a singular structure. The multidimensionality of identity equally results from the individual's "self-narrations" (Fludernik, 2007: 262) to oneself and to others.

Thirdly, the Brooke-Rosean novels bring to the fore the concept of identity as constructed and deconstructed through fiction; thus, I forward yet a third phrase to describe the process by which Brooke-Rose constructs (fictional) identities: the ***ventriloquising self***. By a *ventriloquising self,* I mean the author's (intra- and infrafictional) play with concepts such as self, identity, or alterity.

The play on these concepts can be carried out in two ways: actively or passively, as shown by the grammatical form of the terms. More importantly, these procedures can be seen as the honest practices of a plurilingual, torn self, transposed in fiction. By this process, Brooke-Rose's active *ventriloquist self* manipulates the characters submitted to being ventriloquised in a passive manner. By *ventriloquising* past avatars of herself in fictional contexts, Brooke-Rose underlines the nature in which she manages to voice identity distortions caused by exile. The active, *ventriloquising self* would be her narrative avatar, who manages to voice her personal dilemmas in the story of the text. The *ventriloquising self* is a fictionalised version of Brooke-Rose's own self designed to reinstate certain contexts so as to find a genuine, comforting answer in a multitude of estranging possibilities. But the ventriloquising self who turns others into her fictional puppets is not itself. In experimenting with so many versions and voice variants, the ventriloquist (whom I call a *ventriloquising self*) is actually looking for a voice that is only her own. In this trial and error display of multiple voices, the author's genuine, organic identity is expected to emerge. As the two autobiographies of Brooke-Rose point out, there is no such comfort. Thus, the process unfolding in all her novels is a true mirroring of the self by means of multiple "self-interpretations" (as Charles Taylor called them, 2001: 34) against different backgrounds. Nevertheless, *ventriloquising* can be seen in a different perspective altogether; from a personal viewpoint, I see it as Brooke-Rose's attempt to circumscribe a boundary within which she can find and define herself relating and relying on some aspects of the uncertainties in her own life. These uncertainties derive mainly from her multilingual identity. Born into an English-French speaking family, the author is "brought up bilingually in a more or less exiled family" (Brooke-Rose, 2002: 109). Further on, in the development of her personal and professional becoming, this linguistic rupture is heightened, aggravated, accentuated, and deepened by her learning other foreign languages in personal or professional contexts: German and Polish. Thus, Brooke-

Rose's multilingual identity proves to be not clear cut, which causes her a certain restlessness experienced throughout her life. She therefore tries to find an answer to her plurilingual belonging to several cultures in the construction of her characters, in what can be called a fictionally materialized attempt to find self-definition. This is most evident especially in *Between* – a narrative in which the main protagonist is a female translator, who permanently finds herself in-between languages and cultures, but never manages to really find herself in any of these. As stated in the next part of this research, this fictional character echoes Brooke-Rose's personal identity dilemma. Hence, by *ventriloquising* the character into speaking in all tongues, Brooke-Rose is actually undergoing a personal process of self-definition, a troubling, murky, difficult, and long pursuit of a stable, clear, definite identity.

To these three phrases I must add one more, i.e., **mercurial instability/ mobility**. The constantly changing narrative experiment, an interest in the virtually limitless possibilities of language, and the calligramic disposition of the narrative, highlight the constant mercurial movement of Brooke-Rose's narratives. *Mercurial mobility* stresses the *chameleonic* nature of the author's narratives, which permanently shift the experimental formula, character construction, thematic focus, or the choice of discourse. The chameleonic, mercurial (dynamic) nature of Brooke-Rose's narratives shall hereafter be highlighted in the following features identified in the author's novels.

Part III Postmodernist Chameleonic Features and Strategies

Postmodernism is a complex phenomenon with a particular and complex functioning scheme that mainly works in dual polarities, often in antithesis with the modernist scheme and even with itself. Postmodernism draws its vital substance from binary polarized concepts and everything is finally contested or reflected becoming distorted, exaggerated, parodied, or deconstructed, thus creating a new 'self'-form. However, it should be seen as a rebellious offspring of its forerunner, modernism, as stated by Brian McHale: "the term 'postmodernism,' if we take it literally enough, *à la lettre,* signifies a poetics which is the successor of, or possibly a reaction against, the poetics of early twentieth-century modernism, and not some hypothetical writing of the future" (2004: 5, original emphases). In Linda Hutcheon's statement (2001: 1-2), the term apparently designates an unavoidable phenomenon with a politics of its own. The same critic (Hutcheon, 2001: 24) mentions various theoretical positions regarding the

complicity of discourse, knowledge, and power; she defines postmodernism not only as the absence of a vast totalising narrative, but also as the existence of multiple micro-narratives that do not claim a universal stabilization or legitimation. The new type of postmodernist narrative is under the direct and unmediated influence of a structural and formal difference deriving from self-reflexivity:

> [I]t takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement. It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or 'highlight,' and to subvert, or 'subvert,' and the mode is therefore a 'knowing' and an ironic – or even 'ironic' – one. Postmodernism's distinctive character lies in this kind of wholesale 'nudging' commitment to doubleness, or duplicity (Hutcheon, 2001: 1).

The postmodernist self-contestation can be seen as a main source of renewing – and precisely this renewal in fiction came in many forms that changed traditional ways of approaching the literary field. Such (narrative) formulas changed the understanding of fiction as it had been tackled previously – new narrative perspectives were employed, narrative techniques imposed new forms of reading, different types of characters populated new fiction that brought attention to ever newer and even taboo subjects.

Often labelled as an avant-garde novelist, Brooke-Rose can fit within this category only if her lipogrammic use of language is seen as a form of aesthetic violence. Roland Barthes (1977: 116) defines the ***avant-garde*** movement (before proclaiming its death in the sixth decade of the twentieth century) in terms of its social and artistic position as a manner to solve the self-contestation that was directed to question elitism through aesthetic violence, "the narrative situation is heavily coded nowadays, avant-garde literature alone still dreams of reading protocols – spectacular." In the same spirit, in an epoch of multiculturalism, informational besiege, technological and computer dependence, avant-garde seems to pinpoint, in Matei Călinescu's opinion (2005: 124), both the very possibility of its representatives to be considered at the forefront of their time, and the idea that a fierce fight must be carried out against an enemy embodying the forces of stagnation, the tyranny of the past, and old forms and outlooks imposed by tradition. Still, this very adversary so fiercely sought after by avant-garde representatives seems to be replaced by cultural effusion, multiple-choice options in almost all fields of human activity. Mosaic-shaped entities apparently have an identity of their own, yet they contain in themselves the plural valences of culture (in all its