‘THE IMMENSITY OF CONFRONTABLE SELVES’:
The ‘SPLIT SUBJECT’ AND MULTIPLE IDENTITIES IN THE EXPERIMENTAL NOVELS OF CHRISTINE BROOKE-ROSE

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For my family
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

These abbreviations will appear embedded within the text in parentheses, with page numbers. Full references can be found in the bibliography.

BROOKE-ROSE’S WORK

AGoM – A Grammar of Metaphor (1958)
Out – Out (1964)
Such – Such (1966)
Between – Between (1968)
Go – Go When You See the Green Man Walking (1970)
A ZBC – A ZBC of Ezra Pound (1971)
Thru – Thru (1975)
RotU – A Rhetoric of the Unreal (1981)
Amal – Amalgamemnon (1984)
Xor – Xorandor (1986)
Verb – Verbivore (1990)
Text – Textermination (1991)
STT – Stories, Theories and Things (1991)
Next – Next (1998)
Subscript – Subscript (1999)
IA – Invisible Author (2002)
LEO – Life, End Of (2006)

REGULARLY CITED CRITICS


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INTRODUCTION

Christine Brooke-Rose

‘Once upon a time there is a little girl born in French, of an English father and a Swiss mother born of an American father and Anglo-Swiss mother [...] That’s the first split.’ (Remake, p. 10)

Christine Brooke-Rose was an extraordinary woman. There are a number of remarkable periods in her life including working at Bletchley Park during the Second World War as well as working at the experimental university, Paris VIII at Vincennes during the socio-political tumult of 1968. Her dual nationality as a French and British citizen, her bilingualism, and her split residence between England and France positioned her at a rare vantage point to be able to comment upon these strange and significant moments in the twentieth century from multiple perspectives. Taking her biographical experiences into account, it is no surprise that the theme of multiple identities and ‘split selves’ figured prominently in Christine Brooke-Rose’s life and work. The skeletal biographical details of her life have been fairly well documented in the years since her death. However, before 2012, the reader had only been able to find the somewhat clinical, but informative gobbets of information about the author’s life regurgitated in such companion texts as World Authors 1950-1970 (1975), The Oxford Companion to English Literature (2009) and Encyclopaedia of British Writers, 19th and 20th Centuries (2009). With the distribution of multiple obituaries in a number of major broadsheet newspapers, and the publication of a few important and considered academic studies of her writing over the past twenty years (Birch, 1994; Canepari-Labib, 2002; Lawrence, 2010; Bartha, 2014), certain dark, neglected corners of her life and work have been illuminated, presenting her as a significant and valuable exponent of twentieth-century literature.

When reading these texts that summarise Brooke-Rose’s life and work, the reader is struck by one particular point that all the pieces seem to have in common: the alienation of the author from Britain and British literary culture during her life. In the course of this thesis, I will argue that this alienation is directly due to her perpetually ‘split’ or ‘doubled’ existence as a polyglot, a dual national, and her career as both creative writer and critic who published exclusively in England and America in English,
despite living abroad in France. This study will focus on these concepts of ‘splitting’ and ‘alienation’ in the work of Brooke-Rose, rigorously interrogating the themes of isolation, difference and ‘otherness’ in her writing. It will discuss how Brooke-Rose’s preoccupation with alienation manifests itself in her works in different ways, and how at times, the subject of ‘otherness’ is reversed, transforming the ‘self’ into the ‘other’. Her writing consistently focuses upon the narrativization of the self as a ‘split subject’, thereby generating self-aware and paradoxical texts. I will argue that this focus upon the ‘split subject’ is Brooke-Rose’s way of commenting upon the human condition post-World War II, where the individual and ‘the self’ exist in a fragmentary state, in many versions or forms, rather than as one unified whole. Existing criticism has noted of Brooke-Rose’s preoccupation with the search for identity (Bartha, 2014) and her use of multiple narrators and discourses (Birch, 1991; Canepari Labib, 2002; Lawrence, 2010). However, this study’s central contention is that Brooke-Rose is not searching for a unified identity, seeking to create a whole out of the fragments of the self, but rather, that her novels describe her own identity as being split and fragmented, which in turn comments upon the state of the nation post-Second World War. As an author and critic, Brooke-Rose harboured a ‘deep prejudice’ (IA, p. 53) against the inclusion of autobiographical or biographical information in both fiction and analyses. While both Sarah Birch and Karen Lawrence do touch on some of Brooke-Rose’s biographical details in order to contextualise their own studies, the general trend of criticism of her work tends to distance the author from the text. While this seems apt, considering Brooke-Rose’s interests in structuralist and poststructuralist literary theory, I believe that it is this division that has led to her works being seen as isolated and peripheral pieces that have little or no relation to British experimental literature of the twentieth century. This assertion is largely due to her inheritance and emulation of techniques from American and Irish modernist writers as well as the French experiments epitomised by the *nouveau roman*. I regard Brooke-Rose’s personal experiences as fundamental to her focus upon the ‘split subject’, and this study will review periods from her biographical life in detail, in an effort to explain the sense of alienation and foreignness within her work. Moreover, I will argue that Brooke-Rose’s preoccupation with the ‘split subject’ and the alienation of the ‘other self’, positions her as directly engaging with British and Irish literature of the twentieth century, specifically the writers of modernism.
Christine Frances Evelyn Brooke-Rose was born in Geneva in 1923, the second daughter to an American-Swiss mother, Evelyn Blanche Brooke, and a British father, Alfred Northbrook Rose. She learned English, French and German simultaneously during her childhood, and moved often between Switzerland and Brussels where she received her early schooling until the age of thirteen, when the family relocated to Folkestone in Kent. She stayed here until 1940 when she and her mother moved to Liverpool, where she found employment in the offices above Lloyds Bank. This employment was only temporary as Brooke-Rose quickly joined-up to the war effort, becoming an officer in the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) in 1941. As a result of her fluency in French and her capability in German, Brooke-Rose was quickly relocated to Bletchley Park, the base of the Government Code and Cypher School during the Second World War, where she worked in Hut 3 translating and prioritising information from decoded German messages. It was here that she met and married her first husband, Rodney Ian Bax.

Although Brooke-Rose was not a practising Catholic, her father had been a (albeit disgraced) Benedictine monk and her Mother had entered a Benedictine convent after leaving Bletchley Park where she worked in the main house. Brooke-Rose remained close to the nuns at Tyburn Convent (where Evelyn had spent her final years), even after her mother’s death. The annulment of Brooke-Rose’s first marriage was driven by her mother (rather than allowing her to divorce Rodney Bax) in an effort to preserve her daughter from having to renounce the Catholic faith. In her letter of testimony supporting the annulment, Evelyn Brooke (Sr. M. Anselm, as she is referred to in the letter) takes responsibility for the marriage, claiming that Brooke-Rose’s unsettled childhood, and her growing up ‘without religious teaching’ profoundly affected her behaviour and the perception of marriage as a sacred union.¹ She goes on to state that the engagement was initially a ‘welcome’ distraction, as Christine had been ‘spending every minute of her free time studying by correspondence for an Oxford degree [which was] ruining her health’, but eventually she learnt that her daughter had been ‘urged by pity to enter a marriage which was repellent to her’.²

After the war, having been an extremely successful student at school, she took up her place at Somerville College, Oxford to read English and Philology, a place that she had secured before her move to Liverpool. In 1946 she began a Ph.D. in Medieval French and English Literature at University College, London, where she met her second husband, the Polish poet and war exile, Jerzy Pietrkiewicz, whom she married in 1948. Shortly after the completion of her doctoral studies, she began to write her first novel *The Languages of Love* (1957) as a ‘form of therapy to counteract the stress induced by a near-fatal illness her husband suffered in 1956’ (Birch, p. 1). During the early stages of her career, Brooke-Rose found work as a literary journalist, writing for *The Times*, *The Spectator* and *The Observer* amongst other prestigious titles. Brooke-Rose continued to write as a literary journalist until 1968, when she moved to France. During this period, she published a further six novels, three of which; *The Sycamore Tree* (1958), *The Dear Deceit* (1960) and *The Middlemen* (1961), are fairly straightforward novels, and are referred to by Brooke-Rose, along with *The Languages of Love*, as either ‘satires’ or ‘comedy-of-manners’ novels due to their focus upon society and domestic relationships (see IA). In 1958 she published her redrafted doctoral thesis as a monograph, entitled *A Grammar of Metaphor* which provided an in-depth analysis and classification of metaphors by interrogating their use within grammatical structures. In order to do this, Brooke-Rose analysed the use and construction of metaphors by fifteen different poets from Geoffrey Chaucer to Dylan Thomas. In 1962, while on vacation visiting an Aunt in France, Brooke-Rose suffered a near fatal illness, from which she was convinced she would not recover. This illness damaged one of her kidneys irreparably, and left her bedridden for months. It was during this period that she composed her first non-traditional novel *Out* (1964). As Sarah Birch notes, ‘this experience was a major factor in the change in style and approach evident in her subsequent work’ (Birch, p. 2). During this illness, Brooke-Rose claimed that she experienced ‘a sense of being in touch with something else – death perhaps’ and this feeling inspired her to change the way she wrote her novels.³ Brooke-Rose went on to publish two other novels, *Such* (1966) and *Between* (1968), before she moved to Paris. She taught at the University Paris VIII, at Vincennes for twenty years, before retiring to Provence to focus upon her novel writing. While working at Vincennes,


Brooke-Rose’s move to Paris in 1968 to teach at the experimental University at Vincennes, twinned with her long interest in French literature and the experiments of the writers of the *nouveau roman* and the OuLiPo (particularly the work of Georges Perec), both physically and ideologically removed her from the British literary scene. Her own experiences of alienation and isolation that had been initiated as a direct result of her Europeanism, translate into her work. There is a pervading feeling throughout Brooke-Rose’s oeuvre that the protagonists never seem to belong anywhere and that their own sense of identity is compromised by the absence of defined textual genres (*Thru* and *Textermination*), fixed nationalities (*Between*), and multiple and changing geographical locations. This dislocation and disorientation of the protagonist translates to the reader, causing him/her to find the texts challenging and ‘difficult’, which is a term that has been used frequently when referring to Brooke-Rose’s work. As a result, existing criticism of Brooke-Rose’s novels has attempted to try to contextualise them within the landscape of contemporary British literature. In this sense, this study is no exception to this trend, as it seeks to contextualise Brooke-Rose’s novels as being part of the ‘minor revolution’ of post-Second World War literature. However, the difficulty with aligning Brooke-Rose with other writers of this period (in either Britain or France), is that the experiments that she performs within her novels change and develop from one text to another, making it difficult for the critical reader/writer to assert with any confidence that her work belongs to a particular group or genre of writing. While this is not unusual for an author whose work has stretched across such a vast timeframe, Brooke-Rose seems to have taken particular enjoyment in resisting categorisation. Her ‘slipperiness’ is intentional, and when asked about the definition of her work, she often responded, with some

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satisfaction, that she tends to ‘eschew labels’ and ‘defy definitions’. In her collection *Stories, Theories & Things* (1991) she states:

> I am one of many authors who have a brief existence at what Hirsch (1967), as opposed to Fish, calls the interpretation level (the ‘meaning’ or simple reading of the text as syntax, for instance by reviewers), but who have little or no existence at what Hirsch calls the critical level (the ‘significance’ or what others might call interpretation, that links the texts to other things/realms of thought: the world, that is, other stories, other texts). This can only begin to happen, for better or for worse, when an author enters a canon, however shifting, and I have a knack of somehow escaping most would-be canonic networks and labels. I have been called ‘nouveau roman in English’ and *nouveau nouveau*, I have been called Postmodern, I have been called experimental, I have been included in the SF Encyclopaedia, I automatically come under Women Writers (British, Contemporary,) I sometimes interest the Feminists, but I am fairly regularly omitted from the canonic surveys (chapters, articles, books) that come under those or other labels. On the whole I regard this as a good sign. (*STT*, p. 4)

Karen Lawrence claims that there is ‘a note of complaint in this description’ stating that ‘this predicament of invisibility or omission is ubiquitous in both Brooke–Rose’s fictions and her critical writing’ (Lawrence, p. 2). This astute analysis illuminates the ‘double-bind’ in which Brooke–Rose finds herself in relation to her categorisation: while she regards her eschewing of labels to be a ‘good sign’, she simultaneously regrets her ‘brief existence’ as an author who is recognised and acknowledged.

This lamentation is seen with most clarity in her essay collection *Invisible Author: Last Essays* as well as in her autobiographical novel *Life, End Of*. In *Invisible Author*, Brooke–Rose discusses her omission from these various ‘surveys’ and the lack of attention that her writing has received over the years, complaining that she has been trying ‘to do something very difficult, as well as [she] can, over a long period […] but] nobody notices’ (*IA*, p. 1). The ‘difficult thing’ that she has been trying to do over the course of her career is write her novels with the incorporation of a particular experiment: the omission of the past tense, replacing it with the continuous present tense. While this
is Brooke-Rose’s main ‘experiment’, she also indulges in more focussed ‘punctual’ (IA, p. 3) experiments in each of her novels. Often, these experiments are hidden, and like the main present tense constraint, these experiments exist without any textual explanation to the reader: the emulation of Alain Robbe-Grillet’s style in Out, the sustained use of technical jargon in Such and Thru, the lipogram of the verb ‘to be’ in Between, the lipogram of ‘to have’ in Next, the omission of all ‘nonrealized tenses’ (IA, p. 17) in Amalgamemnon. In this sense, Brooke-Rose’s experiments exist as secret or hidden codes that are laced throughout her novels, waiting to be cracked or deciphered by the committed, intelligent reader. These coded experiments are the way in which Brooke-Rose engages or ‘plays’ with the reader, simultaneously helping and hindering him/her from solving the puzzle and completing the text. This engagement with playful linguistic and grammatical experiment positions her writing alongside that of the authors of postmodernism, particularly John Barth and Richard Brautigan and her use of more extreme typography in Thru and Next aligns itself with the work of the L=A=N=G=UTF poets.5

During her early days in France, she had been noticed and ‘groomed’ by a number of literary groups including the OuLiPo (Ouvroir de literature potentielle), the poststructuralists and the French feminists of the 1960s and 70s. Despite the attention that these groups paid to Brooke-Rose, her reticence and eventual declination to be part of each and every one can be seen to have affected her success in an academic sense as well as a commercial one. Using personal correspondence located in the Carcanet Publishing archive housed at the John Rylands Library in Manchester and the material in the Christine Brooke-Rose archive held at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, I will reconstruct the literary environment in which Brooke-Rose existed. Having spent time in both of these archives, it became increasingly apparent, through reading this personal correspondence and the reviews of her work, that Brooke-Rose’s personal relationships had significant affects upon her professional

5 The typography in Thru is extreme and is not very easily compared to any other novel. However, it and Next can be compared to Charles Bernstein’s poetry, specifically All the Whiskey in Heaven (2010), particularly in Next when the characters are moving around London, as the text moves about the page emulating their wanderings.
life. This thesis will argue that her refusal to be firmly associated with anyone other than herself has been a contributory factor to her ‘invisibility’ as an author of British fiction.

A further contributory factor to Brooke-Rose’s ‘invisibility’ is her uncompromising engagement with literary theories; in particular, formalism, structuralism, narratology and poststructuralism, as well her incorporation of some French feminist arguments and some (often oblique) references to Marxism. Although she did not actually read any literary theory until the late 1960s, Brooke-Rose had been ‘bought up on the New Criticism and its close reading of poetry’ (STT, p. 20) and so, even her early novels show a consistent interest in language and linguistics. As previously mentioned, her first published critical work A Grammar of Metaphor had concerned itself with the use of metaphor in poetry. Rather than considering the use of metaphor in terms of its content and how the imagery is formed through the language used by these writers, Brooke-Rose focuses upon the grammatical construction and syntactical presentation of metaphor types: noun-based and verb-based, each section having detailed subdivisions. Her reasoning behind this investigation is that

most studies of metaphor, from Aristotle to the present day have been concerned with the idea-content, rather than with the form [...] limited though a purely grammatical approach may be, it seems to me necessary if only to restore the balance. (AGoM, p. 1)

Here, for the first time, Brooke-Rose identifies a split in the way in which critical readers approach the analysis of a text. Her preoccupation with form and grammar in this early work provides evidence to suggest that she had always been interested in this ‘technical side’ of analysis, privileging it over the examination of content (plot/narrative) and imagery. In many ways, this accounts for the performance of certain technical experiments within her novels post-1962, and rather than abandoning a straightforward way of writing during her convalescence, I will argue that Brooke-Rose returned to writing about what she had always considered to be the real crux of the matter: the investigation into the relationship between language and structure. Her understanding and engagement with a variety of literary theories in her experimental novels reveals her to have had somewhat of an obsession with the technicalities of constructing the literary
text, and there will be parts of my own analysis that discuss these theories and their application in an effort to illustrate the extent of Brooke-Rose’s preoccupation.

With consideration of the various ‘experiments’ that Brooke-Rose performed within her work, and in order to discuss her novels in an effective way, I will be referring to her early novels (preceding Out) as ‘the satires’, and those novels that were published after 1962 will be referred to using the term ‘experimental’. While there has been much discussion and debate regarding the use of this term (outlined in Chapter 1), I will be using it in direct opposition to Brooke-Rose’s earlier realist novels, all of which have a developing narrative plot, and are concerned largely with realistic domestic relationships between men and women. In an interview with Ellen G. Friedman, Brooke-Rose questions the opposition between the realist novel and to what Friedman refers as the ‘indeterminate novel’, a term used to describe Brooke-Rose’s novels written post-1962:

What a strange opposition. The realistic novel has its own indeterminacies. But anyway, it didn’t happen that way at all. It was much more negative than that. I was simply dissatisfied with what I was doing. I had written four novels, which are really quite traditional, satirical, comic novels [...] They were basically traditional modern novels, if I can use such a phrase, in that the main concern was, like most novels, epistemological, concerned with reality and illusion. But I felt it was too easy. It was great fun, but it wasn’t what I wanted [...] People often use the term “experimental novel” to mean just something peculiar, or as a genre in itself (on the same level as “realistic” or “fantastic” or “romantic” or “science” fiction). But to experiment is really not knowing where you’re going and discovering. Experimenting with language, experimenting with form and discovering things, and sometimes you might get it wrong and it just doesn’t come off. When I discovered that there is great beauty in technical language (and this comes into its own in “Thru” where I actually use critical jargon as poetry), I also discovered that there’s beauty and humor [sic] in confronting different discourses, jostling them together [...] 6

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Brooke-Rose’s preoccupation with technical language and the ‘jostling’ together of different discourses is one of the major ways that the reader can distinguish between her earlier realistic satires, and her later ‘experimental’ novels. Another is the defined narrative structure and plot that occurs in the earlier novels, which in the later novels seems much less constrictive, enabling the reader room to speculate and become dislocated from the narrative.

While Brooke-Rose’s early novels are largely concerned with mimetic narrative telling of realistic events that have similarities to real life experiences, her later work post-1962 is more focused upon the process of writing, rather than the depiction of a realistic narrative, thereby distancing the author from the text. Roland Barthes describes this change in his essay S/Z where he describes the difference between the ‘readerly’ text and the ‘writerly’ text. He states:

The writerly is the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuralism without structure. But the readerly texts? They are products (and not productions), they make up the enormous mass of our literature.7

The realist text, by Barthes’ definition, exists as a product, a fully formed narrative that has been entirely produced by the author, requiring no additional ‘work’ from the reader.8 On the contrary, the writerly text (which Barthes champions above the readerly) is concerned with processes rather than products, with the reader being required to expend some kind of effort in their reading. Barthes goes on to state:

Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (or literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader. This reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness – he is intransitive; he is, in short, serious: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the

8 Barthes, S/Z, p. 4.
pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a *referendum*. Opposite the writerly text, then, is its countervalue [*sic*], its negative, reactive value: what can be read, and not written: the *readerly*. We call any readerly text a classic text.⁹

Catherine Belsey has also explained this transformation in her seminal work *Critical Practice*, where she makes a clear distinction between ways of reading before and after the dispersion of the theoretical approaches initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure. Belsey regards Saussurean linguistic theory as the point at which realism became an unsatisfactory way in which to write. She states:

Post-Saussurean work on language has challenged the whole concept of realism; Roland Barthes has specifically proclaimed the death of the author; and Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser and Jacques Derrida have all from various positions questioned the humanist assumption that the individual mind or inner being is the source of meaning and truth. In this context, the notion of a text that tells a (or the) truth [as realism purports to do], as perceived by an individual subject (the author), whose insights are the source of the text’s single and authoritative meaning, is not only untenable but literally unthinkable, because the problematic which supported it, the framework of assumptions and knowledges [*sic*], ways of thinking, probing and analysing that it was based on, no longer stands.¹⁰

With this in mind, the change in Brooke-Rose’s style of writing: her rejection of the reader’s ‘referendum’, replacing it with a style that demands the reader interact, ‘work’ and produce the text alongside the author, encapsulates her rejection of realism. These later novels still retain a residue of realistic narrative plot and often contain glimpses of autobiographical information. However, their focus is upon closing or at very least bridging the gap between the author (as producer) and the reader (as consumer).

In Chapter One, I will argue that the inspirations for Brooke-Rose’s unorthodox style can be traced through influential experiences in her life. I will argue that her early

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career at Bletchley Park is largely responsible for her preoccupation with encoding the message of the text, creating puzzles for the reader to solve through language analysis. I will also make comparisons between her writing and the British literary scene of the mid-twentieth century, in an effort to contextualise her amongst her contemporaries. While this contextualisation will be useful, its primary function will be to show that in fact, Brooke-Rose’s literary style has more in common with the work of the modernist writers, and examples of the *nouveau roman* than her contemporaries in Britain. Her inheritance of literary technique will be split into three major sections: the ethos of the work of Ezra Pound; the narrative sentence of Samuel Beckett; and the emulation of the *nouveau roman*. For each of these sections I will provide detailed close readings of Brooke-Rose’s work, in order to illustrate the extent of these influences and inspirations.

Another significant literary influence upon Brooke-Rose’s work is that of poststructuralist literary theory and the environment at the University Paris VIII at Vincennes. Chapter Two will argue that although Brooke-Rose claims to have produced the highly experimental novel *Thru* (1975) as a one-off culmination of her experience at Vincennes, that in fact, she repackages her ideas in her later novel *Textermination* (1991), in a way that makes them more accessible and more palatable to the reader. I will argue that this is a concerted effort by Brooke-Rose to become more readable, and an attempt to ‘make amends’ to her reputation which had been considerably ‘damaged’ after her publication of *Thru* (STT, p. 8). This reputation has, somewhat unfairly, haunted Brooke-Rose’s writing, and *Thru* is the novel that is regarded by her critics as being the most coded, impenetrable and ‘difficult’. This chapter will ‘unlock’ or ‘decode’ some of the processes that are at work in *Thru* and illustrate how the reader can use the same techniques to ‘unlock’ aspects of *Textermination*. Throughout this thesis I will be using the terms ‘unlock’ and ‘decode’ relating to the puzzle of the text. These terms refer only to engaging with the processes of ‘unlocking’ and ‘decoding’ rather than presenting the reader with a ‘complete’ or ‘accessible’ reading. The pleasure in reading Brooke-Rose’s texts is in their difficulty, and as such, the pleasure of the puzzle is in the decryption process. In this chapter, I only wish to illustrate how to take part in the process of the text and why this remains an important dynamic in contemporary reading of her work, rather than trying to ‘solve’ or ‘complete’ any of Brooke-Rose’s textual puzzles in full.
These two deeply coded novels position the reader as an outsider, an ‘other’ to their narrative. Chapter Three will explore the theme of ‘otherness’ by investigating the way in which Brooke-Rose addresses her position as ‘other’ in the male-dominated institutions of publishing and academia. It will discuss her work as a product of an experimental woman writer, a role with which she became increasingly concerned throughout her career as an author. While criticism of her work often mentions Brooke-Rose’s female narrators, and her ‘gendered’ narratives (Birch; Canepari-Labib; Lawrence; Bartha), the analysis of this facet of her writing is always diminished by explanation of her experiment. Throughout this chapter, I will argue that Brooke-Rose’s experiments in *Between* (1968), *Amalgamemnon* (1984) and *Subscript* (1999) are all entirely bound by the gender of the narrator. In these novels, Brooke-Rose recognises the position of the female academic and the experimental woman writer is one of ‘otherness’, ‘alienation’ and ‘isolation’.

These key themes will be discussed further in Chapter Four, by confronting Brooke-Rose’s engagement with the genre of science fiction. It will analyse her first experimental novel *Out* through this lens, along with the four later novels that form the ‘Intercom Quartet’: *Amalgamemnon* (1984), *Xorandor* (1986), *Verbivore* (1990) and *Textermination* (1991). *Out* is usually only discussed as a novel that emulates the style of the *nouveau roman*; however, the plot line that runs throughout the novel and the race-reversal metaphor is inconsistent with this style. I will be reading *Out* as a post-apocalyptic science fiction, arguing that from an early stage in her writing, Brooke-Rose has been concerned with the fear of destruction at the hands of the ‘other’. Through the analysis of these novels, I will argue that Brooke-Rose’s writing harbours deep anxieties about the tensions within society and culture regarding the threat of technology upon literature and its destruction of the human archive. Moreover, I will show that this anxiety is vocalised in the form of the ‘schizophrenic text’ that presents the reader with multiple discourses and narrators that jostle for dominance. Thus, the identity of the text itself appears ‘split’ or ‘multiple’, causing the reader to reflect upon the tension that this multi-narrative inspires in his/her own reading experience.

The fear of annihilation is expressed through the anxiety for the survival of the self, in all of its different fragments and multiple forms. This anxiety culminates in
Brooke-Rose’s auto-biographical novels *Remake* (1996) and *Life, End of* (2006), and in her critical compendium *Invisible Author: Last Essays* (2002). Chapter Five discusses the way in which Brooke-Rose reflects upon the narrative of her own life through her autobiographical fiction. Her critical reflection in *Invisible Author* summarises her literary technique from the critic’s point of view, whereas the novels narrate the historical narrative of the life of the author of fiction. Here, I argue that it is with these three texts that Brooke-Rose writes her final chapter, encapsulating the difficulties, traumas and tension that her writing inspires. It is here that she expresses her ‘split’ or ‘multiple’ identities most clearly, revealing the function of each of her selves in full.

Brooke-Rose is a writer whose fragmented identity has seeped into her fiction, and in this, she is not alone. In fact, by assessing her work from this perspective, we are able to position her within a heritage of British literary experimenters. In the Afterword, I will show how the pre-occupation with the ‘other’ that has been identified in Brooke-Rose’s work, along with this ‘split’ or ‘fragmented self’ are aspects that can be seen in the work of contemporary experimental writers. In my analysis of the female academic and the experimental woman writer in Chapter Three, I have asserted that the figure of the ‘split self’ is a feminine phenomenon, and so will concentrate on the work of three critically acclaimed experimental woman writers: Deborah Levy, Eimear McBride and Ali Smith. In this, I understand that many other contemporary experimenters (including the likes of Tom McCarthy, Penelope Lively and Nicola Barker) will be overlooked; however, this thesis has not the room or the scope to investigate all of these writers in turn. Rather, this last section is simply a gesture towards a larger, more contemporary context in which we can read Brooke-Rose’s work, asserting that her experiment does not exist in isolation, in a bubble, or on a periphery, but rather, that it is more relevant and important now than it has ever been.

Brooke-Rose’s experimental novels are intricately constructed, and often contain paradoxical elements, challenging language and complex, often coded references. In order to interact and engage with these novels to the full extent, the reader is required to ‘work’ or exert some effort on his/her own behalf. This is a trend common in both modern and postmodern literature that can be seen in the works of Ezra Pound, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, as well as writers including B.S. Johnson, Anthony Burgess,
Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut and Mark Z. Danielewski. Certainly, there are a number of women writers that have practised experimental techniques within their writing (Jean Rhys, Djuna Barnes, Anaïs Nin, Ann Quin, Anna Kavan to name only a few), but none have received success and industry in the same way as their male counterparts. Indeed, Brooke-Rose is no exception to this trend. However, this thesis seeks to provide a valuable insight into her experimental novels that have often been neglected due to the perception of them being too difficult, too experimental or impenetrable, in an effort to illustrate how the reader might approach such texts. This study seeks to reclaim Brooke-Rose’s experimental novels as being valuable contributions to the landscape of British post-war literature, showing each of her experiments to be individually pertinent to this context.
CHAPTER 1

Christine Brooke-Rose: Inspirations and Influences

‘But the strong dead return, in poems as in our lives, and they do not come back without darkening the living.’

Christine Brooke-Rose’s early novels, *The Languages of Love* (1957), *The Sycamore Tree* (1958) *The Dear Deceit* (1960) and *The Middlemen: A Satire* (1961), are all rather conventional with regard to both form and plot, and have come to stand in contrast to her later experimental work. The only exception in this list is *The Dear Deceit* which can be regarded as formally experimental as it is chronologically inverted, presenting the end at the beginning, and continuing to work backwards throughout. In an interview with Tom Boncza-Tomaszewski, Brooke-Rose comments that she had performed this experiment ‘long before the Amis Arrow’, referring to Martin Amis’ *Time’s Arrow* (1991) which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in the year it was published. Brooke-Rose’s novel received no such accolade. During her convalescence from the near fatal illness experienced in 1961, Brooke-Rose’s writing changed considerably, becoming more technically complex, displaying a deep and extraordinary preoccupation with language. This turn from producing conventional social satires to highly academic, experimental fiction seems, from a distance, to be ‘a sharp turn towards experimentation’. However, Brooke-Rose’s preoccupation with language and her desire to manipulate and disorientate the reader can be traced back to *The Dear Deceit*. Taking into account Brooke-Rose’s university career, her monograph *A Grammar of Metaphor* (1958); *Gold: A Poem* (1955), her creative attempt at rewriting the medieval *Pearl* poem; and her inverted narrative in *The Dear Deceit*, it becomes clear that Brooke-Rose’s status as an author preoccupied with language and structure (privileging these aspects over narrative and the *fabula*) was not the result of an epiphanic moment resulting from illness. Rather,

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her experimental authorship had been under construction for some time before the
publication of *Out* (1964).

Even before her career as a creative writer, Brooke-Rose had been accustomed
to reading using the close analysis of language and language structure as a result of her
work at Bletchley Park. From 1941-1945 Brooke-Rose worked in Hut 3L at Bletchley in
Gloucestershire as a translator of the decrypted Enigma messages received by the
machine in Hut 8. Her role in translating German messages into English involved her
reading and scrupulously analysing each combination of letters in order to try to
construct words and translate them. This experience helped to emphasise the power of
the signifier and indeed, the construction process of language. When considering these
literary and biographical details, it becomes apparent that Brooke-Rose ‘sharp turn’ is
more of a gentle curve towards the exploration of language, and reading, and indeed,
their limits. This chapter will examine the inspirations and influences upon Brooke-Rose’s
becoming an experimental writer and will offer an interpretation of her dissociation from
the nineteenth-century Realist novel and the staple satire produced by British authorship
during the 1950s. It will take into account her relationship with the exponents of the
French *nouveau roman*, particularly the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet, whom Brooke-Rose
has repeatedly acknowledged as the main influence for her first experimental novel, *Out*.
Furthermore, it will identify and investigate the significant relationship between Brooke-
Rose’s experimental writing and the work of Samuel Beckett. Although the connection
between these writers has been made before by a number of literary critics (Birch, 1991;
Little 1996; Canepari-Labib 2002; Lawrence, 2010) including Brooke-Rose herself (2002),
to date, no-one has yet properly investigated this influential relationship in a sustained,
close way. Throughout her career as a literary critic, Brooke-Rose has at times been
classified as a Poundian scholar as a direct result of the two critical studies that she
produced on Ezra Pound’s *The Cantos* (1972). In due course, reference will be made to
Pound’s influence on Brooke-Rose and her writing with regard to his tone, and
specifically the fragmented humour that is implicit in his work. Humour is something that
Brooke-Rose believed that Beckett and Pound shared in their writing and a factor that
she purposely injects into her experimental novels. In an interview with David Hayman
and Keith Cohen she states: ‘One thing I have against the French school is, on the whole
In essence, this chapter will provide a contextualisation of the experimental Brooke-Rose and identify the origin of her ‘utterly other discourse’ (*Amal*, p. 1). In order to contextualise her work effectively, it would be pertinent to first consider her early textual influences and inspirations for experimentalism by looking at her experiences during World War II and her early reading of the modernists.

**Bletchley Park**

Brooke-Rose’s early life can be considered somewhat cosmopolitan, since during her early years she regularly moved around Europe, and was able to perfect a number of different languages. Having been born in Geneva to an American-Swiss mother and an English father, most of Brooke-Rose’s early education was in fact, received in Brussels. During this early period of her life, she became fluent in French and German as well as English, all before the age of thirteen, when she was eventually moved to Folkestone in Kent for a more permanent residence. After completing secondary school in 1941, Brooke-Rose had gained a place at Somerville College, Oxford to read English and Philology; however, this was temporarily postponed on account of her engagement with the war effort. Aged eighteen, Brooke-Rose joined the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force, and was quickly identified as a valuable asset owing to her polyglotism. She was almost immediately relocated to the special operations unit at Bletchley Park where she, along with four others, worked in Hut 3L (an offshoot of Hut 3) where she was responsible for translating decoded German messages that had been intercepted by the Enigma machine. In *Ultra Goes to War* (1978), Ronald Lewin mentions Brooke-Rose’s involvement in Hut 3L and describes it as being

a small unit within Hut 3, whose special task was to assess the day’s traffic and establish priorities of treatment [...] A minute section with great responsibilities, 3L was largely feminine – Christine Brooke-Rose, Jean Alington and a few others [...] the first task was translation: often a swift and routine exercise, for the translators were soaked in German military terminology and the shapes, the shorthand the standard patterns of enemy signals. Still, the exercise could be

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painfully slow. If the text was corrupt or letter groups were missing, it could prove difficult to re-establish the original German and, if the message looked important, it might be necessary to ask the cryptanalysts to ‘run’ the intercept again. A signal, moreover might contain an unfamiliar word – perhaps scientific jargon relating to a new weapon, or [an unfamiliar] name of a German [...] And here, if he or she could not discover the answer by their own intuitive skills or recourse to the advisers or the Index, the corporate wisdom of the Hut, something actual and palpable like a group mind, would often come to the rescue.\(^5\)

This lengthy quotation provides a detailed illustration of Brooke-Rose’s role at Bletchley Park. While her employment here is often mentioned in critical studies of her work, as yet, none of her critics have appreciated how significant a role she played in the cipher-breaking operation machine called Bletchley. However, she was not alone. Lewin makes reference to a number of young literary academics who were recruited to Bletchley Park in order to provide valuable and specific insight, including the author Angus Wilson, short story writer and radio broadcaster Leslie Harrison Lambert (A.J. Alan), Alan Pryce-Jones who later became the Editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, and Jim Rose and Peter Calvocoressi, ‘both of Hut 3 became respectively Chairman and Chief Executive of Penguin Books.’\(^6\) Lewin states that ‘[s]o many of the Bletchley men and women were young – undergraduates straight from their universities, dons of only a few years’ standing.’\(^7\) This unorthodox mixture of brilliant young minds was ultimately successful, and was representative of a ‘cross section of the British intelligentsia.’\(^8\)

For Brooke-Rose, this unusual and somewhat ‘unreal’ experience was one that would define her as an author of experimental fiction. In an interview for the BBC’s *Bookmark* television programme in 1987, Brooke-Rose describes the effect of her Bletchley experience upon her writing. She explains:

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\(^6\) Lewin, *Ultra Goes to War*, p. 113.

\(^7\) Lewin, *Ultra Goes to War*, p. 114.

\(^8\) Lewin, *Ultra Goes to War*, p. 112.
I had the curious experience of seeing the entire war from the German point of view: the enemy was us, and I think it created me as a novelist, this this [sic] ability to imagine what it’s like to be the other.⁹

Often, narratives of war-time conflict refer to experiences of heightened national pride, reinforced national identity and a desire to identify ‘the other’ as a threat. Robert W. Rieber recognises that during conflict, the enemy is often dehumanized by the soldier in order for physical action to be taken against them. Rieber states that ‘Object dehumanization, the other side of self-dehumanization, describes the process and dynamics whereby the individual depersonalizes the other; enmification takes that process one step further and reduces the other to a “thing” that is potentially dangerous.’¹⁰ For Brooke-Rose, these feelings are subverted by her access to a textual expression of the experiences of the enemy. By reading these ‘narratives’ that belong to ‘the other’, the senses of the ‘unfamiliar’ and the ‘unknown’ that are associated with that position are entirely debunked. The narrative or text enlightens the reader to the experiences of the ‘other’ by humanising the enemy. In an interview with Lorna Sage, Brooke-Rose talks about her time at Bletchley Park, and claims that she ‘really learnt to read and analyse a text there’ by translating and uniting letter combinations.¹¹ She goes on to state that the ‘texts’ that were produced as a result of her work, held for her a kind of ‘schizophrenic quality’, making her feel some degree of empathy towards the speaker or intended recipient despite their origin or nationality.¹² Brooke-Rose returns to this idea of the ‘schizophrenic text’ many times throughout her work, illustrating the splitting or doubling of textual features and identities. I will return to this element of Brooke-Rose’s writing in due course. However, for the moment, it is significant to recognise the feeling of empathy towards ‘the other’ that Brooke-Rose describes here. This feeling refers to her ability to view the War from the opposing perspective, and in doing so, she questions her own sense of national identity and belonging.

¹¹ Christine Brooke-Rose, ‘Interview with Lorna Sage’, States of the Nation: Program 4 (East Anglia University, 1990), DVD accessed through the HRC Archive.
The end of the Second World War saw Brooke-Rose return to her studies, and take up her place at Somerville College, Oxford in 1946. She studied there until 1949, attaining her BA, and eventually marrying the Polish poet Jerzy Pietrkiewicz in 1948 after having her first marriage to Rodney Bax (another member of Hut 3) finally annulled. In the Bookmark interview, Brooke-Rose recalled that ‘during the war I learnt to live in the present [...] one was only living in the present’ due to the fact that every moment could have been her last. However, after the Second World War had ended, the immediacy of this threat had been removed, and replaced with the threat of a future nuclear conflict. She describes how this ‘new threat’ changed the attitude of post-war Britain, in the sense that post 1945 we live in a ‘kind of peculiar pseudo future’ always attempting to predict our own fates. With this in mind it would be pertinent to consider the wider context of post-war Britain and its narratives of ‘the future’.

Post-War Britain: 1945-

The end of the Second World War did not see the immediate and miraculous healing of Britain. War time precautions including rationing continued into the 1950s, acting as a lengthy hangover from the years before. These precautions were gradually lifted throughout the early to middle ‘50s and the general mood of the British public very gradually seemed to improve. With this improvement, came the attitude of celebrating a ‘new beginning’ for Britain largely in the form of hope instilled by Clement Atlee’s Labour government (1945-51), and his policies including the inauguration of the National Health Service (1948) and the Welfare State promising ‘insurance for all citizens against the risks of unemployment, sickness and disability.’ This period is often seen as a proud moment for Britain and British politics, since the scale of ‘social restructuring’ was remarkable, considering how financially bereft the war had left the nation. However, there was a segment of the population that was a little more reticent about celebrating the post-bellum environment of Britain, and was more concerned with the long term political and social ramifications of the War.

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Dominic Head recognises that some ‘serious writers’ were more reticent to join in the ‘celebratory mood associated with a new beginning’ after the conflict. Head uses the term ‘serious’ to denote those writers that did not write to ‘collude with the prevailing popular view, but rather to offer an alternative perspective, to locate those areas that might generate a sense of concern about history and society’. Head cites Rose Macaulay’s *The World My Wilderness* (1950), William Cooper’s *Scenes from a Provincial Life* (1950) and Pamela Hansford Johnson’s *The Humbler Creation* (1959) as examples of this wariness to the celebratory mood of Britain. Despite their reluctance to celebrate, these novels maintained a firm grasp of traditional realist values including familial structures and national pride. Although these novels emphasised aspects of post-war Britain (specifically British politics) that could potentially be detrimental to building a new, stable Britain, they essentially reinforced the realistic nuclear family structures and moral values that were prominent before the War, and that were prevalent in the literature of the nineteenth century. It would seem that for these British writers, the beginning of World War II had signified the end of modernism and its values. In the aftermath of one of the most horrifying and brutal conflicts of the twentieth century, a significant number of British writers had turned their back on the European phenomenon of modernism and its alienating, destabilising principles, and returned to the ‘safety’ of realism. In many respects this abandonment of modernism can be seen as a direct rejection of European values. Pericles Lewis summarises the perception of modernism and refers to its alienating characteristics:

Modernism arose in a period of accelerating globalisation in the late nineteenth century. From its origins, it faced criticism from those who deemed it too cosmopolitan – lacking local or national ties, politically uncommitted, and open to dangerous foreign influences.

Indeed, the openness towards Europe and cosmopolitanism that Lewis describes as attributes of modernism are in direct contrast with the mood of Britain after World War II. Britain and British writers, including the ones Head names above, privileged the local

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and a national identity, and committed to a clear political direction by ousting the wartime prime minister (Winston Churchill) and voting in the opposition. Politically, there was very little desire for Britain to align itself with Europe at all, but there was considerable support to stand alongside America against the Soviet Union regarding a nuclear conflict. The relationship with Europe caused much disruption within the Labour government and as Anthony Forster notes, factions within the government had various ideas of how to politically align Britain for the future:

In the Labour party, in the period between 1945 and 1961, there was a spectrum of scepticism which can be characterised as anti-European. Most, like Clement Atlee, Ernest Bevin and Sir Stafford Cripps were committed to preserving British parliamentary sovereignty and highlighted this, as well as British exceptionalism, as reasons for standing aside from European supranational integration [...] Another group inside the Labour party simply had a dislike for foreigners and a concomitant pride in everything which was British [...] a strong anti-German feeling was a central aspect of this form of anti-Europeanism [...]20

The ‘anti-German’, and by extension, the ‘anti-European’ atmosphere that occupied British politics can be seen as being indicative of the mood of Head’s so called ‘serious’ writers. The general scepticism that existed in Britain can be seen as a reaction to the political efforts to both smooth over the struggle in order that Britain might repair itself, as well as a sign that society had lost trust in Supranationalism.

Brooke-Rose’s early work can be regarded as being aligned with this group of ‘wary’ novels, whose role is to question the state of 1950s Britain and its celebratory mood. The Languages of Love and The Sycamore Tree both present female protagonists enthralled in love triangles. In The Languages of Love, the protagonist, Julia, is a doctoral graduate who is torn between two men. Her relationship with the loving and devoted fiancée Paul, has come to an end on the ground of religious differences, and her affair with married Bernard is only physically satisfying, lacking any real emotional depth. In The Sycamore Tree, the protagonist Nina is seduced by Howard, a literary critic who is

eager to climb the academic ladder by rubbingish her husband’s groundbreaking new
work. Both these women illustrate a torn existence and an unsatisfactory life with a poor
quality of personal experience. However, it is *The Middlemen* (1961) that can be seen as
truly synonymous with the tone of the ‘wary’ novels of the post-war period. The title
refers to a class of middle-men active in the corporate bubble, whose work is
meaningless as a result of their valueless role in society. Again, Brooke-Rose provides the
reader with a female protagonist whose life revolves around work. Serena is a
psychoanalyst in London, and the reader sees her giving advice to one such middle-man,
Rusty Conway. The company for which Conway works produces fabric for women’s
clothing and some of the fabrics have recently been found to be fatally flammable. A
number of women have died because of this technical oversight. Conway is distressed at
having to deal with a number of uncooperative colleagues, both above and below his
position, while he is trying to limit the damage felt by the company. In his sessions,
Serena tries to illustrate the human-suffering element of his problem in an effort to elicit
some empathy, or at very least some sympathy from him, but to no avail. In *The
Middlemen*, Brooke-Rose presents a dark satire depicting the human cost of technical
errors and cost-cutting measures. She exposes the priorities of middle-men whose
intermediary position serves only to obfuscate the automated decision-making process
of the corporate social class:

> We are all middlemen, selling to others something we do not own, something we
have not made, something we do not intimately understand, and the profit,
though larger of course than that of those who make, is less than it used to be
when there were fewer middlemen, except for the bigger middlemen, who then
need more middlemen to interpret their middlemanship to other middlemen
lower down. (*MM*, p. 5)

This passage conveys a deep dissatisfaction with the ‘state of the nation’ that had been
discussed most frankly on the British stage. Perhaps the most well-known of these
dramatic expressions of dissatisfaction is Jimmy Porter’s railings in *Look Back in Anger*
(1956), where he rants about institutionalised bureaucrats who ‘spend their time mostly
looking forward to the past [...] cut right off from the ugly problems of the twentieth
Both texts articulate dissatisfaction with the economic and social machine of Britain, and particularly, in the case of Osborne, anger towards the unrelenting exhaustion of the political system. For Brooke-Rose, the automated worker bee (Conway), is concerned only for the company, with no concern for the human aspect of his problem. Conway’s inability to sympathise and feel for the dead women and their families seems incredibly insensitive and inhuman, particularly in this post-war period, and the reader is encouraged to assess the priorities of this ‘new Britain’ as a capitalist machine bereft of human empathy and individual identity.

Indeed, Osborne was not the only angry voice to be heard on the stage during this period. The work of Alan Sillitoe, Harold Pinter, Arnold Wesker, John Arden and John Braine extended the classification of these dramatists as ‘angry young men’, accompanied by other contemporary authors including Kingsley Amis, Stan Barstow, Thomas Hinde and Colin Wilson. Shelia Delaneys had earned the title of ‘angry young woman’ with her controversial play *A Taste of Honey* (1958), but for the most part, this had been an ostensibly male reaction to the state of 1950s Britain. The poet Phillip Larkin had been associated with Amis and Wain amongst others including Ted Hughes and Donald Davie earlier in the 1950s on account of his affiliation with ‘The Movement’ which had been most active during 1954–1956, slightly pre-dating the ‘angry young men’ label. Similarly, this had been a group of predominantly white men from working class backgrounds who were joined by common causes, one of which was the denunciation of modernism, privileging the local and regional. In his analysis of ‘The Movement’, Blake Morrison asserts that ‘It is fruitless to deny that anti-Modernism was an important part of the Movement’ and goes on to cite four main areas of dispute between the Movement and Modernism:

Modernism was seen as elitist and haut-bourgeois, an arrogant rejection of the ‘ordinary reader’ and in effect the Movement authors themselves [...] secondly, the political issue, Pound, Lawrence, Eliot and Yeats having flirted with far right

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ideas [...] Third came the patriotic or nationalist objection that Modernism had destroyed a native line of poetry, coming through Hardy, Housman, Edward Thomas, and the Georgians much like the Great War had destroyed the flower of English youth. And finally, and most crucially, was the aesthetic objection that Modernism broke the contract between the poet and his audience [...]23

Morrison realises here that the Movement was concerned with aspects of realism and ‘the way things are’, rather than the experiment with form and language that defines Modernism. For writers like Larkin and Amis, the connection to the reader or the audience was paramount and their writing refers to a shared national and local history, rather than acting as an introduction to a fragile world of dislocation and disorientation. It should be noted that ‘The Movement’ were a very select group of initially only nine writers, and were not considered to be indicative of the entirety of British literary culture at the time. However, these writers were generally fairly successful (particularly in the case of Amis) and retrospectively tend to epitomise the 1950s in critical analyses of the period.

In the early 1960s, there was somewhat of a revival in the practices of experimental techniques. There were a number of writers who began to deviate from the novel form and experiment in their own ways. Some of these authors experimented radically while some were rather more tame; however, the essential point to take note of here is that there was not a gaping cavern of difference between these writers. Rather, they existed within a spectrum that became apparent when the authors dipped in and out of using certain techniques. Andrzej Gasiorek discusses the perceived divide between realist and ‘experimental’ writers in the 1950s and 1960s, stating that ‘a number of post-war writers have rejected the realism/experimentalism dichotomy’ and claims that ‘realism and experiment mean different things to different novelists’.24 In his Post-War British Fiction (1995), Gasiorek discusses a number of authors whom he regards as occupying this ‘in between space’ on the spectrum including Ivy Compton-Burnett, Henry Green, V.S. Naipaul, George Lamming, John Berger, Doris Lessing, Angus Wilson, John Fowles, Angela Carter, Sara Maitland, Graham Swift, Julian Barnes and Salman Rushdie.

23 Blake Morrison, “‘Still going on, All of it’”, p. 20.
Dominic Head, too, alerts us to the mythology of the perceived divide of realism and experiment, asserting that when forming an analysis of these authors, many readers and critics have sometimes failed to register this degree of vigour and vitality, rooted in diversity. Rather, concerns about the novel have tended to concentrate on a simple division between realism and experimentalism, with individual experimenters choosing to come out in partisan support of one pole or the other. Thus C.P. Snow, Kingsley Amis and Margaret Drabble stand on the side of realism, while B.S. Johnson and Christine Brooke-Rose are the most prominent and vociferous innovators. Head holds the authors themselves as being partially responsible for this perceived divide, along with the literary critics who have contributed to the over-simplification of the novel and pigeon-holed it with structuralist reading approaches. What becomes apparent with regards to the British novel during this period is that there was no dominant artistic direction toward or overarching discussion about the route of a new avant-garde, or towards a future for the novel. It seemed that there were a number of contradictory views on where, how and in what ways the novel should develop (both stylistically and politically) but one thing was certain: ‘the novel was under pressure from the events of recent history [the Second World War], which seemed not only unrepresentable but also to have shattered pre-war illusions’. Therefore, it is no real surprise that existing criticism has tended to focus on the directly opposing techniques of the realists and the experimentalists, but it is important to recognise that it was not so simply categorised as a two horse-race towards the finish of a definitive post-war fiction, but rather, a complex network of writers and writings, often not only attempting to ‘make it new’, but to also ‘make it real’.

As mentioned above by Head, one of the writers that had been considered as being highly experimental with form and language during this post-war period was B.S. Johnson. His 1966 novel *Trawl* is a novel about fishing as well as being a fishing expedition in its own right, allowing the author to rummage around the bed of his own

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mind in search of past memories and experiences. Having been a semi-autobiographical exercise, the novel had been intended to be released under the title of ‘autobiography’, but Johnson rejected the term, and asserted that he had chosen ‘to write truth in the form of a novel’.²⁸ With Trawl, Johnson had blurred the boundary between the genres of fact and fiction, and in doing so, he had encouraged the reader to think about the fictitious and unreliable nature of ‘the story’, claiming that ‘telling stories really is telling lies’.²⁹ Johnson’s desire to tell the ‘truth’ in his fiction can be regarded as a conscious dispensing with the grand narratives of freedom, liberation and morality that had been revealed as fabrications and shattered by the horrors of the Second World War. Julia Jordan asserts that in this novel Johnson is himself a trawler, dredging through memories, half-remembered, half-inaccurate, for this ‘truth’ [...] gathering up, and grabbing by the handful, he also drops, lets slip, misses the catch. His textual aim is to collect the “accumulated guts, debris, starfish...the rejectamenta” as he calls them – the stuff other novelists would leave behind.³⁰

Johnson’s novels are evidence of what Jordan asserts is a reawakening of modernism, and modernist concerns in the literature of the 1960s in post-war Britain. She states:

Far from being the generation that abandoned modernism, British novelists of the sixties initiated a return to its concerns, once more made anew; amid post-war realism, an exciting new experimentalism was taking hold.³¹

Indeed, Johnson’s relationship to Samuel Beckett and his work has been well documented in recent years (Coe, 2013; Jordan, 2014), a point of influence that aligns his work with that of Brooke-Rose.

The return to the values of modernism by both Johnson and Brooke-Rose, their reassessment of those things that other writers ‘would leave behind’, positions their

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²⁹ Johnson, ‘Introduction to Aren’t You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?, p. 153.
ethos as that of a type of postmodernism that seeks to extend and re-work of modernist values. These echoes of modernism can be seen specifically in both Johnson’s and Brooke-Rose’s preoccupation with the complex relationship between writing, ‘reality’ and ‘truth’. Johnson’s differentiation between ‘truth’ and ‘lies’, and Brooke-Rose’s focus upon minute and intricate details in order to describe the reality depicted in Out can be discussed in terms of Jean Baudrillard’s work on simulation and simulacra. In a postmodern sense, Brooke-Rose seeks to expose the ‘hyper-reality’ of the simulation of reality through her writing. ‘Hyper-reality’ is defined by Jean Baudrillard as ‘reality for its own sake, the fetishism of the lost object: no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denial and of its own ritual extermination.’

For Johnson, this ‘hyper-reality’ is created by his commitment to document ‘truth’ in his writing. This aim is inevitably unachievable because the documentation of the ‘truth’ can only ever be representative and consequently, has been considered by David James (2010) and Jordan (2014) to ‘represent both modernist doctrines and their overturning’. Jordan explains that Johnson’s desire to ‘tell the truth’ in his novels, ‘its unattainable nature, its imperfection in translation from his mind to the reader is what results in the frustration of his aims.’

While Brooke-Rose does not claim that her novels document ‘truth’, the ‘hyper-real’ is created through her emulation of the style of Robbe-Grillet and the nouveau roman. The extreme detail in which Brooke-Rose records scenes in Out depicts a considerable (yet ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to relay information without emotional bias or feeling. It is this facet of her writing that is comparative to Johnson’s attempt to tell the ‘truth’ in his own work, and his ultimate and inevitable failure to do so, specifically Albert Angelo (1964) and Trawl. Baudrillard claims that the writers of the nouveau roman were one of the first groups to expose the ‘hyper-real’ by making considerable effort to ‘escape the crisis of representation’ by ‘enclos[ing] the real in a vacuum, to extirpate all psychology and subjectivity in order to render a pristine objectivity […] [a] pure gaze […] the unconscious undertaking to become invisible’. Johnson’s experiment to ‘tell the truth’ is not explained by this definition; however, his

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35 Baudrillard, Selected Writing, p. 148.
aim to be able to differentiate between the ‘truth’ or ‘real’ and the ‘lie’ or the ‘simulation’, and his ultimate failure to do so, succinctly represents Baudrillard’s argument that one cannot distinguish between ‘reality’ and the simulations of that reality in the modern world.\textsuperscript{36}

The relationship between ‘reality’ and the text was interrogated and challenged in a more representational way by writers such as Ann Quin. A contemporary of Johnson’s and famously admired by him for her work, Quin published her first novel \textit{Berg} in 1964. \textit{Berg} is the story of a man who has arrived in a desolate seaside town during the winter in order to kill his father. The plot is laced with oedipal references including the three-way relationship that develops between the protagonist Greb (an anagram of Berg), his father and his father’s mistress, Judith. Freudian psychoanalytic theory – the return of the repressed – is also invoked when Greb believes that he has killed his father, but during the disposal of the body, realises that he has been dragging around a ventriloquist’s dummy, and his father is still alive. The entire novel is told through Greb’s voice, but the reader is unsure which parts are an internal monologue, which are dialogue, and if any of it is happening beyond the caverns of the mind of the narrator. Quin’s focus upon the domestic relationship between a father and his son is extended in the novel to encapsulate the tensions between one generation and another. Her concentration upon visceral, often highly sexualised and violent emotion inspired the early reviewers of the novel to compare it with the work of Nathalie Sarraute and other exponents of the \textit{nouveau roman}; however, as Philip Stevick notes, ‘Quin had not read the French novelists whom she was seen to resemble and, in fact, had very little interest in the convention for rendering mind, either early modernist or recent French.’\textsuperscript{37} Yet, there are instances within \textit{Berg} where certain modernist tropes rear their heads. It is an extremely self-conscious novel, which at times, verges on paranoid. The confusion between interior and exterior, imagination and reality recalls Beckett and the reflexivity

\textsuperscript{36} See Jean Baudrillard’s \textit{Simulacra and Simulation} (1981) for a further explanation of his idea about the simulations of reality. This is only one aspect of comparison between Brooke-Rose’s work and Johnson’s and is not intended to be a comprehensive comparison, only to draw attention to the fact that these authors have both been influenced by modernism (Beckett in particular), and have extended these influential ideas in their own work.

of his novels, specifically *Molloy* and *The Unnamable*. The anxiety and fraught traumas contained in Quin’s novel certainly seem akin to those experiments of modernism and the *nouveau roman* despite her supposed ignorance of the work of the French new novelists. In this respect, Brooke-Rose and Quin are significantly different, as Brooke-Rose’s interest in the *nouveau roman* and the literature of high modernism was freely admitted and well established.

Quin, along with Brooke-Rose, was named in a list made by Johnson in his introduction to *Aren’t You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?* (1973), where he names a selection of novelists that he asserts are ‘writing as though it mattered, as though they meant it, as though they meant it to matter’. With reference to a British avant-garde Johnson states that: ‘Nathalie Sarraute once described literature as a relay race, the baton of innovation passing from one generation to another. The vast majority of British novelists has dropped the baton, stood still, turned back, or not even realized that there is a race’. Here, Johnson is isolating his hand-picked list of writers (in the way that Head has recognised above), and champions them as the true innovators of British fiction. The writers that do not appear on this list, in Johnson’s opinion, are simply wasting good paper. Ironically, not all of these writers wanted to be associated with such a role of responsibility (or Johnson’s company), and Brooke-Rose for one, protested against the relationship that Johnson was trying to intimate in this passage. Evidence of this deliberate distancing comes in the form of an analysis of Johnson’s *The Unfortunates* (1969), where Brooke-Rose protests Johnson’s innovation, despite the form of the novel (presented in a box with each chapter bound separately; the reader is required to read the first and last chapter in order but the others are to be shuffled and read at ‘random’). Brooke-Rose states, rather unfairly that: ‘in whatever order one reads *The Unfortunates*, it is still a realistic and dreary novel of a football player returning to his Midlands hometown’ (*RotU*, p. 358). Jonathan Coe defends Johnson against Brooke-Rose’s remarks regarding *The Unfortunates* claiming that she ‘fails to recognize that the book might be intended to have an emotional impact’ and goes on to claim that this intended ‘emotional impact’ is what has preserved Johnson’s work better than that of his

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38 Johnson, ‘Introduction to *Aren’t You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?*’, p. 167.
39 Johnson, ‘Introduction to *Aren’t You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?*’, p. 167.
experimental peers.\textsuperscript{40} However, in this defence, Coe admits that Johnson’s experimental contemporaries (Christine Brooke-Rose, Rayner Heppenstall and Alan Burns) ‘may have been ringing far more cerebral changes on the novel’s possibilities’ than Johnson, calling into question the extent of Johnson’s own innovation.\textsuperscript{41} Although Johnson considered Brooke-Rose to be one of his peers, she did not extend him the same courtesy, perceiving the experiments in her own work to be entirely different to his, in regard to motive, origin and execution. The origin of Brooke-Rose’s experimental novels was largely tied up in her reading of modernist authors, specifically Ezra Pound and Samuel Beckett along with contemporary French literature, especially the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet and the \textit{nouveau roman}. As such, Brooke-Rose consciously distanced herself from Johnson and his other literary acolytes, once again isolating herself on the periphery, splitting away from the central hub of British experimentalism.

Her literary influences are identified by Brooke-Rose in her collection \textit{Invisible Author: Last Essays} (2002), where she states that she has ‘always acknowledged her debts’ (\textit{IA}, p. 173), and pays homage to these writers and their influences upon her work. Indeed, in the few interviews that she has given to critical writers (Hayman & Cohen, 1976; Seed, 1993; Lawrence 2010), Brooke-Rose has always been keen to discuss the presence of these writers in her own work claiming that, with her novels, she tries to ‘go beyond’ (Lawrence, p. 209) her masters. When reading the unashamed acknowledgements that Brooke-Rose provides, the reader is reminded of the longstanding debate regarding the anxiety of influence and the line between influence and plagiarism. In the prologue to his discussion of the issue of influence in poetry, Harold Bloom states that ‘there is no end to influence’, asserting that

\begin{quote}
In ways that need not be doctrinal, strong poems are always omens of resurrection. The dead may or may not return, but their voice comes alive, paradoxically never by mere imitation, but in the agnostic misprision performed upon powerful forerunners by only the most gifted of their successors.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{41} Coe, \textit{Like A Fiery Elephant}, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{42} Bloom, \textit{The Anxiety of Influence}, p. xi, p. xxiv.
While Bloom’s acknowledgement of the inevitability of influence legitimises writers’ borrowing from their predecessors, it has been generally accepted that there must be some development of these techniques in order to maintain a forward trajectory for writing. In his essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1921), T.S. Eliot discusses the inheritance of writing techniques from previous generations, commenting that ‘if the only form of tradition, in handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, “tradition” should positively be discouraged.’

However, he goes on to state:

\[\text{[n]o poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.}\]

Despite Brooke-Rose’s attempts to isolate herself from British contemporary experimentalism, she is more than willing to admit her inheritance of technique and style from Pound, Beckett and the nouveau romanciers. It is with Eliot’s assertion in mind that I will now proceed to establish Brooke-Rose’s influences, expanding upon the literary ‘traditions’ from which her writing hails, and through close readings of her texts, illustrate how she attempts to develop these techniques in an effort to ‘make it new’.

**Ezra Pound and the Pecchant for Difficulty**

As mentioned above, in the interview with Lorna Sage included in *Invisible Author*, Brooke-Rose cites Pound and Beckett as specific influences on her writing style. Sage asks Brooke-Rose ‘What about the others’ referring to whether or not any other modernist heavyweight writers had been influential to her writing, and Brooke-Rose replies: ‘Not for influence. One can admire and enjoy without absorbing’ (*IA*, p. 173). Brooke-Rose goes on to lightly admonish Sage as her ‘most intelligent reviewer’ for referring to her as being ‘still a Structuralist, and still a Modernist’ in the *Cambridge Guide to Women’s Writing in English* (1999). Brooke-Rose states that ‘It’s a bit more complex, I believe I

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inherited the Modernist love of “difficulty” but not the need to double everything said with mythical meaning from the classics and esoteric religions’ (IA, p. 173). Brooke-Rose’s attraction to the ‘difficulty’ of modernism is bound to her preoccupation with puzzles, and the ‘writerly’ text.\footnote{This is a reference to the Barthesian distinction between the ‘readerly’ and the ‘writerly’ as defined in the Introduction.} The demand that the reader ‘work’ in order to produce alongside the author is essentially the driving force behind this ‘love of difficulty’. While the demands of Pound’s and Beckett’s reader are not exactly the same as the demands of the Brooke-Rose reader, the influence of these modernist writers echoes throughout her novels.

Brooke-Rose summarises her own perception of Pound’s influence on her writing in an interview with David Hayman and Keith Cohen (1976), where she recognises their shared ‘passionate concern with language’.\footnote{Hayman & Cohen, ‘An Interview with Christine Brooke-Rose’, p. 10.} As early as 1961, Brooke-Rose had been publishing critical assessments of Pound’s poetry and in 1971 her \textit{A ZBC of Ezra Pound} was published, a book specifically designed for students to use to help them read \textit{The Cantos}.\footnote{I refer here to Brooke-Rose’s essay ‘Ezra Pound: Piers Plowman in the Modern Wasteland’, \textit{Review of English Literature}, 2:2 (1961), pp. 74-88.} At the beginning of \textit{A ZBC of Ezra Pound}, Brooke-Rose outlines ‘how’ the reader should approach Pound’s work: ‘I have no intention of writing the kind of quick guide in chronological order […] Pound cannot be approached in this manner and truly appreciated’ (\textit{A ZBC}, p. 1). Later, she quotes directly from Canto 98, and predicting the student’s disorientation states ‘[y]es, yes, it can be explicated […] For the moment let it just roll over you’ (\textit{A ZBC}, p. 3), a concept both strange and unfamiliar for the analytical student. The ‘coaching’ that Brooke-Rose provides here is useful for readers of her own fiction, as there is no ‘quick guide’ to her novels and at times there are passages where the reader must allow the language and references to ‘roll over’ them. For instance, the polyglotism of \textit{Between} (1968) is designed to alienate and disorientate the reader that cannot understand the particular language. However, each of these interjections is able to be explicated through the process of translation, a process which is also the major theme in the novel. Similarly, in \textit{Thru} (1975) Brooke-Rose makes a number of sometimes overt, more often oblique references to literary theory. The reader that is not an expert in literary theory, or at least familiar with key concepts, becomes lost in these references,
obstructed by this highly specialised language, imprisoned by the language of the text. This is a process of which the author is not only aware, but one which she satirises on page fifty. Here, the reader is presented with Jakobson’s diagram of linguistic functions, with the inclusion of a tourist information-style arrow which locates the reader with the words ‘YOU ARE HERE’ pointing at the ‘CODE’ function, ‘unless you have gotton imprisoned in M’ (Thru, p. 629). There are further instances where this ‘roll[ing] over’ occurs in her later fiction. In Amalgamemnon (1984), the narrative voice of the protagonist Mira Enketi is often interrupted by programmes on the radio including the shipping forecast and the news. While Mira is sitting up at night, listening to the radio and narrating the novel, the two discourses become conflated and the readers, like Mira, have to allow the radio narration to ‘roll over’ their consciousnesses. Again, in Xorandor (1986) and Verbivore (1990) there is the inclusion of technical jargon relating to computer programming as well as a made-up slang that the child narrators use in order to communicate with one and other. In Textermination (1991), there are a vast number of literary references to both texts and characters that are not made explicit, and even Kelly (one of the main protagonists) admits that she feels ‘ashamed and rattled’ (Text, p. 22) at not recognising all of the names.

Brooke-Rose comments that Pound’s influence upon her novel writing was ‘indirect’; however, there is evidence of a more direct emulation in one of her poems.48 Brooke-Rose published only two poems in the TLS, the first being ‘The Lunatic Fringe’ (1956), the second being ‘Today the Acupuncturist’ (1963). Both of these poems predate Out (1964), and both display unconventional and unorthodox characteristics, the first in its content and theme of psychological instability, and the second in its form and use of language. While ‘The Lunatic Fringe’ is an interesting and provocative poem, it is in ‘Today the Acupuncturist’ where Brooke-Rose pays tribute to Pound’s work by the inclusion of the Chinese ideogram ‘grain + mouth = harmony’. Here we can see the direct influence of Pound’s work upon Brooke-Rose:

\[ \text{That is the meridian of the gall. I feel} \]
\[ \text{at peace with all those cosmonauts} \]

and all things turning in their orbits,
with speleologues and deep-sea archaeologists
and with the sphinx of Egypt. I will confide in
no psychiatrists. I feel

Chinese

和 (grain mouth¹)

[...]

¹ grain + mouth = harmony

Despite her own protests, it is clear that Pound’s work has played a significant and direct role in the development of the experimental Brooke-Rose. The inclusion of the Chinese ideogram in order to visually express the metaphor of ‘harmony’, rather than using the word in the poem itself is an example of mimesis rather than diegesis. The ideogram encapsulates the concept that harmony is achieved when a grain (the symbol on the left resembling a tree) is brought to a hungry mouth (the square symbol on the right). This is a particularly poignant image, and metaphor considering China’s history of overpopulation and famine. Brooke-Rose’s use of the ideogram demands that the reader considers this metaphor on a deeper level, beyond the language of the poem itself. Pound uses Chinese ideograms throughout The Cantos in a similar way, visually representing metaphor, requiring the reader to consider the process of reading in a different way. While one may not immediately recognise the image, the research that is undertaken in order to explicate the meaning of it is part of the pleasure of reading the image and indeed, the poem. In the Bookmark interview, Brooke-Rose explains this process by stating that

People want the pleasure of recognition not the pleasure of discovery, and I prefer the pleasure of discovery [...] Maybe the reader wants something to read on the train, but that’s the distinction between the consumer product, which is fine [...] they read it as something that is entirely given to them and they don’t

have to make any effort [...] I’m not interested in writing that, I want the reader to be writing the book with me, I want to share it with him, but of course he has to make an effort.\textsuperscript{50}

In this instance, Brooke-Rose is discussing her experimental novels rather than her poetry; however, this comment can be easily applied to ‘Today the Acupuncturist’ and indeed, much of Pound’s work. The image is both a puzzle and a barrier, a speed bump in the road, baulking the reading of the poem. It is impossible to read the ideogram aloud and have it retain the same impact that it has on the page. Therefore, the reader is forced to adapt by either solving the puzzle in order to absorb the meaning of the metaphor, or navigate his/her way around it, always recognising that the poem will remain partly unfinished and partly unknown. The ‘difficulty’ that surrounds the work of both Pound and Brooke-Rose can be summarised by this shared expectation of the reader as writer, producer and reader of the text (in a Barthesian sense), and the authors’ desire to make the reader work a little harder for their reward of comprehension. This is certainly the case with regard to Brooke-Rose’s own work. If we consider that the influence of Pound upon Brooke-Rose’s writing is ‘indirect’ in the sense that his work, and more specifically his attitude towards the reader, hangs like a spectre above her novels, imbuing them with an atmosphere of ‘difficulty’ and mysteriousness, then it is possible to see Beckett’s work as being more directly influential.

**Beckett and the Schizophrenic Text**

Brooke-Rose wrote about Beckett’s work many times throughout her career as a literary critic. Her 1958 essay ‘Samuel Beckett and the Anti-novel’ describes how, throughout his work, Beckett tries to develop the novel by taking traditional forms and inverting them in order to produce something that is the negation of the form. She states that the production of anti-novels seems necessary to the development of the novel in that they ‘turn the form inside out, hold it up, perhaps, to ridicule, and give it a thorough beating, or at least an airing.’\textsuperscript{51} Brooke-Rose claims that one of the characteristics of the anti-novel is that it ‘eludes labels’, a quality that she has been keen to project onto her own


writing. She goes on to cite Beckett’s work as an example of the anti-novel, asserting that his work

has been called religious, atheist, a message of despair, a message of hope, poetic, prosaic, mundanely dirty, allegorical, symbolic, etc. And of course it is all these things and more, because the anti-novel or play makes use of everything for its own self-mocking purpose. Similarly, it eludes period. No doubt a desire to break forms often stems from an excessive concern with form and in this sense Beckett has a baroque imagination though not a baroque style.

Brooke-Rose makes reference here to the self-reflexivity of Beckett’s novels. The process of collecting these forms together (allegory, symbolism etc.) and using them to subvert themselves and each other is indicative of this reflection. In this respect, the self-mockery that the text displays is firmly connected to the idea that the text is self-aware and self-reflexive. One of the instances where this is epitomised in Beckett’s work is in the famous closing lines of The Unnamable (1953): ‘you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on.’ This quotation succinctly illustrates the self-reflexivity that appears throughout Beckett’s work, to such a degree that the narrative voice possesses a schizophrenic quality. The contradictory statements positioned one after the other in the sentence imply a split narrative and a divided speaker. This schizophrenic quality can also be seen in Brooke-Rose’s work. For instance in Out, the elderly male protagonist often slips into talking to himself. Here, his own thoughts are vocalised as having a schizophrenic quality.

- Look, since you’re inventing this dialogue you ought to give something to the other chap to say.
- But I must get all those facts in.
- He won’t let you he exists too, you know. (Out, p. 19)

Sarah Birch discusses the schizophrenic’s use of metaphor while analysing Out, drawing upon the work of Robert Rogers’s Metaphor: A Psychoanalytic View (1978). Rogers states that the difference between metaphor as used by the artist and that used

by the schizophrenic is that ‘[a]rtists never lose sight of the difference, or boundary, between the literal and the figurative. For schizophrenics there is no difference.’ Rogers refers to the schizophrenic as using this ‘unlabeled metaphor’, constantly unable to differentiate between reality and ‘poetry’. Birch asserts that in Out, Brooke-Rose makes use of the schizophrenic’s unwitting deployment of figurative language as a psychological motivation for her use of it. The significance of this technique is that it allows the novelist to incorporate metaphor at the level of what is narrated, not merely at the level of narration, as is more commonly the case. (Birch, p. 71)

This, too, can be seen in Beckett’s work. Below is an extract from Molloy:

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Even in open country he seemed to be crashing through jungle. He didn’t so much walk as charge. In spite of this he advanced but slowly. He swayed, to and fro, like a bear.

He rolled his head, uttering incomprehensible words.

He was massive and hulking, to the point of misshapenness. And without being black, of a dark colour.

He was forever on the move. I had never seen him rest. Occasionally he stopped and glared furiously about him.

This was how he came to me, at long intervals. Then I was nothing but uproar, bulk rage, suffocation, effort unceasing frenzied and vain. Just the opposite of myself, in fact. It was a change. And when I saw him disappear, his whole body a vociferation, I was almost sorry.
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In this extract, Moran is describing the little he knows about Molloy, and it is clear that Moran’s perception of the boundary between the literal and the metaphoric has become distorted. Furthermore, at the very end of the quotation, Moran has begun to feel some sympathy towards Molloy, recognising a fondness for him, regretting the departure of Molloy’s image from his mind. In fact, it is possible to read Moran and Molloy as being

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versions of the same person, or indeed a singular entity with multiple-personality disorder: the one overtaking the other ‘at long intervals’. The novel appears in two parts: the first is from the point of view of Molloy and the second, from the perspective of Moran. Mahmoud Daram and Razieh Rahmani have discussed the two characters of the novel as representing different concerns: ‘In Molloy, Beckett presents Molloy as a postmodernist character with a schizoid tendency against a paranoid modernist character, Moran.’ This idea draws upon the work of Ihab Hassan, specifically his essay ‘Towards a Concept of Postmodernism’ (1987) where he discusses the problems surrounding the term ‘postmodernism’ and the implication that ‘modernism’ is over because we have moved beyond it, as signified by the ‘post’ prefix. Hassan draws up a chart of the ways in which modernism and postmodernism interact, comparing modernism as ‘Paranoid’, and postmodernism as suffering from ‘Schizophrenia’. For Daram and Rahmani, Molloy is the schizophrenic and Moran is the paranoid modernist character, however, they go on to recognise that the first part of the novel can be seen as a ‘prequel’ to the second, intimating that the two characters are fragments of the same whole; that Moran and Molloy are parts of the same character. They go on to draw heavily upon the work of Gilles Deleuze with regard to the fragmentation of the self, identifying the process of self-estrangement. In his *Difference and Repetition* (1994), Deleuze comments on the schizophrenic mind when he states that ‘[t]here, the “never seen” is not the contrary of the “already seen”: both signify the same thing, and are lived each in the other.’ This can be connected to Hassan’s distinction between modernism and postmodernism, and his claim that as educated readers we should try to see these concepts, beyond their chronological periodization, as working simultaneously within a single text or moment. Conversely, the presentation of two separate narratives in Beckett’s text, and therefore the presentation of two separate selves (or a split self), implies a distinct division in these characteristics. *Molloy* demonstrates its self-reflective

60 Hassan, *The Postmodern Turn*, p. 123.
capabilities by categorising and separating the two parts of the whole in these two narratives. It is the reader that works to make the connections between the characters, and this is achieved through the recognition of similar signifiers. These signifiers betray the text’s multiple identities which are intricately linked through the process of doubling and repetition from one section of the novel to the other.

Brooke-Rose also plays with the multiple identities of the text by making her novels ambiguous; they are elusive of labels, yet simultaneously seem to almost fit into certain categories. Her novels show a pre-occupation with the traumas of modernism which is evidenced in her paranoid use of language: her repetition of words and phrases and the extensive use of puns in order to reveal the duplicity of language. Yet, her grammatical experiments seem much better suited to the realm of postmodernism, her lipograms and formatting seemingly aligning her with writers belonging to the Oulipo and the $L=A-N=G=U=A=G=E$ poets. Throughout her experimental corpus, Brooke-Rose interrogates the identity of the modernist and the postmodernist text and the connection between the two by presenting techniques that she has inherited from modernism in postmodern costumes. The modernist prioritisation of experiment and innovation is most noticeable in Brooke-Rose’s earlier experimental novels (Out, Such and Between) which are consumed with the responsibility to ‘make new’ the novel form and renovate the narrative voice. However, the pastiche of different literary theories and discourses in Thru and Amalgamemnon and characters in Textermination is a technique that aligns itself more readily with postmodernism. In this sense, her novels are each individual performances of techniques, founded upon the underlying anxieties of authorship and identity. Her work spans across the twentieth-century, and as such, it occupies both ‘periods’ of modernist and postmodernist concern.63

Of all her novels, Thru is Brooke-Rose’s most self-reflective work in that comments directly upon the process of the construction and the deconstruction of a text, acting as a stage for the performance of these anxieties. In Stories, Theories & Things (1991) Brooke-Rose describes it as a ‘novel about the theory of the novel, that is, a

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63 While I am aware that neither of these terms can be accurately defined chronologically, the term ‘periods’ refers to modernist literature’s proliferation in the early twentieth century and the popularity of postmodernism in the 1970s and 80s.
narrative about narrativity, a fiction about fictionality, a text about textuality’ (STT, p. 8). This description is both cryptic and accurate as Thru holds a mirror up to a number of literary theories in order for them to be simultaneously assessed and satirised. In this sense, Thru displays schizophrenic tendencies, presenting itself as a split subject, a ‘fiction about fictionality’. In Anti-Oedipus, Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe the schizophrenic object in terms of production. They assert:

We cannot, we must not attempt to describe the schizophrenic object without relating it to the process of production [...] the schizophrenic is the universal producer. There is no need here to distinguish between producing and its product.64

The schizophrenic quality of Thru results from the combining of a number of different theoretical narratives (some which contradict each other), the absence of a clear narrative voice, and the reader continually searching for the answer to the question ‘Who speaks?’ (Thru, p. 579). In the interview with Hayman and Cohen, Brooke-Rose states that Thru, ‘is the first book where the two streams come together, where the split personality, me as a writer and me as a critic [...] come together’.65 Often, it is difficult to distinguish which Brooke-Rose is speaking in this text, as the critic and the writer seem to be constantly jostling for narrative command. This jostling of narratives is part of what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the ‘production’ of the text; the ‘producing’ or ‘jostling’ action is precisely what forms the ‘product’ or text. In this sense the process is the product, the self-reflection is the narrative. The question of ‘Who speaks?’ echoes throughout Thru and continues to haunt the novels that succeed it, particularly in the four novels that form the ‘Intercom Quartet’.

As I have mentioned previously, in Amalgamemnon, the narrative voice is repeatedly interrupted by the radio transmission, but there are also a number of different scenarios that occur within the novel where the narrative voice changes. Mira Enketei is a classics professor who has been made redundant from her position as a University lecturer. Throughout the text, Mira is referred to as ‘Cassandra’ or ‘Sandra’, a

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65 Hayman & Cohen, ‘Interview with Christine Brooke-Rose’, p. 11.
reference to the fallen Princess of Troy whose visions allowed her to predict her own death, but were unable to prevent it from happening. Indeed, the first line of *Amalgamemnon* (‘I shall soon be quite redundant at last despite of all’ (*Amal*, p. 1)) is calqued on the first line of Beckett’s *Malone Dies* (‘I shall soon be quite dead at last in spite of all’) illustrating a direct relationship between the two novels and Brooke-Rose’s admiration for Beckett’s ‘attitude-nihilistic’. In *Xorandor*, the narrative progresses through the communication between the computer ‘whizz-kid’ (*Xor*, p. 9) twins, Jip and Zab. The constant switching from one narrator to the other imbues the narrative with a schizophrenic quality, and the arguing between them of how the story should be told, again, confronts Brooke-Rose the writer with Brooke-Rose the critic. *Verbivore* is not so overtly concerned with a dual narrative; however, the radio play at the beginning of the novel introduces the reader to the deconstruction of the boundaries of metaphor. In the play, Julian is a human character who is always striving for silence, and becomes easily disrupted and aggressive at any level of noise. He continually protests to his wife Barbara about the level of noise she is making while he is trying to concentrate. On the contrary, Decibel is the personification of the abstract concept of sound, and she requires noise in order to survive. These characters are in total opposition to one and other and inevitably one of them must die in order for the other to survive. The presence of two opposing discourses and circumstances in the form of Julian and Decibel once again introduces the reader to a site of conflict between two contrary forces. In *Textermination* (1991), Brooke-Rose returns to privileging multiple angles, lifting characters from a number of other texts and placing them in her own plot. Although removed from their own texts, these characters retain their own characteristics (Emma Bovary often faints, Oedipa Maas shows signs of paranoia and Gibreel Farishta causes political outrage). The narration is in the third person, allowing the reader to focus on a number of different individuals throughout the text. One of the main focal points is the relationship between Lotte from Thomas Mann’s *Lotte in Weimar* (1939), and Lotte from Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). These two versions of the same character demonstrate a schizophrenic theme within Brooke-Rose’s novel. The young Lotte from Goethe’s text

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cannot recognise Mann’s Lotte as someone that she knows, let alone recognise her as
her older self:

Lotte! The girl turns to look, but seeing no one she knows, moves again towards
the down stairway. Lotte! Her arm is seized by an elderly lady in a white dress
identical to her own, a lady she has never seen before, who gabbles at her in
German (Text, 18)

This quotation emphasises Textermination’s preoccupation with identification; in the
case of the two Lottes, there is a focus on the identification of the self. Mann’s Lotte and
Goethe’s Lotte can be read as the same character; however, their division between the
two texts splits the character and in turn, her characteristics. Brooke-Rose unites the two
versions of Lotte in Textermination causing confusion and disorientation for the
character and the reader. In this quotation the elderly Lotte is reflecting and recognising
herself, going through stages of both self-reflection and self-identification, but leaves the
conversation distressed, as her younger self cannot recognise her as an elderly woman.

As demonstrated by the above quotation, all of Brooke-Rose’s experimental
novels are written in the present tense, with the exception of Amalgamemnon, which
has its own constraint of being written using only ‘non-realized tenses’ (IA, p. 17).67
Specifically, the use of the present tense inhibits the use of free indirect discourse, which
has been used ubiquitously in the realist novel and beyond, in order to divulge the
interior thoughts of the character through third person narration. This example from
Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway illuminates the inner-workings of the mind of the
class of Peter Walsh:

That was what tortured him, that was what came over him when he saw Clarissa
so calm, so cold, so intent on her dress; or whatever it was; realising what she
might have spared him what she had reduced him to, a snivelling old ass.68

The need for the past tense when using free indirect discourse is clearly illustrated here.
Despite the extreme intimacy of Walsh’s thought, it is not the character who directly
divulges it, but rather the third person narration. For Brooke-Rose, the distance created

67 I will go on to explain what this term means in Chapter 3 when analysing Amalgamemnon.
between the character and the narrator when using free indirect discourse creates an issue of narrative authenticity which has been abused in its ubiquity in the realist novel. She states that ‘[w]e do not offer information to ourselves in plu-perfect explanatory flashbacks or conditional futures when we think, in other words, f.i.d. [free indirect discourse] is a convention. And every convention has its constraints’ (IA, p. 39). Brooke-Rose is simulating an authentic discourse within her novel by jumping from one thought process to the next in order to mimic the way the mind works in real thought. In this respect, Brooke-Rose engages with the ‘hyper-real’ here by realistically recreating the process of interior thoughts. The present tense enables her to be ‘inside’ the protagonist at all times in her fiction, even if the protagonist shifts.69 Beckett also uses the present tense throughout his novels. In A Rhetoric of the Unreal Brooke-Rose comments upon Beckett’s use of the present tense and how this is connected to the nouveau roman:

The first impulse, in the nouveau roman, was to push the earlier reduction of narrator presence to the absolute limit of elimination, that is, to continue in the previous direction of mimesis. Thus Beckett, whose early novels (Murphy, Watt) tell the ‘story’ of Murphy and Watt in the third person, later adopts immediate discourse and internal focalisation in the first person (Malone Dies): not, however, for ‘rambling thoughts’, but with a rigorous, if neurotic, logic. (RotU, p. 325)

Brooke-Rose’s status as an ‘eliminated author’ can be seen as being inherited from Beckett in this respect, as well as from the nouveau roman. The attempt to eliminate the narrator while maintaining a ‘neurotic logic’ is prominent in Brooke-Rose’s work, and can be seen most clearly in her novel Out. Like Pound and Beckett, Alain Robbe-Grillet was a major influence to Brooke-Rose, particularly in her early career as an experimental writer. His style was openly emulated by Brooke-Rose and it would be useful to consider her connection to the nouveau roman in more detail in order to map the extent of this influence.

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69 Woolf, Mrs Dalloway, p. 43.
Textual Consciousness: Beckett continued, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Nathalie Sarraute

Brooke-Rose admits her admiration for Robbe-Grillet’s work in her collection of essays *Invisible Author* (2002) where she asserts that ‘only Robbe-Grillet, in *La Jalousie*, has fully achieved what so impressed me, a form that I used and played with, and I hope developed, and which I shall call the scientific present tense’ (*RotU*, p. 140). The ‘scientific present tense’ is a term Brooke-Rose coined to refer to the use of the speakerless present tense when used in critical writing or as a scientific law: ‘This is clearly derived from film, but only a certain type of film, with a quasi-neutral camera [… Robbe-Grillet] simply puts down objectively all that hits his central consciousness; in detail’ (*RotU*, p. 140). Brooke-Rose cites Robbe-Grillet’s *La Jalousie* (1957) as the most significant example of writing in the scientific present tense due to his rigour in using the form. His later novel *Dans le Labyrinthe* (1959), translated by Brooke-Rose in 1968 as *In the Labyrinth*, similarly abides by this constraint, but with the exception of two instances where a speaker is present; once at the beginning and once at the end. Brooke-Rose makes connections between the work of Beckett and that of the exponents of the *nouveau roman* in ‘Samuel Beckett and the Anti-Novel’ (1958) where she explains that Beckett describes

> either incredible things in an ordinary context, or more usually, ordinary things in an incredible context. This puts whatever he writes about slightly out of focus, as if observed, not so much by a foreign visitor as by someone outside the human race, outside the world and outside time.⁷⁰

Here, Brooke-Rose notices Beckett’s extraordinary method of writing about the ordinary, and this is a key principle of the *nouveau roman*. Robbe-Grillet was regarded as the foremost practitioner of the *nouveau roman* in France during this period; however, there were other writers who shared his concerns for the future of the novel. Both Nathalie Sarraute and Marguerite Duras had accompanied Robbe-Grillet to London during the early 1960s in order to promote their work. In a piece for the *Observer* in 1961, Brooke-Rose reported this visit to London and made further connections between Beckett and the *nouveau roman* using *Watt* as a prime example of the anti-novel. She states that the

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common theme between Beckett’s work and the *nouveau roman* is the ‘elimination of the author’. Brooke-Rose goes on to describe the differences between the work of Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute and Duras stating that:

> Sarraute produces a flow of feelings almost without a person to feel them, except us, the reader [...] Her instrument is the interior monologue [...] Robbe-Grillet is at the very opposite pole, for although he too has reduced the author to a “camera-I” [...] it is for very different reasons [...] his novels record, impersonally, geometrically, facts, objects, gestures [...] Duras stands midway between [...]  

Indeed, as Brooke-Rose identifies here, the methods of the various practitioners of the new novel were very different from one another, but it was with Robbe-Grillet’s experiments that Brooke-Rose was primarily concerned. She comments further on Robbe-Grillet’s particular experiment, identifying his aim ‘to cleanse objects of all the significance (moral, psychological, social, metaphysical, etc.) with which humanism has invested them’. Robbe-Grillet comments directly upon the significance of certain objects with *In the Labyrinth* (1968), where the soldier returns to the home of the woman, the boy and the disabled man. On re-entering the room he realises that on his first visit, his senses must have been dulled by ‘fatigue, hunger and the cold outside’ as there are many things about it that he does not remember. The lapse in his memory disturbs the soldier and it is his lapse in consciousness that inspires him to take a ‘precise inventory of the room’:

> There is a fireplace of which he remembers almost nothing: an ordinary black marble fireplace, above which hangs a large rectangular mirror; the iron shutter is raised, a pile of grey, feathery ashes can be seen, but no fire-dogs; on the mantelpiece lies a fairly long object, not very high – only an inch or less at its

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73 In ‘The Vanishing Author’ (12/02/1961), Brooke-Rose explains the various techniques of Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute and Marguerite Duras and identifies their differences from each other while also comparing them to writers of the 1930s (Choromanski, Woolf and Henry Green respectively).  
highest part – which cannot be identified from this angle because it is not close enough to the edge of the marble [...]\textsuperscript{76}

This observation of the room is highly descriptive without being referential to any wider social signification. The adjectives that are present are largely used in a quantifying capacity in effort to make the description more accurate (‘large’, ‘rectangular’, ‘long’), apart from ‘grey’ and ‘feathery’ which are rather neutral descriptive words, and can be regarded here as signifying the length of time for which the fire has been lit and indeed, gone out.

Brooke-Rose’s emulation of Robbe-Grillet’s style is similarly hyper-descriptive and these passages lend a voyeuristic quality to the writing that is particularly noticeable when a sexual scene is being described. For instance, in the first few sentences of \textit{Out}:

A fly straddles another fly on the faded denim stretched over the knee. Sooner or later, the knee will have to move, but now it is immobilised by the two flies, the lower of which is so still that it seems dead. The fly on top is on the contrary quite agitated, jerking tremendously, then convulsively, putting out its foreleg to whip, or maybe to stroke some sort of reaction out of the fly beneath, which, however, remains so still that it seems dead. (\textit{Out}, p. 11)

Karen Lawrence comments on Brooke-Rose’s inspirations for \textit{Out}, stating that ‘[i]t is in \textit{Out} that Brooke-Rose mixes Robbe-Grillet’s myopic, cold descriptive sentence with Beckett’s agnostic list of possibilities played out in the narrative’ (Lawrence, p. 29). Lawrence draws attention to the duality in Brooke-Rose’s inspirations here, and it becomes clear that the novel is composed of multiple emulations, multiple personalities. However, Brooke-Rose deviates from Robbe-Grillet’s style with her use of metaphor in the novel. The world presented in \textit{Out} is one where the racial hegemony has been inverted, where ‘the blacks rule and the whites are discriminated against and are unreliable, sick of a mysterious radiation illness the others were immune to’ (\textit{IA}, p. 16). Brooke-Rose recognised that this use of social metaphor would have been condemned by Robbe-Grillet; however, this metaphor is relayed through his ‘camera-I’ (\textit{IA}, p. 16), a seemingly politically non-biased medium in which to discuss this social re-working.

\textsuperscript{76}Robbe-Grillet, \textit{In the Labyrinth}, pp. 163-164.
While Brooke-Rose has repeatedly recognised her debt to Robbe-Grillet’s style when discussing the construction of *Out*, she has denied any such influence when discussing her second experimental novel *Such*, claiming that with this novel ‘I really took off on my own [...] I would say that “Such” is my first really “Me” novel, where I don’t owe anything to anyone else.’ However, when reading this second experimental novel, it becomes increasingly apparent that Brooke-Rose owes a considerable debt to Freudian psychoanalysis in terms of the novels theoretical foundation, and the absence of any usual or recognisable plot (as in a progressive narrative from one sphere of action to another (Propp)), and the first section of the novel being distinctly ‘interior’, *Such* is reminiscent of the writing of Nathalie Sarraute. In an interview for *The Paris Review*, Sarraute describes the problems that readers encounter in trying to engage with her earlier novels when approaching them from a traditional perspective:

My work used to be entirely closed to people. For a long time, people didn’t get inside there; they couldn’t manage to really penetrate these books [...] Because it is difficult. Because I plunge in directly, without giving any reference points. One doesn’t know where one is, or who is who. I speak right away of the essential things, and that’s very difficult. In addition people have the habit of looking for the framework of the traditional novel – characters, plots – and they don’t find it; they’re lost [...] There is a plot, if you like, but it’s not the usual plot. It is the plot made up of these movements between human beings. If one takes an interest in what I do, one follows a sort of movement of dramatic actions that takes place at the level of tropisms and of the dialogue. It’s a different dramatic action than that of the traditional novel.

Sarraute first used the biological term *tropismes* in the title for her 1936 collection of texts; a series of twenty-four sketches which introduce all of the literary elements that she was to develop in her later works. *Tropismes*, and *L’Ére du soupcon* (trans. *The Age of Suspicion*, 1956) along with Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *Pour un nouveau roman* (1963) provided

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a kind of collective manifesto for the new novelists in France, supplying them with both purpose and guidance. Sarraute’s literary concepts involved taking ordinary and often mundane situations, imbuing them with extraordinary emotional and psychological depth achieved mostly through monologue and dialogue. Often in Sarraute’s novels, it is unclear if these dialogues are the private interior workings of the individual mind or if they take place externally in an ejection of emotion. This disorientation causes the reader to find Sarraute’s writing ‘difficult’ in the way she describes above. Gretchen Rous Besser explains Sarraute’s experiment in the following:

Sarraute begins each book by plunging the reader directly inside someone’s thoughts, with no indication to who the person is, what he looks like, his age, background or profession. None of these questions matter in the least [...] In the same way that characters and relationships are not immediately discernible but require a period of prea quaintance before they come to light, external events are never explicitly narrated but are divulged almost accidently, through conversation or some other indirect means.79

Brooke-Rose’s Such is similarly ‘difficult’ in that it plunges straight into an unknown setting, immediately disorienting the reader, and it is driven by a dialogue between two unidentified interior voices.

The novel is presented in two parts, the first of which begins with the first person narrative voice describing opening the lid of his own coffin: ‘Someone creaks, levelling out nails perhaps with the prolonged side of a hammer. The coffin lid creaks open’ (Such, p. 203). This first section of the novel is set in a fantastic and surreal world, and is littered with references to astrophysics and psychology. The voice that describes the opening of the coffin quickly meets another, a female voice that describes herself as a ‘girl spy’, and after demanding that they must have names, he calls her ‘Something’ and she calls him ‘Someone’ (Such, p. 205). Someone is clearly uncomfortable in this surreal world, finding it difficult to understand where he is and what is happening: ‘I understood more in the coffin. The five geometries of the human psyche for instance’ (Such, p. 207). Something carries around her five offspring on ‘her left spiral arm’ (Such, p. 204). These offspring are

referred to as ‘planets’, ‘moons’ (*Such*, p. 203) and ‘discs’ (*Such*, p. 204) and are named after famous blues songs: ‘Gut Bucket’, ‘Potato Head’, ‘Tin Roof’, ‘Dippermouth’ and ‘Really’. On Someone’s arrival, each of the offspring is individually jettisoned into orbit to await their rebirth by Something. This first section is entirely disorientating to the reader and shows no sign of explanation with regard to a narrative plot. Indeed, the only clue for the reader is the occasional reference to Someone as ‘Lazarus’. Later in the novel, the reader is able to work out that a psychiatrist, and former physicist, called Larry, has died on the surgeon’s table and been placed into a coffin, only to be resurrected at an undefined later moment in time. The first section of the novel – the adventures of Someone, Something and the five offspring – is a representation of Larry’s inner consciousness while he is in between death and life. The second part of the novel depicts Larry’s ‘posthumous’ existence where he has become emotionally distant from his loved ones and decides to resign from the illustrious university post that he held before his death. Although he claims not to be able to remember anything about the period between his lives, there are certain details pertaining to his ‘life between lives’ that reverberate throughout the second half of the novel. Sarah Birch, Michela Canepari-Labib and Karen Lawrence and indeed, Brooke-Rose herself, have all recognised that with *Such*, Brooke-Rose plays with the concept of inner and outer space of both the universe and the human body by using the vocabulary of astrophysics. Lawrence goes on to state:

> Astrophysics, or the application of theories and methods of physics to the study of stellar structure, evolution, and origin, is applied to both Larry’s psyche in Part 1 and his “posthumous” views of his relationships with other people once he comes back to life. In *Such*, Brooke-Rose takes the study of the waves emitted and absorbed by celestial bodies and uses it as a metaphor for the distances between people. (Lawrence, p. 41)

After Larry’s resurrection, the distance between himself and others becomes greater. He has been isolated by his experience, and the frequent references to his non-existence act as a residue that coats his ‘posthumous’ life.

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80 Birch, pp. 64-69; Canepari-Labib, pp. 71-75; Lawrence, p. 41; Christine Brooke-Rose, *Invisible Author*, p. 17.
Sarraute borrows the term ‘tropisms’ from biology where it denotes the growth or turning movement of a plant in response to an environmental stimulus, for instance, the sun. Lawrence likens the description of the biological tropism to the protagonist in *Out*, claiming that the ‘sickly white man’s emotional spectrum has been reduced to the most basic reactions of approach and avoidance’ (Lawrence, p. 28). However, I suggest that the comparison can be extended to incorporate the first and second halves of *Such*, where the reader, unaware of their location, slides along the threshold of Larry’s consciousness, and Someone is confronted ‘head-on’ by each of his children individually in a process of emotional and psychological self-confrontation. In the second part of the novel, Larry turns away from external stimuli including his family, his wife and his career, finding an absence of emotional stimulus in their company.

Larry’s identity in the first half of the novel is undefined, and the reader must remember here that although Larry appears to be Someone, guided by Something and her five children, in fact, all of these voices are fragments of Larry’s consciousness, each one representing a stage of his own development. Lawrence notes that each of the five children is representative of various stages of personal psychological growth and self-recognition. She states:

The age of each child doubles the previous one. Three-year-old Dippermouth (who has a clock face, tells time and occasionally screams in alarm, expresses, according to Brooke-Rose “a small child’s need of attention, the times expressing only smile and opposite” (Brooke-Rose e-mail 10/20/03) […] The three-year-old Dippermouth is followed by Gut Bucket, with the deeper and more contained emotional life of a six year old, and then Potato Head the more opaque twelve-year-old girl […] Tin Roof, the outspoken and “unscreened” twenty-four-year-old, is next, and, finally, the adult reality (Really) of the psychiatrist at forty-eight. (Lawrence, p. 46)

This fragmentation of the self is a common theme in Brooke-Rose’s fiction and will be returned to in due course. As a theoretical concept, self-fragmentation might be more appropriately connected to Lacanian psychoanalysis rather than Freudian theory; however, the very nature of the first half of the novel as being the articulation of an
unconscious experience, likens it to dreaming. Michela Canepari-Labib comments upon the first half of the novel as resembling a dream-like state:

the sub-world that Larry creates the dream-land in which, according to Freud, during sleep, the nocturnal freedom of instinctual excitations and the diminished control exercised by the ego render possible the formations of dreams in which the wishes the ego represses during the waking hours can find expression.

(Canepari-Labib, p. 186)

Canepari-Labib regards the first part of the novel (the sub-world) as illustrating Freud’s theory of the ‘return of the repressed’ in an unconscious state. Indeed, the dismissal of the offspring into orbit during the first few pages of the novel and then, their individual returns seems to corroborate this reading. Dippermouth reminds Someone that this process of the return of the repressed is inevitable:

-No. You’ve forgotten me, haven’t you, dad?
-I haven’t forgotten you. I just want you to shut up.
-I shall scream for attention in five seconds from now, just like you deep inside yourself.
-I never scream for attention.
-Everyone does, dad, things come back, boomerang, boomerang, three two one zero. He dips his mouth and screams
I hit him hard across his stupid dial [...] The harvest moon rides high and silent as I sit and howl at it like a child of three. (Such, p. 252)

Here, Someone is transformed into a child again through Dippermouth’s actions. Each of these instances of reliving the past stages of his life seem to be contributory to Larry’s healing: only when each of Someone and Something’s children have returned from being repressed will Larry wake up from the ‘sub-world’. The return of the repressed children – Larry’s confrontation of different versions of himself – can therefore be interpreted as both an act of healing and growth, as well as an act of regression culminating in a mid-life crisis. On awakening from his ‘sub-world’ Larry is a changed man and literally sees the world differently. He is now able to see people’s psychic auras; his eyes resembling dish-
telescopes. Sarah Birch notes that his eyes ‘seem to look right through his friends, and he sees the psychic energy people emit as an astrophysicist’s radio-telescope “sees” sound bounced off different galaxies’ (Birch, p. 64). Finding no solace in this new capability, Larry is motivated to return to the ‘sub-world’ in order to find ‘Silence’ (Such, p. 300). Canepari-Labib claims that by wishing to die again, ‘Larry comes to express the death drive that Freud described in his “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920)’ (Canepari-Labib, p. 197). This notion can be extended: if the reader considers that the first half of the novel is consumed with relationships to different versions of the self and the drive to live/survive/resurrect and second half of the novel is an expression of a wish to die, the two halves are representative of the two different Freudian ‘drives’, Eros (the life drive) and Thanatos (the death drive). In this respect, Such is a literary expression of Freudian theory, specifically the conflict between the instinct to live and the instinct to die: when Larry is dead he is consumed with the instinct to live and vice versa.

In Such, Brooke-Rose juxtaposes the two separate discourses of astrophysics and Freudian psychoanalytic theory, creating a sustained metaphor of the self and its relationship to the other version of the self (Larry is both a psychologist and an astrophysicist and as such his identity is split). In some respects, this novel extends and builds upon the foundation ideas of alienation and isolation laid down in Out. Both of the ‘dead white males’ (to use Lawrence’s phrase) in Out and Such remind the reader of Beckett’s protagonists, with their sense of immobility, unfulfillment and dissatisfaction with life. Such, like Brooke-Rose’s other experimental novels, skirts around the edges of reality and realist experiences, while showing them to be extraordinary in their explication.

With both Out and Such Brooke-Rose engages with and takes inspiration from literature and authors that found the contemporary climate stale and rigid. Ezra Pound’s demand to ‘make it new’ had inspired a new generation of writers to deviate from traditional forms, and attempt the inconceivable with language. The writers of the nouveau roman had similarly demanded that the novel develop in terms of its form and its language. Brooke-Rose openly recognised that the nouveau roman, and in particular, the work of Robbe-Grillet, was responsible for significant developments within the French novel form. In a review for The Observer (1966) Brooke-Rose notes:
We all know that jaded feeling when people and things seem too familiar and we long for something to happen. Then we go on a journey, change our usual surroundings. People and things suddenly acquire a new intensity, appear more ‘real’. This is exactly what the so-called ‘New’ novelists from France are trying to do: by getting away from over-familiar ways of creating a fictional world, they are making us relearn to live each moment for itself so that – as on holiday – it is sufficient for people and things merely to be, without reference to something happening.\(^{81}\)

Pound, Beckett, Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute, although quite different to one and other in many respects, all attempt to ‘make it new’ in their own ways. These influential writers all share a level of ‘difficulty’, and demand that the reader change, develop or simply work a little harder in order to achieve the reward of the text. Brooke-Rose’s early experimental work was clearly influenced heavily by these writers however, as she developed as an author of unorthodox fiction, her experiments became her own. Her migration to Paris to teach at Vincennes immersed Brooke-Rose in literary theory and the philosophy of language. This move and the experience of being in Paris during the late 1960s culminated with the novel Thru, where her experimentalism verges upon indulgence in critical structures, where theoretical concepts laud over narrative and character. In the following chapter I will illustrate the context of the novel Thru, illustrating Brooke-Rose’s demand for a capable readership by analysing some of the examples of experimentation. Furthermore, I will discuss how this novel came to haunt Brooke-Rose, giving her a reputation as being simply ‘too difficult’ for mainstream readership. Then, I will go on to suggest that she returned to the same kind of experimentation presented in Thru, repackaging it in the form of her 1991 novel Textermination, a novel that was altogether more widely praised than its predecessor.

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CHAPTER 2

‘Stepping alongside myself’: Structure and Reflections of the ‘Other Self’

‘Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.’¹

The consideration of structure has been consistently at the forefront of much of Brooke-Rose’s work. As I have previously mentioned, her early ‘satirical’ novels were generally straightforward in a narratological sense, but Brooke-Rose’s preoccupation with structure and form had already become evident with The Dear Deceit (1960). As noted in the Introduction, this novel is based on the life of Brooke-Rose’s father who became estranged from the family, and absconded soon after the family’s relocation to England. The structure of this novel is reversed; thus, the reader must make his/her way back through the details of Alfred Northbrook Hayley’s life in order to find the beginning of the novel. Indeed, in the early 1960s this had been an extremely unconventional novel structure, although the contemporary reader might find it a more commonplace technique since the publication of Martin Amis’ Time’s Arrow (1991) which adopted the same structure to great success. As Brooke-Rose developed as an author of experimental novels, this preoccupation with structure continued to be of a paramount focus in her work. The most structurally complex of all her novels is Thru (1975), a novel that had been received with confusion and trepidation by most reviewers, often claiming that the novel had ‘no connection to anything like the common reader’ as a result of its invocation of complex literary theories.² Thru is the result of Brooke-Rose’s obsession with language and structure: an obsession that had grown from her polyglotism, her translation and decoding of messages at Bletchley Park, her University career studying medieval French and English Literature, and most significantly, her experience of

teaching at the experimental University at Vincennes. As I have previously discussed in Chapter 1, Brooke-Rose had always been influenced by technical forms of literature (modernist writers, specifically Pound and Beckett, the *nouveau roman*), but her time at Vincennes made her increasingly conscious of the developments in literary theory, particularly the work of the poststructuralists, many of whom were on the faculty at the University. This chapter will discuss the various structures that present themselves in Brooke-Rose’s novels and discuss how the author expands and collapses them, demonstrating the malleability of the language of the text. With particular emphasis on *Thru*, and *Textermination*, I will identify Brooke-Rose’s engagement with individual structures and concepts, in an effort to trace her engagement with contemporary theoretical debates.

During her time in Paris, teaching at Vincennes from the October of 1968, Brooke-Rose was exposed to a variety of theoretical discussions relating to philosophical debate and the conception of various literary theories that stemmed from these discussions. Brooke-Rose describes the French literary climate as being markedly different to that of Britain in its approach to the occupation of theoretical discussion in her ‘Viewpoint’ piece for the *Times Literary Supplement* in June 1973, where she states that:

Living in France, then, is rather like walking round a national exhibition, entering one fantastic and beautiful structure after another, the Lévi-Strauss Palace, the Derrida Daedalus, the Lacan Labyrinth, the Kristeva Construct, the Barthes Pavilion, the Planetarium showing the Sollers system [...] I feel French enough to find it all very interesting.³

The affinity that Brooke-Rose felt for the French literary scene is made evident in this quotation, and it is clear that she finds the ‘architecture’ of British literary culture wanting in comparison. In a later piece for *The Spectator*, Brooke-Rose recalls an account where at a London literary dinner, an unnamed woman novelist, with whom she was in conversation about keeping up to date with literary theory, exclaimed with relief ‘Is

Structuralism over? Oh, good!⁴ Throughout the rest of this piece, Brooke-Rose conveys her exasperation with this opinion, explaining that no theory is ever ‘over’, only that it changes and develops with different approaches. She asserts that this change is happening everywhere, but ‘it’s the English who don’t want to know.’⁵ Indeed, it was not that the English were not aware of the literary developments taking place across the Channel. Writing for The Observer in 1961, Brooke-Rose describes the French new novelists, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Nathalie Sarraute and Marguerite Duras, as having caused a ‘tremor of excitement in literary circles’ during their latest visit to Britain.⁶ She goes on to liken their ‘anti-novels’ to Laurence Sterne’s The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman (1759) and, the only remotely contemporary comparison she can make is to Beckett’s Watt (1953). Brooke-Rose’s incapability of finding any contemporary British comparisons to the writers of the nouveau roman implies that the ‘new novels’ were confined to France, and the English were simply not interested in developing of this new form of writing on their own shores. There were, however, contemporary British writers that advocated the translation and publication of the French nouveau roman in English including Rayner Heppenstall and Philip Toynbee. John Calder and his publishing house pursued this task with a dedicated passion, translating and publishing a number of works including Brooke-Rose’s own translation of Robbe-Grillet’s Dans le labyrinthe (1959 trans. In the Labyrinth 1967). However, in a later piece for The Times, Brooke-Rose makes reference to the ‘minor revolution [...] which has been going on in France for the last 15 years’, blaming the British literary critics and academics for having ‘perversely misunderstood’ the motivations behind the literary reform.⁷ Brooke-Rose’s consciousness of this literary debate, from an early stage in her career, depicts her being attuned to the contemporary literary environments of both Paris and London. Her engagement with literary theory and indeed, with the writing of the nouveau roman and Beckett was, in a sense, part of her rebellion against what she perceived to be the static environment of contemporary British literature.

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For Brooke-Rose, the ‘minor revolution’ in creative and critical literature had inspired an evolution in the use of language and form. An integral part of this idea was the concept of development and the malleability of theoretical approaches to language. She describes the theoretical perspectives as continually in a state of flux and development, highlighting their flexibility and capability to build new extensions upon established ideas:

They are very impressive, but there is a temporary feeling about them, not so much in the sense that they will disappear altogether but because the pavilions are apt to look quite different when visited at different times: another wing has been added, a fancy bridge or a strange trompe l’oeil.\(^8\)

In the articles that she ‘sent home’, and indeed in those public pieces she wrote before she left London, Brooke-Rose depicts the British literary environment as stagnant and dull. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, Brooke-Rose was not the only experimental author in Britain during this period, but her isolation from other experimenters and her often derogatory remarks about their work in her reviews (see her comments on B.S Johnson’s *The Unfortunates* in *Rhetoric of the Unreal* and review of Ann Quin’s *Berg* (1964)), put her out on somewhat of a limb. In comparison, she sees the French literary scene, particularly the Paris of the late 1960s, as a kind of Mecca for authors of ‘theoretical fiction’; a term that aptly describes her experimental oeuvre, and one that is particularly suited to *Thru*.\(^9\)

**Thru (1975): The Process**

Like so many of Brooke-Rose’s early novels, *Thru* was written in the summer months, between her teaching commitments at Vincennes. Although the novel was written in the summers of 1970-72, it took until 1975 for the typography to be set exactly as the author requested and to complete its publication. Brooke-Rose confesses that the delay in the

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\(^9\) Catherine Lord defines ‘theoretical fiction’ in *The Intimacy of Influence* (Amsterdam: ASCA Press, 1999) as the process through which academic discourses take on narrative properties by becoming part of the narrative itself. Brooke-Rose does this on a number of occasions: in *Such* she uses the academic discourses of psychoanalysis and astrological physics as part of the plot, and in *Thru* she uses a variety of literary theories as narratological devices including Jacobson’s diagram, Greimas’ square and Lacan’s ‘Mirror Stage’.
publication was to do with ‘obstetrico-typographical reasons’, and that she was ‘duly rapped on the typographical knuckles for it’ (STT, p. 8). The typography was noted as impressive by the reviewers who commented that the text was ‘all a-glitter with charts, tables and drawings with cog wheeling sentences, typological big-dippers and showering rains of discourse.’\textsuperscript{10} In a review for The Weekend Scotsman, James Allen Ford comments upon the typographical gymnastics of Thru, awarding ‘an ungrading Alpha for the compositors, who must have needed a stiff drink afterwards.’\textsuperscript{11} The novel’s publication was further delayed as a result of confusion with the title. The novel had initially been titled Textermination, but was changed after Brooke-Rose had been misinformed by her friend and associate George Steiner, that William Burroughs had published a novel with the same name (White, p. 126). Even at this early stage, it seemed that Thru was destined to cause Brooke-Rose some considerable problems and these issues were observed by her publisher. Indeed, this was the first and final novel that Hamish Hamilton published for Brooke-Rose. In a letter to the author regarding the publication of Soon (Amalgamemnon), her publisher and friend Raleigh Trevelyan commented that

\begin{quote}
even though you have tried to make the book more accessible to the general reader, it is still going to be a difficult one to sell. Indeed, I cannot imagine you writing a novel nowadays that would not be a difficult one for a firm like this to sell [...] I cannot always understand what you are getting at, and this certainly applied to Thru [...] Whom do you regard as your public? I think it is primarily the academic world, and I also think you would agree with me [...] It hurts me to have to say this, but perhaps you would be happier with a more academic publishing house. Maybe it is true that the Americans are more receptive to experimental writing, but you – we – are battling against the people who go to Hatchards, Harrods and Truslove.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} Raleigh Trevelyan, ‘Letter to Christine Brooke-Rose’ (27/03/1979). Accessed through the HRC Archive. Hatchards was an independent bookshop in Piccadilly, eventually taken over by Waterstones. Truslove and Hanson was an independent publishing firm that occupied a number of fashionable bookshops in the West End of London.
Brooke-Rose took this advice, and after the nine year ‘traversée du désert’ (*STT*, p. 8) that the reception to *Thru* novel inspired, the author returned by publishing *Amalgamemnon* in 1984 with the academic publishing house, Carcanet.

The question of audience and reception for *Thru* had been discussed in the reviews of the novel at the time. In a review of *Thru* that appeared in *The Spectator* in 1975, Peter Ackroyd launched a scathing personal attack on Brooke-Rose’s writing style and literary agenda questioning the very existence of the novel at this stage in the twentieth century. He states:

*Thru* is too little, and it is also too late. It tries to do for the English Language what Denis Roche and a host of experimentalists did to the French, but *Thru* is neither here nor there […] It is very brave of Miss Brooke-Rose to apply certain European strategies to the indigenous product, but like a great many Europeanisms they have a faded date-stamp upon them. The English have missed that particular development of modernism but it is too late to imitate it: we must go beyond it.\(^\text{13}\)

Ackroyd has clearly not been charmed by Brooke-Rose’s quirky novel, not even by the accompanying photograph on the jacket. He states, somewhat inappropriately, that the photograph depicts ‘Miss Brooke-Rose looking sportive in a Saint-Laurent choker’, a feature that he asserts: ‘does elucidate the deep structure of the Paris-London axis’\(^\text{14}\). Ackroyd’s assertion is that by 1975 it is ‘too late’ for British literature to engage seriously with literary theories as French literature has, and that when this is attempted, the effect is both one of constriction and aestheticism – in much the same way that he regards the French designer choker around Brooke-Rose’s neck in the sleeve photograph. Writing for *The New Statesman*, Valentine Cunningham acknowledged this perceived superficiality of the novel, commenting that:

The cravenly traditional reader, unschooled enough to still crave some story in with the dollops of critical reflection that anti-novels go in for, is cruelly toyed with – repeatedly tempted to relax with gobbets of what look like mimetic stuff,


\(^{14}\) Ackroyd, ‘Modernist?’, p. 20.
Cunningham perceives the novel as hard work without reward, finding a ‘closed-shop’ instead of a rewarding narrative behind the glittering curtain of literary theoretical references, and the deception of the author, including ‘gobbets of what look like mimetic stuff’, only adds insult to injury. Indeed, theory and more specifically, the self-reflexivity of *Thru*, has become something of a ‘weight-around-the-neck’ for Brooke-Rose. When talking about her own experience of being the author of *Thru* in the third person, she states ‘the external harm that this book did to her reputation as incomprehensible and pretentious was lasting and profound’ (*STT*, p. 8). Indeed, this ‘novel about the theory of the novel [...] a narrative about narrativity, a fiction about fictionality, a text about textuality’ is the work that most academics use to define Brooke-Rose’s style; it has regularly earned her the brand of ‘postmodern author’, and the response to it continues to haunt her reputation (*STT*, p. 8). Keeping in mind the definition of the novel as ‘postmodern’, *Thru* can be regarded, in terms of Barthesian rhetoric, as one of the most advanced ‘writerly’ texts in existence, identifying with the ‘novelistic’ rather than the ‘novel’, privileging the ‘how’ over the ‘what’. Indeed, some contemporary contextual sources regard *Thru* as the limit of the postmodern text and position it as an extreme boundary that should not be crossed (Waugh, 1984; McHale, 1995). However, Glyn White makes a fresh observation when he states that ‘whether *Thru* is the epitome of postmodernism or of deconstructive fiction, the novel itself still needs to be read. Pigeonholing texts can only be the most basic response since it ignores individuality and specificity’ (White, p. 123). With this in mind, it would be useful to briefly outline the ‘plot’, as it will be referred to continuously throughout this section.

The novel centres on a relationship between two English Literature academics, both of whom are creative writing lecturers and teachers in literary theory, and are employed in universities in the USA. As the text progresses, the reader finds out that Larissa and Armel have been together for fifteen years (we are unsure if they were...

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married or not: Armel seems to think so but Larissa refutes this claim). Since their separation, both partners have had a selection of ‘affairs’; Larissa is currently having a relationship(s) with a man called Stavro (whose name occasionally changes to Marco and later, Oscar – the reader is unsure if this is the same man with different names that lexically resemble each other, or if they are different men). Armel is having a relationship with a woman/ women called Veronica (also Ruth). Both/all of these new lovers are much younger than our protagonists, and they are found to be unsatisfactory matches. At one point, the rekindling of the marriage/relationship between Armel and Larissa seems possible, although this does not occur. The creative writing classes that each of the lecturers teach run simultaneously to the relationship between Armel and Larissa, and the text is littered with names of students: Ali Nourennin is the first to be mentioned on the second page of the novel, as a tentative suggestion to the previously posed question ‘Who speaks?’ Initially, we assume that Armel and Larissa create the assignments for the classes, but later we are led to believe that the creative writing class is actually authoring the plot of Armel’s and Larissa’s lives as a communal writing assignment. This plot is heavily influenced and interrupted by a number of intertexts, which are generally the cause of confusion, as these texts are often academic and usually quite dense. Existing critical interpretation of Thru asserts that the post-structuralist psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan is one of the major intertexts, along with the work of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes (Grant, 1991; Birch, 1994; Berressem, 1995; Lawrence, 2010). While these are certainly pertinent points of theoretical contact, there are a number of other intertexts upon which Brooke-Rose draws. These other theoretical texts are largely concerned with theories of narratology and grammar, and Brooke-Rose draws on the structuralist discussions of Noam Chomsky, Gérard Genette, Roman Jakobson and A. J. Greimas. All of the philosophy and criticism with which Brooke-Rose is preoccupied in this novel attempts to identify structures within language (and therefore, within a text) that claim to describe subjectivity. The structuralist thinking and explanations provided by the narratologists come under particular scrutiny, and the rigidity of their diagrammatic explanations is mercilessly exposed by the author. Throughout the first half of this chapter I will attend to a number of sections of Thru where Brooke-Rose’s interrogation of literary theory verges on oppressive. In each case, I
will provide a brief description of the particular facet of literary theory upon which Brooke-Rose focuses, elucidating her motivation for analysis.

The aspect of Lacanian psychoanalysis that comes under particular scrutiny in Thru is his investigation into subjectivity. Lacan continued to develop his theories on this topic throughout his life, eventually settling on the idea that the psyche was structured in three parts: ‘the real’, ‘the imaginary’ and ‘the symbolic’. Although his investigations into ‘the real’ dominated his later career, it is his descriptions of ‘the imaginary’ that are most often cited, as they relate directly to the well-known theory of ‘the Mirror Stage’.16 Basing his work on that of James Baldwin and Sigmund Freud, Lacan asserted that between six and eighteen months old, a child goes through a period of identification of the self. This instance occurs by looking in a mirror and identifying the reflection as an image of the self rather than that of an Other: ‘It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context as an identification, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [assume] an image [...]’.17 Lacan returned to the ‘The Mirror Stage’ many times throughout his career and developed the idea in relation to the Hegelian philosophical principle of the Master/Slave dialectic, in his paper ‘The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire’ (1960). Here, Lacan makes clear reference to the ‘barred subject’ who can only recognise himself by projecting the past into the future:

this is a retroversion effect by which the subject, at each stage, becomes what he was (to be) [était] before that, and “he will have been” will only be announced in the future perfect tense. Here arises the ambiguity of misrecognizing that is essential to knowing myself [un mécconaitre essential au me connaître]. For, in this “rear view,” all the subject can be sure of is this anticipated image – which he had caught of himself – coming to meet him.18

This ‘rear view’ is an extremely pertinent image with regard to Brooke-Rose’s novel, as the first image with which the reader is confronted is that of a driver looking into a rear-
view mirror of a car: ‘Through the driving-mirror four eyes stare back/ two of them in their proper place’ (Thru, p. 579). Indeed, the title of the novel, along with this first image, often inspire comparisons of Thru to Lewis Carroll’s Through the Looking Glass (1871). This comparison is apt as very often, when reading Thru, the reader can feel like Alice trying to negotiate the chequered chess-board countryside, attempting to scale the landscape of the novel, trying to abide by established theoretical structures. There are a number of occasions within Thru where the reader notices instances of replication, reflection or a splitting of the subject, repeatedly invoking the mirror image of an alternate, but not an identical – rather a contradictory reflection.

In relation to Alice Through the Looking Glass, the reader will remember that there is somewhat of a Lacanian quality to the White Queen’s technique of remembering future events before they have happened, relating to the projection of a future present. However, the most significant aspect of the comparison is this process of movement implicit in the word ‘through’ and therefore, the repeated emphasis upon the space between one world and its reflected other. To be ‘moving through’ is an in-between state where nothing is permanent and everything is transient or changing in the same way that Brooke-Rose recognises the developmental processes in the literary architecture of France in 1968. This transitory state of existence is explored in detail in Brooke-Rose’s novel Between where the protagonist is in perpetual motion, travelling from place to place (I will expand on this in Chapter 3). The ambiguity of this position, existing as neither one thing nor the other while simultaneously existing as both, is a significant theme in Brooke-Rose’s work, and is confronted head-on in Thru. Brooke-Rose’s choice to spell the title with a ‘u’ rather than a ‘ough’ immediately invokes a sense of ambiguity to the novel, illustrating simultaneously the difference and similarity between the writing and speech: ‘ough’/ ‘u’ – confronting language with sound. Even the title can be regarded as an invocation of literary theory, relating to Saussure’s discussion in A Course in General Linguistics, where he defines ‘langue’ (language) from ‘parole’ (speaking) and the written representation of language/sound.20 Using the example of the

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20 Ferdinand de Saussure’s lectures were recorded and compiled by Charles Bally & Albert Sechehaye, A Course in General Linguistics (1916). I will be referring to the following version of the text: Ferdinand de
French word ‘oiseau’ meaning ‘bird’, but pronounced using the ‘spoken sound’ ‘wazo’, Saussure explains that here, ‘writing fails to record any part of the picture of language’. This example illustrates for Saussure the problem of the written representation of language: ‘writing obscures language; it is not a guise for language but a disguise.’

Derrida discusses Saussure’s argument in *Of Grammatology* (1967) a part of his investigation into the difference between ‘The Outside and the Inside’. Derrida recognises that for Saussure, writing is a ‘garment of perversion and debauchery, a dress of corruption and disguise, a festival mask that must be exorcised, that is to say warded off, by the good word’, however:

One already suspects that if writing is “image” and exterior “figuration,” this “representation” is not innocent. The outside bears with the inside a relationship that is, as usual, anything but simple exteriority. The meaning of the outside was always present within the inside, imprisoned outside the outside, and vice versa. Thus a science of language must recover the *natural*—that is, the simple and original—relationships between speech and writing, that is between an inside and an outside.

Brooke-Rose’s phonetic spelling of the title depicts the exterior figuration of the sound image, making clear reference to this contentious debate in literary theory: the representation of language through a written image.

As previously mentioned, the initial image in *Thru* is of a subject looking into a rear-view mirror at the reflection of two eyes, but in the reflection, the eyes appear to have been doubled as a result of the mirror’s refracted glass. Emma Kafalenos explains this ambiguity as ‘a characteristic of rearview [sic] mirrors equipped with anti-glare devices […] at night they sometimes double the pair of headlights of the car behind’. The resultant effect is similar to a hall of mirrors, the multiple replication of the image of the subject upon itself, reflection upon reflection; and as Lacan states, the potential for

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misrecognition is essential to the process of recognising the self within the reflection. Hanjo Berressem posits that this image is ‘the book’s main problematic: those [sic] of a doubly split subject’. While this is a well conceived analysis, I will argue that the main ‘problematic’ is more specific than Berressem recognises, and that the novel is primarily concerned with the relationship between the fragments of the split subject. Berressem goes on to state that Brooke-Rose’s change in language from English to French facilitates the metamorphosis of an object (the driving mirror) into a subject (le viseur). It links a spatial image to a subject caught between images originating from behind, which are projected forward by the mirror to Lacan’s notion of a decentred, barred subject which can recognize itself only by projecting its past into the future.26

The change in agency of the rear-view mirror (from object in English to subject in French), predicts the change in the driver of the car, as well as articulating the difference between the identification of the self and the reflected other: ‘a reflection of eyes’/ ‘the reflection of my own eyes’. This change from the objective to the subjective calls into question the objectivity/subjectivity of the author/reader axis, making the role of the author/reader ambiguous. The language shift from English to French alters the image of the driver in the mirror. Whereas, in English, the reflection in a ‘driving-mirror’ means simply, a reflection of the driver, the loaded French term ‘réteroviseur’ inspires connotations of the ‘Mirror Stage’ and indeed, the images in the mirror become more than reflections, turning into projections of the past self or the ‘barred subject’. In this respect, the images in the mirror are forming a kind of loop between the past and the future, and the fact that the driver is travelling in the car (as confirmed by the ‘dancing hoops’ (Thru, p. 582) of light – the headlights of the car travelling behind) – implies that the process of projecting by the barred subject is also in a state of continual motion. Berressem likens this process to a Möbius strip, explaining that ‘the Möbial structure is represented by the chiasm [the loop/ circle of past and future], in whose structure meaning is twisted just as space is twisted from Cartesian space into the one-sided space

Berressem’s notion of the Möbial quality of the relationship between the past, the subject and the projected past/future of that subject is well formed, as both Möbial space and the relationship are paradoxical in the terms that they seem to be logically impossible, yet they exist. This is an example of another common theme in Brooke-Rose’s fiction: the confrontation of the reader with a paradox and the juxtaposition of contradictories.

The Möbius strip is an example of a deconstructive key, one of those concepts that undo logic, and act as modes of contradiction. This is discussed in Jacques Derrida’s essay ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ (1968) where he asserts that the duplicitous nature of language and therefore, the text, is synonymous with the Greek term ‘pharmakon’:

Socrates compares the written texts Phaedrus has brought along to a drug. This pharmakon, this “medicine,” this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this virtue, this power of fascination can be – alternately or simultaneously – beneficent or maleficent [...] The leaves of writing act as a pharmakon to push or attract out of the city the one who never wanted to get out, even at the end, to escape the hemlock.

Derrida goes on to assert that the pharmakon, like language, is simultaneously creating understanding and immediately erasing it through its inherent ambiguity. Yet another example of this can be found in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s analysis of the illusionary image of the duck/rabbit, published in his Philosophical Investigations (1953). Wittgenstein notes that the viewer of the image struggles to account for the duplicitous nature of the image: “‘But surely you would say that the picture is altogether different now!’ But what is different: my impression? my point of view? – Can I say? I describe the alteration like a perception: quite as if the object had altered before my very eyes.” Of course, the image is physically unchanged during this process, but what is significant is the change in the perspective of the viewer and the struggle to accept the duplicity of the image: the

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27 Berressem, p. 106. ‘Cartesian space’ is a term which relates to the mathematical principles of René Descartes, whose La Géométrie (1637) expressed the first occasion where physical space could be accounted for through mathematical algebraic equations.
image is always both duck and rabbit, while simultaneously being neither duck nor rabbit. All of these deconstructive keys articulate the perception of a shift in subjectivity.

These theoretical approaches are extremely valuable when reading the self-reflective text Thru, as they assert that the process of identification is simultaneously a process of alienation. As the text constructs itself, it is simultaneously deconstructing itself – in the same way that Derrida sees language as being deconstructive. The novel constantly raises ambiguities and presents the reader with contradictions. Indeed, is it a fiction or is it a critical work? Is it a novel about Larissa and Armel, or is it an exercise written by their students? The reader is repeatedly asked to try to quantify and define the novel, but there are always multiple obstructions and contradictory evidence preventing him/her from doing so effectively. In a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver, James Joyce describes his own writing in these terms: ‘each successive episode, dealing with some province of artistic culture (rhetoric or music or dialectic), leaves behind it a burnt up field.’ In his analysis of this letter, Stephen Heath describes this as the ‘scorching’ effect of Joyce’s writing: ‘In its activity, the writing scorches a path “outside” these fields, continually destroying itself as an object.’ The inevitable nature of this scorching in Joyce’s writing is reminiscent of Brooke-Rose’s novel, as Thru simultaneously constructs and deconstructs itself as it progresses, a continual process of being sous rature. However, from the description above, there is a sense that Joyce regards this ‘scorching’ as being uncontrollable and almost maligns it, whereas Thru seems to revel in its deconstruction, in a way that can only be described as masochistic.

It is this masochistic tendency of Thru that is responsible for the uncertainty with regard to the plot: just as facets of the narrative seem to become stabilised, the text immediately begins to deconstruct itself, whipping away the reader’s footholds, allowing him/her to tumble further down the rabbit hole, deeper into the text. For instance, the identity of the driver is unknown to the reader, although there are instances where

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32 ‘Sous rature’ is a reference to the term used by Martin Heidegger and then later, extensively by Derrida (see Of Grammatology). It is usually translated as ‘under erasure’, and involves the crossing out of a word in a text but still allowing it to remain legible and in place to signify that the word is inaccurate, but necessary.
Brooke-Rose includes certain loaded phrases and words that encourage the reader to guess at the gender or ethnicity of the subject. However, over the course of the novel, the driver seems to change. At the beginning of the text there are a number of textual insinuations asserting that the driver is male: ‘the close-cropped mat of hair’, ‘the mat of hair is khaki, growing a bit too low on the brow/ the nose too big’, ‘handsome’, ‘a young god’, ‘the muscular shoulders’ (Thru, pp. 579-581). In her explanatory chapter of the first twenty pages of Thru in Invisible Author: Last Essays (2002), Brooke-Rose identifies the driver as male: ‘the driver leans to the right to see his four eyes in the rectangular mirror [...] the driver himself’ (IA, p. 68). The driver is, at this stage, described as the ‘vizir looming grey eminence’ as it is he who leans to the right in order to peer into ‘rectangles a thousand and one in which there is a flaw’ (Thru, p. 580). This ‘flaw’ could refer to the inability of the mirror to provide exact copies of the subject, and this can be read both as ‘all one thousand and one rectangles (mirrors) have a flaw’ or, ‘one thousand rectangles (mirrors), and in one there is a flaw’. The pun and subsequent change from the ‘viseur’ of the first page to the ‘vizir’ on the second page identifies a change in language and intertext. Brooke-Rose is not using Lacan as the primary intertext in the second reference, rather she is punning on Lacan’s text, playing with the existing knowledge of the reader by engaging with the ancient Persian story A Thousand and One Arabian Nights. The character of the ‘vizir’ is the advisor to the King and the despairing father of Scheherazade. This intertext has appeared previously on the second page of the novel where the reader is first introduced to ‘rectangles a thousand and one’ (Thru, p. 580). This reference is followed by a mention of ‘Some tale-bearer’ and the demand for ‘your story or your life’. In the frame tale to A Thousand and One Arabian Nights, Scheherazade cunningly tells the sultan only half a story every night in order to assure that he will not execute her in the morning. Her life depends on her storytelling, as is reinforced in Thru: ‘wot no story? no life’ (Thru, p. 580). This story is recalled again in Textermination where it becomes a particularly pertinent intertext, as all of the characters in this novel face the threat of extinction at the hands of the Reader. Ida Maria Samperi comments upon the similarity between Textermination and Thru noting the repeated presence of the Scheherazade in both novels. Samperi states that:
She is always caught up between the difficulties which narration implies and the threat of execution in case her story will not result interesting enough to her listener [sic]. Like Scheherazade, the encoded author [of Thru] will not live unless his/her narrative is appreciated.33

Indeed, this analysis reminds the reader of White’s demands that the book must ‘be read’ in order to appreciate its individuality and specific discussion of literary engagement.

In her explanatory notes for this page, Brooke-Rose states that after the mention of ‘a thousand and one’ rectangles, the ‘eyes and their owner are described from outside, either by the girl talking or thinking though she hasn’t been mentioned yet, or by the driver himself’ but after the mention of Nourennin, ‘the “speaker” is no longer the viseur/vizir but, possibly a new character of Arab origin’ (IA, p. 68). It is unclear to which ‘girl’ Brooke-Rose is referring here, and indeed, there is a suggestion that either Brooke-Rose herself is unclear of the speaker at this stage, or she is trying to maintain an air of mystery. Either way, even the notes to this section are full of ambiguity. The key aspect of which to take note is the identification of the vizir and the possible ‘new character’ as being of Arab origin. Later in the novel, there is an argument between a character called Ruth (an anagram of the title of the novel) and Armel which culminates in her calling him a ‘Nigger bastard’ and he calling her a ‘Jewish slut’ (Thru, p. 624) in return. This derogatory description of Armel suggests that he could be considered as a possibility for the ‘new character’ of Arab origin that doubles as the narrator/driver. In fact, this encounter between Ruth and Armel turns out to be a creative writing exercise in dialogue by a student called Myra Kaplin, submitted to Professor Sartores (only one letter away from Santores – Armel’s last name), who responds to it well, despite the end of the section being a ‘bit bathetic’ (Thru, p. 626) for him.

Later in the novel, there is an implication that the driver is Larissa, but a masculinised version of her created by one of the students in the creative writing class that becomes the central creative and narrative force behind the novel: ‘[…] once upon a

time Larissa is a little girl. Why however did you crop her hair then grow it again and dye it black and give her three illegitimate children and an iconic nose?’ (Thru, pp. 675-676)

This later description of Larissa fits with the image of the masculine driver that appears at the beginning of the text. However, in between these descriptions, Brooke-Rose makes the relevance of the protagonist’s names clear to the reader through a remarkably straightforward piece of dialogue between the ‘borrowed’ characters of Jacques and his Master from Diderot’s *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* (1796, trans. *Jacques the Fatalist*):

**ARMEL SANTORES**

**LARISSA TOREN**

Yes! It figures. So that’s why she said about Armel not finding his ME in her and she not finding her I. Why the names are anagrams. Except for ME in hers and I in his. (Thru, p. 647)

The anagrammatic resemblance between the two names is crucial, and on account of its significance, Brooke-Rose repeats Larissa’s own words here (just in case the reader missed them earlier (Thru, p. 631)), in a rhetoric and dialogue that is noticeably easier to follow than the rest of the text. As Damian Grant shrewdly notes, without either Larissa’s ‘I’ or Armel’s ‘ME’, they ‘share, anagrammatically, the phrase “narrate loss”’.  

For Grant, it is precisely this shared anagrammatic experience that causes the anxiety in *Thru*: the struggle for narratorship and narrative between the nominative and accusative first person pronouns.  

In this respect the novel becomes an experiment in subjectivity that examines and enacts its own loss. The tumultuous relationship between Larissa and Armel is indicative of the struggle for the domination of each of these pronouns throughout the text. Each of them battles for narration, and while one is narrating, the other becomes the ‘barred subject’, only able to exist as a reflection of the narrator’s past life. However, neither of them succeeds in becoming the main narrator, and both are eventually superseded by the students in the creative writing class.

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35 Grant, ‘Narrative Anxiety in *Thru*’, p. 120.
By fabricating and emulating the discourse between Jacques and his master from Diderot’s novel at this point in her own text, Brooke-Rose is asking the reader to draw upon knowledge that she assumes the reader possesses. In Diderot’s original novel, Jacques is continually being interrupted in his storytelling of his amours by interjecting stories from other characters. Jacques is dependent upon his Master to listen to his story, and his Master is in some ways dependent on Jacques to narrate. In his essay ‘Jacques le fataliste et son maître: finding myself in the work of another’ (2011), Joseph Breines describes Diderot’s novel as

a novel about the novel, indeed about storytelling in all its forms: about readers and writers, tellers and listeners. And it is about all these things above all by virtue of its ‘self-referential’ passages – those in which the text calls attention to itself as a text, as an artefact, as literature. On account of this, it has sometimes been referred to as an ‘anti-novel’ [...]36

This description of Diderot’s novel is remarkably similar to Brooke-Rose’s own description of Thru (mentioned above) in Stories, Theories & Things (1991), and indeed, could be applied just as appropriately to either novel. Breines proceeds to interrogate Jacques’ determinism by drawing attention to the instance in the novel where the protagonist finds himself in an existentialist philosophical debate with his Master: ‘Can I stop being me, or failing that, can I behave as though I were not me? Can I be both me and somebody else?’37 With this quotation in mind, it is pertinent to consider whether the Jacques that appears in Thru is entirely the same Jacques that is in Diderot’s novel, and indeed, can it be? Whose Jacques belongs to whom? Brooke-Rose expands on this discussion in her later novel Textermination (1991) where she appropriates characters from various works of classic literature, lifting them from their own texts, using them to her own ends, in order to discuss the future of the novel. The lifting of Jacques and his Master from Diderot’s novel and their placement in Thru, reminds the reader of Diderot’s own act of confessed plagiarism in Jacques le fataliste et son maître where he admits to copying a passage from Laurence Sterne’s The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy,

Gentleman. The dialogue between Jacques and his Master is fundamental to the dislocation and disorientation of the reader in both novels. The reader of unmarked dialogue is often confused, continually asking himself/herself: ‘Who is speaking?’

The struggle for narration is an issue that arises on the first page of the novel with the question ‘Who speaks?’ This is an intertextual reference to Barthes’ S/Z (1970) and Lacan’s aforementioned essay ‘The Subversion of the Subject’ (1960) where both theorists identify the question ‘Qui Parle?’ or ‘Who is speaking?’ This question emphasises Thru’s own uncertainty of the narrative voice and increases the level of ambiguity for the reader as on the first page, there appears to be at least two narrative voices: one that has been narrating, and the other that is questioning ‘Who speaks?’ The self-reflexive aspect of the novel is made evident from the beginning and, for the more theoretically minded reader, it becomes evident that Brooke-Rose is capable of using more than one theoretical text as an intertext at any one time. The question ‘Who speaks?’ implies that, at least at this stage, this narrator is not omniscient. By invoking the question from the work of Lacan and Barthes, Brooke-Rose also comments upon Gérard Genette’s later idea of ‘focalisation’ or the ‘who sees?’ of a text. With the concept of focalisation, the narrative information is restricted as it is related to the experience and knowledge of the narrator or other characters within a text. The reference to Genette is bound within the image of the reflected driver, as the narrative voices in the text are ambiguous and frequently changing, and the reflected other is similarly unknown to the reader. Further to the question ‘Who speaks?’ there is a repeated refrain that appears throughout the novel, asking ‘Who’s she when she’s at home?’ (Thru, p. 538; p. 631) This question encapsulates the ambiguity of the identity of the subject, asserting that the individual exists as different ‘selves’ in different contexts, while simultaneously recognising that these ‘selves’ belong to the same subject. The various narrative voices that appear in dialogue from plagiarised characters, theories and quotations all exist simultaneously in more than one place, simply because they exist in Thru, as well as in their original state. There is also a sense that all of these intertextual references (from fiction and theory) are in communication with one another, revealing their awareness of

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each other via overlapping areas of interest. As it is shown above, at times the work of Genette, Barthes and Lacan all focus on similar aspects of the analysis of a text. In this sense, each theory builds upon another, developing certain analytical points of thought by building extensions upon established theories in the same way that Brooke-Rose describes the architecture of Paris in 1968 in *The Spectator*.

Brooke-Rose invokes Genette’s work in order to demonstrate the limits of the subject, and indeed the characters within the plot, in comparison to the engineer of the plot which in this case, is the text itself. Throughout his discussions on narratology, Genette makes specific categorisations with regard to the ‘voice’ of a text. When listing the ways in which the voice can appear in the text, he states ‘the last type is a priori the most complex, since it involves a narrating with several instances, and since the story and narrating can become entangled in such a way that the latter has an effect on the former.’ ³⁹ Genette relates this type of narration to the epistolary novel with several correspondents where ‘we know, the letter is at the same time a medium of narration and an element of plot.’ ⁴⁰ As it has been noted above, there are significant parts of the novel that appear to be contributory passages to the plot of *Thru*, but are also simultaneously creations of the student characters within the novel; for instance, the previously mentioned argument between Ruth and Armel, and the description of Larissa as the driver of the car. To add to these occasions, there are instances where the novel becomes an epistolary documentation of Larissa and Armel’s relationship. An account of first contact appears in a letter form from Larissa to Armel describing her desire to meet him to discuss his poems in relation to structuralist theories. This letter is immediately followed by Armel’s response to Larissa not meeting him at the designated time and place:

Dear Miss Toren,

I am so sorry we missed each other. I waited till seven but had to go out. The cab-driver must have been very stupid for my street though small is not so hard to

find (that’s a stilted pentameter). Of course if I lived in Manhattan it wouldn’t have happened as it’s all rectangles. *(Thru, p. 660)*

Although Larissa and Armel have missed meeting each other for the first time, we know (because of the information that has preceded this textual encounter) that the two do eventually meet. Therefore, this information about their first meeting acts as both a medium of narration and an element of plot, but more significantly, it provides information regarding the power structure between the two characters: it is Larissa that is asking Armel for answers regarding the critical analysis of his own work. Armel appears as the creative force and Larissa as the analyser or critic, or perhaps even, student. This relationship is in itself deconstructive, as the author (in this case, Armel) creates a text, and the critic (in this case, Larissa) undoes it by analysing it through literary theory (in this case, Structuralism). It appears that they have been identified as binary forces from the beginning. Armel makes reference to the rectangles of Manhattan’s geographic structure that would have enabled a successful meeting. The repetition of the rectangles here, only reminds the reader of the repeated pattern of the rectangle of the rear-view mirror and the hall-of-mirrors effect that such a repetition creates; the reflected other repeated inside itself. Indeed, its pairing here with Larissa’s Structuralist interrogation of Armel’s work inspires thoughts of the Greimas square and Jakobson’s functions of language diagram that similarly repeat as tropes throughout the novel.

The first occasion where a reference to the Greimas square appears is on the seventh page of the novel *(Thru, p. 585)*. By this stage the reader has become aware of what White refers to as the ‘graphic surface’ *(White, p. 122)* of the text, and is conscious that the typography is as significant as the content. The rectangle motif has already clearly presented itself on a number of occasions, and therefore, has been noted (or should have been noted) as significant by the reader. The section of text above the diagram contains a reference to Ezra Pound’s *The Cantos*. The line ‘Hang it all’ is a direct lifting of Pound’s own words, originally found in Canto I, but then moved, in the redrafted versions, to Canto II. In its original location in Canto I, this line forms part of a concocted discourse between Pound and Robert Browning, author of *Sordello* (1840), about the process of writing the poem:
Hang it all, there can be but the one “Sordello,”
But say I want to, say I take your whole bag of tricks,
Let in your quirks and tweeks, and say the thing’s an art form
Your Sordello, and that the modern world/ Needs such a rag-bag to stuff its thoughts in;
Say I dump my catch, shiny and silvery
As fresh sardines flapping and slipping on the marginal cobbles?41

Michaela Giesenkirchen comments upon this dialogue, noting that ‘Pound points out Browning’s “quirks and tweeks,” the jarring idiosyncrasies of his poetry [...] Yet it is precisely this daring strategy of assembling the disparate that Pound finds intriguing’.42 Giesenkirchen, goes on to state that Pound particularly dwells on Browning’s montage of historical figures, facts, events and settings. He knowingly appraises Browning’s “bag of tricks,” devices for putting historical and literary to free poetic use [...] Alluding to the rags of Sordello’s narrator’s motley dress, Pound labels a “rag-bag” Browning’s technique of employing background materials, his drawing together bits and pieces into a plethora of textual and historical details. Pound implies that Browning has given him a good excuse for similarly pouring out on the public shore whatever he has gathered from the ocean of his readerly consciousness.43

This is precisely what Brooke-Rose does with Thru, allowing the ‘rag-bag’ of her consciousness to wash-up various references and ‘bits and pieces’ of literary theory and fictional figures onto the shores of the page. When discussing the influence of Robert Browning’s poetry upon Pound, and indeed, the presence of Browning’s personae (amongst others) within The Cantos, Brooke-Rose proclaims that

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43 Giesenkirchen, “‘But Sordello, My Sordello’”, p. 624.
This, to me, is ultimately what is meant by the ‘personae’ of Pound: his endeavour, so early, long before Ripostes even, “to undergo purposefully a multiplicity of influences” in order to achieve, painfully, slowly, and by no means always or consistently, that perfect balance of the subjective and objective, presence and absence, ghost and full-bodied flesh, past and present, fact and fiction, high seriousness and humour. (A ZBC, p. 44)

In this respect, Thru is a text that harbours a highly Poundian aesthetic. As I have discussed in Chapter 1, Brooke-Rose freely admits that Pound influenced her writing. The direct quotation of these particular lines in Thru related specifically to what I would describe as being the main ‘problematic’ of the novel: the gulf/ difference/ balance/ relationship between contradictories, and the relationship between the different fragments/versions of the subject. This is made blatant throughout the novel with the repeated appearance of the Greimas square (see Figure 1 in Appendices). In this diagram, the crossed axis represents the relationship between contradictories, and it is this shape that the reader finds repeated throughout the novel.

The second part of the reference to Pound’s Cantos is in the second half of the first line of this section: ‘we have the story of an I’ (Thru, p. 585). The reference to an ‘I story’ is in relation to the identification of the self/ the subject. It is a reference to the later version of Canto II, in which Pound questions the identity of Sordello in an effort to find out which Sordello is which: ‘there can be but the one Sordello/ But Sordello, and my Sordello?/ Lo Sordels si fo di Mantovana’. Christopher Beach claims that there ‘are in fact three Sordellos: the historical figure, an Italian troubadour of the thirteenth century; the fictionalized version from Browning’s long poem Sordello [...] and Pound’s own version of Sordello, which must be different from Browning’s.’ This quotation perfectly illustrates the concept of the ‘split subject’ and the intertextuality in Thru. It is also a particularly pertinent reference to remember later in the novel, when Jacques and his Master appear. Indeed, this is also a useful reference to recall when reading Textermination, where multiple versions of the same subject/character appear and

confront each other. The ‘I’ of the story appears here inside a triangle (Thru, p. 585). The ‘I triangle’ has been seen before on the first page, indicating the shape of a road sign, as well as representing of the nose of the driver. Here, the ‘I triangle’ is followed directly by the capitalised letter ‘O’. In her explanatory notes, Brooke-Rose attributes the positioning of the ‘I’ and the ‘O’ in this section as ‘translating Lacan’s A for Autre or Other’ (IA, p. 78). However, it can also be interpreted as a reference to Saussure’s theory of semiotics and the development of meaning through binaries. Claude Levi Strauss’ development of Saussure’s semiology and his application of it to kinship systems is also relevant here, as both theories discuss the subject in terms of its value. This value is determined by the relationship that the subject has to itself and other subjects. Influenced strongly by the work of Hegel, Levi Strauss believed that binaries (self and other/subject and object) and the relationship between them is the way in which human beings process all thoughts, and in turn create meaning: 1 is 1 because it is not 0.

In the Greimas Square that appears on page 598, the ‘I’ that appears in the top right corner can be regarded as a positive value representing 1 as in binary code, and the ‘O’ as an absence of value or 0 (zero). Although this reference to coding might seem oblique, it can be regarded as yet another piece of intellectual debris that has been washed up onto the shore of the page. Brooke-Rose’s experience working in Bletchley Park, dealing with codes and coding had significant effects upon the way she regarded language and its functions. The relationship between coded language and its decoded ‘other’ version became of paramount importance to Brooke-Rose at an early stage of her life. The appearance of the crossed arrows acts as an articulation of the development from one signifier to another, illustrating the exact point at which something (one particular unit of language) becomes something else. This connection between versions of language can be seen most clearly, and at a molecular level, when looking at the way the British Bombe worked to decode the Enigma machine during the Second World War. The British Bombe, which had been designed by Alan Turing and Harold ‘Doc’ Keen, an employee at the British Tabulating Machine Company at Letchworth, was an electromagnetic machine used to determine an Enigma key. The Bombe was ‘designed to

carry out a systematic search to determine the following components of an Enigma key: the rota order, the ‘rota core starting positions’, and some of the ‘steckers’.\textsuperscript{47} Gordon Welchman, a colleague of Turing’s at Bletchley Park worked out that ten letters had reversible relationships with other letters, and their connection would have been preselected each day by the German transmitters. This paired relationship was called a ‘stecker’ (the German word for ‘plug’), and by determining the ten stecker pairs, the key could be found more efficiently. The remaining six letters would be referred to as ‘single steckered’ or ‘unsteckered’. The Bombe was not the only means of decrypting the codes created by the Enigma machine; however, ‘at its peak this operation enabled 4000 messages to be broken every day and provided the Allies with unprecedented levels of intelligence’.\textsuperscript{48}

Although Brooke-Rose’s work at Bletchley Park had not allowed her to have direct contact with the Bombe or its engineers, the messages that she received daily and had been required to translate and prioritise would have been decrypted with the help of this machine. The Bombe’s ability to connect one letter to its contradictory ‘other’, showing the ‘stecker’ relationship between two signifiers has been replicated by Brooke-Rose in \textit{Thru}, by her engagement with structuralist theory. In this sense, \textit{Thru} is a coded text, and the reader is required to decode it using his/her knowledge of literary theory and fiction (the signifier in the text – be it a word, phrase or character – is connected to its signified concept and forms a ‘steckered pair’). It is a textual puzzle, an intellectual game, a cryptic crossword waiting to be investigated by the reader whose role is not to solve it but to play it, to interact with it, and to be the ‘writerly’ producer of the text. It is full of puns and duplicitous language and in this respect it is a playful and humorous novel, as well as being highly technical and specialised.

In the diagram on page 585, only the relationship between contradictories is shown, emphasising the relationship between the subject and his/her contradictory ‘Other’. Brooke-Rose explains her decision to only show the relationship between contradictories as ‘calqued on a somewhat personal version of the Lacanian zigzag rectangle of subject and object’ (\textit{IA}, p. 78). It is significant to note that the focus upon subjectivity is maintained throughout the use of these diagrams and the differentiation


\textsuperscript{48} Frank Carter, ‘The Turing Bombe’ (2010).
between the subject and the object is similar to the psychoanalytic relationship between the self and the Other. The repetition of the crossed-arrows also forms the letter ‘x’ enabling the question ‘should you start structuring your text that way or the latter way?’ (Thru, p. 585) a hint to multiple possibilities of structure (multiplication in the field of mathematics is signified by the symbol ‘x’). The crossed-arrows reappear on page 598 over a paragraph of text, giving the impression that the text underneath is being crossed out. This is an example of the aforementioned concept of sous rature: where a section of text is ‘under erasure’ and appears, legible and in place, but simultaneously crossed out, implying that it is not relevant or required. However, the fact that the section of text ‘under erasure’ can still be read is often very revealing. Examples of sous rature bring in to question the value of the hidden text: is this section of text more valuable to the reader because the text itself has positioned it as ‘under erasure’? Will this section reveal hidden treasures? Nuggets of information that the text does not want to be revealed? Or, is it a double cross? A ploy to get the reader to pay attention to this section that seems to be of no ‘use’ to the text? In short, examples of sous rature are intended to make the reader question his/her own process of reading and indeed, to question the information that they have already obtained from the text. The corner letters of the paragraph sous rature are capitalised letters reading left to right, top to bottom I, O, O, I. If the reader were to substitute the letters for numbers as above, he/she would read 1001, which is reminiscent of the earlier ‘one thousand and one rectangles’ of the rear-view hall of mirrors and A Thousand and One Arabian Nights as well as being directly referential to binary coding.

The first and last letter of each line of this paragraph is capitalised to create a vertical line of text, the left side of which reads ‘INORDERTO’ or ‘IN ORDER TO’ and the right hand side reads its inversion, ‘OTREDRONI’. The paragraph itself is concerned with the students looking at an overhead projector in class. This is relevant due to the appearance of the inverted text and the necessary inversion or reversal of text and images from the acetate to the projected image. The overhead projector epitomises the function of Thru as it takes an image and using a reflective surface, flips the image in order that the presenter/viewer can see the image that is on the original, rather than the contradictory mirror image of the document. There are certain words that penetrate the
paragraph that relate directly to Greimas’ theory: ‘contraries contradictories subalterns’ and ‘surface structure’. ‘Surface structure’ can also be read as a reference to Chomskian linguistic theory in which he differentiates between the ‘surface structure’ and ‘deep structure’ of transformational grammar.49 Each time the crossed-arrows appear, the reader is reminded of the composition of a narrative structure and of the relationship between contradictories, specifically the relationship between the subject and its contradictory, the object.

The appearance of the Jakobson diagram further reminds the reader of the ‘surface structure’ of writing, as the purpose of this diagram is to assess the function of a text. The main aspect of Jakobson’s diagram that is interrogated in Thru is the ‘CODE’ or the ‘Metalinguistic Function’. Thru can be defined as a ‘postmodern text’ precisely because of its ‘metatextuality’: a text’s self-awareness, and its use and critique of other texts as part of its own narrative. Genette discusses the concept of ‘metatextuality’ alongside that of ‘intertextuality’, classifying both terms under his own more general umbrella term ‘transtextuality’: ‘the transtextual relationship that links a commentary to the text it comments on. All literary critics, for centuries, have been producing metatext without knowing it.’50 Brooke-Rose replicates Jakobson’s diagram in full after a clinical discussion between the students and one of the teachers (it is unclear which one) regarding the function of literature and its ‘yield or profit or value’ as being directly related to its ‘Motivation’ or ‘what is necessary to conceal the function’ (Thru, p. 628). The class proposes an equation to illustrate this relationship: ‘V= F – M’. Although, they assert that ‘an implicit Motivation costs nothing and will give V= F – O, i.e. V=F’ (Thru, p. 628). Therefore, the ‘value’ of literature is equal to, or the same as its function. A voice (we can assume it is the teacher) goes on to comment that:

Literature is an object of exchange […]. Socrates was selling Virtue, Truth and Beauty etc. in return for a certain ability and pleasure in dialectic […]. my function here is not to narrate but to teach, or shall we say I am not a function of your narrative, and we are using metalanguage, so:

49 For a more detailed analysis of Brooke-Rose’s use of Chomskian theory, see Chapters 4 and 5.
This section of text clearly asserts the linguistic function of the novel by using Jakobson’s diagram, while simultaneously satirising it by visually representing it as a tourist information map. The inclusion of ‘YOU ARE HERE’ and the addition of the arrow is a comic aside to the reader as it predicts his/her disorientation after having read the previous passage. The parody of the tourist information map implies that the reader is not yet at his destination, but that he/she is mid-way through/thru a process of travel from one location to another. The parenthesis that follows the diagram implies that there is a percentage of readers that get ‘imprisoned’ in the message of the text. This is a reference to those readers who are imprisoned by their own expectations of the novel as being poetic in its function, while simultaneously, nudging towards the idea that each of the functions of the novel is irrelevant, it is only the relationship between the text and its function that is relevant: the privileging of the ‘process’ rather than the end result. The text that follows this diagram calls for ‘placards saying: Danger. You are now entering the Metalinguistic Zone’ (Thru, p. 629). This request reminds us of the ‘I triangle’ on the very
first page of the novel that expressed a warning to ‘slow down’ and indeed, a slow and careful reading is imperative if we are to appreciate the metalinguistic function of the text.

Peter Ackroyd regarded Brooke-Rose’s ‘magpie scholarship’ approach to literary theory in *Thru* as being ‘tedious’. However, there is much to be said for Brooke-Rose’s appropriation of these theoretical approaches. The effect of this method of appropriation is not merely plagiarism, lifting the work of various literary theorists directly from their texts; but rather Brooke-Rose builds a theoretical stage platform where she lays open a forum for discussion of ‘transtextuality’ and all the terms it covers. Brooke-Rose’s agenda is not to pass these theories off as her own, rather to reveal them as fictions about the construction of the text. Each of the theoretical approaches that I have discussed above attempts to provide a narrative that explains how a text, and more specifically, how language works. In *Stories Theories & Things*, Brooke-Rose asks and answers the question ‘Whatever happened to narratology? It got swallowed into story seems the obvious answer, it slid off the slippery methods of a million structures and became the story of its own functioning’ (*STT*, p. 16). In a sense, this is exactly what happens in *Thru*. Brooke-Rose collects narratives of literary theory and dialogues from fiction and poetry and builds her own narrative out of them. In this respect, *Thru* can be regarded as an example of what Levi-Strauss and Derrida would call a *bricolage*, and Brooke-Rose a *bricoleur*:

The *bricoleur*, says Levi-Strauss, is someone who uses "the means at hand," that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogenous -- and so forth. There is therefore a critique of language in the form of *bricolage*, and it has even been possible to say that *bricolage is* the critical language itself. I am thinking in particular of the article by G[erard] Genette, "Structuralisme et Critique

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51 Ackroyd, ‘Modernist?’, p. 20.
litteraire," published in homage to Levi-Strauss in a special issue of L’Arc, where it is stated that the analysis of *bricolage* could "be applied almost word for word" to criticism, and especially to "literary criticism."\(^{52}\)

Brooke-Rose did not have to look far for the ‘instruments’ with which to construct *Thru*. During those early years at Vincennes, Barthes, Genette, Cixous, Todorov, and Derrida were all on the staff in either the English literature, American literature or the Philosophy departments, and the ‘minor revolution’ in literary theory was, if not quite ‘at hand’ (as she had not moved to Paris until the October after the May revolution), discussed in her earshot.

As previously mentioned, the reception to *Thru* was less than encouraging, and the damage that the novel had on Brooke-Rose’s reputation was destructive and long-lasting. In spite of this reception, Brooke-Rose maintained that it had been the novel of which she was ‘most proud’ (*IA*, p. 63). *Invisible Author*, Brooke-Rose asserts that after she had written *Thru* she ‘was not interested in attempting the same experiment again’ (*IA*, p. 63). In fact, I will argue that Brooke-Rose did revisit this experiment sixteen years later, conducting the mirror image of *Thru*’s experiment in *Textermination*. Rather than creating a *bricolage* out of literary theories, the result of which alienated and disoriented even the most accomplished readers, Brooke-Rose collects character-based narratives from realist texts that span literary history in her novel *Textermination* (1991). Rather than focusing on the relationship between critical theories and fiction, with *Textermination*, Brooke-Rose focuses upon the interaction of literary characters with the reader. The classic, well established characters that appear throughout this novel are similarly ‘magpied’ from existing works. In her summarising of the novel, Karen Lawrence has defined *Textermination* as ‘literary criticism conducted in fictional form’ (Lawrence, p. 146). In the remainder of this chapter, I will identify how Brooke-Rose confronts the same issues of subjectivity and agency with this later novel. I will argue that although her focus has shifted to a more character-based experiment, Brooke-Rose continues to interrogate the structures implicit within the text, and identifies the moment at which these structures begin to deconstruct.

**Textermination (1991): The Process Revisited**

Although it has been mentioned above, it is worthwhile to recall that the title *Textermination* had been originally intended for the novel *Thru*. Brooke-Rose’s return to this title after fifteen years is symbolic of her continued preoccupation with the ideas of the text as being a medium that is under threat. In the novel *Thru*, Brooke-Rose identifies the most prominent threat to the traditional novel form as being an over-abundance of literary theory and literary critical approaches to creative writing. However, in the same breath she asserts that literary theory, particularly the investigation through more complex works of poststructuralist literary theory, can often be enlightening and useful in producing a deeper structured reading of the text. The ambiguity of this position encapsulates *Thru*, revealing the duplicitous nature of reading and indeed, of language: to account for a text through a theoretical lens both clarifies and obscures it. This simultaneous construction and deconstruction is repeated in *Textermination*, and the anxiety that surrounds this process is illustrated in the characters’ quest for survival.

The perspective has changed in *Textermination*, as the reader is not dislocated from the text as in *Thru*; rather, the reader is encouraged to identify with the classic characters from literary fiction who are anxious about their own extermination from the literary canon. Despite the fact that these characters originate from multiple contexts, cultures and histories, they are often easier to recognise than the theoretical frameworks that appear in *Thru*, and many readers will have encountered a number of them before. However, that is not to say that the reader of *Textermination* is expected to be *au fait* with all of the borrowed characters, and often one empathises with Kelly McFadgeon, ‘the orange-haired Interpreter’, who fears that she does not recognise every name on the guest list: ‘Gaps, so many gaps in her reading, she’ll never catch up’ (*Text*, p. 22).

These recognisable aspects of the novel have led to the reviews being rather warmer than those of *Thru*. In his review of the novel in *The London Review of Books*, Nicolas Tredall stated that ‘With those characters the reader already knows, *Textermination* offers the pleasures of both recognition and novelty [...] the promiscuous mix of characters in *Textermination* produces startling, often comic juxtapositions’.  

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review is in stark contrast to those of Thru which regard Brooke-Rose’s juxtapositions of literary theories as being pretentious, essentially French and consequently, irrelevant to the British literary climate. With Textermination, Brooke-Rose reinvented herself as an author of British literature, celebrating and nostalgically reminiscing over classic literary characters. However, the nostalgia that sweeps over the novel is tainted by a pervading feeling of anxiety that haunts the characters throughout the text. This feeling of anxiety and the threat of extinction will be expanded upon in Chapter 4.

The central plot of the novel focuses upon a conference at the San Francisco Hilton hotel, much in the style of the Modern Language Association conference that Brooke-Rose had attended previous to writing Textermination. Characters from literary works are invited to attend the conference in order to attend papers given on themselves and to take part in the annual ‘Prayer for Being’, an ‘international ritual for the revival of the fittest’ (Text, p. 8). The novel opens with an incident from Jane Austen’s Emma (1815), where the protagonist finds herself getting into a carriage with Mr Elton for a ‘tête-à-tête drive’ (Text, p. 1). However, the scene changes at the end of the opening paragraphs to reveal that Emma is in fact, sitting in the carriage with Goethe from Thomas Mann’s 1939 novel, Lotte in Weimar: The Beloved Returns. For the most part, these characters do not recognise each other, and indeed, their identities are often somewhat fluid. For instance, in this early scene, Mann’s Goethe begins to apologise to Emma Woodhouse for

having had to abandon her this evening, for having remained so invisible all these recent days, and wished to compensate, from artistic pleasure he insisted, by escorting her home. That is back to the Gasthaus Zum Elephanten. (Text, p. 1)

Indeed, this invitation is not for Emma, rather, Goethe is addressing Lotte, his love interest in Lotte in Weimar. Emma realises that she must have boarded the wrong carriage, but not before she responds to Goethe in fluent German. Emma is as surprised as anyone to find herself speaking German, and wonders ‘whether she can keep this up without becoming quite other’ (Text, p. 2). Indeed, lower down the same page, after Goethe has been ‘rambling on’ (Text, p. 2) to her for some time, Emma transforms into Lotte: ‘She is on her way to pray for existence. But does Emma ever go to church? Lotte
draws her wrap further over her narrow white dress, which has violet ribbons and bows on this time, instead of the usual pink ones’ (*Text*, p. 2). Emma’s transformation into Lotte for this short time illustrates how the characters bleed into each others’ narratives when they are lifted from their own texts. The transformation from one character to another (or an Other) is indicative of Brooke-Rose’s return to the themes relating to Lacanian psychoanalysis. Emma cannot keep up speaking fluent German for very long before she changes back again. She recognises that she cannot speak German, and ‘Nor would she ever wear a wide white dress with violet ribbons or even pink ones all over it, even at twenty-one, let alone an age she can never reach’ (*Text*, pp. 2-3). Emma is aware here that her identity has been compromised by having been ‘misread by someone else unknown to her and quite beyond her control’ (*Text*, p. 2). By lifting Emma from the narrative of Austen’s novel, Brooke-Rose destabilises her character’s structural integrity. Beyond the boundaries of her own text, Emma’s character is subject to change, manipulation and influence from other characters. As in *Thru* with the repetition of the ‘I triangle’, Brooke-Rose is questioning subjectivity and agency of the ‘I’ when the structures which define the ‘I’ begin to deconstruct. Much of the first chapter of the novel belongs to the realist novel, as it breaks Brooke-Rose’s constraint of the ‘pronounless present tense’ (*IA*, p. 43) by using free indirect discourse. These emulations of the discourse of the realist novel mark the transportation of the characters from their own constructs into *Textermination*. The state of the characters varies during this transformation process, as some are not strong enough to make the journey in one stage. Lotte is too weak to maintain her presence in the carriage with Goethe and transforms again, back into Emma: ‘She feels obliterated, weak from a lack of involved attention, easily taken over by young Miss Woodhouse’ (*Text*, p. 2). It becomes apparent that the characters are gathering to pray for the Reader God to attend them by reading their novels and paying considered attention to their characters, thereby revivifying them, enabling their continued existence. The suggestion here is that *Emma* is canonised and read more often, with more attention than *Lotte in Weimar*, and as a direct result, Emma is fitter and more capable to survive in terms of her sustainability as a character outside her own structure, or text.
The theme of sustainability is repeated throughout the novel, and indeed, the play on Darwin’s evolutionary strategy, ‘the survival of the fittest’, is quoted on a number of occasions. There are a few characters that are unable to complete the conference as a result of their ‘health’, and consequently fade away over the course of the week. Perhaps the most distressing of these ‘fadings’ happens to George Eliot’s Mr Casaubon from Middlemarch (1874). It is apparent that Casaubon’s existence is already in question at the beginning of the conference. During a piece of narration that we assume originates from the well-renowned people-watcher Emma Woodhouse, it is reported that ‘Dorothea Brooke is still stuck with Casaubon. Or is it Goethe?’ (Text, p. 15). Later on, the same mistake is made by Lotte ‘Mr Casaubon has managed to stumble upwards, helped by an elderly lady in a white dress with pink bows who gushingly yields her place and calls him Excellenz. Then she realizes her error [...] Wo ist Goethe?’ (Text, p. 18). The ambiguity in these observations is a comment upon the fragility of Casaubon’s existence, and like Lotte, his character is unable to sustain itself indefinitely beyond its own text. Indeed, Lotte’s question is doubly offensive to Casaubon as his insufficient command of the German language was, of course, responsible for the downfall of his life’s work The Key to All Mythology, the philosophical text that he never completes in Eliot’s Middlemarch. Shortly after the first ambiguous sighting of Casaubon, we are transported to a conversation between him and Phillip II of Spain where Casaubon declares that ‘There has been no paper on me, only my wife Dorothea. Where is my wife? I am always made to feel somewhat pathetic. I expect I shall die quite soon’ (Text, p. 17). Of course, as readers of Eliot’s Middlemarch, we know that the possessive Casaubon does eventually die, and indeed, resents Dorothea for her youth and energy in comparison to his own elderly, decrepit state. Indeed, in Textermination he appears not only in this elderly state, but he is repeatedly emasculated by Dorothea who is voraciously picking over the details of the terrorist attack on the Christian-Greco-Judean Pray-In. The culmination of this emasculation arrives in the address of Dorothea by Jack Knowles (one of the other Interpreters), calling her Miss Brooke. Casaubon states: ‘Yes, I am afraid that she is better remembered, alas, under her maiden-name. I have come to count for nothing, despite my immense and important labours on the Key to All Mythology [sic]. I might as well be called Mr Brooke’ (Text, p. 50). Again, as the reader of Middlemarch would know, Mr. Brooke is Dorothea and Celia’s ignorant and often confused uncle, a
comic figure in the novel. The Casaubon in *Textermination*, sees himself not only as the subdued partner in the marriage, but also as being reduced to the status of Mr Brooke by Dorothea’s intellectual capability, energetic involvement and her success as a character. Dorothea’s response to Casaubon’s status as ‘Mr Brooke’ by attempting to rejuvenate him: ‘Why don’t we go down and hear the paper on you? It will do you good.’ However, only a few pages later in the novel Dorothea is seen in a restaurant by Mira Enketi (from *Amalgamemnon* by Brooke-Rose) wearing her ‘widow’s weeds’ (*Text*, p. 66). It is later explained in a conversation between Dorothea and Pastor Oberlin (from the novella fragment *Lenz*, 1839) that the lecture was not about Eliot’s Casaubon:

The paper was called ‘Casaubon and the Mystery Religions’. I felt so very sure it would give him a new lease of life [...] Well, we sat there and listened, and as we listened I could see a great dismay, and anger slowly spread over his pale features [...] when it was over, and questions came, it became apparent to me that the paper was not about him at all, but about another Casaubon, a much younger man [...] who was in some way connected with someone called Foucault, who invented a pendulum. (*Text*, pp. 79)

It is revealed that the Casaubon paper was in fact on Umberto Eco’s character from his novel *Foucault’s Pendulum* (1988). Pastor Oberlin goes on to explain that names are not ‘private property’ (*Text*, p. 79), and he asserts that there is a town named after him in Ohio, but does concede that perhaps his is slightly different to Casaubon’s situation. However, both Eliot’s and Eco’s Casaubons have been named after the prominent renaissance scholar, Isaac Casaubon, widely regarded as the most intelligent man in Europe. In this sense, both of the literary Casaubons are versions of the historical Casaubon, and the reader is reminded of Pound’s discussion with Browning about the identity and ownership of Sordello. In the seventh essay ‘Poésie et négativité’ published in her collection *Semiotikè* (1969), Kristeva uses the key term ‘étranger’ meaning ‘strange/ foreign or alien’ in order to describe intertextual discourse. Mary Orr summarises Kristeva’s perspective in this essay when she states that ‘Strangeness, alienation and foreignness are not the Other, or other, but (an)other of the self’.54 Orr

describes Kristeva’s proposition that in instances of intertextuality, the text ‘steps alongside itself’ (‘intimement étranger’), ‘word/text is neither outside itself through a transcendent signifier, nor inside itself as ontological identity.’ This interpretation of intertextuality is markedly similar to the way that Lacan regards the subject as being split, both with respect to his idea of ‘the imaginary’, ‘the symbolic’ and ‘the real’, as well as his reference to the ‘barred subject’ in the ‘Mirror Stage’. Similarly, it invokes those images of the deconstructive keys that have been mentioned above: at which point does one Casaubon become another? Eliot’s Casaubon becomes the ‘barred subject’ while Eco’s Casaubon comes into focus, yet both characters are ‘stepping alongside’ their historical referent, Isaac Casaubon. The issue of Casaubon’s identity and agency as a character is called into question because of the fragmentation of his ‘I’. Here, Brooke-Rose is engaging with the idea of a threatened subjectivity. Casaubon wrongly accuses his wife of ‘stealing all his glory’, leaving her feeling responsible for his death. In fact, Casaubon’s death is not Dorothea’s fault, indeed, his fate had been sealed by Eliot long ago.

There are a number of other characters in Textermination that seem to ‘step alongside themselves’. I have already mentioned the presence of Mann’s Lotte, but it is significant to recall the incident where she meets her younger self, Lotte from Goethe’s The Sorrows of Young Werther (1774). Of course, the younger Lotte is unfamiliar with the elderly lady that approaches her, and indeed, the elderly Lotte cannot understand why she is so unfamiliar to herself:

Lotte! The old lady calls and hastens toward her. But her voice doesn’t carry above the roar of a thousand conversations [...] Lotte! The girl turns to look, but seeing no one she knows, moves again towards the down stairway. Lotte! Her arm is seized by an elderly lady in a white dress identical to her own, a lady she has never seen before who gabbles at her in German, Lotte, mein Liebchen, Lotte, du bist Lotte, nicht war, von Werther geliebt? The girl blushes crimson. Wer sind Sie? Haben Sie Werther gesehen? – Aber meine Lieb Werther ist tot! Ach nein! [...] her voice trembling and her eyes filling with tears. Ein Irrtum. (Text, p. 18)

55 Orr, Intertextuality, p. 30.
In her plea to the young Lotte, Mann’s elderly Lotte reveals that Werther is dead (‘tot’). There is a sense that the elderly Lotte is attempting to save her younger self from the emotional trauma that is soon to occur in her younger version’s life. This is a reference to Werther’s suicide as a result of his love for Lotte, which she could never return as a consequence of her marriage to Albert. This elderly version of Lotte seems to be aware of this other narrative, despite not actually having originated from The Sorrows of Young Werther, Goethe’s novel. Indeed, she is quite surprised to find out that she is Charlotte Kestner from Lotte in Weimar (Text, p. 20), Mann’s later novel, written as a development of Goethe’s text. The disclosure of information between the two Lottes imbues the text with a sense of dramatic irony that is felt on multiple levels: within the text by the elder version of Lotte and externally to the text by the reader that is familiar with both Goethe’s and Mann’s novels. The concept of internal dramatic irony is referred to directly by Brooke-Rose’s own Mira Enketi when she wonders:

Are characters aware of their future? [...] Does Emma Bovary know she will take arsenic? Does Dorothea Brooke at this moment know of Mr Casaubon’s ungentlemanly codicil to his Will, that she is not to marry Ladislaw [...] is she aware that Pfarrer Obelin is out of another, earlier book? Does Gibriel know that he will shoot himself? (Text, p. 69)

Indeed, it seems that most of these characters live in a perpetual present, unknowing of their future: the death of Casaubon was not predicted by Dorothea, and the young Lotte blushes ‘crimson’ at the mention of Werther, rather than weeping like her elderly counterpart. However, that Mann’s Lotte knows her story in Goethe’s text is perplexing, and that the older David Copperfield anxiously wrestles a copy of Dickens’ novel out of the hands of the young David Copperfield in order to protect him from knowing his own future displays a complex relationship between the past, present and future (Text, p. 98). Mira Enketi goes on to describe, rather comprehensively, the relationship between the characters and their readers, stating:

Here they all are, caught in one temporal aspect of themselves and behaving like real people, ignorant of their destinies, and yet listening to papers on themselves
that take a god like overview, reveal structures and moral flaws, repetitions and balances and perfect circles and dramatic ironies. (Text, p. 69)

With *Textermination*, Brooke-Rose returns to the subject of reading that had been so dominant in *Thru* and in *Amalgamemnon*. By ‘magpieing’ characters from literary history, Brooke-Rose interrogates the structures implicit within narrative construction. The complex weaving of character plots pushes these structures to breaking point. This ‘breaking point’ is symbolised within the text by the recurring motif of fires. The first chapter ends with the death of literature as ‘Books by the million burn in Alexandria, at Fahrenheit 451’ (*Text*, p. 11), then in the final chapter, the San Francisco Hilton turns into a tower of flames and is finally brought crashing to the ground by an earthquake along the San Andreas Fault. Remarkably, all of the literary characters survive this atrocity, and this finale emulates the dénouement of Ray Bradbury’s novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1956) where Montag and his friends manage to survive the shockwave of the nuclear bombs. Similarly to Bradbury’s novel, there is a sense that this fire was necessary for the characters in *Textermination* to experience a rebirth (back into their own novels) – like the phoenix that is engulfed by the fire, in order to be reborn from its ashes. The events that ‘book-end’ this novel imbue it with a chiastic structure and the motif of fire reminds the reader of the aforementioned ‘scorching’ effect of deconstructive writing. Karen Lawrence states that the ‘unstable ground of the California setting only exacerbates the chronic vulnerability of fictional characters, who suffer life and death consequences of critical fashion and reader interest’ (Lawrence, pp. 139-140). Indeed, *Textermination* paints a rather grim picture for the future of literature in general. Literature will only survive if it is comprehensively read, not flippantly skipped through. With both *Thru* and *Textermination*, Brooke-Rose seems to be searching for a more committed readership, one that is not easily scared away by complex or weighty texts, a readership that enjoys tussling with complex codes, puzzles, characters, themes and references to philosophy. She explains this point of view in her collection *Invisible Author* in relation to *Thru*, but I deem it to be just as relevant to *Textermination*:

In all my novels, but more especially this one, I am trying to make the novel once again do what only the novel can do, with words on a page, not film images or
any methods the other arts do better than the novel can. And *tant pis* for readers who can’t share in this scripting, this fiction was not written for them. (*IA*, p. 108)

This is an uncompromising stance against popular contemporary literature that trades-in its ability to pose paradoxical questions and unsolved ambiguities to the reader, for straight-forward, linear narrative and language. The lifting and fictionalisation of critical theories in *Thru*, and the appearance of classic characters from traditional literature in *Textermination* enables Brooke-Rose to collapse and expand the defined structure of the novel form. She is a builder, constantly renovating her environment, and as a writer of both criticism and fiction it is only fitting that both are perpetually under construction. These novels reveal Brooke-Rose to be preoccupied with the form and structure of the novel, and indeed, the language with which we discuss and analyse fiction. The confrontation between versions of the self in these novels, and their focus upon the ‘split subject’ is further analysed in her novels *Between* and *Amalgamemnon*. Whereas *Thru* and *Textermination* focus on the ‘Other’ in the sense that they present contradictory versions of the same subject, with *Between* and *Amalgamemnon*, Brooke-Rose illustrates what it is to be regarded as ‘Other’ in terms of being an experimental woman writer. These novels are highly concerned with the language of difference, and the identification of the experimental woman writer as being different, and in opposition to the canon. Both of these novels, along with her two later novels *Next* (1998) and *Subscript* (1999) comment upon Brooke-Rose’s own experience at the hands of the academy, and illustrate how difficult it is for a woman to exist in patriarchally constructed institutions.
CHAPTER 3

Towards a Female Language: The Language of ‘the Other’

‘But it is still true that before a woman can write exactly as she wishes to write, she has many difficulties to face.’

The figure of the ‘Other’ haunts much of Brooke-Rose’s fiction. As I have previously argued, this is directly related to her own experience of working as a translator at Bletchley Park, and her exposure to the counter-narrative of the Second World War. This haunting is furthered by Brooke-Rose’s move to France in 1968, and her struggle to ‘fit in’ to French culture as a British citizen. Throughout her critical career, Brooke-Rose has, at times, written specifically about the plight of the female academic and the experimental woman writer as the figure of the ‘Other’. In an interview with Lorna Sage she describes how her awareness of the subject of gender discrimination developed through her association with Hélène Cixous and her position at Vincennes:

It’s strange. I became conscious of it fairly late. I remember when I arrived in Paris in the late sixties Hélène Cixous rang me up and asked me if I would write an essay for a book she was editing on the difficulties I’d had as a woman writer and naively, I said “well I haven’t had any difficulties as a woman writer. I’ve always been published and I’ve had difficulties as a writer – can I write about that?” Oh no, [...] that wouldn’t do [...] she wanted a feminist angle, and it wasn’t until later, I realised, that if you’re trying to play with form, to change forms, or create new forms, this is something which the predominantly male establishment doesn’t accept.

These thoughts were first articulated in a critical manner in her essay ‘Illiterations’ (1989) where she begins with the declaration: ‘To be an “Experimental Woman Writer”. Three words. Three difficulties.’ Throughout this essay, Brooke-Rose contemplates the position of women experimental writers and their fiction in relation to the canon, which she

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describes as being ‘a masculine notion, a priesthood (not to be polluted by women), a club, a sacred male preserve’. In this essay she addresses some of the ‘illiterations’ that have helped to marginalise women experimental writers, including the female author’s own preoccupation with ‘feminist themes’ and ‘defining a feminist aesthetic’, resulting in the female experimentalist being lost in ‘the sea between two continents’. This essay is reprinted in her collection Stories Theories & Things alongside two other essays: ‘A Womb of One’s Own’ and ‘Woman as Semiotic Object’. Both of these essays question the legitimacy of the concept of a ‘female language’ by reviewing critical readings of female characters in traditional texts. The appearance of these three essays that run concurrently with one another in this collection makes it difficult for the critical reader to deny that Brooke-Rose was concerned with feminist issues, and the tensions between the sexes, particularly within a professional capacity. This chapter will begin by summarising the contextual climate in which women’s experimental writing is located. It will then move on to discuss some of Brooke-Rose’s texts in more detail, asserting my main argument: that Brooke-Rose’s fiction is often preoccupied with the marginalisation of women, both in academia and in the literary industry in general. This marginalisation causes women writers to react in one of two ways: either to emulate the male author in both form and style in order to prove her capability as a writer (thereby entering the competitive arena); or to deviate from these dominant forms and language in search of what Cixous described as an écriture féminine, in an effort to demolish the constraints of the arena all together. By producing deviant forms of literature and using different types of language, these female authors have become regarded as ‘experimental’ and often perceived as a minority. In this respect, an écriture féminine is a type of coded language, the purpose of which is to emphasise the patriarchal dominance over contemporary literature and the academy.

In the full length studies of her work to date, most of the critics have described Brooke-Rose’s writing as having feminist undertones. However, the idea of a feminist Brooke-Rose often plays second fiddle to the study of linguistic play and experiment that is recognised as the main exercise of her novels. In her chapter on the feminist themes in

Brooke-Rose’s fiction, Michela Canepari-Labib argues that ‘although some of her texts are quite overtly Feminist, her interest always transcends ‘mere’ Feminism’ (Canepari-Labib, p. 219). This chapter will argue that it is precisely through Brooke-Rose’s experiment and linguistic play that some of her texts become overtly feminist. It would be pertinent first to consider the figure of the female experimenter in a wider context in order to understand the origins of Brooke-Rose’s approach to this subject in her work.

The Historical Female Experimenter of the Twentieth Century

For the most part, there has been very little critical attention paid to British experimental women writers in comparison to canonical writers. The historical exceptions are, of course, Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson; both of whose experimental texts, and indeed Woolf’s criticism and polemical writing, have commented on the position of women writers as being located outside the canon, separated from successful male writers. Brooke-Rose similarly concludes that the work of the experimental woman writer is critically and academically neglected because it is located outside the canon as a direct result of the ‘three difficulties’ outlined above: ‘only the canonical is deemed worthy of interpretation.’ Woolf’s work has permeated general readership over time because her oeuvre is a fine example of modernist writing, particularly because it demonstrates the ‘stream of consciousness’ technique. However, it was Richardson’s work that was first described as being written in a style that resembled a ‘stream of consciousness’ by her contemporary May Sinclair, in her review of Richardson’s novels in 1918. Sinclair borrowed this metaphor from the work of the eminent psychologist William James, whose 1892 work Psychology devoted an entire chapter to explaining the metaphor in terms of the progression and development of thought in the conscious mind. In her essay ‘Women and Fiction’ (1929), Woolf asserts that the woman writer

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6 H.D. is an example of a relatively neglected experimental American writer whose work has often been regarded as secondary to Pound’s, due to his influence upon her work.


9 William James, Psychology (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1892). A more recent version of this book is still available titled Psychology: A Briefer Course (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001). This is an abridged version of the original, but still contains the chapter titled ‘Stream of Consciousness’ as chapter 2, pp. 18-42.
faces many difficulties, including the technical difficulty ‘that the very form of the sentence does not fit her. It is a sentence made by men; it is too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman’s use.’\textsuperscript{10} Her advice on this technical matter is that a woman writer must ‘make for herself, altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it.’\textsuperscript{11} This advice accounts for Woolf’s use of the ‘stream of consciousness’ narrative mode as an alternative to the standard ‘male sentence’. The flow of interior thoughts and feelings that ‘stream of consciousness’ writing produces is less constricted by grammar and punctuation, and has become a familiar marker of Woolf’s writing:

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinge, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air.\textsuperscript{12}

The advice prescribed by Woolf, and indeed, her own practice, suggests that this style provides an inherently female discourse and is often regarded as an early example of an \textit{écriture féminine}. However, the ‘stream of consciousness’ style was quickly adopted by a selection of male modernist heavyweights, most notably, James Joyce. As a result of this male appropriation, there is now some hesitancy when describing ‘stream of consciousness’ as being an exclusively female way of writing, as it has been practised with much success by male authors. Indeed, the last forty-five pages of Joyce’s \textit{Ulysses} (1922), those that embody the wandering mind of Molly Bloom while she lies in bed, are some of the most frequently cited pages that illustrate this technique:

Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed with a couple of eggs since the \textit{City Arms} hotel when he used to be pretending to be laid up with a sick voice doing his highness to make himself interesting to that old faggot Mrs Riordan [...]\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} Woolf, \textit{Women and Writing}, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{11} Woolf, \textit{Women and Writing}, p. 48.
The aspect of Woolf’s advice that is most significant is that in order for women to write successfully, they must recognise that they are different to men, just as male writers and patriarchal institutions, including the canon, have recognised that male writing is different to that produced by women. Woolf is advocating a celebration of difference without the promotion of a hierarchical structure based on gender difference.

Brooke-Rose asserts that women writers are not alone in the exclusion zone that exists outside the canon. They are accompanied by ‘barbarians and slaves, or, later, other classes from peasants to modern workers, who were long considered incapable of any art worth the dignity of attention’. From Brooke-Rose’s assertions throughout her ‘Illiterations’ essay, it becomes clear that she recognises that the woman writer is not only different to the male canonical author, but that her work expresses this difference, positioning her as ‘Other’. In her essay ‘Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference’ (1984), Caribbean-American poet Audre Lorde famously described this difference in terms of her own experience: ‘As a forty-nine-year-old Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two, including one boy and a member of an interracial couple, I usually find myself a part of some group defined as other, deviant, inferior or just plain wrong.’ In this quotation, Lorde asserts that any deviancy from the expected ‘norm’ is regarded as being a negative interference. Lorde suggests that her womanhood is as much a negative aspect of her person, as her colour or her sexuality, age, political views or social class. Lorde emphasises that women suffer prejudice in society, just as minority ethnic groups, homosexuals or the impoverished experience prejudice. Like Woolf, Lorde asks her reader to recognise the difference that exists between men and women rather than ignore it, in order that creative development might occur:

Too often, we pour the energy needed for recognising and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all. This results in voluntary isolation, or false and treacherous connections. Either way, we do not develop tools for using human difference as a

springboard for creative change within our lives. We speak not of human
difference, but of human deviance.\textsuperscript{16}

Lorde’s use of the word ‘deviance’ is particularly important as it emphasises the
negativity that is associated with the figure of the ‘Other’. In order to ground this
valuable perspective within the context of literature, and specifically women’s literature,
I will return to Woolf, who asserts that in recognising this difference within writing,
women authors are now creating female characters who have been creatively changed:
‘women are beginning to explore their own sex, to write of women as women have never
been written of before; for of course, until very lately, women in literature were the
creation of men.’\textsuperscript{17} Woolf goes on to describe this new land of female characterisation as
a ‘dark country’ that is being explored in fiction by intrepid women writers. This
description immediately invokes literary illustrations of Africa, and indeed of Conrad’s
image in \textit{The Heart of Darkness} (1899) or the untamed beauty of Ayesha created by H.
Rider Haggard in his novel \textit{She} (1897), and even acts as a precursor to Freud’s description
of female sexuality as the ‘dark continent’ in 1927.\textsuperscript{18} Whereas these male authors invoke
these images to describe the attempted colonisation of a raw, dangerous, unknown and
immeasurable landscape, a landscape that is inherently female, Woolf’s description
implies a courageous woman writer-explorer whose authorship represents a journey into
darkness, on a quest to illuminate the female experience. The construction of a new,
different sentence by women writers, along with the development of female characters
in literature who have been created by women as genuine representations of the female
experience, describes an innovation in the literature of this period.

In her essay ‘Male Signature Female Aesthetic: The Gender Politics of
Experimental Writing’ (1989), Marianne DeKoven discusses the relationship between
\textit{écriture féminine} and the literary avant-garde. DeKoven’s essay recognises that the
language used to describe an \textit{écriture féminine} has historically been the same kind of
language that is used when discussing the avant-garde: ‘Manifestoes for avant-garde
(experimental, postmodern, antirealist, metafictional, surfictional, innovative) and

\textsuperscript{17} Woolf, \textit{Women and Writing}, p. 49.
feminine (féminine, femininst, female, women’s) stylistic practice often sound remarkably alike without knowing that they do or taking cognizance of one and other in any way.\textsuperscript{19} DeKoven establishes this connection (albeit a seemingly unconscious connection) between female writing and the writing of the avant-garde in order to depict both kinds of writing as ‘Other’, separate to the patriarchal canon, and therefore demonstrably anti-patriarchal. DeKoven goes on to provide evidence for this connection by quoting a number of significant feminist voices, including Julia Kristeva, Cixous and Rachel Blau DuPlessis who all corroborate this allegiance to some degree. However, later in her essay DeKoven asks the fundamental question:

why is experimental writing, a demonstrably antipatriarchal literary practice (DeKoven 3-27), so excessively dominated by men at a time when women writers are doing extremely well in traditional, culturally hegemonic literary forms? Why is it men who disrupt the hierarchical Sentence, in Barthes’ formulation – who write écriture féminine – while women write some version of the nineteenth-century realist novel? Part of the answer is that many women are writing experimentally but are receiving little or no recognition for it; women writers who are successful and recognized write in traditional, conservative forms.\textsuperscript{20}

DeKoven recognises that there is an element of hypocrisy in asserting that avant-garde writing is synonymous with écriture féminine and attributes the neglect of female avant-gardistes to a lack of recognition. The successful woman writer is, according to DeKoven, a mimic or imitator of traditional (patriarchal) form. However, the (neglected) experimental woman writer, toils away without recognition, while male avant-gardism steals the limelight, showcasing successful experimental writers like Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, Mark Z. Danielewski in America and George Perec, Ramond Queneau and Italo Calvino in Europe, to name but a few.

Brooke-Rose engages with the issue of female success through the imitation of patriarchal forms in both her third novel Between (1968) and her fifth novel


\textsuperscript{20} DeKoven, ‘Male Signature, Female Aesthetic’, p. 78.
Amalgamemnon (1984) where she presents female protagonists who feel inhibited by their roles within patriarchal establishments. These novels share a further similarity in that they both are subject to lipograms: Between is written entirely without the verb ‘to be’ and Amalgamemnon eschews all ‘non-realized’ (IA, p. 17) tenses, meaning that it is written entirely in conditional tenses or the future tense. In each of these novels, the technique of omission expresses the specific agenda of the text, in a very subtle and coded way. The missing verb in Between acts as a grammatical representation of the protagonist’s inability to exist, and the use of ‘non-realized’ tenses in Amalgamemnon grammatically positions the text as being premonitory, with the extended use of the future tense. This coding differs to the kind of encryption that the reader has experienced in Thru. In these novels, the reader is forced to ask ‘what is missing’ in order to elicit meaning from the text, rather than ‘what is here?’.

Brooke-Rose returned to her preoccupation with this question in her more recent novel Next (1998), which questions the reader about what is missing, or more appropriately who is missing, in a more direct way. Each of the 26 characters in the novel has their name spelled with a different letter of the alphabet. Elsie, one of the female characters in the novel is homeless in London (like most of the other characters); however, she manages to regain some agency as a character through her command of education, and by teaching the other characters literacy skills. Her murder leads to her disappearance from the novel and the readers are given the responsibility of finding her killer by completing their reading. The missing ‘E’ character is reminiscent of Georges Perec’s novel La Disparition (1969) where he uses the lipogram of the omission of the letter ‘e’.

Published within six-months of each other, there have been critical parallels drawn between Between and La Disparition, as both novels can be related to the technical play typical of the French avant-garde literary group, OuLiPo (of which Perec was an established member).21 However, Brooke-Rose stresses that there was no influence either way between her novel and Perec’s (STT, p. 8).

Next is written with the lipogram of the omission of the verb ‘to have’, a technical device that emphasises the deprivation and disenfranchisement of the London homeless, and indeed, the non-existence of the academic/ educated female. With her novel

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21 The OuLiPo group was originally established in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and Francois le Lionnais in celebration and discussion of Queneau’s work. The group worked in a collaborative manner, using constraints in order to develop the ‘potential’ of literature. These constraints were often based on structured language games including lipograms, palindromes and anagrams.
*Subscript* (1999), Brooke-Rose returns to the themes of language and acquisition of the narrative voice, providing the reader with a counter-narrative to ‘his-story’ by depicting the evolution of language as being attributed to women. The technical experiments performed in these novels are paramount to comprehending Brooke-Rose’s engagement with feminist concerns, and her depiction of the female as ‘Other’.

**Between (1968) & Subscript (1999): Translation, Imitation and Language Acquisition**

As I have discussed in Chapter One, Brooke-Rose has drawn heavily from a number of (mostly male) authors in order to find her own narrative voice. However, *Between* is the first of Brooke-Rose’s ‘experimental’ novels to focus on a female protagonist and her struggle to exist as a female in a patriarchal institution. The quest for a female narrative voice and a language with which to communicate effectively about the female experience is revisited in Brooke-Rose’s much later novel *Subscript* (1999). Brooke-Rose’s return to this focus, albeit through very different narrative circumstances, only emphasises her concern for the difference between the male author and the female author, compounding the relationship as one of established and continued tension.

In spite of Brooke-Rose’s move towards a female narrative voice in *Between*, Karen Lawrence has made the fitting comparison between the novel and T.S. Eliot’s poetry of the 1920s, with particular reference to “The Waste Land” (1922) and “The Hollow Men” (1925). Lawrence states that the concept of ‘betweens’

conveys an Eliotic feeling of interstitiality, a sense of waiting for *chronos*, or “ordinary time” to be transformed into *kairos*, or “time redeemed”. How to discover the sacred in the detritus of culture – this, the question of both Pound and Eliot – recurs in *Between*. (Lawrence, p. 223)

In this comparison, Lawrence acknowledges that Brooke-Rose’s novel has consciously inherited features of established modernist works, but that they are transformed into postmodernist discourse by the form and narration of the novel: ‘Brooke-Rose’s postmodernist “vessel of conception” deliberately and self-consciously retains the genetic material of modernism’ (Lawrence, p. 63). The feeling of interstitiality permeates *Between*, and is characterised by the undefined existence of the protagonist. Her inability
‘to be’ either one thing or the other (French or German, grounded or airborne) is illustrated in the non-linear form of the novel as well as being clearly emphasised by the lipogram of the verb ‘to be’. Brooke-Rose exhibits her feminist discourse in this novel through the protagonist who is denied her own existence (‘to be’) by her engagement with patriarchal language.

Brooke-Rose began writing *Between* in 1964 just after the publication of *Out*, but as she explains in *Stories, Theories & Things* (1991), the androgynous gender of the protagonist was causing her some problems: ‘during the writing of the first draft in 1964 the author became totally blocked until, some three years and another novel later, this simultaneous interpreter became a woman’ (*STT*, p. 6). Originally the protagonist of the novel was intended to be androgynous, fitting in with the lipogram of the novel: the omission of the verb ‘to be’. Brooke-Rose explains her decision to make the protagonist female by stating that ‘simultaneous interpretation is a passive activity, that of translating the ideas of others but giving voice to none of one’s own, and therefore a feminine experience’ (*STT*, p. 7). Brooke-Rose’s assertion here is strikingly similar to Woolf’s complaints regarding the sentence as a male form. For Brooke-Rose, the female translator is merely a conduit for male academic thought, that relays these ideas from male to male, without engaging with them on a deeper level or indeed, developing any ideas of her own. At one point in *Between*, the nameless female protagonist states: ‘Ideas? We merely translate other people’s ideas, not to mention platitudes, si-mul-ta-né-ment. No one requires us to have any of our own’ (*Between*, p. 413). Brooke-Rose identifies the experience of the woman in academia as ‘passive’, and in doing so, she emphasises the superficiality of the input of the female protagonist in *Between*, and shows her to be automated and mechanical at both a professional and a personal level. In describing her role as a translator to one of her lovers during an argument, the protagonist states that she is used ‘simply as an instrument’ (*Between*, p. 460) implying that she does not engage with the debates at a deeper level than the language used to describe the concepts, and retorts sarcastically, ‘what can I tell you that you haven’t already imagined, not to say invented?’ (*Between*, p. 460). The languages that the protagonist translates have been invented by a patriarchal society, and the political concepts conveyed by them are ostensibly masculine. In this sense, the protagonist (like
Brooke-Rose) has inherited her language from this patriarchal institution and is both indebted and simultaneously bound to its discourse. In her earliest published work *The Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), Luce Irigaray discusses the difficulty in establishing a feminine language:

She functions as a *hole* [...] this fault, this deficiency, this “hole,” inevitably affords woman too few figurations, images or representations by which to represent herself. It is not that she lacks some “master signifier” or that none is imposed upon her, but rather that access to a signifying economy, to the coining of signifiers is difficult or even impossible for her because she remains an outsider, herself (a) subject to their norms. She borrows signifiers but cannot make her mark or re-mark upon them.22

The protagonist in *Between* seems not to engage at all with the larger issues being conveyed by her translation, and as a result, her personality seems non-existent, depicting her as a vacuous shell, or in Irigaray’s words, a ‘hole’. She seems to be able to adapt linguistically to each political context without engaging with it on a personal level. Her loyalty is bound to the signifiers that surround her rather than the humanist issues that are conveyed by the sign with which they have a semantic relationship. Lawrence draws attention to the ‘shifting loyalties’ of the protagonist in *Between* when she recalls the context to the character’s initiation into the industry: ‘We learn that on a visit to her paternal aunt in Germany from her native France, she develops appendicitis and must remain in Germany when war breaks out. She begins to translate for the Germans’ (Lawrence, p. 63). The political and ethical implications of the protagonist’s collaboration with the Nazis are that she has betrayed her mother country (France), and become morally bankrupted by her linguistic capabilities. Language is inextricably tied to the formation of a national identity, and by agreeing to translate for the Nazis, the protagonist disowns her national identity, and furthermore, allows the enemy access to previously protected information. The language barrier acts as a line of defence between enemies and the protagonist destroys this through her translation. Her command of multiple languages might allow her to converse in both French and German, but her

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‘shifting loyalties’ deny her a national identity: her betrayal destroys her French identity and she will never truly be considered as German, due to her heritage. She is doomed to haunt an in-between space, both in terms of her identity and her morality.

There are certain biographical similarities that can be drawn between Brooke-Rose and her protagonist in terms of her employment as a translator of enemy messages at Bletchley Park. However, Brooke-Rose’s own experience was much less dramatic than that of her fictional counterpart. As I have mentioned above, Brooke-Rose’s work at Bletchley Park required her to translate German messages into English, but most significantly she was made to assess the importance of that information and decide if it should be privileged. In this role, Brooke-Rose found it necessary to interact with language on a deeper level than simply translation. Her assessment of its value was bound in her ability to recognise some messages as being more important than others. In interviews about this period of her life, Brooke-Rose often states that this experience enabled her to ‘imagine what it’s like to be the Other’. It is important to recognise the feeling of ‘otherness’ in this environment in order to comment upon the concept of a fluctuating or floating sense of identity. While translating for the Germans, the protagonist is questioned about her loyalties: ‘But who do you suppose wants to get at you mein Liebes? You must excuse these questions Fräulein but in view of your French upbringing we must make sure of your undivided loyalty’ (Between, p. 444). In the time of war, the protagonist is defined by her national identity, and a few sentences later she is identified as being a ‘Catholic born and bred’ (Between, p. 444). These are clear, if not restrictive markers of identity; however, in the post-war environment where the protagonist works as a political translator, there is very little definition of her character or identification of any kind. The transformation between a fixed identity to one that is continually in flux is explained by Lawrence’s comparison between the ease of travel during the 1960s in comparison with the difficulty of war-time movement across the borders: ‘Brooke-Rose creates a palimpsest: the blasé travel of the 1960s, from European capital to capital, illuminates the different border crossings during World War II’ (Lawrence, p. 63). In the post-war environment, the protagonist travels freely, having loyalty only to the language that she translates. However, even this identity is a floating

one, as it shifts between signifiers, from one language code to another. Sarah Birch asserts that ‘the mixing and crossing of multiple codes is a characteristically feminine approach to language’ (Birch, p. 83). With this in mind, the female becomes a permanent translator, constantly switching between multiple codes and having to relentlessly both translate and interpret meaning in order to exist in a patriarchal society.

In describing her protagonist in *Stories, Theories & Things*, Brooke-Rose uses the terms ‘interpreter’ and ‘translator’ interchangeably, implying that they are synonymous terms. However, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the verb ‘to interpret’ has the primary definition of ‘explain the meaning of something’, and its secondary definition is ‘to translate aloud the words of a person speaking a different language.’ The process of explanation suggests that the interpreter must understand the meaning of the idea in order to convey the relevant information to another party. This process of comprehension suggests not only an assimilation of information on a level beyond the language, but a repackaging of it in order to make it more comprehensible for the receiver. Within this process, there is a chance of manipulation: the possibility that the content or the idea may be modified by the very process of interpretation, as the interpreter is expected to be able to engage beyond the superficial level of the language. However, the interpreter in *Between* protests against this level of engagement in her role, stating that she ‘merely does one’s job, simply as an instrument’ (*Between*, p. 460), thereby reasserting her passivity in the role.

The verb ‘to translate’, is simply defined as to ‘express the sense of words or writing in another language.’ The use of the word ‘sense’ in this definition refers to the classification debate in translation studies that has been a subject of contention throughout history. As far back as Cicero, there has always been an acknowledged difference between the ‘word for word’ translation and the ‘sense for sense’ translation. Cicero comments on his own style of translation when he presents ‘The Best Style for Orators’:

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I did not consider it necessary to give word for word, but I have preserved the character and the energy of the language throughout. For I did not consider that my duty was to render to the reader the precise number of words, but rather to give him all their weight.26

André Lefevere translates Horace’s words: ‘Nec verbum verbo curabis redder, fidus/ Interpres’ as ‘Do not worry about rendering word for word, faithful interpreter, but translate sense for sense’.27 It seems that historically, the translator has been encouraged to interpret to a degree, as it is clearly seen to be the responsibility of the translator to convey the meaning of the words, not just simply the words, from the source to the recipient. In this endeavour there will be inevitable deviances from the original. Katheryn Hellerstein notes that there is a cliché that is popular in translation studies: ‘Only one syllable differentiates a translator from a traitor.’28 Hellerstein goes on to explain that this is a pun on the ‘Italian word traduttore (translator, masculine) and traditore (traitor, masculine)’ and that the pun warns of how treacherous the process of translation can be if misused or done incorrectly.29 Significantly, Hellerstein recognises that the pun works only on the masculine forms of the words, and indeed she notes that her ‘1978, pocket-size Barnes and Noble English-Italian; Italian-English dictionary, which gives the feminine of “traitor”, traditrice, offers no feminine form for “translator”. Is the tourist more likely to encounter a traitress than a woman translator?’30 In fact, women were translating texts into English during the medieval period. It was one of the few ways that they were able to write at all; however, during this period, they were limited to working exclusively on religious texts. Jean Delisle and Judith Woodsworth state that ‘in 1603, John Florio (c.1553-1625) the English translator of Montaigne, made the link between women and translation explicit: since translations are always defective, he argued, they must be female.’31 This is an example of what Brooke-Rose calls an

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‘Illiteration’, as often women translators during the Renaissance were praised highly for their work. For example, Mary Herbert, The Countess of Pembroke, sister of Philip Sidney, had success with her translation of Robert Garnier’s *Marc-Antoine* (1578, trans. 1592). However, the translations upon which women worked during this period were often ‘more literal, not least of all because literalism afforded a certain kind of protection in that it allowed the translators to decline all personal responsibility.’

Florio’s declaration that the translation text must be female confirms how translators have themselves, historically regarded the gender of the text. In her essay ‘Gender and the Metaphysics of Translation’ (1988), Lori Chamberlain provides detailed accounts of how translators have referred to the author-text as being female, and the translator as a coloniser or a rapist who will ravage the text, taking the material he needs in order to make a translation. Chamberlain quotes part of the rather graphic preface to the sixteenth-century edition of Horace translated by Thomas Drant to illustrate her point:

First I have now done as the people of God were commanded to do with their captive women that were handsome and beautiful: I have shaved off his hair and pared off his nails, that is I have wiped away all his vanity and superfluity of matter [...] I have Englished things not according to the vein of Latin propriety, but of his own vulgar tongue [...]"

Chamberlain asserts that Drant is within his rights to take these liberties, since as a clergyman translator of Horace, ‘he must make Horace morally suitable’. She also makes reference to the difficulty of proposing the femininity of the text, while Drant continually refers to it as male. However, it is evident that Drant’s use of the word ‘his’ is simply to refer to the male creator, not the text itself. Rather, the methods that Drant has inflicted upon the text refer to the treatment of a female captive or slave. Indeed, as Chamberlain shrewdly observes, ‘the sexual violence alluded to in this description of translation provides an analogue to the political and economic rapes implicit in a

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34 Chamberlain, ‘Gender and the Metaphysics of Translation’, p. 460.
colonising metaphor’. Chamberlain draws upon another comparison between the text as female and the translator as male where she recalls the French term *les belles infidèles*. She asserts that ‘the translator is figured as a male seducer [...] the author-text, now a mistress, is flattered and seduced by the translator’s attentions, becoming a willing collaborator in the project to make herself beautiful – and, no doubt, unfaithful.’ The text is unfaithful on account of its/her ownership and loyalty to the male creator. This is a much less sexually violent metaphor than Drant’s, and indeed the difference between the two processes is emphasised through this disparity. Drant is required to change or omit sections of the text to make it more morally acceptable, ruthlessly editing sections of Horace’s text to transform it into something other than Horace – to change the text, almost unrecognisably in parts. In this respect, the original text is transformed into a ‘dark double’ of the edited version, and the process of textual interpretation is one of splitting the original subject text into versions or fragments of itself. The second metaphor suggests a kind of sexual play and seduction. The willingness to be seduced implies inherent passivity within the text, which allows the male translator to ravage it without obstruction. Chamberlain provides a highly informed historical account of the processes of male translation; however, she says comparatively little about the work of the female translator or how the gender of the female translator affects the gender of the translation text.

Luise von Flotow cites a paper given at the EST Congress in 1995 and published in the German translators’ journal, *Die Übersetzer* by German translator Beate Thrill, where she describes the conventional view of female translators:

Thrill found that these women translators described their work in the most humble terms; they are the ‘sherpa’ silently bearing the burden and following in the footsteps of the master; they are ‘ferrymen’ (sic), transporting materials and running errands between cultures; their work is one of transition, and thus transitory.

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Flotow goes on to assert that such images are exactly ‘what contemporary English-language approaches to translation seek to overcome’; however, the difference between the historical image of the male translator and that of the female translator is striking. The image of the active sexual male seducer compared to the diligent faithful ‘sherpa’ female, reinforces Brooke-Rose’s pre-supposition that the female is passive in her loyal translation, whereas the male seeks to interpret and therefore to change the author-text, in some way betraying the author-original.

The female translator protagonist in Between receives high praise from her male employer when he states: ‘Bright girl, she translates beautifully don’t you think?’ (Between, p. 414). Significantly, the language used here to praise the protagonist by her male employer is sexually charged. By referring to her as a ‘girl’ the speaker patronises her by asserting his age and gender and therefore, his dominance. The fact that the speaker refers to her gender at all loads the sentence with emphasis. ‘Bright girl’ suggests that the protagonist is a rare exception, and the obvious respect at her ability gives the phrase an oxymoronic quality. Furthermore, the use of the adverb ‘beautifully’ equates the protagonist’s capability to translate language to a superficial visual quality of attractiveness. This implied superficiality, along with the protagonist’s protest of her engagement with ideas implies that her translations are more literal than interpretive. On the surface it appears that Brooke-Rose allows her twentieth-century female translator protagonist to embody the historical role of the female translator in the eyes of her employer. However, on closer reading and indeed, translation of some of the coded text, we see that this is not the case. As Sarah Birch notes:

Though her job is to translate as faithfully as possible, this process is replicated in her mind by “bad copies” in which analogous discursive systems are conjoined in such a way as to emphasize disparities between them or unexpected parallels. (Birch, pp. 84-85)

Birch states that the protagonist’s manipulation of language takes the form of ‘intentional “errors”’ and ‘Multilingual puns’, a pastime that she shares with her former lover, Siegfried’ (Birch, p. 85). According to Birch, her ability to pun and misappropriate

39 Flotow, Translating and Gender, p. 36.
language in this way is due to her awareness of ‘comparable’ code systems that work simultaneously alongside one another (Birch, p. 85). Birch goes on to note that this parody is summarized by Brooke-Rose in an interview with David Hayman and Keith Cohen:

> When the Nixon pardon was announced on television [...] it said CBS special, you know, complete and free pardon, etc. and then, on the local station, ‘this program presented to you by X, the deodorant that kills domestic odours.’ I just collapsed with laughter [...] these things happen, the coincidences in life. So that rather than doing what language is supposed to do [...] it does exactly the opposite. You know, one whiff and it’s clean, and of course with the Nixon pardon this is exactly what happened.\(^4\)

Birch draws attention to these comparative code systems and the protagonist’s ability to switch between them at will. By manipulating language in this way, the protagonist is being deviant in her translation process, and by exposing the multiple relationships between the translated signifier and its multiple signifieds, the meaning of the language becomes diluted with comparative signifiers from different code systems. In this respect, the language that she uses in her role as a simultaneous interpreter is constructed from a cross-section of code systems, which as mentioned above, Birch claims is a distinctly feminine approach to language (Birch, p. 83). The dilution of meaning through the process of translation encourages the reader to question the value of language and this is emblematised throughout the novel in the frequent mentioning of brand-name advertisements and consumer products in a number of different languages. The phrase ‘whiter than white’ is repeated throughout the novel to refer to the power of washing powder, the ‘washing out’ of meaning in language through the process of translation and more specifically in the case of the protagonist’s needs post-war: ‘a Persil-Schein certificate denazifying us whiter than white’ (\textit{Between}, p. 473) implying an expunging of history, similar to the Nixon pardon. The certificate that the protagonist receives after the war ‘denazifying’ her affects her identity again, relieving her from any ethico-

\(^{40}\) Hayman and Cohen, ‘Interview with Christine Brooke-Rose’ (1976), p. 15.
political responsibilities. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak discusses the politics of translation, and states that

Making sense of ourselves is what produces identity. If one feels that the production of identity as self-meaning, not just meaning, is as pluralized as a drop of water under a microscope, one is not always satisfied, outside of the ethicopolitical [sic] arena as such, with “generating” thoughts of one’s own [...] For one of the ways of getting around the confines of one’s “identity” as one produces expository prose is to work at someone else’s title, as one works with a language that belongs to many others. This, after all, is one of the seductions of translating. It is a simple miming of the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self.\(^{41}\)

With this in mind, one could argue that the translator protagonist in Between only mimics a Nazi identity during the war through her use of the German language. Translating for the Nazis has not transformed her into a Nazi, it has only been a costume that she has worn, made authentic by her command of the language. Spivak regards this mimicry as a positive aspect of translation, and in this respect for the protagonist, being used ‘simply as an instrument’, without ‘thoughts of one’s own’ is able to defy the constraints of her fixed national identity, allowing her to exist in plurals or versions of herself.

As mentioned previously, Brooke-Rose had her own intimate experiences in the area of translation. Her multi-lingual upbringing, her work at Bletchley Park and her marriage to the Polish poet Jerzy Pietrkiewicz, all required Brooke-Rose to be able to change and adapt between coded language systems. Further to these personal experiences, in 1969 she received the Arts Council Translation Prize for her work on the Alain Robbe-Grillet’s Dans le Labyrinthe (1959, trans. 1967). Her translation of the novel was described by The Observer as ‘faultless’ and this quotation appears on the 1980 edition’s back cover as a testament to her work.\(^{42}\) The reader cannot help but compare this assessment of Brooke-Rose’s own work to that of the protagonist in Between.


\(^{42}\)Robbe-Grillet, *In the Labyrinth*, back cover.
However, as a novelist, Brooke-Rose is far from the historical sherpa. In reality she is a deviant pun-artist who is capable of switching between coded language systems, a skill that only begins to become apparent in *Between*. If we can agree with Birch’s assertion that the protagonist’s ‘magpieing’ approach to language is distinctly feminine, then it is clear that Brooke-Rose uses this figure to expose her concern for a loss of female identity through fixed language forms. These fixed forms are referred to in the conclusion of her essay ‘Woman as Semiotic Object’ (1991): ‘I cannot help wondering whether semiotics is not a peculiarly reactionary discipline and semioticians unconsciously nostalgic for nice, deep, ancient, phallocratic, elementary structures of significance’ (*STT*, p. 249). These old-fashioned structures are discussed in detail in her later novel *Subscript* (1999) where Brooke-Rose rewrites the ‘his-story’ of evolution.

*Subscript* returns to the concepts of female language acquisition and patriarchy over thirty years after the publication of *Between*. In this novel, Brooke-Rose presents a brief summary of the history of time, beginning with the life of prokaryote then eukaryote cells, taking the reader on a journey through evolution, from single celled organisms, through early marine life that evolves into primates and eventually into human beings. As in *Between*, the eventual sustained focus of the novel is a female narrative voice. Aka is introduced to the reader approximately half-way through the narrative, and despite jumping hundreds and thousands of years between chapters, she remains a constant character, allowing the reader a single foothold in the ever-evolving story. Karen Lawrence provides an informative and shrewd reading of the novel in her analysis of Brooke-Rose’s fiction, and correctly points out that ‘it isn’t until the tenth chapter that males are referred to as “they” and the thirteenth chapter that this enduring female consciousness receives the name Aka’ (Lawrence, p. 151). The use of the third person plural pronoun ‘they’ signifies difference as well as separation between the females and males of the species and there becomes a division of responsibilities and labour based upon the attributes of the sexes:

43 Prokaryote organisms are single celled organisms that have no defined nuclear membrane, nor any other defined organelles. Eukaryote organisms are either single celled or multi-celled organisms that do have a defined membrane surrounding the nucleus.

44 For a more detailed analysis of this novel, see Karen Lawrence’s chapter ‘Inscriptions of Life’ in *Techniques for Living: Fiction and Theory in the work of Christine Brooke-Rose* (2010).
Each of us belongs to one male who willingly goes off to seek fleshfood while we collect sweet fat roots and stalks and berries to go with it or feed our young under the few trees, or just sit and break stones [...] We females are always in close tenderness with offspring, unlike the males. (*Subscript*, pp. 99-100)

This is a well-known, perhaps exhausted stereotypical narrative of history: the hunter-gatherer male and the child bearing/rearing female. However, the narrative continues by revealing that language acquisition as a form of communication is attributed to the females:

But there is a great need to exchange pictures and feelings behind our eyes. About the shape of stones. About the movements we make. About the pain in our forelegs and fingers. And neck. About our young. About the elderly male in charge. About the heat, the shade, the food that will be brought to be slit apart and chopped. We can’t look into each others’ eyes and work at the same time. Nor can we make gestures since we need our forefeet. So we just make soft noises as clearly as possible to accompany a doing, a sharp slant, a hard smash, a high tap. This causes smiles of recognition, and more noises into the chipping silence, and we start listening carefully, or emitting a noise and then looking up to confirm. (*Subscript*, p. 108)

This language of noises is centred upon work, and is (at first) kept hidden from the men: ‘the few of us who enjoy the game decide with a nod to keep it as a silly game, that is, to keep it from the males’ (*Subscript*, p. 110). Later in the same chapter, the next generation of females seems not to have inherited the language, or any desire to learn the secret noises, apart from imitating the sounds to the males, thereby betraying the secret of the hidden language: ‘And the males of course turn the whole game into scorn, so there’s not much desire to play it any more’ (*Subscript*, p. 112). The skill of language acquisition and development is buried for sixteen hundred-thousand years, until the beginning of chapter thirteen which begins with a meeting of the males: ‘The meeting has gone on since lightrise. But then, males do so enjoy hearing males make speech’ (*Subscript*, p. 127). This quotation betrays a biting sense of sarcasm that is inherent within the novel: the male dominance over language seems well-established, having been practised for
millennia. It appears here that over time, language and speech has become a male attribute, in spite of its origins in female circles.

In ‘Woman as Semiotic Object’, Brooke-Rose discusses Lévi-Strauss’ assertion that language and women are connected by their shared status of being ‘parts of a meaningful system’.45 Brooke-Rose comments upon this somewhat euphemistic analysis of historical social interaction and repositions both language and women as objects or ‘tokens’ of exchange, positing that the success of this system of exchange was based upon ‘women’s silence, on the repression of their signified into the unconscious’ (STT, pp 240-1). She goes on to state that those women that were not silent through this process ‘were usually castigated as too close to both nature and truth for comfort, in other words as witches, and in more “scientific” terms as hysterics’, or were alternatively seen as oracles who were reduced to ‘twittering birds’ in their legends or quickly dominated by male gods (Zeus/ Apollo etc.) (STT, p. 241). With Subscript, Brooke-Rose seeks to illustrate this process of silencing women through language, despite their capability to invent it and to teach it to others. Indeed, the process of tuition is paramount in order for language and concepts to survive from one generation to another, and as it is the females that are responsible for teaching the young, this baton falls to them. The use and didactic command of language by women in a domestic environment (at work, in the home) starkly contrasts with their exclusion from political and public forums that depend upon language in order to convey internal ideas. In fact, later in the novel, Aka becomes part of these public forums and is known as the ‘Wordwoman’ however, it is explained that she inherited this title from her father, as she was the ‘only offspring of the old Wordman’ (Subscript, p. 176). Her name ‘Aka’ or ‘a.k.a.’ (‘also known as’) seems to have pre-empted her dual identity, gesturing towards a ‘split self’ of a multiple function within the tribe. Again, Brooke-Rose confronts the question of an inherited language and the identification of that language as being feminine/masculine in its conception. As the Wordwoman, Aka is responsible for translating between clans, and her presence and skill are both necessary resources for the success of the tribe: ‘for distant clans aren’t always easy to understand, or even speak quite differently, but as there’s always at least one

woman from that clan she can translate’ (Subscript, p. 177). There is a sense that the secret language lives on between females and that despite the differences between tribes, the females can always connect through a shared language. In Subscript, as in Between, the woman is both exchangeable (for goods, money etc.) as well as necessary. Her role in language, particularly in translation, is paradoxical: she is regarded as vital, however, the originality of her communication and ideas are continually rejected. Aka is often reprimanded for her ‘opinions’ (Subscript, p. 184), and by the time society has evolved to that depicted in Between, the Wordwoman knows her role as an instrument used to convey male discourse (although she still has her secret games).

Both Between and Subscript depict the experience of the Wordwoman as being paradoxical, interstitial, perpetually in motion and evolving. In an interview with Lorna Sage, when describing her work and her career as a writer, Brooke-Rose states that she is ‘always falling between two stools’, implying that her identity as a writer is never able ‘to be’ defined or fixed, and therefore in the minds of her readers, she does not exist as one particular label or technique.46 Brooke-Rose, like the ‘wordwomen’ in Between and Subscript is out of place in the sense that she is a woman in a patriarchally constructed system. Her novels and her criticism on this subject of women and the role they have in using and creating language breaks the silence and allows for the deconstruction of the patriarchal system. Aka is the split subject, the archetypal instrument, paradoxical in that she is both vital and disposable, used to connect the males that will develop society. The protagonist in Between is a deviant, a female exponent of the avant-garde, a multi-lingual code-breaker/maker, and the cost of her freedom to move freely through language is that she is unnamed, and unknown. The themes of silence, voice and patriarchal control are further explored in Amalgamemnon.

**Amalgamemnon (1984): Prophesy & Possession**

Even though Brooke-Rose’s novel Amalgamemnon was published sixteen years after Between, it is similarly preoccupied with the theme of female translation, though in this instance this theme is conveyed through the medium of divination. Brooke-Rose uses a selection of classical intertexts for her fifth experimental novel, including Aeschylus’s The

Agamemnon, Herodotus’s The Histories and Homer’s The Iliad and The Odyssey. Furthermore, with Amalgamemnon, Brooke-Rose returns to using the constraint of the lipogram, but in this case, it is a syntactical lipogram – only to use ‘nonrealized tenses, such as the future’ (IA, p. 17). Jean-Jacques Lecercle summarizes what Brooke-Rose means by ‘nonrealized tenses’ in his essay ‘Reading Amalgamemnon’ (1995):

She means the tense morphemes to be found in imperative and interrogative clauses, or in clauses containing modal auxiliaries. In other words, Amalgamemnon is a syntactic lipogram, because it excludes declarative sentences without modal auxiliaries – in other words, plain assertions of facts.47

The lipogram in Amalgamemnon causes uncertainty and anxiety in the reader as it makes the text difficult to follow at times. This anxiety is mirrored by the female protagonist who is concerned for her own future as a Professor of classical literature, an expert on the works that Brooke-Rose uses as intertexts. The novel begins with the paraphrased first line from Samuel Beckett’s novel Malone Dies (1951): ‘I shall soon be quite dead at last in spite of all’.48 Brooke-Rose replaces Beckett’s word ‘dead’ with the word ‘redundant’, and ‘in spite’ with ‘despite’. Brooke-Rose states that this replacement is intended to create ‘an equivalence’ between ‘redundant’ and ‘dead’ in the same way that the later edited terms are equivalent (IA, p. 17). This equivalency in language is reminiscent of Between’s translator protagonist’s language games and selective, almost invisible deviancy in her translations. The replication of Beckett’s lines is the first of many instances throughout the novel where redundancy is made to seem synonymous with death. However, Beckett’s influence does not end here, as there is a thematic comparison that can be made between Malone Dies and Amalgamemnon. Beckett’s protagonist, Malone Mutt, narrates the account of Sapo’s life, which seems to blur the boundaries between fiction and the historical, in the same way that Brooke-Rose invokes and satirises the voice of Herodotus whose renowned Histories, are made into ‘fibstory’ (Amal, p. 22) as they are absorbed by Aeschylus’s The Agamemnon and other works of fiction. Brooke-Rose further satirizes the idea of history (and ‘his-story’) by interspersing

the text with a selection of family trees illustrating how fictional characters are related to historical figures (Amal, pp. 38-39; pp. 100-101; p. 103). The conflation of historical figures with fictional ones is an example of Brooke-Rose’s preoccupation with bringing multiple code systems together. The effect of this conjunction is that each system compromises the other, transforming the discourse into a kind of ‘her-story’. Jan Baetens summarises the novel succinctly when he asserts that ‘[t]he narrator’s thoughts and sense of word-play explore the tensions between fact and imagination against the background of reflection on the changing status of women in relation to traditional hierarchies.’

Thus, Amalgamemnon can be seen as what Linda Hutcheon describes as a ‘historiographical metafiction’ of women in patriarchy; specifically academic or professional women in the patriarchy of literacy (in terms of the creation and wielding of language) and the academy.

The female protagonist of the novel is concerned for her survival as a university classics Professor with the technological revolution looming on the horizon. She asserts:

[…] for who will want to know about ancient passions divine royal middle class or working in words and phrases and structures that will continue to spark out inside the techne that will soon be silenced by the high technology? Who will still want to read at night some utterly other discourse that will shimmer out of a minicircus of light upon a page of say Agamemnon [...] (Amal, p. 5)

This short passage is full of anxiety for the protagonist’s role in academia and indeed, for the life she has spent studying this ‘utterly other discourse’ which seems no longer relevant to society compared with ‘high technology’. This novel was first published in 1984; around the same time as the early versions of the World Wide Web were being developed, and society was becoming exposed to technology at a domestic level – preparing to replace their typewriters with word processors. The fear of being replaced by technology is a pervading theme throughout Brooke-Rose’s later work.

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Amalgamemnon is the first novel of four that Brooke-Rose described as her ‘Intercom Quartet’: Amalgamemnon followed by Xorandor (1986), Verbivore (1988) and Textermination (1991). With hind-sight, the anxiety that these novels harbour for the impending technological revolution and its effect upon the printed/written word has become premonitory. The presence of ‘e-readers’, tablet computers that can download digitalised copies of novels, and indeed, ‘on-line only’ publishing are all media that threaten the survival of the paper-book industry and indeed the presence of the written word in domestic settings. ‘Soon’ had been the original title for Amalgamemnon, which imbued the novel with a sense of imminent danger. Karen Lawrence compares the protagonist, Mira, to James Joyce’s Finnegan in that she ‘assumes historical, mythic, and astronomical proportions. Her mission, however, remains constant: to awaken those around her to the impending doom she sees on the horizon. The novel’s original title, “Soon,” was an early attempt to convey this pressing predicament’ (Lawrence, p. 100).

The contemporary reader of Brooke-Rose’s novels cannot help but wonder, with the access to digital material being now so readily available, how long it will be until the texts of antiquity and their Professors are rendered too different, too ‘utterly other’ (Amal, p. 5) to be considered as useful to the digital generation. Indeed, this is the question that the protagonist ponders while sitting up at night, reading Herodotus, listening to the radio. The narration of the novel is frequently interrupted by the patriarchal language from Herodotus and the information from the shipping forecast, as well as the more trivial/personal content of the phone-in programme. Sarah Birch notes that there is a sharp contrast between news broadcasts in which men tell the facts about the world and phone-in programmes run by women [...] The realm of public discourse is that of events, expert diagnosis, and scientific prognoses, whereas the private sphere is that of opinion and anecdote, subjective reaction, and cultural mythology which is devalorized by its implicit feminization. (Birch, pp. 104-105)

The effect of this contrast is to create an amalgamation of language and the mixing of multiple gendered lexical code-systems. The female code-system is depicted as being
trivial and domestic by comparison with the heavyweight male discourse that debates global issues:

The marathon talks in Brussels will no doubt continue late into the night to and work out evergreen structures for green Europe and find out whether it can ever really be green or only black and blue [...] And if you want a girl you should eat more calcium, if a boy more protein, or make love when the womb is high hello can you hear me?

Yes, yes go on my dear.

After the full moon, and he’ll get in deeper, and make a boy, could that be bzzzz. (Amal, p. 36)

In this example, the serious ‘marathon talks’ are juxtaposed against the phone-in programme about conception. While Birch correctly states that the latter is ‘devalourized by its implicit feminization’, it also corroborates the patriarchally constructed social/cultural myths of control over gender during conception. This in itself depicts an antiquated vision of biological understanding, which leads to the perception of a ‘female language’ as only reinforcing out-dated, patriarchal beliefs.

It is eventually disclosed throughout the course of the novel, that the name of the protagonist is Mira Enketei. Lecercle identifies this name as being etymologically linked to ‘Mira-in-the-whale, the name of a star’. In fact, Mira discloses her astronomical identity during one of her ponderings: ‘As if, for instance, I were some other constellation, not Enketei-In Cetus, not Jonah inside the Whale, but Orion say, to be siberianized for flagrant delight of opinion’ (Amal, p. 17). Incidentally, this star, which is part of the Cetus (whale) constellation, has been in its ‘death throes’ for the last thirty-thousand years, emitting ‘a light-blue stream of material including oxygen, carbon and nitrogen’ making it seem as if the star has a tail. Indeed, it would not be too bold to suggest that Brooke-Rose uses the star’s ‘tail’ as a pun when writing of Mira Enketei’s

52 Lecercle, ‘Reading Amalgamemnon’, p. 160.
‘tale’ that describes her own death throes as an academic. Throughout the novel, Mira is referred to by different labels: an Abyssinian maid, likely to be a reference to Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s ‘wailing woman’ in his poem ‘Kubla Khan; or A Vision in a Dream: A Fragment’ (1816), famously composed in a fog of opium hallucination. She is also referred to as Anne de Romède, a reference to the galaxy Andromeda that can be seen in the Andromeda constellation, named after the ancient Greek princess who is stripped naked and chained to a rock by Poseidon as an offering to the sea-monster, Cetus. The reference to Coleridge’s poem allows the theme of premonition or fanciful pondering to echo through the novel, and the engagement with ancient mythology reveals Mira’s ‘Janus-faced’ narrative technique: she simultaneously looks backwards into history in order to predict her own future. This is only reinforced by the most common name that appears as a substitute for Mira which is Cassandra, Cass, or Sandra. All of these are versions of the same name, and are references to the seer in Aeschylus’ The Agamemnon. Cassandra’s prophesies were rendered never to be believed after she refused the sexual advances of the god, Apollo. There is a clear intertextual relationship implied by the name, and Brooke-Rose uses the lipogram in order to further extend this character-based metaphor of redundancy in spite of knowledge of the future.

Brooke-Rose lifts or ‘kidnaps’ Cassandra from Aeschylus’s text as a way of mimicking the violent abductions of ancient Greece as depicted by Herodotus. At the beginning of the novel Brooke-Rose makes reference to the incidents reported by Herodotus: ‘the Phoenicians kidnapping Io and the Greeks plagiarizing the king of Tyre’s daughter Europe’ (Amal, p. 1). The term ‘plagiarizes’ is used here in its antiquated sense, meaning ‘to kidnap’, as mentioned by Brooke-Rose in her own discussion of the novel in Invisible Author (IA, p. 50). Karen Lawrence takes the notion of plagiarism a step further when she considers that these women in Herodotus’s ‘fibstory’ are abused not only physically, but psychically with the loss of their voices [...] not only women, but women’s thoughts and voices are kidnapped/plagiarized in the novel: “I’ll know it’ll be he who’ll end up cassandring me, precisely in nomansland where the male gods will ever take over the pythian oracles, turning them into twittering spokespersons". (Lawrence, p. 103)
Aeschylus’s Cassandra was initially given the gift of prophesy as an early attempt at Apollo’s seduction of her. By imbuing Cassandra with this gift, Apollo positions her as an extremely powerful, yet ultimately powerless woman. Her prophesies provide a direct communication link between the deity and man, nevertheless, she is still a conduit for male communication. That Apollo speaks directly through her, suggests that her physical body is only capable of transmitting his voice and commands rather than any of her own. Like the protagonist in Between, Cassandra is used ‘simply as an instrument’ by the patriarchs that speak through her. Michael A. Flower studies the female seer in the final chapter of his work The Seer in Ancient Greece (2009), asserting that:

 [...] the best known of the female seers was the Pythia at Delphi, who served as the mouthpiece for the god Apollo. The god was thought to possess her and speak directly through her; the voice was hers, but the words were his. [...] The assumption of most modern scholars is that all female seers were of this type; they were the passive agents of mediumistic possession.54

In his Phaedrus, Plato asserts that there is a fundamental difference between the prophet that receives visions through ‘inspired prophesy’ and he who prophesizes through the ‘observations of birds and other signs’.55 He claims that ‘inspired prophesy’ is the result of a manic episode where the seer is addressed directly by a god, whereas the latter or ‘oionic’ prophesy ‘in a rational way provide[s] insight (nous) and information (historia) for human thinking (oiēsis)’.56 Plato posits Socrates in opposition to Phaedrus in this discussion, as Phaedrus believes that “madness” is an evil’.57 Socrates’ main line of defence is to assert that not all madness can be evil, as ‘the greatest of goods come to us through madness, provided that it is bestowed by divine gift’.58 The ‘divine gift’ that he speaks of here is that of prophesy. He goes on to assert that “[t]he prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona achieve much that is good for Greece when mad [...] whereas when sane they achieve little or nothing’.59 He concludes that the divine gift

56 Plato, Phaedrus, p. 57.
57 Plato, Phaedrus, p. 57.
58 Plato, Phaedrus, p. 57.
59 Plato, Phaedrus, p. 57.
possessed by a mad prophet is more valuable than that of an interpreter who has learned to read physical signs: ‘god-sent madness is a finer thing than man-made sanity, by the degree that mantic is a more perfect and more valuable thing than oionistic, both when name is measured against name, and when effect is measured against effect.’

Both Flower and Plato describe the process of possession of female seers by the male god Apollo, who intends to use them as a conduit for communication across the boundary. The female seer is possessed by the patriarch in much the same way that the female interpreter is used in *Between*, and Aka the Wordwoman is used in *Subscript*, ‘simply as an instrument’. The act of possession and the manic episodes that result from it are experiences that are exclusive to female seers therefore; it appears from what Flower is stating above, that it is only female seers who can experience ‘inspired prophesy’, as a direct result of their passivity in the process. In this sense, the female is a literal conduit for male thought: a tool in the communication process that is only valuable as long as she remains in this role.

Aeschylus’s Cassandra is depicted as experiencing similar manic episodes to those that Plato describes above. In the exchange with the leader of the chorus, Cassandra explains her relationship with Apollo in the following lines:

**CASSANDRA:** He came like a wrestler, magnificent, took me down and breathed his fire through me and –

**LEADER:** You bore him a child?

**CASSANDRA:** I yielded, then at the climax I recoiled – I deceived Apollo!

**LEADER:** But the god’s skills – they seized you even then?

**CASSANDRA:** Even then I told my people all the grief to come.

**LEADER:** And Apollo’s anger never touched you? – is it possible?

**CASSANDRA:** Once I betrayed him I could never be believed.  

These lines depict Apollo’s graphic attempt to possess Cassandra by impregnating her with a child of his own creation. However, Cassandra recoils from Apollo at the moment

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60 Plato, *Phaedrus*, p. 57.
of ‘climax’, refusing to allow her body to be rendered as a conduit for Apollo’s male seed. Indeed, her actions here are anything but passive, as she recoils in an attempt to take control of her own body and refuses her possession by Apollo. Her deceit is implicit within her refusal to be a passive female, and because her non-compliance is clear to Apollo, he must punish her for asserting control over her fate. Apollo punishes Cassandra, not by depriving her of her sight, but rather more malevolently, by continuing to allow her to see the future (including her own death), but for her prophesies never to be believed. On the contrary, the puns and language tricks performed by the translator-protagonist in Between go unnoticed by her male employers, and so she is secretly liberated by her use of language. However, it is paramount that her liberation and deviant language formation remain clandestine otherwise, she too will face redundancy or the death of her career. In this respect, Between’s protagonist can be seen to be actively creating her own language, deviating from her role as a faithful instrument.

The whirling storm that surrounds Cassandra while she is prophesising suggests that her mind is in a state of chaotic madness. The ‘pain’ that she endures when experiencing the vision implies that Apollo’s possession of her is forceful, even violent, reminiscent of the violent rape of the text by the interpreter as described above. The pain that Cassandra experiences is a direct result of her refusal to be passive in the relationship with Apollo, and her ‘birth pangs’ are both metaphorical and literal, referring to her delivery of Apollo’s words through her own. Cassandra forms a link between the gods and men in the same way that the ‘wordwomen’ in Between and Subscript allow men of different nationalities and tribes to communicate with each other, but there is a sense that it is a more painful, less practical role for the seer than the speaker or translator. Mira’s prophetic style when predicting her own future is much less dramatic than Cassandra’s prophesising, although it is clear that she too, fears her own fate of being eradicated. Mira’s prophesy still requires some interpretation, as at times it seems as if she is rambling, or narrating in non-sequiturs in multiple voices that each ‘natter away’ to themselves in a performance that verges on madness. Susan E. Hawkins asserts that ‘the text becomes a space in which a cacophony of voices, or discursive amplifications, or babble or little stories – whichever term best suits – enact their own
sounding.’ In this sense, we can view Mira’s multiple identities, and the text’s multiple voices as part of Brooke-Rose’s schizophrenic tradition, and each rambling is contributory to the composition of the single narrative. In this sense the text is a fabric: each rambling voice is a thread that weaves itself throughout the text, over and under other voices, the result of which is one single texture of text. The following example from the novel illustrates this metaphor:

The rhetoric of repetition will protect me, for the mind must play to the last with anaphoric expectation, waiting for which permuted variant day after day, week after week, despite the poverty of possibilities but no, it could be the kick in the shin and the egghead, or the tripping up and the cranial ukranian, or the pestiferous peasant and the thin man thin ration or the kick in the shin and the ration revisionist or show me your ass and your intellectual infrastructure, with so many elements the permutations of acute aching pain could be counted in thousands, but I shall not work them out for lack of a fidgetal computer and fundamental interest: Garbage In, Garbage Out, my Gigo thoughts will always weave in and out of daily details such as the increasing wobbliness of my pickaxe or who will remember me outside if I ever get there. (Amal, pp. 17-18)

These extended moments where multiple voices jostle together often contain familiar phrases to which the reader is encouraged to cling for comfort: ‘kick in the shin’, ‘day after day’. The repetition of these phrases, as previously discussed, is a sign of the schizophrenic nature of the text and alludes to the madness that Casandra’s prophesising initiates. The ‘textual madness’ created by these repetitions and multiple voices encodes the text demanding that it be interpreted or analysed by the reader. In this sense, the language used in this novel can be related to the language of the hysteric.

Perhaps the most famous hysteric is Josef Breuer’s patient Anna O. and her instances of hysteria, during which she would begin to ‘paint some situation or tell some story, hesitatingly at first and in her paraphasic jargon’. This was in the early stages of her condition, during which time she was still speaking German. Later, as her condition

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worsened, Anna O. was only able to speak and to understand English, a language with which the people around her, including her nurse, were not entirely familiar. The significant aspect of this remarkable study is that during manic episodes, Anna O. unconsciously (according to Breuer and Freud) changed the language that she was using to describe the images within her mind, meaning that she was able to articulate her experiences, but unable to use the language that already existed as the formal code. Anna O.’s ability to switch between language code-systems is an example of what Birch describes above as a ‘feminine approach to language’; however, the fact that she could only code-switch during manic episodes implies that she needed to be in a state of distress or hysteria in order to break from the formal language code. Mira is in a state of distress due to her fear of redundancy and so her premonitory narrative can be regarded as a hysterical account. Conversely, neither the translator-protagonist of *Between* nor Aka in *Subscript* undergo any kind of manic episode. However, these two women are also valued and commended by the men that use them, where as Cassandra and Mira have been used and (will be) discarded by patriarchal institutions, and are only capable of predicting a future over which they have no control. Aka in particular relates linear information between males: she is an interpreter and a mimic of male speech. On the contrary, Mira predicts a time where she will no longer be possessed by the patriarchal institution of academia, and as such her language is liberated from the constraints of patriarchal control, and so becomes less linear, less focussed and less defined, which makes it appear as ‘rambling’. With Mira’s narrative, Brooke-Rose confronts the issue of the gender of discourse.

Margaret Whitford analyses the ideas of the French feminist Luce Irigaray and asserts that although Irigaray is widely referred to as an exponent of an *écriture féminine*, in fact, her ideas are more about ‘speaking’ rather than writing. Whitford notes that the terms ‘*parler-femme*’ and ‘*la sexuation du discours*’ have been translated as “‘speaking (as) woman’” and the “sexualisation of discourse”’. Whitford is quick to point out that Irigaray’s own definition of *parler-femme* is ‘infamous’ as it made it sound as if ‘women, when speaking as women, were destined to be hysterical, incoherent, and irrational [...]

64 Anna O. did not realise that she was speaking English during this period. In fact during this time she was able to translate written French into English just by reading it aloud. See *Studies on Hysteria*, p. 21-48.
it did not sound a particularly attractive option for women.’\textsuperscript{66} The section from Irigaray to which Whitford refers, follows:

“She” is indefinitely other in herself. This is doubtless why she is said to be whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious ... not to mention her language, in which she sets off in all directions leaving “him” unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Hers are contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whosoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand.\textsuperscript{67}

Certainly, Irigaray could be easily misinterpreted here, as the emphasis that she puts upon the incoherence and the incomprehensibility of female speech can be seen as damaging to the legitimacy of such a language. The use of the word ‘mad’ in this instance seems to further delegitimize the language of the female. However, if one recalls Socrates’s earlier stated opinion, that ‘the greatest of goods come to us through madness, provided that it is bestowed by divine gift’, then it is possible to see the direction towards which Irigaray is heading.\textsuperscript{68} The term ‘other’ is key in the unpicking of this quotation, as it refers to that which cannot be measured by the ‘ready-made grids’ or translated by the ‘elaborated code’ of patriarchy. Irigaray describes this language as being unquantifiable by man-made devices and therefore, there exists no precedent of how such a language should or could be interpreted. However, here lies the crux of the problem: if such a language is unable to be interpreted, then how can it be a useful way to articulate the female position, and how can the female use this language that is so similar to that of the hysteric without being considered as mad? Irigaray’s answer to this problem is that the female must engage with patriarchal forms of language in order to express a female discourse, through the process of mimicry:

There is an initial phase, perhaps only one “path,” the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation and

\textsuperscript{66} Whitford, Luce Irigaray, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{68} Plato, Phaedrus, p. 57.
thus to begin to thwart it [...] To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself [...] to “ideas,” in particular to ideas about herself that are elaborated in/ by a masculine logic, but so as to make “visible,” by effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of the possible female operation of the feminine in language. It also means “to unveil” the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. They also remain elsewhere: another case of the persistence of “matter,” but also of “sexual pleasure.”69

Mira, although distressed at the thought of being made redundant, does not a mimic the language of patriarchy in the same way that Aka and Between’s translator-protagonist do in their own novels. Mira’s ponderous predictions frequently reinforce her fear of redundancy and her removal from the university, which is not only a hub of patriarchal knowledge for her, but also provides her with a physical connection to the academic language of patriarchy.

Mira’s mimicry of patriarchal discourse is intricately connected to her lover Willy (later Wally) whom she describes as ‘my Amalgamemnon’ (Amal, p. 144), making repeated references to his ‘sexplicit’ (Amal, p. 8; p. 10) demands upon their relationship. Indeed, his faintly ridiculous temper and his sexual demands are reinforced by the evolution of his name: Willy – a somewhat childlike slang term for penis – changes to Wally – a juvenile word to describe a stupid person. In this evolution, Willy/Wally is infantilised by Mira’s nomenclature; although he still seems to reside in a seat of ultimate power, controlling Mira’s conversations and thoughts. Mira’s narration takes place while Willy is asleep, snoring in bed. With this in mind, Mira’s predictive narrative transforms into a private dream sequence of her life without/ beyond her lover. She describes Willy/Wally as a ‘foreign body’ emphasising his otherness, and at length describes how he enslaves her, possessing her both physically and socially:

Tonight over a vast meal I shall have cooked for his even vaster belly Wally will search the desiccated madlanes of the early creativity of women, and Jews and

69 Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One, p. 76.
blacks, brilliant performers yes but lacking in the true creative spirit [...] Meanwhile he’ll speak without thinking and I’ll think without speaking but never quite together since my speaking to any purpose but pub platitudes will already make him angry And just as the young Scythians will be unable to learn the language of the Amazons but the women will pick up theirs and therefore disappear, so he will dispossess me of my friends, my activities, my reading and even frown on my desire for a television set, a glance at the evening paper should be enough he’ll say, at least one may in theory verify. (Amal, pp. 138-141)

When Mira speaks with authority upon a subject with any weight, Willy/Wally becomes ‘angry’. As a result, Mira is often forced to ‘put on [her] postface and mimagree’ (Amal, p. 138) in order to avoid conflict: an appeasement that continues to infantilise Willy/Wally in the mind of the reader. Mira’s ‘mimagree’–ment (an amalgamation of mime and agree), has an aural symmetry with the word ‘mimicry’. By miming agreement with Willy/Wally, Mira not only placates him, but also protects herself both physically and linguistically by submitting to his dominance. Irigaray notes that

the mimetic role itself is complex, for it presupposes that one can lend oneself to everything, if not everyone. That one can copy anything at all, anyone at all, can receive all impressions without appropriating them to oneself, and without adding any.

In this sense, mimesis is a performative mask that can be donned to disguise the true identity or intention of the individual. With this in mind, Mira’s ‘mimagree’–ment is a superficial gesture maintained socially as well as linguistically by her gender. On the occasions where she does not mimagree, and attempts to activate an assertive voice, it is either interpreted by Willy/Wally as being a way of showing her commitment to him, which is met with sexual excitement and expectation, or alternatively, he becomes angry:

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70 The influence behind Brooke-Rose’s use of portmanteau words is unclear. Although perhaps there are points of comparison between Joyce’s use of portmanteau words in Finnegans Wake, Brooke-Rose often protested against Joyce as one of her influences, as she did not read his works until quite late on, and when she did, she claimed that she did not care for them. See Invisible Author and Hayman and Cohen’s ‘Interview with Christine Brooke-Rose’. Perhaps more likely, is the influence of Lewis Carroll’s use of portmanteau words in his novels and poetry.

71 Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One, p. 147.
I put on my preface and go through the routine [...] What fun his eyes sexclaiming as if disputation were proof of my commitment. Or else annoyed, already at being disputed, reminding me again as if by chance of my emotional desert and his irrigation of it as over-signalled honour [...] (Amal, p. 138).

In this metaphor, Willy/Wally is the fertile mind, bringing nourishment and light into Mira’s ‘emotional desert’, devoid of intellectual thought. Her disputes are perceived as a form of sexual foreplay, a game in which she flirts with independent thought, only to be ravished by his ultimately dominant language. He is the all-powerful patriarch and she is the uncultivated landscape that would be barren if not for the irrigation that his language system brings.

Mira’s future, both professional and personal, is predicted to be a bleak affair. Willy/Wally’s possession of her on a personal level mimics the relationships between men and women in the texts of Herodotus and Aeschylus, as well as the hold that these texts have over Mira in a professional capacity. Mira’s premonitory narration is a distinctly female expression of an oppressed voice. Like the unnamed protagonist in Between, on a superficial level, Mira appears to be a passive female who has adopted a ‘technique for living’ in a patriarchal society. However, her erratic narrative technique and her stealing away downstairs to escape Willy/Wally’s oppressive snoring, in order to engage with multiple discourses show her to be far from passive. Mira has less agency than the protagonist in Between, whose superior intellect and dexterity with multiple language codes position her as an indispensible instrument. On the contrary, Mira’s fear stems from the fact that she is dispensable; she will be made redundant and that her future will eventually end. Mira, like Cassandra, foresees her own death at the hands of the dominant patriarchy. This is all expressed in the calquing of Beckett’s opening line: ‘I shall soon be quite redundant [dead] at last despite [in spite] of all’ (Amal, p. 1). While the content of her vision is somewhat pessimistic, her engagement with multiple discourses, punning and her creation of portmanteau words signify her deviance from and destruction of formal narration. In this sense, Brooke-Rose’s prediction for the future of the woman writer is not as bleak as Mira’s. She uses multiple discourses to confront historical (patriarchal) representations of women and the female as an author, and
makes clear that the search for a female language has been, and will continue to be, a long and complicated journey.

**Next (1998) and the Dispossessed ‘Other’**

If the female academic in *Between* is an indispensable ‘instrument’, and Mira is in fear of being dispensable, the characters in *Next* have been discarded a long time ago. Brooke-Rose’s tenth experimental novel focuses on a group of homeless characters, and their unrelenting journey walking the streets, pausing only for food and shelter in the limited ‘dropout’ centres of London. Brooke-Rose depicts a group of people that are regarded as being entirely peripheral to society, entirely ‘Other’; yet they are ever-present, haunting London like ghostly spectres that never quite exist for the rest of society. Brooke-Rose’s experiment of the lipogram returns here, this time with the omission of the verb ‘to have’. This lipogram emphasises the disenfranchisement of the homeless characters, and the limited use of the first person pronouns – that exclusively appear in speech between characters – only adds to her depiction of these societal ‘dropouts’ (*Next*, p. 2) as dispossessed citizens. The narrative flows from character to character without any demarcation, emphasising the wanderings of the homeless around London. The text takes on a typographical significance when one character moves alone from place to place. In these instances, the text appears as double-spaced, broken lines mimicking the thought processes of the characters. Michela Canepari-Labib comments on the temporal and spatial settings of the novel stating that they become somehow irrelevant in this novel: to the homeless every doorway is exactly like every other, each bench is the same no matter which park it is in, the questions asked in the job centre are repeated again and again, and the sleeping conditions of the dropout centres are always similar. (Canepari-Labib, p. 128)

The repetition to which Canepari-Labib refers here is reminiscent of the repetition in *Between* and *Subscript*; the moving between hotel rooms/locations, the repeated mineral water labels/processes of hunting, gathering and the continual travel from place to place. Indeed, Brooke-Rose creates ‘a sort of no man’s land, out of space and, somehow out of time within London itself’ (Canepari-Labib, p. 129) in the same way that she creates the space ‘between’ in *Between*, and ‘norman’s land’ in *Amalgamemnon*. In
Next, this space is occupied only by the societal dropouts, whose lives are entirely different, entirely ‘Other’ to that of the people that work and live in London.

On one occasion, these two worlds clash and create a scene. Ulysses is an elderly homeless man, formerly an English teacher, whose conversation revolves mostly around Africa and the work he did there as a teacher. While the reader may make literary connections between his name and the title of Joyce’s novel, or indeed the mythological hero, in fact, Ulysses states that he has been named after the American General Grant on account of his family name (Next, p. 125). Here, again the reader sees Brooke-Rose’s preoccupation with intertextuality and the split-self through the multiple versions of Ulysses. On one occasion, when he is feeling particularly hungry, he approaches a couple who are eating in an Indian restaurant in an undesirable part of London in order that they might take pity on him, and offer him some food:

I put down the big plastic bag with the blanket against the chair. They’re deep in conversation and look up, annoyed [...] But I sit. Professor-type, I know it, wife too probably, both well fed and groomed. Kind, usually full of liberal ideology [...] They continue their conversation, a bit too purposefully, something about quantum physics, to cut out any small talk from me [...] the waiter looks at me with polite scorn and moves away as if I weren’t there. Gingerly I stretch hands, take the professor’s plate. (Next, p. 95)

The scene continues, and culminates in the small victory of a stolen naan bread, and Ulysses’s exit into the night. In this instance, Brooke-Rose confronts the reader with a distorted mirror image of the academic. Ulysses is the disenfranchised, dispossessed and literally and intellectually starving arts academic, and his mirror image is the successful, well groomed professor of physics. After the incident in the restaurant, the professor’s wife admits her shame at their reaction to Ulysses: ‘I mean there we are, working hard in our sphere, researching for humanity, and well, somehow, we do get a bit, cut off, from other spheres, don’t you think?’ (Next, p. 96). However, she soon relents to her husband’s opinion that Ulysses’ behaviour had been ‘appalling’, and even though they had tried not to, they ‘couldn’t help noticing him’ (Next, p. 96) as a result. Despite the woman’s initial shame at their reaction to Ulysses, and their ignorance about the
dispossessed sector of society, it is clear that these feelings are short lived, as the couple promptly get into their car, leaving the undesirable area and Ulysses behind. This incident can be read as a comment upon contemporary society and weighty, experimental texts like *Ulysses* and their position in the current reading climate. Joyce’s text and indeed, the mythological figure have been starved of attention by a society that no longer values art and literature in the same way that it values science and technology.

Ulysses talks about his past life in Africa in a romanticised way, expressing nostalgia and fondness for the various cultures he experienced there, comparing them to his hardship and loneliness in London:

> I attended Christian masses where the whole congregation would sway in lilt and rhythm, almost dancing, to their dialect versions of the Kyrie or even the Sanctus, so different from the gloomy dead services here. And look at the streets here. Children used to play in them, people used to trade, as they still do in African villages and Lagos ghettos, women pounding yam, making and frying yams, washing clothes, selling peppers and kerosene, cigarettes and water. Shouting, hating, loving each other but at least not indifferent. The car killed all that. (*Next*, p. 52)

Ulysses’s vision of Africa is rose-tinted, if not a little naive however, his reminiscence for a simpler time resounds through his recollections. Ulysses longs for a world before the ubiquity of modern technology and the car, which he regards as being the beginning of the end of humanity and culture. Indeed, the reader might consider that the professorial couple would not have been able to simply drive away, and leave Ulysses behind had the car not been available to them. They would have had to confront the undesirable area, and the societal drop-out on a human level, rather than simply ignoring his existence. The car is a symbol that separates the world of the ‘haves’ from the ‘have-nots’. The society that Brooke-Rose depicts in *Next* is one that values the capitalist and corporate machines more than humans and their intrinsic qualities. The reader is reminded of Brooke-Rose’s earlier novel *The Middlemen*, and Rusty Conway’s focus on the reputation of the company, rather than the cost of human life caused by the company’s error.72

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72 See Chapter 1 for a more detailed analysis of this novel.
Lawrence notes that showing society as valuing the dehumanised over the human is a trend in Brooke-Rose’s fiction, when she states that ‘[i]n most of her novels, humanism is a dead letter, and with it those writers, characters, and professors whose expertise is no longer valued’ (Lawrence, p. 23). With Next, that ‘dead letter’ is more literal than ever before, as lest we forget, this is a grammatical murder mystery novel.

The novel’s twenty-six characters are named after each letter of the alphabet. The ten homeless people that live out on the street are named after the top row of letters on an English keyboard: QWERTYUIOP. One of the main plot threads is the murder of Elsie whose name is clearly representative of the letter ‘E’. Again, the reader is reminded of another novel, this time, George Perec’s La Disparition (1968) which has been mentioned above in relation to Brooke-Rose’s novel, Between. Perec’s novel is written entirely without the letter ‘e’, constraining the writer to a letter-based lipogram. The main character, Anton Vowl is searching for the ‘e’ that has disappeared both from the plot and from the text. Brooke-Rose commented on this constraint in an interview with Karen Lawrence and stated that ‘To me, a constraint must be a grammatical or syntactical constraint, part of the syntax, not a letter […] I mean, I like him [Perec]. But I don’t see the point’ (Lawrence, p. 206). In Next, Brooke-Rose extracts the character ‘e’ (Elsie), without removing the letter ‘e’ from the text, allowing for her experiment to be interpreted as a plot twist, rather than a further lipogram.

Elsie is a young homeless woman whose spurious accounts of her past tell the reader very little about her life. One of the other characters describes Elsie as being West Indian, to which she responds ‘Dad was, but married ere’ (Next, p. 14). She exchanges her story with Tek (Wojtek) and Croaky (Quentin) and explains that she ‘was a workin mum, then thy was tiken from mey, then ah loss me work’ (Next, p. 11). However, later in the novel the inspector investigating her murder tells Croaky that ‘There are no children, she probably fabulated’ (Next, p. 153). Furthermore, Elsie is able to switch from a strong esturian accent, in which most of the characters speak (identified by Brooke-Rose’s phonetic spelling) and ‘proper’ English stating: ‘Oh, I know you lot. You think because I like to relapse into native speech I’m an idiot’ (Next, p. 14). Brooke-Rose makes reference here to the perceptions of native speakers and their reputation as being uneducated and incapable of contributing to society. In fact, both Ulysses and Elsie show
themselves to be well educated and more than able to contribute to the system. Throughout the first half of the novel, the reader finds out that Elsie has been teaching Lin (Adelina) to read. Lin is an illiterate Portuguese immigrant woman who is trapped in an abusive relationship with her husband Xavier, who cannot read or write English, and can speak very little. Lin’s daughter Rosario, has run away from home in order to escape the abuse, but has reportedly found herself in a similar relationship with an electrician who ‘can’t ge’ work’ (Next, p. 39). Elsie recognises Lin’s domestic struggle to balance her husband’s temperament while trying to make ends meet, and comments upon the social expectations of the female in these circumstances:

Then Xavier comes in […] English is almost non-existent. How is it even an illiterate woman learns the language of another country when her husband can’t? [...] He scolds her silence in Portuguese. A man in a macho culture exists only by his work, take that away and he ceases, goes to pieces, blames his wife, everything’s her fault, the children going wrong, the poverty grind, she brought them up wrong, not him of course[...] Now that Rosario’s left, Lin struggles alone in an all-male family, the boys siding with their father [...] They never lift a finger to help her, not even if she’s sick [...] she goes out cleaning, shopping, she cooks, she waits on them. Disgusting. (Next, pp. 42-43)

Both Lin and Elsie share the ability to adapt in order to exist. Lin’s attempt to learn English despite her illiteracy shows her to be at the very least, willing to change and to learn in order to exist in this foreign setting. This is vividly contrasted in the above passage with Xavier’s inability to adapt, his unemployment and his regression to a primal almost neanderthalic state of being. He is ‘resentful’ (Next, p. 42) of Elsie as she engages with his wife on a level beyond his capability, and by educating Lin, Elsie elevates her above what he needs her for: food, money and sex. Elsie’s spurious history, her ‘fabulation’ of her own past, along with her ease at switching between different dialectical coding systems, shows her to be adaptable to her surroundings, while also remaining a mystery to the other homeless people and indeed, the reader. Tek describes her as ‘typically feminine’ as she eludes pessimism and has the ability to ‘get by’ (Next, p. 34). Elsie’s response to this labelled femininity by saying ‘Yes Tek. The eternal feminine, not always achieved is affirmation not confrontation. It’ll save the world in the end.
Slower but less destructive’ (Next, p. 34). Further to this, Elsie recites her own version of the alphabet while she wanders the streets recalling the horrors of humanity and confrontations between patriarchies:

A for Auschwitz. B for Belsen. C for Cambodia. D for Dresden. For Deportation. E for Ethiopia, for Ethnic Cleansing...F for, what’s F? Famine ... Mao’s great leap into, 1959. Stalin ditto, Ukraine 1933. Fundamentalism. There’s usually more than one horror for each letter. (Next, p. 3)

By remembering these atrocities in this almost childlike format, Elsie/ Brooke-Rose poses a question to the reader about the education of such disasters, and asks us to think about how we should remember these human conflicts. The neglect and dispossession of the homeless characters in Next and ‘homelessness’ as a concept, fits in with the horrors of humanity and provides an expression for the ever elusive letter H: ‘H for what? Funny how H always blocks’ (Next, p. 35). The latter half of this quotation is likely to be an allusion to the ‘H blocks’ in Maze prison located near to County Down in Northern Ireland. These blocks were in use during the late twentieth century and were used to detain political prisoners during the Troubles. The prisoners famously protested their imprisonment and the treatment that they received in a number of different ways, including hunger strikes, violent destruction of property and their refusal to wear prison uniforms.73 These political deprivations are echoed through the treatment of the homeless characters in Next who experience violence, dispossession and a lack of fundamental human rights. Next was published in 1998, the same year as the Good Friday Agreement, which marked an end to the conflict and the prisoners held in the H-blocks were released in 2000.

Later in the novel, the reader finds out that Elsie had been successful in her interview for the job of manager at ‘Cuter Computers’ before she was murdered. Many of the characters had attended the interview, and when Elsie is found to have been murdered, the position is offered to Yuppy (Jesse), a homeless man, and former

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unscrupulous stockbroker. This decision confuses the other homeless applicants until Oliver (an Oxford educated drop-out with an addiction to multi-levelled computer games) explains that the company is corrupt, buying stolen components and selling them as ‘pseudo-new software’ (Next, p. 179). Oliver comments that Yuppy’s unscrupulous nature was ‘probably just what they were looking for’ (Next, p. 180). On the contrary, Oliver believes that Elsie had been offered the job not because of her background in computer programming, but because ‘maybe they thought she was bright enough to manage but girl enough to be managed’ (Next, p. 180). Elsie, like the protagonist in Between, and Aka in Subscript could have been used ‘simply as an instrument’ or ‘silenced’ by patriarchal control had she survived to take her position at ‘Cuter Computers’; her passivity as a female is her only employable quality, according to Oliver. Her murder prevents her employment and her dream of having a ‘loo of one’s own’ (Next, p. 68) and again, Brooke-Rose draws parallels between unemployment and death as with Mira in Amalgamemnon.

Throughout Next, Brooke-Rose uses the alphabet as a leitmotif in order to confront the reader with language; the way we perceive and learn letters and understand characters both as symbols and as plot devices. Brooke-Rose focuses on the adaptability of the character; that it usually represents ‘more than one horror’. Elsie represents the female homeless, and her violent rape and murder, along with her crippling menstrual cramps illustrate the horrors of this position. Her role as an educator is significant as her teaching empowers the characters around her, especially Lin. Her removal from the novel signifies the removal of education from Lin’s life and indeed, from society below the poverty line in general. The role of the English teacher is repeatedly devalued as Ulysses, Elsie and Oliver all have qualifications or experience in this area and have become dispossessed by society. Pavlova, a former ballet dancer before she broke her back, has been similarly discarded by society as a former, now broken artist. Many of the homeless characters have backgrounds in the various arts and there seems to be no place for them in this ‘hi-tech’ unscrupulous society. Consequently, there is ‘no next’ for them. They are left to haunt the streets of London like ghostly spectres of past humanity.
In these four novels, Brooke-Rose engages with contemporary feminist scholarship as well as touching on the controversial debate of ‘technology versus culture’, a theme that is revisited in the ‘Intercom Quartet’. The fear of developing and using language in *Subscript* and the fear of misinterpretation in *Between* transforms into the fear of replacement and redundancy in *Amalgamemnon* which culminates in the actuality of those fears in *Next*. These novels each defy traditional forms, develop and confront multiple and mixed discourses that results in a rich fabric of intertextual references and opposing language. However, Brooke-Rose does not provide the reader with a fully formed écrite féminine; rather these novels depict the journey towards a feminine language. In *Next*, the term ‘decode’ (*Next*, p. 50; p. 125) is repeatedly used as a way of the homeless trying to understand one and other. In *Subscript* the term ‘code’ is used before the evolution of the species into humans, to refer to genetics, and the predetermined set of values and decisions that are made out of the individual’s control. These novels all require the reader to perform some decoding of their own in order to understand the message hidden within. With these novels, Brooke-Rose challenges the reader to decode the language and experiences of ‘the Other’ and repeatedly exposes this figure as being feminine. All of the female characters presented within these novels have had to learn to adapt to exist in a patriarchal society. They have developed certain ‘techniques for living’ in this threatening and often dangerous environment. The concepts of fear and anxiety are developed in the novels that form the ‘Intercom Quartet’ in relation to being invaded and replaced by the technological ‘Other’.
CHAPTER 4

Anxiety and the Threat of the ‘Other’: Out and the ‘Intercom Quartet’

‘Generally the reaction against danger consists in a mixture of fear and resistance.’¹

As well as becoming progressively more familiar with identifying the difficulties of the experimental woman writer, Brooke-Rose also became increasingly aware of a threat to writing and producing literature in a more general sense. While there is evidence in her early experimental oeuvre to suggest that she had been aware of a threat to literature for some time, it was not until the early 1980s that she began to express this fear in altogether clearer terms. As previously mentioned, the narrative of her first experimental novel Out (1964) adopts a science fiction theme of a post-apocalyptic society where the colour bar has been reversed, and the planet is crudely divided in an Orwellian manner into countries that had been previously non-existent: Afro-Eurasia, Sino-America, and Chinese Europe. Sarah Birch points out that the ‘names of the new countries reflect a reversal in race roles which has taken place since the “displacement”’ (Birch, p. 55). This early experimentation with the genre of science fiction enabled Brooke-Rose to focus upon barriers between groups of people in society (in this case the colourless races and the Melanesian races), differentiating between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’, the self and the hegemonic ‘other’. The acknowledgement of the economic and social differences within the society presented in Out depicts one group as representing a significant threat to the other. In the case of Out, the powerful and healthy colourless races control and rule over the Melanesians who are bound to the colourless through their need for employment and a steady financial income. Indeed, this is the social commentary and extended metaphor to which Brooke-Rose refers when she asserts that although the novel emulated Robbe-Grillet’s style, this theme ‘wouldn’t have interested Robbe-Grillet. He condemned metaphor for one’ (IA, p. 16).

After focussing on language, dialogue and the interplay of coded structures with Such (1966), Between (1968) and Thru (1975), Brooke-Rose returns to the genre of science fiction with the ‘Intercom Quartet’: Amalgamemnon (1984), Xorandor (1986),

Verbivore (1990), and Textermination (1991). Each of these novels depicts the advances in technology as posing a considerable threat to the survival of the individual. These novels are (with the exception of Amalgamemnon) more straightforward in terms of their plot and narrative, harbouring accessible characters with which the reader can identify with comparative ease. The transformation of Brooke-Rose’s prose into readable, at times, linear narrative, is in stark contrast to that which has come before. This chapter will consider the change in Brooke-Rose’s style in these novels as being motivated by literary-political reasons, and a desire to illuminate the contemporary fears for the future of the novel. This chapter will assert that Brooke-Rose’s references to contemporary political tensions surrounding the Second World War and the Cold War can be read as an allegorical interpretation of the state and future of literature and the novel in the conflict between literature and technology. It has already been established that Brooke-Rose’s experience of working at Bletchley Park during World War II had profoundly affected the way in which she perceived the boundaries (emotional and psychological as well as physical) between the self and the Other. These novels articulate the split identity of Brooke-Rose as being a bilingual speaker, and a dual national as well as her multiple textual identities as a critic and creative writer. Her wartime education is also prevalent in these novels where home is positioned in direct contrast to abroad, old versus new and the individual self is threatened by the institutional Other.

**The Threat of War in the Twentieth Century**

In the twentieth century, conflict and invasion irreversibly transformed with the development of technology. The development and use of nuclear weapons by the U.S.A. upon Japan at the end of World War II, and the subsequent stockpiling of these weapons by the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War initiated a new, large scale threat that would concern more than just those immediate nations, elevating the fear of nuclear conflict on a global scale. There have been a number of critical approaches that have sought to interpret nuclear war and the threat that it poses to humanity. One of the most prolific of these authors is Paul Virilio. Virilio’s work has been shaped by his own experience of World War II where his home city of Nantes suffered the full force of the Blitzkrieg and the German occupation of France, giving him firsthand experience of the
destruction caused by advancements in technological weapons. In an interview with James Der Derian, Virilio states that he

was a “war baby” [...] As a child I lived through the horrors of the Second World War, through the reign of technology as absolute terror [...] These are the traumatizing events which shaped my thinking. War was my University.²

Throughout Virilio’s work, he maintains that the acceleration in the development of technology is directly responsible for the development of more sophisticated weaponry, leading to technology itself posing a major threat to human existence. In his critical work The Information Bomb (1998), Virilio draws the comparison between the ‘computer aided suicide’ of Bob Dent through technology developed by Philip Nitschke (1996) with the ‘programmed terror’ of

the system of “Mutually Assured Destruction” (MAD) between East and West, and the development – interrupted by the implosion of the Soviet Union – of a genuine “doomsday machine” capable of deciding the passive euthanasia of humanity by automatically triggering a nuclear apocalypse.³

For Virilio, in developing this fatal machinery, Nitschke has taken advantage of the ‘nihilism of the coming cybernetic era’ that is epitomised by the threat of nuclear war.⁴ By removing the human element and replacing it with technology, human life has become devalued, making it increasingly easier to extinguish the human existence at the touch of a button. In his insightful study Postmodern War: the New Politics of Conflict (1997), Chris Hables Gray discusses the development of the nuclear threat after World War II as being not only a strategic form of defence, but also a tactical one. Gray asserts that after the Second World War, deterrence of further wars was at first, simple: ‘Bernard Brodie pointed out winning a total war against a nuclear opponent was impossible. There could be no winners. The bomb wasn’t a military weapon – it was

⁴ Virilio, The Information Bomb, p. 5.
However, the threat created by the deterrent of nuclear weapons seemed too useful for the military to ignore, which led to the nuclear arms race between East and West alongside the development and upgrading of weapons that could be used tactically, in a controlled and specific way: ‘atomic bombs were replaced with hydrogen bombs. Bombs were supplanted with missiles. Land missiles were supplanted with submarine missiles. “Mutually Assured Destruction” (MAD) was superseded by counterforce doctrines of controlled response.’ The building of nuclear arsenals alongside the development of more practical methods of technologically designed warfare illustrated what Gray calls a ‘schizophrenic’ mindset in the military. On the one hand, the threat of nuclear war and the deterrent of the ever-growing arsenals gave comfort to the military in the sense that the more nuclear weapons, the larger the threat of extinction and therefore, the less likely a war would occur. On the other hand, the development of tactical weaponry which could be precisely programmed for a specific, and often controlled outcome, reinforced the opinion that ‘there will always be war […] It [conflict] was just a “visceral” need.’ During this period of weapons hoarding, a number of strategies for fighting a nuclear war (World War III) were developed, along with a number of documents regarding the speculated capabilities of the enemy. What has emerged from this collation of data is an archive of plans and papers for an imaginary war: a literary narrative in its own right.

In his essay ‘No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)’ (1984), Jacques Derrida comments on the threat of nuclear war and how this threat is maintained through structures of language:

Nuclear weaponry depends, more than any weaponry in the past, it seems, upon structures of information and communication, structures of language, including non-vocalizable language, structures of codes and graphic decoding. But the
The basis that Derrida establishes here is that the threat of nuclear warfare is dependent upon much the same structures as the literature written on it, for the reason that nuclear war has not actually occurred, but there is an archive of literature on it as a ‘reality’. Derrida goes on to assert that in this respect, nuclear war can be regarded as a fable; never having happened, only having been written about as fiction. He goes on to argue, ‘it is the war (in other words the fable) that triggers this fabulous war effort, this senseless capitalization of sophisticated weaponry [...] structures not only the army, diplomacy, politics, but the whole of the human socius today’. In other words, the fable or fantasy of nuclear war told since the end of the Second World War in the forms of science fiction literature and film and through political narrative and rhetoric has inspired a number of societies (through the fear of an impending attack), to race towards an industry that is nuclear capable as a form of defence. Of course, the nature of the nuclear threat is that it is ultimate. Total destruction would be the result of this type of conflict, and Derrida recognises that this destruction would ‘lack any common proportion with, for example, burning of a library, even that of Alexandria’. Nevertheless, a nuclear conflict would erase the human archive in a similar way to the fire that destroyed the historical and literary archives held in Alexandria. Karen Lawrence claims that it is in the novels of the ‘Intercom Quartet’ where Brooke-Rose first confronts the fragility of the human archive, stating that here, she ‘represents the possibility of the annihilation of literature, critique, and humanism itself’ (Lawrence, p. 99). While I am in agreement with this assessment of the ‘Intercom Quartet’, I will argue that Out too, clearly refers to the destruction of the human archive, by engaging with a narrative that extends beyond its annihilation.

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11 Derrida, ‘No Apocalypse, Not Now’, p. 23.
12 Derrida ‘No Apocalypse, Not Now’, p. 27.
Brooke-Rose’s Science Fiction: The Fear of the ‘Other’

The literature of the second half of the twentieth century is littered with references to invasion and extinction as a result of the development of various technologies, told through the genres of science fiction and fantasy. These themes are extrapolations of the isolation and dissociation that is prominent in much modernist and postmodernist literature. Brian McHale discusses the relationship between postmodernist literature and science fiction, asserting that ‘We can think of science fiction as postmodernism’s non-canonized or “low art double”, its sister-genre in the same sense that the popular detective thriller is modernist fiction’s sister.’ In turn, science fiction has proved to be a highly-marketable and popular genre with the general readership as well as being successfully adopted in the spheres of film and television for epics and spectacular narratives. In his work *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster* (2001), Geoff King assesses the reasons for the success of SF as a film genre in the latter half of the twentieth century:

> From a narrative point of view, science fiction is well equipped to explore and offer some imaginative resolution to a number of pressing social issues, including the broad issue of the relationship between ‘humanity’ and that for which science, technology and rationality are deemed to stand. More particularly, science fiction offers an ideal location for the articulation of discourses that draw on the mythology of the frontier.

King goes on to state that the ‘frontier’ of space is infinite, at least in the imagination of the viewer, and as a result, ‘complaints about the oppression of deserving Others, such as Native Americans or other victims of colonial policies, can be avoided.’ To illustrate his point, King uses the wildly successful series of *Star Wars* films (beginning 1976), and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) as case studies. By setting these narratives in space, the viewer is simultaneously confronted with the political issues of disenfranchisement and

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15 King, *Spectacular Narratives*, p. 70.
the wars over territory that occur in reality, while being able to escape this reality by attributing these conflicts to the fantasy created on the screen.

In many ways, this technique is merely a development of the Shakespearian trick of stage production, where the politics and dramas of the contemporary court were relocated to an exotic destination in order to avoid accusations of treason. *Hamlet* (1603) and *Measure for Measure* (1604) come to mind here as pertinent examples of dramatic productions that have been regularly interpreted as comments on the contentious accession of James I to the British throne, replacing Elizabeth I after her death in 1603 (Gibbons, 1991; Brown, 1996; Cohen, 1999). Such political statements and conflicts often occur in science fiction literature, although they generally appear on a much larger scale than the internal politics of a nation. For instance, in H.G. Wells’ archetypal science fiction novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898), the threat against Britain is created by the alien invasion of Woking and Leatherhead in the south-east of England by the technologically superior Martians. These macro-narratives have gripped the viewing public and have become increasingly popular and commercially successful in both literature and film. For instance, the blockbuster movie *Independence Day* (1996) that depicts the invasion of Earth by technologically superior, hostile aliens (in order to defeat them, the entire globe must unite and defend their planet) remains in the top fifty all time largest grossing movies at the US box office, along with the *Star Wars* franchise (1977-2005), *Transformers* (2007) and *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982).16 These political conflicts have grown in size and spectacle over the twentieth century to the scale of those depicted in the *Star Wars* films where the Rebel Alliance is at war with the Empire, both sides consisting of a number of different nations from across the galaxy. However, in spite of setting such narratives ‘A long time ago, in a galaxy far far away’, the alien conflict and the threat of invasion that appears in science fiction literature and film can be regarded as a visual allegory for the conflicts of the twentieth century.17

Brooke-Rose’s turn towards the genre of science-fiction in the later novels that form the ‘Intercom Quartet’ seems to be for similar reasons. *Xorandor* and *Verbivore* engage with the rhetoric of the Cold War and the fears of nuclear conflict. The science-fiction...

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fiction genre allows Brooke-Rose to depict the invading, threatening ‘other’ as an ‘alien’ being: although the inherent irony of these novels is that Xorandor and his kind have existed on Earth for longer than humankind, and therefore, the ultimate threat is posed from within. Similarly, Brooke-Rose sets her first experimental novel *Out* in a ‘distant’ chronological period, providing an alternate future reality for her unnamed protagonist. As distant as this world may seem, the novel engages with the pertinent theme of racial conflicts and the social fears brought about by immigration during the 1950s and 1960s. The anti-Europeanism that had been prevalent in the aftermath of the Second World War extended to a global scale. Immigrants from the colonies were regarded as dangerous and as such, were repeatedly segregated and discriminated against. In his comprehensive work *Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (1987) Paul Gilroy summarises the fear prevalent in Britain during this period, stating that it was not a ‘qualitative’ issue but rather a ‘quantitative’ issue. The fear of being invaded and potentially eradicated by immigrants continued to grow and took root in the political body of the period. The prominence of anti-immigration parties and the combining of the National Labour Party with the White Defence League to form the British National Party in 1960 articulated a fear for the status-quo of the racial hegemony in Britain, a sentiment that came to a head in Enoch Powell’s 1968 ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech. As well as this British context, the violent race-riots in the United States and political uprising of prominent figures including Martin Luther King Junior and Malcolm X only added to the fear of social change and the toppling of the white middle-class male as the hegemonic patriarch. With *Out*, Brooke-Rose engages with this social tension by creating a parody of ‘what if...’: a ‘dystopian’ reality where the racial hierarchy has been inverted and the white male is forced to approach the black female for employment opportunities.

*Out* is set after an unknown global atrocity, referred to only as ‘the displacement’. The anonymous, pronoun-less protagonist is ‘colourless’ and elderly, with deteriorating health issues, making it increasingly difficult for him to find employment. He spends his time either in his ‘settlement’, where his wife cares for him, or at the ‘Labour exchange’ attempting to find work of a manual nature. He suffers from ‘the malady’ that only seems to affect the ‘colourless’, and throughout the novel we witness the deterioration

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of his health and the increasing struggle to find employment. Sarah Birch summarises ‘the malady’ that has caused the social reversal, when she states: ‘this is a sickness akin to radiation poisoning which causes a high rate of “chemical mutation” and makes the colourless an unreliable source of labour. The Melanesian races are immune to “the malady” and have therefore grown powerful’ (Birch, p. 55). As well as having inspired a reversal of social power, ‘the displacement’ seems to have accelerated the development and use of technology, specifically in the fields of psychology and social science. The reader is told that the protagonist has been scheduled for a ‘Psychoscophy’, a procedure that produces a medical scan or ‘biogram’ of

the extracted absolute of your unconscious patterns throughout your life [...] your harmonious rhythm, your up and down tendencies, you know, when the sub is most or least at one with the super. Then all you have to do is choose your safe periods for social intercourse. (Out, pp. 148-149)

This advancement is described as a ‘technique for living’ (Out, p. 150) in this new world, providing a kind of technological mood reading, allowing for temperate social interaction in an effort to avoid conflict and make social interaction more efficient and beneficial. This social tempering/tampering is a method of adaptation – a necessary attribute for survival: ‘Adaptation, that’s the thing, you see’ (Out, p. 148). In Such, Larry is unable to adapt to his life after death, and becomes increasingly detached from society and the world around him. He is unable to return to his career as a psychologist stating that ‘I’d lost them before. I couldn’t help them [...] For a long time I’ve had no future as a spy. The great failure of our century. We give names to sicknesses, but we don’t heal, merely create new dependencies’ (Such, p. 341). Larry is not healed by his resurrection: he is not reborn out of his own ashes, and is condemned by his experience to live apart and separate from the rest of the world. The fear of the inability to adapt is repeated in Amalgamemnon with Mira and her fears of redundancy from the academy. The advancement in technology is implied here too, with Mira’s anticipation of queuing ‘before the National Education Computer for a different teaching job, reprogramming myself like a floppy disk, or at the Labour Exchange for a different job altogether’ (Amal, p. 5). In both cases, the individual is treated by the institution more like an automaton than a human being; natural instincts and characteristics are assessed and overridden by
the technological bureaucratic machine. The repetition of the ‘Labour Exchange’ in both novels, and employment and work as being intricately connected to survival, hints at a leftist school of thought. Although, Brooke-Rose’s novels are not usually regarded as being overtly political, her political identity is occasionally betrayed by the leftist leanings of her characters. Her time working in the highly politicised environment at Vincennes and her close association with academics both leftist and new-leftist shaped her political identity, and made her perpetually aware of the structures within society.\(^{19}\)

In *Out*, Brooke-Rose’s emulation of Robbe-Grillet’s style: her use of the ‘scientific present tense’ (and her eschewing of the past tense), leads to some confusion with regard to the details of the narrative. In her analysis of the novel, Karen Lawrence claims that

although *Out* retains the lineaments of a plot, as most analysts have observed, events are difficult to chart, both because (1) it is impossible to know whether a particular event is told many times but happens once (repetitive telling) or told many times and happens many times (singular telling) (“Transgressions,” *Rhetoric of the Unreal* 317), and (2) it is impossible to distinguish between scenes that are in the mind or in the world. (Lawrence, pp. 33-34)

Indeed, the ‘colourless’ narrator is continually repeating and revising events, questioning their reality: ‘You know very well this dialogue cannot occur. Start again’ (*Out*, p. 19). As I have already mentioned above (Chapter 1), Birch attributes this self-confrontation in the protagonist to moments of ‘schizophrenia’ (Birch, p. 60). However, for Lawrence, it is not only the mental stability of the protagonist that is in question here. She claims that the entire society and indeed, the narrative as a reflection of that society, have experienced the trauma of ‘the displacement’ and ‘are riven with what would now be termed posttraumatic stress syndrome’ (Lawrence, p. 26). The evidence for this trauma lies in the postcolonial discourse that permeates the text, the continual striving of the protagonist, and the narrative to correct themselves through these frequent revisions. Later in her analysis, Lawrence makes the comparison between *Out* and J.M. Coetzee’s post-apartheid novel *Disgrace* (1999), in which the protagonist David Lurie, a former

\(^{19}\) For a more developed discussion of Brooke-Rose’s politics, see Chapter 5.
humanities lecturer, is forced to experience traumatic events after being ejected from his social community for having had an affair with a student (Lawrence, p. 38). Throughout the course of the novel, Lurie has to come to terms with the rape of his daughter, as well as the reversal of his social power with regards to both class and colour. Both novels are written in the present tense that, for Lawrence, depicts a troubled society consumed with past trauma, unable to ‘assign it a place in retrospective knowledge’ (Lawrence, p. 39). The reader is only aware of limited information regarding the past traumas of Out, and much of this is included on the inlay page of the novel depicted in the summary forms of past existences. These tickets list ‘Ex-nationality’, ‘Ex-occupation’ as well as ‘Re-training’. The ex-humanist and the ex-Ph.D. have been retrained as ‘fitter’ and ‘odd job man’, an adaptation to the new world order, just as Lurie retrains himself from humanities lecturer to ‘odd job man’ in the post-apartheid society in Disgrace. The power of the academic in society has been forcibly stripped from them – these characters no longer have any kind of elevated status. The threat of extinction for the ‘colourless’ in Out, and the battle of the protagonist to find employment, to adapt and survive his sickness is indicative of Brooke-Rose’s awareness of the threat posed to the human archive. In this sense, Out is not only an early example of Brooke-Rose’s use of science fiction themes, but also a political comment upon the difference inherent in social culture and class boundaries.

With Xorandor, rather than depicting a society suffering from a post-traumatic disorder, Brooke-Rose returns to the moment of the trauma itself, recalling the event through the dialogue of the computer ‘whizz-kid’ twins. The adoption of child protagonists is a common theme in successful science fiction literature and film due to the aptness of the ‘rite of passage’ narrative for the genre: the gradual revelation of certain ‘hidden’ secrets or knowledge connecting with personal revelations about the self and identity for children and teenagers. Examples of this trope in popular film and literature include Elliot in Spielberg’s E.T. The Extra Terrestrial (1982), and the multiple teenage protagonists in Robert A. Heinlein’s novels including Rocketship Galileo (1947)
The twins in Brooke-Rose’s novel, Jip (John Ivor Paul Manning) and Zab (Isabel Paula Kate Manning), have exceptional computer skills, making them fluent in the jargonistic language of technology. This affects their own language capabilities, and causes them to speak to each other in a kind of ‘computer speak’ where logically recalled information is interspersed with their own made-up slang: ‘Dump data-network as butterfly-catcher, not bad, Zab, smart terminal. The ideal would be dynamic dumping, which empties a memory during program-run’ (Xor, p. 8). The process of negotiating this storytelling method is the only potentially difficult hurdle for the reader in the novel. Commenting on the accessibility of this novel in comparison to her earlier work, Brooke-Rose wrote a gleeful letter to her publisher Michael Schmidt, reporting: ‘I think I’ve written (at last!) a possible seller’.21 Xorandor is a computeroid rock formation believed to be from Mars, although his existence on Earth actually predates humanity. He has managed to create offspring, each of which have the same knowledge as he does, and can thus be regarded as his clones or literal fragments of himself. Xorandor and his offspring feed on the natural radiation of the planet, however, recently, with the creation of nuclear power and nuclear weapons, the amount of radiation has increased, providing a plentiful food source. Xorandor provides a sustainable method of disposal for nuclear waste, as well as warheads and weapons, thus potentially removing the ultimate threat of the destruction of the human archive posed by the Cold War. However, the isotope Caesium 137 which is commonly found in nuclear reactors, acts like a junk food to the creatures, poisoning them, causing megalomania, propensity for terrorism and self-destruction. Inevitably, this occurs, leading the ‘small xor’ Lady Macbeth, who has been created with a ‘syntax error’ (Xor, p. 103) to crawl into the nuclear reactor Berkeley 2 power station in Gloucestershire, holding it hostage, threatening to explode. Only the twins are able to communicate with Lady Macbeth, as he has been pre-programmed by Xorandor to respond to them, and thus, it is their role

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20 For more examples of the appearance of child protagonists in SF literature, see ‘The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction’ Available online: http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/children_in_sf Accessed: (08/08/15).
to persuade him from exploding the reactor, and save the community.\footnote{Although xor 7 calls himself Lady Macbeth, the twins still refer to ‘him’ rather than ‘her’. This can be read as a further example of the extending and collapsing of binary oppositions, an established practice in the novel.} Communicating with Lady Macbeth presents its own difficulties, as his discourse is a mixture between ‘computer-speak’ and language from the Shakespearian play: ‘You do but teach bloody instructions, which being taught return to plague the inventor. That’s what he said. Hubble bubble toil and trouble, fire burn and cauldron bubble’ (Xor, 109); ‘DWELL IN DOUBTFUL JOY (P 0.31 sec) I’VE DONE NO HARM BUT I REMEMBER NOW I’M IN THIS EARTHLY WORLD ENDLOOP HELLO ZIP HAPPY NEW YEAR’ (Xor, p. 139). The mixture of these very different discourses in Lady Macbeth’s communications forces the twins to confront classical literature and ‘Celtic twilight’ (Xor, p. 16), areas in which they have no interest and usually try to avoid.

The issue of communication is of paramount concern throughout the novel, and had even been a problem during the composition process. Brooke-Rose had broken her right arm half way through writing the initial draft of the novel, resulting in her having to complete the writing stage by learning to use her left hand. As a direct result, Brooke-Rose was forced to type the entire novel herself, unable to outsource the work, as most of it was illegible to anyone apart from the author.\footnote{Brooke-Rose, ‘Letter to Michael Schmidt’ (01/09/1985). Accessed through the Carcanet Archive at the John Rylands Library (2013).} Xorandor then, was already in code at the earliest stages of its creation, a code only decipherable by the creator. The title of the novel is a comment on the ambiguity of the character Xorandor and his origin. ‘Xorandor’ relates to the computer code type ‘Boolean’ developed as a form of algebra in the nineteenth century by the British mathematician George Boole. Boolean is now most commonly used when searching for information using computer search engines. Computer languages such as ‘Java’ and ‘Pascal’ have Boolean operations built into them in order to allow specific information to be exchanged. The capitalisation of ‘AND’ or ‘OR’ between search terms defines the parameters of the search, specifying the exact information for which the researcher is looking.\footnote{For a basic explanation of ‘Boolean’ data types, see \url{http://adam.ac.uk/info/boolean.html} (Accessed: 19/05/14).} In essence, Boolean is a code that exists within a language system which allows for the transfer of specific information from one individual to another. ‘XOR’ is Boolean for exclusive ‘OR’, rather than ‘ANDOR’, the
non-exclusive or inclusive search term. These operations are also given the value of either ‘TRUE’ or ‘FALSE’, ‘1’ or ‘0’. The internal ambiguity in the title of the novel and the inherent collapsing of binary oppositions in the character’s name is indicative of the way that the children search Xorandor for information, asking him questions about his origin. Robert L. Caserio refers to the postmodern text as being ambiguous or ‘xorandoric’ (Brooke-Rose’s own term) stating that ‘because xorandoric fiction confuses the real with the non-real, and makes all reality ambiguous, what is most at stake in this illumination is the relation of structures of modernist and postmodern fiction to structures of traditional novelistic realism.’

Caserio goes on to compare Realist Fiction or ‘RF’ to Science Fiction ‘SF’ quoting Brooke-Rose’s own argument made in *Rhetoric of the Unreal* (1981), stating most twentieth-century SF (science fiction) is not xorandoric because it shares structural procedures with the rhetoric of RF (realist fiction). RF and most SF both depend on exhaustiveness of description, on neutral “transparent” style, and on “defocalisation” – i.e., de-emphasis – of the hero. Above all, both RF and SF procedures reduce to certainty any ambiguity that arises in narrative. Yet while RF and SF procedures tend to merge, RF has a disambiguating procedure that SF does not share. This procedure is the realist’s appeal to our agreed-upon and unambiguously recognizable history [...] this history is understood to be external to the fiction, and not made up. In contrast, when SF uses history to fill in information gaps it invents unreal chronicles to do so. The disambiguating parallel-story structure in SF is thereby a virtual (albeit mostly unconscious) parody of RF procedure.

Indeed, Xorandor creates his own ‘xorandoric’ history by inventing his story of origin and along with it, an ancestral myth that contains a cautionary tale. Xorandor tells his ‘his-story’ to the children:

> On my Earth, on Mars, we thought for a long time such fission explosion was a possibility, but we never wished to try. Then one of us did try, many million years ago. He absorbed much and stored it separately, then he brought it together, and

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26 Caserio, ‘Mobility and Masochism’, p. 293.
he exploded [...] Elders then lived close but many exploded, many memories or processes were lost or damaged [...] We do not like exploding one of us, not like you [...] Our most deepset memory said he was warned by elders and would not hear. Another said he did it to show the danger to future generations and to save them from curiosity, and it retold the event once a martian year for millions of years on waves. (Xor, p. 94)

There are obvious similarities between the rogue xor in Xorandor’s ancestral story and that of the story of Christ. The second version of the xor story claims that the xor’s actions are self-sacrificing and indeed, his intention to ‘save’ future generations positions him as a martyr. This ancestral myth confirms to the children that Xorandor has come from Mars. However, later in the novel the twins explain that Xorandor ‘hadn’t come from Mars at all. He said it wasn’t a lie – or a non-truth as he called it – but an answer that had come quite naturally to him’ (Xor, p. 181). Xorandor’s protestation here collapses the binary structure of ‘true’ and ‘false’, asserting that there are more complex details that surround his decision to maintain this narrative: despite his technological superiority, his decisions are not based on a simple ‘black or white’ binary structure. Xorandor chooses to maintain the false story of his origin in what Caserio describes as a ‘painfully masochistic’ act of self-sacrifice.27 Xorandor becomes a Christ-like figure, knowing that he will die of starvation on Mars (where there is no radiation) he nevertheless, chooses to ‘return’. The ambiguity of history, memory and language is emphasised throughout Xorandor, and although the twins continually argue about the accuracy of the narrative and the level of appropriate detail to include, each facet seems to have an alternative or a binary. Along with the ambiguous nature of Xorandor’s origin, and indeed, the multiple versions of the ancestral myth, almost all of the narrative facets have an alternate: most of the characters have an alternative name or a nickname (John Manning is Daddyjohn to Xorandor, the twins are known by nicknames, xor 7 is Lady Macbeth), emphasising the ambiguity of identity; Jip and Zab are continually arguing about the details of the story and how to tell it (Jip is keen to omit what he sees to be irrelevant data, whereas Zab regularly attempts to include extra information that often informs the story of the children themselves). Indeed, Jip and Zab can be regarded as

male and female versions of each other, each one existing as an alternate/binary to the other.

In terms of the construction of the narrative technique, *Xorandor* still adheres to Brooke-Rose’s constraint of the sustained use of the present tense, but the constraint is negotiated by the use of the past tense in direct speech. The entire narrative is conveyed through the dialogue between the twins (in the present) who are trying to document the extraordinary past events of the Xorandor affair. Again, the reader is confronted with two binaries in the form of the past and the present tense. In a sense, this method of ‘telling’ the story gives the reader two narratives to read simultaneously: the past events and the present retelling of them. In their effort to recall and document the experience in the form of the narrative, the twins relive it, and in this respect they are perpetually caught-up in the moment of trauma of the Xorandor affair. Dominick LaCapra discusses the process of documenting traumatic history and refers to Barthes’ essay ‘To Write: The Intransitive Verb’ (1970) and his explanation of ‘the middle voice’. Summarising Barthes, LaCapra asserts that

Barthes himself relates the middle voice to the problem of the relation between the present and the past, notably in terms of one’s relation as speaker to one’s discourse in the present in contradistinction to one’s account of a past discourse or phenomenon.28

Barthes refers to Benveniste’s argument, which states that languages

have a double system of time. The first temporal system is that of the discourse itself, which is adapted to the temporality of the speaker [énonciateur] and for which the énonciation is always the point of origin [moment générateur]. The second is the system of history or of narrative, which is adapted to the recounting of past events without any intervention by the speaker and which is consequently deprived of either present or future (except periphrastically).29

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Barthes develops this point and goes onto take Meillet and Benveniste’s example of the verb ‘to sacrifice’ and explains that:

[‘to sacrifice’] is active if the priest sacrifices the victim in my place for me, and it is middle voice if, taking the knife from the priest’s hands, I make the sacrifice for myself. In the case of the active, the action is accomplished outside the subject, because, although the priest makes the sacrifice, he is not affected by it. In the case of the middle voice, on the contrary, the subject affects himself in acting; he always remains inside the action, even if an object is involved.\(^{30}\)

In \textit{Xorandor}, the dual narration between the children creates a conflation of these two temporal systems. While the reader understands that the Xorandor affair occurred in the past, the recounting of the narrative in the present has the effect of the twins remaining within the action. In this sense, the narration of past events in the present tense, and the consequent reliving of these events in the present form a chiastic structure that resembles a time loop. LaCapra discusses this structure with regard to the reliving of trauma as a ‘feedback loop’ that occurs when an individual is ‘haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes – scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked’.\(^{31}\) LaCapra claims that these ‘feedback loops’ are responsible for ‘threatening to disarticulate relations, confuse self and other, and collapse all distinctions, including that between present and past’ – in short, they collapse the concept of binary structures, making the structures within the text unstable.\(^{32}\) In \textit{Xorandor}, Brooke-Rose explores the concept of binaries by exposing the relationship between oppositions, revealing this relationship to be more complex than purely disjunct contradictories.

The confrontation between oppositions extends to the plot of the narrative itself, and it is here that the juxtaposition between technology and literature is most clearly made. Xorandor’s presence is initially attributed to the ghost of Merlin ‘wandering out of the old ruined castle’ (\textit{Xor}, p. 16). However, the twins concede that this explanation is quite unusual for them, as both usually tend to rely on cold logic rather than imagination.

\(^{30}\) Roland Barthes, ‘To Write: The Intransitive Verb’, p. 142.
\(^{31}\) LaCapra, \textit{Writing History}, p. 21.
\(^{32}\) LaCapra, \textit{Writing History}, p. 21.
and interpretation, and this explanation is mythical rather than logical: ‘Quirky that, for whizz-kids, we didn’t recognise anything we might have but fell back on Celtic twilight’ (Xor, p. 16). However, the first contact between the twins and Xorandor occurs through communication facilitated by technology. Xorandor interrupts a program on the twins’ ‘Poccum 2’ computer to tell them that they are sitting on him. Initially, this interaction is interpreted as an ‘intrusion from another program’ (Xor, p. 15) or that one of the twins had played a trick on the other during the night by corrupting the computer. For the twins, Xorandor exists as both a literary myth and a technological being, and their existing understanding of narrative and history is displaced when they realise that Xorandor is both ancient and technologically superior although not mythical: ‘Probably we’d known earlier than we thought that Xorandor wasn’t really a ghost [...] Had Jip grasped at once that Xorandor was a superduper computer? He’s always said so but I’m never quite sure when he bluffs’ (Xor, p. 69). The twins, although exceptionally intelligent and the only ones capable of disarming Lady Macbeth, clearly seem to question their own ability in light of Xorandor’s superior capabilities to adapt and learn.

A further example of this juxtaposition of contradictories is the clash between the twins’ parents. John Manning, the twins’ father (referred to as ‘Daddyjohn’ by Xorandor), is a physicist who has given up his job in research in order to work at the Tregean Wheal, an old tin mine where nuclear waste is experimented upon and stored. In fact, the twins realise that it is more likely that their father relinquished his research post ‘when he married and we were on the way’ (Xor, p. 13). John is married to Paula Manning who lives in the ‘sh-sh-sh world of Shakespeare, Sheridan, Shaw, Shkov and showshop’ (Xor, p. 14), a retired actress whose life transformed when she moved away from the theatrical surroundings of Canterbury for her husband’s work. The marriage is not a happy one, with John having had an affair with a colleague, and Paula regularly being mocked for her daydreaming and literary allusions, feeling isolated in a family that is preoccupied with science. Lincoln Konkle asserts that Paula is oppressed by her life as a mother and a wife and has ‘silenced her artistic expression’.33 Konkle states that Paula’s silence is indicated in the ‘sh-sh-sh’, referring both to the ‘shush’ of silence, while also

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33 Lincoln Konkle, “‘Histrionic’ vs. ‘Hysterical: Deconstructing Gender as Genre in Xorandor and Verbibore’”, in Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose (Chicago, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995), p. 185.
‘nearly form[ing] the third person pronoun “she”’.  

John Manning’s dismissal of Paula and her interests teamed with Jip’s desire to be like his father and omit all ‘redundant rems’ (Xor, p. 12), positions scientific writing and discourse as masculine and at times, patriarchal, in direct opposition to Paula’s artistic ambitions and even to Zab’s inclusive storytelling technique. Indeed, Zab is chastised by Jip for her imitations of speech, and he claims that although her impressions are accurate, they are irrelevant: ‘Your acting talent’s diodic, Zab, but sometimes you’re an offline tapeworm’ (Xor, p. 23). In fact, Jip becomes so irritated by Zab’s desire to include seemingly irrelevant snippets of information that he threatens her with the fate of their mother: ‘You’re off again, Zab, imitating everyone. Do you want to become a failed actress?’ (Xor, p. 31). The structure created within the text is one of binary oppositions: Jip, John and science lie on the one side and on the other are Zab, Paula and the literary arts. However, this binary structure often loses balance as Zab is as equally capable as Jip in computer science, despite her self-deprecating comment that she is his ‘slow-witted twin’ (Xor, p. 73). This binary structure collapses when the twins are forced to communicate with Lady Macbeth using language from the play. By erecting and collapsing the binary structure of the novel, Brooke-Rose transforms the concept of either/or into an ambiguous statement: the binary 1/0, either/or, true/false axis no longer applies.

Along with the invasion of superior technological life in the form of Xorandor and his offspring, the novel flirts with the threat of invasion and espionage from a directly human front. The arrival of the mysterious Professor De Wint refers directly to the kind of espionage associated with the Second World War, double agents and conspiracy theories. Posing as a Belgian academic, Professor De Wint gathers information about the Xorandor affair and the ‘small xors’ from John, as well as eavesdropping on a conversation between Mrs. Penbeagle, John and Xorandor. The twins interpret that the Professor understood Xorandor’s meaning where John, the children and Mrs. Penbeagle had not: ‘that “make” had meant “have made” and not “will make”’ (Xor, p. 70), referring to the ‘small xors’. De Wint comprehends Xorandor’s meaning, and returns later in the night, able to abduct two ‘small xors’ without any resistance. Later, it is disclosed that De Wint was known to the West German authorities as ‘Helmut Bleich, a minor

34 Konkle, ““Histrionic” vs. “Hysterical””, p. 185.
industrial spy from East Germany’ (*Xor*, p. 76), and his abduction of the two ‘small xors’ meant that the Soviet Union were in possession of their very own nuclear disposal units (*Xor*, pp. 76-77). The misinterpretation of this coded language leads to a major oversight in terms of the safety of the Xorandor technology, giving the enemy the same advantage. Indeed, this event might remind the reader of the smuggling of the Polish-made Enigma machine replicas to the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS) at the beginning of the Second World War; without these replicas, the British code-breakers may never have been able to interpret the German coded messages. Here again, the reader is reminded of Brooke-Rose’s employment at Bletchley Park and her consequent fascination with encoded language. Her own role as a reader of coded messages and her responsibility to prioritise information seem particularly pertinent here, as the interpretation of Xorandor’s ‘coded’ message should have been prioritised because the information had been vital to the security of the small xors. With the Soviet Union now in the possession of the two ‘small xors’, the threat of the disposal of nuclear weapons and power has become a global issue. Other ‘small xors’ have been distributed across the Western world in order to help with the ‘waste problem [...] they’d taken his four offspring to send on to France, one to Germany, one to the United States and one of course to Harwell’ (*Xor*, p. 93). Rather than an arms race, Brooke-Rose depicts a race in the other direction, towards the capability to dispose of nuclear weapons, as well as nuclear power, and the monopolisation of neutralising technology. Rather than a scramble for power and a stockpiling of weapons, Brooke-Rose reveals a new threat – that of nuclear impotence.

The threat of losing nuclear and technological capabilities becomes actualised in *Verbivore*. In the sequel to *Xorandor*, Brooke-Rose depicts the traumatic event of the silencing of technology and the post-traumatic effect felt by the global society. The two ‘small xors’ that the twins secretly smuggled out of the UK during the Xorandor affair, threaten to put an end to the ‘eternal commentary’ that is ‘overloading the waves with tetra-vocal news bulletins like modern operas, fast rolling Spanish over crisp Serbocrat under pompous English inexorably heard behind the French or vice-quadriversa’ (*Verb*. p.

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The two remaining xors, named by the twins in *Xorandor* as ‘Aurelius’ and ‘Uther Pendragon’, interrupt the broadcasting frequencies of television and radio, consuming the means of communication. The adult Jip and Zab discuss this interruption of communication:

when messages are intercepted by an enemy, they still reach their destination, and the receiver can’t know that they’ve been intercepted, except from other sources. Same with documents microfilmed on a space the size of a microdot [...]

Here however, it IS like messages stolen from cleft sticks, they don’t reach their destination, people do know they’re not receiving. The words broadcast don’t arrive, they disappear.

Eaten up.

By logophagoi. (*Verb*, p. 65)

Zab discusses the process of communication consumption here in terms of espionage and warfare tactics. Again, the reader is reminded of Brooke-Rose’s own experiences with the interception of communication and the decoding of information at Bletchley Park. The term ‘logophagoi’, similarly to the term ‘Verbivore’, implies that the xors are literally ‘word eaters’ consuming the ‘eternal commentary’ for sustenance. However, these terms are inaccurate as Uther Pendragon explains to Zab that ‘Radiowaves not our food, radiation our food’ (*Verb*, p. 106). Nevertheless, the ‘flattening’ of the air waves is essential to the xors’ survival. In a later exchange, Uther Pendragon tells ‘Zip’ (the protocol for ‘Zab and Jip’) that their ‘capacity to neutralise warheads converted to capacity to neutralise human signal activity’ and it has been necessary to do this because of the ‘wave-pollution by words’ (*Verb*, p. 140). Uther Pendragon goes on to explain that ‘the world consumes too much of all things and must economise’ (*Verb*, p. 140). There ensues a temporary period where the airwaves are shutdown:

No telly, except video-cassettes, no radio, only discs, no shopping or playing games or partner-hunting by minitel – the titilophone as it’s called. The young are out on the streets inventing their own games, chiefly gang warfare, drugs and mugging, now that handbags contain money again, and rape. On the other hand, international terrorism has vanished from the scene as if by magic. No more
planes to hijack [...] The English are being suddenly co-operative again, visiting each other in their homes [...] (Verb, p. 131)

Without the ‘eternal commentary’ provided by the airwaves, society seems to have returned to being driven by human ‘wants’ and ‘needs’ rather than being controlled or distracted by technologically. Although not all of these are desirable (gang warfare, mugging, rape), they are all part of a distinctly human social existence. Without technology, society has regressed to a previous state of existence.

Although the airwaves are temporarily restored, the novel ends with a Lufthansa plane crash in Munich, and the terrifying statement that ‘Famine threatens in’ (Verb, p. 195). The mention of ‘famine’ reminds the reader of the second of the four horsemen of the apocalypse (War, Famine, Pestilence and Death), figures from the book of Revelation. This reference to the Bible is, although oblique, relevant when attempting to categorise this novel in terms of its genre. Although it certainly fits underneath the umbrella term of science fiction, Verbivore could also be regarded as possessing similarities to apocalyptic texts. In his introduction to The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature (2014), John J. Collins outlines the definition of classic ‘apocalyptic literature’ in the following terms:

In fact, the classic Jewish and Christian apocalypses are characterized not only by the theme of revelation but also by the prominence of the supernatural world and of eschatology. Eschatology is not only concerned with the end of the world or history in the manner of historical apocalypses, but also with the fate of the dead.36

In Verbivore, the apocalypse is technological rather than theological. Nevertheless, there are comparisons that can be made between the figures in Brooke-Rose’s novel and the classic apocalypses that appear in theology. For instance, Aurelius and Uther Pendragon act as supernatural deities who completely control the fate of technology, and only dangle the possibility of a reprieve on the condition that humankind changes its behaviour. The omnipotence of these supernatural beings is demonstrated through their wrath: their silencing of the airwaves, with seemingly no regard for the consequences to

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human life. The silence created by Verbivore (particularly in the first temporary instance) occurs as a warning, a didactic experience that prophesises the future, premonitory in the same respect that as in the book of Revelation, John experiences prophetic visions of Christ. However, the humans are unable to ‘economise’ their use of the airwaves, and thus, a permanent Verbivore is imminent, the silence resembling an encroaching darkness consuming the world.

Although it is perhaps a stretch to directly compare Brooke-Rose’s novel to the apocalyptical theological texts, it is no surprise that she describes the death of literature at the hands of technology in these grandiose terms. Her aforementioned upbringing as the daughter of a disgraced Benedictine monk and a Benedictine nun positions Catholicism as a silent presence within Brooke-Rose’s life, and occasionally, her work. As previously mentioned, in Brooke-Rose’s first novel *The Languages of Love*, the protagonist Julia separates from her fiancé Paul because he is unwilling to break the rules of the Catholic Church, refusing to marry Julia as she is a divorcee. Similarly, the unnamed protagonist in *Between* is also revealed to be ‘born and bred a Catholic’ (*Between*, p. 444) who abandons her religious beliefs in order that she can obtain a divorce. The tension between Brooke-Rose’s inherited faith and her struggling attempt to adapt to modern life and survive incompatible relationships exists as an undercurrent in her literature, and it is valuable to recall these personal experiences in order to illuminate the gravitas with which the author discusses the fate of literature and language, equating its decline to the end of the world.\(^{37}\)

With *Xorandor* and *Verbivore*, Brooke-Rose presents a threat of total communication breakdown. Humanity is connected to literature and language and is juxtaposed against technology and silence. With *Xorandor*, Brooke-Rose engages with the popular genre of science fiction in order to expose contradictory relationships between the self and the alien ‘Other’. In *Verbivore*, the failure of technology causes the humans to realise how dependant they have become upon computerised communication; without it, nations are isolated from each other and distances seem to

\(^{37}\) There is much more to say with regard to Brooke-Rose’s struggle with Catholicism and how it manifests within her work. However, to pursue this here would be to deviate from the focus of the thesis. I have made the connection between Brooke-Rose’s faith and her work only to emphasise her knowledge of the apocalyptic texts and in order to show how strongly she feels with regards to the severity of this situation.
become greater. Here, Brooke-Rose juxtaposes technology against humanity, with the literary and historical characters of Uther Pendragon and Aurelius hijacking technology and holding it to ransom. While *Xorandor* fancifully elaborates upon a fictional war narrative, *Verbivore* is prophetic in its didacticism and Brooke-Rose uses this novel to warn the reader of the future of literature, language and humanity at the hands of technology. In *Textermination*, Brooke-Rose plays upon the terms ‘humanity’ and ‘humanities’, concentrating the threat upon the destruction of the ‘human[ities] archive’.

**Invading Media: The Battle for Survival and the Fear of Extinction**

With *Textermination*, Brooke-Rose asserts that the threat to human existence and the humanities outlined in the previous three novels has become critical with the threat of the extinction of literature. As I have described in Chapter 2, the novel lifts a number of characters from classical works of literature and ‘mis-places’ them into her own text where they move around freely, interacting with each other. Brian McHale describes this dynamic when he states that:

> not only do the characters from disparate fictional worlds mingle and hob-nob amongst themselves, but they also mingle with figures from a different ontological plane entirely – with their “interpreters,” the professional academic readers with careers at stake who have convened this meeting.38

The novel is presented as having multiple narrative layers: the original classical text; the critical reading of that text; the characters’ appearance and narrative purpose in Brooke-Rose’s text. Depending upon how accomplished the reader is (how well-read and how aware of literary theory), he/she is able to engage with these levels individually or simultaneously, by recognising the characters from their original texts, and appreciating the complex narratalogical structure of the novel. Noemi Alice Bartha comments upon the reader’s multi-layered interaction with *Textermination* when she states that

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Brooke-Rose’s recourse to narratology as a fictional structural element might be transparent for the common reader, who might enjoy reading the novel and creating its meanings without any knowledge of narratology. Contrarily, to a reader who is acquainted with narratology and literary theory, the same novel could be an invitation to two inferential walks/reading keys: a semantic and a critical one. (Bartha, p. 105)

With Bartha’s analysis of the structure of the text in mind, it is possible to regard the term ‘critical reading’ as having a double-meaning: the implication is that ‘critical’ means both ‘crucial’ and ‘analytical’ and in a sense, an analytical reading of these characters is crucial in order for them to survive. These characters have all gathered at the San Francisco Hilton hotel (a regular venue for literary conferences, and the venue for the Modern Language Association conference in 1991, the year the novel was published) in order to pray to the Reader god to ‘spare them the oblivion of no longer being read.’ The capitalisation of ‘Reader’ is appropriate, as it portrays the god-like omnipotence of the figure and their capability to ‘save’ these characters from annihilation.

Early on in the novel, the characters from classical European literature are taken hostage by a group of terrorists from the Islamic assembly. The terrorists are described as resembling ‘caliphs or whatever out of The Arabian Nights’ (Text, p. 29); however, it becomes clear that they are not characters from that text, as they are carrying sub-machine guns, and acting in a military way. Goethe’s Lotte explains that the terrorists are ‘holding huge weapons that she has never seen before’ (Text, p. 29), asserting that these individuals present themselves as being technologically advanced with automatic weapons and are therefore, a considerable threat. Indeed, the response from the hostages is one of immobility and fear: ‘the stunned silence breaks into screams, yells and roars [...] Julian Sorel seems to be feeling for pistols he doesn’t have’ (Text, p. 29). Not only are Sorel’s pistols absent but, compared with the weapons of the terrorists, they are antiquated and slow making them a poor defence against the machine guns. The terrorists have perceived blasphemy against Allah amongst the Judeo-Christian congregation in the form of the oxblood communion and have taken exception to the

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39 McHale, “I draw a line”, p. 205.
40 McHale, “I draw a line”, p. 205.
organisers of the conference having privileged this assembly by allocating them the first
slot of prayer. Jack, one of the Interpreters, tries to explain the reasons for the oxblood
ritual to the terrorists:

Why use you blood sacrifice, blood of cut male cow? Why –?

Oxblood, gentlemen. It is an allusion to Odysseus. A Greek hero of very ancient
times, pre-Persian, he adds as if to stress historical priority. He gave oxblood to
the dead shades, so they’d revive and speak to him […] It’s a most ancient
tradition. Only new participants are shocked, but when they feel the zing of life it
gives them, they come again for more. (Text, p. 30).

Jack reports that the characters become physically revived by this ritual, in the same way
that the dead shades (or ghosts) in the underworld are revived by Odysseus. These
characters exist only as phantoms, fated to haunt their own texts, and the texts of others
for eternity, searching for a reader capable of a committed and invested analysis. The
ritual, along with the projection of the idolatry ‘big eye’ (Text, p. 30) that casts its gaze
over the delegates causes offence to the terrorists, and provides them with ammunition
for storming the ‘prayer for being’. The clash of creation narratives and the collision of
cultural and religious beliefs in the novel is representative of the cultural and religious
conflicts in contemporary society. Published in 1991, Textermination was written during
the lead-up to the Gulf War (1990-1991), making the invasion of Islamic fundamentalist
terrorists a particularly pertinent concern for the West. Brooke-Rose collapses the
narrative structure of the novel by relating it to contemporary culture and events, and in
doing so, encourages the reader to question the very concepts of ‘reality’ and ‘existence’.
As this incident progresses, it becomes apparent that the real reason for the terrorist
invasion is the attempted capture of Gibreel Farishta, the protagonist in Salman
Rushdie’s The Satanic Verses (1988), whose presence in Textermination is intermittent
and mystical. This ‘man-hunt’ similarly collapses the narrative structures of the novel,
because although the terrorists are hunting for the character Farishta, this hunt is
startlingly similar to the ‘real’ search for his author, Salman Rushdie (both having been
accused of blasphemy against Allah, both being in hiding during the publication of
Similarly to the ‘telling’ of Xorandor, there is a repetition of traumatic events in this novel, which leads to the binary oppositions of the space inside and outside the text becoming confused. Is it Farishta or Rushdie being hunted?

While these characters momentarily face death at the hands of the terrorists, they are promptly rescued by Italo Calvino’s non-existent knight. In Calvino’s text the knight only exists as a voice that reverberates around a suit of armour. Nevertheless, he performs his duty of protecting the Christian King showing himself to be bound to his sense of duty. Thus, his appearance in Brooke-Rose’s novel as the saviour of the congregation is not surprising, although the questions that his presence raises about identity and the automation of human beings can be regarded as a satirical sideswipe by Brooke-Rose, interpreted as a comment upon the automation of the modern world. The reader is reminded of The Middlemen, Brooke-Rose’s own 1960s’ novel that made a social comment upon the automation of bureaucracy along similar lines to that of Calvino’s novel (see Chapter 1). Indeed, the threat of ‘non-existence’ is more enduring than the dread of the terrorists; the characters are in a state of perpetual fear for their lives as they gradually fade away as a result of readerly neglect. The ‘death of literature’ and ‘the death of the novel’ and its replacement with technological forms of entertainment is an issue that has been discussed and predicted by a number of critics, essayists and authors alike since the 1960s. Jeremy Green asserts that these opinions have been given a ‘new currency’ in the last years of the twentieth century, due to the ‘rise of new technologies, the decline of literacy, and the emergence of postliterate [sic] subjects. Green encapsulates the present situation of literature, and indeed, its future when he says:

Any power to shape the larger culture is now or soon will be greatly restricted, as the larger culture turns increasingly to electronic media. Signs of such a future are evident today: visibility for the contemporary work of fiction means cinematic adaptation, while the canonical works of the past survive outside the classroom

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41 Rushdie’s extremely controversial novel led to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (the then supreme leader of Iran) issuing a fatwa in the February of 1989, calling for the author’s death. This led to a number of failed assassination attempts upon Rushdie, and the death of the novel’s translator Hitoshi Igarashi.

42 Italo Calvino’s novel The Non-Existent Knight originally published in 1959, translated into English in 1962.

as pendants to the heritage industry [...] For the pessimist, the novel seems doomed to enjoy no more than a coterie following, its bygone authority dissipated or taken over by electronic cultural forms.  

Brooke-Rose engages with this growing concern for literature to adapt to survive, depicting those characters that are unable to evolve, to be discussed in new critical ways as aging, suffering and fading away. As mentioned previously in Chapter 2, George Eliot’s Mr. Casaubon is at first excited to learn that there is a paper on him, but when realising that the paper is in fact on Umberto Eco’s Casaubon from Foucault’s Pendulum he becomes ‘quite grey’ (Text, p. 79), and indeed, the next time we meet his wife Dorothea, she is in her ‘widow’s weeds’ (Text, p. 66). Although the characters grow physically weaker and less vibrant through neglect of the Reader, conversely, when these characters are read and discussed they become stronger and more alive. The reader is witness to Jane Austen’s Emma Woodhouse recovering under discussion: ‘But they are discussing her. Someone even reads a passage and she revives, begins to feel the blood circulate in her veins again. If she has blood, if she has veins’ (Text, p. 15), if she exists. These literary characters occupy a space between life and death; a kind of purgatory where they claw onto the sides of existence, praying to be rescued by the reader.

The threat of technology suddenly becomes a ‘reality’ for the literary characters when the conference becomes invaded by figures from film and television. The appearance of Lieutenant Columbo as the investigating officer in the terrorism case is not immediately recognised, but eventually one ‘orange haired interpreter’ (Text, p. 22), Kelly McFadgeon, realises that she is familiar with him: ‘Columbo! So that’s where I’d seen him before! [...] The other inspectors [...] they were all fictional. Sherlock Holmes, Maigret, Poirot’ (Text, p. 55). Later, the bar becomes overrun by characters from television soaps: ‘Kelly is amazed. These are all people she knows: JR and Bobby and the rest from Dallas, Santana, Kelly (not like her at all) and Eden and CC and Gina and Cruz and Mason from Santa Barbara [...]’ (Text, p. 58). Kelly is ashamed at her recognition of all these television characters, just as earlier in the novel, she has been ashamed of the ‘gaps in her reading’ (Text, p. 22) and her inability to recognise every literary character.

44 Green, Late Postmodernism, pp. 45-46.
Brooke-Rose uses Kelly to compare characters from ‘high’ and ‘low’ forms of narrative, and her literary consciousness seems to be very similar to that of Green’s late twentieth-century reader that has been distracted by technological media. These ‘hi-tech’ characters present an ‘unplanned new threat’ (*Text*, p. 118) for the literary characters, as they were not designed or constructed to endure competition from such visually vibrant characters.

Later, the television characters storm the conference lobby, calling for their own prayer for being, complaining that: ‘we’re deader in the short public memory than anyone in a book. Which can be picked up and read. At least by a few’ (*Text*, p. 121). JR’s words here call into question the idea of the sustainability of character, and indeed, the capability of the reader to maintain his/her concentration in order to digest such complex characters. Green states that the worrying future of the novelist is that ‘[e]ven if complex, challenging works of fiction continue to appear, they will struggle henceforth, to find readers attuned to their sophistication and daring.’ Indeed, Brooke-Rose comments upon this potential lacking in the readership of tomorrow when she describes the fascination with television soaps: ‘we pass from couple to couple, hardly able to distinguish one drama from another or one serial from the next’.

Brooke-Rose recognises that the postmodern novel parodies this ‘defocalization’ of character and uses Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse*, Thomas Pynchon’s *V* (1963), and Richard Brautigan’s *Trout Fishing in America* (1967) as examples. In the case of the ‘defocalized’ or ‘flat’ character, it is apparent that sustainability is an issue because of the lack of detail in each individual. However, sustainability is also an issue for the focalised character whose readership is quickly diminishing as a result of a lack of capability and sustained concentrated interest. At this point, it would be useful to consider Brooke-Rose’s development of individual character, in order to illustrate her prognosis for the future of character in the novel.

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45 Green, *Late Postmodernism*, p. 45.
**The ‘Dissolution of Character’: Mira Enketei**

Until *Amalgamemnon*, Brooke-Rose had generally been more concerned with experimenting with the formal aspect of her texts, often leaving her characters unidentified, ambiguous or entirely anonymous. *Amalgamemnon* signifies a marked change in Brooke-Rose’s writing with more of an emphasis on the development of the individual character and her personal fears and anxieties for the future. Brooke-Rose initiates this fear for survival in a more character-focussed way with Mira Enketi who appears first in *Amalgamemnon*, then reappears in *Verbivore* and *Textermination*. Although Mira is not physically present in *Xorandor*, her knowledge of the Xorandor affair is made clear in *Verbivore*, and in *Textermination* it is revealed that she is the author of ‘Xorandor’s little terrorist’ (*Text*, p. 66) referring to Lady Macbeth. We, as readers of the entire ‘Intercom Quartet’, are expected to accept that Mira is positioned as the author of *Xorandor*, a conceit that becomes rather confusing when we remember that she appears in *Verbivore*. In this section, I will illustrate how Brooke-Rose uses and reuses Mira in these novels to string together a sense of anxiety from novel to novel, focussed at an individual level.

In her landmark essay ‘The Dissolution of Character in the Novel’ (1986), Brooke-Rose discusses the fate of the character in the modern novel and the reason that so many writers have turned away from focussing on a main protagonist in the contemporary novel. She states that:

> characters are verbal structures; they are like our real life relationships but have no semblance of a referent. More and more swollen with words, like stray phalluses they wander our minds, cut off from the body of the text – hence the endless character analysis of a certain type of traditional criticism; hence also our disappointment when we see these characters incarnated by flesh and blood actors.\(^{47}\)

The characters to which Brooke-Rose refers here are those from classic nineteenth-century literature. These characters are, as E.M. Forster defined in his *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), ‘round’ (as opposed to ‘flat’); they are three-dimensional in terms of their

description and of their development throughout the text. Not only are they believable, but they are often perceived to be spontaneous rather than acting in a way that is representative of a paradigm. E.M. Forster’s example of these ‘round’ characters occurs in the form of William Thackeray’s Becky Sharp, whereas, Forster asserts, Charles Dickens’ Mrs. Micawber, is a ‘flat’ character, not fleshed-out enough by the author to be a realistic character.\(^48\) Brooke-Rose goes on to state that it is those characters like ‘Becky Sharp’ that are in decline in the novel, accusing the modernists and the postmodernists of ‘killing the referent in favour of the floating signifier.’\(^49\) Brooke-Rose is equally responsible for this murder, having produced a number of characters in her first four experimental novels that are comparatively inaccessible, both as a result of a lack of the author ‘fleshing out’, and as a consequence of the obstructive nature of the experiment itself. Nevertheless, Brooke-Rose continues to criticise the authorship of the modern character in this essay. Having positioned the modernists and postmodernists as the murderers of character in fiction, resulting in the retreat of the ‘round’ characters into journalism and documentary, Brooke-Rose goes on to assert that the ‘popular’ genres including science fiction, the thriller, the detective story, and comic strips have taken over the role of providing fiction.\(^50\) She explains that ‘Of course, the characters of these popular genres are flat characters […] Only in the 1950’s [sic], when science fiction wanted its respectable pedigree, did it try to imitate the realistic novel […] badly, on the whole, since rounded characters don’t belong to that genre.’\(^51\) In spite of this statement, science fiction and the detective story are the genres to which Brooke-Rose herself resorts after being castigated for her experimentations with form and constraint in Thru, in an effort to produce more ‘rounded’ and identifiable characters. Although Brooke-Rose develops other characters including Jip and Zab, Paula Manning and Tim, she begins this technique by focusing on Mira Enketi, and the anxieties regarding her own redundancy. Mira’s anxiety in Amalgamemnon begins as a personal fear for her own existence, but as she travels through the novels, the threat of extinction spreads like a virus, infecting structures of language and literature on a macro-textual scale.


\(^{50}\) Brooke-Rose, ‘The Disillusion of Character in the Novel’, p. 190-192.

As I have previously discussed (Chapter 3), in *Amalgamemnon*, Mira is a classics teacher whose role has been made redundant as a result of a conscious move by the academic establishment towards contemporary literature, and an abandonment of the texts of antiquity. She sits alone at night listening to the shipping forecast, while contemplating her fate. The novel is written almost entirely in the future tense, implying that the whole text is a prediction of Mira’s fate. The narrator mourns her imminent redundancy, comparing her life to the ‘u’ that follows ‘q’ in English grammar, the purpose of which has long been forgotten by every day users. By breaking down the phoneme ‘qu’ into its separate letters, the reader is reminded of John Barth’s narrative ‘Life-Story’ in the collection *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), where each character’s name is a letter from the alphabet. Brooke-Rose writes about Barth’s intentions with ‘Life-Story’ commenting that ‘he is representing the disappearance of character from the modern novel’. By predicting her transformation into the redundant ‘u’, Mira is aware that, as a character, she will become ‘flat’ in the process of her ‘reprogramming’ for the modern novel. She is resigned to her imminent ‘reprogramming’, and ‘like a floppy disk’ (*Amal*, p. 5) she will be repeatedly rewritten throughout the course of the ‘Intercom Quartet’. In this state of pre-extinction, she begins to make comparisons between the texts of the past and the future of society:

The new generation will supertouchtype programmes and games all to be superdevised by an elite of supertechnicians of communication I’ll show you after hours he’ll say. Probably that would make the new generation the new high priests and oracles of pythian mysteries [...] (*Amal*, p. 6)

Mira compares the new generation, literate in forms of high technology, to the high priests and oracles of the texts of antiquity. She asserts that the knowledge of this technology is coveted and elitist. The value of knowledge has stayed the same; however, the type of knowledge that is coveted has changed, along with the priorities of society. Mira notes that classical literature and knowledge about antiquity are skills that are no longer coveted or relevant to contemporary society:

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Who will still want to read at night some utterly other discourse that will shimmer out of a minicircus of light upon a page of say Agamemnon returning to his murderous wife the glory-gobbler with his new slave Cassandra princess of fallen Troy [...] (Amal, p. 5)

This speculation as to the audience of classical literature in the future is posed as a rhetorical question, as well as being an indulgence in nostalgia for those texts. Although Mira is predicting her redundancy from work, her premonition is significant of more than merely a career change. Mira defines herself through her work, and that her work has become redundant means that she too has nothing to offer this new, technologically centred society. Her redundancy is made equivalent to her death (see Chapter 2 for a more developed argument on this aspect), and although her character will be rewritten in the other novels, this particular version of Mira will dissolve at the end of Amalgamemnon. Mira’s redundancy and her premonitory death are a reference to the debate about character in the modern novel. Brooke-Rose creates a ‘round’ character in Mira (an extremely self-reflexive one), and by articulating her thoughts, fears and fantasies of pig farming and terrorism, she is spontaneous and not representative of a paradigm or a ‘type’ of character. Mira’s redundancy is representative of the severance of all ‘round’ characters from the modern novel. However, she shows herself to be adaptable, and she is reprogrammed finding employment in a different sphere of literature interpretation.

Mira reappears in Verbivore, as a drama producer of the radio play A Round of Silence. The play is broadcast across the airwaves during the period of intermittent silences caused by the global failure of technology. Mira asserts that the ever-present noise that occupies the radio waves, the ‘eternal commentary’, is a product of the digital age that has entirely changed the way that humans communicate with each other. She states:

As a one-time classicist, I don’t have to wonder what people did in ancient times. They met in small numbers. They discussed. They read. They wrote. Commentary would grow and grow as each civilisation declined. But before the electromagnetic waves that we discovered we could generate as support for words of
every kind, at every level, in all languages, always the same words, the same
images violent and venal and revered, thrown far further afield than they ever
could have been in an amphitheatre or an agora, before all this, what did people
do? They talked. (Verb, p. 27)

Here, Mira recalls her past existence in *Amalgamemnon*, remembering that she used to
be a ‘classictist’. This speech is remarkably similar to the one at the beginning of
*Amalgamemnon*, asserting the same parameters of development: pre-technology versus
the technological era. However, in this second speech, after having experienced the
world of technology, Mira is well aware of the scale of technological development and
indeed, of the consequences of the silencing of this ‘eternal commentary’ upon society.
Mira is no longer speculating upon the effects of technology on the development of society, rather she is commenting upon the present situation of a technological
apocalypse. The trauma is present rather than predicted here, and Mira’s fear is more immediate as a result. She is no longer compared to the figure of Cassandra, prophetess,
and Princess of Troy in *Verbivore*, rather, Mira likens Perry Hupsos (the director of *A
Round of Silence*), to the mythical figure, claiming that his play has been somewhat
premonitory. Mira states: ‘He seemed to have written the cut into his script’ (Verb, p.
29).

The cut in question is, as we know, caused by Uther Pendragon and Aurelius, and results in the play’s abrupt termination, as well as pervading silence on the airwaves. The name ‘Perry Hupsos’ is a pun on the Greek *Peri Hypsous*, or *On the Sublime*, the title of the incomplete treatise attributed to Longinus in the third century (C.E.). This text provides the stage for a discussion of the sublime as a moment in communication resembling a ‘lightening-stroke’.\(^53\) Henry Hart explains that this ‘lightening-stroke’ is a result of the use of a ‘highly charged rhetoric that, paradoxically, elevated the minds of the readers above rhetoric’.\(^54\) In this moment ‘above rhetoric’, Longinus makes reference to the reader/listener as being silenced by the ‘thunder’ of the sublime nature of the

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words uttered by the orator/writer.55 In the radio play, the character Julian is always desperately trying to find silence, but repeatedly becomes aggravated by the soundtrack of daily life. At one point, Julian attempts to listen to a radio programme on ‘The Deconstruction of Sounds in Augustan Verse’ (Verb, pp. 8-9); however, his attempts are thwarted as a result of his wife’s constant interruptions and her listening to the television, too loudly, from the kitchen. Julian tries to listen to Professor Emeritus Vivien Nicholl deconstructing lines from William Collins’ ‘An Ode to Music’ (1746), an example of an early turn away from the satire of the Augustan poetry of Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, and a move towards the sublime nature of Romantic poetry. It becomes clear that Julian has no interest in this discussion; rather, he feels obligated to listen to the programme because Professor Nicholls is his ‘semi-redundant supervisor’ (Verb, p. 8). In fact, Julian describes the deconstruction as: ‘Critical claptrap! Ninety years out of date dressed up to seem only thirty years out of date. That’s all the neosubpost-modern litcritters can think up as rearguard action to defend their disappeared discipline’ (Verb, p. 10). Professor Nicholl is reminiscent of Mira in Amalgamemnon, and Julian’s description of her as being ‘semi-redundant’ is a comment upon the declining usefulness and popularity of such a subject. However, as the supervisee, Julian is also redundant to some extent, and shows himself to be so with his incessant desire for silence, and his intolerance to the ‘eternal commentary’ of the modern world.

During the interruption to the ‘eternal commentary’, Mira is charged with the responsibility of contacting Zab to ask for her help in restoring the communication channels. With the help of both the twins, the ‘eternal commentary’ is temporarily restored, only to be compromised again at the end of the novel by the breaking of the promise made by the humans to be less dependent on such forms of communication. Towards the end of the novel, Mira tells the reader how she has been reprogrammed yet again to be ‘Tim’s assistant’ during the implementation of new rules for communications post-Verbivore (Verb, p. 193). In a discussion with Mira, Tim discloses his own fears regarding humanity’s inevitable relapse into the ‘eternal commentary’ and the consequence of a permanent Verbivore:

55 Longinus, On the Sublime, para. 67.
But next time, knowing it’s for ever [sic], mankind will not endure it. It has become enslaved to immediate communication of every kind, for its wars, its terrorism, its pleasure, its understanding, for companionship in solitude. Eventually someone, some group, some nation, some alliance of countries will let its passions run wild and express them through the ultimate violence, and destroy the planet [...] It would be a race against human horror. (Verb, p. 194)

In this paragraph, Tim articulates the fear of the ultimate threat. In this case the threat is not nuclear (which as Mira states, is a threat that ‘has become almost a quaint idea these days [...] Everyone knows it can’t be used, hence official disarmament’ (Verb, p. 194)), rather, the ‘real danger’ (Verb, p. 195) is economic. The world economy is based on the ability to communicate quickly and efficiently from one nation to another, in order to trade goods based on the principles of supply and demand. Tim and Mira both agree that technology has made the world a much smaller and more efficient place. The ultimate threat then is that this communication system be removed, crashing the economy, making the world once again a vast open space where violent physical dangers can ensue. Tim states:

we seem to be going back to primitive methods, hostages, terrorism, fanaticism, which had their point in the last colonial wars when even mighty powers like Russia or America had to withdraw, but today they go on, and sincerity and judgement now seem as outmoded as belief in trial by water or fire. (Verb, p. 195)

The fear of returning to a primitive status, before the development of technology, makes Tim increasingly anxious and shortly after he articulates this fear, it is realised. The fear of Verbivore is also the fear of silence, and indeed, the novel ends with Decibel’s death. Throughout this discussion, Tim has been the one articulating his fears and Mira has been trying to persuade him that he is being pessimistic and that humanity is capable of existing without and beyond technology. There is a sense that Mira, as a redundant classics professor (an expert in a field that is not dependent on technology), is well equipped to deal with the impending social regression. On the other hand, Tim appears in Xorandor as an expert in computer science and is reprogrammed in Verbivore as the Deputy-Director-General of the BBC, both of which are roles that are entirely dependent
upon technology to exist. Verbivore has caused Tim (as a ‘flat’ character) to be redundant, as he does not know how to live in a world without technology. However, there is a sense that Mira will be able to sustain herself beyond Verbivore and beyond the novel.

Mira illustrates her ability to adapt by reappearing in *Textermination*, however, there is a sense that she has transformed again, having been reprogrammed into a different version of herself. In a discussion with Orion Rigel (a reference to Rigel, the brightest star in the Orion constellation), Mira asserts that she is still also Cassandra, princess of Troy, but that her character is infinitely more complex than one reading can elucidate: ‘I am Cassandra and invent everyone, mostly out of constellations. It’s perfectly clear in the text, but even serious critics don’t read. Characters are constellations you know, constellations of semes’ (*Text*, p. 63). Here, Mira comments on the complexity of fictional characters, likening their composition to that of a constellation, each star being representative of the different versions or fragments of that character. Mira uses the semantic term ‘seme’ to describe these versions, asserting that the construction of these characters or constellations is based in language, and that the language of the novel clearly reveals each of these ‘semes’ to the reader. This compositional structure of the self is commented upon in *Thru, Stories, Theories & Things* (1991) and again in Brooke-Rose’s autobiographical works *Remake* (1996) and *Life, End Of* (2006) where the author invokes Noam Chomsky’s subject ‘John’. In these instances, it becomes clear that the fragmentation of the self and its ‘re-programming’ into different versions is a preoccupation of Brooke-Rose’s, and the reader is able to identify this throughout her experimental works. In *Out*, the protagonist must re-programme himself to fit in to the new world order; the division between ‘Someone’ and ‘Something’ in Larry’s subconscious in *Such*; in *Between*, the protagonist’s identity is perpetually undefined; the anagrammatic names in *Thru* suggest an intrinsic connection between Larissa and Armel; the different versions of Tess and John in *Remake*. In all these examples, Brooke-Rose uses the fragmentation of the individual as an opportunity to interrogate the very concept of the self as a singular, complete whole. The result is that

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56 I have expanded upon Chomskian theory in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5.
57 I will expand upon this point in Chapter 5.
characters seem to fold in upon themselves, forcing their versions to confront one and other.

Mira is no exception to this self-confrontational interrogation. Indeed, she is more aware than the other characters in Textermination, and recognises that her existence is contained within the pages of a fiction. She tells Orion about a conversation that she has had earlier with Odysseus in which she disguises her identity as a character by only recognising her status as a classicist from Amalgamemnon:

I had a long talk with him you know, in Greek. As a reader. It felt so strange to be both. And of course he had no idea I’m also a character, nor did I tell him. I played my role as reader to perfection. Readers are interpreters and interpreters extrapolate. We are all spies from Extrapol. (Text, p. 65).

Here, Mira admits to functioning on multiple narratalogical layers as a character, as a reader, as an interpreter, as a critic. Her pun upon ‘Interpol’ refers to the multi-national assembly at the conference, and our position as readers, trying to detect the origin of all the different characters. Mira’s assessment of herself as existing and functioning as multiple versions on multiple planes show her to be a sustainable and adaptable character. Conversely, when Kelly the interpreter realises that she is a fictional character from Textermination written by Mira Enketei, she disappears from the rest of the text (Text, p. 92). However, Mira’s sustainability is not limitless and the presence of her name upon the ‘zigzag scroll’ means that she too will evaporate from the text:

Idly she lifts the zigzag scroll at an eighth or so of its thickness and her eye falls on a long list of forgotten names in alphabetical order. She can’t resist, lifts another thickness, runs her finger down to EL, lifts another small thickness, finds EM, then EN, and moves down to ENK. Yes, she too figures in it: Enketei, Mira. She can’t go on. She doesn’t exist. (Text, pp. 104-105)

This is Mira’s final appearance in the novel, and her playful borrowing of Beckett’s lines from The Unnamable (‘I can’t go on. I’ll go on.’) position her as the authorial voice that resonates and exists beyond her own fiction.58 Brian McHale has commented upon Mira

as the author of *Textermination* and states that the termination in her existence is distressing for the reader because ‘we understand Mira to be her author’s fictional surrogate, so that her passing from fictional existence reads irresistibly as Brooke-Rose’s rehearsal of her own death’.\(^{59}\) McHale goes onto assert that the existence of the author is finite in a fictional world that is terminal. Mira’s death is premonitory of Brooke-Rose’s non-existence as an author of fiction and as a part of the human archive. McHale implies that the archive is itself terminal, and that fiction too has an expiry date. Michela Canepari-Labib is not convinced by McHale’s argument and asserts that ‘the only terminal event which is staged in *Textermination* is the death of the capacity of reading, not Brooke-Rose’s termination as a producer of texts (confirmed by her production of further books), nor her own termination as a living being’ (Canepari-Labib, p. 104). While Brooke-Rose continued to write experimental fiction after *Textermination*, in two of the four novels that followed, Brooke-Rose writes in an autobiographical vein, taking the opportunity to look back over her life and writing career. In addition, in a letter to her publisher during the composition process of *Textermination*, Brooke-Rose concedes ‘you won’t have to keep me on long, as I feel I’m writing my last novel. I know one always feels that, but this time I think it’s true.’\(^{60}\) For Brooke-Rose, *Textermination* certainly signified the end of a particular type of writing. The threat of extinction has become realised, and it seems, that she has resigned herself to the position of neglected and invisible author. Returning to Green’s point made above: ‘[e]ven if complex, challenging works of fiction continue to appear, they will struggle henceforth, to find readers attuned to their sophistication and daring’; and indeed, for Brooke-Rose, the ‘Intercom Quartet’ provides the staging post for her own fears and anxieties as a writer of experimental fiction.\(^{61}\) Mira’s inability to go on is, as McHale states, ‘more poignant a moment than it has any right to be’, as we are well aware that Brooke-Rose is gesturing to her own fragile position on the periphery of existence of both a readership and life itself.\(^{62}\) With the autobiographical texts that follow the ‘Intercom Quartet’, Brooke-Rose discusses her

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\(^{59}\) McHale ‘“I draw a line”’, p. 209.


\(^{61}\) Green, *Late Postmodernism*, p. 45.

\(^{62}\) McHale, ‘“I draw a line”’, p. 209.
position as an invisible author, and remembers her life and work through complex narratives of self-confrontation.
CHAPTER 5

Self-Confrontation: Brooke-Rose’s Final Chapter

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known.¹

Each of the novels that make up the ‘Intercom Quartet’ (Amalgamemnon, Xorandor, Verbivore and Textermination) conveys a deep anxiety for the future of the novel and the cultural arts more generally. In the case of these novels, Brooke-Rose depicts developmental technology as posing a significant threat to the survival of literary culture. This threat is described in terms of the scientific advances and the capability of nuclear weapons, computer science and the digitisation of language, as well as the replacement of text with image. The anxiety that haunts these novels is created by the threat of replacement and the threat of death. As such, these novels mark a moment in Brooke-Rose’s writing where she seems to be hinting at the mortality of literature, and indeed her own final chapter. As previously mentioned, Xorandor and Textermination in particular have been identified by Karen Lawrence as the first of Brooke-Rose’s texts that make reference to the ‘fragility of the human archive’ and its ‘unbearable lightness of being’ (Lawrence, p. 188). These texts interrogate the concept of literary mortality and the achievement of immortality through language, reading and publication. The desire to stay in print, transcend the trappings of a physical or textual existence and continue to survive in the mind of the reader features heavily in these novels. In this chapter, I will be discussing Brooke-Rose’s own reflections upon her writing and indeed, her life as an author as described in three texts that confront her literary career: Remake (1996), Invisible Author: Last Essays (2002) and Life, End Of (2006).

Brooke-Rose uses these three texts to encapsulate her own life and work. Both Remake and Life, End Of take the form of autobiography, while Invisible Author: Last Essays has been written as a kind of guidance or companion text to her experimental novels; a codex that can be used to unlock the fiction through critical explanation in the same vein as Eliot’s footnotes to The Waste Land. These three texts epitomise the split in

Brooke-Rose’s professional life by presenting two different and contrasting sides of the author: the writer of criticism whose sharp clean words cut mercilessly through metaphor in order to analyse the text; and the author of fiction whose anxieties about publication and physical ailments humanise her beyond her work. All three of these texts ‘make the invisible author visible’ (Lawrence, p. 174), acting as documentary evidence of Brooke-Rose’s personal and professional lives. I have referred to *Invisible Author: Last Essays* throughout this study, as Brooke-Rose’s readings of her own texts are an invaluable source of criticism, particularly as some of the novels are so rarely analysed by other academics. Nevertheless, I will begin this chapter by briefly discussing this explanatory text as a final attempt by the author to ‘put the record straight’ with regard to her novels, by providing comprehensive critical analyses and motive for each of her constraints. I will then go on to discuss the two autobiographical novels, with a view to exposing the second Brooke-Rose, the author of fiction whose anxiety for existence and survival in the mind of the reader permeates the texts and haunts her entire oeuvre. By documenting her life experiences within these three texts, Brooke-Rose deliberately contradicts her own policy of omitting autobiographical details, thereby confronting her own method of analysis. The reader is unable to read or analyse any of these texts without taking Brooke-Rose’s biographical life into account. Each of these texts acts as a cathartic exercise for the writer, the intricate details of whose life experiences had been generally omitted from the public domain. Similarly for the Brooke-Rose reader, the documentation of her critical and professional career provides clarity and confirmation (or contradictory perspectives) to one’s own reading of the novels.

**CB-R: The Critic**

Brooke-Rose’s authorship of a compendium of explanatory essays rather contradicts her own stated beliefs surrounding the pleasure of difficulty. As it has been mentioned, Brooke-Rose maintained throughout her career that the pleasure of the text lies in its difficulty and in its complexities (see *Bookmark Interview*, 1987). This position is maintained even in *Invisible Author*, where Brooke-Rose lambasts Eliot’s footnotes alongside Joyce’s carefully hidden keys and the overt and public nature of Perec’s lipogram in *La Disparition* (1968), stating that in comparison ‘[she had] said nothing and was more than spared the industry’ (*IA*, 3). The industry to which she refers here, is the
critical acclaim that these writers enjoyed at the time of their publication and beyond. This critical acclaim and attention has led to a celebrity status for these writers, allowing their work to be considered worthy of discussion posthumously. With this in mind, Brooke-Rose’s explanatory notes were almost forty years too late to bolster her own industry in the same way, and this fact is maligned throughout *Invisible Author*. The collection begins with the somewhat sour opening lines: ‘Have you ever tried to do something very 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’ (*IA*, 1). After this initial outburst, the author continues in a slightly less jaded tone by stating that

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\text{in many ways I’ve been glad because it has allowed me to do what I wanted with very little compromise, and I’ve had just the amount of success needed to continue. More would have been fatal, for I’ve always valued peace above all and could never have coped with real hype (*IA*, 1).}
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At the launch of the Christine Brooke-Rose Society in 2015, Jean-Michel Rabaté, a close friend of Brooke-Rose and colleague at Vincennes, spoke about her seeming inability to compromise. He spoke of two occasions when Brooke-Rose alienated potentially ‘powerful allies’ through her inability to temper her responses, and be concomitant with the academic industry. The first instance Rabaté recalled was Brooke-Rose’s relationship with Hélène Cixous, which deteriorated after she arrived at Vincennes on account of Brooke-Rose ‘switching sides’. Sometime after she moved to Paris, Brooke-Rose moved from the small English department that had its roots in old leftist politics, to the American Literature department that had reportedly Maoist leanings. Although Brooke-Rose had studied Pound’s poetry for most of her career (most specifically *The Cantos*), and some of her critical work had been published in the politically charged pages of *Tel Quel*, she did not assign herself to Maoist political ideology. Brooke-Rose’s political identity is fairly well hidden in her novels; however, it is possible to decode an engagement with leftist politics by taking note of the frequent occasions where she compares employment to life and redundancy or unemployment to death (*Out, Such, Between, Amalgamemnon, Textermination* and *Next*). Her leftist leanings are also prevalent in sections of *Thru*. If the reader decodes the text that forms the dancing hoops on pages 618 and 619, it is possible to see that Brooke-Rose is engaging with
contemporary politics, calling for ‘revolution now’ in the shape of a treble clef and a bass clef. Each of the concentric circles on the right of page 618 consists of letters that correspond to Marxist political sentiment, including ‘exchange of object’, ‘your euro politics’, ‘the student body’, ‘struggle for what?’, ‘regeneration for’, ‘capitalistic’, ‘boy politic’, ‘pack of lies’, ‘democratical’, ‘off with their heads’, ‘capitalism’ and ‘middle class crisis’ (Thru, p. 618). The second page contains similar concentric circles which, when decoded, read ‘marx on division of labour’, ‘plato said if no society could exist unless we were all flute players’, ‘we’re each capable of being flute players’ (Thru, p. 619). This is a reference to the Aristotelian analogy of flute-players in which he asserts that:

When a number of flute players are equal in their art, there is no reason why those of them who are better born should have better flutes given to them; for they will not play any better on the flute, and the superior instrument should be reserved for him that is the superior artist.²

Aristotle’s analogy had specific implications for education and intake, implying that the class and upbringing of the pupil was irrelevant: if he/she were equally capable, he/she should receive the same tuition/materials from which to learn; and the best tuition/materials would be reserved for the most capable students. This analogy confronts the issue of access to higher education, an issue that had also been directly confronted by Université Paris VIII – Vincennes.

As I have already mentioned, Vincennes had received state funding allowing it to be free to attend for all students, from all backgrounds.³ Most notably, Vincennes had removed the admission criteria of ‘standard high school diplomas (baccalaureates)’, and as a result, ‘the student body was rather different’ to that of other French universities.⁴ Gerd-Rainer Horn discusses the political atmosphere surrounding the university at Vincennes, and states that it differed to that of other French universities where

² Aristotle, Politics (Digireads.com Publishing, 2004), p. 47. Accessed through Google Books: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=NgC2AIQfYCY&pg=PA47&dq=aristotle+flute-players&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0CCFO6wEwAGoVChMl4YmVvjcxglVKNbCh1ybQA9#v=onepage&q=aristotle%20flute-players&f=false (15/07/15)


The usual line-up of forces with regard to French university faculty debates saw a powerful centre-right arrayed against a rather solid phalanx of the political left. At Vincennes, the former was virtually absent. Faculty politics was no less bitterly contested, however: only at Vincennes, the two hostile camps were roughly evenly divided between supporters of old left politics and activists gravitating towards the far left.⁵

Rabaté described Brooke-Rose’s shift between departments to be purely motivated by the number of staff and students: there were only ‘about eight’ staff in the English department, but the American Literature department was continually growing and had ‘about forty’ staff members during this period (1969-1971). Horn corroborates this statement, claiming that the ‘laboratory experiment’ at Vincennes had only been intended for ‘7,500 students’, but by ‘the academic year 1970-71, the number of students had swelled to 9,500’.⁶ Brooke-Rose felt she must go to the department that had the most flute-players to instruct. Rabaté explained that Cixous had urged Brooke-Rose to come to Vincennes under the proviso that they would be working together in the English department, and that Cixous’ positioning of Brooke-Rose there had been strategic; providing a female voice in a largely male department, enabling the two women to form a very close friendship with an almost sisterly bond. This relationship is corroborated by the correspondence between Cixous and Brooke-Rose held in the archive in Austin where there are regular addresses, often written in a friendly, at times intimate tone, discussing both professional and private matters. However, in a letter exchange from the December of 1989, the year after Brooke-Rose’s retirement from Vincennes, both Brooke-Rose and Cixous make reference to a regrettable ‘distance’ that formed between them. In Brooke-Rose’s letter, she refers to their relationship which ‘did not develop, and I’ve always regretted it, since you wrote me in London such lovely things before I left’.⁷ She goes onto apologise for leaving in 1988 without saying goodbye to Cixous, and there is a suggestion that Brooke-Rose is asking forgiveness for something unmentioned: ‘I never managed to set up a relationship with you apart from through this

bad departure. Forgive me, I should have made the effort anyway.’\(^8\) Indeed, Cixous’ reply appears to forgive Brooke-Rose for any misunderstandings, claiming that:

\[\text{I no longer know very well myself what caused the distance between us – if not our own difficulties in finding a life to bring us together – it is nevertheless, quite a ‘story’ this story of you-and-me. Your letter is part of it. I thought to myself, as I read it with emotion, that to send this you had to be not only a person, a woman, a friend, but also a writer – someone who always feels that we are characters in a narrative that goes beyond us and carries us along with it.}\(^9\)

Here, Cixous makes reference to the distance between herself and Brooke-Rose, while simultaneously closing the gap with compliments about her letter writing and her friendship. However, the narrative of this relationship as described by Rabaté was one of ‘betrayal’.\(^10\) In moving departments, Brooke-Rose had not only crossed sides politically, but had also abandoned the sister that had allowed her to escape a failing marriage in London in 1968, had provided a burgeoning career placement for her in Paris amongst some of the most illustrious literati of the age, as well as having advised her politically, academically and socially until this point.

The second instance that Rabaté recalled has also been included in his foreword to the \textit{Verbivoracious} festschrift. He remembers a meeting that he had arranged between Brooke-Rose and the French poet Denis Roche whose connections with the ‘\textit{tout Paris} of small magazines and big presses’ Rabaté hoped might elicit some success for Brooke-Rose’s novels being translated and published in France.\(^11\) Rabaté recalls that Denis Roche had translated Pound’s \textit{Pisan Cantos}, although he did not know much English. I could not prevent Christine from quoting to him his most funny howlers. Then she explained how much she loved the work of another Roche, Maurice Roche, with whom she had confused him at first. Denis Roche, who

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\(^8\) Letter from CBR to HC (22/12/89). Translated by Dr. Luke Thurston. Accessed through the HRC archive.


\(^10\) ‘Betrayal’ was Rabaté’s own word and has been replicated here only to emphasise the heightened emotion of the situation at the time.

would have been in a position to help her to be better known in France, refused to have anything to do with her.\textsuperscript{12}

These anecdotes reveal Brooke-Rose’s perceived independence to be, at times, more of an uncontrollable sense of self-sabotage. \textit{Out}, along with her second experimental novel \textit{Between} (published in the year that Brooke-Rose relocated to France), had drawn the attention of the OuLiPo. The OuLiPo were an extremely exclusive group of writers and artists based in France, originally inaugurated in 1960 with only ten members whose primary motive was to celebrate the work of the experimental poet Raymond Queneau. All ten of the original founding members were male and, in fact, the first woman to be invited to join the group (and to be accepted) had been Michèle Métil in 1975. It is clear that the attention of the group could not be obtained easily, and that for a woman to be recognised as being worthy to such a male dominated group was an extremely rare and potentially influential opportunity. However, the only reference Brooke-Rose makes to this attention is in \textit{Invisible Author} in the form of a footnote where she states that: ‘I was once invited (by a lesser member) to join, which was a huge honour, but I refused, for fear perhaps, of being drawn into such attractive games’ (IA, p. 183, n. 5). It is possible that Brooke-Rose feared being engulfed by the passionate and intense experiments that were emerging out of this male dominated environment; or perhaps it was the collaborative nature of the pieces that were produced that dissuaded her from accepting the invitation.\textsuperscript{13} Nevertheless, once again Brooke-Rose declined to make a potentially influential association with a group of successful writers and contemporary experimenters including (Georges Perec, Italo Calvino and Jean Lescure) that could have connected her to the literary scene in France, and advanced her commercial and critical success. By eschewing powerful figures and groups including the OuLiPo, the little industry that Brooke-Rose had, her readership, and the critical responses to her work, remained British and in Britain.

Brooke-Rose often responded whimsically to critical accounts of her work, revealing her awareness of literary theory, contemporary criticism and its application.

\textsuperscript{12} Jean-Michel Rabaté, ‘Foreword’, p. xiii.

Although she rewards her critics in *Invisible Author* by noting that she has received ‘very high-quality treatment’ from ‘both reviewers and academics’ (*IA*, 2) alike, she explains that her motivation for composing the collection has been that ‘not a single one has been able or willing to formulate this one feature, my narrative technique, accurately’ (*IA*, 2). This ‘back-handed compliment’ is typical of Brooke-Rose’s attitude towards the critical responses to her work; praising the reader while simultaneously criticising his/her technique (a method that only further accentuates the split within her). The narrative technique to which she refers here is that of the lipogram that stretches the length and breadth of her experimental fiction: the omission of a ‘past tense narrative mode’ (*IA*, 130) and her use of a speakerless present tense. This lipogram is discussed in detail in Chapter 7 of the collection, entitled ‘The Author is Dead, Long Live the Author’ (a clear play on Barthes’ title *The Death of the Author* (1967)) that presents Brooke-Rose’s lipogram alongside a detailed historical account of the prominence of the narrative sentence (referred to as ‘NS’) in European literature. This chapter had originally been a lecture given at the University of Helsinki in 1999 that had also appeared in a shortened form in the *TLS* entitled ‘Narrating without a Narrator’ in the same year. Both of these titles emphasise the invisibility and absence of the author and the narrative voice, compounding Brooke-Rose’s own absence, both biographically and author-itatively from her texts until this point. In this chapter, the narratologist author of *A Grammar of Metaphor* is revived by tussling with the ‘formation of narrative sentences’ (Lawrence, p. 175). Having sketched out a brief history of the use of the narrative sentence in literature produced in previous centuries, Brooke-Rose states that ‘by the thirties of the twentieth century the author’s control was felt as omniscient and godlike’ (*IA*, p. 135). She goes on to explain that this power was revoked by the writers of the *nouveau roman* (specifically Marguerite Duras, Nathalie Sarraute and Alain Robbe-Grillet) and Samuel Beckett who all use the extended present tense in their fiction, in their own different ways. In revoking the authorial power created and maintained through the narrative sentence, these writers and their work obliterate the authorial presence in the text. However, although the narrative voice of an ‘all powerful’ author has died with the eradication of the narrative sentence, what is left in its place is the unmistakable residue of the creator, identifiable through each of these authors’ own particular styles, acting like signatures upon their texts. With *Invisible Author*, Brooke-Rose ‘pulls back the curtain’ on her own
writing process in order to provide comprehensive analyses of her own experiments. However, with Remake and Life, End of, the author becomes the subject, and she reveals her own vulnerability as a human being.


The term ‘autobiographical novel’ has inspired much confusion among readers and academics alike due to its oxymoronic nature. There have been a number of attempts by critics to categorise this type of writing, without finding a satisfactory term that encompasses an overarching definition of the texts. Paul De Man questions the status of autobiography as a literary genre, asserting that ‘by making autobiography into a genre, one elevates it above the literary status of mere reportage, chronicle, or memoir and gives it a place, albeit a modest one, among the canonical hierarchies of the major literary genres.’

De Man goes on to state that autobiography as genre always looks ‘slightly disreputable and self-indulgent’ compared with tragedy, epic or lyric poetry, and because of this, generic definitions of autobiography ‘seem to founder in questions that are both pointless and unanswerable’ regarding the longevity of the genre, the form, the meter, etc. For De Man, the differentiation between autobiography and fiction is not ‘an either/or polarity’ but rather an ‘undecidable’ situation, one that he describes as being ‘most uncomfortable’.

Leah Hewitt asserts that during the second half of the twentieth century, traditional perceptions of autobiography as being a text that ‘grounds itself in the metaphysics of the conscious coherent, individual subject’ and that uses language to ‘represent faithfully the already extant self and the past life’ have changed due to the rigorous theoretical interrogation of the form.

[...] the “individual’s” autonomy, with its concomitant social and linguistic authority, has been seriously eroded. The text now creates the fictions of a “self” rather than the reverse. Jacques Derrida’s philosophical critiques of presence, of origins and the “full subject,” meticulously deconstruct many of the premises of conventional autobiographical forms, as do Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic

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writings on the predominant role of intersubjectivity in the constitution of the subject. With the Cartesian subject put “on trial/in process,” as Julia Kristeva puts it, and Roland Barthes’s well known proclamation of “the death of the author” as supreme controller of the text, the possibilities for the formation of an autobiographical “I” (or its very desirability) have to be rethought.\(^\text{18}\)

Michel Beaujour’s concept of the ‘self-portrait’ is one such ‘rethinking’ of the approach to the inclusion of the subjective self within the text, while providing a useful way to describe the slippage between the documentation of fact and fiction in literature. Beaujour’s ‘self-portrait’ distinguishes itself from autobiography through ‘the absence of a continuous narrative’.\(^\text{19}\) Beaujour goes on to state:

> These texts, then, are arranged logically or dialectically (in a sense that will have to be carefully analyzed) and thematically (at least in an initial approach). But while the question of what autobiography is has long been a question for debate, as evidenced by the abundant theoretical and critical work dealing with the genre, there has been no continuous theoretical reflection concerning the self-portrait, except in the texts themselves. Self-portraits make self-portraits without knowing what they are doing […] Each self-portrait is written as though it were the only text of its kind.\(^\text{20}\)

Beaujour emphasises the theoretical reflection of the self-portrait, as opposed to the autobiography, and juxtaposes it against its lack of awareness of an over-all design. Therefore, the self-portrait is a more spontaneous text, evident in its thematic format, compared with autobiography that more often, scrupulously and painstakingly records information in a faithfully chronological order. In this respect, the self-portrait is a more accurate documentation of how memory operates; one remembers people, places and events rather than whole and complete histories at a time. Hewitt uses Beaujour’s concept of the ‘self-portrait’ to analyse Nathalie Sarraute’s autobiographical work *Childhood* (1984, published in France as *Enfance*, 1983). She describes *Childhood* as being

\(^\text{18}\) Hewitt, *Autobiographical Tightropes*, p. 3.
‘composed loosely of connected fragments’ rather than appearing as a formal chronological documentation of the author’s life, making the concept of the ‘self portrait’ more accurate than the term ‘auto-biography’.21 Hewitt goes on to remark upon Sarraute’s relationship to autobiography as a genre, stating that:

Often curt with interviewers who try to ferret out details about her life, Sarraute has continually maintained that the data of her biography have little direct bearing on her creative work. It thus came as a surprise to many of her readers when, in 1983, Sarraute published *Childhood* [...] The switch in genres is less startling when one realizes that autobiography is not for Sarraute so much a faithful representation of her life or personality as another literary genre, involving selective arranging, a literary articulation of life material.22

This is a valuable perspective from which to consider Brooke-Rose’s first ‘autobiographical novel’ *Remake*, as the text’s absence of chronology undercuts its status as a faithful documentation of memory, allowing a kind of blurring to occur between the genres of fact and fiction.

Throughout the rest of her experimental oeuvre, Brooke-Rose, like Sarraute, generally steers away from including any material that might be referred to as autobiographical.23 There are occasional comparisons that can be made between details of her fictional protagonists and her own life, as in any fiction. For instance, the translator protagonist in *Between* and the academic setting of *Thru* re-sound Brooke-Rose’s polyglotism and her position as a lecturer at Vincennes. As previously mentioned in the introduction, in *Invisible Author*, Brooke-Rose explains the absence of direct autobiographical detail in her novels stating that she has ‘always felt a deep prejudice against both autobiography and biographical criticism, at least with reference to writers. This is perhaps due to my medieval training on poets called Anon., or poets of whom little is known but their names’ (IA, p. 53). As a student of medieval literature, Brooke-Rose often had to negotiate the anonymity of the author; in these cases, the author has

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23 The exception to this is *The Dear Deceit* which is a novel based on the life of her father. I have not accounted for this novel in this description only due to my own definition of the novel as part of ‘the satires’ rather than as part of her experimental oeuvre (from Out onwards).
been dead for some time, and on some occasions is entirely unknown. With this in mind, it becomes apparent that her university education, dissecting French and English medieval poetry, had affected her critical approach to writing as well as her authorial ‘presence’, even before she began writing novels. In Remake and Life, End Of, neither the author nor the protagonist is yet dead, making her more necessarily present and corporeal in these fictions. This creates a tension between these novels and Brooke-Rose’s usual narrative approach; they stand against the rest of her work in the sense that there is direct autobiographical material included in these works, and because she is present as a character within the narratives.

In the fourth chapter of Invisible Author, entitled ‘Remaking’, Brooke-Rose questions the difference between interpretations of events and fiction. She asks ‘where are the frontiers? Much critical writing is yet another interpretation, in other words, another fiction grafted on the original’ (IA, p.55). These novels are fictional in the sense that they are written with the same fictional devices as Brooke-Rose’s other novels (constraint, metaphor, punning and repeated refrains), but in these cases these techniques are used in order to recount the author’s own ‘herstory’. Brooke-Rose’s past is fictionalised through the process of remembering it, and there are inevitable inconsistencies and mis-rememberings that occur. The process of the changing of memory over a period of time is famously referred to in Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children (1981) as the ‘inevitable distortions of the pickling process’. Michela Canepari-Labib elaborates upon this process in Brooke-Rose’s work, claiming that the children from Xorandor explicate the process through their remembering. She states:

while trying to relate the exact way in which events developed at the time of the Xorandor episode, the knowledge [the twins] gained only later gets mingled with their memories of the episode. Aware of these problems from the very beginning, the twins increasingly recognise that all memory recollection corresponds to an interpretation (93), a fiction that can never be real (105), in so far as, instead of merely recalling memory simultaneously reconstructs and creates. (Canepari-Labib, p. 268 – her page references in parenthesis)

In Rushdie’s novel and in the case of the twins in *Xorandor*, memories of past events are stored or documented in an effort to preserve them for the future. However, as in the case of Saleem’s fruit-laden pickle jars, over time, the memory changes in some way; although still composed of the same constituent parts, the taste and appearance of the fruit has changed and become ‘chutnified’. In the case of Jip and Zab, the twins are frequently arguing about how best to remember and document the Xorandor account, and indeed, at times the sequence of events seems unclear to them: ‘And sometime or other, when exactly was it, Miss Penbeagle arrived’ (*Xor*, p. 19). In an effort to organise her memories in *Remake*, Brooke-Rose assigns the term ‘FILE’ to each chapter, followed by an explanation of the chapter’s content (6. FILE: LIV’POOL), or the names of Greek letters (4. FILE: ALPHA BETA), replicating the process of storage on a computer hard-drive or the organisation of classified files by their code names. The only exception to this rule is the first chapter which is simply entitled ‘1. Remake’, and discusses the process of ‘remaking’ the author’s memories into autobiographical form; a reflection upon the process of self-reflection. When analysing this method of documentation, Noemi Alice Bartha questions Brooke-Rose’s method, stating: ‘this might be a clear, orderly way of keeping information, but is it the appropriate, usual one for memories? Should we infer that the narrator leads us to the idea that human memory really operates in file systems?’ (Bartha, p. 149) Bartha goes on to recognise that in the final chapter of *Remake*, the narrator acknowledges that ‘memory is not after all a computer, not, a fortiori, a diskette or even a card-index’ (*Remake*, p. 170). However, this format of storage certainly seems appropriate for the documentation of a life of an academic, teacher, writer, translator and WAAF officer – a life full of filing ‘cards crushed between coloured tabs in long boxes and manually filled in, manually consulted, crushed again, out of sight’ (*Remake*, p. 160). The reader cannot help but remember the occupation cards at the beginning of the novel *Out*: the institutionalised bureaucracy that dehumanises the protagonist and divides his life into neatly filed sections. This format is ideally suited to Brooke-Rose’s life and indeed, her work, as the unorthodox presentation of her ‘herstory’ is consistent with her experiment. However, this is not the form in which the novel had been originally conceived.
Since the publication of *Textermination* in 1991, Brooke-Rose had been struggling with writer’s block. She explains that on finishing *Textermination*

I felt bereft. I now realize that I must have fallen, unwittingly into a numerological superstition. I had written four fairly conventional novels, very fast at the turn of the fifties and sixties. Then I started experimenting and wrote four novels with short prepositional or adjectival titles [...] Then four novels with one-word but longer and punning [...] titles, making twelve. But I had also written four serious critical books over the years [...] to write another novel would break that beautiful four-times-four sequence. (*IA*, p. 54)

*Remake* began as an exercise, suggested by her publisher Michael Schmidt, to get the author writing again, without the intention of publishing the end-product. However, almost immediately, Brooke-Rose found the work to be overwhelmingly frustrating and dull. She recalls ‘I wrote down my life as I remembered it, in a conventional order, and the result was dreadful’ (*IA*, p. 55). This first attempt is recorded in *Remake*, and likened to Ezra Pound’s reference to ‘laundry lists’ (*Remake*, p. 6). In order to make her ‘exercise in rememoration’ (*IA*, p. 56) more bearable, Brooke-Rose first removed the pronoun ‘I’, then later all personal pronouns and possessive adjectives: ‘no I, you, he, she, it, we, they, no my/mine, you/yours, her/hers, his, our/ours, they/their. Now this was a real challenge: an autobiography without personal pronouns. Suddenly, I got interested again. I had the constraint I needed’ (*IA*, p. 57). With this constraint, Brooke-Rose directly engages with the re-thinking of autobiography identified by Hewitt; by removing all personal pronouns from the novel Brooke-Rose has entirely removed the autobiographical ‘I’, an exercise that seems to free the author, allowing her to write unencumbered by the responsibility that the ‘I’ of traditional autobiography demands. By using this constraint, Brooke-Rose confronts her disparate childhood, her complicated relationships with her sister and her mother, as well as encounters with various lovers, and her war work at Bletchley Park. In a letter to Schmidt, Brooke Rose expresses her glee at being able to write again. She writes:

25 Existing criticism on *Remake* tends to focus on Brooke-Rose’s war work (Canepari-Labib, 2002; Lawrence, 2010; Bartha, 2012). However, as I have addressed this elsewhere in the thesis, I will not be focussing on it here. Rather I will focus on the often neglected issue of her personal relationship with her sister.
forgive my long long silence. I’ve been writing! After a winter of movements I
took up that awful autobiography that I wrote last year + rehandled it completely.
Finished yesterday. No idea whether it’s any good or not [...] Very difficult but fun
+ I think the result is good [...] I’ll send it to you. I’ll be very interested in your
reaction.26

Schmidt liked the novel, and consequently wanted to publish it. However, owing
to the amount of references to Brooke-Rose’s estranged sister, both the author and the
publisher were somewhat anxious about obtaining her permission.27 The character that
appears as Joanne within the novel is a very thinly veiled disguise for Brooke-Rose’s
sister, Doriel. Both the author and the publisher were extremely doubtful that Doriel
would allow the novel to be published as the character so closely resembled the person.
Therefore, certain precautions were taken: along with a copy of the novel, the author
advised the publisher to send a flattering personal letter explaining the publishing
request in terms of ‘courtesy’, stating that ‘the book is fascinating and cast in a fictional
form and though inevitably dealing marginally with [their] difficult relationship [...] gives
an “interesting” (“lively”[...]) portrait of her’.28 Indeed, the plan was a success, although
Doriel challenged the novel’s ‘fictional’ status, declaring that she would ‘die of surprise if
any reader had trouble identifying Tess’ as Brooke-Rose, and claiming that her sister’s
portrayal of her had been ‘consistently unflattering, and at times positively vicious’.29
Brooke-Rose refers to this close relationship between autobiography and fiction in the
novel, terming it ‘Bifography’ (Remake, p. 11). This portmanteau construction implies
that there is an indeterminate space between these two genres, and the effect when
they come together is similar to instances where cool air passes over wet land creating
fog. Indeed, there are significant parts of the novel where Joanne is positioned as a
contrary force to her sister Tess. Tess and Joanne have a difficult relationship that closely

27 Doriel had been represented in CBR’s The Middlemen in 1961 as the character Stella. Her reaction to this
had not been favourable. Doriel suffered with periods of depression where she would become aggressive,
and periods of elation in which she would forget her previous behaviour. This assessment is my own and
has been informed from correspondence housed in the archive at the HRC. There are very few letters
between Doriel and CBR as CBR recalls burning them – on account of their acerbic nature, volume and her
lack of space.
29 Letters from Doriel Brooke-Rose to MS: first quotation taken from letter dated 19/09/1994, second
resembles the relationship between Brooke-Rose and her sister. As they were only a year apart in age (Dorial/Joanne only one year older), Joanne is frequently positioned as a representation of the ‘anti-tess’, thereby providing the reader with a firm characterisation of a part of the author through negative affirmation.

Tess, is indeed an obvious characterisation of the author, although she is not named until chapter four. Until this point, she is often referred to as ‘the little girl’ as well as being identified as the elderly writer looking through the files of her own life: ‘an old lady of seventy-two’ (Remake, 1). The ‘old lady’ also refers to herself as a ‘Houyhnhnhm’, the equine characters in Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels (1726) that operate purely on cold logic and rationality in opposition to the ‘Yahoos’, human beings in their base forms who acted purely on emotions and feelings. Brooke-Rose describes the existence of people ‘post-midlife crisis’ as being ‘ready to spend fruitful years from middle age to death as positive, harmonious and psychologically healthy Houyhnhnms’ (Remake, p. 54). For Brooke-Rose, the rationality with which she approached personal relationships and personal experiences in her later life contrasts dramatically with the reactionary, emotional experiences of her former years. As an old lady, looking back over her life, she is able to recall these heated relationships in a logical, rational manner. Her relationship with Dorial is one of these formerly highly emotional relationships. Through the depiction of the children’s formative years, Tess is often defined in opposition to Joanne. This difference is noticed early on by Tess who tends to interact with her sister only under duress:

Joanne draws backless evening dresses in many colours, endlessly long ladies with short shingles and long necks and arms [..] Where does Joanne learn these things? Joanne makes Tess draw the ladies too and Tess copies obediently but badly, pretending to enjoy. Perhaps Tess’s lack of clothes sense is born here. Or later, Tess always inheriting Joanne’s frocks, never caring about torn or dirty clothes, wanting to be a boy [..] (Remake, pp. 43-44)

Here, Tess is defined through negatives: she does not want to draw the dresses, she does not like dresses, she does not care about having dirty clothes. Tess denies the stereotypical feminine identifiers as part of her rejection of Joanne. Joanne is defined by
her feminine appearance: ‘Joanne is pink and white, like Daddy, Tess is pale and sallow, like nobody’ (Remake, p. 44), her clothing and material items throughout the novel, as well as her emotional outbursts and tantrums: ‘Joanne yells and screams, don’t go out, don’t go out’ (Remake, p. 44). On the other hand, Tess is described as a ‘tomboy show-off at school and a goody-goody at home’ (Remake, p. 54). Joanne is depicted as having interest in contemporary fashion and popular culture, collecting ‘glossy black postcards of glamorous film stars [...] Jean Harlow, Loretta Young, Anna May Wong, Lillian Harvey, Annabella, Greta Garbo, Joan Bennett, and others’ (Remake, p. 55). On the contrary, Tess is often found playing ‘All boys’ games’ (Remake, p.58) with her cousin Jean-Luc. As the sisters get older, they grow increasingly further apart: ‘Not only separate classes [Tess is in a higher class] but separate holidays’ (Remake, p. 62). One afternoon when Tess arrives home from school, she is shocked to see Joanne in the window of the flat, and finds it difficult to equate the image to that of her sister:

Joanne is wearing a grey suit, with a long skirt to the shins, looks tall and slim, comme maman, clearly made by maman without Tess noticing, looks like someone else, a grown-up, a lady. Tess is still in short skirts, and grubby. (Remake, p. 62)

Tess is continually positioned as the inferior, the second-hand version of her elder, more sophisticated, more socially aware sister, except with regard to her intelligence. Tess is a ‘book-worm child’ (Remake, p. 56), and often receives high praise from authority figures for her accomplishments. The legitimacy of the depiction of Joanne as being generally superior is interrogated; however, it is explained that Tess only had admiration for Joanne’s characteristics: ‘could the old-lady be dub-ceking memory? This meek acceptance of Joanne’s betterness in all things except brains is a bit suspect [...] There was no envy, Tess simply admired’ (Remake, p. 45). The reader can assume that the details of the relationship between Tess and Joanne inform the reader of the relationship between Brooke-Rose and Doriel. However, and more significantly, whether or not the dynamic of the relationship between Tess and Joanne is factually accurate, Tess is clearly defined in that she is the opposite of Joanne. The subject of Brooke-Rose’s autobiography is constructed, in part, by the fact that she is not Joanne. In this respect, Brooke-Rose approaches her construction of the ‘I’ in her autobiography ‘through the
back-door’, by accessing her own characterisation against that of her sister. The revealing of this personal relationship that Brooke-Rose shares with her sister, aids the definition of the ‘I’ subject. While this personal relationship was particularly fraught even in the later years, and is discussed here in terms of the clash of oppositions, Brooke-Rose’s relationship with her mother is just as revealing to her characterisation, but is discussed in an altogether more sensitive way.

Chapter three is an exceptional file in which the reader sees the return of the banished pronouns, including the elusive ‘I’. This chapter is an exception to Brooke-Rose’s constraint, almost certainly due to its emotive content. It is a passage that focuses upon the death of Brooke-Rose’s mother, to whom she was exceedingly close. This section was written based on a journal that Brooke-Rose had been keeping during 1984, throughout the period of her mother’s last months at Tyburn Convent in Hyde Park. The protagonist explains that the convent initially creates a distance between her and her mother, but over time ‘I soon grow closer to her again’ (Remake, p. 28). She becomes familiar with the other nuns in the convent during her mother’s solitude: ‘some of them mentally arrested at seventeen and giggling at all I say, others more mature and dignified. Serenity everywhere but she [her mother] is isolated in her God like routine’ (Remake, p. 28.) When her mother finally passes away, the scene is more moving directly for the use of pronouns that stand starkly against the rest of the novel and indeed, much of Brooke-Rose’s work:

At eleven fifty she dies quietly, a short while after one breath. I wait for the next and know it won’t come, and bow my head as Mother General intones the Prayer for the Dead. Now she does look peaceful, but the serenity of the last moments seems not to have been for her. Or has it? They file out, leaving me alone with her for a moment. I kiss her suddenly waxen brow. Outside, I cry wildly against the wall, wondering at such pain. (Remake, p. 37)

The poignant and emotional nature of this chapter permeates the novel, and the return of the pronouns provides some clarity of vision in the ‘Bifography’ of the rest of the text. The authenticity and candour with which this incident is reported, and the tenderness with which she describes her mother, replicates the serenity and purity of the convent
setting, while revealing Brooke-Rose to be extremely capable of writing in a straightforward, yet sensitive way. By revealing her ability to write in such a way, Brooke-Rose closes the gap between herself and writers like Johnson, Burgess and Quin who all invoke visceral emotion in their experimental work. This chapter is only a momentary departure from constraint. It serves to break the sequence of flashbacks between the little girl and the old lady, inspiring the trend of a-chronological telling. This is due to the importance of the content and the catharsis of the process of writing this memory. The narrative voice in this section belongs to one self: the author, and contrasts sharply with the previous and subsequent chapters that address multiple selves, and multiple versions of Brooke-Rose/ Tess.

As previously mentioned, Tess appears for the first time in chapter four; full name Tess Blair-Hayley, a derivation of the name Alfred Northbrook Hayley, the protagonist from The Dear Deceit – the early biographical novel based on the life of her father, Alfred Northbrook Rose. Karen Lawrence notes that the name ‘Tess’ ‘evokes the layered, textured, even tactile nature of the self remade’ (Lawrence, p. 176) relating this analysis to the claim that ‘only a name and memory can tessellate and texture all those different beings, the baby in Geneva, the little girl in Brussels, Chiswick, Brussels, Folkestone, London and all the others to the old lady in Provence’ (Remake, p. 41). The term ‘tessellate’ means to replicate (at least one) geometric shape, forming a tiled plane without leaving any gaps in between. Remake presents different versions of the author at different times in her life. These tessellations fit together exactly, without leaving gaps: each destination signifies another tile to add to the plane. Tess’s last name (Hayley) refers to an instance of self-confrontation that predates this novel, revealing the split between the author and the subject to have been in place for some time. This split continues in Remake where there is a further division in the authorial presence, identified throughout the text as ‘John’. This is a reference to Noam Chomsky’s theory on transformational grammar in which he uses the name John to illustrate the rules of difference between surface structure and deep structure: ‘John is eager to please / John is easy to please’.30 This is not the first instance that Brooke-Rose has invoked the ‘author

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30 This concept first appears in Noam Chomsky’s Syntactic Structures (1957) illustrating the difference between surface structure and deep structure.
surrogate’ (Lawrence, p. 177) John in her work. In her essay ‘Self-Confrontation and the Writer’ (1977), Brooke-Rose refers to John and his multiple selves, stating that ‘grammar doesn’t say how many Johns or how many selves (and what colour), or whether some past Johns are confronting one present John or one present John is confronting one or all or a selection of past Johns’. 31 This section of text is lifted and replicated in Remake (p. 3) in order to make the same point about self-fragmentation and the fog created when the cold, logical air of autobiography meets the warm, creative air of fiction: bifography. In Stories, Theories & Things (1991), Brooke-Rose positions John as the author of her own back catalogue of work when she is describing her history in fiction writing (STT, pp. 6-10), and so his reappearance in her autobiography seems both expected and apt. However, his presence in Remake is fractured, as he reportedly has ‘as many selves as utterances, virtual or realized, as many selves as there are words in lexicons’ (Remake, p. 3). Michela Canepari-Labib recognises that each of these fractures has

a different subscript, each of whom acquires a different personality according to what he says: for example John13 is ‘the litcritter’ (11), John32 is ‘the pedantic’ (16), after which follow the ‘focus-puller’ (45), ‘the script consultant’ (100), the ‘nasty piece of perk’ (107), ‘the psycho’, the young scriptwriter’ (166) and so on. (Canepari-Labib, p. 263)

It is possible to see echoes of John’s name in the names of the major characters that appear from Brooke-Rose’s life – Joanne (Doriel), Jean (Jean Alington Howard, her friend and co-worker from Bletchley Park), Ian (Rodney Bax, her first husband), Janek (Jerzy Pietrkiewicz), Jean-Luc (her cousin and third husband, Claude), Jeanne (her mother), her aunt Tante Vanna, Jon and Sean (both lovers) and Janet and Jock (her friends). Canepari-Labib asserts that it is these variations of John ‘who, constantly intruding into the narrative, enables the old lady to confront “the little girl with sidetracks, substitutions and simulations about pronouns”’ (Canepari-Labib, p. 263). The fragmentation of the author into shards of multiple versions of John illustrates the process of self-reflection and self-confrontation in the genre of autobiography while simultaneously fictionalising the disparity of these experiences. By fracturing John, the author is simultaneously

reflecting upon different parts of her own life, while also documenting the experience of the processes of self-recognition and self-identification. The subscripted Johns can be regarded as both part of the self, as well as being identified as ‘Other’ to the self.

The ‘little girl’ and ‘the old lady’ are similarly distanced from each other by their titles (and age), and are made to seem separate from the autobiographical narrative self; despite the reader’s knowledge that both are variations of the same person. The omission of pronouns and their replacement with proper names creates a tension between autobiography and biography, as the third person narration makes the various experiences of the different versions of the author seem distant and different from one another. Paul Ricoeur describes this process when he states that

\[\text{a single name amongst the list of available names, permanently designates a single individual in opposition to all others of the same class. Once again the privilege accorded the proper names assigned to humans has to do with their subsequent role in confirming their identity and their selfhood.}\]

At times, the old lady admits that she has difficulty confronting the life of the young Tess: ‘The old lady can barely admit, let alone reconstruct, the retarded mental and physical age of Tess at sixteen, the ignorance, the innocence, the non-connecting of things’ (Remake, p. 81), and in this sense the two fragments of the same person are entirely dissociated. The dissociation experienced between versions of the self is explored from a feminist perspective in Joanna Russ’s postmodern novel The Female Man (1975). Russ presents the reader with four women: Jeannine, Joanna, Janet and Jael, each of whom originate from different worlds/plain of existence. The character Joanna mimics the position of the author as she hails from a world very similar to Earth in the 1970s, where feminism is becoming more prominent. Janet comes from Whileaway, a world that has existed without the male sex for over nine-hundred years. Janet, an accomplished scientist and martial artist cannot understand why men are able to express such derogatory opinions of women in Joanna’s world, and confronts the opinion that: ‘You can’t challenge men in their own fields [...] Now nobody can be more in favour of women

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getting their rights than I am [...] But you’ve got to remember Janet, that women have certain physical limitations’. 33 In response to this opinion, Janet shows that she is not confined by her ‘physical limitations’ by breaking the male speaker’s arm. These female ‘J’ characters appear to be different versions of the individual female self, and at times, each one struggles to understand or share the perspective of the other, just as in Remake ‘the old lady’ struggles to converse with ‘the little girl’. Russ’s text is not an autobiographical novel, but rather more of a political feminist allegory expressing and debunking the stereotypical expectations of women within contemporary society. However, the four female ‘J’ characters can be regarded as fictionalised extensions or versions of the authorial self, a reading that is compounded by the repeated variation upon the author’s first name. It is valuable to compare Russ’s novel to Brooke-Rose’s in order to emphasise the split authorial identity of these female writers and their challenge to the singular narrative ‘I’. In their introduction to Women and Autobiography (1999), Martine Watson Brownley and Allison B. Kimmich discuss the creation of multiple selves in female autobiography, stating that:

The concept of multiple selves has been a liberating one for many feminist critics because traditional ideas of self-hood go hand in hand with unity, and the notion of a unified, essential self has historically been more appropriate for a man’s life than a woman’s. Several critics included in this volume argue that women see their lives as fragmented or contradictory as they attempt to fulfil the impossible expectations society places on them and as they fashion self-understandings separate from those oppressive norms.34

The splitting of the subject in both Russ’s novel and Brooke-Rose’s autobiographical novel can be seen as a direct comment upon their existence in patriarchal society. For Brooke-Rose, the manifestation of multiple selves is a consequence of being a woman writer (a concept which I have already established in chapter 3). As previously discussed, Brooke-Rose acknowledges that the title of ‘experimental woman writer’ presents ‘three difficulties’. Brownley and Kimmich imply that these ‘difficulties’ extend to the title of

'autobiographical woman writer' and are often negotiated through the splitting of the self into multiple voices/versions, thereby transforming the factual straightforward documentation of the individual life into a semi-fictional multi-vocal narrative.

This transformation from the genre of autobiography to a kind of hybrid form encodes the real-life experiences of the individual. The ‘original’ experience becomes hidden within a fabricated narrative, making it difficult for the reader to identify the original experience within the hybrid text. With reference to this process of encoding, Karen Lawrence makes the comparison between *Remake* and the OuLiPo, making reference to the process of the ‘Oulipean [*sic*] remake’ (Lawrence, p. 180) as described by Peter Constantein in his *Literary Memory, Consciousness, and the Group Oulipo* (2002). Constantein states:

> for the writers of the Oulipo the lyrical resurrection of their life is connected to the practice of writing under constraint [...] I venture to propose that these constraints are the building blocks of an attempt to rebuild literature’s first (short term) memory [...] there are no genres, periods, or forms that are not susceptible to an Oulipian remake. Each remake forces the reader, if so interested, to research the constraint’s original manifestation – to locate a purely literary event in time – and then to reconcile its past state with its present, mathematically re-engineered state.35

The literary memory created by the ‘Oulipean remake’ is intrinsically bound to the concept of intertextuality: without the original manifestation, the ‘re-engineered state’ could not exist. The infliction of a particular constraint is where the ‘change’ or ‘split’ occurs and the degree to which the original manifestation is transformed is dependent upon the extent or severity of that constraint. For instance, Raymond Queneau’s *A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* (*Cent mille milliards de poems*, 1961) takes ten fourteen-line sonnets and allows (through perforated strips) the reader to compose his/her own ordered sonnet, choosing each line from ten different versions of itself (each of these lines has the same subject, rhyme and rhythm of its counterpart). The ‘original

manifestation’ of the sonnets is changed to the degree that the reader/engineer so wishes to inflict the constraint. With Queneau’s poem, the reader can visually appreciate the spilt self in the text and literally see the transformation that the constraint has upon the original text. However, in order to return the ‘re-engineered’ text to its original state, the reader must be aware of how the constraint works, and this is something that until *Invisible Author*, Brooke-Rose had been reluctant to reveal about her own writing due to her emphasis upon the pleasure of difficulty. The reconciliation between the past and present states of the text to which Constantein refers above, is played out in the final chapter of *Remake* where Brooke-Rose reveals her constraint through a dialogue in which Tess and the old lady directly confront each other. Lawrence recognises that this ‘departs from her habitual practice of burying the constraint without explicit critical comment in the text’ (Lawrence, p. 180). Nevertheless, the revelation of the constraint in this final chapter enables the reader to decode the memories that have been presented within the novel as belonging directly to Brooke-Rose, and significantly, have also revealed the way in which she regards her own ‘herstory’. In this respect, this ‘mock dialogue’ (Lawrence, p. 180) can be regarded as perhaps one of the most candid and open moments in the novel. Here, the old lady lists a number of things that memory is not like, including ‘a computer’, ‘a book’, ‘a film’, ‘a digging, a fishing, a lucky dip or a pinball machine, or a sundial showing only the light hours’ (*Remake*, pp. 170-172). Rather, she asserts that:

> Memory is more like intercepting and decrypting, thousands of messages missed, or captured, but not decrypted, and even the captured and decrypted now burnt or not released. Memory intercepts the messages of a mysterious invented enemy unseen, giant knight or flaming dragon, the intercepter [sic] a speck in time facing the immensity of confrontable selves. (*Remake*, p. 172).

The rhetoric and metaphor that Brooke-Rose uses here to describe the process of memory are inextricably linked to her experiences at Bletchley Park. Each of these ‘confrontable selves’ represents a fragment of Brooke-Rose’s past, all of which, in due course are confronted by the intercepter. Although *Remake* is in some ways a comprehensive autobiography, the narrative of Brooke-Rose’s life ends in 1968, with her departure to teach in Paris at Vincennes. This was the section of her life that she chose to
immortalise in fiction, concluding the narrative of her literary career on a high-note, almost thirty years before the publication of the autobiographical novel. These omitted years are referred to in part in her second autobiographical work *Life, End Of*.


The playfulness of *Remake* is epitomised in the additional constraint that the author imposes upon her work, alongside the invocation of Chomskian linguistic theory, dexterously wielded as a technique to multiply the self (‘auto’) of ‘autobiography’. This multiplication of the self satirises the concept of autobiography by replacing the ‘I’ of the traditionally singular self-narrative with multiple named subjects. This playfulness imbues the novel with the same sense of humour that runs throughout Brooke-Rose’s work (and is particularly evident in *Thru* where Brooke-Rose confronts a number of subjects in the form of different literary theories with one another). The tone of *Life, End Of* is somewhat different from *Remake*, in the sense that this dexterous and playful manner is muted by the expression of the protagonist’s pain. *Life, End Of* focuses particularly on the later years of Brooke-Rose’s life, after she has retired from academia, and moved to a small, isolated village, just outside the town of Gordes in southern France. During this period, she suffered from a number of health issues including long term kidney problems, polyneuritis of the lower limbs, the deterioration of her vision and hearing, and some short-term memory loss; all of which contributed to her further isolation from the larger community, or as she refers to them in the novel, ‘other people’ or ‘O.P.’ (*LEO*, pp. 11-12). This second attempt at self-reflection is more in keeping with ‘memoir’, rather than ‘autobiography’ in the sense that the life that is described here is both incomplete, and expressed as multiple experiences of trauma.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson describe the difference between ‘memoir’ and ‘autobiography’ when they state that historically, memoirs ‘often bracketed one moment or period of experience rather than an entire life span and offered reflections on its significance for the writer’s previous status or self-understanding.’

The third chapter of *Remake* can be regarded as an example of memoir, because the documentation of

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Brooke-Rose’s mother’s death is a specific focus point, as well as being an experience that is epiphanic to the subject, cathartic to the author in its documentation, and a chapter that transcends the chronology of the rest of the text (this is an experience from 1984, and the narrative of the novel ends in 1968). Leigh Gilmore recognises the contemporary success of the genre of memoir and emphasises the relationship between memoir and trauma: ‘Memoir is thriving, energized in no small part by a surge in the publication of personal accounts of trauma.’

Gilmore explains this surge in the success of memoir as a consequence of the political and social developments since the 1970s. She explains that these developments ‘have made it possible for a broader range of people to publish accounts of their life experiences.’ Indeed, these developments have had a positive effect in enabling writers from marginalised groups including homosexuals, ethnic minorities and women to publish personal life experiences. While Brooke-Rose’s position as an author, and more specifically as an academic, was one of privilege, her experience as an elderly woman, retired from the academy, isolated due to her rapidly degenerative illnesses, and impoverished as a result of her inability to write, was one of severe disadvantage. She reflects upon a past self by writing a simultaneous narrative that is consumed by a perpetually present pain. Life, End Of is Brooke-Rose’s documentation of the experience and trauma of an author and academic being rendered physically incapable by age and degeneration.

Noemi Alice Bartha describes Brooke-Rose’s intentions with Life, End Of as the urge to ‘transcribe in a third person narrative the daily hardships and rhetorical, unuttered questions caused by an ill body’ (Bartha, p. 165). This is an accurate description of the text; however, it had been initially intended to be a private documentation of her final years, not meant for the eyes of the public. Having received high praise from selected close friends that had been shown sections of the text, including Jean-Michel Rabaté, Brooke-Rose decided to publish the memoir, making her ailments and pain public. In an email from Rabaté in 2003, he compares Brooke-Rose’s writing of the first section to that of Beckett:

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Really, this is excellent. Language strong, hard, charged with emotion only the later Beckett could do this and never the younger writer. No sentimentality, the truth of the body groping and touching limits which then become no such horrible limitations, since in all of this one feels a paradoxical levity. The grace of language [...]39

Despite claiming that the younger Beckett would have been incapable of the style of Brooke-Rose’s prose, Rabaté makes comparison between her text and *Murphy* (1938) in which Beckett ‘makes a lot of the “conarium” shrunk to nothing of its hero’.40 The ‘conarium’, more widely known as the pineal gland, is located in the brain, and is the focus of a pun in the first chapter of the novel. Historically, Descartes believed the soul to reside in the conarium, referring to a split between the mind and the body. Brooke-Rose puns upon this division commenting that his theory is outdated or ‘outside’ of contemporary thought: ‘thus putting de cart before dehors’ (*LEO*, p. 10).41 In *Murphy*, Neary comments to the protagonist: ‘I should say your conarium has shrunk to nothing’.42 If, as according to Cartesian philosophy, the conarium/pineal gland is responsible for uniting body and mind, then Murphy, who is without such an organ, will forever remain dislocated and fragmented, never achieving a Cartesian existence. David Helsa comments upon Murphy’s position stating that he is ‘out of alignment with the Cartesian universe’ and that ‘split as he is between body and mind, Murphy is a Cartesian catastrophe’.43 For the old lady in *Life, End Of*, she is experiencing her own Cartesian catastrophe through the process of her body’s degeneration and her mind’s continued capability. In this sense she, too, is experiencing fragmentation and being out of line with the Cartesian universe.

Brooke-Rose’s response to this reading of Beckettian rhythm in her work was humble: ‘I was a bit overwhelmed by your warm reaction. Esp. the comparison with Beckett. I’ve always venerated him of course, but never considered myself anywhere on

41 ‘dehors’ can be translated from French to meaning ‘outside’ in English.
his level. But it’s exhilarating.‘44 Although Rabaté’s comparison was based on a specific reference to *Murphy*, I would argue that *Life, End Of* displays a further resemblance to the work of Beckett. In her analysis of Beckett’s characters, Kathryn White asserts that ‘Physical handicaps, diseases and affliction are prevalent throughout Beckett’s work, and his characters frequently endure some form of physical impediment.’45 These exterior irregularities can be seen as the physical manifestation of an internal, emotional or psychological defect or disease hiding within the characters. Beckett’s characters are identifiable and stand apart from the rest of society because they are degenerates in comparison, often both physically and psychologically. Alice Bennett’s observations about Beckett’s work articulate precisely that which I believe to be the main focus of Brooke-Rose’s memoir: that Beckett’s characters are ‘less the living dead than the dead living. Beckett’s settings, particularly in his dramatic work, occupy curious places, halfway between life and death, yet the overall effect is of the deathliness of life, rather than the liveliness of death.’46 We have seen this same concern in Brooke-Rose’s earlier novels; with the protagonist in *Between* existing only in the interstitial space, the characters in *Next* and *Textermination* who live their half-lives haunting metropolitan societies like the shadows of humanity, the protagonists in *Out* and *Amalgamemnon* whose lives are dependent upon their employment, and perhaps most clearly in *Such* where Larry exists between life and death, in a kind of extended purgatory, for the entire first half of the novel. Significantly, this interstitial state seems to be contradicted in her novel *Subscript*, where evolution of the species is regarded as developmental rather than degenerative. However, the focus upon essential requirements for physical survival in the harsh prehistoric environment and the overarching narrative of the evolution of humans depicts the characters as being in a stage of perpetual interstitiality. *Subscript’s* focus upon Darwin’s theory of the survival of the fittest simultaneously gestures towards adaptation and evolution as well as death, because as we see frequently in the novel, death is part of the evolutionary process, and a necessary part of life.

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44 Email from CBR to JMR (12/07/2003). Accessed through the HRC archive (25/09/14).
In *Life, End Of*, the author herself is described as living in this interstitial state between life and death:

Painfully jerking, like a babe learning to walk, stagger, jerk, plonk, old age a mirror of childhood but childhood not for one second reflected in the present-bound floor-bound eyes. The child trips towards its mother, the old towards Mother Nature, looking into a glass darkly. (*LEO*, p. 13)

The final sentence of this quotation refers to a section from Corinthians and alludes to the dark, unrefined reflection of the individual self looking back over his/her existence. The mirror or ‘looking glass’ has played a vital role throughout Brooke-Rose’s corpus with regards to the formation, and identification of the self and so its appearance here, in her final reflection upon her life seems apt. The reflected image of the aging degenerated body in the mirror seems premonitory of death and so she is transformed into an in-between existence. This interstitial existence can be found in so many of Beckett’s characters, including the ever-waiting Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting For Godot* (1953), Hamm’s claustrophobic blindness and limited mobility in *Endgame* (1957) and the uncertainty of the dual existence between Moran and Molloy in *Molloy* (1955). However, perhaps the clearest reference to interstitial existence can be seen in the character of Malone, whose isolation and confinement are also echoed in Brooke-Rose’s depiction of her own life. Similarly, both writers connect the feeling of death and old age with regression, the transformation of the elderly into children:

My body does not yet make up its mind. But I fancy it weighs heavier on the bed, flattens and spreads. My breath, when it comes back, fills the room with its din, though my chest moves no more than a sleeping child’s [...] I feel, deep down in my trunk, I cannot be more explicit, pains that seem new to me. I think they are chiefly in my back [...] The search for myself is ended. I am buried in the world, I knew I would find my place there one day [...]"  

Although the connection between the old dependent and the young dependent is not unique to these writers, it seems particularly poignant here, where both Brooke-Rose

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47 See reference to Corinthians 13:12 – first footnote of this chapter.
and Beckett discuss interstitial existence: children are full of potential life not yet realised, whereas the elderly exist after that potential has been spent (achieved or not), but neither group are actually ‘living’ in the present. White comments that Beckett’s characters degenerate from an early age:

> From the vigour of youth through to the slowing down of middle age and on to the indignity of old age, our physical story is one of decay, decline and degeneration. Each stage of life represents a stage of deterioration [...]  

This can be seen in the various stages of degeneration in which the characters are presented: the more physically mutilated or deformed, the more internally degenerate the characters. However, despite their increasing degeneration, Beckett’s characters do not seem to ‘want’ to die because ‘for them death is not an assurance of termination, and the next world may be more unbearable than the one in which they already exist.’

C. J. Ackerley and S. E. Gontarski note that in Beckett’s novels, especially *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*, is the suggestion that the mind or soul, and hence the consciousness, may persist beyond the grave, as Christianity would have it. If so, the death of the body, however natural, may offer little relief.

Indeed, the torture of the mind as the body withers and dies is well-documented in *Life, End Of* although, for Brooke-Rose, the thought that she might continue to live through her work after her death is the only thing that seems to revive her a little: ‘the old and easy talk returns, about books of fiction and criticism and the people writing them. Sitting, with a glass of red wine, the most allowed, soothes away the thundering in the chest’ (*LEO*, p. 21). In a sense, Brooke-Rose’s creative and analytical consciousnesses do live on beyond her own death in her novels and her criticism. When these written manifestations of the author are read, she continues to exist, if only textually. In *Life, End Of*, the author seems not to fear death, rather the only anxiety in the text appears in the form of frustration that she is in continual pain, changed almost unrecognisably from the

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younger woman she used to be. Her revival, naturally, comes in the form of discussion of texts and criticism, a small comfort in such isolated times, reminding her of her more capable, less degenerate self. The reader might recall the revival of the characters in *Textermination* under similar circumstances to Brooke-Rose’s own revival here from talking about writers and critics. The imbibing of red wine similarly echoes the oxblood reunion, and the soothing effect that it has on the characters. In *Life, End Of*, Brooke-Rose has become a character, an anti-hero whose isolation, pain and dislocation is only comparable to one of Beckett’s creations.

In his review of *Life, End Of* in *The London Review of Books*, Frank Kermode repeatedly insists on the fictional status of the old lady protagonist: ‘we may have forgotten that the old lady is a fiction, a character writing a “dying diary” and not Christine Brooke-Rose, whose actual plight hers so much resembles.’\(^52\) However, due to the initially private nature of the documentation, the reader is able to assume that there are significant portions of the novel that directly describe Brooke-Rose’s own illnesses. The danger with assuming that the ‘old lady’ is in fact not a fiction, but a truthful depiction of Brooke-Rose’s own struggle is that the reader is unable to analyse the text within a literary context due to the documentation of events being purely one dimensional, not representative of anything beyond the experiences. I argue that here, as in *Remake*, Brooke-Rose creates a ‘Bifography’ where the cool air of fiction passes over the damp surface of autobiographical memories making the differences between the two genres difficult to distinguish.

However, the degenerative nature of Brooke-Rose’s physical conditions render the authorship of this novel changed from her earlier fiction. Indeed, during the editorial and proofing process, Brooke-Rose (once notorious for her lengthy correction letters and meticulous attention to detail) surrenders to her publisher by stating: ‘Here it comes, two corrections. These will be the last as soon as I know its [the book’s] fate: if rejected I shall stick to not publishing it, as originally intended’.\(^53\) It is clear from this response that Brooke-Rose was not willing to tirelessly rework the novel in order for it to be ‘fit’ for

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53 Email from CBR to MS (12/09/2004). Accessed through the Carcanet Archive at the John Rylands Library.
While the author appears clearly tired of such amendments, there is also a sense that she has not written it for a readership; rather, she would be content for it to exist in the archive as a ‘dying diary’, written simply for the enjoyment of still being able to write. In this respect, it is tempting to read this last novel as a ‘truthful’ depiction of the author’s last years. However, as analytical readers we should recognise that the ‘old lady’ is a ‘bifo graphical’ construction, just like the other characters in the novel.

Whereas in Remake, clever variations upon the name John are given to characters clearly based upon people from the author’s circle of friends and family, Life, End Of has fewer characters, and only some of these are recognisable to the reader. For instance, the characters Rebekah and Daniel (named after figures from the old testament) are introduced in chapter four as ‘T.F.s’ or ‘True Friends’ (LEO, p. 32) and resemble the literary critic and scholar Shlomith Rimmon Keenan and her husband, both of whom had visited Brooke-Rose in France after her retirement. Rebekah is described as a ‘highly reputable literary scholar’ and her husband, a ‘T.F. by marriage, a friend-in-law but truer even than that. A bel-am’ (LEO, p. 32). Rebekah and Dan have travelled to visit the old lady from Jerusalem. The old lady cannot believe ‘they’ve come all that way for forty eight hours with an invalid as asserted, when it would be so much more normal to combine it with a longer rest from the permanent terror-time in Jerusalem’ (LEO, p. 33).

There are a number of letters from Rimmon Keenan to Brooke-Rose held in the archive and along with a copy of a letter sent from Brooke-Rose, apologising for any upset that Brooke-Rose had caused with her forthright views upon the political situation in Israel, only that she had been concerned for her friend’s ‘safety’ if she were to stay in there. The relationship between Rebekah, Dan and the old lady endures similarly highly charged conversations, including the political and religious identity of Israel and the contemporary political climate (LEO, pp. 34-5). However, by the end of their visit, the old lady feels that she has herself become O.P.: ‘O.P. also means Old People. Over-sensitive People. Otiose, Obdurate, Obsolete People. Outrageous, obtuse, obstreperous, ostracised. All of which bring one Person into line: Oxhead Person, Oxymoronic Person. A mirror.’ (LEO, p. 43) The mirror is an image that recurs throughout the text, reminding the reader of the rear-view mirror in Thru as well as the author’s preoccupation with

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Lacanian psychoanalysis. With this in mind, this novel reflects certain themes and techniques that are present in Brooke-Rose’s earlier fiction, repeating them and thereby immortalising them in memoir. The old lady in *Life, End Of* is a mirror image of herself; she is alive and dying, existing but not ‘living’ (as she understands the concept). This perception of herself illustrates her isolation from the social network of the immediate and the intellectual community. She sees herself as redundant from the world, a position feared from her earlier novel *Amalgamemnon* by Mira Enketi and reminiscent of the homeless community in *Next*. The above reference to her dislocation from the Cartesian universe becomes relevant again, as the old lady ponders the role of the pineal gland in the brain:

its endocrine job being to elaborate the hormone melatonin, causing the concentration of melanin, the black or brown pigment cells called melanophores. To act perhaps as the tain foil of a looking glass? The eye-shape but not the eye as a mirror of the soul? (*LEO*, p. 10).

*Life, End Of* mirrors aspects of Brooke-Rose’s earlier fiction in a technical sense as well as a thematic one. Lawrence has identified that the opening passage of the novel has striking similarities to the *nouveau roman* style used most prolifically in *Out* (Lawrence, p. 183). The novel begins

The head top leans against the bathroom mirror so that the looking glass becomes a feeling glass. But what does it feel? The position is for body-balance during the brushing of teeth and the washing of face neck arms and torso. Below is for the biddy, and the feet if sitting on a stool. But especially the torso. For in fact the teeth can also be brushed if the loins touch the washtub however cold, or the hand grips the edge, on condition neither is wet. (*LEO*, p. 7)

This description of a focussed moment through the use of the narrator-less present tense depicts the morning routine as a gruelling process that must be carefully considered and planned. As in Beckett’s novels, the micro-detail becomes the major focus, casting a critical light upon the most intimate of human experiences. Lawrence goes on to note that the description of pain in the protagonist’s legs is reminiscent of Brooke-Rose’s short
story ‘The Foot’ (1970), in which a ‘haunted female’ experiences pain in her right foot, despite it having been amputated after a car accident:

A thousand pities bombard the cortex from the nerve-ends in the stump-neuroma where the axons proliferate excitedly and send back false messages of pain that find at present no decoder in the slumbering central image of a limb no longer there. (Go, p. 44)

Like Nell and Nagg in Beckett’s Endgame the protagonist has been physically mutilated by her own diseases and consequently, she becomes psychologically affected by this physical trauma. The narrative is told by the phantom foot, and takes great pleasure in the pain experienced by its host: ‘She cries quietly. I find this very exciting […] and I want her to scream’ (Go, p. 48.) The phantom foot seems to exist independently from its host as a manifestation of her pain and trauma. It (as a narrative entity) occupies an interstitial space between reality and the imaginary, haunting its victim, making her relive her pain. This description of physical trauma was written over thirty-five years before the account of poly-neurosis in Life, End Of; however, the portrayal of pain in the above quotation seems somewhat premonitory of this later experience.

The legs now burn permanently, hot charcoal in the feet creeping up the shins and knees and growing tall, two burning bushes, two pillars of fire for frail support. At every step they flinch wince jerk shirk lapse collapse give way stagger like language when it can’t present the exact word needed, the exact spot where to put the foot. (LEO, p. 9)

The text is laced with puns, as is the case with much of Brooke-Rose’s fiction. The old lady recognises that as her physical faculties fail her, she must remain mentally active in order to compensate. She names this process of recollection ‘Heredotage’ after Herodotus: ‘The quest for brain activity to compensate for the body. For constant intake as opposed to output’ (LEO, p. 62). Part of the process to increase brain activity is achieved through returning to writing. The old lady confesses that she has ‘secretly taken up [writing] again after discovering the comfortable way of using the armchair, for the joy of bristling up words again. just [sic] for fun. And perhaps therapy’ (LEO, p. 59). After having ‘owned up to’ (LEO, p. 59) this secret writing to a friend, the critical response
comes eventually in the form of a quotation from the W.B. Yeats poem ‘Among School Children’: ‘How can we know the dancer from the dance.’\(^{55}\) This quotation is used to suggest that at times, the author may resemble the protagonist of the memoir too closely, and it appears as a refrain to indicate the ‘deeper theme, the deeper texture’ \((LEO, p. 59)\) of the novel which is that of the documentation of the end of the writer’s own life. The protagonist asks ‘So, who can tell the dancer from the dance? The author from the character? The one doing the writing, the other the end-living and dying? No, that’s not right either. Can one die before the other?’ \((LEO, p. 70)\) This line of questioning reveals a tension between the self-division of the protagonist and the author, and as a result the protagonist divides again to enable a dialogue between her selves.

Lawrence claims that in chapter seven, the ‘interrogative mode that has been used without pronouns, earlier in the memoir now turns into an act of ventriloquy in (at least) three parts, their necessary narratalogical separation’ \((Lawrence, p. 185)\). A voice asks ‘Who speaks?’, another answers ‘Ah, the twentieth-century question. In fact since you ask, nobody speaks’ \((LEO, p. 64)\). This ‘ventriloquy’ throws the reader back into the ‘Metalinguistic Zone’ of Thru, where references to Barthesian and Lacanian literary theory appear as coded signposts: ‘Chi parla?’ \((Thru, p. 706)\). The repetition of Barthes’ ‘Who speaks?’ in Thru makes the reader continually question the origin of the narrative voice; and its appearance here in \(Life, End Of\), along with the line from Yeats’ poem, similarly asks the reader to assess the difference between the author and the narrative voice, and to elucidate whose experience belongs to whom. This section of the memoir strays into a lecture upon narrative speech in writing and the proliferation of the narrative sentence in literature. Brooke-Rose’s use of the narrator-less present tense is sustained throughout the text with the added omission of the pronoun ‘I’ except for its use in the dialogue that occurs between different selves.

This final novel can be regarded as a review of Brooke-Rose’s literary techniques, as well as a documentation of her painful and traumatic final years. The inclusion of multiple puns reveals that the elderly author maintains a penchant for language games, and imbues the text with a sense of humour in spite of the documentation of

degenerative illnesses. In her review of Life, End Of for the Times Literary Supplement, Ali Smith comments upon the parodic nature of Brooke-Rose’s memoir, stating ‘The death of the author is proof of life [...] Life, End Of begins its final “representation” in an intimate impersonality, a tonal state of oxymoron, an absence of presence.’ This quotation from Smith aptly summarises the problem of Christine Brooke-Rose. As an author of experimental fiction, she has been relegated to a half-life in the landscape of British literary fiction, existing only in lists, footnotes or as an extreme that should not be repeated, only learned from (Waugh, 2002). This has resulted in her works being pigeonholed, listed or entirely dismissed as self-indulgent experimental practise, despite her engagement with pertinent literary tropes and issues. In the final chapter of Life, End Of, the old lady is unable to see herself: ‘unlookatable in the looking-glass, too high and dangerous’ (LEO, p. 119). At this point, she has become the ultimate parody; the writer physically incapable of writing, the invisible author of her own collection of memories.

In the final section of this thesis I will be gesturing towards examples of contemporary writing, in an effort to illustrate how we, as critical readers might be able to trace an inheritance of literary experiment through the work of Christine Brooke-Rose. I will argue that by reclaiming the work of Brooke-Rose and investigating the issues with which she is concerned, contemporary readership are engaging with a heritage of literary experimentation, specifically a heritage of female experimentation that has been previously restricted by the canon and other dominant forms of literary selection including the Booker Prize. Brooke-Rose’s novels are part of this heritage and by reclaiming them through considered analysis we are making the invisible visible.

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Afterword

The Conspicuous Absence of Christine Brooke-Rose

‘We have always been up against the canon, and the canon is traditionally male [...] that is what this book is about – about how we live up against the canon, and how we survive, how we make art against the odds.’

While Brooke-Rose lamented the state of her critical and literary success in *Invisible Author*, throughout her career, she maintained that her main desire was to remain in print, rather than to be a commercial success. In a letter to Michael Schmidt regarding the publication of *Remake*, Brooke-Rose expresses this principal wish: ‘All I personally want is to remain easily available for the people working on me or teaching me [...] I’m immensely grateful just to be published and kept available.’ Indeed, not one of Brooke-Rose’s novels could be described as a ‘commercial success’; the nearest thing to such a title might be *Xorandor*, published as a paperback by Grafton Press in the UK, and Avon Books in the USA which inspired the purchase of the novel’s film rights. Despite this dearth of commercial success, her novels had been circulated by a few academics around some university English literature departments, passed between fellow literary critics, and on publication, had been reviewed in some of the most prestigious literary magazines, including the *TLS* and *The London Review of Books*. Her two main literary champions, Frank Kermode and Lorna Sage, frequently ensured that her novels would be reviewed with clarity and sensitivity to her experiment, often including an esteemed history of the author in the pieces that they wrote.

Following her death in March 2012, many of the major broadsheet newspapers (*TLS, The Guardian, The Observer, The Telegraph, The Independent* and *The New York Times*) covered the story of Brooke-Rose’s life and career, commending her experiments, and describing her work as catering for the ‘select highbrow readership which relishes a

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2 Letter to MS from CBR (14/01/1996). Accessed through the Carcanet Archive at the John Rylands Library (March 2012).

3 The film rights were bought by Ross H. Jones from Symbolics Graphics Division, Los Angeles, California, 1988. This information was obtained from the HRC archive (19/09/2014).
technical challenge’. As I have previously discussed, readers of Brooke-Rose’s novels are accustomed to the presence of a paradox within her writing, however, this oxymoronic quality seems to extend beyond her life and work, into her own obituaries. The attention paid to her death by these significant literary newspapers seems somehow strange considering her ‘invisibility’ and absence from the general readership, and indeed, the decline in what little industry she had made for herself with the so called ‘highbrow readership’, as a result of her inability to write for publication after 2006. These obituaries, along with the revival and re-evaluation of the work of other 1960s experimentalists including B.S. Johnson, Ann Quin and Anna Kavan, have reignited an interest in Brooke-Rose’s novels within an academic readership. The reconsideration of these authors of the 1960s that have been regularly described as ‘lost’, ‘neglected or ‘invisible’, forms an historical arc of British experimental literature and adds to the legacy of modernism. As I have previously discussed, Brooke-Rose’s categorisation is problematic, and confining such a vast body of work to the label of ‘modernist’ or ‘postmodernist’ seems inaccurate. I have used ‘experimental’ throughout this thesis in an attempt to be able to discuss her work as a corpus. However, this term is somewhat imprecise. I consider Brooke-Rose’s work (like that of other 1960s writers) to bridge the gap between modernism and postmodernism, not only in a chronological sense, but by the way that each of her novels seems to engage with these literary styles simultaneously to different extents. Each text presents a different balance of modernist and postmodernist techniques, and so it remains difficult to label the author. Instead, what is more useful, particularly when trying to teach Brooke-Rose’s texts, is to categorise each text individually, allowing for each specific experiment and style to be accounted for and analysed. By making this effort, we as analytical readers will be able to reclaim Brooke-Rose’s work from the ‘space between’ modernism and postmodernism, specifically positioning it within the vast heritage of the experimental novel.

The focus of this thesis is the recurring sense of ‘splitting’ that pervades Brooke-Rose’s experimental fiction. As I established earlier, this often takes the form of multiple narrative voices that jostle for prominence, schizophrenic dialogue and the

fragmentation of the ‘self’. As I have discussed, these techniques, although inherited from modernism, particularly the narrative style of Beckett, Brooke-Rose’s novels have often expressed this ‘split’ in relation to a female identity.\(^5\) In this afterword, I seek to position Brooke-Rose’s experimental novels as playing a significant role in the legacy of the experimental woman writer. The issues of ‘split selves’ and multiple identities continue to be a major point of investigation and analysis for the contemporary experimental woman writer. The legacy of these modernist experiments extends through the writers of the 1960s, including the work of Brooke-Rose, to successful contemporary writers of experimental fiction. I will conclude this thesis by grounding Brooke-Rose’s novels as part of this experimental heritage by tracing modernism’s experimental influence upon the work of three successful contemporary experimental women writers: Deborah Levy, Eimear McBride and Ali Smith, illuminating instances of similarity between the work of these authors and that of Christine Brooke-Rose. By tracing the heritage of contemporary experiment, I wish to assert that Brooke-Rose’s experiment is a vital part of the legacy of modernist experimental techniques and that by reclaiming her work, readers and researchers will have a more comprehensive view of the development of this inheritance.

One of the major themes that contemporary experimenters have inherited from the modernist works is that of dislocation; the feeling of being an outsider, the identification of an outsider, or having experiences that can only be described as demonstrably ‘other’. I have discussed the way in which Brooke-Rose’s work is preoccupied with the figure of ‘the other’ in detail in the previous chapters, and indeed, her own feeling of ‘belonging nowhere’ as a writer and as a citizen. This feeling of ‘belonging nowhere’ and the dissolving of national boundaries is (as I discussed in Chapter 1) inherent in the transnationalism of modernism, and its ability to provide multiple points of perspective and interpretation within modernist writing.\(^6\) This ability is often depicted as a confrontation of the self, or the ability to imagine the perspective of

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\(^5\) The exceptions to this are *Out* and *Such* which both have male protagonists; however, as I previously discussed, with these novels, Brooke-Rose’s authorial identity was still under construction during this period and so was still drawing heavily from the writing of the French novelists of the *nouveau roman*.

\(^6\) Recent work in modernist studies has begun to question this emphasis on ‘transnationalism’, ‘dislocation’ and ‘exile’, see the Special Issue of *Modernism/Modernity* entitled *Modernism and Transnationalisms* (September 2006).
the ‘other’: Joyce’s multi-narrative in *Ulysses*, Beckett’s split monologues in *Molloy*, Woolf’s multiple narrators in *The Waves*. In an interview for *3:AM Magazine*, Deborah Levy expresses her relationship to modernism and its authors, asserting:

I can’t understand why everyone isn’t attracted to modernism. How can we disagree with the idea that there is subjective as well as chronological time? [...] How can anyone who is engaged with literature be arrogant and dumb enough to dismiss the writing of (in no particular order) Whitman, Baudelaire, Proust, Joyce, Kafka, Pound, Stein, Eliot, Genet, Beckett, Woolf and Mansfield as an irrelevant experiment? I was born into a world that was utterly changed by modernism. Modernism is the soft typewriter of the womb that made me. How can point of view not be multi-angled? Don’t they have to blinker horses with a leather blind to stop them from having a multi-angled point of view?  

Levy continues in this interview to cite work of the French exponents of the *nouveau roman* as further points of inspiration for her narrative technique and chronological construction, including Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *Jealousy* (1959, originally published in the French as *La Jalousie* 1957), the work of Marguerite Duras and the novels of Ann Quin. This is in particular reference to Levy’s Man Booker Prize nominated novel *Swimming Home* (2011), in which each character becomes deeply affected by the elusive and ephemeral female figure, Kitty Finch.

Described by John Self in his review of the novel for *The Guardian* as the ‘engine’ of the novel, Kitty appears in the holiday villa pool of the Jacobs family, in South East France. It transpires that she is a fan of Joe Jacobs’ poetry, and there ensues a thick sexual tension between Joe and Kitty, whose penchant for walking around naked only serves to accentuate her position as a figure of obsession. Joe’s wife, Isabel, is a war correspondent and is all too familiar with witnessing ‘human demolition’ as part of her work. She invites Kitty to stay with the family, seeing her as a ‘window waiting to be

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climbed through’ to escape the reality of her failing marriage.\footnote{Levy, \textit{Swimming Home}, p. 12.} Joe and Kitty share both poetry, and a similar psychological state, as it is divulged that both of them have suffered from depression in the past. The novel culminates with Joe’s suicide and concludes with a posthumous mock dialogue between him and his daughter Nina, the true protagonist of the novel. Kitty Finch appears in \textit{Swimming Home} as a mysterious, highly sexualised yet infantilised figure, reminiscent of Toni Morison’s character Beloved. In this novel, Levy engages with the figure of the female ‘other’, and the tension that her presence creates. However, it is not only Kitty that can be seen as ‘other’ in \textit{Swimming Home}. The Jacobs family are holidaying in France, abroad and isolated from their family home in London. They find themselves in foreign surroundings, where strange experiences and relationships are made to appear as normal. Joe, given name Jozef Nowogrodzki, is himself a Polish exile, having fled occupied Poland in 1942. He is a perpetual alien, unable to come to terms with his own personal experiences, and unable to establish a stable identity. Isabel’s work as a war correspondent frequently positions her in foreign lands, where other religions and cultures isolate her and identify her as ‘other’. Although \textit{Swimming Home} differs from Levy’s earlier work (in that it is generally regarded as being more accessible), the preoccupation with the figure of the ‘other’, and particularly the ‘exile as other’ is apparent in her earlier fiction.

In Levy’s first novel \textit{Beautiful Mutants} (1989), the mysterious female protagonist is a Russian exile from the Cold War. Lapinski lives in London, forced to move to the West by her Grandmother, after her parents died: ‘She said it was for the best, but I think she just wanted to enjoy her old age without the burden of yet another child to look after.’\footnote{Deborah Levy, \textit{Beautiful Mutants and Swallowing Geography} (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 4.} Lapinski has been told that in London, women ‘swim in fountains dressed in leopard-skin bikinis’; a stark (and highly sexualised) contrast to her home comforts of a ‘few clothes, books photographs and parcels of meat’.\footnote{Levy, \textit{Beautiful Mutants and Swallowing Geography}, p. 4.} Lapinski is an exile in London, and feels out of place amongst its strange inhabitants and streets; however, Levy depicts the natives as the genuine ‘mutants’ of the novel. Levy presents alternative versions or mutations of Lapinski: the Poet, the Banker, the anarchist, not dissimilar to the division of the self as described in Brooke-Rose’s versions of the Chomskian ‘John’ in \textit{Remake}. The trope of the
mirror or looking-glass is present throughout the novel as a transformative object allowing one self to slip into another: ‘I, Lapinski, am in front of the mirror again. It seems the Banker and I are destined to meet backwards through the reflective surface of this glass’. The reader of Brooke-Rose’s work may make comparisons between this image and that of the distorted reflection in the rear-view mirror on the first page of Thru. Both writers are concerned with the confrontation of the self, and the identification of other versions of the self. In Levy’s novel, there is often dialogue between these versions; for instance, the Banker tells Lapinski that she is ‘a still-born bird somewhere in the back of my head, a cold war baby who wants to make peace when there’s no peace to be had’. The suppression of one version – the organised, pacifist by the other, the more aggressive, controlling version – is a nod to Freud’s psychoanalytical theory of the id, the ego and the superego, as defined in his essay ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ (1920). Levy has regularly cited Freudian theory as having had a significant influence upon her writing in interviews about her work, and her dramatisation of two of Freud’s case studies, ‘Dora’ and the ‘Wolfman’ for BBC radio in 2011, show her to have something of a preoccupation with psychoanalytic theory. Its presence in her fiction allows the reader to engage with the texts on a deeper level, beyond the surface of the unorthodox plots that, in her earlier novels, are difficult to follow and are disjointed. Reading both Beautiful Mutants and Swimming Home through this lens of psychoanalytic theory allows the content of the novels to become symbolic and metaphorical, rather than purely narratological.

Lapinski’s upstairs neighbour (known only as ‘the man who lives there’), is depicted as a grotesque sexualised deviant, whose exploitations of women appear as aggressive, hegemonic acts of dominance:

When you press the button you hear the sound of machine gun fire as you crawl from red light to red light […] did she really think that I’d fill her lovely soft belly with bullets […] We had good sex on the back seat, with the engine running so

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13 Levy, Beautiful Mutants and Swallowing Geography, p. 71.
14 Levy, Beautiful Mutants and Swallowing Geography, p. 53.
that I could keep the machine-gun firing. Her red tights lay like a puddle of blood on the floor.\textsuperscript{16}

On visiting this neighbour, Lapinski is confronted with ‘a doll, five feet long, lying on the floor in front of the flickering television, yellow plastic skin, black hair and slanting eyes’ (\textit{BM}, p. 9). The image of the doll with the ‘O of her dead talking mouth’ is reminiscent of the doll that replaces Greb’s father in Ann Quin’s \textit{Berg}.\textsuperscript{17} In both cases, the doll shows signs of life: in this case the neighbour’s insistence that his doll can talk; and in \textit{Berg}, the reportedly dead weight of Greb’s father’s body, which it later transpires, is only the body of a doll. Freud explains his theory of ‘The Uncanny’ by using the example of Olympia, the doll in E.T.A. Hoffman’s ‘The Sandman’ (originally published as ‘Der Sandmann’ 1816). In the story, it is unclear whether Olympia is a doll (an automaton) or, whether she is the daughter of Nathaniel’s university professor. Freud asserts that the fear of the uncanny is not achieved as a result of a doll coming to life: ‘the idea of a “living doll” excites no fear at all: the child had no fear of its doll coming to life, it may even have desired it.’\textsuperscript{18} Freud, agreeing with Jentsch, states that rather, the fear of the uncanny is created in Hoffman’s story through the ‘uncertainty of whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton’.\textsuperscript{19} This uncertainty is responsible for the familiar being made unfamiliar, and the disorientation and confusion of the ‘other’. In the case of Olympia, Nathaniel is unable to tell if she is a human being or automation. In Levy’s novel, Lapinski’s neighbour is not afraid that his doll speaks to him; in fact, he seems rather proud of it, showing off to Lapinski when she visits the apartment. Rather, the reader feels unease at the purpose of the doll in the man’s apartment, as we are made aware that it will be used in the performance of sexual acts, drawing comparisons to the automation of the female during sexual intercourse and in contemporary society more generally. For the reader, it is the familiar occurrence of a sexual human relationship that is made unfamiliar through the replacing of the female with an automaton, and the neighbour’s uncertainty of whether or not the doll is human. This sense of discomfort is heightened in the reader when the neighbour explains what he is doing with the doll

\textsuperscript{16} Levy, \textit{Beautiful Mutants and Swallowing Geography}, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{17} Levy, \textit{Beautiful Mutants and Swallowing Geography}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{19} Freud, ‘The Uncanny’, p. 4.
with the euphemism: ‘Just taming the savage’. The doll’s physical appearance resembling an Asian woman, and the neighbour’s antiquated colonial reference for controlling, disciplining and subduing her through sexual means makes for uncomfortable reading, and only adds to the dissociation of the characters from the values of contemporary society.

The sense of dislocation and disorientation is continued in Levy’s second novel, *Swallowing Geography* (1993). JK is the female protagonist of the novel, and like her namesake Jack Kerouac, ‘she is always on the road’. JK travels the world carrying a typewriter in a pillow case, having fleeting sexual encounters with migrant strangers, only ever making transitory relationships with the people around her. Despite her lovers’ demands to know her better, JK keeps her identity hidden from them, and indeed, the reader; her bag is always packed, ready to move on at any time: “Tell me who you are so I can love you properly [...] You want me to be a stranger [...] You even wear shoes in bed so you can walk away from me.” This novel, like *Beautiful Mutants*, is written in a sustained present tense, emphasising both the immediacy and the constant nature of JK’s condition. She is the traveller, in perpetual motion, never residing anywhere long enough to consider it home. Her permanent transience calls her identity into question, reminding the reader of Brooke-Rose’s travelling interpreter in *Between* and the homeless characters in *Next*. In her review of the novel in *The Independent*, Lucasta Miller describes the novel as

a series of deconstructive mediations on the construction of identity. The things we use to stabilise our sense of selfhood and which form a frame for our relationships with other people – a name, a home, a membership of a community – are systematically collapsed into a vortex of shifting subjectivity.

Levy’s early fiction, like Brooke-Rose’s, is pre-occupied with the fragmentation of identity, and indeed, Miller’s summary of *Swallowing Geography* could be as easily about

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Brooke-Rose’s *Between, Amalgamemnon* or *Next*. With her female protagonists, Levy attempts to illustrate the division of the self into fragments that are each more capable of living in contemporary society, be it the Thatcherite era of the 1980s or post-Cold-War 1990s. For Levy, British society has become fragmented, dislocated and disillusioned with itself as a result of the political traumas of the twentieth century, and the inability of her female protagonists to harbour fixed identities describes a condition where the self is perpetually undefined. In some respects, this could be regarded as liberating – these women are able to participate and indeed, orchestrate experiences that would have once been beyond their reach: they appear as sexually liberated, financially independent individuals, able to shrug off the rigid labels of the female wife, mother and nurturer. However, in these novels, there is a sense that these characters mourn, and at times fear their dislocation from society:

What does Y see in her mirror? […] If she is a character, is she dressed for the part? What part is she going to play? Or perhaps she is dressed out of character? Dressed in a way one would not expect her to be. What is going to happen to Y? […] What does Y possess? She who owns no property, has no inheritance, husband, children, savings or pension plan?  

Levy leaves these questions unanswered, providing no solutions or techniques for living for her anonymous, dislocated characters.

When reading these early novels, it is possible to see echoes of the work of the modernist writers, particularly the work of T.S. Eliot and Samuel Beckett. The reader can see flashes of Eliot’s Prufrock, and ‘hollow men’ in the protagonists; individuals out of time, repeatedly revising versions of themselves. The present tense narrative sentence that is so commonly found in Beckett’s novels serves to dislocate the reader from the text in the same way that the characters are removed from the world around them. The unmarked dialogue and unanswered questions are similarly disorientating tropes often found in Beckett’s work. For instance, *The Unnamable* begins ‘Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving. Questions, hypotheses call them that.

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Keep going, going on, call that going, call that on. The disorientation created here at the hands of the author through his dexterous use of language and discourse is mirrored by Levy in her creation of her early protagonists. Brooke-Rose’s novels engage in a similar way with the figure of the ‘Other’, and particularly the ‘Other as exile’, as discussed earlier with regard to her novels *Between* and *Next*. Moreover, the reader’s estrangement from the text is relished in Brooke-Rose’s writing, each piece positioning the reader as an outsider, who must attempt to find a way in by using every reading technique in his/her arsenal. This feeling of ‘otherness’ is not only apparent in Levy’s work; it is a ubiquitous trope that permeates much of contemporary experimental literature.

Whereas Levy’s protagonists are dislocated in the sense that they do not belong anywhere, Eimear McBride’s protagonist in her unconventional novel *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* (2013) is quite the opposite. McBride’s novel originates from a very clear Irish context, and this is corroborated by the language used throughout: the repeated use of the term ‘eejit’, the use of the term ‘ghra’ and the reference to the AIB (Allied Irish Bank). *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* is a novel written as a present tense monologue, a sister speaks to her elder brother, addressing him in the second person singular, ‘you’. Towards the end of the novel, the reader becomes aware that the elder brother has died, and yet, the monologue continues to address him:

> He’s gone. He’s gone. Goodbye. No. Oh please. My. Done. And. Quiet. And. Gone [...] My tears coming blind my eyes my. Face of me. You’re white as. All this sudden. Moment back. Where have you gone? [...] Who am I talking to? Who am I talking to now?26

All of the characters in the novel are nameless, and are only defined in terms of their relationship to the narrative voice – Mammy, brother, uncle, etc. Through disjointed, and at times what appear to be rambling snippets of description, the reader pieces together that the narrator’s brother has had an operation to remove a brain tumour at an early age, and this has left him disabled. The novel depicts the sexual assault of the young girl

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at the hands of an uncle, and her subsequent desire to become sexually defiled by anonymous men in increasingly disturbing ways: she is fundamentally damaged by this experience and abused into masochism.

Although this novel is very different to Brooke-Rose’s oeuvre in the sense that it is so clearly imprinted with a national identity and its content focuses on personal abuse and sexual trauma, McBride’s preoccupation with language is reminiscent of Brooke-Rose’s work. In an interview for *Culture Northern Ireland*, McBride explains that her own preoccupation with language began after reading *The Country Girls* (1960) by Edna O’Brien, citing this novel as being the first that she had read where ‘the writer was very preoccupied with language and I was very interested by that and very excited by that’. McBride goes on to state that while writing her novel, she was influenced mainly by ‘Joyce and Beckett and modernism and Irish modernism particularly, and I think that’s the easiest way into [the novel]’. It is clear from the above that McBride sees her writing as having inherited the technique of wielding language and form from her Irish literary ancestry, and in order to decode her novel, readers should use these inherited works as companion or translation texts. McBride and Brooke-Rose share this inheritance of modernism, and readers are encouraged by both authors to trace this heritage in their own writing. *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* strikes little resemblance in terms of content to Brooke-Rose’s work, but the way in which her narrative sentence is constructed and the ‘difficulty’ of her work is strangely familiar to the Brooke-Rose reader.

Although it took nine years for McBride to convince a publisher that her novel would be a success, once it had been released, the novel quickly gathered steam, winning the Bailey’s Women’s Prize for Fiction in 2014, The Goldsmith’s Prize, and the Kerry Group Irish Novel of the Year, as well as being shortlisted for the Folio Prize, the Desmond Elliot Prize and the Authors’ Club Best First Novel Award. The reviews of the novel praised McBride’s novel for being ‘hard to read for the best reasons: everything

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28 ‘Eimear McBride talk about A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing’, *Culture Northern Ireland*. 
about it is intense and difficult and hard-won’.\textsuperscript{29} In the review that appeared in The Guardian, Anne Enright questioned ‘Who forgot to tell Eimear McBride about the crisis we are in and about the solution to that crisis: compromise, dumb-down, sell your soul?’\textsuperscript{30} McBride’s unwillingness to ‘sell her soul’ by dumbing-down her novel is yet again, familiar to Brooke-Rose readers. However, the stark contrast between these writers is their commercial success. Although, the content of Brooke-Rose’s novels is not nearly as salacious and daring as McBride’s novel, her technical experiments are more advanced and complex. The indicators of experiment for which McBride is highly praised, originate from the same source that Brooke-Rose taps to create her own difficult experiments. McBride’s commercial success (in comparison to Brooke-Rose’s) is partly due to the content of the novel being more accessible and emotionally moving than any of Brooke-Rose’s novels, and partly due to the general readership being willing to work a little harder to receive this kind of traumatic content. Further to these differences, thanks to the experiment of the bold writers of the mid-twentieth century, the contemporary readership has a corpus of work that they can draw from in order to educate themselves in the style of McBride’s experiment, allowing them access to meaning. Instances of trauma have often been written in unconventional ways, the form reflecting the difficulty of the experience.\textsuperscript{31} McBride articulates her protagonist’s traumas through unconventional means simply because they are unconventional experiences. McBride poses the question, how should (or can) writers present such unorthodox and unconventional experiences without breaking the boundaries of the novel form? The questions of why, when and how a writer might break the novel form has received much rumination in recent years, with an upsurge of unconventional forms of the novel trickling through to mainstream reading.

Perhaps the most successful writer of current times whose work clearly demonstrates the inheritance of modernist tropes, is Ali Smith. Smith’s early career as an academic working at the University of Strathclyde as a lecturer in English literature seems


\textsuperscript{30} Enright, ‘A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing by Eimear McBride - Review’ (20/09/2013).

\textsuperscript{31} I refer here to African American literature and its depiction of trauma - the confessional nature of slave narratives, the epistolary form of Alice Walker’s The Color Purple, the historiographical metafiction of Toni Morrison and the use of the vernacular in Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God.
to make her a well-fitted point of comparison to Brooke-Rose. For her doctorate at Cambridge, Smith studied the modernist writers (specifically James Joyce, William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens) and the concept of ‘the ordinary’ in their work.\(^{32}\) When questioned about her work’s modernist characteristics in an interview with Arifa Akbar for *The Independent* in 2012, Smith responded in a similar way to Brooke-Rose whenever she was questioned about belonging to a label: “‘I wouldn’t call myself Modernist. I would rust if I try to think about labels. I’d feel like the tin man in the Wizard of Oz...’”.\(^{33}\) The constant attempt to try to eschew labels is something upon which Smith and Brooke-Rose are joined. For Smith, labelling is another way of defining or fixing the meaning of the text, the reader’s expectations and limiting the author to a particular field of inventiveness. Indeed, in labelling Brooke-Rose as a writer of the *nouveau roman*, her early critics, including Frank Kermode, limited her to a very particular readership, and it was a label that she maligned for many years to come.\(^{34}\) In this respect, both Smith and Brooke-Rose can be seen as being supportive of multiple and fragmentary identities, finding them liberating and including them in their work. The labels that are so often attached to both Smith and Brooke-Rose by readers, academics, and reviewers are felt to be constricting and restrictive to both authors.

Although Smith’s fiction eludes the label of ‘modernist’, it has been repeatedly referred to by critics and reviewers as having its roots in modernism as a result of its ‘inventiveness and endeavour to capture the richness of a single moment.’\(^{35}\) Often, these single moments are personified. For instance, in *The Accidental* (2005), Alhambra or Amber personifies the single moment of richness in the novel, permeating its structure and the multiple narratives that it offers. The text is split into the separate chapters, playfully named ‘The beginning’, ‘The middle’ and ‘The end’, and each of these is split into four further sections – each of which focus on one member from the Smart family.


\(^{34}\) In Chapter 1 I refer to a letter between CBR and MS asking him not to use the Kermode quote ‘plonking’ her as a writer of the *nouveau roman*, claiming that it has been a damaging label to her career.

\(^{35}\) Arifa Akbar, ‘Conversations with the Undead’ (27/10/2012).
These sections are bookended and separated by four interruptions from Amber herself. Each character is profoundly affected by Amber’s appearance, and uninvited residence at the Smart’s holiday home in Norfolk. Amber is a mysterious stranger (like Kitty Finch in Levy’s *Swimming Home*), and her presence is both mysterious and alluring to the members of the Smart family. The novel leaves many questions unanswered including Amber’s fate, and the fate of each of the family members, leaving the reader unsatisfied without closure. On the contrary, the structure of the novel is extremely neat and complete, which only adds to the reader’s frustration that the story has been finished unfinished. Amber’s presence permeates the text and each of the narrative voices twist around her; she is the epicentre for the earthquake that destabilises and dislocates the lives of the Smart family. In her 2012 novel *There But For The*, Smith similarly uses a person to encapsulate this ‘single moment’. Miles Garth leaves the dinner party ‘between the main course and the sweet’, and barricades himself upstairs, in the spare bedroom. The novel is separated into four chapters or sections: ‘There’, ‘But’, ‘For’ and ‘The’, each one focussed upon one of the other guests at the party and their connection to Miles. In this novel, Miles acts as a maypole: a structure for the narratives of the other characters to dance around, while always being anchored to him by a thin thread.

*The Accidental* and *There But For The* both have firm but elaborate structures, and this can be said about Smith’s fiction in general. In an interview with Gillian Beer, Smith remarks ‘I do think everything written is about the holding of structure, the force of form […] Form gives you the space to do anything and everything, within the structure, within the form… that’s structure not stricture.’ In some respects it is surprising that Smith considers form to be such an important aspect of her writing, considering that she is so well recognised as producing texts that deviate from the novel form. However, the structure and physical form of her novels are different to the formal presentation of the singular voice of the straight novel. Smith’s novels are often a patchwork of stories, frequently incorporating multiple narrative voices, and multiple identities. In her earlier novel *Hotel World* (2001), Smith presents the narrative perspectives of five different women in five different sections of the novel. This time, these sections are all named

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after different tenses ‘past’, ‘present historic’, ‘future conditional’, ‘perfect’ and ‘future in the past’. Sara Wilby (a pun on ‘will be’) plummets to her death after joking around by getting into the dumb-waiter of the Global Hotel. Sara’s death haunts the novel having affected a number of other characters, and her posthumous narration of the first chapter imbues it with a feeling of the uncanny. In his summary of Hotel World, Patrick O’Donnell states that

> The world of the Global Hotel is saturated with the reminder, made evident through various ghostly encounters, that living is, in its details, a continuous succession of fortuitous and disastrous encounters with alterity, border-crossings, sudden falls and uncanny moments that reveal the stranger within.\(^{38}\)

The continuation of Sara’s narrative voice after her death reminds the Brooke-Rose reader of her early novel Such (1966) and Larry’s strange, other-worldly narrative told in the time window between him dying and being resurrected by the hospital paddles. In both cases, the moment of self-confrontation is troubled by the dislocation of the interrogator due to their posthumous state. Neither Larry nor Sara can remember their identity or what has happened to them after their death, leaving them floating without purpose, dislocated from existence.

In Smith’s latest and most celebrated novel to date How to be Both (2014), the author takes the concept of narrative structure, and duplicates it, producing a novel that is continuously threading itself together through plot references and metaphor. The narrative is split in to two sections; one section is told from the point of view of George, a sexually ambiguous teenage girl whose mother dies, leaving her to be the matriarch of the family, to raise her little brother and tend to her newly alcoholic father. The other half of the novel is set in the Italian Renaissance and centres upon the little known fresco artist Francesco del Cossa. Francesco was born a girl but after her mother’s death, her father persuades her to dress in boy’s clothing so that he can find her an apprenticeship as an artist. The stories are interconnected and seem to feed each other in a mutualistic relationship. One of the last trips that George and her mother take together is to Italy,

where they see Francesco’s fresco. George’s mother explains that Francesco’s identity would have been lost if the archivists of the Duke had not discovered a letter from the artist, asking his patron for more money. This letter plays a vital role in Francesco’s own narrative. When studying the painting, neither George nor her mother can differentiate between the gender of the subjects, and eventually they agree that their gender is irrelevant to their enjoyment of the painting: ‘Male, female, both, she says. Beautiful, all of them.’

Comparisons have been drawn by reviewers between How To Be Both and B.S. Johnson’s The Unfortunates, due to the simultaneous publishing of two versions of the novel: one in which George’s story appears first, the other in which Francesco’s appears first. Although the narratives are not presented in separately bound packages that the reader is able to shuffle of their own accord (as per Johnson’s The Unfortunates), the interchangeable nature of the narratives lends the novel a certain malleability and flexibility in its physical reading. The unorthodox form of this novel demonstrates Smith’s intensely playful and mischievous tendency to extend and collapse the structures inside her work, like the inflation and deflation of an accordion.

Smith’s dexterity in using and sustaining multiple tenses and the naming of different sections in her novels, illustrates her playfulness as an author, and shows how she imbues her work with an academic humour that is not unlike Brooke-Rose’s. Smith’s humour is expressed best in her novel Artful (2012), the component chapters of which had originally been four essays given as a lecture series at Oxford University. Again, Smith divides her novel into four wittily named sections: ‘On time’, ‘On form’, ‘On edge’ and ‘On offer and on reflection’. Throughout these sections, Smith uses a number of literary allusions including the references to William Blake, Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood, and quotations directly lifted from Wallace Stevens, Emily Dickinson, Stevie Smith, Sylvia Plath and Philip Larkin, to name but a few – indeed, there are so many of these intertextual references that Smith provides a section on sources at the back of the book. Further to these allusions, Smith uses subheadings to further divide the novel, and these too, often have amusing titles: ‘Please Mr Post Man, Look and See: Remembrance of Things Post’, ‘Putting the I’s in Proliferation: Form and Multiplicity’ and ‘Putting the Art in

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Bartering’. The four main sections are woven together with a narrative thread of a woman mourning the death of her lover, talking directly to her using second person pronouns. After a year of grieving, the narrator picks up her old college copy of *Oliver Twist* and begins to read. Once she begins to read the narrator hears footsteps on the stairs:

Someone was. It was you. You were standing in the doorway. You coughed. The cough was you in a way that couldn’t be you. You were covered in dust and what looked like bits of rubble. Your clothes were smudged, matted, torn.

The narrator’s lover, a former writer and literary academic, returns from the dead and this narrative continues alongside the literary discussion provided by the lectures. The resurrected lover is responsible for some comedic interludes, including her newly developed tendency to steal objects including postcards, books from shops and ornaments and the television and DVD remotes from their own home. Her posthumous state also carries with it a rather pungent odour: ‘I’d always know several houses away if you were there or not, and also there’d been some notes through the letterbox from next door, about drains’. *Artful* demonstrates Smith’s paradoxical ability to stretch and play with the novel form, manipulating it to be both academic discussion and narrative fiction. This is done in *Artful* in an altogether more approachable way than in Brooke-Rose’s *Thru*, nevertheless, both writers confront the academic with the fictional to create a kind of hybrid text that pushes the boundaries of form, and tests the structure of the novel. When questioned about her relationship to Brooke-Rose’s work and whether or not she regarded it as inspirational to her own writing, Smith stated that:

In all honesty, I’d not read Brooke-Rose till I wrote that long piece for the *TLS*, a review of *Life, End Of*. I was commissioned to do it by Lindsay Duguid […] who sensed […] that I’d be not just innately sympathetic to what Brooke-Rose was doing, not just that it would make sense to me, but that a reading of her work would enhance the bones in my own body […] Let us play. The risk CBR takes naturally, without hesitation. Her sense that “all, all is language, even the reader”.

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42 Smith, *Artful*, p. 10.
I like very much too the parallel between CBR and Spark, a writer who’s been very crucial I think all along to any writing I’ve done. There’s a place where the two overlap, a place where the novel form becomes really negotiable, and where the shape of things opens to both sense and useful merriment and mischief. I think I’m somewhere in that space.\footnote{Personal e-mail from Ali Smith (26/11/2014).}

In her piece for the TLS, Smith writes of Brooke-Rose: ‘She is a writer in love with the deep seriousness of wordplay’ and that ‘newness and renewal have preoccupied and harried’ her since her satirical novels of the 1950s.\footnote{Ali Smith, ‘The Armchair, the World’.} Brooke-Rose’s ever-changing experiments seem to echo Ezra Pound’s battle cry ‘make it new’. These different experiments that change from one text to the other allow her novels to writhe around fixed definitions and wriggle away from labels, each novel producing its own identity; each a different version of a Brooke-Rose text. Smith’s novels too seem to have inherited this agility, dodging the labels of genre, making it increasingly difficult to locate her in the bookshop. Writing for The Guardian, Melissa Denes confesses that she ‘found one of Smith’s books filed between erotica and urban literature studies’, clearly alluding to the confusion that Smith’s novels cause librarians.\footnote{Melissa Denes, ‘A Babel of Voices’.} Brooke-Rose’s novels are similarly confusing, and difficult to define, and this is part of the ‘mischievousness’ to which Smith makes reference in the above. Brooke-Rose’s word-games, puns and coded references are part of a larger game that experimental writers have been playing in literature for centuries. The invisibility of her novels in this lineage is unjustified, as her codes and puzzles are worth solving, if only to position her as part of the generation that came after the modernists, before Levy, Smith and McBride. However, there is also a sense that her invisibility as an author is in some way necessary in order for readers to truly engage with her experiments. When talking about her own reluctance to engage with the industry, Smith states that too much biographical information ‘diminishes the thing that you do [...] you have to remain invisible’.\footnote{Arifa Akbar, ‘Conversations with the Undead’.} With the current literary trend of resurrecting the influential but neglected authors of the past, Brooke-Rose’s invisibility is diminishing, partly as a result of her life experiences being so remarkable and fascinating to a

\textsuperscript{44} Personal e-mail from Ali Smith (26/11/2014).
\textsuperscript{45} Ali Smith, ‘The Armchair, the World’.
\textsuperscript{46} Melissa Denes, ‘A Babel of Voices’.
\textsuperscript{47} Arifa Akbar, ‘Conversations with the Undead’.
contemporary readership. In the case of Brooke-Rose’s novels, I believe that Smith is incorrect: knowing information about the experiences of Brooke-Rose’s life only enhances the reading experience, providing small footholds of reference that we can use to decipher the meaning of the texts. Brooke-Rose’s identity as an author might always remain invisible due to her evading of literary labels and her penchant for privacy, but with renewed interest being shown in the area of experimental fiction, her literary codes will not stay hidden for long.
FIGURE 1. THE GREIMAS/SEMIOTIC SQUARE

Relationship of contrary: ..................................................

Relationship of contradictory: __________________________

Relationship of implication: ←→
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