About Two Concepts:
Postmodernism and Rewriting

Ioana-Gianina Haneş [*]

Abstract:
This article deals with the particularities of postmodernism that designate rewriting as a primary literary technique, at the same time lending it a critical and challenging feature. Consequently, within the postmodernist context, rewriting gains the status of antiwriting, since its goal is to metamorphose the text and relate to it in an ironical manner, according to the socio-cultural demands. For this reason, feminism and postcolonialism take advantage of the favourable framework developed by postmodernism and choose critical rewriting as a weapon to restate their identities and shift the reader's viewpoint from the centre to the periphery. By promoting pluralism and alterity, postmodernism diverges from the principles of modernism and reconnects with the past, which it subjects to the mechanism of resignification through ludic or ironic means. Naturally, the author-text-reader relationship is also changed; the focus shifts from the author to the readers, the latter being able to coordinate and transform the textual perspective according to their own reading experience and opinion on the textual reality. The reader's new tasks depend on rereading the text, a process that allows the identification of those elements of interest that prompt the rewriting and give the reader the multiple roles of reader and writer.

Keywords: postmodernism, modernism, critical rewriting, rereading, reader-writer

1. Introduction

The shift from modernism to postmodernism – hotly debated by the criticism of the past decade – left visible marks on the creation and reception of literary works. With postmodernism, literary works became ontological writings that closely questioned the human being and its role in the newly built society. The rejection of the principles of modernism was also visible in terminology, the prefix *post-* indicating not only the chronological order, but also the development of a new attitude towards the world and life. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore that since historically postmodernism comes after modernism, this gives one the possibility of constantly relating the new phenomenon to its preceding movement. Naturally, literary criticism has analysed the above-

[*] PhD Candidate, West University of Timişoara, hanes.gianina@yahoo.com

mentioned shift minutely, but to reiterate such an analysis would be superfluous. However, in order to describe the context and the particularities of postmodern rewriting as accurately as possible, it is necessary to examine several informed opinions, as they underline those postmodernist characteristics that favour the use of rewriting. At the same time, once the context within which rewriting appeared has been clarified, it becomes necessary to analyse rewriting; although this literary technique has been used for a very long time, postmodernism provides it with new meanings, so that its role changes considerably. Consequently, it is relevant to study both the rewriting within the postmodernist context and its implications for the narrative communication levels: author, text and reader.

2. Postmodernism — conceptual demarcations

The complexity of postmodernism no longer needs argumentation, but the postmodernist view on the world compared with its modernism counterpart remains the topic of a hot and interesting debate. In this regard, a good example is the debate on the *epistemology/ontology dichotomy* that Brian McHale analyses for a better understanding of postmodernism and its particularities. While modernism relies on the epistemological dominant that concerns the knowledge of the world and the self, postmodernism can be interpreted from the ontological perspective (McHale, 2009: 27–31). Consequently, the stress lays on questions such as "Which world is this? (...) What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects? (McHale, 2009: 30). The historical context dominated by acute crises like war or other type of genocide caused a strong reaction against rationality, whose credibility had been lost. Thus, the interest in the ontology of the literary text and the universe it creates becomes the prerogative of postmodern fiction, a context that favours textual strategies such as rewriting, intertextuality or parody, since they can explore the multiple modes of existence of postmodern literature. Going back to the terminological approach of postmodernism, one can say that the prefix *post-* underlines not only the chronological order relative to modernism, but also the idea that the rise of postmodernism is connected with modernism, with the attempt to go beyond a view governed by uncertainties. As a result, *post-* acquires new connotations, expressing the paradigm shift and the release from the authority of a mental construct that no longer provides satisfactory answers. In this regard, Matei Călinescu reviews the multiple interpretations of postmodernism and points out, among other things, the rise above modernism and the embrace of an innovative perspective: "Evil modernity was dead and its funeral was a time of wild celebrations (...) The mere fact of 'coming after' was an exhilarating privilege"

(Călinescu, 1987: 268), a rejection of the negative attributes of an era that had ended, an opening towards experiment and improvisation.

It goes without saying that for a better understanding of the complex phenomenon of postmodernism, one should relate to modernism and emphasize the postmodernism-past relationship; all the more so because rewriting acquires certain characteristics in the postmodern era and postmodernism develops a different relationship with the past than modernism. In other words, while modernism is against tradition, while the avant-garde promotes the radical rupture from the past and tradition, postmodernism starts a relationship of reviewing what is already written. In *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, Umberto Eco gives a brief description of the relationship of postmodernism with the past, at the same time revealing the difference between postmodernism and modernism in connection with the same relationship: "The postmodern reply to the modern consists of recognizing that the past, since it cannot be really destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently" (Eco, 1994: 67–68).

Consequently, one can understand both the necessity of using rewriting and the critical nature that rewriting acquires in postmodernism. It cannot be otherwise, since the failure of modernity (dominated by apocalyptic events such as the Holocaust) and the exhaustion of the avant-garde resources require re-establishing the connection with the past, but by means of irony, a critical style and parody. Readiness for starting the dialogue with the past and the critical nature of this dialogue are among the major coordinates of literary postmodernism, which re-evaluates past writings and changes the perspective completely. Although they live with the feeling that everything has already been written, postmodern writers still choose their themes from the past, but they recycle them and subject them to new conventions. The past is then only a source of inspiration and is to be researched with the postmodern instruments of investigation and textual construction, such as fragmentation or irony, the latter becoming a pillar of creating a text. When dealing with the *modernism/postmodernism dichotomy*, Tamara Cărăuş adopts the entire past as the separation criterion, at the same time underlying the revising nature of postmodernism and the multiple approaches of the past: "Postmodernism, so far as it is known, did not repudiate the past. On the contrary, it claimed it in many different ways" (Cărăuş, 2003: 70). The retrospective view chooses its inspiration sources, the older themes becoming new through resignification. Therefore, the relationship of postmodernity with the past is the strongest argument in favour of the rupture with both modernity and the avant-garde sphere.

53

While fully exploring the shift of perspective with the rise of postmodernism in literature, it is appropriate to highlight John Barth's viewpoint described in *The Literature of Exhaustion* and *The Literature of Replenishment*. These two essays can be considered true manifestos of postmodernism, as Barth states that the only way to invigorate literature is to transform it completely and to reorganise the artistic conventions – changes that are promised once postmodernism has been prefigured. Subsequently, a literature that is dull or exhausted can be resuscitated only through postmodern writings, because they use the techniques of a genuine renewal (Barth, 1984: 206).

For a better understanding of how critical rewriting developed into a postmodern literary strategy, one should highlight the manifestations and principles that the feminist movement promoted under postmodernism: the unjust, biased past dominated by patriarchal societies must be revised, reconstrued and eventually rewritten. Feminism as a cultural and artistic movement has its specificity, and the ideas it promotes vary over time with the cultural and historical context. As far as the postmodern age is concerned, one can say that postmodernist theories appealed to the feminist movement especially because they both reacted against modernism. Consequently, feminism is situated under the wing of postmodernism, which rejects faith in reason, the idea of the universal man and the universally valid principles. As it promotes pluralism and showing hostility towards universality and the absolute truth, postmodernism has a great affinity with the feminist principles. Nevertheless, Linda Hutcheon warns that there is a gap between the postmodernist programme and the feminist principles; the two are not fully compatible. More precisely, she states, "postmodernism may propose art as the arena of political fights because it asks multiple and deconstructive questions, but it does not seem capable of turning towards political action" (Hutcheon, 1997: 167). It follows that postmodernism is confined to representation, while feminism wants a change not only in the field of art, but also in the social practices. Precisely for this reason, the feminist movement is not one and the same with postmodernism; it only uses the instruments provided by postmodernism.

Not only feminism, but also what criticism named *postcolonial literature* makes use of such instruments. One should state from the beginning that the colonisation process meant both military-political and cultural domination; the Western influence was visible at all levels. The scars that the traumatic process left on the colonised individuals' conscience are still visible. Exploitation, dehumanisation and racism are just a part of the discrimination and injustice the colonised were subjected to by the imperialists. Imposing the system of values and beliefs, i.e. imposing the imperialist type of mentality caused an acute

identity crisis; the colonised individuals were the victims of a "civilising" mechanism that subjected them completely. This is why one can say that the colonized individuals' purpose was to search for their lost identity or build a new one. Once again, as with feminism, postmodernism favoured the assertion of postcolonial literature, removing the imperialist borders between the centre and the periphery. Furthermore, "the discourse of postmodernism (…) is the discourse of the periphery, a discourse which imperialism had strenuously silenced but which is now made available" (Docherty, 1993: 445). To put it differently, postmodernism provided those who had been silent the opportunity to speak, since, as Nelly Richards says, once modernism was prefigured, "all privileged points of view have been annulled" (Richard, 1993:467). Consequently, the supremacy of the centre over the periphery – that was modernist in nature – was lost with the supremacy of modernism and reason of the Enlightenment. It is postmodern literature that through its textual strategies – such as critical rewriting – revises the unfair part, rewrites it, blames it and discloses all its secrets.

3. Rewriting within the context of postmodernism

One should specify from the beginning that over time rewriting acquired a series of subtle nuances dictated by the cultural and historical context. The critical nature of rewriting developed in postmodernism and allowed research at several levels: history, sociology, culture, mentality. Accordingly, rewriting plays a major role: it does not require copying, but attaching new meanings to the source works according to the author's intention and, by extension, to the context. Any lexical analysis of the word *rewriting* reveals the iterative character of this literary technique, marked by the prefix *re-*. The repetitive nature that the concept itself implies is certainly noticeable in literature from its beginnings. Rewriting is not the prerogative of literature exclusively, but a phenomenon that, with postmodernity, characterised all areas of daily life, cultural or social. More precisely, the paradigm shift that postmodernism put forward also influenced architecture, cinematography and medicine, where the iterative character was adopted in current research work based on duplicating the individual. What one sees is a radical reconfiguration of the field of knowledge, the changes being nothing else but mirror images of postmodern thinking founded on *revising* and *rewriting*. Therefore when crossing the border of the literary text, rewriting becomes an interdisciplinary concept playing an essential part in many knowledge areas. It is as complex a concept as that of postmodernism, difficult to delimit and theorize about. This is easy to notice if one goes over the ways in which rewriting is perceived by literary criticism. Having studied the various meanings of rewriting, I

believe this hybrid and polyvalent concept can be approached both in general, especially using the subdivisions of the generic intertextuality formulated by Gérard Genette, and in particular, as a critical reinterpretation of the canonical works to which permanent and explicit references are made.

First, it should be said that theorist Gérard Genette lays the foundations of one of the best-known and most frequently analysed delineations of transtextual practices. His theoretical study always includes examples from the world literature and clarifies the possible transtextual interaction with definitions and examples. On examining the field of transtextuality, the theorist identifies five categories of relationships among texts, at the same time considering the possibility of adding other categories over time: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality and hypertextuality (Genette, 1997: 8–12).

The privileged category is undoubtedly hypertextuality, which Genette defines as follows: "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text a (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (Genette, 1997: 5). Genette includes rewriting in hypertextuality, having the same principles generally. Additionally, if one explores Genette's differentiations in greater detail, one can say that rewriting, with the meaning I assigned to it previously, is almost the same with what Genette names "serious transformation or transposition" (Genette, 1997: 212). This last category implies the creative reconfiguration of the source text, an ample modification in line with the authorial intention.

Although one cannot speak about rewriting without mentioning Genette's palimpsests, one must distinguish between rewriting as deriving one text from another (rewriting in a wider sense) and rewriting as counterwriting, where the prefix *re-* means *anti-*. It follows that in a narrower sense, postmodern rewriting goes beyond Genette's conception of textual derivation and becomes more complicated and dependent on the political and social context. In other words, one can no longer speak of *literature in the second degree*, because rewriting, now quite complex, becomes the main writing: "(…) contemporary rewrites are no <<footnotes>> to available stories and, more generally, to narrative <<topoi>>" (Moraru, 2001: 8). A free-standing writing, rewriting is not interpreted as another variant of the same text, but a separate writing with a new theme (the innovative character is provided by resignifying the hypotext), a style of its own and naturally an authorial intention that is different from or even opposed to that of the source text. Moreover, it should be said that postmodern rewriting differs from rewritings of other ages in that it allows the practice of the so-called minor genres like romance, children's literature, parodies/satirical discourse, modern fairy

tales, SF etc. Minor genres seem physically inconsistent with the classic ones, but once again postmodernism removes the border between major and minor and questions the notion of genre as a category that differentiates one literary work from another. In other words, postmodernism promotes the mixing of genres, ideas and particularities, rendering the barriers between them irrelevant. The fact that critical rewriting prefers the so-called minor genres that are yet to be explored, reveals the idea that literary postmodernism passes itself off as the discourse of the periphery, of everything that has been marginalised – both as theme, ethnic or social category and literary genre or style.

4. Levels of narrative communication: from reading to la rereading
It goes without saying that rewriting requires one to judge the relationship between the narrative communication levels from a new perspective. The manner in which the authors relate to the texts they start from (the source texts) is a major topic of analysis. Irrespective of its nature (ironical, ludic or appreciative), the authorial intention relative to the canonical text becomes visible to the reader, since the authors do not make references to the source text, but recreate the initial fictional universe according to their own vision.

In modernity, the author-reader relationship underwent certain transformations. The shift of perspective brought about other changes in the narrative communication levels. Unmistakably the reader plays a unifying role to the extent that collage and fragmentation are the most commonly used techniques in creating a text. It is the reader, dissatisfied with what the author offers, who gives the text a global meaning. More than ever, the readers play much-diversified roles, since they are the ones who make the puzzle pieces of the text and suggest an interpretation. The reader's role grows in complexity as the author's role diminishes in importance. The latter, although he intervenes on the textual level, making changes or additions, is not able to develop interpretative paths, this task being assigned to the reader exclusively. Roland Barthes points out that "(…) the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author" (http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf the eighth of February, 2018) Logically, the death of the author takes place simultaneously with the birth of the reader, a reader with multiple tasks at the interpretative level. In my opinion, rewriting proposes that the readers should play a double role. They do not read the text with a sense of detachment, but examine it with critical eyes and mentally reconstruct it so that they can recreate it later, through rewriting in their personal manner. The readers' fundamental part is to assign meaning to what they read, to interpret the meanings they discover, since "A text's

57

unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf the eighth of February, 2018). In this respect, a permanent dialogue between the text and the reader becomes absolutely necessary, since it is the questions to which the reader cannot find an answer that determine the rewriting.

Reading is no longer governed by the author; it is up to the reader to do it, and the chief relationship is that between the text and its reader. To that end, the reader not only updates the text mentally, but also explores the blanks to fill them with meaning. Umberto Eco underlines that "The Real Reader is the one who understands that the secret of a text is its emptiness" (Eco, 2004: 40). The blanks, the empty spaces in the text appeal to the readers' imaginative capacity, as commenting upon them depends on their interpretation abilities. The emptiness is not impossible to explore. On the contrary, it is very fertile, challenging the reader's imagination. That is why one can say that while filling in the blanks, the reader takes active part in creating the text. Moreover, the blanks are the main reasons for rewriting the text and turning the reader into a writer. The readers' freedom to interpret the blanks is one of the roles they play on the textual level. The blanks open up "an increasing number of possibilities, so that the combination of schemata entails selective decisions on the part of the reader" (Iser, 1978: 184).

An essential aspect of the full understanding of rewriting is the *reading-rereading* relationship. While the first reading is for pleasure (or under the pressure of exterior obligations), rereading is more complex because it requires full attention to details and increased awareness. When speaking about the importance of rereading, Matei Călinescu describes it as "a vortex of interrogations, often about matters of apparently little importance or even negligible, but able to unveil textual and intertextual microsecrets (…)" (Călinescu, 2007: 368).

From this viewpoint, rereading and rewriting are inseparable, a dichotomic structure placed at the foundation of postmodern works that result from a process of critical review. In other words, rereading changes into rewriting, always accompanied by an impressive supply of operations of textual reinterpretation and resignification.

4. Conclusions

Following the above presentation and in an attempt to give a definition consisting of puzzle pieces, one can consider postmodernism a pluralist, multiculturalist, eclectic, discontinuous, hybrid and hostile to linearity phenomenon that promotes identity-related, feminist and postcolonial discourses, gathering under its large umbrella all the literary works that amend the past and rehabilitate those excluded or

58

marginalised. When one studies the concept of *postmodernism* and searches for its definitions, it becomes clear that each theorist proposes a different approach of the concept. This helps putting together a bigger picture that in turn helps one to grasp the complexity of the phenomenon and its principles. Our theoretical investigations lead to the conclusion that whatever the causes of treating critical rewriting as the preferred postmodernist strategy, this technique always stands out as a necessity of the socio-cultural context. The latter underlines the problematics of *feminism* and *postcolonialism* that engage in a dialogue with postmodernism, taking advantage of a framework that favours the assertion of identity-related policies. Under such circumstances, critical rewriting becomes the ideal instrument for achieving the social, identity-driven and cultural objectives. Furthermore, rewriting emerges as an independent and aesthetically valuable work, not just a variant of a canonical text. Founded on ethnic, ideological and social principles, rewriting cannot be understood out of the context that produced it; that is why it becomes the instrument with which the unfair, discriminatory past is corrected, triggering an action of revision and resignification.

Concepts like *reader-writer*, *rereading* or *textual blanks* are interconnected and prove useful for the metamorphosis of the active, critical reading, and for the critical rewriting of the read text. We have found that an interdependence relationship is established between these concepts that fuel the readers' desire to change their attitude towards what they read and adopt a firm standpoint through rewriting.

REFERENCES:

Barth, John, *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*, London, The John Hopkins University Press, 1984.
Barthes, Roland, *The death of the Author*, http://www.tbook.constantvzw.org/wp-content/death_authorbarthes.pdf (the eighth of February, 2018).
Călinescu, Matei, *Five Faces of Modernity. Modernism. Avant-Garde. Decadence. Kitsch. Postmodernism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1987.
Călinescu, Matei, *A citi, a reciti. Către o poetică a (re)lecturii* (*Rereading*), 2nd edition, Translated from English by Virgil Stanciu, Iaşi, Polirom, 2007.
Cărăuş, Tamara, *Efectul Menard. Rescrierea postmodernă: perspective etice* (*The Menard Effect. Postmodern Rewriting: Ethical Perspectives*), Piteşti, Paralela 45, 2003.
Docherty, Thomas, *Postmodernism: a reader*, edited and introduced by Thomas Docherty, New York; London; Toronto, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.
Eco, Umberto, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Eco, Umberto, *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, translated by William Weaver. London, Minerva, 1994.

Genette, Gérard, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

Hutcheon, Linda, *Politica postmodernismului (The Politics of Postmodernism),* Translated by Mircea Deac, Bucureşti, Univers, 1997.

Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, London and Henley, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.

McHale, Brian, *Ficţiunea postmodernistă (Postmodernist fiction)*, traducere de Dan H. Popescu, Iaşi, Polirom, 2009.

Moraru, Christian*, Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning*, New York, State University of New York Press, 2001.