Techniques of the Living

Lawrence, Karen R.

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His book has been long in coming—over fifteen years in the making. Although my passionate interest in Christine Brooke-Rose’s work never flagged over that time, the period coincided with my assuming greater administrative responsibilities: chairing the English Department at the University of Utah; serving as Dean of Humanities at the University of California, Irvine; and moving in 2007 to Sarah Lawrence College to become president of the College. My various computers charted my slow pace and the shrinking calendar for my own research: chapter 1 was dated August 1993, chapter 2, August 1994, chapter 3, August 1995 and so on, with some lean years when, although my reading and study continued (I needed to keep up with Brooke-Rose’s own productivity), the writing lagged behind. Finally, upon assuming my exciting new duties at Sarah Lawrence, I realized it was now or never.

I first discovered Christine Brooke-Rose’s work when my colleague at the University of Utah, Robert Caserio, introduced me to the novel Between, as I was writing my book on women and travel, Penelope Voyages: Women and Travel in the British Literary Tradition. I fell in love with
that work and decided that my final chapter would focus on Brooke-Rose’s novel. Robert Caserio has continued to be an invaluable interlocutor for discussion of the significance of Brooke-Rose’s work. I have also greatly profited from conversations with Barry Weller, another former colleague at the University of Utah.

It is appropriate that this book be published in the Theory and Interpretation of Narrative Series at The Ohio State University Press, the home also of the International Society for the Study of Narrative, as I first met Brooke-Rose when she delivered a plenary address at the Society’s annual narrative conference, which was held in Park City, Utah in 1995. Thus began a friendship that included three trips to visit Christine in her home near Avignon, where, in the summer of 2004, we conducted the discussion recounted at the end of this book. My knowledge of Christine Brooke-Rose deepened as well by virtue of trips to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, home now to her papers. Tom Staley, friend, fellow Joycean, and director of the Ransom, first informed me of the library’s acquisition of her papers; the librarians at the Ransom expertly guided me to the papers and manuscripts I needed, even early on before some of the work had been fully catalogued.

Both the University of Utah and the University of California, Irvine supported my research, for which I am extremely grateful. Doctoral students at both universities eagerly responded to Brooke-Rose’s work in seminar, helping to mine the richness of her texts. Paul Lin, my research assistant at UCI, graciously put up with the fits and starts of my research schedule and continued to help me after I moved to New York, where I appreciated UCI’s continued support of the final stages of the project. I had the pleasure of guest teaching Out and Between to the wonderfully curious and creative undergraduates at Sarah Lawrence in Stefanie Sobelle’s course on postmodernism.

My deepest gratitude goes to my husband, Peter. Despite his own incredibly busy and productive life as an academic vascular surgeon, he has taken pleasure in my career as an author. From the time Christine discussed the physiology of phantom limbs with him (many years after she wrote “The Foot”), to our last visit with her at her home, he never ceased to champion this project. Finally, my son, Jeff, a doctoral student in comparative literature, read and discussed parts of the manuscript with me. His astute comments give me confidence that generations of readers will continue to appreciate the techniques for living in the work of Christine Brooke-Rose.

I gratefully acknowledge permission from the publishers to reprint,
in revised form, portions of the following previously published material:


“‘Who Could Have Read the Signs?’ Politics and Prediction in Gertrude Stein’s Mrs. Reynolds and Christine Brooke-Rose’s Amalgamemnon,” Western Humanities Review (Fall 1995): 18–38.


This book is dedicated to Christine.