Techniques for Living

FICTION AND THEORY IN THE WORK OF CHRISTINE BROOKE-ROSE

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This 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 Sara 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.
The Unbearable Lightness of Being

A PREFACE

In interviews and essays on her status as a writer, Christine Brooke-Rose describes herself as having “little or no existence.” In *Stories, Theories and Things*, where she considers her dual career as experimental writer and literary theorist, she says ruefully: “outside the canon no interpretation, rather as one (now abandoned) dogma had it: outside the Church no Salvation. Fish [Stanley] would add: therefore no existence” (Brooke-Rose, *Stories, Theories and Things* 4). She notes that although her work has been reviewed, she lacks existence at the “critical level”:

I am one of the 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 call interpretation, that links the text 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 indeed other labels. On the whole I regard this as a good sign. (Brooke-Rose, Stories, Theories and Things 4)

“On the whole,” she considers this neglect “a good sign,” but there is the distinct note of complaint in this description. The predicament of the “I” here is worth noting, for this predicament of invisibility or omission is ubiquitous in both Brooke-Rose’s fictions and her critical writings. The author, Christine Brooke-Rose, is a specter, a being of “little existence.” Like the shades that inhabit the underworld in The Odyssey, like the ghost of King Hamlet intoning “remember me,” the author’s existence depends upon the ear of the other. Only within the “Church” of the canon is a literary afterlife (Salvation) possible. Beyond the hint of petulance is a serious point about the ontology of authorship: the “I” of the author is simultaneously established in writing (on the page) and yet always aware of the persistent threat of its “textermination” at the hands (or deaf ears) of others. The proper name, “Christine Brooke-Rose,” is a signifier for the life of the author; the author’s existence is a function of intertextuality, which is another word for a living on by virtue of a haunting of other texts.

Now past eighty and living a relatively reclusive life in the south of France after her retirement from her teaching post at the University of Paris, Vincennes, Brooke-Rose desires to haunt the theories and fictions of critics and novelists with an interest in narrative experiment. She desires to be read. Although she has courted difficulty, like the modernists before her, and refused to pander to more popular tastes, she is reaching the end of her life with the desire she fictionalized in her novel Textermination: a desire to be given existence through her words. Her most recent books are overtly valedictory, Invisible Author: Last Essays (2002), a collection of essays in which she returns to the themes of Stories, Theories and Things to further ponder the ontologies of authorship, and Life, End Of, a memoir (2006). Like Italo Suevo’s chapter in The Confessions of Zeno, “The Last Cigarette,” these “last essays” are both a rehearsal of and protest against the death of the author.
In *Stories, Theories and Things* (published in 1991) and *Invisible Author: Last Essays*, Brooke-Rose conducts a kind of self-interview in which she makes a claim on the ear of the other by offering notes on her “intentions.” The word is, of course, anachronistic in a poststructuralist, postmodernist context, the context in which we must discuss Brooke-Rose. Indeed, she has consistently derided the biographical approach to fiction in which the life is meant to explain the work. Yet in the genre of self-examination in her essays, Brooke-Rose reconnects the umbilicus between the author’s being and her words, as if to add weight to her unbearable lightness. In commenting on her dual roles as critic and writer, she describes a “double paradox, that despite the long taboo on author intention . . . writers are constantly invited to talk about their work (first paradox), though the taboo survives in that they are not supposed to write about it (second paradox)” (*Brooke-Rose, Stories, Theories and Things* 5). Ironically, the “taboo” that Brooke-Rose notes is a form of logocentrism, a privileging of the author’s speech in articulating her “intention.” Indeed, the fate of Brooke-Rose’s writings in being both ignored and misunderstood enacts an extreme case of the predicament of all texts, according to poststructuralist theory, a predicament that Derrida has explored, that is, as the fragility and tenacity of the connection between language and being (*Cinders*). This is a predicament that Brooke-Rose investigates in her fiction and criticism. She fictionalizes the orphaning of the text from the author, what Derrida describes in “Signature Event Context” and elsewhere as “writing . . . cut off from all absolute responsibility, from consciousness as the ultimate authority, orphaned and separated at birth from the assistance of its father” (Derrida, “Signature Event Context” 181). With nuance and, sometimes, pathos, Brooke-Rose’s fiction theorizes this central poststructuralist perception of the “death of the author” and the spectrality of all language cut off from its source in being.

Deconstructing the metaphysics of presence occurs on the level of character as well as author. The “unbearable lightness of being” afflicts the characters in Brooke-Rose’s fiction as it afflicts Brooke-Rose, the author. It is most clearly narrativized in her metanovel *Textermination*, in which literary characters assemble at a convention to hold a “Prayer for Being” to the Implied Reader, hoping, the narrator tells us, to “recover, after an unimaginable journey, to savour what remains of international ritual for the revival of the fittest” (*Textermination* 8). The characters are “ghosts” (*Textermination* 19), languishing from “lack of involved attention” (*Textermination* 2) in an age of popular culture. In this comic, apocalyptic novel, we are reminded of fiction’s link with death. *Texter-
mination brings literature to the brink of extinction, thematizing, and, ironically, bringing to life the various “deaths” that have become such critical commonplaces—of the author, of character, of the novel. And, although the postmodern condition has forced us to confront this situation, exacerbated as it is by the technological developments that produce competing claims on the attentions of would-be readers, Brooke-Rose’s novel makes us understand that all fiction in some sense theorizes its own potential demise. Not only postmodern fiction, but realist fiction as well constructs phantoms of the imagination who demand the reader’s faith. In a meeting between Milan Kundera’s Tomas and Austen’s Emma Woodhouse, Brooke-Rose even stages an acknowledgment that reality and unreality are wed in both realism and antirealism, nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction. Emma thinks: “Being seems to trouble him for some reason, and he calls it unbearably light. And to her astonishment she finds herself agreeing. She has never thought of it in that way, and it somehow relieves her of the oppressive feeling she has had ever since she arrived, that her certitudes are uncertain, that she no longer quite exists in them, no longer quite coincides with herself” (Textermi-
nation 109). Specters and speculation go together in the textual world Brooke-Rose has created as she tests and tries out the endurances and vulnerabilities of fiction and its elements. In the thought experiments of Brooke-Rose’s fiction, criticism, character, and theory converge as points of speculation. ²

In Brooke-Rose’s œuvre narrative and theory are chiasmic; she demonstrates how theories tell stories and stories tell theory. Theories themselves are metastories told about language and fiction in particular; conversely, fictions are theories that take narrative form; they embody abstractions as they create a fictional ‘world.’ In Stories, Theories and Things and Invisible Author, Brooke-Rose attempts to add weight to the unbearable lightness of fiction’s being and to the kind of speculation we call narrative theory.

This chiasmus of theory and fiction might seem to confine us within a closed circle of postmodern theory and practice that includes new techniques, but not the “techniques for living” promised in my title. For Brooke-Rose, however, new fictional techniques are needed to represent the cultural narratives of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, narratives that must capture heightened constraint and loss. In A Rhetoric of the Unreal, she describes this cultural narrative:

Never before have the meaning-making means at our disposal (linguis-
tic, economic, political, scientific) appeared so inadequate, not only to
cope with the enormity of the problems we continue to create . . . but simply to explain the world. This seems to be the century which, despite or because of the pace of technological advance, has taken the longest, relative to that pace, to emerge from the mental habits of the previous century. We know that all the old secure values have gone, that a radical change is occurring which man must undergo or perish, yet we somehow go on as if, ensconced still in relics of nineteenth-century ideologies, in a way which other times in parallel situations apparently did not. (Rhetoric of the Unreal 6)

Brooke-Rose associates the last fifty years with a painful loss of our ability to differentiate reality from what she calls “the unreal.” Her novels mime the absence of certain reality, or of some crucial analog for what we used to take as indubitably real. Obsolescence and extinction—even the loss of the human archive—haunt her texts. As they rupture “the relics of nineteenth-century ideologies,” her fictional experiments are performed for the sake of finding new ways to theorize life and formulate conduct in a new world order. The revival meeting at the heart of Textermination, meant to staunch the extinction of its attendees, presages the grand narrative of evolution told in her last novel, Subscript, which begins 4500 million years ago with a chemical reaction and ends with humans on the earth about eleven thousand years ago. In Subscript, constraints on language, mirroring constraints on biological life, turn out to be glorious modes of engendering evolution and survival. Every one of Brooke-Rose’s fictions is a rehearsal for living under the constraints of a new world, one that is as much a matter of shrinking possibilities as it is of a renewed expansion. Yet, contrary to any melancholy implied by Brooke-Rose’s vision, her fiction draws creative vitality and moral inspiration out of the limitations it evokes.

In this book I make three claims about Brooke-Rose’s fictions: (1) Despite their playful experiments with language, they are not insouciant about the pain underlying the “corpus crysis” (Thru 736) and “direlogue[s]” (Amalgamemnon 29) of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; (2) They explore opportunities to convert pain, through discipline, into fictional power; and (3) They trust theory to emerge fictionally. Her novels produce significant experiments in writing and theorizing the novel tradition that fictionally “diagnose” the unreality of twentieth-century life, the conditions that much contemporary theory seeks to analyze and demystify. Kenneth Burke said that literature provides “equipment for living.” Brooke-Rose’s texts and techniques offer us just such instruments.
The most fitting place to start an examination of “the unbearable lightness” in Brooke-Rose’s writing is with her ghost stories. In Go When You See the Green Man Walking, a short story collection published in 1970, for example, narrative speculation begins with the specter. Many stories are told from the position of the already dead: a seraph who greets people at the “Point of No Return” (“George and the Seraph”) or a suicide who takes on bodily existence for one more time to demand that her unfaithful ex-lover give her away in marriage to death (“On Terms”). In the latter story, the “terms” of the title play off of the “on no terms” that mark the failed relationship between narrator and ex-lover. Jealousy feeds the narrator’s fantasy of assembling her bodily atoms one more time to require her ex-lover’s presence at her marriage to death (“But the being not on terms is the driving force which impels me to invent new terms, for of course we are on terms even if only those of agreeing to give me away” [“On Terms” 26]). Protesting her premature obsolescence in their relationship, she forces him to acknowledge his role in her suicide.
In these stories, the work of fantasy is equated with the physical energy needed to sustain an illusion, to prop up a ghost and make her function. The gothicism of these stories underlines the gothicism of all fiction. The ghosts perform the metacritical function of reminding us of fiction’s task of conjuring and the energy it takes—atom by atom—to create the “semblance of a temporal body” (“On Terms” 18) out of words. The difficulty of sustaining this temporal body is emphasized in the truncated form of the short story itself. The fruitful play on the phrases “on terms,” “not on terms,” and “new terms” couples the terms of the love bond with the narrative bond between an “I” narrator and the reader. Out of the literally dead-ended relationship between lovers, the “new terms” of posthumous fiction combine the gothic with black comedy. The postmortem conducted thus leads to new techniques for fiction, with fantasy providing new inspiration, new life. It is no surprise, then, that “On Terms” was first published in a collection called *The Fourth Ghost Book. Go When You See the Green Man Walking* also included the republication of a rich and emblematic story called “The Foot,” that first appeared in *The Unlikely Ghosts*. In this story, the most fascinating in the collection, Brooke-Rose allegorizes the spectrality of narrative.

As with “On Terms,” the brevity of the story encapsulates the precariousness of fiction’s conjuring act. Like the other ghost stories in the collection, this story is told from a posthumous position. Composed roughly at the same time as her novel *Out* (1964) but published later, this important early story is narrated by a phantom limb. Specifically, the first-person narrator is the phantom limb of a beautiful woman whose leg has been amputated following an automobile accident. The narrative “I,” then, derives his existence from his ability to “haunt” his “victim” with sensations of pain from her already severed foot. The story begins: “The victim to be haunted is female. And beautiful. This makes a difference” (“The Foot” 43). The victim is also intelligent, which, according to the narrator, also makes a difference. The “highly intelligent undoubtedly suffer more than the plethoric unimaginative” (“The Foot” 46). In other words, their active imaginations goad them to feel the phantom pain through “imitation neurones” (“The Foot” 49), even though they realize that the limb is gone. Like Beckett characters or Scheherazade, narrators who must continue talking or risk extinction, this spectral voice speaks in order to affirm his ghostly existence and maintain his hold on the patient. The narrator is not the amputated limb but its image, a phantom subject to banishment if the patient, lying disconsolate in a hospital bed, is “cured” by the suave doctor, Mr. Poole. Like the narrative “I” in the story “On Terms,” the jealous lover who is threat-
ened with replacement in the beloved’s and the reader’s attention, the phantom limb guards its existence through narrative. He inflicts pain in order to reassert his connection to the place of the limb’s origin, the body of the female victim. Indeed, the patient’s pain consummates the phantom foot’s existence:

She cries much more than quietly now, she shouts, she sobs, she yells, she gasps. I find it very exciting. The imitation neurones I am composed of agitate their dendrites like mad ganglia that arborise the system as the cell bodies dance along the axis cylinder within the fibres of the foot that isn’t there, move backwards now, tugging away from the interlaced antennae as if trying to wrench themselves from some submicroscopic umbilical tie anchored into soft tissue, caught into bone, straining, straining to freedom birth and terror of time and space as the impulses race down the fibrils and create me, shape me and I ache strongly, I swell to huge existence that possesses her wholly and loves her loves her loves and hurts her unendurably until the cortical area can only respond by switching off the supply of blood along the nerves going out of the spinal cord so that she faints. (“The Foot” 49–50)

The metaphors suggest that the narrator is both orphan, cut off from the body of the mother, and castrated phallus (“I do not mind however at present being thus wound round cut off castrated as a phantom limb for I have temporarily spent my energy in possessing her so hugely hurtfully and I must rest recuperate my atoms . . .” [“The Foot” 51]). This phallic “I’ swells to its phantom existence in writing, yet he recognizes that his power is a sham, a magic puff subject to dissipation. We are made to see the enormous energy necessary to sustaining the narrative’s conjuring act (“the impulses race down the fibrils and create me, shape me), in this case identified as a phallic energy. Tumescence and detumescence are the underlying rhythms in the narrative—as the desire to be felt swells into existence and ebbs after satisfaction. This “lover’s discourse,” a heterosexual plot of longing and abjection, splits the subject, the “I” of narration, into self-confronting parts. The narrator speaks from the point of view of the abjected part, severed from the bodily whole. One could say that his is a synecdochic desire, the desire of the part for the whole that animates the story itself.

“The Foot” is doubly a narrative of abjection: a story of a phantom lover who longs to return to the body of the mother/lover and jealously guards his companionship through pain and a metacritical tale about writing cut off from presence. The story emblematizes the divorce of
narrative utterance from its “lived” context and writing from being. One thinks again of deconstruction’s seminal recognition that “writing [is] an iterative structure, cut off from all absolute responsibility, from consciousness as the ultimate authority” (Derrida, “Signature Event Context” 181). In Brooke-Rose’s version of this “cut,” the prelapsarian body is a female body, its origin haunting a male narrator, as he, in turn, haunts it. The phantom limb, which derives its power by successfully mimicking a lost connection to the body, fears it will be exposed as a fraud. “The Foot” is a narrative of and as fetish, a substitute phallus whose potency is a sham. Like the Wizard of Oz, the narrative “I” fears discovery behind the magic curtain. The short story is a kind of foot fetish, enacting an erotics of longing and substitution.

The potency of the narrator vies with the potency of science, represented by the English doctor healer, Mr. Poole. In the context of the plot, the jealousy of the speaker stems from his fear that his own mimetic powers will be no match for the potent treatment of the doctor. The doctor is a disenchanter, the scientist who tries to convince the patient that her pain is only phantom. Yet this male rivalry between the narrator’s potency and the doctor’s scientific disenchantment is only a screen. For the narrator comes to acknowledge that the patient herself creates his existence. It is SHE who mourns the loss of her bodily image, in the process giving him his paradoxical phenomenality. “And now she thinks about me, giving me strength, existence, and creating my shape, her slim phantom foot, her unendurable phantom pain” (“The Foot” 47–48). He realizes that through her act of mourning, it is she who ontologizes his remains. Although the titles of the short story collections refer to ghosts, these posthumous hangers-on in Brooke-Rose’s fiction have a sensuous materiality to them, more specters than ghostly spirits. These specters figure memory as a palpable reminder and remainder of event and relationship.

By the end of the story, it is the writing of the young woman that itself presents the greatest threat of extinction for the narrator, as the technology of writing becomes a prosthetic tool that will allow her to control her own pain. The story circles back on itself. When Mr. Poole asks his patient what she plans to do when she leaves the hospital, she replies that she has been thinking of writing. “Love stories?” (“The Foot” 59) he asks in his characteristically flirtatious and patronizing tone, and she says no. At this point the narrator, who has already told us that he is not “partial to words, they can be enemies too” (“The Foot” 46), recognizes that the young woman wants to write about him so as to exorcise the phantom pain (“She is thinking of me to write about
in order to get me out of her system as they call it not sympathetic or parasympathetic autonomous but cerebrospinal out of her midbrain on to paper instead of aching there fifty-three and a half centimetres away from her stump” (“The Foot” 59). “I shall not let her get rid of me with words that recreate my shape my galvanising atoms of agony on mere paper to be read by careless unsuffering millions vicariously and thus dispersed” (“The Foot” 60). Her words “recreate” his shape, creating her own prosthesis in language. Disperse him is what she attempts to do, for as she writes, she encircles his narrative, the one that began “the victim to be haunted is female”: “and she opens meanwhile the small exercise book and in thin impersonal strokes she writes the words she hears like white sun swamping all other receptors in the brain so that the white page slowly engraves itself with the victim to be haunted is female. And beautiful. This makes a difference” (“The Foot” 61).

The white page engraves itself with the beginning of the story, the “I” of the phantom foot now subsumed in the young woman’s act of authorship. The grammatical and narrative tables are turned: It is she who is the subject and he who is the object; his effect is already her creation, her cause. She objectifies her pain and mourns her narrative into existence: “à la recherche du pied perdu” (“The Foot” 61), the narrator jokes near the end of the story, but unlike Proust, Brooke-Rose restricts herself to the ephemeral present tense in representing the search of the lost object. Emily Dickinson wrote, “Power is only Pain—/Stranded, thro’ Discipline.” Through the discipline of her gothic writing, the young woman “strands” her pain and usurps the phantom authority of the phantom limb. Writing functions as her prosthesis, extending the life and limits of the body. Brooke-Rose generates narrative, rather than lyric, out of this self-stranding; the discipline of language counteracts loss.

In her meditation on the nature of narrative and loss, On Longing, Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection, Susan Stewart helps to shed light on the erotics of narrative, its relation to the body and to fetish. Her description of narrative as a structure of desire is helpful in discussing Brooke-Rose’s fiction. In chapters on the souvenir and the collection, Stewart interprets the souvenir as “emblematic of the nostalgia that all narrative reveals—the longing for its place of origin” (Stewart xii). “It is this very desire of part for whole which both animates narrative and, in fact, creates the illusion of the real” (Stewart xii). But as Stewart makes clear, the longing for the whole body is marked by a play “between the present and an imagined, prelapsarian experience” (139). In Brooke-Rose’s case, the beautiful women, the
“model,” functions as this platonic body image of wholeness. In “The Foot,” the narrative returns to this archetypal female image, the body of the mother/lover figured as source both of life and death, womb and tomb:

Eyes open can bring beauty alive with awareness of pain terror despair or anger, not to mention desire and liquid tenderness or even the alluring invitation down the pathways to the womb the tomb the cavern the ebb and flow of time linked to the sun-devouring moon the monster chasm of death and timelessness that draws man like a magnet from the moment he is conscious of a fall a wrench of umbilical tissue rough manhandling tumbling lying in soft cloud sucking at heaven severed weight of body on stumbling legs and fall, fall through the days and minutes. Eyes open can bring archetypes alive . . . (“The Foot” 43–44)

Stewart describes her title, “On Longing,” as itself “a kind of ache,” a perfect reference for capturing both the erotic longing and sense of loss that underwrite narrative. It aptly describes the combination of mourning and erotic desire that makes up the particular “lover’s discourse” of “The Foot.” As I will show, this metaleptic lover’s discourse is replayed in much of Brooke-Rose’s fiction, with its apotheosis in her most meta-critical narrative, *Thru: ‘You are the sentence I write I am the paragraph, generating each other cutting off each other’s word.’* 3 Roland Barthes explored these erotics in terms of the relationship between writer and reader, the “I” and the “you” of the text, in *A Lover’s Discourse* and *The Pleasure of the Text.* Famously announcing the death of the author in *The Pleasure of the Text,* Barthes acknowledges the ache that remains for the writer’s presence: “but in the text, in a certain way, I desire the author. I need his figure . . . as he needs mine” (Barthes 27). This codependency is staged in Brooke-Rose’s “posthumous” fiction. Walter Benjamin reminds us in “The Storyteller” that the form of the story, unlike the form of the novel, is historically associated with oral rather than written production. Thus, Brooke-Rose’s use of an “I” narrator who tells his story (an element she will eschew in almost all of her novels), exposes the nostalgia behind the “longing” for origin in the body of the author. In exposing this process of estrangement, Brooke-Rose does not minimize the aspect of mourning.

Like all of Brooke-Rose’s writings, this story of palpable absence dramatizes a cultural narrative, an elegy that is historical. By this I mean more than to acknowledge the fact that the fiction “theorizes” a post-structuralist insight. For Brooke-Rose’s fiction is historical in the way it
records in “new terms” what she calls the “unreal” reality of the post-traumatic second half of the twentieth century. In A Rhetoric of the Unreal (1981), published approximately a decade after Go When You See the Green Man Walking, Brooke-Rose tries to account for the “return of the fantastic in all its forms” in twentieth-century literature, theory, and philosophy (Rhetoric of the Unreal 7). She sees this important return as a symptom of a ‘reality crisis’ in the twentieth century according to which there is a pervasive sense of unreality (Rhetoric of the Unreal 3–4). In her novels, reality is already an effect, issuing from some unspecified cause of separation, an abjection associated with the displacements of the twentieth century: e.g., World War II in Between, an unspecified, probably nuclear, apocalypse in Out, scientific “post-humanism” in Such; technology that threatens to render humanism obsolete in Amalgamemnon. In choosing the phantom limb as her narrator in “The Foot,” Brooke-Rose puns on the idea of extremity. The foot is the extremity that used to link the body with terra firma, the pedestrian, the “real.” Without this link to the earth, reality becomes unreal, fantasmatic. Yet the word “extremity” also conveys the sense that crisis is a part of our everyday lives:

And yet it is obvious that to be effective pain must attack the most active therefore vulnerable part of the central memory-image, the extremities once in touch with earth air fire and water, the soles that bear the whole weight of existence as man transmutes his structural archetypes from curled to lying to upright position and learns the shapes of time food light dark play by fingering breasts limbs balls cuddly animals. (“The Foot” 45)

Curiously, this passage from “The Foot” prefigures Brooke-Rose’s last novel, Subscript, in which she traces the increasing sophistication and sentience of man as he evolves from the prokaryote cell. Throughout her work, Brooke-Rose’s testifies to a “corpus crysis” (Thru, 736) in language and history. The crisis is revealed along the pulses of the body; it is a “corpus” crisis, beginning with the legs whose malfunction calls into question what man’s evolution has wrought. Man must adapt to his environment or face the possibility of his own extinction. In A Rhetoric of the Unreal she speaks of “a radical change” occurring “which man must undergo or perish” (6). “Never before,” she says, “has man been so squarely faced with the possible annihilation of mankind and all his works, his planet and perhaps more. . . . These essential differences [between our century and others] . . . are deeply linked to the sense we have that the real has become unreal” (Rhetoric of the Unreal 8). In her
powerful essay, “The Dissolution of Character in the Novel,” Brooke-Rose discusses the prevailing sense of characters as verbal structures “more and more swollen with words, like stray phalluses, cut off from the real” (“The Dissolution of Character” 186). The narrative construction of a “foot fetish” in “The Foot” enacts this sense of loss and unreality that marks the twentieth-century in particular. Specters populate Brook-Rose’s fiction, clinging to their power to haunt sensuously, palpably. Painfully and in pain, they acknowledge their obsolescence and cling to their material existence in an attempt to be a body that matters. Brooke-Rose’s fictions “speculate” by materializing their theories of narrative in the equivocal figure of the specter. But the pain awaiting conversion, through discipline, into fictional power (to paraphrase Dickinson) is not purely personal. It is public and historic.

Like the phantom limb of “The Foot,” the specter is a revenant, an unwelcome guest whose appearance cannot be controlled. In Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the International, Derrida speaks of the figure of the specter in relation to the question of repetition. It is a figure of iterability that cannot be put in its place or time. He calls this haunting by specters “historical, to be sure, but it is not dated, it is never docily given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of a calendar” (4). In his own analysis of the rhetoric of the unreal that the twentieth century has inherited, Derrida invokes Shakespeare, specifically, the specter of King Hamlet at the beginning of Hamlet, who begins the play with the injunction, “Remember me.” Derrida describes “this pre-originary and properly spectral anteriority of the crime—the crime of the other, a misdeed whose event and reality, whose truth can never present themselves in flesh and blood, but can only allow themselves to be presumed, reconstructed, fantasized” (21; emphasis in original. Emphases in quoted material are original to the text unless otherwise noted.). But for Derrida, this spectrality is not confined to our sense of being haunted by the past. It refers to a haunting, a nonpresence, at work in the present and anticipating the future. He describes this nonpresence of the present as the “non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present” (Specters xix). According to Derrida, reality is shot through with its spectral twin. As in Brooke-Rose’s fiction, this “non-contemporaneity” is exacerbated by a number of features of contemporary life imported with the speed of the technological revolution. Describing the “spectral effects” at work in the twentieth century, he cites “the new speed of apparition (we understand this word in its ghostly sense) of the simulacrum, the synthetic or prosthetic image, and the virtual event, cyberpace and
surveillance, the control, appropriations, and speculations that today deploy unheard-of powers” (*Specters* 54). It also derives from the sense of the already dead and the non-yet-living, the specters with whom we commune in the present. This spectral invasion is also a question of ethics, of attending to the invisible others who cannot claim attention for themselves.

Brooke-Rose, too, is concerned with those “who are not there, of those who are no longer or who are not yet present and living” (*Specters* xix). These are the specters haunting her texts spanning past and future: *Subscript*, THE story of survival and extinction; *Amalgamemnon*, a novel in future and conditional tenses which predicts the end of humanism and, in “unrealized tenses,” imagines the alternatives; *Xorandor*, a computer fiction in which she imagines us on the eve of the destruction of the human archive.

I propose Brooke-Rose as a candidate for the new writer/scholar that Derrida conjures in *Specters of Marx*: “There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being (‘to be or not to be,’ in the conventional reading), in the opposition between what is present and what is not, for example in the form of objectivity. Beyond this opposition, there is, for the scholar, only the hypothesis of a school of thought, theatrical fiction, literature, and speculation” (*Specters* 11). Derrida posits the existence of another scholar, one who could think “the possibility of the specter, the specter as possibility. Better (or worse) he would know how to address himself to spirits. He would know that such an address is not only already possible, but that it will have at all times conditioned, as such, address in general” (*Specters* 12). Brooke-Rose’s fiction and theory take up the theoretical wager, this hypothesis, the specter as possibility. Her work explores the palpability of absence, the sensuous reminder, remainder, anticipation, of event.

It should be clear from my description that Brooke-Rose’s form of postmodernism provides a vision of inevitable human constraint and loss. It does not conform to the kind of ludic postmodernism privileged by Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988). Hutcheon sees in postmodern literature a break and liberation from modernist anxieties, an open-ended plurality that leaves behind the anxious formalisms of the modernists in favor of a more insouciant attitude. She offers a rather glib inventory of what is jettisoned with postmodern experimentations, “such principles as value, order, meaning, control, and identity . . . that have been the basic premise of
bourgeois liberalism” (Hutcheon 13). Although “control” and “identity” are concepts that come in for some skewering in Brooke-Rose’s fiction, value, order, and meaning stubbornly reassert themselves in new forms that bind the fiction to the theory it materializes. Technique materializes theory through what Brooke-Rose calls “constraint” (I will return to this concept in a moment). Rigor, formulation, and form constrain Brooke-Rose’s essays and fiction; they constrain as spurs to invention. They are not abandoned in jouissance.

With the assistance of an unusual essay by Vivian Sobchack I can further distinguish Brooke-Rose’s work from Hutcheon’s version of postmodernism. In an essay entitled “Beating the Meat/Surviving the Text, or How to Get Out of this Century Alive,” Sobchack attacks Baudrillard’s interpretation of the cuts, slashes and amputations in J. G. Ballard’s Crash, an interpretation that celebrates the dematerialization of the text. Sobchack critiques the way that Baudrillard, in particular, and millennial discourses about cyberspace and technology, in general, “decontextualize our flesh into insensate sign or digitize it into cyberspace where, as one devotee put it, ‘it’s like having had your everything amputated.’ In the (inter)face of the new technological revolution and its transformation of every aspect of our culture (including our bodies), we have to recognize and make explicit the deep and dangerous ambivalence that informs the reversible relations we, as lived-bodies, have with our tools and their function of allowing us to transcend the limitations of our bodies” (Sobchack 209).

Now Sobchack, it should be noted, is writing from a particular and highly unusual position, a position she makes explicit to establish her authority: the position of an amputee who has lost her leg to cancer and who tries to come to grips with her prosthesis, her new “cyborg” existence. Her essay is a biting attack on the too confident transcendentalism and happy metaphor hunting in which contemporary theory sometimes engages. Indeed her critique of the decontextualization of the body provides an important corrective not only to Linda Hutcheon and Baudrillard but also to discourses of the posthuman in cybernetics. In this, context, too, “The Foot” is an important text to consider. Although I have read “The Foot” in part as an allegory about narrative, it also clairvoyantly introduces the information age, the noncontemporaneity of the present for the “posthuman subject.” N. Katherine Hayles defines this subject as “an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction” (Hayles 3). As Hayles puts it in her analysis, which also critiques the dematerialization that is the object of Sobchack’s criticism, “information loses its body” (Hayles xiii). “The
Foot’ inaugurates the theme of information and its embodiments and disembodiments that will recur more explicitly in Brooke-Rose’s later novels. Both the false messages relayed by the phantom limb to the victim and the attention to the boundaries and limits of the body are themes that will recur.

Considered in the light of information theory, the sensuous haunting by the phantom limb creates a reverberating loop between body and mind, a circuit of information. Brooke-Rose’s notes for the chapter reveal not only her determination for scientific accuracy but also her focus on how messages deceive the amputee into an illusory image of the body. The falsely “reverberating loop” is explained in Hayles’s history of cybernetics, which explicitly describes the phenomenon of the phantom limb in terms of signs and signals at work: “[McCulloch] proposed that neural nets can set up reverberating loops that, once started, continue firing even though no new signals are incoming. To distinguish between firings signifying an external event and those caused by past history, he called the former ‘signals’ and the latter ‘signs.’ A signal ‘always implies its occasion,’ but a sign is an ‘enduring affair which has lost its essential temporal reference’” (Hayles 59). In “The Foot,” Brooke-Rose’s drama of narrative as fetish, the sign is caught in reverberating loops of self-haunting. Brooke-Rose conveys both the pathos and the pain that Sobchack resolutely seeks to retain for postmodern discourse. Yet in the end, I would contend that despite its power, Sobchack’s essay loses some effectiveness in its unquestioning recourse to the authenticity experienced by the lived body, that is, the author’s experience. It contrasts with the impossibility of retracing the link to the lived body in “The Foot” and Brooke-Rose’s emphasis on the phantom limb as sensate sign. In Brooke-Rose’s fiction, pain is “stranded” through the discipline of language. She refuses to essentialize the body’s experience.

THE SIGN AS SPECTER: THE TURN OF THE SCREW

Brooke-Rose’s brilliant tripartite analysis of James’s The Turn of the Screw, republished in her book, A Rhetoric of the Unreal, reprises, in the form of literary criticism and theory, the theme of the spectral sign. In 101 pages, it takes James’s tale as its model of the return of the fantastic in fiction. Indeed, following Todorov, Brooke-Rose considers James’s text as the example, par excellence, of the “pure fantastic” (128). According to Todorov, the pure fantastic is a category of reading in which two plots (fabulas), one supernatural and one natural, coexist perfectly such that the reader cannot resolve which one is to be preferred. Brooke-
Rose is mindful, of course, that this seminal turn-of-the-century tale has inspired a history of readings which indeed choose between a ghost story (the supernatural) or a psychic tale of hallucination (the “natural”), but Brooke-Rose’s point, and Todorov’s, is that a scrupulous and “objective” reading of the text demonstrates that the clues support either reading without tipping the balance toward one or the other (the unreal or the real). Her exhaustive essay reads *The Turn of the Screw* as “an endless spiral” (*Rhetoric of the Unreal* 173), in which either reading can be supported structurally by the series of contrasts and oppositions mirrored on multiple levels without recourse to a single originating event.

Indeed, the absence of a single precipitating event for the trauma of the ghosts’ appearance (whether as emanations of evil or emanations of the governess’s psychic state) leads Brooke-Rose to dwell on the psychoanalytic concept of trauma as a metonymic relation between two events that share certain features, “a displacement through which the elements shared by both cause the second to symbolize the first and reactivate it” (159). As opposed to a simplistic psychoanalysis of the governess (a project that Brooke-Rose abhors), her own analysis of the “natural” reading (i.e., the nonsupernatural interpretation) posits that the text itself is symptomatic, i.e., a complex transmission of signs fundamentally dependent upon displacement and substitution. In a reading that combines the tools of structuralist analysis, complete with tree diagrams and tables of repetitions and variations that occur in the text, with the methods of psychoanalysis that focus on what is not said or said obliquely (with discussion of Lacan, Freud and Breuer, and Shoshana Felman), Brooke-Rose considers the ghostly effects of letters *in* the text and the language of the text. Her original essay on James’s text, “The Squirm of the True II: The Long Glasses—a Structural Analysis,” revised and reprinted in *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, anticipates by one year Shoshana Felman’s psychoanalytic essay, “Turning the Screw of Interpretation,” published in 1977. In her revised essay, which takes Felman’s work into account, Brooke-Rose focuses on the metonymic displacements and inversions that structure the text and prevent us from mastering its content (i.e., solving its puzzle). She paraphrases Felman’s reading of the “signifying chain of letters” in James’s text that functions as “a chain of ghosts, the erased letter being like the return of the dead, and both like the story of the unconscious, the return of the repressed through the insistence of the signifier” (*Rhetoric of the Unreal*). In cataloguing the quadripartite structure of the text (based on a series of four-sided frames), Brooke-Rose notes that the four storytellers, Griffith, Douglas, the “I-narrator,” and the governess, all are transmitters of the tale for which we are given no “original.” She comments that this transmission
process “further emphasizes the loss of origin, the curiously Derridean
trace of lost origin and the curiously Lacanian ‘rehandling of the signifier’ in a complex chain of transmission, each transmittor or addresor
having first been a receiver or addressee, a reader who turns narrator”
(Rhetoric of the Unreal 173). In this frankly Derridean reading, the missing letters set off a complex transmission of information with neither identifiable source nor destination.

But unlike Felman, Brooke-Rose seeks to anchor her discussion of the ghostly effects of James’s text narratologically, in the precise and careful structuring of its mirroring processes, including, but not limited to, the thematic of the letters and story telling in the text. A fulcrum between structuralism and poststructuralism, Brooke-Rose’s essay tries to show how a poststructuralist reading depends upon a precise formulation of the structures of a text, that “indeterminacy” and “ambiguity” are not antithetical to method and methodology. It also demonstrates that in the work of a “master” such as James, fiction, in its traumatic knowledge, anticipates theory. Although Brooke-Rose mentions that according to previous critics, James could have been acquainted with Freud’s and Breuer’s 1895 Studies on Hysteria (Rhetoric of the Unreal 159), she maintains that a psychoanalytic reading of his text need not depend upon such influence. “James, however, must have been perfectly aware that mirrors and their adjuncts (windows, spectacles, telescopes, etc.) are a constant motif in the supernatural, notably in E.T.A. Hoffmann. Nor is it so by chance. In this text, this odd detail about the governess’s upbringing, and the castration shock it ought in theory to provoke, is a fine example of the writer’s intuition having little need of specific reading in contemporary or (of course) later scientific discoveries” (Rhetoric of the Unreal 398, fn 7). What fiction “knows” is an issue that Brooke-Rose engages in multiple forms and valences, as critic, theorist, and fiction writer. The pleasures, methods, freedoms, and constraints operate variously in texts in which she represents both the systems and intuitions of contemporary discourses. Throughout this oeuvre, however, we witness a fascination with the pressure of what’s missing and an exploration of the ties that bind precisely because they are already severed.

THE FASCINATION OF WHAT’S MISSING

For Brooke-Rose, the fascination of what’s missing is a fundamental matter of technique as well as philosophy and theme. The two are indissoluble. Invisibility, nonpresence, severed ties that bind through haunting—these themes, engaged in her fiction and criticism, correlate
with the most distinctive feature of her experimental writing: her use of lipograms. Lipograms are techniques of omission, self-imposed by the author, in which a grammatical or alphabetical feature is deliberately left out. Strictly speaking, the word “lipogram” means “lacking a letter,” although I join Brooke-Rose in using the term more inclusively to refer to a number of technical “constraints.” *Invisible Author: Last Essays* is devoted to her explanation of her constraints as well as an attempt to tease out the link between these technical omissions and her own invisibility as a writer. Brooke-Rose’s constraints include: the omission of the verb “to be” in *Between*; “to have” in *Next*; personal pronouns and possessive adjectives in her autobiography *Remake* and in sections of *Subscript* (depending on the “consciousness” of the organism she is representing); and constative sentences in *Amalgamemnon*. The most significant and consistent lipogram Brooke-Rose invents in her fiction is a narratorless narrative that eschews the past tense and first-person. With no retrospection (hence, no one vantage point for looking back) and no origin or voice speaking the text, she constantly raises the question “Who speaks?” In chapter 7 of *Invisible Author*, called “The Author is Dead: Long Live the Author,” and in a reprisal in *Life, End Of*, Brooke-Rose describes her technique, adapted for her own purposes from Robbe-Grillet’s nouveau roman, as a “speakerless present . . . [an] impersonal, speakerless (narratorless) narrative” (Brooke-Rose, *Invisible Author* 152).

These “constraints” fund invention. They turn deprivation into power and jolt the novel into experimental form using limitation as a window to creative freedom. Brooke-Rose’s invention of a new, characteristic style asserts a vital alternative. In her focus on lipograms and other constraints in her experimental novels, as well as her emphasis on writing as craft and practice, Brooke-Rose resembles the group of French writers known as Oulipo, a group of writers who founded an association in 1960 which began as a colloquium devoted to the work of Raymond Queneau. The name stands for *Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*. Queneau described the objective of Oulipo: “To propose new ‘structures’ to writers, mathematical in nature, or to invent new artificial or mechanical procedures that will contribute to literary activity: props for inspiration as it were, or rather, in a way, aids for creativity.” The idea of “the artisanal nature of literary work . . . central to Oulipian poetics” (Motte “Introduction” 10) characterizes Brooke-Rose’s treatment of technique as well. Writing with constraints emphasizes the discipline and craft of writing as well as its difficulty as labor. In his edited collection of some of Oulipo’s most important writings, Motte points out that “the
French word *ouvroir* has three principal meanings: it denotes the room in a convent where the nuns assemble to work, a charitable institution where indigent women engage in needlework, and a ‘sewing circle’ where well-to-do ladies make clothes for the poor and vestments for the Church” (Motte, “Introduction” 9). Motte does not emphasize the paradox that although all the forms of labor listed pertain to women’s work, most of the Oulipean writers were male.\(^8\)

Yet, unlike the Oulipeans who advertised their lipograms both within their fiction and in manifestos, Brooke-Rose challenged her readers to discover them. Where the Oulipeans publicized the use of their constraints, sometimes affixing a “user’s manual,” Brooke-Rose tended to embed them. In doing so, she has run the risk that her technical “absences” would go undetected. In essays and interviews, Brooke-Rose sometimes laments the fact that her lipograms often went unnoticed by her readers. *Invisible Author* attempts to redress the peculiar “overlooking” of Brooke-Rose’s main grammatical lipogram: the refusal of the third-person, past tense narrative. The book begins with the question, “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 (Brooke-Rose, *Invisible Author* 1). In *Invisible Author* she explores the “problem of ‘visibility/invisibility’ raised by the lipogram” (3). For, despite able criticism and positive reviews, critics and reviewers failed to comment sufficiently (in Brooke-Rose’s eyes) on the importance of this absence. She contrasts the lack of attention paid to her use of the lipogram with the attention that Georges Perec attracted in writing *La Disparition* (1969), in which he omitted the letter “e.” Brooke-Rose published *Between* in 1968, a few months before *La Disparition* (translated by Gilbert Adair as *A Void* in 1994). She clearly resents the fact that the critics were intrigued when Perec announced that he had used a lipogram in *La Disparition*; yet when she revealed her own self-imposed omission to a friend and reviewer, Hélène Cixous, no one, including Cixous, seemed to care.

As much as the joint interest in lipogram, the contrast between Brooke-Rose’s use of constraints and those of the Oulipeans is instructive. Never a joiner of groups, Brooke-Rose worked alone all her life, despite her friendship with other writers in England and France. Indeed, the only reference to Oulipo in her essays on her craft in *Invisible Author*, comes in one footnote reference to Georges Perec: “Perec belonged to the club Oulipo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle), headed by Raymond Queneau at the time, whom I greatly admired, and which relished formal tours de force of this kind. I was once invited (by a lesser member)
to join, which was a huge honor, but I refused, for fear, perhaps, of being drawn into such attractive games” (Invisible Author 183, n.5).9

Perec and his translator, for example, offered more markers of absence than Brooke-Rose in Between. In chapter one of A Void, the reader is introduced to the main character, Anton Vowl, whose surname itself marks the absence of the letter “e” in the word “vowel.” In addition, Anton, the character’s Christian name, is an anagram for “not an,” adding to the clues of the absence of the letter “e.” Every time we see his name, then, we are reminded of the absence of the most common letter in the French language. Indeed, later on, the character himself disappears. Although the English title, A Void, names an absence, the French title La Disparition, meaning disappearance and passing, more keenly suggests an element of ghostly trace. It is worth noting that in 1972, Perec wrote Les revenentes, literally, “ghosts,” in which “e” is the only vowel employed. A headnote to A Void, published in 1994, after Perec’s death, informs the reader: “After writing La Disparition (A Void), he took all his unused e’s and devoted them to a short text, Les revenentes, in which e is the only vowel employed.” (Perec np)10 Talk about a return of the repressed!

How absence signifies, technically, ontologically, emotionally is a question Brooke-Rose will raise throughout her oeuvre in different genres and with different techniques of omission.11 Although there is often something elegiac in these hauntings, they are also intimations of obsolescence. Like the phantom limb, desperate to continue to signify in the young woman’s life, Brooke-Rose’s characters feel themselves becoming increasingly obsolete, losing their significance. Writing of what he calls “obsolete objects in the literary imagination,” Francesco Orlando sees in literature a range of affective reactions to the obsolescence hastened by the speed, mechanicity, and remakes of modern life. His categorization of different types of images of “nonfunctional corporeality,” might usefully help classify the “lightness of being” Brooke-Rose explores: (1) living human (2) nonliving human, (3) living nonhuman, and (4) nonliving nonhuman.12 Orlando is most interested in the fourth category, the “nonliving nonhuman” and least interested in the first category, which includes what happens to the human body in its weakness, decrepitude, and infirmity. Brooke-Rose’s novels, however, take up the full range of this problematic.

As the title suggests, Out, her first consciously experimental lipogramatic novel, represents abjection, its central consciousness a sick, lethargic, and out of work humanist. Next (with its lipogram of “to have”) explicitly represents the abjected as a social class, the homeless.
In most of her novels, humanism is a dead letter, and with it those writers, characters, and professors whose expertise is no longer valued, as with the multifaceted Cassandra-like consciousness of her novel *Amalgamemnon*, crafted in future or “unrealized” tenses only. But it is in *Remake* and, more painfully, in *Life, End Of*, that the central consciousness finds itself in a Yeatsian predicament, fastened to a dying animal. It is here, in her memoir, that “nonfunctional corporeality” renders the writer’s cruelly ironic predicament most acutely. Losing the use of her legs and her eyesight, the worker in difficult prose is no longer able to climb the stairs to her library, to read, and, finally, to write, her pleasure in the artisinal nature of her work now denied.

Brooke-Rose’s books catalogue as well the “nonliving human”—the specters that haunt the living like the phantom limb; the ghosts she analyzes in James’s *The Turn of the Screw*; Larry, the psychiatrist, who has returned from the dead and is the central consciousness of her novel *Such*; the literary characters who wander the pages of *Textermination*, nervously resisting their own extinction in the cultural memory; and, in the broadest archeological sweep, the extinct species of her Darwinian novel, *Subscript*. In *Subscript*, she also takes up the record of the “living nonhuman” (or prehuman), from the earliest cells to the invertebrates and vertebrates that comprise the species before the appearance of homo sapiens. And in *Xorandor*, she examines the “non living nonhuman”—the computer, Xorandor, whose progeny do nothing less than threaten the human archive.13

As Brooke-Rose destabilizes the ontological foundations of her “beings,” it is language that concerns her. She invents new terms for her literature of speculation. In novels and in essays, she creates “techniques for living,” a phrase she uses in her novel *Out*. Again and again, language is the site of both the threatened textermination and of survival. Indeed, originally entitled “Textermination,” Brooke-Rose’s most metatextual novel *Thru* offers constant reminders of the way that “persons” emerge grammatically and ontologically on the page (“out of the Zero where the author is situated, both excluded and included, the third person is generated, pure signifier of the subject’s experience” (*Thru* 647). *Thru* traces the path of “the sign that watches, helpless and in great pain, the engendering of its own projected trajectory struggling along” (Brooke-Rose, *Thru* 737). In “splitting” herself as theorist and novelist in *Thru* and elsewhere, Brooke-Rose stages the drama of the sign watching the engendering of its own trajectory in the theater of theory. Here, and throughout her work, technique is inseparable from techniques for living.
THE BRITISH NOVELIST B. S. JOHNSON once wrote, “So many novelists still write as though the revolution that was Ulysses had never happened. . . . 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” (quoted in Randall Stevenson, “Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction in Britain” 19).

In this book, I argue that the fifty-year career of Christine Brooke-Rose is a notable counterexample to Johnson’s assertion. Brooke-Rose has continued the radical evolution of narrative in modernism’s wake. Her strenuous and vital fiction offers survival strategies for the genre of the novel, new forms of telling the human story within the “unreality” of the twentieth century.

As critic and journalist in the fifties in England, Brooke-Rose wrote about contemporary novelists who were dismantling and reinventing
fiction. In the *London Magazine*, she described Beckett’s “anti-novel” novels (1958) and reviewed Robbe-Grillet’s new narrative sentence in *Jealousy* (1961). Writing for the *Observer* (1961), she highlighted the phenomenon of “The Vanishing Author” in contemporary fiction and in 1966 spoke of “Making It New” in her review of Robert Pinget’s experimental novels. Like her central consciousness in *Between* who facilitates cross-cultural conversations through translation, Brooke-Rose served as cultural go-between, trying to alert the English that the French were coming. After she moved to Paris in 1968, her efforts took the form of letters “home” from the cultural front. In her “Letters from Paris” in the *Spectator*, she conveyed the excitement of the French revolution occurring in fiction, drama, anthropology, and theory. In longer essay form in journals like *NLH*, *Poetics and the Theory of Literature*, and *Contemporary Literature*, she dissected the genre of the fantastic in Todorov and Henry James. In exploratory yet rigorous analyses in essays with titles such as “Transgressions: An Essay-say on the Novel Novel Novel” and “The Squirm of the True: An Essay in Non-Methodology,” she restored the essay form to its roots as a series of theoretical “attempts.”

The title of Brooke-Rose’s 1980 essay “Where Do We Go From Here?” epitomizes her restless intelligence as a critic and author insistently impelled to take up the question of the future. This is a question not only of fiction’s future, but of the future of the human archive itself. Thus, the “syntax-error” programmed into Xor 7 in *Xorandor*, an error that threatens to obliterate the human race if not for Xorandor’s sacrifice, captures the stakes involved in paying vigilant attention to grammar and other elements of technique. In this context, and in other Brooke-Rose textual landscapes, to speak of her “techniques for living” is not hyperbolic. With the chiasmic crossing of the real and unreal in the twentieth century she has felt that new forms of representation were necessary, but rather than resisting the waves of scientific, technological, and broader cultural changes, she has deployed them as novelistic premises. Each of Brooke-Rose’s narratives inscribes and transmits a cultural predicament. In these narratives, both the textual body of the novel and the bodies represented bear the trace of pain and loss that transcend the personal. Throughout her oeuvre, lipograms encode particular deprivations and defamiliarize the story from the point of view of the always threatened organism. If, as in “The Foot,” “pain is a constant companion” in her texts, a reader’s adventure in watching these texts unfold lies in the discovery of what endures, or what emerges anew, in response to
originary losses. In her stories, theories, and things, Brooke-Rose’s letters and languages “fraternize” in ways that “make it new.” Trusting the novel form to capture the “corpus cryses” of her time, she produced a strikingly original body of work.
PREFACE

1. I will return to the issue of the gender of the source.

2. In *Body Story: The Ethics and Practice of Theoretical Conflict*, Richard Terdiman discusses this vexed relationship between “language and bodies” in twentieth-century fiction, noting its antecedents in Enlightenment texts such as Diderot’s. Brooke-Rose dramatizes this heritage and, like Terdiman, disputes claims of post-modern exceptionalism by including Diderot’s Jacques, the fatalist, as one of her characters in her metacritical novel, *Thru*. See Richard Terdiman, *Body and Story: The Ethics and Practice of Theoretical Conflict* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

CHAPTER ONE

1. Brooke-Rose’s notebooks for the story read like the compulsive note-taking of a medical student studying for an exam on the nervous system, replete with diagrams of brain function. As in her later fiction, she is scrupulous in employing scientific terminology to create the operative metaphors of the text. She takes pains to ensure that her sadistic phantom limb “haunts” his victim in scientifically
reputable ways. It is a tragic irony constantly apparent to Brooke-Rose that in her eighties she has suffered from polyneuritis of the extremities and a permanent burning feeling in her feet. As she says in a private correspondence, “Pain is a companion” (e-mail to author, 1 November 2001).

2. Quoted in Sharon Cameron, Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979) 28. Cameron describes the experience of pain in Dickinson’s poems as an experience of self-severing: “The self perceived as other” (28). She sees this as an explanation for the personification of body parts in Dickinson’s poems: “They are, in the telling, isolated from the rest of the body and hence, metaphorically at any rate, severed from it.” Cameron describes this experience as “survival.”


5. Roland Barthes’s own ‘fulcrum’ text between structuralism and poststructuralism, S/Z, can be fruitfully contrasted to Brooke-Rose’s essay. In the latter, the structuralist methodology produces the poststructuralist reading. In S/Z the systematicity of the codes coexists, but is never quite reconciled, with the starred sections of analysis. Barthes’s fascinating riffs on interpretation seem to undo the system itself.

6. On the subject of formal constraint and invention, see Wordsworth’s sonnet “Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent’s Narrow Room,” a poem about the sonnet form:

Nuns fret not at their convent’s narrow room;  
And hermits are contented with their cells;  
And students with their pensive citadels;  
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,  
Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,  
High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,  
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:  
In truth the prison, unto which we doom  
Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me,  
In sundry moods, ’t was pastime to be bound  
Within the Sonnet’s scanty plot of ground;  
Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)  
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,  
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.


8. Motte’s collection, which includes biographical and bibliographical material on the Oulipean group, cites only one woman, poet Michèle Métail, who joined the group in 1974. Among the best known Oulipeans beside Queneau are Georges


10. An interesting side note is that Gilbert Adair, the translator, also published a novel called *The Death of the Author*.

11. I am reminded of an anecdote a close musician friend told me. Several years ago, Jim Hill, a very talented jazz guitarist, played a solo at the memorial service held for Bill Evans, one of the greatest jazz pianists and a musician with whom Hill had made a series of recordings. Hill played a tune that struck my friend as particularly odd, although she could not identify the reason for her discomfort. Many hours after the service ended, she realized what it was. Without announcing it, Hill had been playing the notes that he had played with Evans in one of their duos. What was missing was Evans’s part. Some time later, my friend saw Hill and mentioned her intuition. He told her she was the only one at the service who seemed to understand that Hill had expressed Evans’s absence *technically* through omission.


13. In my decision to exclude *Next* and *Verbivore* from my reading of Brooke-Rose, I have taken my lead from her own assessment of the novels. In her summary of her novels in *Invisible Author* and in her critical discussions of her work in general, Brooke-Rose gives only cursory attention to *Next* and to *Verbivore*, her sequel to *Xorandor*. Calling *Next* her “least original in terms of subject matter (streetsleepers)” (19), she further admits that its reliance on dialect imposed a disconcerting visual screen between the reader and the text. Thus her assessment is that the “what” of the novel was less interesting and its “how” obstructive. It should be clear that the category of difficulty intrigues rather than daunts me; however, I do find *Next* both more predictable in its content (and politics) and less fruitful in its narrative experiments. For different reasons, Brooke-Rose dismisses *Verbivore* as the less successful of her two science fiction novels. Faulting herself for sending the manuscript too quickly to the publisher after its completion, Brooke-Rose opines that she missed an opportunity to develop a “splendid idea” further “(creatures feeding on our broadcast words and getting so overloaded they demolish all our systems)” (18). In this case, I am in sympathy with my writer’s criticism at the expense of her fiction. I, too, find the dialogic *Xorandor*, with its amalgamations of hardware, software, and wetware, a much more fascinating example than *Verbivore* of technology’s potential threat and possibilities.

**CHAPTER TWO**


3. Brooke-Rose has linked the almost trance-like state of *Out* to her own experience with serious illness in 1962, when she lost a kidney and almost died. “I was very much thinking of death as the meaning of life. And I began to write *Out*, which is a very ‘sick’ novel. I think one can feel that.” See Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “A Conversation with Christine Brooke-Rose,” *Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose*, eds. Ellen G. Friedman and Richard Martin (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1995) 30.

4. In an earlier essay entitled “Dynamic Gradients” (1965), Brooke-Rose describes the way the subjective and objective converge in Sarraute’s writing: “The intensely subjective is treated, not just with ‘ironic detachment’—that critical cliché bestowed on most lady-novelists—but with total scientific objectivity and humility, qualities not found in Virginia Woolf with whom Nathalie Sarraute is so often compared. These half-conscious movements and murderous impulses are viewed like organisms caught and enlarged in an electron microscope.” Christine Brooke-Rose, “Dynamic Gradients,” *The London Magazine* March 1965: 93.

5. In *Christine Brooke-Rose and Contemporary Fiction*, Sarah Birch views the “new epistemology,” or what I am calling the “yoking” together of disparate realms, as a negative example of the “coercive use of metaphor” in *Out* (56). However, she does acknowledge another use of metaphor, which she links to the mind of the central consciousness who produces “creative metaphors which distort, subvert, and ‘mobilize’ the language of authority” (Birch 62–63). But the narratorless narrative is more labile than this parsing into good and bad uses would suggest. The coldness, what I am describing as the “flattening” effect of this yoking resembles the intellectual conceits of the Metaphysical poets. Brooke-Rose herself says that this kind of conceit “resolve[s] the contradictory aspects of emotional experience in relation to the changing validities of time and the physical world” (Christine Brooke-Rose, “The Baroque Imagination of Robbe-Grillet,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 11.4 [1965–66]: 410). In an excellent discussion of the novel, Ursula Heise says, “The peculiar disjunctiveness of perceptions in *Out* does not seem due to illness so much as to a world whose basic functional parameters have changed so radically that conventional reasoning cannot account for them anymore” (229).

6. In “‘Look into the Dark’: On Dystopia and the *Novum*,” Tom Moylan refers to Darko Suvin’s dictum that “a significant SF [science fiction] text must be based on ‘new configurations of reality in both inner and outer space’” (64).

7. The doctor tells the man, “We’re not only able to telescope a dependence that used to take years to build up, we telescope the let-down as well. You’ll see, the wrench will be fairly painless” (141).

8. In my reading of *Disgrace*, I am indebted to two excellent lectures on the novel: Gayatri Spivak’s discussion of the desublimation and counter-focalization in the novel, (UC Irvine, 5/24/02); and Derek Attridge on the new fluidity of human relations in the South Africa of the novel (rev. and published in Attridge, *J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004]).


10. See Birch, 64–69; Canepari-Labib, 71–75 and 185–204; and Brooke-Rose, *Invisible Author*, 17.
11. It is the parsing of parts of the self (as in the case of the orbital “children”) that may account for this uncharacteristic reliance on speech mode and, along with it, the first person pronoun. In an exchange with Brooke-Rose, she balked at the description of her narrative sentence as “first-person,” surprised that she had somehow broken from the “narratorless” sentence she developed in Out: “When I read your description ‘1st person narrative’ I jumped (mentally). For years I have thought, and probably said, that the first three ‘experimental’ books from OUT develop ‘my’ Narrative Sentence (NS), in fact Robbe-Grillet’s in JALOUSIE but he doesn’t develop it further and returns to the 1st person, whereas I have played around with it throughout, with only a few sidesteps, for specific reasons each time (AMAL, XORANDOR, VERBIVORE . . . then back to the NS from REMAKE on, with experiments like NS in changing multiviewpoint.” Brooke-Rose acknowledges the presence of the personal pronoun in Such, but maintains that at the end of the novel, NS reappears and Larry’s ‘I’ vanishes (Brooke-Rose e-mail, 22 July 2004).

12. Brooke-Rose, who aggressively resists the label “Freudian,” read Jung, Freud, and Lacan in Paris. She has admitted reluctantly that for a brief time even before the Paris period, she was treated by a Jungian analyst who told her to record her dreams every morning (see “A Discussion with Christine Brooke-Rose”). Along with the essay “Id is, is id?,” Brooke-Rose’s analysis of James’s The Turn of the Screw in A Rhetoric of the Unreal draws most explicitly on Freud, including, in the latter essay, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious. In this reading, Brooke-Rose mentions the Freud text in detail, along with Jeffrey Mehlman’s fine interpretation in “How to Read Freud on Jokes: The Critic as Schadchen.”

In an e-mail to me about Freud, dated October 11, 2004, she writes that she “must have read Dreams and Jokes since everyone had. But there was no specific or personal F. influence till SUCH, and there it’s always Larry thinking or speaking, not me.”


CHAPTER THREE


2. This is not the place for airing my reservations about Barthes’s basic binary schema, which seems to characterize types of reading rather than to offer a typology of texts. For a helpful discussion of Barthes’s model, see Kaja Silverman, The Subject of Semiotics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

3. See chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of Thru, Brooke-Rose’s most explicit fictional engagement with French theory.

4. In an excellent article on Brooke-Rose’s fiction, Robert Caserio discusses the burdens this kind of free play places on the reader, who has to run to keep up with the hectic and unexpected trajectory of the narrative: “The xorandoric text needs a reader who is critically hyperactive. He who runs may not read any longer,
unless he runs and reads with an unparalleled quickness to catch up with and catch hold of meanings that are rigorous and self-contradictory, determinate and indeterminate, at crucial points” (293). In speaking of the “hectic mobility” of this type of contemporary fiction, Caserio uses Brooke-Rose’s own term, “xorandoric,” which refers to semantic disjunctions and incoherences more than to the kind of syntactic displacements described in Brooke-Rose’s statement above. Between relies on both syntactic errancies and semantic gaps of the sort Barthes describes to create a dizzying dislocation in the reader. See Robert L. Caserio, “Mobility and Masochism: Christine Brooke-Rose and J. G. Ballard,” Novel 21 (Winter–Spring 1988): 292–310.


6. In Brigid Brophy’s In Transit: An Heroi-Cyclic Novel (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1969) Brophy also uses air travel as the quintessential metaphor for twentieth-century culture: “I adopt the international airport idiom for my native. Come, be my world-oyster” (28). The narrator accepts the way the pure products of postmodern jet-age culture collapse the foreign into the familiar: “This airport was the happy ape of all other airports. Its display case cased and displayed the perfumes of Arabia and of Paris, packaged in the style to which they have become accustomed [sic] through the universal Excise of capital letters and full stops in the typography. Every artifact in sight excited me, raised me towards tip-toe. None was everyday. All were exotic. Yet nothing chilled or alienated me, since nothing was unfamiliar. The whole setting belonged to my century” (26). Brophy and Brooke-Rose were friends for many years.

7. In a letter to me, Brooke-Rose specified that this false start consisted of about twenty pages (Letter to author, August 5, 1992).


10. For a good statement of this change in tone and attitude between modernism and postmodernism, see Alan Wilde, Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). For my critique of this approach, see my review of Wilde’s book in Novel (Karen Lawrence, Novel 16 [1983]).

11. See Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture (New York: Schocken Books, 1985) for an antinarrative theory that privileges art that represents the “pleasurable movement” of desire and meaning (105) and Caserio’s critique of Bersani in his excellent discussion of Brooke-Rose in Caserio, “Mobility and Masochism: Christine Brooke-Rose and J. G. Ballard” 295–98.

12. In a critique of Ihab Hassan’s definitional distinctions between modernism and postmodernism, Brooke-Rose objects to the oppositional structure of his paradigm as much as to the overly broad and simplified categories she discovers in much theorizing of the postmodern: “I find both terms peculiarly unimaginative for a criticism that purports to deal with phenomena of which the most striking feature is imagination, and I shall use them only when discussing critics who use them. For one thing, they are purely historical, period words, and in that
sense, traditional” (“Eximplosions” 344). In recent years Brooke-Rose has come to identify her own experimentalism with postmodernism and does make use of the term. Still, her novels, including *Between*, explore the continuity between modernist and postmodernist literature, destroying the neat divisions hypothesized by many theorists. In *Constructing Postmodernism* (which I read after this chapter was written) Brian McHale categorizes *Between* as a modernist novel with a “postmodernist undertow” (215).


15. Brooke-Rose’s novel often echoes Eliot’s poetry of the twenties, such as *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, particularly in its insistent litany of “betweens” (“Between doing and not doing the body floats” [395], or as one character says, “We live between ideas, nicht wahr?” [413]. This cadence of the “between” 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 Eliot and Pound—recurs in *Between*. “The gods have left this land says Siegfried now the boss” (431), the jaded former German soldier and past lover of the translator. Near the end of the novel, the anonymous translator and Bertrand, an aging French suitor who writes love letters to her, discuss Eliot’s poetry. He asks if she has ever read Eliot’s poem “la figlia che piange,” which reminds him of her, and he quotes some of its lines. She has only heard of Eliot: “He wrote something called The Waste Land didn’t he?” (548–49). “Tired of your still point?” Siegfried taunts the translator when she announces her plans to sell her domestic refuge in Wiltshire.

16. See Brooke-Rose’s discussion of Susan Suleiman’s “close reading and imaginative criticism” as opposed to a rigid, more flat-footed “biographical criticism,” against which Brooke-Rose has inveighed many times in print (“Splitlitcrit,” in *Invisible Author* 32–35).

17. I am indebted to Robert Caserio for this notion.

18. See also Blanchot’s exploration of passivity: 14–18.

19. The importance of prepositions in general can be seen in the titles of Brooke-Rose’s other novels as well—*Out* and *Thru*, included with *Between* in the four-novel collection *Omnibus*. For a meditation on the sexuality of grammar, see Shari Benstock, *Textualizing the Feminine: On the Limits of Genre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

20. All sorts of puns on the idea of height circulate in the novel: “I have conducted my higher education by transmitting other people’s ideas,” says Siegfried (426).

21. Even the “myths” of deconstruction are caught in this euphemizing, this gendering. In his essay “Des Tours de Babel,” Derrida tropes the translator as the male in hot pursuit of the virgin translation: “The always intact, the intangible, the untouchable (*unberührbar*) is what fascinates and orients the work of the translator. He wants to touch the untouchable, that which remains of the text when one has
extracted from it the communicable meaning. . . . If one can risk a proposition in appearance so absurd, the text will be even more virgin after the passage of the translator, and the hymen, sign of virginity, more jealous of itself after the other hymen, the contract signed and the marriage consummated” (191–92).

22. For the most thorough description of Brooke-Rose’s development of her “narratorless present tense” narrative sentence (153), her main narrative “constraint” in her novels since Out, see “The Author is Dead: Long Live the Author” in Brooke-Rose, Invisible Author.

23. The “distant brain” in Between is technologically updated in Brooke-Rose’s novel Textermination by the “aerobrain”—both a vehicle of transportation on which characters travel (and thus a “vehicle” of plot) and a computer-like memory containing a host of fictional characters from various literary traditions and periods.

CHAPTER FOUR


5. In “SplitlitCrit,” she comments on “the great innovation of Structuralism,” which signaled a “new attention to narrative structure—new, I mean, in the West” (Invisible Author 24).

6. See de Man, The Resistance to Theory. “Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory is itself this resistance. . . . Yet literary theory is not in danger of going under; it cannot but flourish, and the more it is resisted, the more it flourishes, since the language it speaks is the language of self-resistance” (19–20).

7. See, for example, her discussion of the structure of the imaginary, in “The Turn of the Screw,” Christine Brooke-Rose, A Rhetoric of the Unreal 47.


11. In representing the contents of the girl’s dream, Brooke-Rose joins Lacan in linking the problem of “Who speaks” with the perception that the problem is
related to the operations of the unconscious. “‘I am merely referring obliquely to . . . the right way to reply to the question, ‘Who is speaking?’, when it is the subject of the unconscious that is at issue. For this reply cannot come from that subject if he does not know what he is saying, or even if he is speaking, as the entire experience of analysis has taught us’” (See “The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious” [Lacan, Écrits 299]). The self-reflexivity of the narrative in Thru, however, exceeds any single “key,” including psychoanalysis as a reading practice.

12. See Birch’s fine discussion of Greimas’s paradigm (91–92).


14. Martin Jay notes that in Sartre’s work, as in Bataille’s, “the eye is identified . . . with liquid images of the fetus or womb, which links it to the mother in repellent ways” (281).

15. Glossing this section, Brooke-Rose refers to “the wax tablets or early writing (stone and parchment written horizontally), as well as Freud’s mystic writing pad as discussed by Derrida (1978)” (Invisible Author 76).


17. A number of reviews of the novel confirm the risk involved in the writing strategy.


20. See Brad Buchanan, “‘A Blind Spot in Your Own Youdipeon Discourse’: Christine Brooke-Rose, Oedipus, and the Synecdochic Narrative,” Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies 5.2 (1999): 195–208. Brooke-Rose acknowledges the richness and staying power of the myth of Oedipus that underwrites cultural narratives so durably, and displays no nostalgia for the narrative. Contrast Steven Spielberg’s treatment of the Freudian Oedipal narrative in AI. Although the film is highly imaginative technically and technologically (according to the norms of science fiction), it is surprisingly traditional in envisioning the radical future. The film ends with an Oedipal wish—to sleep in the bed of the mother. For all the technical adventurousness and dark apocalyptic resonance, resolution seems to lie in the body of the mother.


CHAPTER FIVE


2. Mira has an intertextual presence in both *Verbivore* and *Textermination*. Indeed, there is speculation within *Textermination* that Mira is the author of the text, and in *Verbivore* she creates one of the other characters on her computer. This “transfer” between texts might be one playful meaning of the term “Intercom” in Brooke-Rose’s phrase for the grouping of her four novels.


4. “This century seems to us more and more fortuitous despite all our attempts at rational planning, scientific analysis, and system-building (including rhetoric). Never before have the meaning-making means at our disposal (linguistic, economic, political, scientific) appeared so inadequate, not only to cope with the enormity of the problems we continue to create (since every apparent solution creates new problems), but simply to explain the world.” Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal* 6.

5. In *A Rhetoric of the Unreal*, Brooke-Rose comments on what she calls the “gnostic dream of the best of scientific, technological and artistic brainstuff enveloping the earth” in terms that provide a gloss to the neologism “Oblitopia” in *Amalgamemnon*. She compares this “dream” to “Wells’s collective mind or worldwide information service . . . which presupposes an unprecedented harmony of minds: a mad and perhaps naïve fusion of oblivion and utopia one could call oblitopia” (388–89). She calls this fantasy “an elitist dream” (388).


9. In an undated letter commenting on an early version of *Amalgamemnon* entitled “Soon” that Brooke-Rose sent to him, Joseph McElroy shrewdly but gently assesses the tonal successes and weaknesses that result from the constraint of nonconstative verbs. He comments on the “worldweariness” of parts of the novel, which he says is “so much at odds with the bursting appetite that lives in the book’s main voice.” He contrasts this weary tone with those sections where “the future tense becomes a mad, rich sluice or pivot or music that lets us into good possibilities. So I wd say, go easy on the future’s I’ve-seen-it-all resignation and use the ingneuities [sic] and poignance of speculation more.” McElroy’s letter can be found in the Brooke-Rose archive at the Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin.

10. Brooke-Rose also identifies Jean-Jacques Lecercle’s excellent discussion of the omission of constative sentences as a help to her in clarifying her own technique (48). For Lecercle’s essay, see Jean-Jacques Lecercle, “‘Reading Amalgamem-
non,” in Utterly Other Discourse: The Texts of Christine Brooke-Rose 153–69.


12. Xorandor is an example that could qualify as alternative fiction, as is the dystopian novel, Out.


14. In “I draw the line as a rule between one solar system and another”: The Postmodernism(s) of Christine Brooke-Rose,” Brian McHale refers to characters “ontologically enfeebled by their ‘native’ context” [in Amalgamemnon], and makes the intriguing suggestion that their reappearance in later novels of the Intercom Quartet helps them “somehow” acquire “a degree of ontological robustness ‘between’ texts, in the passage from their home text to its sequel” (202).

15. See Michela Canepari-Labib’s detailed discussion of the shifting ontological levels in Amalgamemnon in Word-Worlds 83–94.

CHAPTER SIX

1. In ET, adult receptivity is gendered: the mother is child-like and incompetent, more on the wavelength of her children than the scientific/patriarchal continuum of either her husband or the scientists who invade her home. In Xorandor, the mother’s irritability seems to be a symptom of her marginality and frustration. The twins report, but do not dwell on, her sometimes bizarre public behavior.

2. Brooke-Rose, an inveterate researcher who takes copious notes from scientific source material for some of her novels, has said that in writing Xorandor, she relied on Terrence W. Pratt’s Programming Languages: Design and Implementation, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984). See Pratt 68.


4. Bolter goes on to say that the design of the digital computer “is perfectly logical down to the scale of electrons; it has conquered the disorder of the natural world by the hierarchical principles of symbolic logic” (73–74).


6. In “The Dissolution of Character in the Novel II,” Brooke-Rose herself points to the limitations of the binary logic of the computer, though citing different failings, namely, a reification of the dominant binaries of Western civilization exposed in deconstruction, particularly the persistence of phallocentricism in the multiple semiological systems. She argues that Western society has been locked in such thinking for centuries, and computers, unless creatively used, could merely reify and confirm these coded clichés. She says, “[C]omputer science seems
to root our thought structures—either again (i.e., despite the apparent escape of deconstruction) or even more deeply—in the absolute limitation imposed by logical operations based on binary oppositions, whose positive and negative values, since they are mere electric impulses, are of course completely neutral and unprivileged” (194).


8. Zab, in particular, refers to Plato often, including a Derridean reading of Plato’s logocentric privileging of speech over writing. Her explanation to Jip is Brooke-Rose’s playful citation of Derrida’s “Plato’s Pharmacy” and refers to reading notes she took on Derrida’s 1968 essay, first published in French in *Tel Quel*. She took the notes when working on Pound, but used them later in *Xorandor* and in an allusion to Derrida’s essay in *Thru*: “. . . what begins in banality has to go through the whole signifying chain from idyll to catastrophe until it can be returned to banality, beneath contempt, amusing maybe and harmless, a poison and a pharmakon that immunises. And he is the temporary pharmakos or scapegoat, but only for a time.” Christine Brooke-Rose, *Thru* 711–12.


10. In her essay, “Id is, is id?” published a year after *Xorandor* (and reprinted in *Stories, Theories and Things*), Brooke-Rose speculates on how Freud and Derrida would make use of the technological possibilities of computer memory to “update” Freud’s analogy between the mystical writing pad and psychic memory. In mentioning Derrida’s essay, Brooke-Rose emphasizes the link between death and memory explicit in the French term for computer memory, or Read-Only Memory (ROM), mémoire morte. In the same article, Brooke-Rose refers to Derrida’s description of the machine as “a mechanism without its own energy. The machine is dead, it is death.” Christine Brooke-Rose, “Id is, is id,” *Stories, Theories and Things* 35–36.

11. The impulse to write beyond the ending of the story is one that Brooke-Rose pursues in the “sequel” to *Xorandor*, *Verbivore*, which takes place twenty-three years after the events of *Xorandor*. The sacrifice of Xorandor has not put an end to the nuclear threat, as interference from Xorandor’s offspring wreak havoc on the world economy. Brooke-Rose has admitted her own dissatisfaction with the novel.


**CHAPTER SEVEN**


2. However, as the narrative progresses, we discover the identities of some of its “authors.”
3. See Brian McHale’s discussion of the “ontological effects” of characters appearing in a text and its sequel. “These effects, familiar from realist (e.g., Balzac) and modernist (e.g., Faulkner) as well as postmodernist poetics (e.g., Barth, Pynchon), arise because characters who exist ‘between’ texts, intertextually, seem to approach the ontological status of beings who exist ‘outside’ texts, in the real world.” McHale specifically mentions the transfer of characters, including Mira Enketei, from *Amalgamemnon* to *Verbivore*, which, he says, “has the effect of actualizing them retroactively. It is as if these characters, ontologically so enfeebled by their ‘native’ context [i.e., the lack of “realized” tenses], somehow acquired a degree of ontological robustness ‘between’ texts, in the passage from their home text to its sequel” (202). Brian McHale, “‘I draw the line as a rule between one solar system and another’: The Postmodernism(s) of Christine Brooke-Rose,” *Utterly Other Discourse* 192–213. Brooke-Rose includes a joking allusion to the “non-realized” tenses of *Amalgamemnon* in a piece of dialogue in which Mansall Roberts comments on her speech: “That’s a lot of conditionals, my dear Miss er-Inketytie . . . .” (Textermination 101)

4. One can see this kind of “speculation” as a fictional analogue to the critical conjecture of Virginia Woolf, who ponders what kind of novel Jane Austen would have produced had she written after *Persuasion*: “Her sense of security would have been shaken. Her comedy would have suffered. She would have trusted less (this is already perceptible in *Persuasion*) to dialogue and more to reflection to give us a knowledge of her characters” (231). See “Jane Austen,” in *The Virginia Woolf Reader*, ed. Mitchell A. Leaska 220–32. Into the future, beyond Woolf’s surmise, Brooke-Rose casts Emma, giving her a postmodern afterlife that is manifested in a split sense of identity.


**CHAPTER EIGHT**


5. With the author’s permission, I have reproduced this chart in Figure A (pages 172–173). The chart itself is mentioned in chapter 7 of *Invisible Author* in which Brooke-Rose discusses giving it to her publisher and literary executor “to help possible translators, if any, who could otherwise, especially in Romance languages, bring in an unwanted reflexive (pronominalized) verb, often equivalent
to an English intransitive; or fall into other traps in the Slavic languages, which can do without pronouns altogether except for emphasis.” Brooke-Rose, *Invisible Author: Last Essays* 155.

6. Although Brooke-Rose is a master of creating poetic metaphors for altered states of being and consciousness, this impulse to represent the basic materials of life in such playfully material language seems to infect scientific journalism (and possibly even scientific writing) as well as her novels. Journalistic representations of the startling completion of the map of the human genome in 2001 include a surprising amount of such language, as found in a striking article in *The New York Times* Science section entitled “Genome Shows Evolution Has an Eye for Hyperbole” by Natalie Angier. In the article Angier describes scientists as having gathered “clues to the sticky, stringy, springy, dynamic, garrulous, gorgeous and preposterous molecule of life that resides in nearly every cell of every human being on earth” (D1), (Science Times, Tuesday, February 13, 2001, D1, D5). Eric Lander of the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research describes the parasite LINE (Long Interspersed Element) as “the ultimate selfish element that evolved at the beginning of eukaryotes. . . . It’s been wildly successful. It’s the perfect parasite” (D5). Some kind of pull toward metaphor as well as mimetic exuberance infects the language of science when it is called upon to convey such momentous discoveries in familiar terms.


10. Brooke-Rose’s notes include references to theories of gender differentiation within “a masculine mode of signification.” Brooke-Rose Archive, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Austin, Texas.


**CHAPTER NINE**

1. In a telephone conversation, 27 July 2005.


3. In the chapter “Remaking” in *Invisible Author*, Brooke-Rose discusses her use of this device. See 164–65.

4. Here Brooke-Rose plays on the various geometries of narrative confrontation imagined in structuralist paradigms, a theme developed fictionally in *Between and Thru*. As we have seen, the gendered aspects of these paradigms, involving white knights rescuing damsels from evil dragons, is a continuing theme in Brooke-Rose’s fiction, replayed in *Remake*. As Brooke-Rose has pointed out, there are constraints for women writers in these paradigms, constraints unacknowledged by male theorists and critics like Todorov, Benveniste, and Jakobson.
5. “So I wrote down my life as I remembered it, in a conventional order, and the result was dreadful. The general formula, to exaggerate a little, was “And then . . . I—this, and then . . . I—that.” It was my own life, my own experience, but even I couldn’t reread it. So I put it aside” (55). As Brooke-Rose recounts it, the sudden idea of the constraint against personal pronouns freed her to write her autobiography: “Now this was a real challenge: an autobiography without personal pronouns. Suddenly, I got interested again. I had the constraint I needed” (57).


7. Peter Consenstein, Literary Memory, Consciousness, and the Group Oulipo (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002) 39. Consenstein points out that Jacque Roubaud’s La Boucle is a life-story that employs the constraint of using the present tense to narrate the life (48). La Boucle was published in 1993.


9. In the chapter, “File: Pro-nouns” in Remake, which includes the diary entry on her mother’s death, the old lady describes her mother’s convent surroundings as “Serenity everywhere. But she is isolated in her god-Routine” (28).

10. Paraphrase replaces quotation in this last text because, in a further case of life and art intertwining, Brooke-Rose, the author, like the invalid, can no longer ascend the stairs of her own home. Her access to her library and her computer is therefore limited to the assistance of the few people she hires to assist her.

11. Brooke-Rose described the way the book records a “clinging to the world, a world completely filtered by one’s own memory.” It captures the way that old people “see the body bits going” (telephone conversation with author, July 29, 2005). One thinks back to “The Foot.”


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