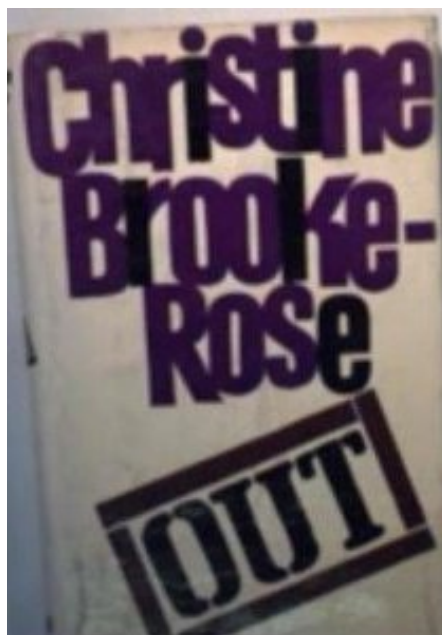




Out

Christine Brooke-Rose

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Out Details

Date : Published 1964 by Michael Joseph Ltd

ISBN :

Author : Christine Brooke-Rose

Format : Hardcover 196 pages

Genre :



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From Reader Review Out for online ebook

Jonas says

Very confusing but interesting and beautiful in parts.

Nick says

Mesmerizing, trance-like prose. The absolute best CB-R has written thus far (through 1964).

Stellar stuff indeed.

Stephen P says

Survival. Inward or outward. A life. Christine Brooke-Rose's novel survives by its refusal to accept the limits of categorization, by sifting through time, through subject matter, events. This elderly colorless man is tossed by waves of time and by his sensitivity and consciousness of the interplay of his inward life and the external world.

Following some unnamed cataclysm the battle of survival has been won by people of color. The winning strategy is outward action and productivity, to play to not lose rather than playing to win. Our protagonist, when asked at the Labor Commission, what he did Before: he answers that he was a humanist, a chemist, a physicist, a philosopher, a teacher, a... At a time when jobs are so scarce none of these translate into anything resembling importance or usefulness. The life of reflection, abstract thought has lost value in a world where its inhabitants focus is to be able to continue life. It proves more difficult for the colorless population due to an unnamed malady they are dying from, a process that comes in an acute form or one that drags out painfully. There is an impression or possibly a fear by people of color that this could be contagious. This along with their previous lives of thought and reflection, puts the colorless on the bottom of the social and economic rung. The world has flipped. The colorless folks have now been wrapped in the sticky grime of prejudiced labels, i.e.; "Your kind are all lazy."

The perfect pitched wonder of this work is that it is told through a colorless elderly man who is probably of an age where he was caught in the middle of the Displacement. He retains the wonder of the world, its awe and beauty, its poetic miracles, the deepened seeds of reflection. However, existence cares little for these waverings. What is cared for is adaption. One must adapt to what has, is, changing. But to give up the life of the mind and how it sprays the outer world with hues of color and meaning. He is a hero? An anti-hero?

It depends, doesn't it, on the context. The context of, within the world of this novel or our present world? Is adaptation even possible for him or even wanted? Possibly, the world of imagination is sufficient.

Does this have anything to do with CB-R's writing style here? Un-coffined and set free, the lid blown open, what has risen from the text or has styled the text, I am only guessing has to do with this quiet battle. While making it a difficult read, at times plodding, there is much repetition, and much on our hero's part of deferring into lengthy scientific explanations-though if read word for word there is still a literary quality because I believe CB-R is incapable of writing anything untouched by her writerly skills.

I am writing this the next morning after finishing reading early last night. My initial impressions. My hopes of trying to understand this work through the act of writing. I know you've been there, so please take this for what it is, not something fraught with confusion but something raw. My hope is to return to edit and fill in. This work deserves a fullness of thought.

Nate D says

In an uncertain future, a disembodied viewpoint, denied original calling, self-worth, or even the specificity of a pronoun -- really denied any verification of identity or existence besides dim effects on others and bits of conversation produced or imagined -- drifts through home and stymied life in a cataclysm-transfigured world, one that might now lack a northern hemisphere as best I can tell. As the view framed by window ledge and eyelid (to the left or right of the nose) is elaborated and repeated in increasing detail, I have to wonder when the banana counting might begin.

But no, Brooke-Rose may be reconfiguring Robbe-Grillet here (and was certainly nouvelle-roman-influenced), but where as much of R-G's prime content (and admittedly, pleasure) occurs in his interrogation of his own form and methodology, B-R has much broader socio-political and narrative goals here. The dislocated center of *Out* is the sensation of dissolving into inconsequence once pushed to the outside of society. The context here is a chain of resettlement and retraining and marginalization that leaves the protagonist melting into the chairs of the unemployment office or microscopically dissecting the interior of his home, focusing on the mating behaviors of flies and the properties of a rectangle of refracted light on the kitchen table (and he fantasizes the table sublimating into dissociated molecules, does he identify?). This unending slow-sinking limbo, here caused by world upheaval, finds clear echo in far less drastic marginalization: the experiences of new immigrants pushed to the fringe or recent college-grads who can't get work in their fields in the economic downturn (here, unemployment is proactively, if dubiously, treated with pills). These are conditions all too ideal for the loss of personhood.

This is novel filled with discoveries and reveals, things hidden that emerge obliquely through repetitions, or premonitions of scenes in schizoid broken chronology that can only later make sense. Cryptic epigrams take on full (and aching) pathos only with time ("History exists only in the privacy of concupiscence"). Sentence by echoing and minutely evolving sentence, recombined and fragmented along with their ostensible content, these are words that reward attention, whose pleasure can be in themselves. But this need not be read through a microscope (or periscope, or endoscope). Another review debated whether this was more about story or words, whereas I would say both are equally, densely, concept-driven. There is an incomparable lavishness of playful-yet-darkly-perceptive intelligence racing under and over this at every level, binding it together while continually tossing out ideas. And thrillingly, the playful complexity of *Out* confirms the surprising genre-mashing readability of Xorandor to be the rule and not the exception within Brooke-Rose's experimentation. I must have more of this. Fortunately I read it in the Omnibus edition.

MJ Nicholls says

Rather than spluttering and mumbling in a futile attempt to explain precisely what this novel is "about" (harhar!), here's Susan Birch from *Christine Brooke-Rose and Contemporary Fiction*:

"*Out* takes place at an unspecified time several decades after the unexplained but presumably cataclysmic event known as the 'displacement.' The anonymous, pronoun-less protagonist is a 'colourless' man who

divides his time between the shack where he lives with his wife and the Labour Exchange where he goes in search of employment. During the course of the novel we witness the progressive worsening of his psychological and physical condition. He works for a time as a gardener on the estate of the rich Mrs Mgulu, and later as a construction worker in her house. But because of his deteriorating health, he is unable to keep any of these jobs long, and throughout much of the novel he is confined to his shack where his wife cares for him.” (p54)

“If we consider *Out* with respect to the conception of metaphor [...], the desperate sputtering of the main character can be seen as active or ‘verbal’ in their metaphoric function: his discourse mobilizes and metaphorizes all others and has only tenuous links with any reality outside its field of operation. As he falls further and further ‘out’ of society these links become increasingly strained. Perception gradually yields territory to fantasy and hallucination as the protagonist’s faculty for reality-testing breaks down and doubt increases. In his weakened state he is unable to control his own metaphors, to keep the various terminologies he deploys distinct. They act on him and impair his ability to distinguish between thought and perception, between concepts and objects.” (p59)

“In psychological terms, this conforms to the classical description of schizophrenia. In all three respects—philosophical, narrative, psychological—the novel highlights the failure of traditional conventions and modes of thought by contrasting them with a grotesque parody of the social and discursive consequences of modern scientific theory. This must not be read, however, as a nostalgia plea for a return to the age of classical epistemology. It is a warning that any science which claims to be authoritative has the potential for being used as a discourse of domination.” (p62)

Whitaker says

A simplistic view of *Out* would be to reduce it to a meditation on the oppressive gaze, and the theme of the observer and observed repeats over and over in the novel:

A rectangle of light ripples on the wooden floor. The wrinkled wood inside the rectangle seems to be flowing into the wrinkled wood outside it, which looks darker. If the source of rippling light were not known to be an oblique ray of winter sun filtering through the top segment of the slightly swaying beads over the doorway, the wrinkled wood might be thought alive, as alive, at any rate, as the network of minute lines on the back of the wrist. But the minute lines on the back of the wrist do not flow as the wrinkled wood seems to flow. A microscope might perhaps reveal which is the more alive of the two.

A simplistic view of *Out* would be to reduce it to a meditation on oppression, and the themes of the oppressor and oppressed, observer and observed, repeat over and over in the novel:

Mrs Mgulu sits graciously at her dressing-table, brushing her thick black hair into sleekness and she takes an interest. Mrs Mgulu sits graciously at her dressing table, having her thick long black hair brushed into sleekness and she takes an interest. She takes an interest in the crackling electricity of her hair which is being brushed into sleekness by a pert Bahuko maid, whose profile is reversed in the mirror. Mrs Mgulu does not choose to be touched by sickly Colourless hands. In the tall gilt-frame mirror the smooth Asswati face smiles, mostly at the front of the head framed by the long black hair, with self-love in the round black eyes and in the thick half-open lips, but occasionally with graciousness at the reflection of the white woman changing the sheets on the bed behind the head framed by the long black hair. The white woman can be seen in the mirror beyond the pert profile and beyond the smooth Asswati face, whose smiling black eyes shift a little to the right, with graciousness, and then a little to the left, with self-love. A

psychoscope might perhaps reveal the expression to be one of pleasure in beauty, rather than self-love. The scene might occur, for that matter, in quite a different form. The personal maid, for example, could be Colourless after all.

Images repeat, words and phrases repeat. How we know what we know, how we interpose what we know on reality, how what we know blinds us to seeing repeat over and over in the novel. What plot there is may be outlined simply as that of an unemployed ill Colourless man who seeks employment as a gardener in the house of Mrs Mgulu, has an affair, and eventually loses his job. To say that the plot is irrelevant to the novel would be wrong as its narrative provides a propulsive rhythm that pushes the reader along. To say that the plot is relevant to the novel would be wrong as it interweaves slightly through the repetitive phrases and images whose rhythms pulse and flow through the novel pushing the reader along.

To read Christine Brooke-Rose, you have to give up everything you expect from a novel. To read Christine Brooke-Rose is to see fulfilled everything you expect from a novel.

Geoffrey says

Abstruse and interesting. I dig it, though clearly it won't be to all tastes. I'll probably read more Brooke-Rose one of these days.
