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POSTMODERNISM IN THE FICTION OF RICHARD BRAUTIGAN

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Postmodernism in the Fiction
of Richard Brautigan

Suzanne Mitchell Sweatt

A dissertation presented to the
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Postmodernism in the Fiction
of Richard Brautigan

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Abstract

Postmodernism in the Fiction of Richard Brautigan

by Suzanne Mitchell Sweatt

During his lifetime, Richard Brautigan published ten novels and one collection of short stories. The themes and techniques of these innovative works of fiction contribute to that division of contemporary literature known as postmodernism.

This study identifies postmodernist elements in Brautigan's fiction, establishes Brautigan as an early initiator of postmodernism, and evaluates his place in contemporary literature. Recognizing the growth of technology, a change in the perception of reality, and the difficulties in establishing individuality in this fragmented world, Brautigan presents an anti-hero who survives by transforming reality, by enduring, or by forming a relationship with another person.

The first chapter, drawing from the contemporary criticism of John Barth, Leslie Fiedler, Jerome Klinkowitz, David Lodge, and others, characterizes postmodernism. Features of

postmodernism include flat characterization, lack of plot development, lack of epiphany, multiple endings, typographical play, and, frequently, the appearance of artlessness.

Chapter II discusses Brautigan's fiction of the 1960s: A Confederate General from Big Sur, Trout Fishing in America, In Watermelon Sugar, The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966, and Revenge of the Lawn: Stories 1962-1970. These novels established Brautigan's reputation as an innovative author.

The five novels that Brautigan published in the 1970s are the subject of Chapter III: The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western, Willard and His Bowling Trophies: A Perverse Mystery, Sombrero Fallout: A Japanese Novel, Dreaming of Babylon: A Private Eye Novel 1942, and The Tokyo-Montana Express. Brautigan's further experimentation with the novel form is evident in these works.

Brautigan's final novel, published in 1982, So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away, blends elements of the traditional novel and the postmodernist novel to produce an important work. The study concludes that an understanding of Brautigan's themes and techniques can be best accomplished by knowing the totality of his fiction and the tenets of postmodernism.

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Foreword

With its small town atmosphere, lush landscape, and scattered beach houses, Bolinas, California, on the ocean side of San Francisco, seems the perfect author's hideaway. But in October 1984, one author's cottage was a grisly scene as two friends found the decaying body of Richard Brautigan, an apparent suicide. News reports quickly dredged up the old labels, "counterculture figure of the '60s," "gentle hippie," and "spokesman for the young," as they eulogized the "humorist" author. However, the old labels fail to adequately appraise Brautigan's significant contribution to postmodernism, a subdivision of contemporary literature characterized by innovation and timely themes.

The death of Brautigan will, no doubt, prompt numerous reappraisals of his work. This study should be among the first to show that Brautigan's literary contribution is measured not only by his works but also by his contribution to current literary thought, both of which establish him as an important figure in contemporary literature.

Introduction

"A cult grows around Richard Brautigan" is the lead to a 1970 Life magazine article titled "Gentle Poet of the Young." The combination article-interview by John Stickney pictures Brautigan in three photographs: stooping "by a rain-swollen California stream," sitting in front of "a communal free school" that takes its name from his most famous novel, and walking "through his favorite area of San Francisco, North Beach" with his ten-year-old daughter.¹ At the time of the publication of this article, Brautigan had published three novels. Chronicling Brautigan's rise from obscurity as an underground writer to published author, Stickney asks the usual question in his article: "Has success spoiled the author?" At thirty-five years of age, the author wears a youthful hair style, parted on the right, a modified pageboy, in length just about even with the jawbone; wire-rimmed glasses; a bushy mustache; and a pensive look. He is casually dressed in jeans.

Eleven years later, in 1981, People Weekly featured an article by Brautigan about one of his peccadilloes: he does not drive an automobile. The three-page article has

¹ John Stickney, "Gentle Poet of the Young," Life, 14 August 1970, pp. 49, 51, 54.

four photographs of Brautigan, and it includes the phraseology much applied to Brautigan: "celebrations of gentleness" and "a cult figure of the late '60s." Eleven years and six novels after the Life article, Brautigan appears again in his jeans. But gone is the youthful hair style of the hippies. The hair is darker, thinner, and shorter. The most striking change is evident in his eyes. At forty-six years of age, Brautigan displays the puffiness of middle age. His physique shows the same flaccid quality. The child-daughter from the Life article is now "a grown daughter who is an aspiring actress in New York."² So instead of walking through San Francisco with his daughter, Brautigan, now only visiting San Francisco from Montana, is riding in a ricksha in keeping with the theme of the article. Another photograph shows Brautigan in a restaurant during a light moment with "San Francisco literati" and the owner of the cafe. The last photograph shows Brautigan seated on railroad tracks, wearing the fashions of the early 1980s--down jacket, cowboy boots, the omnipresent jeans. He holds a backpack (the badge of California collegiates as well as outdoorsmen).

Somewhere in the time-chasm marked by the publication of the article in Life, 1970, and the publication of the

² Richard Brautigan, "Coping: A Happy but Footsore Writer Celebrates his Driver's Block," People Weekly, 8 June 1981, p. 113.

article in People Weekly, 1981, lies the majority of Brautigan's writing career. While marking over a decade of popularity, the two articles considered together show more than physical changes in hair styles, clothing fads, human relationships, and the inevitable aging process. The two articles are the key to understanding an unorthodox personality and a gifted member of the "literati." Interestingly, the two articles are the longest biographical sketches appearing anywhere, both occurring after publication of books. The first article is a barometer of the success of Trout Fishing in America; the second seems media hype to promote The Tokyo-Montana Express, then his latest novel.

Brautigan's writing career spans more than two decades and includes poetry and short stories as well as novels. The eleven works of fiction, ten novels and one volume of short stories, loosely organize themselves into two major periods. Revenge of the Lawn, the volume of short stories, considered as the fifth volume, rounds off the first group. Brautigan published that work and The Abortion in 1971; he did not publish another novel for three years. The first four novels in the second group follow at the rate of one a year, indicating a significant break after Revenge of the Lawn. Additionally, these same four novels carry subtitles, a slight distinguishing characteristic introduced in the titles of the last two works of the earlier group. The subtitles of the four novels published between 1974

and 1977 clearly indicate an attempt at a type, a combination of types, or a parody of a type, according to Brautigan: "A Gothic Western," "A Perverse Mystery," "A Japanese Novel," "A Private Eye Novel 1942." Rather than rounding off a second major block of writing, the fifth work in this group, also published after a three-year gap, appears to point in yet another direction. A subtle indication may lie in the fact that, after six novels with subtitles, Brautigan drops the identifying phrase from the cover in his last work to date.

Brautigan's fiction in chronological order is as follows:

- 1964 A Confederate General from Big Sur is the story of Lee Mellon and Jesse, the narrator, who retreat to Big Sur from San Francisco. The plot involves further complications from women, thousands of frogs, and no money. Set in the 1960s, the novel is only incidentally related to the Civil War.
- 1967 Trout Fishing in America is Brautigan's best-known book. Called "a novel" by Brautigan, the book consists of structured, interwoven chapters that can also be excerpted. In seeking the perfect trout stream, the narrator reveals much about a mostly unpleasant America.
- 1968 In Watermelon Sugar, based in utopian fantasy, explores a world created from the ephemeral substance, watermelon sugar.
- 1971 The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966 is "a novel about the romantic possibilities of a public library in California," according to the front cover. However, it is a strange library that only takes in books and that has only one romance that is quickly complicated by an unwanted pregnancy, introducing to the lovers the problem of coping with the real world.

- 1971 Revenge of the Lawn: Stories 1962-1970 is Brautigan's only collection of short stories. The title story, as with many others, is a childhood reminiscence about a bootlegging grandmother, drunk ducks, and a vengeful lawn that wreaks its wrath on the grandmother's live-in boyfriend.
- 1974 The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western takes Greer and Cameron, two hit men, to Oregon to the monster-inhabited mansion of the Misses Hawkline. After much procrastination, they rid the mansion of the chemical monster, the result of the experiments of the father. This act restores Professor Hawkline and the butler to life, but it destroys the mansion. A final chapter gives a none-too-happy ending to the lives of the major characters.
- 1975 Willard and His Bowling Trophies: A Perverse Mystery follows three sets of people: the Logan brothers who are frantically searching for the stolen bowling trophies, Bob and Constance whose love life has been complicated by a venereal disease, and John and Patricia, their neighbors, who have the bowling trophies. Everyone does not live happily ever after.
- 1976 Sombrero Fallout: A Japanese Novel has two story lines united by their relationship to a writer, "an American humorist." In his wastebasket, the discarded remnants of a story continue a plot line that began when the sombrero fell from the sky. Meanwhile, the neurotic humorist adjusts to his rejection by his Japanese girlfriend.
- 1977 Dreaming of Babylon: A Private Eye Novel 1942 tracks the adventures of C. Card, an ineffectual private detective, who oscillates between his failures in the real world and his world of Babylon. When Card is employed to steal a body that others are trying to steal, the action begins.
- 1980 The Tokyo-Montana Express moves from reminiscences of Japan to reminiscences of Montana. The author calls the book "brief stations" of the Tokyo-Montana Express. Its episodic chapters echo Trout Fishing in America more than any other of Brautigan's works.
- 1982 So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away is Brautigan's most recent work, published after the completion of most of this study; as a first-person narration recalling a childhood tragedy and an intermingled surrealist story, the novel continues themes and techniques discussed here.

Richard Brautigan's fiction is at the forefront of postmodernist American literature. Primarily a novelist, but also a poet and a writer of short stories, now published by Dell Publishing Company, Brautigan was first published by the Four Seasons Foundation, a little press, before his discovery by the prestigious New York publisher, Simon and Schuster. His writing is widely available abroad in English, but his works have also been translated into several languages. Reviews of his work have appeared in periodicals ranging from Playboy and Mademoiselle to The New York Times Book Review, Spectator, and Saturday Review. Such academic journals as Modern Fiction Studies, Chicago Review, and Critique have printed numerous articles on Brautigan's writing. So have such popular, glossy publications as Life and People Weekly devoted feature articles to Brautigan. All of this suggests a wide-ranging audience for Brautigan, even though it is most often characterized as youthful.

Brautigan is a widely published, frequently translated author of international repute. His literary contribution is measured not only by his works but also by his contribution to current literary thought, both of which make him a major literary figure in the field of contemporary literature.

To appreciate Brautigan, perhaps even to understand him, requires knowledge of postmodernist critical thought, historical perspective, and Brautigan's personal philosophy,

as these are gleaned from his works. Four areas of study help show his work as an early initiator of postmodernist literature: literary criticism of the past twenty years, literary transitions from the Beat generation to postmodernist literature, characteristics of postmodernist fiction, and Brautigan's unique style that marks a divergence from the style of the traditional novel and influences further development of the form.

Chapter I

Literary Postmodernism

About the time Richard Brautigan was establishing an underground reputation and a following among undergraduate students with A Confederate General from Big Sur (1964), Trout Fishing in America (1967), and In Watermelon Sugar (1968), John Barth and Leslie Fiedler published essays that come more and more to seem monumental in their analyses of and predictions about contemporary fiction. The impact of these two essays is felt in all postmodernist critical thought.

John Barth's "The Literature of Exhaustion" was published in 1967 in The Atlantic Monthly, and Leslie Fiedler's "Cross the Border, Close the Gap" was published in Playboy late in 1969. Both essays have been frequently anthologized, and any discussion of trends in literature of the last twenty years or so begins with these two essays. Both Barth and Fiedler discuss "the failing novel form" and are the most frequently cited Jeremiahs of the passing of the traditional novel.

Barth's essay begins as a critical review of Labyrinths by Jorge Luis Borges, the popular Argentine author of international repute; in it, Barth reasserts his belief in the

Aristotelian definition of artist-author that is an elitist view: elitist because it speaks in superlatives. In reiterating that definition, Barth says the artist is "the Aristotelian conscious agent who achieves with technique and cunning the artistic effect; in other words, one endowed with uncommon talent, who has moreover developed and disciplined that endowment with virtuosity."¹ Barth expresses a personal preference for a kind of writing that, he says, only a few are capable of. That the possibilities of the traditional novel form are exhausted does not, however, obliterate the novel form. These exhausted possibilities, Barth says, are "by no means necessarily a cause for despair."² The modern novel as a form manipulated by talent shows new, but limited, possibilities. The difficulty, Barth contends, is that the reading and writing public, in fact, eschews elitism and embraces the aesthetic of the Philistines.

A careful reading of Barth's often-quoted essay gives more than its catch-phrase title. While he may appear to accept the death of the traditional novel form, Barth does not predict the destruction of this form but rather foresees a new novel form, rising phoenix-like from its ashes.

¹ John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," The Atlantic Monthly, August 1967, p. 30.

² Barth, p. 29.

The old is not useless or even rejected; instead, it serves as a basis for new development. Barth advocates a modern approach.

Twelve years later, in a 1979 interview published in Contemporary Literature, Barth discusses the spirit of the time in which the first essay was written, what he was trying to say, and what he now sees the present and future states of the art to be. The earlier essay was set, he says, in a period with "plenty of apocalypse floating around."³ Moreover, Barth points out that although the world obviously did not end, college faculties and students were inundated with the controversies surrounding American intervention in Viet Nam, the intellectual pronouncements of Marshall McLuhan predicting the end of print, and, by implication, "everything else," a general, impending apocalypse. Barth stresses that this was the spirit in which his essay was written and that he was speaking to his own feelings and exploring ideas that writers have further developed since the 1967 publication of his essay.

Rather than predicting the demise of the novel ("My own experiments with the oral and epistolary traditions should indicate that I consider the novel far from dead"⁴), Barth

³ Charlie Reilly, "An Interview with John Barth," Contemporary Literature, Winter 1981, p. 6.

⁴ Reilly, p. 6.

in 1979 said that in 1967 he was predicting a birth of post-modern fiction, but in both statements, he struggles for the term to characterize this period. Barth states, as have others, that "modern" plus "fiction" is not a useful term any more. Chronologically and artistically surveying the modern period, Barth differentiates three waves. In the first, he places Joyce, Proust, and Kafka; but he terms them, as has become common, literary aristocrats, writing difficult "stuff"--not immediately successful or delightful. Borges, Nabokov, Beckett, and others comprise the second wave; a transitional group, apprenticed to the older, these authors have pointed new direction to the third wave that Barth says consists of "writers my age and younger." Barth envisions his work, and the works of others like him, as providing a still further transition from the writings of older modernists to those he designates for lack of a better term as the "truly modern" or "recent modern." This last group Barth divides into three distinct subgroups: those (French structuralists particularly) who continue the modernists' programs, those true antimodernists who advocate a return to the nineteenth-century traditions, and those later modernists who rise above all the others, the group among whom Barth hopes to be included. By pondering on whether or not a literature can be written that can bridge the gap between popular art and the art of these modern literary aristocrats, Barth sounds in harmony with predictions Leslie

Fiedler had made in 1969. In 1979 Barth hopes that post-modernism ("or whatever you wish to call it") can "transcend the quarrel between the cultural aristocrats and the pop novelists. You might even say, the quarrel between irrealism and realism."⁵

These 1979 comments duplicate many of the ideas in Fiedler's 1969 essay. In retrospect, Fiedler appears to be the seer making predictions, and Barth appears to be a historian reiterating Fiedler's thoughts. While Barth's concern is with the writer, Fiedler voices the need for a new criticism, a criticism by critics who do not take themselves so seriously; this need has been evident, he says, since the age of Eliot. The time, Fiedler says, prompts the need for a new criticism; he characterizes the time as "apocalyptic, anti-national, blatantly romantic and sentimental; an age dedicated to joyous misology and prophetic irresponsibility; one distrustful of self-protective irony and too-great self-awareness."⁶ Indeed, the events of the 1960s produced a social fissure and created this very aura that Fiedler describes.

Fiedler describes a "truly new novel" that is "anti-art as well as anti-serious"; in doing so, he establishes the

⁵ Reilly, p. 7.

⁶ Leslie A. Fiedler, "Cross the Border, Close the Gap," Playboy, December 1969, p. 230.

basic characteristics of postmodernist fiction. The additional characteristics of the new style that Fiedler conjectures include a quest for myths (even contemporary myth), preference for sentimentality over irony, dedication to the primitive. The postmodernist concern for the naive shares similarities with the beginnings of romanticism, but while some nostalgia exists in postmodernism, realism still predominates.

Fiedler suggests that the new writer should choose a genre least associated with the "exploitation of mass-media." Consequently, in 1969, Fiedler saw the Western, science fiction, and pornography as the fields open to the new writer.⁷ He stated that these are the genres that have not yet been exploited and that have potential for modern myth-making. Interestingly enough, Brautigan writes in all of these categories; the other or already-exploited categories he frequently parodies or burlesques. Again, in retrospect, Fiedler's essay enumerating needs and specifying forms seems Brautigan's writing career neatly packaged--almost his personal fortune with his career a rising star. Perhaps the analogy is better read as a road map with Brautigan carefully studying the signs along the way. Nevertheless, beginning in 1971 with "An Historical Romance" as a subtitle, Brautigan wrote "A Gothic Western,"

⁷ Fiedler, p. 256.

"A Perverse Mystery," "A Japanese Novel," and "A Private Eye Novel 1942." Brautigan published these five novels within six years, almost as though according to Fiedler's pattern. Each is either a new type or a parody of an old type or a combination of the two.

If in 1969, as Fiedler says, the world was in the "death throes of literary modernism and the birth pangs of postmodernism,"⁸ the critics a decade later witness to and write of subtle yet radical changes. While a decade is but a brief moment in the lengthy period of literary history, the decade of the 1960s is receiving much attention from writers other than Barth and Fiedler. Chief among them is Jerome Klinkowitz. Klinkowitz states that ten years in history, especially recent history, are not very long, but some decades, like the sixties, do deserve the mini-epochal status that popular American culture tends to award some decades as contrasted with what scholars previously reserved for centuries. Distinguishing the sixties were politics, literature, and the media, for they all influenced cultural change.⁹

To Fiedler, this change in literature was postmodernism, a movement, he said, which serves to close several

⁸ Fiedler, p. 151.

⁹ Jerome Klinkowitz, The American 1960s: Imaginative Acts in a Decade of Change (Ames: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1980), p. iv.

gaps--the gap between belles-lettres and pop art, the gap between critic and audience, and the gap between the professional and amateur in art. Thus, the widest difference between Barth and Fiedler is in the concept of the new artist. To Barth, the artist can be only the truly talented author sharpening an already fine skill; to Fiedler, every man is an artist. Brautigan encompasses the best of both, a writer with great talent in language, perhaps not understood by everyone, but offering at least surface entertainment to those who fail to understand.

Harkening to his classical grounding, Fiedler mentions the avowed goals of literature--dream, vision, ekstasis, but, he says, the instruction and delight of the traditional author are no longer enough in the world of technology. Fiedler says "wonder and fantasy that deliver the mind from the body, the body from the mind, must be naturalized to a world of machines." Therefore, classical literary motives must be modernized. His powerful conclusion cites the advantage of closing the gap: "literature becomes again prophetic and universal."¹⁰ Then literature is permanent, and as much as things change, they remain the same.

While Barth and Fiedler close the critical door on the traditional, they and other postmodernist critics open the door for new works that differ sharply from novels ensconced in the hall of fame, those mimetic novels of the nineteenth

¹⁰ Fiedler, p. 258.

century by authors such as Melville, Twain, and James and those of the twentieth century by Faulkner, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald. The accepted conventions of romance, realism, and naturalism that brought literature from the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century have given way to the possibility of an abrupt change by practitioners of innovative techniques. Recognized postmodernist innovators include Barth, Barthelme, Heller, Coover, Vonnegut, and, of course, Brautigan.

Understanding this pervasive atmosphere of change can only aid critical appreciation of a writer like Brautigan, who almost ignores characterization and character development and plays occasional havoc with plot, to mention three of his many radical departures from Aristotelian fundamentals, departures that would not have been tolerated by the New Critics.

Several writers, besides Barth and Fiedler, illustrate the transition from Beat to postmodernist. Laying the groundwork for this new criticism, critics such as Susan Sontag and Norman Podhoretz are especially noteworthy. They suggest new directions in contemporary literature and therefore aid preparation for Brautigan's innovations in fiction. Sontag, both novelist and critic, is associated with the rise of Camp. Podhoretz is coupled with the popularity of the journalistic novel. Both Sontag and Podhoretz concern themselves with a predicted direction for the novel.

Sontag has established a critical reputation associated primarily with the aesthetic of silence and the observation that authors should no longer concern themselves with the integration of theme and form. By concentrating only on form, Camp results. Podhoretz's reputation rose with the popularity of the journalistic or nonfiction novel of such writers as Truman Capote and Norman Mailer. The popularity of Capote's In Cold Blood, Mailer's Armies of the Night, and, most recently, Joseph Wambaugh's Lines and Shadows indicates that a kind of journalistic reality is more important in the lives of the reading public than is fiction. These writers capitalized on "the truth is stranger than fiction" adage and on an innate curiosity of the public. Neither Camp nor the journalistic novel has established itself to the exclusion of others as the new or sole literary genre, but they both represent recent attempts at innovation.

Jerome Klinkowitz, citing such fictional developments and others in Literary Disruptions, his critical study of the seventies, considers the pronouncements of Barth and Fiedler and dispels fears of a dead literary form by the very title of his opening chapter: "Prologue: The Death of the Death of the Novel." He acknowledges changes in literary styles, especially during the late 1960s when Brautigan's reputation as a cult hero for the young was well-entrenched, calls Barth's theory of the exhaustion of

traditional narrative form "valid," and cites Brautigan as among those who contribute to a new aesthetic for the novel: not just the reporting of the world, but the imaginative transformation of it.¹¹ Klinkowitz concludes that contemporary fiction has never been healthier. His final comments point optimistically to fiction's possibilities in the hands of those who revitalize the form through innovation, which he calls a "precursor in fact of fiction's greatest renaissance."¹² Klinkowitz says that the issue is not one of the death of the form, but a concern with the change in the dictates of form.

The readiness for innovation and the beginning of the process are difficult to trace; but, during the sixties and seventies, there were literary changes which, however subtle, parallel historical changes. The Beat generation, the San Francisco renaissance, the hippies, and the contemporary scene are Brautigan's background and influences. The Beats became spokesmen for a youthful generation experiencing a lack of joy and a lack of purpose in society. While the Beat generation probably produced more promising writers than significant works, audiences found great power in Allen Ginsberg's readings of Howl, and readers sensed freedom in a life style and in literary techniques in Jack Kerouac's On

¹¹ Jerome Klinkowitz, Literary Disruptions: The Making of a Post-Contemporary American Fiction (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1975), p. 32.

¹² Klinkowitz, Literary Disruptions, p. 32.

the Road. This generation reacted by withdrawing from this society ("dropping out") and by protesting against it.

Bruce Cook, in The Beat Generation, shows that both the academic New Critics and the intellectual Partisan Review writers were hostile toward the populist literature of the Beat generation. Nevertheless, for the Beats, the star of popularity was rising, and this rejection of the Beats by the already established critics may have sped the decline of the popularity of the critical theories of both groups. Cook credits the generation beginning with Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Gregory Corso with surviving, prevailing, and accelerating the pace of things, "and if Beats meant anything to complacent, conformist Eisenhower America, it was change."¹³ But if the Beats survived, according to Cook, it was not because of critical scrutiny, but in spite of it. The chapter titled "Somebody's Niggers" emphatically states that the Beats were the whipping boys of the critics.

Published in 1971, Cook's study traces the influences of writers on three generations of contemporary authors: the Beats (1950s), the hippies (1960s), and the San Francisco renaissance (late 1960s and continuing). San Francisco, as Cook observes, continues to be a gathering place for intellectuals. Looking beyond the literature of these

¹³ Bruce Cook, The Beat Generation (New York: Scribner's, 1971), p. 4.

three decades, Cook interviews some of the younger writers, among them Brautigan, who at twenty-three had likewise moved to San Francisco, just in time for the passing of the Beat generation and the beginning of the hippies. Ironically, the brief interview is one of the few recorded with Brautigan in a book of criticism, and in it he denies moving to San Francisco to be part of a movement. His purpose, he said, was to know people, but, in his opinion, the Beat thing was quiet.¹⁴ The fact remains, however, that he went to San Francisco at a time when there was much literary activity there.

Serious consideration of Brautigan can occur only against the background of changing critical tenets such as have been outlined by Fiedler, Barth, Klinkowitz, and Cook. Contemporary novelists are conscious heirs of the absurd, the existential, and their world view, and they have produced work that has promoted a new literary term: postmodernism.

An understanding of the term "postmodernism" is necessary to an understanding of Brautigan's fiction in its context. The task is complicated because there are varying interpretations of the term. But some common ground of understanding for reader and critic is a necessity. Holman's A Handbook to Literature, a standard

¹⁴ Cook, p. 207.

student reference work, introduced the term in its 1980 edition:

A term applied to much contemporary writing, particularly with reference to the use of experimental forms. The fundamental philosophical assumptions of modernism, its tendency toward historical discontinuity, alienation, asocial individualism, and existentialism continue to permeate contemporary writing, perhaps in a heightened sense. But the tendencies of the modernist to construct intricate forms, to interweave symbols elaborately, to create works of art that, however much they oppose the established order, create within themselves an ordered universe, have given way since the 1960's to a denial of order, to the presentation of highly fragmented universes in the created world of art, and to critical theories that are forms of phenomenology. Myth has given way to denials of those forms, such as the anti-novel. The typical protagonist has become not a hero but an anti-hero.¹⁵

This brief definition is quite an acceptable one, but certain key phrases require clarification and historical perspective. Since postmodernism continues what were modernist innovations, the grounding of postmodernism in modernism is material. According to the Handbook, the four modernist characteristics of "historical discontinuity, alienation, asocial individualism, and existentialism" are perpetuated and intensified in postmodernism. The distinguishing element to extract is the postmodernist's emphasis on the individual as universe as opposed to the

¹⁵ Hugh C. Holman, ed., A Handbook to Literature (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980), pp. 346-47.

modernist's individual in the universe. Where modernist fiction advances the possibility for the self to create order out of chaos, postmodernist fiction tends to negate that possibility. In modernist fiction, in which the self produces meaning from the world, a kind of optimistic existentialism results; postmodernism frequently denies that kind of optimism, but rather asserts an optimistic, visionary facet of its own.

The postmodernist's changes in the form of the novel, which the Handbook notes, develop in part because historically the modern novel became, to use Klinkowitz's phrase, "an elitist, academic diversion."¹⁶ Klinkowitz states that because of inherent difficulty in understanding the texts of modernist novels in the early 1960s, the gap separating author and audience was at its widest. Terming Barth and Pynchon "regressive parodists," Klinkowitz blames them with confusing the development of American fiction and with interfering with the critical appreciation of "a radical disruption" provided by Vonnegut, Barthelme, Kosinski, Brautigan, and others, who were producing works quite different from the well-known writers of the 1950s and early 1960s. Some of these less well-known writers were able to gain an audience through the advent of the so-called little presses that in some instances were little more

¹⁶ Klinkowitz, Literary Disruptions, p. 4.

than mimeograph machines. With the exception of Vonnegut, few of these authors received much critical attention, but a popular culture phenomenon occurred, and the audience dictated to the critics. Popular acceptance of these "disruptionist novelists" goaded a lagging critical acceptance, and no doubt these writers and others illuminated the direction that fiction was going; for these writers are the innovators, the re-creationists of what must now be recognized as a non-dying form.

During the 1970s, prior to the Handbook's succinct definition of postmodernism, numerous critical articles and book-length studies of postmodernism were written. John Ditsky, Philip Stevick, and David Lodge, among others, present the characteristics of, the approaches to, and the methods of contemporary experimental fiction that are the most useful discussions for forming a basis for understanding the term "postmodern" and for examining Brautigan's contributions to postmodernism. In 1972, John Ditsky published "The Man on the Quaker Oats Box: Recent Experimental Fiction" in the Georgia Review. The article is an excellent analysis of some ten characteristics of "recent fiction." From works by such "experimentalists" as William H. Gass, John Gardner, Warren Fine, and Jorge Louis Borges, who were published in the earliest years of the seventies, Ditsky concludes that the writers and the characteristics of their work "define a genuine movement of measurable dimensions,

and provide the areas of discussion from which will emerge the criteria by which the movement's successes and failures will eventually be judged."¹⁷ A successful evaluation cannot result, he says, from existing criticism. While this experimental fiction has had its indicators along the way (Ditsky cites Breton and Céline), the new fiction that he analyzes combines numerous characteristics in American literature. Ditsky develops the following "consistent set of characteristics" of postmodernist fiction, which are "capable of considerable variation":

Concern with the structures by which a fragmented reality is "organized," preoccupation with dream or nightmare states of existence, the tendency to find meaning in physical details rather than plot or psychology, the imposition of non-linear patterns upon "realistic" materials, the active participation of the reader in aesthetic activity without utilitarian function, the conception of fiction as a time-destroyer and the presence in fiction of the element of play, the alliance of fiction with the epic and the novel's direct contact with the substance of myth, the use of Art as a confessedly expedient source of artificial meaning in a world already beyond despair, and a general impatience with "rules" of form or content--these, combined with a highly developed sense of the fantastic and the imaginative, are the general characteristics of the new experimental fiction.¹⁸

¹⁷ John Ditsky, "The Man on the Quaker Oats Box: Characteristics of Recent Experimental Fiction," Georgia Review, 26 (1972), 312.

¹⁸ Ditsky, p. 312.

Philip Stevick is another critic who has attempted to analyze and define postmodernism. Stevick, frequent contributor to academic journals and editor of Anti-Story: An Anthology of Experimental Fiction, is the author of an often-cited TriQuarterly essay, "Scherherazade runs out of plots, goes on talking; the king, puzzled, listens: an essay on new fiction." This 1973 essay uses brief excerpts from Barthelme, Coover, and Brautigan to assert literature's basic changes in narrative motive and narrative appeal.¹⁹ He establishes seven characteristics of new fiction which he denotes as axioms that point toward a new aesthetic. These are:

1. New fiction, although aggressively non-traditional, shows less involvement with the tradition of prose fiction since the beginning of the novel.
2. New fiction is the first substantial body of fiction that self-consciously seeks an audience that is less than universal, attempting to establish a community of sensibility that is willfully limited.
3. New fiction contains and often intensifies the tendency in most fiction of any period to assimilate and transform the bad art of its own time.
4. New fiction consolidates an attempt rare in fiction before the modern period to present elements of its texture as devoid of value; yet new fiction, in contrast to certain areas

¹⁹ Philip Stevick, "Scheherazade runs out of plots, goes on talking; the king, puzzled, listens: an essay on new fiction," TriQuarterly, 26 (1973), 333.

of modern fiction, seeks this value-less quality not as an act of subtraction, or dehumanization, or metaphysical mystification, not as a gesture of despair or nihilism, but as a positive act in which the joy of the observer is allowed to prevail as the primary quality of the experience.

5. New fiction presents its texture as devoid as possible of aesthetic and philosophical depth.
6. New fiction permits itself a degree of latitude from the illusionist tradition greater than in any body of fiction since the beginning of the novel.
7. New fiction, finally, in common with only a few scattered instances before it, seeks to represent, explicitly or implicitly, the act of writing as an act of play.²⁰

Two years later, Stevick expounds further on the narrative changes in motive and appeal that he had cited in "Scheherazade" in "Naive Narration: Classic to Post-Modern," published in Modern Fiction Studies. Again, drawing from examples by Barthelme, Coover, and Brautigan, and now including Kurt Vonnegut, Steve Katz, and Mitchell Siskind, Stevick concentrates on the method of naive narration as used by the postmodernist writer. The narrator's appearance of vulnerability, of having nothing to conceal, of acting on impulse, and of capacity for surprise serve not only to lessen the traditional element of point of view but also to lessen the narrator's "very appearance of knowing in

²⁰ Stevick, "Scheherazade," pp. 355-61. (Italics omitted.)

pursuit of a human vision that he [the narrator] can bear to live with."²¹

David Lodge, the third critic whose work is an important contribution to an understanding of postmodernism, assumes a postmodernist fiction in a chapter by that title in his 1977 The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature. In Lodge's treatment of modern literature, the uniting, thematic development is the assumption that all literary developments must be classifiable along a continuum that is ultimately either metaphorical or metonymic. According to Lodge, who is both a novelist and a critic, if the literature is metaphoric, then it is also symbolic of mythopoeic, writerly, and therefore modernist. If the literature is metonymic, then it is realistic, readerly, and therefore antimodernist. Lodge states that these two poles account for the rhythmical, cyclical, or oscillatory nature of literature. Innovations are deemed innovations by the observance of a turn from the principles of whatever the present popular form is to the principles of the other form with its accompanying predictable rules.²²

²¹ Philip Stevick, "Naive Narration: Classic to Post-Modern," Modern Fiction Studies, 23 (1975), 542.

²² David Lodge, The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), p. 220.

Lodge recognizes that postmodernism challenges his theory because postmodernism as a literary form reacts against neither of his categories, modernism nor anti-modernism. His position is that postmodernism continues the mimetic convention and innovative techniques of modernism, but he contrasts the two by distinguishing postmodernism's "methods."

Lodge believes that postmodernist authors individually employ both metaphoric and metonymic devices, so that characterizing these writers along that continuum as a group is unprofitable, and a close examination "of efforts to deploy both metaphoric and metonymic devices in radically new ways" presents the greatest insight.²³ Lodge suggests that the accomplishment of postmodernism lies in its uniqueness, its use of experimental techniques. A critical recognition of widespread innovation establishes postmodernism as an independent school of thought.

To support his argument, Lodge refers to various works and authors using frequently observed techniques in postmodernist fiction. The discerning of order in the world is the overwhelming theme of both modernistic and postmodernistic literature; Lodge contrasts the modernist's treatment of that order with the postmodernist's denial of it.²⁴

²³ Lodge, p. 228.

²⁴ Lodge, p. 225.

While Lodge echoes others when he terms the denial of the existence of order "a sterile basis for writing," he holds that the postmodernist combines the denial of order "with a poignant demonstration of the human obligation to attempt such interpretation."²⁵ In spite of everything to the contrary, man seeks explanation and permanence. The ultimate futility would be "extinction and silence."

Lodge distinguishes the following as methods and techniques peculiarly postmodern: often a dismissing of "the story" or plots; certainly a dismissing of any suggestion of an epiphany within a story; a resisting of meaningful, logical, interpretation by resisting reading, seeking solipsism; and the replacing of modernist "obscurity" with the postmodernist "uncertainty." As to the major theme of the nature of reality, Lodge suggests, as others have, that to the postmodernist life or reality may itself be a fiction. This explains why endings particularly distinguish postmodernistic fiction, for they are "labyrinths without exits." The traditional closed ending, tying up all loose ends, and the modernist open ending, pointing a direction, have given way to multiple endings and nonendings.²⁶

Within the overall configuration, Lodge identifies six major categories of techniques: contradiction, permutation,

²⁵ Lodge, p. 225.

discontinuity, randomness, excess, and short circuit. In the category of contradiction, the techniques used include verbal contradictions and even sexual ambivalence, a specialized kind of contradiction.²⁷ The second category, permutation, suggests a type of contradiction by allowing the reader to choose and combine possibilities. The mathematical permutations possible can increase tremendously or be restricted by two choices. Postmodernistic writing tends to incorporate, rather than leave out. Discontinuity, as a third category of technique, is particularly distinguishing and, to some critics, disturbing. This is achieved intentionally through abrupt changes in tone, metafictional asides, blank spaces, and the incorporation of the first two categories, contradiction and permutation.²⁸ Randomness, also frequently criticized as haphazardness or artlessness, is the fourth technique that Lodge distinguishes.²⁹ Close to discontinuity, randomness is achieved by authors writing "according to a logic of the absurd." Excess is the fifth category of techniques used by postmodernists. Primarily, the author uses bizarre similes stressing similarity to

²⁶ Lodge, p. 226.

²⁷ Lodge, p. 229.

²⁸ Lodge, p. 231.

²⁹ Lodge, p. 235.

excess or "intolerable specificity" where no detail is omitted.³⁰ The final technique Lodge labels is that of the short circuit. In an effort to shock the reader by short-circuiting the gap between art and life or fictional work and reader, the author may combine diametrically opposing methods: fictional, factual; participation of author, authorship questioned; and using conventions, exposing conventions.³¹ Taken all together and used to the extent that they are, these techniques "profile postmodernism" and, according to Lodge, challenge the extreme of "literature as metaphor." Lodge reminds the reader that variations of these techniques have been used for quite some time, but the collective and frequent use by postmodernistic writers constitutes a new development.

Lodge's summary comments are particularly incisive. He describes much of postmodernist literature as tending toward "a hit-or-miss affair," but also credits the train of thought with being "imaginatively liberating" and keeping available other avenues for artistic development.³²

After a consideration of the critical works of Fiedler, Barth, Klinkowitz, Ditsky, Stevick, and Lodge, of the history and the literature of the late 1960s and the 1970s,

³⁰ Lodge, p. 239.

³¹ Lodge, pp. 239-40.

³² Lodge, p. 245.

one can say the following about postmodernism. It continues the traditional mimetic literary convention of art mirroring life; however, as the artist comes to see that fact and fiction become indistinguishable (that is, simply determining reality is nearly impossible), the reality presented by the artist is also fragmented. Then, phenomenology--the what happens--overshadows and questions ontology--the how it happens. The major themes of life and art become the establishing of identity, coping with this threatening reality, and controlling one's destiny in the midst of a society that moves farther and farther from an individual-centered life toward a mass society, manipulated in some mysterious way. The senseless waste, destruction, and violence that seemingly accompany continuing industrial and scientific sophistication move man farther from the natural world, as these self-same industrial and scientific developments destroy that world. Man becomes increasingly unable to deal with a system that he cannot control. Consequently, as the system overrides the importance of the individual, postmodernist plots (or, really, non-plots) override characterization. Characters frequently appear two-dimensional, less than dynamic in dealing with the forces that manipulate them. Postmodernist authors, orienting themselves to a rapidly changing communication, employ various typographical arrangements for their impact on the reader. For them, the visual is an important part of the cognitive impact.

Settings and events previously considered fantastic become real as fantasy and reality merge. Approaching literature as part of the construct of life, the author presents the reader with a character who deals with a disrupted, fragmented society; in presenting a struggle, but not victory or even the possibility of victory, the author still presents some small hope that contemporary man may rid himself of T. S. Eliot's overpowering image of the vast wasteland accompanying man's scientific and industrial achievements threatening his very being. Dealing in abstract language, the characteristic that distinguishes man as a superior being, the author achieves permanence in art, often the only thing that survives lost civilizations. Illuminating others' struggles for survival, the author focuses on an action that becomes symbolic as man defies and resists the inevitable: death. Thus, these distinguishing characteristics--fragmented reality; themes of establishing identity and coping with an increasingly technological, dehumanized even violent world; two-dimensional characterization; various typographical arrangements; and a frequent merging of fantasy and reality--are the essence of postmodernism. Although the foregoing characteristics generally define postmodernism, Frautigan further develops the term, rather idiosyncratically, in his fiction.

These precepts of postmodernism filtered through Brautigan's fiction incorporate those precepts identified by Holman, Ditsky, Stevick, and Lodge, yet Brautigan infuses his fiction with a unique style. Since postmodernist critics distill their theories from the writings of Brautigan and others of a similar bent, the theories are extrapolated from his writing, rather than his applying their theories to his works. Brautigan is the practitioner; the critics are the theorists.

Chapter II

The Beginning of a Style: Brautigan's Fiction of the 1960s

Between 1964 and 1971, Richard Brautigan published four novels and one short story collection that are the basis for his reputation as an important American writer: A Confederate General from Big Sur, Trout Fishing in America, In Watermelon Sugar, The Abortion, and Revenge of the Lawn. His early reputation is built on his contributions to that subdivision of contemporary literature that has come to be known as postmodernist. The large body of criticism that this early fiction prompted is only beginning to be matched by the criticism of the fiction published in the following decade. Brautigan's fiction of the sixties suggests a potentially great talent; however, that promise is not fully realized in his writing of the seventies. A study of his early work reveals the development of his maturing style and emerging techniques; a study of all of his fiction can provide an understanding of his personal philosophy as it evolves there and in his contributions to recent innovations in literature. Brautigan's unique treatment of theme offers critics and

authors alike models of new directions, new possibilities in literature.

Always Brautigan is a twentieth-century intellectual who only appears to represent the sixties' hippie or societal dropout but who actually interprets contemporary society in his literature. However, the hippie facade is so well established, so apparently solid, that many readers fail to penetrate this facade, even by a careful reading of the texts. While many of Brautigan's techniques are innovative or experimental, many of his concerns, his themes, are in the mainstream of literature. Intellectual man has always been concerned with his place in the scheme of things--with nature, with God, with mankind. Brautigan, as an author representative of contemporary intellectual man, attempts to define man's place within a society that is vanquishing nature, that has announced the death of God, and that produces increasingly maladaptive reactions to the stresses of such a society.

Brautigan's first four novels and the collection of short stories are grouped for discussion not only because of the obvious time frame of writing and publication but also because of certain shared themes. One theme of each of the early novels is a modification of one of literature's traditional pastoral ideas: a retreat to nature is repudiated as a method for coping with society's problems and demands. Many of Brautigan's characters, certainly all

of the characters that he develops in his first four novels, are apart from the mainstream of society for a time, but Brautigan neither advocates dropping out of society as a solution to the problems of society nor presents those detached societies as successful utopian civilizations. On the contrary, Brautigan presents the serious dilemma of contemporary man: there may perhaps be no solution, for man is deprived of individuality in contemporary society and there is no alternative to this society. Man is not able to live in this technological world, but he cannot live outside it. For Brautigan, love or attachment and some contact with nature, however limited, make contemporary man's humanity tolerable, even occasionally blissful. These themes are developed in Brautigan's first four novels and his collection of short stories.

Innovative Humor

A Confederate General from Big Sur (1964),¹ Brautigan's first published novel, illustrates his own inimitable imagination in developing various elements of fiction that have become known as postmodernist. Brautigan inverts the idea of literary hero, twists the implications of the pastoral mode, and utilizes a multiple ending.

¹ Richard Brautigan, A Confederate General from Big Sur (New York: Grove, 1964). All subsequent references to this edition will appear in parentheses in the text.

A Confederate General from Big Sur is a highly imaginative novel. Brautigan creates a pseudo-pastoral existence, develops a pseudo-war hero as literary protagonist, and utilizes an innovative multiple ending; the multiple ending serves to negate the fictive quality of the entire story. The reader is allowed to choose among infinite possibilities for the "real" ending; and, by giving the reader the opportunity to select an ending, Brautigan suggests that life itself may be a fiction and that an individual's perception of reality constitutes the reality.

The main plot, briefly summarized, involves Jesse, the narrator, and Lee Mellon, who meet in San Francisco. Lee moves into the boarding house where Jesse lives and where Lee has a brief affair with a teen-age girl. When his money is exhausted, Lee moves to Oakland to the home of a friend who is in a mental hospital. To survive, he scrounges food and taps the public utilities. After a time, Lee moves to Big Sur to a cabin owned by another unbalanced friend. Jesse joins Lee there. A series of things occurs: they align themselves with two girlfriends; another crazy friend, Johnston Wade, shows up; he departs again; afterwards, the two couples go to the beach, and the novel "ends."

A statement on the back cover of a 1979 reprint of A Confederate General from Big Sur notes that the original edition "sold less than a thousand copies and was immediately forgotten," but Terence Malley, who has extensively

studied Brautigan's first five fictional works, says that A Confederate General from Big Sur "is probably Brautigan's funniest book."² While other critics label it a beat novel that reflects characteristic randomness and inconsequence and place the novel in the dropout school of literature, Malley says the novel has aspects of the traditional American pastoral. Malley's major objection to the exact classification of the novel as American pastoral is the presence of two women, Elaine, a girl Jesse picks up in a bar, and Elizabeth, a high-priced three-month-a-year prostitute, who has known Lee Mellon for some time.

Jesse, the narrator, functions as an authorial convenience for examining the character of Lee Mellon, who claims to be a relative of the fictitious Gen. Augustus Mellon, CSA. After each drinks "two pounds" of muscatel, the two set off for the public library to consult Ezra J. Warner's Generals in Gray for the exploits of General Mellon. No General Mellon is listed. Lee Mellon, unable to accept the fictitiousness of a reality that he has acknowledged for twenty-three years, becomes "a Confederate general in ruins" (p. 18), the Confederate General from Big Sur. Brautigan effects the transition in character, a merging, by expressing ideas pertaining to Mellon's actions in such

² Terence Malley, Richard Brautigan, vol. II of Writers for the Seventies, ed. Terence Malley (New York: Warner, 1972), p. 91.

pseudo-military terms as "skirmishes," "headquarters," "attacks," "campaigns." His apartment is his "headquarters." Illegally tapping the gas line is "A Daring Cavalry attack on P[acific] G[as] and E[lectric]." The move to Big Sur is a "campaign." By these and other numerous comparisons, Brautigan merges a Civil War idea with a modern-day California setting, producing surrealism, pathos, and humor.

Johnston Wade, also a long-time friend of Lee Mellon, is the third male character to arrive at Big Sur. Wade arrives in a Bentley; he carries a pomegranate and a briefcase containing \$100,000. Wade is a thematic foil, a successful but deranged insurance executive. Malley, in fact, stresses the opposing positions in each character's relation to society: Lee Mellon, without, and Johnston Wade, within. Malley traces the major theme of the novel as "the theme of dominance, in the sense of controlling or coping with one's life."³ Jesse and Lee Mellon are failures in a capitalist society; Johnston Wade is a success. However, not one of the three men has control of his own life. Serving as representatives of the extremes of society, they point out man's lack of dominance, man's lack of control.

The idea that Brautigan's adaptation of the pastoral form is a refutation of the possibility of withdrawing from society as a suitable adjustment to contemporary life

³ Malley, p. 103.

is supported not only by Malley but also by Neil Schmitz and Manfred Pütz. In "Richard Brautigan and the Modern Pastoral," Schmitz places Brautigan's first four novels in the pastoral form as the pastoral of Hawthorne rather than the pastoral of Whitman, whom A Confederate General from Big Sur quotes. Looking beyond the critics of this early fiction and perhaps even Malley, Schmitz qualifies Brautigan's use of the pastoral form; he says, "Like Hawthorne, then, Brautigan does not write within the pastoral mode as an advocate of its vision."⁴ Rather, according to Schmitz, when Brautigan characters are in the midst of the seemingly idyllic pastoral life, they do not transcend life, but enter a period of stagnation.⁵ Schmitz concludes that Brautigan is "an ironist critically examining the myths and language of the pastoral sensibility that reappeared in the sixties."⁶

In a similar vein, Pütz, a German scholar, also sets the first four novels in the pastoral mode. Like Schmitz, Pütz refines the classification. In The Story of Identity: American Fiction of the Sixties, the title of the chapter, "Richard Brautigan: Pastorals of and for the Self,"

⁴ Neil Schmitz, "Richard Brautigan and the Modern Pastoral," Modern Fiction Studies, 19 (Spring 1973), 110.

⁵ Schmitz, p. 112.

⁶ Schmitz, p. 125.

indicates the direction his discussion takes. Initially, Pütz describes a typical first reaction to Brautigan's work that reflects the opinions of many critics and casual readers alike. Pütz states:

On first encounter, most of Richard Brautigan's novels strike one as strange conglomerates of simple adventure stories (with a leaning toward the picaresque), somewhat sketchy and informal diaries of personal preoccupation, and occasional allegories of uncertain meaning. As a matter of fact, there are good reasons for regarding them, at least partly, as all of these.

Critics who are quick to dismiss Brautigan's fiction stop here. But Pütz goes further and develops the premise that much of what Brautigan attempts is somehow rooted in the traditional by stating that two other elements combine with these conglomerates, diaries, and allegories, at least in these first four novels; these elements are "variations on the fable of identity" and "a modern form of the pastoral." These elements merge, he says, to produce "a kind of pastoral of and for the self." Hence, the title of the chapter. Pütz goes beyond the discussions of theme and recognizes the contribution of structure. Pütz says, "the structural matrix . . . governs and determines the predominant features and the combination of most narrative elements involved."⁸

⁷ Manfred Pütz, The Story of Identity: American Fiction of the Sixties, Sammlung Metzler, 54 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979), p. 105.

⁸ Pütz, p. 105.

To recognize the integration of theme and form is necessary for a full appreciation of the work as squarely in the center of early postmodernism. Crediting Brautigan with a significant achievement that seems justified, Pütz also says that Brautigan has utilized the traditional "conventions, topoi, motifs, and generic features from a whole range of partly overlapping genres which can be used . . . not in order to evoke the schematism of traditional genres but rather in order to integrate them functionally into a scheme of his own."⁹ Saying that a writer utilizes the traditional to create an individualized work seems the ultimate compliment.

In discussing the first four novels, Pütz uses numerous words and phrases to describe the characters' relationships to society as they seek their identity: "forms of radical disjunction," "awareness of personal confinement," "personal escape," "detachment," "seclusion," "disaffiliation."¹⁰ Any or all of these terms aptly characterize major Brautigan themes. Pütz also traces numerous parallels between Transcendentalist thought and the surface representation of Brautigan's themes that earned Brautigan the "gentle-hippie" label that plagues his critical reputation. Assuming those Transcendentalist parallels, Pütz is quick to point out, as

⁹ Pütz, p. 105.

¹⁰ Pütz, p. 106.

does Schmitz, that Brautigan's portrayal of characters and themes is in reality an "effective refutation and cancellation" of this Transcendental thought. It is this contradiction that produces the characteristic postmodernist tack that is inherent in Brautigan's work. That critics and readers alike may misinterpret the works is accounted for by the author's humor and apparent playfulness, which is combined with and somewhat inconsistent with, Pütz says, "the inherent seriousness of the issues," "a recurrent récit-structure," seeming "arbitrary plot-dissolution," "narrative decomposition," and a verbal change from a uni-referential to a multi-referential vocabulary. All of these characteristics clearly establish Brautigan's early work as postmodernist.

One of Brautigan's most innovative touches in the novel is the denial of the pastoral as a viable solution to the problems in the lives of Jesse and Lee Mellon. Juxtapositions of the expected fulfillment of the premises of a traditional literary formula and the actual occurrences within the scope of the novel are unsettling, and many readers and critics are confused over Brautigan's intent. Repeatedly, Jesse and Lee Mellon are inconvenienced by their withdrawal from society. Unable to become truly self-sufficient, they make forays into town that become a release from the confines of their life at Big Sur. The lack of money to buy

the un-necessaries of life (to twist Thoreau), such as cigarettes and liquor, plagues them.

The character and characterization of Johnston Wade offer the reader another contradiction of expectations. An insurance executive who has succeeded within the system, Johnston Wade arrives at Big Sur as a certifiable loon. In contrast, Jesse and Lee Mellon are presented as sane. A further contradiction in Wade involves him with an unlikely comparison between himself and Roy Earle, a character once portrayed by Bogart in a classic movie; Jesse says, "'The man sort of looked like Humphrey Bogart in High Sierra, except that he was short, fat, bald-headed and looked like a guilty businessman. . .'" (p. 119). Immediately, Wade becomes Roy Earle. Simply by saying it is so, it is so.

The multiple endings of the novel are an obvious experimental technique that Brautigan utilizes. As if from an author's notebook, five endings are hesitantly sketched, but infinite endings are suggested as the endings arrive at the speed of light--186,000 miles per second. No ultimate solution is proposed; the novel "ends" with a non-ending that suggests entropy, running down.

The contrast between the theme of dominance and the language presents the act of writing as an act of play. Brautigan appears to be having gleeful romps with the language as he creates reality from the seemingly far-fetched,

bizarre, and impossible. In the Big Sur retreat, with its one dirt wall, one glass wall, one wooden wall, and one no wall, only the wooden wall with its semblance of reality can be counted on. The dirt wall fell on a pseudo-poet who was criticizing William Carlos Williams; the glass wall shattered when a girl who liked to go nude leaned against it; and the no-wall wall is not there. Add a five-foot-plus-one-inch ceiling to this unlikely structure and inhabit this pastoral retreat with 7,452 noisy frogs in a nearby pond, a descendant of a nonexistent Confederate general, and assorted passers-through, and the possibilities for humor are endless.

In a review of A Confederate General from Big Sur, Auberon Waugh says, "Its narrative may be pointless, but at least events follow one another in chronological sequence."¹¹ It is not clear how he can say this in view of the discontinuity of the relocation of the setting of the Civil War and the personification of the landscape as he describes the plot in traditional terms. Brautigan's fusions seem discontinuous, and in combination are absurdist in technique. Set the Civil War in Big Sur almost one hundred years afterwards and, in Brautigan fashion, Big Sur becomes "the twelfth member of the Confederate States of

¹¹ Auberon Waugh, "Auberon Waugh on the Rest of the Iceberg," rev. of A Confederate General from Big Sur, by Richard Brautigan, Spectator, 27 February 1971, p. 287.

America" (p. 15). Although Jesse, the narrator, muses that believing the mountains and trees to be rebels is difficult, they immediately become so. Such is the power of writing in Brautigan fiction; writing creates reality.

The merging of Lee Mellon with the Confederate general is the predominant metaphor in the novel, and the fusion is easily accepted through understanding the mental state of Lee Mellon. But the brief images in Brautigan's fiction can be quite bizarre: a character kicks his feet "like mashed potatoes" (p. 122), light "dangles" off false teeth "like an illuminated grave" (p. 122), a smile looks "like a ragged Parthenon" (p. 95), waves pounding on the shore are "like eggs against the Grand Grill of North America" (p. 151). These similes abound.

Brautigan combines the historical Civil War with the fictional occurrences of a century later. Brautigan, by contradicting the reader's knowledge of historical fact, arouses a discordant, contradictory feeling within the reader. This feeling parallels that of Lee Mellon, who has believed all of his life that he was related to an important historical figure. Lee Mellon's mal-adaptive behavior is indicative of the possible damaging effects of the destruction of one's comforting illusions without replacement. Lee Mellon's belief that he is a descendant of a Civil War general collides with the factual; this, of course, is the pivotal circumstance on which the book is

predicated. About two-thirds of the way through the novel, Brautigan introduces a device that he continues until the last three chapters of the book: addenda appear showing Augustus Mellon's exploits not as a general, but possibly as a lieutenant or even a private. Because a surrealistic aspect of the novel is artfully woven into the fabric of the novel, the technique functions well. The addenda, rendered in italics, are Brautigan's warp. The woof is the metaphorical language that recurs, making the two into inseparable elements of the novel functioning within the work, rather than overlaying the work.

Because A Confederate General from Big Sur, like many of Brautigan's fictions, has a first-person narrator, the narrator is often identified as Brautigan. This may be, in part, suggested by the author. While in other novels Brautigan identifies a character as an author, the closest he comes to identifying one in this novel is in an exchange of letters between Jesse and Lee Mellon. Jesse recognizes "a budding literary style" (p. 56) on the part of Lee Mellon. Later, Lee Mellon utters the simile comparing the sound of the waves on the shore to a "crack like eggs against the Grand Grill of North America" and then asks Jesse if he likes the image. To Jesse, he says, "'you're supposed to be literary'" (p. 151). While Lee Mellon "works as a Confederate general, Jesse's "job" is apparently being literary. Although the statement naming Jesse

is anything but direct, Brautigan makes inroads on this technique of the anomalous narrator that he is later to use overtly.

Brautigan's peculiar use of the pastoral form illustrates how he can at the same time use and expose convention. Pütz, once he has analyzed the ironic use of the pastoral of and for the self, asks the final, perceptive question that must be asked; to what purpose does Brautigan twist this traditional form? The answer is that Brautigan denies the traditional pastoral mode as an effective method for coping with contemporary life; withdrawal from society contradicts coping with society. It was, after all, the Transcendentalists who saw nature as an intermediary, rather than an end in itself; the higher goal, the religious goal, of Transcendentalism is lacking in Brautigan's world. With this significant factor missing, the ironic presentation of the pastoral and its negation are accounted for.

In his first published novel, Brautigan is preoccupied with the theme of man's inability to cope with a technical world that infringes on his individualism and to live without society and become self-sustaining. The novel is the ultimate expression of frustration, suggesting that indeed there may be no answer to the problems that beset contemporary man.

The Emergence of a New Talent

Trout Fishing in America (1967),¹² Brautigan's second published novel, catapulted him to prominence. Called a novel on the title page, the work consists of forty-seven chapters that range from less than half a page to six pages in length. The subjects of the chapters are diverse; but a central symbol, Trout Fishing in America, and the narrator's quest for the perfect trout stream comprise the thematic thrust of the novel. Postmodernist elements of this novel include a discontinuous but interrelated narrative line, a changing central symbol, typographical play, and the question of authorship.

Trout Fishing in America illustrates techniques in theme, language, and format that have made Brautigan influential. As the narrator goes from one trout stream to another, he reveals the shortcomings and the failures of the historical dream and idealistic promise of America as they conflict with the country's contemporary reality and disappointment. The narrator is frequently accompanied by his "woman" and their baby. All of this sounds very simple indeed, but there are numerous disparate elements in the novel that disturb this simple line of thought.

¹² Richard Brautigan, Trout Fishing in America (New York: Dell, 1967). All subsequent references to this edition will appear in parentheses in the text.

There seem to be little plot and even less character development; continuity in the novel depends less on a narrative line than on symbol and theme. Frequent references are made to the cover photograph, a recipe for walnut catsup is included, words are arranged to look like a bent fishing rod, and--initially most puzzling of all--the central symbol taken from the title of the novel changes. The literal meaning of Trout Fishing in America, of course, permeates the book, but the symbol also becomes a place, a state of mind, a person, a hotel, a pen nib. Through a perversion of the major symbol and variations on the traditional elements of the quest and the pastoral, Brautigan is able to comment here on major and minor themes that are developed in all his works.

The basic themes of the novel are the pessimism and frustration that result as the narrator is unable to find the perfect trout stream, which is itself the symbol for an idyllic, pastoral America. Instead, the narrator encounters the denial of a promise of escape from the conditions created by society. The denial results from encounters with society and the problems that society creates--violence, pollution, crass commercialism--themes that have become the heart of postmodernist literature and are chief characteristics of a society that denies its people individuality. Even the possibility of escape from reality into fantasy is denied.

The opening chapter (or segment), "The Cover for Trout Fishing in America," is an explication of the cover photograph of the novel. Benjamin Franklin and Kafka are set as diametrically opposing symbols of America. In "Knock on Wood (Part One)," the following chapter, the narrator recalls his first knowledge of Trout Fishing in America. A stepfather talked of trout "as if they were a precious and intelligent metal" (p. 3). The narrator dismisses silver as a possible metal and decides that steel with its strength born of metal and heat is just the right image for the metal that trout are made from. The narrator recalls from his childhood his first fishing trip and his disappointment when he discovered that a creek was wood and not a creek. Reality proves to be deceptive to the young boy. The promise of America is not realized. In "Red Lip," the next segment, the narrator, carrying his fishing tackle and trying to hitch a ride, spends three frustrating hours on the side of the road because no one offers him a ride. These early chapters establish the symbol of Trout Fishing in America, but the sense of frustration, the problem of reality, and even the substance of the cold, hard symbol unsettle any ideas that this is a traditional mythic pastoral. Brautigan twists the traditional pastoral; in doing so, he contradicts the usual set of expectations and achieves an even greater effect.

The next two segments, "The Kool-Aid Wino" and "Another Method of Making Walnut Catsup," discuss both ceremony and/or regimentation as a part of ordering one's life.¹³ The importance of routine is mentioned again in The Abortion. The "wino" is a young child, also a memory from the narrator's childhood, who dilutes grape Kool-Aid to half strength. The child is already an example of a Brautigan loser. He has a hernia that disables him, and he is so poor that he cannot afford the sugar for the drink. Nevertheless, in a suggestion that one may escape, the narrator says that the boy "created his own Kool-Aid reality and was able to illuminate himself by it" (p. 10). While the following segment, "Another Method of Making Walnut Catsup," is not a self-contained "story" as is "The Kool-Aid Wino," the recipes given suggest a similar possibility that one may likewise create his own "Kool-Aid reality." The possibility is firmly denied later by the major theme of the novel.

The theme of violence is introduced in the succeeding chapters. "Prologue to Grider Creek" tells of a man who moved to a rat-infested house in John Dillinger's hometown. The man promptly began killing the rats with a .38 revolver,

¹³ See Philip C. Kolin's "Food for Thought in Richard Brautigan's Trout Fishing in America," Studies in Contemporary Satire: A Creative and Critical Journal, 8 (Spring 1981), 9-20. Discussing Brautigan's frequent references to food, Kolin concludes that in Brautigan's fiction food itself is nonsustaining and that the references are used primarily to satirize "a bountiful America."

but the man enjoys the rat slaughter too much. The mention of John Dillinger and the man's pleasure with the gun are the introduction to the element of crime and violence in America found in numerous places in the novel. Later references are made to Pretty Boy Floyd, Jack the Ripper, and Caryl Chessman. In "Room 208, Hotel Trout Fishing in America," the narrator tells of the jail-like existence of an ex-hustler and her boyfriend. From time to time, the couple is threatened by her former pimp, so they have heavily fortified the door with various locks, and the boyfriend has a .32 revolver for protection. Like the wino, they have created their own world, but the threat of violence, the reality of the outside world, impinges.

The next chapter communicates more of the narrator's frustration as he is hindered in his pursuit of the perfect fishing spot. Grider Creek supposedly offers good fishing, but the narrator is unable to get there without a car. In subsequent chapters, the narrator visits several fishing spots. Tom Martin Creek is "a real son-of-a-bitch" (p. 19); at Graveyard Creek, the narrator catches trout, but he is disturbed by the contrast between two nearby cemeteries and "the poverty of the dead" (p. 21). Trout can no longer survive in Hayman Creek. Carrie Creek renders the narrator strange images of an Adolf Hitler-like shepherd who is nearby and an unexplained moribund message that says

"Stalingrad" (p. 55). Salt Creek is tainted by the presence of cyanide capsules that have been put out to poison coyotes. "Big Redfish Lake is the Forest Lawn of camping in Idaho . . ." (p. 61). Although the narrator catches his limit at Hell-diver Lake, he has inadvertently let "the baby" fall asleep in the sun, and she becomes ill. This mars the experience there.

Perhaps the expression of life's extreme frustration is seen in "Trout Fishing on the Street of Eternity," another childhood reminiscence. Having been hired to clean out an old woman's attic, the narrator finds the diary of her dead brother, Alonso Hagen. On the final page of the diary, Hagen has recorded seven years of fishing failures; he never caught a trout. He terms the experience both a "frustration" and "an interesting experiment in total loss" (p. 85). Significantly, Hagen gave up. Only seven pages later, the narrator, too, says, "I've come home from Trout Fishing in America . . ." (p. 92).

The possibility of escape through fantasy is denied in several chapters, most notably in "Sea, Sea Rider." In the upstairs of a bookstore, the narrator has intercourse with a beautiful young girl. The experience is emotionless, unfulfilling. The owner of the bookstore interprets the experience by telling the narrator two different surrealistic stories, one cancelling out the other. There is no meaning to the experience.

The minor theme of crass commercialism is seen in one of the most famous chapters in the novel, "The Cleveland Wrecking Yard." The chapter represents the despoiling of nature by a culture that disfigures, warehouses, and sells trout streams by the foot. "A Note on the Camping Craze that is Currently Sweeping America" is a chapter that satirizes "the return to nature" fad as it has been interpreted by most Americans. Mr. Norris, outfitted with camping equipment, visits sixteen campgrounds before he is able to find room to camp at the seventeenth because someone has just died. At midnight "body bringers" try to return the body to the former camping spot, but Mr. Norris makes them take it away. Brautigan shows how Mr. Norris and the other campers have taken all the trappings of society to nature, and, as a result, they reproduce society's same faults in nature. Thus, since there is, in fact, no contact with nature, modern man lacks the ability to revitalize the soul through contact with nature. He carries "utilization" with him everywhere.

As the narrator moves from place to place looking for his trout stream and as he recalls incidents from childhood and the recent past, he is able to examine a variety of cultural aspects that these incidents suggest. His meeting with a doctor is one such incident; their conversation covers almost the entire scheme of American medicine: the AMA, a possibility of socialized medicine, and, finally,

a tax structure that benefits the doctor for not working. While the narrator seemingly disagrees with the doctor on several aspects of the financial structure, the two share a similar desire for good trout fishing as emblematic of a good way of life. After this chance meeting, the two part company. The surgeon, the narrator says, "was leaving for America, often only a place in the mind" (p. 72). This final comment is especially important in underscoring the major theme of the difference between the real and the ideal America. It is a theme that has come to be the epitome of postmodernist thought at its most depressing.

Of all of Brautigan's novels, Trout Fishing in America has unquestionably received the most critical attention, although the critics do not always agree with each other. They disagree on their general estimations, on the nature of the genre of the work, and on the interpretation of specific symbols and sections. As in A Confederate General from Big Sur, elements of the pastoral are present, but Brautigan's presentation of those elements is interpreted differently by different critics. Some critics see a redeeming, transcendent optimism; others see an overwhelming pessimism.

Critics do agree on one point--that Brautigan's writing is creative--even though they are unable to agree

on the genre for Trout Fishing in America.¹⁴ In a 25 July 1970 review for The Times, English critic Tony Tanner praises the work. The novel, he says, is "one of the most original and attractive novels [emphasis added] to have come out of America during the last decade."¹⁵ Tanner's use of "novel" and the discussion of pastoral elements are a convenient catchall because Tanner frequently clarifies and limits their use. Recognizing that Brautigan had already established himself as an innovative writer, Tanner says, "Brautigan, it is clear, would not engage in anything so recognizable as an established genre." Robert Adams in a review in The New York Review of Books discusses the form of the work. Adams compliments Brautigan's unique style. He refers to Brautigan's first four novels as "prose pieces"; in an explanatory, parenthetical expression, he says, "one can't call them novels or even fictions--they may well go down in literary history as Brautigans."¹⁶ This testimonial to the distinctive achievement of

¹⁴ For example, see David L. Vanderwerken, "Trout Fishing in America and the American Tradition," Critique, 16, 1 (1974), 32-40, for a discussion of the novel as "traditional in theme and form."

¹⁵ Tony Tanner, "The Dream and the Pen," rev. of Trout Fishing in America, by Richard Brautigan, The Times (London), 25 July 1970, p. 5g.

¹⁶ Robert Adams, "Brautigan Was Here," rev. of Trout Fishing in America, by Richard Brautigan, The New York Review of Books, 22 April 1971, p. 24.

Brautigan's writing is frequently made, and it points out marked accomplishment, but the statements also highlight the difficulty of cataloging Brautigan's work. Similarly, in New American Review, John Clayton says "Brautigan's style undercuts the long tradition of realistic fiction. Trout Fishing in America is not an anti-novel; it is an un-novel."¹⁷ Clayton is as concerned with the tone of the work as with the form of the work, and his statement emphasizes the precept that Brautigan's fiction does not protest against what has preceded it but rather creates anew. One reviewer calls Trout Fishing in America "a novel only because it can be called nothing else decently."¹⁸ For what it is worth, Brautigan calls his work "a novel."

Thomas McGuane reviewed Trout Fishing in America, The Pill Versus the Springhill Mine Disaster (a volume of poetry), and In Watermelon Sugar (the three works having been reprinted in one volume) in The New York Times Book Review. His opinion represents the most extreme misreading; McGuane finds only optimism in the works. Characterizing Brautigan, McGuane says, "He seems crazy with optimism."

¹⁷ John Clayton, "Richard Brautigan: The Politics of Woodstock," in New American Review, 11, ed. Theodore Solotaroff (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), p. 64.

¹⁸ Richard Walters, "Brautigan's Trout Fishing in America, The Pill Versus the Springhill Mine Disaster, In Watermelon Sugar," in Survey of Contemporary Literature, Vol. II, ed. Frank N. Magill (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Salem Press, 1977), p. 888.

Like some widely gifted Rotarian who wants you to come to his town, he seems assured and sincere."¹⁹

James M. Mellard maintains in The Exploded Form that Brautigan is a modernist author because he is a writer who brings order out of chaos.²⁰ On the other hand, Malley calls the ending to Trout Fishing in America, a note of sympathy seemingly unrelated to the previous chapters, a non sequitur. That opinion points to little order from the chaos. The novel itself clearly resolves this critical problem.

From the problem of classifying the work according to genre, to understanding the theme, to critical reception of the work, critics differ. The second category, understanding the theme of the novel, is the most important because the other two rest on it. The dilemma is solved by understanding postmodernism.

Brautigan's final chapter in Trout Fishing in America is a token sympathy note about "the passing of Mr. Good" (p. 112). Its bland brand of sympathy collides abruptly with a postscript, "Sorry I forgot to give you the mayonaise [sic]." This is the expression of his need, the narrator

¹⁹ Thomas McGuane, "An Optimist vis-a-vis the Present," rev. of Trout Fishing in America, by Richard Brautigan, The New York Times Book Review, 15 February 1970, p. 49.

²⁰ James M. Mellard, The Exploded Form: The Modernist Novel in America (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1980), p. 177.

says on the previous page, of wanting to end a book with this word. Rather than producing order from chaos, Brautigan introduces more uncertainty. The concluding statement calls attention to the medium and points out that writing is one step removed from the reality of the event. This ending gives little certainty and fails to produce order from chaos.

In his introductory remarks on the methods of post-modernist writers in The Modes of Modern Writing, David Lodge suggests a solution to the seeming disagreements of the critics and their contradictory readings. Lodge says that the confusing problems of postmodernist fiction can result not from obscurity which can be clarified, but from this uncertainty; and he would have the reader simply accept the uncertainty as indicative of the author's belief in uncertainty as a prevailing condition of contemporary life.

Contributing to this uncertainty is the ultimate contradiction or ambivalence residing in the changing title character and the anti-creature, Trout Fishing in America Shorty. Trout Fishing in America has many guises: hotel, pen nib, person, place, spirit, and, of course, a novel. These varying "characters" and the discussion of them prepare for and aid the discontinuity of the novel. With 112 pages and forty-seven chapters, Trout Fishing in America averages a minimal two and a half pages per chapter. The "Contents" is longer than some chapters. It is Brautigan's

shortest novel. This characteristic brevity and Brautigan's brand of metaphors distinguish the work from the work of any other writer. The various guises of Trout Fishing in America are taken to excess by Brautigan's metaphorical comparisons of it/him/them. The threat of these comparisons "to detach themselves from the narrative and develop into little self-contained stories"²¹ is characteristic of almost all of Brautigan's works. It is this characteristic that makes excerpting sections a simple task, but it is also this same characteristic that contributes to a tangential development that appears disjointed, disconnected, or random.

Brautigan's famous distinguishing characteristic is that his metaphors immediately cease to be metaphors; the comparison becomes the reality. He can, for instance, compare a trout's stare to "fallen leaves" and, in the next paragraph, catch "a mess of those leaves for dinner" (p. 35). Although other examples abound, "The Cleveland Wrecking Yard" section provides one of the most detailed instances. It is a long (six-page) chapter that begins realistically; then the narrator, looking for a used trout stream, visits a business that sells secondhand materials. Among its wares is a trout stream, appropriately stored in various lengths with other plumbing supplies, while the insects and animals are stored separately. The fictive

²¹ Lodge, p. 236.

and factual combine in this extended Brautigan metaphor, and the reader must be willing to play the game and to believe that a trout stream could be dismantled, stacked, and stored.

In considering the device of the authorial voice, one finds oneself questioning his notions of fact and fiction. Like A Confederage General from Big Sur, Trout Fishing in America is told by a first-person narrator. Most critics deny Brautigan's use of a persona; rather, Brautigan himself in his own person is assumed to be the narrator. The prominence of a photograph of Brautigan--and a woman--on the front cover reenforces the idea of the intrusive author not only because Trout Fishing in America begins with an explication of the cover but also because further references to the cover are made throughout the novel. The first chapter describes the background of the photograph, but not Brautigan and the woman in the foreground. A similar technique is used in cover displays of many of Brautigan's novels. Consequently, Brautigan in this cover-disguise of "an unemployed Buffalo hunter"²² becomes inseparable from the narrator. A more recent novel, The Tokyo-Montana Express, also features Brautigan in the cover photograph; the back cover of the novel credits Brautigan with the

²² Kenneth Seib, "Trout Fishing in America: Brautigan's Funky Fishing Yarn," Critique, 13, 1 (1972), 64.

"cover concept." Obviously, Brautigan himself contributes to the merging of the author narrator, a device widely used in other postmodernist writings. Brautigan overtly contradicts the traditional use of the persona that allows the author to create a fictional speaker with his own identity and opinions, capable of being trusted or not, capable of making naive or sophisticated interpretations.

Yet, despite the denials of structural narrative made by various critics, numerous other devices bring a unity to Trout Fishing in America. First, there is, of course, the cover that with its first chapter explication begins the book effectively. Although Trout Fishing in America changes in what it symbolizes, it is a recurrent symbol and the focus of the novel. The various interpretations of the symbol constitute the theme of the novel: the contrast between the real and the ideal America. That contrast is the underlying irony of the book. Beginning with the statue of Benjamin Franklin that appears in the photograph on the cover, Brautigan introduces Franklin as one symbol of America and contrasts that symbol with Kafka as another symbol. The traditional element of the quest, as the narrator visits first one stream and then another, unites the novel in the vein of the picaresque. The elements of the pastoral in nature accompany this traditional fictional element, the quest. The quest and the pastoral traditions

combine as the narrator seeks the Franklin myth, the ideal America, only to find the Kafka myth, the real America.

In addition to the controlling devices of the quest, the pastoral, and the myth and the final negation of each, the narrator uses simple time measurement--the times of days, the seasons of the year, and the ages of the narrator in reference to reminiscences--as a unifying device. For the most part, the recurring use of autumn, spring, morning, and childhood retain their traditional symbolic correlation. While there is much to unite the work, Brautigan's peculiarly developed style that has become postmodernist and "Brautiganian" nevertheless contributes to the denial of order in the world. Specifically, Malley accounts for these "incongruous juxtapositions" as "based on connections between apparently unconnected ideas."²³

The inclusion of these unlikely comparisons, of the disjunctions, and of the seemingly unrelated episodes, accounts for much of Brautigan's achievement in humor. For instance, in spite of the diffusion of death and disillusionment throughout Trout Fishing in America, the novel is very funny. The incorporation of the tragic and comic produces a tight-wire act where maintaining one's balance can be a heady experience. In a novel where one element sometimes contradicts the other and a reader draws

²³ Malley, p. 179.

conclusions by interpreting symbols or chapters in isolation, the novel is open to apparent misinterpretations. Nevertheless, Brautigan's innovations in format and language as he tackles themes in the mainstream of contemporary society distinguish this novel; he deserves the acclaim that his accomplishments in Trout Fishing in America have brought him.

An Attempt at Fantasy

A note at the back of Brautigan's third published novel, In Watermelon Sugar (1968),²⁴ indicates that the book was written in Northern California during a two-month period in 1964, at approximately the time of publication of A Confederate General from Big Sur. As Brautigan indicates, each of his novels is somewhat different from every other. In Watermelon Sugar is Brautigan's novel of fantasy, one of the few novels not set in California, incorporating elements of science fiction and utopian fiction.

In Watermelon Sugar is Brautigan's only novel written completely as fantasy. As he had in his two preceding novels, Brautigan again rejects the traditional pastoral as a possible solution to society's ills. The traditional

²⁴ Richard Brautigan, In Watermelon Sugar (New York: Dell, 1968). All subsequent references to this edition will appear in parentheses in the text.

pastoral depicts a simpler, better life in the past, and, of course, "the past" in America equals a decidedly rural existence. Brautigan, knowing that a retreat into history is impossible, rejects this idyllic path and shows the futility of this impractical philosophy. This thematic construction is the most prominent postmodernist element in the novel. In In Watermelon Sugar, the traditional elements that appear in the form of plot and character are undermined by the flat narrative, characteristic of Brautigan and utilized by other postmodernist authors. The sparse narrative line omits many explanations and connections. In contrast to the combination of the realistic and surrealist treatment given his two previous modern pastorals, in In Watermelon Sugar Brautigan writes as if completely in another medium, the medium of fantasy. Brautigan again explores the nature of society and man's place in that society. The imaginative world that he creates and the almost poetic language offer a gentle--but potentially violent--balance. The fantastic microcosm exists at great costs to its members.

The novel begins, as many Brautigan novels do, with the cover displaying a photograph of a young woman in the right foreground and Brautigan in the left foreground. A quotation from the novel also appears on the cover; it says, "In watermelon sugar the deeds were done and done again as my life is done in watermelon sugar." This quotation is the

first sentence of the novel, and it does at least three things. First, it establishes the pervasive symbol of the novel, watermelon sugar, an all-purpose commodity which is, among other things, fuel, clothing, furniture, or ink; second, it establishes the importance of repetition--"the deeds were done and done again"; and third, it establishes the personal nature of the point of view, a first-person, nameless narrator--"call me whatever is in your mind" (p. 4). The rest of the brief, two-page chapter foreshadows the importance of numerous other references that come to hold special meaning in this "extraordinary environment," as the back cover describes this unusual world. This first chapter also establishes, in the intentionally vague form of fantasy, some matters about the narrator: his proximity to the town of IDEATH, described as beautiful; his existing in "a delicate balance" which he says "suits us"; and his personal life style which is "comfortable and pleasing" like his small, sparsely furnished shack. Also brought forth are symbols (including watermelon sugar) of watermelontrout cil, rivers, bridges, trout, and a sun that shines golden on Tuesdays. The narrator tells the reader finally that numerous things are made from watermelon sugar and that he is writing a book, "this book," and that it, too, is made from watermelon sugar.

The cover photograph and the first-person narrator, who is established later as both a sculptor and a writer, are

quite similar to Brautigan's method of approach in his other novels. However, rather than the long table of contents, the novel is divided into three books, "In Watermelon Sugar," "inBOIL," and "Margaret," with what approximates a table of contents given in the fifth chapter as the narrator's list of twenty-four items that he wants to tell "you" about. "Book One" functions as exposition by introducing the main characters, the narrator, Margaret, Fred, Charley, Pauline, and inBOIL; by explaining the peculiar way of life at iDEATH; and by locating the novel at iDEATH. The tremulous tone is set from the first paragraph, and a large part of this first portion shapes this unusual world. The patriarch of this town of 375 is Charley. Charley's brother Fred is the narrator's "buddy." Old Chuck lights the lanterns. A dozen or so people work at the Watermelon Works. A trout hatchery offers work for others. A Tomb Crew works on a new tomb. Pauline and Fred cook. Minor work roles are held by Doc Edwards, Carl the windowmaker, and a school teacher. Numerous statues of vegetables, tigers, and dead people are in iDEATH. These strange statues seem appropriate enough in a setting that is a combination of the indoors and the outdoors, for there are "couches along the river" (p. 18), and the river flows "out of the living room" (p. 19). The sun shines a different color every day of the week, of course producing different color watermelons. Various other disquieting elements intrude in this first

book--the things that happened to inBOIL and his gang, the mysterious Forgotten Works, the narrator's insomnia, and the tale of the time of the tigers, which killed and ate the narrator's parents, but helped him with his arithmetic. The last two tigers were burned on the spot where the trout hatchery was built, a continuity of life following death as the trout offer a gentle reminder of the cycle of life through their spawning. Additionally, the trout furnish iDEATH with useful products.

After "Book One" establishes the routines of iDEATH, "Book Two" presents inBOIL, who with his gang ritually commits suicide at the trout hatchery by mutilating himself and subsequently bleeding to death while high on whiskey distilled from things in the Forgotten Works as a protest that they are the real meaning of iDEATH. As the narrator, Charley, and others from iDEATH watch this spectacle, Pauline speaks: to inBOIL she says, "You're an asshole" (p. 114). According to the narrator, Pauline gets angrier and angrier, yet, as this event transpires, Pauline expresses the only emotion coming from any of the witnesses. Before all are dead, Pauline, impatient to clean up "the mess," goes for a mop and bucket.

Like "Book Two," "Book Three" also focuses upon a death. Margaret, who was once the narrator's girlfriend, but who lately spends more and more time at the Forgotten Works collecting "forgotten things," commits suicide. The

narrator, seeing the suicide in the Statue of Mirrors, describes the act poetically, not horrifyingly; he says:

I saw Margaret climbing an apple tree beside her shack. She was crying and had a scarf knotted around her neck. She took the loose end of the scarf and tied it to a branch covered with young apples. She stepped off the branch and then she was standing by herself on the air. (p. 135)

The narrative is flat, unemotional; the act, painless. Of all of the members of this society, the narrator had been closest to Margaret, yet he calmly recalls the event. This event is a crucial representation of the society that is without passion, without joy, and, therefore, not viable.

The funeral is held on a black, soundless Thursday and followed by a dance at the trout hatchery, according to ritual and custom. The emotional reactions to these deaths in "Book Two and "Book Three" are controlled, matter-of-fact. Again, Pauline expresses the only emotion; she is tearful (pp. 146-47, 152).

The characterization of Pauline, the only character who could in any way be described as emotional, is central to Brautigan's refutation of iDEATH. While these emotional incidents are few in number, taken together they demonstrate this hitherto unobserved fact. Pauline, in her "emotional" state, is the one character who is a participant in life, rather than manipulated by it. She, among everyone in iDEATH, abruptly speaks to inBOIL of his stupidity as he

disfigures himself. She alone initiates the action to clean the trout hatchery, not waiting for the ritual suicide to end. She alone openly mourns for Margaret and ponders any personal guilt. The narrator observes that Pauline sleeps better now since they have been going steady (p. 155). She, like the narrator, once took long walks at night, but she no longer does so. The expression of emotion rather than any sexual satisfaction may be seen to account for Pauline's stability when viewed with other actions. After all, the narrator's troubled walks continue. Malley calls the triumph of the novel the explication of the phrase "strength gained through the process of gentleness" (p. 22), a phrase used to describe Pauline's hand. The phrase should be applied to Pauline rather than to the novel. Seemingly, her character expresses the greatest refutation of the smothering sublimation of I. She is not anti-society as inBOIL is and as Margaret nearly becomes; she provides explicit instruction for life, and it is not emotionless. The society is a failure; Brautigan does not, in fact, recommend iDEATH as a way of life.

Critical interpretations of In Watermelon Sugar are numerous. Tony Tanner compliments Brautigan's language, but he does not believe that the novel is flawless. Harvey Leavitt interprets In Watermelon Sugar as a modern utopian novel with great appeal for the 1970s' college student. Neil Schmitz and Patricia Hernlund agree that Brautigan

rejects the way of life of the society that he creates. The range and focus of these critical opinions suggest complexity that Brautigan is generally not credited with.

The flat narration is central to Tanner's criticism of In Watermelon Sugar. He says that the work has much to recommend it, and he applies such terms as "a charming and original work with touches of magic," but a serious shortcoming, he says, is that In Watermelon Sugar "is a pastoral dream in which the dominance of fantasy and imagination over the Forgotten Works and the wrecking yard is perhaps too effortlessly achieved."²⁵ This is to say that the flat narration assumes rather than develops the fantasy and the imagination.

However, Leavitt, in "The Regained Paradise of Brautigan's In Watermelon Sugar," interprets the novel as speaking to and for the contemporary collegian. Leavitt sees the novel as a utopian novel, with parallels with the Garden of Eden and with natural determinism.²⁶ The orphaned narrator becomes Adam II, building a new Eden on the ruins of the old. This new Adam is a prelapsarian figure in a

²⁵ Tony Tanner, City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970 (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 413.

²⁶ Harvey Leavitt, "The Regained Paradise of Brautigan's In Watermelon Sugar," Critique, 16, 1 (1974), 18.

postlapsarian, post-holocaustal world as Pütz,²⁷ Schmitz,²⁸ and Leavitt²⁹ point out. The pessimistic strain of post-modernism--that man has little control over or understanding of his life--closely parallels natural determinism; yet Leavitt specifies that in IDEATH a man "must allow himself to become an instrument of nature."³⁰ This accord with nature governs the new life, but there is great lack of emotion. Leavitt concluded his analysis by describing the appeal of the novel to the college generation of the 1970s, because, as they did, the novel "rejects man's mastery over nature, rejects intellectual rationalism, rejects authoritarianism, and emphasizes the natural elements in existence, embraces the environment, and lives collectively rather than individually."³¹ Leavitt, saying that "most utopian novels are not exciting reading," credits Brautigan's poetic use of the language with contributing a new dimension of pleasurable reading to the genre.

Schmitz, in "Richard Brautigan and the Modern Pastoral," correctly sees a flaw not in the novel itself but rather with the society that the novel depicts. Schmitz

²⁷ Pütz, p. 111.

²⁸ Schmitz, p. 117.

²⁹ Leavitt, p. 21.

³⁰ Leavitt, p. 20.

³¹ Leavitt, p. 24.

says that Brautigan is rejecting a pastoral life style, the hippie's dropping out, as a viable alternative to contemporary society. Schmitz observes an underlying angst established from the beginning of the novel. The underlying tension is magnified through the glass of the "delicate balance" in IDEATH established by the narrator in the first chapter. The series of balances involves the communal life balanced with the private lives of the inhabitants of IDEATH, technology balanced with primitivism, and even the instincts of life balanced with the instincts of death. In rejecting the idea that the novel portrays a paradise regained (as Leavitt sees it), Schmitz says, "The balance that suits them also stylizes them and the result is a disfiguring of their humanity."³² This conclusion denies the success of this pastoral, utopian community, in that the struggle to maintain an equipoise becomes a hardship.

Paralleling Schmitz, Patricia Hernlund analyzes the novel in "Author's Intent: In Watermelon Sugar" with two stated purposes: she dismisses Leavitt's justification of the novel as one popular with college students because it approximates their contemporary life style in a nonjudgmental fashion; she establishes the true intention of the author. All of Brautigan's techniques, "repetition, fragmentation of time and setting, use of strange lyricism and elements from fantasy and science fiction," Hernlund terms an accumulation "toward characterization for negative

effect." These techniques serve to dismiss this route, this fictional society, as a workable method for coping with life; indeed, this artificial world is not life. Hernlund's final statement summarizes her view of Brautigan's intention in writing this novel: "Brautigan reminds us that a worse thing than violence and death could be a life without pity or joy."³³

Malley, in discussing In Watermelon Sugar, considers the changing symbols of the novel in greater depth than any other critic. Relating Brautigan's tiger to Blake's, he explores the symbol of the tiger as probably representative of "unbridled energy," especially "a kind of self-destructive aggression that generally comes with adulthood."³⁴ Malley and Leavitt agree on the rather obvious second major symbol in the novel, iDEATH. The various terms resulting from the various letter combinations of the name of the town are I death, id death, idea death; and each connotes the loss of individual identity in communal living. The symbols of the tiger and iDEATH constitute, for Malley, the major controlling images of the novel. Malley sees the people of iDEATH able to cope with simplified lives, stripped of passion. Thus, we have

³³ Patricia Hernlund, "Author's Intent: In Watermelon Sugar," Critique, 16, 1, (1974), 16.

³⁴ Malley, p. 125.

another statement of a major theme of Brautigan's fiction: a life stripped to the bare essentials escapes from our modern world rather than copes with it. To go backward is rarely possible.

Another critic, Arlen J. Hansen, explores the world as it is created by language as "The Celebration of Solipsism: A New Trend in American Fiction." Hansen explains Brautigan's world of watermelon sugar as his brand of solipsism, capable of transforming reality.³⁵ The success of this technique in postmodernism pioneered by Brautigan, the imaginative use of language to modify reality or to create reality, requires the reader's participation blended with the reader's permission. However, Brautigan's attitudes toward the written word and the books that contain writing are quite negative in In Watermelon Sugar: books are generally relegated to the Forgotten Works, they are used for fuel, and the narrator is peripatetically writing the first book written in thirty-five years, only the twenty-fourth in 171 years. In "Book Two" when Doc Edwards inquires what the narrator's book is about, the narrator--if he speaks for Brautigan as everyone suggests--scuttles the entire notion of this "about business"; he answers, "'Just what I'm writing down; one word after another'" (p. 129). At the

³⁵ Arlen J. Hansen, "The Celebration of Solipsism: A New Trend in American Fiction," Modern Fiction Studies, 19 (1973), 13.

end of the novel, the convolution is complete. The funeral is over; waiting for the black sun to set and sound to return, the people from the town, the musicians, Charley, Fred, Pauline, and the narrator are about to begin the dance. As Trout Fishing in America ends with a lexical whim, the word "mayonnaise," In Watermelon Sugar ends with "I Wrote," a not-so-subtle reminder of the medium itself. The entire novel has been written in watermelon sugar; the novel, the fictive act, is Brautigan's ephemeral, enigmatic symbol. Words are all.

The fact that the novel lends itself to logical interpretations arriving at diametrically opposing conclusions testifies to Brautigan's and the postmodernist's concern with the contradictory. Contradictory elements need not be, however, mutually exclusive; the intent may be to create contradictions, existing simultaneously, to highlight the inherent ambiguities or uncertainties in living. Certainly, In Watermelon Sugar utilizes contradicting traditional aspects of the novel form; the results of such modified employment are a Brautigan fantasy world, redolent of critical contradictions, transformed by language and emotion.

The First Subtitle

The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966 (1971),³⁶

Brautigan's fourth novel, shares with his previous works elements of the pastoral mode as Brautigan has adapted them to his own works. Parts of the novel work very well, but it is the least successful of Brautigan's early works.

Like the three novels that preceded it, The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966 presents a pastoral microcosm, a fantastic library. Although the library that is a restrictive setting for the majority of the novel is within a real, generally recognizable world, any inhabitant of the library is virtually untouched by the outer world. Again, the reader is made to realize that existence outside of society is untenable; such is not life. This realization, this discovery, accompanies the narrator's psychological journey from innocence to experience and his discovery that this is no world for children, a discovery that is now a cliché. At the conclusion of the novel, the narrator is expelled from the isolated and therefore protected world of the library, but determination of the extent of the narrator's participation in the world after this expulsion produces a major critical problem. It seems clear that the repudiation

³⁶ Richard Brautigan, The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971). All subsequent references to this edition will be in parentheses in the text.

of the pastoral-like existence in the library is complete, but it is not so clear that the narrator is a participant in contemporary society; quite simply, he does not ever become "a hero in Berkeley" (p. 192) or a university "activist."³⁷

In the novel, Brautigan continues his tradition of developing different styles, for here he embarks on a new course, introducing a subtitle and a new blend of genres. However, some characteristics remain the same--there is a nameless, Brautigan-like narrator; there are six book divisions with short chapters and some clever metaphors; and there is a relationship with a woman, a minor quest, a blend of fantasy and what generally passes for reality, but what Brautigan calls history and romance. The blend of the two genres is effective, and Brautigan's descriptive language enhances parts of the novel, but, at times, the narrative plods, and the ending--especially as it concerns the narrator and the woman--is unsatisfactory. But, most importantly, the theme of the novel rejects withdrawal from society as a method of coping (or not coping) with the demands of contemporary society.

This novel, too, begins on the cover. Brautigan and a young woman are featured in the cover photograph.

³⁷ Charles Hackenberry, "Romance and Parody in Brautigan's The Abortion," Critique, 23, 2 (1981), 27.

Building on the subtitle, a brief statement on the cover describes the work as "A novel about the romantic possibilities of a public library in California." The elements "a public library" and "romantic" used in that statement as well as the words "historical" and "romance" used in the subtitle are made clearer by a plot summary. First, the library; it is developed in the first of the six books. In addition, two major characters, the narrator/ librarian and Vida, are present. Foster, a minor character, is prepared for. But finally the library is described and its policies detailed. "Book 1: Buffalo Gals, Won't You Come Out Tonight" begins with the anonymous narrator describing "a beautiful library, timed perfectly, lush and American" (p. 11). Already, the description of the library suggests that something is awry: this library is not the solid structure of the cover photograph. Through the exposition the reader learns that this is a strange library indeed: the twenty-four-hour-a-day librarian checks out no books but checks in one-of-a-kind books on the average of twenty-three a day, records information about the work in the Library Contents Ledger, and then has the author place his work on any shelf that he likes.

One chapter in the first book, "The 23," lists titles and authors of an average day's accumulation. From the titles and the information entered in the Library Contents Ledger, the status of the frequenters of this library

unfolds. The twenty-three books run the gamut from a five-year-old's My Trike to Doctor O's The Need for Legalized Abortion. But most of the books are presented by people obviously separated from society in some way. Charles Green turns in a book that he had tried for thirty-three years to have published. A nondescript middle-aged woman submits He Kissed All Night. An older, more tired Richard Brautigan turns in Moose. Generally, the "authors" have "communicated" their feelings to the written work rather than to another human being, and the effort is its own reward since no one else will read it.

The library seems physically real enough. An exact mailing address is given: "3150 Sacramento Street, San Francisco, California 94115" (p. 21). The narrator locates the library near a pet hospital across the street from a garage that displays a "Gulf" sign. The mysterious aura cast over the library by the explanation of its policies and the suggestion of separation by the word "Gulf" on the sign become more curious as the narrator explores the history of the library and explains his three-year association. While it has been in San Francisco since the 1870s, the library was previously located in St. Louis and New York. The narrator is "the 35th or 36th librarian" (p. 22). Malley discusses the correspondences between the library's moving west with the westering of America and the narrator's number

and the number of American presidents to that date (Cleveland being the problem).³⁸ However, this allegory or fable is not actually developed; in fact, Malley³⁹ and Schmitz⁴⁰ see this confused allegory as a deficiency in the novel.

It is appropriate next to explore "the romantic possibilities"; in this novel "romance" in both the literal and literary senses applies. The "possibilities" for romance in the literal sense are only one--Vida, who like the narrator visited the library to place her own work on the shelf. In the literary sense, the novel is the embodiment of Brautigan's imagination free from the restrictions of reality. While the narrator resides in the library (he took the librarian's job from someone who was afraid the children would steal his shoes), Vida only visits, maintaining her life outside the library by keeping her job at a small research laboratory and maintaining her apartment nearby. Vida (and the novel makes it clear that the pronunciation is "V-eye-da" simultaneously drawing attention to and dismissing the obvious play on the Latin "vita") is present in the novel from the first page, but her appearance at the library is detailed in "Book 2" through flashback. An incredibly beautiful nineteen-year-old with an incredibly

³⁸ Malley, pp. 66-67.

³⁹ Malley, p. 84.

⁴⁰ Schmitz, p. 116.

sensual body, Vida brings her book that details her agony at being trapped inside such a body. She tells of the eccentric behavior that the sight of her body causes wherever she goes. Once a high school student drank hydrochloric acid because she would not date him; another time, a man drove his car into a train because he was distracted by her body. Apparently, the narrator's line that he speaks several times about making people comfortable and making them feel at ease is successful, for Vida offers to stay for the night.

"Book 2" also gives additional information about this narrator and the library. Of particular interest is the narrator's age, thirty-one, the age of Brautigan in 1966. (The reader learns later in the novel that the narrator does not drive, another similarity shared with the author.) The cover photograph, the shy first-person narrator, and the obvious age parallel yield the Brautigan-narrator (or Brautigan), yet the Brautigan-author, by turning in a book to the library written by Richard Brautigan, attempts to disassociate himself and simultaneously associate himself with the books as author-narrator.

In "Book 3" the reader learns immediately that "the romantic possibilities" have culminated in an unwanted pregnancy. An alternative to abortion is never considered. This easily arrived at decision allows Brautigan to comment on both the narrator's and Vida's immaturity and the state of the world. Since the narrator does not function in the

real world, he seeks the help of the gregarious Foster. Foster is the only other employee of the foundation, and he works at the caves where the overflow of books from the library is stored. Since Foster has had experience in these matters, he makes the arrangements for transportation, hotel accommodations, and a Tijuana abortion; he also provides the funds. Foster arrives to run the library during the narrator's absence.

The trip from San Francisco to Tijuana is detailed in "Book 4: Tijuana." These chapters, though they contribute little else to the action of the novel, demonstrate the effects of Vida's overpowering beauty numerous times; they also demonstrate Brautigan's gift of language and powers of observation and at the same time serve as a bridge from the secure, unreal world of the library to the world of poverty and illegal operations. It is representational writing at its best. He contrasts the "very Playboy" (p. 114), slick San Francisco International Airport Terminal with the "small and old-fashioned" (p. 124) San Diego terminal, which has in more recent times been replaced. The landings and take-offs are in morning fog. The sun shines only when the plane takes them away from the realities on the ground. The reader learns that it is Easter time; numerous references to Easter chickens, green things, and spring remind the reader of rebirth and rejuvenation. The full irony of a springtime abortion impinges. What seems the greatest

success is Brautigan's sight and sound word-picture that captures the collision between two economies, two cultures, two nations, as Vida and the narrator move from San Diego, representative of the United States, to Tijuana, the Mexican border town, a distance of approximately fifteen miles. Brautigan's description of the stark reality of the contrast between the two towns is magnificently done. The description and language of the aggressive taxi drivers at the immigration checkpoint and the beggar-like street salespeople are wonderfully realistic, in marked contrast to the fantasy of the insular library experience. The style used to portray the slightly unreal existence in the library yields to the startlingly real and, in this case, harsh world outside the library.

"Book 5: My Three Abortions" chronicles the very busy morning of Dr. Garcia, the Mexican abortionist, as the narrator waits through the routine of three abortions. The abortions are mechanically performed. The narrator quotes the broken English of Dr. Garcia and his youthful assistants as they repeat over and over again a few pat phrases that indicate that the procedure is going routinely. The presentation dehumanizes the experience and emphasizes the mundane machinations.

The events of "Book 6: The Hero" return the couple to San Francisco to find Foster and, therefore, the librarian himself replaced in the library. Consequently, the

narrator, whom Vida describes earlier as "not at home in the world" (p. 51), must now truly exist in the world outside the library. The parallel between the physical abortion and the expelling of the narrator from his "womb" is obvious. The final chapter outlines the present living arrangement: Foster and a Pakistani student live with Vida and the narrator in a small house in Berkeley. Foster works in the shipyard, Vida is a topless dancer soon to return to college, and the narrator is "a hero in Berkeley" (p. 192), soliciting contributions for the library foundation. It is an enigmatic ending. Robert Adams astutely questions the "they-lived-happily-ever-after" ending that some critics see, probably incorrectly, as a successful result of expulsion from the Garden or of learning to cope with the real world. Adams states:

At any rate, by the end of the book, our hero has built himself a certain status as practically everyone's favorite puppy-dog; and unless Mr. Brautigan is a much clumsier artist than I think him to be, he wants⁴¹ that fact to trouble the reader at least some.

Schmitz likewise sees the ending of The Abortion as stasis, a return to "a bland existence not unlike his former library life."⁴² As with the prior novels considered, there is,

⁴¹ Adams, p. 26.

⁴² Schmitz, p. 116.

structurally, no moment toward which all these forces move. Brautigan, postmodernist that he is, sees no epiphany, no moment of truth. There is, rather, a return to the récit-structure.

A more recent critical article, Charles Hackenberry's previously cited "Romance and Parody in Brautigan's The Abortion," attempts an analysis of the novel based on the "generic interplay" of the two forms and develops the literary senses of "historical romance" as indicated by the statement on the cover of the novel. Hackenberry concludes that the elements of the traditional romance (conventions, abbreviated characterization, plot structure with the accompanying emergence of the ego) exist, but the elements are exaggerated and distorted. In stating some of the characteristics of Brautigan's writing in the blending of elements of history and romance, Hackenberry summarizes characteristics that also make this work postmodernist. Hackenberry says:

Brautigan's skill in handling imagery, following formulaic structure without seeming to, and creating ambiguity while defusing potential reader unrest allow [sic] him to interweave romance and parody, to fabricate a not-quite-polished texture that is nevertheless true to his narrator's voice and personality--and not unpleasant to read despite its often disjointed quality, its superficial incongruity.⁴³

⁴³ Hackenberry, p. 31.

Obviously, imagery is Brautigan's forte. The other characteristics cited are postmodernist. The "disjointed quality" or "superficial incongruity" that prompts censure from some critics is easily reconciled as appropriate to the novel narrated by and therefore controlled by a character like the librarian. Hackenberry, however, interprets the final chapter as positive. While Hackenberry sees the narrator's entry into society as counter to the conclusion of Trout Fishing in America, nevertheless, he considers the Berkeley hero "an activist."

Of the four critics (Adams, Malley, Schmitz, and Hackenberry) who discuss the conclusion of The Abortion at length, it seems extraordinary that not one comments about the strange transformation of the character of Vida. To go from extreme self-consciousness because of her body to "working at a topless place over in North Beach" (p. 191) seems something of an over-compensatory adjustment on her part. That appears to be an important but overlooked part of interpreting the conclusion. If her dramatic adjustment is acceptable, then the narrator's is less than satisfactory. He still collects funds for the foundation, so he has not severed all connection with the library. Being near the University of California, he remains on the fringe of the university society. And except for occupying a particular spot at lunchtime to solicit funds, he has no job, no means to contribute to the life style that the

four share. Apparently, he depends on Vida and Foster. The actions of the narrator belie the title "activist."

Although Hackenberry finds the romantic element of the novel successful, he does not find the historical element of the novel as successful. A central problem, he says, lies in the allegorical possibility of the narrator as a symbol for the President, an interpretation that strains the symbolism of the novel. What, then, should the historical element offer? A Handbook to Literature gives as a characteristic of the historical novel the presence of the conflict of two cultures, "one dying and the other being born."⁴⁴ If Brautigan's novel is, as Hackenberry describes it, "a portrait of the peace movement's heroism and efficacy, its solution to the unwanted pregnancy of American intervention in Asia,"⁴⁵ then the symbolism of the abortion would seem to make the novel fit the genre of history more precisely than Hackenberry observes. Thus, Brautigan's mingling of various elements is quite complex and more skillfully done than many critics realize.

One way out of all the confusion may be through the narrator's statements in "Book 3." While waiting for Foster's arrival at the library with all the plans for the Tijuana trip, the narrator reflects on the decision

⁴⁴ Holman, p. 214.

⁴⁵ Hackenberry, p. 34.

to abort the fetus. At that time, the narrator describes Vida's and his mental state as "a gentle form of shock that makes it easier to do one little thing after another, fragile step by fragile step, until you've done the big difficult thing waiting at the end, no matter what it is" (p. 96).

However, hovering behind all of this explication is the tall, blonde, mustachioed author from "The 23," Richard Brautigan, who brings his third or fourth book, Moose, to the library. (He is the only author mentioned who brings more than one book to the library.) When asked by the narrator what the book is about, Richard Brautigan, the character in the novel, dismisses the entire exercise of the "about business" once again; he says, "'Just another book'" (p. 27). This remark, reminiscent of a similar author's reply in In Watermelon Sugar ("'Just what I'm writing down; one word after another'"), makes the act of writing complete within itself and seemingly downgrades its importance and the importance of critical discussion. In Brautigan's writing these statements slip in frequently, and as David Lodge has said, while obliquely referring to Henry James, "A lot of postmodernist writing implies that experience is 'just carpet' and that whatever patterns we discern in it are wholly illusory, comforting fictions."⁴⁶ In Brautigan's

⁴⁶ Lodge, p. 227.

writing, this statement applies on two levels: the act of living (reality) and the act of writing (art). While his fiction may be mimetic, it is also noninterpretative.

Brautigan's statements about the nature of literature that appear in his fiction reflect his uncertainty that reality can even exist in the contemporary world. Thus, according to these statements, time spent in analysis of this fiction is wasted time, for the written word says what it is and is what it says. In analyzing postmodernist fiction, one is already two steps removed from a so-called reality. First, there is the reality (which is questionable); second, there is the writing (which is a direct comment on the reality and becomes its own reality); and, third, there is the analysis (which may distort both the reality and the comment). This accounts for, of course, part of the surface simplicity, the flat narrative, and the frequent repetition of Brautigan's fiction. With Brautigan's fiction, the sophomoric exercise of reading between the lines gives way to reading the lines. And this activity, in turn, is a comment on the first reality.

The Short Stories

Revenge of the Lawn: Stories 1962-1970 (1971)⁴⁷ is Brautigan's only published collection of short stories. In the volume of sixty-two stories, varying in length from three lines to seven pages, Brautigan continues the development of certain themes by use of several techniques that he employs in previously published novels. Several stories "justify considering Brautigan a master of the short story."⁴⁸ Published the same year as The Abortion, the volume is the fifth fictional work by Brautigan.

Revenge of the Lawn shows a wider range of themes than is possible in his novels; nevertheless, the themes cluster into categories of concern for man's relationship with man and man's relationship with nature that he reacts to in all of his fiction. In addition to similarities with themes, Brautigan continues various techniques that he has established in previous fiction. Moreover, Revenge of the Lawn may be seen as a transition from Trout Fishing in America, Brautigan's first major success, to The Tokyo-Montana Express, Brautigan's ninth novel. Although the segments of the two novels are thematically linked as Brautigan

⁴⁷ Richard Brautigan, Revenge of the Lawn: Stories 1962-1970 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971). All subsequent references to this edition will appear in parentheses in the text.

⁴⁸ Malley, p. 63.

continues discussions of human relationships, of disillusionment, of survival, the majority of the segments are self-contained and, therefore, share many characteristics of the short story. Brautigan's tendency to compose in short sections produces characteristic disjointedness, and simply determining whether or not Brautigan intends the genre of a work to be short story or novel is a point considered several times in this study. Consequently, although the short stories discussed here are not entirely in the thematic mode of the pastoral of Brautigan's fiction of the sixties, the discussion of the short stories has direct bearing on other themes and techniques in his novels and on postmodernist literature generally and is, therefore, an important part of this study.

The first technique obviously continued in Revenge of the Lawn is Brautigan's custom of beginning his work with and on the cover. The reader needs to study the cover because of its direct link with the thematic content of the book. The title, a subtitle, and a photograph of a young woman comprise the cover. "Stories 1962-1970," the subtitle, announces that these stories were written over an eight-year period. The page of publishing and copyright information acknowledges several publications that previously published some of the stories now gathered in this volume; they include Rolling Stone, Playboy, New American Review, TriQuarterly, Kalchur, and others. Two "lost"

chapters from Trout Fishing in America were rewritten especially for this volume. The black and white photograph of an attractive, smiling young woman looks like a study in nostalgia. She is seated in a carved oak chair, 1930s style, and wears a feminine, high-necked lacy blouse. On the table in front of her is a chocolate cake. The title story is the first story, and the cake functions as a symbol in that story. After appearing in photographs on the covers of the three previous novels, Brautigan is absent from this photograph.

Although Brautigan himself no longer appears on the cover, he continues to be present as a first-person narrator for the majority of the sixty-two stories; only ten are third-person narrations. The stories continue the tradition of being brief in the Brautigan style, and there is no particular chronological or thematic order. The reader, however, may furnish connectives as he finds similar themes and distinct time periods in some stories. The subtitle indicates that these stories were written during an eight-year period, but they are primarily reminiscences from three stages in Brautigan's life: early childhood (from three years of age through elementary school years), adolescence (from twelve through seventeen years), and the recent past (from twenty-seven to thirty-five years of age, including the time periods when the stories were written). As the narrator, Brautigan is alternately participant and witness

and occasionally interpreter. He most often presents "losers"--victims of society, unattached people, young people who experience disillusionment, and old people who have little to look forward to.

A second technique merges with the multiple themes as the stories continue to develop what in Brautigan's work must be known as the Brautigan narrator. The narrator alternately witnesses the losing in this world and becomes one of the losers he describes. Josephine Hendin, in her discussion of Revenge of the Lawn in The New York Times Book Review, classifies the characters in Brautigan's writing as people who suffer or who are humiliated. Their suffering makes them gentle, cold. Their humiliation makes them hard. They cope with this suffering and humiliation, Hendin says, by withdrawing, seeking protection, or "creating an insulated world of their own."⁴⁹ Since more than fifty of the stories in Revenge of the Lawn are first-person narrations drawn from childhood experiences in the Pacific Northwest and the events of World War II, the narrator is a major character who suffers and is humiliated but survives. According to Hendin, Brautigan characters endure by "cutting out" their hearts, and therefore going beyond "winning or

⁴⁹ Josephine Hendin, "A Distaste for Permissiveness, a Taste for Cool," rev. of Revenge of the Lawn, by Richard Brautigan, The New York Times Book Review, 16 January 1972, p. 22.

losing to an absolute poetry of survival."⁵⁰ This becomes, to Hendin, not just one possible method for survival that Brautigan presents but the major theme in Brautigan's works.

Malley, in his discussion of Revenge of the Lawn, disagrees with Hendin's belief that Brautigan characters seek nonattachment.⁵¹ Malley seems more accurate in his contention that the need for attachment, for love, is quite strong as a circumstance for any lessening of the difficulties in the lives of Brautigan's characters, and in life itself as Brautigan sees it.

While Revenge of the Lawn has had numerous reviews, the short-story collection has prompted little serious critical discussion. Generally, Malley and Hendin agree on the occasional unevenness of this literary effort as does another reviewer, Anatole Broyard, in a review in The New York Times. Broyard says, "He wins some and he loses some. Once in a while a piece will rise to poetry. Others never get beyond easy vignettes, light enough to blow off the page." Broyard divides the stories between two extremes: at one extreme is the combination of a child's clumsy writing effort and "a pretentious piece of avant-garde impressionism"; at the other extreme is a writing effort

⁵⁰ Hendin, p. 22.

⁵¹ Malley, p. 49.

that makes readers feel that Brautigan perceives "a better answer to being alive here and now than we have."⁵²

Broyard's characterization of what he calls the first extreme captures the very essence of the technique that Brautigan attempts: a childlike innocence reflected by a lean narrative line from a frequently naive character who observes without much analysis that things in this world are out of synchronization. Brautigan attempts a homogenization of a childlike quality, avant-garde characteristics, and an "answer to being alive."

With sixty-two widely different stories, a discussion of each of them could yield a work longer than the short story collection. Since critical extremes are being discussed, analysis of some of the more successful stories and some of the least successful stories seems an obvious approach. Consequently, many stories may simply be mentioned as illustrating a particular category or supporting a contention. The clever use of metaphor characteristic of Brautigan's writing style can be demonstrated by frequent quotations.

The title story, one of the longest stories in the volume, is a successful mixture of humor and pathos. In this first-person narration, Brautigan reaches back to the

⁵² Anatole Broyard, "Weeds and Four-leaf Clovers," rev. of Revenge of the Lawn, by Richard Brautigan, The New York Times, daily, 15 November 1971, p. 39.

earliest memories of his childhood (1936 or 1937 when he would have been, at the most, two years old) to recall a scene--a man cutting down a pear tree, pouring kerosene over it, and then burning the tree. Other aspects of the narrative suggest the piecing together of details from family stories told over and over again. The burning of the tree is the culmination of the story. Brautigan begins the childhood reminiscence recalling his grandmother, a bootlegger who "shines like a beacon down the stormy American past" (p. 9). Brautigan's grandmother is a unique character, described as a handsome woman, almost six feet tall and weighing 190 pounds. She was the wife of "a minor Washington mystic who in 1911 prophesied the exact date when World War I would start" (p. 11). Apparently, this prophecy was too much for the grandfather-mystic who spent the next seventeen years in an institution believing that his mother was baking a chocolate cake on a cloudy day, May 3, 1872. Since the lawn was the grandfather's special project and the source of his powers (according to the grandfather), when the grandfather is replaced by Jack, a travelling salesman, the lawn takes on human characteristics (to Jack) and seeks revenge for Jack's neglect of it. Jack came by one day "selling a vision of eternal oranges and sunshine door to door [lots in Florida] in a land where people ate apples and it rained a lot" (p. 10). He stayed for thirty years. The havoc that the lawn wreaks on him includes nails in the

tires of the car and a mud hole that claims the entire car in winter. The pear tree that grows in the yard is an extension of the lawn, and it displays its own peculiar vengeance. The pear tree attracts bees. The bees menace Jack. Twice, distracted by the bees, Jack drives his car into the front porch. One of these times he is actually stung; the second time he fears a sting, attempts to fling away a cigar, and cuts his hand by ramming it through the windshield. After this series of misfortunes, which are related with comic overtones, Jack vents his wrath on the pear tree. Jack's war with the lawn contrasts with the grandfather's love of the lawn. This thematic foil underscores the importance of maintaining harmony with nature.

Another amusing digression included in this reminiscence and culminating at the same time that Jack cuts his hand and drives into the porch involves the grandmother's flock of geese. Having fed on mash from the grandmother's still, the geese pass out. The geese, which "looked as if they had been machine-gunned" (p. 13), appear dead. The grandmother plucks them. Later, they come to life as "some helpless, primitive American advertisement for aspirin" (p. 14). The events of the story are amusing. These strange twists illustrate Brautigan's postmodernist observation of contradiction: events in life do not follow a linear path with one causative factor following another.

Other stories in the collection easily associated with Brautigan's relation-to-nature theme include "Elmira," "A Short History of Oregon," and "The Lost Chapters of Trout Fishing in America: 'Rembrandt Creek' and 'Carthage Sink.'" "Elmira," a two-page first-person narrative reminiscence of a teen-ager, begins with the simile "I return as if in the dream of a young American duck hunting prince to Elmira" (p. 30). From the "as if" comparison, the narrator moves to its being a dream, a familiar one, and then to its being reality itself. This technique, that moves from reality to fantasy and then maintains that fantasy as reality, is common in Brautigan's writing. This brief story seems a vehicle for a contrast between the author's musings while wandering through the wooded area beside the Long Tom River, his personal, mythic, symbol, and through the town of Elmira. In "Forgiven," the first-person narrator explains the personal symbolism of the river. The narrator says that the Long Tom River "was the beginning answers to some very complicated questions in my life that I am still trying to work out" (p. 165). This quotation parallels a statement from The San Francisco Poets, interviews and poetry edited by David Meltzer. Brautigan discusses the therapeutic nature of his writing as well as the highly personal themes in his writing. In a brief discussion prefacing several of his poems from Rommel Drives on Deep into Egypt, Brautigan

states, "I tried to write poetry that would get at some of the hard things in my life that needed talking about."⁵³

The first-person narrator in "Forgiven" also blends several postmodernist techniques. Brautigan sets up the Brautigan narrator but then contradicts this possibility by addressing Richard Brautigan, the author. There is no effort to create reality. The narrator begins by stating that this is "a story," a story with the same theme as Richard Brautigan's Trout Fishing in America, and ends by stating that he hopes that Richard Brautigan will forgive him for writing this story.

Similar to "Elmira" and "Forgiven" is "A Short History of Oregon," another somewhat lengthy (for Brautigan) teenage reminiscence of a hitch-hiking-hunting trip when the narrator seeks "the awareness of hunting" (p. 106) rather than the thrill of the hunt. Wandering through the woods, the narrator is surprised to see a shack surrounded by old cars and other junk. Four children emerge from the shack and stare silently. The narrator's final statement is, "I had no reason to believe that there was anything more to life than this" (p. 107). The unexpected presence of man in the remote area is a reminder that man cannot retreat far enough to be completely isolated from any society and that wherever man settles, he mars the landscape with

⁵³ David Meltzer, The San Francisco Poets (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), p. 294.

the trappings of his so-called civilization and begets a generation that will probably continue spoiling nature. Several stories in this collection conclude with similar interpretative remarks.

Other childhood memories developed in Revenge of the Lawn recall growing up during the years of World War II. Malley says that these stories illustrate the child's ability to transform reality through imagination, and paradoxically represent for Brautigan a time when things were easier to understand and deal with.⁵⁴ "The Ghost Children of Tacoma," "Corporal," and "A Complete History of Germany and Japan" are three stories of those childhood war years. "The Ghost Children of Tacoma" is a recollection of children pretending to be at war; the narrator, recalling these incidents more than twenty years later, says that he has entire days when he feels "like the ghost of a child" (p. 75). The simile seems appropriate on two levels: the more obvious level of the child now grown and the less obvious level of the child who imitates those fighting and dying in the war. The narrator recalls from his childhood games precise numbers of "kills" and the names of plane models. At the end of a graphic description of being "a young airplane" and telling his young sister to hang onto her hat, the narrator offers another of his tangential, interpretative comments. In "Ghost

⁵⁴ Malley, p. 54.

Children of Tacoma," it is a brief, nostalgic ode to lost youth: "Your Hat/ Gone Now These/ Twenty Years/ January 1,/ 1965" (p. 75).

"Corporal," another childhood "war story," is also a first-person narrative, not quite two pages long, that recalls a school paper drive to support the war effort. Collecting unremembered numbers of pounds earned an elementary school student various military ranks. The memory is a symbol of an initiation into painful disillusionment. The vague recollection of numbers of pounds required for achieving specific ranks in "Corporal" sharply contrasts with the exact recollection of numbers in "The Ghost Children of Tacoma" and other stories. The unpleasant memory is partially blocked, as described in Freudian psychology, in an attempt to ease the pain of the experience by simply forgetting that it ever occurred. In "Corporal," the Brautigan narrator had wanted to be a general. By careful neighborhood canvassing, the narrator earns first the private's stripe and then the corporal's stripes. However, by this time other students "who wore the best clothes and had a lot of spending money and got to eat hot lunch every day were already generals" (p. 119). The Brautigan narrator painfully experiences disillusionment. Even with all his diligent effort, he is quickly outdistanced by the advantaged students. The final statement here is effective because of a concrete Brautigan metaphor. Brautigan's belief in the destructive power of the written word also

comes through. The narrator states: "I brought a halt to my glorious military career and entered into the disen-
chanted paper shadows of America where failure is a bounced
check or a bad report card or a letter ending a love affair
and all the words that hurt people when they read them"
(pp. 119-120). Malley cites this quotation as an example of
another major theme of the book, Brautigan's "sympathetic
identification with losers,"⁵⁵ but that is not quite strong
enough to account for the narrator's feeling, for the nar-
rator is a loser. As a method of survival, the postmodern-
ist's solipsism is evident here. "Corporal" is among the
most memorable stories in the volume.

"A Complete History of Germany and Japan," less than
a page long, is a vignette recalling the squealing of the
animals from a nearby slaughterhouse. The narrator recalls
the child's impression that because everything supported the
war effort this animal-slaughter squealing does, too. This
brief narrative exemplifies the possibility of reader par-
ticipation, for it seems only a half imaginative step to
draw a parallel from this slaughter to the human slaughter
of the war. If, as several critics suggest, Brautigan
should not obtrude with these obvious comments, whether or
not the reader should supply them in their absence is still
another question. Yet, it seems clear that the reader is
led to do so.

⁵⁵ Malley, p. 58.

Sympathy with people who are unsuccessful in either life or love is found in over half of the stories in Revenge of the Lawn. Among the more successful of these are "1/3, 1/3, 1/3," "Coffee," "The Wild Birds of Heaven," "April in God-Damn," "Atlantisburg," and "Greyhound Tragedy."

The short story "1/3, 1/3, 1/3," set in the Pacific Northwest, gets its title from the division of responsibilities for preparing a novel. The thirty-one-year-old narrator of the story recalls an odd three-person alliance of some fourteen years earlier that he was a part of because he owned the typewriter. This childlike invitation brings to mind children's games when a not-necessarily-wanted person is invited to join the team because he owns a crucial piece of equipment; this reenforces the pathetic naiveté of the three people. A second one-third would go to a welfare recipient in her late thirties who was to edit the book relying on her knowledge drawn from reading the Reader's Digest and pocketbooks. The final third would be the author's. The author, a fourth-grade dropout, is writing the love story of an Oregon logger and a waitress, appropriately enough in a childlike scrawl in a Hopalong Cassidy notebook. The story of the literary allies is poignant. Each of the three characters is sad; the typist/narrator, a "lonely and strange" (p. 18) seventeen-year-old living by himself in a cardboard-lined shack that he built; the editor, a lady whose life revolves around welfare-check day;

and the author, a man in his late forties who "looked as if life had given him an endless stream of two-timing girlfriends, five-day drunks and cars with bad transmissions" (p. 20). Brautigan brings the three unlikely literary novices together on a miserable, rainy day in the author's old, messy trailer. These losers in life make a pathetic threesome "pounding at the gates of American literature" (p. 24). In this story, Brautigan captures the spirit of disappointment and failure in their feeble attempts.

"Coffee" is one short story that serves as a partial refutation of Hendin's contention that Brautigan people survive through non-feeling, non-attachment. Twice in one day, early in the morning and late at night, the narrator calls on old girlfriends under the pretense of asking for a cup of coffee. Neither girl is eager to see him. While each one allows him in to make his own instant coffee, neither girl stays to visit with him. The lack of company and the rejection are clearly frustrating as the narrator bides his time between the two visits and leaves the second apartment without his coffee when he realizes that he is not wanted. The final statement of "The Betrayed Kingdom," the story of a notorious flirt who makes promises of sexual favors through innuendo and thereby dupes males into driving her home from parties only to make them sleep on the floor, could just as well be appended here. When one floor-sleeper finally gets revenge by humiliating her, the narrator says:

"This might have been a funny story if it weren't for the fact that people need a little loving and, God, sometimes it's sad all the shit they have to go through to find some" (p. 141). Indeed Brautigan characters frequently seek such an attachment only to be disappointed.

"Greyhound Tragedy," one of the few third-person narrations in the collection, explores the theme of the unrealized Hollywood dream. A middle-class teen-ager dreams of success in Hollywood. For her, a major step is getting up the nerve to inquire about the price of the ticket to Hollywood at the local bus station. After seven months of wondering about the fare, she goes to the bus station, but she leaves in tears unable to ask. Succumbing to parental pressures, she marries a young Ford salesman. The Hollywood dream seems visited on her two children, whom she names Jean and Rudolph, apparently for the legendary Jean Harlow and Rudolph Valentino. The narrator tells the reader that, after thirty-one years, she blushes at the bus-station memory.

"The Wild Birds of Heaven" is another story about a loser, this time a man victimized by his own family and dehumanized by a consumer credit society. This story, like "Greyhound Tragedy," is a third-person narration, but it is a strange fable. The theme of the story, according to Malley, is the extinction of the identity of the main character, Mr. Henly. Malley calls this extinction of

identity a "small fable" told with "great economy" and "considerable power."⁵⁵ Henly's wife and children browbeat him into purchasing a television set with a forty-two-inch screen. (Ironically, this story was written before such sets were available.) When Henly enters the world of consumerism by purchasing one of its most popular products, he is ushered into the credit department past a girl who "looked like a composite of all the beautiful girls you see in cigarette advertisements" (pp. 52-53). Her very appearance compels him to smoke a cigarette. In the credit department, Henly exchanges his shadow for that of a huge bird; the bird shadow is painlessly nailed to his feet. The demands of the children are ludicrous in the extreme; if Mr. Henly does not buy them a "video pacifier," they will become juvenile delinquents. Ironically, the wife asks if he is "'some kind of human monster'" (p. 55). When the clerk asks whether or not Henly has an account, the clerk looks at Henly's feet and then knows that he does not. The children's threats, the wife's question, and the clerk's action subtly prepare for the surrealistic event that follows. When the beautiful girl sends him to the room for the shadow exchange, Brautigan describes a very strange, heavy door with a solid silver doorknob. "BLACKSMITH" appears over the door (p. 56). The badgering that sent Henly there and his feelings at the end make him a victimized, dehumanized character. A Kafka-like aura

pervades. That aura is somewhat softened by the absence of physical pain and the presence of the trappings of the middle-class family.

In a number of stories, Brautigan expresses sympathy with eccentric people or old people. In "Winter Rug" a gardener buries an old woman's dog wrapped in a thousand-dollar Chinese rug. Although the gardener considered the value of the rug and still thinks about why he buried the valuable rug, he obviously respected the wishes of the old lady. That is, however, only one aspect of a story which also includes numerous sympathetic comments about becoming very old and very lonely as people "lose the way when it comes time to actually die" (p. 57). The narrator implies that the lingering on and living with death are worse than death.

In "The Old Bus," the young narrator boards a San Francisco bus that is filled with elderly people. When he sees that he is an unpleasant reminder of their lost youth, he gets off the bus as soon as possible. This strange, brief story deals with sparing the feelings of these old people.

In "1692 Cotton Mather Newsreel," the narrator tells of a dare taken when he was four years old. Believing a strange-looking lady in Tacoma to be a witch, the narrator accepts a dare from his friend to wave from the window of her apartment. Reflecting on this incident twenty-eight

years later, the narrator says, "I look about as crazy in 1967 as you [the Tacoma witch] did in 1939" (p. 15). Examining her garbage and even her apartment and finding only one unusual thing--many flowers--the children, through their imagination, still believe that she is a witch, rather than accepting the ordinary evidence that refutes it. This story also has a coda; the narrator says, "This was a month or two before the German Army marched into Poland" (p. 18). Brautigan's final statement reminds the reader that World War II abruptly ended many childhood years.

Several brief pieces deal with the narrator's perception of one thing in terms of another. Using the postmodernist technique of short circuit, Brautigan makes unlikely combinations. Several of these, however, seem among the most unsuccessful of the pieces. In reading Brautigan's work, the reader must frequently make a quantum, imaginative leap, but the greater context for referral in the novels seems to aid that process. Stories that are unsuccessful because of these skewed perceptions are "Pale Marble Movie," "Halloween in Denver," "Trick or Treating Down to the Sea in Ships," and "I Was Trying to Describe You to Someone." Perhaps a brief discussion of three of these will show some of the shortcomings. The phrase "pale marble movie" has a nice poetic ring, but the poetry of the simile is lost in a brief, inane conversation. The narrator tells his bed partner to return to bed because she is still asleep. She

is obedient, and the scene is recalled as "a pale marble movie" (p. 98). Another story, "Halloween in Denver," has an abrupt change of scene and an abrupt ending occurring simultaneously. A Telegraph Hill couple makes preparations for trick or treaters. When none have called by 9:30 p.m., the two go to bed. Fifty-four seconds into their love-making, the trick or treaters ring the doorbell; "suddenly we weren't at home" is the only transition. The Telegraph Hill couple is now at a Denver street corner. This lack of connective or plausible explanation seems an overt postmodernist characteristic that parallels the postmodernist's belief that events are not necessarily causal and/or linear; however, exactly what Brautigan's intentions are for this rapid change of scenery remains a mystery. "I Was Trying to Describe You to Someone" is a digression that seems longer than its page and a half. The girl is described as a movie, a movie about electricity and its accompanying advantages. The attempted connection is strained and ineffective. Although these stories indicate an unevenness in the short-story collection, the majority of the stories are successful.

In a final thematic category, three stories illustrate Brautigan's statements about the power of words and communication. "Lint," "Pacific Radio Fire," and "The World War I Los Angeles Airplane" are interesting for what they

contribute to this theme. "Lint" is among the shortest pieces in the volume. The narrator says:

I'm haunted a little this evening by feelings that have no vocabulary and events that should be explained in dimensions of lint rather than words.

I've been examining half-scrap of my childhood. They are pieces of distant life that have no form or meaning. They are things that just happened like lint. (p. 121)

This quotes "Lint" entirely. Brautigan seems to be getting at the idea that the human element, verbalization, is responsible for life's form and meaning. The events just happened. "Vocabulary" gives shape to experiences. "Pacific Radio Fire" shows that while words alone are ineffective in aiding a broken heart, the sound of compassion in a human voice makes a difference. "The World War I Los Angeles Airplane" is the last short story in Revenge of the Lawn. Because it occupies a strategic position and is among the best, the story is the last to be discussed here. This story incorporates several of Brautigan's thematic concerns: death (the ultimate losing), a loser in life, and the power of words. Ten years after the event, the narrator recalls having to tell his wife about her father's death. Reflecting on "what his death means to all of us" (p. 169), the narrator lists thirty-three items that chronicle the father's life. The list leads the reader through a life of frustrations

and disappointments--a marriage, a divorce, a tragic car accident, World War I, another marriage, the Depression, several jobs, and retirement. After a life of disappointments, the father becomes an alcoholic who replaces life with sweet wine. His one moment of glory, mentioned twice, was that in 1918 he was followed by a rainbow as he flew over France. The list gives a very sympathetic treatment to someone who seemed manipulated by historical events. At the beginning of the story, the narrator muses on how to tell his wife about her father's death. With this musing comes a powerful statement. He says, "you cannot camouflage death with words. Always at the end of the words somebody is dead" (p. 169). While words have great positive power and give shape to experience, words also inherently possess great negative power, the potential for hurt, for disillusionment.

Conclusion

The fiction that Brautigan wrote between 1964 and 1971 established his reputation as a promising American author with a large following of undergraduate students. In that fiction, Brautigan thematically addresses the problems of the decade, a decade characterized by upheaval in American society. While Brautigan's themes were "relevant," as the catchword of the sixties would have said, his personal

techniques for deploying these themes also aroused the interest of readers. Frequently, technique overrides theme. Brautigan popularized a characteristic use of a narrator, lists, bizarre similes, short sections, simple sentences, and ordinary vocabulary.

In the 1960s, college students assumed the roles of militant intellectuals or intellectual militants as they protested two major concerns: America's participation in an unpopular war and industry's rape of the land while government agencies looked the other way. The protests ranged from violent outbursts with deaths and property destruction to gentle songs. "Kent State" became synonymous with "student against the establishment." "Ecology" became a part of everyone's vocabulary. Many of these protestors felt frustration and futility. Consequently, "dropping-out" became the only alternative. Unable to change society, individuals ceased to be members of the society. "Gone to look for America," a line from a Simon and Garfunkel song of the time, became the avowed purpose of many disillusioned young people. Predictably, the timbre of the time produced Brautigan, the author who says in Trout Fishing in America that America is "often only a place in the mind." Brautigan's literary characters also seek America.

The characters Lee and Jesse from A Confederate General from Big Sur are on the outside of society, the narrator of

Trout Fishing in America actively seeks the real America in its trout streams, the narrator of The Abortion is a dropout who does not quite "drop back in," and numerous characters in Revenge of the Lawn reveal an authorial sensitivity to old age, nature, and love. The early Brautigan novels epitomize the frustration and futility of that time.

But the decade of the sixties inevitably gives way to the decades of the seventies and the eighties. The hippies become middle-aged. Inevitably, Brautigan has broadened his concerns and continues to interpret contemporary life through his art. The timeliness of the majority of his themes is not, however, so easily dated, for man's relationships with nature, God, and society always have been and always will be necessary intellectual considerations. Nevertheless, Brautigan's themes keep pace with the changes in society wrought by science and industrial technology.

Chapter III

The Established Author: Brautigan's Fiction of the 1970s

By the early 1970s, Richard Brautigan's reputation as an innovative writer and a reclusive person was firmly established. His published fiction--four novels, a volume of short stories, and many other individually published short stories--and poetry attested to wide-ranging talent; the labels of "gentle hippie," "spokesman for the young," and "cult figure" appeared frequently in book reviews and critical articles. Brautigan's fiction of the 1970s includes five novels: The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western, Willard and His Bowling Trophies: A Perverse Mystery, Sombrero Fallout: A Japanese Novel, Dreaming of Babylon: A Private Eye Novel 1942, and The Tokyo-Montana Express. In these novels, Brautigan continues various postmodernist techniques and themes that he used in his fiction of the 1960s that established his literary reputation. First, he further develops his "personal genre" of literature as indicated by a subtitle appended to the titles of his first four novels published during the 1970s. As the subtitles suggest, four of these novels present dual story lines. Other recognizable continuing Brautigan

elements include his non-traditional, generally underdeveloped hero or main character, a mix of the light-hearted and the serious, abrupt junctures in dual plots, simple sentence structures, imaginative metaphors, some obscure symbolism, and brief novels; his themes evidence his continuing concern with the impossibility of preserving or even establishing identity in a high tech society. Additionally, Brautigan shows growing thematic awareness of violence as an endemic part of American culture. Recognizing the precarious nature of society ringed by various pressures, Brautigan contemplates the obliteration of all mankind. Finally, Brautigan's obvious concern with the impact of the visual as a part of the medium of the novel is continued in these works by his characteristic cover treatments, vast blank spaces, generous margins, and typographical play. Unfortunately, in light of the great artistic promise of his fiction of the 1960s, Brautigan's novels of the 1970s are not particularly distinguished. Occasionally, the novels lack the vitality of the earlier works. In some instances, there is more contrivance than technique, more ennui than imagination. Nevertheless, at its best--and there are numerous achievements--Brautigan's fiction of the 1970s continues to be entertaining, innovative, and germane to contemporary social issues.

Blended Genres

In The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western (1974),¹ Brautigan continues the development of a "personal genre" of literature begun by The Abortion. During the 1970s, Brautigan's personalized novelistic genre takes one of two forms: in the first instance, he blends two forms of literature (i.e., the Gothic novel and the western) for the purpose of parody; or, in the second, he creates a pseudo form by blending two elements in the subtitle (e.g., his second novel of the decade is subtitled "A Perverse Mystery"). Whatever Brautigan's underlying structural technique, his themes continue to be statements about mythic America and an individual's efforts to cope with American reality; also there is thematic statement that violence is inherent in American culture. In The Hawkline Monster, Brautigan, by parodying elements of the Gothic novel and the American western, makes serious statement about America's failed ideal.

Brautigan's western is a modified stereotypical western. The story is set in the western part of the United States, but the villain is a monster, not a man, and the

¹ Richard Brautigan, The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974). All subsequent references to this edition will be in parentheses in the text.

hero is two persons who are, in reality, "hit men," characters who embody traits of both the literary hero and the anti-hero. By destroying the villain, the heroes rescue two women. The Gothic elements are developed primarily by the Hawklime mansion and its atmosphere; the feeling that something bad is imminent is carefully calculated throughout the novel. Damsels in distress exist in the characters of the Misses Hawklime. The strange Hawklime mansion contains a mysterious underground laboratory. Both of these elements, the western and the Gothic, reenforce the setting and the story of The Hawklime Monster; as with much postmodernist writing, character development of even the main characters --Greer, Cameron, and the Misses Hawklime--is slighted.

The Hawklime Monster is a third-person narration. Other than a few stories in Revenge of the Lawn, this is Brautigan's first work in the third person; the two novels that follow are also told from the third person. This marks a divergence in Brautigan's narrative style, as he removes himself from the forefront of his fiction. The novel is divided into three books: "Hawaii," containing twenty-seven chapters in fifty pages; "Miss Hawklime," containing only five chapters in eight pages; and "The Hawklime Monster," containing fifty-six chapters in one hundred thirteen pages.

Even though "Hawaii" is the title of the first book, only the first chapter, "The Riding Lesson," is set in

Hawaii. Later references to Hawaii are sprinkled throughout the novel. In this initial chapter of exposition, two of the main characters, Greer and Cameron, are introduced against the background of Hawaii in the summer of 1902. This initial two-page chapter is packed with detail. Dressed in their Eastern Oregon cowboy clothes, Greer and Cameron crouch in a pineapple field watching a man teach his son to ride. The two cowboys have been paid a thousand dollars each to shoot the man that they are watching. The wife, dressed in white, appears on the porch of the large house to call her husband and son for dinner, completing a pleasant family scene. This idyllic scene seems to reveal some redeeming characteristic in the personalities of the two henchmen, but the narrator dispels the possibility of any good-guy associations by recalling an incident when the two shot a deputy sheriff ten times. When he does not die after the ten shots, they make a pact with the deputy that they will not shoot him again if he will die. The deputy replies, "'OK, I'm dead.'" If this strange piece of repartee is not unusual enough, the entire exchange is described as a "terrifying experience" superseded only by the "terrifying experience" of the boat trip from San Francisco to Hawaii. This outlandish, deadpan humor serves two functions. First, the reader knows that this is not a traditional western novel; nonrealistic elements and an unusual narrative mode imbue this tale with a distinctive style.

Second, the reader is immediately introduced to Brautigan's characteristic, metaphorical comparison; for some critics, these metaphors distinguish his style as nothing else does.

Immediately, Greer and Cameron return to the Mainland, ultimately arriving in Portland, Oregon, where the first Miss Hawklane finds them in a brothel. This scene establishes a strong element of earthiness--for some critics, particularly offensive. Dressed as an Indian and calling herself Magic Child, she gives Greer and Cameron five thousand dollars without disclosing their duties. The following morning the three leave Portland for Central County to meet the second Miss Hawklane, the fourth major character, who is Magic Child's twin sister, and to learn from her what they are to do. Most of the first book, one-third of the novel, details their making of the trip to the Hawklane house. During this first book, Brautigan accomplishes three things. First, he provides the necessary exposition, by setting the time and place, introducing the major characters, and establishing the mysterious atmosphere necessary to the novel. Second, throughout this first book, Brautigan maintains the mystery of what the two will be required to do for this five thousand dollars, a rather large sum of money when one considers they murdered "a Chinaman" in San Francisco for seventy-five dollars. Third, during their journey, grim reminders of violent death pass by, yet those are often touched with humor. They pass

the towns of Billy and Brooks, Oregon, named after two brothers who killed each other over five chickens (p. 25). As Greer, Cameron, Magic Child, and a barbed-wire salesman leave Gompville in the stagecoach, they see a man hanging from a tree. The narrator describes the scene: "There was a look of disbelief on his face as if he still couldn't believe that he was dead. He wouldn't believe he was dead until they buried him" (p. 26). As the stagecoach passes by, the salesman comments that this is the work of the gunmen from Portland, a naive statement that reminds the reader of Greer and Cameron's occupation.

As they continue their journey, they stop on a ridge to view another scene of death. Thousands of sheep have been slaughtered; the stereotypical range war between the cattle ranchers and the sheep herders provides further background for the western half of the novel. Yet, the narrator updates this with a surreal description of the scene. The narrator states:

There was an Old Testament quantity of vultures circling and landing and rising again in the meadow. They were like flesh angels summoned to worship at a large spread-out temple of many small white formerly-living things. (p. 33)

After spending the night in a barn at the last stop along the way, the three continue to the Hawkline house on rented horses. Greer terms the scenery along the way "stark" (p. 52). When they finally see something "human," it is

a grave (p. 54). The narrator discusses the name of this "stark" region, the Dead Hills, and the road the three are travelling is an imaginative metaphor that further emphasizes the numerous elements of death encountered on this journey. The narrator says that the Dead Hills "looked as if an undertaker had designed them from left-over funeral scraps." The course of the road is described as "wandering like the handwriting of a dying person over the hills," and the road is "barely legible" (p. 52). Five chapters later the road stops in front of the Hawkline house "like a dying man's signature on a last-minute will" (p. 58). The images are typically Brautigan--the imagination that sparked them and the elaboration that continues them--but the substance of what is discussed, death, blunts the humor with harshness.

However, counterpoised against all of the references to death are some genuinely funny descriptions, some very casual interspersions of sex, and some raw, earthy language. In the brothel, Greer and Cameron are interrupted by Magic Child. At a stagecoach stop at Widow Jane's house, the driver and Widow Jane have their "coffee" upstairs while the passengers have coffee and doughnuts downstairs listening to the squeaking bedsprings (p. 28). At Billy, Magic Child initiates sex with both Cameron and Greer. Magic Child has "a reputation in town for being generous with her favors" (p. 47), and the narrator recalls still another time

when she slept with Pills, the sixty-one-year-old owner of the barn.

Coarse language can be used to reenforce the coarseness of a character in the novel, but the use of this same type of language by the narrator seems the most blatant misunderstanding of or disregard for the effects of the language. For example, the use of "fuck" by all of the main characters, as well as the monster and even the monster's shadow, becomes simply offensive when overused and used by the narrator himself. Supporting this view is Valentine Cunningham, who, in a Times Literary Supplement review, focuses on the surreal aspects of the novel and the explicit language of the novel. First, Cunningham warns that triteness and banality are "embarrassing neighbors" to the surreal and that Brautigan has not been careful enough of his deadpan manner to avoid the embarrassment. Second, Cunningham terms the explicit, four-letter variety of language "extremely liberating" as it makes "an unstrident appearance in fiction," but she points out that "especially--in regard to sexual events narrative inertness speedily numbs."²

"Book II: Miss Hawklime" deftly turns the western to the Gothic. Arriving on a hot July day, they are greeted by the second Miss Hawklime, identical to Magic Child. On

² Valentine Cunningham, "Whisky in the Works," rev. of The Hawklime Monster, by Richard Brautigan, Times Literary Supplement, 11 April 1975, p. 389.

this hot day she is wearing a coat. Within a hundred yards of this huge yellow house, the air becomes cold. The ground around the house is covered by frost. The environs of the house demarcate a strange, Gothic world. When the narrator begins to create this atmosphere, he begins subtly. When the two sisters greet one another, the narrator describes them as "two beautiful and unreal women" (p. 65). Magic Child changes clothes, sheds the Indian identity, and returns in a proper New England wardrobe indistinguishable from her twin; they are even without distinguishing first names.

In this brief middle section, important references are made to two other things that are of major importance in "Book III." The first reference is to someone or some thing observing their arrival from the upstairs window. That reference is appropriately stated in the passive voice; this is, of course, the monster. The second reference, made only in passing, is to a large elephant foot umbrella stand in the hallway; the monster is responsible for the transformation of Professor Hawklime into the umbrella stand.

After Greer and Cameron eat breakfast, they discuss with the Misses Hawklime what they are to do to earn this five thousand dollars. This discussion enables the author to bring in the background information that has been withheld to this point. The Misses Hawklime explain their father's background. As a professor of chemistry at

Harvard, Professor Hawkline experimented extensively with "The Chemicals" which held "the answer to the ultimate problem facing mankind" (p. 89). When the experiments began to go awry, the Professor moved his family, his laboratory, and his 7'2" butler to Eastern Oregon. The huge Gothic house is situated on top of the laboratory which sits on top of ice caves. Greer and Cameron immediately connect the monster to the experiments, but the Misses Hawkline are determined to finish the experiment in their father's memory. Professor Hawkline's disappearance is so far the strongest manifestation of the monster's powers. Other effects wrought by the monster seem somewhat frivolous--green feathers in shoes, black umbrellas all around, and clothes disappearing off people. However, the Misses Hawkline are affected in other strange ways without being aware of the effects: not knowing their own first names and not being able to think clearly are two effects. Later, the two cannot recall the name "Magic Child," and one is surprised to find Indian clothing in her closet.

Cameron, Greer, and the Misses Hawkline, with the butler behind them, go to the laboratory to kill the monster. Just as they start to open the door, the butler "dies." Now faced with two problems, whether to bury the butler or to kill the monster, one of the illogically thinking Misses Hawkline suggests a third alternative--sex. Afterwards, the four of them procrastinate longer by having tea. By

the time they get around to burying the butler, his body has shrunk so much that they bury him in a suitcase.

As all of these events transpire, the narrator establishes the nature of the monster. While the powers of the monster have been operating throughout "Book III" and Cameron and Greer have observed some of the effects, one chapter clearly establishes that this monster is a unique conception on the part of the author. In a chapter that recounts the history behind the experiments, how they have gone awry, and the powers and pranks of the monster, the narrator describes the unusual monster; the narrator says, "the monster was an illusion created by a mutated light in The Chemicals, a light that had the power to work its will upon mind and matter and change the very nature of reality to fit its mischievous mind" (p. 113). The monster-light has a disapproving shadow which is an element that has separated itself from the rest of the mixture and still carries with it the notion of doing good for mankind. The light relies on The Chemicals as its source of energy. These chemicals are a mixture of "things from all over the world," a cross between the very old, "something from an Egyptian pyramid dating from the year 3000 B.C." and "witchcraft and modern science, the newest of discoveries" (p. 11).

When the professor passed electricity through The Chemicals, the mixture became unbalanced. While the professor was diligently working to correct the balance of

The Chemicals "promising a brighter and more beautiful future for all mankind" (p. 112), he disappeared from his laboratory. At this point, the Misses Hawkline determined that the monster must be killed.

During all the episodes that take place within the house, Greer and Cameron carefully observe things. The two as outsiders are partially immune to the mental tricks that the monster plays, so their observations can be relied on. Greer is especially observant, and he becomes acutely aware of the moving light in a chandelier and later around a pearl necklace. It was, of course, Greer who observed "the flash of light" at an upstairs window when they arrived at the Hawkline house. Greer and Cameron both conclude that the monster and The Chemicals are interrelated. However, the four of them decide to postpone again the monster-killing until after supper. About midnight of this one very long day, the four discuss the monster. For the first time, Greer and Cameron mention the moving light to the Misses Hawkline; one confirms that the light is associated with The Chemicals. Finally, they conclude that destroying the experiment is a necessity. For some unknown reason, Cameron pours a large glass of whiskey, and he takes it with him. As Greer and Cameron proceed to the laboratory, the Misses Hawkline are struck by the likeness of the umbrella stand to their father. Meanwhile, the shadow, still sympathetic to the professor's original purpose, acts at a critical moment

that prevents the light-monster from interfering with Cameron's next action. Cameron pours the whiskey into the light's energy source; blue sparks fly and set the house on fire. The father, somewhat stiff and grouchy, sheds his umbrella stand likeness, and the butler emerges from his suitcase grave. The house burns, and the ice caves melt, forming a lake. The Hawkline sisters suddenly remember their names are Susan and Jane. The spell is broken. Cameron, curious to see if anything is left of the monster, swims in the newly formed lake and finds thirty-five blue diamonds.

A final chapter, reminiscent of Victorian Gothic novels, maps the future of everyone's life. The professor exchanges experimenting for stamp collecting. Greer marries Jane. They start a brothel. They divorce. Jane runs the brothel for five more years until she is "barely killed" in a car accident. Greer spends four years in jail, where he becomes interested in the Rosicrucian movement, for auto theft. Cameron and Susan split up after a time. Susan goes to Paris, marries a Russian, and moves to Moscow. "She was killed by a stray bullet during the Russian Revolution in October 1917" (p. 187). Cameron becomes a movie producer. The diamonds are spent. The Hawkline property is sold to the state for a park, but the site, the reader is told as the final statement in the novel, "doesn't get many visitors" (p. 188). This closed ending is an atypical one for

Brautigan, but it shows that the dreams of the four main characters, in spite of the brief success of destroying the chemical monster, reach unhappy conclusions.

The summary of this Brautigan plot is lengthy and indicates the inane quality of the plot; this summary lends some credence to the comments of the various book reviewers who harshly criticize the novel. However, much of the detail is recounted in an effort to establish the western and Gothic elements in the novel and Brautigan's postmodernist adaptation of them.

In a flurry of brief, negative reviews of the novel, one serious critical article of some length appeared discussing The Hawkline Monster. Lonnie L. Willis, writing in Critique, notes the paucity of critical estimations of Brautigan's 1970s fiction. Stating that The Hawkline Monster goes beyond parody of the western and Gothic novels, Willis says that the novel deserves attention as a "resolution of some issues characteristic of Brautigan's earlier work." Many of Willis's contentions lend support to points made in this current study and deserve close attention. The novel, Willis says, "continues Brautigan's serious concern with failed American dreams." Willis further states that the novelist "investigates the failure of the American experience to harmonize expectation and reality, and it calls attention to illusions that have distorted the

national vision."³ In "Brautigan's The Hawkline Monster: As Big as the Ritz," Willis develops two major ideas. First, Willis parallels events in The Hawkline Monster to F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz." Willis cites similarities between the hero's quest, the descriptions of the families' homes, the fact that both burn, and the diamonds that are found and squandered. Willis also traces Fitzgerald's source of skepticism to the influence of Mark Twain in The Mysterious Stranger. Therefore, the line of influence is from Twain through Fitzgerald to Brautigan. (Several critics have likewise alluded to the influence that Twain and Fitzgerald have had on Brautigan, but the parallels have not been drawn so clearly.) Second, Willis explores Brautigan's "land of fantasy and fable--even myth,"⁴ as Brautigan makes still another statement about "failed American dreams." This aspect sets the novel in the mainstream of Brautigan thought and theme. Willis explores the symbolism of The Chemicals and the professor's relation to them, and he analyzes the myth of the quest as it relates to Greer and Cameron.

Seeing the professor's experiment a failure and a Brautigan statement of "America's apocalyptic future,"

³ Lonnie L. Willis, "Brautigan's The Hawkline Monster: As Big as the Ritz," Critique, 23, 2 (1981), 37.

⁴ Willis, p. 40.

Willis examines the contribution and the dominating structure of the myth of the hero and his quest. Setting the hero's quest in a peculiarly American form, the western, Brautigan takes advantage of preset, stereotypical expectations. According to A Handbook to Literature, "If out of the American experience there has come a representative action that has the characteristics of a myth and expresses in plot and character the average American's view of the cosmos, it appears to be the Western."⁵ In applying this American myth of the cosmos to The Hawkline Monster, Willis states, "Brautigan's use of the myth of the heroic quest does not include the concluding sense of hope." In his discussion of the literary hero and Brautigan's hero, Willis cites Joseph Campbell's definition of "hero" in The Hero with a Thousand Faces. The hero and his quest must fulfill four requirements to fit Campbell's definition. There is first a journey from the ordinary world to a supernatural one. In this extraordinary world, the hero confronts strange forces. He overcomes the forces, and finally he returns to benefit his fellow man. Greer and Cameron, as dual hero, fulfill three of the four requirements. The conclusion obliterates any hope for the heroes to provide any benefits for mankind. While Willis develops the major

⁵ C. Hugh Holman, ed., A Handbook to Literature (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980), p. 466.

points that The Hawklime Monster resolves questions that Brautigan raises in earlier works and that Brautigan succeeds in going beyond parody of the western and Gothic, Willis concludes that "the Hawklime monster's shadow falls between them [expectation and reality]." Willis attempts to relate the shadow of Brautigan's monster to Eliot's "Shadow" in "The Hollow Men": "Between the idea/ And the reality/ Between the motion/ And the act/ Falls the Shadow." This attempt at connection is weak; while Brautigan's monster is malevolent, the shadow of the monster, one element from the experiment that separated itself, disapproves of the monster's actions and continues to hope for a slender possibility for the success of the original intention of the experiment. In aiding Cameron to destroy The Chemicals, the shadow exterminates its own existence; the shadow itself is not a symbol of evil. Otherwise, Willis's commentary is helpful for looking beyond the problem of inappropriate use of coarse language and pointing out influential literary precursors and important thematic concerns.

The Hawklime Monster has much in common with previously discussed Brautigan fiction. There is a need to consider the matter of potentially offensive language: there is a postmodernist combination of forms injected with the Brautigan humor; and the theme is typically Brautigan.

Brautigan's First Dual Plot

With the publication of Willard and His Bowling Trophies: A Perverse Mystery (1975),⁶ Brautigan continues several characteristic elements established by his previously published fiction, but he also veers markedly from his fictional path. The novel is the second in a series of three written in the third person; the Brautigan narrator is absent. The novel continues the use of the Brautigan subtitle. The "Willard" in the title suggests a major character or symbol that is, in reality, mentioned very few times; Willard is, as are many would-be Brautigan symbols, personal, obscure, and malleable. The novel, like all of Brautigan's work, is briefer than its bulk and page numbers suggest. Beginning in the middle of page 11, the novel contains 167 pages with large print, wide margins, and 71 chapters, all of which begin halfway down the page and many of which end in the middle of another page. The briefest chapter, "Locomotive Bubble," consists of the following one line: "'OH, GOD! THE BOWLING TROPHIES ARE GONE!'" (p. 65). While the continuation of these similarities reenforces the Brautigan style, the differences are, however, more interesting to study, for in Willard and His Bowling Trophies,

⁶ Richard Brautigan, Willard and His Bowling Trophies: A Perverse Mystery (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975). All subsequent references to this edition will be in parentheses in the text.

Brautigan begins a technique of maintaining separate, but parallel, story lines that are developed independently and that cross one another climactically. The author deals in turn with the incidents in the lives of the various characters as these events lead them to their author-predestined meeting. This meeting results in violence, the senseless violence that has become another Brautigan--and postmodernist in general--theme. Accompanying this technique of maintaining separate story lines is Brautigan's exploration of this new theme. In the discussion of the novel in The New York Times Book Review, Michael Rogers, associate editor of Rolling Stone, says "[the Brautigan style] has collided firmly with the harsh and nasty seventies."⁷ Rogers recognizes the postmodernist author's merging of fact and fiction.

Three story lines are developed in Willard and His Bowling Trophies. Two story lines are closely related because they develop the lives of two couples who are friends and who occupy the second and third floor apartments above a laundry. Yet the two couples are never in the same scene, and, for the most part, their lives are led separately. Constance, a model and author of one

⁷ Michael Rogers, "The Gentle Brautigan and the Nasty Seventies," rev. of Willard and His Bowling Trophies, by Richard Brautigan, The New York Times Book Review, 14 September 1975, p. 4.

unsuccessful book, and Bob, a man who seemingly does nothing and who is slowly losing his mental faculties, occupy the third floor; most of the novel is devoted to their lives, made miserable by venereal warts contracted by Constance and communicated to Bob. Patricia, a junior high school Spanish teacher, and John, a film-maker, occupy the second floor apartment; Patricia and John possess Willard, a large papier-mâché bird created from a dream by a California artist, and the bowling trophies that John says they found in an abandoned car in Marin County. The third story line details the lives of the Logan brothers but focuses on their three-year search for their bowling trophies. The frenetic search has taken them throughout the United States and led them from frustration to desperation. When their money is exhausted, they finance their search through increasingly violent crimes.

The introduction of Willard offers the opportunity for presenting his creator, an artist who is easily envisioned as the author Brautigan. After all, Brautigan is never far removed from his own work. Obvious biographical parallels include age, failed relationships, and the California residence. Familiarity with this stylistic tic of direct author participation makes the connection not at all strained; to the reader who is familiar with Brautigan's writing only through this novel, the connection would be strained.

Brautigan describes the artist:

The artist was in his late thirties and had had a very fucked-up life with many bad love affairs and much torment but he had somehow kept it together and was now supporting himself from his sculpture and he had a woman who took care of his basic physical and spiritual wants without fooling with his head too much. (p. 45)

When the three story lines intersect, the Logan brothers burst into the wrong apartment and shoot Bob and Constance. So ends the novel. A very brief epilogue raising the question of the whereabouts of the Logan sisters is answered with "Forget them." That is the denouement.

Willard and His Bowling Trophies has elicited little critical interest other than reviews attendant upon its publication. Three critics, Phoebe-Lou Adams in The Atlantic Monthly, L. J. Davis in The New Republic, and Michael Mason in the Times Literary Supplement, refer to elements of the novel that delineate extreme characteristics of the novel and mark it as postmodernist in theme and form. (However, not one of the reviewers directly categorizes the novel as postmodernist.) Adams mentions theme, Davis discusses simplicity of form, and Mason explores lack of "connectedness." The comments of these three critics delineate three areas of the novel convenient for beginning a discussion. While comments of all three critics may, at first, seem negative ones about Brautigan's work, they are, when set against the tenets of postmodernism, illustrative of the author's intent.

Adams' somewhat sarcastic review actually comes quite close to summarizing the intent of the author as revealed by a major theme of the novel. Adams' brief review is easily quoted in its entirety. Adams says, "Mr. Brautigan strings together some outlandish episodes to demonstrate that the world is full of misdirected violence. He must have been reading the papers."⁸ What this critic rather flippantly dismisses is a traditional tenet of literature: art mirroring life. For Adams, Brautigan's writing is too close to daily newspaper fare to be considered an artistic effort. Yet Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and others have examined "transfiction" and the nonfiction novel and find these forms to be replacing traditional fictional efforts. These are further aspects of postmodernist fiction. A key phrase to apply from this criticism is "noninterpretive narrative forms";⁹ Brautigan indeed presents an example of "misdirected violence" preceded by events that are not as "outlandish" as they may first appear. From Adams' brief review, "outlandish" is the keystone, yet frequently journalists purvey stories that leave their readers repeating the adage that truth is stranger than fiction. Saul Bellow, in Him With

⁸ Phoebe-Lou Adams, rev. of Willard and His Bowling Trophies, by Richard Brautigan, The Atlantic Monthly, October 1975, p. 110.

⁹ Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 4.

His Foot in His Mouth and Other Stories, presents Victor, a character, studying transcribed notes and wondering if he had said that truth was stronger than fiction. In post-modernist writing, both words seem to apply. This is, of course, the very basis of much postmodernist writing. The novel is prefaced by two quotations about madness and violence. At the moment the Logan brothers break into the room and shoot the wrong couple, Bob is reading one of the quotations from the Greek Anthology to Constance: "'The dice of Love are madneses and melees.'" The second quotation that appears before the title page quotes Senator Frank Church; he says, "This land is cursed with violence." The juxtaposition of the ancient with the modern demonstrates the long history of violence and prepares for the contemporary example of violence that by chance destroys the two pathetic lovers.

In his review of Willard and His Bowling Trophies, Davis observes, as this study has also shown, that the fictions that Brautigan has written share similarities with one another, yet he astutely observes a reverse trend in the level of difficulty. Davis says that "the books are getting easier to read all the time."¹⁰ This results from the frequent use of the simple sentence, frequent use of run-on sentences, rare use of subordinates, much use of the

¹⁰ L. J. Davis, rev. of Willard and His Bowling Trophies, by Richard Brautigan, The New Republic, 20 September 1975, p. 30.

repetitions of normal speech, and from sheer brevity. The lean, hard line, a characteristic of Brautigan, and also of Vonnegut and other postmodernist authors, is frequently criticized for its lack of art. Yet it can be argued that, because it reproduces normal speech patterns, the lean narrative line of the postmodernists should be lauded.

Mason comments on the lack of "connectedness" in the novel, a lack which accounts for some of the simplicity through omission. It also illustrates a third characteristic of postmodernism. Mason looks to the word "perverse" in the subtitle of the book and offers a particular connotation to support Brautigan's use of the word. Mason says: "Indeed the whole thrust of Willard (and its originality, what makes the mystery 'perverse') is to bring about a connection that is ludicrous because so unsupported by other examples of connectedness."¹¹ Being brief, the author does not provide plausible developments or explanations; the implication is, as postmodernists in general hold, plausible explanations do not exist. This lack of connectedness also exists because there is no attempt at transition--indicative of the denial of cause-effect relationships--as the author deals with the concurrent events in the lives of the three sets of characters. The Logan brothers' search is an

¹¹ Michael Mason, "Rootin', Tootin', and Shootin'," rev. of Willard and His Bowling Trophies, by Richard Brautigan, Times Literary Supplement, 21 May 1976, p. 600.

example of frustration and futility as they seize one wild idea after another that takes them through various states and ultimately to Alaska where an Eskimo suggests that the bowling trophies are to be found in California. The exact location comes from an anonymous telephone tip that the reader gets no explanation for. The mix-up in apartment numbers that results in the wrong couple being killed is a small joke that Patricia has played. This is one explanation in the novel provided by the author as the brothers stand in the hallway and debate why "two" comes before "one" in this building.

Mason's discussion of "perverse" seems only one level of meaning that the word operates on. The word operates on at least two other levels, one closely related to Mason's understanding. There is, however, sexual perversion at work in the novel. The venereal warts that Bob and Constance have contracted prevent normal sexual activity, and the two have resorted, mostly at Bob's insistence, to a bungled parody of events in The Story of O; things are bungled because of Bob's diminishing capabilities and his preoccupation with the Greek Anthology. As a result of all of this, their sexual activities have become somewhat perverted, a situation they are not pleased by, and the pathos of their situation permeates the entire novel. Another level of meaning for "perverse" operates in the Brautigan scheme of things when one considers the

"perverse" as a genre of literature. In a series of five novels, Brautigan blends genres of literature; as he has established the sequence, "perverse" literature is an idiosyncratic genre. If there is any eroticism, pornography, or perverseness, it is so mild that this third level of meaning depends more on Bob and Constance's activities for support than could be supported by terming this "perverse" literature; no doubt there are those who would describe the book as perverse, but the novel truly lacks the graphic descriptions characteristic of eroticism or pornography. Likewise, the novel is hardly a mystery. From the beginning of the novel, only the Logan brothers are ignorant of the location of the bowling trophies, and the reader knows that the three brothers are capable of the great violence and ignorance with which the novel ends. This capability grows as the almost-parallel story lines intersect at one violent moment. The object of their search, fifty bowling trophies, is the essence of all that is inane, but their symbolic relation to theme is important. The idea that violence--and even senseless violence--is endemic to American culture is displayed by the Logan brothers' maniacal search for the bowling trophies and their willingness to commit murder for the recovery of these trophies. This violence is Brautigan's perversity.

The Logan brothers' search, the bowling trophies, and especially Willard offer some difficulty in their symbolism.

Davis explains the symbolism of two of them: "I think the bowling trophies and the Logans' search for them are meant to represent the sleaziness and degrading pointlessness of American life." Parenthetically, Davis comments on the symbolism of Willard: "What Willard means is anyone's guess; I think Brautigan wants it that way."¹² This is the highly personal, obscure brand of symbolism that has earned Brautigan severe criticism. However, by giving Willard a prominent place in the title of the novel and by using recurring references throughout the novel, Brautigan obviously intends for Willard to be an important symbol: the importance of the symbolism cannot be glossed over. Brautigan, in the equivalent of a one-page chapter, describes Willard and his bowling trophies as perceived by the ghost of Matthew Brady, who photographs the scene. The author says the ghost slipped in "supernaturally," but the literary word would be "surrealistically." The author metaphorically compares Willard to Abraham Lincoln, and he compares the bowling trophies to Lincoln's generals during the Civil War (p. 109). While the exact contemporary referent for Willard may not be clear, the correlation between the war (violence) that separated this country as it had never been separated before or since and the potential for that separation

¹²Davis, p. 30.

through the kind of violence that is precipitated by the loss of the bowling trophies is apparent. The significance, as the author intends it, is further strengthened--if not explained--by the author's final comment in that chapter.

He [Matthew Brady] disappeared back into the swirls of ghostly time, taking with him a photographic impression of Willard and his bowling trophies to be joined visually with the rest of American history because it is very important for Willard and his bowling trophies to be a part of everything that has ever happened to this land of America. (p. 110)

In Willard and His Bowling Trophies, Brautigan makes a postmodernist statement about overwhelming, senseless violence in America. He sympathetically treats the two characters, Bob and Constance, whose lives have become very sad. Mason and Davis see similarities between Willard and His Bowling Trophies and previous fictions (especially The Hawkline Monster), but they comment that the famous wit, humor, and use of imaginative metaphor are lacking. The theme does not allow for humor.

Fantasy and Metafiction in the
Second Dual Plot

Sombrero Fallout: A Japanese Novel (1976)¹³ is Brautigan's eighth published fictional work and the third in a series of four novels bearing a subtitle that indicates a blend of two literary elements, one--in this instance--a Brautigan creation. Beginning with this Brautigan "genre," one questions what constitutes a "Japanese" novel. (Critics frequently question what Brautigan thinks constitutes a novel.) What is a Japanese novel if it is not one written in the Japanese language or by a Japanese novelist or one about one or more Japanese characters or one that takes place in Japan. This novel is none of these. There is a Japanese "character," but she sleeps throughout the novel. In the novel, the major character is seen during an excruciating hour, agonizing over the month-long breakup of a two-year relationship with Yukiko, a beautiful Japanese woman. A drawing of this exotic, beautiful woman adorns the cover of the novel, her luxuriant hair meeting a likewise luxuriant black cat in her arms. (Since she sleeps through the entire novel, her depiction on the cover with

¹³ Richard Brautigan, Sombrero Fallout: A Japanese Novel (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976). All subsequent references to this edition will be in parentheses in the text.

open eyes is questioned by one reviewer.¹⁴) This woman is part of Brautigan's "Japanese" element. The main title, of course, suggests nuclear fallout and nuclear bombs, and, by extension, Japan. "Sombrero" is strangely paired with "Fallout," but the first event in the novel accounts for this: "'A sombrero fell out of the sky and landed on Main Street. . .'" (p. 11). This line appears as a quotation within a quotation because it begins a story that the main character, described as an American humorist, has begun writing. Because he is distressed over his broken romance, his inspiration to write is thwarted, and the beginning of the story ultimately finds its home in the wastepaper basket. When the scraps of the story decide to proceed without the author, they seem to have a life of their own. The humorist (could this be Brautigan?) is therefore released from responsibility for the story about the sombrero that follows.

Joan Hinde Stewart appropriately suggests that a "re-interpretation" of "sombrero" may be in order to include not only the common Mexican hat but also the "obsolete meaning of Oriental parasol."¹⁵ The title offers a strange mixture

¹⁴ Joan Hinde Stewart, rev. of *Sombrero Fallout*, by Richard Brautigan, *Magill's Literary Annual*, Vol. II, ed. Frank W. Magill (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Salem Press, 1978), p. 786.

¹⁵ Stewart, p. 785.

whose elements are most easily accounted for by looking at the novel itself. Once again, Brautigan maintains two separate plots told by a third-person narrator; one plot details the humorist's miserable evening alone as representative of numerous miserable evenings alone; the second plot unfolds the increasingly disastrous events precipitated by the sombrero's falling from the sky and landing on Main Street in the midst of three people. A subplot, possibly a third story line, describes the Japanese mistress sixteen blocks away as she dreams during this hour time lapse and as the humorist imagines her activities. She dreams one unpleasant dream that recalls memories of her father who committed suicide, but the majority of her hour is spent in pleasant slumber. Her dream is surrealistic, self-effacing. She is not discussed as a third story line because her activities are part of the humorist's story and sometimes only imagined by him.

Unlike the various plots in Willard and His Bowling Trophies where the story lines cross at the end of the novel, these separate story lines intersect briefly at the beginning, but they are maintained separately throughout the majority of the novel. One story line operates under the guise of reality (events in the man's life); the other story line is truly a fiction (a story that the man began writing). Harold Beaver, in the Times Literary Supplement, writes that this is the art of "mix and shuffle." This

postmodernist technique of dealing with first one story line and then another without attempts at transition or connection or balance is seen in one way or another in three of Brautigan's last four novels. This technique reflects the postmodernist author's belief in the disjointedness of reality, that there is no connectedness. Also seeing Sombrero Fallout as a continuation of many techniques that characterize Brautigan's writing, Beaver describes the novel as "a jigsaw of anecdotes--part sentimental idyll, part comic-strip fantasy--retailed in eighty bizarre sequences, or shots, as from a film, or frames, or chapters varying in length from a picture postcard to an airletter form."¹⁶ It should be apparent, then, that the novel is in the Brautigan vein: numerous short chapters, seemingly disconnected plot lines without transition, a rejected lover unable to control the events of his life, and puzzling surrealistic symbolism. Both Stewart and Beaver conclude that Sombrero Fallout alone will not endear readers to Brautigan's fiction; neither reviewer sees the work as among his most successful works.

Since the stories appear to have nothing in common except "that he who initiated the one is the chief

¹⁶ Harold Beaver, "Dead Pan Alley," rev. of Sombrero Fallout, by Richard Brautigan, Times Literary Supplement, 1 April 1977, p. 392.

protagonist in the other,"¹⁷ the two stories are best discussed separately. The story of the evening of the nameless American humorist begins with his futile effort at writing. He spends the next hour recalling how he met Yukiko; imagining that she is sleeping with someone else; resolving to call her, but realizing that his call would not be welcome; calling another former girlfriend, making a date, and then cancelling it; rummaging in the kitchen for something to eat, but not knowing what; finding and then losing a long strand of Japanese hair; and searching frantically for this tangible reminder of his former love. At the conclusion, the humorist begins writing a country and western song "about loving a Japanese woman" (p. 186). As with Brautigan images from earlier works, the thought becomes reality. As the humorist begins to write and sing his song, the narrator states that Waylon Jennings sang the song; it became a number one hit record. The final scene shows the American humorist as forlorn as he was at the beginning, holding the strand of hair and singing his song. The action of this half of the novel purposely moves slowly; the reader is made to feel the restlessness, rejection, and frustration that contrast sharply with the satisfaction that he enjoyed with their relationship.

17 Stewart, p. 786.

Because of the symbolism associated with the sombrero, the second story line is more difficult than the first to make sense of. The sombrero with a temperature of -24 falls in the midst of three people: the mayor who wishes to continue as mayor, his cousin who has his own political aspirations, and a man out of work who wants a job so that he can eat hamburgers instead of berries. The two men accompanying the mayor separately consider the ramifications of their picking up the hat for the mayor. How this action will be perceived is weighed carefully. The mayor's cousin wants to be the mayor himself, so he attempts to ingratiate himself with the action; he sees his future possibility for being mayor, perhaps even president, linked to this action. The unemployed man sees a possibility for employment--and hamburgers--if he pleases the mayor. With their future lives at stake, the two men quarrel over who is to pick up the sombrero. This rapidly escalates into a local riot. The entire six-person police force in this small town is killed when, in rushing to the riot in two vehicles, their cars collide. While the mayor's cousin and the unemployed man wail over their lost opportunities, the mayor rants "AZ 1492," his license number, over and over. (Brautigan's playful symbolism that suggests the beginning and end of America with the first and last letters of the alphabet and the date from every school child's sing-song phrase, "in 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue," is an obvious frolic

with the language.) The mayor is dubbed General License Plate, and he presides over the conflict that continues to escalate. Reflecting the intensity of the mob violence, the temperature of the sombrero gradually rises. The state police arrive, and their arrival and their shooting the ears off the town librarian serve to unite the rioting crowd against a common enemy rather than one another. When the state police are routed, the National Guard arrives. It fares no better against the townspeople than the state police, and, ultimately, the President authorizes federal troops. Continuing the parodic and surrealistic detail that Brautigan frequently uses, he has Norman Mailer, war correspondent, to arrive on the scene. After three days and much carnage, the town is captured. Over half the town's population is dead, including the mayor. In retrospect, no one can give a logical explanation for the cause of the riot. What has become of the sombrero? The third-person narrator states: "It's still there, lying in the street but its temperature returned to -24 degrees and fortunately for America it stayed there" (p. 183). The word "fortunately" and the pronoun "it" are important words in the consideration of any symbolic interpretation of the sombrero as beneficial, neutral, or malevolent. Against the background of the violence in Willard and His Bowling Trophies and the references to Viet Nam and connections to nuclear weapons in Sombrero Fallout, the interpretation of the sombrero as the

potentially politically divisive and destructive power of America's war machine or as the potential for misdirected, mindless violence from protests about nuclear power seems obvious. It seems necessary to point out a simple grammatical principle that "it" refers to the constant temperature, -24, that is "fortunate," not the presence of the sombrero. At -24 the power of the sombrero is latent, yet the temperature rise that accompanies the intensity of the fracas is a measurement or gauge of the riot, not a causative factor. The sombrero would seem to be neither beneficial nor malevolent. At best, it is neutral but capable of rapid change. The sombrero represents a cause that exists in the midst of the society; the potential for destruction is omnipresent.

Beaver terms the events that follow the fall of the sombrero a "fission," therefore maintaining the nuclear metaphor. Robert Christgau, in The New York Times Book Review, writes that the sombrero is "a surrealistic detail," and he asks, "Does the pessimistic turn merely reflect the derangement of his lovelorn protagonist?"¹⁸ Whether or not the sombrero scene is surrealistic is a moot point, but the second point phrased as a question is answered negatively by the novel itself. The connection between the lovelorn humorist and the beginning of the story and therefore the

¹⁸ Robert Christgau, rev. of Sombrero Fallout, by Richard Brautigan, The New York Times Book Review, 10 October 1976, p. 4.

responsibility for the story are severed when the pages are torn up and tossed in the trash. The continuation of the story on its own seems a further statement of meta-fiction, the subdivision of postmodernism that is a story about the nature of fiction or the writing of a story, where the explicit power of words, bereft of the human power to manipulate those words, displays itself. The symbolism of the pervasive sombrero is, however, problematic.

The sombrero story continues Brautigan's brand of imagination, while reenforcing the difficulties of being overly obscure or overly personal in his symbolism. The description of the hour in the life of the forlorn humorist veils a Brautigan-like character; and, as has been frequently pointed out, this type of character appears often in Brautigan's fiction. The choice of "humorist" as his profession is significant because critics frequently rate Brautigan as just that as opposed to author or novelist. This statement of theme that dwells on the need for a successful attachment to another human being for amelioration of the rigors of life and coping with one's environment is Brautigan's most extensive and most personal statement to date. Sombrero Fallout is one in a series of four novels that deal with dual plots; the enigmatic symbolism is the primary reason that the novel is not particularly successful.

Fantasy and Parody

Dreaming of Babylon: A Private Eye Novel 1942 (1977)¹⁹ is Brautigan's ninth fictional work, the last in a series of four novels carrying a subtitle. Once again, the subtitle specifies genres open to question. In Dreaming of Babylon, Brautigan returns to a first-person narration, continues a dual story line, blends literature types, and maintains the practice of dividing the work into numerous brief chapters; most of the pleasant metaphors are lacking, and the first-person narrator is truly a persona separate from what has heretofore been referred to as the Brautigan narrator. Aside from the entertainment value of the novel, the theme is the most important aspect to analyze as Brautigan presents an absurdist view of the main character overwhelmed by the events of this life; to date, this is Brautigan's most extreme statement of the futility of life. The major character is totally manipulated by the events of the world. The harsh theme is softened by the ludicrous extreme to which the characterization is taken. Yet, the events of the novel, only a day in the life of the main character, are a circle. While the character may be amusing, his final statement in the novel emphasizes the personal failure of

¹⁹ Richard Brautigan, Dreaming of Babylon: A Private Eye Novel 1942 (New York: Dell, 1977). All subsequent references to this edition will be in parentheses in the text.

the main character. After being cautioned by his mother to be careful, the main character states: "I had to, seeing that I was right back where I started, the only difference being that when I woke up this morning, I didn't have a dead body in my refrigerator" (p. 220).

At 220 pages, the book is among Brautigan's longest works, but the 79 brief chapters, averaging less than three pages per chapter, and general typographical display of wide margins, large print, and chapter beginnings in the middle of the page continue the visual impact that is identifiable as the Brautigan mode of postmodernism. For the first time, Brautigan does not appear on the cover nor is he credited with the cover concept. Once again, a title and particularly a subtitle specify genres open to question. In the subtitle Brautigan asserts that Dreaming of Babylon is a specialized type of fiction: "A Private Eye Novel 1942." A private eye novel is a specialized subdivision of the novel; the date 1942 suggests a parody of the novel of the type popularized by Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Ross MacDonal. Brautigan counterpoises an idiosyncratic blend of the private eye novel with a loose parody of the novel against a surrealistic dreamworld in the person of C. Card. The plot of Brautigan's novel is not concerned with solving the murder through a logical process of reasoning. The murder is solved incidentally, but no motive is ever established, and the murderer is released for lack of

evidence. As he had maintained separate story lines in the three preceding novels, Brautigan here develops two story lines within the life of the main character. These story lines are two different worlds--the apparently real, the world of the private detective C. Card, and the obviously fictional, the world of Babylon that C. Card slips into and out of, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. Indeed, the sketch of the central figure on the cover of the paperback edition of the novel coupled with the central character, C. Card, in the novel reminds the reader that designers of the covers of much pulp fiction apparently never read the book: the broad-shouldered, square-jawed man with the cleft chin is too handsome, too manly, too self-assured to be the C. Card of Brautigan's novel. This description evokes Sam Spade, not C. Card. Even the back cover of the novel proclaims that "When you hire C. Card, the hero of Richard Brautigan's eighth novel, you have scraped the bottom of the private eye barrel." While C. Card is obviously the main character in the novel, he is not a "hero" in the traditional, connotative sense of the word. C. Card is ineffectual, bumbling, seedy--"the bottom of the private eye barrel." C. Card is Brautigan's statement through characterization and theme of man's inability to cope with the events of life; he is manipulated by everyone and everything. His success and his pleasant life exist only in his dreamworld.

This private eye has lived a life of failures. At four years of age, he threw a ball into the street. When his father went after the ball, he was killed by an automobile. The mother blames C. Card for killing his father. After this childhood catastrophe, the second major failure for C. Card came when trying out for a semi-professional baseball team. When at bat, he was knocked unconscious by the first pitch. This event, of course, provides the logical cause as well as the beginning of his sojourns in Babylon. A third failure resulted from his being wounded in the derriere while participating in the Spanish Civil War; his simplistic logic took him to Spain because he thought that Spain might be like Babylon. The wounding was ignoble, a source of embarrassment. A fourth failure resulted when C. Card did not complete the examination for the police department and, consequently, did not pass the examination because he was dreaming of Babylon.

His most recent months are chronicled as a further series of failures that has placed him in his present circumstances. He owes money to practically everyone else in the novel--his landlady, his mother, Sergeant Rink, and Peg-leg, the mortician. All but Peg-leg deride him unmercifully. When Peg-leg attempts to tease C. Card, the private eye, for some inexplicable reason, is able to return the insults.

As a detective, C. Card is also a failure, and that failure has further contributed to his current status. Since he has not had a client in three months, he has been forced to give up first his secretary, then his office, and finally his car. On January 2, 1942, when he is finally contacted by a client after this hiatus in his practice, C. Card is without clean clothes (even matching socks) and without bullets for his gun, the gun being a prerequisite for taking the case. The image of a disheveled private detective riding a bus and without bullets is ludicrous, a stark contrast to and loose parody of the cool, sophisticated Sam Spade.

Occupying the first half of the novel, the humbling machinations that C. Card endures in preparation for meeting his client at 6 p.m. with bullets in his gun include placating his landlady; avoiding his mother; visiting Sergeant Rink, a successful police department applicant when C. Card was not, and receiving a seventy-five cent handout and a lecture; asking Peg-leg, his friend at the morgue, for three bullets; and finally getting five dollars from a crippled war veteran who was his friend by mentioning repayment of a nonexistent loan. After ridiculous preparations, C. Card meets his client and is hired to steal the body of a dead prostitute lying in Peg-leg's morgue. In light of the nature of the theme of pervasive violence in the two

previous novels, the fact that the prostitute died a violent death is interesting.

As if the character of C. Card were not already caricature, the events of the plot assume similar absurdist twists. Two other groups of people have been hired for this task. The first group steals the wrong body. C. Card gets the right body by paying off Peg-leg with one hundred dollars from his five-hundred-dollar advance fee and borrowing his car. After being pursued by the second group hired to steal the body, C. Card places the body in his refrigerator and goes to rendezvous with the client, hoping to get even more money. At the cemetery at 2 a.m., the rendezvous, almost all of the characters in the novel appear. From behind a tree, C. Card watches and narrates the arrivals and departures. The client and her chauffeur are in Sergeant Rink's custody for the prostitute's murder, but he is forced to release them for lack of evidence; at this point there is no body. Obviously, there is no longer any money to be made from turning over the body to them, and C. Card could only incriminate himself and be in worse straits. Sergeant Rink took care of the first group of body stealers when they returned to the morgue to get the right body, but the second group arrives at the cemetery and relieves C. Card of the rest of his advance money. All of these people disappear into the night, leaving C. Card to encounter, of all people, his domineering mother, who is mourning over her husband's

grave. After a lengthy day, the circle is complete. In spite of numerous efforts to the contrary--desperate, laughable attempts to succeed at being a private eye--C. Card has nothing to show for the efforts of his day except Peg-leg's car that he wrecked and a dead body.

Counterpoised with the so-called world of reality that victimizes C. Card is the dreamworld of Babylon that allows him two attainments denied him in the world of reality: success and the love of a beautiful woman, Nana-dirat. While the success may assume the various forms of a baseball hero, a famous private detective, a cowboy, a general, or a famous chef, and the success may be acted out as a Shakespearean tragedy with a happy ending, movies, a comic strip, a short detective novel, or even a serial, the beautiful woman is always the same. Nana-dirat--beautiful, sensuous, and adoring--is an accessory to all of his dreams--his masseuse, his secretary, a kidnapped school teacher, his nurse, Gertrude and Ophelia, a dancer. Since C. Card is presented as happiest in his dreamworld, the two elements of successful coping and meaningful attachment speak for those elements in the amelioration of an otherwise difficult life. It is interesting that the main character sees love without substantial success as impossible.

The dreamworld is replete with surrealistic trappings that mix the ordinary with the extraordinary. Nana-dirat is a Democrat who likes President Roosevelt. A watch has

twelve hourglasses for telling the time. Nebuchadnezzar sends in the cavalry. The private eye office is near the Hanging Gardens. In this dreamworld, the dream that occupies most of C. Card's adventures involves borrowing Ming the Merciless from Flash Gordon and making some changes until he creates a new serial, Smith Smith Versus the Shadow Robots. In Babylon, C. Card is Smith Smith, a detective, and the shadow robots are inventions under the control of Dr. Abdul Forsythe, the altered character of Ming the Merciless. Once again, it is the private eye as lone hero against the forces of the world, but in his dreams he is always victorious. Of course, Nana-dirat appears in this serial. Such ludicrous dreams are appropriate to the character of C. Card; their significance lies in the need for success and love.

One cannot help but empathize with the bumbling ineffectual who is the main character. Victim of a series of events beyond his control, he is a hapless creature of circumstance. Aside from this characterization as major theme, the chief value of the novel, when the novel is seen in isolation from the others, is that it is mildly entertaining. Both Thomas M. Disch, in the Times Literary Supplement, and Joe Flaherty in The New York Times Book Review, write disparaging reviews. Flaherty sees the failure in the novel as a failure of a Brautigan attempt

at parody.²⁰ Disch calls the novel "so systematically witless, so deliberately weary, stale, flat and dumbass that the most guileless reader would not be able to accept it at face value."²¹ Obviously, the novel must be set in the context of Brautigan's other works. One accepts little in Brautigan's works at face value. Near the end of his totally negative review, Disch states that the story "resists interpretation," but in this context of Brautigan's major theme (man coping with the circumstances of this life), Disch's final statements truly "interpret" the novel. Disch writes:

The book is a vacuous dream of the same order and worth as the vacuous daydreams about Babylon that beset C. Card. These dreams do him no harm. In fact, they are his primary and most reliable source of pleasure. Such, Brautigan suggests, are the pleasures of fiction, and probably of life.²²

Brautigan does, however, a creditable job of arousing reader sympathy for a loser in life, a man victimized by the events of this life. C. Card's refuge from the dehumanizing world of reality is in the Walter Mitty-like

²⁰ Joe Flaherty, "The Sam Spade Caper," rev. of Dreaming of Babylon, by Richard Brautigan, The New York Times Book Review, 25 September 1977, p. 20.

²¹ Thomas M. Disch, "Dumber Than Dumb," rev. of Dreaming of Babylon, by Richard Brautigan, Times Literary Supplement, 14 April 1978, p. 405.

²² Disch, p. 405.

world of the fantastic and the surreal; unfortunately, that world does not possess the same element of permanence as the world C. Card and other Brautigan characters attempt to function in daily. The long tradition of literary hero --master of his fate, able to overcome all obstacles--is foreign to the Brautigan character who represents contemporary man and his ineffective struggles.

A Train to Introspection

The Tokyo-Montana Express (1980),²³ Brautigan's tenth work of fiction, consists of 131 segments ranging in length from a few lines to nine and a half pages. Only eighteen segments are longer than two pages, about forty-eight are less than a page, and four are six lines or less. Once again, classifying the work according to genre is a problem: while the diverse mini-chapters make this appear to be a short story anthology, the unifying themes and a dominant metaphor proclaim that this is indeed another Brautigan novel. After producing a series of novels written as blended stories and loose parodies, Brautigan now writes numerous separately titled segments, "stations" that comprise "the route" of his improbable metaphorical train

²³ Richard Brautigan, The Tokyo-Montana Express (New York; Dell, 1980). All subsequent references to this edition will be in parentheses in the text.

between Tokyo and Montana. An introductory note announces the metaphor:

Though the Tokyo-Montana Express moves at a great speed, there are many stops along the way. This book is those brief stations: some confident, others still searching for their identities.

The "I" in this book is the voice of the stations along the tracks of the Tokyo-Montana Express.

As the train/observer and participant, Brautigan narrates approximately thirty-seven stations/experiences of life that take place in Japan (primarily Tokyo), some ten with ambiguous settings, and the majority in the United States (primarily Montana). In spite of the proclamation to the contrary, the "I" is the Brautigan narrator, a veiled Brautigan, even once referred to as Richard.

In addition to using the beginning statement as a unifying device, Brautigan attempts to tie the novel together visually with the reproduction of a medallion featuring a train at the beginning of each "station." The configuration of the same train appears on the front of the hardcover edition. After a conspicuous absence from the cover of his previous novel, Brautigan returns. On the back of this book jacket appears a photograph of Shiina Takako and Brautigan, human representatives of the East and West, respectively. Nevertheless, as with other Brautigan works, the story begins with the cover that also unifies.

Reviewing the book for The Nation, Sue M. Halpern writes: "The Tokyo-Montana Express is not a novel. It is a collection of vignettes held together by contrivance."²⁴ This comment duplicates many critical appraisals of Trout Fishing in America. The "lack of connectedness" associated with postmodernist works seems to apply to this novel primarily because the "connectedness" is askew. Yet, the common elements of pain, frustration, loneliness, and death are presented as crosscurrents of all cultures, symbolized by two technological giants of the industrial world. Interestingly enough, no announcement of genre exists in the work, and acknowledgement of previous publication of parts of the work in at least twelve periodicals attests to possible fragmentation of the work. Although alternately referred to in this study as stations, chapters, stories, and segments for the sake of variation, thematic arrangement (grouping "stations") produces basic unifying themes reminiscent of a short story collection and similar to the disordered, but predominant themes in Revenge of the Lawn. Although the slang expression "the end of the line" is never used, the dominant theme in the work explores ages and stages in life that move the individual ever faster toward the inevitable conclusion of life with all the speed and efficiency of

²⁴ Sue M. Halpern, "A Pox on Dullness," rev. of The Tokyo-Montana Express, by Richard Brautigan, The Nation, 25 October 1980, p. 416.

a Japanese bullet train. Barry Yourgrau writes in The New York Times Book Review that "telldales of an uneasy middle-aged soul peep darkly among the cute knickknacks."²⁵ But, in fact, the opposite is true. The whimsy (the cute knickknacks) only occasionally breaks through the somber themes of unfulfilled potential, death, love affairs that did not work out, loneliness, and failed businesses. What whimsy there is lies in the form of a Brautigan image or one of the few fantasy pieces. The work is written primarily from the first-person point of view, and several first-person interjections assert the presence of a middle-aged, self-conscious Brautigan.

Since Brautigan even as persona is never far from his own work, the frequent references in the first person to his own age and health account for the penetrating aura that Yourgrau terms "an uneasy middle-aged soul." Additionally, the narrator, during the trip to Japan, is reading a book about Groucho Marx's last year; that book is a constant reminder of aging and its attendant problems. The "happy hippie" reflects on the now stereotyped concerns of one who has probably lived something over half of his life. At least seven times in the novel, Brautigan makes references to failing health and middle age, and they are not amusing.

²⁵ Barry Yourgrau, "An Uneasy Middle-Aged Soul," rev. of The Tokyo-Montana Express, by Richard Brautigan, The New York Times Book Review, 2 November 1980, p. 13.

In "Shrine of Carp," for example, the "I" describes a Friday night scene of young Japanese couples hurrying home to happy love-making. Since the "I" has no place to go "that counts," he is not in competition for the transportation. In three statements indicated as three paragraphs, the narrator says: "Let them have the cabs. They are a blessing from me to them. I was once young myself" (p. 22). In "Rubber Bands," the narrator accounts for being uninterested in finding numerous rubber bands inexplicably scattered on a street with the following statements: "I haven't been feeling very good. A spell of middle age and poor health have been grinding me down" (p. 84). Later, in "The Man Who Shot Jesse James," the narrator muses that "at the age of forty-three I can't remember the name of the man who shot Jesse James" (p. 126); an important memory of his boyhood hero is now clouded by a mental lapse. Only two pages later, in "Seventeen Dead Cats," the "I" reminisces that in Oregon in 1947 when he was twelve, a factual parallel to Brautigan's life, he owned seventeen cats. Writing in California thirty-one years later, the narrator muses on the end to the childhood pets, the fish that he caught for them, and the games with string that he played with them. In "Light on at the Tastee-Freez," the narrator explains the seasonal operation, dictated by Montana winters, of the local ice cream parlor. Closing the Tastee-Freez in September signals the end of the summer and saddens the narrator. He says, "I am

growing older. There is one less summer in life with a closed sign on the door" (p. 130). In "A Reason for Living," set in a Tokyo cafe, the narrator contrasts the appearance of a Australian businessman, whom he has observed and dislikes immensely, with his own appearance; the narrator says dully, "I look like a fading middle-aged hippie" (p. 155). A final reference to lonely middle age occurs in "Sunday," a reflection on purchases made at a supermarket that reveals a "San Francisco Lord's Day" for the middle-aged man who precedes the narrator in the check-out line. The purchases include vodka, dog food, a newspaper, cigarettes, and a fireplace log, but, ironically, there is not a food purchase among them. Adjectives applied to the man's purchases further the pathos of implied loneliness; the vodka is "cheap," the log is "artificial," and the man's companions will be nonhuman. Even a possible association with the Madison Avenue creation, "the Marlboro man," is dispelled by the narrator. Terming this assemblage at the grocery store "an urban still life," the narrator concludes by stating; "I'm forty-four years old. Now: it's my turn" (p. 243). No doubt his middle-age purchases will reflect the same loneliness.

In addition to these numerous personal references to middle age and growing older, other references to death, to never-repeated peak points in life, and to preoccupation with the aging process abound. In "A Death in Canada," the

narrator states that someone's death in Canada does not influence the day's events in Tokyo, another variation of the adage that life goes on. In a very long simile in which he compares how he feels that day to a dull, rusty knife, the narrator concludes the image with the word "grave" and says, "Anyway, a place where we are all going" (p. 26). The most obvious instance of an individual suddenly snapped into awareness of his place along the continuum of life is a third-person narration, "Very Good Dead Friends." The brief section begins with a simple, direct statement: "One day in his life he realized that he had more very good dead friends than he had living ones" (p. 43). Sadness is the first feeling evoked by the realization, but ultimately "he" turns this feeling into "feeling nothing at all and that felt better, like not being aware of the wind blowing on a very windy day" (p. 44). Dealing with the ultimate reality of life, one's mortality, is easiest through numbness.

In "Sky Blue Pants," the narrator describes a Japanese girl of approximately eighteen who "has a magnificent body and walks like a Twentieth Century shrine in the pleasure of its own worship" (p. 248). Her youthful good looks on this day are described as "the Mount Everest of her existence" (p. 247). When the narrator concludes that "If she lives to be a hundred, life will never be the same again," Brautigan reminds the reader of the brevity of youth compared to a lengthy stretch of old age, particularly for a young woman

who has been encouraged to rely on her beauty alone without achieving something else in life. "To the Yotsuya Station" is a chapter that transfers the literal trip of an attractive Japanese woman in her thirties to the metaphorical strand that announces the book and strings together the unlikely train that stops randomly in Japan or Montana. Her face is attractive and her figure is pleasing, but she is "absent-mindedly playing with the skin under her chin" (p. 111). For the first time since the introductory note, the narrator explicitly states the metaphorical connection.

Above us twelve million people are trying to be happy and make the best of their lives while she continues to think about the firmness of her chin and the years to come, which will certainly come. They will come just like the station in front of us that we are hurtling toward.

Welcome to the Yotsuya Station.

It's just another stop on the way.

(p. 111)

Another major thematic concern expressed through these mini-chapters is one of unfulfilled potential either through businesses that fail or through life's expectations not reached. In "The Butcher," a middle-aged man wears a "forlorn expression on his middle-aged face that had gone as far in life as it was going to go" (p. 108). The narrator sees an impending rapid change from the face of a middle-aged man to the face of an old man. Among the briefest of the 131 segments is "All the People That I Didn't Meet and the

Places That I Didn't Go," a dialogue between a twenty-three-year-old woman and the Brautigan narrator decrying "a short lifeline" that could possibly foretell reduced life expectancy, not a usual concern for one in the early twenties. "Her Last Known Boyfriend a Canadian Airman" is a brief segment that tells of a war-time death of a Canadian at age twenty-two. Some thirty-four years later, his once beautiful Chinese girlfriend continues to live a death-in-life existence as a dishwasher. Her incentive taken away by his death, she dropped out of college; intellectual achievements and her beauty are obliterated by over three decades of acute loneliness and unthinking drudgery; she is a by-product of the wastes of war. The chapter "Drowned Japanese Boy" is a somewhat neutral observation on the death of a young person, but three other sketches tell of the violent deaths of young adults in their early twenties, two by suicide. In less than half a page, the episode "Football" details the total life of a twenty-two-year-old man killed in a car accident. His having been selected as an all-state football player ranks as the major accomplishment in this man's short life. The implied health and virility and any possibility for further accomplishments are negated as the minister gropes for something to say. "The Beacon" and "One Arm Burning in Tokyo" are two stories involving suicides, one from the West and one from the East. Because each man

is in his early twenties, their deaths as unfulfilled potential are especially poignant.

At the other extreme of life prematurely taken is "The Menu/1965," the second longest section in the book, which seizes a tangible object, a menu from San Quentin's death row, as a study in what prolongs the lives of men who are, in reality, already dead. Various people's reactions to seeing the week's menu are woven together.

All of life's unmet expectations do not result in death. The segment "OPEN" chronicles the disappointments of a middle-aged Chinese woman who works hard to save money in order to open a comfortable restaurant. In spite of good food and a good location, the restaurant fails, and the woman is witness to another change. Her restaurant becomes a mortuary. This story is among the strongest postmodernist statements of the theme that man is unable to control the events of life, for no logical explanation exists for the failure of her restaurant. The story "Al's Rose Harbor" explains a failure in spite of good intentions. Al's Good Time Harbor, a bar, failed because "it was in the wrong location and he didn't know anything about the bar business and he wouldn't let any of his friends pay for drinks" (p. 70); the failure is nonetheless touching because the disappointment took with it Al's incentive to try, to struggle against the forces that manipulate one's life.

The timbre of the entire work is set by the first story. At eight and a half pages, it is among the longest in the novel. The American years in the life of an immigrant, who in 1851 gave up an apparently comfortable life in Czechoslovakia to come to the United States, are explored against questions involving why he would immigrate to America and "the ultimate meaning of man's life" (p. 1). In all, Joseph Francl makes three feckless, gold-hunting trips to California, recalled in "The Overland Journey of Joseph Francl and the Eternal Sleep of His Wife Antonia in Crete, Nebraska," a story with a title that is almost half as long as several of the "stations" in the novel. The Brautigan narrator wonders especially about the loneliness of Antonia, Francl's wife, who bore him six children and waited a great deal. While Brautigan interjects some amusing comments into the story in the form of understatement (Sioux Indians "show a great deal of affection toward" Pawnee scalps and trouble-making Pawnee Indians "did not have pleasant ideas"), the life of Joseph Francl is not amusing. Francl symbolizes generations of restless, dissatisfied people lured by the shadow of a promise of wealth. The third trip, the final trip, is years after the gold rush. Francl, sick and delirious, is separated from his companion and dies in the snow. Antonia's death some thirty-six years later ends "all the waiting that could ever be done" (p. 9). This final

statement implies great sympathy for the loneliness that Antonia experienced.

In addition to these themes of middle age, death, peak physical points in life, and loneliness, another important theme is developed as the theme of love affairs that either did not endure or did not turn out happily. Obvious potential for loneliness is a by-product of this theme. Two of these stories are set in Japan and removed from the experience of the Brautigan narrator. The segment "Toothbrush Ghost Story" begins with a moral about "the sensitivity of Japanese women" and a comment that this might be "just a story somebody made up" (p. 86); nevertheless, because the woman is sensitive to subtleties, the lover's act of replacing her toothbrush deposited at his apartment symbolizes rejection to the woman. In "Contents for Good Luck," the narrator reacts to his reading of a poem by Shuntaro Tanikawa. The poem recounts the difficulty of sleeping with an unfaithful wife after learning of her unfaithfulness. Taking this problem back through Roman and Egyptian times to the "mental symbols" of the caveman, Brautigan identifies a change in the relationship as a result of the unfaithfulness and the man's awareness of the unfaithfulness.

Two of the stories about love affairs are first-person narrations. "Something Cooking" is couched in a pleasant image of simmering soup, of which the narrator says, "Of

course it has to be a woman" (p. 118). While drunk, the narrator meets a beautiful blonde woman who shares his sexual desires, but who asks him to return when he is sober. Years later, the narrator graphically recalls the woman but not "where back was" (p. 119). In contrast to the two pages and vivid memory in "Something Cooking" is the seven-line brevity and muddled memory of "Ghosts." The narrator recalls another meeting in a bar. However, unlike the previous encounter, the narrator shares a few drinks and conversation before returning to her place. Although the narrator says that sometimes he recalls this incident, he remembers only that she had a dog.

In addition to failures in love, in business, and with life itself, isolation and loneliness are explored in other ways. At least three stories, "House of Carpets," "The Purpose," and "Light on at the Tastee-Freez," look at businesses at night that close people out. In "The Purpose," a ringing but unanswered telephone signals the failure of one human being to make contact with another. Other sketches emphasize the loneliness of people even though surrounded by people. One such story, "Harem," describes an "almost invisible" man who photographs beautiful Japanese women, making life-size prints to keep him company when he is lonely. In another story, "The Great Golden Telescope," a slovenly, overweight woman babbles in a way "everybody has heard again and again coming from people who have been

wiped out by taking too many drugs or living a lifestyle that's just too estranged from reality" (p. 125). Finally, the woman recognizes her babblings are the result of acute loneliness. The segment "The Irrevocable Sadness of Her Thank You" is a description of a sad young Japanese woman encountered on a train. The tone of her voice reverberates with the inexplicable sadness sensed by the narrator. Recognizing the unhappiness and caring about her do not lessen the impact of the fact that this is just a chance encounter, and it does nothing to change her life.

The sheer number of segments and their diversity prohibit discussion of each or all. To be fair to the book, some attention must be given to the Brautigan images, the whimsy, and the fantasy that soften the realities. Additionally, the inspiration of nature refreshes the narrator's sensitivity in several other segments. Among all of this are several self-contained stories.

After a dearth of images in the last four novels, The Tokyo-Montana Express contains a plethora of images, both long and short, that echo the technique that made earlier Brautigan works simultaneously appealing and distinct. Among the longer and most refreshing images, almost a recollection of Trout Fishing in America, is "Autumn Trout Gathering," couched in the sacramental reverie of a worship service of nature and recalling Thoreau's "Time is the stream I go a-fishing in." The purchases from a tackle

store are viewed as part of the preparations to "renew myself again as fisherman" (p. 27), and, of course, as a human being. The lengthy metaphor that follows exudes the regenerative potential that nature has, particularly the contact with nature through fishing that is a Brautigan hallmark. The metaphor follows:

I love fishing tackle stores.
They are cathedrals of childhood romance,
for I spent thousands of hours worshipping the
possibilities of rods and reels that led like a
religion to rivers and lakes waiting to be fished
in the imagination where I would fish every drop
of water on this planet. (p. 27)

The segment "Leaves" is a second comment on the necessity of contact with nature. In the Japanese sector of San Francisco, the narrator mistakes dark autumn leaves that fell from plum trees for chocolate wrappers, stating that he had been "totally erased from nature lately, like a blackboard before school starts" (p. 238). At the end of a half page, he queries, "Where had I gone wrong?"

One final brief word-sketch is offered as an example to reenforce the hallowed aspect of nature. Brautigan begins "Kyoto, Montana" with a six-line description of a six-hundred-year-old Moss Garden, a Buddhist Shrine. From this sanctified, recognized Eastern shrine, imbued with natural beauty, Brautigan's word picture shifts to an autumn scene of Montana cottonwood trees; this setting, although

unsanctified by a religious group, likewise offers a scene of natural splendor enriching to the soul.

Other long images are not bound up in Brautigan's theme of nature's ability to regenerate the soul. The longest image extends a comparison between complicated things in life and things that a mother-in-law who is eighty might do (p. 190). That image is dismissed as "we" are asked to return from the complicated to the simple things in life. In "Times Square in Montana," the narrator reverses the usual image taken from nature, as he replaces two 25-watt light bulbs illuminating a rustic barn with two 200-watt ones. Since the two brighter bulbs burn out immediately, the narrator returns them to the store. Successful in this exchange, the narrator says, "One of life's victories had just fallen into my hands" (p. 143). Replacing the bulbs once again with two 150-watt bulbs, the barn becomes a Broadway play, a surrealist play with Bernhardt and Barrymore, tap-dancing in Hamlet, with music by Mozart.

Among the longer Brautigan images are numerous effective shorter ones that exemplify the Brautigan imagination and use of language. The rich, aged redwood in the barn, illuminated by only the two 25-watt bulbs, is described as "like a sundown from the wood" (p. 137). Attempting to define an earthquake for the understanding of a mentally subnormal boy, the narrator suggests "an earthquake is a wind that blows through the ground" (p. 146). Changing

seats on a train is described as "a complicated little life ballet movement" (p. 35). A difficult conversation "struggled through" is likened to quicksand (p. 39). Coffee jitters are described as nerves that are "lionesque" (p. 45). A young man pondering suicide has a mental "traffic jam" (p. 61). Making a careful word choice is compared to the actions of "a jeweler cutting a diamond in swiftly moving fog" (p. 78). A Japanese painter-artist quickly autographs books "like some king of machine" and "as if Sony had invented him" (p. 98). The multiplicity of these comparisons prohibits discussion of all of them, but it is obvious that in sheer number the brief similes and metaphors as well as the extended comparisons reappear in The Tokyo-Montana Express in a quantity not seen since Revenge of the Lawn.

Theme, image, technique characteristic of Brautigan's writing are all contained in this collection united as novel. The postmodernist slight of characterization and plot development is evident. Some "stations" work well as complete, independent short stories, but the majority of the sections are highly fragmented and are dependent on the total context of the work for meaning.

Two of the most amusing stories from the work are "The Old Testament Book of the Telephone Company" and "The Good Work of Chickens." The first story is a satire on dealing with the telephone company, a frustration of contemporary

life, when the narrator is treated as a "special case" and his "rush order" will be filled in 327 years. "The Good Work of Chickens" is a marvelous story of a farmer's revenge on a city couple who abandon their pet dog near his farm; he dumps three tons of chicken droppings on their suburban lawn. Two other sarcastic observations on American life are amusing. One, "The 1977 Television Season," finds a falling thermometer "much more interesting than the television" (p. 233). The second, "Tod," examines the narrator's dislike for games, particularly Scrabble. In an ironic statement for an author, he questions the value of a game that involves making up words that have no use after they are made and depends on an already established ability to spell.

In addition to the amusing comments on life, there are characteristic surreal fantasies tempered with the Brautigan imagination. The chapter "An Eye for Good Produce" begins with a telephone call to a girlfriend. While the telephone continues to ring, the narrator envisions her apartment so realistically that he is transformed to being there. The segment "Another Montana School Gone to the Milky Way" tells of realistic details indicating the presence of a school that is not there. The section "Pleasures of the Swamp" compares snakes, mosquitoes, and quicksand to silverware, bloodthirsty flying air conditioners, and a telephone call to a lover.

Discussions of all 131 "stations" would yield a volume much longer than what is, at 258 pages, Brautigan's longest work, but the somewhat arbitrarily selected stories discussed in this study show that indeed the work is a continuation of the characteristics and themes of Brautigan's fiction. A seeming major division appears as Tokyo (East) and Montana (West), but that division is blurred as the narrator muses on things American while in Japan and on things Japanese while in America. The link provided by the metaphor of trains and "stations" is traditional in its effort, but it is absurdist in its practicality. No doubt, although the themes of growing older and disappointments in life blend with the themes of loneliness and death, some possible grouping could have been attempted, but the vignettes accurately reflect the essence of chance encounters with other people and play against the tension-relief aspect of life that is the very nature of human experience. Much evidence of psychological free association exists that prompts the recall of memories at a particular moment. The form denies the careful patterning of selectivity and causal plot organization inherent in more traditional fiction. Several times Brautigan reminds the reader of the medium of fiction within which the work is presented. Discussing the Montana barn that he writes in, Brautigan describes the pleasure his surroundings give "when coming and going from words like these" (p. 137). He compares the work of the

old men in Tokyo who hand out handbills advertising massage parlors and cabarets to his occasional feelings toward his work as a writer. He says: "Sometimes when I finish writing something, perhaps even this, I feel as if I am handing out useless handbills or I am an old man standing in the rain" (p. 207).

The work begins with reflections on the nineteenth-century adventures of Joseph Franc1, immigrant and prospector, who speaks to Brautigan from the grave through the medium of a diary. However, he obviously never communicated with Antonia, his wife. Counterpoised against this antedated first story is the final station, "Subscribers to the Sun," that describes high-tech communications between countries via the teletype. The chasm of these years reflects the chasm in human communication still extant in spite of such sophisticated inventions. The majority of Brautigan's "communications" assert the postmodernist theme that the human condition has not changed markedly and that, to Brautigan, the rigors of this life are lessened only by communication through words and through love.

Conclusion

The fiction that Brautigan published between 1974 and 1980, while not as stellar as his earlier fiction, continues many of his themes and techniques that appeared in his

fiction of the 1960s, yet he experiments with the novel form still further, particularly as he utilizes dual plot lines. For the first time in a novel, Brautigan uses the third-person point of view.

Brautigan's use of dual plot lines echoes Fiedler's suggestions in 1969 that the western, science fiction, and pornography were genres still open to the new writer. The Hawkline Monster, containing elements of the western and science fiction, and Willard and His Bowling Trophies, labelled "A Perverse Mystery," seem Brautigan's innovative approach to these genres. Sombrero Fallout and Dreaming of Babylon, both labelled with subtitles and both blending literary "types," are Brautigan's experiments with developing new genres. The Tokyo-Montana Express, with characteristics reminiscent of both Trout Fishing in America and Revenge of the Lawn, combines the majority of the themes and techniques used in Brautigan's other fiction. By 1980, when The Tokyo-Montana Express was published, Brautigan was forty-six years of age and the author of nine novels and a volume of short stories. For Brautigan, the novel itself has become a plateau for reflecting on middle age and mortality. Still present in Brautigan's fiction of the 1970s are the simple sentence structures; the clever, occasionally overdone, metaphors; the ordinary diction; the illogical connections; the obscure, but recurring, symbolism; the brevity; and Brautigan.

Chapter IV

Toward a New Direction: Brautigan's Fiction of the 1980s

Richard Brautigan's tenth novel, So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away (1982),¹ (his eleventh fictional work and his last novel published during his lifetime) was published late in 1982. As one attempts to make large permanent constructs that appraise an evolving career, a new publication is both an event and a challenge. Can the latest work be crammed into the old theories, or does it represent a new departure? Does it reenforce the authority of one's critical pronouncements, or does it contradict every assertion?

So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away is a novel. It is not funny. To be able to make such a straightforward, simple statement of genre about a Brautigan work suggests that something is different, and there is. There is a main character--even character development; there is a definite realistic setting; there is even a story. But there are also all the characteristics that mark the pure

¹ Richard Brautigan, So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away (New York: Delacorte/Seymour Lawrence, 1982). All subsequent references to this edition will be in parentheses in the text.

Brautigan novel: brevity (131 pages), a first-person narrator, imaginative images, a surrealistic scene, a strange time line, and recurrent themes. These elements are combined in Brautigan's unique way to render the traditional innovative. Furthermore, the critic oriented toward traditional methods of novel construction should find himself comfortable with this novel, while those who are accustomed to pleasant, unexpected turns of phrase and radical departures from the traditional will also find themselves at ease.

So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away is a novel narrated by an intrusive author who recalls a childhood tragedy, an afternoon of shooting practice that ends in death. The narrator and David, the most popular boy in school, spend February 17, 1948, a Saturday afternoon, shooting rotten apples that still hang on the trees in an abandoned orchard in Western Oregon. The two separate. David shoots at a pheasant through the undergrowth, but misses the bird that moves toward the narrator. The narrator shoots at the frightened bird, but he also misses. The bullet intended for the pheasant strikes David in the leg, severing the femoral artery. The boy dies. This is a conventional story line with the narrator seeking some sort of epiphany, some sort of self-discovery, from this experience. Another portion of the book, however, is not traditional.

As the narrator unravels the events that lead to that particular afternoon and develops the characters of both David and himself, he simultaneously develops a surrealistic, idyllic fishing scene, which he holds in suspension, "freeze-framed," for much of the novel. An obese man and woman drive a truckload of living room furniture to the local pond, they set up an outdoor living room, and they fish from their "house" by the pond. The jacket of the hard cover edition displays a photograph that resembles the outdoor living room of this couple. The lavender and purple boards display a reproduction in silver of Brautigan's signature. Even the cover treatment appears traditional in contrast to the covers of other Brautigan novels. The couple's trek toward the pond is either in slow motion or completely suspended while the narrator tells the main story line. The couple complete this ritual every night in the summer of 1947. The trek to the pond allows the narrator to introduce two other characters who live near the pond: an alcoholic watchman at a nearby sawmill and an eccentric war veteran who lives in a shack. Their personal histories contribute to an important minor theme as well as enlightening a side of the major character.

As the narrator gives specific dates less than a year apart for the major story lines in the novel, he also dates the beginning of the telling of this story. In a typical Brautigan comparison evocative of the nostalgia the past

holds, he states: "As I sit here on August 1st, 1979, my ear is pressed up against the past as if to the wall of a house that no longer exists" (p. 3). Throughout the novel, neither the narrator nor the reader will forget that, in fact, this is a story, for the narrator addresses the reader, breaks into the narrative, and finally states a purpose in telling the story. Both he and the reader are acutely conscious of the medium.

After a digression in the initial exposition, the narrator says, "I'll continue on with this story" (p. 2). Seven pages later the narrator discusses his family, mentioning two sisters. Immediately, the reader is told that "they are not really a part of this story" (p. 9). Then he states that that is a lie and that they will reappear (which they do with a reminder that he is making good his word) on page 12. The narrator then states, "Now we can continue on without, I hope, too much loss of credibility" (p. 9) and reminds the reader that he could have simply undone all of this instead of offering an apology. Near the end of the novel, the narrator again addresses the reader and signals the end of the narration when he says, "Well, there you have it" (p. 121). The most revealing direct comment to the reader embodying the self-consciousness of the writer as storyteller and citing both a reason for writing the novel as well as the theme of the work is one long, loose sentence. These authorial asides and addresses to the

reader that remind the reader of the medium while simultaneously suggesting a confessional immediacy create an interesting narrative tension. However, in spite of all of this explanation, the epiphany of the traditional novel is again denied, for he is still searching for the self-discovery, the insight, the meaning. (At the beginning of the following quotation, the narrator is predicting heart attacks and early deaths for the fishing couple.) The narrator states:

First, one would die and then the other would die, and that would be the end of them, except for whatever I write down here, trying to tell a difficult story that is probably getting more difficult because I am still searching for some meaning in it and perhaps even a partial answer to my own life, which as I grow closer and closer to death, the answer gets further and further away. (p. 92)

Considered in context with all of his foregoing fiction, this paragraph reveals three elements about Brautigan's writing: why he wrote, his belief in some part of life surviving through literature, and a major theme of his.

The statement about writing as therapy parallels a similar statement, previously quoted, from an interview when Brautigan was discussing why he wrote, "to try and get at some of the hard things in my life." The paragraph reveals that, to Brautigan, writing could preserve some aspect of humanity that with death might otherwise be forgotten. Finally, the narrator looks for "even a partial

answer" in the face of his own mortality. The novel does not reveal that he finds the answer.

The first-person narrator appears to speak for Brautigan. Enough other biographical parallels exist to justify calling the narrator an example of the veiled Brautigan narrator--even Brautigan himself. Of course, the narrator is writing a story. His stated purpose in writing the story parallels a Brautigan public statement quoted several times in this study. At the beginning of the story, the boy is twelve, as Brautigan was in 1947. Even the boy's interests and physical description evoke Brautigan. The boy fishes. He is nicknamed "Whitey" because of his light blond hair. His family is very poor. Brautigan's musing on fishing and communicating with the ultimate meaning of life through that medium is an often-repeated thread of theme in this study. As a blond adult, Brautigan is easily envisioned as a tow-head of twelve. The theme of the pain of poverty and the setting of the Pacific Northwest are both parallel elements to Brautigan's youth. Even a kindly interest in old people and a fondness for spiders parallel both the narrator and Brautigan. Because all indications point toward an actual event, surmising this as a childhood experience is only a brief step away; however, proving a reality is not necessary, for the story is compelling and poignant by itself.

Although the story is recounted thirty-one years later, the narrative incorporates the appearance of the naive narrator through the flatness associated with postmodernism as well as the childlike sentence structure of a twelve-year-old. Additionally, there is much repetition and shifting from then (1947 and 1948) to now (1979) and back again. The narrative begins as a movie run backwards, a wish to retrace the path of the fatal bullet until it is back in the box on the shelf at the gunshop and the money spent on a hamburger. The decision to purchase bullets instead of a hamburger is seen over and over as the predetermining factor of the accident in the midst of other predetermining factors.

The trauma of killing a friend is increased by a well-chronicled childhood attitude toward death that incorporates both a horror of and a fascination with death and the nature of the two boys' friendship. The narrator recalls previous addresses where his family lived. Associated with each address is the memory of the death of a child. At age five, he lived in an apartment that was a converted part of a funeral home. Obviously, funerals were frequent. Residing at an old house, the narrator recalls the death of a next-door neighbor, also a young boy, in a car accident. At still a third address, the narrator recalls the vivid memory of an eight-year-old girl who died from pneumonia.

Likewise, the unlikely friendship between the narrator and David is handled carefully, contrasting the lives of the two children. David is popular, bright, talented, and athletic, the kind of kid who "always got into achievement and glory" (p. 94). Because the narrator's "obvious poverty" separates him from other students, the secret friendship with David is special.

The novelistic treatment of the accidental death of David, the boy who "had everything going for him" and whose "future was unlimited" (p. 94), is an exploration of the Brautigan theme of unrealized potential through an early death. The narrator is a youthful example of a Brautigan character who is victimized by events in this life. On his trips to the pond, he is drawn to two other losers--the watchman and the veteran. The watchman's unhappy life is a consequence of drinking and a broken marriage, while the veteran was a victim of a wartime gassing that left him with one lung. Both characters exemplify sad, lonely, wasted lives.

The story itself is relatively simple, but the treatment, the technique is complex. The intermingling of the description of the couple's nightly fishing scene and the story of the accidental shooting are sprinkled with a refrain and numerous Brautigan images. These combined with the author's intrusions produce a technically interesting work. The title of the book, So the Wind Won't Blow It All

Away, is the first part of a refrain followed by "Dust . . . American . . . Dust," which is repeated ten times within the novel. The allusion to the brevity of life and how quickly and easily life may disappear is implicit.

The clever images often reenforce the themes of the pain of poverty, the waste of human potential, the fear of death, and the idea of life in simpler times. The novel recounts childhood pleasures found in redeeming beer bottles and selling night crawlers, but it is ultimately the story of the abrupt end of childhood. On the basis of this one novel alone, Brautigan, the so-called "humorist," deserves the label so long denied him--significant contemporary American author.

Conclusion

Postmodernism in literature continues the traditional mimetic literary convention of art mirroring life; however, as fact and fiction become indistinguishable, the reality presented is fragmented. Then, phenomenology overshadows and questions ontology. The major themes of postmodernism are the establishing of identity, coping with a threatening reality, and controlling one's destiny in the midst of a society that moves farther and farther from an individual-centered life toward a mass society, manipulated in some mysterious way. The senseless waste, destruction, and violence that seemingly accompany continuing industrial and scientific sophistication move man farther from the natural world, as these self-same industrial and scientific developments destroy that world. Man becomes increasingly helpless to deal with a system that he cannot control. As the system overrides the importance of the individual, postmodernist plots override characterization. Consequently, characters frequently appear two-dimensional, less than dynamic in dealing with the forces that manipulate them. Postmodernist authors, orienting themselves to a rapidly-changing communication medium, employ various typographical arrangements for their impact on the reader. For them, the visual is an important part of the cognitive impact. Settings and

events previously considered fantastic become real as fantasy and reality merge. Approaching literature as part of the construct of life, the author presents the reader with a character who deals with a disrupted, fragmented society; presenting a struggle, but not victory or even the possibility of victory, the author still presents some small hope that contemporary man may rid himself of T. S. Eliot's overpowering image of the vast wasteland that accompanies man's scientific and industrial achievements that threaten his very being. Dealing in language, that characteristic of man which man has often used to distinguish himself as a superior being, the author achieves permanence in art, often the only thing that survives lost civilizations. Illuminating others' struggle for survival, the author focuses on an action that becomes symbolic as man defies and resists the inevitable: death.

These precepts of postmodernism filtered through Brautigan's fiction incorporate those of Ditsky, Stevick, and Lodge, yet Brautigan infuses his fiction with a unique style.

Brautigan's postmodernism is similar to the traditional, mimetic fiction, but he changes the use and the emphasis to accord with a still more modern, technologically-oriented society. The dissemination of information through various media forms obviously influences Brautigan. Frequently, the first chapter or preface

of each book is an explication of the cover photograph. This technique makes separating Brautigan from his first person narrator difficult, and, of course, introduces the possibility that Brautigan does not want the reader to separate them. His novels are usually quite short. Depending on the edition and the accompanying print size, they range from one hundred and eleven pages to something over two hundred. They are, however, briefer than the total pagination indicates. Numerous brief chapters ending at the top of a page or halfway through create vast blank spaces, accompanied by wide top and bottom margins. In the later novels, increasingly larger print accounts for the greater number of pages. What does all of this mean? Part of this reflects Brautigan's personal style and part of this reflects the influence of McLuhan; both combine as a testimony to the merging of theme and form. Indeed, the attempt to separate theme and form is frequently a self-defeating exercise because one is an inherent part of the other. Fragmentation as a characteristic of society and even the inability of the reader to devote large time periods to art forms seem interrelated. Often, these brief chapters are complete little stories or an extended analogy. Consequently, a smooth narrative is often submerged beneath Brautigan's language display. His sentence structure is the basic simple sentence, frequently run-on. With much repetition of very simple ideas, the sentences are most often

simple or coordinate structures. Some critics see Brautigan's whimsical, imaginative use of the language as the single liberating, humanistic feature of his themes. It is as if man's ability to verbalize a wish or a relation extends the possibility into actuality that the verbalizing will bring the act to fruition. To some critics, the fact that humor, whimsy, and imagination constitute a prominent element in Brautigan's brand of postmodernism denigrates; while producing a personalized style, the interweaving of the tragi-comic motifs seems the very "stuff" of which life is made, a true reflection or mimesis of art and life. Yet, for the most part, Brautigan's treatment of reality shows that reality is askew. When the language liberates, producing less than realistic results, the element of surrealism pervades always through the use of simile, metaphor, or analogy. But Brautigan's protagonists are not heroic; they are more often victims of modern society. They move either from city to country (pastoral) or from reality to surreality (fantasy). Beyond coping with reality, simply determining which reality is real becomes the central problem for character and reader. In addition to exploring one's relationship with society, Brautigan explores the impact of this separation and isolation. Being lonely in the midst of a crowd because of a failure

to cope or because of the lack of any meaningful relationship intertwines with the theme of establishing a personal identity.

Traditional themes and traditional literary terms can be frequently applied in the study of Brautigan. With personal modification, he utilizes the pastoral or utopian existence and the accompanying Adamic character, the quest theme, the putative author technique, and elements from satire, burlesque, and parody that he combines with science fiction, romance, western and Gothic, but predominantly his works deal with the individual's struggle to live in a dehumanizing and increasingly violent world that begets frustration and personal impotence.

While his fictional works share a great many similarities one with another, they are also markedly different. In an early interview (already cited) with John Stickney, Brautigan accounts for the great differences by stating that he does not intend to mimic a previously used style or structure. In a typical Brautigan metaphor, he compares Trout Fishing in America to an old machine that he has dismantled and left to rust in the rain. In an interview with Bruce Cook (also previously cited), Brautigan discusses his personal writing discipline. While he gets the material down as rapidly as possible and uses an electric typewriter to do so, he also does not, he says, spend time on character delineation and situation. This accounts for a major

difference between his writing and the writings of traditional novelists. Personal statements by Brautigan in The San Francisco Poets precede several of his poems from Rommel Drives on Deep into Egypt; they also illuminate two other important aspects of his writing--the metaphorical language and his themes. Revealing a probable cause for the frequent, extended metaphors and language often described as poetic, Brautigan says: "I wrote poetry for seven years to learn how to write a sentence because I really wanted to write novels and I figured that I couldn't write a novel until I could write a sentence." His purpose in writing is highly personal and borders on the confessional; he says that he wanted to "get at some of the hard things in my life that needed talking about."

The "hard things" in Brautigan's life are the common philosophical questions in the mainstream of literary themes, but he modifies these questions with the additional difficulties a technological society presents to the contemporary world. Brautigan, exploring serious life problems common to us all and yet expressing them in a unique way, assures himself a comfortable place in American literature. His technical innovations contribute to an artistic freedom that critics have said was needed for the novel form to survive as an art form. His themes deal with the most profound questions confronting mankind. His fluidity with language casts a poetic medium over the most mundane event, creating

a style unique in prose. As with any author, the "what" he says and the "how" or "way" he says it combine to produce fiction that separates itself from any that has gone before, but is noteworthy for utilizing previously accepted traditional forms. The general assumptions of Brautigan and postmodernism are the same: the world has changed; therefore, reality has changed. The author's effort in writing is an effort at interpretation, encouragement, tenacity, permanence.

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