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The Fiction Of Fishing: Richard Brautigan's Metafictional Romance

Brian T. Way

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THE FICTION OF FISHING:
RICHARD BRAUTIGAN'S METAFICTIONAL ROMANCE

by

Brian T. W. Way

Department of English

Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario
October 1991

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Tom McGuane simply says: "When the 60s ended, he [Brautigan] was the baby thrown out with the bath water" (Barber 15). While that postmodern critical framework to which Chénétier alludes, and in which Brautigan's fiction is most profitably read, will be more fully elucidated in Chapter One of this dissertation, the purpose of this "Introduction" is to present, at the immediate outset, alternative readings of Brautigan's final fiction to illustrate some of its depths and to suggest that Brautigan's writings, which have generally been ignored in critical circles since 1970, merit a reappraisal.

The central narrative incident in So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away occurs on February 17, 1948, when the white-haired boy accidentally kills a friend named David while they are out shooting rotten apples in an abandoned orchard. The book represents an attempt by the narrator, some thirty-two years later, to come to terms with that traumatic occurrence. Beginning with the wish that somehow the bullet would spiral itself back into his .22 rifle, the narrator recounts episodically, though seldom chronologically, the events that precede the accident. These separate events include several somewhat morbid

romance forms, including western, gothic, erotic, detective and historical romance, these genre experimentations move Brautigan toward the development of a unique hybrid text that aspires to enfold all forms of human discourse in an elastic fictive structure-- such is the final substance of Richard Brautigan's metafictional romance.

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Introduction: of fish and film

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In the final section of Richard Brautigan's final book, So The Wind Won't Blow It All Away, two corpulent characters arrive in their truck at a local pond. They unload several pieces of living room furniture and, sitting on their couch, begin to fish. The man and woman refer to each other, respectively, as "Father" and "Mother." It is the summer of 1947. They are watched from a distance by a blond twelve year old boy: "While they were setting up this living-room ritual of life beside the pond, I sat in some grass nearby, just watching them, *saying nothing*" (italics mine; Wind 127).¹ In turn, this boy and these furniture people are watched, and their story recounted, by that young boy grown older:

Sometimes I would arrive early and wait for them.
 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. (Wind 3)

As Jay Boyer notes (43), in addition to the layering of incidents of past and present, an eerie autobiographical dimension exists in that Richard Brautigan was a white-haired twelve year old in 1947, and lived in the various locations in Oregon where the fiction is set. The boy resembles the young Brautigan who, now grown older in the summer of 1979, is involved in the reflective process of telling his own story, of finally "saying nothing" no more.

Although it unfolds as a fiction that is intriguing and complex, So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away (1982) has received little critical attention. In his monograph on Brautigan, Marc Chénétier argues that after the 1960s Brautigan's work was wrongfully condemned by being solely associated with that time period:

... Brautigan's career certainly did not end when the social phenomenon he was supposed to express subsided and the sixties turned into something else. In fact, it has gone on to display even more clearly the originality and the genuine contribution of a fiction writer who ... has always been much more akin to the

metafictionists of the seventies than to the naïve flower-children of what I should like to call the pre-Nixapsarian sixties. (16)

Tom McGuane simply says: "When the 60s ended, he [Brautigan] was the baby thrown out with the bath water" (Barber 15). While that postmodern critical framework to which Chénétier alludes, and in which Brautigan's fiction is most profitably read, will be more fully elucidated in Chapter One of this dissertation, the purpose of this "Introduction" is to present, at the immediate outset, alternative readings of Brautigan's final fiction to illustrate some of its depths and to suggest that Brautigan's writings, which have generally been ignored in critical circles since 1970, merit a reappraisal.

The central narrative incident in So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away occurs on February 17, 1948, when the white-haired boy accidentally kills a friend named David while they are out shooting rotten apples in an abandoned orchard. The book represents an attempt by the narrator, some thirty-two years later, to come to terms with that traumatic occurrence. Beginning with the wish that somehow the bullet would spiral itself back into his .22 rifle, the narrator recounts episodically, though seldom chronologically, the events that precede the accident. These separate events include several somewhat morbid

childhood memories that are attached to previous places of residence, and the recollection of three strange encounters, one with a crippled old man who lives on the pond, another with the laconic owner of the Crossroads Gas and Worm Station, and the third with an alcoholic watchman, a source for the boy of revenue-producing beer bottles. All of these incidents, however, including the climactic shooting, are interwoven between the announcement and the eventual arrival of the furniture-toting fishers.

So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away, then, is in a traditional sense both Bildungsroman and Kunstlerroman, tracing the growth of a youth into adulthood and depicting his eventual development as a writer. Although he is "acquitted by the court of any negligence in the shooting" (Wind 118) the young boy realizes that his "childhood ended when [he] was twelve years old on February 17th, 1948 ..." (Wind 14). As with Melville's Ishmael and a host of other fictional narrators who recount their own life stories, it is only in his eventual shaping and retelling of his tale that he can come to some understanding of his life and some separate peace with himself. The substance of that understanding and peace of mind appears to be located, at least in

part, in the complex symbolic pattern of the fiction, a pattern which invites varying interpretations.

The boy and David, whom he kills, are mirror images of one another. While the boy is a self-confessed "weird kid" (Wind 30) and "social outcast" (Wind 93) who is fascinated with the funerals of children and the fate of "dead toys," along with the aforementioned alcoholics and old cripples and furnished fishers, David is very much part of an accepted social order:

David was an enormously popular kid: the most outstanding athlete in school and class president. Whenever anything was voted on, he got it. His grades were straight A's.

... Whereas a lot of older kids got into some kind of trouble, he always got into achievement and glory. He had everything going for him. His future was unlimited. (Wind 94)

David is the best singer and dancer in the school, serves as president of the drama club, and dates a cheerleader, the "prettiest girl in the school" (Wind 95). David is from a very wealthy family; in contrast, the young narrator lives with his mother and sister, supported by Welfare. Although David never socializes with the boy when others are around, they are paradoxically attracted

to one another, meeting "in a constant but almost accidental pattern" (Wind 95). As the boy declares:

I played a hidden role in his life.

He liked the odd paths of my imagination. (Wind 94)
David can talk to the boy about his dreams and about things "that he can't talk to other kids about" (Wind 94) and their relationship develops symbiotically:

"Did you see that cat?" he said.

"Yeah," I said. Then I knew what he was going to say next but I let him say it first.

"It looks like that other cat, but it's smaller," he said.

Those were the exact words that I knew he was going to say. (Wind 97)

While such suggestive comments hint at the omniscient relationship of the author to his work (Brautigan *knows* "the exact words" that are to be said), they explicitly illuminate the interdependence of the boys. Most significantly in their relationship, David has one fear which he repeatedly confesses to the boy:

"I'm scared of something, but I don't know what it is ... It bothers me all the time. Sometimes I get very close to knowing what it is, but then when I can almost see it, it fades away and I'm left alone, wondering what it is." (Wind 95)

The two boys travel to the deserted and decayed orchard where they shoot some rotten apples and then separate, David wandering into some bushes to look for pheasants, the boy sitting on a "huge fallen apple branch" (Wind 111) to wait for David's return. The orchard, near "a burnt-down farmhouse and half a barn" (Wind 111), is comparable to a decayed Eden and the boys, transformed by circumstance, plausibly resemble Cain and Abel. The boy sits and thinks about his relationship with David:

I wondered how it had all gotten started in the first place. It's not an easy thing for a friendship to be founded on one person telling another person about his dreams, but they were the main ingredients of our friendship, and especially the one dream that baffled him so much, the thing that frightened him, the thing that he could almost see, but not quite.

There was something in his mind that kept it out of arm's reach. Though he tried and tried, he couldn't touch it, so he was constantly telling me all about what was not visible to him.

I was interested but not that interested, though I pretended to be because I wanted his friendship, even if it was based mostly on dreams.

Then I heard his .22 go off. (Wind 114)

At this point a pheasant appears and the boy shoots at it. He misses the bird but kills David.

The telling of the story provides the older narrator with several potential resolutions to the trauma with which he has lived for so many years. In one sense, as a young boy in this decaying edenic place he has killed his symbiotic brother because, mythically, banefully Cain-like, that is what he is fated to do. This is a post-lapsarian world in which the sins of the fathers are endlessly re-enacted by the sons. There is substantial evidence in the book of this reiterative curse. Even on their way to the orchard, for instance, the boy and David are accosted and berated by an unknown boy:

... "You sons-of-bitches all have bicycles!" he said. "I'll have a bicycle someday."

Soon we had left his voice behind like a voice from a dream dreamt down the road, but I looked back into the dream and I could still see him yelling, but I couldn't hear a word. He was just another kid driven crazy by poverty and his drunken father beating him up all the time and telling him that he'd never amount to anything, that he would end up just like his father, which he would. (Wind 109-110)

In many ways, as Boyer points out (44), the life of the young narrator, in its poverty and alienation, resembles that of this stranger more than it does the life of David. Symbolically, David's death may ultimately be necessary in order that the boy come to understand his true situation in the world, in order that he come to terms socially and economically with who he is. Any genuine or lasting alliance of rich and poor, of outcast and establishment, is impossible. Lighting out, being on the road, escaping into a controlled, albeit quasi-solipsistic existence is a theme common in Brautigan and recurrent in works by a broad range of American writers including Cooper, Thoreau, Melville, Twain, Fitzgerald, Steinbeck, Kerouac, Salinger, Harrison and Kingsolver, among others.²

Still other potential resolutions for easing the narrator's anxiety are apparent in his retelling of his tale. David exists as the boy's contrasting double. For the boy to authenticate himself as an independent being, he must somehow control or suppress this other self. The personalities of the two boys are opposites--while David is wholly involved with the political and social aspects of his world, the young narrator is focused on darker, interior things, on death and the imagination. "The imagination was where I snuck around," he exclaims (Wind

18). As well, David is quite self-centred, using the narrator when he needs him but never introducing him to his society. David lacks both the humane sensitivity and the intellectual awareness that the young boy demonstrates throughout the story as, for instance, in the empathetic episode with the old Thoreau-like man at the pond. In one scene the old man gives the boy a tomato and puts some pepper on it for him:

I took a bite out of the tomato.

"What do you think of tomato with pepper on it?"

he said.

I've been eating it that way ever since. (Wind
60)

For David and his friends, however, this recluse is simply a "crazy old man" (Wind 57) whom they ridicule. David's insensitivity is also self-reflexive; he is "scared of something" but does not know what he fears. He brings his nightmare dreams to the boy to solve. Without the ability to reflect, to imagine, to sympathize, David, in spite of his social and political promise, is trapped in an insightless wasteland and seems doomed from ever being completely human. Like the angry boy on the road, his fate is blindly sealed long before the lethal shot is fired. His final words confirm the inevitable: "I'm never going to see it now" (Wind 118).

Therefore, by the end of his tale, the narrator has given himself several reconciliatory resolutions to that most crucial day in his life, February 17, 1948. His narration, however, does not seem to adopt one solution; in effect, there may be no absolute solution. An accumulation of resolutions may be the best that he can do. At the very end this allows him, as narrator and as character, simply, symbolically, to vanish from his work. In the final words of the fiction, the fishing couple comment on his disappearance:

"Where did that kid go, Mother?"

"I don't know, Father." ...

"I don't see him anywhere."

"I guess he's gone."

"Maybe he went home." (Wind 131)

This reading of So the Wind Won't Blow It all Away as an open-ended novel in the tradition of the Bildungsroman or Kunstlerroman, I think, shows it to be an intelligent and reasonably well-wrought work of fiction. All difficulties with the work, however, are not entirely resolved with this reading, nor are all of its finer tones revealed. An alternative reading may prove useful.

The narrator is always an active force in this fiction. As his younger self watches the furniture people unload their truck, he comments:

Sometimes I would arrive early and wait for them.

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.

I can hear the sound of redwing blackbirds and the wind blowing hard against the cattails. They rustle in the wind like ghost swords in battle and there is the steady lapping of the pond at the shore's edge, which I belong to with my imagination.

The blackbirds sound like melancholy exclamation marks typed on the summer late afternoon, which has a feeling of bored exhaustion because a hot wind is blowing from the south. That wind is always tiring and gets on my nerves. (Wind 3)

As the boy sits by the pond in the summer of 1947 and waits for two eccentric people to arrive with their furniture to fish, the narrator sits in his house in the summer of 1979 and listens. Although different senses control other passages, hearing, or sound, is the dominant sense impression here. Metaphorically, the past is compared to a house which "no longer exists." The narrator hears various sounds of nature: redwing blackbirds, wind, cattails, and the "steady lapping of the pond." Inside this metaphorical house other metaphors

take over. The cattails in the wind are "like ghost swords in battle" and the blackbirds are "like melancholy exclamation marks typed on the summer late afternoon." The metaphoric house which contains these similes is, as the narrator tells us, his imagination. It is that to which the pond, the blackbirds, the furniture-toting fishers, and the boy himself, "belong." Appropriately, associated with his past, the cattails are ghosts. As well, the blackbirds evoke an intricate metaphor which works in and out of the passage. These birds are compared to exclamation marks which are typographical features of the actual text that the narrator/writer is, at the moment of his telling, making. Subject of the text and text itself metamorphose into one and the reader is brought dramatically back from 1947, not only to the writing present of 1979 where the narrator sits with his feelings of "bored exhaustion," but also to the reader's own present and a view of the text as a thing created, as the product of an imagination and a typewriter. The "I" who arrives early and waits is the boy waiting by the pond, but also it is the narrator telling his tale, and the author listening to the memory house of his imagination. That "I" may also be the reader.

So the Wind Won't Blow it All Away is very much a fiction conscious of itself as a fiction. There are

numerous examples of such reflexivity in the work. The narrator admits that he is telling a lie in his text about the exclusion of his mother (9) and later includes a footnote to indicate that the lie has been emended (12). Even later he self-consciously comments: "You must pardon this cartoon-like Oedipus interlude because my relationship with my mother is not the point of this story" (Wind 45). Frequently, as mentioned, author-Brautigan knows "the exact words" that are to be said. Sometimes, Brautigan appears to be the narrator autobiographically recalling his own life; at other times, the narrator is clearly a fictional persona and his story is the stuff of fanciful regional gothicism. Characters in the fiction are discernibly manipulated by the narrator so that their manipulation becomes a part of the fiction itself. For example, absolute control is exercised over the couple who fish:

... I won't let the people drive up to the pond and take their furniture off the truck and go about their evening's fishing a third of a century ago ...

They will remain for a while longer two American eccentrics freeze-framed in grainy black and white thirty-two years ago at sunset (Wind 92-3)

As well, the fiction always seems very aware of the presence of a reader who is, as in the example above, continually made aware of narrative decisions or, in another instance, asked an opinion:

I think the only reason he had that filling station was that he liked to count worms and pennies. I can't think of another reason.

Can you? (Wind 106)

The text at times displays typographical idiosyncrasies:

While the minute passes before they get here with their furniture, there will be a huge
INTERRUPTION like a black wet Titanic telegram ...

(Wind 71)

The use of upper case typography here acts as a double displacement, semantically announcing a break in the text and physically producing one. The title of the book itself, used as a refrain to denote structural divisions in the fiction, is a reflexive device which indicates certain thematic possibilities about the need for imagination and fiction; otherwise, all that is of value will be lost, blown away. At the same time, the repeated use of this title, like some header pulled down from the top of the page, announces to the reader over and over again that this is a text that one is reading and that this is the title of that text.

So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away, then, can be read in quite different ways. It is a fiction about the abrupt growth of a young boy from a condition of innocence into adulthood and a fiction about that young boy grown older coming to shape and resolve that experience in art. So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away is also a fiction about fiction; it foregrounds its own self-consciousness by openly discussing narrative decisions, by enfolding the reader in its fiction-making processes and by wilfully playing with the relationship between fiction and reality. Most importantly, it is a composite fiction which explores all of these elements while it tries to hold them in balance and that is probably its greatest ambition. As a result, a tension exists in this book that is best expressed by the title itself. Episode by episode, the narrator recalls his past in an attempt to encode those memories and images in language so that the things which are important to him will not be lost, so, as the refrain insists, "the Wind Won't Blow It All Away/ Dust ... American ... Dust." That wind of change is always blowing. Images of wind and movement and transience are everywhere. The narrator and his mother are always being moved by the Welfare Agency, and baby buggies and bicycles are perpetually coveted by the children as a means of providing some

vital motion in their lives. Even as the narrator writes, "a hot wind is blowing from the south," and he says: "That kind of wind is always tiring and gets on my nerves" (Wind 3). That wind blows in 1979 and that wind blows the cattails of his memory. No matter how much the narrator recalls the furniturc-toting fishers of the summer of 1947, the winter of 1948 lies ahead. Change is inevitable. A bullet cannot be spiralled back into the barrel of a rifle; David is forever dead.

Change is a central component in the life of the narrator; for Brautigan, as this novel unfolds, it becomes not only a thematic but a fictional consideration as well. The narrator's "obsessive search for salvation" (Wind 119), which began with David's death, seems to be a lifelong obsession. The salvation for which he searches seems to be some method of preventing change or, at the very least, of controlling it. At one point the narrator images the accident of February 17th as a film:

I have a gigantic motion picture studio in my mind where I have been working constantly on this movie since February 17th, 1948. I have been working on the same movie for 31 years. I believe that this is a record. I don't think I will ever finish it.

I have, more or less, about 3,983,421 hours of film ...

I call my picture Hamburger Cemetery. (Wind 74)

As the narration illustrates, his "motion picture studio in [his] mind" has unsuccessfully attempted to come to terms with change in many ways. At one point after shooting David, the boy curiously researches hamburgers:

Somehow I believe that only a complete knowledge of hamburgers can save my soul. If I had gotten a hamburger that February day instead of bullets, everything would have been different, so I *must* find out all that I can about hamburgers. (Wind 81)

Although this holistic hamburger inquiry produces few results, another concern that permeates the boy's story is revelatory. In almost every episode of this book, characters demonstrate obsessively habitual or ritualistic behaviour.

To begin with, obsessive habits form an important part of the boy's life. As a child he regularly rises early to watch funerals from his bedroom window, and he listens to the radio every night while his mother skims Reader's Digest. He decides to visit the alcoholic watchman every four days as a "regular part of [his] life" (Wind 8), and he and David routinely travel to the abandoned orchard to shoot apples. As an adult, his recollection of David's death has become an unending

motion picture and even his writing on hot summer days with its "feeling of bored exhaustion" (Wind 3) takes on a compelling tone. Similarly, compulsive behaviour seems to surround and intrigue him in his life. His mother wakes up several times each night to check for gas leaks, "repeating over and over again, in a hissing whisper: 'Gas, gas, gas, gas'" (Wind 55). The alcoholic watchman always dresses impeccably but goes nowhere and treasures mysterious icons of his past such as a postcard from New Orleans depicting a huge catfish on a flatbed truck. The old man on the pond maintains an exquisite dock and boat but uses neither and the owner of the Crossroads Filling Station spends his life methodically counting out worms, then pennies, for the children. The foremost ritual makers of all are the fishing couple with whom the narrator's story begins and ends.

Toward the end, the narrator allows these fishers to arrive and set up their "living-room ritual of life beside the pond" (Wind 127). On one level, they are the eccentric and detached and sometimes visionary individuals who form a vital part of any society's fabric--as independent as a Thoreau or a Huck Finn or a Dean Moriarity; on another level, they represent America itself, recreating its "living-room" culture, its city upon a hill in its own place, in its own way; and in yet

another way, they are the embryonic human race. They call each other "Mother" and "Father." Their conversations are brief and present an elegiac lament for a lost species that is ever changing:

"I don't know why people have to move all the time, Father."

"Neither do I, Mother." ...

"Betty Ann moved in 1930," he said.

"That means Bill must have moved in either 1929 or 1931 because they moved a year apart," she said.

"I don't know why either of them moved," he said.

"Well, don't forget we moved, too," she said.

"But it was different with us. We had to move," he said. ...

"They could be anywhere now, but I think they would have liked this place." ...

"Maybe they don't even fish any more," he said. ... People change. They give up fishing. ..."

(Wind 127-9)

Herein lies the central paradox which underlies the tension of the work and the trauma of the narrator. The "living-room ritual" of these people enables them to deny the similarity of their lives to that of others. By setting up their furniture where they fish, they

establish a sense of place and being. They discredit moving, even though they have and even though they do every day. For them, their ritual is a celebration of their individuality and of their existence; it is also a denial of their sameness, a denial of their death. Paradoxically, by denying inevitable reality, in effect claiming that the wind does not blow, they entrap and doom themselves. As the boy notices, they fish but they never eat any of the fish that they catch. Their fishing, like their living room, is a ritualistic attempt to give order and meaning to their lives. But as with the boy's quest for hamburger knowledge, it seems comic and ineffectual, doomed to failure.

Of their fate, part-way through his book, the narrator says:

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 very 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.

In my mind I can see two extra large graves in the middle of nowhere with not a single piece of fishing furniture in sight. (Wind 72)

The narrator, whose situation recalls that of an author-character such as Tristram Shandy at this point, doomed as a writer to an endless and, therefore, impossible task, nevertheless understands what appears to be the vitality of his role as artist. If he does not write their lives, nothing will remain, not even their most eccentric furniture feature.

In his writing, however, which includes them because of their eccentric ritual, the narrator announces their death and, by association, reflects upon his own. Like Sterne's Tristram Shandy, he realizes that his narrative only pushes the answer "further and further away" (Wind 92). The "obsessive search for salvation" is a lifelong search and thus the text can never end. It is the repository of his creative vision, his house of imagination--it is his art and his life. Ironically, and literally, it is the fiction that kills the furniture-toting fishers, and David. Their rituals, which presumably provided an order and a sense of permanence for their lives and which ostensibly promoted their appearance in the fiction in the first place, apparently fail. This may be an indication that these rituals were

misdirected or undirected or lacking in some other way. In some sense, for Brautigan, and it is a topic that will be considered more fully later, they seem to fail because they are rituals. Like the wind that blows, all things change. This wind, however, contains no blessing for the narrator; it tires him and gets on his nerves. It is a twentieth-century wind, not some gentle Wordsworthian breeze. Somehow, now, it would seem, fiction must take its imaginative epiphanies, its spots of time or moments of incarnation, and forge a text that is not a prison-house or a tomb but a living, changing entity. By creating and encoding these characters, the fiction destroys them in the same way that they have destroyed themselves by habitually creating and encoding their lives in a restrictive "living-room ritual of life" (127). Ultimately in So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away all of the habit-bound characters emerge as pathetically limited human beings. Fiction itself must avoid becoming habitual or it will suffer the same fate. It will ossify, become a dead idea, a statue, an iDEATH as Brautigan labels this process in In Watermelon Sugar. This is the narrator's lesson in art and life, and this is the realm that Brautigan's final fiction seeks to explore. To adopt his imagery, perhaps fiction must come to resemble something like film, placing its still

photographs of perception in constant motion and, in that mercurial manner, engaging the continual participation of an audience so that, potentially, at least, each individual comes to see not just the same film but his own film. To use another of Brautigan's pivotal metaphors, one can image fiction as a form of fishing, an act of sustenance and an act of slaughter, in which reader and text, fisher and stream, all exist as components of the metaphoric equation. The vehicle and the tenor, however, are interchangeable: reader sometimes acts as fisher with text as his stream; text is sometimes fisher with reader as stream. Like Yeats' dancer and dance in "Among School Children," though, one does not exist without the other. For Brautigan in this book, fiction is an integrated act of creation and of destruction. It is the terrible beauty of sneaking around in one's imagination. For this reason, impulsively, So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away seeks a type of self-destruction in baring itself as fiction. Conversely, it attaches itself to reality--Brautigan himself sits and writes in the summer of 1979--and seems to challenge us to define any separation between reality and fiction. The reader remains alone as part of both. Near the end of the book, as one might expect, narrator

and character vanish like trout slipping into the deep darkness of a clear stream.

ii

So the Wind Won't Blow it All Away was published in 1982. Although, as the discussion above has proposed, it seems to be a relatively complex work with many intriguing possibilities, the reviewers were almost universally negative. Patty Campbell sees it as a book for "sixteen and seventeen-year-old boys" in which "Brautigan is amused and bemused, entranced and baffled by all that goes on and may or may not mean something" (334-335). The anonymous review in The New Yorker considers it only as a "weary little dirge" (173), and Eve Ottenberg places the novel in the "current sullen trend" and sees it as being obsessed with death: "As a result, there is not sufficient space to develop the minor characters and the reason why they do appear is never made clear. ... The style is disconnected, chaotic, redolent of alienation. Everyone in the book has an acute case of the late 20th century blues" (47). In Downstream from Trout Fishing in America, a critical biography of Brautigan, Keith Abbott suggests that

Brautigan's timing was off and labels the work as "clumsy and badly written" (135).

While the reviews of this last work were negative, Brautigan's first published writings in the 1960s received considerable critical praise. In reviewing A Confederate General from Big Sur (1964), for example, Auberon Waugh suggests that "Mr. Brautigan writes five thousand times better than Kerouac ever did ..." (287) and F. J. Brown characterizes its success as "a surrealist novel kept going by the exuberance of the author's invention" (46). Among plentiful praise offered to Trout Fishing in America (1967), the anonymous reviewer in The Times Literary Supplement regards it as a fiction with "... emotional complexity,... imaginative ingenuity, [and] implicit historical and cultural awareness..." (893), Kenneth Seib sees it as a "solid achievement in structure, significance, and narrative technique" (71), Tony Tanner in The Times describes it as a "minor classic" of American literature (5), and John Ciardi says: "The man's a writer and the writing takes over in its own way, which is what writing should do. Brautigan manages effects the English novel has never produced before" (Barber 115). Of Brautigan's writing in In Watermelon Sugar (1968), J. G. Farrell says "... his imagery is so supple as to make more conventional writers

look hopelessly musclebound" (133) and Albert Norman claims "[In Watermelon Sugar] is Brautigan at his best. Every page is gracefully complex. The characters in this naive allegory are as sweet as sugar. The writing melts in your mouth" (55). In fact, regarding Brautigan's work of the sixties, among the seventy-seven reviews included in John Barber's recent and comprehensive Richard Brautigan: An Annotated Bibliography, only nine are negative.

After such considerable critical praise in the sixties, however, reviews of Brautigan's writing afterward are diffuse and virulently negative; they are almost pervasively as narrow and pessimistic as those above that castigate So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away. At times one gets the impression that, after 1970, reviewers were not reading his books but simply following a Brautigan-bashing trend. As John Barber notes:

Because of the timing of his success with Trout Fishing in America, Brautigan was often called "the hippie novelist," a term that puzzled him. "I never thought of myself as a [hippie novelist]," he said in rebuttal, "My writing is just one man's response to life in the 20th century" [Bozeman Daily Chronicle 6]. ...

The sincerity and the disconnected, elliptical style of Brautigan's writing that had so charmed critics and readers in the early years, palled. Critics enjoyed his Hemingway style, Twain humor, and unique philosophy, but they generally dismissed Brautigan as a writer who had peaked early and had nothing new to offer. ...

Richard Brautigan was expelled from the arena of critical literary attention. (Barber 14-15)

Examples of the negative reaction received by Brautigan's work after 1970 are plentiful. Susan Hill concludes that The Abortion (1971) lacks any "literary quality" having a "total absence of good writing, perceptive description or insights into any human purpose" (124) and the review in the Times Literary Supplement considers the novel pretentious and stylistically flat, "a studied evasion of saying anything" (113). John Yohalem suggests that The Hawkline Monster (1974) has no depth but is merely "cute" (7), and Roger Sale calls it "edgeless and pointless, ...: It's a terrible book, deeply unfunny, in no need of having been written" (624). Peter Ackroyd claims the novel "contains a great deal of fancy but no imagination at all ...: fortunately, the novel is arranged as a series of brief chapters, and the print is large, so the tedium of

its self-indulgent whimsy is camouflaged for quite long periods" (412). Michael Mason views Willard and His Bowling Trophies (1975) as too stylistically simple and "disingenuous" (600) while Phoebe Adams pans the novel as a stringing together of "some outlandish episodes to demonstrate that the world is full of misdirected violence" (236). An anonymous review in Choice depicts Sombrero Fallout (1976) as "the last gasp of the Beat Generation" (1433) and Robert Christgau suggests that Brautigan "no longer knows what to write about" (4). Reviewing Dreaming of Babylon (1977), Thomas Disch claims it is "a tale 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" (405) and Joe Flaherty argues that the only "result in this basically plotless book is cartooning" (20). Barry Yourgau describes The Tokyo-Montana Express (1980) as a collection of "doodlings falsely promoted from the author's notebooks" which belong in "anybody's museum for the trivial and goofily mawkish" (13) and Sue Halpern reads the book as "flat and uninteresting ...: Brautigan does not know when he is good and when he is insipid" (416). In their assessments of the fiction that Brautigan wrote after 1970, then, no one can accuse the reviewers of being too kind.

Brautigan did not fare much better in academic circles where his early work from the 1960s is almost always the focus and little comment is made on anything published thereafter. In fact, at this writing, only five articles in English have been published that set their principal focus on post-1970 works. In the monographs, Malley's book is published in 1972 before the works of the seventies, Foster virtually dismisses the "novels published in the 1970s" as "generally weaker than his other fiction" (105), Abbott and Chénétier concentrate their analyses on the earlier works, and Boyer labels the novels of the 1970s "minor works" (105). However, Boyer also comments:

Contrary to much of what's been written about Richard Brautigan, he was not an author who knew what he was doing for a novel or two and then lost sight of it. As we'll see, his writing forms a body of work, one with consistencies and developments--both in terms of style and thematic concerns. (16)

The purpose of this dissertation is to reconsider Brautigan's canon as a body of work which develops in the 1960s and, by design, redirects its forms and emphases in the two decades which follow. Initially, So the Wind Won't Blow I All Away has been examined in this "Introduction" to suggest that Brautigan's writing after

1970 at the very least merits a serious critical consideration which, generally, it has not been given. Chapter One will outline the literary and cultural domain in which Brautigan's early writing was born and establish a theoretical framework with which to begin an exploration of his work. Chapter Two will examine the three major early fictions, Trout Fishing in America, A Confederate General from Big Sur, and In Watermelon Sugar, as metafiction; Chapter Three will consider The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966 and, briefly, Revenge of the Lawn, Brautigan's collection of short fiction, as transitional works; Chapter Four will examine Brautigan's exploration of the genres of popular romance in The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western, Willard and His Bowling Trophies: A Perverse Mystery, Sombrero Fallout: A Japanese Novel, and Dreaming of Babylon: A Private Eye Novel 1942; and Chapter Five will consider The Tokyo-Montana Express as a complex work, similar to So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away which follows it, in which Brautigan ultimately cultures a hybrid form of fiction. At the end, as Brautigan's pragmatic gunfighter, Cameron, might say, conclusions will be made.

Notes: Introduction

¹References to all sources used in this dissertation adopt the parenthetical method of documentation recommended by the most recent MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Only those works to which direct reference is made, or works that were seminal to my research, such as specific bibliographies, are included. For the sake of clarity in documenting the few critics, such as Abbott or Chénetier, who have published more than once on Brautigan, parenthetical references cite their monographs. Any variation will be noted. Parenthetical reference to the works of Richard Brautigan will be made using the following abbreviations:

Abortion: The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966

Babylon: Dreaming of Babylon: A Private Eye Novel 1942

Express: The Tokyo-Montana Express

General: A Confederate General from Big Sur

Galilee: The Galilee Hitch-Hiker

Hawkline: The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western

June: June 30th, June 30th
Machines: All Watched Over by Machines of Loving
 Grace
Marble: Lay the Marble Tea
Mercury: Loading Mercury with a Pitchfork
Revenge: Revenge of the Lawn
Rommel: Rommel Drives on Deep into Egypt
Sombrero: Sombrero Fallout: A Japanese Novel
Trout: Trout Fishing in America
Octopus: The Octopus Frontier
Pill: The Pill Versus the Springhill Mine
 Disaster
Plant: Please Plant This Book
Sugar: In Watermelon Sugar
Willard: Willard and His Bowling Trophies: A
 Perverse Mystery
Wind: So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away

²When Huck comments at the end of The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, "... I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest ... " (226) he delineates a generic theme of American literature, the tendency of characters, physically and psychically, to avoid civilization by escaping to the frontier. This motif percolates through numerous

American writings and neither the authors I have mentioned, nor the works catalogued below, represents an exhaustive list. Specifically, however, in the authors mentioned, this theme is at the very least a preeminent concern in the following: Cooper, all five of The Leatherstocking Tales; Thoreau, Walden; Melville, Moby-Dick, Bartleby; Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby; Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath; Kerouac, On the Road (and everywhere else); Salinger, Catcher in the Rye; Harrison, Legends of the Fall; Kingsolver, The Bean Trees.

Chapter One: of the times and the word

i

On January 14, 1967, the first Human Be-in and Gathering of the Tribes, held in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, was attended by some twenty thousand people including Allen Ginsberg, Ken Kesey, Timothy Leary and Jerry Rubin. Music was provided by the Grateful Dead and the Jefferson Airplane who offered their panacean advice, "feed your head." Later in 1967, the Beatles released their revolutionary concept album, Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, and Hair opened. Woody Guthrie died, Elvis Presley got married and Rolling Stone magazine was published for the first time. It was the summer of love, and the time of the hippie. The Monterey Pop Festival, from June 16 to 18, became the first great rock festival, foreshadowing Woodstock and Altamont. Over one billion dollars were spent in the year on record albums. Even in

Canada bright change seemed inevitable with Confederation celebrations, Expo '67, and the resignation of Lester Pearson to make room for Pierre Trudeau and a Just Society. And in Viet Nam, although American involvement escalated to include more than 485,000 troops by December, the Tet Offensive of January, 1968, would forever change public opinion and American commitment to the war. The times seemed to be changing. (Factual information from Rock Almanac 124-137.)

In 1967, Donald Allen, editor of a small nonprofit press called Four Seasons Foundation, re-acquired a small book that Grove Press had decided not to publish. Its author's only other prose work, A Confederate General from Big Sur, had sold less than eight hundred copies and had been remaindered. The author was a relatively unknown San Francisco writer named Richard Brautigan and the book, which he had completed in 1961, was Trout Fishing in America. It sold extremely well for Allen, rapidly going through four printings, and was purchased and reissued nationally by Delacourt Press. Trout Fishing in America achieved a remarkable popularity--eventually selling over two million copies worldwide--in part because, as Keith Abbott suggests, it seemed to speak so precisely to the public sentiment and popular culture of the time:

When Trout Fishing in America was published in 1967, its patchwork construction, its pastoral lost-paradise themes, and its funky, wacky and innocent voices appeared to mirror events in the Haight. Brautigan's active engagement with the Diggers gave him recognition and a de facto status as Poet Laureate for the street. At last the media had something written and so the novel became an emblem, an explanation, and a target. (41)

Richard Brautigan quickly became very well known and very wealthy. His approach to his writing was symptomatic not only of changes in popular culture, however, but of changes in literary culture as well. (Publishing information from Boyer (7-11), Abbott (32, 67) and Barber (9-19).)

In 1967, John Barth published an essay entitled "The Literature of Exhaustion" in which, essentially, he announced the death of an old kind of literature and the need for a new:

By "exhaustion" I don't mean anything so tired as the subject of physical, moral, or intellectual decadence, only the used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities--by no means a cause for despair. (The Friday Book 64)

Barth simply argues that too many contemporary writers were producing dull, derivative books, writing "turn-of-the-century-type novels, only in more or less mid-twentieth-century language ... about contemporary people and topics ..." (The Friday Book 66). Writers should not attempt to follow Dostoevsky or Tolstoy or even Joyce and Kafka but rather should attempt to succeed "those who succeeded Joyce and Kafka" (The Friday Book 67). As models, Barth cites Beckett, Nabokov, and Borges, concentrating for the most part on the works of the last. To be admired in those works is Borges' intellectual confrontation with and adaptation of the artifices of language and literature, in effect using those artifices as his central themes. Borges images literature and life as a labyrinth which Barth defines as "a place in which, ideally, all the possibilities of choice ... are embodied and ... must be exhausted before one reaches the heart" (The Friday Book 75). Barth's own short fiction, "Lost in the Funhouse," also published in 1967, exemplifies exactly this new sensibility that he praises. It is a fiction that explores its own fictional possibilities. Ostensibly, its plot concerns a trip by Ambrose and his family to the Ocean Park Funhouse but it continually comments on its own process, making itself its own subject. For example, following a description of the

mother, the fiction comments: "Description of physical appearance and mannerisms is one of several standard methods of characterization used by writers of fiction" (Lost in the Funhouse 70). At other moments, Barth's fiction discusses the function of "the beginning of a story," it includes diagrams of Freytag's triangle, so often used to represent the dramatic structure of a literary work, and it concludes by drawing a comparison between fiction and the funhouse:

He wishes he had never entered the funhouse. But he has. Then he wishes he were dead. But he's not. Therefore he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator--though he would rather be among the lovers for whom funhouses are designed.

(Lost in the Funhouse 94)

"Lost in the Funhouse" and "The Literature of Exhaustion," then, both represent cries from what John Barth sees in 1967 as a literary wilderness. Traditional fiction had become "used up"--after the novels of James and Woolf and Joyce a new direction was needed but had not yet been fully invented or adopted. For Barth and many others, in 1967, the critical and creative biases of modernism were still firmly entrenched in academic and literary realms. Although any extended discussion of the pervasive influence held by modernism is beyond the scope

of this thesis, some comment is useful in situating the origins of the writings of Richard Brautigan.

Barth, in "The Literature of Replenishment" (1979), a later essay which re-examines his earlier ideas, usefully lists what he sees as the dominant and dominating traits of the modernists (The Friday Book 199). These include their self-conscious rejection of nineteenth-century conventions of realism; the disruption of a linear flow of narrative and of unity and coherence in plot and character; the use of irony to question the moral and philosophical meaning of literature; the opposition of inward consciousness to rational, objective discourse; the special and alienated role of the artist in society; and the decision to foreground language and technique over mere content.

As Barth suggests, the modernists presented a relatively dogmatic and formidable design for literature. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," written in 1919, T. S. Eliot emphasizes his view of the need for a distinct and depersonalized literature: "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (The Sacred Wood 53). Modernism is a literature that tries to erase its author, aspiring to be "dry, hard, classical verse" as T. E. Hulme had proclaimed in "Romanticism and Classicism" in

1913 (133). Conservatively, it looked back, admired, and borrowed from the valued "classical" traditions of the past while trying, in Pound's sense, to charge the starkly contemporary images of its art and language with meaning. Its emphasis was on the immediate and the internal. "Everything is the proper stuff of fiction," writes Virginia Woolf in "Modern Fiction" but, in a time much influenced by the theories of Freud and his resonant image of the oceanic id, origin of the deepest streams of consciousness, Woolf concedes that "for the moderns ... the point of interest lies very likely in the dark places of psychology," in spiritual rather than material things (The Common Reader 156-158). Literature through its precise and sparse and fragmented imagism should reveal those moments that most reify life's greatest enigmas; literature should reveal the patterned energies of life itself to use Kenner's phrase for Pound's Vortex (The Pound Era 145-146). Similarly criticism should be precise and analytical and centre its attention not on the artist but solely on the work of art, on the verbal orderings of the individual text.

Critically, modernism set high intellectual criteria for fiction--as Joyce once claimed, The Waste Land ended the idea of poetry for ladies (Ellmann 155)--and was candidly elitist in its mensuration of literary merit.

One influential text of the time, E. M. Forster's Aspects of the Novel (1927), provides an interesting example. In his critical study Forster essentially defines what a novel should be, not what a novel is. He lists the aspects it should contain--story, people, plot, fantasy, prophecy, pattern and rhythm--and indicates how those items work best, reviewing novelists who succeed and who fail. Gertrude Stein, for example, fails because she attempts to abolish time in her work: "... the experiment is doomed to failure. The time sequence cannot be destroyed without carrying in its ruin all that should have taken its place; the novel that would express values only becomes unintelligible and therefore valueless" (49). For Forster, the novel bifariously upholds and creates a system of values; it takes order from, and gives order to its society. One is reminded of Conrad, whom Leavis placed at the zenith of the "great tradition," and his extravagant declaration about fiction and the role of the artist: "... art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing light to the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect" ("Preface" to The Nigger of the Narcissus 11). Fiction clearly has an idealistic yet practical purpose in the world and the artist seems to be the one

capable of seeing into the mysteries of things and forging its uncreated conscience; he is, in Pound's phrase, the antenna of his race. Forster compares the writer, creating his characters, to the Supreme Being: "If God could tell the story of the Universe, the Universe would become fictitious" (63). At the end of his study, Forster contemplates the future of the novel and concludes that novelists will not change: "History develops, art stands still. The novelist of the future will have to pass all the new facts through the old if variable mechanism of the creative mind" (171). In that it would require a change in human nature itself, and a change in the creative process, Forster doubts that any new form of fiction will emerge:

... perhaps it is impossible for the instrument of contemplation to contemplate itself, perhaps if it is possible it means the end of imaginative literature-- which if I understand him rightly is the view of that acute inquirer, Mr. I. A. Richards. That way lies movement and even combustion for the novel, for if the novelist sees himself differently he will see his characters differently and a new system of lighting will result. (172-3)

"The Literature of Exhaustion" is John Barth's cry for a "new system of lighting." Barth was not alone in

his call for a new fiction; it was a howl persistently heard in the fifties and sixties. In his introduction to Scattered Poems, for example, Jack Kerouac forcefully expresses the prevalent attitude toward modernism held by the Beat writers:

Poetry & prose had for a long time fallen into the false hands of the false. These new pure poets confess forth for the sheer joy of confession. They are CHILDREN. They are also childlike graybeard Homers singing in the street. They SING, they SWING. It is diametrically opposed to the Eliot shot, who so dismally advises his dreary negative rules like the objective correlative, etc. which is just a lot of constipation and ultimately emasculation of the pure masculine urge to freely sing. (v)

Similarly, Alain Robbe-Grillet argues in For a New Novel that literary forms had to evolve "in order to remain alive" (8) and that no novel can merely be a product of some literary movement's definition:

There is no question, as we have seen, of establishing a theory, a pre-existing mold into which to pour the books of the future. Each novelist, each novel must invent its own form. No recipe can replace this continual reflection. (12)

Robbe-Grillet also insists on the novel's "absolute need of the reader's cooperation, an active, conscious, *creative assistance*" (156). Of the novelist's demand on the reader, he says: "What he asks of him is no longer to receive a ready-made world completed, full, closed upon itself, but on the contrary to participate in a creation, to invent in his turn the work--and the world--and thus to learn to invent his own life" (156). Robbe-Grillet argues that the novel is an exploration and what it explores is itself. The writer is always a critical part of that exploration. In comparing the actual flight of some sea gulls in Brittany with those described in his novel, The Voyeur, Robbe-Grillet realizes that the actual gulls did not match those in his imagination, and he makes an insightful conclusion about his role as a writer: "I do not transcribe, I construct" (162).

William Gass arrives at a similar conclusion in Fiction and the Figures of Life when he comments:

It seems a country-headed thing to say: that literature is language, that stories and the places and people in them are merely made of words as chairs are made of smoothed sticks and sometimes of cloth or metal tubes. Still, we cannot be too simple at the start, since in the obvious is often the unobserved.

... That novels should be made of words, and merely words, is shocking, really. (27)

Whether imaged as labyrinths or funhouses or even as a female, as Gass himself does in Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife, novels for these postmodernist writers are constructions made by authors and not mimetic reproductions of some external reality or internal consciousness. The only truth to be revealed has to do with the workings of the fiction as a fiction and with the variable fluctuations of the author's imagination as revealed therein. Gass continues to say:

The nature of the novel will not be understood at all until this is: *from any given body of fictional text, nothing necessarily follows, and anything plausibly may.* Authors are gods--a little tinny sometimes but omnipotent no matter what, and plausible on top of that, if they can manage it. (Fiction and the Figures of Life 36)

As construct, fiction is experiential; it is reality, at least as much as anything can be reality, and it is as eclectic as the imagination of the author or the attention of the reader. Ronald Sukenick, a contemporary of Gass and Barth, makes the following suggestion in The Death of the Novel and Other Stories:

The contemporary writer--the writer who is acutely in touch with the life of which he is a part--is forced to start from scratch: Reality doesn't exist, time doesn't exist, personality doesn't exist. God was the omniscient author, but he died; now no one knows the plot, and since our reality lacks the sanction of a creator, there's no guarantee as to the authenticity of the received version. Time is reduced to presence, the content of a series of discontinuous moments. Time is no longer purposive, and so there is no destiny, only chance. Reality is, simply, our experience, and objectivity is, of course, an illusion. ... There is only reading and writing, which are the things we do, like eating and making love, to pass the time, ways of maintaining a considered boredom in the face of the abyss. (41)

Thus, Sukenick argues that contemporary life and human nature, in fact, have changed radically from what they used to be for Forster and the modernists; reality and time and personality have all become virtually undefinable. Forster's God, who could have told the story of the universe, and Conrad's truth, revealed in that story, no longer exist. There are no reliable systems or values or "traditions" on which to rely; each

writer must start absolutely "from scratch" and each reader must rely upon his own acumen in dealing with fiction. A surface of everyday existence replaces the stream of consciousness. Given such changes, the novel as it once existed is dead and a new creation, which Sukenick calls the "contemporary post-realistic novel," has been born.

Many other writers and critics from the late fifties to the early seventies voice similar declarations about the appearance of a new fiction either in their attempt to produce such fiction, or in an effort to understand the works of such contemporary writers as Abish, Barth, Barthelme, Borges, Brautigan, Calvino, Coover, Federman, Fowles, Gass, Hawkes, Katz, Kesey, Nabokov, Pynchon, Spark, Sukenick, B. S. Thompson, Vonnegut, and others. Although much was written, a brief survey indicates that there was little agreement as to how this new variety of fiction should be defined or labelled. In "The White Negro," Norman Mailer announces the rise of the Hipster and his "language of energy" (Advertisements for Myself 349); Ihab Hassan speculates that the hero of the recent novel has changed, now being both rebel and victim and thus possessing a "radical innocence," and he notes that the novel no longer uses society as its mirror but focuses on "the shifting straining encounter of the

rebel-victim with destructive experience" (Radical Innocence 111); Jerome Klinkowitz speaks of a new "Superfiction" and is concerned in much of his criticism with the intentional subversion and disruption created in this recent fiction by "the self-apparent fictionist" who, by eccentric metaphors and "verbal acrobatics," forces the reader's attention toward the making of the fiction and thus "the genre's weakest point" becomes "a tactical strength" (The Self-Apparent Word 33); William Gass coins a new word to describe much of the new writing--"metafictions" (Fiction and the Figures of Life 25), of which more will be said later; in 1967, Robert Scholes calls the recent novels "Fabulation, ... a more verbal kind of fiction ... a less realistic and more artistic kind of narration ... more concerned with ideas and ideals, less concerned with things" (The Fabulators 12) and later he defines metafiction to be "experimental fabulation" (Fabulation and Metafiction 4); Raymond Federman labels such experimental writing "Surfiction," a "fiction that tries to explore the possibilities of fiction" and thus exposes the "fictionality of reality" (7); Mas'ud Zavarzadeh considers metafiction, surfiction and science fiction to be modes of a broader experimental form, "Transfiction"; Alan Wilde argues that much contemporary fiction, which he calls "Midfiction," has

been overlooked or misunderstood because it does not fit the common literary extremes of realism or metafiction; and other sources variously speak of the avant-garde novel, the anti-novel, the surrealist novel, the introverted novel, or even, simply, the experimental novel.

The advent of postmodernism, as this new era of literary and cultural inquiry has paradoxically come to be labelled, has fuelled great debate. Many observers including Gardner, Graff, Mellard, Newman and Olderman, argue that these contemporary works are either an extension of what came before, a sort of late modernism, or a fiction and criticism "gone wrong," to use Gardner's phrase (On Moral Fiction 4). Many others, including Fiedler, Gass, Hassan, Klinkowitz, McLowan, McHale, Stevick, Waugh and Wilde, envision a literary breakthrough and are determined to ascertain what postmodernist literature is all about. At this point in time, after considerable debate, it would seem that postmodernism has reasonably established itself as a "movement." As Alan Wilde says in Horizons of Assent:

[Postmodernism] has, in other words, and despite some critics who continue to regard it as a wrinkle in the larger fabric of modernism, attained the status and respectability of an independent movement (as

independent as any movement can be). ... In short, critics both here and abroad have embraced the word postmodernism as their preferred way of designating various, perhaps most, of today's innovative attitudes, arts, artifacts, and technologies.

Whether as a result it has lost some of its edge, or whether it will come in time to have some of modernism's amplitude and resonance, remains to be seen. (ix-x)

In In Form, Sukenick comments: "Writers don't need theories in order to write ..." (xvi). However one interprets, adheres to, or even rejects the theorizing about postmodernism, it seems evident that a large body of writing has been produced since the 1950s which exhibits common characteristics and, conversely, which displays marked differences from previous types of fiction. As noted above, those features include the idea of fiction as a construction and of the novelist as an active figure who does not disappear from his work to "par[e] his fingernails" as Joyce once suggested he did (A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man 215). Gass says: "Novels in which the novelist has effaced himself create worlds without gods" (Fiction and the Figures of Life 20). These postmodern fictions are frequently interlaced with their author's personal reflections and

confessions and even appearances. Sukenick is his own main character in Up and "The Death of the Novel." John Fowles appears on the train in Paddington Station flipping a coin to decide which ending to give to The French Lieutenant's Woman, and Barth, Katz and Brautigan all appear as characters in their fictions. Often these novels include blatant attempts to disrupt their own narrative flow. In the centre of Snow White, for example, Barthelme includes a questionnaire which asks the reader to evaluate the work and in Johnson's Albert Angelo, the entire fiction is interrupted in a section entitled "Disintegration" where Johnson writes: "... fuck all this lying what im really trying to write about is writing not all this architecture trying to say something about writing about my writing im my hero ..." (167). As part of the text, it is not uncommon to find diagrams, photographs, typographical idiosyncrasies, found items such as newspaper clippings, and footnotes or other academic paraphernalia. For instance, in "The Flight of the Pigeons from the Palace," a story in Barthelme's Sadness, the entire text is a synergism of drawing and word, each illuminating and, at the same time, generating the other; several pieces in City Life are an intrinsic blend of visual and verbal forms. In Slaughterhouse Five, Vonnegut includes a drawing of Montana Wildhack's

locket and breasts as, in fact, the most immediate and effective method of conveying that information to the reader. Italo Calvino's reflexive novel If On A Winter's Night A Traveller begins on its front cover, informing the reader of what he is doing and of how he should proceed: "You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, If on a winter's night a traveller. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought." Similarly, the photograph on the cover of Brautigan's Trout Fishing in America, discussed in that book's first chapter, becomes an integral part of the fiction as, one begins to suppose, all covers of all books are. Many of these inclusions, along with an often playful, quirky use of language in image and metaphor, encourage, perhaps force, the reader to perform actively in the reading of the fiction. As Gass says, echoing other postmodernists: "... the object of every novel is its reader" (Fiction and the Figures of Life 70). In this sense the reader assumes a vital role. The thrust of postmodernist literature is not, as it seems to be in modernist literature, for the reader somehow to unravel the text and know himself, but instead, for the reader somehow to unravel himself and know the text. As Roland Barthes says in The Rustle of Language, only "when the author enters into his own death" (54) does writing begin:

... the space of writing is to be traversed, not pierced; writing constantly posits meaning, but always in order to evaporate it: writing seeks a systematic exemption of meaning. Thereby, literature (it would be better from now on, to say *writing*), by refusing to assign to the text (and to the world-as-text) a "secret," i.e. an ultimate meaning, liberates an activity we may call countertheological, properly revolutionary, for to refuse to halt meaning is finally to refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science, the law. (54)

What Hassan (Postmodern 1-22, Orpheus 1-23, Paracriticisms xi-xvii)) and Sontag (Reader 181-204) speak of as silence, and what Klinkowitz (Disruptions 1-32, Subversions ix-xlii) calls literary disruption or subversion, is this attempt to vivify the reader through the text. Such "subversions" represent what Barth means when he argues "that artistic conventions are liable to be retired, subverted, transcended, transformed, or even deployed against themselves to generate new and lively work" (The Friday Book 205). In this way, as in Walter Abish's Alphabetical Africa, where the linguistic possibilities of the text playfully expand or contract as letters of the alphabet are added or subtracted, the fiction often emerges as a kind of performance or game in

which the reader must take part--as a game does not exist without a player, fiction cannot exist without a reader. In "The Death of the Novel," Sukenick comments, "All right enough of this. I'm not filibustering fate, like Beckett or one of those cats. This is not a game it's a story. Or it's both, a game and a story" (The Death of the Novel and Other Stories 55). Similarly, Barth's Scheherazade outlines for her sister the fiction-making process which enables her to survive from one night to the next: "... the magic words in one story aren't magical in the next. The real magic is to understand which words work, and when, and for what; the trick is to learn the trick" (Chimera 15). In Gass's sense, fictions are verbal worlds whose words themselves, in an era of structuralism and post-structuralism, possess indeterminate, game-like qualities; no author can control the interpretation of his language, the reading of himself. As such, the dependence of fiction on a reader is necessary, and perhaps, recognized in such a role, restorative. It is this artistic refusal to halt meaning that has produced what John Barth terms a literature of replenishment.

In his inventive The Life of Fiction, Jerome Klinkowitz provides a summative list of what he sees as

the predominant features of this literature of replenishment:

- it is expressive and not descriptive ...
- it uses the reader's imagination as part of the action ... [asking] for participatory reading ...
- it is both self-reflective and self-reflexive, respectively making the conditions under which one writes the subject of one's writing ... but also using the writer's own self-created personalist mythology ...
- it restores the act of reading to its original pleasure status ... (4)

Playfulness, self-consciousness, the active role of the reader, an intentional concern with superficiality or the surface of things, and the imagination responding to the imagination are all vital aspects of this fiction; however, this is not to suggest that postmodern fiction came to existence in some sort of worldless vacuum.

Fiction in America, as fiction always has everywhere, responded to its time and its place. Beginning in the fifties with global tensions inaugurated by the cold war and the apprehension of atomic annihilation, to the sixties with political assassinations and racial unrest and Viet Nam, to the seventies with international

terrorism and environmental blight and disclosed presidential corruption, all of which were intensified and hypostatized by the ubiquity of the electronic media. Life seemed increasingly tenuous and uncertain. Timothy Leary's axiomatic advice in the sixties was tune in, turn on, and drop out. The fragmentation of reality and the inescapable loss of identity in an incredibly mechanized and urbanized and televised world accordingly becomes reflected in a fiction that is often, collage-like, composed of disparate elements, often fusing reality and history and fantasy so that the text itself presents, and the reader encounters, as much uncertainty and insanity as exists on the surrounding planet. As Alan Wilde suggests in Horizons of Assent:

Postmodernism ... presents itself as deliberately, consciously antiheroic. Confronted with the world's randomness and diversity, it enacts (*urbi et orbi*) that attitude of suspensiveness which, as we've frequently seen, implies the tolerance of a fundamental uncertainty about the meanings and relations of things in the world and in the universe. (131-132)

The reader must survive his fiction as he survives the uncertainty of his life. Like those insular flower children who dropped out of their world to gather at that

first Human Be-in in 1967, the postmodern reader enters, as Gass proclaims, a world made of words in which, potentially, all possibilities exist to feed one's head. Reading becomes an acid trip, an insular, personal act, the equivalent of entering a labyrinth, or a funhouse, or a civil defence bomb shelter, and, as Barth claims, only two consequences are likely: "defeat and death or victory and freedom" (The Friday Book 75).

ii

As the canon of postmodern literature has grown, various critical divisions and sub-divisions have been made. As mentioned, critics have drawn variously fine distinctions among surfiction, fabulation, transfiction, midfiction, and metafiction, and have elaborated on quite different forms of writing such as nonfiction or the New Journalism. Of all the labels applied to describe this experimental writing which burst into such widespread prominence in the sixties and seventies, probably the term used most was metafiction. In fact, many of the critical differentiations, such as those made among metafiction, surfiction and fabulation, are indistinct at

best. The term "metafiction" was first introduced by William Gass in 1970 in Fictions and the Figures of Life during a discussion of trends in recent fiction. For Gass, those trends included the novelist's use of philosophical ideas "in a very self-conscious and critical way" (24) including the realization that his business was to make, not represent, a world through "the only medium of which he is a master--language" (24):

There are metatheorems in mathematics and logic, ethics has its linguistic oversoul, everywhere lingos to converse about lingos are being contrived, and the case is no different in the novel. I don't mean merely those drearily predictable pieces about writers who are writing about what they are writing, but those, like some of Borges, Barth, and Flann O'Brien, for example, in which the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed. Indeed, many of the so-called antinovels are really metafictions. (24-25)

Since Gass's coinage of metafiction, several other critics have used and attempted to clarify the term. In The Metafictional Muse, Larry McCaffery describes metafictions as "... fictions which examine fictional systems, how they are created, and the way in which reality is transformed by and filtered through narrative

assumptions and conventions" (5). Metafictions either investigate their own constructions or "seek to examine how all fictional systems operate, their methodology, the sources of their appeal, and the dangers of their being dogmatized" (17). In "Notes on Metafiction," Sarah Lauzen advances the curious idea that "metafictional novels are quest novels: they contain within themselves the means for their own examination and elucidation as well as a critique of the current status of the literary species" (McCaffery Postmodern Fiction 94). Mas'ud Zavarzadeh concludes in The Mythopoeic Reality that "metafiction more than other modes of transfiction is conscious of its own fictivity and ... exults over its own fictitiousness" (39). In The Meaning of Metafiction, Inger Christensen regards metafiction as "fiction whose primary concern is to express the novelist's vision of experience by exploring the process of its own making" (11) and insists that metafiction is not merely a display of technical brilliance but must convey a message. Jack Hicks sees metafiction operating in a dual fashion: "... as metaphysical fiction, the prime interest of which is in a world of ideas; and *meta-fiction*, a literature extended beyond its former possibilities, transcending an essentially mimetic status" (19). He concludes: "Thus metafiction may be profitably seen as a series of

searches for a way out of a cultural labyrinth" (21). In an exacting approach, Linda Hutcheon reasons that there can be no theory of metafiction "because the point of *metafiction* is that it constitutes its own critical commentary, and in so doing, ... sets up the theoretical frame of reference in which it must be considered" (6). In *Fabulation and Metafiction* Robert Scholes applies a similar argument, noting that "metafiction assimilates all the perspectives of criticism into the fictional process itself" but he sees it as a "... short-lived trend which is nearing its end" (213) because its form is alienating and limiting: "Metafiction, then, tends toward brevity because it attempts, among other things, to assault or transcend the laws of fiction--an undertaking which can only be achieved from within fictional form" (114). Perhaps the most succinct summation of metafiction is provided by Patricia Waugh:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality

of the world outside the literary fictional text.

(Metafiction 2)

To summarize from these definitions, then, metafiction is a general tendency of a certain type of fiction to incorporate as part of its actual text an awareness of its own fictional nature. In that respect, as the diversity of critical definition indicates, each metafiction is unique, and should be approached as such; however, as a collective fictional tendency, its recent origin lies in that generic postmodern uncertainty about the mimetic ability of literature to copy reality. As such, metafiction continually reminds the reader of its inherent fictiveness, thereby impelling a critical examination of the nature of all fictions and, perhaps, of all realities.

Although its proliferation is probably greater in this recent period than in any other, it is important to note that metafiction is not solely a contemporary or postmodern phenomenon. As several studies indicate, metafictional instances have occurred throughout literary history. For example, both of the full length studies of metafiction by Waugh and Christensen include ample reference to Sterne's Tristram Shandy, certainly one of the most fictionally self-conscious books ever written. In the same way, Richardson's footnotes in Clarissa,

Fielding's numerous narrative intrusions and interlocutory chapters in all of his fictions, and the overt constructions and redirections of Swift's A Tale of a Tub are essentially metafictional. In point of fact, many of the fictional problems and strategies of early English prose fiction writers such as Bunyan and Defoe resemble those that have resurfaced in the postmodern era. In frequently introducing the author into the fiction, by examining the problem of consistency and believability in character and plot, by struggling with the difficulty of language and of closure, one could be discussing the themes evoked by any one of a number of recent prose fiction writers, or one could be discussing the central issues, perhaps, of Moll Flanders. In some ways metafiction represents a return to the very beginning, to an investigation and rediscovery of the very processes of technique and imagination that motivated and troubled prose fiction in its nascence.

By way of summary, Brautigan's So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away discussed in the "Introduction" is a metafiction, meticulously aware of its fictiveness. It is a book about the fictional power fiction has to create, to shape, and to destroy, both reality and itself. It is a fiction about fiction, words about words. In addition to this, one must note, So the Wind

Won't Blow It All Away is not solely a metafiction. Like a more traditional novel, it tells the tragic story of a young boy during the season in which he loses his innocence and portrays an artist coming to terms with his art as he comes to terms with his life. Given Richard Brautigan's self-inflicted death in 1984, So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away marks the unconditional end-point of his achievement in fiction; this thesis will suggest, with some sadness in reflecting upon what might have been, that Brautigan had ineluctably achieved a radically new form of postmodern fiction, enacted in the eclectic fusion of disparate elements of his genre experiments of the seventies with his iconoclastic metafictions of the sixties. His final work was both the abalienation and the heir of his earliest writings of the 1950s when his career, under various influences, began. At that time, when Richard Brautigan arrived in San Francisco, the reign of the Beat Generation and the advent of Confessional poetry were well underway, both literary movements that, in part, defined themselves by their strident opposition to what had become modernist dogma. The paradoxical freedom of existentialism, and the surfacing horrors concerning the atrocities of World War II, and the desire for a new way to write were all ideas in the post-war air. Brautigan's early fiction,

culminating in 1967 with the meteoric success of Trout Fishing in America, reflects and is a reflection of those postmodern times and its deterministic apotheosis of the word.

Chapter Two: of magic and mayo

In one of the earliest detailed articles on Brautigan, "Richard Brautigan: The Politics of Woodstock," John Clayton expresses his awe at the "magical process in his writing" (60). Ron Loewinsohn, in a review at the same time, comments: "Brautigan's language is magical, & absolutely accurate, a kind of lens which allows you to see his vision of America ..." (228). In these and other early reactions, the style more than the content of Brautigan's work is the object of praise. It was a unique writing style that brought his work to prominence in the late sixties and, accordingly, the perceived decay of that style which later led to his being deserted by the popular and critical establishment. It is fruitful, then, to begin any discussion of Brautigan's early writings with a consideration of this so-named "magical" style.

Richard Brautigan began his writing career not as a writer of prose, but as a poet. He is quoted in an interview by David Meltzer:

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. I used poetry as a lover but I never made her my old lady. (293)

Similarly, Lawrence Wright quotes Ginny Adler, Brautigan's first wife, as she recalls the period when her husband was beginning to write Trout Fishing in America: "He had to learn to write prose; everything he wrote turned into a poem" (36). Prior to completing the first draft of Trout Fishing in America in 1961, Brautigan had poems printed in numerous periodicals including Epos, Foot, Hearse, J, and San Francisco Review; as well, several broadsides of his poetry and four chapbooks had been published. Most of this writing is slight, colloquial, idiosyncratic, ephemeral; no book of Brautigan's poetry takes more than half an hour to read. As Boyer says of his writing at this time, it is "unusual without being distinctive" (7). These "unusual" poems are still interesting to read, however, at the very least for what they reveal about his later prose.

The first poem in Brautigan's first book, The Galilee Hitch-Hiker, serves as an example. It images Baudelaire driving a Model A and picking up the hitch-hiking Jesus:

...

"Where are you
going?" asked
Jesus, getting
into the front
seat.

"Anywhere, anywhere
out of this world!"
shouted
Baudelaire.

"I'll go with you
as far as
Golgotha,"
said Jesus.

"I have a
concession
at the carnival
there, and I
must not be
late." (Galilee 1)

The poem presents an absurd, quirky situation,
juxtaposing disparate characters in a disparate

situation, thereby providing a jolt of surprise to the reader. In stark contrast, which intensifies this surprise, is the commonplace conversational style and flat voice with which the poem is delivered.

Thematically, the emphasis of this poem seems fixed on the situation imagined within; there is no recognizable external reality or visionary message. The image of Golgotha as a carnival with Jesus as a hitch-hiker and roustabout is startling and fresh, especially so in 1958 when this poem is published. To some extent, this approach anticipates the self-conscious, self-contained metafiction that was to come. The poem is about itself as much as anything else--it creates and contains its own reality and allows its concerns to play within that framework. Many of Brautigan's poems operate in this fashion, providing a sudden snapshot of a confidential moment or a thought and then fading away like a negative exposed to the sun, and, one feels, that is exactly what they are supposed to do. Poetry for Brautigan, at least in this early stage of development, is not something heavy or pedantic or ageless. It is brief and temporal; according to Abbott, one of Brautigan's favourite comments with respect to the lifespan of poems was to say they "disappeared in their becoming" (29). Another early

poem, "GEOMETRY," cryptically implies that identical idea:

A circle
comes complete
with its
own grave. (Marble 14)

Existentially like all complete things, the circle contains its own death. One of Brautigan's collections, Please Plant This Book (1968), was printed on eight seed packets, poetry doomed to be destroyed when the seeds were planted. Edward Foster sees this "sense of transitoriness" (16) as a universal theme in Brautigan's writing:

The impression of permanence and substance that art may give is illusory. ... nothing is truly substantial or permanent--all that we perceive through our senses is illusion. (17)

Foster suggests that Zen Buddhism has an extensive influence on the work of Brautigan, arguing that he always wrote, in Gary Snyder's phrase, "flowers for the void:"

The "void" in Brautigan should be understood in terms of Eastern mystical thought. The "void" here refers to that state beyond rational comprehension which a Buddhist--or, specifically, in the case of Brautigan

or Snyder, the Zen Buddhist--considers the ultimate source, of all that is experienced. ... True or ultimate meaning lies in, indeed *is*, the great void where, as the source of all things, it is also the source of the very illusion by which it is obscured.
(16)

In later poetry, Brautigan continues to cultivate his poetic, possibly echoing the tenets of Zen as Foster argues but, just as probably, following some of the central Romantic traditions which exist in so much American poetry from Poe and Whitman to Stevens and Ginsberg. "General Custer Versus the Titanic" is a good example:

Yes! It's true all my visions
have come home to roost at last.
They are all true now and stand
around me like a bouquet of
lost ships and doomed generals.
I gently put them away in a
beautiful and disappearing vase. (Pill 3)

The speaker-poet's visions are finitely collected and, likened to lost and doomed things, gently stored in a vase that is beautiful, but disappears. In one sense, whether ship or general or vase or poem, all things are temporal and will vanish; it is the writer's apparently

futile task to attempt to store his true and beautiful visions; for Brautigan, at least, if not for that earlier poet of vases, Keats, even the vase will disappear. Abbott notes that Brautigan always called his books "paper phantoms" (173). The vase, the text, is merely part of the fragile and doomed artistic vision, akin to Shelley's image of all poems as feeble shadows of what they were at the moment of inspiration. And in that sense, contained within its poem, Keats's urn is a disappearing vase as well. Nevertheless, for Brautigan, these "visions" of the speaker-poet are true and beautiful and still seem worth storing, perhaps simply because they are the poet's visions, all he knows on earth. That all things of the world are mutable, including poetry, is no reason to stop living, or writing; as well, all things of the world seem to be suitable subjects for poetry. As such, in Romantic iconography the poet becomes the aeolian harp, an everlasting universe of things flowing through him. Robert Kern associates Brautigan with William Carlos Williams and labels his poetry "a post-modernist instance of primitivist poetics:"

For a poet like Brautigan, ... poetry is whatever happens to him, a continuing, everpresent possibility, and he is, almost helplessly, its

it has become written ..." (10). Brautigan next quotes from Hooton's Twilight of Men: "But no animal up a tree can initiate a culture ..." (Trout 181). The idea of human growth and evolution as an essential corollary to being human, as forming a part of the human equation itself is the central message here. The vital indicator of being human is the ability to grow or change; most consistently and significantly, this ability is reflected in human communication. To be human is to language; to language is to change, to be adaptable and plastic. Only in this framework can essential human experience be known or, perhaps, even be experienced. Thus, Brautigan implies at the end of Trout Fishing in America, language is not only the central feature of human culture but, in its fluctuations and in its untiring devotion to newness, language is that which stimulates and binds humanity, which keeps humanity alive. And so, Trout Fishing in America ends with the word "mayonaise" but not, as the narrator wishes, with the word "Mayonnaise." This does not indicate some ironic failure to achieve a desired end, as critics such as Horvath (439) and Schmitz (125) have suggested, but instead it delineates an inevitable linguistic necessity and underscores what may be the dominant theme of this fiction. From second last chapter to last, the word "Mayonnaise" changes to the word

poem. And several times, as in "1891-1944," "Millimeter (mm)" and "88 poems" (Rommel 27,38,78) only a title appears on a blank page. The poem, like the vase, seems to have disappeared in its becoming, enacting its own inevitable fate even before it could be printed on the page.

In effect, it is useful to see Brautigan's early poetry, unequal as it is in quality, serving as a workshop in technique and attitude for the prose that was to follow. As Boyer suggests, "...in short, the elements we've come to associate with Brautigan's novels ... are also to be found in his poetry ..." (16). In that poetry, he initiated a sense of flat tone, of eccentric metaphor and copious imagery, of brevity and fragmentation, of fragility and loss--all elements that remain substantial hallmarks of his style throughout his career. To write prose, Brautigan felt he had to escape from his poetic inclinations, but in the prose that he did write, that escape was never absolutely managed. Keith Abbott quotes from a journal entry written by Brautigan in 1960:

The idea of this journal is I want to make something other than a poem ... One of the frustrations of my work is my own failure to establish adequate movement

... I want the reality in my work to move less obviously and it [is] very difficult for me. (159)

That attempt at movement, to enlarge momentary vision, to translate from poetic form to prosaic, provides a tension that is in evidence throughout Brautigan's canon; and that attempt sits at the heart of the style that captivated the first readers of Trout Fishing in America, the style which they labelled "magical."

i

The final sentence of Trout Fishing in America reads: "P.S. Sorry I forgot to give you the mayonaise [sic]" (Trout 182). This sentence acts as a postscript to a letter which is dated "Feb 3-1952," a time which most certainly predates any of the action of the book. This letter is addressed to "Dearest Florence and Harv," concerns Edith and Mr. Good, and is signed "Love Mother and Nancy," all of whom are characters that appear nowhere else in the fiction. The purpose of the letter, which is structurally typeset like a poem on the page, is to offer a message of sympathy to Edith on "the passing of Mr. Good." The letter insists that "Gods will be done" and punningly reminds Edith that the deceased had

"lived a *good* long life" (italics mine). Ostensibly, the events of this final chapter, entitled "The Mayonnaise Chapter," have little connection in content or style with what comes before. Like some misplaced postscript or personal artefact, it is simply attached to the end of the book. It is like leafing through an old volume in someone else's library and finding a letter that has no context, no connection, and, in that sense, no discernible meaning. That is the way Trout Fishing in America ends.

The previous chapter, "Prelude to the Mayonnaise Chapter," almost universally ignored by critics, provides some useful insight, although in itself it is also a chapter that appears without connection to anything that has come before and is linked to the final chapter by title alone. In effect, this chapter is simply a compilation of quotations from educational textbooks by three social scientists, Ashley Montagu, Marston Bates, and Albert Hooton, followed by the narrator's seemingly unconnected comment: "Expressing a human need, I always wanted to write a book that ended with the word Mayonnaise" (Trout 181). Presumably, that "human need" is accomplished by the "P.S." in the next and final chapter in which the word "mayonnaise" appears as the last word in the book.

In some sense, the quoted material in the penultimate chapter, all of which considers the cultural development of humankind, reflects the history of "human need." The quotation from Montagu's Man: His First Million Years, for example, notes that Eskimos have "no single word for ice" although they live "among ice all their lives" (130). In the chapter quoted by Brautigan, which is entitled "Attempting to Make the Best of It," Montagu focuses on "Language, Grammar, and Culture," and, using the example of the Eskimo, advances the idea that "language reflects cultural interest" (130). Montagu continues in this section of his textbook to outline the general tendencies of linguistic development:

As languages grow somewhat removed from practical need, they tend to become more abstract and unrelated to action. Language is marked by its great plasticity and its adaptability to the needs of the culture. ...

Every language enshrines its own reality, for the world is organized according to the manner reflected in the language. Hence, the best means to the understanding of the way in which other people think is through their language. Different languages do not merely represent different ways of labelling experience, but each language serves as a guide to

reality in that it is by means of its words and grammatical categories that order and meaning is given to the world of experience.

... We must conclude, then, with the statement that without language human culture would be impossible, and that granting man's great educability, he becomes even more educable through the exploitation of the new meanings that language, properly used, makes possible. Language is the great social stimulator and binder. (130-131)

Abstraction, exploitation, adaptability, plasticity, a guide to reality, a means by which to encode experience and to stimulate and bind society--all of these are qualities that Montagu ascribes to language and, not coincidentally, are aspects that resemble the linguistic manipulations, that magic style, of many of Brautigan's earliest writings.

The quotations from Bates and Hooton in this chapter echo similar concerns. Early in Man in Nature, Bates emphasizes the expansiveness and uniqueness of human language in comparison to the limitations of animal communication systems and refers to the various theories that attempt to account for the origin of human language, "bow-wow," "ding-dong," and the like (10). Bates notes, "... language does not leave fossils, at least not until

it has become written ..." (10). Brautigan next quotes from Hooton's Twilight of Men: "But no animal up a tree can initiate a culture ..." (Trout 181). The idea of human growth and evolution as an essential corollary to being human, as forming a part of the human equation itself is the central message here. The vital indicator of being human is the ability to grow or change; most consistently and significantly, this ability is reflected in human communication. To be human is to language; to language is to change, to be adaptable and plastic. Only in this framework can essential human experience be known or, perhaps, even be experienced. Thus, Brautigan implies at the end of Trout Fishing in America, language is not only the central feature of human culture but, in its fluctuations and in its untiring devotion to newness, language is that which stimulates and binds humanity, which keeps humanity alive. And so, Trout Fishing in America ends with the word "mayonaise" but not, as the narrator wishes, with the word "Mayonnaise." This does not indicate some ironic failure to achieve a desired end, as critics such as Horvath (439) and Schmitz (125) have suggested, but instead it delineates an inevitable linguistic necessity and underscores what may be the dominant theme of this fiction. From second last chapter to last, the word "Mayonnaise" changes to the word

"mayonnaise" and that subtle variation in spelling indicates not some failure on the narrator's part but the triumph of human culture imaged in the unavoidable inventiveness of human language. The text enacts its own conclusion; its language insists on changing, avoiding fossilization and closure. Through language, human potential continues to realize itself and Trout Fishing in America both announces and enacts its most predominant theme.

Trout Fishing in America, then, is a "novel," so Brautigan labels it on his title page, which ends with two autonomous chapters that proclaim the vital centrality and variability of language in human culture. With the exception of these two chapters, however, the remainder of Trout Fishing in America proceeds as a relatively consistent picaresque that offers various glimpses into scenes of life in rural and urban America circa 1960. The narrator either recounts his adventures and impressions in travelling among campgrounds and trout streams in the western United States or he recalls his experiences wandering the urban byways of San Francisco. Although there has been much insightful criticism of Trout Fishing in America, few critics have considered the relationship between the episodic events of this picaresque novel and its final curious "mayonnaise

chapters," a relationship which seems to me to be crucial to any understanding of its overall design and directions.

Criticism has frequently addressed the pastoral themes of the "novel," examining its contrasting worlds of city and country. John Clayton describes the novel as a "gentle pastoral" in which the imagination provides individuals "salvation through perception" (59). Neil Schmitz and Manfred Pütz find irony in Brautigan's use of the pastoral conventions. Schmitz sees Brautigan exhibiting an "ironic pessimism" in dealing with the "pastoral concept" of trout fishing in America and unable, in his imagination or elsewhere, to restore that myth in a modern America (110-111). Brautigan is alienated by both woods and city. Pütz argues that Brautigan enacts the "systematic disintegration of pastoral and Transcendentalist ideals" by promoting but then undercutting them (118). Kent Bales sees a more balanced Brautigan who uses "mutually cancelling ironies," thus establishing an ambivalence toward the world:

... seeing and feeling things and persons as they are along with the myths by which they order and disorder their lives, means most to Brautigan. It permits him and us to recapture the simple while remaining aware

of the complex, to fish for trout while aware of all that trout fishing ignores. Most of all, it evades pessimism by offering an escape into other ways of ordering reality into "new" myth. (41)

Similarly, Charles Caramello cites ambivalence as the core of Trout Fishing in America, considering it as an "overtly American" guidebook which concedes "the absolute absence of authorial guides" (51).

Kenneth Seib argues that the work is more satire than pastoral, criticizing an America that has "deteriorated from a nation of rugged trout fishermen to a callous assembly of inhuman surgeons and witless Norrises who are fearful of the young, of genuine protest, of the future" (69-70). Brad Hayden compares the novel to Walden-- whereas in 1854 Thoreau could find transcendence in nature, in 1960 Brautigan finds only frustration and "disjunction" (23). For Philip Kolin, Trout Fishing in America is an entirely pessimistic satire, its food symbolism showing "the extent to which America has perverted traditional values" (18). Charles Russell perhaps envisages the novel in the most negative light of all, calling it an "abortive fiction" which portrays a "world without permanence." The language and metaphor of the novel are in a "constant flux of emerging and

receding," in effect, leading nowhere but to themselves (354-355).

On a more optimistic note, John Cooley, Thomas Hearron, Brooke Horvath, Jerome Klinkowitz, James Mellard, and David Vanderwerken all see Trout Fishing in America as a book about the possibility of escape from failure, despair, disillusionment, and even death in our contemporary society through the power of the imagination. For example, Hearron suggests:

The novel's theme, much like that of Wordsworth's The Prelude, is the development of the power of the imagination; acquiring such power results in an ability, like that in "Tintern Abbey," to summon imagination to one's aid in times of distress: it provides a way of escaping to nature even in the midst of a city. (30)

Mellard compares Brautigan with another romantic poet of sorts. Wallace Stevens:

Brautigan feels just as strongly as Stevens that reality must constantly be reinterpreted, the old myths replaced, revitalized, or stripped of their husks in order to lay bare the live core. But the job takes an artist's imagination, and we must all be artists. What Trout Fishing in America does, then, is to represent both the need and the expression of

imagination, and Brautigan's portrait of a young trout fisherman thus becomes a portrait of the artist as well. (168)

Klinkowitz finds the central theme of Trout Fishing in America located in its refreshing style: "The poet's art of surprise can make a boring world live for us again" (1960s 44).

These interpretations of Trout Fishing in America, divergent as one might expect of such a galvanic work, all tend to concentrate on the novel as a fiction which, whether invoking or subverting traditional patterns such as pastoral or satire, holds a mirror up to the depletion and despair of modern America and suggests that one can, or perhaps can not, escape its malaise. Thus as the narrator tours America, episode after episode, from the Kool-Aid Wino of his youth to the alcoholic Trout Fishing in America Shorty of the present, from the overcrowded campgrounds of the country to the entrepreneurial Cleveland Wrecking Yard of the city, he encounters one instance of desolation after another. Most certainly, on the surface, Brautigan's novel offers a relatively grim portrait of his contemporary society; as several critics have suggested, the power of the imagination may be necessary just to survive in this world, let alone reclaim it or escape from it. Reading the book, however,

and saying that it is negative, or labelling it as pastoral or satire does not seem to be enough; Trout Fishing in America always seems much larger. It is a book that reads with great energy and humour and joy; it is a book whose language itself must not be denied when speaking of its themes. What it is surely depends on how it reads. Although it seems randomly structured, and some critics argue that it is written with "carelessness" (Walker 309) or in a "careless style" (Seib 71), it seems to me that Trout Fishing in America is precisely crafted. Keith Abbott notes that Brautigan laboured through "seventeen total revisions of Trout Fishing in America" and, in the process, "became well aware of his own peculiar gifts and ... took himself seriously as a writer" (37).

The first chapter of Trout Fishing in America is entitled "The Cover for Trout Fishing in America" and it is a curious first chapter indeed, but a consequential place to begin an understanding of how this fiction works. The content of the chapter consists of a discussion of the photograph on the front cover. Immediately, the raison d'etre of the book seems to be the book itself; the subject of the "novel" is the novel. As Charles Caramello suggests, this opening section "turns the cover of the book into the "cover," or

pretext, for the book..." (167). By analyzing the cover, the book forces the reader, even before he begins, to be aware of the act that he is about to perform--it is an act of reading, an act of encountering fiction. Conversely, the book also draws attention to its own concrete reality, it is a book with a cover and that cover is a photograph of an actual place in San Francisco that contains a real statue of Benjamin Franklin who once lived and was important in America, and so on. In some ways the reader is stranded between worlds of reality and of fiction, and ontologically is forced to come to terms with both. Brian McHale comments on the serious effect of this playful opening:

... Richard Brautigan in Trout Fishing in America (1967) seems to flirt with the idea that his text is only a kind of extended caption for the photograph on its cover. But when he jokes about "returning" to the book's cover, his joke has point, for this "return" is ambiguous: on the one hand, his fictional characters return to it in the sense of revisiting the site depicted in the photograph; on the other hand, the *reader* returns to the cover by physically *closing the book* and re-examining its cover-photo. In other words, Brautigan's playful manipulation of the conventions of cover-illustration serves to

foreground the ontological opposition between the fictional world and the material book. (190)

What neither McHale nor Caramello, or any others, seem to notice is that the description of the cover photograph in the first chapter and the photograph itself are two different things.

In the first sentence the narrator explains that the cover depicts "a photograph taken late in the afternoon, a photograph of the Benjamin Franklin statue in San Francisco's Washington Square" (Trout 1). The cover, however, is not a photograph of Washington Square or the Franklin statue at all, but a photograph of Brautigan himself and a female companion, both dressed in "old-fashioned" or "hippie" clothes, whichever sartorial bent you choose. The statue, the poplar trees and all else that is discussed in this chapter are only visible as part of a blurry background. Instantly, then, the reader should be aware of an elusive discrepancy between what the narrator of this book says and what the reader sees. There is frequently a distance, a difference, between the text and the meaning. As Caramello suggests, Brautigan "plays in the gaps between language and the real, between sign and referent, within, in other words, the connection that presumably grounds literature" (167). Brian McHale speaks of "mixed visual-verbal texts" as "schizoid

texts," (190) postmodern fictions which challenge the reader to decide how they are to be read, and although he does not consider Brautigan in this category, he might have. One must not judge the cover of this book by what this book says. The first chapter states one thing, the cover which it discusses seems to say something else-- the reader is immediately drawn, like a fish on a line, I suppose, into the process of this book, into the problem of how to read this fiction. Does Benjamin Franklin and his pragmatic vision of all that America could be lie at the centre of Trout Fishing in America, as some critics have claimed, or does Richard Brautigan? If the pretext for the book is its front cover, then the book may indeed be about the prominent figure of that cover, Brautigan, the writer.

The second sentence of this chapter speaks of the statue of Franklin which "stands on a pedestal that looks like a house containing stone furniture" (Trout 1). This first simile is an indication of things to come and in itself is a perfect example of Brautigan's metaphoric style, that poetic articulation which Clayton first labelled a "magical process" (60). The stone statue of Franklin is set on a stone pedestal which looks like the roof of a house that, in the narrator's view, would probably contain furniture. In his simile, Brautigan

dislocates the adjective "stone" from the substantives "pedestal" or "house," to which grammatically it would normally be attached, and uses it to modify "furniture," thus producing in a very simple way a unique image. Examples of this technique of linguistic dislocation are myriad. Next in this chapter, for example, Brautigan writes: "Then the statue speaks, saying in marble: ..." (Trout 1). Again, this demonstrates the use of appropriate words, but in slightly dislocated or irregular places; the effect is to surprise, to startle, to provide for the reader a provocative newness of insight not so much of a world out there, but of the page being read, of language itself. Over and over again, the reader is forced to engage with the text as the primary purpose of this fiction. The imagery continually challenges any established linguistic sensibility the reader may have; the language continues to form itself in unique patterns. It is a text of perpetual encounter. Later in this chapter, for example, the narrator describes a nearby church which has "a vast door that looks like a huge mousehole, perhaps from a Tom and Jerry cartoon, and written above the door is 'Per L'Universo'" (Trout 2). Any encounter with or interpretation of this image, first and foremost, must acknowledge the wonder and imaginative insight of a language that can transform

a gothic arch into the world of animated cartoons and then transform that cartoon back into the world of the cathedral per l'universo. To suggest that Brautigan, by this image, is indicating that ecclesiastical usefulness in the twentieth century has declined to the significance of a Saturday morning cartoon, or to suggest that, like some huge mouse hole, the church has become the last spiritual refuge in this age, is, I think, to miss the point here. Jerome Klinkowitz comments:

Brautigan's far-reaching metaphors are wacky comparisons which stretch the maximum distance between tenor and vehicle so that the reader must make a hardy effort to connect the two. In this way the book comes together in the reader's mind as a living structure. It is a book about words, and Brautigan has fun with them. (1960s 44)

In a practical way, the function of such linguistic dislocation in Brautigan is to force the reader with every word on every page to come to terms anew with the fiction being read, with language itself. Both novel and reader explore new territory with every utterance.

Following the image of the "stone furniture," the first chapter includes the inscription on the statue. Words are typographically enlarged on the page to resemble the actual words on the monument, enabling and

forcing the reader to see as well as read its message. After these four words of "WELCOME" that surround the statue are mentioned, the narrator then describes the poplar trees that are behind it, and mentions the wet grass caused by the February rains. Next the narrator describes a nearby cypress tree, recalls that Adlai Stevenson spoke beneath it in 1956, and then mentions in rapid order, the church across the street, the poor people who gather there in the afternoon to receive sandwiches, a pessimistic anecdote about one disappointed person who received a spinach sandwich, and finishes ironically with a reference to Kafka:

Was it Kafka who learned about America by reading the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin ...

Kafka who said, "I like Americans because they are healthy and optimistic." (Trout 3)

This is a method of narration by association, where one idea or image leads to the next--church to poor people to one person's disappointment at his sandwich to Kafka's view of American health and optimism--and so on.

Brautigan uses this form of associative narrative throughout Trout Fishing in America. Examples are numerous. In the chapter entitled "Sandbox Minus John Dillinger Equals What," for instance, the narrator mentions returning to the cover, then speaks of taking

his baby to the Washington Square pictured on that cover, and then in a rapid stream of association his topics are wet bread on the grass of Washington Square, pigeons who do not eat the bread, a hippie who eats apple turnovers near a sandbox, the baby in the sandbox, the baby's red dress, the woman who wore a red dress and betrayed John Dillinger, and so on. Aside from being hypnotic to read--one is entranced in following from one association to the next--this method is also the source of much of Brautigan's humour. Like that of Twain or Leacock, his humour usually derives its impact from a droll, deadpan expression. With a flat voice and, most often, a superb sense of timing, Brautigan allows his associations to multiply until, sharply, he will deliver the punchline--often done by letting the associations develop into such comic absurdity that the momentum of the scene, or the pretension of certain characters, is ridiculously undercut. In the chapter cited above, for instance, the comparison between his infant daughter and the notorious "Woman in Red" ends with the baby "leaving in a huge black car" which stops down the street at an ice cream parlour: "An agent got out and went in and bought two hundred double-decker ice-cream cones. He needed a wheelbarrow to get them back to the car" (Trout 143).

In essence, this narration by association is a perfect mate for the linguistic dislocation effected in his metaphoric method in that the narrative, like the imagery, establishes its own autonomous path by its own logic, and in so doing places a significant burden on the reader. Reading Brautigan's prose is a collaborative act. It is also, often, a colloquial act; one could liken it to talking, or at least listening, to a neighbour. Keith Abbott notes the role of an auditory sense in Brautigan's fiction: "What is crucial to Brautigan's style is that both dialogue and narrative strike a similar sound and that a neutral equality be created between them" (152). Abbott argues that the success of Brautigan's understated style arises from the fact that the reader listens to it and must respond for "hearing a voice demands ... [an] emotional reaction" (152). In terms of Brautigan's poetic, a sense of oral expression fittingly evokes the quality of transience that he finds in all things. Whether hearing is the predominant principle of this style at all times or not, it nevertheless underscores a fictional method which challenges the reader to cast away any previously held rules of story-telling or narrative. Its manipulation of language compels an imaginative reading; the reader must assume an active role. This process, which again John

Clayton and other early critics saw as the "magical process" of Trout Fishing in America, is the fusion of Brautigan's associative narrative and linguistic dislocation. For the reader, at those moments when that fusion is most successful, magic is perhaps as good a word as any; and like most good magic acts, that reader is a member of the audience brought on stage, amazed by, but a participant in the world of wonders.

As the picaresque episodes of Trout Fishing in America proceed, the thematic role of language becomes evident. The book, like the sign encountered near the Klamath River, seems aware of its own syllabic structure:

NO TRESPASSING

4/17 OF A HAIKU (Trout 9)

In "Knock On Wood (Part One)," the narrator recalls his drunken stepfather "describing trout as if they were a precious and intelligent metal" and he realizes even as a child that he has to find the perfect adjective to describe the way he feels about trout and everything else: "I'd like to get it right" (Trout 4). The difficulty with language, getting it right, avoiding its pitfalls, is a primary impulse in scene after scene. In "Knock On Wood (Part Two)," the narrator as a child gets his language wrong when he identifies a flight of wooden stairs as a trout stream. He is greatly disappointed

when he discovers his error: "There was nothing I could do. I couldn't change a flight of stairs into a creek. The boy walked back to where he came from" (Trout 8). The disappointment the child suffers is a disappointment of the word, of naming, and early in the book this scene acts as a warning about the potential dangers, as well as benefits, of language and the imagination. The human manipulation of language to avoid disappointment, to enhance or protect characters' lives, sometimes saving and sometimes destroying, becomes increasingly evident as the narrator's tale continues.

In "The Kool-Aid Wino," the narrator remembers a maniacal young boy who ceremoniously mixed Kool-Aid by creating his own watery, sugarless recipe: "He created his own Kool-Aid reality and was able to illuminate himself by it" (Trout 15). In "Room 208, Hotel Trout Fishing in America," the role of language is vital but enigmatic:

The Negro woman sat there very quietly studying her brandy. A couple of times she said yes, in sort of a nice way. She used the word yes to its best advantage, when surrounded by no meaning and left alone from other words. (Trout 110)

The meaning of language is a tenable, yet tenuous thing. This woman has a cat named 208 which intrigues the

narrator to the point where he pretends the cat is named after her room number even though he knows the room is in the three hundreds. Upon finally discovering a year later that the room of a bail office downtown is numbered 208, he concludes for himself that he has resolved the mystery of the cat's name, although, for the reader, there is no discernible logic to his conclusion, other than as an act that quells his persistent obsession with regard to the mystery of the name: "... it was easier for me to establish order in my mind by pretending that the cat was named after their room number" (Trout 111). While in school, the narrator confirms a reputation, and an identity, when he inscribes first graders with his language of terrorism, printing "Trout Fishing in America" in chalk on their backs. The words "trout fishing in America," themselves, metamorphose into various realities through the course of this book. At one time or another, "Trout Fishing in America" is a designation for the book (1), its cover (2), a fishing trip through America (7), a character who acts like a Greek chorus commenting on events (8), a gourmet cook (18), the dead Lord Byron (50), the aforementioned slogan of elementary school terrorists (56), a friendly writer of letters to the narrator (65), a handicapped degenerate (69), an alias for Jack the Ripper (75), an hotel (105),

an advice column writer (124), a peace parade (159), and the nib of a fountain pen (177). Like its language, then, the title of this novel permutes into different roles in different situations.

Given this quixotic quality, the reading of Trout Fishing in America becomes as much an act of fiction as was its writing. The surreal "Sea, Sea Rider" chapter serves as a touchstone to illustrate this. In "Sea, Sea Rider," a bookstore owner provides the narrator with a woman for sexual intercourse, an act that is performed in the store while her wealthy husband watches. Afterward, the owner interprets the love-making scene for the narrator:

... I'll tell you what happened up there ... You fought in the Spanish Civil War. You were a young Communist from Cleveland, Ohio. She was a painter. A New York Jew who was sightseeing in the Spanish Civil War as if it were the Mardi Gras in New Orleans being acted out by Greek statues. ...

You both fell very much in love. ...

When Barcelona fell, you and she flew to England, and then took ship back to New York. Your love for each other remained in Spain. It was only a war love. You loved only yourselves, loving each other in Spain during the war. On the Atlantic you

were different toward each other and became more and more like people lost from each other. ...

When the ship bumped against America, you departed without saying anything and never saw each other again. The last I heard of you, you were still living in Philadelphia. (Trout 37)

In spite of what seems to be a final interpretative comment, the bookstore owner continues his tale to describe the narrator's journey to Mexico and his life as a Billy the Kid-like desperado. He concludes:

"See, I do know what happened upstairs," he said. He smiled at me kindly. His eyes were like the shoelaces of a harpsichord.

I thought about what happened upstairs.

"You know what I say is the truth," He said. "For you saw it with your own eyes and traveled it with your own body. Finish the book you were reading before you were interrupted. I'm glad you got laid."

Once resumed, the pages of the book began to speed up and turn faster and faster until they were spinning like wheels in the sea. (Trout 39)

The narrator offers no denial of the storeowner's account of his lovemaking. What the bookstore owner does, in essence, is what Brautigan, in the writing of this fiction, forces the reader to do. As his later reference

to Montagu suggests, "every language enshrines its own reality" (Montagu 130). It is an idiolectic world. For humans to endure, they filter the reality they see through imagination and language and recreate the world into a form with which they can cope. The language given to an act becomes the act. So "C. C. Rider," an old rock and roll song, becomes "Sea, Sea Rider," a chapter in Trout Fishing in America, and the bookstore owner makes up his romance, and the narrator makes up a story to account for the humped back on a trout he catches (90), and the Kool-Aid Wino mixes his "illuminations," and the surgeon (113) and Mr. Norris (117) go camping, and Charles Hayman (40) and Alonso Hagen go woefully fishing (134), and Trout Fishing in America Shorty maintains his screaming wheelchair angst (69). An uncomfortable disparity usually remains, however, between the reality these characters create and the world they encounter. As with most stories involving fish, something always seems to get away. The young narrator's trout stream is a set of stairs and Alonso Hagen's fishing diary is a catalogue of failure: "Total Trips 22 Total Trout Lost 239 ... I've had it. I've gone fishing now for seven years and I haven't caught a single trout. ... next year somebody else will have to go trout fishing. Somebody else will have to go out there" (Trout 135-137). Thus, this

imaginative approach to the world, although it seems to be the best that one can do, still leaves a sense of ambivalence, of doubt, of waste. Most of the characters encountered in Trout Fishing in America are lost and defeated, losers in society and in their personal lives. Their existence is as diluted and pale as the young boy's Kool-Aid. Imagination and language have created a world for them just as horrific as the world "out there" could ever be.

"The Cleveland Wrecking Yard" (Trout 164) is probably the ultimate example of this human fiction-making gone awry. It is a place which sells virtually anything that can be labelled. Used trout streams, with live trout, are sold by the foot, waterfalls can be bought in the plumbing department, and birds can be purchased from the birdcage which is covered by a piece of canvas "so the birds wouldn't get wet when it rained" (Trout 173). Even the buildings are for sale at the Cleveland Wrecking Yard, "eighty-cents a square foot" (Trout 174). Insects are free. All that can be encoded by language becomes objectified, real, and often in America, so Brautigan suggests, marketable. America itself, as the narrator mentions earlier in the novel, is "often only a place in the mind" (Trout 116). From the pragmatic optimism of Ben Franklin to the overcrowded campgrounds of the

present, it has only been an act of the imagination encoded in language.

Trout Fishing in America, as its title suggests, exists as a form of guidebook for a fishing of the world not by hook but by imagination. It shows us how to fish as much as where to fish. It is also a cautionary tale. There is always a danger in entering a world of the imagination, a world where what a character thinks and says becomes what is, and Trout Fishing in America demonstrates its awareness of this danger. This theme, the desire and need to get away, and the incumbent danger in that act, as D. H. Lawrence among others has noted (3), is a frequent motif in American literature. When a character steps outside the usual boundaries of language, the ability to communicate may descend into incomprehensible babbling, into madness. When characters accept and pursue their imaginative vision as truth, when they surrender any distance or objectivity, their world becomes radically altered; in fact, annihilation in one form or another is often the result. Many of Poe's stories ("Berenice," "Ligeia," "The Oval Portrait," "A Descent into the Maelstrom," and "The Cask of Amontillado" for example) examine minds consummately and destructively obsessed with their imaginings. Ahab's visionary monomania compels him to label and to pursue

the force behind the "pasteboard mask" to his annihilation. Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," "Ethan Brand," "Rappaccini's Daughter" and "Wakefield" are all stories that examine the dangers inherent in stepping outside a world of everyday experience. The coda of "Wakefield" acts as both moral and warning:

Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one another and to a whole, that, by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever. Like Wakefield, he may become, as it were, the Outcast of the Universe. (80)

Bartleby's refusal and Billy Budd's inability to engage in language, Huck Finn's declaration at the end of his narrative that he "ain't agoing to [write] no more" as he prepares "to light out," Benjy's impressionistic narration of the first section of The Sound and the Fury, Nick Carraway's brooding and broken retreat to the west, and to the past, at the end of The Great Gatsby, the adoption by Ellison's "invisible man" of Rinehart's flexible persona so that he can speak on "lower frequencies," Chief Bromden's retreat into schizophrenic silence--all of these represent instances in which characters separate themselves from the mainstream of

human communication. Such separation is destructive; however, merely to stay within the mainstream, to join the crowds that flow back and forth over Eliot's London bridge, to be Willy Loman or Christopher Newman or J. Alfred Prufrock or Jason Compson or Mr. Jones, is also a form of annihilation, death by quiet desperation. The solution that Trout Fishing in America offers to this dilemma is one of style as much as content; later, in his work of the seventies, in challenging traditions and mixing genres, Brautigan would forge other solutions.

As mentioned, Brautigan labels his work a "novel," but it adopts no one consistent novelistic tradition, instead using fragments from many traditions--picaresque, pastoral, satire, epistolary, Bildungsroman, guidebook. The tropes and schemes of this fiction also follow no specific tradition--random structure, multiple voices, variable symbols such as trout fishing that assert no consistent meanings, concretist representations, linguistic dislocation in terms of metaphor and simile, and narration by association. The imagination that Trout Fishing in America demonstrates is continually in motion. It flows like a trout stream with a language that is as flexible and metamorphic as its final two chapters insist all language must be. One should approach the world. Brautigan seems to be telling us, as one is forced to

approach this "novel." It is, after all, a guidebook. Repeatedly it shows us characters who once made use of their imaginations but they have ceased and allowed their visions to petrify. There is a fundamental immobility to their worlds--the Kool-Aid Wino never removes his clothes, only rarely seems to leave his bed and always mixes his Kool-Aid in the same manner, the woman of Room 208 never abandons her room, campers remain entrenched in their campsites for fear they might never find another, Trout Fishing in America Shorty is without legs, the Cleveland Wrecking Yard suicidally sells itself, Benjamin Franklin is made of stone. In their petrification, which stems from their chronic misuse of the imagination, they have created a language that is dead and entombed themselves within it. Brautigan's novel, on the other hand, encounters this petrified world with a continually active imagination. It does not allow itself to ossify or stop flowing; like the narrator endlessly searching out new and old trout streams which are always different, always flowing, the text re-encounters the world and itself again and again. Like its own title, the book with its flowing associations and inconstant metaphors reiteratively challenges and guides the reader; in its flux of change a persistent newness is born in the world, and in the viewer of that world. And when the word

"mayonaise" closes the book, and not the desired word "Mayonnaise," the human world and the language that encodes it are once more revitalized.

ii

In City of Words, Tony Tanner argues that American writers have a "dread of all conditioning forces" which in turn creates a "paradox for the writer":

If he wants to write in any communicable form he must traffic in a language which may at every turn be limiting, directing and perhaps controlling his responses and formulations. If he feels that the given structuring of reality of the available language is imprisoning or iniquitous, he may abandon language altogether; or he may seek to use the existing language in such a way that he demonstrates to himself and other people that he does not accept nor wholly conform to the structures built into the common tongue, that he has the power to resist and perhaps disturb the particular 'rubricizing' tendency of the language that he has inherited. Such an author--and I think he is an unusually common phenomenon in contemporary America--will go out of

his way to show that he is using language as it has never been used before, leaving the visible marks of his idiosyncrasies on every formulation. (16)

Richard Brautigan is a founding citizen of the contemporary municipality that Tanner labels a "city of words." In Trout Fishing in America, Brautigan attempts to use language "as it has never been used before" and, in so doing, forces the reader to shed any preset notions of the nature of words and texts, to respond to Trout Fishing in America as a genuinely brave new world of fiction. It is a fiction profoundly aware of its fictiveness, the sort of text which characterized the advent of postmodern metafiction. This is not to say that Brautigan's early fiction is without comparison. His poetic imagery certainly has associations in tone, wit and shape with the work of poets such as Williams, Spicer and Ferlinghetti and his prose style reminds one of such loosely structured, surrealistic works as The Journal of Albion Moonlight by Kenneth Patchen or even Earth House Hold, a later collection by Gary Snyder. More than these works, however, Brautigan's manipulation of his prose in Trout Fishing in America approaches what Tanner labels a "verbal autonomy" (344). The multifarious eclecticism of his metaphor and the associative breadth of his narrative are far more

startling, absurd, unique, than any that came before, so much so, in fact, that Brautigan could not get Trout Fishing in America in print for nearly six years. During that time Brautigan's second novel, A Confederate General from Big Sur (1964), was published. It is a work that followed more traditional patterns of style and narrative, or so it probably seemed to the editors of Grove Press at the time. Even so, at its fundamental levels, like Trout Fishing in America, it is a strikingly metafictional text, a novel fundamentally different from other novels, a fact that quite probably hindered its sales and caused it to be quickly remaindered.

A Confederate General from Big Sur tells the humorous story of two male friends, Lee Mellon, a rebellious profligate, and Jesse, the shy narrator; they meet and wander about in San Francisco in Part I of the novel and then have some erratic adventures in a Walden-like setting at Big Sur during the rest of their story. Their situation parodically recalls a common convention in American literature, fictions in which two men bond merrily together along the road of life (Hawk-eye and Chingachgook, Ishmael and Queequeg, Huck and Jim, Dean Moriarity and Sal Paradise, perhaps even the Lone Ranger and Tonto--in Life and Death in the American Novel, Leslie Fiedler makes a great deal of the homo-eroticism

of these situations). Through the process of their acquaintance, Jesse arrives at some remarkable insights into Lee, into himself, into history, into the human condition in contemporary society, and into the nature of texts themselves.

A Confederate General from Big Sur resembles a traditional narrative more than Trout Fishing in America does. Setting and character development are more firmly established and the plot, from the initial meeting of Jesse with Lee to a rather remarkable and oddly conclusive ending, is more cogent. In the manner of modernist texts, but unlike his later work, Brautigan includes more than thirty allusions to other writings and artists. One of the most direct of these allusions occurs at the very beginning of the novel where two lists of historical fact from Ezra Warner's Generals in Gray serve as a prologue, one recording the fates of the generals who did not survive the civil war, a second listing the peace-time occupations of these generals. After this historically factual prologue, the opening sequence of the novel concerns the meeting of Jesse with Lee Mellon, who claims to be the descendent of Augustus Mellon, an actual general in the civil war. After drinking a half gallon of muscatel, Jesse and Lee journey to a library; however, in researching a biography of the

generals of the civil war, they discover no "Mellon" listed. Lee, of course, is perplexed and upset:

"I know there was a Confederate general in my family. There had to be a Mellon fighting for his country ... the beloved South. ...

Promise me till your dying day, you'll believe that a Mellon was a Confederate general. It's the truth. ..."

"I promise," I said and it was a promise that I kept. (General 31)

As Trout Fishing in America is a text about words and the way those words shape reality, so A Confederate General from Big Sur is a text about words in time and the way those words shape history. It begins with the discrepancy between the words of historical fact and the contemporary words of Lee Mellon and, for the most part, that discrepancy is the subject of the novel throughout. The perception of history and, in particular, the issue of existing in time are related themes that occur in many of Brautigan's writings both from the perspective of the narrative voice and in the lives of characters encountered and they are concerns central to the development of A Confederate General from Big Sur.

Although Keith Abbott suggests that "Brautigan's novels are ahistorical" (173), A Confederate General from

Big Sur seems to have a great deal to do with history and, specifically, with what is often the core of human history, the history of war. As fishing is the tropological locus of Trout Fishing in America, so war sits at the centre of A Confederate General from Big Sur. It is a text written with the language of war; military imagery abounds. Lee and Jesse's apartments are known as "headquarters" (32), while tapping a gas line in Oakland to get free heat Lee leads a "calvary attack on PG&E" (41), Lee drives a "Civil War truck" (82) and "marches" (79) away two young men who try to steal his gasoline. In "A Farewell to Frogs" (100), two alligators are drafted for a battle against a frog pond: "Lee Mellon ... [prepared] to send his calvary in, dust rising in the valley, an excitement in the time of banners, in the time of drums" (102). When the crazy Johnston Wade, alias Roy Earle, arrives he recounts his story "as if he were a prisoner of war, giving his name, rank and serial number" (124). Big Sur becomes another Battle of the Wilderness (107).

In addition to the military language that Brautigan uses, other images of war permeate A Confederate General from Big Sur. Historical wars are of direct consequence to many of the characters. Elizabeth's house is haunted by the ghost of a veteran of the Spanish-American war

(General 114) and her husband was killed in the Korean war (General 85). World War II imagery surrounds Roy Earle, who is at war with his family because they think that he is insane for wanting to buy a sports car, appropriately, a Bentley Bomb. During his stay at Big Sur, references to "B-17 bombers," "antiaircraft fire over Berlin," and "Winston Churchill's V for victory" (General 136-140) are common. Lee Mellon, of course, feels that he is a linear descendent of a civil war general and he carries out his life with that ancestry in mind.

Much of the historical bent of A Confederate General from Big Sur and the language of its telling must logically be attributed to its narrator, Jesse, and the influence made upon him by Lee Mellon. Lee Mellon is a Confederate general, partly because of his own actions but mostly because of the light in which he is cast by Jesse. Like Nick Carraway in his admiration for Jay Gatsby, Jesse worships Lee as a hero and replicates him and his actions accordingly. In one typical instance, for example, Jesse refuses to be critical of Lee, portraying him as an intrepid general even though Lee is in the process of ignoring a woman whom he has seduced and whose life he has ruined: "Lee Mellon didn't show any interest in our little game. He said, 'The light's

changed.' He was wearing a gray uniform and his sword rattled as we walked the street" (General 48). For most of the book, Jesse keeps "the promise" he has made to Lee about his ancestry and portrays him unquestioningly as a hero at war; critical reaction to Lee Mellon has often not been so kind. Brooke Horvath argues that A Confederate General from Big Sur is a book about the effect that Lee has on a sensitive, withdrawn Jesse and that the effect is ultimately negative. Lee exhibits "sadistic behavior" in order to give his life of "petty violence, squalor, and penury" some "meaning and heroic dimension" (442). In the end, that lifestyle fails to give Jesse "the illusions he needs" (443) and, traumatically, prevents Jesse from finding a way to end his story. Gerald Locklin and Charles Stetler contend that Lee Mellon is a "counterfeit general" (74) who lacks humanity and tends to "dehumanize" those around him: "Truly Lee Mellon is a man reduced to animal, man stripped of his ideals, and those who come in contact with him suffer a like fate" (76). Tony Tanner sees Lee as a scavenger capable of "ruthless brutality," a fact that Jesse finally understands and so the book ends in "a mood of great desolation and sadness" (407). What none of these readers seems to perceive or allow is that Lee Mellon, like him or not, *is* a general and he *is* waging a

war. Jesse's narrative emerges as the lone historical archive of that war.

The arrival of Roy Earle is probably the key to an understanding of the nature of Lee Mellon's war and Jesse's role in it. Before Roy Earle arrives, A Confederate General from Big Sur mostly deals with the comical escapades of Lee and Jesse, drinking, starving, setting up camp in Lee's ramshackle, squat cabin by the frog pond, finding women, engaging in minor con games, and so on. When Roy Earle arrives, however, the narrative changes dramatically. Roy Earle, the crazy but wildly successful Insurance Company entrepreneur, arrives in the novel for ten chapters (pages 115-150); during those same pages (112-147), set apart in italics, Jesse includes in his narrative an inventive civil war story about Private Augustus Mellon, a tale presumably imagined by Jesse as there is certainly no corroborating historical evidence. This interlocutory story of Private Mellon takes place on May 6, 1864, during the early days of the bloody Battle of the Wilderness in Virginia. Mellon does not seem to be a very dutiful soldier--he is missing and his captain figures that he is "... [p]robably out stealing something as usual..." (General 114). In fact, Augustus Mellon, having lost his shoes, is barefoot and running for his life: "... he could

almost hear his own name, Augustus Mellon, searching for himself" (General 131). Mellon plays dead as two Union soldiers run by; ironically, these men are "looking for a Confederate to surrender to" (General 135). Mellon then steals the boots from a decapitated Union captain and stumbles into a clearing where a skirmish is in progress. Also in that clearing Mellon witnesses the "8th Big Sur Volunteer Heavy Root Eaters" offering a limpet to General Robert E. Lee's horse and beginning to dance in a circle about Lee and his horse " ... while all around them waged the American Civil War, the last good time this country ever had" (General 147). This interlocutory tale serves several functions. In part, it comically resolves the mystery of Lee Mellon's civil war ancestry, Jesse imagining Augustus Mellon to be a person more like the present-day Lee than like any distinguished general. As well, in typical Brautiganian style, the final episode with the Big Sur Volunteers hurls the reader back to consider their only other appearance which happened in the very first chapter. There the reader is informed that Big Sur was "the twelfth member of the Confederate States of America" (General 15) and was represented in the civil war by its Digger Volunteers who offered General Lee's horse the gift of a limpet during the

Battle of the Wilderness. At the conclusion of the first chapter, the narrator comments:

When I first heard about Big Sur I didn't know that it was part of the defunct Confederate States of America, a country that went out of style like an idea or a lampshade or some kind of food that people don't cook any more, once the favourite dish in thousands of homes.

It was only through a Lee-of-another-color, Lee Mellon, that I found out the truth about Big Sur. Lee Mellon who is the battle flags and the drums of this book. Lee Mellon: a Confederate general in ruins. (General 17-18)

By his heritage, imagined if not factual, Lee Mellon is connected to Augustus Mellon and the civil war, a war that was, in effect, a battle to maintain the union of all of the states. As Private Mellon loses his shoes in the war, so Lee Mellon, when he first meets and sponges off Roy Earle and his family, forgets his shoes when he must run from the house: "I was so drunkied [sic] up that I even forgot my shoes. I arrived back here with no shoes" (General 128). As Private Mellon was a keeper of slaves, so Lee Mellon chains the mad Roy Earle to a log. Roy Earle, rich, crazy, enormously successful as a seller of insurance, is a representative of the reconstructed

America that resulted from the war to maintain and cement its union. His is a success story. As soon as his temporary insanity clears, he rushes off to keep a business appointment with a client in Compton. In many ways, Brautigan seems to suggest, it is his capitalistic mainstream world, the world created by the civil war, with which Lee Mellon is in conflict.

For Lee Mellon and many others, the civil war has never ended; it continues as a civilian war and throughout this book one finds individuals waging war against the American way of life and the manifestly hollow dream it offers them. It is a society that values material success, the kind that Roy Earle's family has, living in a huge house in San Jose, both children in college; however, few achieve that level of prosperity and even when they do, as with Roy Earle's family, there is little satisfaction. It is a society that relegates its old to disconsolate hotplate lives in small rooms: "A hotplate in a little room is the secret flower of millions of old people in this country" (General 37). Jesse mistakes "Hearstville" for "Hearseville" (General 152). Lee Mellon, of course, is the prime example of one who wages civil war against that Hearseville society--he refuses to work, he continually engages in confidence games, including robbing the "PG&E" for heat, he denies

any obligation to family life after he gets Susan pregnant, he retreats to an independent, semi-bucolic existence at Big Sur, he gets his cigarettes from the sides of the road, he drives a truck that is a crazy mutation of any vehicle that Detroit could produce, he uses drugs, he defiantly proclaims that "man is the dominant creature on this shitpile" (General 97), he even has varying numbers of teeth--all that he does and represents is in contrast to the accepted values and lifestyle of the established American society.

Many of the lesser characters in the novel also seem involved in this civilian war, some by choice, some by necessity. Elizabeth works for three months as a high-priced prostitute and then spends the other nine months in retreat at Big Sur with her children. Susan "puts on layers and layers of fat like geological muck," smokes cigars and becomes "a baby factory" (General 47), giving her children up for adoption as soon as they are born. Roy Earle is labelled insane by his family any time he shows a tendency to be independent and question the mindless daily routines of his business life. Until he meets Lee, Jesse himself seems lost and without direction. He readily latches onto Lee, becoming his follower and biographer, an action that seems to provide some shape and purpose for his life. Lee, unlike the

others, recognizes the civilian war that is raging and he entices Jesse to become his disciple and enlarge his life: "Come down to Big Sur and let your soul have some room to get outside its marrow" (General 54). Thus Jesse falls under Lee's influence and, when he finally comments about the American civil war, "... that was the last good time this country ever had" (General 147), he means just what he says. At least then, the civil war was identified as a war, not the ongoing, deteriorated guerrilla conflict that it now seems to have become. Jesse elegizes that lost America when he says, it was "a country that went out of style like an idea" (General 18). In following Lee, as the Confederates before him did, there is some hope perhaps in regaining that lost vision of independence, of individuality. Thus, Lee Mellon *is* a Confederate general, albeit in ruins, but waging his civil war nonetheless.

In the end, as documented by Horvath (443), Tanner (407), and Locklin and Stetler (76), among others, Jesse seems disillusioned. Terence Malley even suggests that Jesse finally fails to be a "completely successful character" (110) because of this psychological funk. Strung out on dope, Jesse is impotent with Elaine and, as insects attack him, he sarcastically seems to question Lee's earlier affirmation about human existence: "Who

said we were the dominant creature on this shit pile?" (General 156). But as Lee's exclamation is ironic, so is Jesse's question. Imaginatively, by bringing the cowardly though resilient Augustus Mellon to life and, logically, in seeing Lee's brutal treatment of Roy Earle--"It was just horrible" (General 142)--Jesse's understanding has deepened. In finally reflecting on his stay at Big Sur, he claims "[r]eality would be better" (General 126) and feels a "wave of vacancy" (General 149) go over him. As the outside world of Roy Earle and the San Francisco of Part I of the novel are shallow and ultimately unsatisfying, so also is Lee Mellon's confederacy at Big Sur. Jesse is stranded in a no-man's-land. Perhaps the most significant indicator of his dissatisfaction occurs when, near the end of his narrative, his power over his language begins to fail him:

Elaine stared at the waves that were breaking like ice cube trays out of a monk's tooth or something like that. Who knows? I don't know.

(General 153)

Ultimately, Jesse seems unable to place closure on his narrative and offers the reader several conclusions. The first ending has the characters absurdly helping Roy Earle search for his pomegranate, the second has Lee and

Elizabeth silent and motionless as "photographs in an old album" (General 158), the third has a seagull fly over and synaesthetically seem to replace the senses of the characters with its own, a fourth ending has the characters all throwing Roy Earle's money into the sea, a fifth has Jesse imaginatively reaching up to feel "the arch and rhythm" of a seagull's flight, and at the last, there are "186,000 Endings Per Second," endings at the speed of light. Thus the final movement of Jesse's history of a Confederate general from Big Sur ends with the *apparent* failure of language and fiction, and with Jesse himself left in a sterile state of desolation.

Like Melville's Ishmael, Jesse first introduces himself by claiming "[m]y name is Jesse" (General 25); to pass his time he counts the punctuation marks in "Ecclesiastes." Melville's Ishmael also studies Ecclesiastes, a book which he admires as the "fine hammered steel of woe" (Moby-Dick 355). After his pronouncements about Ecclesiastes in the often quoted "Try-Works" chapter of Moby-Dick, Ishmael comes to his most important understanding of the role that humans play in the cosmos:

There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest

gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar. (355)

While the monomania of Ahab leads him and his followers to annihilation, Ishmael as narrator is able to see the white whale and the doubloon and the universe itself in a much less singular and subjective way. The distance and balance which he achieves in the telling of his tale allow him to endure and accept his role in a universe that is often at best ambiguous and indifferent and multi-faceted. Similarly, at the end of his tale, Jesse comes to a divergent vision that Lee will probably never see and would probably never accept. The multiple endings directly reflect that understanding. Augustus Mellon and Lee Mellon and Roy Earle are closely associated in Jesse's narrative; in many ways Lee is as locked into his lifestyle as Roy Earle is into his. For Jesse, neither staying at Big Sur as the follower of a bogus Confederate general nor returning and embracing the mainstream world of Roy Earle is acceptable. Either of those choices implies a rigid fixation of life, like having one's name and occupation chiseled into some sheet

of historical fact. For Jesse, as his fiction illustrates, a balance is needed, a stance which does not absolutely accept any one position. Such is his wisdom that is woe. The endings he gives to his fiction represent not so much inconclusiveness, as several critics have argued, but possibility. Those endings begin to list choices individuals have--the first, madness; the second, death; the third, a loss of senses (perhaps through drugs); the fourth, a rebellious rejection of society; the fifth, the power of the imagination; and on and on, "... faster and faster until this book is having 186,000 endings per second" (General 159). Fractal-like, the text moves toward infinite but as yet undefined solutions; one is reminded of John Barth's description of the postmodern fictional labyrinth as "a place in which, ideally, all the possibilities of choice ... are embodied ..." (The Friday Book 75). The text moves at the speed of light toward such a place.

In considering the transcendentalist Zen Buddhist aspects of this book, Edward Foster suggests that Jesse's final position "is close to the profound ironic pessimism of Hindu thought in its insistence that, by transcending history, one does not transcend evil any more than one transcends good" (45). The novel ends, Foster claims,

... with resignation, an acceptance of experience and its underlying laws without any desire or wish or hope to change what is. While Jesse may transcend history, he does not change it or condemn it. It is, coming from a deeply religious man like Jesse, a specifically mystical acceptance, one which, as we will find, is characteristic of all Brautigan's major fiction. (46)

Although Jesse's "deeply religious" persona may only be as deep as a study of Biblical punctuation marks will allow, Jesse does seem resolved at the end at least to accept the unresolvable. History, for Jesse, and for Brautigan, is clearly an act of the individual imagination. As Jacques Goutor in "The Historian's Craft" (Lecture) has said, historical fact is an arrangement of words, and those words are arranged by a person. Lee Mellon is a Confederate general because he wills himself to be and because Jesse writes it that way. Jesse does not "transcend history" inasmuch as he creates it, or perhaps, allows it to create itself. Language is forever a living, moving thing and that, finally, is what history must also be. The account of Augustus Mellon is a clear example--history is always the product of the present tense. But in that process Jesse also realizes the futility of Lee's actual war. As Keith Abbott

suggests: "While Brautigan sees that his imagination can make history come alive, he simultaneously mourns that imagination will also inevitably warp events in the telling" (171). Such tellings will also be warped again in the reading. As Gass says of literature (27), so one might say of history; inevitably, it is made of words and Brautigan is very aware of their danger, along with their possibility. To accede to the historical fact which suggests there was no General Mellon is to be imprisoned in another's linguistic dungeon but to finalize a history, to give it closure, is to make one's own dungeon, as Roy Earle and Lee Mellon themselves have done. The best posture Jesse can assume is one of balance: that is the place where, as Tanner suggests, the greatest possibility for "verbal autonomy" (344) exists. In existing in time, in being compelled, in order to communicate with his contemporary world, to "traffic in a language which may at every turn be limiting, directing and perhaps controlling his responses and formulations," as Tanner notes (16), the writer may feel "that the given structuring of reality of the available language is imprisoning or iniquitous" (16) and he may attempt to "us[e] language as it has never been used before" (16). This use of an illimitably plastic language, the creation of a text which strives to be non-temporal, is one method

that Brautigan explores through metafiction in order to solve the restrictive dilemma, as he seems to envision it, posed by one's existing in time. It is a theme that Brautigan repeatedly returns to in both of his next fictions, In Watermelon Sugar and The Abortion: An Historical Romance.

In the antepenultimate chapter of Trout Fishing in America, Brautigan imagines "Trout Fishing in America" becoming a pen nib: "After a while it takes on the personality of the writer. Nobody else can write with it. This pen becomes just like a person's shadow. It's the only pen to have. But be careful" (Trout 179). Through his own language and imagination, Jesse creates the history of Lee Mellon. Similar to Trout Fishing in America, which begins with the stone statue of Ben Franklin and ends with the transformed word "mayonaise," so A Confederate General from Big Sur begins in concrete, immobile fact, the fate and occupations of civil war generals, and ends in motion at the speed of light. When all is said and done, history is made of language and is as mercurial and plastic as the nature of its edium. In the end we can only conclude that, truly, the 8th Big Sur Volunteer Heavy Root Eaters did help the South lose the war that Lee Mellon tenaciously continues to fight.

iii

In Watermelon Sugar turns Trout Fishing in America and A Confederate General from Big Sur upside down. The lost utopian world lamented by the narrators of both of those books is already achieved years before the narrative of In Watermelon Sugar begins; the marvellous trout and the rushing water and the remarkable Lee Mellon are all symbolically fused in the wondrous "watermelontrout oil" that sheds light upon the world of iDEATH. It is a world in which deeds and life are "done and done again" in watermelon sugar (Sugar 1). While A Confederate General from Big Sur shows Brautigan's concern with language as it struggles to reconcile familiar and historical fact, and while Trout Fishing in America works toward seeing words and texts as ever-changing entities, those impulses are developed into fully formed metafiction in In Watermelon Sugar. It is a text about texts.

In Watermelon Sugar begins in the following manner:

IN WATERMELON SUGAR the deeds were done and done again as my life is done in watermelon sugar. I'll

tell you about it because I am here and you are distant.

Wherever you are, we must do the best we can. It is so far to travel, and we have nothing here to travel, except watermelon sugar. I hope this works out. (Sugar 1)

This beginning is at once enigmatic and revealing. With its repetition, its simple diction, and its intertwined compound-complex sentences, the opening has the quality of a chant, a poetic refrain that charms and calms and lures one into the fiction by the very shape and sound of its language. Attention is focussed on the curious phrase "watermelon sugar." repeated three times, once emphasized by upper case typography. The narrator does not offer any quick explanation of what he means by "watermelon sugar" and, in this, establishes a pattern that extends throughout the fiction. We see only what we are told, and the narrator, like most of the characters in this world, seems to be one who does not know or reveal a great deal. Like the unidentifiable objects randomly found in the Forgotten Works, the reader is given arbitrary fragments; often more seems unsaid than said. Fittingly, two presences are clearly acknowledged in this opening, "I" and "you," the narrator and the reader. The "I" seems tentative both about his ability

to tell his tale and about his rationale for telling it. The telling is presumably a collaborative exercise between narrator and reader--"we must do the best we can" (*italics mine*)--and there is no guarantee that the exercise will succeed--"I hope this works out." The reason for the narrative seems to be the fact that narrator and reader are "distant," but for that very reason, because of that distance--in place, in time, in beliefs, in experience, in age, perhaps, the possibilities are endless--the success of the fiction is precarious. Thus, in the only rationale offered for the fiction lies its potential failure. From its beginning, then, this is a text that is absolutely aware of itself as a fiction, immediately cognizant of such extra-textual realities as the nature of the reader and the ability of language to convey a "telling."

In Watermelon Sugar depicts a utopian society which presumably exists either on some other planet (the sun is a different colour every day) or on some future earth which has undergone a drastic change. There are "about 375" people in the communal Watermelon Sugar whose central village is intriguingly named iDEATH. It is a place where most residents seem to be occupied doing what they wish to do, many of them engaged in small factories making watermelon planks or watermelontrout oil. Most of

their bridges and buildings are made of "pine, watermelon sugar and stones" (Sugar 1). Nearby is the Forgotten Works which seems to be a huge dump that stretches for miles and contains all sorts of things from a previous civilization in which most of the commune has no interest. The community buries its dead in glass coffins in a stream that runs through iDEATH and is inundated with many statues, most of them of vegetables.

The narrator's tale, such as it is, is divided into three sections, each of which recounts a death. In Book I, the narrator tells us that, having failed at sculpting a bell, he is now writing a book. In the course of this section, he talks to old Chuck who lights the lamps, has supper at iDEATH, sees a bat that Fred has found at the Watermelon Works, makes love to his new female friend, Pauline, sees a Grand Old Trout, and recalls the death of his parents who were eaten by some charmingly literate though arithmetically retarded tigers. Book II is a dream vision of sorts in which the narrator falls asleep and recounts the tale of inBOIL and his gang and the events of two years ago. InBOIL rebels against the calm life of iDEATH and retreats to live in the Forgotten Works where he and his friends brew alcohol and remain perpetually drunk. As their rebellion proceeds, the narrator begins to lose interest in his girlfriend

Margaret because of her insistent desire to go into the Forgotten Works and retrieve artefacts for her collection. In the end inBOIL and his gang come to iDEATH to show the commune "the true meaning of iDEATH" (Sugar 93) and gruesomely commit suicide by cutting off parts of their bodies. In Book III, the narrator meets with Fred for lunch, a baby girl is born, and Margaret commits suicide. Margaret is buried and the narration ends with all of the members of iDEATH waiting for the sun to set and a dance to begin.

The exact meaning of Brautigan's communal society in In Watermelon Sugar has been the source of much debate. Harvey Leavitt suggests that the narrator is a second Adam and that In Watermelon Sugar, as a "work of teaching and guidance," demonstrates a "natural determinism" (20) as characters surrender their selves to outside forces and come to live in harmony with nature. Manfred Pütz argues that In Watermelon Sugar presents a new Arcadia which "embraces a progressive Utopia of self-realization in conjunction with a regressive Utopia of the state of world and society" (111). This balance enables the self "to lose itself in one form in order to find itself in another" (111). Josephine Hendin sees the novel reducing life possibilities to two choices, one can choose between the "utopian iDEATH or the hellish state of

inBOIL, either detachment and ego death, or seething destructiveness" (46). In reading the novel as an example of surrealism, Mary Rohrberger argues that In Watermelon Sugar represents not a choice between, but "a delicate balance" of, the forces of life and death, of waking and dream (63). Other critical readings interpret In Watermelon Sugar as a dystopia. Robert Adams describes the book as a "nightmare of innocence" with the characters being "more victims than heroes" (24-25). Brooke Horvath sees iDEATH as a community with the knowledge to suppress death; however, in doing so. it suppresses the "life awakening fears of death" (437). In the end the narrator presents a book that "gives the lie to the utopian triumph over death this world seems to represent by showing Watermelon Sugar as the restricted, dehumanizing, hopeless, and deadly place it finally is" (446). Neil Schmitz notes that the fundamental law of iDEATH is the prohibition of the *i*:

The denial of the *i*, of aggressive masculine individuality, opens up the possibility of all sorts of simple pleasures, all kinds of enjoyable agrarian pursuits. . . . Yet, the loss of the *I*, so it would seem, results in a loss of vision, of what can be seen, and spoken.

... If the phallogocentric universe of patriarchal discourse, with its brawling treatises and combat fiction, its sharp-pointed stylus, is to be turned down, what are the resources of the opposing discourse? We contemplate in each fiction the milky mind of a feminized man. Mother-wit, speaking for nurture from "natur," deals out the cliches of optimism, draws the writer into the confinement of her sugary language where, as a writer, as a man, he perishes. (Of Huck 249-251).

Patricia Hernlund focuses on the boredom and sterility of life in Watermelon Sugar:

Brautigan judges his utopian commune and finds it wanting, and the "curious lack of emotion" is the very reason for the negative judgement. Brautigan reminds us that a worse thing than violence and death could be a life without pity or joy. (16)

James Mellard notes that the commune of Watermelon Sugar obviously prefers iDEATH over inBOIL but the "world and storytelling-as-art demand that the latter appear" and thus, artistically, In Watermelon Sugar "manifests Brautigan's uneasiness with the purely solipsistic or purely aesthetic" (147).

For the most part, this criticism, diverse as it is, fails to interpret In Watermelon Sugar as a fiction about

fiction, but as Marc Chénétier suggests, such a metafictional understanding is crucial:

Brautigan is a writer concerned with defying language's fixities and points of reference; indeed, I believe all his books are motivated by one central concern and activated by one central dialectic: they are driven by an obsessive interrogation of the fossilization and fixture of language, and by the counter-desire to free it from stultification and paralysis. The genesis and contents of his early novels, in particular, seem clearly predicated on the antagonism he develops between, on the one hand, fixed forms and stabilized references and, on the other, the way these might be fractured--through literary techniques, linguistic complications and distortions, and the workings of the imagination. This is why, in these novels, anything but a metafictional reading seems doomed to be simplistic, or else condemns the text to a lasting illegibility.

(22)

When the narrator dismally fails at creating a sculpture of a bell, Charley suggests that he try writing a book:

You don't seem to like making statues or doing anything else. Why don't you write a book?

The last one was written thirty-five years ago.
It's about time somebody wrote another book. (Sugar
9)

In the 171 years of its history, there have only been twenty-three books written in Watermelon Sugar on topics such as owls, pine needles, and one on a journey into the Forgotten Works. There is obviously no priority and little value placed on the written word; most of the books that have been written are now lost. Charley refers to the texts of the Forgotten Works as "terrible books," and once, when tigers were being burned, books were used as fuel. The newspaper of Watermelon Sugar is published only once a year and we can assume that most of the inhabitants are like Fred who has never read a book. Members of the community politely ask the narrator about his book--his former teacher thinks that it might be a book about weather because of a school essay he had written on that topic--but he declines to offer any information on the subject. It is only on the final page of In Watermelon Sugar that one discovers that the text one is reading is the book the narrator is writing, and, in that sense, it is a book that ends, in effect, before it has begun:

The musicians were poised with their instruments.
They were ready to go. It would only be a few
seconds now, I wrote. (Sugar 138)

In its disinterest in writing, Watermelon Sugar is a world that denies history. As Jesse creates a personal mythology for Lee Mellon, so the commune at iDEATH refuses to allow a past or record a present; it refuses to language itself. It is a timeless place, a world of day-by-day slow motion and simplicity. The colour of the day, sleeping bats found in factories, and lunch and supper menus are the highlights of life. Their statues portray vegetables. The past has been relegated to the great garbage dump known as the Forgotten Works whose entrance bears a sign reminiscent of that marking Dante's hell:

THIS IS THE ENTRANCE TO THE FORGOTTEN WORKS

BE CAREFUL

YOU MIGHT GET LOST (Sugar 69)

Inevitably, those who venture into the Forgotten Works do get lost. Both inBOIL and his gang, who take up residence there, and Margaret, after she becomes obsessed with collecting objects from this wasteland, end up committing suicide. The past is dead and deadening; presumably, the present is peaceful and life-assertive. Once there were tigers, whom Charley suggests were

originally humans, but these have all been annihilated, remembered by most of the village only for their danger, recalled by the narrator for their charm and their beautiful singing. The trout hatchery at iDEATH, where inBOIL kills himself and where the dancing takes place, is built on the spot where the last tiger was burned. Even the dead at iDEATH, who are buried in glass coffins lit by foxfire, seem to remain a visible part of the living community as they send their "light shining up" (Sugar 134). But the narrator has accompanied Margaret to the Forgotten Works, and he seems destined to write. By recording the daily activities of iDEATH and not writing a book on pine needles or the weather, the narrator is producing a social history and, in a revolutionary way, shattering what seems to be the primary law of village ahistoricism and atextuality. It is little wonder that he carefully keeps the subject of his book a secret from any who ask.

The narrator has problems with his writing which stem from his sugary environment. From the outset of the novel, the narrator seems dissatisfied. He is an admitted insomniac, he is frustrated at his sculpting attempt, he is endlessly restless as he wanders back and forth about Watermelon Sugar, and he makes cryptic comments about the quality of his life: "My life lived in

watermelon sugar. (There must be worse lives)" (Sugar 9). He seems to be a person without an identity; in "My Name" he says he has no "regular name" but can be identified by any number of possibilities ranging from a question to the rain to a childhood game to a joke: "Just call me whatever is in your mind" (Sugar 4). As Chénetier says of him, "Ishmael is out-Ishmaeled" (36). Virtually all things in the commune are made from watermelon sugar including the lives of the characters (Sugar 33) and the book being written (Sugar 2). The narrator writes with "watermelonseed ink" (Sugar 57). Throughout the novel, one feels that the narrator must force himself back to his task and in many ways the language of watermelon sugar does not seem adequate to the work at hand. His language, for example, is not capable of describing the "thing" Fred finds: "I tried to hold it like you would hold a flower and a rock at the same time. ... 'It looks like one of those things inBOIL and his gang used to dig up down at the Forgotten Works'" (Sugar 7). Of the Forgotten Works, themselves, the narrator can only vaguely say; "The Forgotten Works just go on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on and on. You get the picture. It's a big place, much bigger than we are" (Sugar 69). Throughout, In Watermelon Sugar is a frustrating book to read, and

intentionally so. One is almost never told what one would like to know but continually one is given trivial details about lunches, everyday conversations and the like. It is this kind of thing, I suspect, that leads critics such as Kenneth Seib to dislike the novel for being "too vague or too personal" (63) or Keith Abbott to read it as an unevenly conceived "coda for personal loss" (45).

The narrator of In Watermelon Sugar is aware of the limitations his world forces on perception, and on language. It is a culture which seems to smother things, to boil down things, in order to make all uniform and tranquil. Everything is made of "pine, watermelon sugar, and stones" and everyone is the same. Tigers and Margarets and inBOILS are eliminated and the Forgotten Works, forgotten; all are focused on life in the present, one moment, one meal, one sugary plank at a time. Life at iDEATH is entirely predictable--each day of the week has a different colour and produces a similarly coloured watermelon. Meatloaf is served at the local cafe on every grey Wednesday. The name of the village is indicative of the problem the narrator encounters. As a multitude of critics has observed, iDEATH suggests several possibilities: the death of the ID (ID death), the death of the ego (I death), the death of ideas or

thought (IDEA death), or even the inextricable linking of individual life and death (I DEATH). In effect, to me, the point seems to be that there is no *one* answer to the meaning of iDEATH. In fact, there is no *one* way even to pronounce the word. It is emblematic of the world it names. It appears to reveal a great deal but, because of its sugary ambivalence, one cannot definitively say what it means. This seems to be the ontological difficulty that lies at the centre of the narrator's unhappiness and it is that which impairs his writing. He is an artist working in a medium which is imprecise, inexact, engulfed by contemporary culture. In his writing, the narrator is undertaking an heroic task, attempting to revive the language of his world, to forge its uncreated conscience. He creates a fiction that struggles with its own making in a world where the text is unread, dead, forgotten, or, just as injurious, perused by a public whose expectations--to read a text on weather, or owls, or pine needles--will undermine the material. Consequently, as much as anything else, In Watermelon Sugar is a revelation of this dilemma, a text with an inadequate language floundering in an aliterate world. And this text, and this world, Brautigan surely suggests, parallel our own. Although Brautigan's use of satire and parody and irony, as such, will be considered more fully in

relation to The Abortion in the next chapter, a brief comment here is useful. Metafiction, in turning in on itself, in being essentially auto-critical, invariably raises satiric questions about the very nature of fictions, both those that adopt a metafictional approach, and those that do not. As Linda Hutcheon notes, "[m]etafiction parodies and imitates as a way to a new form which is just as serious and valid, as a synthesis, as the form it dialectically attempts to surpass" (25). Brautigan, by manipulating such fictional forms as the guidebook, the epistolary novel, the historical novel, and so on, satirizes many elements of literature and life, past and present. In addition, this satiric bent undoubtedly influences Brautigan in his experiments with genre in the 1970s where variously he will interrogate, or burlesque, or embrace those genres. In this respect, much of In Watermelon Sugar emerges as a form of satire ridiculing a society and a readership whose expectations undermine and whose abilities delimit the possibilities of the fiction. In many ways, these citizens aspire to be little more than the vegetables that their many statues portray.

Statues are everywhere in Watermelon Sugar but the most remarkable is the Statue of Mirrors. The narrator's visit to this statue marks a central chapter in Book III:

EVERYTHING IS REFLECTED in the Statue of Mirrors if you stand there long enough and empty your mind of everything else but the mirrors, and you must be careful not to want anything from the mirrors. They just have to happen.

An hour or so passed as my mind drained out. Some people cannot see anything in the Statue of Mirrors, not even themselves. (Sugar 112)

What the narrator sees as he stands in front of the Statue of Mirrors is all of his world: "Then I could see iDEATH and the town and the Forgotten Works and rivers and fields and the piney woods and the ball park and the Watermelon Works" (Sugar 112). He sees Old Chuck and Doc Edwards and Pauline and Fred and the burned shacks of inBOIL and, at the end, Margaret committing suicide:

I stopped looking into the Statue of Mirrors. I'd seen enough for that day. I sat down on a couch by the river and stared into the water of the deep pool that's there. Margaret was dead. (Sugar 114)

The Grand Old Trout that had earlier stared at him, now turns away: "I stared at the place where he had been in the river. It was empty now like a room" (Sugar 114). Edward Foster interprets In Watermelon Sugar as something akin to a Zen "tract" and sees no remorse or regret in the narrator's action:

It is while looking at the statue that the narrator sees Margaret kill herself. He knows what is happening and where it is happening, but he does nothing to stop it. Indeed, he is so cut off from ordinary feelings that he can feel nothing toward what he sees. He cannot feel resignation or alarm or concern; he merely watches and records what he finds. But he does not understand it; it is an action tied to the Forgotten Works, and so all that he can do is to watch and tell us what he sees. (84)

Contrary to Foster's claim, Margaret's death does affect the narrator. It leaves him empty "like a room," as empty in fact as Margaret's artefact-filled room when it is sealed:

We left Bill putting the bricks in place. They were watermelon bricks made from black, soundless sugar. They made no sound as he worked with them. They would seal off the forgotten things forever (Sugar 126).

Margaret, friend, lover, co-traveller with the narrator into the Forgotten Works, has become a forgotten work herself. The death of Margaret haunts him in this book--there are eight chapters that focus on her (for example, "Margaret Again, Again, Again, Again, Again") and Book III is entitled "Margaret." If In Watermelon Sugar is a

Zen tract, as Foster suggests, then it is surely a tract that reveals a dissatisfaction with such a single-minded approach to the world. The narrator turns away from the mirror that shows his society for what it is and, choosing to live on the outskirts of iDEATH as he does, he clearly chooses to be an outsider in this world of statues. The fiction that he writes, as a satire, most certainly exposes the limitations of that society.

Watermelon Sugar is a world of present time, methodical and predictable and patient. It is a place where everything, from vegetables to human beings, has a defined place. Each human is assigned a job, no matter how menial, and eventually each human is assigned a casket and, at times in Watermelon Sugar, the dead seem to give off more light than the living. All things are categorized, labelled. Those that do not lend themselves to such classification are forgotten, unlanguage. Kathryn Hume argues that, by embracing the world of iDEATH, aggressive and violent forces, represented by inBOIL, are expelled from the unconscious and the writer is released from his writer's block: "Somehow, by rooting out the longing for material possessions and for ego-building excitement, the non-egotistical being finds it possible to be creative" (186). What Hume does not allow is that the narrator's book is essentially a clandestine

secretive work. The Statue of Mirrors is an image of the world of Watermelon Sugar exactly as it is, a world that reflects "everything" but gives nothing. The text that the narrator writes is, in itself, a statue of mirrors, a product of his culture, but it is a text that satirically calls that very culture into question and, in the process, calls itself into question. It is a text that negates itself even as it is being written, being not just creative, as Hume notes, but destructive as well. Margaret and inBOIL are as much a part of the book as Pauline and Charlie. Brautigan casts doubt on any act that will ossify or fossilize language, on any force that will put ideas to death. Thus In Watermelon Sugar is a work in progress--it contains its own rough outline ("Charlie's Idea") and ends with the narrator still in the very act of writing. There is no escape from predictability in Watermelon Sugar; in In Watermelon Sugar, however, the narrator, in the ongoing act of his writing, illustrates the illimitable nature of the world of his experience and his art. Fiction, like life, must resist becoming a statue, must avoid merely, repetitiously, being "done and done again."

The question arises--after In Watermelon Sugar, what next? In reading Brautigan, there is some sense that the game of metafiction was being pushed to its limits. As A Confederate General from Big Sur is a novel that never ends, so In Watermelon Sugar never begins; at the endpoint of its beginning, it hangs motionless in the air like its dancers. In fact, after In Watermelon Sugar was written in 1964, Brautigan did not produce another piece of extended prose fiction until 1971. While there is much humour and joy in Brautigan, there is also a sense of sadness and dissatisfaction, and it is a sense that arises not just from what he sees in the world but from how he is perceiving that world in fiction. Some critics have argued that metafiction dangerously contains its own solipsistic dead end. In considering "recent experimental fiction" in 1975, Morris Dickstein offers a vehement reproach:

... some of the new fiction is really about fiction itself, paralyzed by self-consciousness, caught in an infinite regress of writing about writing. Thus, bereft of a full human subject, embroiled in problems of craft rather than art, it readily devolves into a parochial whine or ascends to a cerebral high.

manipulating words and worlds with a meaningless impunity. (263)

In 1979 Robert Scholes similarly argues that self-reflexive fiction such as metafiction is "... a short-term trend which is nearing its end" (Fabulation 213). There is a perceived danger in a fiction that continually questions its own possibilities, its own limits, and, one can argue, much of the purest, most significant metafiction by Abish, Barth, Barthelme, Coover, Gass, Sukenick and others, including Brautigan, may have flourished and disappeared by the late 1970s. One cannot go home again, however. As Linda Hutcheon notes. "... the point of *metafiction* is that it constitutes its own critical commentary, and in so doing,... sets up the theoretical frame of reference in which it must be considered" (Narcissistic 6). For Brautigan, having once explored the self-reflexivity of metafiction, the very nature of fiction is forever changed. Kathryn Hume notes the irreversibility implied by metafiction:

Metafiction by Barth, Borges, Sorrentino, and Barthelme not only help [sic] us understand literature as criticism, it makes the argument that we can and should enjoy this state of affairs rather than long for a new naivete. (45)

Brautigan may have found that he had pushed certain aspects of metafiction as far as he could; in effect, however, this postmodernist strategy was not a thing that could be abandoned--one could not somehow return merely to writing fiction involving streams of consciousness or social injustices. The verities of metafictional word and text were finely ingrained in the writing of Trout Fishing in America, A Confederate General from Big Sur and In Watermelon Sugar; by 1965 linguistic dislocation and narration by association were deeply entrenched hallmarks of Brautigan's style. Eventually, Brautigan's solution to any problematic limitations caused by metafiction is not to abandon it but to apply its postulates to various forms of popular fiction--in fact, some of the aspects of popular romance can already be found in In Watermelon Sugar. Although it represents a decision which lost him much of his popular audience, the writing of The Abortion also represents the first concrete step in his exploration of various literary genres, a movement which leads Brautigan toward a remarkable and complex hybrid fiction.

Chapter Three: of foetus and form

At one point Pauline asks the narrator of In Watermelon Sugar about his book:

"How's the book coming along?" she said.

"Fine," I said.

"What's it about?" she said.

"Oh, I don't know," I said.

"Is it a secret?" she said, smiling.

"No," I said.

"Is it a romance like some of the books from the Forgotten Works?"

"No," I said, "It's not like those books." (Sugar 21)

While the narrator denies his book is "like" those of the Forgotten Works, he does not deny Pauline's linking of his book with romance. In fact, many of the features commonly associated with the literary tradition of romance can be found in In Watermelon Sugar. The remote, supernatural setting, often a borderland of one sort or another, the magical monster-tigers who sing and talk,

the representational, wooden characters including a diametric pair of females, the fair-haired Pauline and the dark Margaret, the joyous "happily-ever-after" conclusion, the dark, psychologically complex understructures evidenced in the neuroses of inBOIL, Margaret and the narrator--all of these are features commonly found in generic romances. Following In Watermelon Sugar, then, it is no great surprise to find that Brautigan's next novel, The Abortion, is subtitled An Historical Romance 1966 and overtly explores the romance genre. The publication of The Abortion and Revenge of the Lawn¹ in 1971 represents an important transitional stage for Brautigan.

As a transitional stage or turning point in his fiction-making, The Abortion stylistically marks a shift from the primarily metafictional works of the sixties toward what Chénétier calls the "genre wars" of the 1970s (52). Metafictionally, it is a book about a library, a book about books, and as such, is a fiction that seriously concerns itself with the inherently problematic nature of fiction. Similar to Brautigan's earlier work, it tentatively masks itself as a narrative--it has a title and a cover and words and a plot--but through associative narrative and metaphoric dislocation and an unrelenting refusal to sink into any "suspension of

disbelief" that narrative is often unmasked and that unmasking becomes a subject of the fiction. In The Abortion, Brautigan continues to make his language as new as he possibly can, attempting, in Fiedler's phrase, to "cross the border, close the gap" (256), to make fiction and reality, language and text, writer and reader, one. That he became known as the spokesperson of his hippie era, but no more than that, is, perhaps, an ironic testament to his success. That he turned in the 1970s to experiment with the prevalent fictional forms of the popular culture that so praised him is no surprise, although there may be deeper reasons that relate to the very nature of Brautigan's metafiction itself.

i

Patricia Waugh points out that among metafictionists the use of well known forms of popular fiction, such as romance, is common for several reasons:

The entertainment value is still maintained, but the defamiliarization of the popular form with the new context uncovers aesthetic elements that are appropriate for expressing the serious concerns of the new age. (79)

Thus, these pre-established forms enable the metafictionists to focus their concerns on matters of primary interest to them, the problems of language and text and the reality they present, while opening a broad range of new possibilities. In this regard, Linda Hutcheon suggests that metafiction frequently makes use of popular fiction in order to bring the reader into an active participation in the creation of the text:

...self-reflective narrative often presents the story of its own coming to life, its own creative processes, through the actualized structures of these various models. Detective plots, fantasy, games, the erotic--all these function as self-reflective paradigms, making the act of reading into one of active "production," of imagining, interpreting, decoding, ordering. in short of constructing the literary universe through the fictive referents of the words. Reader and writer both share the process of fiction-making in *language*. (86)

With his metafictional style firmly established, then, Brautigan declares his subtitled intention in The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966.

The Abortion is most certainly true to this romance subtitle. Charles Hackenberry investigates Brautigan's adaptation of romance in The Abortion by using several of

the postulates of Northrop Frye who, in The Secular Scripture, praises the romances of writers such as Sir Walter Scott and defends the value of popular literature in general: "Popular literature, so defined, is neither better nor worse than elite literature, nor is it really a different kind of literature: it simply represents a different social development of it" (28). Using Frye as his guide, then, Hackenberry identifies several key elements of romance in The Abortion including: a tendency toward allegory; stylized characterization; monster imagery; a quest consisting of three main stages (a perilous journey, a crucial struggle, and the exaltation of the hero); and "Centroverson, a theory which finds 'the gradual identification of the ego with the conscious rather than the unconscious'" (26). In identifying the object of the quest as an abortion, Hackenberry concludes that Brautigan's romance actually constitutes an ironic parody of romance:

... while Brautigan relies on the conventions of the romance to provide the structure of his tale and possibly the vehicle for one level of the work's meaning, he suggests that life rarely, if ever, parallels art, especially the art of romance. (31)

Although Hackenberry's observations are interesting enough, given Brautigan's attention to the nature of

texts, The Abortion may be read more insightfully not as a parody of romance, but as a metafiction of romance in which both components, romance and metafiction, are mutually parasitic. As well, Brautigan's use and development of romance may compare more favourably, and usefully, with the early writings of American romance than it does to Scott on whom Hackenberry, via Frye, generally bases his ideas.

In "The Custom-House" introduction to The Scarlet Letter, Nathaniel Hawthorne specifically locates the setting of American romance:

Thus, therefore, the floor of our familial room has become a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other. (38)

It is in that borderland between the actual and the imaginary that Hawthorne sets much of his fiction, as do Poe, Cooper, Melville, James, Faulkner and the other American romancers. Whether that murky borderland is the past or the Pacific whaling grounds or European society or the mind itself, the art of the romancer, according to Henry James in his "Preface" to The American, is to sever the rope that fetters the metaphorical "car of the imagination" to the "balloon of experience" and thus

provide for the reader, without his knowing it, "experience liberated" (33-34). In The Abortion, Brautigan severs that rope with alacrity although, in keeping with his metafictional inclination, he often makes the reader aware of the procedure, and the "experience liberated" is usually of a linguistic bent.

There are two predominant worlds depicted in The Abortion, the world of the library and the world of Tijuana. The "beautiful library" (Abortion 11) is a place of calm and peace, a physical sanctuary for the narrator and a literary sanctuary for the lonely and lost who stock it with their unread books. Tijuana, on the other hand, is "THE MOST VISITED CITY IN THE WORLD" (Abortion 135). It is loud, cheap, dirty, a place of Woolworth's, abortion, and death. In the course of the novel, the narrator and Vida travel from the world of the library to that of Tijuana and, as a result of their journey, they end up residing in a territory between the two. It is in that place that they find happiness with themselves and with their world. Using Hawthorne's geography, they firmly take up residence in a borderland or "neutral territory" between the "imaginary" world of books and the "actual" world of Tijuana. They have learned the lesson and achieved the vision that, for example, neither Hawthorne's Chillingworth nor Melville's

A few moments passed during which there were no more surgical sounds in the room. There was now the sound of cleaning up and the doctor and the girl and the boy talked in Spanish as they finished up.

Their Spanish was not surgical any more. It was just casual cleaning up Spanish. (Abortion 153-154) The actual language of the narrative aborts itself here into foreign sounds it cannot transcribe--silence, metallic, surgical, cleaning up, Spanish. And Vida's stomach is "vacant like a chalkboard" (Abortion 160). all of its words erased by the surgeon's hand. It is language that is aborted on this romance journey. Sitting through three abortions, the librarian, custodian of this language, undergoes a form of resurrection and purification: "... then the language and silences of the abortion began. ... It was the ancient ritual of fire and water all over again to be all over again and again in Mexico today" (Abortion 159-161). For the narrator, then, the text enacts its own abortion. it performs the ritual of death and rebirth, a ritual that it must apparently perform, repeatedly, forever. In this way the narrator's journey to Tijuana becomes not a journey associated with images of death or finality, as one might initially expect, perhaps conditioned by the grimness of other abortion stories, such as Faulkner's The Wild Palms

has been lost, something has been found. In the fashion of much American romance, they undergo a transcendental reconciliation with the world at the end. Vida no longer hates her appearance and the narrator has come to realize himself as a "hero in Berkeley."

ii

At that crucial point in The Abortion when the narrator is preparing to leave the sanctuary of his library, which is a world as remote and protective for him as that of Watermelon Sugar or Big Sur is for its inhabitants, he makes the following comment:

I think we have the power to transform our lives into brand-new instantaneous rituals that we calmly act out when something hard comes up that we must do.

We become like theaters. (Abortion 96)

The Abortion is a book about such "instantaneous rituals," about people transforming themselves into "theaters." It begins with a narrator who, like most of Bontigan's protagonist-narrators, is a shy, submissive individual; he secludes himself in a library: "... I am here twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week to receive the books" (Abortion 12). The books he receives

are from the lonely and outcast of America and are only deposited, never read. Titles include Growing Flowers by Candlelight in Hotel Rooms, My Trike, The Stereo and God, and even Moose by an anachronistic-looking writer named Richard Brautigan. The narrator's life is drastically changed when Vida Kramer arrives with her own book describing the horrors of physical beauty--Vida is so beautiful that she causes car accidents and suicides and solicitations everywhere she goes. Vida stays at the library and, before long, develops an unwanted pregnancy; she and the narrator decide to have the foetus aborted. Given the illegality of abortions at this time in California, hence, in part, the "historical" nature of this romance, the narrator calls upon his experienced friend Foster for help. Foster, who works storing books in caves and whose outlaw personality resembles Lee Mellon's, makes all of the necessary arrangements for a trip to Mexico.

The library that the narrator and Vida leave is "another kind of library" (Abortion 19) in many ways. It is a repository of words, containing and contained by text. It exists because of the demand of words:

This library came into being because of an overwhelming need and desire for such a place. There just simply had to be a library like this. That

desire brought into existence this library building which isn't very large and its permanent staffing which happens to be myself at the present time.

(Abortion 21)

The library is a mecca for a huge number of people and their lonely words, so many in fact that surplus books are stored in caves in northern California, caves that are originally described as "hermetically-sealed" (Abortion 34), but as the narrator discovers just as he is leaving the library, have destructive "cave seepage" (Abortion 83). These books, unread and destined for a watery grave, are doomed. In this, his fourth novel, Brautigan himself arrives as a character to place his "third or fourth" book in the library:

Every time he brought . . . a new book he looked a little older, a little more tired. He looked quite young when he brought in his first book. I can't remember the title of it, but it seems to me the book had something to do with America. (Abortion 27)

By this action, Brautigan suggests that his own writing ventures toward the same end as all other books, doomed to be forgotten, dead. As the narrator says: "What a strange place this library is, but I guess it's the only place you can bring a book in the end" (Abortion 76). For Brautigan, all books, "paper phantoms" that they are,

are so fated. The texts of The Abortion's library are akin to the "terrible books" of the Forgotten Works or those that the narrator of Trout Fishing in America describes in the bookstore of the "Sea. Sea Rider" chapter:

The bookstore was a parking lot for used graveyards. Thousands of graveyards were parked in rows like cars. Most of the books were out of print, and no one wanted to read them any more and the people who had read the books had died or forgotten about them ... (Trout 32)

At first, of course, the librarian, who acquired his job because he is a writer, a text-maker, seems at one with his graveyard library; he sleeps, cooks, eats and makes love there: "I believe I am the only person in America who can perform this job right now and that's what I'm doing" (Abortion 22). The librarian is as dead as his library. It is hardly surprising that his only significant creation during his time there is a foetus that is to be aborted. In effect, the library that he runs and the texts he collects, unread and destined for a watery grave, are abortions as well. So, Brautigan implies, are all texts.

Other characters in the novel revealingly assess the library in less positive ways than the narrator. In

spite of the fact that Vida has brought her own book there, she describes it as "a place where losers bring their books" (Abortion 48) and Foster categorizes the library as a "garden of nuts" (Abortion 91) and an "asylum" (Abortion 105). In their view the library is as horrific as Tijuana. It is only in abandoning the library and its condemned texts that the librarian confronts it as the abortion that it truly is and, in the process, becomes more fully human.

The abortion itself, the supreme goal of this romance quest, is done offstage, out of sight of the narrator who refuses to watch. It is an abortion of sounds and silence:

Then the doctor said something in Spanish to the boy and the boy answered him in something metallic, surgical. The doctor used the thing that was metallic and surgical and gave it back to the boy who gave him something else that was metallic and surgical.

Everything was either quiet or metallic and surgical in there for awhile.

Then the girl said something in Spanish to the boy who answered her in English. "I know," he said.

The doctor said something in Spanish.

The girl answered him in Spanish.

A few moments passed during which there were no more surgical sounds in the room. There was now the sound of cleaning up and the doctor and the girl and the boy talked in Spanish as they finished up.

Their Spanish was not surgical any more. It was just casual cleaning up Spanish. (Abortion 153-154) The actual language of the narrative aborts itself here into foreign sounds it cannot transcribe--silence, metallic, surgical, cleaning up, Spanish. And Vida's stomach is "vacant like a chalkboard" (Abortion 160). all of its words erased by the surgeon's hand. It is language that is aborted on this romance journey. Sitting through three abortions, the librarian, custodian of this language, undergoes a form of resurrection and purification: "... then the language and silences of the abortion began. ... It was the ancient ritual of fire and water all over again to be all over again and again in Mexico today" (Abortion 159-161). For the narrator, then, the text enacts its own abortion. it performs the ritual of death and rebirth, a ritual that it must apparently perform, repeatedly, forever. In this way the narrator's journey to Tijuana becomes not a journey associated with images of death or finality, as one might initially expect, perhaps conditioned by the grimness of other abortion stories, such as Faulkner's The Wild Palms

or Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants" or Audrey Thomas's Mrs. Blood, but a journey filled with images of rebirth and renewal. On the way to the airport, for example, the narrator sees a "sign with a chicken holding a gigantic egg" (Abortion 112). The journey takes place in spring, near the time of Easter, and on the way to Tijuana and back, the colour "green" is seen over and over: there is a "green aura" about the women in San Francisco airport (115), the narrator feels green as the plane takes off (119) and is fascinated by a "green pocket" in the mountains (120), they stay at the Green Hotel in San Diego (128), and Dr. Garcia's clinic is in a green building (142). Like the ritual of Easter, the journey to Tijuana is a journey to life through death. As their conception is destroyed, part of Vida and the narrator is reborn, and that rebirth occurs both in terms of romance and in terms of language.

In the tradition of a hero of romance, through his journey the narrator-hero changes himself and the people around him, and restores or improves the society in which he lives. All characters in The Abortion are revived by the experience--Foster acquires a permanent girlfriend and a job, fittingly, at Bethlehem Steel; Vida, once hateful of her body, now, ironically perhaps, exploits and profits from it as a topless waitress; and the

narrator gets involved in fund raising for the Pynchonesque "The America Forever, Etc." and becomes "a hero in Berkeley" (Abortion 192). Presumably, his heroism is genuine. He locates himself near Sproul Hall at Berkeley which, as Mark Kitchell 's recent film Berkeley in the Sixties (1990) suggests, was the birthplace for much of the student protest in the 1960s that challenged American attitudes toward race and war and many other things. Both the library and Tijuana, respectively, represent forces of the imaginary and of the actual that can deaden humans. In the library people entomb themselves in idiosyncratic texts and, like Mrs. Charles Fine Adams, retreat into the night tired but satisfied "Now it's done..." (Abortion 20); in Tijuana, people are entombed by a smothering commercial world where everything is bought and sold: "TAXI! HEY THERE! TAXI! TIJUANA! SHE'S GOOD LOOKING! TAXI! TAXI!" (Abortion 137). In breaking free of the library and in returning from his perilous journey to Tijuana, the narrator has liberated himself from a suffocating world on the one hand, and a killing world on the other. In the end, he establishes himself balanced between the two; he is situated at Sproul Hall with all those others ostensibly about to change the world. Like Jesse and the narrator

of In Watermelon Sugar and Ishmael before them, perhaps, he has attained a "wisdom that is woe."

In metafictional terms, the narration illustrates Brautigan's view of the text as abortion. Marc Chénétier argues that, for Brautigan, once the text is written it is dead:

Indeed, the library the narrator had spontaneously chosen to run a few years earlier, dropping all other activities, is of a special kind. Here, unique works are brought in by their authors in manuscript form, as soon as they are finished, so that they can be buried at random in a morgue-like San Francisco library until their 'Foster' parent ... carts them out to a northern California grave. Already their real life--being written--is over... (53)

As the narrator's library temporarily stores books, deposited but never read, so Vida's uterus acts as an impermanent host for the zygote, conceived but never to be born. Thus, in The Abortion, there is never any significant ethical discussion between the narrator and Vida regarding their journey to Tijuana; it is an act carried out as naturally and necessarily as the conception itself, an act that reflects the true nature of the text in which it is contained, and the true nature of all texts.

For Brautigan, in The Abortion, the genre of romance and the technique of metafiction are symbiotic, they feed upon one another and they nourish one another. Brautigan applies his metafictional sense of what a text must be to popular romance, which implicitly assumes what a text is; conversely, the romance formula, oscillating between worlds of "the Actual and the Imaginary," seems to enfold perfectly the volatile style which Brautigan employs. Within the inherent dualism of this strategy, The Abortion performs a dance of ironies. That the contemporary goal of a romance quest should be an abortion is certainly ironic; that achieving that goal actually does regenerate the characters and their world in the fashion of a more traditional romance is doubly ironic. This is the tactic that Alan Wilde, in discussing the "ironic vision" of the metafictionists, describes as "an irony beyond the irony" (143). This complex irony does not stop at simply holding romance up to scrutiny or ridicule as a fictional genre in contemporary time but, in metafictionally turning back on or doubling its own ironic perception, romance used in this innovative way potentially becomes renewed by the process. Patricia Waugh generally identifies this tendency as an intricate form of "double-edged" parody:

In fact, parody in metafiction can equally be regarded as another lever of positive literary change, for, by undermining an earlier set of fictional conventions which have become automatized, the parodist clears a path for a new, more perceptible set. (64)

Unlike mere parody, The Abortion, incorporating its complex ironies and metafictional approach, might best be described as a metafiction of romance in that, for Brautigan, the process energizes the genre far more than it ridicules it. In this sense, as Waugh's contention would indicate, new possibilities emerge in old forms. Woven with his metafiction, the development of this ironic vision toward romance in The Abortion propels Brautigan toward further experiments with genre.

iii

In his first metafictional novel, Trout Fishing in America, Brautigan clearly advances two of his fundamental beliefs: language is what makes human beings human, and language is invariably flexible and evolutionary. In Brautigan's prose which follows, life

and art succeed best when they observe these same criteria. To serve your Kool-Aid infinitely diluted, to be content in the land of iDEATH, to live forever in a building whose books acknowledge their own deadness, is to be a fossil, a vegetative statue. Alternatively, to live only in the commercialized world of taxis or insurance sales or television, as Roy Earle and as the shadowless Mr. Henly in "The Wild Birds of Heaven" (Revenge 51-55) do, is to become a madman, a Forgotten Work, an abortion. For Brautigan, to be a writer and to write must always involve a questing out of language, a constant renewing of words and self: in The Abortion he begins to envision the same necessity with regard to larger forms of fiction. Everpresent is the danger for the writer, and for the fiction, of succumbing to the numbing will of the public or to the so-named prisonhouse of language, confined by one into writing the same fiction, by the other into using the same library of words, over and over and over. It is the peril that the narrator of In Watermelon Sugar encounters, his life and words being "done and done again" and one is reminded of Camus' artist in "The Artist at Work" who is destroyed by his inability to balance worlds of "solitary or solidary" (158). The true domain of writing for Brautigan then may be that locale best defined by the geography of romance.

a borderland between the actual and the imaginary that allows a continual shifting from one to the other, both in terms of language and in terms of incident. The energy and the caprice of his language and the intriguing associational wackiness of his narratives stem from a symbiotic fusion of both worlds.

By the end of The Abortion, the narrator has enabled himself to write another text, the one that we are reading, and is on his way to becoming a "hero in Berkeley." Upon his departure from the library, he coyly describes himself as an "instant man" and speaks of the power to transform life with "brand-new instantaneous rituals" (Abortion 96). In this way, as he predicted at that time, he has become like a theatre. Unlike Camus' artist, Brautigan's narrator finds his place. He lives in a world of stillness and flux, sitting at his table while surrounded by students who "come pouring through Sather Gate like the petals of a thousand-colored flowers [sic]" (Abortion 192). In the end that is what The Abortion is all about. The text or the life that is simply encoded, that is dropped off in the library of the world by the author who then disappears into the darkness of the night like the exhausted Mrs. Charles Fine Adams, "to walk very slowly back to her room in the Kit Carson Hotel and to the flowers that waited for her there"

(Abortion 21), that text, that life, is as dead as an aborted foetus. To live in the instant is essential, for language and genre and being. If a text, or a society, is buried by, or in, its language or its rituals--these often seem to be the same in Brautigan--it is doomed. At the very least the human animal and the society it forms must forge new texts and, like film, like a trout stream, be always instantaneously made new. In such a way are heroes born, and in such a manner does Brautigan himself forge ahead in the 1970s to explore the possibilities of popular romance as seen through his metafictional eye.

Note: Chapter Three

¹Brautigan's collection of short fiction, Revenge of the Lawn, brings together sixty-one stories written between 1962 and 1970. As one might expect, these stories proceed with a similar style, and often examine the same themes, as his longer fiction of that period. Many of the stories, periodically referred to in this dissertation in the course of dealing with the longer works, are essentially metafiction--"1/3, 1/3, 1/3" (19), "A Short Story About Contemporary Life in California" (26), "Pacific Radio Fire" (28), "An Unlimited Supply of 35 Millimeter Film" (48) and "The World War I Los Angeles Airplane" (170) are examples; others clearly show Brautigan's early use of some of the tenets of romance--"Revenge of the Lawn" (9), "1692 Cotton Mather Newsreel" (15), "Elmira" (30), "The Wild Birds of Heaven" (51), "Blackberry Motorist" (81), "The Post Offices of Eastern Oregon" (90), and "Forgiven" (165) are examples.

Chapter Four: of genre and genre

When The Hawklime Monster: A Gothic Western was published in 1974, as Keith Abbott notes (88), it was the first novel Richard Brautigan had written in seven years, and with its third person narration, its chronological plot and its dual genre classification, it seemed substantially different from previous work. In moving from California to the open spaces of Montana to join a community of writers that included Tom McGuane, William Hjortsberg and Jim Harrison--The Hawklime Monster is dedicated to "the Montana Gang,"--Brautigan had "vowed to write a novel each year, each novel of a different subgenre" (Boyer 10). Keith Abbott interprets this experimentation with genre as Brautigan's attempt to impress the critical public:

It became clear that Richard, with his belief in names--that giving something a label made it that thing--was trying to influence his critics.

... His unspoken hope was these [novels] would be seen as tours-de-force and he would be recognized as a virtuoso. (123)

Were Brautigan trying to impress the critics, the evidence of the contemporary reviews, as we have seen, shows that he failed miserably. Instead of such attempted pandering, it seems more likely that the "unspoken hope" of these genre experiments is embedded in the inherently self-conscious aims of Brautigan's own style of metafiction.

Linda Hutcheon, among others, strongly contends that a central feature of metafiction is its proclivity toward auto-criticism:

'Metafiction,' as it has now been named, is fiction about fiction--that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity. (1)

Generically, then, metafiction is an analytical form of writing that attends closely to the design of all fiction, to its own form and to that of others.

Brautigan's genre experiments, in spite of the motives that Abbott may see, critically and coherently represent an extension of his earlier work. Both Waugh and Hutcheon note that one frequent tendency of metafiction

is to make use of a wide range of popular fictional genres. Hutcheon comments:

... Metafiction parodies and imitates as a way to a new form which is just as serious and valid, as a synthesis, as the form it dialectically attempts to surpass. (25).

Following his foray into the world of romance in In Watermelon Sugar and The Abortion, and as a fundamental part of his metafiction, then, Brautigan's genre experiments explore the condition of popular forms of fiction by combining genres; in that critical coupling, those genres are pushed to new limits where, either they disintegrate or they expand to become something entirely new. In this process, the very operation of Brautigan's metafiction itself is illuminated and frequently altered. In effect, this chapter will argue that Brautigan's writings of the 1970s produce hybrid fictional genres, a kind of *meta-meta-fiction*.

i

In the end The Hawklime Monster: A Gothic Western is neither western nor gothic. It is a novel that is riddled with dichotomy, beginning with its title. "Hawk-

line" itself is an oppositional image, suggesting something that is both soaring and unencumbered as well as precise and directional, a blending of discordant inclinations. As Malcolm Bradbury says, "The Hawkline Monster (1974), sub-titled 'A Gothic Western,' merges two seemingly incompatible forms, the classic adventure Western and the Gothic novel of horrors, displacements, and estrangements..." (171). In terms of its structural geography, the centre-point of the novel is the town of Billy. Before Greer and Cameron arrive in Billy, the novel mostly resembles a typical western; after Billy, as the gunfighters move out into the Dead Hills toward the Hawkline mansion, the fictional tropes and schemes of the gothic novel begin to govern. Contrast is the dominant impression.

The surfaces of the western world and those of the gothic are distinctly inverse. When the gunfighters arrive at the Hawkline mansion, the intense summer heat turns to winter cold and the open flat plain becomes a towering "gothic" mansion: "... the house ... was a classic Victorian with great gables and stained glass across the tops of windows and turrets and balconies and red brick fireplaces and a huge porch all around ..." (Hawkline 58). The tropological sensibility of the fiction changes from the horizontal to the vertical; it

is as if one suddenly stopped watching a film such as Stagecoach (Ford 1939) to begin watching Batman (Burton 1989). Plain gives way to hierarchy. Wilderness and desert are replaced by society and, instead of entertaining themselves in a western whorehouse, Greer and Cameron drink tea in an elegant music room. The daylight world of the west becomes predominantly night in the gothic; the showdown with the villain occurs at midnight, not high noon, and the weapon used is a glass of whiskey from a cut-glass decanter, not a revolver. These transformations noticeably affect the characters. In the gothic world, Greer and Cameron stop being deadly gunfighters and become something more akin to sleuths; their intellectual rather than physical abilities are called upon to defeat the villain. Magic Child, who as an Indian maiden fits quite nicely into the imagery of the wild west, simply disappears in the gothic world:

Magic Child was becoming Miss Hawklane right in front of Greer and Cameron's eyes. ...

... [Greer] suddenly realized that Magic Child was going to die shortly in that kitchen and a second Miss Hawklane would be born and then there would be two Miss Hawklanes and you wouldn't be able to tell the difference between them. (Hawklane 76-77)

In manipulating the common motifs of each genre, Brautigan populates each fictional world with its own appropriate set of minor characters. Jack Williams of the west, for instance, is a tough but honest, Matt Dillon-like sheriff; later, he is displaced in the fiction by Mr. Morgan, the Hawklime's butler, "an old giant" (Hawklime 95) who once worked in a circus. Their difference is defined by the region of the text, by the genre, in which they are found. In this regard, Chénétier argues that, ultimately, the two genres combined in this novel are so similar in substance and form they do not essentially differ as fictions: he sees the gothic transformation of the Hawklime sisters, and the gunfighters as well, as inevitable and appropriate:

... in the gothic world of doubles the two [sisters] are indistinguishable. By the same token, save for a few distinct traits, the two killers could well be brothers. (57)

Gordon Slethaug, in interpreting The Hawklime Monster as a fantasy that assiduously disavows the human ability to escape its world of concrete reality, suggests that the western world portrayed in Brautigan's book does not entirely align itself with the nature of the traditional western novel:

Indeed, book 1 might well be considered a "liberated western," for the heroes and heroines relish sexuality; ironically, in this topsy-turvy western it is mainly the women who do the seducing, suggesting an inversion of the conventional roles of men and women. (140)

What Slethaug fails to understand, however, is that The Hawkline Monster corresponds not so much to the tradition of the literary western as it does to the tradition of the film western and, in particular, to the film western of Brautigan's time.

The western of popular fiction genealogically dates back through work by writers including Louis L'Amour, Zane Grey, Owen Wister, and Bret Harte, with several works by Stephen Crane, Mark Twain, James Fenimore Cooper, and even Crèvecoeur being influential as well. Wister's The Virginian is probably the novel that synthesized, if it did not create, the formula of the popular western and it is interesting that The Hawkline Monster is set in 1902, the date when Wister's stereotypical work was published. As Edward Foster notes (106), Edwin S. Porter's The Great Train Robbery (1903) was also released at this time, a film which is not only the first western movie, but in David Cook's view, marked "the beginning of a truly cinematic narrative language.

because it posited that the basic signifying unit of film--the basic unit of cinematic meaning--was not the scene--... but rather the *shot* ..." (24). For Brautigan, a time which marks the twin births of both the popular western and the language of film is a germane setting in which to locate his experimental novel. In effect, much of his fiction, especially in the genre works of the 1970s, seems composed more of shots than scenes.

Brautigan himself was much influenced by film. In the early seventies he co-habited with Siew-Hwa Beh, who authored a book on women's writing in film and fostered a serious interest for Brautigan in film noir (Abbott 88). Rancho Deluxe (Perry 1975), the western written by Tom McGuane about a pair of charminely unsuccessful contemporary cowboys, was shot near Paradise Valley, Montana, where Brautigan lived, and The Hawkline Monster was optioned by Hollywood with Brautigan writing the screenplay. Even before the seventies though, Brautigan was an inveterate movie goer and, as noted, images of film and film personalities are frequent motifs in his work--the Missouri River, for instance, transforms in a child's imagination to become a Deanna Durbin movie and a central metaphor for change in Trout Fishing in America (146) and reference to such film personalities as Marilyn Monroe and Jane Fonda is common in Revenge of the Lawn

and other writings. Interestingly, as indicated in an early interview by Bruce Cook, Brautigan even linked his method of composition to film:

I get it down as fast as possible. ... and on an electric typewriter, 100 words per minute. I can't spend time on character delineation and situation. I just let it come out. And when it doesn't want to come, I don't sit around and stare at the typewriter or anything. I just go down and see about two or three movies--the worse they are the better. And for some reason that loosens me up and gets things going again. That's what I do when I'm stuck. (208)

The filmic influence that defines the west of The Hawkline Monster is not so much that of Hollywood's traditional mythopoeic westerns, such as Ford's Stagecoach (1939) or Zinnemann's High Noon (1952) or Stevens' Shane (1953), but the more contemporary American western of the sixties and early seventies, a revisionist form of western. Such films as The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (Ford 1962), Cheyenne Autumn (Ford 1964), The Shooting (Hellman 1967), The Wild Bunch (Peckinpah 1969), Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (Hill 1969), Little Big Man (Penn 1970), McCabe and Mrs Miller (Altman 1971), and Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid (Peckinpah 1973) seem closest to the ambience of The Hawkline Monster. These

are all lyrical western films that self-consciously contemplate the myth and the fate of the west, and perhaps of the western. In addition to being self-reflective, these films also frequently manipulate traditional techniques of film narrative, in effect, adopting a somewhat metafictional approach. The editing of The Shooting continually undercuts the audience's expectations--for example, what appear to be long shots turn out to be close ups, what seems to be the smashing of a gunfighter's skull is actually the crushing of his hand, and so on. Similarly, the lack of a musical sound track, the use of stills and sepia, and the camouflaging of almost all shots through dust or bushes or other obstacles make the cinematography of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid as compelling as the story. Most of these contemporary westerns are set in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century at a time when the wild west is in its death throes, law books and barbed wire are signalling the end of the open prairies and its codes of behaviour. In The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, for example, the arrival of a judiciary society signals the end for John Wayne, the prototypical cowboy hero, who unheroically wins a gunfight at midnight by shooting Liberty in the back; Ford's last shot of Wayne has the hero drunkenly stumble off screen left while the camera

focuses on a scene concerning matters of legislation and law. Films such as The Wild Bunch, Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid are elegies to the death of the west and the individualism it fostered; in each, the force of modern civilization is casting its pall of conformity over all. That pall, of course, is the same "sivilization" that sends Huck Finn lighting out for the "Territory" and which drives Cooper's Hawk-eye farther and farther westward to his lonesome death on the prairie. Cheyenne Autumn, Little Big Man and McCabe and Mrs Miller, which is also set in 1902, the same year as The Hawkline Monster, pejoratively probe the myths of the west by foregrounding issues not often uncovered in previous westerns--the genocidal betrayal of the Indian, the ironic madness of the so-called civilized world of law and order, as represented by men like Custer, the anti-heroism of McCabe's north-western world, the seamy inhumanity of its con-games, its whores and its drugs. Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid even ends with an inverted allusion to the mythic Shane as a young boy runs after Garrett the gunfighter-hero, not to call him back, but to throw stones at him. Many of the western films of the 1960s, then, call into question the very assumptions on which the genre was built. The rugged heroism of the cowboys, the codes of frontier

justice by which they lived, the advent of law and order on the prairies, the value system which the westering spirit engendered in America as outlined in such documents as Turner's influential "Frontier Thesis"--a mirror is held to all of these, and like the mirror Pat Garrett shoots at the end of Peckinpah's Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid, it is a mirror that is inevitably shattered. In the wake of these iconoclastic films that reduced its myths to shards, the virtual disappearance of the Hollywood western after the early seventies, at least for a time, is understandable. Arguably, as happens in this novel, it has been predominantly displaced by the gothic, John Wayne has given way to Batman or Darkman, Bonanza has been replaced by the grotesquerie of America's Most Wanted or Unsolved Mysteries.

Underlying The Hawklime Monster then is a genre of western that has already announced the death of its own postulates and there are indications of this death from the outset of the novel. It begins in the summer of 1902 in Hawaii where Greer and Cameron fail in their attempt to kill a man ostensibly because he is teaching his son how to ride a horse and because his wife calls him in to dinner. In reading the novel as an allegory of the failure of the "American Dream," Lonnie Willis suggests that this Hawaiian location is an "Eden-like 'Garden of

Plenty'" and that Brautigan's cowboys exist "as figures from an authentic American West that stands in opposition to the mythic West" (42) and are obviously misplaced there:

Therefore, they are anachronisms in the garden, out of place in time also, and they can only take flight back into the reality of America. ... Like the woman in white who calls to her cowboys, Brautigan insists, the dream and the myth beckoned Americans into the big white house of illusion; the reality of America is to be revealed back in the Hawklime mansion. (42)

As usual in Brautigan, though, to argue that his fiction is saying absolutely one thing or another about some external theme, such as the failure of the American Dream (Willis) or the impossibility of human escapism (Slethaug), is to have said not quite enough. As in his other works, Brautigan's The Hawklime Monster seems more concerned about its self-created inner worlds than about the outer cosmos. It sheds more light on itself as a form of fiction perhaps than it does on the problems, or the verities, of the world.

From its out-of-joint beginnings in an Hawaiian pineapple field, the world of the west that Brautigan portrays in The Hawklime Monster seems strained and on the verge of collapse. Cameron, killer that he is,

unfathomably counts things, Magic Child, the Indian maiden, is almost absurdly too free with her favours, a deputy sheriff that Greer and Cameron shoot ten times will not die until they stop shooting him, a hanged man refuses to believe that he is dead, the barbed-wire drummer is inexplicably named Marvin Cora Jones, the matronly Widow Jane, although a good cook, does not exactly behave according to normal social custom, the people in Billy do not "give a shit" about their church graveyard, and Pills' horses are very strange including one that has a wooden duck's foot. From its beginning the sparse landscape and language of this western seem to be in a strained death agony:

... It was a three-hour ride to Miss Hawklime's house. The road was very bleak, wandering like the handwriting of a dying person over the hills.

There were no houses, no barns, no fences, no signs that human life had ever made its way this far except for the road which was barely legible. ...

Finally they came across something human. It was a grave. The grave was right beside the road. It was simply a pile of bleak rocks covered with vulture shit. There was a wooden cross at one end of the rocks. The grave was so close to the road that you almost had to ride around it.

"Well, at last we've got some company," Greer said. (Hawkline 52-54)

Like its cacographic road, the world of the west deteriorates and vanishes: "The road stopped like a dying man's signature on a last-minute will" (Hawkline 58). The rational, horizontal world of the western, where things that need to be said and done are clear and linear and can be counted, where dead men are dead, and a man is a man, and so on, is completely expropriated by the enigmatic, vertical world of gothic romance, with its many layers like the floors of a mansion, with its mirrors and shadows and monsters. As the narration suggests from its beginning, this western world no longer seems to hold itself together in the twentieth century, either in 1902 or in 1974 when the novel is being written. The narration gives up on its western motifs and settles in to relate "the Fall of the House of Hawkline," as Chénétier labels it (57). The point of this transformation may be, not so much as Chénétier claims, that "nothing ... really differs between the western and the gothic" (58) but rather that, the singular, horizontal language of the western no longer suffices in a post-Freudian twentieth century, and a post-1960s America. The Interpretation of Dreams, after all, is published in 1900, two years before the action of

The Hawkline Monster, and the Viet Nam war, race riots and the political doublespeak of the 1960s wove a complex paranoiac tapestry about all utterance; possibly "the dark places of psychology" (Woolf 156) suggested by the nature of gothic fiction are more applicable to the times. The first half of The Hawkline Monster, then, presents a text whose own language seems unable to sustain it. Like the road the gunfighters follow, its language is "barely legible" (52). As a fiction, it is as much a post-mortem of its own systems as it is a conventional western. This is not simply to suggest, of course, that The Hawkline Monster rejects the genre of the western to embrace that of the gothic; Brautigan's metafiction is not ultimately concerned with, nor would it allow, such a rudimentary resolution. If anything, concerns with the limitations of genre and language intensify in the Hawkline's mansion.

The purpose of the gunfighters' journey to the Hawkline Mansion is to destroy the evil created by Professor Hawkline. Like many scientists before and after, in his attempt to improve humankind Professor Hawkline creates a monster: "Our father told us when The Chemicals were completed that the answer to the ultimate problem facing mankind would be solved" (Hawkline 69). The origin of Hawkline's Chemicals is noteworthy:

The Chemicals that resided in the jar were a combination of hundreds of things from all over the world. Some of The Chemicals were ancient and very difficult to obtain. There were a few drops of something from an Egyptian pyramid dating from the year 3000 B.C.

There were distillates from the jungles of South America and drops of things from plants that grew near the snowline in the Himalayas.

Ancient China, Rome and Greece had contributed things, too, that had found their way into the jar. Witchcraft and modern science, the newest of discoveries, had also contributed to the contents of the jar. There was even something that was reputed to have come all the way from Atlantis. (Hawklins 111)

Although Willis sees this combination of Chemicals as an allegory of the "elements that comprise the American experiment in democracy with its borrowings from many national cultures" (45), these Chemicals also depict the typical fabulous sources in exotica and Orientalism of most gothic literature. In the same manner that Sterne in 1770 sought to probe and disassemble many of the established assumptions about prose fiction and human behaviour with Tristram Shandy, the advent of gothicism

at that same time similarly challenged the Lockean empiricism which insisted that all human experience was explicable and controllable and produced a genre of literature that has been remarkably popular ever since. These "gothic Chemicals," then, are both the source and the target of the gunfighters' mission.

The Chemicals are nameless. In effect, the monster they create is a monster of language. It has the power to render the Hawklime females naked by simply uttering the word. After the butler dies, Cameron sarcastically comments: "You didn't think he was going to turn into a dwarf when he died, did you?" (Hawklime 119). Shortly thereafter, through the monster's linguistic trickery, the butler's corpse becomes a dwarf. The longer the characters remain in the mansion under the influence of the monster, the more difficult rational discourse becomes. Topics of conversation are repeated without realization (91), dialogue is mundane and trivialized (94), patterns of thought are disrupted (112), recognition and memory are altered (123), and, like some refugees from Beckett, characters say they will do one thing and then do something different, or do nothing (104, 136). Even the narrative itself seems to fall under the Lethean spell of the monster and, at times, mechanically has to force itself on: "Anyway: on with the

story ..." (Hawklime 88). Toward the end, the monster decides to enslave all of the characters as its own personal shadows and the true nature of its linguistic identity is revealed:

The Hawklime Monster was basking in confidence as it drifted and flowed down the stairs. What did it need to worry about because after all, did it not have the power to change objects and thoughts into whatever form amused it? (Hawklime 165-166)

That power "to change objects and thoughts" is the power of naming, the power of language that the monster exerts over all who come under its influence. Thus Greer and Cameron, one says little, the other counts, are chosen to destroy this monster which, out of control, threatens to enslave their world, to reduce its inhabitants to silent, role-playing shadows. Similar to the western world of the first half of the novel, or the sugary community of iDEATH, or the entombed library of The Abortion, this gothic world unveils itself as one which endangers human discourse. It offers a language monster which destroys language. Appropriately, the heroes chosen to conquer this beast are ones who seem to use language minimally.

Chénetier reads The Hawklime Monster as an allegory about the destiny of the text to embrace "fixity and impotence" (64). Professor Hawklime is one who

experiments with language, "who hawks lines about" (61), and is nearly destroyed by its uncontrollable poetic urges:

... Readers and characters alike become victims of imagination and fantasy, who can themselves only follow and 'perform the perfunctory tasks of a shadow.' ... the verbal utilitarianism of discourse is radically questioned and disrupted by the subversive power of the poetic imagination. (62)

Chénetier concludes that, since a "free-roving text" causes too much damage, narration, reason and the traditional laws of genre all work toward the "text's disappearance":

When language threatens to escape all control, the killers must move in, to perform an act of public safety, restoring everything to 'normal'. (63)

The opposite of what Chénetier says seems just as likely. The true monster of this gothic mansion of fiction is its desire to subjugate, to mollify all of its words so that they are the same, safe, controlled, shadowy duplicates of all that once was new. The true monster is not the ability of language to "escape all control," as Chénetier argues, but the temptation of language in the context of its genre to make all things conform to the patterns of its genre consciousness. Like the repetitive, obsessive

habits that restrict and destroy so many of the characters encountered in Brautigan's earlier fiction, genre fiction such as the western or the gothic, in following singular, recitative formulae, can come to operate in the same tautologically deadening way. Writings within the genre formula can assume the routine of habitual, meaningless ritual, becoming mere shadows of the substance they were once intended to be.

With the destruction of the monster, the novel rapidly dissolves. The mission has been accomplished. The potential fictional limitations inherent in the western and the gothic have been exposed and the ending is perfunctory. Like a film montage, the dénouement reveals the future histories of the characters who are now freed from the confines of their genre-worlds into an everyday reality and they succumb to its everyday fate. Professor Hawklane gives up chemistry and permanently returns to the East. His daughters acquire names, Susan and Jane; one is killed in an automobile accident, the other in the Russian Revolution. Greer winds up with religious inclinations in a Wyoming prison and, appropriately perhaps, Cameron goes to Hollywood to become a "successful movie producer" (Hawklane 187). Their fates may seem banal but they are far more diverse

and authentic than their previous fiction, western or gothic, would have allowed

At the end, then, The Hawklime Monster becomes neither gothic nor western. In this way this text illustrates for Brautigan the difficulty these genres face in functioning independently as fictions in a contemporary literary world. As Sukenick says of such fictions: "The form of the traditional novel is a metaphor for a society that no longer exists" (Klinkowitz Life 26). As suggested by his earlier work, for Brautigan art and life come into peril when they encounter any situation that delimits their possibilities, their fluidity. As the Kool-Aid Wino or the people of iDEATH petrify their worlds in unchanging ritual and conformity, so it would seem that a fiction that has its parameters rigidly defined in the language or codes of a certain time or a certain genre may suffer the same fate. That way lies impotence, statues, abortion. Language and the life and the fiction it spawns must ever change or it will become a frozen shadow of the force it created, transformed into something as lifeless and meaningless as an elephant foot umbrella stand. In iDEATH, there are no statues of trout or their streams; by the end of The Hawklime Monster, the monster has become multi-faceted blue diamonds. When the text

itself, under a metafictional sensibility, is the dominant reality, no fixed or terrible monster is allowed to ensconce itself. The text cannot become the sort of diminished western or gothic fodder that lines the bookshelves of the local Coles, descending in artistic credibility to the status of a B Western, or becoming one of Hollywood's many inept versions of a Poe story, endlessly seen on late night television and endlessly starring Vincent Price. By fusing genres and by exposing those genres in self-reflexive metafiction, The Hawklime Monster emerges as an intriguing fiction and easily escapes the morass of conformity into which most popular westerns and gothic tales tumble.

As a metafictional experiment in mixed genre, then, The Hawklime Monster is in many ways a remarkable success. It is an imaginative and extremely humorous piece of fiction which quite effectively melds the language and landscapes of two seemingly incompatible forms. For Brautigan, it must have confirmed what he had sensed about the fictional possibilities and problems of genre in The Abortion and most certainly provided another vista for the metafictional eye he had opened in his very earliest writing. Like Professor Hawklime in the early stages of his experimentation, it assuredly encouraged him to further his examination in these directions;

possibly he was aware of the monsters he might release, possibly not. Two other genres of the world of popular fiction--the erotic novel and the mystery novel--were his next vehicles of exploration.

ii

"And nothing will come of anything," Bob said.

(Willard 25)

Willard and His Bowling Trophies is a book of fragments about fragments. In effect, while The Hawkline Monster contains many filmic associations, the splintered style of Willard and His Bowling Trophies exhibits an even more acute fragmentation, of the sort that one might associate with television. It consists of seventy-one "chapters," each with a title that proleptically heralds its contents. These "chapters" are generally short, one consists of only a single line, and more closely resemble a sequence of shots or short takes that one might find in a film or a television show than the typical scenes of a play or novel. A typical example occurs between pages 42 and 49 where four short sequential "chapters" quickly

shift among events in each of the four main "plots" of the fiction, beginning with Bob and Constance, then shifting to John and Patricia, then to the Logan brothers and, finally, to Willard. The breaks or cuts between such "chapters" intentionally divide episodes and produce a disjointed, fragmentary quality in the action of the novel. This fragmentation alternatively engenders a sense of suspenseful tension and a sense of distortion. The actions and thoughts of characters are frequently cut off to be continued several pages later, often precisely from the point where the break occurred. In one situation, for example, the Logan brothers are waiting for a crucial telephone call. The phone finally rings, like a sound edit in a film, and the chapter ends:

RRRRRRRRRIIIIIIIIIINNNNNNNNNNGGGGGGGGGG

The telephone rang.

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (Willard 100)

The next "chapter" cuts to a discussion between Bob and Constance, the following "chapter" cuts back to the telephone ringing with the Logan brothers frozen watching it, and then, only after two more "chapters" are spliced in, is the telephone answered; and after all that, it is a wrong number. By disrupting its own narrative progress, Willard and His Bowling Trophies creates its own curious or "perverse" momentum, its very divisions

producing an impetus for an irresistible narrative propulsion. Like geometric fractals, the fragments of this fictional world contain a self-similarity such that, in spite of the divisive cuts, a distinctive and unmistakable unity exists. That unity is so pervasive that even isolated minor characters such as the Logan sisters, who are always absent doing "what they had done seven times before" (Willard 70), or Mr. Logan with his transmission obsession, or even Greta Garbo the loner, are recognizable as belonging to this text. Like the grammar of language itself, or again, like fractal generation, the structural development of Willard and His Bowling Trophies is unpredictable but absolutely determined. Such a pattern resolutely defies succumbing to the deadening habits that Brautigan may have perceived in ordinary formula fiction but, ultimately, such a pattern may also undercut the postulates of the crime-mystery and pornographic genres that Willard and His Bowling Trophies sets out to combine. In the end, as Bob's favourite epigram suggests, "nothing [may] come of anything."

The novel essentially consists of four "plots" or "stories" edited into one whole. The events of the fiction actually take place in the space of three hours one autumn evening in San Francisco, although flashbacks

and characters' recollections fill in a great deal of its history. One "plot" concerns Bob and Constance who, after the reciprocal contraction of venereal warts, have reverted to an unhappy form of sadomasochistic love-making disparagingly referred to as "Constance and Bob's fourth-rate theater of sadism and despair" (Willard 17). Another "plot" concerns the Logan brothers who come home one night to find that the only things which they value in the world, their bowling trophies, have been stolen; they set out on an increasingly violent quest to retrieve them. A third "story" concerns John and Patricia, a film-maker and a Spanish teacher, respectively, who live in the apartment downstairs from Bob and Constance. In the course of the novel, and, we are led to understand, it is the pattern of their lives, they come home from watching a Greta Garbo film, eat, make love, and fall asleep watching Johnny Carson. The other "plot" of this fiction involves Willard.

Although Suzanne Sweatt suggests that Willard is a symbol which cannot be absolutely explained but has connections with "war and violence" (140), a more replete understanding of the title character in this novel is necessary. To begin with, as Abbott notes, Willard was real. Originally made by a friend of Brautigan's, and traded back and forth as a standing joke with another

friend, it was a "goofy-looking papier mâché bird. About four feet high and painted red, white, orange and black. Willard has big saucer eyes, a huge beak and a round pot-bellied body" (Abbott 17). Brautigan subtly changes the Willard that appears in the novel; it has a black body which is "covered with a strange red, white and blue design like nothing you've ever seen before" (Willard 26) and is guardian over "fifty or so bowling trophies" (Willard 71). That "nothing you've ever seen before" is probably the American flag or, at least, a fragmented version of it. Like the melting pot of Chemicals in Professor Hawklime's experiment or the quest for trout fishing in America, Willard, in red, white and blue, guarding fifty trophies, is a plausible symbol of what Brautigan sees as contemporary America, indifferent, ineffectual, its values lost or distorted. Willard is born in an artist's dream, "a dream that was composed of miniature silver and gold temples built but never used and waiting for a religion" (Willard 45). That artist, "in his late thirties [after] a very fucked-up life with many bad love affairs and much torment" (Willard 45), is no doubt Brautigan's coy self-portrait, but Willard's conception is also a reasonable image of the optimism associated with the birth of America, akin to that inherent in Winthrop's "city upon a hill" or Jefferson's

agrarian republic. It even recalls the symbolic architectural plans of Latrobe and Jefferson for Washington, D. C. Thus it is fitting, in what initially seems to be a non sequitur in the narrative, that the ghost of Mathew Brady appears and photographs Willard. Brady disappears "... 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" (Willard 110). Suitably, the bird is imaged as "Saint Willard," resolutely faithful to his bowling trophies, an immortal being who "always stayed the same" (Willard 27):

There were also two chairs and a couch, a phonograph and a television set that didn't work in the room, but Willard and his bowling trophies made them seem almost invisible as if the room were void of everything except Willard and trophies. (Willard 71)

Like the America that Brautigan images as "often only a place in the mind" (Trout 116), Willard is seen by different people in different ways. He is likened to an enigmatic piece of art:

The ability of Willard's face to change had something to do with the way the artist had created Willard after waking from his dream.

Willard was a kind of bird *Mona Lisa*. (Willard 84)

At one point, when John and Patricia return to their apartment, Willard appears to them "like a dwarf tree:"

Willard looked curious. Sometimes the expression on Willard's face would change. He was artfully constructed. (Willard 43)

In itself, Willard is an onlooker, one who is never directly involved in the action; he watches over all like some avian god made of papier mâché. He guards the bowling trophies, unattached and independent and apparently incapable of the folly that exists around him in the world of the Logans and the world of the apartment building in which Bob and John and Constance and Patricia live. His presence makes those characters along with the material objects of his room "almost invisible" (Willard 71).

The trophies, themselves, "large elaborate ones like miniature bowling altars and small ones like ikons" (Willard 32), not only contain a religiosity for "Saint Willard" but for the Logans, as well, who piously quest for them as if they were a grail. Before the theft, the

Logan brothers were "wholesome all-American boys" (Willard 27): "They were honest and looked up to as heroes, and all the mothers in town wanted their sons to grow up and be like the Logan brothers and be champion bowlers" (Willard 129). For the Logans bowling becomes in Freud's sense a repressive displacement for emotional development, for sexual relationships, for life itself:

By the time the Logan brothers were in their middle twenties, they had accumulated over fifty bowling trophies. They continued living in their parents' house and found various jobs in town and never went out with girls and devoted themselves like monks to bowling and like bankers to the gathering of trophies. (Willard 50)

After their trophies are stolen, life for the Logans has no progression, no meaning--one paces, one reads advertisements in comic books, one drinks beer. Collectively, they become an anti-life force, the Five-Gallon Gang who, like Bonnie and Clyde or Ma Barker's family, randomly murder their way across America.

For other characters in the novel, the bowling trophies and Willard exist as unusual curiosities:

Strangers would come into the room and say, "My God, what's that?" pointing at Willard and his bowling trophies.

"That's Willard and his bowling trophies." was always the reply.

"Willard and his what?"

"Bowling trophies."

"You mean bowling trophies?"

"Yeah, bowling trophies."

"What's he doing with them?"

"Why not?" (Willard 71-72)

Bob continually, singularly, asks John one question about the trophies:

"Where did you get these bowling trophies?" Bob asked for the hundredth or was it the thousandth time? It was his favourite question to ask over and over again. (Willard 33)

Brautigan seems to suggest that bowling, like most sport in America, is often accorded an absurdly high status and garners ridiculously high rewards. Ironically, although inherently valueless, these bowling trophies contain a private meaning to the person who views or possesses them. In the case of the Logans, it is a meaning compelling enough for murder. Such is the idiosyncratic significance of the trophies, and of Willard who guards them, and of America itself whom Willard symbolizes. In many ways, all of the characters in this novel resemble the monomaniacal bowling Logans: all are significantly

limited by the personal icons they establish, by the trophies they find and worship. They have shaped papier mâché gods for themselves and idolize them with a vengeance. Such is the nature of their egocentric religions, a word, it is worth noting, which comes from the Latin, religare, meaning to bind; it is the force that impels these characters and at the same time restrains them. For Brautigan, in their zealous religiosity for their egotistic symbols, they are America itself.

Bob and Constance lead banal lives, searching to intensify their love with sado-masochism while unable even to communicate. Constance is a failed novelist who is gagged and silent for much of the novel; when she does speak, she has no understanding and little sympathy for Bob and his inept fascination with bondage and The Greek Anthology. Bob, forgetful and self-absorbed, is a failure at everything from tying knots to conversing with his neighbour. Their "small time perversion" (Willard 22) acts only as a futile attempt to revivify lives that are diseased and decayed. The other couple in the building, John and Patricia, live an even more mundane and predictable existence--working, eating, going to Garbo movies, making love, watching Johnny Carson each night. James Mellard, reading the novel as a parody of

pornography, argues that John and Patricia have a more imaginative life and this is what saves them:

Imagination and playfulness are what doom the first couple and the three desperate Logan brothers, for they have neither, and save the second married couple, for they have both. Imagination, then, Brautigan tells us in one crucial section of this novel, is what moves and animates us and the world.

(148)

In effect, what actually saves John and Patricia, the switching of apartment numbers, seems to be a twist of fate more than an act of imagination. Imagination, in Brautigan, is often not enough; imagination must be ongoing and fluid and Willard and His Bowling Trophies portrays a contemporary America that is immobilized and debilitated by its fragmented and unimaginative and habitual obsessions with such things as film and television and sport and pornography. In the context of such a splintered world, and through its metafictional capacity to cast a critical eye on its own techniques, Willard and His Bowling Trophies seems to scrutinize, if not distrust, the authenticity of the very genres, crime-mystery and pornography, that it has adopted. In fact, as the fiction develops, Bob's interests turn from sexuality toward textuality.

Bob becomes as obsessively involved with The Greek Anthology as he is with sado-masochism and the importance of The Greek Anthology to Willard and His Bowling Trophies becomes increasingly notable. The epigram of the novel is from The Greek Anthology, "The dice of Love are madresses and melees." This reference to the throwing of dice foreshadows the multifarious role that fate takes in the narrative, from the Logans going to a drive-in movie, which they think is about bowling, on the night when their trophies are stolen to John's accidental discovery of those portentous laurels to Constance's contraction of venereal disease to John's switching of apartment numbers, a final joke that carries with it epic consequences, the deaths of Bob and Constance. The Greek Anthology itself, which Brautigan admired and "recommended for models of brevity and emotional concision" (Abbott 32), is a collection of fragments, brief glimpses by and about persons long dead. The "Question and Answer" Epilogue which concludes Willard and His Bowling Trophies even stylistically echoes the method of several of the Anthology's epigrams. At one point, Bob weeps for those Greeks of the Anthology:

He was thinking about people who lived in another time and were dead now and he grieved for them and

himself and the entire human condition: the past and future of it all. (Willard 28)

Like a palimpsest of the lost humanity that The Greek Anthology is, Willard and His Bowling Trophies acts as a contemporary "American Anthology," a portrait written in fragments about a world in fragments. And like so much of the material of The Greek Anthology, hovering over all of Willard and His Bowling Trophies there is a sense of fatalism and waste, a sense of the ultimate futility of human existence.

Brautigan's "American Anthology," then, is a collection of characters entrapped by their own singular visions much the same, Brautigan apparently suggests, as all people in all history have been, from those photographed by Mathew Brady to those represented in The Greek Anthology. The quest for bowling trophies, trivial sado-masochistic sex, or even addiction to Johnny Carson--all are activities that restrict these characters' vision and repress their potential to be complete human beings. Humans seek situations that bind them together--friendship, love, family, community, nationhood--and yet, ironically, perversely, are driven apart when they have achieved those relationships through idiosyncrasy, mean-spirited jokes, egocentricity, violence, civil war, even religion. Like the walls that

Robert Frost always saw humans building between themselves, the sado-masochistic love-making of Bob and Constance, where as lover she is bound and gagged as a captured enemy, is a remarkable symbol of humans together yet infinitely apart. Thus, the consequence of one person's autonomous actions on another constitutes a force that permeates this novel, fate. So when, at last, Bob potentially attains some insight into the human condition and some genuine feeling in weeping for the lost human beings of The Greek Anthology, recognizing that they and he are the same and that life is preciously ephemeral, the death-dealing force of fate enters his room shouting, "BOWLING TROPHY THIEVES DIE" (Willard 166), and extinguishes him. That Bob's ultimate insight is verified by the Logan brother's bullets is small consolation but a profound ironic reification of the impervious and often perverse mystery that life and art are. In this way, Willard and His Bowling Trophies operates as a tragic satire depicting the wasted lives of contemporary America; and as a metafiction, it questions the very genres it uses.

Jay Boyer sees Willard and His Bowling Trophies, subtitled "A Perverse Mystery," as dealing with "the power of the mind to disrupt our lives and lead us in directions that are not in our interest" (34) and he

interprets Brautigan's combination of thriller and erotic novel as an attempt to expose this theme: "... both subgenres concern a desire or obsession that reduces people to other than reasonable behavior, and isolates them from one another in ways they seem unable to avoid" (34). In the end all characters are isolated from each other and set apart from the world, "lost, perhaps irreconcilably, to their private visions and needs" (35). In their narrowest sense, both the crime-mystery novel (or thriller, as Boyer labels it) and the erotic novel work toward unveiling the enigmas, the possibilities, of human life. In the splintered contemporary America that Brautigan images, however, such a fictional task may be impossible. Brautigan's metafiction, which as a crime-mystery novel is structured in fragments and universally inhabited by incompetent, compulsive and unlikeable characters, prevents the development of any coherent sense of mystery. The mystery, the stealing of bowling trophies, is a petty crime at best and the fragmented arrangement of the fiction either gives the puzzle away--the reader knows where the missing trophies are--or it never reveals many of the other intriguing secrets it creates--one never discovers who stole them, or why, or how they came to be in the abandoned car in which John finds them. Similarly, the abrupt fragmentation, and the

pathetic inhabitants of the pornographic plot. Bob and Constance, never promote any satisfying notion of titillation or eroticism. Theirs is a "fourth-rate theater of sadism and despair" (Willard 17). Brautigan seems to suggest that these forms of the popular novel, like the perverse and repetitive acts of sex and violence they portray, may stifle rather than stimulate vision. Both Chénétier (67) and Abbott (163) comment on a circularity in phrase and image to be found in Brautigan's style, a methodology which impedes the narrative from acting in any linear fashion. Chénétier even suggests that Brautigan's work is "devoid of dramatic action" (71) and argues that Brautigan simultaneously advances and retards his stories: "Brautigan performs the role of the novelist, as a kind of act of 'good faith,' but he also undermines that role at the deepest level. Held in stasis, arbitrarily raising and denying promises and pleasures, his books end on exits rather than resolutions" (77-78). In this regard, no mystery can be solved, no orgasm can be reached and Willard and His Bowling Trophies, as a form of metafictional satire which portrays a fictional world whose fictions seem inept, inherently advances serious doubts about the relative viability of either of these genres. Nothing comes of anything.

In combining crime-mystery and erotic forms, Brautigan ironically, and intentionally, presents a fiction that invents as many problems as it solves. Specifically, it ends with a question: "What about the Logan sisters?" We are told to "Forget them" but other questions that arise are not so flippantly dismissed. There are obvious questions unanswered about the narrative--who stole the trophies and why, and what happens to the Logan brothers, do they search the downstairs apartment, find their trophies, and kill John and Patricia, as logic dictates they should, or does human logic truly govern their actions? And what will happen to Willard, will he be separated from his trophies, and so on? Many questions of a fictional context arise as well. The viability or relevance of certain genres in certain times, the confining restrictions that seem to be placed on fiction by genre, the ontological problems of developing any narrative in a contemporary consciousness seemingly ruled by fragments--all of these important issues are raised but remain relatively unanswered by the end of the novel. In this regard, as one might expect, Brautigan's next fiction, Sombrero Fallout, begins where Willard and His Bowling Trophies ends, and, in terms of its own imagery, proceeds

to turn much of that previous fiction inside out "like a reverse origami cradled on the abyss" (Sombrero 22).

iii

Marc Chénétier suggests that the essential "substance of Brautigan's work" is located in his concentration on specific moments of existence:

... instants, selected by will, or forced on the attention; anecdotes and vignettes; things or objects waiting, in the process of becoming; snapshots; epiphanies; concatenations. Duration is out of the question. Horizontality suggests the superficial and artificial, like metonymic echoes over the void. Only a vertical drilling down into the moment offers access, however problematic, to the truth of existence. (82)

Sombrero Fallout is constructed out of such "instants" as those Chénétier identifies. The first chapter of Sombrero Fallout begins with a story about a sombrero falling into a village but then the writer intercedes,

remembering a lost lover, and discards his text in despair:

He tore up the piece of paper that had everything that you have read here about the sombrero. He tore it up very carefully into many pieces and threw them on the floor.

He would start over again the next morning writing about something else that would have nothing to do with a sombrero falling out of the sky.

(Sombrero 13)

Sombrero Fallout, then, begins with its own destruction, its own abortion as a fiction. As the concluding events of both of the earlier genre novels, The Hawklime Monster and Willard and His Bowling Trophies, coincide to form finished narratives, so Sombrero Fallout moves immediately in an opposite direction, its narrative being torn apart and its author refusing to write it any farther, withdrawing his authorial presence. Sombrero Fallout, like an orphan, then, and an abused child at that, is abandoned in disunity, intentionally left to seek its own being rather than being crafted towards some recognizable form of consolidation:

He picked up the many torn pieces of paper about the sombrero and dropped them into an empty wastepaper basket which was dark and totally

bottomless, but the pieces of white paper miraculously found a bottom and lay upon it glowing faintly upward like a reverse origami cradled on the abyss. (Sombrero 22)

This novel, then, is a combination of "instants," a "reverse origami" structured not as a reflection of some decorative form of fictional reality shaped by an author's hand but as an inversion of that process. In that inversion, Brautigan will probe in a new fashion the folds that comprise the "origami" of fiction and of the reality with which it contends. And so, in addressing such issues as the relationship between the author and his text and the correlation between that text and the reality it reveals, Sombrero Fallout acts in direct response to many of the unanswered issues raised by the end of Willard and His Bowling Trophies.

Similar to the four "plots" that structure the narrative of Willard and His Bowling Trophies, three "plots" are intertwined throughout Sombrero Fallout although they are less connected than in Willard. In one storyline, between 10:15 and 11:15 in the evening a depressed and obsessive writer, who is a "very well-known American humorist" (Sombrero 13), laments his broken love affair with a Japanese woman, Yukiko, visits his refrigerator, phones a friend, and loses and finds a

strand of the woman's hair which he iconizes as a "dominant theme in his grief" (Sombrero 37). In a second plot, Yukiko sleeps and dreams of her dead father while her cat stops purring, leaves her bedroom and later returns. And as mentioned, in his wastepaper basket the writer's discarded manuscript provides the third plot by writing itself, beginning with the mysterious arrival of a black sombrero in a village and rapidly spinning outward into an elaborate story of violence, riot and national disaster. What in Willard and His Bowling Trophies was a world of fragments and fragmentary people is in Sombrero Fallout a fragmented literary landscape of shredded manuscripts, unremembered dreams and essentially insignificant idiosyncratic icons.

The text of Sombrero Fallout begins with a black sombrero:

A sombrero fell out of the sky and landed on the Main Street of town in front of the mayor, his cousin and a person out of work. (Sombrero 11)

Although Boyer likens this occurrence to the "well-worn plot of science fiction--a flying saucer from outerspace comes to earth and sends a community into panic" (35), this opening more closely resembles that of Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, one of the earliest gothic novels in English. Walpole's novel begins with a huge helmet

mysteriously falling out of the sky to crush Conrad, the son of the usurper Manfred. This is the first of many supernatural events which create great turmoil and eventually bring about the downfall of Manfred and the restoration to the throne of the rightful ruler, Theodore. Like The Castle of Otranto, the sombrero plot of Sombrero Fallout advances with many unlikely coincidences and strange twists of fate--the inexplicable arrival of the sombrero, the fatalistic struggle of the cousin and the unemployed man to impress the mayor, the accidental deaths of the entire police department, the chance presence of the ammunition train at the depot, the mid-air collision of the respective helicopters of the State Police Captain and the Governor. The sombrero plot generates itself at a rate that is as out of control as its own angry mob; from beginning to end it is pure story, never pausing to doubt or question its plausibility, and in that penchant it resembles the ceaseless narrative propulsion of many of the early gothic fictions. It is story and all story--the sort of writing, one supposes, a story would do if a story could write itself. Its events finally unfold with the harsh eye of Juvenalian satire--the crowd is mindless and obtuse and destructive for no reason, the Governor and the State Police Captain exterminate themselves racing

for public attention, and the irrepressible Norman Mail gallantly throws himself into the fray in order to further his media image. In the end, after the pointless slaughter, the president gives a famous speech, and the town is designated a national monument, making it a lucrative tourist attraction.

Countering this in terms of pace, the events which occur in the plot of the American humorist advance as slowly as the sombrero's incidents rush with speed. His life is frozen in a stasis of self-doubt and self-pity; he resembles the disconsolate Bob in Willard and His Bowling Trophies although he never attains even the small, if ironic, insight that Bob does:

Then he looked down at the torn pieces of paper at his feet. Why should a sombrero fall out of the sky? The torn pieces of paper would never be able to tell him. (Sombrero 17)

This humorist has little understanding of his art and, as he ironically realizes, "no sense of humor" (Sombrero 42). He is entirely absorbed by his egocentric grief. He despondently recalls his relationship with Yukiko, and the process renders him catatonic:

During the time that he was thinking about his hunger, he had forgotten about her. Then he thought about her and it was apocalyptic to his being. It

just took one simple thought of her to purge hunger instantly from his body and return him to a condition of total despair. (Sombrero 96)

The American humorist almost telephones Yukiko, then calls a former stewardess friend to make a date and then calls her back to cancel it. He then finds a long strand of Yukiko's hair, loses it, and desperately searches until he finds it again: "... he sat there holding a strand of her hair, staring at it like a madman" (Sombrero 159). His is a "rollercoaster mind" (Sombrero 81), moving at great speeds but always attached to a structure that enables it only to re-enact itself over and over. An aborted manuscript, one suspects, is the best that he will ever do. The story of the American humorist ends with him composing a terrible Country and Western song for his lost love:

He started singing the song aloud to himself:

"She's my little lady from Japan,"

holding one long strand of black hair in his hand.

(Sombrero 187)

There is a definite contrast, then, between the paralysis of the humorist's story and the non-stop action of the sombrero plot; in effect, however, like the library and Tijuana of The Abortion, both offer non-productive worlds of delusion and death and neither

offers a satisfying alternative for art or life. The wastebasket story, after all, is a discarded product of the humorist's morbid consciousness--the two plots are mirror images made from shattered glass. They are tragic satire. The story of Yukiko is different, however.

While the American humorist cannot sleep, Yukiko sleeps through the entire novel. We learn that during her relationship with him, it is Yukiko's "security and mental stability" that constantly fed "his insecurity and neurosis" (Sombrero 35). Their first love-making is imaged as a funeral for the humorist:

His own funeral flashed across his mind.

It would be a nice one.

He saw this beautiful Japanese woman at the funeral, wearing a veil that matched her eyes.

She was walking in front of his coffin as it was being carried to the grave. She moved in perfect rhythm with the pallbearers and the coffin. His funeral flowed like a river into eternity.

There was no stopping.

They moved past his grave.

They did not stop for that open hole.

They continued on with her leading the way forever. (Sombrero 59)

The American humorist, in effect, is a corpse after his relationship with Yukiko but it is a death of his own making. While she leaves to pursue her life, he entombs himself in his remorse, in the meditation of lost and found hairs. Ironically, even in sleep Yukiko has a more vital life than the humorist does while he is awake. In her state of sleep, Yukiko surrenders control. In abandoning the obsessive ego, she gains understanding and vision and attains a condition of mind that represents for Brautigan another image, in its fluidity and flexibility, of the ideal possibility toward which life and art must aspire. It is a life that accepts its mobility among "instants."

As she sleeps Yukiko dreams:

She had a small dream about her childhood. It was a dream that she would not remember when she woke up in the morning nor would she ever remember it.

It was gone forever.

It was actually gone as she dreamt it.

It erased itself as it happened. (Sombrero 18)

Yukiko's dream masks the diaphanous guise that all fiction wears for Brautigan, disappearing in its becoming (Abbott 29). The plots of her dreaming continually shift. She dreams of walking in a warm autumn rain in Kyoto and then of walking in a spring rain in Seattle.

The presence of her father, who committed suicide with a letter opener many years before when he discovered her mother's unfaithfulness, infiltrates each dream in a curious inverse way: "He was everything in the dream that you couldn't see" (Sombrero 142). An umbrella given to her by her father protects Yukiko from the Seattle rain and she imagines her father still to be alive: "He had not killed himself and there was no stepfather calling her 'China Doll'" (Sombrero 162). During her last appearance in the novel, Yukiko's dream significantly changes:

Then she took an omnipotent view of the dream. She went from first person singular to third person. It was as if she were sitting in a theater, looking at a movie of her dream. ...

... Then her father who was alive and everything that you couldn't see in the dream changed into being dead. He was dead now but you still couldn't see him.

His death was now everything that you couldn't see in the dream, but it didn't make her unhappy. His death was just there. It was a fact. (Sombrero 184-185)

In the same way that the break-up with the humorist does not destroy her life, so the change of her father does

not shatter Yukiko's dream. Her father's death is a thing that she accepts as fact; it is an instant of life but not life itself. In marked contrast to the life of the American humorist in which each event, each hair, is scrutinized to the point of stasis, Yukiko's dream state is a condition which erases itself as soon as it is created. For her, death, change, is taken in stride as it must be--such is "a fact" of existence. To be unable to accept such change, as the humorist cannot, as Yukiko's father did not, as so many characters in Brautigan do not, is a form of suicide.

Sombrero Fallout depicts three alternatives. The American humorist, in clinging to an event of his past, paralyzes himself and, at the end in his feeble attempt to mythologize his love for Yukiko in a Country and Western song, he pathetically parodies his art and himself. In the wastebasket, the stampeding sombrero tale leaves no space or time for anything but events, piled so quickly one upon another that all becomes a somewhat meaningless blur. Satirically, tragic violence becomes humorous like scenes of slapstick in a Three Stooges' comedy. Yukiko's dream, peaceful and meditative, emerges as the best alternative by far. She lives in a chaotic world, working with "psychologically disturbed people, suicide attempts, nervous breakdowns or

just plain crazy" (Sombrero 81), and living with the trauma of her father's suicide, the marriage of her mother to a disliked stepfather, and the nasty break-up with the American humorist. Amid the turbulence of the humorist's mind and its rambunctious spawn in his wastebasket, Yukiko sleeps and dreams. Even when her dreams change to unveil such realities as her father's death, she adapts to the change by exercising an "omnipotent view" (Sombrero 184). As imaged in her state of dream, Yukiko manages a stability of balance in her life. The way of her life and fiction exists again as a model for Brautigan. Her self-eradicating dream-fiction, which she watches "as if she were sitting in a theater," parallel those other galvanic motifs favoured in his writings, fishing and film. The "instants" that compose Yukiko's realities erase themselves and begin ever anew through continual transformations.

There are many transformations in Sombrero Fallout. The sombrero itself changes from minus twenty-four degrees to zero and back again. At the beginning it is black and the centre of the controversy; by the end the sombrero is white and, although it was the cause of a riot, it has become virtually invisible:

Millions of tourists have walked all around it
but not one of them has seen it, though it is in

plain sight. How can you miss a very cold white sombrero lying in the Main Street of a town?

In other words: There is more to life than meets the eye. (Sombrero 183)

For those common townspeople who gather like vultures on their Main Street, that place so often directly visited in American fiction by writers such as Anderson, Lewis, Masters and Wilder, or for a writer such as the American humorist, a life seen too literally, without perspective or balance, is a life doomed to meaningless failure and death. One must somehow avoid fallout which is a deadly and ubiquitous thing. To cope with life, with grief, with change, to write fiction, in Brautigan's vision, requires "an omnipotent view of the dream," the endless ability to erase reality, to see more than meets the eye. The sombrero assumes that ambiguous colour of white and, like Melville's whale or that unfathomable shape Frost sees deep in his well in "For Once, Then, Something," it takes on the perspective of the viewer, becomes the viewer himself. One man in Sombrero Fallout wants political advancement, another wants his old lover, another wants food, one woman wants no more children, the mayor wants to ensure the status quo, the Governor wants to avoid big political mistakes, the State Police Captain wants to maintain his pride, the trainmaster wants

revenge for the murder of his wife, and so on. For these people, like Melville's sailors, each of whom interprets the doubloon according to his own point of view, life is only what meets the eye. The villagers' tragic story, as it unwinds fact after fact, is a comedy of errors; their annihilation serves only to profit the tourist trade. In the end, none is able truly to see the white sombrero and that inability is what destroys them.

In "A Short Study in Gone," a poem in June 30th, June 30th, published in the same year as Sombrero Fallout,

Brautigan writes:

When dreams wake

life ends.

Then dreams are gone.

Life is gone. (June 29)

In part, this view of existence as a form of dream shows some of the influence of Zen Buddhism on Brautigan. As Brautigan says: "I slowly picked up Buddhism through osmosis by watching the way my friends lived. ... I learned Buddhism by watching" (June 9). The alternative offered by Yukiko's story in Sombrero Fallout very clearly illustrates the ability to experience life as a kind of dreamscape in which the personal need to control is replaced by a passive acceptance of the facts of one's life even as those facts change. Yukiko achieves a level

of selflessness which none of the others do, and the tragic wasteful stories of the American humorist and of the villagers act as twin cautionary tales of the price to be paid by those who do not see that the most important thing of all may be that which does not meet the eye. And, of course, such a message has much to do with the writing of fiction itself.

As a fiction, Sombrero Fallout is subtitled "A Japanese Novel" and is dedicated to Junichiro Tanizaki whose works such as The Key and Diary of a Mad Old Man tend to be carefully constructed stories often concerned with the control and power of the psychic forces of human sexuality. In fact, the structure of Diary of a Mad Old Man, with its random events and irregular entries, resembles the patterns of Yukiko's dream-life. The necessity of control or balance is an important theme not only in Tanizaki but in many spheres of traditional Japanese art and culture, in films such as those by Ozu or Kurosawa, in the tradition of the *haiku*, in the craft of *ikebana*, and so on. In effect, Brautigan embraces those artistic or cultural dispositions and creates a genre, "the Japanese novel." Its themes echo Brautigan's disposition toward balance, an idea recurrently expressed in earlier fictions such as A Confederate General from Big Sur and The Abortion. Sombrero Fallout, as the title

implies, is also a mixture or fallout of several other genre-related items. It is, in part, a crime-police thriller, and it also contains some of the supernatural elements of the gothic. It is variously dream-vision and Kunstlerroman and beast fable and at the end, perhaps, part Country and Western musical. It contains a great deal of fictional fallout and, in the end, is really a genre in which multiple genres seem at home. In one way, at least, this is Brautigan's solution to the potential constraint that writing in a particular form or genre may create. "The Japanese Novel," it would seem, is an open-ended genre, an omnipotent fiction, which, at any moment, can transform its shape, like Yukiko's dream, from one thing to another and absorb that transformation as part of its being. It embodies many popular forms and its many shifting, contrasting points of view--its male and female perspectives, its states of waking and sleeping, death and love, and insanity and sanity, and even the possibility of writing with or without authorial control--celebrate the possibility, the necessity, of a multi-faceted, ever-innovative fiction of the "instants."

As a portrait of the artist as a failed human being, and failed artist, and as a signpost pointing the way toward a new "multi-genre" form of fiction, Sombrero Fallout resolves some of the fictional problems relating

to the role of the author and to the development of narrative discourse in a fragmentary world, issues raised by the end of Willard and His Bowling Trophies. The American humorist orphans his own literary child by imposing on it his conscious will, his own overbearing sense of place and self, and, in so doing, paralyzes himself as a writer and as a human being. His fiction ends up, frantically writing itself as garbage in a garbage pail. One message that Brautigan certainly seems to be sending to his negative critics is that neither writer nor audience must influence the flourishing of a fiction. The dream, with its detachment and fluid, origamic transformations forms another ideal metaphor for Brautigan, like film or trout fishing, of the fictional process. The writer must be willing to enter a selfless consciousness, akin to the dream state that Yukiko possesses as she sleeps, and allow the magic transformations of the imagination absolute control over the fiction-making process. That process sanctions the "instants" as the substance of fiction, and the "constants" of change as its method; it is an imaginative process of fictional freedom that acknowledges, commands, the necessary erasure of each word and each text--they die in their own becoming. For the writer and the reader

alike, Brautigan ultimately insists, fiction and life depend on far more than meets the eye.

iv

C. Card, Private Investigator, has his first paying case in months, but C. Card, Private Investigator, has problems. He needs to use a gun on this case, but he has no bullets for his gun and he cannot afford to buy bullets. Having already stretched his credit limit with everyone he knows beyond the point of friendship or trust, he is unable to borrow any money. He has had to give up his car, his office, his secretary, and his holster. His rent is overdue and his landlady is abusive. His mother hates him for having killed his father and he has no food in his refrigerator. Lately he has resorted to bumping into blind beggars and stealing their change; worst of all, though, during the most critical moments of his life, he has an untimely and uncontrollable penchant for collapsing into daydreams of Babylon. Such are the troubles of C. Card, Private

Investigator, that Richard Brautigan sets out to probe in his final specific genre novel.

Dreaming of Babylon: A Private Eye Novel 1942 emerges as possibly the most sustained, most effective of all of Brautigan's genre works. The novel is narrated by C. Card, Brautigan's first use of a first person narrator since The Abortion and a technique, virtually dictated by the private eye genre, that positions the reader closer to the main character than in any of the previous genre works. Although this dissertation does not examine Brautigan's use and development of humour, per se, Dreaming of Babylon is also a very humorous book; W. P. Kinsella, for instance, calls it "the funniest novel I have ever read" (5). Thematically, Sombrero Fallout concerned itself with the dream as an ideal metaphor for the fictional process and with the need for humans to see more than meets the eye; Dreaming of Babylon: A Private Eye Novel 1942, as its title suggests, continues this thematic investigation, focusing both on dreams and eyes. In fact, one of C. Card's nicknames is Eye. In terms of genre, Dreaming of Babylon sets about to use, and examine, the tenets of the "hard-boiled" detective novel as perfected in the 1930s and 1940s by writers such as Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. Says Card: "Not only was I the most famous detective in Babylon but I was

also the most hard-boiled just like a rock" (Babylon 60). Contrary to what critics such as Chénetier (65), Boyer (38) or Grimaud (129) have contended, Dreaming of Babylon is not, I think, primarily a parody of this form. Brautigam does not set out simply to ridicule hard-boiled detective fiction--actually he uses its tenets in a reasonably faithful and effective manner. If the detective genre fails in Dreaming of Babylon, it may be an indication from Brautigam's point of view of the inevitable failure of all single genre fiction and not a specific indictment of this one genre. William Bloodworth even argues that the literary treatment of popular fiction, such as that Brautigam gives to the detective genre, may serve to authenticate rather than negate its viability:

... the literary story actually tends to affirm rather than deny some of the basic themes of its more widely circulated popular cousins. The Literary Western [as an example] represents an extension of the Popular Western as much as it represents a departure from it. (289)

With respect to the detective genre, generally, Brautigam was a devoted student of film noir and admired the mystery-detective format it so often used in films such as The Maltese Falcon (Huston 1941) and Double Indemnity

(Wilder 1944), cinema that typically exposed universal corruption with a grim cynicism and which underscored the evolution that detective fiction had undergone in the twentieth century.

In discussing this evolution of formula stories, John Cawelti summarizes the formula of the original or classical detective story of the nineteenth century:

It ... moves from the introduction of the detective and the presentation of the crime, through the investigation, to a solution and apprehension of the criminal. (142)

In hard-boiled detective fiction of the twentieth century, according to Cawelti, several revisions are made to this original formula. Two of the most significant involve the nature of the setting and the character of the detective.

The predominant setting in hard-boiled fiction changes dramatically from a city of magic to a wasteland city:

When we step from the world of the classical detective formula into the milieu of the American hard-boiled story, the vision of the city is almost reversed. Instead of the new Arabian Nights, we find empty modernity, corruption and death. A gleaming and deceptive facade hides a world of exploitation

and criminality in which enchantment and significance must usually be sought elsewhere, in what remains of the natural world still unspoiled by the pervasive spread of the city. (Cawelti 141)

Immersed in this environment, the nature of the detective changes as well; Sherlock Holmes becomes Mike Hammer:

Where the classical detective combined scientific ratiocination with poetic intuition, the hard-boiled detective's character paradoxically mixes cynicism and honor, brutality and sentimentality, failure and success. The hard-boiled detective is first and foremost a tough guy. (Cawelti 149)

For this detective, the process of his investigation becomes "not simply a matter of determining who the guilty person was but of defining his own moral person" (Cawelti 146). Commenting on the nature of this hard-boiled detective, Larry Grimes notes:

The resolution of action in the classical detective formula is achieved by an act of mind. It is reached in hard-boiled fiction by an act of will. Accordingly, with the advent of the hard-boiled detective, the mystery novel takes a turn toward subjectivity. (536)

According to Grimes, the hard-boiled detective is forced toward discovering not only who did a crime but what to do about it; he must act as detective, judge and jury. In terms of narrative, Dr. Watson is displaced and the story is visualized through the primary eye of the detective, through a Philip Marlowe, or a C. Card.

In Dreaming of Babylon, C. Card's San Francisco certainly fits the requisite image of the seedy, desolate, "unreal city" of the hard-boiled formula. Its citizens, for the most part, are macabre underworld types willing to commit any act of violence or perversity for a profit. From bus drivers to doormen to landladies, the people of Card's city are offensive and ill-spirited. Sergeant Rink rules the police beat through brute force, Peg-leg seems to lust after all the pretty corpses that have the misfortune to wind up in his morgue, and even Card himself has a repulsive side. He is willing to steal from the blind and, on many occasions, shows no sympathy for those who are less fortunate than he. When he discovers that his landlady has died from a heart attack, for instance, his response is, "Good" (Babylon 102). As the blond woman who hires Card says, "You're the only one we could trust to steal a body for us. ... The other detectives might have some scruples. You don't have any" (Babylon 130). Card does not disagree.

As a detective, Card is not very good. Patricia Waugh notes that "[t]he detective story celebrates human reason: mystery is reduced to flaws in logic, the world is made comprehensible" (82). Repeatedly, Card's lack of comprehension is painfully, comically apparent, a stupidity made all the more conspicuous given the fiction he is in. Invariably the reader of a detective story is a detective. Because of its interrogative nature, detective fiction automatically casts its reader in an active role, involved along with the detective in the process of sorting and solving clues to discover "who done it." In Dreaming of Babylon the active reader must be doubly active, shuffling clues *and* Card. For example, Card has a poor memory. He cannot recall why a letter opener is important when Peg-leg mentions it to him in the morgue (34) but the reader remembers, in elementary fashion, that Rink has shown it to him just a few pages earlier (21); Card's incompetence is glaring. Similarly, when he enters the morgue later in the novel and encounters two men struggling to carry out a large bag, Card cannot imagine what they might be carrying: "I wondered briefly what was in the bag. It was kind of late to be taking things out of the morgue ... " (Babylon 141). Only several pages later, well after a corpse is discovered missing, does Card come to some understanding:

Suddenly a thought came to my mind. ...

"Wait a minute," I said, "I'll bet you anything she was the body the two guys stole from here a little while ago." (Babylon 150)

We learn that the only success Card has had as a detective is the result of an out of court settlement he received for being hit by a car while on a case, getting both legs broken. Most certainly, the somewhat dim intellect of C. Card does not, to use Waugh's phrase, "celebrate human reason." Brautigan constructs his narrative framework, then, so that the detective-reader repeatedly works, not with, but ahead of detective Card, so that the reader must be conscious of his own role as a "Private Eye." Although this adds greatly to the humour and pleasure of the text, there is another consideration here. Given the relative incompetence of Card, the only realistic chance of solving the mysteries in this text may depend on the reader. For Brautigan, such may be the case for all texts, and all realities; however, as the reader is drawn more closely into this fiction, another problem manifests itself.

Not only is Card a poor sleuth, as the detective-reader can attest first hand, but often in the course of his story he is not a very good narrator. For example, he says:

Peg-Leg walked me out to the front door. He moved quickly and gracefully for a man with a peg-leg. Did I mention that before? I don't think I did. I should have. It's kind of interesting: a man with a peg-leg taking care of dead people.

Then I remembered something that I was going to ask him. (Babylon 40)

The logical sequence of the narrative is askew here, the story-telling is awkward, and what appears to be a proposed rumination on a peg-legged man and dead people is never pursued. Card's shortcomings as a detective, his poor memory and faulty logic, also mar his abilities as a story-teller. In addition to many other strange narrative inclusions and loose ends, Card often assumes that his reader is as dense as he is. For example, during his first meeting with Peg-leg, he feels compelled to explain what is a fairly obvious reference:

"Oh, 'Eye,'" Peg-leg said. "Haven't you starved to death yet? I've been waiting to get your body."

Peg-leg always called me "Eye." That was short for private eye. (Babylon 33)

Such a comment, of course, comically alerts the reader to Card's intellectual limitations as narrator and as detective, and it increases the complexity of Brautigan's fiction. Intentional or otherwise, on his part, Card is

an unreliable narrator and the reader must assume an active and cautionary pose in reading his words, being not only a private eye but a private reader, as well. In fact, at times Card resembles the American humorist of Sombrero Fallout. If it were not for his ability to dream, Card would quite plausibly be as depressingly ineffectual at his life and his art as the humorist is. For Card, however, the city of San Francisco, 1942, represents only part of his domain as C. Card, Investigator.

The main reason that Card is a failure in his life stems from the problem he has with his daydreams; ironically, these are also the source of his only success. At significant points in his life, during a tryout with a professional baseball team, for instance, or during the writing of his police examinations, Card has drifted off into daydreams about Babylon and has failed. For the Walter Mitty-like Card, Babylon is paradise: it is an edenic, imaginative world in which he is a success and a hero. Babylon assumes many forms for him at different times; once it is a novel that he writes, chapter by chapter, or later a comic strip that he creates, or a serialized film that he shoots. As Card says, "Sometimes I played around with the form of my adventures in Babylon" (Babylon 59). Identity as well as

form is flexible; in his Babylonian world Card has many names, Samson Ruth, Ace Stag, Smith Smith, and is many people--a baseball star (51), a detective (57), a cowboy (58), a general (58), an actor playing Hamlet (59), a comic book hero (60), a famous chef (106), a swinging big-band leader (187). Each of these personae is successful at what he does and each is joined in different guises by the beautiful heroine, Nana-dirat. (Brautigan probably adapts the name from Nanai, an ancient Mesopotamian goddess of fertility and victory.) Like Yukiko's submission to her dream, Card's Babylonian captivity paradoxically provides him with a freedom in life to achieve whatever kind of success he dreams possible. Similar to the Japanese novel, from tragedy to soap opera to comic book, the world of Babylon created by Card is a mélange of all possible genres. His daydreams constitute a romance-like borderland in which the waking world and the dream world, the actual and the imaginary, meet; it is a fictional place where, as Barth says of Borges' labyrinth, "all the possibilities of choice" exist (The Friday Book 75). It is the house of the imagination that will later emerge in So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away.

In Dreaming of Babylon Card's main Babylonian villain is Ming the Merciless whom he transforms into Dr. Abdul

Forsythe. Reminiscent of Professor Hawklime's monster, the substance of Dr. Forsythe's threat is that he has a ray that can change people into shadow robots:

He had a plan for creating artificial night composed of his shadow robots that would move the real night from town to town conquering unsuspecting citizens and changing them into more shadow robots.

(Babylon 63)

The action of Card's Babylonian plot ends at a climactic point in Dreaming of Babylon where, as the famous detective Smith Smith, he sets out to stop Dr. Forsythe from acquiring a new invention, "mercury crystals," a substance which would enable the evil doctor to conquer the world with his shadow robots. For Brautigan, mercury is a recurrent symbol of the galvanic power inherent in language--loading mercury with a pitchfork is an act deserving of admiration (Mercury 16) and the title of an entire collection of poetry--and, as such, it is a substance that must be kept out of Dr. Forsythe's evil hands or, in the same manner as the Hawklime monster, he may be able to control language and his world. Similar to the historical Babylon, which brings to mind, at the very least, antithetical images of slavery and paradise. mercury has multiple connotations, suggesting, among other qualities, changeability, god-like speed,

elusiveness, deceit and toxicity. Like imaginative language itself, for Brautigan, these "mercury crystals" have the capacious power to renew or to destroy.

Although Card realizes that his daydreaming trips to Babylon have caused many of the failures of his life, and although at times he must struggle to keep his dreams under control, he is committed to his dreams:

I'd much rather be in ancient Babylon than in the Twentieth Century trying to put two bits together for a hamburger and I love Nana-dirat more than any woman I've ever met in the flesh. (Babylon 63)

Babylon exists as a state of imaginative freedom for Card in which identities and forms are eternally changing and fluid. As a fictional form, Card's Babylon is a textual flux that incorporates all genres and all realities. It is a world of mercury. The primary danger is the invasion of shadow robots, unsuspecting people who have been transformed into something less than human, "stacked [by Dr. Forsythe] ... like newspapers in a hidden warehouse" (Babylon 64). Their only function is to turn the world into artificial night. These "newspaper" people are texts unread, and unable to read themselves; they are reduced to robotic being under the merciless control of the rational and scientific Dr. Forsythe. Ultimately Card is faced with a choice between the

Babylon of his imagination or the San Francisco of 1942, a city which is filled with vice and desolation in a world that is freshly engaged in a catastrophic process of human degradation and war. For Card, the choice is not difficult. In point of fact, it might seem that Dr. Forsythe and his shadow robots have already spread their artificial night over the world of 1942; perhaps, through the efforts of C. Card, alias Smith Smith, that other world of Babylon and the imagination is the only one left that can be saved.

Thus, on the final page of Dreaming of Babylon, Card's intentions are clear: "I put my sword shoulder holster on underneath my toga" (Babylon 220). As he begins to leave the cemetery, however, we are again reminded of the danger inherent in Babylon--it is a paradise that can enslave. Frequently associated in popular myth with excess and degeneracy, in many ways the Babylon of Card's dreams actually has destroyed his chances for success although, for Brautigan, success in the profane world of 1942 may not be such a desirous thing. Nevertheless, living in his world of dreams creates dangers for Card in the waking world. At the end of the novel Card's mother narrowly saves him from tumbling into an open grave:

"Watch out, son!" my mother said as I almost walked straight into an open, freshly-dug grave. Her voice jerked me back from Babylon like pulling a tooth out of my mouth without any Novocaine.

I avoided the grave.

"Be careful," she said, "Or I'll have to visit both of you out here. That would make Friday a very crowded day for me."

"OK, Mom, I'll watch my step."

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. (Babylon 220)

The only change in Card's life after one more day of existence in the everyday world of San Francisco is more death. He must be careful every step he takes or this world will bury him. From heart attack victims to stabbed whores to World War II, from reality to fiction, from waking to dream, this is a world with a morgue at its centre.

Card is unable and unwilling to participate fully in such a place; in addition, Brautigan may suggest that even Card's formula of fiction is at risk in this world. When he tries to enact the detective formula, Card seems to be aware that the role he is playing is not entirely

credible. For example, when he returns to help Peg-leg fight the thugs, he says:

I was going to find out what was happening.

That's what private detectives are supposed to do and if I had to get a little rough it was totally acceptable in the tradition. (Babylon 160-161)

Later, when he crosses the cemetery, Card speaks of being a "stealthyful confident private eye starting to conclude the biggest deal of his life" (Babylon 207-208). In effect, what Card does throughout the novel is try to convince himself that he is a private detective. Rink and Peg-leg and his mother continually remind him that he is not. Identity in the everyday world is a problem for Card, and possibly a blessing. He is known only as C. Card which Foster suggests one might read as "Calling Card?" or "Seek Hard?" (110). His nickname is Eye, however, and the "C" may simply suggest what his role in the everyday world is--to see. Ironically, although his memory and understanding are poor in the matters of his cases, Card possesses a remarkable poetic ability to appreciate and observe the small things of life. He raves about the minute pleasures of a bus ride (78); he notes that "the best perfume in the world is the smell of something brand new" (Babylon 82); and he espouses the joy of singing Christmas Carols, even in July (96). In

his life C. Card sees the everyday world of San Francisco, 1942, and in his dreams he sees an imaginary world, and there is no doubt which he prefers: "The world sure is a strange place. No wonder I spend so much time dreaming of Babylon. It's safer" (Babylon 123). Card's sight is the sight of a private eye. And that, ostensibly, is what the reader must become in order to read this fiction and, Brautigan might be implying, to read all fictions, possibly, to live all lives. The world in 1942, corrupt and dismal, is a place in which an "Eye" like Card cannot succeed; as well, perhaps, from the perspective of Dreaming of Babvlon in the late 1970s, neither can the literary art in which he exists, which he presumably creates. About to face the horrors of Auschwitz and Dachau and the Gulag, the classic detective question, "who done it." assumes trivial proportions and the hard boiled quest to find, try and execute the guilty becomes inconceivable, impossible. Dreaming of Babylon, like both classic and hard-boiled detective fiction, presents its mysteries, but it does not offer any answers. In the end, the beer drinking femme fatale and her accomplice, the neck, are released by the authority figure, Sergeant Rink; all three go off to have a beer together. Card ends up with no answers and no money, exactly the same as he started out, except that a corpse

has now been added to the meagre contents of his refrigerator. Given the alienated, inexplicable, even indescribable horror of the world which he inhabits, Card devotes himself to a place of language and the imagination in which mysteries can be solved, evil can be identified and defeated, fiction undergoes constant change, and humans are ever renewed.

Larry Grimes argues that in postmodern fiction the detective formula has evolved once more under the influence of absurdist visions: "The result is a plot of infinitely incomplete action" (544). The detective-hero becomes a protean character who can no longer live by some pre-established code of behaviour: "Imagination and not integrity is the ingredient essential to a meaningful life in the world of the hard-boiled formula revisioned" (544). In Dreaming of Babylon, for Grimes, facts have "no intrinsic meaning":

Meaning ... is connected with Babylon, with the pure imagination, and not with objective fact. The implication for the formula is clear. According to Brautigan, nothing meaningful is gained by taking murder out of the drawing-room and placing it in the streets. The real and the meaningful are not synonyms. This is the case because, at least in Dreaming, the world of facts is patently absurd--

guns but no bullets, refrigerators stocked with corpses. (541)

Similarly, Patricia Waugh points out that "in the post-modern period, the detective plot is being used to express not order but the irrationality of both the surface of the world and of its deep structures" (83). In the end, Dreaming of Babylon underscores the irrationality that exists in the world of 1942 both inside and outside of the detective novel. In some sense, the world presented in detective fiction, with its cynicism and vice and hard-boiled hero, pales by comparison with the unfathomable horror of the "real world" that surrounds it. That world often seems too absurd, too insane, too fictional, to be real, a realization that lies at the heart of most post-war existentialist writings. One recalls Philip Roth's pronouncement in 1960:

... the American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand, describe, and then make *credible* much of American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's one meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and

the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist. (120)

The world of C. Card is saturated with such *incredible* figures and events. At one point, for example, Card incidentally bumps into an oriental man on the street who responds with hysterical paranoia:

"Not Japanese," he said, turning to me as he started to hurry away. "Chinese American. Love flag. Love Uncle Sam. No trouble. Chinese. Not Japanese. Loyal. Pay taxes. Keep nose clean." (Babylon 76)

In some sense, that the hard-boiled detective story, which purports to be naturalistic fiction, is neither as real nor as fictional as this "real world" creates a crucial dilemma which challenges the very authenticity of the genre. Dreaming of Babylon, then, does not parody detective fiction so much as it pushes the cynical scepticism inherent in the genre to a consideration of the genre itself. Dreaming of Babylon suggests that the genre, like C. Card himself at times, is left groping for an identity. It is without solutions to the largest mysteries; the police and criminals go out for a beer, corpses end up in refrigerators. Any impact is diminished and any insight it might have offered is lost. For C. Card in Dreaming of Babylon, of course, the

solutions to such dilemmas are routinely fathomed and easily solved; they are only a daydream away.

v

In the end, Brautigan's genre novels seem to call into question the effectiveness of any fiction limited by sets of pre-defined codes. Malcolm Bradbury says generally of Brautigan's genre experiments in the 1970s: "These books are attempts at the dissolution of forms, the breaking of serial orders, the collapse of nominative processes and identities, the substitution of free invention for static mimesis" (171). Similarly, Chénétier argues that Brautigan's writing continually questions the efficacy of genre:

... Brautigan sees characters sucked dry of inner life by outward linguistic systems, and pits adversary systems against these. The result is sometimes a method of strategic parody, a mocking and subversion of genres. But this is part of a larger and more precise struggle, which seeks the partial deconstruction of the narrative fundamentals--plot,

character, structure--through ellipse, discontinuity, redundancy, *trompe-l'oeil*, syntactic disruption. ...

Genre in Brautigan hence collapses in many ways.

(65-66)

Genre is certainly experimented with and challenged by Brautigan, but it may not collapse in his fiction so much as it is transformed into a new form of fictional expression. Contrary to the views of Bradbury and Chénétier, Brautigan's novels of the 1970s do not ultimately dismiss genre writing at all. If anything, Dreaming of Babylon, the final specific *genre-novel* that he writes, is the most successful of all. Brautigan discovers in the detective form and other forms of popular romance that genre fiction as it has existed posits potentially severe limitations on language and text; but Brautigan's fiction does not stop at that point, nor is that the point of his genre fiction. By combining genres in The Hawkline Monster and the novels which follow, at the very least, Brautigan repeatedly forces these popular forms into new proximities and greater latitudes and in those states they come to illuminate and energize one another. With the use of multiple genre, as evidenced in "The Japanese Novel" and in "Babylon," the potential for such forms of writing becomes illimitable. Brautigan's discovery, then, is not

the ridicule or erasure of genre as a viable form of writing but a revelation of its possibilities. Patricia Waugh suggests that such use of popular genres by metafictionists, Brautigan included, is vital to the survival of the novel:

The use of popular forms in 'serious fiction' is therefore crucial for undermining narrow and rigid critical definitions of what constitutes, or is appropriately to be termed 'good literature.' Their continuous assimilation into 'serious fiction' is also crucial if the novel is to remain a viable form.
(86)

By combining the genres of popular romance, and impelled by his metafictional style, Brautigan arguably creates an entirely new form of the novel that locates itself in a metaphoric borderland between fiction and reality, writer and reader, whose potential is inexorably "more than meets the eye." That new form, a hybrid that might best be labelled metafictional romance, encompasses, invites, demands of fiction and its forms and its substance and its readers an unremitting flexibility and newness. Such, at least, is the direction represented by Brautigan's next works, The Tokvo-Montana Express and So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away, writings that definitively sow the early fictional forms of the sixties

with the seed harvested from the genre experiments of the seventies.

Chapter Five: of eye and I

The Tokyo-Montana Express is a complex and curious fiction. Written with an eclectic, non-sequential structure, in some ways it resembles Brautigan's earlier writings much more than it does the works of his "genre wars," as Chénétier labels the works of the 1970s (80). Similar in part to Revenge of the Lawn, it is a collection of brief disseminations, some approximating short stories, some similar to what Stevens called "adagia." As in Trout Fishing in America, flaunting its linguistic dislocation and its narration by association, Brautigan's quixotic metafictional style regulates the tenor of the book. In other ways, however, in direction and impact, and in consistency of subject matter and voice and plot, The Tokyo-Montana Express is dissimilar to any of the earlier texts. Throughout its chapters, from ghost stories and science fiction to chivalric tales and historical romance, a remarkable variety of different fictions appear and vanish like stations along the tracks. It is a hybrid text, a metafiction that has been filtered through Brautigan's experimentation with the

genres of popular romance and that filtering gives it a feeling and a capacity that is much different than those singular earlier works. The Tokyo-Montana Express emerges for Brautigan as a unique piece of writing; in effect, it is a form that might best be called metafictional romance.

Kathryn Hume quite correctly argues that "[u]nity of plot and finally plot itself vanish: Brautigan's The Tokyo-Montana Express has no story" (44); what it does have, however, which Hume fails to note, is an intricate pattern of narrative structures that takes on as much significance as plot ever could. Boyer, for example, notes that many episodes deal with "being detached from the world, or being isolated against it by one's own private version of reality" (41) and Horvath sees many of Brautigan's chapters, as in the "Tire Chain Bridge" (Express 94-97), as emblematic of the human struggle to gain control over life and, thus, to manage an escape from death (450-454). Foster places the novel in a cultural context:

... it is about two very different cultures, East and West, American and Japanese, and their effect on each other. The Tokyo-Montana Express is Brautigan's "Passage to India," but the passage turns out to be a

well-travelled highway with much traffic and exchange of goods, both physical and metaphysical. (118)

All of these critics, however, overlook the two predominant patterns which govern the fiction. One is a motile pattern of settings, resembling the numerous plots of Willard and His Bowling Trophies, or recalling fictions such as Calvino's Invisible Cities, Cortázar's Hopscotch, or Acker's Blood and Guts in High School, in which multiple, erratic distortions of time and place are intentionally and continuously created to disrupt the reading of the text, as if the Express were being switched randomly, chaotically, from one track to another throughout its journey in order to prevent its getting anywhere. In association with this narrative disjunction, a second thematic pattern emerges; it appears in nearly half of the chapters of the book and its implications threaten to derail the very act of fiction itself. Recurrently, from text to telephone to teletype, various methods of human communication are examined in The Tokyo-Montana Express and usually found wanting; a crisis of communication arises--the intelligible association of one word with another falters--and, finally, the very possibility of any expressive human discourse, fictional or otherwise, is called into question.

The Tokyo-Montana Express has generally been categorized by reviewers and critics as heralding a return by Brautigan to his origins, to the early form of writing at which, in their eyes, he was most successful. Yourgrau (13) and Boyer (39) both comment on similarities found in style and content between it and the early successes like Trout Fishing in America, as does Chénétier:

The Tokyo-Montana Express is a work that sounds a clear, loud note of personal recovery--the best work that Brautigan has produced since the wonderful original trilogy with which his quest began... . (92)

Foster reads the book in a similar vein:

Furthermore, the book that he had just finished, The Tokyo-Montana Express, was a far better book than any of his books published in the 1970s. It is without the puzzling moral ambiguities and vacuous characterizations that lessen our interest in The Abortion, The Hawkline Monster, and other novels that he published in that decade. The diction in The Tokyo-Montana Express is as lean, spare, and

effective as that in the early fiction, but the tone is moderate, restrained, almost delicate. There are fewer characteristic Brautigan metaphors than in Trout Fishing in America--the book which The Tokyo-Montana Express most resembles, but the typical Brautigan narrator--solitary, withdrawn, but fundamentally content even when threatened by the world around him--is again at the center of the book.

(117)

Although Foster dislikes the genre novels--in essence, they do not align themselves very well with the Zen Buddhist thesis that he advances--and although he notes some differences between The Tokyo-Montana Express and Brautigan's earliest fiction, he explores neither of these avenues in any thorough manner, but is content to concentrate on The Tokyo-Montana Express as the proper return of Brautigan to Zen.

One of the reasons that the critics notice such similarity to earlier styles is accounted for quite simply--several of the chapters, although published in The Tokyo-Montana Express in 1980, were written much earlier. The very first chapter, "The Overland Journey of Joseph Franci and the Eternal Sleep of His Wife Antonia in Crete, Nebraska" (1-9), in fact, was originally written as the "Introduction" to The Overland

Journey of Joseph Francl published in 1968 (Barber 50). "The Menu" (162-171) is exactly the same in The Tokyo-Montana Express as its first printing in Evergreen Review in August, 1966. Several other episodes, including "Football" (18), "An Eye for Good Produce" (63), "Dogs on the Roof" (103), and "The Great Golden Telescope" (123) were also composed and published in earlier years.

In addition to these relatively scattered dates of publication, many chapters are set in earlier periods and places, and transmit the ambience of those eras; The Tokyo-Montana Express travels with ease through time and space. "The Overland Journey of Joseph Francl" (1-9) is set in the 1850s, "Another Texas Ghost Story" (51-55) "begins in West Texas in the early 1930s ... and will eventually end in 1970 at a picnic gathering of middle-aged people" (Express 51), "Werewolf Raspberries" (85-86) is a short prose elegy dated "Late Spring/ 1940," "What Are You Going To Do With 390 Photographs of Christmas Trees?" (44-49) is specifically set in January of 1964, shortly after Kennedy's assassination, "Tire Chain Bridge" (94-97) concerns a journey across New Mexico in 1969 and the end of an era, "The 1977 Television Season" (233) contrasts the eternal quality of nature with the ephemeral and superficial aspect of a specific television season, "Drowned Japanese Boy" (122)

is dated "Tokyo/ July 14, 1978" (Express 122), and "There is No Dignity, Only the Windswept Plains of Ankona" (56) takes place in the future in the year 3021.

In contrast to this spontaneous motility in time and place, many episodes involve a process of internal reflection on the part of the narrator, a technique in which the narrator looks from his present to his past, similar to the technique later employed in So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away. Although the fiction always radiates away from the narrator, it is persistently grounded in his presence and his voice and it always returns the reader to him. In "Farewell to the First Grade and Hello to the *National Enquirer*" (72-75) the narrator recounts his youth and the history of his learning to read, in "The Great Golden Telescope" (123-125) he recalls the incident of an aging and forlorn hippie who had "been in a Volkswagen bus too long" (Express 125), in "1953 Chevrolet" (155-159) he recollects a friend's attempt to purchase a fifty dollar car, and in "Ghosts" (187) he tries to remember an earlier love affair but, vaguely, can only recall two facts: "We made love and she had a dog" (Express 187).

The chapter entitled "Seventeen Dead Cats" serves as an effective example to clarify this process; it consists of the following:

When I was twelve years old in 1947, I had seventeen cats. There were tomcats, and mother cats, and kittens. I used to catch fish for them from a pond that was a mile away. The kittens liked to play with string under the blue sky.

Oregon 1947--California 1978 (Express 128)

The austere postscript to this chapter, emphasized in italics by Brautigan, is a clear pronouncement of the subterranean theme of this passage and of many others. While the speaker recalls with a tone of pride, and sentiment, perhaps, the cats of his youth, the postscript starkly defines the passage of time that has occurred, the then and now of living. Those seventeen cats which once played "under the blue sky," and for which he once caught fish, are dead. Throughout The Tokyo-Montana Express the voice of the narrator recurrently draws himself and the reader from past memory back to the present time and the irrefutable knowledge that time passes and things change--the reader is always made aware of "*Oregon 1947--California 1978*," of then and now. Thus, the finality of this postscript affirms not only the title's blunt assertion ("Seventeen Dead Cats") but, by extrapolation, the stark and undeniable mortality that faces both narrator and reader. That narrator, who often is obviously Brautigan himself, profiles the fate of

everyman. In "Sunday," for example, he follows a middle-aged man through a grocery checkout sarcastically commenting on his mundane purchases; then, when the man is finished, he says:

I'm forty-four years old.

Now: it's my turn. (Express 243)

In lamenting his own aging, he marks the fate of all:

In actuality what makes you older is when your bones, muscles and blood wear out, when the heart sinks into oblivion and all the houses you ever lived in are gone and people are not really certain that your civilization ever existed. (Express 162)

Therefore, the erratic range of The Tokyo-Montana Express in time and place offers no enduring sense of flexibility or freedom for narrator or reader but, instead, emphasizes the very opposite. One is continually bombarded by an awareness of the limitations of passing time, of the final stillness of age and death. Although the text may initiate a suspension of disbelief, the text also always brings one back to a stark reality: that the narrator and the reader will age and die, that the heart will sink "into oblivion," seems to be the ominous, incessant message.

Accordingly, images of stillness and aging and death are common in The Tokyo-Montana Express. The book begins

with the story of Joseph Franci's fatal journey to America, and randomly includes many accounts of incidental death in episodes such as "Football" (18), "A Death in Canada" (25-26), "One Arm Burning in Tokyo" (82-83) and "Drowned Japanese Boy" (122). Certain seasons become associated with death as in the story of the passing of one's youth in "Autumn Trout Gathering" (27-28) or the image of the "frolicking" graves in "Winter Vacation" (30-31). In "Very Good Dead Friends" (43-44), a man realizes that he has more dead friends than living ones, and the deaths of John Kennedy and Groucho Marx are central to "What Are You Going to Do with 390 Photographs of Christmas Trees?" (44-49) and "A Different Way of Looking at President Kennedy's Assassination" (190-193), and "Homage to Groucho Marx 1890 - 1977" (78-80) and "My Tokyo Friend" (252-254), respectively. The presence of ghosts forms the core of "Another Texas Ghost Story" (51-55), "Ghosts" (187) and "The Instant Ghost Town" (228-229), and the death of a caged wolf is the inciting incident of "The Wolf Is Dead" (75-76). "Tire Chain Bridge" (94-97) recounts the death of the 1960s and both "Homage to Rudi Gernreich/ 1965" (198-203) and "The Good Work of Chickens" (220-224) deal sardonically with the fate of pets.

In addition to these actual instances of death, many episodes in The Tokyo-Montana Express portray characters trapped in death-in-life situations, sometimes paralysed by their own fears or flaws, sometimes defeated by forces beyond their understanding and control. The story enacts its title in "All the People That I Didn't Meet and the Places That I Didn't Go" (10) as a woman in bed looks at her hand and mourns over the shortness of her lifeline, and in "Football" (18) both the over-confident young man, dead in an automobile accident at twenty-two, and the forgetful minister who buries him are victims of their own undirected self-perceptions. Many episodes depict individuals as loners and losers, alienated from themselves and their worlds. The photographer in "Harem" is "almost invisible" (Express 66), living only for the two dimensional world that his photographs offer, and Al, a seaman who loses everything when he enters the bar business, lives out his life at his mother's house as a "blank" (Express 71). The man in "The Bed Salesman" (92-93) abjectly sits alone on a "rainy winter day," the central character in "The Butcher" (108-110) grieves for what his life could have been had he not had cold "butcher" hands, the life of the businessman in "Dancing Feet" (127-128) is entirely absorbed in his fetish for feet, the poor obese girl in "Portrait of a Marriage"

(193-194) has "nothing going for her," and the sixty-year old Italian cook in "Beer Story" (197) lives only to brag about the beer he drinks. Even the relationship of lovers can be numbing as both "Toothbrush Ghost Story" (86-88) and "Her Last Known Boyfriend a Canadian Airman" (106-107) illustrate. At times, it is simply the inexplicable nature of the world that destroys everything in a person except his or her life. The empathetic Chinese woman in "Open" (40) labours hard to make her restaurant a success but she fails and ends up working in a mortuary:

"I've been working for Adams and White since the restaurant failed," she said, her voice was almost desperate and suddenly she seemed very small like a frightened child, just waking up from a nightmare and trying to talk about it while it was still so vivid that the child couldn't tell the difference between it and reality. (Express 42)

Although The Tokyo-Montana Express presents a world in which the memory and imagination and, ultimately, the fiction of the narrator shift impulsively through time and space, that one is forever confronted by a world in which life is cruelly frozen into blankness and immobility and death, a world in which "the heart sinks into oblivion" (Express 162), is an ironic disjunction.

The acute awareness of a specificity in time is a recurrent theme in Brautigan's works. In The Tokyo-Montana Express and elsewhere his characters repeatedly appear as beings trapped in time, often resembling the aged hippie in "The Great Golden Telescope" who, while recounting her plans to sell seaweed clothes and create a mountain commune where "people can live in peace and harmony" (Express 124), realizes that she has been "in a Volkswagen bus too long" (Express 125). Many of Brautigan's entire fictions locate themselves in specific instants of time--The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966. Dreaming of Babylon A Private Eye Novel 1942. June 30th, June 30th, "The Literary Life in California/1964" (Revenge 127), "One Afternoon in 1939" (Revenge 116), "1891-1944" (Rommel 27), "April 7, 1969" (Rommel 54), "Tokyo / June 13, 1976" (June 73), and so on. All things exist in time and the awareness of specific moments and the attempt to come to terms with those moments, as the young boy must do with that fateful February day in So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away, rest near the centre of much of Brautigan's writing. It is as if by encountering certain points of time in comic and satiric and creative ways Brautigan and the characters he creates can best attain some understanding of their present lives; perhaps, in Eliot's sense, it is their means of

recovering meaning from experience, of arriving where they started and knowing the place for the first time. In the process, those specific moments, and the history or the genre associated with them, undergo a regeneration; the Private Eye Novel of 1942 is revitalized by the Metafictional Romance of 1977. Chénétier sees this attempt by Brautigan to penetrate into such "instants" of time as pivotal to an understanding of his entire message and method:

Only a vertical drilling down into the moment offers access, however problematic, to the truth of existence ... Instants ... side by side; between them and beyond them, nothingness. As Bachelard has it: "Absolute naught on both edges of the instant." Or as Brautigan puts it: I find the breaks in his diary very beautiful like long poetic pauses where you can hear the innocence of eternity" (Express 6). ... By the time of Sombrero Fallout and The Tokyo-Montana Express, these arrests, these refusals to move on, have intensified, producing a fragmented assemblage of places and instants which stand for composition, and seek to increase one's power to penetrate the real by sharpening the focus. (82-83)

It is common for critics reading Brautigan's work to isolate the affirmative role of the imagination as a

means of escaping these shackles of time and place (see my discussion in Chapter Two of this dissertation--83-84, 99-105). In The Tokyo-Montana Express, however, if not earlier even the power of the imagination seems limited and in doubt. Abbott suggests that for Brautigan there is always a danger inherent in the imagination: "One theme throughout Brautigan's work is that the imagination works as both a curse and a blessing. ... While the ability of the imagination to alter reality is celebrated, confusion breeds from it too" (164). To encounter the instants, to drill into them as Chénétier argues, is a problematic fictional decision--on the one hand, possibly intensifying the fiction's expression of the real, on the other, through fragmentation and stasis, subverting the ongoing act of fiction-making itself.

Two issues clearly arise in The Tokyo-Montana Express, then. The narrative disjunction caused by its radiating, discursive settings discloses an apparently unsolvable problem. Existentially sealed in time, the value of both life and fiction is called into question; even the power of the imagination seems thwarted by the constraint of time. A correlative theme emerges. When both reader and narrator are incessantly, fatalistically, made aware of "*Oregon 1947--California 1978*," the significance of any form of communication is challenged.

As such, as the other dominant theme governing this fiction, a crisis of communication unfolds.

ii

The Tokyo-Montana Express begins with one man's attempt to communicate what another man attempted to communicate. In a final analysis, it is "a book," as Braufigan labels it, that deals with acts of communication. Initially, the narrator recounts, and reflects upon, and recreates the details of Joseph Francl's diary account of his "Overland Journey" to California in the 1850s; then in chapter after chapter the book proceeds to present and explore various means by which human beings attempt to communicate experience. Assorted themes of communication--the need to communicate, attempts at communication, images of successful and of failed communication--appear throughout The Tokyo-Montana Express. Among these are palmistry (10), a message in a bottle (11), weather records (13-15), eulogy (18), telephone calls (31-32, 37-39, 63-65, 115-116, 175-178, 246-247), conversation (33-37, 123-125), a jigsaw puzzle (61-63), photography (66-67),

reading (72-75, 252-254), signs of commerce or traffic (72-75, 99-100, 179-181, 188-189, 190-193, 204-205, 206-207, 232), words (78-80, 145-146), autographs (97-98), letters or mail (104-105, 106-107, 185-186), pamphlets (112-114), television (146-147, 228-229, 233), newspaper clippings (195-196), epitaph (198-203), song (208-209), teletype (257-258) and many forms of literary fiction including ghost stories (51-55), science fiction (56-57), romance (120), history (125-126, 149-150), and poetry (181-182, 213-214, 241-242). With these inclusions, Brautigan broadens the scope of his recent writing by shifting from a singular consideration of fictional genres to an extended meditation on all means of human discourse. In The Tokyo-Montana Express, set in the midst of pathetic scenes of aging and dying, many of these attempts at communication appear futile; they ineffectually begin to mirror their own disconsolate world by mimicking the overused forms of communication it practices. As in the genre fiction, by defining their limits with such forms, they perish in their own constraints.

"Cold Kingdom Enterprise," by way of example, is a chapter which dies by giving birth to itself. The entire chapter is as follows:

Once upon a time there was a dwarf knight who only had fifty word [sic] to live in and they were so fleeting that he only had time to put on a suit of armor and ride swiftly on a black horse into a very well-lit woods where he vanished forever. (Express '20)

The folk tale/romance form used here inherently imposes certain fatal limits on itself. Its action, for instance, is removed in time and place ("Once upon a time..."), and it deals with certain types of individuals ("knights") who are what they are because they subscribe to certain codes of behaviour (they wear "armor" and "ride swiftly" and possess honour--presumably, if they only have "fifty word" to use, they will only use "fifty word"--the passage contains exactly that number). Within those restrictive guidelines, the knight can only be a "dwarf knight;" he has "vanished forever" almost before his story begins, a victim of the limits of his own fiction, his own words precipitating his destruction. Many of the episodes found in The Tokyo-Montana Express parallel this abortive knight's tale; for Brautigan, it would seem that this knight's tale and perhaps all tales, all forms of fiction or communication that delimit themselves, are indeed a "cold kingdom enterprise." "Old Man Working the Rain" is another example.

In "Old Man Working the Rain," the narrator empathizes with old men in Tokyo who advertise massage parlours and cabarets by carrying signs or by offering handbills to people:

Often the men are old and wear poor sloppy clothes, standing there holding erotically promising signs. I wish the old men were not doing that. I wish they were doing something else and their clothes looked better.

But I can't change the world.

It was already changed before I got here.

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, wearing shitty clothes and holding a sign for a cabaret that is filled with the beautiful and enticing skeletons of young women that sound like dominoes when they walk toward you coming in the door. (Express 206-207)

Part of the process of writing is aging and death, for the writer, for the reader, and possibly for the writing itself. Here the "useless handbills," as a metaphor for fiction, announce a reality that is already dead. As the narrator realizes, that is the inevitable way of the world, a world which is "changed" before the writer

arrives. Fiction does not alter the reality, the aging and death and "shitty clothes" of the world. But fiction does bring that awareness to the narrator and, potentially, to the reader. In this way, futile or not, it is an authentic act, a way of dealing with the absurd and irrational nature of being, a way of dealing with time. All of the human attempts at communication, then, from the scribblings of Joseph Franci to the old men's handbills, even though "[s]ometimes" they may seem useless, perhaps especially when they seem useless, bring to consciousness the actual state of being human. They are realities in and of themselves.

"The Japanese Squid Fishermen Are Asleep Now" is a "chapter" that deliberately addresses this issue. The speaker has brought an old bottle with him to Japan with the express purpose of throwing it into the sea. The bottle is "a cross-section of an evening in an American bar" (Express 12), containing private messages from all the patrons and sealed with the bartender's calligraphy wax:

A few weeks later I brought it to Japan with me to throw into the sea where it would drift with the tide and maybe all the way back to America and be found three hundred years later and be quite a media curiosity or just break against a California rock,

the pieces of glass sinking to the bottom and the released messages floating a brief lifetime before becoming an indistinguishable part of the tide's residue stranded anonymously on the beach. (Express 12)

The speaker forgets to bring the bottle with him on the day that he had planned to throw it into the sea, however, because he has become preoccupied in thinking about some squid fishermen. These fishermen toil at night and sleep during the day: "The four boats of the Japanese squid fishermen were arranged perfectly like stars in the sky. They were their own constellation" (Express 11). The story ends with the speaker associating his forgotten bottle full of secret messages with those fishermen: "The bottle was on a table beside all their beds, waiting for the night to come, so that it could join their constellation" (Express 13). The bottle, of course, is a vessel of fiction and, resembling The Tokyo-Montana Express itself, is filled by separate but inter-connected fragments of writing. If thrown into the critical sea, it seems destined for two equally unpleasant fates--to drift for hundreds of years until it is discovered as a media curiosity, or to be smashed anonymously on the rocks of America. In either case, the substance of the vessel goes unnoticed. By being

forgotten and left behind, the bottle, like the fishermen, like the sea and stars, literally constellates itself. In effect, it possesses its own consciousness, it is its own reality, its own apotheosis. It needs no external or critical confirmation. It celebrates itself, it sounds its barbaric yawp, and that is enough.

Similarly, The Tokyo-Montana Express, and, by extension for Brautigan, all means of human discourse, all fiction, exist as entities, as forms of human consciousness in and of themselves. The reception of their publishings, to be garnered as media curiosities or to be lost anonymously on the rocks of America, is inconsequential to their being and to the value and meaning which that being constellates in them. In some sense this represents Brautigan's attempt to justify his own form of metafictional writing and it is the primary theme to which he repeatedly turns in The Tokyo-Montana Express, the theme with which he begins and ends this text.

The Tokyo-Montana Express begins with an account of the "Overland Journeys" of Joseph Franci which, as the narrator observes, were recorded in a diary:

His diary is written in mirror-like prose that is simultaneously innocent and sophisticated and reflects a sense of gentle humor and irony. He saw this land in his own way. (Express 2)

The narrator sees Francl *in his own way*, as well. His account of Francl's tale reads like the diary of a diary. The narrator's own personal asides and observations are scattered simultaneously among fragments quoted from Francl's writings so that, if it were not for italics, the writings of the narrator and those of Francl would be inseparable.

The narrator's account of Francl, who gave up his life as a classical musician in Europe to travel to the American west, is, on the surface, an attempt to understand the man and his motives: "I keep asking myself a question that can't be answered: Why did Joseph Francl come to America in the first place and leave so different a life behind him?" (Express 2). Francl leaves his wife, Antonia, waiting in Wisconsin while he undertakes a futile search for gold in California; the narrator's insight seems one with Francl's: "The people that Joseph Francl met on his way West are mentally cross-eyed and archetypically funky. ... Things just did not work out for Joseph Francl in California, a land that he describes as '*th's beautiful but unfortunate country*'" (Express 4-6). It would seem that the country which Francl describes reflects his own "unfortunate" experience as much as anything else. Of importance, and of notable interest to the narrator, are the gaps that frequent

Francl's diaries. The narrator quotes Francl at one point where he writes: "I was just pouring out the tea when I heard--" (Express 6). As the narrator notes, at this point the diary stops:

But we'll never know what Joseph Francl heard because part of his diary was lost right after *when I heard--*

I find the breaks in his diary very beautiful like long poetic pauses where you can hear the innocence of eternity. (Express 6)

The narrator, like Emerson in the silent church before the service, seems to discover as much in these gaps as he does in Francl's story itself:

The next break in his writing is a chosen one. He is at Fort Laramie and says, *I will not describe the rest of my journey to Salt Lake City, for I do not remember that anything of interest occurred.*

Then suddenly he is in Salt Lake City and nothing is described in between as if the distance from Fort Laramie (over 400 miles) to Salt Lake City were just a door that you opened and stepped through. (Express 6-7)

Seeing, like Francl, "in his own way," the narrator continually fills in the gaps of Francl's life with his own observations. In the end, the gaps in Francl's

diary, his life and his death, all become part of the narrator's projected consciousness, as the imagined account of Franci's death illustrates:

Then Joseph Franci got lost from his travelling companion who looked for him, then went for help. When the search party found him a few days later, he was lying facedown in the snow, dead, and he was not unhappy.

In his delirium he probably thought that death was California. He was buried at Fort Klamath, Oregon, on December 10, 1875 in a grave that was lost forever. It was the end of his American childhood.

(Express 9)

Like the gaps in his diary, the unknown events of Joseph Franci's life are filled in by the narrator. Only in the consciousness of the narrator who reads Franci's diary, and in that of the reader who reads this first chapter, does Joseph Franci survive at all; even then, the Franci that survives probably is more a reflection of the narrator, or of oneself as reader, than anything else. As with the bottle and the squid fishermen, as in Whitman's barbaric yawp, self awareness is all. What Franci did not write is as beautiful as what he did write and that, for Brautigan, is probably his greatest achievement. In a world where things were changed before

one arrived, where poems die in their own becoming, where all humans inevitably see things "in their own way," the personal constellation of one's consciousness, the ability to keep searching continually for one's place, to encode gaps in the record of one's life as if one were inviting the reader to take part, to keep changing in an ever changing cosmos, as Francl tried to do, is an ultimate goal and the fiction that could do the same would be an ideal fiction. For Brautigan, Francl's capricious life represents a way to prevent the heart from sinking into oblivion and that life is exquisitely duplicated as fiction in the "mirror-like prose" of his diary.

Historically, as a means of writing, the diary is at best an ambiguous form. As sculpted by writers from Pepys to Nin, it is a collection of private observations, secret and intimate, and yet, at the same time, in the very act of being written and preserved, it is a document that seems intended to be a public text. In fact, many diaries are written quite obviously with an audience in mind--conversely, one might surmise, many fictions are little more than personal diaries (in some sense, as all diaries are texts, so all texts are diaries). As a fiction, then, The Tokyo-Montana Express begins with this multiplex form; the diary is a genre of fiction, in

effect, that contains the potential to be many different things to different writers and readers. As the narrator says: "The story of Joseph Francl is not an easy one" (Express 8). Appropriately, Francl is characterized as a man with a multiple personality, innocent and sophisticated, humorous and ironic; his diary is written in its "mirror-like prose" (Express 2) and, for the narrator, its absences are as "beautiful" as its presences. The Tokyo-Montana Express begins, then, as a mirror-like text with gaps; as Francl responded to California "in his own way," as the narrator responds to Francl's diary, so, too, must the reader respond to The Tokyo-Montana Express. The reader must approach this "Overland Journey" with the awareness that what one reads in a mirror text and what one sees in looking into lexical gaps are, by necessity, a part of the reader as well as a part of the text; the reader, like the narrator, is compelled to complete this text with the understanding that what is read is at best a shared product combining what is written on the page with what is contained in the consciousness of the reader. As Wolfgang Iser, echoing other reader response theorists, claims, "[t]he convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence" (275):

Indeed, it is only through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism. Thus whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections--for filling in the gaps left by reason itself.

... one text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled. In this very act the dynamics of reading are revealed. (280)

Brautigan foregrounds these dynamics, much the same as Francl's text does; they consciously become the text itself. For him, fiction is the fusion of "eye" and "I," of text and reader, and both are transformed in the process. Like all forms of communication, this diary of a diary becomes a palimpsest of the lives of Francl and the narrator and the reader. As such, for Richard Brautigan, The Tokyo-Montana Express formulates itself as the ideal genre, a text of eye and I, a self-conscious fiction that reflects as much as it reads and demands a

new reader of each reading. This is the purpose of labelling it a metafictional romance. As an inclusive term, romance is a common label for many genres; accordingly, after the mid-1970s Brautigan's fiction moves toward embracing numerous popular forms in single texts. As well, the bipartite geography of romance encompasses a psychic and linguistic borderland between the real and the imaginary in which the nature of the fiction that one is reading often self-consciously alters itself and, in James' sense, liberates the experience of the reader. It is a territory which, fundamentally, metafiction easily inhabits. The Tokyo-Montana Express emerges, then, as a galvanic, self-conscious fiction which potentially enfolds, not only all genres, but all means of human discourse, and which compels the reader toward an awareness of how fiction must operate in order to remain an ever new and viable enterprise, and not simply become "vanished forever" as a "cold kingdom" (Express 120).

The final station of The Tokyo-Montana Express, "Subscribers to the Sun," corroborates the ideas introduced in the first:

It's morning and soon the Teletype will start
and this hotel in Tokyo will be connected like a

bridge directly with the events of the world as they happen. (Express 257)

The entire chapter ruminates on the electronic awakening of a hotel teletype machine which begins its day with a printing test. Part of this test involves printing apostrophe marks and various letters:

... and then the almost religious chant of the wire service machine:

THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG

THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG (Express 258).

This phrase, of course, is meaningless in context in that there are neither lazy dogs nor quick foxes in this Tokyo hotel. As practice for typists or teletypes, however, and as the material from which a writer creates, this phrase is essential, containing all of the letters of the alphabet. The Tokyo-Montana Express ends here with the beginning of a new day and an image of a teletype machine spewing out the alphabet, ostensibly entwining the entire universe:

Then the machine is totally awake, ready for the day and its first message comes out, connecting it with the third planet from the sun, Earth:

:ATTENTION SUBSCRIBERS

GOOD MORNING

(Express 258)

Thus this fiction ends at a point of beginning, a moment of potential and renewal and possibility, calling out for its subscribers' regard'. The alphabet contains the potential for all means of written human communication. That this fiction ends with teletype is also interesting. Tele, from the Greek, indicates distance, specifically "far off" or "at a distance," and type has two significant origins, in the Latin typus meaning a form or figure, and in the Greek typos indicating a blow or impression. Ultimately, teletype serves Brautigan in The Tokyo-Montana Express as another effective image of the way fiction operates, the writer from his distance in time and place articulates the form of his experience in an alphabetic equation and offers that blow or impression to "the third planet from the sun, Earth:

:ATTENTION SUBSCRIBERS

GOOD MORNING (Express 258)

The reading of that impression is beyond his control. If it is a somewhat haphazard process, a process which is started by the writer but then slips out of his control, that is the reality of human discourse. In effect, the teletype seems to type itself; its fiction is autonomous. Such is the fate of Joseph Fracl's diary, and of The Tokyo-Montana Express, and of all communication. The genre that recognizes its mirror being, like the

individual who recognizes the inevitable absurdity of his living and accepts the need to adapt to the change that time dictates, designates a condition to be desired. Such is the mercurial desire of Brautigan's metafictional romance. Ultimately, the fate and the form of writing lie with the reader's understanding that eye and I are at work. And that is the final nature of the fiction that Brautigan comes to write. To use another of his metaphors, it is a fiction of fishing, an act of destruction and of sustenance, where reader and text come to act interchangeably as fish and fisher, and both are rejuvenated by their roles.

Conclusion: of endings and beginnings

In a short "Preface" to The Tokyo-Montana Express, Brautigan likens his book to a train that moves "at a great speed" with "many stops along the way":

... This book is those brief stations: some confident, others still searching for their identities. (Express vii)

Each station or chapter of the book is separated by "a photo of a medallion of the last coal burning train that I saw in the transportation museum in Tokyo" (Barber 155). These medallion reproductions, one of which is central to the cover of the text, depict an old locomotive, spewing coal smoke, and driving like the train in Magritte's Time Transfixed (1939) straight into the reader's world. Reproduced between each chapter, they act as a visual mantra, unifying the text both by dividing and by linking all of its stations, in the same way that Tokyo and Montana, although divided by ocean and culture, are metaphorically linked by the writer's

travels and imagination and by the reader's engagement with the fiction. Like Magritte's surrealistic painting, these medallion images depict a moment of the cessation of movement, a point when motion and time are frozen. For The Tokyo-Montana Express and for Brautigan in general, that image of a huge locomotive with its billow of smoke flowing away, speed and power and movement personified, but frozen at rest in a moment of reflection, is a viable image of the way all texts (and possibly all lives) exist and operate. For Brautigan in The Tokyo-Montana Express and elsewhere fiction is an attempt to *express*, to *train*, the moment in words, to place time and space in a momentary stasis so that, perhaps, as he says in his next novel, "the wind won't blow it all away." It is not an attempt, however, to live within the medallion, to mix one's Kool-Aid there or plant one's living room furniture there. That life is fragmentary, that the moment is fleeting, that it must die in its becoming, is realized in the very act of its expression on the page. The train depicted in motion, in truth, is not. It is "the last coal burning train" and, imprinted into cold museum metal and typeset on the pages of this text, it is a dead express. However, any one station in The Tokyo-Montana Express quickly gives way to the next; the Express rushes on "at a great speed." In

its fluid metafictional self-consciousness and in its undeviating mixing of many popular genres, it is an articulate reminder of what Brautigan comes to see as the necessary nature of fiction itself.

i

Richard Brautigan's final work, So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away, has been considered at length in the Introduction to this dissertation as a fiction that combines genres such as autobiography and Bildungsroman and Kunstlerroman and the gothic regional tale with a metafictional perspective and very much proceeds in the manner of The Tokyo-Montana Express. Even as the narrator of that last fiction attempts to come to terms with his past and as that past enacts its own fatalistic sequences, furniture fishers and all, the text turns on itself, questions itself, invites the reader's opinions, and works toward disintegrating the very tale that it is in the act of creating. Although doomed to be bound and fixed as a text, like the express rushing from station to station, like a mercurial trout, it denies that fixity and continually seeks a newness.

At the end of So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away, as the narrator fades into the author, he comments:

... I sat there watching their living room shining out of the dark beside the pond. It looked like a fairy tale functioning happily in the post-World War II gothic of America before television crippled the imagination of America and turned people indoors and away from living out their own fantasies with dignity.

In those days people made their own imagination like homecooking. Now our dreams are just any street in America lined with franchise restaurants. I sometimes think that even our digestion is a soundtrack recorded in Hollywood by the television networks.

Anyway, I just kept getting smaller and smaller beside the pond, more and more unnoticed in the darkening summer grass until I disappeared into the 32 years that have passed since then, leaving me right here, right now. (Wind 130)

Throughout his canon, virtually every word Brautigan writes and every image he creates represent a lament for, a howl against, the loss of language and imagination that he sees in contemporary "franchise" America. From Kool-Aid Wino to stoned Confederate general to life in sugary

iDEATH to the dead library of The Abortion to the maniacal Logan brothers to the furnished fishers and their "living room ritual," individuals and societies who succumb to the numbing influence of ritualistic habit cease to renew themselves and, as Jesse says of Lee Mellon, are ruined. The same is true of writing. A form of fiction which merely follows pre-ordained patterns, which religiously ties itself to a code of laws, is doomed. This dissertation has attempted to illustrate that Brautigan's efforts throughout his oeuvre, and especially in the critically overlooked genre experiments of the 1970s and early 1980s, represent an unending attempt to forge a fresh sort of fiction that insists on a fluid use of language and structure and genre, a use that correlates with the nature of the absurd and fragmentary world that Brautigan saw. The fiction he achieves is not only a noteworthy accomplishment--his work has certainly influenced several contemporary writers including Kinsella, McGuane, Reed and Robbins--but it is unique, a hybrid product that was the combination of his beginnings with metafiction in the 1960s and his experiments with genre in the 1970s.

Richard Brautigan committed suicide sometime near the beginning of October 1984. As the assistant coroner's report indicates, his nearly unrecognizable remains were not found until almost a month later:

The body was badly decomposed, and the abdomen had ruptured from the distension of gases, so its content had become available to insects, flies, and maggots, which had eaten away most of the soft tissues, including the fingers and facial features, leaving only remnants of his genitals. At first inspection it was impossible to say whether the body was male or female, white or black, and we had to identify it by dental records. The house was filled with flies, and the odor was overwhelming. He had been at the foot of the bed looking out the window when he shot himself. The shot pretty much blew away the rear portion of his head. (Manso 115)

Near the body several papers and poems were found including the following:

Somehow we live and die again,
I wonder why to me it just seems
another beginning
Everything leads to something else, so

I think I'll start
 over again.
 Maybe I'll learn something new
 Maybe I won't
 Maybe it will just be the same
 beginning again
 Time goes fast
 for no reason
 Because it all starts
 over again
 I'm not going anyplace
 except where I've
 been before. (Abbott 137)

The poem invokes the desire to "start over," and although that "beginning again" may not guarantee a desired change--it may only re-initiate the repetitive cycle of one's life--it still exists as the sole way toward renewal. Throughout his canon, Brautigan's writings resolutely insist on such renewal in language and form. Of his death, Keith Abbott says: "It's my belief that, in his anger and desolation, Richard wanted his remains to waste away in that gloomy Bolinas house, as a final comment on his regard for the world" (139). That Brautigan should desire to disappear in a becoming like one of his poems, that he should plan in the end to alter

his form like a trout vanishing in a stream, should come as no surprise. Remarkably, horrifically, his final act faithfully mirrored the fiction he relentlessly aspired to write.

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