

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA  
ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

Experiment in Richard Brautigan's Work

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí bakalářské práce (supervisor):  
Mgr. David Vichnar, PhD

Praha, 2019

Zpracovala (author):  
Alina Sokolova  
studijní obor (subject):  
Anglistika a Amerikanistika

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

V Praze dne 13.5.2019

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

Prague, date 13.5.2019

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

.....

Alina Sokolova

## Abstrakt

Díla Richarda Brautigana jsou krátká, imagistická a sebereflexivní. Jeho osoba v Americké literatuře může být popsána jako nedostatečně reprezentovaný symbol alternativní kultury 60. let. Nicméně, jeho díla představují široké spektrum postmoderních experimentálních idejí, které tážají konvenční normy, vnímání reality a názor na každodenní zkušenost. Otevírají tím pádem problematiku lidského bytí, oprávněnosti norem a pravidel v umění a literatuře, měnících se názorů ohledně krásy a pravdy, a nedostatečnosti jazyka jako prostředku záznamu životních zkušeností. Brautigan hledá odpovědi jak na otázky metafyzické tak na všední, a zkoumá život nekonvenčními způsoby – odmítáním obvyklých očekávání při budování příběhů, obrazů a stylu. Během tohoto procesu, Brautigan přebírá mnohé postmoderní ideje, například rekombinace, metafikce a fragmentace. Tato bakalářská práce prozkoumá díla Brautigana včetně *In Watermelon Sugar*, *Trout Fishing in America*, *So the Wind Won't Blow it All Away* za účelem představení způsobu použití experimentů a jejich efektů, a zkoumá pozici Brautigana v souvislosti se současným kontextem.

## Abstract

Richard Brautigan's works are short, imagistic and self-reflexive. His status in American literature is of an underrepresented symbol of the 60s counterculture. However, his works offer a wide range of postmodern experimental notions that challenge the conventional norms, perception of reality and stance on everyday experience. They open up problematic topics of a person's existence, of the validity of norms and rules in art and literature, of shifting views of what is commonly seen as beautiful and true, and of the inconsistency of language as a medium to record one's experience. Looking for answers on questions both metaphysical and mundane, Brautigan explores life in an unconventional way – through the rejection of the familiar expectations about the narratives, imagery, and style. In doing so, he adopts numerous postmodern notions, for instance, those of recombination, metafiction, and fragment. The proposed thesis will approach such works as *In Watermelon Sugar*, *Trout Fishing in America*, *So the Wind Won't Blow it All Away* among others in order to show the ways the experiment is used and the effect that it creates, recontextualizing Brautigan's position from the contemporary viewpoint.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Mgr. David Vichnar, PhD, for his invaluable support and inexhaustible patience which aided the conception and completion of this thesis.

I would also like to thank my friends and family for supporting and motivating me.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	6
1. Style – Reusing Traditions.....	13
1.1. Hemingway.....	13
1.1.1. Camera-eye.....	13
1.1.2. Repetition.....	15
1.1.3. Iceberg theory.....	17
1.2. Greek Anthology.....	18
1.2.1. Fragmentation.....	19
1.2.2. Reduction.....	20
1.2.3. Recombination.....	21
1.3. Haiku and Zen.....	23
1.3.1. Haiku moment.....	24
1.3.2. Observation.....	25
1.3.3. Juxtaposition.....	26
2. Figurative Language.....	29
2.1. Image.....	29
2.2. Mixed metaphor.....	31
2.3. Conceit.....	33
3. Narrative.....	37
3.1. Metafiction.....	38
3.2. Chronology.....	39
3.3. Levels of the narrative.....	40
3.4. Characterization.....	42
3.5. Narrating memories.....	43
3.6. Speed.....	47
Conclusion.....	51
Bibliography.....	58

## Introduction

I have come across Brautigan's work by accident, attracted by an odd title of one of his books, *In Watermelon Sugar*. The title did not disappoint: Brautigan has proved to be one of the most perplexing authors I have ever read. Although popular in the 60s and 70s,<sup>1</sup> his overall career has been generally misunderstood and marginalized. From the fifteen major anthologies and companions to the American writing, specifically those concentrating on the postmodern and experimental works, published by Cambridge, Norton, Routledge, Blackwell and Penguin,<sup>2</sup> only four briefly refer to Brautigan,<sup>3</sup> and only one – *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology* – has a section dedicated to him, including passages from his *Trout Fishing in America*.<sup>4</sup> The main aim of the present thesis thus is to identify the key elements of his style that may have contributed to his marginalization, trace them to the specific traditions, and rethink Brautigan's contribution without the constraints of the conservative reviewers, suggesting instead a more fitting context in which to evaluate his particular approach to writing.

When not overlooked, then Richard Brautigan is generally criticized for various technical “insufficiencies” of his works, for instance, “[making] no attempt to create characters, plot or narrative tension”<sup>5</sup> or presenting “less-than-cardboard narrators.”<sup>6</sup> The criticism also works in more general terms, for instance, the critics panning his works for “vulgarity and obscenity,”<sup>7</sup> “childishness,”<sup>8</sup> or “goofy inconsequence.”<sup>9</sup> The result of such approach attracts reviews like this one by Kenneth Seib:

---

<sup>1</sup> William Hjortsberg, *Jubilee Hitchhiker: The Life and Times of Richard Brautigan* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012) 391.

<sup>2</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to American Poets* (2015), *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism* (2015), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (2004), *The Norton Anthology of Postmodern American Poetry* (2013), *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* (2011), *Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature* (2012), *A Companion to American Literature and Culture (Blackwell Companions)* (2012), *Nation of Letters: A Concise Anthology of American Literature (Blackwell)* (2005), *The Penguin Anthology of 20th-Century American Poetry* (2013), *Anti-Story: An Anthology of Experimental Fiction* (1971).

<sup>3</sup> *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern American Fiction* (2017), *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (2009), *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature* (2016), *Postmodernist Fiction* (2013).

<sup>4</sup> Paula Geyh et al., eds, *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology* (New York: Norton, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Gard, “Drama of Doomed Author Redeems Pedestrian Writing,” *The Plain Dealer* (2000): 12.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas M. Disch, “Dumber Than Dumb,” *The Times Literary Supplement* (1978): 405.

<sup>7</sup> Bobbie Burch Lemontt, “Dreaming of Babylon by Richard Brautigan,” *Western American Literature* (1978): 302.

<sup>8</sup> George Steiner, “Briefly Noted,” *New Yorker* (1977): 230.

Perhaps the most serious criticism that one can direct against Brautigan is that his novels lack structural design, that they are random observations and experiences strung together with cute chapter titles and little overall unity. Brautigan's offhand manner and sense of comic disproportion give to the narrative the extravagance and implausibility more suited to the fishing yarn and tall-tale than to realistic fiction.<sup>10</sup>

The reviewer expects *Trout Fishing in America* to function according to realist conventions. Seib finds problematic the novel's "lack of structural design", "random observations and experiences", "little overall unity", "comic disproportion", "extravagance", and "implausibility". Here, realism becomes the excuse for criticism to dismiss Brautigan's fiction without an attempt at in-depth engagement.

To specify further, realism in the present thesis is understood as an approach to represent reality in the most common and everyday terms. As Erich Auerbach notes, reality, already at the time of Homer's *Odyssey*, was perceived as

a line of externalized, uniformly illuminated phenomena, at a definite time and in a definite place, connected together without lacunae in a perpetual foreground; thoughts and feelings completely expressed; events taking place in leisurely fashion and with very little of suspense.<sup>11</sup>

Such notions as linear time and definite place, externalized experiences, coherent actions, and clearly expressed thoughts and feelings are presented as realistic. As a consequence, realist fiction often strives to represent and communicate these notions in the most realist way, thus creating a tense relationship between the notions of reality and experience, mind and space, and their representation in fiction. However, as Monika Fludernik usefully reminds us,

all narrative (even on its minimal level of a sequential report) is a fictive construct, a representation, and cannot reproduce 'reality' in any mimetic fashion. Stories, lives, the products of conversation are all concepts of the human mind, the result of cognitive parameters which we bring to bear upon the flux of unknowable and indivisible being, upon our exposure to the world.<sup>12</sup>

Brautigan prioritizes this approach, and the human mind and experience become of topmost importance, while the perceived realistic parameters are not treated as the leading ones. However, Brautigan's decision to name his works "novels" has caused controversial response from the critics. This happened due to the tendency, as Fredric Jameson usefully points out, of

---

<sup>9</sup> Anthony Thwaite, "Sour Smell of Success," *The Observer* (1978): 27.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Seib, "Trout Fishing in America: Brautigan's Funky Fishing Yarn," *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* Vol. 13 (1971): 63-71.

<sup>11</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2013) 11.

<sup>12</sup> Monika Fludernik, *Towards A Natural Narratology* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 30.

“[identifying] realism with the novel”, equating “the history of the novel [with] the history of the realist novel, against which or underneath which all the aberrant modes, such as the fantastic novel or the episodic novel, are subsumed without much protest.”<sup>13</sup> However, Brautigan’s experimental novels like *Trout Fishing in America* do protest against the “rules and categories” which are often expected to be realistic, given the novel-realism association. Brautigan’s fiction is far from representing any universal truth or any “real life” experience. In the words of Raymond Federman,

fiction can no longer be reality, or a representation of reality, or even a re-creation of reality; it can only itself be a reality – an autonomous reality whose only relation to the real world is to improve that world. To create fiction [...] is to transform reality, and to some extent even abolish reality, and especially abolish the notion that reality is the truth.<sup>14</sup>

In such fiction time and space lose their initial definiteness, individual experiences of the self and the world are internalized and brought to the foreground, and the timeline becomes disrupted. Conventional methods no longer lend useful means to describe this sort of experiences. Thus, Brautigan addresses the tense problem of the writing of personal experience and its perception in the form of experimental, unconventional texts.

In what ways, then, does Brautigan experiment in his fiction? In the words of John Tanner, “Brautigan’s only lasting attachment was to language and its capacity for imaginative transcendence.”<sup>15</sup> Specifically, his “obsession with language, and his simultaneous frustration with language’s limitation”<sup>16</sup> and “love of the non-sequitur”<sup>17</sup> are some of the prominent features of Brautigan’s topmost preoccupation with stylistic experimentation. “The heightened awareness of the non-semantic qualities of written language”<sup>18</sup> along with “complex layers of intertextuality, surreal juxtapositions and events [...], ambiguity [...], baffling digressions and omissions”<sup>19</sup> are the linguistic and syntactic techniques that reflect his stylistic choices. His works

---

<sup>13</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013) 3.

<sup>14</sup> Raymond Federman, *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) 38.

<sup>15</sup> John Tanner, *Landscapes of Language* (Humanities-Ebooks, 2014) 22.

<sup>16</sup> Tanner, *Landscapes* 67.

<sup>17</sup> Tanner, *Landscapes* 16.

<sup>18</sup> Tanner, *Landscapes* 17.

<sup>19</sup> Tanner, *Landscapes* 86.

blur the boundaries between prose and poetry, can be playful, often seek imaginative transcendence of perceived reality, defamiliarize the everyday, commonly prefer fragmentation to cohesive and closed narrative, fuse minimalism with the metaphorical exuberance of surrealism, and struggle with the choice between stoical or amused/ironic detachment on the one hand and sentimentalised engagement on the other.<sup>20</sup>

Marc Chénétier regards such treatment as “an obsessive interrogation of the fossilization and fixture of language, and [...] a counter-desire to free it from stultification and paralysis”<sup>21</sup> – in essence, a rejuvenating attitude of the experimentalist fighting not only against the inevitable conservative normalization of literature, but also criticizing the very society that produced it.

The result is Brautigan’s stance against the realist conventions and his resistance toward pigeonholing. Recently, the most effective way to understand his works has been from the position of postmodernism and the experiment. However, his works were not exactly avant-garde – they were strongly associated with the zeitgeist of the 60s and 70s, but as this specific cultural atmosphere passed, so did the popularity of his books. To speak in more exact terms,

postmodernism is precisely not avant-garde – or rather, while it may preserve an experimental impulse, it dispenses with the avant-garde spirit of aesthetic intransigence and intractability, instead coupling experimentalism with values of accessibility, legibility, popularity, and pleasure.<sup>22</sup>

These are precisely the qualities for which Brautigan is both most praised and dismissed. Thus, his position is never stable – it is always balancing between the opposing schools of thought and approaches to fiction.

Another postmodern tactic that Brautigan was recognized as using is his resistance to categorization, coming from the notion of defying the existing genres. As Jean-François Lyotard rightly points out,

the postmodern artist or writer is in a position of a philosopher: the text he writes or the work he creates is not in principle governed by preestablished rules and cannot be judged according to a determinant judgment, by the application of given categories to this text or work. Such rules and categories are what the

---

<sup>20</sup> Tanner, *Landscapes* 32.

<sup>21</sup> Marc Chénétier, *Richard Brautigan* (London: Methuen, 1983) 21.

<sup>22</sup> Joe Bray, et al., *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature* (London: Routledge, 2012) 142.

text or work is investigating. The artist and the writer therefore work without rules and in order to establish the rules for what has been made.<sup>23</sup>

This is why the best approach to Brautigan would be to meet him on his own terms, attempting to understand the internal logic and functioning of his works, and not imposing rigid external constructions on his texts. Departing from the conventional forms and genres, he specifically critiques

American cultural symbols, especially [...] materialistic and commercial character of society, [...] commodification of national symbols and myths, [...] the illusory vision of national cultural identity, its history and alleged success, [...] the American Dream, and the belief in technological progress.<sup>24</sup>

Some of the sources for such stylistic and thematic statements were borrowed from or inspired by other writers, outlining another postmodern strategy – a bricolage resulting in pastiche. In the words of Fredric Jameson,

that pure and random play of signifiers which we call postmodernism [...] no longer produces monumental works of the modernist type, but ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of pre-existing texts, the building blocks of older cultural and social production in some new and heightened bricolage: metabooks which cannibalize other books, metatexts which collate bits of other texts – such is the logic of postmodernism in general.<sup>25</sup>

In Brautigan's case this reshuffling, bricolage, fragmentation, and layering become a frequent practice. There are pieces of found art woven into many of Brautigan's works, present to the highest degree in *Trout Fishing in America*. "Another Method of Making Walnut Catsup" is a chapter with recipes from cookbooks found "at the Mechanics' Institute Library,"<sup>26</sup> "The Mayonnaise Chapter" "consist[s] in its entirety of a single letter of condolence,"<sup>27</sup> reportedly found in a second-hand book; "a list of twenty-two classic books about fishing [...] in the 'Trout Death by Port Wine' chapter"<sup>28</sup> was also sourced at the Mechanics' Library. This strategy goes along the lines of Roland Barthes' postmodern notion of the death of the author, according to

---

<sup>23</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence, 1982-1985* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 15.

<sup>24</sup> Jaroslav Kušnir, "Reconsideration of Nature, Myths and Narrative Conventions of Popular Literature in Richard Brautigan's Novel *The Hawkline Monster: a Gothic Western* (1976), or *Gothic Novel and Western in One*," *American Fiction: Modernism-Postmodernism, Popular Culture, and Metafiction* (Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2007) 62.

<sup>25</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) 96.

<sup>26</sup> John F. Barber, "Trout Fishing in America," Brautigan.net, <<http://www.brautigan.net/trout.html>> 13.2.2018.

<sup>27</sup> William Hjortsberg, *Jubilee Hitchhiker: The Life and Times of Richard Brautigan* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012) 174.

<sup>28</sup> Barber, <<http://www.brautigan.net/trout.html>> 13.2.2018.

which the text becomes “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.”<sup>29</sup>

Brautigan’s loss of popularity in the late 70s may have been caused by the relatively stable themes and techniques used throughout his oeuvre. When the zeitgeist changed, Brautigan became outdated, and the interest in his work declined. It did so faster than if he were associated with a memorable label and had like-minded peers, which happened, for instance, to the beatniks. Since Brautigan was not a part of any specific movement, refusing to be associated either with the beatniks or with the hippies and did not participate in many collaborations, he was not able to follow the changing tastes of the general audience. However, some of his works were recently reissued by such publishers as Random House, Vintage, Mariner Books and Canongate Books. For instance, *Trout Fishing in America* was republished in 2010, 2011 and 2014; *A Confederate General From Big Sur* in 2014; *Dreaming of Babylon* in 2017. Those anthologies that do mention him, present his texts alongside “major postmodern works written in the 60s and 70s.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus, in order to identify the key elements of his style and their sources, and to rethink Brautigan’s philosophy in a more appropriate context, the thesis is structured as follows. The first chapter attempts to define his style and its experimental traits and delineates their genealogies. It allows to ground Brautigan in the postmodern tradition and to access further elements of his works with specific viewpoints of this movement. The second chapter examines his rhetoric and use of figures of speech. This offers the reading of metaphors in order to understand his attitude towards perception and imagination, and their relation to reality. The third chapter proceeds to apply the postmodernist tactics to Brautigan as a storyteller, with the main focus on the experiment with the narrative techniques. It allows suggesting the way the author reflects on the temporal and spatial boundaries, retraced in the narrative ones. Close readings of passages aid in illustrating the specific techniques Brautigan uses and the issues he addresses, which helps to illuminate the ways they can be understood. The argumentation is supported by the academical works on the postmodern and experimental theory, which

---

<sup>29</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image—Music—Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 146.

<sup>30</sup> Brian McHale, ed., *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016) 139.

appreciate and recognize Brautigan's works in the contemporary context, fostering crucial findings that help to reconsider his position in the American literature and recontextualize many aspects of his works.

## 1. Style – Reusing Traditions

Brautigan expressed his distrust of prescriptive traditions by detaching himself from the conventions of the realist narrative and character techniques, and by avoiding strictly delineated genres. Instead, he parodied and distorted them, offering unconventional fusions and juxtapositions: gothic and western, erotica and mystery, novel and story collection. He took inspiration from many sources, which result in a bricolage of dissimilar traditions, twisted genres, and solutions. In the process, he forged a unique style that established him as one of the most prominent and recognizable postmodern writers of his time.

### 1.1. Hemingway

#### 1.1.1. Camera-eye

First on the list of Brautigan's influences is Hemingway. Many sources speak of Hemingway as Brautigan's favorite author and of "the artistic economy he learned from reading him."<sup>1</sup> Such Hemingwayesque traits as "[sparse] adjectives, small number of details [...] carefully juxtaposed one to another" and "impersonality" result in a precisely measured style that often seems "unpsychological", unemotional and "sterile". In Bradbury's words, such mode of writing "does not go inside, but projects action outward", and the important events are presented "without decoration or romanticization" in a detached journalistic style. Also, due to the gruesomeness of war and the impossibility to rightly express it in words, much like in Beckett's minimalistic dark plays, the attention to the outward detail and the dialogue becomes "a total metaphor for an inward and psychic condition, as the reader fills the empty spaces and the area of implied pain and hysteria."<sup>2</sup> Brautigan had a reason to choose similar techniques, too. He took over this metaphor and transferred it to his poems, stories, and novels, for instance, "The Menu". In it, the narrator was asked to write an article on the condition of the death row convicts in the San Francisco state prison. After meeting the prison official and acquiring the convicts' menu, he showed it to his friends:

---

<sup>1</sup> Hjortsberg, *Jubilee Hitchhiker* 68.

<sup>2</sup> Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel* 94-97.

It was not by accident that I showed him the Death Row menu. It was time for the menu to go to work. I just handed it to him and said,  
“Take a look at this.”  
“What do you have there, Richard?” He took a look at the menu and it did not please him. His face tensed and became a nervous gray.  
“That’s the Pop Art that hurts,” he said.  
“You think so, huh?” I said.  
“Yes, it’s sick,” he said. “It’s like that sculpture. You know the kind that has drawers full of dead babies.”  
The menu was lying in front of him on the table and it said that for breakfast on Saturday the men on Death Row would have a

California Orange  
Cornflakes  
Plain Omelet  
Crisp Bacon  
French Toast  
Maple Syrup  
Toast—Bread—Oleo  
Coffee—Milk<sup>3</sup>

The menu becomes the focal point of the story, while Brautigan as a reporter does not provide any judgment – he merely records the responses of others, thinking himself only that this “menu was a very powerful and strange experience”. However, as he ponders, “how could beet and onion salad condemn our society?” The answer is found in the words of Brautigan’s friends and in his descriptions of their responses. According to them, the menu is “frightening, obscene and disgusting”, it is “so stark, so real [...] It’s senseless.” Here the menu represents a document, although an “equipment for a perfect vision of Death Row”, it consists only of factual information, like subject details – meals, and the kitchen staff. But when inspected carefully, and realising that this is the menu for the “condemned row”, consisting of approximately 4500 calories fed to people that are already “effectively dead”, the deeper meanings shine through, challenging old worn-out norms: “Ah, to journey with a Death Row menu through the streets of San Francisco and to nurture its expanding vision, its search for new reality in a tired old thing.” Practically, it shows in what a grotesque and illogical way function some parts of the American society:

The other poet looked at the menu and said, “Look at all that food. I love crisp bacon. I haven’t had any bacon in a year. Look at all that food. The men up there must really get fat. It’s like nailing the goose to the

---

<sup>3</sup> Richard Brautigan, *The Tokyo-Montana Express* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1980) 167-168.

floor and then feeding him to death. Why don't they give this food to a poet?" "Because a poet didn't kill anyone," the other poet replied.<sup>4</sup>

All the while Brautigan does not judge the menu or the Death Row in any direct way, thus becoming a neutral, camera-eye witness of the situation. This way it is a straight, journalistic vision of the issue without any pressure of authorial interpretation, much like Hemingway's, similarly stripped of the direct moralistic tone of the authorities.

### 1.1.2. Repetition

This technique does not provide any exact answers, the author does not take sides, and the meaning becomes autonomous, relieved of the authorial pressure. In such a way the technique acquires an anarchistic undertone. Creative monopoly is taken from the author, freed from the strict writer-reader hierarchy. Furthermore, the imagination is required to glue together pieces of dialogue, description, and action into a moving, living situation – a motion picture of sorts, happening in the mind's eye. It facilitates the author's trick to create the whole situation from small scenes, even snapshots. Brautigan adopts yet another famous technique of Hemingway's – repetition, acquired as a result of being influenced by Imagists, photography, and cinema. Zoe Trodd speaks of the repetition technique as creating a slow-motion effect, which is a result of "representing an image or idea from a different angle."<sup>5</sup> This means that the same object or idea gradually progresses and evolves, repeated several times in close proximity to create a progression of motion. It also creates visual points and topography-like orientation, with the story decorated by the same familiar objects. This repetition insists on an almost monotonous description, although when a familiar element is misplaced or described differently, it attracts attention due to the very minimalism of decorations:

Her turning woke the cat up and the cat stopped purring. The cat thought about going back to sleep, then decided not to.

The cat lay there staring into the dark evening depths of the room. The cat was thirsty. Soon it would get out of bed and go into the kitchen and get some water from its dish by the refrigerator. It would probably have a little midnight snack, too. The cat would have five or six bits of dried cat food which it would eat very slowly: *crunch crunch crunch* like chewing soft diamonds in the dark.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Brautigan, *Tokyo-Montana* 166-169.

<sup>5</sup> Zoe Trodd, "Hemingway's Camera Eye: The Problem of Language and an Interwar Politics of Form," *Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms"*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009) 216.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Brautigan, *Sombrero Fallout* (London: Arena, 1977) 103.

The cat's actions are described in a gradual, careful manner – each movement is given significance, even though the cat is only a secondary character in the book. Here the cat is repeated many times in order to attach the attention to it, to follow it in every small movement from frame to frame. A new, rhematic element is added at the end of the passage – the way the cat eats – “like chewing soft diamonds in the dark”. The repetition of the cat's actions establishes a familiar, gradual progression and, when juxtaposed with another descriptive element, creates visual and tactile interest in the otherwise acoustic sensation of “*crunch crunch crunch*”.

However, repetition as a tool creates more than a cinematic effect of following each movement of a character. In Brautigan's hands it is also very dream-like, time-bending, when describing the mind that is remembering, dreaming, fantasizing. It happens, for instance, when the protagonist remembers going to bed with his ex-girlfriend for the first time:

After his funeral, they took their clothes off and got into bed. They took their clothes off in response to an invisible signal [...] that caused them to just start taking their clothes off at exactly the same time. [...] She took her clothes off like a kite takes gently into a warm April wind. He fumbled his clothes off like a football game being played in November mud. [...] While she was taking her clothes off, she watched him take his off. [...] After she took her clothes off, she slipped into bed and under the covers. She watched him standing there fumbling off the last of his clothes.<sup>7</sup>

Here, although Brautigan describes a scene with actions, they are almost frozen, stretched for several pages, disturbed by other thoughts or descriptions, resulting in a very slow-moving scene, or almost identical scenes inserted throughout the passage. This happens due to the fact that the protagonist is remembering them.

Yet another use of repetition is to communicate an obsessive mood:

When he ordered eggs in a restaurant there were just two of them. That was a controllable number of eggs to his thinking. Two eggs were not a commitment. They were just something to eat and enjoy. A dozen eggs were a different matter. They were *twelve* eggs. That was just too many eggs to think about at one time. After all, he had just so much time in life to think about eggs and twelve eggs occupied too much time, so he preferred not to have that many eggs in his house.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Brautigan, *Sombrero* 67.

<sup>8</sup> Brautigan, *Sombrero* 91.

Continuing on the topic of obsessive mood, Brautigan takes repetition to the level of chapters, repeating several of them where the protagonist speaks about food: “Tuna”, “Avocado” and “Eggs” chapters.

In these two examples Brautigan shows things happening in the mind of the protagonist, not his actions, thus departing from Hemingway’s notion of unpsychological fiction. Still, the mind and psychology are described indirectly, enabling access to the psychological and emotional state of characters on a neutral level, unmanipulated by the author’s presumptions.

### 1.1.3. Iceberg theory

The last important idea that Brautigan learns from Hemingway is his “iceberg theory”, which means that only the most important elements of the story are told, while the rest of the facts are hidden under the surface, unmentioned. However, such a technique requires

the reader [to] feel the whole story, [...] fill the gaps left by [...] omissions with their feelings and round [it out] to make it three-dimensional, providing the next angle in [this] multi-shot aesthetic.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, such elimination is not random – only those parts that are known to the author can be deleted, otherwise “a writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing.”<sup>10</sup> But, if the style is already very economic and is rather “dependent upon implication rather than explication,”<sup>11</sup> every missing detail creates tension – a feeling of mystery if described by very scarce means, or suspicion – if supported enough information to follow the clues. A great example of minimalism and omission is Brautigan’s mini-story “The Scarlatti Tilt” from *Revenge of the Lawn*:

“It’s very hard to live in a studio apartment in San Jose with a man who’s learning to play the violin.”  
That’s what she told the police when she handed them the empty revolver.<sup>12</sup>

The story is told in two sentences (plus the title), and the number of clues is very limited. The most immediate explanation is that the woman killed the man because of his unskillful violin playing that bothered her. Other clues – a limited number of details – assist in forming this

---

<sup>9</sup> Trodd, *Hemingway's Camera Eye* 218.

<sup>10</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Scribner, 1932) 154.

<sup>11</sup> Millicent Bell, “Pseudoautobiography and Personal Metaphor”, *Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom’s Literary Criticism, 2009) 107.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Brautigan, *Revenge of the Lawn* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971) 50.

vision: the studio apartment suggests that all living space is restricted to one room, and there is no way for the woman to escape the man's playing into another one. The learning process is an indication of playing done unskillfully enough. The police and the revolver point to the crime scene. Finally, the Scarlatti name from the title most likely points to an Italian composer Giuseppe Domenico Scarlatti, known for his lively sonatas from the period between Baroque and Classical schools, his innovative music ranging "from the courtly to the savage, from an almost saccharine urbanity to an acrid violence,"<sup>13</sup> the description that only adds to the effect of the dramatic way the man performed his playing. Arguably, omission and minimalism invite to add missing elements to create their own version of the story – why those two people lived together, what exactly happened between them that resulted in the police visit, what is the role of the San Jose reference as applied to Brautigan's times.

Oftentimes, though, Brautigan's treatment of the iceberg theory evolves to the point when it becomes problematic to calculate by the tip size how big is the rest of the iceberg. This is best seen in the poems that consist only of titles, as in "A 48-Year-Old Burglar from San Diego."<sup>14</sup> In those instances when an element's presence has no supportive description, it is unclear what constitutes its "point". Here, Brautigan also challenges the academy that insists on integrity and clarity of the experienced text. However, both reality and memory rarely present a full picture. An experience of one individual is always partial and one-sided in the general situation. By using omission, Brautigan implies the inevitable alienation that every member of the society, and the society in general may experience in relation to other parts of humanity. This is where his next influence shows up, illustrating how and to what effect fragmentation is used.

## 1.2. The Greek Anthology

Another way Brautigan commented upon American tradition was through techniques he found reading epigrams. William Hjortsberg wrote that Brautigan owned "a three-volume set of *The Greek Anthology*, one of his favorite literary works,"<sup>15</sup> which consisted of "about 3700 Greek

---

<sup>13</sup> "Domenico Scarlatti", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Domenico-Scarlatti>> 10.02.2018.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Brautigan, *Rommel Drives on Deep into Egypt* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1970) 2.

<sup>15</sup> Hjortsberg, *Jubilee Hitchhiker* 498.

epigrams, songs, epitaphs, and rhetorical exercises”<sup>16</sup> on a variety of themes. According to the description, epigrams offer a number of approaches. There is the fragmented nature of a piece taken from a bigger work, its combination with other pieces to form a collection, satirical take on a thought, and also randomness and variety of survived pieces from long ago, paired with the editorial revision and selectivity.<sup>17</sup>

Brautigan read the *Anthology* that represents Greek literary culture as comprised of numerous fragments – authorial or anonymous, complete or partial, with a distinct moral statement or just descriptive. When placed together, they constitute a mixed palette of the country’s literary heritage. Meleager, the initial compiler of the *Anthology*, referred to those epigrams as “the Garland,”<sup>18</sup> or a bouquet of flowers. Brautigan put the epigrammatic potential into practice, keeping in mind their variability and compactness.

### 1.2.1. Fragmentation

He applied these principles extensively in *Willard and His Bowling Trophies*. There he describes them as “just fragments. Lines, [...] parts of lines and sometimes only single words that remain from the original poems written by the Greeks thousands of years ago.”<sup>19</sup> He frequently quotes them, for instance, “more beautiful”, “having fled”, “takes bites of the cucumbers”, “I was”, “storms,”<sup>20</sup> and the like. In case of *Willard and His Bowling Trophies*, these fragments are used as a link between the main character’s mental state and his actions, enhancing the feeling of the moment: “and nothing will come of anything”<sup>21</sup> is used by a desperate Bob who has contracted an STD from his wife Constance. He becomes very absent-minded, unable to

do anything right and he overwaters the plants and things drop out of his hands and he’s always falling over things and breaking things and he forgets what he’s talking about half the time in the middle of what he’s saying.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> “Greek Anthology”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <<https://www.britannica.com/art/Greek-Anthology>> 12.2.2018.

<sup>17</sup> “Epigram”, *Merriam-Webster*, <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epigram>> 12.2.2018.

<sup>18</sup> “Meleager”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Meleager-Greek-poet#ref221811>> 12.2.2018.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Brautigan, *Willard and His Bowling Trophies* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975) 24.

<sup>20</sup> Brautigan, *Willard* 25.

<sup>21</sup> Brautigan, *Willard* 25.

<sup>22</sup> Brautigan, *Willard* 13.

He likes to quote from *The Greek Anthology*, but epigrams that he chooses only make his condition more explicit: “let us put little garlands of celery upon our brows and hold high festival to Dionysus”<sup>23</sup> right before having sex, “painting a lion from the claw”<sup>24</sup> while dissatisfied with the process, “I know the tunes of all the birds,”<sup>25</sup> after bringing Constance a sandwich instead of a glass of water that she was asking for. Each time Bob comments upon a situation with an epigram, it roughly fits the context, but more often it leaves many things unsaid, many feelings not understood, many meanings unclarified. Thus the use of epigrams evokes such notions as randomness, fragmentality, uprootedness.

### 1.2.2. Reduction

Brautigan uses his own epigrams when dealing with secondary characters – the three Logan sisters – at the beginning of the text, and keeps their description minimal, almost lacking, but still mentioned throughout. Such fragmented characterization parallels the use of epigrams, when at the very end of the book an epilogue titled “Searching for an octopus” (itself a quote from an epigram) contains nothing more than these words: “Q: What about the Logan sisters?/ A: Forget them.”<sup>26</sup> Such use of the device is summed up by Bob:

that’s all that’s left of a poem. I wonder what happened to the rest of it. So many things can happen in two thousand years. Wars and, you know, all sorts of stuff like that. Plagues and countries and whole civilizations passing away. It must have been a beautiful poem.<sup>27</sup>

While Brautigan keeps adding details that never develop after their initial mention, the epigrammatic technique develops into a means of constructing a situation by putting together views from different angles. This time it is done without repetition, all the while highlighting the fact that these are random facts about a character (or a situation) aimed to illuminate their behavior (or the story’s point) from different angles. However, at the story’s end, it contributes little to the overall integrity of the character. For example, in *Willard and His Bowling Trophies* neither the traits nor the actions that Bob and his wife are characterized by explaining why they get killed at the end. The action of the Logan Brothers lacks inherent logic. It mimics the

---

<sup>23</sup> Brautigan, *Willard* 36.

<sup>24</sup> Brautigan, *Willard* 42.

<sup>25</sup> Brautigan, *Willard* 73.

<sup>26</sup> Brautigan, *Willard* 167.

<sup>27</sup> Brautigan, *Willard* 73.

randomness and the enigma surrounding the *Greek Anthology*, lacking the explanation on Brautigan's part as to why he has chosen those exact ones.

### 1.2.3. Recombination

All three stories comprising the book are happening in an intermingling parallel manner, but the lives of the characters are barely connected to one another except for being neighbors and used in the same story. Brautigan explicitly highlights this fact:

Of course Bob and Constance couldn't hear what Patricia and John were saying downstairs and neither of the couples knew what the other couple was doing.

That's one of the strange things about people living in apartment buildings. They barely know what anybody else is doing. The doors are made out of mystery.<sup>28</sup>

However disconnected from each other, the stories of Brautigan's characters make perfect, straightforward sense. Only in a combination they create this sense of things not completely making sense – all because of the random fact added by Brautigan at the end – apartment number swapping. Epigrams in the *Anthology* work in a similar way – they are loosely, artificially arranged, creating this partial, glimpse-like impression.

Similarly, epigrams quoted by Bob are just hints to what is happening in his mind, as Brautigan does not describe it otherwise. Does he point to the inevitable fragmentation process of human thinking, of the gradual disintegration of personality and memory? Does he highlight the “normal” thinking process disintegrating under specific circumstances – trauma, loss, depression? Could he, as the author, make meaning when describing a character by such fragmentary means? It is doubtful, as Brautigan's present approach is unsteadily places between coherence and disintegration of characters and situations, like in this chapter, entitled “The *Greek Anthology* Telephone Call”:

The telephone rang just as the Logan brother's hand touched the receiver and he picked it up without any hesitation in one motion as if the telephone had been ringing all the time.

“Yes,” he said.

“...”

“I'm one of them,” he said.

---

<sup>28</sup> Brautigan, *Willard* 127.

“...”  
“The very same,” he said.  
“...”  
“Thank you,” he said.  
“...”  
“On Chestnut,” he said.  
“...”  
“Yes,” he said.  
“...”  
“I appreciate it,” he said.  
“...”  
“Yes,” he said.  
“...”  
“Thank you,” he said.  
“...”  
“Any time,” he said.  
The Logan brother hung up.<sup>29</sup>

It is not explained where they got the information that someone would call, how that person knew about John and Pat and their apartment number, or for that matter – what the person on the other end was saying. Arguably, this is excessive information irrelevant for the plot, but its lack creates the feeling of something missing, as Brautigan observes, referring to *The Greek Anthology* in the title of the chapter.

From another perspective, Amy Arenson et al. speak of fragmentation as of “fear of stability, as stability equals death.”<sup>30</sup> When Brautigan divides an instance into several possibilities, for example, the ending of *A Confederate General From Big Sur*, he disagrees with a singular view of history, of universal vision or truth. Arenson et al. speak of it as having “no closure; what we are left with is not a ‘Union’, and [it] cannot, like our heavy history books, pretend to one truth. In the myriad endings are multiple possibilities; this story could have been told 186,000 ways.”<sup>31</sup> *Trout Fishing in America* and *Tokyo-Montana Express* function in a similar way. There is a central theme that binds all chapters together – a critique of American reality and its success dream in the first, and ponderings on fleeting moments of life influenced by Zen Buddhism and Japanese mentality in the second. Then, every chapter becomes a variation on this central theme, being only a part of the general picture, only a single-sided view. These chapters also show that

---

<sup>29</sup> Brautigan, *Willard* 153.

<sup>30</sup> Amy Arenson, et al., “The Final Chapters in a Confederate General From Big Sur,” *Richard Brautigan: Essays on the Writings and Life*, ed. John F. Barber (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2006) 34.

<sup>31</sup> Arenson 34.

the dominant motif is not so distinctly identified, escaping singular definition or categorization – *Trout Fishing in America* is as much about fishing as *The Tokyo-Montana Express* is about trains, and together they are as much about single characters as about the country in which those characters live. Language works in a similar way, only partially capable of expressing thoughts, ideas or reality – it is always only a fraction of versions of how it could be done – and not the only valid one.

Arguably, every work of Brautigan’s is shaped by the model of the *Anthology*. Every novel is divided into “chapterettes”<sup>32</sup> that present distinct, separate ideas; story collections are combinations of sketched situations on a variety of topics, each story concentrating on its own internal problem; poetry collections are short lyrical versions of the story collections, all of which are just fragments of human experiences. It is possible to imagine an overarching theme that connects all these fragments in a collection. However, Brautigan opposes such pursuits in his every work, including elements that are as distant from one another as possible, for instance, trivial poems are paired with serious ones. But, as distinct stories and poems are separated, each of them preserves the individuality of its main point – as an epigram that is able to stand alone and keep its distinct voice, even in a big volume of text to offer an insight to any relevant idea that it happens to connect with.

### 1.3. Haiku and Zen

Brautigan’s next approach to comments upon the Western ideology is by using logic and techniques that have a marginal status there. “Rational discourse in the Western world establishes absolutes, insists on a categorical difference between Heaven and Hell, up and down, fiction and fact, love and hate.”<sup>33</sup> Such thinking also involves strict linear planning, clarity of moral position and a strong emphasis on belonging to a specific group, category or side. Contrarily, Eastern discourse, when applied to arts specifically, depends less on reasoning and more on intuition, which is immediate in reaction and is thus “non-judgmental, amoral, non-

---

<sup>32</sup> Julian Barnes, "Kidding", *New Statesman* 4 April 1975: 457.

<sup>33</sup> Mary Rohrberger, "In Watermelon Sugar", *Masterplots II. American Fiction Series*, ed. Frank N. Magill, Vol. 2 (1986): 787-791.

verbal, and uncritical.”<sup>34</sup> All these values stem from the saturation of the Eastern traditions with Buddhist philosophy, in Brautigan’s case specifically with Zen Buddhism and its influence on the Japanese tradition of haiku.

Brautigan is strongly associated with Japan, which he visited many times and even married a Japanese woman. Speaking in an interview about Japan, Brautigan confirmed this influence and added:

Thirty-one years I’ve been massively influenced by the culture of Japan. I love the energy and the imagination of the Japanese people, and every time I’m in Japan I’m extremely pleased to be there, and I find it very very stimulating and somehow, in some beautiful way, Japan is one of my teachers.<sup>35</sup>

Hjortsberg notes Brautigan speaking of his early acquaintance with haiku:

I was seventeen and then eighteen and began to read Japanese haiku poetry from the Seventeenth century. I read Bashō and Issa. I liked the way they used language concentrating emotion, detail, and image until they arrived at a form of dew-like steel.<sup>36</sup>

Those qualities that Brautigan mentions – emotion, detail, image – are central to understanding haiku and its influence on his work. They also clarify this approach to language which he described as “dew-like steel.”

### 1.3.1. Haiku moment

There is one crucial element that connects Zen Buddhism, the haiku form and Brautigan’s writing. It is that moment of realization, of illumination, of a turning point that brings a new understanding of some idea. In Zen Buddhism it is called satori, meaning “enlightenment” – a moment of “intuitive insight into what transcends logical distinctions,”<sup>37</sup> or “the unfolding of a new world hitherto unperceived”<sup>38</sup> – a new viewpoint on an everyday matter. A similar element is present in haiku, called the haiku moment. It is an “aesthetic moment [...] in which the words which created the experience and the experience itself can become one.”<sup>39</sup> During the haiku

---

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Yasuda, *Japanese Haiku. Its Essential Nature and History* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2001) 4.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Brautigan interview, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snr9LktUiOE>> 27.2.2018.

<sup>36</sup> Hjortsberg, *Jubilee Hitchhiker* 66.

<sup>37</sup> Joan Giroux, *The Haiku Form* (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 1974) 22.

<sup>38</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (London: Arrow Books, 1959) 88.

<sup>39</sup> Yasuda, *Japanese Haiku* 32.

moment “man and his environment are one unified whole, in which there is no sense of time.”<sup>40</sup> It allows the poet to build connections between complex and opposing ideas, such as the realization of one’s life in a single moment, or of the vastness of the world in one momentary thought. The haiku moment brings “a new insight or vision which the haiku poet must render as an organic whole.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, practicing haiku as one of the Zen arts, the poet learns to tackle complex issues in one short, relatable form.

Brautigan attributed such illuminating role to his poetry and to poetry in general, which he saw as “telegrams of the human soul – [created] to illuminate, to make us more compassionate, to understand more of our condition. The human condition.”<sup>42</sup> He did so with the aid of haiku techniques learned from Bashō and Issa.

### 1.3.2. Observation

The central Zen technique or practice is observation. With observation the poet gains material about the topic of his interest. In Zen, it is nature and everyday life, while Brautigan adds to these two his observations of internal situations as well as other people’s actions. Bashō’s observation of a cicada leads to a composition of this haiku:

“The cicada”

In the cicada’s cry  
There’s no sign that can foretell  
How soon it must die.<sup>43</sup>

In his poem, Brautigan observes a man in a cafe:

“In a Cafe”

I watched a man in a cafe fold a slice of bread  
as if he were folding a birth certificate or looking  
at the photograph of a dead lover.<sup>44</sup>

While the poet studies the object in a neutral way, he is open to the new revelations enabled by his unjudging viewpoint. While Bashō observes a cicada and listens to the sound it makes, he

---

<sup>40</sup> *Japanese Haiku* 32.

<sup>41</sup> *Japanese Haiku* 32.

<sup>42</sup> Brautigan interview, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snr9LktUi0E>> 27.2.2018.

<sup>43</sup> Yasuda, *Japanese Haiku* 243.

<sup>44</sup> Brautigan, *Trout, The Pill* 107.

realizes that apart from this moment of its life there is a moment of its eventual death – however, it is not marked by any sign of the exact time when it will happen. In a way, this cicada exists forever at this moment; it is atemporal. Brautigan’s poem also combines this duality of life and death in a single observed moment, through small details. The man’s folding of a piece of bread is compared to the folding of a birth certificate. Is it done with care, or with the grief of being reminded of one’s age? In the second comparison, similar emotions raise new questions: does looking at the photograph of a dead lover evoke sorrow for their loss, or does it bring a realization of the preciousness of their photo and the memories it brings? These two comparisons suggest many other questions. Although Zen concept of life sees it as “a succession of moments, whose meaning is to be captured by openness to the significance of each event as it occurs,”<sup>45</sup> denying any continuity between the past and the future and insisting on the ever-present now, a single haiku moment suggests greater depth than the one seen from the surface of the poem.

### 1.3.3. Juxtaposition

This is another important technique in this writing – relying on opposite qualities and their juxtaposition, or combination, or fusion – all in one small poem. It produces the effect that Brautigan called “language concentrating emotion”. It is thus concentrated because it places opposite notions in close proximity, creating tension, raising the concentration of ideas in the small volume of the haiku – all aimed to attain the haiku moment. It depends on opposite qualities as much as on satori, and “[e]ach of these conditions integrates complementary and antithetical qualities; directness is linked with paradox, austerity with joy, love of nature with love of the ordinary.”<sup>46</sup>

Thus an inexpressive everyday object is perceived in a different light when paired with a notion opposite to it:

“Cicada’s ShriII”

---

<sup>45</sup> Giroux, 22.

<sup>46</sup> Giroux, 22.

How silent and still!  
Into the heart of rocks sinks  
The cicada's shrill.<sup>47</sup>

Here, Bashō again uses the cicada's sound to emphasize the silence that comes before and after its loud song, absorbing it by its vastness. Conversely, in this silence, the cicada's call is well heard, and silence, too, works as an enhancer. In such a way two opposite qualities are not hierarchically organized – they are connected in a more subtle, complex way – as companions and complements, not as competitors. This complexity of relationships creates this “dew-like steel” effect: a poem's object is often physical, material – a natural phenomenon, a living creature, a plant. They all have their cycles of life, with its (or its effect's) implied temporality and change – like mist, sakura petals, snow, sun, sea, etc., becoming the gentle “dew” of the comparison. Meanwhile, the elements that they are paired with are often abstract, universal, “steel-like”, solid phenomena: solitude, cosmic silence, life, death, nature, etc. Due to the nature of haiku that must incorporate these two organically into one picture, their combination creates this notion of steel gentle and fleeting, like dew, and dew potent and strong like steel. Brautigan used this technique even more after visiting Japan, resulting in the poetry collection *June 30th*, *June 30th*, exemplified by the poem “Japan”:

Japan begins and ends  
with Japan.

Nobody else knows the  
Story.

. . . Japanese dust  
in the Milky Way.

Tokyo  
May 18, 1976<sup>48</sup>

Here, Brautigan uses this technique of juxtaposition to create the contrast between abstract and concrete notions: Japan, as much as almost every country, is a measured and marked territory, but Brautigan describes it by a paradoxical saying – Japan defines its dimensions by itself, but he gives no definite numbers or directions. Here, Japan as a territorial unit is opposed to Japan as a country with a specific cultural, socio-political, etc. context. Brautigan continues by saying that “Nobody else knows the/ Story”, implying, arguably, that no living or dead person could grasp the whole story of its country, or ever will. Only Japan as a whole with all people and their

---

<sup>47</sup> *Japanese Haiku* 243.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Brautigan, *June 30th, June 30th* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1978) 31.

history define what and where Japan is physically, but also theoretically, i.e. what Japanese culture is, where it starts and ends, and what elements belong there or do not. The last part of the poem is a strong juxtaposition between an image of the Japanese dust particle and its floating in the Milky Way, evoking the feeling of the sublime by placing side by side two elements of incomparable sizes. Thus, all the richness and volume of Japanese knowledge, culture, and history is followed by the reference to the Milky Way – an entity that is incomparable in size for an average human, measured in light years and comprised of billions of cosmic bodies. Thus, juxtapositions of opposite qualities are ways of representing these objects in a more extreme, contrasting version. It creates the necessity to evaluate their deeper nature, and think of their central-most values, as Brautigan said, not to “peel life like an apple, [but] to slice it to the core.”<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Hjortsberg, *Jubilee Hitchhiker* 68.

## 2. Figurative Language

### 2.1. Image

Brautigan's use of metaphors and other figures of speech is another of his prominent experimental traits. There is an abundance of them in his every work: "I walked home past the glass whiskers of the houses, reflecting the downward rushing waterfalls of night,"<sup>1</sup> goes a typical passage with two metaphors from *Trout Fishing in America*. Here, the metaphors' vehicles can be traced to their initial tenors. "Glass whiskers of the houses" refer to the windows, and "downward rushing waterfalls of night" is a way to describe the approaching darkness. However, this example is one of the rare occasions when he uses them in a more standard, recognizable fashion, that is – a metaphor consisting of a tenor and a vehicle, where the vehicle seeks to clarify or transfer some characteristics of the tenor through analogical comparison:

Where a concept, an idea, an emotion may be hard to grasp in language, then a metaphor, an offering of perceived resemblances, may enable us the better to 'come to grips with' the issue in hand.<sup>2</sup>

The conventional form of metaphor offers an analogical pairing of two notions in order to explain something that lies outside the scope of language.

In Brautigan's case, the Poundian term "image", "which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time,"<sup>3</sup> may as well be used. It accurately describes Brautigan's technique, for example:

He was bald with a red birthmark on his head. The birthmark looked just like an old car parked on his head.[...] He nodded and the old red car wobbled back and forth on the road as if the driver were having an epileptic seizure.<sup>4</sup>

The comparison of a birthmark with an old red car does not reveal any insight about the birthmark. The important characteristics that are transferred are the red color and later – its motion. Both are grasped visually. The man's birthmark moves when he nods, and the car also moves only with the help of the driver. The image is present here to transition to the imagined

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard Brautigan, *Trout Fishing in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010) 4.

<sup>2</sup> David Punter, *Metaphor* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 13.

<sup>3</sup> T. S. Eliot, ed., *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1968) 3.

<sup>4</sup> Brautigan, *Trout* 9.

scene that the author constructs, showing it in a more articulate, theatrical way. There is no need to understand any intrinsic value of the birthmark – the image is in Poundian’s terms direct, it shows only objects that are precisely in the focus, as Pound states in the first two points of “A Retrospect”: “1. Direct treatment of the “thing” whether subjective or objective./2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.”<sup>5</sup>

Brautigan’s comparisons are often precisely this – images with no obvious symbolic or analogical connection. Brautigan undermines the device’s central purpose of explaining some notion better, making it more obscure instead, as in the poem “The Wheel”:

The wheel: it’s a thing like pears  
rotting under a tree in August.  
O golden wilderness!  
The bees travel in covered wagons  
and the Indians hide in the heat.<sup>6</sup>

This poem contains a series of images that are not particularly connected to one another – rather, they contribute to the general context separately. There is a comparison between the wheel and the pears under the tree. They are connected only by the notion that they are both objects, “things”. Again, the wheel gains nothing in this comparison with rotting pears – the vehicle is in a way random, interchangeable for any other “thing”. Here it contributes only to the visual establishment of a scene. It is free from any dialectical load from its connection to pears and is thus immediate. The purpose of the image here is to point to its “objectness”, to highlight the wheel’s status not as a crucial invention, but just as a material object. However, its relationship to the rest of the objects in the poem is unclear. Is it involved as a symbol in the wilderness-civilization duality? Is it an object that distinguishes the American settlers from the native people? Are “the bees” the reference for the “working” Americans who are perceived alongside the images that arise as connotations of the wheel? As Brautigan’s comparison is not obvious enough, it leaves the image unprocessed, objective.

Similar processes happen with other images, for instance, in the poem “The Horse That Had a Flat Tire”:

---

<sup>5</sup> Eliot, *Essays* 3.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Brautigan, *The Pill Versus The Springhill Mine Disaster* (New York: Dell, 1968) 28.

In the valley  
there was a beautiful maiden  
whom the prince  
drifted into love with  
like a New Mexico made from  
apple thunder and long  
glass beds.<sup>7</sup>

The images are disconnected from one another and, although Brautigan insists on connecting them by using “like”, it is difficult to see how falling in love can be similar to one of America’s states (New Mexico) made of chewing tobacco (“Thunder” is a brand, and “apple” – one of the flavors), somehow connected to glass beds. If it is an allusion to the Snow White tale (given the prince, the apple and the glass coffin context), then what is its connection to New Mexico? Is it a visual pair for the “valley”, referring to the state’s arid territory covered in deserts and mountains? As these images are ambiguously connected, they again remain just this – images, imaginary landscapes with loose hints at possible scenarios of the situation, while explaining little of the primary intrinsic load of the objects or the author’s intention.

## 2.2. Mixed metaphor

In terms of metaphor typology, similar ones are sometimes called “mixed” ones, and Punter defines them as mixing “apparently incompatible topics. It is often the result of a rhetorical mistake but sometimes [...] may be used to remarkable effect.”<sup>8</sup> Brautigan’s mixed metaphors are no rhetorical mistakes. Moreover, they are the result of the conscious placement of “apparently incompatible” objects together. The effect is a non-sequitur, and the image that consists of such illogical connection brings surprise, creates surreal imagery and challenges the familiar meaning-making patterns. It is also critical of the conventional insistence on the necessity of the presence of specific meaning, highlighting rather the surreal potential of real-life objects.

Sometimes, senses other than vision are involved, too: “[t]he flesh about my body felt soft and relaxed like an experiment in functional background music.”<sup>9</sup> Here, physical sensations are likened to audial ones, not only inviting to grasp some idea, but also to transfer it to the

---

<sup>7</sup> Brautigan, *The Pill* 87.

<sup>8</sup> Punter, *Metaphor* 147.

<sup>9</sup> Brautigan, *Trout* 24.

domain of other senses, to experience it richer. Such images offer a synaesthetic connection between two notions, as in the poem “The Quail”:

There are three quail in a cage next door,  
and they are the sweet delight of our mornings,  
calling to us like small frosted cakes:  
bobwhitebobwhitebobwhite,<sup>10</sup>

where the quails are compared to small frosted cakes. The birds make a whistling sound that resembles their species common name – bobwhite. It is an idea that is similar to the representation of a letter in a language with sound – two notions from different senses are linked and associated together (letterform – visual, phoneme – audial). As letterforms are arbitrary for any given language, their connection to sounds is done by analogy. In this case, the whistle the quail makes is comprised of two “notes”, first one lower, and the second – higher. The word bobwhite has two syllables, with “o” in “bob” empirically sounding “lower”, and “ai” in “white” – “higher” of the two. Such comparison is of no great importance in terms of meaning, but it is sensually rich due to its reliance both on visual and audial senses.

Brautigan’s images often follow the postmodern notion of questioning the reliability of norms and rules. In this case, it is the reliance on the central metaphorical function of the image – to connect two items together by stating their similarity. When such similarity is discovered, the whole situation becomes more understandable, more vivid. However, Brautigan questions this relationship. He keeps the conventional form of the metaphor, but places the fulfillment of its meaning out of interest. It is only possible to observe the feelings concerning such use of the figure:

I left the room and walked down the hall that follows beneath the river. I could hear the river above me,  
flowing out of the living room. The river sounded fine.  
The hall was as dry as anything and I could smell good things coming up the hall from the kitchen.<sup>11</sup>

“The hall was as dry as anything” is an image that turns upside down the notion that metaphors should have deep, revelatory meanings. Even the superficial, naive or cliché comparison is not present. The comparison of “the hall’s dryness” is to “anything”, which simply means that it was

---

<sup>10</sup> Brautigan, *The Pill* 82.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Brautigan, *In Watermelon Sugar* (New York: Dell, 1968) 19.

moisture-free compared to the river above it; the comparison to “anything” redundant. David Punter says of such use of metaphor:

For the postmodern text, nothing is taken for granted; at its most extreme, there is no extra-textual ‘real’ to which the text might refer, and this ‘absence of validation’ itself becomes the very substance or ground of writing. [...] Postmodern metaphor takes as its ground the impossibility of assigning meaning.<sup>12</sup>

Brautigan’s “anything” is pointing in this direction. It does not create or evoke any meaning outside of itself, does not rely on any “extra-textual reference”. It gives an option to fill in the fitting comparison according to one’s preferences, but also does not strictly insist on it, showing its potential uselessness.

### 2.3. Conceit

One more strategy by which reality and literal meaning as references are undermined is when the metaphor is extended and becomes the main focus of a poem, turning into a conceit. The vehicle becomes the foreground, the literal level, while the initial tenor is abandoned, sometimes never to be returned to. To use a common example, it works as if a lady’s beauty was compared to a rose, and the poet kept on talking about the rose in terms more direct and detailed than he spoke of a lady, not returning his comparisons to her anymore. In such a way Brautigan turns it into a conceit, but the one that abandons its conventional design. For example, it happens in the poem “Sonnet”:

The sea is like  
an old nature poet  
who died of a  
heart attack in a  
public latrine.  
His ghost still  
haunts the urinals.  
At night he can  
be heard walking  
around barefooted  
in the dark.  
Somebody stole  
his shoes.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Punter, *Metaphor* 60.

<sup>13</sup> Brautigan, *The Pill* 74.

Not only is the sea compared to an old nature poet, but also described him in a very detailed way. However, details that Brautigan incorporates are not connected back to the initial tenor. He speaks more about this poet than the sea itself, and it remains questionable what characteristics of the sea he wants to highlight. The poet and the story of his heart attack, his ghost, and lost shoes become the focus of the poem. What is the place for the sea in this story? Does its unceasing movement create a sad impression, like the ghost's afterlife wanderings? The sound of its waves muted by their friction against the shore, like the shuffle of bare feet? The public latrine connected to the water element? Why is the sea a poet, and not a plumber? The connection has to be worked out backward, with the tenor and the vehicle changing in the importance. Is it fruitful, though, to search for such decoding on every occasion? Does it not lose all the richness, suggestiveness and unrestrictedness of the image? With the number of conceits that work in a similar fashion, the answer is likely positive.

Furthermore, Brautigan's experiments with the boundaries of the trope are found in his stories and novels. This is a part of the chapter "The Hunchback Trout" from *Trout Fishing in America*:

The creek was made narrow by little green trees that grew too close together. The creek was like 12,845 telephone booths in a row with high Victorian ceilings and all the doors taken off and all the backs of the booths knocked out.[...] The trout in those telephone booths were good fellows. There were a lot of young cutthroat trout six to nine inches long, perfect pan size for local calls. Sometimes there were a few fellows, eleven inches or so — for the long distance calls[...]

A little while later I was punching in at the creek. I put my card above the clock and went into that long tunnel of telephone booths. I waded about seventy-three telephone booths in. I caught two trout in a little hole that was like a wagon wheel.[...]

The next good place was forty-five telephone booths in. The place was at the end of a run of gravel, brown and slippery with algae. The run of gravel dropped off and disappeared at a little shelf where there were some white rocks.[...]

Later in the afternoon when the telephone booths began to grow dark at the edges, I punched out of the creek and went home.<sup>14</sup>

This is one of the longest extended metaphor that Brautigan created. Its part here compares the creek with a row of 12,845 telephone booths. Its length and the arched roof created by the tree branches are in the center of the metaphor, but it is developed even further. The narrator casually refers to the creek as "those telephone booths". During the whole story, he describes distance in

---

<sup>14</sup> Richard Brautigan, *Trout Fishing in America, The Pill versus the Springhill Mine Disaster, and In Watermelon Sugar* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989) 52-54.

telephone booths: “I waded about seventy-three telephone booths in”, or “The next good place was forty-five telephone booths in”. The trout caught in this creek are compared to the calls – either local or long-distance, depending on the fish length. The narrator himself becomes part of the telephone booth setting:

Sometimes when I went fishing in there, I felt just like a telephone repairman, even though I did not look like one. I was only a kid covered with fishing tackle, but in some strange way by going in there and catching a few trout, I kept the telephones in service. I was an asset to society.<sup>15</sup>

However, this example is extraordinary not only because of the number of metaphors and similes that develop into one long conceit, but also because of their multi-layered structure, branching out one from the other. There are cutthroat trout compared to Jack the Ripper; a pool like a pencil sharpener; a flat white rock reminiscent of the unfortunate dead cat from the narrator’s childhood; the hunchback trout’s power like the sudden sound of a siren; and then the trout hump’s sweet taste like kisses of Esmeralda. In this chapter, the central simile moves along the main story, evolves as the story progresses and offers additional images as new situations are added. Christine Brooke-Rose says: “In metaphor B can replace A altogether, leaving us to guess it, or it can be linked to A by an enormous variety of complex grammatical and syntactical means of expression.”<sup>16</sup> As Brautigan develops one metaphor into a number of images, connected together and dispersed throughout the text, he points away from the initial underlying story. Because of the overall domination of similes in comparison to the story’s objects, they replace them, create a new story atop of it, and each new one emerges as soon as Brautigan sees the potential to do so. A simple white rock brings a side story that drastically digresses from the main plot. It has nothing to do with fishing, telephone booths, the forest or the creek. It does not reveal any trait of the narrator, nor does it explain the importance of the white rock. It is concerned with the fate of a cat who died a particular way when the narrator was a child. The image, however, takes a central visual part in the story, temporarily taking over the flow of the events. When the cat accident ends, the story returns to the narrator and the creek. This digression neither provides any vital information for the plot, nor does it explain the choice of the image. Any object can be treated in a similar way, no central event dominates the scene, any number of digressions is allowed. It is not essential to be completely sure of what the author

---

<sup>15</sup> Brautigan, *Trout, The Pill* 52.

<sup>16</sup> Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Grammar of Metaphor* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1958) 14.

intended and planned as the central attraction. Brautigan continues to transfer the focus from one object to another, from one image to the next – all in hopes of keeping the story together, which, finally, creates an idiosyncratic scenery and action that everyone processes in his own liberated way.

### 3. Narrative

The final discussed aspect of Brautigan's experiment is the narrative. Its composition varies in each of his works. In some, like *Dreaming of Babylon* (detective), *Willard and His Bowling Trophies* (mystery) and *The Hawkline Monster* (gothic/western), which mockingly follow the rules of the genres they are written in, the narrative is the main focus of attention. These genres depend on the characters' actions to propel the story forward. At the end of these stories, their main characters are supposed to find the criminal, reveal the mystery, and kill the monster, respectively. However, the main goals of these stories are not exactly reached, because the conventional construction of such genre works is disrupted. The detective is unable to catch the criminal because he is bribed to let her go; the mystery of the trophies is not revealed, turning out to be accidental, causing the death of the wrong people; and the gunslingers destroy the monster by pouring whiskey on it, turning it into blue diamonds. In his study of genre conventions, particularly the western, Theo D'haen notes, that

Brautigan exploits a number of extraneous paraphernalia to generate in his reader the expectation that he is going to read a true western in order to be able to twist the conventions he has emphasized. [...] Brautigan's gunfighters are not "real" western heroes, his villain is not a true "villain," and his plot is not a true "western" plot [...] In fact, we read *The Hawkline Monster* only as a western because it is set in the West [...], because its characters are dressed like characters from a western, and – perhaps most of all – because the subtitle to the book claims it to be "a gothic western". In the process, [...] *The Hawkline Monster* mocks [the western] clichés. [Brautigan] is doing to all these conventions what his coda is doing to the novel's "orderly" solution: he is showing them up as conventions and nothing more.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the deviations from the conventional structure of these works, their plots are meticulously linear. They all start somewhere in medias res, where the actions of the main characters already concern the main plot or are close to doing so, and gradually progress without any major distractions towards their denouements. According to Gérard Genette, "the convention of the beginning in medias res, followed by an expository return to an earlier period of time,"<sup>2</sup> started as early as the classical period, and was faithfully followed by writers "even in the heart of the 'realistic' nineteenth century."<sup>3</sup> However, following this storytelling convention is not enough for the stories' classical resolution, likely due to the lack of other classical conventions.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matei Calinescu and Douwe Fokkema, eds, *Exploring Postmodernism. Selected papers* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1990) 169-171.

<sup>2</sup> Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983) 46.

<sup>3</sup> Genette, *Narrative* 36.

However, as D’haen notes, there are numerous conventional elements that Brautigan uses, but does so in a mocking way, stressing out their superficiality. It causes the conventional stories to fall apart at their resolution. To contrast this, Brautigan’s other works establish deeper relationships between their unconventional elements, which allows them to form organic connections among them and help build stronger internal integrity. Following their own internal logic and structure, such works are able to find their definitive conclusions. In doing so, they are not restrained by any genre or convention. For example, keeping the chronology straight is not the main goal, and the outcome of the story is not the main attraction. However, these parts of the narrative are central to establishing the needed integrity of his works. Brautigan does not neglect them – he adapts them more naturally to the needs of his narratives.

### 3.1. Metafiction

Works like *In Watermelon Sugar* or *So the Wind Won’t Blow it All Away* have internal structures reflective of their modes of narration, i.e. the metafictional tale of the book creation, and the disrupted narrative of the union of time and memory. They are not meant to trace any strict conventions, as they do not claim to belong to any particular genre, apart from being subtitled “novels.” Thus the best reading is the one that accepts their own internal rules that become gradually revealed in both of them. The narrative of *In Watermelon Sugar* turns out to be a book that the narrator writes as the action progresses further. It is evident due to the numerous mentions of the fact:

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. [...]

After Fred left it felt good to get back to writing again, to dip my pen in watermelonseed ink and write upon these sheets. [...]

Here is a list of the things that I will tell you about in this book.<sup>4</sup>

From the first page, the narrator assumes that the book is actually being read. He also raises the awareness of the fictionality of the forthcoming action – its authorship, its structure, and the creation process. This is an introduction to the metafictional mode of the narrative. However, the narrator creates the urge to suspend disbelief and enter the fictional world on the narrator’s terms:

---

<sup>4</sup> Richard Brautigan, *In Watermelon Sugar* (New York: Dell, 1976), 1-9.

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.<sup>5</sup>

Although watermelon sugar as a material is not used literally as an instrument for the plot progression, it constitutes a central symbol that Brautigan relies on to form around the narrative of the book. In the present reading, I treat it as the symbol for imagination, creativity and the workings of the mind. It is the ungraspable material that produces ideas, dreams, and memories. As the narrator states,

Our lives we have carefully constructed from watermelon sugar and then travelled to the length of our dreams [...]. All this will be gone into, travelled in watermelon sugar.<sup>6</sup>

He highlights again the fictional nature of the narrative, the characters, the story. The book that the narrator has produced is also made of watermelon sugar:

We make a great many things out of watermelon sugar here – I’ll tell you about it – including this book being written near iDEATH.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.2. Chronology

As a consequence, the actual book is an open metafictional statement, which has its fictional nature at the very core. However, the narrative itself revolves around the characters and their lives. In the process of reading, the creation motif is constantly revisited. The narrator reveals the plot and its dénouement already on page 10. He methodically lists the things that he would tell about, arguing that “there’s no use saving it until later.”<sup>8</sup> Thus the highlights of the plot are presented:

1. iDEATH. (A good place.)
2. Charley. (My friend.)
3. The tigers and how they lived and how beautiful they were and how they died and how they talked to me while they ate my parents [...] and we talked for a long time and one of the tigers helped me with arithmetic, then they told me to go away while they finished eating my parents, and I went away. [...]
8. Fred. (My buddy.) [...]
14. A waitress. [...]
17. The sun and how it changes. (Very interesting.) [...]

---

<sup>5</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 1.

<sup>6</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 2.

<sup>8</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 9.

18. inBOIL and that gang of his, [...] and all the terrible things they did, and what happened to them, and how quiet and nice things are around here now that they are dead.<sup>9</sup>

Compared with the actual plot, the sequence of events in this content section is not chronological. The key plot elements are mixed with more “trivial” things (my buddy, a waitress), while the key scenes of the narrative are easily unraveled as advance mentions (inBOIL and their terrible deeds). After quite a revelatory introduction, the narrative suspense is reintroduced when the story progresses independently from what the narrator delineates. As Peter J. Rabinowitz suggests,

sometimes, an author will merely give us a foreboding, a generalized hint about the sort of future that awaits the characters in a narrative, leaving the reader in suspense as to the precise form it will take. [...] But an author can be more concrete in prefiguring the course of a narrative, as well.<sup>10</sup>

Brautigan chooses both options. Each of the twenty-four chapters represents a mini-version of the forthcoming events. During the course of the narration, it is developed and connected to other events, echoing in stories of different characters, thus hinting at a multi-focal perspective. For example, the inhabitants of the iDEATH community stand in the opposition to the tigers and their bloody deeds, exterminating them all, after the tigers keep killing community members. In contrast, inBOIL and his gang think that “the tigers should never have been killed. The tigers were the true meaning of iDEATH. Without the tigers there could be no iDEATH, and you killed the tigers and the iDEATH went away.”<sup>11</sup> The tension rises between these two opposite sides. inBOIL’s further demonstration of the true iDEATH – killing himself in public – is also mentioned in the contents. However, the consequent suicide of Margaret (one of the community members) constitutes the climax of the story and becomes the only central element kept secret until its proper placement in the narrative.

### 3.3. Levels of the narrative

This self-conscious metafictional element – revealing the contents of the work – does not stand in opposition to the plot’s resolution and suspense. On the contrary, it becomes a compound device that can be both classified as the advance mention (explicit marker of the future event),

---

<sup>9</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 9.

<sup>10</sup> Peter J. Rabinowitz, *Before Reading. Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987) 114.

<sup>11</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 111.

and also as metalepsis, which, according to Gérard Genette, is “the transition from one narrative level to another,”<sup>12</sup> producing “an effect of strangeness that is either comical [...] or fantastic.”<sup>13</sup> Thus the protagonist, writing a book about his life, is able to share some information about future events beforehand, right at the beginning. This creates a strange effect – at one moment the narrator descends onto the level of the protagonist, merging with him, to tell about future events. Arguably, this is the second – the fantastic effect that Genette is talking about. Despite his temporal omniscience, the narrator does not reveal all the plot intrigues at once. He only offers a preliminary glance at the events, evoking curiosity, urging to try and imagine the connections and outcomes of the situations hinted at. Moreover, such evasion, coupled with the strange unemotional reactions of the narrator, do not exclude the possibility that the narrator is, in fact, unreliable. Such tactics demands to search for other opinions and examine the opinions of the narrator and the characters more closely.

Additionally, the narrator fosters interaction between different levels of the narrative by yet another element – the reported speech tags. *In Watermelon Sugar* is divided into three individual books: first – *In Watermelon Sugar*, second – *inBOIL*, and third – *Margaret*. In each of these books the reported speech is almost exclusively followed by a tag with the verb “say”:

“Hi, stranger,” she said.  
“What’s for dinner?” I said.  
“Stew,” she said. “The way you like it.”  
“Great,” I said.<sup>14</sup>

Here again, the attention is drawn to the artificial construction of the dialogues, of their universal pattern. It makes the process of their composition more obvious due to the constant repetition of the same tag. In contrast, when the action in each consecutive book draws to a close, a special tag follows. The first book ends with “I thought,”<sup>15</sup> the second – “I dreamt,”<sup>16</sup> and the third – “I wrote,”<sup>17</sup> each repeated only once:

---

<sup>12</sup> Genette, *Narrative* 234.

<sup>13</sup> Genette, *Narrative* 234.

<sup>14</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 19.

<sup>15</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 62.

<sup>16</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 123.

<sup>17</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 166.

As the flames diminished to very little, a strong wind came out of the Forgotten Works and scattered ashes rapidly through the air. After while Fred yawned, I dreamt.<sup>18</sup>

These tags mark specific processes – thinking, dreaming, writing. They happen, as proposed before, in watermelon sugar (as everything else in the book), resulting in the creation of some imaginative matter – thoughts, dreams, stories. Despite the fact that each book almost exclusively consists of descriptions of events and actions, on the higher level though, the books themselves are the products of the mind.

### 3.4. Characterization

This intricate duality reminds one of the relationship between the mind and the body: the plot driven by actions symbolizes the body, and the mind symbolizes the mental processes by which *In Watermelon Sugar* is constructed. Surprisingly, the protagonist's thoughts are never described directly, from within. Some mental processes are only stated, but not developed further. This is as far as the narrator goes in describing thoughts, one of the rare occasions:

I sat there for a long time without thinking about anything or noticing anything any more. I didn't want to. [...] Then I saw a lantern faraway and moving out of the piney woods. [...] It was in the hand of a girl. [...] It always comforted me when I saw her out there. [...] I thought she was very pretty, but I didn't know what color hair she had.<sup>19</sup>

If any, the thoughts are always reported indirectly. The characters' psychology is rarely highlighted, and often their responses and dialogues seem unemotional, disinterested. It does not help to create more depth to the character. To counteract this void, the special tags add up to the mental events of the book, reminding that the mental processes are not lacking here; rather, they are all around, they are the very essence of that world's existence. When they appear, they stress that all that came before them is a retelling, a direct one, happening in the mind's eye.

The sentences that denote events are also very straightforward. Most of them follow the regular, rhythmical pattern:

After dinner Fred said that he would do the dishes. Pauline said oh no, but Fred insisted by actually starting to clear the table. He picked up some spoons and plates, and that settled it.

---

<sup>18</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 123.

<sup>19</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 101.

Charley said he thought he would go in the living room and sit by the river and smoke a pipe. Al yawned. The other guys said they would do other things, and went off to do them.<sup>20</sup>

The sentences are often short, declarative, describing the characters' actions, and written in the simple past tense. Most of them are arranged in the strict chronological order. Every movement is orchestrated to follow the previous one, creating one unbroken flow of events. This pattern becomes so familiar and commonplace that even the big flashback, constituting the whole second book, is not able to disrupt the pace of events. The events in a flashback are also presented in the strict chronological order. The second book ends with the tag "I dreamt", and the third book appropriately starts with "I woke up feeling refreshed,"<sup>21</sup> returning to the main plot line and, consequently, to its logical resolution.

In fact, the book follows this rule so carefully, that at times it becomes too mechanical, too artificial, as was shown in the previous example. Thus Brautigan parodies this realistic technique, and if it was enacted in real life, it would look very unnatural. Quite in a different way, *So The Wind Won't Blow It All Away* presents a maze of thoughts and memories that spring from the narrator's mindscape. Based on such unsteady grounds, it becomes difficult to control or predict the next plot turn.

### 3.5. Narrating Memories

On the one hand, *In Watermelon Sugar* is dominated by the theme of a very careful literary construction (at times very self-conscious), and the narrator never mentions the difficulties of the process. On the other hand, *So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away* is openly desperate about success in such matters. The plot does not flow evenly, the characters unexpectedly die, their dialogues disintegrate in the making, and the narrator's mind refuses to obey his instructions. It becomes evident in a number of instances. One is a tangled chronology: events jump from the past to the future and back again without any perceivable order or design:

---

<sup>20</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 21.

<sup>21</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 127.

Finished with the undertaker's daughter and still carrying my sack of beer bottles, I'm halfway to the pond now where the people will arrive soon and start taking their furniture off the truck and setting up their highly original house beside the pond.<sup>22</sup>

This small passage is just one sentence. In it, the narrator first mentions events of the past, when he is five years old. Then he moves to the scene that is a prolonged “present”, where the narrator is twelve – “I'm halfway to the pond now”, with “now” and “I am” being its markers. After that he speaks of the events that would happen later that day: “the people will arrive soon”. In a similar fashion, he routinely diverts the narrative to whatever memory the narrator recalls at the moment of narrating. The following paragraph concerns the events when the narrator is eleven years old, and several paragraphs into the story he decides to switch to the earlier time:

The next address after the radioless apartment would be the auto court and out the front door of the cabin on the way to my beloved pond and its fishing furniture.  
Meanwhile: Let's go back the two addresses and I'll tell a story of dead toys and silence.<sup>23</sup>

Thus the initially secondary stories are inserted in between initially primary ones, but are also rarely told uninterrupted, being constantly switched between one another. With the reconstructed chronology, events in the plot look like this (where the numbers denote the order of events in the overall story, the dashes connect events that are narrated directly one after the other, and slashes mark the special intersecting element that follows any given section):

9 \ 5 - 12 - 4.1 - 4.2 - 4.0 - 4.2 \ 1 \ 4.2 - 3 - 2 \ 3 \ 4.2 \ 4.3 \ 5 - 7 - 6 - 5 - 10 - 5 \ 8 - 9 \ 11 \ 5

This intersecting “refrain” element (“\”) refers back to the book title: *So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away/Dust... American... Dust...* According to the schematic numerical plot outline, it is used ten times. It always follows, either implicitly or directly, the death of some character. For instance, after one boy's death in a car accident:

I had climbed the tree because I didn't know what else to do. I was sitting up there thinking about the boy being dead.[...]  
Sometimes I would climb up in the apple tree and quietly weep:

*So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away  
Dust . . . American . . . Dust*<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Richard Brautigan, *Revenge of the Lawn, The Abortion, So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1995) 41.

<sup>23</sup> Brautigan, *So The Wind* 42.

<sup>24</sup> Brautigan, *So The Wind* 46.

Or after observing the funeral of a child:

Did I dream the undertaker's daughter and her hands which were like white daisies growing on top of Mount Everest? Did I really hide from them until one day I saw the funeral of a dead child who had no friends and, not wanting to end up that way, courted her hands as if they had the desirability of warm mittens on a freezing winter day? Yes, and I remember:

*So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away*  
*Dust . . . American . . . Dust*<sup>25</sup>

There are some hints to its role in the book. Here, the wind is likened to time, and dust – to the pieces of memories that are mixed, uprooted from their chronological order and scattered somewhere else. The narrator's attempt to remember the events of the past, to navigate through his memories is not always successful – they are displaced, chaotic. Hence the plot is not structured logically, and is following freely wherever the memory leads, like the wind that blows without restrictions. Remembering and recording is a desperate attempt to try not to get lost along these paths of memory “in the geography of time,”<sup>26</sup> even though such attempts do not always bring any objective advantage:

Leaving the zoo, I passed the cage of a black bear. He had a grizzled face.[...] I wonder why I still remember him after all these years. He's probably dead now. Bears don't live forever, but I remember him:

*So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away*  
*Dust . . . American . . . Dust*<sup>27</sup>

Thus constant deaths, funerals, accidents, and tragedies are dispersed throughout the narrative. Their omnipresence creates a strong motif for the whole text. However, the effect of such intersections is not only one of reorganizing, but also of dividing the narrative. There is a constant tension created by the self-conscious attempts of the narrator to make sense of his memory. Simultaneously, the narrative is also constructed as a self-conscious realization. In Linda Hutcheon's words, “the parody and self-reflection of narcissistic narrative work to prevent the reader's identification with any character and to force a new, more active, thinking relationship upon him.”<sup>28</sup> The narrator fights the battle with time, but in the end is not able to prevent the inevitable fragmentation and degradation of the memory affected by the running

---

<sup>25</sup> Brautigan, *So The Wind* 40.

<sup>26</sup> Brautigan, *So The Wind* 64.

<sup>27</sup> Brautigan, *So The Wind* 126.

<sup>28</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000) 49.

time. However, the partially successful (or unsuccessful) process of its recreation by the narrator invites to take part in it, make sense of it, participate in it due to the more demanding and challenging, at times desperate, yet more insightful and playful process.

Due to the same reason the narrative is so unstable at times, that the narrator fails to create believable characters with human traits, or dialogues that stay on topic:

I wonder which one of them mentioned it to the other one first and what the expression on their face was and the next thing they said. I tried to imagine those words, but I couldn't because I wouldn't know what to say. Would you?

But whatever was said in reply was the correct answer, the right thing agreed upon and done.<sup>29</sup>

Here, the narrator tries to remember the exact words and expressions of those people, but either forgets or does not consider it crucial, because the whole situation with them is told in a sequence of instances that repeat year after year. They come in a pickup truck to the pond, unload their furniture and set it near the water, and spend an evening there fishing. Arguably, it is the most puzzling element of the narrative. Why these people? What is their purpose, their goal, both in that situation and also in the narrative? Neither the narrator nor the protagonist know the answers to this. As their situation is constantly revisited throughout the book, it serves some sort of complement to the primary plot. It contrasts it by means of being random, uncontrollable, puzzling – while the main one unravels directly due to the protagonist's choice – to buy a hamburger or some bullets. Buying the bullets that day, the protagonist later incidentally kills his friend. But the situation with the pond people is different – it almost has no context, no explanation, and thus these characters lack internal characterization and external logic of actions. Realistically, their dialogue cannot be constructed – most importantly, due to their inexplicable occurrence and unclear significance in the protagonist's life. The narrator could have constructed it somehow to fill in these “correct answers”, but instead has stressed his inability to do so.

But could such treatment of plot devices be actually justified by the emulation of the troubled, unstable mind? As Genette notes, “distortions and anachronies are justified by workings of life, experience and memory.”<sup>30</sup> That way they could be seen as normal, even traditional in their topic and realization. These instabilities not only become markers of the

---

<sup>29</sup> Brautigan, *So The Wind* 69.

<sup>30</sup> Genette, *Narrative* 157-8.

uneven, unstructured events happening to him, but also of his weakening and fragmented memories, and the time passing:

"He's been dead for a long time."  
"Too long," she said. "I can hardly remember what it was like."  
I didn't know the full meaning of what she was saying.  
I do now.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the universality of such situations and their relatability, the idea that they might be realistic/mimetic or not does not lend much insight here. It is impossible to trace them to any more or less "authentic" reality, and what is important is already placed in front.

### 3.6. Speed

However, there is another device that cannot be traced as directly from experience to the text. What is unconventional is the speed with which the narration is taking place. The recurring mentions of the same event are holding the narrative in one spot, or (as there still is a bit of information added each time) it progresses very indolently, like in a slow-motion film (marked by present continuous):

I'm fishing directly across the pond from where they will come in a few hours and set up their furniture. I'm waiting for them by watching my bobber bobbing up and down like a strange floating metronome and slowly drowning a worm because the fish are not interested in the slightest with its plight. The fish just aren't biting, but I don't care.  
I'm just waiting and this is as good a way to wait as any other way to wait because waiting's all the same anyway.<sup>32</sup>

The aforementioned scene is pure observation. The narrator's description of the protagonist is like a description of a photograph, where many details and objects can be observed, but few actions can. Thus, although the narrative does not stop completely, it acquires this momentary quality, as if he did a very thin slice of time. A similar situation happens when the narrator describes another scene:

The first drops of heavy rain started falling, but there was quite a bit of distance between the drops. They were falling very slowly and you could almost walk around them if you were interested in doing that.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Brautigan, *So The Wind* 10.

<sup>32</sup> Brautigan, *So The Wind* 5.

<sup>33</sup> Brautigan, *So The Wind* 112.

This instance shows that these slow-motion scenes are not only meant to represent the impression of the time by the protagonist, but also show the narrator's power over its use in the work:

They don't know how slowly they are travelling to the pond because they've been dead for so many years now. They will remain for a while longer two American eccentrics freeze-framed in grainy black and white thirty-two years ago at sunset.<sup>34</sup>

Here the narrator does not allow the characters to continue with their actions. Later he would allow them to proceed:

Well, there you have it and now I have released the two people from their paralyzed photograph of 32 years ago, and their truck filled with furniture is coming down the road toward the pond. The truck rattled to a stop and they got out.<sup>35</sup>

As such passages are intersected throughout the work, they mix with the more stable time flow, constantly switching from slow-motion to normal speed to fast-forward action into the future. Such flow cannot be relied on throughout the narrative, as it cannot be logically predicted:

Before I open the screen door and go into the shack I'd like to make an observation. I keep referring to the sawmill night watchman alcoholic as an "old man." But looking back down upon that long-ago past now from the 1979 mountain side of this August afternoon, I think the "old man" was younger than I am now. He was about maybe thirty-five, nine years younger than I am now.<sup>36</sup>

Such scenes create obstructions, making it difficult to adjust to any single speed of the narrative. There are also omissions and ellipses that skip the unnecessary or the insignificant events and rapidly transfer to the more noteworthy events of the plot. Thus an uneven motion is created – a slow-motion scene is followed by a rapid leap in time, very abruptly and hastily bringing a new scene. These leaps are also not conducted on a regular basis, happening almost randomly, unpredictably. It becomes ever more difficult to relate to the narrative on the conventional, realistic terms.

This type of temporal texture, together with the non-linear distribution of events of the plot line, complemented by the fragmenting lense of the protagonist's mind, becomes the reason

---

<sup>34</sup> Brautigan, *So The Wind* 93.

<sup>35</sup> Brautigan, *So The Wind* 126.

<sup>36</sup> Brautigan, *So The Wind* 18.

to perceive the text as experimental. In some cases, however, the reviewers describe it as unsuccessful:

The narrative awkwardly stumbles from past to present and back again. Ineffectively organizing the story's chronology, it serves only to tangle and detract. Where this retrospective approach might have offered insight and depth to an understanding – both ours and the narrator's – of the boy's personality, it serves no purpose here. [...] we can credit any narrative irrationality to the inconsistency of childish observation.<sup>37</sup>

It is possible to disagree here, because the narrative thus arranged is not supposed to clarify all of its parts and, moreover, to ascribe to the conventional ways of telling a story. Instead, it insists on documenting the succumbing workings of memory and temporality of the human life – thus it serves its purpose here. Yes, it is ineffective at imitating the linearity of life. However, the narrator never insists on the idea that the work is a smoothly rendered story from the past, but rather on that it is his recollection of that time. It is concerned as much with the workings of memory and the process of remembering as with the facts and descriptions themselves. The reasoning for this work is to record, to preserve – not to classify the memories, which, again, is reflected in the book's title. Brautigan challenges conventional techniques dealing with chronology, the time pace and the structure of the plot, and the construction of dialogues, arguing that the linear, even plot and time are not suitable for representing the memory. Again, it does not mimic, but creates its own reality, with its own rules and processes.

Arguably, the main ambition of the text is to fight time, to fight death – and to create such space where the time does not function as it does in real life, where it cannot be reversed. There are two passages that do just that: the very first and the very last episodes of the book. They are not memories, but are fantasies – at the very end the narrator disappears in thin air, while at the beginning he is described as sitting forever at a restaurant eating a hamburger, mourning his dead friend. As these instances did not happen in the protagonist's life, they are timeless, and the time there has no power over the memory. These spaces offer alternatives to save all that is perceived as valuable – experiences, dreams, emotions. *In Watermelon Sugar*, on the other hand, holds quite a different opinion on these values. Those who insist on saving past memories (“forgotten things”, found in the *Forgotten Works*), ultimately succumb to desperation and insanity, and the weight of their ego (and all its memories) does not allow them to live a

---

<sup>37</sup> Amy Lippman, “The New Brautigan: A Silly Pretension,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (2 September 1982): 55.

happy, balanced life. However, those who decline their identities as much as they can and live at iDEATH (ego-death), are spared their lives, capable of keeping that, although quite restricting, but also “delicate balance in iDEATH.”<sup>38</sup> Those who insist on keeping their egos, eventually die, as do Margaret and the inBOIL gang. One thing remains constant: the imagination and its products (art in its various forms) are the ways to withstand the pressure of time and to cope with the imminent death, and to explore the issues that would otherwise be unmanageable by the conventional approaches that impose rules and boundaries in many aspects of life. This is how Brautigan describes it at the end of *So The Wind Won't Blow It All Away*:

I sat there watching their living room shining out of the dark beside the pond [which is very similar to the living room at iDEATH]. 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 home cooking. 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.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Brautigan, *Watermelon Sugar* 1.

<sup>39</sup> Brautigan, *So The Wind* 131.

## Conclusion

Strict categorization and realist approach do not work with Brautigan, which is why many critics have failed to appreciate his works and to extract their value for the wider context. However, reading them on their own, meeting their experimental nature descriptively rather than prescriptively, provides a less restrictive approach than some. In fact, it allows a whole range of interpretations. This is why the loose category of literary “experiment”, the postmodern sort in particular, is useful when approaching Brautigan’s works, and fosters the process of their analysis in a more neutral and detailed way. Such approach is beneficial, because it can be supported by a theoretical material on the topic and, simultaneously, does not restrict and categorize Brautigan, as there is no evidence that he associated with any of the literary movements or schools of his time.

Taking into consideration the recent reprinting of Brautigan's books, there is a need to stress the importance of the revival of Brautigan studies and their more extensive application in the postmodern context. His works show a wide variety of postmodern techniques, such as metafiction, fragmentation, parody and pastiche, comedy, ironic reconsideration of genres, and extensive borrowing from other literary traditions, while also aiming to deliver ideas through popular mediums. He uses these techniques in order to question the conventional norms, to reassess the popular beliefs and clichés of the American dream and mentality, and to challenge the possibility of categorization of works of literature and art. While some of the more recent studies note his deserved position within the postmodern canon, noticing at once his critical potential, and at the same time his elusiveness and idiosyncrasy, he is in no way a paradigmatic postmodern writer, but rather one whose work has developed in this key by a more independent process.

The reason for this may be that his popularity, spanning the time during the San Francisco Renaissance of the 60s and 70s, died away when the new political climate started to dominate the conservative 80s, which led to the ideological shift in the *Zeitgeist*, including the mental makeup of Brautigan’s fans. Even more so, many critics note that his concerns remained

relatively consistent as his oeuvre grew. This means that when the zeitgeist of the 60s passed, so did Brautigan's popularity. However, the topics that he addressed were not limited merely to his time, and show greater depth than is usually discovered by the opposing critics.<sup>1</sup> Some of the more universal themes are addressed time and again as the world continues to change. Acknowledging his contribution, the reviewers in *The Postmodern Short Story: Forms and Issues* note that "Brautigan portrays age-old themes of human alienation, social envy, broken dreams, and loneliness in completely new presentations."<sup>2</sup>

There is, for example, the ancient struggle of the creative person to represent life in their works, to understand the purpose of artistic expression in relation to this world, to come to terms with the phenomenon of reality itself. The very fictitious nature of existence and the way real and fictional characters construct their internal and external worlds are documented most notably in the narrative of *In Watermelon Sugar*. Here, the author heightens the awareness of this relationship by highlighting the metafictional elements, the very regular and unnaturally constructed flow of the narrative, and the repetitive, trivial dialogues of the mostly observant and submissive characters. The constant repetition of the creation motif and the unreliability of the story's narrator demand to be more critical and questioning towards the neat and sound narratives that revolve around everyone on a daily basis, constructed by the mainstream news, the dominant political discourse, or by the ones who believe that everything has a purpose and a logic behind. Similar ends are reached by the contrasting means of *So The Wind Won't Blow It All Away*. Through the disintegration of characters, dialogues and the narrative itself the narrator explores the events of the distant past. Memories, dreams, and fantasies are reflected in this chaotic and unstable flow of events. They merge, shift, overlap, and abruptly end. It is even possible to say that the very integrity of the text could be endangered, if it were not for the binding motif that works both as a sad refrain of a lullaby and the mumbling of a disillusioned narrator, speaking from the distance of many years. However, as the story is told from the narrator's mind, there is no real need for it to be completely coherent. This way, this dark narcissistic narrative prevents the reader from the identification with the main hero and fosters a more serious and deep relationship with the story and the characters.

---

<sup>1</sup> August Kleinzahler, "No Light On In The House", *London Review of Books*, Vol. 22 No. 24.14 (2000): 21-22.

<sup>2</sup> Farhat Iftekharruddin et al., *The Postmodern Short Story: Forms and Issues* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003) 8.

Another prominent issue dealt with is the spread and advancement of technology. Himself, Brautigan embraced the possibility of sharing much more information in the times to come.<sup>3</sup> However, as the technological progress was inevitably connected with the growth of consumerism and demanded a deeper immersion into the capitalistic world, it was not seen as a positive outcome by many poets, for example beats as well as Brautigan. Ginsberg's poems like "Supermarket in California" or "Howl" reflect the follies of the changing world, suggesting that a solution to this problem was the reconnection with the person's spiritual self, the exploration of it through learning Eastern philosophies that would balance out the Western values. Brautigan, too, saw that the future world could be built in a more wholesome and empowering way. Usually, his visions of the future or alternative societies are hopeful, or at least envisioning more satisfactory communal solutions, as in *In Watermelon Sugar*. This way, he did not construct dystopias or utopias, but rather criticized them both, searching for ways to embrace change and to implement it to the advantage of all parties.

However, the dissatisfaction with the present state of the world did not evaporate with the sweet aroma of the burned watermelonseed oil. As he experienced the arbitrariness and relativity of people's opinions and traditions, Brautigan felt the need to overcome the limitations that were created by such one-sided worldview. There was a need to slow down the accelerating pace of life and appreciate the fragile imagistic quality of every moment. To do so, Brautigan took to a tradition drastically different from the Western one. Most notably, the result could be visible in his adoption of the Eastern traditions of haiku and Zen, the quality of which he described as "the dew-like steel", exemplified in his poetry collections. It helped him to solve the daunting and disquieting effect of the fragmentation of the world into opposite categories. While they were perceived as such, the haiku moment helped to build connections between them, unifying the worldview and pacifying the tension built in the process of identifying the opposites. Through this satori moment, the poet and the environment around them became one, and in this timeless aesthetic moment, some complex and irreconcilable ideas could be perceived in a new light, and rendered in the poetic insight as an organic whole. The need to sort the world into opposing categories ceased to exist, and the juxtaposed notions started to work as complements, not as

---

<sup>3</sup> Brautigan interview <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snr9LktUi0E>> 27.2.2018.

competitors. Thus such a technique to represent the situation in a more condensed and intense way was a tool to reevaluate the importance of its elements and to suggest the possibility of their new internal value.

Another of Brautigan's observations of the complexity of life and the limitations of a single human being was tackled through the connection to the reader's imagination and the minimalistic means modeled on the Hemingway's omission technique and the neutral journalistic approach. Most of all, there was a need to show not just the general complexity of the world, but its dominating pain, melancholy, loss, and the alienation of the characters in the narrated situations. Thus, however cheerful, light, and charming Brautigan's work may seem on the surface, the underlying stories are those of a decline – either professional (*Dreaming of Babylon*), social (*In Watermelon Sugar, Trout Fishing In America*), personal (*So The Wind Won't Blow It All Away*), or sometimes even simply universal (*Willard and His Bowling Trophies*). However, Brautigan believed in the role of writing as illuminating the human condition and consequently making people into more compassionate beings. Because of that, he shared his creative monopoly with his audience in various ways. Through the neutral, journalistic view he rid the text of the pressure of the authorial interpretation and moralization. He destroyed the strict writer-reader hierarchy, offering his reader more autonomy in creating their own meaning. By withdrawing the judgment, he made the texts more open to exploration. In the context of the Eastern approach, he created

a revitalized form of the genre itself where the reader comes to grips with the idea that Brautigan's works do not simply mirror life and that they are not pseudorealistic documents. They are serious commentaries on the decline of social, moral, and political values, a decline that is a serious threat to the American dream.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, he acknowledged the life's composition as the numberless fragments collected and processed by our minds. He described them through the processes of wakeful awareness, night- and day-time dreaming, remembering and forgetting, and experiencing the ever-changing emotions arising with the multitudes of random situations. This fragmentary nature of the human life is best illustrated in Brautigan's favorite Greek anthology and was recreated in the randomness, the whimsy, and the eclecticism of the short-spanning poems and chapters. He

---

<sup>4</sup> *The Postmodern Short Story* 11.

understood that the linear, logical and rigidly defined narratives, characters and dialogues are not always the most suitable means to write about life. Thus he used fragmentation and selectivity in various ways to be more true to the described experiences. Through such technique he could communicate the raw feeling that life often lacks explanation, and however hard one tries to find answers and see connections, it is not always possible. In such a manner Brautigan's experimental works balance between coherence and disintegration, the state of mind which, if not accepted, must be masked with illusions

of orthodox syntax and grammar, but the sentences are continually turning off into unexpectedness in ways which pleasantly dissolve our habitual semantic expectations. At the same time, Brautigan is constantly, cunningly, deviating into sense; there is enough linguistic coherence left for us to experience [his books] as communication, and enough linguistic sport for Brautigan to demonstrate his own freedom from control.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, Brautigan declines the possibility of the singular interpretation through the polysemic and open approach to situations and dialogues. He gives the text and its audience a certain autonomy and works on fostering their direct communication.

Serving as a trademark of his style, Brautigan's use of figurative language is one of his most noticed and admired traits. His metaphors come with unexpected connotations, which bring about bewilderment and confusion and challenge the familiar meaning-making patterns. In the most concentrated examples, he does this by abandoning the initial tenor, while making the vehicle the main focus of the comparison. Thus Brautigan undermines the central purpose of the device to explain some notion better, making it instead more obscure. The disconnected images are freed from the dialectical load and are immediate in effect. This results in a criticism of the Western insistence on logicity. Brautigan offers a more complex vision of the world, whose logic is much harder to grasp. He does not diminish its polysemic and polymorphous value, which brings a more humbling appreciation of the world and challenges traditional patterns of thinking. Such an approach reminds of the postmodern distrust of rules and norms, suggesting that "nothing is taken for granted". The final and complete meaning is impossible for postmodernists and Brautigan alike.

---

<sup>5</sup> Tony Tanner, *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 411.

Thus, my analysis of sources and techniques aimed to unravel some crucial paths in understanding Brautigan better through accepting his acknowledged influences as well as the internal logic of his works. Without these passwords, Brautigan's accounts of real and imaginary experiences tend more often than not to be dismissed as quite inconsequential, lazy, simplistic, and unreasonably funky. Moreover,

had Brautigan been an Easterner, an Ivy League graduate, a habitué of upper Manhattan literary soirées, he might well have been allowed a gentler landing. But he was not any of those things: he was a Westerner, white trash, didn't go to college, and worst of all, was a California phenom, a national success, the literary darling of the young. The long knives [of the critics] were well due in making an appearance.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of these presumptions, there were also critics that saw the depth and application to Brautigan's whimsical texts. I have tried to understand the ways in which his unique style and approach are built around and inside these seemingly random but so ergonomically intertwined traditions. His blend and view are unique and harmonious; they are solidly based on the constant undermining of the reality and art (separately or together) as we know them.

His stance is also very contemporary if viewed from the perspective of the changes brought by modern technology and attitudes. The experience of life in general, and of art and literature in particular, spans increasingly shorter periods of time, given the popularity of the ever shorter posts in social media, peer-to-peer conversations, and educational programs. Those educational media, previously predominantly textual, are now oriented more towards mix-media choices, including not only text, but also audio and video, oftentimes at the same time, implying a stronger communication between the senses. Brautigan knew the potential of such synaesthetic approach and evoked it in his metaphors and generic mixtures. But he was also aware of the drawbacks of such a lifestyle, of the potential fragmentation of the perception and effects that it brings and reflected it in the short forms and fragmented elements, broken chronology and minimalistic dialogues. Accordingly, as the fast pace of the constantly changing technology ever more dominated people's lives, its drawbacks evoked the desire to try different lifestyles, which Brautigan expressed in his retraction into the Zen tranquility and detachment. He tried to heal the ever-growing consumerist culture with the minimalist stylistic means, while creating new works by upcycling the existing ones, thus reconnecting to the natural cycle of life and suggesting

---

<sup>6</sup> Kleinzahler 22.

alternative communities. Moreover, given the numerous explorations of the relationship between humans and nature, his works are still relevant for the recent studies in ecocriticism. His works have inspired numerous writers, including Haruki Murakami,<sup>7</sup> musicians like The Magnetic Fields band,<sup>8</sup> and various artists, for instance, a collaboration between a poet Francis Daulerio and an illustrator Scott Hutchison who revived the idea of *Please Plant This Book*.<sup>9</sup> Brautigan's example embraces diversity, creativity and a persistent feeling of openness to the big, unknown world. To be open to such topics means that it is easy to get lost in their intricacies and complexities. And, as a consequence, Brautigan has ended as a forgotten and marginalized writer in the eyes of many critics and academics. However, as it works with the writers

who become genres unto themselves, even Brautigan's lesser works are treasures, simply because they are one of a finite number of relics of a mind admired as much for its idiosyncrasy as its skill. (I think immediately of H.P. Lovecraft, Gertrude Stein, and W.G. Sebald.) And as with true appreciation, his weaknesses appeal as much as his strengths. Each Brautigan is a unique little world. Getting lost, then, is not the risk but the reward.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, as such traits like individuality and personal idiosyncrasy are starting to gain more weight in the academical and critical context, it seems like a proper time for Brautigan to leave the margins of American literary history and be accepted as one of its central members and contributors, regardless of the fact – or maybe due to it – that his works can be seen as very different from the realist conventions of fiction which, as it turns out, often prove to be rather stifling, reductive and counter-productive.

---

<sup>7</sup> Roland Kelts, "Lost in Translation?," *The New Yorker*, 9 May 2013, <<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/lost-in-translation>> 4.4.2019.

<sup>8</sup> Stephin Merritt, The Magnetic Fields band, interviewed by Scott Timberg, 21 April 2017, <<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/all-the-poets-musicians-on-writing-stephin-merritt-of-the-magnetic-fields/>> 9.4.2019.

<sup>9</sup> Justin Klugh, "Packets of Hope," *Grid*, 18 June 2018, <<http://www.gridphilly.com/grid-magazine/2018/6/18/local-poet-francis-dauleorios-final-collaboration-with-frightened-rabbits-scott-hutchison>> 9.4.2019.

<sup>10</sup> Justin Taylor, "On Brautigan," *Lost Magazine*, 17 September 2007, <<http://www.lostmag.com/issue17/brautigan.php>> 9.4.2019.

## Bibliography

1. Arenson, Amy, et al. "The Final Chapters in a Confederate General From Big Sur," *Richard Brautigan: Essays on the Writings and Life*. Ed. John F. Barber. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2006.
2. Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.
3. Barber, John F. "Trout Fishing in America." *Brautigan.net*. <<http://www.brautigan.net/trout.html>> 13.2.2018.
4. Barthes, Roland. *Image—Music—Text*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977.
5. Barnes, Julian. "Kidding." *New Statesman*. 4 April 1975: 457.
6. Bell, Millicent. "Pseudoautobiography and Personal Metaphor." *Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Scribner, 2009.
7. Beresford, J. D. "Experiment in the Novel." *Tradition and Experiment in Present-Day Literature*. London: Oxford University Press, 1929.
8. Brautigan, Richard. *In Watermelon Sugar*. New York: Dell, 1968.
9. Brautigan, Richard. *June 30th, June 30th*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1978.
10. Brautigan, Richard. *Revenge of the Lawn*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971.
11. Brautigan, Richard. *Revenge of the Lawn, The Abortion, So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away*. Houghton-Mifflin: Boston, 1995.
12. Brautigan, Richard. *Rommel Drives on Deep into Egypt*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1970.
13. Brautigan, Richard. *Sombrero Fallout*. London: Arena, 1977.
14. Brautigan, Richard. *The Tokyo-Montana Express*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1980.
15. Brautigan, Richard. *The Pill Versus The Springhill Mine Disaster*. New York: Dell, 1968.
16. Brautigan, Richard. *Trout Fishing in America*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2010.
17. Brautigan, Richard. *Trout Fishing in America, The Pill Versus the Springhill Mine Disaster, and In Watermelon Sugar*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1989.
18. Brautigan, Richard. *Willard and His Bowling Trophies*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975.
19. Bray, Joe, et al., eds. *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*. London: Routledge, 2012.
20. Brian McHale, ed. *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
21. Brooke-Rose, Christine. *A Grammar of Metaphor*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1958.
22. Calinescu, Matei and Fokkema, Douwe, eds. *Exploring Postmodernism. Selected papers*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1990.
23. Chénétier, Marc. *Richard Brautigan*. London: Methuen, 1983.
24. Disch, Thomas M. "Dumber Than Dumb. Dreaming of Babylon." *The Times Literary Supplement*. 14 April 1978.
25. Eliot, T. S., ed. *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions, 1968.
26. Eliot, T.S. "Experiment in Criticism." *Tradition and Experiment in English Literature*. London: Oxford University Press, 1929.
27. Federman, Raymond. *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.
28. Fludernik, Monika. *Towards A Natural Narratology*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

29. Gard, Andrew. "Drama of Doomed Author Redeems Pedestrian Writing." *The Plain Dealer*. 16 July 2000.
30. Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983.
31. Giroux, Joan. *The Haiku Form*. Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 1974.
32. Hjortsberg, William. *Jubilee Hitchhiker: The Life and Times of Richard Brautigan*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2012.
33. Hemingway, Ernest. *Death in the Afternoon*. New York: Scribner, 1932.
34. Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
35. Iftekharruddin, Farhat, et al. *The Postmodern Short Story: Forms and Issues*. Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003.
36. Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
37. Jameson, Fredric. *The Antinomies of Realism*. London: Verso, 2013.
38. Kušnír, Jaroslav. "Reconsideration of Nature, Myths and Narrative Conventions of Popular Literature in Richard Brautigan's Novel *The Hawkline Monster*: a Gothic Western (1976), or Gothic Novel and Western in One." *American Fiction: Modernism-Postmodernism, Popular Culture, and Metafiction*. Stuttgart: Ibidem, 2007.
39. Lemontt, Bobbie Burch. "Dreaming of Babylon by Richard Brautigan." *Western American Literature*. Fall 1978: 302.
40. Lippman, Amy. "The New Brautigan: A Silly Pretension." *San Francisco Chronicle*. 2 September 1982.
41. Lodge, David. *The Art of Fiction*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1992.
42. Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence, 1982-1985*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
43. Mottram, R. H. "Tradition in the Novel", *Tradition and Experiment in Present-Day Literature*. London: Oxford University Press, 1929.
44. Punter, David. *Metaphor*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
45. Rabinowitz, Peter J. *Before Reading. Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987.
46. Rohrberger, Mary. "In Watermelon Sugar." *Masterplots II. American Fiction Series*. Ed. Frank N. Magill. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Salem Press, 1986.
47. Suzuki, D. T. *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. London: Arrow Books, 1959.
48. Tanner, John. *Landscapes of Language*. Humanities-Ebooks, 2014.
49. Tanner, Tony. *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
50. Taylor, Justin. "On Brautigan." *Lost Magazine*. 17 September 2007. <http://www.lostmag.com/issue17/brautigan.php> > 9.4.2019.
51. Thwaite, Anthony. "Sour Smell of Success." *The Observer*. 16 April 1978.
52. Trodd, Zoe. "Hemingway's Camera Eye: The Problem of Language and an Interwar Politics of Form." *Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms"* Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2009.
53. Yasuda, Kenneth. *Japanese Haiku. Its essential Nature and History*. Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2001.

