

How is a Woman Like a Watermelon?:  
Advocating a Psychological and Comparative Examination of Brautigan's Novels

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Abstract

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“How is a Woman Like a Watermelon” examines two of Richard Brautigan’s novels, *In Watermelon Sugar* and *An Unfortunate Woman*, as they relate to each other in ways that offer a better understanding of each. This paper enriches an understanding of Brautigan’s work by exploring the historical context of his writings, studying his style and presenting diverse interpretations in a mutually inclusive way that complements the multifaceted qualities of his writing. By studying Brautigan’s novels in a comparative manner, the essential and distinctive principles that drive Brautigan’s work—his manipulation of genre, use of memory and a complex first person narrator as an author persona—are better understood. Because of Brautigan’s use of the first person, this study advocates an analytical psychological analysis aimed at discerning underlying emotion within apparent personal detachment, the use of projection as a defense mechanism, and the psychological associative value of words, images and memories. An inclusive and comparative study that foregrounds these psychological elements will ultimately allow for a more complete and subtle analysis of Brautigan’s work.

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## *Preface*

Scholarship on Richard Brautigan almost always involves an obligatory mention of his status as an overlooked, marginalized American author of import who deserves teaching in literature courses. In the same breath might follow a statement about his unfortunate and longstanding association with the San Francisco counterculture. Though he drew upon the cultural context in which he lived (like most writers), he also drew upon the collective consciousness—literary movements as they were linked to social causes and lifestyles. His work reflects the Transcendentalists’ style and preoccupation with Nature, the Beats’ attention to travel literature and a lifestyle centered around the open road, and the Zen Buddhist aesthetic so prized by his contemporaries and direct literary forbearers such as Philip Whalen, Gary Snyder and Michael McClure. Brautigan’s work *In Watermelon Sugar*, for instance, draws upon the American Utopian tradition in literary style while thematically exploring society’s deflation of the American dream after WWII.

Thus, while Brautigan’s writing is a product of San Francisco and the 1960s, he wrote with a mature understanding of many literary and cultural influences. For this reason, Brautigan’s association with the Beats<sup>1</sup> and the counterculture is most interesting in the ways he differs from both movements, personally and artistically. That is not to say, however, that giving Brautigan’s work historical context is not valuable; we cannot ignore the fact that Brautigan’s immediate success with the counterculture is what gave him the financial stability to continue writing, but his audience may have read his books for what they assumed they would find and ignored other critical dynamics.

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<sup>1</sup> Brautigan is often considered one of the last Beats as his writing career comes at the tail end of their reign. Brautigan himself was never fully accepted into their circle of friends and his writing was often criticized by many of the established beats. Ferlinghetti, for one, found his writing simplistic and naïve: “as a writer, I was always waiting for him to grow up” (qtd. in Donlon 90).

At the time in which Brautigan was writing his most famous work, America itself was experimenting with new lifestyles and making history in civil rights. *In Watermelon Sugar* was published around the same time as the first Monterey Pop Festival and Mailer's and Chomsky's march on the pentagon. After publishing *Trout Fishing in America* in 1967, Brautigan soared to popularity "on a street buzz that American Literature had seldom seen."<sup>2</sup>

Brautigan had just scored a six-page spread in *Life* magazine, won the National Endowment for the Arts, and lived amidst the San Francisco Beats (before moving to Bolinas, California) although he was wealthier and more popular than any of his contemporaries (Donlon 90,92). In his essay, "Shooting up the Countryside," Donlon calls Brautigan "a writer who moved in Beat circles, yet wrote nothing like they did" and "never did drugs" (93). Though revered and acclaimed in his time, "he received far more criticism than praise, and was only truly accepted by the masses when he was rich" (Donlon 93).

Brautigan's acceptance did come on the coattails of his own commercialization. He seemed to typify the East Coast's vision of the liberal, "out there" Westerner. The trade magazines that spread his fame also shaped America's perception of the author, shackling him to a certain thread of our cultural psyche. Specifically, *Life* magazine, in their psychedelic spread, used a distinct word to describe the author: "gentle." "The adjective 'gentle' would follow the writer like his shadow and the article would propel Brautigan out of the underground and into the mainstream of American media" (Giddens 201). Not only does it conjure images of peace and love-ins so associated with flower children, but it is also a word that became very important in Brautigan's own work, *In Watermelon Sugar*. The repetitious way Brautigan uses the word to

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<sup>2</sup> Berger, Kevin. "The Secrets of Fiction: Where have you Gone Richard Brautigan."  
(pgs 45-6)

create a sense of apathy and inaction in what might be an overlooked parody of some of these cultural ideals will be discussed later on.

Brautigan was accepted, but accepted into the mainstream as only a curio piece. In this way he was at once both embraced and ostracized—an appraisal that would follow him throughout his career and become mirrored in scholarship and American academic culture. By late 1968, *Rolling Stone*, which then was much more connected to the counterculture than it is today, had mentioned him, published pictures of him, or reviewed his work over a dozen times (Giddens 182). Unfortunately, his immense popularity as a topic in magazines like *Rolling Stone* further alienated Brautigan from a more literary, academic audience.

Because the nation was in such a volatile state, Brautigan's literary achievements were obscured by the cultural context. Schiller, in examining Brautigan, considers him still “an author who is typically assessed not on the merits of his own work, but rather on his engagement with the social context of the period in which he was writing” (212). At a time when the American counterculture was actively opposing the views and lifestyle of the conservative majority, Brautigan's work seemed to establish itself in opposition to standard social traditions of the 1960s and 70s. As Theado points out about the Beat aesthetic in "Beat Generation Literary Criticism," “one does not have to be a bona fide member of a group to respond to the same cultural pressures or share a common poetics” (760). Certainly this is true for Brautigan whose work does not affirm the lifestyle he has been thought to have, but rather parodies and exposes its limitations. Brautigan, for instance, never experimented with drugs though his contemporaries were writing about their experiences using them. Brautigan's main character in his work *The Confederate General From Big Sur*, however, is a Kool-Aid junkie. With this character he parodies the alternative and separatist lifestyle of his contemporaries. His

association with the counterculture and with the Beats, however, led early readers to see his writing as a celebration instead of parody of the society in which he was living.

His having been thought of in terms of “generational context” by readers and critics has prevented Brautigan from being fully respected and studied within academia. He was seen as having been revered only by “reactionary hippies.”<sup>3</sup> In fact, Brautigan cared little for those who flocked to San Francisco during the summer of love; he had already been living there for ten years and their presence brought tourism and naivety. In fact, Brautigan worked with and associated himself with the Diggers, more so than any other group—not the hippies. Michael McClure, Brautigan’s friend and fellow poet, called him the “real poet of the Diggers”<sup>4</sup> (qtd in Giddens 166).

Giddens points out other ways Brautigan was attracted to the Diggers; Brautigan was captivated by the ways their activism combined politics and art. He participated in “The John Dillinger Computer CO.” in the basement of the Glad Memorial Church (Giddens 160). This event would last for days; it was a cultural performance and included poetry, dance, porn, drugs and an in-house newspaper established to publish new occurrences within the event on the hour.

He also subscribed to the Digger’s “free” philosophy. He strongly believed in the Free Store,<sup>5</sup> often keeping it open and running it while using the printing machine in the back. Brautigan fully endorsed their independent publishing ventures; even in 1968 he was still giving his work away for free. His relationship with the Diggers ended, however, when he distanced

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<sup>3</sup> Triance, Travis Echan. “Richard Brautigan: A Poetics of Alienation.”

<sup>4</sup> The San Francisco Diggers took their name from a 17<sup>th</sup> century communist community of English farmers who fought to grow food and live on their own land because of astronomical food costs and immense poverty. In San Francisco, the Diggers (1960) were an offshoot of the Artists Liberation Front and provided free theatre, newspapers, food and clothes for others.

<sup>5</sup> The Free Store was essentially just that. The Diggers opened many Free Stores in San Francisco and the idea eventually spread to the East Coast. Speculations cite the Digger’s Free Stores as the origin of our modern “Give-Away Box.”

himself from the group because they began to abandon their focus on the arts to pursue back-to-the-land movements and start communes. (Giddens 178).

For scholars who are quick to see Brautigan as a social outcast himself, this decision marks an important aspect of his character. It seems to suggest that Brautigan's primary concern was finding a way to live as a part of society, not apart from it. His work sought to push against social boundaries, not to avoid them altogether. *The Abortion*, for example, was not published until 1971 when controversy arose over Roe vs. Wade though it was written in 1966. To write (from a male perspective) about a previously "unmentionable" and progressive feminist topic, Brautigan shows his active presence in society's friction. Brautigan was so thoroughly engrossed in American culture that his work gives early voice to progressive political topics. In other words, his *involvement* in society is directly connected to the social controversy outlined in his texts.

Besides the historical context, which has the opportunity to both enrich and drown his texts, Brautigan's works may fall victim to their own autobiographical nature. Some scholars who read his work for autobiography draw similarities between Brautigan and his narrators, while others attempt to determine the actual locations that may have inspired his fantasies. McClure even suggests that the Sears Roebuck on Geary St. is the Forgotten Works in *In Watermelon Sugar* (166), while others have considered iDEATH an idealized version of Bolinas, and the Forgotten Works as representative of downtown San Francisco...fast becoming a refuge for the migratory masses with flowers in their hair (Berger 48). Because his literature has been understood so simplistically, and informed only by his community and local cultural context, Berger explains that: "we consume them all without pause or discrimination" and his works can

be idealized as a manifestation of “the end of the line for a certain ebullience in American Fiction, days when it thrived at the heart of our culture” (46).

While Brautigan’s work is undoubtedly autobiographical, focusing on this aspect can discourage readers from exploring his achievements in experimental style and structured commentaries. The way autobiographical and historical readings associate Brautigan with the counterculture inadvertently shapes the way in which scholars have spoken about his work. Even with the best of intentions, a critique can compliment his work while continuing to marginalize it within the context of literary history. Instead of examining Brautigan’s narrative structure or doing a close reading of his work, for instance, scholars tend to describe and generalize his aesthetic in their own peculiar paradigm, as in the following example, extracted from Triance’s article “Richard Brautigan: A Poetics of Alienation.” Triance’s praise of Brautigan’s experimental style illustrates this point as he describes Brautigan’s innovative use, and misuse, of conventional literary forms as: “Mark Twain...lodged in a player piano which continuously emits a jumble of hauntingly familiar, yet ineffably garbled show tunes” (Triance). These historical interpretations extend beyond a simplistic placement within the cultural context of the era. The hasty mention of Mark Twain in the above quote allows readers to transfer Twain’s cultural associations to Brautigan. Inherent in Mark Twain’s name are issues surrounding race, youth and dialect—none of which relate to Brautigan’s aesthetic.

Later on, Triance states that his work is like “garbled show tunes.” Show tunes imply a certain frivolity while Brautigan’s language is minimalist. Unfortunately, using this type of language to compliment an author not only confuses readers as to his writing style and makes him seem antique, but also suggests a certain silly and commercial quality—just as Brautigan’s initial praise in the *Rolling Stone* did.

The worst consequence of historical or autobiographical reading is finding predictors of his suicide throughout the body of his work. Donlon delineates what he sees as a literary comparison between Brautigan's style and that of Ernest Hemingway, but an overly acute autobiographical eye makes his final comparison grave. He saw Brautigan as "following closely in the footsteps of Papa Hemingway, not least of all in the way he decided to end his life" (Donlon 88).

Undoubtedly Brautigan had a fascination with death and wrote about the death of his friends, but scholars who push his work into the macabre mask the joy and humor layered within each text. And while Brautigan's works are meditations on his own life, the same may be said for many other authors who escape the same kind of "biomythography" to which Brautigan has been subjected. Inherent in the study of Brautigan is an acknowledgement that a complete biography will never be written. His daughter's book, *You Can't Catch Death*, describes meeting her Grandmother many years after her father's death. Because Brautigan was both exceedingly secretive yet autobiographically revealing in his writing, trying to uncover his past through his novels becomes alluring. But while this type of work might create an interesting cultural oddity, it does not involve enough academic worth to justify his worth as an American *literary* figure.

Against this cultural backdrop, imbedded as it is with mis-readings, misconceptions, urban legends and literary folklore, I hope to put forth a synthetic view that promotes a basic harmony of critique. New Brautigan scholars will benefit from a reading that culls from the existing interpretations—historical, surrealist, Christian, Zen Buddhist, autobiographical and postmodern—in such a way that they add insight into new ways of reading Brautigan. Examining Brautigan's novels as they relate to each other while using a psychological lens to

study his complex narrators will provide an unbiased, non-dogmatic interpretation, open to the kinds of analyses mentioned earlier, but one that is not driven by them. I begin my work, not simply bemoaning Brautigan's exclusion from the curriculum, but by examining those reasons why scholarship may have inadvertently reinforced his omission. In the chapters that follow, I hope to offer viable, if not vibrant, reasons why his work is still original, performs well for today's readers and still warrants more critical analysis—particularly his ignored, later works and the way they relate to his body of work as a whole.

## CHAPTER ONE

The prefacing pages to this work briefly examine some of the historical background that enriches an understanding of Richard Brautigan's work but warns against limiting analysis to either historical or autobiographical interpretations. These values inform the tenor of my own critical reading of Brautigan's work. Chapter One will both justify and prepare readers to examine Brautigan's work psychologically and relatively. This chapter explores a few themes that appear throughout several of Brautigan's novels, leading scholars to inspect how each novel explores them differently. Because Brautigan's novels connect thematically (and as we will discover, technically), they are best appraised in an inclusive study. Chapter One will then set forth technical aspects of Brautigan's writing in preparation for subsequent close readings of his novels in Chapters Two and Three.

Chapter Two is a close reading of *In Watermelon Sugar*, paying significant attention to its inclusion in America's utopian tradition as well as in the chronology of Brautigan's own work. This close reading will present a large amount of interpretation, my own as well as a review of other scholars'. Chapter Three will then use interpretive information drawn from *In Watermelon Sugar* to examine *An Unfortunate Woman: A Journey* in a relative way that reveals new information about both primary texts. In doing so, this paper will offer one of the first scholarly criticisms on Brautigan's last, posthumously published work *An Unfortunate Woman* (2000).<sup>6</sup>

From Brautigan's first work, he lays down the themes and experimental techniques that he explores throughout the entirety of his fiction. With such similarities, as will be discussed

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<sup>6</sup> *An Unfortunate Woman* was first published in France in 1994, translated by Brautigan scholar Marc Chénétier under the title *Cahier d'un Retour de Troie (Return of the Woman of Troy)*.

later on, it is disconcerting that no critics have yet sought an examination of his collective work since the publication of *An Unfortunate Woman*. This paper will not attempt such a difficult task, but will open the door to future comparative examinations.

...a gold nib is very impressionable. After a while it takes on the personality of the writer. [...] I thought to myself what a lovely nib trout fishing in America would make with a stroke of cool green trees along the river's shore, wild flowers and dark fins pressed against the paper. (Brautigan, *Trout Fishing* 110)

Even in Brautigan's first novel, he explores the process of writing as something both reflexive and referential. He was molding his own gold nib, beginning to write in a way that would mature throughout his body of work. The strokes of the nib sketch the artistic ideas that most concerned Brautigan, underlying themes such as naturalism, identity through authorial voice, and human determinism that will reoccur throughout his novels and provide interpretive connections. He is at first concerned with the writer, an idea that will find its incarnation in the self-conscious writer/narrator in *An Unfortunate Woman*.

The idea of nature informing writing is another theme that remains important throughout *Trout Fishing in America* as Brautigan parodies Walden Pond and asks readers to question the value of nature writing for modern audiences. Brautigan's exploration of the relationship between nature and writing continues in *In Watermelon Sugar* as the author character writes in meaningless pastoral imagery. It is therefore difficult to discuss Brautigan's concerns without considering two or more of his novels as his themes develop and are explored in different ways.

While existing Brautigan scholarship has the tentative beginnings of comparative analysis, these texts do not actively pursue this type study and the publications were compiled

prior to Brautigan's last two texts, *So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away* (1982) and *An Unfortunate Woman* (2000). Edward Foster's book-length study on Brautigan's work, for instance, notes that in *The Confederate Soldier from Big Sur* (1964), readers are asked to watch a group of people who are detached from convention. In *Trout Fishing in America* (1967), however, readers are asked to try this attitude themselves and see the world through this lens (6). This variation of a theme marks the way Brautigan explores similar topics, and by doing so, will make it possible to analyze many of his themes as his texts relate to one another. This occurs in a smaller scale among his collection of short stories, *Revenge of the Lawn* (1971). Brenda Palo's work addresses death motifs within these short stories. Iftekharuddin also contends "the reader has to find cohesion in his stories through imaginative discourse" (428).

Edward Foster again points to repetition of narrative structure found within Brautigan's texts: "*Trout Fishing in America* cultivates in its prose an attitude of emotional and intellectual detachment that was to be found at the very center of the existential, alienated culture characteristic of the hipsters and the beats of the 1950s" (6). Foster notes the presence of first person detachment within Brautigan's work—a controversial theme best delineated and understood in the context of Chapter Two's discussion of *In Watermelon Sugar*.

Common themes and an obtrusively present first person narrator are not the only analytical carryovers in Brautigan's texts. He also creates symbols and gives them particular and deliberate meaning within a work; these symbols then make guest appearances in his other works, carrying with them a reader's informed meaning and thereby enriching the other texts. For example, Kylo interprets "the phrase 'trout fishing in America' [...] to symbolize the ideal state of existence" (4). Kolin goes on to assert a similar analysis that "trout are the most

important symbol in the novel...freedom, innocence, and beauty—all now lamentably on the wane or lost” (11).

When Brautigan’s later works use trout imagery, their presence can hardly be separated from his first novel. Foster succinctly specifies the relationship between these communal themes, psychology and the first person:

The feeling that an individual should not be understood primarily as a function of time and place, as a psychological compromise between public and private needs, but rather as a self potentially and ideally independent of history underlies Brautigan’s best work. The detached, ironic intelligence that results from a refusal to accept on faith the opinions of the majority, is the point where the political and social satire of *Trout Fishing in America* begins and also provides the principal subject of, as well as the narrative point of view for, *In Watermelon Sugar*. (Edward Foster 41)

Brautigan’s complex narrators also have symbolic meaning that harkens back to his first novel. Boyer suggests: “The ‘story’ of *Trout Fishing in America* is the narrator’s search for a new perspective, for a contemporary vision of how to survive in an America that has somehow lost, sold, traded or destroyed its promise of personal freedom and integrity” (12). One gets the sense that his narrators both live in a society, be it one removed from the norm, and find themselves at odds within their community. Edward Foster insists, “It is the desire to be someone different or perhaps something *more* than society permits that has made them outcasts. Their only prominent shared characteristic is their inability or unwillingness to conform” (28). Within their nonconformity lies their aesthetic. “Brautigan emphasizes the narrator’s perspective [...allowing] him to illuminate things with a clarity that many of us may never find elsewhere”

(Edward Foster 119). For this reason the narrators seem detached and withdrawn, although they are typically actively engaged within a commune or group, or with the act of writing itself.

Kyllo claims that the Brautigan narrator creates an “alternated reality to sustain himself” (2).

This “alternated reality” may compel readers to seek a more internalized reading, most likely a psychological one.

### ***Brautigan’s Technique***

Edward Foster’s scholarship carefully notes Brautigan’s cultural references and parodies of such classic authors as Thoreau and Melville. For this reason his later work should also be examined for references to classical literature, parody and psychological association (due to the control of the first person narrator). But before a close examination of these aspects of his work commences in Chapters Two and Three, his language use and technique should be discussed.

First time readers may find his metaphors and starkness startling; they will fixate on their seeming disjointedness, and will forgo reading on both the sentence level and thematically.

Boyer reaffirms that “so much attention was being paid to the formal qualities of Brautigan’s fiction that no one seems to have thought to look closely at the content” (47). Chénétier, on the other hand, purports that scholarship has “ignore[ed] the specific technical qualities of a highly experimental writing, and instead invest all one’s critical capital in the study of his themes and subject-matter” (16). This controversy is due to the close relationship between Brautigan’s language and themes; his language reveals his themes. The language provides a platform for his themes, either in tone, in contrast or in revelation. In *Trout Fishing in America*, for instance, the FBI takes a particular interest in a stream; they watched the trout “as if they were all holes punched in a card that had just come out of a computer” (Brautigan, *Trout Fishing*, 42).

Comparing trout with a computer printout shows, on a small scale, Brautigan’s larger concern

with the relationship between technology and the natural world. At times it is the sum of these small comparisons and metaphors that fosters an understanding of his overarching themes.

The “Brautigan metaphor” is the most auspicious of his writing techniques. He combines aesthetics, fusing contrasting ideas to produce a shocking and telling metaphor. Edward Foster clarifies: “His type of metaphor is his own, allowing a sense of impression of fleetingness or insubstantiality—the opposite, that is, of the impression which metaphors, usually founded in solid visual and aural imagery, are supposed to give” (21). In the chapter “Trout Fishing In America Terrorists,” the sixth graders are interrogated by the principal for writing “Trout Fishing in America” on the first grader’s backs. The sixth graders remain quiet except for the sound of blinking: “It was very much like the sound of an insect laying the 1,000,000<sup>th</sup> egg of our disaster.” This metaphor, though heavy with a sense of dread, is “fleeting” and “insubstantial” in the way it undermines its own importance. How can the millionth egg be any more important than the one hundred thousandth egg? The eggs themselves may produce disaster, but the exaggerated counting produces a light-hearted and almost comical effect.

McDermott notes the following passage as a prominent example of Brautigan’s acute use of language from *Trout Fishing*: ““It is all right for a trout to have its neck broken by a fisherman and then to be tossed into the creel or for a trout to die from a fungus that crawls like sugar-colored ants over its body until the trout is in death’s sugarbowl”” (qtd. in McDermott 63). McDermott continues examining this passage as an example of concrete rather than emotive language.

Rather than expressing an attitude by means of the emotive function of language, which would undo his posture of reserve, he obliquely communicates an expressive attitude toward the death of the trout and toward the emotive function

itself, gestures that unearth the buried presence of an intricately structured, highly self-aware subjectivity. (McDermott 64)

While this description may illustrate, as McDermott points out, the superficial coolness and “subjectivity” that scholars will later find problematic in their analyses, Brautigan’s excerpt also functions on the smallest of levels. “It is all right,” first of all, gives readers the sense that the speaker might be attempting to reassure himself or his beliefs. Ultimately it is this phrase that lends irony to the overall quote. The fish first receives a broken neck. The trout is almost humanized; we think of other food animals and humans as getting their necks broken, not fish. This adds to the overall repulsion readers feel and works to further the narrator’s goal—to complicate the process of fishing. We both agree and disagree with killing the fish.

The next image, of death, alludes to ants and sugar, producing a vivid image of bodily decomposition while creating a whimsical depiction of both the trout and a death persona in the mind of the reader. After all, Death personified does not seem likely to have a sugar bowl. Images that layer humor and death produce a strange enjoyment in the reader, but provide a certain level of guilt and discomfort for finding amusement through morbidity. In this way Brautigan’s technique affects the subject of the metaphor as well as the reader’s understanding.

Possibly the most keen aspect of this quote is the use of realism and imagination. Abbot notes that Brautigan’s work “provides example after example of how imagination and reality are seldom aligned, usually because exercising the imagination admits to the hope that things will be different, that the status quo won’t do” (165). Brautigan’s images expose realism’s limitations in conveying extreme emotions in a short span of time without romanticism and idealism. The whimsical images in the above quote, of the sugar and the sugar bowl, are the hopeful aspects Abbot mentions. The sugar bowl provides a concrete image that overshadows fungus and death.

In Abbott's memoir of Brautigan he again points to the nuances of his colleague's skill: "One of the strengths of his style is that he leaves the right things unsaid and trusts the placement of his language to supply the emotion" (158). This is clearly illustrated and not contended in regard to sentence level readings; however, very few scholars, as will become clearer later on, search for the unspoken on a theoretical and thematic level. The narrator's silence and lack of commentary on certain emotional events in *In Watermelon Sugar* lead critics to speculate about the narrator's detachment. I would suggest that the same tools used for sentence level readings might be useful when analyzing a text in its entirety; the unspoken might hint at a more subtle reaction. The projections and associations produced in the mind of the reader are more varied and subjective thanks to this specific aspect of Brautigan's technique.

Brautigan began writing as a poet and his experience writing poetry perfected and pushed his ability toward the direction of stating ideas succinctly. Because of his concern with every word, his novels not only hold a great deal of meaning in just a few words, but also take on a self-referential understanding, much like a themed book of poetry.

Chénétier hails Brautigan as "the most consistent practitioner of fragmentary prose there is, since he constantly reduces prose to its most fundamental constitutive unit. Few of his sentences have more than one or two clauses, and these are usually simply hinged on an 'and' or a 'but'" (69). This style produces a rushed and arbitrary effect. And while Schrooder notes that *Trout Fishing* was completed in just four weeks, Abbott's memoir recounts a night when Brautigan called him, reading a single sentence to him in different ways for more than an hour, agonizing over a single word (47). Though Brautigan produced work in a short period of time, it is evident that his craftsmanship is anything but rushed and haphazardly constructed.

Even more than Brautigan's stylistics, his narrative voice has generated much analytical response; most commonly it is considered child-like or naïve—though reasons for this comparison vary. Abbott notes that, “the voice sounded as if the speaker were talking, but not always consciously aware of being heard. This might account for what other people have dubbed the naïve quality of Brautigan's fictions: the tone of a child talking to himself” (151). Kylo suggest that his narrator seems childish because his sense of reality is imbued with his imagination (53). Boyer also sees Brautigan's innocence as connected to the imagination, but he sees imagination as a device that does more than offer escape from reality; it offers transcendence (14). The imagination of the first person narrators in both *In Watermelon Sugar* and *An Unfortunate Woman* is intrinsically linked to their psychological state; it is through their imaginings that readers are able to gauge their feelings.

At times Brautigan slips between first and third person and thus sometimes loses track of “reality” in the text. Readers must examine his first person work thoroughly and guard against drawing mistaken assumptions about characters and places; Brautigan achieves a style that resembles objectivity through its cool detachment and lack of an emotionally embellished style. In the two novels examined here, the narrators are writers whose emotions hide behind a pretense of journalistic reporting, but ultimately the psychological effects of association, projection and avoidance prevent this. In this way, too, analysis of Brautigan is closely linked to the technical elements of his writing. Though this paper does not focus explicitly on his style, the close readings often link word association and scene shifts to thematic meanings. After all, Brautigan's “revolutionary” style can “impart language which is frequently implied,” and implied not only by context, but his other works as well (Blakely 150).

## CHAPTER TWO

Brautigan, over the course of his life, would experiment with many different literary genres. At times his use of genre and irony would appear in his novel's titles; *The Abortion, A Historical Romance* is one example. *In Watermelon Sugar*, however, was published without a subtitle. Because of this, early readers might not have fully understood how his use of the utopian genre strengthened the level of his satire.

In "Varieties of Literary Utopias," Northrop Frye explores the traditional elements of utopian novels. He points out that utopian literature is inherently satirical as it means to analyze the author's society (325). Showing an ideal community, typically in the future or another "far away" place, accomplishes this. *In Watermelon Sugar* drastically differs from this model as the commune is built, literally, on the ruins of the past. In Brautigan's work, readers are meant to see the utopia, not as a prediction or a hypothetical future, but are instead asked to accept that it has already happened: "I'll tell you about it because I am here and you are distant" (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 1).

Most utopian fiction builds upon present day society, which by contrast to the utopian vision, will seem inadequate. *In Watermelon Sugar* forces readers to supply their own present day comparison as the ruins of the past in Brautigan's work are vague and allegorical. The novel then becomes, not a satire of the narrator/author's society, but the reader's.

Another element of the utopian novel, as noted by Frye, is the presence of a guide. Typically a first person narrator enters the utopia (via a dream or vision) and is shown around by a guide (325). Brautigan's work, on the other hand, presents a first person narrator as a guide who shows readers his commune *through* the novel. As will be discussed in Chapter Three,

Brautigan often used his novels, or the concept of the written word, as a vehicle for change or as a personified character. In *In Watermelon Sugar* the book that is being written by the first person narrator seems almost like a cultural artifact written for ages to come.

Many questions regarding interpretation arise due to Brautigan's use of the utopian novel, particularly as the 1950s and 1960s were the height of post WWII dissatisfaction and the deflated sense of the American Dream and saw the utopian genre itself turn more satirical. As scholarship continues to develop, particularly comparative scholarship, the rest of Brautigan's genre-based texts will provide a better understanding of his manipulation of utopian elements in *In Watermelon Sugar*. Until such a relative examination, the aesthetic result of Brautigan's experimentation with genre remains speculative.

Published in 1968, Brautigan might have used the The Diggers' shift toward communalism and separatism or the Summer of Love as an inspirational force, in which case *In Watermelon Sugar* would embody what he disliked about the counterculture's ideals. The psychedelic aspects of the novel's world, as described by the narrator, hint at a parody of drug culture. Brautigan's work might raise questions about what San Francisco appeared like to someone who did not participate in communal living or use recreational drugs. Did Brautigan see a dark quality behind their quest for freedom and happiness? Brautigan held many strong beliefs about American culture. In an interview, Dennis Hopper relates that Brautigan speculated about an American demise; it would be forgotten in a century except in dreams of an idealized past (Peter and McClure 67).

As mentioned above, one longstanding tool of utopian literature is the dream sequence. Dreams typically function to bring the narrator into the utopia, a *dream vehicle*, or to enrich the

understanding of being in the utopia.<sup>7</sup> As Lewis tells us: by “choosing the dream as [a] literary vehicle[,] the utopian writer has already accepted the improbability of achieving his perfect world” (194).

Brautigan, however, departs from this traditional method because his narrator already exists in his utopia. In fact, his narrator cannot sleep, much less dream, and is prone to thinking as he wanders through the community at night. Many scholars, Edward Foster for one, insist that this is one reason why Brautigan has illustrated a vision that “really works” (80). Is the narrator then, living the dream, and does this describe an attainable reality? Has “the dream as [a] literary device...give[n] way to the dream made real” or has the dream vehicle been replaced by another device (Lewis 200)?

Another characteristic of the utopian genre is the portrayal of “societies which have made great strides technologically” (Lewis 198). They are often set in the future, the “post-industrial age.”<sup>8</sup> Other authors respond directly to the problems and fears of their own age, but Leavitt declares: “Brautigan is responding to the cumulative ages of man” (18). *In Watermelon Sugar* could take place in the past, the present, or the future. It could also represent any ethnic demographic and any physical location. Schiller, author of “The Historical Present: Notions of History, Time and Culture Lineage in the Writing of Richard Brautigan,” comments on a “malleable” quality in the way Brautigan uses and relates to time. Later on we will discuss the chronological use of time, but here the sense of agelessness directly relates to this malleability (Schiller 220).

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<sup>7</sup> Lewis, Arthur O. Jr. “The Utopian Dream.” (pgs 192-3)

<sup>8</sup> Leavitt, Harvey. “The Regained Paradise of Brautigan’s *In Watermelon Sugar*.” (pg 18)

The commune in *In Watermelon Sugar* does suggest a “non-authoritarian rule, an intensely self-disciplined society which limits its parameters consciously” (Leavitt 23). The commune and nature itself seem to be controlled by the practiced will of the commune members. Brautigan offers a basic, almost industrial “acknowledgement of man’s intrinsic inability to understand or control the world,” which allows a communal member to live as an “instrument of nature” (Foster 85, Leavitt 20). But nature, for Brautigan, is often both organic and manmade.

The participants of Brautigan’s commune also use another device to maintain control. They appear to have little or no emotional attachments—an aspect that is not uncommon in utopian literature. Some critics have come down hard on this aspect of the novel and view it as having “an unpleasant, negative effect.”<sup>9</sup> Hernlund views the emotionally unavailable characters as being subhuman and probably as individually cruel as any imperialist dictator. Regardless of these critical views on the emotional warmth or lack thereof in Brautigan’s fiction, it is agreed that something lies between the pages of *In Watermelon Sugar* that has frequently been overlooked. Regardless of the utilitarianism of his ideas, “Brautigan’s work in the quest for a utopia should not be minimized” (Foster 90).

To best interpret a symbolic novel of this nature, it is ideal to discuss scholarly interpretations of important images as they arise through a close walk-through of the text under examination.<sup>10</sup> *In Watermelon Sugar* is set in a natural community nestled between streams and art statues, consisting of shacks and a common area where the community eats and can choose to sleep, which they call iDEATH. The word iDEATH refers to a communal house at the center of the community, but also to the commune itself. The community is also, at times, referred to as

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<sup>9</sup> Hernlund, Patricia. “Author’s Intent: *In Watermelon Sugar*.” (pg 5)

<sup>10</sup> Brautigan, Richard. *In Watermelon Sugar*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin/Seymour Lawrence, 1989.

Watermelon Sugar, which encompasses its outskirts. What lies beyond the communally used areas are various historical sections of the community that link community members to their almost forgotten past and help explain their status as social outcasts.

Both the names iDEATH and Watermelon Sugar contain important meanings that reflect the philosophy of the community. iDEATH literally suggests “the death of ‘I,’” which enables the inhabitants to live collectively with nature (Foster 85). This means the supremacy of social order is also dead, and that the world “knows no domination or superior animals” (Leavitt 23). For Leavitt, iDEATH can also translate into “id death” or “idea death” because the ego lives in the past, which is banished in iDEATH, along with knowledge (24).

The novel is divided into three books: In Watermelon Sugar, inBOIL and Margaret. Ultimately, readers understand the overall work to be the narrator’s book, which he writes during the course of the novel. Interestingly enough, the book jacket describes the novel as being “‘a story of love and betrayal’” (Hernlund 5). Exactly who or what is loved and betrayed is not addressed in the novel itself; we assume it is Margaret, though it could be the commune itself, the narrator, or all three.

The novel begins memorably with the statement: “In Watermelon Sugar the deeds were done and done again as my life is done in watermelon sugar” (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 1). As if coming into a second Eden on earth, we enter the novel during the “again” stage, “man’s second great attempt to obtain an earthly paradise” (Leavitt 19). We discover that everything is made from watermelon sugar or from natural elements like trees and rocks. Though watermelon sugar is one of the building blocks of the society, it “is not only physical, but a state of mind” in which its “sweetness...makes it a metaphor for the good nature” of the gentle community (Leavitt 22).

The narrator, in the chapter titled “My Name,” attempts to describe his name by recounting moments of nostalgia, regret, anticipation, personal humor and warmth. Ultimately he tells us to “call [him] whatever is in [our] mind[s]” (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 4).<sup>11</sup> By surrendering his name, his “I,” the narrator is “demonstrat[ing] his allegiance to [the commune’s selfless] philosophy. In iDEATH, the sacrifice that is made is a bit of each person’s humanity—his or her individual identity. (Foster 90) This is one element that sets Brautigan’s novel apart from others of the Beat Period that tended to revel in personal actualization, identity, and separation from community.

According to Foster, the narrator provokes a great deal of criticism, both as the “quintessential member of the commune” and through his exhibition of “gentleness” and “honesty” (85). As the narrator’s trustworthiness falls under scrutiny, this anonymity could prove his objectivity but could also create doubt and suspicion in the mind of the reader (86). The narrator’s lack of emotion is most commonly interpreted as either honesty or as a sign of his malicious intent to manipulate readers. Edward Foster, for instance, points out that because the narrator is “thoroughly disinterested and detached from the confusion and expectations of our conventional world, he is able to see and record experience with an honesty few of us could match.”<sup>12</sup>

Patricia Hernlund, however, believes the narrator has not written the book himself, as he suggests, and that the author purposefully manipulates the reader by recreating the story’s events outside of proper chronology. She says: “the narrator does not decide to write a book; he lacks

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<sup>11</sup> Once a psychological reading is established, this request becomes extremely interesting. It suggests that the narrator’s very identity depends on the thought patterns of readers. Like *An Unfortunate Woman*, a (seemingly) mutual relationship develops between reader and narrator.

<sup>12</sup> Foster, Edward Halsey. Richard Brautigan. (pg 87)

the volition” (10). To her, the narrator arranges the events in the text in such a manner that readers will associate events that should not be associated.

The novel does have the sense that it is being written at the moment of reading. The final sentence of the novel, however, is: “It would only be a few seconds now, I wrote” (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 138). This seems to verify that the novel we have read is at least part of a written account by the narrator himself, though it may imply incompleteness, or a shift from *reading* the actual text to *our being read to from* the “work.”

As the narrator writes the novel, he is interrupted by events that he then records.<sup>13</sup> Margaret attempts to visit him but he ignores her; Fred stops by soon after. Fred asks the narrator to come by the Watermelon Works, a factory that produces watermelon sugar and things made from the sugar, to observe something curious in the morning. Then Fred says he plans on seeing the narrator at the communal meal that evening at the village center. Before Fred leaves, he produces an object he found earlier in the day that baffles both men. They assume it came from inBOIL, the community outcast, and from where he lives in the Forgotten Works. This type of narration, where the narrator’s written accounts are interrupted with occurrences in the present, represents a type of reality-driven stream of consciousness. Some scholars have discussed this technique, which shifts between the narrator’s memories and responses to events of daily life, as a device used to combine separate and distinct time sequences, constructing them in such a way as to manipulate the mind of the reader (Hernlund 6-8). While the narrative does present the past through episodic memories, as they are associated with daily interruptions, the novel takes on a linear feel. It *is* linear in the sense that readers have passed through moments in

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<sup>13</sup> These interruptions at the moment of conception are used frequently in *An Unfortunate Woman*. There they function to highlight the performance quality of the text in addition to creating the sense of a “present” time to accompany the written reflections.

the mind of the narrator, following the associations of his mind. The novel does, however, include moments from four different time periods. Instead of purposely manipulating the reader, the narrator/author appears to offer us a most personal account, one that includes his own mental associations surrounding the interconnectedness of three death sequences.

The narrator next describes how good it feels to be writing again and lists twenty-four things he wishes to tell us about during the novel. We then discover that the narrator began writing this book at Charlie's suggestion: "You don't seem to like making statues or doing anything else. Why don't you write a book?" (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 9). There have only been twenty-three books written in the iDEATH community over the past one hundred and seventy one years. Most of these books are said to have been boring, but one of them is about an author's journey through the Forgotten Works.

Heading down to the iDEATH communal center, the narrator walks through pine trees and looks at the red stars. "They are always that color" (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 13). While thinking intermittently about Margaret and Pauline, he meets Old Chuck, who has come to light lanterns on the "real bridge" and the "abandoned bridge" (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 14). Two tigers, when there were still tigers in iDEATH, were trapped on the abandoned bridge and set on fire; part of the bridge remains intact and the tiger's bones stick out of the sand below as reminders.<sup>14</sup>

Sitting down for dinner, the narrator notices Pauline's body as she prepares the iDEATH meal. Pauline serves the narrator first, and the others are happy about the apparent relationship

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<sup>14</sup> Throughout *In Watermelon Sugar*, the present appears to be built, quite literally, on the past. The narrative structure of *An Unfortunate Woman* also provides this same allusion—the present moments are related within memories of the past.

between Pauline and him, because no one likes Margaret anymore. No one has any evidence, but they assume she conspired with inBOIL and his gang, enemies of the commune.

After dinner and many goodnights, Pauline and the narrator go home to her shack together (Brautigan *Watermelon* 24). On the way they stop to comment on the beauty of the tombs at night and the narrator thinks about the many statues of vegetables scattered over iDEATH. “Somebody a long time ago liked vegetables and there are twenty or thirty statues of vegetables scattered here and there in watermelon sugar” (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 25). In Kolin’s essay “Food for Thought in Richard Brautigan’s *Trout Fishing in America*,” he notes that “food is compared to inedible objects, many of these objects are fashioned metaphorically from food” (10). And so food that cannot be eaten becomes another thematic element Brautigan continues to use across his works.

Art seems unusual in iDEATH to readers who view the community as harsh and unfeeling. While the art may be described as sterile, a communal environment that supports artistry as a valid societal contribution would in turn view art as an important fixture of society, and the statues would hold more meaning and potential emotional than is depicted by the narrator. In Leavitt’s Christian interpretation, he asserts that these statues of vegetables reflect a “natural determinism” by “artistry [that] is commanded to build monuments to nature” (20). The statues are not reflections of the self but of natural objects that are detached from normal context or meaning. The selfless ideal of iDEATH is again reaffirmed, through artistic expression that lacks personal, emotional response and self-pity, much like the narrator’s novel itself.

Pauline ventures to ask how Margaret is taking “all this.” Presumably she is referring to the fact that the narrator left Margaret for Pauline (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 27). She is very worried for the other woman, who used to be as close to her as a sister, but also states that: “the

heart is something else. Nobody knows what's going to happen" (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 27). If this novel is a story of love and betrayal, as it professes, then it centers around this story line. Margaret is betrayed, both by Pauline, her friend, and by the narrator, who was once her lover. Another type of love and betrayal occurs in iDEATH; as Hernlund points out, the only true type of love that exists in the community can be described as "communal pride" (16). The two other betrayals that occur during the novel can then be seen as Margaret and inBOIL's actions against the commune.

The narrator and Pauline make love while listening to the wind. "The wind suddenly stopped and Pauline said 'What's that?' 'It's the wind'" (Brautigan 30). This quotation echoes a portion of T.S. Eliot's "The Wastland": "'What is that noise?'/The wind under the door./'What is that noise now?/What is the wind doing?'/Nothing again nothing."<sup>15</sup> In both instances, a narrative voice hears silence after the wind. This heightens the unusual relationship these commune members have with nature. In iDEATH, the concrete facts about the organic world that are learned as toddlers, like the color of sky and sun, are variable entities. Nature seems to exist, like the commune, without a history. Eliot's poem continues, "Do you remember nothing?" In relation to *In Watermelon Sugar's* attempt to eradicate a collective past prior to the existence of the commune, this line rings out hauntingly.

The novel's descriptions of the lovemaking seems overly systematic and unfeeling. Critics are concerned about whether love even exists in iDEATH. Sex is described by lyric expressions but "not particularly *good* lyric expressions" (Hernlund 14). The narrator first describes Pauline's body as a bed of daisies but then wonders "if perhaps that is where the lamb sat down" (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 37). In keeping with the Brautigan tradition of drawing his

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<sup>15</sup> Eliot's "The Wastland," Section II. "A Games of Chess," lines 117-120.

inspiration from a cultural consciousness, Giddens cites the source of this odd image. Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *Patience* reads: "You must lie upon the daisies/And discourse in novel phrases/of your complicated state of mind,/The meaning doesn't matter/if it's only idle chatter/of a transcendental kind" (71). This source suggests that a simple life externally might hint at a more complex internal dialogue. Regardless, the narrator's bedtime conversations do not point towards love.

The act of loving, like the rest of their lives, also seems emotionless, but as pointed out in "The Regained Paradise of Brautigan's *In Watermelon Sugar*," it "demonstrates the sensory nature of the experience" (Leavitt 21). By the narrator's description of touch and smell, readers understand an idea of natural sex "growing out of his biological nature and not charged with abstract emotion" (21). Leavitt expounds: "Libido is translated into the purely physiological" (23).

Lying in bed together, the lovers begin to discuss the last of the tigers that, oddly, could speak their language. Hunters came into town, when Pauline was just a baby, with the last tiger already dead. They brought the dead tiger to iDEATH, poured watermelontrout oil on it, piled flowers upon that, and Charlie set fire to the heap. People stood crying for the last tiger. After the tiger was reduced to ashes, the village began to build the trout hatchery over the remains—an act that may symbolize the community's focus on the natural cycle of regeneration (Foster 86). Building the trout hatchery over the ashes of the tigers might symbolize a move from death to rebirth; but in this sense the hatchery seems to replace a wild untamed force of nature with a controlled and imaginatively sterile one. Pauline falls asleep after reminiscing, but the narrator goes out for a long walk and tells us about how the tigers killed and ate his parents.

According to the narrator, one morning during breakfast, the tigers came into his parent's shack and began eating them, saying: "We don't hurt children. Just sit there where you are and we'll tell you a story" (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 33). They began chewing the mother's arm but the narrator does not want to hear a story. He tells them that they were his "folks" and the tiger apologizes: "We wouldn't do this if we didn't have to, if we weren't absolutely forced to [...] this is the only way we can keep alive" (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 34). The narrator then asks for help with his arithmetic and soon they are answering multiplication problems and finishing up their meal.

After the tigers leave, the narrator sets fire to the shack and goes to live downtown at iDEATH. For many scholars, the tigers represent some essential elements that are necessary for proper interpretation of *In Watermelon Sugar*.

The tigers incorporate the human qualities of rational discourse and instinctive survival. The tigers symbolize the destructive ambiguity of man, his instinct for survival and his rational nature that allows him to explain his acts of violence in terms of survival. (Leavitt 19-20)

Foster offers that the tigers, by justifying their violence to the narrator as a child, "reflect man's need to explain away his violence in terms of self-preservation" (89). As man becomes more civilized, his connection to instinctual survival is diminished; he can no longer connect his actions with needs or goals (Leavitt 20). The tigers are the human race pre-iDEATH. The tigers are also considered to be a reference to William Blake, one of Brautigan's favorite poets.<sup>16</sup> In Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "Proverbs of Hell" reads: "The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction." Here Black contrasts the wildness of the tyger with the

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<sup>16</sup> McClure, Michael. "Ninety-One Things about Richard Brautigan" (pg 166)

domestication of the horse. Brautigan seems to be using Blake to construct tigers that are wise enough to teach math, in contrast to the commune's trained horse-like members. The next line in Blake's poem, "Expect poison from the standing water," precisely foreshadows violent events yet to occur within the trout hatchery—the commune's standing water.

In iDEATH, the tigers are not the only elements of the natural world that differ from our own; the sun shines a different color every day. The watermelons that are picked on those days make corresponding-colored watermelon sugar and their seeds grow more monochromatic melons. This is one way in which nature in iDEATH controls not only how things appear, but also their essence itself. "Man must accept his subordinate, passive role in the workings of nature; he does not have the power to create anything of his own but illusion" (Foster 90).

The sun was shining gray on the morning after Pauline and the narrator make love as they walk back to the iDEATH compound together for Pauline to make breakfast. After breakfast, Fred and the narrator walk down to the Watermelon Works together and look at a bat that is clinging beneath one of the machines. On the way home, the narrator stops to appreciate a tomb being built for the next death. The dead are incased in glass, with foxfire around them, so that the community can "appreciate what comes next"; they are then lowered to the bottom of the river (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 51). An old trout, The Grand Old Trout, is also watching the tomb being prepared. This strikes the narrator as unusual because this trout is so old, he has seen many tombs being readied but has ignored other, more elaborate, preparations.

By putting the dead to rest, clearly visible to the community, lit with foxfire, they become a part of iDEATH and create, as Leavitt suggests, a "pantheistic integration" (22). The trout begins staring at the narrator as he turns to leave: "he was still staring at me when I was gone from sight" (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 53). For readers who are familiar with Brautigan's most

famous work, *Trout Fishing in America*, this trout character seems to be an odd addition and readers will unquestionably draw comparisons between the two works. The narrator's paranoid antics, however, might suggest that he subtly reveals his emotions through projection. Twice the narrator believes the Grand Old Trout is staring at him, revealing his own feelings of guilt.<sup>17</sup> Later, after Margaret commits suicide, the narrator reports that the trout could not sleep, yet another act of projection that allows us to understand he may have felt emotions but lacked the agency or the ability to express them.<sup>18</sup>

Book Two begins with no differentiation other than the title change to "inBOIL." The story continues with the narrator's return home from the river and his discovery of a note from Margaret. "[He] read the note and it did not please [him] so [he] threw it away, so not even time could find it" (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 57). Next the narrator paces back and forth across the bridge in front of his house, trying to find the squeaky board that Margaret always steps on. He cannot find it and, tired, goes in for a nap, during which he dreams of inBOIL and "the terrible thing that happened just a few short months ago" (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 60). Here the narrator is clearly disturbed by Margaret's note. His desire to be rid of the note and his obsession with finding the specific board that only Margaret can make squeak portrays heightened emotion even though Brautigan's writing style remains free from emotive language. The narrator's experience with Margaret's note, the contents of which are never disclosed, create an associative dream-state connection to inBOIL. Brautigan's language functions to minimize the importance of what the note said in readers' minds by creating a clause that more strongly holds the imagination: "so

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<sup>17</sup> Rohrberger, Mary and Gardner, Peggy C. "Multicolored Loin Cloths, Glass Trinkets of Words: Surrealism in *In Watermelon Sugar*" (pg 63)

<sup>18</sup> As previously stated, the symbol of the trout is thought to convey an ideal. Here readers get the sense that the trout is another remnant of the past. In this case the recollection of the past, even as an archetypal past, signals these emotions in the narrator though he does not express them verbally.

not even time could find it.” As the narrator of this novel is also its writer, minimizing such important plot information produces a type of stylistic avoidance behavior.

Readers learn through the narrator’s dream about inBOIL, who after a fight with his brother Charlie, built a shack and lived near the Forgotten Works. During this confrontation, inBOIL made vague accusations against iDEATH saying: “This isn’t iDEATH at all. This is just a figment of your imagination [...] I’ve forgotten more iDEATH than you guys will ever know” (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 64). Kylo suggests that his name implies what it says, that inBOIL “seethes internally” (52). She also notes that his speeches are also frequently filled with emotion in contrast to the other dialogue.

Occasionally members of the community who were “unhappy and nervous [...] and talk[ed] a lot about things that good people did not understand nor wanted to,” would join inBOIL and his gang until they numbered around twenty (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 61). The gang lived apart from the iDEATH community and drank whiskey brewed from the things at the Forgotten Works. Margaret too, like many people in iDEATH, has a profound curiosity for the Forgotten Works. The Forgotten Works are simply a large collection of stuff from a previous time, the function of which no one can remember. In the Forgotten Works “the dead past [lies], a past that includes all of man’s efforts, [...] delusions of power and knowledge” (Foster 87).

For some, the Forgotten Works may confirm an Edenic view of iDEATH, complete with temptation. “The original tree of knowledge led to a civilization remote from nature,” and to go into the Forgotten Works, “to pass through the gates with the warning,” is likened to eating from the forbidden biblical tree (Leavitt 24). The Forgotten Works stand for “knowledge and curiosity,” (23) so they can lead to “the destruction of iDEATH, just as they led to the fall of Eden” (Foster 88). If, however, the Forgotten Works suggest a post-apocalyptic interpretation

for the novel, its existence then allows the community a fresh start (Leavitt 18). Rohrberger and Gardner present “The Forgotten Works [as] remnants of our civilization after a holocaust,” an event so traumatic that the specific events are lost to history” (62). Surrealists would view the junk heap as the “manifestation of the subconscious,” and thus the individual objects become “inspiration” which, since they seem to be written about frequently, do inspire the narrator/author, as well as the outcasts in community (62).

No one remembers how old the Forgotten Works are nor how far back into the distant past they reach. A sign above the entrance gate reads: “THIS IS THE ENTRANCE TO THE FORGOTTEN WORKS/BE CAREFUL/YOU MIGHT GET LOST” (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 69). The narrator recounts a day in the recent past when he and Margaret, at her request, went to the Forgotten Works together for her to poke around. Margaret was very friendly and polite to inBOIL, which “really disgusted [the narrator]: a decent woman smiling at inBOIL” (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 73).

On the way home from this excursion, Margaret senses the narrator is mad at her, though he insists he is not. The memory jumps forward by weeks, and finally Margaret’s shack was full of treasures from the Forgotten Works. If the sign above the forgotten works warns those who enter that they might get “lost,” one wonders if Margaret’s acquisition of these objects is getting lost. Might holding on to the past be detrimental to the commune? It is possible that the success of the commune rests on its members living in the moment.

The narrator recalls one day he went with Margaret to her favorite section of The Forgotten Works. While there, inBOIL tells the narrator he was planning on sharing with him something about “what the real iDEATH is like” (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 77). That evening the people at iDEATH discuss inBOIL; their concern prevents them from eating dinner. Margaret is

unaffected and able to eat, which puts her in suspicion, and she and the narrator fight. Readers can assume that this was the end of their relationship as he is presently with Pauline. It is interesting that at a previous dinner the commune openly approved of the narrator's new relationship with Pauline. Here they seem to actively alienate Margaret, which results in the narrator replicating the group sentiment. Hidden within the text under a guise of gentleness, a strong group ethos is felt.

After the fight, the narrator then returns to his shack, where he passes a fretful, sleepless night. Then, during the communal breakfast the next morning, inBOIL comes into town. InBOIL leads the community down into the fish hatchery to show them the true iDEATH. Pauline, harassed by inBOIL, defends herself and gets madder than anyone has ever seen her before. InBOIL begins lecturing the masses: "The tigers were the true meaning of iDEATH" (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 93). If the tigers (tygers of wrath) were the initial meaning of the community, one might imagine that group thought (as demonstrated regarding the narrator's relationship) may have replaced the "I" in iDEATH. In this sense, inBOIL will demonstrate figuratively and literally, the meaning of "i."

He declares that he would "bring back iDEATH" and pulls out a jackknife and cuts off his thumb (93). InBOIL's gang then cut off their thumbs, noses, ears and the rest of their fingers. The gang slowly bleeds to death, while Pauline gets a bucket and begins angrily mopping up the "mess" (95). As he dies, inBOIL states: "I am iDEATH" to which Pauline replies: "You're an asshole" (95). For Edward Foster, inBOIL has internalized his ego and self-destruction is the meaning of "iDEATH" (87).

The bodies are piled into inBOIL's own shack and set afire. It appears that inBOIL believed his death would bring back the true iDEATH, because of a "perverted sense of the

philosophy of the commune. To inBOIL, the death of the self is physical” (Foster 88). The self-death of the community is generally assumed to be an emotional death that benefits the community. “Individual [physical] death is not an issue, because nature’s cycle of birth and death guarantees the regeneration of the species,” Foster reveals (85).

It is possible, if we believe inBOIL’s perception and see the novel through Hernlund’s lens, that by the cutting of his sensory organs, inBOIL was attempting to warn the community that “the people of iDEATH have cut themselves off from reality of the senses, except taste, to avoid being bothered by life” (12). Or perhaps he was restating the actual iDEATH philosophy to “avoid extreme sensory stimulation,” and therefore “attraction and addiction [...] to the temporal world” (Foster 88). InBOIL’s desire to drink whiskey brewed from the forgotten works may be seen as either an addiction to sensory stimulation or as a deadening of the senses—an act of both remembering and forgetting.

Pauline’s as well as the entire community’s reaction to the mass suicide is a highly controversial one. Their festive spirit after the deaths, and lack of emotion, are seen as being pivotal to scholars who seek existential and Zen Buddhist interpretations that hinge on the narrator’s seeming dispassion. Pauline’s reaction to the suicides, however, is one of extreme anger. Pauline’s response is justified, according to Foster, because inBOIL is the antagonist (88). It could be said that “everyone realize[d] that inBOIL was a threat to the security and peace of iDEATH” and anger would represent the community’s ability to perpetuate itself (88).

Book Three, entitled “Margaret,” begins on the same day the narrator went to the Watermelon Works and saw Fred’s bat. He meets Fred for lunch and there they talk about Margaret and her possible involvement with inBOIL. Then he goes to sit at the Statue of Mirrors for a while. “Everything is reflected in the Statue of Mirrors if you [...] empty your mind [...]

and [are] careful not to want anything from the mirrors” (Brautigan 112). While standing before the mirrors, the narrator sees various people he knows involved in the mundane acts of life. Finally he sees Margaret hang herself from an apple tree. The narrator leaves the mirrors and sits by a pool. For Harvey Leavitt’s Christian interpretation of the novel, Margaret symbolizes Eve, tempting the narrator with things from the Forgotten Works, and then hanging herself from an apple tree—atonement for her sins (20).

After the narrator sees Margaret’s death in the mirror, he tells readers that he did not look into the mirror for the rest of the day. Though a day is not a lot of time, this statement lends itself to a psychological reading. For someone whose writing projects emotional detachment, it is clear that seeing her death affected him.

Earlier in the text the narrator heads toward the commune, excited to see Pauline. As he gets closer, he begins to fear that he will run into Margaret. This shows a change that occurs within the narrator; he not only exhibits feelings, his psychology shifts. Again, the narrator’s avoidance of Margaret points directly to his own feelings of guilt or shame.

Margaret’s suicide may or may not be a reaction to inBOIL’s. The way the narrator shifts between the present events of Margaret’s death and his memories of inBOIL’s demise seems to connect them. On one hand these two characters were both “attached to the past” through their love of the Forgotten Works and through their own personal histories. It seems that inBOIL wanted to revive what he fondly referred to as the old and true iDEATH, while Margaret could not forget her past as the narrator’s lover (Foster 87). On the other hand, inBOIL alienated himself from the community while the group held Margaret under suspicion and ostracized her. The narrator himself avoided and ignored her and began publicly seeing her friend. Hernlund feels that suggesting these two outcasts were connected proves “the narrator’s negative character,

his unreliability as an informant” and that this connection is “not borne out by the time sequence or the words of the other characters” (11). It then becomes important to realize, though Margaret’s death comes after inBOIL’s, that a good deal of time passes between them, during which time Margaret seems to suffer a broken heart. It is also important to consider the function of a first person narrative; regardless of his reliability concerning actual facts, he conveys truths about himself.

One cannot help but wonder why the narrator connects the two deaths so strongly. Either they are simply two deaths he has experienced, or he blames the Forgotten Works and inBOIL for Margaret’s death, instead of attributing the blame to his own actions. The deaths of Margaret and inBOIL and his gang are only similar in that they are suicides; their motives differ greatly. It is safe to say, however, that similarities between these two individuals exist: both inBOIL and Margaret suffered self-inflicted (and communal) ostracism and were not happy in the “peaceful” utopia in which they lived.

Many scholars are perplexed and, at times, bothered by the nonchalant way the narrator describes the suicide. Foster believes that since “extreme human emotions only [lead...] to disappointment[,] depression” and possible suicide, the “detachment of the narrator and the other members of iDEATH protects them” (89). The narrator’s projection of human feelings onto The Grand Old Trout then becomes the psychological coping mechanism to prevent him from the same fate. And, as the narrator never discloses the contents of Margaret’s note, we can only wonder at the level of his guilt regarding her death.

Fred and the narrator go together to tell Margaret’s brother about her death. Her brother says: “It’s for the best” (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 118). They then remove her body from the tree and Fred suggests they take her to iDEATH. “Her brother looked relieved for the first time since

[they] told him of her death” (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 120). Her brother’s relief may be because, even though she committed suicide, Margaret is allowed to return to iDEATH for her wake. She will not be carried into her shack and burned like other bad memories eradicated in iDEATH.

That night the narrator goes for another sleepless night’s walk. He goes into the trout hatchery, where Margaret’s body is laid out, and sits for a long time. If the narrator were truly apathetic, his night might have been filled instead with sleep. By sitting with Margaret’s body, he seems mournful, though unable to express such emotions verbally or in writing. After a typical service, the town prepares for a post-funeral dance down in the fish hatchery. Since, on that day, the sun was shining black, and on black watermelon days there is no sound, the novel ends with the musicians poised ready to play as soon as the sun sets.

Margaret’s death may “demonstrate the communal deprivation” (Hernlund 12). As a childless woman who does not share the cooking at iDEATH, and is then abandoned by the narrator, she fulfills no role in the community. Hernlund believes that this communal disconnectedness may have led her to kill herself (13). As Brautigan states in the beginning of the novel, the narrator abandoned making sculpture and does not have a regular job, which is why it was suggested that he write a novel. It seems that to be able to function in Brautigan’s utopia, each member must serve a purpose that supports the community—be it through art or factory work. The narrator too casts himself as an outsider when he states that those “who do not have regular names spend a lot of time by [them]selves” (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 28), and “appears resigned to the fact that certain character types are not a part of that façade of politeness that is iDEATH” (Rohrberger and Gardner 63). The narrator, who did not have a job in the commune until it was suggested that he write a book, seemed to have been as interested in *The Forgotten Works* as Margaret. It is subtly suggested that he might have become ostracized as

well but he begins to act as others suggest he should, ultimately becoming assimilated into the group.

Most interpretations of *In Watermelon Sugar* agree that the narrator is, in fact, emotionally disconnected. This is then turned into a generalization about Pauline, and is then applied to the rest of the iDEATH community, which is denounced, or defended, through reexamining the utopian genre. It is important to note that certain emotions are blatantly exhibited. Anger and rage are depicted, as are contentment and sadness. The community cries for the loss of the tigers (Brautigan, *Watermelon* 31); Margaret cries while she hangs herself (113), and Pauline cries when she discovers Margaret is dead (121). From this readers understand that the sense of detachment comes, not from the commune itself, but from the narrator. The narrator is coping with his own experience of trauma through detachment and his manipulation of time is an effect of his own mental anguish, not an attempt on his part to manipulate the readers or cast blame from himself.

A new wave of interest in Brautigan's work has arisen since 2002, particularly in the United Kingdom.<sup>19</sup> This new criticism is beginning to explore the difference between "unemotional" writing versus the ways in which the narrator's feelings are expressed, and thus begins to pluck subtle traces of emotion from the text. For Palo, the narrator is a "hopeless prisoner of time who relies [...] on the signifier both to defer their pain and reconnect them with the loss" (187). She points out times in the novel when the narrator focuses, sometimes briefly, on small or banal objects. At one point, the narrator notes an apple with a moth clinging to it which might remind him of Margaret hanging from the apple tree—why would the author (narrator) include such an

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<sup>19</sup> During his lifetime, some intellectual criticism by Japanese avant-garde intellectuals existed. In America he was read by a much younger audience and was considered an illegitimate, uneducated writer. Current scholarship, in the United Kingdom, mainly through new doctoral theses may signal a rise of a new wave of consideration regarding Brautigan's work.

image? He has clearly experienced an emotional reaction to it, though he does not use words that represent a passionate reaction in his writing. After the narrator is *displeased* by Margaret's note, he paces back and forth across the bridge, trying to find the squeaky board she always walks on. This is a specific physical action to denote extreme emotional unrest. Brautigan effectively uses "melancholia and death in relation to time as well as language use."<sup>20</sup> The narrator's tendency to jump around in time allows the reader to gather an understanding of how his mind functions. Chénétier suggests that this rhizomatic structure relates to real experience: "all reality is mobile, unsteady, fluctuating, and life is not a continuum but an accretion of moments, transitory and ephemeral states" (36).

If, after sleeping with Pauline, the narrator goes for a long walk and thinks about Margaret, one could easily picture him as feeling guilty. Interestingly, the entire novel mentions Margaret repeatedly. Her name appears in multiple chapter titles and he constantly circles around various mentions of her. Regardless of the narrator's emotional state, it is evident that his "survival depends on his ability to concentrate on short or small entities, objects isolated from their continuum" (Palo 188). This is why the narrator becomes fixated on the squeaky board, even though that board was inexplicably linked to Margaret.

The reality of human experience is not twofold. There is no distinction between the tangible elements of the physical world and the ideas and discoveries of the imagination. The two exist inextricably. (Schiller 214)

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<sup>20</sup> Palo, Brenda M. "Melancholia and the Death Motif in Richard Brautigan's Short Fiction." (pg 186)

Thus, what the narrator reveals and describes to us is in direct relation to how he feels. In one of his short stories, “World War I Los Angeles Airplane,”<sup>21</sup> Brautigan wrote: “You cannot camouflage death with words. Always at the end of words somebody is dead.” Possibly the same is true of emotions, they cannot be camouflaged with words. The novel takes on a new form if we see it as a diary-type recollection by a man who is too close to a situation and still too much in shock to be able to speak directly from his emotions.

Brautigan creates a new type of novel, one that uses the presence of a first person narrator to trouble readers’ assumptions about the very events he relates. Brautigan uses the traditional dream device of utopian literature. But instead of projecting the character into a utopian dream of the future, Brautigan’s narrator already lives in an intentional community and his dreams are based on his own memories of the past. In discussing the autobiographical nature of Brautigan’s work, Pettersson notes: “Three important and interrelated features [...are]: space, time and remembering—including the recording—of the spatially and chronologically situated life.”<sup>22</sup> Not only does this prove important in authorial or autobiographical readings, but also where Brautigan has invented a narrator/writer who has written, in essence, his own autobiography (or fragment of an autobiography). This type of narrator/author’s memory is therefore shaped by both his own perception of the event as well as the persona he creates as an “author.” These key elements are important, particularly as they point to a psychological understanding of his work, and will continue to be important through the examination of *An Unfortunate Woman*.

Word association, within the realms of psychology, offers the best example to explain how Brautigan uses his narrator’s memories or his action of remembering (association of events)

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<sup>21</sup> “World War I Los Angeles Airplane” is the final story in Brautigan’s *Revenge of the Lawn*, first published in 1963, (pg170).

<sup>22</sup> Pettersson, Bo. “The Geography of Time Remember: Richard Brautigan’s Autobiographical Novels.”

within the text. Word association does not involve, externally, any emotion on the part of the subject. It is with close critical examination and interpretation of *why* the individual would associate certain words that informs an emotional and mental assessment. Similarly, memories, which only function by association, can be examined for subtle signs of emotion. Brautigan uses these memories to produce associations in his novel, as do his readers.

The parallel exposition of multiple story lines is a characteristic of postmodernism. Brautigan took this complex style and layered a referential aspect in regards to narrator psychology. In this way, a groundbreaking reassessment of Richard Brautigan's novels could bring postmodernist criticism away from the overly abstract or metaphysical and into a more specific, concrete and especially a psychological kind of understanding. This manner of study might also affect the way scholars approach American Beat literature in general. Most post-WWII American fiction, creating the foundation of postmodernism, depicts withdrawal from society or emotion as a way for characters to protect themselves from what they see as a downward turn in society or politics or as reaction to trauma. By examining novels for subtle indicators of the presence of emotion, scholars could begin to study how separatism and individualism in postmodern literature function in *reaction* to society instead of in *disconnect* with it; inherent in studying a reaction is the study of the underlying psychology of a narrator, author, group or generation.

### CHAPTER THREE

The most noticeable and striking similarity between Brautigan's *In Watermelon Sugar (Watermelon)* and *An Unfortunate Woman (Woman)* is its narrative structure. *Watermelon* is about a narrator who is writing a book, the book that readers are encountering. Likewise, *Woman* is a journal. Readers must then be conscious of a subjective recitation, regardless of the seeming objectivity of the narrator—particularly readers familiar with Brautigan's famous, seemingly unemotional, unreliable narrators.

Most importantly, first person narrators may discuss the people in their lives or their living environment, but their discussions lead primarily to the uncovering of their own identity. With this in mind, readers may uncover psychological meaning, metaphors that illuminate the subtext i.e. cynicism, lies, satire, sarcasm, guilt and mental state of the narrator himself.

With the type of reading prescribed here, both books examined in this study become investigations of the individual self through the vehicles of relationships, alienation and death. Brautigan, in essence, provides a lens through which we can examine the world to discover the self behind the lens, thus leading us to examine our culture and ourselves.

Though all Brautigan's works are seemingly autobiographical, I hope to eliminate such singular and limited readings of his texts to better reveal his skill. By seeing the narrator as a Brautigan persona instead of a character, Schrooder suggests that critics will not find "significant irony"; Brautigan intentionally creates his author/characters to complicate ideas of fiction and nonfiction, though it is this knowledge that creates excitement and tension for the readers (45). Readers consider Brautigan to be a cultural icon, so we tend to read his novels as a way to discover more about him. More so than with many of his other works, reading *Woman*

autobiographically would remove much of the multiplicity, the layering and the complex relationship that forms between narrator/author and readers.

As for the form itself, Brautigan's writing of a fictional journal mirrors his previous experimental styles: exploring the western and detective genres among others.<sup>23</sup> Brautigan's use of a journal form, however, shows a sophisticated author toying with concepts of historical accuracy and authorial intent. *Woman* pushes these boundaries by manipulating what is prized as historically valuable and, in regards to such works as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, sacred.

In terms of genre, Brautigan's use of the journal reads less like a personal narrative and more like an account of days with a known end and a purported goal. His book begins with a letter from July 8<sup>th</sup> as a preface, but he then begins reciting what occurs in a journalistic manner, beginning with January 30<sup>th</sup> of the same year. The journal does not reveal an account of what happens on each day prior to July, but intertwines memories from the past. The narrator/author<sup>24</sup> is working through his history and emotions within the six months prior to July. Readers will know the outcome, but as the subtitle "A Journey" suggests, will be going on an expedition of significant complexity.

The preface to *An Unfortunate Woman* is a letter written to N. (Nikki Arai) from R. (Richard Brautigan). Nikki was a dear friend of Brautigan's who died on July 8, 1982 after battling cancer. The letter tells Nikki that he heard about her death and wants to talk about it with a neighbor. He has a watermelon that was left over from a dinner party and he plans on taking it over to M's house. He describes himself as "a bachelor stuck with too much

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<sup>23</sup> *The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western* (1974) and *Dreaming of Babylon: A Private Eye Novel 1942* (1977), respectively.

<sup>24</sup> To eliminate a strictly autobiographical reading of Brautigan's work, particularly as this text lends itself to such more than *Watermelon*, and to aid in the examination of Brautigan's complex "author as narrator and character" structure, the journal's author will be referred to as the author or narrator. Brautigan will be referenced in name only.

watermelon” (*Woman* ix). The narrator, R., interrupts his neighbor’s lovemaking but insists “There was something [he] wanted to show her about the watermelon that required her to get a knife and cut into the melon.” They stand beside the watermelon in silence. Kylo delineates aspects of Brautigan’s novel *The Abortion* that play out in the same fashion. Those characters are also unable to communicate (51). *The Abortion* also depicts neighbors who visit each other as a way to control and find stability in their lives. These moments call to mind “ceremonies or rituals” (Kylo 44). The slicing of the watermelon becomes reminiscent of a ritual.

His visit ends, the watermelon sliced but not eaten, and R. returns home wishing he might call his dead friend. Only she, he muses, might understand the humor of the coital interruption and unspoken conversation. R. then admits that “the watermelon was just some kind of funny excuse to talk about [his] grief” (*Woman* xi).

Just as Brautigan’s trout becomes a symbol larger than life, so too does the watermelon take on extraordinary meaning when set against *In Watermelon Sugar*. In both these novels, the watermelon becomes a symbol of the unspoken and a harbinger of death. Just as *Watermelon*’s narrator is unable to relate to Margaret’s death emotionally, so does R. find himself unable to share his grief. Even as the watermelon is split open or the sugar extracted, the significance of its symbolic stuntedness is withheld.

The above letter to N., included as a preface, intermingles Brautigan as author with Brautigan as character and blurs the line between fiction and non-fiction. The use of epistle is literarily important in two ways: it gives the work a weight of truth to create an effect on the reader (as does the first person narrator in *Watermelon*) and it allows a psychological reading. Readers who encounter the earnest letter cannot help but connect the novel’s subtitle “A Journey,” with migration narratives. The preface harkens to the letters of authenticity that were

often included prior to a slave narrative—vouching for the narrative’s plausibility and truthfulness.

This letter allows readers to impose their sense of the “truth” and “ultimate outcome” upon the entire text, instead of experiencing it without hindshadowing. R. is writing a letter to a woman he knows (and the readers know) is dead. This letter, in which he tells her “you would,” “you could” and “you have” is a perfect example of denial in the Kubler-Ross model of grief. His letter comments on the fact that N. is dead, but his language exposes his inability to accept and cope with death.

The narrator begins the novel by telling about a shoe lying on an Interstate highway in Honolulu: “Why is it that when people see one shoe, they almost feel uncomfortable if a second is not about? They look for it” (*Woman* 1). He finally tells readers that an unfortunate woman has hanged herself; he refuses to let someone discuss it over dinner. While attempting to enumerate his travels, he talks about having a birthday alone on a train in Canada. In this manner, Brautigan uses scenes that should be friendly and busy—an intersection, a dinner and a birthday—to transmit loss. He layers loneliness when there should not be any, while his preoccupation with her death becomes an intrusion into companionship.

The narrator, by describing his own journeys in Montana, California, Canada and Japan, is also taking readers on a journey. Each day the author tells about past occurrences and, as he tells these stories, his mind jumps between them. As A. Boyer points out in reference to Brautigan’s other novels, “There is a sense throughout [...] of a mind-in-progress, a mind that would like to, as the speaker says here, *get it right*, and too a reminder that no matter how casual and familiar the writing may seem, communicating with people is no simple matter” (20). The narrator wants to give the audience a clear picture, but he can only relate to his experience

through remembrances. Just as the narrator in *Watermelon* inserted snippets from the past as they are mentally associated with his present, so too does this narrator reveal his psychology through the relativism of associated memories.

*Woman*'s narrator first relates the story of having his picture taken in Honolulu with a chicken. The picture would serve as a curiosity for his guests as they might wonder why he had such a strange picture taken. During and after the event, the chicken seemed very serious to the narrator who described the bird as walking "slowly and bewilderingly away, feathers downcast" (*Woman* 11). This sentence is followed by a complete shift in thought: "Last week I got off the train in Berkley and walked home to the house where the woman had hanged herself" which, incidentally, is also his own home (*Woman* 11). The psychological connection between these two sentences suggests that the way the chicken walked away reminds the narrator of the way he felt walking to the site of the suicide. Additionally, the narrator's refusal to name his friend, referring to her only as "the woman," signals a deep level of denial and disconnect.

The narrator also meets a cat as he draws near this woman's home. The cat stops and stares at him. Like the Grand Old Trout in *Watermelon* who stares at its narrator, this author is also projecting his guilt into the actions of animals. His sense of being watched points to a paranoia and isolation associated with grief and an inability to converse or connect meaningfully with others—like two neighbors uncomfortable with a watermelon.

The narrator next describes getting onto a bus to go to the Japanese section of San Francisco, but en route a building is on fire and the passengers are asked to evacuate. While watching the fire, the other passengers get back on the bus and he is left behind. Once alone in the street, the narrative switches from first to third person. This device functions as a way to distance the narrator from his own experience, again pointing to a psychological attempt to mask

many emotions, including grief. He notes that the building was empty and therefore there was, “no drama of life and death to mar or perhaps enhance the fire viewing” (*Woman* 17).

Watching the fire reminds him of a lover who followed fire trucks to watch buildings burn. Their relationship ended badly, but he decides to call her from across the street. She laughs about his call and they end the conversation pleasantly. Readers wonder if this is N. from the opening letter or the character who hanged herself—the characterized embodiment of N.

Soon vignettes involving several unnamed women, and women who are referred to by an initial, are compiled alongside stories reflecting people and objects that fail to perform their function or come to fruition. The narrator begins by imagining how an affair might begin in a supermarket, and his narrative changes from future to present tense—suggesting that the narrator has slipped into another story. But after living out a possible scenario, the narrator finds himself staring at a can of soup in his own imagination, still waiting for his imaginary Ms. X to appear.

This memory dissolves into an experience he had with an ex-girlfriend when he was once sick and unable to make love. She would often go out with a ballerina friend who once fell asleep waiting to perform and her dance never occurred. He remembers all this while thinking about a Japanese woman who took him to a cemetery while he was in Hawaii, where most tourists visit the sunny local beaches. The culmination of these associated images gives readers the feeling that the author’s experience with women has been filled with deficiencies. The deaths of both N. and the mysterious woman who hanged herself have been foretokened by hundreds of other relationships within which the narrator experienced some type of insufficiency or inadequacy.

While in the cemetery, the narrator finds a pile of uprooted and discarded grave markers. He finds out that these graves have been removed; the markers haphazardly piled. “They say

those tombstones are from graves that were dug up because the families didn't want the responsibility of keeping them up anymore" (*Woman* 35). As this novel begins with two deaths, readers must find significance in the cemetery, and much more significance in loved ones who are described as being unwilling to care for the dead. The narrator goes on to state: "This pile of forgotten tombstones made no sense at all to me. I guess it is a part of everything else, including this" (*Woman* 37). The "this" mentioned here is the journaling this self-aware author/narrator is doing. He must find some association between what he is writing and the discarded gravestones. Perhaps he subconsciously finds his digressions in thought and writing an avoidance of his responsibility to commemorate his dead friend in this novel.

Further on the narrator relates the strangeness of living in an apartment where a woman hanged herself. He has a friend who lives there now and he has received calls for the dead woman. The narrator plays out several scenarios when someone calls to find out that the former resident of the apartment is dead and reacts with disbelief, anger and grief. He then wonders if "the telephone rang just the second after she hanged herself and she was still alive, conscious" (*Woman* 45). This directly mirrors his desire to call his friend N. after her death, creating a relationship between the phones and dying. Perhaps he feels guilt for not calling his friend sooner. It is an interesting aspect of the opening letter that R.'s impulse was not to see his friend, but rather to call her.

The telephone becomes almost as symbolic as the trout and the watermelon in Brautigan's writing. Brautigan's 1970 recording "*Listening to Richard Brautigan*" begins with the haunting ring of a telephone. This album even listed his personal phone number on the sleeve. The phone as a symbol creates the illusion that one can be instantly connected to someone else, that a person can ring and another *must* answer, and that the two might feel an

illusion of connectedness—like the narrator who calls his friend who loves fires. The narrator of *Woman* continues to describe the dying woman’s call by saying that the unanswered call gets softer and softer, fading into nothing, as if a telephone call had a waning life of its own.

Next, readers learn that the author is indeed writing this novel on the consecutive “journal” days from a hotel in the Japanese section of San Francisco, and then the first gap in entries occurs: February six through fifteenth. Certainly this gap in journaling, which occurs as the narrator moves back into his/her house and over Valentine’s Day, is not coincidental. He acts as if his motivation for returning was to “become more aware of [the house’s] role in eternity” (*Woman* 52). It becomes clear that the author character was romantically involved with the woman who hanged herself—sparking many more questions about his involvement and the circumstances surrounding her death.

The narrator has a hard time delineating what events occurred during his journaling hiatus. He seems to think this is both important and mundane. His confusion of the chronology of events stems from not knowing which days of the week correspond to the missing calendar dates. This results in a huge disconnect between the dates he is writing down in his journal and the way that weekdays are normally noted, through documentation of activity and scheduling of events.

In response to his confusion with time, like a playwright might, he creates a scene of courtroom drama wherein he is on trial for date confusion. “Chronologically speaking, I am considered a human monster by a lot of people who are devoted to and depend on time” (*Woman* 54). The jury all wear watches; one of them even appears as the white rabbit from *Alice in Wonderland*, clutching a pocket watch and ready to sentence the accused.

The trial portion is clearly drawn from Kafka's text, *The Trial*. As mentioned in Chapter One, Brautigan's work frequently draws inspiration from classic literary moments. Not only does Brautigan mention Kafka by name twice in the text, his use of initials is reminiscent of *The Trial*'s protagonist Joseph K.

Marc Chénétier reminds us, "Brautigan's humorous hijackings are both a denunciation and a recuperation. How can one write, he seems to exclaim on every page, when the history of discourse and literature invades one's own linguistic endeavors" (34-5). It is impossible for Brautigan not to draw upon literature's community of discourse. Although this author/narrator knows what crime he is being charged with, he seems unable to find a defense.

Much like Kafka's Joseph K., this author character finds himself most certainly looking toward a verdict of "guilty" and readers wonder what the *real* reason for his trial might be. This is another psychologically charged moment that hints toward feelings of guilt and paranoia. His feelings of guilt were displaced from their original source (whatever caused the gap in time) onto the gap itself. The use of an author character in *Watermelon* causes scholars to raise questions about his honesty and genuineness. Is this narrator also consciously avoiding telling readers his true feelings, or is the cause of his avoidant behavior subconscious? The only incident the narrator describes regarding his hiatus from writing is waking up in the morning, every morning, to the sound of a woman making love nearby: she, in fact "is a part of the dawn" (59).

In *Trout Fishing*, "time, incidentally, is not recorded—or created—by clocks or any other human device; people tell time by, they say, studying the rivers—by attending, that is, to nature rather than be creating artificial measurement" (Foster, Edward 84). *Woman* shows one man's attempt to keep a measured account of time and ultimately seeing it break down and end. Close to the end, the author shows the passing of time in the same way he does in *Trout Fishing* and

*Watermelon*, through nature. In lieu of the sun shining different colors, the narrator looks to the rivers again. “The creek. That’s where I get my water, so the snow just recently up in the mountains is now in my freezer to be refrozen” (Brautigan, *Woman* 109). Here Brautigan shows the natural passing of time as well as the ultimately meaningless ways humans attempt to control and manipulate time and nature. This quote also gives the feeling of a “redemptive quality of nature—the ability for man to regain whatever civilization has taken away” (Kyllo 14). If man has taken something away from nature with the measurement of time, he can get it back as the ice slowly melts and the seasons change.

Again there is a break in the journaling and it is, as the narrator offers, “chronologically mischievous” (59). This break is from February 16<sup>th</sup>-March 1<sup>st</sup>. During this time, the narrator goes to Chicago to visit friends, gives a speech and teaches a friend’s English class. He stays in Chicago longer than he had expected. When asked why he stayed longer by several individuals, he lists specific people who interested him and made him want to stay. The narrator is beginning to create a link between people and time. The reason so much time passed was due to those who filled the time. And just as the woman’s morning lovemaking became, not so much the crowing announcement of the new day, but an altered portion of the dawn, so do his interactions with various people define his time spent in Chicago.

More and more the narrator attempts to write chronologically about what happened in the past that has not yet been written about, what happened during the skipped journal entries and what is currently happening. Although he is wrapped up in telling readers when he will tell us about something and when it happened, very little is being conveyed. Readers feel that the best this author can do is get down bare fragments of memories, “filter them through his imagination once in a while, and try to put them together,” often failing (Boyer 37).

Next, the author breaks with a “Contemporary Interruption” and admits: “one of the doomed purposes of this book is an attempt to keep the past and the present functioning simultaneously” (Brautigan, *Woman* 64). This is not a new concept in Brautigan’s fiction. As Abbot writes in his memoir: “The present intrudes in Brautigan’s work, and the present is defined as the moment of writing itself, the ‘real’ present for the writer” (171).<sup>25</sup> We see this device in *Watermelon* as well, though it might be readily misconstrued as a part of the convention of unreliable narration.

In the narrator/author’s desire to express the relationship between individual incidents and the time they took place, and the moments at which he is remembering them in the present, he finds himself unable to keep track of the time: For example,

Before I wrote the last paragraph, I had planned to mention that a Japanese man at another table is eating a doughnut, but when I finished telling you what time it was and that the shops were closed, the man was gone and so was his doughnut[.] [...] Yes, it is difficult to keep the past and the present going on at the same time because they cannot be trusted to act out their proper roles. (Brautigan, *Woman* 66)

He finds fault with the past and the present and is unable to keep them isolated. His desire is to keep them alive and moving, but not allow himself to respond to them reflectively.

The next entry begins listing days that are a part of another gap in writing. “March 3, 4, 5, 6, 7” through “and now I start writing again on June 22, 1982” (Brautigan, *Woman* 70). The narrator is no longer allowing days to pass unnoted, but begins enumerating them. With this

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<sup>25</sup> In *The New Aesthetics in Brautigan’s Revenge of the Lawn*, the author sees this as Brautigan’s tendency to connect ideas spatially rather than linearly (Iftekharruddin 420). While I see these connections as associative, it is clear that time and space are two of the binaries Brautigan toys with in his writing.

begins a strange entry, one that passes into imagination and illusion in addition to continuing the merging of disparate elements of chronology.

He tells us he now has a broken leg, and tells the reader how much he dislikes having to tell the story of the incident over and over, so he writes about an occasion (an imagined event) where he makes up a fantastical story about how his leg was broken. He gets into a cab; when the driver inevitably asks him how his injury occurred, he is promptly told that dragons did it. In the cabby's shock he almost rear-ends another cab in front. The author then imagines a man with a broken leg, in a cab in front of them, telling his cabbie how he was injured and his fear that, had they been rear-ended, he might have broken his other leg.

The author/narrator then has a conversation with the reader, anticipating the question he knows they will ask: "But how did this leg become broken?" The narrative then breaks into a scripted scene between Author and Reader in which Reader interrogates Author about the incident but ultimately decides that the circumstances surrounding the broken leg are unimportant. Breaking the conventions of the journal genre, Brautigan, through the Author, explores the complex relationship between Author and Reader by scripting a conversation and "allowing" the Reader to reply.

This same passage fully blurs the barrier between passive narrator and active author. Even though this novel appears to be journalistic, it is written as if the author/narrator wishes to get something off his chest or show something to an audience. At times he rambles on about how he might, stylistically, begin a section or what it is that he should be including, but in this section he not only envisions an audience, he personifies his own.

Brautigan experiments in subtler ways; much like Bruno Schulz does in his *A Street of Crocodiles*, first published in English in 1963, Brautigan plays with and distorts the readers'

sense of time by combining fact with fancy, illusion with the concrete. And just as Schulz's seasons blend surreally, so too does Brautigan's narrator report that Montana is having a "winterlike spring[sic]" (Brautigan, *Woman* 70).

Thus Brautigan experiments with performance and process. One might say that the writing process is a part of *Woman's* performance. The author admits: the "main theme is an unfortunate woman. I'm actually writing about something quite serious, but I'm doing it in a roundabout way, including varieties of time and human experience" (Brautigan, *Woman* 74-5). The author allows the reader in on the process, sets up expectations and then says he is unable to meet them. In this way Brautigan exposes the limitations of genres and the nature of writing. Chénétier describes this self-aware performance:

We are emphatically in the presence of a narrative that is always being made. His fiction always pushes forward, feels into the coming moments-unlike realistic fiction, which is regularly slowed down and held back by the weight of an implied past, a previous world of events that must be retold." (71)

While this is true of most of Brautigan's fiction, *Woman* is both constantly being created, yet at the same time fosters a sense of the past; from the opening letter it is continually self-reflective in the telling. He can be grounded in the past, while performing through the motions of his style.

Brautigan's writing functions as if it simply occurs for his author characters, a style that shows a masterful manipulation of multiple layers of authorship. Edward Foster recognized the same style in *Trout Fishing in America* and notes the way it affects readers: "He devises a world that is intensely felt but instantly perishable. This aesthetic realization would presumably be the result of considerable work, the result of careful working and reworking of language, yet the impression that the finished work gives is much the opposite" (18). Brautigan cultivates this

sensation in *Woman*, even mentioning that it must be evident to the reader that he has not gone back and revised.<sup>26</sup> Though the style seems campy, it functions with such ease that it is clearly well crafted and of great literary merit.

Stretching the boundaries of genre even further, the book soon becomes an actual place or space for the author. He speaks of both “being” the book and starting to write where he left off but feeling he “was always here” (Brautigan, *Woman* 76). Chénétier suggests that the way genres break down is at the root of most of Brautigan’s other experimentations, though “the collapse of the traditional genre distinctions is one of the most dominant features of Brautigan’s work” (65). As the pages continue to turn and the author remains impotent in the novel’s telling, readers feel as if the physical elements of the book are in control.

The pages themselves seem to become master over the author as the narrator describes a Montana storm approaching in the present of the novel; at the same time he is explaining that the book will end when the pages (160) run out.<sup>27</sup> Pre-storm events are playing out, but he is consumed in relating the minor mathematical equations concerning words per page and so forth. Finally a reader’s voice is heard asking: “What about the storm?” to which he replies “Just let me finish with this minor numerical theme that arrived of its own accord and would like to finish itself” (Brautigan, *Woman* 77). Brautigan’s prose is something like a self-aware stream of consciousness that prevents a planned purpose and plot from emerging, with two sides continually struggling. If this novel is, in fact, a journey through grief, the mental confusion and imbalance often associated with a mental reaction to grief directly manifests in the writing.

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<sup>26</sup> Boyer also notes this type of associative delineation. Brautigan’s short story, “The World War I Los Angeles Airplane,” has 33 small sections that are arranged in the order that they occur to the narrator (19).

<sup>27</sup> In *Richard Brautigan* by Chénétier, he notes the precise “chronological limits” were set for a few of his most recent novels. *Sombrero Fallout* lasts one hour and the half-hour chimes in the middle of the text. *June 30<sup>th</sup>-June 30<sup>th</sup>* spans the time suggested by its title (81).

The journal entry regarding the storm, June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1982, ends: “what I’m trying to say is...I wonder how old the woman was who hanged herself” (Brautigan, *Woman* 78). The author’s confusion as he struggles to write and each of his irrelevant side-stories seems to be acts of avoidance. He is both attempting to write about the unfortunate woman and unable to do so.

After finally becoming able to speculate on the unfortunate woman’s death, the author/narrator again takes a hiatus from writing. When he returns, the flow of novel is as impulsive as ever. The narrator is trying to decide which story to tell next. He decides to flip a coin and goes into the house to retrieve one, telling the audience to wait and that he will return momentarily, again giving the impression that the novel and the audience exist physically/kinetically in the present.

Finally the author/narrator tells readers: “I am haunted by the woman who is dying of cancer” (Brautigan, *Woman* 90). He recalls talking to her on the phone last night but must suddenly get up and search for a kitten that may be lost behind the barn. When he returns he must recount the events of the search before admitting that he believes his friend has become used to the idea of her own death. This is the first he has been able to write about an experience with her or how she is doing. In fact, this is the first time N. from the preface has been mentioned within the text at all. Readers now fully understand the importance of the phone as a symbol and the author’s intentional invention of a fictional hanging. He recognized his friend’s mortality and willingness to die over the phone and he equates a resignation to death with death itself. The phone is a harbinger of change.

Nearing the end of the novel, on the last and longest recorded day, the author experiences a phone call and notes how the telephone has been particularly important in his life lately, recalling the phone call about N. This time he talks to his daughter: “When at last we had filled

up the space for a Father's Day telephone call and our first conversation since November, about eight months ago, it was now time for one of us to initiate hanging up" (Brautigan, *Woman* 100). The narrator speaks to many different women on the phone during the course of this novel and each relationship is different but ultimately unfulfilling in some way. He had a nice conversation with his friend who likes fires, but their reconnection also foregrounds a lost relationship. Readers also recognize the similarity between his relationship with his daughter and his inability to talk to the neighbor in the opening letter. This space of the phone call, a measurable amount of devotion, is what the novel itself has become. The author/narrator planned on filling 160 pages. This task marks the space allotted for grief or for the death of a friend.

Edward Foster says of Brautigan's narrator from *Trout Fishing*: "[he] can offer no collective or group solutions, only personal ones. [...] Brautigan's narrator is neither a reformer nor a prophet. He knows very well what is wrong [but does not have] the means to change it or even to escape from it" (61). This is very true for *Woman's* narrator as well, but Brautigan's narrator has grown in complexity—his narrator controls the meta-narrative in such a way that the performance of the writing process itself creates not so much an escape as a controlled illusion.

In closing, the author/narrator states: "I will finish as I started toward no other end than a human being living and what can happen to him over a given period of time and what if anything, [sic] it means" (Brautigan, *Woman* 107). He asks again what has happened to the unfortunate woman who hanged herself, his friend dying of cancer and his daughter. These women are absorbed into his existence. The subtitle "the journey" is a portion of time within a life; it is also a journey from fighting cancer to succumbing to it and the distance that can grow between and father and daughter or between two lovers.

Ultimately he leaves the last line blank, empty, left for someone else's life. Marc Chénétier points out a paradox in Brautigan's writing that informs this moment in *Woman*. On one hand there is the "hope that anything written might just succeed in perpetuating the moment"; on the other hand, "writing is killing" (31). He also notes a trend in Brautigan's work to create devices that will save "writing from death" (75).

This novel becomes almost a compromise: it ends but leaves open a space. Even the author states that the calendar has been closed like a door; his task is in/complete. If the novel has become a space in which he and these women have inhabited, there will also be the possibility of more for them. The door will not close on their moments and as long as that space exists, infinite possibilities exist for these unfortunate women and their author.

Keith Abbott points out another important symbol that spans the body of Brautigan's work and proves important for both works addressed in this paper. Abbott reveals, "all through Brautigan's work, doors constantly appear, sometimes as images of separation, but most often as symbols for changes in life" (43). A comparative reading of Brautigan's works examines the passing of time as a "calendar-like door" that brings change. In *Watermelon* we see a narrator who hides from Margaret behind a door, symbolizing a change that has occurred between two people, and the mirror as a frame-door that shows the narrator Margaret's death. Interestingly, Brautigan uses a frame for his novel that produces interpretive change. He frames the texts with quotations.

*An Unfortunate Woman* has an epigraph from Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*. The quote is Iphigenia asking her father, Agamemnon, if she is being sent away and telling him to hurry back from Troy. This passage is taken immediately before Agamemnon tells her he has a sacrifice to complete first, hinting at his plan to kill her. In the end of the play, Iphigenia's suitor is unable

to protect her and she decides to die with honor and offers herself up for sacrifice. The play ends as they take Iphigenia away.

In this epigraph we see another unfortunate woman making an unfortunate decision, though her options lead to the same outcome. N. also prepares for death instead of fighting what has become inevitable (like the 160 page limit, no more). The choices left to these women are ultimately inconsequential; this quote blurs the lines between “giving up” and “dying with honor.” Though it appears this journey is about to end and that Brautigan has written another novel about death, Brautigan adds a closing quote.

Brautigan’s novel ends with: “Iphigenia, your daddy’s home from Troy!” (*Woman*, 110). With this quotation, which appears to be from Euripides’ play but is not, Brautigan suggests possibility. With this line, *An Unfortunate Woman* becomes a novel about life instead of death. Brautigan envisions Iphigenia alive and waiting for her father as she imagined before learning of his schemes. This quote projects a choice that might be made to prevent an unfortunate death and to foster a relationship of love and trust between father and daughter.

In this one simple move, Brautigan reveals that he has mapped out a journey whose destination has been known before the novel begins. However, he refuses to end the journey and suggests an alternative. This ending, however, is bittersweet. Brautigan might have imagined writing that takes hold and controls individual actions and fates, but ultimately the power of words is too limited and finite. The author confesses this early on: “It becomes more and more apparent as I proceed with this journey that life cannot be controlled” (Brautigan, *Woman* 59).

Though readers briefly consider, that if his ending might allow Iphigenia to live to welcome her father home from Troy, leaving that last deadening line open might prevent N. from reaching her end. Though Brautigan’s friend Nikki Arai did die on July 8<sup>th</sup>, the novel ends on

June 28<sup>th</sup> and with it we sense both the deep denial of grief and a most prominent feeling of guilt. The guilt comes from his inability to change reality in the same way the written word can be changed, reinterpreted and incomplete, though the novel becomes an exercise in the relationship between reality and writing and how the two might inform each other.

Besides this most pressing use of Euripides' drama, it also affects the structure of this work. The author/character suggests his novel seems to be written in "strophes" (Brautigan, *Woman* 106). The novel is comprised of strophe-like sections, like stanzas in a poem, but as a strophe can be the beginning section of a choral, so too is his work comprised of many beginnings to stories and unfulfilled plotlines.

Brautigan also hints at a feeling of identification with Euripides on a more personal level. They were both cultural outcasts and both chose to seclude themselves, living alone. Eerily, *Iphigenia in Aulis* is Euripides' last written work, just as Brautigan's *An Unfortunate Woman* was his last and was published posthumously. Brautigan's author/character almost playacts Euripides' writing habits:

Maybe Euripides woke up in the morning with a hangover while he was writing

*Iphigenia in Aulis*. Perhaps funny, frustrating, totally-without-reason things happened to

Euripides while Iphigenia journeyed on toward her sacrifice. (Brautigan, *Woman* 75)

Not only is the author projecting his thoughts, writing process and bizarre mental interruptions on Euripides, but he links Iphigenia with the dead and dying women in his novel through the word "journey." Readers understand the journey to be one towards death, through grief and about the writing process itself.

## **Conclusion**

Marc Chénétier, in his work *Richard Brautigan*, came close to a comparative examination of his novels and is truly the pioneer of serious Brautigan scholarship. Of Brautigan's work he wrote: "Instants become the building blocks of life; lives become units of instantaneous surprises, piled one on top of the other, crisp, contrasted, angular or curvaceous" (82). When I think about Brautigan's novels, I cannot help but imagine each one "crisp" or "curvaceous," each one unique in its instance. When compiled the novels gather meaning in their proximity and form something greater than the sum of their parts. It is my hope that by comparative analysis, we might begin to understand some of Brautigan's most misunderstood middle works, which are still considered stilted and genre-driven, and to begin to explore his ignored final novels. His manipulation of genre, first explored in *In Watermelon Sugar* (1968), became more developed through *The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western* (1974), *Willard and His Bowling Trophies: A Perverse Mystery* (1975) and *Dreaming of Babylon: A Private Eye Novel 1942* (1977). To some, his choice of "fluff" genres like mysteries and private eye novels may have further excluded him from serious, scholarly consideration. As this type of comparative examination continues, the experimental nature of these novels will emerge and produce a deeper understanding of Brautigan's masterful use of genre. Just as a comparison of *Watermelon* and *Woman* better revealed the complexities of Brautigan's first person narrative, so too will the above novels inform each other in regards to genre, as well as opening up a deeper understanding of his use of a utopian platform in *Watermelon*.

As this study is expanded, a continued exploration of his narrative voice will assist me in examining Brautigan's other final, unexplored works, particularly *So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away* (1982), a novel about remembering trauma from childhood.

In my mind Brautigan championed the complexities of first person narrative by eliminating the overly didactic and internalizing emotion to shed the explicit and the maudlin. Even through the appearance of detachment, his “narrative functions as a kind of coda about personal loss, and about the need to leave things and relationships in ‘The Forgotten Works’” (Abbott 45).

Brautigan’s ability is to not only push the boundaries of writing, but to break open genres and authorship itself as he intersects life, fiction, truth, illusion, writing, autobiography myth and cultural consciousness to weave a text that truly performs when read. Readers who come to Brautigan’s writing with common expectations will miss the point of novel.

Finally, Stull says of *Trout Fishing*, “while American Eden may be forever gone from the earth, the new kingdom remains within the writer’s imagination” (Stull 79). Twenty years later Brautigan was still exploring the writer’s imagination in *An Unfortunate Woman*. What he reveals about his author/narrator becomes an important part of living in post-WWII America—the dreams are not gone, but the way we talk about them has changed.

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