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TROUT FISHING WITH RICHARD BRAUTIGAN BY GEORDIE DE BOER

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The Rediscovery of Richard Brautigan

Circa 1968 I discovered Richard Brautigan. I don't mean I discovered him and brought him to the public's attention. The public brought him to my attention. More accurately, a used bookstore kitty-corner from the What Me Worry University campus brought Richard Brautigan to my attention. The bookstore carried as many Brautigan novels and books of poetry as they could order.

After reading Richard Brautigan I thought I understood him. Then, for forty odd years (quite odd) I didn't read nor understand Richard Brautigan. My Brautigan books had fled my bricks-and-boards bookshelves during that time. So, not only did I not understand Richard Brautigan, I couldn't read his books in order to understand him.

Much later than c. 1968 I began haunting musty used bookstores; I also began haunting musty used lives, my own in particular. I found *In Watermelon Sugar* in one bookstore and *Trout Fishing in America* in another. The books cost one dollar each. They cost \$1.95 each in c. 1968, the equivalent of eight beers at Rex's tavern. A dollar wouldn't buy beer spit now.

As I re-read Richard Brautigan, I re-discovered and thought I re-understood him. In c. 1968 I was mentally unbalanced and now am just happily eccentric. Is there a connection here?

While I don't think you must be crazy or eccentric to understand Richard Brautigan. The only effective tonic for mankind is plate tectonics, so to appreciate Richard Brautigan you must be able to see the plates of the earth move; being crazy or eccentric helps. So does being older and having survived being crazy to emerge as simply eccentric.

I consider myself eccentric in the following sense of the word: "3, deviating from usual or recognized form", Webster's Handy College Dictionary, 1981, pocketbook edition. I carry a copy in my jacket pocket, left, inside. I am odd, strange, different, but harmless to myself and others.

Richard Brautigan could see the plates of the earth move, and I'm sure he could feel them move beneath his feet. He mixed up the solid parameters of the world, stirred them around,

bent them, and used them in his unique way to his own unique ends.

I don't think he broke them, although he may have thought he had, and thinking so decided he couldn't continue his calzone. I don't know, because when I say I understand Richard Brautigan I mean I understand what he wrote. I didn't know Richard Brautigan - although I may have gone trout fishing with him once - so I can't claim to have understood the man.

Along the way to becoming Me I had a bit of a breakdown. I'd stopped reading Richard Brautigan, so who wouldn't have collapsed. Perhaps if I'd continued to read him I'd have understood myself better and not had that breakdown. In the long run, however, I don't think Richard Brautigan could have helped me. That mental breakdown was my own doing and I had to solve it myself.

All that's left of that breakdown - it's filed in my calzone recipe file as MBc68Eub (Mental Breakdown circa 1968 Eubetcha) because I feared I'd have a few more - are a few stray shards. I come across them now and again when conducting a dig on the tell that was once me and is now a different me.

I think Richard Brautigan should have been a Taoist, if he wasn't one. Since he lived in Japan toward the end of cleaning up the calzone on his plate perhaps he was a Zen Buddhist. I try to be as Taoist as an American can possibly be and, brother, is that a hard row to hoe. Besides, if you say you're a Taoist, you aren't.

A Letter to Richard Brautigan

Some month, some day, c. 1968

Richard Brautigan
c/o Benjamin Franklin Statue
Washington Square Park
San Francisco, CA

Dear Richard Brautigan:

I am a reporter whose beat is Life (whose life is beat). The question to which I'm trying to get answers could be phrased as "Why?". I'm not really interested in what, when, where or how. I've had a little too much of those, especially what.

I want to know why the things that occur happen in the particular way that they occur. Why do certain people come into and out of one's life and leave footprints all over it? Why does one make stupid and heinous mistakes? Why am I left with the feeling that Life is absurd?

I know "Why?" is a tough question. You don't have to answer if you don't feel like it. I won't even ask you why you didn't answer if you choose not to. I will put your non-answer down as just another instance of "Why?".

I have more succinct questions related to "Why?" that might help you respond if you so choose:

Why was the canzone developed in its particular form?
Why didn't those two pizza places on the river serve calzone?
Why did canzone, calzone and beer conspire on a particular night

to create a Very Big Event?
Why do certain events always and forever seem heinous in their recollection?
Why do certain heinous events stay with one to color one's every thought and action of every tedious living day?
Why does contemplating one's death not change the heinousness of particular events one whit?

I am led back to my original question "Why?". If you have any insight into "Why?" I truly would appreciate hearing from you.

Sincerely,
(unsigned and unsend) (why?) (why bother.)

The Birth of the Canzone

An old paisano sat on a ristorante piazza in the fading Tuscan twilight. A look of puzzlement crossed his wrinkled face. With a quivering liver-spotted hand he gestured the ristorante owner to his table. There was a blot of bird poop on the tile-topped table at which the old paisano sat. The old paisano paid it no mind and the ristorante owner did not apologize for it. It was only bird poop.

"What time is it?" asked the old paisano.

"It's somewhere in the late 16th to early 17th century," said the ristorante owner. "I think."

The old paisano nodded and said, "Bring me more wine."

The old paisano had already drunk seven or eight glasses of wine and the ristorante owner became alarmed. The paisano may have been old, but he could become rowdy when drunk. But the ristorante owner brought the old paisano his eighth or ninth glass of dark red Tuscan wine anyway. After all, he had a business to run and a sale was a sale.

"Ouch. What is that caterwauling?" asked the old paisano referring to a noise coming from inside the ristorante.

"Oh, that is my son Giuseppe," said the ristorante owner.

"What's the matter with him? Is he in pain?" asked the old paisano.

"Oh, no," said the ristorante owner, "he is singing."

"You call that singing?" asked the old paisano.

"Giuseppe says it's a new poetic form put to music called a canzone. The poem itself has five stanzas of twelve lines each followed by a sixth stanza of five lines," said the ristorante owner. "The poet uses five repeating words at the end of each line. . ."

"Pah, it'll never catch on," said the old paisano. "Too complicated. Boring, too. And tell your son that he is a terrible singer."

"Say, do you serve calzone?" added the old paisano.

If Richard Brautigan Made a Calzone

If Richard Brautigan made a calzone he'd stuff it with brook trout fresh caught from Tom Martin Creek. The crust would be a wrap of watermelon sugar pastry. For a marinara he'd heat a watermelontrout oil sauce on a single-burner hotplate. He'd bake the calzone wrapped in foil over glowing coals on his campfire somewhere in the Stanley Basin, Idaho. Then, he'd eat it at the foot of the Benjamin Franklin statue in San Francisco's Washington Square Park. He'd wash down his calzone with dark, heavy, red port wine. And he'd burp with satisfaction after eating it.

When done eating, he and his woman would board the Tokyo-Montana Express destination Worsewick Hot Springs. Once there, they'd strip off their clothes and take a long soak in the hot water. They'd play water games for a while. Then, Richard Brautigan would take his woman into his arms and they'd hold one another closely. He and she would make love in the warm pool of water.

She'd never ask Richard Brautigan "Do you like calzone?" because she'd know he did.

I Take a Book I'd Written to a Library Run by a Guy Who Looked Like Richard Brautigan

The library sat on a large lot in San Francisco. The building was old, but looked friendly. A tall, thin, blonde-haired man with an old-fashioned handlebar mustache sat at a desk in the library. I was fairly certain he was Richard Brautigan; I'd seen photographs of him on his book covers. This guy looked like the Richard Brautigan on those book covers. When I approached the man at the desk he looked up and smiled.

"Are you Richard Brautigan?" I asked.

"He brought a book here once," he said. "It's shelved over there by Yeah? Who Says? by C. Heare. It's titled Moose."

"Mousse? Was it a cookbook?"

"No, you misspelled it. It's spelled m-o-o-s-e. I think it's about a moose, or a herd of moose; it's been awhile since I read it. He brought a book he'd written about trout fishing for me to read, too. I didn't get it. It wasn't about trout fishing at all. But I see you've brought a book, too," he said.

"Yes. It's an old book. I've been trying to get it published for years now. I guess nobody wants it."

"Well, we'll take it," he said. "We consider every book written to be valuable and worthy of being in a library for others to enjoy."

"That's great," I said.

"What's the name of your book?" he asked.

I'd printed the book from my computer and I'd created a nice cover for it. The typescript both on the cover and in the book was in a nice font. It wasn't fancy and was easy to read. New York, I think, or maybe Palatino. I don't remember. It had been a long time since I'd printed it and trotted it all over the place trying to get it published.

The name of my book was printed on the cover. I knew the man behind the desk - I was

convinced he was Richard Brautigan - had read the title, but he wanted me to say it aloud. He was offering me the chance to say the name of the book with pride in my voice.

“It’s called Pizza? Why Not Calzone?” I said.

“Hmm, sounds interesting. I like calzone. Is it a cookbook?” he asked.

“No, although it has a recipe or two in it. It’s not really about calzone, you see,” I said.

“Hmm,” he said. “I’m intrigued. How about some coffee, and we’ll talk about your book? Would you like that? I only have instant.”

“That’s fine,” I said, “we only had instant at home. I’m used to it.”

He walked through a door at the back of the library. I could hear the tinny clink of metal utensils and the sound of running water. After a few minutes - during which time I glanced around the library, which had a lot of books in it - I could hear the whistle of a teapot. Soon after the whistling ceased the man came back carrying two tin cups.

“Be careful,” he said. “Those tin cups can get pretty hot. I use them because I like to pretend I’m in the mountains drinking my coffee. In a minute I’ll set down my cup, grab my fly rod and go fishing. Do you like to fish?”

“Yes,” I said, “but I’m not very good at it. Especially fly-fishing. I either snap the flies off or tangle them in the bushes. I haven’t caught very many fish, but I like to go fishing just the same. I just don’t get wrapped around the axle about it - just the bushes.”

“We should go fly-fishing sometime. I’ll show you some pointers. But even if you decide not to fish, you could come along,” he said.

“I’d like that,” I said.

We discussed my book then. He looked through it and said it reminded him of Richard Brautigan. I was positive he was Richard Brautigan, especially since he was an avid fisherman.

“Reminds me of Brautigan not in subject matter, but in construction. You even have him as a main character. That’s interesting. However, using a canzone to write a novel seems odd,” he said.

“Novel, yes,” I said trying to make a joke. At least he smiled at my comment.

“What’s the deal with calzone?” he asked.

“When I was a kid and figuring out life,” I said, “I overheard a young woman say to her boyfriend, ‘I like calzone. Do you like calzone?’ I thought at first she really wanted to know if he liked calzone. Then it dawned on me that wasn’t it. She probably didn’t give a shit about calzone. I knew about calzone because Mother made calzone and it was no big deal as far as I was concerned. She was asking about their relationship, or in a broader sense about life.”

“More coffee?” he asked

When he came back with the coffee he asked, “What made you think she was talking about their relationship?”

“I could tell they were boyfriend and girlfriend by the way they were holding on to one another,” I said. “They were kind of making love while walking down the street. I knew that much and I was trying to figure out if they slept together, although I wasn’t entirely clear about what sleeping together entailed.”

I had some inkling, though. I told Richard Brautigan - I’ll call him Richard Brautigan - about the time a neighborhood kid and I caught his niece and nephew going at it, sleeping together, one night in this old barn. They were maybe ten years old, but it looked like they knew what to do. I assumed they did, since I didn’t know the mechanics of it myself.

“Wow, that’s pretty young,” he said. “When was this?”

“Oh, circa 1968 or so,” I said. “I was in high-school and still a virgin. I’d touched little girls’ parts, and vice versa - doctor games. I’d even gotten one little girl to show me her naked pussy, and we used to practice kissing. But this display of pre-adolescent screwing really blew me away. Kind of scared me, like there seemed so much more to it than I’d imagined.”

“Wow,” he said, “did you ever. . .with this little gal?”

“No,” I said, “although I could have. A friend of mine did while I watched. When it was my turn I was too terrified. I was a practicing Puritan at the time. In spite of the kissing and peeking. Unfortunately, that Puritan strain hung on into my late adolescence. I was a pretty shy, frightened, and guilty guy.”

“What were you guilty about?” he asked.

“Damned if I know,” I said. “Everything. Nothing. It seemed every time I’d try to talk to a girl, I’d button up like a bull’s ass at fly time. I’d fantasized about sleeping with her, and when we’d come face-to-face I’d feel guilty as hell. I was sure it showed in my face, my thoughts I mean. It took me a long time to get past that.”

We each stared into our coffee cups for a moment wrapped in our unspoken thoughts.

“Well, I’m no shrink,” he said. “I’ll leave that to Freud. Hope you got it figured out. If we go fishing and you want to talk about it some more, we could. Now, I’ve been thinking about your book’s title. Maybe you could come up with something that ties calzone and canzone together? Like, A Canzone on Calzone, a nice alliteration, or musicality, uh. . .whatever.”

“I like that a lot, actually,” I said glad to be off the subject of sex.

Wow, I thought, what opened my spigot? Must be buzzed on the coffee, which was very strong.

“I tried to come up with a catchy little subtitle, too, but never landed on the right one. Some little hang-line like corporations use to hook people on to their name. I thought a subtitle might tease a potential reader into becoming a purchasing reader.”

“Tell me some subtitles,” he said, “and I’ll tell you my reaction.”

“Okay,” I said. “I’ll use the new title you just gave me. “A Canzone on Calzone. . .uh, A Real Pizza Life.”

“No,” he said. “Too corny if the novel’s a serious one.”

“It’s serious enough,” I said. “Okay, A Canzone on Calzone: The Big Bang and Its Fallout.”

“I don’t get it,” he said.

“You need to read the book,” I said.

“I will,” he said. “I read every book that comes in here. But now you ought to decide where you’d like to shelve your book. That’s the fun of bringing a book to this library, you know.”

I looked around the library again. Things had an order, but not like you find at most libraries. Obviously, people shelved their books where they damned well pleased. For example, on one shelf I found *How to High Jump Over Men to Get Them Out of Your Life* by Sarah D. Leaper next to *The Bone of Contention About Cannibalism* by Don R. Pass, which was next to *How to be a Success by Acting Like an Asshole* by I. Malone. Richard Brautigan saw me reading these titles.

“Is this the spot?” he asked.

“No,” I said. “I think my book might be a bit more uplifting than these. The only interesting book I see here is the one by Sarah D. Leaper. I’ll keep looking.”

Finally, I found a section that looked right. There was a book titled *The Psycho-Sexual Properties of Vienna Sausages*, another titled *Sonnets for Sons-of-Bitches*, and one titled *Beer, Pizza and the U.S. Army*.

“This looks more like it,” I said slipping my book between the book about sausages and the one for sons-of-bitches.

“Oh, I need to change the title,” I said.

Richard Brautigan handed me a black indelible marker

“I’ll run off a cover with the new title and bring it in sometime,” I said.

“And I’ll check it out sometime,” he said. “When you come back, let’s go fishing.”

“Okay,” I said happy I’d brought my book to this library.

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published short fiction. G. de Boer received both undergraduate and graduate psychology degrees from the University of Oregon in Eugene, his hometown.