

# With the Devil You Never Know

David Denny

Richard Brautigan walks backward down  
Pacific Coast Highway, a knapsack slung over  
his shoulder, his thumb pointed at the sky.

Ten thousand cars pass him by before a brand-new  
Mercedes Benz pulls over. Brautigan slides  
into the passenger seat. You're late, he says.

The driver answers, I'm always late, but  
I always show. What have you got for me?  
Brautigan opens his knapsack and rummages.

I have the Devil's own backup singers.  
These three girls can curl your toes with their  
harmonies. I have a grand suspension bridge

built of fog and rainbow droppings. It'll get you  
safely across any relatively stagnant body of water.  
And I have thirty overinflated weather balloons

filled with helium and joy. They'll lift you  
out of any dilemma and set you down in a field  
of poppies in the county of your own choosing.

The Mercedes speeds on down the highway.  
The sky is cerulean, the curling waves are teal  
and Payne's gray, the sunset clouds are a pale

magenta tinged with lemon yellow. I have  
my share of troubles, the driver says,  
but I'm afraid of heights. I'd love to sink

my toes into those rainbow droppings, but  
I've already got a suspension bridge in the back  
of the tour bus. I'll be travelling with Big Brother

and the Holding Company this summer, and  
I could sure use some kick-ass backup singers.  
I imagine there's a contract for me to sign?

Always, Richard Brautigan replies. I warn you,  
you never know how long you'll get.  
Some get a decade, some only a single year

before the Devil comes to collect. Give me  
the pen, she says, pulling over into the sand,  
I'll sign. Just give me the god-damned pen.

# Baudelaire Buzzes the Gorilla Compound

David Denny

Richard Brautigan is seated at the IBM Selectric  
in his small apartment on Geary Street.  
It is one hour before dusk in the year 1963.

He is *tick-tack-ticking* the keys in the same  
soulful manner that Thelonious Monk plays  
the piano...*tick-tack-tickety-tack*. He lifts

his hands. He goes to the window and lights  
a cigarette. He tells Robert Creeley to play  
the Selectric for awhile. He opens the window

and leaps. Robert Creeley plays Richard  
Brautigan's Selectric while he flies around  
the neighborhood...*tickety-tack-tick-tick-tack*.

As long as Creeley keeps playing, Brautigan remains  
airborne. If Creeley stops, Brautigan will fall...  
*tick-tack-tickety-tack-tack-ding!-tack-tack-tack*.

Eventually Richard Brautigan flies back  
in the open window. He lands on his feet and  
straightens his windblown hair. He adjusts

his glasses and closes the window. He pulls on  
his old gray sweater with the patches on the elbows.  
He walks over to the Selectric, releases

the carriage lock, and pulls out the sheet.  
Creeley has typed a poem entitled "Flight,"  
in which Brautigan, disguised as Baudelaire,

loops the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge,  
buzzes the gorilla compound at the zoo,  
swoops down to the take-out window of

the Dairy Queen, and grabs a soft-serve  
vanilla cone dipped in chocolate and peanuts.  
Richard Brautigan grabs a pencil. *We need*

*a comma here*, he says. He straightens, then  
bends again to the paper. *No, nevermind.*  
He rubs the eraser and blows free its

tiny debris. He tucks the pencil behind an ear.  
Robert Creeley carries two ice-filled glasses  
from the kitchen. Richard Brautigan fills them

with bourbon. They raise their glasses and silently  
toast the fog as it circles the building twice and  
rubs its purple whiskers against the window pane.

# Weeping a Mote Around Ben Franklin

David Denny

Richard Brautigan circles Washington Square Park  
on his hickory broomstick. It is 1961, and  
the sun is shining all over America.

He does not cackle, no. He flies in silence,  
watching the children play in the sandbox,  
watching the nuns across the street at

the Church of Saints Peter and Paul, watching  
the old Italians chew cigars and play poker.  
He comes in for a landing and fills his belly

at the public drinking fountain. But now  
he is too waterlogged to fly. He kneels  
at the base of the statue of Benjamin Franklin,

who looks down upon him with a grim smile,  
his three-cornered hat tucked under  
his left arm, a book in his right hand.

Richard Brautigan weeps when the conductor  
of the Mason Street cable car clangs his bell  
and everyone reaches for a strap as the car

lurches up the hill. He weeps as Ben Franklin  
recalls for him the April day in 1956 when  
Joe DiMaggio and Marilyn Monroe posed for

pictures on the steps of the church following  
their wedding. He weeps at the memory of the poem  
that got away that morning, the one he thought

sure he'd set his hook into, the poem that swam  
to freedom up Geary Street and out of sight.  
He weeps a mote around Ben Franklin.

Finally, he mounts his hickory broomstick  
and speaks the magic words. He pushes off  
from the sidewalk and glides over the poplars,

circling back over Franklin, who winks  
at him, places his three-cornered hat  
atop his bald head, and hops down from

his cement perch, joining the old Italians  
in a game of poker, jokers and deuces wild,  
play at your own risk, winner take nothing.

# Walking with Wordsworth, Punching with Papa

David Denny

Richard Brautigan stands in the cold rush  
of Big Smoky Creek. The biggest fish  
are holding in a deep pool next to the boulders,

just beyond his reach. He aims his rod  
in their direction, flicking his wrist in one  
fluid motion as lure and line whip and whip

through the crisp morning air of July 2, 1961.  
Straddling a log on the shore, his wife and baby  
daughter follow the jaunty rhythm of Brautigan's

fiberglass RA Special. On the floor of the Plymouth  
station wagon, beneath the borrowed Royal typer,  
lies the manuscript that will change everything

and nothing. Forty miles away, in Ketchum,  
Ernest Hemingway places the blue double barrel  
of his W & C Scott shotgun to his forehead and

trips the trigger. Brautigan catches his limit,  
and he catches a cold. Summer is all but over.  
Any day now they will break camp and drive

back to San Francisco. It's been said that  
Wordsworth's verse comes at a walker's pace.  
Hemingway's best prose bobs and punches

like a cornered prize fighter. Richard Brautigan's  
style captures the pulse of a man knee-deep  
in an icy river, his arm flexing out and back

as he reaches and reaches for the biggest trout,  
the ones holding in the swiftest current,  
in the deepest pool, just beyond reach.