

# Arts & Entertainment

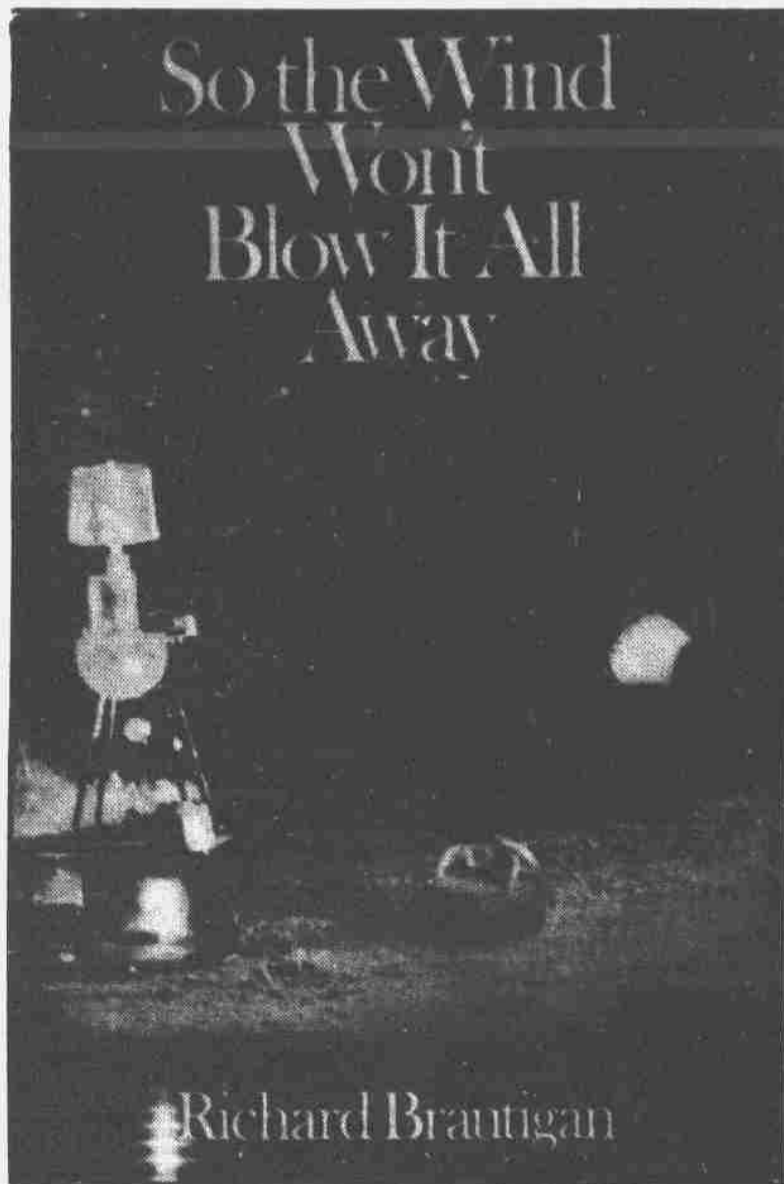


Photo courtesy of Delacorte Press

## Buy the hamburger, but don't buy the book

So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away  
Richard Brautigan  
Delacorte Press

I've read a number of Richard Brautigan novels over the last few years and none of them were as bad as "So the Wind Won't Blow It All Away."

Actually, I shouldn't say "bad," as that implies that this is a bad novel, which it really isn't. It's only bad when compared to his earlier works.

The book centers on a childhood episode in which the narrator accidentally shoots and kills a friend of his.

It might be said that this book examines in detail the role that seemingly innocent decisions play in our lives, such as whether and when to take a particular



## Book Review

class, what party to go to, etc. In this case, the decision is whether to buy a hamburger or a box of bullets.

The narrator opts to buy the bullets, the bullets that eventually will kill his friend.

On another level, the novel also deals with acceptance.

The incident took place on Feb. 17, 1948, as the narrator mentions several times. He also tells us that he is looking back on this in August 1979. Obviously, the narrator, who is never mentioned by name, is still unable to accept what happened that day.

Immediately after the incident, he embarked on a mission to learn everything he can about hamburgers, because he passed up the hamburger on that fateful day when he bought the bullets.

And even today he still thinks about it. There is this, for example, on the first page of the book:

"For the rest of my life I'll think about that hamburger. I'll be sitting there at the counter, holding it in my hands with tears streaming down my cheeks."

Unlike some of Brautigan's other books, most notably "Dreaming of Babylon," which may well be the funniest novel ever written, this book isn't particularly funny. Not that it doesn't have its funny moments. Like this admission:

"I was a strange kid.  
"I guess you could safely add very."

But the fact remains that a lot of this book is just dull, though not for long stretches. After all, the whole book is only 131 pages.

The book also jumps back and forth between different time periods in the past. This isn't too confusing to the reader because Brautigan makes it pretty clear when he does this. But it does hurt the continuity of the story.

Of course, Brautigan has always been a pretty strange writer. It wouldn't be realistic to suddenly expect him to start writing like John Cheever.

Still it would be nice if he returned to the Brautigan of old. As a character says to Woody Allen in "Stardust Memories," "I love your movies, especially the funny ones."

Perhaps Brautigan is in danger of becoming stereotyped, just as Woody Allen has been.

By Jeff Goodwin

## Letterman keeps late-night TV cool

By Pat Higgins

NBC owns late-night TV. Johnny is better than ever, as he rolls along in his guise as the guru of cool. SCTV is the best of the quasi-hip young adult shows, and then there's Letterman.

He's been getting a lot of publicity lately (cover of Rolling Stone, attacks on him in Lampoon), and he deserves the attention.

Letterman is as funny and as fine an interviewer as Johnny. Letterman's advantage is that he is able to get



guests like Hunter Thompson and James Brown, instead of Vegas show biz fogies.

Although Letterman wears a suit, the twinkle in his eye indicates there is a little bit of subversion in his soul. Spontaneity is part of his act, too, something that Johnny tends to avoid.

For example, Bill Murray was scheduled one night but he hadn't shown up, and Letterman was getting nervous. The phone conveniently located on his desk

rings, and it was Murray.

"Party, David," the unidentified voice said to the befuddled Letterman. "It's me, David — Bill Murray. I'm at a great party. Roberto Duran's sparring partner's ex-girlfriends are here. You gotta come over — party."

Letterman said something about having to do a show and the fact that Murray had promised to be there.

"Forget that stuff. NBC can cover for you. They're ready for situations like this. They'll pull out the '75 Series or something," Murray cajoled.

The screen goes blank and what is this? It's the '75 Series. To be exact, it's the bottom of the 10th of the sixth game with Carlton Fisk coming up to hit his memorable home run. What happened to Letterman?

Evidently the lure of the party proved too powerful, and he abandoned ship. Finally, responsibility wins out and he returns with a belligerent Murray in tow. This is the stuff from which TV legends are born.

Paul Shaffer and band also deserve credit for good fade-outs as they rock out pretty decently, especially for TV — sure beats Doc and company.

Although Letterman has all the moves, he has a dangerous tendency to be too cute for his own good. But the bottom line is that Letterman is cool. As Letterman says at least once a week,

"If that isn't enough then, by gosh, don't you think that it ought to be?"

## Zen and the art of vacuuming

As anyone who's bounced off the bottom even once knows, poverty is hell. When you're down so low it's all up to you, you see how money's freedom and you're alienated from an inalienable right.

It's mean irony, to languish in all the free time you've ever lusted for, unable to enjoy, impotent of means, flat out. To survive, you must be a stoic and stick-in-the-mud homebody.

The first neurotic weeks are typically conceded to be the worst. Yet they're only the natural lag that a mind and body feel, converting from consumerism to inaction.



## David Wood

The trickier part is afterward when you must resist the dreaded vicious circle of depression, desire, hope, expectation and failure, followed by despondency.

You learn to hang no hopes on the world, as much of it is illusion. You've got to resort to soundproofing a nook in your head to do your main hanging in. Television is a good first step in acquiring this knack.

Nash Rambler didn't have a TV, but he didn't need one. Whether spending or scrimping, he did nothing unless it was with fervor, with mind, body and soul. He'd luckily been reading a lot of Zen literature at the time he was burned and again when things leaped from the skillet into the fire, only to be nuked and sent to hell, and so he picked up on situational numbness with a flair.

He lost touch with the world in a big way. Before long, only CheckRite kept any interest in him. By the time he was eventually blackballed from every check counter in town, he no longer felt pain. He thought of joining the Army, having a lobotomy and living out his life in mindless bliss on a government pension, as the recruiting office also managed to keep tabs on his address. But the pipe dream was discarded as illusion.

He idled ambiguous days away rifling the public library for things to read. His tastes wavered between the overlapping topics of Zen, neurology, cognitive theory, artificial intelligence and cybernetics. Reading and the severe meditations it produced, besides seeing him through life's ugliest hours, also taught him survival tactics that'd give him guerrilla control over his mind.

Rambler was offered a figurative golden apple one day. He was hungry and bit. It came in the form of words overheard while donating plasma. An unhappy brute next to him was going on and on about how unending his hatred was for his job and boss. He thundered that he was "no man's mealy fetch-it. I quit, there in his face, like God's own truth."

Rambler couldn't avoid hearing him and being amazed at how violently blood splashed into his donor bag. He was just one in nine Americans unemployed, but he wailed like a martyr nailed to a cross with blood-letting needles.

A nurse intervened long enough to snip away the bloated bag, and Rambler snuck a question in edgewise. "The swine were who?"

With a sneer and some well-turned expletives, the brute said he'd worked for Snidely Bros. Building Services. Then he burst, "What's the needlin' for, chump? Ya fishin' for a job? Well, go to Snidely's, say you know

Garcia and it's cinched. But a real man'd be a bum, scumbag!" A spitting tirade followed.

Rambler fixated on the information and speculated on the immediate, even though he knew it was a blatant excursion into the unknowable. But even a Zen master would've had problems erasing thoughts amidst a clamorous donor room. A mind, body and soul naturally get flighty and feisty when the blood's a pint low. Rambler flexed mental muscles that should be kept supple, and when his fabled Zen invisible ego popped, like a bubble, it was hard to reinflate.

Whoever Garcia was, his name worked like gold, and Rambler cinched a janitor position on a bank crew. He took to the job like a shark to spilled innards, rapidly surmising that vacuuming was a superb way to meditate. He became a model worker and was left alone mostly, except when, because of his perpetual grin, co-workers approached him to ask about finding drugs.

Life ebbed into silence again. "The Buddhist behind the broom," as his co-workers called him, was one with his vacuum sweeper and the universe until, one day, he was baited by another golden apple. Its form this time was a young banker who worked late into the night on the computers.

Rambler hadn't solicited the acquaintance. It'd just happened when he was innocently following the path of least resistance with his sweeper. "I ask a favor," the banker said, tapping Rambler's shoulder with one hand and flashing a twenty with the other. He'd hair like gold, skin like bronze, muscles like steel, but it was his voice that was truly commanding.

A silver DeLorean drove up outside the bank three minutes later, precisely as the banker said it would. Rambler recited the code words he was entrusted with, and a sultry woman in midnight blue handed him a sealed envelope and squealed off into the evening.

Along the way on the low-resistance path, Rambler chanced to read the nameplate on the door he returned to.

### RANDY EWING OPERATIONS

"It's the janitor," Rambler said, knocking. "Come on in," the metallic-tough Ewing said, opening the door and dispensing another twenty. He gestured Rambler toward a plush seat, as he had a phone cradled to his ear. "It's the janitor. I'll have to get back to you, J.R. Yes, you'll know about it. I'll let you know about it, J.R. Bye."

He repeated the words "I'll let you know" again after hanging up. He sat, put his fingertips together and stared into the reflection of himself he saw in the picture of himself on his desk. He finally turned to Rambler and said, "The package."

Ewing tossed the package into a lower drawer he opened and closed quickly. He then yanked open an upper drawer and came up with a silver spoon full of white crystals. He offered it to Rambler.

"Drugs are false chariots for where I'm going," Rambler said strangely. Ewing took a rolled \$1,000 bill to the heap and elegantly snorted. "But as a vacuumer, I'm impressed," Rambler said.

"I like your style, kid. I'm always looking for a good man. The name's Ewing, Randy Ewing," Ewing said, unrolling and extending his \$1,000 toter to Rambler.

To be continued