

Richard Brautigan's Pre-Birth Library

by Peter Erich

The last thing Mickey Hess did before he retired from literature was participate in an interview with Shock-G. Shock-G asked him, "Who is your biggest influence?"

Mickey responded, "Before my career, I was close to Richard Brautigan. He was wildly popular and then suddenly no one wanted to read his shit." Mickey explained to Shock-G that Richard spent the last half of his life trying to break the idea that he was a generational symbol. Shock-G asked, "Were you two friends?"

Mickey responded, "To the onlooker, to the passersby, it would have appeared so, in the way we walked step for step with each other, headdresses flowing behind us. And in the way we spoke with a familiarity not often achieved as quickly as we had achieved it. But no. We were not friends."

Mickey knew Richard because Mickey was his apprentice before he was born.

As Brautigan aged his writing became drab, niche, and something that your hippie cousin would put in the bathroom as a way to piss off his parents. He became better known for representing the 60's than for his skill. His writing suffered from his desire to prove himself as more than that.

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Before Mickey was born, Richard asked him to turn his underwear and socks into puppets. Richard wore a single pair of underwear and

a single pair of socks as he wrote Lay the Marble Tea. The puppets would be a kind of therapy for him.

That would make sense, wouldn't it? Couldn't you just see Mickey sewing button eyes onto Brautigan's tightie-whities? And Richard himself would be play a sombrero with a mustache, venting. Richard would, you know, talk it out.

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Mickey got to know Richard well but said that when Richard would share something, he couldn't tell if "that shit was sincere."

While Mickey was editing his book about newborns and hip-hop, Richard told him that when he wrote the poem A Boat he wrote it with Ezra Pound. It was a poem which was meant to be folded into thirds and placed into the left chest pocket of his career, which Richard believed was in a coffin.

Mickey told me once, "Richard and Ezra wrote that shit together while presiding over the typewriter. They shared the keys as if it were All In The Family."

Mickey said to me that Ezra said to Richard that in the poem A Boat, Richard is the ferris wheel, the lights are his sadness and the tears are his self pity. Ezra would call Richard names.

Richard would argue that he is the poem, his pain is the werewolf, the world is the evil forest, and the tears are his soul. He said to Ezra, the soul cannot help but acquire what surrounds it.

And Ezra responded with, I would like to see your prescriptions. Do you live in a perpetual birthday bash? Are you mad? I bet you wear a feather boa in the bathtub, you loon!

Richard cried and cried and cried. He cried until Mickey was actually born. Then he stopped crying and listened and was hopeful.

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Mickey's book about newborns and hip-hop was published when he was just nine months old. It was titled, "My Crib" and was a success. He went on to published 19 novels.

In the interview with Shock-G, Mickey told him that before he was born he learned everything he knew about literature from a library in the office of the most sad man he had ever met.

In the library was novel after novel after poem after poem after notecard after notecard after long exhale after long exhale of the greatest collection of unpublished works ever put into alphabetical order.

It was everything Richard wanted to write but couldn't because he was trying to be something he was not.

Mickey said to Shock-G, "I wrote a play for Richard. It is a happier version of the wild play we performed together. I think he will like this shit."

Richard Brautigan might have smiled had he read the interview.

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Richard died of sombrero frostbite and in-turn, Mickey retired from literature. He was at Brickbat Books standing next to Shock-G and me, who had been his apprentice since before I was born.

Mickey said to us, "Every man has the right to the pursuit of happiness and should first try a job that he might gain happiness

and fulfillment from. This doesn't make me happy anymore. It makes me miserable and a drug addict. I'm forty-two and have wants/needs/bills/responsibilities. So there it is, spread the word, I quit. I don't make beats, I don't do vocals, no more underwear parties, NONE OF IT."

That was it really.

* * * This story incorporates elements from the short story, The Novelist and The Rapper by Mickey Hess which incorporated elements from the letter that rapper Shock-G circulated to announce his retirement and author Isaac Bashevis Singer's 1978 Nobel Banquet speech.

