

## JAPAN AND JAPANESE REMINISCENCES IN THE COLLECTION BY RICHARD G. BRAUTIGAN "JUNE 30TH, JUNE 30TH"

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*Abstract.* Richard Gary Brautigan (1935–1984) was an American postmodern writer and poet popular in Japan, whose creative activity was greatly influenced by Japanese literature and culture. His prose works, inspired by travels to Japan, are: "Sombbrero Fallout: A Japanese Novel", and a collection of 131 very short stories, "The Tokyo–Montana Express". In May and June of 1976, during his first trip to Japan, Brautigan created a cycle of seventy-seven poems in prose dedicated to this journey – "June 30<sup>th</sup>, June 30<sup>th</sup>", in the introduction to which he explained the emergence of interest in Japanese culture by how he had felt as a child about a relative who had participated in World War II. This paper examines the images of Japan that push the poet towards introspection and reflection and can be metaphorically understood as a travel inside one's own self, as a way to self-awareness. Themes, ideas, artistic devices and literary techniques, allusions to Japanese poetry, as well as the influence of Zen Buddhism and *haibun* literary form on Brautigan's poetic experiments are analyzed. The writer's poems of the Japanese cycle are discussed with regard to the references in his work to Japanese medieval literature, the aesthetics of which he combines with postmodern tendencies. The postmodern image of the lyrical character, who acutely feels his loneliness, comes to the forefront; for him, Japan for the first time shifts from the realm of fantasy to the realm of actual experience, which pushes the poet towards introspection. Postmodernism in this collection of poetry is manifested in the fact that the personality of the protagonist is a reflective project, and the images of Japan are depicted as catalysts for this reflection. The collection is characterized by such techniques as intertextuality; fragmentation; removal of boundaries between reality and illusion; irony, allegory, symbolism of images, and use of hybrid genres. At the same time, allusions to Japanese literature are in the diary structure (a travel journal) of the poetry collection, partly reminiscent of *haibun*, partly – of *zuihitsu*; as well as in references to a number of traditional images from *haiku* by poets Bashō Matsuo and Kobayashi Issa (a frog, a crow, a dew-drop world), which sometimes acquire new interpretations from Brautigan.

*Key words:* American literature; American writers; literary creative activity; literary genres; literary plots; literary images; allusions; Japanese literature; Zen aesthetics; postmodernism; poems in prose

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## ЯПОНИЯ И ЯПОНСКИЕ РЕМИНИСЦЕНЦИИ В СБОРНИКЕ РИЧАРДА Г. БРОТИГАНА «30 ИЮНЯ, 30 ИЮНЯ»

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*Аннотация.* Ричард Гэри Бротиган (1935–1984) – американский писатель и поэт-постмодернист, популярный в Японии, значительное влияние на творчество которого оказало знакомство с японской литературой и культурой. Известны его прозаические произведения, вдохновленные путешествиями по Японии: это «Следствие сомбреро. Японский роман», а также сборник, состоящий из 131 короткого рассказа, – «Экспресс Токио–Монтана». В мае и июне 1976 года, во время первой поездки в Японию, Бротиган создает цикл из семидесяти семи стихотворений в прозе, посвященный своему путешествию, – «30 июня», в предисловии к которому объясняет зарождение интереса к японской культуре детскими переживаниями о родственнике, принимавшем участие во Второй мировой войне. В статье рассматриваются образы Японии и подход писателя, который воспринимает путешествие по стране как средство для самопознания и рефлексии. Анализируются темы, идеи, художественные приемы, аллюзии на японскую поэзию, а также влияние дзен-буддизма и литературной формы *хайбун* на поэтические эксперимен-

ты Бротигана. Японский цикл стихотворений писателя исследуется с учетом отсылок в его творчестве к японской средневековой литературе, эстетику которой он сочетает с постмодернистскими тенденциями. На первый план выходит постмодернистский образ лирического героя, остро ощущающего свое одиночество; Япония для него впервые перемещается из сферы фантазий в сферу реального опыта, что подталкивает поэта к самоанализу. Постмодернизм в данном поэтическом сборнике проявляется в таких приемах, как интертекстуальность; фрагментарность; разрушение границ между реальностью и иллюзией; ирония, аллегория, символичность образов, смешение жанров; образы Японии побуждают лирического героя-автора к рефлексии, осмыслению и осознанию себя. При этом аллюзии на японскую литературу состоят в дневниковой структуре поэтического сборника (дневник путешествия), отчасти напоминая *хайбун*, отчасти – *дзуйхицу*; а также в отсылках к ряду традиционных образов из хайку поэтов Басё Мацуо и Кобаяси Исса (ворон, лягушка, жизнь-росинка), иногда обретающих у Бротигана новые интерпретации.

**Ключевые слова:** американская литература; американские писатели; литературное творчество; литературные жанры; литературные сюжеты; литературные образы; аллюзии; японская литература; японская культура; образ Японии; эстетика дзэн; постмодернизм; стихотворения в прозе

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### Introduction

An American poet and writer Richard Gary Brautigan (1935–1984) published eleven novels, ten poetry collections, and two short story collections, as well as five volumes of collected works, several nonfiction essays, and a record album of spoken voice recordings. His creative activity has not been previously investigated in Russian science.

Barber notes that although Brautigan knew the Beats – a literary movement “The Beat Generation” started by a group of authors whose work explored and influenced American culture and politics in the post-war era – and they knew him, the writer always insisted he was not a part of this literary movement. Contemporary literary opinion supports this contention, seeing Brautigan, when his writing catapulted him to international fame in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as the writer best representative of the emerging counterculture [Barber 1999: 1]. Throughout Brautigan’s entire work one notes his characteristic idiosyncratic yet easy-to-read prose style: an eccentric combination of imagination, strange and detailed observation, whimsy, humor (often the black one), and satire. Brautigan has been called one of the major innovative writers of “New Fiction” and was considered to be the literary representative of the 1960s era known variously as “the hippie generation” and “the counterculture movement”. Brautigan’s early novels were offbeat autobiographical pastorals, and were widely acclaimed. His later works experimented with different genres like gothic, science fiction, mystery, and detective, resisted classification, and were generally considered to be less

successful by critics who began accusing him of relying too heavily on whimsy and being disconnected from reality [Charters 2000; Hjortsberg 2012: 61].

Barber presumes that “because Brautigan was disappointed over the lack of positive critical acclaim he received in the United States, he divided his time between California, Montana, and Japan. California was “home”, Montana was a solace, a retreat, and Japan was a source of acceptance and acclaim not afforded in America. He had a substantial following in Japan and traveled there often” [Barber 1990: 15]. His works of the Japanese cycle influenced by his passion for Japanese culture consist of a poetry collection “June 30th, June 30th” (1978), “Sombrero Fallout. A Japanese Novel” (1976), and a collection of very short stories “The Tokyo–Montana Express” (1980).

In May and June of 1976, during his first travel to Japan, Brautigan created a collection of poetry that records this visit – “June 30th, June 30th”; the title is based on the date of departure for the United States after his seven-week sojourn, the date repeated because the day is recaptured as the airplane crosses the international date line. In the preface called “Introduction” the author explained the emergence of interest in Japanese culture by how he had felt as a child about his uncle Edward who had participated in World War II. Brautigan as a little boy was angry with the Japanese because his uncle died in 1942 after being wounded in 1941 when the Japanese attacked Midway Island just prior to America’s entry into World War II. Uncle Edward’s death wasn’t directly caused by his wounds, but little Brautigan hated the Japanese

all during the war and “killed” thousands of Japanese soldiers playing war, which is shown in his short story “The Ghost Children of Tacoma” [Brautigan 1971]. Brautigan wrote: “I was no longer the child of World War II, hating the Japanese, wanting my uncle to be revenged. I moved to San Francisco and started running around with people who were deeply influenced by and had studied Zen Buddhism. I slowly picked up Buddhism through osmosis by watching the way my friends lived. I am not a dialectic religious thinker. I have studied very little philosophy. I watched the way my friends ordered their lives, their houses and handled themselves. I picked up Buddhism like an Indian child learned things before the white man came to America. They learned by watching. I learned Buddhism by watching. I learned to love Japanese food and Japanese music. I have seen over five hundred Japanese movies... I had Japanese friends. I was no longer the hateful boy of my wartime childhood... I read Japanese novels, Tanizaki, etc. Then I knew that someday I had to go to Japan. That part of my life was ahead of me in Japan. My books had been translated into Japanese and the response was very intelligent. It inspired and gave me the courage to continue on in my own lonely direction of writing...” [Brautigan 1978: 9–10].

The metaphoric nature of Brautigan’s prose and poetry composition and the poetic expression of his works were largely influenced by Zen Buddhism which basically had a considerable effect on the so-called Beat Generation of the American writers. For example, the integration of Buddhist thought in Brautigan’s very short stories collection “*The Tokyo–Montana Express*” is discussed by Petino [Petino 2020] whose thesis is that the “Logic of Soku-Hi,” a concept that rejects thinking in terms of either/or, mirrors the existence of traditional opposites in Brautigan’s work as it not only reinforces but enhances western postmodern aesthetics. The illusion of permanence in Brautigan’s poems in prose is based on an aesthetic concern for the spontaneous and immediate – a technique that Brautigan borrowed from the poetry of Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694). To consider fleeting feelings before they flee necessitates a slow movement of the life and a meditative approach; instants become the building blocks of life in Bashō’s *haiku*. Being attracted to Japanese aesthetics Brautigan has organized his collection of

poems in prose as a *haibun* – combining both *haiku* and *zuihitsu* tradition: he included in “June 30<sup>th</sup>, June 30<sup>th</sup>” elements of a diary, an autobiography, a very short story and a travel journal. Brautigan wrote his poems in prose echoing Bashō’s attachment to finding and unravelling the hidden emotions in small, quotidian things; his engagement with Japanese aesthetics is not something simply and fashionably acquired through the Californian popular acceptance of Zen, – the connection is in any case more fundamental. According to Chenetier, it derives from Brautigan’s desire “to rediscover eternal things through the representation of small concrete objects, existing somewhere between gesture and nothingness” [Chenetier 1983: 88–89].

Brautigan expresses in his poems in prose what the disciple of Zen knows: that the world is continually changing and that the change is without logical purpose. Foster notes that Brautigan accepts and intuitively expresses the Zen principle of eternal change knowing that he has “nowhere to go” [Foster 1983: 24]. This can be seen as a presumable reason why the writer has organized his collection of poems in prose in a form of a travel diary: his voyage to Japan can be considered as a metaphor for travel inside one’s own self, with some stops made to feel the instant turning into eternity.

#### **Zen aesthetics and allusions to Japanese literature in Brautigan’s poems in prose**

“June 30<sup>th</sup>, June 30<sup>th</sup>” was published in 1978; the collection consists of seventy-seven short poems in prose, and it turned out to be Brautigan’s last poetry book published before his suicide in 1984. Its Japanese translation appeared in 1992; in 1999 the 1992 translation of “June 30<sup>th</sup>, June 30<sup>th</sup>” was reissued as “Tokyo Diary” (*Tōkyō nikki*), the choice of title picking up the reference to the “diary” in Brautigan’s “Introduction”: “The poems are dated and form a kind of diary... They are different from other poems that I have written. Anyway, I think they are but I am probably the last person in the world to know. The quality of them is uneven but I have printed them all anyway because they are a diary expressing my feelings and emotions in Japan” [Brautigan 1978: 11]. Precise details abound in Brautigan’s collection of poems in prose: dates, time, room numbers, locations all give a sense of the ephemeral and yet the real. Every poem is

followed by the date when it was written, like in travel journal (i. e. “Tokyo June 12, 1976”, sometimes with even time indicated, i. e. “10 PM”); the circumstances in which the poem was created may be briefly provided, and short explanations in italics may be given before or after the poem. Some notes present a dedication to Brautigan’s Japanese or American friends.

Let us see two examples of poems preceded by comments. 1) “Lazarus on the Bullet Train”: “For Tagawa Tadasu. The Bullet Train is the famous Japanese express train that travels 120 miles an hour. Lazarus is an old stand-by” [Brautigan 1978: 56]; 2) “Meiji Comedians”: “Meiji Shrine is Japan’s most famous shrine. Emperor Meiji and his consort Empress Shōken are enshrined there. The grounds occupy 175 acres of gardens, museums and stadiums” [Brautigan 1978: 68]. Let us see three examples of notes following some of Brautigan’s poems in prose. 1) “Fragment # 4”: “Never finished outside of Tokyo // June 23, 1976 // except for the word // other added at // Pine Creek, Montana, // on July 23, 1976” [Brautigan 1978: 91]; 2) “Stone (real)”: “Tokyo // June 29, 1976 // Very drunk // with Shiina // Takako watching //me” [Brautigan 1978: 96]; 3) “Land of the Rising Sun sayonara”: “June 30th again // above the Pacific // across the international date line // heading home to America // with part of my heart // in Japan” [Brautigan 1978: 97].

Such notes and comments follow the tradition of *haibun* – a literary form combining prose and *haiku*, often in a genre of a travel journal [Keene 1999: 233]. For example, Bashō’s *haibun* contain *haiku* with a short description of a place or the circumstances; the poet often wrote *haibun* during his various journeys, the most famous of which is “Narrow Road to the Interior” (*Oku no Hosomichi*, 1689). Bashō’s shorter *haibun* include compositions devoted to travel and others focusing on character sketches, landscape scenes, anecdotal vignettes and occasional writings written to honor a specific patron or event [Shirane 1998: 212]. In Brautigan’s collection, we can also see some remarks, often ironic, regarding the process of writing (“Never finished outside of Tokyo except for one word...”), as well as the details explaining Japanese realities and toponyms in the poem (The Bullet Train, Meiji Shrine), or sketches of people or things around the poet (“Takako watching me”), or

the poet’s self-awareness (“very drunk”, “with part of my heart in Japan”).

Although Brautigan came to Zen Buddhism by accident, his choice of a form – a short poem in prose – for his Japanese collection “June 30<sup>th</sup>, June 30<sup>th</sup>” was not accidental. Short prosaic and poetic forms are traditional in Japanese literary culture; therefore, in the context of Japanese literature one can distinguish several original minor genre forms known both in Japan and all over the world. The most popular poetic forms are *tanka* (literally “short song”) and *haiku*, the medieval short prosaic form is *zuihitsu*. They determined the specific features of poetics: the succinctness of expression, the strict canons governing the use of metaphors and allusions; a hint, the subtext based on image associations and word-play; a fleeting mood full of understatement [Boronina 1978: 233–237]. These features became traditional both for poetic forms and the entire Japanese culture. In some of the minor prosaic and poetic forms that became traditional for Japanese literature one can trace a profound influence of Zen Buddhism that served as the basis for certain artistic devices; they became integral components of the Japanese artistic tradition in general. As Suzuki Daisetsu, a Japanese theoretician of Zen, said, “You do not need to write a huge poem of a hundred lines to let out the feeling that emerges when you look into the abyss. But when the feelings reach the pinnacle, we fall silent... And seventeen syllables may be too many. A Zen artist can express his feelings with two-three words or two-three strokes of the brush. If he expresses them too fully, there will be no place for a hint left while the hint contains all the mystery of Japanese art” [Grigorieva 1979: 208]. This is how Brautigan works with the language of his short poems in prose: his method of composition makes his works sound as if they were easily written. Indeed, although Brautigan’s poems in prose are startlingly unique, they never seem complex; they are plain, direct. As pointed out by Foster, “with the simplest verbal gestures, 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... Brautigan’s language sounds as if it were easily put together; it is not” [Foster 1983: 18].

Being a postmodernist (a magic realist mainly), Brautigan portrays a typically lonely postmodern protagonist, who is devastated and feels helplessness, solitude and internal emptiness, feeling himself stranger in the surrounding world; and in the same time the writer draws on Zen aesthetics in his poems in prose when borrows devices and images from Japanese literature, involving some allusions to the famous Japanese *haiku*, and uses the intertextuality technique shaping his poems' meanings by the extractions from texts by Bashō. Literary scholars express different points of view regarding Brautigan's approach to Zen in this collection of poems in prose: for example, Turner remarks that there are some commentators who present Brautigan as an "aesthetician and conscious artist who used Zen principles; he thus invites an unusual sort of reader response modeled upon Zen observation", while "in his "Introduction", Brautigan does reveal his fascination... with the "form of dew-like steel" in the works by Bashō and Issa, but his remarks are about aesthetics rather than spirituality" [Turner 1999: 247]. The Japanese *haiku*, especially as practiced by such masters as Bashō and Issa, was an important poetic discovery Brautigan made in high school: "I like the way they used language concentrating emotion, detail and image..." [Brautigan 1978: 8]. But in his poetic diary, Brautigan never actually follows the strict syllabic form of the classic *haiku*, though aiming at the same effect in his short poems.

Evidence that Brautigan uses mostly Zen aesthetics, but not spirituality, can be seen in the fact that many of his poems in prose contain skepticism which Zen Buddhism doesn't recognize, or at least, even finding some place for humor in its conception, it never encourages black humor which Brautigan's works often have. As Turner quotes other scholars who approach Brautigan through Zen, Zen implies "dispassionate observation" along with "detachment and passivity" [Turner 1999: 248], but by no means sarcasm and black humor, like in Brautigan's poem "Taking No Chances" beginning with philosophical introspection and then ending with a sarcastic line: "I am a part of it. No, // I am the total but there // is also a possibility // that I am only a fraction // of it. // I am that which begins // but has no beginning. // I am also full of shit // right up to my ears." [Brautigan 1978: 83]. The black humor regarding human's life as fleeting as a dewdrop (as it is un-

derstood by Zen) can be seen in the poem "Taxi Driver": "I like this taxi driver, // racing through the dark streets // of Tokyo // as if life had no meaning. // I feel the same way." [Brautigan 1978: 82]. One more example is the poem "Japan Minus Frogs" [Brautigan 1978: 45] where Brautigan describes the situation when he cannot find the word for frog in his Japanese-English dictionary; the author gives an allusion to the famous Bashō's *haiku*: "The old pond // A frog jumps in // Sound of water" (*Furu ike ya // kawazu tobikomu // mizu no oto*). Brautigan's poem ends up with the humorous line, "Does that mean that Japan has no frogs?" – which may be seen as a reference both to contemporary Japan that is aesthetically distant from Bashō's meditative mood and self-deepening, and to the image of a lyrical hero who is doing his best to get to the point of the country he is traveling around, but still is unable to understand Japan, staying estranged there, as well as being alienated in his home country.

Another image borrowed by Brautigan from famous Bashō's *haiku* is that of a crow – as a symbol of loneliness: "Upon a withered branch // A crow has stopped this // Autumn evening". (*Kareeda ni // karasu no tomarikeri // aki no kure*). The allusion to this Bashō's *haiku* is Brautigan's poem "Worms" creating an atmosphere of loneliness: "The distances of loneliness // make the fourth dimension // seem like three hungry crows // looking at a worm in a famine" [Brautigan 1978: 51].

One of the techniques borrowed by Brautigan from Bashō's poetry is extrapolation from microcosm to macrocosm, when an instant caught by the consciousness in the *satori* state of an enlightened mind expands from a subtle individual experience; a moment of personal life of a traveler expands to something more widescale that's ready to become eternity. Usually, the first one-three lines of a poem represent the poet's individual experience in Japan; the last lines make a move towards eternity, from the inner world to the outside, capture a moment to make it infinite, and may either contain images of Japan or not. Here are some examples. 1) "A Mystery Story or Dashiell Hammett a la mode": "Every time I leave my hotel room // here in Tokyo // I do the same four things... The rest of life is a total mystery" [Brautigan 1978: 28]; 2) "The 12,000,000": "I'm depressed, // haunted by melancholy... Others must feel the way // I do" [Brautigan 1978: 30]; 3) "A Small Boat

on the Voyage of Archaeology”: “A warm thunder and lightning storm // tonight in Tokyo with lots of rain and umbrellas // around 10 P.M. // This is a small detail right now // but it could be very important // a million years from now when archaeologists // sift through our ruins, trying to figure us // out” [Brautigan 1978: 48]; 4) “Travelling toward Osaka on the Freeway from Tokyo”: “I look out the car window // ... and see a man peddling // ... he’s gone in a few seconds. // I have only his memory now” [Brautigan 1978: 53]. The shift of dimensions can also be carried out in a more complicated way, in a reverse order: microcosm-macrocosm-microcosm, i. e. from a moment in present to the future and back. “Future”: “Ah, June 1, 1976 // 12:01 A.M. // All those who live // after we are dead // We knew this moment // we were here” [Brautigan 1978: 38].

Some of Brautigan’s poems represent moments of the poet’s daily life and impressions in Japan, express inner thoughts and feelings; they are largely descriptive, atmospheric and remind of “The Pillow Book” (*Makura no Sōshi*, 1002) by Sei Shōnagon (966–1017?) both by title and by episodic textual structure, for example – “Shoes, bicycle”: “Listening to the Japanese night, // the window is closed and the curtain pulled, // I think it is raining outside. // It’s comforting. I love the rain. // I am in a city that I have never been before: // Tokyo. // I think it is raining. Then I hear a storm begin. // I’m slightly drunk: // people walking by in the street, // a bicycle.” [Brautigan 1978: 31]. The kaleidoscopic descriptions, both reflective and spontaneous, catch the reader’s attention often due to the technique of fragmentation used in poems like the above one: to allow place for the open and inconclusive, the poet is breaking up the text into short fragments or sections, separated by space; in this case there is a space after the line “I’m slightly drunk”, and after the space the poet slides from his personal feelings into the outside world, the sounds of which he is listening to. In such poems Brautigan, like Sei Shōnagon, focuses on his personal experiences, the likes and dislikes of the surrounding world, what he is interested in personally, and the delightedness of the world that he viewed in Japan and lived in for the first time during this travel.

The idea of a dewdrop world, of life as fleeting as a dewdrop, was borrowed by Brautigan

from one of the most famous Kobayashi Issa’s (1763–1828) *haiku*: “This dewdrop world // Is but a dewdrop world, // And yet, and yet...” (*Tsuyu no yo wa // tsuyu no yo nagara // sari nagara*). The allusions to this *haiku* can be found in two poems – with life represented as a dust of a Big Bang in the forming Universe or as a grain of a sand: 1) “Japan”: “Japan begins and ends // with Japan. // Nobody else knows the // story. // . . . Japanese dust // in the Milky Way.” [Brautigan 1978: 24]; 2) “Floating Chandeliers”: “Sand is crystal // like the soul. // The wind blows // it away.” [Brautigan 1978: 33]. Yet, the tribute to Issa in an extra-short poem entitled “Homage to the Japanese Haiku Poet Issa” is humorous: “Drunk in a Japanese // bar. // I’m // OK” [Brautigan 1978: 25].

Only one of the poems in the collection is defined by the author as *haiku* – that is “Strawberry Haiku”: “\*\*\*\*\* // \*\*\*\*\* // The twelve red berries” [Brautigan 1978: 27]. As can be seen, along with traditional *haiku* structure (5–7–5) and aesthetics implied, this poem contains a postmodern fragmentation used as means of allowing place for the open and inconclusive by breaking up the text with the symbols (asterisks). It can have three possible interpretations. One is that the first two lines are a hint based on image associations, characteristic of Japanese culture; therefore, the first twelve syllables can be interpreted as a blank space left for the reader’s imagination, so that one could make guesses and complete *haiku*. The second interpretation is that it is just a draft for the *haiku*, and the poet was perhaps just awaiting the inspiration that would provide the missing syllables. The third interpretation is suggested by Turner who sees in this *haiku* a parody of the later-day *japonisme* among Brautigan’s generation, and interprets twelve asterisks as something symbolizing the twelve berries. According to Turner, “The problems of translation are entertainingly highlighted in “Strawberry Haiku”... it is that which does not in itself require translation – the dots which represent the berries (five for the first line, seven for the second) – which prove the most problematic... “Strawberry Haiku”, then, permits the reader to reflect on shared and singular aspects of cultural contact, and unsettles what is perhaps thought basic (punctuation) so that the iterated (the twelve dots) can be read as part of a unique vision; as the berries represented themselves can-

not be identical, so neither can the individual's encounter with the new experience or culture" [Turner 1999: 262–263].

The sense of disconnection from reality is a prevalent theme in Brautigan's writing, especially in "June 30<sup>th</sup>, June 30<sup>th</sup>", where Zen aesthetics is a technique supporting this attitude of the poet. Barber notes that Brautigan's "Zen Narrator" wanders through the world as an observer, who seems "of" the world but not "in" it, a narrator who observes and reports everything in an unemotional, matter-of-fact voice. None of the events that Brautigan's narrator witnesses seems to have strong effect on him, and the narrator always moves on to the next observation unchanged and disconnected [Barber 1990: 9]; but his observations aim to express something profound in a few words and images.

#### **Travel to Japan as a metaphorical image and the Japanese language as an intensifier of postmodern loneliness in Brautigan's poems in prose**

Like many literary journeys, Brautigan's visit to Japan became a point of departure for an exploration of the self in relation to the world of the nonself; the poet also explores his poetical talents, experimenting and dedicating some of the fragments not only to his journey, but also to reflections on poetry and to attempts of writing one, as does Ki no Tsurayuki (872–945) in his Tosa diary (*Tosa nikki*, 935). There is a haunting feeling of loneliness in Brautigan's poetry collection – a sense of a stranger in a strange land – that ultimately makes Japan seem like a metaphor for alienation. Travel to Japan pushes the poet towards introspection and reflection and can be metaphorically understood as a travel inside one's own self, as a way to self-awareness. This travel can be performed both in time and space. On June 18 Brautigan wrote a poem "Tokyo / June 24, 1976", where his lyrical hero makes a loop from his present to the past and the future: "As these poems progress // can you guess June 24, 1976? // I was born January 30, 1935 // in Tacoma, Washington. // What will happen next? // If only I could see June 24, // 1976." [Brautigan 1978: 84]. The cyclic structure of this kind is used in Brautigan's poems in prose to depict a search for oneself and a return to oneself, with an image of a hotel or a Japanese street allegorically representing an inner space

(the soul) where the poet wanders looking for the meaning of life. For example, one of the first lines of the poem "Things to Do on a Boring Tokyo Night in a Hotel" is: "Wander aimlessly around the hotel", while the last lines are: "... Should I leave // a message at the desk saying that when I return // I should call myself?" [Brautigan 1978: 52]. In this new for the poet reality, in the process of a journey, the image of a hotel is metaphorically representing self in a number of Brautigan's poems; thus, an earthquake felt in the hotel room can be considered as something that shackled the poet's soul in the poem "It's Time to Wake Up", – that could be a shocking reality, because the earthquake "...woke me up... // From the middle of a dream" [Brautigan 1978: 79].

The image of Japan in Brautigan's collection of very short stories "The Tokyo–Montana Express" is discussed by Okumura who points out the influence of the aesthetic principle of *aware* on Brautigan's prose [Okumura 2016: 51] – the concept that implies that each object or phenomenon has its own special, unique charm, aesthetic value, which is not explicit; since the Middle Ages *aware*, or *mono-no aware*, has been associated with a haze of fragility, the ephemerality of everything that exists, which Zen Buddhism teaches: both female beauty, and human life, and the life of a flower are finite. This aesthetic principle implies that one needs to have time to catch all this and reflect around oneself, entering the state of the "enlightened mind"; so, the poet or a writer transcends the boundaries of a real world to comprehend and feel the *aware*. Therefore, the boundaries between reality and dreams or illusions are vague both in Brautigan's poetry collection and in his short-stories collections; fantasies were an escape from the specter of meaninglessness that the poet felt in and around his life. This attitude reflected in a number of his poems that can be divided into three groups: "life as a dream"; "the American poet in Japan as something unreal"; "Japan as an illusion". The first group of poems represents life as a fantasy, because the poet seems disconnected from reality. Examples. 1) "Looking at My Bed / 3 A.M.": "Sleep without sleep, // then to sleep again // without // sleeping." [Brautigan 1978: 81]; 2) "Dreams Are Like the [the]": "Dreams are like the [the] // wind. They blow by. The // small ones are breezes, // but they go by, too." [Brautigan 1978: 26]; 3) "A Short Study in Gone": "When

dreams wake // life ends. // Then dreams are gone. // Life is gone." [Brautigan 1978: 29].

The second group of poems represents a figure of the poet who is doubting in his being real during his travel in Japan, and who looks like someone unreal and alien in the eyes of the Japanese, with broken clock and other images symbolizing his being out of this reality. Examples. 1) "The American in Tokyo with a Broken Clock": "People stare at me – // There are millions of them. // ... Is he for real or is he just an illusion? // People stare at me and the broken clock // that I carry like a dream // in my hands." [Brautigan 1978: 61]; 2) "Passing to Where?": "Sometimes I take out my passport, // look at the photograph of myself // (not very good, etc.) // just to see if I exist" [Brautigan 1978: 72]. The image of a living creature who prefers illusions and is happy with his illusions rather than with a reality is metaphorically portrayed in the poem "Cat in Shinjuku": "...The cat is happy // in front of plastic Chinese // food with real food // waiting just inside the door." [Brautigan 1978: 18].

The third group of poems represents Japan as an illusion, and a travel as an illusionary and sometimes even mystic experience. Examples. 1) "Day for Night": "The cab takes me home // through the Tokyo dawn. // ... The cab is a pillow, // the streets are blankets, // the dawn is my bed. // The cab rests my head. // I'm on my way to dreams." [Brautigan 1978: 41]; 2) "Tokyo / June 13, 1976": "I have sixteen more days left in Japan. // I leave on the 29th back across the Pacific. // Five days after that I will be in Montana, // sitting in the stands of the Park County // Fairgrounds, // watching the Livingston Roundup // on the Fourth of July, // cheering the cowboys on, // Japan gone." [Brautigan 1978: 73]. In the last poem the details of the American reality abound – to strengthen the effect of the illusory Japan that in sixteen days will seem a distant memory, an unbelievable journey.

In four poems new experiences in Japan make the poet feel as an enthusiastic child, or as a helpless child in the world of adults, – but the positive images prevail. 1) "The Red Chair": "I saw a decadent gothic Japanese movie... // I was transformed into a child learning // for the first time // that shadows are not always friendly..." [Brautigan 1978: 76]; 2) "Pachinko Samurai": "I feel wonderful, exhilarated, child-like, // perfect. // I just

won two cabs of crab-meat (\*real) // and a locomotive (\*toy)..." [Brautigan 1978: 23]; 3) "The Hillary Express": "I just ordered my first meal // curry and rice // all by myself in a Japanese restaurant. // What a triumph! // I feel like an infant taking its // first faltering step..." [Brautigan 1978: 19]; 4) "Japanese Children": "I just spent the last half-an-hour // watching a Japanese children's program // on television. // There are millions of us here in Tokyo. // We know what we like." [Brautigan 1978: 17]. There is also a poem "Meiji Comedians" where the narrator represents himself both as a spontaneous child and as a drunk western savage in Japan, trying to enter Meiji Shrine criminally in the evening when it was already closed [Brautigan 1978: 68]. The encounter with Japan helps the poet realize he has always been childish. "Age: 41": "Playing games, // playing games, I // guess I never really stopped // being a child // playing games // playing games" [Brautigan 1978: 93].

The Japanese language that the poet doesn't speak is used in the poems as an image intensifying postmodern loneliness, detachment from reality and the atmosphere of alienation in which he exists; the lonely narrator is depicted in the country of strangers who are both attractive to him and are unable to provide him with understanding he is longing for. 1) "Kitty Hawk Kimonos": "Watching Japanese television... // ... I wish I knew Japanese..." [Brautigan 1978: 15]; 2) "A Study in Roads": "...all led here: // Having a drink by myself // in a bar in Tokyo before // lunch, // wishing there was somebody to talk // to" [Brautigan 1978: 32]; 3) "The Silence of Language": "I'm // sitting here awkwardly alone in a bar // with a very intelligent Japanese movie director // who can't speak English and I no Japanese..." [Brautigan 1978: 78]; 4) "Talking": "I am the only American in this bar. // Everybody else is Japanese. // (reasonable / Tokyo) // I speak English. // They speak Japanese. // (of course) // They try to speak English. It's hard. // I can't speak any Japanese. I can't help. // We talk for a while, trying. // Then they switch totally to Japanese // for ten minutes. // They laugh. They are serious. // They pause between words. // I am alone again. I've been there before // in Japan, America, everywhere when you // don't understand what somebody is // talking about." [Brautigan 1978: 39].

There are poems where Japan is represented as an unfriendly space with no one to talk to and to fall in love with; in such poems Japan is depicted



rejecting the poet, or at least making him acutely feel how lonely and different he is. 1) "Taxi Drivers Look Different from Their Photographs": "There is no difference // between Tokyo and New York. // ... Complete strangers drive // these cabs" [Brautigan 1978: 35]; 2) "Writing Poetry in Public Places, Cafes, Bars, Etc.": "Alone in a place full of strangers... // – my tongue a cloud of honey – Sometimes I think I'm weird." [Brautigan 1978: 65]; 3) "On the Elevator Going Down": "...He is old, fat and expensively // dressed. // ...He doesn't want to talk to me // any more..." [Brautigan 1978: 46]; 4) "Ego Orgy on a Rainy Night in Tokyo with Nobody to Make Love to": "My books have been translated // into // Norwegian, French, Danish, Romanian, // Spanish, Japanese... // but // I will sleep alone tonight in Tokyo // raining." [Brautigan 1978: 50].

### Conclusion

Sweatt points out that the literary context for most of Brautigan's works is that of postmodernism [Sweatt 1985: 3]; like postmodernism itself, the writer's texts propose no explicit commentaries, but instead announce his individual world-vision. European and Japanese aesthetics meet in Brautigan's collection of poems in prose "June 30<sup>th</sup>, June 30<sup>th</sup>", representing an amalgam of postmodern tendencies and Zen reminiscences. The poetry is about the loneliness of the voyage into a strange land which is both Japan and the true self of the poet; the travel is a metaphor for Brautigan's physical and mental wanderings. The postmodern image of the lyrical character, who acutely feels his loneliness, comes to the forefront; his actual experiences in Japan open a breach to connect the fantasy with a given reality, which pushes the poet

towards introspection. Postmodernism in this poetry collection is manifested in the fact that the personality of the protagonist is a reflective project, and the images of Japan are depicted as catalysts for this reflection and self-awareness. The collection is characterized by such techniques as:

1) intertextuality as shaping of poems in prose's meanings by the texts of Japanese literature, which is manifested: a) in allusions to some traditional images from *haiku* by Bashō and Issa; b) in a reference to Bashō's device of extrapolation from microcosm to macrocosm, from instant to eternity, from individual experience in Japan to the Universe and humans in it; c) in the diary or a travel journal structure of the poetry collection, partly reminiscent of *haibun*, partly – of *zuihitsu*, with its essayistic structure and fragmented ideas responding to the traveling author's surroundings;

2) fragmentation, when instead of the whole picture of Brautigan's life in Japan the poet is giving only scattered pieces of it, representing his Japanese experience and reality not through events happening, but through his emotions, as some comically inaccurate instants, each of them being incomplete and inconclusive. Thus, a number of Brautigan's poems in prose are broken up into short fragments separated by space or symbols; unexpectedly for a reader, ironical comments may be introduced;

3) vague boundaries between reality and fantasies, the images of Japan and the narrator as allusions;

4) irony, allegory, symbolism of Japanese images, hybrid genres (prose notes, poems, *haibun*, *zuihitsu*, travel journal).

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