

# Rommel limps on deep into nowhere

Thomas Haroldson

1970

a review of

*Rommel Drives on Deep Into Egypt* by Richard Brautigan, A Delta Book, 1970, \$1.95.

Anyone who has been thinking of reading Richard Brautigan's poetry should not buy his new book. Almost every worthwhile poem he has written is available in *The Pill Versus the Springhill Mine Disaster* which came out two years ago. *The Pill* contains 104 outstanding poems written between 1957 and 1968—all are above average; a third are very good; a dozen are great.

*Rommel*, on the other hand, is nothing more than a mediocre collection of verbal doodles. Of the 85 "poems," 25 are sentences, four are merely titles (no poems under them), and what remains is uniformly inferior to almost all of Brautigan's previous work. No more than six poems in *Rommel* are even worth reading.

It is unnecessary to say that the author has experienced better days, because he says it himself. In many ways, *Rommel* reads more like a suicide note than a collection of poetry.

For example:

"I feel so bad today  
that I want to write a poem.  
I don't care: any poem, this poem."

And:

"Drinking wine this afternoon  
I realize the days are getting longer."

And:

"Too many lifetimes like this one, right?  
Hungover, surrounded by general goofiness,  
lonely, can't get it up, I feel just like a pile of bleached cat shit."

And:

"In a room that knows your death  
a closet freezes like a postage stamp."

A coat, a dress is hanging there.”

It could be argued that these four poems aren't poems at all, but their lack of quality (except perhaps the last one) is more disturbing than their brevity. In the past, even when Brautigan was discouraged, his work managed to retain a certain degree of vitality and humor:

“Yup

A long lazy September look

in the mirror

says it's true:

.

I'm 31

and my nose is growing old.

.

It starts about 1/2 an inch

below the bridge

and strolls geriatrically down

for another inch or so: stopping.

.

Fortunately, the rest

of the nose is comparatively young.

.

I wonder if girls

will want me with an old nose.

.

I can hear them now

the heartless bitches!

.

'He's cute

'but his nose

'is old.”

It may be that more than Brautigan's nose has grown old since he wrote the above poem four years ago, but most likely his recent work merely suffers from comparison. *The Pill* is a tough act to follow, and nothing as carelessly conceived as *Rommel* can hope to match it.

# fifth Estate

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