

Title Archiving the Popular: An Examination of Equity in Archiving Through the Lens of
Richard Brautigan's *The Abortion*
by Zachary Schechter

995 South End, Woodmere, NY 11598. Zachary.schechter@macaulay.cuny.edu

Date: 5/5/20

Abstract: In this manuscript, I analyze the archival process for works of art and literature and examine whether or not the way we do things is actually fair, right, or good. In doing so I discuss the library featured in Richard Brautigan's *The Abortion* as well as this very online archival database.

Permission Statement

"I, Zachary Schechter, submit this unpublished manuscript, written by me and entitled, Archiving the Popular: An Examination of Equity in Archiving Through the Lens of Richard Brautigan's *The Abortion* I assign the following rights for usage of my manuscript by others:
None. I retain all rights as holder of copyright for this manuscript"

Date 5/5/20

Signed Zachary Schechter

In Richard Brautigan's 1971 novel, *The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966*, he describes a unique library that accepts exclusively unpublished narratives. The Library, and its tireless and nameless Librarian, are available to would-be writers, thinkers, and dreamers at all hours and authors are encouraged to place their books on whichever shelf they like, so long as they feel that their manuscript would feel at home there. While the Library in the book serves merely as a backdrop for the whirlwind and "historical" romance of the Librarian and a young woman named Vida that results in the need for a cross-country trip to Mexico for the titular abortion, the governing and operating principles of the Library have led me to question the merits by which we as a society archive and preserve works of art and literature. I believe that the selective and biased nature of modern day archives and literary canons, coupled with the need for a work to be palatable to the elite for it to be published and consumed by the masses, has severely hindered our ability to preserve and be exposed to alternative schools of thought or unique or marginalized viewpoints. I believe that this hurts not only our current cultural moment, but can also have unforeseen consequences for decades, if not centuries, to come.

The Abortion features a library that exists exclusively to give a voice to the voiceless. In the halls of this fictional library, anybody and everybody can submit just about anything to an unflappable Librarian who files it away within the Library. Works in this library are rarely read and, in fact, many of them are completely unreadable, but that is of no concern to the Librarian or to the Library's strange and varied authors. The Librarian takes his job very seriously and though the Library technically has hours of operation, the Librarian never leaves and accepts books at all hours of the day and night. No matter who comes, no matter when they come, the Librarian greets them with a smile, an encouraging word, and open arms. As the Librarian states, "no matter, rich or poor, the service is the same and could never be any different" (7). To the Librarian, the life of the author is irrelevant. It is only that they have brought a book that matters. In fact, the Librarian specifically strives to be available to people from all walks of life. The Library serves as a literary life raft for any author who has had an idea and wants it to be saved. It doesn't matter if an idea has merit, if an author has an education, if a book is deemed as "worthy of preservation." For this library, a book is a book, and "the service is the same and could never be any different" (7).

The Librarian treats his job with the utmost gravity. In the opening paragraph of the novel he states:

“Though the library is ‘closed’ I don’t have to go home because this is my home and has been for years, and besides, I have to be here all the time. That’s part of my position. I don’t want to sound like a petty official, but I am afraid to think what would happen if somebody came and I wasn’t here.” (6)

He states, specifically, that he *has* to be at the Library. Not only for himself, though it seems that he has nowhere else to go, but for his patrons. An author can show up unannounced, at any time, with a bristling need to unburden themselves in the Library. The Librarian describes entering through the threshold of the Library as having a “religious affection to it” (7). Passing into the library, holding something so original, so unique, that it could never have been created by anybody else at any other time on any other world, carries with it the gravity of an act of God. Ideas are unique like that; they are the only thing that can be created “ex nihilo” from nothing but words. For an idea to be had, and for nobody to be available to receive it, is an idea that fills the Librarian with dread. So he has a bell rigged that can be rung at any hour, to rouse him from any sleep, or meal, or activity. Nothing can stop the Librarian from fulfilling his duties, for he sees himself as being entrusted with the most valuable things people have to offer.

Throughout *The Abortion* the Librarian accepts a number of strange and eclectic books that could never have hoped, dreamed, or wished to be preserved and kept for all time. There is a book titled *Leather Clothes and the History of Man* which is, pages and all, entirely made of leather (14). There is a tome titled *Bacon Death*, submitted by a woman whose only notable feature is a look of pained anguish on her face, which is described by the librarian as looking “like a pound of bacon. I was going to open it and see what it was about, but I changed my mind. I didn’t know whether to fry the book or put it on the shelf. Being a librarian here is sometimes a challenge” (17). The Librarian here is what we’ll call the platonic archivist. He exists not to pass judgement on any works or artefacts. He does not even need to *read* the works he is preserving, though often he does. His job is only to archive. To save. The relative value of the works can be determined by others. For the Librarian, the value is in the fact that it is unique and personal and that it could not have been created if not for these authors being brave enough to put their thoughts into words. Who is he to decide whether or not *Bacon Death* should be burnt or consumed by the masses? Brautigan’s Librarian, and the nameless Library he serves, rages against the notion of a select few dictating to the world what can be considered popular. It is possible even that Brautigan rejects the notion of the popular entirely. Why should it matter if a

work is, or has the potential to be, well-liked by many people? Perhaps it only needs to be well-liked by one person, even if that one person is the person who wrote it. At the very least, Brautigan believes that thinking about the popular has no place in any competent archival system.

It would seem that Brautigan's novel idea for a new kind of library and librarian was not simply a kind of new idea for a novel, but rather something that he desperately needed to exist, if only in the pages of his own writing. At one point in the novel, the Librarian lists a number of eclectic and oddball writers who all come to submit works to the Library one day. One of these authors is a fictionalized version of Richard Brautigan himself. This fictional version of Brautigan is described as being one of the most prolific authors to grace the Library's shelves. The Librarian makes note that Brautigan looks "a little older, a little more tired" every time he submits a manuscript to the library (16). It as though this version of Brautigan is literally handing over a piece of himself to the stalwart Librarian, to be interred in the Library for all time. This version of Brautigan is depicted as being uninterested in talking about his latest book. For him, the book is him and he is the book. The text that he is submitting contains everything he has to say about it, all that is left to do now is to preserve it, so that someone in the future might one day come across it and understand him. Brautigan wishes to be able to create freely, in a way in which he is never required to explain himself, to *justify* his own work. In the real Brautigan's ideal reality a work could exist just because. I think that the form of writing that Brautigan is capturing here is incredible. In a world in which archives are owned and operated by private companies with precise agendas and exacting standards, works can never exist or at least, they can never exist in a way that can be widely consumed, in a way an author originally intends for it to exist. Works cannot exist, and therefore cannot *persist* without very specific rhyme and excruciatingly precise reason. In Brautigan's vision, this is not the case. In his, and my own, opinion a book, or any sort of work, should be allowed to exist, and be saved for no other reason than because somebody decided to put it into the world. With the increasing digitization of books, we are now more than ever equipped to save and archive *every* work for the foreseeable future and I believe that we have no compelling reason *not* to.

If we allow modern standards for what is considered "good" to also dictate what is considered "worthy of saving" we are preventing future generations from disagreeing with us and deciding that a work has merits that weren't seen or appreciated during its own time. If we

save everything, or allow authors, thinkers, and creators of all stripes to have the opportunity to save their own works, then we are doing nothing more than preserving a more complete, and accurate, depiction of what people were thinking about during our cultural moment. I am not calling for an eradication of the critic, in this model I am not saying that everything we save should be considered “good”. I am simply saying that not being “good” shouldn’t mean that a work should sink into oblivion. Brautigan’s Library provides a sort of idealized framework for that, but the ideas behind it have been discussed by scholars and critics for decades.

Before we explore the consequences, and benefits, inherent in the way we as a society determine and archive the popular we must first define some of the key terms that will be used in this paper. The term “popular”, for example, is a loaded one. For years, theorists, historians and thinkers of all stripes have had trouble pinning down *exactly* what it means. In *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams claims that to be popular is, among other things, to be “well-liked by many people” (237). Already, this assumes mass access to a given work. Dominic Strianti, in *Introduction to Theories*, puts forth a similar view when defining popularity in conjunction with mass culture when he suggests that for something to be popular it must be from “a set of generally available artefacts” (108). So while something that is popular must be “well-liked”, it must also be “generally available”. In order to understand how works or culture can come to gain the elusive and coveted “popular” prefix we must understand how works come to be readily accessible.

The best way for older works to reach a wide audience is for them to be “canonized”. The term “canon” historically referred to the set of texts and books that were considered to be true and legitimate when codifying the Christian Bible. In his essay, “Canon”, John Guillory describes the work done here as “a principle of selection by which some authors or texts were deemed worthier of preservation than others” (233). This general principle has been adopted by literary historians and critics to assemble lists of important and valuable texts known as “literary canons”. These canons create lists of essential texts that have been, and will continue to be, preserved for all time, but it also means that any text *not* canonized could be lost forever. This creates a sort of literary natural selection. In a perfect world the canonization process would simply weed out bad texts and allow them to be lost to history. Only the best works would survive to be read and seen by future generations. In an ideal setting, canons could be used to

determine the true, objective, worth of a given text. Unfortunately though, as we will see, the canonization process is far from perfect, and far from objective.

In “Chronicling White America”, Benjamin Fagan explores the unintended but historically catastrophic consequences of selective archiving. While discussing the struggles and obstacles that are now part and parcel with researching or accessing large swaths of black history in America, he refers to “the racial politics of digitization” (12). He describes how difficult it is to read and analyze nineteenth century black periodicals, pamphlets and many other primary sources because of how few of them were *saved*. Due to a perceived unimportance of certain texts, an entire history is now irrevocably skewed. Even the few black newspapers and texts that survived the century are now sealed away behind corporate owned paywalls and are inaccessible to most of the general public. Sealing away what little primary history remains for an entire people and culture and making it only available to a select few with the means and resources to access it only serves to exacerbate the already uneven nature of historical record. While white Americans have no shortage of documents, newspapers, diaries, and even autobiographies detailing and valorizing their past, black people need to make regular cash deposits in order to simply look at the remnants of theirs. These are the damaging racial politics Fagan refers to, the critical unbalance between one history that is free-flowing and vast, and another that requires a monthly subscription to access a trickle.

This original unevenness in the recording and keeping of Antebellum periodicals doesn't simply effect our understanding of one era. Historians and archivists failing to preserve the history of an entire race, and this is nothing short of an abject failure seeing as we have *zero* black newspapers from any time before 1865, has snowballed into a divide that only grows larger, and will only continue to grow larger, with every passing generation. While the work of a white revolutionary figure, such as Ben Franklin's *Autobiography* has been reprinted, republished and shared far and wide ad nauseam and is now freely available to the world on sites like *Project Gutenberg*, a theoretical similar work written by a black author which details their experiences in a pre- and post-revolution America may have been forever lost to history, or else, it can only be accessed by an elite few. This in turn means that any modern day attempts to piece together or analyze the experiences of the average early American will be inherently flawed and unignorably lacking. As Fagan writes, “the uneven coverage of even the private databases makes access to the full range of digitized black newspapers nearly impossible” (11). It is nearly

impossible for historians to attain a clear and full picture of what it was like to be black in America during its inception. *This* means that the general public is left with a view of this history that skews unquestionably white. A lie of omission on this grand a scale is damaging to everybody, and the blatant commodification of a race's history is an especially egregious crime that influences the study of history for all time. A pay-to-play model of history and culture such as this only creates a loop of the elite controlling the cultural consumption of the masses and prevents any works or ideas that don't conform to the worldview of this subset of the populace from gaining any sort of foothold in culture. The fictional Library in *The Abortion*, on the other hand, revels in accepting works from the disenfranchised and the controversial, books such as one submitted by a "doctory and very nervous" (18) fellow titled *The Need for Legalized Abortion* thrive in the lawless jungle of this particular archive. In Brautigan's model, works do not need to appeal to any one powerful group or demographic. They do not need to appeal to anyone. I believe that the fewer obstacles and restrictions that are placed on works before they can be seen and consumed and preserved, the more equitable and encompassing any future projects on history or culture can be.

Any time a canon -a list of works that has been deemed by some corner of academia as being acceptable and even necessary for mass consumption- is created, it is an inherently political act. In Guillory's "Canon", he discusses a need for what he calls "opening the canon" (235). The canon as we know it is too closed, too constricting and wholly terrible at its stated objective of compiling a list of "must-reads" that are valuable for everyone. As Guillory describes it, "beneath the supposed objectivity of value judgements [there is] a political agenda: the exclusion of many groups of people from representation in the literary canon" (233). Guillory, like Fagan, recognizes the fatal flaw inherent in letting any one group of people decide on and compile a list of literary classics. Invariably, this group will be made up of people with the means and influence to force the issues they want forced, and to bury the works that they fear. Guillory poses the question: "Could it be possible that all along good or great works have been written, but that they have not been preserved, or not canonized, because their authors were not upper-class, or white, or male?" (234). A question to which Fagan would probably respond, "well duh." There have undoubtedly been thousands of great works that never had a chance to be popular and now, never will, because they weren't produced by acceptable or "canon-worthy" people and are now buried in the sands of time. The trouble here is not with the writers. For

surely canonical writers have not committed any crime in being included in a list produced by a biased third party. Rather, there is an inherent flaw in the archivists, the deciders of canon. A problem that does not exist in a Brautiganian system, and a problem which a growing number of intellectuals around the world are beginning to acknowledge, and combat.

In “The Canon in Revision: A Periodical Maintenance of the Canon” the Committee for the Development of the Dutch Canon pick up the threads left by Guillory and Fagan and discuss the virtual impossibility of creating a fair, accurate, and timeless canon. The scholars who make up this committee argue that any functional canon must be “of great resilience and flexibility” (79). At first glance, this line of reasoning seems oxymoronic. If a canon is resilient, how can it be flexible. If one were to develop a list of important works of literature that was robust and resistant, could it also be fluid and bending? The members of this Committee however, argue that the resiliency of a given canon is *found* in its flexibility. If a canon is resistant to changing with the times, to being updated to reflect the needs and concerns of an ever-changing populace, then it will cease to be of any use or value. If a canon wants to stand the test of time it must *move* with it instead of against it. In the view of the Committee for the Development of the Dutch Canon, to be flexible is to continue to be of use. The Committee argues further that “as spectators of our own times and recent past, we are simply too close to judge what will be of lasting influence and significance” (80). In other words, it is virtually impossible for us to know what future generations might find value in. The Committee is terrified of committing an archival sin that will have untold repercussions such as the ones Fagan describes. They argue that two lists should be made. A changing Dutch canon that reflects the greatest Dutch works of any given time, so that future scholars might know what any given generation valued. And a second list, a list of everything else. This second list, they argue, should possess a “wiki function” (82), meaning it should be constantly updatable by anyone in the world. They argue that, as times and values and art forms change, future generations might like to read works or view art that was not included in traditional canons from their eras. This second “wiki” list, is highly reminiscent of Brautigan’s Library. An unmoderated, communal database that is flexible and fluid where canons are rigid. A database that works in conjunction with scholarly canons. A database that could serve as a breeding ground for debates about what should be added to or removed from an eternally flexible canon, so that it can be resilient.

The members of Committee for the Development of the Dutch Canon saw themselves as responding to a national need. A need to preserve. It is notable that neither the Librarian nor the Library are ever given a name. In truth, neither of them are given any sort of sense of permanence. The Librarian himself notes that he was not the first librarian to maintain the massive archive of the library (12), and by the end of the book, his position has been seized by someone else (115). In regards to the Library itself, the Librarian describes it as having been created not according to any plan, but rather it “came into being because of an overwhelming need and desire for such a place. There just simply had to be a library like this” (12). The Library is mythologized in this way. It sprang into existence in response to an unignorable societal need. The world needed to unburden itself of its secret and hidden and weird ideas, and the Library opened up its doors to accept them. Brautigan is saying here that his vision of the perfect archive can exist anywhere and can be run by anyone, so long as they are up to the task of responding to such a monumental and universal *need*. Just as Brautigan needed to imagine a world where ideas could be preserved, so too did he believe that he wasn’t alone in this desire. Just as the books within it can be written by anybody who has ever wished to record an idea, so too, can anyone take it upon themselves to begin saving literature.

In the podcast *Book Fishing in America* Brautiganian scholar, Sean Cole describes the Library as being “hilarious, heartbreaking, and democratic, and other-dimensional all at the same time” (5). The fictional Library existed in response to a need to be heard and to be preserved. It was hilarious because such a thing had never existed before, and so it became inundated by the absolute strangest and offbeat works that could ever conceivably exist. It was heartbreaking because the books that were interred there rarely, if ever, saw the light of day ever again. It was democratic because anybody and everybody’s voice could be heard there. And it was other-dimensional because it could never exist in the real world. Or could it? The idea that *The Abortion* library could exist anywhere, in any time, struck a chord with scholar Todd Lockwood, who decided to see if he could recreate this library in real life. Thus, the Brautigan Library was born, and the unpublished authors of the world rejoiced. The Brautigan Library’s mission is the same as Richard Brautigan’s fictional Library. Any work, no matter who it’s by, no matter what it’s about, no matter how comprehensible it is, has a place there. There is no arbiter, no judge who can reject a book for being too subversive or outlandish. No publisher who can decide that an autobiography’s subject does not warrant having any sort of book published about them.

There is no wall to climb, no gates to keep, and all of it is free to access. Cole further goes on to say that The Library served as “a home for anything anyone felt a burning need to express, or explain, or somehow get off their chests” (5). It is possible, Lockwood, speculates, that something in the Brautigan Library can one day resonate with someone else, another disenfranchised soul that is not interested in what has been presented to them as popular. The Brautigan Library is all about creating new traditions that popular culture has never had the time for, and that conventional literary canons would balk at.

On the subject of literary traditions, T.S. Eliot, in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” writes that “every nation, every race, has not only its own creative, but its own critical turn of mind” (36). Traditions are important, Eliot says, and often they make up the backbone of any culture. But a tradition can never be all encompassing. By its very nature it cannot be all things to all people. And there are times when culture *needs* to fulfill this role. People are infinitely complex in a way that a rigid tradition or literary canon cannot readily accommodate, and what resonates and holds meaning to one person may not have the same effect on another and doubtlessly won’t have the same value for the entirety of that person’s nation and race. Eliot describes cultural traditions as a long chain with each successive link transforming and enhancing the tradition in a way only it can. However, at the same time, Eliot opposes the notion that an artist’s own personality has a place within the literary tradition. He writes: “the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality” (39). He believes that it is neither the job nor purpose of an author to produce something so intensely personal that it may turn out to not have a place in a “traditional tradition.” For Eliot, if a work is so personal as to be potentially alienating, then what value could it possibly have? For a Brautiganian scholar, that intense personality is exactly where the value lies.

The underlying philosophy of the Brautigan Library is that the greatest traditions aren’t chains with clearly defined links that are the product of extensive knowledge of what came before and a cold and calculated ability to combine and reorganize it into something fit for public consumption and mass enjoyment. Rather, traditions are like a particularly frayed rope, with strands of ideas and stories and histories weaving in and out of one another, culminating in innumerable new ideas traveling in as many new directions. Just as the Brautigan Library is not interested in fame or notoriety, neither are the authors and artists and visionaries and crackpots that contribute to it. For many of them, the traditions that they are participating in or creating will

end with them. There will not be a later author who comes in and creates a work to carry on and add a new link to the chain of tradition of a Brautiganian manuscript. Lockwood, on *Book Fishing in America*, recalled that, when asked why the real life Brautigan Library houses unpublished manuscripts, staff members responded “So they can stay alive, and people can read them” (12). A Brautiganian tome or manifesto won’t appear on a *New York Times* best seller list, and it will never be made into a multibillion dollar movie franchise. It won’t trend on Twitter and it won’t make for a good holiday gift, but it will always exist and it will always be accessible, just in case.

All of this means that the writers of the Brautigan Library can enjoy a sense of unchained freedom. Take, for example, the most prolific author in the real life Brautigan Library’s archives, Albert E. Helzner. Helzner has contributed nineteen different books to the library. Each of Helzner’s works is deeply personal in a way that only a Brautiganian work can be. Yet his nineteen works form their own literary tradition. As Cole puts it “everything and everyone in the Helzner-verse is interconnected and impactful” (22). Despite being so uniquely personal and Helzner-esque, this Brautiganian tradition operates very similarly to Eliot’s version of the tradition. Eliot describes a tradition as “[something that] cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labor. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense” (37). Nobody could argue that Helzner didn’t take in account much of what came before him when he wrote *The World Is Wrong*. One would be hard pressed to argue that he didn’t labor greatly over his ideas when he produced his seminal *Revolutionary Way of Looking at the Earth as a Planet*. Helzner is reminiscent of the fictional version of Richard Brautigan from *The Abortion*. Both authors consistently return to either the fictional or real life versions of the Library in order to give more and more of themselves over to it. This fictional version of Brautigan, and like him, Helzner are prime examples of creating culture in a way that can *never* be popular, and yet, I would argue, are still worthy of being preserved. If only because popular culture can never be as personal and as raw as the culture we need.

As Brautigan writes of the books housed in the library, “nobody ever checks them out, and nobody ever comes here to read them. This is not that kind of library. This is another kind of library” (20). This kind of library does not exist to teach; it exists to save. The archive housed in Brautigan’s fictional Library will not, and oftentimes cannot, be read. In fact, it can barely be navigated. Authors are encouraged to place their books on any shelves they please. There is no

categorization system at work in the library, and trying to find something would be nothing short of a Herculean task or Odyssean quest. Regarding this aspect, Todd Lockwood actually chose to differentiate his library from Brautigan's.

Lockwood understood that the true value of such a library is in the connections it could create between people and people, stories and stories, and stories and people. Libraries in general often form the cornerstone of communities. They hold classes on arts and technologies, they provide warmth to people who need it, and they forge bonds between the people who patron them. In a 2013 report for the Center for an Urban Future titled, "Branches of Opportunity", David Giles writes that "No other institution, public or private, does a better job of reaching people who have been left behind" (3). Libraries have always existed as safe havens, and in creating his defictionalized library, Lockwood saw that as being of the utmost importance. People are encouraged to visit the real Brautigan Library, even if they don't have works of their own that they want to submit. While the books stored in the fictional Library were left to languish for all time, the ones housed in the Brautigan Library live on to be read and enjoyed. In this way the ideas and books that might have otherwise been left behind can instead reach new audiences from all walks of life.

In recent years, the Brautigan Library has gone digital, and the thousands of unpublishable works it holds are now fully available online, archived and categorized according to the authors' specifications. Now, more than ever, the risk of human bias or interference preventing future generations from accessing something great or weird is eliminated. Authors can choose whether their work is worthy of preservation, and they can choose *where* that preservation should take place. The Brautigan Library's works are organized according to the "Mayonnaise System" named after the empty mayonnaise jars that bore the category names in the original, physical, Brautigan Library. There are fifteen categories including, "Love", "Adventure", "Meaning of Life", and "All the Rest". These categories represent traditions and canons of their own. All of the works on love nobody wants to read. Every adventure that can never be told. Twenty-one different and odd and wonderful meanings of life that a publisher would laugh right out the door have a home forever in the defictionalized and digital walls of the Brautigan Library. In many cases, the category these works are placed in can tell us a lot about the works themselves. Take for example, Etherly Murray's *Autobiography about a Nobody*. Murray's work takes great advantage of Eliot's ideas of finding a home and meaning in the ideas

of older authors but is also as Brautiganian as a book could be. The book takes readers through Murray's life in Depression-era Pennsylvania and her travels and misadventures during this time. Seemingly, this manuscript could fit snugly in many of the Mayonnaise sections: "Adventure", "Family", "Street Life" perhaps? But Murray chose to place it in the "Comedy" section, thus linking it with the dozens of ideas that other authors found funny before her.

The Mayonnaise system and the odd kinships and traditions it forms between unpublished books demonstrates how vital such an archive is. The Brautigan Library causes these disparate and dysfunctional books to come together into a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This idea crops up in *The Abortion* as well, when the Librarian leaves the library and sees several loose and scattered papers lying in the street. He comments that these leftover pieces of paper "looked terribly alone" (64). It is unnatural for him to see papers on their own, devoid of companionship. To be "terribly alone" is to crave contact, to need a place to belong. Throughout history there have been millions of stories and ideas and works that never had the chance to find a place for themselves and were relegated to being terribly alone. The Brautigan Library strives to bridge the gap between "terribly alone" and "well-liked by many."

The idea that stories need companionship and can create powerful bonds is the overarching idea behind Scott Russell Sanders's "The Power of Stories." In this essay, Sanders writes that "stories create community. They link tellers to listeners, and listeners to one another" (116). In Sanders's view, stories need to be personal, because they exist to create very real bonds between complex people. He writes that stories are the best way to learn about the experiences of others. For this to work though, people must have access to stories that are from perspectives that are foreign to their own. In *The Abortion* the Librarian makes a point of stating that the books under his care are different from any book you could find in a traditional bookstore. While a bookstore is bound to house only those books that are deemed by others as viable to sell, the library can house anything. A library doesn't need to make any sales; it doesn't need its books to be able to sell. The library can feature the unique stories and perspectives of a limitless number of unmarketable individuals, forming bonds and links between people who might never meet, and granting sanctuary to those who might otherwise have been doomed to eternal terrible loneliness. Sanders also points out that one of the greatest powers that stories possess is the power to "teach us how to be human" (125). Stories can ground us; they have the power to cut through the buzz and the noise of life and take us back to our roots. As Eliot points out, traditions

are the most powerful way to link us back to our pasts. Sanders capitalizes on that link but goes on to say that stories “hold a reservoir of human possibilities, telling us what has worked before, what has failed, where meaning and purpose and joy might be found” (125).

According to this view, saving stories from the past is of paramount importance for securing our future. Sanders claims that we, as a society, need to be saving as many different stories, as many different experiences, as many different voices, as we possibly can. The power of stories is not to be underestimated, but that power can be different for each reader. As the Committee for the Development of the Dutch Canon points out, it is impossible to know how any given work might resonate with someone in the future, and we have a responsibility to preserve as much as we can, regardless of perceived contemporary value. In *The Abortion*, the Librarian describes the books under his care as “flying through the pages of eternity” (40). The unpublished books take on a timeless quality upon being interred in the library. Their value might not be apparent when they are brought in, but that hardly means they will never be needed.

An archive doesn't exist only for the sake of the future though. An archive serves to unite the past, present, *and* future. It brings stories and texts from the past into the present and onward into the future. Like Brautigan wrote, to be archived is to be timeless. Many a restless author has found closure in the shelves of the Brautigan Library. Todd Lockwood speaks about how writers would tell him “wow, this really is a weight off” (22) upon having their books accepted into the Brautigan Library. The act of being archived has saved them from the burden of being unable to share their story with the world. By placing their books, their most personal ideas and thoughts about the world, into a library where anybody, in any time, and, now thanks to its digitization, in any place, can read it, they are preserving a piece of themselves for all time. The Brautigan Library gives people the ability to connect in a way that they never could before, and it gives rise to stories and ideas that never could have been heard otherwise. Current librarian of the Brautigan Library, John F. Barber describes the guiding principles behind the Brautigan Library as being “about people telling their stories in a democratic way. It is a home for grassroots narratives in a digital age” (4). Here again we have the notion of archives creating democracy, of a myriad of voices being joined together to express many different wills in a place where they can all be heard, and where they can all be valued.

Richard Brautigan writes that the goal of his fictional Library is “to gather pleasantly together the unwanted, the lyrical, and haunted volumes of American writing” (51). In this

mythic library, Brautigan hoped to create a blueprint for preserving the forgotten and undesirable pieces of human thought. Brautigan's use of the words "lyrical and haunted" here are especially telling. Brautigan saw each individual work as a single note. Individually they might not mean anything. They might just be noise. Yet, at the same time, each of them are equally vital and integral to creating something beautiful. Brautigan understood that just because an idea or a work might seem pointless or meaningless, that didn't mean that it wasn't worth recording and saving. Just because something is meaningless to one person doesn't mean it will be meaningless to every person for all time. An unpublished work is like a ghost with unfinished business. It will persist. Its absence will haunt the world, creating a void that cannot be filled except for by the work itself. Brautigan sought to bring these forgotten works together, to gather them pleasantly into something that could survive and persist. In *The Abortion* Brautigan wrote about a place where harmony could be granted to the discordant and contradictory ideas that had been shunned by the mainstream society of the era they were born into. Todd Lockwood and other scholars like him picked up where Brautigan left off and brought his ideas to fruition so that other ideas could be saved and preserved and read and maybe brought to fruition themselves one day.

The value of the Brautigan Library and projects like it that strive to archive works that otherwise would not have been archived, is that they allow people to truly be people. They inject a sense of warmth, of human contact into the world of literature that commercially published, or canonical works sometimes fail to reach. Brautiganian works are raw, they are unpolished, they are subversive, but they represent hundreds of un- or underrepresented philosophies, backgrounds and people that need the Brautigan Library to make them timeless. Richard Brautigan's idealistic vision of the archiving process rages against much of what has been common practice and tradition for centuries. Yet Brautigan is not the only writer or scholar to take issue with the notion of "tradition." Benjamin Fagan, John Guillory, Scott Sanders, and the members of the Committee for the Development of the Dutch Canon hold similarly radical views about archiving and preservation. In the view of all of these writers, literature has the unique power to connect us to our past and guide us through our future. These writers believe that literature and ideas of all stripes have merit, regardless of whether or not they are marketable. The preservation of works is valuable because it grants writers a sense of immortality through their ideas. It creates bonds and traditions between works that may never have been put into conversation otherwise. Most importantly, it creates a more complete picture of our cultural

moment, so that future generations might find what we've written, and in doing so, understand who we were, and who we could be.

Works cited

- Barber, John F. "The Brautigian Library Mission." 2010.
<http://www.thebrautigianlibrary.org/faqs.html>. Accessed Nov 17, 2019
- Brautigian, Richard. *The Abortion*. Vintage, 2002.
- Eliot, T.S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *Perspecta*, vol. 19, 1982, pp. 36-42.
- Fagan, Benjamin. "Chronicling White America." *American Periodicals: A Journal of History & Criticism*, vol. 26 no. 1, 2016, p. 10-13. *Project MUSE* muse.jhu.edu/article/613375.
- Giles, David. "Branches of Opportunity." The Center for an Urban Future. 2013.
<https://nycfuture.org/research/branches-of-opportunity>
- Guillory, John. "Canon." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, edited by Frank Lentricchia and Thoman McLaughlin. Chicago Universtiy Press, 995. 233-249.
- Sanders, Scott Russell. "The Power of Stories." *The Georgia Review*, vol. 51, no. 1, 1997, pp. 113–126. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41401008.
- Strinati, Dominic. *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*. Routledge, 2008.
- "The Canon in Revision: Periodical Maintenance of the Canon." *A Key to Dutch History*, by THE COMMITTEE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DUTCH CANON, Amsterdam University Press, Netherlands, 2007, pp. 79–83. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvhrcz58.9.
- "The Room of Requirement." *This American Life*. WBEZ Chicago, Chicago, December 28, 2018. <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/664/the-room-of-requirement>. Accessed Nov 17, 2019.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture & Society*. Hogarth, 198