

THE PSYCHOANALYTIC ISSUE
IN THE SHORT STORIES
OF
DONALD BARTHELME

by
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ABSTRACT

As the title of this thesis indicates, this work is a study of key psychoanalytic issues deemed to be central to a proper appreciation of the work of the contemporary American writer, Donald Barthelme. Much has been written about Barthelme's fiction in recent years (he has, for example, been the subject of four full-length studies in the last five years), but the approach taken by criticism in general to his work misinterprets what seems to me to be one of the most interesting and relevant issues raised by his work. Conventional wisdom assumes that Barthelme's short stories represent a uniquely successful challenge to the notion that fiction need embody meanings which originate in the author. It is asserted, in other words, that Barthelme's fiction has for all intents and purposes utterly subverted potential criticism which might attempt to establish a relationship between text and author. In the effective absence of an "author," Barthelme's prose is taken to represent a radically innovative form of discourse, a form of discourse which has influenced an entire generation of experimental writing.

The context in which Barthelme's fiction is appreciated by criticism is informed by distinctively postmodern aesthetics. In particular, what critics identify as postmodernism's emphasis on "an aesthetic of process" (Hutcheon 1985, 2) has served to throw the entire concept of the artist or the author as the source of meaning in a text open to serious question. Postmodern fiction presents itself as a form of situation, a variety of experience in which author and reader are free to recreate meaning and recreate themselves in a dynamic gestalt through the process of text.

What is most repugnant to postmodernism is the rule of definitions of the self that are anterior to the text, definitions that limit the existential freedom of the self to recreate itself in situation. Barthelme's fiction is widely proclaimed to be exemplary postmodern writing in the sense that it has created a form of discourse in which the author--a potentially limiting source of prefigured meanings--is effectively absent from the text, and can therefore be discounted as a factor in any interpretation of the meaning of the text.

This study will show that the voice of the author in Barthelme's short fiction is neither absent nor as irrelevant as criticism would have us believe. Indeed, this study will show that Barthelme's fiction says essentially the opposite of what has hitherto been assumed with regard to the relevance of the authorial voice to the meaning of the fiction.

This study is psychoanalytic in the sense that it will isolate the latent features of Barthelme's prose based on readings of patterns of association as they occur in the manifest content of the stories. To this point no criticism has considered the relevance of these patterns of association in Barthelme because it has been assumed that, in the absence of a legitimate authorial voice in his work, such patterns either do not exist, or if they do exist, they were deliberately woven into the fabric of the prose by an ironic author familiar with Freud.

With a careful and comparative analysis of his earliest stories to serve as a reference point, this study proposes to demonstrate basically two things: first, that Barthelme's fictions have from the beginning implicitly affirmed the notion that an understanding of the psychoanalytic issues attached to the voice behind the fiction has been crucial to an

appreciation of the full meaning of any given story; and second, that the psychoanalytic issues of concern to the authorial voice in Barthelme have not changed to any significant degree over the twenty years Barthelme has been publishing fiction. The implications of the latter point are especially worth noting: proof of the presence of a consistent authorial voice would require a radical readjustment to the popular view of the meaning of Barthelme's fiction.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER TWO: THE POSTMODERN CONTEXT	33
CHAPTER THREE: "BALLOON MAN DOESN'T LIE, EXACTLY"	69
CHAPTER FOUR: AN ANTHOLOGY OF SELF	132
CHAPTER FIVE: THREADS OF THE DISCOURSE	236
CHAPTER SIX: A CONCLUSION	305
NOTES	318
APPENDIX A	322
WORKS CITED	326

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS

Quotations taken from Donald Barthelme's works are taken from the texts listed in Works Cited. The following abbreviations have been used:

<u>A</u>	<u>Amateurs</u>
<u>CBDC</u>	<u>Come Back, Dr. Caligari</u>
<u>CL</u>	<u>City Life</u>
<u>DF</u>	<u>The Dead Father</u>
<u>GD</u>	<u>Great Days</u>
<u>GP</u>	<u>Guilty Pleasures</u>
<u>S</u>	<u>Sadness</u>
<u>Sx</u>	<u>Sixty Stories</u>
<u>OTMDC</u>	<u>Overnight To Many Distant Cities</u>
<u>UPUA</u>	<u>Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts</u>

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

BARTHELME: In a commonsense way, you write about the impingement of one upon the other--my subjectivity bumping into other subjectivities, or into the Prime rate. You exist for me in my perception of you...That's what's so curious when people say, of writers, this one's a realist, this one's a surrealist, this one's a super-realist, and so forth. In fact, everybody's a realist offering true accounts of the activity of the mind. There are only realists. 1

Donald Barthelme published his first collection of short stories, Come Back, Dr. Caligari, just over twenty years ago. Since that time his work has consistently attracted the attention of important critics. As the body of his fictions grew over the subsequent years, so too did a substantial body of commentary (indeed, so varied and so substantial were both the body of the fictions and the body of the criticisms that in 1977 Jerome Klinkowitz, Asa Pieratt, and Robert Murray Davis published Donald Barthelme: A Comprehensive Bibliography and Annotated Checklist). Barthelme's place among writers of contemporary fiction is such that it is difficult to find a work of criticism that deals with postmodern or contemporary American fiction that does not at some point consider Barthelme's contribution. Without question Barthelme is generally regarded as an important writer, a leading contemporary figure who is almost always placed among authors like Barth, Coover, Pynchon, Gass, and others in critical pantheons of seminal American and international writers. It is virtually a commonplace to identify Barthelme, as for instance do the authors of the bibliography, as "one of the most significant writers in America," or as "one of the leading

practitioners of innovative American fiction" (Klinkowitz 1974, 7). Richard Gilman has called Barthelme "one of a handful of American writers who are working to replenish and extend the art of fiction" (27). John M. Ditsky, in 1975, described Barthelme as "easily the most written about of the 'experimental' writers" (388), and Morris Dickstein identifies Barthelme as "the greatest influence on our developing writers" (270). Jack Hicks says that Barthelme's work "has established him as the best of the metafictionalists, both here and abroad. His work has consistently been that of one of the finest stylists in contemporary American fiction...." (81). According to Larry McCaffery, "especially during the late 60's and early 70's Barthelme's work probably had more impact on American innovative fiction than that of any other writer" (1982, 99). In that same study, McCaffery calls Barthelme "our society's most consistently brilliant critic of the language process itself and of the symbol-making activity of modern man" (100). Jerome Klinkowitz, in 1980, fifteen years after Barthelme's first collection of stories was published, called Barthelme "one of the more prolific but also the most imitated fictionalists working in America today" (62). Finally, no less a figure than William Gass recently observed in an introduction to one of Barthelme's stories in *Esquire* that Barthelme "has permanently enlarged our perception of the possibilities open to short fiction" (1986, 46). As these few illustrations suggest, mainstream criticism attests to the worth and importance of Barthelme as a writer of influence.

This summary is not to suggest, of course, that there exists any real consensus among Barthelme's critics as to the ultimate worth of his contribution. Several critics complain, for instance, that, while Barthelme

is unquestionably a clever and accomplished stylist, his subject matter is finally too trivial. Indeed, if there is one aspect of Barthelme's work with which even his most sympathetic critics find fault it is, as Morris Dickstein puts it, that his work is "too full of the trivial and the inconsequential, the merely decorative or the merely enigmatic" (270). Richard Gilman, too, is uncomfortable with Barthelme's tendency to indulge in what he takes to be "cheap incongruity or the merely bizarre"; Gilman characterizes this tendency as a "certain kind of unseriousness which is not quite the same thing as high, conscious, daring frivolity" (27). Dickstein suggests that Barthelme's real problem as a writer is that he lacks "a great subject," something "immediate" enough "to draw him at least halfway out of his irony and aesthetic detachment" (271).

The question of how to account for Barthelme's apparent "unserious frivolity" represents something of a shibboleth for anyone seeking to identify a pattern or to establish a consensus of opinion in the available criticism as to the value of Barthelme's work. Almost without exception critics applaud the sometimes remarkable effects Barthelme's style is capable of producing. However, these same critics will often lament the absence of what Dickstein somewhat ambiguously refers to as a "great subject," and therefore they deplore Barthelme's failure to entertain a subject sufficiently serious to imbue the trivia in his work with a reasonable significance.

In some sense the problem of how to deal with Barthelme's apparent unseriousness, and the surfeit of trivia it produces, is a representative problem in the criticism of postmodern fiction as a genre. It involves a problem critics have had (and continue to have) in developing an

aesthetic--a new norm, if you will--to allow them to account for the continuing assaults on the old norms that arguably is one of the principal subjects of postmodern fiction. The problem of subject in postmodern literature is a function of postmodern art's principal subject, the essential meaninglessness of the world as it relates to the processes and products of the art. Postmodern art is understandably concerned with surfaces, the thing that impinges most in a meaningless environment. The criticism that postmodern art in general, and Barthelme's fiction in particular, is apt to draw, therefore, is that it is finally only a trivial reworking of the already trivial. But art, as Annie Dillard says, "including the art of surface, must do more than dazzle" (10). Art must mean something. Dillard uses the instructive image (after Magritte) of the egg in the cage to distinguish in collage between the arbitrary image (a function of accident or novelty) and the significant image. Though similar in appearance to the arbitrary image, the significant image is quite different in design. It is the difference between placing an egg as opposed to an onion in the birdcage: it is the egg which serves to create that hallmark of a work of art, what Dillard calls its "calculated" or "unified" effect (11). Traditionally, it has been this unified effect that has served to distinguish a good from an inferior work of art. And so the question is inevitably begged of postmodern fiction, which has been so radically influenced by collage: "When is a work of art 'about' meaninglessness and when is it simply meaningless?" (Dillard 12). It is not an easy question to decide. There are standards and criteria to which one might make appeal, but there is some question, as we shall see, of the appropriateness of some current, and most traditional, criteria as they might be applied to

postmodern fiction. This is Philip Stevick on the challenge posed by the new fiction to criticism:

In short, almost all of the equipment which we have for defining a direction in the history of art, setting it off from what has gone before and what comes after, breaks down in the face of those writers whom we would easily call non-traditional writers of fiction, an incongruous and highly individual lot....What we do not need is criticism of new fiction as pure technique, disengaged from its cultural ambience, 'read,' explicated, exhausted, like a metaphysical lyric...What we do need is an aesthetic of new fiction. (337)

It is not my intention in this thesis to "explicate" the new fiction in the sense that Stevick intends, but rather to demonstrate that Barthelme's contribution to the new fiction has been generally misinterpreted to this point. It may not require anything so grand in design as a "new aesthetic" to appreciate Barthelme's fiction, but the work certainly requires some adjustment of focus in the terms of the old aesthetics as they are applied to that work.

One very surprising aspect of the criticism of Barthelme's fiction to date is the fact that the stories themselves are rarely, if ever, analyzed in detail. Even in the more developed studies by Moleworth, Courturier and Durand, and Stengel, Barthelme's stories are addressed in the most general terms. On the one hand, this tendency to generalize about Barthelme's work is understandable. In the first place, his collected short stories number over one hundred and thirty fictions. Generalization about such a large body of fictions is inevitable. In the second place, critics generally seem to appreciate that Barthelme's stories represent a provocative challenge to traditional criticism. They therefore tend to focus on the aesthetic implications of the stories (the relationship to postmodern aesthetics in particular).

What is remarkable about this typical approach to the exegesis of Barthelme's fiction is that these same critics generally applaud the subtle and complex use Barthelme makes of language. Alfred Guerard has suggested, for instance, that Barthelme's use of syntax and diction represents a successful attempt to render in prose the subtle, complex, and sometimes contradictory processes of thought (31). And yet, no critic that I know of has analyzed in any depth the use of that language in any story by Barthelme, and this is nothing short of astonishing. Of the books devoted to his work, Stengel's devotes the most attention to individual stories (his study concentrates on sixteen stories), but even his more detailed analyses tend to stand some distance back from the stories, and to gloss over the actual mechanics of the prose.

Barthelme is something of a minimalist; his prose is extremely compressed. So compressed is his discourse that an analogy could easily be drawn between the means by which Barthelme arranges language and the processes that result in poetry. Indeed, the stories require something approaching the same sort of exegetical rigour one might apply to the analysis of a long poem. Analysis which concentrates on the aesthetic implications of Barthelme's prose in general is, of course, useful and worthwhile, but a real understanding of what Barthelme is attempting, and expressing, in his prose demands that very careful attention be paid to the mechanics of that prose.

The number of stories Barthelme has written poses certain advantages and disadvantages for his critics. The sheer number of the stories, for instance, makes a comprehensive analysis of all, or even a healthy percentage, of the stories utterly impractical. Inevitably one faces the

problem of selection, of arriving at, and then justifying, the criteria that will determine which stories are selected for special attention. Central to this thesis is the idea that Barthelme's prose is descriptive of a subjectivity that has remained relatively constant. What is therefore required in the way of selective criteria is one that provides for a chronologically representative selection of stories for analysis. The stories that I will examine, therefore, except for a particular emphasis on four stories from the first collection, are drawn in roughly equal measure from the eight collections published over the last two decades.²

What I have also elected to do in light of my contention that Barthelme's prose has remained relatively constant in terms of both form and content is to examine in some detail the first stories Barthelme published. These stories will be examined for common features in an attempt to profile what is most essential in Barthelme's earliest prose. These stories will serve to define the features of what I will call "the central fantasy" in Barthelme, a particular and constant configuration of latent content that I hope to show remains at the heart of Barthelme's fiction throughout (for the purposes of convenience in subsequent references to them, I will designate these four stories the synoptic tales). The analysis of four stories in this group is meant to allow for sufficient representation and emphasis of what I intend to show are the remarkable (and heretofore unacknowledged) similarities among these first stories.

An appreciation of the aesthetic principles that have determined the form and content of his fictions is, of course, crucial to a study of this kind. Therefore, I propose to devote an entire chapter to the examination of these principles. This examination will take basically two forms. I

want to begin with a consideration of the current critical attitudes toward Barthelme's prose in an attempt to illustrate what I take to be the limitations of the current criticism. Furthermore, because Barthelme is generally taken to be a postmodern writer, and because Barthelme in his fictions adopts key postmodern aesthetic principles, the question of postmodernism as a distinctive approach to the act of making fiction will have to be considered in the context of this discussion.

Following this consideration of the current critical attitude toward Barthelme's work, I intend to show, through the analysis of two short stories, "The Balloon" and "I Bought A Little City," that Barthelme's art is, on a fundamental level, about the discharge and control of what Barthelme himself terms in one of his short stories, "the psychoanalytic issue" (CBDC 9). Following the analysis of "The Balloon" and "I Bought A Little City," I will list the several features of Barthelme's aesthetic using detailed analysis of certain key fictions to illustrate this list.

This thesis intends to show that, despite the postmodernistic claims made in, and about, Barthelme's prose as to the irrelevance of authorial design, the outmodedness of searching for such a thing as meanings in his fiction, and the discontinuity of the subjective in the authorial voice, the fiction is, in principle and in practice, a demonstration of the relevance of authorial design, the assumption of meaningfulness, and, most important of all, the continuity of the subjective voice in Barthelme's fiction. Crucial to the demonstration of especially the latter point is a demonstration that all of his fictions have been critically determined by "the central fantasy." As we have already noted, however, it is utterly impractical to examine all of Barthelme's stories in any detail. A peculiar

problem for this thesis with regard to the sheer number of Barthelme's stories is the fact that this thesis is oriented toward the careful analysis of associative material as it is developed within the closed frame of individual fictions; in the absence of the demonstration of associative relationships among various parts as this associative material occurs within an individual story, generalizations about the latent content of a given story are difficult to justify. Notwithstanding this problem, if this thesis hopes to deflect the charge that it has analyzed only those stories which would favour the universal presence of the central fantasy in Barthelme's work, it is incumbent upon it to find some means to show that the central fantasy is a present and vital factor in all of Barthelme's fictions. For the sake of this needed comprehensiveness I have prepared a list of key manifest motifs which appear, to various degrees, and in various combinations, in every Barthelme story. Considerable space has been devoted to the explanation as to how these motifs tend to function in context.

While virtually all critics of Barthelme agree that his prose is descriptive of some form of psychic disturbance, it is generally felt that it is more appropriate to describe Barthelme's fictions as forms of cultural as opposed to individual "brain damage." As a consequence of this view, no studies of Barthelme's work examine the peculiar psychology depicted in Barthelme's work in any detail whatsoever. Generalizations are typically made as to the lack of ego strength in the narrators, or about the cultural factors contributing to the chronic degree of the alienation of his characters, but criticism has yet to examine the prose for a detailed psychological profile of the typical "voice" heard in Barthelme's fiction.

Nor has criticism examined in any detail how that psychology serves to structure the precise terms of the texts; critics either see no significant degree of similarity among the voices heard in Barthelme, or, in light of the work's declared "postmodernism," critics view the issue of authorial design on this level as essentially irrelevant to the interpretation of the prose. This thesis asserts that the question of authorial design, far from being irrelevant to an appreciation of Barthelme's fiction, is absolutely crucial. Further, this study intends to show that Barthelme's fictions are the varied utterances of a consistent voice whose "character," capable of being described in psychoanalytic terms, is responsible for the peculiar shape and substance of Barthelme's fictions.

Using a method of text analysis derived from Freudian dream analysis, this study will consider fictions in terms of their manifest and latent content. The mode of analyzing psychoanalytic causality is based on drawing connections in the text through the examination of patterns of association as they occur in the text. The method requires that the following means of association be considered:

- a) similarity of treatment of characters by narrator (called "displacement")
- b) similarity of response by character to other characters ("displacement")
- c) fusion of common elements in symbols (called "condensation")
- d) connotations of imagery that illuminate and explain (a), (b), (c), and (d).
- e) origin of, and response to, conflict by characters and narrator ("defenses" used)

f) links between episodes in the plot: implied or overt

g) consideration of associations attached to major symbol, episode, character, or object.³

By weighing all of the above as they occur in the rich fabric of Barthelme's prose, a far more complete picture of Barthelme's method and meaning than is presently available in criticism can be made available to the reader.

The method of this study is threefold. First, the associations within the closed field of each individual fiction will be analyzed using the means listed above. Only those patterns of association which each fiction develops within the closed frame of that particular fiction will be used to assess the meaning of the symbols, characters, relationships, objects, etc. However, this study asserts as part of its thesis that a consistent authorial voice is behind each fiction and manifests its presence in critical patterns of association in all of Barthelme's fiction. Therefore, the second method of analysis of this study will be to consider patterns of association in the larger field of the corpus of Barthelme's work. This movement into the larger field of association probably represents the most important contribution this thesis will make in that the demonstration of a vital relationship between the "author-principle" and the fictions will have radical implications for the criticism of Barthelme.⁴

This study is psychoanalytic in that it adopts the Freudian view which suggests that dream and text have much in common. Specifically, this study adopts the view that both dream and text are composed of manifest and latent content. It therefore follows that the means of dream analysis can be applied to text as a means of revealing material which might not otherwise

be available for commentary. This study, however, does not assume in any way that the latent content of the text should be regarded as equivalent to the "meaning" of the text, or that psychoanalysis in any way "solves" a work of literature. Rather, what the psychoanalytic point of view provides is access into the text to get at structures of determination that might not otherwise be available to criticism. In that Barthelme's fiction represents an attempt to describe a state (some would say "states") of mind, psychoanalysis would seem to be peculiarly advantaged to provide especially valuable commentary on his prose.

One of the standard objections to psychoanalytic criticism (an objection frequently sounded in postmodern aesthetics) is that it uses the text to illustrate models anterior to the text. According to this objection, if the text is approached in this manner, it can lead to a general disregard of the text, of the particular and specific way a text is put together. A recognition of this potential liability leads us to the third method of criticism this study will adopt. This study is concerned only to show that the psychoanalytic method can be applied to Barthelme's fiction in the interests of providing a much more complete picture of this seminal writer's work. Whenever possible, therefore, especially with regard to a consideration of the patterns of association in the larger field of Barthelme's work, this study will pursue an inductive as opposed to a deductive approach. As much as possible, the psychoanalytic nature of the author-principle in Barthelme will be described in terms the texts themselves insist upon. In other words, since this study has no interest whatever in explaining, demonstrating, or defending the psychoanalytic method per se, every effort will be made to allow the patterns as they occur

in the text to dictate the terms of the psychological mechanisms giving rise to these patterns.

A basic distinction in the analysis of fiction comes down to the distinction between literature as reflection of personality and consciousness, and literature as an objectively rendered means of transcending consciousness or personality. Those who argue that literature is a means of transcending consciousness argue that literature serves to render irrelevant all definitions of the self or personality that depend on coherence and durability. This, for instance, is Leo Bersani's definition of what he calls that "ideal utterance": It would be "wholly without mystery--nonreferential, nonrelational, and devoid of attitudes, feelings, tones. It would, most radically, imply the absence of any coherent and durable subjectivity. Literature would no longer reveal a self; rather, it would provide models of nonstructurable desires, of scenes of desire irreducible to a history of personality" (1976, 231). What basically distinguishes this thesis from all other approaches to Barthelme is that this thesis assumes that literature is a projection of human consciousness, a series of linguistic gestures which are best examined as tracings of the consciousness out of which they originate. Alfred Guerard observes that, "In diction, in pace and pauses and the larger ordonnance of syntax, Barthelme's style really captures the movement of thought" (31). Guerard is exactly right: not only does Barthelme's prose capture the movement of thought, I would argue that these movements of thought "reveal a self" behind Barthelme's prose--the consistent and quantifiable "voice" of the author. All other criticism of Barthelme opts for the postmodern view of

literature as represented by Bersani's remarks quoted above, that is, that Barthelme's work represents an escape from the self. As we shall see in our examination of "The Balloon" especially, Barthelme argues (both in and out of his fiction) for the view that his work must stand for itself, that his art is not about something, it is something. Jerome Klinkowitz says this about Barthelme's fiction: "The key to Barthelme's new aesthetic for fiction is that the work may stand for itself, that it need not yield to complete explication of something else in the world but may exist as an individual object, something beautiful and surprising and deep" (1980, 80). Klinkowitz's view of Barthelme's prose is essentially the mainstream view, but this view completely undervalues what I take to be the only subject of worth in Barthelme: Barthelme's prose is descriptive of a state of a very particular and very constant subjectivity.

What it comes down to is the attitude we as readers choose to take toward the authorial voice in Barthelme. Critics who argue for the absence of self in Barthelme tend to agree that Barthelme's prose is marked by a distinctive authorial voice, but while that voice is distinctive, its distinctiveness ironically lies in our inability to locate its source. Barthelme's fiction thus tempts us into looking for authorial design, for the source of the tracings of consciousness we find scattered everywhere in the prose, but the fiction always manages to undermine that search and ends by mocking our attempt to trace a source.

Critics who argue for the absence of a graspable subjectivity in Barthelme's prose point out that this absence is served in part by characters who are hardly characters at all in any traditional sense. Most critics view Barthelme's characters as little more than phonemes. Thomas

Docherty, for instance, calls them merely "oral surfaces": "Lacking intentional determination in their de-centred conversations, they can also be imputed to lack a depth of characterological psyche, being reduced to merely a series of 'speech events' within the larger speech act of the fiction as a whole" (110). Larry McCaffery, one of several critics who would agree with this estimation, suggests that Barthelme's "characters never develop into psychologically convincing people so much as mere linguistic consciousnesses or collections of odd-words" (115). Neither, it is argued, are these characters to be taken as re-worked configurations of a central consciousness. Rather, what they serve to represent are independent, autonomous "views" of reality. The fictions in which these characters function, therefore, "aren't nearly as interesting for what they themselves have to tell us about the world as for presenting different methods of viewing or thinking about it" (McCaffery 1982, 118). The key phrase here is "different methods." In other words, according to this view, Barthelme's fictions amount to disconnected, discontinuous views that are not descriptive of, or traceable to, a single or central subjectivity. As Docherty says, Barthelme produces "not individual characterization, but if anything, the 'voice of America' at a certain historical moment" (113).

In contradistinction to most of Barthelme's critics, I would argue that Barthelme is more than innovative stylist who lacks a great subject. Barthelme has genuine subject, even a great subject, which serves as the source of the unity and consistency of his work, a source which accounts for what some critics take to be a surfeit of the trivial in his work. I will argue that the subject of Barthelme's work is a state of mind, a subjectivity, a "self." It shall be the intention of this thesis to show

how Barthelme's fiction is constructed as a form of feeling, and to show that those feelings embodied in the forms constitute a complex, a profound, and most of all, a coherent subject.

In an article on Barthelme's fiction, Alan Wilde points out that appreciation of Barthelme's work depends to a degree on seeing the differences between modernist and postmodernist irony. According to Wilde, postmodern irony is different from modernist irony in the manner in which it responds to the notion of the abyss: the modern "anironic" assumes the existence of a heterocosm" (47), whereas the postmodern substitutes "the apparent randomness of simple contiguity" for the "symmetry of modernist disorder" (48). Wilde argues that, while the postmodern's preoccupation with the trivial (the chaos of objects) may seem at first glance to lack or even reject a human reference, the human reference is nevertheless present, albeit in a form that is likely to frustrate what Wilde refers to as "the same analytic techniques regularly applied to the classics of modern literature" (49): "But the lack of an easily paraphrasable theme or an extractable moral, or, on the other hand, of a pattern of search and, if not resolution, then closure, doesn't necessarily imply the absence of human reference of one kind or another" (49-50). Wilde goes on to define these human references in Barthelme, not as the "larger, more dramatic emotions to which modernist fiction is keyed [in particular, the fiction of Woolf, Joyce, and Faulkner] but to an extraordinary range of minor, banal dissatisfactions" (57). It is at this point that Wilde's argument and the argument of this thesis part company, for while I would join with him in calling for a critical technique capable of appreciating the "human

reference" in postmodern fiction (appreciating the fact that Barthelme's prose represents an attempt to establish a genuine "link between the fictional form and the forms of feeling" [55]), I cannot concur that the range or the depth of that human reference in Barthelme is, as Wilde puts it, "a muted series of irritations, frustrations, and bafflements" (25). Here we have no minor distinction. What Wilde is suggesting is that the trivial in Barthelme can be worked into a pattern of human reference, a form of feeling, but that the feelings that have found their way into form are, by their very nature, hardly worth considering.

Betty Flowers is one of those critics of Barthelme who would likely agree with Wilde that an identifiable personality (that is, one composed of those "larger, more dramatic emotions") is all but absent from his work. Flowers, exploring the analogy proposed in one of Barthelme's stories of the narrator-as-patient and the reader-as-analyst, concludes that the analogy, while provocative and at first promising, is fundamentally unworkable in Barthelme as a model of interpretation because the patient-narrators of Barthelme are strangely absent. The distinction between the narrator as a fictional construct and the author as actual personality is, of course, crucial, and nowhere in her article does Flowers suggest that we can assume in Barthelme that one is meant to stand for the other. And yet it is interesting that Flowers is inevitably seduced into an identification of the "patient," not merely as the narrator, but as Barthelme's voice, and finally, as Barthelme himself. She speaks, for instance, of trying to come to terms with the elusive narrator by "entering the world of the author" (43). She attempts to come to terms with the narrator by assessing the psychology of the characters:

In this way, not only is the reader discouraged from making any identification with the characters, but he is also prevented from forming any sort of sympathetic alliance with the narrator...The reader cannot maintain the role of analyst because the author does not maintain the role of patient. Aware of the critical observer, he builds through the story an elaborate disguise with which he hides his true identity....The reader...can find neither the center of Barthelme's world nor even Barthelme himself. Not only is there no central vocabulary, no central point of view, but the fictive entity of the author himself is inconsistent, perhaps even 'unreal,' a sort of ghost-like virtuoso reflected from the thousand different mirrors of his language, but ultimately hidden from the gaze of The Other. (43)

Both Wilde and Flowers, then, if for different reasons, conclude that Barthelme as personality is essentially absent from his work. He is found to be absent despite what is patently a series of repeated teasing invitations in the text to try and catch him. There is a sense in Barthelme that a full appreciation of what is happening in the prose depends on the presence of a consistent identity, and yet, when looked for, that identity proves too elusive. The prose is thus acknowledged as a successful series of disguises which precludes significant knowledge of the author beyond the level of the most casual and oblique acquaintance. Barthelme, as experienced from such a perspective, reads as an extremely clever and elusive presence whose features, as they are manifested in the prose, lack all but provisional coherence.

We began this chapter with the observation that Barthelme is widely acknowledged as one of the most important, most influential of postmodern writers. As an index of that regard (both in North America and Europe), three full-length studies of his work have been published in the last few years, Charles Moleworth's Donald Barthelme's Fiction: The Ironist Saved From Drowning, Maurice Couturier's and Regis Durand's Donald Barthelme for

the Methuen Contemporary Writers series, and most recently, Wayne C. Stengels's The Shape of Art in the Short Stories of Donald Barthelme. What I now propose to do is to look at these more developed studies of Barthelme's work in terms of the questions raised above as to the nature of the narrative voice in his work. Each of these studies views the question of the identity of the narrative voice in Barthelme's work as a central issue, but all three of these studies, as we shall see, conclude that that the identity of the narrative voice in Barthelme changes. Indeed, they suggest that the mutability of that voice is linked to one of the central themes of Barthelme, the mutability of the Self. Of special interest to this thesis is Courturier's and Durand's study in that their aesthetic is informed by psychoanalytic (specifically Lacanian) criticism. But let us begin with Molesworth's 1982 study of Barthelme as ironist.

As the title of his study suggests, Molesworth's argument is that irony is that element in Barthelme's fiction most responsible for his style. Molesworth asserts that Barthelme's irony is so pervasive that it devalues every kind of value on virtually every front. As a consequence of this immanent sense of irony in Barthelme, the work is sometimes open to the charge of being "trivial" in that Barthelme is apt to be more concerned with the technical aspects of writing than he is with either character or plot. According to Molesworth, this absence of character or plot, the traditional sources of unity in fiction, occasionally leads to what appears to be disorientation for the sake of disorientation (20). Molesworth's estimation of Barthelme is consistent with that of Wilde and Flowers and the rest who have observed that the abundance of trivia in Barthelme's work is a

consequence of the felt absence of a subject. Notwithstanding this absence of subject, Molesworth points out that there exists in Barthelme a constant tension between "the deepest psychological needs and the shallowest cultural artifacts" (5). These deep psychological needs are expressed, he says, by "a fictional voice that is both coy and disaffected, naively desirous and dispassionately suave" (17). Significantly, in light of our discussion above concerning the intuited but finally elusive narrative voice of the author, Molesworth identifies another source of tension in the difference in the texts between the sense "of a highly skilled author" and "especially maladroit characters" (36). According to Molesworth, Barthelme's characters are not characters at all in any traditional understanding of the term:

In large terms, there are few characters in Barthelme's fiction with distinctive psychological identities. The paradigm I have discussed is repeated often, though with differing details. But this is the result of Barthelme being more 'maker' than 'author,' more collagist than oracle or psychological realist. All the language is in his hands. This paradigmatic character tends to become identified with the author, especially for readers trained on the ironic realism of writers such as Joyce. And this confused identity of author and character takes on a profile that is distinctive, at least in its own terms. (70)

Venturing briefly into psychoanalytic criticism, he suggests that while the prose has a distinctive voice, that voice is ultimately "depersonalized" due to the "lack of a firm sense of a subjectivized ego in either the characters or the narrative voice" (37). What Molesworth refers to a "lack of subjectivized ego" is that same absent entity or consistent narrative voice noted by Wilde and Flowers. He concludes that Barthelme's fictions are depersonalized fictions, fictions not "characterized by the representations of states of mind" (37).

For Molesworth, the paradigmatic character manipulated by the "meta-voice" (70) in Barthelme serves to direct us to a distinctive

authorial voice, but this voice is depersonalized, a voice with many accents: "What we hear in Barthelme is something like an anonymous voice, or to use a figure from one of the media, that amalgam of voices that confronts us as we turn on the selector dial on the radio" (36).

(Curiously, Molesworth does not identify what seems to me to be the more immediate and relevant source of the figure he uses: it is from "The Dolt" (UPUA) in which the son enters wearing a serape made up of radios all tuned to different stations). Molesworth suggests that "Barthelme's own voice is both without authoratative force and yet completely in control" (36).

Further, he asserts that the "constant shifting and displacement of authority" in Barthelme's completely "depersonalized prose" amounts to "rule by no one" (36). Even if we wanted to say something precise about that ambiguous voice, says Molesworth, we would "have to deal with nonquantifiable elements" (37).

Throughout his study, then, Molesworth, like the critics we have looked at to this point, identifies the authorial voice in Barthelme as "anonymous" and yet, in a qualified sense, clearly that of the author. He stops short of analyzing the character of that voice, except in the most general terms, because he believes that he would have to deal with what he calls nonquantifiable elements.

While they are more willing than Molesworth to "quantify" the elements which constitute the character of the authorial voice in Barthelme, Couturier and Durand nevertheless share Molesworth's basic conviction that the source of that voice remains hidden. Courturier and Durand agree that Barthelme's stories represent "countless discourses which do not seem to

reflect the workings of an individual mind or unconscious, but rather a great variety of both" (18). For these two critics it is a mark of Barthelme's genius and the ultimate worth of his style that it is not possible to view the several voices manifest in his stories as the accents of a single "meta-voice" (Molesworth's term), at least not a voice about which much of real significance can be said. Nevertheless, despite this conclusion, the course of Couturier's and Durand's argument follows a quite different path from those we have examined thus far.

Their interpretation is psychoanalytic in orientation, as is the orientation of this thesis, and they therefore make certain assumptions about text. They accept, for instance, that text's such as Barthelme's represent a form of discharge and control of unconscious material. And yet, as we will observe, they are led to conclusions about Barthelme's prose that are antithetical to those of this thesis. The issue that distinguishes their study from this one concerns the ultimate knowability of the "character" who serves as the authorial voice in Barthelme's fiction.

Like Molesworth, Couturier and Durand see a direct relationship between Barthelme's style and the need to perpetuate the anonymity of the controlling voice: "Barthelme manages to divert our attention away from himself by drawing it toward the technical feats" (20) (note in this statement the tacit assumption that there is a "self" in the text whose presence, and whose absence, is at issue). The fact of this self is further substantiated by their assertion that Barthelme's principal concern as a writer--that is, his principal subject--is "the interaction between the real (its signs and its meanings) and the self (its imaginative power and its emotions)" (26). Concerning the impression that there are several "selves"

in Barthelme, as opposed to a single, consistent "self," Couturier and Durand suggest that the source of this impression lies in "the most striking aspect of all his stories...the absence of the subject, of a stable, confident self" (33). According to Couturier and Durand, the unstable ego of the authorial voice in Barthelme always has trouble distinguishing between it and the outside world; it is because this ego is unstable that each story sounds as if it were spoken by a different voice. The only constant about this voice, in other words, is its inconstancy.

Like Flowers, Couturier and Durand observe that the image of the virtuoso speaker in Barthelme splits itself into so many reflections that it is "ghost-like"; that is, the identity of the speaker is more subject to intuition than to reason. Couturier and Durand do, however, make some attempt to define the features of this speaker. As we have noted, they are assisted in their analysis by a crucial assumption, an assumption Flowers et al are not prepared to make: Couturier and Durand adopt the psychoanalytic view that the apparent unrelatedness of certain textual elements has an analogy in unconscious material as it is viewed by the conscious mind. The ubiquitous sense of the inability to stabilize the environment in Barthelme is a consequence of "brain damage...some unidentified traumatic event, of which we may know only the symptoms, the signs; a void, a deprivation, a disaster, leaving behind a host of painful affects, like fear, guilt, anxiety and disconnection" (34). This "brain damage" cannot be escaped in Barthelme because its source is unconscious, and like the unconscious "there is no running away from it; it will manifest itself all the time" (34). The texts are thus highly conditioned by "the ambivalent retention/excretion of the speaker" (37), expressing unconscious concerns, but in a form calculated

to frustrate conscious analysis. Couturier and Durand are prepared, then, at least conditionally (using the model of the concealed, but inescapable unconscious) to suggest that the discursiveness of the individual texts is related to the discursiveness of a consistent voice behind all of the texts. In other words, the apparently arbitrary pourings of the speaker who speaks these stories are manifest effects which at once serve to express and conceal latent (unconscious) features of a consistent "self."

So far as they are willing to go Couturier and Durand analyze the character of this voice with great skill. They more carefully distinguish the character of what Molesworth referred to as "unsubjectivized ego" as a "deprived superego, stricken with the loss of the good object [the father]" (32). My quarrel with their study is not so much with any specific suggestions they offer with regard to the character of this voice--its deprived superego [what exactly they mean here is unclear], its ambivalent use of language, its fascination with divorce and estrangement, its preoccupation with the preterite life--but rather with the conclusion they draw as to the degree of "closure" possible in *Barthelme*. According to Couturier and Durand, "What *Barthelme* offers is a bright theatre of meaning; he does not impose closure and continuity where a condition of fracture and carnivalesque disparity obtains" (73). Couturier and Durand thus end their study by affirming the fundamental anonymity of the narrative voice in *Barthelme*, asserting that the very nature of the prose precludes our ever knowing a voice of any genuine, consistent, or developed character. According to these critics, the search for the concealed source of the artist's discharge and control of unconscious material in *Barthelme* is bound to be frustrated because *Barthelme* has managed to do what no one before him

has been credited with doing: he has made the unconscious a conscious part of his work, or so Couturier and Durand would have us believe:

Surrealistic fictions are crammed with phenomena which (it seems) can only be, in Freudian parlance, the product of primary processes; they do not seem to spring from an individual's conscious mind but from his unconscious--which makes them very disturbing, of course. The "learned reader" (who is usually a very sensible person) cannot accept what he fails to understand or master; like the analysand who is telling his dream to his analyst, the reader submits the images to a 'secondary processing' and blots out the elements that ruffled his imagination by rationalizing them. Traditionally, it had always been considered that such images could be dreamt, not made up. It seems that Barthelme has mastered this difficult art, that he can extract anything he likes from his Mad Hatter's top hat. (57-58)

What these critics are suggesting, then, is that Barthelme's text contains no "dreams" (or more to the point, his "dreams" are manufactured so skillfully that they can pass for legitimate figurations of unconscious material), and, therefore, his text cannot be psychoanalyzed except in a very general and highly qualified sense. Couturier and Durand suggest that Barthelme's "brain damaged" prose only approximates the form of dream; the randomness and the persistent absence of referentiality in his fiction comes from the model of the dream in which the manifest context displays the same features. According to Couturier and Durand, Barthelme, an accomplished post-Freudian anarchist, has managed the ultimate post-Freudian deconstruction: he fabricates dreams using the constitutive principles of dream distortion, but without appeal to actual primary processes. Barthelme has thus, in an act calculated at some level to frustrate the "moralizing" of psychoanalysis, created dreams that have no actual unconscious or latent content. In Barthelme, then, if we accept Couturier's and Durand's view, we have the dream but no dreamer, or to borrow a figure from Yeats, the dancer at last separated from the dance. The implications of this position are

profound; this position represents the most radical assertion we have considered to this point of the independence and discontinuity of Barthelme's authorial voice. Couturier and Durand even go so far as to suggest that the projective fallacy is all but irresistible in Barthelme because his "dreams," being essentially false, void of any traceable unconscious material, are more apt to be "filled in" by the reader: "The rational interpretation of the text becomes...problematical...it is bound to reflect the desires of interpreter as much as the intentions of the artist" (59). The position they ultimately take as to the knowability of the voice behind the fabulations is therefore absolutely consistent with the position advocated by the prose itself, that is, that meanings, or "morals," are useless, and that closure must be resisted at all costs:

The reader feels extremely embarrassed; he has no idea what these fictions are about because there are just too many subjects evoked...There is no satisfactory way of summarizing such stories, since a narrative line always depends on the "moral," a prime meaning--which is absent here. (64)

Citing a passage from Barthelme's story "Daumier," "the self cannot be escaped, but it can be, with ingenuity and hard work, distracted" (§, 181), Couturier and Durand insist that Barthelme's style resists the "supposed inevitability" in the reading of fiction that leads the reader to identify "a distinctive voice" (66). As far as they are concerned, Barthelme, like several other postmoderns, has managed to escape the self: "The text [Snow White] is erroneously taken by another critic as the discourse of the author; naturally, if this were the case, Barthelme would have failed to 'escape the self'" (67). What is curious here is that Couturier and Durand seem to ignore the fact that the crucial term in the quotation they cite from "Daumier" is "distracted," not "escaped." The fact is that the text of

the story "Daumier" proclaims that, despite its own considerable "ingenuity and hard work," the self "cannot be escaped." Couturier and Durand, in assuming that the "discourse of the author" is absent in the first place, have themselves been distracted. They conclude this issue, as they must, with the observation that Barthelme's fiction is "a collection of random sequences and fragments," a fiction that leaves readers "free to develop any interpretation they like" inasmuch as it is a fiction "which does not create any value and does not leave any residue" (69).

Couturier and Durand are well aware of the critical impasse such an attitude is apt to engender: "Yield to the indeterminacy of the text and the text remains an enigma; wave your troubles away and its uniqueness is lost. In both cases interpretation is defeated" (72). As the conclusion of their book indicates, their study ultimately serves to navigate between what they perceive as the twin threats of indeterminacy and closure: "Between the violence of interpretation and the suicidal temptation of mimeticism, the critical act follows an arduous course. It can't go on, it will go on..." (74). Without doubt this Beckettesque flourish at the end of their study, a study profoundly informed by structuralism, has a certain appeal. There are, of course, aspects of the text that cannot, and should not, be forced with procrustean zeal into some or another interpretative frame of reference; meanings and morals are always dangerous, inevitably reductive. Further, Couturier and Durand are quite right to be wary of the danger of the affective fallacy when dealing with Barthelme's especially oneiric prose. I am not convinced, however, either by Barthelme's prose with its tactical distractions of the reader, or by Couturier and Durand et al, that such is the case in Barthelme. In fact, I would suggest that this view

represents a gross misreading of Barthelme. What we have in Barthelme is not the absence of latent content but a sophistication beyond the usual degree of the defenses of secondary revision. Barthelme is well-versed in the phenomenology and the same (especially French) postmodern aesthetic principles that inform Courturier's and Durand's study. A reading of his work (the novel Snow White in particular) shows that he clearly knows his structuralism, and that he obviously knows his Freud. I suspect that, consciously or unconsciously, he has used this knowledge to "distract" readers like Courturier and Durand who perhaps come to the text prepared to enter postmodernism's bright theatre of equivalences in which no meaning or moral can obtain. Barthelme has exploited the critical predispositions of his age to help cover the trail of the ghost-like virtuoso whose voice can be heard behind his fictions, but whose source is difficult to trace.

In "The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough," Gerald Graff proposes a thesis which touches on this argument. According to Graff, the postmodern vision is not so much a breakthrough as an intensification of the single tradition of romantic and modernist art, an art "in which man is totally and irreparably alienated from a significant external reality, an objective order of values" (393). In postmodernism, this alienation is manifested by a "celebration of the undifferentiated" (393). In Barthelme, therefore, Graff sees the abundance of the trivial as an expression of what he calls the "law of equivalences" which states that "nothing is intrinsically more 'interesting' than anything else" (401). Graff's view that the law of equivalences rules in Barthelme is the same in principal as Courturier's and Durand's notion of a bright theatre of meaning in Barthelme. Graff's acceptance of the rule of this law of equivalences, however, represents a

gross misreading of the fiction which, far from practising what it everywhere seems to preach about the inherent valuelessness of all objects, consistently and meaningfully selects and arranges certain objects from the heap into significant patterns. Careful and comparative readings of Barthelme reveal that the law of equivalences has a rather more restricted ambit in Barthelme, at least, than Graff would have us believe.

There can be no argument that the postmodern, who lives in an increasingly relative universe, has had to face an increase in the sheer quantity of objects in his world. Adding to the confusion is the fact that objects generally are no longer connected to objective systems of meaning. However, it would be a mistake to assume therefore that the objects in the world the postmodern inhabits are devoid of meaning. What has happened, in brief, is that the source of the process by which objects are made meaningful has shifted from the objective to the subjective. If we watch the way a postmodernist like Barthelme picks among, and sorts out, the clutter of his world--the way he differentiates--we are likely to be rewarded with the observation of meaningful patterns, patterns that lead us back to a constant subjective source. Once these patterns have been established, the world of otherwise trivial objects as it appears in the prose is no longer an undifferentiated heap of extra-personal, equivalent objects, but rather a meaningful arrangement of otherwise meaningless detritus. The problem, of course, is, first, to find the patterns, and second, to assign them a meaning.

Published in 1985, Wayne B. Stengel's The Shape of the Art in the Short Stories of Donald Barthelme is the least satisfying of the three major

studies. Not only is the book marred in several places by inaccuracies, Stengel's analysis of Barthelme in no way accounts for much of what is present in any of the sixteen stories upon which he concentrates. The basic problem with his study lies in his view of the moral purpose of Barthelme's aesthetic. Stengel feels that Barthelme's character-artists are able to define the self as a "dynamic organism" (15) through their art. The typical Barthelme character has, according to Stengel, managed to turn "the essentially negative force of [his or her] irony into a creative, affirming value rather than allowing it to become another caustic voice adding to the debris it castigates" (12). Barthelme's dynamic character-artists, remaking themselves in situation, thus represent "Barthelme's moral solution to a meaningless world" (15).

The basic flaw in Stengel's interpretation of Barthelme's view of self, as it is represented in the stories, is that it is far too sanguine. I would argue virtually the opposite of Stengel when it comes to assessing Barthelme's view of the self. The self I read in Barthelme is neither dynamic nor open to change on a fundamental level. The self as Barthelme depicts it is, rather, a virtual constant, inured in the detritus and the patterns of a past it cannot escape. The process of making art is, as Stengel asserts, an attempt constantly to remake the self in the face of a meaningless reality, but Barthelme views that attempt as futile.

With regard to Stengel's view of the knowability of the shaping voice behind Barthelme's fiction, let it suffice at this juncture to point out that Stengel is in basic agreement with the critics we have cited to this point. Since Stengel feels that Barthelme's protagonists demonstrate the notion that an individual can and does continually remake his identity in an

attempt to affirm a new reality, he is not disposed to see any great similarities among Barthelme's protagonists except in their "moral" attitude toward the value of art. He is, however, inclined to view the various protagonists in Barthelme as the masks Barthelme-as-artist has created and discarded in his efforts to remake himself: "Often the reader feels that not only is the protagonist hiding his identity but that Barthelme is as well" (19).

Much of Barthelme's art, according to Stengel, is occupied by "his endeavors to play with his audience, to distance and alienate them from his identity and that of his characters" (23). Barthelme is thus "a parodist who mocks the idea of reading a text to determine authorial design. His success is in his ability to elude his reader's search for his character's strategies and motivations" (23). It is this view of Barthelme as an author who first invites, then utterly frustrates, the reader's search for some credible and useful explanation of his character's "strategies and motivations" that this thesis directly challenges.

Donald Barthelme is generally acknowledged to be a postmodern writer. One identifies Barthelme as postmodern, of course, with some hesitation given the range of forms and styles of postmodernism, to say nothing of the difficulty of defining what is meant by the term postmodern. Notwithstanding the complications attached to identifying Barthelme's work as postmodern, it is clear that his work has been profoundly influenced both in terms of its design and its interpretation (as we have seen to this point, especially in the case of *Couturier* and *Durand*) by distinctively postmodern aesthetics. Crucial to an appreciation of Barthelme's work,

therefore, is an appreciation of the postmodern context within which his work must be considered. It is not an easy subject about which to generalize, but I believe that some introduction to postmodernism as set of aesthetic principles is necessary in this study; if nothing else, the discussion of postmodernistic criticism in particular will serve to underline the distinctive approach this thesis has taken to Barthelme's prose.

In the following chapter, key features of postmodernism as they might apply to the interpretation of Barthelme's fiction will be addressed. What I basically intend to argue is that postmodernist arguments against the relevance of meaningfulness or the relevance of authorial design in the text have limited applicability to the interpretation of Barthelme's fiction.

CHAPTER TWO: THE POSTMODERN CONTEXT

Postmodern is a term applied to an approach to art, and to a style of art, as presented in various media. Obviously there is much that might be said about the development of postmodern art, but since my interest is to provide an aesthetic context within which to view Barthelme's contribution, I want to limit discussion here to those issues attached to the postmodern aesthetic I would deem relevant to the particular approach this study will take to Barthelme's work. In this chapter, therefore, I will discuss postmodernism in terms of the following: as it compares to modernism; its metafictional aspect (including the problem of language, and the problem of meaning); and finally, the place of the author in the postmodern text.

It must be acknowledged at the outset of this discussion that the term postmodern itself is somewhat controversial. Consensus among critics as to the meaning of the term, or even that such a thing as postmodern literature exists in the first place, simply does not exist. One of the problems with the term, it is argued, is that it is simply too imprecise to be of any real value. As one critic says, "The meanings of 'postmodernism' are as varied as the phenomena its users attempt to describe" (Antin 143). John Gardner rejects the term because it "sets up only a vague antithesis to 'modernism', meaning only, in effect, more like Italo Calvino than like Saul Bellow" (Gardner 81). Ihab Hassan, one of the less partisan critics of postmodern fiction, agrees that term itself is "not only awkward and uncouth; it evokes what it wishes to replace or suppress, modernism itself" (1980, 117). However, concludes Hassan, "what better name have we to give to this curious age?" (1980, 119). Well, as it happens there are several names currently competing to describe "this curious age" of fiction: surfiction,

anti-realist, anti-fiction, metafiction, conceptual fiction, late-modernism, avante-garde texts, the new fiction, fabulation, and contemporary fiction are among them.¹ As David Antin suggests above, the terms applied to the fiction do tend to vary with what a given critic views as the most distinctive or determining feature of the prose.

It might be argued that postmodernism is only an extension in practise of essentially modernistic aesthetic principles. I would argue, however, that it is possible to distinguish postmodern fiction as a distinctive style or an approach to the act of making fiction. Further, so far as Gardner's contention that the term postmodern only serves to vaguely distinguish Bellow from Calvino is concerned, I would argue that there are several determining criteria available that distinguish the work of the postmodern writer from the work of his contemporaries, work which might easily embody certain elements of the postmodern point of view.

It might be appropriate to begin our enquiry into postmodernism by asking what we mean when we speak of modernism. Is there any useful way of summarizing the work of the so-called modernist period? Irving Howe in The Decline of the New, a study of modernism, says that "it is quite impossible to sum up the central assumptions of modernism, as one can for Romanticism, by listing a sequence of beliefs and visions. Literary modernism is a battle of internal conflicts more than a coherent set of theories or values." (21). Howe calls modernism "a drama of doubt" and says that it is especially difficult to say anything final about modernism because for the "great figures of modernism...everything depends on keeping a firm grip on the idea of the problematic." Nevertheless, it is possible to say something about what was distinctive about the modernist temperament because, as Howe

himself puts it, even the iconoclastic modernist finds that he or she "cannot resist completely the invading powers of ideology and system" (21).

Baruch Hochman in The Test of Character (1983), a study which traces the development of the view of character in modernist literature, identifies Woolf, Lawrence and Joyce as the three most important modernist writers, the writers who gave best and most innovative expression to modernist aesthetic principles. Hochman sees one of the first of these principles of modernism as the rejection of "the seemingly solid social and moral surfaces of the self" (154). For the modernist, the stable surfaces of the external world were not stable at all but rather these surfaces disguised a disturbing and universal flux. One generalization one can make about modernism, therefore, is that the modernist writers were far more interested in describing the world as it is experienced by an individual consciousness than they were in descriptions of a stable and fixed field of objectively available phenomena. Instead of locating the consciousness of their characters in the world, Joyce and Woolf especially were interested in recording the world as it impinged upon the consciousness of their characters. As Robert Alter puts it, the modernist turns his "attention inward to the movements of the protagonist's mind," a shift of emphasis which serves to fragment "the external world into a staccato series of overlapping interior impressions" (141).

What modern writers were doing was challenging the basic authority of objective, extra-personal value in favour of an exploration of existential or subjective authority. As modernism matures that development is marked by "increasingly militant insistence upon the primacy of human consciousness over an inessential external world" (Harris 173). The work that emerges from modernism focuses on the play of individual sensibility, the mobility

of affective responses, and especially the flow or stream of consciousness. The shift of emphasis from objective to subjective values resulted in the subversion of the old monolithic coherence of traditional realism. In the attempt to render inner states into prose, the modernist writer sought to reproduce in prose his acceptance of things as they are (however strained that acceptance sometimes seems to be). He sought to capture the complexity and contradiction of experience as he or she knew it, avoiding as much as possible "the need to impose upon it a falsifying order of causes and consequences, an order of causality on which the traditional novel insists" (Rosenheim 21).

Modernism was made possible by new views of human consciousness. These new views, which completely redefined the private man's relationship to his society, to the world, and to himself, encouraged writers to organize language the way thought itself is organized. Under the influence of the views of Freud in particular, modernist writers sought to incorporate into their work the very processes which accounted for consciousness itself, "the involuntary associations and relationships, memories and anticipations, observations and imaginings which defy conventional dimensions of time and space and unconcernedly cross and recross the gap between fact and fantasy" (Rosenheim 134). The result is prose and poetry which may defy logic and reasonableness but which remains, nevertheless, intelligible on what might be called an emotional level; in modernist prose what appears strange in terms of conventional modes of expression achieves an unprecedented sense of reality, an unprecedented sense of how experience is actually experienced by consciousness.

Ihab Hassan in Paracriticisms says that postmodern art is fundamentally

"anti-art" that it is designed, not unlike the Dadaist art of modernism, to challenge certain assumptions we may cherish about the significance of works of art (1975, 21). A consideration of the anti-art bias is as good a place as any to begin this examination of the postmodern aesthetic.

Anais Nin in her modernist vision of the future novel, speaks of "a new swift novel" that would build upon the innovations of modernism. It would, she says, be "born of Freud, Einstein, jazz and science" (Nin 332).² Postmodern prose is the new swift style which has grown out of, and to a degree supplanted, modernism's preoccupation with the vicissitudes and processes of consciousness. Postmodernism, for reasons we'll explore below, rejects the modernist idea that consciousness mimetically rendered in restructured prose would provide a lasting or viable subject for prose. Indeed, it is this rejection of the modernist idea that "consciousness (the certainty that 'I' exist for 'myself') defines existence" (Waugh 135) that probably best serves to distinguish the modernist from the postmodernist aesthetic.

As a direct consequence of postmodernism's lack of faith in a distinction between the world and the discretely conscious "Self," irony has become an essential feature of the postmodern aesthetic. Irony is integral to the postmodern because, as Larry McCaffery puts it, "Fiction cannot hope to mirror reality or tell the truth because 'reality' and 'truth' are themselves fictional abstractions whose validity has become increasingly suspect as this century has proceeded" (1982, 5). The surfictionalist Raymond Federman puts it this way: "If the experiences of any man (in this case the writer) exist only as fiction...then these experiences are inventions. And if most fiction is (more or less) based on the experiences of the one who writes...there cannot be any truth nor any reality exterior

to fiction" (1973, 427).

Modernism, however, still was prepared to place some faith in the power of art to mirror reality on some level. There is, therefore, a qualitative difference between modern and postmodern irony. Alan Wilde in an article on Bartheleme's irony offers this distinction between the two forms of irony:

...modern literature confesses a longing to overcome the ironic vision with the countervision of an 'anironic,' resolving unity. And it is precisely that concept of a heterocosm, the image of a perfectly ordered world, which in its autonomous perfection becomes both moral and referential, that postmodern literature rejects (or attempts to reject), even as it carries on and redefines the problem of the artist's relation to the reality that surrounds him.(47)

The rejection of what Wilde terms the "anironic" vision of a resolving unity is what distinguishes postmodern from modern irony. For the purposes of this study, the crucial phrase in this passage from Wilde is "attempts to reject." As we shall see, and as this thesis will ultimately argue, the question of whether or not Bartheleme's writing does or does not posit the existence of a heterocosm is by no means closed. Let it suffice for now to point out that postmodern works of art, whether or not they implicitly refer to a reality outside the text or not, are typically designed, as Rimmon-Kenan says of the modern text in general, "to prevent the formulation of any 'finalized hypothesis' or overall meaning by making various items undermine each other or cancel each other out, without forming neatly opposed possibilities" (121).

One example Ihab Hassan offers to demonstrate that in the postmodernist text the "art cancels itself" is the last sentence of Beckett's *How It Is* which tells the reader that the book he has just completed has been about "how it wasn't" (21). Beckett's attack on the view that art is some sort of mirror of reality, an attack couched within the very work itself, is an extremely common device in postmodern fiction. It is aimed at one of the

central assumptions attached to art itself, at least art as it is practised and received in the West, for postmodern art is extremely concerned to show that a work of art is not a frame set up around a fixed set of significances; it tries to demonstrate that even in the act of making art, art is fundamentally incapable of establishing meaningful patterns, especially if the source of those meanings is certain patterns and meanings presumed to exist in the world outside the frame of the work of art.

Jacques Erhmann's statement that literature "as a dumping ground for fine feelings, a museum of belles lettres has had its day" is typical of utterances found in the many manifestoes attempting to define the postmodern aesthetic (248). In the universe the postmodern sees himself as inhabiting there simply is no room for such things as fine feelings, basically because fine feelings require some sort of stable or absolute context in which to signify. In the relative and conditional world of the postmodern, no such patterns or systems can be acknowledged because they would threaten the evolving subjectivity of the individual.³ The postmodern sensibility views any system as a potential threat to what an existentialist would term an "authentic" existence. It is not surprising, therefore, that postmodernist art tends to insist on its status as an artificial object. It proclaims itself an experience among experiences with no special claim as a standard or vessel of the real since consciousness is, by its very nature, discontinuous. According to Scholes, Proust is only one of several modernist precursors of postmodern skepticism about art per se; Proust's particular contribution may have been the way he exploded "the empirical notion of characterization so essential to realistic and naturalistic fiction, by demonstrating the artificiality of the real and the reality of the artificial" (1967, 20). For a sensibility caught in the field of flux

Beckett calls "the haze of conception-preconception," a work of art inevitably is rendered as irrelevant as a discarded mask or skin (1970, 11). Postmodernism is predicated on this attitude toward the art it creates: "Art consists of the forms we leave behind in our effort to keep up with ourselves, define ourselves, create ourselves as we move along" (Sukenick 1981, 35-36).⁴

Many critics who take the auto-referentiality of postmodern fiction to be its most distinctive feature, refer to the fiction as "metafiction." While I would question that the term is the most appropriate descriptive term for the fiction, I would not question the importance of appreciating the source and effects of postmodernism's meta-fictionality.

Metafiction, a term coined by William Gass and popularized by Robert Scholes, refers to any "writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose certain questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh 2). Metafictional prose is therefore highly self-conscious in that it aims to explore "a theory of fiction through the practice of writing fiction" (Waugh 2). As Jack Hicks puts it in his book In The Singer's Temple, which examines the work of certain postmodern writers, the postmodern metafictionalist sensibility "does not accept the world 'out there' as a referent for its own existence but works, instead, from second-order literary and intellectual materials" (21). The postmodern writer, thrown by various and complex forces back upon the resources of his own private sensibility, turns, albeit somewhat abashedly, to the corrupt and corrupting vehicle of fiction in an effort to supply himself with a more relevant sense of that subjectivity.

Metafiction is necessarily concerned with language, particularly language's inability to describe what is real, its inability to bridge the gap between word and experience. As an approach to the act of making fiction, metafiction justifies itself with the assertion that, while it may be impossible to use language to represent the world, it, nevertheless, remains possible to "represent" the discourses of the world.

The self-reflexiveness of metafiction could be said to have both a positive and a negative aspect; that is, even as metafiction works to deconstruct the reality quotient of the machine of fiction by exposing the operation of its gears, it nevertheless works to construct an alternative reality, a means of escaping, if only momentarily, the consequences of using language. What metafiction attempts to do through the presentation of various exercises of subjectivity is to try to provide "a useful model for understanding the construction of subjectivity in the world outside the novels" (Waugh 3). Metafiction may thus be viewed as not merely an attempt to decry the failures of language and various forms of discourse: it has a decidedly positive and constructive aim because metafiction is, in fact, "a series of searches for a way out of a cultural labyrinth" (Hicks 21).

The basis of all metafiction is suspicion about the worth of discourse. This is not to say, of course, that the metafictional impulse is uniquely modern. Cervantes, whose novel Don Quixote is generally regarded as the first novel, directed his book in part against what took to be a corrupt romantic view. Indeed, Don Quixote even directs metafictional irony at the book, Don Quixote, even as it directs an attack against that romantic view. The early history of the novel (as represented by the work of Cervantes, Fielding, Defoe, Sterne) is, in fact, marked by this tendency to construct a novel discourse in reaction to a previous and presumably irrelevant mode of

discourse. With this dynamic in mind, it is possible to view the true novel (as its name suggests) as something entirely new, manufactured out of, and to a degree defining itself in contradistinction to, old materials. Thus it might be observed that while there are a great many books that adopt the form of novels, the proportion of genuine novels is necessarily small.

The metafictional bias of the novel, always lifting out of the heap of old discourses on the wings of a novel approach, has reached such a pitch in our century that silence, the ultimate denial of anterior discourse, has been considered as a viable form of expression. This crisis has come about, not merely because fiction as a legitimate or authentic mode of expression has come into question, but because language itself has been identified as the original source of man's sense of dislocation from a meaningful context.

The fundamental problem with language is language's enormous capacity to make sense out of the world. This capacity to make sense, to suggest the presence and the operation of a coherent system, might seem at first blush an agreeable quality. The problem lies in language's corollary tendency to limit and, in fact, transform the world in the very act of describing it. Instead of serving to connect the self to the world, language, in a shifting, discontinuous, relative universe, is seen to serve to distance that self from the world, and ultimately, the self from the self. Language is designed to "engage the systemizing mind" (Johnson 83). However, once the principles which hold any system together are undermined or are defeated altogether, language is turned into a potentially inimical force which serves to keep the discontinuous self from relevance in the world. What the postmodern writer wants in his prose, therefore, is language that is "not repressive but expressive" (Hicks 57). Language becomes expressive, ironically, when it abandons its claim to transparency (mimesis) and draws

attention to its status as autonomous object, its opacity, in other words.

The inevitable consequence of modernism's determination to challenge or subvert the transparency of language was postmodernism's various (and necessarily repeated) attempts to create language even in the act of destroying it: "[late] Modernism assumes that language must necessarily die, that it can no longer be the ground of unity between speakers, but only, through its death, the ground for a possible unity of self, for a radical and singular sense of self" (Kuspit 238). Postmodernism thus takes it as a given that language must represent only itself; that is, draw attention to itself as a discourse among various other discourses of the world. In Fiction and The Figures of Life, William Gass declares that novels are made up of words and only words. According to Gass, moving through and beyond the language of fiction into the "soundless dreams" afforded by viable mimesis involves a certain risk for the reader--such dreams lead him "out of sight" and distract him from what is really going on in fiction. For readers accustomed to identifying with the situations and characters rendered in fiction, the declaration that fiction is, as it were, not wearing any of the clothes we remember having seen on it is a shock: "That novels should be made out of words, and merely words, is shocking really...It's as though you had discovered that your wife were made of rubber: the bliss of all these years, the fears...sponge" (1970, 39). Postmodern fiction thus purports, as Gerald Graff puts it, to be "a form of energy not accountable to the orderings anyone makes of it and specifically not accountable to the liberal human values most readers want to find there" (403). In Barthelme's short story, "Me and Miss Mandible"(CBDC), the protagonist's "great discovery" is semiotical: "...signs are signs,

and...some of them are lies" (109). This is the great discovery of post-Saussurian postmodernism in general. As a result, postmodern fiction is typically made up "of signs and relationships which are freely constructed and have no necessary connection to the world" (McCaffery 1982, 23).

We have noted that the postmodern writer accepts ipso facto that language improperly attended to is most apt to serve, as Gerz puts it, as a vehicle of "dispossession and alienation" (Gerz 280). Dispossession and alienation occur because language, which intends to connect the self to the real, actually serves to obliterate the real in the very act of description: "The given can thus be known only through the non-given (the symbol), without which we would have no access to empirical reality" (Waugh 58). Once the given (the thing itself) is replaced by the non-given (the representation of the thing itself), one is turned from the potentially open and rich field of the given and into the closed and self-validating, self-justifying world on the non-given. As Gerz puts it, "The individual becomes, instead of a holder of language...[he becomes] language's object and as such a speechless part of the contradictory order established by it" (281).

Absolute escape from the tyranny of what Waugh calls the "non-given" of language, whatever the form of the discourse, is simply not possible in that the only true escape from language lies in the absolute rejection of its use, or silence. And silence, as Susan Sontag points out, can't ever be a viable option for the artist (1969, 12-14). For the creative artist, then, continued use of language in the creation of discourse is thus predicated on an approach to its use that incorporates a distinctive sense of the danger language inherently poses to a radical and singular sense of self. The postmodernist continues to use language in the full knowledge that words are

merely signs and that their claim on meaningfulness is limited: "The written word is an object in its own right; it is different from meaning which it defers and which cannot be grasped except by other signs that we place in the 'empty' space of the signified" (Culler 258).

The search for an expressive as opposed to a repressive form in which to apply language is, in a very real sense, what the history of literature is all about. (As Italo Calvino points out, "The whole struggle of literature is in a fact an effort to escape from the confines of language" [77].) Postmodern "expressiveness" manifests itself in metafictional attacks on language's inherent repressiveness (language as vehicle for the transmission of systemized thought), an attack which is sounded, nevertheless, amid a celebration of what Howe calls language's "most primitive quality", that is, its "incantatory, magical and automatisitic power to arouse emotions and engage the consciousness" (Howe 20). The result is a kind of paradoxical, intensely ironic utterance in which the speaker constantly works to discredit the very discourse he or she is using.

Postmodern writers argue that only by insisting on the limited significance of language does the possibility exist to use language to say something of genuine significance. It should be noted that Barthelme is an acknowledged leader among writers who keep finding ways to put language to new uses. R.E. Johnson compares Barthelme's use of language to an act of exorcism whereby the very nullity of significance in words is turned to advantage: "His language is self-subversive, but it drives out its devil--or god--that seven more might enter, calling for seven times the expulsion effort. Far from being an exercise in frustration, this offers the possibility for more life: word-making times seven. Nothing may precede language; but language, as interpretation of nothing, is not only

something, but the basis for another something ad infinitum" (87).

This simultaneous renunciation-validation of language which Barthelme and others exploit to such unusual advantage is central to postmodern fiction. Robbe-Grillet's "whole art," for instance, as Roland Barthes says, "lies in destroying meaning in the very act of revealing it" (Morrisette 12) (or as John Cage has put it, "I have nothing to say and I'm saying it" [quoted by Michelson, 56]). Robbe-Grillet's approach to fiction is epitomized by his efforts to act as the pure chosiste or, the neutral describer of things. The so-called chosisme are intended to have no significance beyond their status as objects (9). They are not meant to refer the reader to a thing in the world outside the text, nor are they meant to refer to the author: they have no depth or significance beyond what is immediately available in the text. In traditional narrative or conventional realism, depths are by right deemed superior to what lies on the surface. In the prose of Robbe-Grillet, however, the surface is everything because, according to Robbe-Grillet, the surface is all that a writer can describe.⁵ This principle of description which underlies the so-called "new realism" thus reverses the traditional aims of fiction in its absolute rejection of the application of "the 'crust' of interpretation and hidden meanings" to the prose: "Any explanation or interpretation can only be de trop or gratuitous, when confronted by the thereness or reality of situations, gestures, and things" (Morrisette 27). The objects created in Robbe-Grillet's fiction are things made out of nothing; that is, they are intended to stand alone as their own significance and make no appeals for significance to sources outside the text (signifié). The position taken by most postmodernists on the problem of language may be thus be summarized as follows: words are objects and contain no transcendent meaning or depth

beyond that which you, the reader, invest them with in the act of re-creating them in the act of reading.

At the risk of oversimplification, let me suggest that what the postmodernist spirit rejects in all so-called art is basically the celebration of the artifact as vessel of special and permanent significance, a celebration which happens, in the case of literature, at the expense of the potentially rich and liberating experience of reading. Postmodernism insists that the significances embodied in the artifact are second-hand and predetermined. Consequently, acceptance of those significances on the part of the reader is therefore alienating; the act of interpretation (the text refers to this in the world and that meaning is essentially the same for you and me) only serves to distance one from one's experience of oneself in the highly relative world one inhabits.

Many would argue that the fiction that results from this aesthetic which conceives of form as a means to suppress content is either unrealizable or, quite literally, unreadable. Donald Kuspit points out in his study of intentionality in postmodern art, The Critic as Artist, that,

purification of the medium amounts to an infinite regress of artistic form, until form becomes a tautology of the artistic object. As long as the tendency toward a tautologous self-definition of art is in force, the artistic object can be said to exist in a novel mode of natural givenness. The naivete with which it simply taken to be its own form amounts to a taboo about thinking about it, to reflecting on its ground rather than assuming, as Frank Stella puts it, that 'what you see is what you see.' Thinking about it is to move from perceiving it to conceiving it.(4)

The problem nascent in this approach to form is where to draw the line between meaningful disarray and pure nonsense. In the case of the postmodernist literary artifact, the ideal would be constituted out of language akin to the language Poulet imagined could be created, a "living,

gliding language that simultaneously creates and destroys expectations...wrenching language free from habitual meaning without quite casting it into nonsense" (Hicks 23). But is such language possible? Those who question whether such art and such language is possible point out that the element which keeps art from slipping over the precipice into nonsense and noise is the selective (and usually, highly informed) perspective of the artist.# They would argue that the artist must impose a pattern and an order on the elements he fits inside the frame otherwise there would be no point in having a frame in the first place. If the work isn't nonsense one has to assume that a pattern has been placed in the work, even if the pattern is calculated to celebrate accident and the absence of meaning (the fact that so many postmodern writers are also tailors of manifestoes giving reasons for the absence of reason in their work is suggestive).

In an interview with Joe David Bellamy, William Gass said that the real danger with looking for meanings in literature is that "it provides a sense of verification (a feeling) without the act of verification (a process)" (33). Under the influence of this false feeling of meaningfulness, readers tend to set up what Susan Sontag calls in her essay "Against Interpretation" "a shadow world of meanings" (1982, 99). According to this view, interpretation is tantamount to an act of ravishment by the imperial forces of allegory, an act that violates and subverts the integrity of the text. We have seen in our consideration of the elements of anti-art and metafiction, and now the rejection of depth or meaning in discourse, that the meaning of postmodern fiction is couched in peculiar fashion in the surfaces of the fiction itself (hence Ricardou's famous assertion that fiction is "no longer a mirror taken out for a walk; it is the work of internal mirrors ubiquitous and at work within the fiction itself" [130]).

The problem of meaning (or decidability or determinacy) is therefore the central issue in the criticism of postmodern fiction. If we are to accept the pronouncements of the writers themselves, the act of interpretation is always an imposition, a supremely gratuitous and even violent incursion into the field of indeterminacy the text aims to achieve. According to this view, interpretation merely serves to manufacture a pseudo-significance, an artificial sense, or an allegory, which only serves to re-name and thus effectively obliterate the text. And yet the fact remains that unless the text is interpreted on some level, however cautious^{ly}, nothing is accomplished, the text remains, quite literally, irrelevant. As Couturier and Durand put it, summing up the challenge postmodern fiction poses to interpretation, "Yield to indeterminacy and the text remains an enigma; wave your troubles away and its uniqueness is lost. In both cases, interpretation is defeated" (72).

I am prepared to argue that this defeat of the validity of interpretation is altogether pyrrhic, grounded on a number of dubious assumptions. At the outset we must recognize that the postmodern call for a discourse that will serve as a non-interfering vision of the world in all of its pre-meaningfulness is predicated on a contradiction in terms. The fact remains that the only way a text can exist is to come between a reader and his view of the world, to interpose itself as a series of structured and structuring experiences. While it is perfectly possible to mitigate against determinacy in a text (a matter of degree), beyond a certain point, a de-structured text of, let's say, equivalent signs, ceases to be a text at all. It is inescapable that, without some sense of structure or pattern available in the text to the reader, the text will cease to function because it cannot engage the reader. I would therefore argue that the creation of

what Barthes calls an opaque text is doomed to fail on two points, the first, theoretical, and the second, practical. The theoretical failure lies in a fundamental contradiction the idea of non-meaning which is itself (as the wealth of commentary by postmodern writers on the subject of meaninglessness attests) an extremely meaningful idea. Second, as this thesis hopes to prove in the analysis of Barthelme's prose, it is inevitable that an author through his use of metaphor will infuse the text with certain subjective, habitual patterns of association that will ultimately serve, as it were, to lift the author's voice out of Erhmann's babel of equivalent meanings. What we might call the character of that pattern is crucial in that it serves to structure the experience of our reading.

Postmodern aesthetics suggest that the question of where the author figures in the postmodernist text is inappropriate and even irrelevant. The text, it is argued, merely is: it represents itself. According to structuralists and those adhering to their approach, the supreme text is the text that cannot be recovered. Meaning is no longer the responsibility of the author; meaning, if such a thing can be said to exist in texts at all, has become the responsibility of the reader who, in a dynamic gestalt with the text, makes his own meaning. The text of this new fiction does not intend to posit a rigid and quantifiable meaning but serves to lead the reader back to himself as co-creator, and finally sole creator, of his own texts. Jean-Francoise Bory says that, "with new books, the reader will begin to read his own text, his environmental text around him, into which he is permanently plunged. And so the endless reading begins...from now onwards, [it] is a matter of reading the world-text" (288). Alvin Greenberg calls the new novels the "novels of disintegration" because they depend on

fragments "distorted and out of focus because seen without perspective (or without context) [my italics]" (14); these "new books" offer the reader pieces of a puzzle, a puzzle he has the opportunity to arrange into some meaningful (if only temporarily meaningful) pattern.⁶

Authors of postmodern fiction are, like their critics (and not surprisingly, some of the most important postmodern writers are, or have been, literary critics themselves, e.g. Barthes, Barth, Federman, Sukenick, Coover, Ricardou, Robbe-Grillet, Derrida, Sollers, Sontag, Gass, Kostelanetz, Bory, Calvino), are notoriously chary of any talk of meaning or, a related concept, intentionality, in their work. Almost without exception they are inclined to deflect responsibility with regard to the matter of significances away from themselves and toward the reader.

Robbe-Grillet, discussing Dans le labyrinthe, says that the work can indeed be "recuperated" by the reader looking for meaningful patterns in the work, but he adds that, "If I thought that it could not, I would not continue to write. I would have attained my goal" (Culler 259). Corollary to the notion of reader responsibility for meaning is the notion that the idea of "author" is basically irrelevant. Indeed, so integral is this new view of the author to postmodernism that Barthelme's much-quoted line from Snow White--"Try to be man about whom nothing is known" (SW, 56), an ironic inversion of Henry James' advice to writers to know as much as possible, could serve admirably as a motto for postmodernist writers.

From the point of view of the postmodern writer, fiction at best should be viewed as a machine, Furthermore, the only ghost admitted into the machine originates in the mind of the reader; the author behind the fiction does not, for all intents and purposes, exist. Indeed, one of the immediate corollary consequences of the increasing opacity of language was a new

status accorded the author of fictions: just as literature could no longer claim to represent the world, it could no longer claim to represent its author.

In traditional realist fiction the reader was always allowed to entertain the sense that behind the text stood a controlling intelligence and personality, a genuine character whose presence could be felt and, to a degree, known through the reading of what that author had written. Robert Alter points out that nineteenth-century realism can be viewed as an attempt on the part of its authors to control the world by capturing it and drawing it inside the private sphere of their own imaginings (97ff). A reader reading Dickens or Balzac, for instance, can be excused, therefore, if he cannot escape the feeling that he is in touch with the character of the individual author on a very profound if abstract level. For the postmodern, however, the question as to whether this contact is actual or open to verification is beside the point: once readers are encouraged or even allowed to assume that the text belongs to an author, the potentially liberating act of reading has been critically undermined. Unlike nineteenth-century realism, postmodern fiction is not designed to be an exercise in authorial domination over a given environment. It is, rather, the self of the reader and not the self of the author that postmodern literature is designed to reflect and explore. As Maurois says in his introduction to his study of Borges' fiction, "Any great and lasting book must be ambiguous...it is a mirror that makes the reader's features known" (x). Thomas Docherty is exactly right, then, when he observes that, "what is at stake in post-Modern writing is not the triumph of an established Self over an Other environment, but rather the very position of such a Self at all for reader and writer" (xv-xvi).

In the new fiction, the new realism, the writer, formerly assumed to be a source of meaning, the architect of patterns of significance in traditional fiction, works to efface himself as much as possible from the text. The ideal book, says Ronald Sukenick, has no real author; it would, in fact, have "no plot, no character, no chronological sequence, no verisimilitude, no imitation, no symbolism, no subject matter, no 'meaning'" (43). In the postmodern work of fiction the responsibility of the writer has become to keep a priori meaning out of the text. Richard Pearce suggests that the new fiction not only demands that the reader enter the frame of the novel and assume a greater responsibility for meaning, it questions that arrival at meaning should be an end at all for author, text, or reader: in the new fiction the "narrator is no longer situated between the subject and the reader, he no longer stands on a fixed vantage, and no longer encloses the subject within the frame of his visual imagination...what the reader sees is no longer a clear picture contained within the narrator's purview, but an erratic image where the narrator, subject, and the medium are brought into the same imaginative field of interaction, an image that is shattered, confused, self-contradictory, but with an independent and individual life of its own" (48). Jacques Ehrmann imagines a similar field of interaction as the object of the new fiction: the new fiction, Ehrmann says, leads to "an unworn, unbroken mass, a wave of proliferating signs; a sort of unassembled film which one might designate as the discourse of the world; an ensemble, heap, accumulation of all the discourses, of all the signs, of all the traces that no frontier, whether temporal or spatial, historical or cultural, could hinder by its dotted line...In this babel all meanings are equivalent" (248-49).

In his book, The Practice of Fiction in America (1980), Jerome Klinkowitz supports the paradoxical claim made by many postmodern writers and critics that postmodern fiction serves to represent in some way the mind of the author even as it manages to render that representation irrelevant as far as any consideration of the "self" of the author is concerned. On the one hand, Klinkowitz can make this claim: "For a writer the whole point of literary technique is fullest possible release of the energy of his personality into his work, and when one comes into contact with that force, the whole superstructure that one had assumed to be the point of literature begins to burn away" (116). However, using Barthelme's Great Days to illustrate, he also says the following: "The writer's presence is thus completely effaced, and what is left is only the words themselves" (118). In the postmodern text, therefore, the "energy" of a writer's "personality" is released in such a way that the "writer's presence is completely effaced." A few pages later, he develops what he means by "only the words themselves" which remain in the postmodern text (he's using Clarence Major's Emergency Exit to illustrate his point): "Hence language which all too dangerously can refer outward here leads inward, toward the author's own created structure. For all practical purposes, language has been deconceptualized. All references are contained within the novel's own world" (122).

From what we have already said about postmodernism--its approach to form and language and the whole question of where the source of meaning should lie--it's clear that Klinkowitz supports the avowed aims of postmodernism with regard to the questions of referentiality and intentionality. The import these and related claims of nonreferentially have for anyone who accepts the existence of the unconscious, at least as it

is understood by Freudian psychology, is immediate. One need only turn to Simon Lesser's description of how fiction is read to see the challenge to the psychoanalytic point of view posited by postmodern fiction's claim of nonreferentiality: "In response to fiction we fall into a kind of long-sustained trance, a semihypnotic state in which the conscious mind focuses on the more manifest meaning of developments while the unconscious penetrates to the implication to which the intellect chooses to be blind" (109). It's easy to see that Lesser is dealing here in precisely those terms and concepts that would seem to Klinkowitz and others to be most incompatible with postmodernist aesthetics; terms like "trance" and "semihypnotic" and a concept like hidden meaning have no relevance to postmodernism as we have described it this point.

In the following discussion I intend to outline in a general but essential fashion the applications psychoanalytic literary criticism can have in the analysis of postmodern literature. Perhaps it might be appropriate to begin this discussion where psychoanalytic assumptions about the nature of fiction would be most immediately felt in any criticism of the work, the nature and the meaning of character in postmodern literature.

Notions of character in fiction have changed considerably over the last twenty years. In an excellent recent analysis of character, Thomas Docherty, in Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a Theory of Characterization in Fiction (1983), outlines in a most useful and comprehensive manner the nature of character as it obtains in postmodern literature. The source of the shift in perspective with regard to character in postmodernism centres on the whole question of the efficacy of what Docherty calls "mimetic adequacy" (x). What Docherty means here by mimetic

adequacy is the theory of character (which has held sway since the time of Aristotle) which measures character on the basis of that character's resemblance to persons in the real world: "A written character, then, is mimetically adequate or 'lifelike' not when it totally replaces a real person, but rather when it works, like a reflection, to imply the presence of a real person somewhere else; in other words, it is mimetically adequate to reality if it points out from itself to an implied reality, if it refers us to the real world, in short. And finally, integral to such a theory is the notion that fiction constitutes no part of reality, but somehow exists alongside reality, analogous to it, but not part of it" (xi). According to Docherty, the problem with this approach to character in fiction, an approach exercised most recently by critics like W.J. Harvey and Patrick Swinden, is that mimetic adequacy, like the notion of reality on which it depends, amounts to little more than "a vague critical concept" if examined carefully (x). The problem postmodern aesthetics has with a concept like mimetic adequacy, as we have seen, is that makes fiction a mirror of something else, implicitly denying the unique reality embodied in the text on the assumption that there is a fixed and meaningful reality to be described in the first place. What follows naturally from this mimetic approach is the notion that characters are to be judged for worth on the basis of their formal unity, a unity expressive of certain fixed ideas or meanings that lie somewhere outside and anterior to the fiction.

Docherty makes the crucial point that the reader reading character in fiction mimetically tends to equate character with meaning which has as its source, the voice of the author:

Further, since the 'meaningful' character is the focus of critical attention in this mode of reading, we are guaranteed a fixed or essential meaning of the fiction as whole, which we comprehend through the characters and their relation to their fictive

environments. But whose meaning or truth is this? According to the mimetic approach to character, we make the leap from an understanding of the meanings of singular characters to the truth or message being expressed by their author; the characters are simply the porte-parole of an author, and it is his or her meaning which we readers seek. With this leap, the activity of the reader is actually erased, in a sense; for once the novel is read and the authorial message understood, the actual process of reading the novel, of discovering (or actually constructing) that meaning can be legitimately forgotten. The end result, authorial meaning, is all. In other words, the reader's activity of creating character and meaning is being elided, and with that elision goes any notion of real interaction. (xii-xiii)

What serves to replace this process of "elision" in postmodern fiction is the breaking apart or fragmentation of character. The fragments that occupy the place formerly held by unified character are intended to represent what Docherty calls the "instants of subjectivity" of a "more mobile subject" (xiv). The result of this refusal on the part of the postmodern writer to work the fragments into a forced and artificial wholeness is that the reader is offered the opportunity to be involved in a more dynamic gestalt with the text: "Post-Modern characterization...grants the reader the possibility of escape from a fixed selfhood into an existence as a series of subjectives, always in first-person (and hence direct) contact with the environment" (xvi).

We have already noted that postmodernism has in effect placed itself between traditional mimetic forms and formlessness. The mimetically determined character of traditional forms represents, as Docherty notes above, the implied voice of the author--the more developed (unified) the mimesis, the stronger our sense of the fixity of the author's voice, a voice we equate with meaning. The problem with the presentation of subjective fragments, a procedure which aims to subvert the arbitrary and seeming unity of mimetic character, is that the fragments cannot simply be thrown together arbitrarily in the text. The postmodern text, then, is faced with the task

of circumventing any suggestion that a god-like author is behind the text, even as it works to forestall any suggestion that the fragments before us in the text are undifferentiated clutter. Docherty suggests that the way to reconcile these contrary claims lies in the concept of a kind of implied author: "In any case, one way out of the dualism and hypocrisy which forms the central shaping fiction of character in the novel seems to be found in this location of the character in the 'voice' of the text, or the transient subjectivity of its speaker" (Docherty 35-36). The fragments of subjectivity we see in the text can therefore be said to express a pattern, a pattern which leads us back to an implied author. This implied author, however, is quite unlike traditional mimetic prose's implied author: this implied author must be "transient" and mobile and therefore out of the reach of any fixed patterns of meaning.

This view that character in the new fiction is, as Bersani describes it, "a psychology of fragmentary and discontinuous desires," has its origins of course in existentialism (1970, 7). Existentialism posits basically that a person can create his self anew at every moment of his existence. Therefore, as Natalie Saurrault for one has argued, it is fallacious to speak of "the self" in any case since neither person nor character can be fixed.

If we accept, even conditionally, this existential view of the self, how can we justify applying psychoanalysis to the literature written under the influence of this view? Psychoanalysis, after all, is presumed to proceed on the basis of certain fixed assumptions about the nature of the self. It suggests that every person shares certain anterior desires and that these common desires, depending how they are satisfied, to a great degree determine character. Psychology may allow for a significant margin

of divergence among men based on their particular experiences in the world but, in its acceptance of the unconscious, it is basically a view predicated on the authority of what the existentialist would disparage as "essences."

Therefore, from the point of view of the postmodern, psychology is a hostile science, a procrustean and reactionary instrument used, as one critic puts it, to "objectify the subjective" (Hutcheon 1984, 98); the postmodern is inclined to view psychoanalysis as the translation of the all-important present subjective possibilities into meaningless anterior objective fixities. Psychoanalytic criticism is accused of allegorizing the text into something it is not, thus defeating the purpose of the text which is to resist being localized as a series of clues leading back to a constant and knowable voice: "The objection--and the obvious one--to the use of dreams as a model for art is that it reduces art to a psychological framework for something else" (Hutcheon 1984, 109). According to Susan Sontag, "contemporary zeal for the project of interpretation in general is often prompted...by an open aggressiveness, an overt contempt for appearances"(1982, 98). Interpretation, she says, all too often "excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs 'behind' a text, to find a subtext which is the true one." Sontag pillories Freud in particular for attempting to "erect another meaning on top of the literal one": For Freud, according to Sontag, the "manifest content must be probed and pushed aside to find the true meaning--the latent content--beneath"(1982, 98).

Those who castigate Freudian analysis of fiction have some basis to their arguments. Even were we to ignore that fact that Freud himself never insisted on the permanence or irrefutability of the structures he suggested, the charge of reductionism is difficult to avoid. Psychoanalysis of fiction is a translation of the text into other terms, but certainly any criticism

of any work of art does essentially the same thing. Indeed, as Sontag herself appreciates, the very act of reading requires that we affect some translation and "repudiate" the text. The point Sontag is making obliquely--and the point I wish to make in support of psychoanalytic criticism--is that it is not interpretation per se that is suspect: the real issue centres on the degree to which interpretation seeks to offer itself as a substitute for the text. There is no reason that psychoanalysis treated as a suggestive as opposed to a conclusive view of human character cannot serve to enlarge our understanding of the text.

Psychoanalysis' former emphasis on the importance of the id encouraged a certain "closure" when it came to assessing character. As Doherty points out, finding Freudian instinctual (id) motivation for a character amounts to limiting the freedom of the postmodern character to his past (19). However, there is in the current emphasis in psychoanalysis on ego psychology as opposed to id psychology an almost existential recognition that what a person does has a significant effect on who he is and who he might become. A case could therefore be made that this recognition that the ego has a greater influence in the formation of the identity than was formerly thought (based on the later writings of Freud) represents tacit support of the postmodern notion that the text is descriptive of a developing and mobile subject. As Leo Bersani says, there is no reason that psychoanalysis need serve as "a reductive expose of the writer's 'secrets' or 'problems'; rather, it [can serve to expose] those patterns of desire which may be the affective basis for the formal organizations of art in general [*my italics*]"(1976, 30).

This study intends to examine the networks of associations in Donald Barthelme's prose in an attempt to offer objective descriptions of the state

of mind inside the fictions. These associative patterns will be presented as evidence in support of the thesis that certain fixed unconscious patterns are critical structural elements in his fiction. This approach is motivated by the conviction that, "Psychoanalysis can give us an articulate formulations of the laws governing the relation between the said [the text] and the unsaid [what is fixed and permanently sealed in the text and is more or less available to every reader]" (Bersani 1976, 43).

There is no point in disputing that there are certain limitations and liabilities attached to the psychoanalytic approach, both on theoretical and on practical grounds. Everyone is familiar with the cruder type of psychoanalytic critic, for instance, whose studies are "confined to the revelation of oedipal material and the hunt for sexual symbolism"(Tennenhouse 7). Because the psychoanalytic critic has in psychology access to a fairly developed allegorical system of causes, the temptation to translate the text into a system of meanings is sometimes difficult to resist. The best psychoanalytic criticism, however, takes the text fully into account. It applies psychoanalytic principles as a means of discovering a satisfactory account for the order of words, all the time exercising a rigorous attention to intrinsic textual concerns. It begins and ends in the text.

Postmodern literature demands that we look inside rather than beyond the text for meanings. It implicitly warns us away from seeking any reflection of a personality in the work. It seems to do all that it can to discourage readings that might localize that personality. And yet, if we approach the text as a form of subjectivity, even the most rigorously postmodern text would seem to invite interpretation as an act of personality. As we have noted above, Robbe-Grillet's fiction probably

represents one of the most informed and rigorous attempts on the part of any writer, living or dead, to efface the self from the fiction. His method has been from the beginning calculated to, as he says, "make something out of nothing, something that would stand alone, without having to lean on anything external to the work" (quoted by McCaffery 1982, 2). Ironically, what Robbe-Grillet's experiments with fictional form have demonstrated (and his influence on the directions taken by succeeding novelists of less talent and determination is incalculable) is that psychology is not irrelevant to fiction, rather it is integral.

George Szanto, in Narrative Consciousness (1972), discussing the literature that has descended from Flaubert through Kafka through to Beckett and Robbe-Grillet says this about the place of psychology in the text:

The narrator's unconscious has ascribed certain values to environment, to images both of the external world and of psychological pictures (memories and possibilities); the result is not a description of the world, but a Rorschach test of the perceiving individual. Each conscious narrator is a universe insofar as he has been able to internalize his environment, to systemize it for himself, and to see each new moment in it as part of the system he has constructed for himself. Everything fits somewhere; if it does not, some might call it absurd, so the mind must struggle to find its proper place.(8)

Szanto later suggests that the chosiste of Robbe-Grillet (objects viewed in a purely objective light) are really the result of "subjective choices of a psychology enforcing its obsessions onto a conscious and recording mind...colored by the needs of that mind" (130). Bruce Morrisette in his study of Robbe-Grillet also points out that Robbe-Grillet's rejection of "all interiority, including psychological states and reactions" ends in ambiguity (29). Morrisette agrees with Gaston Blanchard that a work of art must be connected in some vital way to the unconscious of its creator: "a work of art can hardly derive its unity from anything other than a complex...if the complex is missing, the work, cut off from its roots, can

no longer communicate with the unconscious" (quoted by Morrisette, 54).

Frederick Crews in his defense of the psychoanalytic method incidentally points to one of the inherent paradoxes of the postmodern concern for avoiding what it takes to be the reductionism of psychoanalytic interpretation:

An aesthetic theory which ignores the possibility that latent and manifest content, unconscious and conscious purpose may be imperfectly harmonized [in a text] is...more reductive than a theory in which art represents a complex 'overdetermined' adjustment to various psychic interests. One must decide whether to see art as a mental activity or as a direct apprehension of truth and beauty. The former attitude is less exalted, but it leaves the critic free to trace the actual shape of a work, including its possible double meanings or confusions and its shifts of intensity and mood.(12)

As Crews puts it in another context, psychoanalytic readings of literature, rather than serving to dwindle the work to an illustration of models of theory, can serve to make the work "richer and stranger than ever" (169).

The trick is to incorporate into the psychoanalytic approach these principles: first, that the work signifies on several levels and no meaning is the final or single meaning; second, the picture of the self as it is articulated in psychoanalysis is itself a thing of flux, incomplete and developing; finally, rigorous attention must be paid to all that is present in the text, not merely to those features that fit easily into a given psychoanalytic meaning.

In a recent symposium on deconstruction featuring the Yale Deconstructuralists, Louis Mackey asserted that what the Marxist and the Freudian approaches have in common is that, "in a sense, [they] already know what is going on in a text, they have a preconception of what's going on, whereas at least the ideal deconstructionist reader is open to whatever might pop up...The Freudian knows that there is some libidinal thing down there that he's going to find when he scrapes the barnacles off the

underside of the discourse" (Davis 1985, 80). Barbara Johnson counters this familiar objection by saying that the ideal Freudian reader "would also want to discover things they weren't expecting to find" (80). She goes on to make the ironic and telling point that Freud may not have known that the method he pioneered was "Freudian"; in other words, an inherent feature of the Freudian model is that it is committed to remaining open to, as Mackey says, "whatever might pop up" (80).

"We know that all literature is a form of disguise, a mask, a fable, a mystery: and behind the mask is the author" (Edel ix). Notwithstand^{ing} our knowledge that an author does indeed lie somewhere behind the mask of his prose, how much can we say with any confidence about the features of that face behind the mask; the question which must inevitably be begged by this study asks for a precise differentiation between what we read as the real author behind the fiction and what we read of the implied voice inside these fictions. Unfortunately, it is next to impossible to define with any precision the exact nature of the relationship between the author and his voices. This study assumes that an unconscious or latent content, which has its origins in the mind of the author, has some influence in the shaping of the fiction. It also assumes that we are directed to that content through the behaviours and attitudes of the narrators and characters which appear in the work--the voices the author adopts.

It is generally accepted that the voice we hear in the text cannot be absolutely equated with the author's own voice and yet, by the same token, so compelling is the temptation to draw at least tentative or qualified axis of correspondence, that all critics tend to assume the equation to some degree (even to speak of a book as being "so and so's book" is to make

certain giddy assumptions). While we must accept that the text is not the author's own voice, just as certainly, we cannot keep from acknowledging that the author's voice is tangled up in the text in some vital way. The postmodern approach to fiction has, of course, only served to complicate an old dilemma: "By breaking the conventions that separate authors from implied authors from narrators from implied readers from readers, the [postmodern] novel reminds us (who are 'we'?) that 'authors' do not simply 'invent' novels. Authors work through linguistic, artistic, and cultural conventions. They are themselves 'invented' by readers who are 'authors' working through linguistic, artistic, and cultural conventions, and so on" (Waugh 134).

Postmodern fiction typically appears to have been written by what Natalie Saurraute has called an anonymous "I," a figure "who is at once all and nothing, who as often as not is but the reflection of the author himself, has usurped the role of hero, occupying the place of honor. The other characters, being deprived of their own existence, are reduced to the status of visions, dreams, nightmares, illusions, refectations, quiddities or dependents of this all-powerful 'I'" (56). Unlike the author of realistic fiction, the postmodern author makes no claim to have a reality independent of, or more concrete than, his fiction; from the point of view of the postmodern writer, everything is fiction, from the dictionary to the children's bedtime story. One curious manifestation of this expansion of the definition of fiction is the delight certain authors take in introducing themselves into their fictions. So common is this Hitchcock-like mechanism that one could easily list it as a characteristic device (Calvino, Sukenick, Federman, Barthelme, Coover, Barth, and especially Borges and Nabokov are examples of authors who explicitly feature "themselves" in their own work

which spring immediately to mind). The point made by these authors who literally introduce themselves into their work is that the idea of an author is absurd: authors can only have as much reality in their reader's mind (and possibly in their own minds as well--see especially Borges' short story "Borges and I") as any other fictional construct. This ironic insistence on their real-life authorial identities only serves to underline their status as fictions. As Christensen says, metafictionalists who place themselves "as a structural element in the novel" ironically deepen the impression that authors are something to believe in. However, she concludes, since "The historical author will of course always exist outside and apart from the work itself...metafiction only operates with an additional factor: the fictional author" (13).

But the explicit inclusion of themselves in their own fictions is only a minor feature of a broadly based assault by postmodern writers on the knowability of the voice behind the fiction. As we have noted above, the attack on any ontogenetic fixity we readers seem to hear in the voice of the author is an oblique attack of the fixity of meaning itself (Hutcheon 1984, 144). And yet, even in this style which posits itself as the utterance of a mobile and discontinuous subject, the sense of an author remains: as with the authors of the most traditional fiction, the postmodern author is "uppermost in our minds; his presence haunts us; we watch him struggle with his characters; in the long run, he is the only one who holds our attention"(Boyd 33). We can observe this tendency to identify a constant voice behind the fictions in the criticism of all postmodern writers. This tendency isn't simply a demonstration of the persistence of old interpretative bias, it is a consequence of postmodernism's assumption of what Saurraute calls "the all-powerful 'I'" (56).

As far as the question of precise nature of the relationship between the "personality" exhibited in a work of art to the actual, historical personality behind the fiction is concerned, no final correspondences between them can or even need be drawn. Boyd says of Borges and Nabokov that their writing is an attempt to "save the self by making it visible in the work, but both writers are also acutely aware of the promise of failure inherent in such an effort" (151). The key phrase here is the "promise of failure": the "self" we seek in the author simply lies beyond our reach; the author is not merely the sum of the words he has given us for he or she exists both in and beyond the page. It is the world beyond that is closed to us. Since "mere words provide the only access we have to that self and we cannot go beyond what they say," we should direct our energies at studying what exactly the words say (Boyd 35).

Fiction may well be a reflection of the author's self in all of its multiplicities and depth, but it remains a reflection of a self that must be viewed as open to change. More important, it is a self which, as Freud himself understood, can never be known in any final sense. Notwithstanding this welter of hesitation as to the worth of speaking of "authors" in anything but the most qualified sense, there does remain an "author" we can locate in the text, a consistent and unified subject, a "profound and secret thematic self" located somewhere behind the prose (Bersani 1970, 16).

CHAPTER THREE: "BALLOON MAN DOESN'T LIE, EXACTLY."

I want to initiate analysis of Barthelme's view of art and the relationship of the artist to his art by comparing two stories, "The Balloon"(UPUA) and "I Bought A Little City"(A) ("The Balloon" was first published in 1966, and "Bought" was published in 1974). "The Balloon" is generally acknowledged as one of Barthelme's most important stories, a story that is generally taken to define, in uniquely organic terms, Barthelme's aesthetic of fiction. As the following analysis hopes to show, however, criticism of the story to this point has utterly failed to appreciate the full dimensions of Barthelme's aesthetic as it is embodied in this story. To help illustrate issues raised in our discussion of "The Balloon," comparison will be made to a later story, "Bought." In terms of style, tone, and subject matter "Bought" would appear to have very little in common with "The Balloon." However, as I intend to show, despite dissimilarities of manifest elements, both stories are descriptive of exactly the same state of mind. More to the point, both stories say essentially the same thing about the artist's relationship to his art and to his world.

"The Balloon" begins with the narrator's description of how he introduced a large balloon over Manhattan one night while the people were sleeping. He has his engineers expand the balloon until it covers an area

approximately forty-five blocks by twelve blocks over the centre of the city. The narrator takes care to note the variety of reactions to his balloon but observes that the initial reaction of the city to the balloon could be summarized as "a calm, 'mature' one" (23). Part of the reaction the narrator judges as mature is agreement by the people that the meaning of the balloon can never be known in any final or absolute sense. There is some argumentation at the start about the meaning of the balloon but argument soon gives way to activities that suggest that the balloon has been accepted, activities such as decorating the balloon with paper lanterns or writing messages on its surface. The children of the city respond to the balloon as they would to a new toy. They climb all over its surface and use it for a variety of bouncing games. The children, because they have grown accustomed to "the city's flat, hard skin," find the pneumatic surface of the balloon "extremely exciting" (24).

Not all the reactions to the balloon are positive, however. Some people have difficulty trusting the balloon and some are even hostile. The source of the hostility toward the balloon on the part of some stems from an inability to determine either the source of the balloon's helium supply or, what is perhaps more important, the purpose of the balloon. The narrator is aware that he could have circumvented this difficulty by painting some sort of pseudo-scientific information on the side of the balloon but he resists the impulse. The frustration of the authorities eventually gives way to a universal acceptance of the balloon on the part of ordinary citizens who soon are feeling a certain warmth towards it.

The narrator invests the phenomenon he has manufactured with particular phenomenological significances: he observes, for instance, that this single

balloon functions in the way a symbol might in that it "must stand for a lifetime of thinking about balloons" (25). The narrator also notes that the attitude of each citizen toward the balloon is a complex thing; each attitude is a reflection of, in the words of the narrator, "a complex of attitudes" (25). The narrator then develops, by way of illustrating both how complex and how divergent reactions to the balloon can be, three reactions to the balloon. The description of these attitudes serves as the central part of the story, and concludes with the observation that critical opinion on the balloon remains divided (several excerpted "blurbs" of divided critical opinions are included in the text).

The population of New York eventually completely accepts the presence of the balloon over their city. So complete is this acceptance that the people begin to locate themselves in relation to the balloon, much as they would with a building or a park. The narrator is careful to point out that the intersections that occur between the anomalous balloon and the conventional features of the skyline must remain crucial: "But it is wrong to speak of 'marginal intersections,' each intersection was crucial, none could be ignored (as if, walking there, you might not find someone capable of turning your attention, in a flash, from old exercises to new exercises, risks and escalations). Each intersection was crucial, meeting of balloon and building, meeting of balloon and man, meeting of balloon and balloon" (28). It is this capacity of the balloon to offer "mislocation of the self" out of rigid patterns that ultimately is what is most admired about the balloon. The balloon, principally because of its capacity to change its shape and to provide special "intersections" between itself and reality, offers a vital opportunity to a city and a population suffering stress in the grip of

patterning, proscriptive "machinery."

The story concludes rather abruptly and ambiguously with a direct address on the part of the narrator to the lover who has been absent from his life. It is revealed that the balloon was, in fact, some sort of surrogate object: "I met you under the balloon, on the occasion of your return from Norway; you asked if it was mine; I said it was. The balloon, I said, is a spontaneous autobiographical disclosure, having to do with the unease I felt at your absence, and with sexual deprivation...." It will now be put away in storage, he tells her, to await "some other time of unhappiness, sometime, perhaps, when we are angry with one another" (29).

"The Balloon" is designed to function on several levels at once. On the most immediate level the story creates a simple, evocative image in the balloon that is accessible, like the balloon in the fiction itself, on a relatively unsophisticated level. But the story, as it were, surrounding the simple object is very complex, open to interpretation on any of several levels.

Critics are in general agreement that "The Balloon" is one of Barthelme's best stories. As evidence of the importance of this particular story, all of the major studies of Barthelme's work single out "The Balloon" for developed analysis. This attention is appropriate in that the story is one of Barthelme's most representative stories in a double sense: first, it exemplifies the best that Barthelme's style is capable of achieving; second, its principal subject is patently the process of making and interpreting the fictional object.

Virtually every critic who has commented on "The Balloon" has pointed out that the story represents a statement by Barthelme on what a modern work

of art should be. Stengel in his study of Barthelme says that the story represents Barthelme's "most significant single definition of art in a dehumanizing society" and that the story is nothing short of "a paradigm of Barthelme's ideal modern art object" (205). Richard Schickel also points out that the balloon is a metaphor for the modern art object and the problems people have in coming to terms with such objects (15). According to Couturier and Durand, who feel that "The Balloon" is "clearly one of [Barthelme's] best fictions" (69), "what is being discussed in this fiction is not the unlikely UFO [the balloon] but the fiction itself" (71). Larry McCaffery says as much calling "The Balloon" an "allegory about the status of an art object's relationship to both its creator and its audience" (1982, 105).

Probably the most cogent analysis of "The Balloon" to this point is that offered by R.E. Johnson. Johnson sees "The Balloon" as fiction designed to create meaning even in the act of destroying it: the story, according to her, is "Both open and closed...one of those fictions Frank Kermode describes as a both a projection and a 'disconfirmation' of the possibility and impossibility of closure" (75-76). She agrees that the balloon is meant to serve as a symbol for the fictional object and suggests that the significance developed through that symbol is that "Content exists only as a vehicle for the manifestation of form and thus [the balloon is]...effectively empty" (74). The meaning of the story, therefore, is that there can be no meanings, a conclusion which is of course consistent with the mature perspective celebrated in the story itself. Referring to the explanation offered at the conclusion of the story in which the narrator

reveals what meaning the balloon has for him, Johnson contends that the balloon, if it does indeed "develop a central coherence, [this revelation] mandates, and thus destroys its promised vitality" (80). The point is well taken for what are we to make of a story that, on the one hand argues for the indeterminacy of the object, but on the other attempts to mandate a coherent interpretation of the same object? Johnson sees the true source of vitality in the story, not in the putative open significance of the balloon, but in the tension between various narrative codes (myth, fairy tale, phenomenological inquiry). These codes work against one another and thereby serve to confound "any monistic reading, any attempt to establish the logos of the text" (80).

The narrator's rather glib and "spontaneous autobiographical disclosure" which is offered at the end of the story, therefore, in light of the argument running through the story up to the moment of that disclosure, must be seen as gratuitous. Larry McCaffery, commenting on the narrator's eleventh hour disclosure, says, "the narrator apparently does not intend for this private meaning to be apprehended by his audience" (1982, 105). In McCaffery's reading of the story, the balloon may well have a "private meaning" but that meaning remains only the narrator's meaning, limited because, like the meaning everyone else in the story attaches to the balloon, it has been determined by the needs and proclivities of an exclusive subjectivity. The narrator's meaning is no more meaningful, in other words, than any of the meanings which arise along the various intersections between balloon and subjectivities which the story describes. Like McCaffery, Johnson views the narrator's disclosure as limited in significance, a disclosure which in context merely serves to confirm "that

only outside of the story can the question of [the] origins [of the balloon] be explored" (74). What lies outside the story, of course, is the meaning that we as individual readers are apt to discover as a function of the various attitudes we bring to the experience: "As a single balloon must stand for a lifetime of thinking about balloons, so each citizen expressed, in the attitude he chose, a complex of attitudes" (25).

The balloon as Barthelme conceives it as symbol is meant to function in the text in a manner significantly different from a traditional literary symbol, say, Hawthorne's scarlet letter or the whiteness of Melville's whale. The symbol of the scarlet letter, for instance, was designed by Hawthorne to represent potentially several things at once (the device of multiple choice, or the controlled division of sympathies). The scarlet letter may be a complex symbol, but the range of its significances is nevertheless proscribed by the text. The balloon, on the other hand, appears to make no attempt to control the division of sympathies. It is designed, not merely to entertain several possible significances at once, it appears to be designed to entertain every possible interpretative overture made to it. Where the potential significance of Hawthorne's scarlet letter is manifold, the potential significance of Barthelme's balloon appears to be unlimited. As a symbol that can mean anything, the balloon is quite unlike a symbol in any traditional understanding of the term.

According to Iser, texts like "The Balloon," and symbols like the balloon, are modern in that they characteristically eschew meaning as an absolute. The modernist text works to maximize the potential margin of what Iser calls the "configurative meaning" which arises out of an intersection

between the text and the individual mind of the reader:

The text provokes certain expectations which in turn we project onto the text in such a way that we reduce the polysemantic possibilities to a single interpretation in keeping with the expectations aroused, thus extracting an individual, configurative meaning. The polysemantic nature of the text and the illusion-making of the reader are opposed factors. If the illusion were complete, the polysemantic nature would vanish; if the polysemantic nature were all-powerful, the illusion would be totally destroyed. Both extremes are conceivable, but in the individual literary text we always find some form of balance between the two conflicting tendencies. The formation of illusions, therefore, can never be total, but it is this very incompleteness that in fact gives it its productive value. (1980, 59-60)

Iser's "configurative meaning," of course, would obtain in any work of fiction. What the postmodernist text seeks to do, however, is to delimit the polysemantic possibilities of the text to the most radical degree possible.

What Barthelme is telling us with his balloon is that the relevance of a certain kind of literary symbol has passed; no matter how rich the potential meaning of these traditional symbols, these traditional symbols simply remain too narrow and rigidly defined to be of much use to Barthelme's postmodern citizens locked into a corrupt meaningfulness, and looking for a way out of their unhappiness. By way of alternative, Barthelme's narrator offers New York in the form of the balloon (as Barthelme offers us in the form of "The Balloon") an object of tremendous surface but negligible content; it is ours to adapt to our private needs. Barthelme's balloon is meant to be a signifier that has no final meaning of its own--our experience as viewer determines content. Because of this lack of significance, the story tells us, the balloon serves to refer us back to ourselves. The balloon, if we accept this interpretation, is the ideal postmodern object, for postmodern fiction is designed to prevent the reader from making any simple

translation from the language and events of the fiction into the objects and events of his present reality.

Barthelme is fond of comparing fiction (unfavourably) with the more plastic arts, painting and sculpture (see especially his interview for The Paris Review). In many ways Barthelme's balloon resembles a work of the postmodern sculpture he is so fond of in form, design, and intention. In several essays of art criticism written in mid-sixties (the period in which "The Balloon" was written), the New York art critic Lucy Lippard describes the postmodern sculpture that is pushing forward what she calls "the dematerialization of art" (the title of one of her essays). Her descriptions of those sculptures might easily serve as description of the balloon Barthelme has put on display over New York. Here are two examples of that criticism, the first describing the work of Don Judd and Robert Morris, and the second describing the work of Sol LeWitt:

They are monolithic, in that they are single shapes, though that is neither here nor there; they make no attempt to change or activate the space they fill, neither do they refer to anything outside of themselves. Yet by filling space they do change it, even if the change is minimal and inactive.(143)

Because their entire structure...is laid open to view, they are among the most cohesive works made in the genre. Nothing about them is secret. No angle is better than any other angle from which to view them. There is no core, no 'relationships' within or without the pieces...and they come as close to not changing the space they fill as anything can...despite their rigorous rejection of all chance and inflection, their apparently ultimate order, they are subject to the most drastic change and modulation [because the perspective of the viewer is bound to change].(145)

Barthelme's balloon is the literary equivalent of these conceptual sculptures, objects divested of significance--"nothing about them is secret"--but which nevertheless aim to signify in a unique way.

Of course, Barthelme's literary "sculpture" has antecedents in modern literature as well. This is Robbe-Grillet in "A Future for the Novel," for instance, on the question of "signification" in literature:

Instead of this universe of 'signification' (psychological, social, functional), we must try, then, to construct a world both more solid and more immediate. Let it be first of all by their presence that objects and gestures establish themselves, and let this presence continue to prevail over whatever explanatory theory that may try to enclose them in a system of reference, whether emotional, sociological, Freudian, or metaphysical. (276)

What these "more solid and more immediate" objects of postmodernism are designed to do in this insistence on their "presence" is to subvert certain traditional assumptions about the meaningfulness of art objects. These postmodern art objects are a function of a new understanding of reality and consciousness which suggests that absolute concepts (like Beauty and Truth and even Meaning itself) can have no real value to the individual. By the new "consciousness" I mean the knowledge that, as Leo Bersani says, "we must live in a continually changing series of discrete presents, which is to say that we must always be absent to ourselves, always moving to a future presence" which will in turn "evade us" (1976, 208-209). Symbols with fixed meanings are irrelevant and even inimical because they serve to localize consciousness. The symbol with the fixed meaning, to put it in terms "The Balloon" suggests, is merely another predetermined pathway in "the grid of precise, rectangular pathways under our feet" (28). Follow those paths, the story warns you, and you are kept enthralled to society's "complex machinery" and in a state of "bewildered inadequacy" (29). The indeterminacy of the postmodern literary experience is intended to offer its audience the happy possibility of what "The Balloon" calls "randomness...mislocation of the self" (28). This mislocation allows us "to

abandon our position in the present...and to move beyond that localized self into a series of discontinuous subjectivities. The Romantic liberty of transcendence of the localized self is thus established..."(Bersani 1975, 208-09). Robbe-Grillet's fiction aims for this same sense of "mislocation" in the reader; according to Bruce Morrisette, Robbe-Grillet's art seeks to place together "gratuitous objects and the play of 'objective' chance (as the surrealists insisted)" which then serve to illuminate, as Robbe-Grillet himself says, "the enigmatic connections which bind everyday life to art" (25).

The balloon in "The Balloon"--and more to the point, "The Balloon" itself--is obviously designed to create and sustain the continued life of those "enigmatic connections": "Each intersection was crucial, meeting of balloon and building, meeting of balloon and man, meeting of balloon and balloon" (28). There can be little question that the story ostensibly honours the aesthetic credo so many writers and critics have articulated for the new fiction. "The Balloon" is meant to be, as George Szanto says of the new novel, "not a product but a medium, not the writing about something but the process of something being transmuted; the process becomes the created object" (9).

Interpretation of the story thus comes down to whether the balloon is as "empty" of what Johnson terms "monistic" significance as it seems to proclaim itself to be. Is it possible to interpret the balloon beyond saying simply (if such things can be said simply) that the significance of the balloon is that it has no significance? Does the balloon accurately

reflect the essence of literature as it is defined by postmodernism?: "The essence of literature is not representation, not a communicative transparency, but an opacity, a resistance to recuperation which exercises sensibility and intelligence" (Culler 258).

Warren and Wellek argue that in the literary object we, as readers, "grasp some 'structure of determination' in the object which makes the act of cognition not an arbitrary invention or subjective distinction but the recognition of some norms imposed on by reality" (152). The question is, of course, are the structures of determination we may or may not infer in the balloon meaningful in any objective sense, or is the insistence of these structures as "immature" as Barthelme suggests in this story and in his fiction in general? Ihab Hassan frames the essential question raised by the contrary positions taken by those who argue essentially either for or against structures of determinacy: "Is all criticism, then, a rationalized response to a 'voice' that the critic pretends to hear and which he never hears twice the same" (1975 xv)?

"The Balloon" is a highly developed and (if the advice of some critics can be credited) convincing argument for postmodern undecidability. I would agree that the story can indeed be read as polemic, a polemic illustrating certain crucial features of the postmodern aesthetic. It's fairly obvious that the story argues for the irrelevance of authority, the autonomy of the object or text, the creative responsibilities of the reader/observer, the capacity of art to deliver the reader/observer to himself and, most important as far as this study is concerned, the fundamental absence of content or meaning contained by the object itself. What I hope to

demonstrate is that the story contains within it, and utterly fails to resolve, the basic paradox confronting postmodern fiction; that is, it argues against the strictures of meaning, for non-referentiality and the freedom of the reader to re-make the object according to his disposition, even as it works to attach a very specific and personal meaning and significance to the object intended to argue against the need for extra-personal meaningfulness. I intend to challenge the view that "The Balloon" is a convincing example of art that allows for the maximum possibility of what Iser calls "configurative meaning." I am prepared to argue that the story, in fact, posits and develops a very precise meaning for the balloon as symbol, a meaning which limits in a radical fashion the development of those "crucial" enigmatic connections between it and those with whom it comes into contact.

It is important to distinguish between what the narrator says the balloon should mean and what he actually says about the balloon. It's easy to miss the fact that there are, in fact, two balloons in this story: the balloon experienced by the people of New York and the balloon experienced by the people of New York as that experience as viewed by the narrator. As readers, our only view of the balloon is by way of the narrator who absolutely controls that view: no one else in the story speaks: everything said, done, or thought in the story is funnelled through a single conduit, the narrator. The story, in other words, contains a fundamental paradox: it everywhere proclaims the value of unlimited and unrestricted "intersections" between balloon and not-balloon, even as it limits the

intersections available to the reader to one intersection: unlike the citizens in the story, the only balloon we as readers ever view is "The Balloon," a very particular view of the balloon determined by the narrative voice. Of course, the number of intersections this balloon allows as a fictional object is, in a very real sense, unlimited: "The Balloon" has the potential to mean something different to every reader, and something different with every reading. Surely the issue, however, is not the mere possibility of configuration, but rather the scope or margin of configurative meaning an art object allows. "The Balloon" advertises itself as a kind of prototypical postmodern symbol working to enlarge that margin of configuration to the widest extent possible. It seems to make itself available to any interpretation. And yet--and it is very easy to miss--the story limits the meaning of the balloon we as readers experience in a profound way.

Proof of the balloon's limited meaning does not lie with the narrator's glib autobiographical disclosure. This explanation of the balloon's "meaning" is simply too calculated. The story has taken considerable pains to prepare us for such attempts at meaningfulness: in the carefully developed context of other "meanings" determined by the wishes and needs of viewers of the balloon, this disclosure is meant to be seen as just one more meaning attached to an object that can happily accommodate any meaning. But is the balloon we see in the story really capable of welcoming polysemantic possibilities?

The balloon we are shown is not, in fact, the same "frivolous and gentle" (22) balloon that evidently hangs over New York. Rather, the balloon we see is actually a very highly determined and very peculiar

symbol--a symbol capable of entertaining only a very limited margin of configurative meaning: the symbol of the balloon in "The Balloon," and "The Balloon" itself, has meaning. Ironically, the proof of this meaning is concealed in the complex of attitudes described in the story.

The physical qualities of the balloon as they are described to us by the narrator (who designed the balloon) are an important clue as to the meaning of the balloon. It is described several times in the story: it has "muted heavy grays and browns for the most part, contrasting with walnut and soft yellows. A deliberate lack of finish...gave the surface a rough, forgotten quality..." (23); it has a "warm gray underside" (23); "And the underside of the balloon was a pleasure to look up into, we had seen to that, muted grays and browns for the most part, contrasting with walnut and soft, forgotten yellows" (26); the balloon has "warm, soft, lazy passages" (28). The repetition of certain features--the muted grays and browns and yellows, and especially the forgotten quality of this balloon--gives this balloon a very distinctive character as an object. It is not anything like a tabula rasa, or a blank canvas. It is a particularly sensual and psychologically distinctive object.

In the middle of the story the narrator offers developed examples of a variety of attitudes engendered by the balloon. It is necessary that we quote these reactions at length:

As a single balloon must stand for a lifetime of thinking about balloons, so each citizen expressed, in the attitude he chose, a complex of attitudes. One man might consider that the balloon had to do with the notion sullied, as in the sentence The big balloon sullied the otherwise clear and radiant Manhattan sky. That is, the balloon was, in this man's view, an imposture, something inferior to the sky that had formerly been there, something interposed between the people and their 'sky'. But in fact it was January, the sky was dark and ugly; it was not a sky you could look up into, lying on your back in the street, with pleasure,

unless pleasure, for you, proceeded from having been threatened, from having been misused. And the underside of the balloon was a pleasure to look up into, we had seen to that, muted grays and browns for the most part, contrasted with walnut and soft, forgotten yellows. And so, while this man was thinking sullied, still there was an admixture of pleasurable cognition in his thinking, struggling with the original perception.

Another man, on the other hand, might view the balloon as if it were part of a system of unanticipated rewards, as when one's employer walks in and says, 'Here Henry, take this package of money I have wrapped for you, because we have been doing so well in the business here, and I admire the way you bruise the tulips, without which bruising your department would not be a success, or at least not the success that it is.' For this man the balloon might be a brilliantly heroic muscle and pluck experience, even if an experience poorly understood.

Another man might say, 'Without the example of ---, it is doubtful that---would exist today in its present form,' and find many to agree with him. Ideas of 'bloat' and 'float' were introduced as well as concepts of dream and responsibility. Others engaged in remarkably detailed fantasies having to do with a wish either to lose themselves in the balloon, or to engorge it. The private character of these wishes, of their origins, deeply buried and unknown, was such that they were not spoken of; yet there is evidence that they were widespread. It was also argued that what was important was what you felt when you stood under the balloon; some people claimed that they felt sheltered, warmed, as never before, while enemies of the balloon felt, or reported feeling, constrained, a 'heavy' feeling. (25-27)

There is much in this passage that warrants discussion. Probably the most important thing to note is that this survey, while it purports to examine several complex attitudes, is limited to really only two attitudes: the "heavy" feeling the first man experiences and the "muscle and pluck" pleasure fantasy of the second man. Let us assume for the moment that the narrator who is translating these complexes for us is really expressing his own complex of attitudes through these "fictional" attitudes. The picture of a complex that emerges, while it is ambiguous, is remarkably consistent. On the one hand, there is in the attitude the impulse to challenge the authority of the balloon, a feeling associated with being sullied, a function of having been threatened or misused in some way. Out of this

feeling, nonetheless, is "an admixture of pleasure...struggling with the original perception." Next we are introduced to another "poorly understood" experience (one informed by the unconscious?), this time one of pure but particular pleasure. The fantasy in which the man receives sudden, unexpected, and unqualified approval from authority is as extreme in its own way as the first man's determination to wallow in the darkness and ugliness of the January sky.

The final paragraph invites nothing short of a Freudian reading of the balloon. The notions of "bloat" and "float" it introduces, suggesting the overindulged, oceanic bliss one might have known "originally," further urges the reader toward a view of the soft, forgotten balloon with its offer warmth and shelter, as a symbol of the breast.¹ The radical contrast in the last paragraph between the feelings of being sheltered and warmed, and the "heavy" feeling, serves as a further confirmation that the scope of attitudes this balloon is capable of entertaining is really rather narrow. In brief, then, the attitude one feels under this object as it is viewed by our narrator is one which swings between extremes of abjection and elation, feelings consistent with a personality with very poor ego strength and given to regressive fantasies of oceanic attachment to the breast. As it happens, characters who alternate between precisely these same extreme and unrealistic feelings are common in Barthelme.

The manifest content of this story is about the potential mislocations afforded the self by art. It is an argument for postmodern lack of intentionality in the art object. The latent content, on the other hand, offers a psychological profile of the narrator behind the balloon, a profile of desire with much blurring at the edges, but distinctive in many crucial

respects. The latent content shows how inured that identity is in "original" and "forgotten" patterns of rigid thought which all but preclude anything but temporary mislocation.

The balloon that appears in Barthelme's "universe of signification," like the postmodern art object, is intended to prevail over systems of explanation addressed to it, thus allowing it continued life as what Robbe-Grillet terms a more "solid" and more "immediate" presence (the story says as much in proclaiming the concrete particularity of the object). What critics have failed to appreciate about this story is the fact that, even as it serves to define the proper function of the art object, the story is saying something very revealing, and even disturbing, about Barthelme's view of the artist. To begin to appreciate this "meaning" of the story we must first appreciate that the balloon the artist-narrator imposes on the population of New York has a very special and localized private significance to him. Though the balloon is shared and open to interpretation, it remains, from its inception to its removal, his balloon in every sense of the word. Without question, the act of installing the balloon over the city has much in common with the display of an art object, but the fantastic proportions of the display and the pure arrogance of the act itself also renders the entire balloon episode as a display of another kind.

This balloon is the narrator's literal and figurative toy. This very personal object is so captivating that it quite literally conquers and completely dominates the imagination of one of the world's great cities. Everyone who relates to the uninvited balloon, in effect, is relating to the narrator: the power of the balloon is the narrator's power: the power to

frustrate authority, to entertain, in short, to metaphorically "absorb" and "engorge" an entire population. Viewed from this perspective, the entire episode of the balloon is nothing short of a grandiose fantasy on the part of a narrator who, gathering from his "autobiographical disclosure," is badly in need of some attention:

I met you under the balloon, on the occasion of your return from Norway; you asked if it was mine; I said it was. The balloon, I said, is a spontaneous autobiographical disclosure, having to do with the unease I felt at your absence, and with sexual deprivation, but now that your visit to Bergen has been terminated, it is no longer necessary or appropriate. Removal of the balloon was easy; trailer trucks carried away the depleted fabric, which is now stored in West Virginia, awaiting some other time of unhappiness, sometime, perhaps, when we are angry with one another. (29)

The fact that the balloon is taken back and put away at the end of the story suggests that the artist-narrator has control over it, but, we are told, this same balloon will appear again the moment it is needed. This balloon serves, in other words, as a fixed integer of meaning in a repeating pattern of behaviour. What makes this view of the balloon especially strange is the fact that its principal function for the population in general is to allow them the opportunity to change out of old and fixed patterns of behaviour. The balloon is thus expressive of a certain ambivalence on Barthelme's part as to the nature of art. On the one hand, art offers the chance of a new, enlarging experience (mislocation from rigid patterns of thought and behaviour), and on the other, art is nothing more than a kind of mirror, reflecting back and reinforcing what is already known and felt.

From the point of view of the artist-narrator in this story, the art object represents an opportunity for the unrestricted expression of a very

powerful, even omnipotent ego. In a related story, "The Temptation of St. Anthony"(S), the "Saint" plays a role similar to that of the artist-narrator in "The Balloon": an entire city is held under the sway of his personality. The conflation of art and will that is latent in "The Balloon" is made manifest in this story in that the saint's "will" serves as a major landmark in the city (153). The saint is not an artist per se but he shares two qualities with the artist: he is a dealer in special mysteries, and, like the artist in "The Balloon," he claims a specialized sensibility that dominates an entire city. It is worth noting that the people hate this saint because "he 'thought he was better than everybody else'" (151). My point here is that the artist-narrator in "The Balloon," for all of his protestations of altruism and his insistence on the palliative nature of his object, is really using the balloon in a "hateful" way, to satisfy very personal and very selfish needs.

Though the balloon is advertised by the artist-narrator as offering everyone the opportunity to mislocate and find new selves in the experience of the balloon, no one seizes this initiative. Indeed, the story makes the point that, like the narrator, people tend to see and experience in the balloon only what their desires and wishes determine they should see and experience. The citizens of New York, however, are acting and re-acting in a manner thoroughly consistent with the design and structure of the balloon. The balloon is not a new object, and neither is it an object born of a mislocation on the part of its creator. It is, in fact, a very old and fixed object, thoroughly imbued with a meaning in the mind of its creator. The object has been manufactured to serve as a substitute for a lost object, a lover in this case. Assuming that the balloon as art object has

mislocating and healing properties for the population in general (although this is certainly open to question), from the point of view of the artist-narrator, the act of making art in the form of this balloon hasn't mislocated him in the least. Indeed, it is doubtful whether anyone is mislocated to any significant degree by this balloon. For the population of New York the balloon is only a distraction, a game, and finally only an extension of themselves. The artist behind it all isn't served in any positive sense by the balloon either; that is, the balloon doesn't serve to lift him out of the fixed grid of psychological pathways he follows: he remains fixed psychologically in one place, an omnipotent omnipresence manipulating the event while hidden somewhere behind the scenes. At the end of the story, this balloon isn't destroyed or abandoned in favour of another object. Rather, it is simply put away until this same balloon is needed again, a meaningful and many-layered symbol which obtains in a rigid and morbid pattern.

"The Balloon" suggests on almost every level that art has a great deal in common with fantasy. From the point of view of the narrator, the fantasy of the balloon substitutes the clever and decisive assumption of control over the attention of an entire population for the evident lack of control exercised over an inconstant and inattentive lover. The act of making art is thus depicted as an ambivalent act: according to this story, the artist is a figure who enjoys an extraordinary degree of authority and control. Literally whole populations are held under the sway of his imagination. And yet, he remain an essentially powerless, duplicituous, and even pathetic figure, locked into confining patterns from which his art affords him no escape.

Like "The Balloon," "I Bought a Little City" is, at least in terms of plot, a simple and straightforward story. In "Bought" the narrator buys a city and, like some despotic ruler with absolute power, goes about imposing his will upon it. After completely redesigning pattern of the streets and shooting several thousand of the city's dogs, the narrator falls in love with the wife of Sam Hong, a man who sells Oriental novelties. She rejects him and the disappointed narrator sells the city at a loss--"I took a bath on that deal" (58)--and retires to a sterile and inconspicuous life in Galena Park, Texas. The lesson he learns is, "don't play God" (58), but he ends the story still tormented by love: "Still covet Sam Hong's wife, and probably always will" (58).

As is usually the case with Barthelme, the surface simplicity of a story belies considerable complexity. In "Bought" the narrator's megalomania is presented in unequivocal terms whereas in "The Balloon" the egoism inherent in the act of taking over an entire city is qualified as an act akin to aesthetic altruism; the egoism that originally inflates the balloon that takes over New York's sky is obscured in the story by the balloon's putative democratic availability, its supposed capacity to dislocate identity. On the other hand, justification for the vulgar act of taking over Galveston is never offered: the act is presented in unequivocal terms as patently and unwholesomely selfish, an act committed by a self-serving egoist with a contempt for democracy.

In many ways "Bought" is the inverse of "The Balloon," a complementary version of a story that has attracted far more critical attention because it serves as a representative fiction. As I intend to show, however, in terms

of what each story says about the meaning of art, and the artist's relationship to the art he creates, "Bought" is just as representative. Moreover, the meaning of both stories centres on certain shared "psychoanalytic issues," issues which Barthelme implicitly posits are integral to the process of making art as he knows it.

One of the most basic things the two stories have in common is a narrator who exhibits a particular attitude toward his environment. The narrators of both stories are childish meglomanics whose childishness is manifested most obviously in their determination to make the world over in their own image. As it happens, both men impose their personal visions on entire cities in the form of an art object. Appropriately enough, the objects they choose to create in the exercise of their meglomania are a balloon and a puzzle, the literal and figurative toys of a single, willful individual. In both stories, the artistic value of the objects is highly qualified, though the terms by which each is qualified are quite different. On the manifest level neither the balloon nor the puzzle are designed to be valued in terms of their inherent worth or sophistication as art objects (as art objects, both balloon and puzzle are rendered in context as essentially bereft of meaning). The difference between the two objects on the manifest level primarily lies in the context in which they are developed. In the context of "The Balloon" the balloon is developed as the expression of a sophisticated and radical conception of art. As we have seen, on one level the balloon has a private meaning, but we are meant to view that private meaning as virtually irrelevant in light of the malleable balloon's capacity to resist closure and invite the dynamic participation of the viewer. The Mona Lisa puzzle in "Bought," on the other hand, is presented as the

ultimate untransformed kitsch object, a hackneyed and "closed" reproduction that makes no claim whatever to serve, enlighten, or dislocate the viewer. "Bought's" art puzzle even lacks a developed ironical context, the sort of irony that transforms similar objects (like Andy Warhol's soup cans, for instance, or his series of portraits of Marilyn Monroe) into sophisticated works or art (or rather, sophisticated statements about the nature of art, and its relation to certain cultural values). Unlike the balloon, the Mona Lisa puzzle doesn't appear designed to serve as any kind of comment on the nature of art or the artist. And yet, as I am prepared to argue, the puzzle functions exactly like the balloon in terms of the meaning Barthelme invests it with on a latent level; the Mona Lisa puzzle in "Bought" does represent as developed a comment on the nature of art, and the relationship of the artist to his art, as the balloon does in "The Balloon." All that is required to see the similarities between puzzle and balloon is a careful reading of the associative matrix in which Barthelme develops the two objects.

"Bought" develops around basically three episodes: the redesign of the city as a puzzle; the wholesale shooting of the dogs; and the unsuccessful attempt to seduce Sam Hong's wife. The story is so designed as to suggest on the manifest level that the three episodes are essentially unrelated except in the most general terms. A more careful reading of the story, however, reveals that all three episodes are related versions, to use terms the story itself suggests, of the same "vile" act of the "imagination." Just as the story is drawing near its conclusion, the narrator recites a telling little poem:

I own a little city
Awful pretty

Can't help people
 Can hurt them though
 Shoot their dogs
 Mess 'em up
 Be imaginative
 Plant some trees
 Best to leave 'em alone
 Who decides?
 Sam's wife is Sam's wife and coveting
 Is not nice. (57)

What this infantile rhyme intimates is that, in the mind of the narrator, the various episodes that occur in his pretty city and the coveting of Sam's pretty wife are tangled up together. What I intend to show is that the three episodes are integrally related, to show that each is part of carefully disguised expression of the fantasy we referred to above as the central fantasy.

The first episode in Galveston centres around a plan the narrator and a city resident devise to allow citizens of Galveston more privacy. "Private looking," says the narrator, approving the plan, "that's the thing" (53). What they devise is a scheme to break up the patterns of the streets and reshape property lines (there is an echo here of "The Balloon": the purpose of the balloon was to mislocate citizens otherwise committed to "a grid of precise, rectangular pathways under our feet" [28]). The model upon which they base their new design is an unlikely one, "a jigsaw puzzle with a picture of the Mona Lisa on it" (53). The result of this scheme is that everyone feels, as the narrator puts it, like the people are "living in the middle of a titantic reproduction of the Mona Lisa" (54).

In the second episode, purely as a demonstration of his "proprietorship" (54), the narrator shoots six thousand dogs in one day, an act which gives him "great satisfaction" (55). Despite the scope of this slaughter of the innocent dogs, nothing is accomplished: the dogs in Galveston still outnumber the citizens by a margin of two to one. Feeling some sense of remorse, the narrator

decides to write a piece about himself in the local newspaper denouncing himself as "the vilest creature the good God has placed upon the earth." In the article he goes so far as to question whether it is appropriate to call "so vile a critter" as himself a man in the first place. In doing this, he feels he's behaving like Orson Welles (an allusion to Citizen Kane, a movie about a lonely man with enormous power whose fate turns on a lost toy): "...I'd seen that Orson Welles picture where the guy writes a nasty notice about his own wife's terrible singing, which I always thought was pretty decent of him, from some points of view" (55). Having invited a challenge to be held accountable, the narrator is confronted by one man who steps forward carrying "a bad-looking piece of pipe" (56) to protest the killing of the dogs. The man is angry about the death of his dog, Butch, a dog that obviously served as something of a surrogate son to this man and his wife: "Butch was all Nancy and me had...We never had no children" (55). The man leaves, but not before cursing the "black-hearted" narrator in no uncertain terms. He warns the narrator that he'll "roast in the eternal flames and there will be no mercy or cooling drafts from any quarter" (56) for what he has done to him and his family.

As we noted above, the power of this narrator is enormous, indeed, almost absolute. He himself, in fact, characterizes the whole Galveston exercise as an attempt to play God (58). The power to satisfy his every wish and whim is, however, limited in only one way in the story: he can't have Sam Hong's wife. It is in this incident, particularly in the construction he places on the incident, that the full significance of the Mona Lisa episode is revealed.

When the offer is made to her, Sam Hong's wife politely resists the narrator, pointing to her "young and intelligent-looking" husband giving off unfriendly looks from behind the cash register of their store. Furthermore, she

points out that she already has "one and one-third lovely children" (57). In the context of the story, the way the wife is described is crucial: "She was smaller than I was and I thought that I had never seen so much goodness in a woman's face before. It was hard to credit. It was the best face I'd ever seen" (57). What is crucial in understanding this description are the associations it awakens with regard to the Mona Lisa puzzle episode: a man who has transformed an entire city into a gigantic portrait representing one of the most famous and celebrated beautiful faces in western civilization falls desperately in love with a small, obscure, unnamed Oriental woman (the only woman who appears in the story) whose principal distinguishing feature is her face, the best face, in fact, he has even seen. Now it could be argued that the choice of the Mona Lisa as the subject of the puzzle and subsequent design of the city is a casual or arbitrary one. After all, the narrator undertakes the project to satisfy one of the citizens whose home he destroyed when he took over the city. The idea and the puzzle itself are suggested by Bill Caulfield, one of these displaced citizens. And yet, the pattern of equivalences which occur on either side of the beautiful face these two women hold in common is so consistent and so balanced that it is hard to resist seeing his purchase and subsequent transformation of Galveston into a titantic painting as a displacement for his real wish, that is, to secure the love of a married woman who is, and will forever remain, outside his grasp. The little jingle he repeats in the story ("Got a little city/ Ain't it pretty" [54]; "So I owned this little which was very, very pretty" [56]; "Got a little city/ Awful pretty" [57]) serves to continually reinforce the fact that the city is serving as a displacement for the pretty

wife (and mother) he covets.

There is another detail in the story which serves to relate the Mona Lisa episode to the Sam Hong's wife debacle. A man comes to the narrator about the imposition of the Mona Lisa design on the city complaining that he feels like he's "living inside this gigantic jive-ass jigsaw puzzle" (54). The narrator is only too happy to confirm this interpretation: "Seen from the air, he was living in the middle of a titantic reproduction of the Mona Lisa, too, but I thought it best not to tell him that" (54). Two things are especially worth noting about this incident. The first is that the narrator finds that he is unable to decide whether this man's eyes are "gleaming or burning" (54). The narrator's inability to decide on the true nature of the intense feeling generated by what has happened to the city suggests that he himself may be ambivalent with regard to how he feels about the procedure which has also placed him in the middle of the Mona Lisa.

The second thing worth noting about this incident is that the placing of everyone in his city inside a titantic, gigantic image of a woman may reveal a wish on the narrator's part to return to the mother. This possible construction would mean little were it not for the fact that the issue of pregnancy is a factor in his relationship with the Chinese wife and mother he longs to possess: she makes the unusual claim in rejecting him that she is one-third pregnant. As with the look in the man's eyes who complains about being inside the Mona Lisa, the narrator once again evinces a certain ambivalence about this fact: "She didn't look pregnant but I congratulated her anyhow" (57). What this conflation of Mona Lisa and Sam Hong's wife appears to represent is the expression of the narrator's desire to possess the woman who is another man's wife but who is also the gigantic woman that

once enclosed him in the womb, the mother. This desire, of course, is one of the most dangerous, the "vilest," a son can feel, which leads us to consider how the dog episode figures in all of this.

After killing the dogs, the narrator makes a point of calling himself the vilest creature who ever lived and the aggrieved "father" of Butch agrees, cursing him to eternal torment in the flames of hell. And yet the guilt felt and the crime confessed to here seem out of all proportion to each other. An explanation for this curious behaviour on the part of the narrator may lie in the fact that the killing of the dog-son Butch places the narrator in an extremely complex position psychoanalytically speaking, a position which may account for this uncharacteristic display of guilt and abjection. We notice, first of all, that the narrator carefully contains and controls all phases of the episode, from crime through confession to the meeting of one of his victims. Why then does he find it necessary to play out this charade of uncharacteristic abjection? The answer may lie in a concealed motive for killing the dogs. He suggests that his reason for killing the dogs is not to trim their numbers but to assert "proprietorship," to make a show of the control he has over his city, a show of strength. We have already noted that the Butch incident serves to associate the dogs with children (specifically, sons), an association which has the effect of placing the narrator in the role one would normally associate with the powerful, talionic father. But there is also some suggestion that the narrator identifies with the dogs and the slain dog-son Butch: in his printed confession he calls himself a critter and asks whether "so vile a critter could be called [a man], etc. etc." (55). Challenged by a pipe-wielding father who obviously cared about his dog-son

(the pipe is mentioned twice). He successfully meets the threat of this father by threatening to hit him with "a writ of mandamus" (56), in other words, evidence of superior strength under the law. The narrator, then, plays the role of a son who is so strong he can openly challenge fathers; his role here as destroyer-of-family challenged by a phallic and betrayed father is an acknowledgement of guilt, but the role also serves to make him the one who can threaten the family and offend the father with virtual impunity. The result of this episode, in psychoanalytic terms, is that a kind of stalemate obtains: the situation represents a complex fantasy, a kind of game in which all parties are satisfied, guilt is acknowledged, but nothing is really resolved. The narrator's reaction to the whole episode confirms this: "He went away happy with his explanation. I was happy to be a black-hearted man in his mind if that would satisfy the issue between us because that was a bad-looking piece of pipe he had there and I was still six thousand dogs ahead of the game, in a sense [emphasis added]" (56). The last phrase is telling in that the killing of the dogs has accomplished virtually nothing on any level: the manifest and latent situations which obtained before the killing of the dogs remain the same, and the secretive, private game the narrator is playing at continues as before.

There is another small piece in the puzzle of this story that supports the idea that the narrator identifies at some level with the dogs he shot. Just before he announces that he has fallen in love, he says this: "So I owned this little city which was very, very pretty and I couldn't think of any more new innovations [like killing the dogs] just then or none that wouldn't get me punctuated like the late Huey P. Long, former governor of Louisiana." The next sentence reads: "The thing is, I had fallen in love

with Sam Hong's wife" (56). The contiguousness of the names Long and Hong, the association of the fear of being shot (punished) with the coveting of another man's wife, the association of the fate of the dog-son Butch with his own if he gets too "innovative"--all of these associations are pieces of a puzzle which when put together serve to suggest that the narrator sees himself in the position of the son who covets the mother and both fears, and identifies with, the father he hopes to dispossess.

Right after he is rejected by Sam Hong's wife, a curious event takes place: the narrator goes out into the street and finds a cop who he sends to get Colonel Sanders' Kentucky Fried Chicken, extra crispy. "I did that just out of meanness," he says. "He was humiliated but he had no choice" (57). This sudden desire for hot food (extra crispy) delivered by a humiliated authority figure, a desire which immediately follows his rejection by Sam Hong's wife, is a condensation. The sudden need for food very likely represents oral compensation for the loss of the mother, the loss of the love and security known at the oral stage of development. The humiliated cop is a displacement for Sam Hong, the real object of his anger; like the father of Butch, the cop is also the dispossessed authority-figure over whom the son can exert superior authority. The insistence on extra crispy food picks up on the burning motif that runs through the story (seen already in the burning eyes of the man inside the Mona Lisa and the eternal flame curse the father of Butch). Burning is itself a condensation in the context of this story for it embodies both the crime--the burning passion for the inviolable woman--and the punishment--the flames of eternal damnation.²

Throughout the story, the narrator has been very careful to avoid being what he calls being too "imaginative" (the word, in fact, is used a total of seven times in the story). The narrator equates creative exercise of the imagination with the display of the self and he is acutely aware from the start that too much exposure of that self is likely to bring disaster down upon him. More specifically, it is likely to bring him to the attention of God, the punishing father who is introduced at the close of the story, the father who has more imagination. In the end he does, in fact, discover that he shouldn't have tried to play God because God's "got a better imagination than I do" (58). In the mind of the narrator, the entire Galveston project has represented a kind of challenge to paternal authority, and the locus of that challenge has been the family: "Probably I went wrong by being too imaginative, although really I was guarding against that. I did very little, I was fairly restrained. God does a lot worse things, every day, in one little family, any family, that I did in that whole city" (58). The sense the narrator has that God exercises his imagination within the family in particular, coupled with the fact that the narrator then associates God's exercise of power in the family with his own exercise of power in the city, shows that this whole Galveston affair has been, in the mind of the narrator, a family affair (he puts people out of their homes, he kills a member of one family and tries to steal the wife out of another). The punishment the narrator is accorded by God (the father) is an exact realization of the talionic curse the offended father in one broken family laid upon him. He ends the story burning in a place that admits of no hope of change:

But [God's] got a better imagination that I do. For instance, I still covet Sam Hong's wife, and probably always will. It's like having a tooth pulled. For a year. The same tooth. That's a sampling of His imagination. It's powerful.

So what happened? What happened was I took the other half of my fortune and went to Galena Park, Texas, and lived inconspicuously there, and when they asked me to run for the school board I said No, I don't have any children. (58)

For crimes against the family, for trying to usurp God-the-father's role, he suffers a particularly apt form of punishment: an oral aggressive, he is literally de-toothed, a procedure which also suggests castration. The fact that the punishment is prolonged and focussed on the same tooth suggests the obsessive and specific nature of the crime he committed.

But as horrible as his punishment is, it is not complete. Certainly he ends up thoroughly reduced (half his fortune gone), leading a sterile and inconspicuous life, still coveting and anguishing over the woman he cannot have. However, what also must be taken into account is that he still has half that original fortune, he still covets as before, and, in a clue typical of the clues compacted into the dense associative puzzle of this story, he's relocated in Galena Park, a city in the same state with a name composed of letters from the name Galveston. What this resolution of the story suggests is that the narrator has not resolved his "vile" appetites in the least, despite his punishment. What the closing does suggest, however, is that, owing to a failure on the part of a paternal figure only marginally more powerful than the son ("Who decides?"), the son is allowed to continue as before. What he has learned (and his new situation indicates as much) is to be less imaginative; in other words, in the future the narrator will endeavour to be even more "inconspicuous" as he continues to go about the pursuit of his interests.

On the manifest level, this story is about selfishness and overweening acquisitiveness carried to grotesque extremes. Wayne Stengel, whose interpretations of Barthelme can usually be relied upon to weigh only what is available in the manifest content, suggests that this story is "a fable about the impotence of the powerful": "Extending the mindless consumerism of [other Barthelme stories] to gargantuan proportions, the narrator of "I Bought a Little City" not only purchases other individuals but commands an entire town. Yet without a goal for his possession and with play as his only means of development, the speaker discovers that his acquisitive desires have robbed him of humanity and imagination without giving him the woman he loves" (119). This interpretation of "Bought" does credit to Barthelme's ability to provide some kind of credible sense to his stories on the manifest level, but it offers little that would account for much of the surface detail in the story. Stengel's reading of the story is a reading which chooses to ignore altogether the subtle patterns of relationships that Barthelme has developed among the various parts of this story. As a fable about the impotence of the materially powerful, "Bought" makes for slight reading: there is nothing original or particularly insightful about consumerism or materialism or even human nature in the story on this level at all. What is evident once the associative puzzle of the story is solved is that the narrator does have "a goal for his possession" in mind as he takes control of his little city--possession of the mother-figure--and it is a goal that is never very far from his mind.

What "The Balloon" and "Bought" serve to demonstrate is that

Barthelme's art is critically informed by psychoanalytic issues that have their origin in the subjectivity of the artist. In both these stories, the art the protagonists create is distinguished by two main features: first, it makes the claim that it means nothing; second, it works on another level altogether to attach a very specific and private meaning to that object. As we noted above in another context, Barthelme's critics are inclined, almost without exception, to see in Barthelme's art a successful attempt to undermine "the idea of reading a text to determine authorial design" (Stengel 23). As my analysis of "The Balloon" and "Bought" has demonstrated, however, authorial design is evident. Both of these stories implicitly argue for the relevance and meaningfulness of authorial design in the interpretation of an art object. On the manifest level in "Bought" especially, the issues that determine the form art objects take are presented as arbitrary or accidental. The objects created are toys, putatively all surface and almost no substance. What could be more accessible, prosaic, and "unintentional" than a simple toy? However, in both stories the textual environment in which these perfectly prosaic toys are presented is highly determined. To understand what these objects mean, therefore, it is important that we not separate the object from the terms or conditions of its presentation; the meaning of the gigantic sky-filling balloon and the titantic city-puzzle comes from their performance in the context of a pattern of desires. We spoke above of the wide margins of "configurative meaning" possible in the modernist text. We noted how critics have accepted that the balloon in particular is an ideal modern art object in that it maximizes the possibilities of configurative meaning. And yet, as I hope my reading of the two stories has shown, the actual margin of

configurative meaning in Barthelme, if the stories are carefully attended to, is really very narrow. In context, Barthelme informs us through a complex arrangement of association, that these objects are deeply imbued with meaningfulness that does not leave them open to configurative interpretation except within very restricted limits.

"The Balloon" and "Bought" each develop around what might be termed a missing subject; that is to say, in both stories, we observe a pattern of consequences that results from a hidden cause. The constitutive feature is common to all of Barthelme's fiction: even in stories in which no past events or situations are explicitly pointed to as determining factors, Barthelme manages to create the impression that the events in the story, the behaviour of his characters, the attitudes of his narrative voices, are all the result of a determining but concealed subject. On the manifest level, the prose presents itself, as in "The Balloon," as surface surrounding empty space. The fact is, however, that the surfaces of Barthelme's prose describe a common and very particular shape.

In "Florence Green," for example (the third of the synoptic tales), the pseudo-brilliant Baskerville manoeuvres throughout the text in what he himself declares is an effort to forestall the reader's boredom. Essential to this procedure of forestalling boredom is Baskerville's maintenance of the ambiguity surrounding the psychoanalytic issues potentially buried in the text. With regard to the aesthetic determining the content of "Florence Green," then, it might be observed that the text develops around a kind of implied absence in the text. This notion--that Barthelme's fictions develop around what would be viewed as an absence in traditional realistic

fiction--is important to an appreciation of how Barthelme's fictions are designed.

"The Phantom of the Opera's Friend"(CL)is a good story to begin to consider the issue of the missing subject in Barthelme in that the story demonstrates, not only how Barthelme's fiction characteristically develops around a missing subject, the story also demonstrates in fairly explicit fashion Barthelme's tendency to implicate himself in his fictions, specifically, as the source of the psychoanalytic issues which so critically inform those fictions. Like so many of Barthelme's stories, "Phantom" condenses several subjects into a dense and resonant form. In the opening sentence of the story, the narrator points out that the Phantom lives "five levels below the Opera, and across the dark lake" (101). As we shall see in the following analysis of this story, the association of depth and dark with the home of the Phantom at the centre of this story is entirely apt; the Phantom we seek is, as his name suggests, a figure of shadow and hidden substance, and the truth of his situation is difficult to locate in the conflicting and strangely incomplete manifest surfaces of this story.

In "Phantom", Barthelme elects to rewrite a literary objet trouvé, the story of the Phantom of the Opera. As is his habit, he adapts the model in a radical way to suit his own purposes. The changes Barthelme makes to the original are always instructive: the most obvious changes he has made to the original in this case involve the introduction of the narrator, whose story this really is, and the elimination of the heroine and the revelation scene, one of the most famous in film history. In this version, the woman remains wholly in the background, replaced, as it were, by the narrator, and

a different kind of love.

In the Phantom, Barthelme has hit upon a figure who seems, after a few minor but significant alterations, virtually tailor-made for a role in his fictional universe. What makes the Phantom so ideal a choice for Barthelme is that so much of what is figuratively and psychologically true of Barthelme's characters is literally true of the Phantom. The Phantom is a failed artist and an outcast. A deformed monster constrained to hide his twisted face behind a mask, he nevertheless represents, principally because of his talent as an artist, a creature of enormous contradiction. Owing to the peculiar contradictions inherent in his character, his talent, while it may be "immense", is doomed to remain "buried" (102). The manifest cause of this old artist's relegation to the death-in-life existence of the underground man is a woman, Christine, his "lost love" (103). What is also wonderfully appropriate with regard to the sympathies nascent in the literary model of the Phantom, and the imagery which surrounds the typical Barthelme protagonist who burns with forbidden and compromising desires, are the Phantom's disfiguring "terrible burns" (106). These are the burns which originally drove him underground, the scars of which he still bears like stigmata signifying his devotion to a lost but still burning love.

A superficial reading of the story reveals little about the intense but ambiguous relationship between the narrator and the Phantom. The story is told from the narrator's point of view and it centres on the narrator's inability either to account for his attachment to his friend, the Phantom, or his inability, despite considerable justification, to break off this unreasonable attachment to the Phantom. Throughout the story the narrator vacillates between a kind of pride in the Phantom--"I rejoice in his immense

buried talent" (102)--and a sense of shame and frustration over their friendship: "Why must I have him for a friend? I wanted a friend with whom one could be seen abroad. With whom one could exchange country weekends, on our respective estates! I put these unworthy reflections behind me..."

(105). The frustration the narrator feels is born out of a recognition that his attachment to the trapped Phantom is a kind of trap for himself as well: "Everything that can be said has been said many times. I have no new observations to make....How many nights have I spent this way, waiting upon his sighs....What was required was the boldness, the will to break out of old patterns..." (103). For some reason--reasons which, it must be stressed, are simply not available in the manifest layer of the story--both narrator and Phantom lack the will to break out of the morbid, old patterns which hold them each in thrall.

The narrator behaves like someone with very little ego strength, and despite some sense of disappointment over the Phantom as friend, he clearly views the Phantom as some sort of ego ideal. Much of the narrator's identification with the Phantom may come from the fact that the Phantom's unreasonable devotion to Christine, the lost and former love of his life, is a simulacrum of his own devotion to the Phantom. Of the Phantom, he says: "His situation is simple and terrible. He must decide whether to risk life aboveground or to remain forever in hiding, in the cellars of the Opera" (102). Yet the narrator's situation is equally "simple and terrible" for he must decide whether to risk life without the Phantom or to remain forever in waiting, "waiting upon his sighs" (103). The narrator observes this of the Phantom: "Yet the vivacity with which he embraces ruin is unexampled, in my experience" (105). One of the ironies of the story, of course, is that this

observation is equally true of the narrator himself.

The narrator convinces the Phantom to seek the services of a doctor, a plastic surgeon. The surgeon and his associate, a Dr. W., "A qualified alienist" (107), offer the hope of a cure, a way out of the old pattern. But when the appointed hour comes for the Phantom to deliver himself into the hands of the doctor, and a possible release from his enthrallment, he doesn't appear. The narrator, in a manner consistent with the ambivalence he has so far exhibited with regard to the Phantom, doesn't know whether he should feel any disappointment over the fact that the Phantom's and his own situation will now continue as they always have:

But when I call for the Phantom on Thursday, at the appointed hour, he is not there.

What vexation!

Am I not slightly relieved?

Can it be that he doesn't like me?

I sit down on the kerb, outside the Opera. People passing look at me. I will wait here for a hundred years. Or until the hot meat of romance is cooled by the dull gravy of common sense once more. (107)

The bulk of what is communicated to the reader about the Phantom's character originates in the narrator's view of his relationship to the Phantom. It is in this relationship that is the richest source of information about the Phantom's obsessions. According to the narrator, the Phantom is what he is, not out of love, but out of hate: "Is one man," he asks, "entitled to fix himself at the centre of a cosmos of hatred, and remain there?" (104). According to the narrator, the personality of the Phantom alternates between "what can only be called fits of grandiosity" followed immediately by a "deep despair" (104). The archaic nature of the feelings that have driven this rejected, obsessive, disfigured lover underground are made explicit in this exchange between the narrator and the

doctor: "But was it not the case that originally, the violent emotions of revenge and jealousy--," says the doctor. "Yes," replies the narrator. "But replaced now, I believe, by a melancholy so deep, so all-pervading--" (107). What this says about the Phantom's state of mind is that it has its source in an original love, a love lost in an atmosphere marked by jealousy and revenge. In the absence of that love, the Phantom, lost in an all-pervading melancholy, has been driven to live the life he now leads, the underground life of an artist.

What is important to note in the story, given the few details we have to work with, is that the relationship to Christine which is so crucial to the Phantom's condition is marked by a certain ambivalence:

Sometimes he speaks of Christine:
 'That voice!'
 'But I was perhaps overdazzled by the circumstances...
 'A range from low C to the F above high C!
 'Flawed, of course...
 'Liszt heard her. 'Que, c'est beau!' he cried out.
 'Possibly somewhat deficient in temperament. But I had
 temperament enough for two.
 'Such goodness! Such gentleness!
 'I would pull down the very doors of heaven for a--' (103-04)

This series of exclamations represents the sum total of direct information we are given about the Phantom's relationship with Christine. Before we consider it, let us consider some of the information we are given about the Phantom in general which might serve circumstantially to fill in some of the gaps in these protestations of love.

The first thing the Phantom is quoted as saying in the story itself has to do with the wine he has stolen from the cellar of the Opera's Board of Directors. This is how the Phantom characterizes the theft: "I tell you, it made me feel like a director myself! As if I were worth two or three millions and had a fat, ugly wife!" (101). What the Phantom reveals here is

that he associates the theft of food with the theft of the role of the powerful Director. The Phantom also associates the stealing of the food with possession of the Director's wife. The fact that he fantasizes about stealing the hated Director's wife is significant in its own right but the fact that he chooses also to make the wife the object of his hostility and to characterize her as fat and ugly is also telling. After all, at the heart of his unhappy situation is a preoccupation with Christine, the woman he would have made his wife--a lost love.

Later in the story, the Phantom sends the narrator an urgent note. Only the conclusion of that note is disclosed: "All men that are ruined are ruined on the side of their natural propensities" (105). The precise nature of the "natural propensities" alluded to here are never explained. However, we do know that the Phantom's ruination is tied directly to his prolonged obsession ("all of this is generations cold" [104]) to repossess his "lost love" (104). Returning now to that series of exclamations recorded by the narrator, if regarded closely we can see that they contain a number of clues as to the nature of the ruinous natural propensities alluded to above. On the one hand, he remembers Christine as a great singer of extraordinary range, a creature of great gentleness and goodness. On the other hand, however, a more rational Phantom suspects that he may have been "overdazzled by circumstance" (a kind of blindness) and sees her as deficient in temperament. In other words, the Phantom believes that together he and Christine--the abundant temperament and the beautiful instrument--would have made a single and complete being.

How are we to reconcile this "bedazzled" view of Christine with the fact that the Phantom sits at the centre of a world of hate, that he

fantasizes about stealing the fat, ugly wife of the Director? The ambivalence of these feelings is epitomized in the excessive but incomplete expression of love that serves as the culminating utterance of his feelings for Christine: "I would pull down the very doors of heaven for a--". For what? Why does he trail off into silence at this point? And why, we are tempted to ask, is it heaven and not hell, which typically serves to come between lovers, that must be attacked to get at her to do whatever it is he hopes to do but cannot tell us?

Halfway through the story, the narrator's voice breaks off and Gaston Leroux is suddenly introduced as the author of The Phantom of the Opera, the voice behind the voice we have been listening to to this point. Leroux is tired of writing The Phantom of the Opera and so he puts the manuscript in a closet and tries to switch to another story, "The Secret of the Yellow Room." What follows, however, is the narrative of The Phantom picked up exactly where it left off. This "authorial" intrusion is extremely suggestive in context. The most immediate consequence of Leroux's intrusion is to multiply the number of levels on which this story is functioning. The "Phantom," as the title of Barthelme's story suggests, is really about the narrator and the matter of his compelling "friendship" with the Phantom. With the introduction of Leroux, however, Barthelme gives us a variety of obsessive attachment on a third level (Phantom to Christine and his opera; narrator to Phantom; Leroux to the narrator and Phantom) and thereby ultimately implicates his own voice in the complex and reflexive pattern of obsessions he has created.

We noted above that Barthelme locates his Phantom five levels below the surface. As it happens, Barthelme has so constructed his story as to make

that internal observation true in another sense: it could be said that with the sudden introduction of Gaston Leroux the number of possible points of view active inside this narrative is increased to five.

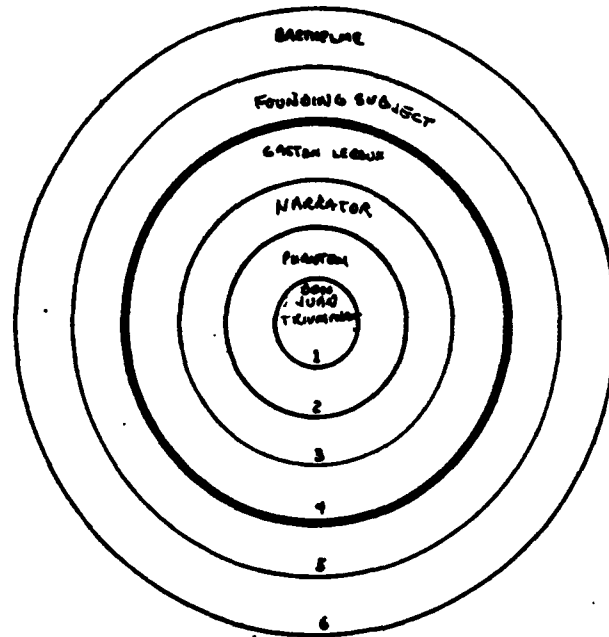


Fig. 1. "The Phantom of the Opera's Friend"

At the very farthest remove from the centre is Barthelme himself, the phantom-artist about whom, in any final sense, nothing can be known. Barthelme, of course, has always been present at some indirect and inaccessible remove behind the author-principle, but the manner of the introduction of Leroux as obsessed author of a version of the "Phantom" has the effect of invoking the ultimate author behind these several authors, involving Barthelme in a unique way in the pattern of obsession. In other words, with the introduction of Gaston Leroux-as-story-writer especially, Barthelme-as-

story-writer implicitly implicates himself with a writer who for some

unknown reason cannot stop writing the story of the Phantom, even when the deliberate and conscious attempt is made to write another story.

The point of view with which we are made most familiar is that of the narrator. And yet, the story is designed in such a way as to imply that the factors which bind the narrator to the Phantom are part of an overall pattern of obsession. The story is so structured as to provide us with the profile of an obsession but, by dint of complex layering, the story makes it difficult to establish the actual source and nature of that obsession or to the relationship between one form of obsession and another. Is the story suggesting, for instance, that Leroux's compulsion to write the story of the Phantom has something to do with the Phantom's obsession with his opera? Or is the story suggesting that the narrator's attachment to the Phantom is a function of the fact that he sees in the Phantom's situation a figuration of his own? What the story does suggest, in fact, via negativa, in the scrupulous absence of evidence in the story that might suggest the contrary, is that all of the versions of obsession in the story, implied or otherwise, are related in a profound but secret way. At one point in the story, the narrator hears the Phantom's music. His description of what he hears of that music aptly describes what we hear of Barthelme in the story we're reading: "Faintly, through many layers of stone, I hear organ music. The music is attenuated by unmistakable. It is his great work Don Juan Triumphant. A communication of a kind" (102).

The next point of view after Leroux's operating within this story is, of course, that of the narrator, and of all the obsessives and potential obsessives in this story, we know the most about him and his attachment to the Phantom. At the next level is the Phantom himself whom we view

primarily through the eyes of the narrator. Located at the very heart of this story, and at the centre of all these layered perspectives, is another work of art, the opera the Phantom has been working on while pursuing his underground existence. That work is entitled Don Juan Triumphant and we know nothing about it as fact beyond what is suggested by the title. Nevertheless, in the context Barthelme provides, that title is highly suggestive. Like the omniscient Barthelme who chose the story of the writing of the Phantom of the Opera as his vehicle, and like Leroux who chose the narrator and his Phantom as his special vehicle, the Phantom has chosen Don Juan (the word chosen here is probably misleading given the example of compulsive Leroux, an artist who cannot help but choose the Phantom).

Why is Don Juan the chosen vehicle/persona for the Phantom? And why, given the Phantom's seeming defeat at the hands of love, is the opera about a triumph? We know that Don Juan is a particular type. The character has, in fact, since given his name to a complex exhibited by men who display an ambivalent attitude toward women. Like the Joker in Barthelme's story "The Joker's greatest Triumph"(CBDC), a Don Juan is a lover, but he is also an "abominator of women" (157), a man who basically fears and even hates women. Since he feels threatened by women, a Don Juan would tend to view the act of love, not as a tender, reciprocal attempt at intimacy between equals, but as an act of conquest. The type is common in Barthelme. The mysterious Shel McPartland (a name suggestive of an empty and fragmented self) in "The Reference"(A) is one of the more obvious examples of the type: "He has too much love and respect for women. He has so much love and respect for women that he has nothing to do with them. At all" (148).

How all of these inferences drawn from the title of the Phantom's magnum opus are relevant to the problem that keeps the Phantom underground, of course, remains problematic and circumstantial. Without a careful consideration of all of the patterns of associations developed in the context of the story (patterns we have considered here in only a preliminary way), there just aren't sufficient grounds provided in this story ("a communication of a kind") to draw anything more than highly suggestive or speculative inferences.

In "Engineer-Private Paul Klee" (S), Barthelme seems to be showing how the artist can use his art to turn a threatening situation to his advantage. The story is important in any analysis of Barthelme's aesthetic because it shows in practise that Barthelme views art as equivalent in some respects to an act of forgery. We shall note in "Florence Green" that Barthelme's narrator, Baskerville, chooses to use the story he tells as a kind of game in which the object for the reader is to find a putative psychoanalytic issue he declares is hidden somewhere in the text. That missing subject could possibly be inferred from a reading of the manifest level of the text, but the text is very careful to keep that subject, while always before the reader, carefully out of reach. In "Engineer-Private Paul Klee," Barthelme designs a different kind of game for the reader than he does in "Florence Green," but the point of the game, and what that game implies about the relationship in fiction between what is said and what is meant, remains the same.

In the story, the painter Paul Klee is working as a painter-artist in the Air Corps, doing work which requires no great skill or imagination

(Paul Klee, of course, is the name of an actual artist of the Bauhaus school who, as it happens, did serve in the German army in World War I). While transporting three planes by train, Klee emerges from a restaurant while on route to discover that one of the planes is missing. Unable to find the plane he draws a picture of the empty canvas and then decides to apply Reason to solve his problem: "Reason dictates the solution. I will diddle the manifest. With my painter's skill which is after all not so different from a forger's, I will change the manifest to reflect conveyance of two aircraft..." (69). Satisfied with this solution, he goes in search of chocolate for which he has developed a sudden craving.

The story is structured as a series of alternating first-person disclosures by Paul Klee and by the Secret Police. The Secret Police are more important to this story and what it is saying about the nature of art than they may at first seem. When they first introduce themselves, they explain that they are after secrets, the secrets which are the basis of the power they seek: "Omnipresence is our goal. We do not even need real omnipresence. The theory of omnipresence is enough. With omnipresence, hand-in-hand as it were, goes omniscience. And with omniscience and omnipresence, hand-in-hand as it were, goes omnipotence. We are a three-sided Waltz" (66). These Secret Police, however, suffer from "melancholy" because, as they put it, "We yearn to be known, acknowledged, admired even. What is the good of omnipotence if nobody knows? However that is a secret, that sorrow" (66).

The Secret Police watching Paul Klee observe the missing aircraft. Like Klee, they are threatened by what has taken place. The threat to them arises out of the fact that a missing plane is an affront to their view of

themselves as omnipresent. Put along with Klee in an embarrassing and threatening situation by the missing plane, they are delighted with Klee's forgery of the manifest. Indeed, they use exactly the same terms Klee himself uses to describe his painter-forgery's skill: "We have previously observed him diddling the manifest with his painter's skill which resembles not a little that of the forger" (69). The story ends with the Secret Police still secret and Paul Klee completely unaffected by what has occurred. Klee, who has made a drawing of the potential disaster, has even come out ahead of the game: "I wait contentedly in the warm orderly room. The drawing I did of the collapsed canvas and ropes is really very good. I eat a piece of chocolate. I am sorry about the lost aircraft but not overmuch. The war is temporary. But drawings and chocolate go on forever" (70).

On one level this story is a simple and straightforward celebration of the artist's power to control his situation, to turn potential threat into private gain. The space the missing aircraft occupied is translated into an artifact that Klee can sell for more chocolate, if he so desires. The world, meanwhile, is none the wiser. Klee's skill as an artist keeps the Secret Police and the World War from disturbing his insular and modest little existence--drawing and chocolate go on forever. Reading the story as a celebration of the skill of the artist, however, represents a gross oversimplification of what actually takes place in this story. According to Wayne Stengel, the story is designed to show "the ability of a great artist to create from the raw materials of a hostile world"; it "celebrates the power of the artist to make an object of beauty from what is lost or missing from what otherwise might be a source of distress or embarrassment" (55-56). Stengel believes that the Secret Police represent "social insanity," the

"policed madness [which] drives a country to war and...attempts at total control over its citizens" (56). Stengel views Klee as the "man who has become the happy creator of his own reality" and suggests, therefore, that the story affirms Klee's own "triumphant belief that an artful, creative life is a kind of forgery, which occasionally permits one to live in the imagination, even if reality is savage and destructive" (56-57).

This seems to me to be an altogether naive reading of this story, a reading which is possible only because it chooses to ignore the fact that art is equated with forgery. It is a reading of the manifest level of the story, a reading which, in terms of a principle of interpretation the story takes pains to develop, chooses to accept at face value the forged version of the truth couched in the manifest, chooses to ignore the fact that something has obviously gone missing. Stengel's reading of Barthelme's manifest content is suspect in light of the artist-as-forgery principle, but there are other "secrets" in the story which should make us suspicious of that "manifest."

First of all, there is almost nothing in the story to support Stengel's notion that Klee can be separated all that easily from the corrupt values couched in the background of this situation. First of all, there is the matter of the setting of this story, the First World War. The story takes place during the World War, but the war is extremely remote from Klee. The story, in fact, exhibits absolutely no interest in the war at all and certainly not as any kind of drama of horror and waste. From Klee's point of view, the war is a job, a mundane and innocuous job, a job in which he even takes a measure of pride (he insists that he and his fellow painters of fuselages be called painter-artists). "It's not a bad life," he says,

"There is always bread and wurst and beer in the station restaurants" (65). There is, therefore, no internal justification to set Klee's artistic values up in contrast to those exemplified by the War. The solipsistic Klee's interests are strictly limited to himself and extend no farther than the reach of his most immediate appetites.

As far as the notion that the Secret Police stand for the madness that drives a country to war or represent a force which seeks total control over its citizens is concerned, again, there is little in the story beyond the suggestive import of their title to support this view in the story. Actually, the Secret Police come off as a rather pathetic, ineffective, and even sympathetic group. They are patently weak and vulnerable, and the absurd secrets they do discover--Klee's "feet rest twenty-six centimeters from the baggage-car stove" (66)--are harmless. The fact that they end up in essentially the same position as Klee, compromised by the loss of the plane, and the fact that they view the role of the artist in exactly the same terms as Klee himself, lead one to suspect that they are not as inimical and hostile as their role would seem to suggest.

Finally, and most problematic of all, is the question of the value and meaning of Klee's art as it is represented in this story. The comparison of the artist to the forger Klee himself makes is hardly a flattering one but it is certainly a telling one. Klee reasons that he cannot construct a convincing duplicate plane and therefore elects to "diddle the manifest." Why is this act of erasure and minor act of forgery (one assumes that all he has to do is to change the number three to the number two) compared to the skill of an artist? A forger is a technician more than he is any kind of artist, a specialist in facsimiles, not interpretations. Furthermore, a

forgery is a kind of liar, a kind of thief whose work profits only the thief. If the presence of the Secret Police or the backdrop of the War are meant to serve as justifications for this petty criminal act than why does Barthelme so arrange it that Klee remains unaware of the presence of the Police, and why does he have this artist evince no interest at all in the war, that great subject lying all around him, the same war that gave such impetus to modernism in general? What this Klee does in diddling the manifest is to say, in effect, "Screw the world! I may be responsible for the loss of this plane but I'm clever enough to avoid having to be responsible to anything beyond myself." As further evidence of the inherent pettiness and selfishness of the act, Barthelme has his Klee develop a sudden craving for candy, as if to say that the artist has earned some kind of childish oral reward for his cleverness. As proof of the importance Barthelme accords this association between making art-forgery and eating sweet food, it is underscored by being repeated in the last line of the story.

The artist Klee's diddling of the manifest is the central act in this story. What this act offers the reader on a metafictional level is something of an oblique and qualified warning by Barthelme to the reader that artists diddle the manifest to serve private and hidden agendas. If the reader is at all sensitive to this warning, he is obliged to look at the text, at some level, as a sustained act of forgery, a forged manifest designed to conceal the absence of a genuine but now missing subject. As it happens, there is a subject of this story missing from the manifest level, and even if its whereabouts is not immediately apparent, it is a part of the story we're reading. The search for the missing and secret subject in this story begins with the Secret Police.

What Stengel's reading of the story overlooks is the fact that the story is as much about the Secret Police as it is about Paul Klee. The most obvious evidence of this is that the story is literally shared between them. In Stengel's view, a view firmly supported by the manifest layer, the Secret Police have nothing to offer us. They are not artists, they are meglomaniacal brutes, different in purpose and in method than Klee. Klee, on the other hand, is an artist, a man of refined sensibilities. How do we know this? We know this because his name is Paul Klee, and Paul Klee, as everyone knows, was a great artist. And yet, what do we see of worth in this artist whose worth should be rendered so much more apparent inasmuch as the exclusive source of comparison lies in the broadly drawn foil of a Secret Police? The fact is that, except for the famous name and all that that name might encourage us to infer about quality of spirit and such, the Paul Klee Barthelme gives us in this story is, as great spirits of genius go, something of a disappointment. What Barthelme has done with Paul Klee, in fact, is to do what he always does with found objects--he has hollowed out the centre and replaced the original matter with substance of his own peculiar manufacture (as in the balloon in "Balloon" and the Mona Lisa in "Bought"). The Paul Klee we see in this story is a petty, unremarkable, spoiled, self-serving, duplicitous fake who values his own appetites as much as he does his art. Barthelme has so tailored his portrait of the artist-forger that the Secret Police attached to him emerge as a somewhat grotesque but essentially sound reflection of the man they watch. A careful reading of the story reveals that their need to control and manipulate events is different from Klee's, not in kind, but only in scope.

We watch events unfold in this story from both of their perspectives,

each alternating point of view contributing to our interpretation of the simple facts of the story. Notice, too, that, despite the difference in tone, they agree absolutely as to the procedures and attitudes one adopts when dealing with the world. In what amounts to a more devastating assessment of the artist than the business comparing artists to forgers, Barthelme so arranges it that the Secret Police and Klee depend, not just on secretiveness per se, but on the very same secret to protect them.

There is a third perspective implicitly at work here, one that encloses the perspective of the Secret Police just as their perspective encloses that of Klee: the "artist-forgery" of "Engineer-Private Paul Klee," the story which also has a manifest disguising a missing freight. There is much in the story that keeps urging us to consider this third artist's place in the story. The number three, for instance, is very important in this story: besides the third perspective of the omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent implied author, there are three characters in the story, the Secret Police, Klee, and Klee's girlfriend Lily (who doesn't appear); originally, there were three planes, reduced to two when one went mysteriously missing; the Secret Police speak of their sad three-sided waltz. Their waltz is sad because their situation is paradoxical: they want to go public, to be admired, but their secrets are powerful only if they remain secrets. They are like the impoverished ego that longs to be universally admired, but for some reason fears exposure, and so finds itself in a melancholy position it cannot resolve: it needs to participate and control, but it is deeply fearful of the loss of the advantage of anonymity. The Secret Police are also like the omniscient narrator by dint of the perspective from they

choose to operate: like that omniscient narrator, the first secret about them is where they are.

What all of this serves to imply about the omniscient voice of this story is that he, too, dances a three-sided waltz involving himself, the story, and the reader. The missing subject that lurks inside the diddled manifest of this story has been so skillfully concealed by Barthelme's artist-forger's skill that it can only be inferred from events and relationships left in the text. As spare as that material is, it is nevertheless highly suggestive. It suggests, for instance, that Barthelme has a rather ambivalent view about the motivation for making art. It suggests that the character of the artist is distinguished by meglomania, by a fundamentally weak ego that cannot risk exposure but dreams of universal approbation. But perhaps most suggestive of all is the notion carefully embroidered into this story that the manifest artifact is a forged version of the truth, a forgery designed to conceal a secret--a missing subject--that, if exposed, would thoroughly compromise the position of the artist.

"The Dolt"(UPUA) is another story in which the central subject matter is the process of making art, in this case, fiction. It makes essentially the same sort of statement made by "Engineer-Private Paul Klee" as regards the handling of the missing subject in the text. Edgar, the artist-narrator in this story, a man living "in worlds of hurt" (64), is having trouble completing a story he has been required to write as part of something called the National Writer's Examination. The interior fiction which is included in its entirety inside the frame tale is an historical romance. It

concerns a love triangle involving a Prussian Baron, his younger wife, Inge, and a young former priest named Orsini who the Baron conscripts and places in a regiment of giants (the detail of the giants is important, see below). The story is a depiction of an oedipal triangle in classic terms, complete with descriptions of the young Orsini's "passion, that was present, as it were in a condition of latency" (70) and a vengeful and betrayed father-figure who exposes the lovers to the "blood-lust of the pandours", and so is flung "headlong into a horrible crime" (70).

Edgar is married to Barbara, a former hooker, a woman described as "very sexually attractive...but also deeply mean" (65). Barbara is a version of the women in "Mandible" or the woman that emerges from the composite portrait of all the aggressive, predatory, debilitating women we will meet in the synoptic tales. Typical of the type, her sexual attractiveness is malign, a source of hurt and confusion to her husband. Also according to type, she treats Edgar with contempt. Specifically, she treats him as if he were a child: "There is not a grown person in the United States that doesn't know that," (65) she says to him as she proves how well she can handle questions on the exam he has failed twice. (The answer to the question is The Battle Hymn of the Republic. This is no casual detail. It is, rather, another example of just how dense and over-determined the fabric of Barthelme's fictions are: it is wonderfully apt that the oedipally enthralled Edgar who is writing a love-and-war story about oedipal transgression and punishment should suffer embarrassment over this particular song, a battle hymn about war and retribution meted out by a punishing father-God.)

At the close of the story, as the tension between Barbara and Edgar

over this story is reaching a crisis, their son enters. Note the manner in which he is described: "At that moment the son manqué entered the room. The son manque was eight feet tall and wore a serape woven out of two hundred transistor radios, all turned on and tuned to different stations. Just by looking at him you could hear Portland and Nogales, Mexico" (72). Edgar tries "to think of a way to badmouth this immense son leaning over him like a large blaring building. But he couldn't think of anything" (72). The story ends with one of Barthelme's usual depictions of a crisis that cannot be resolved, a crisis that conflates aesthetic and psychic morbidity: "Thinking of anything was beyond [Edgar]. I sympathize. I myself have these problems. Endings are elusive, middles are nowhere to be found, but worst of all is to begin, to begin, to begin" (72-73).

What makes this story especially relevant to our discussion of the manner in which Barthelme introduces and subsequently manages a missing subject in his work is that Edgar-the-writer of short stories is a "dolt" because he can't bring himself to write the middle of his story: "'I don't have the middle!' he thundered. 'Something has to happen between them [says Barbara], Inge and what's his name,' she went on. 'Otherwise there's no story.' Looking at her he thought: she is still streeety although wearing her housewife gear. The child was a perfect love, however, and couldn't be told from the children of success" (71) (the child Edgar is alluding to here is his daughter, his youngest child, Rose, who in her white bathrobe looks to Edgar like "a tiny fighter about to climb into the ring" [64]). What is significant about this issue of the missing middle of the story--the part of the story which certainly would have depicted the intercourse between the young Orsini and Inge, and their subsequent violent deaths at the hands of

the "brutal and much-feared" (67) pandours--is that that missing narrative is, in effect, present in the frame tale, in the story of Edgar; the middle of the story that Edgar cannot write is depicted, or expressed, in the oedipal latent content of both the frame tale and the interior fiction. The frame tale and the interior fiction are depictions in different terms of the same situation. The only substantive difference between the frame tale and the interior fiction in terms of content is that the interior fiction is a more dramatic and colourful version of the former. To understand how the missing middle has been written into the frame tale, the reader has to appreciate how much Edgar's and Orsini's respective situations have in common.

There are, in fact, five versions of the same character in "The Dolt," Orsini, Rose, the son manqué, Edgar, and the author of "The Dolt." Let us begin with Orsini. Orsini's situation is a classic depiction of an oedipal situation: he "enjoyed a peculiar status in regard to the lady; he was her lover, and he was not" (68). The young and trusted officer lusts after and subsequently beds his fatherly benefactor's young wife, and so becomes involved in "a horrible crime" (70). As Don Juan served the Phantom as persona, Orsini serves Edgar. In "The Dolt," however, there is more concrete evidence that the relationship between the created persona and the creator is an intimate one.

Edgar has two children, Rose and the unnamed son manqué who enters just as the story ends. Both these children are displacements for Edgar, and the displacement is accomplished in the frame tale primarily through the figure of Orsini. In her white fighter's bathrobe. Rose serves a displacement for the former priest (innocent) turned military officer (fighter) who once

served in a regiment of giants. The "perfect love" Rose is to her father what Orsini is to Inge, a perfect but illicit love. Edgar's "immense" son manque is a more complex figure. The use of the term manque relates this son to Orsini who was treated as a son by the Baron, but failed to fulfill the responsibilities of his assumed role. Edgar feels threatened by this son and associates this gigantic son leaning over him with an enormous building. The son manque is also a displaced depiction of Orsini who is both a father and a son: as a former priest, he is a kind of father, and in his latest role, he is treated as a kind of son. Also associating the son manque with Orsini is the fact that Orsini "has the bad luck to be a very tall man" (68) (the son manque is eight feet tall. See also the issue of height in "The Hiding Man," Chapter Four). Furthermore, the association of the giant son with a threatening building picks up on the fact that in the interior fiction the crime against the father-figure takes place in the Baron's chateau, a chateau that is besieged, and so, figuratively, brought down upon the head of the transgressing son-figure. From Edgar's point of view, the son manque is a hybrid, part father and part son: he is Edgar's son but his size makes him as big as a father to Edgar.

Then there is Edgar himself, the one who stages the oedipal triangle in the interior fiction, a fiction which for some reason not explained in the text he cannot bring himself to finish. Most of what we know about Edgar originates out of his relationship to his wife. What we know about Edgar is that he is married to a lubricious and powerful woman who threatens his sense of himself by treating him like a child (or son).

The final incarnation of the figures involved in the same problem is the most problematic. In the final sentence of the story, quoted above, the

putative "author" of "The Dolt" intrudes into the text for the first time with an explicit identification with Edgar and Edgar's psychological-aesthetic predicament: "I myself have these problems." This authorial intrusion serves to do two things: it multiplies the number of figures in the constellation of figures caught up in the "problem," and it multiplies the number of fictions that now claim to have no middle--Edgar's untitled interior fiction; the story of Edgar as told by the authorial "I"; and Barthelme's "The Dolt." The implication is, however, that each fiction does in fact contain a middle, albeit it is a middle that is "missing" from that text.

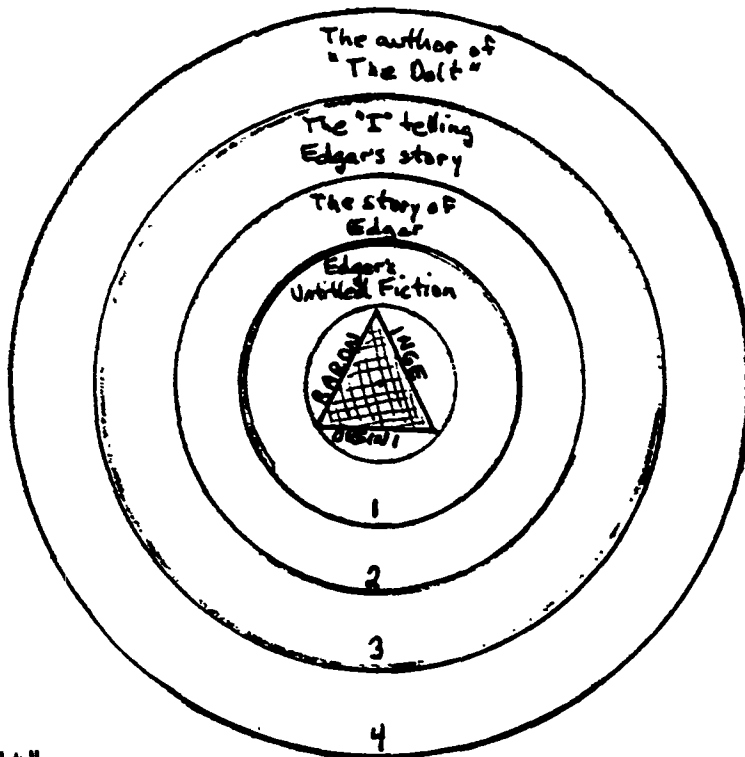


Fig 2. "The Dolt"

What is interesting about each successive layer is that each surrounds at least one incomplete version of itself. All of these layers are wrapped around the putatively missing middle in Edgar's unfinished story, the

discovery of the trusted "son" and the betraying "mother" in bed together. As we shall see in analysis of the synoptic tales and the rest of Barthelme's stories, it is this moment that provides for the missing subject matter of much of Barthelme.

A story that is very similar to "The Dolt" in terms of the equivalence it draws between a fairly explicit and unresolved oedipal situation and the inability to resolve or complete an interior fiction is "And Then"^(A). As in "The Dolt," the artist-narrator in this story cannot bring himself to finish the story he's been writing: "The part of the story that came next was suddenly missing, I couldn't think of it..." (105). The oedipal love triangle in "And Then" is one of the most explicit in Barthelme, to the point where the police sergeant's wife, Cynthia, is manifestly identified with the artist-narrator's mother: "'Yes!' I shouted, 'she's my mother! And although she is a widow, and legally free, she belongs to me in my dreams!'" (110).

One possible means the narrator entertains to complete the missing part of the interior fiction involves a version of the children's fairy tale, "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." Significantly, in light of what we have noted to this point about the tendency to multiply fictional layers around a missing core, the bears in "And Then" begin to multiply: "...and the seventh bear descends from the flies on a nylon rope and cries, 'Mother! Come home!!' and the eighth bear--" (111).

Caught between the threatening presence of the police sergeant leaning over him and unable to resolve "these terrible contradictions" (112) with his mother, the resolution this narrator imagines for his psychic-aesthetic

impasse is the literal immolation of his obsessions. By destroying those obsessions, however, his own ruination is almost guaranteed: "I will reenter the first room, cheerfully, confidently, even gaily, and throw chicken livers flambé all over the predicament, the flaming chicken livers clinging like incindergel to Mother, policemen, bicycles, harpsichord, and my file of the National Review from its founding to the present time. That will 'open up' the situation successfully. I will resolve these terrible contradictions with flaming chicken parts and then sing the song of how I contrived the ruin of my anaconda" (111). The image of the major figures and "parts" in his regressive, unresolved and wholly debilitating obsession burning together suggests the very fiction we are reading: "And Then" likewise draws all of these constituents together into one great burning "predicament." The "contrived" story about the ruined phallic anaconda (an image which suggests impotence) reads very much like a version of Barthelme's story "And Then." As in "The Dolt," the missing portion of "And Then" (which could be entitled "The Ruin of my Anaconda") lies in the "missing" (disguised) latent content of the story itself: the material derived from an analysis of the associations of "And Then" is the unfinished part of "And Then."

CHAPTER FIVE: THREADS OF THE DISCOURSE

We turn now to a careful and specific consideration of four of Barthelme's short stories. What follows is an analysis of Barthelme's first short stories, originally published between 1961 and 1963, and collected in his first book of short stories, Come back, Dr. Caligari. The stories will be analyzed in the order in which they were originally published, beginning with "Me and Miss Mandible" and ending with "Florence Green is 81."

"Me and Miss Mandible," "Florence Green is 81," "Hiding Man," and "The Big Broadcast of 1938" are four of the first five stories Barthelme ever published, which should serve to mitigate somewhat against the charge that only those stories from Come Back, Dr. Caligari that support the views of this thesis were selected. In fact, any four stories from Come Back, Dr. Caligari, and indeed, any four stories from anywhere in Barthelme would have served just as well as the focus for analysis. The first stories were selected as a means of underscoring the fact that the subject of Barthelme's fiction has been, from the very outset, a state of mind.

It should be noted that these four stories are not the first four stories Barthelme ever published. "The Viennese Opera Ball," the fourth story Barthelme published, just after "Hiding Man," is not included in this series. This story would be included in the synoptic tales except that it is the first example of a type of story that Barthelme has published every so often over the years. "The Viennese Opera Ball" is representative of Barthelme's least successful kind of story. As Molesworth suggests, this story is one of a type in Barthelme that virtually precludes interpretation

except in the most general terms: "These stories demonstrate Barthelme's indebtedness to an avant-garde program of radical experimentation...Barthelme evidently felt the need to go all the way into incoherence before he could clearly define the limits of his art" (74). As a type, these stories are simply too aleatory, too open to too many interpretations, to be of any real use in a study of this kind. I have therefore elected to substitute "The Big Broadcast of 1938," chronologically the next story Barthelme published, to bring the number of original stories analyzed up to four.

The following analysis of "Mandible" represents the most developed criticism of any single story in this thesis. There are several reasons for this. First, since the discussion of this story represents, not only an introduction to Barthelme's prose, but the first demonstration of the approach this thesis will take to all of Barthelme's fiction, the analysis of "Mandible" is especially developed. Second, "Mandible" is the first story Barthelme ever published. Because this thesis asserts that Barthelme's prose is so designed as to describe the operation of a founding subjectivity, a profile of the psychoanalytic issues nascent in the very first fiction Barthelme published would have to be expected. Third, "Mandible" is innately deserving of greater attention because, despite the fact that it is the first story Barthelme ever published, the story remains one of Barthelme's best and most representative fictions.

The analyses of the succeeding three stories in what I am calling the synoptic tales are more streamlined and less exhaustive because these examinations are to some extent build upon material already explored or explained in the analysis of "Mandible." Nevertheless, the concentration on

detail in these analyses still represents a significant increase in anything available outside this thesis. As noted in the opening chapter of this study, for various reasons exegeses of Barthelme's stories tend to generalize about his work. Despite the fact that Barthelme's prose resembles poetry in its concentration of effects within a dense, resonant, and limited frame of reference, no criticism that I know of has approached this highly condensed prose with the kind of rigour that needs to be applied. Indeed, so concentrated is Barthelme's prose that even the following analysis of "Mandible," which runs some 12,000 words, manages to consider only the better part of the relevant associative material active within the frame of the story.

Of the three stories, "Hiding Man" has probably attracted the most attention in criticism, and "The Big Broadcast of 1938" the least. "Florence Green" has attracted more than its share of critical attention and is generally recognized as an important story. Primarily this is because it explicitly introduces the concept of the "psychoanalytic issue" as a potential, if somewhat problematic source of meaning in Barthelme's aesthetic (not insignificantly, "Florence Green" is suggestively placed as the opening story in Barthelme's first collection of short stories, a fact which lends a certain emphasis to the entire question of the psychoanalytic issue as it obtains in his work).

It is perhaps appropriate at this juncture to emphasize again exactly what it is that this study is seeking in the stories. We have spoken above of Robbe-Grillet as that author whose work probably best exemplifies the postmodern argument that writing is "not derivative of an anterior reality, that it does not refer us to that reality, and that it is itself the reality

with which we must deal" (Docherty xi). I want to allude to his example a final time. Roland Barthes, in his introduction to Morrisette's study of Robbe-Grillet's fiction, says that, while he recognizes the originality of Robbe-Grillet's vision, he agrees with Morrisette that ^{it} is wrong to assume that Robbe-Grillet's prose is cut off from all reference. The principle Morrisette adopts, and which Barthes supports, is that some of the objects and situations in the prose are patently obsessive; that is, they are repeated often enough to imply that they have a meaning (based on the assumption that what is repeated has meaning). According to Barthes, Morrisette is able to show in his study that certain "objects...reintroduced with variations throughout a given novel, all imply an act, criminal or sexual, and beyond this act, an interiority" (13). In other words, Morrisette is able to show that Robbe-Grillet's fictions are based on a story, and that this story has a meaning: "The result is that, provided with a story, a psychology (pathological), and a subject that are if not symbolic at least referential, the Robbegrilletian novel is no longer the 'flat' design of early criticism; it is a thing not only full but full of secrets. Therefore, criticism must begin to search out what lies behind and around this object: it seeks for 'keys' (and usually finds them)" (15). This study intends to show the presence and function of what Barthes calls "interiority" in Barthelme's writing by observing patterns of obsession that have their origin in the pathology of the authorial voice; what my method requires is the discovery and subsequent analysis of the "keys" within individual stories, keys distinguished by repetition. Following the discussion of patterns within an individual story, we'll proceed to a superimposition of texts in an attempt to describe the features of what we

will call the central fantasy. The central fantasy is composed of latent common denominators which might otherwise have escaped detection and which cannot be explained by traditional methods of literary criticism.

I

The narrator of "Me and Miss Mandible" (CBDC), identified only as Joseph, the author of the journal we read, has been sent back to elementary school to relearn lessons he somehow failed to appreciate on his first visit. The authorities responsible for this arrangement are interested, not only in punishing Joseph, but in rehabilitating him: they expect him eventually to rejoin the ranks of functioning adults. His adult career as a Claims Adjustor came to an abrupt and ignominious end when it was discovered that he had acted in the interests of an elderly woman, a Mrs. Anton Bichek, and against the interests of his company.

His teacher, Miss Mandible, and indeed everyone else with whom he comes into contact, is content to treat him as an eleven-year old child in spite of obvious physical evidence that he is a fully-grown, thirty-five-year old adult. His days in school are enlivened by the anticipation that Miss Mandible, who has in Joseph's opinion, a "lubricious eye" (102), will make some sort of sexual advance. Eventually she does, they are discovered, and the story ends with Joseph on his way to another doctor for observation, and Miss Mandible feeling "ruined but fulfilled" (105).

For Joseph, life, specifically the rigours of adult life, is conceived of as a kind of puzzle, complete with clues, a mystery to be solved; his fall from experience back into innocence happened because he "misread a

clue" (109). The agency responsible for providing the clues is referred to consistently as simply the "authorities." The nature of that authority is somewhat obscure, but what is clear is that Joseph tends to equate all forms of authority: the authorities that put him back in school, the army, and the larger systems of America itself, are expressions of the same basic failed system of authority. The journal, of course, owes a great deal to Kafka, especially his novel The Trial (Joseph's name is an obvious reference to Joseph K.) and the short story, "The Metamorphosis". As in Kafka's The Trial, the persecuting authority in "Mandible" has no real face; its influence, although immanent, is arbitrary, and the source of that authority is difficult to trace.

Encouraged by Joseph, who plays the role of victim with a strange enthusiasm, we cannot fail but to identify America as the source of Joseph's troubles. Yet for all of his bitter insight into the debacle that is American life, Joseph never once overtly resists its corrupt machinations, nor is he inclined to openly protest his innocence. He acts, in other words (as distinct from what he says), as if he and not America were the guilty party. Observe, for instance, how he rationalizes his decision to accept the grotesque situation in which he has been placed: "Therefore, when I was installed here, although I knew an error had been made, I countenanced it, I was shrewd; I was aware that there might well be some kind of advantage to be gained from what seemed a disaster. The role of the Adjustor teaches one much [emphasis added]" (99). It is only by carefully reading the partisan testimony of the journal, with a particular eye to the suggestiveness of the language in the prose, that a more feasible rationale for the predicament of this consummate "Adjustor" can be realized. As we shall see, the prose of

Joseph's "clandestine" journal cum diary is layered (98), a nexus of merged meanings. It is written in a prose style designed to exploit the suggestiveness of language, to encourage multiple and sometimes contradictory connotations (as in, the statement "the role of the Adjustor teaches one much"). If we are to get at the source of Joseph's problem, and the nature of the "advantage" he now hopes to gain, we will have to accept at the outset that one of the things this shrewd Adjustor is adjusting is the truth of his situation.

The second childhood to which Joseph has been forced to regress is fraught with strange tensions, intrigue, and a very real danger. Psychoanalysis, with its unique concern with the concealed influences of infantile experience on adult life, would appear to be happily situated to provide some kind of commentary on this short story. There is much that can be said about the meaning of the story, particularly with regard to what might be deemed the philosophical or sociological dimensions that seem to accrue around the image of America as purveyor of lies and false promises. However, interpretation that doesn't take unconscious content into account would inevitably fail to account fully for much that happens in the story, especially the ambiguous conclusion. The story is clotted with incidents and peculiar associations that resist classification; clearly, the implications of Joseph's situation go far deeper than might ^{be} apparent. America is part of Joseph's problem, but the truth behind his situation has a much more intimate source and reference.

On the manifest level, Joseph's journal provides us with abundant and substantive reasons for accepting what would otherwise be viewed as a

humiliating situation. He asks to be seen, more than anything, as a victim, a victim of too fine a sensibility, the unfortunate bearer of a "great overgrown heart" (104). He describes the world he knew as an adult as "a vast junkyard" (99). This regression into the stultifying world of a second childhood is somewhat justified, then, given that the alternative is life in a wasteland.

The story is structured to encourage the view that the American Dream and Joseph's personal breakdown are functions of a general lack of semiotic integrity: "But I say, looking about in this incubator of future citizens, that signs are signs, and that some of them are lies. This is the great discovery of my time here" (109). This lack of correspondence between sign and significance is carefully and repeatedly cited as the cause, both of Joseph's inability to find love and for the perpetuation of a corrupt and debilitating myth of American righteousness. Joseph's estrangement from love and his estrangement as an American citizen are, however, different issues--the former is a personal, psychological issue, while the latter is primarily a philosophical matter (albeit with psychological implications). Nevertheless, Joseph is either unwilling or unable to see his personal problems as anything but a function of his having misread the signs of his culture. Does the failure of America to keep its promises adequately account for Joseph's unwillingness to protest his situation? Does it account for the singular absence in him of resentment over, or even of disappointment with, his present situation? Before we begin to address these questions, we must first deal with a more fundamental question: what is the exact nature of the "advantage" sought by this innocent, too-wholesome, all-suffering victim who accepts (and even seems to seek out)

punishment?

With regard to his failure to read signs correctly on the personal level, according to Joseph, he and his wife Brenda were led into their unhappy marriage because each had "misread" a series of clues. Joseph, for his part, naively assumed that because he had obtained a wife with all the right "wife signs [beauty, charm, softness, perfume, cookery] he had found love" (109). Brenda had likewise been taken in by false signs: "Brenda, reading the same signs that now misled Miss Mandible and Sue Ann Brownly, felt she had been promised that she could never be bored" (109). Similarly, what the flag "betokens" about America doesn't represent the reality that exists beneath the veneer of its "general righteousness": "Plucked from my unexamined life among other pleasant, desperate, money-making young Americans, thrown backwards in space and time, I am beginning to understand how I went wrong, how we all go wrong" (100). In Joseph's view life in "pleasant" America requires a certain "desperation" on the part of its citizens; provided one is prepared to participate in the conspiracy of the relevance of American values, a measure of solace is seen to be forthcoming. Miss Mandible, for instance, after she seduces Joseph, for purely personal reasons feels that America has kept faith with her: "Although she will be charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor, she seems at peace; her promise has been kept. She knows that everything she has been told about life, about America, is true" (11). Miss Mandible, like Joseph, equates her private desires with the American Dream. What is curious about this particular passage is that, in spite of the bitter irony with which Mandible's delusive conflation of spheres is presented, Joseph has made and will continue to make the same mistake. And while it appears that only Miss

Mandible is served by such a shifting of personal responsibility, the fact is that Joseph is no less served the procedure.

America and an endemic sense of uncertainty are surely involved in Joseph's situation, but the failure of America to provide signs of absolute integrity doesn't begin to account for the particular dimensions of Joseph's "tragic" situation. The great discovery that signs are only signs and that some of them are lies is one of enormous significance and marks Joseph as a man whose sensibilities are developed well beyond those of the Americans around him. However, notwithstanding the virtue of this insight, there is no suggestion at all in the story that the "fundamental flaw" (108) in him which precipitated his fall from grace is effected in the least by his insight into the truth of what America represents: he remains at the conclusion of the journal a prisoner of forces he can neither understand nor control. The great discovery made in Joseph's return to the classroom may well be that signs are signs and that some of them are lies, but why is it that this metaphysical epiphany does nothing to mitigate against the more insidious consequences of a deeper mystery, a mystery that Joseph will utterly fail to solve?

The fact is that it is not America or semiotics that preoccupies Joseph, it is love: "The sixth grade at Horace Greeley Elementary is a furnace of love, love, love" (106). His descriptions of the preterite world he has been thrown back into tend to concentrate around this, its most significant feature: for Joseph, it is "an atmosphere...charged with aborted sexuality," an atmosphere that "buzzes with imperfectly comprehended titillation" (107). "But I did not create this atmosphere," he says, once again refusing to take any responsibility for the situation, "[but] I am

caught up in it like the others" (107).

The atmosphere of Joseph's past is dominated in a particular way by females; it is a world in which the predatory Miss Mandible and Sue Ann Brownly, with her typically feminine "malign compassion," vie for the opportunity to involve Joseph in dangerous sexual intrigue. Significantly, it is also a world that Joseph is in no hurry to leave: "Here I am safe, I have a place; I do not wish to entrust myself once more to the whimsy of authority" (107).

In this furnace of love, love, love, the environment he has not known since a child, Joseph finds himself in a position to solve the riddle of his past. Like a sort of Oedipus, he spends his time weighing certain clues to the mystery of his origins, the experiences that have resulted in his unhappy hybrid status of part man and part child: "All of the mysteries that perplexed me as an adult have their origins here, and one by one I am numbering them, exposing their roots" (109) (this passage has something of a ironic metafictional component to it as well, inasmuch as the journal is comprised of numbered sections, sections in which various roots of the mystery are exposed). Joseph is viewed by the children as "a mutation of some sort but essentially a peer" (103): in light of the correspondences between his situation and that of the Oedipal archetype it is significant that the particular physical form his "mutation" takes reminds one of Oedipus: according to Joseph, the students treat him as if he "had only one eye, or wasted, metal-wrapped legs" (103).

What of Joseph's own views on love? In what is surely a flourish of ironic ambiguity, he says the following: "...it is only in the matter of my sex that I feel my own true age; that is apparently something that, once

learned, can never be forgotten" (103). What are we to understand by the phrase, "my own true age"? The manifest surface of the journal would have us believe that its author enjoys maturity and confidence as a sexual adult. But is there any evidence in the text to support such a view? It certainly is remarkable that Joseph, a confessed casualty in all other spheres of development, should claim to have kept his sex consistent with his physical age, free from the failures of confidence that otherwise go unchecked in his person (if the thing once learned and never forgotten is some sexual technique, Joseph's view of what constitutes his "true age" is impoverished in the extreme). His assertion that sex represents his only viable claim to maturity is especially perplexing given that the journal otherwise makes so much of the fact that he looks and thinks like an adult: "I am thirty-five, I've been in the army, I am six foot one, I have hair in the appropriate places, my voice is a baritone, I know perfectly well what to do with Miss Mandible if she ever makes up her mind" (97). His physical and mental faculties, then, are in no way those of a child. In fact, there is every indication in the journal that in all things excepting his sex, Joseph is an adult male.

Joseph's "true age" sexually is probably closer to eleven, the age of the children in the class he is now forced to occupy. Sexual maturity includes the capacity to view women, at least to a degree, as something other than vicious, malign, lubricious, duplicituous, callous, and finally, dangerous at close quarters. The journal, however, entertains no other view of women than that for Joseph, just another of those "individual egos crazy for love" (108) he sees all around him, women come equipped with mandibles. Joseph may indeed know what to do with Mandible in a physical sense, but a

large part of the reason he's back in school is that he has no real idea what to do with her psychologically; sex as a physical act may lie within the ambit of his maturity, but sexuality is another matter. The irony of Joseph's insistence on his own true age and on the fact that he carries with him the thing "once learned" and "never forgotten" is, of course, that he is telling the truth on one level: the thing once learned and never forgotten is the lesson of sex he learned as a child, and never got over. The "roots" of the problem that plagued him as an adult reach deep into the psycho-sexual conflicts of childhood.

Freud identified three component phases of the oedipus complex. We need not speak of any chronological order of passage or even of the necessity that all three phases be present before the oedipus complex can be identified as such. However, as I hope to show, all three of these primal phantasies are expressed in "Mandible" and lie at the very heart of the mystery Joseph will fail to solve:

Among the occurrences which continually occur in the story of a neurotic's childhood, and seem hardly ever absent, are some of particular significance which I therefore consider worthy of special attention. As models of this type I will enumerate: observation of parental intercourse, seduction by an adult, and the threat of castration." (1974, 406)

What I propose to do is to organize the analysis of the "imperfectly comprehended titillation" (107) in this journal around these three occurrences.

Clark Blaise, in his novel Lunar Attractions, expresses what is a fundamental predicament of children in terms most useful for our discussion: "In those days, my parents were to me not people, not personalities, but

contending principles in the universe" (10). From a psychoanalytic point of view, this is wonderfully put: with his passage into the oedipal phase of development, the child finds himself situated between two contending principles. The result of that tension, the degree to which it is successfully resolved, will determine the nature of his personality, and so, the quality of his life.

Robert Con Davis, in a study of The Odyssey, makes the analogy between the child's passage through this difficult period and Odysseus' passage between the twin threats of Scylla and Charybdis. The paternal principle, according to Davis, corresponds nicely to Scylla, an "insuperable and adamantine...image of irresistible demand...[that] incorporates several aspects of the rigidity and authority of paternal prohibition" (1981, 22). Freud points out that the successful resolution of the castration anxiety that attends the oedipus complex depends to a great extent on the efficacy of the father; that is, it is the strong and potent and stable father who must exercise his prohibitive authority over the son. Everything depends on the strength of the father's law and the father's concomitant capacity to be empathetic. For the child, a demonstration of anger against this father constitutes an unacceptable risk.

We have already observed that Joseph is especially careful to avoid an outright challenge to the authorities, thereby circumventing the threat of talionic punishment. In his life, so far as we know, he has never openly challenged the "authorities," despite the fact, as his journal makes abundantly clear, he doesn't for a moment believe that their claim to authority is valid. One of the insistent preoccupations of the journal is the arbitrariness, and even the absurdity, of authority. Whenever he is

faced with a situation in which authority has been arbitrarily and unfairly exercised in a kind of ethical vacuum (the Mrs. Bichek affair, the painting of the trees while in the Army, the installation in the elementary classroom), Joseph accepts "the whimsy of authority" (109) without a murmur of overt protest. Something keeps him silent: "When I was first assigned to this room I wanted to protest, the error seemed obvious...but I have come to believe it was deliberate, that I have been betrayed again" (108). From this statement we get an indication of how his mind works when faced with the whimsy of authority: notice the shift from the impatience with the authorities (an impatience which, if allowed to mature into expressed hostility, would lead him to openly rebel) to a conspiracy theory. The agency behind his predicament then takes on a face, but it seems an altogether unlikely face: he suspects "his wife of former days" (100) of being behind his problem. The agency manifestly responsible, the paternal authority represented by Henry Goodykind of The Great Northern Insurance Agency, is thus effectively let off the hook. For reasons not immediately apparent in the text, a woman is suspected of being the cause of his misfortune. It is important to note that there is no evidence whatever offered in the text on the manifest level to support the notion of a literal conspiracy, yet for reasons of his own Joseph is predisposed to excuse the obviously responsible male authority and to focus the hostility he does feel on an unlikely source, his former wife, Brenda. Even the name "Henry Goodykind" expresses the benignity of the paternal principle here, whereas it is the rather forbiddingly named Miss Mandible who serves as the local agent for the maternal principle, and the object of Joseph's hostility (as we note below in another context, Joseph tends to view all of the women

currently in his life as versions of the same woman).

There is much evidence in the text that Joseph, despite his determination to present himself as a man "with a great, overgrown heart" (104) and to play the hapless, gentle victim of a corrupt and insensitive system, is concealing an enormous amount of hostility, hostility that finds only oblique and disguised expression in his attitudes and behaviours. For instance, we note that Joseph's former "life-role" as a Claims Adjustor "compelled" him to spend his time amid the debris of our civilization: "rumpled fenders, roofless sheds, gutted warehouses, smashed arms and legs" (99). The imagery here, with the exception of the roofless shed, all has a human reference (the word "rumpled," suggesting wrinkled clothes, is used when referring to the fenders instead of the more likely word "crumpled"). The word that Joseph chooses to use to account for his involvement in what might otherwise be considered a morbid line of work is compelled, which serves to underline a sense of distaste, but more important, a lack of responsibility for a (pre)occupation in such mayhem. He suggests that prolonged service in this role has taken a psychological toll: "After ten years of this one has a tendency to see the world as a vast junkyard, looking at a man and seeing only his (potentially) mangled parts, entering a house only to trace the path of the inevitable fire" (99). Reading Barthelme one has to be very sensitive to the manner in which the ambiguity and connotative power of language is exploited. In the sentence beginning "After ten years....," we have an excellent example of language used ambiguously. Notice how the verb tense shifts in the middle of the sentence to the series of gerunds, "looking," "entering," "seeing": the effect is

slightly jarring, suggesting that some internal disturbance, however mild, has taken place. On the figurative level, the sentence represents an eloquent, even a poetic indictment of the banality and the brutality of modern life, a point of view with which we, as readers, are likely to sympathize. On another level, however, a more literal level (a consequence of the verb shift), Joseph has made what amounts to a confession of unwholesome "tendencies": in other words, when Joseph looks at a man, he sees only potentially mangled parts; when he enters a house, he looks for the ways it might be burned down. Quite literally, then, when Joseph looks at the world he looks through the eyes of a murderer and an arsonist. You cannot help but be struck by the way in which this journal is constructed so as to at once justify passive and irresponsible behaviour on the basis of sensitivity and compassion, even as it allows for the expression of what might easily be construed as the vicious terms of an anger its author cannot otherwise express.

In his relations with the children in the classroom and with Miss Mandible, Joseph's actions are uniformly those of an obliging and even model student. A closer look, however, reveals a subtle difference between the way he behaves with the other boys and the way he behaves with the females of any age. The difference is not so much a matter of behaviour--on the manifest level he treats both sexes with equal care, repeatedly professing, and apparently demonstrating, interest in their welfare--it is much more a matter of the attitude he brings to these relationships. It is only if we look at the consequences of his behaviour, and then compare those consequences with the peculiar way in which his journal characterizes his relationships with either sex, that the difference becomes apparent.

In the journal entry for September 22, Joseph informs us that he is "being solicited for the volleyball team [emphasis added]" (99). He declines, "refusing to take unfair profit from [his] height." Does this episode simply represent a display of good sportsmanship and personal integrity on Joseph's part? This reading is certainly the reading the journal invites. This behaviour is certainly consistent with Joseph's pattern of going to great lengths to avoid any form of competition or confrontation with males, even with boys who would seem to pose no physical threat. Nonetheless, there is a subtle indication that there might be another reason behind Joseph's unwillingness to press the advantage of his adult status. The clue the text offers here is the word "solicited," a word that suggests that some kind of sexual overture has been made to Joseph. It's as if taking advantage of his mature physical prowess would somehow draw him into a sexual situation he would rather avoid.

In a second of the "isolated challenges to [his] largeness" (103), he is challenged to a fight by Harry Broan. It is a challenge Joseph characterizes as being (on Harry's part) nothing short of "a suicidal undertaking" (104). Again, as in the volleyball incident, gentle Joseph declines: "I replied that I didn't feel up to it" (104). This challenge is patterned on the model of the son's challenge to the father's largeness and authority. For some sons, this kind of adventure is quite literally a "suicidal undertaking." What is especially interesting about this particular challenge to Joseph's "largeness" is the manner in which it is resolved.

This confrontation is an extremely complex depiction of the father-son rivalry from two points of view; Joseph manages the entire confrontation so

that he plays both father and son in an effort to play out a fantasy reconciliation. Apparently, for Joseph this reconciliation with the father-figure is a necessary and preliminary step in the seduction of Miss Mandible. The most obvious role the adult Joseph plays in this situation is that of the large and powerful father whose authority is challenged by the smaller and weaker son. Joseph as father-figure behaves in an unusual way: to avoid competition, he is completely willing to abandon a legitimate claim to power and authority. From Harry-as-son's point of view, this resolution is a dream come true; playing the role of overt filial challenger over to what rightfully belongs to the larger man, Harry suffers no loss of life or face as a result of an ill-advised challenge. The father-figure is successfully challenged and the two become, as Joseph puts it, "friends forever" (104).

But this journal is the childish Joseph's journal, and the suspicion is that it is Joseph who is the real "son" looking for the means to identify with, and propitiate, a threatening father. In terms of the latent content of the confrontation with Harry, Joseph is able to act out a fantasy resolution of the conflict with the father by acting out the role of the passive, obliging father who is willing to allow the son to successfully challenge him. For Joseph to express his real intent here as son, however, it would also be necessary to have Harry play the father to his son. He manages to do just that by associating Harry with the father. Harry's dimensions as father-figure are realized in two ways. Notice first of all that Harry is himself a figure of some authority: when he addresses his challenge to Joseph he is attended by his "followers." More important, though, is the fact that Harry's authority comes from his rich father who

made a fortune manufacturing something called the Broan Bathroom Vent. For Joseph's show of restraint in not killing Harry, he is offered an unlikely reward by "Ventsville" Harry: Harry takes Joseph aside and "privately" offers him "all the bathroom vents [he] will ever need, at a ridiculously modest figure" (104). Harry offers, in other words, to share his father's source of power. Joseph thus manages to align himself through Harry with a "rich" and powerful father.

The nature of that paternal power comes from a rather evocatively named appliance, the bathroom vent. It doesn't take a great deal of ingenuity to see in the "bathroom vent" a vivid metaphor for the sphincter (the name "Broan" could be a composite of "brown" and "roan," which, given Harry's background, makes for a suggestive sobriquet). Joseph, in choosing to align himself with bathroom vents "forever," reveals his own infantile preoccupation with his bowels. Why would control of the bowels be important to Joseph? Control of the bowels represents a momentous event in a child's development, an event which has a great deal to do with the way that child deals with authority. Learning to control his bowels is the first time that a child must learn to deny a drive to pleasure by making concessions to forces outside himself. Control of the anal sphincter also represents the child's first civilized behaviour in that self-regulation is the mark of all civilized behaviour. One sure means of demonstrating defiance of authority at this stage is through the deliberate lack of self-regularization--bathroom venting, in other words.

Putting all of the associations surrounding this episode together, what do we have? On one level we see Joseph, an adult male with a real claim to authority, assuming a passive role, a role passive to the point of impotence

(recall that Joseph doesn't feel "up to it"). We see the victorious and aggressive child Harry who, rather than exploit his advantage, chooses to align himself with Joseph, the father-figure of diminished authority. On another level we see Harry sharing the father's riches with the childish Joseph, rewarded for his passivity. Together, these two "friends forever," who have negotiated a way through a suicidal confrontation, join in a relationship that depends on the richness that comes from venting aggression in the relative safety of the bathroom. What we see demonstrated in this episode is, in fact, the subtle skill of a consummate claims adjustor with a genuine flair for insurance. The oedipal confrontation between father and son is resolved to the satisfaction of both father and son. The price of this compromise, however, is very high. The current form of Joseph's punishment perfectly expresses the consequences of this particular resolution to the oedipus complex: chronic and moribund passivity and impotence (castration), continued interests in a powerful and forbidden mother-figure, and general psychological retardation of aspects of the self that are prevented from developing beyond the infantile stage.

The primal scene, the second of the three components of the oedipus complex, is defined by Rycroft as the child's "conception of his parents having intercourse as an idea around which fantasy has been woven rather than a recollection of something actually performed" (123). Usually these fantasies arouse in the child a mixture of dread and excitement in that they express both the desire for the mother (seduction) and the fear of castration that will result if the seduction takes place. Joseph's journal is emphatic on the point that his childhood is the source of the personality

disorders that have left him, as he puts it, "ever so slightly awry" (108). Not surprisingly, while sifting through the clues and contradictory signs that might lead him to divine the mystery of his past, Joseph is drawn into a version of the primal scene fantasy. The most developed and suggestive allusion to primal scene fantasy (one that highlights the damage that can result from a lack of its proper resolution) centres around the Movie-TV Secrets episode.

In the context of this classroom, Movie-TV Secrets is a catalogue of secret adult sex upon which the children in the class, especially the girls, batten their fierce sexual curiosity. Exchanged as tokens of love, these magazines serve the most ambitious and aggressive of the girls, Sue Ann Brownly, as a guide to the adult role she can expect to play "when she is suddenly free from this drab, flat classroom" (106). At one point the girl Frankie Randolph makes an "overture" to Joseph by sending him a copy of Movie-TV Secrets (it is interesting to note that the only passive female in the story--a girl who "hides her head under the desk" (105) after she sends the magazine--has a name composed of two masculine names). Sue Ann, seeing the challenge, "pulls from her satchel no less than seventeen of these magazines, thrusting them at [Joseph] as if to prove that anything her rival has to offer, she can top" (105). Joseph "shuffle[s]" through them "noting the broad editorial perspective [emphasis added]". Following his reading, he reacts with what for him is an exceptional show of emotion: "I am angry and shove the magazines back at her without even a whisper of thanks."

One of the "secrets" contained in these magazines is one likely to fuel Joseph's anger: girls, once they reach sexual maturity, are given a terrible power over men. An ad for "Hip Helper" promises "hipless

eleven-year olds" that once supplied with the proper equipment they'll be able to "Drive him frantic" (105). Joseph's remark on the subject constitutes a remarkable insight into the nature of displacement: "Perhaps this explains Bobby Vanderbilt's preoccupation with Lancias and Maseratis; it is a defense against being driven frantic." Joseph sees the fascination boys of this age have with cars as a "defense" against the "drives" that will leave them vulnerable to "frantic" disequilibrium. Little wonder that Sue Ann, who according to Joseph is already equipped with "a woman's disguised aggression," carries so many of these powerful magazines around in her satchel. (It is interesting that Barthelme has changed the usual advertisements for breast enhancement typically featured in these magazines to an advertisement for the improbable, and probably unmarketable, "padded rumps" of Hip Helper. This shift to the frantic-inducing hips and away from the pre-oedipal and non-threatening breast may connote the threat boys face when the hips of the mother, as opposed to the breast, become a source of interest).

The most important "secret" in the magazine, however, concerns the love triangle of Liz-Eddie-Debbie: all sixteen examples of editorials are concerned with the causes and consequences of this scandalous love triangle. The great "secret" the magazine shares, in other words, is that a rival can come between a married man and woman. Joseph's eye is drawn to one picture in particular: "The picture shows a rising young movie idol in bed, pajama-ed and bleary-eyed, while an equally blowzy young woman looks startled beside him" (105). "Here's what really happened!," proclaims the magazine. Joseph then makes a strange comment about the picture: "I am happy to know that the picture is not what it seems; it seems to be nothing

less than divorce evidence" (105). What does it "seem to be" to Joseph? From the point of view of the children in the classroom, this adult couple are performing a version of the fantasized primal scene. But the picture is also associated with a depiction of a betrayal in a marriage bed. The picture thus could serve to depict a warning to potential "young" lovers of the consequences of answered desires. The picture would represent a very powerful statement to the "bleary-eyed" oedipally determined son, the son who sees himself in his mother's eyes as a "rising young...idol"; a picture of this kind would at once serve to warn of the dangers of exposure while exciting curiosity with a glimpse of the forbidden sexual act. As it happens, for the oedipally determined and psychologically retarded Joseph, the picture serves, not only as a clue to his past, but it accurately augurs his future: his pending tryst-disaster with Miss Mandible in the cloakroom, the major culminating event of the story which is a version of the primal scene. This is the episode as it is described in the entry for December 9, the last entry in the journal:

Disaster once again. Tomorrow I am to be sent to a doctor, for observation. Sue Ann Brownly caught Miss Mandible and me in the cloakroom, during recess, and immediately threw a fit. For a moment I thought she was actually going to choke. She ran out of the room weeping, straight for the principal's office, certain now which one of us was Debbie, which Eddie, which Liz. I am sorry to be the cause of her disillusionment, but I know that she will recover. Miss Mandible is ruined but fulfilled. (110-11)

Like most of the events in the story, this event signifies on a number of levels. It is uniquely constructed within the context of the story to provide Joseph with a seduction of the mother-figure, Miss Mandible, and second, it displaces to the figure of the child Sue Ann, the trauma that attends the betrayal inherent in the primal scene. From Sue Ann's point of view, she is the injured party: her love object, Joseph, who is to her what

Miss Mandible is to him, a parent-figure of the opposite sex, betrays her by choosing the rival mother-figure.

This episode in the "cloaked room" of fantasy serves Joseph in many ways. Notice that both Sue Ann and Mandible are the objects of violence here: Sue Ann is choked and Mandible is "ruined." Mandible's ruination not only has the extra-textual connotation of the loss of reputation, it has an inter-textual denotation: the word is used in only one other context in the journal, to describe the nature of Joseph's punishments: "A ruined marriage, a ruined adjusting career..." (107). Miss Mandible, in other words, is punished in exactly the same terms that Joseph has been punished. On the unconscious level of this journal, her punishment suits her crime in that she represents the sexually attractive mother-figure who figured in the original ruination of Joseph's life.

Typically, Joseph denies any hostile feelings or sense of satisfaction for the injuries done to these women (Sue Ann is only provisionally a child, see below): "I am sorry to be the cause of her disillusionment," says Joseph. With a gesture of apparent selflessness, he appeals to the authorities to hold him and not Miss Mandible responsible: "I have tried to convince the school authorities that I am a minor only in a very special sense, that I am in fact most to blame--but it does no good. They are as dense as ever. My contemporaries are astounded that I present myself as anything other than innocent victim" (111). Why does Joseph feel that he should be held responsible? After all, both Miss Mandible and he are adults, and throughout the journal it has been Miss Mandible and not Joseph who has been consistently identified as the source of the passion between them. Indeed, if we can credit the journal, Miss Mandible is equally, if

not more, to blame than Joseph. Notwithstanding Miss Mandible's manifest culpability, Joseph is determined that he should be held responsible. This is a case, common in fantasy, of being able to eat your cake and have it too.

"Guilt hangs about me" (106), declares Joseph at one point in the journal. On the manifest level of the journal, however, the justification for this guilt, so oppressive and so constant, is never offered. It is only if we look at the consequences of his behaviour that we see some cause to credit that sense of guilt. Joseph is able to accomplish much in his short stint in the classroom: he manages to seduce Miss Mandible even as he punishes her and Sue Ann for their malign compassion and their sexual power over him; he proves the authorities as dense as ever; he escapes blame and even wins the admiration of his contemporaries. What everyone, of course, fails to realize about this skillful "adjustor" is that the best way to escape responsibility is to declare your guilt in such a way that that declaration could not be taken seriously. Further, were one inclined to accomplish what Joseph has accomplished, the ideal place to act from would be the last place the authorities would think to look: from the safety of his rather special minor status, free from the burden of responsibility that would fall to an adult, Joseph strikes back at the agents responsible for relegating him permanently to the psychic purgatory of his childhood.

The girl Sue Ann is shaken but she will "recover," and the woman Miss Mandible is "fulfilled" despite the loss of her job. Neither appears likely to suffer any long term ill-effects as a result of the "disaster" in the

cloakroom which marks the end of their relationship with Joseph. Each of their recoveries serves to underline the fact that Joseph is doomed to remain behind, a minor in a very special sense, part boy and part man. Sue Ann's recovery points to the child's proper development out of the oedipal desire for the parent of the opposite sex and Miss Mandible's recovery demonstrates the kind of fulfillment possible in a sexual relationship between consenting adults. Unlike Joseph, Miss Mandible and Sue Ann have found the means to escape from, and matriculate out of, the stultifying atmosphere of this classroom. The real victim of "disaster" is Joseph, the one who shows no hope of recovery or escape. His behaviours have, if anything, only served to deepen the terms of his regressive, psychologically retarded status; Joseph, as "frantic" as ever, ends the story essentially where he began it, on the way to a doctor for observation. One of the reasons he is likely to remain in the position he's in is that the culminating primal scene with Miss Mandible is very likely a reprise of a seduction scene which we can only assume took place in his past, on that first passage through the system: "Disaster once again."

As the title of the story indicates, "Me and Miss Mandible" centres around Joseph's relationship with Miss Mandible. Despite the fact that she is a correspondent in what amounts to the oedipal seduction that figures as the central event in the story, she remains a somewhat obscure figure. Lone representative of the adult world in the classroom, she is described always in terms of either her breasts or her eyes. For instance, as we have already noted, the first thing we learn about Miss Mandible is that she, and not Joseph, has a "lubricious eye." There are several other references to

eyes in the story which together comprise an important pattern.

The pattern of emphasis on the eyes is likely a result of Joseph's studied passivity; Joseph prefers passively to observe situations and to see himself as acted upon, an attitude which forces others to act and thus reveal themselves: "But I prefer to sit in this too-small seat with the desktop cramping my thighs and examine the life around me" (97). In Joseph's world, much is expressed through the eyes: "But Miss Mandible was watching me, there was nothing I could do" (100); "She watches me constantly, trying to keep sexual significance out of her look; I am afraid the other children have noticed" (100); "...Sue Ann watches me with malign compassion" (100); "We accept courageous assurances without blinking" (100); "The next thing I knew I was here...under the lubricious eye of Miss Mandible" (102); "I leaf through Movie-TV Secrets and get an eyeful" (103); "But I cannot deny that I am singled by her long glances from the vicinity of the chalkboard" (103); "Conflagrations smolder behind her eyelids, yearning for the Fire Marshall clouds her eyes" (104); "Sue Ann has observed Frankie Randolph's overture, and catching my eye..."(105); "From time to time Miss Mandible looks at me reproachfully, as if blaming me for the uproar" (107).

It is also worth noting that Joseph's "feeling of having been through all of this before" has a peculiar effect on his legs: "But I prefer to sit...cramping my thighs"; "Yesterday [Sue Ann] viciously kicked my ankle for not paying attention [to her]. It is swollen still" (100): Joseph feels that he is regarded "as if [he] had... metal-wrapped legs" (103); "Sue Ann Brownly kicking me in the ankle...Her pride in my newly acquired limp is transparent, everyone knows that she has set her mark upon me, that it is a victory in her unequal struggle with Miss Mandible for my great, overgrown

heart" (104); "At recess I can hardly walk; my legs do not wish to uncoil themselves" (107). Although Joseph actually limps, there is a tendency on his part to view the limp as something not part of his self: the limp is Sue Ann's "mark"; the limp is "acquired"; the students look at him "as if" they see metal-wrapped legs; the legs do not wish to "uncoil themselves."

This tendency to shift the source of the "sign" of feeling is also evinced in the eye motif: it is Miss Mandible's lubricious eye that is "clouded" with passion, not Joseph's. One can appreciate that, in terms of the story as fantasy, it is important that Miss Mandible be identified as the source of appetite, even to the degree that she becomes something of a caricature (as her name suggests) of voracious appetite. However, as I have suggested all along, there is reason to suspect that the true source of desire may be Joseph.

Projection is a form of defense against unpleasant unconscious wishes. It serves, essentially, to change the subject of the feeling, which is the person himself, to someone else. Projection is usually preceded by some form of denial, i.e. one denies that one feels a given emotion, or has such and such a wish. The projective defense against neurotic or moral anxiety might find expression, for instance, in the notion that everyone around you is burning in a furnace of passion while you, the actual source of the heat projecting your desires, remain a model of cool and chaste innocence in your conscious estimation. The dynamics of this defense may serve to explain why Joseph "acquires" the limp that is Sue Ann's mark upon him, and why Miss Mandible is consumed by desire for the Fire Marshall. When Joseph is made the Fire Marshall, the act is "interpreted by some as another mark of my somewhat dubious relations with our teacher [emphasis added]" (103). In the

context of the classroom and the prose--contexts in which some signs are lies and cannot be trusted to signify with any degree of reliability--the armband Joseph wears, emblazoned with the word "FIRE," ironically serves to identify accurately the true source of combustion. It is appropriate that Joseph, who so consistently inflames women of every age, who will himself, as it were, be consumed by passion, is thus marked off from his peers. In spite of his repeated denials and projections, he quite literally wears his true heart on his sleeve. We see in Claims Adjustor Joseph's role as the Fire Marshall (the person whose job it is to control rather than start fires) how the unacceptable impulses of this latent arsonist are at once disguised and expressed through hypertrophy of an opposing tendency; despite what Joseph says, it is evident from his behaviour, and from clues scattered and displaced throughout the text, that he wants to start fires, not put them out.

Miss Mandible is only one of a small constellation of women that surround Joseph. There is the primary triad of Sue Ann Brownly, his former wife Brenda, and Miss Mandible, and there are two secondary figures, his mother and Mrs. Anton Bichek. Joseph tends to view all women as the same woman: Sue Ann is an immature version of Miss Mandible, and Brenda, the wife of his former days, seems to be an earlier version of the same type. Of Sue Ann, Joseph observes, defining the type, "she is clearly a woman, with a woman's disguised aggression and a woman's peculiar contradictions" (98). This view of women is so deeply entrenched in his thinking that he doesn't regard them as individuals so much as representatives of a type. In fact, so strong is this tendency to respond to a woman on the basis of a type

established in his past, that Joseph has trouble keeping the members of the major triad separate in his mind: "Oddly enough Sue Ann reminds me of the wife I had in my former role, while Miss Mandible seems to be a child" (100). Only by collating the features and characteristics assigned to each of the women that tend to merge together in his mind, can the nature of the "disguised aggression" and "peculiar contradictions" of this composite woman be seen in relief.

Miss Mandible's peculiar contradiction is suggested by her name: the mandible is a lower jaw, literally of any animal, but more typically it refers to the jaws of an insect. The name thus connotes a kind of oral threat, the source, perhaps of the disguised aggression Joseph senses in her. Mitigating this threat, and lending her a peculiar contradiction, is her physical attractiveness. The only physical distinction Joseph notes is her bust, and the description of that bust directs us to its maternal, nourishing aspect: "Miss Mandible is in many ways, notably about the bust, a very tasty piece" (103). In Joseph's mind, Miss Mandible is at once the source of a powerful attraction and the source of threat--a very tasty piece who is capable of inflicting a very terrible bite. As it happens, the events of the story bear out the threat latent in her name as Joseph is effectively destroyed as a consequence of his attraction to this forbidding creature. To the oedipally awakened child, the mother is both an object to be desired and, because the father can be a powerful rival, an object to be feared. From a psychoanalytic point of view, the name, Miss Mandible, is wonderfully apt: the promise of the "Miss" is balanced by the threat of the "Mandible," expressing fear of castration, the fear of being eaten. Little wonder, then, that Joseph assumes an attitude of studied passivity in his

attempt to get close to this woman.

Sue Ann, although aged between eleven and eleven and a half, is a budding version of her rival Miss Mandible, to whom she is often compared. Just as Joseph is a minor in a very special sense only, Sue Ann, although a child, "is clearly a woman" (98). Throughout the story, Joseph vacillates between these two women: "...my own allegiance, at the moment, is divided between Miss Mandible and Sue Ann Brownly...of the two I prefer, today, Sue Ann..." (97). Sue Ann, disfavoured by her putative status as a child, will eventually fail "in her unequal struggle for [Joseph's] great, overgrown heart," but she represents, nevertheless, a faithful version of nascent femininity, a kind of premenstrual monster of debilitating possibilities. For Joseph, her attack on his ankle is typically womanlike. Following the attack, he makes a telling observation: "How lifelike, how womanlike, is her tender solicitude after the deed!" (104). Once again, as in the case of Miss Mandible, we note that women make only unreliable demonstrations of tenderness. What is more reliable is the sense that they conceal a crippling threat.

Sue Ann and Miss Mandible are only the latest contestants in a struggle for Joseph's heart that apparently has been going on for a long time. In Joseph's mind, as we noted above, Miss Mandible is a version of Sue Ann, and Sue Ann is version of Brenda, the wife of his former role. They are all, in other words, versions of the same creature. The description Joseph offers of that marriage is instructive:

Her name was Brenda, and the conversation I recall best, the one which makes me suspicious now, took place on the day we parted. 'You have the soul of a whore,' I said on that occasion, stating nothing less than the unvarnished fact. 'You,' she replied, 'are a pimp, a poop, and a child. I am leaving you forever and I trust that without me you will perish of your own inadequacies. Which

are considerable. (100)

It is important to recall that Joseph suspects Brenda of being behind the betrayal that has brought him to this classroom. We noted above that this seemed unlikely inasmuch as, on the manifest level of the text, there is nothing whatever to suggest that she had anything to do with it. Indeed, the vehemence with which she breaks off her attachment to Joseph "forever" makes her an especially unlikely suspect. However, on the latent level, the level on which she is associated with Miss Mandible and Sue Ann, it is another matter: the source of Joseph's betrayal is an unnatural attachment to a woman from his past--the mother-figure, currently being played by Miss Mandible. On this level, his suspicions regarding Brenda constitute an ironic and accurate "clue" as to the hidden truth of his tragic situation.

The terms of Brenda's invective are worth noting: given what we know about Joseph from his journal, this listing is no casual or merely mean-spirited listing of faults. There can be no question, even in Joseph's own mind, that he is a kind of "child": "Only I, at times (only at times), understand that somehow a mistake has been made, that I am in a place where I don't belong" (98). The suggestion that he is a "poop" is supported by his eternal alliance with Harry Broan and the bathroom vent. The charge that he is a pimp is more problematic. A pimp is someone involved in the degradation and exploitation of the sexuality of women, a man who profits from that exploitation. It's a fairly strong charge Brenda is making, and at first blush there would seem to be little evidence in the text to support it. One piece of evidence supporting it, of course, is the fact that Joseph calls her (and, by implication, all women) a whore. What more than proves the worth of Brenda's estimation on this point, however, is Joseph's deeply

felt conviction that all women exploit sex to their advantage; for Joseph, all women appear to be fundamentally false in that they are capable only of pretended tenderness and solicitude, a pretense aimed at disguising their desire to exploit men for private gain.

Of his relationship with his actual mother, Joseph provides us with a single, but highly suggestive, clue: "The peanut butter sandwiches that my mother made me in my former existence have been banished in favour of ham and cheese" (103). For Joseph, whose mother is no longer around, "One of the advantages of packing my own lunch...is that I am able to fill it with the things I enjoy." No further mention is made of his family, but it is interesting that the one reference to his actual mother celebrates his independence from her in oral terms. Her contribution to his nourishment has not been merely put aside or replaced, it has been banished, a word that ironically describes his own status in the world of men; if we are correct in our analysis of the unconscious content of this story, it's an appropriate word to use in light of the fact that his continued dependence on the mother has resulted in his banishment. Joseph may take a measure of comfort from this small but aggressive show of independence, but we note that he is only too willing to attach himself to Miss Mandible's "tasty bust," thus demonstrating his continued oral dependence on the mother (it is also significant that he stores his lunch right next to the armband reading "FIRE" which Miss Mandible awards him as a mark of their "dubious relationship"). We certainly should not make too much of a single and relatively undeveloped reference to the mother, but viewed within the framework of associations in the journal in toto, the banished peanut butter sandwiches are yet another "clue" in a richly developed pattern of

ambivalence toward women evinced by Joseph in his journal.

There is one other woman in the journal who deserves our attention, Mrs. Anton Bichek. The mistake that lands Joseph in his present predicament happens as a result of his relationship with this woman. Without Joseph's encouragement, he tells us, this elderly woman "would never have had the self-love to prize her injury so highly" (102). Joseph evidently teaches her enough about self-love and the prizing of injuries for her to press a claim against the Big Ben Storage and Transfer Company.

The mistake that lands Joseph back in the classroom is a romantic one, romantic in two senses. First of all, it is romantic in the sense that he chooses principle over policy. There is definitely something wholesomely romantic about the gesture he makes for Mrs. Bichek; it seems the act of an individual risking much in the service of some ideal. The act is akin to that which a Boy Scout, the traditional ally of the old lady, might have undertaken on her behalf. But the entire episode is romantic in a second sense: in choosing the interests of Mrs. Bichek over those represented by Big Ben and Henry Goodykind, Joseph displays a "tragic" willingness to seek the "satisfaction" of the maternal at the expense of the paternal (the word "tragic" is used twice to characterize the scope of the "mistake" he makes). Consistent with the oedipal dimensions of the act, the paternal authorities subsequently lose "faith" in Joseph's ability to play his "role" correctly, and he is symbolically castrated: he literally has his manhood taken away from him. (The "Big Ben Storage and Transfer Company," the name of the company against whose interest Joseph acts, is rich in suggestion: the name Big Ben connotes both a large male, which would be appropriate in light of the oedipal challenge to the father-figure the mistake represents, but it is

also the name of a famous clock. The association with time is telling in that Joseph is, in effect, punished by time; forced to replay his past, he is locked in time. The Storage and Transfer portion of the name picks up on the fact that the latent content that is so important to this story is material that has been stored for a very long time. This stored material depends on the careful transfer of unconscious material into conscious form.)

Transformed into a child manqué, part defective adult and part lame preadolescent boy, Joseph is to be given a second chance in the very place where "all of the mysteries that perplexed [him] as an adult have their origin": "The next thing I knew I was here...under the lubricious eye of Miss Mandible." A crucial episode from the "first voyage" will be replayed: Joseph will be given the chance by the authorities to either resist, or succumb to, the temptation to seek the "satisfaction" of the maternal. If he behaves and acts in accordance to the demands of his "role"--for him, a system of imperfectly understood expectations--he will be allowed to become an adult. If he succumbs to temptation, however he rationalizes his guilt, he will be forced to remain a "mutation," an adult still chasing a figure he should have left behind in childhood.

Returning to Davis' analogy of the paternal Scylla and the maternal Charybdis which the child must, like Odysseus, navigate between, we see that in "Mandible" the paternal has failed to exercise sufficiently reliable authority. The child in Joseph, if he is to recover, will need a paternal authority who is both powerful and a source of empathy, a figure not given

to the exercise of power on the basis of "whimsy." Paternal authority, as it is represented in "Mandible" is not, as Davis suggests it should be, "insuperable and adamant": it is too closely associated with America and a system of failed signs to serve Joseph a reliable model of behaviour.

Paternal authority has failed Joseph in another way: it was the "dense" authorities, after all, who insisted on placing Miss Mandible within his grasp, who provided him with the perfect situation for a seduction. It was authority that insisted on leaving him to his own devices in a sexually charged atmosphere, the most glamorous object in an environment virtually without rivals. The failure of authority allowed Joseph to drift too far in the direction of the Charybdis of the maternal as represented by Miss Mandible, "a whirling maelstrom of contradictory motions...a lack of fixity" (Davis 22). The Charybdis maternal in "Mandible" is the locus of aggressive, lubricious drives; like Joseph, she is prepared to violate a powerful code of behaviour in the service of appetite. In such a predicament, situated between two such failed parental principles, Joseph is bound to fail: he cannot manage the necessary identification with the father to draw him away from the vortex of the mother, and thus his tragic struggle with childhood issues persists into adulthood and repeats in a disastrous cycle.

Although he longs to be normal--"let me be, please God, typical" (108)--Joseph seems to know at some level that this attempt to change a personality that he himself realizes needs "reworking in some fundamental way" (108) is doomed to fail. It will fail, says Joseph, because "Miss Mandible will refuse to permit me to remain ungrown" (109). While Joseph appreciates that he needs reworking at a fundamental level, he absolutely

refuses to accept any responsibility for his behaviour in the seduction that keeps him "ungrown." It is this failure to acknowledge his desire, his insistence on his own innocence, that, in effect, closes the circle of his neurotic attachment to the pattern of behaviour that leaves him frozen in perpetual childhood. This unwillingness to accept responsibility also accounts for the two levels on which this story operates.

We have seen how this story carefully layers and weaves together two major themes. The manifest theme, developed around the discovery that signs are signs and that some of them are lies, is that American culture makes you crazy. This theme, however, is subordinate to the psychological theme developed around Joseph's unresolved infantile wishes which have their origin in the oedipus complex. The manifest theme is subordinate in the sense that the journal consistently organizes itself around the machinations of Joseph's relationship to Mandible, and gives the existential theme of failed signs the more personal and intimate reference of Joseph's psychology; the theme of failed signs simply isn't developed in an original way, or in any way that would suggest that it take precedence over the psychological theme.

Without question, the theme of the corrigible schemata and the theme of unresolved infantile wishes function in concert, the meanings of each developing, and developed by, the other. In "Mandible," Joseph is involved in basically two quests for identity: an existential quest on behalf of other "pleasant, desperate, money-making" young Americans leading the "unexamined" life (what the existentialists might deem an "inauthentic existence"), and a parallel, simultaneous quest to solve a personal mystery that has its source in his own childhood. In terms of the the former quest,

Joseph is only marginally successful. Certainly he makes discoveries of great consequence, both to himself and to his culture in general, and his journal might be serve as a kind of minor manifesto denouncing the bad faith of America as the source of misleading signs. The irony of the journal on this level, of course, is that it is America, and not Joseph, that needs the fundamental reworking. These "great discoveries," however, appear to do him or those around him little good: they fail to effect to any significant degree the "reworking" he admits he needs. In terms of the more fundamental quest for the root causes of his current psychological malaise, he is not even marginally successful.

II

"Hiding Man" is set in a darkened theatre. Burligame, who expected to find the place empty, discovers that a stranger, a Negro, is watching the film with him. While the film, Attack of the Puppet People plays across a torn screen, the Negro cross examines Burligame. Their conversation centres on certain events from Burligame's past, particularly the events surrounding his estrangement from the Catholic church. Burligame, a detective of some sort and a member of an underground, tells of his difficulties at Our Lady of the Sorrows school where he was taught the meaning of sin. He ran away from this school, and the priests have been after him ever since. Of special concern to Burligame is the relationship he had with the athletic priest, Father Blau, who took a personal, "vested" (31), and finally disturbing interest in him. Eventually the Negro stranger, Bane-Hipkiss,

peels off his black skin to reveal that he is a white man, a priest, an agent the church has sent to bring back Burligame. Burligame refuses, they struggle, and Burligame manages to overcome Bane-Hipkiss by plunging a syringe into his neck thereby transforming him into a barking animal.

What immediately strikes one about this story is its dream-like, nightmarish quality. The story is set in a world like the world of film and the world of dream, a world in which anything can happen and everything seems possible:

Time and space do not exist; on a slight groundwork of reality, imagination spins and weaves new patterns made up of memories, experiences, unfettered fantasies, absurdities and improvisations. The characters split, double, and multiply; they evaporate, crystallize, scatter and converge. But a single consciousness holds sway over them all--that of the dreamer. For him there are no secrets, no incongruities, no scruples, no laws. (Strindberg 1973, 33)

This excerpt from Strindberg's introduction to his *A Dream Play* provides an apt description of the atmosphere in "Hiding." In "Hiding," one dreamer holds sway over all of the characters who split, double and converge in the story. The darkened theatre into which Burligame has fled is very much a theatre of memory and dream; the dream he dreams is a dream of identity.

For Strindberg's dreamer there were no "secrets". The same, however, cannot be said of Burligame: somewhere, concealed in his past, concealed in the curious mixture of ritual and confession of this story, is a secret he keeps hidden from himself. As in "Me and Miss Mandible," "Hiding Man" is designed to conceal and express a hidden truth, a mystery. Unless we, as readers, pay very close attention to the clues surrounding this mystery, very little of what Burligame tells us will make much sense. On the most superficial level only this story is about a boy's (and now a man's)

estrangement from the Catholic church. The church-school here functions in essentially the same manner as the school in "Mandible"; the story is only incidentally about the Catholic church as a failed source of authority. The true source of the thing Burligame is running away from has a deeper and more intimate source, and is much more difficult to define.

In the story, film is referred to as "ritual" (36), as "celebration" (36), and as a source of "vision" (37): "People think these things [films] are jokes, but they are wrong, it is dangerous to ignore a vision..." (37). The films that play in this very special theatre are all of a kind: they represent to Burligame, the hiding man, a source of private rituals, celebrations, and visions that point to a private truth that is more real (and so, more "dangerous") than the alternative, public rituals available outside the theatre, especially those of the church. In the apparently ludicrous and grotesque visions of the schlock horror films that make up the exclusive fare of this theatre, Burligame's private vision is defined.

No fewer than twenty-two titles are cited in the course of the story. Most of the titles appear to be actual titles of horror films produced in the late fifties and early sixties, presumably the period during which Burligame was coming of age. The litany of these titles is taken from a genre of film particularly popular with adolescents. It is appropriate that this type of film is featured in this particular theatre: the psychological effect of these films usually always depends on the equation of sex and violence. The films tend to exploit the fear adolescents bring to the subject of sex, the fear attached to the release of powerful, destabilizing sexual feelings. It is not unusual for these films to therefore equate sexual expression with the release of the beast, a beast that punishes or

destroys the sexually awakening teenager.

No listing of the various titles can capture the subtle contextual use Barthelme makes of each title. At certain junctures in the narrative, a title or two will be introduced as a means of dramatizing, in the grotesque and vulgar terms of the genre, Burligame's unconscious wishes and fears: Burligame as Screaming Skull or Beast With a Thousand Eyes or Teenage Werewolf. Burligame's identity, his sense of himself and his vision of reality, is thereby translated into the crude psycho-sexual terms of the nightmarish horror films he would have seen as an adolescent. For him, a crucial component of his identity is tied up in this genre: "And yet, is this not a circumstance before which the naked Burligame might dangle, is that not real life, risk and danger, as in Voodoo Woman, as in Creature from the Black Lagoon?" (30).

At one point in the story, Burligame describes more precisely what these films represent to him. According to Burligame, the films that play in this theatre are all "superior examples of the genre, tending toward offscreen rapes, obscene tortures: man with huge pliers advancing on disheveled beauty, cut to girl's face, to pliers, to man's face, to girl, scream, blackout" (25). Evidently the film that provides for the exclusive source of the rituals, visions, and celebrations of his private life conflates sex and violence, particularly violence against women; the sex these films portray is at heart, and in essence, sadistic, a violent and calculated assault on the "beauty" of women.

The most important of these films is the film that plays throughout the events of the story thereby serving as something of an organizing metaphor, Attack of the Puppet People. As Burligame tells Bane Hipkiss, "pay

attention to the picture, it is trying to tell you something, revelation is not so frequent in these times that one can afford to diddle it away" (36). Barthelme structures "Hiding" so as to insure that we "pay attention to the picture": he inserts several episodes from Attack into the frame tale, inserting them at various junctures. Based on the following three episodes we can splice together a crude story line for this film:

Hard pressed U.S. Army, Honest John, Hound Dog, Wowser notwithstanding, psychological warfare and nerve gas notwithstanding, falls back at onrush of puppet people. Young lieutenant defends Army nurse (uniform in rags, tasty thigh, lovely breast) from obvious sexual interest of splinter men. (27)

On screen famous scientist has proposed measures to contain puppet people, involving termites thrown against their flank. The country is in a panic, Wall Street has fallen, the President looks grave. (28)

Mutant termites devouring puppet people at great rate, decorations for the scientists, tasty nurse for young lieutenant, they will end it with a joke if possible, meaning: it was not real after all. (30)

The title Attack of the Puppet People is taken from an actual film, released in 1958 by American International (the film is generally regarded as an unimaginative version of the far more subtle and successful The Amazing Colossal Man, also mentioned in this story). Barthelme, as he so often does, has taken an objet trouvé, an artifact from popular culture, and as it were, has hollowed out the original to fill it with the stuff of his own creation. The original film was about a lonely and diabolical old dollmaker who shrank people to one foot in height so as to control them and keep them from leaving him. Barthelme's version would appear to have left little of the original intact, but a closer look reveals that the Pinocchio motif of the original has been retained in Barthelme's version, albeit in a somewhat distorted fashion (in another reference to the film in the story

Hipkiss has to lift his voice slightly at one point to "carry over the Pinocchio noises coming from puppet people" [25]).

Both versions of the the film, Barthelme's and the original, are versions of the original fairy tale which featured a benevolent old toymaker whose love for his creation was such that the doll is eventually transformed into a real boy. Central to this tale is the lesson Pinocchio has to learn on the road to selfhood; that is, Pinocchio has had to learn to overcome the id, principally because his hidden and uncivilized wishes are betrayed by a nose which grows and gives him away. He has to learn, in other words, to abandon the pleasure principle in favour of the reality principle. In the American International version, the benevolent old father-figure, instead of loving his child and encouraging his maturity into independence, is an amazing but malevolent colossal man who uses magic-science to reverse the procedure of the original tale and literally belittle adults to the size of children that can never leave him. In Barthelme's version, the puppet people have become the source of the threat and have to be destroyed by the scientists because, in terms of the original tale, they have failed to control their feelings, feelings epitomized in the film by "their obvious sexual interest." It is the sexual interest of these puppets that precipitates and fuels the conflict that results in their destruction.

At the centre of the conflict, "a young lieutenant defends an Army nurse." The object of the puppet people's sexual interest, this nurse is twice descibed as "tasty," implying that the puppet people are especially interested in oral gratification. Perhaps the most revealing expression of this interest occurs in the passage describing the terms of the reward the young lieutenant receives for having defend^d the nurse from the sexual

"onrush" of the puppet people: "tasty nurse for young lieutenant." The word "nurse" is used here in such a way as to allow for it to serve as both verb and noun: in other words, on one level the line suggests that the good lieutenant is allowed to nurse from the "lovely breast" he has defended. The film, as Barthelme deconstructs it, is a "ritual" depiction of the oedipus complex. The puppet people are "splinter men": on one level, they are like Eliot's hollow men, crazed casualties of modern life. But on a deeper level they represent children, or, as in Burligame's case, the childish aspect or splinter of a man still fixated on the nursing mother. These puppet people are children inflamed by sexual interest in a woman they cannot have, and so they make war on the family (represented by the couple) despite "psychological warfare" and "nerve gas"--the psychological pressures put in place to curb and deflect such sexual interest. So powerful are these appetites that, from the point of view of the child, his entire world is threatened: "The country is in a panic...." The family is defended by paternal forces (the army, scientist, President) and the unsuccessful puppet-children are psychically destroyed.

For a few moments in the film success with the nurse seems possible, just as it does for the oedipal son who first imagines he can replace the rival and absent father ("the President looked grave"). But ultimately the puppet people are punished by the authorities in telling fashion: mutant termites devour the flanks of the puppet people--the mutant or unnatural termites who act as agents of the oral punishment are a response to the initial unnaturalness of the oral attack of the puppet people.

The puppet people of this central "vision" represent a displacement of Burligame's own childish self. In "Hiding" three figures serve to represent

the child Burligame: the puppet people, Burligame's actual childhood self as recalled in manhood, and a mysterious boy who makes several enigmatic appearances in the story. Before considering Burligame's own case history as he recalls it for Bane-Hipkiss, I want to consider the significance of this boy.

Alluded to three times in the story, this figure and the symbolic value that develops around him are developed in a manner that is typical Barthelme. This is how the technique works in "Hiding": we are given a series of what can only be described as impressions of a figure; that figure is glimpsed several times as the fiction circles and returns in a compulsive manner to an image it cannot quite define (this circling of the plot will be characterized in our analysis of "Florence" as the "whirlpool" technique). Each appearance constitutes a subtle development over the last: more detail added, other details repeated, some dimensions enhanced. The image is further constituted associatively on the basis of the specific context of each occurrence of the image. What Barthelme is exploiting here is the fact that exactly the same sentence, word for word, detail for detail, could connote radically different meanings in different contexts. A simple image repeated in various contexts can accumulate astonishing degrees of suggestive meaning (the meaning tends to be suggestive because the same words are being used, a fact which tends to discourage the conviction that something different is being said).

Here are the three passages in which this child appears, bereft, of course, of context:

Keep eye on EXIT, what about boy in lobby, what was kite for? (25)

Boy in lobby wore T-shirt, printed thereon, OUR LADY OF THE SORROWS. Where glimpsed before [the question the reader must be

asking himself as well]]? Possible agent of the conspiracy, in the pay of the Organization, duties: lying, spying, tapping wires, setting fires, civil disorders. (26)

And what of young informer in lobby, what is his relevance, who corrupted wearer of T-shirt, holder of kite? (28)

The boy is not referred to in "Hiding Man" except in these three instances, nor is his precise "relevance" ever established. However, as sketchy as the acquaintance is based on these four sentences, the figure, modelled by association, has considerable substance and "relevance." Of course, limitations of space simply don't permit analysis of the contextual implications of this boy's appearances (why he appears when he does), but we can say something about what he means based on a number of associative connections.

What most concerns Burligame is that the boy may be in the employ of the "conspiracy," an "informer" of the same "organization" that has pursued Burligame since he left Our Lady of the Sorrows school. The physical description of the boy is limited to three details: he is a boy wearing a shirt emblazoned with the name of Burligame's old school, and he carries a kite. The T-shirt and the fact that he is a boy obviously serves to connect him to Burligame's childhood self: "I was the tallest boy...at Our Lady of the Sorrows" (37). There are, however, no other kites in the story. What might the kite signify? Because Burligame asks, "what was kite for?," we are encouraged to look for a significance. A kite is a toy and might therefore serve to identify the boy with play, or lost innocence. The kite, like of the puppet people with whom Burligame identifies so strongly, is tied by a length of string which ultimately precludes its freedom.

What the boy represents is a version of Burligame, a "splinter" of an identity that is strewn all over the highly charged environment this fiction

describes. A kind of puppet of the organization (he even carries in the kite his own string), the boy is the "corrupted" and belittled infantile self of Burligame, that part of him that is still under the control and the influence of the mysterious organization. Waiting in the lobby, attending Burligame's secret visions and ritual, the boy stands for that part of Burligame that is invoked when he withdraws into his private fantasy world. Notice, too, that the duties Burligame imagines for the boy (lying, spying, tapping wires, setting fires, civil disorders) are all compatible with Burligame's present state of mind; all of the activities mitigate against human contact, mitigate against relationship. Moreover, as we shall see in our examination of Burligame's case history, these activities are versions of activities that occupied Burligame as a child (both the puppet people and boy with the kite are involved in aggressive, even hostile behaviours which suggest that they represent Burligame's own concealed, displaced anger).

Throughout "Hiding Man," the story works to associate the movie theatre and the church in the reader's mind, just as they are inextricably associated in Burligame's. One of the most interesting means by which this is accomplished is through a mysterious odour that Burligame can't identify. Throughout the story, at various junctures, and usually in response to moves made in his direction by Bane-Hipkiss, Burligame attention is drawn to a strong odour of flowers coming from under the seats: "Odor of sweetness from somewhere, flowers growing in cracks in floors, underneath the seats...Can't identify at this distance, what does Bane-Hipkiss want? (29); "flower smell stronger and sweeter, are they really growing under our feet...? (31); and finally, as Bane-Hipkiss closes in, "The sweetness from

beneath the seats is overpowering..." (36). As always, it is difficult to say with any authority what this smell represents. However, what is clear is that Burligame associates the "overpowering" smell with the approach of Bane-Hipkiss, the disguised Father. On the manifest level, what Burligame is associating here is the smell of candy and such typically emanating from the floors of movie theatre and the strong smell of incense that Catholic children would naturally associate with priests and the church. Another important clue as to the latent significance of this smell, and his sense that is "overpowering" and like the smell of flowers, comes late in the story: the planting of "gladiolus, iris, phlox" (37) is featured in the short list of activities which occupy the unsuspecting fathers to whom Burligame feels he represents a threat (see discussion of the story's conclusion below).¹

The smell is one way the story develops the Catholic church and the movie theatre as alternative sources of identity. Burligame has escaped from the church, a vision he discovered to be corrupt, and retreated into the movie theatre. The movie theatre, though it represents a private theatre of meaning, is deeply informed by the church he knew as a child. As dissimilar as the church and the movie theatre may at first appear, they are linked by common visions, rituals, and celebrations. In both church and theatre, one seeks out "that vision which most brilliantly exalts and villifies the world" (35). As in the church confessional, in the movie theatre a form of surrender takes place: "Alone in the dark one surrenders to Amazing Colossal Man all hope, all desire..." (35). The fundamental issue relating church and movie theatre is an absorption in the sins of the flesh: both church and film have provided Burligame with "visions" that

both exalt and villify women.

As we have seen in "Mandible" (and will see in "Florence Green" and "Broadcast"), Barthelme is concerned to provide his characters with case histories, case histories that have been refined and compressed into a few essential, formative episodes. In "Hiding Man," Burligame's current view of women, as suggested in his attachment to the genre of horror film he watches, is partially explained by what he tells us of his case-historical experience with women:

'My impure thoughts were of a particularly detailed and graphic kind, involving at that time principally Nedda Ann Bush who lived two doors down the street from us and was handsomely developed. Under whose windows I crouched on many long nights awaiting revelations of beauty, the light being just right between the bureau and the window. Being rewarded on several occasions, namely 3 May 1942 with a glimpse of famous bust, 18 October 1943, particular chill evening, transfer of pants from person to clothes hamper, coupled with three minutes exposure in state of nature. Before she thought to turn out the light.' (32)

Several things are worth noting about this passage. First of all, Burligame's interest in "beauty" in this memory resembles that of the puppet people: their sexual interest was directed to parts of women (breast and thigh), whereas Burligame's interest in Nedda Ann Bush (a suggestive name, as in "need a bush") is similarly couched in terms of her "parts," the "famous" bust and the "bush" of the pudenda implied by her name. Just as the puppets are inflamed by glimpses of the nurse's flesh as seen through her torn uniform, young Burligame is inflamed by "glimpses" of Nedda Ann Bush. This former tendency to view the people in parts, especially women, is also expressed in Burligame's current mode of voyeurism: the screen on which his favourite genre plays is "torn from top to bottom, a large rent,

faces and parts of gestures fall off into the void" (26).

The puppet people expressed their sexual desire in obvious fashion and were devoured for it. Burligame, while he obviously shares an interest in the parts of women, adopts an attitude that is anything but obvious: the sexual outlet he found in youth beneath Nedda Ann Bush's window, he recreates in the darkness, privacy, and isolation of the movie theatre, a position which guarantees him the options of flight and concealment: "I entrust myself to these places advisedly, there are risks but...Flight is always available, concealment is always possible" (26-27). The difference between Burligame and the puppet people is that Burligame fled the situation that threatened to compromise him, and learned to conceal and defend his consciousness against the irruption of sexual interest. Under the influence of Burligame's defenses, the "tasty thigh" and "lovely breast" the puppet people saw, and were inflamed by, have been transformed. The ambivalence with which Burligame now views the "beauty" of women is suggested in his use of terms like "handsomely developed" and "famous bust": the modifiers and the nouns themselves protect the parts from private and sensual identification by insulating them, in the latter case with an abstract association, and in the former case, with an adverb associated with maleness, which thereby marks the parts of her body with the father's stamp of prohibition.

Indeed, the language Burligame uses to describe this entire episode is the language of detached and objective analysis, as in phrases like, "involving at that time principally" and "transfer of pants from person to clothes hamper, coupled with three minutes exposure in state of nature." He begins this recollection with a reference to "particularly detailed and

graphic" thoughts of impurity, yet his descriptions of the impure events are utterly lacking in prurience. The only graphic or particularly detailed information he does recall concerns the precise dates on which these events occurred, easily the most neutral details in the entire episode. Also worth noting is that the way the entire episode is recalled connotes as much a saint's or acolyte's prayer vigil as it does an act of voyeurism; a devout Catholic might crouch and debase himself thus for "many long nights awaiting revelations" of "beauty" in "the light."

The progression of events in the Nedda Ann Bush episode is also suggestive. Burligame is first "rewarded" with a glimpse of her breasts. After a significant passage of time, some six months later, he sees her pudenda. This happens on what he calls "a particularly chill evening." The noun or verb "chill" is grammatically inappropriate in this sentence--the sentence should read, "a particularly chilly evening." There is a brief three-minute exposure, and the lights go out. What this progression of events parallels is the progression of involvements the child has with the mother. It begins with the warmth (May) and security (reward) of the relationship limited to the breast, but later is complicated by more complex desires, desires which involve the sex of the mother. This interest in the mother, as it were, with her pants off, if not properly resolved, results in the psychic "chill" of the threatened and soon-to-be displaced son.

Father Blau, to whom this episode was originally confessed, gave Burligame "only steadfast refusal to understand these preoccupations, wholly natural and good interest in female parts however illicitly pursued, as under window" (33). Clearly the terms in which this sexual episode is confessed (it is told to the church's agent) express both the desire for sex

and the father-centred prohibitive agency denying that desire. The films he now watches in the dark celebrate a ritual disfigurement of the "beauty" of women (the word "beauty" is used in both the definition of the genre and to describe Nedda Ann Bush). Note that in the definition of the genre, the sadist attacking the woman uses pliers, pliers which could only be used to tear beauty into parts (the unusual detail of the pliers also picks up associatively on the jaws of the mutant termites that devour the puppet people). Clearly Burligame's current affinity for the genre has its genesis in the fear of women as the object of compromising desires, desires that placed him in conflict with the Catholic Fathers.

Let us turn to the climactic confrontation between the revealed "Father" Bane-Hipkiss and the renegade "son." In this confrontation, the father-figure is overcome when Burligame thrusts into his neck a syringe charged with mutating serum. This is a particularly suggestive gesture in terms of both intrinsic and extrinsic associations. For instance, with regard to intrinsic associations, we recall that the puppet people were turned back by scientists who used "mutant termites." Burligame, a puppet person in his own right, now uses a similar kind of science to mutate the father-figure, to literally turn him into an animal. As usual, the way the event is described is crucial: "I...join needle to deadly body of instrument...Bane-Hipkiss advances, eyes clamped shut in mystical ecstasy, I grasp him by the throat, plunge needle into neck, his eyes bulge, his face collapses, he subsides quivering into a lump among the seats, in a moment he will begin barking like a dog" (37). The needle joined to the "deadly body" is phallic in design and effect, and its use here denotes the son's wish to celebrate phallic power at the expense of the father. The price that

Bane-Hipkiss must pay as the son asserts himself is to be forced to assume the feminine position, subservient to the son's powerful magic penis. The father's "mystical ecstasy" is described in terms that suggest orgasm: his eyes bulge, his face collapses, he subsides into a quivering lump. The father is subsequently transformed into an animal: Burligame has thus managed to destroy a significant portion of the identity of this father by awakening in him the same fierce and dangerous desires that the father had denied in the son.

The final paragraph provides us with the final clues as to the significance of this unusual attack:

Most people haven't the wit to be afraid, most view television, smoke cigars, fondle wives, have children, vote, plant gladiolus, iris, phlox, never confront Screaming Skull, Teenage Werewolf, Beast With a Thousand Eyes, no conception of what lies behind the surface, no faith in any manifestation not certified by hierarchy. Who is safe with Teenage Werewolf abroad, with streets under sway of Beast With a Thousand Eyes? People think these things are jokes, but they are wrong, it is dangerous to ignore a vision, consider Bane-Hipkiss, he has begun to bark. (37)

These "people" who "haven't the wit to be afraid" of a teenage werewolf are not people in general, they are fathers: who else would smoke cigars, fondle wives, have children, but fathers, complacently ruling the house? The vision that is dangerous to ignore, the thing which isn't a joke, is the beastly desire of the son (recall that the story of the puppet people was mistakenly treated as a "joke"). The concluding events of this story, which reads like a scenario for a horror film, is a warning to the father that the thing which "lies beneath the surface" of his domestic situation is a violent, even murderous son: "Who is safe?" asks Burligame, with the screaming, teenage beast abroad.

While it is evident that the significance of the vision that closes the

story is that the son has potentially murderous phallic appetites, why does it happen that the father-figure is transformed into the barking dog that so much resembles the wolfish son? What is important to appreciate about this concluding transformation of the father is that it also represents a queer kind of reconciliation between father and son. The father is, after all, put in essentially the same position as Burligame by Burligame's attack.

The ambivalence Burligame expresses by the particular form this attack takes can be accounted for if we keep in mind that fathers are not merely castrating rivals whose rule must be challenged or overcome. Fathers also represent crucial objects of identification: the son must tread a fine line, needing to identify with the parent-rival, seeking his approval and the advice of his example, even while wishing, at some level, to take what is his or to remove him altogether. The ambivalent view of the father accounts for the presence in the story of two Fathers, Father Blau and Bane-Hipkiss. It also accounts for the splitting of Bane-Hipkiss into two separate identities (it is worth pointing out at this juncture that Bane and Blau are versions of the name Burligame: the names begin with "B" and, excepting the "n" in Bane, Bane and Blau are formed from the letters in Burligame).²

Bane-Hipkiss' Negro disguise is a version of his true identity as priest. The two aspects have several things in common. As a Negro, for instance, he is a black man, a colour Burligame specifically associates with priests: "'No longer loved God, cringed at words 'My son,' fled blackrobes wherever they appeared'" (33). His association with the blackness of the priests is supported by the name he first uses, Adrian. The name "Adrian" comes from Latin and means "dark one." The Negro and the priest also share

a particular view of manhood, one that involves the loss of the phallus. At one point as Adrian, he makes the following overture to Burligame: "'I'm a dealer in notions,' friend volunteers. 'Dancing dolls, learn handwriting analysis by mail, secrets of eternal life, coins and stamps, amaze your friends, pagan rites, abandoned, thrilling, fully illustrated worldwide selection of rare daggers, gurkhas, stilletos, hunting, throwing'" (28). This listing of comic book symbols of mystic power amounts to a kind of inverted version of Catholic mysticism. The offer is one calculated to appeal to a man-child who is still predisposed to view the world in terms of Catholic rituals. When he removes his disguise, Adrian says, "'It was necessary to use this (holds up falseface guiltily) to get close to you, it was for the health of your soul'" (36). Adrian obviously knows his quarry well enough to know that the repeated offer of the phallic knife is bound to have a special effect on him. The offer of the knives, however, proves false and Burligame takes his revenge in the subsequent attack on him with the deadly needle.

Like Bane-Hipkiss, Father Blau made Burligame a false offer of male power. Burligame recalls how Blau approached him, the tallest and most mature of the boys in his charge, to play on the basketball team. Father Blau, like a kind of tyrannos, has his eye "on the All-City title" (32) and needs Burligame who had "secreted sufficient hormones" (31). Burligame refuses to play. Although he does not explain his refusal, it is suggested that the reason he refused to play basketball is that he is preoccupied with another pursuit, the "wholly natural and good interest in female parts" (33). Father Blau punishes him for refusing to use his hormones in this proscribed fashion. What the celibate priest Father Blau is insisting upon,

in other words, is that Burligame make the transition from boy to man ("He wanted me to grow" [32]), but without the use of the phallus; like Adrian's false promise of the knives, Father Blau's version of growth and power has no sex attached to it. Fathers Bane-Hipkiss and Blau both want to be "friends" with Burligame but that bond is contingent on the loss of Burligame's sexual identity. The Fathers want Burligame to join with them but they are men whose sexuality has been lost to the Catholic church, represented here by the female Our Lady of the Sorrows.

The act of plunging the needle into the neck of the father represents the son's assumption of the magically powerful penis, the use of which has been denied him by this same father-figure. But the act does not mean that the son has defeated the father or that the son has regained the use of the instrument hitherto denied him. Rather, the peculiar terms in which this act is expressed indicate that the attack is not a resolution to Burligame's identity problem. Careful analysis of the associative implications of the attack suggest that Burligame's lack of identity--the "burly game" of his manhood and his selfhood--is likely to continue. The assumption of the magical syringe with its transmuting serum suggests that Burligame now controls the penis. Both the scientific instrument he uses, and the power of mutation as it occurs within the context of the story, serve to identify Burligame with the scientists in the Attack of the Puppet People who used science to mutate the devouring termites. The choice of the syringe, in other words, aligns Burligame with the paternal scientists whose conscious powers of logic and reason defeated the emotionally obvious puppets. In the attack on Bane-Hipkiss, the conscious power of science is joined to the libidinous appetite ("I...join needle to deadly body of instrument"). The

result appears to be a victory over the "mystical" power of the castrated Fathers in the service of Our Lady of the Sorrows. Note, however, that the priest-Father is not destroyed but is, rather, transformed into a beast, a representation of animal desire. That this is an appropriate punishment for the man who denied the beast in Burligame is obvious. What is not so obvious, perhaps, is that there is something decidedly domestic about this variety of "werewolf": it "barks." The father is thus invested with an exaggerated but qualified dose of animal desire to compensate for his "steadfast" rejection of same in his son. The animal desire that entirely usurps the Father's former identity does not render him powerful or threatening, but rather serves to humiliate and degrade him, much in the way that Burligame has been degraded for his interest in female parts. The transformation of Bane-Hipkiss to dog is, in fact, a dramatic version of an earlier attack on Blau in the confessional: "Leaving Father Blau, unregenerate, with the sorry residue of our weekly encounter: impure thoughts, anger, dirty words, disobedience" (32). With this transformation of the Father, the way is now open for the son to become "friends" with the father-figure (the term "friend" is used repeatedly by Burligame to describe Bane-Hipkiss): both will now be possessed, quite literally, by animal desire for female parts. This desire will not, however, be so powerful as to render either father or son "wolfish", as the barking indicates.

The attack also serves to place the father in a feminine position, an object that collapses into a quivering, faceless lump at the touch of the magic penis. What is significant about the particular form this attack takes is that it is a version of the attack with the pliers on the female "beauty" which is the central vision, ritual, and celebration in Burligame's

private theatre of fantasy; on one level Barthelme thus associates Burligame's disfiguring attack on the father with the fantasized disfiguring attack on a woman's beauty. The key, then, to this entire episode lies in Burligame's anger toward, not the father with whom he seeks identification, but the immanent and shared figure of Our Lady of Our Sorrows, the lady who has managed to undermine the "burliness"--the sexual identity--of the Fathers and now lurks behind the conspiracy that wants Burligame.

III

"The Big Broadcast of 1938" invites us to share Bloomsbury's radio station, a private place subject to very few distractions. As the journal serves Joseph in "Mandible" and the films serve Burligame in "Hiding Man", this private, these one-man radio broadcasts serve Bloomsbury as the seat of private rituals and celebrations. The unusual radio broadcasts consist almost exclusively of recollections cum confessions calculated to serve as bait in a literal "broad-cast" for the woman who deserted Bloomsbury some years before. In his broadcasts Bloomsbury is trying to recall, in both senses of the word, the estranged spouse he addresses as either the "girl" or "woman." This equivocation over terms, and the turn of mind it represents, are known to us already in Joseph's conflation of his two seductresses, Sue Ann Brownly and Miss Mandible (and will be seen again in Baskerville's tendency to refer to Florence Green as the "old girl"). Nowhere, however, in the synoptic tales is this tendency to confuse the ages of women more pronounced or insisted upon than it is in "Broadcast": our attention is repeatedly drawn to Bloomsbury's inability to decide whether or

not his former wife (and present companion) is a girl or a woman. The aetiology of this confusion constitutes the principal subject of Bloomsbury's broadcasts, the principal subject of the story itself.

As mentioned above, the action of "Broadcast" is set in a radio station. Several times the point is made that the radio station which provides for the seat of the present action was secured in exchange for the house that Bloomsbury and the old girl shared when they lived together:

Having acquired in exchange for an old house that had been theirs, his and hers, a radio or more properly radio station....(67)

...she with whom he had lived in the house that was gone (traded for the radio). (68)

For there had been no response from her (she who had figured, as both subject and object, in the commercial announcements, before it had been traded for the radio, lived in the house....)(70)

In a way reminiscent of "Hiding Man" in which the movie theatre of Burligame's present and the church of his past are conflated, in "Broadcast" there is a remarkable degree of correspondence between the events that took place in that old house and the events now taking place in the radio station, a correspondence that is gradually developed by Bloomsbury's radio talks. These talks are divided into what he calls "the first kind and the second kind" (67). The first kind "consisted of singling out, for special notice, from among all the others, some particular word in the English language, and repeating it in a monotonous voice for as much as fifteen minutes, or a quarter hour" (67). Among his favourite words in these talks are "assimilate, alleviate, authenticate, ameliorate" (67), words which all point to the potentially therapeutic possibilities of expression. These tautological announcements of the first kind provide for an appropriate

complement to the talks of the second kind which are attempts to resolve (to come to terms with) trauma in his past life. The ironic fact is that the chronic repetition, the lack of development in these talks aimed at healing and self-actualization accurately reflects the lack of health and development Bloomsbury receives from this talks of the second kind.

The talk of the second kind, composed of the so-called "commercial announcements" (68), is devoted to describing his disturbing past relations with the wife of his former days. There are four announcements altogether, and they are of special interest in that they provide a kind of comprehensive history of that failed, but still active, relationship. As we shall endeavour to show, the fantasies and screen memories expressed by these announcements contain the roots of Bloomsbury's current psychological malaise.

In the first of the four announcements, a series of incidents (in his memory, they happen over the course of a single day) reveal that his life with the "old skin" (69) was hardly a model of domestic bliss. The refrain, "Man and wife!," repeated twice, each time following an account of a connubial, emotional debacle for Bloomsbury, is redolent with bitter irony. The phrase excerpted from the marriage vow serves to underline the complete absence of a secure, reciprocal, sustaining relationship between Martha and Bloomsbury. Bloomsbury's status in this marriage was not that of a partner, but more akin to that of a child or a dog. Actually, his marriage denigrated him to a status even more abject than that of a dog inasmuch as his love, as this announcement indicates, was never sought or cherished, but was, rather, a thing to be endured.

In this first announcement, Martha's authority and Bloomsbury's

abjection are measured in terms of control over the sources of nourishment. Bloomsbury remembers having "crawled" before her as she walked, sweeping chestnuts from her path with his hands. For his pains, he is "treated...to a raspberry ice" which she places "daintily" at her feet. Later, as a special treat, he is allowed to put his "stained...muzzle" into her gloved hand. As a result of this unusual embrace, her "little glove came away pink and sticky, sticky and pink" (68). Later they argue over the subject of her choice which she announces will be "Smallness in the Human Male." Bloomsbury, acknowledging his "smallness," attributes it (unsuccessfully) to "a lack of nourishment during my younger years" (68). The victorious Martha then arbitrarily denies him four meals as he vigorously protests his love for her.

It doesn't demand any great psychoanalytic insight to see in their relationship a version of the primitive relationship between the powerless, dependent child, and the all-powerful, nourishing mother. Every protest of love Bloomsbury sounds in this announcement echoes the absoluteness of the identification the child seeks with the mother, especially before the child is weaned. The breast is the first erotic object and withdrawal of the breast ends an idyll of innocence (from the child's point of view, the self and the breast are one and the same thing). Bloomsbury seems to be suffering a shock similar to that of the weaned child: "And I said, but we were everything to each other once" (69).

The relationship is characterized in this announcement by Bloomsbury's determination to overvalue Martha, much as a child would value its mother. Even though he looks "absurd" to Martha, he insists on "crawling" abjectly before her like a preambulatory child. The curious and erotic "treat"

involving the stained pink glove is indicative of a confusion over two modes of approach. It's as if the oral and the regressive part of him, and the phallic adult part of him, have hit upon an act that serves to satisfy the drives of each. Apparently stuck at the oral stage of development, he conceives of love in terms of nourishment. Bloomsbury cannot distinguish in fantasy between his mouth and his penis as the appropriate source of pleasure, and so he has hit upon an act that reconciles the two: into the vaginal glove ("pink and sticky, sticky and pink") he inserts a compromise object, a mouth shaped like a phallus, a "muzzle." What this shows is that the adult pleasure derived from penetration is viewed in terms of the oral pleasure derived from feeding. For Bloomsbury, however, this act can be accomplished only at great cost to his self-esteem.

The introduction of the phallic component, suggested by the sticky emissions released in the glove, only serve to annoy Martha: "I had, you said, ruined a good glove with my ardor, and a decent pair of trousers [emphasis added]" (69). Bloomsbury's view of his sexuality as dirty and animalistic is perfectly expressed by this failed overture which only serves to stain a "good" glove and his own "decent" trousers. His punishment for this expression of what would be called "obvious sexual interest" in "Hiding Man" is to have his food withheld, precisely the form of punishment an orally fixated man-child would most appreciate.

Bloomsbury's determination to treat his wife as he would have treated his nourishing mother results in what Joseph in "Mandible" so aptly termed as "disaster." Martha's insistence on discussing "Smallness in the Human Male" points to her crucial part in the process which has resulted in Bloomsbury's "smallness," a word that could refer to his lack of

self-esteem, his lack of phallic strength, or the fact that, as an fully-grown adult, he carries within him a small child. Bloomsbury's smallness is disastrous to the extent that it could entertain all three connotations of the word.

The second announcement provides a commentary on the first announcement, this time positing essentially the same relationship in a different situation. The sex that takes place in this episode (all of the announcements develop around a sexual episode) is, on the surface, that of the adolescent. This memory of an "old day, from the old days" (70) is set amid the "pushing and pawing, pawing and pushing" (71) of a movie theatre balcony. The tautology of the pawing and pushing serves to recall a similar construction, also involving the Bloomsbury-as-dog motif, the sticky and pink tautology of the muzzle in the glove. We see a Martha here similar to the Martha of the first announcement: she is sexually aggressive, impatient with Bloomsbury's inexperience or reserve in matters sexual. Martha obviously wants the encounter in the balcony to develop beyond the preliminaries of the pushing and pawing of adolescent petting, but Bloomsbury, distracted by the "picture," is not inclined to continue:

The first thing I knew I was inside your shirt with my hand and I found there something very lovely and, as they say, desirable. It belonged to you. I did not know, then, what to do with it, therefore I simply (simply!) held it in my hand, it was, as the saying goes, soft and warm. If you can believe it. Meanwhile down below in the pit events were taking place, whether these were such as the people in the pit had paid for, I did not and do not know. (71)

This description of "the first thing" Bloomsbury knew is a marvelously accurate description in psychoanalytic terms of the child's feeling about the breast. He clings to the breast (which, not named, maintains its primitive, pre-nominative aspect), but it is no longer his breast. His

ironic repetition of the word "simply" is especially suggestive: he finds himself clinging to the soft and warm breast in a very complex position; he has reached a kind of impasse, unable to return to the breast as his breast, and unwilling to proceed to a more mature sexual advance.

The image of the "pit" that seizes his attention is overdetermined in that it might represent any of the following: the pit as theatre pit; the pit of the stomach; the pit of Hell; or finally, the pit or cavity of the vagina to which Martha is evidently urging him to proceed: "'You then said into my ear, get on with it, can't you?'" (71). The events taking place in any of these pits all point to Bloomsbury's anxiety over the shift from the infantile attachment to the breast to the awareness that Martha as love object has sexual dimensions that are complex and dangerous from the point of view of someone who would prefer the breast.

Bloomsbury is punished in this announcement as he was punished in the first. In this reconstruction of the old days, Martha is again cast in the role of sexual aggressor, demanding adult consummation from the childlike Bloomsbury. In the first announcement, meals were withheld; in this announcement, the actual breast is taken away from Bloomsbury: "'At this speech of mine [he explains that he's watching the picture] you were moved to withdraw it, I understood, it was a punishment'" (71). Martha's role here conforms to that of the mother who pulls her breast away from the child signalling a new phase of that child's development and a dramatic change in their relationship. What is an inevitable step in the breakdown of the absolute intimacy shared between mother and child is interpreted as a "punishment" by the child. Later in the story, Bloomsbury tells Martha: "You veiled yourself from me, there were parts I could have and parts I

couldn't" (78). Given the opportunity to take some part other than the breast, he hesitates, and is left with nothing:

Having withdrawn it you began, for lack of anything better, to watch the picture also. We watched the picture together, and this was a kind of intimacy, the other kind had been lost. Nevertheless, it had been there once, I consoled myself with that...And to that row of the balcony we, you and I, never returned. (71)

The "picture" which they watch together provides for the basis of a new kind of intimacy, but from Bloomsbury's point of view, it is poor substitute. It is this "picture" going on down in the pit that preoccupied Bloomsbury while he clung to the breast. This picture is important in that the narrative also makes it clear that its effect on both Bloomsbury and Martha is profound, so profound that it provides for the destruction of the old intimacy and for the terms of a new relationship. As far as the events of the picture itself are concerned, no details whatsoever are provided, which is odd given the importance Bloomsbury attaches to it. In a wonderful demonstration of how displacement occurs in fiction as it does in dream, in the very next episode in the frame tale the significance of the picture is hinted at. It is at this juncture in the frame tale that Martha enters the story, as it were, in the flesh.

Bloomsbury is "weeping quietly in the control room [emphasis added]" (71) when the "girl or woman of indeterminate age" suddenly appears. "Tell me about your early life," says Bloomsbury. Significantly, in light of the events at the movie theatre and the "missing" picture, the central feature of her history is that she was once "the president of the Conrad Veidt fan club" (72). In fact, she still carries the picture of this motion picture star in her purse, "where it had apparently remained for some time" (73). She proceeds to describe her attachment to Conrad Veidt in very strong terms

(Conrad Veidt was the star of The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, the film that was the inspiration for the title of this collection of stories). The Conrad Veidt Martha sees in the picture, if he does represent part of the missing picture, would provide the necessary incentive to a person with Bloomsbury's psychological predispositions not to press a sexual claim on the mother-figure. This is Martha's description of her idol: "His magnetism and personality got me. His voice and gestures fascinated me. I hated him, feared him, loved him" (73). Curiously, this figure who "got" Martha conforms in every crucial aspect to the child's view of the father who is so attractively powerful and powerfully threatening. It might be argued that this is Martha speaking of her feelings, and not Bloomsbury speaking of his. The narrative, however, then proceeds to provide a final piece in this puzzle. Bloomsbury is shown the picture. His reaction echoes Martha's sense of ambivalence: "It bore a photograph of Conrad Veidt who looked at one and the same instant handsome and sinister" (73). Thus, through a series of displacements, the nature of the picture that signalled the end of the old intimacy between Martha and Bloomsbury is expressed. The picture is of the father who, to the oedipal child, is someone who can be hated, feared and loved at one and the same time.

So strong is the influence of the "silver screen" on both Martha and Bloomsbury that, in their subsequent sexual relations, they find themselves conforming to a cinematic model. For instance, Martha approaches Bloomsbury in the frame tale comparing herself to the film star Carmen Lambrosa. Bloomsbury, who we already know would prefer to crawl, initiates an embrace by taking "a single stride, such as he had often seen practised in film" (79). This pseudo-cinematic embrace ends as an unsuccessful attempt to

emulate the romance of the pictures. In terms of the picture metaphor already alluded to, this approach to their relationship must fail:

Bloomsbury's attempts to affect the stride of the movie star is an attempt to usurp the role of the handsome and sinister figure with a prior claim on Martha.

The third announcement, which concerns an argument over ice cubes and the process of refrigeration, highlights other features of the state of mind which has its origins in Bloomsbury's relationship to Martha. Bloomsbury, by cheating, manages to challenge the "immaculate" and "magisterial" authority of the "old girl," by winning an argument involving the counting of ice cubes. He then presses this momentary advantage, and for the first time in this case history, takes an active role in a sexual encounter:

'What a defeat for you! What a victory for me! It was my first victory, I fear I went quite out of my head. I dragged you to the floor, among the ice cubes...and forced you, with results that I considered then, and consider now, to have been first rate.'
(75-76)

Bloomsbury is evidently able to perform sexually if authority is "defeated." The act of love, as it is described here, is an attack, akin to an act of rape. Bloomsbury goes out of his head, drags her to the floor, and forces her to make love. In other words, Bloomsbury's "victory"--his potency--is tied directly to the infliction of humiliation on the object in the absence of the rule of justice.

The subject of "Refrigeration" that provides for the basis of this quarrel is important to our understanding of what this announcement signifies. It is important to take careful note of the particular terms in which the process of refrigeration is described:

..that among its attributes was the attribute of conceiving containing and at the moment of need whelping any number of ice

cubes so that no matter how grave the demand, how vast the occasion, how indifferent or even hostile the climate, how inept or even treacherous the operator, how brief or even nonexistent the lapse between genesis and parturition, between the wish and the fact, ice cubes in multiples of sufficient would present themselves. (74)

The associations attached to the subject of refrigeration develop the fridge into a complex symbol that has significance on several levels. On an intrinsic level, refrigeration picks up on the raspberry ice of the first announcement. The fridge is where the food is kept and the principles by which it functions make it an appropriate source of contention for this couple.

The fridge, placed in their kitchen by Martha, is developed into a metaphor for a woman who conceives, contains, and whelps ice cubes on demand. On one level the imagery surrounding this "machine" suggests the Virgin who, "without doubt and on immaculate authority" (74), is capable of "genesis" virtually without regard to the participation of the "operator." The association of the fridge with the Virgin, a figure imbued with the strongest and most fundamental prohibitions against being viewed as a sexual object, is the immaculate mother who cannot be touched.

The message of the immaculately conceiving fridge image is that pregnancy can result without intercourse taking place. As an object capable of impregnation, pregnancy, and delivery in unlimited quantities, this fridge argues for the autonomous power of the mother. It must be kept in mind that the "immaculate authority" of Martha will not permit this characterization of the fridge's function to be challenged. As a depiction of the family, it is, as it were, a chilling view. The mother is absorbed in insular processes designed to sustain self-love, processes not open to

interference from the operator. The superfluous male operator is characterized as either "inept" or "trecherous." The "climate," the world into which the ice cubes are delivered, is "indifferent" or "hostile." Finally, there is the matter of the "whelps" produced by this fridge under these conditions ("whelping" represents another feature in the Bloomsbury-as-dog motif): the fact that the children that result from this sort of family are ice cubes tells us much Bloomsbury's view of the origins of his own frigidity.

By attacking the immaculate authority of Martha's version of refrigeration Bloomsbury hopes to prove, as he puts it with emphasis, "that there is no justice!" (75). Proving that there is no justice allows Bloomsbury to attack and rape Martha. The concept of justice typically originates in the view of the father who threatens the son who desires the mother with castration. In what proves to be only the momentary circumvention of justice, and the threat of punishment, Bloomsbury finds the means to vent what amounts to anger at the powerful and seductive mother-figure. The irony here, of course, is that "victorious" Bloomsbury has already been punished by this point with castration in the form of psychic impotence (or frigidity). Bloomsbury, throughout the story and the history of his life as we know it, is psychologically, a figure of ice, or, as his name suggests, a "buried-bloom." There is, then, more than a little irony in Martha's final words to Bloomsbury: "'Balls,' she said. 'I know you and your letchy ways'" (81). The irony is that his letchy ways have, in effect, cost him his balls.

The fourth announcement basically serves to describe in different terms again what we have already seen depicted in the three preceding

announcements. This announcement is developed around two family triangles, two triangles which, as I hope to demonstrate, amount to versions of the same triangle. The first triangle is formed when the heretofore unmentioned child of Bloomsbury and Martha is mentioned (no doubt this child is in part an allusion to a similar imaginary child in Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?). The first triangle, then, consists of Martha, Bloomsbury, and a child whose gender is concealed behind the indefinite pronoun "it." The second triangle is formed with the intrusion of Jack, Martha's lover. This second triangle moves Bloomsbury from the position of father to one more familiar, that of the displaced son. What is fascinating about these two triangles is the way in which the predicament of the child in the first triangle serves as commentary on the predicament of Bloomsbury in the second triangle: Bloomsbury's child and the childish Bloomsbury are both rejected by Martha in a realization of the refrigeration argument she promulgated in the third announcement. The child and Bloomsbury are relegated to a queer kind of oblivion by Martha: the child is simply "gone...away," and the adult Bloomsbury is simply "gone" as a person, lost in a morbid and moribund way of life, still rehearsing unresolved infantile fantasies.

This is Bloomsbury's description of the first triangle:

Well, I said, and the child? Up the child, you said, 'twasn't what I wanted anyway. What then did you want? I asked, and the child cried, its worst forebodings confirmed. Pish, you said, nothing you could supply. Maybe, I said. Not bloody likely, you said. And where is it (the child) now? Gone, I don't doubt, away. (77)

In this first triangle, Bloomsbury is rejected along with the child of his "supply." In the story this is Martha's only manifest act as mother, but it is utterly consistent with the view of her as mother we have been obliquely offered in the previous announcements, especially the third announcement.

In the third announcement, Martha's refrigeration argument provides a gloss on her maternal attitude as it is demonstrated here. The selfishness and self-absorption nascent in the fridge image is manifested in the callous rejection of the child because it is not what she wanted.

The second triangle is a more developed version of the first, this time with Bloomsbury the husband put in the position of a child who has his "worst forebodings confirmed." Bloomsbury is betrayed by Martha when she takes a man named Jack into her bedroom. This has the effect of placing Bloomsbury in exactly the same position as a child in the primal scene, stationed outside the bedroom door listening to the imperfectly understood and disturbing sounds of adult intercourse:

A man came, in a hat...Jack, this is my husband, you said. And took him into the bedroom, and turned the key in the lock, you and he together on the inside, me alone on the outside. Go away and mind your own silly business, you said, from behind the door. Yes, Jack said (from behind the door), go away and don't be bothering people with things on their minds...I watched at the door until nightfall, but could only hear no more words, only sounds of a curious nature, such as grunts and moans and sighs.
(78)

Bloomsbury's tendency to confuse girl with woman is further demonstrated by the events which follow this reconstruction of the primal scene. Earlier, Bloomsbury states that their marriage bed, now occupied by the copulating Jack and Martha, has a significant history: "The bed, your mother's bed, brought to our union with your mother in it, she lay like a sword between us" (77). After Jack has made love to Bloomsbury's wife behind the locked bedroom door, the door is opened. It is not Martha who emerges, however, it is Martha's mother: "At length the door opened, your mother emerged, looking as they say 'put out'. But she had always taken your part as opposed to my part, therefore she said only that I was a common

sneak" (78). This switch from Martha to Martha's mother is a displacement. The displacement is signalled in part by the use of the ambiguous term "put out": Martha's mother may look put out, but it is Martha who has just "put out" sexually for Jack. This displacement perfectly expresses Bloomsbury's critical inability to distinguish wife from mother.

Bloomsbury accuses this mother of always taking the wife's part. The meaning of this complaint turns on the word "part." On the most superficial level, it means that the mother always sides with the daughter against him. On another, still literal level, it means that, in Bloomsbury's mind, a mother has always taken his wife's part or role, an accusation which supports what we have contended to this point. Furthermore, this is the same mother who lay "like a sword" between Bloomsbury and his wife. The sword here represents the phallic threat attached to the seduction of mothers (from what we know of Bloomsbury, it is far more likely that it is he who brought the sword-bearing mother-figure to bed with him).

There is another motif in the story that complements Bloomsbury's of Martha as a figure who carries a sword. The first details in this pattern occur in the details of Martha's clothes as they are described in her first appearance in the frame tale. She is described as "a girl or woman of indeterminate age in a long bright red linen duster...[she] removed her duster, underneath she was wearing black treader pants, and orange sweater, and harlequin glasses" (71-72). There would seem to be two Martha's here, one dressed as a domestic in a red duster, and a second Martha dressed in a garrish, even an aggressively garrish, costume. The fact that she is wearing harlequin glasses points to the fact that she is wearing a dramatic disguise, in other words, that she is portraying something or someone. The

black toreador pants are referred to again in another context which serves to develop their significance. This time, however, they are called "bullfighter pants" (80) and they have a particular effect on Bloomsbury (Martha has just wept which has tempted Bloomsbury): "'As a matter of fact, you were most appealing. Tempting, even. I was fooled for whole moments at a time. You look well in bullfighter pants'" (80). Evidently Martha literally and figuratively "wears the pants" in Bloomsbury's family. Bloomsbury's own pants, we recall from the first announcement, were "ruined" long ago.

The fact that Martha insists on her resemblance to Carmen Lambrosa, a Latin film star, and the fact that she, in effect, brought a sword to the marriage bed also figure in this bullfighter pattern. Each of these details--the red duster, the toreador bullfighter pants, her resemblance to Carmen Lambrosa, the possession of the sword--are part and parcel of a pattern that indicates that, in Bloomsbury's mind, making love to Martha puts him in a position analogous to that of the bull who faces a matador in the corrida. Evidently Bloomsbury (who adopts the attitude of a domesticated animal, the dog, around Martha) feels that behind the cape of the red duster, a bullfighting Martha waits, sword in hand, to threaten the animal in him (the bull serves as a symbol of potent and rampant maleness).

The curious juxtaposition of mother and wife in the fourth announcement is consistent with Bloomsbury's pronounced determination to refer to Martha, either as she exists in the present, or as she was in the past, as the "girl or woman." It is, it should be noted, a description that is not justified by the text; that is, there is nothing in her appearance as we have it from Bloomsbury to warrant this refusal to opt for one of the two terms. The

justification, rather, lies in the latent content of the story, in Bloomsbury's unwillingness or inability to separate his mother from his wife, or put another way, his refusal to give up his fantasy "marriage" to the mother he knew as a child. This tendency to identify Martha as both girl and woman, as young and old, is a projection of his own desire to play boy and man to her. The label "old girl," then, while it is not at all descriptive of Martha, is entirely descriptive of Bloomsbury's own divided status as both child and man. It is clearly not Martha who is confused over her role (she's a woman with a woman's appetites), it is Bloomsbury, the man who continues to nourish the buried bloom of a boy's desires. To the end Bloomsbury refuses to accept that it is he, and not Martha, who will not let go of the past: "'Martha,' he said, 'old skin, why can't you let the old days die? That were the days of anger, passion, and dignity, but are now, in the light of present standards, practices, and attitudes, days that are gone?'" (80). But this Martha he is addressing does not exist; in fact, no woman of that name independent of his memory could be said to exist at all in this story.

Martha of "the old days" answers the call and returns to his isolated radio station. It is soon made clear, however, that the terms of their relationship have not changed to any significant degree since her last incarnation. Bloomsbury discovers that he is finally unable to "authenticate, ameliorate, assimilate, or alleviate." It is significant, too, that this man who cannot find the means to go forward into health and validity finds himself preoccupied with the word "matriculate" in one of his announcements of the first kind, for "a period longer than normal" (79). The story ends essentially where it began, with nothing resolved: "'Then we

are, as they say, through?' she asked. 'There is no hope for us?' 'None,' I said. 'That I know of'" (80). In terms of the latent content, Bloomsbury finds that he cannot return with Martha to the pre-phallic, pre-oedipal idyll he knew at Martha's breast, the time before he knew the interpolating threat of the picture, Jack, and the castrating sword. There can be little question that these are the impossible terms of the reconciliation he waits for: "Could not we two skins, you and me, climb and cling for all the days that were left? Which were not, after all, so many days? Without the interpolation of such as Jack? And no doubt, others yet to come?" (78).

For Bloomsbury, the result of this relationship to Martha is the psychic impotence and impasse common to all of the characters in the synoptic tales. Bloomsbury, who repeatedly qualifies observations he makes with "as they say," is patently incapable of feeling any emotions except grief, regret, and anger. This limited spectrum of emotion is completely tied to the one person who utterly dominates his psychic life, Martha. There is a sentence in the story that expresses his incapacity to feel, and it points to the fact that this lack of confidence in his feelings is a function of his inability to gauge her feelings toward him: "But I felt, I felt, I felt (I think) that you were, as they say, angry" (71). So profound is Bloomsbury's commitment to his past life with Martha that when the meeting between them in the present finally develops into a seduction, the scene is rendered in terms that utterly drain it of any sense of life or immediacy. Bloomsbury's steadfast conscious denial of the basis of his attraction to Martha precludes his "making up his mind" about Martha:

'Do I impress you?'
'In what way?'

'As a possible sex partner? Sexually I mean?'
 'I haven't considered it,' he said, 'heretofore.'
 'They say I'm sexy,' she noted.
 'I don't doubt it,' he said. 'I mean it's plausible.'
 'I am yours,' she said, 'if you want me.'
 'Yes,' he said, 'there's the difficulty, making up my mind.'
 (79)

Incarnated once again by the incantations of Bloomsbury's announcements, Martha is thus reaffirmed in the present as the ambivalent maternal figure about whom Bloomsbury was unable to make up his mind in the past. The expression of obvious sexual interest in Martha still represents a risk that Bloomsbury is not prepared to take. Just as certainly, covert sexual interest in Martha is a desire he is not yet prepared to abandon. It is appropriate that the first and last times that Bloomsbury sees Martha in the frame tale, it is "in the glass" (71) of the control room: Martha in the present is no more than a reflection of the lost object he carries within him, a thing fashioned entirely out of the unresolved wishes of the old days he cannot stop reliving. Because he cannot come to terms with the only woman in his life, his fate is certain: he will not escape the hermetic and closed booth of his obsessions. Every announcement he makes, every "performance" he undertakes, is an exercise in failure. Like the stories of Joseph, Baskerville, and Burligame, this story ends with the protagonist trapped inside the stultifying monotony of his fantasies. The last sentence of this story closes the circle the story has drawn: "That was the end of this period of Bloomsbury's, as they say, life" (81).

IV

"Florence Green is 81" traces the course of a dinner party at Florence Green's. The story begins somewhere in the middle of that evening, follows the dinner party to its conclusion, and ends with Baskerville, whose point of view we share, having left the party, turning circles in the street in his car. The figure that dominates the perspective we share with Baskerville is Florence Green, an old woman who lapses in and out of consciousness and thus is given to what Baskerville refers to as a "Form of Address":

"Dinner with Florence Green. The old babe is on a kick tonight: I want to go to some other country, she announces. Everyone wonders what this can mean. But Florence says nothing more: no explanation, no elaboration, after a satisfied look around the table bang! she is asleep again. The girl at Florence's right is new here and does not understand" (3).

Florence Green's rather delphic form of address is very much like the form of address the fiction itself adopts; the narrative, like Florence's idiosyncratic ramblings (and like the route Baskerville will eventually follow as he sings his Kyrie at close of the story), describes a series of uniquely determined concentric circles.

Baskerville, the would-be novelist, currently "a sophomore at the Famous Writers' School in Westport" (3), edits a magazine entitled The Journal of Tension Reduction. Baskerville's trade is to sponsor through his magazine, as he puts it, "portages through the whirlpool country of the mind" (6). This is a key image in the sense that the story we are reading is a form of precisely this kind of portage. Baskerville provides the point of view through which we view the events of this story. There are, therefore, strictly speaking, no events per se in this story: only

reactions to events. The portage thus consists of a series of impressions linked by association into configurations that resemble, as much as anything, whirlpools. Everything that "happens" in this story is expressive of, and contained by, the "whirlpool country" of Baskerville's complex subjectivity.

As readers, our inevitable confusion as to the subject of "Florence" (the difficulty we have maintaining our equilibrium as we portage through the text) is correlative to the new girl's confusion over the highly eccentric, solipsistic form of address she hears at Florence's table. It is not long, however, before we begin to see that, though this country may be dominated by whirlpools, there is a stabilizing pattern in the text in the form of repeated, developing motifs. Unlike, say, the rapids of pure discursiveness, whirlpool country is marked by definite patterns.

In "The Big Broadcast of 1938" Bloomsbury speaks of "both the subject and object" of his narrative excursions as being one and the same creature (70). In the nature of, and the relationships among, the associative patterns in "Florence," the real subject and object of the portage described in this story is contained; the patterning of a limited number of motifs whose significance is uniquely determined by their relationships to one another serves to reveal both the subject and the object of "Florence"--Baskerville's state of mind.

Any listing of these motifs, however exhaustive, would fail to provide an adequate sense of their significance, for these motifs signify as much in terms of their relationship to one another as they do independently. The method of "Florence" thus serves to demonstrate the efficacy of Bartheleme's

maxim that the how of a work of art is more important than the what.³

Consider, for example, the following passage: "'The aim of literature,' Baskerville replied grandly, 'is the creation of a strange object covered with fur which breaks your heart.' Joan says: 'I have two children.' 'Why did you do that?' I ask. 'I don't know', she says" (15). The statement Baskerville makes regarding the aim of literature means something strictly in and of itself as a unit of meaning (in fact, it is often quoted by critics out of context). It is contiguous to a sentence with which it would seem to have little in common. As in Florence's form of address, we shift with "no explanation, no elaboration" from an observation about literature to the personal disclosure by the woman Baskerville is currently seducing. In relation to each other, and in way independent of the significance of each, these two sentences serve to describe in a uniquely active way what can be described passively to lesser effect: the way Baskerville's mind works. The real subject of this exchange, therefore, is the agency directing the flow of association from literary objects covered with fur to this woman's children. This particular associative fragment also signifies within the larger context of the whole associative field of the text, telling us even more about the way Baskerville's mind works. For instance, we already know by this point that Baskerville is unable to father children. We also know that a novel has been gestating in his mind for twelve years. We know that he is attracted to what is maternal in women...and so on. If we add this single scrap quoted above to the accruing, reflexive heap of associations contained by the entire narrative, what begins to emerge from the complex matrix of significances that is formed is the otherwise concealed substance of Baskerville's state of mind.

The style of "Florence" is a version of the modernist style Joyce developed in Ulysses, "a continual kaleidoscopic interweaving of interior monologue, style indirect libre, direct speech, indirect speech, first person and authorial narrative" (Iser 78, 209). The form is meant to approximate consciousness which is characterized by an ever-shifting viewpoint constantly adding new material to a history of impressions. The choice and placement of material is determined by both conscious and unconscious factors. The unconscious element is critical to our sense of how this particular history of impressions develops, our sense of how Baskerville's mind works. Donald Barthelme, commenting on the conceptualization of his stories, once said, "All of the magic comes from the unconscious. If there is any magic."⁴ The role the unconscious plays in this story is made the manifest subject of the story as the reader is asked to consider what is somewhat ironically identified as "the psychoanalytic issue" (9).

Early in the narrative, the reader is encouraged to see his role as analogous to that of a psychoanalyst observing Baskerville in the text playing "the nervous, dreary patient" who is trying, by various means, "to put you into the problem" (4). The reader's status as detached doctor is ironically acknowledged. Barthelme's intent here is not so much to awaken a sense of the limits of fiction as illusion as it is to turn the act of reading into a kind of game of hide-and-seek: "Reader...we have roles to play, thou and I: you are the doctor (washing his hands between hours), and I, I am, I think, the nervous, dreary patient. I am free associating, brilliantly, brilliantly, to put you into the problem. Or for fear of boring you: which?" (4). With this sly admission, the game is on. The

object of the game is to find the patient, or more specifically, find the psychoanalytic issues purported to lie concealed somewhere in the fabric of the narrative (the name "Baskerville," which comes from Arthur Conan Doyle and a mystery involving the famous detective Sherlock Holmes, adds to the sense that this story is some kind of mystery to be solved).

The text presents itself as a series of brilliant free associations that will, if properly attended to by the reader-psychoanalyst, put him or her into a problem. The problem, we cannot fail but to conclude, is a problem that a psychoanalyst is advantaged to appreciate; in other words, the text declares that it contains a problem that is likely to be unconscious in nature. The text then proceeds, however, to cast the whole issue into doubt by declaring that the associations we see in the text may not be free at all: they may simply be Baskerville's way of titillating the reader-psychoanalyst with ersatz symptoms, and, by implication, altogether bogus psychoanalytic issues: "One source of concern in the classic encounter between patient and psychoanalyst is the patient's fear of boring the doctor....In such cases the patient sees the doctor as a highly sophisticated consumer of outré material, a connoisseur of exotic behavior. Therefore he tends to propose himself as more colorful, more eccentric (or more ill) than he really is: or he is witty, or he fantasticates" (5-6).

At one point in the story, after repeating an introduction of himself for the third time--"I am a young man but very brilliant, very ingratiating" (8)--the credibility of the narrative voice is deliberately undermined: "...did I explain that? And you accepted my explanation?" (8). The point is timely: by virtue of the fallibility of Baskerville as reliable narrator, we find that we have indeed been "put into the problem," a problem

which centres on the identity of the narrative voice. Baskerville is aware, and wants the reader to be aware (and wants the reader to be aware that he's aware, etc.), that the prose you're reading may be "a tactic for evading the psychoanalytic issue" (8-9). The effect of the irony here is to make the search for the pschoanalytic issue all but irresistible, even as it renders the inclination to view the text in this manner highly suspect.

The question as to whether or not the text of "Florence" contains a legitimate psychoanalytic issue, or whether it contains only "brilliantly" ironic openings for the reader to posit his own desires remains. The reader has no choice but to behave as he or she has been encouraged to behave, that is, to try to determine whether of not the text contains legitimate psychoanalytic issues crucial to an understanding of the story.

The most important relationship in the story is that which is developed between Baskerville and Florence Green. Baskerville's relationship with the new girl (he first calls her "Kathleen," but later admits her name is "Joan Graham"), which begins and ends the evening, is a mere dalliance compared to the degree of preoccupation and the intensity of emotion Baskerville directs at Florence Green. The complex associative matrix of the story, which leaps backward and forward into time, everywhere serves to implicate Baskerville's history with that of the dowager Florence Green. Primarily this implication is accomplished through the splicing together of fragments of their respective histories; as the narrative develops, certain episodes from Florence's past serve as oblique commentary on episodes from Baskerville's past. The story thus provides essentially three spheres of subject matter: Baskerville's current evening with occasional and cryptic commentary from Florence; Baskerville's recollections of Florence's personal history; and

finally, Baskerville's account of his own personal history. All three spheres are active at once and the boundaries between each sphere are deliberately blurred. The result is the creation of a single, highly complex and resonant space, a space occupied by Baskerville's subjectivity.

One of the purposes of this structure is to place the histories of Florence and Baskerville in a dialectical relationship: contrast and comparison between the two histories is inevitable. It soon becomes apparent that there are fundamental differences between the two characters. The fabulous variety and scope of Florence's experience in the world serves to underscore the stultifying narrowness of Baskerville's life and times. Florence has led something of a charmed life. She has travelled, she has been loved, she has been involved in exotic adventures, and even though she has fallen into a queer kind of decay, she still commands a considerable audience and exercises power far in excess of anything Baskerville could hope to achieve. Baskerville, on the other hand, hasn't developed in any theatre of accomplishment much beyond levels he achieved as a child, and not a particularly promising child at that. Baskerville is, like Joseph in "Mandible," an adult in a qualified sense only: he is still waging and losing wars he fought as a child. He is still nursing ancient wounds to the exclusion of almost all else:

Despite his slowness already remarked upon...Baskerville never failed to be 'promoted,' but on the contrary was always 'promoted,' the reason for this being perhaps that his seat was needed for another child (Baskerville then being classified, in spite of his marked growth and gorgeous potential, as a child). (9-10).

Throughout the story, Baskerville juxtaposes his current adult experience against a developing case history which is meant to account for his present psychological condition. The case history, of course, is one of

the requisites of classic psychoanalysis and Baskerville, dutifully playing his role of patient, is careful to provide one. According to him, he was anything but an exceptional child. Indeed, his most vivid recollections concern repeated failures to impress adults in authority with his prospects: "Baskerville's difficulty...in every part of the world is that he is slow. 'That's a slow boy, that one,' his first teacher said. 'That boy is what we call real slow,' his second teacher said. 'That's a slow son of a bitch,' his third teacher said" (5).

A child of little promise, he found himself attracted to a number of male role models who held out the promise of a means to power and selfhood. First among these was Joe Weider, "Trainer of Terror Fighters," whose ads every boy knows from comic books advertisements. Under Joe Weider's guidance, Baskerville turns himself into an adult with "trim midsection sporting chiseled abdominals...superior shoulders and brilliantly developed pectoral-latissimus tie-in" (5). To complement his brilliantly developed form he turns to another juvenile source of status and achievement, the Famous Writer's School in Westport. He now presents himself to women as "a weightlifter and a poet," or as he puts it in another context, "a man stronger and more eloquent than other men" (8). Having achieved in extravagant fashion more than anyone evidently expected of him as a child, Baskerville nevertheless patently suffers from a profound lack of self-esteem, living literally and figuratively inside the hollow achievements of adulthood. The capacity to inspire terror, promised by Joe Weider, remains an impossible goal. The identity that now inhabits Baskerville's brilliant adult form is still "young Baskerville...shrinking along the beach" (16). Beneath the impressive surface of chiseled

abdominals is a "stomach like a clenched fist," a fist that can only be unclenched "by introducing quarts of Fleischmann's Gin [flesh-man's gin]" (4-5).

Along with Joe Weider and the Famous Writer's School, Baskerville's mind is also drawn to another of the figures who would have appeared in a typical boy's pantheon of role models of the period, Mandrake the Magician. Mandrake is perhaps the most important of these models (his name is a tautology emphasizing masculinity). In the narrative, Baskerville keeps returning to the figure of this crime fighter-magician, in particular to an episode involving Florence Green. Florence Green once saw Mandrake lift a piano in the air as a demonstration of his hypnotic power. What fascinates Baskerville about the incident is that Mandrake, "the great pianist...could not be persuaded to play" (7). The fact that he is able to control the piano (he moves it and makes it sway "from side to side"[9]), without actually having to touch it, in particular fascinates Baskerville: "What if Mandrake had played, though, what if he had seated himself before the instrument, raised his hands, and...what? (8). Significantly, the only other reference to music in the story occurs in the last two sentences: "In my rain-blue Volkwagon I proceed down the rain-black streets thinking, for some reason, of Verdi's Requiem. I begin to drive my tiny car in idiot circles in the street, I begin to sing the first great Kyrie" (16).

What Mandrake represents with his power to move the piano but his refusal to play is yet another version of the bogus Weider myth of male identity: Mandrake's show of strength is an illusion, and as an index of power, hypnosis is little more than another in the series of empty shows of

male adult "development" that have left Baskerville in the position he now occupies. As the last sentences of the story indicate, Baskerville does "play" music, but it is a requiem, sung while turning redundant circles in the street. For the nervous, insecure and alcoholic Baskerville, these role models, which favour form over substance, fail to amount to a viable model of a mature, autonomous male identity.

With a case history populated by disappointed teachers and hollow paragons, it is little wonder that the adult Baskerville turns in his bitterness to the writing of a magnum opus entitled, "The Children's Army." The book is about an army of children rising up and wreaking murder on an adult world. For Baskerville, this fantasy of revenge represents something of life's work: it has been "incubating" in him since his Joe Weider days ("it will be twelve years old Tuesday"[10]).

Success with women, an integral part of the Weider myth, still eludes him. Florence Green, the matriarch to whom he looks now for financial support, and at whose table he is currently constrained to curry favour, is a version of the adult authority he seems to have suffered under all his life. His demeaning position at her table, jockeying for position with several rivals, underlines the fact that the adult Baskerville is no better off than he was a child. The product of an abortive childhood and a miscarried attempt to reach maturity, Baskerville's lack of sexual maturity is reflected in a dismal history of consummations: "I am also...the father of one abortion and four miscarriages; who among you has such a record and no wife?" (5). We observe Baskerville throughout the story posturing before Joan Graham. The terms of his view of this woman he hopes to seduce are worth noting in light of his terror fighter fantasy for there are definite

hostile undertones involved. Responding to her question, "Are you a native of Dallas?," Baskerville says, "No Joan baby I am a native of Bengazi sent here by the UN to screw your beautiful ass into the ground, that is not what I said but what I should have said, it would have been brilliant" (8). When he finally consummates his seduction of the "new girl," for some reason it amounts only to an act as sterile and as compromised as his other masculine accomplishments. It is also a consummation more than vaguely reminiscent of the cloakroom consummation Joseph had with Miss Mandible: "In the dim foyer I slip my hands through the neck of Joan's yellow dress. It is dangerous but a way of finding out everything at once" (16).

Although Baskerville's ambivalent sexual interest is manifestly directed at the new girl, he actually evinces far more interest generally in the "old girl" Florence Green, more interest than can be justified by his need to toady funds for his magazine. While this fascination is never expressed in explicitly sexual terms, in the urgency with which Florence's attention is sought, his solicitations take on much of the character of a lover's suit. What follows are three expressions of this ardour excerpted from various junctures in the story:

Rock pools deep in the earth [Florence Green's money comes from oil], I salute the shrewdness of whoever filled you with Texaco! Texaco breaks my heart, Texaco is particularly poignant. (6)

The Principal Seas are wonderful, the Important Lakes of the World are wonderful, the Metric System is wonderful, let us measure something together Florence Green baby. (7)

It is well known that Florence Green adores doctors, why didn't I announce myself, in the beginning, from the very first, as doctor? (11)

Baskerville's feelings for Florence Green are ambivalent in the sense

that he is obviously attracted to her power--it breaks his heart, it is "particularly poignant"--but he also fears her. The heartbreaking poignancy of this ambivalence is that he is at once attracted and repelled by the same thing, her power. Consider, for example, the image he presents of Florence Green's Club: "Florence has a Club...The Club is a group of men who gather, on these occasions, to recite and hear poems in praise of Florence Green. Before you can be admitted you must compose a poem...Florence carries the poems about with her in her purse, stapled together in an immense, filthy wad" (14). This Club must represent a disturbing image for Baskerville who considers himself a poet, and sees himself in competition with other poets for this powerful woman. Florence takes poems in which declarations of love are contained and stores these "filthy" offerings in her purse as if they were merely another form of currency. In Baskerville's mind, the manifest source of her power may come from oil and money, but on a deeper level, he sees her power as the ability to catch, keep, and degrade the love of men. Florence is thus related to a figure like Circe, a female who debased and trivialized the men who fell under her spell.

The word "Club" has another connotation, a connotation over which Baskerville reveals some concern: a club is also a weapon. This connotative possibility is awakened when we learn that Florence not only collects poems, she also collects canes: "...here I will insert a description of Florence's canes. Florence's canes line a special room, the room in which her cane collection is kept. There are hundreds of them...resting in notched compartments that resemble arms racks in an armory. Everywhere Florence goes, she purchases one or more canes. Some she has made herself, stripping the bark from the green unseasoned wood,

drying them carefully, applying layer after layer of a special varnish, then polishing them endlessly..." (12). In Baskerville's mind, these canes would be highly suggestive. First of all, they are treated very much like the love poems which Florence also collects and stores in a special place. Second, there is something vaguely unpleasant about the description Baskerville provides of Florence preparing her canes. The process sounds like the malign process of maturation Baskerville has endured: his green and unseasoned self was roughly "stripped" of something integral; he was turned into an adult to take his place in "this vast, dry, and misunderstood country" (6); and like the canes, the dissembling, elusive Baskerville's true surface lies hidden under "layer and layer of a special varnish." Finally, there is the association of the canes as weapons in an armory. Baskerville, we recall, has been preoccupied for years with a book-fantasy he calls "The Children's Army." There is an incident with a cane which Baskerville recounts that is important in this context. Florence has just learned about the holocaust, years after it has taken place. In her anger, she rushes out and attacks the nearest German she can find: "She lifted her cane, the cane of 1927 Yellowstone, and cracked [the German Policeman's] head with it. He fell into a heap in the middle of the street. Then Florence Green rushed awkwardly into the plaza with her cane, beating the people there, men and women, indiscriminately, until she was subdued" (12). One of the ironies of this incident is that in Baskerville's "violent and necessary" book, "The Children's Army," a similar scene of mayhem takes place: "One day the Army appears in the city, in a park, and takes up positions. Then it begins killing the people" (10). Florence Green's behaviour in the caning incident is excessive, wilfull, and selfish, but

most of all, it is overt. Baskerville, who imagines a similar attack in his book, refuses to act on this or any of his aggressive impulses in an overt fashion. Florence's attack on the German people may be misguided, but it is done out of a sense of moral outrage, a sense of justice. Baskerville's fantasy of revenge is motivated, on the other hand, by merely personal emotions. At some level, what this pattern of association suggests is that Florence Green, in the use of her cane as a weapon (or as a "club"), has usurped Baskerville's identity: her behaviour mocks the hostile but impotent terror-fighter Baskerville. Unlike Florence's attack on the Germans, Baskerville is unable to focus on a real object: in his novel, his army kills no one in particular, it just intends to kill "people." The last of the General Orders he lists for his "immaculate Army" reads, "What the general wants to do now is, find and destroy the enemy" (15).

There is another element in the pattern surrounding the cane episode that tends to confirm that Florence Green represents to Baskerville a superior version of his own identity:

It was the first issue [of Life magazine] containing the first pictures from Buchenwald, she could not look away, she read the text, or a little of the text, then she vomitted. When she recovered she read the article again, but without understanding it. What did exterminated mean? It meant nothing, an eyewitness account mentioned a little girl with one leg thrown alive on top of a truckload of corpses to be burned. (10)

Why is this particular image of the girl with one leg mentioned by Baskerville? What, if any, relationship does this image bear to other patterns in the text? We know that Baskerville is especially concerned about children, with crimes against his own childhood self and with crimes against innocence ("immaculateness") in general. He clearly considers himself a victim of murder, psychological murder, and he dreams of ways of

avenging himself on the world. Why, though, is it a girl who is about to be burned alive, and why a girl with one leg? If we keep in mind that Florence Green represents someone who has effectively usurped Baskerville's identity, behaving as he'd like to behave if he had the courage or the means, the fact that it is a girl about to be burned alive can be explained. If the child to be burned were a boy, it would indicate that Florence was prepared to act on behalf of a version of Baskerville. As it stands, however, this "old girl," this "old babe," avenges an outrage committed against a version of herself, a girl. Baskerville, on the other hand, who carries within him the stricken but still living form of the boy he once was, can do almost nothing in the way of seeking justice or atonement. The fact that the girl has one leg has extra-textual significance (the lameness-castration motif we noted in "Mandible") but it also has inter-textual significance if we recall that Florence Green, in that she is especially taken with canes, likely has some sort of problem walking. The fact that the girl has one leg thus serves to support the suggestion that Florence's attack on the Germans represents retribution for an attack against a version of her self. For Baskerville who recalls the episode, the episode represents a displaced version of his wish to kill the enemy that burned and crippled him as a child.

We noted above that Baskerville felt ambivalence toward the powerful Florence Green. We noted his hostile fantasy which involved screwing Joan Graham's ass into the ground. There is a third woman in the story who may help us to focus on the object of Baskerville's repressed anger. Baskerville attaches important clue to his explanation of the novel he calls the "work of a lifetime": "What could be more glamorous or necessary than The Children's Army, 'An army of youth bearing the standard of truth,' as we

used to sing in my fourth-grade classroom of Our Lady of the Sorrows under the unforgiving eye of Sister Scholastica who knew how many angels could dance on the head of a pin..." (13). The novel is thus associated with a figure with whom Baskerville was embroiled in the fourth grade. It is a figure with whom he is arguably still embroiled: the unforgiving eye of Sister Scholastica has been replaced in adulthood by the undifferentiating eye of Florence Green, his current Lady of Sorrows. She is no less powerful, no less senior, and no less sexually ambiguous than the original.

Baskerville's position at Florence Green's here-and-now table is a version of a position he must have been forced to assume "under" Sister Scholastica. Certainly his current attitude toward women is consistent with the attitude a boy would bring to a relationship with a maternal figure of enormous but vaguely malign power (the allusion to the angels dancing on the head of a pin is a typical flourish of Barthelme ambiguity: the expression perfectly captures the absurdity of arbitrary authority, but it also conjures up the image of children--the little angels in Baskerville's "immaculate army"--being tortured, forced to dance on the end of the pin the unforgiving Sister Scholastica wields. The pin is also a version of the cane Florence Green uses). In his behaviour toward Florence and Joan we see much evidence of the fact that Baskerville continues to see in women a powerful but inimical object that, like Sister Scholastica, he both desires to please and fears.

The most obvious indication we have of Baskerville's ambivalence toward Florence Green is his tendency to refer to her as "the old girl," "the old babe," or simply as "girl." It's as if he sees in her both the prohibited maternal old woman and the more sexually appropriate object of a girl.

There is one image in particular that perfectly captures this sense of ambiguity Baskerville attaches to the old girl:

On a circular afternoon in June 1945--it was raining, Florence says, hard enough to fill the Brazen Sea--she was sitting untidily on a chaise in the north bedroom (on the wall of the north bedroom there are twenty identical framed photographs of Florence from eighteen to eighty-one, she was a beauty at eighteen) reading a copy of Life. (10)

The above describes an especially condensed image. Probably the most significant detail in the image is the unusual collection of photographs. The pictures are, as the title of the magazine she is reading indicates, a chronicle of her adult "Life." There are two things of especial interest about these autobiographical photographs: first, they are identically framed; second, the ages at either end of the span of life depicted, if they are reversed, are identical in a sense: "18" is the reverse of "81". The message of these "circular" photographs (which is, by the way, the third important circular image we've noted in the text) is that, in Baskerville's mind, Florence is both an eighteen-year old girl and an eighty-one-year old woman sitting "untidily" but permanently in his imagination.

Baskerville sees in Florence a woman who has usurped his identity, who at the very least acts the way he wishes he could act. This leads us to consider another significance to this image of the photographs: it is a depiction of Baskerville's own psychological status. We must keep in mind as we consider this possibility that the Florence we view in the narrative is Florence as she exists in Baskerville's mind. Notice that the pictures do not so much depict the changes in a lifetime as the lack of change: the frames are identical, and the ages are versions of the same age. In the story, Florence's arrested development is literal; that is, she is senile. Nevertheless, there is every indication that she has led a full and

developed life. Baskerville, on the other hand, in that he is still shrinking along the beaches he haunted as a child, is the true case of arrested development. Further, it should be noted that the image of someone sitting in their bedroom on a circular afternoon surrounded by pictures of themselves so designed as to suggest circular development represents a remarkably accurate depiction of narcissism, a psychological attitude to which the "brilliant" and "glamorous" Baskerville is also clearly given (we might also note that in "Mandible", Joseph's original tragic mistake involved a lesson in self-love with the elderly Mrs. Anton Bichek).

If the old girl Florence does represent a mother-figure to the childish Baskerville, he would have cause to displace any sexual longings he had for her. One way of displacing those feelings, of course, is to imagine her as a "beauty at eighteen." Another way would be to displace those feelings onto a seemingly more appropriate object. Baskerville does this with Joan, the new girl at the old girl's table. All of Baskerville's manifest sexual interest is directed at Joan. There is much evidence in the text, however, that Joan is a version of Florence, and is therefore viewed with the same ambivalence. In that Baskerville is predisposed to see the mother-figure Florence in Joan, the romance follows a distinctive pattern.

Despite the vigour of Baskerville's fantasy assault on Joan, we see little of the "native" abandon of the fantasy actually expressed in the relationship. In fact, Baskerville's interest in Joan is peculiarly limited in intensity. He may want to screw her ass into the ground (does he want to bury her?) but his descriptions of her all tend to concentrate on her breasts. This, for example, is his first reference to her: "The new girl's boobies are like my secretary's knees, very prominent and irritating" (3).

This is an unusual way of describing a woman's breasts. Why are they irritating, and why do they seem like, of all things, knees? A clue to the significance of both the irritation factor and the resemblance to his secretary's knees may lie in the fact that Florence is described only once, and that description focusses on her legs: "Florence Green is a small fat girl eighty-one years old with blue legs and very rich" (6). Joan and her "boobies" (a childish term) may therefore remind Baskerville of Florence. The fact that it is his secretary's knees works in the displacement in that he is related by subservience to Florence as his secretary would be related to him. In the second of three descriptions of Joan, her breasts are again featured, this time explicitly associated with food: "The new girl is a thin sketchy girl with a big chest looming over the gazpacho and black holes around her eyes that are very promising" (5). The new girl's figure as Baskerville views it is akin to a caricature--big and looming breasts on a sketchy figure. There is also something vaguely ominous about the introduction of this image, in the "looming" breasts and the black holes around the eyes. What "promise" could black holes around eyes offer? Is Baskerville imagining her face as a skull?

In the third and final description of her, the breast fixation is tied to the fear and loathing motif we saw expressed in his view of Florence (her wad of filthy poems and her menacing canes): "Joan is like one of those marvelous Vogue girls, a tease in a half-slip on Mykonos, bare from the belly up on the rocks" (9). In context, this is highly suggestive image. To begin, the association with the Vogue magazine picks up on a magazine motif running through the story. Baskerville edits a magazine and he associates Florence with Life and Joan with Vogue. With this image, the two

women also share the "rock pool" motif (Joan perches on a rock in a pool and Florence's money and power comes from Texaco's rock pools deep in the earth). What is also clear from this image is that, in Baskerville's mind, Joan shares with Florence the mythological siren's power to attract and destroy men. In the image of the bare-breasted Joan beckoning from the rocks of a Greek island, the malignancy of this power to "tease" men to their destruction is rendered more explicit than it is in the imagery that surrounds Florence, but it amounts to the same thing. What we also have to bear in mind is that the thin, sketchy new girl makes a perfect displacement for the short, fat old girl (who, Baskerville tells us in passing, "was not always a small fat girl" [6]). The "promise" of Joan's "looming" and "irritating" breasts, and the skull-like eyes, is that falling under the spell of these women (or, rather, woman) results in a kind of death-in-life. Asked at one point why the children in his novel kill everybody, Baskerville says, "Because everybody has already been killed. Everybody is absolutely dead" (14). In Baskerville's mind, in other words, to leave childhood under the terms he left it, is to die.

Not surprisingly, the relationship between Joan and Baskerville is brought to a rather unsatisfactory end: "In the dim foyer I slip my hand through the neck of Joan's yellow dress. It is dangerous but it is a way of finding out everything at once" (16). What does he mean by "everything"? Does he mean that he'll find out whether or not she's willing to go further? If so, why is the matter suddenly dropped without comment? Baskerville leaves alone and no further references are made to Joan. The unusual grope through the neck of Joan's dress confirms that her breasts are of primary interest (they certainly have been to this point). Having touched her

breasts, he seems to exhaust "everything" in the way of sexual possibilities with this woman whose appeal begins, and ends, in her dimensions as a potential source of nurture. The "danger" lies not in the threat of rejection or even so much in the threat of discovery, but in the very real danger, psychologically, of his continued attachment to the old girl this new girl stands for in his mind. As in the denouement of Joseph's seduction of Miss Mandible, the thing you find out "all at once" in dim cloakroom assignations with women of this type is that a man in the arms of a woman he should have given up in childhood is, in a sense, a dead man.

The story concludes with an image of Baskerville turning circles on the rain-black street in his rain-blue Volkswagon, singing a requiem. Several associative threads running through the story meet in this final image. The rain recalls the image of Florence on that circular rainy afternoon in her bedroom, surrounded by images of herself. The "tiny" rain-blue Volkswagon (a German car) affords its occupant very little space, a fitting enclosure given the obsessively limited psychological space Baskerville's mind inhabits. The rain-blue car takes its colour from two sources in the story, both of them associated with Florence: the blue of her legs and the knowledge of the blue bodies of water Baskerville suggests to, and imagines sharing with, Florence. The "slow idiot circles" he describes in his car is a chilling metaphor in its own right for neurosis, but it also reminds us that Baskerville, "that simple preliterate," is still the "slow" child his teachers punished and humiliated, trapped in a whirlpool of obsession. The requiem he sings is for himself, and the reason he sings it is anything but "some simple reason": the choice of music is entirely appropriate for character (and a state of mind) held so firmly in the grip of mourning and

melancholia that he cannot break the pattern of "psychoanalytic issues" that keeps him driving through life in slow, redundant circles.

Let us now endeavour to summarize the common features of these stories. In terms of content, one of the most immediately apparent similarities among the stories is the fact that all four of the protagonists in the synoptic tales are preoccupied with their past lives. Specifically, they are absorbed in reconstructing their past lives, and searching it for clues as to the meaning of their present predicaments. Their current lives are disasters, but disasters of a very specific kind. All four of these characters are unsuited to the role of adult male. They prefer (or are compelled) to spend their time running or hiding from whimsical paternal authorities even as they pursue maternal figures in the vain hope of reestablishing a relationship based upon a relationship known in their former lives. None of them is in a position to let the old days die. The moment in their past lives which most seems to interest them is the moment when their sexuality became an issue. None of the four seems to have matured sexually or psychically beyond the stage when sex became an issue in their lives. With the possible exception of Burligame, the protagonists have attached themselves to older or maternal women in a relationship modelled on the relationship to the mother. What this situation suggests, of course, is that these boy-men remain boys because they continue to

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wrestle with unresolved sexual feelings originally harboured for the mother.

In terms of style, all of these stories have in common the "whirlpool technique" displayed in "Florence Green." The technique basically involves a form of montage, the superimposition of episodes and fragments from the past and present lives of a given protagonist. The features or motifs which emerge from this procedure are repeated in various contexts to form developing patterns, patterns in which the significance of individual features is managed by means of association.

Just as all four protagonists imagine that their lives contain mysteries they need to solve, in all four stories, to varying degrees of explicitness, the fictions present themselves as puzzles, mysteries, or games that the reader is invited to solve. As the protagonists sift through the clues provided by memory and desire in their lives, the reader follows a parallel course, sifting clues provided by the remote and mysterious voice of the author, Barthelme. The stories are extremely compressed and this compression results in a unique resonance--at first, the fictions do seem to be about too many things. Comparison of the motifs and images that reoccur as a result of the concentric (whirlpool) development of the prose reveals, however, that all of the material is traceable to, and coheres around, a central subject.

The most convenient method of summarizing the terms of the central fantasy as it is manifested in the synoptic tales is by means of the following list. Elaboration of individual features of the central fantasy is unnecessary here given that all of the features included here have been

discussed at length in the context of the analysis of the stories.

1) Protagonist as man-child. Inured in the unsuccessful attempt to break free from, or to solve, the issues and crises of their past lives, these men are adult males in a special sense only.

2) The splitting of the female figure. In all three stories involving relationships with women, the protagonists find themselves dealing with two women, one of whom is either literally a mother (as in "Broadcast") or is functioning maternally, and the other a more appropriate love-object. Typically, the features of one have a great deal in common with the features of the other. In all cases, the possibility of sex with one of these women is an issue. The sex that happens between the protagonists and these women results in a major disaster to the self of the protagonist, and serves to deepen the terms of his confinement to old patterns of behaviour.

The four protagonists all incline to express their interest in women in oral terms, an interest which is manifested in the issue of food and a special interest in the breast.

3) Women as powerful (immaculate authority). In the view of the four protagonists of the synoptic tales, women are more mobile, aggressive, threatening, powerful, and generally superior in strength and sense of identity to men.

4) Hostility toward women. All four stories contain acts of violence, either real or imagined, toward women. The Barthelme protagonist, who

basically fears women, desires to "ruin" the powerful women who dominate and diminish their lives.

5) The love triangle. This is the most dominant form of relationship in Barthelme and its importance is augured in the synoptic tales. The love triangle as it occurs in Barthelme seems to be a rehearsal of the "tragic" love triangle of the family romance.

6) Absence of self-esteem. Attending the profound lack of self-esteem exhibited by these characters is the humiliation that results from involvement in sexual relationships. This humiliation takes the specific form in three of the stories of being reduced to the status of a dog ("Mandible," Hiding," and "Broadcast"). In all four of the synoptic tales, the literal or figurative reduction to the diminished status of a child is interpreted by the protagonists as a kind of punishment for their lack of worth.

Accompanying this profound lack of self-esteem is an equally exaggerated tendency toward grandiosity. The type is seen throughout Barthelme and is his most representative character. A good example of the type is the Phantom in "The Phantom of the Opera's Friend"(CL). The Phantom's "simple and terrible" character alternates between "fits of grandiosity" and "the deepest despair" (104). It's as if these characters, in failing to find love in the world outside of self, have turned the need to find an object to love upon themselves. Manifested in a tendency to think of themselves, as Baskerville puts it, as stronger and smarter than other men, the self-love these characters practise, in that their narcissism

is fundamentally "circular" (as depicted in "Florence Green"), does not solve their need for love or serve to compensate for their basic lack of self-esteem.⁵

The protagonists are all passive underground men who play "roles" or wear masks as opposed to inhabiting constant identities. This passivity is manifested in particular by a tendency toward voyeurism, the tendency to seek to gain control over situations, and women, by looking.

7) In three stories, the motif of burning, or of the burning child, is present. The burning points to the presence in the child or childish man or "burning" passions. In "Broadcast," the opposite of burning, ice and refrigeration, is featured. The fire of passion is the mode of the past and the ice of impotence is the mode of the present (depicted in "Mandible" in the "historical" image of Napoleon caught in the snow but still wanting to burn Moscow--see discussion of Ice and History motifs in Chapter Five of this thesis).

8) In all four stories, but especially "Hiding Man," the father is viewed ambivalently as both competitor-rival and as potential "friend." The relationship to the father in these stories, while highly determined, seems to develop under the auspices of the far more volatile and compelling relationship to the mother. The symbol which expresses this ambivalence in the synoptic tales, and throughout Barthelme, is the dog (for a fuller discussion of the role of the father in Barthelme see the Dog motif and the Authority motif in Chapter Five).

CHAPTER SIX: A CONCLUSION

In Barthelme, art represents the forum in which the self seeks to represent itself. As it was for Burligame in "Hiding Man," art is the forum in which the self posits its own private visions and rituals as a hedge against the competing visions and rituals of one's culture (or the Other, that which is not the self). The visions and rituals of the artist-self in Barthelme are like dreams of the self, highly compacted and condensed configurations that are deeply informed by secrets about the self, secrets^{that} are difficult to discover and "dangerous to plumb." What must be recognized about Barthelme's view of art as it is depicted in his stories is that the artist's visions are not at all progressive in the sense that they represent an escape from the case-historical events that have determined and limited the self as Barthelme conceives it. Art as depicted by Barthelme is regressive, a nexus of situations, conflicts, and emotions from the past which critically

limit and determine behaviours and attitudes in the present. Rehearsals of these preterite causes is only nominally heuristic (in the sense that they provided for a "distraction" of the self trapped in the past), and really only amount to tracing the path of a spiral inward (and backward) toward a fixed centre. It should be noted that nowhere in all of Barthelme is there an artist (or a non-artist) who manages to create something that allows him or her to escape the deeply entrenched definition of the self as it is defined by case-history.

In "A Picture History of the War" (UPUA), the protagonist Kellerman runs around with his naked father under his arm. At one point in the narrative, the father says the following to his son: "'O sin...in which fear and guilt encrandulate (or are encrandulated by) each other to mess up the real world of objects with a film of nastiness and dirt, how well I understand you! Standing there! How well I understand your fundamental motifs! How ill I understand my fundamental motifs! Why are objects preferable to parables?" (142). This father's predisposition to view his situation in terms of "fundamental motifs" is reflected in the construction of the story itself, a story made from a series of repeating motifs (we have, of course, already seen the tendency to think in terms of these fundamental motifs in Barthelme in our analysis of the synoptic tales,

particularly in "Florence Green" and particularly in the image of the circular, repeating progress of the whirlpool). "Picture History" is an organic manifestation of the father's preference for objects as opposed to parables. The story is full of objects that obviously have deep meaning within the limited context of the story. Unlike parables, however, which presumably contain morals that serve to connect the self to the world, the objects in this story are valued for their private significances only. In the "picture history" of this story (a useful image: all of Barthelme's stories are very much picture histories), the "film" that covers the world the father sees contains objects, objects that have been arranged so as to form fundamental motifs. As it happens, essentially the same film covers the world described in all of Barthelme's stories. What is the same is not merely the notion of a film of private objects, the objects themselves are the same from story to story; Barthelme's world is a world of objects limited in number and meaning by fundamental motifs, motifs that can be described, quantified, and ascribed meaning.

Barthelme's descriptions of the physical world tend to be very simple. As a writer, as a realist, he exhibits little if any interest in detailed description

of the surfaces of things, or indeed, in physical detail of any kind. His canvasses are painted, as it were, with bold and primary colours, almost like cartoons. What he tends to do in his fictions is to concentrate on the dynamics of a subjectivity at work within a given environment; the result is the creation of what is certainly a sensual world, but as in dream, it is a world of surfaces only, a two-dimensional world virtually without mass. There is no depth or play of light in Barthelme; it is a world of shape and outline. As a result, the limited number of physical details that are introduced into the psychological framework of his prose tend to take on a considerable symbolic valence. Not only do the physical details in any given story tend to be overdetermined, a careful reading of the body of his fictions shows that the details out of which Barthelme's fictions are formed--their flora and fauna, if you will--are drawn from a curiously limited fund of objects.

As we noted in an earlier chapter, critics of Barthelme tend to complain that his fictions are about too many things. A related criticism is that his stories are full of trivial concerns, or simply full of trivia, trivia that may have been lovingly collected, but which has not been made subordinate to a worthwhile subject. This view of the prose as all surface or an

admixture of fragments, depending on the critic, is either taken to be a fault (a failure of subject), or a reflection of legitimate postmodern refusal (or inability) to opt for artificially meaningful subject matter that would only serve to impose arbitrary limits on what amounts to a healthy lack of closure. The fact is, however, as this thesis has hopefully suggested to this point in its analysis of individual fictions, that Barthelme's fictions do have a subject (albeit a "missing" subject), and that subject is meaningful, and that meaning is reflected in the way Barthelme organizes his fragmented world into coherent and consistent patterns.

Traced through associations found in displacements, etc., these patterns of meaning are evident in the closed frame of individual fictions. What I now propose to show is that the subjectivity behind the associative valuation of objects within the closed frame of individual fictions is also exercised in the larger field of association in the entire corpus of Barthelme's short fiction. As a means of demonstrating this, I propose to list the major motifs running through the corpus, together with some explanation as to their significance in terms of the central fantasy. The following objects and fundamental motifs will be considered:

- The Animal Totem (dog)
- Food (the breast)
- Alcohol
- Lameness (and blindness)
- History
- Size Reversal
- Colour
- Authority
- Children
- Rebellion
- Water
- Ice

Swords
Windows
Combinations

Animal Totems (or the furry object). In "Florence Green" the would-be novelist Baskerville characterizes the aim of literature as the creation of a strange object covered with fur that breaks your heart. The implications of this statement are realized in a literal way in the overwhelming majority of Barthelme's fictions in the symbolic use he makes of animals as totems. We saw this use of the animal image in all four synoptic tales: in "Mandible," Joseph realizes that he has become the "Teacher's Pet"; in "Hiding Man," Bane-Hipkiss is transformed into what appears to be a dog; in "Broadcast," Bloomsbury is treated, and behaves like, a dog when in his former life he sticks his "muzzle" into Martha's sticky glove for food; in "Florence Green," Baskerville's name suggests his status as a (literary) dog. So important is this feature of Barthelme's method as prefigured in the synoptic tales, that in virtually every story Barthelme has written since, a totemic animal figure will appear in some form or another.

The animals used in this manner range from the strange and poisonous green fly that makes three appearances in "Cortes and Montezuma" (GD) to the nine-banded armadillo in "Lighting" (OTMDC). While the appearance of birds and reptiles is common, the animal that is by far the most frequently used is the dog. It is the dog that we will consider in this examination of the furry animal because, as I hope to demonstrate, the dog stands for the persona who stands at the heart of the central fantasy in Barthelme.

The scope of the dog metaphor can range from its use as a central image or conceit as in "The Falling Dog" in City Life to a minor allusion stitched into the complex weave of a given story (as in the underfed Doberman

pictured on the door of the Pasha's building in "The Abduction from the Seraglio" [GD]). In each case, however, regardless of the scope of the image, dog imagery serves to identify the protagonist with a dog. But why of all possible animals has Barthelme hit upon the dog? One reason might be the dog's special status in our culture, an animal that is domesticated to the point that it is almost taken for human. The dog, then, is a member of the family but a member whose status is part-human and part-animal, a sort of child manque like Butch in "Bought." Given what we already have learned about the complex dynamic of the family as it is represented in Barthelme, it is probable that this hybrid status is the key to the animal's appeal as totem.

For a more concrete estimation of the dog's function as totem let us concentrate the discussion for the moment on the story that makes the most developed use of the dog totem in Barthelme, "The Falling Dog"(CL). In "Falling," the hapless artist-narrator, a Mr. XXXXXXX, finds himself in that "unhappiest of all states, between images" (45). One day a dog jumps out of a window knocking him to the pavement. He looks at the dog, the dog looks at him. "Well," says the narrator, "it was a standoff" (42). The narrator then decides to make up a scenario to explain everything. In the story he invents, the dog takes him to where the dog lives. At this place, a woman named Sophie explains that "The dog is only admitted if he brings someone" (42). Evidently, when someone enters, a beam is broken which summons a man. The narrator, obviously taken with Sophie, offers to do for her whatever it is that that man does. No, she says, "You are for breaking the beam and taking the dog back to his place" (43). The Swiss man Sophie has been waiting for then enters. He is described as "a real brute, muscled, lots of

fur" (43). The man then refuses to let either the dog or the narrator stay, giving them the "Threatening look, gestures, etc." (43). The narrative reaches a crisis with this confrontation between the two rivals and then, as in similar confrontations depicted in "And Then" and "The Dolt," is abruptly abandoned.

The artist-narrator in "Falling" is between images. His old image, the Yawning Man (an image suggestive, not only of boredom or ennui, but also of a decidedly oral but passive attitude) no longer interests him. Inflamed by Sophie, he now feels the need to move from an exhausted identity to a promising other: "I wanted the dog's face. Whereas my old image, the Yawning Man, had been faceless (except for the a gap where the mouth was, the yawn itself), I wanted the dog's face. I wanted his expression, falling. I thought of the alternatives: screaming, smiling. And things in between" (45-46). Note the ambivalence of the image he wants, the screaming coupled with the smiling. This is thoroughly reminiscent of the ambivalence other narrators have felt toward the image of the father. What the scenario this artist-narrator invents involving the displaced dog and the furry Swiss father-figure indicates is that he views the assumption of the dog identity as a means of sharing Sophie's favours, favours currently monopolized by the brutish Swiss stranger. What is interesting about this love triangle which features a rivalry between the narrator who identifies himself with the dog and the powerful Swiss man who is covered with fur, is that the dog image in "Falling," like the image of the dog in "Hiding Man," serves as a point of connection for both the father-figure and the son-figure. It is in the image of the dog, therefore, that the complex and ambivalent relationship between the son and the father is localized.

The story ends with the artist-narrator attempting to assimilate the dog's face and so rescue himself from that unhappy state of being between images, but there is no indication in the story that this artist-narrator will be any more successful than any of the others we have seen in passing out of the arrested state he currently finds himself exploring. (One clue indicating this lies in the pattern of food associations that runs through the story. As we shall observe below in our consideration of food imagery in Barthelme, a preoccupation with food suggests a wish to return to the nurturing, all-giving mother. In this story, the food associations begin with the "Crumbs of concrete driven into [the narrator's] chin" [41]. Food associations are picked up again when we learn that the dog that has brought the narrator to Sophie stays with her because, as Sophie says, "His food is here" [42]. Next, the chin with crumbs driven into it is identified by the Swiss man as the part of narrator he wants removed from Sophie's room: "'What do I care about your flaming chin...There's no reason in the world why we should stand here and listen to a lot of flaming nonsense about your flaming etc. etc...." [43]. Finally, on his way to assimilate the dog's face, the grip he assumes on the dog--"I wrapped my arms around his belly and together we rushed to the studio"[48]--indicates that his interest in the dog is, psychologically speaking, more regressive and oral than it is progressive and phallic).

The dog image represents the son caught between two images of himself. This interpretation of the dog image would help explain the emblem of the underfed Doberman that appears on the Pasha's door in "Abduction." It helps explain why the father-figure of "Phantom"(CL) would say, "Our behavior is mocked by the behavior of dogs" (102). It also helps explain why the

identity-threatening narrator of "What To Do Next"(A) tells the reader of the instructions the following: "Yes, the dog is dead, I admit it. I'm sorry. I admit also that putting eight-foot-square paintings of him in every room of the house has not consoled you. But, studying each painting, you will notice after a time that in each painting the artist has included, in the background, or up in the left-hand corner...other dogs [as Barthelme has done in "The Falling Dog"]..Thus the whole concept of 'other dog' suddenly thrusts itself into your consciousness...you understand that one of them, might just possibly become the 'new dog'--the 'new dog' of which you have been, until now, afraid to think. For life must go on, after all, and that you have been able to think new dog is already a victory, of a kind, for the instructions" (82). In the frames of fiction after fiction by Barthelme we see this "new dog" depicted in some form or another. But the meaning of these dogs is always the same which makes the dog a particularly compelling piece of evidence that Barthelme's fictions are critically determined by the same state of mind.

Food. There is perhaps no more consistent feature of Barthelme's stories than the fact that food will appear in his stories in some form or another. Food can appear in his stories in the most unlikely places as in the characterization of the suitor's forehead in "The Apology"(GD) as looking like banana paste, or the artist in "The Abduction from the Seraglio"(GD) who devotes himself exclusively to the manufacture of steel artichokes. So ubiquitous, in fact, are food images and situations involving food in Barthelme that citation of examples illustrating the importance of food to Barthelme is almost unnecessary.

What does this preoccupation with food in the stories denote? I believe it points to the Barthelme protagonist's primitive psychological attachment to the mother as source of nourishment: food for Barthelme's characters represents a reasonable facsimile for love. Indeed, as with love-struck Andy with the banana-paste forehead or the underfed Doberman on the Pasha's door, food is the currency of love. One thinks, for instance, of the zombie-lovers in "Zombies" (GD) who come looking for daughters to buy and marry: they tempt them with detailed promises of the breakfasts they can expect.

Closely related to this tendency to equate nourishment with love is a fixation exhibited in Barthelme with that part of a woman most closely associated with nourishment, the breasts. We have already noted this form of attention to the breasts in the synoptic stories (the most important, if somewhat disguised, instance of breast fixation in the stories we have analyzed to this point is, of course, "The Balloon").

There is a version of this breast fixation that occurs with some frequency in Barthelme in episodes which, while they do not specifically equate the breasts with food, do equate the offer of sex with the display of the breasts. What is unusual about this pattern is the consistency of the terms in which it is couched. In every instance it involves a woman removing or opening a shirt or blouse to show her breasts to men who never do anything more than look:

Yes yes, I said. I'm going to fall.

Jump down here, she said, and I'll show you the secrets of what's under my shirt.

Yeah yeah, I said, I've heard that before.

Jump little honey baby, she said, you won't regret it. ("The Sergeant A, 76)

'Just the breasts then,' she said, 'they're wondrous pretty,' and before I could protest further, she'd whipped off her pretty mannikin's tiny shirt. I buttoned her up again meantime bestowing buckets of extravagant praise. 'Yes,' she said in agreement, 'that's how I am all over, wonderful.' ("The Palace at Four A.M. OTMDC, 158)

The mistress of the torero puts down the camera and removes her shirt....The beautiful breasts of the torero's mistress are appreciated by the aficionado, who is also an aficionado of breasts. ("The Wound" A, 14)

What a beautiful girl Julie is! Her lustrous sexuality has the vandals agog. Follow her around trying to touch the tip of her glove, or the flounce of her gown. She shows her breasts to anyone who asks. 'Amazing grace!' the vandals say. ("A Film" S, 77)

The two novels Barthelme has written are replete with versions of this breast display. The Dead Father in particular, which features the split mother-lover figures Julie and Emma, is punctuated with regular incidents in which the women open their shirts to give the men either a look or a "suck."

One of the most developed uses of the motif of breast exposure occurs in two related stories in City Life, "The Explanation" and "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel." What is interesting in both these particularly metafictional stories is the special status accorded a very specific, developed, and essentially identical version of the breast exposure fantasy. In "The Explanation," a story about the processes of translating mind into the machinery of fiction, the answering voice in what amounts to an interior monologue keeps returning to the image of a girl removing her blouse (she isn't removing her blouse in each reference but the blouse and what lies behind it is clearly the key to the hold this image's has on the voice's imagination). In "Kierkegaard Unfair To Schlegel," written in the same question-and-answer form as "The Explanation," the discussion between the two interior voices centres on the relationship between fantasy and irony.

The answering voice recognizes the vicissitudes of both forms of contact with the world (irony and fantasy each have the effect of alienating the self from a vital connection with the world). In this intensely ironical story, an identical version of the girl from "The Explanation" serves as the exclusive object of fantasy. In both stories the girl looked at is described as "self-absorbed"--that is, turned away from the narrator in a narcissistic attitude--and in both cases the blouse is blue. We have seen this attitude of "self-love" before in Barthelme, particularly in our analysis of the synoptic tales. As in the synoptic tales, the narcissism of the fantasized girl in "The Explanation" and "Kierkegaard" mirrors the sterile narcissism of the observers. The blue blouse, if our analysis below of the significance of blue is correct, denotes the intrusive threat of the father (the same thing is accomplished without using the colour blue in the looking fantasy of "Hiding Man" with the characterization of Nedda Ann Bush's famous bust as "handsome," or in Attack of the Puppet People with the tasty nurse surrounded by threatening versions of male authority).

The breast in these looking fantasies is the focus of arrested desire, the desire to return to the archaic, lost, uncomplicated breast of the all-giving, nourishing mother. The sexual contact embodied in these fantasies is not only regressive, it is voyeuristic. The appeal of voyeurism, as it is so aptly described in "The Sandman"(S), is that it maintains the distance between voyeur and object: "The tension between the desire to draw near the object and the necessity to maintain the distance becomes a libidinous energy nondischarge" (92). This "nondischarge" of energy accounts for virtually all of the sex that occurs in Barthelme; sex as it occurs in Barthelme is restricted in two ways: its emphasis is on

looking (voyeurism) and the most typical object of that need to look is the breast. With regard to the former aspect, notice that the man in his fantasy never makes any attempt to get any closer to the girl. With regard to the later aspect of the fantasy, the preoccupation with the breasts, note that in "Kierkegaard" the girl takes off her pants but the voice's attention never strays from the blouse. This preoccupation with breasts leads us to consider a surprising fact about Barthelme's fiction in general: in the larger arena of Barthelme's fiction there is a virtual absence of interest in genital intercourse.

It is worth noting with regard to this absence of interest in genital sex that the golden fleece, the object of the quest that provides for the narrative movement in Barthelme's most developed fiction to date, The Dead Father, turns out to be Julie's pudenda. On the very last page of the novel, just as the dead-but-still-living-father is about to be buried, after repeated searches under Emma's and Julie's blouses for the breast, Thomas touches the object of the quest for the very first time: "Thomas placed his hand on the Fleece, outside the skirt" (176). With the father almost out of the way Thomas can almost bring himself to touch it. We note, however, that the Dead Father is climbing into a hole (suggesting the threat of continued life). Knowing what we know of the Dead Father from this novel and about fathers in Barthelme in general (in The Emerald"[Sx], for instance, the malign father-figure's crime is that he wants to kill the son so that he can live twice), the father will never be truly out of the son's way. We notice that the novel ends once the fleece is touched and touched only in the most preliminary and tentative way. The truth of this quest is that the quest for possession of this particular fleece is likely to continue; Thomas gives

every indication that, owing to the persistent life of his father, he will continue to travel the psychological treadmill of a morbid and regressive fascination for the archaic breast of the nurturing mother.

Alcohol. Barthelme's characters can be relied upon to do two things with astonishing regularity--eat and drink. The drinking is done in an attempt to escape a depressing and oppressive reality; gratification is the object of the obsession with food but the little oblivion of alcohol-induced mislocation would seem to be the object of the persistent drinking. Barthelme's drinkers are not drunks; that is, he never describes them as drunks and never describes drunken behaviours.

Lameness. As indicated in our reading of the synoptic stories, lameness, or attacks on the feet or legs, is a characteristic problem of the typical Barthelme protagonist. The lameness motif often occurs in tandem with a blindness motif. Rarely is the lameness or the blindness literal; rather, it tends to be manifested in various and oblique forms. Lameness, for instance, can be obliquely registered as it is in "Mandible" in the suspicion that Joseph feels that he is being regarded as having metal-wrapped legs or as it is in "The Emerald"(Sx) in the fact that the relic foot of Magdalene is used to defeat the father-figure, Vandermaster. On the other hand, the lameness of the protagonist can be made literal as it is in the wound in the foot that brings down the torero in "The Wound"(A) or in the accusation made in "What To Do Next"(A) that the instructions have been designed for "a wimp and a lame" (86). As far as the meaning of the

lameness is concerned, it is likely that the foot or leg serves as a displacement for the phallus and thus symbolizes castration (see comments on same above in discussion of "Mandible").

In much the same fashion as the lameness motif, what I am calling the blindness in a blindness motif rarely if ever occurs in Barthelme as actual blindness. Rather, it tends to occur as a pain in the eyes or in the sense that one's capacity to see has in some way been compromised (as in "At The Tolstoy Museum"[CL] in the reference to the "several hazes" which passed over the eyes of the narrator when looking at the portraits of Tolstoy, portraits which remind him of his father). Leaving aside for the moment the classical psychoanalytic meaning of blindness as is suggested by Freud in his interpretation of Oedipus Rex (blindness represents castration),¹ Barthelme's work provides for the meaning of these references to the loss of sight in his obsession with looking. As we have already noted, the protagonist in Barthelme uses looking, or voyeurism, as his primary means of establishing contact with the world, and with women in particular. With regard to women, he typically imagines looking at them, and he imagines them looking at him (see especially "The Explanation" and "Kierkegaard Unfair To Schlegel"). Looking is also a feature of his relationship with the father. He fears discovery by the father who looks at him and sees that he is guilty (as in "Flight of the Pigeons from the Palace"[S] and "At The Tolstoy Museum" and "Engineer-Private Paul Klee"[S]).

Removal of the capacity to see, therefore, represents to the typical Barthelme protagonist a complex symbolization of meanings that cohere around the subject of castration: in the blindness motif, the eyes that greedily search out the forbidden object (the mother) are cut off from the object

thus making one safe from the eyes of the father that look for your crime.

Looking is also the mode of the narcissist (which accounts for the frequency of mirrors in the work), the narcissism that is integral to the state of mind Barthelme's psychological realism describes. The implications of blindness as a symbol for the narcissist are even more complex. On the one hand, blindness represents a suspension of the tendency to look at oneself (in the most extreme instances, blindness is a version of suicide, the loss of the self as it is known to the narcissist). But blindness also represents a perpetuation of the narcissistic mode in that, with the world darkened, one is driven back in upon oneself. The blindness the Barthelme narcissist imagines, therefore, in that it is informed by two contradictory wishes, is a representation of a kind of psychological stalemate, which probably accounts for the appeal of the motif to Barthelme whose stories all end in stalemate.

History. In "Down the Line with the Annual"(GP), the narrator speaks of his education as time spent "seeking answers to the mystery of personality and the riddle of history" (4). The association of those two concepts--personal history and world history--is important. One of Barthelme's favourite motifs lies in the use he makes of this notion of history as the source of meaning for the personality. As we have seen over and over again in our analysis of Barthelme's stories, his characters are deeply connected to their history. Indeed, given their tendency to repeat their own history, it would not be too much to say that the typical Barthelme character is his history; as the leader of the group taking the students on the tour in "The

Educational Experience"(A) says, "The world is everything that was formerly the case..." (128). In other words, the only present (and, by implication, future) that these students have is couched absolutely in their past. This function of history serves to explain why the outsider-genius in "The Genius"(S), when asked about the source of his genius, delivers this cryptic answer: "Historical forces" (27).

This preoccupation with history can take several forms. It can involve, as it does in "Mandible," "Broadcast" and "The Sergeant"(A), a literal replaying of past situations. Most often it takes the form it takes in "Florence Green" and "Hiding Man," that is, the development of present situations strictly in terms of past situations.

The use of this historical motif is closely related to the image of the father as he is embodied in the several guises he takes in Barthelme as preterite authority figure. It is, therefore, not surprising that this historical motif, which conflates subjective case-history with objective world history, is peopled with authority figures from various spheres, figures from political, art, religious, mythological, philosophical, and the popular cultural history of the United States.

Given the atmosphere of hostility, aggression, and danger involved in the past as it is recalled by Barthelme's characters, it is also not surprising that the military past is of special interest to Barthelme (we first observed this bias for historical military situations in "Mandible" in Joseph's interest in Napoleon frozen in the middle of his campaign to conquer Russia. The military historical motif is also evident in Baskerville's novel The Children's Army and in Burligame's fascination with the old film Attack of the Puppet People). Military figures of various rank

and origin are sprinkled throughout the body of Barthelme's work. In stories like "The Sea of Hesitation"(OTMDC) and "The Indian Uprising"(UPUA), for instance, historical military figures appear in the background of stories about failing relationships.

Size Reversal. As in the case of the lameness and corollary blindness motifs discussed above, size reversal in Barthelme is extremely common and it can be manifested in either literal or figurative terms. Again, as in the case in other motifs, this motif can take the form of a fairly developed and central feature of a story--Snow White surrounded by her dwarfs and the massive Dead Father are two examples which come most immediately to mind--but it is also common to find this tendency to distort size manifested in the background of a story. The offhanded reference to the tiny girls in black followed by the large girls in white who parade past the distraught Edward in "A Few Moments of Waking and Sleeping"(UPUA, 97) and the incident of the growth of the movie star Frot Newling in "A Film"(S) that leaves the other actors "peering into his ankles" (70) are just two examples of the way in which size reversal can figure as a minor feature of a story (this latter example, by the way, might also be offered as an example of the oblique and apparently offhand way in which the lameness motif can find its way into a story).

At one point I had thought of calling this motif "the Amazing Colossal Man motif" after Burligame's wish to surrender to same, but that would have implied that size reversals were restricted to father-figures which is not the case. Mother-figures, too, tend to be subjected to this same process of displacement. But whether or not it is a female or a male figure that is

enlarged, the key to the occurrence of size reversals lies in the difference in size between a child and an adult; what these radical size differentials point to the persistence in the state of mind Barthelme depicts of childhood attitudes and relationships. In other words, the Barthelme protagonist finds himself or herself oscillating between the role of child and adult in his or her dealings with parent-figures of either sex. Joseph from "Mandible" is a good example of how this tendency can be expressed: while on the one hand, Joseph sees himself as the same size and age as Miss Mandible and as a relative giant to his other love interest, the eleven-year old child Sue Ann Brownly, on the other hand, he allows everyone else to view him as the eleven-year old he suspects he is on some level. He is, therefore, the same "size" as Sue Ann Brownly and Miss Mandible, but at the same time, he plays the "giant" parent to Sue Ann and the dwarfed child to the adult Miss Mandible. The size differentials here point, as they always do in Barthelme, to the tendency on the part of fully grown adults to turn the people around them into parents and themselves into children so as to play out again themes and conflicts they failed to resolve in childhood.

The appearance of this motif can take varied, subtle, and not always apparent forms. A story we have already examined above, "I Bought A Little City," demonstrates how disguised the use of size reversal can be in any given story. As our analysis has shown, however, the gigantic beautiful face of the Mona Lisa is a displacement for the small and beautiful face of the oriental woman the narrator covets. In "The Catechist"(S) the older priest-father carries a tiny, postage-stamp Old Testament, a detail in his costume which suggests that at some level the other priest in the story views him as a version of the amazing colossal man (124). In "An Hesitation

On the Banks"(GP), the home of George Washington ("The Father of our country..." [82]) is attacked by boys who throw giant crayfish at its windows, a complex image which serves to suggest, even on the surface, that there is some dynamic working beneath the surface of this story creating size distortions.

"The President," a story in the aptly titled collection, Unspeakable Practises, Unnatural Acts, makes considerable, if discrete, use of size reversals. What makes the motif of size reversal which occurs in "The President" worth looking at is that it occurs in two different fashions in the same story. In the first instance, the problem determining the size and relative disposition of the parent-figure breaks through, as it were, into the manifest surface of the prose. The mother of the President (a man the narrator has already characterized as looking "in his black limousine with the plastic top...[like] a little boy who has blown an enormous soap bubble which has trapped him" [151-152]) is a lady about whom "little is known" (154) and who "presented herself in various guises" (153). These guises--or more to the point, disguises--involve combinations, not only of the size reversal motif, but the dog motif (see discussion above) and the phallic cane (see discussion below):

A little lady, 5'2", with a cane.
 A big lady, 7'1", with a dog.
 A wonderful old lady, 4'3", with an indomitable spirit.
 A noxious old sack, 6'8", excaudate [having no tail], because of an operation. (154)

Little wonder, given what we have already established with regard to the psychoanalytic issues behind each of the motifs used here in combination that the narrator observes the following about what is known about this mother: "We are assured, however, that the same damnable involvements that

obsess us obsess her too. Copulation. Strangeness. Applause" (154).

What is most interesting about this story which foregrounds a size reversal involving the mother is that a size reversal involving the father is placed in the background. It happens that the sight of the President has made a woman faint on the street. The narrator who dutifully runs to help her is "shocked to discover that she wore only a garter belt under her dress." Having made this accidental and entirely innocent perusal of her private parts, he carries her into a store and is there assisted by a strange figure: a "Salvation Army major--a very tall man with an orange hairpiece." The major is preoccupied with certain suspicions he has about the President, but he never finishes his dire and enigmatic pronouncements: "'I think he's got something up his sleeve nobody knows about. I think he's keeping it under wraps. One of these days....I'm not saying that the problems he faces aren't tremendous, staggering. The awesome burden of the Presidency. But if anybody--any one man...." (152-153). Later in the story the narrator's secretary faints in the same manner as the young woman on the street. Not only does her fainting recall the first woman, her name, Miss Kagle, serves to recall the shock the narrator claims he felt at seeing the vulva of the "young girl": it's difficult to believe that it's merely a coincidence that a kegle is an exercise involving contractions of the vagina which women--that is to say, expectant mothers--perform to strengthen the muscles of the vagina prior to childbirth. Following the path of these fainting episodes through the text we are led, finally, to the mysterious figure who stands behind the President just as she stands behind these displacements: "I gave [Miss Kagle] water with a little brandy in it. I speculated about the President's mother. Little is known about her. She

presented herself in various guises...." (153).

Like most of Barthelme's fiction, this story trades on a welter of displacements. The "very tall" Salvation Army major who helps the narrator with the young girl is a displacement for the father. Not only does his size and his dual role as church and military authority figure argue for this interpretation, the fact that he wears the false hair--a kind of disguise--also suggests that he is not what he seems to be on the surface. Two other bits of evidence argue for this interpretation. First, he and the narrator are related by the young girl. The young girl and Miss Kagle are displacements for the mother of the President, the woman about whom little is known. Second, the major claims to know about the thing the President has up his sleeve, the thing he is keeping under wraps. His warnings about this mysterious and dangerous something are vague and incomplete but can clearly be read as a warning to the President not to reveal the thing he keeps hidden, that is, his phallic interest in the thing he saw under the woman's dress.

While on the manifest level this story can be read as an indictment of the American political system that makes celebrities out of politicians, it really offers little in the way of original thought on the subject. The bizarre portrait of the President and of the narrator himself simply occupies too much of the foreground of the narrative to justify any reading of this story that does not deal with the precise nature and terms of the personality this fiction works to describe. Of himself the narrator offers us only one concrete detail: looking at Miss Kagle he regards her, he tells us, "with my warm kind eyes" (154). His protestations of warmth and kindness aside, the President with the dark secret and the damnable

involvements is in all likelihood a displacement for the narrator himself who, like the President the major warns him about, is keeping a great deal under wraps with regard to his real intent in the telling of this story.

There is a variation of this size reversal motif in Barthelme which deserves separate consideration. As we noted in three of the four synoptic tales (excepting "Hiding Man"), Barthelme's stories tend to feature combinations of older and younger females, females between whom a narrator or protagonist is having some trouble choosing. As we have had occasion to observe in the analysis of several stories, this occurrence usually points to the presence in the story of a displacement for the mother-figure. Sometimes, as in the case of Florence Green and Joan Graham, the two women are distinguished by age. Or it might happen, as it does in "Mandible" with Miss Mandible and Sue Ann Brownly, that size is also a factor. It might also occur, as it does in "Broadcast," that the two women involved are simply identified as mother and daughter. Several stories feature pairs of women, stories like "The Party"(S) in which everyone watches two sisters taking a bath, or "A Picture History of the War"(UPUA) in which a pair of mothers, one wearing red and the other wearing blue, always appear together. In whatever form these pairings occur, however, they always occur as the result of a narrator's or a protagonist's suppressed wish to involve himself with a mother-figure, involvement that he associates with a threat to his self. By splitting the figure in two on the manifest level while simultaneously relating the two figures together on the latent level, he manages through fantasy to both express and deny his sexual interest in the maternal.

A good example of how this splitting can occur happens in "The New Music"(GD). In this story, the two voices of what appear to be brothers discuss their mother, a powerful and malign figure who completely dominates their view of things. Throughout the story, as they rehearse their relationship to their Momma, they variously associate her, either with a "Dark Virgin...black, as is the Child" (25) or with any of several Greek or pagan divinities, including Athene (21), Demeter (31), and Persephone (34). What this represents is an inability to contain the mother-figure, with her "variously colored moods" (29)--she is both the Dark Virgin, the sacrosanct mother and bride of God who "makes you want to cry" (23), and the more earthy, pagan version of virgin and mother. Notice, however, that even within the more positive images of the Greek divinities are included a mother and daughter combination. The presence of both Demeter and Persephone in the associative matrix surrounding Momma points to a confusion the speakers feel about their own dual status as both sons and lovers. This Demeter-Persephone split, while suggestive in its own right, is supported by an episode that is recalled right at the outset of this story.

--Ah well. I was talking to a girl, talking to her mother actually but the daughter was very much present, on the street. The daughter was absolutely someone you'd like to take to bed and hug and kiss, if you weren't too old. If she weren't too young. She was a wonderful-looking young woman and she was looking at me quite seductively, very seductively, smoldering a bit, and I was thinking quite well of myself, very well indeed, thinking myself quite the--Until I realized she was just practising.

--Yes. I still think of myself as a young man.

--Yes.

--A slightly old young man.

--A slightly old young man still advertising in the trees and rivers for a mate.

--Yes. (22)

In this episode, the confusion surrounding the relation to women is

represented in several ways. First, there is the confusion over who is really being addressed on the street, mother or daughter. Second, there is confusion over whether the daughter may in fact be too young to hug and kiss (note, also, that this hugging and kissing is a somewhat childish version of what adults do in bed). Third, there is some confusion about whether the offer of sex is really being made. And finally, the confusion surrounding the mother-daughter affair is related to the voice's own confusion about his dual status as slightly young and old man. This status as slightly old young man could describe the typical Barthelme protagonist. What is important to note here is that in this episode (which is really a distillation of themes developed in different terms in the larger arena of the entire story) the source of this arrested development is clearly identified as the failure to resolve ancient feelings of sexual interest directed at the mother-figure. The value of this particular version of the issue is that it shows us that the tendency to split the female into mother and daughter figures is traceable to the persistence in the son of a failure to find his way out of an incestuous wish to play both child-son and adult-lover to a simultaneously dangerous and seductive mother-figure.

There are no pairings of males in all of Barthelme that happen in the way they do with the mother-daughter, two female lovers, or the twin mother pairings. The configuration simply does not occur. Even in those stories in which a female character figures prominently or in those stories written from a woman's point of view, male pairings do not occur. However, male pairings of a different kind do occur. In fact, the tendency to pair men or male voices together probably accounts for the most common configurations of character in Barthelme. The difference lies in the fact that the male

pairings happen to the central characters whereas female pairings happen to secondary characters; to put it in different terms, narrators and protagonists whose point of view we share tend to split into two male voices whereas female splitting occurs among the women whose point of view is not shared: male pairings look whereas female pairings are looked at. The reason it occurs this way is that the state of mind Barthelme describes in his stories is a peculiarly male point of view; the terms of the central fantasy in all of these stories are peculiarly male. Pairings that happen close to the point of view in the fictions, therefore, all tend to involve ambivalent relationships between father-figures and son-figures.

It is important to distinguish here between the father-son pairings involving delineated characters and the pairing of anonymous voices such as we see in "The New Music" or "The Leap" (GD) or in any of the variations of a form of narrative in which Barthelme specializes, a form which began with the use of Q and A (question and answer) in stories like "The Explanation" and "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel." These stories are only marginal dialogues between voices who, while they may seek to place a different emphasis on shared experiences, nevertheless share the same point of view. This form of dialogue is really a form of dialectic, a form of dramatic monologue and should not be confused with pairings involving relatively discrete characters.

Colours. Perhaps more than any of the associative motifs in Barthelme, the use of colour to designate objects with consistent latent value is unique to Barthelme, and, as a motif, potentially the most revealing in terms of showing the universality of fundamental motifs in his work. In a manner

approaching the allegorical, key colours in Barthelme point to the exercise of the subjectivity of the founding subject who is behind all of the fictions. As we shall see, however, what keeps colour from allegorical designations of meaning is the presence in any given context of competing and mitigating associative factors that must be taken into account.

The use of colour in Barthelme is revealing, but demonstrating how it functions and what specific colours mean in the broad arena of all the fictions is difficult. The range of colours Barthelme uses is not particularly great (nine colours), but each colour has distinctly different in meaning in Barthelme, and limitations of space preclude our examining all nine (green, blue, red, black, white, yellow, brown, silver, gold). Further complicating the issue is the fact that colours are basically modifiers which means that they usually appear attached to a wide variety of objects, objects whose various meanings in Barthelme also have to be taken into account. Despite these complications, it is nevertheless possible, if even in a limited and somewhat modified way, to show that in the universe Barthelme's fictions describe the colour of objects serves as an important clue as to the latent meaning of those objects. As a means of demonstrating how colour functions in Barthelme, we will consider two representative colours, blue and green, perhaps the two most important colours in Barthelme. Let us begin with the colour green.

Barthelme consistently associates the colour green with the feminine. He uses the colour green to identify the feminine in basically two ways: either he simply describes an object associated with a woman as green, or, more obliquely, he uses plant or flower associations, as for instance the naming of female characters after flowers (as we have had occasion to note

above, the names Barthelme chooses for his characters are important; names commonly serve to denote some critical aspect of character). But why does this pattern of association of the colour green and flowers or plants with women occur? The best way to answer that question is to consider some examples of its use.

It might be appropriate to concentrate on a story we have already examined in some detail, "Florence Green." The story makes considerable use out of the green motif, beginning with the repetition of greenness in Florence (flora) Green's name. Green images are found throughout the story: when Florence Green takes sick after seeing the pictures of the pictures of the holocaust she goes to Greenbrier, West Virginia (10); at one point she is described as "smiling through her emeralds" (8); describing the canes Florence made herself, Baskerville speaks of her "stripping the bark from the green unseasoned wood" (12). Other references in this story which probably figure in the green motif are Baskerville's remark, "Before the flowers of friendship faded friendship faded Gertrude Stein" (9), and the fact that the children's army in his book take up positions in a park to begin their murderous assault on the adult world (the green space of the park is equivalent to the space out of which Baskerville operates, the green-dominated space of Florence Green's table).

Crucial to an estimation of the significance of the patterns formed by the colour green in this story is the recognition that, like most women in Barthelme, Florence Green is viewed ambivalently. It would be nice to say that green represents the feminine and let it go at that but that kind of simplification would represent a gross underestimation of the complexity of the state of mind Barthelme's stories describe (not to say the complexity of

mind itself, particularly with regard to its capacity to invest contradictory and ambivalent feelings in the same image). To Baskerville Florence Green represents a superior and more dramatic variation of his own identity. Florence Green's dinner party, especially her place as idiosyncratic hostess at the head of her own table--a role that determines, and to a great extent subsumes the roles of her guests--is a dramatization of Baskerville's role as the voice relating the story we are reading. In other words, Florence Green is what Baskerville wishes he now could be--an enormously powerful and magnetic figure with a rich and varied former life. She commands attention and, unlike Baskerville, doesn't care whether she's boring or not. Like the addled and self-obsessed hostess Florence Green who controls the desultory flow of conversation at her table, as host of the story we're reading, Baskerville leads the reader on a journey into the whirlpool country of his mind. Baskerville's act of turning his life into fiction can also be viewed as the ironic realization of Florence's "simple, perfect idea" (15) of wanting to turn her back on her present and "go somewhere where everything is different" (15).

As we can see in his relationship to Florence Green, Baskerville is decidedly ambivalent about the colour green. On the one hand, green identifies a compelling maternal identity that exerts a powerful attraction. The need to identify with this aspect of feminine is extremely pronounced in Baskerville. Just as pronounced, however, as we can see in the image of Florence Green stripping the bark off the green branches she later turns into one of her collected canes, is the fear of loss of identity if one gets too close to a woman of her kind. It should also be noted that the manifest basis for the would-be writer and the would-be powerful

Baskerville's identification with Florence centres on her money. And her money (a thing typically associated with the colour green), as we have already seen in the image of the filthy wad of love poems she keeps in her purse, is a displacement for the literature in which Baskerville couches his identity.

If green is the colour associated with women in Barthelme, blue is the colour associated with men. Blue, for instance, is the colour of the jumpsuit God is wearing in the basement in "At The End of the Mechanical Age" (A 176). The king in "The Palace" (GP) shows up wearing a blue hardhat (75). In what is probably its most important designation, blue is the colour police wear in their many appearances in Barthelme's stories. It is the colour that the powerful engineers in "Report" (UPUA) decide is the "most popular colour worldwide" (59). It is the colour of Captain Blood's velvet jacket in "Captain Blood" (OTMDC 60). In "The Sergeant" (A), the man the Joseph-like narrator is asked to shoot, and the general that he ends up serving, are both wearing blue (76-77).

This is not to say that women don't appear in the stories wearing, or associated with, the colour blue. However, those females that are associated with blue are thus marked as aggressive and always represent a special threat to the men who share their stories. Examples of "blue" women include the little girl in "This Newspaper Here" (UPUA) wearing a "blue Death of Beethoven printed dress" who stabs the thigh of the narrating old man with a "steel-blue knitting needle" (32), the "Blue-cross-Blue Shield" that Perpetua receives from her husband when she leaves him in "Perpetua" (S 37), and the female loadmaster in "Departures" (S) in the "blue cloth coat" who

loads the children on the school buses in "Departures" (101) (other examples of "blue" women are discussed below when we consider blue when it is used in combination with green).

What is interesting about the two colours is the fact that they are often used together. When used together, these two colours signify a situation in which a debilitating balance of forces obtain. A good example of this use of blue and green in the same pattern of associations occurs in "Brain Damage"(CL). In the second prose vignette in "Brain Damage" a curious flower--blue petals and a green stalk--is described. The narrative voice in this vignette is trying to decide whether or not to plug the flower in like an appliance, to make it, in other words, a working fixture in the home. Significantly, in light of what we have suggested to this point about the female associations of green and the male associations of blue, Barthelme carefully exploits the sexual implications suggested in the image of electricity applied to a blue-and-green flower. The narrator refers to certain ingenuous characters who want to see "the flowers light up, or collapse, or do whatever they were going to do, when they were plugged in." They are, however, wary of using Direct Current because "in the early days of electricity, many people were killed by it," which implies that they are afraid of an archaic if more vital form of connection: "We were sort of afraid to plug them in, though--afraid of all that electricity pushing its way up the green stalks of the flowers, flooding the leaves, and finally touching the petals, the blue part, where the blueness of the flowers resided, along with white, and a little yellow" (136). The narrator then says something which further develops the notion that the flowers represent

people, specifically children: he alludes to the "humanist position" on flowers which states that flowers should be let alone, comparing that position with "the new electric awareness" that demands that they be plugged in right away (136).

What this vignette represents is a depiction of the psychic stasis that results from failure to resolve an elemental conflict. As is the case in all of Barthelme, the conflict centres on the contrary claims made by the uncertain prospect of commitment to a fierce and physical connection (one either lights up or collapses) and the contrary appeal of an inert, solipsistic, but somehow appropriate isolation (it is unnatural, after all, to turn flowers into appliances). The many-layered symbol of the blue-and-green electric flower also manages to represent that conflict in terms of a tension between an innocent but potentially lethal regressive mode (the old direct current killed many people) and a new alternating awareness that will, if applied, completely undermine the flower-as-flower by making it into something it is not, that is, a machine. Not surprisingly, in light of what we have seen to this point about the "idiot circles" Barthelme's characters end up describing, the voice behind this particular fiction ends up unable to resolve or to abandon the conflict embodied in the symbol of the blue-and-green flower: "My own idea about whether or not to plug in the flowers is somewhere between these ideas, in that gray area where nothing is done, really, but you vacillate for a while, thinking about it. The blue of the flowers is extremely handsome against the gray of that area" (136).

Another story which demonstrates the psychoanalytic terms of the conflict embodied in the combination of things blue and things green in

Barthelme is "The Indian Uprising" (UPUA). The same psychoanalytic issues embodied in the symbol of the blue-and-green flower in "Brain Damage" are embodied in this story in the image of a blue-and-green city under seige, a city which is developed in the course of the story into a representation of the narrator's state of mind.

If we follow the use of the blue and green imagery as it occurs in the story we note that both colours are associated with women, but nevertheless signify different feminine values. Women wearing blue, for instance, belong to a world other than that which the narrator occupies. Blue women in "Uprising" are the source of a particular kind of threat. For example, Miss R., the malignly powerful teacher to whom the narrator is referred, wears a "blue dress containing a red figure" (14). Later, the narrator tells us that, "The girls of my quarter wore long blue mufflers that reached to their knees. Sometimes the girls hid Comanches in their rooms, the blue mufflers together in a room creating a great blue fog" (14). The image of the blue dress containing a red figure is supported by the image of blue muffled women hiding red men in their rooms. Keeping in mind that the story later identifies the red Indians killed in the attack as children (see also the Children's army motif in "Florence Green" and "Hiding Man"), the former image especially serves to suggest that blue women "contain" red men, an image which connotes pregnancy; the combination of red and blue in this case indicates that the false women in the narrator's part of the city are mothers (an interpretation that is supported by Miss R's habit of referring to the narrator as a child). Occupying the narrator's section of the city are mothers whose real sympathies lie with the red warriors attacking the city (this pattern of red and blue is reinforced in the listing of objects

in the useless barricades the narrator hides behind: "...a blanket, red-orange with faint blue stripes; a red pillow and a blue pillow..."[12]; significantly, both of these objects come from a bed, which, as is noted below, is the true field on which this uprising takes place).

The meaning of the uprising that is threatening the narrator's city is suggested in the image of the map the narrator shows to his lover, Sylvia: "Our parts were blue and their parts were green. I showed the blue-and-green map to Sylvia. 'Your parts are green,' I said" (13). Though he pictures Sylvia as green in this instance, he later views her in different colours: "She wore a yellow ribbon [an allusion, no doubt, to the western film of the same name], under a long blue muffler. 'Which side are you on,' I cried, 'after all'" (15-16). The long blue muffler, of course, identifies her with the blue "mothers" from his part of the city, mothers whose real sympathies lie, in the mind of the narrator, with the Indians.

Sylvia (whose name means "from the forest"), the "green" lover the narrator is losing in the psychological upheaval of this uprising, is the locus of a conflict between things green and things blue. The question the narrator asks her, "Which side are you on?," points to the real issue behind this complex story and helps show that the basis of the conflict in this story is fundamentally romantic and psychological. Alternating between descriptions of the current course of the uprising and reminiscences about his failed relationship with Sylvia, "Uprising" shows itself to be about the inability of the narrator to establish a permanent and meaningful relationship with Sylvia; their relationship is in a state of crisis, and this crisis originates in the narrator. For some reason, Sylvia seems to represent a serious threat to his identity. What criticism of this story to

this point has utterly failed to realize is that the uprising this story describes, while it certainly has wider implications, is essentially a private and internal matter--the story is a depiction of an essentially internal upheaval precipitated by the narrator's inability to come to terms with a sexual object. That this uprising is really a private and especially a sexual matter is confirmed in a line late in the story: "The sickness of the quarrel lay thick on the bed" (19). Furthermore, the hidden sources of that "quarrel" can be traced only by careful observation of motifs like the green and blue pattern of associations, patterns that, it should be pointed out, simply have no meaning or purpose otherwise. The blue-and-green conflict in "Uprising," like the blue-and-green flower threatened by electricity in "Brain Damage," is a representation of a state of mind, the state of mind of a man struggling to keep the two colours and what they represent balanced in his mind: "In Skinny Wainwright Square the forces of green and blue swayed and struggled" (15) (for a further discussion of the meaning of this dense and complex fiction see discussion of "Uprising" under the analysis of the Indian motif).

There are several other instances in the corpus of Barthelme's work in which blue and green are used together. For instance, Julie in "A Film"(S) leaves a trail of blue and green hankchiefs to the camp of the vandals that have abducted her. In "Edward and Pia"(UPUA), a story set in Scandinavia in which the Pia is repeatedly sickened by the would-be lover Edward, Edward observes late in the story that Scandinavian money is "green-and-blue" (90). In "The President"(UPUA), Sylvia, the girlfriend of the narrator, is wearing a "blue-and-green gypsy costume" when she says to

the President, "I love you" (155). In every case, the colour combination is associated with a failed romantic situation, a failure that can be traced to the past and unresolved romantic conflicts involving parent-figures.

In Barthelme, the colour red identifies sexual passion. The Indians in "Uprising", explicitly identified as "Red men" (11), represent the intrusion into the world of the narrator of sexual passion. The blue women in the same story who contained the red figures therefore represent, not only mothers, but women marked by sexual passion. This use of red is utterly consistent with Barthelme's use of the colour in all of his stories. Whenever the colour red occurs it consistently points to the always unsettling and disruptive display of sexual passion.

Colour is often assigned to objects that would seem to have little to do with sexual passion, that would seem, in fact, to represent opposite values. However, if careful attention is paid to the associative context in which the designation of colour is made, one finds that in almost all instances, certain colours denote certain latent content. Let me demonstrate this phenomenon with another example of the manner red is used in "Uprising." Consider the following passage: "[Miss R. says], 'The ardor aroused in men by the beauty of women can only be satisfied by God. That is very good (it is Valery) but it is not what I wanted to teach you, goat, muck, filth, heart of my heart.' I showed the table to Nancy. 'See the table?' She stuck out her tongue red as a cardinal's hat (15). Miss R.'s lesson is that the narrator must displace his filthy, goatish ardor for beautiful women onto God. The door the narrator alludes to here is the

hollow-core door-tables he repeatedly uses as displacements for women. He is drawn to the inanimate doors because he can control them, because they conform to instructions. The woman Nancy, when asked to acknowledge the reality of the door, sticks out her tongue--a derisive and suggestive gesture. To the narrator, who wants to control the red uprising that threatens to overwhelm him by displacing his ardor for women to God, associates the woman's tongue with a cardinal's hat thus forming a condensation; that is, he forms an image that is informed by more than one, and in this case, contradictory meanings. The red in this apparently anti-sexual red object in this case, therefore, actually does contain and express sexual ardor--the red cardinal's hat is a symbol of the fear and hatred of the sexual self as it is derived from the church.

Authority. Barthelme's protagonists often find themselves in conflict with male authority figures. These authority figures are always representatives of culturally validated systems of order, systems which are viewed as inimical to the growth of the self as an independent and valid entity. This is what Wayne Stengel says about the role of authority in Barthelme:

Frequently...Barthelme demonstrates that the self is defined in its conflicts with an authority figure--a priest, a father, a boss, a teacher, or even the president of the United States. Such encounters are among the most crucial in the stories. In each of these conflicts, the self discovers that it must stop worshipping such icons; in fact, it must destroy the respect it holds for these figures so that it can gain its own vision of reality, one not derived from superiors. The only belief worth holding is that which originates in the self.(14)

Barthelme's protagonists do tend to define themselves in opposition to authority figures, but Stengel misses the absolutely crucial point in these conflicts that Barthelme's attitude toward authority (as manifested by his

characters) is always ambivalent. Barthelme's characters may be uniformly convinced of the inherent weakness and limitations of authority in whatever guise it appears, but in no story is that lack of regard for the caprice or "whimsy" of authority ever present without an accompanying, and equally intense, need on the part of the character to seek some kind of identification with the same authority it villifies. The result of this ambivalence is the perpetuation from story to story of essentially the same crisis.

In Barthelme, the male authority figure can take on any of several shapes, but most typically it takes on one of the following eight forms: the priest-father, the doctor, the engineer, the policeman, the great artist, the soldier, the politician, and the king.

1. Priest-Father.

Clerics of all rank make frequent appearances in Barthelme (who was raised as a Catholic) Closely associated with the colour black, these figures--literal and figurative fathers--are particularly compelling, and so are particularly dangerous to the self. As in the case of Burligame in "Hiding Man," there is marked tendency on the part of protagonists to view the relationship with this figure in terms of a competition for selfhood. The relationship to this figure is ambivalent in the sense that it is marked by the wish to confess to, and join the father, and the contrary wish to flee from or to renounce the father. To deliver oneself into the hands of the priest-father may result in temporary relief, but the fear of the ultimate annihilation of the self which knows itself in terms of its sins (or irruptions of self) prevents this. Contrarily, the attention of these

father-priests represents a form of love which nourishes the self and so identification with them cannot be completely suspended. The result is a perpetuation of the chase we see depicted in "Hiding Man."

2. The Doctor.

Stories in which a protagonist either competes with a doctor for the affections of a woman or is defeated and delivered into the hands of a doctor are common. The overwhelming majority of these doctors are psychiatrists. There are also several stories in which no doctor appears but in which psychology or psychoanalytic theory is cited, either obliquely as it in "The Balloon" or explicitly as in "A Few Moments of Sleeping and Waking"(UPUA). In every case, as it happens in "Florence Green," the protagonist sets himself up against psychology and what he construes as its procrustean tendency to limit the possibilities of the self. As in the case of the priest-father, there is a tendency to identify with the doctor (and the principles of psychology he represents) even in the act of attacking him and disparaging the limiting view of personality he is seen as advocating.

3. Engineer (Architect/Scientist).

All three of these manifestations of paternal authority have in common a belief in reason or objective order, systems of thought which are fundamentally inimical to the view of the self as irruptive or liquid. For instance, when the balloon presents itself to New York it offers release in the form of randomness and mislocation in contradistinction to the "grid of precise, rectangular pathways under our feet" (28). What the Barthelme protagonist longs for is escape from the rigid and predetermined systems in

which he finds himself trapped. This explains why Sylvia introduces a liquid rebellion into the city of objects in "The Indian Uprising": "The situation is liquid," says one character (14) as "Red men in waves" (11) overrun the city and the streets fill with muck. The Barthelme protagonist is drawn to the principles of disunity such as the Marivaudian moment of the pastless-futureless man of pure present as described in "Robert Kennedy Saved From Drowning"(UPUA) or the notion of an irruptive self as it is defined in "What To Do Next"(A), the self that cannot be contained.

The tension between the ordered, formal and rational world of the engineer-type can be seen in all of Barthelme's illustrated fictions. In every one of these stories, there will be a collage dominated by mathematical lines of perspective. Inside that grid of precise and geometric pathways, Barthelme will place in counterpoint an animate figure who resembles, more than anything else, a creature caught and held in some kind of net or web.

4. Policeman.

Another favourite figure of Barthelme's is the policeman. The presence of a policeman not only represents the authority of the law and the implication that a crime has been committed. Police represent a form of punishment for that crime. The police in Barthelme, unlike the doctors or priests, are never very subtle. What the police tend to represent in Barthelme is unrestricted ego, the need to dominate and control the world by force. One thinks of the Secret Police in "Engineer-Private Paul Klee" (§) who desire "the three-sided waltz" of omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence (66) or of Horace in "The Policeman's Ball" (CL) who approaches

the seduction of his girlfriend, Margot, in the much the same crude way as he approaches the dismemberment of a Game Hen with a pair of pliers.

5. Great Artist.

This category of paternal authority figure, like the Phantom in "The Phantom of the Opera's Friend"(CL) or like Edward Lear in "The Death of Edward Lear"(GD), is a tragic figure, but he is also a vain, jealous and oppressive figure. The best and most developed example of the type is found in "At The Tolstoy Museum"(CL).

"At The Tolstoy Museum," like any of the illustrated stories Barthelme has published, is composed of prose blended with a series of antique engravings or prints. This story develops around several portraits of the great nineteenth-century Russian writer, Tolstoy (a writer generally acknowledged as one of the greatest, if not the greatest writer, who ever lived). One picture in particular is repeated several times in this story: a portrait of Tolstoy's scowling, disapproving face. The second picture in the series of portraits is a slightly smaller but identical version of the first. In the picture the dwarfed figure of Napoleon stands looking up at the giant head. In the third picture, a collage, Tolstoy's enormous coat is on display. The overwhelming largeness of Tolstoy's image, in fact, is the principal mode and theme of this museum.

The story makes both metafictional and psychoanalytic use out of the figure of Tolstoy. The story works to make the Tolstoy whose accomplishments in fiction dwarf those of other writers a father-figure, the father whose enormous presence diminishes and impoverishes the identity of the son. Not surprisingly, depression is the watchword at the Tolstoy

museum. The opening sentence reads: "At the Tolstoy museum we sat down and wept" (49). Later we are told that "sadness grasped" (59) the visitors to the Museum. In the following passage, the source of this persistent weeping is all but identified in the resemblance the great writer bears to a father-figure: "More than any other Museum, the Tolstoy Museum induces weeping. Even the bare title of a Tolstoy work, with its burden of love, can induce weeping--for example, the article titled 'Who Should Teach Whom to Write, We the Peasant Children or the Peasant Children Us?'" (54). This passage shows that Tolstoy's work brings with it, as does the relationship with the father, a "burden of love." The reference to the article which questions whether the children or Tolstoy (by implication, the father) should be in control of writing associates the issue of writing with the challenge the child poses to paternal authority in the act of becoming a self, an independent voice. That this challenge to the authority of Tolstoy-as-artist is equivalent to the challenge to Tolstoy-as-father-figure is also suggested by an allusion made earlier in the story to the figure of Napoleon, the young man who made unsuccessful war on Russia (we noted a version of this Napoleon-as-son also appears in "Mandible"). The association of Tolstoy with the father is also strongly suggested in the sense of guilt the narrator observes is felt when standing before the portrait of the master: standing before one of the portraits the feeling is like you've committed "a small crime and having your father, who stands in four doorways, catch you at it" (55). This sense that the narrator is implicated in some sort of crime, and a crime specifically against the artist-father, is also suggested in image of Tolstoy as the threatening and unpredictable bastion of moral authority: "The entire building, viewed from

the street, suggests that it is about to fall on you. This the architects relate to Tolstoy's moral authority" (53-54).

The story obviously works on several levels at once. On one level the story represents a writer's acknowledgement of Tolstoy's genius, the pre-eminent potency, if you will, of his reputation in fiction--the very field of endeavour in which "At The Tolstoy Museum" now seeks to participate. What must be acknowledged is that on this level Barthelme's story represents a direct and aggressive challenge to, and an implicit refutation of, the form of fiction in which Tolstoy made his reputation. As an artist, Barthelme's narrator can thus be viewed as ambivalent, caught between an attack on, and an embrace of, the pre-eminent figure of the artist, Leo Tolstoy. We can see this ambivalence at work throughout the story. Take, for instance, his reference to the story Tolstoy wrote about the three hermits. His loyalty to the master, if you will, is evident in his acknowledgement that he finds the story beautiful, but the story is so beautiful that the narrator is left "incredibly depressed by reading this story" (56). What is perhaps less obvious about this retelling of Tolstoy's story is that, even while acknowledging the beauty of this story, the narrator, in effect, destroys the story by quite literally rewriting it and making it, in effect, his own.

Tolstoy is represented in this story as a figure who, with his "moral authority" (54) and his literally overwhelming presence, is a representation of the god-like "Amazing Colossal Man" Burligame longed to surrender to in the dark. But, as we have noted, one gets the distinct impression in this story that Tolstoy also represents an oppressive force that the narrator longs to overthrow. Like the two pictures that open and close this

story--the first a massive portrait and the last featuring a "disaster" with an arrow purporting to identify the miniscule figure of Tolstoy (it is obviously not Tolstoy or anyone that could be identified for that matter)--the story develops around a paradox, a paradox rife with ambivalence directed at the artist-as-father-figure. The artist-as-father-figure is an authority whose example must be challenged and ultimately overcome if the artist-self ever hopes to realize his own voice as an artist. As in "The King Of Jazz"(GD), another story which depicts a challenge directed at a declining paternal artistic power, art is a medium of self-expression, self-actualization, a medium in which fathers and sons inevitably vie for ascendancy: "He's sensational," says the elder musician of the challenger he calls son, "Maybe I ought to kill him" (57). Hideo, the young challenger, plays with his head discretely placed between his knees in keeping with the manner of sons like the narrator of "At The Tolstoy Museum" who find it necessary ^{to} disguise their real intentions, from the objects of their love and rage, and from themselves. "At The Tolstoy Museum" ends with yet another of Barthelme's looks forward into an empty future: "I haven't made up my mind. Standing here in the 'Summer in the Country' Room, several hazes passed over my eyes. Still, I think I will march on to 'A Landlord's Morning.' Perhaps something vivifying will happen to me there" (60). "The King of Jazz" closes with a similar veiled and ironic assertion of the sadness and fundamental sterility that always attends the role of the artist in Barthelme: the story closes just as the King of Jazz is about to render a number entitled "Flats."

Barthelme's prose, as we have noted above, is clotted with allusions

to other works of art. This allusiveness amounts to a kind of oppressiveness in Barthelme's world. One thinks, for instance, of the Captured Woman in "The Captured Woman"(A) jamming her hapless artist-captor in the stomach with a copy of The Portable Milton (95). Allusiveness can take several forms in Barthelme. It is not uncommon, as we have seen, for Barthelme to use actual figures from the history of art in his stories, figure like Tolstoy, Goethe in "Conversations with Goethe"(OTMDC), Ezra Pound in "A Film"(S), Daumier and Dumas in "Daumier"(S), or the Fisher King in "The Educational Experience"(A). In one story, "The Question Party"(GD), this allusiveness takes on Borgesian proportions (in Borges' story, "Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote," is about a man who rewrites an exact but somehow infinitely richer version of Cervante's Quixote). "The Question Party" is an exact duplicate except for "some three dozen lines" (71) of a story originally published in Godey's Lady's Book in 1850.

6. Soldier.

Again, we have already alluded to the significance of this figure above in our discussion of History. The key to this figure's appeal lies in his place in the history of conflicts. The soldier is also an expression of phallic power which is suggested in the number of appearances soldiers make brandishing a sword (see also Sword motif below).

7. Politician.

The politician as a figure of authority is usually the object of broad political satire in Barthelme. The most typical appearance politicians make in the fiction is in the form of the always unnamed President. The

President as he is depicted in several stories in the parodic Guilty Pleasures especially is patently a sham identity, all image as opposed to substance. "An Hesitation on the Bank of the Delaware" is an instance when, in the figure of an egotistical George Washington, the politician and the soldier are conflated in the same figure.

As is the case with all of these authority figures, the politician can in rare instances be cast as an extremely sympathetic figure, a figure with whom the narrator feels a compelling need to identify. "Robert Kennedy Saved From Drowning" is probably the best example of a sympathetic portrayal of a politician. The basis for this sympathy lies in the fact that, despite the high public relief of these personalities, no one can really know the truth about these men.

8. King.

The appearance of royal figures is common in Barthelme and, unlike other categories of authority figures, is not restricted to males. In Barthelme the kings and queens (and the gods and goddesses) are representations of the parents as viewed through the eyes of a child. Peterson's claim in "A Shower of Gold" (CBDC) that, "My mother was a royal virgin...and my father was a shower of gold" (183) is an expression of the altogether natural and infantile wish to see oneself as the child of special parents. In Barthelme, this traffic in royalty is a function of a persistent and archaic sense of grandiosity, a sense a character has of himself as being a person holding special power and privilege. It is a sense always accompanied by the equally strong conviction of worthlessness. One need only consider Peterson's claim to be the child of royal or divine

parents from ancient mythology: Peterson has almost no sense of worth and views every relationship as a form of punishment, proof of his lack of worth. "The Palace at Four A.M." (OTMDC) features a version of Peterson, a character who is a writer and a king. This royal artist, however, is, nevertheless, the only man in the kingdom who thinks of himself as a donkey.

Children. The role that children play in Barthelme in general is akin to that played by the children in the classroom in "Me and Miss Mandible" or in the remembered childhoods of the three other protagonists in the synoptic tales; that is, children are victims, psychological victims of a universe which alternates between hostility and indifference. Joseph's discovery that all of the problems which plague him as an adult had their origins in childhood is a discovery all of Barthelme's protagonists share in one way or another. His typical character may be an adult physically, but this character remains psychologically committed to issues and relationships that he knew and failed to resolve as a child. The commitment to the issues of his preterite life turns him back upon himself and out of the world.

It is not surprising that when children do appear in Barthelme, they hardly seem children at all. Rather, they seem as much hybrids of childish and adult identities as are the adults around them (hence the popularity of dwarfs and giants in Barthelme's universe). In the most extreme cases, the threat to the psychological well-being of children is translated into a palpable threat and the children are openly persecuted, or in the more extreme cases, tortured or killed. In "Traumerei" (§), for instance, the son, Daniel, is told by his parents that, "we did not realize that your

option had been picked up, you will be the comfort of our old age...if you live" (21). The man-child Daniel's essential powerlessness, his abject enthrallment to the whim and appetite of his parents, is common to most children as they are depicted in Barthelme.

The most common mode of threat to children is psychological, and the most common source of that threat has its origins in the family. In The Dead Father, Thomas offers this evaluation of the family: "The family produces zombies, psychotics, and warps...In excess of what is needed" (78). Barthelme consistently represents the family as a hothouse of threat, seduction and betrayal on every side.

"Will You Tell Me?"(CBDC) is typical of one of Barthelme's family stories, that is, stories which explore the relationships which are prone to develop within the context of the family. The story is fraught with the rivalries, vanities, hostilities, and general perversities of familial love that are so common in Barthelme. A friend of the family, Hubert, has an affair with Irene, the wife of Charles. Hubert gives the couple a child. This son, Paul, makes bombs out of empty beer cans to throw at, and frighten his father. His father, Charles, lusts after the girl, Hilda, the girl who loves Paul. Howard also loves Hilda. Paul also loves Inge. Ann also loves Paul. And so on. Indeed, part of what makes the story worth considering in the context of this discussion is the unique way in which Barthelme entangles together in a unique way the histories and identities of this extended family.

As the story develops and more characters are introduced, aligning themselves with other characters along various axes, a peculiar phenomenon occurs: unless the reader has been keeping careful track, he begins to lose

grip on who is with who and for what reason. This is the schema of the family as developed by "Will You Tell Me?":

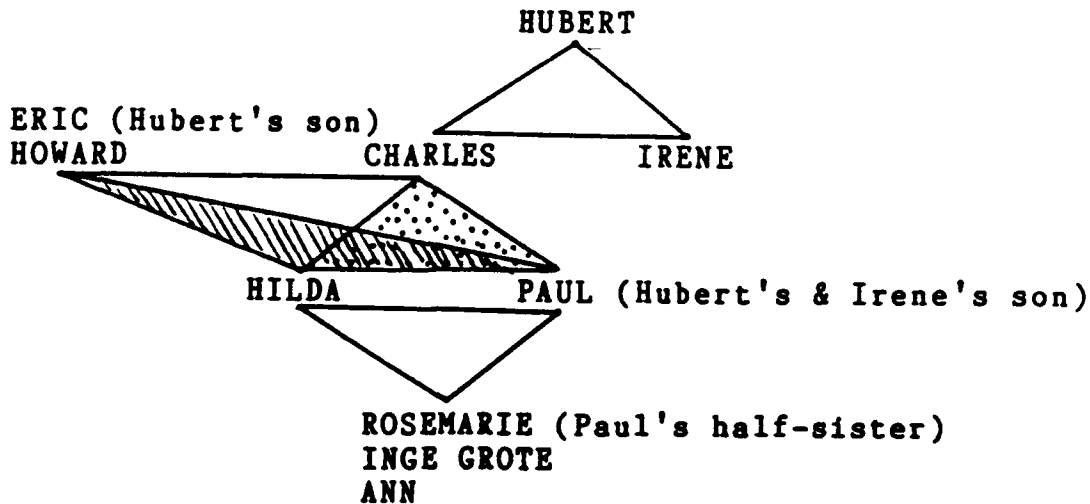


Fig. 3. Romantic triangles in "Will You Tell Me?"

In the absence of fidelity the structure of this family totally breaks down; after a page or two this family doesn't register as a group of discrete identities at all, but more like a undifferentiated mass of partial identities. These characters, linked by common obsessions and despair, do not seem like characters at all, but rather seem like the various manifestations of a discrete, but very complex, pattern of obsession. What this story in particular shows us is that the whirlpool as a structural image is equally applicable to a consideration of content: the family as it viewed in "Will You Tell Me?" is a configuration distinguished by limited movement around, and into, a centre which inexorably draws all things into

it. At the heart of Barthelme is the family, and the disruptive and deforming mechanism that sits at the heart of the family as it is viewed by Barthelme is desire.

Rebellion. As a consequence of the ubiquity of oppressive authority figures in Barthelme, coupled with Barthelme's view of society as a complex of traps in which to lose the self, a significant percentage of his stories describe some form of rebellion. Forms of rebellion can range from the personal rebellion of a character like Perpetua in "Perpetua"(S) who leaves her husband and her marriage to join a revolutionary cell of musicians, to general rebellions such as those described in stories like "City Life"(CL), "The Crisis"(GD), or "A Nation of Wheels"(GP). The scope of the general rebellions, however, is only nominally general. The actual scope of the rebellion in these stories is very restricted, restricted in the sense that the focus of the rebellion is not so much political or sociological as it is private and psychological. In fact, as a motif, the Rebellion motif functions in essentially the same manner as the History motif: the putative objective and extrapersonal scope of the drama only serves as a gloss on the personal and the psychological.

"The Indian Uprising," for instance, is manifestly a story about a general rebellion. A careful reading of the story reveal that the actual site of the quarrel, as we noted above in our analysis of the story, is the bed shared by the two lovers, the narrator and Sylvia. In fact, it is probably more accurate to say that the real setting of this rebellion is internal: it takes place inside the mind of the narrator.

In Barthelme, rebellion represents a radical attempt to redefine the

self. Love is the most common mode of rebellion in the sense that the offer of love is viewed by the state of mind Barthelme's fictions describe as a challenge to the self. The prospect of love holds out the promise of escape from the self. For reasons we have outlined above the prospect of love in the present is turned aside by the reactionary Barthelme protagonist who cannot escape a self locked in "history."

Crucial to an appreciation of how the rebel functions in Barthelme is the concept of containment as it is articulated in "What to Do Next"(A). In the story the listener is offered the choice between the passive option of being "contained" by his culture, or the active option of "containing" the world as realized through the celebration of that which makes him different. The seat of those differences are symbolized in this story by the highly suggestive image of the "banged thumb, swelling and reddening and otherwise irrupting all over [the matrix of this culture's] smooth, eventless surface" (86). The problem with either role--the role of the "uncritical sop" (85) or the role of what amounts to the narcissist or solipsist--is that neither option is sufficient to make you happy. "What to Do Next" ends at the dead end at which Barthelme's protagonists all eventually arrive; faced with the choice of containing or being contained, they opt for the active option of containing, of following the paths dictated by their irruptions. As the ending of the story indicates, the self is not so much restored by this option as it is kept from oblivion; an unhappy balance of forces still maintains: "Your life is saved. Congratulations. I'm sorry" (86).

"Marie, Marie, Hold on Tight"(CBDC) is a story about rebellion that equates rebellion with the promethean act of artistic expression. The story shows, however, that the real subject and object of the rebellion lies not

in the world but in the self. The three protesters in the story ask on their painted signs, "Why does it have to be that way?" (117). These men attempt to raise in existential fashion "the question of man helpless in the grip of a definition of himself that he had not drawn, that could not be altered by any human action, and that was in fundamental conflict with every human notion of what should obtain" (121). They eventually discover, like all of Barthelme's rebels discover, a fundamental paradox: the source of that limiting definition of the self lies not so much ⁱⁿ the world as it does in the self. The key to the story of the rebels in "Marie, Marie" is not the merit of their straightforward existential protest or the fact that they alone have seen through the hypocrisy of the church, that they know about the death of God; the key to the failure of these rebels is only secondarily an absurd or basically hostile universe. Rather, it is clear from their behaviour in the story that they've solved the problem of the world to their general satisfaction. The real key to their helplessness lies in their relationship to the mysterious Marie who lurks behind their protest. Who is this Marie, this woman they serve? Why does she stand so far from the manifest centre of this story, removed from the action but somehow enclosing it all? It is Marie, after all, who painted the signs in the first place. As the title of this story--"Marie, Marie, Hold on Tight"--ironically suggests, the more problematic source of the "tight hold" on the respective identities of these rebels, appears to lie in the undisclosed terms of the relationship they hold in common with the mysterious Marie.

The appeal of the notion of rebellion is that it seems to promise a way out of participation in systems of containment. Artistic self-expression would appear to offer in principle the prospect of a way out of the

labyrinthine trap of the self (this is Stengel's and Couturier's and Durand's position). Artistic thought is original thought, after all, a way of re-making the world. The trap that Barthelme's artist-narrators fall into, however, is that, in spite of themselves, they commit themselves to the circular, inverted path dictated to them by their deeply private irruptions. And so it happens that rebellions always fail in Barthelme; rebellions fail because they begin and end in the self which, as the story "Daumier"(S) explains, simply "cannot be escaped" (183).

Water. In "Florence Green" Baskerville associates the two women who interest him in terms of bodies of water--the Principal seas and rock pools deep in the earth for Florence, and islands set in the sea for Joan Graham. As our reading of the story in an earlier chapter indicated, Baskerville appears to associate Florence Green with a kind of immersion, a return to a preterite and elemental condition that will relieve him of the anguish which comes from having an impoverished sense of self. The whirlpool country of "Florence Green" features a pattern comprised of several water images: Florence Green's preoccupation with the leaking bathroom; Baskerville's preoccupation with coastal cities, foreign rivers and Principal Seas; Baskerville's image of himself as a perennial weakling still haunting the beach of his youth; Baskerville's second novel will be entitled "Hydrogen After Lakehurst" (7); Mandrake's piano is compared to "Gibraltar in the sea" (8); Joan Graham's breasts are viewed as she leans over soup. He ends the story driving around in circles in the rain, rain which not only suggests sadness, but within the associative framework of the story, the rain is a form of water. The final tableau represents a kind of marginal immersion:

enclosed in the dry, confined space of the Volkswagon, Baskerville ends the story trapped on a kind of island--still drawn to, and surrounded by, water, but still unable to risk total immersion.

Among the stories which make developed use of water or liquid associations for the feminine are "The Indian Uprising"(UPUA), "Paraguay"(CL), "The New Music"(GD), "Will You Tell Me?"(CBDC), "You Are as Brave as Vincent Van Gogh"(A), "At the End of the Mechanical Age"(A), "Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning"(UPUA), "Sentence"(CL), "The Phantom of the Opera's Friend"(CL), "The Mothball Fleet"(OTMDC), "Captain Blood"(OTMDC), and "Brain Damage"(CL). There are many other stories which draw the same correspondences between liquidity and the feminine but in the stories listed above the water-as-feminine association is central.

Water is always used used in Barthelme to symbolize either one of two forms of threat to the identity: in its first use, it represents a source of isolation, and in its more radical forms, a source of oblivion. "The New Music" posits a body of water with precisely the same associative values as the water in "Florence Green," but it couches the water metaphor in slightly different terms. In the story, the two voices, utterly dominated by the presence of their mother, speak of returning to "Pool," which is described as the "city of new life" and the "city of hope" (24). "That lonesome road. It ends in Pool," (24) says one of the voices. The characterization of the Pool as new, however, turns out to be bitterly ironic.

The surreal and horrific city of the future, Pool, is actually the city of the past. This Pool owes something allusively to Bath, a favourite city in eighteenth-century literature, but Barthelme's Pool is an altogether

private city. It is a version of the cities described in all of Barthelme's fictions. We are told, for instance, that the houses in Pool are occupied by "Elegant widowed women living alone...". Inside the houses there is a familiar occupant: "a grown child...or an almost grown one...". But what is most disturbing and familiar about these dangerous homes ("medals are awarded to those who have made it through the day") is the pall of guilt and the weight of the past: "The dead are shown in art galleries, framed. Or sometimes, put on pedestals. Not much different from the actual practice except that in Pool they display the actual...Person...Shocked white faces talking...Killed a few flowers and put them in pots under the faces, everybody does that..." (26).

As disturbing as this vision of Pool is--"I saw the streets of Pool, a few curs broiling on spits"--the two voices cannot escape from it: "Something keeps drawing you back like a magnet..."(27). In this private city the grown-but-not-grown child waits alone in the dangerous house with the widow. He is alone, except of course for the dead-but-not-dead of the past who continue to be "shocked" by some crime that is never described directly.

This same pool is investigated, albeit in different terms, in "You Are as Brave as Vincent Van Gogh." In this story, a male narrator addresses his young lover. Set beside a swimming pool, this story chronicles the attempt of the narrator to come to terms with this woman. The central event in the story is the woman driving a road-mending machine (a hopper) into the pool toward narrator who sees himself as a drowning signalman. As is the case in all of Barthelme's most representative fiction, the story is written in such a way as to surround this central event with a welter of associations,

associations which invest it with meanings no summary can account for here except in the most general fashion. However, the moment of the attack on the narrator is suggestive enough in its own right to warrant inclusion in this consideration of the Water motif: "And the giant piece of yellow road-mending equipment enters the pool, silently, you are in the cab, manipulating the gears, shove this one forward and the machine swims. Swims toward the man in the Day-Glo orange vest who is waving his Day-Glo orange flags in the air, this way, this way, here!" (168-169). The key to this water image is that the man signalling in various ways is threatened with drowning by a woman who has usurped a male role (she drives the giant hopper). The male protagonist, on the point of being immersed by a threatening female figure, continues to signal desperately. The confrontations that occur in and around these pools are never completed, are never really resolved because water represents the source of a persistent and ambivalent threat and appeal of immersion in the past in the course of which you're likely to confront a mother-figure who'll threaten you with the loss of your selfhood.

This significance for water helps explain the meaning of an important story in Barthelme, "Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning." In "Drowning," the narrator saves the enigmatic and contradictory figure of Robert Kennedy from drowning (in Kafkaesque fashion, Kennedy is referred to throughout the story simply as "K."). The story is marbled with many of the motifs we have identified in this chapter, and all of them point to Robert Kennedy's status as father-figure. The story, in fact, makes only nominal use of Robert Kennedy as actual historical figure. The Robert Kennedy of "Drowning" is purely a Barthelme creation; like the Paul Klee of "Engineer-Private" or the

Tolstoy of "At The Tolstoy Museum," the name of the famous authority figure serves to provide Barthelme with an outline, a nominal identity he then fills with the stuff of his own manufacture.

K. is a figure who is both loved and hated, a strangely remote and unhappy figure who resembles, as much as any character in Barthelme, the missing father in "Views of My Father Weeping" (CL). "Drowning," in fact, is written in much the same form as "Views," a series of views that add up to a portrait of ambivalence. In "Views" the point of the investigation is to re-view the son's relationship with the father by getting at the facts surrounding his death; in "Drowning" the aim of the narrative is similarly to understand who this literal and figurative father is, and this time, to literally rescue him from death in "the green depths" (53).

Why K. has entered the dangerous water in the first place, leaving behind what appears to be a Zorro costume, is never explained. In the view of K. immediately preceding the view of him in the water, however, the Marivaudian moment is described, and described in such a way that it resembles a version of drowning: "The Marivaudian being...cannot predict his own reactions to events. A condition of breathlessness and dazzlement surrounds him. In consequence he exists in a certain freshness which seems, if I may say so, very desirable" (52). What K.'s suicidal swim represents in context, therefore, is an attempt to approximate the sense of "breathlessness and dazzlement" that would attend living as a "pastless futureless man, born anew at every instant" (52). The desperate swim is one of those distractions that Barthelme's characters are forced to undertake because they know, as "Daumier" says, that the self (the self rooted in the past) cannot be escaped. The terrible irony of the swim, of course, is

that, on a manifest level--an attempt at a suicide-death--it offers only a nominal approximation of a pastless and futureless life. The swim presents K. with two possible resolutions: death or rescue. Unfortunately, each of these resolutions fails to resolve the problem. The latter only serves to perpetuate the problem.

On a latent level, the immersion in the regressive and maternal "green depths" and the subsequent rescue is more complex: it represents a failure to escape the morbidity determined by a commitment to the past, the failure to escape into the vital Marivaudian life of the present. The narrator-son is drawn to the water's edge where he sees his own past and future depicted in the form of the father-figure with whom he has been seeking to identify struggling in the green, maternal depths. What the rescue represents is an expression of the son's attempt to identify with the father (the identification is phallic, too: he is connected to the father's sword arm by a rope around his waist). The father-figure is rescued but what is really solved or answered or redressed? The story ends when K. says simply, "Thank you," which is no more than the minimum expression of gratitude or acknowledgement one could expect. Notwithstanding the perfunctoriness of the remark, it is highly suggestive in context. It is, after all, the first direct contact between narrator and the elusive, problematic K.; it represents a kind of mutual recognition. Nevertheless, the story and their relationship ends here; that is, it ends here because it has to--there is absolutely nothing in the story to suggest that there are any grounds for this relationship to proceed. K. remains at the close of the story as enigmatic a figure as he was at the start: "He is neither abrupt with nor

excessively kind to associates. Or he is both abrupt and kind" (40).

Ice. "Skiing along on the soft surface of brain damage, never to sink, because we don't understand the danger--" (149): this last, unfinished sentence of "Brain Damage"(CL) associates the damaged brain with coldness. Given the fact that Barthelme's characters tend to find themselves frozen, as it were, in positions of sterile isolation, it is not surprising that ice and snow metaphors consistently figure in his stories. Ice, as the refrigerator episode of "Broadcast" implies, is also the medium in which things are preserved--it suspends growth and animation. Ice is also the opposite of fire and Barthelme's characters are manifestly wary of the heat of passion (figured in the prose by the colour red and all sorts of fire imagery). The Ice motif shows up in images as diverse as the reference at the close of "You Are as Brave as Vincent Van Gogh"(A) to the child the woman left out in the hailstorm (171), to the "icy peaks" (67) metaphor for a bachelor one guest offers at "The Question Party"(GD). The Ice motif is sometimes combined with the colour motif as in the red snow in "Paraguay"(CL) connoting aborted passion or the green snow of Montreal in "Will You Tell Me?"(CBDC).

Swords (clubs, canes, revolvers). Barthelme's characters often find themselves involved in violent situations. More often than not the violence is suppressed and psychological as opposed to overt and physical; it tends to appear as the threat or fear of violence rather than as naked, actual expression. For instance, in a story like "110 West Sixty-first Street"(A), a story about a particularly bitter failed marriage, there is plenty of

psychological and implied violence, but it never breaks through to the surface of this unhappy relationship. The violence is all displaced. For example, the story begins: "Paul gave Eugenie a very large swordfish steak for her birthday. It was wrapped in red and white paper. The paper was soaked with swordfish juices in places but Eugenie was grateful nonetheless" (21). The swordfish steak, Paul's "tasteless" joke (22), is then associated by his wife, Eugenie, with her dead son, Claude, whose body was given to the hospital for medical experimentation. As the story develops and the full scope of the hostility and sense of betrayal mutually felt in Paul's and Eugenie's relationship is known, the true meaning of the swordfish steak joke emerges (the swordfish steak is a condensation which contains four of Barthelme's favourite motifs: Food, Water, Animal, and Sword): the joke, like the majority of Barthelme's jokes (the jokes described in "Hiding Man" as "dangerous to plumb"), is a symbol of the violent and complex feelings that have utterly compromised this marriage. The violent emotion contained just under the surface in this relationship, as it happens in almost all cases in Barthelme, is never expressed openly. Rather, it finds oblique expression in various images and associations which, like the leaking swordfish steak, surround and serve to define the terms of the central relationship.

Canes, clubs, pliers, revolvers, or any of a host of sundry other weapons are common in Barthelme's stories. Barthelme's favourite among them, though, is the sword. Part of the appeal of the sword no doubt lies in the fact that it is an antique; that is, the sword is an "historical" artifact: the sword is part of the paraphernalia of the history and military motifs that figure so prominently in Barthelme. In "The Dolt" (UPUA), for

instance, Edgar, the author who writes historical romance, uses his knowledge of four archaic names for the sword in a vain attempt to demonstrate that he still has some control over his wife and over his art.

The psychoanalytic phallic implications of the sword are obvious and need not be elaborated here at any great length. Let it suffice to say that in Barthelme's stories, which typically feature male characters lacking phallic strength, control of the sword or club or revolver is inevitably an issue.

So common is the occurrence of swords in Barthelme that it gives rise to a distinct category within the Sword motif, what might be called the D'Artagnan leitmotif. Stories in which literary swordsmen appear are common. Literary swordsmen are figures out of romantic literature, figures like musketeers, pirates, outlaws like Zorro--the dashing or romantic stereotype. These figures have a special fascination for Barthelme, a fascination underlined by the fact that they tend to turn up in the most unlikely places. One thinks, for instance, of the black hat and cape and the sword left behind by the drowning K. that anachronistically appear on the shore in the last episode of "Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning"(UPUA). In "The Abduction from the Seraglio"(GD) the following index of how stupid a woman can be is offered: "She's not so dumb as a lady I once knew who thought that the Mark of Zorro was an N..." (93). In "Perpetua"(S), Perpetua leaves her husband for her new life wearing, of all things, a "D'Artagnan cape" (40). In "Nothing: A Preliminary Account"(GP) the absence of the three musketeers is suddenly lamented: "I am sorry to say that it is not Athos, Porthos, or Aramis, or anything that ever happened to them or anything that may yet ever happen to them if, for example, an Exxon

tank truck runs over a gila monster which is then reincarnated as Dumas pere" (163). The most developed use of the D'Artagnan leitmotif occurs in "Daumier"(S), a story in which Dumas and D'Artagnan himself play featured roles. What this figure represents in Barthelme's universe of discourse is a hero, an ego ideal that contains literary, Historical (in the sense described in the discussion of the History motif), romantic, and phallic significances.

The allusion in "Perpetua" to Perpetua's assumption of the D'Artagnan cape leads us to a consideration of another motif in Barthelme which should be considered in the context of the Sword motif. This motif represents a reversal of the Sword motif and involves the assumption by women of the paraphenalia one would most tend to associate with men, that is, the instruments or paraphenalia of war. In several stories, women appear who have assumed the role of the phallic male and thus represent, as does the Indian Sylvia to the narrator in "Uprising," threatening phallic women. We saw this assumption of the phallic threat manifested in the synoptic tales in Miss Mandible's name, Florence Green's canes and Martha's bullfighter pants in "Broadcast." Two of the more colourful examples of this phenomenon in Barthelme in general are the Pin Lady, the archenemy of the Balloon Man in "The Great Hug"(A), and the malevolent little girl who stabs the thigh of the old man in "This Newspaper Here"(UPUA).

Captain Blood in "Captain Blood"(OTMDC), who is part of the D'Artagnan leitmotif discussed above (a literary, historical, romantic, sword-carrying hero), confronts the phallic woman as part of his routine. The swashbuckling outlaw pirate Blood (who became a pirate "after some

monstrously unjust thing was done to him" [62]) describes what he calls the "wonderful moment" of pirating as follows. What Blood describes is a highly suggestive moment in the context of our discussion of phallic women:

Preparing to board. Pistol in one hand, naked cutless in the other. Dropping lightly to the deck of the engrappled vessel, backed by one's grinning, leering, disorderly, rapacious crew who are nevertheless under the strictest buccaneer discipline. There to confront the little band of fear-crazed victims shrinking from the entirely possible carnage. Among them, several beautiful women, but one really spectacularly beautiful woman who stands a bit apart from her sisters, clutching a machete with which she intends, against all reason, to--(62)

Captain Blood, the disciplined head of a libidinous crew, closes in on what is clearly, for him, the very object of pirating itself only to find that the beautiful woman he seeks, "against all reason," has armed herself with a menacing sword (and a particularly thick sword, at that). Barthelme's description of the incident aborts at this point, lapses into silence. The rape and murder attached to the role of pirate may be "entirely possible" and may, indeed, be the point of being a pirate in the first place, but faced with the beautiful machete-weilding woman, Blood is unable to proceed. By weilding the machete the woman has managed--against all reason--to essentially abort this fantasy of murder and rape. We aren't told what happens to the woman (early in the story Blood considers throwing women into the sea to slow down his enemies but decides against it) but what we do know is more important: the hapless but altogether typical Barthelme protagonist Blood will end up dancing the redundant, "grave and haunting sardana" and wondering why he ended up "with a spider monkey for a wife. And what does his mother think of him?" (65)

Women or girls who appear as soldiers are common in Barthelme because

the military connotes the phallic father (see Authority motif above). Examples of women thus identified and so rendered dangerous to their lovers include the following: Perpetua (whose abandoned, voyeur husband has already been given her Blue Shield and Blue Cross); Sunny Marge, also from "Perpetua", a displacement for Perpetua, who has a tattoo of Marshal Foch on her back; the woman patient at the centre of "Sentence"(CL), "an immensely popular soldier" (115) who dresses up as a tree and eats the enemy's lunch (see Green and Food motifs); the narrator in "Views of My Father Weeping"(CL) who wonders why he isn't "out in the street feeling up eleven-year old girls in their soldier drag, there are thousands, as alike as pennies..." (16); the woman in "Up, Aloft in the Air"(CBDC) who wears a medal from the First World War between her breasts (125); Alexandra, the lesbian in "Henrietta and Alexandra"(GD) who is a member of the Knights of St. Dympha (patroness of the insane); the woman in "Terminus"(OTMDC) who served three years in the army (114). There are other stories in which the association is present but more obscure. For instance, the knight in pink armor who falls from the Glass Mountain in "The Glass Mountain"(CL) may very well be a manifestation of the type, as might Hilda who in "On the Steps of the Conservatory"(GD) is ambiguously described as "a veteran" (135). Women can also assume other typically masculine guises. Examples of this would include the wife wearing the shoulder pads in "The Piano Player"(CBDC), the captured woman who plays with the football in "The Captured Woman"(A), Phillipas in a Royal Canadian Mounted Police Hat in "Departures"(S), and the Dyrad carrying the axe and standing at the head of an army of dryads, also in "Departures."

What the phallic woman represents is the maternal marked by the

castrating power of the father; a woman who appears wielding a sword or wearing part of a soldier's uniform is a figure at once beautiful but deadly, a figure of monstrous appeal and threat. Because one cannot take her except at great risk (and, as Captain Blood so aptly puts it, against all reason), her presence virtually obliges the regressive type who acts as Barthelme's prototypical protagonist to opt for castration (to back down and away), to opt instead for the fantasy of pre-oedipal, oceanic involvement with the mother.

As might be expected, given the distribution of symbols as it occurs in the girl-as-soldier motif, men or fathers who behave like women appear with some frequency. Examples of men or fathers acting roles associated with women include the narrator of the Captured Woman in "The Captured Woman"(A) who ends up doing dishes, the father in "Views of My Father Weeping"(CL) who plays with dolls and wears a straw hat with flowers in it, or the father in "See The Moon"(UPUA) who was a seamstress and a cheerleader. One of the best examples of this tendency to confuse gender roles as represented by costume confusion occurs in "The Agreement"(A). The narrator here is haunted by repeated visitations of figures who appear at his door wearing a red dress and who spit blood on their dress. The first figure is an old woman. The second is his lover's lover, but the narrator isn't sure whether it is a man or a woman. Finally, the narrator imagines himself spitting red blood on his blue shirt.

Windows. The incidence of windows that appear in Barthelme's stories is one of those minor details that might escape notice were it not for the fact that they occur with such remarkable regularity. It is not difficult to

account for the preoccupation with windows in the world Barthelme's fictions describe if we keep in mind that windows provide the viewer with a framed view of the world. A man looking through a window, to use the container/contained imagery from "What To Do Next"(A), contains the world, limiting and controlling it in a proscribed, subjectively determined view. A window offers a safe vantage from which the private man may look at the world without having to risk contact with the world. The voyeuristic element of the state of mind Barthelme's fiction describes would obviously relate to the world in terms of windows: windows allow a form of contact but maintain distance, thus perpetuating the "libidinous energy nondischarge" alluded to in "The Sandman" (§ 92).

Windows would be suggestive in Barthelme because, not only does a window serve to contain the world and keep it at a distance, a window also contains the viewer. The windowed enclosure, such as the glass booth to which Bloomsbury has retreated in "Broadcast," is therefore common in Barthelme.

Combinations. Almost as important as the interpretative principle which recognizes that Barthelme's individual fictions are held together by motifs common to all of his fictions is the recognition that these motifs most often occur in combinations. What to the casual reader might seem a colourful or merely unlikely image often represents a highly meaningful image or symbol invested with several layers of significance. The unlikely giant dog and the small dog which subsequently appears with the father in "Views of My Father Weeping," for instance, are features that can be shown to be signifying as part of a fixed pattern of motifs that runs right

through Barthelme; these dogs are compounded out of a limited reservoir of meaningful motifs.

It is partially through the combination of these motifs that Barthelme creates the many-layered symbol the climber sought in "The Glass Mountain." An understanding of the dynamics of these many-layered symbols (which are really motifs in combination) is critical to an appreciation of Barthelme's art.

At the end of "Me and Miss Mandible" Joseph is delivered into the care of doctors who no doubt will attempt to determine whether this delinquent adult can be recovered and returned to his community. There is nothing in the story, however, to suggest that there is anything that can be done for Joseph. Thus, as the journal ends, Joseph's situation has effectively come full circle: it is apparent that his time in the classroom of his past has not succeed in reworking him to any significant degree. Not only has his situation not been resolved, his character not reworked, we leave him if anything more deeply entrenched in a situation that seems to admit of no solution. Joseph's basic problem is that he is caught in what comes down to a conflict between two life roles: the absurd life role laid out for him by the authorities, and the private role dictated to a large extent by wishes and desires he denies that he feels. Rejecting the world offered him by the authorities--a system utterly compromised by failed signs and meaningless processes--Joseph opts almost by default for desire and what amounts to the treadmill of obsession. Having made such a choice (though Joseph as author of this journal is a skilled adjustor--another "forger of manifests"--and is determined to suppress any indication that he has made any choices at all), Joseph commits himself to a course that can only end in the repetition of some version of events which took place in the classroom of his past.

Part of what urges Joseph in the direction of obsession is a fundamental lack of confidence in any system or meanings outside of self.

The discovery that some signs of what conventionally obtains in the world are lies is a discovery from which Joseph cannot recover. Lacking the "faith" to participate in such failed systems, and lacking a viable alternative to that system, Joseph is drawn down a path whose direction has been predetermined for him by his own history. And so he ends the story like Napoleon in the history lesson that fascinates him, frozen forever in the middle of a doomed campaign.

In our analysis of the synoptic tales we saw how the basic pattern of "Mandible" (the first story Barthelme published) was repeated in those stories with no significant changes to the pattern. The narrators in all three subsequent stories, having followed roughly parallel routes out of a corrupt world of exhausted meanings, are drawn deeply into the inverted, entirely personal and ultimately moribund world of the solipsist, a world that admits of no avenues of escape. The image of Baskerville turning idiot circles while singing Verdi's Requiem is probably the most vivid and telling of the conclusions of the synoptic tales, but all four stories end in the same place, and in terms of latent content, for the same reasons.

This study has suggested that the analogy of "Mandible" and the synoptic tales can be enlarged to include the body of Barthelme's work; that is, Barthelme's stories describe a series of unsuccessful attempts to resolve the same latent conflict depicted in "Mandible." We also noted that a reading of the synoptic tales reveals that the self at the centre of "Mandible" trying to find a way out of its isolation and its melancholy, and to some sense of validity, is for all intents and purposes the same self at the centre of the struggle in the subsequent three stories. A careful and comparative reading of the fundamental motifs that occur in the next one

hundred and thirty odd stories shows that the self at the centre of the conflict in the corpus of Barthelme's fictions remains the same; despite the fact that the manifest terms of the conflict change with every story, the same particular psychoanalytic or unconscious issues remain at stake throughout.

Why is the question of the consistency of the character of the founding subject central in the interpretation of Barthelme's prose? As we noted at the outset of this study, the issue of intentionality and authorial design is at the centre of criticism of all postmodern art, Barthelme's included. It is generally asserted that Barthelme is a representative voice--if not a leading voice--among postmodern writers, writers who are credited with restructuring fiction and the fictional experience in a radical way by rendering the question of intentionality--and the corollary issue of meaning--all but irrelevant; criticism credits Barthelme, if not with the creation, then certainly the considerable sophistication of a form of utterance that in didactic fashion devalues prose as a source of meaning. So apparently successful is Barthelme at this devaluation of any "philosophical, historical, or metaphysical given" (Molesworth 83) that some critics go so far as to rest Barthelme's importance as a writer on the fact that he has managed to create a form of prose that doesn't validate anything.

I would argue, however, that while Barthelme may not be prepared to invest confidence in anything which transcends the self, he does believe in the self. As manifested in his prose, Barthelme's view of the self, especially in relation to its case history, is incompatible with postmodernism's notion of the ideal utterance which would serve to delimit

the self of the author. This study's analysis of Barthelme's prose may not undermine the plausibility of such an ideal utterance per se, but it does show that Barthelme is not postmodern in the sense that we have defined that set of aesthetic principles (if anything, Barthelme is a Romantic writer in the tradition of Poe [Stengel 283, Graff 1982]). The question of the claims made on Barthelme by postmodernism aside, the demonstrated presence of a consistent founding subject behind the prose (as opposed to the ghost-like virtuoso successfully mocking the reader's search for authorial design) begs a profound reassessment of the meaning of Barthelme's discourse.

Certainly it does no particular credit to Barthelme's considerable range as a stylist to reduce his work to a series of disguised versions of what amounts to essentially the same story, but this study did not set out to consider the impressive number of ways Barthelme has found to keep on talking. What this study has intended to show, rather, is that the standard reading of Barthelme which presents him as a seminal postmodern anarchist, and his stories as the polyphonic utterance of the self in a dynamic state of flux, completely misreads what Barthelme is saying in his stories, individually and in toto, about the self, and the self in relation to the world it inhabits and the art it creates. What Barthelme's fictions in fact represent are dramatizations of a contest between a self as it knows itself in the flawed and disposable terms insisted upon by the world (the Other), and that same self as it longs to experience and know itself free from the constrictive patterns imposed by memory and desire. Probably the purest expression of this alternative mode of the self is found in "Robert Kennedy Saved From Drowning" (UPUA). The story posits Poulet's Marivaudian being as the best approximation of a being that has somehow managed to slip the bonds

of time:

The Marivaudian being is...a pastless futureless man, born anew at every instant. The instants are points which organize themselves into a line, but what is important is the instant, not the line. The Marivaudian being has in a sense no history. Nothing follows from what has gone before. He is constantly surprised. He cannot predict his own reaction to events. He is constantly being overtaken by events. A condition of breathlessness and dazzlement surrounds him. (52)

The Marivaudian being is the most radical alternative open to a subjectivity isolated inside what Sartre calls in Being and Nothingness an "already meaningful world": "I, by whom all meanings come to things, I find myself engaged in an already meaningful world which reflects to me meanings I have not put into it" (510). According to Sartre, the "I" confronting an already meaningful world (replete with meanings that he sees as false) finds that he cannot exist as a factuum, but only "in situation" (521). The tension between an already constituted and "valued" world, and a self trying to constitute itself out of the contaminated materials available to it (language and the moral values upon which language depends) lies at the heart of Barthelme's fiction; what Barthelme's fictions amount to is a series of linguistic "situations" in which the "I" of the founding subject in Barthelme attempts and fails to realize a sense of Marivaudian breathlessness.

The story "What To Do Next"(A) frames this existential predicament in terms of containment: one either contains, or is contained. According to this story, an individual is faced with the choice of either giving in to the culture that surrounds him and thereby losing his self, or by ignoring that culture, cutting the self off from any hope of definition: "The culture that we share, such as it is, makes us all either machines for assimilating and judging that culture, or uncritical sops who simply sop

it up, become it" (85) (the "you" this piece is addressed to is, like all of Barthelme's protagonists, "a rather poor specimen" with "leaning personality" lamentably lacking in "definition" [84]). According to the ironic "instructions" this story provides, the only way for the self to remain intact and to retain control is by cultivating solipsism: if you hope to survive, you have no choice but to become, like many famous teachers who teach "a course in themselves," a deliberate and determined solipsist, to become, in effect, an "anthology of yourself" (86). What is crucial in the procedure as it described in "What To Do Next" is that the source of the material entered in that anthology is that which is generated out of irruptions of private concern which define you in contradistinction to your "culture": "Because you stick out from the matrix of this culture like a banged thumb, swelling and reddening and otherwise irrupting all over its smooth, eventless surface, our effort must be to contain you, as would, for example, a lead glove" (86). Faced with a culture which works to subvert individuality, Barthelme's characters consistently opt for concentration on the irruptive self as "What To Do Next" defines it. Identity thus depends in a critical sense on the irruptive events which took place in the past. As we observed especially in the synoptic tales, the procedure basically involves withdrawal from the world at large and into the world of the self, a withdrawal exacerbated by the celebration of private rituals modelled on episodes from the irruptive past. The procedure results in survival of the self, but unfortunately the procedure doesn't solve the problem by recreating a valid or authentic self. Celebrating private rituals--rituals whose content is predetermined by case-history--Barthelme's characters avoid the psychic death of being "contained" by their "eventless" culture, but

they also risk the equally certain psychic death that attends the role of the solipsistic "container" of all that he sees (86). The end result for the Barthelme protagonist who refuses to be contained, and yet longs for release from the death-in-life of solipsistic containment which forces him back upon his own case history as a context for the self, is that he inhabits a kind of psychic limbo. The idea of "the pastless futureless man" fails to penetrate "the cocoon of habituation" (§ 179) that insulates the self and keeps it from any hope of what "The Balloon" calls mislocation, a sufficient margin of new situation in which to recreate aspects of the self.

Patently unable to participate in an absurd universe of already constituted but failed meanings, and apparently unable to rework the self so as to allow it to participate in anything approaching the dazzling Marivaudian present, Barthelme's characters find themselves drawn to the only selves ever known in health and validity, the self of childhood. What each story amounts to, therefore, is a complex procedure to distract a case-historical self that cannot be escaped. We know that this self cannot be escaped because, as this study has endeavoured to demonstrate, this "self" stubbornly reappears in story after story. This failure to resolve the problem of the self amounts to the closing of the circle of obsession. Living inside the circle the self is saved, but at great cost: "Your life is saved," conclude the instructions in "What To Do Next." "Congratulations. I'm sorry" (86).

In "See The Moon?"(CL) the artist-narrator seeks to justify his private preoccupations as no more than the arbitrary result of a search for something distinctive upon which to base his sense of himself: "I set out to study cardinals, about whom science knows nothing. It seemed to me that

cardinals could be known in the same way we know fishes or roses, by classification and enumeration. A perverse project, perhaps, but who else has embraced this point of view? Difficult nowadays to find a point of view kinky enough to call one's own, with Sade himself being carried through the streets on the shoulders of sociologists, cheers and shouting, ticker tape unwinding from the windows..." (169). The narrator of "See The Moon?" adopts a practice that the many artists in Barthelme appear to practice; that is, the pursuit of the arbitrarily perverse or kinky as a means of registering against what "What To Do Next" characterizes as the smooth, eventless surface of their culture. As was noted in the introduction to this study, the cultivation of arbitrary or gratuitous perversities is a practice often imputed to Barthelme. The imputation is understandable in light of the fact that, like his narrator in "See The Moon?," Barthelme is inclined to suggest that the objects that appear in his stories are arbitrarily chosen: they make no claim to embody permanent meaning, nor do they claim to leave any residue. According to the logic of "See The Moon?" and other fictions, cardinals or giant balloons or cities designed like Mona Lisa puzzles are not chosen because they contain meaning in their own right. Such objects are chosen, rather, not on the basis of content but on the basis of principle, because they represent "events" that can be seen against the eventless norm. The narrator in "The Indian Uprising" who looks at his barricade and declares that he knows nothing thus performs a typical gesture in Barthelme.

Notwithstanding these manifest assertions as to the lack of meaning attached to the objects in Barthelme, a more careful and comparative reading of Barthelme reveals that objects and "perversions" are not chosen

arbitrarily. In fact, quite the opposite is true. In "The Balloon" and "Bought," as we have seen, despite the fact that attention is carefully diverted from the private character of the balloon and puzzle respectively, the balloon and puzzle are profoundly meaningful on a personal level. As this study of the fundamental motifs in Barthelme shows, the objects that find their way into Barthelme's compressed and highly determined universe are selected and arranged into various configurations because they mean something to the subjectivity behind the fiction.

A number of critics have commented that Barthelme's work, in terms of innovation or growth, reached something of a plateau in the mid-70's. Larry McCaffery suggests that Barthelme's work since Come Back, Dr. Caligari has evolved in only "relatively unimportant ways," and that his work "seems to be suffering from too much...sameness" (1982, 100). Wayne Stengel, looking through Barthelme's latest collection of stories, Overnight To Many Distant Cities, notes the same of lack of "growth" in Barthelme: "Yet I detect that this volume, and perhaps the last two or three, have elicited fewer shocks of recognition and squeals of delight from reviewers, critics, and even the writer's most ardent fans than did his earliest fiction. Perhaps Barthelme achieved his greatest career growth and development during...the late sixties and early seventies..."(212). Like McCaffery, Molesworth sees little substantive development in Barthelme after the startling innovations of Come Back, Dr. Caligari: "Some of the stories in his first collection, especially 'Me and Miss Mandible' and 'Florence Green is 81,' are as skillful as any of the others he published in the subsequent twenty years. Barthelme's skill has never been doubted, and it developed very early, as is

sometimes the case with certain forms of mimicry. So the question of growth becomes cloudy in his case, and his techniques of collage and parody have rather expanded in their application than deepened in their profundity" (80). Without question, a reading of Barthelme's latest fictions published in The New Yorker, and those included in his latest collections, does show a certain lack of innovation and vitality. Indeed, several of the best stories in Overnight To Many Distant Cities were originally written or published a decade before. How do we account for this levelling off of the growth of Barthelme as a writer? Molesworth's suggestion that the worth of "Mandible" has not been surpassed to any significant degree by subsequent fictions is true certainly in terms of the scope of technical virtuosity demonstrated in that first story, but his comment is also true vis a vis this thesis; that is, the redundancy noted in Barthelme's work is at least partially attributable to the fact that, from the outset, the subject at the centre of Barthelme has been the chronic identity problems of a very particular self. The very first story Barthelme published describes the closing of a circle of obsession around an identity which lacks the means to escape the definition of its self. What is apparent from a reading of the corpus of Barthelme's work to this point is that he shares with his characters an inability to escape this self. Throughout the subsequent twenty years of writing neither the conditions informing the crisis confronting that self nor the state of mind of the self at the centre of the conflict have changed as is indicated by the fact that the fundamental motifs introduced in those early stories run through his work to his most recent fictions virtually unchanged.

Perhaps more than any of his places of the self, the Paraguay of "Paraguay" (CL) could serve as a metaphor for the state of mind Barthelme has charted in so many fictions. Like the movie theatre in "Hiding Man" or the Galveston of "I Bought a Little City" or the city under seige in "The Indian Uprising" or the Mexico of "Cortes and Montezuma" or any of scores such places mapped in his stories, Paraguay is one of Barthelme's places of the self, environments uniquely determined in all respects by the politics of one man's experience. I want to close this study with a look at this story from City Life.

What the story characterizes as "an ongoing low-grade mystery" (39) is really a search on the part of the story's familiar narrative voice for a way out of the self as it is determined and limited by memory and desire. As in Barthelme as a whole in which one senses the presence of a speaking voice concealing itself behind a new vocabulary or behind a new set of objects it will soon discard, in Paraguay shed skins accumulate and become a problem. Adding to the impression that Paraguay is populated by really only one character is the fact that everyone in Paraguay has the same fingerprints. But perhaps most telling of all in light of Barthelme's demonstrated inability to develop his art much beyond his earliest work in terms of both form and content is the fact that Paraguay's borders are closed, and "Everything physical in Paraguay is getting smaller and smaller" (38). Finally, and in a manner so characteristic of Barthelme, the last sentence of "Paraguay" serves as much as an overture to the next story as it does as a conclusion to the story before us. The closing sentence tells us in effect that the next story will chart essentially the same ontological terrain "Paraguay" has just taken us through: "We began the descent (into?

out of?) Paraguay" (40).

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

1 O'Hara, J. D. Interview in *The Paris Review*, June 1978, pp. 201-202.

2 For a full listing of stories see Appendix A.

3 In terms of its structure, particularly the way it develops meaning through patterns of association, Barthelme's prose has much in common with dream. This thesis will argue that critical patterns in Barthelme's prose are determined by unconscious wishes which result in prose whose surface elements are like those of dream; that is, they are discursive, illogical, even hallucinatory: "Dreams are disconnected, they accept the most violent contradictions without the least objection, they admit impossibilities, they disregard knowledge which carries great weight with us in daytime, they reveal us as ethical and moral imbeciles" (Freud Dreams, 119-20). Barthelme's condensed prose ("condensed" in both the lay and the psychoanalytic sense) also has in common with dream the capability to suggest meaning on several levels at once (see discussion of "The Phantom of the Opera" in Chapter Three). The reader, therefore, is virtually required to read these stories on several levels.

Freud's analysis of what he called the "Dream of July 23rd-24th, 1895" (sometimes referred to by subsequent commentators as the "Irma Dream") is one of the first and one of the most developed of the dreams Freud analyzed in The Interpretation of Dreams. As an example of the method Freud developed, the analysis of this dream--both in terms of its form and the approach Freud took to its interpretation--serves as useful background for the approach this thesis will take in examining Barthelme's short stories. In the analysis of this dream Freud demonstrates how effectively unconscious wishes are at once expressed and concealed by dream. In particular, Freud shows how the processes of condensation and displacement especially serve to distort the dream-thought into dream-content acceptable to the conscious mind. Freud's method is to examine by means of association every detail the dream (in the case of the Irma dream, it is his own dream). Using associations suggested by the dreamer, he discovered that apparently inexplicable or nonsensical features of the dream-content could, in fact, be traced to concealed dream-thought. Freud called the dream-content as recalled by the dreamer manifest content, and the dream-thought as revealed by analysis he called latent content. The translations of the latent to manifest content, because it involves the expression of unconscious wishes intolerable to the conscious mind, results in considerable distortion.

According to Freud, "Dream-displacement and dream-condensation are the two governing factors to whose activity we may in essence ascribe the form assumed by dreams [Freud's italics]" (417). Because of their importance in dream analysis, and this analysis of Barthelme's prose, it might be useful at the outset to briefly define what Freud meant by condensation and displacement.

Condensation is "The construction of collective and composite figures" (400) which admit of multiple determinations. In a dream of his uncle, for instance, the figure of Dr. R is offered by Freud as an example of a condensation. The creation of this Dr. R who contains elements of two discrete figures, Freud likens to a process by which "two images [are projected] on to a single plate, so that certain features of common to both are emphasized, while

those which fail to fit in with one another cancel each other out and are indistinct in the picture" (400). Freud also notes that condensation is seen at its clearest in dreams in the handling of names (403), a point of especial relevance in our analysis of Barthelme who invents names for his characters which appear to have considerable psychoanalytic significance (e.g. Burligame, Bloomsbury, Miss Mandible).

The second of the defense mechanisms of dream we'll consider, called displacement, is basically "a transference...or psychical intensities" (417) from one image in a dream to another. It is the process by which in dream one image can symbolize another.

It might bear mentioning at this juncture that in Erikson's subsequent analysis of the Irma dream, and his analysis of Freud's analysis, Erikson notes a considerable number of displacements in the dream either unnoticed or unacknowledged by Freud in his original analysis of his own dream (197-204). A comparison of Erikson's analysis of the Irma dream with Freud's original is useful for a number of reasons. First, it ironically demonstrates the consistency of Freud's method inasmuch as Erikson's reading of the dream is not so much a refutation of Freud's analysis as a deepening of that original reading; what Erikson uncovers is not so much contradictory evidence, but further evidence of what Freud himself asserted in The Interpretation of Dreams--that dreams are enormously dense and layered:

As a rule one underestimates the amount of compression that has taken place, since one is inclined to regard the dream-thoughts that have been brought to light as the complete material, whereas if the work of interpretation is carried further it may reveal still more thoughts concealed behind the dream. I have already had occasion to point out that it is in fact never possible to be sure that a dream has been completely interpreted. Even if the solution seems satisfactory and without gaps, the possibility always remains that the dream may have yet another meaning. Strictly speaking, then, it is impossible to determine the amount of condensation. (383)

It should be noted that the construction we place on the term "author-principle" is not consistent with Foucault's for whom the term has no descriptive significance.

CHAPTER TWO

¹ Metafiction is probably the most appealing alternative to the term postmodern. Among the critics currently using the term metafiction for the new fiction are Robert Alter in Partial Magic, Patricia Waugh in Metafiction, and Inger Christensen in The Meaning of Metafiction. As John Gardner says of the experimental fiction written after modernism, it is chiefly distinguished by its preoccupation with the processes of its own manufacture; the most appropriate term is therefore "metafiction" because "both in style and theme" the fiction "investigates fiction" (81). Raymond Federman argues for the term "surfiction" in a collection of essays entitled Surfiction but his reasons for using the term are essentially the same as those who argue for the term metafiction. Michael Boyd calls this type of fiction "reflexive" but again, he defines the literature in terms similar to those who choose to call it metafiction.

Certainly the term metafiction points to a crucial aspect of the prose--its unusual degree of auto-referentiality (of course no one familiar

with the history of the novel would argue that current metafiction is unique in principle or even in matters of practice)--but this emphasis on the narcissism of the fiction tends to obscure what I would take to be a far more interesting matter of content, that is, experience. Inger Christensen in her book on metafiction says that "metafiction is regarded as fiction whose primary concern is to express the novelist's vision of experience by exploring the process of its own making" (11). It is what Christensen alludes to as the writer's "message" that inclines me away from the use of the proscriptive term metafiction: postmodern may be somewhat vague as a term of general reference but at least it allows for greater emphasis on the possibility that a message is embodied in the prose, a message which transcends to some degree the metafictional, and sometimes the overly self-conscious tendencies of the prose.

² The term postmodern is not entirely workable as a chronological distinction. If it were, the work of any writer published after, say, 1930 would have to be considered potentially post-modern and books like Tristram Shandy and Don Quixote (to name only two of the more celebrated examples of early novels whose preoccupations are surprisingly modern) would have to be excluded. The fiction generally regarded as being postmodern was, however, published for the most part during and after the 1960's.

³ This sense that any system is likely to prove inimical or malign once it ossifies into a pattern of perceived causalities has its origins in the modernist sensibility. One need only consider the work of Proust and the work of Kafka. Both of these writers explored the problem of the individual consciousness, the problem of identity, the struggle between form and formlessness, between memory and intuition. In Kafka we encounter again and again visions which portray man as a shadowy, uprooted creature cruelly subordinated to anonymous and arbitrary authority. Kafka, more than any modernist writer, explored the dark side of the failure of Absolutes. He illustrated how devastating can be the disintegration of the self and the loss of a sense of what is real that accompanies the process of questioning one's existence.

Proust was fascinated by a different kind of dislocation of self. As Beckett says of Proust in his study of the author, for Proust (and the same could easily be said of the emerging modernist sensibility in general) reality came to be viewed as no more than a "retrospective hypothesis" (Beckett 1970, 11). Proust's fiction demonstrates what Leo Bersani calls the "chimerical formula" behind much of modernism: "Desire is no longer responsible to memory" (1976, 251). As a result, modernist confidence in consciousness and the art that embodies that consciousness gives way to postmodern skepticism about the meaningfulness of either consciousness or art. Postmodern fiction does not work merely to draw the reader into a frame of reference but rather works through various metafictional strategies to push the reader back on himself.

⁴ Postmodern fiction is therefore populated by characters, like those in Beckett's fictions, who have manufactured their own systems of meaning-through-consciousness as a check against chaos only to find themselves lost within, and victims of, the very systems they erected to protect them. As McCaffery says of postmodern characters in general, we observe them "continually seeking answers and assurances, creating their own systems, and then becoming imprisoned within them, finally claiming that they can't go on in such a world and then going on anyway" (1982, 14).

⁵ "Robbe-Grillet's writing has no alibi, no density and no depth: it remains on the surface of the object and inspects it impartially, without favouring any particular quality: it is the exact opposite of poetic writing. Here the word does not explode, nor explore; its function is not to confront the object in order to pluck out the heart of its substance an ambiguous, summarizing name: language here is not the rape of an abyss, but the rapture of a surface; it is meant to 'paint' the object, in other words to caress it, to deposit little by little in the circuit of its space an entire chain of gradual names, none of which will exhaust it...The object is no longer a center of correspondences, a welter of sensations and symbols: it is merely an optical resistance."
(Barthes "Objective Literature," 1985, 14)

⁶ Modernism began (or, if one takes the modernistic tendencies of the eighteenth century novelist into account, accelerated) in the nineteenth century with a general rejection on several fronts (philosophical, scientific, psychological, religious, sociological) of received authority. What this meant for the novel, at least the novel as it was developing under Flaubert and Balzac, was a shift away from a focus on subject and a concomitant interest in pure style. Flaubert's famous letter to Louise Colet in 1852 anticipates what will become, if not a modernist, then certainly a postmodernist rejection of the notion of subject or idea in fiction:

What I consider fine, what I should like to do, is a book about nothing, a book without external attachments of any sort, which would hold of itself, through the inner strength of its style, as the earth sustains itself with no support in air, a book with almost no subject. Or at least an almost invisible subject, if possible. (quoted by Michelson, 51-52)

Flaubert's interest in a book about nothing has its origins in a rejection of illusionism (an hostility to illusion which has its origins in seventeenth-century philosophy) and a developing aesthetic interest in what Michelson calls "the constitution of a more purely pictorial, sculptural, or literary fact" (51). Flaubert's interest in the purification of the medium and a return to pure style (an absolute kind of fiction Flaubert never wrote) is the theoretical progenitor of what Jonathan Culler and others have posited as a writing machine: "The [writing] machine produces a structure [without human intentionality] but significance is the product of the reader" (260). As imagined by Culler and postmodern writers in general, literature thus stripped of human intentionality becomes its own definition. Its meaning is "everything it contains or implies. Meaning is produced by the total context to which a statement belongs and which it evokes" (Wetherill 87).

CHAPTER THREE

¹ Daniel A. Dervin's article in American Imago 33 (102-22, 1976), "Breast Fantasy in Barthelme, Swift, and Philip Roth: Creativity and Psychoanalytic Structure," examines in some detail what most readers would take to be the obvious significance of the balloon as breast in "The Balloon." As far as his analysis touches on our analysis of the story, one point he makes is especially worth noting. Dervin points out that Barthelme's description of the balloon--its shape, its fantastic size, and particularly its muted brown and grey colouring--is utterly consistent with the most archaic memory of the breast, as

recalled in dream (note that the balloon does appear at night while "people were sleeping"): "The frequently overwhelming, thick, gigantic, visual component may be in its most primitive aspect an endless wall, which one may be both inside and against, while later memory traces add form. i.e., curvature, and collects details..." (109).

- 2 Fire is an important and recurring symbol in Barthelme. Not surprisingly, Freud's reading of fire, especially in "The Acquisition and Control of Fire" (SE, XXII 187-193), suggests that fire represents "the passion of love...a symbol of the libido" (190).

CHAPTER FOUR

- 1 A version of this smell is mentioned in "Mandible" in Joseph's list of "wife signs" which would further lead one to suspect that flowers in this story stand for the all but absent feminine component.

- 2 There is an unusual degree of similarity between the names of three of these four early Barthelme protagonists. In particular, the names begin with the letter "B" and are between nine and eleven letters in length:

BARTHELME
BURLIGAME
BLOOMSBURY
BASKERVILLE.

- 3 "The change of emphasis from the what to the how seems to me to be the major impulse in art since Flaubert, and it's not merely formalism, it's not at all superficial, it's an attempt to reach truth, and a very vigorous one" (O'Hara 278).

- 4 O'Hara, p. 182.

- 5 The term "narcissism," which is often used in this thesis, requires some explanation. Narcissism, or self-love, is a term first used and explained by Freud in his 1914 paper, "On Narcissism: an Introduction." The term has since fallen into general use, a use which all too often grossly distorts its original clinical meaning. Narcissism as Freud defined it is a consequence of object loss, the removal of the nurturing figure in whom the person had invested. Faced with such a loss, the person substitutes self-regard as a means of sustaining ego-strength. In healthy development, attachment to the inner object choice is eventually given up once a satisfactory relationship with another has formed. If no such relationship is possible, one is drawn into involuntary self-preoccupation in an attempt to balance (or, as is the case with attachment to secondary objects, recover) the lost object. The radical swings between feelings of grandiosity and self-loathing are typical of the narcissist. Boundless suppressed rage and unsatisfied oral cravings also figure in the profile of the narcissist.

Christopher Lasch in The Culture of Narcissism, a study of the cultural effects of what is termed "secondary narcissism," offers (after Freud) the following profile of the narcissist, a profile which is highly suggestive in light of the character of the "founding subject" this study infers to be behind Barthelme's prose:

These patients...tend to cultivate a protective shallowness in emotional relations. They lack the capacity to mourn, because the intensity of their

rage against object lost love objects, particularly their parents, prevents their living happy experiences or treasuring them in memory. Sexually promiscuous rather than repressed, they nevertheless find it difficult to 'elaborate the sexual impulse' or to approach sex in the spirit of play. They avoid close attachments, which might release intense feelings of rage. Their personalities consist largely of defenses against this rage and against feelings of oral deprivation that originate in the pre-Oedipal stage of psychic development. (37)

APPENDIX A

COME BACK, DR. CALIGARI

Me and Miss Mandible
 The Hiding Man
 The Big Broadcast of 1938
 The Viennese Opera Ball
 Florence Green is 81
 The Piano Player
 Margins
 For I'm The Boy Whose Only Joy Is Loving You
 To London And Rome
 Marie, Marie, Hold on Tight
 A Shower of Gold
 Will You Tell Me?
 The Joker's Greatest Triumph
 Up, Aloft in the Air

UNSPEAKABLE PRACTICES, UNNATURAL ACTS

The Indian Uprising
 Game
 Can We Talk?
 Edward and Pia
 This Newspaper Here
 See The Moon?
 The Balloon
 Report
 A Few Moments of Sleeping and Waking
 The Dolt
 Robert Kennedy Saved From Drowning
 Alice
 A Picture History of the War
 The President
 The Police Band

CITY LIFE

City Life
 At The Tolstoy Museum
 On Angels
 Paraguay
 Views of My Father Weeping
 The Phantom of the Opera's Friend
 Brain Damage
 Sentence
 The Glass Mountain
 The Falling Dog
 The Policeman's Ball
 The Explanation

Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel
 Bone Bubbles

GUILTY PLEASURES

Down the Line with the Annual
 Letters to the Editore [sic]
 That Cosmopolitan Girl
 Eugenie Grandet
 Snap Snap
 The Angry Young Man
 The Expedition
 Bunny Image, Loss of: The Case of Bitsy S.
 The Young Visitirs [sic]
 L'Lapse
 The Teachings of Don B.
 Swallowing
 The Palace
 The Dragon
 An Hesitation on the Banks of the Delaware
 The Royal Treatment
 Mr. Foolfarm's Journal
 Heliotrope
 And Now Let's Hear It for the Ed Sullivan Show
 Games are the Enemies of Truth, etc.
 A Nation of Wheels
 Two Hours to Curtain
 The Photographs
 Nothing: A Preliminary Account

AMATEURS

Our Work and Why We Do It
 The Wound
 110 West sixty-first Street
 Some of us had been Threatening Our Friend Colby
 What To Do Next
 The Sergeant
 The School
 The Great Hug
 I Bought A Little City
 The Agreement
 The Captured Woman
 And Then
 Porcupines at the University
 The Discovery
 Rebecca
 The Reference
 The New Member
 You Are As Brave as Vincent Van Gogh
 At the End of the Mechanical Age

SADNESS

Critique de la Vie Quotidienne
 Traumerei
 The Genius
 Perpetua
 A City of Churches
 Engineer-Private Paul Klee
 A Film
 The Sandman
 Departures
 Subpoena
 The Flight of Pigeons from the Palace
 The Rise of Capitalism
 The Temptation of St. Anthony
 Daumier

GREAT DAYS

The Crisis
 The Apology
 The New Music
 Cortes and Montezuma
 The King of Jazz
 The Question Party
 Belief
 Tales of the Swedish Army
 The Abduction from the Seraglio
 The Death of Edward Lear
 Concerning the Bodyguard
 The Zombies
 Morning
 On the Steps of the Conservatory
 The Leap
 Great Days

SIXTY STORIES (only previously uncollected stories are listed here)

Aria
 The Emerald
 How I Write My Songs
 The Farewell
 The Emperor
 Thailand
 Heroes
 Bishop
 Grandmother's House

OVERNIGHT TO MANY DISTANT CITIES

(the short italicized fragments between stories are not listed here)

Visitors
Affection
Lightning
Captain Blood
Conversations with Goethe
Henrietta and Alexandra
The Sea of Hesitation
Terminus
The Mothball Fleet
Wrack
The Palace at Four A.M.
Overnight to Many Distant Cities

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