

STRINGS OF LANGUAGE: DONALD BARTHELME AND THE DISCOURSES

OF POSTMODERNISM

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ABSTRACT

Only by analysing fragmentation can one begin to understand Donald Barthelme's work, which often consists of "strings of language". Yet his writing is neither an isolated nor an idiosyncratic phenomenon. On the contrary, it is very much part of postmodernism: one of the chief features of postmodernism is that it values difference and plurality over identity and unity. To describe fragmentation persuasively in Barthelme's fiction, one has to rely on structuralist and poststructuralist discourses, which have become the dominant critical languages of postmodernism. Using these discourses, one can account for the rupturing of communication, the dispersal of traditional forms of identity, the collapse of conventional literary depictions of space, and the importance given to isolated words and objects in Barthelme's stories and novels. So close is the relation between Barthelme's writing and literary theory, that one is tempted to see Barthelme's oeuvre as an allegory of that theory. (Critics such as Walter Benjamin have claimed that allegory as a mode is deeply concerned with fragments.) In this way, fragmentation paradoxically provides a coherent framework for Barthelme and for postmodernism.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

M.D. du Plessis

15th day of April, 1988.

To my parents and

to Rhoda

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Without my supervisor, Mrs Hazel Cohen, this dissertation would never have been completed: her interest, enthusiasm and dedication sustained me during some dark times.

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Erratum

Because of an unrectifiable error in printing out the final copy of the dissertation, endnotes do not appear at the end of each individual chapter. All the notes are given after Chapter Five instead, and they are numbered consecutively from 1 to 574. As a result, some confusion may arise between the first bibliographic entry and subsequent references to the same text. Full bibliographic details of each text cited are repeated for every chapter.

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INTRODUCTION

If a single sentence of Donald Barthelme's could stand as a motto for my reading of his work, it would indisputably be the following: "Strings of language extend in every direction..." ("The Indian Uprising", UPWA 11). Everything I consider to be characteristic of postmodern writing is contained in that scrap of sentence: the primacy and ubiquity given to language (language as far as the eye can see), the delight in the opaque materiality of words (language turned into strings, bunting, verbal ticketstaple), and, above all, the relinquishment of totality in favour of fragmentation (the great master-texts of culture - identity, truth, history - disappear, leaving bright ribbons of discourse to flutter in their wake).

Fragmentation offers a way of reading both Barthelme and postmodernism. For this reason, Strings of Language begins with the most obvious instance of linguistic breakdown in Barthelme's stories, namely the texts that consist either largely or exclusively of dialogue. In these texts, every utterance is an isolated snippet, answering nothing, so that dialogue as a meaningful interaction around a specific topic no longer exists. The second chapter of my work goes on to examine the self that speaks, or the selves that could have produced such fantastic utterances. It is soon apparent that this self is no ordinary identity of either character or author, or character with author, but is another centrifugal network: a divided, decentred subject. The third chapter surveys the calculatedly incoherent construction of milieux, settings and spaces in Barthelme's writing. If dialogue is discontinuous, and identity intermittent, the

world in which these figures move and in which these words are spoken is no less fragmented.

Not only is the relation between word and thing, on which realist fiction relies, broken, but the connection between word and word is transformed as well. As verbal constructs, occupying the physical space of a page, Barthelme's stories are deceptive and disorientating. Lacunae appear where we anticipate continuity, or else dizzying repetitions and structural displacements trap us in a mirror maze of words. The fourth chapter sets the omnipresent fragmentation of Barthelme's writing in the context of postmodernism, both as a mode of writing and as a mode of production, or better still, as a particular economy of textual practice, which turns out commodities, fetishes and texts with such ease that it becomes impossible to distinguish between them. In the fifth and final chapter, Barthelme's work is read as a particularly postmodern instance of the anxiety of influence. Indeed, the influence of Harold Bloom's theory on Barthelme's novel, The Dead Father, seems so pronounced that one begins to wonder whether one cannot view this novel, and perhaps all of Barthelme's writing, as an allegory of theory, or an allegory of theoretical reading.

Moreover, if the discourses of Barthelme's texts seem characteristic of postmodernism, these characteristics are best established when one situates Barthelme in the discourse of poststructuralism, because poststructuralist theories have strongly determined what we consider to be postmodernist. I have, in other words, committed the tautology of reading Barthelme's already dispersed strings of language through a theoretical grid itself composed of heterogeneous terms and quotations drawn from a wide variety of critics and writers. So Chapter One takes much from J. L. Austin's speech act theory and its explicators and opponents,

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particularly from Jacques Derrida, Austin's wildest antagonist. (Tellingly, Derrida's strategy in his response to Austin's follower, John Searle, consists of breaking Searle's argument down into a welter of quotations, so that Derrida's argument quotes the whole of Searle's paper, albeit in fragments. This is literally a crushing strategy.) Chapter Two stages a dialogue between two of the most intriguing theorists of the self which no longer coincides with itself, Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Lacan. In addition, Chapter Two provides an overview of the polemic surrounding the split subject (from Louis Althusser, via Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, to Terry Eagleton, who takes a dim view of celebrations of decentred subjectivity). Chapter Three finds a guide to Barthele's multiverse in Michel Foucault, who is joined by Jurij Lotman and Michel Serres. Jean Baudrillard dominates Chapter Four, shadowed by Andy Warhol, who acts out, or practises, clownishly, what Baudrillard proposes. (Or is it the other way round?) The final chapter of my work draws strongly on Harold Bloom, and also on Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory and the incorporation of that theory into some very persuasive accounts of postmodernism. Other theorists have informed my argument, such as Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Frederic Jameson, Julia Kristeva, Paul de Man, and most of all, Roland Barthes, whose influence permeates almost every page of Strings of Language. Add to this the innumerable anatomists of postmodernism and the host of commentators on Barthele (notably Charles Hoileworth, Maurice Couturier and Regis Durand) and it is clear that criticism here is no decorously self-effacing handmaiden to a Primary Text, but a text in its own right. Where, in the mass of reading and re-reading, does postmodern criticism end and creativity begin? Warhol confidently assures us: "All the critics now are the real artists".¹

Yet, one of the dangers of this method is that what is intended as a theoretical stereography² may become a critical cacophony. Where this has happened, I can only submit the contagious effects of the postmodern will to fragmentation as a defence. Intertwining the strings of language produced by contemporary theory with those of *Barthelme* has proved irresistible.

The frequency with which I have reduced the discourses of some postmodern aphorist, or of *Barthelme*, to quotations in my own writing may seem to be a case of pulverising the already fragmentary; let it suffice to point out the etymology Julia Kristeva discovers for "analysis" in the Greek analysin - "to dissolve".³ Analysis and dissolution share the same root, fragmented even at their origin.

In the sonorously entitled "Epitapho-Critical Prologue" to The Origin of German Tragic Drama, Benjamin distinguishes between mathematics, which validates itself by means of "coercive proof",⁴ doctrine, which asserts itself by means of the authority of axioms,⁵ and what he calls the "treatise".⁶ The treatise lacks the powers of ideology, for, as far as it is concerned, Benjamin writes that "truth-content is only to be grasped through immersion in the most minute details...".⁷ From the tireless accumulation of such details or fragments, a different kind of "truth" can issue: consider the speaker of "See the Moon?" who justifies his obsession with debris by saying "It's my hope that these...souvenirs...will someday merge, blur - cohere is the word, maybe - into something meaningful" (UPVA 156, *Barthelme's* ellipsis). Benjamin goes so far as to find similarities between the treatise and the mosaic, partly because "both are made up of the distinct and the disparate".⁸ For Benjamin "in their supreme, western, form the mosaic and the treatise are products of the Middle Ages; it is their very real affinity which makes comparison pos-

sible".⁹ One should not forget that the major part of The Origin of German Tragic Drama is a description and defense of allegory as a system of fragments.

But postmodernism is less concerned with truth than with pleasure: Barthelme admits that a number of his stories are "pretexts for the pleasure of cutting up and pasting together pictures, a secret vice gone public" (GP n.p.). The sheer enjoyment of matching a fragment of Barthelme's with a snatch of quotation from the storehouse of contemporary theory has made Strings of Language something close to mosaic, which is not an inappropriate way of writing about Barthelme, since he is known primarily as a collageist. It is not an unsuitable method for dealing with postmodernism, either, because postmodernist theory and text so readily collude, and postmodernist criticism is so keen to generate new texts.

My extensive use of quotation has some justification. Quotations are not only pleasurable, they are powerful: as George Steiner remarks of Benjamin's working method that is an "[examination] but also [an embodiment] of the authority of quotation, the many ways in which a quotation energises or subverts the analytic context".¹⁰

An even guiltier pleasure than quotation is name-dropping, and of that I have been unrepentantly guilty. Warhol, arch name-dropper, says the following in an interview: "I like the kind of critics who, when they write, just put the people's names in, and you go through the columns and count how many names they drop". One of his interlocutors pronounces the name "Suzy" at this point, to which Warhol adds "Suzy is the best". The interviewer then asks "The best critic?", and Warhol replies "Yeah, because she's got the most names".¹¹ Name-dropping is another way of rel-

ishing the residual magic of the isolated signifier, just as quotation reveals in the joy of fragmentation.

But, to go back to the sentence from "The Indian Uprising" which was my point of departure, I have not, as yet, quoted the entire sentence, which runs as follows: "Strings of language extend in every direction to bind the world into a rushing, ribald whole" (UPUA 11). What kind of whole can one compose from strings? What kind of movement extends and binds simultaneously, or is at once centrifugal and centripetal? Too easily could one bracket a part of the "whole", to make it "(w)hole", as indeed I bracketed the rest of the sentence at the beginning. More challenging is the way in which Barthelme's work, or the writing of certain theorists, forces us to reconsider parts and wholes. A "rushing, ribald" whole is the static and stultifying unity which criticism at least since [unclear] has tried to force upon us: rather, this "whole" is a new, [unclear] manner of rethinking the fragment. Barthelme's Dead Father speaks of a "tensionally cohered universe" which is at the same time a chaosmos of endlessly mobile atoms: "here today and gone tomorrow finity inward and finity outward and ever-advancing speeding poised lingering or dwelling particles in waveful duality and progressive conceptioning..." (DF 50).

A similar "tensionally cohered universe" of details emerges as one counters a fragment of Barthelme with a fragment of theory: despite the discontinuities, dialogue still goes on; although the self is shattered, all our theories return to it; even a non-space can make a common ground; the closure of the system of political economy is unsettled by making everything, including alienation, into a commodity. The theory of fragments makes sense of Barthelme and of postmodernism, as a whole.

So the relation between theories of the text and textual practice can finally best be understood as allegorical, in the sense that Benjamin uses allegory. For allegory is a way of understanding fragmentation by means of fragments; allegory is precisely that never completed whole amassed from fragments; allegory is both a system of ruins and the ruin of systems. Barthele's gaze, melancholy yet amused, turned on the trash of late capitalist culture, makes him the most comprehensive allegorist of postmodernism.

CHAPTER ONE

BARTHELME'S DIALOGUES AND THE "ORDINARY RULES OF CIVILISED DISCOURSE"

Donald Barthelme's writing is made up of a clash of heterogeneous modes and discourses.¹² This clash could, perhaps, be characterised as a "dialogue" of languages. Such a dialogic tendency is at its most obvious in Barthelme's dialogue pieces: seven texts in Great Days, "Wreck" in Overnight To Many Distant Cities, and "The Emerald", "The Farewell", "Heroes" and "Grandmother's House" in Sixty Stories. These texts consist almost exclusively of dialogue, with indications of context reduced to an absolute minimum, if not eliminated altogether. They present the drive toward an open interchange of languages, which is present in all Barthelme's writing, in its purest form, and they provide a useful point of departure for analysing "strings of language."

What do these dialogues have in common with what a figure in "The Leap" calls "the ordinary rules of civilised discourse" (GD 152)? And what are the rules that determine the transmission of meaning in conversation? Jan Mukařovský defines dialogue by means of the difference between it and monologue. "Unlike monologic discourse, which has a single and continuous contexture, several or at least two contextures interpenetrate and alternate in dialogic discourse."¹³ Monologue consists of a unified, homogeneous discourse, but more than one speaker is involved in dialogue, and

each speaker necessarily introduces her or his idiosyncratic context and utterance into the conversational situation. Dialogue is intersubjective and discontinuous, in Mukařovský's view; it originates in the opposition and interpenetration of discourses. Mukařovský's definition of dialogue also offers a suggestive description of the functioning of Barthele's dialogues.

However, most models of linguistic exchange do not adequately acknowledge the constitutive role of discontinuity in dialogue, and prefer to focus on supposedly unbroken communication. Roman Jakobson isolates the "essential aspects" of communication as the following:

the addresser, the addressee, the message, a context (or what the message refers to), a physical contact (parchment, stone, paper, sound-waves, and of course, the signs used, in their phonetic or graphic form), and a code.¹⁴

Post-Saussurean linguistics has reacted strongly against this unequivocal identification of language with communication. According to Jakobson's description, dialogue is a simple transference of pre-existent meanings and intentions from addresser to addressee. This is a utilitarian view of language, which takes the material aspects of signifiers for granted to such a degree that they become almost invisible: "of course, the signs used." Post-structural theories of language have challenged such notions, and have reversed the hierarchy between agent and implement, arguing that we do not simply use signs, but that signs, in a very real sense, use us.

Mukařovský's formulation of dialogue as multiple "contextures" does not distinguish between speaker, language, message and context. "Contexture" collapses the "context" (which Jakobson associates with the referential

function of language) into the materiality of the utterance (its "texture"). The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines "contexture" as "act, mode of weaving together; structure; fabric; mode of literary composition."¹³ *Barthelme's dialogues* transform the contexture into a mode of literary decomposition, using one contexture to unweave the fabric of another.

However, language remains identified with "use" and with a transparent means of communicating the intentions of a speaker, who is credited with an existence outside the utterance. These notions persist in speech act theory. The differences between Mukařovský and Jakobson open the way for the debate between John Searle and Jacques Derrida, which will be considered in the course of this chapter. Between all these contextures, the utterances of *Barthelme's* texts slip, sometimes criticising, sometimes exemplifying, and quite often dislodging, critical pronouncements.

Critical Contextures: "The Crisis"

"The Crisis" (GD) provides a locus for the collision of critical discourses. One of the discourses at work in the text appears to be political, and concerns a rebellion, while the other seems to be emotional and personal, and deals with the end of a relationship. The distance between the semantic fields and the lexicons of war and love, and the way in which the opposed contextures "interpenetrate and alternate", illustrate Mukařovský's description of dialogue perfectly. Indeed, there seems to be almost no communication at all between the speakers of "The Crisis", only a conflict of contextures.

The second speaker acknowledges the rebellion, the topic of his interlocutor, only in two instances - once three quarters of the way through the text:

- Yes, they [presumably the rebels] pulled some pretty cute tricks. I had to laugh, sometimes, wondering: What has this to do with you and me? Our frontiers are the marble lobbies of these buildings. True, mortar pits ring the elevator banks but these must be seen as friendly, helpful gestures toward certification of the crisis (GD 6),

and again at the end of the dialogue: "The rebel brigades are reading Laskov's Why Are Books Expensive in Kiev?" (GD 8).

The first speaker never responds to his interlocutor's indications of a personal crisis. (One should note that the title - "The Crisis" - neatly covers both crises: the rebellion and the love affair.) The only other communicative links between the two speakers are those concerning "Clementine" or "Clem". "Clementine" is mentioned by the first speaker and seems to be the absent woman, the "she" with whom the second speaker has had a relation. The identification of "Clementine" or "Clem" with the pronoun "she" is not at all as straightforward as it might have been in a different context. The grammatical expectation that a personal pronoun should refer to a preceding proper name generates such an identification. Co-reference between preceding and succeeding lexical items is known as anaphorisation, and Barthelme may well be exploiting and subverting the possibilities of anaphorisation in "The Crisis". Keir Egan describes the co-referential rule in discourse as follows:

If, in referring to W_0 [the world set up as a shared universe between text and decoder], one names a certain individual or object - say John Smith or a red car - it is understood that successive references to John Smith or the red car will denote the same individual or object and not a homonymous individual or an identical car in this or some other world.¹⁴

The reader of "The Crisis" is not sure if the co-referential rule has been violated, and this text relies on such uncertainty. The extreme dissociation between the utterances of the two speakers generates an anxiety in the reader, who, in her or his relief at discovering terms which could possibly refer to one another, constructs an identity for Clementine. She becomes both a leader of the rebellion, and the former lover of the second speaker. A convenient centre for both discourses is provided by this identification which effects a synthesis of the two isotopies operative in "The Crisis", namely "love" and "war". Isotopies account for the coherent decoding of texts, because they function as semantic levels which unify the disparate *somes* of the text.¹⁷ In the case of "The Crisis", the dominant isotopy of "crisis" is particularised by the secondary isotopies "end of a relationship" and "rebellion". Clementine stands at the intersection of these isotopies, and appears to be a key term in the decoding of "The Crisis". However, a more precise examination of references to Clementine demonstrates that coherence and identity are mirages, posited by the reader's need for significance. Consider the following instances:

- Clementine is thought to be one of the great rebel leaders of the half century. Her hat has four cockades.
- I loved her for a while. Then it stopped (GD 4).

- The present goal of the individual in group enterprises is to avoid dominance; leadership is felt to be a character disorder. Clementine has not heard this news, and thus invariably falls forward, into thickets of closure.
- Well, maybe so. When I knew her she was just an ordinary woman - wonderful, of course, but not transfigured (GD 6).

Another reference to Clementine occurs when the first speaker catalogues Clementine's "glorious" activities during the rebellion. This elicits the following response from the second speaker: "When she gets back from the hills, I intend to call her. It's worth a try" (GD 8).

In all these instances, the contiguity of a proper name (always supplied by the first speaker) and a personal pronoun (used exclusively by the second figure) creates a semblance of continuity: both speakers seem to discuss the same referent, albeit in antithetical contexts, such as love versus war, or the private and personal versus the public and political.

The second speaker avoids any direct equation of the pronoun "she" and the proper name "Clementine". The gap between proper name and pronoun effects what Roland Barthes has called a "leak of interlocution"¹³ through which coherence and identity drain. A straightforward reading of "The Crisis" would see "Clementine" and "crisis" as isotopies which form a unified semantic level on which Clementine is both an instigator of the rebellion and a source of emotional disturbance. "The Crisis", in this reading, would embody the truism that politics and personal life are inextricable. But what if origins, centres and unity were not so easily identifiable?

As we have seen, Clementine may well not be the "she" of the second speaker's discourse, in which case the two crises collide but never coincide, and "The Crisis", as text and as specific utterance, remains indeterminate and unresolvable. Perhaps the speakers do not even inhabit the same universe of discourse, or perhaps the reader is confronted with two slightly different universes of discourse which occasionally share, and possibly duplicate, certain features. Perhaps Clementine exists in two (or several) possible worlds simultaneously, in one of which she is a rebel leader, and a partner in a failed relationship in another.

Such a drastic lack of coherent concatenation between the utterances of the two speakers, or even between successive utterances of the same

speaker generates an uneasiness in the reader. The implausible, yet ever-present possibility that no link exists between "Clémentine "she", or between consecutive occurrences of "she" strikes at the heart of the referential function, questioning the relation between word and world on which communication depends. Language leads a life of its own, beyond the exigencies of meaning.

A detailed analysis of the opening of "The Crisis" discloses a teasing alternation of concatenation and disjunction in the exchanges.

Good will is everywhere, and the lighthearted song of the
gondoliers is heard in the distance.
- Yes, success is everything. Morally important as well as
useful in a practical way (223).

These utterances have neither semantic nor referential links, but the use of parallel construction, or isocolon, seduces the reader into believing that some continuity exists. "Good will" belongs to approximately the same lexicon as "success", and the syntactic parallel between the words reinforces their putative relationship. "Everywhere" and "everything" have the same morphology, and both sentences consist of a subject and a predicate, which is made up of copula plus adverb in both cases. A subsidiary clause follows the predicate, but this section of each utterance is lexically and logically opposed to its counterpart. The first, "lighthearted song", is a parody of particular, outdated cultural models of bonhomie. The second qualification, "morally important", is a stylisation of official rhetoric. Because it appears in such an indeterminate context, it loses its power to persuade. But even such a claim is not altogether accurate, because this phrase cannot carry much signifying weight. It registers too clearly as a cliché, and what immediate satiric end can be achieved by parodying a cliché?

The next exchange is this:

- What have the rebels captured thus far? One zoo, not our best zoo, and a cemetery. The rebels have entered the cages of the tamer animals and are playing with them, gently.
- Things can get better, and in my opinion, will (GD 3).

The collocation of "rebels", "cemeteries" and "zoos" forms a semantic ungrammaticality of the kind that lards Barthelme's writing. The same of "gentleness" runs counter to cultural stereotypes of political upheaval. Once again, the second speaker responds with a bureaucratic non-sequitur, which is perhaps an instance of the political discourse challenged by the first utterance. Is this a complete conversational disjunction, or are we required to perceive some mysterious connection?

- Their Graves Registration procedures are scrupulous - accurate and fair.
- There's more to it than playing guitars and clapping along. Although that frequently gets people in the mood (GD 3-4).

The phrase "Graves Registration procedures" may have been suggested metonymically by the mention of "cemetery" in the previous exchange. Metonymy forges a link between the speakers' utterances, although this link exists on the level of metonymic slippage, or of language running out of control, rather than on the level of logic and referentiality. And to whom does the exophoric pronoun "their" refer? Does it refer to "rebels", and if so, how can the "scrupulousness" of their bureaucratic methods be another sense in the classeme "rebellion"? Furthermore, the interlocutor's response becomes wholly indeterminate as a result of the exophoric pronoun "it". "it" could refer equally to the registration procedures, by a stretch of grammar, and to the rebellion itself. The pronoun could be linked obliquely to the same speaker's previous pronouncement. In this case, "it" would refer anaphorically to the anticipated improvement in the state of affairs. Here, the multiple ref-

erences of a single pronoun erase the deictic function of a pronoun, which is to clearly point out its single reference.

- Their methods are direct, not subtle. Dissolution, leaching, sandblasting, cracking and melting of fireproof doors, condemnation, water damage, slide presentations, clamps and buckles.
- And skepticism, although absolutely necessary, leads to not very much (GD 4).

Once more grammatical parallelism leads the reader to believe that a connection has been established between utterances. The similarity between the final phrase of the first speaker, "and buckles", and the second speaker's opening phrase, "and skepticism", suggests a minimal concatenation. The reader is persuaded to elide the qualitative differences between the two nouns, although the concrete noun "buckles" resists a semantic association with the abstract noun "skepticism". The diversity of the first speaker's list forces the reader to accept difference as a norm.

The allusion to "their" methods appears to relate to the first speaker's overriding referent, "rebels", in which case the list of methods extends or describes the "Graves Registration procedures", and this hypothesis is confirmed by the synonymy of "procedures" and "methods". Yet, having established this connection, the reader must balk at the thought of "accurate" and "fair" "Graves Registration Procedures" which consist of "sandblasting, cracking and melting of fireproof doors" and all the other activities. Indeed, the appearance of continuity can only signal its own absence. The formal continuity of language marks the discontinuity - or discontinuation? - of meaning, just as the relation of signifiers demonstrates the non-relation - or non-existence? - of signifieds.

Pure Transactions, or, What About the Cooperative Principle?

Régis Durand, in "On *Conversing: In/On Writing*", calls Bartheleme's dialogues "pieces of pure transaction",¹⁹ and this captures perfectly one's sense that the dialogues maintain a mirage of grammatical continuity, while voiding such continuity of any content. Durand asserts that the use value of language is replaced entirely by exchange value in these texts. The sign exists solely as a signifier to be exchanged (banded about, bounced to and fro) and has no existence as a signified to be used (valued, interpreted, communicated, exhausted, used up). This exchange without boundaries has been identified, by Jean Baudrillard, as one of the dominant characteristics of postmodernism.²⁰

Pure transaction is also pure cooperation, and the type of exchange which Durand identifies in these dialogues can be productively compared to the way in which the "cooperative principle" functions in Bartheleme's texts.

The speech act theorist, H. P. Grice proposes a cooperative principle which tacitly supports any form of conversational interaction. In "Logic in Conversation" in Speech Acts, Syntax and Semantics, he defines the principle as follows: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged".²¹ Grice describes the logic- and convention-bound character of conversational discourse as follows:

Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a series of disconnected remarks and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognises in them, to some ex-

tant, a common purpose or a set of purposes or at least a mutually accepted direction.²¹

Four sets of maxims delineate the principles of conversational congruity, according to Grice. Keir Elan paraphrases Grice's maxims:

- 1 The maxims of quantity. (a) The contribution should be as informative as is required for the purposes of the exchange. (b) The contribution should not be more informative than is required.
- 2 The maxims of quality, expressible as the supermaxim "Try to make the contribution one that is true". (a) The speaker should not say what he knows to be false. (b) He should not say that for which he lacks evidence....
- 3 The maxims of relation, i.e. "Be relevant".
- 4 The maxims of manner, expressible as a supermaxim, "Be perspicuous". (a) The speaker should avoid obscurity. (b) He should avoid ambiguity. (c) He should avoid unnecessary prolixity. (d) He should be orderly.²²

Despite Mukařovský's identification of the colliding contexts underlying dialogue, he upholds a principle of unity in conversation, that resembles Grice's norm of "a common purpose or a set of purposes or at least a mutually accepted direction". Mukařovský states emphatically that "dialogue is impossible without the unity of a theme".²³ He cites a folk proverb which exemplifies the impossibility of dialogue when antithetical contexts are brought into conflict: "I'm speaking about a cart and he about a goat".²⁴

The following exchange, from the text "Great Days", appears to be a perfect illustration of an extended conversational impossibility.

- Man down. Centre and One Eight.
- Tied flares to my extremities and wound candy comes in my lustrous, abundant hair. Getting ready for the great day.
- For I do not deny that I am a little out of temper.
- Glitches in the system as yet unapprehended.
- Oh that clown band. Oh its sweet strains.
- Most excellent and dear friend. Who the silly season's named for.

- My demands were not met. One, two, three, four (GD 157-158).

The "mutually accepted direction", shared by addresser and addressee, of which Grice speaks, cannot be discerned. These dialogues take place in an *asemantic realm*, where the demands of the cooperative principle have been suspended.

A writer like Roland Barthes perceives the disappearance of meaning as something pleasurable rather than dystopic, and this perception distinguishes Barthes from the mainstream of Anglo-American literary criticism. In Roland Barthes, Barthes confesses that he "dreams of a world which would be exempt from meaning (as one is from military service)... against Science (paranoiac discourse) one must maintain the utopia of suppressed meaning."²⁶ Jerome Klinkowitz, however, exemplifies the Anglo-American tradition. He resolutely conscripts Barthes's dialogues into the service of meaning. Referring to the dialogues of The Dead Father, Klinkowitz writes:

Such conversations begin as random grumblings, lack any real sense of direction, and soon deteriorate into fragments. But they do carry meaning, even as Barthes moves them toward the abstract qualities of words alone.... By the end we have an even deeper sense of the father's vulnerability and diminished stature, all thanks to the bits of conversation... (my emphasis).²⁷

About Great Days Klinkowitz writes: "Barthes uses these [improvisational] models to get down to pure writing, without losing the sense of where the mimetic elements of his story are leading" (my emphasis again).²⁸ Klinkowitz is clearly discomforted whenever "pure writing" and "the abstract qualities of words alone" appear, and he has to exorcise these by invoking "sense".

The mutation of meaning is one of the constitutive elements of postmodern practice. Frederic Jameson calls it the "new depthlessness".¹⁸ This tendency finds its most consistent polemicist in Jacques Derrida, who has articulated a forceful critique of the logocentrism, or sense-centredness of Western culture. Klinkowitz is evidently trapped in a logocentric practice of exegesis, unable to read the postmodern text, and therefore forced to domesticate its workings. Interestingly, both H.P. Grice and Klinkowitz use metaphors of teleology: Grice argues that the cooperative principle establishes a "mutually accepted direction"; Klinkowitz worries about the "lack [of] any real sense of direction" in Barthele's dialogues. If these dialogues do participate in the economy of postmodernism, then one can assume that they will circumvent both teleology and the cooperative principle.

And indeed, an entire anthology of violations of the cooperative principle can be culled from the dialogues. Grice's "truth" maxim, the maxim of quality, is flouted by the text qua text. Since modernism, after all, it has been axiomatic to observe that truth values do not apply to the literary text, which has been defined, since Mallarmé at least, as a privileged site beyond the exigencies of veracity. Barthele's texts are the inheritors rather than the instigators of this tradition; anti-representationalism forms an inescapable part of their fabric.

The maxim of quality is rendered even more irrelevant by the absence of any inferable context for the exchanges. Because the utterances are so pure, so stripped of any indices of a world shaping the words, the reader finds it impossible to extrapolate either a universe of discourse or stable speaking subjects from the dialogues. The dialogues have been described as follows:

The dialogues [of Great Days], whose content is deliberately murky, recall Gaddis's JR - that paean to voices and sounds deriving from every direction. The idea is that "voices" in themselves go beyond communication; we hear sounds, but are not concerned with their meaning. Sounds are sufficient.... The result, from both Gaddis and Barthelme, is "voices" without direct communication, overhearing without hearing. These, too, are the great days that are coming, the politics of noise.²⁹

The "politics of noise" realise, in a suitably postmodern way, the Paterian dictum that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music."³¹ The tendency towards pure musical sound in modernist writing culminates in a text like Mallarmé's sonnet in "yx", known as "le sonnet en YX"³² or "See purs ongles tres haut dediant leur onyx",³³ which reverberates with [lks], a very rare sound in French. A meaningless transliteration of a Greek word "ptyx" is a central term in Mallarmé's poem. Barthelme's texts transform this modernist musicality into post-modern "noise", so that a figure in "The New Music" appropriately alludes to "a disco version of Un Coup de Dés" (GD 33). The dialogues translate the empty and resonant signifiers of high modernism, its "music", into upbeat noise. In the presence of phonetic textuality a contribution "that is true" is irrelevant.

The sub-maxim, "the speaker should not say what he knows to be false", entails a concept of the subject as a knowing intentionality. Speech act theory tends to focus on an active, intentional subject, but, because Barthelme's figures have no existence outside their language, questions of consciousness - do these figures want to say what is true? - become unanswerable and unthinkable.

In "The New Music", one of the speakers responds to the question "What did you do today?" by saying: "[I] went to the grocery store and xeroxed a box of English muffins, two pounds of ground veal and an apple. In

flagrant violation of the Copyright Act" (GD 21). No matter how it is read, this utterance violates Grice's maxim of "quality". As a "true" statement by a "fictional" speaker, it represents an impossible universe in which groceries are inadequately (1) protected by the Copyright Act. As a "lie" told by a "fictional" speaker (who is then credited with the intention to lie), the utterance flouts the super-maxim which requires a "true contribution". The interlocutor's failure to react to this flouting of the cooperative principle is even more surprising than the utterance itself.

A minor infringement of a societal code is at the heart of the utterance, namely the "flagrant violation of the Copyright Act". In Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of the premises of speech act theory, "truth" and "copyright" are important terms. Derrida sees the existence of copyright as an indication of some uneasiness about the status of truth; he "[reflects] upon the truth of copyright and the copyright of truth".¹⁴ Derrida observes that in the case of "the obviously true... copyright is irrelevant and devoid of interest: everyone will be able, will in advance have been able, to reproduce what he [the speaker of truth] says".¹⁵ Derrida's opponent in the debate is John Searle, who upholds the veracity of speech act theory, and it is he who withholds the copyright of his utterances. Yet in this debate, Derrida refuses to cooperate and avoids any direct confrontation, preferring instead to concentrate on marginal elements, like Searle's indication of copyright. Derrida, more precisely, violates the cooperative principle. The Derrida-Searle debate lacks any "mutually accepted direction".

Copyright entails an attempt to foreclose the infinite repeatability of the signifier; copyright uneasily ensures a relationship of hierarchical dependency between an original utterance and its repetition. It is

tempting to read "copyright" as "copy-write", in which case the "Copy-Write Act" would be any rule that enforces and polices the referential, representational function of language. The speaker of "The New Music" has flouted the maxim of quality, but the "Copy-Write Act" has been violated as well.

Grice's maxims of quantity determine that a statement should be "more informative than is required". The comic excess of the apology, and the litany of thanks in "The Apology" (GD) undermines these maxims by their linguistic overkill.

- William I'm sorry you don't ski and I'm sorry about your back
and I'm sorry I invented bob logging which you couldn't do!
I'm sorry I loved Antigone! I'm sorry my mind wandered when you
talked about the army! I'm sorry I was superior in argument!
I'm sorry you slit open my bicycle tires looking for incriminating
letters that you didn't find! You'll never find them!
(GD 17).

The apology transgresses Grice's quantitative rules. Its excessiveness is its chief characteristic. In Derridean terms, language itself is an excess which covers an absence, an apology.³⁴ In so far as "The Apology" reflects the supplementary character of language, one could argue that the real subject of "The Apology" is language and its lacunae and excesses. Conversational exchanges in Barthele's texts become self-reflexive, and *in doing so, erode the basis of communication*. Their mimesis is that of "language imitating itself", which is what Barthes finds in the text of bliss.³⁵ Derrida, too, celebrates the "mimicry [that imitates] nothing".³⁶

The maxims of manner outlined by Grice are flouted throughout the dialogues, or more accurately, are suspended. The context of the utterances cannot be determined, and the reader cannot judge whether a response is

appropriate in its manner. The maxims which guide "appropriate" conversational manner have an affinity with the maxims of relation. In an exchange like the following, both sets of maxims have been violated, because the conversation seems to be composed entirely of irrelevant statements that are obscure, ambiguous, prolix and disorderly in their irrelevance:

- What ought I to do? What do you advise me? Should I try to see him? What will happen? Can you tell me?
- Yes it's caring and being kind. We have corn dodgers and blood sausage.
- Lasciviously offered a something pure and white ("Great Days", GD 170).

(As has already been noted, the entire text of "The Crisis" depends on the disjunction of conversational contributions.)

Nevertheless, in all these texts, the dialogue continues. No "normal" conversation would survive such glaring and repeated transgressions of cooperative principles. The absence of any controlling principle transforms dialogue into a game that does not communicate conventionally. Perhaps the underlying aporia of the dialogue texts is the following: they are non-communicative communications. Like Beckett's Unnameable the cooperative principle "can't go on, [will] go on".¹⁸

Berthelme frequently uses anaphora to bind utterances into disjunctive units.¹⁹ Anaphoric constructions set up a misleading continuity of exchange. In this instance, however, anaphora remains on the level of syntax, and seems to be immune to semantic disruption. At the same time, anaphora seems to be the perfect figure for exchange; it becomes a way of figuring the semantic process of purely lexical exchange at work in the texts. Although anaphora should be part of a highly concatenated and

logically coherent discourse, here signifiers are passed from speaker to speaker in a way that undermines meaning:

- Being clean
- You're very clean.
- Cleaner than most.
- It's not escaped me. Your cleanness.
- Some of these people aren't clean. People you meet.
- What can you do?
- Set an example. Be clean ("The New Music", GD 22).

In this citation, both epiphora, or repetition at the end of clauses, and polyptoton have been used. The latter device rings a series of morphological changes on the morpheme "clean", such as "cleaner" and "cleanness". Bartheleme's particular manipulation of epiphora and polyptoton does not permit dense and potentially new signifieds to accumulate with each repetition. The repetition counteracts meaning: as Barthes asserts, "to repeat excessively is to enter into loss, into the zero degree of the signified".⁴¹

Repetition creates exchanges that have no semantic use value in these dialogues. Régis Durand makes some perceptive comments on use and exchange value in textual conversations:

Whenever someone speaks in a text, a strange composite effect is produced. One could analyse it by saying that it mixes the use value and exchange value of speech, or perhaps even that use value tends to lose ground to exchange value, to the extreme point where every response to a statement is in effect a commentary on it and not much else: a metadiscourse (my emphasis).⁴²

In Bartheleme's texts, then, exchange functions in a markedly different manner from the habitual functioning of exchange in realist fiction. One reading of the mechanisms of exchange is offered by Rosalind Coward and John Ellis.⁴³ Following the Barthes of S/Z, they argue that exchange is the basis of both capitalism and the realist text. The exchange of signifier for signified, and of labour for capital, rests on a system of

equivalences to which the parties involved in the exchange have tacitly agreed. The sign stands for its referent, as capital stands for labour. A circuit of precise equivalences is required for these exchanges to take place. This is another, wider variant on the principle of cooperation. Indeed, a description Marx offers of the relationships necessitated by the exchange of commodities seems to bear a tempting resemblance to the cooperative principle as articulated by Grice. Coward and Ellis cite the following passage from Marx as authorisation for their attack, quite conventionally Marxist, on exchange value.

In order that these objects may enter into relation with each other as commodities, their guardians must place themselves in relation to one another.... They must therefore mutually recognise in each other the rights of private proprietors. This judicial relation, which thus expresses itself in a contract, whether such a contract be part of a developed legal system or not, is a relation between two wills (Coward and Ellis's ellipsis)."

Substitute "utterances" for "objects" and "communications" for "commodities", and one has a fair description of Grice's analysis of conversation. The notion of private proprietorship obviously surfaces in the discussion of copyright, as has been noted.

Representation, according to Coward and Ellis, is the effect of the equivalence of signifier and signified, which reader and writer implicitly acknowledge, in a "relation between two wills". Barthelme's texts deny any equivalence between signifier and signified. If equivalence no longer supports exchange, conventional relations of buyer and seller, or of addresser and addressee, partners in trade or in conversation, are

disturbed. Exchange exists here, as one of the figures in "Great Days" puts it, as a "nonculminating kind of ultimately affectless activity" (GD 159).

What conclusion is one to draw from this apparent violation of the laws of political economy and the codes of realism? The position adopted by Coward and Ellis vis a vis this seemingly avant-garde assault on readerly norms is the conventionally Tel Quel one: an experimental text is presumed to have adequate political power to disturb the social formation. Tampering with representation is tampering with base structure. This is what Kristeva calls the revolution of poetic language.²² The reader is meant to be shocked out of her or his habitual mode of communication. One should note, however, that Coward and Ellis's argument relies on another equivalence, that of economic relations of production (capitalism, in this case) to textual production (realism).

This model is perhaps too easy for Barthele's texts. Why do we read on if we recognize that the text has flouted the principle of cooperation? Why does dialogue continue (even in the recent Overnight to Many Distant Cities)? Perhaps the kind of exchange with which we are dealing is different from the naive equivalence of signifier and signified, and perhaps the simple completed transaction of communication is no longer even at stake.

For a somewhat headier analysis, one has to turn to Jean Baudrillard. In an essay on the postmodern condition, he writes:

Here set forth and denounced the obscenity of the commodity, and this obscenity was linked to its equivalence, to the abstract principle of free circulation, beyond all use value of the object. The obscenity of the commodity stems from the fact that it is abstract, formal and light in opposition to the weight,

opacity and substance of the object. The commodity is readable: in opposition to the object, which never completely gives up its secret, the commodity always manifests its visible essence, which is its price. It is the formal place of transcription of all possible objects; through it, objects communicate. Hence, the commodity form is the first great medium of the modern world. But the message that the objects deliver through it is already extremely simplified, and it is always the same: their exchange value. Thus at bottom the message already no longer exists; it is the medium that imposes itself in its pure circulation. This is what I call (potentially) ecstasy (my emphasis)."⁶

Baudrillard's "ecstasy of communication" is very different from the transportation of signifieds from one consciousness to another, as Jakobson envisages it, just as the continuation of Barthele's dialogues differs from Grice's cooperative principle. The exchangeability of utterance in the dialogues of Great Days transforms language into a commodity that circulates ceaselessly, while the only message it communicates is, as Baudrillard notes, its own exchange value. Here we no longer have the straightforward bargains of realist equivalence which imply that text equals world. Nor do we have an avant-garde assault on the ideologically dominant mode of signification, so that Coward and Ellis's reliance on a notion of oppositionality between experimental text and society seems rather anachronistic. Coward and Ellis themselves begin to appear logocentric, eager to assign a political use value to the text. For better or worse - and this raises the question of the "reactionary" nature of postmodernism⁷ - Barthele's writing resists any easy assimilation to a political project. As A says in "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel", "I'm extremely political in a way that does no good to anybody" (CE 84).

To return to Grice, it has to be admitted that despite the normative, prescriptive and overtly egocentric character of his maxims, his theory allows for, and indeed, anticipates, violations of the cooperative principle. However, the threat - for Grice as for Klinkowitz - of

meaninglessness, that "at bottom the message already no longer exists," in Baudrillard's words, is safely contained. Grice discovers the meaning of ostensible meaninglessness, and formulates a theory of conversational implicature.²⁹

For example, if one were to respond to the question "Do you love me" by saying "The weather is fine", one would be violating the maxim of relation, but one would be indicating an unwillingness to answer the question as well, and this would imply a lack of reciprocal feeling. Grice's analysis of conversational implicature is related to a valorisation of semantic complexity and depth. For Grice, a speaker always means more than she or he says. The signifier is subordinate to its signifieds; the use value of language exceeds its exchangeability. The theory of conversational implicature could provide a frame work for the analysis of conversations in the novels of Henry James, or of the dialogues in Pinter's plays. With *Barthelme*, however, one is no longer dealing with his modernist complexity. Instead, one moves without constraints in the space of postmodern, asemantic euphoria. *Barthelme's* dialogues imply nothing: as one of the seven dwarfs has it, "there is nothing [between the lines], in those white spaces" (SW 106). Grice's theory, finally, has as little hold on the slippery "white spaces", as the claims made by Coward and Ellis.

Barthelme's texts have as their universe of discourse the postmodern space of infinitely interconnecting networks and of circulating "strings of language". Flouting and erasing any rules, the dialogue goes on, while the speakers are gloriously unaware of the disconnection of their utterances, or aware, perhaps, of connections the reader cannot perceive.

- Take a picture of this exceptionally dirty window. Its grays. I think that I can get a knighthood, I know a guy. What about the Eternal Return?
- Distant, distant, distant. Thanks for calling Jim it was good to talk to you.
- They played "One O'Clock Jump", "Two O'Clock Jump", "Three O'Clock Jump" and "Four O'Clock Jump". They were very good. I saw them on television. They're all dead now ("Morning", GP 126).

These dialogues recycle the "ordinary rules of civilised discourse", but each recycling cancels a new rule, and each exchange makes small-talk out of the disappearance of communication in any meaningful form.

Unnatural Contexts, Unspeakable Acts

Unnatural Contexts

A long tradition of Western thought conceives of the extra-linguistic context of any utterance as the guarantee of its truth. "Taking a statement out of its context" is a semantic sin, a crime against a determined and determinate meaning. Derrida, in an essay "Signature Event Context", remarks that this view of language does not articulate the interrelatedness of code and context adequately. The signifier can potentially be repeated in an infinity of new contexts; the mark can be re-marked. Derrida claims that both signifier, or code, and situation, or context, are subject to what he calls the "graphematics of iterability". He explains:

Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written ... can be cited, put between quotation marks, but in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any centre or absolute anchoring.¹⁹

This iterability results in what Derrida describes as "the disruption, in the last analysis of the authority of the code as a finite system of rules; at the same time, the radical destruction of any context as a protocol of code".²⁰ Neither code nor context can exist without the other, yet each can be used to undermine the other. Because the sign is a sign it can be repeated, and it introduces potentially different situations into the context in which it occurs. On the other hand, these possible

contexts transform the sign, depriving it of a singular, unique significance.

Shifters are particularly prone to the graphematics of iterability. They are signifiers which refer exclusively to the context of utterance; they have no meaning outside this context. At the same time, they are not unique marks of a specific context; paradoxically, they are specific to every context. They shift: my "I" is specific to my context, yet every subject can articulate this sign in every situation. Keir Elam defines a shifter as an "empty verbal index".¹¹ The mark of any contextual certainty is by nature vacant, because it must be iterable in every context. Roland Barthes theorises about the subversive power of shifters, and terms them "leaks of interlocution". He observes that "the shifter thus appears as a complex means - furnished by language itself - of breaking communication"¹² Barthes's texts use the shifter to disrupt code and to ambiguate context; again, one sees the use of language to undermine the use of language. The difficulties of pronominal reference in "The Crisis" have already indicated the shifty character of the shifter.

(A fictive, textual dimension even encroaches on the critical discourses about the shifter. Christopher Norris perceives a connection between Derrida's "Signature Event Context", the resulting debate between Searle and Derrida, and Barthes's discussion of shifters. Searle tries to refute Derrida's assertion that the absence of addresser and addressee infiltrates any message, rendering fully realised communication impossible. He offers the following utterance as proof that a message can remain wholly legible outside its context: "On the twentieth of September 1793 I set out on a journey from London to Oxford."¹³ Norris notices¹⁴ that Searle's irrefutable proof resembles a message which Roland Barthes cites as proof of the "freedom and ... erotic fluidity" of shifters outside

their context."⁵⁵ Barthes's message is "Monday. Returning tomorrow. Jean-Louis."⁵⁶ There is a distinctly Barthelmean character to these critical pronouncements, so that it is not unexpected that Derrida should read Searle's proof of the validity of an utterance outside its context, as a "rich and wondrous fiction."⁵⁷ This digression demonstrates precisely the disturbances that result from the reinscription of the signifier in different contexts.)

Shifters form a subsidiary component of deixis, or reference to the context of a message, and in fiction, deixis plays a central role in the construction of a referential illusion. Jakobson's model of communication, cited at the beginning of this chapter, associates the aspect of context with the referential function of language, because language refers by pointing to its supposedly extra-discursive context.⁵⁸ Keir Elam enlarges the referential scope of deixis identified by Jakobson and describes deixis as "the necessary condition of a non-narrative form of world-creating discourse."⁵⁹ In a fictional text, deixis creates a reference, and then appears to have been necessitated by the context it has created. Any interference in the deictic elements of a text will therefore disturb the effects of referentiality.

In Barthelme's fictions, deixis becomes highly ambiguous. Maurice Couturier and Régis Durand realise that "it is practically impossible to identify the deictic coordinates" of the dialogues. "Without such indications, any piece of recorded dialogue would be difficult to understand, but when transcribed, it does not make sense at all; we do not even know how many characters there are."⁶⁰ The absence of a discernible context leaves the shifters and deictic pointers signalling in a vacuum; they now only point to the disappearance of any reference. Interestingly, Couturier and Durand themselves fall victim to the lack of context. They

identify the situation in "The Apology" (GD) as one that "in easy to picture", because it concerns "husband and wife arguing".¹¹ A more accurate reading suggests that the speakers of "The Apology" seem to be two women, and that the men, William, is merely the topic of their discourse and not a speaker. But then, what does this matter? Such an ostensible "misreading" merely serves to emphasise the emptiness of contextual indices in "The Apology".

David Forshaw comments on the use of dialogue without context in "The Explanation" from City Life:

The interview itself is generally a mechanical form that records information passed between a questioner and respondent locked in a feedback loop. The contexts for such an information loop disappear - setting, physical descriptions, etc. Often, one of the participants is anonymous, though in this abstract catechism [specifically "The Explanation", but this phrase describes Bartheleme's dialogues aptly] both interviewer and interviewee are without identity, effaced in favour of a vehicle for pure communication. However, what would normally be an efficient device for recording what two people are saying to each other here becomes, through a series of addresses and lacunae, a device for communicating what two people are having trouble saying to each other.¹²

The pure dialogue, because of its lack of context, is not pure communication. "The Explanation" begins with a large black square, followed by this interchange:

Q: Do you believe that this machine could be helpful in changing the government?

A: Changing the government ...

Q: Making it more responsive to the needs of the people?

A: I don't know what it is. What does it do?

Q: Well, look at it.

[The black square appears once more.]

A: It offers no clues.

Q: It has a certain ... reticence.

Q: A lack of confidence in the machine? (CL 69-70, Bartheleme's ellipses).

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"The Explanation" relies on a deictic indeterminacy, namely the assumption that the deictic marker "this" points to the black square, identifying it as "this machine", or the machine that is present in the context of the dialogue, the machine that is being talked about. However, this identification scrambles the reader's context and the context of the text. "This machine", the black square in front of the reader, cannot be the machine itself; it can only be "this" representation of "that" machine, which is the topic of conversation between Q. and A. But perhaps "this" black square is indeed the machine itself, in which case the context of the text includes its reader as well. Forush draws out some of the results of this deictic aporia:

Who are A. and Q.? Where are A. and Q.? Are they literally on the page? How else could they refer to the same black square which I see there? The black square is both an object and a figure (in the literary sense, a symbol, trope or metaphor) for some sort of machine, and by reflection, the words on the page are seen both as objects and as parts of a literary device.⁴³

The indeterminacy of the deictic marker "this" unhinges the difference between presentation and representation, trope and literalism, reader and text.

In "The Explanation", A. remarks on the question-and-answer form: "I am bored with it but I realize that it permits many valuable omissions: what kind of day it is, what I'm wearing, what I'm thinking. That's a very considerable advantage, I would say" (CE 73). The advantageous omissions, in fact, strip the dialogue of its context, of everything it needs to make sense. Forush claims, somewhat forcefully that "in this case [the 'it'] has lost its antecedent".⁴⁴ This is strange, because in context, "it" is quite clearly anaphoric, and relates directly to the antecedent "the

question-and-answer form" (CL 73). Porush makes some valuable remarks about this putative loss of an antecedent, however.

Is A. talking about the "machine"? If so, he is equating the machine with a narrative device. On the other hand, his description could serve self-reflexively as well for the interview, which also permits "many valuable omissions".¹⁴

Another, clearer instance of an exophoric pronoun occurs in "Great Days". In this example, the vacuum left by the vanishing of a meaningful context becomes filled with risque suggestion, as the exophoric "it" seems to refer to all kinds of improper possibilities:

- Well, I don't know, I haven't seen it.
- Well, would you like to see it?
- Well, I don't know
- Well, I would like to see it right now because just talking about it has got me in the mood to see it. If you know what I mean (CL 167).

"Wreck", in Overnight to Many Distant Cities involves many surprising shifts in shifters. The dialogue begins with a firm deictic exposition, which locates speakers and context.

- Cold here in the garden
- You were complaining about the sun.
- But when it goes behind a cloud -
- Well, you can't have everything (OTMDC 136).

The elements of the garden are then seemingly listed, providing additional contextual clarification.

- The flowers are beautiful.
- Indeed.
- Consoling to have the flowers....
- And these Japanese rocks -
- Artfully placed, most artfully (OTMDC 135).

However, the list suddenly includes "Social Security", "philosophy", and "sexuality" (OTMDC 135). These items cannot be part of the garden in the same way as the flowers or Japanese rocks. Even the reassuring deixis of the opening lines undergoes mutations. The opening utterance is reiterated " - Cold, here in the garden" (OTMDC 143). These shifts in the description of "here" may be ascribed to quarulousness or confusion on the part of the speaker, or even to alternations in the weather, but a residue of uncertainty lingers.

The main body of the text is taken up by an attempt to pin shifters down. One speaker tries to make the other identify various bizarre objects as his possessions, such as doors, a bonbon dish, a shoe, a hundred-pound sack of saccharin, a dressing gown and "two mattresses surrounding [a] single slice of salem" (OTMDC 143).

But any attempt at deictic clarification seems doomed to lead to uncertainty:

- When?
- It must have been some time ago. Some years. I don't know what they're doing here. It strikes me they were in another house. Not this house. I mean it's kind of cloudy.
- But they're here....
- But the doors are here. They're yours.
- Yes. They seem to be. I mean, I'm not arguing with you. On the other hand, they're not something I want to remember, particularly (OTMDC 138, my emphasis on deictic markers and shifters).

The speaker does identify the hundred-pound bag of saccharin as his, but this identification soon becomes less secure.

- Mine. Indubitably mine I'm forbidden to use sugar. I have a condition.
- I'm delighted to hear it. Not that you have a condition but that the sack is, without doubt, yours.

Mine. Yes.

I can't tell you how pleased I am. The inquiry moves, progress is made. Results are obtained.

- What are you writing there, in your notes?
- That the sack is, beyond a doubt, yours.
- I think it's mine (OTMDC 141, my emphasis).

And then the speaker asserts:

So the sack of saccharin is definitely not mine.

- Nothing is yours
- Some things are mine, but the sack is not mine, the door is not mine, the bonbon dish is not mine and the doors are not mine.
- you admitted the doors.
- I'm wholehearted.
- you said, I have it right here, written down, "Yes, they must be mine"....
- I withdraw that (OTMDC 141, my emphasis).

Even writing, it seems, is powerless to halt the slipping of shifters.

"On the Steps of the Conservatory" (GD) seems to be unequivocally situated in an identifiable context, as the title indicates. The dialogue takes place between speakers who are named in their very first exchange:

- C'mon Hilda don't fret.
- Y'all Maggie it's a blow (GD 133).

Unlike texts like "Great Days", "The New Music" (both in GD), or "Grandmother's House" (SE), in which speakers exist only as sites of discourse, Maggie and Hilda are characters in a more conventional sense. Some of their personality are liberally distributed through the text in the manner of realistic fiction. Hilda and Maggie reveal themselves in their utterances: Hilda is ambitious, depressed and has recently had some experience of love, while Maggie is successful, and duplicitous, as she seems to derive a certain malicious enjoyment from Hilda's plight.

Despite such ostensible realism, "On the Steps of the Conservatory" does not examine character and situation. Its real concern seems to be the impossibility of securing any singular, and single, context. The dialogue takes place as a threshold - the steps of the conservatory. Hilda directs her energies toward an unobtainable, distal deictic. ("Distal" denotes a distance from the speaker, "proximal" denotes nearness).⁶⁶

Is it wonderful in there Maggie?

- I have to say it is. Yes. It is.

- Do you feel great being there? Do you feel wonderful?
I will never get there (GD 141).

Read in this way, the text explores the way in which the distal deictic "there" intrudes into what Keir Elam calls the "context-of-utterance", which is marked by four shifters, namely "I", "you", "here" and "now". The "context-of-utterance", according to Elam, should "serve as an indexical 'zero-point' from which the dramatic [or dialogic] world is defined".⁶⁷ "On the Steps of the Conservatory" traces the supplanting of the proximal "here" by "there". Hilda has fantasies about the world "there": "I could smile back at the smiling faces of the swift, dangerous teachers I could work with clay or paste things together" (GD 136). Maggie, as a student of the conservatory, represents this desirable deictic "there", and allows it to permeate the dialogue. Her contributions to the conversation introduce the unfamiliar contexture into the context-of-utterance:

- We got men naked models and women naked models, harps, gramophone plants, and drapes. There are hierarchies, some people higher up and others lower down. These things, in the gorgeous light. We have lots of fun (GD 141, but see also 136).

The "here" of Hilda's exclusion cannot become the "there" of her desire. Indeed, the dialogue of "On the Steps of the Conservatory" is structured

around the absence of the conservatory, and is not built on any securely present context-of-utterance. The latter becomes merely liminal and peripheral in the face of distal desire.

Maggie's descriptions, Hilda's longing, and a sense of the ubiquity of the conservatory combine to make the conservatory far more vivid than the immediate context: "C'mon Hilda don't weep and tear your hair out here where they can see you" (SS 135, my emphasis). Like "The Crisis", "On the Steps of the Conservatory" presents the interpenetration of two opposing contextures. However, the opposition here/there is potentially reversible, precisely because it is encoded through shifters. The opposition on which "On the Steps of the Conservatory" is based, is therefore open to reversal.

And this is exactly what has happened in "The Farewell" (SS). Hilda has "finally been admitted to the damn Conservatory. Finally" (SS 424). "There" has indeed become "here" in a movement of shifters, but Hilda has attained her position only to encounter a new and even more desirable "there": the Institution.

- I guess this joint is tough to get into, right?
- Impossible (SS 426).

A final context in which the "here" of utterance will coincide with the "there" of desire, is deferred; as "here" becomes "there", and vice versa, one finds no ultimate context, only a circulation of shifters.

"The Leap" illustrates the elusive character of shifters, but focuses specifically on the marker of context-of-utterance, "now". The text again begins with clear deictic coordinates:

- Today we make the leap to faith. Today.
- Today?
- Today (GD 145).

The drift of this dialogue is away from the certainty that "today's the day" (GD 145). There is no apocalyptic "today", only an infinity of new contexts in which the empty index "today" appears over and over again.

- Try again another day?
- Yes. Another day when the plaid cactus is watered, when the hare's foot-fern is watered (GD 153).

"Today" is quite simply never "the day" for the very reason that "today" is only a shifter, an empty verbal index, which can be reiterated, "quoted", if one wishes, in endless new contexts. Every day has been, or will be, or is "today", with the alarming result that this moment in time is always subject to all the other moments. "Today" resonates with the echoes of all the other "great days" which are everywhere except here. "The Leap" seems to illustrate perfectly the reciprocal deconstruction of code by context, and context by code. Like the apocalypse, "today" never takes place. This is possibly why the extended catalogue of attributes of the "other day" mingles echoes of the folkloric motif of a never-to-be day, with banal, everyday elements. (See GD 153-154.) The day, "another day", will therefore be both "a wedding day" (GD 153) and "a plain day" (GD 154).

The shifters "here" and "now" are not the only ones to be called into question by shifting displacements of context. The lack of context results in a voiding of the speaking subject, or the enunciating "I". Frederick R. Karl writes that "we cannot be certain of two voices in many [of the dialogues], since they could be, like Prufrock, a single self split into two or more voices".⁴⁴ The utterances, according to Karl,

confuse gender, and blur distinctions between human and non-human, between individual enunciation and mass media. In the dialogues, the reader finds "male and female intermixed, the world of dead matter, news items, personal relationships all reduced to the snippets by which we assimilate them; there is no continuity."⁷²

The shifter "I" does not cause unexpected difficulties in the dialogues alone. Betty Flowers offers a comprehensive summary of the narrative shifts of Snow White:

Through random switching from "I" to "we", Barthes emphasises a common identity among the dwarfs. When the narrative shifts to "I" the reader is never sure which dwarf is "I". When the narrative is third-person dwarf, one is uncertain who is "watching" for at some point in the book, each of the seven dwarfs is "watched" and described by the "third-person" dwarf (as distinguished from the "third-person omniscient narrator" who is also active in Snow White).⁷³

Such shifts in the pronoun "I" can also be found in "Florence Green is 81":

... when we were introduced she said "Oh are you a native of Dallas Mr Baskerville?" No Joan baby I am a native of Bengazi ... that is not what I said but what I should have said, it would have been brilliant. When she asked him what he did Baskerville identified himself as an American weightlifter and poet (CBDC 8, my emphasis).

One should note that Baskerville and the "I" are in fact one and the same person, but that the language of the text plays havoc with the shifter "I", as one can see from Baskerville's description of his identification of himself.

Barthes describes shifters as "so many social subversions" which are "conceded by language but opposed by society" because, Barthes believes,

society "fears such leaks of subjectivity and always stops them by insisting on the operator's duplicity"⁷² The arch-shifter "I" is particularly prone to a subversion which must remain unacknowledged if communication is to be successful. For Barthes, the first-person pronoun is fraught with exactly the possibilities noticed in citations from Barthes's writing:

I speak (consider my mastery of the code) but I wrap myself in the midst of an enunciatory situation which is unknown to you, I insert into my discourse certain leaks of interlocution (is this not in fact what always happens when we utilise that shifter par excellence, the pronoun [I])⁷³

Cozier and Durand even assert that Barthes's writing is the realisation of Barthes's dream of a world of deixis without reference.⁷⁴ Barthes's speakers use "I" while they wrap themselves in enigmatic enunciatory situations; his writing releases the subversive potential of shifters. Every "I" engaged in the text - the "I" of character, reader or author - is subject to these leaks of interlocution.

Unspeakable Acts, or, Derrida Unfair to Searle

Clarifying the nature of a speech act, Émile Benveniste writes that a "performative that is not an act does not exist". The speech act must be associated with authority and power, otherwise it deteriorates into empty words.

Anybody can shout in the public square "I declare a general mobilisation" and as it cannot be an act because the requisite authority is lacking, such an utterance is no more than words; it reduces itself to futile clamour, childishness or lunacy (Benveniste's emphasis).⁷⁶

Against this exposition, one could set an utterance from "The Crisis", which presents one of the actions involved in the rebellion: "The rebels have failed to make promises. Promises are, perhaps, the nut of the matter" (GD 8). In speech act theory, promises are indeed the nut of the matter, and the failure to make or keep a promise presents an insurrection of words.

J. L. Austin's exposition of speech act theory confidently (but a bit tentatively?) promises its reader that it will show him or her How to Do Things with Words.⁷⁷ Barthele's dialogues, on the contrary, are anti-illocutions, performatives without authority, utterances that are "no more [and no less] than words", and, to echo Austin, ways of doing nothing with words. These dialogues are unspeakable speech acts. Couturier and Durand point out that what "the reader misses most ... [is] the illocutionary value of what is being said (the intended speech act behind the words: statement, complaint, promise, question, and so on)."⁷⁸

"Morning" and "The Apology" can be described as meta-speech acts, or speech acts that enact their performance self-consciously. At the same time, both texts reveal the instability, and what Austin calls the infelicity⁷⁹ of performatives. "Morning" takes the performative "I admit I am frightened" as its matrix. "Say you're frightened. Admit it" (GD 123). "The Apology" is based on the performative of apology. (Perhaps all performatives are apologetic just as all shifters are shifty?) Here, the performative is overextended and finally infelicitous:

Was I sorry enough?
- No. (GD 18).

The speaker of "Morning" admits to fear by defining it metonymically. The sources of fear are enumerated: "I'm frightened. By flutes and flower girls and sirens.... By coffee, dead hanging plants, people who think too fast, vestments and bells" (GD 124). Although both texts exaggeratedly overdetermine their performatives, the performative of "Morning" seems to be so felicitous that the interlocutor vainly demands a denial at the end of the dialogue: "Say you're not frightened. Inspire me" (GD 129). Such risible overdetermination of a performative becomes a way of diminishing its status as an act, and reducing it to its constitutive elements, the words themselves denigrates in such strong terms. In both "Morning" and "The Apology" the original performative is obscured by the strings and fragments of discourse to which it gives rise. The speech act drifts away from action and back to speech.

The very first sentence of the first text in Great Days, "The Crisis" provides an example of peculiar performatives, speech acts which are devoid of illocutionary and perlocutionary force: "On the dedication page of the rebellion, we see the words 'To Clementine'" (GD 3). Carl Naeigret describes the functioning of this type of utterance very perceptively indeed: "The text thus refers to a non-entity, in effect creating, in a perlocutionary fashion, its own speech act, a referential code which has no prior existence."¹⁸ The line from "The Crisis" is a performative, because it does what it says. Had the speaker said "the words appear", instead of "we see the words", the utterance would have been a simple constative one. Although it is a performative, the line simultaneously fulfils and violates the felicity conditions, the requirements for a speech act to constitute itself "properly" as such.

We do see the words "To Clementine", but not on the "dedication page of the rebellion". (The latter phrase is another bizarre Barthelmean collocation.) Our only conclusion can be that the utterance is self-reflexive, that it refers to the fiction itself. The phrase, "dedication page", draws attention to the material form of a book, a text, this text. (Great Days itself is dedicated to "Thomas B. Hess", who may be as fictional as "Clementine".) We see the words "To Clementine" in the first sentence, if not on the dedication page. And the dedication "To Clementine" is itself another performative, embedded within the performative that makes us see the words "To Clementine" themselves. At the same time the texts "the rebellion" and "The Crisis" do not quite coincide, so that the perlocutionary, or persuasive force of the utterance remains obscure. As readers, we are both convinced and not convinced.

It is significant that this performative incorporates a quotation, "To Clementine" and a reference to another text, the "rebellion" which has a "dedication page". Perhaps this other text is none other than the rebellious Great Days. To deconstruct the edifice of speech act theory, Derrida focuses precisely on these "parasitic" forms of discourse, such as quotation and fiction.⁸³

In "Signature Event Context" and "Limited Inc abc ..." (Derrida's ellipsis) Derrida argues that the theories of Austin and Searle are another incarnation of the "metaphysics of presence", because speech act theory presupposes a fully self-present speaker with the intention of communicating something. For Derrida, speech act theory depends on the hierarchy of logical dependencies which has characterised Western thought:

The hierarchical axiology, the ethical-ontological distinctions ... do not merely set up value-oppositions clustered around an ideal and undefinable limit, but moreover subordinate these values to each other (normal/abnormal, standard/parasite, fulfilled/void, serious/non-serious, literal/non-literal, briefly: positive/negative and ideal/non-ideal)...⁵¹

Derrida accuses Austin and Searle of taking part in the metaphysical

enterprise of returning "strategically", ideally, to an origin or to a "priority" held to be simple, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-identical, in order then to think in terms of derivation, complication, deterioration, accident, etc."⁵²

(One should note that Grice's maxims also participate in this enterprise, because normative rules are formulated before violations of the norm are considered.) The citation from "The Crisis" offers an example of exactly the kind of non-literal, non-serious, parodic, parasitic discourse Austin and Searle attempt to exclude from the canon, of pure speech acts.

Derrida's deconstruction of speech act theory utilizes the notion of iterability:

Iterability alters, contaminating parasitically what it identifies and enables to repeat "itself"; it leaves us no choice but to mean (to say) something that is (always, already, also) other than what we mean (to say), to say, to say something other than what we say and would have wanted to say, to understand something other than ... etc. ... Limiting the very thing it authorizes, transgressing the code or law it constitutes, the graphics of iterability inscribes alteration irreducibly in repetition (or in identification): a priori, always and already, without delay, at once, aussi se. [the last phrase puns on Derrida's acronym for his essay "Signature Event Context", Sec]. (first ellipsis, Derrida's).⁵³

("The Apology" and "Morning" perform the drift and alteration inscribed in the sign, which, by its very nature, must be repeatable.) Derrida argues that because a speech act is necessarily conventional - apology,

thanks, promise, declaration, threat, whatever - its repeatability, its status as a sign, must pre-exist any supposedly original moment of pure, fully intentional communication. Any speech act must "always and already" be a quotation for it to be intelligible as a speech act. Quotation, imitation (parody and pastiche) and fiction cannot therefore be excluded from a theory of speech acts, because they are "always and already" part of any speech act.

John R. Searle responds angrily to Derrida's misreading of Austin, only to have Derrida re-iterate the argument of "Signature Event Context" in "Limited Inc abc ..." as a response. Derrida renames Searle "Sar1", or Société à responsabilité limitée, or "Society with Limited Liability",¹⁸ and makes much of the copyright which Searle attaches to his essay. "Sar1", in fact, becomes the paradigm of all those who claim proprietorship of texts in the name of legitimate authorship and authority, thereby controlling and limiting the endless quotations of textual and intertextual play.¹⁹

The final series of exchanges of "Great Days" embodies a perfect illustration of Derrida's critique of speech act theory. It deserves to be quoted in full:

- What do the children say?
- There's a thing the children say.
- What do the children say.
- They say: Will you always love me?
- Always.
- Will you always remember me?
- Always.
- Will you remember me a year from now?
- Yes, I will.
- Will you remember me two years from now?
- Yes, I will.
- Will you remember me five years from now?
- Yes, I will.
- Knock knock.
- Who's there?

- You see? (GD 171-172).

Couturier and Durand read this text as "a ritual review and exorcism of past behaviour, leading to the final promise to love and remember."⁶ In other words, despite their denials, cited earlier, of illocutionary force at work in Barthele's texts, they read these utterances as a straightforward, felicitous speech act, a "promise to love and remember." Significantly, the phrase "ritual review" hints at iterability, but this hint is neither explored nor considered. Furthermore, their conclusion depends on the suppression of the last three lines of dialogue, a surprising omission. The dialogue itself examines the ways in which the "always and already" present peritism of iterability undermines even the most felicitous of performatives.

The dialogue is a shifting interplay of citations and quotations. The question "Will you always love me?" is introduced from the start, as a quotation, as something "the children say". Even in its presumably original context, namely the posing of this question by the children, the question is still a quotation. The children are imitating - or quoting - the language of adults, and the adults in their turn are simply quoting a culturally encoded form every time they ask this question. The origins of the question disappear in a maze of quotation. As a promissive speech act, "I will always love you" is voided in advance by its status as a conventional response to a highly conventionalised question. The utterances are, therefore, quotations to an indeterminate degree. As Couturier and Durand recognise, the dialogue is a ritual, but its ritual character radically undermines the possibility of a felicitous speech act. These utterances are quotations and not (speech) actions; the ritual quality of the exchange serves to underline its textuality.

Barthes concedes that I-love-you is "a 'formula', but this formula corresponds to no ritual."¹⁷ It would seem that Barthes, like Couturier and Durand, conceives of the utterance I-love-you as a moment of pure self-presence on the part of the speaker, despite the conventional nature of the speech act. However, like everyone else, the speakers of "Great Days" are locked in the iterability of ritual. The performative of love is called into question by the formulaic repetition of a "knock knock" joke. This type of joke obviously depends on coded, iterable formulae for its effectiveness. The first speaker interprets the conventional response - "Who's there?" - to the conventional prompt - "Knock knock" - as a sign that he has already been forgotten by his interlocutor. Barthes draws a parallel between a conventional instance of language use, a formulaic joke, and what we would all like to believe is a spontaneous, unconventional moment of self-presence in the company of the other, I-love-you. Infelicitously, in terms of linguistic convention, there is no distinction between a "knock knock" joke and a declaration of love, because both depend on the iterability of conventional signs for their success.

The speaking subject, even in its most spontaneous performativa, is doomed to quotation. The lovers of "Great Days" can only reiterate "what the children say" to signal their love. The necessarily conventional nature of language betrays the transience of human affections, and undermines the always uncertain authority of the speech act.

* * *

Barthes's dialogues consistently undermine their own premises. They construct no coherent universe of discourse; they violate the cooperative principle without any compensation in semantic depth; they subvert the anchorings of context and reference by means of deixis itself; they use

performatives as pure quotations, and divest them of authority. They reveal that the speaking subject is never in command of its utterances, and that language enunciates us, rather than the other way round. The reversibility of speaking positions in dialogue is used to set up a ceaseless circularity of language. This is something that Jean Baudrillard specifically identifies as a break with the forms of thought that preceded postmodernism. For Baudrillard, circular discourse is different because

it no longer passes from one point to another but ... it describes a circle which indistinctly encompasses the positions of transmitter and receiver now unlocatable as such. Thus there is no longer any transmitting instance - power is something that circulates and whose source is no longer marked, a cycle in which the positions of dominator and dominated interchange in an endless reversion that is also the end of power in its classical definition (the ellipsis is Hal Foster's, who quotes this argument).⁸

In other words, the tradition of phono-logocentrism, of the speaking voice as a guarantee of truth, a notion that is still current in modernism, is wittily undone in Barthelme's dialogues.

The utter impossibility of determining "tone" in any utterance from these texts challenges the dominance "tone" achieved under the auspices of New Criticism, the legitimating theory of high modernism.⁹ The concept of textual "tone" betrays a certain longing for the residue of a voice as an index of individuality. In an exchange like the following, it simply does not matter whether the "tone" is sad, elegiac, ironic, bitter, or defensive:

- My demands were not met. One, two, three, four.
- I admire your dash and address. But regret your fear and prudence.
- Always making the effort, always ("Great Days", GD 158).

Klinkowitz reveals an ingrained phono-logocentric bias, an unquestioned preference for the presence of a speaker as revealed by a voice, even if that "voice" is a critical fiction. He claims, rather astonishingly, that Barthelme's "favourite subject" is the "quality of the human voice."²² Molesworth also detects tones in Barthelme's writing: the naively nostalgic and the sardonic, but he does concede that these two tones cancel each other, leaving the texts "virtually toneless."²³

Unlike the "full" voices of figures in classic realist fiction, or even in high modernist writing, speaking from the plenitude of an individuality, the empty voices of Barthelme's speakers reveal that the speaking subject is never quite present in its utterances, and that circular discourse can unsettle the polarities of communication. But the "sweet even discourse" ("Great Days", GD 159) of the dialogues is a reminder, in its fun, wit and exuberance, of the unleashed possibilities of language in the "great days" to come.

CHAPTER TWO

BARTHELME'S EFFACED SELF: DISCOURSE AND SUBJECTIVITY

In the preceding chapter we saw that, according to Jan Mukařovský, dialogue differs from monologue because the latter has a "single and continuous contexture."⁴² But what do we do with texts in which an apparent monologue turns out to be a concealed dialogue? The discourses of Barthelme's characters are permeated to such a degree by other voices that Mukařovský's presentation of monologue seems simplistic, for Barthelme's fictions work to dissolve any monolithic, monologic identity.

Roland Barthes claims that in the classic realist text "characters are types of discourse, and conversely, the discourse is a character like the other." The "complicity [between character and discourse] assures the uninterrupted exchange of the codes [of readability]."⁴³ If one aspect of Barthelme's writings is the endless circulations and exchanges of discourse, "character", on the other hand, is radically interrupted and syncretized, as the complicity between character and discourse is dissolved. The partnership between reader and character, or "empathy", is disturbed as well.

The "complicity" which Barthes detects in the realist text is not, of course, specific to classic realism. What greater example could one find of this allegiance between discourse and character than the interior monologue or stream of consciousness so dominant in modernist practice?

In this case, each item in the discourse determines and overdetermines a character in its every recess. Think of Molly's celebrated monologue at the end of *Ulysses*; think also of Barthelme's pastiche of this mode of writing in the mock interior monologue of the Dead Father (*DF* 171-173).

Frederic Jameson observes that in high modernism

the problem of expression is closely linked to some conception of the subject as a monad-like container within which things are felt which are then expressed by projection outwards.... When you constitute your individual subjectivity as a self-sufficient field and a closed realm in its own right...[you] condemn yourself to the windless solitude of the monad, buried alive and condemned to a prison-cell without egress.¹⁴

Jameson goes on to declare that postmodernism disrupts the "monad-like container" of the Romantic-modernist individual, who is condemned by his very individuality to an eternity of interior monologues. The decentred subject of postmodernism, on the other hand, vanishes into strings of language.

In a perceptive reading of Barthelme's fiction, R. E. Johnson suggests:

For Barthelme as for Nietzsche, it is this displacement [of the self]-effected by the clash of grammars - that affords the liberating recognition that the self is a grammatical construct. Herein lies the pleasure generated by the play of language.¹⁵

In other words, the realisation that character is only a discourse offers a way out of the modernist prison of the self toward a new conception of subjectivity. I shall not deny that this subjectivity affords pleasure, but the exact value of the decentred subject has been challenged. Some aspects of this challenge will be examined at the end of the chapter; for

the time being, a degree of caution when dealing with utopian claims like Johnson's is enough. But what precisely is the "effaced self" in Barthelme's writing?

The Dialogical Subject: An "Intersubjective Atrocity"

One of the narrators of "Daunier" attempts to find out more about selfhood by studying texts with the word "self" in their title.

I turned over the literature, which is immense, the following volumes sticking in the mind as having been particularly valuable: The Self: An Introduction by Meyers, Self-Abuse by Samuels, The Armed Self by Crawlie, Burt's The Concept of Self, Self-Congratulation by McFee, Fingerette's Self-Deception, Self-Defense for Women and Young Girls by Birch, Winterman's Self-Doubt, The Effaced Self by Lilly, Self-Hatred in Vermin by Skinner, LeBett's Selfishness, Gordon's Self-Love, The Many-Coloured Self by Winsor and Newton, Paramananda's Self-Mastery, The Misplaced Self by Richards, Nastiness by Bertini, The Self Prepares by Teller, Flaxman's The Self as Pretext, Nickel's Self-Propelled Vehicles, Sorensen's Self-Slaughter, Self and Society in Ming Thought by DeBarry, The Sordid Self by Cluta, and Techniques of Self-Validation by Wright. These works underscored what I already knew, that the self is a dirty great villain, an interrupter of sleep, a devil of weakness, an intersubjective atrocity, a mouth, a maw (p. 169).

Here the subject, both as topic and as self, disappears exuberantly in the discourse that is meant to express it. Barthelme's self is ludic and "many-coloured", but, at the same time, it is "misplaced" and "effaced". The self is a "pretext" for heterogeneity rather than identity; these titles share only their playful resistance to self-expression.

One of the reasons why this list induces laughter is because the word "self" itself lacks identity and changes its meaning as a result of different contexts. The "self" that can be abused or defended (a body) is clearly not the same as the self that can be effaced or doubted (a personality). And these "selves" are not the same as the "self" of "self-propelled". The list is funny because the speaker can neither limit nor catalogue the difference between self and other. In the confusion of "self" as a body with "self" as a supposed essence, one can see a de-categorisation of the premises of Western selfhood. The Cartesian dualism of mind/body cannot function if its terms are scrambled, as they are in this list.

The last sentence of the quoted section constitutes a miniature allegory of the subject in language. Discourse pre-exists any individual, and the attempt to locate a stable subjectivity in, and by means of, language results in the discovery of what one (always) "already [knows]." The self provides a pretext for an endless discourse, a never-ending text, which fails, despite its "immensity", to capture the self. The self is the absent centre of encircling discourses. It remains, in the words of "Daumier", both a stubborn presence, a "villain" and an enigmatic absence, a "man".

In addressing Barthelme's texts, one has to determine why any attempt to identify or fit the subject in language, or the speaker in discourse, necessarily entails a misplacement (The Misplaced Self by Barthelme?). A reader like Larry McCaffery finds speakers and characters in these fictions unproblematic. Their language expresses a self, as far as McCaffery is concerned, because this language represents their "struggle to stay alive, make sense of their lives and establish a meaningful con-

tact with others...."⁹⁹ A "significant" relationship exists between the attempted self-expression of characters and "Barthelme's own struggle with the deterioration of fictional forms and the deterioration of language".¹⁰⁰ McCaffery fails to account for anything beyond the stylistic idiosyncrasies of an individual author. (Hence his telling emphasis on "Barthelme's own.") He can only diagnose "character" in a traditional way, whether this character is "Barthelme" or "Baskerville" in "Florence Green is 81" (CBDC), whom he describes as a "deeply disturbed individual indeed".¹⁰¹ Individual-in-deed is indeed the unproblematic notion of character-in-action. McCaffery cannot comprehend the explosion of any unified, diagnosable character in these texts, and cannot grasp the complicity of language in such a process.

Charles Molesworth offers characterological profiles of the "typical character" created by Barthelme.¹⁰² He claims that "Barthelme's characters show how they desire an ethical, normative measure that will allow them to comprehend their experience".¹⁰³ Molesworth's book is larded with references to "individuals" and assumptions that are based on psychologising.¹⁰⁴ He does admit that "in almost all [Barthelme's] stories the characters appear as victims, pasteboard caricatures of social attitudes and psychological dilemmas, obviously 'signs' only of their author's glibness." Even so, a caricature is a distorted representation, and if this still offers too disturbing a view of "character", we can assume the presence of an author behind all the "signs" and "pasteboard", beyond seemingly self-generating discourse. Molesworth continues: "And yet they [the characters] do reflect, and in some cases even expose the way we live now...." He concludes that these characters do represent what he somewhat anachronistically terms "real life".¹⁰⁵ However, one must admit that Molesworth's attitude wavers. He is capable

of insights like the following: "In *Barthelme's* case, no ... assumption of consistency is possible. If Edward and Pia are truly representative or sympathetic characters they should be presented in a homogeneous fashion. If the heterogeneous presentation is an accurate reflection of their character, they are hardly to be viewed in a stable emotional frame".¹¹³ This is exactly the *sporia* I propose to address.

Contrary to assumptions about consistent, or even consistently inconsistent, identities, the utterances of *Barthelme's* characters are not at all single and continuous expressions of unique personalities. They are underpinned, instead, by what Mikhail Bakhtin calls a "hidden dialogicality".¹¹⁴

In his reading of *Dostoevsky*, Bakhtin distinguishes between two major categories, namely "object-oriented" words and the "double-voiced" word.¹¹⁵ (It should be noted that Bakhtin uses "word" consistently as a synecdoche for "discourse".) The "direct word [is] aimed directly at its object," and in this context "object" can be understood as both the "referent" of a signifier, and its "intention". Referentiality, and illocutionary or perlocutionary force are instances of object-orientated discourse. For Bakhtin, such a goal-directed, illocutionary and referential discourse is "the expression of the speaker's ultimate semantic authority" (my emphasis).¹¹⁶ The object-orientated word is not innocent, despite its apparent transparency. It is inextricably linked to the "presence of authoritative points of view and authoritative established values."¹¹⁷

Bakhtin identifies represented discourse or the "objectivised word"¹¹⁸ as another discursive sub-group, which is subsumed by the "object-

oriented" word. The "objectivised word" is clearly subordinated to the direct, authoritative metalanguage of a narrator. In both the object-orientated word, and the objectivised word, language is seen as the virtually unmediated expression of an intentional individual. Both Holesworth and McCaffery seem to be reluctant to move beyond these levels of language, and view the character's inconsistency as part of the author's consistency, or as instances of the "objectivised word" in Bakhtin's terminology. Bakhtin sees both these types of discourse as examples of "self-enclosed utterance".¹⁰⁹ Here we encounter the "self-enclosed" self or the modernist monad once more. However, Bakhtin contests what he calls the "verbal-semantic dictatorship of a unified style and tone".¹¹⁰ This attitude is echoed by Roland Barthes, who sees unified individuality as repressive: "how much penal evidence is based on a psychology of consistency!"¹¹¹

In Bakhtin's typology, the "double-voiced word" plays paradox to the discourse of object-orientated discourse, whether direct or represented. The double-voiced word collides two or more semantic authorities, and, in this way, challenges "monologically secure speech".¹¹² The "hetero-directed word" undermines the function of conventional discourse, which Bakhtin claims is "to signify, express, convey or represent something".¹¹³ Again, we are dealing with a challenge to an identification of language with communication. The illocutionary force of an utterance is short-circuited by hetero-directed discourse, because the latter recognises no single semantic authority. In Bakhtin's case, the challenge to communication entails a questioning of the self that is presumed to be engaged in the communication of meaning. The double-voiced word is both answer and anticipation; it is involved in a complex dialogue with itself. It becomes the site of "interferences" between several equally authoritative

voices.¹¹⁴ Bakhtin describes dialogic discourse as "[losing] its composure and confidence and [becoming] agitated, innerly undecided and two-faced".¹¹⁵ He stresses that the dialogic word is always (already) a response to the utterances of another. No utterance is fully present or original, for, as Bakhtin persuasively puts it, "there is only the word-address, a word which comes into dialogical contact with another word, a word about a word addressed to a word".¹¹⁶ (So much, one is tempted to add, for referentiality.)

Bakhtin formulates the dialogic character of discourse in a way that is seductively similar to Derrida's articulation of an infinity of contexts set in motion by the graphematic mark:

No, [the speaker] receives the word from the voice of another, and the word is filled with that voice. The word arrives in his context from another context which is saturated with other people's interpretations. His own thought finds the word already inhabited.¹¹⁷

Despite the striking parallels between the arguments of Bakhtin and Derrida, Bakhtin remains content to regard dialogic discourse as a marginal and circumscribed instance, a deviation from a monologic mainstream. For this reason, despite his acknowledgment of the dialogic potential of various genres,¹¹⁸ he stops short of recognising that all discourse is dialogic. If one follows a Derridean trajectory, dialogue cannot be the etiolated derivation from an originary, self-present utterance. Quite simply, monologic discourse is a dialogue which has repressed, or hidden, its dialogicality.

Perhaps the "word about a word addressed to a word" is nowhere more apparent than in the phenomenon Kristeva calls intertextuality,¹¹⁹ that

mesh of quotations without origins which make up any utterance. It is because the sign is iterable that any text is already an intertext, made up of other people's words. The conclusion of "Great Days" (GP) is a telling instance of such intertextuality; others are "The Catechist" (S) and "The Sandman" (S). Again, if a monological utterance has repressed its own dialogicality in order to create an effect of communication, realist and referential discourses repress intertextuality so that they seem to have direct access to a referent, and do not appear to be mediated by this potentially endless web of quotations. Postmodernist writing appears eager to draw attention to its own intertextuality for the sake of that intertextuality, and not in the service of some modernist "allusion" or appeal to an originally authentic context. It is not that postmodern writing is intertextual, and the nineteenth century novel is not. Any writing partakes of intertextuality, it is just that the attitude to this condition of writing differs in postmodernism.

To grasp the radically dialogic character of all discourse as proposed by post-structuralist theories, one has to turn to Jacques Lacan's model of subjectivity in language. Here one finds that Bakhtin's notion of the discourse of another becomes the language of an other, the Other. Meaning is determined by this Other, according to Lacan. (To fully comprehend the potential of Bakhtin's thought, it is necessary to introduce the concepts of another, in a self-fulfillment of the theory.) Coward and Ellis summarise the significance of the Other in Lacan's work as follows:

The positionality which characterises language - in which meanings exist for a subject who functions as the place of intention of those meanings - commences with the separation of subject and object. The situating of the image as separate [occurs] through the intervention of the third term, the other It demonstrates here how language constructs itself from a state of otherness. The self-presentification of the subject

arises from primary alterity; the subject represents itself by a "stand-in". The subject is constructed through its acquisition of language from the place of the Other (my emphasis).¹¹⁷

Lacan defines the Other as "the place where the signifying chain is, which controls everything that will be able to be presented from the subject ..."¹¹⁸ As Bakhtin argues, the utterance of any subject is an answer to or an anticipation of the discourse of the Other, because the latter pre-exists the self. (There is, of course, a kind of chicken-egg interdependency here that opens the way for deconstructive manoeuvres.)

The presence of the Other is the condition for meaning, obviously because "communication" can only be intersubjective. Coward and Ellis add that "significance is only possible with the construction of the Other as the place of the signifier; that is, the construction of an outside referent by which the individual speech act or word is verified".¹¹⁹

Such verification raises unforeseen difficulties, because the presence of the Other in "self-presentification" and in the language of the self means that the self is neither entirely self-present, nor self-enclosed. The self must be locked in an endless internal dialogue that is the exact opposite of a sealed interior monologue. The Other's possession of language renders this dialogue even more difficult. Because the Other is the "place of the signifier", every word uttered by any speaker can only be a response, always and already, to the discourse of the Other. In Barthelme's novel, Snow White explains the opening phrase of her poem, "bandaged and wounded", as a "metaphor of the self armouring itself against the gaze of the other" (SM 59). This process can never be completed because the self only has meaning in the gaze of the Other.

Such a concept of dialogicality embodies a return of the d'alogical repressed. (Perhaps one should recall Lacan's most enigmatic aphorism: "l'inconscient, c'est le discours de l'Autre - "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other."¹²²) In order to be fully fledged individuals, we have to repress the dialogic character of language, forgetting that we are constructed by, and in, the discourse of an-Other. Only this repression enables us to believe that we are the autonomous possessors of *interior monologues*.

Like Lacan's subject, Bakhtin's is split, for it is both penetrated and constructed by the gaze of the Other. Bakhtin says that a Dostoevsky character engages in "playing the role of the other person in regard to himself",¹²⁴ and that this character "lives only in the other person, he lives in his reflection in the other person".¹²⁵ Once again, this observation bears a striking resemblance to Coward and Ellis's reformulation of Lacan, cited earlier. "The self-presentation of the subject comes from primary alterity; the subject represents itself by a 'stand-in'." The self plays Other in relation to itself, and (mis)recognises itself in the self of which it glimpses a reflection in the gaze of the Other. Lacan consequently asserts that any identity entails a misrecognition, a méconnaissance.¹²⁶

It should not be assumed, however, that the dialogical self or the split subject is a universal, a historical phenomenon, as these theories may appear to imply, if taken in isolation. Although Bakhtin addresses himself to texts by Dostoevsky and Rabelais, and Lacan to either metapsychology, or a nineteenth century text like "The Purloined Letter"¹²⁷, both theories have only gained currency as part of the contemporary emphasis on decentred subjectivity. In other words, these

theories do not operate in a vacuum, but must be seen as part of specific postmodernist discourses. The decentred, dialogic or divided subject is a postmodernist one, and texts, whether one considers Barthele's, Bakhtin's, or Lacan's, are deeply inculcated in this process of decentring.

What is at stake here, is the absence of a metalanguage, a critical discourse outside the phenomenon being described. Bakhtin and Lacan theorize the decentred subject; Barthele enacts it. Theory (psychoanalysis, literary criticism) and practice (fiction) mutually reinforce one another. Terms like "theory" and "practice" inevitably appear anachronistic: Derrida reminds us that there is no outside-text.¹¹²

Barthele's texts demonstrate the impossibility of an enclosed self armoured against penetration by the Other; they allow the repressed dialogicality of language to return. Although the Other is inseparable from the construction of identity, the allowance for otherness casts doubt on the self. This doubt can be activated at any moment, as Jane in Snow White knows. She writes to Mr Quistgaard:

You may have, in a commonsense way, regarded your own [universe of discourse] as a plenum, filled to the brim with discourse. You may even have felt that what already existed was a sufficiency. People like you often do. That is certainly one way of regarding it, if fat self-satisfied complacency is your aim. But I say unto you, Mr Quistgaard, that even a plenum can leak (SW 45).

Jane describes the exact dialogical mechanism that sets Barthele's universe in motion, the process which underpins his discourses, and the threat posed to the "fat self-satisfied complacency" of a stable identity.

The moment I inject discourse from my u. of d. into your u. of d. the yoursness of yours is diluted. The more I inject, the more you dilute. Soon you will be presiding over an empty plenum, or rather, since that is a contradiction in terms, over a former plenum, in terms of yoursness. You are, essentially, in my power (SW 46).

Notions of the self as self-sufficient may be deeply rooted, as Molesworth and McCaffery indicate. Yet Barthelme's "empty plenum" remains to testify that a plenum, in particular, has always-already leaked.

Distracting the Self, or, Ruptures and Slidings

In "Dammier" a monological self is played off against the possibility of dialogical selves. The text concludes with these observations: "The self cannot be escaped, but it can be, with ingenuity and hard work, distracted. There are always openings, if you can find them, there is always something to do" (§ 183). One way of discovering what Jane would call "injections" of otherness into the language of the self is by paying attention to these "openings" in Barthelme's fictions. For Bakhtin, ruptures and breaks characterise dialogic discourse. Analysing examples from Dostoevsky, he finds that "everywhere, but especially in those places where allusions appear, the anticipated speeches of others wedge themselves in".¹²⁸ Pauses "where none would occur in monologically secure speech" characterise dialogic discourse, as well as "peculiar interruptions of speech which define its syntactical and accentual construction".¹²⁹

Dialogical discourse disrupts the unity of a speaker's tone - it is an "accent which is foreign to the speaker and thus breaks up his sentence...."¹²¹ Consider this quotation from Barthelme's "Rebecca":

"Shaky lady," said a man, "are you a schoolteacher?"

Of course she's a schoolteacher, you idiot. Can't you see the poor woman's all upset? Why don't you leave her alone?

"Are you a homosexual lesbian? Is that why you never married?"

Christ, yes, she's a homosexual lesbian, as you put it.
Would you please shut your face? (A 139-140).

Who interrupts the story to admonish the man? Is it the same voice that takes over the end of the text? At the conclusion of "Rebecca", Rebecca and her lover "sit down together. The pork with red cabbage steams before them. They speak quietly about the McKinley Administration, which is being revised by revisionist historians". But then, in the same paragraph, someone remarks:

The story ends. It was written for several reasons. Nine of them are secrets. The tenth is that one should never cease considering human love. Which remains as grisly and golden as ever, no matter what is tattooed upon the worn tympanic page (A144).

The reference to writing in the second quotation seems to force the reader to accept that this is the "author himself" in propria persona. Discussing the various assaults on "character" in postmodernist fiction, Carl Malmgren observes:

... the metafictionist can emphasize characterliness (or the lack of this quality) by working some simple transformations upon his or her system of ACTANTS. --- An even more disconcerting example of actantial transformation might be the appearance within the fiction of the (as it were) flesh-and-blood author himself.¹²²

Maimon notes this phenomenon in both John Barth and Ronald Sukenick; for him it is an instance of the "overdetermination" for parodic purposes, of "the preoccupation of traditional criticism with plot and characterisation".¹³²

Charles Molesworth identifies what constitutes another, separate instance of discursive interference in Barthelme's work, namely the ubiquitous tonal contradiction between "sardonic rejection" and "naive naivete".¹³³

To discuss all the occurrences of ruptures and interruptions in Barthelme's texts would involve a reduplication of the texts themselves. Barthelme is a collagist, and collage is a dialogical principle per excellence. Most of Barthelme's fictions involve some degree of fragmentation. Consider the interrupting intertitles of "Daumier" (S), the disjunctions of "Views of My Father Weeping" (CL), "The Falling Dog" (CL), "The Rise of Capitalism" (S), or "Alice" (UPUA), the deconstruction of Balzac's Eugénie Grandet by Barthelme's "Eugénie Grandet" (GP), or the lexemes of "The Glass Mountain" (CL). The full implications of fragmentation will be discussed extensively in the fourth chapter. For the moment, it will be sufficient to note that such ubiquitous fragmentation allows otherness to seep into subjective or stylistic unity, and creates more perforations in the "plenum" of the self.

Couturier and Durand notice "discontinuities, hesitations and aporias" in Barthelme's texts, but they insist that a "sense of insecurity and precarious identity is tied up with [this] discourse" They claim that "if ... it becomes almost impossible to connect, to string sentences and narratives together, then the self is locked in anguish and

panic".¹³³ The disappearance of a stable subjectivity constitutes a "void, a deprivation, a disaster, [which leaves] behind a host of painful affects, like fear, guilt, anxiety and disconnection".¹³⁴ In this respect, their analysis does not really differ from more traditional humanist critics, for whom the decentering of subjectivity must necessarily be a catastrophe.

In "Daumier", however, an escape from the self is seen as liberatory, or "distracting" at the very least. Daumier distracts himself, or his self, by constructing adventures for surrogate selves, who are figured by the pronouns "he" and "you". The dialogical self offers a release from stultifying monadism.

The false selves in their clatter and boister and youthful brio
will slay and bother and push and put to all types of trouble
the original, authentic self, which is a dirty great villain,
as can be testified and sworn to by anyone who has ever been
awake,

says the self-multiplying monologist (§ 163). The "false selves" of Barthelme's fictions trouble the "dirty great villain" of the "original, authentic self" by puncturing its originality and authenticity. It is interesting that in both citations from "Daumier" the self is called a "dirty great villain". This distrust of a centered subjectivity is shared by any number of postmodern polemics.

Pronominal inconsistency generates a similar sporadic, even in a text that does not superficially appear to be interrupted. Such disturbance of the anaphoric constentation of noun and pronoun casts a powerful doubt on the ability of the name to determine identity. Baskerville, in "Florence Green is 81" is an extreme example of someone "playing the role of the

other person in regard to himself".¹²⁷ He becomes simultaneously "he" and "I" in his discourse, seemingly unable to choose between different subject positions in language. Such slidings from one pronominal position to another, in an apparently random way, appear in "The Indian Uprising" (UPUA) as well. "I" and "we" are juxtaposed in a contradictory way. (The shiftings of the shifter, discussed in the first chapter, are again applicable here. How can the "I" have an identity if it keeps on speaking from other positions like "he" and "we"?) In "Daumier", "the miracle of surrogation" of one self for another consists simply of the substitution of the third person singular pronoun for the first; this is the substance of the "LONG SENTENCE IN WHICH THE MIRACLE OF SURROGATION IS PERFORMED BEFORE YOUR EYES" (Q 164). Daumier frees himself by this strategy from the constraints of the villainous self.

Slippages of identity occur on the level of lexical identity as well, as words begin to blur into one another, losing the boundaries which determine their meaning: "Surely the very kidneys of wisdom, Florence Green has only one kidney, I have a kidney stone, Baskerville was stoned by the massed faculty of the Famous Writers School" (CBDC 7). Just as the speaker slides from "I" to "Baskerville", so "kidney" and "stone" slip from literal to figurative and vice versa. In other words, identity leaks away in these flows of language.

Here a brief explanation of the "signifying chain" and its relation to self and Other may be required. Lacan conceives of language as "la chaîne du signifiant".¹²⁸ This term is translated by Coward and Ellis as the "signifying chain".¹²⁹ More accurately, it would be the "chain of the signifier". Signifiers make up a chain because one word leads to another, just as the process of definition is nothing more than the sub-

stitution of another word or of other words for the word in question. Lacan argues that "la notion d'un glissement incessant du signifié sous le signifiant s'impose donc"¹²² ("the notion of an incessant sliding of signified under signifier thus imposes itself", my translation). This ceaseless slippage results from the endless circulation of the chain of signifiers. However, slippage is only potentially infinite. In communication, effects of meaning are produced by means of what Lacan calls "les 'points de capiton'"¹²³ (literally, "upholstery buttons"). Coward and Ellis explain that at these "points" the "direction of the signifying chain is established". The points de capiton are "located in the diachronic function of the phrase, in that meaning is only ensured with its last term, that is, retrospective meaning".¹²⁴ Furthermore, Coward and Ellis see the point de capiton as working with the Other in the process of signification.

The incidence of the chain of signifiers on the signified, i. e. [sic] the production of meaning, represented in the fictional model of the point de capiton is an incidence which can only occur if speech can evoke a third term as a witness to its meaning, and thereby complete the signifying chain.¹²⁵

Only the Other as witness and the point de capiton as instrument can arrest the signifying chain and fix it in an effect of meaning. As it has been demonstrated, an "inmixing of otherness" as Lacan calls it,¹²⁶ can threaten the meaning of the subject. What happens to subjectivity if it cannot control the ceaseless slidings of signifiers?

In instances of pronominal inconsistency, one can see a single demonstration of this condition. The subject cannot attach itself to a particular pronoun, and is dispersed, instead, in a range of possible alternatives. Identity slips away in the pronouns that are meant to fix

it. The sentence from "Florence Green is 61" provides a similar instance. No particular point offers control over the sliding of signifiers, and even the end of the sentence gives no indication of "retrospective meaning". A text like "Bone Bubbles" (CL) lacks a finalised and finalising point of reference, and evokes the reader only as witness to an impossibility of meaning. Here one cannot pin a determinate signified on to the chain of signifiers, so that slippage or glissement, is endless indeed:

poet's slurs extra rations on 96th Street blueprints of uncompleted projects drunk and asked too malphony down at the old boathouse dark little birds astonishing proportions drummed out of the circle I'll insult his Scotch student rags and bones sunspots spoiled the hash keen satisfaction (CL 123).

Any attempt to segment this string of signifiers will be arbitrary and will be experienced as such. The reader as Other, as witness to the meaning of the text, is stymied. Where does one begin to pin any meaning down?

Consider an arbitrary selection from the cited passage like "dark little birds astonishing proportions drummed out of the circle". If one breaks this particular chainlet after "birds" and "proportions", three reasonably coherent phrases may be achieved. One could also read each lexical item in isolation (an almost impossible procedure), or one could sift through the words, selecting "meaningful" phrases at random, although the very randomness of this strategy makes any meaning it locates suspect. An arbitrary meaning tenes the subject a privileged position.

"Alice" (CL) deploys a similar technique:

hurled unopened scream the place down tuck mathematical models
six hours in the confessional psychological comparisons scream
the place down Mars yellow plights : s/he misfeet of old cowboy
sirs cornflakes people pointing to the sea overboots nasal
contact 7 cm. prune the audience dense car correctly identify
chemical junk blooms of iron wonderful loftiness sentient pop-
ulations (UPUA 127).

"Alice" consists of such flows of words, but at the same time it is a highly fragmentary text which draws attention to its own interruptions with capital letters proclaiming "SECTION SEVEN" (UPUA 120), "SECTIONS SIX THROUGH TWELVE" (UPUA 121), and "SECTION FORTY-THREE" (UPUA 126). Even more interestingly, these numbers do not correspond to the actual sequence of the sections (as far as I can determine, at any rate). Because "Alice" reiterates sexual descriptions, and appears to be concerned with a speaker's intention to commit adultery, it is very tempting to read "Alice" and its techniques as an expression - albeit playful - of a definite speaker's state of mind. His confusion, one could argue, is represented by the disruptions of language. However, such a reading fails to account for the element of pastiche involved in sections like the one quoted above. The "technique" of "Alice" is not a technique that signals Bartheleme's unique authorial style as a kind of fingerprint or signature of authorial presence. The verbal slippages recall William Burroughs's "cut-up" technique very calculatedly.¹⁴⁶ (This technique is pastiched in Snow White as well, although that section marks pauses in a very clear typographic way, so that one is more aware of fragmentation than of flowing. For example

"THOSE men hulking hulk in closets and
outside gestures evocating against a
white screen difficulties intelligence
I only wanted one plain hero of incredible size
and soft, flexible manners parts
thought disassembling limb
add up the thumbprints on my shoulders" SW 31.)

The text, "Sentence" (GL) indicates a similar unwillingness to complete the signifying chain. The eponymous sentence is unbroken and uninterrupted, and offers the reader no vantage point for the finalization of meaning. It should be noted that a writer like Catharinaelsey associates a determinate textual meaning with a belief in stable and centred subjectivity. In classic realism, she argues, readers and authors "independently produce a shared meaning which confirms the transcendence of each" (my emphasis).¹⁴⁶

The metamorphosis of proper names in Barthelme's texts offers further evidence of the ineffectuality of points de capiton. A proper name should be an arch-point de capiton, because it identifies a correct reference once and for all. Proper names work to establish a very powerful referentiality, and this referentiality censors all possible slidings away from meaning and identity. There can be only one "Paraguay" "Cortes", "Daumier" or "Edward Lear", because all these names have fixed biographical, historical or geographical references. However, once again, Barthelme's fictions undo such fixity. It seems that nothing (neither author nor reader) can put an end to the contradictory and impossible accumulation of bits of discourse. Consider the fates of the proper names listed above in Barthelme's writing. "Paraguay", one is informed in the second section of the text, "is not the Paraguay that exists on our maps" (GL 20). "Cortes" in "Cortes and Montezuma", "Edward Lear" in "The Death of Edward Lear" (both in GD), and "Daumier" in "Daumier" (S) are not to be found in our biographies either. Misplacement of the proper name is a frequent strategy of Barthelme's writing; think of the "Paul Klee" of "Engineer-Private Paul Klee Misplaces an Aircraft between Milbertshofen and Cambrai, March 1916" (S, what could be more

referential?) or the "Robert Kennedy" of "Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning" (UPUA).¹⁴⁷

It is important to note that whether one encounters ruptures and interruptions, or whether one faces the random slidings of a chain of signifiers, the final effect is the same: a unified identity dissolves.

The invocation of the clinical model of schizophrenia as a description of the postmodern condition has become something of a truism.¹⁴⁸ In his essay "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" Frederic Jameson draws on Lacan's diagnosis of schizophrenia to argue that schizophrenia is the result of a breakdown in the signifying chain.¹⁴⁹ This is the kind of breakdown that Bakhtin's notion of dialogicality, as the rupturing of self by otherness, incorporates.

The concept of the signifying chain or chain of signifiers appears to embody a contradiction. Meaning will only be affected if the chain is interrupted or arrested momentarily. Should the sliding of the chain be halted too forcefully, however, the breakdown that characterizes schizophrenia will take place. On the other hand, if the sliding of the chain happens uninterruptedly, meaning will again be made impossible. This seems to be the circularity of ceaseless exchange which characterizes postmodernism for Jean Baudrillard.¹⁵⁰ The contradiction in the concept of a signifying chain is precisely encapsulated in the quotation from "The Indian Uprising": "Strings of language extend in every direction to bind the world into a rushing, ribald whole" (UPUA 11). Fragmentation ("strings of language") is superimposed on incessant sliding ("every direction ... rushing, ribald"), and the resultant "(w)hole" forces one to look beyond a simple opposition of fragment/flow or of part/whole.

DeLuze and Guattari identify this conjunction of rupture and flow as schizophrenic:

Desire constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows.¹³¹

"Brain Damage" (CL) provides a perfect summary of the interrelations between fragmentation, slippage and self-distraction. The text consists of fragments or seemingly random sections narrated by a first-person speaker. One has the by now familiar sense that the "I" is, and yet cannot always be, the same, identical "I". In three sections of the text the first person is carefully eliminated in favour of an impersonal mode of narration. (See CL 136, 140, and 142.) Another section consists of thirty three sentences, all of which begin with "I" as the subject of a predicate (CL 136). This already fragmented discourse is broken by glaringly "other" utterances. The nineteenth-century atchings, frequently used by Bartheleme, make up one particular type of interruption. On other occasions large, bold letters, that spell out brief questions or terse noun groups are interspersed between the narrative fragments. For example:

TO WHAT END?
IN WHOSE NAME?
WHAT RECOURSE? (CL 145),

or,

RETCHING

FAINTING
DISMAL BEHAVIOUR
TENDERING OF EXCUSES (CL 136).

The different utterances and the images which accompany them bear no relation to each other and are certainly not the utterances of a single speaker. The antinomy between the discourses is figured, perhaps, by the contrast between the italics of the major sections and the bold print of the interruptions. Similar boldly printed interruptions of another discourse, without identifiable producer, occur in Snow White.

The final fragment of "Brain Damage" presents the encroachment of "brain damage" as a form of alienation which even prevents the self from recognising its alienation: "... Brain damage caused by art. I could describe it better if I weren't afflicted with it ..." (CL 146, Bartholme's ellipses). This fragment is permeated with breaks; it contains five ellipses and six dashes. Remember Bakhtin's assertions that the discourse of the Other can infiltrate "everywhere, but especially in those places where ellipses appear ...", or that an abundance of pauses marks dialogic utterance. (These claims were quoted at the beginning of this section. See note 129.) In this case, one has the impression that "brain damage", or the otherness of the self, is wedging itself into these pauses.

The last paragraph of "Brain Damage" reads as follows: "Skiing along on the soft surface of brain damage, never to sink, because we don't understand the danger - " (CL 146). What is one to make of that final dash? It would seem that one cannot sink into "brain damage", one can only slide across its surface, in the same way that this section of the text con-

stantly slips away from the phrase "brain damage" which it continues to use (twenty-three times on a single page, in fact, apart from pronominal references and an allusion to it as "you-know-what", CE 146). "Brain damage" as a lexical item, with an otherwise clearly delineated referentiality, cannot halt the sliding of signifiers. Despite its medical scientificity as a term in other contexts, "brain damage" can combine and recombine with an unlimited number of signifiers in Barthele's text. ("Brain damage" can be offered as a persuasive synonym for the postmodern condition.)

Analysing Text Analysing Reader

The reader's presence renders textual signification possible; the subjectivity of a reader makes sense. No wonder, then, that so many theoretical enterprises invoke the reader as a witness to the meaning of a text. The reader is identified as both agent and addressee of significance, for she or he decodes the discourses of the text, and ties its dispersed signifiers to a signified, ensuring coherence. The languages of the text converge upon the reader and thereby define the reader as the site of meaning. The text, on the other hand, requires the reader to give it a voice.

Within such a framework, the reader is an uninvolved interlocutor, who remains silent, but is capable of decoding the insistent discourse which the text addresses to her or him. This partnership recalls the psychoanalytic situation: the analysand talks, the analyst listens. The

analyst asks, the analysand answers. However, the analysand is in possession of neither its speech nor its meaning, for meaning emerges only under the knowing gaze of the analyst. In "Florence Green is 81" Baskerville says: "Reader, ... we have roles to play, thou and I: you are the doctor (washing your hands between hours), and I, I am, I think, the nervous dreary patient" (CBDC 4).

Reader and text, it would seem, occupy positions which correspond to mutually defining polarities. These oppositions determine identities: analyst and analysand or questioner and respondent. Baskerville touches on these relationships when he explains: "I am free associating, brilliantly, brilliantly to put you into the problem" (CBDC 4). The text mobilises a play of languages, or it "free associates". The last term has a dual reference. It designates one of the earliest psychoanalytic techniques used to get the patient talking, and it also carries associations of the aesthetic appropriation of Freudian techniques (by Surrealism, for example). The adverbs, "brilliantly, brilliantly", define the activity as a specifically aesthetic one. However, "free association" appears in its more clinical aspect in the reader's supposed responses. It signposts a function for the reader, who then slips into her or his role as doctor, as the analyst who inevitably construes textual "brilliance" as a "problem".

Larry McCaffery concludes that the configuration of utterances in "Florence Green is 81", which we identify as "Baskerville", constitutes a "deeply disturbed individual".¹¹² McCaffery has offered a reading of the text's predicament; he has extrapolated an identity from the heterogeneous languages. In the text itself, Baskerville appears to affirm McCaffery's critical position. He goes so far as to interrupt his

narratorial difficulties, exclaiming: "I feel feverish; will you take my temperature doctor?" (CBDC 11). As readers we are explicitly invited to diagnose the linguistic symptoms presented to us. McCaffery accepts this invitation.

What makes analysis work? What renders the talking cure possible? The mainspring of the psychoanalytic situation is transference: the analysand invests the analyst with meaning, so that the pattern of the analysand's previous relationships is repeated within analysis itself. Lacan notes that "transference ... is only understandable in so far as its starting point is seen in the subject presumed to know; he is presumed to know what no one can escape: meaning as such."¹² It is because the analysand presumes that the masterful analyst "knows", or has access to "meaning as such" that the analysand duplicates former relationships in its relationship with the analyst. This "presumption" of knowledge is precisely what we have seen in Baskerville's remarks addressed to the reader, and in McCaffery's responses to the text. The text prattles, but the reader can be "put into" the problem or the picture, which will totalise the random discourses of the text into a diagnosis, or a representation.

At the same time, the verb and preposition used by Baskerville, "put into", hint that the reader will not be outside the text any more, but will be part of the text itself. This is what happens in Baskerville's utterance.

It is not constative; performatively it opens a space in the text for the reader as analyst, which the reader has to occupy or reject.

Baskerville offers another possibility when he suggests a second reason for his "free association". He asks: "Or [am I free associating] for fear of boring you: which?" (CEBC 4). This alternative hints at a very different kind of partnership, one which is not hierarchised according to polarities such as doctor/patient, identity/difference, or meaning/non-meaning. These oppositions are dissolved in a question of entertainment. But the possibilities of enjoyment and bliss cannot be addressed at this stage.

In Barthelme's Snow White, the reader is again identified as a source of meaning. The notorious questionnaire asks the reader to identify a "metaphysical dimension" of the text, and to describe it in "twenty five words or less" (SW 82). The reader is even given the opportunity to control the trajectory of the text. "In the further development of the story would you like more emotion () or less emotion ()?" The reader is asked to evaluate "the present work, on a scale of one to ten ...?" (SW 82-83). We are offered the opportunity to tell the text what to do next.

This is an interesting situation, because it is neatly reversed in a text from Amateurs, "What to Do Next", which consists entirely of a series of instructions directed at the reader. As readers we are no longer diagnosing the text: the text, instead, tells us what to do. The reader is informed that the collective speakers of the text "have therefore decided to make you [the reader] a part of the instructions themselves" (A 86). The reader "will be adequate in [her/his] new role" (A 86). Superficially, this construction of a space for the reader resembles Baskerville's apostrophising of the reader, but the effect appears to be quite different.

One could argue that the reader is the subject of the text's transference in "Florence Green is 81", for the reader is the "subject presumed to know" ("take my temperature doctor"). But in "What to Do Next" analyst becomes analysand, just as reader becomes text: "The anthology of yourself which will be used as a text is even now being drawn up by underpaid researchers in our textbook division." As a piece of writing, the reader is tractable and will eventually turn into "another success story for the cunning and gay instructions ..." (A 86)

No "character" is offered for our knowledgeable diagnosis. Quite simply, the text is now in control. Retracing our steps, we can see that the questionnaire from Snow White is a blatant fiction: we cannot determine the course of the text, the course of the text will determine us. Baskerville's solicitations of the reader are equally impossible; they tease the reader with the illusion that there might be a reality behind the words of the text, a speaker beyond the discourses. The reader's mastery, in both Snow White and "Florence Green is 81" is make-believe, and it therefore partakes of the fictivity which it sets out to control. The subject is drawn into the text only to discover its own textuality. (This recalls the list of texts on the self from "Daumier".)

The question earlier was what makes analysis possible. What makes analysis (psychoanalytic and literary) impossible? The answer to the first question is transference, the answer to the second is counter-transference.

First, consider some points made by Lacan about the similarity between analysis and linguistic exchange:

What needs to be understood as regards psychoanalytic experience is that it proceeds entirely in this relationship of subject to subject which means that it preserves a dimension which is irreducible to all psychology considered as the objectification of certain properties of the individual. What happens in an analysis is that the subject is, strictly speaking, constituted through a discourse to which the mere presence of the psychoanalyst brings, before any intervention, the dimension of dialogue (all emphases, mine).¹⁵⁴

For Lacan, there is no such thing as the "psychology" of an "individual" (Baskerville, for example). The subject of analysis only exists in a discourse, which has all the dimensions of a dialogue. If the psychoanalyst is truly engaged in a dialogic discourse with the patient, this means that neither subjectivity can lay claim to mastery, because both are constituted in and by the subversive reversals of dialogue.

According to Lacan, "transference is nothing real in the subject other than the appearance, in a moment of stagnation of the analytic dialectic, of the permanent modes according to which it constitutes its objects".¹⁵⁵ As we have seen above, the participants in the "analytic dialectic" are involved in a "dialogue". Dialogue is characterised by the reversibility of its roles, the shiftiness of its shifters. It therefore follows that this "[re]appearance ... of the permanent modes" of the subject's relations can occur equally in patient and doctor. The transference that occurs in the psychoanalyst is called counter-transference.

Lacan describes Freud's discovery of the unconscious, and notes that the unconscious was

something he [Freud] could only construct, and in which he himself was implicated; he was implicated in it in the sense that, to his great astonishment, he noticed that he could not avoid participating in what the hysteric was telling him, and that he felt affected by it. Naturally, everything in the re-

sulting rules through which he established the practice of psychoanalysis is designed to counteract this consequence, to conduct things in such a way as to avoid being affected.¹⁴

The mainspring of analysis may well be transference, but this transference must be confined to the analysand alone. The analyst's mastery depends on the control exercised over his own (counter) transference. On no account should the hysteria of the other penetrate his subjectivity. Although Lacan conceives of analysis as a dialogue, conventional psychoanalytic practice does its best to preclude the reversibility of a dialogic situation. The spiral of transference and counter-transference potentially resembles the "nonculminating ... ultimately affectless activity" (GD 159) of Bartheleme's dialogues. Yet psychoanalysis does everything in its power to maintain the control of self over other, and doctor over patient.

The reversal of roles in the relationship between reader and text suggests that Bartheleme's texts unleash the potentially endless circularity of the analytic situation. In this way, analysis - and again the word subsumes literature and psychoanalysis - is used to subvert itself. In this circular discourse, no subjectivity is ever immune from another, and the analyst can never have the last word.¹⁵ No wonder that one of the questions in the Snow White questionnaire is "Do you feel that the creation of new modes of hysteria is a viable undertaking for the artist of today?" (SW82). Bartheleme's reader cannot simply be the witness of the text's "hysteria", but must be implicated in it. Intersubjective, intertextual hysteria decentres the reader as the subject presumed to know.

Baskerville's fragmented discourses elicit the reader's intervention, but they turn against the reader. They do not express a character. Rather, they foreclose any possibility of passing judgement. Baskerville is always one step ahead of diagnosis, soliciting it in advance. At the same time judgement or diagnosis of Baskerville is precluded by his anticipation of the reader's responses. An attempt to comment on the play of discourses that sometimes coalesces into "Baskerville" cannot "avoid being affected", as Lacan puts it. Such an attempt runs the risk of becoming part of the discourses it intends to master.

Elizabeth Wright traces the trajectory of the reader from a self-present subject to an other in the otherness of the text:

The reader begins as an analyst and ends up as an analysand, reactivating his past traumas. Instead of the reader getting hold of the story ... the reading effect is that of the story getting hold of its readers, catching them out in a fiction of mastery.¹⁵⁴

There is no stable vantage point outside the text from which we as readers, as outsiders, can formulate a detached judgement. In the following comment by R. E. Johnson, the analyst/analysand couple appears in a more sophisticated form. Johnson argues that the "Q/A method", which Barthes uses in "The Explanation" and "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel", both in City Life, "is in a sense a structural paradigm for the dialectics of all narrative: ... the reader asks the book's question and the book supplies the reader's answer".¹⁵⁵ This notion of textual supply and demand seems a little glib. If the figure Q represents the questioning reader and A the responsive text, what are we to make of the "explanation" of "The Explanation"?

Q: Now that you've studied it for a bit, can you explain how it works?

A: Of course. (Explanation) (GL 71).

The text becomes distressingly opaque at the moment when the reader might have caught sight of some answering glimmer of meaning. Such textual resistance is figured by the black squares, or black 'boxes', which appear at intervals in "The Explanation" and once in "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel" (GL 69, 70, 75, 79 and 90). Barthelme's texts resemble the speaker of "The Agreement", who asks: "Why do I conceal from my doctor what it is necessary for him to know?" (A 62). The opacity of the text prevents a diagnosis.

One readerly response to the opacity of the text is a sense of exclusion. Patricia Waugh claims that "The Explanation" is an exemplary metafictional text because "the story is simply and directly metafictional: it is 'about' the non-interpretability of itself."¹² Waugh's interpretation seals the text off as a contemporary verbal icon: "The Explanation" has literally been written off, leaving its reader securely on the outside of the text.

David Forush offers a somewhat more interesting reading when he points out that the title of "The Explanation" covers at least three possibilities, namely the explanation "by A of the machine, the story by the same name, and any possible explanation of the story."¹³ The text is metafictional only insofar as it draws any metalanguage, or interpretation, into itself. The reader is required to offer an explanation of the explanation, and the impossibility of such an explanation has already been commented on (or explained by?) the text in question. Any interpretation of the text must therefore be tautologous, and this reduplication of text

by commentary is a very different concept from the enrichment of a text by sensitive readings, which demonstrate the virtuosity and control of a reader. "What to Do Next" indeed locates the "cunning" and "success" of its instructions in the reader's "movement from container, which you were in your former life, before you renewed yourself, with the aid of the instructions, to contained ..." (A 86, my emphasis). The supposedly transcendental consciousness of a super-reader cannot contain the text: the text contains its reader.

Irony, in its classic form, offers another example of the reader "supposed to know". The reader has a sense of being in on a joke which she or he shares with the author. The text, for a moment, becomes a transparent medium through which two knowing subjectivities wink at each other, sharing a meaning. (Think of "dramatic irony".) Irony asserts the priority of readerly subjectivity over a text. In Barthelme's story, "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel", the speaker A paraphrases Kierkegaard's definition of irony, according to which irony "is a means of depriving the object of 'its reality in order that the subject may feel free" (CL 88). Irony triumphantly affirms the transcendence of the ironic subject.

Indeed, in Critical Practice Catherine Belsey observes that irony provides a "[guarantee of] the subjectivity of the reader as a source of meaning."¹⁶² Irony also emphatically guarantees and guards authorial subjectivity in Molesworth's work on Barthelme. For example, the subtitle of Molesworth's text, The Ironist Saved from Drowning, turns abstract noun - "irony" - into human agent - "ironist". The transformation implies that the trope necessarily defines a certain kind of sensibility, an implication which does not hold true for other rhetorical figures: imagine a metonymist or a polyptoc'onist! "Irony", for Molesworth, has transcended

its origin as a device of rhetoric to become both a naturalised component of literature and an essential characteristic of a hazily defined contemporary consciousness: "The trouble, if that is the right word, with irony is that it has become so central to the modernist temperament that it's hard for many to see that it is not necessarily a natural part of literature".¹⁶³ The message Molesworth conveys to his readers is that 'there is still hope for the subject. Despite ubiquitous fragmentation, the subject *still survives, is still there, rescued at the last moment by nothing other than its command of irony: "Barthelme is saved from drowning in a world of fragments by his ironic manipulation of them".¹⁶⁴*

R. E. Johnson has this to say about irony in "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel", however:

[The] ironic involutions assume dizzying proportions when "A" says that his comments on Kierkegaard's treatment of Schlegel's irony were in themselves ironic. What's more, the problem is compounded by Kierkegaard's consistent maintenance of an ironic relation to himself ... and by the fact that the narrator makes Kierkegaard's irony reach out to encircle him, to, in fact, precede his own writing (The irony similarly encircles the reader when he "checks out" A's references to The Concept of Irony and finds them to be accurate.)¹⁶⁵

"Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel" presents a figuration of the relationship between textuality and subjectivity. Every subject attempts to assert its mastery over language, over a text. According to Molesworth, "Barthelme" saves himself, or his self, from fragmentation, by means of his irony. Kierkegaard's critique of irony attacks another text, Schlegel's novel, Lucinde. Kierkegaard locates "the actuality of irony in poetry" (CL 89). In other words, Kierkegaard's discussion of irony is meant to demonstrate his superiority over the texts in question. This is interesting, because one of the criticisms Kierkegaard levels at the

ironic subject is precisely that it denies the reality of its object, thereby asserting its own supremacy and priority: "The object is deprived of its reality by what I have said about it. Regarded in an ironical light, the object shivers, shatters, disappears" (CL 88). A. tries to affirm his superiority over yet another text, namely Kierkegaard's The Concept of Irony. And in turn, the reader tries to make sense of "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel".

Despite the interventions of these various subjects, "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel" consists of a receding chain of texts with only another fiction, Lucinda, at its origin. Yet each successive reader - Kierkegaard A., Barthelme's reader - tries to master these texts, in an endless conflict between self and text. "Irony" itself appears in some form in each response: as a diagnosis on the part of Kierkegaard, as a deliberate strategy on the part of A., and as a critical comment on the part of a reader like R. E. Johnson. At this point "irony" no longer exists in any form to which we have become accustomed. It stands simply as an empty signifier which appears whenever there is a struggle between a text and a subjectivity, the "unfairness" of the title. Commenting on postmodern painting, Steven Henry Nedoff notes that "postmodernism's equivocal voice has lost irony altogether."¹⁸

A. claims that Kierkegaard's reading of Schlegel "neglects" the "objecthood" (CL 90) of Schlegel's text. A. himself attempts to "annihilate" (CL 90) Kierkegaard's commentary. The reader, precisely by focusing on this debate, slides the textual aspects of Barthelme's writing, its "objecthood". This repressed materiality of the text returns to haunt each of its readers. For example, one could note the way in which quotation marks are emphasized by the use of their lexical equivalents

"quote" and "unquote" (CL 88-89). David Porush notes the reappearance of "utterances that appear entirely devoid of reference - purely formal syntactical and grammatical exercises"¹⁸⁷ in "The Explanation". Such utterances also occur in "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel". (See CL 84, 86 and 92.) The framing sections of the Kierkegaard-Schlegel debate appear unrelated and random.

This return of the textual repressed is obvious in A.'s attempted "annihilation" of Kierkegaard's text. A. affirms his identity as ironist ("O! You are an ironist," CL 86) by utilising an ironic strategy already outlined in The Concept of Irony. A. claims "I think Kierkegaard is unfair to Schlegel. And that the whole thing is nothing but a damned shame and crime!" (CL 90). Immediately after this, A. retracts his statement and says "that is not what I think at all. We have to do here with my own irony. Because of course Kierkegaard was 'fair' to Schlegel" (CL 90). In his exposition of Kierkegaard's argument, A. explains that the making of a contradictory, "ironical" statement deprives the object of the statement of "its reality" (CL 88).

However, this "annihilation" is made impossible by the way in which Kierkegaard's discourse reaches out to encircle A.. Although The Concept of Irony is logically and chronologically anterior to A.'s utterances, he reads it as a comment on himself. Yet commentary must clearly be logically and chronologically posterior to its object. A. is surrounded by the language he sets out to annihilate. A. has abolished the hierarchisation of statement and commentary, self and text, on which irony may be said to depend. His own utterances are shot through with quotations from Kierkegaard; his own subjectivity is permeated with the "disapproval" (CL 91) of another.

Madoff's comments about the disappearance of irony in post-modernism deserve to be quoted at length:

The main rhetorical element of modernism was its profound irony. Irony is a purposeful break with something that was whole, a schism that is created. The ironic mode always counts on the space it opens up to show a loss, a nostalgia for a destroyed unity. But with the unbounded freedom of exchange in information culture [used here as a synonym for "postmodernism"], ... where every space in the network expands into new categories, irony is no longer possible We have not reached a new unity, a successful resolution to irony, when all things are equalised. We have only reached a stage of perpetual movement and mutation along a surface of networks.¹⁴⁸

The last statement describes perfectly the endless process of an empty "irony", and the concomitant disappearance of a subject for and of this irony.

"Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel" begins where this section began - with the analytic situation. A. describes what appears to be an erotic encounter, and Q. observes, like a proper psychoanalyst: "That's a very common fantasy" (CF 84). It would be tempting to pursue the analogy between transference and irony. Transference is necessary to psychoanalysis, as long as it is kept in its place and keeps analyst and analysand in their respective places. However, counter-transference bedevils the analysis. Irony, equally, forms the mainspring of many a conventional reading. Roland Barthes even describes irony as a "final code"¹⁴⁹, because it closes the text and allows the reader the last word. But in "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel" irony becomes a process of perpetual reversal, rather like the role reversals effected by transference and counter-transference. These reversals ensure that any affirmation of subjectivity is forced to encounter its own textuality.

The Uncanny Sandman: Hoffmann, Freud, Barthele

Several of Barthele's texts deal thematically with the psychoanalytic situation. "The Sandman" (5) raises important questions about the relation of analysand to analyst. On closer reading, the text performs the instability of any hierarchisation between analysand and analyst, or between object - and metalinguage, or between text and interpretation.

Perhaps my responses to "The Sandman" will clarify the processes of textual transference. Initially, I found it one of Barthele's most irritating pieces. It seemed to offer a complacent argument against any kind of analysis. This argument appeared to be too easily anchored in a recognisable referentiality: the world of neurotic New Yorkers celebrated and popularised by Woody Allen, the sphere of sixties political activism, anti-psychiatry, civil rights and Ebony magazine. Unlike "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel", there seemed to be no display of textuality whatsoever. "The Sandman" appeared to be commonsensical, and, even worse, entirely "realistic". As a text, it seemed to encode attitudes which all too easily appeared to be those of "Barthele himself" - a disillusionment with psychoanalysis that might have spoken of autobiographical experience.

With its clearly determinable tone, "The Sandman" scored too facile a victory over too obvious an opponent, namely the overinterpreting psychiatrist, butt of many a lowbrow joke. One could say that my initial reading demonstrated some resistance to the object to be analysed. Upon re-thinking and re-reading the text, however, a process of transference and relayed interpretation emerged, in which neither the text nor I, as

a reader, remained in a position of dominance. I acknowledge that my reading of "The Sandman" is neither obvious nor spontaneous. In producing this reading, I have indeed resisted the lure of the text to be read literally and straightforwardly. Resistance and re-reading are at the core of my reading of "The Sandman". In this respect, my reading of the text has re-enacted and repeated the movement of the text itself. The compulsion to repeat, or Wiederholungszwang¹⁷⁸ in Freud's term, will become important when we examine the text and its intertexts.

The issues at stake in "The Sandman" are the following. On the one hand, there is a literal reading, in which what is meant is stated unequivocally. On the other is an analytic reading, which refuses to accept the closure of the sign, and inserts itself into the gap opened by the non-coincidence of signified and signifier. The anonymous letter-writing protagonist of "The Sandman" asks "an interesting question":

Why do laymen feel such a desire to, in plain language, fuck over shrinks? As I am doing here, in a sense? I don't mean hostility in the psychoanalytic encounter, I mean in general. This is an interesting phenomenon and should be investigated by somebody (§ 89).

The desire to "fuck over shrinks" is a refusal of interpretation. (The use of "plain language" is an interesting point here. It is evidently opposed to the elaborate metalanguage, or "jargon", of psychoanalysis.) The letter-writer insists on closure, quite literally the terminator of analysis. Discussing Susen's wish to end analysis and buy a piano, he concedes that the analyst has

every right to be disturbed and to say that she is not electing the proper course, that what she says conceals something else, that she is *evading reality*, etc. etc. Go ahead. But there is one possibility that you might be, just might be, missing, which is that she means it (§ 88).

These terms may equally well be applied to the reading of "The Sandman" which I propose here. Does one assume that what the text "says conceals something else" and adopt a figurative reading? (Remember Freud's remark: "I invented psychoanalysis because it had no literature."¹⁷¹) Or does one side against "literature", psychoanalysis and the rhetorical and assume that the text "means" what it says. The letter-writer insists that the correct possibility is the literal one, in which the subject is adequately expressed in language. The analyst feels that Susan is "evading reality" and not "electing the proper course", because Susan believes that she is fully in possession of her meaning. There is clearly a sort of symmetry in these arguments. Each partner in the argument asserts the primacy of a mode of reading, and accuses the other of an improper interpretation. This quarrel duplicates my own hesitation, as a reader, between the manifest content of the text and the lure of a figurative analysis of a latent content.

For the protagonist of "The Sandman", the analyst's immersion in theory causes his limited perspective. "The one thing you cannot consider, by the nature of your training and of the discipline itself, is that she really might want to terminate the analysis and buy a piano" (§89). Dr Hodder's reading of Susan's motives "indicates in [the protagonist's] opinion, a radical misreading of the problem" (§ 92, my emphasis). The letter we are reading is intended to rectify this faulty interpretation. In other words, the letter should supplant the discourse of the psychia-

trist. The letter-writer's discourse claims to be the metalanguage of "truth" working on the arronous object-language of psychiatry.

The "truth" of the matter is that once a movement of misreading has begun, any metalanguage suffers the same fate as the object-language it seeks to control. Dr Hodder reads, or misreads, Susan's statements just as the letter-writer reads, or misreads, Dr Hodder's reading. Yet he offers his reading of a reading as a primary, "obvious" one. In "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel" A. could only offer an ironisation of a critique of irony, and in this intertextual regression, primacy was subverted.

Consider what happens when the protagonist of "The Sandman" enumerates the various hypotheses Dr Hodder could propose to explain Susan's conduct. He ends the list by simply repeating "or":

Or:

Or:

Or:

Or:

Or:

(S 88-89.)

These alternatives resemble the blanks which the reader is invited to fill in in Snow White. The reader is drawn into the interpretative game, adding to the protagonist's reading of A reading.

The letter-writer is caught in the relay of reading. He finds himself in a dialogic situation, despite his desire to present his discourse as

an irrefutable monologue which means what it says. Shoshana Felman says that

the constitutive condition of the unconscious [is that it is] itself a sort of obscure knowledge which is, precisely, authorless and ownerless, to the extent that it is a knowledge which no consciousness can master or be in possession of, a knowledge which no conscious subject can attribute to himself, assume as his own knowledge.¹⁷²

Felman goes on to cite Lacan who claims that "any statement of authority...has no other guarantee than that of its own utterance".¹⁷³ (How different from Benveniste on the performative cited in the first chapter!) The letter-writer of "The Sandman", despite his assertion of authority, is already not fully in possession of his meaning.

The letter begins with an indirect apology: "... I realize that it is probably wrong to write a letter to one's girlfriend's shrink" (§ 87). Indeed, the letter constitutes an attempt to sidestep the inevitable transference of the psychoanalytic encounter: "I thought of making a personal visit but the situation then, as I'm sure you would understand, would be completely untenable - I would be visiting a psychiatrist" (§ 87).

Both apology and anticipation of transference ("I'm sure you would understand") signal that the letter-writer has lost his monological autonomy. He has been drawn into the circuits of dialogicality. Even his interpretation is only a response to a preceding interpretation. The letter-writer's argument anticipates most of the arguments that can be brought *against* it, in a manner that is recognizably dialogical. The text offers other examples of anticipated responses and reactions by the silent

interlocuter - Other: "You must be aware ..." (§ 87), and the end of the text: "If this makes me a negative factor in the analysis, so be it" (§ 96). (Notice that the protagonist almost unwittingly includes himself in the analysis in the last utterance.)

A further twist is that the letter-writer's rejection of psychoanalytic interpretation can only be justified by referring to the very texts he rejects. He cites an essay in Psychiatry (§ 89), Straus's Phenomenological Psychology (§ 92), and Heidegger's The Hidden Order of Art (§ 93). Like A. in "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel", he has no language of his own, and can only use the discourse of his antagonist, while vainly attempting to turn it to his own purpose. His rejection of psychoanalysis stems from his own experience (§ 90-91), and his attempt to "fuck over" Dr Hodder is therefore a re-enactment of the aggression he felt towards the previous psychoanalyst. He is therefore caught in transference despite, or more accurately, because of the agency of the letter.

Repetition, unobtrusively, assumes a crucial role in "The Sendmen". The letter re-enacts previous aggression. This is the letter-writer's second encounter with psychiatry. He repeats the analyst's arguments, and the analyst's responses to the letter will repeat those interpretations already anticipated by the letter-writer himself. Susan regularly repeats "what she said and what [Dr Hodder] said" (§ 87) to the protagonist, who repeats this to Dr Hodder. The title of the text is a repetition of Susan's nickname for her analyst. The nickname is an allusion to a nursery rhyme of which other variants exist (§ 88). The compulsion to repeat is more than a feature of the text, because it is the central

characteristic of neurotic behaviour as well). (Repetition as a textual feature will be discussed presently.)

Another psychoanalytic symptom, namely repression appears (or fails to appear) in "The Sandman". The most obvious source of the title is not indicated directly in the text at all. The protagonist cites a nursery rhyme as an explanation for both the title and Dr Hodder's nickname. However, he obliquely suggests other possibilities. "This is a variant [of the 'Sandman' motif]; there are other versions, but this is the one I prefer" (§ 88, my emphasis). Barthelme's "Sandman" has another literary predecessor, E. T. A. Hoffmann's story, "The Sandman".¹⁷⁴ Hoffmann's "Sandman" is the subject of a reading by Freud, "Das Unheimliche" ("The Uncanny"),¹⁷⁵ which is a locus classicus of the psychoanalytic reading of a literary text. Elizabeth Wright observes that "there have been at least nine recent readings of Freud's essay", and she adds her own reading to the list.¹⁷⁶

Freud's analysis of Hoffmann's text has generated a critical polyphony which is exactly the opposite of Barthelme's letter-writer's will to literalism. Wright underlines the incomplete character of the Hoffmann-Freud reading. "The general view is that it would indeed be a mistake to let Freud's analysis of Hoffmann be the last word on the uncanny".¹⁷⁷ Returning to the repressed source of Barthelme's text, one encounters yet another debate about the "last word". This "last word" promises to bring the play of re-reading to a close, but instead, the attempt to have the last word initiates a process of deferral. Every "truth" generates a new reading: Freud's, Wright's, Barthelme's, mine. Each reading repeats an original gesture, namely Freud's psychoanalytic interpretation of

Hoffmann's text. Such repetition uncannily recalls the repetition-compulsion already encountered.

When one discovers that Freud's essay itself is deeply involved in repetition-compulsion, as Neil Hertz suggests,¹⁷² the interchanges between text and commentary, and object- and meta-language become vertiginous indeed. "The consensus of critical readings of Freud's essay", Wright informs us,

has it that "The Uncanny" ... reveals the founder of psychoanalysis in the grip of a repetition-compulsion... On the one hand, it is argued, Freud's paradigm for the uncanny, ... "The Sandmen", becomes a prime example of the return of repression, because Freud's essay edits out its uncanny potential. On the other hand, Freud's essay as a (w)hole [sic] is held up as a prime example of the return of the repressed, because what is left out of the story returns to haunt the essay.¹⁷³

Repression, the return of the repressed, and repetition-compulsion are deeply woven into the fabric of these texts. No matter how much the letter-writer of Barthelme's "Sandman" tries to repress interpretation, it inevitably returns in the guise of repetition. (In what way does one not, as a reader, repeat the encoded responses of Dr Hodder in one's analysis?)

One can uncover other similarities, or repeated elements, between Hoffmann's text and Barthelme's, beyond the shared title and mutual association with psychoanalysis. Hoffmann's "Sandman" begins in the epistolary mode, with an exchange of letters. Barthelme's fiction is itself a letter. The protagonist of Hoffmann's narrative, Nathanael, keeps encountering the sinister figure of Coppélius, who intrudes into

all Nathanael's relationships. (This he does in different guises, as Coppelius-Coppola, and as Spalenzani.) In Barthele's text, the intrusion of Dr Hodder into the letter-writer's relationship with Susan is the pretext for the letter itself. Nathanael tries to win an automaton, Olympia, from her owner Coppelius, in much the same way that Barthele's protagonist attempts to lure Susan from Dr Hodder. In a very perceptive essay on Hoffmann and Freud, Neil Hertz identifies

a series of triangular relationships [in Hoffmann's "Sandman"], in which the Sandman blocks Nathanael's attempts at love, first in the form of Coppelius coming between Nathanael and his fiancée Klara, then in the form of Coppola taking Olympia away from Nathanael, finally once again as Coppelius, driving Nathanael to suicide just as he is about to marry Klara.¹⁴

An interesting transposition of "madness" into "neurosis", and of "male madman" into "female neurotic" occurs in the space between Hoffmann and Barthele. Perhaps the most telling comment on Barthele's protagonist is that his counterpart in Hoffmann, Nathanael, is mad. The triangular structure which Hertz identifies in Hoffmann is replicated in Barthele: the protagonist, Susan, Dr Hodder. Hoffmann's "Sandman" and Barthele's "Sandman" are mirror images of each other. Barthele's protagonist even alludes to an essay called "Toward a Triadic Theory of Meaning" by Percy (§ 89). Lacan's model of signification is indeed triadic, because it is composed of subject, Other and signifying chain. An even more interesting triad consists of Hoffmann, Freud and Barthele. The conflation of the intrusive Coppelius of Hoffmann's text with Freud, the earnest reader of the text, in the figure of Dr Hodder, who is both intruder and reader, Coppelius and Freud, should not go unnoticed either. Moreover, Neil Hertz uses biographical material to demonstrate that, at the time of writing his essay "The Uncanny", Freud himself was involved in triangular re-

relationships with Lou Andreas-Salome and Victor Tausk. This triangle was duplicated in 1918-1919, when Tausk became the analysand of one of Freud's colleagues, Helene Deutsch, who was undergoing training analysis herself with Freud.¹²¹ "The Uncanny" was published in 1919.¹²²

Jonathan Culler has drawn out the implications of Neil Hertz's essay, and these implications are surprisingly applicable to the reading of Bertheime's "Sandmen" I have been proposing here. Culler points out that implicit in Hertz's argument is the suggestion that

the uncanny results not from being reminded of whatever it is that is being repeated but from glimpsing or being reminded of this repetition compulsion, which would be more likely to happen in cases where whatever is repeated appears particularly gratuitous or excessive, the result of no cause but a bizarre manifestation of repetition itself, as if for the sake of literary or rhetorical effect (my emphasis).¹²³

Hertz himself phrases this perception as follows:

The feeling of the uncanny would seem to be generated by being-reminded-of-the-repetition-compulsion, not by being-reminded-of-~~whatever-it-is-that-is-repeated~~. It is the becoming aware of the process that is felt as eerie, not the becoming aware of some particular item in the conscious, once familiar, then repressed, now coming back into consciousness Whatever it is that is repeated - an obsessive ritual, perhaps, or a bit of acting-out in relation to one's analyst - will, then, feel most compellingly uncanny when it is seen as merely colouring, that is when it comes to seem most gratuitously rhetorical.¹²⁴

What is uncanny about repetition is neither its content (a repeated conflict within a triangular relationship, or the re-doubling of elements from "The Sandmen") nor its effects (a profile of castration anxiety, a pattern of literary cross-reference, which adds "depth" to an otherwise

slight piece by Barthelme), but its very appearance as repetition, as a rhetorical figure and as figurative language.

If my initial reading of Barthelme's text opposed the letter-writer's literalism - letteralism?'" - to Dr Hodder's dogged discovery of "deeper", figurative meanings, then the text has now looped its own loop, and has reached a point at which "literal" and "figurative" have become indistinguishable - the opposition between these terms has become indeterminate. For if Neil Hertz argues that what is truly uncanny is the figure of repetition itself, then the figure has to be read for itself, as "meaning what it says", and as pure repetition which means nothing beyond itself. What is uncanny about repetition, finally, is that it is the literal occurrence of a rhetorical figure. In a sense then, "The Sandman" - whether it be Hoffmann's, Freud's, Barthelme's, or Hertz's - reverses the hierarchy between the literal and the figurative.

Both Culler and Hertz write of the domesticating effects of attaching a meaning, a signified, an interpretation of the figure, to the figure of repetition. It does not stand for something other than itself (a castration complex, for example). Domestication censors the truly uncanny. It is this censorship that Hertz detects in Freud, who totalises the instances of repetition in Hoffman's "Sandman" by reading them as symptoms of a latent castration anxiety. The latter then functions as the meaning of the figure. Culler observes:

The interpreter's temptation, in such situations [faced with an uncanny proliferation of pure repetition] is to master these effects of repetition by casting them into a story, determining origins and causes, and giving it a dramatic, significant colouring.¹⁵

Bartheleme's "Sandman" simply repeats elements from Hoffmann's "Sandman", and from Freud's reading of Hoffmann's "Sandman", and even from Neil Hertz's reading of these texts, as well as of biographical material about Freud. There is no question here of "origins and causes", nor of influence and allusion. The repetitions do not add "depth" to Bartheleme's text, nor do they explain it. The repetitions are there, and this is why they are uncanny.

(Such repetitiveness dominates postmodernism, from the theoretical emphasis on the simulacrum, or the copy of a copy, which will be discussed in the fourth chapter, to Warhol's uncannily repeated Monroes or Maos. Terry Eagleton notes unsympathetically:

To place a pile of bricks in the Tate Gallery once might be considered ironic; to repeat the gesture endlessly is sheer carelessness of any such ironic intention, as its shock value is inexorably drained away to leave nothing beyond brute fact.¹²⁷ my emphases.)

For Culler, the interpreter - any interpreter, whether it be Freud, Dr Hodder, or myself - attempts to reassert mastery over the play of repetition by giving it some significance. And this attempted mastery returns me to the claims made at the beginning of this reading. Bored by the straightforwardness of Bartheleme's story, I willfully proposed a maverick reading of my own, to demonstrate my own mastery over the text. Yet, in the course of this reading, surprising, uncanny similarities between texts that had been forced together, began to appear. Neil Hertz experiences a similar uncertainty about identity, authorship and ownership. Having suggested strong autobiographical elements in Freud's essay on "The Uncanny" to account for the similarities between Freud's life in the period 1918 to 1920, and Hoffmann's text, Hertz writes:

Suppose this were the story one put together. Mightn't one then, like Nathaniel crying out "Whose voice is this?" after he had finished his poem, still feel impelled to ask: Whose story is this? Is it one's own? Is it Roazen's [a biographer of Freud's]? Is it Hoffmann's? Is it The Story of Freud and Tausk "as told to" Paul Roazen, chiefly by Helene Deutsch?¹¹¹

The text, in short, is no longer under my control; "my" reading no longer has any owner. This is the kind of unsettling of readerly subjectivity which conventional criticism cannot acknowledge.

Furthermore, this capacity for unsettling is not an inherent property of Barthelme's text itself. The "meaning" of Barthelme's text does not reside in its putative allusions to Hoffmann and Freud and the practice of psychoanalytic literary criticism. If one were to read "The Sandman" in this way, one would be ascribing a conscious intentionality to "Barthelme" as writing subjectivity, and to the text as bearer of its author's intentions.

Even the text - Barthelme's "The Sandman" - is neither self-present, nor self-enclosed. Its meaning points to another text, which in turn points to yet another, which in its turn is already a repetition. Lothar, the narrator of Hoffmann's "Sandman" admits that he "was most strongly compelled to tell you about Nathaniel's disastrous life".¹¹² Lothar is compelled to repeat by means of telling the text at its origin.

Barthelme's text is equally haunted by its shadowy, dialogic Other, whose words it is condemned to repeat, just as the protagonist of "The Sandman" feels compelled to write to Dr Hodder ("... there are several things going on here that I think ought to be pointed out to you ...")

§ 87). Barthelme's text further rehearses its own possible readings.

Perhaps the final joke of "The Sandman" is the absence of either signature or proper name at the end of Barthelme's text. The letter - the literal - belongs to no-one, as Shoshana Felman notes of unconscious knowledge. Its figurative play cannot be signed off by an interpretation located in a single subjectivity.

* * *

What of "Barthelme" himself? What of the name on the title-page, the photograph on the dust-jacket? Surely these traces testify to a "real" presence?

Commenting ...urely on the slightness and derivativeness of Barthelme's writing, Gore Vidal concludes with a remarkable reconstruction of authorial identity:

The only pages to hold me were autobiographical. Early dust-jacket pictures of Barthelme show an amiable-looking young man upon whose full lips there is a slight shadow at the beginning of the lip's bow. The dust-jacket of Sadness shows a bearded man with what appears to be a harelip. Barthelme explains that he has had an operation for a "basal-cell malignancy" on his upper lip. True graphics, ultimately, are not old drawings of volcanoes or of perspective [these are to be found in Sadness] but of the author's actual face on the various dust-jackets, ageing in a definitely serial way, with, in Barthelme's case, the drama of an operation thrown in, ... interesting for the reader though no doubt traumatising for the author.¹²²

The reader looks beyond the text, which does not offer "true graphics", to the "author's actual face", and reads the narrative of developing identity in this face. (Note that Vidal has elided the mediating agency of textuality in an interesting lapsus. Of course, the face is not, and cannot be the "actual" face: it is only the photograph of a face.) Vidal's fiction about Barthelme is intriguing, because it is such a clear

statement of the reader spellbound by the ^{of} authorial presence despite
the intervention of the text.

Charles Molesworth notices the absence of style in Barthelme's oeuvre, a "depersonalized style ... in relation to the much more affective, more emotionally charged writing of people like Norman Mailer or Joyce Carol Oates."¹²¹ Later Molesworth comments on the "absence of a central philosophical, historical or metaphysical given"¹²² in Barthelme's work. Undeterred by the disappearance of a Weltanschauung, Molesworth defines Barthelme as the "final post-Enlightenment writer, the final skeptic."¹²³ Both Vidal and Molesworth sense the absence of a writing subjectivity in Barthelme's texts, and both compensate for it in different ways: Vidal, by constructing a consolatory profile of the author, Molesworth, by asking the absence of a definite identity itself a kind of identity. If one considers a "found" text like "The Question Party" (QP), even the author's signature becomes a problem.

Frederic Jameson explains both the "waning of affect", as he calls it, and the disappearance of style as an index to the unique personality of an artist in terms of the postmodern condition:

The end of the bourgeois ego or monad no doubt brings with it the end of the psychopathologies of that ego as well - what I have generally here been calling the waning of affect. But it means the end of much more - the end for example of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive individual brushstroke (as symbolised by the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction) ... there is no longer a self present to do the feeling.¹²⁴

This chapter began with a refusal of any relations between Barthelme's "characters" and a world outside the text. Now, finally, does the effect

or erased self in Barthelme's texts relate to the self under erasure in the text of contemporary culture? What is one to make of decentred subjectivity as motif, effect and manifesto in postmodernism in general?

Hal Foster provides an overview of the positions that have been taken:

On the Right [one finds] ... a nostalgic insistence on the good strong self, pragmatic, patriarchal and ideological in the extreme. Yet the left positions on the subject are only somewhat less troublesome. Diagnoses of our culture as regressive, one-dimensional, schizophrenic ... often preserve this bourgeois subject, if only in opposition, if only by default. Even for Adorno, the most dialectical of the Frankfurt School, this subject often seems the counterterm of the decay of the ego in the culture industry, of the psyche penetrated by capital. On the other hand, celebrations of this dispersal, the radical position of various French critics, may only collude with its agents ... (the second ellipsis is Foster's).¹⁵⁵

The notion of the "good strong self" as the locus of ideology derives from Louis Althusser, whose immensely influential essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)"¹⁵⁶ presented the argument that ideology can only reproduce itself by hailing, or interpellating a subject. And this subject can only respond to interpellation if it is unified; a decentred subject cannot be addressed by ideology. It follows that the dispersal of subjectivity offers a way out of the prison-house of endless ideological reproduction.

Jean-François Lyotard presents this decentring as something of a fait accompli:

Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and "retro" clothes in Hong Kong¹⁵⁷

In other words, the decentred, contradictory subject of postmodernism can accommodate contradictions in a way that would have been unthinkable for the nineteenth-century petit bourgeois. Lyotard's description of the postmodern condition is echoed, interestingly, by both an early and a recent story by Barthes. Think of the way in which pauses and purchases alternate in "To London and Rome" (CBDC). Consider the calculatedly eclectic fragments in "Overnight to Many Distant Cities": "In Stockholm we ate reindeer steak and I told the Prime Minister ... that the price of booze was too high" (OTMDC 170, Barthes's ellipsis), or: "In Copenhagen I went shopping with two Hungarians ... They bought leather gloves, chess sets, frozen fish, baby food, lawnmowers, air conditioners, kayaks ..." (OTMDC 172, the final ellipsis is Barthes's), or:

In Berlin everyone stared, and I could not blame them ... I correctly identified a Matisse as a Matisse even though it was an uncharacteristic Matisse, you thought I was knowledgeable whereas I was only lucky, we stared at the Schwitters show for one hour and twenty minutes, and then lunched (OTMDC 173-174).

Who could the subject of these utterances be?

Terry Eagleton comments that "it is not just that there are millions of other human subjects less exotic than Lyotard's jet-setters", and, one wants to add, than Barthes's, but also "that many subjects live more and more at the points of contradictory intersection" between decentred selves and what Eagleton rather moralistically calls "responsible citizens".¹²² For Eagleton, as for Jameson in the final analysis, the self as "decentred network of desire"¹²³ is necessary to the functioning of

late capitalist hyperconsumption. Eagleton and Jameson represent, then, the condemnatory attitudes of the Left.

Both Hal Foster and Craig Owens maintain a counter-position, namely that the fracturing of the unitary subject constitutes a liberation. Hal Foster asks "For what is this subject that, threatened by loss, is so bewitched? Bourgeois perhaps, patriarchal certainly - it is the phallogocentric order of subjectivity".²⁰⁰ A concomitant of the disappearance of identity is the release of otherness, which is now given its turn to speak. Craig Owens emphatically identifies these "others" as women and marginal groups, silenced by the construction of a monolithic male identity. In his remarkable essay, he discusses Laurie Anderson's performances, and the artworks of Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman.²⁰¹ One would like to add Barthele's Snow White to this list, with her poem that is, in her words, "free ... free, free, free" (SM 59).

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari manage to synthesise the notion of a decentred subject that is the product of late capitalism with a sense of the subversive potential of the "schizo". They observe, sounding a bit like a text by Barthele, that "our society produces schizos the same way it produces Prell shampoo or Ford cars, the only difference being that the schizos are not saleable".²⁰² Although they state that "at the deepest level", capitalism and schizophrenia have "one and the same economy, one and the same production process",²⁰³ they oppose the two terms

... one can say that schizophrenia is the exterior limit of capitalism itself or the conclusion of its deepest tendency, but that capitalism only functions on condition that it inhibit this tendency, or that it push back or displace this limit, by substituting for it its own immanent relative limits ... for capitalism it is a question of binding the revolutionary potential of decoded flows with new interior limits Hence

schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death.²²⁴

The "schizo", or fragmented and split subject, does have a contestatory power therefore, because it pushes the fragmentation of capitalism to an absolute point.

Do Bartheleme's texts liberate character, reader and author, turning the monolithic subject into an unstable circulation of centrifugal discourses? Or are they simply part and parcel of the everyday life, textual or otherwise, of late capitalism? Do they disseminate the mode of subjectivity necessitated by hyperconsumption? "The Question Party" reminds us that questions are dangerous:

"What will the question be?" asked Miss Jewart.
"Something dangerous", said Mr White, with a twinkle.
"Parties are always dangerous", said Miss Jewart (GD 70).

The "question party" of the title asks "What is a bachelor?" (GD 67). Various enigmatic answers, including a "blank" card, are provided (GD 67-70); importantly, the bachelor in question, Mr Lynch, is murdered when the answers are read. Could this be a parable of the death of all subjects: God, the Author, the Reader? The text kills.

"Dangerous parties", such as Bartheleme's texts, dissolve the belief in a self outside language on which the fixed identities of self and other, doctor and patient, reader and text depend.

CHAPTER THREE

THE "NON-PLACE OF LANGUAGE": LANGUAGE AND SPACE IN BARTHELME'S WRITING

Michel Foucault opens The Order of Things with a discussion of a text by Borges in which a catalogue that is an extreme example of paratactic disorganisation appears:

The monstrous quality that runs through Borges's enumeration consists ... in the fact that the common ground on which such meetings are possible has itself been destroyed. What is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible... Where could they ever meet, except in the immaterial sound of the voice pronouncing their enumeration, or on the page transcribing it? Where else could they be juxtaposed except in the non-place of language? Yet, though language can spread them before us, it can do so only in an unthinkable space.²²²

Of course, this kind of enumeration is also a characteristic Barthelmean technique. When one considers an emphatically "monstrous" list from Barthelme's "The Viennese Opera Ball", the destruction of meaningful "common ground" is quite evident:

Nonsense! said a huge man wearing the Double Eagle of St. Puce, what about sailing, salesmen, salt, sanitation, Santa Claus, saws, scales, schools, screws, shipwrecks, shoemaking, shopping, shower baths, siegas, signboards, silverware, sinning, skating, skeletons, skeleton keys, sketching, skiing, skulls, sycrapers, sleep, smoking, smugglers, Socialism, soft drinks, soothsaying, sorcery, space travel, spectacles, spelling, sports, squirrels, steamboats, steel, stereopticians, the Stock

Exchange, stomachs, stores, storms, stoves, streetcars, strikes, submarines, subways, suicide, sundials, sunstroke, superstition, surgery, surveying, sweat and syphilis! (CDDC 90).

(In its context, this list is not a response to any particular prompt; the speaker's exclamation of "Nonsense!" is exophoric.) Elements are juxtaposed, but the act of juxtaposition does not make them cohere, and fails to set them within a stable epistemological space where they might have co-existed.²²⁶ Here there is no question of a coherent taxonomy; what is at stake seems to be what Foucault calls the collapse of "our epistemic distinction between the Same and the Other."²²⁷ (We have already encountered a similar instance in the bibliography of texts on the self from "Damián". All the "selves" of this list are somehow different: the Same becomes Other even in the tabulation of its identity. See the section entitled "The Dialogical Subject" in "Intersubjective Atrocity" in Chapter 2, above.)

The list from "The Viennese Opera Ball" conflates the categories with which we structure our experiences, for it includes, all at once, nature ("squirrels") and culture ("skyscrapers"), the mundane ("stores") and the exotic ("smugglers", or "space travel"), the real ("secretaries") and the fabulous ("the Seven Wonders" and "Santa Claus"), the tangible ("sealing wax") and the ideational ("Socialism"). Such an impossible paradigm could indeed only be conjugated in what Foucault names the "non-place of language", for the items on the list share linguistic characteristics alone. They are held together exclusively by their common initial letter, "s", and by their strict alphabetical arrangement. Alphabetical arrangements have achieved a degree of ubiquity in postmodern practices, an eloquent testimony, perhaps, to a reluctance to organize material in any other than

an aleatory manner. Steven Ungar suggests that "[Roland] Barthes characterized alphabetical ordering as simultaneous order and disorder, the zero-degree of order"²⁰⁸; Jenny Holzer lists her "Truisms" alphabetically;²⁰⁹ Walter Abish uses alphabetical sequence in his stories "Ardor/Awe/Atrocity" and "In So Many Words", as well as in his first text Alphabetical Africa.²¹⁰ By the purest coincidence, the Borges catalogue which Foucault discusses is organised alphabetically as well. Foucault claims that this ordering device "transgresses the boundaries of all imagination, of all possible thought"²¹¹ Interestingly enough, Carl Malmgren identifies "alphabetical space" as one of the sub-categories of fictional space. He discusses its predominance in postmodernist fiction, using Abish's Alphabetical Africa as illustration.²¹²

Another list of Berthelme's, this time not arranged alphabetically, performs an even more extensive erasure of a logical common ground. "Nothing: A Preliminary Account" is made up of a random collection of elements which share only one attribute: they are failed attempts to define nothing. More accurately, the common ground of juxtaposition becomes "nothing", a "non-place". The list cannot be completed, because "nothing" and its definition never quite coincide: "Our list can in principle never be completed ..." (GP 164). At the same time, if the condition of existence of the list is nothing other than "nothing", the list itself must finally be erased. "And even if we were able, with much labour, to exhaust the possibilities ... - the list itself would remain. Who's got a match?" (GP 164).

Berthelme's fictions make coherence and semantic stability disappear. This chapter proposes an exploration of the spatial effects of this dis-

appearance. What happens when language and space are no longer intimately linked? Foucault answers that

the uneasiness that makes us laugh when we read Borges is certainly related to the profound distress of those whose language has been destroyed: loss of what is "common" to place and name. Atopia, sphasis.²¹²

Places and names diverge suddenly, unexpectedly, in Barthelme's writing. The text constructs, or deconstructs, a particular presentation of space: the Barthelmean atopia. At the same time, the text composes, or decomposes language in a particular manner: Barthelmean sphasis.²¹³ The encounter of space and language generates another term, namely, "aporia", which is at the heart of postmodern indeterminacy. Barthelme's work is undecidable, because every text is simultaneously a "strange object covered with fur which breaks your heart" (CBDC 14) and a "strange country... [which] exists elsewhere" (CL 20).

Heterotopias: Barthelme's red velvet maps

The first text of Overnight to Many Distant Cities, "They called for more structure..." (Barthelme's ellipsis), ends with a description that provides a model for all Barthelme's spaces.

... we moistened our brows with the tails of our shirts, which had been dipped into a pleasing brine, lit new cigars, and saw the new city spread out beneath us, in the shape of the word FASTIGIUM. Not the name of the city, they told us, simply a set of letters selected for the elegance of the script (OTMC 10).

Space and signifier do not enter into a motivated relationship. The signifier cannot name the City, but it provides an unthinkable structure which is in its turn based on "the elegance of the script", or on the graphic qualities of the signifier.

Each fragment of "Overnight to Many Distant Cities" is set in a different city: Paris, Stockholm, San Francisco, London, San Antonio, Copenhagen, Mexico City, Berlin, Boston, Barcelona (OTMDC 169-174). The reader is led to expect that a particular fragment will embody the essence of the city in question, and this expectation is supported by the italicisation of the opening sentence of each fragment. Such emphasis seems to promise the aphoristic encapsulation of the truth of a "distant city". For example, a section begins: "In London I met a man who was not in love" (OTMDC 171), and one anticipates some exposition of the connection between London and the phlegmatic character of its inhabitants. Yet it is this kind of referential generalisation about the mutual interdependence of space, event and language that is consistently withheld by the text, which rejects the determination of character and event by environment. In one section, a generalisation about national character is made, and it is a patently useless aphorism. After a bizarre shopping expedition in Copenhagen with two Hungarians, the protagonist is told by an anonymous group of people that "'this will teach you ... never to go shopping with Hungarians'" (OTMDC 172). The text finally sails into the fantastic as the protagonist has lunch with the Holy Ghost, in Barcelona. The Holy Ghost provides yet another pseudo-generalisation about a city. "'We have that little problem in Barcelona', He said, 'the lights go out in the middle of dinner'" (OTMDC 174). The movement into fantasy signals the impossibility of telling anything about the cities the text lists so assiduously.

Structurally, the fragments or "Overnight to Many Distant Cities" lack a shared thematic centre. They are joined by their differences alone, and so make up a typically Barthelmean list. (The difficulties surrounding the notion of "protagonist" in this text have been noted in the second chapter.) What one can extrapolate from the text is that the city, whether it be domestic Boston or exotic Barcelona, does not provide a common ground for meaningful resemblances and differences any more. If one thinks of the centrality accorded the city, as an immense forcefield of meaning, by the exponents of high modernism, the arbitrary use of urban space in Barthelme's work is striking. Gone are the Paris Arcades, which Walter Benjamin believes to be an integral element of Charles Baudelaire's work.²¹² Andrei Bely's Petersburg, Joyce's Dublin and Alfred Döblin's Berlin, as spaces invested, or better still, saturated with meaning, are equally remote.²¹³ The postmodern city, on the other hand, is simply a site on which random elements are dispersed. More accurately, the postmodern city is a non-site, an utopia, about which predication is impossible. The arbitrariness of incident, and the equally arbitrary relation between incident and environment in "Overnight to Many Distant Cities" presents the "atopia, aphasia" of which Foucault speaks.

Roland Barthes outlines the significance of centres in L'empire des signes, writing of

un sentiment cénesthésique de la ville, qui exige que tout espace urbain ait un centre où aller, d'où revenir, un lieu complet dont rêver et par rapport à quoi se diriger ou se retirer, un mot s'investir (a coenesthetic feeling of the city, which demands that each urban space should have a centre to which to go, from which to come back, a complete space of which to dream, and from which to direct oneself, or to retreat, in a word, from which to invent oneself.)²¹⁷

Barthes claims that a homology exists between Western metaphysics and Occidental cities:

... l'Occident n'a que trop bien compris cette loi: toutes ses villes sont concentriques; mais aussi, conformément au mouvement même de la métaphysique occidentale, pour laquelle tout centre est le lieu de la vérité, le centre de nos villes est toujours plain: lieu marqué, c'est en lui que se rassemblent et se condensent les valeurs de la civilisation: la spiritualité (avec les églises), le pouvoir (avec les bureaux), l'argent (avec les banques), la marchandise (avec les grands magasins), la parole (avec les aigras: cafés et promenades); aller dans le centre, c'est rencontrer la "vérité" sociale, c'est participer à la plénitude superbe de la "réalité". [... the West has understood this law only too well: all its cities are concentric; but also, conforming to the very movement of Western metaphysics, according to which any centre is the site of truth, the centre of our cities is always full: an inscribed site, it is here that the values of civilisation gather and concentrate themselves: spirituality (with churches), power (with offices), money (with banks), commodities (with large shops), speech (with places of assembly: cafes and promenades): to enter the centre is to encounter social "truth", is to take part in the superb plenitude of "reality". My translation.]¹¹

Barthes's work is characterised by its lack of spatial and thematic centres. No city in Barthes is ever a concentric structure. Consider the transformation of "Galveston, Texas" into a "titanic reproduction" of a "jigsaw puzzle with a picture of the Mona Lisa on it" (A 53-54). The city cannot represent the values of the culture that built it, just as the text cannot represent the city that was meant to have informed it. Once again, the structure of the city is arbitrary, irrational.

"A City of Churches" presents an immense displacement of centre and periphery, so that the centre is everywhere, and therefore nowhere. "'We are discontented,' said Mr Phillips. 'Terribly, terribly discontented. Something is wrong!'" (S 54). In this text, the church does not provide a spiritual centre for the city in the style of the Western cities Barthes

describes, but takes over the entire city space instead. The city consists entirely of churches: "Do you think it's healthy for so many churches to be gathered together in one place?....'It doesn't seem... balanced, if you know what I mean" (§ 51). If the centre is dispersed in such a way, then the significance that the centre should have produced is lost. "The desire for a car-rental girl is a displacement and a projection of this desire for a point of meaning: "Our discontent can only be held in check by perfection. We need a car-rental girl" (§ 54). The car-rental girl will supply the "perfection" of completed, meaningful structure, which will foreclose desire. Yet this is the central function that Cecilia, the potential car-rental girl, refuses to fulfil, as she threatens the stability of the structure.

"I'll dream the life you are most afraid of", Cecilia threatened.

"You are ours," he said, gripping her arm. "Our car-rental girl. Be nice. There is nothing you can do."

"Wait and see," Cecilia said (§ 54).

"City Life" is another city-text which gives its title to a collection, like "Overnight to Many Distant Cities". It ends with an image of roads centrifugally branching: "These dances constitute an invitation of unmistakable import - an invitation which, if accepted, leads one down many muddy roads" (GL 168). The "truth" of a city cannot be contained within what Barthes calls the "inscribed site" of a centre; it can only lead to more voyages and new spaces. Neither "City Life" nor "Overnight to Many Distant Cities" stands in the usual relation of eponymous text to its collection, because neither furnishes a stable vantage point, or a thematic centre, for the reading of other texts in the collection. In their semantic relation to the collections of which they seem to form a privileged part, and in their own lack of a thematic and structural

centre, both these texts demonstrate the impossibility of locking meaning and space together.

"Departures", in Sadness, accepts the "[invitations] down many ... roads" with which "City Life" ends. It presents a number of departures that are fictional, fantastic and metaphoric. Once again, a central point is missing, so that the departures are more than centrifugal: they lack any centre as an origin, or as a point of departure. The last section ends with the speaker's lover leaving. "I am sure that you will eat well aboard that ship, but you don't understand - it is sailing away from me!" (§ 109). The other departures do not even feature this first-person speaker; he cannot supply the centre from which the figures "[sail] away". The fourth of the eight numbered fragments of "Departures" is simply the very boldly printed word

DUNKIRK (§ 102).

Like "FASTIGIUM", this is another empty signifier. "Dunkirk" is only another place from which departures have been made, and the text does not realise any of the historical senses of the word. Although "Dunkirk" is at the centre of the eight numbered fragments, it cannot exercise a centripetal pull on the departing discourses of the text.

A detailed instance of postmodern space appears in "City Life".

Laughing aristocrats moved up and down the corridors of the city.

Els, Jacques, Ramona and Charles drove out to the combined race track and art gallery. Ramona had a Heineken and everyone else had one too. The tables were crowded with laughing aristocrats. More laughing aristocrats arrived in their carriages drawn by

dancing matched pairs. Some drifted in from Flushing and São Paulo. Management of the funded indebtedness was discussed; the Queen's behaviour was discussed. All the horses ran very well and the pictures ran well too. The laughing aristocrats sucked on the heads of their gold-headed canes some more... [The aristocrats] all raised their canes in the air, in rage. A hundred canes shattered in the sun, like a load of amphetamines falling out of an airplane. More laughing aristocrats arrived in phaetons and tumbrels... Laughing aristocrats who invented the cost plus contract...

Laughing aristocrats who invented the real estate broker...

Laughing aristocrats who invented Formica...

Laughing aristocrats wiping their surfaces clean with a damp cloth... (CL 157-158, the last four ellipses are Barthelme's).

The passage begins with what seems to be a generalising mise-en-scène.

The exposition gives way to particularisation: Elsa, Jacques, Ramona and Charles are individual inhabitants of the city, which is now particularised by a synecdoche, the "combined race track and art gallery". The description has moved from whole to part, and from general to specific. This movement is, of course, a common technique in realist writing.

Inconsistencies and lacunae work against the almost taken-for-granted device, however. For example, the movement from general to particular is reversed in the sentence "Ramona had a Heineken and everyone else had one too." "Laughing aristocrats" belong to a different connotative and lexical field from the "American" city. A semantic contradiction is set up by the simultaneous presence of "aristocracy" and the "democracy" connoted so mythologically by "America". The frequently reiterated phrase, "laughing aristocrats" begins to signal a reluctance to distinguish between general and particular. Do all the aristocrats laugh? Or are these actions performed only by those aristocrats who do laugh? Or

is "laughing" the realisation of a some of "aristocrats", an actualisation of a stereotyped frivolity?

The aristocrats move "up and down", a description which invites a double reading, rather like the double images in certain of Salvador Dali's paintings.²¹⁸ One could initially interpret the movement as vertical, an interpretation which is supported by the strong sense of verticality in "up and down". A more logical reading would suggest that the aristocrats are moving "up and down" in a horizontal way. In this case "up and down" would be a substitute for "along". A similar spatial indeterminacy occurs later in the passage when raisers canes "[shatter] ... like a load of amphetamines falling out of an airplane" (my emphasis). Although the canes are raised, the analogy transforms the upward trajectory into a downward one.

Other uncertainties invade the passage. Is "corridors" a straightforward metonymy for "buildings", or are we meant to take the word at face value, and assume that the buildings of the city consist exclusively of "corridors"? The "combined race track and art gallery" becomes an emblem of these unthinkable dualities and spatial anomalies. The extraordinary semantic collocation of art gallery + race track occurs on the level of syntax in the phrase "matched pairs". "Dancing pairs" is acceptable only if its classeme is "human", while the phrase "matched pairs" appears to require the classeme "horses". The combination of the two phrases scrambles the classemes and renders the resulting phrase semantically unreadable. The verb and preposition "to drift in" presuppose a degree of proximity, yet the aristocrats "[drift] in from Flushing and New Paulo", two place names which connote distance from the presumed American context. Again, mutually exclusive semantic fields are forced to co-exist,

and the frequency of such contradictions abolishes conventional representations of space, leaving, in its wake, a space without distance, without direction, and without perspective. (One should note that "São Paulo" and "Flushing" may be opposed in terms of the exoticism of the former and the familiarity of the latter, but such oppositions seem quite irrelevant in the kind of space described.)

The passage disintegrates when it combines increasingly bizarre predicates with "laughing aristocrats". These predications culminate in the presentation of the aristocrats "wiping their surfaces clean". Once again, various readings suggest themselves. "Formica" may well be the logical antecedent of "surfaces", but as a result of the pronoun "their", "surfaces" also seems to refer to the aristocrats themselves, who are then transformed into strange creatures. The inappropriateness of a term such as "surfaces" when joined to any "human" subject is striking, as is the looped reference of "their", which creates another spatial indeterminacy, and collapses any grammatical distance between "aristocrats" and "Formica", as well as any semantic distance between the "human" and "inanimate".

We witness an abolition of distinct semantic fields in this excerpt from "City Life". Real and fantastic, exotic and familiar, up and down, general and particular are all scrambled. At the same time, the incongruities do not form a new space in which their differences can be synthesized into some new unity. This landscape also recalls John Ashbery's puzzle scenes,²¹⁹ such as "These Lacustrine Cities"²²¹ or "Daffy Duck in Hollywood",²²²

The postmodern atopia becomes familiar, and even reappears in the settings of Edmund White's novel Erasing Stone,²²² which Ashbery, incidentally, praises highly.²²³

Writing about John Ashbery's poem, "These Lacustrine Cities", Marjorie Parloff makes comments that are applicable to all these utopias. She remarks:

In Ashbery's verbal landscape, fragmented images appear ... without coalescing into a symbolic network. "These Lacustrine Cities" is framed as a series of synecdoches, but Ashbery's are not, in the words of Wallace Stevens' title, "Parts of a World". For there seems to be no world, no whole to which these parts may be said to belong. Totality is absent Such disjunctive metonymic relations converge to create a peculiar surface tension.²²⁴

If one returns to the excerpt already quoted from Barthelme's "City Life", the aptness of Parloff's remarks is obvious. A metonymic chain derives from "aristocrats" of which the links are "laughing", "carriages", the "Queen", "gold-headed canes", and "phaetons". Although "tumbrels" belongs approximately to the same semantic field as "aristocrats", its association with the French Revolution makes the conjunction of "phaetons and tumbrels", as suitable vehicles for aristocrats, either slightly jarring or parodic. So far the metonymic relations seem to be reasonably uniform, but the linkage of "aristocrats" to the series of contemporary inventions and pseudo-inventions, like the "cost plus contract", the "real estate broker", and "Formica", creates a disjointed effect. The chain of metonymies which radiates from "aristocrats" connotes "period", or a sense of historicity, which is both spatially and temporally different from contemporary life. Yet, another, equally powerful metonymic chain of items drawn from urban contemporaneity, is at work in the pas-

sage. Terms like "Formica", "Heineken" and "amphetamines" demonstrate this particular strand clearly. It is the crossing, scrambling or superimposition of two distinct metonymic chains, of which each would have made sense in isolation, that is responsible for what Perloff calls "a peculiar surface tension". Proper name references like "Flushing" and "São Paulo" only serve to *emphasize* that a space like the one presented cannot exist, so that conventional locative referentiality is not feasible. Perloff writes that John Ashbery's cities "seem to have no external referent", for they "seem to exist nowhere outside the text itself",²²² and the same might be said of Barthelme's cities.

However, the text outside of which such cities cannot exist, extends in every direction. Postmodernism as movement has been closely associated with architecture.²²³ Frederic Jameson discusses an actual building, the Bonaventura Hotel in Los Angeles, in terms that could have been used for any of the spaces framed by Ashbery, Barthelme or White. Jameson notes that "emptiness is here absolutely packed ... it is an element within which you yourself are immersed, without any of that distance that formerly enabled the perception of perspective and volume".²²⁴ Moreover, for Jameson

this latest mutation in space - postmodern hyperspace - has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world.²²⁵

"Postmodern hyperspace" sweeps across the postmodern text: writing, painting, building. The postmodern subject recalls Barthelme's Perpetua, who "[smiles] at the new life she [sees] spread out before her like a red velvet nap" ("Perpetua", § 37). Had her life merely been compared to a

map, the analogy, and Perpetua's smile, would have been nothing out of the ordinary. But because the map is a "red velvet" one, it no longer notates, or maps an external reality. It becomes an object stripped of function and referentiality, which still provides pleasure, albeit of an unfamiliar kind.

A traditional critic like Francis Gillen offers the reader a conventional map of Berthelmean space. His self-styled "guide" turns out to be a sociological reading of the fictions of City Life, which is resolutely referential. Gillen interprets the cityscapes as latterday waste lands, claiming that "Berthelme sees urban life as a modern inferno",²³⁰ and that the texts are "[explorations] of the full impact of mass media pop culture on the individual ..."²³¹ Such a reading seems inaccurate, largely because it fails to take the shift between modernism and postmodernism into account. T. S. Eliot presumably also saw "urban life as a modern inferno", and The Waste Land is profoundly concerned with the effects of mass culture, even while it attempts to stave off those attempts. What makes Barthelme's red velvet maps of hyperspace different?

Perloff draws an important distinction between the "anigma texts" of postmodernism and the : of high modernism. She argues that a text like The Waste Land has, "despite its temporal and spatial dislocations and its collage form, a perfectly coherent symbolic structure".²³² Eliot's "Unreal Cities" offer themselves to the reader as texts that can be decoded, but the postmodern city resists such reading, because it is a heterotopia, a non-place where conflicting elements are drawn together but not resolved. The many disjunctions of Pool, "city of new life", in Barthelme's "The New Music" demonstrate perfectly the heterotopic character of postmodern urban space.

Pool is best apprehended as a sign of itself, as pure signifier, as a wholly "Unreal City": "Pool projects positive images of itself through the great médium of film So even if one does not go there, one may assimilate the meaning of Pool" (GD 27). Faced with the contradictory images of Pool, one may find the "meaning" not quite as easily assimilable: here, the ordinary ("elegant widowed women", GD 26) jostles the fantastic (the "red rock gardens" with carved stone flowers, GD 25); semantic ungrammaticalities like "a man spinning a goat into gold" (GD 27) appear next to semantic inversions like the "Dark Virgin" who is "black, as is the Child" (GD 25). The utopian converges on the dystopian, for Pool is "one of these new towns. Where everyone could be happier" (GD 25), yet one speaker mentions "a few curs broiling on spits" in the streets of the city (GD 27). The unmitigated alterity of Pool defines any orientation towards a particular meaning. Eliot's "Unreal Cities" are semantically marked as nightmares; they are heavy with the weight of their own horror, as persistent allusions to Dante's Inferno indicate.¹³³ Pool is neither utopian nor dystopian; it is simply alien. At the same time, Pool re-writes the "Unreal City" of the modernist Waste Land as a text of bliss.

Overnight to Many Distant Cities alludes to Les Illuminations, by Arthur Rimbaud, in its opening section: "The little girl dead behind the rosebushes came back to life, and the passionate construction continued" (OTMHC 10). This echoes a line from Rimbaud's "Enfance II", "C'est elle, la petite morte, derrière les rosiers". [It is she, the little dead girl, behind the rosebushes. My translation.]¹³⁴ The jewelled flowers of Pool, "carved red asters, carved red phlox ... set off by borders of yellow beryl" (GD 25) also recall the precious stones and flowers of Rimbaud's "Fleurs".

Des pièces d'or jaunes bédées sur l'égate, des piliers d'acajou supportant un dôme d'émeraudes, des bouquets de satin blanc et des fines verges de rubis entourent la rose d'eau. [Pieces of yellow gold stream on egate, pillars of mahogany supporting a dome of emeralds, bouquets of white satin and slender stalks of ruby surround the water-rose. My translation.]²²⁶

Quite consciously, Barthelme's writing grafts itself on that of Rimbaud. For Perloff, the asymbolic, deconstructed vistas conjured up in Les Illuminations are postmodern. avant la lettre.²²⁶ She cites Jean-Pierre Richard's designation of the Rimbaudian landscape as an anti-paysage (anti-landscape). For Richard, Rimbaud's landscape "n'est-il plus vraiment un paysage mais plutôt un anti-paysage, une pure vision sans témoin" [is not really a landscape any more, but rather an anti-landscape, a pure vision without a witness My translation.]²²⁷ Barthelme's writing brings Rimbaud's petite morte back to life and continues the "passionate construction" of anti-landscapes begun by Les Illuminations.

The absence of a witness is a recurrent feature of Barthelme's presentation of space and spectacle. It is closely related to the disappearance of subjectivity discussed in the second chapter. Who inhabits these landscapes, who describes them and for whom do they exist? Careful use of passive constructions erases all traces of a witnessing subjectivity,²²⁸ as in the following sentence: "Pillows are placed in the tombs, potholders, dustcloths" ("I am, at the moment ...", OTWDC 164, Barthelme's ellipsis). Other examples occur frequently in Barthelme's work, for instance, this passage from "Speaking of the human body ..." (Barthelme's ellipsis):

At other points on the street four-poster beds were planted
Elsewhere, on the street, conversation pits were chipped out

of the concrete, floored with Adax rugs Favourite paintings were lashed to the iron railings bordering the sidewalks ... (OTMDC 59).

"I am, at the moment ..." presents a characteristic Barthelmean anti-landscape. It begins with specific indices of subjectivity, time and place, "I am, at the moment, seated on a stump in the forest, listening" (OTMDC 163), somewhat in the manner of a Romantic lyric. But the rest of the passage does away with such familiarity. "Ireland and Scotland are re ... Wales is not near England is far away, and France is but a rumour Spain is distant, Portugal wrapped in an impenetrable haze" (OTMDC 163-164). The location of the forest can only be defined by what is distant from it, an *stopsis* indeed. Even the promise that the "forest will soon exist on some maps, tributes to the quickness of the world's cartographers" (OTMDC 164) seems a hollow performative. Postmodern space is unmapable, beyond the grasp of even the quickest cartographers.

In "I am, at the moment ...", a metonymic chain of natural images like "stump", "forest" and "tall white beechwoods" collides with metonymies of an industrial or urban setting, like "chandeliers", "statues", an "excise machine" (one which produces music), "foundry" and "quai". Once again, the mutually exclusive categories of "culture" and "nature" are scrambled. Under the strain of accommodating "thieves", "deans", a "forest", "tombs" and "chandeliers", any cohesive symbolic field would shatter. Even very powerful cultural connotations are neutralised in this *stopsis*, so that a perturbing collocation like "Wallace made of hen" (OTMDC 163) is not negatively marked. "Tombs" metamorphose into "little houses" in which the speaker "sleeps with the already-beautiful..." (OTMDC 163).

of the concrete, floored with Aden rugs Favourite paintings were lashed to the iron railings bordering the sidewalks ... (OTMDC 89).

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In "I am, at the moment ...", a metonymic chain of natural images like "stump", "forest" and "tall white beamwoods" collides with metonymies of an industrial or urban setting, like "chandeliers", "statues", an "ax-cise machine" (one which produces music), "foundry" and "gnai". Once again, the mutually exclusive categories of "culture" and "nature" are scrambled. Under the strain of accommodating "thieves", "deans", a "forest", "tombs" and "chandeliers", any cohesive symbolic field would shatter. Even very powerful cultural connotations are neutralised in this atopia, so that a perturbing collocation like "wallets made of ham" (OTMDC 163) is not negatively marked. "Tombs" metamorphose into "little houses" in which the speaker "sleeps with the already-beautiful..." (OTMDC 163).

The forest is empty and claustrophobic at once; it is a deserted, distant site and a densely populated place. Somehow the "already-beautiful", the speaker, the thieves and the deans are all present, and so is the elaborate decor already enumerated. The "presence" of these figures and items in the landscape is a further puzzle, because: whatever presence exists is invoked by future tenses. The auxiliary "will" is used with some regularity, for example. Simple present tense may signal either a ritualised repetitiveness of action, or actual presence at the moment of utterance. One is never too sure which of these alternatives is at stake when the present tense is used in "I am, at the moment ...", so that the scene is eerily unique and repetitive. Such ambiguity makes the appearance of any element in the landscape illusory, simultaneously there and not there. The paradox of postmodern space, according to Jameson is that "emptiness is here absolutely packed"²³

The "passionate construction" consists of the articulation of heterogeneous terms in such a way that no stable, recognisable unity emerges. "Tirelessly you glue", says the speaker of "I am, at the moment ...". A text like "The Palace" is a perfect illustration of postmodern bricolage. Both palace and text are glued together from allusions and references, "full of Eames chairs and Barcelonà chairs and Pollock paintings", and every possible architect of the twentieth century makes some contribution to the palace: Breuer, Mies van der Rohe, Corbusier, Venturi, Solerì. The proper names themselves add their lustre to a text that becomes a witty catalogue of the influences on postmodernism, which are brought together and synthesised in the magical space of the palace. Indeed, the palace allows the old dream of unity to return in the guise of stylistic zero-degree: "The wonderful part was that the whole place worked, it came together beautifully, none of the architects tried to

upstage each other - the palace appears to be the product of a single hand" (GP 75). At the end of the text, the palatial utopia is deferred, and then abolished as a fiction: "The palace exists; we have only to get there - that is, walk hard enough. That is a beautiful idea of which I have always been very fond. The truth is that the palace does not exist but the serfs do" (GP 76).

Space, as presented in Barthele's texts, satisfies Florence Green's "[demand for] nothing less than total otherness" ("Florence Green is 81", CBDC 15). The sheer alterity recalls her desire to "go somewhere where everything is different" (CBDC 15). "Paraguay", from City Life, is such a place.

The text begins with the precise spatial location one has learnt to distrust:

The upper part of the plain that we had crossed the day before was now white with snow... there was a storm raging behind us... we had only just crossed the Burji La... We had camped in a slight hollow at Sekbachan, eighteen miles from Malik Har... Ahead was Paraguay (CI 19-20).

Here the exoticism of the place names is held firmly in check, and only serves to reinforce the exactitude of spatial indices. Beginning with what lies behind and proceeding to what is ahead, the trajectory of the description seems to mimic the temporal and spatial sweep of the journey described.

For the theoretician Michel Serres, discourse and itinerary, or discourse and percours²⁴⁴ are intimately linked, by more than their common etymological stem. In the course of a complex argument, he states that

"before discourse, there existed a multiplicity of unrelated spaces: chaos".²⁴¹ Discourse, particularly in the form of myth, "attempts to transform a chaos of separate spatial varieties into a space of communication".²⁴² According to Serras,

global wandering, the mythic adventure, is in the end, only the general joining of these spaces, as if the object or target of discourse were only to connect, or as if the junction, the relation constituted the route by which the first discourse passes.²⁴³

Yet the assertion, in Barthelme's text, "Ahead was Paraguay" hardly functions as such a discursive bridge, connecting past and future, space traversed and space to be crossed. The particular section ends with an indication of a footnote, one of two in the text. The reference is supplied at the end of "Paraguay": "1. Quoted from A Summer Ride Through Western Tibet, by Jane E. Duncan, Collins, London, 1906. Slightly altered" (sic, CL 27). The discourse as itinerary, as adventure and exploration, as "a summer ride through Tibet", cannot make places communicate with each other. In fact, the place names are marked as Tibetan ones, which makes the apparently seamless discursive juncture of the penultimate sentence to "Ahead was Paraguay" a disjunction. South America and Tibet are joined in a single breath by an impossible discourse, one which undoes the connection of parcours and discours, and returns space to its pre-discursive chaos.

The next section echoes the closing sentence of its predecessor, "Ahead was Paraguay" in its heading "Where Paraguay Is" (CL 20). This sentence is a calculated syntactic and semantic distortion of its predecessor: "ahead" has been replaced with "where", and "was" has been transformed into its assertive present tense version, "is". The location of Paraguay

can only be defined negatively, like the forest in "Jan at the moment...". If the first section concludes by promising us that "ahead was Paraguay", then the narrator can now only inform us "Thus I found myself in a strange country" (CL 20). Although "thus" has a strong conjunctive function and should signal the clear result of a determinate cause, in this case "thus" discursively joins disconnections in the itinerary. The narrator anticipated an entry into Paraguay, but having crossed the border, finds himself in uncharted terrain, which is identified by three negations:

This Paraguay is not the Paraguay that exists on our maps. It is not to be found on the continent, South America; it is not a political subdivision of that continent, with a population of 2,161,000 and a capital city Asuncion (CL 20, my emphasis).

In the only positive proposition, "This Paraguay exists elsewhere" (CL 20) the "where" of the heading turns into "elsewhere". The reader is plunged into the unreal. Note the detail of "flights of white meat [moving] through the sky overhead" (CL 20). "Meat" seems to be an inconceivable substitute for the "snow" of the opening section. Although spatial indices are retained, "overhead" and "through the sky" cannot knit spaces together as transparent mediations between "above" and "below", because this context has robbed them of their power to connect. How can "white meat" be overhead in the sky? How are we to visualize the scene, since the description does appear to invite visualization?

The "Jean Mueller" section continues the penetrative movement begun in the opening of the text.

Entering the city I was approached, that first day, by a dark girl wrapped in a red snowl.... The girl at once placed her

hands on my hips, standing facing me; she smiled, and uttered a slight gull.... We then proceeded to her house, a modern structure some distance from the centre of the city where I was shown into a room... (CL 20, my emphasis).

The narrative presents a series of entries into increasingly intimate spaces, so that the protagonist moves from country to city, to house to room; the participle "entering", and the prepositions "in" and "into" serve to reinforce this sense of penetration, and words like "then" and "there" create a strongly sequential structure. As Serres would have it, this is an itinerary, a conjunction of spaces by language. To penetrate to a spatial centre is to link different spaces (country-city-house-room) and in so doing to discursively enact the discovery of "truth". Once inside the room, one expects that the narrator will discover an explanation for this chaotic space.

However, from the section entitled "Temperatura" (CL 21) onwards, the narrative disintegrates into a collection of random vignettes from which no overall picture of "this Paraguay" can be deduced. The elaborate technical lexicon of the "Temperatura" seems to parody the ambitions of science to map the surrounding world.

Temperature controls activity to a remarkable degree. By and large, adults here raise their walking speed and show more spontaneous movement as the temperature rises. But the temperature-dependent pattern of activity is complex. For instance, the males move twice as fast at 60 degrees as they do at 35 degrees... (CL 21).

The spatial movement initiated by the early sections of the text seems to have been more or less disrupted, but the final section deceptively completes the trajectory of discovery. Herko Mueller "[opens] the box" which contains "the plan" (CL 27). We have been waiting for the narrative

to open its "box", reveal its "plan" and explain it. If since the protagonist entered Jean Mueller's room. After all, a box should contain something, just as a narrative should resolve its enigma by mediating between the spaces of the known and the unknown. At this point, "Paraguay" performs the same evasion that "The Explanation" did. No solution is given; it is only designated as a plan. The refusal to provide an explanation is also a rejection of the mediating function of discourse.

Another instance of a false textual resolution, and of the withholding of an explanation occurs when the protagonist is elected as a leader, on "the principle of the least-likely leader" (CL 27). In other words, he is integrated into the hitherto alien space of "Paraguay", and the integration of an outsider into a community would appear to offer a familiar resolution of the tension between seemingly irreconcilable spaces. Yet the last sentence of the text overturns the ostensible resolution effected by the choice of protagonist as leader. "We began the descent (into? out of?) Paraguay" (CL 27). Any possible representation of space in "Paraguay" (text and place) is destroyed by the simultaneous presence of two mutually exclusive choices, "into" and "out of".

Bear in mind that the penultimate sentence of the first section is "I paid each man his agreed-upon wage, and alone, began the descent" (CL 20). According to this description, one enters Paraguay from a descent, and one should therefore leave it by ascending the bounding slope. A descent must be a movement into Paraguay. But if the speaker only enters Paraguay at the end of the text, where has the fiction been situated? Have we ever really entered, or can we ever enter, Paraguay? The spatial clues offered

by the text contradict each other in a way that destroys narrative illusionism.

Spatial disturbances are, inevitably, discursive disruptions. The short-circuiting of semic codes in "Paraguay" deserves some consideration. The section entitled "The Wall" destroys the senses of "security" and "stability" associated with "wall". "The wall would be divided, by means of softly worn paths, into doors" (CL 24, my emphasis). Another utterance, "some of the doors would open, some would not" (CL 24), violates the "door" code, which assumes that the opening or closing of a door must serve a purpose. The conclusion of this sentence, "this would change from week to week, or from hour to hour, or in accord with sounds made by people standing in front of them" (CL 24) destroys notions of the stability of architecture, replacing the "permanence" connoted by an edifice with a distressing arbitrariness. These violations are made funnier and more disorientating by their attribution to a "real source", a text by Le Corbusier, solid cornerstone of modernist architecture (CL 27). Elsewhere in "Paraguay", animals are "[fixed] ... in place" by "electrolytic jelly" (CL 25); this fixity betrays the association of "animals" with "movement" (a distinctive opposition between "animals" and "plants", for example). We are told that at the "ends of the waves [are] apertures through which threatening lines might be seen" (CL 25). One would only be able to see through the "ends of the waves" if the waves had been frozen. An "aperture", equally, is a stable opening. The sense of "constant movement", a very conventional association of the "sea", has been inverted. The "New Sea" of Paraguay (CL 22) is stationary, and this is a violation of the most basic element of the "sea" in cultural codes. Such metamorphosis appears in the shedding of human skin as well, where what is stable becomes fluid, just as what is in flux becomes fixed:

"...Jean sat on a rubber pad doing exercises designed to loosen the skin.... The process of removing the leg skin is private... the skin is placed in the green official receptacles" (CL 23).

The cities of Paraguay are structured as unthinkable, unimaginable structures. Although "relational methods govern the layout of cities", the reader is informed that "in some of the most successful projects the design has been swung upon small collections of rare animals spaced ... on a lack of grid" (CL 24-25). It is just this "lack of grid" that characterises all Barthelme's fictional spaces. Any coherent description of a relation between space and language is overturned by the appearance of a heterotopia, which undermines both language and space. Foucault analyses heterotopias persuasively:

Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy "syntax" in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to hold together ... utopias permit fables and discourse; they run with the very grain of language; heterotopias desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of speech at its source...¹⁴⁴

Its "lack of grid," its refusal of syntax, and its subversion of language make "Paraguay" precisely such a heterotopia.¹⁴⁵

"Paraguay" can be described as a sequence of frames that frames an absence, or a nowhere. The text is framed by the sentences, "I ... began the descent. Ahead was Paraguay" (CL 20) and "We began the descent (into? out of?) Paraguay" (CL 27), but these sentences connect nothing and no real Paraguay-space is traversed between them. The use of verbs such as

"enter" and of prepositions such as "in", "into" or "behind" suggests a sense of penetration into the core of a mystery. But "Paraguay" resembles, in its construction, a series of Chinese boxes: the opening of one box simply reveals another. Such an impression of constantly entering frames and spaces, or discovering boxes inside boxes is reinforced by the spatial paradigm of "rooms" (CL 20), "receptacles" (CL 23), "chambers ... on the model of telephone booths" (CL 24), "empty boxes" (CL 25), and "box" (CL 27). The lack of narrative continuity from one section to the next forces the reader to perceive each section as a discrete unit.

The central sections of "Paraguay" feature absences. In "The Wall" we read that "long lines or tracks would run from the doors into the roaring public spaces" (CL 24), and in the next section we are told of the "[beneficial] establishment of 'white space' in a system paralleling the park system" (CL 24). In "Terror", "threatening lines" appear in "apertures" at the "end of the waves" (CL 25). In "The Temple", the protagonist discovers an "abandoned" temple, "littered with empty boxes" (CL 25). In Paraguay a process of "microministerialisation leaves enormous spaces to be filled" and there are big empty spaces in which men wander, trying to touch something" (CL 26). These vacant spaces at the heart of "Paraguay" recall the encoded entropy of the city in "They called for more structure ...", by means of which "areas of the city ... {have} been designed to rot, fall into desuetude, return, in time, to open spaces" (OTMDC 10).

What, finally, is there to be said about the lures of heterotopia when it resists language as a means of gathering its spatial discontinuities? "Behind the Wall" in "Paraguay", the protagonist sees a "field of red snow" which "[arranges] itself into a smooth, red surface without

footprints" (CL 27). His response to the scene is perhaps the only possible definition of the non-place: "It seemed to proclaim itself a mystery, but there was no point in solving - an ongoing low-grade mystery" (CL 27).

Limits, Boundaries and Plots:

"Through a Window and into Another Situation"

Juri Lotman supports the arguments of Serres and Foucault concerning the relationship of meaning and space, and takes the debate into specifically aesthetic and narratological terrain in The Structure of the Artistic Text. Lotman writes:

... on the level of the supra-textual, purely ideational model the language of spatial relations turns out to be one of the basic means for comprehending reality. The concepts "high-low", "right-left", "near-far", "open-closed", "demarcated-not demarcated" and "discrete-continuous" prove to be the material for constructing cultural models with completely non-spatial content and come to mean "valuable-not valuable", "good-bad", "one's own-another's", "accessible-inaccessible", "mortal-immortal" and so on. The most general social, religious, political and ethical models of the world, with whose help man comprehends the world around him... are invariably invested with spatial characteristics...²⁴⁴

Here, Lotman reiterates the post-Saussurean axiom that any meaningful system is made up of differences. The only alteration in this familiar

assertion is Lotman's investment of his binary oppositions with spatial attributes, or, more accurately, his claim that binary oppositions begin as spatial antitheses. Because Lotman's spaces derive meaning specifically from their opposition, they must possess clearly circumscribed limits, so that the stability of the system they construct cannot be disturbed. The dash which divides "high" from "low" for Lotman, plays the same role as the slash mark separating "s" from "z" in Barthes's S/Z. Meaning, in the realist text, as in Lotman's cultural models, derives from a stable structure of oppositions. The underlying antithesis of the text must remain intact, and Barthes describes it in spatial terms: "The antithesis is a wall without a doorway. Leaping this wall is a transgression".²⁴⁷ The disruption of meaning, is "what happens when the arcana of meaning are subverted, when the sacred separation of the paradigmatic poles is abolished, when one removes the separating barrier, the basis of all "pertinence".²⁴⁸ No distinct semantic field can exist without the pertinent and separating barrier, which distinguishes S from Z,²⁴⁹ inside from outside, the familiar from the alien, difference from similarity.

Stable spatial delimitation defines the space of Utopia as well. "One of the most notable features of the utopian picture is its limit", writes Louis Marin in "Disneyland: A Degenerate Utopia".²⁵⁰ This limit has to mark utopian space off from the "real" world.

The utopian land belongs to "our world", but there is an insuperable gap between our world and utopia. This [boundary] mark in the discourse ... is a semiotic transposition of the frame of a painting.²⁵¹

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Utopia is always a stable, perfected, and accordingly enclosed site. Barthes adds to this discourse on utopia by stating that the function of utopia is "to make meaning".²³² It (utopia) "is a second term which permits the sign to function: discourse about reality becomes possible
...."²³³

What do Lotman's "means of comprehending reality", the "sacred arcana of meaning" in the realist text, and a utopian "discourse about reality" have in common? They share the feature of a limit barrier, and a commitment to meaning and reference. All these discourses are bounded, by physical or metaphoric limits, and all are referential. Both Barthes and Marin denounce the logocentric base of utopia, and Barthes even decides that "atopia is superior to utopia (utopia is reactive, tactical, literary, it proceeds from meaning and governs it)".²³⁴ Lotman, on the other hand, appears to be an apologist for meaning, yet when his theory is applied to Barthelme's writing, it seems as if this writing deliberately utilises the theory to undermine meaning.

For example, "Paraguay" consists of a number of borders or limits, concluding with the boundary that separates Paraguay from the outside world. But this boundary becomes the non-place where meaning collapses, where inside and outside are one and the same, and where the descent is simultaneously "into" and "out of" Paraguay (GL 27). Heterotopias and atopias dissolve limits, and the dissolution of borders collapses meaning.

No boundary in Barthelme's texts is ever absolute. Not surprisingly, these fictions display an impressive number of attacks on the stability of limits. Indians invade a city in "The Indian Uprising" (UPUA); Cortes colonises South America ("Cortes and Montezuma", GD); King Kong's "giant

hands, black, thick with fur, [reach] in through the windows" at "The Party" (S); a herd of porcupines threatens a university ("Porcupines at the University", A); zombies arrive in a village ("The Zombies", GE); wheels instigate a revolution ("A Nation of Wheels", GP). Familiar urban spaces are disturbed by a gigantic balloon ("The Balloon", UPUA), by a glass mountain ("The Glass Mountain", CL), and by a dog falling out of the sky ("The Falling Dog", CL). Elements from one context are arbitrarily transposed to another, so that an adult returns to school in "He and Miss Mandible" (CBDC), a civilian is trapped in the army ("The Sergeant", A), and a dragon appears in a contemporary city ("The Dragon", GP). Boundaries separating texts from each other are suspended, and as a result, numerous literary, and mythological figures surface in Barthelme's fictions. Perseus features in a television talk show ("A Shower of Gold", CBDC), Batman and Robin are appropriated in "The Joker's Greatest Triumph" (CBDC), Snow White appears as an American "horsewife" (SM), King Kong attends a party ("The Party" S), St Anthony returns in "The Temptation of St Anthony" (S), the Phantom of the Opera makes a new friend ("The Phantom of the Opera's Friend", CL). One has the feeling that all the volumes of our vast cultural library have suddenly run together, permitting a limitless eclecticism which goes far beyond mythological or literary "allusion" as practised by modernists. All texts converge, and even putatively "real" figures are placed in manifestly fictive contexts, like Paul Klee in "Engineer-Private Paul Klee Misplaces an Aircraft between Milbertshofen and Gumbrair, March 1916" (S). Robert Kennedy in "Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning" (UPUA), Goethe in "Conversations with Goethe" (OTNDG), or Tolstoy, enshrined in a museum of Barthelme's making ("At the Tolstoy Museum", CL).

Gaston Bachelard eulogises secure and enclosed spaces in his topographical analysis, The Poetics of Space. "Within the being, in the being of within, an enveloping warmth welcomes being."²² Limits provide safety: "The sheltered-being gives perceptible limits to his shelter."²³ Postmodern space knows no such enclosure. The walls guarding domestic space even crumble in Barthelme's "110 West Sixty-first Street": "The back wall of the apartment was falling off.... One could see the daylight between the back wall and the perry wall" (A 22). One is tempted to respond to Bachelard's safe enclosure in the words of the "horrors" from "The Policeman's Ball":

The horrors waited outside patiently. Even policemen, the horrors thought, we get even policemen, in the end.... The horrors had moved outside Horace's apartment. Not even policemen and their ladies are safe, the horrors thought. No one is safe. Safety does not exist. Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha! (CL 56).

Frightening and euphoric, postmodern space does not conform to any model that valorises utopian stability. The words of the "horrors" are placed at the end of the text, as a textual limit, but the action which they promise is deferred outside the text, so that "The Policeman's Ball" is both bounded and perforated by the "horrors". Quotation marks contain utterances, bounding them and marking them off from the surrounding discourse. In this case, the absence of quotation marks suspends the boundaries that otherwise exist between the discourse of characters and that of the narrating agency. The reader is not ^{at} all sure whether the final burst of laughter is simply some utterance of the "horrors" or whether it emanates from the narrating agency, who suddenly turns out to be colluding with the "horrors". A degree of tonal indeterminacy

(spiteful? horrified?) results from the suspension of barriers that usually guide interpretation.

To return to Lotman, one remembers that he argues "that as a rule the principle of binary semantic opposition lies at the foundation of the internal organisation of textual elements". Such an opposition is embedded in "spatial organisation", so that the "classificatory border between opposing worlds assumes spatial features: Lethe, separating the living from the dead; the gates of hell..."²²⁷ Lotman uses this notion of spatial opposition and organisation to draw up a typology of texts: he distinguishes between plotless texts and texts with plots. Barriers are uncrossable and absolute in the plotless text, which "makes these borders fast".²²⁸ On the other hand, whenever a semantic boundary is traversed, plot appears. For Lotman, the minimal unit of plot construction is the "event [which] is the shifting of a person across the borders of a semantic field".²²⁹ He explains:

The movement of the plot, the event, is the crossing of that forbidden border which the plotless structure establishes.... Therefore a plot can always be reduced to a basic episode - the crossing of the basic topological border in the plot's spatial structure.²³⁰

A shift across a semantic border initiates narrative, but on no account should the border itself be obliterated. Indeed, narrative seems to be an elaborate structure which neutralises or reverses the movement it initiates. An outsider who enters the sphere of the familiar has to be driven out, or else assimilated; the voyager in alien realms must return to normality. Barthes claims that in the realist text "it is fatal ... to remove the dividing line, the paradigmatic slash which permits meaning to function (the wall of the Antithesis)"²³¹ The movements across

borders necessitated by plots therefore, in no way, qualify Lotman's initial insistence on the absolute-ness of semantic and spatial borders.

The obsessive thematics of invasion in Barthelme's writing, enumerated above, certainly seems to characterise these fictions as quintessential narratives, as arch-plots. Elements are shifted constantly across borders, limits are always subject to attack. Yet Barthelme's texts do not strike one, even on a very simple level, as narratives, in the sense that Balzac's Sarrasine, or the myths to which Lotman alludes, do. What takes place in Barthelme's texts is the erosion of plot from within. The minimal unit of plot - a movement across a border - is used to undermine plot itself, to displace, or better still, to deconstruct, the notion of border or limit. One is left with a textual space with neither limits nor borders in which elements, devoid of meaning, move. Jean Baudrillard describes this postmodern space without limits very strikingly: "It is our only architecture today: great screens on which are reflected atoms, particles, molecules in motion. Not a public scene or true public space but gigantic spaces of circulation, ventilation and ephemeral connections".²⁸² Indeed, the clash between meaningful structures and inexplicable amorphousness is presented in "The Balloon". "But it is wrong to speak of 'situations', implying sets of circumstances leading to some resolution; there were no situations, simply the balloon hanging there -... " (UPUA 16).

An application of Lotman's principles to the ur-Snow White narrative, and then to Barthelme's treatment of this narrative, demonstrates the way in which the postmodern text uses the structure of plot to void itself. In the ur-Snow White, the spatial opposition of "palace-forest" seems fundamental. One can identify the following as major events of the narra-

tive: Snow White's escape from the queen to the dwarfs (she crosses the boundary which separates "palace" from "forest" to enter the new space inhabited by the dwarfs); the queen's arrival in the forest, and the gift of the poisoned apple (the queen invades the semantic field made up by Snow White and the dwarfs in the forest); the prince's appearance (the prince, second representative of the "palace" enters the "forest"); Snow White's resurrection (a neutralisation of the second event); Snow White's departure from the "forest" and her re-entry into the world of the "palace", which has remained her rightful place. (This last event affectively neutralises the initial one, and restores the spatial and semantic status quo, with everyone in her or his proper place. The witch-queen, who has occupied more than one semantic space simultaneously, is eliminated.)

The terms "palace" and "forest" are force fields of semantic opposition. Apart from the obvious antithesis of "culture" and "nature", the forest is also the domain of the marvellous, the magical, and the childlike, while the palace is the world of adults (the royal parents), of intrigue and violence. Although both spaces are situated in the encompassing sphere of the fairy tale, the opposition acquires a hierarchical dimension, because the dwarfs and the forest represent the marvellous and the unknown, even for characters in the text, while the palace represents a world that is less fantastic, and closer to the everyday sphere of marriage and family. At the end of the story, Snow White's return to the palace reverses her original entry into the alien space of the forest. Moreover, her return restores the basic semantic opposition of "palace" and "forest", because she returns to the place where she belongs. The tensions generated by the crossing of a semantic boundary are neutralised so that the text can move to the stability and closure of "happily ever after".

What happens in Barthelme's Snow White? The presence of Snow White in the semantic space of the dwarfs creates a degree of tension which the complaint of the dwarfs makes explicit: "Now we do not know what to do. Snow White has added a dimension of confusion and misery to our lives. Whereas once we were simple bourgeois who knew what to do, now we are complex bourgeois who are at a loss" (SM 87-88). Semantic fields have been shifted: Snow White is a token figure for identification in the ur-"Snow White", and the reader shares a sense of wonder at the marvellous events of the narrative, but the identification has been reversed in Barthelme's version. Snow White is now the alien, and this shift places the reader on the other side of the "familiar-strange" opposition. The dwarfs provide a point of view, which is simultaneously strange and ordinary: the dwarfs are dwarfs (the space of fairy tale) and members of the bourgeoisie (the realm of the everyday). In the ur-text, the hierarchisation of "reality" and "fantasy" is maintained, albeit tenuously, but such semantic distinction is eroded in Barthelme's text. All the characters inhabit the same space, namely the heterotopic Barthelmean city, with the result that the "palace-forest" opposition disappears. The prince, in the ur-text, has the function of eliminating the tension caused by the crossing of a semantic boundary, because he cancels the queen's act, and he returns Snow White to the world of the "palace". Barthelme's Paul is a failure as a prince, and drinks the poisoned vodka Gibson, intended for Snow White, himself (SM 174-175). This action fuses the third and fourth plot events of the ur-"Snow White", making any neutralisation or resolution of movements across semantic boundaries impossible. This "narrative" cannot move towards closure and restitution, but ends instead with new movements and more departures:

SNOW WHITE RISES INTO THE SKY

THE HEROES DEPART IN SEARCH OF

A NEW PRINCIPLE

HEIGH-HO (SW 181).

Barthelme's "The Indian Uprising" turns the heroic colonialist narrative of resistance to an invasion upside-down, and demonstrates the disturbance of limits and the disintegration of plot. The first two sentences of the text neatly oppose two antithetical spaces: "We defended the city as best we could. The arrows of the Comanches came in clouds" (UFOAS). Two separate sentences contrast the world of "our city" with the domain of the Comanches; the irruption of the Comanches into the city, denoted by "de-fence" and the "uprising" of the title, appears to be the underlying ever-so-familiar plot. In a conventional narrative, such an invasion of one context by another is precisely what the narrative structure will work out and neutralise. Here, for example, the reader has to ask the question: "How will the uprising be resolved? What will happen?". The crossing of a semantic boundary prefigures its own resolution. In this instance, only two possibilities can be envisaged: the invader will either be repelled, or will conquer the invaded space. The unity and identity of the invaded space will be restored in the first possibility; in the second, a new, unified space, with its own boundaries and semantic identity, will be created. The first two sentences of "The Indian Uprising" underline the separation of the city and Comanches by means of their paratactic juxtaposition, with the arrows as emblems of invasion, of the penetration of one space by another.

So far, the narrative of a besieged city has proceeded exactly as Lotman's model would have it. With the third sentence, however, a few traps are set for the unwary. "The war clubs of the Comanches clattered on the

soft, yellow pavements" (UPUA 3). For a moment, it seems that this sentence is nothing more than an extension of sentence two, because the syntactic parallelism between sentence two and three suggests that the latter is simply an elaboration of the former. Yet "war clubs" are obviously not weapons for throwing, and cannot therefore penetrate the city in the same way that arrows can. Within the limits of what is plausible, "war clubs" can only "clatter" on pavements if the Comanches are already inside the city. Any possible reading of this utterance makes the notion of a distinct boundary problematic. One reading transforms "war clubs", against all semantic probability, into weapons that abolish the distance between inside and outside; another possible reading does away with the boundary altogether, because the Indians are always-already inside the city, foreclosing a narrative of uprising and invasion. "Clatter" and "soft" contradict each other, and the "soft, yellow" pavements embody a spatial instability that disquietingly erodes any distinction between the firm and the malleable.

We return to the familiar code of "invasion" in the fourth sentence: "There were earthworks along the Boulevard Mark Clark and the hedges had been laced with sparkling wire" (UPUA 3). Two barricades - "earthworks" and the barbed wire - reinforce the distinction between the inhabitants of the city and the invaders.

By now, the reader has identified the basic spatial opposition of "The Indian Uprising" as "City-Indians". This antithesis is extremely powerful, because it resonates with some of the oppositions which are central to western culture, such as "culture-primitivism", "inside-outside", and "familiar-alien". The familiarity of these pairs sweeps the reader past the anomalies examined above, and the second paragraph of the text begins

with another statement of limits: "Patrols of paras and volunteers with armbands guarded the tall, flat buildings" (UPUA 3). But the next sentence shifts locales disorientatingly, with its unexpected description of the torture of the captured Comanche (UPUA 3-4). (On a semantic level, the description of the torture suggests a reversal of roles, for the "defenders" of the city and of the "civilisation" it supposedly represents, engage in torture, an "uncivilised" activity.)

Later in this, the second paragraph, the text seems to reiterate its opposition of inner to outer:

Not believing a ... report of the number of casualties in the outer districts where trees, lamps and swans had been reduced to clear fields of fire, we issued entrenching tools to those who seemed trustworthy and turned the heavy-weapon companies so that we could not be surprised from that direction (UPUA 4, my emphases).

Spatial indices such as "outer districts", "that direction", and the "turning" of companies presuppose a conflict between centre and periphery, with the narrating agency implicitly situated at the centre, which resists the invasion. At the same time, this stable opposition is ambiguated by the presence of inexplicable elements, like the heterotopic catalogue of "trees, lamps and swans". Another unlocalised shift in narrative space follows the passage. "And I sat there getting drunker and drunker and more in love and more in love. We talked" (UPUA 4). "There," according to the exigancies of syntax, should refer to "that direction", but this reference causes the very clearly demarcated antithesis between inner and outer to collapse. An alternative possibility is that "there" refers elliptically to the locale in which the Comanche is tortured, and which is mentioned at the beginning of this particular

paragraph. Yet this reading disintegrates distinct semantic categories which organise experience: by means of what hiatus can the space of "torture" coincide with the space of "love"?

The paragraph itself violates a semantic boundary. A paragraph is conventionally bounded by the limits of unified meaning, so that it functions as a discursive unit. However, in the paragraphs of "The Indian Uprising" irreconcilable, contradictory utterances collide, leaving only the form of the paragraph as a teasing trace of meanings produced by discursive limits. The paragraph as an arbitrarily demarcated site appears in a number of other texts from Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts, like "The President" and "Game".

Later in the text, a description is given of the barricades intended to resist the invasion. They are "made of window dummies, silk, thoughtfully planned job descriptions (including scales for the orderly progress of other colours), wine in demi-johns, and robes" (UPUA 5). The barricade which keeps the city from the Comanches, or "culture" from "primitivism", disappears in a welter of increasing detail, as the narrator "[analyses] the composition of the barricade nearest [him]" (UPUA 5). He finds

two ashtrays, ceramic, one dark brown and one dark brown with an orange blur at the lip; a tin frying pan; two-litre bottles of red wine; three-quarter litre bottles of Black & White, aquavit, cognac, vodka, gin, Fed # 6 sherry; a hollow-core door in birch veneer on black wrought-iron legs; ... a Yugoslavian cerved flute, wood, dark brown; and other items (UPUA 5).

No wonder the narrator concludes, after this analysis, that he "[knows] nothing" (UPUA 5).

Nevertheless, recognisable spatial oppositions continue to gleam, mirage-like, throughout the text. Miss R's house has "steel shutters on the windows [which make it] safe" (UPUA 5); the shutters divide a safe interior from a hostile exterior. Polar oppositions are invoked, so that one character claims that the forces of the city "hold the south quarter and they [the Indians] hold the north quarter" (UPUA 7, my emphasis). The thematics of invasion are suggested again, for the Indians "[infiltrate] our ghetto and... the people of the ghetto instead of resisting [join] the smooth, well-coordinated attack with zip guns, telegrams, lockets, causing the portion of the line held by the IRA to swell and collapse (UPUA 6).

Underlying all these instances remains the sense that antitheses are crumbling. Miss R's house does not exclude danger: it becomes the site of the last threat to the narrator (UPUA 11-12). The polar oppositions are no sooner mentioned than dropped, and the "collapse" of the "line" in the quotation above marks another decomposition of limits. The notion of a stable historical sequence, supported by geographical and historical limits is exploded, by the presence of the IRA in the uprising. As a semantic entity, "IRA" connotes "revolution" in bourgeois mythology, yet here it joins the forces of reaction, the defenders of the city. One is not at all sure how the term fits into the connotative fields on which the text draws: it simply serves to ambiguate these fields by jumbling their connotations.

There are several overt dissolutions of barriers. One of the organisers of the insurrection is someone called Sylvia, who resembles Clementine/Clem of "The Crisis" in some respects. Sylvia is an Indian

and an inhabitant of the city, the narrator's lover and enemy, all at once:

I held Sylvia by her bear-claw necklace. "Call off your braves", I said. "We have many years left to live".... "with luck you will survive until matins", Sylvia said. She ran off down the Rue Chester Nimitz, uttering shrill cries (UPQA 6).

Signifiers of stereotyped "Indian primitivism", like "bear-claw necklace", "braves", and "shrill cries" are superimposed on signifiers of "western civilisation" like "matins", "Rue", and the proper names "Sylvia" and "Chester Nimitz". In Sylvia, the classemes of "culture" and "primitivism" intersect, no longer separated by any barriers. As the narrator asks her: "Which side are you on ... after all?" (UPQA 6). (One should note that the peculiar place names connote "America" and "Europe" simultaneously, and so deny the distinction between "New World" and "Old", which has generated so much American fiction from Hawthorne onwards.²⁴³ These names are "Rue Chester Nimitz", "Boulevard Mark Clark" and "Skinny Wainwright Square", UPQA 3, 6 and 8.)

Even the emblematic colour contrast between areas occupied by the Indians and those defended by the city's inhabitants seems to be a pseudo-antithesis: "On the map... our parts [are] blue and their parts [are] green" (UPQA 7). What is one to make of the following utterance? "I opened the letter but inside was a Comanche flint arrowhead played by Frank Wedekind in an elegant gold chain and congratulations" (UPQA 9). The "flint arrowhead" is an emblem of almost stone-age "primitivism", but it is "played" by "Frank Wedekind", who metonymically evokes the overripe culture of fin-de-siècle Vienna. The "human" and "non-human" are conflated, and a sense of determinate size is subverted by the confusion of "small" (the letter) and "large" (the human figure), because the former

now contains the latter, against all the dictates of familiar experience. The spatial rule that containers must be larger than their contents has been suspended, and so it is permissible to read the preposition "in" of the phrase "Frank Wedekind in an elegant gold chain ..." as "inside". (Once barriers have disappeared, anything is permissible.) Of course, this is only a temporary syntactic aberration before the "correct" reading of "in" as "wearing" asserts itself. The phrase "in an elegant gold chain and congratulations" seems to be a case of whimsical zeugma, another miniscula sporia. When the linear chain of syntax, with its own internal limits, has been destroyed, words can combine in just this zeugmatic way. A tamer reading of this utterance notes the semantic pull between "letter" and "congratulations" as terms that more or less belong to the field, "epistolatory communication". The utterance can then be reduced to the quite tractable "I opened a letter but inside was a Comanche flint arrowhead ... and congratulations". This is clearly an attempt to rearrange the sentence so that it makes sense, but it can explain neither the fantastic appearance of Frank Wedekind nor the breakdown of precisely the semantic-syntactic groupings that have been used to make the sentence decipherable.

The confession of the captured Comanche climactically undoes the last remnants of the "culture-primitivism", "inside-outside" antitheses.

We attached wires to the testicles of the captured Comanche. And I sat there getting drunker and drunker and more in love and more in love. When we threw the switch he spoke. His name, he said, was Gustave Aschenbach. He was born at L-, a country town in the province of Silesia. He was the son of an upper official in the judicature, and his forbears had all been officers, judges, departmental functionaries... (UPUA 10, Berthelme's ellipsis).

Aschenbach is the protagonist of Thomas Mann's novella, Death in Venice, and prototype of the decadent bourgeois. (In a sense, Wedekind and Mann belong to the same culture.) The Comanche's confession quotes expository lines from Death in Venice,¹¹ and sends the reader to another fiction, instead of revealing some "truth" about either the Comanches, or their uprising. More importantly, the slash mark dividing "culture" from "primitivism", the "alien" from the "familiar", and the "true" from the "fictional" disappears, for the captured Comanche only reiterates the stereotyped, mythological fiction of Western culture in decline, and tells it in the familiar, formulaic manner of the nineteenth-century novel, with its attention to genealogy and heredity.

Invaders and defenders, inside and outside merge when "the dusky warriors (pad) with their forest tread into ^{the mouth of} the mayor" (UPUA 11). This sets up a chiasmic inversion of the Comanche's confession: the alien Comanche quotes, or is, a canonical text of great Western literature; the discourse of the mayor, a representative of urban law, speaks of Comanche alterity.

The Indians and the "I" confront one another at the end of the text:

I removed my belt and shoelaces and looked (rain shattering from a great height the prospects of silence and the clear neat rows of houses in the subdivisions) into their savage black eyes, paint, feathers, beads (UPUA 12).

As the protagonist looks into the eyes of the Indians, a direct confrontation between their gazes is set up. The intimate, intense space made up by two reciprocal gazes is invaded and infiltrated by the vertiginous distances of the parenthesis, with its description of "great heights",

"prospects" and "rows of houses". Because the pronoun "I" and its gaze are separated from the object they view, it seems that the interpolated description lacks a viewing subjectivity. Who sees the "great heights" if the protagonist is looking into the eyes of the Comanches? This lack of the "I" as viewer suggests that the protagonist has vanished (into? out of?) the gaze of the Indians. Following the interpolation, the isolated preposition "into" contributes to a sense of the "I's" disappearance. (The ubiquity of prepositions like "in", "into" and "inside" in "The Indian Uprising" must be noted.)

Whatever remains once the protagonist has gone, it once again catalogues the "primitive" alterity of the Comanches. Their otherness is so absolute that only its surfaces can be enumerated: "savage black eyes, paint, feathers, beads". But this alterity is contradicted by the fact that most of the figures in the text either collude with, or are, the Comanches. Sylvia organises the insurrection; the mayor is taken over by "dusky warriors" (UPNA 11); Miss R turns out to be in league with the Indians; the protagonist seems to be entirely assimilated by the gaze of the Comanches. Everyone is a double agent, and if identity no longer exists, neither does alterity. ("Safety does not exist", as the horrors said in "The Policemen's Bell".) This is why the discourse that has resolutely been "on our side" vanishes and leaves only the signs of stereotyped otherness behind, why the Comanche confesses in the words of Thomas Mann, why the warriors pad into the mayor's mouth. The disappearance of barriers makes difference impossible and narrative an anachronism.

The instability of barriers is figured by ^{the} ubiquitous trope of water. Liquid appears as a dissolving agent in the last sentence of the text: the "rain [shatters]... the prospects... and the clear neat rows of

houses..." (UPUA 12). The interrogators "[pour] water into [the] nostrils" of the captured Comanche (UPUA 4); the Indians come "in waves" (UPUA 4); a "sort of muck [runs] in the gutters, yellowish, filthy stream suggesting excrement or nervousness..." (UPUA 6); Black asserts that "the situation is liquid" (UPUA 7); Miss R's litanies "[run] to liquids and colours" (UPUA 9); the protagonist observes the impossibility of "recapitulating moments that occur once, twice, or another number of times in rebellious, or water" (UPUA 11). Such fluidity occurs on a level of events as well. The ease with which "situations" merge is clearly demonstrated in the following case: "...a Comanche... made a thrust with his short, ugly knife at my leg which buckled and tossed me over the balustrade through a window and into another situation" (UPUA 8).

This fluidity does not herald an entirely new spatial dispensation. The old, bounded, meaningful space of narrative with its borders to be crossed has gone, but its outlines re-appear in "The Indian Uprising". Categories like "known" and "unknown", "city" and "wilderness" no longer persuade, yet their after-images constitute this text. Lotman's model of plot hardly explains "The Indian Uprising", although the text seems to be parasitic on exactly this model of limits and borders, spinning its fiction from an elaborate demolition of Lotman's premises. Old, familiar elements, and well-known stories are scrambled, or sutured so that they cannot make the sense they once did. The city of "The Indian Uprising" is truly an utopia, another frontier global village of which the borders have collapsed, and which the inhabitants still defend.

Frames, or The Limits of Representation

Thomas and the Dead Father have this conversation in The Dead Father:

My criticism was that you never understood the larger picture, said the Dead Father. Young men never understand the large picture.
I don't suggest I understand it now. I do understand the frame. The limits.
Of course the frame is easier to understand.
Older people tend to overlook the frame, even when they are looking right at it, said Thomas (DF 32).

What is the relation between seeing the picture and understanding the frame, or between reading a text and seeing its limits? For Lotman, the "problem of the frame - the boundary separating the artistic text from the non-text - is one of fundamental importance".²⁶⁶ Lotman goes on to behave like the "older people" who overlook the frame in his actual pronouncements.

A picture frame may be an independent work of art, but it is located on the other side of the line demarcating the canvas, and we do not see it when we look at the picture. We need only begin to examine the frame as a kind of independent text in order, for the canvas to disappear from the field of our artistic vision; it ends up on the other side of the boundary.²⁶⁷

A slightly more obtrusive position is accorded to the frames of literary text, because, in Lotman's view, "the frame of a literary work consists of two elements: the beginning and the end".²⁶⁷ So the frame is consigned to the periphery in both painting and writing. However, the frame returns in the tension between the text as a representation and the limits of the text. As object existing in space, the text is defined by its frame,

which seals it off from its surroundings. As representation, the text denies its own frame, the better to work itself seamlessly into what seems to be an extra-discursive reality.

In practice, this conflict [between "frame" and "story" in the term Lotman uses] most often takes the form of an argument between those who, like the Romantics and Realists of the nineteenth century, view art as a conventional reflection of the object (a "generalisation") and those who regard art as that very object (a "thing"), the point of view taken by the Futurists and other representatives of the avant-garde in the twentieth century.¹⁴

How does the postmodern text treat the conflicting possibilities of the frame?

Barthelme's "The Question Party" demonstrates different ways of responding to the problematic of the frame. One's first response is to read "The Question Party" as an essentially Barthelmean text. To do this, one relies on the implicit framing of the text, its position in the anthology Great Days, a collection of stories by Barthelme. While shaping one's responses to the text, this frame is so implicit as to be invisible: it guarantees the text qua text, but withdraws, so that it does not become a text in its own right. As Lotman says, "we do not see it when we look at the picture".

But "The Question Party" has another, less self-effacing frame. An "Author's Note" plays the role of post-script and terminating frame. "This piece is an objet trouvé. It was originally published in Godoy's Lady's Book in 1850, under the byline of a Nickory Broom. I have cut and padded some three dozen lines" (GD 71). "The Question Party" is not a text by Barthelme at all, this new frame informs the reader. It draws attention

to the implicit framing of "The Question Party" in Great Days; it casts doubt on the authenticity of all the other "invisible" frames. The "Author's Note" is a frame which becomes a text in its own right. Once its presence has been recognised, it has the power to entirely change the text it initially seems simply to frame. Who frames any utterance? the post-script asks. Retrospectively, this question of authorship appears within the text itself. The game played at the question party entails writing answers to set questions. Anonymity is one of the rules of the game. "There is to be no mark upon the response by which its author may be known", says Mrs Teach (CP 66). The players try to determine the author of each answer as it is read aloud, just as the post-script forces the reader to try to identify the author of "The Question Party". Questions raised by the frame form part of the interior of the text, so that the frame, contrary to Lotman's view, is not securely on some "other s." of the text. Quite possibly the post-script is a fiction in its own right, with Hickory Broom just as much a character as Mrs Teach.

Lotman suggests that concentration on the peripheral causes the central text "to disappear from the field of our artistic vision". Barthelme's writing is full of such disappearances, decenterings and displacements. The analysis of the barricade in "The Indian Uprising" has already been discussed. Here the supposedly central text - the invasion of a city by Coasneches - is displaced by an enumeration of the objects which make up a barrier between invaders and defenders. The list is open-ended, concluding with the words "and other items" (UPUA 5). In mid-text, the enumeration opens a new potentially endless space, and for a vertiginous moment the reader entertains the suspicion that the analysis of the barricade will take over, and take up, the entire text. The analysis of the barricades duplicates Miss R's litanies, and mirrors the structural

principles of collage and disjunction which shape the text which contains the catalogue itself. As another frame or limit, the barrier becomes a miniature of "The Indian Uprising". Such a representation of the text inside the text itself is a mise-en-abyme.²⁶⁹ For Mary Ann Caws, a mise-en-abyme entails "the setting of settings one inside the other, like so many nesting boxes, or infinitely receding thresholds."²⁷⁰ (This description is an apt metaphor for "Paraguay".)

As a result of the mise-en-abyme and its "abyssal" or "infinite" dimensions, the opposition between frame and text, or between container and contained is deconstructed: the text becomes endless because it encloses its own limits. Under no circumstances must this effect be confused with the cosy self-enclosure of the modernist text, or the verbal icon celebrated by the New Critics. Shoshana Felman writes of an "otherness which violates the story's presence to itself"²⁷¹ Although her reading focuses on Henry James's The Turn of the Screw, what she has to say is highly applicable to the postmodernist text.

The frame is therefore not an outside contour whose role is to display an inside content: it is a kind of exteriority which permeates the very heart of the story's interiority, an internal cleft separating the story's content from itself, distancing it from its own referential certainty. With respect to the story's content, the frame thus acts both as an inclusion of the exterior and as an exclusion of the interior: it is a perturbation of the outside at the very core of the story's inside, and as such, it is a blurring of the very difference between inside and outside.²⁷²

Barthelme's texts frequently reverse the opposition of container to contained, a reversal already noted in the letter of "The Indian Uprising". It is taken to extreme lengths in a text from Overnight to Many Distant Cities:

I put the square, neat package in a safe place, and put the safe place in a vault designed by Caspar David Friedrich, German landscape painter of the last century. I slipped the vault into a history of art (Insel Verlag, Frankfurt, 1980). But, in a convent library on the side of a hill near a principal city of Montana, it fell out of the history of art into a wastebasket, a thing I could not have predicted. I bound the wastebasket in stone, with a matchwood shroud covering the stone, and placed it in the care of Charles the Good, Charles the Bad, and Charles the Fair. They stand juggling cork balls before the many-times encased envelope, whispering games which are not the right one. I put the three kings in a new blue suit, it walked away from me most confidently (OTMBC 37-38).

(This is only the final section of the particular text.)

Not only inside and outside are inverted, but ends, beginnings and middles are shifted so drastically in Barthelme's writing that Lotman's assertion that "the frame of the literary text consists of two elements: the beginning and the end"²⁷³ begins to seem a little anachronistic. A writer named Edgar is preparing a text for the National Writers' Examination in "The Dolt". Edgar's story has a beginning, but no title and an end but no middle (UPMA 64 and 68). Edgar's wife, who comments on his writing points out that endings and beginnings alone do not make up narratives: "Something has to happen between them.... Otherwise there's no story" (UPMA . 68). The "story" Edgar writes is not the only incomplete one in "The Dolt", because the framing narrative, in which Edgar himself features as a character, is also fragmented. It lacks an opening, in marked contrast to the leisurely exposition of the text Edgar writes. Even more strikingly, the framing narrative has no real conclusion: one is not told whether Edgar sits for the examination or not. Only the intervention of an unidentified first person (another "dolt"? Barthelme himself?) brings the text to some semblance of an ending. "But he couldn't think of anything. Thinking of anything was beyond him. 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"
(UPUA 69).

The ending of "The Dolt" is then a meta-ending, just as the fiction has been a meta-fiction. To add to the confusion, this meta-ending to a meta-fiction ends with three repetitions of "to begin", so that the conclusion of "The Dolt" looks forwards to the beginnings of more fictions, and backward to its own beginning (or lack of one). Endings and beginnings change places, and like middles or centres, are quite literally, "nowhere to be found".

While the story about Edgar seems to consist of a middle only, Edgar's story about the Baron A- does have a beginning and ending, but no middle. But the tempting complementarity of these two pseudo-narratives remains just a possibility. Although the two decomposed stories seem to be on the point of making up a single text, and although they both occupy the textual space designated by the title "The Dolt", sequential dislocations of beginnings, frames, middles, centres, and ends foreclose the discovery of a whole. Edgar's story is not completed in that of the Baron A-, and neither is the story about the Baron A- completed by Edgar's story. One text supplants the other, with the result that one text is relegated to a peripheral position as the reader focuses on the other. In the term Derrida borrows from Kant, one is parergonal to the other. Here is Derrida's overview of the term parergon:

Les dictionnaires donnent le plus souvent "hors d'oeuvre", c'est la traduction la plus stricte, mais aussi "objet accessoire, étranger, secondaire", "supplément", "à-côté", "reste". C'est ce que ne doit pas devenir, en s'écartant de lui-même, le sujet principal (Dictionnaires give "digression" most often as the strictest translation, but also "accessory, foreign, secondary object", "supplement", "margin",

"residue". It is that which must not become, by deviating from itself, the principal subject. ...My translation.)^{27*}

(One notices how often the left-over and the marginal, the decentred and digressive appear in Barthes's writing. Consider Dan the dwarf's Derridean delight in linguistic "filling" and "stuffing", SW 96.)

Couturier and Durand perceive no incongruity in 'The Bolt'. For them

it narrates a man's abortive attempts to compose ... a story And it is not even this character, Edgar, who makes the anxious, bored comment [the concluding lines of "The Bolt", cited above]; it is rather the narrator or writer himself who appears to be lamenting his fate. Yet, in the process, a story is actualised, of a seductive baron Meanwhile, in the dialogue between the unsuccessful storyteller and his patronising, another tale of marital animosity gradually emerges.^{27*}

Couturier and Durand concede that this "structure" is an "elaborate" one,^{27*} although the overdetermination of the single signified "marital animosity" in two complementary narratives hardly seems "elaborate". By positing the isotopy of "marital animosity", they are able to resolve the conflicts between frame and centre in "The Bolt" quite neatly. According to their reading, the framing narrative of Edgar, and the possible mise-en-abyme of the Baron A- tell the same old story, and any interplay between the texts occurs only on the level of the signified. And the framing presence of the voice they call "the narrator or writer himself" is equally unproblematic, because "marital animosity" is a theme which is repeated frequently in Barthes's work. If the "ubiquitous 'failure' of 'a relationship'"^{27*} characterises Barthes's writing, then the presence of the narratorial voice at the end of the text makes "The Bolt"

a "spontaneous autobiographical disclosure", as the narrator of "The Balloon" calls it (UPUA 22).

Despite *Couturier and Durand*, it seems that the disarticulations of beginnings, middles and ends in "The Bolt" makes it difficult to conceive of a "story [being] actually told". Edgar's conflict with his wife and his preparations for the National Writers' Examination seem to make up a narrative that is semantically central, but the structural centre of "The Bolt" is occupied by the story about the Baron. And even the structural centrality of this story is qualified by the parergonal excess of irrelevant details (the minutiae about the various Prussian rulers, for example, UPUA 64 and 66).

Lotman, one remembers, identified ends and beginnings as literary frames. In "The Bolt", an end and a beginning appear at the formal centre of the text. The story about Edgar, on the other hand, is a single, indefinite "middle". Yet structurally, this "middle" frames the beginning and end provided by the Baron A- story. The arch-elements of straightforward storytelling, beginning, middle and end are not so much displaced as misplaced.

On another level, metalanguage can be considered as a kind of frame, which is exterior to its object while constituting that object. Commentary, extrinsic to the text, turns the text into "literature". When the text includes a commentary on itself, distinguishing between what is extrinsic and what intrinsic becomes problematic. (This has already been noted in both "The Examination" and "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel".) Jonathan Culler draws out some of the implications of parergonal logic for literature and commentary:

The distinction between criticism and literature opposes a framing discourse to what it frames, or divides an external metalinguage from the work it describes. But literary works themselves contain metalinguistic commentary: judgements of their own plots, characters and procedures. Curiously, the authority of critics' metalinguistic position depends to a considerable extent on metalinguistic discourse within the work: they feel securely outside and in control when they can bring out of the work passages of apparently authoritative commentary that expound the views they are defending.²⁷

Clearly, the critical assertion that "The Doll" is metafictional relies on the critical comments made by Edgar and his wife. Any comment on "The Doll" is forced to reiterate the text's own concern with beginnings and endings, and any critical discourse which tries to frame "The Doll" is drawn into the text, becoming part of the text itself. At this point, distinguishing what is inside the text from what is outside it, is almost impossible.

"The Balloon" lacks such overt framing devices, although the ostensibly central "I" is relegated to a parergonal position, as Maurice Couturier notices: "One finds quite a few personal forms [in 'The Balloon'], especially at the beginning and the end, but they do not properly belong to the report as such."²⁸ He adds:

It is tempting, when reading this fiction, to disregard the narrator who refers to himself unambiguously in the first and last paragraphs because the unlikelihood of the events calls for our unlimited attention from the beginning.²⁹

Couturier seems to reiterate Lotman's argument here, that the drama of the central text engrosses the reader so much that she or he forgets about what is parergonal. Yet the opening and closing paragraphs elucidate the origins and the end of the balloon, just as a frame constitutes its text. What is more, this framing explanation of the balloon frames a host of

pseudo-explanations of the balloon. Indeed, responses to the balloon occupy the text from the first sentence of its third paragraph - "There were reactions" (UPUA 16) - to the penultimate paragraph: "It was suggested that what was admired about the balloon was finally this: that it was not limited, or defined" (UPUA 21).

The comments on the balloon which take up the central section of the text can also be read, by metafictional extension, as a series of comments on the text itself. This assumption is facilitated by the recognisably literary or aesthetic character of most of the comments, for example:

There was a certain amount of initial argumentation about the "meaning" of the balloon; this subsided, because we have learned not to insist on meanings, and they are rarely looked for now, except in cases involving the simplest, safest phenomena (UPUA 16).

Or, "conservative eclecticism that has so far governed modern balloon design" (UPUA 20), and the familiar question of "unity": "Has unity been sacrificed for a sprawling quality?" (UPUA 20). This extensive commentary has an odd effect: it seems to displace its object. Couturier remarks that "despite its extraordinary dimensions, [the balloon] has been, as it were, bodily removed from the text by this critical discourse; it has been replaced by 'fantasies', individual representations that have very little to do with it."²² So the opening and closing paragraphs of "The Balloon" frame an absent centre, because the commentary at the centre of the text effects the "disappearance" of the balloon, while trying to comprehend and frame it. This is another instance of that which is parergonal, commentary in this case, usurping the place of that which is central, here the spongy balloon.

Of course there is not only one balloon in "The Balloon"; there are at least three: the balloon as object, the "Balloon" as text, and the "Balloon", which is a metafictional conflation of object and text. But the balloon - "Balloon" - "'Balloon'" paradigm is not a stable sequential progression from inner centre to outer frame, since each particular term has the ability to unsettle another. One would imagine that the balloon is enclosed in the text about the "Balloon", while the "'Balloon'" somehow encloses both. Yet the object, the balloon does not enjoy any priority, for it has been structurally displaced to the outer limits of the text (the "Balloon"), and from that position it frames, or engulfs, the commentary about it, the "'Balloon'" of the central sections. And even the balloon itself is a kind of commentary on something else as the last paragraph reveals: it is a "spontaneous autobiographical disclosure" (UPWA 22). No wonder then, that Couturier declares that Barthelme "tricks us into assimilating the object and his fiction, into falling under a dreadful spell which confuses our critical mind".²²

"The Phantom of the Opera's Friend" in City Life presents what seems to be a straightforward mise-en-scène at the centre of the text. Gaston Laroux, author of the novel, The Phantom of the Opera, is shown in the act of writing this very novel:

Gaston Laroux was tired of writing The Phantom of the Opera. He replaced his pen in its penholder.

"I can always work on The Phantom of the Opera later - in the fall, perhaps. Right now I feel like writing The Secret of the Yellow Room."

Gaston Laroux took the manuscript of The Phantom of the Opera and put it on a shelf in the closet.

Then, seating himself once more at his desk, he drew towards him a clean sheet of foolscap. At the top he wrote the words, The Secret of the Yellow Room (GL 100-101).

Although "The Phantom of the Opera's Friend" seems to frame its origins by representing the origin of its original text, this mise-en-abyme opens an uncertainty: the actual writing of The Phantom of the Opera is put aside, usurped by the mysterious Secret of the Yellow Room. Quite logically, past tense is used in this section. After all, The Phantom of the Opera had to be written before "The Phantom of the Opera's Friend", and this hierarchy is implicit in the use of tenses in Barthelme's text: past tense for the mise-en-abyme, present tense in the rest. But while past tense conventionally signals a completed action, here the action depicted is incomplete, deferred, left open. How can Barthelme's text graft itself on Leroux's Phantom of the Opera if the latter has not been finished? This sense of inconclusiveness is still present at the end of "The Phantom of the Opera's Friend". Waiting perhaps to be inscribed into some text, the narrating "I", the friend of the title, carries:

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 mist of romance is cooled by the dull gravy of common sense once more (CL 103).

Open-endedness is a recurrent feature of Barthelme's writing. John Leland writes that "Barthelme's refusal of closure is perhaps most dramatically seen at the end of Snow White where we are left only with a series of possible beginnings."¹² Similarly, "Views of My Father Weeping" in City Life ends quite simply with "Etc." (CL 15). This is hardly the inconclusiveness of realist fiction, which encourages the reader to believe that there is a reality beyond the frames of the text, or, more precisely, that the text has no frames, so that it is simply and seamlessly part of the continuum of reality. As we have seen, Barthelme's fiction is highly concerned with limits and frames, although it

problematizes these concepts. It seems that this writing uses textual limits to open a space within the text itself, so that the bottom drops out of representation.

Leland's essay "Remarks Re-marked: Barthes, What Curios of Signs" relies largely on a distinction between cyclic and serial form in the structuration of myth, a distinction drawn by Claude Lévi-Strauss in L'Origine des Manières de Table. Myths originate as self-enclosed cycles, but as the cyclic structure is repeated and re-told, it undergoes a certain transformation, because the reduplication of a closed structure turns it into an open, serial one. It should be strongly emphasized that this change does not entail the simple replacement of a closed structure with an open structure. Serial structure is an infinite conjugation of the closed cyclic paradigm, with the result that serial form unfolds itself from within the space of the cycle: the cycle is opened from inside by the serial reduplication of itself. For W.S. Doxey, Barthes's "Views of My Father Weeping" is a "modern view of Oedipus",²²⁴ but what might have been simply another re-telling of Oedipus as a cyclic structure is opened by the isolated "Etc." (CL 16) which ostensibly ends or frames the text. This "etc." signals an endless serial reduplication of the text from inside the structure of the mythic cycle: a postmodern Oedipus. Lévi-Strauss writes:

This degeneration [of myth] begins when structures of opposition give way to structures of reduplication... And the process is completed at the moment when the reduplication itself takes the place of structure. A form of a form, it absorbs the last murmur of the expiring structure. Since the myth no longer has anything, or very little, to say, it only survives by repeating itself.²²⁵

We have encountered such "structures of reduplication" already in a text like "The Sandman", and we shall encounter the "form of a form" again in the postmodern simulacrum. Of course, the miss-en-abyme is a perfect example of the reduplication of a structure inside the confines of that structure.

For Leland, Snow White, in particular, shows an aporia which originates in the conflict between the boundaries of the book and the recessions of the text:

For the "ending" of Snow White only represents the ending of Snow White. As captured within the institution of the BOOK within which the BOOK becomes an individualised object, complete in-itself. For this notion of the Book, of literature as a finished object, a self-enclosed text, seems to be radically denied by Snow White. The unity of the Book ... is fragmented by Bartheleme's text as it emerges as a remarking of that has already been marked end as its "and" ... opens only as another beginning. In this way, Snow White ... to form a totality: neither its own beginning nor its own end (projected into a future it, as Book, cannot contain) is circumscribed by the unity of the Book which exists only as a site of transformation.²²²

(Couturier senses a similar tension in "The Balloon": the conflation of balloon-object and balloon-text "raises the difficult problem of 'oeuvre' and 'texte' which Roland Barthes tried to elucidate by saying that the 'oeuvre' is what can be held in our hand, whereas the 'texte' is what is held by language".²²³)

The result is a double vision of the text as object and implosion, frame and absence, rectangle and balloon:

This ability of the balloon to shift its shape, to change, was very pleasing, especially to people whose lives were rather rigidly patterned, persons to whom change, although desired,

We have encountered such "structures of reduplication" already in a text like "The Sandman", and we shall encounter the "form of a form" again in the postmodern simulacrum. Of course, the mise-en-abyme is a perfect example of the reduplication of a structure inside the confines of that structure.

For Leland, Snow White, in particular, shows an aporia which originates in the conflict between the boundaries of the book and the recessions of the text:

For the "ending" of Snow White only represents the ending of Snow White as captured within the institution of the BOOK within which the Book becomes an individualised object, complete in-itself. But this notion of the Book, of literature as a finished object, a self-enclosed text, seems to be radically denied by Snow White. The unity of the Book ... is fragmented by Barthele's text as it emerges as a re-marking of what has already been marked and as its "end" emerges only as another beginning. In this way, Snow White refuses to form a totality: neither its own beginning nor its own end (projected into a future it, as Book, cannot contain) is circumscribed by the unity of the Book which exists only as a site of transformation.²¹⁴

(Couturier senses a similar tension in "The Balloon": the conflation of balloon-object and balloon-text "raises the difficult problem of 'oeuvre' and 'texte' which Roland Barthes tried to elucidate by saying that the 'oeuvre' is what can be held in our hand, whereas the 'texte' is what is held by language".²¹⁷)

The result is a double vision of the text as object and implosion, frame and absence, rectangle and balloon:

This ability of the balloon to shift its shape, to change, was very pleasing, especially to people whose lives were rather rigidly patterned, persons to whom change, although desired,

was not available. The balloon, for the twenty-two days of its existence, offered the possibility, in its randomness, of mislocation of the self, in contradistinction to the grid of precise, rectangular pathways under our feet (Cf. 21).

Pierre-Yves Pétillon has many subtle and interesting things to say about space and Barthes, in an essay from Critique. "Entre l'enlèvement et l'abîme, l'écrivain américain." (Between the quicksand and the abyss, the American writer. My translation).²²² Writing about Barthes's "Balloon" he observes:

A l'ordonnance de l'espace héritée du vieux monde, l'Amérique n'oppose pas un autre espace au sens où la Chine et le Japon tels qu'on les imagine sont un espace autre, mais plutôt une sorte d'hernie sauvage de la grille ancienne, une boursoufflure comique, une enflure rebelle, et, entre le cadastre ressenti comme un géôla et le gonflement, bouffon ou paniqué du moi, il y a l'écrivain américain qui va et vient, tour à tour traqué et exubérant. (To the arrangement of space inherited from the old world, America does not oppose another space in the sense that China and Japan, such as one imagines them, are another space, but rather a sort of wild rupture of the ancient grid, a comic tumescence, a rebellious swelling, and, between the demarcated territory, resented as a prison and the inflation, farcical or panicky, of the self, is the American writer, who comes and goes, by turns hemmed-in and exuberant. My translation).²²³

What Pétillon has to say about the American writer is directly applicable to postmodern writing. Postmodernism has been accused of being a universalisation of the American condition.²²⁴ Postmodern space is permeated by paradox, as the quotations from Pétillon indicate. Space is depicted and decomposed; semantic sites are deterritorialised and reterritorialised in the same gesture;²²⁵ the text is hollowed out from inside by the representation of itself inside itself. It is a space which no longer offers a table of classifications, but has become sheer, repetitive language. Says Pétillon "... l'espace épistémologique où classer et analyser faits et sensations est perçu comme une sorte

d'élucubration fantastique de fictions étrangères" (... epistemological space in which to classify and analyse facts and sensations is penetrated like a kind of fantastic lubrication of alien fictions. My translation)²⁸²

And as a last digression, a final pereragon, these utterances of Andy Warhol:

I really believe in empty spaces, although, as an artist, I make a lot of junk.
Empty space is never-wasted space.
Wasted space is any space that has art in it
My favourite piece of sculpture is a solid wall with a hole in it to frame the space on the other side.²⁸³

CHAPTER FOUR

POSTMODERNISM: "THE LEAST UGLY TERM"

"After listing the words most commonly used to characterize the current movement in American fiction - post-modernism [sic], metafiction, surfiction, superfiction - he comments: 'I suppose post-modernism is the least ugly term'" (Barthe's, in a transcribed interview with Larry McCaffery)^{22*}

What is at stake in the term "postmodernism?" Barthe's, whose writing is surely most representative of its practices, allows the word only by grudging default, as "the least ugly term". Other writers are even less enthusiastic: Christine Brooke-Rose, in the course of an illuminating genealogy of the (ab)uses of the term, finds it "peculiarly unimaginative", "self-cancelling in an uncreative manner" and concludes that it "merely means moderner modern (most-modernism?)".^{23*} Let us decompose the signifier "postmodernism", allowing it to speak for itself.

"Modernism" as a movement is self-conscious of its novelty, its difference from received tradition, and its critically transitional status.^{24*} "Postmodernism", with or without its hyphen, on the other hand, seems to confront us with the impossible claim of being beyond the new, on the other side of the contemporary. The prefix "post" signals that somehow the up-to-date is dated and the modern is passé. As a term,

"postmodernism" flaunts the fragility of avant-gardes, subordinated as they are to what Derrida calls "the incontestable phenomenon of fashion".²²⁷ Movements, "postmodernism" implies, are fads, quite frankly, and "postmodernism" is the latest, a faddishness to end all fads. Perhaps the fashionable currency of the term is one of the reasons why serious-minded critics object to it. (The very appearance of fashions calls universality into question; admitting that one is fashionable exposes everyone else to accusations of being dated.)

Barthes, who in many ways extended the project of modernism, while at the same time heralding postmodernism, speaks of "un moment à la fois décadent et prophétique, moment d'apocalypse douce, moment historique de la plus grande jouissance". [a moment simultaneously decadent and prophetic, moment of gentle apocalypse, historical moment of the greatest possible bliss. My translation.]²²⁸ Here Barthes captures some of the significance of "postmodernism". He hints at something embedded in the very term, namely a millennialism that has gracefully outlived itself, and which now endures as a post-history.

A further aspect of "postmodernism" as signifier is its inclusion of "modernism". Indeed, no sooner have we been informed by the assertive prefix that we are now beyond, in the reaches of the ne plus ultra, than "modernism" appears again. "Post-modernism" indeed. "Modernism", postmodernism declares, is "dead, but still with us, still with us but dead", like Barthes's Dead Father (DF 3). This apparent inability to dispose of the corpse of modernism is another source of distress for critics raised on notions of organic development in the realm of literature. Postmodernism plays the role of parasite on the body of a host it professes to discard. As the prefix indicates, postmodernism is a sup-

ploment, a parasite, an addendum to a canon that seems to be complete. It is a postscript - playful, outside "good" writing, tentative, marginal, like all postscripts - to an originality that is déjà lu and déjà vu. (In two recent essays both Frederic Jameson and Terry Eagleton comment on the way in which postmodernism feeds on "dead styles".²⁸⁹ Jameson describes pastiche as the dominant mode of postmodernism and adds, "pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language",²⁹⁰ and Eagleton denounces postmodernism as a "sick joke at the expense of ... revolutionary avant-gardism"²⁹¹ and as a "grisly parody".²⁹² The recurrence of adjectives like "dead", "sick" and "grisly" reveals a metaphoric association of postmodernism with a posthumous feeding on modernism.) Notions of parasitism and supplementarity, originality and belatedness are, of course, hotly debated in the arena of explicitly theoretical postmodernist discourses.

The presence or absence of the hyphen - present in Barthes's use of "post-modernism", absent in my own - presents the (im)possibility of a break or discontinuity. Does postmodernism continue the project of modernism? Does it oppose modernism? Is it a radical epistemic rupture or unoriginality masquerading as novelty?

My analysis, or decomposition, of the signifier "postmodernism" partakes of other aspects of the postmodern phenomenon as well. Firstly, cutting up the term itself enacts in miniature the postmodern will to fragmentation, which replaces a reified textual unity with the frankly perverse pleasure of fetishism. Even otherwise moralistic Marxists fall under the spell: Pierre Macherey calls for "the total abandonment of a unified notion of the literary work as a finished form capable of resolving the conflicts of reality to which it is a response".²⁹³ In Macherey's case,

fetishism is provided with an alibi - fragmentation ruptures the coherence of ideology. Any analysis seems necessarily to be a defeculation as far as postmodern theory is concerned. For Kristeva, the etymology of "analysis" must be taken into account: "analysein, to dissolve; dissolving the sign, taking it apart, opens up new areas of signification."²³ Postmodernism, therefore, refuses the reconstitutions or recuperations traditional hermeneutics performs. Post-structuralist theorising colludes with postmodernist textual practice, and in so doing, refuses any totalising, finalising metalanguage on the other side of the text.²⁴ It is almost impossible to write level-headedly about postmodernism, and indeed, the dilemma of the critic is already figured inside the text. As the speaker of "Brain Damage" has it:

And you can hide under the bed but brain damage is under the bed, and you can hide in the universities but they are the very seat and soul of brain damage - Brain damage caused by bears who put your head in their foming jaws while you are singing "Masters of War" ... Brain damage caused by the sleeping revolution which no one can wake up ... Brain damage caused by art. I could describe it better if I weren't afflicted with it (Barthelme's ellipses, Cf. 146).

"Fragments are the only forms I trust"

The first, second and third chapters, above, have all, in different ways, concentrated on fragmentation. Snatches of dialogue replace monologue; a unified self is decentred and ruptured; homogeneous space is reduced to congeries; previous literary certainties crumble. In "See the Moon?", one of Barthelme's early stories, the speaker says "Fragments are the only

forms I trust" (UPUA 169). This utterance has become something of a credo for postmodernist discourse, a snippet of manifesto.

Barthelme has since distanced himself from this, his "most frequently quoted" perlocution.²⁸⁴ In an interview with Jerome Klinkowitz, Barthelme says:

Because that particular line has been richly misunderstood ... I have thought of making a public recantation. I can see the story in, say, Women's Wear Daily: WRITER CONFESSES THAT HE NO LONGER TRUSTS FRAGMENTS....²⁸⁵

He offers an ingenuous reason for his change of art: "Fragments fall apart a lot."²⁸⁶ The speaker of "See The Moon?" also retains some faith in a deferred totality: "It's my hope that these ... souvenirs ... will someday merge, blur - cohere in the word, maybe - into something meaningful. A grand word, meaningful" (UPUA 156-157, Barthelme's ellipses).

Rather than assuming that Barthelme and his protagonist have seen the error of their practices, and become belated converts to organic wholeness, I think that in this instance we have something more than a straight-forward opposition of part to whole. A more complex procedure than the conventional choice between fragmentation and totalization is at work here. Postmodernism (or Barthelme, by extension) does not simply celebrate the fragment at the expense of the whole. This would leave the hierarchical opposition between part and whole intact, a hierarchy which insists that the whole is always the prior, more positive term. Postmodern practices, instead, deconstruct our very notions of parts and (w)holes. Take, for example, a quotation from Maurice Blanchot, which Couturier and Durand perceptively relate to Barthelme:

To speak of the fragment must not be solely in reference to the fragmentation of an already existing reality, nor a moment of a totality which is to come. This is difficult to consider because of the exigency of our comprehension, according to which there can only be a knowledge of the whole, just as a view is always comprehensive; according to this comprehension, there should be, where there is a fragment, an implicit designation of something whole, whether it is going to become so in the future - the cut-off finger refers to the hand, just as the first atom prefigures the universe and contains it within itself.¹²⁹

For Blanchot, it seems almost impossible to conceive of a fragment without reading it as a synecdoche - a part which points to the whole of which it is both part and sign. Nonetheless, the postmodern fragment is precisely such an impossibly self-referential synecdoche. In postmodern terms, the part is always more than the sum of its (w)holes.

Frederic Jameson suggests that the postmodern spectator is required "to rise somehow to a level at which the vivid perception of radical difference [entailed by postmodernist juxtapositions in collage] is in and of itself a new mode of grasping what used to be called relationship: something for which the word collage is still only a very feeble name".¹³⁰ Barthelme's fragments are "postmodern" exactly in the degree to which they refuse to be categorized as signifiers signalling a transcendental oneness. We are forced to re-evaluate radically our notions of difference and unity.

A fragment about fragments that is even better-known than Barthelme's, occurs at the end of T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land: a speaker (the speaker?) says: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins".¹³¹ Charles Holmsworth also makes a connection between Barthelme's fragment and Eliot's, although for him, continuity between the two is paramount, and

"the line from the Waste Land [sic] stands as an appropriate motto for Barthelme".³¹² Why does Eliot's modernist speaker shore fragments agonisedly against his ruins? Why does Barthelme's figure simply put his postmodernist trust in them? Note, for example, the specifying thrust of Eliot's deictic "these" as opposed to the poker-faced absence of an article in Barthelme's remark.

Eliot's fragments of language testify eloquently to the demolition of systems of meaning. Quotations in The Waste Land are centripetal fragments, which gravitate towards the elaborate mythic paradigms Eliot employs. Once the reader has identified the whole to which parts of The Waste Land refer, synecdoches snap together, magically reunified by the power of myth. Eliot himself remarked that his celebrated "mythical method" was "simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history".³¹³ The mythical method supplies a meaningful paradigm, so that the logocentric quest through the ruins of the Waste Land "heals" the textual land by connecting its pieces on both structural and metaphysical levels. Eliot's experience of fragmentation is unambiguously one of bleakness and displeasure, while Barthelme's fragments leap exuberantly at the reader, with a jaunty louisance. A change of affect obviously occurs between modernism and postmodernism, a change which extends particularly to the experience of fragmentation. Where Eliot sees "futility and anarchy", Barthelme finds "pleasure". He writes in the Preface to Guilty Pleasures that "some [of the following texts] are pretexts for the pleasure of cutting up and pasting together pictures, a secret vice gone public" (GP n.p.). Equally, in The Pleasure of the

Text, Barthes assures us that textual enjoyment takes place "whenever I do not respect the whole."¹⁴

Note the differences between the following. Eliot:

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down
Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina
Quando fiam uti chelidon - O swallow swallow
La Prince d'Aquitane a la tour abolie¹⁵

And Bartheleme:

EBONY
EQUANIMITY
ASTONISHMENT
TRIUMPH
VAT
DAX
BLASQUE (SM 95)

Eliot's phrases are still reasonably meaningful even outside their original contexts; Bartheleme simply confronts us with oddly alien and isolated words. Eliot's fragments have a clearly signalled cultural value (different European languages), and connotations, genealogies and significances which, when tracked down, lead one to the very heart of the museum of Western values. Bartheleme's lexical items are inventions that appear to pastiche the idiolects of advertising, where words have neither history or meaning beyond their appearance on a page. Eliot's allusions hail the reader and challenge her or him to perform a feat of integration and interpretation. Although they are quotations, their sources and origins are either readily recognisable or glossed in most editions of the poem. Their status as citations does not really call the identity or intention of Eliot as author into question. Yet with Bartheleme, we are

not at all sure who produces the utterance, or why. Once the writing subjectivity and its aims become uncertain, ^{the result is} tonal ambiguity results. Parody? Pastiche? Pleasure? Play? Certainly, since there is a pleasurable sense of meaninglessness in the purely phonemic similarities between "VAT", "DAX" and "BLAGUE", or between "EBONY" and "EQUANIMITY". What are these words, anyway? "VAT" and "DAX" could be the (in)proper names of consumer products, "real" or "imaginary", but what, then, is their relation to "EQUANIMITY", "ASTONISHMENT" or "TRIUMPH"? Are these the names of products rather than states of mind? Have these "abstract" nouns now become commodities? The reader is never seriously expected to answer these questions, and the final word/object/fragment is "BLAGUE" ("joke"). In the questionnaire of Snow White we are asked whether there is "too much blague in the narration?() Not enough blague?()" (SW 62), as though blague were an additive that could be included in the texture of the text, in the same way that flavouring could be added to any other junk food. Eliot's fragments alert the reader to semantic depths; Barthelme's are simply there.

The postmodern fragment and its effects can be measured against Roman Jakobson's identification of two axes of language, namely the paradigmatic axis (selection, identified with the trope of metaphor) and the syntagmatic axis (combination and contiguity, and associated with the trope of metonymy).²¹ Metaphor and metonymy have enjoyed a meteorological career in structuralist and post-structuralist analyses. David Lodge, one of the most determined popularisers of Jakobson's typology, has argued, in The Modes of Modern Writing, that there is a tick-tocking oscillation from one pole to another in successive styles or periods of writing. Following Jakobson, Lodge claims that classic realist writing is predominantly contiguous, or metonymic. Modernist

writing, on the other hand, is largely substitutive, or metaphoric. Trying to find a synthesis of metonymy and metaphor, Lodge asserts that postmodernist writing is a "[deployment of] both metaphoric and metonymic devices in radically new ways, and [a defiance of] (even if such defiance is ultimately vain) the obligation to choose between the two principles of connecting one topic with another"¹⁷ Christine Brooke-Rose comments: "Lodge's 'alternatives' then, are not alternatives to the metaphoric/metonymic poles ... but exacerbations".¹⁸

The apparent randomness of combination and contiguity in modernist texts, like The Waste Land, or, for that matter, Joyce's Ulysses or Finnegans Wake, is exercised the moment the reader turns from the syntagmatic to the paradigmatic axis, and considers selection and substitution. Here we realise that behind the surface disorder of the "phenotext" (I borrow this term from Kristeva and Barthes to signal the phenomenal presence of the text, as it "stands",¹⁹ is another text. This text has the power to reintegrate the surface fragments, and is usually invested with mythic allure - a cultural value. Think of the grail quest in Eliot, or the *Ur-Ulysses* in Joyce. Myth provides a paradigm for the contemporary waste land (Joyce's, Eliot's), a totalising metaphor. It should not surprise us that it isolates the use of paradigm, or metaphoric substitution, as the chief characteristics of high modernism.²⁰

When we turn to Barthelme, we find that his fragments indeed unsettle the opposition between metaphor and metonymy through "exacerbation", as Brooke-Rose says. Postmodernism, as exemplified by Derrida's deconstruction, has a way with binaries, and the metaphor/metonymy distinction is no exception. Barthelme's intractable fragment is not a dutiful metonym: it aspires to a condition of paradigmatic abundance or "overkill"

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as Brooks-Rose somewhat disapprovingly suggests.³²¹ Lodge describes Barthelme's catalogue of comparisons for moonrocks in "A Film" (§ 78) as an instance of postmodern exacerbation, and confusion of selection and combination. Barthelme deliberately seems to defy the necessity of selection, by giving all possible comparisons. The narrative progress of the text, its syntagmatic concatenation, is disturbed by such paradigmatic excess. The moonrocks themselves are metonymies, but rapidly supersede their referent, the moon. The abysmal opening of a paradigm inside a syntagmatic structure has been commented on in the third chapter, above. Such an effect occurs, for example, in "Views of my Father Weeping" when the unresolved detective story concludes with "Etc." (Cl. 16). Quite simply, the bottom drops out of the text.

Syntagmatic-paradigmatic scrambling occurs throughout Barthelme's work, and has interestingly postmodernist effects in The Dead Father. As Barbara Maloy has painstakingly demonstrated, the latter can be read as another incarnation of the Fisher King/Grail quest.³²² Now, the most striking structural characteristic of the "quest" as narrative is surely its irreversible teleology. The quest, by definition, is directed towards a goal, the discovery of which terminates the quest and closes the narrative. The location of the grail revitalises the Waste Land, just as the disclosure of the entire panoply of mythic reference regenerates The Waste Land. (The identification of references to an ur-text in Ulysses or Finnegans Wake has somewhat less spectacularly logocentric results, but nevertheless involves the reader in a construction of meaning.) What happens to the quest as a mythic paradigm in The Dead Father?

Any clear sense of progression, or any clear charting of space to be traversed, is foreclosed. This is a direct result of the particularities

of postmodern space (discussed in the third chapter, above). Quite a few of the sections of The Dead Father open with indications of a continuing journey, for example: "The road. The caravan" (DF Section 11, 84), "Evening. The campfire. Cats crying in the distance" (DF Section 6, 40), or "An outpost of civilisation or human habitation. Dwellings in neat rows back to back to back to back" (DF Section 17, 105). Nonetheless, the abruptness and fragmentary quality of these spatio-temporal coordinates tend to disorientate the reader, rather than giving her or him a sense of goal-directed progress. The highly incoherent description of the ritual in the cathedral is not prepared for, in any way (DF Section 13, 84-85). It begins abruptly: "The mountain. The cathedral. The stone steps. Music. Looking down. The windows, apertures" (DF 84). Who looks down? On what? The lapidary phrases provide no explanatory causal links. There is no transition from one station of the quest to the next, unlike, say, another modernist quest, Heart of Darkness.

In The Dead Father, the rigid syntagmatic concatenation of the quest structure has been broken. The ostensible object of the quest, the Golden Fleece, is revealed to be Julie's pubic hair (DF 174-175). The object which should be discovered at the end of the quest, as a result of the syntagmatic traversing of space and time, has always-already been there. The quest-model is not only ruptured but also undermined. It should be noted that the quest as general model provides both a linear syntagmatic sequence, and a global paradigm of meaning, and that both these possibilities are upset in Barthele's (sub)version.

The quest is not only short-circuited on the syntagmatic axis, but also loses its reconstructive paradigmatic force. The Fleece, of course, does not regenerate the Father, and neither does Thomas dispose of Fatherhood

for good (DF 174-175). The reader is not expected to perform some sympathetic magic of her or his own, as in Eliot. Our recognition of the mythic paradigm of reference, pace Maloy, is not a panacea. One of the running jokes of The Dead Father is that the paradigmatic myth of the modernist Waste Land has become just another untrustworthy fragment in the postmodernist playground. The opening section of the novel, spoken by an identified plural voice, keeps drawing attention to the familiarity of the mythic code: "The brow is noble, good Christ, what else? Broad and noble. And serene, of course, he's dead, what else if not serene?" and:

Jewline compares favourable to a rock formation. Imposing, rugged, all that. The great Jew contains thirty-two teeth, twenty-eight of the whiteness of standard bathroom fixtures and four stained, the latter a consequence of addiction to tobacco, according to legend, this beige quartet to be found in the centre of the lower jaw.

And again:

The red full lips drawn back in a slight rictus, slight but not unpleasant rictus, disclosing a bit of mackerel salad lodged between two of the stained four. We think it's mackerel salad. In the saga, it is mackerel salad (all quotations DF 3).

Recognising mythic, or pseudo-mythic references, is no longer the adventure of meaning it was for modernist writers and readers. Maloy seems sadly insensitive to the shift of register between modernism and postmodernism when she reads the description of "a bit of mackerel salad" as a straightforward allusion to the Fisher King. "We are thus", comments Maloy, "given an immediate and strong use of the 'fish' image".²² I agree with Maloy's identification, but any attempt to enlist the allusion in the service of a totalising meaning is misguided. The blague of the

allusion is surely that it registers but does not signify. The reader does not need to engage in the elaborate research Maloy undertakes.²²⁴ Barthelme takes for granted that we as readers are as familiar with mythic fishers and fisher kings as we are with mackerel salad. Indeed, one of the reasons why it is funny - does one really have to explain the joke? ^{is} - because the reference implies that there is no distinction between culturally prestigious myths and the mythologies of consumerism. Both are equally fragmented "bits of mackerel salad". "High" culture and "low" culture come together, because the distinction between them is no longer tenable. Jameson asserts that "modernist styles ... become postmodernist codes",²²⁵ and one of the characteristically postmodern responses to the authority of a code is parodic fragmentation. The "bit of mackerel salad" may then well be what Eagleton calls a "sick joke at the expense of ... [the] revolutionary event-gardism".²²⁶ It may also be a joke at the expense of any totalising paradigm (Eliot's conservative Anglicanism, Eagleton's devout Marxism). One critic's "sick" is another reader's "entertaining", and the eroding of systems of authority seems politically useful in a way Eagleton ignores. Be that as it may, Barthelme's "bit of mackerel salad" demonstrates the difference between modernism's centripetal mythological signified, and the demystified fragments of postmodernism, which deny depth. The reference is immediately there, and not outside in a system of value.

Eagleton is perfectly correct in his assessment of postmodernism as a parody of the regenerative aspirations of modernism. The quest as a grand récit or master narrative is dead ("but still with us"), but Barthelme has playfully shored these fragments *against its ruins*.

One should acknowledge, however, that a more appealing argument for postmodern myth than Maloy's can be found in Molesworth's Donald Barthelme's Fiction. After a close reading of "At the End of the Mechanical Age" (A) as "a parody not only of the epithalamion but also the story of Genesis, and the Miltonic version of Adam and Eve's marriage from Paradise Lost,"²² all "canceled, as it were, by [the structures] of the woman's magazine story",²³ Molesworth suggests that there may be more than deconstruction involved in Barthelme's treatment of mythic forms. The "recycling" of the residues of myth "constantly offers to contemporary consciousness the detritus of the past ... on the assumption that the half-remembered visions will serve to keep alive some glimmer of a transcendent belief".²⁴

Reworking Molesworth's inferences, one can glimpse a version of Barthelme as a collagist on the verge of becoming a mythmaker, engaged in a very specific mythopoesis for the "end of a mechanical age". Whatever mythologies will be produced from the leavings of history, consumer culture and literature, they will offer entirely new, as yet unreadable texts. The only equivalent is the graffiti artist Keith Haring who defaces billboards and subways with an elaborata signese, part hieroglyph, part diagram and part comic strip, oddly familiar, yet indiscipherable. The new myths, if they do emerge from the fragments of our world, as the speaker of "See the Moon?" implies, will be instructions for decoding and transcoding the future:

You see, Gog of mine, Gog o' my heart, I'm just trying to give you a little briefing here. I don't want you unpleasantly surprised. I can't stand a startled look. Regard me as a sort of Distant Early Warning System (UPUA 168).

But the time has not yet come for a mythopoetic reading of Barthelme, for the dominance of mythic narrative as institutionalised by modernist writers and critics is still too much with us. Perhaps that is the reason for postmodern attacks on paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes. The two axes lie at the very heart of narrative and constitute its most secret grammar. As Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan summarises the outcome of the quest for narratological grammar: "Whereas the surface structure of the story is syntagmatic, i.e. [sic] governed by temporal and causal principles, the deep structure is paradigmatic, based on static logical relations among the elements...."²⁰ To decompose the structures of narrative while maintaining their outlines, such is the project of Barthelme's texts. Can postmodernism ever rid itself of the Dead Father, the god of myth and narrative, while it clings to, in whatever fragmented form, the ghost of narrative grammar? Remember the aphorism of Nietzsche which has gained such prominence in postmodern readings: "I fear indeed that we will never rid ourselves of God, since we still believe in grammar."²¹

The breakdown of both syntagmatic sequence and sustaining paradigmatic "deep structure" is noticeable in the lapidary "bits" of story of which The Dead Father consists. Some selections: "The roadside. The tablecloth. Ringle of dinnerbell. Toasted prawns" (DF 7), or "The Dead Father plodding along, at the end of his cable. His long golden robes. His long gray hair to the shoulder" (DF 80), the entire opening of section 15 (DF 84-85), or "The jolting of the road. The dust. The sweat. The l...les in conversation" (DF 147), and, most spectacularly, the extended sexual description:

The trees. The stars. Each tree behaving well, each star behaving well.
Perfume of night-scent.

Thomas lying on his back, cruciform.
Julie prowling the edges.
Julie kisses inside of Thomas's left leg.
Thomas remains in Position A.
Julie kisses Thomas on the mouth.
Thomas remains in Position A.
Julie back on her haunches with a hand between her legs.
Thomas watching Julie's hand.
Glistening in the hair between Julie's legs.
Slight movement of Julie's stomach.
Thomas watching Julie's hand (neck craned to see).
Julie kissing underside of Thomas's dipstick (DE 159)

In the citation above, the dearth of finite verbs, the use of present participles, and the fragmentation of each action by its appearance as a self-enclosed paragraph, emphasis^d by the high degree of parataxis, should be readily observable. The description continues for two more pages. (See DE 159-161).

What we might seem to have here is a tight-lipped narrative minimalism, in which actions and events are simply designated, but neither elaborated nor described. It would seem that the text suddenly tries to give access to a pure signified, sidestepping the mediation of the signifier. Such an attitude should be familiar to us as the quintessential American distrust of language, evidenced spectacularly by Hemingway's laconism or Burrough's belief that language is a virus.³² But is Barthelme's text really withdrawing in front of an extratextual "reality" (bizarre as that reality may appear, in The Dead Father)? Or is a more complex strategy at stake?

In S/Z Barthes describes the actions of a narrative as terms in what he calls the proairetic code.²²¹ In other words, what in a text is not so much a description of an action outside language as it is a "title" bestowed on a recognised set of terms that is already familiar, already read. For example, the reader groups a series of movements or gestures in a text under the heading, say of stroll, murder or rendezvous (Barthes uses these three examples).²²² No action exists outside language: Barthes asserts that "the sequence [of actions in a narrative] exists when and because it can be given a name".²²³

Barthes's succinctness does not strike one as evidence of a desire to erase writing in front of a self-evident reality, as might have been the case for Hemingway. It is almost as though Barthes's naming of a sequence of actions is so explicit that the readerly activity of unconsciously entitling what Barthes mockingly terms "very natural actions"²²⁴ becomes foregrounded and self-conscious. We are not given a homogeneous narrative syntagma in The Dead Father; instead, we have a display of the already named, overly familiar "naming" codes of familiar narrative. And the emphasis is not on the action but on the code: we have already remarked on the irritated question "Christ, what else?" in the description of the Dead Father (DF 3); Julie and Thomas's love-making concludes with the words "And so on and so on and so on and so on" (DF 61), which clearly signal the utter predictability, the ineluctably coded character of any such description. Susan Sontag has noted the readiness of pornography, for example, to signal the rigid codification of its apparently raw material: "It is in the nature of the pornographic imagination to prefer ready-made conventions of character, setting and action... Indeed, parody is one common form of pornographic writing".²²⁷ In Barthes's case, the titles of actions are "given" directly, so that in the process of reading,

all one can do is to name and re-name items of the proairetic code, with the result that "actions" shimmer and recede in a network of language. The sexual activities of Thomas and Julie merely reinforce the familiarity of the designation "sexual activities"; the activity of the reader in the classic realist text, namely naming actions, is foreclosed by the explicitness of the proairetic code in *Barthelme*. Barthes also argues that proairetic "naming" on the part of the reader causes "everything [to hold] together"²²⁸ in the readerly text, for the coherent piecing together of micro-actions into a recognisable sequence makes a logical "paste" (Barthes's word).²²⁹ It is exactly this kind of coherence that has become unstuck in *Barthelme's* text: both on a micro-level (individual actions float in isolation) and on a macro-level (the quest itself, as overall proairetic term, no longer signifies, or signifies only its own fragmentation).²³⁰ All that is left, in the postmodernist interim, as we vainly wait for the Dead Father of narrative to disappear, is the jouissance of transforming narrative actions into material signifiers with which we (*Barthelme*, Julie, Thomas, the reader) can play.

Frederic Jameson states that "in the cultural text, the isolated Signifier is ... something closer to a sentence in free-standing isolation".²³¹ This is, of course, exactly what we have seen in *The Dead Father*, the only difference being that *Barthelme's* fragments of narrative are simply phrases, sentences without verbs, residues of proairesis that lack linguistic designations of action. Jameson illustrates how widely-spread this tendency in postmodernism is:

Think, for example, of the experience of John Cage's music, in which a cluster of material sounds ... is followed by a silence so intolerable that you cannot imagine another sonorous chord

coming into existence, and cannot imagine remembering the previous one well enough to make any connection if it does. Some of Beckett's narratives are also of this order, most notably Watt, where a primacy of the present sentence in time ruthlessly disintegrates the narrative fabric that attempts to reform around it.²⁴²

The dual process of fragmenting an overly familiar narrative and then reifying the "bits" of narrative is particularly striking in Barthelme's "The Glass Mountain" in City Life where the fairy-tale quest becomes one hundred lexias, literally narrative action by numbers. We also find the same process at work in postmodernist criticism, most celebratedly in Barthes's S/Z or his "Textual Analysis of Poe's 'Valdemar'"²⁴³ or even in Barthelme's own decomposition of Balzac's Eugenie Grandet in his "Eugenie Grandet" in Guilty Pleasures.

Furthermore, according to Barthes the code of truth (hermeneutic) and the code of action (prosdretic) are irreversible. Narrative, like the quest itself, is a one-way ticket. Because Barthelme's writing collapses the syntagmatic axis, reversibility can enter his text, while it is firmly excluded from traditional narrative. One of the great irreversibles of storytelling is the death of a character. Death is irrevocable, and a character may only return from it under exceptional circumstances that refer to some common cultural assumption (the existence of ghosts, or reincarnation). Specific models of "probability" have to be invoked. Such a kind of one-way plausibility is flouted by the premise of Barthelme's text, namely, the Dead Father himself. All manner of semantic ungrammaticalities are generated from the reversal of the irrevocable, for example: "Great to be alive, said the Dead Father" (DF 15).

Even the exact status of the italicised opening (DF 3-5) is questionable. It can either be read analeptically, as a reference to the condition of the Dead Father before the actual voyage, or be interpreted proleptically as a description of the Dead Father after his ostensible burial in section 23 (dead but still with us, still with us but dead).

So fragmentation breaks sequence and syntagmatic linkage. But the paradigmatic axis, too, is unsettled by ubiquitous fragmentation. Brooke-Rose discusses "ancess" as one of the ways in which postmodernism "[parodies] and [burlesques] and [tests] the metaphoric and metonymic poles".²⁴⁴ Barthelme's most frequently used device is the inventory. Inventories are paradigms: they are also, usually, lists for classifying reality. As such they seem to rely on a direct correlation between word and thing, signifier and referent. In Barthelme's world, such a correlation no longer exists; indeed, this correlation has become problematic in the entire postmodern sphere. Barthelme's inventory consists of pure language, and pushes the linguistic structure of the paradigm itself to breaking point, a breaking point which is achieved precisely by overdoing the paradigm. (Later I shall argue that all postmodern practices are characterised by the periodic excess with which they push dominant forms - modernism, capitalism - to their limits and beyond. In other words, the postmodernist tries to push a particular system to the point where it self-destructs, rather than trying to make a clean break with the system. This is obviously another mode of parasitism.)

Consider the following inventories, culled only from The Dead Father:

I f...hered upon her ... the poker chip, the cash register, the juice extractor, the kazoo, the rubber pretzel, the cuckoo clock, the key chain, the dime bank, the pantograph, the bubble

pipe, the punching bag both light and heavy, the inkblot, the nosedrop, the midget Bible, the slot-machine slug... (DF 36).

In reply to Thomas's pronouncement that "the first step [in making a will] is the inventory" (DF 163), the Dead Father lists these, and many other possessions:

A nut-brown maid, he read. Pegs. The stereo. A pair of chatterpies. My ravens. A pair of rental properties. Eleven rogue elephants. One albino. My cellar. Twelve thousand bottles more or less. Lithographs to be swallowed for sickness. Two hundred examples. My print collection, nine thousand items. My sword (DF 164).

The Barthelmean inventory has already been discussed in a previous chapter as a paradoxical collapse of the classificatory (or paradigmatic) capacities of language. Let us once again note that these inventories quite spectacularly shored fragments in a way which ruins the very act of enumeration. They strain paradigm while rupturing syntagm.

What happens to words, or isolated signifiers, when the signifying chain which is meant to subtext their coherence, breaks down? We have glimpsed some of the results of the fracturing of the signifying chain in Chapter Two: meanings cannot be located, identities shatter, proper names undergo metamorphosis. Another result that is particularly evident in The Dead Father is the decomposition of grammatical contexts, and their re-articulation in wildly ungrammatical ways. Such ungrammaticality can be adduced to further demonstrate the dissolution of the syntagmatic axis. In the discussion of Lacan and "la chaîne du signifiant" (Chapter Two), it became clear that the syntagmatic axis controls syntactic-semantic organisation. Wrenching signifiers out of any recognisable context must therefore be another instance of fragmentation. In the mockingly

onymous Dead Father the signifier "father" is rendered semantically "dead". Outside its conventional lexical relations, "father" re-appears in unlikely paradigms like the following, drawn from the table of contents in Peter Scatterpatter's manual:

1. Mad fathers
2. Fathers as teachers
3. On horseback, etc.
4. The leaping father
5. Best way to approach
6. Ya
7. Names of
8. Voices of
9. Sample voice, A
B
C
10. Fanged, etc.
11. Hiram or Saul
12. Colour of fathers (DF 113).

And so on. Scatterpatter's name can be decoded as "scatter-patter": the dispersal of "father" as signifier, the dismemberment of the patriarchal Symbolic Order. Of course, this is exactly what The Dead Father does as a text. For Lacan's magisterial and monolithic Non-du-Père, The Dead Father finds a plethora of diffused signs:

The names of fathers. Fathers are named:

A'albief
Aerial
Aeron
Aba
Ababaloy
Abaddon
Aban
Abarthur
Abbot
Abdia
Abiou
Achsah
Adam

(DF 121).

Again, the list is too long to quote in full. Derrida calls the act of scattering the paternal signifier "dissemination":

Germ'nation, dissemination. There is no first insemination. The semen is already swarming. The "primal" insemination is dissemination. A trace, a graft whose traces have been lost. Whether in the case of what is called "language" (discourse, text, etc.) or in the case of some "real" seed-sowing, each term is a germ, and each germ a term. The term, the atomic element, engenders by division, grafting, proliferation.³⁴⁸

To continue Derrida's 'location of "what is called 'language'" in the frame of a wider text, consider what the deconstruction of paradigm and syntagm might mean in the text of culture. Jonathan Culler suggests that paternity is structured on the base of paradigmatic substitution - "like father, like son", replacement of father by son - while maternity is structured on the base of syntagmatic contiguity - mother and child, physical proximity.³⁴⁹ Tentatively, one could suggest that the way in which Barthes's texts fracture both syntagm and paradigm can be read as an attempt to unsettle dominant patriarchy in the text of culture. Recall Levi-Strauss's analysis of how cyclical structures in myth become serial ones as the myth becomes exhausted:³⁴⁷ what Peter Scatterpatter's Manual for Sons proposes is nothing other than an attenuation of the patriarchal paradigm: "You must become your father, but a paler, weaker version of him...Fatherhood can be, if not conquered, at least 'turned down' in this generation - ..." (DE 145).

Part of the process of "turning down" the phallogocentric order of fatherhood consists of shattering the signifying chain, and disseminating the debris. But this dissemination enables yet another way of breaking down meaning: as signifiers are scattered, they are also recombined into unexpected, fragmentary totalities. Once stable syntagms are fragmented,

one can re-assemble signifiers in an aleatory manner, and so create intermittent and impossible, ludic and ludicrous meanings. For example:

Red roan-coloured fathers, blue roan-coloured fathers, rose grey-coloured fathers, grulls-coloured fathers are much noted for bawdiness....Spots, paints, pintos, piebalds and Appaloosas [all "fathers"] have a sweet dignity...The colour of a father is not an absolute guide to the character and conduct of that father but tends to be a self-fulfilling prophecy ... (DF 132-133).

Or:

There are twenty-two kinds of fathers, of which only nineteen are important. The drugged father is not important. The lionlike father (rare) is not important. The Holy Father is not important, for our purposes. There is a certain father who is falling through the air, heels where his head should be, head where his heels should be (DF 136).

The dissemination of fragments, not only in these particular examples, but throughout Barthelme's work, participates in the postmodern deconstruction of the antimony between part and totality. "Former" wholes are decomposed, but the fragments achieve an autonomy which denies the priority or primacy of the whole. Barthelme has said in an interview:

The point of collage is that unlike things are stuck together to make, in the best case, a new reality. This new reality, in the best case, may be or imply a comment on the other reality from which it came, and may be also, much else.¹²⁹

As Jameson suggests "much else" is something "for which the word collage is still only a very feeble name".¹³⁰

Objects: Commodities, Fetishes, Signifiers

Barthele's pages are crowded with objects which lack context and use. A random selection of these objects includes "purple plywood spectacles" (SW 51), "buttons, balloons, bumper stickers, pieces of the True Cross" (A 126), "a blue Death of Beethoven printed dress" (UPUA 25), "an asbestos tuxedo" (OTNDC 69), "photographs of the human u1" (GE 153), "beautiful shoes, black as black marble" (OTNDC 171), a "fifty-five pound reinforced-concrete pork chop" (GD 95), a wire which consists of "a string of quotations, Tacitus, Herodotus, Pindar" (A 126), "tiaras of red kidney beans, polished to the fierceness of carnelians" (OTNDC 64), "a mirror pie, a splendid thing the size of a poker table ... in which reflections from the kitchen chandelier exploded when the crew rolled it from the oven" (OTNDC 154), a "toothpick scale model of Heinrich von Kleist in blue velvet" (UPUA 30), "nails painted with tiny scenes representing God blessing America" (CL 7), a "pistol-grip spring-loaded flyswatter" (OTNDC 148), "dead women by the hundreds [painted] in passionate imitation of Delacroix" (GD 168), electric flowers (CL 134), "two young men, wrapped as gifts, ... codpieces stuffed with credit cards" (OTNDC 68), a "new machine for printing smoke on smoked hams" and a "new machine for printing underground poles" (A 9), the balloon of "The Balloon" (UPUA 13-23), a "veit designed by Casper David Friedrich, German romantic painter of the last century" (OTNDC 35), the shower curtain on which the esthetician remarks (SW 123), and a "genuine Weegee, car crash with prostrate forms, long female hair in a pool of blood shot through booted cop legs. In a rope-moulded frame" (OTNDC 132).

Even otherwise repellent things can suddenly become invested with desire in Barthelme's world, so that a figure in "The Wound" can say: "I want this wound. This one. It is mine" (A 17).

Food, often touted as evidence of "universal" human need, does not remain untouched by these transmutations, so that it becomes desirable and inedible, simultaneously. The Seven Dwarfs produce "baby food, Chinese baby food" and observe that "it is amazing how many mothers will spring for an attractively packaged jar of Baby Dim Sum, a tasty-looking potlet of Baby Jing Shar Show Bow" (SW 18). There are "four welded-steel artichokes" (GP 91), a "glass of chicken livers flambé" (A 112), "dangerous drugs, but only for dessert" (A 126), "Blue Whale stuffed with Ford Pinto" (GP 98), "Moholy-Nagy cocktails" (CL 134), "a pornographic pastry" (SW 35), "giant [boiling] eggs, seated in red plush chairs" (OTMDC 70), and a "special-together drink, nitroglycerin and soda" (GP 16). Such foodstuffs appear under the sign of positive affect, unlike the nightmarish nourishment offered in Burroughs's writing.²²

In addition, objects assume a life of their own altogether beyond the confines of the pathetic fallacy: a "thick smile spreads over the face of each cupcake" (CL 5), a bull "begins to ring, like a telephone" (A 17), and, "after a slight hesitation [the piano strikes] him dead" (CBDC 22). On the other hand, commodification can occur in utterly unexpected areas: "Hubert gave Charles and Irene a nice baby for Christmas" (CBDC 41).

Distinctions between "abstract" and "concrete" are suspended, so that a balloon can be a "spontaneous autobiographical disclosure" ("The Balloon", UPUA 22), sims are "preserved in amber in the vaults of the Library of Congress, under the management of the Registrar of Copyrights" (UPUA

139). There are "novels in which the final chapter is a plastic bag filled with water, which you can touch, but not drink" (CL 109). Barthelme is particularly fond of similes which forcibly connect "abstract" and "concrete". Snow White says, "Like the long-sleeping stock certificate suddenly alive in its green safety-deposit box because of new investor interest, my imagination is stirring" (SM 59-60). Barthelme's Goethe produces metaphor after metaphor on the following lines: "Music ... is the frozen tapices in the ice chest of History" and "Art is the four per cent interest on the municipal bond of life" ("Conversations with Goethe", OINDC 74-75).

Objects, foodstuffs, machines, even analogies, all are disconnected, divorced from any conceivable context. Each fantasmatic "thing" lights up in isolation: it does not signify a larger social entity as did possessions and objects in the classic realist text. Molesworth can only sense a duplicity in Barthelme's objects: "Barthelme uses enough of the realist mode to imply that physical details are a trustworthy guide to psychological experience, but he also misuses the details in such a way as to imply that there is no trustworthy scheme of interpretation."³¹ But a few pages later, Molesworth reads things as psychological and social indices: "...objects themselves become registers of their owners' (or would-be owners') anxiety..."³² Which is it? One has to concede that Barthelme's "things" are neither satirical distortions of real objects nor tongue-in-cheek figurations of actual social tendencies. What can one say about Chinese baby foods or "baffe" (SM 55)? Listing objects does not dispell their strangeness, because phantasmagorical taxonomies cannot restore a stable referential function to language. Molesworth admits that "the stories often resort to lists, which can be seen as attempts to 'add up' or point to some overriding significance, but always end up as merely

a collection of things".³⁵³ But these 'things' are more than 'merely' that: if a nominalist concept of language treats words as labels stuck on phenomena that are unquestionably real, then constructing blatantly non-existent artefacts must cast some shadow on the putative ability of words to name pre-existent things. Language produces its own purely semiotic world, and the gap between things and words becomes ever wider.

One could even argue that objects in Barthele's multiverse perform in exactly the same way as the fragments Blanchot envisages: like the fragments, these objects do not allude to any exterior or original or future whole; like the fragments, these objects should be metonymies of a larger context, but speak stubbornly only of themselves. They resemble nothing so much as Melanie Klein's "part-objects", which Elizabeth Wright describes as "what an adult would perceive as parts of other things or persons but which the child invests with powerful fantasies both pleasing and frightening".³⁵⁴ So intense is the appearance of objects in these texts, and so keen the detail with which they are presented, that a clear psychic investment or cathexis is signalled, which steeps Barthele's part-objects in affect even as it singles them out. Many commentators see the "Marivaudian being" from "Robert Kennedy Saved from Drowning" as essentially postmodern, or Barthelemean. The description of the "Marivaudian being" is also highly applicable to Barthelemean, or postmodern objects:

The Marivaudian being is, according to Poulet, a pastless futureless man, born anew at each instant. The instants are points which organise 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 partaken by 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. This freshness Foulet, quoting Marivaux, describes very well (CL 46).

Substitute "object" for "being" or "man" and "it" for "he", and the passage becomes a wonderfully appropriate comment on the objects we have seen. The ease with which "object" can replace "being" is very telling: Molesworth writes of "Robert Kennedy Saved From Drowning" that "K. himself becomes an 'anxious object'...."³³³ But Molesworth finally re-affirms quite traditional concepts of "character" in the particular story, for he claims "the character is not simply an object among other objects, for in some sense he reflects, even epitomises his environment. This reflection is one of the main characteristics of the realist hero".³³⁴ Remember, however, that part-objects can be parts of either things or people, and Deleuze and Guattari enthuse about part-objects in terms which clearly recall the "Marivaudian being":

There is no sort of evolution of drives that would cause these drives and their objects to progress in the direction of an integrated whole, any more than there is an original totality from which they can be derived. Melanie Klein was responsible for the marvellous discovery of partial objects, that world of explosions, rotations, vibrations.³³⁵

They leave little doubt about the process of fragmentation involved in the creation of such objects. Molesworth states that "people [in Barthes's texts] are ... dominated by a neurotic relation to objects".³³⁶ Taking his diagnosis further, one could say that objects, part-objects, are invested by an intense desire, a cathexis that does not seem to emanate from the "characters" or even from the author. To rephrase the credo of "See the Moon?" - "Fragments are the only form I desire". Fragment becomes partial object, which becomes fetish in its turn.

But at the same time, part-objects, as one finds them in Barthes, are also commodities. An early text, "To London and Rome", is almost a shopping-list, a record of purchases punctuated by silences: a "sewing-machine ... with buttonhole-making attachments", "a purple Rolls", "a handsome race horse", "a large hospital", and so on, until the story climaxes with "a Viscount jet", bought for "an undisclosed sum" (CBDC 161-169). Indeed, all the objects listed at the beginning of this section are purchasable.

Having noted the sheer insistence of these verbal objects, one finds oneself asking, like the general in "A Picture History of the War": "Why are objects preferable to parables?" (DL 139). If these objects are indeed commodities, may they not be interpreted parabolically, as signifiers of what Jameson somewhat heavy-handedly calls "the cultural logic of late capitalism"?²⁵² In his analysis of what makes postmodernism different from modernism proper, Jameson contrasts Van Gogh's modernist Bauernschuhe (Peasant Shoes) with Andy Warhol's Diamond Dust Shoes. He decides that while Van Gogh's painting refuses commodification, Warhol's Shoes, as art-object and as footgear, have become "clearly fetishes both in the Freudian and in the Marxian sense".²⁵³ Fetishism is the postmodernist perversion par excellence. For Barthes, the text itself is a fetish;²⁵⁴ Gregory Ulmer finds an exemplary fetishism in Derrida's post-criticism:

A review of Derrida's texts turns up a small collection of such borrowed theoretical objects, including, besides the umbrella [from Nietzsche], a pair of shoes (from Van Gogh) [the already-encountered Bauernschuhe], a fan (from Mallarmé), a matchbox (from Genet), a post card (from Freud) ... each of these objects occurs in a discussion of fetishism. Let it suffice to say that the "example" in post-criticism functions in the manner of a "fetish object"....²⁵⁵

We must note that Derrida does not originate his own fetishes, he "borrows" objects from other writers, which he then puts to a perverse use. Even more importantly, Derrida's borrowing results in a plethora of fetishes, unlike the dominant and determining object (or paradigm of objects) which characterizes mundane fetishism. For early psychological theory, the solitary fetishist was bound to a single object, which makes the fetishist both "individual" - he is eccentric - and "case history" - he is typical. In "A Picture History of the War" we read that sins are "preserved in amber ... under the management of the Registrar of Copyrights" (UPCA 139). Psychological theory, too, in its dealings with fetishists tries to reify their "sins" or "perversions" by keeping them in the preservative of theory. Moreover, rigid delineation of "types" maintains a kind of copyright over each perversion, so the quotation from "A Picture History of the War" seems a particularly apt remark on the position of fetishists in psychological thought. Remember that copyright, in Derrida's view, ensures uniqueness, establishes origins and guards the legitimate owners of property. Each "sin" is unique and jealously guarded. But Derrida's own easygoing appropriation of fetish-objects and Barthes's playful multiplication of things deny any supposed uniqueness. Postmodern fetishes are not indivisible, matchless and protected by copyright; they are borrowed objects, part-objects, instants in an endless series.

The following quotation demonstrates what differences exist between objects that are solidly there, and postmodern fetishes: "Went to the grocery store and Xeroxed a box of English muffins, two pounds of ground veal and an apple. In flagrant violation of the Copyright Act" (GR 21). The "flagrant violation of the Copyright Act" has already been considered as a symptom of the postmodern assault on mimesis, but there is more to

the "violation" than that. Unauthorized duplication of "things", objects and language infringes copyright: Derrida borrows the fetishes of others; Barthelme's speaker Xeroxes mundane groceries, and, doing so, lifts them out of the realm of usefulness. The act of reproduction becomes perverse and the humdrum groceries become traces of objects, photocopied fetishes, desirable goods at second hand.

Frederic Jameson argues that under capitalism proper the function of technology is production, but in late capitalism, technology is directed at reproduction.³³ Such a proliferating reproduction is embodied, quite precisely, in the Xerox. As the catalogue of objects from Barthelme's writings indicates, reproduction and dissemination define postmodernism and its commodity fetishes. No one item is singled out for fixation; Barthelme's work abounds in objects that hold one's attention for a moment before they are replaced and effaced by others. Verbally, Barthelme's objects are immediately disposable.

Whatever else it might have, the postmodern fetish lacks the originality of a "classic" fetish. Sometimes it is a borrowed object, often it is an objet trouvé like the whole text of "The Question Party" (GD 71). Like the photocopied muffins, the postmodern fetish is a copy, or more precisely a simulacrum, which Jameson defines as an "identical copy for which no original has ever existed".³⁴

The simulacrum has enjoyed considerable prominence in theories of postmodernism, reaching its zenith in the writings of Jean Baudrillard, who summarises the whole of contemporary experience as follows: "... il n'est plus lui-même qu'un gigantesque simulacre - non pas irréel, mais simulacre, c'est-à-dire ne s'échangeant plus jamais contre du réel, mais

s'échangeant en lui-même, dans un circuit ininterrompu dont ni la référence ni la circonférence ne sont nulle part"²⁶⁶ [... it is nothing more than a gigantic simulacrum - not unreal, but a simulacrum, which is to say that it does not exchange itself for what is real, but exchanges itself within itself, in an uninterrupted circuit of which both the reference and circumference are lost. My translation.] Baudrillard even lists ways in which "reality" has become a simulacrum, some of which recall aspects of Barthes's writing:

- I. The deconstruction of the real into details - closed paradigmatic declension of the object - flattening, linearity and seriality of the partial objects.
- II. The endlessly reflected vision: all the games of duplication and reduplication of the object in detail...this indefinite refraction is only another type of seriality....
- III. The properly serial form (Andy Warhol). Here not only the syntagmatic dimension is abolished, but the paradigmatic as well.²⁶⁷

Echoing both the proliferation of signs and objects discussed earlier, and the uncanny repetitions noticed in Chapter Two, Baudrillard states: "For the sign to be pure, it has to duplicate itself: it is the duplication of the sign which destroys its meaning. This is what Andy Warhol demonstrates also: the minute replicas of Marilyn's face are there to show at the same time the death of the original and the end of representation".²⁶⁷ Michel Foucault also discusses the simulacrum in terms of an endlessly ongoing series. He draws a distinction between what he calls "resemblance", a representation which stands for a reality, and "similitude", the disseminating (re)production of simulacra:

Resemblance has a "model", an original element that orders and hierarchises the increasingly less faithful copies that can be struck from it. Resemblance presupposes a primary reference that prescribes and classes. The similar develops in series that have neither beginning nor end, that can be followed in

s'échangeant en lui-même, dans un circuit ininterrompu dont ni la référence ni la circonférence ne sont nulle part"²⁶⁴ [... it is nothing more than a gigantic simulacrum - not unreal, but a simulacrum, which is to say that it does not exchange itself for what is real, but exchanges itself within itself, in an uninterrupted circuit of which both the reference and circumference are lost. My translation.] Baudrillard even lists ways in which "reality" has become a simulacrum, some of which recall aspects of Barthele's writing:

- I. The deconstruction of the real into details - closed paradigmatic delection of the object - flattening, linearity and seriality of the partial objects.
- II. The endlessly reflected vision; all the games of duplication and reduplication of the object in detail...this indefinite refraction is only another type of seriality....
- III. The properly serial form (Andy Warhol). Here not only the syntagmatic dimension is abolished, but the paradigmatic as well.²⁶⁵

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one direction as easily as in another, that obey no hierarchy, but propagate themselves from small differences among small differences. Resemblance serves representation, which rules over it; similitude serves repetition, which ranges across it. Resemblance predicates itself upon a model it must return to and reveal; similitude circulates the simulacrum as an indefinite and reversible relation of the similar to the similar.³⁴

What could be more repetitive than the endlessly reiterated image of a soup can? What could be a more perfect illustration of the postmodern fetish, of the disseminated simulacrum? Like Baudrillard, Foucault alludes to Warhol: "A day will come when, by means of similitude relayed indefinitely along the length of a series, the image itself, along with the name it bears, will lose its identity. Campbell, Campbell, Campbell, Campbell."³⁵ Repetition marks the simulacrum, just as it gives rise to an uncanny intermittence in the subject (see Chapter Two).

From Warhol's soup can to Barthelme's purple plywood spectacles to Derrida's borrowed umbrella, there is an endless swarming of things in circuits that have neither origin nor goal nor point of reference. And the movement of the simulacrum is not confined just to literary texts: in obedience to Derrida's dictum that nothing falls outside the text,³⁶ the simulacrum also becomes the sign of postmodern political economy.

Here a brief digression on Marx and exchange may be necessary to pin down exactly what makes postmodernism different. Marx asserts that the capitalist system of exchange is deeply unfair, because it is not based on exact equivalence: surplus value can only be produced if exchanges are unequal. The exchange value of commodities, or their salability, masks the "intrinsic" use value of things.³⁷ But the social formation of postmodernism, late capitalism, goes even further. It does not simply obscure use value with exchange value; it performs the trick of making

any consideration of value disappear altogether. How can a simulacrum have value? What is the value of an asbestos tuxedo, a Xeroxed muffin, a mirror pie, a tiara of kidney beans? As Baudrillard argues, the simulacrum floats in a ceaseless exchange, devoid of value.

Baudrillard admirably summarises the difference between high capitalism and late capitalism. In the former, the commodity and its price have a function similar to that of the sign, which signals a referent. For the nineteenth century bourgeois, value, of whatever kind, still referred to a fixed system of meaning. Describing this situation, Baudrillard states that the "finalities of prestige and distinction still corresponded to a traditional status of the sign, in which a signifier referred back to a signified, in which a formal difference, a distinctive opposition (the cut of a piece of clothing, the style of an object) still referred back to what one could call the use value of the sign, to a differential profit, to a lived distinction (a signified value)...."⁷² On the other hand, what Baudrillard calls the "form sign", or floating signifier, dominates postmodernism:

The form sign describes an entirely different organisation: the signified and the referent are now abolished to the sole profit of the play of signifiers, of a generalised formalisation in which the code no longer refers back to any subjective or objective "reality", but to its own logic. The signifier becomes its own referent and the use value of the sign disappears to the benefit of its commutation and exchange value alone.⁷³

If one accepts Baudrillard's suggestion that the political economy of postmodernism is best understood in terms of semiology, and may well be indistinguishable from semiology, then one can propose a resolution to the dispute about the differences between capitalism and late capitalism. For Daniel Bell the postindustrial society breaks with capitalism proper;

for Frederic Jameson and Ernest Mandel, late capitalism simply intensifies capitalism.²⁷⁴ The resolution takes an appropriately textual form: postmodernism parodies capitalism by pushing it to such an excess that capitalism is voided of meaning. This is precisely the process of Barthele's text "The Rise of Capitalism" which wittily empties its title of any content:

Capitalism arose and took off its pajamas. Another day, another dollar. Each man is valued at what he will bring in the marketplace. Meaning has been drained from work and assigned to reproduction. Unemployment obliterates the world of the unemployed individual. Cultural underemployment of the worker, as a technique of domination, is found everywhere under late capitalism. Authentic self-determination by individuals is thwarted. The false consciousness created and catered to by mass culture perpetuates ignorance and powerlessness. Strands of raven hair floating on the surface of the Ganges ... Why can't they clean up the Ganges? If the wealthy capitalists who operate the Ganges wig factories could be forced to install sieves, at the mouths of their plants ... (§ 147, Barthele's ellipses).

Evidently, in the course of the quoted paragraph, a slippage occurs in which capitalism and its discontents lose any referential value. Take the opening of the text:

The first thing I did was make a mistake. I thought I had understood capitalism, but what I had done was assume an attitude - melancholy sadness - toward it. This attitude is not correct. Fortunately your letter came, at that instant. "Dear Rupert, I love you every day. You are the world, which is life. I love you I adore you I am crazy about you. Love, Marta". Reading between the lines, I understood your critique of my attitude toward capitalism. Always mindful that the critic must "studiarlo da un punto di vista formalistico e semiologico il rapporto fra lingua di un testo e codificazione di un ..." But here a big thumb smudges the text - the thumb of capitalism, which we are all under (§ 143).

Although the excerpt begins with a cause, "capitalism", and its effect, the attitude adopted towards it, "melancholy sadness" (and here one de-

nects an echo of the title of the collection, Sadness, as well as a hint of the reason for this emotion, "capitalism"), questions of political determination are rapidly collapsed into matters of semiotics: the letter, reading between the lines, a "formalist and semiological point of view", "codification", another language, the thumbprint which interrupts the text. Odd, therefore, that Molesworth should insist that in "The Rise of Capitalism" "the narrator tries to comprehend how social forces and individual identity are related",³⁷⁵ or even that "many of Barthelme's bizarre formulations can be traced back to some recognisable, even plausible, mimetic referent".³⁷⁶ The opposite is true, for both Barthelme and the political economy of postmodernism. Capitalism reifies value as something to be exchanged, not used, and postmodernism makes an absent object a fetish, a simulacrum, which can only be exchanged or disseminated.

It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that the objects in or of Barthelme's writing do not represent or mime a particular political economy. I have already claimed that one cannot think of these partial objects as pointing to any totality, therefore it would be unfortunate to try and think of them as signs of the "relations of production". Barthelme's texts do not figure a "truth" of the base structure. To suggest simply that Barthelme's objects are distortions of the commodities that assail us in everyday life will not take one very far.³⁷⁷

Words, discourses, in Barthelme's texts are as much fetish objects as the commodities which these words present, and the discourses are as widely exchanged as any commodity. Molesworth intuits the process: "But it is not only material objects that make up the sewing remnants of Barthelme's world. Words are also used in the collage techniques, and they often bear

the marks of their status as things".²⁷⁸ He adds that Barthelme "shows how words and things are similar". The dialogues between Julie and Emma which punctuate The Dead Father demonstrate exactly how fragmentary units of language are recycled. Here is one such dialogue:

Break your thumbs for you.

That's your opinion.

Take a walk.

Snowflakes, by echoes, by tumbleweed.

Right in the mouth with a four-by-four.

His basket bulging.

I know that.

Hunger for perfection indomitable spirit reminds me of Lord Baden-Powell at times (DF 147, see also 23-27, 60-64, 85-90, 147-155).

To re-state some of the arguments of Chapter One, what we have here is less "dialogue" in the sense of communication, than an outbidding, a game in which one utterance (regardless of meaning) calls forth a counter-utterance, (again, with no respect for meaning). Each particular enunciation has become a counter which repays, or is exchanged for, another enunciation. The actual content of the statements is irrelevant; what matters is that the exchange continues.

For Regis Durand, the replacement of textual use value with exchange value unites such ostensibly disparate postmodernists as William S. Burroughs, Truman Capote, Barthelme and Andy Warhol (whose name crops up in every discussion of the phenomenon). Durand writes: "Use value has been drained out of all objects and signs, to be replaced by pure exchangeability and circulation - exchange and circulation as value".²⁷⁹ In other words, the

postmodern text itself can no longer claim exemption from the businesses of exchange which circumscribe the postmodern condition. Both Baudrillard, and, following him, Durend, argue that the empty but exchangeable signifier is the foundation, as far as such a concept has any weight for postmodernism, on which all other transactions are predicated. Such an argument reverses the conventional Marxist stress on the economic base as an ultimately determining instance of which writing could never be more than a reflection. But this reversal of what is traditionally viewed as the base and what as the superstructure is already visible in the post-Althusserian insistence on the productivity of language, which implies that language, the sign must be what finally determines a social reality.²⁰⁰

Still, postmodernism, as Molesworth notices, takes this to an extreme degree, refusing to discriminate between signifier and commodity. No wonder that the ideal text is an objet trouvé, a recycled commodity, a "Babe Ruth Wrapper" (UPUA 157), described as a potentially perfect work of art, an unacknowledged borrowing, a fetishised quotation. Barthelme's texts are pecked with discursive simulacra. For example, a speaker in "Great Days" describes another's discourse as "nonculminating kind of ultimately affectless activity" (GD 159): the statement has been lifted from Susan Sontag's well-known essay, "The Pornographic Imagination" in which it is offered as a definition of sex in 'pornographic texts.'²⁰¹ (Pornography, according to Sontag, is itself highly intertextual, as we have already noted.) All the enunciations in a Barthelme text have this uncanny quality of some not immediately localisable déjà vu. They may well all be quotations, or even more disturbingly, statements that look like quotations. Unsurprisingly, Peter Scatterpatter's Manual for Sons

is "translated from the English" (DF 111); any postmodern discourse is always-already a translation, a quotation, a copy, an exchanged sign:

The confessions are taped, scrubbed, recomposed, dramatised, and then appear in the city's theatres, a new feature-length film every Friday. One can recognise moments of one's own, sometimes (DF 4).

And even this description recalls Burroughs's "scrambling technique", as well as the procedures of Laurie Anderson's performance piece Americans on the Move.²²²

Language can only be recycled or reiterated - Molasworth observes that "one of the effects of the texture in a Barthelme story comes from this recycling of clichés and conventional wisdom",²²³ and calls the process a "salvaging".²²⁴

More importantly, text and economy, or word and commodity are now adjacent, and no term enjoys priority over another as political economy and textuality become indistinguishable. The relationship here is truly what Foucault calls "similitude", for word and commodity are like each other, but do not resemble each other in a hierarchical way: the utterance does not represent the commodity.

Warhol wittily exemplifies the inscription of the text in ever-accelerating circuits of exchange. In his autobiography he discloses:

When Picasso died I read in a magazine that he had made four thousand masterpieces in his lifetime and I thought, "Gee, I could do that in a day". So I started. And then I found out, "Gee, it takes more than a day to do four thousand pictures". You see, the way I do them, with my technique, I really thought I could do four thousand in a day. And they'd all be master-

pieces because they'd all be the same painting. And then I started and I got up to about five hundred and then I stopped. But it took more than a day, I think it took a month. So at five hundred a month, it would have taken me about eight months to do four thousand masterpieces... It was disillusioning for me to realize it would take me that long.¹⁰⁰

Picasso's prolificacy is a sign of his artistic stature and his individual "greatness"; Warhol, in typically postmodern fashion, emulates or pastiches Picasso's productivity by an active re-activity, which strips the "masterpieces" of its uniqueness by multiplying it. To assume that "they'd all be masterpieces because they'd all be the same painting" poses an unanswerable challenge to the bases of modernist High Art. Four thousand identical masterpieces would be four thousand simulacra, while the masterpiece is announced by its presence, its individuality, its singular authority as a masterpiece. Can a photocopied Picasso be a masterpiece? Once more, postmodernism's "flagrant violation of the Copyright Act" confounds us. The striking similarity between Warhol's practices and Walter Benjamin's predictions of "The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction" has been noticed by John Noyes, whose paper on Warhol and Benjamin is essential reading.¹⁰¹

Terry Eagleton brings a political commentary to bear on the differences between modernism and postmodernism which we have just seen so engagingly demonstrated in the encounter between Warhol and Picasso. Eagleton's summary of the modernist project is useful, because it encapsulates the modernist position, while pointing out its latent contradictions: "Modernism is among other things a strategy whereby the work of art resists commodification, holds out by the skin of its teeth against those social forces which would degrade it to an exchangeable object". The

modernist work of art does everything in its power "to forestall instant consumability", so that it becomes a self-contained, self-sufficient and self-referential artefact. But, ironically, there is a price to pay for this status: "If [the modernist work] avoids the humiliation of becoming an abstract, serialised, instantly exchangeable thing, it does so only by virtue of reproducing the other side of the commodity which is its fetishism".²⁸⁷

Eagleton's diction betrays his nostalgia for modernism, as well as his tacit identification with its values, evident in the way he describes exchange as "degradation" and "humiliation". He distinguishes between fetish and exchange object as far as the work of art is concerned, but, as we have seen, postmodernism makes any distinction between artefact and commodity difficult.

On the other hand, Eagleton characterises postmodernism in terms that echo Benjamin: "the commodity as mechanically reproducible exchange ousts the commodity as magical aura [the masterpiece of modernism]".²⁸⁸ Postmodern technology (re)produces circuits of exchange in which empty signifiers move without interruption. So Warhol talks about his "technique" instead of his "style", for technology replaces unique stylistic "handwriting". Warhol is identified chiefly with silkscreening as a medium, which evidently enables "mechanically reproducible exchange", something that could describe Warhol's works and Barthelme's words.

Barthelme's "Parsguy" produces a Warholian glut of masterpieces: "The rationalised art is despatched from central art dumps to regional art dumps and from there into the lifestreams of cities. Each citizen is given as much art as his system can tolerate" (GL 23). The entire section an-

titled "nationalisation" in "Peraguay" deals with a streamlining of "problems of art" (CL 22): "Production is up. Quality-control devices have been installed at those points where the interests of artists and audience intersect. Shipping and distribution have been improved out of all recognition" (CL22-23). The result is the following:

Rationalisation produces simpler circuits and, therefore, a saving in hardware. Each artist's product is then translated into a statement in symbolic logic. The statement is then "minimised" by various clever methods. The simpler statement is translated back into the design of a simpler circuit. Foamed by a number of techniques, the art is then run through heavy steel rollers. Flip-flop switches control its further development. Sheet art is generally dried in smoke and is dark brown in colour. Bulk art is air-dried, and changes colour in particular historical epochs (CL 23).

Warhol extends the idea of recycling to its absolute limit, giving us a vision of a world in which everything is "bulk art" and everything can be sold. Even more strongly this global supermarket recalls Deleuze and Guattari's eulogisation of the circuits of desire. Warhol writes:

There should be supermarkets that sell things and supermarkets that buy things back, and until everything equalises, there'll be more waste than there should be. Everybody would always have something to sell back, so everybody would have money, because everybody would have something to sell.... People should be able to sell their old cans, their old chicken bones, their old shampoo bottles, their old magazines ... I think about people eating and going to the bathroom all the time, and I wonder why they don't have a tube up their behind that takes all the stuff they eat and recycles it back into their mouths, regenerating it... And they wouldn't even have to see it - it wouldn't even be dirt. If they wanted to, they could artificially colour it on the way in. Pink.^{3**}

Regional art dumps which fuse art and junk, recycled excrement dyed pink, as much art and as much selling as one's constitution can bear - such is the postmodern condition.

The Strange Object Covered with Fur, or, The Logic of the Fragtrash

The fragment becomes fetish, and the fetish is this idiosyncratic useless object covered with fur (CBDC 14). Stated bluntly, the fetish is a piece of trash. Critics insistently identify both the will to fragmentation and a fascination with the "trash phenomenon" as defining features of Barthelme's writing.³⁹² Fragment, for h, trash: fragtrash. "Fragtrash" is an unrepentantly ugly neologism I have coined to telescope all these meanings; "fragtrash" is a verbal fetish and a trashy word. Molesworth defines the short story as a genre which "recycles junk",³⁹³ and writes that "Barthelme's stories may offer us some discovery that will explain the junk and the signs, even if we have to consider the possibility that they are one and the same".³⁹⁴ When littering and semiosis cannot be told apart, anything can happen.

The postmodern commodity undergoes a strange transfiguration, of which the fantastic commodities which open this chapter are exemplary: pieces of trash, disposable words, left-overs from an apocalypse that never happened. Erw White presents the most overt statement of the poetics of trash. Dan, one of the dwarfs, says:

You know, Klipschorn was right I think when he spoke of the "blanketing" effect of ordinary language, referring, as I recall, to the part that sort of, you know, "fills in" between the other parts. That part, the "filling" you might say, of which the expression "you might say" is a good example, is to me the most 'interesting' part, and of course it might also be called the "stuffing" I suppose....But the quality this "stuffing" has, that the other parts of verballity do not have, is two-parted, perhaps: (1) an "endless" quality and (2) a "sludge" quality....The "endless" aspect of stuffing is that it goes on and on, in many different forms and in fact our exchanges are in large measure composed of it, in larger measure even, perhaps, than they are composed of that which is not "stuffing" ... (SM 96).

Barthelme's language becomes "sludgy" itself, as is evidenced by the numerous quoted phrases and by its hazy prolixity. It does what it says, in an unnerving parody of the New Critical verbal icon. The "exchanges" of postmodernism are "in large measure composed of [stuffing]", in all possible ways, from the circuits of commercial exchange, which rework junk, in Warhol's vision, to the interchanges of "sludgy" discourses, which reiterate empty signifiers, like Derrida's gram.²³³

A kneejerk critical response defends the sacred text from any encroachment by stuffing or sludge. Gass: "Barthelme's method fails, for the idea is to use druck, not write about it".²³⁴ Similarly, the reader soon finds Nolesworth talking of Barthelme's stories as attacks on the "false consciousness" (now there is a bit of a verbal anachronism!) generated by the media.²³⁵ He makes it the goal of Barthelme's fiction, as he sees it, explicit, couching that goal in the language of salvation and sanitation: to "[redeem] fictional consciousness"²³⁶ and to "aestheticise junk and fragments, to make them safe for literature".²³⁷ Even the otherwise perceptive Couturier and Durand claim that "Barthelme constantly denounces what he calls this 'blanketing' effect of ordinary language".²³⁸ Critics appear to have an urge to claim that Barthelme

because Gass refers to "specific instances still, the attitude should be noted.)

himself is or must be free of the taint of trash. The text in front of us has to denounce everyday language, to thematise it, to make it undergo a sea-change in the "art gallery" and in the "laboratory of discourse",³³ the two realms to which Couturier and Durand would like to consign Barthelme's writing.

But Dan's remarks about mundane discourse do not seem to be denunciatory in tone at all. The admission of blanketing, sludgy, stuffing, useless language into any discourse has disconcerting results. Presumably Couturier and Durand see their own critical enterprise as belonging itself to the galle. In laboratory, loci which could dignify and authorize their words. What does one do in the face of linguistic devaluation? How does one analyse dreck?

Bear in mind that one of the dwarfs in Snow White says: "We like books that have a lot of dreck in them, matter which presents itself as not wholly relevant (or indeed, at all relevant)..." (SW 106). Dreck is marginal and trashy, impossible to analyse, not because it is irreducible, but because it draws analysis into its orbit. What nightminded critic would willingly pay attention to the trivial and useless?

Dreck poses a threat to the logocentric edifice of museum and laboratory. Trash senses "Literature" and its accomplice "Analysis". An analysis must have a worthy object; for otherwise a reading of dreck may not keep its distance, and could suffer the fate of becoming as trashy as its object. Linguistic inertia presents insoluble difficulties - all the discourses it encounters may be drawn into its trashy spell (my portmanteau word, "fragtrish", for example). How can one appeal to any validity if language has become useless? Couturier and Durand try to exorcise the

spectra of waste by implying that Barthelme's recyclings of linguistic rubbish, much like Warhol's sellable trash, leap from quantity to quality; Holesworth insists that "these stories are highly sophisticated cultural objects" that transform pulp into poetry.

Dan pursues his discussion of the "blanketing" effect of ordinary language: "... there is a relation between what I have been saying and what we're doing here at the plant with these plastic buffalo humps" (SW 97). The ease with which Dan moves from linguistic to commodity exchange proves my suspicion that word and commodity are interchangeable: like discourse, the buffalo humps are meaningless. We have taken note of Baudrillard's belief that semiotics fulfills the role under late capitalism that political economy played in the nineteenth century heyday of capitalism. The circulation of signs now provides the referent. Dan almost seems aware of this reversed relation of language to object, for he says that "we pay particular attention to those aspects of language that may be seen as a model of the trash phenomenon" (SW 97-98). The concept of language as a model is, of course, the structuralist dream.

Dan openly concedes that the injection of trash into any practice, whether discursive, economic or textual, has unsettling effects:

Now you're probably familiar with the fact that the per-capita production of trash in this country is up from 2.75 pounds per day in 1920 to 4.5 pounds per day in 1965, the last year for which we have figures, and is increasing at the rate of about four percent a year. Now that rate will probably go up, because it's been going up, and I hazard that we may very well soon reach a point where it's 100 percent, right? [Observe the deconstruction of authenticity implicit in the concept of pure junk, of something 100 percent trash.] And there can no longer be any question of "disposing" of it, because it's all there is, and we will simply have to learn how to "dig" it - that's slang, but peculiarly appropriate here. So that's why we're in [plastic buffalo] humps, right now, more really from a philo-

sophical point of view than because we find them a great moneymaker. They are "trash", and what in fact could be more useless or trashlike? It's that we want to be on the leading edge of this trash phenomenon, the everted sphere of the future, and that's why we pay particular attention, too, to those aspects of language that may be seen as a model for the trash phenomenon (SW 97-98).

Terry Eagleton gets hot under the theoretical collar when contemplating the same phenomenon with less than Barthelmean "equanimity".⁴⁰¹ "Reification", he writes, "once it has extended its empire across the whole of social reality, effaces the very criteria by which it can be recognised for what it is and so triumphantly abolishes itself, returning everything to normality". From this, he deduces that "postmodernism is thus a grisly parody (!) of socialist utopia, having abolished all alienation at a stroke."⁴⁰² After all, "it's 100 percent, right?" No wonder that faced with this alarming development, Couturier and Durand feel the need to resurrect the ghost of literary value, as a denunciation of ordinary language. No wonder that Eagleton appears as a socialist voice calling his refusal to "dig it" in a postmodern wilderness.

In its confrontation with a mass production of "languages", the modernist text reluctantly inserted its own discourse into the linguistic marketplace, not as another idiolect among the many, but as the Logos or the last word of "truth". Everyone knows that Eliot's Waste Land was first entitled He do the Police in different voices; the voices of mass culture must be made different, translated and transliterated.⁴⁰³ Whatever else it may be, The Waste Land is no easy plea for pluralism. Its linguistic impasto, and its disfigurements of other texts and of everyday language make The Waste Land a contorted master discourse. The ease with which Tiresias' voice subsumes the others, indicates a drive towards a

normative, if not a normal language. Even the polyphonous discourses of Ulysses ultimately fuse, in the reader's mind, to form a single language, which becomes normative by its very abnormality and which is unified by its resolute rejection of anything that sneaks of the undisfigured vernacular. Reworking some of Walter Ong's insights, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar contend that since the seventeenth century all Western male writers have had as their singleminded aim the transmutation of everyday language into Literature (exemplified by Milton's struggles to produce a classic epic in the mother tongue).⁴¹³ Literature, in the form in which we have constructed it since Mallarmé, has had the denunciation of everyday language as its only goal.

Yet, when Couturier and Durand, and Molesworth try to impose the antinomy between ordinary language and literary language on Bartheleme's writing, they are misguided. Both Russian Formalism and New Criticism pursued the chimerical distinction between literary discourse and other utterances. But postmodernism robs the text of its privilege as a verbal icon, and transforms it into another commodity on equal and familiar terms with plastic buffalo humps. Warhol provides a succinct description of the transition from capitalised "Art" to late capitalist "business art":

Business art is the step that comes after Art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist. After I did the thing called "art" or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art businessman or a Business Artist....Business Art. Art business. The Business Art Business.⁴¹⁴

On the other hand, Couturier and Durand presuppose some aesthetic hierarchy, since Literature or Art must be superior to other discourses if it is to occupy a position from which to denounce them. Here the familiar

modernist notion of an antagonism between high art and popular culture reappears. All modernist writing is based, in some degree, on the schism. As Mallarmé testifies, the poet's duty is the following: donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu (to give a purer meaning to the words of the tribe, my translation).⁴⁴

Pierre-Yves Pétilion retells a revealing anecdote from Barthelme's childhood. Barthelme's father, a Texas architect who was trying to introduce severely modernist architecture into America, had built a house in the style of Mies van der Rohe for his family. Every Sunday, ordinary Texans out for a leisurely drive would stop in front of the alien construction to gape at it in bewilderment, at which point the Barthelme children would dash out and perform a cancan for the onlookers. Pétilion comments that this memory determines all Barthelme's subsequent attempts to turn European high culture into a "music-hall spectacle": "Le recours de Barthelme, transformer tout cela en spectacle de music-hall".⁴⁵

Following the persistence of the high/low antithesis turns up some surprises, for the opposition lingers in unsuspected places: the writings of Roland Barthes, for example. The antimony between scriptible (literally "writable", but translated by Richard Wright as "writerly") and lisible (literally "readable"; given as "readerly" in Wright's version) seems to be one of the most persuasive binaries of late structuralist thought.⁴⁶ Barthes states what he presumes to be the vs. embedded in the "writerly" with an uncharacteristic degree of coercion. "Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text".⁴⁷ One glimpses, behind the readerly and the writerly, the consumer and the producer, another incarnation of the passive/active doublet.

Even in a late work by Barthes, like The Pleasure of the Text, it is clear that the codes of jouissance exclude the mass text.⁴¹³ Julia Kristeva, in a recent piece entitled "Postmodernism?" says the following: "Compared to the media, whose function it is to collectivise all systems of signs, even those which are unconscious, writing-as-experience-of-limits individuates".⁴¹⁴ So the writerly, the blissful, writing-as-experience-of-limits, despite its heterogeneity must constitute a superior discourse which can give the lie to ordinary language. Literature is never a popular art. Writers as diverse as Eliot, Barthes, Milton and Kristeva are all united in some way by the dream of a masterful language, the potent patrius sermo, or "father's sermon" in Ong's term, which redeems its raw material namely the materna lingua, or "mother tongue" in Ong's term.⁴¹⁵

Five years after S/Z, in Roland Barthes, Barthes concedes that "writerly" and "readerly" constitute a nondialectical "oppositiva".⁴¹⁶ Promisingly, he seems about to move away from the opposition, for he writes that he now believes in something on the other side of the readerly and the writerly: "alongside" them "there may be a third textual entity...." Will this third term conflate or synthesise readerly and writerly? No, because it turns out to be an intensification of the writerly. Barthes calls it the "receivable":

The receivable would then be the unreaderly text which catches hold, the red-hot text, a product continuously outside of any likelihood and whose function - visibly assumed by its scriptor - would be to contest the mercantile constraint of what is written; this text, guided, armed by a notion of the unpublishable, would require the following response: I can neither read nor write what you produce, but I receive it, like a fire, a drug, an enigmatic disorganisation.⁴¹⁷

What Barthes articulates here is the familiar avant-garde dream of a text which is not a commodity, and which remains "continuously outside" both "likelihood" and "mercantile constraint". His ideal gift can only be received as gift, something that is not an exchange. By the term "unpublishable" Barthes designates the calculated withdrawal of such a text from the circuits of commercial exchange. A very common modernist myth deals with the unpublished or unpublishable manuscript: from Sautelaire to Genet, from Joyce to Burroughs, the modernist text is supposedly surrounded by scandal. Barthes leaves us, then, with a normative opposition, publishable versus receivable, which incarnates that most stultifying of norms, literary value, and repeats a central tenet of modernism.

On the other hand, Barthes's texts are eminently publishable. His stories have been published in periodicals like Esquire, Mademoiselle and The New Yorker, as the verso of the title page of each collection of Barthes's work shows. Glossy publications form an appropriate discursive site for late capitalism. Barthes is entirely aware of the constitutive relationship between the consumer-reader and the contemporary magazine: "[I] asked her in the nicest possible way what magazine she read, what magazine she identified with, what magazine defined her ..." (GF 19). That this particular story is called "That Cosmopolitan Girl" and appeared in The New Yorker should not be lost on the reader. Such a reliance on established channels of publication marks a telling difference between postmodernism and modernism. Barthes avoids the alternatives of the "little magazine" or clandestine publication. To misquote Barthes, Barthes's texts are products that appear "continuously within likelihood", on this side of the "mercantile constraint" of postmodernism.

Molesworth comments on the connection between Barthelme's stories and the way they are published:

The stories in some sense reflect their place of publication, namely the modern magazine. Addressed to an audience with a relatively wide experience of travel, an acute sense of fashion and change, as well as a consciousness formed in part by a purposely pliant cultural context, these stories must constantly widen, shift, and quicken their reader's sense of timely details. In a sense, Barthelme's stories must compete with, even as they ironically comment on, the advertisements and nonfiction "features" that surround them.⁴¹⁸

It is indeed tempting to suggest that the texts "reflect their place of publication", or even that the exigencies of periodical publication have produced the texts, but such a suggestion would run the risk of giving a determining priority to an economic base.

By staying inside the processes of textual commodity exchange, Barthelme's stories have caused doubt and confusion on at least one occasion: Jerome Klinkowitz warns us that there is a "name-sake plagiarist" of Barthelme's.⁴¹⁹ Nonetheless, Barthelme himself has written texts, in his own style, for The New Yorker, under the pseudonym "Lily McNeil". Either someone else copies Barthelme, under Barthelme's own name, or Barthelme, as someone else, copies himself. These texts have no value because they are not part of the "authentic" Barthelme canon. But despite their lack of value, they are published like any "true" work: they represent the exchangeability of the empty signifier in a general economy of exchange.

Barthelme's texts are more than publishable; in their own way, they are highly readable as well. Does a relationship exist between the writerly, the readerly, and the readable? (This is a distinction which one can only

draw in English, thanks to Wright's translation of lisible and scriptible by those well-known neologisms, "readerly" and "writerly". In French lisible simply means "readable".) Barthelme's texts are oddly readable in a popular sense, while retaining vestiges of writerliness: why?

Jameson isolates "a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality, in the most literal sense - [as] perhaps the supreme formal feature of all postmodernists".¹¹⁷ According to Jameson "modernist styles become postmodernist codes".¹¹⁸ The glossy surfaces of postmodern works certainly speak of a flattening-out of modernist notions of profundity and originality; signifying style turns into something that is taken for granted. To juxtapose a section from Finnegans Wake and an excerpt from The Dead Father, which explicitly pastiches Joyce's style, might be informative.

Margot Norris offers the following as "a typical Wakean sentence [which] serves to illustrate how contiguous associations create a vertical depth along a narrative line" (my emphasis):¹¹⁹

It was of the Grant, old gartener, que gold meddlist, Publius Manlius, federal private (his place is his poster, sure, they said, and we're going to mark it, sore, they said, with a carbon caustick manner) bequother the liberalsoider at his party coporeleszo that Hung caughtnepping from his baited breath, it was of his, my wife and I thinks, to feel to every of the younging fruits, tenderosed like an atlantic's breastswalls or, on a second wreathing, a bright tauth bight shimmeryskaking for the welt of his plow.¹²⁰

Turning to Barthelme, one finds that his writing lacks both depth and narrative line:

AndI. EndI. Great endiforce testertestertertottering. Willit
urt. I reiterata. Don't be cenacle. Conscientia mille testes.
And having made them, where now? What now? Mens agitat mollem
and I wanted to do it well, do it well. Elegantesente. Oh! Jus
satis, AndI. Pathatiquarly the bungrah night and date through
all the heures for the good of all. The Father's Day to end all.
AndI understand but list, list, let's go back. To the
wedbedding. To the dampdream. AndI a onochsevenyearold boy,
just like the rest of them. Pitterpatter (DF 171).

The Wake is indisputably writerly. It sends its reader scurrying into a
thicket of clues, puns and tangled signifiers. Umberto Eco makes the Wake
a paradigmatic "open" text: the "open" text actively creates its own
reader, unlike the "closed" text, which passively presumes a reader.²¹
(Evidently the "open"/"closed" antithesis can be linked to all the other
oppositions we have seen so far.) The quotation from The Dead Father
looks writerly, but there is a very real difference between Joyce's lan-
guage and Barthelme's wordplay. Barthelme substitutes, for example, a
slightly distorted version of the "normal" word or phrase: "willit urt"
for "will it hurt" or "cenacle" for "cynical". His substitutions have a
facile quality quite unlike Joyce's verbal labyrinths, which rely on an
ever-widening spiral of cultural reference, "atglantic", for instance.
Once the one-to-one relationship between Barthelme's verbal inventions
and the conventional version of those words has been deciphered, the joke
is up. Joyce's writing has a kind of immediate presence as a unique
style, while Barthelme's text connotes, as part of its signifying effect,
a Joycean-ness.

At the same time, Barthelme's writing is superficial in every way: the
quotation from The Dead Father reads like a deadpan copy of Joyce, a
Xeroxed page of the Wake which appears as a perfect simulacrum in
Barthelme's text. The comparison of "original" (Joyce) and "copy"

(Barthelme) shows how postmodernism parodies modernism, with neither satirical nor normative purpose.

The movement from Joyce to Barthelme perfectly exemplifies the readerification of the writerly. Everyone now knows Joyce, so Barthelme provides us with an exact copy of Joyce. But Barthelme is no Pierre Nénard,⁴²² he does not open the work of his master to new meanings, but deliberately curtails its density. Joyce, all considered, is simply another item in our encyclopaedia or museum. Therefore, to produce a new writerly text merely continues Joyce's original project, but to reproduce Joyce, while smoothing out his fable writerliness, unsettles the very notions of readerly and writerly. That is why Joyce becomes so readable in Barthelme's version: The Dead Father offers a Reader's Digest version of Finnegans Wake.

As it wallows uncritically in secondhand signs, postmodernism seems unable to distinguish between the esoteric and the popular. A striking instance is In His Own Write by John Lennon, which belies its title with local pastiches of the manner of Finnegans Wake.⁴²³ The disappearance of anything resembling an authoritative metalanguage may well relate to the loss of cultural mastery which Craig Owens, following Lyotard, sees as a defining characteristic of the postmodern condition.⁴²⁴ Kitsch and high art come together in a process that may even have begun with Joyce: "Finnegans Wake carries the tendencies of high art and of popular culture to their outer limits, there where all tendencies of mind may meet, there where the epiphany and the dirty joke become one".⁴²⁵ But whatever its initially populist intentions might have been, Finnegans Wake was subsumed into the canon: "an acknowledged but unread masterpiece, the least dog-eared book on every graduate student's shelf, a cult item conned

by footnote hounds and citation grubbers".^{42c} The Dead Father, on the other hand, belongs to both academic treatise and glossy magazine.

Is postmodernism kitsch? Eco defines kitsch as the reiteration of aesthetic effects that have already been successful elsewhere,^{42'} so that kitsch is a kind of neutral stylistic quotation: "I reiterate-reiterate-reiterate-reiterate, pitter-patter" (DF 171). By its hollow reiteration of the modernist flourishes that have enjoyed a succès de scandale elsewhere, postmodernism performs the final transgression of transforming transgression into kitsch. High and low collapse onto each other: there is truly no longer any difference between popular culture and high art.

Even when postmodern texts appear to be what Barthes calls "enigmatic configurations", one still has the sense that postmodern enigmas are marketable commodities. Berthelme's regular contributions to mainstream American periodicals is a case in hand, but Laurie Anderson's recorded performance pieces are featured on hit parades, and Warhol's influence on popular culture has been immense. Consider the rise of the pop video, complete with Godardian jump cuts and imagery borrowed from Un Chien Andalou. The gap between art, supposedly timeless icons, and fashion, conventionally ephemeral commodities, narrows and disappears.

How then does one analyze drack? What is the appropriate response to a world that is no longer an imaginary museum but a global junkyard? Surprisingly, Roland Barthes adumbrates the most appealing position:

Stupidity is a hard and indivisible kernel, a primitive: no way of decomposing it scientifically (if a scientific analysis of stupidity were possible, TV would entirely collapse). What is

it? A spectacle, an aesthetic fiction, perhaps a hallucination? Perhaps we want to put ourselves into the picture? It's lovely, it takes your breath away, it's strange; and about stupidity, I am entitled to say no more than this: that it fascinates me. Fascination is the correct feeling stupidity must inspire me with (if we reach the point of speaking the name): it grips me (it is intractable, nothing prevails over it, it takes you in an endless hand-over-hand race).⁴²⁴

So Barthes does have the last word. Perhaps Bartheime's strange object covered with fur, his fragtrish neither gladdens nor breaks one's heart: the fragtrish fascinates.

CHAPTER FIVE

PATERNITY, ANXIETY, PASTICHE, ALLEGORY: "THE FATHER'S DAY TO END ALL"

Paternity

Bartheleme's work is full of fathers: "The man sitting in the centre of the bed looks very much like my father....But perhaps it is not my father weeping there, but another father: Tom's father, Phil's father, Pat's father, Pete's father, Paul's father" ("Views of My Father Weeping", GL 5). They turn up in surprising circumstances: "Kellerman, gigantic with gin, runs through the park at noon with his naked father slung under one arm" ("A Picture History of the War", UPUA 131).

The Dead Father concerns itself most single-mindedly with the omnipresence of fatherhood, so much so that one might feel that The Dead Father is less a tale of potential patricide than an instance of paternal overkill. Les Couturier and Durand are quick to reprimand the more literal-minded among Bartheleme's readers for taking the "omnipresent figure of the father" at face value. What concerns Bartheleme, they maintain, is "not the thematic aspect of the father", nor the "question of the father ... [as] merely ... [a] fascination with origins, another version of the old identity problem". No, according to Couturier and

Durand, what is at stake here is an issue of psychoanalysis: a matter of the self, of the ego and its relation to the superego.²³

Perhaps one should heed Conturier and Durand's advice about the significance of psychoanalysis in reading The Dead Father, but ignore their readiness to see the father as just another symbol, or even as the symbol of the Symbolic.²⁴ After psychoanalysis, it is not very hard to guess that a text entitled The Dead Father will be a retelling of the Oedipus story. We can usefully assume that if the Dead Father is a symbol of anything, he will be a symbol, or better still, a metonym, of fatherhood and its relations to storytelling. So the Dead Father is another Laïus, and Thomas a latterday Oedipus. At the Father's request, Thomas tells a story, in which he, like Oedipus, comes across a hybrid creature, not the Sphinx, to be sure, but the Great Father Serpent (DF 43-44). (Is there an allusion to the Sphinx in the portmanteau word "sphinxeries", which seems to combine two diminutives of "sphincter" with "sphinx"? DF 65) Like the Sphinx, the Great Father Serpent has a riddle to ask (DF 43-46). As everyone knows, the Sphinx asks Oedipus "What goes on four feet, on two feet, on three, but the more feet it goes the weaker it be?"²⁵ As everyone knows, the answer is "Man". The Great Father Serpent's riddle is "What do you really feel?" (DF 46), to which Thomas replies with the word he has glimpsed on the polished sheet of tin which the Father Serpent either carries in his mouth or uses as a mirror: "like murdering" (DF 46). ("...because that is what I had read on the underside of the tin, the wording murdering inscribed in a fine thin cursive", says Thomas in explanation, DF 46.) Thomas is astonished at how closely the word "[accords] with [his] feelings, [his] lost feelings that [he has] never found before" (DF 46). After listening to Thomas's story, the Dead Father

wants to know: "What is the moral?". Thomas reiterates: "murdering". And although Thomas prevaricates "I mentioned no names", the Dead Father immediately draws a connection between that "moral" and himself. "Murdering is not correct....The sacred and noble Father should not be murdered. Never. Absolutely not", he rants (DF 46). It is directly after this that Thomas confiscates the Father's belt buckle, first of his symbols of authority to be stripped (DF 47-48).

Although Peter Scatterpatter's Manual for Sons warns its readers against patricide ("a bad idea", DF 145), one cannot help feeling that if Barthelme's novel has any "moral" it must also be "murdering", for the novel reworks the story of the arch-patricide Oedipus, and ends with the Father about to be buried. Betty Farmer goes so far as to claim that Barthelme himself, at the end of the text, calls for a "total darkness for the gods rather than just a 'Twilight of the Gods'".⁴² An end to all patriarchal deities, nothing less than a "Father's Day to end all" (DF 171).

Somewhat lost in the welter of allusions that Farmer's essay uncovers, is a suggestion that The Dead Father draws unmistakably and perhaps inevitably on Freud: she registers the similarity between Barthelme's novel and the story of the slaying of the Ur-Father by the "primal horde", which Freud recounts in Totem and Taboo.⁴³ When one turns to Freud, parallels between his text and The Dead Father are quite pronounced, and more extensive than Farmer allows. The version I am quoting comes from Moses and Monotheism, not from Farmer's source, Totem and Taboo. (Freud was drawn to the story of the Father's death more than once in his career.) Freud hypothesises that "the events [he is] about to describe occurred

to all primitive men - that is, to all our ancestors". Although the events have been made into a single coherent narrative, both by Freud, and the primal storytellers who handed them down, in however mediated a form, Freud reminds us that the "story is told in an enormously condensed form, as though it happened on a single occasion, while in fact it covered thousands of years and was repeated countless times during that long period".³²⁴ (Notice how carefully Freud establishes his text as a story.)

Freud goes on: "The strong male was lord and father of the entire horde and unrestricted in his power, which he exercised with violence. All the females were his property - wives and daughters of his own horde and some, perhaps, robbed from other hordes". Gloomily Freud conjectures that

the lot of [the] sons was a hard one: if they roused their father's jealousy they were killed or castrated or driven out. Their only resource was to collect together in small communities, to get themselves wives by robbery, and when one or the other of them could succeed in it, to raise themselves into a position similar to their father's in the primal horde.

But a decisive change took place when the brothers who had been expelled, came together, overpowered the father, and "as was the custom in those days, devoured him raw".³²⁵ Freud explains that the sons

hated and feared their father but also honoured him as a model, and ... each of them wished to take his place in reality. We can, if so, understand the cannibalistic act as an attempt to ensure identification with him by incorporating a piece of him.³²⁶

A synopsis of prehistoric history, according to Freud, is then provided. Somewhat taken aback by their own transgressive daring, the sons who had

murdered their father forged a rudimentary social contract, enforcing exogamy and forbidding incest, which served as the basis for "civilisation".⁴³⁷ Thousands of years later, a massive and worldwide feeling of guilt heralded a return of the repressed (the original killing of the father): "It appears that a growing sense of guilt had taken hold of the Jewish people, or perhaps the whole of the civilised world of the time, as a precursor to the return of the repressed material".⁴³⁸ It is to St Paul that Freud ascribes the invention of "original sin" as a way of naming that guilt without actually recalling its "real" content, and Freud credits Christianity with the task of dealing with these matters, in a culturally palatable way through rituals of atonement and the myth of a son's redemptive sacrifice.

What one must bear in mind is that Freud has found in his farfetched anthropological fiction not only a heuristic tool for explaining virtually anything, but also a way of making the story of Oedipus exceed the limits of the merely ontogenetic, or of individual biography, to become phylogenetic, a universal and all-encompassing myth of origins.⁴³⁹ The "literary" qualities of Freud's story are quite obtrusive, so that it is quite predictable that Freud will attempt to find proof for his hypothesis in literature. In the beginning was the Deity, he asserts at the end of Totem And Taboo,⁴⁴⁰ twisting the words of St John, and this deed must have determined literature. He finds in unconsciously recollected guilt for the killing of the father

the true basis for the "tragic guilt" of the hero of drama, which is otherwise hard to explain. It can scarcely be doubted that the hero and chorus of Greek drama represent the same rebellious hero and company of brothers; and it is not without significance that in the Middle Ages what the theatre started afresh was the story of the Passion.⁴⁴¹

Already in Totem and Taboo Freud emphasizes the omnipotence and omnipresence the primal father acquired in death: "The dead father became stronger than the living one had been ...,"⁴⁴² once he was internalised as guilt, remorse and attendant prohibitions and rituals. Mysteriously killed, the father continues to come back. That can stand as a summary of Barthelme's "Views of My Father Weeping", as well, which is a "modern [or postmodern] Oedipus" as W.S. Doxey suggests.⁴⁴³ The Dead Father, too, explores precisely how powerful a dead father can be: "Dead but still with us, still with us but dead" (DF 3).

Barthelme's novel shows quite a few correspondences with Freud's phylogenetic fable: there is the exact lexical similarity of "dead father", there are further semantic similarities. Like Freud's primal father, Barthelme's character issues imperious decrees: "Nobody disobey a ukase of mine, said the Dead Father. He chuckled" (DF 9). He experiences implacable rages - the massacre of the musicians (DF 11), or the titanic slaughter of the animals (DF 32-53). Saturnlike, the Dead Father devours his offspring: "I had to devour them, hundreds, thousands, faefifofum ..." (DF 18). From a Freudian perspective myths and fairytales concerning violent fathers or brutal patriarchs keep an steviatic memory of the primal father alive. The Dead Father makes his inhibiting influence felt in his attempts to intervene in the sexual activities of his children (DF 9, 15 and elsewhere). The lot of his sons is indeed a "hard one", as Freud has it, - the sons are forced to wear the caps of jesters as tokens of their inferiority (DF 7); the Father boasts: "Punishment is a thing I'm good at" (DF 82). Like Freud's narrative, Barthelme's text tells of the overthrow and death of the Father, only in Barthelme's novel, the death is tautologous (DF 175).

Hindsight makes Freud seem slightly like Barthelme as well: a glance at the entries under "Father" in the Index to The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works discloses the protean features of the Father, and the arrangement of such polymorphousness as an alphabetical catalogue reminds one irresistibly of Barthelme:

ambivalence towards; and castration threat; and incest taboo; and Oedipus complex; as beater in beating-phantasies; as child's rival; as girl's first sexual object; as prototype of bogies; boy's hostility to; boy's identification with; boy's incestuous feeling for; [quite a few entries follow under "boy's"] ...; carries out ritual defloration of daughter; child's relations to; death of; death of, and disavowal; death-wishes against; ... equated with animal in animal phobias; equated with animal in fairy tales; equated with animal totem; equated with forces of nature; equated with God; equated with hero of legend; equated with King; fear of; fear of being eaten by; ... "good" and "bad"; humility of hysterics traceable to; ... "inner"; killing of (see Father, primal; Parricide); ... overcome by hero of legend; phantasies concerning; phantasy of rescuing; seduction by; substitutes for; super-ego inherits authority of; - symbols (see under Symbols);...***

There is no role the Father cannot play; "Father" is best described as a floating signifier. The Concordance to The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works reveals that the word "Father" appears a staggering two thousand one hundred and eighty two times in Freud's writing, while derivatives such as "fatherless", "fatherly", and "fatherland" are used three hundred and eighty nine times. (Freud's most famous term, "Oedipus" only turns up a modest three hundred and eighty five times in total.)*** The enormity of Freud's concern with fathers is incontestable: what a magisterial Manual for Sons he compiled, exhaustive beyond the wildest dreams of Peter Scatterpatter!

Loosen, the most dutiful but the least tractable of Freud's sons, reduces all of Freud's work to a single question: "la question d'où lui-même est

parti: qu'est-ce qu'un Père?" (the question from which he himself set out: what is a Father? my translation) The answer to this question should not surprise us: " - C'est le Père mort, répond Freud ..." (It is the dead Father, answers Freud ..., my translation). Lacan adds that he, Lacan, has taken up the very same question "sous le chef du Nom-du-Père" (under the heading of the Name-of-the-Father).⁴⁴⁴ So Freud, Lacan and Barthelme agree on one thing: the true Father is a Dead Father, "stronger than the living one had been...."

⁴⁴⁴With Lacan's re-formulation of the question of the Dead Father as a question of language, le Nom-du-Père, it may be appropriate to pass from what has so far been largely a semantic consideration to an investigation of the language of The Dead Father. Most commentators notice the strongly Joycean quality of Barthelme's text: Pierre-Yves Pétillon alludes to it,⁴⁴⁷ and Farmer deduces the close relationship of The Dead Father to Finnegans Wake ("Barthelme's main source for this novel") from "an overt parody" of Joyce in Chapter 22,⁴⁴⁸ the Dead Father's mock interior dialogue. (In Chapter Four I contrasted an extract from that passage with a sentence from the Wake.)

But Joyce's influence is much more pervasive than Farmer recognises. It makes its presence felt even in the verbal minutiae of Barthelme's novel: lexical items like the following all seem derived from Joyce - "ringle" (7), "flang" (10), the repetitions of "if if if" (18), "neonate" and "weakwick" (34), the descriptive compounds lavished on the Great Father Serpent: "fina smaliclothes of softwhispering bluscoloured changeable taffets" (44), odd portmanteau words like "aphinxeries" (65), "castigatorious" (79), "scotomising" (91), "deblock", "beardscules" (105), "nonfligitiousness" (119). There are also instances of tmesis such

as "infuckingcredible" and "infuckingbelievable" (38) where Americanese or what Pétillon calls "yigglish new yorkais",⁴⁴⁴ and the lexicon of Finnegans Wake coincide.

One can find endless other correspondences between Finnegans Wake and The Dead Father. As its title indicates, the Wake may be a text of mourning, for a dead father, of course: "Dauncy a deady o! Dood dood dood!" (FW 499).⁴⁴⁵ It is about "the fall ... of a once wallstrait oldparr [which] is retailed early in bed and later on life down through all christian minstrelsy" (FW 3). Anthony Burgess supplies two meanings for "oldparr": "a parr is a young salmon... Old Parr was the oldest man who ever lived, guilty of begetting bastards in his hundred-and-fiftieth year",⁴⁴⁶ but he misses the obvious one: "old pa". And the "oldparr" ("old fart"? DF 78) is "the big cleanminded giant H.C. Earwicker" (FW 33). (Compare that with The Dead Father: "... you are an old fart ... and old farts must be notably clean of mouth in order to mitigate the disgustingness of being old farts" DF 52.) Like the Dead Father, H.C.E. is a patriarchal giant, "Doublends Jined" (FW 20), "Immensipater" (FW 342), the "fafafsther of all schemes for to bother us" (FW 45). He even has a "buckler" inscribed with the letters F.E.R.T (FW 127); Barthelme's Father has a belt buckle, "gift of the citizens, many Father's Days ago" (DF 47).

The "fall" of H.C.E. is recoid in many different forms in the course of Finnegans Wake:

The principals are always the same: an old man, two girls, and three soldiers - representatives of Earwicker and his children. The girls tempt the old man to commit assorted indacencies that the three men witness; in some versions, they then rise against the father figure. These indacencies form an almost complete array of sexual perversities.⁴⁴⁷

(The somewhat diminished cast list of The Dead Father consists of the father, two girls, Emma and Julie, and two sons, Thomas and Edmund.)

Like the fathers of the Manual for Sons (DF 140), H.C.E.'s perversities include exposing his "drawn brand", "shagsome and all beastful" to his daughter (Isabel, FW 566). In fact, the Wake shows the same obsession with the father's penis as Scatterpatter's Manual does; the latter devotes an entire section to the "sexual organs of fathers" (DF 140-141). H.C.E.'s "propendulous loadpoker" (FW 493), his "stark pointing pole" (FW 566) seems yet more proof that "the penises of fathers are in every respect superior to the penises of nonfathers ... because of a metaphysical responsibility", as Scatterpatter assures us (DF 141). The Dead Father's most phallic weapon, his sword, is called a "maulsticker", a very Joycean term (DF 79). The Dead Father claims to have crossed the stry: by "uncoiling [his] penis, then in dejected state", making "a long cast across the river, sixty five meters where it snagged most conveniently in the cleft of a rock in the farther [a pun?] shore". He then hauled himself "hand over hand 'midst excruciating pain ... through the raging torrent to the other bank" (DF 38). H.C.E. rivals such phallic potency - one of his appellations is Husan Conger Eel (FW 525) which makes him "an animated penis", as Burgess observes.⁴⁴²

Like the Dead Father, H.C.E. is constantly subject to attacks and insurrection. Roland MacHugh "[distinguishes] seven main areas of direct attack" in Book 1, Chapters 2 to 4 alone.⁴⁴⁴ The most explicitly "Oedipal story"⁴⁴⁵ in Finnegans Wake is the shooting of the Russian General by Private Butt (FW 340-348, Chapter Nine according to William Tindall;⁴⁴⁶ Book 2, Chapter 3 by Edward Kopper's calculations;⁴⁴⁷) Butt even feels "there was fear on me the sons of Nud for him" (FW 344), to underscore

the transgression against a patriarch. Like the sons of Noah, he, Butt, is spying on the father's nudity: "Nud" = "Noah" + "nude". The Russian General has literally been caught with his trousers down: he is defecating (FW 343-344).

Earwicker may even be dead: Burgess, in what seems to be pure coincidence, dubs him the "dead father".²⁸⁸ Early in the Wake a funeral procession for the father takes place: "the teak coffin, Pughglasspane!fitted, feets to the east, wes to turn in later, and pitly petly near the porpus ..." (FW 76, it seems to go to 80). "Porpus" = "corpae"/"corpus" + "papa", at least; think of the explosion of paternal /p/ plosives in the last monologue of Barthelme's Dead Father (DF 172-173). When Earwicker speaks towards the end of the text, he is "a ghost, ... [having] his say through filial lips",²⁸⁹ and in his medium-mediated monologue, he pleads: "Pity poor Haveth Childers Everywhere ...!" (FW 535). This passage resembles the monologue of Barthelme's Dead Father structurally - it occurs three quarters of the way through the text - and semantically - the "sir ghostus" (FW 532) of the Father has his (elmost) final say to beg pity. "Pitterpatter...Pitterpatter oh please pitterpatter" (DF 173). Needless to say, the Wake shows evidence of the "estupus complex" (FW 128), and hails Oedipus: "God serf yous kingly, adipose rexi!" (FW 499). (Some of the other parallels between The Dead Father and Finnegans Wake will be noted later.)

One of the most intertextually and phonetically resonant recollections of Joyce in Barthelme's novel must be the aggressive signifier "murdering", the answer to the Great Father Serpent's riddle. That the "morel" of Thomas's dream should be "murdering" is not in itself remarkable, given the Oedipal dimensions of the text, but what does merit

attention is that this moral should be couched in Joyceanpeak.⁴⁵⁰ There are fathers in abundance in Joyce's work, not only H.C.E., but Dedalus page from whom Stephen must attempt his Icarus-flight in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and Leopold Bloom, the father panque of Ulysses. Yet when one goes back to the ostensible source of Barthelme's paternal fixation - Joyce - one finds very little certainty, but rather doubts and complexities that prefigure Barthelme's treatment of paternity.

The relation of fathers to sons, and of sons to their origins, is fraught with anxieties; in a vivid essay on Portrait, Naud Elinann has the following to say about Stephen's voyage back to his city of origin, Cork: "This is a first time masquerading as a repetition. It recalls the first sentence of the whole autobiography: 'Once upon a time and a very good time it was', where the first time turns out to be not the beginning of Stephen's story, but of a story told to Stephen by his father".⁴⁵¹ She senses that the texts of father and son "[graft]" themselves on one another, in an act of competitive mutual parasitism. "We begin to suspect some relation between the father and false starts; and to suspect, perhaps the very notion of beginning."⁴⁵² So both Freud and Joyce, as "sources" of The Dead Father, can only offer more repetitions at the origin, more verbal acts of violence, more doubts about the provenance of stories and words. A propos of Joyce, Valentine Cunningham asks "... where are the fathers of language, of texts? And the curious answer returned is, nowhere really. At least Joyce's texts try hard to banish the idea of fathers as generators of the word, the text, the fiction. Their Oedipal content is high, both manifestly and latent".⁴⁵³

The most virtuous rhapsody on the topic of fathers, sons, and literature in all of Joyce's writing must be Stephen Dedalus's endeavour to use Hamlet as a key to Shakespeare's life and work. (As for Freud, the story of Oedipus solves riddles.) "A father ... is a necessary evil", expostulates Stephen. "Fatherhood, in the sense of conscious begetting is unknown to man. It is a mystical estate, an apostolic succession, from only begetter to only begotten...Paternity may be a legal fiction. Who is the father of any son that any son should love him and he any son?" (U 207).⁴⁴² Freud, too, alerts us to the fictitiousness of fatherhood: according to Freud, the growing child soon discovers that "'pater noster incertus est' while the mother is 'certissima'". (Translator James Strachey notes "An old legal tag: 'paternity is always uncertain, maternity is most certain'.")⁴⁴³

The Manual for Sons, like Stephen, concerns itself with the incomprehensibly elaborate forms of fatherhood, hence the intricacy of its instructions: "If he [the mad father] cries aloud 'Stomp it, emptor!' then you must attempt to figure out the code" (DF 116). Its advice grows even more abstruse: "Two leaping fathers together in a room can cause accidents" (DF 119); "The best way to approach a father is from behind" (DF 120); "Many fathers are blameless in all ways, and these fathers are either sacred relics people are touched with to heal incurable illnesses, or texts to be studied ..." (DF 122).

The father is to be decoded, a text to be decrypted: just by reading the "father", despite Couturier and Durand, the reader can go quite far. Yet where do the resemblances between fatherhood in Joyce and fatherhood in Bartheleme leave us? We can take Freud's word that all culture is deeply obsessed with the Father, Oedipal at heart, and conclude that in their

own ways, Joyce and Barthelme testify to the universality of this obsession. An inference like this, however, reduces any stylistic difference between the two, for now they seem joined by as old-fashioned a critical commonplace as a thematic concern. Or, even worse, by a shared autobiographical impulse. Perhaps one could argue that while Joyce is "authentically" concerned with paternity, the same interest has been voided of significance by Barthelme, so that it has become, in the latter's case, simply a second-hand stylistic flourish, like the lexical concoctions cited earlier. The "thema", then, is not a proper theme, but another item of post-Joycean debris.

But we have still not solved the riddle of "murdering". Remember that Stephen Dedalus's maverick misreading of Hamlet makes Shakespeare the ghost, the dead father, in his own text, disclosing both a primal scene and a father's murder:

- Is it possible that the player Shakespeare, a ghost by absence, and in the vesture of buried Denmark, a ghost by death, speaking his own words to his own son's name (had Hamnet Shakespeare lived he would have been prince Hamlet's twin) is it possible, I want to know, or probable that he did not draw or foresee the logical conclusion of those premises: you are the dispossessed son: I am the murdered father: your mother is the guilty queen Ann Shakespeare, born Hatheway? (U 189).

Stephen's perverse interpretation reminds one of the family romances spun by neurotics and unravelled by Freud, in which the mother is cast in the role of villainness, placing her in narratives of "secret infidelity and ... sexual love-affairs".⁴⁵ Stephen declares that in Hamlet "through the ghost of the unquiet father the unliving son looks forth" (U 239): is it not possible to reverse the utterance, and say that in The

Dead Father "through the unliving son the ghost of the unquiet father looks forth"? The "unquiet father" in this case must be none other than the ghost of Joyce, who, in the tale told by a stuttering son, Barthelme, (CE 46), denounces his own textual murder: "murdering", a signifier which simultaneously rocks and recalls Joyce. Stated simply, "murdering", uttered by the son's text, speaks its desire to murder the (pre)textual father.

Anxiety

No critic has devoted more energy to mapping "the hidden roads that go from poem to poem" (AI 96)⁴² or text to text, nor has proved more adept at weaving literary family romances, nor has celebrated intertextuality as filial aggression more forcefully than Harold Bloom. (The coincidence which gives him the same surname as the considerably neeker but no less fanciful father in Joyce's Ulysses is too delightful to pass unnoticed: a family romance? It makes Bloom's unwillingness to consider Joyce in The Anxiety of Influence all the more extraordinary.) Bloom has made willful misreading à la Stephen Dedalus the basis of his entire literary system, which Charles Newman describes as eminently postmodern, "one of the most fashionable contemporary critical theories", before dismissing it as "a highly exaggerated notion of the necessity for the Artist to rid himself of his progenitors - a Freudian version of Marx's nightmare of history weighing upon all generations".⁴³

Bloom's theory of misreading, first articulated in The Anxiety of Influence, concentrates on what Bloom believes to be the profound belatedness all post-Miltonic writers in English experience. The sense of being a latecomer expresses itself as anxiety, which becomes aggression directed at the work of some precursor so that all writing is Oedipal, determinedly "murderous". (Bloom's genealogy goes something like this: Milton is the precursor, particularly for Wordsworth, Milton and Wordsworth are precursors for Keats, Keats for the Victorians, the Victorians for the modernists, and the modernists for the postmodernists, say, for example, Stevens for Ashbery, AI 11-12.) Ephobos and precursors, in Bloom's terminology, are textual sons and textual fathers in an agonistic relationship: "Battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites, Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads; only this is my subject here ...", writes Bloom (AI 11). Bloom turns to Freud as his own precursor, and specifically to Freud's work on family romance: Bloom, in fact, makes poetry and family romance one and the same thing: "Poetry (Romance) is Family Romance. Poetry is the enchantment of incest, disciplined by resistance to that enchantment" (AI 95).

Postmodernism is hyperconscious of its belatedness, its post-ness, as we have seen in Chapter Four. After Joyce, it seems that there is very little for writing to do. David Hayman and Elliot Anderson entitle their collection of "postmodern" and "post-Wake"⁶⁶ polemics and writing In the Wake of the Wake; Newman gives exactly the same title to a section of his Postmodern Aura;⁶⁷ at the beginning of his own career as a writer, in 1964, Barthelme wrote an essay called "After Joyce".⁶⁸ Aptly, John Cage calls one of his verbal experiments Writing for the Second Time through Finnegans Wake,⁶⁹ which seems to be what all postmodernist writers, consciously or unconsciously, are doing. Philippa Sollers summarizes the

Waka-belatedness of postmodernism with elegant hyperbole: "Since Finnegans Waka was written English no longer exists. It no longer exists as self-sufficient language, no more indeed than does any other language".⁴⁷³

To return to Bloom, a detail that deserves mention is that the essay by Freud, from which Bloom derives the notion of "family romance", has, in its German original, the title "Der Familienroman der Neurotiker". "Der Roman" can be translated in a variety of ways: "novel, (work of) fiction; ... romance".⁴⁷⁴ The dustjacket of the 1975 edition of Barthes's work leaves the reader in no doubt about the genre of The Dead Father: on both front and back covers one reads, under the title, "a novel by Donald Barthes", ein Roman, a family romance. Fathers provide an inexhaustible source of narrative in Freud and Joyce, in Bloom and Barthes, even if this is only a retelling, a writing through for the second (or thousandth) time.

How rich the father is as a source of stories may be seen in Chapter 5 of The Dead Father:

It was on a day much like this, said the Dead Father, that I fathered the Pool Table of Sallambangjang. The what? It is a rather interesting tale, said the Dead Father, which I shall now tell (DF 35).

In the hodgepodge of incidents that follow, Farmer notices metamorphosis which is "common in Medieval stories",⁴⁷⁵ as well as typical of tales about Zeus's sexual adventures. (Zeus is, appropriately, father of the gods.) She remarks on the echoes of "the story of Orpheus and Eurydice",⁴⁷⁶ but there is a host of allusions unremarked by Farmer:

Dante, Persephone, Faustus (DF 36-38). It comes as no surprise that Farmer should find The Dead Father a cornucopia of literary references.

In support of the richly textual, pretextual and intertextual character of paternity, Roland Barthes has written:

Death of the Father would deprive literature of many of its pleasures. If there is no longer a Father, why tell stories? Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus? Isn't storytelling always a way of searching for one's origin, speaking one's conflicts with the Law, entering into the dialectic of tenderness and hatred. Today, we disavow Oedipus and narrative at one and the same time....³⁷⁷

What if, in telling the story that is meant to take one to one's origins, one finds the father's word already there, as Stephen Dedalus does at the beginning of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*? Barthes seems to be engaged in the ambivalent, even contradictory, enterprise of producing narratives for an era after the Death of the Father. "Tell me a story, [says] the Dead Father" (DF 40) and what can Thomas do but tell the story of Oedipus? In his story, it is important to note that the Great Father Serpent bears the sheet of polished tin in his mouth, locus of utterance (DF 44). The word that chimes so well with Thomas's most secret feelings is written on that mirror "in a fine thin cursive [script]" (DF 46). The mirror must recall, for all perusers of Lacan, the stade du miroir, the moment when the infant is constituted as a subject by glimpsing, for the first time, its reflection in a looking glass. And indeed, Thomas in his dream and his story seems to discover his origin and his identity in the mirror: as a potential murderer of the father, as another Oedipus. So Barthes is perfectly right in his assumption that "every narrative [leads] back to Oedipus". Yet what the mirror shows Thomas is not his own face, himself, but someone else's word (the Father's, the precursor's,

perhaps no-one's). Any return to origins, or any story for that matter, is troublesome, as Bloom duly concedes. He writes that his theory makes a "return to origins inescapable, though distasteful" (AI 58-59).

(The reader can sense some of the difficulty of making stories in an epoch that is skeptical of fathers and origins in the uncassily simultaneous use and abuse of narrative structures in most of Barthelme's texts. I have already, in the previous chapter, pointed out how the code of proairesis, or the motif of the quest is deconstructed in The Dead Father, and I never feel entirely comfortable designating any text of Barthelme's unconditionally as a "tale", "story", or "narrative", a reservation that must be born in mind throughout this chapter. It may also seem unwarranted, even by the standards of postmodernist textuality, to apply what is so explicitly a theory of poetry to prose works by Barthelme and Joyce. But Bloom himself, despite his focus on poetry, draws no rigid distinctions between criticism, poetry, and prose. On occasion he cites novelists, or even critics or theorists as evidence for the anxiety of influence. See AI 9, 59, and 94-95.)

What is surprising is that Bloom's Anxiety of Influence does more than simply explain The Dead Father, the way works of literary theory are conventionally supposed to do. As a fiction in its own right, it shows quite a few similarities with Barthelme's novel. Bloom returns again and again to the metaphor of the quest: "All quest-romances of the post-Enlightenment, meaning all Romanticisms whatsoever, are quests to re-beget one's own self, to become one's own Great Original" (AI 64, see 10 and 36). However deconstructed, The Dead Father still retains the outlines of a quest, a "grand expedition" (DF 6). What seems to be a quest to "re-beget" or at least rejuvenate the Dead Father (DF 39) becomes the

son's triumph. All quests aim to make one one's own father, according to Bloom. Freud: "All instinctual drives, the tender, grateful, lascivious, stubborn, self-exalting, are satisfied in this one wish: to be the father of oneself".⁴⁷⁶

Barthelme's text comically fulfils that fantasy in the form of the Wends:

Let me tell you about Wends, the Wend said. We Wends are not like other people. We Wends are the fathers of ourselves.

You are?

Yes, said the Wend, that which all men have wished to be, from the very beginning, we are.

Amazing, said Thomss, how is that accomplished?

It is accomplished by being a Wend, the leader said. Wends have no wives, they have only mothers. Each Wend impregnates his own mother and thus fathers himself. We are all married to our mothers, in proper legal fashion (DF 73).

Bloom ponders pompously on the literary equivalent of the Wends:

But what is the Primal Scene, for a poet as poet? It is his Poetic Father's coitus with the Muse. There he was begotten? No - there they failed to beget him. He must be self-begotten, he must engender himself upon the Muse his mother (AI 36-37).

There are several other overlappings between Bloom and Barthelme. Bloom identified a blocking-agent in the way of textual production which he calls the Covering Cherub, a male Sphinx (the term is derived from Blake AI 35-36); Barthelme's "Sphinx" is also male, a Great Father Serpent. The Manual for Sons tells us this about fathers:

[They] are like blocks of marble, giant cubes, highly polished, with veins and seams, placed squarely in your path. They block your path. They cannot be climbed over, neither can they be

slithered past. They are the "past", and very likely the slither, if the slither is thought of as that accommodating manoeuvre you make to escape notice or get by unscathed. If you attempt to go around one, you will find that another (winking at the first) has mysteriously appeared athwart the trail. Or maybe it is the same one, moving with the speed of paternity (DF 129).

For both Bloom and Barthelme "father" and "son" are mutually defining. The Dead father insists: "No Fatherhood without childhood" (DF 17), while Bloom writes: "The strong poet ... must wait for his Son, who will define him even as he has defined his own Poetic Father" (AI 10). The son is inescapably doomed to belatedness, something which gives poetry its pathos for Bloom. The ephebe "from his start as a poet...quests for an impossible object as his precursor quested before him" (AI 10); for finally the "strong poet fails to beget himself" (AI 37). Although Thomas has fathered a daughter, like Peter Scatterpetter (DF 57 and 134), and despite his apparent victory over the Dead Father at the end of the quest, the Dead Father still claims that a son can never gain priority: "A son can never, in the fullest sense, become a father" (DF 33). From the very beginning of the novel we have been told that the Dead Father "controls what Thomas is thinking, what Thomas has always thought, what Thomas will ever think, with exceptions" (DF 4).

Asked by Julie if he ever harboured any ambitions to paint or draw, the Dead Father answers: "It was not necessary ... because I am the Father. All lines my lines. All figures and all ground mine, out of my head. All colours mine. You take my meaning". Julie can only respond: "We had no choice" (DF 19). ("Figure" and "line" have precise literary equivalents.) As Pierre-Yves Fâtillon writes, "le Père Mort est le maître des mots et son bon plaisir en sémantique aussi fait loi" (the dead father is the master of words, and in semantics too his wish is law, my

translation).⁸⁷⁸ The Dead Father monopolises meaning. There is none but his to take, and similarly he controls language; all words, lines, figures are his, because language can only be the father's: le Nom du Pere, the "Noym" of the Father.⁸⁷⁹ (Remember how exhaustively the Manual for Sons tries to list the names of fathers, DF 121-122, 130, 141-142.) Julia pictures the effects on the as yet unnamed and unspaking child of the father's language:

The whelping is, after agonies I shall not describe, whelped. Then the dialogue begins. The father speaks to it. The "it" in a paroxysm of not understanding. The "it" whirling as in a centrifuge. Looking for something to tie to. Like a boat in a storm. What is there? The father (DF 77).

The father's monopoly on language can be adduced as a fanciful reason for the effects of Joycean influence specifically on the vocabulary of Barthelme's text. It is as though there are no other words in which to write except those coinages already used by the precursor. The frequency with which Barthelme's "Joycean" words show onomatopoeic "echo" affects - "murdering", for example - may be viewed as an attempt to inscribe stylistic "echoes" in the words themselves. On the subject of echoes: Anthony Burgess cites "echechohoing" from a 1932 composition of Joyce's as a typical example of Joyce's style, and Burgess also points out that the letters ECH are, of course, an anagram of M.C.E., the father's name.⁸⁸¹

For Harold Bloom, too, the language in which anyone - poet or critic - writes, is already "inhabited", "inherited", "a language in which poetry already is written, the language of influence" (AI 25; see 32). One never sees oneself in the Great Father Serpent's mirror, one only glimpses

someone else's writing. Peter Scatterpatter's Manual assures us that "text-fathers" are easily recognizable, as they are "usually bound in blue" (DF 123), but text-fathers and father-texts cannot be that readily identified and isolated.

In The Anxiety of Influence, Bloom's first Manual for Sons, he identifies, or claims to identify, six revisionary ratios or six strategies by means of which the belated scrivener can enjoy the illusion of having made language his own. As the term "ratio" indicates, these are ways of positioning the ephebe's text vis a vis the precursor's, so that it seems momentarily as if the effects of influence have been overcome. The ratios have florid appellations: clinamen, tessera, kepsis, daemonisation, askesis and apophrades (AI 14-15); Bloom himself concedes that his terminology is "arbitrary" (AI 11). In A Map of Misreading, Bloom elaborates those terms considerably, adding corresponding tropes and psychic defence mechanisms.⁴²² For reasons of economy, I am limiting my discussion to the ratios as set out in The Anxiety of Influence only.

The Dead Father can be scanned for illustrations of Bloom's ratios, which do, in a way clarify the relation between Joyce's writing and Barthelme's. Yet, despite Bloom's cognisance of postmodernism, and consideration of someone like Ashbery (AI 10, 143-146) he seems unable to account for anything postmodern about postmodernism, since, given his outline of literary history, postmodernism can be nothing more than another turn of a diminishing spiral of influence: like most wholehearted subscribers to the Oedipus story, Bloom dooms himself to finding the same (old) story everywhere. Cast in Bloomian terms, the Joyce-Barthelme relation would be interesting in itself, but much more intriguing, and more postmodern than the strategies by which Barthelme's text deals with Joyce's influ-

ence, is the way in which Bloom's ratios can be applied to the relation between his own theory, as expounded in The Anxiety of Influence, and The Dead Father.

I shall define and discuss the ratios one by one, suggesting how they relate to Barthelme and Joyce, or Barthelme and Bloom. The first one is clinamen, which means "swerve" (AI 14), or "poetic misprision" (AI 19), or the "poet's deliberate misinterpretation, as a poet, of the precursor poem or of poetry in general" (AI 43). By clinamen, Bloom seems to understand, following his spatial metaphor of swerving, some displacement, or whatever introduces a difference between the work of the precursor and that of the ephebe. Clinamen is the way in which the latter revises what he has inherited from his predecessor. As an instance of such swerving one could cite the "misinterpretation" of Joycean concerns in Barthelme's fiction, which, even when it duplicates those concerns exactly, inevitably resembles parody, presumably because of the temporal lapse between the two. (Too much stylistic water has flowed under the critical bridge for us to see paternity simply as an unmediated "theme".) Also, one could argue that questions of semantics in Joyce are displaced into matters of *form* in Barthelme. Whereas fathers in Joyce's writing send commentators scurrying for biographical clues, even when Barthelme makes a direct "autobiographical disclosure" (UPUA 22), such as the one about his father's house, it seems more like an issue of style, of modernism against postmodernism.

The entire novel, The Dead Father, can be seen as a wilful misreading of the problem of paternity in Joyce, Freud, and particularly in Bloom. While Bloom uses the desire to be one's own father as a metaphor full of pathos for the grandiose perversity of "strong" poetry (AI 5, 10, 11, 23,

30, 60) as he sees it, Barthelme makes the same desire mundane - the Wonds, with their insistence of doing everything in "proper legal fashion" (DF 73) and their painstaking exposition of their status. The Dead Father makes fiction, or even nonsense, out of Bloom's theory by (mis)reading Bloom's myth in a precisely literal way. Bloom is still on the side of the canon-makers, the arbiters of Great Traditions, the adjudicators of literature in terms of strength or weakness. Barthelme's writing is wilfully "slight", part of a "minor literature".⁴²²

Bloom's next ratio is tessera, or "completion and antithesis" (AI 14 and 49). Bloom explains: "a poet antithetically 'completes' his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough" (AI 14). Barthelme retains the terms of his forerunners, sometimes directly as in the case of "dead father" which overtly links Barthelme's novel to psychoanalysis, sometimes indirectly as in the use of Joycean devices, such as peronomasia, to generate a "new" Joycean lexicon. Yet the terms now mean different things. As far as Joyce is concerned, Barthelme's text manages to do what Finnegans Wake never could achieve, namely, to embed itself entirely in consumer culture. Remember Joyce's fond belief that the Wake would be generally accessible.⁴²³ And it is exactly this "completion" of the precursor's work that makes the two texts seem to stand in an antithetical relation: Finnegans Wake belongs to high culture, The Dead Father occupies a no man's land between high and popular culture. In Barthelme's use of Bloom one finds another tessera, for although the same discourse is used, a shift from metaphor and mythopoesis to literalness has taken place. Considering that Bloom cautions against "the deadly danger of literal meaning",⁴²⁴ Barthelme's literal misprision of

Bloom's paternal myth seems a most effective way of "murdering" this predecessor.

The etymology of tessera, according to Bloom, derives "not from mosaic-making, where it is still used, but from the ancient mystery cults, where it meant a token of recognition, the fragment say of a small pot which with the other fragments would re-constitute the vessel" (AI 14). Later Bloom offers a dense weave of quotations which traces the term tessera to Lacan, who, in his turn, employs it in the context of a remark made by Mallarmé, which, in its turn, links "the common use of language to the exchange of a coin whose obverse and reverse no longer bear any but worn effigies and which people pass from hand to hand 'in silence'" (AI 67).*** From this, Lacan deduces that words, even when almost entirely worn out, retain their value as tesseras, or as passwords, things to be exchanged. Metaphors of potshards or coins smoothed by use are particularly apt for Barthelme's writing, which abounds in fragments, whether from popular culture or from what was once the discourse of high culture. (It is charming that the word tessera itself has been handed down in a haphazard way.)

Kenosis, the third revisionary ratio, Bloom defines in a number of hazily mystical ways. (The word comes from no less an authority than St Paul, AI 14.) Bloom appears to be thinking of a kind of subversive "undoing" (AI 88-89) in which the epigone repeats the work of the precursor, but in curtailed form, so that the epigone is able to undermine that work retrospectively. Kenosis, or "undoing in oneself" is thus a "liberating discontinuity" (AI 87-88). There is no clearer statement of kenosis as strategy than the final advice of Scatterpatter's manual:

If your father was a captain in Battery D, then content yourself with a corporalship in the same battery. Do not attend the annual reunions. Do not drink beer or sing songs at the unions....choose one of your most deeply held beliefs, such as the belief that your honours and awards have something to do with you, and abjure it (DF 145).

Such repetition of a forerunner's glories with diminishment and abjuration is kenosis.

Bloom's terms grow more bizarre. Daemonisation, the fourth ratio, is "a movement towards a personalised Counter-Sublime, in reaction to the precursor's Sublime" (AI 15). To demonstrate the presence of any sublimity, or counter-sublimity in postmodernism may seem a hazardous, or even foolish, undertaking. Yet in Frederic Jameson's perceptive tabulation of the salient features of postmodernism, he identifies the experience of postmodern textuality, which makes the world a "glossy skin", with camp, or even better, with "a camp or 'hysterical' sublime".¹³⁷ Bloom's Sublime still seems to be the modernist sublime of mystical awe: note his reverent capitulations. No wonder that Bloom derives daemonisation "from general neo-Platonic usage" (AI 15) where it refers to the adept's summoning of spiritual, demonic intermediaries. To apply the term "camp" to Bloom's posturing theoretical machismo would be misguided, but Barthelme's writing is unmistakably the product of what Susan Sontag hailed as the "camp sensibility".¹³⁸ Think of what I have described as a fascination with stupidity, in Chapter Four; bear in mind Gore Vidal's dismissal of Barthelme's "chilling heterosexual camp";¹³⁹ think also of Baudrillard's "ecstasy of communication" or Barthes's "textasy".¹⁴⁰ By making Bloom's concern with paternity and textual authority into camp, or by offering a demystified sublime made of leftovers, The Dead Father teaches us not to heed the voices of fathers any more. (The Manual for

Sons gives three "sample voices", DF 113, witty pastiches of masculinist discourse, DF 122-129. When Bloom has to come up with an example of the anxiety of influence in contemporary prose, he thinks of Ernest Hemingway and Norman Mailer AI 28).

The next ratio, askesis, seems quite close to kenosis, for under askesis the belated writer

yields up a part of his own human and imaginative endowment, so as to separate himself from others, including the precursor, and he does this in his poem by so stationing it in regard to the parent-poem as to make that poem undergo an askesis too; the precursor's endowment is also truncated (AI 15).

Later Bloom glosses askesis as "purgation", a deliberate paring down of one's own particular "genius" in order to reflect negatively on the "genius" of those who are for Bloom the "Great Originals" (AI 128).

Again, the Manual:

Your true task as a son, is to reproduce every one of the enormities touched upon in this manual, but in attenuated form. You must become your father, but a paler, weaker version of him. The enormities go with the job, but close study will allow you to perform the job less well than it has previously been done, thus moving toward a golden age of decency, qu'... and culmed fevers (DF 145).

So Bartholme, acting on the advice of his own manual, deprives the language he has inherited from his modernist master of any depth, or recasts Bloom's egons as sleepstick.

For Bloom the ratios form a sequence in the incarnation of a stropg poet and they culminate in a resurrection (AI 7-8). The final ratio is anophrades or "the return of the dead": "I take the word from the Athenian

dismal or unlucky days upon which the dead returned to reinhabit the houses in which they had lived" (AI 15). Barthelme intended writing a novel called Ghosts, only to discover that another novel, a murder mystery - what else? - by Ed MacBain already had that title.⁴⁷¹ Bloom writes that "strong poets keep returning from the dead, and only through the quasi-willing mediumship from other strong poets" (AI 140-141). Tindall writes that H.C.E. in the course of Finnegans Wake becomes a ghost who has "his say through filial lips";⁴⁷² one of the last words is "mememorance" (FW 628), which recalls Hamlet's father, with his parting cry "Remember me" (I.V. 91). What better instance of a spectre than Barthelme's Dead Father, who is the shadow of Joyce's ghosts? Stephen Dedalus has already defined sophrades far more eloquently than Bloom: "through the ghost of the unquiet father the unliving son looks forth". Now the reason emerges why Chapter 22 of Barthelme's novel, the interior monologue of the Dead Father, should be written in a pastiche of Joyce:

To the bicker end. Endocardial endocarditis. Enowenowenow don't want to undertake the OldPep yet. Let's have a party. Pep in on a few friends. Pass the pepcorn. Yield my peppanheimer once again. Old Anpurvadall Companion of my finest hours! Don't understand! Don't want it! Fallo fallere fefelli falsum! My broad domainasterias. Pitterpatter. Thegreatestgoodofthegreatestnumber was a Princeapple of mine. I was compassionata, incoferasitwaspossibletobeso. Best I cud I did! Absolutely! No dubitatio about it! Don't like! Don't want. Pitterpatter oh please pitterpatter (DF 173).

Here the obtrusiveness of the morpheme /pap/ with its evident patriarchal resonances is tempered by the echoing morpheme /end/. Even the Father's plea "pitterpatter" (pity pater?) is obliterated as it becomes the patter (pitterpatter) of tiny feet, textually encroaching on their Father.

Pastiche, Parody

Jameson, in his discussion of postmodernism, characterises pastiche as "the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language" (my emphasis).⁴³ The Dead Father's endspeech seems an even more telling instance of the return of the ghosts of Joyce and Bloom as precursors. Further, for Jameson, pastiche

is a neutral practice of [stylistic] mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, asputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists.⁴⁴

Pastiche is doubly dead: dead speech in a dead language, just as the Dead Father will be doubly dead after his last speech, buried alive even though he is dead.

And it would seem that pastiche is also the literary name one could give to Scatterpetter's strategy for the "turning down" of patriarchy: "Fatherhood can be, if not conquered, at least 'turned down' in this generation - by the combined efforts of all of us together"; or: "You must become your father, but a paler, weaker version of him" (DF 145). ("Turning down" has the meanings of "renunciation" as well as of "decrease", in volume, for example.) Pastiche, or attenuation, provides a more effective means of ridding ourselves of the lures and perils, the fears and threats of patriarchy (to which Bloom's work is the most recent testament) than any other.

The Manual for Sons recommends "turning down" only after having emphatically rejected patricide. Why? Jane Gallop assures us

There must be a way out of the Freudian/Lacanian Oedipal closed circuit, but revolt against the Father is no way out. Revolt against the Father, the violent refusal to honour and respect, is the Oedipal complex (Oedipus not recognising his father, which kills the old man).⁵¹²

Peter Scatterpatter says almost exactly the same:

Patricide is a bad idea, first because it is contrary to law and custom and second because it proves, beyond a doubt, that the father's every fluted accusation against you was correct: you are a thoroughly bad individual, a patricide! - member of a class of persons universally ill-regarded (DF 145).

Even to reject the notion of an Oedipus complex kills the theoretical Father, and thereby validates his prophecy.

As a feminist manoeuvre, Gallop recommends a deliberate flirtation with the father, a seduction by the daughter,⁵¹³ an enactment of patriarchy as pastiche. (By a remarkable coincidence Gallop's Manual for Daughters draws the same conclusion as Scatterpatter's Manual for Sons.) Gallop suggests that women should "not [step] outside the system of marriage, the symbolic, patriarchy, but [should hollow] it out, [ruin] it from within."⁵¹⁴ (Of course, she uses "marriage" as a metaphor here.) The Dead Father does something similar: if one cannot tell a story without going back to Oedipus, if one cannot write without being murderously aggressive towards some precursor, if a dead father is stronger than the living, then there is only one way of avoiding universal Oedipalisation, and that is to parody, to pastiche the father. (To thus sidestep the onus of fatherhood is a clinamen Bloom could not have envisaged.)

By the analogy between Gallop and Barthele, I am not suggesting that The Dead Father is necessarily a feminist text, by any means. Instead, what I propose is that the kind of feminism forwarded by Gallop, and the attenuation of fatherhood propounded by Barthele's novel have a method and a goal in common: to dispose of patriarchy by "[hollowing] it out, [ruining] it from within".

To resume the discussion of Bloom's last ratio, apophrades is more than the return of the dead within linear time: it is also a reversal of the chronology that destined the ephebe to belatedness. Bloom writes, "the uncanny effect [of apophrades] is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work" (AI 16). Since Bloom does open The Anxiety of Influence with a "meditation upon priority" (AI 5) it may be useful to bear in mind that The Anxiety of Influence was published in 1973, while The Dead Father appeared in 1975 (the same year as Bloom's elaboration of his theory in A Map of Misreading). Yet, throughout this chapter, The Anxiety of Influence has been read as a commentary on The Dead Father, and, built into the relationship between commentary and text is the assumption that commentary follows its object (both in time and in order of importance.) So the chronological relation between the two texts has been reversed.

At the same time, Barthele's text demands to be read as a parody of Bloom's text. After The Dead Father it is difficult to take Bloom's few little allegories seriously. Bloom, for example, makes up a story about the "bald gnome Error, who lives at the beck of a cave; and [who] skulks forth only at irregular intervals to feast upon the mighty dead, in the dark of the moon". Error even has two "little cousins, Swerve and Cos-

pletion" (AI 78). Once one has read The Dead Father, Bloom's purple forays into portentous prose are even less bearable, like the following from an epilogue entitled "Reflections upon the Path":

Riding three days and three nights he came upon the place, but decided it could not be come upon.

He paused therefore to consider.

This must be the place. If I have come upon it, then I am of no consequence.

Or this cannot be the place. There is then no consequence, but I am myself not diminished.

Or this may be the place. But I may not have come upon it. I may have been here always (AI 157).

It does indeed seem as if Barthes has written his predecessor's, Bloom's work, in a spirit of mad parody. Apophrades rebounds negatively on its inventor.

A digression on parody: although Jameson poses a qualitative difference between pastiche and parody, parody has been less summarily dismissed elsewhere as pre-postmodernist. Derrida sees in parody a way of staying outside authority, although he cautions against "a priesthood of parody interpreters";⁴³³ Linda Hutcheon and David Benneet treat parody as the dominant of postmodernism;⁴³⁴ Moleworth devotes half his text to dealing with parody in Barthes. He supplies some interesting definitions: "Parody begins in literature ... without any special ironic edge. Strictly defined, it means the use of an accepted form or structure for a different content from one it is usually associated with." He writes that the "[parodied] structure might be mocked and celebrated at the same time."⁴³⁵ (The last statement matches well the ambivalence of undermining fatherhood by means of fatherhood.) Pétillon has the most seductive view

of parody in Barthes. He points out that the first text Barthes published was a parody, "L'Épave", in 1963 (reprinted GP): at its beginning Barthes's work was parodic, but there is no real origin for this parody, nothing outside it in the discourse of postmodernism. Petillon exclaims that "... tout est déjà parodie" (everything is already parody, my translation).³²¹ This reversal of literary priority - making the parody not a supplement, but an origin - should appeal to Bloom. (Bloom, by the way, seems to believe that parody is an essence rather than a mode: he eulogises Thomas Mann's "parodistic genius", AI 54.) Petillon moves smoothly from parody to pastiche: ³²² "policing rigid distinctions between the two is not very helpful."

Bloom's text elucidates Barthes's novel; Barthes's novel parodies Bloom's text. The connection between theory and fiction is a chiasmus in which neither enjoys complete priority. Each in its turn becomes an object of commentary for the other, executing a series of reversals that is far in excess of what Bloom understands by apophrades. The relation between postmodern text and postmodern theory is so perfect that it approaches parody: it produces excess and indeterminacy. Who can blame Jameson for complaining about "the abolition of critical distance"?³²³

If parody is a mode of overdoing, then postmodernism is parodic through and through: late capitalism parodies the capitalism denounced by Marx, Barthes parodies theory. Jean Baudrillard asserts: "Ce serait notre mode propre de destruction des finalités: aller plus loin, trop loin dans le même sens ..." (it will be our very own way of destroying finalities: to go further, too far in the same direction/sense ..., my translation).³²⁴ Here we are face to face with another variant on Peter Scatterpatter's advice to sons: finish fatherhood by going on with it,

just as Barthelme's novel subverts Bloom's theory by being its perfect illustration.

Bloom cites with qualified approval, Andre Malraux's dictum "from pastiche to style" (AI 26).¹⁴⁴ For Bloom, it encapsulates the career of the strong artist. It is the most audacious apophrades of The Dead Father to have reversed the dictum: from Joyce to Barthelme, from modernism to postmodernism, from style to pastiche.

Allegory

One could write that a spectre haunts the preceding discussion: the phantom of allegory. The most economic way of characterising the correspondence between Barthelme's fiction and critical theory is to call that connection "allegorical". Many of Barthelme's commentators find themselves speaking of allegory, almost involuntarily, for they seem reluctant to utilise fully a term that has suffered nearly two centuries of opprobrium. Barbara Maloy promisingly subtitled her interpretation of The Dead Father "Analysis of an Allegory", but we soon find out that she means, boringly, nothing more than that the novel sustains traditional exegesis. She calls it "a modern allegory with archetypal characters", which sets the tone for embarrassments like the following:

The Christ-as-hero analogy is further accentuated near the end of the book when Thomas is described, in two instances, as maintaining a cruciform position during a sexual episode. Thomas's clothing provides additional evidence for this symbol. There are repeated references to his orange boots and orange tights.

This colour imagery becomes significant if we consider that orange is the colour of a rising or setting sun.^{50c}

Couturier and Durand notice a link between postmodernism and allegory and drop the correct names (Craig Owens and Paul de Man, both of whom are central to the following section), but they relegate allegory to a footnote, in which they simply quote one of de Man's definitions of allegory, as though that settled a troublesome matter.^{50d} Holsworth lets slip a few times that Barthelme's work may be allegorical, or "almost allegorical",^{50e} but fails to relate his insight to postmodernism, nor does he have any sustained theoretical position from which to argue a case. (Harold Bloom hints that The Anxiety of Influence may be allegorical, AI 12 - of course it is - and he singles out Angus Fletcher, the "demonic allegorist", AI 66, as a particular influence.)

Yet, although the topic has never received more than a cursory treatment from Barthelme's critics, allegory possesses an interpretative force that accounts for Barthelme's fiction and makes its links with postmodernism and literary theory evident. For there is a way in which criticism, literary or other, cannot escape allegory: no less a critic than Northrop Frye has claimed: "All commentary is allegorical interpretation".^{50f} Craig Owens supports the point: "... allegory becomes the model of all commentary, all critique, in so far as these are involved in rewriting a primary text in terms of its figural meaning" (A 1 69).^{50g}

Allegory has recently enjoyed a remarkable renaissance in critical theory and creative practice (or, as we are beginning to see, necessarily in both, because allegory knots the two inextricably). Paul de Man's essay, "The Rhetoric of Temporality", written in 1969, traced the critical de-

cline of allegory in Romantic and post-Romantic aesthetics. He predicted that "recent developments in criticism" would be responsible for resuscitating the term.¹¹¹ Angus Fletcher's pregnant Allegory had appeared five years earlier.¹¹² And indeed, one has every reason to accept de Man's prediction. A decade after de Man, Maureen Quilligan wrote: "having recently rediscovered language . . . , we can again read allegory properly, intelligently. . . ."¹¹³ She even had a sense of millennialism: "We seem in the last quarter of the twentieth century to have reentered an allegorical age" (La 155). Walter Benjamin's monumental Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels, which spends half its length adumbrating a suggestive theory of allegory, was translated into English in 1977; de Man himself vindicated his earlier claim with Allegories of Reading in 1979: together Benjamin and de Man have been responsible for making "allegory" a keyword of what Gregory Ulmer calls "post-criticism".¹¹⁴ Art criticism has seized on allegory to account for postmodernist art to such an extent that Owen locates an "allegorical impulse" at the heart of his anatomy of postmodernism (A 1 and A 2)¹¹⁵ (A movement from literature to fine arts should not confuse us, for allegory invariably shuttles between the verbal and the visual.) Allegory is currently everywhere in criticism, from the vanguard to the less modish: Ulmer, and Jameson both characterize Derrida's conception of the sign as allegorical; Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism was to have been a primer for a theory of allegory.¹¹⁶

Why has allegory gained such a critical ascendancy? What makes a strategy of reading particularly allegorical? How can the notion of allegory explain the close alliance between postmodern criticism and postmodern art?

In 1964, Fletcher cautiously defined allegory in a way that retained its conventional literary usage, while making the term available for new

purposes: "In simplest terms, allegory says one thing and means another". He immediately, and perhaps unexpectedly, conceded that allegory possesses a subversive potential: "It destroys the normal expectation we have about language, that our words 'mean what they say'". If "pushed to an extreme", allegory could "subvert language itself, turning everything into an Orwellian newspeak".²¹⁷ Things rarely go to such extremes, at least according to Fletcher, for "many [allegories] ... fall far short of [such] confusing doubleness".²¹⁸ Yet doubleness may be allegory's most definite characteristic: Owens, a less cautious critic than Fletcher, says that "allegory occurs whenever one text is doubled by another" (A 168). Quilligan even designates allegory as "double-talk" (LA 27).

At a time when received critical opinion holds that even the simplest act of reading entails the bringing to bear on a sign of a reader's "encyclopaedia",²¹⁹ allegory as double-reading or double-speaking must re-emerge. The plurality of available theoretical discourses means that any text can be doubled, redoubled, and doubled again. Nor does Owens intend the simple substitution of transparent signified for abstract signifier when he writes of one text doubling another. (That process of substitution is so often understood as the function of commentary.) Allegory, or allegorical reading, never turns a text simply into its own exegesis: the conception of allegory as a thing of "levels" and univocal figurative meaning has been responsible for such prejudice against the mode. (Halcy's concept of what to do with The Dead Father as an allegory exemplifies this mistake.) Quilligan traces that particular misunderstanding of allegory to Dante's notorious "Letter to Can Grande" (LA 27-8), which popularised the idea of four levels of allegorical interpretation. She effectively dispels any such assumption about the primacy of meaning in allegory by demonstrating how deeply bookish, or textual

In contemporary parlance, allegory is, and how radically concerned it is with the nature of language. Quilligan aptly cites an accusation levelled at Oedipa Maas in Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 that she (Oedipa) is "Hung up with words, words" (LA 13-14);¹²⁰ that accusation, says Quilligan, is a perfect definition of allegory, for "all true narrative allegory has its source in a culture's attitude towards language, and in that attitude, as embodied in the language itself, allegory finds the limits of its possibility" (LA 15).

What one faces, in the case of allegory proper, is not a question of the retreat of language before meaning, but an unlimited intertwining of signs and emblem. Allegory does not disclose its signified in the text that doubles it: there one finds simply another text, in a kind of infinite regression. Like language, as Lacan knows, allegory never trades a signifier for a signified, but only a "signifier ... for another signifier".¹²¹ Of course, the sense of limitless textual dedoublement should be familiar to us from the fluctuating relationship between The Dead Father and The Anxiety of Influence, where neither text can be unambiguously described as the signified of the other. Allegory brings texts together even as it separates them: "the meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the repetition ... of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this previous sign to be pure anteriority", writes de Man.¹²² (This corresponds remarkably to Bloom's theory of the precursor and the ephebe; it seems that allegory is always the story of a belated sign!)

Quilligan aptly, if unintentionally, shows the double nature of allegory by splitting it into "good" and "bad". "Good" allegory is "narrative

allegory", while "bad" allegory is "allegoresis", or the "literary criticism of texts" (LA 20, 22, 25-26, 33). (Shall we say that Maloy's work is an example of allegoresis, where the aim is to reduce the text at all costs to a transparent meaning?) Quilligan rather easily makes allegoresis shoulder the blame for all prejudice against allegory. Yet later she has difficulty keeping narrative allegory and allegoresis, now understood as any literary criticism, apart. They appear in the same text, battling for priority: consider an exemplary postmodern work like Vladimir Nabokov's Pale Fire (discussed in Quilligan, LA 143-154). Narrative allegory and allegoresis come together, because the "allegorical narrative combines both creative and critical processes by evolving a narrative which glosses its own ... text" (LA 61). The allegorical text is itself already divided or double; to double it with commentary is a necessary tautology.

Most explicators of allegory feel a need to go back to the etymology of the word. Fletcher writes: "Allegory from allos + agoreusin (other + speak openly, speak in the assembly or market)".¹² Quilligan reiterates the etymology but qualifies it considerably: "The 'other' named by the term allos in the word 'allegory' is not some other hovering above the words of the text, but the possibility of an otherness ... inherent in the very words on the page ..." (LA 26). "There are worms in words", someone exclaims in Barthelme's story "A Picture History of the War": "The worms in words are, like Mexican jumping beans, agitated by the warmth of the mouth" (UPWA 142).

(By way of a clarifying parenthesis, Quilligan does not understand "narrative" in her term "narrative allegory" in any of the conventional senses of the term, such as a well-made plot, causality, closure. Evidently,

all the latter would be inappropriate for a discussion of Barthelme. Quilligan states emphatically that narrative allegory invariably shows a "dispensable 'plot'" (LA 68), and should be treated as "a text, not primarily as a story involving characters who move through a realistically organised plot" (LA 45). The "story" of an allegory exists as an alibi for semiosis, for a consideration of signs: "all allegorical narrative unfolds as action designed to comment on the verbal implications of the words used to describe the imaginary action" (LA 53).

Part of the "otherness" of allegory is that its language points elsewhere. This reference is not referential, for it indicates another text. Quilligan calls it the pretext: "the source that always stands outside the narrative ..., the pretext is that text that the narrative comments on by reenacting, as well as the claim the narrative makes to be a fiction not built upon another text" (LA 97-98). Twisting Freud's inversion of St. John's words, one could say that in the beginning of allegory was the text, the other text.

One text comments on another by reenacting it: what better statement of the kinship between literary theory and Barthelme's writing? By staging the ideologies of Freud and his literary inheritors as a novel, The Dead Father, Barthelme puts them into question. Barthelme's novel finds its significance - not its signified! - in another book. (Remember that Blos, too, writes that "the meaning of a poem can only be another poem" or even "a range of poems", AI 94-95). Of course, a pretext is essential for all forms of parasitic discourse: parody and pastiche, the favoured modes of postmodernism, rely on pretexts.²⁴ The presence of the pretext works to undermine assumptions about originality; for a fascinating discussion of postmodern parasitism see the "Parasite/Saprophyte" section

of Ulmer's "The Object of Post-Criticism": a "model for the relation of the post-critical text to its object of study ... is that of parasite to host."²² Paul de Man also grants allegory an inevitably belated status, as a "secondary" text: "allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal distance."²³ The distance from origins, from pretexts, gives allegory its "rhetoric of temporality". With an equally acute awareness of its separation from beginnings, postmodernism comes irresistibly to allegory.

Yet allegory differs from parody and pastiche, at least for Quilligan, because the latter can have any other text for pretext. Quilligan submits that allegory can only have one pretext, the Bible: "all allegories incorporate the Bible into their texts ... and its problematic incorporation into the text becomes ... a defining characteristic of the genre" (LA 96). Early allegories simply acted out Biblical sententiae in the form of stories (LA 96); later allegories are more complex, and a great deal more ambivalent in their allegorisation of Biblical pretexts. Even though texts other than the Bible may on occasion function as pretexts, they must have a common denominator, namely "a legitimate language in which to articulate the sacred" (LA 100). If one bears de Man's description of allegory in mind, one has to concede that allegory, by its very nature, may well signal its distance from sacred language and sacred texts.

A case can be made for the existence of pointed allusions to the Bible in The Dead Father. These have been dutifully noted by Betty Farmer: Thomas's name (the doubting disciple, John 20:24-28); Thomas's singing a fragment of the Lord's Prayer, addressed to the Dead Father (DF 157); allusion to Matthew 20:16 "... the last shall be first" (DF 166); the

(DF 144). Such talk of "aspects" of an indefinable being mimics the language in which discussions of the Trinity are usually couched.

What is one to make of the profusion of Biblical analogies in a postmodern text? Discussing how "Finnegans Wake has freed itself" from the grasp of the Bible, Philippe Sollers says:

The question is, can one have distance (aesthetic and intellectual) in relation to the Bible? That's the question put by my book [Paradis, a recent novel]. In my opinion, that sort of distance has never existed. I feel that the Bible is a constant in our culture. It is repressed, denied, hallucinated. We pretend that it doesn't exist for us, but it is there unavoidably. And I think that all our ideas, whether we know it or not, are absolutely determined by the biblical text.¹²²

Dead, but still with us, how does the biblical (pre)text determine The Dead Father? One response, surely the least imaginative, is Maloy's: to see the novel as a straightforward treatment of archetypal Christian material. The Manual for Sons itself dismisses such a reading: "The Holy Father is not important, for our purposes" (DF 136). Only a complete incapacity to recognise parody could have enabled Maloy's reading.

Maureen Quilligan borrows two terms from Edward Honig to designate the different ways allegories can deal with their pretext: either "prophetically", in which case biblical material is handled with all due respect as authoritative, or "apocalyptically", when the allegory decomposes or inverts the sacred text on which it draws (LA 99).¹²³ We have seen that Betty Fermer opines that Barthelme himself calls for more than a Gottterdammerung at the end of the novel: "Bulldozers" (DF 177).¹²⁴ References to the All-Father appear under the heading "the death of father" in The Manual for Sons (DF 144), and these may be sly allusions to the

death of God as proclaimed at least since 1880. Even the title of the novel surely recalls that particular Dead Father. Is Barthelme's text then an apocalyptic allegory for an age after the apocalypse? Remember that the portentous horseman is no herald of the Last Judgment, but only "mother", ready to bring fresh supplies of groceries (DE 169-170), so here even the allegorical mode that inverts its pretext has been stood on its head. Sollers makes the achievement of a "critical distance" from the Bible a necessity for our time.⁵³¹

Valentine Cunningham provides a novel perspective on the Wake's attitude to the Bible. Read through Cunningham's essay, Barthelme's writing appears to have a necessary reason for using Joyce's writing as a pretext, or, more elaborately, for using Joyce's use of the Bible as a pretext as its own pretext. What makes Cunningham's analysis of the Wake a' the more irresistible, in the present context, is that it is intended as a parody, or at least as a reluctant emulation of what Cunningham sees as the excesses of poststructuralist criticism. Cunningham does more than uncover the "utopian" tendency of the Wake, he connects that to specifically Christian themes: "In his thinking and writing about fathers and sons/texts Joyce was most anxious not only to have his words and texts seen as versions of Christ the Son or Logos, but also as versions of Christ the self-generating, self-substantive Logos".⁵³² Persuasively demonstrating the plethora of biblical matter in Finnegans Wake, Cunningham writes:

The density of this book's play with the early books of the Bible, its endeavour to go beyond them, to curtail the Pentateuch and rebuild it (and the tower of Babel) within a zealously marginalising intent, to outdo by redacting that old Babel blasphemy.⁵³³

Outdoing by redoing, outwitting by rewriting: the most characteristic postmodernist strategy, at the heart also of Barthelme's attitude to Joyce. But more than just a redoing takes place, because

the words of [Joyce's] text posit and produce a chaotic existence: they undo God's creation and ordered Logos - with its connectadly ordered syntax and grammar and semantics - of orthodoxy, transforming it into the faked perodic de-creation, the logos of the heretical undoers of orthodoxy.²⁴

This is an outdoing that undoes: the Wake is an anti-Logos in the fullest possible sense, in the same way that the anti-Christ opposes himself to the true and usurps his place as a false double: a parody, a pastiche. Consider unobtrusive banality with which a reference to Christ is slipped into one of the dialogues between Emma and Julie:

Much cry and little wool.
Ready again to send his Son to die f. us.
Like sending a hired substitute to the war.
I rehearsed the argument with him (DF 62).

(Half, one suspects, as provocation to critics on the lookout for biblical clues.)

Cunningham treats the imperative "Remove that bible" (FW 579) as a disclosure of the ambitions of Finnegans Wake, which wishes to be nothing less than a simulacrum of a sacred text. Cromwell, Puritan iconoclast, cried "Take away that bauble", referring to the mace in the House of Commons, as Cunningham points out.²⁵ The bible-bauble must be simultaneously removed and renovated, and Finnegans Wake is this "renoval". (Quilligan disapproves of the faithless or unfaithful use of pretexts in allegory, for she cautions that to comment on a pretext which is not be-

lieved "can only end" in a negativity she calls "irony", LA 135.) Like a false Bible, the Wake has attracted its evangelists and exegetes - all postmodern exponents of textuality, in Cunningham's opinion.

Part of his dissatisfaction with the poststructuralists seems to stem not so much from what is expressly unorthodox about their undertaking, as from the suspicion that their heresy sustains by inversion, like all black magic, the sacredness of the Text. (Note that the text that usurps the place of text-fathers in The Dead Father, The Manual for Sons, dismisses the Holy Father but teaches its reader what to do after invoking Satan, DF 117.) Cunningham states that

Whatever one thinks, in the end, of Saussure, or Eugene Jolas, or Joyce, or Derrida, or whoever, one can do worse than start by realising that within the zones of the modernist [and presumably postmodernist too, for Cunningham keeps on lumping them together] frame that they, their followers and imitators variously exhibit and sustain, there has gone on a large-scale set of substitutionary acts, a giant serial act of parody or pastiche (my emphasis).⁵²

Like mourners at a Wake, like parasites around a once-living host, the postmodernist letecomers depend on a dead pretext. The old status of the Bible for allegorists of every kind has now been usurped by textuality in contemporary allegoresis: Cunningham discerns "a very specific exchanging of an old plenary sense of Scripture for a new but limited and limitingly partial sense of écriture."⁵³

I mentioned earlier that Cunningham intends his essay on the Wake as a pastiche of what he believes to be "textual" (that is, nonreferential) literary criticism in action. Cunningham is intent on beating his poststructuralist enemies at their own game, only then to disarm them by submitting that Finnegans Wake - of all Texts! - is actually referential

because it "simply would not exist were it not for the pre-existence of historical texts and historical phenomena anterior to itself as text".⁵²³ (Cunningham's personal game is the resuscitation of "history" in the face of celebrations of its demise.) The Wake, writes Cunningham, depends on the discourse of history as a parasite: drawing attention to the basis of some of the wordplay of the Wake in historical quotation, he says: "The pun is a parasite".⁵²⁴ The language of the Wake consists of "calques",⁵²⁵ tracings or copies of other utterances. Tellingly, Cunningham cannot prevent "parody", "pastiche" and "parasite" from cropping up in his definitions of the Wake.

Of course his argument is not as irrefutable as he believes it to be: the existence of a pretext, a host, does not mean that the second text (Finnegans Wake, The Dead Father) is referential; the interval between texts opens just the kind of gap which identifies the allegorical text for de Man. The "eatupus complex" of the Wake is best demonstrated by the omnivorous way it devours the textual body of its forebears - the text of history or the Bible.

What is there to say about a work like The Dead Father which has Finnegans Wake for a pretext? If the Wake is a Scriptural parody, or a scripition of parody, The Dead Father must be a parody of parody, the ghost of a ghost. Nilesworth begins his study of Barthelme by wondering about the value of the forged Barthelme stories as "[parodies] of parodies".⁵²⁶ Even in Finnegans Wake one can find a pretext (in its ordinary and allegorical sense) for forgery, as Shem the Penman "[studied] with stolen fruit how cutely to copy all their various styles of signature so as one day to utter an epical forged cheque on the public for his own private profit ..." (FW 181) and we are asked:

Who can say how many pseudostylistic shamsians, how fee or how many of the most venerated public impostures, how very many piously forged palimpsests slipped in the first place by this morbid process from his plagiarist pen? (P 182).

All allegories have a Biblical pretext, and The Dead Father has a latterday Bible, the Absolute Text of (Post)Modernism, as Cunningham grandiosely calls it, for pretext.

(On the subject of pretexts, Quilligan sees Nathanael Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter as an essential allegory, so much so that she wonders whether Hester's "A" might not even stand for "Allegory", LA 5. When Quilligan later informs us that the nineteenth century was a golden age for allegory in America (LA 193), one begins to think that the Scarlet Letter at the origin of American literature may well signify an allegorically double "A": "America" and "Allegory". Following the paths from text to text, as Bloom advises us to do, we find that William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying parodies Hawthorne's romance,¹⁴² while in an interview Barthelme acknowledges that The Dead Father reworks Faulkner's novel, masculinising Addie, that other scarlet "A" (into the eponymous Father.¹⁴³ From A to B and back again: scarlet letters or red herrings?)

Allegories do better than double, they multiply. For Quilligan, a defining structural feature of the genre is not only the pretext, but what she terms a "threshold text". The pretext stands outside the allegory while the allegory re-enacts and comments on it; the threshold text forms part of the allegory itself (LA 97-98). It is usually found at the beginning of the allegorical work, as an emblem, or better yet, a mise-en-abyme of the allegory which then unfolds as an elucidation of that

threshold text. Here the overlap of criticism and fiction becomes more pronounced than ever: "The allegorical author simply does what the allegorical critic does; but he writes a commentary on his own text rather than someone else's. And his 'commentary' of course is not discursive, but narrative ..." (LA 53, see 61). Allegory invents a fiction as a gloss on its own threshold text; the allegorical critic glosses other texts by inventing critical fictions.

In The Dead Father the italicised opening, separated by its tense and its typeface from the rest of the novel, is such a threshold text. The "story" of The Dead Father, for all its disturbances of syntagm and proairesis, unfolds sedately in the narrative preterite. Perhaps that story tells how the Dead Father came to dominate, physically and emotionally, the unnamed city and the unidentified "we": "No one can remember when he was not here in our city positioned like a sleeper in a troubled sleep ..." (DF 3 4), and how the Dead Father came to control Thomas absolutely: "Controls what Thomas is thinking, what Thomas has always thought, what Thomas will ever think, with exceptions" (DF 4). In other words, the ostensible narrative of The Dead Father is a perfect narrative allegory, a commentary on and enactment of its opening text (which may itself be seen as a dramatisation of Freud's phrase: "The dead father became stronger than the living one had been ..."). Barthelme's threshold text also acknowledges Finnegans Wake - Betty Farmer cannot be the only reader to notice a correspondence between Barthelme's patriarchal giant, sprawled across a city, and Joyce's Finn MacCool, or Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, dreaming Dublin.⁴⁴⁴ Moreover, the threshold text in this instance makes the reader part of and accomplice to its Oedipal urges: "We want the Dead Father to be dead. We sit with tears in our eyes wanting the Dead Father to be dead - meanwhile doing amazing things with our

threshold text. Here the overlap of criticism and fiction becomes more pronounced than ever: "The allegorical author simply does what the allegorical critic does; but he writes a commentary on his own text rather than someone else's. And his 'commentary' of course is not discursive, but narrative ..." (La 53, see 61). Allegory invents a fiction as a gloss on its own threshold text; the allegorical critic glosses other texts by inventing critical fictions.

In The Dead Father the italicised opening, separated by its tense and its typeface from the rest of the novel, is such a threshold text. The "story" of The Dead Father, for all its disturbances of syntagm and proafrasis, unfolds sedately in the narrative preterite. Perhaps that story tells how the Dead Father came to dominate, physically and emotionally, the unnamed city and the unidentified "we": "No one can remember when he was not here in our city positioned like a sleeper in a troubled sleep ..." (DF 3-4), and how the Dead Father came to control Thomas absolutely: "Controls what Thomas is thinking, what Thomas has always thought, what Thomas will ever think, with exceptions" (DF 4). In other words, the ostensible narrative of The Dead Father is a perfect narrative allegory, a commentary on and enactment of its opening text (which may itself be seen as a dramatisation of Freud's phrase: "The dead father ... stronger than the living one had been ..."). Barthelme's threshold text also acknowledges Finnegans Wake - Betty Farmer cannot be the only reader to notice a correspondence between Barthelme's patriarchal giant, sprawled across a city, and Joyce's Finn MacCool, or Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, dressing Dublin.⁵⁴⁴ Moreover, the threshold text in this instance makes the reader part of and accomplice to its Oedipal urges: "We want the Dead Father to be dead. We sit with tears in our eyes wanting the Dead Father to be dead - meanwhile doing amazing things with our

hands" (DF 5). We are inscribed in the first person plural and its doubly patricidal wish, so we, too, must be doing "amazing things with our hands". Maloy asks stumbingly "The question occurs after reading this as to what is being done with the hands - Praying? Clapping? Garessing? Wringing?"¹¹⁴⁴ To Maloy's rather prim catalogue one must add writing, making obscene gestures and threatening signs, masturbating: all toll-tale tokens of insurrection against paternal authority. By an odd reversal, the threshold text also comments on the rest of The Dead Father, for it warns us that to destroy the Father is to perpetuate his influence indefinitely. Round and round go threshold text, narrative and commentary in the spiral of metalanguage and object-language so typically postmodern. (Remember Chapter Two).

Barthelme's allegory embeds not one, but three threshold texts in its texture. The first has just been examined, and although the two others are not located at the beginning, they play a role similar to that of the threshold text as described by Quilligan. The second threshold text of The Dead Father must surely be Thomas's dream, which presents in miniature the Freudian and Oedipal pretexts of which the novel itself will stage a critique. Indeed, the word "murdering" is more than the "moral" (DF 46) of Thomas's tale: it can stand as the motto of the whole text. The dream is a threshold text, albeit a little displaced, for it tells us how to read the surrounding narrative. (Owens says "the allegorical work tends to prescribe the direction of its own commentary", A 1 69.)

Thomas's summary of his own story as "the dream of a stutterer" (DF 46) reminds us of his own stutter. ("datatata", "bbbbbbborn", "ppppppperiod", DF 57). But one of the pretexts, or rather the pretext of The Dead Father can also be called "the dream of a stutterer" - it is Finnegans Wake, in

which both father, H.C.E. (FW 36, for example) and son, Shen the Penman (FW 186, for example) stammer, and which has been described as the "dream" of H.C.E. by Tindall.¹⁴⁴ So The Dead Father incorporates its pretext into one of its threshold texts, and thereby hangs its tale. Ingesting the precursor is one way of dealing with the Father as the primal horde knew (eatupus!). Finnegans Wake does exactly the same: it refers, famously, to "an intrepidation of our dreams" (FW 338), or Freud's Interpretation of Dreams. Tindall goes so far as to assert that the Wake "[includes Freud's] books on wit and dream...."¹⁴⁵ The Wake refers to "treamscript" (FW 623): "Traum", German (appropriately, for Freud) "dream" + "scrap" + "script". Joyce is recycling the detritus of Freud's language of dreams as his own (stammering?) dreamscript. Late in the Wake, the son (Shen?) wakes from a dream of fathers to be reassured by his mother:

You were dreamend, dear. The pawdrag? The fawthrig? Shoe! Hear are no phanthares in the room at all, avikkeen. No bad bold feathern, dear one....Scny all in your imagination, dim (FW 656).¹⁴⁶

The third threshold text of The Dead Father is The Manual for Sons. The latter plays a dual role: it is a threshold text which the rest of the novel casts in terms of a story, but it is also a commentary on that story. Again, like the dream, or the opening, it is a part of the novel which can usurp the whole: The Dead Father is nothing if not a Manual for Sons, translated from the English (DF 111) of its paternal precursors, not the least of which is Joyce's "Joysprick". The appearance of the Manual in Barthelme's text evidences a particular tendency in allegorical narrative, something Quilligan calls "the pretext reified" (LA 121). Here the pretext is made into an "actual" book in the story which the allegorical characters encounter and read. (Quilligan cites as examples

the Bible in Book I of The Faerie Queene, or the Bible Christian takes with him in The Pilgrim's Progress, LA 118-122.) The Manual is of course fictive, pretext and threshold text.

The Dead Father provides its reader with three thresholds, three ways into the text, and three texts on which the "action" - such as it may be - acts as elucidation. Quilligen derives her notion of a "threshold text" from Edward Monig, who takes the word "threshold" from Hawthorne's allusion to "the threshold of our narrative" at the beginning of The Scarlet Letter (LA 51-52 and SL 76);*** it is also the doorway of the prison through which Hester Prynne is about to step. Hawthorne's narrator offers the reader an allegorical rose from the rosebush which grows "almost on the threshold" as a "sweet moral blossom" (SL 76). When Hester does present herself, the nature of her appearance is undecidable, for although she is a "[malefactor]" (SL), literally a scarlet woman in the eyes of her community, the narrator suggests that "a Papist" would have seen an "image of Divine Maternity" in her, if "only by contrast" (SL 83): Madonna or Great Whore? More is at stake here than Quilligen allows one to suspect - she concedes that the imaginary Catholic's response, "like all the interpretations of the letter, is neither right nor wrong" (!) but tries to cover the emerging indeterminacy by saying that "these interpretations function simply to reveal the particular spirit in which characters comment on the letter's significance", LA 56. On the threshold of American Allegory stands another "A", Ambivalence. For Angus Fletcher, for example, allegory tends to be subivalent.***

All three threshold texts of The Dead Father are as ambivalent as Hester's first appearance. The opening section of Barthelme's novel can be seen as a moment before Thomas's journey, or else as the culmination of his

quest; Thomas's dream leaves us unsure whether or not to murder the Father; this is how Julie and Thomas respond after they have read the

Manual:

Seems a little harsh, Julie said, when they had finished reading.

Or perhaps it's not harsh enough, said Thomas.

It would depend on the experience of the individual making the judgement, as to whether it was judged to be too harsh or judged to be not harsh enough.

I hate relativists, she said, and threw the book into the fire (DF 145-6).

Thomas's last statement sounds exactly like Quilligan's comments on the doubleness of The Scarlet Letter.

In all three there is a "relativism", an impossible choice between extreme alternatives, which in the case of the Manual for Sons is so intense that it consumes the text. Quilligan, as I have shown, is willing to agree, within limits, that allegory offers its interpreter a choice between exclusive possibilities. What she cannot concede is that this choice is impossible, yet unavoidable: Hester cannot be whore and virgin, the Manual must be either too harsh or not harsh enough; the first section of Barthelme's novel has to be either end or beginning; one must either overcome the Father (and so affirm the Father's "accusation", DF 145), or one must remain a son forever (and so acknowledge the Father's power).

This doubleness contaminates the language of allegory. Quilligan writes that "allegorical action" either "redeems" or "abuses" language (LA 79 and 86): in the case of the former, language creates "truth", in the event of the latter, it is duplicitous. But these two alternatives become incorporated into the same text: "Language in Greiviny's Rainbow, as in other

allegories, has a power to cause evil as well as good, and ambiguity can cut both ways" (LA 214). Indeed. Allegory cuts both ways, too, by forcing a "binary choice" (LA 262 and 263) upon readers and characters alike. Quilligan views the outcome of that choice as the result of a didactic process by which the allegorical text has shaped the reader. (LA 264-265).

Other readers of allegory have been less convinced of their ability to choose correctly in an allegorical reading. Craig Owens finds a simple allegory in one of Laurie Anderson's performances. In it, a garage mechanic comments on signs: "In our country, we send pictures of our sign language into outer space. They are speaking our sign language in these pictures". (The pictures are line drawings of a naked man and woman, with the man raising his right arm, palm outward; they were drawn on the Apollo 10 spacecraft. Anderson has the images projected behind her.) The character then asks: "Do you think they will think his hand is permanently attached in this way? Or do you think they will read our signs? In our country, good-bye looks just like hello".⁵⁵ Owens's gloss on what is, in true allegorical manner, already a commentary on signs, is highly applicable to the choices of The Dead Father:

Two alternatives: either the extraterrestrial recipient of the message will assume that it is simply a picture, that is, an analogical likeness of the human figure, in which case he might logically conclude that male inhabitants of Earth walk around with their arms permanently raised. Or he will somehow divine that this gesture is addressed to him and attempt to read it, in which case he will be stymied, since a single gesture signifies both greeting and farewell, and any reading of it must oscillate between these two extremes (A 2 60-61).

Owens points out that the raised arm could equally well represent the command to halt, or swearing an oath,

but if Anderson's text does not consider these alternatives that is because it is not concerned with ambiguity, with multiple meanings engendered by a single sign; rather, two clearly defined but mutually incompatible readings are engaged in blind confrontation in such a way that it is impossible to choose between them (A 2 61).

Quens argues that allegorical signs are radically indeterminate, so that allegory "works to problematise the activity of reading, which must remain forever suspended in its own uncertainty" (A 2 61). The threshold texts of The Dead Father - opening, dream, manual - enforce a binary choice the reader cannot make.

Barthelme's texts often turn on an irresolvable conflict between two opposing interpretations. Consider the well-known declaration in "He and Miss Mandible" that "signs are signs, and ... some of them are lies" (CBDC 109). Like the extraterrestrial about to read the drawings on the spacecraft, we may realise that these signs address us. We may realise that they need not necessarily be true, but which signs are false and which true? Umberto Eco makes untruth that which defines a sign: "Thus semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie". He adds that "lying" may be a prerequisite for "telling": "If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth: it cannot in fact be used 'to tell' at all".⁵¹² "A Shower of Gold" ends with the character Peterson's outrageous claim "My mother was a royal virgin... and my father a shower of gold" (CBDC 183), yet the only guidance the narrator gives is the terse remark: "... although he was, in a sense, lying, in a sense he was not" (CBDC 183). Paul de Man provides support for the semiotic indeterminacy of allegory: in what he calls "the allegory of unreadability, the imperatives of truth and falsehood oppose the narrative syntax and manifest themselves at its

expense" (AR 206) and these allegories are characterized by the "structural interferences of two distinct value systems" (AR 206). Where two meanings - falsehood or truth in "A Shower of Gold", patriarchy or anti-patriarchy in The Dead Father - interfere with one another, one has allegory. As Owens says, the reader is "stymied".

One of the most justly famous passages of post-modern allegoresis comes from de Man's Allegories of Reading:

The paradigm of all texts consists of a figura (or a system of figures) and its deconstruction. But since this modal cannot be closed off by a final reading, it engenders, in its turn, a supplementary figural superposition which narrates the unreadability of the prior narration. As distinguished from primary deconstructive narratives centred on figures and ultimately always on metaphor, we can call such narratives to the second (or the third) degree allegories. Allegorical narratives tell the story of the failure to read whereas tropological narratives ... tell the story of the failure to denominate (AR 206).

Yet the allegorical narrative is in a certain sense parasitic on the tropological narrative and not its opponent:

The difference is only a difference of degree and allegory does not erase the figura [uncovered by the tropological narrative]. Allegories are always allegories of metaphor and, as such, they are always allegories of the impossibility of reading - a sentence in which the genitive "of" has itself to be "read" as a metaphor (AR 206).

(I take it that by the last, rather mysterious pronouncement de Man means that the preposition "of" can either designate possession or concern, the literal genitive, or the more metaphoric, extended sense of "about". So allegories are part of metaphor, but they are also about metaphor; allegories are part of the impossibility which pertains to reading, they are also about that impossibility - as an allegory "of" vice concerns vice.

Typically, de Man finds an impossible allegory in the very designation of the phenomenon.)

By way of glossing de Man's comments, it should be noted that "tropological narratives" and "allegorical narratives" both pose the question of figurative language. Thus, the "failure to denominate", which tropological narratives expose, consists of an inability to recognise metaphor, while the allegory of unreadability, in its turn, tells of how a metaphoric reading becomes impossible. Owens explains that "de Man recognises allegory as the structural interference of two distinct levels or usages of language, literal and rhetorical (metaphoric), one of which denies precisely what the other affirms" (A 2 73). (De Man himself echoes Quilligan's notion of binary choice, albeit in a more radical tone: allegories "compel us to choose while destroying the foundations of any choice", AR 245.) What happens, de Man asks, for example, if the last line of Yeats's "Among School Children" - "How can we know the dancer from the dancer?" - were read literally, and not as a rhetorical question (AR 11-12). The conventional, metaphoric reading of the line vindicates metaphor as the perfect match of tenor to vehicle, while the unexpected, literal interpretation puts an end to any such metaphoric composure. At a push, one could say that the first reading is a tropological "narrative", and the second allegorical, an allegory which produces an unreadability.

"Readable" texts, for de Man, are, or appear to be, referential, because the reader can work out "the rhetorical status of what has been written" (AR 201). De Man observes that usually "we [are not] helpless when confronted with figures of speech: as long as we can distinguish between

literal and figural meaning, we can translate the figure back to its proper referent". As illustration, he gives the following:

We do not usually assume, for example, that someone suffers from hallucinations merely because he says that a table has four legs; the context of common usage separates the figural meaning of the catachresis (which, in this case, leads to the referent) from its literal denotation (which, in this case, is figural) (AR 201).

So, concludes de Man, "any reading always involves a choice between signification and symbolisation, and this choice can be made only if one postulates the possibility of distinguishing the literal from the figural" (AR 201). The typical Barthelme character or reader is someone who does believe that the table has four real legs. A notorious instance of the "hallucinatory" inability to tell literal from figural comes from "The Piano Player":

"... Now get up and go back out to the smokeroom. You're supposed to be curing a ham."
"The ham died," she said. "I couldn't cure it. I tried everything....The penicillin was stale" (CDDC 19).

Barthelme's tale "The Glass Mountain" engenders another unreadable allegory. The story concerns someone, a man, who is climbing a glass mountain "at the corner of Thirteenth Street and Eighth Avenue" (GL 59). (The text is divided into exactly one hundred numbered lexias.) Teasingly, a slight delay occurs when we are told what the goal of his climb is: "At the top of the mountain, there is a castle of pure gold, and in a room in the castle sits..." (GL 61, Barthelme's ellipsis). By the time the sentence is resumed, two lexias later, the reader who is thoroughly acquainted with the codes of fairy tale - its rhetorical status - has filled the ellipsis with "a beautiful princess". But this is not how the interrupted sentence

continues. What the reader finds is "... a beautiful enchanted symbol" (CL 61, Barthelme's ellipsis).

The text has changed register - it has switched from a presentation of the fantastically literal to a speculation on the metaphor that underlies the seemingly literal. Of course everyone knows, consciously or unconsciously, that the princess at the end of a fairy tale quest is a "symbol", in the same way that the happy ending is a "symbol". But readers are almost never required to think about stories on this "metaphorical" level. (De Nan uses "metaphorical" to designate the level at which the text comments on its own tropes, AR 14-15). From this point onwards, "The Glass Mountain" is a tropological narrative, for it deconstructs its own figure or "symbol" by drawing attention to it. The reader must see the princess as a metaphor and not as a real character.

Yet the tale swerves one more time at its end:

96. At the same moment a door opened, and I saw a courtyard filled with flowers and trees, and there, the beautiful enchanted symbol.

97. I approached the symbol, with its layers of meaning, but when I touched it, it changed into only a beautiful princess.

98. I threw the beautiful princess headfirst down the mountain to my acquaintances.

99. Who could be relied upon to deal with her.

100. Nor are eagles plausible, not at all, not for a moment (CL 64-65).

(The eagles are meant to be the "conventional means of attaining the castle", CL 63, for they lift the climber of the glass mountain onto a balcony of the castle.)

At the moment of "symbolic" consummation - here, literally the climax of the metafigural - literalness asserts itself again, in such a way as to deny what the previous reading has affirmed: the story is just a story and the metaphor is just a princess. Nothing in the text is "plausible", neither metaphor nor letter: the interference between the two makes "The Glass Mountain" unreadable, an allegory as de Man understands it.

Before one dismisses de Man's account of allegory as a distortion of allegory proper, one should note that Quilligan also assumes that allegory pits literal against figurative, even though she is unaware of de Man's work. Contrary to received opinion, allegory is not the apogee of figurative meaning. Quilligan roundly asserts that allegory concerns itself with literal, letteral, meaning (LA 67-68).³³

It presumably takes readers a while to decide whether to read "Dead Father" in the opening section of The Dead Father as a "symbol" or not. Like the children, later, readers must ask:

What is that? the children asked, pointing to the Dead Father.
That is a Dead Father, Thomas told them (DF 14).

Once the readers opt for a literal reading - in the same way that readers of a fairy tale accept the "princess" as princess - the text catches them out: the Dead Father's right foot "is naked except for a titanium steel band around ankle, this linked by titanium steel chains to dead men" (DF 4). Having encountered a "real" Dead Father, it makes perfect sense to assume that the phrase "dead men", too, partakes of this literalness. But of course "dead men" is a dead metaphor, and the text corrects our misreading with spiteful pedantry: "dead man n.1, a log, concrete block,

etc. buried in the ground as an anchor)" (DF 4). (No's that we are only given one sense of "dead man" - "n.1".)

In Julie's wonderful definition of a father, literal and figurative meanings collide: "The father is a motherfucker" (DF 76). "Motherfucker" is only a figure, a metaphor, and as such it conveys the aggression felt towards the father. But in this context, and only in this context, "motherfucker" is literally true: the source of aggression towards the father lies precisely in his sexual possession of the mother. As Quilligan remarks, all allegories "make the final focus of their narratives ... the slippery tensions between literalness and metaphor" (LA 64).

Perhaps "motherfucker" and "dead man" are best described as puns, since they play with double meanings, or are, like allegory "other speakings". Quilligan accords the pun a paramount importance in allegory: "... we may easily sense the essential affinity of allegory to the pivotal phenomenon of the pun, which provides the basis for the narrative structure characteristic of the genre" (LA 33), because "allegorical narrative unfolds as a series of punning commentaries" (LA 22). As a very minor instance of allegorical punning, take the following: "The Dead Father led away and chained to an engine block abandoned in a farther field" (DF 21, my emphasis). Even such apparently trivial linguistic coincidences can be incorporated into an overall network of allegorical puns. The "farther/father" pun is not as irrelevant as it may seem, for a recurrent joke in The Manual for Sons relies on a literal reading of Leacan's metaphor for language, le Nom-du-Père (DF 121-122, 141-142). We are not given a discussion of the topic under the headings "Names of [Fathers]" (DF 111); an extensive list of bizarre proper nouns is all that appears.

I would argue that the pun, and punning commentary, which underlies the entire novel is exactly that: the Nays of the Father,²²² language and its discontents, the difficulty or even impossibility of writing in the Father's language. (One can only translate it, "from the English", DF 111.) The Dead Father forces his sons to wear the "cap-and-bells" of a jester as a token of their inferior position, but of course, it is also a "fool's cap" (DF 7, both quotations), a pun on the blank page which the son must try to fill with his writing.

No text is more obsessed with the name of a father than Finnegans Wake which makes endless anagrammatical play with the initials of the father H.C.E.. Norris points out that the "full name of RCE, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker (we surmise), is never stated as such in the work",²²³ yet that name is everywhere in its initials: Haveth Childers Everywhere" (FW 535), "Howth Castle and Environs" (FW 3), "Hag Chivychas Eve" (FW 30), or even "Hocus Crocus, Esquilocus" (FW 254 - is the Name of the Father all hocus pocus?). It also appears in three word phrases that do not have telltale capital letters: "habituals conspicuously emergent" (FW 33) or "homosexual cathexis of empathy" (FW 522). Most importantly, H.C.E. is "H.C. Enderson" (FW 138). As Barthes asserts, the Father is the source of all stories (Hans Christian Andersen), but if stories are Oedipal, then they necessarily entail the death of the Father (Enderson): "endifarce" (DF 171), "endshrouded in endigmas" (DF 172), as the Dead Father says. Quilligan claims: "More than any other creator of narrative, the allegorist begins with language purely; he also ends there" (JA 42). That the Nays-of-the-Father should form the base of The Dead Father is entirely predictable.

Walter Benjamin notes that the tendency to fragment language into isolated signifiers (loaded puns, letters, names) is part of "the disjunctive, atomising principle of the allegorical approach" (OGTD 206). He writes that in "... anagrams, ... onomatopoeic phrases, and many other examples of linguistic virtuosity, word, syllable, and sound are emancipated from any context of traditional meaning and are flaunted as objects which can be employed for allegorical purposes" (OGTD 207). John Gage has undoubtedly taken this allegorical tendency, manifest already in Joyce's work, to its postmodernist limit. Instead of reading the Wake for acrostics of the fictional father, H.C.E., as most readers soon learn to do, he reads, or rather "writes" through the Wake to find elaborate anagrams, "mesostics" as he calls them, "of the name of the father of the fiction itself, "James Joyce":

Joh Joseph's
 baAuty
 Mouth, sing him.
 look at lokmen! whatbEtween
 the cupgirlS and the platterboys.

Juke
 dOne it.
 inhisp:rrY boat
 theoldthelassoGrats
 ofinvisibLe empores,....**7

Just as it plays literally with the Name-of-the-Father, so the entire allegory of The Dead Father fluctuates between figurative and literal treatments of its pretexts in literary theory and psychoanalysis. Broken down into stages, the reading process of The Dead Father goes something like this. First of all, we learn to read the novel literally: the Dead Father is a "real" Dead Father; the Wends are "really" the fathers of themselves; the Father is finally buried, and so on. However, deviations

and ungrammaticalities on a literal level work as indices of a figurative dimension.¹¹³ Quilligan, too, alerts us: "the absurdity of the surface of a text is the necessary signal for the existence of allegory" (LA 28).

The Dead Father abounds in such deviations: "You're a family man, now, the bartender said to the Dead Father. That's perfectly plain" (DF 30), as just one of many examples. There is more to the text than meets the eye: as Couturier and Durand warn us, we are not to take the Father literally.

It is at this point that the reader decides to read The Dead Father as an allegory, in the simplest, most conventional sense of the term. One text must be read through another, so the grotesque surface narrative is "about" fatherhood. Maloy: "The Dead Father is a masterful, Expressionist revelation of the ambivalence of feeling in the archetypal father-son, love-hate relationship".¹¹⁴ More accurately, The Dead Father is a fiction about the fiction of fatherhood as Joyce, Bloom and Freud have written it. The novel is now seen as a narrative enactment of certain motifs, and once the reader has traced the pretext, the text itself becomes readable. In de Man's terms, it tells the story of a failure to denigrate: the Dead Father mistakes the nature of his journey, believing it to be a "real" quest, when in fact it is a metaphoric voyage, from "life" to "death". (The trope of life as a journey is so old and so obvious that I am not going to offer support for my point - think of The Canterbury Tales, for example.) The reader, no doubt, may share the Father's misinterpretation.

But then, the tropological narrative engenders a supplementary narrative, as de Man predicts. For if The Dead Father is an allegory of fatherhood ("of" again!), then it comes into existence only because Sartheles has,

in his novel, misread Freud and Bloom with such exemplary naivety. (Quilligan notes that the protagonists of allegory are always stupid, LA 133; Peter Scatterpatter is a "dolt", DF 108.) The Dead Father is exactly the kind of story someone who did not realise that the "dead father" is a theoretical construct for Freud, or a trope for Bloom, would tell. In other words, someone who stupidly took signs perfectly seriously, at face value. Quilligan writes: "the plots of all allegorical narratives ... unfold as investigations into the literal truth inherent in certain words" (LA 33). What is literally at stake in the metaphor or the Dead Father?

Barthelme's novel takes Freud's concept, "dead father", for a character in its text: the personification of a noun, especially an abstract noun is the allegorical technique par excellence (LA 70). Aptly, Quilligan argues: "Personification allegory relies on the reification of language itself, a process which involves the animation of nouns and the close scrutiny of the 'things' embedded within words by etymology and puns" (LA 115-116). We have seen how the question of the dead father for Freud becomes a metaphor for language in Lacan's writing; Barthelme simply continues this process with his reification of the Name-of-the-Father.

As an allegory of unreadability, told by someone (Peter Scatterpatter?) who cannot tell the literal from the figurative, The Dead Father recounts a failure to take literally what is literal. It is on exactly this issue of interpretation that his children finally defeat the Dead Father - because he is the Dead Father, he must be buried. It does not matter that he is, by all accounts, alive:

You are to get into the hole, said Thomas.
Get into the hole?
Lie down in the hole.

And then you'll cover me up?
The bulldozers are just over the hill, Thomas said, waiting.
You'll bury me alive?
You're not alive, Thomas said, remember?
It's a hard thing to remember, said the Dead Father (DF 175,
my emphasis).

Two readings battle for priority in The Dead Father. One is metaphorical: it deals with the Dead Father's discovery of the "true" nature of the journey, and as such it has the vestiges of a narrative line. It is, at a push, patriarchal, because it validates Freud's assertions and conforms to Bloom's model of literary influence, ^{as} because there would then be a line of patrilinear descent from Joyce to Barthelme. As yet another story about (the death of) fathers, The Dead Father confirms the omnipresence of fatherhood. By reworking material so clearly Oedipal, the novel reinforces the universality of Oedipalisation.

The other reading is literal, and it undoes the first: it has no clear narrative line; it parodies Bloom and Freud and Joyce, thereby bracking free of their paternal influence. By using the signs of paternity against themselves, it makes Bloom and Freud seem risible; by provoking the reader with the outrageous fiction of The Dead Father, the novel makes her or him realise just what an outrageous fiction paternity itself is (whether in its psychoanalytic or literary form). This reading is anti-patriarchal and anti-Oedipal: it "turns down" patriarchy. As some support, one can add that Craig Owens sees a link between postmodernism and the end of patriarchy, heralded for Owens by the collapse of master-narratives, such as Oedipus.⁵³

De Man summarises the effects of two opposed yet interlocked readings: "the one reading is precisely the error announced by the other and has to be

undone by it" (AR 12). Owens complicates the matter even further: if allegory, in its postmodern guise, is a form of deconstruction, "there is ... a danger inherent in deconstruction: unable to avoid the very errors it exposes, it will continue to perform what it denounces as impossible and will, in the end, affirm what it set out to deny" (A 2 71). Oedipal, anti-Oedipal; figurative, literal; denouncing, affirming: to use a Father's Day to end all Father's Days is an ambivalent undertaking. After all, The Dead Father is built on the paradox that the father is "dead, but still with us, still with us, but dead". The chiasmus in this instance is an apt figure for the intertwining of two opposed readings. Let the Dead Father himself have the last word on allegorical doubleness: "Having it both ways is a thing I like" (DF 15).

In the relation between The Dead Father and the various theories that have been brought to bear on it, one can see a striking emblem of the kinship between postmodern theory and postmodern fiction: Bloom, or de Man, or Quilligan produces a theoretical fiction to account for a literary phenomenon, while Barthelme constructs a real fiction to describe a theoretical phenomenon. Perhaps this explains the sense the reader of Barthelme's work so often has that it is both the perfect illustration of some theory (whatever: Lotman on plot, Barthes on proairesis, Searle or Austin on speech acts, Marxists on the commodity) and the parodic undoing of that theory.

Most contemporary criticism is allegorical. The commonest strategy of current literary theory is to transform a text into an allegory of the critical issues at stake in reading and interpretation; de Man's Allegories of Reading simply makes explicit an assumption held by many a poststructuralist reading. And here my own work is no exception: I have

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