

I. *Snow White* as a Postmodern Parody

Parody imitates something in such a way that makes the original thing seem ridiculous. It is an incongruous imitation which imitates the form, style or the subject matter of a serious literary work or a literary genre in verse or in prose; however, it makes the imitation amusing by a ridiculous disparity between the manner and the matter.

Parody means the imitative use of the words, style, attitude, tone and ideas of an author in such a way that which ultimately leads to ridicule themselves. Exaggeration of certain features provides a way to gain ridiculous elements. Postmodernist authors make the use of parody and irony to undermine the traditional genre of popular literature and give an intramural critique of traditional narrative techniques and the extramural critique of consumerism and popular culture.

Fairy tales as a subgenre of folk tales and as a part of children's literature can be understood as a specific form of popular culture. *Snow White*, the novel is result of parodic style. It is an oblique and incongruous version of the fairy tale in episodic form. Donald Barthelme undermines both traditional narrative style and the mythical status of Snow White's innocence at the very beginning of his novel providing the details which evokes erotic connotations. The narrator exposes Snow White as "a tall dark beauty containing a great many beauty spots: one above the breasts, one above the belly, one above the knee, one above the ankle, one above the buttock, one on the back of the neck "(1).

The beauty spots are placed around Snow White's sexual organs. This enumeration appeals to the reader's erotic imagination rather than to his/her sense of beauty and innocence and alludes to sexual pleasure. The central character Snow White is combination of both contemporary young woman and a parodied version of a famous

myth, involving in the physical (sex, alcohol, popular culture) and spiritual life (art, literature, knowledge, and intellectual heritage). As Nicholas Sloboda comments:

Set in the modern day world, Barthelme presents Snow White not as a virginal maiden, but as a tall seductive woman who habitually makes love in the shower with her attendant dwarfs very different from their fairy tale prototypes, these dwarfs occupy themselves by washing buildings and by "tending the vats"(18) in which they prepare their father's recipes of Chinese baby food. (109)

Barthelme reconstructs the popularized Disney version of traditional fairy tale. The characters are similar to the original story on the one hand but distorted their roles in such a way that creates humour in the novel.

In *Snow White*, Barthelme uses narrative strategies only loosely reminiscent of the original pretext. Through his hyper textual techniques, meta-fiction, self-reflexivity, and fragmented composition, he depicts the modern version of Snow White, her position and meaning in the contemporary American popular cultural context. Although by parodying both the famous story of Snow White and the narrative conventions of fairy tales; Barthelme's parody is not aimed at mocking either the author or the story itself, but to playfully deconstruct the original story. It offers a pluralist vision of the world through multiple voices. Such a vision rejects any authoritarian and unified vision of reality represented by fairy tales. In addition, Barthelme's postmodern story provides a critique of traditional genres and offers a new poetics, which can better express the sensibility of the contemporary period.

Postmodern fiction often extends the novel beyond its traditional convention of generic boundaries. Postmodern novel is found necessarily in fragmented style. Donald Barthelme, an American postmodern writer of fiction mingles and accepts the copresence

of differing discourses and conflicting categories. In such fiction the strategy of openness is handled smoothly. Meaning is presented as something in move, developed dynamically; the pace of meaning is deceptively slow but never comes to rest in social discourse. Barthelme is considered to be one of the pioneers of American postmodernism. He brought the free-spirited and highly self-conscious stream of writing to the forefront of American literature. The fragmentary style of Barthelme's writing is commented by Herrero-Olaizola as:

The fragmentary nature of Barthelme's story is highlighted by typographical alteration in the text, specially a series of headings in boldface that occupy entire pages. These alternate with the story's narration to enuciate its thesis about the protagonist's psychological condition (16), or to comment on themes apparently unrelated to the story being told. (11)

Experimentation is a feature of postmodern novel. In such novels literary devices are exploited to serve the psychological defenses. Fragmentation of character and narrative often serve as devices for reducing anxiety.

Donald Barthelme's remark that "only trust the fragments" is significant in this context. He stresses emphasis in fragmentation and claims that the reality can be exposed through the various perspectives. He intends to clarify that the different perspectives are only possible when there is fragmentation in narration. Each and every fragments are significant in the novel though they may not have order. He finds equal importance and similarities in different binaries. As Josephine Hendin views; Barthelme's episodes show how to avoid either asking or answering the questions where "Emptiness and boredom operate as alternatives to fury and pain. If there is nothing that signifies anything, then feeling and not feeling, having and not having are alike" (262).

Postmodern text always makes delays the meaning. To prevent the predictability of language and, co-extensively, blind consent to their implied meanings (and ideologies), Barthelme constructs his narratives almost entirely out of word-play and language games. For example, in an attempt to appease Snow White's desire to hear new words, the dwarfs try to create new expressions and different images. While rejecting the possibility of "fish slime", mentioned by one of their visitors, the dwarfs are able to suggest only what they admit to as another "weak" suggestion "murder and create!"(6). Barthelme tries to extend the meaning and denotation of any expression by mixing the literal with figurative. Because of the change in perspective multiple voices roar up and one has to conclude after the analysis of the event. Paul analyses himself and recognizes that he prefers inaction; far from being happy in traditional role of fairy-tale prince, he desires to be discovered as a new television star.

Postmodern parody and irony are understood as important means, narrative strategies and tropes which have subversive function. It provides a critique of both the linguistic representation of traditional and popular genres and the vision of the world these genres convey. In postmodern age, cultural activity is dominated by media industries. For postmodernists, the loss of unity is not something to be mourned, but something to be celebrated. The postmodern aesthetic is not only fractured and fragmented it is flat too. Barthelme's novel has liberated soul that normally does not collide in the earth. Horst Ruthrof describes style as a "schema of openness, in which meaning ... is something on move, a dynamic which at times is deceptively slow but never come to rest in social discourse" (30).

Barthelme often sets his formal textual innovations in the context of parody, satire and irony. Barthelme is the writer mainly responsible for brining this free-spirited and highly self-conscious effort of writing to the forefront of American literature. *Snow White*, in this regard, can be taken as an antinovel.

Antinovel refers to such a novel that is deliberately created in a negative fashion, violating traditional norms and established novelistic conventions. According to M. H. Abrams antinovel is:

[...] a work which is deliberately constructed in a negative fashion, relying for its effects on the deletion of standard elements, on violating traditional norms, and on playing against the expectations established in the reader by the novelistic methods and conventions of the past.(195)

Antinovel does not lead reader's consciousness in a linear way. It goes against the expectations formed in the mind of the reader by traditional novelistic norms and forms. There is no attention paid to the standard elements such as plot, characterization, descriptions of states of mind, normal settings in time and space, and frame of reference to the world in which the work is set.

In *Snow White* Barthelme presents Snow White drastically different from the Snow White in the fairy tale. Snow White is sexually active character. She lures the people by letting her hair down the window and exposing her open breast. She indulges with seven dwarfs but psychologically she has fragmented desires that she is not satisfied with them. She desires for Paul, a princely figure; but he died to save her which ultimately left her alone and fragmented. The plot construction in the novel is not chronological; as the narrative technique is fragmented reader can not grasp the plot line smoothly. Jeffrey T. Nealon thus, asserts:

However, there clearly is a knowledge produced by the ironic text, no matter how radical its irony. The reader of *Snow White* does not take away a singular moral or plot line, but he or she does take away a revelation: the revelation that the ironic perspectives the one best suited to the contemporary situation. (2)

The characters acts against the expectations of readers; for instance, being a monk Paul should not have any interest in female's body but he looks Snow White's naked body hiding under the tree. Christina Bacchilega opines, " In Barthelme's *Snow White* language, structure, and style, then, are already a challenge to the conventions which regulate its intertext "*Snow White*" " (13).

Barthelme's *Snow White* alters the notions of sexuality as procreation. Snow White engages herself with seven dwarfs; they consume sex in the shower room turn by turn but her lap is infertile. They used sex as a means of pleasure not as a means of continuation of generation. In this regard, Christina Bacchilega further says: "Quite explicitly, in fact, Barthelme's no longer muted Snow White criticizes the idea of sexuality as procreation (i.e. production, authorship, authority) and contrasts a different kind of pleasure, her own, to it "(15). Snow White has become a sexual object of dwarfs. These sexual activities take place in the shower room.

Characters are involved in immoral activities and sustain their living. They do not have the feeling of humiliation and frustration in cheating their friends: Dwarfs grasp the typewriter of Paul. Barthelme naturalizes and generalizes these activities as normal as the water in the sea. He makes an effort to suggest that the postmodern era itself has loosened its anchor to morality. Postmodernism developed the attitude that dismantles the traditional hierarchies and conventions in every field and disciplines where it reached. So, antinovel becomes the part of postmodern consciousness which deviates the traditional model of novelistic genre violating norms and forms established by convention. Similarly, Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola remarks:

Barthelme's *Snow White* not only parodies the folktale but converts it into garbage, destroying the popularity of Snow White by trashing Snow White. Barthelme's text consciously reflects on this trashing exercise and

fosters an appreciation of the qualities associated with residual fiction.

(11)

Along with the alteration in the traditional folktale it ruins the fame of Snow White in the novel. She has been changed in to a plaything of dwarfs and socially outcast woman in the conventional sense.

In *Snow White* Barthelme uses the irony, collage, pastiche and parody to extend the novel beyond its conventional generic boundaries. Barthelme's aim is not to undermine the traditional narrative conventions for its own sake, but through their undermining to give a critique of the traditional objective, unitary vision of reality mediated by traditional narrative techniques, used mostly in popular genres, which evoke a make-believe, mimetic representation of reality. Blurring of generic boundaries does not mean to devalue the traditional narrative technique but it is for its own sake and try to give a critique of the traditional narrative techniques and aware the readers as it is only the representation of reality not the actual one. Moreover, people use language and the language used to convey some information may stand for something else and thus, can not lead us to ultimate reality rather to illusion and delay of the meaning since language is a symbolic system, and the means of knowledge is language itself. Blurring of generic boundaries got its privileged position in postmodern fiction. *Snow White* stands out as a best example of it.

Barthelme destabilized the conventional language coinciding the creation of disjunctive and indeterminate narratives. For instance, while describing their daily activities the dwarfs often mingle non associative, at times contradictory, ideas without any vivid logical links: "THEN I took off my shirt and called Paul because we were planning to break into his apartment" (13). Traditional pattern of novel always try to make believe on readers providing the sense of reality and predictable happenings.

Standard elements of novelistic genre are taken under consideration. When one reads the novel completely s/he easily gets the sense because of linearity of the plot and monoglossia.

However, Barthelme makes the use of innovative techniques presenting the events in a fragmented way. While carrying out stylistic analysis of Barthelme's *Snow White*; Larry McCaffery comments:

Often Barthelme incorporates into his work the sorts of events, names, facts, and data which can be found in the daily newspaper. Even more often, however, these fragments are drawn from clichés of learning hackneyed opinions dressed up in even more hackneyed styles. We find, for example, parodies of specific literary styles and conventions, pseudo-learned digressions about history, sociology, and psychology, mock presentation of Freudian and existentialist patterns, and inane concrete poems. (21)

Aestheticity differentiates newspaper and special genre. Newspaper is time bound thus it is temporary but literary works become permanent despite its association with spatiality and temporality. Barthelme strives to blur the generic boundaries by using the language of newspaper in the novel *Snow White*. He makes the fun of hackneyed opinions and styles; and mocks Freudian psychology, existential patterns and silly concrete poems.

The closing of the novel is extremely misleading for Barthelme who is much more interested in creating "collage effect" than following the story line to develop in any straightforward fashion. Supporting this stance, McCaffery further adds:

Relying mainly on juxtaposition rather than the more usual novelistic principle of transition to achieve its effects, Barthelme's apparent intent in

bringing together this collection of fragments in such a blatantly non-linear fashion is to create the verbal equivalent of a collage. (22)

Barthelme juxtaposes heterogeneous fragments and seems unwilling to exploit usual novelistic principles of transition which results the verbal equivalent of a collage.

Barthelme abandons the self enclosed epic-styles of fictions. By means of his reflexive narratives, he enacts Bakhtin's call to test heroes and their discourses or, on a theoretical level, he engages in what Bakhtin describes as aesthetic contemplation "which involves seeing an individual object ... from inside in its own essence" (qtd. in Sloboda 114).

Though the text has been viewed from aforesaid perspectives, and though many contemporary scholars have analyzed the novel in terms of its, narrative, theme, technique and have slightly touched upon the issues of parody and irony, these criticisms have failed to analyze parody as postmodern cultural agenda, as used by Barthelme in *Snow White*. Thus this thesis, departing away from the bulk of criticism of the book, attempts to justify that Barthelme through the parodic subversion and intertextuality, parodies the linear narrative and concept of hero; and challenges the hierarchies of meaning and use of language, philosophical and psychological systems of thought and psychoanalytic notion of subjectivity.

II. Parodic Intertextuality in Postmodern Art

In any piece of work of art and literature narrative implies the written or spoken account of events of fictional or non-fictional stories. The tendency of narrative in postmodern art and literature is quite different from modern narrative. Postmodern novels are avante-garde, experimental in form. In these avant-garde novels, narrative experiment has introduced new ways of handling characters, plot, description, dialogue and so on. Postmodern novels are centrally concerned with experiencing time in the age of 'posthistory'. Heise in her *Chronoschism* describes the relationship between postmodern narrative structure and transformation in the western culture of time. She opines:

The shorting of temporal horizons in late twentieth century and awareness of western society of culture due to the technological innovation challenges the official history. Neither the postmodern technological time has relation to any calendar of events nor does it have any collective memory. It has made a permanent present or timeless intensity. (26)

Like Heise, Jameson and Oromnrth also hold similar views that they have focused on the importance of present in the contemporary time sense. Both writers point out the difficulties of describing more long-term temporal pattern. The temporal problems have reflected on the narrative form of the postmodern novels. The microstructure of time does not bridge the gap but rather it splits the things. In literary narrative, repetition and recursion are articulated by means of written language. Postmodernist novels focus on the moment or the narrative present at the expense of larger temporal development. Heise further says: "The reduction of temporal scope in the postmodern novels forms part of a more general culture of time that has become worry of hypostatizing long term historical patterns and developments" (64). Such reduction of temporal scope in postmodern novel is what creates intertextuality through parody.

As a literary form and rhetorical trope, parody has a venerable history: in classical literature and rhetoric; in the great precursor of the western novel, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. But it has become a particularly important feature of postmodern narrative for the simple reason that parody resists singularity. All parodic narrative is doubled narrative: there is a story, but also activity that undermines that story: there is anecdote, and its antidote.

Parody thus makes the fundamental paratactic gesture of postmodern discourse. To recapitulate generally, "discourse is the broad term that applies to any differential system of meaning and value: that is, any system that acts like language as Saussure conceived it, even though its signs may consist of garments, or bodies, and not words" (Ermarth, 226). In differential systems of value that constitute discourse, then, syntactic relations have the power to produce (statement, unity, meaning) while paratactic relations run (as the term suggests) beside the syntactic and productive sequence, remaining within sight of, but heterogeneous to it. In postmodern narrative, the classical genre or trope – Parody: - Greek: *parodos*; Latin: *parodia* - expands out all recognition into anthematic development that multiplies many times the doubling gesture of parody.

This para prefix marks the characteristic doubling feature of parody, para meaning alongside of, heterogeneous to. In classical terms, parody literally is the precursor or parallel ode. In modern terms – that is, in the terms of post-medieval Europe – the agendas of art, as of politics, and science, were to establish a world of difference mediated by common denominators, especially those all-important media of modernity, time and space. In modernity, therefore, parody did not have the importance it had in earlier writing. As Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth opines: "to the modern empiricist mind, in human as well as physical science, the term 'parody' could seem to modernity to imply little more than a faintly unsavory undercut, a weak form of humor or joking, a shallow

form of satire lacking the cultural agreements that enable satire's wit and edge. In the discourse of modernity, then, parody's doubling capability lacks opportunity" (227).

Postmodern artists, whether their medium is words, or stone, or sound, or celluloid, find in parody a useful tool precisely because the convention denies priority to any single narrative. The most fully achieved examples of pluralized plots and exfoliating styles of postmodern parataxis transcend anything that might be recognized as classical parody and turn into something quite uniquely postmodern. In the hands of accomplished artists, parody becomes a means for reconstructing the world. Similarly, according to Ermarth: "parody has 'play' or scope in postmodernism because it undercuts singular narrative: and parody itself is play-ful in the sense that it is a form which pluralizes the possibilities, the play, of systems" (227). Postmodern parody thus exercises old tools in the service of a new conjugation that surprises and takes on the objectified world of humanism and history. In the process, postmodern artists transfigure classical parody.

However, classical parody is a bit like those finger exercises by aliens; a basic narrative alphabet or format for sequence that then can be transformed beyond recognition by more complex and inspired usage. Margaret Rose's ground-breaking work that traces the history of literary parody to its classical roots, compares it to satire and irony, and discusses its new value in the twentieth century. She demonstrates most importantly "the epistemic value of parody in the crisis of representation" where, unlike satire's attempt to reinforce a code, "the text involves an uncertain 'dialogue' between codes"(128).

Acknowledging Margaret Rose's important work, Linda Hutcheon goes on to argue for a broader respect for the pragmatic complexity of parody in twentieth-century writing, and for a critical response respectful of the complex 'aesthetic realities'. Hutcheon uses both visual arts and music alongside literature to suggest the broad

cultural range of expression in which the parody's variety can be discovered. Martin Kuester, adds among other things the important point that "parody need not necessarily be humorous"(qtd. in Ermarth 229). He treats parody as a special case of irony; others treat it, especially in its fullest forms, as almost consonant with, or as a special case of, postmodernism. In any case, parody is one to the para-powers that have emerged into contemporary usage (parataxis, parallax), if not always yet into dictionaries and encyclopedias.

Because these differences in usage depend on the cultural and historical context in which terms like 'parody' or even 'postmodern' function, a brief historical reprise is in order. It should be noted in particular that the problem of parallel worlds was recognized and explored long before contemporary parody developed its particular strengths. It was a primary cosmological problem for seventeenth-century astronomy and theology as they dealt with the Copernican revolution and its implicit recognition that many 'centers' compose the universe-as many as the (uncountable) number of planetary or galactic system. After the seventeenth century while this problem remained and, for that matter, still remains, the cultural activity of modernity in politics, art, and science all tends to focus primarily on the production of common denominators between systems: especially the common denominators of neutral time and neutral space as they were constructed after the Renaissance and Reformation, and later, and most poetically, the fictional 'aether' of Victorian science.

In the twentieth century, when, as Derrida says, 'language invaded the universal problematic', the problem of parallel worlds becomes discursive. As Julio Cortazar puts it, "residence in a language means residence in a reality, where the term 'language' includes not just verbal enunciation, but usage in any of the myriad sign systems with which we enunciate, reinscribe, and revise our social, psychic, political, cultural lives"(qtd. in Ermarth 229). Thus the problem that parody enunciates in narrative form is

the post-modern problem of parallel discursive worlds: a problem of relationship and adjustment within a condition of constantly multiplying 'codes'.

Having rapidly sketched a cultural and historical horizon I would like to turn to my central point, which concerns the variety of postmodern parody's possible deployment. It cannot be overemphasized that parody in the hands of the most accomplished contemporary artists far transcends anything evident in its classical forms. And it cannot be said too often that the problems of postmodernity, expressed in part by philosophers and theorists, have been most fully expanded and explored by artists, writers, filmmakers, and architects broadly interested in cultural value. Full development of parody provides the postmodern utmost in complex value.

The parodic element in the text is not singular, but instead a constant and virtuoso act of language running multiple parallels to the plot. The postmodern parodic texts that negotiate shifts between parallel systems and sequences achieve exactly that kind of discursive in-between 'writing'. Parodic undercut is only the rudimentary beginning of this pluralizing format in which the original parody gets subsumed in the vibrant play of values that constitutes the chief moral quality of this art.

Postmodern parody makes quite complex new demands on attention and recognition. The postmodern texts "preserve particulars from erosion by 'meaning' so that they can function, in their particularity and discreteness, as the basis for a new kind of order: one that reorders relations between present and past that constitutes such new orders entirely by differential relationships"(Ermarth 240). Such sequences, in novel or film, leave a residue of intensely felt value that, like linguistic value in Saussure's sense, exists quite apart from, and even prior to, all established meanings. Such texts, such 'writing', insist on value in a new sense that is systemic, profound, and adequate.

Parody has proved particularly serviceable as one of the concepts and critical categories used to chart the open and metamorphic territories of postmodernism. Its

double coding accommodates the anxious sense of belatedness or exhaustion diagnosed by the critics of the postmodern as well as the hybridization and the ensuing sense of aesthetic replenishment extolled by the exponents of postmodernism. The aesthetic narcissism of parody also displaces and crystallizes the seminal if questionable opposition introduced by Ihab Hassan between modernist transcendence and postmodernist immanence, the immanent quality of contemporary art having been also explored by Charles Altieri in the field of poetry. For Hassan, "the self-conscious combination of styles and trends effected by parody is characteristic of the antifoundationist, anarchic dispersal of values central to his conception of postmodernism" (128). Indeterminacy and absence of closure, the multiplication of hybrid idiolects in texts which eschew the teleological dynamics of aesthetic renewal, contribute to the alleged immanence of postmodernism. The modern episteme, which posited a difference between a transcendent referent or origin and its representation, have been shaken to its foundations. Parody has become the arch-symptom of the precellence of simulacra and of the triumph of 'difference' over semiotic difference.

One should not subscribe unquestioningly to the version of postmodernism, whose defence of parody tends to become prescriptive when it furnishes the signs of the current disintegration of validating criteria with the very supra-legitimacy they help to debunk. One must nevertheless admit that, more than any other practice or mode of encoding, parody lays bare the link between the undoing of origin/ality and the deconstruction of the modern teleological dialects of mainstream and avant-garde. Whether one considers that parody textualizes the world to the extent that it becomes 'lisible' always already encoded, or, on the contrary, that the general semiosis it engenders is the occasion of a radical replenishment, parody makes it possible to rethink the status of the author, the way culture encodes its habitus and also the somewhat rigid polarity opposing transcendence to immanence.

This is particularly true of parody in contemporary English fiction. In these novels the self-centredness of parody is endowed, to employ Aristotle's concept, with a new cultural *energeia* resulting from the critical incorporation of the past and pointing to a potential replenishment. This programmatic synthesis is founded on a form of aesthetic 'either and ' which "accommodates both the subversive function of parody as defined by Gerard Genette and Margaret Rose and a more eerie ventriloquism which does not make for easy categorization" and consequently "discredits any attempt at establishing watertight partitions between pastiche, imitation, plagiarism, parody and satire" (Bernard 169). Formal indeterminacy mirrors the ontological uncertainty and plural sense of belonging of a great part of contemporary English writing. Similarly, one should not speak of parody but of forms or instances of parody which resist classification.

Another, different approach from that of literary entomologists like Gerard Genette should prevail. One must take care not to reproduce the sterile and inoperative pigeon-holing which parody has always belied, while nevertheless highlighting a coincidence between the degree and quality of parody – i.e., whether it partakes more of pastiche or of satire- and the nature of the cultural pragmatics that obtains. Linda Hutcheon's idea that the "various colours or modes of parody are conditioned by and in turn condition different kinds of ethos, have different kinds of pragmatic impact," will prove useful (146). The different modes of cultural belonging and of cultural ethos involve different degrees of parody, which in turn reflect back on the perception the author has of his/her position within a cultural tradition and on his/her faith in the pragmatics of literature.

The various kinds of ethos define various degree of investment and disinvestment of the authorial erosion. In that sense, reflection on the problematic status of origin/ality in contemporary texts cannot be disintricated from the influence of modernism. The specificity of postmodernist practices cannot be precisely assessed unless by

contradistinction from modernist ones. Whereas the laying bare of the cultural clichés performed by satirical parody still pertains to the defamiliarization defined by Shklovsky and still upholds the belief in authority, the depersonalization at work in pastiche and plagiarism erases the author's *locus operandi*, brackets him/her in order to show the logic of cultural memory, the stratification of voices. Only greater attention to the pragmatics and ethos of parody will warrant the critical validity of such a distinction. Once more, "the pragmatics of the literary categories is bound to subvert the received categories of parody," this formal subversion being in turn symptomatic of the defamiliarization and dislocation of our cultural habitus (Bernard 170).

The intertextual double coding of parody conditions a reception based on recognition, on the rediscovery of what is already known yet remains to be defamiliarized in order to be fully acknowledged. Distancing allows the addressee to accommodate and identify the laws of the cultural code which has also contributed to fashion his/her own identity. In this to-and-fro movement, literature imposes itself both as an interface and as an interspace, as euphonic consonance and dysphoric dissonance. The etymology of the term, as explored by Linda Hutcheon, is programmatically "oxymoronic" (Hutcheon 144). As Hutcheon suggests, "if the meaning of *para* usually retained by critics points to an antagonistic difference or contrast, one should not overlook the more positive associations of the prefix, which imply a possible concordance between text and hypotext" (144).

This literally disconcerting collusion is particularly congenial to the subversion of the cultural doxa, fiction appropriating either generic norms of founding texts, i.e., either stealing (inside) the well-worn gear of its ancestors or defacing the tables of the law. In both cases, the misappropriation of the common literary heritage implies a degradation which is itself symptomatic of the crisis of legitimacy or the value system. The disaffection inherent in parody also affects the system of representation at large:

"consciousness of the implosion and destabilization of the systems of representation upholding mimesis comes to bear on the formal choices made by most novelists writing from within the historical double bind which results from an acute sense of belatedness and from the coincidental belief that exhausted forms may still retain some degree of relevance even if it is paradoxical" (Bernard 171).

The grotesque parody of realist conventions objectifies the cultural past and also heightens the hybrid nature of the novel. By laying bare the programmatic polyphony of the genre it also comes into its own at last. By exposing the 'historical provisionality' of representation, parody becomes an instrument of ontological emancipation:

The text is freed from the 'anxiety of influence' by the recognition that not only can literature never be free, cannot be 'original', but has always been 'created' or produced. The reader is freed from the anxiety of meaninglessness by the recognition that not only can literature never be free in terms of literary tradition; it also cannot be free either in its relation to the historical world or in its relation to readerly desire. (Waugh 67)

The ironic wedge placed in the literary brickwork dislodges it and supposedly emancipates both text and addressee from a naturalist and essentialist conception of representation.

Hence parody can be identified here as a key agent in the anti-foundationist war waged by postmodernism against essentialist value systems. Leaving aside the unacknowledged paradoxical collusion between this vision of the reader's enfranchisement and the modernist progressivist history of forms, one should, however, reconsider the general relevance of this definition of parody. It thus increases the sense of cultural contingency which only a satirical ethos may transcend, as Patricia Waugh's implicitly teleological insistence on the release function of parody as "creation plus

critique" suggests: "Parody renews and maintains the relationship between form and what it can express, by upsetting a previous balance which has become so rigidified that the conventions of the form can express only a limited or even irrelevant content" (68).

However, the ironical ethos of parody is not always relayed by a satirical one ultimately implying a breakthrough. The symbolical displacement effected in a different key. Parody hollows out codes and norms to expose the husk-like quality of beliefs, the absurdity and dramatically ironical nature of interpretation.

Parody is no longer used as an agonistic strategy employed by today's literature to dislodge the heritage while acknowledging the persistence of tradition, thus propelling writing forward on a teleological journey towards self-fulfillment. It does not only work as a form of 'strong' reading of past literary works, as Margaret Rose suggests in the wake of Harold Bloom's argument: "In reflecting upon another literary work from within a literary form, literary parody is also able to act not only as an 'archeological' analysis of another literary form and its background, but as a form of 'strong reading' of another work or set of works, to quote the term used by Harold Bloom" (qtd. in Bernard 177).

Bloom's 'strong reading' and Rose's insistence on the metamorphic and subversive intent of parody revisit Eliot's idea that literature is forged out of a dialogue between tradition and the individual talent. Incidentally, this approach to parody also anticipates and justifies Hillis Miller's definition of reading and criticism as a practice that involves a textual host and a critical parasite. One cannot deny that part of the complicity generated by parody still results today from such a 'strong reading', which distances a world-vision while acknowledging our persistent debt to it.

The ironical ethos of parody cannot be understood outside the more general anti-foundationist context in which the intertextual fictions under scrutiny are steeped and to which such interrogations of the status of innovation and the questioning of the literary *telos* must be referred. The lapsing of parody into pastiche implicit in ventriloquism

rephrases the central question of the limits of originality; a question which predates post-structuralism and thus cannot be accounted for simply by the familiar 'death of the author' syndrome heralded by Foucault and Barthes. Parody cannot but drift into pastiche and plagiarism, cannot but be parasitic, not so much on account of its critical function as for its inhibiting insight into the foreclosed nature of creation and of the cultural habitus. Similarly, Gilles Deleuze views: "Pastiche pretends to achieve a synthesis that propels writing forward into the realm of free-floating and multiple allegiance; it in fact symmetrically locks itself up in a mirror-crypt and seems to place itself up in a mirror-crypt and seems to place itself in ' the service of Thanatos'" (147).

The ethos of parody in the works under scrutiny should be distinguished from the indirection and reversibility of values that prevail in other treatments of parody and which have come under attack by Fredric Jameson for their alleged lack of historicity, for their 'historicism', which makes it "possible to renew references that are otherwise irreconcilable, and to interweave different cultural temperatures" (174). When parody veers off into pastiche, the defamiliarization inherent in parody turns self-destructive and self-alienating. Deprived of any original identity, the writers voice is condemned to impersonation or even to plagiarism, which instead of prefiguring an aesthetic coming of age, irremediably alienates writing from itself. In a dizzying displacement of the centred ego, both the parodied voice and the parodist are shown to be apocryphal. It must be obvious by now that such a vision of the palimpsest identity of the writer aspires to a wider relevance than its postmodernist background may vouchsafe.

The wider, atemporal relevance of these postmodern instances of Menippean satire should not, however, obfuscate their more topical significance. The impact of contemporary parody is threefold and, to some extent like literature itself, it is cumulative and once more paradoxical. With theories of intertextuality at large it crystallizes the dialogic nature of literature and the consequent erosion of the writing

self. With classical parody as defined by Genette and Menippean satire it shares a defamiliarizing power thanks to which contemporary culture comes to recognize its sense of belonging and to identify its historicity, which is distanced at the very moment it is foregrounded. With postmodernist avowedly metafictional parody, it consequently flaunts the constructedness of systems of representation while strengthening the sense of cultural belonging. Pastiche "displaces the cultural center of gravity of English literature by recentering its subversive and radical energy, by stressing its visionary powers, and reinterprets the supposed coherence of the literary canon" (Bernard 185). These pastiches in fact thereby strengthen the deathly, rather than the nostalgic, grip of the past over the present.

Parody partakes of the wider 'allegorizing' turn of contemporary semiosis and of the exegetic programme of postmodernism. If we accept with Craig Owens that "the paradigm for the allegorical work is the palimpsest" and that "allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery" which both "'confiscates' and distances the appropriated meaning or text by 'supplementing' them," parody can be subsumed under allegory (69). Parody does not purport to uncover a buried and supposedly exact meaning, but stages the process by which signs are embezzled and supplemented. Their common emphasis on interpretation and on the constructed rather than the transcendent nature of meaning and their 'problematizing the activity of reading' are by now standard features of postmodernist aesthetics.

Although the playfulness and metatextuality of postmodern texts would seem to confirm the differentiation of the aesthetic and the social realms central to the more narcissistic side of modernism, the questioning of cultural constructs performed by parody is adequate evidence of its historical relevance. This simultaneous appeal to and recantation of a sense of cultural belonging, the relentless questioning of the received and naturalized logic of memory, rephrase the more radical stances of modernism. In the

view of Jameson, with their familiar stress on the vocation of art to restimulate perception, to reconquer a freshness of experience back from the habituated and reified numbness of everyday life in the fallen world. The interaction between past and present eventually foregrounds the pragmatic ethos of parody and its illocutionary potential and places the addressee in a utopian and indeterminate position which compels him/her to reread his own spectral fiction of culture.

Postmodern intertextuality, thus, is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context. It is not a modernist desire to order the present through the past or to make the present look spare in contrast to the richness of the past. It is not an attempt to void or avoid history. Instead it directly confronts the past of literature – and of historiography, for it too derives from other texts. It uses and abuses those intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions and then subverting that power through irony. According to Linda Hutcheon, "intertextuality replaces the challenged author-text relationship with one between reader and text; one that situates the locus of textual meaning within the history of discourse itself" (126). A literary work can actually no longer be considered original; if it were, it could have no meaning for its reader. It is only as part of prior discourses that any text derives meaning and significance.

Intertextual parody of canonical American and European classics is one mode of a appropriating and reformulating-with significant change- the dominant white, male, middle-class, heterosexual, Eurocentric culture. It does not reject it, for it cannot. Postmodernism signals its dependence by its use of the canon, but reveals its rebellion through its ironic abuse of it. Along with the development of literary and philosophical theory on modernist formalist closure, postmodern fiction has certainly sought to open itself up to history. As Linda Hutcheon views:

But it seems to have found that it can no longer do so in any remotely innocent way, and so those un-innocent paradoxical historiographic metafictional situations situate themselves with historical discourse, while refusing to surrender their autonomy as fiction. And it is a kind of seriously ironic parody that often enables this contradictory doubleness: the intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of both the "world" and literature. (224)

The textual incorporation of these intertextual pasts as a constitutive structural element of postmodernist fiction functions as a formal marking of historicity-both literary and worldly. At first glance, it would appear that it is only its constant ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity that distinguishes postmodern parody from medieval and renaissance imitation.

For Linda Hutcheon, "postmodernism clearly attempts to combat what has come to be seen as modernism's potential for hermetic, elitist isolationism that separated art from the world, literature from history" (140). But it often does so by using the very techniques of modernist aestheticism against themselves. The autonomy of art is carefully maintained: metafictional self-reflexivity even underlines it. But through seemingly introverted intertextuality, another dimension is added by the use of the ironic inversions of parody: art's critical relation to the world of discourse-and through that to society and politics. History and literature both provide the intertexts in the postmodern novels, but there is no question of a hierarchy, implied or otherwise. They are both part of the signifying systems of our culture, and therein lies their meaning and their value.

Within this parodic and intertextual tropings of postmodern narratives, fairy tales and other forms of popular culture have changed in their character. They have become the products of visual rather than oral or written culture, a change which expresses the sensibility of the contemporary period. Visual images produced on television, in videos,

and in the movies have replaced the written word and sound and have become a considerably influential means through which the peoples' vision of reality is not only filtered, but also manipulated. Popular culture presented especially on television, in videos, and in films, often use the technical inventory of the visual culture to evoke a simplified uncomplicated image of reality that blurs the distinction between reality and its visual image, between fact and fiction. According to Lloyd Spencer:

The postmodern age is one in which cultural activity is dominated by media industries capable of appealing directly to a public (itself the beneficiary of mass education) over the heads of any cultural elite. Mass media and the culture industries, informatics and cybernetics, virtual reality and an obsession with 'image'- postmodernists and their detractors map the changes in the increasingly synthetic fabric of social life in very similar ways. (159)

Famous stories, myths, legends, but especially fairy tales have become popular pretexts for their cinematic and television adaptations popularized especially through Walt Disney's cartoon series, popular films and TV serials. Not only because of the world audiences' familiarity with famous fairy tales, but especially because of the considerable impact of the contemporary (tele) visual versions of the traditional fairy tales, these have become models influencing children's imaginations in a global televisual village.

Postmodernist literature has often used and, at the same time, parodied the narrative conventions of popular literature including fairy tales. Through the use of parody, irony, metafiction and other narrative strategies, its aim is not to undermine the traditional narrative conventions for its own sake, but through their undermining to give a critique of the traditional 'objective', unitary vision of reality mediated by traditional narrative techniques, used mostly in popular genres, which evoke a make-believe, mimetic representation of reality. In addition, "another aim of postmodernist literature is

to give a critique of popular culture as a product of consumerism; and last, but not least, through the use of intertextual and metafictional strategies" it aims to point out a sensibility of contemporary postmodernist culture influenced by visual and popular culture (Kusnir 35).

This sensibility is based on the changed position of the contemporary man and his perception of reality influenced mostly by technological progress, manifested especially in the media and in popular fiction. In addition to this, postmodernist literary works using and parodying the older forms of representation point out the 'textuality' of reality and the interconnectedness of the signs representing reality rather than the interconnectedness between reality and its linguistic representation. Postmodern literary texts using, reworking, alluding and referring to other texts emphasize the instability of the referent, of the signified, its imperfectness and inability to express a clear, understandable and unified vision of reality. Similarly, Jaroslav Kusnir views:

The use of the narrative techniques of traditional genres shows one of the basic aesthetic tenets of postmodernist literature... In postmodernist literary work, various narrative strategies, conventions, and myths are reconsidered, transformed, or recycled to show the connection between cultural products (including popular culture), social reality and cultural codes representing particular cultures. Such a strategy breaks the illusion of newness; reality is perceived and understood as a copy, as a collection of images which has already been used in the past. (35)

These images, copies, and reproductions are mostly conveyed through mass media and popular cultural forms. They distort people's vision of reality and relativize the difference between fact and fiction, between morality and immorality.

The language and narrative conventions of popular literature are parodied to criticize traditional linguistic representation of the forms and genres producing a

simplified image of reality. As Linda Hutcheon opines, "this is not a traditional parody with a mocking intent, but a neutral parody, a postmodern parody, showing a difference between the past and the present, between past and contemporary representations of reality" (202). Parody and irony are the means the authors use to criticize the consumer culture, the simplified vision of reality conveyed through media and popular culture as well as the linguistic representation traditional artistic forms give.

Thus, on the one hand, using the narrative strategies of popular cultural forms, postmodernist literature can appeal to a broader audience; it can reach a mass audience and thus stimulate its interest in reading. On the other hand, many postmodernist works, quite paradoxically, do not overcome the gap between the popular and high culture, but tend to be either highly intellectual or naively popular and kitsch. Postmodern parody, irony and metafiction are understood as important means, narrative strategies, and tropes which have a subversive function and which provide a critique of both the linguistic representation of traditional and popular genres and the vision of the world these genres convey.

III. Parodic Intertextuality in Donald Barthelme's *Snow White*

Donald Barthelme undermines both traditional narrative conventions and the mythical status of Snow White's innocence at the very beginning of novel through the enumeration of unimportant details evoking erotic connotations, as well as through the inclusion of the graphic patterns representing Snow White's beauty spots': The narrator introduces Snow White as " a tall dark beauty containing a great many beauty spots: one above the breasts, one above the belly, one above the knee, one above the ankle, one above the buttock , one on the back of the neck" (3).

The enumeration of the beauty spots, many of them placed around Snow White's sexual organs, appeals to the reader' erotic imagination rather than to his/her sense of beauty and innocence and alludes to sexual pleasure. Such erotic connotations are developed further in the story, Snow White is presented as a woman living in a modern world and enjoying the pleasures of commercial popular culture: the pleasure of sexual experience (living and cohabiting with seven men who are reminiscent of the seven dwarfs) and a consumerist way of life.

Barthelme's *Snow White* represents the fragmented multiple identities of both a person and a popular icon which ' crosses the border and closes the gap between the past and present, between popular and high culture, between spiritual and physical experience. Snow White is a contemporary young woman as well as a parodied version of a famous myth, indulging in both the physical (sex, alcohol, popular culture) and spiritual life (art, literature, knowledge, and intellectual heritage/ideas?). An omniscient narrator comments on her education:

Beaver Collage is where she got her education. She studied Modern Woman, Her Privileges and Responsibilities; the nature and nurture of women and what they stand for, in evolution and in history, including householding, upbringing, peacekeeping [...]. Then she studied Classical

Guitar I, utilizing the methods and techniques of Sor, Tarrega, Segovia, etc.,. Then she studied English Romantic Poets II: Shelley, Byron, Keats. Then she studied Theoretical Foundations of Psychology: mind, consciousness [...]. (16)

Similar enumeration can also be found in other parts of the book. There is, for example, the enumeration of Snow White's activities or of the modern junk food the dwarfs produce. In combination with the repetition of words, phrases, questions, and the strange combinations their juxtapositions create, these techniques make a reader aware of the language, its working and meaning. Enumeration and the strange juxtaposition of different utterances, self-reflections, illogical statements, and unfinished fragmentary sentences blur the meaning. The words and sentences are deprived of their referential function very often, and thus they become mere objects, material things, recycled, as in consumerist culture.

In addition, by making marginal objects important, Barthelme corrects as well the skewed values that have attached alternately to both the dominant social or institutional aspects of culture and to those of individualism which has opposed them. This strategy of producing vague, blurred meaning can be seen in the following: "Informal statements the difficulties of ownership and customs surprises you by being love exchanges paint it understanding brown boys without a penny I was bandit headgear. And the question of yesterday waiting members [...]" (103).

This passage, reminiscent of a modernist interior monologue but deprived of its understandable meaning, becomes its parody, through which Barthelme expresses his critique of modernist narrative conventions marked by psychological subjectivity and its potential to grasp the meaning of the world through psychology. In *Snow White*, Barthelme rejects any possibility of seeing and explaining the world as it is in the traditional fairy tale, realistic or modernist conventions, and emphasizes the plurality of

discourses, worlds, and understandings of reality. The rejection of psychology and its potential to understand the world manifests itself not only in this passage, but also throughout the whole text. The depiction of the protagonists' behaviour and the psychological motivation of their acting is reduced either to a simple description of their or to reflections. These reflections mostly manifest themselves in dialogic exchanges.

The rejection of a traditional vision and understanding of the world manifests itself in Barthelme's use of ironic comments, such as, "What is Snow White thinking? No one knows" (17); in pseudo/subtitles ironically alluding to psychology; as well as in boldface chapters consisting of mock subject headings, philosophic or historical commentary, psychological interpretation of the characters, or indications of narrative development. For example, one of the subtitles reads:

The Psychology of Snow White: In the Area of Fears, She Fears

Mirrors

Apples

Poisoned Combs. (17)

The other subtitle parodically alludes to Freudian theory as the main source of the modernist vision of the world:

The value the mind sets on erotic needs instantly sinks as soon as satisfaction becomes readily available. Some obstacle is necessary to swell the tide of the libido to its height, and at all periods of history, whenever natural barriers have not sufficed, men have erected conventional ones. (76)

Entrapped in the context of parodic allusions to the famous fairy tale, Freudian and other theories, and various literary works of James Baldwin, Henry Adams, Malcolm Lowry, Snow White acquires a transspatial and transgeneric identity which enables her to oscillate between the traditional innocent world and the contemporary modern world;

between the physical and the spiritual; between the past and present. This, however, does not enable her to cope with any of these worlds and modes of experience. The past world is symbolically criticized and rejected through Barthelme's depiction of Snow White's moral and material corruption in a contemporary, technologically advanced world. In other words, through Snow White's rejection of innocence and tradition. The contemporary world is rejected because it does not bring Snow White either physical or spiritual satisfaction.

In addition, Barthelme emphasizes Snow White's dissatisfaction through his use of fragmentary composition, self-reflection, metafiction, and imagery evoking incompleteness. This imagery is represented by unfinished sexual acts, by Snow White's unfinished education, or by the failure of the protagonists' artistic ambitions, which all undermine the completion of any meaningful action. Snow White asking "Which prince? [...] Which prince will come? Will it be Prince Andrey? Prince Igor? Prince Alf? Prince Alphonso? Prince Malcolm?" is thus symbolically asking about the role she is to fulfil in these worlds (77).

Barthelme depicts Snow White's connection with both the past and the traditional story only loosely through his use of the motifs from the original tale, such as poisoned combs, apples, Snow White's hair, a prince, a stepmother and other characters. These motifs form an inventory of devices which construct her identity and her symbolic role as a mythic figure of innocence, beauty, goodness, and a moral authority. Such a symbolic construction expresses a belief in the victory of good over evil, in the fulfillment of ideals, and in an idealized vision of the world. However, Snow White's identity is immediately undermined since she is depicted as morally corrupted pseudo-intellectual who has to struggle with both her traditional meaning and the consumerist reality of the contemporary modern world. Barthelme's construction/portrayal of Snow White's function in the contemporary world manifests itself also in his use of self-

reflexivity and metafictional strategies. Self-reflexivity emerges in the narrator's constant questioning of her/his statements and his/her constant reflection on issues that are often illogical. This can be seen in the following example:

Kevin spoke to Hubert. 'There is not enough seriousness in what we do,' Kevin said. 'Everyone wanders around having his own individual perceptions. These, like balls of different colors and shapes and sizes, roll around on the green billiard table of consciousness [...]'. Kevin stopped and began again. 'Where is the figure in the carpet? Or is it just ... carpet?' he asked. 'Where is -.' 'You're talking a lot of buffalo hump, you know that,' Hubert said. Hubert walked away. (129)

In the novel, such self-reflexivity is further developed by the narrator's frequent allusions, references to and meditations on various works of art, scientific works, and subjects. Metafictional strategies are the strategies that reveal the fictional nature of the work itself. Fictional writing which self consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to post questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional texts.

Parody as Subversion

Through the self-reflexive and metafictional strategies focusing the reader's attention on language and its ability to construct meaning: through the construction of his protagonists (modern versions of fairy tale figures corrupted by the contemporary materialist and popular culture- sex, alcohol, or pop music); through emphasis on Snow White's physical and sexual rather than spiritual experience; and by replacing the idea of innocence by moral corruption and evil, Barthelme not only undermines the narrative conventions of traditional romantic, realistic, and even modernist writing, but also evokes a parodic effect. This parody is not a coherent parody of a particular genre, but it

is scattered throughout the text and dissolved in the narrative techniques. The function of such a parody is not to evoke a mocking effect and to ridicule the parodied text or its author as in traditional parodies, but to point out a difference between past and present forms of experience and the art representing it; to give a critique of traditional past artistic representations of reality which tried to convince a perceiver about their objectivity and truthfulness; and to give a representation of reality which blurs the distinction between fact and fiction. The function of such depiction of reality is to give a critique of some aspects of contemporary cultural experience. This is a kind of neutral parody which "implies a distance between the backgrounded text being parodied and the new work, a distance usually signaled by irony. But the irony is more playful than ridiculing, more critical than destructive" (Hutcheon 202).

This is exactly the nature of Barthelme's parody here; through the reference to the original text, he playfully shows a difference between the past and the present and between the literary forms which represent both past and present realities. In the novel, Barthelme, by referring to an American geographical context, refers also to its cultural context, which is a context, in his presentation, of popular and consumerist culture which he criticizes.

Snow White's transition from the past to the present represents symbolically and allegorically a transition between innocence and experience, between tradition and modernity, between past and present sensibilities. All the self-inclusive narrative strategies used in Barthelme's novel emphasize the interrogative nature of his writing, in which he asks questions rather than gives answers. One of the most important symbolic questions he is asking and searching for the answer to is the question of the meaning of language. Barthelme's parody of the genre of a fairy tale, of its mythical status and meaning, does not mean the rejection of fairy tales. As Stanley Trachtenberg argues, "more central to the Barthelme version is the value of the story itself, recovering the

surprise available in the linguistic vitality of popular oral forms, a vitality, the novel suggests, that had been lost through self-conscious substitution of language for either feeling or understanding and through the consequent continuing need for novelty to insure interests" (167).

In Barthelme's depiction, Snow White has lost her mythical innocence as a representation of goodness, traditional values and morality as well as the literary tradition a fairy tale represents. Thus:

By becoming vulgar, erotic, anti-psychological, pseudo-intellectual and constructed of clichés associated with contemporary consumer sensibility i.e. eroticism, physicality, and sexuality instead of traditional platonic and mythical innocence, indecency instead of politeness, calculativeness instead of honesty; she has become a parodic version of her pretextual ancestor. (Kusnir 41)

This parody thus gives a critique not only of the traditional representation of reality, but also of a popular culture Snow White is representative of in a contemporary world. In a contemporary world, by becoming a figure appealing to contemporary sensibility through her eroticism, alcoholism, and physicality, Snow White, on the other hand, becomes a cliché rid of deeper cultural or social values she could possibly represent, a figure appealing to the lowest tastes of the consumer audience in the contemporary world. These are the tastes popular literature including fairy tales require to appeal to the broadest audience. At the same time, these tastes and strategies of manipulation of popular culture are thus become criticized by Barthelme.

Donald Barthelme's *Snow White* seeks to exploit the decay of language and literature. Like so many other works of art in this century, *Snow White* has as its subject matter art itself. It is not the real world which it seeks to represent, but the status of art; and as with any significant work of art, we can learn something about ourselves if we

respond to it. *Snow White* can, therefore, best be termed a "self-reflexive" work in that even as it is being created, it seeks to examine its own condition. Rooted deeply in a fundamental distrust of most of the conventional principles of fiction, the book also shows and understanding of famous distinction between what can be told and what can be shown. Not a description or theory of the conditions and limitations of language and literature, *Snow White* portrays these features in its very fabric.

The writer adopts the strategy of self-consciously incorporating the decayed, brutalized elements into his own particular idiom and; make the new idiom part of his point. Although one hundred eighty pages in length, *Snow White* is not so much a novel as a sustained collection of fragments, organized loosely around the Snow White fairy tale in what resembles a collage method. Barthelme's rendition of the myth is, of course, peculiarly modern. As Richard Gilman has said: "the tale is here refracted through the prism of a contemporary sensibility so that it emerges broken up into fragments, shards of its original identity, of its historical career in our consciousness; [...] and of its recorded or potential uses of sociology and psychology" (45).

Barthelme has turned to a familiar myth rather than to reality to provide a basic framework for his tale, although the material which he places into the framework is drawn from a wide range of literary and cultural sources. Despite its mythic framework, *Snow White* is likely to leave an initial impression of shapelessness on the reader.

The novel presents a profusion of bits and pieces, both high and low, drawn from books and other literary storing houses i.e. folk tales, myths, newspapers, advertisements. Often Barthelme incorporates into his work the sorts of events, names, fads, and data which can be found in the daily news paper. Even more often, however, these fragments are drawn from clichés of learning – hackneyed opinions dressed up in even more hackneyed styles. One finds, for example, parodies of specific literary styles and conventions, pseudo-learned digressions about history, sociology, and psychology, mock

presentations of Freudian and existentialist pattern, and inane concrete poems.

Barthelme's use of the heterogeneous mixture of learning and verbal trash does not contribute to any verisimilar design but communicates a sense of what it is like to be alive at a given moment.

Barthelme's mythic perspective is prevented from being seriously mythic to any extent. Barthelme manipulates myth for his own comic or parodic purposes in *Snow White*. We can find parallels between the events and characters in Barthelme's *Snow White* and those of the "historical version" of the fairy tale. The "action" of the story often twists and halts unexpectedly, but eventually it fulfills the basic situation of the fairy tale as follows: Snow White, now twenty-two and beautiful, has grown tired of the words she always hears and has rebelled by writing a dirty poem. She is presently living with seven men (the dwarf figure) who daily sally forth ("Heigh-ho") "to fill the vats and wash the buildings" of a Chinese food factory (8). Concerned about her promiscuity (she copulates with her roommates daily in the shower room), Snow White has rationalized that they only add up to two "real men" (hence their "dwarfishness"). Later on, the rest of the familiar cast is completed with the appearance of Jane, a young woman who is the witch-figure, and Paul, the Prince for whom Snow White is waiting. While Jane begins to spin her wicked web, Paul digs a bunker, sets up a dog-training program, and keeps watch over Snow White with a self devised 'Distant Early Warning System' - all designed to help him watch and eventually win her. Paul finally makes the fatal error of eating the "poisoned apple" himself (in this instance, a poisoned vodka Gibson), which the evil Jane has intended for Snow White. As the story concludes, Snow White is left to cast flowers on Paul's grave, and "revirginized," she rises into the sky.

One should quickly note that any summary is extremely misleading, Barthelme is much more determined on creating his collage effect than on permitting a story-line to develop in any straightforward fashion. The progression of events in *Snow White* is, for

example, continually interrupted by digressions, catalogues, lists, and seemingly gratuitous trivia. Each of the heterogeneous fragments is given its own individual section or "chapter", which is usually very short (they are rarely more than two pages long, and several are only on or two lines). Transitions between the sections are sketchy at best and often are entirely lacking; to establish a time scheme for the events in the book, for example, is quite impossible. Relying mainly on juxtaposition rather than the moral usual novelistic principle of transition to achieve its effects, Barthelme's apparent intent in bringing together this collection of fragments in such a blatantly non-linear fashion is to create the verbal equivalent of a collage.

Aiding his collage effect, Barthelme switches the typography back and forth between conventional type and large black upper-case letters-much like silent-film titles. This device, however, is also being used self consciously, so that the "authorial insights" are themselves parodies, as in the following banal and inconsequential asides:

PAUL: A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY (47)

PAUL HAS NEVER BEFORE REALLY

SEEN SNOW WHITE AS A WOMAN (150)

Likewise, the "background sections" typically turn out to be clichéd, scholarly-sounding assessments- sometimes attributed to specific writers but usually not-of literature, history, or psychology:

THE SECOND GENERATION OF ENGLISH ROMANTICS INHERITED THE PROBLEMS OF THE FIRST, BUT COMPLICATED BY THE EVILS OF INDUSTRIALISM AND POLITICAL REPRESSION.

ULTIMATELY THEY FOUND ... (24)

THE VALUE THE MIND SETS ON

EROTIC NEEDS INSTANTLY SINKS AS
 SOON AS SATISFACTION BECOMES
 READILY AVAILABLE. SOME OBSTACLE
 IS NECESSARY TO SWELL THE TIDE
 OF THE LIBIDO TO ITS HEIGHT ... (76)

At other times, the passages seem to trail off into total incoherency, as when the following neatly centered list of words appears:

EBONY
 EQUANIMITY
 ASTONISHMENT
 TRIUMPH
 VAT
 DAX
 BLAGUE (94)

Such digression and irrelevancies, of course, considerably impede the narrative of the book and prevent Barthelme from relying on conventional tension, development, and plot. For Barthelme, the formal structures belong to a previous literature, the product of a defunct reality. Indeed, even the characters in *Snow White* seem to be openly conspiring to refuse to cooperate with our expectations. Since for Barthelme the changes in modern society make the holding of any mythic center impossible, we find that the mythic parallels in *Snow White* follow only up to certain points, and then find appropriate alterations. The characters openly defy their traditional roles and undercut nearly all our expectations about them.

Like every other literary device in the book, the characters themselves are parodies of their archetypes, uniformly flat and almost comic-bookish in nature. Any sense of their actual identities is minimal and the whole realistic notion of developing a

history or background for them is ignored. The book is almost devoid of the sort of details usually provided by novelists to help "realize" the action in their stories. Thus, the name of the city, physical descriptions of the characters of settings, indications of a daily routine- all are left out. Any background information provided is usually obscure and serves to mock and defeat our expectations. Of the dwarfs' background, for example, we know virtually nothing except that they were all born in various National Forests. Of their father we are told: "Our father was a man about whom nothing was known. Nothing is known about him still. He gave us the recipes. He was not very interesting. A tree is more interesting. A suitcase is more interesting. A canned good is more interesting" (18-9). Since we are given no physical descriptions, no backgrounds, and no idiosyncratic traits, we can "know" the characters only through the words they speak- and even here only minimal distinctions are made. Indeed, at times the dwarfs seem to have a difficult time identifying even each other: "That's true, Roger, Kevin said a hundred times. Then he was covered with embarrassment. 'No, I mean that's true, Clem. Excuse me. Roger is somebody else. You're not Roger. You're Clem. That's true, Clem'" (67).

Even more unsuited is Paul, whose princely role is to rescue Snow White from her captivity with the dwarfs and save her from the murderous intentions of the witch-like Jane. But Paul is destined to be defeated in both his attempts, apparently doomed by the conditions of contemporary life which make sustaining the archetype which Paul should embody impossible. The type of figure Paul should be, Barthelme suggests, has been driven underground- or into parody- by the neuroses and self-consciousness facing all modern men. From the beginning, Paul (who, in keeping with the current demand for princes, is receiving unemployment compensation) is concerned about the implications which Snow White's appearance has for his own life; he seems to sense immediately that involvement with her will impose on him duties and obligations- responsibilities he is

not certain he can fulfill. Thus, after he has seen Snow White suggestively hanging her black hair out of the window, Paul remarks:

It has made me terribly nervous, that hair. It was beautiful, I admit it...

Yet it has made me terribly nervous. Why some innocent person might come along, and see it, and conceive it his duty to climb up, and discern the reason it is being hung out of that window. There is probably some girl attached to the top, and with her responsibilities of sorts. (13-14)

Paul's response to these obligations is to flee, although he retains considerable awareness of the implications of his actions. He realizes, for example, that conditions in today's society militate against true "princeliness."

In rationalizing his decision to hide in a monastery in western Nevada, Paul considers the lack of opportunity for heroic action today:

If I had been born well prior to 1900, I could have ridden with Perishing against Pancho Villa. Alternatively, I could have ridden with Vila against the landowners and corrupt government officials of the time. In either case I could have had a horse. How little opportunity there is for young men to have personally owned horses in the bottom half of the 20th century! A wonder that we U.S. youth can still fork a saddle at all. (78)

Paul decides to abandon his efforts at princely evasion. Like many of modern literature's comically conceived anti-heroes, Paul is totally incapable of responding naturally to any situation because his decision-making process has been encrusted by the sludge of literary and cultural conventions.

Snow White, meanwhile, has patiently been waiting for reluctant Paul to complete his duties. As she explains to one of her anxious wooers:

But this love must not be, because of your blood I must hold myself in reserve for a prince or a prince-figure, someone like Paul. I know that

Paul has not looked terribly good up to now and in fact I despise him utterly. Yet he has the blood of kings and queens and cardinals in his veins. (170)

As Paul soon demonstrates, Snow White is overestimating the ability of royal blood to produce a contemporary prince figure. One may question whether such concepts as "royal blood," "princeliness," and "heroic action" were viable in any age, but literature (including history books) has conditioned us to think otherwise. We are led, like Snow White, to react to Paul through these filtered, largely literary stereotypes. As Snow White realizes, the fault may not lie so much in Paul as in our own unrealistic expectations of him: "Paul is a frog. He is frog through and through [...]. So I am disappointed. Either I have overestimated Paul, or I have overestimated history" (169).

If we turn now to the central question of the role of language in Barthelme's book, we find that, more than anything else, the book seems to be "about" the condition of language and the possibilities which exist today for a writer to communicate something meaningful to his readers. Throughout the book a variety of very topical subjects are brought up: the Vietnam War, crowded street conditions, air pollution, political corruption. But as Gilman has observed, "the novel isn't about these things, not about their status in the imagination" (50). In some places Barthelme uses pastiche without political purpose. He is, therefore, not so much interested in using such material for satiric analysis as he is in seeing how such things have affected the public consciousness, especially in the way that consciousness is reflected in language.

Barthelme takes special delight in poking fun at the Freudians. At times we are presented passages so teasingly Freudian that they slip over into parodic self-commentaries, as the following:

WHAT SNOW WHITE REMEMBERS:

THE HUNTSMAN

THE FOREST

THE STEAMING KNIFE (39)

In other situations, the characters themselves either anticipate our probable interpretations of what is happening or create their own interpretation. One of the dwarfs, for example, says of the women they watch while they are at work, "We are very much tempted to shoot our arrows into them, those targets. You know what that means"(8). And, of course, we do. Not surprisingly, Snow White is very much aware of the literary significance of letting down her hair from the window: "This motif, the long hair streaming from the high window, is a very ancient one I believe, found in, many cultures, in various forms. Now I recapitulate it, for the astonishment of the vulgar and the refreshment of my venereal life"(80). Bill, the most self-conscious dwarf, is also the book's most expert symbol hunter, at times even anticipating the potential sources on which readers might rely to give "meaning" to a scene. When Bill notices the long black hair hanging out of the apartment window, he asks himself whose hair it might be: "This distasteful answer is already known to me, as is the significance of this act, this hanging, as well as the sexual significance of the hair itself on which Wurst has written on the hair, but rather about it" (92).

The most pervasive way in which Barthelme demonstrates the bankruptcy of language and literary traditions is the more familiar approach of parodying well-known styles and methods. *Snow White* is created out of a variety of narrative styles traceable to specific literary sources; in addition, allusions to these works, some direct and others veiled, are everywhere and serve to reinforce the reflexive nature of the work. Often the short sections of the book are created from a hodge-podge of styles, modulating rapidly between specific literary parodies, current slang, academic cliché, and advertising jargon. The style, whatever its source, is usually wholly inappropriate to the subject at hand: an

eloquent sermon is delivered against "buffalo music," a learned commentary is presented on the horsewife in modern society.

Parody as Postmodern Trope

Barthelme's *Snow White* makes an attempt at proposing a solution, even if only a solution in progress. By employing a strategy which parallels popular cartoons, Barthelme amplifies a narrative segment of the tale of "Snow White" – heroine's stay with the dwarfs – invites the readers to become aware and beware of their expectations. The novel has three parts which re-presents on a narrative level *Snow White*'s three-fold nature and the three phases of her traditional initiation process. While one would expect such a tripartite structure in the retelling of a tale of magic, most of the other narrative devices in *Snow White* are puzzling and non-fairy-tale-like: the little story there is told by several narrators, including Snow White, thereby dismembering the voice and authority of the traditional omniscient narrator. The unity of style is also disrupted as the text moves from the language of comic books, cartoons and film to that of social science and philosophy, "from the language of business and technology to that of advertising and hiplingo, from flat, vulgar street talk to inflated political, academic, and even church diction" (Gordon 26). Finally, in spite of Bill's and Paul's sacrificial deaths, there is no happy ending, in fact, there is no recognizable ending. Part I culminates in a self-parodying questionnaire which makes it impossible for readers to be passive, but gives them no reliable direction to follow:

2. Does Snow White resemble the Snow White you remember? Yes () No

()

9. Has the work, for you, a metaphysical dimension? Yes () No ()

10. What is it (twenty-five words or less)?

14. Do you stand up when you read? () Lie down? () Sit? ()

15. In your opinion, should human beings have more shoulders? () Two sets of shoulders? () Three? (). (82)

The "conclusion" the second part shows Snow White still hanging her beautiful hair out of the window, just as she did at the beginning of Part II, and lamenting: "No one has come to climb up. That says it all. This time is the wrong time for me ... There is something wrong with ... the very world itself, for not being able to supply a prince. For not being able to at least be civilized enough to supply the correct ending to the story" (131-32). Part III mocks traditional expectations of a denouement or epilogue, by presenting us with an inconclusive series of possible endings:

THE FAILURE OF SNOW WHITE'S ARSE

REVIRGINIZATION OF SNOW WHITE

APOTHEOSIS OF SNOW WHITE

SNOW WHITE RISES INTO THE SKY

THE HEROES DEPART IN SEARCH OF A NEW PRINCIPLE

HEIGH-HO (181)

In other words, Barthelme systematically refuses to provide a linear narrative with a satisfying ending. He also makes use of those "key fairy tale characteristics" in the novel not to make his modern retelling of the tale somewhat real to his audience, but to produce disrupting anti-fairy tale effects. For instance, particularly interesting is Barthelme's transgressive use of externalization. Snow White's seven companions' dwarfed height serves as a comment on their moral and aesthetic stature (without any potential for their growth, as individuals or as a group), but ironically their washing of buildings is immediately related to "the idea that man is perfectible"(8). Snow White's beauty, which in the traditional tale reflects her inner qualities, is described in such a literal way that its symbolic significance is lost:

SHE is a tall dark beauty containing a great many beauty spots: one above the breast, one above the belly, one above the knee, one above the ankle, one above the buttock, one on the back of the neck. All of these are on the left side, more or less in a row, as you go up and down. (3)

A schematic representation of those beauty spots follows on the page. Instead of functioning as a device which shows the truthful and reassuring continuity between inner and outer world, externalization is used to question the text's own vraisemblance by presenting a world of meaningless or over-abundantly meaningful surfaces and by mocking readers' expectations of coherence and effortless intelligibility.

In Barthelme's *Snow White* language, structure, and style, then, are already a challenge to the conventions which regulate its intertext "*Snow White*." Within this framework, the authority of the mirror is actively threatened in more than one way. First of all, the text seems to delight in showing us what the mirror refuses to : from the very beginning of Barthelme's novel, its readers are exposed to Snow White's "tall dark beauty containing a great many beauty spots," those very human spots which the mirror fails to reflect since they would be blemishes on her snow-white skin. Furthermore, the text exposes the gap between woman as artistic object in a male-inscribed text and woman as subject of her own imagination by showing how the dwarfs' reification of Snow White parallels the one operated by the mirror and is, in fact, authorized by the mirror's logic.

Snow White is reduced to a rather absurd collection of fetishized objects: the dwarfs' versions of *Snow White* are no different from the mirror's and just as lifeless. By juxtaposing one fetish to another and underscoring the reified nature of Snow White in the dwarfs' and the mirror's versions of her, the text calls our attention to the ideological process by which, a woman makes her appearance in the world of the imagination authorized by the mirror. But the text does more than expose the nature of the mirror's power: it also voices a potentially "other" imagination and so far excluded that of Snow

White. And in this world which the mirror does not frame, one see her "beauty spots," the blague in the initiation process she is expected to complete, her displeasure with the fiction she is locked into, her anger and her attempt at escaping, and finally the failure of her fragile imagination. One can also see how she has fully realized the close connection between sexual reproduction and narrative production at work in the tale tradition has told of her, but how she is not powerful enough to unsettle it.

The movens of Barthelme's fragmentary plot is Snow White's dissatisfaction with language: "Oh I wish there were some words in the world that were not the words I always hear" (6). Confronted with the failure of the script she has been handed, *Snow White* self-consciously decides to write her own and, in taking some charge of her own story, she challenges the framing power of mirror. The result is a poem, the first word of which is "' bandaged and wounded'" ('runn together' as one word, Snow White insists) and the theme of which is loss (59). The dwarfs, who are not allowed to read it describe it as " a dirty great poem four pages long," while Snow White defines it as " 'Free, ... free, free, free' "(10, 59). As a deferred presence, the poem remains between the dwarfs and Snow White: for them it is "an immense, wrecked railroad car"; for her it's a sign that her " ' imagination is stirring' "(59). The dwarfs comment: "something was certainly wrong, we felt' " (60).

Snow White's imagination reverts to being a "long-sleeping stock certificate" (59) and, following Paul's death, becomes nostalgic: "Snow White continues to cast chrysanthemums on Paul's grave, although there is nothing in it for her, in that grave" (180). She, of course, knows there is nothing but a grave for her in the world of traditional expectations, but is also aware of how difficult it is to imagine another world. Barthelme through *Snow White* renews the narrative's powerful image in the modern world.

Delight in formal experimentation is one characteristic of much of our contemporary American fiction. Another, either explicit in the choice of subject matter or implicit in the narrative treatment, is the scornful criticism of the popular culture and its audience. *Snow White* is innovative fiction having stylistically appropriate and a remarkably entertaining performance. *Snow White* is merely slick and self – indulgent. According to John Gardner, Barthelme "reflects his doubting and anxious age because he is, himself, an extreme example of it" one whose only advice is better to be "disillusioned than deluded" (81). Gerald Graff goes a step further. Although in his ambivalent and even contradictory remarks on the novel, Graff does admit that Barthelme's style parodies empty language – language as gesture rather than language as communication – and acknowledges that *Snow White* is "finally a form of cultural statement," (226) he criticizes what he considers the author's "irreverent stance toward his work" and "the novel's inability to transcend the solipsism of subjectivity and language ..." (227). In sum, the novel does not entirely succeed in playing the "adversary role" prescribed by Graff because Barthelme "lacks a sufficient sense of objective reality" (53) and therefore does not fully resolve what Graff identifies as "the writer's problem": "to find a standpoint from which to represent the diffuse, intransigent material of contemporary experience without surrendering critical perspective to it" (238).

Barthelme penetrates his novel's various surfaces – of character, of clichéd language, of printed page – in order to expose the melancholy absence of any deeper, humanizing meaning. It is the dwarfs, not their author, who love books that require them to do nothing more than read, or experience, the words printed on a page, the way a jaded traveler reads the print on a timetable. Barthelme dives beneath these surfaces in order to expose the plastic mask of dwarf language and culture.

The purposely anonymous society sketched in *Snow White* that is characterized not merely by a reductive political equality but more importantly by a radical and

insidious democratization of language – a linguistic democracy in which any word can be substituted for any other word, in which all utterances are equally empty gestures produced as if just so many plastic buffalo humps, and in which the hollowness of the mass culture is reflected in the hollowness of the characters' language and in the general "failure of the imagination" (59) of a culture given entirely over to the mindless consumption of ideas as well as goods. Such a world Donald Barthelme neither surrenders to nor endorses.

Snow White is, among other things, a one hundred-and - eighty-page verbal vaudeville show (itself a kind of theatrical collage) in which the form of the jokes often constitutes the author's critique of dwarf culture. In all speech, says Dan, one of Snow White's seven dwarf lovers, there is always "some other word that would do as well, ... or maybe a number of them"(96). Promiscuous as the novel's characters may be, it is their linguistic promiscuity which titillates the reader. Incongruities abound, obscure and archaic words appear as often as contemporary slang, and literally anything can be obscene: consider Snow White's sexually loaded plea for "more perturbation!" and the "pornographic pastry" which, alas, is not "poignant" (34-34). And, of course, just the reverse can happen: a "cathouse" mentioned several times turns out to be a house for cats. Similarly, anything can be a dead metaphor. Characters are frequently "left sucking the mop" (7) or finding "the red meat on the rug" (10). One Character becomes "a sack of timidities" (146); others worship "the almighty penny" (102). Filled with a dread induced in part by introductory courses in philosophy and psychology, they have no difficulty coming up with such existential aphorisms as "The *Inmitten*-ness of the *Lumpwelt* is a turning toward misery" (29).

"Give me the odd linguistic trip, stutter and fall, and I will be content," says dwarf Bill (139); and early in the story Snow White laments, "Oh I wish there were some words in the world that were not the words I always hear"(6). Both complaints are, in

one sense at least, foolish, as Barthelme's fantastically inventive word-play makes clear. Whether such crippled imaginations as theirs can successfully struggle against the usurping, homogenizing culture which dwarfs them and make the Barthelmean leap of language is, however, more than just a little suspect. The Snow White who, apparently not having taken a course in modern poetry at Beaver College, has never before heard the expression "murder and create" (6) is nonetheless writing "a dirty great poem" about "loss" (10,59). Given the would-be poet's lack of both a tradition and an individual talent, the reader may find "the President's war on poetry" a rather gratuitous undertaking. The dwarfs have certainly already surrendered, as the mixing of metaphors in the following passage attests:

Of course we had hoped that he [Paul] would take up his sword as part of the President's war on poetry. The time is ripe for that. The root causes of poetry have been studied and studied. And now that we know that pockets of poetry still exist in our great country, especially in the large urban centers, we ought to be able to wash it out totally in one generation, if we put our backs into it. (55)

The omnivorous dwarfs read novels aloud and in their entirety, even the "outer part where the author is praised and the price quoted" (105-6), while the prince-figure Paul is torn between acting heroically and eating a "duck-with blue-cheese sandwich" (28). Worse yet is the narrator's unconscious and incongruous juxtaposition of the emotional and the anatomical in this passage: "At the horror show Hubert put his hand in Snow White's lap. A shy and tentative gesture. She let it lay there. It was warm there; that is where the vulva is" (41). Such are the fruits of what Barthelme's narrator calls "the democratization of education" (128) and the mindless eclecticism of today's brand of higher education. This radical and entirely reductive equality is applied not merely to words, including names, but to people as well who, as a result, are often confused with

and reduced to the level of objects, future trash, as in the novel's opening sentence, which begins, " She is a tall dark beauty containing a great many beauty spots..." (3). Even when, on rare occasions, Snow White becomes uncomfortable with this kind of language, she is only able to substitute one form of it for another.

Barthelme's reader is delighted, but at the same time dismayed and provoked, by the ludicrous literal-mindedness of the characters in the situation report and, for example, the "interrupted screw" and " bat theory of child-raising" passages(29,16). This same journalistic literal-mindedness leads to the explanatory overkill evident on virtually every page of the novel, including the first.

The ultimate linguistic democracy of *Snow White*, however, is characterized not by any such active refusal but instead by passive acceptance, indiscriminate consumption, and echolalia. The result is indeed a "failure of the imagination"(59) or, more specifically, a sadly reductive democracy in which all words, things, people, emotions, and values are finally equal – that is to say, equally worthless, equally insignificant and interchangeable, equally dehumanized and dehumanizing. Such "muck" does indeed cripple consciousness. Much to his credit, Donald Barthelme does not turn away from the contemporary mass culture, nor does he scornfully and condescendingly belittle it. As one aphoristic chapter near the very end of the novel warns, "ANATHEMIZATION OF THE WORLD IS NOT AN ADEQUATE RESPONSE TO THE WORLD" (178). For the characters in the novel, this means the uncritical acceptance ("Heigh Ho") of their situation. For Barthelme it means something quite different. *Snow White* is not a book "crippled by the absence of a subject," (221) as Morris Dickstein has said, but instead a fiction that is very much about a crippled culture, a book that uses parody and various innovative techniques to analyze the texture of contemporary life. The character who admits, "But to say what I have said gentlemen, is to say nothing at all" (99), speaks for himself and his dwarfish kind but not at all for his

author, whose purpose is to clarify the relationship between the state of the society and the state of its language. Clearly and inventively, Donald Barthelme's novel suggests that in a dwarf culture of plastic buffalo humps, religious sciences, hair initiatives, unemployed princes, "hurlments," attractively packaged jars of Chinese baby food, *dreck* and *blague*, one well-aimed joke is worth considerably more than a thousand words from the collective mouth of Bill, Dan Kevin, Edward, Hubert, Henry, and Clem.

Perhaps as compensation for the problems inherent in the word beauty, the reader is next invited to picture Snow White's beauty through the beauty marks that rest not so coincidentally near her fetishized erogenous zones: breast, belly, knee, ankle, buttock, neck. To assist the reader in attempting to conjure up an aesthetic image of Snow White's beauty marks, there's a helpful representation provided in the text. However, this series of bullets on the left side of the page manages only to disrupt or frustrate the reader's representational desire and, in the process, links this frustrated desire to the failure of the word or category beauty--to the tautology that, let us say, opens the text or, perhaps, (fore) closes it as it attempts to begin. Unable to climb toward the light of the signified, we remain exposed to the uncertainty of the signifier.

This problem concerning meaning, which dogs all of Barthelme's *Snow White*, seems to rob textual or aesthetic production of its traditional privilege and put it on the same level as other cultural productions. This postmodern situation, in turn, troubles traditional aesthetic thinking on at least three registers: first, it robs aesthetics of its role as arbiter of taste and value; second, it collapses the aesthetic distance that is absolutely essential for a traditional notion of aesthetic judgment; finally, and perhaps most cripplingly, such a leveling gesture robs aesthetics of its proper object--after Warhol, how to tell the difference between a disposable commodity and enduring art? But as Dan the dwarf puts it in *Snow White*'s most famous passage, there may be a way for aesthetics

to continue from the point where its founding distinctions are irremediably blurred, from the point where art cannot separate itself from trash:

at such a point, you will agree, the question turns from a question of disposing of this "trash" to a question of appreciating its qualities.... 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 particularly appropriate here. (97)

However, this emphasis on words as trash does not necessarily signal the failure of a postmodern aesthetic project in *Snow White*; rather, on this reading, constituting an aesthetics adequate to this infected condition would actually be the book's (or perhaps the reader's) project. Larry McCaffery writes that "Barthelme's book attempts to create new art out of these same words and in the process it exploits the very nature of the debased condition into which language and story-telling have fallen" (31). Here, both Barthelme and the reader, in taking up what Peter Nicholls summarizes as "the ironic perspective that offers the only way of seeing the world afresh" (15), would be able to salvage a kind of new aesthetic experience, "to create new art" out of the junkpile of the text. And even if the text really does turn out to be garbage, at least the reader would have the solace of being among the few to realize that fact; with any luck at all, the reader as ironist can join Barthelme "at the leading edge of this trash phenomenon" (97-98).

For Barthelme the moment of understanding as "'reconciliation' offers no way of defamiliarizing the world for perception" (13). Barthelme's project, then, could be--and has been--called a radically ironic one: an attempt to preserve the wonder of ironic dissimulation. Here Barthelme's irony seems to be an attempt to reenchant an otherwise wholly disenchanted world--an attempt to restore wonder to the reader and, in the process, to question the priority of abstract or unitary knowledge.

This brief analysis, thus, shows that postmodern intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context. It is not a modernist desire to order the present through the past or to make the present look spare in contrast to the richness of the past. It is not an attempt to void or avoid history. Instead it directly confronts the past of literature – and of historiography, for it too derives from other texts. It uses and abuses those intertextual echoes, inscribing their powerful allusions and then subverting that power through irony.

In *Snow White*, Barthelme uses narrative strategies only loosely reminiscent of the original pretext. Through his hyper textual techniques, meta-fiction, self-reflexivity, and fragmented composition, he depicts the modern version of Snow White, her position and meaning in the contemporary American popular cultural context. Although by parodying both the famous story of Snow White and the narrative conventions of fairy tales; Barthelme's parody is rather neutral. It is not aimed at mocking either the author or the story itself, but to playfully deconstruct the original story. It offers a pluralist vision of the world. Such a vision rejects any authoritarian and unified vision of reality represented by fairy tales. In addition, Barthelme's postmodern story provides a critique of traditional genres and offers a new poetics, which can better express the sensibility of the contemporary period.

IV. Conclusion

Donald Barthelme subverts both traditional narrative convention and the mythical status of Snow White's innocence through the enumeration of unimportant details evoking erotic connotations as well as through the inclusion of the graphic patterns representing Snow White's Beauty spots. The novel *Snow White* represents the fragmented multiple identities of both a person and a popular icon which crosses the border and closes the gap between the past and present, popular and high culture, spiritual and physical experience. Entrapped in the context of parodic allusions to the famous fairy tale, Freudian and other theories and various literary works Snow White acquires a transpatial and transgeneric identity. She rejects both the past and present.

Snow White is a contemporary young woman as well as a parodied version of a famous myth, indulging in both the physical i.e. sex, alcohol, popular culture etc. and spiritual life i.e. art, literature, knowledge, intellectual heritage etc. Barthelme uses modernist interior monologue which does not have understandable meaning to parodies it expressing his critique of modernist narrative conventions marked by psychological subjectivity and its potential to grasp the meaning of the world through psychology. He rejects any possibility of seeing and explaining the world as it is in the traditional fairy tale, realistic or modernist conventions, and emphasizes the plurality of discourses, world and reality.

In the novel, self-reflexivity is developed by narrator's frequent allusions, reference to and meditations on various works of art, scientific works and subjects. To reveal the fictional nature of the work itself metafictional strategies are used. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional texts. Barthelme emphasizes Snow White's dissatisfaction through the use of fragmentary composition, self-reflection, metafiction, intertextuality, irony, parody and imagery evoking

incompleteness. The dwarfs establish a literal connection between the writing process and sensual or even sexual expression. They also reveal their almost constant interest in sexual matters. By developing a bond between text and bodily imagery throughout the novel, Barthelme thus exposes another level of inter-play between *Snow White* and the dwarfs. The imagery is represented by unfinished education, or by the failure of the protagonists' artistic ambitions, which all undermine the completion of any meaningful action.

By intertwining extra-textual discourses within his retelling of the traditional tale, Barthelme establishes a multi-leveled text: on the level of the story, he playfully highlights his characters' sense of despair and isolation; beyond the story, he parodies literary applications of psychoanalytic discourses. In addition to intertextual references, Barthelme further develops his textual openness by adapting the principle of mosaic or collage from the visual arts. Specifically, he juxtaposes fragments of discourse, imagery, and narratives without, however, coordinating these "pieces" in an overall unity or predetermined design.

In a most pervasive way Barthelme demonstrates the bankruptcy of language and literary traditions of parodying well known styles and methods. He uses parody and various innovative techniques to analyze the texture of contemporary life. He tries to clarify the relationship between the state of the society and the state of its language. The reader of *Snow White* does not take away a singular moral or plot line, but he or she does take away a revelation: the revelation that the ironic perspective is the one best suited to the contemporary situation. The characters openly defy their traditional roles and undercut nearly all our expectations about them.

Like every other literary devices in the book, the characters themselves are parodies of their archetypes, uniformly flat and almost comic-bookish in nature. Any sense of their actual identities is minimal and the whole is realistic notion of developing

a history or background for them is ignored. The book is almost devoid of the sort of details usually provided by novelists to help "realize" the action in their stories. The type of figure Paul should be, Barthelme suggests, has been driven underground or into parody-by the neuroses and self-consciousness facing all modern men.

By establishing an open-ended text that rejects synthesis –textual or ideological – Barthelme devises a "mirror" that reflects his at once distinctly playful and postmodern view of the subject, the word, and world as interrelated and constantly transforming phenomena. The novel consists of parodies of specific literary styles and conventions, pseudo-learned digressions about history, sociology, and psychology, mock presentations of Freudian and existentialist pattern, and inane concrete poems. Barthelme's use of the heterogeneous mixture of learning and verbal trash does not contribute to any verisimilar design but communicates a sense of what it is like to be alive at a given moment. Relying mainly on juxtaposition rather than the moral usual novelistic principle of transition to achieve its effects, Barthelme's apparent intent in bringing together this collection fragments in such a blatantly non-linear fashion is to create the verbal equivalent of a collage.

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