

state allowed deep water companies to purchase islands, shores, or shallow bays from them as part of their efforts to build, own, and operate deep water harbors and channels, and docks and wharves along the Texas coast.⁷⁷

In addition, the state cooperated with port cities when these municipalities shared with private companies the burden of obtaining deep water as well as of seeking other improvements. In 1899, the Texas legislature ratified a Galveston ordinance authorizing Collis P. Huntington, the entrepreneur and railroad magnate, to build and maintain piers on Galveston Bay. Specifically, the act permitted Huntington to construct piers and to dredge on their sides to secure "at least twenty-five feet of water at mean low water . . . and . . . to secure a connection by a continuous channel twenty-five feet in depth at mean low water from . . . [the] piers to the Gulf of Mexico." Accepting the ordinance's description of Huntington's work as "greatly to the interest of the city," the legislature relinquished to him title "to any portion of the flats or lands under water" involved in the project.⁷⁸

Similarly, in 1905, the legislature confirmed a Galveston ordinance granting M.A. Low the right to build and maintain docks and wharves on Galveston Bay and to dredge and fill on either side of these structures. Reiterating that these activities were in the public's interest, the act declared that the area needed improvement, specifically enlargement of the Port of Galveston to better accommodate commerce.⁷⁹ By this time, however, private activity along the Texas crescent had diminished. A number of projects had proven exceedingly ambitious and financially devastating. By 1900 the government, namely the Corps of Engineers, had assumed responsibility for completing and maintaining the shaky schemes.⁸⁰

Legal scholar G. Sidney Buchanan, has observed that the abdication to localities of the responsibility for development of their ports was part of Texas's tradition.⁸¹ Indeed, in the case of Galveston, the development of the port has been at its heart an intensely local affair. The state—conceding to the city from time to time power essential to promote its growth—has through charters and other special laws acknowledged and encouraged that process.

Though state and federal entities have shared with Galveston powers over the port's growth, the city nonetheless has been in law and in practice the dominating force in determining the port's future. That future has basically hinged on the degree to which Galveston has acquired and preserved deep water facilities. As a port city, Galveston has been a crucible for federal, state and local jurisdictions. But as a community, it alone has been responsible for its survival. In its constant struggle to remain a competitive port city, Galveston has had to adapt to the changing needs of navigation and commerce. Its current campaign for an offshore superport is only a contemporary manifestation of that contest.

KATHLEEN E. LAZAROU received the Ph.D. degree in American Constitutional-Legal History from Rice University in May, 1980. She is employed as a legal research assistant at Vinson & Elkins legal firm.

⁷⁷Tex. Rev. Civ. Stat. art. 1254 (1911).

⁷⁸1899 Tex. Gen. Laws, ch. 94, sec. 1, at 163, 164-165.

⁷⁹1905 Tex. Gen. Laws, ch. 35, sec. 1 at 291.

⁸⁰Wheeler, *To Wear a City's Crown*, p. 119.

⁸¹G. Sidney Buchanan, "Texas Navigation Districts and Regional Planning in The Texas Gulf Coast Area," *Houston Law Review*, X (March, 1973), pp. 576, 578.

DONALD BARTHELME IN HOUSTON

BY ROBERT MURRAY DAVIS

Like many overnight successes, Donald Barthelme served a long and varied apprenticeship, but only through the luxury of hindsight can we determine in his nearly five hundred signed items between 1949 and 1962 the nature of that apprenticeship. Until the last third of the 1950s, there was only slight indication that he was more than a reviewer with considerable facility, some talent for broad parody, and a limited stylistic and intellectual range. In 1956, however, with the founding of the University of Houston's magazine, *Forum* Barthelme's interest in learning something from everyone, indeed from every conversation, began to show results that led from editorship to authorship on new levels, to directorship of the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, and finally, in a combination of his long-established editorial ability and his newly-evident knowledge of contemporary art, to the editorship of the short-lived but prestigious journal, *Location*, and the expanded horizons that a New York base can provide.

The most obvious feature of Barthelme's early career—and for that matter his later career, as *Guilty Pleasures* testifies—is an interest in parody. His first discoverable work, "Rover Boys' Retrogression," published in the Lamar High School literary magazine in 1949, is a parody of *Pilgrim's Progress* which traces the journey of Half-Asleep and Not-Quite-Awake to the banks of the River of Respect Due where, failing to prostrate themselves before "an impressive array of state barges carrying great quantities of Personages, Dignitaries, Golden Calves, Sacred Cows, Cabbages, Kings, and Members of the School Board," they reach the final goal of Expulsion. Though somewhat labored, the parody is significant because of the preface in which the seventeen year old Barthelme explains his theory that

a parody, to be completely effective *as a parody*, must be a complete reversal of attitude, set in the form of the work being parodied. As "Pilgrim's Progress" is highly moral, the ensuing "Rover Boys' Retrogression" is not. It has been written as the antithesis of Bunyan's

book, not because the writer feels any perverse delight in caricaturing things as they are, but purely from altruistic effort to respect the integrity of the parody form, as he sees it.

Disingenuous though it is, the disclaimer allowed the story to escape whatever censorship existed.

This piece and untraceable high school pieces seem to have had no immediate successor, but in June, 1950, Barthelme began reviewing books for the University of Houston student newspaper, *The Daily Cougar*. Occasionally these reviews display flashes of wit, as in the description of Speed Lamkin's style as being "fully as emotion-charged as a telephone's dial tone"; in the description of a scene "in which Houston, the crazed Negro, holds the entire population of Hardtimes plantation at bay with a bread knife"; and in what is either a hopelessly confused or admirably deadpan and devastating review of Frederick Buechner's *A Long Day's Dying*.

Having proved reliable in what—to journalism majors—were small matters, Barthelme rose rapidly in the *Cougar* hierarchy. He was appointed Assignment Editor and later Copy Reader during the summer of 1950 and published his first signed column on August 18—a forgettable mock review of a non-book titled "Bottle-Snatching, for Fun and Profit," lightly ridiculing redemption policies.

In the fall semester, Barthelme was named Amusements Editor and besides continuing his column (soon to be signed with the pseudonym "Bardley") he continued to review books as well as productions by the university drama department. He soon displayed a talent for controversy, both internally—with disgruntled actors, would-be authors, and a former editor who threatened a \$50,000 law suit—and extramurally. The first of these external conflicts resulted in a reply to a Yalie, Clyde Rainwater, who complained that Barthelme seemed to think that he was Wolcott Gibbs and asserted that "there's nowhere else in life but New York." Later, on the verge of breaking out of the provinces, Barthelme was to admit the disadvantages of living in them; in 1950, he ironically thanked Rainwater for telling him "how they do it in the East . . ." Later, as Bardley, he repudiated University of Texas editor Ronnie Dugger's charge that the University of Houston "is a haven for party-time types, and lacks serious students," and predicted "a bright future in journalism for this boy. With his combination, a typewriter and no ethics, how can he miss?" Both Rainwater's and Dugger's charges may have had enough truth to put Barthelme on the defensive.

Locally, Barthelme continued to rise. He became Managing Editor in February, 1951, and after Joe Maranto resigned in April to become a church reporter for the *Houston Post*, he became the youngest Editor-in-Chief in *Cougar* history. As editor, he displayed little interest in writing editorials, publishing only two identifiable by his initials. In July, he followed Maranto

to the *Post* as reporter and reviewer for the amusements section under Hubert Roussel. He continued, however, to publish as Bardley in the *Cougar* for another 16 months. The reason does not seem to be the arrested development or fear of the outside world that creates university-groupies. Barthelme was only twenty-one when he last contributed to the *Cougar*, and as by-lined reviewer and later weekly columnist for the *Post*, he received adequate recognition. Since he contributed a Bardley piece on the average of every six weeks, he was clearly able to pick his occasions. His chief motives, perhaps, were to write the kind of things not normally appropriate to the *Post* and to continue the process of creating a distinctive persona for Bardley. At first, Bardley was a disguise so thin that the *Cougar* could announce the editorial shift with the headline, "New Era: Bardley In, Maranto Out," but he became a figure of increasing fantasy involved, for example, in a quixotic attempt to charge the English "with a plot to emasculate American taste, intelligence and morals" by exporting "the works of John Milton, a literary cutpurse of considerable personal disrepute . . ." Barthelme could also use the column to parody Grimm, creating an unsuccessful witch named Jane, in a prefiguration of *Snow White*; to change Don Marquis' archie the cockroach into a flamingo; and to publish as his farewell to the *Cougar*, in October, 1952, "Amanda Feverish," which he described as "a deeply disturbing novel of the South." Unlike that of Speed Lamkin's book, the style of Bardley's novel was, from the beginning, far from flat:

A fine pink haze, composed of gin and magnolia blossoms in equal parts, hovered over the Feverish plantation. It was dusk, the magic hour when the overpowering fragrance of the old slave quarters suffused every part of the grounds, even the south forty, where Amanda Feverish, windblown, wildeyed, sat under a juniper bush, pulling the wings off a giant, green-gold dragonfly.

The brief work, perhaps the "only four-chapter novel in the entire world," details Amanda's efforts to have someone fetch her a drink. First St. Clair Pitkin, "moody, star-crossed scion of a fine old Southern family," fails to fetch the Old Illusion due to an overdose of morphine. Next Pierre-Jean Louis Maurois Ennui, "a handsome if decadent French poet living on love and peach brandy in a shack in the middle of Amanda's peach orchard," succumbs to his own distillation, laced with insecticide. Finally Amanda is visited by Erskine Scaldwell, desiring to breathe "the wine-like if decaying atmosphere" of the Old South. Amanda, incensed and "drawing an immense hogleg from her garter," shoots him and then herself, leaving old Josh, "her aged, faithful, Sioux butler," emitting "the soft patter of tears . . . peeling onions in the kitchen." Less than three months after this was published, Barthelme was drafted, but there was probably no connection.

All of this, however, was incidental to his work for the *Post*, where he wallowed in the pop culture of the early 1950s. Piper Laurie, Norman Granz's "Jazz at the Philharmonic," Robert Ryan, John Wayne, Wayne King, Donald O'Connor and Francis the Talking Mule, John Crosby, Greer Garson, Ma and Pa Kettle, Abbott and Costello, and dozens of less memorable people figure in his reviews. He had plenty to do: though his major task was reviewing first-run movies showing in Houston, he also reviewed local productions of plays by as many as four little theatre groups in Houston and by the University of Houston Players, acts of considerable variety appearing at the Rice and Shamrock Hotels, musical recitals and concerts, and after a year on the job, records and books.

He was allowed considerable leeway in tone and style in these reviews and was probably encouraged to be sprightly in such pieces as "Vera Ellen Gets Her Man in Musical Whirl at Met," "Spike Jones and Company in Strenuous Concert," "Boys Choir Scores at Music Hall," and "Sister Act at Shamrock." Occasionally he could write parody for "Stage Business," his Sunday column, turning from Houston theatre groups and Houston-based show business figures to a Mike Todd version of *The Old Man and the Sea*, a science fiction version of Goldilocks, or between-act-conversations by type-characters from the audience.

In almost every review one can see him making at least a minor experiment with style. Reviewing *Little Big Horn* with John Ireland, he ends the plot summary with, "Custer gallops to his death unwarned. The producers evidently realized that their chances of turning aside the course of American history weren't worth a plugged Sioux . . ." *Take Care of My Little Girl*, he observed, "cracks the fraternity-sorority question wide open, with beautiful Jeanne Crain used as a maul," but "ends up more rhinestone than brimstone." The chance to polish his anticlimax was too good to resist in reviewing *Painting the Clouds with Sunshine*: it "is packed with color, spectacle and glamour, and is a pretty dreary business." His taste for Damon Runyon's prose, first revealed in the style of his Bardley column on "The Shooting of Dan McGroovy," was given professional exposure, without apologies, in a review of *Behave Yourself* and again a year later in a review of *Bloodhounds of Broadway*. On other occasions, prompted sometimes by contempt for hackneyed movie plots or possibly by ignorance of classical music, he indulged his life-long relish for cliches in long passages or even in whole reviews. For example, a flutist who "brings to her work a sure technique and a beautiful tone, as well as a completely winning stage manner" also "negotiated the intricacies of the Telemann suite, which is in turn whimsical, grave, gay, and stately, with an ease that captivated her audience, which rewarded her with abundant applause." On numerous other occasions, recitalists were "forced to surrender an encore." Students of this aspect of Barthelme's style will find especially rewarding his "Young Viennese Pianist in Expert Performance" on November 20, 1952, which he filled with cliches and in which he managed to say nothing specific about the music or the performance.

Though Barthelme continued throughout his career at the *Post* to experiment mildly with style and to assemble cliches for the amusement of author and audience, after the first six months on the job he did more refining than extending. Instead, he began in mid-1952 to expand his range as a critic, alluding to authors like Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dorothy Parker, Ambrose Bierce (on whom he was the *Post's* resident expert) in order to emphasize a point about theme or to undercut pretensions. Though these allusions are neither numerous nor extensive, they do indicate Barthelme's desire to go beyond mere journalism in order to see the movies in a larger cultural context. Students of cinema will, however, find the reviews disappointing. Their format is typical of fifties' movie criticism: heavy emphasis on plot; some attention to the quality of the leading performances and on occasion to the nuances or lack of nuances in the script-writing and directing; comment, usually perfunctory, on the use of spectacular elements in production numbers or scenery; and very occasional mentions of camera work. Neither reviewers nor public were versed in the vocabulary of cinematics, and Barthelme did little to advance the state of the art.

Perhaps as a result, Barthelme may have felt in his nine post-Army months as a reviewer that he had learned all that the job had to teach him. At any rate, he left the Houston *Post* to join the University of Houston News Service in October, 1955. As he had done on the *Cougar* and on the *Post*, he began to make the job serve him. When news director Farris Block convinced the university administration to divert some funds from *Acta Diurna*, the faculty newsletter, to a journal which would increase the university's prestige, publicize accomplishments, and provide a showcase for the faculty's talents, Barthelme was named editor. According to the testimony of Block and S. Wayne Taylor, director of the university's printing services, Barthelme devoted most of his considerable energies to making the *Forum* a success. He badgered everyone for funds, learned enough typography to be asked to teach a course in it, argued with his printers, his editorial committee, and his authors. On one memorable occasion he faced dismissal because he telephoned Jean-Paul Sartre in Paris without asking permission. He also made the acquaintance of emerging and established figures in the worlds of art and literature.

This is the Barthelme whom Taylor says was unhappy unless he was doing something useful. One useful thing he learned—essential to the survival of *Forum*—was typography. When he began, he did not know what a serif was, but he soon learned to scramble. Because he could afford very few decorative cuts, he learned to move the few he had, notably one of a snowflake, from form to form in order to give variety to his pages. Except for long arguments with Taylor and the other printers—they finally gave him the run of the shop because they could not keep him out—he was virtually self taught. He apparently had been through every type-book in the world, finding in one the type he insisted on using for *Forum's* title, and badgering Taylor into ordering

just those five letters from Holland. He also learned to handset type, and over and over again would set a line, study it intensely, change it, pull proofs, study it some more, and change it again.

One result of his efforts was a brochure, "Graphic Arts & Your Future," which he wrote, designed (insisting on 14-point rather than 18-point type), set and reset perhaps a dozen times to get the layout exactly right; then he fought with Taylor over the photographs. Barthelme did not like to have people in the photographs, and Taylor insisted that a brochure for prospective students should have some people in it. They compromised: Taylor agreed to show only hands in the photographs of printing equipment; Barthelme agreed to show faces on the back cover.

This was merely an exercise, of course. Barthelme was clearly on the way up. Testimony to this judgment can be found in the enthusiasm with which Taylor and others speak of his intelligence, his desire to learn and accomplish—even trips to the Algerian cafe (now defunct) for ham sandwiches and beer in frosted mugs, where he insisted on going daily, were occasions for pumping his companions for information or for money to support *Forum*. By mid-1960, according to Taylor, he had learned what he wanted to learn, turned the magazine over to Donald Lee, and moved to the Contemporary Arts Museum, first as acting and then as permanent director.

In his tenure as *Forum* editor, he continued to develop as a writer. He began with "Cameras in the Classroom," a workmanlike account of the operations of public television station KUHT, and soon published an essay on Elia Kazan which points out the shortcomings as well as the virtues of his theatrical style and which is at least journeyman literary criticism, far beyond anything he had done for the *Post*. There are an additional pair of works which, though he was to remain in Houston another two years, show him already a citizen of a larger world.

Most striking for the student of Barthelme's fiction is "Pages from the Annual Report," published in 1959, signed "David Reiner," and identified as Barthelme's by a long-time friend, Dr. Marjorie McCorquodale of the University of Houston. It is possible to see the story as a preliminary sketch for "Game" or "The Indian Uprising," for it has many of the characteristics of a mature Barthelme story: characters imprisoned by an institution and becoming increasingly paranoid or really persecuted; slightly distorted banalities from daily life (a sign says BLINK); oppressive amounts of things physically and imaginatively constricting the characters; catalogues of things or mere words; mixtures of the banal and exotic.

Like most Barthelme stories, it yields only a strong aura of imbecility when summarized. William Elderly Baskerville and H. De Vinne, confined to a paper-littered office full of what we learn are blank forms, fret about their purpose, make innumerable Rorschach blots, try to shoot a rat with a crossbow, menace each other and the girl from the mimeograph room with paper knives, threaten the aged office boy, Palatino, who informs them that

"They're going to hook the fire hoses up to the transoms" and drown the pair, and discuss taking hostage the floor maid, Miss Angel Caw, who locks herself in the closet. At a dead end, they circle in dialogue towards their function: "to be a bottle-neck" for all of the paper, "the substance of human lives," in order to "hold together the meaningless lives of hundreds and hundreds of people." Because this is the truth behind all organizations, the consequences of this knowledge "would be corpses hanging from lampposts, I suppose. Or other places. The stockmarket would explode in a marvel of fission. Blood would run in the gutters. The price of eggs would go up. I don't know." Baskerville surmises that the organization has turned on them "Because it knows we're thinking" and later supposes that "it *might* be true . . . Truth is punishment, he thought."

At this point the offensive begins: a slither of fire hoses halted by De Vinne's crossbow shot; "a loudspeaker and leaflet unit" which attacks them with "poorly printed broadsides" of advertising, a voice "with the intonation of an Oriental villain of some recent war," and "Pennsylvania 6-5000." Hesitating on the brink of retaliation by initialing and forwarding all the paper but fearing the consequences, they are surprised by a policeman who, nailed by De Vinne's bow, sags to the floor in a pool of ink as the two men "feverishly" begin "to initial the strange documents."

This early, unacknowledged story should not be forced to assume a heavy burden of interpretation, but it is clear that Barthelme has moved far beyond his earlier, parodic attempts at fiction, for instead of imitating forms, he is here examining and illuminating by distortion a *structure*. This tactic may not be original with Barthelme—Borges uses it, as does Barth, though they deal more with literary than with institutional structures—but it is characteristic of a great deal of his mature work. Later he learned not to underline his theme quite this heavily, but the lightness and flexibility of style are already present. From this achievement there is no great leap to the stories Barthelme published before he left Houston—"The Darling Duckling at School," "The Hiding Man," "The Big Broadcast of 1938," and "The Viennese Opera Ball," collected in *Come Back Dr. Caligari*—or to those published during his early years in New York.

In "Culture, Etc.," published in the *Texas Observer* in March, 1960 (only a month before his review of H.L. Hunt's *Alpaca* appeared in a national magazine, the *Reporter*), Barthelme explored roles, the individual's way of finding a place in a larger structure. In the essay, one sees him coming out of the closet, declaring himself an intellectual rather than a Texan. Even though, as he says, "It is frequently painful for a Texan to decide that he is not, after all, a cowboy," in this role "certain important areas of thought and feeling are closed to him . . ." Moving from the cowboy and Texas to more general considerations, he argues that most current models are taken from the mass media, with the result that he has trouble distinguishing Dr. Schweitzer from Dr. Lionel Barrymore. The chief objection to these models "is that they are

second-hand, weak, and flat. In the choice of such models is to be found the meaning of provincialism." Using the example of a Houston group almost successfully imitating the Modern Jazz Quartet, he notes "how much I have missed hearing the Modern Jazz Quartet" and that "we know what we know of the principal sources of our culture in pretty much this pale, unsatisfactory way. This too is part of the definition of provincialism"—a piety embraced by the media, "a lovely myth that enables us to avoid the arduous business of seeking out and experiencing the New."

Barthelme, of course, was going through just this process: as editor of *Forum* publishing Walker Percy, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and W.H. Gass; next as director of the Contemporary Arts Museum sponsoring exhibits or appearances or performances of work by avant-garde artists in all media; and finally, as a logical step, physically moving out of the provinces to New York and the physical and literary company of many of the writers and painters whose work he had sponsored.

ROBERT MURRAY DAVIS is Professor of English and Assistant Dean of the Graduate College at the University of Oklahoma. He has published widely in the fields of modern English and American fiction.

THE HOUSTON OF THE "DARING PLUNGERS"

As the photographs which follow attest, early Houston was not an imposing place physically. The city's unpretentious appearance was achieved as much by design as by accident. As the editor of Galveston's newspaper complained in 1858, "in Houston everything is business Our merchants are spending their thousands in building handsome stores with iron fronts, while the merchants of Houston are doing a much larger business in the same buildings they have been occupying for years." Houston clearly lacked the culture and elegance—an urbane attitude almost European in nature—that characterized Galveston, but it had enterprise. The monuments left by the "daring plungers of Houston"—as E.H. Cushing described the city's merchant class in 1859—were not to be found in mansions or impressive storefronts, but in the thriving commerce that made Houston "the great interior commercial emporium" of Texas.

As Houston entered into the second half of the nineteenth century, the town still possessed many frontier characteristics: the population was highly transient, the sexes were unbalanced, there were a relatively small number of children, but a large number of men older than 20 years and younger than 50. The most easily identifiable individuals in the population were the city's successful merchants: men like William R. Baker, William Marsh Rice, William J. Hutchins, Cornelius Ennis, Paul Bremond or Benjamin Shepherd. Despite its raw appearance, the town was becoming more sedate. The forces of order and decency had diminished its unenviable reputation for brawling; no longer could patrolman Edward Stiff describe Houston as "a grand rendezvous for abandoned characters from the four quarters of the globe." By mid-century there were eight churches in the town and numerous fraternal, debating and singing societies. Since 1858 the town had boasted of the existence of the Houston Academy with Dr. Ashbel Smith as its first superintendent. Cultural activities were still limited: Jenny Lind visited town in 1859, and the same year Professor Wilbur drew a considerable crowd to observe him ascend in a balloon from Market Square. A curious sight that same winter was the occasional appearance of a camel on the town's streets. A large herd of the desert beasts had been employed as camouflage on a slave smuggling ship and they were pastured for a time on Francis Lubbock's farm just outside of town.

Most visitors noted the fragility of those elements in Houston that enhance the quality of daily life, but they were more impressed with the energy and optimism that characterized its entrepreneurs. The city had prospered in