

# A Literary Darwinist Interpretation of Jane and Hogo's Romantic Relationship in *Snow White*

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In *Snow White*, Donald Barthelme subversively rewrites the Grimm's fairy tale "Snow White" with a postmodern sense. One significant adaptation is the parody of the wicked stepmother-figure into Jane—a semi-witch who bemoans the passing of her youth and tries to keep the love of the opposite sex desperately. Jane as the female antagonist with her caddish lover Hogo forms a romantic relationship which constructs a main conflict in the novel, and their romance works like a distorting mirror, dramatically reflecting the states of American in the 1960s. This paper is intended to interpret Jane and Hogo's romantic relationship by profiling Jane and Hogo in romance, analyzing the conflicts between their mating strategies and Jane's consequent sexual jealousy from the perspective of Literary Darwinism. Through the analysis, the carnalism, individualism, and the unbroken gender shackle depicted in the novel are revealed and criticized, facilitating the understanding of human nature and Barthelme's attitude towards the postmodern world.

*Keywords:* *Snow White*, Literary Darwinism, evolutionary psychology, mating-strategy

## Introduction

Known for his bold experiment on fiction writing, Donald Barthelme (1931-1989) is one of the most influential and distinguished postmodernists in American literature of the 20th century. *Snow White* is Barthelme's 1967 novel which parodies the classic German fairy tale "Snow White" by the Grimm Brothers with postmodern methods including heteroglossia and collage. While ridiculing and rebelling against the original fairy tale and the traditional value embodies in the text, Barthelme's *Snow White* shows a deep concern about social reality and human nature through his unrestrained writing.

Barthelme retains the main characters and the general plots of Grimm's "Snow White" while making some innovations. In this novel, Barthelme sets the story in 1960s Greenwich Village. The seven dwarves are still dwarves but are named as Bill, Kevin, Edward, Hubert, Henry, Clem, and Dan, and the unclear narrator or narrators are one or some of them. They work for a Chinese baby food factory. As for Snow White, she is a modern, semi-liberated woman who lives a wanton life with the dwarves as a "housewife" and waits for a prince with noble blood to rescue her from her ordinary life. As for the prince, Paul, he is weak and lacks of heroism, and he dies at the end of the story for drinking the poisoned vodka Gibson which is intended for Snow White—it is Paul's only time trying to show masculinity which accords to traditional concept by saving a lady from the drink which is "too exciting" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 115) but pays with his life. The poisoned wine is from Jane, the variant of the wicked stepmother, and her motive here is her jealousy because of her lover Hogo who falls in

love with Snow White. The jealousy from the female antagonist and the revenge act of poisoning are retained as one of the central conflicts in the story.

Literary works are not created in isolation but at a specific socio-historical instance and hence are subject to multiple determinants, and Barthelme's *Snow White* has been greatly influenced by and reflects the social reality in the 1960s America. Critics have seen the design of a sexually autonomous Snow White and a "pure frog" prince (Barthelme, 2013, p. 112) as a powerful subversion of stereotypical views of gender and this rewriting "maintains the feminist prerogatives of the 1960s, marked by the massive growth of radical feminism" (Aljadaani & Al-Sharqi, 2019, p. 155). The pervasive elements of sexuality in the text are obviously influenced by the sexual revolution of the 1960s. In Alina Leonte's study, Barthelme's story portrays Snow White as a typical female in the 1960s who struggles to escape the social values and expectations of her time but ultimately fails. According to Leonte, Snow White's restlessness reflects the social problems of the time as well as existing cultural conflicts over modern views of the emergence of the "free" woman (2013, pp. 1117-1120). Similarly, most scholars put emphasis on Snow White when analyzing female condition in the novel and the relevant social reality. Perhaps it is because the tremendous subversion of Snow White's image is earth-shattering and is deemed as kind of a postmodern landmark. But it is worth noticing that the only second female character in the story—if not considering Jane's mother, Jane, is blocked out from the heated discussion of female condition. In fact, Jane's sex psychology and her relationship with Hogo are significant in representing the postmodern society, and the fate of those two characters also reflects Barthelme's attitude to the postmodern world.

This paper is intended to interpret Jane and Hogo's romantic relationship and put emphasis on Jane as a postmodern female antagonist from the perspective of Literary Darwinism. The theoretical basis of Literary Darwinism comes from sociobiology, evolutionary, and experimental psychology represented by E. O. Wilson, David Buss, and Steven Pinker, et al. Literary Darwinists argue that since the human brain is a product of evolutionary adaptation and literature is a product of the brain, evolutionary biology can extend to literature. Literary Darwinism sees all literature as an expression of the mechanisms of natural selection in forming a universal human nature. Literary Darwinists take human nature, which reflects the motivation and emotion of human behavior, as the main research object. Combined with evolutionary psychology, Literary Darwinists interpret literary works from the basic evolutionary principles—survival, reproduction, kinship, social activities, life cycle, and so on. Through the analysis of characters' behaviors in the specific cultural context, how the characters in the text adapt to change according to the cultural context is discussed. Taking the stance of Literary Darwinism and with the help of evolutionary psychology, this paper firstly gives a profile of Jane and Hogo in romance, and then analyzes the conflict between their mating strategies and Jane's consequence sexual jealousy. Finally, based on the previous analysis of human nature and human experience, this paper examines the projection of reality in the novel and discusses Barthelme's attitude towards the postmodern world.

### **The Profile of Jane and Hogo in Romance: The Hopeless Lovestruck and Her Cad**

Love, especially romantic love, is one of the universal dispositions of human nature; this fusion of intense attraction and a desire for commitment is a fairly widespread phenomenon in human cultures. In 1992, the anthropologists William Jankowiak and Ted Fischer tested this idea by examining a sample of 166 societies in the ethnographic record, and found evidence of romantic love in almost 90 percent of the societies studied. Romantic love was in all likelihood a human universal, or at the very least a near-universal. Moreover, Patrick Hogan's recent empirical study of world literature has also identified "romantic union" as a universal prototype

that suggests cross-cultural constants in emotional experience. Marcus Nordlund further assumes in his study that the human affections are rooted in evolved dispositions with sexuality and attachment as separate but overlapping systems, with important connections between adulthood and childhood (2005, p. 114). The study of the romantic relationship of Jane and Hogo is crucial to understand the human nature reflected in *Snow White*.

Jane, in full name Jane Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, is occupied with writing "irritating" letters without explicit reason at her first appearance in the novel. And according to her latter monologue, she was once "the fairest of them all" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 30), being sexually attractive and competitive in the mating market for "Men came from miles around simply to be in my power" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 30). But Jane experiences the decline of her sexual attraction and she cultivates her malice. The "irritating" letter made by Jane could be a possible absurd evidence for her malice; however, her letter to Mr. Quistgaard shows her malice is rather obtuse. Compared to the vicious step-mother in Grimm's tale, despite the similar quasi-loss of sexual appeal, Jane is originally less tragic. Unlike the demure, self-effacing virgins or destructive mothers that stalk the traditional tragedies, Jane is vigorous and exotic that she "likes to swing from the lianas that dangle from the Meat Street trees" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 25), and she is quite passionate towards her lover Hogo. The passionate love is the source of Jane's vitality, at the same time the source of her tragedy. In a word, Jane is a hopeless lovestruck. In the novel, Jane firstly suffers from the declination of her sexual attraction, and that implies the fear of losing the power of female choice and other sequence privileges. Basically, Jane has a negative self-evaluation and put her esteem almost only on her sexual value and the affirmation from the opposite gender. And to deal with her uneasiness and panic, she chooses to find redemption from a romance: "Were it not for the fact that I am the sleepie of Hogo de Bergerac, I would be total malice. But I am redeemed by this hopeless love, which places me along the human continuum, still" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 30).

Then Hogo's love constitutes Jane's ultimate goal. She takes a submissive gesture in their relationship that she accepts Hogo's nasty and loathsome way to jam a chocolate swirl into her mouse, which might allude to oral sex; she tolerates Hogo to drop garbage out of windows, and even takes it when she is glued to a Pontiac convertible seat by Hogo and only mildly complains that "I also admire the way you use these Pontiac convertible seats for chairs in your house. But mine is uncomfortable" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 84). It is worth noting that Jane is clearly aware of the unhealthiness of their romance. When Jane finds out that Hogo makes a stain on her new white-duck love seat with pillows of white-on-white Indian crewel, she said:

That's a pretty strong metaphor Hogo of what you would like to do with me, too. I understand. If you think for one moment that your capability of staining the thing you love has escaped me, from the very beginning, you have grossly misperceived our situation. (Barthelme, 2013, p. 74)

Jane knows exactly how poisonous their relationship is, but she still stays with Hogo and plays the role of an obedient lover. And when Hogo removes his love from her to Snow White, which deprives Jane's ultimate life value, she exclaims "Now I have been left sucking the mop again...Now there is nothing but malice" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 104). Jane is trapped in the romantic relationship and can be regarded as the shadow and an elder version of Snow White that both of them play the role of housewife and the only differences are the age, the number of men they look after, and their attitude towards the man or men they are dating. Snow White is Jane in her "better days".

As for Hogo de Bergerac, this is a new character created by Barthelme in his novel and is a crucial character to push forward the plots that his unfaithful love directly triggers Jane's revenge which is one of the central

conflicts in the story, and his desire for Snow White and power among the dwarves leads to his involvement into killing Bill, which is another central conflict on the story. And in the romantic relationship, Hogo is a typical cad. A number of studies both in the United States and cross-culturally have shown that women regularly report being attracted to men who are socially respected, financially well-off, ambitious, industrious, dependable, emotionally stable, and romantic, all qualities that indicate the ability and willingness to sustain long-term, parentally investing relationships (Kruger, Fisher, & Jobling, 2005, p. 226). Hogo is the perfect opposite to such ideal mates; he is “canaille...not very simpatico” (Barthelme, 2013, p. 25), thirty-five, rude, vile, brutal, aggressive, “like to keep everything sharp” (p. 102), and a philanderer. He is sexy, for Snow White gives the affirmation: “I am not unaffected by your Prussian presence, or by the chromed chains you wear looped around your motorcycle doublet, or by your tasteful scars on the left and right cheeks” (Barthelme, 2013, p. 112). And he is sensual that he decides to woo Snow White and leaves Jane after seeing the former's nude. Barthelme tunes everything more absurd by making Hogo be aware of the wrong in his mistreatment of Jane—“I do owe you something for having been the butt of my unpleasantness for so long” (Barthelme, 2013, p. 102) but feel nothing wrong to be unfaithful.

Jane and Hogo's relationship does not perfectly accord with ideal prototype of romantic love but does involve Jane's effort to pursue her romance, and the irreconcilable conflict between a lovestruck woman and a cad as a common image in love story has its deep biology origin in human evolution.

### **Conflict Between the Sexes and Jane's Rage in Sexual Jealousy**

Over human evolutionary history, there have been numerous problems we have had to solve to survive and reproduce. Adaptations, including sexual psychologies, are the solutions that help certain individuals perform better in survival and reproduction than others. And when it comes down to reproduction, the adaptive problems that faced males and females are significantly different. According to the theory of parental investment, given the relative differences in reproductive conditions for men and women, generally ancestral man's psychological adaptations favor the pursuit of low-cost reproductive opportunities to increase the number of their descendants, while ancestral woman's focuses on evaluate the willingness of men to commit investment for women bear a higher cost for reproduction (Salmon, 2005, p. 252). As descendants of those winners in the evolutionary lottery, modern humans have inherited a specific set of mate preferences. But in reality, humans experience both short-term and long-term mating and show a degree of flexibility rarely observed in other species. According to Buss (2019), generally long-term mating strategies make a woman prefer to date with a reliable man who was willing to commit to her and would have her children who survived, thrived, and multiplied; and for a man, he can get increased odds of succeeding in attracting female, increased paternity certainty, increased survival of his children, added coalitional allies, and increased lifespan and many other benefits from the commitment of marriage. As for adopting short-term mating strategies, just as mentioned above, man can get increased offspring production with a low cost; at the same time, a woman can also get benefits in resources, genes, mate switching, short-term for long-term mating goals, and mate manipulation. Which strategy an individual pursues often depends on context. In *Snow White*, the core conflict between Jane and Hogo is the divergence of their mating strategies.

In Jane's case, she adopts a blend strategy for both long-term and short-term dating. On the one hand, her requirements of the romantic relationship basically follow the pattern of typical romance that the emotional focus is on love, commitment, and nurturing, and she expects “the creation of a perfect union with the ideal mate”, which is the final goal of romance in most literary (Salmon, 2005, p. 247). Nordlund proposes a possible explanation for romantic love that it is the result of the converging of sexual desire as well as long-term

attachment intensely upon the same love object (2005, p. 114). Jane has the both sexual desire and long-term attachment to Hogo and expects to receive the same response from him. Leave aside the possible restriction on her sexual value such as aging and defects in character, throughout the story there is no evidence of Jane's intention of giving up her romance with Hogo; instead, she faithfully takes Hogo's love as her redemption as well as willingly works as his housewife, for example, in *Snow White*, "Jane entered trailing a shopping cart filled with shopping" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 100).

What makes Jane's mating strategy different from the typical long-term mate is that her love object does not indicate the ability and willingness to sustain long-term, parentally investing relationships. Jane's sexual psychology of choosing a cad can be explained by short-term mating strategies. It could be the "sexy son hypothesis" of Weatherhead and Robertson that when a woman mates with a cad, the genes that make the father sexually successful as a cad would be passed on to her son, and because this sexy son contains 50 percent of the mother's genetic material, he would increase his mother's fitness by giving her numerous grandchildren through his sexual success. And Jane's hybrid mating strategy has its reason. Kruger assumes that the attachment process is a mechanism for developing optimal reproductive strategies within particular environmental contingencies, and insecurely attached women would be more likely to focus on the criteria valued in short-term relationships. Fearfully attached individuals are believed to have a negative evaluation of both themselves and others, which suggests that these women may judge the prospects of receiving long-term support from a male partner as unlikely. In Jane's case, she worries about the declination of her sexual attraction, and feels uneasy for men to no longer woo her fervidly. She mainly evaluates herself as a mating partner and has a rather negative self-evaluation. Thus, fearfully attached Jane may concern about her mate leaving their relationship badly and believe it is better to mate with someone who is likely to provide genes that promote reproductive success in the current environment. But at the same time, the mate preference in human nature derives her to uncontrollably seek commitment and stability in their romance that she inevitably asks Hogo, "What is to become of us, Hogo. Of you and me" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 84).

Hogo's mating strategy is simpler. He adopts the short-term mating strategy in their romance. Before Hogo gets attracted by Snow White, he already has no intention of developing a stable long-term relationship with Jane. Facing Jane's question about prospect of their romance, Hogo's answer is explicit: "Nothing is to become of us Jane" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 84). There is almost no long-term attachment in Hogo, and he avoids commitment, leaves partner number or variety open, and keeps the ability to identify women's fertility active (Buss, 2019, p. 333). When Hogo is making a plan to get inside the house of Snow White and is caught by Jane, he reviews Jane and has such an interior monologue:

He noticed that she had her graceful cello shape, still. "This cello-shaped girl still has some life in her," Hogo reflected. "Why don't I spend more time looking at her and drinking in her seasoned beauty." But then he thought of the viola da gamba-shaped Snow White. "Why is it that we always require 'more,'" Hogo wondered. "Why is it that we can never be satisfied. It is almost as if we were designed that way. As if that were part of the cosmic design." (Barthelme, 2013, p. 100)

Here the comparison between Jane and Snow White as "cello shaped" and "viola da gamba-shaped" reveals Hogo's mate preferences. Ancestral men would benefit from marrying women with the capacity to bear children to be reproductively successful, so selection could only have fashioned preferences in men for observable qualities that are reliably correlated with reproductive value (Buss, 2019, p. 275), which is dominant in man's short-term mating strategies. According to Buss, signals of youth and health are central among these cues—clear

skin, full lips, good hair, symmetrical features, white teeth, absence of sores and lesions, facial femininity, facial symmetry, and a small ratio of waist to hips. In the novel, Jane's age is not clear, but from her own narration and Hogo's description with the word "seasoned beauty" we can infer that she is older than Snow White who is 22-year-old. Snow White has the skin "white as snow" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 7), smooth lips and face (p. 18), breasts "stand delicately away from the trunk", and "stunning arse... good legs... the important knees" (p. 95). The good condition of her body gives cues of high fertility in that she is young and physically attractive. And more significantly, the long hair is "black as ebony" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 7) which she hangs outside the window. Hinsz's study interviews 230 women, and finds hair length and quality are strong cues to youth and health: Younger women have longer hair of higher-rated quality and hair quality is positively correlated with women's subjective judgments of their own health. And from the comparison of "cello" and "viola da gamba", we may speculate that Snow White has a lower ratio of waist to hips than Jane. And Jasienska's study found that women with a low waist-to-hip ratio and relatively large breasts had 26 percent higher levels of the ovarian hormone oestradiol (E2), which is a good predictor of fertility and pregnancy success. Oestradiol is a good index of reproductive value, since the oocytes are directly involved in producing it, and link between the waist-to-hip ratio and reproductive status may make it a reliable cue for ancestral men's preferences in a mate. Even the ratio gap between Jane and Snow White might be subtle, it still lures Hogo, the cad who adopts short-term mating strategy, to require "more".

It is clear that the core conflict between Jane and Hogo is the divergence of their mating strategies: Hogo takes his romance with Jane temporarily and tries to establish with other woman of higher reproductive value, while Jane tries to extract signals of genuine commitment from their relationship even though she adopts compromised mating strategy given all kinds of reason in reality. And contradiction of their sexual psychology leads to Jane's sexual jealousy and her tactics of mate retention from vigilance to violence.

Evolutionary psychologists have hypothesized that the emotion of jealousy and behavioral tactics of mate retention have evolved "to fend offmate poachers, to deter a mate's sexual infidelity, and to retain a mate for the long run" to fulfill the reproductive potential inherent in the initial mate selection (Buss, 2019, p. 639). And being jealous of the diversion of Hogo's commitments, Jane's behavioral output of jealousy in the form of mate-retention acts and tactics ranges from submission and self-abasement, vigilance to violence, three out of the 13 sample tactics presented by Buss in his 1988 study.

Jane's submission and self-abasement appears even before the existence of an exact rival in love that is the overall result of her low self-evaluation, insecure attachment, and Hogo's cad behaviors. And when she happens to see Hogo planning to get into Snow White's house and trying to concealing his intention, considering Hogo's previous performance, Jane senses the danger and she asks Hogo "What are you thinking about?" while holding tensely to the handle of the shopping cart (Barthelme, 2013, p. 101). That is the vigilance. And after Hogo's confession that "I love her, Jane... Whoever she is, she is mine, and I am hers, virtually if not actually, forever" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 102), Jane is certain about being "left sucking the mop again" (p. 103) and her rage reaches the peak and decides to revenge.

Jane's revenge is mainly violence towards her rival, including both socially ostracization and physical aggression. At the first level, Jane wants to poison Snow White's interpersonal relations; she says "I think I will go around to Snow White's house, where she cohabits with the seven men in a mocksome travesty of approved behavior, and see what is stirring there" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 104), which implies that she is about to hurt Snow White by attacking her unconventional cohabitant with seven dwarves; and at the second level, she wants to

arrange a sleep for Snow White “in the corner of a churchyard” (Barthelme, 2013, p. 104), and that involves the physical aggression. And Jane’s weapon is a poisonous vodka Gibson on the rocks for Snow White, and that wine caused Paul’s agonizing death. The capacity for hatred is part of human nature, but so is positive sociality. Jane’s rage in sexual jealousy finally leads to not only Paul’s tragical death but also the death of part of her human nature.

### **The Invisible Power of Social Reality Whispering to Biology Design**

Carroll points out that human nature has been shaped through natural selection so that it fits into the contours of the natural world, and in speaking of “characters” and “setting” in literature, “we need to bear in mind that those conventional categories reflect an elemental fact—the fact that all human beings are organisms within an environment” (2004, p. 159). Almost everything that is important about human behavior and psychology always develops through a combination of nature and environment. In *Snow White*, Jane and Hogo’s behaviors are not only driven by their instincts and evolutionary mechanisms, but also influenced by the specific cultural configurations of 1960s America and their individual personal identities.

The 1960s was a hybridized era in American history. On one hand, the fairytale aspirations had been completely shattered in the post-World War II world, and people were faced with monopoly, polarization, cold War, nuclear competition, loss of faith, breakdown of order and collapse of tradition, increasingly strong egotism, and increasingly indifferent interpersonal relations. On the other hand, there are some new constructions in the society. With the second wave of feminist movement and contraceptive pills, female consciousness has been strengthened, and women’s social status has been constantly improved. However, the patriarchal ideology is deeply rooted and pervasive, and women are systematically under the influence of the patriarchal forces. As a result, it is difficult for women to achieve the real equal status with men and the struggle for liberation is fraught with difficulties. At the same time, sexual revolution brings increasing acceptance of sexual encounters outside of marriage, co-habitation, growing number of non-monogamous relationships, and these behaviors have seriously challenged traditional sexual concepts and morals, and brought about many social problems, such as the rising divorce rate, sexual violence, and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, which have aroused widespread concern (See, Yu, 2005; Carlisle & Golson 2007; Zeng & Jiang, 2016).

One important design in the novel alludes to the sexual revolution which is the absence of fathers. In the story readers can find clues of the mothers of Jane and Hogo; however, there is no word about their fathers. And this might relate to the increasing divorce rate or unmarried mothers in the 1960s America society. And this hypothesis provides a possible explanation of the cause of Jane’s and Hogo’s personality. Salmon’s study proves that the attachment system evaluates conditions during childhood guides mating strategies in adulthood. And fearfully attached women who have experienced disruptive social environments as children without a supporting father are more likely to adopt short-term mating strategies (Salmon, 2005, p. 238). And Hogo as a cad may also be influenced by his father: Cross-culturally, men from father-absent households favor a sexually promiscuous mating strategy and are more misogynistic and reluctant to engage in parental investment; they are also violent, aggressive, rebellious, high in risk-taking, and at high risk of incarceration (Krugel et al., 2005, p. 228).

Jane’s condition as a love-struck is a further revealing and query of the 1960s social reality. The uneasiness in her attachment caused by a potentially absent father is aggravated by the condition of aging and a lower level of sexual attraction. Jane closely attributes her old “better days” to her past fairness and laments the situation of fewer wooers. And Jane’s mindset reflects her self sex-objectification and her plight in the abyss of male gaze,

representing the strong obstruction in the society faced by feminist movement. In contrast to Jane, Hogo as a 35-year-old man does not suffer from anxiety as he grows older: "You don't mind then. That you are not young". "It has its buggy aspects as what does not?" "You don't mind then that you are sagging in the direction of death". "No, Jane" (Barthelme, 2013, pp. 84-85).

Hogo enjoys equanimity because patriarchy advocates the idea of male dominance and the social evaluation of his value focuses more on money, status, and power, and the sexual charm highly related to age is not important for such a patriarchal sexual subject. Facing female choice in reproduction as the only power she has in the society, Jane's fear and agitation to aging is self-explanatory. In a modern society that has restricted female options primarily to control through influencing men, females have two choices: They can exert as much control as possible through men (as often seen in romance novels), or they can work to gain control on their own (one feminist impulse) (Salmon, 2005, p. 249). Unfortunately, the society failed to provide a real equality for females, and along with her flawed personality, Jane can only choose her own bondage. By taking Hogo's love as her redemption, she uses romance as a strategy to adapt to circumscribed life and to convince herself that limitations are really opportunities.

Mating strategy is not only the means of reproduction, but also a social bonding mechanism. And the strategy an individual pursues often depends on context, which means reflecting the social reality around him or her. The prevailing individualism in society also affects the marriage relationship. With the vogue of co-habitation and other unrestrained sexual relations brought by the sexual revolution, the social atmosphere greatly makes Jane's and Hogo's mating strategies more chaotic. In the postmodern 1960s, with the improved productivity, prosperous economy, and improved social security system, there is a small effect of male parental investment on female reproductive success, which means women have more freedom and risk resistance capacity in mating. As modern evolutionists are well aware, there is a fundamental conflict in human nature: Human beings are individual organisms as well as social animals, and they are constantly seeking to reconcile these two demands by means of conflict and cooperation. It is part of human nature being characterized with pair-bonded, semi-monogamous mating systems and extraordinarily high levels of parental investment (Carrol, 2004, p. 219). So Hogo's exclamation "It is almost as if we were designed that way. As if that were part of the cosmic design" (Barthelme, 2013, p. 100) is partial, and it is the overall result that sexual desire overcomes long-term attachment in an individualistic society.

To emphasize the exaggerated competition and indifferent interpersonal relations in a postmodern society, Barthelme makes the fate of the characters break away from the traditional concept that the good should be rewarded and the bad should be punished. In the novel, Jane does not wear "the red-hot iron shoes" to be punished for her sin of murder but seats in the third row on Paul's funeral safely; and Hogo successfully becomes part of the group of the dwarves even though he participates in framing Bill to death. As characters of the Golden Age of Capitalism, Jane's and Hogo's concept to co-opt the resources of others has invaded other aspects in the society, and cooperative alliance in human evolutionary psychology gives way to competition and aggression. By depicting the chaotic scenario, Barthelme attacks on the brutal reality.

### Conclusion

By resorting to "human nature", literary writers can base their values on what they consider to be the basic reality and compare these basic realities with the customs of their own culture, showing that these customs are

superficial, abnormal, artificial, unhealthy, or undesirable. And through analyzing Jane and Hogo's romantic relationship, Barthelme's attitude towards the postmodern American society is revealed.

First, to some extent, sexual liberation and the decline of marriage have affected children's psychological growth, and further influenced their concept of mate selection as adults, accelerating short-term mating strategies and discouraging long-term attachments. This is represented by Jane's chaotic and contradictory mating strategy and Hogo's short-term mating strategy as well as the conflicts between the two. Second, the bulging capitalism casts competition and aggression to the society; the increasing individualism not only affects the decaying pair-bond system but also catalyzes violent crimes in society. And third, the second feminist movement faces numerous obstacles both inside and outside, and the road to equal rights for women still has a long way to go—Jane does not break through the stereotypes of female character in literature, including “the passivity of female protagonists, the dearth of ‘heroic’ female protagonists, the emphasis on the beauty of female protagonists, the emphasis on marriage, and the stigmatization of older female characters” (Gottschall, 2005, p. 210).

Identifying human nature as a central point of reference does not require the critic to postulate any ultimate resolution of conflict in a novel. Darwinians regard conflicting interests as an endemic and ineradicable feature of human social interaction. Male and female sexual relations have compelling positive effects, but they are also fraught with suspicion and jealousy; different individuals have reciprocal altruistic behavior but also competition in survival and reproduction. Each human organism is driven by its own particular needs, with the result that all affiliative behavior consists in temporary arrangements of interdependent interests. Jane and Hogo's romantic relationship juxtaposes images of harmony with images of violence, and reflects the dynamic and complicated side of human nature. The novel ends without a final outcome of Jane and Hogo's relationship, and that points toward no ultimate metaphysical reconciliation, no ethical norm, and no utopian ideal. Barthelme's characters deeply reflect the 1960s social reality and resonate with readers because they powerfully evoke unresolved discords within the adaptively functional system in which human beings live.

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