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METAFICTITONAL NARRATIVE QUALITIES OF CHIMERA

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Abstract

This paper seeks to discern the narratological aspects of John Barth's famous essay titled "Literature of Exhaustion" in narrative qualities of his own novel, *Chimera*. Different narrative elements are discussed in the process of reading the essay; they include "The Construction and Deconstruction of Illusions in *Chimera*", "The Orchestration of Polyphony of Voices", "The Decadence of Mythology" and "Barth's Success in the Pedagogy of Writing". Each concept will be discussed in a separate section. The first section aims to discuss the concept of metafiction. Barth tries to represent the clash between real and represented worlds to confirm the fact that the boundary between reality and fiction becomes vague in the process of the novel. The second section focuses on "Heteroglossia" as one of the major themes of the novel. All of the characters represent Barth's voice in *Chimera*. The third section examines the influence of mythology and its decadence. The author attempts to advance a new method of writing by the traditional mimic forms and intertextual games. The last section intends to examine Barth's pedagogy of writing. He tries to create new fictions out of what already has been said in the world of fiction. The article concludes that *Chimera* is a rich postmodern novel that can be a role-model for writers to avoid originality and writer's block in writing.

Keywords: Metafiction; Heteroglossia; Mythology; Pedagogy of Writing; Originality.

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1. Introduction

The present essay revolves around some of the narrative qualities of John Barth's *Chimera*. This essay examines the novel under four major headings: "The Construction and Deconstruction of Illusions in *Chimera*", "The Orchestration of Polyphony of Voices", "The Decadence of Mythology" and "Barth's Success in the Pedagogy of Writing". It aims to analyze Barth's novel through Barth's main essay 'Literature of Exhaustion'.

The purpose of this essay is to scrutinize the Functions of Metafiction, Mythology and Heteroglossia in Barth's *Chimera* to explore narrative features of the novel. The present study is

an attempt to prepare the analysis of John Barth's *Chimera* so as to provide the reader with the key for repetitions, re-writings and echoes in the novel; therefore, this paper can be an exploration to prove key terms such as metafictional elements of the novel, the important roles of mythological figures, their polyphony of voices in the narrative qualities of *Chimera*, and the role of the essay "Literature of Exhaustion" in the progression of these narrative functions in order to apply new techniques in writing *Chimera*. In addition, this essay intends to examine and discuss Barth's success in applying the aspects of his essay "Literature of Exhaustion" in his own novel, *Chimera*, and to investigate his purposes in the structure and themes of the novel to achieve his goal to revitalize postmodern novels.

This essay aims to answer two important questions which are: "what are the functions, if any, of 'Metafiction', 'Heteroglossia' and 'Mythology' in Barth's *Chimera*?" and "Is it possible to say that John Barth succeeded in applying the aspects of "Literature of Exhaustion" to his own novel *Chimera*? If so, what are his purposes in the structure and themes of the novel?". In order to address these questions, considerations regarding the structure and narrative processes are to be examined. A study of some theorists and writers such as Patricia Waugh, Alaine Robbe Grillet and Jorge Luis Borges can be profitable in its own right in this essay to discuss narrative qualities of the novel, and it is John Barth's narrative discourse itself that will provide the unifying focus for the different grafts. The methods consist of interpreting and comparing the sources, analyzing Barth's essays and the techniques of his writing in *Chimera*; moreover, Barth's historical awareness of literary traditions and his postmodern inclinations will be discussed.

In order to shed light on the concepts of "metafiction", "mythology", "heteroglossia" and "Barth's pedagogy" in *Chimera*, this essay is divided into four sections. In the first section, "The Construction and Deconstruction of Illusions" will be analyzed to explore the mixture of fictional and real worlds of *Chimera*. The next section, "The Orchestration of Polyphony of Voices", intends to provide the concept of 'heteroglossia' to examine the possibility of polyphony of voices in *Chimera*'s each novella and its effect on narrative qualities of the novel and to explore the pluralization of *Chimera*'s monological worlds to shape Barth's narrative strategies. The third section of the present study "The Decadence of Mythology" intends to discern the role of mythical characters in the narrative qualities of *Chimera*, and to discuss the influence of their decadence on the novel's narrative functions based on the essay "Literature of Exhaustion". The fourth section, "Barth's Success in the Pedagogy of Writing", will be studied through examining Barth's role in writing the novel. The last section of this essay intends to mention important results in conclusion.

2. Discussion

2.1. The Construction and Deconstruction of Illusions in *Chimera*

The concept of metafiction can be regarded as one of the main key terms in the discussion of John Barth's narrative qualities. Metafiction, as a term, is created to pose questions about the relationship between fictionality and reality of a text; moreover, it examines the fundamental structures of narrative fiction and the possible fictionality of the world outside literary text (Waugh, 1984:4). Barth tries to undermine both the real and the fictional world's ontological stability by mixing the details of the fictional and real worlds. For instance, Polyeidus, as one of the fictional character in the mythological world in the third novella, *Bellerophoniad*, began a lecture about the

fact that man is free to create himself (1972: 159); therefore, Barth mixes the details of fictional and real worlds. This can be the result of both the concept of metafiction in the novel and the author's lack of authority. The collapse of ontological boundaries in different parts of the novel seems to convince the reader that there are no boundaries between real life and fiction as Barth believes that an author comes into being in the act of writing (Nicole, 2009:78). As a matter of fact Barth in "Literature of Exhaustion" believes that life is a fiction (2002:73); therefore, he tries to prove it by rewriting literature and mythology throughout irony and parody.

Barth in his essay "Literature of Exhaustion" illustrates that he is under the influence of Luic Borges's writing techniques, for instance the "contamination of reality by dream" (Ibid: 71), as one of the themes in Borges's creative writing, is one of Barth's favorite fictional devices that imagines a fictional work into existence and it can represent the metaphor for the author's concerns; as a matter of fact, this reality can be suffering from exhaustion of literature by contemporary writers; therefore, he attempts to apply this element in a fictional work to affirm the contamination of reality by a dream in his works, for instance he creates an author named genie as a character in *Chimera* who is struggling with the problem of writer's block which occurs from the exhaustion of traditional concepts of literature. Barth believes that all the postmodern writers suffer from "Literature of Exhaustion"; therefore, "Contamination of reality by dream" becomes one of the most important themes of Barth's writing as he is a writer of metafiction (Barth, 2002). Barth discusses that when characters in a work of fiction become readers or authors of the fiction they are, they remind the reader of the fictitious aspects of their own existence (Ibid: 73). When Dunyazadiad narrates the first story she believes that "the real magic is to understand which words work, and when, and for what; the trick is to learn the trick (Barth, 1972:8). It seems that a character such as Dunyazadiad accepts the fact that her existence and even her sister's and other characters of the story depend to the words, without words and without stories they cannot exist; therefore, they accept their own fictionality as characters of the story.

The clash between real and represented worlds confirms the fact that fiction is fictional, and it is not more than reality, when the distinction between fiction and reality becomes vague, the outside world of the novel comes into the world of the novel, and the story oscillates between the real world and the fictional world. Barth blurs the boundaries between his real life as an outside world which makes him an author with the problem of creative writing, and his fictional world as a character who seeks for the key to the treasure of writing a new piece of literature. Jorge Luis Borges's short stories often set references to fictional authors alongside references to obscure real ones and confuse the reader as to whether the fictional ones are in fact real and the real ones fabrications "(Barth, 2002). Barth tries to apply Borges' technique to blur the boundaries between real characters and fictional characters; therefore, the reader hesitates to accept real characters as fictitious ones. Barth parodied the life of the author, who assumes the role of Genie in *Chimera*. For Scheherazade, Genie may not exist as a character, because Genie the author is beyond her ontological reach. However, Genie as an author has to be seen in the process of the story, since as Barth claims; an author's task is to create a fictional universe or fictional universes (Zeigler, 1989:27). As a narrator, Genie can have the responsibility without being held responsible for it. As a matter of fact, the analogy between Genie and Scheherazade is parodied in this novel, because both of them are two storytellers from different ontological boundaries with the same concern that is the problem of writer's block.

The second story of the novel starts with Perseus as the narrator who narrates these sentences: “stories last longer than men, stones and stories, stars than stones. But even our stars’ nights are numbered, and with them will pass this patterned tale to a long-deceased earth “(Barth, 1972:59). This suggests that the beginning of the second story reminds the reader that what has been said is a fiction, but while reading the text the author, under the camouflage of Perseus, starts to talk and the author’s entrance into the fiction mixes reality and fictionality; therefore, metafiction dominates the pattern of the novella. Its function is to help Barth to achieve his purpose which is creative writing. Perseus believes that as other characters may have noticed, myth isn’t reality (Ibid, 106). By this sentence Perseus undermines his own reality as a mythical character. In other words, metafiction’s function is to create a fiction and then to make a statement about the creation of that special fiction (Waugh, 1984:6).

In contemporary metafiction both life and novels are constructed through frames, and this is impossible to know where one frame ends and another begins (Ibid: 29); therefore, the novel ends with “it’s no Bellerophoniad. It’s a “(1972:308). There is not any ending and any frame for the novel here. As the concept of ‘frame’ is related to Chinese-box structures, in John Barth’s *Chimera* this structure is based on individual ‘box’ through a nesting of narrators (Ibid, 31), for instance the first novella’s story includes different narrators. The story is fixed, but the narrators change and each of the characters narrate different parts of the first story and even in some parts the reader cannot be sure which character is speaking. For instance, in the second part of the first novella the reader reads these lines: “her eye still averted, Dunyazade explained in a dull voice that one aspect of her sister’s revenge was this reversal not only for the genders of teller and told (as convinced by the Genie), but of their circumstances, the latter now being at the former’s mercy” (1972: 39). This suggests that the reader can be confused, because he cannot identify the real narrator. The narrator can be more than one person; therefore, the reader cannot recognize which character is speaking.

The construction and deconstruction of illusion can be one aspect of any metafictional text which can be traced in some parts of the novel. The last novella, Bellerophoniad, is written based on this aspect of metafiction when the protagonist of this story tries to construct his own story as a hero, but he himself deconstructs his own story because he just tries to imitate other heroes and he questions his own existence. The novel ends with Bellerophon’s speech as he says:” I hate this, World! It’s not at all what I had in mind for Bellerophon. It’s a beastly fiction, ill-proportioned, full of loungers, lumps, lacunae, a kind of monstrous mixed metaphor” (Barth, 1972: 308); thus, the illusion of Bellerophon’s life is deconstructed as a metafiction. Metafictions always remain mimetic, as Bellerophoniad claims that “Art is as natural an artifice as Nature: the truth of Fiction is that Fact is fantasy; the made up story is a model of the world” (1972:246); therefore,” narrative diegesis is a natural act of the human mind, transformed from life to art. What is new in modern self-conscious fiction is the acknowledged involvement of the reader (Hutcheon, 2013: 47).

Barth’s fiction exemplifies Brian McHale’s definition of postmodernism as a form of writing preoccupied with ontological questions. These fictions remind the reader that fiction does not refer to some outside reality of the reader but inside its own imagined world (1975:51). What Barth creates in his own imagined world moves him toward a fictional world to let him escape from the problems and challenges of writer’s block, as Perseus says, “that’s how it was, and at the time we were archetype, not stereotypes; reality, not myth. Your own stonework, so realistic in its day, I’ll

bet its legendary now. So, it goes” (1972: 129). A metafiction list “belittles[s] the significance of his fiction as ephemeral illusion and establishes its relevance to the reader’s life. “The reader becomes aware of the potency of the fiction as a fiction in the worlds of fiction and of the destructiveness of fictions” (Currie, 1995:214). As “Bellerophon wishes he had never begun this story” (1972:170), the reader can understand the fact that Bellerophon’s goal is just to create a story and it is completely outside the level at which the reader exists which is perfectly the imagined world of Bellerophon himself. It focuses the reader’s attention on the question of reading rather than writing, but each character’s main concern is the question of writing, that is specified how to read the challenging fiction the author, and in some cases the characters produce (McHale, 1975:52). A metafictional text’s aim can be “the imitation of creative process” (Hutcheon, 2013: 40); therefore, the power of creation becomes the main role of both the reader and the writer.

Robbe-Grillet’s *nouveau roman* (1975) indicates the “practice of writing”, which is the main concern of each of the characters and the author himself in *Chimera*. Barth’s fictional worlds are not unitary even in retour de personages, when the identical characters recur in different novellas by the same author and his fictional worlds are not unitary, because they are just an uneasy juxtaposition of incommensurable worlds. Barth’s works are similar to Robbe-Grillet in this sense. The juxtaposition of Barth’s world with the world of Scheherazade reveals two different levels of ontological instability in the first novella. Robbe-Grillet’s technique is to parody the device of instability of fictional worlds and characters of the novels as intertextual zones. Barth’s goal by the juxtaposition of different worlds and ontological instability of his fiction is to parody mythical characters and archetypes to write new stories without any originality. If the reader compares Barth’s retour de personage with that of Robbe-Grillet, he’ll understand the fact that Barth uses this technique through exaggeration, for instance he applies all of his major characters from *The Floating Opera* (1956) to *Chimera* (1972), and combines them in a new fictional world. The characters are aware of living through a sequel and this awareness can sometimes be too vague to destroy the realistic illusion (McHale, 1975:57). “The illusion of reality make connections between life as the reader knows it and the fictional world. The reader pretends to discriminate between fiction and reality in the process of actually doing the opposite: confusing the two” (Currie, 1995: 214). It seems that the narrator is “violating what was originally designed as a realist mode of fiction (Ibid).

In Barth’s novel the overplot of the mythic quest demonstrates the fact that all the characters are self-consciously the plotters of the story, for instance in the first story, *Dunyazadiad*, the characters decide the ending of the story or in the second and third stories, *Perseus* and *Bellerophon*, the main characters try to write the stories of their heroic lives. As a matter of fact, the overlap of the mythic quests with the stories of Barth demonstrates his lack of authorial control over his own text. Patricia Waugh in her book “Metafiction” believes that all of the characters of Barth “embrace nothing but the ‘baroque exhaustion of the frightening guises of reality’” (Ibid). Barth’s fictional world is merely similar to Borges’ stories, where “already a fictitious past occupies in our memories the place of another, a past of which we know nothing with certainty – not even that it is false” (Ibid).

John Barth’s comment ‘if Beethoven’s sixth were composed today, it would be an embarrassment; but clearly, it wouldn’t be, necessarily, if done with ironic intent by a composer quite aware of where we’ve been and where we are’ (1984:50) admits that other characters are free to be

reconstructed in other people's imaginations, and even in other people's texts and films, even an author can appear in other texts and scripts.

Barth tries to have the metafictional gesture of frame-breaking in all of his works and mostly in *Chimera* by oscillating and destabilizing ontological levels, for instance in the third novella Philonoe asks Bellerophon not to kill Chimera. She says: "bring her back alive for the University's Zoology Department. Okay, Bellerophon? She grew excited at the idea: we could build Chimera an asbestos cage; her breath could be used to heat the whole zoo free of charge" (Barth, 1972: 223). This part of the novel both represents different ontological levels and at the same time and it can be the parody of mythology in a sense of humor.

In the metafictional gesture one illusory reality is sacrificed to a higher reality of the author and this absolute reality of the author becomes just another level of fiction and introduces him into the fiction to become a fictional character (McHale, 1975: 197). In the first novella, Barth hides behind other characters and in the third novella he, as the author, starts to talk. He claims, "My general interest in the wondering-hero myth dates from my thirtieth year, when reviewers of my novel *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960) remarked that the vicissitudes of its hero follow in some detail the pattern of mythical heroic adventure (Barth, 1972: 198). This metafictional frame-breaking is repeated both at the level of the fictional world and at the level of the author, who now is part of the fiction; therefore, here the author has the role of the author in the first person narrative.

Barth merely rejects coherent narrative and for him narrative is the result of interpretation and selection. This conceit describes the self-reflexive and self-conscious techniques of the 'metafictional' writers; therefore, Barth's *Chimera* is "a self-informing fiction" (Hutcheon, 2013: 37) that thematizes the consequences of writer's block and the influences of archetypes on contemporary writing as the most important issues in his essay, "Literature of Exhaustion". As McHale believes metafiction is not a mirror-reflection of the world, it is a combination of worlds that the reader himself must make sense by relating these worlds to other texts that none of them are related to the external world and all to the internal worlds (McHale, 1975), for instance Bellerophon, as a reader of his own life story, knows that his heroic life is constructed by someone else or Dunyazadiad knows that her existence is completely related to words.

The heroic characters' lives are framed as they experience the world as mediated through a range of discursive and narrative constructs. At first the reader can see the realistic layer of the artistic work; however, it can provide different layers and different worlds of the artistic text. For instance, while reading *Bellerophoniad*, at first the reader may not pay attention to the author's indirect presence behind the story of Bellerophon, but as this novella can have different layers of meaning each reader can enter different worlds of the novel. Any narrative of the fictional world represents not just a small frame of the work, but larger sections and inwarded frames. It represents the ability of the author to decide which parts of the represented world to frame.

The frame in fiction is the narration of the text, because by this narrative framing the fictional world and the real world come together and by this relationship between these two worlds the reader can see the fictional world and he/she can enter this layer of the artistic text to experience the elements and happenings of the fictional world by the help of narrative. The real world of the author in the first novella includes the writer's block and the fictional world of the author reveals

itself in the character of Genie as a fictional character who tries to solve his “writer’s block” by helping Scheherazade and her sister. These two different worlds of the author combine to shape the metafictional structure of the novel.

As one of the functions of metafiction can be fiction which refers to other fictions, and a fiction which comment on the artist’s work, *Chimera* refers to other fictions such as mythologies, *Odyssey* and *Decameron*. In the first novella Barth states, “to this example, which delighted him, the Genie added several unfamiliar to us: a great epic called *odyssey*, for instance, whose hero returns home after twenty years of war and wandering; another work called *Decameron*” (1972:25). In the third novella he writes, “I couldn’t help remarking that she’d done much rewriting already of Perseus’s history” (Ibid: 278). Here, the author asserts that his fiction refers to other fictions. Barth’s purpose can be to offer a ‘parodic metafiction’ as for Barth mythical characters are not heroes anymore, instead they have tedious lives which make them weak; in addition, he comments on his own novel as a rewriting of another hero’s life. As the function of any metafictional text is to have a meaning making structure, Barth ironically parodies the texts of literary history to create a new art object with its own unique meaning; therefore, he tries to apply other fictions on his work to complete the process of creation and to give meaning to his fiction by the help of other fictions.

Each novella in *Chimera* is constructed based on two different stories; the first story of each novella is about a mythical hero or an archetype that is deteriorating, and at the same time, the second story is about a writer who is trying to write a new piece of literature to rescue from decadence. Barth juxtaposes the elements of fiction and theory as metafiction is totally aware of its own status as an artificial, created entity and willingly transfers this awareness to the reader. As the objective truth is absent in a metafictional work, for Barth the only real “truth” can be obtained by the fictional world. Although, one may not objectively understand the real world, the world of fiction might be understood, and exploring it may therefore allow one to more effectively “organize one’s experience so that [one] can deal with the world” (Waugh, 1984). As any metafictional work can include fictional systems of meaning made to prepare order and coherence to reality, metafictional characters often “decide to create or invent a system of meaning which will help to supply their lives with hope, order, possibly even some measure of beauty”. For instance, Bellerophon says, “the suffering was real. There was Perseus, raised from his misery and shining in the sky; here was Bellerophon, miserably content, holding his story in my hand” (1972:141). Bellerophon is hopeless in his life; therefore, he decides to imitate Perseus to shine in the sky and to supply his life with hope. This can help the metafictionalist, such as Barth, to move beyond self-reflexive literature to a new original and revolutionary form of art which refers to its own being (Barth, 2002); therefore, language play gradually becomes more important than theme and content for these postmodernist writers.

Mostly metafictional works are written in a way that they are more than a story; they can be analyzed on a deeper level, because any fiction criticizes its own existence and status as a reflexive criticism to raise fundamental questions about literature, life and mankind. In the third novella Bellerophon is mostly involved in these fundamental questions as he says: “I asked a few trial questions – who am I? et cetera- and receiving no reply sent it out with mixed feelings on the next tide “(Barth, 1972:245). His life is full of reflexive criticism and in this novella the reader faces this notion of Barth’s writing as Bellerophon says: “all that night I swatted bugs, studied stars, listened to my

heartbeat, wondered what a Bellerophon prospectus was. My name, from endless repetition, lost its sense “(Ibid).

Patricia Waugh believes that the foundations of metafiction are the notions of relativity and skepticism (1984). Every character of Barth’s novella and even Barth himself, both as a writer and as a character, challenges reflexivity and skepticism throughout each novella. From the first novella Scheherazade doubts whether she can be a good storyteller or not. This can be the main concern of Barth who struggles with writer’s block. He doubts “whether he abandoned fiction or fiction him” (Barth, 1972: 9). The notion of skepticism spreads throughout the whole novel in a way that every character is involved in it. Metafiction, after representing fiction, starts to question fiction. Each of the mythical characters question their heroic lives and they try to change their stories. Each of the stories as metafiction fill the role of reflexive-criticism, as it is the base of these metafiction; they parody mythical heroes and mythology.

In a metafictional work the audience is free to have many different interpretations from the text. In *Chimera* there can be two different audiences. The first audience is the reader who is reading the text, and the second audience is the character in each novella who plays the role of the audience to hear the stories of each heroic character, for instance, in the second novella Perseus is telling his life story to Calyxa who is a nymph, and in the third story Bellerophon tells some parts of his life story to Melanippe. On the other hand, in a metafictional text the artist may have his own purpose or intention. Again there can be two different meanings for the word ‘artist’ in *Chimera*. The first meaning of it can refer to the author of the work, John Barth, whose intentions of writing already was explained in his essays “Literature of Exhaustion” and “Literature of Replenishment”. The second meaning of the word ‘artist’ can refer to the mythical characters and archetypes in each novella in which their intention is to tell their heroic stories again in a different way. They become the writers of their own fiction, and their intention is to find a new narrative structure for their heroic stories; however, the process of writing metafiction and its interpretation is not related to the author or the narrator’s intention, as any reader can have several different interpretations of the work.

Some critics believe that a metafictionalist does not try to create another world or worlds which can be superior to reality, whereas the writer of a metafictional work tries to escape these worlds (McHale, 1987:32). This notion can be traced in *Chimera* in a way that both the author and the characters are attempting to escape from the worlds they have created, Barth tries to escape from the world in which he struggles with writer’s block; therefore, to solve his problem he moves from the first novella’s world to the second novella and then again he leaves the second novella’s world and he steps into the world of the third novella. He creates a world, leaves it, creates another world and at the end he leaves the already created world again. Mostly the character’s escape from their world to the new created world can indicate the notion of escaping from already created worlds in metafictional works, as the writer and all the characters are retreating from their real worlds the positive results from their art might be lost.

As it was mentioned before, any metafiction can be a parody; therefore, the character’s ‘search for truth’ within their creation may be mocked in different ways throughout the novel, for instance, Bellerophon’s heroic deeds are mocked throughout the novella by telling him that he is not the actual killer of Chimera and he does not have any active role in this heroic act. Thus, he becomes

just a passive character in a way that nothing becomes as important for him as just imitating successful heroes such as Perseus. What happens for Bellerophon and even other characters is that they just continue their quest, just as metafiction continues their creation and investigation. As the fiction of Beckett is considered a nihilistic work and it is still worth reading for its view of the world, even if the characters and the authors in metafiction are trying to escape from what they have created, their investigations illustrate that still they are hopefully trying to uncover the meaningful relationships with different worlds and metafiction worth reading (Barth, 1984).

When some characters are created in a work of metafiction they cannot be free of the text in which they are written, but they can be reconstructed in other texts by the imagination of other writers. If some other characters that are presented by an author appear in author's novel, then even the writer can appear in other works too, for instance, in the first novella as Scheherazade appears in Barth's *Chimera*, Barth can transfer in the story of *One Thousand and One Night* by the mask of a character named Genie. What he knows from the characters of Scheherazade's story is based on his own twentieth-century perspective as he does not live with them (Waugh, 1984: 12).

In short, it was observed that *Chimera*, as a metafiction, includes Barth's different purposes in writing a postmodern work based on his theories in the essay "Literature of Exhaustion". As it was mentioned in this section, metafiction is one of the most important key terms in Barth's narrative techniques to juxtapose real and fictional worlds together.

2.2. The Orchestration Polyphony of Voices in *Chimera*

One of the functions of narrative qualities in the postmodern era is to question narrative traditions of the past; thus, the concept of heteroglossia, as one of the major themes in Barth's novels, can remove narrative traditions to rejuvenate literary works. A novel can be constructed based on concrete social speech diversity. As the function of heteroglossia is to apply the polyphony of voices on the novel, it can juxtapose different language styles, genres and intertextual citations. In fact, the pluralization of worlds is implicit in heteroglossia. As a matter of fact, a fiction can include individual monological worlds of discourse; for instance, the first novella of *Chimera* involves Scheherazade's world of discourse which is monological, but as soon as another character from another world of discourse enters and disrupts her world, these two discourses combine and form a postmodern fiction. Each discourse, whether Scheherazade's or genie's, has its own voice and when they intermingle the polyphony of voices occurs because different intertextual concepts juxtapose and the pluralization of worlds occur in the novel; therefore, at any moment an alien discourse can be injected to a closed world of discourse and these two discourses combine (Nicole, 2009:168). The technique of injecting another world of discourse into a homogenous discourse world to create polyphony is typical in postmodernist fiction, as in the first novella the discourse world of Genie is injected to the closed world discourse of Scheherazade and in the second and third novella the world discourse of the author combines with the world discourse of mythical characters.

Barth applies the device of 'glossing' specialized counterculture vocabulary and he translates it to the language of today's world to foreground the language and anti-language dialectic in *Chimera*. In the third novella the language Antia uses to talk to Bellerophon can refer to this dialectic. She says; "let the kid to be a semigoddamn demigod; who cares?" (1972:181) the language she uses is

against what the reader imagines in his mind as a mythological character's speech, or in the second novella, Philonoe, that is a mythical character's girlfriend starts to talk as a contemporary university student (Ibid:208). Barth uses the anti-language of slang world used by Antia; on the other hand, he uses the language of official culture to talk about the book and its world; therefore, he stages the confrontation between language and anti-language (McHale, 1989:170). The author uses the language of slang world and the language of contemporary university students to parody mythological heteroglossia. The effect of the glossing can be alienating and aggressive for the reader, because the imitation of the reader's knowledge can be challenged. The narrator is aware of the limitations of the reader's knowledge and assumes him as an outsider. One of the potentials of polyphony in any fictional text is to undermine the stable ontology. As mentioned earlier, an ontological violation can appear in any postmodernist fiction, for instance, mythical characters start to talk like university students. The juxtaposition of these discourses influences the stable ontology of the text. Segments from different discourses combine and they develop the ontological tension discourse-worlds and even any discourse can have different layers.

The fictional character confronts a conflict between a monological world-view and the multiple-world universe of Barth's polyphonic text. When Bellerophon states, "I wonder how many voices are telling my tale. It seems to me that my first being transformed into the story of my life. , at best a sorely qualified immortality, the narrative voice was clear and objective" (1972:142), it is an example of the conflict between monological world, and multiple worlds. Each character feels that language subverts him/her, as Genie says, "My name is a jumble of letters" (Ibid: 10) because the power of language influences the power of the author and even language can deteriorate his power. Language subverts the author's authority and the character's attempt for immortality; therefore, Language seems to be against the author, and the characters.

As "Heteroglossia emerges in cultures which embrace several languages, cosmopolitan cultures in which the various national languages are mutually ever of one another" (McHale, 1975:171). What Barth depicts in this novel is the mixture of cosmopolitan cultures, such as mythology with contemporary discourse. Barth, by using this technique tries to reconstruct the original conditions for the novel's creation, as mentioned before; Barth's purpose is to return the novel to its historical roots, such as mythology by the device of heteroglossia. In the third novella he states that, one of the thematic concerns of his fiction is the desire for immortality, especially by the mythic hero's transformation into the sound of his own voice (1972:199). He argues that by returning to the voices of mythical characters, as narrative roots of stories, an author can create new methods of storytelling.

Bakhtin's polyphony can emphasize "the variety of different positions available for the author within a text" (Keen, 2003:9), according to Bakhtin, multiple voices of characters mediate the author's voice within the text. Each character represents the author's voice in *Chimera*, as Bellerophon says, "I think I'm dead. I'm full of voices, all mine, non me; I can't keep straight who's speaking, as I used to" (1974:147). Here, the reader can understand the author's voice behind Bellerophon's mask as a person who carries the voice of all the characters in his fiction. Multiple attitude voices of characters are positioned in dialogic relation to one another. These voices can be diverse, and each of them can have social types implied by these voices.

A novelistic discourse, according to Bakhtin, represents interactions among voices that imply social beings. Brian Richardson believes that, "contemporary fiction is replete with a polyphony

of competing narrative voices, even where the narrator's speaking situation seems fixed, the proliferation of alternative voices threatens to destabilize that situation "(Keen, 2003 :48). In the third novella Barth writes, "Did Bellerophon's grounding happen all at once or gradually, over the years of his marriage? You know the story. I wish I were dead" (1974: 146). It seems that the narrator is the author here, but as this fiction is replete with the polyphony of voices, the narrator can be Bellerophon, his wife or his mistress; therefore, the situation can be destabilized in the third novella by several narrative voices. The function of heteroglossia in the novella can be to parody mythical character's monological voice to create a contemporary fiction.

Bakhtin's polyphony or heteroglossia includes the meaning of different" voices of a narrative text and these voices response to particular historical conditions and ideologies", one of its features can be" hearing the voices of those who may have been silenced or ignored in the past" (Ibid: 52). As for Barth "all writers are more or less faithful amanuenses of the spirit, translators and annotators of pre-existing archetypes" (1984:55), he prefers to apply the voices of those silent pre-existing archetypes to avoid originality and to hear their voices as important parts of literature. Scheherazade is considered as one of the best archetypes of storytelling for Barth; thus, he attempts to keep her voice alive for contemporary storytellers, as he said in all the years he has been writing stories, her book has been beside him (1972: 13). Double-voiced qualities of narration that represent different stages to narratees can be another function of heteroglossia. This can be one of the features of Barth's writing throughout *Chimera*. In the third novella Zeus comments, "By imitating perfectly the Pattern of Mythic Heroism, your man Bellerophon has become a perfect imitation of a mythic hero. That sort of thing amuses us" (1972: 297). This can be an example of double-voiced narrative as the narrators can be both Barth and Zeus at the same time.

Bakhtin's view of language and its intertextual nature can extend the reader's understanding of the novel's dialogism. For Bakhtin dialogism and the character's personality are interrelated, as any character can have his/her own specific personality; moreover, Bakhtin believes that a character's personality is expressed through his/her words; thus, when a character speaks, according to Bakhtin, this character is expressing a 'worldview 'that makes his voice different from others and the character gains his own specific discourse. For instance, Scheherazade, as a role model for storytelling, believes in herself as an artist, as she advocates, "artists have their own tricks" (1972:4); whereas, Bellerophoniad is upset and he struggles self-criticism (Ibid:139). For Barth, the construction of any hero can lead to a construction of an autonomous discourse, all the heroes and heroines, from Scheherazade to Bellerophon; create different specific discourses to communicate and to have their own specific voice. Barth, as the author, tries to hide his specific voice behind the discourses of each character he constructs. As a matter of fact, while reading a novel a reader cannot see the hero, the reader hears the hero; therefore, when the hero's discourse is autonomous, it means that it can be a pure voice; as a result, a reader can communicate with heroes toward their specific voices. A polyphonic novel includes a world, or many worlds, in which all characters and narrators have their own discourses and this polyphonic novel does not involve an objective, authorial voice; therefore, the world of the novel includes many discourses that are different interpretation of this world which responses and calls other discourses, and there is not any objective narrative voice to guide the reader through the voices, responses and world-views of the novel (Allen, 2000: 23).

One way of narration that aims to highlight the polyphonic quality in Bakhtin's sense of the term is the existence of two dominant narrative modes in the tradition of novel writing which are first-person and third-person narration voice. Both the first-person narrator and the third-person narrator can be other subjective voices in the novel, and they can play the role of objective narrators. Barth presents the reader with a world full of individual voices including the narrator(s) with controlling and omnipotent narrator. For instance, in the second novella, *Perseid*, the reader reads: "I wonder how many voices are telling my tale. It seems to me that upon my first being transformed into the story of my life, as bet a sorely qualified immortality, the narrative voice was clear and objective" (Barth, 1972: 142). Here, although the narrator seems to be objective, the character is aware of his subjective voices and for the reader the narrator is anonymous, as the reader cannot be sure who the narrator is in this part of the novel.

The switch of narrating from first point of view to third point of view is one of the aims of Barth's writing to both apply the similarity between the author and the character, and at the same time to represent different voices in the process of reading each novella. For instance, in the third novella, "Bellerophon wishes he had never begun this story. But he began it. Then he wishes he were dead. But he's not. Therefore, he reconstructs it painfully for his darling Amazon, as he once pained with it patient Philonoe" (1972:170) and the narrative changes to the first-person," so on the way to Tiryns it occurred to me to try again".

By comparing Barth and Bakhtin's ideas about the author, they both believe that the author's trace is still behind his/her novel, but maybe he does not have the role of a guiding authoritative voice. By reading Barth's *Chimera* the reader can perceive the author's attempt to decentralize himself from the text. For instance, Proetus pointed out that his "Illustrations were drawn from the future and so lent substances to his own conviction that mythic heroes weren't that they used to be; that the present crop was small potatoes compared to the generation of their fathers- an age of gold, so to speak, succeeded by an age of brass" (1972: 177). Here, Barth disguises behind the face of Pretus to explain his ideas about the mythic heroes. No authoritative voice can be heard throughout the novel, thus the author seems to play hide and seek through the novel by appearing and disappearing throughout each novella. In all the three novellas the reader can feel the trace of the author, John Barth, but he is not in the center of the reader's attention. There is not any original imagination for Barth's characters, because, according to Bakhtin's description on Dostoevsky's speech, much of Barth's speech, as it was mentioned earlier, is full of parodies, utterances, distinct social and cultural positions, transformations and other kinds of speech genres.

'double- voice discourse', as one of the main points in Barth's writing, can be traced through the novel, for instance, while reading *Bellerophoniad* , the reader can trace both the voice of the character , Bellerophon, and the voice of the author (Allen, 2000: 25). Bellerophon says:" in conclusion, I call your attention to the ambiguity of my official mythic history" (1972: 233). Here, it seems that Barth is having a speech and presenting his thesis about mythic history and it is not about Bellerophoniad talking about his life. It seems that Barth's characters' speech represent the comments of other speakers, even arguing and criticizing each other , so based on Bakhtin's ideas ,the discourses are dependent to other people's utterances. What happens in the third novella represents the utterance of a single speaker and the dialogic address with the other character; therefore, internal monologues can be double-voiced, as Bellerophon states," All that night I swatted bugs, studied stars, listened to my heart beat, wonder what a Bellerophonic prospectus

was. My name, from endless repetition, lost its sense “(1972: 245). The characters can create a network of utterances. These utterances can be Bellerophon himself, Barth, Perseus or even Scheherazade; therefore, a character’s thoughts are not just simply his own, his thoughts can represent his dialogic place in the world of the novel (Allen, 2000: 25).

During reading *Chimera* different characters’ worlds become double-voiced, because mostly all of them represent the clash between different classes and literary positions. From Scheherazade’s story in the first novella to the last novella which is *Bellerophoniad* the double-voiced technique can be traced. In the third novella Bellerophon says, “ she volunteered to tutor me in writing if I’d give her flying lessons indeed, she told me frankly that the only thing that bothered her about me ,hero-wise, was my articulateness and apparent gentleness of manner :heroes ,she fancied ,should be rougher-edged and less ready of speech” (1972: 209);therefore, double-voiced discourse is one of the main concerns in any dialogic novel that leads the reader to intertextuality. “All utterances depend on or call to other utterances are shot through with other, competing and conflicting voices” (Allen, 2000: 27) ;thus, what stands behind each word of the novel represents dialogic interaction not just a single voice and its existence draw upon transferring from one context to another context and from one generation to another generation (Bakhtin,1984:201).

The clash of past utterances and present utterances within the language can represent individual utterances. What happens in the polyphonic novel is that, as individual character’s speeches are double-voiced, two speakers are speaking at the same time and each of them can have different intentions,” the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author” (Allen, 2000: 29). This can represent the intertextual nature of language. Heteroglossia includes in many different social languages of different classes in society. For instance, Philonoe says,” in my senior thesis I argue that mythic heroes do this now and then to show that it’s the general favor of the gods that gives them their clout, rather than some particular item of gear, which could be lost, stolen or neutralized. It’s a debatable generalization, I know, but I had to get a prospectus in by mid-semester. I hope you’ll take a look at my list of examples and counter-examples” (1972:231).

In addition, heteroglossia can be translated as ‘multi-linguagedness’ which refers to both spoken and written language and novel as a specific form, because it can include different types of speech and any form of novel can reflect different societies. *Chimera* reflects many societies such as the world in which Scheherazade lives, the world of Genie, mythological character’s societies and even contemporary society of the author. Each novella mirrors its own society which is not fixed and can change by the double-voicedness of the characters, as the form of novella is considered as a social form, because it includes many different voices that interact with each other.

Different discourses encounter in a novel, and they lead to different points of views, because different viewpoints enter into a relationship with each other. According to Bakhtin meaning is not a stable phenomenon as long as it is expressed in a language; thus, Informal discourses can combine with formal discourses (Ibid: 9) such as the combination of the discourse of today’s university students with the discourse of mythical characters in the third novella of *Chimera*. It seems that Barth’s aim is the interconnection of the history of mythical characters to the contemporary world.

As Bakhtin pays a special attention to the utterance, his concepts challenge the reader or listener in the process of the novel as an active participant in understanding different voices in the text to make a meaningful communication ;therefore, these concepts can challenge traditional role of the reader or listener (Zappen, 2004:11). As mentioned before, one of the important goals of Barth in his essay “Literature of Exhaustion” is to challenge the traditional narrative; thus, by the help of Bakhtin’s views he attempts to prove that the traditional triptych of speaker, audience and subject cannot show the importance of utterance “as part of an ongoing, complex, interactive web of discourse set within a social context”(Ibid), because each of the parts of the triangle, listener, reader and audience can have multiple roles and it goes beyond a triangle because the discourse includes complex webs. For instance, in *Chimera*, there is more than one speaker that each of them can be indirectly the listeners. In the third novella, Melanippe plays the role of both the listener and the speaker of the story, and at the same time she is an indirect writer of Bellerophon’s story; therefore, “Every utterance is many utterances; every speaker is many speakers” (Ibid) the concept of polyphony, according to Bakhtin, can have some functions such as creating different ideas that leads to a process of social transformation. The context of each text is related to the context of other texts. (Ibid: 38).

In Bakhtin’s idea language is “an active viewing of each utterance from the perspective of the other “(Ibid: 34). Each reader needs to know the fundamental role of the other to have an understanding of him. Bakhtin believes that the reader’s experience of another person such as his sufferings, can project the reader into other person. For instance, in the first novella Genie plays the role of a reader for Scheherazade’s *The Thousand Nights and a Night*; therefore, as both of them are storytellers he, as the reader, by returning to himself, can be able to understand her sufferings. Any character can reflect several linguistic and cultural systems such as the language of an author, of an artist, of a hero and everyday life and the languages which can occur in the consciousness of the characters such as the languages of Scheherazade and Genie as storytellers and artists, consequently several cultures and languages from different ages are connected to each other; therefore, the heteroglot worlds of characters have become dialogized, and the understanding of each language and culture can be viewed by the perspective of others.

In sum, heteroglossia or the polyphonic creating of ideas, helps Barth to participate along with the characters and the readers in *Chimera* to use devices such as parody to make the ideas more creating, as the concept of dialogism and heteroglossia can be regarded as a response to the crisis of the individual author confronted to challenge with the traditional norms of writing.

2.3. The Decadence of Mythology

The main concern of the present discussion is to observe the function of mythological characters on the narrative structure of the novella. Barth’s interest in comparative mythology in the 1960s “-mythic patterns and structures- “(Zeigler, 1989:14) makes his past toward applying mythological characters and archetypes in his novel; moreover, his interest in “timeless myth” (Ibid) helps him to make a transworld level, in which the novel’s entities transfer from one ontological realm to another. This transformation can cause the loss of mythological entities’ “superior reality” and they can deteriorate to the level of mere fiction (Mchale, 1975: 36). For instance, When genie appeared from nowhere right there in Scheherazade’s library, she “asked him whether he’d come from her pen or from her words, he seemed to understand the question, though he didn’t know the

answer” (Barth, 1972: 9). Here, genie as a fictional character migrates to another ontological realm which belongs to Scheherazade and this migration causes her loss of reality and she demotes into the fictional level of existence.

Barth knows that one of the significant problems in contemporary writing is the loss of myths, therefore; he as one of the literary scholars attempts to advance a new method of writing, one that acknowledges the collapse of traditional mimetic forms and flourishes in intertextual games (1984) by writing his two essays, “Literature of Exhaustion” and “Literature of Replenishment”. For Barth one of the key terms to the new creative literary writing is to apply mythological entities in his stories, therefore; as “the collapse of traditional mimetic forms” can be one of the headings in Barth’s writing, he considers to collapse mythological stories, as traditions of writing, and to make new mythological entities, therefore; he uses and abuses these characteristics of mythology in order to create a new style of writing out of exhausted traditional forms. For instance, the rejection of heroism can be considered as one of the characteristics of the collapse of mimetic forms, and as “postmodern skepticism is presented as the refutation and rejection of modernism’s heroism” (Wilde, 1981: 87). Bellerophon in the third novella can be one of the best candidates for Barth to apply his purpose in *Chimera*. Bellerophon, as a defeated hero, becomes a great artist rather than a fabulous hero. As it was mentioned before, another major characteristic in creating a new form of literary art is to enter “intertextual games”. Barth makes each reader enter a labyrinth of mythological stories and then he artistically transfers them into the present and future time by this device, “as the letter from the future in the *Bellerophoniad* illustrates the method of applying future results of historical or scientific research to ancient myth can shed new light on patterns that seemed to be exhausted long ago” (Zeigler, 1989: 58). “Barth could envision his alter ego as having lived in the past or as living in the future. This device proved to be more than a camouflage; it opened up new literary passage ways. As a possible authentic figure from the past or the future, the mythic hero came to Barth’s mind” (Ibid, 87).

The value of myth is to reject sterility and to delay reality, therefore; the novel’s characters, especially Bellerophon, imitate the patterns of the myth and they become the parody of a hero rather than being a real hero. Stewart believes that “ostentatious use of literary and mythic allusion reinforces the notion of fictionality and the reader’s awareness of the construction of alternative worlds” (1979: 48), as Bellerophon utters:

Upset upset. My life’s a failure. I’m not a mythic hero. I never will be. Had I understood, when I consented at the end of the novella to be transformed by the seer Polyeidus into a version of Bellerophon’s life, that I might be imperfectly, even ineptly narrated, I’d have cleaved to my original program: to fall from heaven into thornbush, become a blind lame vatic figure, and float upon the marshy tide, reciting my history aloud, in my own voice, to Melanippe the Amazon- my moon, my muse, my final mortal love- as she ebbed and flooded me (1972: 139).

Myth can point to daily reality, therefore; as Murdoch believes “people create myths about themselves” (1977: 138), Barth recreates myths about himself and his problem of writer’s block. He feels trapped and he selects other people to play roles in his life. Zeigler believes that “[myths] are ready fictions which can be used by everyone as a means to cope with their own life” (26), therefore; one of its functions can be disguising a person’s identity.” If man’s essence can be changed at will, then this essence becomes identical with the masks he put on” (Ibid). Mythology

can help Barth to define himself and his problems as an author in the postmodern world, for instance, Barth can show his problem of writer's block behind the mask of Bellerophon, therefore; it can be claimed that one of the functions of mythology for Barth is to express himself to cope with his artistic life, as he says:

Moreover, like all of Borges's works, it illustrates in other of its aspects my subject: how an artist may paradoxically turn the felt ultimacies of our time into material and means for his work-*paradoxically*, because by doing so he transcends what had appeared to be his refutation, in the same way that the mythic hero transcends finitude is said to be enabled to live, spiritually and physically, in the finite world" (1984: 71).

Barth's works not only imitate but also parody myth. He paradoxically applies myth in his works and connects them to the contemporary time to create a paradox and to "demythologize genres and narratives, for parody derives from the changing of world views, while myth depends on the repetition of the unchanging" (Zeigler, p38). It can be observed that Barth parodies myth because his heroes are tragic, for instance, Bellerophon is a tragic hero since he even hasn't done his mission and he just tries to imitate mythic patterns to be like other heroes and he hasn't done his mission in a heroic manner, therefore; he reflects the tragic posture of the artist, and as any tragedy requires meaning, Barth attempts to give meaning to his tragedy by myth. For Barth any "mythical origin [is] a riddle about the loss of identity" (Ibid, 52), therefore; it can be another function of parodying mythological entities. For instance, when Proetus asks Bellerophon: "Most heroes I've heard of had a definite monster or task in mind when they set out. Doesn't your lack of one make you wonder whether you're really what you hope you are?" (1972:176), this question challenges Bellerophon's purpose and includes his lack of mission, and at the same time it refers to his loss of identity, because he hopes to be a hero with a clear task, but he lacks any heroic deed.

One of the functions of mythical allusions is to "remind the reader of the existence of this world outside every day time and space, of its thoroughgoing textuality and intertextuality" (Waugh, 1984:112). Barth, by the use of mythological entities, attempts to step out of his world's ontological level to combine the mythic world of the past to the world of reality. For instance, the combination of the worlds of Scheherazade and genie confirms the fact that the author mixes the world of past to the world of present in order to assert his purposes on the novel. A myth "transfers meaning through mere repetition" (Zeigler, 1987: 58); thus, the repetition of the past archetypes in the contemporary writing can open new paths for transferring meaning and Barth, as a postmodern author, is aware of the fact that he cannot claim originality, because he attempts to reflect the pre-texts from his point of view; as a result, Barth effectively rewrites these narratives to make them his own in *Chimera*, although he is not an authentic artist.

Although Barth's development destroys his unquestionable identity, in the process of the novel's narration, he tries to recover that identity by the help of myth, as the function of myth can be to blur the borderline between reality and fiction, it can dissolve the boundaries between identity and anonymity. For instance, in the third novella Bellerophon believes, "I was an ambitious young man, trying to become a mythic hero and purify myself at the same time, and worrying about the laws of hospitality. It was just the wrong place and the wrong time. I'm sorry about that" (1972:281). Here, the author tries to identify himself by standing behind a mythical character. He tries to blur the distance between himself as a real character and Bellerophon as a fictional

character to avoid being anonymous. In Barth's idea the origin of any story can be found in myth, because it's main function is to "dissolves the borderline between reality and fiction. This borderline can transgress in both directions; fiction can replace life, life can also replace fiction (Zeigler, 1989:55); therefore, Barth's purpose by applying mythical characters can be replacing his own life with fictional mythical characters to gain a new identity, such as the identity of an artist.

As "postmodern culture coincides with mythological deaths of authoriality, originality, spirituality, monumentality, beauty, profundity- everything" (Burt, 2000:84), Barth as a postmodern author announces the death of originality in his essay "Literature of Exhaustion" and he transfers myth in his writing to create a new literary work based on pretexts to prove the death of originality and to apply literary rejuvenation and innovation without the need for originality. The idea of the mythic hero came to Barth's mind since, "All traditionally known mythic heroes follow the same course. Moreover, not only do all mythic heroes live according to this repeated pattern, but the pattern only becomes obvious in the course of historical time, or more to the author's point, by being told and retold, again and again in the course of time. And in the end the pattern becomes more important than any proof that the mythic hero who fulfills it did in fact exist" (Zeigler, 1989: 87).

In the third novella although Polyeidus already knows the ending of the story, he advises Bellerophon, "you want to be a mythic hero, you follow the Pattern" (1972: 259). Barth tries to develop his fiction based on the narrative repetition over life. In Barth's view myth is important because it can "add structure and vitality to the daily existence (May, 1991). He tries to access new narrative strategies by replacing this repetition with new models of writing, therefore; he fictionalizes this concept in *Chimera* to create "a realm of imaginative freedom" (Zeigler, 1989: 87) in his life as an author.

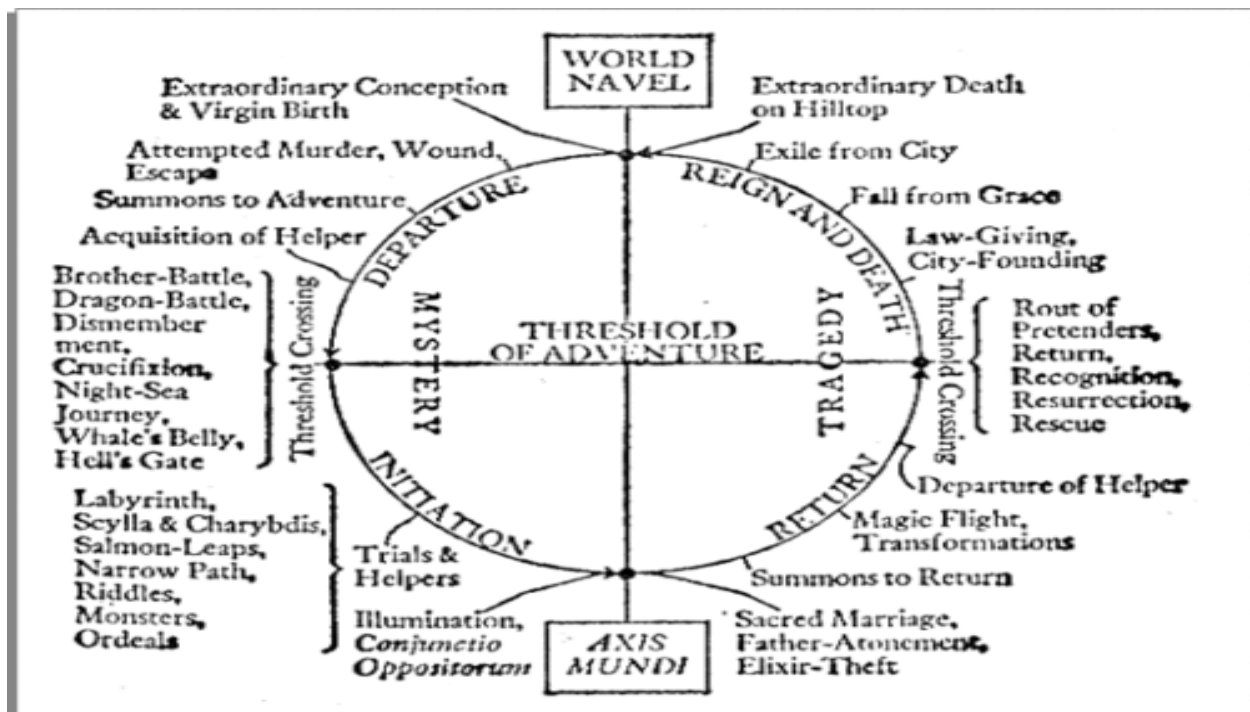


Figure1.1: The pattern of mythic heroism

At the end of the novel the author believes that,

By imitating perfectly the Pattern of Mythic Heroism, your man Bellerophon has become a perfect imitation of a mythic hero. That sort of thing amuses us. But look again at your famous Pattern. It says *Mystery* and *Tragedy*: Mystery in the hero's journey to the other world, his illumination, his transcension of categories, his special dispensation; Tragedy in his return of daily reality, the necessary loss in his translation of the ineffable into sentences and cities, his fall from the favor of gods and men, his exile, and the rest. Now look at Bellerophon's story thus far: it's not mystery and tragedy, but confusion and fiasco (1972: 297).

As figure 1.1 is repeated over and over in mythological stories, it seems that Barth attempts to parody this Pattern by challenging its repetition. He tries to illustrate that mythological characters cannot be heroes by imitating others and patterns, actually they become lost and they make confusion; therefore, following this pattern causes the decadence of mythological characters as helpless fake heroes who knows nothing but imitation.

Barth can add meaning to the daily routine by applying myth in his works. For May the loss of myth can increase alienation and meaninglessness, and Barth is aware of this fact, therefore; he tries to escape meaninglessness in his literary works, and the myths of Bellerophon and Perseid are concerned as devices for him to remove meaninglessness of life and his problems of writer's block. He states that:

Several of myths subsequent fictions_ the long short story *Menelaia* and the novella *Perseid*, for example_ deal directly with particular manifestations of the myth of the wandering hero and address as well as a number of their more current thematic concerns: the mortal desire for immortality, for instance, and it ironically qualified fulfillment especially by the mythic hero's transformation, in the latter stages of his career, into the sound of his own voice, or the story of his life, or both. I am forty" (1972: 199)

As Barth mentions in *Chimera*, "immortality" is considered as one of the concepts for removing meaninglessness and the search for immortality can be considered as one of the meanings in using myths, as the heroes in *Chimera* try to achieve immortality, it is the author's concern to be immortal in the artistic life by creating new literary works.

Any myth can be a guide for the individual's development, and Barth as an individual author attempts to develop his own technique of writing and represents his dilemmas in writing a new piece of literature by the help of myth as guidelines in his process of writing. For instance, Bellerophon as a defeated hero, and a successful author who narrates his own repetitive story guides Barth to overcome his problem of writer's block and as "myths are narratives that gives significance to our existence"(May,1991) , he searches his own identity as an author who urge immortality, therefore; the myth's function can be to deconstruct and construct self and identity, and by this method Barth , as an individual, can make sense of his own experience, because it can led him to the meaning-making process and the outcome of this process is the creation of *Chimera*, therefore; Barth first deconstructs old myths and create new mythologies to replace the meaning systems it deconstructed (Hoofman,2008). He rewrites the myths of Bellerophon and Perseus and he changes Scheherazade's archetype to achieve his own purposes, and then he reconstructs and

parodies them as new myths. In short, the decadence of mythology becomes one of the writing styles for Barth to create new path of narrating stories without originality.

2.4. Barth's success in the Pedagogy of Writing

It can be demonstrated that John Barth, as one of the important American critical authors, has first concentrated on the exhaustion of possibilities in the novel. Barth has an anxiety toward unoriginality and this concept makes him write essays such as "Literature of Exhaustion" and "Literature of Replenishment" about creating new fictions out of what already has been said in the world of fiction. For instance, in the third novella the author remarks that:

They missed one: the key to the treasure. This fellow's born into this family where all the men for centuries have worn themselves out looking for this particular Secret Treasure, okay? So when he grows up, instead of chasing all over the world like they did, he reads all the books in the library about Quests and stuff and decides that the Treasure probably somewhere I his own house" (1972:254).

For Barth originality is not saying something for the first time, rather it can be a re-saying of something that has already been said in a new way; therefore, the real treasure for Bellerophon to be immortal and to reach his purposes is not being a hero; moreover, the treasure to be immortal are the books in the library; thus, there is not any original story for Bellerophon, all he needs is to imitate pre-existing texts in the library. Barth explains the pedagogy of creative writing:

Can it be learned? Sure. Not by everybody, but by more writers per annum than anyone has time to read. Whatever the demand for their product, the supply of able American poets, novelists, and short-story writers has not declined in the second half of [20th] century. The fiction and poetry editors of the few American large-circulation periodicals that still publish fiction and poetry are comparably deluged, as are the directors of the nation's better known graduate programs in creative writing. Lots of literature out there (1985).

For Barth the literary writer's fate is similar to Scheherazade's *Thousand and One Nights*, she as a cunning storyteller attempts to create a fiction to save herself. Her dilemma can be a metaphor of every writer's predicament; the king as 'the absolute critic' stands for the audience, always threatening to stop reading and consign the writer to oblivion; therefore Scheherazade gives up political science and psychology and she turns to mythology and folklore in order to find a miracle to stop wrecking the country by the king (1972:6-7). The story of Scheherazade is "a metaphor for the condition of narrative artists in general" (1984: 135). Barth claims, "in other words, as Dunyazade and Scheherazade and the author came to learn, the key to the treasure is the treasure" (Ibid: 137) and he continues, "all these retracements, recapitulations, rehearsals, and reenactments really would be simply regressive if they didn't issue in reorientation, from which new work can proceed" (Ibid: 139). He recapitulates originality and attempts to create a new work out of oriental archetypes. The concept of replenishment can be applied in *Chimera*, as it enacts Barth's radical manifesto for the rejuvenation of literature. Barth's purpose is to shape a creative rewriting and he is also responsible for a productive demystification and challenging the notions of author, reader and text. By deconstructing this traditional triptych, Barth attempts to create a poststructuralist reorientation in narrative semiotics as he describes his work as "a reorchestrating of old

conventions and old melodies. He indicates, "I'm tempted to well, reconstruct an old story-something to the effect of let's run it through again, but in another key" (Reilly, 1981: 11). He states that, "my imagination is most at ease with an old literary convention like the epistolary novel, or a classical myth- received melody lines, so to speak, which I then orchestrate to my purpose" (Plimpton, 1985:148); therefore, he tries to reconstruct old literary conventions to his present purpose. Barth attempts to find a way out of the narrative crisis by redefining notions of origin and originality and by deconstructing traditional concepts of authorship and literary forms. For instance, when the last sentence is incomplete in the end of *Bellerophoniad*, it can represent an infinite gap and an ultimate blank as the story leaves the reader, almost gasping from exhaustion in having come so far, to the brink of an abyss of emptiness. In *Chimera*, Barth continues to struggle with this moment of 'exhaustion', yet the text allows flickers to light that seem to point to a certain direction ahead. As Bellerophon says:

What is wanted to restore [the novel's] ancient dominion is nothing less than a revolution; indeed the Revolution is waiting in the wings, the Second Revolution, and will not stay for the bicentennial of the First, than which it bids to be as more glorious as its coming, to a world impatient to be Reset Now of 'Science Fiction' (1972: 248).

In *Chimera* he states that: to the objection that classical mythology, like the Bible, is no longer the staple of the average reader's education, and that, consequently, the old agonies of Oedipus and Antigone are without effect on contemporary sensibility, I reply. Anyhow, when I had completed the Perseid novella, my research after further classical examples of the aforementioned themes lead me to the minor mythic hero Bellerophon of Corinth (1972:199).

Continuous circulation can be the result of Barth's creative rewriting, because according to Robert Con Davis it can be called a 'poststructuralist mimesis, whereby the text is both an imitation and a product of a mimetic act, as it imitates other works and this mimetic process continues (985:59). The structures of each of the novellas in *Chimera* are constructed based on a circulation of imitation, as each story is an imitation of a pre-text and each character tries to obey a mimetic act to become a hero. Moreover, self-imitation can be one part of the process of imitation. For instance, Perseus and Bellerophon attempt to imitate the life of their past to stop giving up heroism, as Perseus says, "I stayed up too late, drank too many, traded shameless on my authority to bore each night a captive audience with the story of my life" (1972:71). However, any contemporary imitation needs ironic intent, as Barth in "Literature of Exhaustion" believes, "if Beethoven's Sixth were composed today, it might be an embarrassment; but clearly it wouldn't be, necessarily, if done with ironic intent by a composer quite aware of where we've been and where we are" (1984:69); therefore, each of the novellas in *Chimera* follows imitation of pre-texts to apply ironic intent to the novel and to parody the roles of mythical characters and archetypes, for instance the ironic story of Scheherazade undermines her role as one of the best storytellers to apply new ways of writing unoriginal works based on pre-texts. He referred to it in *Chimera* as a "New, the Second Revolution, an utterly Novel Revolution" (1972: 249). As Barth regards his novels as original pieces of literature, he resurrects old characters; on the other hand, he recycles both the form and the content from the past. As mentioned earlier, the function of this recycling for Barth can be to apply irony and parody on the text to change it to a new piece of literature.

Umberto Eco in *Reflections on the Name of Rose* states, “the past, since it cannot be really destroyed, because its destruction leads to silence, must be revisited; but with irony, not innocently” (1985:67). Barth is aware of Eco’s view and he accepts it as a part of his work; thus, Barth regards ‘repetition’ as a new technique which “may be quite serious and passionate despite its farcial aspect” (1984: 72). He believes that in order to write future, a person must first rewrite the past. As Barth claims in *Chimera*, “my project is to learn where to go by discovering where I am by reviewing where I’ve been- where we’ve all been” (1972:10); therefore, he believes in “returning to the original springs of narrative” (Ibid).

After Barth finished *Lost in the Funhouse*, he faced a dead end, he was literally trapped in his own funhouse and he was struggling to overcome his writer’s block. In *Chimera* he continues, “he felt that a treasure house of new fiction lay vaguely under his hand, if he could find the key to it (1972: 19); therefore, he discovers that to write about the writer’s block is to cure his own writer’s block, as he says, “the key to the treasure is the treasure”(Ibid:11). In Barth’s view the key was the transposition of one text into another, as he says, “he had added to the morass of notes he felt himself mired in, a sketch for a story about a man who comes to realize that the key to the treasure he’s searching for is the treasure. Just exactly how so he had no chance to consider, for the instant he set on paper the words *the key to the treasure is the treasure*, he found himself (1972:11), as Morris Dickstein believes:

Barth deliberately direct the three novellas in *Chimera* as the crisis of self-consciousness that he perceives in experimental writing which had been the problematic subject of *Lost in the Funhouse* and had subsequently given him his first taste of writer’s block. His solution is to return to the earliest myths and legends, like those of Scheherazade and Greek mythology but nothing could seem further from ‘the original spring of narrative’ ”(Dickstein, 1976: 317).

Barth pays attention to the relationship between writer and reader. The reader’s role is not passive, for as Dunyazade says, “a good reader of cunning tales work[s] in her way as busily as the author” (1972: 26). The relationship between the author and reader can be fertile in this novel. It is no wonder that Barth sees himself as an imitator, as in “Literature of Exhaustion” he describes his novels as “novels which imitate the form of the Novel, by an author who imitates the role of Author (1984: 72). In short, Barth realizes that in order to be able to subvert and move beyond the myths of western literature, these myths would first have to be evoked, whereby their existence is in fact reaffirmed. This realization, this inability to shake off the yoke of mimetic realism, was seen by him as part of the “Literature of Exhaustion”; therefore, Barth becomes a writer who deliberately imitates the Novel: the first Novels known to people are already forms of imitation.

3. Conclusion

It can be claimed that the concepts of metafiction, hetroglossia and mythology are among Barth’s central concerns to become successful in the pedagogy of writing and his essay “Literature of Exhaustion” and to affect *Chimera*. He did not hesitate to express his postmodern views in this novel; therefore, Barth’s *Chimera* is rich in postmodern form and content as a role-model for contemporary writers to avoid originality and to apply Barth’s techniques to remove exhaustion and blocks in writing new pieces of literature.

In addition, Barth chose a new narrative structure in *Chimera* rather than a traditional narrative structure. Despite Barth's centrality in the postmodern literature, he attempts to affect contemporary and future writers by removing originality. The present essay has tried to shed lights on Barth's views inscribed in *Chimera*. In other words, focusing on each of the novellas has explicated his concerns in his essays. It has endeavored to show metafictional narrative qualities to avoid traditional narratives, how and why he applied heteroglossia in *Chimera*, why he advocated the decadence of mythology, and what were his strategies to become successful in the pedagogy of his essays.

Each section has attempted to explain and answer two important questions of the essay. As the concept of metafiction is regarded as one of the key terms in Barth's writing, *Chimera* can be considered as a metafiction in order to apply metafictional narrative constructions to avoid traditional narrative techniques and to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction in order to achieve creative writing in postmodern era and to deconstruct any already constructive illusions in the novel.

In order to question narrative traditions, heteroglossia has considered as one of the main themes in Barth's *Chimera*. As *Chimera* includes multiuniverses, each part of the novel enters the polyphony of voices by different characters and the author at the same time to avoid a monological world-view and to mix cosmopolitan worldviews so as to parody monological narrative structures.

The main role of mythological characters and their deterioration in *Chimera* can be considered as Barth's another technique to escape from the exhaustion and writer's block at the same time. As contemporary writing lacks mythology, Barth focuses on advancing a new strategy in literary writing in order to remove traditional mimetic writing. The decadence of mythological characters has been considered as creative parody of sterility and reality, and it can be a new window toward avoiding originality in writing a piece of literature.

Finally, the last section has provided the reader illustrations about Barth's success in applying his methods in "Literature of Exhaustion" on *Chimera*. As mentioned before, he proves that a postmodern work, such as *Chimera*, can be original in a way that it is the imitation of pre-texts and any imitation can be original in creative writing in postmodern era. He applies recapitulations, rehearsals and reenactments in *Chimera* to create a new work of literature.

Therefore, this essay has been an attempt to answer the questions in order to help the reader analyze Barth's narrative strategies and understand his goal of constructing new narrative methods in writing *Chimera*, at the end this essay might shed a light for the reader to step beyond the concepts of this paper in order to examine different narratological elements in *Chimera*.

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