



Hiding Man: A Biography of Donald Barthelme

By Tracy Daugherty

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In the 1960s Donald Barthelme came to prominence as the leader of the Postmodern movement. He was a fixture at the New Yorker, publishing more than 100 short stories, including such masterpieces as "Me and Miss Mandible," the tale of a thirty-five-year-old sent to elementary school by clerical error, and "A Shower of Gold," in which a sculptor agrees to appear on the existentialist game show Who Am I? He had a dynamic relationship with his father that influenced much of his fiction. He worked as an editor, a designer, a curator, a news reporter, and a teacher. He was at the forefront of literary Greenwich Village which saw him develop lasting friendships with Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, Tom Wolfe, Grace Paley, and Norman Mailer. Married four times, he had a volatile private life. He died of cancer in 1989. The recipient of many prestigious literary awards, he is best remembered for the classic novels *Snow White*, *The Dead Father*, and many short stories, all of which remain in print today. This is the first biography of Donald Barthelme, and it is nothing short of a masterpiece.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. This sprawling first biography of the writer Donald Barthelme (1931–1989) complements an exemplary account of the man and his milieu with a history of 20th-century architecture, film, philosophy, visual art and political activism—not to mention a stunning exegesis of Barthelme's work and a surfeit of vignettes from New York literary life in the 1960s and '70s. Daugherty, a professor of English and creative writing at Oregon State and former student of Barthelme, renders the writer of *The Dead Father* in all his complexity: the experimental iconoclast, the establishment figure without a university degree who published more than 100 stories in the *New Yorker*, the citizen-activist, admitted alcoholic, the devoted if distant father and the prankster on the page. While Daugherty firmly takes Barthelme's side in his four troubled marriages, he assesses the writer's legacy, his champions and detractors (e.g., Joyce Carol Oates, John Gardner and the hundreds of readers who canceled their *New Yorker* subscriptions in 1968 to protest the publication of his catty *Snow White*). Like Barthelme's best stories, this unapologetically literary and ambitious book is cultural and artistic bricolage at its finest. 16 pages of b&w photos. (Feb.)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Critics unanimously applaud Daugherty for the first comprehensive, analytical biography of his former teacher. *The Oregonian* calls *Hiding Man* a "remarkably tender, sympathetic treatment" of Barthelme, and while Daugherty may have given Barthelme a glowing biography, he doesn't downplay his more negative traits. The book also does an excellent job of connecting the writer to his literary and social context. The *Oregonian* notes that while Barthelme can be difficult to read, "in Daugherty's hands the stories seem not nearly as challenging as they are inviting," a point echoed by the *Washington Post*. Readers interested in Barthelme will find an informative, entertaining biography; readers unacquainted with this postmodern giant may wish to start with one of his short story collections. Copyright 2009 Bookmarks Publishing LLC

From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Mold-breaking writer Donald Barthelme (1931–89) could have been a musician or an artist, but it was obvious from an early age that language was his gift. The oldest child in a creative "hothouse" household—his flinty father was a prominent Houston architect and his brothers, Frederick and Steven, also became writers—Barthelme honed his chops as a journalist, critic, and editor, then revolutionized fiction with his wildly creative, satirical, metaphysical, and moral short stories and novels. Published regularly in the *New Yorker* for many years, Barthelme became controversial and famous and yet, in significant ways, remained little known. Daugherty was a student of Barthelme's at the University of Houston, and his fluent, enlightening biography traces the evolution of Barthelme's complex, influential aesthetic while capturing both his whimsy and sorrow. With a colorful cast of writers and artists, involving tales of family strife and artistic excitement, Daugherty's delving, simpatico portrait of "the first true American surrealist," a brilliant, bedeviled writer who "insisted that humor was his only mode of seriousness," anchors a fascinating chapter in American letters by reclaiming and redefining a risk-taking writer whose edgy legacy is found in today's most imaginative fiction. --Donna Seaman

Users Review

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