BINARY OPPOSITIONS IN DONALD BARTHELME'S SHORT FICTIONS

SHAGHAYEGH MOHAMMADI

Department of English Language and Literature, Islamic Azad University Central Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran

ABSTRACT

This article is going to drag out Derrida's inversion on Donald Barthelme's inverted binary oppositions to show the emergence of the large space of nothing/everything between the binaries which could be only noticeable in an instant. This world of nothing is a world which cannot be defined by the simple medium of logos, but in order to be apprehensive and tangible in this logocentric world, a name should be chosen for its identification. In fact, it is an awareness of the possibilities of other possibilities. However, the crucial aim is to depict this world without the usages of language, in a neutralized context by applying the inversion of the inverted postmodern binaries which are totally different from our dualistic expectation, but in order to be apprehended, we have no other way to ignore the language. This research concerns about Donald Barthelme's three fictions: Me and Miss Mandible, A Shower of Gold and The Glass Mountain. The reading strategy is Derrida's Deconstruction on the subject of the inversion of the inverted which results in the emergence of a new world protruded in an instant. Although there are many other worlds separated by different bulwarks, this new created world is the first step in permeating into other unknown parallel worlds. Therefore, more investigations are required in this matter. The aim of this article is to show the binary oppositions of selected postmodern short stories (Me and Miss Mandible, A Shower of Gold and The Glass Mountain), which are the inversion of normal fixed binaries of the routine logocenteric mind structure. This postmodern inverted binaries are now becomes naturalized so much as our own daily reality.

KEYWORDS: Binary Oppositions, Deconstruction, Supplementation, Pharmakon, Jeu, Logocentric

INTRODUCTION

Famous for playful postmodernist style, Donald Barthelme (April 7, 1931 – July 23, 1989) is an American writer whose composition style is too compact which creates a new name in writing short story called short-short story, flash fiction, or sudden fiction. Unlike other postmodernist writers, Barthelme was not mainly interested in the usual methods of short story composition. His fictions are mainly denying the traditional principles. Although the stories seem illogical and chaotic in appearance, they do transfer their own logic

The medium of Barthelme's art, his language, as Jochen Achilles has mentioned "brims with linguistic patterns derived from all sorts of jargons and resounds with the hollowness of standardized phraseology" (106). However, if it is necessary to compare this with its classical type as Aristotle says of tragedy, "the incidents and the plot are the end [telos]' of the whole work" (14). Although he contends that "the end is the chief thing of all," (Aristotle 16) and this dictum holds for many dramatists and novelists, it is not the same for Barthelme. In fact Barthelme's fictive situations characteristically fail to suggest any telos in the sense of a coherent plot development. Barthelme's stories are remarkably organized around situations, hypotheses or suppositions that commit him to no particular line of narrative development. Through constant irrelevant statements, Barthelme creates a kind of fragmented verbal collage in the stories that subvert the reader's expectations.

To sum up, it might be more accurate to say that Barthelme's stories are about the other side of everything and that is 'nothing'. However, the ideal words which were once defined as sacred truth now have a special, narrowly focused meaning which makes Barthelme's fiction unusually difficult to summarize. On the other hand, although the ordinary bases of logic are refused, it is a fact that throughout this illogical anarchy, new things get the chance to be born.

Binary Opposition Revisited

The double movement of deconstruction involves both an inversion of the hierarchical relationship on whose obstruction and suppression the neutrality of the difference between the terms of any binary opposition depends. Allowing one to say of something that it is, the sudden emergence of a new concept which is not a true concept at all in as much as the very signifier of a signifier depends on an idea of the difference make the thing present. What the oppositions depend on is the oppression of the upper binary's originariness. "Derrida is not referring to something that deconstruction does to oppositions, but rather to what happens to oppositions in and as themselves" (Lucy 13).

Therefore, within binary oppositions there is not only an oppositional relationship between the two terms, but also there is a strange complicity within which the presence of the one side depends on the presence of the other. According to Bertens; "Instead of opposites that could not be further apart", though "we find two terms that are deeply implicated in each other" with a large gap in between. "In the deconstruction of binary oppositions, too, either/or gives way to both/and" (131).

Once you accept the hierarchy of the binaries as standard and while you accept that one opposing side privileged to the other, and make one as a center, you can no longer think of the privileged binary in terms of the conceptual limits that are ascribed to it from within the structure of an opposition. This is the structure in process on the format of postmodernist fictions. It is the must to seek for a new concept but this is impossible because of the previous fixed way of hierarchy. But if a new concept suddenly emerged, this new concept would not be something that was new in the sense of being unprecedented or original. It would be there already. It would have been happening already. Paradoxically, the inferior term in the oppositional set turns out to be a condition for the opposition as such and is therefore, as important as the so-called privileged one.

This article is going to drag out Derrida's inversion on Donald Barthelme's inverted binary oppositions to show the emergence of the large space of nothing/everything between the binaries which could be only noticeable in an instant. This world of nothing is a world which cannot be defined by the simple medium of logos, but in order to be apprehensive and tangible in the logocentric world, a name should be chosen for its identification. However, the crucial aim is to depict this world without the usages of language, in a neutralized context by applying the inversion of the inverted postmodern binaries which are totally different from our dualistic expectation, but in order to be apprehended, we have no other way to ignore the language. Here, Donald Barthelme's the most playful and imaginative story, "Me and Miss Mandible", begins:

> Miss Mandible wants to make love to me but she hesitates because I am *officially* a child; I am, *according to the records,* according to the gradebook on her desk, according to the card index in the principal's office, eleven years old. There is a *misconception* here, one that I haven't quite managed to get cleared up yet. I am *in fact* thirty-five, I've been in the Army, I am six feet one, I have hair in the appropriate places, my voice is a baritone, I *know* very well what to do with Miss Mandible if she ever makes up her mind. (Barthelme, *Miss Mandible* 17 emphasis added)

According to the italic words on the text, this is an unusual world of language that is not apprehended by dualistic system of one's logocentric thought. However, in order to be understood, one has to build new centers and structures.

The narrator of this short story is a thirty five years old man against our rational dualistic logic who had worked as an insurance claims adjuster who is now acclaiming himself to his new role as a fifth-grade student and making the best of a situation that no one else around him seems to recognize as irrational. The inversions are working in several levels.

First, Joseph as an adult reverts to child status and at the same time his teacher, Miss Mandible, appears to him like a child. On the other hand, one of his infant classmates reminds him "of the wife I had in my former role" (Barthelme, *Sixty Stories* 19). These are the signs which contradict logocentric system of understanding. This confusion of roles and blurring of distinctions is an indication of Joseph's ability to see through the artificiality of such roles and distinctions, as the narrator, throughout the story, says: "The distinction between children and adults, while probably useful for some purposes, is at bottom a specious one, I feel. There are only individual egos, crazy for love" (Barthelme 25). By this statement the story opens the possibility of making another extra-ordinary world totally unacceptable according to our expectations. It manifests that not only all these hierarchies but also language itself are not basically absolute and pure ones.

This postmodern fiction illustrates the arbitrariness of such roles as being a child or an adult by constructing a new system totally different from its traditional fixed values. Although this story is not based on logical logocenteric ways, it lets one see the existence of other worlds that are totally unseen and undefined by the world of words. Breaking all one's expectations, the story not only lets the readers think about the arbitrariness of such roles but also by depicting this arbitrariness it opens their world toward the existence of other new worlds which are not restricted by dualistic comprehension. This possibility of inversion of the inverted makes one free from the traps and the problems invented by the world of language. Although this new world is not noticeable at first sight, it becomes vivid little by little by focusing more on the possibility of such worlds' existence similar to the acceptance of these fictive realities. This is the world like Plato's *Phaedrus* (*pharmakon*), a new world which could have a name by the world of words and at the same time could not have a name. These are the first steps toward knowing other worlds just like postmodernist's new way of writing in fictitious realities.

Throughout the diary entries format, the narrator discloses that his adult life has consisted of a grim stint in the army, when he felt his identity slipping away from him, followed by a marriage and career that both ultimately failed. His current predicament is apparently a punishment for misinterpreting his employer's stated dedication to serving its customers: he helped an old widow collect a claim rightfully due her. The narrator admits that since his army days, when he frequently questioned the value of apparently pointless activities, he has felt isolated from others. He yearns to be "typical" (Barthelme 26) or unique and feels that he needs "reworking in some fundamental way" (25). Thus, as an adult, he adjusts his habits to his new childhood life. However, the distinguishable line between childhood and adulthood is depicted as broken when he smokes only in the boy's bathroom, gives up alcohol, and petitions for a larger desk; "he is eleven years old according to the records, according to the grade book on Miss Mandible's desk (his teacher), according to the card index in the principal's office but he is in fact thirty five years old, a misconception that he has not quite managed to get cleared up yet" (Barthelme 17). This is the status of the broken lines. The large gap in between which could be called as a new world exists between the inverted binaries different from our hacked fixed ones in mind owes its existence to the breaking of all the limitations that the world of language has made for logocentric world.

However, possessing traits common to many of Barthelme's characters, the narrator of this story is lacking confidence as he is unstable and anxious all the time. This lack of confidence originates from the unreliability and arbitrariness of signs which are the basic units of language. However, it is through this simultaneously absurd and poignant narrator that Barthelme could practice such matters as the blurred distinctions of childhood and adulthood. ('There are only

individual egos, crazy for love' (Barthelme 25)), the arbitrary nature of social conventions, conformity, and the brutal fact that 'arrangements sometimes slip... errors are made... signs are misread' (27) are the best manifestation of the world constructed by words. The sexual demands of adults do not subside and find satisfaction in Miss Mandible. Within these distinctions the link between the binaries gets to be absolutely ruptured from the root. Now childhood and adulthood are simultaneously at the same position and the hints of the one could be traced in the other. That is exactly the structure of Derrida's supplementation defined practically within post-structuralism. The function of this created world is where this large gap full of meanings protrudes from the broken rules. Here Derrida's technique becomes practically equal to the one Plato has used in his works "Pharmakon". This is a world which covers two opposing senses within itself. However, Derrida's usage of this word is totally different from Plato's. As Derrida puts it; "in other cases, Plato can *not* see the links, can leave them in the shadow or break them away. And yet these links go on working of themselves" (Derrida, *Dissemination* 96). There is a large gap within the thin link between the poles of the binaries in which no clear distinction is noticeable. Within this world everything is possible and this possibility is totally contrary to logocentric logic.

As an example of what is meant by the possibility of impossible, one could indicate an action within the story in which the students are graded as children but have sexual attraction toward each other. The terms of this binary pair are held in a relation of non-absolute, incomplete and non-oppositional difference. The narrator's musings on the unreliability of signs is another example in this regard. The phrase; "we read signs as promises. Signs are signs, and some of them are lies" "Wife-signs (beauty, charm, softness, perfume…. (Barthelme, *Forty Stories* 26-7) underscore the idea that life and society promise things that are often unattainable. Accordingly nothing is reliable. This unreliability opens a window toward the gaps behind which language hides its presence. Having inverted the inverted criteria of logocenteric world, the aim is the strategy of not getting back to its first beginning (logocentric view) but of showing a creation of new world within the space of the borderlines.

Another inverted binary opposition in "Me and Miss Mandible" is appearance vs. reality. For example, the narrator's company's motto─ "Here to Help in Time of Need"─proves to be untrue, when the narrator helps an old woman, he gets fired; his wife, Brenda (whom Sue Ann Brownly resembles in some unpleasant ways) (Barthelme 20), is unfaithful to him in spite of the fact that she has wife signs; characteristics or concepts associated with womanhood (beauty, charm, softness, perfume, cookery) (26); American flag no longer has the same meaning to everyone too long. Barthelme plays out the story's key line: "We read signs as promises" but "some of them are lies" (26). Focusing essentially upon the arbitrariness of both seeming and being, the narrator goes beyond the disparity between what appears as signs and what is then interpreted as fact or illusion in order to show how virtually everything is sometimes true but sometimes false.

The story is utilizing the same procedure which deconstruction as a strategy is applying on other texts. "This is the absolute meaning of signs are signs and some of them are lies but is this absolute, there is no one pure meaning anywhere" (Gordon 50). Characters' roles and even the tenacity, or veracity, with which they are held, all in all is similarly both true and false, both real and unreal. In this story "the "authority" both behind and presumably inherent within the word, the interpreted act, the relationship, perhaps life itself, is arbitrary" (Gordon 51). By breaking the border lines existing within these inverted binaries the discussion, instead of getting back to its logocentric world, opens a large gap which challenge a new window toward other concepts unknown and indefinable. This crushing of the two terms in one another in a world parallel to the real one makes not only the readers simultaneously read a fictional reality and mix this fictional reality with their own real world but also to the reader's failure of satisfaction in noticing the reality. A world shown by the arbitrariness and conventional structure of signs and language is a new world called 'nothing'. Here 'nothing' is not

tantamount to the meaning of absurd; paradoxically it is the world of 'nothing' in which multiplicity of meanings is going to be found.

Another inversion of binary which outshines throughout the story is the absence-presence state of affairs. Here "The overgrown narrator's female classmates try to make up for their lack of experience with the other sex by a voracious consumption of magazine reports on the love life of movie stars" (Achilles 105). The characters try to disturb the absence of relationships by replacing the presence of magazines reports on the love life of movie stars, even the barefaced distinction between absence and presence is effaced so that the two binary oppositions are blurred into one another with no clear-cut distinction. It functions as if one has both absence and presence, a culmination of the sides. In this story the idea to relive one's life is transformed into a literal fact. The narrator comes to awareness that the rules are all arbitrary *jeu* and he was not able to follow in his former life-role. As Jochen Achilles mentions in his article:

> Joseph begins to understand that the social patterns of school education, army, insurance company, and marriage have no validation beyond their sheer existence and self-perpetuation. There is no substantial moral reason not to ignore these patterns except the pragmatic consideration that one is punished for the refusal to fulfill one's role within them. Joseph cannot accept this. He cannot bring himself to confuse "authority with life itself" any more. (108)

The narrator tries to break away from those patterns and to recognize his life autonomously when he begins an illicit love affair with his teacher. The love affair lets the narrator free himself from the language limitations; however, he has to return to his present limited childhood life-role pattern by using man-made language patterns and rules. Consequently, this love affair leads to his expulsion from the school and from the orderly conventional life that the school prepares him for. He refuses to model himself on the patterns that engulfed him. The technique of inversion functions in an emancipating manner as it forms the turning point from dependence on conventional norms to freedom.

As Plato envisages, everything that exists in this world is an imperfect copy of an ideal object which is outside the substance and time-scale of the world as we perceive it. In "Me and Miss Mandible", Barthelme illustrates that our world is the one constructed by arbitrary signs originated from the ideals in our mind which are the basic units of language. However, Barthelme manifests throughout his fictitious reality that signs are not reliable. As Joseph sketches within the stories, this unreliability is originated from the fact that "signs are signs and some of them are lies" (Barthelme 26). It is the faith on meaningfulness which makes logos seems as real, if this reliability is lost, a large gap which is in the space between two poles of binaries will come forth in an instant to make one believe in another world constructed by other arbitrary mediums. This is where language as a problematic notion is hidden. According to this play of language, this process never comes to an end; it is a tangible circle in an endless regress.

In another Barthelme's story "A Shower of gold", other sets of oppositions contrary to realist logocentric world are sketched. It is a story of a man named Peterson, a sculptor who lives in a hyper-educated age and the one who decides to participate in a television program called "Who Am I?" (Upton 13) to earn some extra money. The narrator's position, Peterson, as an artist is subjected to inversion. As an artist, Peterson's position is subjected to a change. Contrary to customary belief of a sacred and higher position for artists, the story exhibits the inversion of this fixed hierarchy as a new reality. Now the Philistines have their own voice in "A Shower of gold". They get the chance to express themselves from the highest position of power. In fact they get the chance to have a voice of their own. If in former times the artists like T.S. Eliot, Mathew Arnold and many other cultural élite despises the Philistine in their works, it is now the Philistines who turn to smash the artists in postmodern fictitious reality. The artists as cultural elites who once have the privileged position

in classical and modern literature, in postmodernism, have lost their position and become inferior by Philistines. Peterson becomes a person who is almost getting inferior into apologizing for not being sufficiently interested in absurdity by a Philistine TV interviewer, Miss Arbor, the talk master of the TV-show he wishes to participate in for financial reasons. Parallel to this manifestation of Philistine vs. artist inversion, the mimetic relation between art and reality is shaken. On the one hand, "reality appears either as a hysterical performance by the Theatre of the Absurd or as the delusive product of an artistic imagination directed by highly subjective interests. "On the other hand Peterson's desperate confession remains as artistic residues of a reality that is what it seems" (Achilles 112). "Reality turns into an imitation of stock artistic styles and techniques, whereas only an art that is uncontaminated by social convention and personal interests is able to retain a sense of what is real" (ibid.).

Another inverted binary within this story is at the level of genre. It is vivid that the story is a parody of a myth. Parody is a kind of inversion of its higher version (myth). Reading the title of the story "A Shower of Gold", the mythical story of Zeus and Danae's intercourse comes into mind. The result of this intercourse was their son Perseus who fulfilled the prophecy of the oracle by accidentally killing the king while throwing the discus. The story shows that the modern Perseus who becomes Peterson in this postmodern story is subjected to the ways television has injected into his mind. Television now takes the contemporary art structure. A form that slams us with thousands of information bits every evening, all popularized and anesthetized, so that his consciousness and identity are shaped by them. With this consciousness, he lost his own personality as an artist and his identity so much so that he gets wonder in the TV talk show. However, he wishes to take the form of mythic Perseus with no fulfillment at the end;

> "My mother was a royal virgin," Peterson said, "and my father a shower of gold. My childhood was pastoral and energetic and rich in experiences which developed my character. As a young man I was noble in reason, infinite in faculty, in form express and admirable, and in apprehension . . ." Peterson went on and on and although he was, in a sense, lying, in a sense he was not. (Barthelme, *A Shower of Gold* 16)

As Jochen Achilles has mentioned in his article; "Peterson's TV-speech against alienation appears so subversive to the program officials that they desperately try to turn him off. The truth the artist Peterson hesitatingly and uncertainly gropes after proves strong enough in the end to penetrate the cocksure pseudo-radicalism of TV-society" (112). As it is demonstrated, the extraordinary matters are mocked in this parody of myth and become ordinary as a part of the narrator's everyday fictitious reality.

In Barthelme's "The Glass Mountain," a story in which all the sentences are numbered except for those included within one quotation treated like a sentence, other types of inversions are in process. The story describes the ascent of the narrator up a large glass mountain at the corner of Thirteen Street and Eighth Avenue. At the top of the mountain dwells a "beautiful enchanted symbol" ("*The Glass Mountain*" 174). Although "The climber is reviled by his materialistic acquaintances" (Johnson 72), he succeeds in obtaining the top of the mountain. It is at the top of the mountain that he watches the symbol changing into only a princess. Contrary to customary expectation, it seems that in a fit of disgust brought on by the transformation, the climber throws the princess violently down to his revilers. As Johnson has noted; "the movement up the mountain is achieved by the successive engagement of the binaries both the material and the ideal, both the concrete and the abstract" (74):

- To climb the glass mountain, one first requires a good reason.

- No one has ever climbed the mountain on behalf of science, or in search of celebrity, or because the mountain was a challenge.

- Those are not good reasons.

- But good reasons exists.

- At the top of the mountain there is a castle of pure gold, and in a room in the castle tower sits...

- My acquaintances were shouting at me.

- "Ten bucks you bust your ass in the next four minutes!"

- .... a beautiful enchanted symbol (Barthelme, *The Glass Mountain* 174).

The abstract transcendental signified now is at hand, but paradoxically as its concreteness becomes tangible, it is promptly destroyed. In this position the abstract takes the place of concrete as privileged. The princess's absence is now higher than her presence. The goal of this fiction, according to R.E. Johnson, "is the symbol within the symbol, squaring the abstraction rather than concretizing the abstract" (75). It is the symbol which takes the position of both concrete and abstract. In this regard, the void between these two binaries is not filled but it just jumps upper to higher position as symbol. Now the absence and presence are at the same level with no hierarchical boundary in between.

Another inversion sketched within this story is the inversion of literature vs. trash opposition. This sketch takes its origins against the idea that "literature has always its own sacrosanct meaning based system waiting for the tools of science before it yields its mysteries. Barthelme raises the idea that literary language is its own origin, its own explanation, its own meaning" (Johnson 75). Through these postmodern stories analyzed here, the holiness of literature is collapsed, but along with this collapse, other descended notions are replaced. The bases of literature and language existence weave into one another. Implicit here, then, is a linguistic realism. However, this is not to say that fictional language is to be judged primarily by some aesthetic or grammatical criterion. This is not suggested that Barthelme's be a literature so "mature" that it writes itself "like an automaton," as Julia Kristiva puts it. For Barthelme, to deconstruct the origin is not the same as to eliminate it. His is neither an ontology of presence nor one of absence, but of both presence and absence with no definite distinction line in between. The text is neither closed nor open as what Roland Barthes has mentioned; "neither as closed as the old "writerly" fiction nor as open as the do-it-yourself games" (1474). Barthelme's fiction "indicates the enormous absurdity of both assumptions according to Derrida: that there is a structure, and that there is not" (Lodge 90). That there is a center and that there is not. "It is in this sense, then, that the fiction's criterion is itself, or more accurately, that it provides its own paradigm" (Johnson 76).

In another level of binary oppositions revisited, Barthelme uses spatial symbols in the most playful sense. "The Glass Mountain" is a complex, basically more reflexive story. Working in paradoxical terms, the story is both confirming and doubting the meaningfulness. It is actually a reflection about both the necessary existence and the necessary dissolution of the traditional symbol, or rather, of its hidden properties and spiritual tenor. The glass mountain, about which "[e]veryone in the city knows" (Barthelme 172), and which "towers over that part of Eight Avenue like some splendid, immense office building", vanishing "into the clouds, or on cloudless days, into the sun" (172) is a symbol with a wide-spread tenor which stands for a simultaneity of times, of actualities, and of meanings. It is apparently a symbolic-antisymbolic story in which Barthelme reversed its two binary sides, the vehicle and tenor of the symbol, which leads to the failure of meaning within the story. While ascending the glass mountain, the climber contemplates about the reasons that one would climb such a mountain, an adventure which many gallant "knights" have failed to complete successfully and have paid for with their lives. He finally finds the reason for his climbing-adventure in the fact that "the

castle of pure gold" (the glass mountain) at the top of it, is "a beautiful enchanted symbol" (Barthelme 174). Yet the reason for climbing up to the "enchanted symbol" is split:

- Does one climb a glass mountain, at considerable personal

- discomfort, simply to disenchant a symbol?

- Do today's stronger egos still *need* symbols?

- I decided that the answer to these questions was "yes".

- Otherwise what was I doing there, 206 feet above the power-sawed

  elms, whose white meat I could see from my height. (Barthelme, *The Glass Mountain*174)

The climber of the glass mountain furthermore cites the definition of the traditional symbol throughout his narration;"it presumably arouses deep feelings and is regarded as possessing properties beyond what the eye alone sees" (175), and finally makes use of what the narrator calls "these conventional means of attaining the castle" (175). These conventional means are the one which the climber takes from its fairy tale version. In an intertextual interchange of his own status with that of the climber in the story from its fairy tales, he puts into work a fantastic transformation: "The eagle dug its sharp claws into the tender flesh [...] The creature in terror lifted him [the actual climber of the glass mountain] high up into the air and began to circle the castle [...] The bird rose up in the air with a yelp, and the youth dropped lightly onto a broad balcony [...] he saw a courtyard filled with flowers and trees, and there, the beautiful enchanted princess"(Barthelme 175-6). The structure of the symbol, the indissoluble interrelation of its two polar "the vehicle and tenor", reversely is now made the basis of the narrative process. What the climber sees is the separation of the inseparable binaries of the symbol, of vehicle and tenor which leads to the failure of meaning according to customary logic. As Hoffmann has mentioned in his book;

> He now existentially and painfully *experiences* the failure of the meaning giving function of the symbol, a circumstance that he *knew* from the beginning. Yet the existential engagement is cut back, even reversed by the contrast between existential experience and the diagrammatic reductive style of the story, which de-existentializes the quality of the experience. By leaving gaps, rejecting psychological frames, denying emotion an "adequate" expression, and contrasting ways of perception and response, Barthelme gains the freedom of playful ambivalence in the handling of symbolic signification (Hoffman 411).

Nevertheless, the climber has continued: "I approached the symbol, with its layers of meaning, but when I touched it; it changed into only a beautiful princess" (Barthelme 176). By losing its tenor, the symbolic vehicle loses the function of a symbol as a deferred transcendental signified. Transcendental signified now loses its holiness and becomes "merely" a beautiful princess. The logical consequence is its deconstruction as a symbol, a process which here is literalized into physical destruction:

- I threw the beautiful princess headfirst down the mountain to

- My acquaintances.

- Who could be relied upon to deal with her.

- Nor are eagles plausible, not at all, not for a moment. (Barthelme, *The Glass Mountain*176)

These are not the stories of "happily happily ever after" but something totally different which open mind toward the existence of other new worlds. These stories let one consider other centers which implicitly are connected to construct a focused foundation. These centers are not considered as marginal anymore, for example, the reality which we believe in or the famous motto repeated over and over in fairy tales "Happily happily ever after" is not working anymore. However, these marginal centers which are hidden behind the focused center could come out only by the changes of contexts, settings, and situations. Unconsciously, Derrida's motto is proved to be true "the center is not the center" within postmodern fictions as they apply poststructuralist's assumptions. Nonetheless, multiplicity of centers occurs and this multiplicity is apparent only by changes of contexts and the acceptance of their being as normal criteria in these postmodern fictions. Here, we prepare ourselves to believe in such marginal centers challenged within any structures and let them show their existence along with the others.

By showing the inversions of the binaries within these stories and by postmodernist's practices of Derrida's assumptions, other marginalized centers and worlds get the chance to have their own voice. The voices within the stories talk about the ones that were suppressed, sacrificed and ignored. They give them voice to define themselves throughout their fictitious reality and to have the chance to express their own selves. Having constructed new fictitious reality and having valued something inferior as high, postmodernists try to open the chance of equality. This equality of prior and inferior opens new holes in front of words world. The reality structured by these inversions within the stories help the research to have the chance to think about others. In spite of the wrong apprehension of the readers, the stories could prove their own fictitious being as acceptable and natural. One of these Others which are sketched throughout these fictions is the aim of this research and that is the world called as 'nothing' full of everything according to words logic. This nothing world is a space of equality, without any discrimination or any intercession as a medium of communication. Everything which exists within nothingness is without making any margins or centers.

In content, the stories remind the story of creation and that is in anarchism which new things are born. Although in anarchism everything seems chaotic at first sight, the anarchy is a position through which new windows toward new worlds have the opportunity to get opened. Although the atmosphere of short stories seems chaotic, they have their own world by the inversion of fixed logocentric criteria. Through anarchy, new worlds get the chance to be born. As it has been quoted throughout the short stories till now; "signs are signs but some of them are lies"; "I threw the beautiful princess headfirst down the mountain to my acquaintances"; Who could be relied upon to deal with her. Nor are eagles plausible, not at all, not for a moment";"My mother was a royal virgin," Peterson said, "and my father a shower of gold. My childhood was pastoral and energetic and rich in experiences which developed my character. As a young man I was noble in reason, infinite in faculty, in form express and admirable, and in apprehension . . ." Peterson went on and on and although he was, in a sense, lying, in a sense he was not". These quotations from the stories analyzed in this part are the signs which seem at first sight as lies; however, these are the statements which go beyond dualistic ideological logic by mythic and fairy tale structure assumed as one. These are assumed as an only conception of reality. The stories take one to another world which could exist if one's imagination gets free itself from the limitations constructed by language; language's forms, rules, contents and many other limitations.

CONCLUSIONS

"Me and Miss Mandible", "A Shower of Gold" and "The Glass Mountain" make their own fictitious reality by revealing how the binaries privileged side becomes inferior. This process is easily possible only by the changes of contexts in postmodernism. Within the stories the inferior part gets privileged and one could accept the postmodernists as normal throughout these new constructed centers. When one accepts that there is no fixed concept and no fixed meaning with such

arbitrariness and multiplicity of words, the first steps toward constructing other worlds are founded. The world of these inversions is illustrated in these short stories and by the process of inversions other centers and priorities found their bases. The centers which are always ignored and considered as marginal are now activated and have their own type of reality. Although not well understood the stories play with their own rules and centers, they build new centers which do not play subjectively.

By the manifestation of other centers, this world of 'nothing' is a world of now and here. It is experienced just in an instant with uncertainty. In order to be understood, these contexts have a world which has their own logic and criteria. The same procedure is in process for this newly born world of namelessness. The world of 'nothing' is not meaningless. Paradoxically there is a great logical system of everything behind or within it. This 'nothing' is totally different from the past's perspectives of absurdity. It is not the world dominated by words. It is called 'nothing' or anonymous. This is a world at threshold by which other new worlds including world of words could be analyzed. It not only helps one to see world of words from another outlook, but also helps one to discover other new, unknown horizons. This status comes out of the large gap between binaries within which there is both nothing and everything in equal position. The status of mind and heart simultaneously are working inseparably throughout this new world; this is the world in which there is no difference between sanity and insanity; in which there exists truth as well as punishment simultaneously; in which no transcendental signified is deferred because everything protrudes from its original ideals with nothing in between (as a medium) for communication. "Nothing is what keeps us waiting forever" is Barthelme's notion beautifully illustrated in his *Nothing: A Preliminary account* (241).

This is an immense space standing at the threshold between the world of words inside and many other worlds outside. As a reader and a critic, you find yourself in aporia for you cannot accept another reality parallel to yours in an instant of nothing full of everything because the center and values which you believe in are not what you find in these postmodern short stories. They are against customary expectations, definitely upside down. There is no absoluteness anymore. This non- absoluteness becomes a fact which is proved in logocenteric world view. These are what you are not expected; however, for their existence, they have to construct new centers within new contexts and keep one in a sustained position. The discussed world like postmodernism will take time to be well-matured and well-known.

Consequently, the reality constructed by the logic of poststructuralist's point of views emerges another unknown centrality, which is escaping all the time. This reality is started from the beginning by constructing other centers in an endless regress, ad infinitum. This circle is at process; however, the stories restart their beginning with new experiences each time. It can be declared that the process of the story telling was not, is not and never will be starting with the same beginning as it seems at first sight. It is always new because new insights get always involved within the same beginning as it appears. Accordingly, this process of elevating beyond the words requires accepting other centers or structures which are automatically built. Apprehension depends on these constructions behind which language hides its identity. However, in order to prevent the structurality of structure and to make it part of itself by rejection, deconstruction is trying to decentre the reader and the critic itself. That is how it has always been neutralized or reduced by a process of giving a center or by the process of referring to a point of presence, a fixed origin (a critic). This is what the play of structure means.

By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. Deconstruction as well as the postmodernist's short stories such as the ones analyzed here, does have their own reality. World of nothing is the world of undecidability (multiplicity of meanings), *différance* and the equality of oppositional system without hierarchies.

REFERENCES

1. Achilles, Jochen. "Donald Barthelme's Aesthetic of Inversion: Caligari's Come-Back as Caligari's Leave-Taking". *The* Journal of Narrative Technique, No. 2, Spring 1982. 105-20. Print.

2. Aristotle. *On Poetry and Style*. New York; The Bobbs-Merrill company, Inc. The Library of Literal Arts, 1989. Print.

3. Barthes, Roland. S/Z: An Essay. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974. Print.

4. Barthelme, Donald. *Forty Stories*. New York: penguin group (USA) Inc., 2003. Print.

5. ---. *Sixty Stories*, New York, Penguin Group (USA), 1987. Print.

6. Bertens, Hans. *Literary theory: The Basics*. New York, Routledge, 2001. Print.

7. Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. Print.

8. Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass. London-New York, Routledge, 1978. Print.

9. de Saussure, Ferdinand. *Course in General Linguistics.*1916. Trans. Roy Harris. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965. Print.

10. Gordon, Lois."Come Back, Dr. Caligari". Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981.35-61. Print.

11. Johnson, R.E.Jr. "Bees Barking in the Night: The End and Beginning of Donald Barthelme's Narrative". *Boundary* 2, Vol. 5, No. 1, Autumn 1976. 71-92. Print.

12. Klinkowitz, Jerome. *Donald Barthelme: An Exhibition*. Duke University Press, Durham & London, 1991. Print.

13. McHale, Brian. Postmodernist Fiction. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.