

WORLDMAKING VIA CONSTRUCTION OF LANGUAGE ACTS

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Abstract

In 1978, Nelson Goodman coined the term “worldmaking” to show that several other “worlds” may exist along with the single “world” that most think they know. To be after a single absolute meaning of the “world” in the post-Derridean and post-Saussurean world may already sound anachronistic. With the help of new ways of reading in the post-modern world, we can get help from creative works of popular culture in reinscribing, revisiting and having a critical eye over their working mechanisms. In the face of globalizing trends, meaning can be traced within the cross-cultural relationships between natural, political, cultural and linguistic worlds. At the same time, the constantly deferred meaning can be analysed by laying the working principles of logocentric thought bare, which is a long running organizing principle of Western thought. Paul de Man defines it as a mode of thought as follows: logos “divides the world into a binary system of oppositions organised along an inside/outside axis and then proceeds to exchange the properties on both sides of this axis on the basis of analogies and potential identities” (qtd. in McQuillan 10). This paper aims to decipher “the uncanny ability” of logocentric thought in McQuillan’s wording and to lay the working mechanisms of this thought bare in undoing its logic and its system of thought by putting popular texts under close scrutiny (McQuillan 11). This analysis, first of all, tries to pinpoint the binary oppositions, then to deconstruct the hierarchy between these binaries; and finally, it will display how the work undermines its own working mechanisms by focusing on the impasses of meaning. In the end, it is discovered that the popular text in question seems to build itself on the hierarchical play between primary vs secondary legs of the binary oppositions; however, the constructed world falls into the trap of logical fallacies such as sweeping generalization and appealing to the popular assumptions.

Keywords: Globalization, Worldmaking, Deconstructive Reading, Logocentric Thinking, Hierarchy.

DİL HAREKETLERİNİN KURGULANMASI İLE DÜNYA YARATMAK

Öz

1978 yılında, Nelson Goodman, birçok kişinin bildiğini düşündüğü tek bir “dünya”nın yanı sıra başka “dünyalar”ın da var olabileceğini gösterebilmek için “dünya yapımı” terimini ortaya atmıştır. “Dünya”nın tek bir mutlak anlamının peşinde koşmak, hali hazırda Derrida ve Saussure sonrası bir dünyada kulağa zaten kronolojik anlamda hatalı (*anachronistic*) gelebilir. Postmodern dünyanın bize sunduğu yeni okuma metotları vasıtası ile popüler kültürün sunduğu yaratıcı eserlerden yardım alarak yeniden kaydetme, yeniden değinme ve bu eserlerin çalışma prensipleri hakkında fikir edinebiliriz. Globalleşen eğilimler karşısında, anlamın izini ancak doğal, politik, kültürel ve dilbilimsel dünyalar arasındaki çapraz kültürel ilişkiler içerisinde sürebiliriz. Aynı zamanda, sürekli ötelenen anlam, uzun zamandır Batılı düşünme tarzının önde gelen düzenleyici prensibini benimsemiş anlam merkezli düşüncenin (*logocentric thought*) çalışma ilkelerini açık ederek incelenebilir. Paul de Man bu düşünme tarzını bir düşünme yöntemi olarak şu şekilde açıklar: Anlam (*logos*) dünyayı iç/dış eksen olarak organize eden ikili zıtlıklar sistemi çerçevesinde böler ve sonrasında karşılaştırmalar ve potansiyel kimliklere dayanarak bu eksenin her iki tarafındaki özellikleri bir birileri ile değiştirerek ilerler (qtd. in McQuillan 10). Bu makale, mantık merkezli düşüncenin McQuillan’ın ifadesi ile “esrarengiz becerisi”ni deşifre etmeyi ve popüler metinleri detaylı bir inceleme altına alıp bu düşünce sisteminin mantığını ve düşünme sistemini alaşağı ederek bu tarz düşüncenin çalışma mekanizmalarını gözler önüne sermeyi amaçlamaktadır (McQuillan 11). Bu inceleme, ilk olarak, ikili zıtlıkları saptamaya, daha sonra bu zıtlıkların arasındaki hiyerarşiyi alaşağı etmeye çalışacak ve en son olarak da bu eserlerin nasıl kendi çalışma mekanizmalarını sarstığını anlamsal çıkmazlara odaklanarak gösterecektir. Nihayetinde, bahsi edilen popüler metin, kendini ikili zıtlıkların birincil ve ikincil ayakları arasındaki hiyerarşik hareket üzerinden inşa ediyor gibi görünse de aslında kurguladığı dünyanın, kapsamlı genellemeler, ya da popüler varsayımlara hitap etme gibi mantıksal hataların tuzağına düştüğü keşfedilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Globalleşme, Dünya Yapımı, Yapı Bozumcu Okuma, Anlam Merkezli Düşünme, Hiyerarşi.

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It is clear that there was a major reorientation in philosophical thought after the 1960s, marked by a shift of attention from the problem of the subject as an epistemological category to the analysis of structure and language. Christopher Johnson reflects on this repositioning by identifying the constituents; that is, he detects Saussurean linguistics as a point of reference for incorporation of several philosophers and theorists like Derrida and Lacan (2). From that point onwards, as Johnson's analysis puts forward, a new system of thought emerges: "The word 'language' was applied not simply to verbal communication, to the realm of the immediately anthropological, but to any complex or system: everything was, or structured like, a language" (2). Thus, it can be said that the imagination of this new temporality is reconfigured through language. Different from the understanding of the twenty-first century language, the *word*, the Greek translation of *logos* refers to meaning or sense; that is, it is revealed that Western thought is governed by an idea of stable or essential meaning, which is ultimately fixed by a transcendental signifier. So, this desire to know; the act of logocentrism, this way of reading, is a theological activity because it presupposes and desires a single, fixed and authoritative centre. In that sense, Derrida agrees with Nietzsche as he asserted, "God, or any absolute reference point, really does 'die' (does become decentred) for the modern world" as Davis and Schleifer pinpoint in their survey of contemporary criticism and theory (300). Instead of pursuing the precepts of the long acknowledged logocentrism, Neil Goodman in his book titled *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978) devises a new way of gauging such epistemological categories like truth, reality or meaning and adopts a more contingent philosophy. He announces that language cannot convey any kind of absolute meaning, but may offer many depending on the context as follows: "Countless worlds made from nothing by use of symbols" and the themes like "the multiplicity of worlds, the speciousness of 'the given', the creative power of the understanding. The variety and formative function of symbols" are all parts of his thinking (Goodman 1). Along with philosophers like Derrida resisting against the shrewd propositions of Western logocentrism, Goodman proposes the term "worldmaking" in order to show that worlds, realities and/or truths can be made for each and every context; that is, one cannot assert that there is one single world or absolute truth/meaning.

In the wake of embracing different and contextual worlds and worldmaking one should be in command of Derrida's paper, titled "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," which marks an explicit break with the assumptions and decorum of structuralism. This kind of an epistemological break can only be possible by deciphering the underlying principles of logocentrism and challenging the concept of origin, problematizing the binaries it creates and the sense of causality in the Western intellectual. In his article, Derrida declares that Western philosophy and science proceed with a structure, which works with a "centre ... a point of reference, a fixed origin" (149). This organising centre actually does not exist, yet it has a role, which is to orient, balance and organize and at the same time this totalizing structure does not let the freeplay of the structure. This assumed centre is believed to be a transcendental force and a signified that organizes and grants everything else meaning. Thus, logocentrism is based on the ideal that: "univocity is the essence, or better, the *telos* of language" as Richard Rorty concludes in his article titled "Deconstruction" (173).

Starting with the ancient Greeks, the Western tradition has been functioning on the idea that language can express thought. For Derrida, this kind of an approach is bound to fail because in the post-Saussurean world, it would be anachronistic to believe in the function of language to convey meaning, which is always deferred. The only thing language is capable of doing is to "betray any attempt to transcend it" because the signifiers' being in pursuit of a signified is a constant deferral attempt of seeking for an absolute truth or meaning (Rorty 173). In other words, language cannot communicate the transcendental truth because the signifier can never reach its signified, its origin or centre, which is already illusory for Derrida. For Derrida, language is a "never-ending chain of words in which there is no extralinguistic origin or end to the chain" (147). Any attempt to express meaning through language is undermined with the endless freeplay of signifiers: "the domain or the interplay of signification has, henceforth, no limit" (Derrida 151).

Derrida's ideas on language enable him to challenge the binaries. While discussing the logocentric tradition, Derrida says that it is based on "violent hierarchy," in which one of the terms dominates the other and thus occupies the commanding position" (qtd. in Culler 85). While one leg of

the binary occupies a superior position, the latter is secondary, subordinate to the first and mostly derivative. To be able to become aware of the principle according to which this hierarchical thinking is organized, the reader does not have any other option than trying to lay the working mechanisms bare. For this, in order not to create another totalizing narrative and/or discourse, deconstruction does not offer a methodology or a technique; through deconstructive viewpoint, we can open ourselves up to the possibility of another way of thinking about the act of reading and orient ourselves towards the questions raised by deconstruction. These questions range from what kind of dualistic logic tries to be established, what principle governs the hierarchy and what term is granted the primer or the supreme position. Thus, it can be said that language holds the key to how the text is constructed, on what kind of binary oppositions it tries to consolidate; and in return what kind of a world the text is trying to create.

In light of these propositions, the next question to pose should be what kind of a world tries to be made in the twenty-first century. The world to be created would most probably be described as an irresistibly global one under the hegemony of dominant Westernization and/or Americanization by achieving connectedness of the whole wide world. Firing “a global imagination” as Shashi Tharoor, widely known Indian politician, names it in his speech titled “Globalization and Human Imagination” in 2003 global forces are at work by both exerting hard and soft power. With the enhancement of the new communications technology and international mass media, as Tharoor identifies the world has shrunk and in a real sense it is made all one. People from all nationalities and origins changing places fast, digitizing everything including money and making transactions of any kind in seconds, facilities of quick communications and travel are all like the symptoms of one connected world.

Globalization is the buzzword of the millennia and it has been widely used and variously defined in many different fields and contexts. Almost all the connotations that would appear in our minds refer to one connected and homogenous culture. Globalization together with the recent developments in technology connects spaces and places to one another regardless of national borders and/or limits. David Harvey defines the condition of globalization in his book titled *The Condition of Postmodernity* as follows:

As space appears to shrink to a ‘global village’ of telecommunications and a ‘spaceship earth’ of economic and ecological interdependencies ... and as time horizons shorten to the point where the present is all there is (the world of the schizophrenic), so we have to learn to cope with an overwhelming sense of *compression* of our spatial and temporal worlds. (240)

Amidst all these changes, to foster one connected culture for the world, lands, borders and spaces become more important. Among various motivations behind the urge to compress time and space on behalf of a homogenous culture one can consider the wish to claim monopoly on economy and values. When it comes to define and/or describe globalization, even the so-called neutral definition of globalization seems to consolidate the dominant discourse of the logocentric tradition. The world the logocentric tradition tries to make seems to impersonate one which embraces the dialogic relationships with other countries and nationalities taking into consideration of the transhistorical and transnational links between different cultures and places. In the second half of the twentieth century, with the dissolution of the national borders and mononational identities, spaces in the global world are open to infiltration. However, with the active and critical involvement of the reader, one can pinpoint what kind of a world is being created by having a critical eye over the dualistic logic of the texts.

One definition for globalization by a tech savvy anonymous Internet user on the international mass media is globalization means “Princess Diana's death” (“What is the truest definition of globalization?”). The further question is “how come?” (“What is the truest definition of globalization?”). The answer worths quoting at length is as follows:

An English princess with an Egyptian boyfriend crashes in a French tunnel, driving a German car with a Dutch engine, driven by a Belgian who was drunk on Scottish whisky followed closely by Italian paparazzi, on Japanese motorcycles; treated by an American doctor, using Brazilian medicines. (“What is the truest definition of globalization?”)

This long answer is like confirming the conventional general assumptions about the nationalities in question. All these answers seem to match with our common knowledge about the reputations of these nationalities. The definition given here all with the analogies and/or metaphors seems to arouse from the necessity of being connected to the rest of the world, which is the most fundamental characteristic of globalization to take its course. However, if we look at this short text from a critical viewpoint; the hierarchical relationship set between the Western and/or American countries and Eastern and/or African ones can easily be noticed. The first leg of the binaries associated with the Western and American countries, stand for nobility, development, science and technology; to exemplify; princess is of British blood and a member of royalty or nobility is associated with Britishness. The princess's boyfriend is Egyptian, who can be a secret boyfriend as he would not be a proper match for a British princess in public. He, definitely, cannot be noble enough to be a husband. The tunnel in which the princess had an accident was built by the French, that is, building a tunnel will certainly need some expertise in engineering. Another reference to a good related to the noble princess is the car, which is absolutely a German one. Germans are known to produce high quality brands which are the symbols of prestige or of wealth for the rest of the world. Another hallmark for a developed Western country is the engine of the car, which is produced by the Dutch. Japan is yet another country associated with technology; they are good at cars, motorcycles and technological devices. On the contrary, the other leg of the binaries throughout the text is defined with less serious or dangerous tasks like driving drunk or chasing famous people. The driver of the car is Belgian, who drives drunk. The analogy drawn here is that Belgium is not taken that much seriously as France or Germany are; rather this country has to be in the shadow of these powerful countries and has a bad reputation about their politics in the Western community. In this text, written based on hierarchical thinking, paparazzies are Italian, being one of the least serious members of the European Union; they are famous either with their pizza or spaghetti. From all these haphazard data gathered from this text, the world created here seems to be a global one but definitely not one based on the principle of homogeneity on equal terms. On the contrary, it is rather clear that globalization takes its power not from creating one single global imagination but from hierarchical thinking based on subordination of the weaker leg over the primary.

Logocentric tradition proceeds to exchange the properties on both sides of the axis on the basis of analogies and potential identities. In the second part of the text; another set of metaphors and analogies are drawn on the basis of a plan of operations and/or a set of abstract relations. The second part of the definition of globalization is as follows: Princess Diana is

treated by an American doctor, using Brazilian medicines. This is sent to you by an American, using Bill Gates's technology, and you're probably reading this on your computer, that uses Taiwanese chips, and a Korean monitor, assembled by Bangladeshi workers in a Singapore plant, transported by Indian lorry-drivers, hijacked by Indonesians, unloaded by Sicilian longshoremen, and trucked to you by illegal Mexicans. That, my friends, is Globalization. ("What is the truest definition of globalization?")

The English princess is treated by an American doctor, who is most probably more reliable than any other doctor from another nationality. This information is delivered to the reader by a technological device which is again manufactured by the Americans. The most important component of globalization; that is, connectivity is come true by an American fingerprint. However, the weaker and the subordinate leg of the binary is mostly associated with such nationalities like Taiwanese, Bangladeshi, or Korean. The skills they contribute to the manufacturing of a computer are all realized with the practice of outsourcing, which is implemented to serve for the benefits of the stronger of leg of the opposition. What is more, the low and unskilled labour like lorry driving is done by Indians. Illegal and/or criminal actions like hijacking is related to Indonesians. This text builds itself on logical fallacies; such as sweeping generalization or hasty conclusions by openly consolidating the sedimentation and habitualisation of the binaries. At this point, active reader involvement and development of complex level thinking will lay the logic of the subordination in this text. With these extended metaphors, the text serves the metaphorisation of logocentrism and proceeds with false oppositions in the frame of violent hierarchy.

In conclusion, language is no more a tool or a vehicle for communication because it does not have the potential to convey meaning, which is already deferred for good. The long running organizing principle of Western thought can be best analysed by laying the working principles of logocentric thought bare by being aware of that meaning is constantly deferred. This popular text in the postmodern era is far from challenging the totalizing narratives and it does not put the monolithic labels under question. What is more, it fails to depict that epistemological categories inferring a homogenous wholeness for communities or identities are problematized. Thus, to be able to reflect this sensibility in postmodern works, a piece of work should have the command to be engaged in such worldmaking that it should welcome any free interplay with frozen identities, communities or lands. Tharoor's observation rings true as he foresees "the globe will always have more than a single mind."

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