



Equality versus Freedom in “*Harrison Bergeron*” by Kurt Vonnegut: A Study of Dystopian Setting

Abdol Hossein Joodaki (corresponding author)

Faculty Member, University of Lorestan, Khorramabad, Iran

Tel: 661- 6200090 E-mail: joodaki367@yahoo.com

Hamideh Mahdiany

M.A. student, University of Lorestan, Khorramabad, Iran

Tel: 131-4227069 E-mail: mahdianha@gmail.com

Received: 12-03-2013

Accepted: 06-05-2013

Published: 01-07-2013

doi:10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.2n.4p.70

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.2n.4p.70>

Abstract

This article is devoted to the analysis of one of Kurt Vonnegut’s dystopian short stories, *Harrison Bergeron*, through the setting analysis focusing mainly on the use of media as a means of creating mono logical setting and discussing the dance scene as an act of escape from this mono logical setting. Kurt Vonnegut, a contemporary American novelist and short story writer, using his experiences during World War II, reflects on the post war American society especially through his satirical works about power structures. And in this short story he satirizes the forced equality in an imaginary American society.

Keywords: Media, Monological setting, Equality, Bakhtin, Dance.

1. Equality vs. Freedom in Mono logical setting

“To be, is to communicate”. (Bakhtin, 1984)

The story of “*Harrison Bergeron*”, concerns a society in which the government has enforced the equality laws on peoples’ lives. “They weren’t only equal before God and Law; they were equal every which way.” But this equality is achieved _or better to say: is forced into the people’s minds by making them think so_ through “the 211th and 212th and 213th Amendments to the Constitution”. So anyone who is more than average in intelligence, beauty, or strength is forced into wearing handicaps which makes them be NORMAL. Being normal is getting deformed in a way .So equality and freedom are achieved through governmental force, becoming unnatural and manmade. In this way this equality needs to be checked by the agents of the government Handicapper General, in order to stop any missteps from growing any sort of ideas even in their self-thoughts. In this way how can freedom be a value?

It seems that these people have no tendency toward changing this forced handicapcy, as George in reply to Hazel’s suggestion in order to “make a little hole in the bottom of the bag and just take out a few of the lead balls; Just a few” says first “two years in prison and two thousand dollars fine for every ball I took out”; confirming their fear of punishment by the rules set by H-G. George goes on saying that “if I tried to get away with it then other people would get away with it- and pretty soon we’d be right back to the dark ages again, with everybody competing everybody else.” George as the every man in this story doesn’t question the existence of such handicaps in the first level; rather he has this belief that by standing this burden, he is doing his duty as a citizen; as if using his natural, God given abilities is a crime. Not only does he act natural but he also sees competition as a sign of barbarism, as an evil act against the current society or as Becker (1963) says “moral panic” which he says “typically focuses on evildoers or supposed evildoers who come to be defined as the enemy of the society.” He won’t take the responsibility of being the first man who makes the burden less heavy, rather he is more relaxed with the burden but not the responsibility.

E. J. White in her article on “A Philosophical and methodological route to dialogue and difference” says “Mono-logism, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, represents the shutting down of dialogue and its alteric potentials” and “the dangerous consequences on mono logism is “the loss of freedom.” A short look at the dialogues Hazel and George have during the story shows how meaningless their conversations have become. George mostly replies with a “yep” or “huh” or “um”; and Hazel, being less intelligent than George, can’t even remember what she wanted to say. On the other hand bakhtin defines mono logism as the denial of the existence outside oneself of “another I with equal rights” (Bakhtin, 1984). When Diana Moon shoots the dancing couple dead, she kills the chance for new meanings, insisting on the “finalized meanings” which are already defined by her. In *Harrison Bergeron*, the dancing, happy, powerful, freedom-seeking Harrison and Ballerina are shut to death so that the viewer wouldn’t even have the chance to develop any kind of identification with them which would even least probably make them want to be real humans.

On the other hand, for Bakhtin, the voice of the person is inseparable from the dialogue between I and Thou, the person does not dwell within himself but on the boundary; for his self-consciousness is constituted by his relationship to Thou