Donald Barthelme's short stories: "The Indian uprising" and "The balloon"

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Donald Barthelme's Short Stories: “The Indian Uprising” and “The Balloon”

Kazuki Ishizaki

I

Donald Barthelme’s short stories occasionally arouse our historical concern. “The Indian Uprising” is for instance apparently suggestive of thematic historicity: historical condition and fact. We may expect that it will be about Native Americans’ predicament and their struggle for freedom. As is often the case with Barthelme, his apparent statement is often a deliberate disguise only to overthrow itself. Especially when concerning historicity, his maneuver confuses our ordinary sense of history and leads us to a more profound understanding of the status of historical fiction.

In fact, Barthelme’s short stories often become polemical in the way they take their narrative form. John Barth praises his works, commenting thus:

His [Barthelme’s] natural narrative space was the short story, if story is the right word for those often plotless marvels of which he published some seven volumes over twenty years. . . . These constitute his major literary accomplishment, and an extraordinary accomplishment it is, in quality and consistency.¹

Here Barth provisionally uses the word story to describe the work of
Barthelme, who is often highly estimated as a short-story writer.

As Barth suggests in the conditional clause, the problem concerns the denomination for Barthelme's short pieces. In them, we see "plotless marvels" which make it inadequate to their being called "story." There are some methodological elements which jointly constitute the marvel: mere itemization, insertion of illustrations, and crisscross dialogue. All this is at work to render both form and content of the narrative fragmentally accumulated. Under these circumstances, what becomes at stake, in terms of narrative discourse, is the adequacy for us to say these elements eventually fashion what we call a "story," and extensively a "plot," in order to represent "reality," because of its lack of any sequence of time and space, of scarcely stable characterization and point of view, and of incoherence of style, all of which are supposed to construct a realistic narrative.

The formally superficial complexity to fragment the structured into segments is his style. For Barthelme, this way of fashioning is strenuously consistent through his literary career, as Barth says. The complexity is his style. Here I pose the question of whether Barthelme's complexity is effective as a historical discourse, and whether it states some truth, in spite of its lack of narrative order which ordinary historical narrative has. In the course of answering this, I will take up two of Barthelme's pieces; "The Indian Uprising" and "The Balloon." The latter concerns the creative will in a broad sense. With the two, what becomes clear is that Barthelme's narrative has, not to do with the will to find a fact in history, but to do with the will to make up a truth.
II

As the basis for the analysis of "The Indian Uprising," of its effectiveness as narrative discourse, it is necessary to survey its structure, for Barthelme varies his methodological element adapted to the occasion of each individual piece. His narrative is typically fragmented in its appearance. Here is the outset:

We defended the city as best we could. The arrows of the Comanches came in clouds. The war clubs of the Comanches clattered on the soft, yellow pavements. There were earthworks along the Boulevard Mark Clark and the hedges had been laced with sparkling wire. People were trying to understand. I spoke to Sylvia. "Do you think this is a good life?" The table held apples, books, long-playing records. She looked up. "No."

Patrols of paras and volunteers with armbands guarded the tall, flat buildings. (108)

The connection of each sentence is semantically tenuous. What constitutes these sentences can be classified as two levels; on the one hand, the Comanches, Native Americans who originally resided in the prairie from Wyoming to Texas and who now survive in Oklahoma, and their belongings: on the other, people and things going with our modern civilization, as is implied with the "long-playing records" and "the tall, flat buildings." "We," our contemporaries, defend their city from the Comanches who are trying to take the fortress. This ontologically impossible juxtaposition of the two parties under the circumstances of war confuses our sense of time. We, readers, cannot have the ground of the time basis which is supposed to support the structure of narrative in
Donald Barthelme’s Short Stories: “The Indian Uprising” and “The Balloon”
general. In this manner, Barthelme undermines his narrative’s structure and creates a non-structural narrative.

This inclination for structurelessness is the chief characteristics of Barthelme’s narrative. Barthelme conceives types of narrative discourse different from the ordinary realistic one. Concerning this, Jerome Klinkowitz says that “Barthelme’s aesthetic is much more complex than the structural device of nonstructure. Structure, the stronger the better, is his chief concern. The roots for it may be found in his interest with the forms of language and even the sounds of words.” Barthelme’s way of apparent structurelessness is the attempt to reveal the structure of language itself. The discrepancy of each word and sentence directs our concern at it. The narrative’s structure is paradoxically strengthened because the narrator questions through the narrative the given way of the nature of language.

The narrator’s way of making lists is a technique to emphasize language itself; he often goes through the catalogue of miscellaneous objects which consist of barricades on the narrator’s side. He analyzes one of the barricades:

I analyzed the composition of the barricade nearest me and found two ashtrays, ceramic, one dark brown and one dark brown with an orange blur at the lip; a tin frying pan; two-liter bottles of red wine, three-quarter-liter bottles of Black & White, aquavit, cognac, vodka, gin, Fad #6 sherry; a hollow-core door in birch veneer on black wrought iron legs; a blanket, red-orange with faint blue stripes; a red pillow and a blue pillow; a woven straw wastebasket; two glass jars for flowers; corkscrews and can openers; two plates and two cups, ceramic, dark brown; a yellow-and-purple poster; a Yugoslavian carved flute, wood, dark
brown; and other items. I decided I knew nothing. (109)⁶

In this lengthy listing up, the sequence of objects seems random and not inevitable. In addition, the objects do not seem to be appropriate to make the barricade if the narrator intends to make them function as a barricade to defend himself from his enemy. That is, the barricade malfunctions as a defilade and the meaning is detached from itself in the context of this listing up. As far as the constituent, each in itself is substantial but, when piled up and presented to us as a "barricade," it seems to lose substance. Each word's sign estranges it from its referent. In other words, the barricade is, as it were, one to prevent us from understanding. Moreover, the sound makes us conscious of the nature of language with the succession of noisy words: twenty-three labial stops and forty-two alveolar stops. The narrator only lists up the names of very ordinary items which belong to our private life: table luxuries, tableware, beddings, posters, and instruments.

The inclination toward disjunction between sign and referent damages people's cognitive ability. Those who suffer the damage are the people in the narrative and at the same time we ourselves. We try to understand the text from the outset but confront with difficulty its fragmentation. The narrator begins to narrate and then confesses the difficulty of his fellow people, "People were trying to understand." (108) Still, the narrator keeps on narrating and the fragments continue to be accumulated. We still try to understand. If we persistently try to understand the narrative discourse by way of the ordinary referential relation between sign and referent, we cease to understand as a matter of course. After his listing up, the narrator, who is in the interior dimension of the narrative, gives
up to understand: “I decided I knew nothing.” (109) We cannot cease to understand. Then, what to do for us is to see the narrative language at a distance from the exterior. What the narrative imposes on us is to relinquish the convention of language’s referential relationship, to unlearn the language, and then to understand.

When we think of “The Indian Uprising” in that it has the nonstructural structure which is derived from the accumulation of fragments, it is violence which comes up as having a thematic significance. The violence is represented under the circumstance of ongoing war in which the structures are fractured and the fragments are created.

On the textual level, there is both reduction and production. The former is clear in the disconnection of the conventional referential relationship of language, and the latter is shown in the foregrounding of language as a larger structure. The narrative is the stage of the interplay between the reduction and the production. The interplay is extremely subtle and works in the narrative to create the discourse. The productivity suggests that the fragments consequent of the destruction produce interpretations anew. Of course, the violence of war itself in our world cannot be justified. Still, this narrative is partly supported by the theme of the violence which is the evidence of productivity: fragments make narrative.

The subjects that employ violence are the narrator and his company as the representatives of the moderns. The narrator is well informed in torture, which is a means of the demonstration of power of the subject. To the person who indeterminately seems to be his opponent, Block, the narrator “related a little of the history of torture, reviewing the technical
Donald Barthelme's Short Stories: "The Indian Uprising" and "The Balloon"

literature quoting the best modern courses, French, German, and American." (111) He and his company also actually put his enemy to torture: "We interrogated the captured Comanche. Two of us forced his head back while another poured water into his nostrils. His body jerked, he choked and wept." (108)

The violence used by the subjects mars the Comanches and, though it does not actually disjoint them, makes them the equivalent of fragments:

Red men in waves like people scattering in a square startled by something tragic or a sudden, loud noise accumulated against the barricades we had made of window dummies, silk, thoughtfully planned job descriptions (including scales for the orderly progress of other colors), wine in demijohns, and robes. (109)

As thus envisaged, the violence used under the conditions of war, on the one hand, emphasizes, with its sarcastic tone, fatuity of the subject that arouses the war. On the other hand, it complements the destruction to induce the fragments which are scattered through the text and constitute the narrative.

Here, the exchange of the role of the two, one is the narrator and his company as the subject and the other is the Comanches as the anti-subject, is guaranteed by the structural indeterminacy. The exchange is expectable and acceptable for us because the positions of the subject and the anti-subject are supported by the nonstructure; they stand on instability. The exchange is spurred when we remember the moral drama of the cowboy picture, in which Native Americans are chastised by the frontiersmen as an executioner in the name of goodness, which is nowadays never justified. Then, in the narrative in which the statements
of the war banter the war itself and its subject, we can regard the Comanche as the subject of the narrative and the narrator as the anti-subject. In this way, the fragmentation is the inducer of productivity and the Comanche has become the part of the fragments.

Brian McHale and Moshe Ron attempt, concerning this change of roles, to reduce "The Indian Uprising" to its abstract structure, invoking A. J. Greimas's "actantial model" of characters:

The distribution of roles . . . depends upon identifying the Subject position, and though "I," the narrator, certainly occupies the subject position in the discourse of the text, this does not ipso facto make him the actantial Subject. Indeed, the text's ironies are such that there is room for regarding him (and his fellow defenders) as occupying the Anti-Subject position, the true Subject of desire being the Comanches, who struggle with the Anti-Subject to (re)possess the Object of their (the city).8

An agent can have contradictory functions, the Subject and the Anti-Subject, in a certain narrative text. The Subject's, that is, the narrator's status is undercut by this possibility. There's also a possibility that such a exchangeable property, as McHale and Ron suggest, degrades the structuralistic reduction because of the narrative's indeterminacy.8 This is a positive perspective that the Comanche, who is fragmented by the violent force of the subject, now can probably acquire the status of the Subject.

The new Subjects who are qualified to pursue their desire are the Comanches. The new Anti-Subjects who narrate fragmentally are the narrator and his fellows. The exchange is, however, not equilibrated. On the side of the narrator, emergence of madness is implied at the end of
Donald Barthelme's Short Stories: "The Indian Uprising" and "The Balloon"

the narrative. "The Indian Uprising" ends thus:

We killed a great many in the south suddenly with helicopters and rockets but we found that those we had killed were children and more came from the north and from the east and from other places where there are children preparing to live. "Skin," Miss R. said softly in the white, yellow room. "This is the Clemency Committee. And would you remove your belt and shoelaces." I removed my belt and shoelaces and looked (rain shattering from a great height the prospects of silence and clear, neat rows of houses in the subdivisions) into their savage black eyes, paint, feathers, beads. (114)⁹

The "white, yellow room" seems to suggest the inside of a mental institution. The "Clemency Committee" appears to tell the narrator the exemption for military service for his symptom of madness. The "neat row of houses in the subdivisions" probably describes the external appearance of the living quarters the institution belongs to.

After the killing of the children, the "more" who "came" seem to be the ex-Anti-Subjects. Then, the narrator implies his own moving on to madness, but he hardly seems to care whether he is mad or not. This indicates two possibilities; the narrator gradually becomes mad toward the end; and, throughout the narrative, he has been a madman. In either case, the existence of a stable subject is thrust out of the narrative. In the former case, the credibility of the narrator is overthrown in the end by the implication of the madness. In the latter, the narrator has not been the subject, in Foucauldian sense, from the outset, but he is an "other" who is forced to be marginalized by the "subject."

The madness here, thus, does not have necessarily a negative
Donald Barthelme’s Short Stories: “The Indian Uprising” and “The Balloon” connotation. The narrative has been constituted by a potential madman. The madman as an “other” is a residue and a foreign body, which is forced out by the reasoning activity of the reasonable human being, and which, at the same time, doubtlessly, makes up our reality as a whole. The accumulation of fragment and trash is the gleam of light which implies the existence of every little individual. Barthelme suggests, though provisionally, the possibility of escape from such reductive subjective circulation.

III

When it was published in book form, Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts (1968), “The Indian Uprising” came first. The next was a piece called “The Balloon.” This arrangement, though I do not know whether it is Barthelme’s intention or not, is quite suggestive of the creative will of a private individual, in terms of productivity. Of course, when the narrator tells a narrative, such as “The Indian Uprising,” in which the language is foregrounded, the act of narration itself indirectly concerns creativity. The narrator of “The Balloon,” now, speaks of the very act of creation. Wayne B. Stengel refers to the same shift of reductive to productive creativity, commenting on, by a curious coincidence, other Barthelme pieces: “one also discovers a gaiety of vision in [the] affirmation of the power of the modern artist to create a private identity free from the madness of society.” This shift is a positive one. In “The Indian Uprising,” the narrator is captured in the madness that he himself causes to be induced and finally seems to collapse, but in “The Balloon,” the narrator seems to hold his identity stable and to direct his desire at the exterior surroundings of himself.
In "The Indian Uprising," the narrator, in an epistemological sense, though trying to acquire any recognition of his surroundings, decides he "knew nothing." Also in "The Balloon," the epistemological instability is, no better than before, still preserved. It is true that the narrator makes the narrative to create a textual world, but, this time, he is never captured in the instability of the fragmented structure. On the contrary, the narrator is the cause of epistemic failure for the people other than himself. In the narrative, a gigantic balloon emerges overnight and covers Manhattan. Its creator is the narrator:

The balloon, beginning at a point on Fourteen Street, the exact location of which I cannot reveal, expanded northward all one night, while people were sleeping, until it reached the Park. There, I stopped it; at dawn the northernmost edges lay over the Plaza; the free-hanging motion was frivolous and gentle. (53)

Aside from the probability of his creating the gigantic balloon, his construction of the narrative is relatively stable, compared with "The Indian Uprising." There is much less disconnection of referential relationships.

The instability on the side of the people's epistemology is caused by the balloon's improbability, because if a probable phenomenon takes place, people never get confused. That is, this phenomenon is so intense that their epistemic ground is shaken. Accordingly, expecting the significance of the balloon, a storm of interpretations of the balloon blows up. Here are three examples:

One man might consider that the balloon had to do with the notion *sullied*, as in the sentence *The Big Balloon sullied the*
otherwise clear and radiant sky. . . . Another man, on the other hand, might view the balloon as if it were part of a system of unanticipated rewards. . . . Another man might say, “Without the example of ——, it is doubtful that —— would exist today in its present form,” and find many to agree with him, or to argue with him. (55-56)

In these examples, we see not only the variety of interpretations but also their extention, in terms of both individual and interpersonal. Sometimes they show up accompanied with error. The interpretation of the first man pertains to the individual. His interpretation is a right statement on the face of it but, in fact, it is wrong. Because the balloon emerges in January, “the sky was dark and ugly; it was not a sky you could look up into, lying on your back in the street, with pleasure. . . . And the underside of the balloon was a pleasure to look up into.” (55) The third example shows the possibility of interpersonal extension. Some “agree” to it and others “argue” against. These extensions cause various interpretations. As it were, the balloon is the place of “the fusion of horizons,” as Gadamer puts it. 12

Barthleme endorses the condition that we are implied by the fusion in the uncertainty of interpretations. In spite of the narrator’s saying “each citizen expressed, in the attitude he chose, a complex of attitudes,” (55, italics mine) the citizens’ statement above is defined by the inferential modality with the auxiliary “might.” A certain statement is inevitably defined by uncertainty. Thus the fragmentation begins again. After the citizens state their interpretations, critics’ opinion is deployed on the textual pages:
Donald Barthelme's Short Stories: "The Indian Uprising" and "The Balloon"

"monstrous pourings"

"harp"

"certain contrasts with darker portions"

"inner joy"

"large, square corners"

"conservative eclectism that has so far governed modern balloon design"

"abnormal vigor"

"warm, soft lazy passages"

"Has unity been sacrificed for a sprawling quality?"

"Quelle catastrophe!"

"munching" (56-57)

This deployment seems not from the narrator's own confusion but from the intention of expressing his sarcastic view of the flood of superficial statements in mass media. These statements are probably filled with interpretative errors, too.

Because of their uncertainty, the city officers are vexed by the balloon, not being able to demonstrate their authority. They cannot find out the originator of it and settle the confusion of New York city. In addition, the narrator says: for them,

The apparent purposelessness of the balloon was vexing (as was the fact that it was "there" at all). Had we painted, in great letters, "LABORATORY TESTS PROVE" or "18% MORE EFFECTIVE" on the side of the balloon, this difficulty would have been circumvented. (55)

The meaning of the existence of the balloon cannot be determined, even by authorized critics, and the municipal authority cannot demonstrate their power.
As time goes by, however, some people gradually become familiar with the existence of the extravagant balloon. They come to utilize it rather than pursue its meaning. Since the balloon expands touching buildings, people can jump upon it and, for them, "a stroll was possible, or even a trip, from one place to another." (54) Besides, there are people who began, in a curious way, to locate themselves in relation to aspects of the balloon: "I'll be at that place where it dips down into Forty-seventh Street almost to the sidewalk, near the Alamo Chile House," or "Why don't we go stand on top, and take the air, and maybe walk about a bit, where it forms a tight, curving line with the façade of the Gallery of Modern Art—" (57)

These are not the purposes of the balloon, nor the ultimate meanings. So, as the provisional statement consequent upon the balloon, people suggest that "what was admired about the balloon was finally this: that it was not limited, or defined." Being randomly changeable, the balloon keeps on entertaining the people whose lives are "rather rigidly patterned, persons to whom change, although desired, was not available" (57) for twenty-two days, and disappears. The narrator lets gas out of the balloon, before it acclimates people.

For New Yokers, and us, too, it is natural to expect that the narrator has a grandiose and presumptuous motive for inventing such an extravagance, because it pleases, displeases, and confuses them and us, implying the possibility of infinite interpretation. Unexpectedly, however, his motive was quite simple and fundamental; the balloon is a gratuitous gesture done for private reasons. He concludes the narrative thus:
I met you under the balloon, on the occasion of your return from Norway; you ask if it was mine; I said it was. The balloon, I said, is a spontaneous autobiographical disclosure, having to do with the unease I felt at your absence, and with sexual deprivation, but now that your visit to Bergen has been terminated, it is no longer necessary or appropriate. Removal of the balloon was easy; trailer trucks carried away the depleted fabric, which is now stored in West Virginia, awaiting some other time of unhappiness, some time, perhaps, when we are angry with one another. (58)

The narrator and his beloved one alone know the true significance of the balloon. This exposure at the end is, in one sense, the narrator’s strategy to represent his sarcastic view of the people who kick and struggle to pursue ultimate true meaning and who scatter uncertain interpretations. At the same time, in another sense, the strategy suggests that however fragmental, light, and trashy a private person’s emotion may be, the emotion, or the incarnation of it, here the balloon, is ready to be an object to be seriously analyzed and criticized, and to be an inexchangeable treasure for certain people, to an improbable extent, like the improbability of the balloon. When blown up, it becomes fragments. Inflated, it becomes light. Its material is trashy rubber. Awaiting another opportunity, the balloon is stored.

IV

Judging from the narrative in the context of a vulgar sense of truth-value, it is impossible to imagine the war between the Comanches and our contemporaries. That is, the narrative is a lie and, on the face of it, nonsense. The discrepancy of each word and sentence, and the
substancelessness of things do not seemingly support its reality. However, it is not necessarily to be a realistic narrative to tell a truth and to represent reality. In the narrative like “The Indian Uprising” which has relinquished the realistic mode, we can find a truth-value in general.

In discussing the “truth” of literature, Hayden White compares literal (fictional) narrative and historical narrative. Because of its probability, we are apt to think that there is legitimacy of truth-value more in scientific and objective historical narrative and in the realistic narrative which is the relative of the historical one than in fictional narrative in which there are imaginative statements. When, in history, the narrator tells “literally” what he says is inclined to be fact, such a way of statement is regarded as a figure of speech, but still it is true. On the other hand, when in literature, what he says is the “imaginative,” even if it partly consists of historical facts, it is the statement supported by imagination. Imaginary statements may possibly be a truth but never be a fact. Then, in terms of truthfulness, in that it is supported by facts, the literary text is inclined to be excluded. That is, it is a general view that in the narrative called “history” there is “fact” but in the narrative called “literature” there is no fact but “imagination.” It is clear that we attribute the truth-value to “history.”

However, if we humbly admit that language cannot ultimately designate and explicate “thing-in-itself,” every verbal activity is more or less fictional, even history; history is a variety of fiction. According to White, every narrative account is “always a figurative account, and allegory.” The inclination to read a fact in historical (and realistic) narratives, and not in fictional, is “a scientific prejudice in favor of
Donald Barthelme's Short Stories: “The Indian Uprising” and “The Balloon” realism." Each interpretation on a certain event is in itself never be an absolute explication of it, as the people in “The Balloon” have suggested. They make up the “fusion of horizons,” which refuse the autonomous objectivity of a text.

In so far as every narrative text is organized by a narrator as the subject, every verbal activity is more or less ideological, whether it is the historical narrative or the realistic one. White says: “One can produce an imaginary discourse about real events that may not be less ‘true’ for being ‘imaginary.’ It all depends upon how one construes the function of the faculty of imagination in human nature.” It is true that transparency, rationality and coherency of both historical and realistic narrative consists of some reality, but not an absolute one. Rather, if such a narrative claims truthfulness on the basis of its objectivity, it disguises the way it is; it conceals the ideological nature and the existence of the subject, in “The Indian Uprising,” of the violence, thematically.

“The Balloon” is the evidence that every narrative discourse is potentially ideological. The desire which is on the ground of ideology is represented by the phenomenon of the balloon’s showing up, and induces a storm of interpretations. Though various arguments are done, the narrator and his lover, who express the desire, are the only persons who know its true value. There is no substantial law. Some estimate it and others oppose it. Some utilize it and others become unhappy with it. There is a reality in this. The narrative mode Barthelme adapts is his performative ability to create reality and truth of his version. He makes up the seemingly illogical and irrational construction of narrative in order to attempt to describe the flux between the subject and the anti-
subject. Because he himself can never help being the subject at last, it is quite natural that his attempt to describe the narrative without subject naturally comes to fail, but this is never to degrade his text's truth-value to represent reality.

V

“The Indian Uprising” is represented, as its historical theme, by war. In the text, there are distillates of discourses that people have experienced and expressed throughout history. War is the most unfortunate phenomenon of the consequence of the ideological collision and, at the same time, is painfully existing reality. In various scales, the collisions exist. There is accumulation of fragments of a number of experiencing subjects and the narrator who seemingly collapses toward madness enumerates the fragments.

However, the madness in “The Indian Uprising” is the suggestion of the subtle equilibrium between reduction and production. It is true that there is epistemological crisis in the narrator and his narrative, but it is not ultimate crisis. When we are freed from the narrative convention and when the subject and the anti-subject are in the flux of exchangeability, we can produce the narrative discourse which says that the epistemological crisis is submerged in the conventional view to history and fiction. After being freed from the view, we can have a narrative like “The Balloon,” under the condition that we cannot have any objective truth. Every narrative is more or less ideological, if every private desire is its origin. There is only the fusion of horizons, and it is not permitted to claim that any narrative is absolutely true. Our creative will is the opportunity of misinterpretations. Expressing ourselves in language, we
Donald Barthelme's Short Stories: "The Indian Uprising" and "The Balloon" have no other way than using narrative forms. If we use the word "story" on the condition of recognizing such misinterpretation and error, the word could be applied to Barthelme's pieces, only provisionally. The recognition saves ourselves from the convention, in which we call it story.

The gleam of hope is in fragments, as an individual who has a creative will, on the condition that there is always the possibility of collision. In the narrative, the Comanches, who were a part of the barricades, acquire the chance to be a subject in the flux of the role exchanging. They are, if having their creative will, ready to be treasures, by expressing themselves, and so are every fragment, every piece of trash, and every little thing.

Notes


2. "The Glass Mountain" is the piece in which the form of itemization is emphasized. Sentences amounting just one hundred are numbered one from a hundred in this narrative. Pieces like "At the Tolstoy Museum" and "The Flight of Pigeons from the Palace" contain quite elaborate illustrations, such as perspectives of architecture and drawings of figures, animals and anatomical specimen. "The Explanation" and "Kierkegaard Unfair to Schlegel" take their shape by proceeding dialogue between two persons, "Q" and "A." Barthelme's methodological characteristics are the most conspicuous ones but of course do not fully explain the way his narrative is. For the classificatory approach, see Wayne B. Stengel, The Shape of Art in the Short Stories of Donald Barthelme (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1985), in which Stengel attempts to classify Barthelme's works into sixteen types to study their production.

3. Though Barthelme's narratives hardly permit us to epitomize themselves because of their complex structure, here, for the better understandings, I dare
Donald Barthelme's Short Stories: "The Indian Uprising" and "The Balloon"

to outline "The Indian Uprising." The narrator of the narrative basically describes his surroundings under the circumstances of the ongoing war with the Comanches in a city. These are the characters: the narrator and his fellows who defend the city: the Comanches against whom the narrator fights: Sylvia with whom the narrator is infatuated, and other women: Kenneth whom Sylvia seems to love: Miss R, an academician, and Block whom we cannot determine to be ally or enemy. In the course of the sometimes visionary description of miserable war, the narrator frequently inserts, in abrupt way, comments and soliloquies on his ordinary private life, especially the life with his lovers. The text includes all discrepancies, contradictions, and sundry things to the extent that it exposes both the narrator's and our epistemological stability to danger. When we consider this narrative to be the narrator's erotic biography, his eventual madness, to which I will refer later, is a consequence of the termination of the relationship with his dearest Sylvia, but it seems to be caused mainly by the miscellaneous nature of the narrative environment. See Donald Barthelme, 

_Sixty Stories_ (London: Minerva, 1991). All quotations from "The Indian Uprising" and "The Balloon" are taken from this edition, and subsequent references appear in the text by page number only.

4. The narrator of "See the Moon?" says, "Fragments are the only forms I trust." This seems to be Barthelme's manifesto for his creative activity. See _Sixty Stories_, 98.


6. In terms of the color image which is emphasized in this quotation, see Brian McHale and Moshe Ron, "On Not-Knowing How to Read Barthelme's 'The Indian Uprising.'" _The Review of Contemporary Fiction_ 11.2 (1991) 50-68.

7. McHale and Ron 56.

8. Immediately before the previous quotation, McHale and Ron suggest the structural indeterminacy caused by the exchange of actantial role.

9. McHale and Ron point out, in terms of the war theme, that "To read 'The Indian Uprising' as an allegory of the Vietnam War seems not just plausible but irresistible, particularly since the analogies between the Indian wars and the Vietnam War, between Comanches (or Apaches) and Viet Cong, have become a commonplace of discourses about and representations of the
Donald Barthelme's Short Stories: "The Indian Uprising" and "The Balloon" 21

Vietnam War." See McHale and Ron, 54.
11. Stengel 55.
12. According to Gadamer, the act of understanding of a text's meaning is produced by a "fusion of horizons." He demonstrates this hermeneutical view on the condition that "a hermeneutical situation is determined by the prejudices that we bring with us. . . . [N]ow it is important to avoid the error of thinking that the horizon of the present consists of a fixed set of opinions and valuations, and that the otherness of the past can be foregrounded from it as from a fixed ground." See Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (NY: Continuum, 1994) 306.
15. White 133.