



## A DECONSTRUCTIONIST ARRAIGNMENT OF READING

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### ABSTRACT

Deconstructive readers are interested in ironies, aporias, paradoxes, contradictions, conflicts, parenthesis, ambiguities, puns, multiple meanings, linguistic peculiarities, intertextuality, repetitions, etc. Deconstructive readers give you an idea about in the ways a text says something different from what it aims to imply or the ways texts do not always mean. According to Barbara Johnson, “The reader’s task is to read what is written rather than simply attempt to perceive what might have been meant” (25). In this regard, deconstruction is an analog of New Criticism and other formalisms. Deconstruction in some respects is merely a synonym for ‘analysis’, which means that the title of this research paper is a tautology. It is not a synonym for ‘destruction’. Though the American style of deconstruction as operational tenets for literary criticism has now lost its significance, the deconstructive strategies of critical analysis have been commonly used so far. Deconstructive criticism, as Culler concludes, is not the application of philosophical lessons to literary studies, but an exploration of textual logic in texts called literary. This paper is essentially an analysis—a breaking down of a complex text into its various elements and a close assessment of those elements, especially the elements that most need examination because of the difficulties, ambiguities, or problems that they pretend.

**Keywords:** Deconstruction, Jacques Derrida, Binary Oppositions, Difference, Logocentrism.



The reader's real problem in understanding Derrida's works is how to know whether his argument is really serious or merely teasing. Derrida himself tells us that his manner of arguing is and has to be "a strategy that is complex and tortuous, involved and full of artifice." Even professional philosophers are irritated by this trait. Derrida's style is usually allusive, elusive and evasive. In a seminar at which Derrida was present many teachers and critics tried to get from him some elucidation of his main concepts. Derrida's conclusion is really an illustration of his argument. He states, "No, nothing new, no, we'll follow deconstruction, but deconstruction is nothing new." (Dhavale 17)

Deconstruction often involves a way of reading that concerns itself with decentering—with unmasking the problematic nature of all centers. It is a form of textual practice, which aims to demonstrate the inherent insatiability of both language and meaning. It rejects the word "analysis" or "interpretation" as well as it rejects any assumption of texts. A poststructuralist theory mainly stands on the writings of the French intellectual Jacques Derrida. Derrida assumes that meaning, as accessed through language, is indeterminate because language itself is indeterminate. It is a system of signifiers that can never fully mean i.e. a word can refer to an object but can never be that object. However, Derrida developed deconstruction as a response to certain strains of the Western philosophy; in the United States. It was the focus of a group of literary theorists at Yale, including Paul de Man and Geoffrey Hartman. Deconstruction used as a method of literary critique, it refocuses attention on a work as open-ended, endlessly available to interpretation, and far beyond the reach of authorial intention. Deconstruction traces how language generates meaning both within a text and across texts, while insisting that such meaning can only ever be temporary.

Deconstruction is a critical viewpoint concerned with the relationship between text and meaning. According to Derrida and taking inspiration from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, language is a system of signs and words only have meaning because of the contrast between these signs. Words have meaning only because of contrast-effects with other words; no word can acquire meaning in the way in which philosophers from Aristotle to Bertrand Russell have hoped it might. As a result, meaning is never present, but rather it defers to other signs. In the 1980s, deconstruction was generally used in a range of theoretical enterprises in the humanities and social



sciences, including law anthropology, historiography, linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychoanalysis, feminism, etc.

In poststructuralist literary theories, Deconstruction occupies a central place. Even though deconstruction is not much in favour with literary critics, it is difficult to imagine that there is any literary interpretation, which does not use the theory of deconstruction in some or other way. This theory is nihilistic in nature, but there cannot be any new interpretation without raising questions on the positive meaning in the first one. At present, all the literary critics, new historicists, culture critics, feminist, and psychoanalysts use the theory of deconstruction, rejecting the previous interpretation. We find that the theory of deconstruction is used in numerous ways. First, we would explain the theory of deconstruction and then show how other theorists use this theory.

Derrida first uses the term 'deconstruction' in his most influential work on deconstruction - *Of Grammatology* (1967) which was originally published in French, later translated into English by Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak. The main theme of the book is 'language and text'. Jacques Derrida invented the term deconstruction while discussing the implication of understanding language as writing rather than speech, is commonly used in philosophy, literary criticism, cultural studies, and even in popular media, especially in America. Derrida's original use of the word "deconstruction" was a translation of 'destruction', a concept of the work from Martin Heidegger that Derrida sought to apply to textual reading. Heidegger's term referred to a process of exploring the categories and concepts that traditionally has imposed on a word, and the history behind them. Derrida selected for deconstruction over the literal translation "destruction" to suggest precision rather than violence.

In the 1980s, deconstruction is the third linguistic theory emerged in the circles of literary criticism and was fascinating to a group of critics and academicians. However, Derrida argued that meaning in language is completely unstable. He believes that a text cannot have any single meaning, certainly not a meaning that the writer invests in it. Deconstruction can perhaps best be described as a theory of reading, which aims to undermine the logic of opposition within texts. Deconstruction rarely has a critical theory attracted the sort of dread and hysteria that deconstruction has incited since its inception in 1967. Deconstruction made its first inroads in the United States through the departments of literary criticism, which sought new strategies for interpreting literary texts. As a result, deconstruction became associated and sometimes confused with other trends, including reader



response theory, which argues that a text's meaning is produced through the reader's process of encountering

There is one statement by Derrida, which has been of great interest, which appeared in an essay on Rousseau in *Of Grammatology*. It is the assertion that, "There is no outside-text" which is often mistranslated as "there is nothing outside of the text". The mistranslation is often used to suggest Derrida believes that nothing exists but words. According to Derrida, his statement merely refers to the inevitability of context that is at the heart of *différance*. For instance, the word "house" derives its meaning more as a function of how it differs from "shed", "mansion", "hotel", "building", etc. See how the word "house" may be tied to a certain image of a traditional house i.e. the relationship between signifier and signified. However, Structuralism viewed language as a number of signs, composed of a signified (the meaning) and a signifier (the word itself). Derrida proposed that signs always referred to other signs, existing only in relation to each other, and there was therefore no ultimate foundation or center, this is the basis of *différance*.

Thus, complete meaning is always "differential" and postponed in language; there is never a moment when meaning is complete and total. A simple example would consist of looking up a given word in a dictionary, then proceeding to look up the words found in that word's definition, etc., also comparing with older dictionaries from different periods, and such a process would never end. Further Derrida describes the task of deconstruction as the identification of "Metaphysics of Presence" or "Logocentrism" in the western philosophy. Logocentrism is the desire for immediate access to meaning, the privileging of presence over absence. This means that there is an assumed bias in certain binary oppositions where one side is placed in a position of one over another, such as good over bad, speech over the written word, male over female among other oppositions. To Derrida the central bias of logocentrism was the now being placed as more important than the future or past.

Deconstruction usually tries to demonstrate that any text is not completely separate but contains several opposing and contradictory meanings. However, any text has more than one interpretation; that the text itself links these interpretations inextricably. The inappropriateness of these interpretations is irreducible; and thus an interpretative reading cannot go away from a certain point. Derrida refers to this point as an "aporia" in the text; thus, deconstructive reading is termed "aporetic." He insists that meaning is made possible by the relations of a word to other words within



the network of structures that language is. Deconstruction denotes the pursuing of the meaning of a text to the point of exposing the supposed contradictions and internal oppositions upon which it is founded. Derrida states that deconstruction is not an analysis in the traditional sense. This is because the possibility of analysis is predicated on the possibility of breaking up the text being analyzed into elemental component parts. Derrida argues that there are no self-sufficient units of meaning in a text. This is because individual words or sentences in a text can only be properly understood in terms of how they fit into the larger structure of the text and language itself.

The term Deconstruction denotes a particular kind of practice in reading and, thereby, a method of criticism and mode of analytical inquiry. In her book *The Critical Difference* (1981), Barbara Johnson clarifies the term:

“Deconstruction is not synonymous with ‘destruction’, however. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word ‘analysis’ itself, which etymologically means, “to undo” – a virtual synonym for “to de-construct”.... If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not the text, but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another. A deconstructive reading is a reading which analyses the specificity of a text’s critical difference from itself.” (Cuddon 209)

The Derridean deconstruction not only presents its insightful philosophical approach and new ways of thinking, but also demonstrates its effective strategies of critical analysis. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines deconstruction as, “A strategy of critical analysis, directed towards exposing unquestioned metaphysical assumptions and internal contradictions in philosophical and literary language.” (32) Indeed, deconstruction with its hermeneutical implications of how to interpret a text and its character of immanent critique based on demonstrating problems or contradiction that are already operating within the deconstructed text, has been developed as a critical theory, especially in America, although Derrida himself denies the identity of his deconstruction with the “deconstruction in America.” Rodolphe Gasché another Derrida scholar, also observes that, “deconstruction, as a method for the reading and interpreting of text and as a procedure for demystifying established beliefs and conceptions, is American through and through.” (Gasché 21)

In literature, Deconstruction means to analyze a text in order to show that there is no fixed meaning within the text, but that the meaning is created each time in act of reading. Deconstruction



used in literature to emphasize the role of the reader in the production of meaning and it stated that it is impossible for a text to have one fixed meaning. The focus of deconstruction is language and text. Deconstruction is a rigorous attempt to rethink the principles of reason that has shaped the emergence of the western philosophy, science and technology. Derrida's deconstruction is simply a thought of proclamation of all the habits for any discipline with clear-cut lines between reality and representation, which are related to the notion of language or text. Jacques Derrida, associated with the movement in philosophy, known as deconstruction is arguably one of the most elusive controversial and influential figures in western intellectual history. His writings are related to philosophy, literature, law, social, moral and political theories and are obsessed with the function of language.

The basic difference between Derrida's and Saussure's approaches to language lies in the fact that the former takes up the case of written language while the latter assigns superiority to the spoken words. Derrida's argues that speech cannot claim its direct relationship to the origin, since the origin, as it is comprehend, in already split. Derrida feels that Saussure never thinks in terms of a writing that might have usurped speech. However, Saussure's problem was that he never thought of writing as figuration or symbol. Derrida says that even before speech is linked to signifier, which must signify something, the concept of the graphic implies the framework of the instituted trace, a possibility common to all systems of signification. As a chief contributor of deconstruction, Derrida reaches the point that 'the language is fundamentally slippery'. There is no fixed place for meaning 'difference' and 'deference'. All writing is this difference and a study of this 'difference' is what Derrida distinctively termed in his book *Of Grammatology*. No critical analysis of 'text and literary language' has been rigorous than that of Derrida, Paul de Man, Geoffrey, Hartman and Harold Bloom. As we know that, our life is governed by certain Ideology, which is built into our language. According to Derrida, "Language has not a reliable mode of communication that we believe it. It has not permanency. It is so fluid and slippery". According to Saussure 'Language is a system whose parts can and must all be considered in their synchronic solidarity'. As a tool for communication, Deconstruction does not mean stability or solidity. The way we understand the world and see ourselves, are governed by the language, "Language teaches us, and we have learned it as an



experience. The world is governed by the language and language has carried along with its conflicting ever-changing and dynamic system of ideologies.”(Krishnaswami 32)

According to deconstruction, meaning is fluid, brought to a text by its readers as well as by its placement on a page, in a journal or a book, and by many other factors that affect the way it is perceived. In fact, these issues are stronger than the intentions of the author, even to the point of arguing that texts have no author, once they have been written. The author sets the words down, but once released, has no more ownership of or control over the text. Deconstruction is finding of self-contradictions in a body of work. You realize that there are two sides to every story and support the side that is less obvious. In other words, you play devil’s advocate. It may be applied to the literary text by recognizing the existence and operation of binary oppositions in our own thinking, by seeking the differences, by liberating of what you already know—you are taking a ‘side’ you do not normally take. According to deconstruct, we cannot simultaneously see both sides of a story. We simply ignore our first interpretation to accept the second.

Jacques Derrida questioned the fundamental conceptual distinctions of our understanding of the World through a close examination of the language and logic of philosophical and literary texts. Deconstruction sees all writing as a complex historical, cultural process rooted in the relations of texts to each other. Deconstruction clarifies the instability created by the metaphorical, meanings of words. It discloses the metaphysical contradictions of philosophical writings. Deconstruction is an anti-foundational theory. Derrida clearly states that deconstruction is not an analysis, a critique or a method; it is not a precise set of rules that can be applied to any text in the same way. Each deconstruction is necessarily different. As Derrida stated Deconstruction takes place, it is an event. Deconstruction is based on a meticulous rather apply in reading and, thereby, a method of criticism and mode of analytical inquiry. Although deconstruction was sometimes used pejoratively to suggest nihilism and frivolous skepticism Jonathan Culler Professor of English at Cornell University gives a provocative analysis of the deconstruction considering deconstruction in terms of the questions raised by psychoanalytic criticism. On Deconstruction, “The entire history of the concept of structure,” Derrida argues, “...must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center” The knowledge of ‘reality cannot be achieved only via words.



Derrida shows that a text can be read as saying something quite different from what it appears to be saying, and that it may read as carrying a plurality of significance or saying many different things, which are fundamentally at variance with, contradictory to, and subversive of what may 'betray' itself. A deconstructive criticism of a text reveals that there is nothing except the text. Derrida believes that one cannot evaluate, criticize, or construct a meaning for a text by reference to anything external to it. For instance, can we translate any experience into symbolic form? Think of a sensation like orgasm and explain it via words. A Text cannot simply transfer an author's ideas totally. Therefore, Derrida encourages the re-reading of philosophical writings. Deconstruction describes the failure of the appeal to presence within the text that its author intended it to mean. It describes problems in the text rather than creating them.

Between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, many thinkers were influenced by deconstruction, including Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, and J. Hillis Miller. This group came to be known as the Yale school and was especially influential in literary criticism. Miller has described deconstruction this way, "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock, but thin air." Paul de Man a prominent practitioner of deconstruction as he understood it. His definition of deconstruction is that, "it's possible, within text, to frame a question or undo assertions made in the text, by means of elements which are in the text, which frequently would be precisely structured that play off the rhetorical against grammatical elements." Richard Ellmann defines deconstruction as, "it the systematic undoing of understanding". (*Wikipedia*)

Other prominent thinkers connected with Deconstruction in various ways are Foucault, Barthes, Harold Bloom, Lyotard, Lacan, Julia Kristeva and some others. All of them are very versatile writers, and refer frequently to language and literature from different points of view. Though Barthes was also a structuralist, his views have influenced deconstruction a great deal. He repeatedly tells that literature 'signifies nothing', 'literature is fundamentally constitutively unrealistic, 'the text is plural.' His views and those of Deconstructionists are frequently the same. Foucault is perhaps the most versatile of these writers, with his book on topic like madness, sexuality, etc. He is always eager to revise all earlier views and attitudes, and is always a revolutionary in all fields. Some of his epigrammatic enouncements have had a great effect on modern thought.





Deconstructive reading transcends the semanticity, the literality of language, which is always in conflict with the text's explicit meaning. The conflict points to the 'other' in the text and opens the way to the infinitization of possibilities. The critique of an object, by bringing in another object, as for example the study of one man by another man, is bound to suffer from certain inherent through invisible contradiction. This contradiction, which often manifests as supplement, delay, difference, is the basis for the elaboration of the meaning of the text in an endless play of dialectical, revisionary, and supplementary monstrosity.

All texts are mediated by language and by cultural systems and meaning is a shifting field of relations in which there is no stable point. Reading can be different. It can be literal reading or deconstructive reading. In deconstructive reading, a high level of universality could be achieved. For this reason deconstructive gives a sense closer to reality also it helps entering into the thoughtful play of contradiction examination of the stability and cogency of the text. Derrida argues that all theories of knowledge are metaphysical appeals to the full presence of truth in a given situation. Consider how a word can create negative or positive characteristics in the mind. For instance, if someone says, a nose neutral emotion is created in the mind and if he says penis or condom, a provocative emotional flush comes into action. Consequently, each word generates prototype emotion when it is being analyzed in the brain.

The other distinctive feature is each word has a mental picture. When we hear the word spoon, a specific mental picture (spoon like) formed in the mind. What about if someone says heaven? We have some form of imagination of that place, although we have never seen it. Another aspect is the ambiguities of a text and it can be interpreted in different ways giving dissimilar nuances. Therefore, a text has no stable reference and obviously, anyone can question the ability of language to represent the reality. Obviously, the language has numerous limitations and the reader frequently find the impossibility of providing intentional meaning. Most often, the expected meaning does not originate in the words and understanding may be somewhat different.

Thus, deconstruction is a critical problem in modern philosophical view. It is a highly controversial issue in various branches of knowledge as it touches almost every subject in which intellectuals are interested. It has particularly influenced in modern philosophical, social, moral, political, linguistic and literary theories. Deconstruction is used for searching analysis of language,



which leads to new and unexpected interpretation of fact opinions and theories. The working idea that emerges from the foregoing discussion is that deconstruction is a “searching out” or dismantling operation conducted on a discourse to show how the discourse itself undermines the argument it asserts.

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