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Deconstruction: A Simplified Study

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ABSTRACT

One of the main ideas of postmodernism is deconstruction. The process of thoroughly dissecting and exposing the presumptions, decisions, and values that underpin social structures and philosophical concepts is known as deconstruction. These days, deconstruction is especially popular in the English-speaking world when combined with analytical philosophy. Jacques Derrida is undoubtedly one of the most enigmatic, divisive, and influential figures in Western intellectual history. Derrida's writing style is whimsical, meandering, and at times cryptic, as he is preoccupied with dealing with the work of language. He makes his points clear demonstrating a level of self-reflexivity. Derrida's work was labelled post-structuralism and is also associated with postmodern philosophy. Derrida's theories on deconstruction were influenced by the work of linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure and literary theorists such as Roland Barthes. Jacques Derrida's observations are cited in discussions of ontology, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, hermeneutics, and philosophy of language. This paper unpacks the complex concept of deconstruction, presenting it in a lucid and engaging manner.

Keywords: Deconstruction, Post structuralism, Postmodernism, Binary opposition, Western Philosophy.

These days, there is a lot of talk about theory which radically changed the nature of literary studies. Theory can be defined as what changes people's views, makes them think differently about their objects of study and their activities of studying them. The main effect of theory is the disputing of common theory questions.

- the conception that the meaning of an utterance or text is what the speaker had in mind.
- or the idea that writing is an expression whose truth lies elsewhere, in an experience or state of affairs which it expresses
- or the notion that reality is what is present at a given moment.

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Theory has broadened the questions that literary works can address and brought attention to the various ways that these works challenge or elucidate the ideas of their respective eras. The literary canon is currently growing along with the field of cultural studies. Writings by women and other historically marginalised groups are included in today's literature. Whether added to traditional literary courses or studies as separate traditions (“Asian American Literature”, Postcolonial Literature in English). These writings are often studies as representations of the experience and the culture of the people in question (in the United States, of African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and US Latinos as well as women) such writings bring to the fore questions about how far literature creates the culture it is said to express or represent.

“A language is a system of differences” so declares Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist of the early twentieth century whose work has been crucial to contemporary theory.

According to Saussure, linguistic signs are arbitrary, and this is the fundamental aspect of language as a system of signs. This has two implications. First, the sign consists of a form (the signifier) and a meaning (the signified), with convention serving as the foundation for the relationship between the two. On the plane of sound, English distinguishes chair, cheer, and char as distinct signs with various meanings. According to Saussure, a language must have "nomenclature," which gives names of its own to categories that do not exist in language.

Saussure makes a distinction between specific instances of speech and writing (*parole*) and the language system (the *langue*). Reconstructing a language's underlying system, or grammar, which permits speech events, or *parole*, is the goal of linguistics. The goal of linguistics, according to the most significant linguist of our time and the creator of transformational generative grammar, Noam Chomsky, is to reconstruct native speakers' linguistic competence. A work is interpreted based on the reader's experience, which may involve self-corrections, hesitations, and speculations. Telling a reading story is the act of interpreting a work. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, for instance, can be understood from the perspective of the reader. To deny the play of the game is to say that *Hamlet* is about a prince in Denmark. Different interpretations entail engaging in the "about" game (1). The



disintegration of the Elizabethan world order is the subject of Hamlet. Men's fear of feminine sexuality is a theme in Hamlet. The unreliability of science is a theme in Hamlet.

Different theoretical approaches to literature or schools of literary criticism provide different answers to the question of what a work is ultimately about.

- the class struggle (Marxism)
- the possibility of unifying experience (New Criticism)
- Oedipal conflict (Psychoanalysis).
- the containment of. Subversive Energies (New Historicism)
- the asymmetry of gender relations (Feminism)
- the self-destructive nature of the text (Deconstruction)
- the acculturation of imperialism (Post-colonial Theory)
- the heterosexual Matrix (Gay and Lesbian Studies)

The theoretical discourses named in parentheses are not primarily modes of interpretation, they are accounts of what they take to be particularly important to culture and society.

Although context is infinite, meaning is limited. Expanding or redefining the context may lead to significant changes in how theoretical discourses interpret the data. For instance, Toni Morrison contends that reading American literature's engagement with freedom in the context of slavery is necessary because it has been profoundly influenced by the historical, unacknowledged existence of slavery. According to Edward Said, one way to read Jane Austen's novels is in the context of the Empire's colonies, which are exploited to produce wealth for a comfortable life back home in Britain. Although meaning is dependent on context, theoretical discussions can always cause context to change.

The work of Jacques Derrida is most directly associated with deconstruction, a philosophically critical approach to textual analysis. He provides an explanation of binary opposition. The deconstructive method is employed to demonstrate how a literary text's meaning is not constant or set in stone. Because there is no clear connection between a signifier (a word) and a signified (an object), according to Jacques Derrida, all

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communication is marked by uncertainty. There is no real meaning to a text once it is written; it only has meaning until the reader reads it. Deconstruction is a method to comprehend how the meaning of the text relates to it, reading texts while keeping an ear out for anything that contradicts the text's intended meaning or structural coherence.

In his well-known lecture "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," French philosopher and semiotician Jacques Derrida questioned two fundamental tenets of western philosophy: first, those stable, central truths are possible; and second, that language and discourse are characterised by fundamental patterns of meaning. Derrida and Deconstructionists believed that the relationship between signifier and signified in language is unreliable, leading to a breakdown of certainty. Literary texts should be dissected to show that they are fundamentally contradictory and have an endless number of associations, just like any ideology or communication. The creative power of language and the ability of the critic to interpret and translate it in fresh, thought-provoking ways have supplanted the conventional idea of the author as a creative creator. Similar to the new critic, deconstruction relies on a close reading of the text because it only refers to itself and does not discuss the author's intentions with regard to the outside world.

Derrida's Deconstruction Theory, linked to literary criticism, rejects the idea of pure presence and holds that intrinsic meaning is necessary. The meaning of the word "house" comes from its distinctions from other terms like "shed," "mansion," "hotel," and "building," rather than from its association with a particular type of traditional home. This is the signifier-signified relationship. The play differs in that any words that follow "house" in any expression change the meaning of the word. In language, the whole meaning is always different. The meaning is never fully realised at any one time. There are many variations for a word even in dictionaries.

When addressing the ramifications of comprehending language in writing as opposed to speech, the term "deconstruction" was first used in grammatology in 1967. According to Derrida, when language is interpreted as writing, meaning is deconstructed. Because these thoughts are already occurring in the language that does not originate with them, the meaning does not originate in the thoughts of the language user or the specific user. They receive it



from outside sources. Therefore, the language user does not have complete control over meaning.

According to deconstruction, the text is an open-ended, centerless entity. The notion of "difference" is extended from de Saussure's "binary composition" and "indefiniteness" to acknowledge the text's ambiguous, intertextual, and indefinite nature, which causes significations to be postponed. Deconstructionists fervently contend that a writer is never able to convey through his writing what he is feeling. As a result, he must devote himself to the never-ending task of discovering the author's intended meaning.

Derrida coined the term „difference, to include both „differ“ and „defer“. According to him, the significance of the text is endless due to the presence of contradictions, paradoxes, metaphors, allusions and references. In an endless pursuit, it takes linguistic signs and investigates the plurality and multiplicity of their interpretation. Thus the meaning of the text expands infinitely. Deconstructive stylistics is a paradigm which investigates the formal linguistic devices to defer the argument and discussion endlessly in order to remind inconclusive and make them open-ended. It reminds open to all types of thoughts and impressions.

In the late twentieth century, the critics from the USA and England, the new criticism with the spell of Russian Formalism try to decipher the connection between language and its context the emergence of formalism as an academic discipline and reaction against the dominance of romantic theories of art and literature, foregrounded the text itself by demonstrating how the text was indebted to forms and the inherent features of a text ranging from grammar and syntax to metre and tropes.

The text itself became the manifesto of focus on the literary text, the meaning, structure and value of text are inherent within the finished, freestanding and public work of literature, not outside in the 70s, with the linguistic turn and cultural theory, the structuralist and post-structuralist question the fixity meaning of verbal icons of new criticism. However, close reading as a strategy of critical investigation continued more powerfully in the polysemous world of contemporary theory.

Though close reading was a typical feature of new criticism, the deconstructionist of the later decades, the American Deidian“s performed close readings of the passages of texts that



range from Plato through Jean Jacques Rousseau to the present era. M.H. Abram argues, a radically destructive closed reading undertakes to show that a literary text lacks a totalized boundary that makes it an entity, much less than an organic utility. Also the text, by a play of internal counter forces, disemanates into an indefinite range of self-conflicting significations.

With Derrida's challenge to the structurality of structure, the Poststructural turns in criticism got underway and ushered in a new phase of French intellectual life. Derrida disapproves of the entire arche and telos line of inquiry, which is based on the idea that cultural activity can be approached and examined as a sign in an objective manner. According to Saussure, language is a system (structure) made up of connected parts that follow certain rules of behaviour and have an internal order. According to Saussure, there are only distinctions in language—positive terms are absent.

A literary work, according to Roland Barthes, is nothing more than a collection of signs that combine in specific ways to produce meaning; structuralism completely rejects signifier-signified relationships that are not motivated. A word, in the words of Ferdinand de Saussure, is the combination of two elements: meaning or sense and sound image or physical form. He considers the sense image to be "signified," and the sound image to be "signifier."

Words are nothing more than signs, and they have a symbolic connection to the outside world. Both the signifier and the signified have significance and reference to the external world. A sentence's verb is its central component, and the semantic charge of the verb influences the other sentence components.

Post-structuralism is a critic rather than a continuation of structuralism. Post- structuralism rejects the notion of a single truth. They use various means and methods to deconstruct the structures of language. Derrida developed deconstruction criticism which asserts that text can only be constructed to reveal their contradictions, not stable truths. Richard Ellmann has called “the systematic undoing of understanding focuses on the contradictions and internal opposition” upon which meaning in a literary text rests, demonstrating how such meaning is endlessly complex and unstable.” For the Deconstructionist, *Against Deconstruction* (1989) (61) a literary text has multiple and contradictory interpretations that are never fully resolved. J. Hillis Miller observes “Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a



demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid and is no rock but thin air.” Theory Now and Then (1991) (57).

It is impossible to escape the text, as Derrida claims. The creative potential of language or the text and the critic's clever deconstruction and translation replace the traditional idea of the author as a creative originator in the eyes of the deconstructionist. Similar to the New critic, Deconstruction relies on a close reading of the text, but the formalists' faith in the coherence and unity of literature is called into question.

As a reaction to Structuralism, Post-structuralism emerged and rejected the centrality of structure as propounded by Saussure. Structuralism focuses on what is „intrinsic“ to the work ignoring „extrinsic“ matters. In Poststructuralism the prefix „post“ suggests that „structuralism“ has now been supplanted by a new theory, taking on the relationship of binary opposition. Poststructuralism offers a way of investigation of how knowledge is produced and criticizes structuralism premises.

It argues that because history and culture condition the study of underlying structures, both lead to subject biases and misinterpretations. A post-structuralist approach argues that to understand an object, a text, it is necessary to study both the object itself and the systems of knowledge that produce the object. Derrida’s theory of Deconstruction emphasized the concept of unstable, unfixed, meaning in language.

As a critical practice, deconstruction is an evaluative device found useful in the current schools of theory to emerge. In *Beginning Theory*, Peter Barry sums up the practice of post-structuralist critics.

1. They read the text against itself to export to the „textual subconscious“ where meanings are expressed contrary to the surface meaning.
2. They fix upon the surface features of the words, similarities in sound, the root meanings of the words, metaphor and bring these to the foreground, crucial to the overall meaning.
3. They seek to show that the text is characterized by this unity rather than unity.
4. They concentrate on a single passage so intensely that it becomes impossible to sustain as „univocal“ reading and the language explodes into „multiplicities of meaning“.



5. They look for shifts and breaks in the text, to make it an evidence of what is repressed or glossed over in silence by the text. These discontinuities are called „faultlines“, a geological metaphor (147).

In short, it is a reading against the grain where texts annihilate themselves in the process. In practice, deconstruction is the systematic undoing of understanding how a literary text has multiple and contradictory interpretations. It can be elucidated through a simple poem „Mending wall“ by the American poet Robert Frost. The poem is set in rural New England, where Frost lived at the time and takes its impetus from the rhythms and rituals of life there. The poem describes how the speaker and the neighbor need to rebuild a stone wall between their properties, a ritual repeated every spring. At its core, the poem is about borders and the way it shapes human interactions. The speaker and the speaker’s neighbor debate on the function of the wall affecting their relationships.

On the surface of the level, the poem is about the disagreement over an issue so fundamental to human society and political things. As far as deconstruction is concerned, things can be understood in binary opposition. The speaker advocates nonconformity and the neighbor, without even thinking about what he is doing, advocates conformity. The ideological stance of the poem attacks- good fences make good neighbors- is actually called valid within the action of the poem. The title implies that "mending" becomes a wall that mends relationships rather than a wall that is mended if we interpret "mending" as an adjective instead of a verb. The unsolvable conflict between conservatism and progressivism suggests that reality is not reducible to any one category. And any attempt of that kind will suggest a loss of meaning. The Derridian project is to reject the certainty of meaning by demonstrating that it is based on a fictitious centre. The deconstructive reading distributes meanings to conclude this.

Deconstruction, as a school of philosophy and literary criticism, celebrates a centreless world of „free play“ with incredulity towards meta-narratives. Opposed to the idea of pure presence, is the free play of the signifier in the deconstruction. There are hierarchical opposition between presence and absence.



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