



Deconstruction: Literary deconstruction in practice

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Abstract

This synecdoche substitution of one art of literary theory and criticism for the whole must be considered unfortunate by both advocates and opponents of deconstruction. Derrida's influence in literary studies has been extremely controversial, and many scholars refused such association with what they conceive as a catastrophic assault on the values of truth, rationality, and common sense. But equally, those more sympathetic to Derrida may stress that not only is deconstruction *affirmative* rather than destructive, but it is not a method of criticism, or even a theory in the sense in which we usually use that term. Moreover, in deconstruction's resistance to conventional descriptions what its advocates argue makes it so important: He only possibility of a response to literature which does not destroy what it seeks to understand.

Keywords: deconstruction, Derrida, criticism, argue

Introduction

Deconstruction is form of textual practice (one cannot really say 'analysis' or 'interpretation' since it rejects the assumptions such terms involve), derived from the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, which aims to demonstrate the instability of both language and meaning. Derrida is possibly best approached as the latest, and in many ways the most radical, exponent of philosophical skepticism, a tradition whose brief has been to undermine the time-honored assumptions of Western philosophical enquiry – assumptions such as that truth is not a relative notion, or that word have determinate meanings.

Deconstruction is not a philosophy but a technique, a method that can be applied to texts both literary and philosophical. Deconstruction we cannot follow text. We believe hypertext. For example: T.S. Eliot's the concept of deconstruction is "In the end is beginning".

Literary deconstruction in practice

Let us examine closely some 'texts' to discover within each of them opposing ideas.

A. Read carefully the text given below

In the beginning God created the heaven the earth.
And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness
Was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God
Moved upon the face if the water. And God said, 'Let
there of be light' and there was light. And God saw the
light,
that it was good. And God divided the light from the
darkness.
And god called the light Day, and the darkness he called
Night.

The deconstructive enterprise involves setting up binary distinctions or oppositions.

1. In the above text several binary oppositions are set up:
heaven/earth god/...not good (implied)
spirit/from God/man
light/darkness
day/night beginning/...end (implied)
2. In each pair there is a hierarchy and one is privileged. 'Heaven' is privileged over 'earth', 'spirit' over 'form', 'light' over 'darkness' etc. who created good and evil? Reverse the hierarchy and see the consequence.
3. The trace of one is available in the other; for example, the trace of darkness is available in light. Is there any transcendental 'signified' (i.e. an absolute description or definition) for any one of the terms? Try to find it and show that without one the other has no meaning.
4. Do you think that is a phonecentric or alogocentric bias in the text? How is it expressed in the text? What God said is written; any comments on that? Christianity and Hinduism always expressed a principal mistrust of the written world and privileged the spoken world. That was why Plato and Aristotle were retained by the Western tradition that was shaped, at the early stage, by its exposure to Greekphilosophy. In Jewish and Islamic traditions, on the contrary, there no such bias. Do you agree?
5. The text given above exhibits the presence of a centre and shows that everything is received. How are these ideas expressed in the text?
6. Do you think that creation occurs in language? Is there anything outside the text?

B. Now read the text given below carefully

Tryger, Tryger burning bright
In the forests of the night;

What immortal hand or eye
 Could frae thy fearful symmetry?
 In what distant deeps or skies,
 Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
 On what wings dare he aspire?
 What the hand dare seize the fire?
 And what shoulder and what art,
 Could twist the heart began to beat,
 What dread head? And what dread feet?
 What the hammer? What the chain?
 In what furnace was thy brain?
 What the anvil? What dread grasp
 Dare its deadly terrors clasp?
 When the start threw down their spears,
 And water'd heaven with their tears:
 Did he smile his work to see?
 Did he who made the Lamb make thee?
 Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
 In the forests of the night:
 What immortal hand or eye,
 Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

The following picture emerges

Tyger Fearful primordial evil	he the creator/God the immortal hand	Lamb innocent victim divine gentleness, peaceful
	ness, self-service, the guardian Divine Christ on the cross.	

American Deconstruction

Deconstruction in America, though influenced by Derridean ideas, is guided by the history of literary criticism in the U.S.A. PUL SW Man’s Blindness and Insight (1971) and Allegories of Reading (1979), Harold Bloom’s A Map of Misreading (1975), Geoffrey Hartman’s The Fate of Reading (1975) and criticism in the Wilderness (1980), J Hillis Miller’s deconstructions of fiction in Fiction and Repetition (1982) and Barbara Johnson’s the Critical Difference (1980) are some of the important works within the deconstructionist paradigm. These critics have also been referred to as ‘The Yale School’. American Deconstruction gas cone out of the formalism of the New Critics and the Coleridge an Romantic notion of ‘organic form’ akin to that of nature; however, with this background, American deconstructionists discover more multiplicity and contradictions in the natural organic form. They base their observation on close reading. De Man show s that readings is always necessarily misreading; using the Romantic ‘crisis-poems’ of words worth, Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson, Bloom demonstrates how each poet ‘creatively misreads’ the works of his predecessors. Some do it with gay abandon but others with deconstructive insight.

Paul de Man’s reading of the closing lines of Yeats’ poem ‘Among School Children’ is a good example of a contrary reading:

O chestnut-tree, great rooted blossomer,

Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
 O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
 How can we know the dancer form the dance?

The concluding question has traditional unit between form and experience, between creator and creation thus presupposing an; organic unity’. The last line has been read figuratively, as a rhetorical the figurative reading is more ‘knowledgeable’. But the lines your friend whether you are interested in Post Modernism or difference?’ Your reply could mean that you are literally asking for the differences between the two, or it could mean that you tried your best and that you are so exasperated that you don’t care because you think there isn’t much difference; in that case, the demonstrates that the question ‘How can we know the dancer form the dance?’ Can be read literally to mean, ‘Please tell me how I can know the dancer form the dance? This may lead to greater complications of theme and statement since the dancer and dance are not the same.

The two contradictory readings or the; double logical’ shows the incompatible and yet mutually dependent interweaving of pluralistic perspectives as the basis of meaning and interpretation; it can also show the critical nature of literary texts and the literary nature of critical texts.

Deconstruction in India

In India, a pluralistic sub-continent, scholars have always used deconstructive thinking, of course, without using as equivalent term in Indian languages. For instance, Nagarjuna (1 or 2nd century AD) raises a question similar to what de Man says about the last line in Yeats’s poems. Nagarjuna, a Buddhist philosopher, asks the question: How can we know the goer (i.e. the person who performs the action of going) form the action of going? Is ‘going’ in the person who goes? ; So ‘going’ belongs to the ‘goer’. If ‘going’ is in the person who goes, what happens if he stops? If he does not go, he cannot be the goer and identical, there are no two no going. If ‘going’ and ‘goer’ are identical, there are no two activities. So Nagarjuna argues that there is no reality in ‘going’. Both are unreal. Similarly the dancer and the dance are unreal. This kind of Buddhist *Suunyavaada* is ‘nothing’ in the modern sense.

Nagarjuna’s ideas are worth thinking about

There is nothing which could be affirmed of anything independently by itself without reference to something else; nothing therefore could be conceived of as having any essence by itself. All appearances are therefore only interdependent, phantom creations; it is precisely this interdependence that proves the senselessness of their natures. All things are relative and hence indefinable in themselves and there is no way of discovering their essences; and since their essences are not only indefinable and indescribable, but incomprehensible as well they, cannot be said to poses any essence of their own. No concept reveals any intrinsic nature of its own and one could understand a concept only through another and that again through the former or through another and so on.... (One may read Derridean concepts of trace and supplementary in what has been quoted above). Though Nagarjuna’s ideals are not text-oriented like in Derridean Deconstruction, notions

like plurality, indeterminacy, circularity and the impossibility of getting it right are emphasized by him.

Anekanantavada, the epistemological view of Jainism—other major protest movements against the supremacy and teaching of the Vedas, advocates an important doctrine of non-absolutism. Vedas believe in the transcendental self-luminous Brahman or the supreme reality (Truth (Para), the only reality through which everything else is manifested. *Anekanantavada* views reality as being pluralistic, many sided or expressing itself in multiple forms and holds that whatever we say about reality is only ‘perhaps’. This doctrine of ‘perhapsism’ or ‘maybeism’ is found in the well-known story of the blind men and the elephant. Mahavira (maybe fourth century BC) emphasizes through this story the impossibility of getting anything right since reality is ever changing, dynamic complex and that any search for the absolute (fixed) is futile. This argument is called *Syadvada* (*syat=perhaps; uada=ism*). Bhartrhari’s (fifth century AD) *Vakyapadiya* presents a synthetic view of language philosophy through the *Sphota* theory. According to him, *Sphota*, an integral linguistic symbol which cannot be heard or written, is best manifested through sounds temporally; the ultimate *Sphota* is not uttered by the speaker nor heard by the listener. What is articulated is *Dhwani* (sound). Bhartrhari looks upon *Sphota* as an inner entity which reveals itself through the articulated sounds; the inner entity has no distinction between speech and thought and belongs to the level of intuition. All attempts to comprehend it by the intellect may only take us up to some point and even there we may get just a glimpse of that integral whole. The concept of ‘relative pluralism’ - the notion that ‘reality’ can be considered from different points of view of *Nayas*, the realization that all is never the ‘same’ and even that while changing gives the impression that nothing changes, the thinking that the all judgments are relative and probable, and the faith that essential nothing is the basis for all changes, thereby giving ‘shanti’ – are part of the Indian Psyche. That is why, in Indian philosophy, it is believed that one never enters the same river again (in the context of one bathing in the river); by the time body chemistry and the mental make-up of the one taking the bath also changes.

With its rich pluralistic culture (multi lingual, multi-cultural, multi religious, multi ethnic etc.), revolt traditions from the ancient times to the present day mutinies, manifold commentaries as text in their own right each supplementing the store of wisdom, constantly deconstructing and absorbing waves of invasion in all areas of life, India represents a multiversity. So, understanding deconstruction or applying it should not pose any problems at all to the Indian mind; the only thing is that we should come out of the universities and their fossilized thinking and try to learn Deconstructing without using the label, or often without knowing that they are deconstructing, since it is a natural way of thinking in India.

Conclusion

One’s final attitude to deconstruction might well depend on whether agrees that rationality and logo centricity really are the confidence tricks that Derrida insists they are. How far down this road one can follow Derrida without collapsing into a self-defeating solipsism and private language is, however, an interesting question to ponder. I might also be objected that if

language is as marked by indeterminacy as deconstruction claims, then it is difficult to see how it can establish this indeterminacy through the use of language: some sort of logical paradox would seem to be involved at that point. Madan Sarup claims that Derrida can be exonerated from such an accusation:

The usual superficial criticism of Derrida is that he questions the value of ‘truth’ and ‘logic’ and yet uses logic to demonstrate the truth of his own arguments. The point is that the overt concern of Derrida’s writing is the predicament of having to use the resources of the heritage that he questions.

(An Introduction Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism, p.58) g

But Sarup is unlikely to persuade too many doubts that the logical paradox has been explained away, although that rarely deters philosophical skeptics from proceeding in their enquiries.

For all its impact on critical discourse, it is most likely that deconstruction will be remembered as a particularly radical, if on occasion more than a little eccentric, form of philosophical skepticism that forced re-examination of the subject’s foundations of argument.

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