

The Deconstructive Study of William Faulkner's 'The Sound and the Fury'

Parisa Pooyandeh

Master of Arts Degree in English Literature, Department of English, University of Tehran, Iran
Corresponding Author email: p.pooyandeh@yahoo.com

Abstract: The present paper is an attempt to explore the theory of deconstruction and its application in the novel of *The Sound and the Fury*. Deconstructive theory was coined by Jacques Derrida in France who launched a major critique of traditional Western metaphysics. Like Sigmund Freud's deconstructive strategies which take off from Ferdinand de Saussure's insistence on the arbitrariness of the verbal sign they have subsequently established themselves an important part of postmodernism especially in post-structural literary theory and text analysis. Though the deconstructive principles of Derrida and latter critics are well established, they remain somewhat controversial.

Key words: Deconstructive theory, postmodernism, sign, poststructuralism

INTRODUCTION

The author strives to find some remarkable commonalities between deconstruction and intertextuality demonstrating that both theories support the idea that meaning of texts are brought forth through a process of reading, recreating and de- and re-contextualization. Derrida shares views on how texts refer to and depend on each other in the form of allusion, quotation, adaptation, pastiche, parody, burlesque, spoof, and other kinds of transformation.

The philosophy of deconstruction involves the questioning of the highly hierarchical opposition such as cause and effect, presence and absence, speech ("phonocentrism") and writing in order to expose the bias (the privileged terms) of those tacit assumptions on which Western metaphysics rests. To many American scholars, deconstruction seemed a logical step beyond New Criticism with its strong emphasis on text, and it was readily accepted and enlarged upon at Yale University by such individuals as Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller. The theory of deconstruction originated mainly among literary scholars and thinkers in the discipline of literature in the late 1960s and early 1980s. It is consequential to a number of fields including literary theory, philosophy, architecture, cultural studies, and the like; an interdisciplinary theory came into rise mainly from the work of Jacques Derrida who was an iconoclast and rebelled against all established stereotypes of all ages. According to Derrida, deconstruction is not a synonym for destruction rather it is an attempt to open a text to several meanings. Put differently, deconstruction does not intend to destroy rather like intertextuality it points out the limitless instability of language and meaning. The main objective of deconstruction is to discover the concealed meaning of the texts.

Derrida is mainly interested in the correlation between the text and what the text intends to speak of, but fails. As far as the deconstructionists are concerned the text is open to any sort of interpretation. They believe that meaning is indeterminate and plural. In other words, deconstruction believes in plurality and multiplicity of meaning and therefore providing for the various interpretations of literary texts. Rashkow(1992, 59-60) stresses that plurality here does not mean several meanings, but rather that the text cannot be reduced to a meaning. Deconstructionists acknowledge that their own texts are open to further deconstruction.

There is no definite reading; all texts contain contradictions, gaps, and fragments. Deconstruction discloses the complexities of meaning and acknowledges the deep mysteries of meaning which allows the readers to free themselves from the tyrannies of univocal reading. Multivocality is useful in illustrating the fact that what we say is not necessarily what we mean instead, words and statements can have a plurality of meanings. Put simply, sometimes words do not actually express what the speaker wants them to express so words will mean one thing, and what people intended to convey might mean another. Deconstruction is a kind of approach for analyzing texts and refuting the idea that there is one objective meaning and hence leaves the text open to personal and creative interpretations. It suggests that meaning is created each time in the process of reading.

The meaning is up for grabs and a text is a code; it is the reader who decodes it. It should be noted that decoding any text requires levels of competence and the meaning depends largely on the competence of the reader. Derrida argued against fixating on the meaning of words. He demonstrated that dictionary definitions are of limited

philosophical use, since there is no simple appendage to a word that can be called meaning. Instead, he showed how to focus on the way in which words refer to other words..

The initial step to deconstruct a text is finding the binary oppositions in the passage and seeing what is privileged over what. Hence, as tastes are different and the norms of society are not stable, one can dismantle the previously held universal views and accept the possibility of various levels of a text based on the new binary inversions. Binary oppositions include the male/female binary in that male has value because it is not female, and the light/dark opposition where light is valued because it not dark. The deconstruction of this binary comes when a concept such as incest is introduced in that it fits on both sides of the slash. Incest is universally taboo, but is dealt with differently on cultural levels. This disruption of binary opposition is the essence of deconstruction, and occurs in several instances.

The Sound and the Fury is a novel told from four points of view, each of the first three sections narrated in the first person by a Compson brother, and the fourth section is narrated in the third person by the author. The title of the novel is taken from Shakespeare's play Macbeth. Like Macbeth's view of life, the novel is told (in part) by an idiot, Benjy Compson. The method of presentation is unique. Faulkner uses stream of consciousness and interior monologue in the narration of the story. He uses italics to mark time shifts within Benjy's and Quentin's sections.

In this study Benjy, Caddy, Quentin and Jason Compson are all deconstructed. Benjy is demonstrated as an idiot by the author, but it is approved that in some cases he is more aware than the ordinary people. Caddy is also proved to be the cause of plague and disaster rather than a compassionate sister and Faulkner's "heart's darling". On the other hand, Quentin is also a naïve and narrow-minded character instead of sophisticated one. It is also proved that Jason is an economist and philosopher one who knows the way of living and also a compassionate brother rather than being a character only after money.

Book I is a statement of the tragedy as seen through the eyes of a thirty-three-year old idiot son of the family, Benjy. Faulkner had claimed that in this novel he had created his heart's darling, the beautiful and tragic Caddy whose story is told through her three brothers. But analyzing the novel especially the first section, one can see that he has, in fact, created Benjy as his heart's darling. Benjy's section symbolizes both the mental deterioration of the family (the South) and through his castration, its physical sterility. He is the best embodiment of Faulkner's favorite themes: the inability of modern man to communicate; modern life's absurdity, and lack of significance, and man's suffering and endurance. Benjy's defective sense of time is one of the best and the most important portrayals of Faulkner's view of time.

There exists a contradiction between what Faulkner wants his readers to perceive and what in reality the text signifies. In Benjy's section, he wants to show the disordered and chaotic state of Benjy's mind and is somehow successful in his work by shifting from past to present and vice versa or by using the italic form. On the other hand, we see that Benjy, though an idiot, has a strong sense of order and he bellows against any change. In fact, any change or disorder through the first section which is the microcosm of the novel is betrayed by Benjy's howling and grunting. He senses the decay and deterioration of the family in the form of disorder and loss: his loss of Caddy (loss of love), the loss of his pasture (paradise lost), his loss of sexuality (modern man's sterility), etc. Unlike other children, the only thing he never loses is his innocence. He is in fact Shakespeare's Desdemona without any harm, trapped in troubles.

For Benjy everything rides from left to right i.e. counter-clockwise and so has its order in that direction. Therefore, one can argue that in this case Benjy can be proved to be a normal man having all his life direction from left to right. Maybe all of us be counted as idiots for Benjy, compared with his way of life. In addition the perception of time discussed here can scarcely be Benjy's, who is an idiot, and does not recognize the symbolic meaning of clockwise and counter-clockwise; the pattern would have to be one that imposed externally i.e. by the author.

Faulkner has seriously tried to show Benjy an idiot who is unaware about everything. But he in fact failed in the last scene in which Benjy is aware about order and direction when Luster takes him at the monument. His movement from left to right represents his denial of the human time system, so whether conscious or not, Faulkner gives an idiot a kind of order and understanding of the artificial and real time, a sort of vision about time problem despite Faulkner's trial to approve the opposite of that. Faulkner believes that Benjy is naïve and like animals, so he has no sense of time. But he acts as an astute and genius who consciously rejects to be trapped in human time and seeks eternity by negating the artificial time; Benjy does not yield to this time system unlike his brother Quentin. According to deconstructionists, "A literary text, then, of inner necessity says one thing and performs another."

Caddy was the image around whom the novel took shape. She was "the sister whom I did not have and the daughter whom I was to lose" (An Introduction to the Sound and Fury). In depicting Caddy, he has quite a misogynist view. She is compassionate and tender towards her brothers especially Benjy and Quentin, but antithetically, she was the cause of their doomed disaster and misfortune. She was seventeen when she lost her virginity having

promiscuous relationship with Dalton Ames. She anticipates Dalton Ames's gesture to make her "an honest woman". But Ames refuses to marry her and she is left pregnant and unmarried. Dalton Ames does not consider any value for women and regards Caddy as any other woman as a sexual tool. By introducing Caddy as a promiscuous, Faulkner gives her the worst role that a woman can have in life. Moreover, he does not give her a separate section to justify her actions. Faulkner, by creating Caddy in the novel has created a plague, a curse, a villain, the cause of loss and disaster rather than his heart's darling.

As discussed in this analysis, we may have different interpretations of the novel *The Sound and the Fury*. We went through the binary oppositions and the privileging system, and by reverting the binary, gained a new interpretation. For example, Faulkner had claimed that he has introduced the story of the novel through the eyes of an idiot quite objectively, so in fact idiocy was privileged over sanity in the case of Benjy. But as explained, as far as his problem of time and his sense of order showed, Benjy did not seem to be an idiot at all. J. Hillis Miller, one of the most widely read of deconstructors, state that any literary text is "indeterminable and undecidable"; hence, that all reading is necessarily misreading." (Literary Glossary)

Caddy, as claimed by Faulkner, was the cause of his novel, and she was his "heart's darling" around whom the whole novel was shaped around. But it is concluded that she was a villain and the cause of catastrophe of the family. Also, Faulkner had claimed that Quentin committed suicide because he could not tolerate the shame of his sister's loss of virginity, and he could not be the observer of the destruction of the past values. But contrary to that, the hierarchy was reverted, and in contrast Quentin was a neurotic person suffering from psychological problem and he committed suicide because he had lost his sister. Jason, unlike Faulkner's assertion of being "the only sane Compson since Culloden", is quite insane and sadistic.

CONCLUSION

Deconstructionists and Intertextualists insist that words and texts contain layers of meaning that exist only as the result of cultural and historical processes. Thus, when a writer constructs a text, a reader may find meanings that were not intended by the author. The end result is that the author no longer has any authority to claim the true meaning of the text, nor there any one universally applicable meaning.

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