

THE EMERGENCE OF DECONSTRUCTION: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Serpil Tunç Oppermann (*)

The word deconstruction has been associated with the name of the famous French philosopher Jacques Derrida ever since his presentation of a paper at the 1966 conference on Structuralism at the John Hopkins University. This conference was organized especially to introduce structuralist thought to the American academia. Thus, only the European thinkers presented papers. These were: George Poulet, Eugenio Donato, Lucien Goldmann, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida, among others.

Jacques Derrida, who was then a young French philosopher, made the most powerful impact in the line of critical thought by his paper, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." In this paper he criticised the fundamental assumption in Levi-Strauss's works and Saussure's structuralism, namely a logocentric, or centered way of thinking. For him, the main contradiction in structuralist thought was its binary thinking, because it allowed one term of an opposition to repress another. Here, Derrida was questioning the operative conditions of binary thinking, or in other words, system of differences that structuralism posited. However, Structuralism overlooked the fact that this system allows no origin of meaning apart from itself only. By ignoring this fact, structuralism gets inevitably trapped within logocentric frames. (Derrida's readings demonstrate the

* Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters Hacettepe University

paradoxes of structuralist positions). Derrida's aim was to show that all reflexive thought is constituted within the paradoxical and differential play of language in which there is no origin or center; or in his words, there is no "transcendental signified." Every signified is another signifier, and "structure of structure" has no boundaries and can be explained by a notion of infinite play of language. This decisive critique had powerful implications for the theory of meaning. In this respect, thought occurs within the differential play of language. He states:

Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse... That is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. ("Structure, Sign, and Play" 84)

Logocentric thought ascribed a center which was the organizing principle in the structural systems, and it ordered our philosophical thinking and the whole western episteme. Derrida attacked this assumption lying behind the whole tradition of Western metaphysics, and rejected the dominance of the key concepts, such as God, nature, reason, meaning, self, origin, truth, etc., because they have become self-presencing and sings of Being; the signifiers that turn into transcendental signifieds (any sort of final meaning). These seemingly self-sufficient notions function as the parts of hierarchial binary. This means that these concepts exist by negating their opposites, or inferiors, like: truth-fiction, man-woman, origin-end, nature-civilization, speech-writing, God-man. Deconstruction shows that these major concepts repress their opposites, and attempts to reverse this habit in thinking. It displaces the primary term and draws

attention to the relations of such differences to produce meaning, like woman-man, fiction-truth, writing-speech. However, deconstruction does more than just reversal and displacement. It rethinks the once-secondary term by reinscribing it, and deconstitutes the term's former definition. In this respect, interpretation can never come to an end, because there is nothing but play. Thus, Derrida's major contribution to philosophy and criticism was to invert the hierarchy of concepts and to welcome the indeterminacy of meaning in interpretation.

In the early 1970s American deconstructionist like Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller, and Joseph Riddel, have taken on the significance of this play in interpretation, and they have focused on the rhetorical self-reflexivity of the text. They investigated the text's verbal ambiguities, figures and metaphors. Their line of criticism was to show the gaps in texts where the texts undo themselves. The text refuses closure and posits itself as an autonomous whole, but cannot be a whole because it is endlessly open to play of differences. As Hartman would argue, all origins were delusive.

Furthermore, deconstructive criticism that flourished in the U.S.A. after the 1970s with the joining of the younger critics like Shoshana Felman, Barbara Johnson, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, has proved to be able to investigate the linguistic density of the work of literature itself. Almost all of these critics were associated with Hopkins University or Yale University. Miller and de Man, in the early 70s, joined Bloom and Hartman at Yale and the "Yale School" emerged. Due to their influence deconstruction spread widely in the late 70s and early 80s. Also, the translations of Derrida's works had already played a particularly important role in the late 70s.

These were:

1. *Of Grammatology* (1976)
2. *Speech and Phenomena* (1973)
3. *Writing and Difference* (1978)

In the 1980s a second wave of translations followed:

1. *Positions* (1981)

2. Dissemination (1981)

3. Margins of Philosophy (1982)

In the 1980s American deconstructors played a more major role in the formation of deconstructive criticism. Several books were published, such as Jonathan Culler's *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982), Christopher Norris's *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (1982) *The Deconstructive Turn: Essays in the Rhetoric of Philosophy* (1983), and Vincent B. Leitch's *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction* (1982). These were all introductory books written to clarify the obscure and complex points in the Derridean theory, and they were aiming to give examples of its practice.

Later in the 80s deconstruction had already provoked large numbers of intellectuals and students of literature, and created a debate over the meaning and interpretation theories. This debate generated a massive secondary literature. Deconstruction had shaken the faith in the past theories and occupied the center stage in literary criticism. It still dominates the literary field by innumerable commentaries, and continues to energize the field of literary theory.

STRATEGY OF DECONSTRUCTION:

In *Of Grammatology* Derrida claims that "deconstruction is not a theory, nor a method." If it is not a theory, it can tentatively be called a "textual strategy" and more precisely a "practice" (I xxxix). Marie-Rose Logan states in relation to Derrida's clarification of the term deconstruction that "Closely linked to the practice of teaching, the deconstructive strategy is... conceived of by Derrida as an ongoing revisionary process." (59). However, Derrida does not systematize the purpose or aims of deconstruction, but elucidates the concern over the nature of textuality. As Norris writes, "deconstruction is... an activity of reading which remains closely tied to the texts it interrogates, and which can never set up independently as a self-enclosed system of operative concepts" (*Deconstruction* 31). Deconstruction of a text implements first, its intertextuality and undecidability, and second, entails the subversion of the logocentric tradition. In this respect,

deconstruction challenges the unity of the text by replacing the hierarchical oppositions. This means that the standard critical concepts of signification and structure come under close scrutiny by following the "effects of differences already at work within the illusion of binary opposition" (Johnson Critical Difference, x-xi).

According to Derrida all texts contain both the traditional materials of metaphysics and the subversion of these materials. Since Western Culture or Literature already contains the incompatible concepts and undecidable elements, it has the inevitable self-deconstructing logocentric system. In this system a text can not step outside of itself, but it also cannot be enclosed within itself. Thus, a text is read against its own logic, by focusing on its overlooked and excessive elements, its gaps, and by tracing repeated textual elements.

A text exists only in relation to other texts. Therefore, its study is the study of intertextuality. This term designates a text's dependence on prior codes, concepts, figures, conventions and texts. Studying intertextuality leads to the dissemination of meaning, and erases the illusion of a centered ground in interpretation. The ground of any text is always another text, and the language of a text is always intertextual.

As Derrida pronounced in *Of Grammatology*, "There is nothing outside of the text" (158). The meaning of a text can be discovered differentially, through the relations between arbitrary signs. The sign cannot refer to another sign that pre-exists it. Every concept moves in a chain in which it constantly refers to other concepts by a systematic play of differences. This endless play of meanings prevents enclosure, and produces infinite possibilities of interpretation and liberation of multiple meanings. In this respect, the prevailing notions of univocity, unity, coherence and wholeness are ruled out of interpretation. Indeed the nature of textuality excludes these notions. Irene Harvey states that "univocity, unity, coherence, and systematic totality are not the aims of interpretation" for Derrida (142).

This nature entails at least two levels: one controlled by the author, one not: one declared by the author one

described; one metaphysical, one not; one entailing form, one content; one entailing a principle, one a practice and so on. However, these levels are not related in an oppositional manner nor in a hierarchial one. Instead, they are disjunctive with respect to their presentation to the "reader" /interpreter. The appearance of one necessitates the disappearance of the other. (142).

The nature of textuality involves the contradiction in itself, by presenting several oppositional levels to operate simultaneously, such as author-non author, form - content, theory - practice, metaphysical- real. If one level appears the other disappears, but also they are tied together by a linking term which plays a role in both levels but without synthesis.

If these levels of a text appear identical they lead to the closure of other levels for their location. Here, deconstruction traces the excluding gestures for closure, and shows that whatever is excluded or made irrelevant is always lurking behind, and constituting the production of presentation, and the excluded term always leads to the other levels of the text and never to a center.

Deconstruction shows the arbitrary structure of such disjunctive relations among the levels of a text. Derrida's textual analysis however, never claims that two sides of a text are always visible at the same instant. They require a repetition or a second reading in which one level is suspended and this suspension reveals the appearance of the disjunctive relation. This, of course, creates undecidability, because the linking term between the two levels becomes apparent when two levels are realized as such. In this respect, privilege of any term over another is disrupted, and a synthesis of two levels becomes perceptible if both levels are juxtaposed. This seems like impossibility to reason, because reason works according to a criterion of completeness. But this revelation of contradiction within textuality turns the logocentric claims of a text towards unity upside down, and reveals that rules, which are believed to govern the structure of a text, are inconsistent.

Deconstruction states the impossibility of the unity of a text as well as its undecidability. This undecidable element is repressed

by the completion or closure of the structure. In other words, a structure is always given a fixed origin, or a center, and therefore, the undecidable element is forced to be invisible. But, it is this element that is central to the text. As Derrida argues, the center is at once inside and outside. It is both a part of the structure of signs and an obstacle that prevents the structure's wholeness by "escaping structurality." "The center is not the center" ("Structure, Sign and Play"). For further understanding of this obvious contradiction, we can refer to Douglas Tallack's evaluation of Derrida's term "supplementarity."

As in his deconstruction of Husserl's original moment of intention, Derrida demonstrates that for a structure to be complete it must paradoxically have an "extra" element. However, "infinite substitutions and the freeplay" (260) of competing interpretations, are not dependent upon the degree of ambiguity of a particular text, since ambiguity implies that the meanings are contained and somehow balance each other. Freeplay is the consequence of the lack of center that is definably *inside* or *outside* a structure and so able to unify it. (164).

In such an approach to the text where the hierarchical order of concepts have been disrupted, where the undecidable elements decentralize the structure, where ambiguous tropes, figures and metaphors are traced and repeated, the text can never be subjected to a single homogeneous reading. Such a reading produces inexhaustible possibilities for interpretations, and the futility of logical closures. Thus, deconstruction overturns the traditional assumptions of interpretation and meaning, and shows that when one tries to go to the origin or center of a structure of any text, one only finds supplement, repetition, freeplay, absence and undecidables.

Actually, the nature of textuality (language) excludes totalization because of its infinite play of substitution. In short, language itself has no center. Since the linguistic structures of the texts behave like language, deconstructive approach erases a culture of reference and advocates the process by which the structure unfolds itself with the freeplay of differences in it. In this respect, the texts are read against their own logic by

concentrating on the repressed elements. Such overlooked, marginal or excessive elements posit the incompleteness of the text. It is this incompleteness that provides a deconstructive reading. Thus, a text can not be enclosed. As Norris states in *The Deconstructive Turn*, "to deconstruct a text... is to bring out a radical disjunction between logic and rhetoric, intention and sense, what language explicitly says and what its figural workings constrain it to mean" (157).

In deconstructive criticism the critical concept of "textual difference" is crucial to the practice. The critic's task, here, is to analyze the text's critical difference from itself. He searches for the ways in which the text differs from itself. But this difference does not constitute the text's identity. Therefore, the critic focuses on the difference *within* the text, because it is this difference that defers the possibility of a totalized whole and thus an integrated meaning. The result of this kind of criticism is to expose the signification process within the text and to show the freeplay of signifiers.

In pre-deconstructive reading theories it was the center that provided the meaning of a text. However, deconstruction shows that it is the undecidable element that is central to the text, but paradoxically it limits the structure by "escaping structurality" and becomes non-center. This contradiction is related to the reading of a text, in that, reading adds something that is assumed to be lacking. Derrida states that this is the movement of "supplementarity." The structure strives to be complete, but in order to be complete, it paradoxically includes an extra element. Focusing on this extra element produces a freeplay of interpretations. In short, texts cannot determine interpretation alone. As Spivak writes in her Preface to the translation of *Of Grammatology*:

the desire for unity and order compels the author and the reader to balance the equation that is the text's system. The deconstructive reader... (seeks) the moment in the text which harbors the unbalancing of the equation, the sleight of hand at the limit of a text which cannot be dismissed simply as a contradiction. (24-5)

Here, the deconstructive critic recognizes the differential quality of language and exposes the text's dialogical nature. He seeks the text's "moment" when it will differ from itself, transgress its own system and become undecidable. This inevitably breaks the continuity and the self-assumed unity of the text, and leads to a double reading. This undecidable reading effect is achieved by breaking apart signifiers and signifieds continually and reattaching them in new combinations. It is this process of displacement that produces a play of differences in interpretations. It is precisely at this point that deconstruction challenges and disrupts traditional literary assumptions about textual coherence.

The reading of a text in deconstruction is carried on a double mode. Here, the text is shown to be woven from different strands which cannot lead to a synthesis, but endlessly displace one another. Derrida's reading of texts in this manner never proposes a unified theory about literature. In fact, he emphasizes the fact that constructing a coherent theoretical system about literature is impossible. Instead, he creates a system around key concepts, and gives new roles to his terms. His purpose and practice is to introduce new terms and displace the old in order to prevent them from becoming the central concepts of a new theory.

However, Derrida's work is most often treated as a new theory with central concepts and with analytical methods. Jonathan Culler stresses this observation more clearly, stating that Derrida's work is read and discussed as a theory "making general claims about the nature of language and texts" ("Jacques Derrida" 156):

Even if one grants that it is his dealings with texts rather than any explicit theory which ought to be stressed, as soon as one cites or presents these readings they become examples of analytical practice and thus illustrations of a theory and method. The very nature of intellectual discussion... involves effects of mastery and hence the formulation of general claims, such as can be inferred from his practice of reading and writing. (156).

Although the reader encounters a paradoxical situation in the reading process - because any exercise of language involves certain

contradictions - the solutions to such paradoxes can be to convert them as "complex patterns of internal differences into alternative positions or interpretations" (Culler, *On Deconstruction* 215). The critic should address the text's contradictions and explore the way they are reproduced.

DOUBLE READING IN DECONSTRUCTION:

The major strategy of deconstructive criticism is to undertake a double reading, calling attention to the ways in which argumentations in texts question their own lines of premises.

Language is perceived as a play of differences, traces and repetitions which produce meaning. The problem of difference is seen as an uncertainty, and reading leads to a proliferation of traces and differences. It tries to identify and to dismantle differences by means of other differences that cannot be fully identified or dismantled (Johnson x). Deconstructive reading shows the ways in which a text differs from itself. This is done by finding the contradictions in the text and the binary oppositions. Meaning is explained according to the underlying system of differences. In his essay entitled "Différance" Derrida emphasizes the inevitability of differences in the system of language: "In a language, in the system of language, there are only differences... But, on the one hand, these differences *play* in language, in speech too, and in the exchange between language and speech. On the other hand, these differences are themselves *effects* (125).

The elusiveness of differences according to which words are read in language creates the major difficulty in the reading process. However, the critical concept of difference is crucial to the practice of deconstructive criticism. By analysing a literary text the critic tries to indicate the ways in which the text is different from others and also establishes his own difference in analysis from other critics. But, a text's difference can never be its special identity. What is important in a text's difference is the way in which a text differs from itself. The reading of a text aims at showing this inner difference. Therefore, it is a difference within, not a difference between. This difference that is inherent in each text subverts the text's identity and prevents the text from

achieving totality. The text differs *within* from itself and makes any integrated meaning impossible. Deconstructive reading focuses on this difference. In other words, texts undo themselves by the working of differences to reach unequivocal messages. Thus, a deconstructive reading analyses a text's subversion of its implied meaning. Therefore, reading theories that aimed at reducing a literary text to a unity of meaning are destroyed.

Derrida's readings usually focus on the undecidable terms which operate on a double range and which allow no synthesis and which undo the text's claim to totality. These terms continually displace one another in an infinite chain of differences from one another. Derrida uncovers logocentrism in his readings. D.C. Wood points out that "meaning for Derrida is always mediated, never immediate. And by mediation is not meant just a deferred presence which finally comes, but a permanent state of deferment" (21).

The play of differences in a text always defers any closure of meaning, and cannot be represented or captured in a system. Therefore, any privileged meaning that the text seems to posit is infinitely deferred. Deconstructive readings attempt to transform "a text without merely endorsing the wider framework to which its terms belong" (Wood 24). Also, the critic reverses the hierarchy while deconstructing the oppositions. In other words, reading is done in terms of changing the hierarchical order of ideas and arguing against the oppositions. However, one should prevent the new opposition and reversal from establishing itself into a privileged position. This involves double reading by carefully displacing the new conceptual marks and putting a distance within the new concept which, no longer allows itself to be grounded into the old pattern.

Double reading requires two strategies. First, the critic should read without changing ground and repeating the logocentric issues. He uses the system against itself. Second, the critic should read by changing ground and affirming discontinuity and difference (Leitch 283).

Derrida practices double reading in *Of Grammatology* on Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Language*. In this text, Derrida

points to the opposition of "nature/ culture." Man living in nature in a happy state recognizes the need for community. In the process of transformation into society from nature, culture became an additional state of happiness for man. In other words, culture "supplemented" nature, and later it took the place of nature. Thus, culture became both an addition or supplement and also a substitute for nature. This nature/culture opposition leads to similar traditional oppositions like: good-evil, truth-fiction, masculine-feminine, health-disease, speech-writing. In each case the second term came as a supplement to the first. For example, writing came late in the evolution of man and offered both positive and negative advantages. The first term in the opposition was always the privileged term. Without the supplementary term the first term had no truth value. In other words, there was no original unsupplemented term. Derrida inverted the nature/culture opposition and pointed to an "undecidable" concept in Rousseau's text. He deconstructed "nature" and "culture" and showed that "culture" did not supplement nature, but that nature was *always already* a supplemented entity (Leitch 284). Derrida first wrote the concept and then erased it. He also questioned the notion of "natural origin" or "unsupplemented purity" by the *always already* formula. The effect was to insert the *supplement* into any seemingly simple or pure metaphysical pair of binary opposites (284). He discovered that the outside was really the inside.

Double reading employs reversing and displacing key terms and thus inverting the oppositions. It involves immanent analysis. By repeating textual elements such as themes, and concepts, deconstructive analysis brings out the disruptive elements in the repetition. Repetition reveals the operations of difference disorienting the substitutions. Thus, deconstruction of a text entails a subversion of the logocentric tradition. It shows that all texts contain the incompatible elements, discontinuities and undecidables. When the concept of structure is dismantled, a play of meanings is laid bare. So we have an infinite, indeterminate play of signifiers. In this respect, to deconstruct a text is to show how the text undermines what it asserts.

PRACTICE:

For a deconstructive reading we shall explore Barbara Johnson's discussion of *Billy Budd*, "Melville's *Fist: The Execution of Billy Budd*" in her book *The Critical Difference*. Johnson's reading is one of the most distinctive deconstructive criticisms.

Billy Budd is the tragic story of a very innocent, handsome and young sailor Billy Budd who arouses the antagonism of the satanic master-at-arms Claggart. Before the Captain, Vere, Claggart falsely accuses Billy of plotting mutiny. Billy strikes Claggart dead. Captain Vere convinces the other officers that in the dangerous times of the French Revolutionary war, Billy must hang as an example to the fleet. Before Billy dies his last words are: "God Bless Captain Vere."

Johnson first directs our attention to the ambiguity in the story, and second to the ending. The story ends "no less than four times" (80). Johnson notes that the story does not totalize itself into intentional finality but "in fact begins to repeat itself - retelling itself first in reverse and then in verse" (81). Accordingly, "to end is to repeat and to repeat is to be... open to revision, displacement and reversal" (81). In her discussion the next important point is the problem of reversal and oppositions. The issue of this story is not the relation between good and evil or innocence and guilt as most critics have argued, but rather the relation between being and doing. The opposition between Billy and Claggart is actually an opposition "between two conceptions of language, or between two types of reading" (84). To understand this point, we must consider the important fact in the story that each character meets a fate which is a direct reverse of what is to be expected from his "nature." "Billy is sweet, innocent and harmless, yet he kills. Claggart is evil, perverted and mendacious, yet he dies a victim. Vere is sagacious and responsible, yet he allows a man whom he feels to be blameless to hang" (82). The opposition between the characters' natures and what they do produces the discrepancy between the two types of reading. Billy is a simple literalist, and as Melville writes, "To deal in double meanings and insinuations of any sort was foreign to his nature" (618). Claggart is a personification of duplicity and a

believer in the discrepancy between form and meaning. He always suspects appearance and reality. But Melville notes: "Innocence and guilt personified in Claggart and Budd in effect changed places"(650). Billy demonstrates this truth (Claggart's accusation) by the act of denying it. Johnson writes, "Melville both invites an allegorical reading and subverts the very terms of its consistency" (83). Melville reverses the relation of the oppositions and directs our attention to the opposition between being and doing. Thus what the story means by its good versus evil is undone by the way it reverses it.

Curiously enough, it is precisely this question of being versus doing that is brought up by the only sentence we ever see Claggart directly address to Billy Budd. When Billy accidentally spills his soup across the path of the master-at arms, Claggart playfully replies, "Handsomely done, my lad! And handsome is as handsome *did* it, too!" The proverbial expression "handsome is as handsome does," from which this exclamation springs, posits the possibility of a continuous, predictable, transparent relationship between being and doing. (83)

Johnson argues that what Claggart actually questions in Billy is this "continuity between the physical and the moral, between appearance and action, or between being and doing" (84). Paradoxically Billy never questions the meaning of appearances, because he is "symbolically and factually illiterate" (84). The important issue Johnson points here is the fact that Billy's assumption of taking language at face - value, and thus excluding the very "functioning of *difference* that makes the act of reading both indispensable and undecidable" (84). Claggart, on the other hand, is the image of difference and duplicity. He represents the separation between being and doing. "He is properly an ironic reader, who, assuming the sign to be arbitrary and unmotivated, reverses the value signs of appearances and takes a daisy for a mantrap and an unmotivated accidental spilling of a soup for an intentional, sly escape of antipathy" (85). Thus, the deconstructive critic's task is to analyze the opposition between literality and irony. This inevitably leads him to consider Captain Vere's position. He is described as an exceptional character. He is a great

lover of books about history, biography and philosophy. When he exclaims after Claggart's death, "Struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the Angel must hang!" (649), we understand that Vere's military duty and his realization of Billy's character are at odds. While Billy and Claggart read for motive and meaning, Vere "reads instead in relation to political and historical circumstance and in relation to prior texts, the Bible and the Mutiny Law. His judgement stems from the relationships between other interpretations and acts by that judgement" (Culler *On Deconstruction* 238). Vere refers to allusions, quotations, to history, and to politics in his decision. The conditions of judgement place Captain Vere between several oppositions, such as the naval and the primitive, Nature and the King, Martial Court and what he calls Last Assizes.

Vere confirms his allegiance to martial law and conventional authority, because his reading is conditioned by historical and political frames. He states: "however pitilessly that law may operate in any instances, we nevertheless adhere to it and administer it" (654). Johnson argues that "the two alternative frames of reference within which judgement is possible are not nature and the king, but the two types of textual authority: The Bible and the Mutiny Act" (104). By bringing Billy and Claggart together in his cabin, Captain Vere unwittingly sets up the conditions for the reversal of oppositions that he must judge. Captain Vere ironically causes the reversal of places between innocence and guilt. Thus, he covertly a difference between Claggart and Billy, Nature and the King. Therefore, Vere both inserts ambiguity into the story's oppositions and also mobilizes ambiguity. His judgement does not convert the ambiguous situation into a decidable one; instead, it creates the undecidable element in the story by problematizing the legal point of view. In my opinion, this undecidable element produces the indeterminacy of meaning in the story's reversal of oppositions, and especially in the nature of the ending of the story itself. In Melville's own words:

The symmetry of form attainable in pure fiction cannot so readily be achieved in a narration essentially having less to do with fable than with fact. Truth

uncompromisingly told will always have its ragged edges; hence the conclusion of such a narration is apt to be less finished than an architectural finial. (664).

Melville overtly affirms the necessity of "ragged edges" in the conclusion of such a narration, and further states that the story continues far beyond its "proper end:" "But though properly the story ends with his life, something in way of sequel will not be amiss. Three brief chapters will suffice" (665). Johnson points to this sequel :

1. the story of the death of Captain Vere after an encounter with the French ship, the *Athee*; 2. a transcription of the Budd-Claggart affair published in an 'authorized' naval publication, in which the characters of the two men are reversed, with Budd represented as the depraved villain and Claggart as the heroic victim; and 3. a description of the posthumous mythification of Billy Budd by his fellow sailors and a transcription of the ballad written by one of them, which presents itself as a monologue spoken by Billy on the eve of his execution. Billy Budd's last words, like Melville's own, are thus spoken posthumously—indeed the final line of the story is uttered from the bottom of the sea. (80)

All these three endings contribute not only to the ambiguity of the story but also to its indeterminate meaning. The story reverses itself by telling itself in repetition. It is the story that raises the question of ending and conclusion. It transgresses its own proper end three times, and by repeating itself it achieves the opposite of what it "properly means." Johnson points out that the ending "problematizes the very idea of authority by placing its own reversal in the pages of an authorized naval chronicle" (81). *Billy Budd*, Johnson concludes, is "a dramatization of the twisted relations between knowing and doing, speaking and killing, reading and judging, which make political understanding and action so problematic" (108).

In her examination of *Billy Budd*, Johnson investigates the relations between premises or interpretations and conclusions, and shows that the readings or interpretations are "undermined

by the very assumptions that make them possible" (Culler *On Deconstruction* 240). She analyses what the text says about judgement and its critique. In this text, action, judgement and character are revealed as types of reading trying to link means and ends and meanings. Johnson's essay, thus, shows how deconstructive criticism proceeds "by identifying and dismantling differences by means of other differences that can not be fully identified or dismantled" (Johnson x).

Thus, we have seen that focusing on internal difference deconstructive criticism undoes the narrative schemes and shows how texts undermine their own grounds of meaning.

WORKS CITED :

1. Culler, Jonathan. "Jacques Derrida." *Structuralism and Since: From Levi-Strauss to Derrida*. Ed. John Sturrock. Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 1981. 154 - 179.
2. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. New York : Cornell UP, 1982.
3. Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Spivak. Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP, 1976.
4. "Différance." *Critical Theory Since 1965*. Ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle. Tallahassee : Florida State UP, 1986. 120 - 136.
5. "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." *Critical Theory Since 1965*. Tallahassee : Florida State UP, 1986. 83-94.
6. Harvey, Irene. "The Wellsprings of Deconstruction." *Tracing Literary Theory*. Ed. Joseph Natoli. Chicago : U of Illinois P, 1987. 127-148.
7. Johnson, Barbara. *The Critical Difference : Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading*. London: The John Hopkins UP, 1985.
8. Leitch, B. Vincent. "Deconstructive Criticism." *American Literary Criticism From the Thirties to the Eighties*. New York: Columbia UP, 1988. 267-302.

9. Logan, Marie - Rose. "Deconstruction: Beyond and Back. Response to Eugenio Donato, 'Historical Imagination and the Idiom of Criticism'" *Boundary 2: The Problems of Reading in Contemporary American Criticism*. Ed. William V. Spanos, Paul A. Bove, Daniel O'Hara. 8.1. (Fall 1979). 57-62.
10. Melville, Herman. *Billy Budd. A Concise Anthology of American Literature*. Ed. George Mc Michael. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1985. 614-667
11. Norris, Christopher. *Deconstruction : Theory and Practice*. 1982. London : Methuen, 1988.
12. *The Deconstructive Turn: Essays in the Rhetoric of Philosophy*. 1983. London, New York: Routledge, 1989.
13. Tallack, Douglas. "Deconstruction: Henry James, *In the Cage*." *Literary Theory at Work: Three Texts*. Ed. Douglas Tallack. London: BT Batsford Ltd. 1987. 159-179.
14. Wood, D. C. "An Introduction to Derrida." *Radical Philosophy*. 21. (Spring 1979). 18-28.