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Ce qui arrive (réellement) **The Curious Relationship of the Word and the World, Against a Background of Discussing Deconstruction with Many Caveats**

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... I believe that every conceptual breakthrough amounts to transforming, that is to deforming, an accredited, authorized relationship between a word and a concept, between a trope and what one had every interest to consider to be an unshiftable primary sense, a proper, literal or current usage – Jacques Derrida, “The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations” 40-1.

Not surprisingly, introductions and companions to, and commentaries on, Jacques Derrida/Deconstruction, true to their subject matter, are unusually self-reflexive and self-conscious, if not narcissistic, and take a via *negativa* (the analogue with Apophatic theology lightheartedly indicates an impossibility in defining deconstruction akin to that of defining God!) in attempting to fulfil the task of exposition. They also showcase, by contagion, paradoxes and contradictions, and have an understandable overdose of caveats. This is due perhaps to the understanding that deconstruction is, with its ingrained self-applicability, conceptually *singular*, to use the adjectival form of one of Derrida’s favourite words – singularity. An endeavour to define deconstruction is said to be a semantic contradiction and goes against the very (anti-foundationalist) spirit of what the term tends to signify – a philosophical position, a concept, a school, a literary theory, a critical practice, a method of reading, or whatever it seeks to ‘pin down.’ According to Derrida, “Prefaces, along with forewords, introductions, preludes, preliminaries, preambles, prologues and prolegomena, have always been written, it seems, in view of their own self-effacement” (Derrida1981: 7). As for his own definitions (or strategic non-definitions), Derrida says: “I have often had occasion to define deconstruction as that which is – far from a theory, a school, a method, even a discourse, still less a technique that can be appropriated – at bottom *what happens or comes to pass [ce qui arrive]*” (1995: 17; emphasis as in the source). The crux of what actually happens – *ce qui arrive* – with deconstruction is mired in the cautionary elusiveness and self-reflexive illustrations of elucidatory enterprises and labyrinthine cautionary tales, probably

triggered by Derrida's own enigmatic, quasi-cryptic writing and contestations of "conventional semantic values" (Wolfe 1998:3), both, more often than not, depriving the reader of a handle on the object. One may, however, for heuristic purposes, go against the caveats and cautions, stick one's neck out, and find a point of departure in one, if not the chief, of the principles of deconstruction – *a conceptual negotiability innate to any discourse, or a tension intrinsic to the concept* (or conceptual constants which Derrida calls *philosophemes*) *itself*. Derrida's examples for intra-conceptual tension popularly include 'the gift' and 'the center'.

The vocabulary of any language consists of a hierarchy of concepts. On the top of the hierarchy are what I call macro-concepts (for example, the concept of life, declared a humanist abstraction in the post-structuralist critical climate). These are generalized ideas whose particular manifestations are expressed using micro-concepts (e.g., a life of suffering). These micro-concepts are macro-concepts to concepts which are still lower in the hierarchy. In the example here, one might ask: what kind of suffering? The answer to the question (e.g., poverty, starvation, confinement, torture, or destitution) is the corresponding micro-concept to the macro-concept immediately above in the hierarchy. The lower one moves down the hierarchy, the more particular the reference becomes. Particular meanings, or ideas, recalled by the mind, are particularized ramifications or instantiations of the concepts. When one looks from the top of the hierarchy, one can see only abstractions. This is inevitable as these are abstracted from concrete, particular instances of what the concept signifies in experience. The macro-concept bears only an inadequate 'trace' of the particular experience. When one speaks of a macro-concept, the micro-concepts which are invoked have among them only what Ludwig Wittgenstein might have called a "family resemblance" (Familienähnlichkeit). Différance and the "play" (jeu) of signifiers are a story of such conceptual ramifications – ramifications that destabilize any putative generality.

Pedigrees and Descendants

The above narrative of deconstruction entails much. On the one hand, deconstruction has revealed an unsettling feature of language by which every statement is infused with an in-built instability, undecidability, and alogicality which compromise its truth-claims. Derrida has indeed driven a wedge of alogicality (or, logic of illogicality, if you will) into the Western philosophical tradition. His philosophical legacy, though it spans several disciplines and objects of study, I believe, rests primarily on his critique of *logocentrism* – "metaphysics of presence" – which, according to him, characterizes most of Western philosophical thought. The Johannine Gospel, written for a Greek audience, might serve as a point of reference for Derrida's own Graeco-Judaic intellectual pedigree. The Gospel famously opens as follows: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Greek word for the Word is *Logos*. St John used it to establish the pre-existence of the Son in the Holy Trinity before Jesus's earthly mission: "As a designation of Christ, therefore, *Logos* is peculiarly felicitous because, (1) in Him are embodied all the treasures of the divine wisdom, the collective 'thought'

of God . . . ; and, (2) He is, from eternity, but especially in His incarnation, the utterance or expression of the Person, and ‘thought’ of deity. . . . In the Being, Person, and work of Christ Deity is told out” (Notes to the passage in the Scofield Reference Bible). Greek Logos means word, speech, knowledge, wisdom, thought, governing reason, organizing principle, and so on. Above all, in the Biblical sense, it signifies: 1) a thought or concept; and 2) the expression or utterance of thought. The word itself suggests an identity of thought/concept and the utterance of the thought, which guarantees a stable meaning. Derrida reveals a rupture between the two. His inversion and de-binarization of speech/writing as well as its near-replacement with the idea of “contamination” by the “other” (“nonsynonymous substitutions”; *Derrida Reader* 65) flows from such ruptured identities. Every thought, idea, or concept is contaminated by other thoughts, ideas, and concepts. That the signifier and the signified have only a gliding relationship – “chance meetings” (Wolfreys 1998:103) – has always been a feature of language and a condition of writing.

On the other hand, rather than articulating a ‘weakness’ in language, deconstruction celebrates its unlimited onto-semantic potential. The text renews itself across spaces and ages due to its ‘textuality.’ Many ‘worlds’ (even futuristic ones) are implicit in language, which are invoked when the reader meets the signifiers on the page. *Iterability*, Derrida’s polyglottal portmanteau term, describes the capacity of signs and texts to be repeated in new situations and to produce new meanings (“Signature Event Context”) in their “transactions.” The term encapsulates Sanskrit *itera* (other) and Latin *iterare* (to repeat). For instance, upon first reading the Biblical passage “For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath” (Matthew 25: 29), I, born in a Syrian Christian household in the left bastion of Kerala, thought, particularly in the light of the popular characterization of Jesus Christ as the first socialist, that it was a critique of acquisitive society and of the socio-economic condition in which the rich got richer and the poor, poorer. Educational psychology may find in the passage a metaphor for the additive character of learning. A passage signifies differently because of the relatability of the words to multiple contexts, with different implications for different life-worlds. This potential of language lies at the core of all possibilities of cross-cultural concretization of texts. Goneril and Regan appear to speak like Indian daughters (or daughters-in-law)! In other words, deconstruction affirms the capacity of language for creating unanticipated symmetries with auctorially unforeseen experiential worlds. Of course, whether signs without human intention constitute language at all is debatable – a question that pertains to the ontology of language. For instance, for Stephen Knapp and Walter Benn Michaels, this is only a semblance of language (728).

That deconstruction is not mere literary theory is implied in the elusiveness of the elucidatory endeavours alluded to at the beginning. In a sense, the history of literary theory is itself a narrative of changing relationships among four entities – language, text, the self, and the world. Two key tendencies of 20th century theory – linguistic/textual deconstruction and ideology-critique (a sub-type of what Paul Ricoeur, another French

philosopher, and Derrida's near-contemporary, terms the "hermeneutics of suspicion"¹ take off from two insights articulated by Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the demythologizers of modernity along with Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. If Derrida is heir to the former, Foucault is one of the several intellectual descendants of the latter. The 'linguistic turn' can probably be traced back to the following statement of Nietzsche's, included in *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1873). He asks:

What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations which, poetically and rhetorically intensified, became transposed and adorned, and which after long usage by a people seem fixed, canonical and binding on them. Truths are illusions which one has forgotten are illusions, worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the sense. (Nietzsche 1973: 46).

Derrida echoes Nietzsche when he discusses the figures of "the structure" and "the center": "The history of metaphysics . . . is the history of these metaphors and metonymies"; and Heidegger in the following sentence: "Its matrix . . . is the determination of Being as presence in all senses of the word" (Derrida 1978:279). The fixation, institutional, linguistic, philosophical and cultural, that Nietzsche mentions is the target of deconstruction, which reveals it to be the subject of lexico-conceptual *jeu*. Elsewhere, Nietzsche demonstrates how apparently neutral and rational concepts such as truth and morality were originally matters of political expediency, ruses contrived to serve the interests of particular groups. For instance, in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887) he showed how Judaeo-Christian ennoblement of values of meekness, humility, poverty, suffering, and piety was a craftily sublimated expression of slaves' *ressentiment* (often translated as 'resentment') against, and ideological revenge upon, their masters. That is why Nietzsche calls for a 'revaluation' of all values. The suspicion of much contemporary theory and criticism is directed, quite legitimately, at concealed ideologies. We shall briefly discuss the relationship between deconstruction and contestation of ideologies in the final section of this essay.

The Auto-Epiphany of Western Thought

In any case, deconstruction occupies a pertinent place in the history of the Occident's attempts at world-conceptualization.² The world-process is intricate, complex, multi-stranded, tantalizingly unwieldy, and often inscrutable. As such, for reasons of cognitive economy, the temptation to make sense of it using "single-entity tropes" has

¹"Hermeneutics of suspicion" (Ricoeur 34) is a mode of interpretation which aims to reveal disguised meanings: "This type of hermeneutics is animated by . . . a skepticism towards the given, and it is characterized by a distrust of the symbol as a dissimulation of the real" (6). Ricoeur contrasts this kind of hermeneutics with the "hermeneutics of faith," concerned with the "restoration" of meanings. He designates the demythologizers of modernity—Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud – "masters of suspicion," who "look upon the contents of consciousness as in some sense 'false'; all three aim to transcend this falsity through a reductive interpretation and critique" (6).

²For those who are interested in such a long history of Western world-theorizing endeavours, a key work is Richard Tarnas's *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that have Shaped Our World View* (2010).

been quite strong in Western intellectual history. Ancient religion provided the earliest trope in the form of omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent deities. This propensity extends to modern concepts as diverse as Friedrich Hegel's Absolute Spirit, whose "outworking" or unfolding is both the progress of consciousness and of human history; Arthur Schopenhauer's Will (all striving); Henri Bergson's *élan vital* (vital impetus); Oswald Spengler's inner historical directionality of cultures, and Charles Darwin's natural selection, albeit with limited explanatory ambitions. One of the tendencies in this history has been the self-reflexive turn to the human subject, mental principles (à la Immanuel Kant) and cultural, linguistic, and representational schemata as the ground of world-theorization. Now where does deconstruction stand in this long history? Derrida and deconstruction may be argued as representing a climactic problematization of this history of world-theorizations. We shall briefly explore how. What language captures is only an abstract, limited in multiple senses, of the world process (the world in its broadest conceptions and in the largest ontological sense). The abstract is haunted by what it cannot capture, foresee, or limit, by the proliferent *excess* of the world-process, plurality of experience, shiftability of modes of being, the intricacies of many a *Lebenswelt* (reality as actually organized and experienced by an individual subject), and the world's extensive anastomosis in time, space, and consciousness. If we reckon only the word, we can see only the "differential fraying" in language. Deconstruction reveals the gaping gulf that opens between *world-conceptualization* (in language) and *world-excess* – an assertion of the latter against a whole self-assured history of the former. This 'hauntological' inevitability, whether acknowledged or not, is the *auto-epiphany* (if not an anti-epiphany) of Western thought, and, in this sense, deconstruction may be classed in the same category, though they belong to different domains of knowledge and despite internal differences, as Thomas Kuhn's "paradigm shift", Werner Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle", and Albert Einstein's "theory of relativity".

The Things-Work-on-Their-Own Bandwagon

Both structuralism and post-structuralism reveal another tendency in the aforementioned history. In the humanities in general, and in literary studies in particular, we increasingly notice a tendency to deny agency and to examine dynamic human reality in terms of impersonal systems and codes. Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of language, immediate precursor to Derrida's, is a modern example. Perhaps this is part of the (unconscious?) scientific aspirations of the humanities (conversely, the sciences might have humanistic aspirations), embedded in the anxieties of the discipline(s). Consider Terry Eagleton's summary of Formalism, which typifies the tendency:

The literary work was neither a vehicle for ideas, a reflection of social reality nor the incarnation of some transcendental truth: it was a material fact, whose functioning could be analysed rather as one could examine *a machine* [emphasis added]. It was made of words, not of objects or feelings, and it was a mistake to see it as the expression of an author's mind. Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, Osip Brik once airily remarked, would have been written even if Pushkin had not lived (2-3).

The 'things-work-on-their-own' bandwagon has been on the move for quite a few centuries of Western intellectual history across disciplines – religious studies, linguistics,

semiology, anthropology, literary criticism, and cultural theory. In fact, the tendency has been prevalent alongside its opposite in many epochs. The world emerged and goes on, on its own; there is no first cause or a prime mover. Language works on its own; there is no intention. We do not speak language; language speaks us. The text creates meanings on its own; the author is irrelevant. Discourse creates subjects; the question of subjectivity does not arise. Everything works on its own. Probably this was an offshoot of Deism³ and the “Disenchantment of the World” (Max Weber’s *Entzauberung der Welt*).⁴

Literary critics also became eager to deny the human agential dynamics underlying most phenomena. With this end in view, literary criticism borrowed avidly from other disciplines, linguistics (Ferdinand de Saussure) and anthropology (Claude Lévi-Strauss) in particular. Choice, intention, and agency were abandoned. Probably, this was the result of a disappointment with the soft, effeminate character, or image, of the discipline. In the form of structuralism, criticism began to be “concerned with structures, and more particularly with examining the general laws by which they work” (Eagleton 1996:82). Poems, myths, and other narratives came to be seen as structures. Food, clothing, kinship, language, and narrative were systems of signs. The humanities abandoned the human element: “The mind which does all this thinking is not that of the individual subject: myths think themselves through people, rather than vice versa. They have no origin in a particular consciousness, and no particular end in view” (Eagleton 1996: 90). Structural Marxism, which curiously combined the mechanistic logic with political engagement, also continued the legacy of de Saussure and Lévi-Strauss:

As far as a science of human societies goes, . . . individuals can be studied simply as the functions, or effects, of this or that social structure – as occupying a place in a mode of production, as a member of a specific social class, and so on. But this of course is not at all the way we actually experience ourselves. We tend to see ourselves rather as free, unified, autonomous, selfgenerating individuals; and unless we did so we would be incapable of playing our parts in social life. For [Louis] Althusser, what allows us to experience ourselves in this way is ideology (Eagleton 1996:149).

The latest entrant to the things-work-on-their-own network is the post-structuralist theory of textuality. “To write” is an intransitive verb. It has neither an object nor a subject; the author is ‘dead’.

³Deism restricted the deity to creation, and envisioned a universe that works on its own uniform and impersonal laws.

⁴Using a phrase borrowed from Friedrich Schiller, “Disenchantment of the World” (*Entzauberung der Welt*), Weber outlined a process which Western civilization had been experiencing for several millennia, and reached a highpoint with the scientific revolutions of modernity. In Weber’s work, the phrase denotes, on the one hand, a development within the domain of religion from magic to paths to salvation completely devoid of magic, and on the other, an understanding of the world’s occurrences increasingly by reference to natural forces, which are humanly controllable by rational calculation, physical laws, and mechanical principles than to magical and supernatural powers (Weber/Kalberg xxii-xxiii). The second of the two senses is what matters to the present discussion.

“Put a Pin in That Chap, Will You?” Deconstruction in Critical Practice

To the philosopher’s objection (à la Rodolphe Gasché’s⁵) that literary-critical use of deconstruction is not philosophical enough, the critic may respond by pointing out (rightly or otherwise) that what deconstruction seeks to identify in discourse – conceptual negotiability and/or intra-conceptual tension – has always been there. When ancient deconstructive thought as old as *pharmakon* (remedy, poison, and scapegoat) reaches Derrida post a Heideggerian detour of fundamental ontology (Being in itself – *das Sein* as opposed to *das Seiende* – precursor to the critique of “presence”) and several other unimmediate antecedents, what makes the movement momentous, at least to the literary critic, is the new reading – something which prompts J. Hillis Miller (1987) to describe deconstruction as “nothing more or less than good reading as such” (10), or reduce it to the rhetorical analysis of literary texts. Is deconstruction just another kind of ‘good’ reading? Is it like any other method of reading, like say Feminist, Marxist, Psychoanalytic, and Postcolonial ones? Each of them destabilizes a hermeneutic ground. It is easy to categorize Derrida alongside the other “masters of suspicion” whom Ricoeur lists. Derrida re-examines the fundamentals of thought, language, conceptualization, writing, and reading, and breaks up the critical ground, which was for long taken for granted. But can language as ground be considered on par with patriarchy, reason, truth, consciousness, epistemes? Perhaps Feminist, Marxist, Psychoanalytic, and Postcolonial criticisms may be deemed deconstructions of the respective discourses they contest. But Derridean interrogations, far from the exclusive impression their technicization conveys, plough the very ground of all knowledge and discourse, and involves a meta-engagement. Small wonder it has served as the conceptual fount, and perhaps a natural ally, of all critical contestations, despite the charge of it being ahistorical and apolitical.⁶ For literary criticism, deconstruction has been, among other things, a seductive invitation to unleash the protean energies of the text,⁷ a banner of revolt against the tyranny of closure. Origins, boundaries, axioms, protocols, and hermeneutic economies ceased to count. Its own advertising strategy presented the phenomenon as the *Poltergeist* (etymologically, rattling spirit) of literary criticism, a threateningly powerful force which departments of English had to reckon with. Deconstruction also legitimized an uncanonical idiom in which those who glamorously practised it could write about it. However, as Miller points out, Derrida and Paul de Man do not offer a method but provide us with “exemplary acts of reading” (Miller 1995: 80): “Deconstruction, like any method of interpretation, can

⁵See Gasché 22-57

⁶Deism Drucilla Cornell (1992) responds to the charge thus: “Derrida’s text leaves us with the infinite responsibility undecidability imposes on us. Undecidability in no way alleviates responsibility. The opposite is the case. We cannot be excused from our own role in history because we could not know so as to be reassured that we were ‘right’ in advance” (169).

⁷The title of this section is borrowed from the “Proteus” episode of James Joyce’s high-modernist magnum opus *Ulysses* (1922), where Stephen Dedalus probes “the inelucatable modality” of thought and experience through the visible and the audible. The Homeric title of the episode comes from the name of the slippery god of water bodies in Greek mythology, whose adjectival form has been repeatedly used as a metaphor for the slipperiness of language and deconstruction – their refusal to be pinned down.

only be exemplified, and the examples will of course all differ” (Miller 1995: 231). Let us look at a Derrida example. In ‘Ulysses Gramophone’, a piece to which Gasché grants the status of a philosophical text (“property of philosophy”), Derrida offers a non-linear reading of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. He shows how the book’s elements can coalesce in unconventional, non-linear ways to create meaning: Molly Bloom’s life-affirming “yes” in the interior monologue of the ‘Penelope’ episode, the coda of the book, is read as a belated response to her husband’s telephone call to Alexander Keyes in “Aeolus”. It may be argued that Derrida is able to link Leopold Bloom’s telephone call and Molly’s “yes” because *Ulysses* is a fragmentary text whose elements can coalesce in multiple ways (a cluster of dots which can be joined into several figures) and that this cannot happen with all texts. The text itself self-reflexively illustrates the possibility of creating meaning through making connections between its apparently unrelated parts. Where there is no logical connection, there could be a symbolic one. Within the linear narrative, when Martha Clifford, Leopold Bloom’s epistolary love-interest, makes a typographical error in her anonymous letter to him, he pursues its semantic possibilities to affirm the plenitude of the human world around in contrast to the poverty of the other world. She writes: “I called you naughty boy because *I do not like that other world* [instead of ‘word’; emphasis added]. Please tell me what is the real meaning of that word? [sic]” (Joyce 1984:5.244-6).⁸ Bloom responds to the error several pages later in the Prospect Cemetery, ironically also conveying Joyce’s ‘this-worldly’ religious attitudes: “There is another world after death named hell. I do not like that other world she wrote. No more do I. Plenty to see and hear and feel yet. Feel live warm beings near you. Let them sleep in their maggoty beds. They are not going to get me this innings. Warm beds: warm fullblooded life” (6.1001-5).

The self-consciously anticipative hermeneutic of *Ulysses* prevents an apparently invalid textual element from remaining invalid by hooking it elsewhere, thus providing an alternative validating logic. In a linear narrative, the elements follow one after the other (*nacheinander*). The reader needs to keep them mentally one next to the other (*nebeneinander*).⁹ The text is self-righting because it is self-writing. Owing to the intra-textual magnetism – the potential of the textual elements to club, to hook themselves elsewhere, and self-validate – we can say: ‘a text of genius makes no mistakes. Its errors are coalitional and are the portals of meaning’ (after Stephen’s psycho-biographical statement on Shakespeare: “A man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery”; 9.228-9).

The most lauded of “Joyce effects” (the title of Derek Attridge’s work) consists in the change he ushered in our conception of language – particularly, his role in foregrounding the “plurisignificatory” character of the word. Perhaps, in a lighter vein, we can say:

⁸ In keeping with the tradition of using the Gabler edition of *Ulysses*, I have cited episode and line numbers instead of page numbers.

⁹ *Nacheinander* and *nebeneinander* are terms which feature in Stephen’s interior monologue in the “Proteus” episode, and are a reference to the German aesthetician Gottfried Ephraim Lessing’s work *Laocoön* (1766).

Had there been no Joyce, there would have been no Derrida – a mystical apostolic succession! This may be an exaggeration, but, as Julian Wolfreys observes, “What James Joyce may be said to represent for Derrida is a certain optimum mobilization of equivocity and undecidability, which Derrida acknowledges in ‘Two Words for Joyce’” (Wolfreys 1998:39). The two words in question are from *Finnegans Wake* (1939) – “He war” – which Derrida subjects to deconstructive analysis: “He [Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker] makes war” and “He was” (based on the German meaning of ‘war’). With its use of multiple languages, portmanteau words (in the manner of Lewis Carroll), puns and a thoroughly unconventional syntax, the *Wake* came in handy for Derrida. Joyce used puns and portmanteau words as a means of packing enormous masses of telegraphic allusions into a short space in the *Wake*:

... we grisly old Sykos [psychoanalysts] who have done our unsmiling bit on alices [young girls, also an allusion to Carroll’s Alice books] when they were yung [German word for young, also a reference to Carl Gustav Jung, who treated Joyce’s daughter] and easily freudened [frightened, and a reference to Sigmund Freud] in the penumbra of the procuring room and what oracular compression we have had to apply to them (115).

The pleasure of reading the book lies in the possibility of participating in its meaning-making dynamism. Reading becomes a kind of puzzle-solving.

The examples from Joyce given above illustrate two deconstructive features of texts. First, as the *Wake* passages show, an undermining of “mimetic correspondence” (Wolfreys 1998:17) by what Derrida would call “excesses” and “supplements.” As Christopher Norris (1988) puts it, “To deconstruct a text is to draw out conflicting logics of sense and implication, with the object of showing that the text never exactly means what it says or says what it means” (7). Second, as is the case with the *Ulysses* examples, they demonstrate how the apparently allogical intra-textual coalitions produce (or destabilize) meaning, which also points to the etymology of the word ‘text.’ The English word ‘text’ is derived from the Latin infinitive *texere*, which means ‘to weave.’ ‘Textus’ is the past participle form meaning ‘woven.’ Meaning and *différance* are a function of textual weaving and unweaving. As Wolfreys rightly points out, “meaning is context-dependent and the product of a structure rather than a discrete unit, and rather than there being any full meaning inherent in any one term” (41-2), and “rhetoric performs its own structure” (22).

What does deconstruction mean for literary research? If we go by Hillis Miller’s clarification “Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself” (Miller 1976:341), the following may appear to be the case. We know the finding in advance. What is singular about a particular deconstructive enterprise is merely the demonstration. The thrill lies in the process of discovering or revealing the ways in which the text has ‘dismantled itself.’ If this is the case, it is return of ‘deductive (syllogistic) reasoning’ in another form: All humans are mortal; Socrates is human; so he is mortal. Analogously, textual meaning is undecidable. This is true of work *x* (*x* = *The Aeneid*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *As You Like It*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Middlemarch*, *Women in Love*, *The Wasteland*, *One Hundred*

Years of Solitude. . .). This is where the self-deconstructive character of deconstruction becomes significant. Derrida illustrated this by an estranging inconsistent emphasis on his own “master-words” so that they did not “congeal” (Spivak 1974: lxxi). They become mere ‘figures.’ Deconstruction consciously takes a position against programmatic replication, and emphasizes irreducible singularity: “We cannot bring an idea of reading to a text ahead of its being read. The particularity of the text precludes the possibility of a theory or method of reading” (Wolfreys 1998: 50-1). Deconstruction is different every time we invoke it in relation to a text. As Wolfreys urges, “we have constantly to be on our guard against falling into those programmatic, conventional, institutionally approved modes of thought where everything is decided in advance, everything is planned and given some kind of anticipatory articulation, a strait jacket with which to welcome the guest” (190). The guest could be the text or deconstruction itself.

The redeeming feature of deconstruction is that it is a huge paradox. Fidelity to the rules of the game in practice undermines the theory of the game. Even as we recognize its ontological slipperiness, we cannot let go its terminology. Deconstruction has proven itself a vividly illustrative example of the ability of any idea to turn on itself. Its legacy lies (no pun intended) in this admirable paradox. That is why Geoffrey Bennington (1993) maintains that the only way of respecting Derrida’s thought is to betray it (316). The legacy of deconstruction for academia is a culture of perpetual (self-) questioning. It has provided a repertoire to approach the word and the world with scepticism. If, today, we unfortunately find that scepticism is mistaken for critical intelligence, fortunately the unwritten maxim itself is liable to such self-questioning.

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