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Analyzing ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’ from the Perspective of Derrida’s Deconstruction

Hassin Ur Rehman¹, Hafiz Imran Nawaz², Prof. Dr. Asadullah Larik³

Abstract

‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’ is a masterpiece composed by Robert Frost. Many critics have discussed this poem from every possible perspective which makes the poem more complex in finding the actual meaning of the poem. Deconstruction is related to close reading as it points out all the inconsistencies, flaws, contradictions, ambiguity, oppositional ideas, and incompleteness of a text. There is no fixed meaning of the text due to binary opposition and it determines that other possible meanings come from inside the text. These differences can be structural, syntactic, semantic and phonological. Deconstruction makes the text free from the authority of the author. This study analyzes and breaks down the poem to get other possible meanings. The title doesn’t give a proper sense. The speaker of the poem is confused as he asks a question about the owner of the woods and then gives the answer that he knows the owner. The speaker assumes the meaning of the harness bell that the horse is asking about the farm house as he doesn’t mention how he gets the assumption of the farm house. In the last stanza, the speaker says that he has some responsibilities to comply and he acts against his words along with that he doesn’t move from the spot. The researcher also focuses on other related research articles to support the topic under study.

Keywords: Deconstruction, inconsistencies, contradictions, ambiguity, binary opposition

Introduction

Robert Frost is a well-known poet in the history of American literature. He has contributed to American literature with the help of his writings. He is very close to nature due to the fact that he has a strong sense to discuss nature in poetry. ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’ is one of the most interpreted poems of Robert Frost. Every critic has gone far in the explanation of this masterpiece. The poem has a potential to provide or generate new meanings on every new reading and each meaning is better than the previous one. Critics find it complex to decide a particular meaning of the poem therefore, the interpretation goes in different directions. The researcher analyzes this poem through the lens of ‘Deconstruction’.

Deconstruction means something else other than the actual apparent meaning. When the text has more than one meaning or other meaning than the apparent meaning, it is because of loopholes, contradiction, binary opposition, and other possible meanings. These things often lead a text to give flexible meaning except general meaning (Hendricks 2).

¹ Lecturers Department of English, Hamdard University

² Lecturers Department of English, Hamdard University

³ Dean Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hamdard University

Theoretical Framework

The researcher applies Deconstructive theory of Jacques Derrida on the poem of Robert Frost 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening'. The theory deals with flaws, inconsistencies, loopholes, contradictions and binary opposition in the text.

Research Questions

How does the poem 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evenings' present the loopholes and contradiction?

How does the theory help to explore other possible meanings in the text?

Literature Review

The 20th century has brought everything together with the help of language and text. As Derrida expresses that language creates meaning and it becomes problematic for the readers to get the actual meaning of any text. He established the term 'Deconstruction' in order to provide a solution to this problem. He believes that meaning can be constructed individually from texts. He further criticizes the Western thought about the hegemony of the meaning authorization and fabrication with the aim to liberate the meaning of the texts (Yegen & Abukan 49).

Deconstruction, a term or theory, has been borrowed from the writing of Martin Heidegger. However, Derrida begins applying this term to textual reading. He discusses that there is nothing outside the text and this makes the context essential for the theory (Al-Muttalibi 144). Deconstruction is a post-structuralist theory constructed on the writings of Derrida. It includes the close reading of the text with the aim to exhibit that every text is irreconcilably inconsistency and has contradictory meanings (Mambrol).

Deconstruction is a theory related to literature and language and it is a reaction to the structuralism developed around the 1970s. It has a unique way of interpretation of a literary text. It covers language, literature, philosophy, textuality, and speech. According to Derrida, deconstruction is all about a new interpretation of a text. It seeks out all the flaws, cracks, incompleteness, and inconsistency in the text. Deconstruction breaks a text into pieces and analyzes the pieces separately. It is very much related to 'close reading'. Derrida expresses that every new reading of a text provides different meanings. The aim is not to displace or demolish a text but to find a contradiction in a text. He further explains that it makes the text free from the author's hegemony (Hendricks 2).

Derrida suggests that everything has its opposition and this creates other possible meanings. He states that every text may have different meaning with the same characteristic. The binary oppositions are here in the language due to the fact that they make relationships with other meanings or the meanings can be identified with the help of binary oppositions. He articulates that the process of creating perception or meaning can never be ended whenever the reader reads the text, it offers new meaning at every attempt. This attempt of reading with the help of deconstruction reveals flaws and gaps in the text (Yegen & Abukan 53).

According to Yegen and Abukan, deconstruction claims that meaning is flexible and inconsistent. Language can be worked through different social structures which help to create meaning from anywhere. Deconstruction also helps to discover meaning inside the text (54). In this sense, deconstruction can discuss the relationship between the text and meaning.

Derrida says that 'there is nothing other than the text' which means that the meaning can be taken from inside the text.

Gnanasekaran expresses that 'deconstruction' is derived from the French words 'deconstruire' which means improvement or development. It comprises word play, allegories, parallel contrary images, verbal signs, and ambiguity (212). According to deconstructionists, the significance of the study is very vast. It is helpful to find out utilization and inconsistencies of the structures and words of sentences. It focuses on deficiencies, conflicts, clashes and ambiguity in the text (Gnanasekaran 213).

Derrida exposes the uncertainties in language and binary opposition of a text. For instance, the text describes something white but not black or feminine but not masculine and true but not false. Now Derrida says that every signifier and signified has an arbitrary relationship. So, the purpose of deconstruction is to uncover the irregularity of language by pointing out contradictions embedded in a text. The process of discovering ambiguity in a text is possible due to the debatable or unstable meaning. Further he explains that deconstruction is not all about random doubt but by careful focus on inside the text (Almasalmeh 97 and 98).

Deconstruction does not help to tell the meaning of a text but to find out other possible and different meanings and it expresses how these meanings are different than the actual meanings (Hendricks 8).

One of the characteristics of deconstruct is to bring out from the text what is excluded by showing what is included. Derrida believes that deconstruction always shows something else or in other words, it always shows what is undecidable in the text. Every text has its own value and according to that value the text should be read. He further explains that there is not a fixed meaning of text, it always finds another meaning or thinking (Güney & Güney 223).

Al-Jumaily presents about the idea of Deconstruction is:

- Text generates meaning with the help of inside differences. These differences can be semantic, structural, syntactic or phonological. Words can offer different meanings due to their differences from other words. As Derrida confers that meaning can be defined by opposition. As there is no distinctive relationship between signifier and signified.
- There is no specific meaning of a text as it provides different meanings at different readings. Structuralism insists that the meaning is generated on one particular structure but Deconstruction annihilates and denies this specific structure and states every structure contradicts itself therefore; there is no specific structure. As Derrida discusses that each word has its opposition like good has bad and truth has deception (16 and 17).

Abdulrehman and Iqbal point out that Structuralism focuses on linguistic structures that define individual thought which is determined by culture. Deconstruction defies this notion that the meaning of structure is inflexible, historical or universal. A person can get whatever the meaning he wants to get. In simple words, Deconstruction validates that the text has abundant conflicting and inconsistent meaning. It also expresses that every text tries to cover up the fluidity of meaning (42).

Derrida states deconstruction is a textual event. The reader doesn't perform anything outside the text but everything happens inside the text. The text itself offers other possible and contradictory interpretations. Every text has different possible interpretations according to its background reading. It requires a certain openness or attitude to the text which can be explained with the expression of Derrida 'meaning to say nothing' (Enwald 56 and 57).

Important Features of Deconstruction

- Deconstruction is related to the close textual reading and there is nothing outside the text. It always discovers something else inside the text.
- There is no fixed meaning of the text and it offers different meanings at different readings.
- It tells the relationships between the words and meanings, and how the language is used to convey the meanings.
- Every text has inconsistency and contradictory meaning.
- There is no actual meaning of any text and it is all about the new interpretation of a text.
- It finds flaws, cracks, incompleteness, gaps, deficiencies, conflicts, clashes, uncertainty, and ambiguity in a text.
- To find out these elements, a text has to be divided and analyzed in separate pieces.
- Binary opposition generates other possible meanings.
- Deconstruction helps to liberate the text from the authority of the author.

Research Methodology

The researcher analyzes the poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evenings* by Robert Frost from the perspective of Deconstructive theory with the help of Textual Analysis along with Close Reading. According to McKee, textual analysis helps to uncover the underlying meaning of the text and it is an educational guess (3).

Deconstruction Study of the Poem

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

The concept of Derrida regarding *différance* reinforces his development of deconstruction and his suggestions for the analysis or interpretation of the poem. He further explains that the poem must be decentered, and the meaning is never fixed. There is always something else in the meaning.

While reading a poem, readers often experience jarring and unconceivable impact because poetry doesn't act according to conventional rules and regulations which produce usual English

sentences. In order words, poetry doesn't follow the rules of grammar and structure. A deconstructive reading explores that contradictory forces inside the text make the text incompatible, multiplex and undecidable in accordance to meaning (Pishkar & Nasery 3).

The following points are observed after analyzing the poem through deconstruction:

- The title 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' shows:
 - The speaker wants to stop by the woods.
 - The speaker tells about his stop/ stay by the woods.
 - It also shows the speaker usually stops by woods in some other conditions but now he is talking about snowy evenings. As this idea proves by his words 'whose woods are these, I think I know he is in the village though'.
 - The title also attracts or invites the readers to stop by woods on a snowy evening.
- The first stanza shows the person who lives in the village as the speaker explains. Now the readers don't know about the place, the owner and the village. The poet doesn't explain anything about them. The meaning can be different now. Either the poet or the speaker doesn't know about these things, or the speaker doesn't want to explain anything about them, or something is missing from the poem. The first stanza starts directly from the introduction of an unknown person.
- 'I think' reveals that the speaker is in the state of confusion about the person or he is not sure about the same person. If he is wrong then the next few lines will have no value in the poem it will also be considered wrong. The word 'think' shows that the speaker isn't certain for the owner but later, the statement 'he lives in the village' represents he is sure about the owner.
- He is standing before the frozen lake and forest. Now the speaker doesn't explain anything about his stay, so why does he stop? He stays because there is no path to go or he stays to think about his journey ahead or he just wants to rest or he stops to enjoy the weather or the scene.
- The poem doesn't indicate anything about his starting and ending point from where he has started or wants to end his journey.
- If the weather is bad, then there is no use to travel, as people don't travel in bad weather. The poem doesn't display any purpose of the speaker's travelling in this weather. The poet doesn't describe where the speaker is going or talk about the destination.
- The poem is indistinct about the route that the speaker takes the road or path from the inside of the woods. Isn't there any other way besides the forest/ woods?
- When the speaker is in the forest then how does he listen the sound of snowy flack while he was on the horse? If there is wind, then there will be no sound of snowflakes. The speaker expresses that there are two sounds; the sound of wind and the sound of snowflake but he mentions the word 'Only' to describe these two sounds. 'The only other sound' makes the sense that there are other unrecognizable sounds as well but the speaker doesn't declare those sounds.
- The horse must think it's queer, how the speaker knows that the horse is feeling strange. How does the horse ask about the purpose of stay? How the speaker gets the meaning of the harness bell that the horse is saying, 'To stop without a farmhouse near'. How does the speaker assume about the farm house?
- There is also opposition of the idea that the darkest evening of the year. How can the evening be dark? Not only dark but the darkest evening as dark is the characteristic of night not the evening.

- There is also a contradiction between action and speech. The last two lines say, 'mile to go before I sleep'. Now he stands over there and doesn't move. He only speaks about the journey but doesn't go forward. He goes against his speech and if he is to go then why is he standing over there.
- 'Woods are lovely, deep and dark', the line also provides the opposition of the idea that the speaker doesn't express about the words 'lovely, deep and dark' either they are used in positive sense or in negative sense. A thing cannot be lovely, deep or dark at the same time.
- 'Mile to go before I sleep', for sleeping there is no need to go for miles. Just take any shade and sleep. again the poet doesn't give a specific sense of the journey and sleeping.

Conclusion

It is disclosed through the analysis of the poem from the perspective of Derrida's deconstruction that the poem rests on binary opposition which can be discussed by contradictory textual confirmation. Frost doesn't express any conformity of the meaning in the text; therefore, the poem has ambiguous scenario, contradictory ideas and inconsistent situation. 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' has various undecidable meanings. The analysis of the poem reveals that the title doesn't give the exact sense. The first stanza makes a confusion that at first the speaker asks a question about the woods then he says that he knows that person living in the village. The speaker assumes the meaning of the harness bell that the horse is asking about the farm house as he doesn't mention that how he knows the assumption of the farm house. In the last stanza, the speaker says that he has some responsibilities to comply and he doesn't move from the spot. Inconsistency is there as the speaker stands before the frozen lack and at the end says he has to go to fulfil his responsibilities but doesn't move from the spot. Lovely, deep and dark represent the opposition of idea because a thing cannot be lovely, deep or dark at the same time. These are the few elements which are brought after applying deconstruction in the poem.

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