

Uncivilization in William Shakespeare's Play *The Tempest*: Deconstructive Criticism

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Abstract

This paper tries to apply a kind of criticism; that is, deconstruction. In this paper, the kind of criticism is applied to the play entitled *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare. Deconstruction is a term coined by the contemporary French philosopher Jacques Derrida and it has been used primarily to designate the mode of literary criticism practice since the publication of Derrida's seminal work in the late 1960's, by proving more forth coming with negative rather than positive analyses of the school. This criticism tries to examine binary opposition by showing the negative side of the play which implicitly symbolizes the author. Thus, this study also tries to present the negative side in *The Tempest*, and this negative side refers to uncivilization in this play. There are some civilized but nasty characters that show harshness especially in speech. Although some come from so-called civilized people as they are from high class-society. They often tend to establish impolite ways of speaking, like mocking others, rudeness, insensitivity, and impolite utterances. These forms of harshness in speech actually symbolize uncivilized side. That is why such harshness in speech in William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* becomes the concern of this study. In addition, it seems that such forms of harshness and impolite utterances can be found in the play and those symbolize uncivilization aspect in the play.

Keywords: deconstruction, harshness, uncivilized, binary opposition.

Introduction

It is argued that since antiquity the aim of the Literary Theory was to come to terms with literary texts and their meanings. Critics found it difficult to capture any particular meaning of the text. That was why criticism kept on enriching itself with new ideas from different disciplines so as to cope with literary productions and find a method by which a text can be analyzed systematically (Al-Jumaily, 2017). Like what Al-Jumaily has done on his deconstructive analysis, it is also considered that Shakespeare's literary works including *The Tempest* resist casual analysis because they deal with the varying human nature and hence keep on suggesting new meanings at any time his works are read. Shakespeare's plays are very commonly analyzed with greatly positive side.

However, experience proved that each text can be approached through a certain critical theory, while other critical theories cannot be fit to deal with it. This argument can best be applied to his play *The Tempest*. *The Tempest* which is considered as maintaining the complex aspects of a play still provides some other aspects contrary to the good one. Moreover, the author is also considered the

greatest dramatist. These factors provide binary apposition. That is why it is extremely proper to appreciate Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* by means of deconstructive study.

Deconstruction is a term coined by the contemporary French philosopher Jacques Derrida and used primarily to designate the mode of literary criticism practiced, since the publication of Derrida's seminal work in the late 1960's, by proving more forth coming with negative rather than positive analyses of the school. Derrida gives these negative descriptions of deconstruction in order to explain "what deconstruction is not, or rather *ought* not to be" and therefore to prevent misunderstandings of the term.

Within literary criticism, the deconstructive method is used to show that the meaning of a literary text is not fixed and stable. Instead, by exploring the dynamic tension within a text's language, literary deconstruction reveals the literary work to be not a determinate object with a single correct meaning but an expanding semantic field that is open to multiple, sometimes conflicting interpretations. Thus, this study tries to read and to seek the negative side of the play which shows implicitly the binary opposition between the speech delivered by the so called civilized people and their social status.

Literature Review

Jay (1990, p. 11), as quoted by Almasalmeh (2014), explains *deconstruct* and *deconstruction* may embody negative connotations, *deconstruction* has lately gained currency since it very often permeates fields as diverse as architecture, theology, and geography. Yet the use of deconstruction in a variety of contexts could be quite problematic. On the one hand, it is difficult to define "deconstruction" because, as Jay points out, "deconstruction has now become an indeterminate nominative". This statement suggests that the difficulty associated with deconstruction stems from a problem of reference. That is, it is difficult to decide what it refers to. On the other hand, if the assumptions of deconstruction are correct, deconstruction is then an uncertain term. That is, if deconstruction assumes that all terms are unstable, then this must apply to deconstruction as well. However, we always attempt to explain deconstruction anyway, despite the fact that some points in the text cannot be explained.

Deconstruction was first coined by Jacques Derrida, one of the pioneering figures who have inexorably exposed the uncertainties of using language, and he is definitely the most important figure in the issue of deconstruction. The basis of deconstruction emerges from Derrida's argument that people usually express their thoughts in terms of binary oppositions. For example, they may describe an object as white but not black, or masculine and therefore not feminine, true and not false. Derrida then provided his well-known theory that the signifier (i.e. the word) and the signified (i.e. its reference) have an arbitrary and random, rather than a straightforward and clear-cut, relationship. The function of deconstruction is to unravel the inconsistencies of language most outstandingly by highlighting the contradictions embedded in a text. In so doing, it demonstrates how a text destabilizes itself, thus undermining its fundamental premises.

Then, here are some other additional explanations about deconstruction. Deconstructing a text seeks to unravel the struggle between signifiers and signified. As Johnson (1980, p. 5) suggests, "the deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself". Johnson observes that there is organization in deconstruction, and that the text is weaved out of clashing forces that could be the basis of deconstruction. In addition, for Culler (1982, p. 86), "to deconstruct a

discourse is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies". This process of uncovering the various contradictions in any given text is possible since meaning is always debatable and/or unstable. There is always a gap between the reader and the text's assumptions.

Here are some ideas on Deconstruction:

- a. Texts produce meanings through the difference upon which the meaning inside them is generated. Literary works rest on many differences on the phonological, semantic, syntactic, and structural levels. According to Deconstruction, words themselves produce meanings as a result of their difference with other words: We know one phoneme or one word because each is different from another, and we know that there is no innate relationship between a signifier and its signified...It is this free play or undecidability in any system of communication that Derrida calls writing (Habib, 2007, pp. 110-111). Writing can best represent these oppositions. By writing Derrida refers to the continuous process of free play of meanings. The concept of difference helps to generate meanings and analyze them at the same time. The text is constructed with the seeds of deconstruction inside it.
- b. There is no one particular meaning for the text. Texts supply new meanings at different readings. This is the main issue of Deconstruction which makes of this theory a postmodern critical discipline. Modern theories, like Structuralism, insisted on locating a unique meaning for the text built on one specific structure. Deconstruction demolished all the structural thinking and insisted that there is no particular structure; simply because structures always deconstruct themselves, and that is the nature of reality which does not have any particular face: According to Derrida for each center, an opposing center exists. We know truth, for instance, because we know deception; we know *good* because we know *bad*.
- c. Whenever a certain meaning is obtained from a text, it soon starts to deconstruct itself because it becomes a sort of (presence) which will not last long unless it invites its (absence). In other words, reality, according to Deconstruction is but a moment when it is reached, it is no more reality. This idea is clearly seen in "The Road not Taken." The speaker in the text himself is not certain of anything, and likewise, he keeps readers hesitant as they move from one idea to another; not knowing which one is true or better: The search, then, for the text's " correct " meaning or the writer's so called intentions becomes meaningless. Since meaning is derived from differences In a dynamic, context – related, ongoing process, all texts have multiple meanings or interpretations (Habib, 2007, p. 115).
- d. Deconstruction values (writing) over (speech), Derrida considered writing a sort of deep structure; speech is only one representation of it. Speech will be soon lost, and meaning will be also lost with it. Words soon die unless they are transferred into written symbols: "writing is actually a precondition for and prior to speech. According to Derrida language becomes a special type of writing that he calls arch writing."

Derrida considers writing to be the origin of language. It is a mental process that governs speech which is but a branch of writing. This philosophy of language is similar to De Saussure's linguistic ideas. If these principles of the deconstructive theory are applied to the text of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, it can be obviously seen that the text is very close to the main issues of Derrida's theory.

Research Method

This study applies descriptive qualitative approach. This approach is used to describe the civilized sides that can be found in the play *The Tempest* by showing harshness

in speech and impolite utterances that are presented by some civilized characters in the play. In short, such description provides the finding of this analysis.

Results and Discussion

From this play, there are some nasty characters that show harshness especially in speech. Although some come from so-called civilized people as they are from high class-society, but they often tend to establish impolite way of speaking, like mocking others, insensitivity, and impolite utterances. This harshness in speech actually symbolizes uncivilized side. Of course, those characteristics may represent the writer of the play. Therefore, it shows that W. Shakespeare is an uncivilized man. It means that he is a kind of rude person. He is violent in speech. He is rather insensitive when he speaks to others. He uses some sort of impolite utterances. These describe that he is an uncivilized man. We can see such kind harshness from the following quotations presented by the characters in the play.

1. When *Sebastian* mocks *Boatswain* he speaks harshly or unpleasantly.

Boatswain: *Down with the topmast. Yare, lower, lower! Bring her to try main course. [A cry within] A plague upon this howling! They are louder than the weather or our office.*

(Reenter Sebastian, Antonio, and Gonzalo)

Yet again! What do you here? Shall we give o'er, and down? Have you a mind to sin.

Sebastian: *A pox o' your throat, you bawling, blasphemous, incharitable dog!*
(1.1.32-39)

We can see how *Sebastian* uses the language impolitely to *Boatswain*. He mocks *Boatswain* harshly. He utters "blasphemous, uncharitable dog". It sounds harsh to say such kind utterance to other people. It means he treats *Boatswain* the same as a dog. It seems opposite to Sebastian's status. He is the brother of the king of Naples, but he cannot use the best way to criticize someone; on the other hand he uses language immorally. Of course, we agree that this seems harshness in speech. This describes that W. Shakespeare is a harsh man. And, this harshness represents someone uncivilized.

2. *Antonio* also mocks *Boatswain*.

Boatswain: *Work you then.*

Antonio: *Hang, cur; hang, you whoreson, insolent noise maker; we are less afraid to be drown'd than thou art. (1.1. 40-42)*

There are nasty words in *Antonio's* speech; that is, *cur* (is kind of dog) and *Whoreson*. It seems *Antonio* is harsh or violent in speech. And this also represents the writer of this play how he uses the language harshly or violently. If he is civilized, there will be no such kind words. Again these words describe uncivilized side.

3. *Prospero* is angry with *Ariel*.

Ariel: *Yes, Caliban her son.*

Prospero: *Dull thing, I say so; he, that Caliban
Whom now I keep I service. Though best know'st
What torment I did find thee in; thy groans
Did make wolves howl, and penetrate the breasts
Of ever-angry bears; it was a torment
To lay upon the damn'd, which Sycorax*

Could not again undo. It was mine art,
When I arrive'd and heard thee, that made gape
The pine, and let thee out.

Ariel: I thank thee master.

Prospero: If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak
And peg thee in his knotty entrails, till
Thou hast howl'd away twelve winters.

Ariel: Pardon, master; I will be correspondent to command,
And do my spriting gently. (1.2.84-98)

Here we see how *Prospero* treats *Ariel* immorally. *Prospero* tends to be arrogant due to his magic power. *Prospero* will *peg Ariel with Caliban's knotty entrails*. This shows his violence in speaking and indeed, and the same time it also shows that the author is uncivilized one owing to his harsh treatment.

4. How severe *Prospero* treats *Caliban*.

Caliban: [Within] There's wood enough within.

Prospero: Come forth, I say; there's other business for thee.
Come, thou tortoise! Speak. (1.2.314-316)

We see how *Prospero* commands *Caliban* to come to him. He uses the word "tortoise". It shows violence, and it means uncivilized way to use such kind word. This also shows the uncivilized side of the author. Besides, this scene shows the colonialism done by *Prospero*.

5. *Prospero* uses a nasty word for *Caliban*.

(Re-enter *Ariel* like a water nymph.)
Pine apparition! My quaint *Ariel*,
Hark in thine ear.

Ariel: My lord, it shall be done. [Exit]

Prospero: Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself
Upon thy wicked dam, come forth! (1.2.317-320)

Prospero's treatment of Caliban is perhaps the example of his behavior which causes us the most problems- it seems to some people excessively severe. Here, we see *Prospero* uses "poisonous slave". We have to remember, however, that *Prospero* has taught *Caliban* language and many other things, and he feels that he has been ill-repaid by *Caliban* when the latter attempted to rape *Miranda*. Indeed, it is human that *Prospero* gets angry to *Caliban* owing to his immoral deed. Still, *Prospero's* harshness of language and violence of behavior toward *Caliban* shows uncivilized action because he knows that *Caliban* is inhumane and uncivilized and this makes him to teach *Caliban* language.

6. *Prospero* makes *Ferdinand* an underdog.

Prospero: [Aside] Poor worm, thou art infected!
This visitation shows it.

Miranda: You look wearily."

Ferdinand: No, noble mistress; ... (3.1.32-33)

Prospero makes *Ferdinand* carry logs, and when he seems weary *Prospero* does not want to let him stop for a moment. This shows how harsh he is. And, this harshness symbolizes uncivilized side.

7. *Prospero* commands *Caliban*.

Prospero: *Thou most lying slave, Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have us'd thee, ... (1.2.344-345)*

This line shows how *Prospero* colonizes the savage, *Caliban*. He makes *Caliban* his slave that must obey his command. Making someone underdog is a kind of uncivilized action.

8. *Caliban* is threatened if he disobeys *Prospero's* order.

Prospero: *Hag-seed, hence!
Fetch us in fuel. And be quick, thou 'rt best
To answer other business. Shrug'st thou, malice?
If thou neglect'st, or dost unwillingly
What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps,
Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar,
That beasts shall tremble at thy din. (1.2.365-371)*

The above lines prove that *Prospero* uses his magic power to rule the savage. He is shipwrecked in the island where the only savage is inhabitant, but by his magic he wants to dominate the island. And he makes the savage obligatorily obey his order. This is a kind of colonialism. Colonialism represents uncivilized side.

9. *Prospero* treats *Ferdinand* harshly, and he considers *Ferdinand* a traitor.

Prospero: *Follow me. Speak not you for him; he' a traitor.
Come;
I'll manacle thy neck and feet together.
Sea-water shalt thou drink; thy food shall be ... (1.2.460-464)*

This shows how *Prospero* treats *Ferdinand* harshly. The phrase "manacle your neck and feet together" describes that *Prospero* is still uncivilized. At the same time this represents the author of this play.

10. *Stephano* speaks violently to *Caliban*.

Stephano: *Come on your ways; open your mouth;
here is that which will give language to you, cat.
Open your mouth; this will shake your shaking, I can tell you, and
that soundly;
You cannot tell who's your friend.
Open your chaps again. (2.2.77-80)*

Stephano establish a drunken lordship over *Caliban*. *Stephano* makes himself into sort of vulgar mocking, dressing up in the clothes he finds in the clothes line. His power is a kind of bullying, and he is potentially violent towards both *Trinculo* and *Caliban*. His vulgar mocking shows himself as an uncivilized man. In the above line, we see how he uses the word "cat" toward *Caliban*. Of course, this character represents the author. It means that the author is also uncivilized.

11. *Antonio* always speaks impolitely.

Gonzalo: *And—do you mark me, sir?*
Antonio: *Prithee, no more; thou dost talk nothing to me.*
Gonzalo: *I do well believe your Highness; and did it to ...*

Antonio: 'T was you laugh'd at. (2.1.163-168)

Antonio seems harsh in speech as well as in deed, He is insensitive to others, selfish and treacherous. He likes mocking the kind of old *Gonzalo*. His violence shows that he is uncivilized. This also proves that the author is same as his violence. *Prospero* and *Antonio* who are considered as civilized people show their harshness and violence. In comparison to Ariel, a native spirit, they seem more uncivilized than he is. Thus, it can be seen that American savages are in many ways more moral, more humane people than so-called civilized Europeans.

From the above quotations, we can see harshness, impoliteness, and mocking which are presented by the characters. All these symbolize uncivilized characters. Then, implicitly these may also symbolize the author, W. Shakespeare.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we have seen how *The Tempest* can be approached from a deconstructive point of view. There are the forms of harshness and impoliteness that can be seen from the characters in the play. Finally, it shows that *The Tempest* provides binary oppositions through which uncivilization are presented by so called civilized characters.

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