

CHAPTER THREE

JACQUES DERRIDA: FIGURES AND FALLIBILISM

I

This chapter seeks to explore (i) Derrida's thesis on the language of language; (ii) the nature of meaning in any system of signs, especially in the overarching shadow of post-structuralism; (iii) the locus of Derrida's objections to the Saussurean paradigm of signification, particularly in view of its foundational bias inherited from structuralism, evident in anthropology and linguistics; and (iv) the connection between Derrida's figurations of the figure in relation to Saussure's figurations.

This reading looks at Derrida's explications of the issues in *Of Grammatology* (1976). The choice of this book as the Derridean exemplum is guided by the fact that in this book more than anywhere else, we see the most sustained articulation of several radical linkages between phenomenology and cognitive linguistics. The other factor behind this choice is the fact that the interrogation of western metaphysics in the book has significant bearings on meaning and interpretation—that is, the interpretation of language and the language of interpretation—given that at the heart of western metaphysics, as Derrida sees it, is a crucial metaphoric divide between Word and word.

The chapter is governed by the following hypotheses: (i) that anybody dealing with language and meaning is bound by a system of signs, which, in effect, is not only the structure but also the medium with which we conduct our linguistic behaviour; (ii) that any study of the nature of language and the source of meaning is likely to see the impossibility of determinate and authoritative meaning; and (iii) that meaning is indeterminate because language itself is indeterminate, given that any meaning—or allocation of identity in a language system—is an ideality that halts the motion of signs.

In effect, meaning can never coincide with its object at a point of pure, unobstructed union. Language invariably intervenes to deflect, defer or differentially complicate the relation between manifest sense and expressive intent. Hence, the search for an absolute word for a thing is always on—there is bound to be an inadequacy or lack of coordination that characterizes our drive to make words into things.

It is contended in this chapter that metaphoricity is the only way through/in which language can pass from one existing order or meaning to another. Metaphor being the force of displacement or deferral of meanings, that which enables us to associate one

thing with another, is the way we deal with differences between things and also study the gap between the word and the thing. The interpretive activity therefore always leads towards the poetic and metaphorical status of language, because, there is no way we can fix meanings absolutely or find completely stable structures to contextualise them in a deterministic manner.

In an interview with Jean Birnbaum in 2004, Derrida spoke about the future of his writing:

[T]o put it playfully and with a certain immodesty, one has not yet begun to read me. . . even though there are, to be sure, many very good readers (a few dozen in the world perhaps, people who are also writer-thinkers, poets) . . . I have the feeling that two weeks or a month after my death *there will be nothing left*. Nothing except what has been copyrighted and deposited in libraries. (Quoted from Sarah Wood, 139)

It is not only a matter of variety of authors studying, critiquing various aspects of Derrida's work, but that of readings which cannot be unified in any one individual or perspective, which prompts one to ask "Is There Some *Thing* Called Deconstruction"(Wolfreys, 21). The 1970s saw a popularization of deconstruction within university literature departments, as there was a diffuse influence of Derrida via a number of journals founded by academics that read, translated and wrote about Derrida. The Yale School, came up with an anthology, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (1979), by Harold Bloom, J. Hillis Miller, Paul de Man and Geoffrey Hartman, which included a contribution by Derrida.

One very prominent work in the early years of deconstruction is *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method* (1967) edited by Richard Rorty is an anthology of essays by philosophers like Carnap, Ryle, Bergmann, Max Black, Urmson, Katz etc., illustrating "various ways in which linguistic philosophers have viewed philosophy and philosophical method over the last thirty-five years" (Preface). In his book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1980), Rorty argues that the search for knowledge and the epistemological field has always been trapped in its own engaging metaphors: "It is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions" (12). Derrida has been given a marginal place in this work, but as Christopher Norris suggests, elsewhere, "Rorty has written most

persuasively of Derrida's significance and the questions he poses to 'normative' or mainstream philosophy" (Norris, 1983; 16-17). The central issue of Rorty's writings, Norris suggests is that "of philosophical *style*, in a sense more crucial and encompassing than most philosophers are willing to entertain ... [he] rejects the protocols of orthodox linguistic philosophy in favour of a conscious, even artful, play with stylistic possibilities"(17).

Rorty is of the view that with *Glas*, there arises a distinction between an earlier and later Derrida. This has been dealt with in *Contingence, Irony and Solidarity* (1989), where Rorty contends that the early Derrida is "in quest of . . . words which express the condition of possibility of all previous theory . . . [the] early Derrida sometimes goes in for word magic . . . he too, wants to find words which get 'us' beyond metaphysics—words which have force apart from us and display their own contingency" (123-124). Later in *Philosophical Papers, vol.2: Essays on Heidegger and Others* (1991), Rorty writes:

The later Derrida privatizes his philosophical thinking . . . He simply drops theory—the attempt to see his predecessors steadily and whole—in favour of fantasizing about those predecessors, playing with them, giving free rein to the trains of associations they produce. (117)

So far as the 1970s is concerned, Gayatri Spivak in her 'Translator's Preface' in *Of Grammatology* (1976) provides a summary of Derrida's argument in *Of Grammatology*. She discusses the concept of binary oppositions in terms of writing/speech, and says that for Derrida 'writing' is a metaphor, which names "an entire structure of investigation, not merely . . . 'writing in the narrow sense', 'graphic notation on tangible material" (ix-lxxxix). According to Spivak, Derrida is not merely opposing writing to speech, in the process of reversing a binary opposition (Speech/Writing), so as to give precedence to a term which is traditionally considered in our thought to have a secondary role, while speech is then relegated to a secondary position. So according to Spivak, 'writing' is a key figure in Derrida's writing, but as a figure which announces structure, and not merely as opposition to speech. She is of the view that writing is a 'broader concept than the empirical concept of writing' (xxxix). However, Spivak cautions us that Derrida 'does not hold on to a single conceptual master-word very long...such important words...do not remain consequently important conceptual master-words in subsequent

texts' (lxxi). Such words are not 'congealed' in Spivak's words, but are constantly on the move, their definition being altered by their subsequent use in different contexts. Words and metaphors, Spivak points out, are not keys which unlock the way to truth, but as levers which, in being jiggled, loosen up the text as not to harbour any absolute truth at all, but as a mere structure which in various ways produces various meanings which we mistake for truth. Spivak suggests that if words or metaphors in texts seem to harbour unresolvable contradictions or suppress implications, we should grab hold of those words and metaphors, following their workings in order to 'see the text come undone as a structure of concealment' (lxxv). In highlighting the difference between Derrida's approach to reading and traditional methods, Spivak states that '[t]raditional textual interpretation founds itself on ... [the] understanding of metaphor [as] a detour to truth' (lxxiv). Derrida's approach dismantles 'metaphysical and rhetorical structures which are at work, not in order to reject or discard them, but to reinscribe them in another way' (Derrida cit. Spivak, *G* lxxv).

In his article "The critic as host" (1977), J. Hillis Miller responds to a contribution on deconstruction by M. H. Abrams. Analysing the logic of "parasite" and "host", where a citation is regarded as an alien parasite in the host body of the main text, Miller argues that deconstruction recognizes "the great complexity and equivocal richness of apparently obvious or univocal language" (443). In fact, he argues, "there is no conceptual expression without figure [i.e. figurative language], and no intertwining of concept and figure without an implied story, narrative or myth. . . Deconstruction is an investigation of what is implied by this inherence of figure, concept, and narrative in one another" (443). In *Theory Now and Then* (1991), Miller has some very interesting observations to offer on deconstruction: "Deconstruction cannot by definition be defined, since it presupposes the indefinability or, more properly, 'undecidability' of all conceptual or generalizing terms. Deconstruction, like any method of interpretation, can only be exemplified, and the examples will of course differ" (231). Further:

Deconstruction, as a mode of interpretation works by a careful and circumspect entering of each textual labyrinth. . . deconstruction, rather, annihilates the ground on which the building stands by showing that the text has already annihilated that ground, knowingly and unknowingly. Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the

structure of the text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock but thin air. (126)

The Linguistic Moment (1985), *The Ethics of Reading* (1987), *Versions of Pygmalion* (1990), *Topographies* (1994) and *For Derrida* (2004) are some of Miller's works among the many which discuss various aspects of Derridean deconstruction. In *The Ethics of Reading*, for instance, he argues that "there is a necessary ethical moment in [the] act of reading as such, a moment neither cognitive, nor political, nor social, nor interpersonal, but properly and independently ethical" (1). According to Miller, this is because as we think of ethics as a series of commandments ("do not lie"), these can be made sense of in narratives.

By 'the ethics of reading'. . . I mean that aspect of the act of reading in which there is a response to the text that is both necessitated, in the sense that it is a response to an irresistible demand, and free, in the sense that I must take responsibility for my responsibility and for the further effects . . . of my acts of reading. (43)

Similarly, in *Versions of Pygmalion*, Miller provides four "laws" for deconstructive interpretation. He argues first that the "relation of literature to history is a problem, not a solution" (33); second, the scholar-critic while reading a text must be "guided by the expectation of surprise, that is, the pre-supposition that what you actually find when you read is likely to be fundamentally different from what you expected . . . Good reading is also guided by a possible heterogeneity in the text" (33). As per Miller's third rule, context and text have a relationship in language: "the relations of literature to history and society is part of rhetoric" (34); and finally, reading is transformative, that is, a work of literature "intervenes in history when it is read" (34). *Topographies*, on the other hand is a collection of essays that concerns itself with issues related to concepts of place, site, location, and mapping, as figures and tropes appearing in literary and philosophical works. In *For Derrida*, Miller collects all the essays on specific aspects of Derrida's work that he has written for conferences and journals since Derrida's death in 2004.

In the essay, "The Deconstructive Angel", M.H. Abrams opines about Miller:

Miller applies the terms *interpretation* and *meaning* in an extremely capacious way, so as to conflate linguistic utterance or writing with any metaphysical representation of theory or of "fact" about the physical world. The diverse realms are treated

equivalently as “texts” which are “read” or “interpreted”. He thus leaves no room for taking into account that language, unlike the physical world, is a cultural institution that developed expressly in order to mean something . . . (Abrams 245-46)

He further expresses:

Hillis Miller, suspended by the labyrinthine lines of a textual web, over the abyss that those black lines demarcate on the blank page, busies himself to unravel the web that keeps him from plunging into the blank abyss, but find he can do so only by an act of writing which spins a further web of lines, equally vulnerable to deconstruction . . . (Abrams 250)

Paul de Man’s *Allegories of Reading* (1979) is a collection of essays that demonstrates the author’s fascination with European Romanticism and its legacy, the rhetoric of identity, and the relationship between figural language and reality. Through an extensive account of tropes in Rousseau, de Man suggests that what we normally consider to be deviant uses of figural language in poetry and literature are in fact the general condition of all language and communication. He develops an understanding of different orders of textual allegory, in which a text is said to be always referring to something other than itself. De Man’s hypothesis on critical blindness and insight mentioned in *Blindness and Insight* (1983) suggests that any critical text is unaware of its own ignorance concerning the key tropes that it interrogates. According to de Man, in the movement between the literary text and its critical reading, any attempt to produce a definitive reading is always undone, as the key terms of the reading are rendered unreadable in a straightforward sense. De Man turns his attention to ideology as a linguistic problem in eighteenth century philosophy, notably in Kant and Hegel in a collection of essays titled *Aesthetic Ideology* (1996). De Man basically shows how the relationship between word and thing is conventional, not phenomenal.

Geoffrey Hartman in *Saving the Text: Literature, Derrida, Philosophy* (1980), elaborately considers Derrida’s *Glas* with an effort to examine the question of his styles. Approaching the text primarily with literary interests in mind, Hartman develops his reading of *Glas* throughout the first three chapters. The fourth chapter examines the reception and transformation of psychoanalysis, particularly Freudian discourse, in the works of Derrida and Lacan. According to Hartman:

Derrida deconstructs not only others but also himself: the activity, that is, of philosophizing in general. He shows how much metaphor remains and must remain, how much equivocation and palimpsest-residue. He does not advocate a more literary philosophy, but he doubts that philosophy can get beyond being a form of language. (23)

In the chapter on psychoanalysis, Hartman opines that “both Lacan and Derrida remind us that language, like sexual difference or passion in general, is that in which we live and breathe and have our being. It cannot be subdued but remains part of the subtle knot that perplexes even as it binds together man and woman in the “scene familial” (100).

Barbara Johnson, who translated Derrida’s *Dissemination* in 1981, was well known for her exemplary deconstructive readings that engage textually and politically with issues ranging from feminism, psychoanalysis, legal theory to race. In her first book, *The Critical Difference: Essays in the Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading* (1980), Johnson offers a series of meticulous readings of American and European texts which radically alter our understanding of the traditional logic of binary oppositions. She writes “the difference *between* entities (prose and poetry, man and woman, literature and theory, guilt and innocence) are shown to be based on a repression of differences *within* entities, ways in which an entity differs from itself” (x-xi). In *A World of Difference* (1987), Johnson goes on to ask if the idea of difference may be taken “out of the realm of linguistic universality or deconstructive allegory and into contexts in which difference is very much at issue in the ‘real world’” (2). The essay “Double mourning and the public sphere” considers the way in which deconstruction’s deferral of meaning brings forth not a denial of interpretation but an affirmation of meaning. This essay and another titled “Women and allegory” together comprise *The Wake of Deconstruction* (1994). In *The Feminist Difference* (1998) and *Mother Tongues* (2003), Johnson takes up the issue of the struggle for an affirmation in meaning in readings of psychoanalysis, gender, race, and sexuality.

Jonathan Culler seems to be repeating Spivak at one level in *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (1982), when he says, “The distinction between the literal and the figurative, essential to discussions of the functioning of language, works differently when the deconstructive reversal identifies literal language as figures whose figurality has been forgotten instead of treating as deviations from proper, normal

literality' (150). One of the most influential of Derrida's commentators in the early 1980s, in *On Deconstruction*, which he terms to be 'a sequel...to *Structuralist Poetics*', Culler examines the concerns of what he terms 'deconstructive criticism' seeing its function as the interpretation and analysis of textual logic within literary texts. Culler also discusses at length the issue of binary oppositions: 'to deconstruct an opposition, such as presence/absence, speech/writing, philosophy/literature, literal/metaphorical, central/marginal, is not to destroy it, leaving a monism according to which there would be *only* absence or writing or literature, or metaphor, or marginality. To deconstruct an opposition is to undo and displace it, to situate it differently' (150). Accordingly, 'deconstruction is not a theory that defines meaning in order to tell you how to find it. As a critical undoing of hierarchical oppositions on which theories depend, it demonstrates the difficulties of any theory that would define meaning in a univocal way: as what an author intends, what conventions determine, what a reader experiences' (131).

Frank Lentricchia also takes up a critique/commentary on Derrida's writing in his work, *After the New Criticism* (1980), with considerable 'caution'. For throughout his discussion, he uses the term 'Derridean' instead of referring to deconstruction as a methodology. The chief criticism Lentricchia makes of 'Derridean criticism', following comments of Edward Said and remarks made by Terry Eagleton is that Derrida's contentions concerning Western metaphysics are so broad, that they deny a specificity for a particular text in historical terms. This prompts Lentricchia to assume that 'Derrida's deconstructive project is formalist through and through' (177). On Lentricchia's treatment of Derrida, Julian Wolfreys comments that "Lentricchia's is a system of questioning or methodology which is unable to question its own critical criteria, and which can conceive of the 'historical' in a particular form and as a particular system, which Derrida's thinking might question from another place so as to show the workings and limits of that system" (Wolfreys 41).

On a similar vein, Terry Eagleton also finds Derrida's so-called formalism lacking in historicist specificity or contextualisation, in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983). Eagleton contends that : "'deconstruction' is the name given to the critical operation by which. . . [binary] oppositions can be partly undermined, or by which they can be shown partly to undermine each other in the process of textual meaning" (132).

As per Eagleton's comment, Derrida's thought becomes an operation whereby deconstruction is the hunt for the binary opposition—such as man/woman or good/evil—and the subsequent inversion of that binarism so as to show how a particular text is undermined in its logic according to its reliance on such paired oppositions. He further suggests that 'deconstruction . . . has grasped the point that the binary oppositions with which classical structuralism tends to work represent a way of seeing typical of ideologies' (132). Eagleton argues that 'in the Anglo-American world' deconstruction has taken on an apparently radical stance with regard to everyone's statements except its own. Referring to Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller, he says that in their view, 'literature does not need to be deconstructed by the critic: it can be shown to deconstruct itself' (145). Identifying a supposedly 'doctrinal obsession with "undecidability"' (146) in Anglo-American 'deconstruction' and seeing this as a form of 'liberal scepticism' (147), Eagleton seems to assert that deconstruction is a textual quality or structural element and not a practice.

Another prominent critic, Hélène Cixous uses Derrida's ideas to critique patriarchy and the way of thinking—phallogentrism. Cixous' text "Sorties" (1986) combines deconstructive insight with a sceptical approach to Freudian and post-Freudian subjective theory. She argues that the "hierarchical oppositions" in different areas are all suggestive of the inferiority of the term "Woman" to the term "Man". Along with "Sorties", in a piece from *The Newly Born Woman* (1986). "The laugh of the Medusa", Cixous employs Derridean deconstruction to recast the binary opposition of man/woman. Building on Derrida's analysis of logocentrism and the post-Freudian theories of Lacan, Cixous' *écriture féminine* represents that which is repressed in the Symbolic order. According to Cixous, this order is fundamentally phallogentric, and it sustains itself through a network of oppositional hierarchies such as man/woman, mind/body, self/other, which privilege the masculine. It is interesting to note at this point that Derrida himself described Cixous as 'incomparable' from 'a certain point of view, that of writing itself' (Wood,168), He felt that Cixous found 'at a stroke the best access, the most secret, to the workshop and the form, to the meaning and the unconscious body of my writing' (Wood, 168)

In this context, it would be worthwhile to mention *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida* (1987), edited by John Sallis, where the writer argues that "at

the outset, deconstruction is situated in a certain positive way with respect to philosophy, as an attempt to give an account . . . namely, to account for certain “constitutive” “contradictions” by means of various arche-syntheses or “infrastructures”(xiv). The book is basically a collection of papers presented at the international conference, “Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida” held at Loyola University, Chicago on March 22-23, 1985. Sallis goes on to comment:

Among other things, deconstruction cannot but put radically into question the orientation of philosophy toward that place where it has so customarily been inscribed and, in a good sense, grounded, namely, the university. To expose philosophy’s inscription, to expose philosophy to inscription, is to set adrift in a way not unlike that in which a text is set adrift in being translated, reinscribed. If philosophy cannot but be inscribed, if it cannot submit to writing, then it is always a matter of translation. . . (xiv)

Thus, as is evident from the above, while in the seventies and the eighties critics were primarily concerned with an exposition of Derrida’s philosophical thought, and with the translations of the philosopher’s major texts, the nineties were witnesses to the prominence given to an analysis of the ideals of deconstruction and the philosophical and literary bearings they had on them. For instance, Rodolphe Gasche has subsequently written quite a few noteworthy contributions on the ‘improper use’ of Derrida in his *Inventions of Difference: On Jacques Derrida* (1994). Here, Gasche claims that literary criticism conceived fashionably as ‘theory’ has turned attention to the ‘ridiculous application of the results of philosophical debate to the literary field’ (23). Instances of this misappropriation on the part of literary critics are cited later by Gasche when he examines Derrida’s ‘Ulysses Gramophone’ as an almost exclusively philosophical text (231). The essay, which draws upon aspects of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* might, according to Gasche, ‘easily be construed as an irresponsible spinning out of private fantasies, wild jokes, and totally arbitrary associations—in other words, as a text of so-called deconstructive criticism where everything goes’ (231). Earlier in *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (1986), Gasche attempts to rescue Derrida from literary critics in the name of philosophy, examining Derrida’s project as amounting to a philosophy of/as reflection. As the author himself states in *Inventions of Difference*, “*The Tain of the Mirror* . . . is concerned to differentiate Derrida’s thought

from an interpretation, especially by literary scholars, that saw it as advocating not only the primacy of literature and rhetoric over philosophy and conceptual argumentation, but as conceiving of the specificity of the literary text in terms of self-reflexivity and an ironic debunking of conceptual opposites . . . (1-2). A reading of Gasche, might lead one to conclude that Derrida's interest is in the rhetorical analysis of written language for the purpose of demonstrating the illusory ground of conceptual structures.

Christopher Norris also discusses the issue of whether deconstruction can be termed as a discernible methodology in *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (1982) and *Derrida* (1987). In a work titled *The Deconstructive Turn: Essays in the Rhetoric of Philosophy* (1983), Norris suggests that "Deconstruction is first and last a textual *activity*, a putting-into-question of the root metaphysical prejudice which posits self-identical concepts outside and above the disseminating play of language" (6). He further continues that "The scandal of deconstruction ... is its habit of uncovering a disjunct relationship between logic and language, the order of concepts and the order of signification" (7). Also he draws the reader's attention to some of those statements of Derrida's concerning why 'deconstruction' cannot be reduced to a methodological procedure (*Derrida* 18-22). Norris is keen to assert that we should not write off Derrida's American commentators and associates as being guilty of 'wilful misappropriation' (*Derrida* 20).

According to Norris, those who do construct a simple practice out of Derrida's writing do so by taking his writing at face value in terms of the emphasis on 'limitless interpretive license' (*Derrida* 20). To do so, he suggests, is to ignore the 'rigorous *work* of deconstruction'. Norris is not in favour of making hard and fast distinctions between 'rigorous ('philosophical') and non-rigorous ("literary") forms of deconstructive activity' (*Derrida*, 21), precisely because in such attempts, we run the risk of entrenching ourselves in somewhat blind positions belonging to the falsely polarized debate over 'philosophy versus literature' which Derrida seems to initiate towards investigation. In another work that Norris authored with Andrew Benjamin, titled, *What is Deconstruction* (1988), he comments on what deconstruction 'is': "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). This statement renders deconstruction as a practice determined in its activities by that consciousness which 'draws out' the disparity between saying what we mean and meaning what we say.

In the introduction to the second English edition of the *Positions*, 2002, where he seeks to ‘resituate[e] Derrida’s work’, Norris comments that Derrida “is clearly much concerned with [the] issue regarding the status of deconstruction, ... as to whether his texts are “philosophical” in any recognized sense of that term or whether they belong to a different kind of writing entirely, a “literary” practice that breaks with all the ground-rules or protocols of logocentric thought” (x). He however has a word of caution that “anyone who presumes to state what Derrida “thinks” or “means” with respect to the philosophy/literature issue—or other topics that arise in the course of these interviews—is at risk of finding their position undermined by his cautionary statements in just that regard”(xi).

John D. Caputo, another prominent Derridean critic is well known for his works like *Radical Hermeneutics: Deconstruction and the Hermeneutic Project* (1987); *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (1997), *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (1997). In the essay, “The Economy of Signs in Husserl and Derrida: From Uselessness to Full Employment” (1987), Caputo initially examines Derrida’s arguments against the “uselessness of signs” propounded by Husserl, after which he suggests that Derrida exposes “the primal and unsettling contingency which lies not far beneath the surface of our creations. He alerts us to the danger of falling into subjugation by created things, contingent unities of meaning” (Sallis 108). According to Caputo,

Derrida warns us against the seductive “effect” of presence and the cleverness of signs which, by making themselves transparent, lead us to believe that they are . . . useless. But Derrida has found gainful employment for them. . . The work of signs is to produce presence in the pregnant sense, where presence is impregnated with absence, presence in the supplemented sense, where presence is supplemented by signs. . . Presence is not fallen from the sky; it is generated by constitution, engendered by repetition. (109)

“The Deconstructive Angel” mentioned earlier with reference to Hillis Miller is included in Abrams’ collection of essays titled *Doing Things with Texts* (1989). Having discussed “Differance” at length in the same essay, Abrams has the following to say about Derrida:

What Derrida's conclusion comes to is that no sign or chain of signs can have a determinate meaning. But it seems to me that Derrida reaches this conclusion by a process which, in its own way, is no less dependent on an origin, ground, and end . . . His origin and ground are his graphocentric premises, the closed chamber of texts, for which he invites us to abandon our ordinary realm of experience in speaking, hearing, reading, and understanding language. . . Derrida's chamber of texts is a sealed echo-chamber in which meanings are reduced to a ceaseless echolalia, a vertical and lateral reverberation from sign to sign of ghostly nonpresences emanating from no voice, intended by no one, referring to nothing, bombinating in a void. (244)

Peggy Kamuf, one of Derrida's principal translators, is a vital intellectual link between the US academia and contemporary French thought and writing. *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds* (1991), an edited collection of Derrida's essays, is a prominent work by Kamuf. This may be regarded as one of the first anthologies, in terms of the range and the selection of pieces and in terms of the concise introductory remarks attached to each of them.

In *The Division of Literature or the University in Deconstruction* (1997), Kamuf offers a sustained historicization of literary studies within the modern university, while examining critically the debates around the perception of deconstruction and the question of 'political correctness' amongst academics. An important book concerned with the interrelations between deconstruction, literature and the institution of the university, it develops attempts at a critique of the North American academic institutions through readings of principally Gustave Lanson, Charles Péguy, Hegel and Herman Melville.

The effect of naming and identifying deconstruction as a definable academic practice recognised in institutions is one of what Peggy Kamuf terms closure, which she suggests, is an 'institutional effect . . . that works to dispel uncertainty' (140-1). She offers a lucid argument concerning the history of deconstruction's recognition in the universities of the US (141-5). As she perceives, in tracing the arguments of those who fear what they understand as the threat of deconstruction, there are others who are of the view that 'deconstruction is the name of something that *has no place* in the university' (143). She suggests:

Concerning the institution that is the university put in question by the PC debate, the term ‘deconstruction’ is most often presumed to refer to a theory, a method, a school, perhaps even a doctrine, in any case, some identifiable or localizable ‘thing’ that can be positioned— posed and opposed—within that institution, but also that can be excluded from within this defined enclosure. (143)

According to Kamuf:

The fact that deconstruction cannot be positioned as at once too political and not too political at all . . . signals that the terms in which the political is posed . . . are inadequate to account for all the effects being produced. (146)

Kamuf thus seems to suggest that what is called ‘deconstruction’ has always exceeded the narrow conception of politics. As she points out, this is not so much a problem with deconstruction as with the conceptualization and theorization of politics.

Nicholas Royle also speaks along the same line of thought when he argues in *After Derrida* (1995), that no matter how faithful a reading or interpretation may be, it “necessarily differs from that which it expounds. Any exposition of a text is necessarily a transposition, a translation and transformation inseparable from invention” (4). The book is a collection of essays engaging in a wide range of analysis on the works of a number of authors starting from Shakespeare and Wordsworth to Salman Rushdie and Toni Morrison, including varied topics like ghosts, telepathy, laughter and love. While the essays are explorations of their subjects informed by Derrida’s work, they also “offer the reader performative extrapolations of Derridean thinking” (220). The statement quoted above from Royle seems very much an echo of Derrida himself, which the latter does every time he involves himself in what he calls ‘writing transactions’ or ‘writing performances’ (*Acts*, 61). Looked at from this point of view, Royle’s work appears to be a translation itself, as being both a transaction and a performance, in that it is more of a response to Derrida’s text than a reading of them. *Deconstruction: A User’s Guide* and *Jacques Derrida* are two other works by Royle, both published in the year 2000. In *Jacques Derrida* (2000), Royle deals with “the question of responding, the different readings to which a particular question or statement or text can and must give rise, questions of identity (human, sexual, ethnic, religious, national, political, personal) and what Derrida has called the ‘disorder of identity’ . . .” (4). He tries to show that:

Deconstruction engages a thinking of the force of the non-centre. This is not to suggest that the concept of the centre is not important. On the contrary, Derrida is sharply aware of this importance: his concern is with describing and transforming it (16).

Royle strikes an interesting comparison between Shakespeare and Derrida:

Derrida's work seeks to make legible the monstrosities of the world of politics, philosophy, literature and so on...Like Shakespeare's, Derrida's achievement seems unnatural, prodigious, gigantic, extraordinary, abnormal. There are at least two other respects in which their writings might be felt to correspond on the subject of monsters and monstrosity. Both writers are concerned with a performative exploration of the concept of monstrosity as a monstrosity of conception. For both, also, monstrosity appears to be above all a question of the future. (107)

Referring to Derrida's texts, the established Derridean critic Geoffrey Bennington, comments in his collection of essays titled, *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (1994):

All of Derrida's texts are already applications, so there is no separate 'Derrida' in the form of theory who might *then* be applied to something else. Insofar as 'Deconstruction' tends to become a method or a school, we might say that it has forgotten this, and has begun at least to make Derrida into a theory which it wants to put into practice (17).

Bennington's work part particularly highlights the claim of Irene Harvey and Rodolphe Gasche to debunk literary critics' study of Derrida. He highlights the claim of the philosophers that literary critics lack the proper training in reading philosophy; therefore they do not know how to approach Derrida. His *Legislations: The Politics of Deconstruction* (which includes the above-mentioned article) lays emphasis on Derrida's work as having a political thrust. Having read through a wide range of philosophers and other authors including Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Freud, de Man, and Jean-Francois Lyotard, Bennington offers a criticism of those such as, Gasche and Harvey. He suggests that the purpose of such critics is to appropriate Derrida for a narrowly conceived philosophical project. He argues that deconstruction is a form of political thought as it always entails an ethical opening onto the other which, on its arrival, announces the possible onset of 'legislation' between positions. *Interrupting Derrida* (2000) is

Bennington's collection of essays, in which " 'Derrida' would be the only common thread running through them" (3), despite the fact that the essays have been divided into three sections, depending on different foci. He calls the collection as 'Interrupting Derrida' , "because Derrida himself practices an art of interruption with (all due) respect to metaphysics . . . also because these essays diversely interrupt Derrida, cut into the flow of his work, politely pause here and there to look more closely or to bring other interruptions into play" (3-4). In Bennington's words,

Deconstruction is not a form of hermeneutics . . . hermeneutics always proposes a convergent movement towards a unitary meaning . . . deconstruction discerns a dispersive perspective in which there is no (one) meaning. . . The absence of a unitary horizon of meaning for the process of reading does not commit Derrida to the *recommendation* of meaninglessness . . . but it does argue that no one reading will ever be able to claim to have exhausted the textual resources available in the text being read. (11)

'Derridabase' , an expository but challenging account of Derrida's work, along with references to other philosophical thinkers is included in the work, *Jacques Derrida* (1993), compiled along with Derrida.

Similarly, in *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: From Structuralism to Postmodernism* (1994), by John Lechte the author describes deconstruction as a 'process' which 'investigates the fundamentals of Western thought' (107). He goes on to suggest that 'one way or another, the whole of Derrida's *oeuvre* is an exploration of the nature of writing in the broadest sense as *differance*. To the extent that writing always includes pictographic, ideographic and phonetic elements, it is not identical with itself. Writing, then, is always impure and, as such, challenges the notion of identity, and ultimately the notion of origin as "simple"'. Writing is 'what makes production possible' (108). From Lechte's perspective, a careful reading of Derrida makes one doubt the possibility of transforming deconstruction into a methodology or reading practice because Derrida talks about the workings and movements of 'deconstruction' as one of the many elements of writing or as another term for 'writing' in its broad sense.

Another introduction to deconstruction by Richard Rorty worth mentioning here features in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: From Formalism to Poststructuralism*,

Volume 8 (1995), While Rorty's initial works have been mentioned, it may be noted that Rorty views the 'deconstructionist movement' as part of an effort to politicize the function of English literature departments (168). Furthermore, Rorty states that:

[T]his chapter will be concerned with the deconstructionist movement narrowly construed as a school of literary criticism. Despite this focus . . . it will be necessary to spend a good half of the available space on deconstructionist philosophizing. This is because deconstructionism is perhaps the most theory-oriented, the most specifically philosophical, movement in the history of literary criticism. The catchwords which pepper its readings of literary texts . . . are unintelligible to those who lack a philosophical background. (168)

Rorty first of all introduces those philosophers he considers as antecedents to 'deconstructionist theory', followed by commentary on what the 'deconstructionists' themselves have to say about the nature of texts. This is followed by the much shorter 'practical section' which follows 'how deconstructors read texts' (184). He structures a clear and irrefutable division of texts between those which are taught in departments of philosophy and those which are taught in the departments of English. In this demarcation, he uses cognate statements on the 'nature of the literary text' as a series of links between philosophy and literary criticism. Moving on to 'deconstructivist criticism', Rorty concludes his overview with an argument that, seen from the point of view of 'what it does with texts', deconstruction is 'a gesture in the direction of a groundswell of suspicion and impatience with the status quo among the intellectuals' who are part of 'an amorphous movement' (196).

The Derrida Reader: Writing Performances (1998) is another anthology of Derrida's essays after Peggy Kamuf's compilation. Edited by Julian Wolfreys, the *Reader* draws together a number of Derrida's writings, which examine literary language: "If *anything* can be said to connect these essays...then the connection can be sought in the constant raising of the question of rhetoric, of tropes, metaphors, structures of language, the poetics and grammar of a text... (10). According to Wolfreys, "Derrida has taught us that the nature of the text is such that all the "boundaries and divisions" which we assign a text are always already overrun by textuality itself"(9). In another of Julian Wolfreys' works, *Deconstruction•Derrida* (1998), it is stated that ". . . the purpose of this 'book is largely . . . didactic, pedagogical and expository . . . because it is supposed to serve the

function of an introduction to both deconstruction and Jacques Derrida. . . There's deconstruction. And there, *there* is Derrida . . . The bullet point is silent but serves to articulate in its own mute, inescapably inscribed, rather than voiced, fashion, the uneasy, disjointed yet undeniable relationship between the two" (48). Julian Wolfreys points out, "Deconstruction may well have been transformed into a metaphor or proper name for a practice, if not a practice itself. . ." (15).

At this juncture, it would be worthy to look at Martin McQuillan's comments in *Deconstruction: A Reader* (2000):

At no stage should Derrida's writing be allowed to occupy a privileged or 'transcendental' space within the discourse of deconstruction. If this is allowed to happen deconstruction will indeed become a 'school', with 'paternal' status accorded to certain texts, a 'presence' and authority bestowed upon Derrida as a person . . . The highest compliment that one could pay to the work of Derrida might be to see his name disseminated across a range of texts. . . In short, one cannot forget Derrida, but there is more to deconstruction than merely Derrida. (xii)

McQuillan's *Reader* examines the status of the term 'deconstruction' and various issues associated with it through a reading of the works of leading commentators of Derrida's texts. Beginning with essays by pre-Derridean thinkers, the essays by Derridean scholars are divided into sections covering philosophy, literature, politics, ethics, including interviews by Derrida: "What connects these texts is not a 'method' or 'school' but an openness to the possibilities of difference"(xv). McQuillan suggests the following as a definition of deconstruction:

A definition . . . of deconstruction might be that deconstruction is an act of reading which allows the other to speak. Two consequences of this ... First, deconstruction is the singular act of reading itself, not a method applied to the text to produce that reading . . . Each deconstruction is unique and singular to the text it reads and to the moment in which it reads. . . Secondly, deconstruction is impossible. If deconstruction allows the other to speak, then a 'proper' deconstruction . . . would not be knowable, because whenever we think we are hearing the other speak we are always reducing its otherness to the self-same.(6)

Peter V.Zima's *Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (2002) may be mentioned here so far an introduction to deconstructive theory in the light of new literary and cultural theories are concerned. Barry Stocker also takes up the issue of Derrida's exchanges with philosophy in *Derrida on Deconstruction* (2006): "For Derrida, since philosophy exists in language, there is no escaping from language as the medium of philosophy" (16). With regard to language, Stocker suggests that "Derrida's position on language is . . . characterized by a commitment to the metaphoricity of language, including in the most metaphysical texts that may appear to offer a literal theory of truth and reality beyond any figure of speech" (70). Stocker is of the opinion that Derrida's early texts may be considered in terms of "established questions in metaphysics, knowledge, language and mind" (9), while "the later texts tend to say more about core themes in ethics, aesthetics, political and legal philosophy" (9). Of course, Stocker does not adopt very sharp distinctions in this regard as he observes that earlier texts by Derrida also dealt with certain issues which dominate the later ones.

Joseph Carroll suggests in the first volume of *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory* (ed. Gregory Castle, 2011), is "that by detaching language from its natural function as an intermediary in human communication, poststructuralism falsely attenuates the power of authors to be the origin of their texts, the individuality of both authors and readers who share an "actual" world, and the distinct character of specific literary works as intentional communicative artifacts" (2011, 2).

The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory (2011), the general editor of which is Michael Ryan (writer of *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation*, 1982), is one of the recent compilations covering a wide range of topics related to literary and cultural theory, across three volumes. The first volume titled 'Literary Theory from 1900 to 1966' is edited by Gregory Castle, the second volume including issues pertaining to literary theory from 1966 to the present is edited by Robert Eaglestone, while the third volume covering cultural theory is edited by M. Keith Booker. In the entry on deconstruction compiled by Michael Ryan and Danielle Sands, included in the second volume, it is stated that:

It is important to remember that it is not signification in signs itself that Derrida claims is generative of the basic terms of philosophy, but the process of difference and mediation that signification is associated with in the Western philosophic

tradition. . . “text” and “writing”. . . are metaphors for *difference*. . . deconstruction is not a critique of “binary thinking”. . . Derrida does attend to oppositions, but only to the extent that they are the form that logocentric philosophy’s founding values assume. (544)

In the entry on Derrida, Ryan and Sands comment that:

Differance is Derrida’s name for the processes that give rise to presence, but it can never itself be “present” and can never therefore be grasped “as such” by the conscious mind. Derrida thus puts in question the simple assurance philosophy has taken for granted that words are guaranteed truthfulness by being measured against the standard of ideational presence. (553)

Eftichis Pirovolakis comes up with *Reading Derrida and Ricoeur: Improbable Encounters between Deconstruction and Hermeneutics* in 2010, where Pirovolakis tries “to bring into focus the difference between these two most prominent continental philosophers” (4). The author says at the very beginning of the project: “I will juxtapose and reflect on texts in which Derrida and Ricoeur address similar issues or scrutinize the work of thinkers such as Edmund Husserl, Sigmund Freud, and Emmanuel Levinas” (5). Pirovolakis justifies the use of the term “improbable encounters” by saying that the term “points toward another logic and another thinking of difference and similarity according to which the required possibility of absolutely differentiating between them is not simply coexistent with but the *same as* the impossibility of identifying, conclusively and definitely, an absolute difference” (164). Concerning Derrida he suggests that “If iterability cannot be disengaged from the necessary possibility of non-presence, the self-identity of the referent is rendered problematic, and along with it the belief in language as a means of expression and singular responsibility” (11). After a study of both Derrida and Ricoeur through four exhaustive chapters, Pirovolakis concludes:

. . . to the extent that Derrida is attentive to the exigency of difference and discontinuity, deconstruction is able to account more effectively than hermeneutics, for the self-interrupting movement . . . posited by hermeneutics. It is Derrida, rather than Ricoeur, who thinks through the conditions of possibility for the non-realizability of the *telos* . . . Derrida both reflects on the necessity of interruption,

which alone can guarantee the infinity of the prescribed task, and subjects all concepts in solidarity with such teleology to philosophical scrutiny. (163)

Having reviewed some prominent works on Derrida till the recent times, one can only suggest that any search for an answer to the question as to whether there is a thing called deconstruction, leads one only into the middle of this debate irrespective of where one begins. Given the variety of interpretations propounded by a large number of scholars and critics, the question seems to come after what have been apparently articulated already at the same time when it precedes what scholarship is to follow in times to come.

Stephen Hahn has thus rightly pointed out in *On Derrida* (2002):

It is a matter of frustration for some critics . . . that Derrida does not seem to come to a conclusion and give voice to a doctrine, unless it is the doctrine of a belief in a productive kind of displacement—of sense by meaning, the present by an undisclosed future. . . and the openness of both texts and contexts to revision, re-writing, or re-inscription. And it is a bit peculiar that he seems continually to be going back to some text in order to move forward but never to arrive. . . But perhaps too there is a consistency to Derrida’s paths of returning and reading texts . . . that are given to us by “all this cultural tradition” and deconstructing our previous readings of them. . . (49).

It is interesting to note that a survey of the critical works on Derrida and his philosophy reveals the following major trends: translation and exposition of Derrida’s prominent works; deliberations on the philosophical associations between deconstruction and philosophy and the linkage between deconstruction and hermeneutics. While there have been interesting debates between structuralist and deconstructive thought, a response to Derrida’s take on the relationship between the word and the world through the examination of the figurative nature of language appears to be an area yet to be explored.

Derrida clearly feels that this analysis of Saussure, as the foundation of all modern theories applies to all linguistic study, and he consequently devotes a good deal of discussion in *Grammatology* to extending its implications. In the course of this consideration of the more concrete consequences of his position for linguistics, however, Derrida points to two objections. One set of objections to Saussure’s phonologism is a simple extension of Saussure’s own theory and is lodged from a point of view inside the

discipline; the other, the consequence of Derrida's final deconstruction of the Saussurean model, necessarily rejects the project of empirical study altogether. But it is not so entirely clear as one might suppose which argument finally gains precedence.

At one point, for example, Derrida begins by reiterating Saussure's own call for the "reduction of phonetic matter" (*Grammatology* 53): "The linguistic signifier", Saussure says, "is not [in essence] phonic . . . The idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it" (Derrida quoting Saussure, *OG* 53; Derrida's interpolation). Without excluding the phonic substance from the system of language, Derrida notes, Saussure would have no basis for his distinction between *langue* and *parole* (*OG* 53): the study of *langue* observes only the differences and oppositions functional for that language, while the study of *parole* would include accidental and random elements. Similarly, placing the phonic substance outside language proper not only requires a parallel distinction between phonology and phonetics, but finally renders phonology itself, as Saussure terms it, an "auxiliary discipline" (Derrida quoting Saussure, *OG* 53). There is, however, some confusion surrounding this last issue, within both Saussure's and Derrida's texts. Saussure's opposition between phonology and phonetics is not the modern one between the study of perceived differences or "distinctive features" (phonology) and acoustics or phonetics; his definition of phonology, rather, is simply the synchronic study of speech, and includes elements we would now relegate to phonetics, hence his motivation for placing "phonology" outside the study of language. When Derrida cites this passage, therefore, it is not clear as to which connotation of phonology is being used.

Second, Derrida appears vague when it comes to Saussure's treatment of the 'psychologism'. Having followed him thus far, then, having conceived of the sound-image as a product of perception, yet insistent, too, that this perception is not a matter of individuals or individual psychology but a fact of the language system itself, linguistics must again be faulted for locating a stable, abstract object, and for identifying the expression of difference in form. "Sound-image" is invariable, verifiable, and therefore a false notion (*OG* 64); "trace" on the other hand, is neither an "ideal" nor "real" object (*OG* 65). In short, the discussion never develops, for Derrida has in a sense already rejected the project for being an empirical one; an engagement with Saussure never takes place. Despite a wish to critique "phonologism" from within linguistic study, therefore,

Derrida's main attack is launched from without: it participates in a metaphysics of presence, assumes the existence of objects and subjects.

The issues highlighted above lead to the question as to what is the difference between the representation of a word situated in our consciousness and the represented word, or in other words, the difference between the sign as the signifying and the signified concept. The word may exist as a physical thing outside consciousness, but as a word with a meaning that communicates something it exists only in the consciousness. Thus, it would be pertinent to locate as to the difference between the word and the word as we imagine it in consonance with a physical existence.

Second, with regard to metaphoricity of language, Derrida believes that all language is essentially metaphoric, that it is never possible to observe it functioning in some transparent, truth-preserving manner, there exists for him no "nonmetaphoric language" with which to confront metaphors. Therefore it requires to be seen as to how (i) a metaphor erases itself, thereby constructing its own destruction, and (ii) metaphoricity intrudes into the 'homogeneity' of philosophical concepts, and finally, (iii) the metaphoricity in Derrida's language become legible, by way of reference to Saussure's.

II

Derrida's analysis of Saussure's *Course* in *Of Grammatology* functions as a later source of reference, terms like "*difference*" and "*trace*" forever recalling his reworking of the Saussurean model. He says that although structurality has always been at work, it has been overlooked, neutralized, or reduced by assuming that there is, within the structure, a centre, a presence, a truth that governs, but is not itself, structurality. The centre, the truth, is the point at which the substitution of contents or terms is no longer possible. This centre organizes the structure but closes off the play of the structure it makes possible. Derrida's project is to deconstruct this centre, this meaning, which he calls the transcendental signified—"transcendental" because it is conceived of as a concept independent of language, an ideality exterior to the process of language, a something that language means to say:

It has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the

center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*. The center is not the center. The concept of the centered structure—although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the *episteme* as philosophy or science—is contradictorily coherent. (*Writing and Difference* 279)

This would in a way question the ‘metaphoricity’ of structure, which would prevent the intervention of the geometrical and morphological connotations associated with the concept of structure:

As long as the metaphorical sense of the notion of structure is not acknowledged as such, that is to say interrogated and even destroyed as concerns its figurative quality . . . one runs the risk, through a kind of sliding as it is *efficacious*, of confusing meaning with its geometric, morphological, or in the best of cases, cinematic model. One risks being interested in the figure itself to the detriment of the play going on within it metaphorically. (*WD* 16)

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida says that “to make enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words ‘proximity’, ‘immediacy’, ‘presence’ . . . is my final intention” (*OG* 70). Rather than seeing meaning as a centre that governs structure, Derrida sees it as coming after, a product of, structurality. His point is that in language there are no essences, no identities, or even signs that present themselves as such. There is no origin of sense except the trace or difference that makes signs iterable and makes them differ from and defer that which they represent. The signifier is always already a signified, and the signified is always already a signifier; in the final analysis, one has only a sign of a sign which is for Derrida a *supplement* that not only adds itself to and replaces what it represents but that also effaces its supplementary role. In language, and hence in experience, everything (including meaning, being, presence) is always already a sign of a sign in a system of signs, that is, *absent*. Therefore he invites us “to speculate upon the power of exteriority as constitutive of interiority: of speech, of signified meaning, of the present as such” (*OG* 313). He identifies “logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence as the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire for such a signified” (*OG* 49), but says that “from the first texts I published I have attempted to systematize a

deconstructive critique precisely against the authority of meaning, as the *transcendental signified* or *as telos*” (*Positions* 49).

Since he finds language so thoroughly invested with the metaphysical presuppositions he continually deconstructs, Derrida does not believe that any discourse can entirely escape them. Derrida’s technique consists first in locating some opposition in the text, a hierarchy of terms—presence/absence, speech/writing, nature/culture, non-fiction/fiction—and second in demonstrating the way in which the supposedly dependent, supplementary notion, by some principle the writer himself has previously introduced, infects the first, the apparent foundation of the philosophical discussion. Derrida insists that “in classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful co-existence of a ‘vis á vis’, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand” (*Positions* 41).

Derrida very often explicitly points out that his grammatology is the working out of what is implicit in Saussure’s definition of a sign. According to Derrida, Saussure’s thesis of arbitrariness of the sign “successfully accounts for a conventional relationship between the phoneme and the grapheme . . . [and] by the same token it forbids that the latter be an ‘image’ of the former” (*OG* 45). To put it in simple terms, Derrida contends that the very concept of the arbitrary sign that signifies within a structure of oppositions and differences contains within it the necessity of language being “writing” prior to all speech and writing. The science of writing, grammatology, is the “science of ‘the arbitrariness of the sign’, science of the immotivation of the trace, science of writing before speech and in speech” (*OG* 51). This science, according to Derrida, is the one Saussure staked out a place for, the one “Saussure saw without seeing, knew without being *able* to take into account” (*OG* 43).

Derrida seems more drawn towards Saussure’s defensive tone at this juncture in the argument, a consequence, Derrida implies, of Saussure’s need to retain the purity of his object, to keep a concept potentially disturbing to his project, “outside” linguistics proper. Accompanying this implicit inside/outside metaphor (the phonological system as the internal mechanism of language, and the graphematic system as external to it), consequently, is a continual characterization of the sound-thought connection as natural—“the true bond, the bond of sound”—and the relation of writing to language.

(Derrida quoting Saussure, *OG* 35). To writing, in other words, Saussure assigns a subversive role; it is “the superficial bond”, “fictitious”, deceptively and easily identified with language itself, and in danger of seeming to “usurp” the central role of the sound-image (Derrida quoting Saussure *OG* 36). As Derrida explains, Saussure, aware of the “intimacy intertwining image and thing”, in this case *graph* (written unit) and *phone* (sound unit), aware, that is, of the way in which “representation mingles with what it represents”, feels the necessity of warning against the confusion of language and writing (*OG* 36). The result would be a muddle of origins—speech might appear as a mere reflection of writing, instead of the reverse. And to consider writing thus would be to commit a simple error, to fall into a ready “trap” (*OG* 36-37). Linguistic study, then, excludes consideration of the written word, which not only obscures analysis of the central data (*OG* 38-39), but which also, as in cases where literate people modify their speech habits in order to conform to orthography, corrupts natural processes (*OG* 41).

According to Derrida, this theme serves to place Saussure firmly within the traditions of Western metaphysics which equates voice with presence and treats the spoken word as naturally and unambiguously connected to objects in the world, meanwhile relegating writing “to the rank of an instrument enslaved to [this] full and originally spoken language” (*OG* 29). Because of the logocentrism within which “Saussure and the majority of his successors” worked, they were unable to see fully and explicitly what Derrida sees, that “writing itself as the origin of language writes itself within Saussure’s discourse” (*OG* 43-4). Derrida meticulously analyses Saussure’s attempt to exorcise writing, as he promotes linguistics, “the modern science of the logos” (*OG* 34):

It is when he is not expressly dealing with writing, when he feels he has closed the parantheses on that subject, that Saussure opens the field of a general grammatology which would not only no longer be excluded from general linguistics, but would dominate it and contain it . . . Then something which was never spoken and which is nothing other than writing itself as the origin of language writes itself within Saussure’s discourse. (*OG* 43-44)

Saussure’s treatment of writing, it turns out, is consistent with Rousseau’s. Both see writing as a “violence” which has “befall[en] an innocent language” (*OG* 37); both seek to anchor meaning in a spoken language that is the natural expression of inner consciousness. Derrida writes, “As in the dream, as Freud analyses it, incompatibles are

simultaneously admitted as soon as it is a matter of satisfying a desire . . .” (OG 245). Thus Rousseau, like Saussure, “accumulates contradictory arguments to bring about a satisfactory decision: the exclusion of writing” (OG 45). According to Derrida, what makes speech the “ultimate” medium of Being as logos in the Western tradition is the “fact” that in a language of words, “the voice is *heard* ... closest to the self as the absolute effacement of the signifier: pure auto-affection that necessarily has the form of time and which does not borrow from outside itself, in the world or in ‘reality’, any accessory signifier, any substance of expression foreign to its own spontaneity. It is the unique experience of the signified producing itself spontaneously, from within the self, and nevertheless, as signified concept, in the element of ideality or universality. The unworldly character of this substance of expression is constitutive of this ideality” (OG 20).

The blurring of the distinctions of the conceptual dyad, speech and writing as evident in Saussure’s *Course* leads Derrida to suggest:

Now we must think that writing is at the same time more exterior to speech, not being its “image” or its “symbol”, and more interior to speech, which is already in itself a writing. Even before it is linked to incision, engraving, drawing, or the letter, to a signifier referring in general to a signifier signified by it, the concept of the graphie . . . implies the framework of the instituted trace, as the possibility common to all systems of signification. (OG 46)

Derrida defines the “instituted trace” as the unmotivated character of a signifier, the arbitrariness of a sign, the sign as difference within a structure of differences that makes it possible for oppositions to have meaning: “The general structure of the unmotivated trace connects within the same possibility, and they cannot be separated except by abstraction, the structure, of the relationship with the other, the moment of temporalization, and language as writing” (OG 47). Further, “when the other announces itself as such, it presents itself in the dissimulation of itself” (OG 47). Thus in its dissimulation of itself, the arch-trace engenders the difference between the sign and the referent, of presence and absence, thereby opening up the possibility of all relation to an Other, to an exteriority. Thus the arche-trace, as an “irreducible arche-synthesis [opens] in one and the same possibility, temporalization as well as relationship with the other and language” (OG 60). Moreover, as an origin of the experience of space and time, the

constitution of the arche-trace “permits the difference between space and time to be articulated, to appear as such, in the unity of an experience” (OG 65-66). That is, the arche-trace as “absolute past”, as an irreducible “always-already there”, also opens up “the difference between sensory appearing (*apparaissant*) and its lived appearing (*apparaître*),” between appearance and appearing (OG 66). Derrida’s observation on the notion of the arche-trace is noteworthy here:

The trace is not only the disappearance of origin—within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme, which would derive it from an originary nontrace and which would make of it an empirical mark, one must indeed speak of an originary trace or arche-trace. Yet we know that the concept destroys its name and that, if all begins with the trace, there is above all no originary trace. (OG 61).

The trace thus is *nothing* (no thing) and therefore cannot be treated as an object. Trace is not present—only its path among possibilities which signifies that the origin of the signifier and signified is *nothing*. It is the “possible” character of the signifier that allows it to have a signified. It marks the rupture of the seemingly “natural attachment” of the signifier to the signified in reality. It is the becoming-unmotivated character of signs, the becoming-sign of the symbol. With this term and notion Derrida stresses what is implied in Saussure’s concept of the arbitrary nature of signs: in language there are no foundations and no signifieds other than signs of signs.

Derrida develops two important insights into Saussure’s explication of the sign. First, Derrida discovers that Saussure does more than depict a false contrast between voice as natural and writing as artificial. Saussure, that is, actually changes his mind about what is “natural”, developing two contradictory explanations for the exclusion of writing from linguistics: one sees writing in a natural (meaning reflective) relationship to speech and therefore outside the scope of a science of signs, while the other attempts to exclude writing on the basis of its artificial, derivative status, as opposed to the natural (meaning arbitrarily but intimately intertwined) connection between the phonic substance and language. This, of course, leads to Derrida’s second, real point—Saussure’s failure to carry through on all implications of his principle of “difference”.

Derrida's own arguments in this connection are also apparently contradictory; the first attacks the too rigid distinction between signifier and signified, but the second criticizes the *unity* of the Saussurean sign—graph, phoneme, concept. Both perspectives however, appear consistent. In the first case, Derrida notes Saussure's unwillingness to conceive of an overlap between signifier and signified. If language is a system of differences, and if, as Saussure illustrates in his discussion of value, the limits of signifieds are determined arbitrarily by their opposition to other signifieds in the system (the signifieds identified by "mutton" versus "sheep" in English for example, as against "*mouton*" with no equivalent opposing term in French) then signifieds are other signifiers, referring as they do to absent terms, meaning is entirely system-derived, and there is no object of language, the presence of the signified always being deferred. Yet if all signs are arbitrary—and if writing, according to Saussure's first analysis of it, is a secondary sign system referring to another—how can a qualitative distinction be enforced between graphic and phonic signs? And if writing, by Saussure's second characterization of it, is a reflection or derivation of the sound system, how can this claim be squared with the obvious arbitrariness of any apparent connection between the two substances? As Derrida puts it, "does not the radical dissimilarity of the two elements—graphic and phonic—exclude derivation (*OG* 54)?" Derrida finds a certain amount of ethnocentrism in the analysis here, for a thorough examination of a variety of writing systems would surely force Saussure to this conclusion. It is only by recognizing just two types of writing systems, ideographic and phonetic, in their unmixed forms, Derrida notes, that allows Saussure to describe writing as dependent and derivative (*OG* 32). Pictographic systems are contrary evidence, and the slippage between "pictographic, ideographic, and phonetic scripts" is indication of the need for linguistics to "abandon an entire family of concepts inherited from metaphysics" (*OG* 32-33).

Saussure's attitude toward writing is similarly not a legitimate consequence of his statement that language is a system of differences without positive terms. The concept of difference, again by definition, necessarily "contradicts the allegation of a naturally phonic essence of language" (*OG* 53); difference, after all, as Derrida says, "remains inaudible" ("Difference" 133). Since language is, by Saussure's own account, form, not substance, since the signifier is "incorporeal", a mere function of "the differences that separate its sound-image from all others", there is no present point in which to locate its true nature—no more in verbal than in written matter (Derrida quoting Saussure *OG* 53).

Following through on Saussure's suggestion of all sign systems as a type of writing, then, one can readmit writing as an object of analysis in a "science" of "grammatology"; the focus of such a study is "arche-writing", a general writing which subsumes both graphic and verbal "writing", emphasizing the essential and thorough artificiality of all language (*OG* 56-57):

To think the unique *within* the system, to inscribe it there, such is the gesture of the arche-writing: arche-violence, loss of the proper, of absolute proximity, of self-presence, in truth the loss of what has never taken place, of a self-presence which has never been given but only dreamed of and always already split, repeated, incapable of appearing to itself except its own disappearance. (*OG* 112).

With reference to a "science" of "grammatology", it would however, push even further Saussure's description of the differential nature of language (it is here that Derrida rewrites Saussure's model). As Derrida explains somewhat more fully in *Positions* and in "Differance", Saussure's discussion of value implicitly extends the principle of difference to signifieds as well as to signifiers or sound-images, since conceptual differences are a product of the language system, having no form or outline prior to their association with phonic material ("Differance"140). A signified is consequently never a defined, "adequate presence that would refer only to itself" ("Differance" 140). In this sense signifieds are really other signifiers, referring elsewhere, namely, to what they are not, an observation which, in *Of Grammatology*, calls into question Saussure's unity of signified and signifier, his treatment of the sign as an inviolable and indivisible single element more-or-less equivalent to the "word" (*OG* 31-32), and which, in *Positions*, deconstructs Saussure's rigid distinction between signifiers and signifieds (18-20).

The result is an opened-up version of the Saussurean model, a continual play and deferral of meaning along a chain of signifiers, and Saussure's metaphors—voice is to writing as nature is to culture, as inside is to outside, as source and origin are to reflection and derivation, and as life is to violence and death—are un-hinged. This new model functions not only as a critique of the empirical basis of modern linguistics, a linguistics which aims at the description of a transcendental signified, some fully present object, but also as a "telling example" of a more general "logocentric metaphysics", especially, Derrida implies, of a Western philosophy which does not pause to question the assumed transparency of the language in which it fashions its arguments (*OG* 46).

By a too distinct division between signifier and signified, then, Derrida means to question any *a priori* signified fully present in itself (*Positions* 19-20). Yet while this is a clear consequence of Saussure's amorphous plane of thought prior to the appearance of language, elsewhere, in his discussion of writing, Saussure assumes a fixed relationship between graph (since it is entirely dependent on the phonetic system), phoneme, and a concept or signified. Derrida remarks Saussure's tendency to revert to a classified definition of signs as involving signifiers which refer directly to pre-existing objects in the world, to again fail to follow through on his differential theme. Here the mistake results from Saussure's use of the term "phoneme" as more-or-less equivalent to "word". Once more he allows no slippage between the graphematic system, the sound system, and signifieds; absolute correspondence is assumed between word divisions, phonic units, and concepts. The singular *unity* of the "word" is thus paradoxically similar to the problem of the hard-and-fast distinction between signifier and signified (*OG* 21-22, 31-32). Both are attempts to stop the play of difference and to preserve objects in the world outside the system. This is perhaps why it is essential to Derrida to renounce Saussure's phonocentrism: form, not substance, is the true locus of interest—and further, not even form as an abstract, identifiable system, but as an unsystematic, unavailable space.

This brings us to a very important point. Derrida declares that "to keep sonority on the side of the sensible and contingent signifier", and to keep it distinct from the difference between substances, is "strictly speaking impossible, since formal identities, isolated, within a sensible mass are already idealities that are not purely sensible" (*OG* 29). Form and substance are inseparable, in other words: since form in language must be located within that otherwise undifferentiated mass of sensible material (the sound stream or other matter), that substance is no longer mere substance but form, and likewise form cannot be substance-free, since its very perception requires expression in some material. We consequently reach an interesting paradox: the inability of phonology to distinguish matter and form, to focus on the differential space between elements, is reason for preferring one somewhat more successful approach over another, ultimately for rejecting phonological study altogether for its failure to do so; yet on the other hand, it follows from the principle of *differance* itself that such a goal is an unattainable one. A form/substance opposition is, too, after all, subject to deconstructive analysis, and Derrida finally unhinges the very opposition that was the source of his critique. To disengage form from substance, that is, one must pose the question of the origin of form;

and this is to imply a presence, a place of perception from which forms are delineated within the sensible mass. This, it appears, is the real source of his objections: a linguistic model can resist objectively defined elements, but it must then turn instead to locate the stability of the sign in another object—“mind” or “perception”.

Derrida therefore seems to ultimately focus on Saussure’s account of the issues related to the mind— “psychologism”. While Saussure generally does not deal with such concepts elsewhere, Derrida notes that in his discussion of writing he relies on a crude psychology in order to affirm his sense of the natural bond between sound and meaning. Interestingly enough, while he himself imitates Saussure’s “incorporeal” sound-image, he finds faults with Saussure for indulging in a psychology of “intuitive consciousness” which once again links voice to full presence (Derrida refers again to Saussure’s treatment of sounds as “natural”), a psychology which is unable to imagine the radical emptiness of the sign, the absence of the signified (*OG* 40). Derrida connects psychological considerations to the unity of signifier and signified, thereby indicating a false notion of communication which opens up direct access between objects and a delimited self.

However, Derrida demonstrates some ambivalence about the place of “psychologism” in a description of language. Returning to the distinction Saussure institutes between sound in its physiological, objective sense (what we would now call the study of phonetics) and the “sound-image” or what Saussure elsewhere terms the “psychic image” or “psychic imprint of the sound”, in other words, the functional sound distinctions of a particular language (the province of phonology), Derrida considers under what conditions such notions could be preserved (Derrida quoting Saussure *OG* 63). Second, one would need in order to avoid the charge of “mentalism” to specify both that the psychic image need not copy external reality, nor need it designate instead a “natural”, “internal” reality, simply replacing thereby an external object with an internal one (*OG* 64). Further, the sound-image must not be seen to have its source in any unified presence, that is, in some notion of the individual, again the product of a naive Western metaphysics: the “essence of the *phone* cannot be read directly and primarily in the text of a mundane science, of a psycho-physio-phonetics” (*OG* 65). Rather it must be thought of as a “trace”, the “condition of all other differences”, the absolute origin of sense in general” (*OG* 65). Linguistics, of course, can accommodate the first requirement—indeed, it is its source.

To this extent, the sound-image/sound (phonology/phonetics) distinction goes some way toward removing Derrida's objections to the continual reference of phonology to phonic material: the "material" in question is not sound, but the "sound heard" in some potential sense, not actual sense, and its objects of description are at least not objects in the world. The second of Derrida's criteria, too, represents an argument from within linguistic study; in fact, he cites Jakobson's objections to mentalism of this sort (*OG* 64). His final requirement amounts to a rejection of even the narrow sort of reference to perception that Derrida had seemed about to accept. Once again this is meant to be a deconstruction of the aims of linguistic study from within—a demonstration that completely transforms the notion of the sound-image, in effect removing all suggestion of a connection between it and psychology or actual perception, hence rendering this possible solution, too, equivalent to the principle of *difference*, removing all suggestion of its origin outside the system. To speak of the "absolute origin of sense" is to speak of "non-origin" (*OG* 65), Derrida notes, since the source of sense is *difference* and has no identifiable location; it exists after all, beyond individuals and individual perception.

But it is not clear whether Derrida accomplishes the re-writing of "sound-image" as "trace" from within the tenets of the discipline he wishes to question, if he does not address the matter of psychologism outside Saussure's chapter on writing. The problem, it seems, is that Derrida opens up the very interesting matter of Saussure's psychologism without considering in any detail whether it is of the sort he describes—whether it really reflects some assumption of speakers' full and immediate "intuitive consciousness". It seems to follow for Derrida that the "voice-as-natural" theme in Saussure's chapter on writing does indeed demonstrate that this is the case. But as the investigative procedure in the *Course* reveals, Saussure's psychological theory is both undeveloped and inconsistent, and it is not clear that such a notion "infects" his entire discussion as Derrida suggests.

The point is that this is only an open question. It may be that Saussure's distrust of abstract categories in itself could be proven a sign of a psychologism of this sort. But it is more clear that the perception of the sound-image of Saussure's theory is not in any sense individual, but social, that it is not under the conscious control of the speakers, and that at least it need not, for the purposes of theory, require the notion of a unified subject; indeed, Derrida relies himself on such arguments for the iterability of the speech act

(“Signature” 315). Derrida’s concentration on his overall project, a demonstration of a consistent tradition, a metaphysics of presence, perhaps blunts his analysis here.

To Saussure’s discussion of associative (paradigmatic) relations, to the opposed signifier/signified, the phonemic system, and somewhat more rarely, the binary oppositions of the distinctive features of the phoneme, Derrida attaches the notions of spacing, deferred meaning, goal-lessness, and the absent “other”. Such metaphors ideally suggest continual dialectic and tension (the differentially defined elements are never resolved by some transcendent third term); delay and deferral in reference to the opposed, absent paradigmatic elements; the impossibility of determining an unimpeachable reading (the interacting particles are continually escaping focus and resolution); the resistance of meaning to schematization and theory; and once again the futility of imposing interpretive closure (there is nothing in the metaphors to suggest some ultimate consequence). In fact, just as interesting as the linguistic metaphors he imports are the portions of the Saussurean account that Derrida’s metaphors do not activate.

Derrida’s metaphors, then, are never linear or spatial in the usual sense. He refers to deferral and spacing, it is true, but this is rather a “deep” than linear distance, merely some continual reference to further absences, and unimaginable as a solid line of events. This, then, is the reason for Saussure’s “paradigmatic relations” being a primary source of Derridean metaphor; because a linear model suggests a progress toward some goal and movement from some origin (which would return him to a logocentric metaphysics), Derrida rejects reference to “syntagmatic relations” altogether and dismisses as well Saussure’s discussion of the stream of speech, the effect of processing language across a span of time (just as Saussure himself ultimately does).

III

Derrida’s critique of Saussure is finally, then, one which is both thoroughly Saussurean itself and yet one which nullifies the structuralist project. That is, the analysis, which relies initially on binary oppositions analogous to phonemic contrasts, introduces an “arche-writing” and a science of “grammatology” in language that deliberately echoes Saussure’s announcement of a new science of semiology. At this first level, “grammatology” is simply the new metaphor for an over-arching theory of signs,

“writing” the replacement for “sign”, and “graph” for “phoneme”. But in the second movement of the analysis these simple equations are rendered inadequate, and “arche-writing” becomes an “open” system, the only “system” able to resist objectification itself, and “trace” the only differential principle which, unlike “signifier/signified” is able to elude final location in opposed but present substance.

Derrida’s version of the Saussurean metaphors, it is seen, are principally phonological, a point that follows necessarily from Saussure’s exclusion of syntax or discourse from his account and from Derrida’s treatment of Saussure as the paradigm linguistic theory. The endlessly interacting, decentred system suggests that no final statement of the text/utterance is possible, that no reading/interpretation which arrives at some resting point is an adequate description of textual/utterance meaning. Similarly, interpretation need no longer assume the function of imitating the conditions of textual production—it need not be narrowly intentional—since the metaphor of the Saussurean system implies that meaning is a product of language itself, not of persons who enjoy full control over the force of their own utterances (*OG* 157-59). As Derrida says, while critical reading can no longer repeat the text, since this is an impossible and endless task, it likewise cannot “transgress the text”, attempt to find a “referent” outside it—either “metaphysical” or “psychobiographical” (*OG* 158). For him this apparently means that there is no clear demarcation between context and text, between outside and textual effects.

One of the central interests of Derrida’s account is his appropriation of Saussure, his central reference to a model he eventually reinstitutes a higher level. The world itself, that is, is a Saussurean system, the history of philosophy a “grammar” (“Differance” 149) or “system” too (“Signature” 311); binary oppositions consist now of thematic elements rather than structural ones—“philosophemes” replace “phonemes” (“Structure” 288) –and the speaking subject is now inscribed within an all –encompassing grammar, is the object essentially, of a phonemic analysis. “[T]he writer writes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely”; no longer the independent internalizer of language, he is “governed by the system” (*OG* 158). In short, many of Derrida’s principal metaphors are intelligible only by way of Saussure’s.

His deconstruction of the Saussurean sign signals the death of the sign, the end of linguistics, the inauguration of a new epoch; indeed, Derrida often speaks in these terms himself (“Differance” 132; *OG* 74-93). Perhaps all these are open matters, but from the substance of his chapter on Saussure, it seems reasonable enough to observe briefly in response to the objections that Derrida never wholly dismisses nor underwrites Saussure, and that the business of locating an inconsistency in Saussure’s text is precisely the interest of the account. In any case, it should be clear by now that Derrida persists in recognizing the radical potential of Saussure’s work and finds faults with him only for developing the full implications of his thesis.

Yet while Derrida calls a theory as Saussure’s an instance of theoretical “progress” (*OG* 61), two major objections remain. First, these “original and irreducible” “form[s] of expression” refer to graphic (or, presumably, phonic) substance in a “very determined” manner (*OG* 60); in effect, the underlying substance-free form is an object—a substance—itsself, and again ultimately resists the play of differences. Second, in the construction of such a theoretical system one must finally consider “the question of the transcendental origin of the system” (*OG* 61). It is not possible, consequently to achieve a description of continually deferred meaning by way of such a closed model: eventually one must also explain the presence and origin of the system as a whole (*OG* 61-68). Only in Derrida’s open model is it possible to resist asking this final question; it is not, to use Derrida’s earlier comments, a matter of describing “play in the world” (as in the closed model)—rather a matter of thinking through “the game of the world” (*OG* 50). Thus Derrida repeats the movement from “writing” to “arche-writing” in his analysis of Saussure; abstract objects are objects nevertheless, and only the notion of “*difference*” can avoid this ultimate problem.

As Derrida reworks Saussure’s model of a self-contained, closed language system, he necessarily dismisses any use of language which would focus on normative rules; and as he denies the possibility of a science of language, he also rejects a criticism or interpretation which would attempt either to find structures in a text or to locate a stable source of meaning in a perceiving subject. The final result is to bring criticism back to consideration of individual texts, since Derrida’s theory of meaning is about meaning’s resistance to theory. Thus the task of deconstruction is often described as locating “*cruxes*” in texts, the points at which language resists the writer/speaker’s apparent

meaning, as method rather than theory, in other words. Since Derrida is not bound to the sort of literary projects which apply linguistic metaphors “non-metaphorically”, his use of metaphors is naturally looser, more suggestive. As he discusses Saussure, for example, Derrida transforms Saussure’s remarks on the “reflective” relationship of writing to speech into an image of *differance*, the image of an endlessly reflecting and refracting mirror; Saussure’s game metaphor becomes a trope for the “play” of language (“Differance” 154); the pairs inside/outside and close/open, only implicit in the *Course*, become dominant metaphors of the deconstructive process. It is the character of language as difference that simultaneously defers presence and enables signification. Because of this essential structure of difference, what seems to *be* only *seems* to be. What seems to *be* is already a sign of signs, but the supplementary character of these signs goes unnoticed. Between the signifier and the signified, the word and the thing, the statement and the meaning, the expression and what is expressed, the representer and the represented, is the space, the gap, where the thing signified is lost in order to be signified.