

## A Misreading of the Poem of Maya Angelou's 'My Arkansas'

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### Abstract

Literary texts are significantly made up of signifiers from the definition of poststructuralist perspective. The author's literary product is a dynamic, when a

reader is making multiple readings. That is to say that a primary reading is not an end. There are multiple readings in literature. This kind of multiplicity of reading is safely called '*misreading*'

### Keywords

Culture, deconstruction, environmental concern, misreading, nature

### Introduction

The well-known African American poet is Maya Angelou. She is a civil activist in Arkansas. Arkansas is a place in America, where black people live and were discriminated brutally on the racial issues. She is labelled as postcolonial / subaltern writer. Her most famous poem is 'My Arkansas'. Generally this poem deals with the poet's reminiscence of her experience of the poet. As it is well known that this poem is a note of autobiographical. Angelou has brought bitterly out the present and the past experience. From the perspective of post structuralism, a theorist can reread this poem in the aspect of multiplicity of meaning. The surface level of the meaning is defaced and the hidden meaning is unearthed. The constant unearthing activity is the primary act of post structuralism.

### Misreading- A note:

The term deconstruction is derived from old French word. Derrida himself says that deconstruction is not a new term. It better to quote from Julian Wolfreys' essay 'Deconstruction, What Remains Unread':

Post structuralism has not emerged suddenly. In arts and humanities the theory has been developed from structuralism. Post structuralism has produced a term called 'deconstruction'. Originally the term deconstruction announced and practised by Jacques Derrida. Derrida was a French philosopher, born in 1930. In his intellectual account, he has written three significant books. Those are: a) *Speech and Phenomena* b) *Writing and Difference* and c) *Of Grammatology*. Derrida is not to the diametrically opposite meaning in a text. Rather, he is to the unread meaning, which is left in a text by a common reader. The term deconstruction is not a new one. It already existed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Derrida says that a literary text is already dismantled by itself. Therefore, he says that the left over meaning with the play of signifiers is reread.

'The first known written appearance of the word in English is in 1882'. As with its French predecessor, it has legal connotations: 'a reform the beginnings of

which must be a work of deconstruction'

Misreading of a literary text is not the reading of a literary text in a wrong manner, but it is a reading in which the other meaning is exhumed from a literary text. There are two kinds of method of reading, which can be functioned analyse a literary text.

A) *Intended meaning* (author's / general / surface meaning)

B) *Unintended meaning* (reader's reconstruction/misreading/unread meaning/deconstruction)

### Deconstructive Analysis of the poem 'My Arkansas'

Maya Angelou's 'My Arkansas' is a well-known African American poem. Some readers and critics say that the poem deals with the theme of autobiography. Through this poem Angelou has depicted that there

There is a deep brooding  
in Arkansas  
old crimes like moss pend  
from poplar trees

the poet has utilized the metaphorical and figurative language in the above stanza. The poet says that in Arkansas old crimes are prevalent even now. The words 'old' 'crimes' 'make sense that the poet is in dilemma between old crimes and the modern crimes, since the old crimes are emphasized figuratively.

Moreover, the author has used the figurative words comparatively that 'deep' 'brooding' 'moss pend' and 'poplar trees', which have the nature of fast growing. Here the figurative words are representing

(wolfreys, 117.)

The *intended* meaning defines that the surface level of the meaning in a text which the author wants to convey to readers. And it has a sequential logic at giving the meaning.

The *unintended* meaning defines that a reader deconstructs a literary text / art not from a reader's own perspective, but to discover the unread he meaning, which is already dismantled by itself. In a linguistic network the play of signifiers are already tended to be deconstructed.

is a racial discrimination in her country. This poem is an example for that. In a deconstructive reading all the readings are the *provisional*. Therefore, in the practice of deconstruction, the term *aporias* used.

the crimes committed by people in the Arkansas are culture. The words 'moss' and 'poplar' are representing 'nature'. The poet seeks for assistance to bring out culture from 'nature'. This is what a poststructuralist reading calls a concept of binary opposition. That is nature X culture, man X woman as such. In the poem the signifiers reiterate nature for emphasizing culture. The poet explains that nature of fast growing trees like 'moss' and 'poplar'. The above few lines of the poem have the nature of culture

the sullen earth  
Is much too  
Red for comfort

The above lines are the environmental concern rather than her autobiographical note. The words 'sullen earth' and 'too red' are in the metaphorical sense. Again the poet seeks for assistance from nature 'earth'. The words 'too red' might have explained that the earth is destroyed by the

crimes. It shows that the earth is being deteriorated into loss of fertility, nature and greenish, because of the man-made violence. It is better termed as anthropocentrism. Therefore, it might to say that the poet has eco-concern

Sunrise seems to hesitate  
And in that second  
Lose its  
incandescent aim, and  
dusk no more shadows  
than the moon

The above lines are the explanatory of change of whether /climatic condition. The sun is not able to appear and disappear in the proper region /location. The sun loses its brighter light to flash. The line 'the past is brighter yet' shows that the line is connected with the 'old crimes' like 'moss pend'. The explanatory note here is the cultural degradation makes more on nature and it has lost 'values' and 'nature'. Again the poet seeks for assistance from natural phenomena like 'earth, moon'. The poet is so concern about the environmental degradation and is compared with past/old crimes in Arkansas.

Old hates and  
Ante-bellum lace, are rent  
But not discarded  
Today is yet to come

The poet might to say that before the American Civil war the condition was unsatisfactory. This might be a reason that the American civil war could bring peace. The term 'ante-bellum' is on par with before the American civil war. Therefore the poet makes importance to the environmental concern rather than her autobiographical note in the poem.

## References

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