

THE VILLAIN IN SPIDERMAN MOVIE I: A DECONSTRUCTIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews on how deconstructive reading strategy plays an important role to reveal meanings in the movie that are tried to hide. Analyzing movie is an important study to do as we can gain a lot of advantages from the movie such as ideas, concepts, and values of life. One and the first most successful film based on a comic book is *Spiderman Movie I* with the villain named Green Goblin. This article focuses on analyzing Green Goblin's characterizations from the perspective of Deconstruction. The character of Green Goblin will be observed by using Propp's Morphology of Folk Tale and later dismantled by deconstructive reading strategy. Green Goblin, in this particular movie, is always considered as a bad guy. Ignoring the motives or causes of being Green Goblin leads viewers to judge that he is a villain in New York City and must be eliminated. Nevertheless, by using deconstructive reading strategy, the idea of Green Goblin will be dismantled and built again to find some undecidable meanings.

Key-words: *deconstruction, undecidable meaning, Spiderman, Green Goblin*

Deconstruction has been a debatable criticism since late 1960s when it was first proposed in 1967 by Jacques Derrida in his influential book, *Of Grammatology*. The notion of deconstruction proposed by Derrida (1974) is that Deconstruction is a perpetually self-deconstructing movement that is inhabited by *différance*. No text is ever *fully* deconstructing or deconstructed. Yet the critic provisionally musters the metaphysical resources of criticism and performs what declares itself to be *one* (unitary) act of deconstruction.

This idea can also be called revolutionist because it does not have a fixed pattern to apply into texts or objects. Free playing and deferring the meaning from texts or objects are the most obvious characteristics of deconstruction because "deconstruction eschews the concept of one possible meaning for a text, and instead suggested that meanings of a text are multiple and contradictory" (Ellis-

Christensen, 2003). Cuddon (1991) states that Deconstruction, however, is not synonymous with destruction. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word analysis itself, which etymologically means 'to undo', a virtual synonym for 'to de-construct'. If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is not the text, but the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another. A deconstructive reading is a reading which analyses the specificity of a text's critical difference from itself.

This reading strategy has a very broad range of areas. The areas of deconstructionists are not only applicable in philosophy and literature but also in most social aspects of our life. Spivak (in Newton, 1992) also believes that deconstruction is a tool that can be used to effect political change. Deconstruction has since carried its influence far beyond literary studies, not only to philosophy but also to branches of

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humanitarian studies and often to the social sciences, and debates still rage over its relevance for the so-called hard sciences (Parker, 2008). Parker (2008), moreover, says deconstruction has been absorbed by later thoughts and often remains crucial to contemporary cultural and literary criticism. To understand more about deconstruction, Bressler (1999) gives his brief idea that Deconstructors do not wish, then, to set up a new philosophy, a new literary theory of analysis, or a new school of literary criticism. Instead, they present a new reading strategy that allows us to make choice concerning the various levels of interpretation we see operating in a text.

From the above point of view, it is possible to conclude that deconstruction is a reading strategy which can be applied to either contemporary cultural or literary criticism. It is applicable to dismantle the rhetorical structures within a text to demonstrate how key concepts within a text depend on each other binary opposition.

Spiderman Movie I

The main generic division of literature today is into poetry, drama, and the novel but in earlier times the major genres were recognized as epic, tragedy, lyric, comedy, and satire (Peck and Coyle, 1986). Movie, therefore, can fall into the category of a dramatic work, especially modern dramatic. The uniqueness of movie is similar to drama - one of the oldest and most popular literature genres -which is performance art. One dissimilarity is that drama is performed live not recorded like a movie.

A literary study on particular popular culture example such as movie might be a challenging choice. Some would say that the study on novels or any artworks like those of Dickens, Austen, or Shakespeare would be more worthwhile to analyze. Currently, however, literary criticism does not limit its study on those classics. In *Key Concepts in Literary Theory* (2002), a criticism is the act of analyzing and evaluating literary texts, films and images, cultural forms and phenomena. By mentioning films and images, cultural forms and phenomena lead to the result that criticism is not only for literary text or even canonical

works.

Spiderman Movie I is "superhero and American icon, Spider-man is born finally in the new box-office smash movie directed by acclaimed and cult director Sam Raimi." (Vasquez Jr, 2002). The success of Spiderman was because of the visual effect used by Columbia Pictures in making the realistic movement of Spiderman, Green Goblin and other actions. *Spiderman Movie I* was the first and most successful film based on comic books, written by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. The characteristics of hero and villain are obviously seen in *Spiderman Movie I* using Propp's Morphology of Folk Tale (in Chandler, 2002). However, it is not advisable to have early conclusion about the ideas of hero and villain from one point of view. Viewers must look deep inside the motives of hero or villain why they choose their ways. Furthermore, a clear border of hero and villain in *Spiderman Movie I* makes it easier for viewers to analyze this movie.

Structuralism: Only the Beginning

Strinati (1995) says that Structuralism is defined as a theoretical and philosophical framework which is relevant to the social sciences as a whole. Derrida (2002) also emphasizes that everything begins with structure, configuration, or relationship. Therefore, it is very necessary to study more about structuralism because this theoretical framework has correlation on how to do deconstruction.

Structuralism has thoroughly touched the notion of semiology or semiotics. By having those particular theories, this study is expected to analyze not only the surface of the movie, but also character of a hero represented by Spiderman and a villain by Green Goblin. The study of sign, in drawing the characteristics, plays an important role in this study. The use of structuralism in term of semiology and semiotics is also proposed by Parker (2008) that Whatever genre they study, they will try to reveal its grammar, or, as structuralists often say, its code and conventions. And as structuralism increasingly takes on the broader task of interpreting culture at large, they may often think of those codes and conventions as cultural codes and conventions.

Moreover, Strinati (1995) in an

Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture, says The Swiss linguist Saussure (1857 - 1913) attempted to establish and develop the discipline of structural linguistics and on this basis suggested it was possible to find a science of signs. In these respects, his ideas played a crucial role in the emergence of structuralism and semiology, and make their intentions and methods a lot clearer, while demonstrating their continuing relevance for the semiological study of contemporary forms of popular culture.

The Morphology of Folk Tale

In his highly influential book, *The Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1928), the Russian narrative theorist, Vladimir Propp (1895 - 1970), reports that a hundred fairy tales that he had analyzed are all on the same basic formula. He reduces them to around thirty one functions (in Chandler, 2006). Based on the deeds done by doer in fairy tales, Propp has come into a conclusion which he names 'function'.

To analyze movie or film especially regarding one character, more or less depends on Vladimir Propp's theory. He concludes Morphology of the Folk Tale that was published in Russian in 1928 that his character types are used in media and education and can be applied to almost any story be it in literature, theatre, film, and television series. After the initial situation is depicted, the tale starts. See the series of the functions in Table 1.

Table 1. Series of Function in the *Spiderman Movie I*

	Function	Role
0	Initial Situation	Members of the family of the hero are introduced.
1	Absentation	A family member absents himself from home.
2	Interdiction	An interdiction is addressed to the hero.
3	Violation	The interdiction is violated.
4	Reconnaissance	The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance.
5	Delivery	The villain receives information about his victim.

6	Trickery	The villain attempts to deceive the victim.
7	Complicity	The victim is deceived.
8	Villainy	The villain causes harm or injury to family.
8a	Lack	A family member lacks or wants something.
9	Mediation	Misfortune or lack is made known. The hero is dispatched.
10	Counteraction	The seeker decides upon counter-action.
11	Departure	The hero leaves home.
12	First function of donor	The hero is tested.
13	Hero's reaction	The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor.
14	Receipt of the magic agent	The hero acquires the use of magical agent.
15	Spatial transference	The hero is led to the object of search.
16	Struggle	The hero and villain join in direct combat.
17	Branding	The hero is branded.
18	Victory	The villain is defeated.
19	Liquidation	The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated.
20	Return	The hero returns.
21	Pursuit	The hero is pursued.
22	Rescue	Rescue of the hero from pursuit.
23	Unrecognized	The hero, unrecognized, arrives home or in another country.
24	Unfounded claims	A false hero presents unfounded claims.
25	Difficult task	A difficult task is proposed to the hero.
26	Solution	The task is resolved.
27	Recognition	The hero is recognized.
28	Exposure	The false hero or villain is exposed.
29	Transfiguration	The hero is given a new appearance.
30	Punishment	The villain is punished.
31	Wedding	The hero is married and ascends the throne.

However, because this study will focus on a hero and villain, the following typical morphology will only be directly connected

with the characteristics of a hero or villain in *Spiderman Movie I* and there are 10 functions as follows:

1. Absentation.
2. Delivery.
3. Trickery.
4. Complicity
5. Villainy.
6. Struggle.
7. Difficult task.
8. Solution.
9. Punishment.
- 10 Victory.

Spiderman and Green Goblin as Hero and Villain

The 10 functions proposed by Propp above are applicable to *Spiderman Movie I* to define which one is hero and which one is antihero. However, at least it still can function as parameter of how it can define Spiderman as a hero and Green Goblin as a villain. The title of movie is often called the main point of the movie. Therefore, with the title Spiderman, viewers are already forced to believe that the movie will only talk about Spiderman with his victory in defeating all his villains.

Rzadkiewicz (2009) defines that Hero is someone "who does not act on his own behalf but on the behalf of others. He acts for the good of friends, family community, and/or country, with no thoughts of glory or fame or, especially, financial gain." Having analyzed the definition, it can be concluded that a hero is the one on the story who has the good looking traits in moral value.

However, Green Goblin is placed in an unfair position, and according to analysis based on Morphology of Folk Tale he is indeed the guilty man and the only villain of Spiderman in *Spiderman Movie I*. Harris (1994) gives the definition of a villain as a person who, for a selfish end, willfully and deliberately violates the standards of morality sanctioned by the audience or reader.

It is obvious that after a hero is defined, the one who is struggling against hero can be simply judged as an enemy or villain. Having such a bad deed leads Green Goblin to a very bad position as a man who had to be expelled

from a society.

Deconstruction as a Reading Strategy

The rough idea of deconstruction first appeared and was brought by Friederich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844 - 1900). He also was the scapegoat of Nazi ideology's enemy. He was blamed as the founder of Nazi's fundamentals. The notion brought by Nietzsche successfully affected Hitler and brought the world toward the World War II. Nietzsche stated that human is an eternal recurrence. This philosophy is beyond other thoughts because he had an irrational view of life by having 'no truth' in every aspect of life. Deconstruction does not merely follow the idea proposed by Nietzsche. He just wanted to give the notion of skeptical method toward the claim of truth and tried to open widely our mind from the boundary of conceptual theories.

The first idea of deconstruction proposed by Derrida (1974) is that the movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work.

Thus, deconstruction is a reading strategy which proposed that nothing is a certain truth in a text (Al-Fayyadl, 2006). Therefore, one must look very carefully at what the text wants to say but, this truth might not appear in text. This strategy leads us to always defer our conclusion about meaning of a text as it is written in *Key Concepts of Literary Theory* (2005) that in Derrida's words, deconstruction, if it is anything, is an "economic concept designating the production of differing/deferring".

Some would say that deconstruction is very hard to be applied to a text or an object because of having no absolute result after analyzing. The certain conclusions, meanings,

values, or truths never come up as they are always deferred. Structuralism always offers a centre of meaning of some sort. Unlike the structuralism, this branch of poststructuralism, however, offers no centre of meaning (Selden and Widdowson, 1993).

Derrida in Newton (1993) proposes the idea of deconstruction as a mode of interpretation works by a careful and circumspect entering of each textual labyrinth. The deconstructive critic seeks to find the element in the system studied which is logical, the thread in the text in question which will unravel it all, or loose stone which will pull down the whole building.

When readers want to apply deconstruction as their reading strategy, they must be able to leave the conservative way of thinking. This way of thinking is mainly to put the binary opposition and centering ideas as very important roles to find the meaning of a text or an object. Nevertheless, free playing and deferring the meaning from texts or objects are the most obvious characteristics of deconstruction. Parker (2008), moreover, strengthens the idea of deconstruction by saying that deconstructionist believe in multiple meaning.

In order to ease the deconstructive readers to analyze the text or object, Parker (2008) presents the table of deconstructive terms (See Table 2.). This table clearly delivers the brief and effective conclusion of what being inside either the non deconstructive ideas or the deconstructive ideas.

Table 2. Deconstructive Terms

For Non Deconstructive Ideas	For Deconstructive Ideas
truth, substance, essence center nature stability	play, free play, undecidability, aporia decentering culture instability differance, surplus of meaning, supplement
speech, voice, phonocentrism literalness, logocentrism	writing, textually rhetoric

origin, authority, authenticity metaphysics of presence	suspicion of stabilizing ideas such as origin, authority, authenticity absence
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The table is very easy to read because it has a systematic way of proposing the ideas and it shows a great deal of the ideas of deconstruction with other perspectives. Other easy idea to analyze deconstructively is given by Bressler (1999).

To apply this deconstructive strategy, readers must do the following:

- discover the binary operations that govern a text.
- comment on the values, concepts, and ideas beyond these operations.
- reverse these present binary operations.
- dismantle previously held worldviews.
- accept the possibility of various perspective or levels of meaning in a text based on the new binary inversions.
- allow meaning of the text to be undecidable.

The idea given by Bressler is similar to Parker's in some cases. At the end, deconstructive readers must not have an absolute conclusion as deconstruction will not allow someone to be selfish in having a single meaning, value, or truth.

There will be many meanings and interpretations. Readers, however, come to an initial conclusion and always do because in the highest level of deconstruction, readers have to allow meaning of the text to be undecidable. No absolute meaning exists in the text.

Parker (2008), furthermore, gives a simpler way of deconstructive analysis that deconstructionist interpretation frequently follows what has come to be called a double reading, a two-stage reading. In the first stage, the readers identify confidently singular interpretation, free of multiplicity and deconstruction. Then in the second stage, readers find things that undermine the structure, things that (in deconstructionist lingo) 'break down the binary' or 'explode the binary,' or a moment of undecidability (sometimes pretentiously called an aporia), showing how the

free play of the text's signifiers - its language - goes beyond the capacity of the system to confine it to one meaning or set of meanings. To do a double reading, readers must have the capacity in determining the general ideas of a text first and later they have to be able to find something that troubles or breaks up the system.

Initial Conclusion of Result of Structuralism

The initial conclusion of result of structuralism is the conclusion taken from the analysis above to determine what roles Spiderman and Green Goblin in the movie are. After having a short observation on 10 functions based on *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, it comes to certain conclusion. This conclusion is not a final result of this study because it does not reflect the idea of deconstruction which is to always defer the original meaning (Maksum, 2009). Maksum (2009) continues to say that this process of deconstruction is unlimited or endless. Deconstruction brings the idea that value of a sign is determined by the difference of other signs in terms of *differance*. The value never comes up suddenly but it is always deferred and determined, even modified, by next signs (Derrida in Maksum, 2009).

Before giving a result of deconstruction, it is a must for readers to be analytical to find the initial structures or foundations. These structures or foundations are used to be the cores of what readers are going to analyze later. After having proper structures or foundations, readers are freely allowed to play their role in deciding the final result of a certain text. The upcoming subchapters help readers to scrutinize a text from the perspective of deconstruction.

Rzadkiewicz (2009) defines that Hero is someone "who does not act on his own behalf but on the behalf of others. He acts for the good of friends, family community, and/or country, with no thoughts of glory or fame or, especially, financial gain." This movie has a clear boundary to differentiate who are the called hero and villain. Supported by the 10 functions from Propp's *the Morphology of Folk Tale*, which are absentation, delivery, trickery, complicity, villainy, struggle, difficult task, solution, punishment, and victory, the initial

conclusion of a hero is Peter Parker, Spiderman.

Harris (1994) gives the definition of a villain as a person who, for a selfish end, willfully and deliberately violates the standards of morality sanctioned by the audience or reader. Being a very helpful person in New York City, Spiderman is respected by the society and it puts him in a very high position as a hero. Green Goblin, however, is placed in an unfair position, and according to analysis based on *the Morphology of Folk Tale* he is indeed the guilty man and the only villain of Spiderman in *Spiderman Movie I*.

It is obvious that after a hero is defined, the one who is struggling against hero can be simply judged as an enemy or villain. Having such a bad deed leads Green Goblin to a very bad position as a man who had to be expelled from a society. *The Morphology of Folk Tale* puts Green Goblin as a villain based on 8 functions which are delivery, trickery, complicity, villainy, struggle, difficult task, solution, and punishment. The initial conclusion in this movie puts Green Goblin as the main and only villain.

Binary Operation

Before discussing more about binary operation, we must have basic knowledge about what binary opposition is. In *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (1998), binary means a combination of two things, a pair, 'two', duality and this is a widely used term with distinctive meanings in several fields and one that has had particular sets of meanings in post-colonial theory. Binary opposition as it is explained in *Key Concepts in Literary Theory* (2005) is any pair of terms which appear diametrically opposed; therefore: good/evil, day/night, male/female, etc.

The idea of binary opposition is first proposed by structuralism and for structuralists, we understand everything by seeing its difference from something else. We interpret the world by juxtaposing different concepts against each other in what structuralists call binary oppositions (Paker, 2008). To apply the deconstructive method of reading, readers must be able to determine the first binary or common binary. Then later, they can apply to reverse the binary opposition. This method is used to find the multiple, unstable, and without

unity of a meaning.

The binary operation used in this study is good/evil to show the functions of Spiderman as a hero and Green Goblin as a villain. This binary cannot stand by itself actually but they are always together as it is a pair and they support each other. Good cannot be a good if it has no anonymous pair which is evil. This idea appears and readers understand this pair because their difference from each other, in binary opposition to each other. Readers are not able to see meaning in either good or evil except through comparisons. Good/evil is only example of infinite binary opposition in our perception and thought, including hero/villain, inside/outside, on/off, and so on endlessly.

The conclusion of binary operation used in this movie is Spiderman is reflected as a good and Green Goblin is represented as an evil. This sort of conclusion does not come automatically but it comes from the deep analysis from the meaning of hero and villain and fully supported by Propp's ideas. Hero with his valuable action is definitely placed in the 'good'. Villain with his destructive action is stigmatically placed in the 'evil'.

Values, Concepts, and Ideas

Values, concepts, and ideas deliver the deep thought of this movie and to find another basis of why readers are allowed to reverse the binary opposition. Value, as it is stated in *Key Concepts in Literary Theory* (2005), is the estimation, appraisal or interpretation of a given commodity's worth, significance or utility. Value also refers to a moral principle established by a given individual or community.

The value of this movie is to give the notion that superhero will get a victory at the end by defeating his foe. But this does not appear instantly as there are 10 Propp's functions applied in this movie. Hero always struggles against criminals and of course his main villain. He does not only face those two bad guys but also the accusation from Daily Buggle. The accusation says that Spiderman stands behind Green Goblin. Spiderman tries to prove that Daily Buggle is incorrect by helping people trapped in burning house. In the final battle Spiderman also helps the kids in the cable car and Mary Jane. This evidence has brought

Spiderman in a position of a hero. The main value of this movie is to illustrate that we have to do good things as what Spiderman has done and afterward we will get what we have done. Unlike Spiderman, after doing the bad things, Green Goblin is sternly dead by his own spear.

The value of the movie has been explored in the preceding paragraph. A concept is a general idea or notion that corresponds to some class of entities and that consists of the characteristic or essential features of the class. The concept of this movie is to show up the superhero movie in the class of action movie and Spiderman movie is considered as the first best superhero movie. The success of Spiderman was because of the visual effect used by Columbia Pictures in making the realistic movement of Spiderman, Green Goblin and other actions.

An idea is something, such as a thought or conception that potentially or actually exists in the mind as a product of mental activity. The idea of this movie is to demonstrate the Spiderman as a hero and his ordinary life as Peter. The ideas of this movie can be generated as the evil will ruin and never win at the end. Hero, a good guy, however, will reach the superiority. This idea has been proposed by Propp that the punishment function will come to the villain and hero will deserve to get a victory.

What viewers can take from this movie is only, regardless the great visualization and special effect of the movie, the traditional plot of superhero story. This is called traditional because *Spiderman Movie 1* tends to follow Propp's idea. Thus, even though it still uses traditional plot of superhero story, it is very appropriate to deconstruct the values, concepts, and ideas in *Spiderman Movie 1*. The idea comes up from this movie in regards to binary opposition is Spiderman as a hero and Green Goblin as a villain.

Reversal of the Binary Opposition

The reversal of the binary opposition leads us to apply the conventional of binary opposition in this movie and to change it. Diagram that shows the binary opposition is clearly stated below:

Good >< Evil
 Hero >< Villain
 Spiderman >< Green Goblin

At this stage, readers have already had a first-stage of reading. After all, readers are expected to reverse the binary opposition such as:

Evil >< Good
 Hero >< Villain
 Green Goblin >< Spiderman

Some readers might be difficult to see this binary reversal as it is uncommon to see that hero is an evil and villain is a good. As the notion of deconstruction is to have multiple meanings, readers must be flexible to reverse the binary opposition. But to reverse the binary opposition, readers must have a better understanding about the binary. This understanding does not come without any reasons or explanation.

Dismantle Previously Held Worldviews

To dismantle means to tear down piece by piece. In term of deconstruction, to dismantle is to find any supports which build such an interpretation from a text or object. In this movie, the process of dismantling the previous held worldviews is by analyzing Green Goblin who is placed as a villain due to the common ideas of people. This common idea in our society called stigma. Stigma is an attribute, behavior, or reputation which causes an individual to be mentally classified by others in an undesirable, rejected stereotype. Stigma and discrimination are inter-related. Stigma is the root of discrimination.

Undecidable Conclusion

Spiderman Movie I is the most famous movie based on comic book and the plot is very simple as it tends to follow Propp's idea about folk tale. Even though the movie still uses traditional plot of superhero story, it is very appropriate to deconstruct the values, concepts, and ideas. This movie tells about the struggle of superhero, Spiderman, against his victim who is probably a greater hero, Green Goblin.

Deconstruction plays an important role in

making this binary opposition in *Spiderman Movie I* fair enough for both Spiderman and Green Goblin. Deconstruction has the main characteristic which is no certain result after analyzing the text or object. Deconstructive readers are expected to avoid the centralized meaning or single meaning (Maksum, 2008). This strategy declares that a text has an almost infinite number of possible interpretations which are just as creative and important as the text being interpreted (Bressler, 1999).

The discussion of this study will end up with the result derived from Green Goblin's characterization. By using deconstruction, the possibilities of Green Goblin's possible characters in this movie are as follows:

1. The Patriotic Man
2. The Hidden Hero
3. The Victim

Those are only small number of interpretations but different readers or viewers are allowed to have their own different interpretations. This sort of conclusion is acceptable for those who use deconstructive reading strategy in observing a text or object.

Absolute Meaning: Unreachable

An absolute meaning is always avoided by deconstructive readers as this is not the notion of deconstruction. To deconstruct means to dismantle and build the meaning from pieces of unit that makes a text or object. Therefore, an absolute meaning is always deferred and never appears in the text or object forever. Free playing of interpretation is encouraged to deconstructive readers.

As the meaning has to be undecidable, there will be no chance to find the absolute meaning. This reading strategy brings the new idea of how people can measure and analyze their life. As it is also mentioned by Spivak (in Newton, 1992) that deconstruction is a tool that can be used to effect political change. Deconstruction, moreover, has since carried its influence far beyond literary studies, not only to philosophy but also to branches of humanitarian studies and often to the social sciences, and debates still rage over its relevance for the so-called hard sciences

(Parker, 2008).

Finally, the most important thing is that deconstruction is a way of thinking which always challenges us to answer questions, and how we differentiate something without judging and deciding (Maksum, 2008). By using deconstructive reading strategy, readers are free to explore their ideas about a text or an object and no mistake occurs in having an initial conclusion. By applying deconstructive reading strategy, readers let the absolute meaning rest forever to be impossibly found.

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