

Deconstructing the Life-Death Binary in the Poetry of John Donne and Robert Herrick: A Derridean Reading

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Abstract

The poetry of the metaphysical and Cavalier poets has been a source of controversy and interest over the past three centuries due to the imagery, language, and themes it presents, such as death and life, that differ from those of previous and subsequent poems. Thus, researchers, interested parties, and experts in literary critical studies must approach it within the limits that accord it its due research and academic merit. It is necessary to employ Jacques Derrida's theory to deconstruct the texts they wrote, although it (deconstruction) is closer to linguistic studies than to literary studies. However, reading their poems forces the reader and literary critic to analyze them from a purely literary-critical perspective. Therefore, this study argues that the binary oppositions of death and life in the poetry of John Donne and Robert Herrick yield numerous interpretations, meanings, and themes through an exploration of *différance*, trace, absence, and presence in a deconstructive framework, applicable to the analysis of poetry. It aims to examine and deconstruct the binary of life-death in selected poems by the metaphysical poets and Cavalier poets. The study analyzes two poems by the metaphysical poet John Donne and two poems by Robert Herrick, a Cavalier poet, who represent different approaches to presenting themes in their work. It serves as a research sample for a deconstructive analysis of the binary oppositions of life and death, focusing on the binary oppositions and interpretive distinctions within the texts. The study concluded that the contrasting and deferential hermeneutical interpretation (*différance*) of the binary of death and life in the poems of John Donne and Robert Herrick cannot be limited to the meanings, interpretations, and readings presented in this article, but will continue to deconstruct indefinitely.

Keywords: Metaphysical Poetry, Cavalier Poetry, John Donne, Robert Herrick, Binary Opposition, *Différance*, Deconstruction.

تفكيك ثنائية الحياة والموت في شعر جون دون وروبرت هيريك: قراءة داريدية

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الملخص

لطالما كان شعر شعراء الميتافيزيقيا والفرسان مثاراً للجدل والاهتمام على مر القرون الثلاثة التي خلت لما يُقدمه من صور ولغة وموضوعات كموضوعات الموت والحياة تختلف عن سابقتها ولاحقاتها من القصائد. لذا صار لزاماً على الباحثين والمهتمين وخبراء الدراسات النقدية الأدبية تناوله ضمن الحدود التي تمنحه قيمته البحثية والأكاديمية المستحقة. ويمكن ضرورة استخدام نظرية جاك دريدا تفكيكاً للنصوص التي كتبها رغم انها (اي التفكيكية) أقرب الى الدراسات اللغوية منها الى الادبية، بيد أن قراءة قصائدهم تجبر القارئ والناقد الادبي على أن يحللها من منظور أدبي نقدي بحت. لذلك تجادل الدراسة بأن الثنائيات الضدية للموت والحياة في شعر جون دون وروبرت هيريك تُنتج تفسيرات ومعانٍ ومواضيع عديدة من خلال استكشاف الإرجاء، الأثر، الغياب والحضور في إطار تفكيكي، ينطبق على تحليل الشعر. وهكذا، فإن هذه الدراسة تبحث في دراسة قصيدتين للشاعر الميتافيزيقي جون دون وقصيدتين للشاعر روبرت هيريك من الشعراء الفرسان اللذين ينتميان الى مدرستين مختلفتين في تناول الموضوعات وعرضها في قصائدهم كعينة بحثية كدراسة تفكيكية لثنائية الموت والحياة من خلال تحليل الثنائيات الضدية والتمايز او الفرق التأويلي للنص. وقد توصلت الدراسة الى أن التفسير التضادي والتأويلي التأجيلي، "الإرجاء" لثنائية الموت والحياة في قصائد جون دون وروبرت هيريك لا يمكن أن ينتهي عند المعاني والتفسير والتأويلات القرآنية في هذا المقال بل سيستمر تفكيكاً دون نهاية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعر الميتافيزيقي، شعر الفرسان، جون دون، روبرت هيريك، التضاد الثنائي، الاختلاف، التفكيك.

1. Introduction

The basic principles of the text, including meaning, contradictions, and autonomy far removed from the author, are the focus of deconstructionist study because they have become the property of the reader, who in turn is able to derive meanings and interpretations. It relies on a new, renewed reading that the poet did not consider when writing the poem. For the reader, the text is a piece that can be read from multiple perspectives and never has a single meaning or interpretation. Deconstruction makes it more dynamic and skilled at deriving new and advanced interpretations and meanings in response to shifts in societal thought and history. Deconstruction has been controversial since its inception and one of the most important intellectual and critical changes to emerge in the twentieth century in the fields of literary, intellectual, and literary criticism. Deconstruction seeks to find a new reading of the text that transcends conventional boundaries by identifying gaps and semantic shifts in meaning and interpreting them in a way that suits the new reader. The deconstructive approach was founded by philosopher Jacques Derrida in 1960, in response to the structuralism philosophy popular at the time. However, although deconstruction is originally a critical philosophical approach, it went further, carving out a critical approach to reading literary texts. Thus, the reading becomes purely philosophical and critical.

It is worth noting that, through his deconstructive ideas and theory, Derrida does not call for demolition, but rather for a different rereading of texts, without adhering to specific concepts imposed by the rules and theories of language. He also calls for a continuous reading, as continuity means new interpretations for each reader, with a different perspective on their reading of these texts. Poetic texts prepared for deconstructive reading are usually open to multiple or infinite interpretations in deconstructive criticism. They lend themselves to semantically confused interpretations that reflect the emotional, social, religious, and even political fragmentation of the poet, who wrote his text with an intentionality that a modern reader cannot grasp under the influence of deconstruction. Although the prevailing critical notion holds that deconstruction is an anti-metaphysical concept, this does not mean that it undermines the poetic and philosophical value of metaphysical poetry. This is because metaphysical poetry and the poetry of the Cavaliers are far removed from relying on absolute, fixed

truths. Therefore, reading them with a deconstructive, critical approach grants them the right to open interpretation and explanation.

Contemporary critical reading does not stop at a specific point but rather transcends it, producing multiple forms of approaches that view literary texts in a new and contemporary light. A text cannot be left with fixed interpretations that persist for centuries without being deconstructed and reread. The deconstructive approach in the context of reading poetry offers in-depth readings of previous texts that cannot be left to die with fixed readings. The philosophical, historical, and critical depth of this approach establishes a contemporary critical method that attracts ideas and meanings worthy of note, attention, and study. Thus, forms of reading English poetry are evolving, representing a major shift in the depth of understanding literary texts within postmodern interpretations. Deconstruction undermines all preceding Western cognitive and linguistic constants because it conjures up unstable meanings that are far removed from centrality. An English poem cannot be read from a single, fixed perspective but rather blends all possibilities, displacements, postponements, interpretations, and contradictions. Through poetry, we can read history, language, traditions, and conventions and observe how literary texts have fallen victim to them. Therefore, it is necessary to delve into the hidden and ambiguous aspects of literary texts, especially poetry, and deconstruct them to allow the reader to read deeply, away from contextual, traditional, and linguistic experimental interpretations.

The topics covered in poetry throughout the ages vary according to several factors, including social, religious, and economic. However, this study is concerned with tracking and examining the most important commonalities, differences, and discrepancies between metaphysical poetry, which is related to the mental, intellectual, and philosophical aspects of the poet, by comparing two completely different things in terms of form, type, and unequal relationship on one hand. Besides the poetry of the Cavalier that urges the enjoyment of life and its beauty on the other hand. The study deals with their use of rhetorical devices, imagery, treatment of the same subject matter, the theme of *carpe diem*, the attitude toward mortality. It compares the style of poetry in these two schools, the topics presented, and how they deal with them in a poetic framework in harmony with the social and political nature of the time. In principle, both schools are similar in some of the issues they deal with, such as the investment of time and love, but they may differ in terms of content and purpose as well as in other topics, such as delving into the issues of unequal comparison as well as issues of mortality.

The diversity of poetry topics and its evolution are related to its relationship with society and religion, as well as the social and political ties within its community. These developments helped the emergence of poetry schools that played an effective role in enriching the cultural system with poetic models referred to as important and prestigious position in the field of poetry. Among those schools is the metaphysical school which is a literary and philosophical trend that searches in the phenomena of the world in a mental way, not a mystical intuition, mixes the mind with emotion. It is a branch of philosophy related to the fundamental nature of reality that creates literary methods that combine the different and the combination of intellectual imagination and natural phenomena [1]. It aims to provide a structured description of the world and the principles that govern it. Unlike the natural sciences, which study specific aspects of the world, metaphysics is an investigative science that is broader in the basic aspects of beings. Metaphysicists rely on analytical patterns that in turn depend on pure logic rather than the experimental approach followed by naturalists. The metaphysics speculation focused

on basic concepts such as space and time, causality, identity and change, possibility and necessity, singularities and generalities, mind and body [2].

Metaphysical doctrine began in England, although its ideas greatly influenced writers of neoclassicism in the whole of Europe and the entire Western Hemisphere. Some believe that Christian religious beliefs are the intellectual background for literary metaphysical doctrine. Perhaps a person's inability to understand the unseen things in life pushed him to express all the unseen phenomena, such as soul and life, fate and death, through poetry, novels, and drama in order to reach an understanding of the essence of these phenomena. The Metaphysical poets have been known for their ability to surprise or scare readers and present new viewpoints by using a metaphor called conceit, paradoxical language, less forceful statements, imaginative syntax, and representations of literature, philosophy, and religion. According to Harmon and Holman, the chief characteristics of Metaphysical Poetry are:

the startling rhythm and diction and the variety of tone. The poets speak in their own persona or create dramatically different characters, or in other words, the poets use self-dramatization more than self-expression, showing internal dramatic conflicts. The meter and stanzas are used to evoke emotions that emphasize action, tension, and conflict. They also use argumentation, logic and dialectical expression. The metaphors and similes, which are often extended into metaphysical conceits, are original and startling. Its content shows sensuousness, directness, and immediacy and is often religious [3].

Critics suggest that the designation "Metaphysical poets" does not imply a unified worldview among these poets; rather, it indicates a common poetic style and method of organizing thoughts. John Donne (1572-1631) is a key figure in metaphysics, having established the metaphysical school in English poetry. He is associated with 17th-century poets such as John Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Robert Crashaw, Andrew Marvell, and Abraham Cowley, who adopted his approach to the Mysteries of Existence.

Similar to the metaphysical school, another group or school of poetry emerged during the same time period, namely in the 17th century. This group, or school, of poetry was known as the Cavalier poets, and it was formed in favour of King Charles and against those who supported the Commonwealth. Its ideas may have been different from those of the metaphysical school. In the 17th century, they were participants of the aristocracy, and they were called after King Charles I, who was ultimately put to death because of a civil war. Even though they supported the king and the court party in opposition to the Puritans and Parliament, they did not use their poetry as a propaganda tool against the adversaries of the monarch. The poets Robert Herrick, Richard Lovelace, Thomas Carew, and Sir John Suckling are often considered to be the most well-known of the Cavalier poets. Lyrics from the Cavalier were influenced by both Ben Jonson and John Donne. It was a source of pride for most of the Cavalier poets to refer to themselves as "the children of Ben." After taking all of this into consideration, Harmon and Holman define cavalier poetry as follows:

courtly, off-hand, and loyal to the monarchy. Its chief characteristics are graceful and melodious. It has polished diction and meter, showing an elegant display of Latin classical influences. Sometimes it is licentious and cynical, but often epigrammatic and witty. Carpe Diem is a frequent theme; the persona often in the guise of a military swashbuckler or aristocratic courtier, and the poems are often occasional [3].

The clarity and lucidity of language, emotional regulation, and sound maturity have all been derived from Ben Jonson. Under Donne's influence, they used in their poetry a conversational tone, philosophical thoughts, etc. Both Ben Jonson and John Donne have therefore been their role models. Their most popular characteristics in poetry are, without a doubt, that most poets celebrate beauty, love, nature, sensuality, drinking, good fellowship, honour and social life. The study argues that the binary oppositions of death and life yield numerous interpretations, meanings, and themes through an exploration of trace, absence, and presence in a deconstructive framework, applicable to the analysis of poetry. This study aims to examine and deconstruct the binary of life-death in selected poems by the metaphysical poets and Cavalier poets. The study analyzes two poems by the metaphysical poet John Donne and two poems by Robert Herrick, a Cavalier poet, who represent different approaches to presenting themes in their work. It serves as a research sample for a deconstructive analysis of the binary oppositions of life and death, focusing on the binary oppositions and interpretive distinctions within the texts.

2. Methodology

This study adopted an objective qualitative analytical approach. This methodology examines recurring themes in literary works, including the binary oppositions of death and life, by linking them to the critical reading factors of deconstruction theory. This methodology was applied by selecting two poems by John Donne and two poems by Robert Herrick from two different schools of thought, each of which addressed the themes and presented them in their poems as a research sample. Jacques Derrida's deconstruction concepts that are related to the binary of death and life were applied, demonstrating their relationship to the perspective of the ordinary and critical reader. Derrida's concept of the binary oppositions and the related substances, such as *différance*, trace, absence, and presence, was chosen. Thus, narrative excerpts were selected for the current study based on the nature of these two poets' poetry and the possibility of interpreting the binaries in modern ways that were perhaps not considered by the poets themselves. The desired results of the research were achieved by analyzing them according to the aforementioned methodology.

3. Theoretical Background

Jacques Derrida's deconstruction ruins the primary method for recognizing binary oppositions, illustrating that each word, rather of being a full antithesis of its counterpart, operates inside it. Subsequently, the framework of antagonism that maintained their separation disintegrates. The distinction between the two becomes indistinguishable, rendering binary opposition meaningless or transforming it into a play of literary interpretation. This approach is termed 'deconstruction' as it amalgamates the construction of meaning with the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence inside the text. The concept posits that one should neither establish a new binary system with the formerly subordinate word elevated nor dismantle the existing system [4].

According to Lietch's view of Derrida's definition of difference, *différance* means the displacement of meaning from the codes that constitute language. All texts undergo historical transformations and interpretations that are subject to a general reference and system. He believes that the connotations and interpretations carried by the words of a literary text are distinguished by their difference from one another due to the endless sequence of language vocabulary, removed from its written context.

Therefore, meaning is temporarily postponed, indefinitely, such that each word and meaning leads to another semantic interpretation without arriving at a specific meaning for those words. Derrida seeks to undermine the authority of presence and distance it from the control of the reader, who is under its influence. As a result, the literary work transforms into a never-ending stream of connotations and interpretations. Deferring semantic meanings within the limits of difference means a lack of stability and constancy on a unified interpretation, but rather open beginnings and ends. From this perspective, Derrida coined his term “*différance*,” whereby the semantic and interpretive meaning remains suspended and postponed, with no known meaning. Time and place. The attempt to obtain one meaning after another will be repeated according to the repetition of the idea of the presence of meaning and its difference through the system of difference and postponement. Thus, the path remains paved for any new reader in a new time and place, without specific restrictions on the method of reading and its tools [5].

Derrida's deconstructionism introduces new dialogues and ideas that uncover various interpretations of literary texts, highlighting the depth of their semantic meanings. By analysing the binary oppositions and the interpretive differences in the text, Derrida uses “difference” to generate multiple interpretations, meanings, and themes while exploring difference, trace, absence, and presence within a deconstructive framework. Indeed, it establishes the binary opposition and a departure from the centrality of the logocentric meaning familiar to classical readers of poetic texts. Norris, C., and B. Andrew see deconstruction as:

is ‘philosophical’ in the sense that it deploys a distinctive mode of argument in raising certain problems about knowledge, meaning and representation. It suspends our commonsense-intuitive attitude and asks what ultimate grounds exist, in the nature of experience or a priori knowledge, for those items of belief we standardly take on trust [6].

Derrida contends not just to invert but to interrogate from inside the centrality of meaning presented by binary opposition. He asserts that deconstruction is neither a method, methodology, nor a form of criticism. Derrida thinks that deconstruction serves as an effective method for articulating new insights on the text. The continuous substitution of meaning and representation in the text occurs via remnants of additional text. His deconstructive strategies focus on dissolving conceptual oppositions and disassembling hierarchical systems of thinking, allowing for their re-inscription within an alternative framework of textual meaning. Deconstruction meticulously identifies aporias, blind spots, or instances of self-contradiction within the text that inadvertently reveal the conflict between rhetoric and logic, as well as the disparity between the text’s explicit statements and its intended meaning [6].

Furthermore, Derrida adopts the concept of binary opposition, which originates from Levi-Strauss, who asserts that the elements within a structure are interconnected in opposition to one another. These units are positioned in a binary format on each side of a slash, exhibiting opposing characteristics. He contends that antonyms are inextricably linked to one another. They also possess disproportionate cultural values. The first word in a binary is consistently ascribed more cultural significance than the subsequent one. He analyzes binary opposition to investigate the essence of Western metaphysical concepts. He asserts that the first word of a binary is consistently ascribed more cultural significance in Western metaphysics. He contends that the whole of Western epistemology is founded on binaries similar to those already mentioned. They are seen as inflexible and unyielding. Furthermore, they

cannot convey excessive ideas by movement. They are also socially and culturally determined, which provides them with permanency [7].

In addition, one of the significant ideas that Derrida contributed to the field of deconstruction is the notion of the “trace”. Within the framework of deconstruction, the idea of “trace” is connected to the idea of the subjective existence of meaning. The philosophical idea of presence and the trace is dismissed by Derrida because he perceives something in the trace that eliminates it. He builds his theory on what he refers to as “presence,” which is the recognition of the existence of a system that exists outside of language and justifies reference to facts or truth. Derrida's objective is to accomplish the deconstruction of philosophy and its ambitions to experience presence by attempting to demonstrate that the function of language itself is a barrier to the accomplishment of that objective. On the other hand, Saussure is mostly concerned with the contrast that exists between the signifier and the signified. Since Saussure's idea entailed the presence of conceptions that are not based on words, he does not accept the precedence of the signified over the signifier [8].

The identification of the dissolution of the distinction exemplifies a familiar deconstructive methodology articulated by Derrida, particularly in *Grammatology*, the hierarchical elements of a binary opposition are inverted, and the subordinate term is conceptualized as *différance*, which ostensibly “originated” the opposition; however, Derrida refrains from characterizing *différance* as “producing” differences or oppositions, much less as a “production apparatus.” Similarly, from a distance, one may discern the kind of thought most associated with Derrida. The binary opposition is thereby both retracted and redefined. This oscillatory motion demonstrates the displacement within a system, emphasizing the processes of recurrent inscription and erasure [9]. It is also obvious in his comment on tracing the Being of anything, which could lead to the meaning. Derrida states:

then *différance*, in a certain and very strange way, (is) “older” than the ontological difference or than the truth of Being. When it has this age it can be called the play of the trace. The play of a trace which no longer belongs to the horizon of Being, but whose play transports and encloses the meaning of Being: the play of the trace, or the *différance*, which has no meaning and is not. Which does not belong. There is no maintaining, and no depth to, this bottomless chessboard on which Being is put into play [10].

Thus, *différance* can facilitate meaning within the same text with various numbers of new interpretations. In this context, meaning is immediate, and presence may signify what it represented in western metaphysics, just as a consequence of “*différance*” the perpetual deferral of meaning [10]. He also affirms his philosophy about “*différance*” when he says:

What is written as *différance*, then, will be the playing movement that “produces” --by means of something that is not simply an activity an activity--these differences, these effects of difference. This does not mean that the *différance* that produces differences is somehow before them, in a simple and unmodified--in-different--present. Difference is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name “origin” no longer suits it [10].

Then *différance* serves as an alternative to and a means of evading the logic of a transcendental signifier [11]. Derrida posits that meaning is produced via the differentiation between signifiers. Each

signifier is unique from other signifiers; nonetheless, there exists a relationship among them. The meaning of each signifier is established by its interactions with other signifiers. Nonetheless, the significance of each signifier is never entirely present at any instant; it remains perpetually missing despite its existence. Consequently, difference is not only the antithesis of presence and absence; it predates both concepts [8]. In Difference, there is no decisiveness or stability of meaning, but rather its postponement away from a single point of interpretation. Thus, it remains open to multiple interpretations and meanings with open-ended interpretations.

Through the process of deconstruction, Derrida aimed to transcend the confines and regulations of classical Western philosophy, enabling readers to navigate the intricate and well-defined passages of literary texts. Deconstructive reading, in practice, critiques the central pillars of a literary text in order to arrive at connotations that even the author may not have intended. These connotations help generate new, ongoing meanings based on deconstructing ideas and discourses and dissecting them linguistically, metaphorically, and allegorically. However, this reading does not serve as a definitive interpretation of the text; rather, it provides a gateway to countless alternative interpretations. Literary texts, by their very nature and structure, tend toward a diverse format and impact on the reader. Poetry is among the most important, oldest, profound, and most expressive literary forms, evoking the reader's emotions through its direct connection with the human spirit. Since this study examines two poems by the metaphysical poet John Donne and two poems by the Cavalier poet Robert Herrick, which are replete with nature, emotion, and imagination, this paves the way for exploring meanings and interpretations that diverge from their classical counterparts. This study conducts a deconstructive analysis of the death-life dichotomy by examining opposites and the interpretive distinctions within the text.

4. Discussion

The metaphysical poets usually use different ways to explore the multiplicity of connotations concealed behind a single thought. For example, Donne's dealing with death reveals his thoughts and beliefs about mortality and life after death as well as his religious trends at that time. In the subject of death, Donne had a strong curiosity and sought to grasp it ceaselessly during his lifetime. He, as a Christian, believed the notion of an afterlife (though perhaps he did not grasp it). His interpretation of death as a required stage before achieving the glory of heaven, the promised life with God, reflects this conviction [12]. In his poetry, death is one of the principal themes. In songs and sonnets and Holy Sonnets, his effort to overcome death is expressed. Death in songs and sonnets is not real, but fictional and imaginary. The death of the Holy sonnets; however, oppresses Donne in real life. Two factors may define his attitude toward death; the first one is the positive attitude that eagerly desires death, and the other is the cynical mindset that persistently opposes death. They have something in common, even though these two attitudes are paradoxical and conflicted. In this context, he refers to two main points; mortality of man and immortality after death [13].

In addition, religion influenced people strongly every day, theology fashioned social life in its most detail, and the monastery governed the throne and its subjects as a rigid master who made people abstain from the world [14]. In light of this, in his poem "Death Be Not Proud" Donne addresses death as if he is conversing with a friend, encouraging readers to overcome their fear of it. He challenges the concept of death, urging individuals not to fear it and to resist its defeat. He posits that death serves as

a means for the soul to attain freedom [15]. In his poem “Death Be Not Proud”, Donne’s attitude towards death is so severe that he rejects its “mighty and dreadful”, he personifies death, addresses death as if he talks to his close friend: “Death, be not proud, though some have called thee/ Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;” [16], so as to modify its dangerous saying that it is a mere way of escaping from life. Finally, they have been incorporated into a transcendental mentality. He has declined the belief that death as life’s end. On the contrary, he believes that only through death is the way to overcome death. Although death is a part of the creation of God, but it is not all-powerful, it is a kind of “sleep,” a middle stage to pass to the afterlife [16].

In analyzing John Donne’s poems, particularly those addressing the theme of death, it is essential to explore the binary of death and life. In the poem “Death, Be Not Proud” the concept of *différance* serves to deconstruct the binary opposition between death and life. He personifies death in the poem, addressing it as though it were a companion. In this instance, he appears to remove the authoritative guise from the poetic representation of death, seeking to perceive it as lacking power and authority. Consequently, when death is devoid of its associations with fear and power, its significance alters, and authority dissipates. Thus, power diminishes, leading to the cessation of the fear of death. When he severs the link between life and death, death’s significance diminishes, and it is deprived of its prevailing interpretation and the widely accepted perception as the antithesis of life. The analysis and critical as well as conventional readings of death are deferred and absent in their dominant form. Consequently, the concept of *différance* effectively illustrates that the presence of meaning, interpretation of a poem, analysis of a vision, and other aspects of death, as posited by Derrida, are primarily shaped by the absence of oppositional meaning and its differences.

Derrida interprets binaries as chronological signs rather than definitive conclusions to events. Continuous interpretation defers the significance of death by employing “*différance*” in relation to life. The dynamic and ongoing relationship between death and life establishes and validates the existence of each, indicating that their relationship varies in semantic and interpretive significance, thus complicating the genuine connection between them. This produces the trace known as “*différance*” wherein meaning diverges from its stability and transitions toward another, deferred absence. Donne’s approach to death involves its displacement, resulting in a trace defined by the negation of both death and killing. It endures without its power, leading to the dissolution of its semantic meaning, thereby converting it into a different absence. He challenges the taboos that uphold the sanctity of death’s authority in various religions and beliefs, stating, “Death, be not proud, though some have called them, /Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so.” He deconstructs his binary with life, unafraid of its potential to be removed. It further delays the framework that connects it to life, resulting in instability. Subsequently, it undergoes gradual oscillation until it attains the state of postponement. Consequently, death diminishes in its fearsome and authoritative aspects, transforming into an entity engaged with by a human, rather than the conventional notion of death, as expressed in the line, “Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee” [16]. The erosion of power and authority disrupts the dichotomy of life and death, reallocating responsibility to the recipient and destabilizing the role of death. The devaluation of the object is attributed to its representation through less impactful images and scenes, as opposed to those that provide entertainment and a sense of reassurance and comfort. Sleep and recreation, as representations of rest, utilize the concept of oscillation to create a separation from the

original trace, in line with Derrida's notion of difference. Images of death create a deferred impact, mirroring those of sleep and rest.

This trace is evident in the reduction of death's power, authority, and status, as Donne characterizes it as a mere "slave": "Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men" [16]. In this context, he critiques the concept of death, positioning it as subordinate to human agency and material existence, rather than the reverse. He recognizes the absence of his authoritative role as a significant figure in shaping the meanings of semantic images. The stability of binary constructs is a fundamental principle within deconstruction theory. In the poem, Donne intentionally introduces elements that differentiate these binaries, softening their distinctness and permanence, as illustrated in the line, "One short sleep past, we wake eternally," [16]. The semantic pattern of binary is characterized by fragmented and disintegrated straight lines, producing transient meanings of death that oscillate without settling at a definitive temporal point.

Donne ultimately constructs a coffin for death, an act that serves as a basis for the principle of deconstruction and its implications. If death ceases to exist, how can it remain an opposing binary following this direct displacement of its existence and presence, which oscillates and ultimately disintegrates into antithetical infinity? This process influences the temporal sequence of time related to the concept of death, shaped by the absence of life and the impossibility of death's presence. The conventional representation of death dissolves, shifts, is deferred, varies, and extends into an infinite array of meanings and interpretations, distancing itself from the intrinsic significance of death. This poem by Donne negates the metaphysics of death, situating it within a linguistic semantic framework characterized by imagery of sleep, rest, and slavery. He critiques its actions and attributes, delays its binary interpretation, challenges the dominant concept of death, and even anthropomorphizes it by depicting it as capable of experiencing death. He functions as a decipherer akin to Derrida, adept at interpreting the binary of death as infinite by rearticulating its semantic significance through ongoing differentiation and the deferral of its manifestation in both form and meaning.

The second poem by Donne in this study to be analyzed, "A Nocturnal upon S. Lucie's Day, Being the Shortest Day" differentiates itself from the other songs and sonnets by encapsulating the quintessence of his nuanced poetic style while achieving a distinctive equilibrium between religious and profane expressions of love. "Nocturnal" depicts the poet overwhelmed by the death of his beloved, striving to derive solace from the prospect of reuniting with her in the hereafter. Refusing to dwell in profound disillusionment and sorrow, as shown in "Farewell to Love" or "Love's Alchymie," he forsakes earthly love in favour of divine love. The poem's distorted brutality reflects the immense effort required to reconstruct, or at least start the reconstruction of, a mind completely ravaged by profound despair. Consequently, the poem is both potent and contentious to the extent that several commentators see it only as a manifestation of unmitigated sadness. Recently, it has been acknowledged that the "Nocturnal" transitions from despair to resolution. The poet navigates a sequence of destruction-creation units, ultimately confronting a negative existence, culminating in a realm where destruction and creation are not sequentially opposing and complementary happenings, but rather where destruction transforms into a kind of creation [17].

Deconstruction as a means of renewal enhances poets' works by employing antagonistic binaries to establish a semantic framework that favors one aspect of the binary, consequently introducing

instability in meaning. In Donne's poem "A Nocturnal upon S. Lucie's Day, Being the Shortest Day," the death-life dichotomy is explored, portraying death as a form of new birth and an indication of new life, notwithstanding the associated pain. He does not depict death as an immediate presence; instead, he affirms it through the experience of loss. In the second stanza of the poem, he says:

Study me then, you who shall lovers be
At the next world, that is, at the next spring;
For I am every dead thing,
In whom Love wrought new alchemy.
For his art did express
A quintessence even from nothingness,
From dull privations, and lean emptiness;
He ruin'd me, and I am re-begot

Of absence, darkness, death: things which are not [16].

He appears to be indicating to researchers that his words will be interpreted, experienced, and conveyed in a different context. Death is not an entity but the absence of life itself. The identity of the grieving, loving poet is fundamentally rooted in death. His deconstruction of life is perpetual, with the letters of his poem representing an eternal existence, an unbroken trace, and a manifestation of life's absence. The trace of life serves as a structural indicator of the existence of death.

The assertion, "For I am every dead thing," [16], exemplifies a key aspect of deconstruction. This uniform mixture of organic matter signifies the lack of life. He suggests that the fragmentation of his self into inanimate objects represents a collection of absent lives. This is due to his rejection of the existence of entities; instead, he eradicates them from both existence and presence at the fundamental level of life. Consequently, the trace persists temporarily before vanishing, undergoing transformation and gradual fading. In this context, Donne illustrates the existence of life amid its absence by highlighting the void of certain elements. He negates his own presence, rendering himself absent, thus experiencing a form of death through love, where death emerges from nothingness. Through his art and correspondence, he evokes the emergence of traces from nothingness and emptiness, thereby creating an image imbued with new meaning. He suggests that all of this transpires through the concepts of absence, darkness, and death—elements that are non-existent. It appears that he articulates Derrida's theory of absence, presence, and death, invoking contrasting binaries through absent and nonexistent entities.

In the third stanza, Donne identifies his purpose in the dispersion of meaning and the relocation of semantic interpretations from their original contexts. He thereby delays and postpones meaning, distributing it among the soul, life, form, and spirit: "All others, from all things, draw all that's good, /Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing have;" [16]. These connotations contradict the concept of death; however, he situates himself in the grave and subsequently refutes it. The interplay of affirmation, negation, return, and distancing enhances the potential to systematically deconstruct meaningless gaps and perpetually defer the essence of the soul within the tumultuous significations of

existence, which he characterizes as a flood. The flood signifies the persistence of the trace, which consistently retreats from its dispersed nature. This stanza illustrates deconstructive imagery: “Drown the whole world, us two; oft did we grow/To be two Chaosses, when we did show” [16], depicting the disassembly of the opposing binary of death and life. His use of “us two” illustrates the binary of life and death, where “he” and “his beloved” both complete and negate one another. This supports Derrida’s principle of generating chaos, “To be two Chaosses,” in semantic interpretation through delay, difference, and postponement, resulting in a tripartite trace on meaning. He reaffirms Derrida’s concept of semantic meaning by emphasizing the themes of presence and absence, as demonstrated in the phrase, “Care to ought else; and often absences/Withdrew our souls, and made us carcasses.” [16]. This transformation results in both spiritual and physical subjugation, illustrated by the images of corpses that manifest and vanish in the absence of the soul.

In addition, Donne traverses the poem towards self-negation: “But I am None; nor will my Sunne renew.” [16]. His disappearance and reappearance effectively negate his existence. He also reorganizes his identity, similar to the process of deconstruction, by deferring difference. The absence or presence of meaning is neither permanent nor stable, leading to a reinterpretation of meaning through the deconstruction of the binary of life and death, as well as their interplay of absence and presence. Thus, he laments and urges young readers to embrace and employ antithetical binaries as a crucial and foundational aspect in the recurrence of absences and presences of meaning. He examines Derrida’s notion of deconstructing the death-life binary by negating the self through the ideas of presence and deferred absence. The existence of love does not imply the nonexistence of death, nor does the converse hold true. “Différance” arises from the delineation of meaning’s absence and presence.

Moreover, Donne’s employment of verbal metaphors, including the sun, flowers, and plants, signifies the existence of life and the deferral of death. This principle is similarly applicable to the existence of night and the nonexistence of day, and conversely. Furthermore, he employs the terms “nothing” and “non-meaning” to displace presence, activate its absence, and demonstrate the continuity of meaning in spite of that absence. The poem illustrates the principle of deconstruction concerning the binary of death and life, as Don exists in a state of both being dead and alive, while his beloved is simultaneously absent and present. The principle and concept of the trace are grounded in the reformulation of this binary through the postponement of death and its representation in various metaphorical images. The elements of his poem illustrate the application of the principles of presence and absence within the framework of deconstruction, encompassing concepts such as postponement, displacement, and trace.

In a different context, Robert Herrick’s poem “His Meditation upon Death” is included among the referenced works; therefore, it does not represent a parody in the conventional sense. Although they convert the sacred into profane applications, it is crucial to recognize that the profane use maintains considerable seriousness. Their objective is to merge classical concepts of endurance in poetry with ritualistic implications of timelessness and eternity, thus converting mutability into permanence through two distinct approaches. Poetry and its monuments exist within one context, whereas souls continue in a different one. The poems express the classical confidence found in “The Pillar of Fame” alongside the Christian faith evident in “His Meditation upon Death” These poems reflect an expression of, and a dual response to, the mutability consistently observed by Herrick [18].

The selected poem for analysis through Jacques Derrida's lens of deconstruction is Robert Herrick's "His Meditation Upon Death". This poem reflects on a significant, daily, and recurring event. The principle of deconstruction posits that absence and presence can either advance or delay meaning, yet the trace persists. The trace serves as the primary and fundamental rationale for selecting this specific poem. He initiates his poem by reflecting on its conclusion, engaging in a contemplation that highlights the element of time, though it is a subtle aspect, as noted in the line, "Blest with the meditation of my end:" [19]. Understanding these meditations is essential for interpretation. The existence of death and the lack of the life in this binary opposition validate the principle of deconstruction and highlight the trace in its absence. Meditation is characterized as a form of death, as noted by Herrick, without juxtaposing it with an opposing binary concept. Conversely, he illustrates the absence of the opposite as a direct deconstruction of it, even when a trace is present. Herrick, or the speaker, conveys a sense of denial and indifference toward life and age, irrespective of their duration: "Nor makes it matter Nestor's years to tell," [19]. This assertion undermines the intended coherence of meaning within the poet's exploration of life and death binary. Life presents inherent chaos, despite the appearance of a structured sequence. "An abundance of days accumulated rarely results in order, but rather in confusion." [19]. He seeks to dismantle the order of binary by generating chaos that undermines the central significance of life's meaning. Departing significantly from the core concept of binary effectively eliminates the existence of its counterpart. He presents various images of death, including sleep and burial, to challenge and deconstruct the authority and power associated with death. "And when the night persuades me to my bed, I'll think I'm going to be buried." [19]. He is simply a visitor or an image that emerges through contemplation, nothing further. The images of death, including meditation, sleep, and burial, represent a trace of a binary existing within a state of semantic chaos as documented by "différance".

Likewise, Herrick's mixing and separation in his portrayal of death as sleep and life as sleep create a binary of presence and absence in meaning. In his meditations, the concepts of the body, resurrection, destruction, the judge, the peasant, and the prince emerge as significant life images. The lines, "Which must produce me to that General Doom, /To which the peasant, so the prince, must come," [19], highlight their perpetual presence and absence. The dual images appear at the poet's discretion and conversely. The existence of these images post-mortem undermines the significance of death and creates a new presence with an alternative meaning, termed "différance". It also defers the interpretation of death as a contrast to the existence of life in various forms, thereby viewing it as a temporal phase within the conventional continuum that connects the binary of death and life. Meaning may be postponed, yet it manifests in various forms: "Let me, though late, yet at the last, begin" [19]. This represents a trace of meaning that precedes it and extends indefinitely. According to Herrick, events do not culminate, as death represents both security and triumph:

Such let my life assure me, when my breath
Goes thieving from me, I am safe in death;
Which is the height of comfort: when I fall,
I rise triumphant in my funeral. [19]

The image of the fall presents a contradiction and conflict in its semantic meaning with linguistic and interpretive constants; however, it results from the deconstruction of the binary of death as a fall. Derrida deconstructs this binary by establishing a trace of a new emergence, resulting in a postponement that embodies both absence and presence of meanings that persist indefinitely. In Herrick's poem, presence manifests as an absence akin to contemplation, sleep, and burial; conversely, absence embodies a presence reminiscent of falling and victory. He reorganizes the antithetical binary of death and life as a constant presence that revives, falls, fragments, and disintegrates, generating numerous images and meanings that emerge, vanish, and are deferred over time, resulting in purely linguistic and religious implications.

The same theme takes on new form in comparison to other poems; "To Daffodils" exhibits a complexity and paradoxical nature that is unmatched, particularly when considered alongside "His Meditation upon Death," with which it shares certain similarities. Each poem enhances the overall understanding of the situation by examining it from multiple perspectives. In order to conduct a more thorough analysis, it is necessary to incorporate additional poems. The poem exemplifies Herrick's *carpe diem* philosophy, emphasizing the transient nature of beauty and life as symbolized by the fleeting existence of daffodils. The primary themes address the impermanence of life and the shared mortality between humans and nature, emphasizing the transient nature of existence, which makes the work both poignant and relatable to readers across different generations [18].

Additionally, Herrick employs a non-human entity to explore the binary of life and death, illustrating how the trace varies in presenting death to elucidate the semantic implications of existence. The beauty of nature elucidates the presence of life through the imagery of flowers, despite their ephemeral nature "You haste away so soon;" [19]. This phenomenon reflects an aesthetic absence, characterized by the trace left behind. The departure of the flower signifies its aesthetic significance. His appeal to the flower, urging it to remain, signifies a deferred absence, and the variation in the timing of displacement affirms the existence of the trace. The lack of trace and the existence of meaning illustrate Derrida's principle of deconstructing the binary of death. He exerts control over the poem while addressing the flower, allowing the reader to engage with the text at any moment, thereby conjuring and dismissing oppositions at will, which results in chaos and fragmentation within the work. His integration of floral nature with themes of absence and presence in relation to human nature challenges the coherence and strength of binaries, emphasizing the significance of humanity in both death and life. The simile's purpose, then, is not to prove death, but rather to signify absence through presence, and vice versa: "We have short time to stay, as you, /We have as short a spring;" [19].

It is important to note that Derrida articulates the count and chronological sequence of the flower's demise by challenging the stability of binaries in both time and the trace left by the flower's death and withering. The trace represents a life generated by death for the flower, alongside the simile that Herrick invokes in the poem. Moreover, his metaphor depicting death as wilting, drying up, and the vanishing of dew supports Derrida's assertion regarding the inherent instability of the semantic binary of death. Thus, his metaphorical depiction of death presents an imaginary and unrealistic portrayal, illustrating the fragility of fixed binary using of the previously mentioned images. The text illustrates the deferral of death's presence for the flower "différance" while simultaneously challenging the notion of life's absence, as evidenced by the impact of death's delayed presence "As your hours do, and dry/Away," [19]. Herrick's intended chaos and fragmentation in the poem, achieved through his

manipulation of the presence and absence of meaning, establish an ongoing instability of meaning that leads to the disintegration of binaries into infinity. He, thus, offers an original interpretation of life, emphasizing its manifestation through the interplay of chronological sequences in both life and human existence. This mixing can induce chaos that results in postponements and delays, ultimately leaving a lasting impact on the absence of life as a poetic event, characterized by the passage of time rather than the absence of death.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the deconstruction of the death binary in selected poems by two poets from distinct schools, the Cavalier and metaphysical, reveals instances of creative, critical, and literary linguistic phenomena. John Donne's "A Nocturnall Upon S. Lucies Day" and "Death Be Not Proud" employ a binary opposition of death and life, both explicitly through the use of the terms and implicitly through metaphorical language. Derrida's perspective on binary opposition demonstrates that Donne employed it in a fragmented manner, where meaning is destabilized by the interplay of absence and presence, oscillating and varying, while the trace remains evident. He did not portray death as the opposite of life, nor vice versa. He portrayed life not as the opposite of life, but rather as the foundation for the trace's existence. In these poems, he demonstrates the absence of life to affirm its presence and existence. Similarly, death was depicted as an event postponed through linguistic analogies. The significance derived from the binary is characterized by oscillation, instability, fragmentation, and deferral, influenced by presence, absence, and difference.

Turning to Herrick, he considered the binary of death and life as a linguistic and temporal relational construct. He utilized metaphors to portray death in a manner that diminished its authority and power, delayed its arrival, and at times obscured life, while at other instances necessitating its acknowledgment. He also employed binary elements to document, establish, and defer the negation of death. He successfully invoked one through the absence of the other, consistent with Derrida's principle, and vice versa.

In conclusion, both Donne and Herrick exemplify the principle of deconstruction through their use of images, metaphors, and poetic dialogues that transcend the binary opposition of death and life. In Donne's poems, novel representations of death and life arise, with their imagery being subverted by the simultaneous presence and absence inherent in each aspect of the binary. Herrick similarly integrated natural depictions of death with human imagery to illustrate the instability, chaos, and fragmentation inherent in this binary. He highlighted the enduring influence of each side in relation to the other, noting that it is at times postponed, present, or absent, varying continuously until achieving continuity. The poems of both poets exemplify Derrida's concepts of presence and absence, as well as trace and difference, through the language of the text, its poetics, and its various forms. Each reader interprets these traces differently, influenced by the chronological sequence of the text.

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