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Praxis

**A Peer-Reviewed Journal of
The Department of English
University of Rajshahi**

Editor

Dr. Md. Sakhawat Hossain

Associate Editors

Dr. Mahbuba Hasina

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Editorial Preface

Praxis: Journal of the Department of English, University of Rajshahi is committed to maintaining rigorous academic and ethical standards in the publication of scholarly research in the English language, linguistics, and literature. As a double-blind peer-reviewed journal, *Praxis* ensures that all submitted manuscripts undergo an impartial and thorough evaluation process, safeguarding both academic integrity and intellectual merit.

The journal adheres strictly to a policy of originality. Submissions are unpublished and not be under consideration for publication elsewhere. Any form of plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, is considered a serious breach of academic ethics and results in immediate rejection. Authors are responsible for ensuring the authenticity of their work and for properly acknowledging all sources in accordance with recognized citation standards.

To maintain disciplinary coherence while encouraging intellectual diversity, *Praxis* accepts contributions primarily within the fields of English studies, linguistics and English Language Teaching. Interdisciplinary work is welcomed, provided it demonstrates a clear and substantive engagement with these core areas. All manuscripts are written in English and follow either the MLA (9th edition) or the APA (7th edition) style, depending on the disciplinary orientation of the paper.

The journal enforces a structured submission protocol. Manuscripts fall within the prescribed length and include an abstract and a brief author bio-note. Submissions are accepted in both print and digital formats, prepared according to specified formatting guidelines. To ensure equitable representation, each author is permitted to submit only one manuscript per volume. In cases of joint authorship, full disclosure of all contributors and their institutional affiliations is required.

The editorial board reserves the right to make necessary revisions for clarity, coherence, and consistency without altering the substantive argument of the work. Final decisions regarding publication rest solely with the editorial board, based on reviewers' recommendations and the journal's standards. Individual authors, and not the Editorial Board, are responsible for the views expressed in their writing.

Through these policies, *Praxis* seeks to uphold excellence, transparency, and fairness in academic publishing, fostering a scholarly environment that values critical inquiry, methodological rigor, and intellectual responsibility.

In Memoriam: Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed Md. Sakhawat Hossain

I had the privilege of being a direct student of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed, and the memory of his classroom remains one of the most formative experiences of my intellectual life. He was not a teacher of abundance in number, but of precision and distinction; he took relatively few classes, yet each one bore the mark of rare excellence. His lectures were events that were often animated, lucid, and deeply engaging, without ever obscuring the depth of his scholarship.

What set him apart most strikingly was his method. He had the remarkable ability to render even the most extended and complex texts into something graspable without diminishing their intellectual weight. With a lightness of touch and a finely tuned sense of humour, he guided students into the depths of a text as if it were the most natural of movements. His wit was never ornamental; it was pedagogical and it was an instrument through which difficulty dissolved and insight emerged. Many of his students would testify that his classes were filled with mirth, yet never lost their seriousness of purpose.

In demeanour, he was at once formal and disarmingly intimate. His English was impeccable, measured, and refined, reflecting a deep command of language and tradition. Yet he was not bound by rigidity; at moments, he would slip into Bangla, often to delightful effect, using humour to draw students closer into the discussion. He had a characteristic habit of addressing students as “thou,” a gesture that seemed to collapse distance while invoking an older, almost Shakespearean intimacy. Standing before the class, he maintained an alert and penetrating gaze so that no student could afford inattentiveness, yet none felt excluded or disengaged. His presence commanded attention without coercion.

His intellectual range was formidable. He possessed a sharp and integrated knowledge of English literature, history, philosophy, and the broader Christian and Western intellectual traditions. Yet his scholarly vision was not confined within conventional disciplinary boundaries. His doctoral work on the literary techniques of *Surah Yasin* remains a landmark contribution that demonstrates his courageous attempt to bring Islamic textuality into the sphere of literary criticism. In doing so, he opened a space for dialogue between traditions that are too often kept apart.

Born on 31 December 1938, Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed completed his MA in English from the Department of English, University of Rajshahi, in 1960, and qualified in the then Special East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCS) examination. He joined the Department of English at the University of Rajshahi on 10 March 1973 and served there with distinction until his retirement as Professor on 30 December 2004. He passed away on 16 May 2022, leaving behind a legacy of intellectual brilliance, pedagogical excellence, and humane values.

Dedication



Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed
(31 December 1938-16 May 2022)

This Volume is dedicated to the cherished memory of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed—a teacher of rare brilliance, a scholar of profound humanity.

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Racial Segregation in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*: A Post-Structural Rereading

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Abstract

This paper discusses the contemporary circumstances regarding the segregation between White and Black people in the southern part of America, which are manifested especially through the eyes of the children: Scout, Jem, and Dill from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Marguerite (Maya Angelou's nickname) and Bailey from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. If Scout and the other children in *To Kill a Mockingbird* are recorded with a presumably easy and happy upbringing with an invulnerable position in a prejudiced white society, Maya and her brother in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* are noted for a rather harsh childhood without the affection and secure placement in the same southern part of the country. The two narrating voices account for their experiences separately, being distinct as to races and occurrences, denoting their distinct positions in society. Nevertheless, several parallel phenomena observed in the two books suggest some common issues that every human being raised in the mid-nineteenth century underwent. The goal of this study is to compare them from the viewpoints of Black and White children. Therefore, this paper aims to explore social behaviour with the implications of apparent binary oppositions, which will be later deconstructed, concurring with Derrida's idea of 'inconsistent meaning' within texts and language. In doing so, this paper juxtaposes the two aforementioned texts to identify the similarities in light of intertextuality, a poststructuralist theory that seeks to understand a text and its meaning through its relationship with other texts.

Keywords: Segregation, races, Southern America, children, social behaviour, prejudice, binary oppositions, deconstruction, intertextuality, poststructuralist theory.

Introduction:

Racial segregation has always been an institutionalized social organization of the United States, especially in the southern states where strictly defined racial relations regulated social interactions, cultural beliefs, and daily activities. As a continuation of the slavery tradition and solidified by the systematic implementation of the Jim Crow laws, segregation resulted in the social system where racial disparity was institutionalized through the legal constraints, economic marginalization, and territorial segregation. American literature in this historical setting has been a critical cultural archive that has created documentary, challenging materials of racial inequality ideological underpinnings.

To Kill a Mockingbird and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* are among the texts that best describe the experience that racial segregation entails in the American South. In spite of the fact that the texts of Harper Lee and Maya Angelou are characterized by different genres, as the former is a fictional narrative whereas the latter is an autobiographical one, both works present the social, moral, and psychological outcomes of racial discrimination in the most delicate way. Both stories are mediated by a child narrator Scout Finch in the novel by Lee and Marguerite (Maya) Johnson in the memoir of Angelou. These child-based views make the texts so clear on how racial ideologies

are experienced, learned, and bargained in the day-to-day life of the segregated populations in the American South. Supporting the fact that all human beings are born with the same innocence, irrespective of race, sex, country, time, environment, culture, and so forth, this paper intends to first locate the "factors" that initially compel the children to put each other on edge, then release the children from the binary-based society by deconstructing them.

The trial of Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird* reveals the inconsistencies that are inherent in the moral self-image of the white southern community and the ethical position of Atticus Finch predicts the conflict between law and the deeply rooted racial bias. In comparison, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* offers a very personal story on the psychological and social conflicts that African Americans went through due to the oppressive environment of the segregation. The story that Angelou tells is a foreground of the convergence of race and trauma and identity formation and resilience, thus exposing the micro impacts of systemic racial exclusion. The texts present a complementary and different view of the arrangements of racial ideology that informed the American society of the middle of the 20th century. The two works reveal the ways that racial hierarchies are replicated in the routine social practices and also reveal instances where these ideological formations are being put into question or disrupted.

The themes of racial injustice, childhood subjectivity, trauma, and resistance by the African Americans have been sought exhaustively in the existing scholarship on these texts. Nevertheless, numerous critical readings are implicitly based on unchanging conceptual oppositions, white/black, dominant/marginalized, civilized/savage, powerful/powerless, which, at some historical stage, supported the ideological justification of segregation. The post structuralist theory offers a critical approach to questioning these seemingly set binary structures. To be more precise, the deconstruction philosophy of Jacques Derrida disputes the notion that binary oppositions have stable and hierarchical signification. According to Derrida, the oppositions of this sort are internalized unstable in that the privileged term in the binary is often reliant upon the non-prevailing term in order to establish conceptual coherence and power. To deconstruction thus reveals that the underlying structures are actually unstable though they seem to be logically arranged and ideologically safe.

In agreement with this point of view, the notion of intertextuality that was created by Julia Kristeva serves as another theoretical prism that can be used to study the process of interconnection between literary works and the wider cultural discourses. To suggest that a literary work is not an autonomous or independent phenomenon, Kristeva proposes that it is constructed inside a web of textual and ideological relations that tie it to other cultural stories and discourses of history. In this sense, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* can be interpreted not only as separate texts but also as textual reactions to a common historic fact of racial segregation in the American South.

Based on these theoretical frameworks, the current study employs comparative post-structural analysis of both texts in an attempt to analyse how discourses of race are formed using binary oppositions and how the binary structures are disturbed in the texts. In the end, this paper seeks to suggest that reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* through the prismatic approaches of deconstruction and intertextuality can help better understand how literary narratives reproduce and challenge the racial ideologies of their historical time.

Research Questions:

This paper will consider the following questions to decipher its objectives:

1. How has racial segregation impacted the children regardless of race, sex, and upbringing?
2. To what extent do *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* resemble each other?
3. What factors lead one to contempt the 'Other' in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*?
4. How does Derrida's theory of deconstruction reshape the functions of binary terms in the two novels?

Research Objectives:

This paper evaluates the adverse effects of the prevailing racial segregation on the emotional and mental development of both white and black children. The study also determines the level of racial persecution that leads individuals to choose between two diametrically opposite viewpoints. In addition to these, it analogizes subjects like courage, racial injustice, prejudices, black powerlessness, and human dignity to justify the correspondence between *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* in the light of Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality. Finally, this essay seeks to analyse people's dialectical interactions in society as seen via the deconstruction theory of Derrida.

Literature Review:

This study finds that most of the present studies have been conducted individually, and neither of the texts has yet been investigated under binary or deconstructive reading. However, there remain numerous studies focusing on racial segregation that help shed light on the work. Other research on deconstructing binary oppositions can be cited as references to support this one, although they vary in their honourable ideas. In their "Critical Discourse Analysis of Oppression in *To Kill a Mockingbird*," Salih Al-Mamoory and Masoumah Abathar Witwit have described the concept of racism using multiple dimensions to find out the methods the author herself has presented in her book *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Furthermore, in their paper, the researchers have brought forward a hypothesis that explains the oppression of Maycomb's black people at the description, interpretation, and explanation levels, respectively. Supporting W. E. B. Du Bois' thoughts, Faeze Rezazade, and Esmaeil Zohdi explain in their research, "The Power of Being Colour-Blind in *To Kill a Mockingbird*," how colour blindness in racism can alone fix most of the issues in white communities, e.g., prejudice, discrimination, inequality, and injustice towards the coloured people. In their work, "Literary Testimonials of Racism and Oppression in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*," Mr. Abderrahmane Benkoider, Mrs. Nassima Amirouche, and Miss Bouchra Nouara have detailed the history and background of black slavery, the period of black literature, along with all the possible themes engrained in Angelou's first autobiography. In "Racism and Displacement in Maya Angelou's autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*," Malek Chergui, Hadjer Benatmane, and Zina Zerrouki deal with Freud's notion of defence mechanism, which explains the fundamental changes Angelou had gone through, from being a vulnerable, meek black girl to a self-reliant, mature girl. In "Deconstructive Analysis of Main Character in *Frankenstein* Novel by Mary Shelly," Familia Bowta and Yulan Puluhulawa reread the novel by describing Victor's character, finding binary oppositions in the character, and then deconstructing Victor's character. With the purpose of finding the hidden meaning in the text, they deconstruct the main character and establish Victor himself as the cause of all the chaos caused by his creatures. In "Binary Oppositions as the Result of Deconstruction Analysis in the *Goldfinch* Novel by Donna Tartt," Christine Aprilia and Tomi Arianto explore the binary themes in the text to find the opposite understandings. The study shows the text's indefinite and

inconsistent meanings by deconstructing the core ideas that the novel initially offers. Although the abovementioned last two researchers do not share the subject matters with this paper, their deconstructive methods play a vital role in embodying this study.

Conceptual Framework:

This study initially discusses racial segregation and its effects on the children, as well as the Southern people in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Taking the settings of the two books (both in the southern part of Alabama), this paper proposes to see the two distinct places as a whole: an individual society where Scout experiences segregation from the white part and Angelou from the black part. Although there is no reference to an interconnection between these books, this study hypothesizes that they are inadvertently connected. Both of the novels have a similar setting and bildungsroman structure, share many common themes, and mention the Great Depression and its impacts on the American people, which tends to remind the readers of one another to some extent.

A French philosopher and poststructuralist, Julia Kristeva coined the term intertextuality that vindicates Derrida's textual view: "There is no outside text" (Nayar 43). This elucidates that all texts are interconnected with other texts since a complete work "cannot exist as a hermetic or self-sufficient whole and so does not function as a closed system" (Worton and Still 1). Therefore, every text follows and leaves some traces of other texts. A writer cannot write anything outside the text because they have lived through "ongoing socio-cultural processes" (Raj 78). This does not suggest they do it deliberately; they do it because no one can go beyond the context. In Raj's words,

A novelist, [thus], performs two oppositional roles: the narrative role and the textual role. The two-fold creative dynamics of an author can be understood as the working pattern or the structuration that defines textual meaning involving word and sign, elements that have liquidity relying on the interconnection with other functional elements within the text. (79)

Deconstruction is considered a separate approach to poststructuralism, which was pioneered by the French philosopher in 1976. Ferdinand de Saussure saw the concept of binary opposition as a system in linguistics that "existed about each other" (Nayar 4). The idea was that to understand a text, a reader only needs to focus on the language pattern, grammar, signs, and remaining other structures. The meaning of a text lies within, is predictable, and suggests a text to be always close-natured. In the pair of binary contrasts, if one acts positively, the other will surely be negative, and they will never coexist. For example, good is only understood as 'not bad', and vice versa; similarly, dark is the absence of light; black is the lack of whiteness; and likewise, there would be no concept of man without the linking concept of woman. This justifies the existence of paired opposites as positive and negative, and thus, they are related to each other. But poststructuralism opposes these fixed principles and opts for unpredictable meanings and findings in a text and a pair of opposites. As Barry states,

Structuralism derives ultimately from linguistics. Linguistics is a discipline which has always been inherently confident about the possibility of establishing objective knowledge . . . By contrast, post-structuralism derives ultimately from philosophy. Philosophy is a discipline which has always tended to emphasize the difficulty of achieving secure knowledge about things . . . After all, language is an orderly system, not a chaotic one, so realizing our dependence upon it need not induce intelligent despair. (62-63)

That is to say, poststructuralism has a more vital role in literature that allows it to dive into the sea of knowledge rather than focusing merely on the discipline of words and framing structure. Therefore, with the approach of deconstruction, readers can find more than just one existing meaning based on their knowledge and comprehension. Unlike structuralism, post-structuralism does not undermine the polar characteristics of the characters; rather, “Deconstruction is interested in the hierarchic binaries set up within texts” (Nayar 46). In a separate pair, one becomes dominant over the other, and the latter is contrarily pushed over the boundaries, so the former acquires the illegitimate supremacy. Similarly, in this study, white Americans in Southern society are initially seen as being more privileged than black Americans, but this deconstructive reading once more establishes that the situation may reverse because “with the text’s rhetoric logic...reveals that there can be no inside without the outside” (46). Thus, Julia’s intertextuality and Derrida’s deconstruction theory help to understand the purpose of this paper: to trace the diverse functions of the same terms (words) in two individual books. For instance, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the white society and its values and norms seem to stand out as the dominant theme in contrast to the black society. As time passes, the reader finds that the latter plays a crucial role in fabricating the whole story. In the same manner, in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the hardships of the black people seem to serve as the primary concern of the writer, but in reality, the white community remains, although invisible, in the book’s heart and shapes the entire composition.

Research Methodology:

This paper uses a qualitative interpretive research design that is based on post structural analysis of literature. The authors use textual analysis to find how racial segregation and ideological structures surrounding it are destabilized and depicted to represent the elements in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) and Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969).

The theoretical basis of analytical framework of the study is Jacques Derrida’s theory of deconstruction and Julia Kristeva’s theory of intertextuality. The defamiliarization of hierarchical binary oppositions inherent in the stories is achieved through deconstruction and the critical interrogation of the hierarchical binary oppositions in the narratives. The analysis does not merely claim to identify these oppositions but it explores the way the texts destabilize or invert the hierarchical relations between the texts like Derrida did. In this process, the contradictions of the racial discourse within are unveiled and we can see how dominant meanings are dependent on the marginalized terms in the binary system.

The comparative aspect of the study is also guided by the concept of intertextuality proposed by Kristeva. Instead of looking at the two texts as two literary works in their own right, the study considers them as mutually dependent cultural stories that arose out of the same historical and socio-political condition of racial segregation of the American South at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The two works of literature, i.e., *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Lee and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Angelou, are the central sources of information of this paper. The chosen extracts, plot events, and character dialogue that describe racial hierarchy, social marginalization, and moral dilemma are carefully discussed in an attempt to define how racial difference is discursively created.

There is also the use of secondary scholarly sources as the study is based on critical works on post-structuralism, deconstruction, intertextuality, and racial discourse in American literature, outside of primary texts. These sources offer the theoretical and critical context that is required to place the analysis in the frames of the wider debates in the literature and cultural studies.

Discussion:

Racial Segregation in the Contemporary Period:

Racial segregation is an arbitrary 'separating system' among the races in a particular area or country that may prevail in every sphere of the lives of some groups. In this classification of groups, the privileged, which in this case is the white group, used to exercise tremendous power over the so-called lower class people, such as the African-Americans as well as other minorities from all over the world. For hundreds of years, black people were enslaved and oppressed in many corners of the world. Situations were expected to change after the abolition of slavery in 1865, but in many parts of the United States as well as other countries, the situation remained the same, and people continued to stay segregated from each other. To make their condition even worse, Jim Crow Laws were legalized, which officially allowed discrimination in every aspect of American life. Although Harper Lee and Maya Angelou belonged to two different areas—the former lived in Monroeville, Alabama, and the latter in Stamps, Arkansas—they faced acute segregation, which has been exposed in their epochal works. The Jim Crow Laws were enacted after the era of the Civil War to marginalize the Afro-Americans by depriving them of every remaining right to a better lifestyle that could uphold them on the path of progression. This lasted for about 100 years until the rise of the Civil Rights Movement. Institutional racial laws were legalized particularly for the southern parts, i.e., Blacks were not allowed to live side by side, had different churches for prayers, had a different transportation system, kids could not go to the same schools and colleges, had separate economy (mostly assigned to have degrading jobs), and different facilities, e.g., restrooms, parks, medical services, restaurants, and so on.

Racial segregation started to circumscribe the black community by escalating residential, social, economic, educational, and other institutional restrictions in every way possible, which led to deep psychological damage as well. Children growing up in the situation often saw themselves as inherently inferior to the dominant white group and bought into their hopelessness as either misfortune or the social norm from which they could never be disengaged. As a result, they are forced to live a certain type of life that lacks aspects of amenities to which white people are accustomed, and thus both groups came to regard themselves in a binary dimension.

Calpurnia, the Black housekeeper, almost like a mother figure to Scout and Jem, operates as a bridge between the Black community and the Finch household. She addresses the children as 'sir' and 'ma'am' from the very beginning of the story, pointing to the white supremacy over the coloured, be it a child or an adult. Although Calpurnia's situation in the Finch family is quite different under the shadow of Atticus, Calpurnia chooses to be at her limit anyway. Another example of racial segregation in this book is the school that Scout and Jem go to. Given the account of the narrator, there seem to be no coloured children in their school. That is because there were separate schools for the coloured ones. As in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou reflects while describing how worn-out her school is,

Unlike the white high school, Lafayette County Training School distinguished itself by having neither lawn, nor hedges, nor tennis court, nor climbing ivy. Its two buildings (main classrooms, the grade school and home economics) were set on a dirt hill with no fence to limit either its boundaries or those of bordering farm ...Rusty hoops on the swaying poles represented the permanent recreational equipment, although bats and balls could be borrowed from the P.E. teacher if the borrower was qualified and if the diamond wasn't occupied. (148-49)

Segregation in churches is another common scenario where a shortage of facilities adds another level of discrimination by not allowing African Americans to pray in the same church. In the

southern parts, the entrance of black folks into the white churches was forbidden, and for the white folks, if not forbidden, they were more or less frowned upon. It is noted that many black churches were used as a hub to talk about and deal with their predicament. As Reverend Sykes is seen to collect charity to help Tom's family in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, similarly, in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the church is concentrated as a sanctuary. W.E.B Du Bois has given a complete picture of this. He writes,

At the same time this social, intellectual, and economic centre is a religious centre of great power. Depravity, Sin, Redemption, Heaven, Hell, and Damnation are preached twice a Sunday after the crops are laid by; and few indeed of the community have the hardihood to withstand conversion. Back of this more formal religion, the Church often stands as a real conservator of morals, a strengthener of family life, and the final authority on what is Good and Right. (131)

Calpurnia speaks with the children in the colloquial language of the 1930s Alabama dialect, but she is notably seen to speak in a different language—a vernacular of the black community. Here, her use of other dialects places her as a representative of another cultural context. Unlike her, most of the other black folks speak their only dialect. This is because Calpurnia is one of the few members of the community who has learned to read and adapt to the white culture. Atticus lets her fit into his household because he wants to have the best influence on his children, but to other blacks, it would simply be an act of wanting to be one of the whites. As Calpurnia comments, “they’ve got to want themselves, and when they don’t want to learn there’s nothing you can do but keep your mouth shut or talk their language” (Lee 143). Thus, black people’s indifference to the white folk’s language determines them to employ binary thinking on their part.

Binary Oppositions in Criticism and Their Prominence in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and

***I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*:**

Unlike structuralism, in texts, Derrida’s theory of deconstruction searches for different possible meanings and concealed illustrations drawn by a writer. He further argued with the notion of Saussure that since the connection between the thing (signified) and the addressed word (signifier) is arbitrary, the meaning, core, or essence changes from one signifier to another. Therefore, this suggests that the absorption of information by several readers varies based on their background, society, and culture. To him, writing and speaking are commenced through ‘différance,’ a complex theory by Derrida that combines difference and deference and tries to illuminate the way words are used and how their specific meaning is derived. A word’s or concept’s meaning is something that is always deferred until other words complete it and differ from other words to differentiate some specific words. In Nayar’s words,

Derrida’s chief contribution has been to show how language is fundamentally slippery, based on self-contradictory, unfinalizable conditions of difference and deference. His arguments have focused on the need to pay closer attention to the way in which meanings are produced temporarily rather than with any finality, through conditions and ambivalence, and have consistently rebelled against any ‘authoritative’ or authoritarian meaning. (39)

Derrida’s other contribution is his transition of binary oppositions. Binary opposition explains that a text or concept can be read or viewed from two contrary sides, and according to Derrida, there always remains a side more privileged than the other, and Western philosophy always tends to “search for a core meaning in its privilege of presence and rejection of absence and difference” (42). He rejects this application of binary thinking that suggests the existence of one core meaning or truth. He proposed the dismantling of the function by a reversal technique. First, it traces

classical structuralism concepts to their roots and overhauls them with new insights. Reversing the hierarchy in a binary pair, a text can be easily reconstructed with numerous findings that may contradict its earlier results. As earlier discussed, Derrida opposes any kind of binary implication; reversing hierarchy is only the first step to opening the door for many possibilities, but it doesn't wish to establish the newfound additional meanings. Rather, it destabilizes the new hierarchical relationships and again leaves them in a situation called "aporia"(47), where there will be no dominant or dominated term. So the main purpose is to explore the areas of the texts that have been mostly unnoticed and bring them into sight as an unavoidable part of the texts.

Central-Peripheral:

To Kill a Mockingbird and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* have shared many elements that the deconstructionist eye sees as presented from contradictory angles. The narratives are told by the voices of two little girls, and they start with a prejudiced point of view because they have no actual knowledge of the outer world. Children's first school is their surroundings; they learn from and absorb the perspectives of the people they are with. From the very beginning of these two books, Scout and Marguerite start as the representatives of their community. As a white child, Scout seems to be shocked at one of Calpurnia's scornful remarks toward a white man. She goes as, "'There goes the meanest man ever God blew breath into,'" murmured Calpurnia [...], and she spat meditatively into the yard. We looked at her in surprise, for Calpurnia rarely commented on the ways of white people'" (Lee 13).

Given the characteristics of her father, Atticus, it is very unlikely for her to adopt this kind of attitude from the family. It is naturally associated with her being a part of the white community. In the beginning, Scout is not only prejudiced regarding race; she is noticeably partial to anybody who lacks the traits of her usual community, such as Boo Radley, the Cunningham family, and the Ewell family. They are all white folks, yet the children are not ready to accept their differences. From the binary point of view, in Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the whites seem to be mostly privileged, not in the way of their societal position, economy, or power, but privileged in the way the writer mostly concentrates on the white groups and their interactions with the coloured people. Being a child, she couldn't explore the whole town of Maycomb by herself. She is only narrating as much as she has seen and learned. A general reading may take the white society and its norms as the author's primal preference to focus on. But if it is to be seen through the deconstructive lens, it is the black people who are: their ways, the oppression, and the systematic racial segregation that destabilises the central focus from the white community to the Black people's social and legal marginalisation. In the trial scene where Atticus seems to be presented as the moral hero, saving a helpless Black man; instead, Tom Robinson's suffering becomes the core of the text in a deconstructive reading. The position of white society as the moral and justified judge is now being questioned due to the wrongful conviction of Tom Robinson and the criticism directed at Atticus for defending a Black man. Among many others, such as socioeconomic status, community pressure, moral duty, and gender norms, racism functions as one of the major concepts explored by the narrator's usual readers. Deeply internalized, this attitude shapes the daily conversations, establishes social identity, dictates suitable jobs for the individuals, and determines guilt irrespective of all the evidence in the people of Maycomb. However, when it comes to acknowledging the children's personality development, these experiences, along with Tom Robinson's trial, give them a strong platform for accepting 'others' with their 'odds and differences'. They experience how the two opposite groups interact with each other, and in the meantime, Atticus takes the situation as a perfect opportunity for his children to draw an example—the example of triumphing over humanity.

Similarly, in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou keeps her attention on the conditions of black people during the period of Jim Crow Laws. The white folks tend to be peripheral in her description, yet they seem to have a continuous influence over the black community. Once intersected with the formation of the writing, the lives of the black people are seen to be established as the 'preference' for values that strengthen the existing social structure and perpetuate their status in it. Race categorizes people into groups based on their distinctive physical characteristics and appearances that are associated with biological origin. Angelou came to the southern part of Arkansas at the age of three and spent most of her childhood in Stamps, a separate part of the town for black people. Given her account, they did not have that much confrontation with the white people, as she wrote:

In Stamps, the segregation was so complete that most Black children didn't really, absolutely know what white looked like. Other than that they were different, to be dreaded, and in that dread included the hostility of the powerless against the powerful, the poor against the rich, the worker against the worked for and the ragged against the well dressed.

I remember never believing that whites were really real. (Angelou 23)

Here, the writer is putting herself as well as the black people in a binary-based society, where white folks are the "powerful" (23), privileged with all the blessings of life. She is living in a society where all the members look like her, with the same hair texture, facial formation, and other physical characteristics, yet she is unable to accept herself for not looking like a white kid. Just like Scout, as a child, Maya is also seen to be prejudiced because she is not comfortable with her own skin (colour). Scout here represents the unenlightened white children, who are yet to learn to accept all with their odds and peculiarities in addition to their colours, and Maya is of the black children, who are forced in ways to see themselves as the inferior people, or as she felt "only little higher than the apes" (Angelou 118), who is to learn to accept herself and get her out of the shackles of imposed social standards.

Tolerant-Intolerant:

In a racist setting from the contemporary era, if it is questioned which group is to be regarded as more intolerant between the blacks and whites, most of the answers might come as 'the whites'. This is mostly true because it is the lack of tolerance that has forced many black people to meet a distressing fate or, if the cases were worse, accept the death penalty. The Ku Klux Klan, or KKK, was a group of white supremacists and was notorious for its hatred towards other races. One demonstration is given in chapter three of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* when Angelou's uncle Willie had to hide in a bin to save his life from the attack of the KKK group. The reason behind this was that "a crazy nigger messed with a white lady" (Angelou 17), and to give her justice, they were going to wipe out all the Negro boys that night. Another example of their extreme intolerance is portrayed in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where Tom Robinson is imprisoned for raping a white girl, which, according to Atticus, is a false allegation. Tom Robinson is expected to receive the death sentence in the view of the whites because his crime was, firstly, being a coloured man; whether he had committed the heinous crime, in reality, comes later. Atticus put it this way: "In our courts, when it's a white man's word against a black man's, the white man always wins; they are ugly, but those are the facts of life" (Lee 252).

But there are always some exceptions, and that applies to this part too. Not all white people are the same; not all are prejudiced. People are always remembered for the kindness that they show in their hearts. Atticus, a central character of the text, is remarkably noted for his patience and wisdom. All people, from the rich to the poor, from blacks to whites, from children to adults,

respect him. Atticus reminds the readers of the existing moral backbone of the white community. He knows from the very beginning that he is going to lose the case, but that does not stop him from doing what is 'right', which is to defend an innocent man from getting the unjustified death penalty. It is Atticus who plays a vital role in structuring his children's personalities. He does not want his children to be prejudiced, racist, or affected by "Maycomb's usual disease" (100). Likewise, Miss Kirwin, "a rare educator" (Angelou 188), who seems to have had a great impact on Angelou in her school days and who speaks to her with respect, neither too nice nor "liberal" (189), nor completely indifferent, views her as a student to whom she thinks to pass as much knowledge as possible.

Cultured-Savage:

The lives of black people started as slaves in the 16th century with people from West Africa, who "were forcibly taken to Spanish America and, in the 17th century, to English colonies in North America" (Mariappan 3). They had been forced into slavery until 1865, when, after the Civil War, they were declared liberated. Still, they were segregated as second-class human beings for almost a century and treated as the descendants of 'apes,' who are never to be trusted or to be around, as the countrymen remarked, "They c'n go loose and rape up the countryside for all'em who this county care" (Lee 153). Like this, stereotypical beliefs that white people were the pioneers of their civilized culture and black people were the descendants of the apes were instilled from a very young age, which they tended to carry (if not enlightened in the midway) for the rest of their lives. Unlike Scout, Jem, and Dill, the remaining white children in *To Kill a Mockingbird* are shown to have this belief system that they have learned from the adults they live with. Francis believes, along with her Grandma, that they "will never be able to walk the streets of Maycomb again" (94), and Cecil Jacobs announced in front of the whole school, "My folks said your daddy was a disgrace an' that nigger oughta hang from the water tank" (87). To protect their white culture from the non-whites, the white folks made it a norm to stay away from them. In Maycomb, people demand that black people's inherent barbarism is what motivates them to have the desire to rape white women. But everyone in the trial seems to already know, including the children, that Tom Robinson was unable to do so because of his physical disability. Therefore, it is the cultural problem that triggers every black person into a fight with a white person. Lee specifically gives a vivid description of the Ewell household and their deportment: a poverty-stricken, drunken father, abusive in character, who never sends his children to school. Nevertheless, he wins the case. Tom Robinson, on the other hand, appears to Scout to be a "respectable Negro"(219), because he seems to know his limitations in a white-dominant society. It is he who stands as morally and culturally superior to many of the white characters from Maycomb, knowing and acting like a kind human being towards Mayella despite knowing that being in the house of Bob Ewell was not the safest place in the world for a black man.

Similarly, in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Maya's illustration of Afro-American people's living in Arkansas is done in such a way that the readers find how culturally and morally they were equally progressed. In many situations, white people are more biased. One event is the white dentist who never treats the black folks; a San Franciscan white matron who refused to sit beside a black civilian on the streetcar; the white ladies who imposed Maya with a different name; the "powhitetrash kids"(Angelou 27) aping her grandmother. The white teenagers represent the white brusqueness, suggesting only one thing; their families did not care to educate them to have respect for, at least, the black elderly people. They call her by name, mock her, and try everything to agitate her. Angelou feels humiliated and weeps seeing the occurrence. She wants to protect

herself from all the insults those impolite girls are imposing, but Momma teaches her on the contrary; to remain calm and brave while tackling a situation like this. As Walker puts it,

The scene with the “powhitetrash” girls causes Maya to react with the same helpless anger and humiliation, but through the response of her grandmother Henderson (whom she calls Momma) to the girls' rudeness and crudity, Maya learns there can be a better and more effective way to respond. (94)

Destitute-Solvent:

One of the major resemblances between Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is the reference to the Great Depression and its impact on American life. The lives of the white folks were told to be 'enviable', since there was no scarcity of jobs for the white Americans, whereas, on the contrary, coloured folks were left with few options: either to pick cotton in the white men's land, which seemed never “enough” (Angelou 9) or to attend their households, like Miss Glory and the writer herself were appointed as maidservants in Mrs. Cullinan's house in this book, and Calpurnia and Jessie, Mrs. Dubose's black maids in Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

However, being materially solvent cannot always guarantee one's ethical richness. While Lee does not directly dedicate any chapters to describing the suffering of black people during the great crisis, as she does with the white neighborhood, their hardship is still implied through the contextual references. Her book describes farmers like Cunningham having to pay the daily bills with what they had. He offers a load of “stove wood,” “a sack of hickory nuts,” and “a croaker-sack full of turnip greens” (Lee 23) on several occasions to show his gratitude towards Atticus. Similarly, Dr. Reynolds receives “a bushel of potatoes” (23) from the country folk in exchange for service. Scout remembers, “There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy, and no money to buy it with, nothing to see outside the boundaries of Maycomb County” (06). This implies it to everyone, including the Black residents, who have supposedly faced the consequences of the drastic fall of the economy more than the socially privileged ones. A deconstructive reading of the book traces the destabilisation of the expected correlation between races and financial power. White residents like the Ewells, although socially disadvantaged, still maintain racial privilege, receiving the support of the jury. The jury, a group of white men who are expected to establish justice in society, ironically lacks moral integrity. They prove themselves morally bankrupt by embodying institutionalised racial bias. On the other hand, those who are evidently marginalised, both racially and socially, show great examples of resilience, as is seen in Calpurnia in the Finch family, the communal support for each other in the church, and Tom Robinson helping Mayella, not for money but as a gesture of kindness. Unlike his white neighbourhood, they express their respect and gratitude towards Atticus by sending him food, indicating they are grateful enough to give away what little they have. This reinforces the idea that social and material power cannot always ensure moral solvency.

Furthermore, as Angelou notes, the economic crisis could not initially hit black Americans with the same blow. The condition of their lives used to be so poverty-stricken that they were unable to get out of debt with the wages they got long before the crisis. She opines that it took a couple of years before they understood the grave impact of the economic fall: “It was when the owners of cotton fields dropped the payment of ten cents for a pound of cotton to eight, seven, and finally five that the Negro community realized that the Depression, at least, did not discriminate” (Angelou 44). Nonetheless, Anny Handerson (Momma) has a crucial role in terms of shifting the role of being destitute as a black woman. She is one of the few black people who successfully managed to

escape the economic shock, keeping the store going, whereas some highbrows had to borrow money from her, such as the white dentist who later refused to give any treatment to Maya. As the writer remembers the demonstration of open racism, ““Annie, my policy is I’d rather stick my hand in a dog’s mouth than in a nigger’s”” (165). Unlike most, a black family with financial strength still faces the continuous dehumanizing treatment from someone who holds both professional and social status. However, this discussion, by no means, aims to imply that all whites or wealthy people lack empathy and ethics, whereas the black people are morally superior. Instead, it deconstructs the societal categorizations and substantiates the fact that those who appear to be destitute in all forms can be deciphered as the most charitable, inverting the hierarchy with their generosity and kindness.

Conclusion:

Thus, this paper shows how the deconstruction of a text can take its readers several steps forward in finding what is silenced and overlooked by the authors themselves. While looking for the otherness of the books, one is a memoir and the other is a fiction; the paper identifies all the given manners of one being the mirror of the other. In other words, intertextuality emerges from the very titles that center upon birds: symbolic representations of the harmless individuals. Sheltered by two compassionate older brothers and guided by commanding personalities, both narrators beautifully sketch a separate yet one racially segregated world. These two texts suggest that people are not born prejudiced. Regardless of races, ethnicities, and cultures, individuals absorb their surroundings and are then influenced by the social conditions, essentially playing a vital role in forming future demeanors. Thus, in the end, Scout is able to let herself get into other people's skin, and Maya learns to accept herself as she is, placing humanity above everything. Furthermore, in the process of extracting the essence of these two novels, this analysis redefines and reexamines the labels that have been imposed on the people: white being the highbrow and black the lowbrow for hundreds of years. When examined closely, it is to be found that no particular label can ascertain a group of people. This is because there is no society without a liar, no race without a criminal, and no country that does not need a judicial system. Deconstructing the binary characters: central-peripheral, tolerant-intolerant, cultured-savage, and destitute-solvent—this paper concludes that words are inconsistent and relative based on the situations in which they are articulated.

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