

**Deconstruction of Social Traditions in the
Short Story *Bayt Sayyi' Al-Sum'ah* by Najīb Maḥfūz**

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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the deconstruction of social traditions in the short story *Bayt Sayyi' Al-Sum'ah* by Najīb Maḥfūz through Jacques Derrida's deconstructive framework. The narrative portrays tradition as a seemingly stable, normative, and hierarchical system, particularly in relation to gender relations, morality, and social honor. This research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive analytical approach, using library research and close textual reading. The analysis is conducted through three stages: identifying binary oppositions, tracing *différance*, and examining absence. The findings reveal that binary oppositions such as male and female, honorable and dishonorable, and private and public are hierarchically constructed, yet contain internal tensions that destabilize their coherence. Through *différance*, meanings of social labels are shown to be unstable and continuously deferred. Moreover, social stigma is shaped more by collective perceptions than explicit facts, indicating that tradition is a social construct open to reinterpretation.

Keywords: *Deconstruction, Najīb Maḥfūz, Tradition.*



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Introduction

Modern Arabic literature does not merely function as an aesthetic medium that displays the beauty of language (‘Atīq, 1972), but also serves as a medium of social reflection that critically represents the realities of Arab society (Sandra Maulana, Dessy Wardiah, 2023). In its development, modern Arabic literature demonstrates a strong tendency to address social issues such as inequality, the pressure of collective norms, and conflicts between traditional values and continuously changing social realities (Muhammad Jailani, 2025).

Through literary works, modern Arab authors do not simply record social realities; they also articulate critiques of social structures and established traditions. Tradition constitutes an important element within every human community, as it functions as a foundation for organizing and regulating their social systems (Ḥabīb, 2003), particularly when such traditions have the potential to generate injustice and restrict individual freedom. In Arab societies, tradition represents a system of values and social norms transmitted from generation to generation (Rifana, 2024). Tradition can be understood as a set of life regulations emerging from culture, in which abstract ideas believed by society are manifested in concrete patterns of social life, encompassing shared values, ethics, and fundamental principles (Ḥabīb, 2003). However, when traditions are maintained rigidly and treated as absolute, these values frequently generate social conflict, stigma, and the marginalization of individuals who are perceived to deviate from collective norms (Ghozali, 2023). This condition indicates that tradition is neither neutral nor stable rather, it operates as a social construction containing internal tensions and is therefore open to critical interpretation within literary studies.

The deconstructive approach in literary studies is employed to dismantle established meanings that have long been considered stable and authoritative. This approach opens opportunities for interpreting texts in alternative ways (Endraswara, 2021). including the concept of tradition that is legitimized through dominant social structures and discourses. In the context of modern Arabic literature, tradition is no longer positioned as a singular and unified value, but rather as a social construction that contains internal contradictions and hidden power relations (Muhammad Jailani, 2025).

According to Mu‘jam al-Falsafī (Ṣalībā, 1982), deconstruction or dissociation in psychology refers to the separation of mental elements from one another. An element that at one time is associated with a particular object and at another time with a different object tends to detach from both until it becomes an abstract element, as

occurs in the process of abstraction. Deconstruction itself can be understood as an act of the subject in dismantling an object composed of multiple elements (Muzir, 2017). Thus, the deconstructive approach becomes relevant for exploring how tradition is not only represented but also questioned, dismantled, and renegotiated within modern Arabic literary texts.

The theory of deconstruction initially emerged as a philosophical approach aimed at criticizing and dismantling the workings of language and structures of thought within texts. This theory was developed by Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher (1930–2004) and a central figure of post-structuralism who gained wide recognition since the late 1960s through his critique of structuralism (Jihād, 2000). Deconstruction is understood as a concept that resists the restriction of meaning through fixed definitions or final translations (Mardatillah & Hasbi, 2025). It rejects the assumption that a text possesses a single stable meaning and instead views meaning as open, dynamic, and dependent on the process of reading. Meaning within a text does not appear directly rather, it is produced through the relationships among linguistic signs. Derrida emphasizes that a word or text does not carry a single meaning, but that meaning changes depending on its usage and context (Azzahra et al., 2025).

In literary studies, deconstruction regards the text as an open and dynamic linguistic space rather than as a container of a single, final meaning determined by the author. Meaning is understood as unstable, continuously shifting, and open to multiple interpretive possibilities (Prasetyawati et al., 2025). Deconstruction is therefore used to reveal the instability of meaning and to demonstrate that meaning in a text is never completely fixed or definitive. Deconstructing a literary text involves questioning the commonly assumed meanings that are believed to underlie the work through the elements present within the text (Nani et al., 2025). Consequently, a deconstructive reading shifts the focus from searching for a single meaning toward understanding the plurality and indeterminacy of meaning.

This deconstructive approach becomes particularly relevant for analyzing the short story *Bayt Sayyi' Al-Sum'ah* by Najīb Maḥfūz, which represents social realities through symbols of tradition that are often regarded as sacred and honorable. The story portrays a house that is socially associated with a particular reputation, shaping the community's perceptions of morality, honor, and the identity of those connected to it (Maḥfūz, 1965). Through its narrative and characterization, the story implicitly questions the validity of traditions that have long been accepted without criticism. Therefore, a deconstructive analysis of *Bayt Sayyi' Al-Sum'ah* becomes essential to

reveal how social traditions are constructed, maintained, and simultaneously destabilized by realities that contradict the idealized image long upheld by society.

Several previous studies have applied deconstruction theory in literary analysis. Research by Laras Nur Fauziah et al. (2024) examined binary oppositions in the novel *Si Anak Savana* and demonstrated that deconstruction can destabilize seemingly stable meanings; however, the study remained limited to thematic aspects. Meanwhile, Edi Nugraha et al. (2023) analyzed female characters in the novel *Hanum dan Rangga* through a deconstructive approach, focusing on gender issues, particularly the reversal of the opposition between pious wife and impious wife. Nevertheless, this study did not address broader social traditions. Salahi Peyman (2016), on the other hand, analyzed the short story collection *Bayt Sayyi' Al-Sum'ah* by Najīb Maḥfūz using a structural approach, focusing on narrative elements such as plot and character. Although the object of study was similar, the research did not employ deconstruction theory. Based on these observations, the present study offers novelty through the application of deconstruction theory to dismantle the construction of social traditions in *Bayt Sayyi' Al-Sum'ah*, thereby providing a different interpretive perspective from previous studies.

This study aims to examine the construction of social traditions in the short story *Bayt Sayyi' Al-Sum'ah* by Najīb Maḥfūz through the deconstructive framework formulated by Jacques Derrida. The analysis focuses on three interrelated conceptual devices used to dismantle the structure of meaning. First, through the identification of binary oppositions, this study investigates how the text constructs the legitimacy of tradition by positioning it within hierarchical relations with other concepts such as modernity, disgrace, or individuality (Altiria, 2023). At the surface level, these oppositions create an impression of stability and clarity of values; however, deconstructive reading reveals that every hierarchical structure contains internal dependence. The supposedly marginalized element, paradoxically, serves as a foundation for the existence of the dominant meaning (Widyantoro & Ernawati, 2021). Second, through the concept of *différance*, the meaning of tradition is understood as something that never appears in a complete form but is always deferred within a network of sign relations. Every claim of the stability of tradition within the text simultaneously exposes traces of ambiguity that shift the center of meaning (Paulus Subiyanto, 2025). Third, the reading of absence demonstrates that what is not present whether in the form of silenced voices, unrepresented experiences, or suppressed perspectives is not merely emptiness but a structural strategy that contributes to the

production of meaning (Muzir, 2017). Thus, the text operates not only through what is explicitly stated but also through what is systematically silenced.

Through this framework, the study argues that tradition in the short story does not function as a firm and unquestionable foundation of values, but rather as a fragile and contradictory construction that remains open to the reversal of meaning. The relationship between individuals and tradition cannot be reduced to a pattern of mere obedience; instead, it reveals a complex dynamic of negotiation in which collective norms are simultaneously upheld and disrupted from the inside (Azizah & Purwanto, 2025). Consequently, this study not only expands the application of deconstruction in modern Arabic literary studies but also offers a conceptual understanding that tradition within literary texts constitutes a site of meaning production that continuously undergoes processes of differentiation and reinterpretation.

Method

The research method employed in this study is a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. This approach was selected because the study focuses on a critical interpretation of the construction of social traditions represented in the short story *Bayt Sayyi' Al-Sum'ah* by Najīb Maḥfūz (Fiantika et al., 2022). The analysis is conducted based on the deconstruction theory developed by Jacques Derrida in order to dismantle the structures of meaning, oppositional relations, and conceptual tensions that shape the understanding of tradition within the text. Through this approach, the hidden instability and ambiguity of meaning embedded in the narrative can be revealed.

The primary data source of this study is the text of the short story *Bayt Sayyi' Al-Sum'ah*, while secondary data are obtained from various references, including literary theory books, scholarly journals, academic articles, and other relevant works related to deconstruction studies.

Data collection was conducted through a library research method consisting of several stages. The first stage involved reading and examining the short story *Bait Sayyi' al-Sum'ah* intensively as the primary object of the study. The next stage was identifying significant parts of the text related to the focus of the analysis, such as narrative structures, characters, and indicators of implicit meaning. In addition, relevant theoretical references were collected, particularly those associated with the deconstruction theory of Jacques Derrida. Furthermore, quotations, key terms, and theoretical concepts were recorded to serve as the foundation for the textual analysis.

The data analysis technique in this research is conducted qualitatively by applying the deconstructive approach of Jacques Derrida through three principal stages: the identification of binary oppositions, the tracing of *différance*, and the exploration of absence. First, the researcher deconstructs the textual structure by identifying binary oppositional relations and hierarchical meanings that position one element as dominant while marginalizing the other. Second, the analysis is directed toward the concept of *différance* to demonstrate that meaning within the text is continuously deferred and produced through the play of differences among signs. Third, the researcher examines the aspect of absence, referring to elements that are not explicitly presented in the text yet significantly influence the formation of meaning (Edy Nugraha, Desi Darmayani, 2023). Through this analytical framework, it can be emphasized that meaning in the text is inherently unstable, open-ended, and continuously engaged in an ongoing process of formation.

Result and Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the construction of traditional society in Najīb Maḥfūz's short story *Bayt Sayyi' Al-Sum'ah* is built through a binary opposition structure that creates a hierarchy of meaning. Through a deconstruction approach, it was found that this structure is not stable, but rather contains tension and the possibility of a reversal of meaning. This reading confirms that the traditions that appear to be established in the text actually contain internal contradictions that open up space for reinterpretation.

A. Binary Opposition

Binary opposition is a concept in Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory that refers to a pattern of thinking that divides reality into two opposing poles, such as good/bad, right/wrong, or honourable/despicable. This structure is hierarchical because one position is placed more dominantly than the other (Norris, 2000). In deconstruction, this opposition is not neutral but forms a system of meaning that tends to marginalise one side (Hermawan, 2023).

In the short story *Bait Sayyi' al-Sum'ah*, the opposition between honour and disgrace forms the basis for the formation of a social tradition that judges individuals based on collective moral standards. This hierarchy places honour as the primary value, while disgrace is positioned as something that must be eliminated. This structure can be clearly seen in the following excerpt.

Data 1:

غير أن بيت آل حلاوة خرق العقل والمعقول وقام وحده ككلمة متحدية . عرف بالبيت السيئ السمعة وأحيط بسياس من الرهبة . ومجرد جريانه على لسان صبي أو بنت كان جريمة يستحق من أجلها الزجر . وضربت حوله المقاطعة كأنه وباء . وحتى اليوم لا يذكر إلا مصحوبا بسوء الظن وبذلك تحدد في التاريخ (Maḥfūz, 1965)

"However, the house of the Al-Halawah family defied reason and logic, standing alone like a defiant word. The house was known for its bad reputation and was surrounded by an atmosphere of fear. Even mentioning its name by a boy or girl was considered a mistake worthy of reprimand. A kind of exclusion was imposed around it as if it were a plague. Even today, the house is never mentioned except with suspicion, and thus it is recorded in history."

This quote constructs a clear binary opposition, namely normal > abnormal, respectable > bad reputation, centre > periphery, and accepted > feared. Society is positioned as a representation of normality, rationality, and respectability, while the Halawah house is positioned as something that defies reason and is challenging. The phrase bad reputation indicates the existence of collective social labelling. The house is not described as having committed any specific moral wrongdoing, but has already been constructed as something deviant. In fact, even mentioning its name is considered an offence. This shows that the opposition between good and bad is constructed through social power mechanisms that control language and naming (Ridwan et al., 2022). In this structure, society becomes the centre which is normal and correct, while the Halawah family becomes the periphery which is deviant and must be avoided. This hierarchy appears stable and seemingly unquestionable. However, this structure begins to shake in the following excerpt:

فقالت بحدة : أنت لا تريد ، ليس عندك الشجاعة الكافية ، أبيتنا مخيف إلى هذه الدرجة ؟
لا .. الأمر وما فيه لا تكذب ، أنا أعرف كل شيء ، وماما لم تخطيء ، وشارعنا كله سخافة في سخافة ، ونحن أشرف من الجميع ، يجب أن تعرف ذلك. (Maḥfūz, 1965)

"Then she said sharply: 'You don't want to, you don't have enough courage. Is our house so scary? No... that's not the case. Don't lie. I know everything, and Mum is not wrong. Our whole street is just nonsense, while we are more honourable than everyone else. You should know that."

This statement presents a significant reversal of opposition. Whereas previously society positioned itself as a symbol of honour, now the Halawah family declares itself

to be more honourable than everyone else. Thus, the meaning of honourable is no longer monopolised by the majority group. In the perspective of deconstruction as proposed by Jacques Derrida, every binary opposition is hierarchical and places one element at the centre of truth (Zullyansyah et al., 2025).

However, this text shows that this centre is fragile. When the Halawah family rejects the label bad and refers to their environment as full of ignorance, a shift in position occurs: those who were previously considered marginalised now speak as subjects who reassess the centre (Halim, 2024). Thus, *honourable opposition* >< *bad reputation* becomes unstable. Honour is no longer understood as something determined by the majority, but rather as a debatable value construct. In fact, the moral identity of society depends on the existence of the bad reputation house as its symbolic opponent. Without the existence of a party labelled as bad, society's claim to honour loses its comparison.

Through a deconstructive reading, it can be concluded that this text does not merely present a social conflict between the community and the Halawah family, but rather reveals a battle of meaning over who has the right to determine moral standards. The binary opposition that appears clear at first ultimately reveals its relative and contestable nature (Djaha, 2021). Thus, the label bad reputation is not an absolute truth, but rather the result of a social construction that can be reversed from within the text itself.

Data 2:

النساء عورة والحب حرام ، والزواج إجراء من اختصاص الرجال
والعروس آخر من يعلم. (Maḥfūz, 1965)

"Every house closes itself off like a secret. Women are considered shameful, love is forbidden, and marriage is a matter for men while the bride is the last to know."

This quote reveals a social construct built on a number of binary oppositions, such as open >< closed, male >< female, subject >< object, and knowing >< not knowing. The home is described as a space that shuts itself off, symbolising a closed and controlled social system. In this system, women are positioned as something to be covered and placed in a realm of secrecy. Love is categorised as something forbidden, while marriage is defined as a man's business. This structure shows a clear hierarchy, with men present as active subjects and decision-makers, while women are placed as passive objects who are even the last to know about their own marriage. Thus, the text creates the impression that male domination and female limitations are natural and

normative (Asia et al., 2024). However, this structure of meaning begins to be shaken in the following excerpt:

وهي السن التي انتهت عندها ميمي. وكانت أول امرأة في الحي ترى سافرة فلا برقع أبيض ولا أسود

وقد تصطحب معها بناتها الأربع فتمضى بهن سافرات كذلك. (Maḥfūz, 1965).

"She had reached the age of fifty an age that Mimi would later reach. She was the first woman in the neighbourhood to be seen going out without a veil without a white or black face covering. Sometimes she took her four daughters with her, and they walked with her without veils as well."

This quote presents an event that shook the previous opposition. If women were previously constructed as aurat and confined to closed spaces, now they appear in public spaces without veils, a symbol that previously represented closure and social control. This action is not merely a violation of norms, but a symbolic reversal of an established system of meaning. From the perspective of deconstruction as proposed by Jacques Derrida, every binary opposition is hierarchical and non-neutral. One element is placed at the centre privileged term, while the other is marginalised (Izumi et al., 2026). In this text, men/active/knowing become the centre, while women/passive/unknowing become subordinate. However, the actions of women who go out without a veil show that this subordinate position is not natural, but rather the result of a social construction that can be challenged (Manek et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the text shows that the dominant identity men as controllers and decision-makers depends on restrictions on women. When women enter the public sphere and act as subjects, the hierarchical structure begins to lose its stability. Thus, the opposition between men and women can no longer be maintained as an absolute truth, because each position is interdependent in the formation of meaning. Through a deconstructive reading, it can be concluded that the text not only presents a conflict between closed and open spaces, or between domination and subordination, but also reveals the instability of the value system that underlies it. The meanings of modesty, forbidden, and men's business are not final concepts, but rather the result of cultural constructions that can be changed and shaken from within the text itself (Aditya et al., 2025).

a. Différance

One of the key concepts in deconstruction is *différance*, a term introduced by Jacques Derrida to indicate two simultaneous movements in language distinguishing and deferring. This concept emphasises that meaning is never fully or finally present in a sign, because it is always formed through its relationship with other signs (Norris,

2000). Thus, meaning is constantly moving within a network of signifiers and continues to be deferred, so that it never reaches complete certainty (Jihād, 2000)

This understanding is used to read data in texts, where terms such as bad reputation and love appear certain, but are actually unstable. Their meaning depends on the social context and the development of events, so they are always in a process of difference and deferral (Sonya Trikandi, Yusro Edy Nugroho, 2023). This is evident in the following text excerpt:

Data 1:

لذلك كله لم يكن غريبا أن يذكر بيت حلاوة مقرونا بلفظة دعارة ، دون مناقشة . وكانت الأسرة على علم بأراء الجيران ومشاعرهم ولكنها لم تكثرث لذلك أدنى اكتراث ، وترفعت الهانم عن الجميع وسارت في طريقها شامخة الأنف كأنها من سلالة غير سلالة الحي جميعه. (Mahfūz, 1965)

"Because of all that, it was not surprising that the Halawah family's house was referred to with the word 'prostitution' without the slightest debate. The family was aware of the neighbours' opinions and feelings, but they paid no attention to them whatsoever. The lady behaved haughtily towards everyone and walked her path with her nose in the air, as if she were of a different lineage from the entire neighbourhood."

In this excerpt, the meaning of prostitution appears to be final and indisputable without the slightest debate. The label functions as a sign that immediately locks the Halawah family's identity into a certain moral category. Structurally, the community in the text builds a collective agreement that makes the term a social truth that is considered established. The absence of debate indicates that the meaning has been accepted as something naturalised, as if it no longer requires proof. This is where language functions as an instrument of symbolic power it establishes identity through naming.

However, when read through the concept of *différance* as formulated by Jacques Derrida, the meaning is never truly present in its entirety. Within the framework of deconstruction, signs never have a completely stable or autonomous meaning. What appears to be certainty is actually the effect of a system of differences in language (Anafiah et al., 2024). Thus, the term prostitution does not present a specific moral essence, but rather a position in a constantly shifting network of signs.

The term prostitution derives its meaning not from the objective facts described in the text, but from its difference from concepts such as honour, purity or normality. In other words, the meaning is formed through a network of differences (to differ). It does not stand alone, but depends on the social value system that surrounds it. Without the existence of concepts that are considered its opposites, the term loses its distinguishing

power. This shows that meaning is always relational, not substantial (Kurniawati et al., 2020). In other words, what is called bad can only be understood because there is a construction of what is considered good.

Moreover, this meaning is also subject to deferral. The text provides no concrete evidence for this accusation; rather, it is based on the collective perception of society. Thus, the meaning of prostitution is deferred to a series of social judgements that are constantly reproduced, rather than to any definitive truth. This deferral shows that meaning never reaches a definitive end point. It always awaits legitimisation from the next social voice, the next rumour, the next opinion. This means that meaning lives in the circulation of discourse, not in stable facts (Fazalani, 2021).

This tension of meaning is even more apparent in the following excerpt:

تذكر كيف تزوجت بنات البيت السيء السمعة واحدة بعد أخرى رغم ما سمع مرارا وتكرارا بأنهن بنات لم يخلقن للزواج ولن يسعى إلى الزواج منهن أحد. وكلما جاءه نبأ عن توفيقهن في زواجهن ذهل واختلت موازينه
(Maḥfūz, 1965)

"He remembered how the daughters of the 'house of ill repute' married one after another, even though... He had heard many times that these girls were women who were not created for marriage, and no one would seek to marry them. However, every time news of their successful marriages reached him, he was stunned and his equilibrium was shaken."

Here, a significant shift in meaning occurs. If previously these girls were constructed as not created for marriage, the fact that they did succeed in getting married shook the established structure of meaning. Social predictions built on the basis of moral labels turned out to be unable to maintain their consistency when faced with reality. This shows that meanings that are considered stable are actually fragile and depend on collective expectations. The meanings of bad reputation and unfit for marriage are unstable. They are delayed and changed when confronted with social facts that do not match society's predictions. The reactions of shock and imbalance show that the previously believed system of meaning is in crisis. This crisis is not merely a psychological shock, but a moment of rupture in the structure of discourse. From a *différance* perspective, this rupture is evidence that meaning always holds the possibility of reversal within itself (Harjanti, 2021).

Through a *différance* reading, it can be understood that the Halawah family's identity is never fully present as bad or dishonourable. The meaning is always in flux, dependent on differences with other concepts, and constantly delayed by the development of events in the text. Identity is formed through relationships, not through essence (Paulus Subiyanto, 2025). Therefore, what is referred to as social truth

in the text is actually a construction that can collapse at any time. In other words, the text shows that seemingly definitive moral labels are actually fragile and can be shaken from within the narrative itself. The narrative actually opens up space for contradictions that disrupt the stability of meaning. The marriage of the Halawah family's daughters becomes a kind of deconstructive moment that shows that the community's value system is not entirely consistent (Putri et al., 2026).

Thus, the concept of *différance* reveals that meaning in a text is not a fixed entity, but rather a process that is constantly changing and never reaches a final certainty (Mardatillah & Hasbi, 2025). The social label attached to the Halawah family exists in a tension between society's claims and a reality that continually delays the certainty of its meaning. This tension shows that language is not a neutral medium, but rather an arena of meaning that is constantly shifting without a fixed centre.

Data 2:

فرمقته بتوجس وتساءلت : وماذا تظن بي أنا ؟
فبادرها تجنباً للمضاعفات : كل خير ، أنا .. أنا أحبك يا ميمي وابتسمت .
ومضت به إلى أريكة تمتد أمامها هضبة معشوشبة (Maḥfūz, 1965)

"Mimi looked at him cautiously and asked, "So, what do you think of me?"

He replied immediately, avoiding any possible complications,

"All good things. I... I love you, Mimi."

Mimi smiled. She then led him to a bench facing a small grassy hill stretching out in front of them."

In this dialogue excerpt, the phrase *I love you* spoken by the character Ahmad to Mimi, a woman from the Halawah family, initially seems to convey the meaning of love as something sincere and convincing. Ahmad's response, everything that is good, creates the impression that his feelings are honest and personal. Textually, this statement paints a picture of a relationship between the two that is based on strong affection and seemingly free from social pressure. Thus, at the initial stage of reading, the love expressed by Ahmad appears solid and authentic as a form of emotional attachment between two individuals.

However, when read through the perspective of *différance* in Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory, the seemingly stable meaning of love is never truly present in its entirety. The concept of *différance* shows that meaning is always formed through a process of difference and deferral, so that an expression does not have a fixed meaning (Fadhilah & Purwanto, 2025). In this context, Ahmad's expression of love cannot be

understood as a final meaning, but rather as a sign whose meaning depends on its relationship with the broader social context (Kurniawati et al., 2020).

This is related to the position of the Halawah family in society, which is described as having a bad reputation and being the object of social stigma. Therefore, the love that Ahmad expressed to Mimi from the beginning was actually in tension between personal feelings and social norms. Textually, the expression does appear to be a strong declaration of love, but in a deconstructive reading, the meaning begins to shift. The meaning of love no longer stands as a completely sincere expression, but becomes a sign that is open to the possibility of contradiction (Sugestian & Taum, 2025).

This condition shows the difference in the meaning of love. What initially appeared to be a solid and convincing feeling began to show instability when faced with the surrounding social reality (Prasetyawati et al., 2025). In other words, the love expressed by Ahmad does not stand entirely as a definite commitment, but exists in an ambiguous space between personal desire and the pressure of social reputation. This shift in meaning becomes even clearer in the following excerpt, when the relationship between love and social stigma begins to reveal a more tangible tension.

سأنتظر بكل سرور ، ولكنى فى حاجة إلى شيء يبرر انتظارى أمام الآخرين ، أى شيء ، ارتباط من أى نوع ؟! تخيل طلبه الارتباط بينت من البيت السيء السمعة بتعاسة ورعب ، وانعقد لسانه فلم ينطق.

I will wait with pleasure, but I need something to justify my waiting in front of others, anything, any kind of bond! Imagine his request for a bond between the house with its bad reputation, misery and terror, and his tongue was tied and he did not speak."

Here, the meaning of love changes again. Whereas previously he had declared All that is good, now he is paralysed by the social label of a house of ill repute. The meaning of love is delayed by collective stigma. His personal feelings cannot stand alone because they are burdened by the social meaning system that has already been attached to Mimi's family. The paralysis of language his tongue was tied symbolises that love can no longer be expressed freely. Language that was previously fluent in acknowledging the meaning of love now stops when faced with social norms. This shows that love is always in tension between individual desire and collective pressure. Within the framework of *différance*, this moment reveals a crack in the seemingly solid meaning of love, which is easily shaken by the structure of social reputation. This postponement of meaning takes on a more complex form in the following excerpt:

ولم يكن غريباً أن يستخرج دفتر مذكراته القديم من الدرج الخاص بالأوراق الثمينة كعقد ملكية الأرض وبوليصة التأمين . وكان اعتاد على عهد المراهقة وهو عهد كان يحلم فيه بعرش الزجل ! أن يسجل أحداثه

العاطفية والاجتماعية يوما بعد يوم. وفرّ صفحاته ليرجع إلى عام ١٩٢٥ وما حوالياه حتى رقم التليفون وجده . وبدافع لم يعرف كنهه امتدت يده إلى قرص التليفون فأدارت الرقم القديم (Maḥfūz, 1965) .

"It was no surprise that he then took his old notebook out of the special drawer where he kept his important papers such as land deeds and insurance policies. In his youth the time when he dreamed of becoming the king of folk poetry he was accustomed to recording his emotional and social events day by day. He flipped through the pages to return to 1925 and its surroundings. He even found the telephone number. Driven by an impulse he did not understand, his hand reached for the telephone dial and dialled the old number."

The act of returning to the past shows that the subject is not only dealing with social pressure, but also with traces of previous experiences. In the framework of *différance*, meaning always moves within a network of mutually referential signs and is never directly present. The past here functions as a trace that continues to influence present decisions. Love for Mimi does not exist as a completely new experience; it is always overshadowed by other experiences, possibilities, and choices that once existed. The decision to call the old number shows that the meaning of love for Mimi is never truly final; it is delayed by memories, fears, and other alternatives stored in the memory. The movement towards the past shows that the subject is seeking stability of meaning elsewhere, because the current meaning of love is unable to give him certainty. Thus, the meaning of love moves in a chain of differences between the present and the past, between Mimi and other figures who have filled his life.

Thus, through the concept of *différance*, it can be understood that the meanings of love, commitment, and even courage in this text are not fixed. They continue to change according to the context between private and public spaces, between feelings and social norms, between the present and the past. Every time the meaning seems to become certain, it is immediately shifted by a new context that delays it (Pramulia, 2022). The love expressed in the initial dialogue does not guarantee the courage to act in social reality. The love that seems simple in the initial confession is entangled in a network of social meanings that delay the certainty of its actions. In other words, the meaning of love is not a stable core, but a process that is always negotiated in relation to norms, reputation, and personal history.

Therefore, this text shows that meaning is never present in a complete and stable form. It is always different and delayed, moving in the tension between personal desires and the social structures that frame them (Halim, 2024). This is the work of *différance*, which shows that meaning in a text is always in process, not in final

certainty. The meaning of love here is not a conclusion, but a series of possibilities that are constantly changing and never fully completed (Asia et al., 2024).

b. Absence

Absence in the perspective of deconstruction is a concept that refers to the absence of meaning that actually contributes to the presence of meaning itself. In Jacques Derrida's thinking, there is no meaning that is purely and wholly present, because every sign always contains traces of other signs that are not directly present in the text (Derrida, 1944). In other words, what is not said, explained, or displayed in the text still plays an important role in shaping the reader's understanding (Norris, 2000). This absence is not a void, but rather a space that allows for various possibilities of meaning. In deconstruction, absence shows that presence always depends on something that is not present, so that meaning never stands stable or final (Harjanti, 2021).

وكان شبان الحي يسرون جماعات تحت حجرة الاستقبال المتألثة بالأنوار ، يصفون إلى الضحكات المتصاعدة ، وعزف البيان ، والغناء ، وكلما ظهر في النافذة طربوش تبادلوا الغمزات والنكات وذهبوا في التأويل كل مذهب وتخيلوا أعجب المواقف (Maḥfūz, 1965)

"The young men of the neighbourhood walked in groups under the glittering lights of the reception room. They listened to the soaring laughter, the piano music, and the singing. Every time a tarbus (red cap) appeared in the window, they exchanged winks and jokes, then interpreted it as they pleased and imagined the strangest scenes."

On the surface, this quote presents a lively and active atmosphere: light, laughter, music, and singing. However, through the perspective of deconstruction as proposed by Jacques Derrida, the text is not only read from what is present, but also from what is not present (Setiyoningsih et al., 2024). In the excerpt, only the perceptions of the young men appear they interpret as they please and imagine the strangest scenes. However, the text never directly presents what actually happened inside the house. There is no concrete description of the activities that were considered deviant. Thus, the meaning of evil or suspicion is constructed not from explicit facts, but from collective imagination.

It is this absence of objective facts that is important. The voices of the house's inhabitants are not heard. The perspective from within the space is not provided. All that is present are interpretations from outside (Anafiah et al., 2024). This means that the reality of the house itself is never truly presented; it only appears as a shadow in the social imagination. Furthermore, the phrase interpreting as one pleases suggests that meaning is formed through speculation. However, the text does not confirm the truth of this interpretation. Here, it is evident that the moral meaning attached to the

house stands on the emptiness of representation. The presence of light, laughter, and music actually raises the question of whether joy is something wrong. The text never states this directly.

Thus, through a reading of absence, it can be understood that the stigma attached to the house is not built on clear evidence, but rather on empty spaces filled with prejudice and imagination. The meaning of evil is present not because of the actions depicted, but because of the absence of clarification or alternative perspectives (Derrida, 1944). It is this absence that shapes the construction of meaning in the text.

Conclusion

This study shows that the community in Najīb Maḥfūz's short story *Bayt Sayyi' Al-Sum'ah* tends to reject new traditions or elements of modernity because they are considered a threat to the established social order. The community's closed attitude towards change gives rise to social judgement mechanisms against individuals or groups who are considered different. In this context, the Halawah family becomes the object of stigma because they do not fully follow the prevailing collective norms. However, on the other hand, the Halawah family also does not establish open communication and dialogue with the surrounding community, so that activities that reflect modernity give rise to misunderstandings that further strengthen the social distance between the two. These findings confirm that the concepts of right, wrong, and evil in the text are not born objectively and absolutely, but are formed through the perspectives, discourse, and social constructs of society. Labels such as *bad reputation* are not facts that stand alone, but are the result of a process of social labelling produced by collective value structures. Thus, this short story shows that tradition is not an absolute value system, but rather a space for the negotiation of meaning that continues to change along with social dynamics. As an academic implication, this study opens up opportunities for further research to develop the deconstruction approach pioneered by Jacques Derrida in Arabic literary studies with a broader perspective. Future research can explore the relationship between deconstruction and cultural studies, gender studies, or the discourse of modernity in modern Arabic literary works. In addition, further research can also combine the deconstruction approach with social criticism theory or discourse analysis to see how literary texts not only deconstruct meaning structures but also reflect the dynamics of social change in society. Thus, literary studies not only produce textual interpretations but also enrich our understanding of the relationship between texts, traditions, and cultural transformations in society.

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