

## RHETORIC OF FORGETTING AND LINGUISTIC TRAUMA IN SHERINE'S BATMANNA ANSAK: DERRIDEAN DECONSTRUCTION

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### Abstract

*This study investigates how the rhetoric of forgetting and linguistic trauma are represented in Sherine Abdel Wahab's "Batmanna Ansak" through the deconstruction of binary oppositions. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research analyzes five purposively sampled lyrical units, focusing on Derrida's concepts of différance, trace, and binary structures. The findings reveal that the lyrics systematically undermine binary oppositions through rhetorical repetition. The expressed desire to forget paradoxically strengthens the presence of memory as an indelible trace, creating a suspension of meaning where linguistic trauma manifests as a dependency between the illusion of love and the reality of pain. These results imply that the song constructs a hyperreality of trauma that blurs the boundaries between presence and absence. Furthermore, this study suggests a poststructuralist insight into how language shapes and deforms human emotional dynamics, concluding that text resists linear narratives of emotional resolution by opening an endless interpretative space.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Literature is often the object of study by researchers because it contains various unique elements that have the potential to be used as scientific research material. Generally, literature is understood as a medium of expression conveyed through oral or written forms (Novianti et al., 2025). In another view, literature is not merely positioned as an aesthetic object to be enjoyed, but also plays a role as a medium for criticism of various phenomena that occur in the social construction that has been formed, especially in the genre of poetry literary works (Alandira et al., 2025).

Furthermore, according to Sapardi Djoko Damono's interpretation, literature is a medium that is not only used to explore ideas and convey social criticism, but also has the potential to be a tool in reconstructing or changing established social orders (Kamala, 2024). Literary works, such as poetry, prose, and drama, consistently serve as a means for writers to express their feelings, ideas, criticisms, and aspirations. Literature is more than just a spoken or written form it is a reflection of the social dynamics experienced by a group of people. This reflective nature of literature allows the meaning of literary texts to be interpreted more broadly. One approach to interpreting the meaning of literary texts is through deconstruction theory (Fauziah et al., 2024).

Deconstruction is a theory in poststructuralism introduced by Jacques Derrida through his monumental work, *Of Grammatology*. According to Derrida, deconstruction refers to a careful reading of a text to reveal its implied meanings, as well as a form of critical study of the text that produces contradictions, paradoxes, and inconsistencies in the writing. The process of deconstruction begins with dismantling the text to identify paradoxes and reader interpretations, and ultimately reveals the failure of philosophical meaning in the text, so that the shortcomings in the text become clearly visible (Altiria, 2023).

Derrida's theory of deconstruction, often referred to as dismantling, is not a destructive attempt to destroy the text, but rather a critical strategy to reveal hidden layers of meaning, unspoken assumptions, and distortions that create inherent contradictions (Ruhupatty, 2021). As explained by Sahu et al. (2021) in their analysis of Derrida's deconstructive approach to philosophy, this concept challenges logocentrism, or the belief in a fixed center of meaning, and phonocentrism, or the priority of sound over writing, and introduces *différance*, a play on words that combines *différance* and deferral, where meaning is always deferred and never fully present.

In an interdisciplinary context, deconstruction has penetrated various fields, including law, education, and hermeneutics, to reveal structural injustice and false binary oppositions. For example, Sahlan et al. (2024) applied deconstruction in the reform of Indonesian agrarian law to dismantle colonial legacies, the dualism between customary law and national law, and injustices in land distribution, thereby opening space for more inclusive and substantial interpretations. Similary, Taherkhani and Fatemi (2023) highlight how deconstruction reveals violence in the formation of law and marginalized voices, making it a tool for radical intervention against the hegemony of a single legal logic. Then, Jin (2019) in his deconstructive hermeneutics of nature and culture, argues that binary oppositions such as nature or culture are linguistic prejudices that never achieve their intended meaning, so that deconstruction reveals the meaninglessness of signs and the erasure of culture against nature, encouraging eternal reflection to return to a "belief in nature" post-Derrida.

In the realm of literature, deconstruction is particularly relevant to analyzing texts involving emotional trauma and rhetoric, such as song lyrics that represent personal and collective experiences. For instance, in studies of fanfiction as popular literature, deconstruction uncovers how real-world figures (e.g., K-pop idols) are transformed into fictional characters, dismantling binaries like reality/fiction to reveal the traces of original identities persisting within new narratives (Cahyanti & Dermawan, 2021). This process mirrors the paradoxical reinforcement of presence through absence, akin to the rhetoric of forgetting in song lyrics. Similarly, deconstruction applied to children's literature exposes fluid gender roles, reversing traditional binaries of masculinity/femininity in characters like Meps (active career woman with masculine traits) and Beps (domestic male with feminine attributes), demonstrating how literature can fluidize societal norms for young readers (Alamsyah & Mulyati, 2024). In short stories, deconstruction reveals identity multiplicity, as in Najib Mahfudz's "Si Malang," where the character Hasan El-Dahsan embodies unstable meanings through verbal, textual, and linguistic readings, challenging fixed notions of power, evil, and powerlessness (Halim, 2024). Extending to poetry, deconstruction decenters rural/urban binaries in Balinese modern Indonesian poetry (1960s–2012), portraying cities not as progress centers but as sites of individual awareness and cultural struggle against policy-driven hierarchies (Hardiningtyas et al., 2020). Furthermore, in novels, deconstruction rejects grand narratives such as scientific cartography, religious paradigms of heaven, and historical absolutes by inverting hierarchies to uncover ancient histories and societal instabilities, as seen in E.S. Ito's "Negara Kelima" (NL et al., 2016). These literary applications echo the emotional paradoxes in song lyrics, where trauma defers resolution. Complementing this, psychological analyses of abandonment trauma in films like *Toy Story 3* illustrate disorganized attachment styles manifesting as manipulative behaviors, paralleling

deconstructive traces of unresolved pain that blur trust and control binaries (Nabila & Ernawati, 2025). In Butt et al. (2022) research, it is emphasized that deconstruction broadens the scope of questions about education and teaching by exploring political, ethical, and existential dimensions, similar to how it dismantles hierarchies in literary texts to reveal aporias. Sahu et al. (2021) further compares Derrida's *différance* with Nagarjuna's concept of emptiness, demonstrating the Indian roots of deconstruction that challenge representationalism and open up endless interpretations. This approach is ideal for analyzing the lyrics of Sherine Abdel Wahab's song Batmanna Ansak, which are rich in the rhetoric of forgetting and linguistic trauma, where the desire for absence actually strengthens the presence of memory, creating an irresolvable emotional paradox. Complementing this, analyses of cultural production in fields like visual arts and gastronomy show how creators balance convention and originality through mechanisms like juxtaposition and transformation processes that echo deconstructive play, allowing producers to form "a canon of one's own" by embedding traces of the familiar within innovative disruptions (Coman & Opazo, 2020).

There are several similarities between this research, "The Rhetoric of Forgetting and Language Trauma in the Lyrics of Batmanna Ansak by Sherine Abdel Wahab: Derrida's Deconstruction Approach" and previous research. (1) The focus is on the field of literary studies as a medium of expression and social criticism. This research is in the domain of poststructuralist literature which positions literature as a reflection of social dynamics and a tool of reconstruction, in line with previous studies which analyze literary texts as emotional expressions and spiritual reflections. In particular, this has similarities with Novianti et al. (2025) who emphasized the potential of poetry as a medium for expressing strong emotions and Alandira et al. (2025) who examined literature as a social critique of societal injustice through poetry, as well as Kamala (2024) who highlighted social reconstruction through Sapardi Djoko Damono's interpretation. It also aligns with explorations of deconstruction in fanfiction, where literary transformation deconstructs idol figures to fit narrative demands, revealing persistent traces of the original (Cahyanti & Dermawan, 2021), gender deconstruction in children's literature, fluidizing roles without biological determinism (Alamsyah & Mulyati, 2024), identity multiplicity in short stories, inverting power hierarchies (Halim, 2024), decentering rural/urban in poetry as cultural resistance (Hardiningtyas et al., 2020), and rejection of grand narratives in novels, reversing scientific, religious, and historical binaries (NL et al., 2016). (2) Use of Derrida's Deconstruction Theory Framework. This study uses Jacques Derrida's comprehensive deconstruction framework, including binary opposition and *différance*, which is a central approach in many previous studies on literature and philosophy. The use of deconstruction to reveal the paradoxes and contradictions of meaning (Altiria, 2023), non-destructive critical strategies (Ruhupatty, 2021), and the comparison of *différance* with Nagarjuna's concept of emptiness is a tested and recognized practice in the literature, similar to Fauziah et al. (2024) who applied it to the binary gender opposition in the novel (3) Emphasis on Revealing Contradictions, Paradoxes, and Trauma in the Text. The main focus of the research is to unpack layers of hidden meanings, unspoken assumptions, and emotional paradoxes such as memory/forgetting. This is consistent with the main goal of deconstruction, which is to challenge logocentrism, phonocentrism, and false binary oppositions to open up endless interpretations. Specifically, this theme is in line with Butt et al. (2022) who extended deconstruction to the political-ethical dimension in education and interdisciplinary studies such as Sahlan et al. (2024) who revealed structural injustice in Indonesian agrarian law, as well as Jin (2019) who highlighted the "meaninglessness" of the signifier in the nature/culture opposition. Furthermore, it resonates with cultural production theories where deconstruction aids in balancing conformity and innovation, as seen in the mechanisms of juxtaposition and self-insertion that producers use to create distinctive yet canon-embedded works (Coman & Opazo, 2020), and psychological explorations of

trauma-induced attachment disorders that mirror deconstructive instabilities in relational binaries (Nabila & Ernawati, 2025).

This study has several différences that demonstrate its originality and strong research position: (1) Integration of Différence in the Rhetoric of Forgetting in Contemporary Song Lyrics. This study explicitly maps différence (the suspension of meaning through rhetorical repetition) on the opposition of memory/forgetting, where the desire for absence actually strengthens the presence of trauma, specifically in the lyrics of the Arabic song "Batmanna Ansak". Previous studies generally focus on prose or poetry. Such as the study by Fauziah et al. (2024) which focuses on gender novels and research by Altiria (2023) which focuses on cognitive linguistics, not on the dynamic form of song lyrics with paradoxical repetition as an indelible trace. Unlike fanfiction analyses that deconstruct static idol transformations (Cahyanti & Dermawan, 2021), this emphasizes rhythmic, performative repetition in music, or gender role fluidity in children's lit (Alamsyah & Mulyati, 2024), which targets young audiences rather than adult emotional trauma. (2) Object of Analysis of Language Trauma as a Unique Emotional Paradox. This study analyzes language trauma as the illusion/reality of intertwined love, with life/death as a metaphor for perpetual suffering, using lyric data as a purposive unit of analysis. This is a specific focus that has not been found in previous literary studies, especially in the context of Arabic pop music; although Sahu et al. (2021) compared Nagarjuna's différence with emptiness, this study is the first to apply deconstruction to the rhetoric of forgetting as linguistic trauma in the song genre. It diverges from identity deconstruction in short stories (Halim, 2024), or grand narrative rejections in novels (NL et al., 2016), which prioritize socio-political instabilities over personal emotional deferral. (3) Pure Literary Context vs. Broad Interdisciplinary. Unlike the majority of previous studies that focus on interdisciplinary applications such as law in Sahlan et al. (2024) study focused on colonial agrarianism and in Taherkhani & Fatemi (2023) study focused on legal violence, or education (Butt et al., 2022) and cultural hermeneutics (Jin, 2019), this study focuses purely on the analysis of contemporary literary texts and personal/collective emotional dynamics, without extensions to formal social or ethical reform. It diverges from institutional ideology analyses, such as those in planning where deconstructive-like morphological approaches unpack contested concepts like liberty and property (Shepherd, 2020), by prioritizing emotional rather than policy binaries, or urban decentering in poetry as policy critique (Hardiningtyas et al., 2020). While trauma in film attachments offers psychological parallels (Nabila & Ernawati, 2025), it lacks the linguistic focus of différence. (4) Focus Exactly on Repetition as a Paradoxical Suspension of Meaning. This study highlights how the repetition of phrases, such as "I wish I could forget you" collapses the linear narrative, leaving uncertainty as the primary meaning, with différence as the primary tool. This distinguishes it from other studies that tend to emphasize structural binary oppositions by Ruhupatty (2021) and Alandira et al. (2025) or general social criticism by Novianti et al. (2025) and Kamala (2024), where repetition is more of a reinforcement than a lasting shift. In contrast to cultural production models that use transformation for canon-building (Coman & Opazo, 2020), this views repetition as a traumatic deferral rather than creative evolution.

In conclusion, while deconstruction has been widely applied in interdisciplinary fields like law and education (Sahlan et al., 2024), its application to the specific emotional trauma within Arabic pop music remains under-explored. In doing so, this study not only reveals the complexity of trauma in contemporary literary texts but also contributes to a poststructuralist understanding of how language shapes and deforms human experience, in line with the broader interdisciplinary application of deconstruction (Taherkhani & Fatemi, 2023). It extends insights from fanfiction deconstruction, where idol figures leave indelible traces in fiction (Cahyanti & Dermawan, 2021), gender fluidity in children's narrative (Alamsyah & Mulyati, 2024), identity multiplicities in prose (Halim, 2024), cultural decentering in poetry (Hardiningtyas et al., 2020), grand narrative rejections (NL

et al., 2016), trauma attachments in media (Nabila & Ernawati, 2025), and cultural innovation studies that highlight deconstructive mechanisms in personal canon formation (Coman & Opazo, 2020).

This study intends to deconstruct or unpack binary oppositions, specifically memory of forgetting, life or death, and presence or absence, based on the theoretical background and research gaps mentioned above. It also seeks to reveal the manifestation of linguistic trauma through the mechanism of *différance*, including traces and paradoxical repetition that create an endless deferral of meaning in the lyrics of Sherine Abdel Wahab's song "Batmanna Ansak."

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method. The qualitative approach is used to explore the complex meanings that individuals associate with social and human issues (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The descriptive method was specifically modified to prioritize an "in-depth reading" of song lyrics, enabling a systematic interpretative framework that categorizes linguistic data into specific psychological and philosophical themes. Sample selection used purposive sampling techniques, targeting fragments of lyrics in the song "Batmanna Ansak" that explicitly represent the phenomena of linguistic trauma and the rhetoric of forgetting.

The research procedure follows systematic stages adapted from Creswell & Creswell (2023): (1) organizing and preparing the lyrics data; (2) deep reading to obtain a general impression; (3) coding fragments; (4) identifying the main deconstructive themes; (5) narrative and tabular presentation; and (6) final interpretation.

This research tool is a modified deconstruction framework based on Derrida's work (Derrida, 2016). This modification focuses on two operational dimensions to suit the medium of lyrics; First, binary oppositions, which analyzes the tension between presence/absence and illusion/reality. Second, the dimension of *différance*, which is further operationalized into trace, delay, and paradoxical repetition. This specific adaptation is necessary to bridge abstract philosophical concepts with the rhythmic and repetitive nature of pop lyrics.

The data analysis technique uses a deconstructive reading strategy. This involves a two-stage process; identifying the "logocentric" (dominant) meaning of the lyrics, and then revealing the internal contradictions (aporia) that undermine that meaning. This technique emphasizes how linguistic trauma functions as a suspension of meaning, where the act of voicing the desire to forget inherently reinforces the presence of memory.

## RESULT

The research results are categorized into two main dimensions of Derrida's deconstruction: Binary Oppositions and *différance*. The distribution of data findings is summarized in table 1.

**Table 1. Deconstructions Analysis Grid of "Batmanna Ansak"**

Dimension	Subindicator	Number of Data Units	Data Number	Example of Lyrics Excerpt
Binary Opposition	Presence/ Absence (dependence of memory and forgetting)	2	Data 1, Data 5	"I wish I could forget you, just like you forgot me one day."
Binary Opposition	Illusion/ Reality (illusion of love vs reality of pain)	2	Data 2, Data 4	"Why did I love you? I believed words of illusions/

Binary Opposition	Life/ Death (contradiction of emotional life and death)	1	Data 2	delusions, and woke up to fire and pain.” “And how I am dying while you are living? While your eyes sleep at night.”
Différence	Trace/ Shadow left over from absence	1	Data 3	“I wish it would disappear, your features would disappear from my mind, even if you leave, acceptable...”
Différence	Deferral/ Postponement of meaning through repetition	1	Data 3	“But it’s unbelievable, I suffer all the time, every day I am preoccupied with your eyes...”
Différence	Paradoxical Repetition (repetition that reinforces instability)	2	Data 5	“I wish I could forget you, and forget that I ever loved you.” (final repetition)
Total	-	5	Data 1-5	-

Based on the details in Table 1, this study identifies five data of evidence indicating that lyrical meaning is never fixed or stable. An in-depth perspective on these finding is outlined below.

First, the analysis of Binary Opposition reveals a strong tension between presence and absence. Looking at Data 1 and Data 5, the act of voicing the desire to “forget someone” inadvertently makes the memory of that person more vivid and real. When the singer says, “I wish I could forget you,” it highlights a contradiction the attempt to create absence (forgetting) entirely depends on a powerful presence (memory) of that person in one’s mind. Another opposition, between life and death, appears in Data 2. This data depicts a subject who feels emotionally “dead” inside, while the person they sing about remains peacefully alive. This illustrates how deep trauma can disrupt the understanding of being emotionally alive or existentially dead.

Next, through the analysis of Illusion and Reality, the researcher finds a collapse of meaning between the two. Data 2 and Data 4 show that the subject realizes the “illusionary words” once believed to be love have now transformed into a harsh, burning “reality of pain,” fiery like flames. This deconstruction shows that the very real present suffering grows directly from the past illusions they trusted. As a result, love and pain are no longer

merely simple opposites. They merge into a single traumatic experience where today's truth is forever colored and haunted by the devastating lies of the past.

The concept of Différance is also crucial. The researcher finds evidence of traces and an uncertain deferral of meaning. In Data 3, the hope for someone's face to "disappear" backfires, causing their features to return as a haunting shadow that persistently disturbs the subject's mind. This indicates that the desire to erase an object's presence never leads to complete absence; it always leaves a trace and continues to affect the subject's emotions. This deferral becomes even more apparent when the lyrics describe pain occurring "every day" and "all the time." Such a state suggests that emotional healing is perpetually deferred, without a stable end point.

Finally, the Paradoxical Repetition found in Data 5 is key to understanding the linguistic trauma of this song. The repetition of the phrase "I wish I could forget you" five times at the song's closure is not merely a stylistic choice, but a representation of a condition of endless deferral, or eternal deferral. This repetition destroys the simple narrative of forgetting someone; the more frequently the desire to forget is repeated, the more permanently that memory is engraved as an indelible trace in the text. This creates a "hyperreality of trauma," where the song's meaning is forever trapped between the longing for freedom and the inescapable bond with the past. The result is a subject stuck in a permanently unresolved state of meaning.

## DISCUSSION

Researchers found a gap in how linguistic trauma is represented, viewing it as a deconstructive cycle rather than a linear healing process. Analysis shows that every attempt to "forget" in Nour's (2024) lyrics delays its own achievement, making the memory even more present as an indelible trace. This is in line with Derrida's view that deconstruction reveals hidden contradictions to create diverse interpretations (Ruhupatty, 2021).

The specific tensions identified in this study provide deep theoretical insights into emotional trauma; (1) Presence/Absence, the repetition found in Data 1 shows that the desire to forget (absence) is inherently linked to the memory (presence) of the object. This reflects similar dynamics in contemporary studies of women's literature, such as the ambiguous language in Fadwa Tuqan's poetry that rejects singular narratives in favour of symbolic resistance (Aditya et al., 2025). (2) Trace and Deferral, in Data 3, the act of expressing the desire for features to disappear paradoxically makes those absent features present as haunting shadows. The five repetitions in Data 5 further signify eternal deferral, where the text fails to reach resolution and leaves the emotional state in a suspension of meaning. (3) Suffering and Resolution, this finding suggests that in emotionally charged texts, deconstruction functions as a space where the meaning of suffering never reaches absolute resolution.

Additionally, the collapse of the Illusion/Reality opposition in Data 2, where the reality of suffering depends on the previous illusion of love, aligns with the radicalization of femininity in the lyrics of "Ngamen Lima." In this study, traditional illusions are deconstructed to achieve a new, equal balance (Rohman, 2023). Similarly, the non-linear dynamics and fragmented meanings in "Batmanna Ansak's Paradoxical Repetition" resonate with the novel "Balas Dendam Romantis," where love and revenge are mutually deferred, giving readers space to negotiate the paradox (Nani et al., 2025). This also reflects mechanisms in cultural production, where creators delay fixed meanings while inserting traces of authenticity (Coman & Opazo, 2020), as well as traumatic bonds that maintain relational delays (Nabila & Ernawati, 2025).

However, this study acknowledges several limitations. First, the scope of this study is limited to one musical work, "Batmanna Ansak," which may not represent the full complexity of linguistic trauma in contemporary Arabic pop music as a whole. Second, this analysis relies heavily on Derrida's deconstructive framework, which is inherently

interpretive. Therefore, alternative theoretical lenses, such as psychological trauma theory or critical discourse analysis, may offer alternative insights into the text. Finally, this study focuses strictly on textual and linguistic elements of the lyrics, neglecting performative aspects such as Sherine's vocal delivery and musical arrangement, even though these elements significantly contribute to the overall emotional impact of the song.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the lyrics of Sherine Abdel Wahab's song "Batmanna Ansak" function as a space of deconstructive tension, where the rhetoric of forgetting paradoxically reinforces the presence of memory as an indelible trace, revealing a "hyperreality of trauma" that maintains a state of *différance* towards linear narratives of recovery. To apply this approach practically in literature or linguistics, researchers can adopt a systematic three-stage framework consisting of binary mapping to identify hierarchical oppositions, aporia detection to find internal contradictions where the logic of the text reverses itself, and trace analysis to track how lost meanings continue to haunt current discourse. This methodology can be applied to broader literary studies, such as analyzing identity instability or gender fluidity, and has pedagogical aims by integrating post-structuralist analysis into the curriculum to develop the critical thinking and advanced skills necessary for interpreting complex cultural and emotional phenomena in the modern world.

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