



# STONE'S REVENGE: DECONSTRUCTING HIERARCHY IN 'CERITA BATU'

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## Abstract

*This paper analyzes the short story Cerita Batu through the lens of deconstruction, focusing on the reversal of hierarchical oppositions and the rejection of new hierarchical structures. The analysis identifies key binary oppositions in the text Man/Woman, Living Things/Inanimate Objects, and Happy/Sad and examines how these oppositions function within the narrative. The study highlights how the text initially presents dominant and marginal hierarchies, such as male dominance over female and human superiority over inanimate objects, which are later deconstructed. By reversing these hierarchies, the story reveals the interdependence between opposing elements: men and women, humans and stones, and happiness and sadness. The narrative demonstrates that these binary oppositions are not fixed, but fluid and interconnected, showing how meaning in the text is plural and resistant to singular interpretations. Ultimately, Cerita Batu emphasize the idea that oppositions are mutually constitutive, challenging conventional notions of dominance and subordination.*

## 1. Introduction

The deconstruction approach introduced by Jacques Derrida emphasizes the analysis and dismantling of the hierarchical structure underlying the system of thought and language. One of the main concepts in deconstruction is the reversal of structure which refers to the opposition to binary oppositions that distinguish concepts such as male/female, subject/object, and center/periphery. According to Derrida, this hierarchical structure is not natural or undeniable, but rather a construction that needs to be questioned. The reversal of hierarchy in deconstruction aims to change the relationship of domination that usually benefits one party, for example the subject has more power than the object. In the shifting of hierarchy, elements that are usually placed in a more central position, or have more significant power and influence.

Supriyadi (2014: 61) said that deconstruction is a strategy of reading and deconstructive reading that starts from a 'philosophical hierarchy in which two opposing terms are presented as a 'superior' general case and a 'defeated/marginalized' special case. According to Derrida (Ratna, 2015: 224-225) the poststructuralist group in general, views that the main problem that needs to be raised, and in itself is its main goal, is the rejection of the existence of a single center. Deconstruction rejects this center by continuously trying to break away, while trying to find new centers.

'Cerita Batu' is one of the short stories written by Eka Kurniawan in a book of Short Story Collections entitled 'Perempuan Patah Hati Yang Kembali Menemukan Cinta Melalui Mimpi'. This collection of stories was published by Bentang Pustaka in 2015. This short story tells about a stone that is described as the size of a baby's head that holds a grudge against a man who killed a woman

by dragging her into a river. The woman who was the man's wife was tied to a rock, then drowned in the river. Therefore, the stone felt very humiliated because the man had tricked him; involving the stone in the murder. The stone did not remain silent, he thought of many ways to avenge his revenge. At the end of the story, he managed to avenge his revenge, but unfortunately, he was again used by other humans in killing the man. The stone saw a smile of victory on a woman who was none other than the young wife of the man who had killed his first wife. The woman had killed the man using the help of the stone.

The short story "Cerita Batu" offers an interesting perspective to explore the concept of hierarchical reversal within Derrida's deconstruction framework. In this short story, stones often act as symbols that hold deeper meanings than mere physical objects. In the deconstructionist view, stones can be seen as having more dominant power than humans in the narrative, so that the relationship between the subject (human) and object (stone) in this short story can be reinterpreted by reversing the hierarchical structure that has been considered as something that is permanent.

Several previous studies using Derrida's deconstruction approach have been conducted. One of them is a study conducted by Shaifullah (2023) entitled "Analisis Dekonstruksi Dalam Penembak Misterius Karya Seno Gumira Ajidarma". This study aims to describe the elements of the opposition hierarchy contained in the short story 'Penembak Misterius' by Seno Gumira Ajidarma and describe the opposition counter text contained in the short story collection. This study traces the elements of aporia, namely the paradoxical, contradictory, and ironic meanings of the literary works read, and identifies the dominant opposition hierarchy represented by the author in the text.

In addition, similar things have also been done by several other researchers, namely Zulfadli (2009), Respati (2018), and Azril (2023). They conducted similar research using Derrida's deconstruction approach in different works. Zulfadli (2009) conducted research on deconstruction in Indonesian literary works, while Respati (2018) conducted research on deconstruction in literary feminism. Meanwhile, Azril (2023) conducted research on deconstruction in contemporary literary works. These studies indicate that deconstruction serves as an efficient analytical method in revealing the structure and meaning of a literary work. They also reveal that deconstruction could be used to criticize and question the structure and meaning contained in a work.

The short story "Cerita Batu" presents deep symbolism, where the stone acts as a dynamic element and has power in the storyline. However, there is still a few research that explores how deconstruction proposed by Derrida could be applied to analyze the symbolism of non-human objects that play an important role, such as the stone in this short story. This study explores how deconstruction by Derrida changes the way people view objects that are usually seen as inactive in literary works. Thus, the problem in this study is how to apply the deconstruction approach proposed by Derrida to examine the changes in hierarchy between objects (stones) and subjects (humans) in the short story *Cerita Batu* by Eka Kurniawan.

The novelty of this study is the emphasis on the interaction between the subject (human) and object (stone) in the short story "Cerita Batu". In many literary works, objects such as stones are often considered as inactive objects and only function as backgrounds or symbols. However, in this story, stones have an important role and have the power to influence certain events. In this case, stones are no longer seen as objects controlled by humans, but rather become subjects who have the freedom and ability to take revenge. This provides a different perspective on the application of deconstruction to analyze the interaction between humans and inanimate objects in literary works.

## 2. Theory

Deconstruction is a theory proposed by a French philosopher named Derrida. Derrida's three most influential books in 1967 were *Of Grammatology*, *Speech and Phenomena*, and *Writing and Difference*. These books sharply criticized phenomenology (Husserl), linguistics (Saussurean), Lacanian psychoanalysis, and structuralism (Levi-Straus). Deconstruction according to Derrida is a rejection of the center. Structuralism always prioritizes the center, but deconstruction rejects centralization because according to Derrida we must be able to think in other ways in order to find new innovations, even if they come from the periphery or are considered unimportant.

Derrida (2012: 21) said that deconstruction does not stop at criticizing, but rather dismantling and looking for the contradictions inherent in the building and then leaving it in ruins and not allowing it to be rebuilt. Faruk (2012: 210) said that deconstruction is a method of reading texts that is carried out so carefully that the conceptual distinctions that the author uses as a basis for the text are proven to fail on the basis of their inconsistent and paradoxical use in the text as a whole. For Jacques Derrida (Sim: 2002) deconstruction is not a system of thought but rather a tactical effort designed to prove the instability of language and the shaky foundations that underlie most theories.

The task of deconstruction is to reveal the problematic nature of the central discourses, while on the other hand, it dismantles metaphysics by conceptually changing its boundaries. In this case, Derrida crosses out words that he considers inaccurate or inadequate in describing reality, but still allows the word to be found and read in the reading. This instability of language makes Derrida initiate 'Sous rature' which means 'crossed out'. Through this approach we could understand Derrida's thoughts (Sarup: 2008).

According to Derrida (Sarup: 2008) the signifier is not directly related to the signified; words and objects in reality never become one unit. He also said that one sign will refer to another sign and another sign will refer to another sign and *et cetera*, endlessly. The signifier continues to change into the signified and will never arrive at the final signified which in itself is not a signifier. Derrida (Sarup: 2008) also stated that reading a signifier in a text, it is not merely clear in its meaning. The signifier shows what is not there and that means its meaning is also unknown. It will continue to move along the chain of signifiers and cannot determine where its position is because the meaning is never tied to a particular sign.

Sarup (2008) said that meaning is never identical to itself because it appears in different contexts, signs never have the same absolute meaning. Meaning will never be the same from one context to another; the signified will continue to be changed by the various chains of signifiers that ensnare it. In semiological terms, words in a scope can only move their oppositional meaning with other pairs of words, as in the quote below:

"to summarize and speak of it in semiological terms (it being a brief point of analysis that reflects, like a mirror, the subject and method of our study), that words in the domain derive meaning only from their opposition to other words (usually in pairs), and that if these oppositions are maintained, the meaning is unambiguous. (Barthes:2012)

In his book Barthes said that the sign actually has dissimilarity with: signal, index, icon, symbol, allegory, which are the main rivals of the sign. General terms like that tend to show the relation between two related, such characteristics cannot be used to distinguish any term to find variation of meaning and we must use alternative terms, namely presence/absence.

Sarup (2008) said that this deconstruction method is connected to what Derrida calls the 'metaphysics of presence'. According to Derrida, metaphysical binary oppositions include: signifier/signified, the sensible/the rational, speech/writing, conversation (parole)/language (langue), diachronic/synchronic, space/time, passivity/activity. In this case, Derrida opposes structuralist who do not put concepts under the cross, they never question binary oppositions.

Binary opposition is a way of looking at things or simply can be interpreted as a system that tries to share something in a classification related to the structure. In construction theory, binary opposition is looking for a common thread between truth and misunderstanding, meaningful and meaningless, center and periphery. Derrida (Sarup, 2008: 54) said that we must destroy the oppositions that we usually use to think and preserve metaphysics in our mindset such as mask/truth, body/soul/, interior/exterior, text/meaning, and others. Here Derrida's role is to recommend this method to destroy the opposition. Phonocentrism-logocentrism is related to centrism itself - namely the human desire to place a 'central' presence at the starting point and end point. The desire for the center, the pressure that gives authority, is what gives birth to the concept of hierarchical opposition.

In determining binary opposition and destroying hierarchy, it is necessary to know what is meant by inferior and superior in order to distinguish the true nature of reality in that opposition.

### 3. Research Method

This study implement qualitative research methods, which specifically emphasize the analysis of literary works using a deconstruction approach. The aim of this research is to find out how binary opposition is constructed in the short story "Cerita Batu" by Eka Kurniawan and how this opposition is deconstructed to show the flexibility of meaning and the interrelationship between opposing elements.

The primary method of data collection is the close reading of *Cerita Batu*, focusing on identifying and analyzing the binary oppositions present in the text. This process involves interpreting the text in its entirety, with particular attention to language, symbolism, and narrative structure. Following the deconstructionist approach as outlined by Derrida and interpreted by scholars such as Rodolph Gasche (via Norris, 2006), the analysis will proceed through the following steps: Identification of Binary Oppositions, Reversing Hierarchies, and Rejecting New Hierarchies. To enhance the analysis, the study incorporates an understanding of the broader literary and cultural context within which '*Cerita Batu*' was written. This include exploring themes of gender dynamics, social hierarchies, and philosophical ideas about power and agency as they relate to the story's characters and objects.

Finally, the findings from the textual and thematic analysis will be synthesized to form a conclusion regarding the text's deconstruction of binary oppositions and hierarchical structures. The study will argue that the narrative demonstrates the interdependence of all oppositions and challenges the traditional view of fixed dominance and subordination in literature.

### 4. Result and Discussion

This sub-chapter contains the author's findings and discussion. There are two aspects that will be discussed: deconstruction in the short story 'Cerita Batu' and reversing the hierarchy and delaying or rejecting the new hierarchy.

#### Decontruction in the short story 'Cerita Batu'

In deconstructing a work, the first step that must be taken is to find or determine the binary opposition in the short story text. Then find the hierarchy of the series of binary oppositions in the text. The next step is to reverse the existing hierarchy, so that deconstruction can show that the text in a work can deny its basic logic. The last step is to reject or delay the emergence of a new hierarchy.

The steps for implementing the deconstruction approach, according to Rodolph Gasche (via Norris, 2006:13) are as follows:

1. Identifying oppositional hierarchies in texts where it is usually apparent which terms are systematically privileged and which are not;
2. Dismantling binary oppositions, namely by reversing binary oppositions, marginal becomes dominant, decentering, sous rature, and changing perspective;
3. Introducing a new idea that turns out not to fit into the old opposition categories.

The steps that have been explained above clearly show that deconstructive reading is different from ordinary reading. Ordinary reading always looks for the meaning contained in the text, while deconstruction tries to prove that the meaning is not singular.

#### 1. Paired Opposition

The first stage is to identify the opposition in the text. The opposition detected is as follows:

1	Man	Woman
2	Living things (humans)	Inanimate objects (stones)
3	Happy	Sad

If the opposition above is read from a structuralist perspective, then what is on the left is the dominant hierarchy, while what is on the right is marginal. This is what Derrida later criticized. According to him, dominant exists because of marginal and on the contrary, marginal exists because

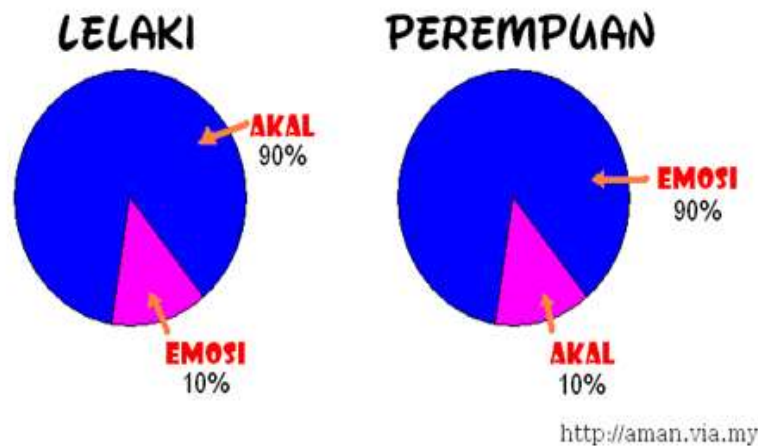
of dominant. Both can be reversed; the dominant can become marginal and the marginal can become dominant.

After completing the first stage, the next step is to look for the hierarchy between paired oppositions. As depicted in the quotations in the text.

a) Male >< Female

"...sore itu seorang lelaki menyeret seorang perempuan sekarat ke tepi sungai, lalu menggelindingkannya ke dalam perahu." (Kurniawan, 2015: 78)

If Judging from the hierarchy that has been identified above, men have a higher hierarchy than women. In the quote above, it is clear how even a dead woman is still in the lower hierarchy, namely still being tricked by men. He killed the woman who was his own wife for the sake of another woman he wanted to marry. In this case, he has the power to determine who has the right to be his partner. He had the heart to kill his own wife with his own hands. He felt strong and able to do it himself. The muscles that men have show that they are able to do everything, and women who do not have muscles are considered incapable. Muscles finally become a source of pride for men in general. With the gift of muscles, it is as if they are ready to guard and protect women, even ready to destroy them. Men also have more dominant reason than women who tend to be emotional.



In this text, it can be found how the man who is also the husband of the murdered woman plays an active role in playing with her mind. He tries to lie to everyone, which is actually not him who killed his wife, even he behaves as if he is the most miserable husband, as depicted in the text below:

"Lelaki itu tampak bebas berkeliaran. Ia bahkan menumpahkan air mata demi melihat mayat si perempuan, dan hanya karena orang-orang memegangnya, ia tak menghamburkan dirinya ke arah mayat yang sudah pasi dan koyak-koyak tersebut." (Kurniawan, 2015: 79)

From the quote above shows how the man could play with his wits to deceive everyone. He feels that the woman could not do anything, especially after she stops breathing.

b) Living Objects (humans) >< Inanimate Objects (stones)

Humans, based on social conventions, are creatures who could do anything, and have superiority over inanimate objects such as stones. In this short story, at the beginning of the story Kurniawan tries to describe how stones become inferior, as the author mentions in the following text:

"Ia hanya sebongkah batu, sebesar kepala bayi. Walaupun begitu, ia selalu berharap manusia memandang dirinya dengan segala hormat, dan kesal sekali jika mereka melakukan mereka semena-mena." (Kurniawan, 2015: 77)

That is how the author describes the inferiority of a stone in his work. A stone is just an inanimate object that cannot do anything, he could only hope that humans respect him, but in reality, humans only see stones as inanimate objects that have no feelings and could be treated as they please. The story also tells how a husband kills his own wife by using the stone. The stone is only a victim of human behavior. After that incident, the stone felt very unclean because with his help, the man had succeeded in killing his wife. In fact, the stone could only scream to himself

without being heard by any human. He wanted to take revenge on the human by complaining about it, but he was helpless.

“Itu pembunuhnya! Itu pembunuhnya! Lelaki itu yang membunuh si perempuan dan membenamkannya dalam keadaan sekarat ke dasar sungai.” Teriak si batu (Kurniawan, 2015: 79).

Not even a single human being listened to his screams. However, the stone continued to scream while pointing at the man. Humans did not understand what language the stone used, they never even thought of learning it, because all they knew was that the stone was an inanimate object that could not speak. In this case, Kurniawan tried to show the inferiority of the stone. The stone was still an inanimate object that could not fight humans. Even the stone did various ways to take revenge, but all failed. Starting from wanting to uphold justice for other humans, to killing the human who had cruelly killed his own wife.

c) Happy >< Sad

Death is a sad tragedy for humans. In the short story written by Kurniawan, he tries to show the happiness of a man who has killed his wife for another woman he loves, how could it not be, the woman is more beautiful and much younger.

“Istri keduanya, yang membuatnya harus melenyapkan yang pertama, jauh lebih muda. Bahkan, bertahun-tahun kemudian ketika ia telah menua, perempuan ini masih tampak berkilau.” (Kurniawan, 2015: 86)

An old man living with a woman who is much older is a joy in itself for him, when others are already old and have to live with old wives whose beauty has been away by age, however this man could still enjoy the beauty of God's creation in his young wife.

## 2. Reversing the Hierarchy and Rejecting the New Hierarchy

After determining the dominant hierarchy, the next step is to reverse the previously identified hierarchy and reject or delay the emergence of new hierarchies.

a) Female >< Male

At the beginning of the story, the author depicts male dominance, but at the end of the story, the author deconstructs the hierarchy. The man who was initially depicted as so strong and capable of doing anything, including killing his own wife, but it turns out he also has a reason, namely for another woman. He killed a woman, on the other hand he also loves another woman. Both are women, not men. It is seen how men need women. On the other hand, the woman who became his wife at the end of the story is said to have killed her husband.

In essence, all wives need men, be it the affection, attention and security that their husbands give them. Men have strengths that women do not have. Men are destined to have better brains and muscles than women to take care of their wives and children, but that does not mean that women cannot take care of themselves and their children. The roles of both are very important. They need good cooperation to achieve a complete household. For example, a husband earns a living outside and the wife takes care of and cares for the children. Both help each other. If this were reversed, it could also happen because in essence women are also given brains to think, they are also able to work outside the home.

b) Inanimate Objects (stones) >< Living Objects (humans)

Stone is an example of an inanimate object that the author uses to describe the subordination of inanimate objects in the short story entitled *Cerita Batu*. At the beginning of the story, the author tries to describe the misfortune of a stone, which helplessly managed to be used as a tool by humans to kill other humans. However, at the end of the story, the author reverses the hierarchy by focusing on the stone, namely that the man finally died because he slipped on a small stone, none other than the stone he used to kill his wife at the beginning of the story.

In essence, stones are inanimate objects that are always needed by humans. In the short story ‘*Cerita Batu*’ we could see how stones and humans need each other. First, the man needs a stone to roll the woman to sink to the bottom of the river. Second, the stone needs a woman (second wife) to help him kill her husband. Both need each other, and there is no dominance and subordination.

c) Sad >< Happy

The sadness that the author describes towards the stone shows the weakness of an inanimate object. The stone does everything to take revenge. Then, in the middle of the story, the author shows the stone's pleasure because it is able to take revenge on the man. At the end of the story, the author turns it around again, that it is actually the woman who dominates the inanimate object, because his second wife actually planned the murder by using the stone. The happiness that the stone feels then turns into sadness, because it realizes that it is being used by humans again.

Next, the happiness that the author describes for the man turns into sadness. After killing his first wife, the man marries a younger and more beautiful woman. He feels happy at the beginning of the story, but it turns out that the second wife is a cunning woman, she is willing to kill her husband for the wealth she wants.

Everyone certainly wants happiness, but sometimes without being based on happiness comes from sadness. This means that happiness exists because of sadness. In the short story 'Cerita Batu' shows happiness that is momentary, where the man's happiness is only temporary, after the happiness created by himself, then fate makes him have to die in a very sad way. The same is true with the stone, after sadness then at the end of his wait he feels happiness, but in the end he also has to experience sadness again. That is the form of happiness and sadness alternately. The happiness of the stone exists because of the previous sadness, namely his long wait for revenge finally realized. If the murder had not happened, maybe the stone would not have experienced such deep sadness, and he would not have had the desire to take revenge. When his revenge was repaid, then happiness came. Maybe that happiness would not have been present if he had not felt sad before, happiness came because of his satisfaction in the revenge he had wanted all this time. Thus happiness and sadness show each other's existence in creating plural meanings. Therefore, the meanings of one and another are interrelated and cannot be separated, meaning that nothing is centralized.

## 5. Conclusion

In the analysis that has been done, it can be concluded that the story which was initially a superior opposition, the author automatically tries to reverse the hierarchy. Stones which are inanimate objects that are marginalized, never even thought of by humans have helped humans in many ways, in this story actually show their superiority, but at the end of the story they remain inferior. Then the researcher deconstructed it again so that the results found that inanimate objects (stones) and living things (humans) essentially need each other and cannot be centered. Likewise with the opposition of men and women and sadness, they need each other so that both cannot be separated and it cannot be determined which is dominant and marginalized.

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