



## Investigating the Implications of Gender Role Deconstruction in Fire heart from a Gender Studies Perspective

Sidra Fatima<sup>1</sup> & Mahnoor Fatima<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M. Phil English Scholar, Department of Linguistics and Literature, Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology, Dera Ismail Khan, KP, Pakistan Email: [sidrafatima00545@gmail.com](mailto:sidrafatima00545@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> M. Phil Linguistics Scholar, Riphah international university Islamabad, Faisalabad campus Email: [mnf147863@gmail.com](mailto:mnf147863@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the representation of male and female characters' in Fireheart movie from the perspective of deconstruction theory proposed by Jean Jacques Derrida. Traditional gender roles assume men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they assume women as emotional, irrational, weak, nurturing, and submissive. Deconstruction does not mean to destroy; rather, it means to break down and reconstruct the already constructed structure of something for better understanding. The extraordinary actions and performances of female characters; Georgia (protagonist) and Pauline (antagonist), in the movie; deconstruct the concept of strength and leadership. The researcher finds both female characters as the embodiment of empowerment and bravery. Georgia keeps defending her dream of becoming the world's first female firefighter; even though her father does not support her but she never gives up. She voluntarily decides to save the world from the arsonist (a smoke monster) in disguise of a man named Joe. She solves the mystery and reveals the true identity of Pauline who wanted to destroy the world and took revenge on them. Georgia saves the world and her father from the evil plan of Pauline and achieves her dream by becoming the world's first female firefighter. Pauline and Georgia, both are smart, confident, intelligent, and decisive women. They live their lives as men do. Their characters demonstrate female superiority and dominancy. Hence, both opponents are interdependent on each other but neither is stronger or weaker than the other. Both have their own significance. The study is purely qualitative and illustrative in nature.



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Corresponding Author's Email: [sidrafatima00545@gmail.com](mailto:sidrafatima00545@gmail.com)

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

The term “deconstruction” was coined by the French philosopher Jean Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) in the late 1960s. He is one of the most influential thinkers of the second half of the 20th century. Derrida infuses a new spirit in literary criticism by developing the literary theory in his first book “*Of Grammatology*” (1976). The theory emerged as a reaction to Ferdinand de Saussure’s idea of structuralism (1950). In his book *Dissemination*, Derrida (1981) explains deconstruction as the term of analysis that etymologically means to undo. In simple words, deconstruction means to deconstruct and then reconstruct things in a new way to get something new.

Derrida (1981) rejected the thought of western metaphysics that always has been structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities: presence vs absence, man vs woman, good vs evil, life vs death, mind vs matter, speech vs writing, truth vs error and soul vs body. These opposing terms are neither independent nor equal entities. The second term in each pair is considered to be a negative, corrupt, and undesirable version of the first. Derrida believed that deconstructive strategy reverses this hierarchic binary opposition. So they can be neutral, and each of the oppressed sides gets its proper right to represent itself. Therefore, none of the sides is superior or weaker than the other.

Barthes, in his short essay ‘The Death of the Author’ (1968), rejects the traditional view that the author is the origin of the text, and has the only authority for meaning and interpretation. Barthes believes when the author is dead, the active reader is born and the reader gives its own interpretation to the text. The multiple meanings can be achieved through the interpretation of different readers.

The theory of deconstruction aims at finding the contradictions, tensions, shifts, and paradoxes within the text. It also aims to reveal the failure of the text’s efforts to bring the absolute truth. It exposes unrevealed things that contain many shortcomings and frailties behind the text. In simple words, it uncovers the hidden facts. The destruction happens in the text itself, the reader does not need to participate actively or perform this strategy in the text. The text allows itself to be reread and interpreted many times; the text itself has its own words and sentences providing the possibility for uniqueness, differences, and divergent interpretations of the text.

*Fireheart* (2022) is a computer-animated adventure comedy film directed by Theodore Ty, and Laurent Zeitoun. It was produced by L’Atelier Animation. The plot of the movie is set in 1930s New York, a 16-years-old Georgia Nolan (protagonist) dreams of becoming the world’s first female firefighter. The movie starts when she was a little girl and every day was an adventurous day for her. She was playing games with her dog, whose name is Ember, for instance, how firefighters rescue and save people from fire by risking their lives. Her father, the retired captain Shawn Nolan, was a fireman but later he left his job and started his tailor business. Since childhood, Georgia’s father didn’t want her to be a firefighter and he told her that women can’t be firefighters because the work is too dangerous and society didn’t allow women to be firefighters. Georgia felt heartbroken and worked alongside her father as a seamstress for his tailor business. Ten years later, she was 16 years old. She practiced every day to become a firefighter and never gave up on her dream and seized her dream close to her heart. The arsonist, a smoke monster, appeared and attacked 40 Broadway theaters by destroying them and 800 firemen disappeared in those theaters. Mayor Jimmy Murray had no other choice but to ask Shawn Nolan to run a fire investigation to save the world with a volunteer team against this

arsonist. Captain Shawn Nolan reluctantly agreed and Georgia overheard this. She decided to disguise herself as a man named Joe and started work as a subordinate to her father along with neurotic science expert Ricardo and daredevil driver Jim. They tried their best to catch the arsonist. Georgia unmasked the true identity of the arsonist; that it was Pauline (antagonist) who wanted to take revenge on the people for her subjugation as a woman by destroying them, especially men. Georgia saved the world and became the world's first female firefighter and the mayor Jimmy Murray awarded Georgia with a gold medal.

The focus of this study is to explore how female characters deconstruct gender roles in this movie.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Women do not get proper rights and face many problems because of the inequality between men and women. Society made rules for women and they are not allowed to revolt against these rules. Women are considered weak, oppressed, fragile, and lunatics. This research aims to challenge the misrepresentation of women through deconstruction theory and seeks to establish them as strong, dominant, and powerful members of society. Georgia Nolan and Pauline deconstruct the concept of strength and leadership in the *Fireheart* movie and prove their strength and dominance.

### **Aims and Objectives**

1. To explore the characteristics of the male and female characters in this movie.
2. To make people aware of the reversed concept of strength and leadership.
3. To highlight how female characters' use strength to bring peace or destruction to the world.
4. To deconstruct traditional gender roles and to show female empowerment.

### **Research Questions**

1. How the male and female characters are represented in the *Fireheart* movie?
2. How is the main character, Georgia Nolan, shown in the *Fireheart* movie?
3. How do Georgia Nolan and Pauline deconstruct the concept of strength and leadership?
4. How do Georgia Nolan and Pauline demonstrate the masculine qualities in the movie?

### **Literature Review**

This section outlines various research works that have been done in terms of deconstruction theory.

Metz (1974) states that everyone likes to watch movies and it can be watched at any age. A movie cannot make someone bored because the movie takes us into the imaginative world where we feel happy. Different meanings and interpretations can be derived from movies.

According to Enwald (2004), deconstruction is seen as a double gesture. On one hand, deconstruction breaks down the hierarchic binary opposition and on the other hand, it displaces the dichotomies and describes it differently introducing a new and unique concept.

M.A.R. Habib (2005) defines deconstruction as a new way of reading and writing and, above all, it challenges the conventional interpretations of the texts. According to Hu (2006), movies provide audio and visual materials to the students for understanding different things in a better way.

Gill (2010) states that the main characters are the dominant characters who play an important role in the story. They are usually complex and undergo different changes with the development of the story.

Fadhilah (2010) deconstructed the feminist characteristics of the major female character (Veronica Franco) in *A Destiny of Her Own* movie. Veronica Franco is portrayed in the movie as a decisive and independent woman because she does not usually depend on men like other women. The researcher identifies different things about Veronica Franco using deconstructive theory. Veronica is not really an independent young woman. She depends totally on men to support herself and her family. She also depends upon Marco and her mother to make decisions.

Tanvir and Amir (2017) deconstruct the character of Saleema in the short story "*Saleema*" By Daniyal Mueenuddin. The researcher focuses on analyzing a different dimension of Saleema's character. The findings show that Saleema is not a weak and oppressed woman rather she is a strong and independent woman who uses every possible means to get what she wants.

Sya'roni (2017), in her research, with the help of deconstruction theory deconstruct the concept of protagonist and antagonist, good and evil in *Suicide Squad* movie. The main characters in this movie are villains who play the role of protagonists. The findings show that nothing is fixed and constant not even the role of characters is absolute, the villain characters change into good characters and become the protagonist and they are the ones who saved the world. It all depends upon the intention and the situation.

Ardini (2017) in her thesis deconstruct the binary opposition between the main character and minor characters in an animated movie, *Moana*. The findings show that every character is equal in its own way and every character plays the same role in building the story in that movie. Father, Mother, Grandmother, and Maui help Moana to become a strong and independent woman.

Sayekti (2018) deconstruct the character of Alice in *Alice Through the Looking Glass* movie in her research. The movie shows the character of Alice as a woman who can be strong and equal to men. The researcher analyzes the character of Alice differently with the help of deconstruction theory. The findings show that Alice is not an independent and strong woman because of the authority of her father.

Teddy (2019) in his designed research article deconstructs the qualities of male and female characters' in *Zootopia*. The researcher's aim is to analyze these gender qualities and how these qualities are deconstructed in the movie through analysis. The findings show that the meanings can be "disseminate" or can be perceived in different ways. Both oppositions are interdependent and none of them is stronger or weaker than the other.

Arifin et al. (2019) in their research analyzed the characters in Christina Rossetti's poem *Goblin Market* from the perspective of Derrida's deconstructive theory. The poem gives an idea to the readers that Goblins are the seducer merchants who seduce women. After deconstructing this conventional meaning that goblins are the evil men while Lizzie and Laura (two sisters) are good

women, the researcher finds that they are not good and pure as represented in the poem rather they are the seducer women who seduce goblins with their looks.

Batubara et al. (2020) deconstructed the major and minor characters in the movie script *Zootopia* with the help of deconstruction theory. The major characters have a privileged position in the movie. The aim of this research is to reverse the hierarchy and to show the importance of minor characters. The minor characters are strong, brave, and honest.

Suparyati and Dwi (2021) in their research analyze the binary opposition of the rich and poor characters in the *Parasite*, a Korean movie. Rich people are usually described as powerful and superior while poor people are described as helpless and inferior people. The researchers find that this movie is different; in this movie poor characters are more powerful and superior than the rich character.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the method, data collection process, and all the instruments that are used to analyze the *Fireheart* (2022) movie in the light of a deconstructionist point of view.

### **Research Method**

In this research, the researcher uses a qualitative and descriptive method because the data will be collected in the form of dialogues from different scenes of the movie. The movie, in which the Deconstruction theory by Jacques Derrida is to be applied, is the animated movie named *Fireheart* (2022).

### **Data Process**

The sources of data are taken from “*Fireheart* Movie”. It was published in 2022 and the duration is 1 hour 32 minutes.

### **Data Sources and Collection Procedure**

The researcher uses two types of data: Primary and secondary data. In this research, the primary data is taken from the script and scenes related to the character of Georgia Nolan in the *Fireheart* movie. The secondary data is taken from various sources. They are collected from journals, articles, and books that deal with deconstruction theory and the movie.

Some steps have been taken to conduct this research. The first step is to watch the movie so that the story of the movie would be understood after understanding it, the different aspects; that is significant for this research; could be figured out. The second step is to specify the topic for this research. The last step is to collect significant and helpful data and information for analysis in this research.

### **The Technique of Data Analysis**

The researcher has used the deconstruction theory by Jean Jacques Derrida to deconstruct the concept of strength, leadership, and traditional gender roles in the movie in terms of the binary opposition of the characters and to find the hidden meanings in the movie and how these hidden meanings help us to conclude the analysis differently.

### **Data Analysis**

In this chapter, the researcher's focal point is to analyze the selected literary work and apply the deconstruction theory of Jacques Derrida.

### **The Representation of Qualities in *Fireheart***

In this research, the researcher reveals the traditional gender roles. The qualities of male and female characters are presented differently in *Fireheart* movie. They have distinctive qualities. After finding these qualities, the researcher deconstructs them with the help of deconstruction theory. Nothing is fixed and not even the portrayal of the characters is fixed.

### **Qualities of Male Characters in *Fireheart***

Male chauvinism can be seen in this movie. Male characters are presented as superior and dominant, tall, big, and powerful. Captain Shawn Nolan, Georgia's father; is portrayed as the dominant character; controls his daughter according to his own will. Georgia dreams to become the world's first female firefighter but her father does not support her decision because it is against the rules and patriarchal system. He suggests her to help him in his tailor business by becoming a seamstress.

*Shawn Nolan: "Do you know why we say fireman and not firewoman"?*

*Georgia: "To save time".*

*Shawn Nolan: "No Peanut. Because girls aren't allowed to be firemen. It's against the rules"*

*(Ty & Zeitoun, 2022, 00:05:54).*

This dialogue clearly shows Shawn Nolan is a patriarchal man who thinks her daughter weak, submissive, and sensitive girl just like other girls and considers it better for her to stay at home.

Mayor Jimmy Murray is another dominant and powerful man in this movie. He is represented as evil and selfish who only cares about himself. He is the mayor of New York City; this shows that leadership has only been given to men in the movie. He is dominant and occupies higher status as compared to female characters. Jimmy Murray asks Captain Shawn Nolan to run a fire investigation against the arsonist just because he wants to show people that he is a good person and take care of them. The hidden motive behind it is to collect votes from the people and in this way, he will be elected as a mayor for the next four years. He does not care if people die or kidnapped from arsonist attacks, he just wants to be powerful and authoritative.

In conclusion, male characters in *Fireheart* movie are portrayed as male chauvinists controlling females according to their own wishes and desires and exerting their power and authority to maintain their dominance over everyone.

### **Female Characters' Qualities in *Fireheart***

Georgia Nolan and Pauline are the two important female characters in *Fireheart's* movie. They are portrayed as submissive characters at the start of the movie. Georgia Nolan since her childhood wanted to be the first world's female firefighter. She idealized her father and wanted to save people but her father told her that she can't be a firewoman, it is against the rules. Further, when Georgia came in disguise of a man named Joe, Georgia's father was ready to train her because she was a male in that getup.

Pauline is the antagonist in this movie. She is the arsonist (a smoke monster). She completed her Ph.D. in chemistry. Even after gaining too much knowledge, she is unable to convince people to change their rules and conservative thinking about females. People subjugated her because they liked to do so and she faced a lot of rejection from everywhere. As a result of this oppression and suppression, she decides to take revenge.

In conclusion, females are completely controlled by males. Even they don't have any right to take their own decision and do something new and creative because it is against the patriarchal rules.

### **Deconstruction of Strength**

The representation in *Fireheart* shows that males are much stronger and more dominant as compared to females. In general, the concept of bravery and strength is only related to males, not females. This shows that the binary oppositions are unstable because one is more powerful than the other and to make both oppositions equal, the hierarchy must be undermined within the structure to show the weak as powerful.

Despite being considered as weak, female characters in this movie are much stronger. The leading character of *Fireheart*, Georgia Nolan, is a strong character that goes against the patriarchal rules and their ideas that consider women weak, sensitive, and indecisive. When her father told her, that she cannot be a firewoman because it is against the rules. But Georgia is confident in herself to fight for what she believes is right, she insists that her views and opinions should be valued and does not give up her dream of becoming a female firefighter. She is active, confident and does not hesitate to take control when she ought to, such as disguising herself in male clothes to save the world and to prove that she is so stronger to be the first world's female firefighter. *Georgia Nolan: "And I am brave. As brave as any boy" (Ty & Zeitoun, 00:06:16)*. She is ready to help the world when an arsonist, a smoke monster, attacked 40 Broadway theaters and 800 firemen disappeared. She solved the mystery of the arsonist and finds out the actual identity of the arsonist. It is Pauline who wanted to take revenge on people. She also finds the 800 missing firemen and becomes a hero in the eyes of the world.

Georgia is not only the character in *Fireheart* but she also shows the way out of stereotypical gender roles. The character of Pauline, the antagonist, and arsonist, also defies the patriarchal concept of women being second to men. Pauline is a strong and intelligent woman. She completed her Ph.D. in Chemistry and takes revenge on people. She makes a fireball from gunpowder and dynamite. These fireballs activate with music and within 90 seconds they explode by hypnotizing people and turning everything into ashes. She hypnotizes and makes all firemen disappear just because she wants to rule over the world. This clearly shows how powerful Pauline defeats the male characters in the movie.

### **Deconstruction of Leadership**

In *Fireheart*, the leadership is dominated by the male characters Captain Shawn Nolan (Georgia's father) and Jimmy Murray (the mayor of the city) are all males. However, the deconstruction in the movie shows the females' leadership such as Georgia Nolan and Pauline.

At the very beginning of the movie, many people believe that Georgia will never be a female firefighter because she is a woman. However, Georgia shows that she can be a firefighter because she has a spirit of a leader. Georgia is not a weak girl and does not follow the rules of

other people and her father rather she follows her dreams. She saves the world from the arsonist and saves lots of people. Georgia also saves the life of her father when Pauline attacks on them. *Shawn Nolan: "You saved me" (Ty & Zeitoun, 01:11:51)*. She also possesses a high IQ level to find the origin of the mystery about the arsonist. She trained herself day and night and never miss opportunities to become a firefighter. Georgia proves that she has complete control over her life and she is her own leader. Such spirit leads her to success.

Another proof can be seen in Pauline's situation where she shows that she can control and subordinate men by hypnotizing them. She spreads fears among the people. The whole city is in panic and tense because of the arsonist's attacks. Pauline is also the leader of her own life and takes her own decision. She is very smart and even the mastermind that makes people believe that it is the arsonist who attacks the city. She has the power to change the patriarchal rules by challenging them. She wanted to rule over the world. This proves that women can also lead because they are equally strong and brave as men and change is possible because nothing is fixed in this world.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, traditional gender roles are shown in *Fireheart* in which men are portrayed as stronger and dominant ones. Women are controlled by the men under the patriarchal system. However, despite being represented as weak and submissive, the female characters are much stronger and more dominant than the male characters. The concept of strength and leadership; which is only associated with men in a patriarchal society; is reversed with the help of deconstruction theory by Jean Jacques Derrida. Georgia and Pauline are much stronger because they have the spark in their hearts to change the rules and prove to the world that they are as brave as men. Georgia positively exerts her power to save the world by becoming a hero in the eyes of people while Pauline is a vengeful woman who negatively uses her power to terrify the people and destroy the city. Both are extremely intelligent and smart. Their extraordinary actions and bravery change the negative thinking of people that women cannot do anything. Through the analysis, the researcher proves that women are as important and powerful as men and none of them are superior or inferior. They are interdependent and play an important role in the movie as well as in society.

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