

## REWRITING THE SUPERHERO MYTH: DERRIDEAN DECONSTRUCTION OF HEROIC IDENTITY IN DEADPOOL & WOLVERINE (2024)

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### Abstract

This study addresses the contemporary shift in superhero narratives by deconstructing the heroic identity in the film *Deadpool & Wolverine* (2024) using Jacques Derrida's theoretical framework. of analysis regarding the meta-narrative fragmentation and the destabilization of heroic binaries in postmodern, self-reflexive cinema, heroism/villainy, sacrifice/irony), detects their inherent hierarchies, and exposes the instability of these structures. The findings show that the film destabilizes the metaphysical hierarchy by emphasizing moral purity above moral ambiguity, revealing heroism as a discursive construct based on *différance* and narrative fragmentation. *Deadpool* and *Wolverine* are portrayed as liminal characters who both embody and contradict the classic heroic ideal. This study adds to superhero research by giving a comprehensive philosophical examination of how postmodern films commodify.

**Keywords**— Antihero, Derrida, Deconstruction, Film Analysis, Heroism, Postmodernism

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### Introduction

The superhero genre has traditionally relied on a binary logic that distinguishes the hero from the villain, the sacrifice from the selfish, and the holy from the profane. *Deadpool & Wolverine* (2024) is a significant departure from these typical arrangements. Despite the explosion of superhero studies, existing study has yet to properly examine the theoretical implications of films that expressly emphasize meta-narrative fragmentation. This study fills that vacuum by using Derridean deconstruction to investigate how the film's self-reflexivity undermines its heroic claims.

In the age of postmodernism, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction serves as a vital theoretical lens for reexamining these shifting ideals. Derrida's theory, first articulated in works such as 'of Grammatology' (1967) and 'Writing and Difference' (1967), posits that meaning is never fixed but constantly deferred through 'difference. Every concept, such as 'hero,' gains significance only in relation to its opposite 'villain,' 'chaos,' or 'failure.' Thus, heroism becomes a fluid signifier rather than an essential truth. This study applies Derrida's deconstructive approach to uncover how 'Deadpool and Wolverine' dismantles binary oppositions and reconstructs a new, ambivalent notion of the heroic.

This research finds it compelling to explore how such characters subvert traditional heroic values, especially through Derrida's deconstruction theory, which questions fixed meanings and binary oppositions. Derrida offers a completely different and problematic concept. Derrida's concept is different from the concepts of previous philosophers. Through deconstruction, he finds meaning in "text" not just by presenting the original meaning of the text, or seeing the text with a purpose, or by understanding the whole text, or the meaning for oneself and so on" (Tana, 2019). According to Jacques Derrida, deconstruction is a philosophical approach that aims to analyze and dismantle the structure of thought or text that seems stable and clear. In Derrida's view, the meaning in a text or thought is never fixed or singular, but is always open to different interpretations and can change over time. Because truth is not just one (singular), absolute and universal. Truth is multipluralist (many). So everyone can get a different and deeper meaning. This does not mean that truth is relative. But



deconstruction wants to invite us to think more openly about the truths that will emerge / arise. Therefore there is always another possibility that may be unexpected. Deconstruction always invites to bring up new meaning surprises, that is why it questions the existing meanings so that unexpected meanings emerge (April M & Ridho, 2024).

Deconstruction, as defined by Jacques Derrida, is not a method of destruction, but rather a critical examination of the "logocentrism" that pervades Western metaphysics. This research revolves around the concept of *différance*, which is a play of meaning that is both different and deferential. In film, this allows for the identification of the "trace," where the presence of the hero is always haunted by the lack of the evil or sarcastic. A key focus of this study will be on How does *Deadpool & Wolverine* (2024) destabilize traditional heroic binaries through *différance* and narrative self-reflexivity and In what ways does the film's meta-narrative structure expose the "trace" of the negated other within the heroic figure.

## Literature Review

Jacques Derrida's concept of deconstruction stands as one of the most pivotal philosophical interventions in twentieth-century critical thought. Derrida's method of deconstruction aims to undo the binaries established by metaphysical thought. Importantly, deconstruction is not destruction; it does not seek to negate texts or meanings. Rather, it reveals the instability and interdependence of concepts that seem opposed (Vinay & Chaudhary, 2025).

Key concepts employed in this study include Binary Opposition, the structural pairings that dominate discourse (hero/villain, good/evil, chaos/order) and their inversion; Difference, Derrida's notion that meaning is always deferred; identity is constructed through difference; Logocentrism, the belief in a central, authoritative meaning, which deconstruction seeks to dismantle; and Trace, the residual presence of what is excluded or suppressed; every meaning bears traces of its opposite. Through these principles, this study reads 'Deadpool and Wolverine' not as a superhero narrative, but as a text of philosophical conflict where meaning unravels through contradiction.

Literary characters with powers beyond human capabilities or skills deemed to be extraordinary have existed long before the emergence of the superhero genre in the first half of the 20th century (Baule, 2017). Conceptions of heroes have evolved and expanded over time the meaning of the term hero has changed over time. The ideas of heroes and heroism are popular in most societies. The term hero is derived from the Greek word *hērōs*, referring to an entity that is half human and half divine. Heroes serve as role models that motivate and guide individual actions and outlooks and reflect dominant societal values and behaviors. People often identify heroes as those who have made selfless or courageous accomplishments. These definitions share the characteristic that heroes are individuals regarded as playing a public role due to certain feats they have accomplished or their personal traits. Accordingly, heroism can be defined on the basis of a higher expectation for the individual's moral worth and selfless commitment (Allison et al., 2016) in (Wan et al., 2023)

Heroes serve to inspire, offer hope, remind about the good in the world. The concept of heroism, deeply rooted in mythology and folklore, indeed carries a rich and complex history that has evolved significantly over time. Originally, heroes were often seen as larger-than-life figures with extraordinary powers, performing feats of strength, courage, or wisdom that could save others or influence the course of history. In classical mythology, heroes like Hercules, Achilles, and Odysseus embodied ideals of bravery, moral virtue, and sacrifice (Gabrielyan & Garbuzov, 2025).

## Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design, focusing on textual analysis within a post-structuralist framework. Moving beyond the broad qualitative methodology given by Creswell (2014) and Sugiyono (2018), this study applies Jacques Derrida's deconstructive method to investigate the heroic identity in contemporary cinema.

## Research Design

The study is structured as a qualitative textual analysis. It does more than just describe the plot, it approaches the picture as a text with an interpretations that are unstable and open to

deconstruction. The emphasis on determining how the film's narrative self-reflexivity and metafictional aspects work to undermine classic heroic frameworks.

### **Data Source**

The film *Deadpool & Wolverine* (2024), directed by Shawn Levy, serves as the major data source. The material includes visual sequences (scenes), speech, and character interactions that expressly address themes of heroism, sacrifice, and the anti-hero stereotype.

### **Unit of Analysis**

The units of study are distinct cinematic "moments" or sequences in which the binary opposition of hero/villain or hero/anti-hero is most directly questioned. This includes both the dialogue between the main characters (Deadpool and Logan) and the visual clichés that either reinforce or contradict standard superhero imagery.

### **Data Selection Criteria**

The scenes for analysis were selected using a planned sampling strategy. The selection criteria included the following.

Scenes that contrast conventional heroic motifs (such as the sacrificial death in *Logan* 2017) with their deconstructed counterparts in the current film.

Meta-Narrative Fragmentation: Scenes in which the characters break the fourth wall or recognize their status as corporate/cinematic constructions.

Internal Contradiction: Scenes in which the protagonists' actions directly contradict their stated noble goals, revealing the "trace" of their opposing identity.

### **Analysis Procedure (Derridean Steps)**

The analysis employs a rigorous five-step deconstructive process tailored for film studies:

1. Identification of Dominant Binaries: Locating the narrative's structural pairs (such as Hero/Anti-hero, Sacred/Profane, and Life/Death).
2. Hierarchy detection entails determining which phrase is privileged in the Western superhero tradition (for example, the self-sacrificing "Perfect Hero" is superior to the "Flawed Anti-hero").
3. Exposure of Instability: Examining how the film's irony and self-reflexivity destabilize these systems.
4. Binary Reversal: Showing instances in which the concealed term (the defect, irony, or obscenity) becomes the major motivator for the heroic act.
5. Différance Demonstration: Showing how the ultimate "meaning" of heroism is never resolved, but rather deferred through a play of signs and myriad permutations.

## **Results and Discussion**

The deconstruction of heroism in *Deadpool & Wolverine* occurs through scenes that dismantle the binary opposition of "perfect hero" versus "flawed anti-hero," manipulate the meaning of the hero's presence, and delay the central authority (Logan) to assert the ambiguity and vulnerability of the heroic identity. Scenes are identified that demonstrate the deconstruction of heroism, where the characters attempt to question or dismantle the idea of what it means to be a hero. Below are scenes that demonstrate the deconstruction of heroism in this film based on Derrida's principles.

### **The Exhumation of Logan: Disruption of Sacrificial Closure**

The film opens with a striking scene where Deadpool digs up Logan's grave from *Logan* (2017), presenting Logan's body as an object of commodification. In this scene, Deadpool not only physically digs up Logan's grave but also deliberately mocks his death. This undermines the traditional idea that a hero's death should be honored and treated with seriousness. Deadpool, as an anti-hero, not only digs up the grave but also mocks the heroic narrative surrounding Logan. In Derrida's theory, this can be seen as an effort to show that the meaning of a hero's death is never fixed or stable. The meaning depends on context and interpretation, and Deadpool directly subverts the structure that should sanctify a fallen hero. This shows that the "end" of a hero is never to be

accepted dogmatically, and even a hero who is dead can be exploited and replaced in a larger narrative. By digging up Logan's grave, Deadpool dismantles the concept of heroism as something eternal and unchanging.

Sacrificial closure is drastically disrupted symbolically in the first exhumation scene. The 2017 movie Logan challenges the metaphysical finality associated with heroic martyrdom by physically unearthing Logan's remains. The "sacred" death of the hero is become "profane" by Deadpool's disrespectful intrusion, revealing the traces of commodification that plague the superhero heritage. The hero's demise is never a set "transcendental signified" but rather a circulating signifier inside a corporate meta-narrative, implying a binary destabilization of the Sacred/Profane hierarchy.

### **The Multiverse and the Proliferation of Différance**

The film introduces multiple versions of Logan from different multiverses, none of which depict Logan as the perfect hero. Some versions of Logan are shown to be filled with regret, failure, or confusion. For instance, one version of Logan struggles to find the right path but eventually succumbs to his own confusion. By showing Logan in these different variations, the film undermines the idea that a hero is a singular figure who must always appear strong and right. In conventional superhero narratives, characters are often portrayed in an almost idealized way, without flaw. But here, Logan is no longer the one-dimensional character we expect; instead, multiple versions of Logan reveal that heroes, like all people, are complex, uncertain, and internally conflicted. In Derrida's view, this illustrates how the identity of a hero is something fragmented and never fixed. A hero is not a perfect individual with a stable narrative but an idea that can shift and transform depending on context and perspective. This subverts the notion that a hero must always be identifiable in a specific way.

A narrative example of *différance* is the introduction of several Logan variations. A steady, unique "Logos"—the one real hero—is the foundation of conventional superhero logic. Nonetheless, there are numerous Logans in the multiverse that are characterized by internal contradiction, failure, and regret. Because of this plurality, Wolverine's "meaning" is continuously postponed over several timelines rather than being completely present. The idea of a "essential" or "ideal" hero is ideologically impossible because each variation bears the scars of the others' shortcomings.

### **Reviving the Dead: Hierarchical Reversal of Narrative Finality**

In the film's climax, Deadpool and Logan must work together to defeat a powerful enemy and save their world. While the two characters often find themselves in conflict or opposition, this scene shows that true heroism does not always come from an individual struggle alone. Instead, heroism can be found in collaboration, sacrifice, and mutual support. This is a shift from the classic idea of a hero who must fight alone and save the world by their own efforts. Through their collaboration, Deadpool and Logan show that true heroes are not just individuals but can be found in collective action and mutual sacrifice. This challenges the old understanding of heroism that is based on a lone individual's journey, and underscores the importance of unity in facing large challenges. From Derrida's perspective, this is a statement that destabilizes traditional narratives, which often depict heroes as individuals who must bear the weight of the world alone.

Deadpool's resurrection of Logan via time travel represents a hierarchical reversal of the Life/Death binary. In classical tragedy, the hero's death gives the journey its ultimate meaning. By reversing this finality, the film demonstrates the instability of narrative limits. The "Dead Hero" is no longer the ultimate word, but rather a fluid construct that may be recirculated and reindexed. This implies that heroic legacy is a discursive construction sustained by story repetition, rather than a permanent historical or moral actuality.

### **The "Nicepool" Conflict: Deconstructing the Myth of Perfection**

Throughout the film, we are given many references to Logan's legacy, both through other characters who remember him and through various elements that remind us of Logan's long journey as Wolverine. However, the film does not simply honor Logan as a classic hero; it also delves into his complexities, weaknesses, and failures. The film portrays Logan as someone who is filled with

regret and mistakes, someone who, even in death, cannot fully escape his darker past. Logan's legacy in *Deadpool & Wolverine* shows that a hero is part of a much larger narrative, and that their legacy is not solely built from their heroic deeds but also from the choices and mistakes they made throughout their life. From Derrida's perspective, this shows that a hero is a construct that is always open to interpretation and can be understood in different ways depending on how we view and remember them.

The protagonist's conflict with "Nicepool"—a version of Deadpool without scars or cynicism—destabilizes the Perfection/Imperfection binary. Traditionally, the "perfect" hero takes precedence over the "flawed" anti-hero. However, the film flips this hierarchy, depicting the ideal variant as ineffectual and vapid. This exposing of fragility implies that the "hero" can only operate as a vestige of the monstrous or imperfect. The "meaning" of Deadpool is thus found not in a quest for perfection, but in the ongoing play of contrast between his different scarred and unscarred versions.

### **Meta-Narrative Reflection: Critical Tension and Commodification**

Deadpool frequently speaks directly to the audience, and in *Deadpool & Wolverine*, he doesn't just engage in satirical humor but also comments on how superhero stories are usually structured. He talks about narrative clichés, mocks the story structure, and suggests that we, as the audience, should be more critical of the narratives we consume. This is not just a humorous tactic but also a form of deconstruction, where Deadpool acknowledges that he is part of a larger story and that heroes are not just characters on-screen but part of the larger narrative structure that must be examined and questioned. By inviting the audience to see the story from a more self-aware perspective, Deadpool reminds us that heroism is not just about what characters do but also about how the story is told and how we understand the role of heroes within that narrative. This is a clear example of Derrida's narrative deconstruction, where we do not just see the hero as a character, but as part of the larger language and story structure.

Deadpool's meta-narrative commentary serves as a criticism of the film's "truth claims." By addressing corporate mergers and the mechanics of the "Marvel Cinematic Universe," the film reveals the presence of the "Corporate Other" within the heroic character. This raises a crucial critical question: is Deadpool a genuine deconstructive agent, or is the film appropriating postmodern irony to enhance its own hegemonic power? This self-reflexivity implies that contemporary heroism is a "culturally mediated construct" (Wan et al., 2023) that is acutely conscious of its artificiality.

### **Conclusion**

The exploration of *Deadpool and Wolverine (2024)* through the lens of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory reveals how the film subverts traditional notions of heroism. The central theme of deconstruction in the film revolves around the dismantling of the binary opposition between the "perfect hero" and the "flawed anti-hero," a duality that has dominated the superhero genre for decades. Rather than presenting a straightforward hero vs. villain narrative, *Deadpool and Wolverine* embraces ambiguity, moral complexity, and imperfection, challenging the established understanding of what it means to be a hero.

At the heart of this deconstruction is the character of Deadpool, whose irreverent, self-aware, and often flawed nature actively questions the very idea of heroism. Deadpool's self-mockery, his refusal to adhere to traditional superhero norms, and his physical and emotional scars demonstrate that heroism is not about being flawless or morally unambiguous. His journey is not about achieving victory or redemption in the traditional sense but about accepting his vulnerabilities, confronting his past, and finding a sense of purpose in his imperfection. This contrasts sharply with the traditional portrayal of heroes as invincible, morally pure, and unwavering in their decisions.

Instead, he embodies a more morally ambiguous form of heroism, shaped by trauma, guilt, and the conflict between personal vengeance and the broader ideals of heroism. His internal struggle to reconcile his violent nature with his desire for redemption and to protect others reflects a deeper, more complex vision of what it means to be a hero. This complexity is further highlighted by his relationship with Wolverine, as both characters are forced to collaborate despite their differences and

past conflicts, underscoring the notion that heroism can emerge from collaboration, vulnerability, and mutual sacrifice rather than individual glory.

One of the film's most significant deconstructive elements is the concept of the multiverse, which introduces various versions of Logan, each embodying different facets of heroism. These variations of Logan disrupt the traditional idea that a hero is a singular, stable figure. By showcasing different versions of Logan who grapple with personal flaws, regrets, and failures, the film emphasizes the fluidity and fragmentation of heroism, suggesting that there is no singular or ideal form of a hero. Instead, heroism is something that can be interpreted in multiple ways, depending on the context and the individual's journey.

Furthermore, the film employs a clever manipulation of time and space through the multiverse and time-travel elements, allowing Deadpool to revive Logan and interact with different versions of him. This manipulation of time serves to highlight the deconstruction of fixed identities and stable narratives. The idea that heroism can be altered, changed, or even "re-created" across different universes further emphasizes the theme that heroism is not a static concept but one that is open to interpretation and transformation.

The villainous character of Cassandra Nova also plays a crucial role in challenging traditional notions of heroism and villainy. As a character who is both morally ambiguous and complex, Cassandra Nova disrupts the simplistic binary of good vs. evil. Her motivations are not rooted in pure malice but in a desire to control and reshape the multiverse, making her a more nuanced character than the typical villain. This blurring of the lines between hero and villain aligns with Derrida's deconstruction of binary oppositions, where good and evil are not rigidly separated but are instead shown to coexist and influence each other in complex ways.

Ultimately, *Deadpool and Wolverine (2024)* offers a profound deconstruction of the superhero genre, challenging its traditional structures and redefining what it means to be a hero. The film invites the audience to question the conventional hero narrative, exploring the idea that heroism is not defined by perfection or moral clarity, but by the complexities of personal growth, sacrifice, and the acceptance of one's flaws. The characters of Deadpool and Wolverine embody a new kind of heroism—one that is grounded in vulnerability, internal conflict, and the constant negotiation between personal desires and broader moral imperatives.

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