

In 1987, a graduate student at Yale who was intending on memorialising Paul de Man after his recent death came upon a startling discovery while hunting down every piece of written work by de Man. The student found 180 articles by de Man from 1941 and 1942 that were written as Nazi propaganda in Belgium newspapers. These appeared in the Belgium press after it was overrun by Germany--this wasn't exactly the nicest thing that de Man could have done to his native Belgium. Later, to get into the United States, de Man lied about his past. This while abandoning his wife and two children in South America.

De Man often referred to writing as being "experienced as a dismemberment, a beheading, or a castration." He referred to deconstruction as the "terrorism" of "ruthless theory." There appeared to be a little obsession with violence in de Man's work.

Of course, the intelligent thing for deconstructionists to have done would have been to denounce de Man and distance him from deconstruction. Instead, Derrida called for "the most serious and careful analyses" of de Man's writings.

An analysis by Johnathon Culler which was approved by Derrida concluded that accusations of anti-Semitism were exaggerated as de Man only praised Hitler by name once. Perhaps they missed where de Man called for the resistance to "Semitic infiltration of all aspects of European life" or where he called for the deportation of Jews to an island colony.

But apparently there was a bright light in only wanting to ship the Jews off to a colony, analyses by Derrida and de Man's Yale colleague J. Hillis Miller revealed that de Man's works were meant to condemn "vulgar anti-Semitism."

As if deconstructionists hadn't made fools of themselves enough yet, Richard Rand's analysis found that the criticisms of de Man themselves were anti-Semitic "for are not, indeed, Paul de Man and his deconstruction somehow overwhelmingly Jewish?"

But it was in their defences of de Man that the deconstructionists showed the weaknesses, and the lies, that held together deconstruction. J. Hillis Miller noted "errors" in the criticisms of de Man, "All these propositions are false, the facts are otherwise." But according to deconstruction, all language is in error, and there are not knowable facts in the world.

In fact, as can be seen by the defences of de Man above, all the deconstructionists tried to apply some meaning to the writing of de Man. As Peter Shaw has pointed out, "in defending de Man, Derrida, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, and their followers ended up doing to deconstruction what deconstruction had set out to do to meaning and certainty: they left it in ruins."

Perhaps the deconstructionists could have passed off de Man as an exception if it had not been for the fact that in that same year it was revealed that Martin Heidegger, whom Derrida referred to as the progenitor of deconstruction, was also found to be a Nazi sympathiser. As were some of Heidegger's students. Heidegger wrote in November, 1933 that "the Fuehrer, and he alone, is the sole German reality and law, today and in the future." In one letter to his academic colleagues asking for signatures on a public version of a speech he stated "Of course, it is clear that no non-Aryans should appear on the signature page." He paid throughout the war his Nazi-party dues, and always signed any letter of correspondence "Heil Hitler! Yours, Heidegger." After the war, Heidegger lied and claimed that he had tried to prevent the Nazi burning of books in the universities.

So apparently not all deconstructionists were the nicest of people. Other deconstructionists then went to ridiculous extremes to try and defend this behaviour. Funny how the politically correct movement tends to call people "racist" and "homophobic" when it has embraced a "performance" with Nazi roots, a "performance" (THEORY!) that is authoritarian in the manner it tries to reduce everything to nothingness.

We'll leave you this week with one of the most ironic passages ever taken from any work, this coming from de Man's Allegories of Reading (1979):

*It is always possible to excuse any guilt because the experience always exists simultaneously as fictional discourse and as empirical event and it is never possible to decide which one of the two possibilities is the right one. The indecision makes it possible to excuse the bleakest of crimes.*

Tell it to the relatives of the six million Jews

"deconstructed" by the Nazis.