

Core English 313

Literary Criticism 3

UNIT 02

03. 'Derrida as a Critic'

[01] Introduction:

△ **Born: *July 15, 1930, El Biar, Algeria.***

△ **Died: *October 8, 2004, Paris, France.***

△ **Jacques Derrida was a prominent *French philosopher known for developing deconstruction theory,* which *challenges traditional assumptions about language, meaning, and textuality.***

△ **Derrida's *work has faced considerable criticism.***

△ **Derrida's *thoughts suggest how our reading of literary texts should be done.***

△ **Jacques Derrida *in 1966 when he delivered aLecture on 'Structure, Sign and Play' in an internationalSymposium.***

△ ***After Derrida's lecture on 'Structure, Sign and Play' in1966,* the *fire of deconstructionism and poststructuralist approach to literature became strongerWhen he published *three game-changing, revolutionary books in 1967*(as under):**

1. *Of Grammatology (1967),*

2. *Writing and Difference (1967),*

3. **Speech and Phenomena (1967),* and after*

4. **Margins of Philosophy (1972),* etc.*

△ Derrida's ***work often focuses on concepts like différance, the play of signifiers, and the impossibility of reaching a definitive meaning.***

△ ***His main Critical Theories are:***

Derrida's critical theories ***primarily focus on language, literature, and philosophy.***

1. **Deconstruction,**

2. **Différance,**

3. **Binary Oppositions,**

4. **Textuality,**

5. **Undecidability,**

[02] Deconstruction:

Derrida argued that ***language is inherently unstable and that meanings are always deferred, meaning they are never fixed but endlessly deferred to other words and concepts.***

Deconstruction *involves examining the underlying assumptions and contradictions within texts to reveal multiple interpretations and complexities.*

->Definition:

At its core, ***Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory is about questioning and destabilizing the fixed meanings and hierarchies in language and texts.***

△ ***_ "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the struggle of text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock but thin air."_***

- ***J. Hillis Miller***

△. ***_ "Discourse on the concept of method is an interesting one."_***

- ***Derrida***

(1) *What's 'Trace'?*

• Jacques Derrida's concept of ***"trace"** is central to his philosophy of deconstruction.*

- The ***trace signifies the presence of absence,*** suggesting that ***meaning is always deferred and can never be pinned down definitively.***
- According to Derrida, ***language operates through a system of differences, where meaning is deferred and never fully present.***

(2) *What's Difference?:*

- Différance***combines the French words “différer” (to differ) and “difference”*** (deferment or postponement).
- In brief, ***différance suggests that meaning is never stable or fixed, but is always deferred and differs endlessly.***

(3) *What's Binary Oppositions?:*

- ***Derrida argued that language and thought often rely on binary pairs such as good/evil, presence/absence, or male/female.***
- However, Derrida ***believed these pairs were not equal opposites but rather hierarchical, with one term privileged over the other.***
- Deconstruction aims to reveal ***the instability and hierarchical nature of these binary oppositions by showing how each term depends on and relates to its supposed opposite.***

(4) *What's Logocentricism?:*

- Logocentrism, a concept introduced by Jacques Derrida, ***refers to the privileging of speech or the written word as the center of meaning and truth.***
- ***It implies that language can accurately represent reality and convey fixed meanings.***

(5) *What's Phonocentrism?:*

- Phonocentrism, a concept coined by Jacques Derrida, ***refers to the privileging of speech over writing in Western philosophy and culture.***
- It suggests ***that throughout history, speech has been considered more authentic, immediate, and trustworthy compared to writing.***

(6) *'Signified', 'A sign' & 'Signifier':*

A sign* is the basic unit of communication that refers to anything (word, image, or symbol) that carries a meaning. In structural linguistics, the sign is made of a 'signifier' and a 'signified'.

In Derrida's view, ***the relationship between signifier (the word or symbol) and signified (the concept or meaning) is not fixed or stable.***

When we see a beautiful natural scene, we enjoy it at that moment. But there is no guarantee that we will enjoy the same scene with the same intensity after five minutes.

Time changes, mood changes, light changes, everything changes even after a moment. Sopotstructuralists strongly believe that meaning does not depend on “sign” and “signifier”.

(7) ***Structural linguistics*** is a branch of linguistics that treats language as a system of interconnected units.

(8) ***Hierarchy:***

Is a ***system in which things or people are organised into different levels based on their status or importance.***

(9) ***APORIA* :**

Aporia is a kind of impasse or paradox. Aporia is the form of the figure of speech within the English language, which can be used to express doubt surrounding questions or statements.

e.g* .: In William Shakespeare’s play, ‘Romeo and Juliet’ we see an example of aporiain the question *‘‘What is a name?’’

(10) ***Supplement:***

By its very nature, language lacks the centre so Derrida emphasizes the element of supplement.

***Roussaeu* says,**

** _ "Writing is a dangerous supplement." _ **

[03] FAMOUS WRITERS ASSOCIATED WITH THE MOVEMENT OF DECONSTRUCTION:

- *Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)*
- *Paul de Man*
- *Jonathan Culler*
- *Samuel Weber*
- *J. Hillis Miller*
- *Gregory Jones-Katz*

[04] Conclusion:

In conclusion, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction emphasizes ***the inherent instability and ambiguity of language and texts.***

** _ "There's nothing outside the text." _ **

- **Derrida**

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