
UNIT 1 ROOTS : NEW CRITICISM AND STRUCTURALISM

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

We begin this unit with a recapitulation of the basic tenets of New Criticism, which you read in detail in **Block 4**. We then move on to familiarize you with the evolution of critical thought between New Criticism and the rise of Poststructuralism. Put together, the two discussions should provide you with the roots of Deconstruction.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The two important critical / theoretical movements, which precede Deconstruction and in a sense provide the soil from which it grows are New Criticism and Structuralism. New Criticism broke off from the conventional historical/biographical approach to reading literature and focused exclusively on the text—a tendency similar to the close focus on language in Structuralism. New Criticism tried to explain the effect of a poem in terms of images locked in paradox and irony. This, in a sense, fostered the structuralist tendency to break-up the literary text into its supposedly constituent units and analyze its functioning. Thus the basic parameters of the deconstructionist method—close focusing on a text and trying to analyze its structure seem to be prepared for in New Criticism and Structuralism.

1.2 NEW CRITICISM: A BRIEF SURVEY

In Block 4, you studied New Criticism as practised between 1920 and 1950 in England and America. Let us recapitulate some of the important tenets of this school:

1. New Critics believed literature to be a self-sustaining artifact and hence discussed it only through a "close reading" of texts. They worked without any

assumptions about the author's intention, the work's relation to history, society, or the sciences; and did not value any subjective response. A text's meaning was to be found through careful attention to the complex verbal texture present on the page.

2. Within literature, poetry was seen as a special kind of language saying things that could not be paraphrased—therefore a poem was said to possess an organic unity with form and content being inseparable. Further, New Criticism tried to displace content in literary analysis and treat the work's *form* as its *content*. Form was treated as a self-contained and autonomous entity deserving all critical attention. This is what is referred to as the *formalism* of New Criticism.
3. The *form* of a poem was defined by the New Critics primarily in terms of its images. A close reading involved a reader's preliminary identification of key images in a recurring pattern of opposition or tension. *Paradox* and *Irony* were posited as the controlling figures of tension. A poem operating through this tension also resolved it. Discovering images locked in tension through paradox or irony and their resolution, thus became a substitute in New Criticism for the conventional project of determining the content of a poem.
4. Paradox and irony were considered important because they were thought to reflect the structures of the human imagination itself.

1.3 FROM NEW CRITICISM TO STRUCTURALISM

New Criticism declined in the 1950s. One of the chief causes for its decline was that it concentrated on the isolated literary text and left the broader, *structural* aspects of literature untouched. This conflicted with the spirit of the then current North American society, which was steadily growing more scientific and managerial in its mode of thought. What was needed was a mix of the formalist bent of New Criticism together with something much more broad-based, to make criticism a good deal more systematic and scientific. The answer arrived in 1957 in the form of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*.

Reacting mainly to the limited, 'single-text' perspective of New Criticism, Frye felt that contemporary criticism had become a matter of subjective value judgments and needed the discipline of an objective system. He believed that literature itself was an objective system and worked through certain objective laws.

Frye's theory viewed literature as a recurrence of *mythic archetypes* and unlike New Criticism found in it an alternative history—the history of literature itself. Frye viewed each literary text as a structure composed of variants of certain fixed mythic archetypes. Literature for Frye, to put it rather simply, became a system of such individual literary structures. Criticism was set the task of identifying and classifying the objective laws of this literary system.

This view of literature, as you can see, appears more scientific and systematic. But, it was equally subjective and did not have the general validity and consensus which a systematic and scientific discipline merited. Frye, after all, was talking only about mythic archetypes.

Meanwhile criticism in this century continued to grow more scientific, objective and self-reflective and in the process, shifted its emphasis from *author* to *text* and *reader*. In the early years of the century, biographical / historical criticism focused on the author and his/her age; later, New Criticism focused exclusively on the text. Frye's *Anatomy* also concentrated on the text but was concerned only with its subjective-mythical structure. The call of the hour was to go beyond it. And it seemed to be

answered by Structuralism. For it was Structuralism, which systematically focused on the objective structure of the text and on certain operations involved in perceiving them.

1.4 STRUCTURALISM: AN INTRODUCTION

Roughly speaking Structuralism derives from two terms: *structure* and *ism*. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "structure" as "manner in which a complete whole is constructed, or a whole of the essential parts of something." Look at the pen you use. It is a structure made up of smaller units: the body, the refill, the spring, etc. So, when we speak of a structure we refer to a whole with certain essential constituents. "Ism" is a suffix, which suggests a system, or principle based on the word / concept to which it is appended. So, Marxism suggests a system or body of principles deriving primarily from the writings of Marx. Thus, Structuralism would refer to a system or body of principles deriving from the belief that any phenomenon is a structure, that is, a whole with certain essential constituents. It would attempt to investigate the nature of the structure and the general laws by which it works.

The belief that everything could be studied as a structure seems to be firmly grounded in the 19th and early 20th century Western thought. Both Marx and Freud considered that certain phenomena (in society or psychology), were made possible by underlying systems and structures: for Marx the *superstructure* was a manifestation of a system of relations at the *base*; for Freud, human behaviour could be explained in terms of the operations of an *unconscious*. (The belief seems to continue in the later Freudians, specially Lacan, who sees the unconscious as **structured** like language.) Similarly, Saussure believed that a linguistic phenomena could be explained in terms of an underlying system or structure. In his lectures, he tried to outline this structure and the laws governing its functioning.

1.4.1 Saussurean Linguistics

Ferdinand de Saussure is considered by many to be the father of modern linguistics because he gave a radically new turn to the study of human language. Pre-Saussurean linguistics had studied variations in languages across time (that is, the study was *diachronic*) and also linked these variations in a causal relationship to linguistic as well as non-linguistic factors. These differences were usually noted by an analysis of actual speech acts of some individuals (that is, the *parole*). So, for example, it would study the evolution of the meaning of a word in specific utterances and try to link the changes to social/ political /cultural factors.

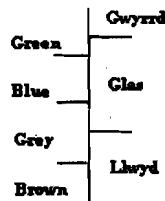
Saussure felt that individual speech acts were many and varied and no linguist could hope to study all of them. Instead what linguists could do was to study what made them all possible – that is the underlying system at a given point of time by virtue of which a language could mean—that is its *langue*.

This shift from *parole* to *langue* is one of the most important contributions Saussure made to modern linguistics and Structuralism. In studying the *langue*, he put forward his view of language as a system of signs. He was trying to understand language as a structure—composed of units called signs. Each sign was in turn seen as another structure made up of a signifier (the sound we make in pronouncing it or the marks we make in writing it) and a signified (the concept or meaning). The three black marks CAT, or the sound we make in reading it are a signifier which evoke the concept or signified CAT in every reader of English language. However, the important point made by Saussure was that the relation between a signifier and a signified is entirely arbitrary: there is no inherent reason why these three black marks should mean 'cat' other than cultural or historical convention—that is, because a particular linguistic community forged and continues to use this link between the

marks and the concept. The relation between the whole sign (signifier+signified) and what it refers to, which Saussure called the referent, (the real furry four-legged creature) is therefore also arbitrary. **That is, Saussure argued about two arbitrary links: between a signifier and the signified, and the sign and the referent.**

There is also a third level of arbitrariness according to Saussure, which is slightly more difficult to understand. This is the arbitrary nature of the sign at the level of the signified / concept. He argued that not only do different languages use different signifiers, they also cut up the phenomenal world differently—that is, they use different signifieds/concepts. Cutting up the phenomenal world means dividing the sensual phenomena we perceive into discrete and useful categories. The need to do this arises because the world is not available to us as an array of independently existing concepts which language goes on to name. Rather, it is in the process of cutting up and representing, that language gives these phenomenal categories their discrete and independent status. As Saussure points out “if words stood for pre-existing entities [i.e. signifieds] they would all have exact equivalents in meaning from one language to another, but that is not true”

One of the most commonly referred to illustrations of this fact is the colour spectrum. The colours of the spectrum actually form a continuum so that blue, grey, etc. are not independently existing entities. They are rather the products of cutting up of the colour continuum by the English language in a particular way. Other languages cut it up differently as Hjelmslev shows this in the comparative study of the English and Welsh languages. In Welsh the color glas includes elements which English would identify as green or grey. The boundaries are placed differently in the two languages and thus the Welsh equivalent of the English ‘grey’ may be llwyd or glas.



Hjelmslev's Figure

Similarly, there is nothing natural or inevitable about the way we cut up and articulate the rest of our world in a particular language. Each language cuts up the world differently, constructing different meaningful categories and concepts—creating different signifieds.

That was how Saussure conceived the nature and structure of the basic unit of language - the sign. He further went on to explore how signs had meaning and posited the principle that each sign has meaning only by virtue of its difference from others in the system. CAT has meaning not by itself but because it is not CAP or CAD or BAT. For the production of meaning it does not matter how a signified is altered, as long as its difference is preserved from all the signifiers. So, Saussure says, "in language there are only differences, without any positive terms". By positive terms he means fixed immutable entities.

This is what in criticism is referred to as the differential / relational nature of meaning and let's open it up a little further. To do this, let us return to Hjelmslev's color spectrum, and pick up any one color in it—say green. We have seen that green is not an independently existing color but a range in the continuum cut up into a category and represented by the word 'green' in the English language. Green, in other words, is not a *fact* but a *value* particular to the English language in that it is created within that linguistic system. In Welsh there is nothing called green but two

values: gwyrdd & glas which combine the English green with blue and an undesignated color above green in Hjelmslev's figure. So, when we speak of green or glas as concepts we should be aware that these are actually values constructed within the English and Welsh linguistic systems—constructed by their difference from other elements in the system, not, by any positive content which they independently possess. Their identity lies in their difference from others. We can verify the absence of their positive content deductively. If they had any, it would have asserted its influence in the operation of other linguistic systems. Green or glas, on the contrary simply disappear in some linguistic systems.

Let us discuss an example Saussure himself cites. Division of time into the present, past and the future, so familiar to us in English, are unknown in certain languages. Hebrew does not recognize even the fundamental distinction between the past, present and the future. Proto-Germanic has no special form for the 'future'. This implies that the flux of time is cut up differently into one, two or three sets in Hebrew, Proto-Germanic and English. So, instead of pre-existing ideas about the division of time, we find in all the foregoing examples different modes of cutting up the flux of time. That is to say, the parts into which time is divided are values particular to a system. The future is a value particular to the English language in that it is created within that linguistic system. As we have seen, Proto-Germanic has nothing called the future. It is these values which are referred to as concepts or signifieds and are constructed within the system - constructed by the difference from other elements in the system and not by any positive content which they possess. Like in the early example, we can only deduce the absence of its positive content. If the concept 'future' had any positive content, it would have asserted itself in other linguistic systems too.

Language was thus understood as a system of signs in which the meaning of each sign was determined by its difference from others. This view of language had certain revolutionary implications. It challenged the commonsensical belief that language/ words had any direct link with the world/object they named. The essential status of the colour green is thus brought under question. What we can be sure about is the system under which we produce an identity for a range—nothing beyond that. This de-linking of the word from the world has, as we shall see, important consequences for the interpretation of literary texts.

1.4.2 Saussure to Structuralism

We have seen that Saussure's structural analysis of language attempts to examine the conditions that allow language and meaning to function, seeking to know how meaning is made possible. Saussure hoped that his linguistic theory would be applied to other social and cultural phenomena as well. Through his linguistic theory, Saussure claimed to have inaugurated "Semiology": a science that studies the life of signs [linguistic or otherwise] within society".

Saussure's linguistic theory was reconstructed by his friends and colleagues on the basis of his notes and lectures delivered between 1907-1911 at the University of Geneva. However, it was only in the 1950s that some thinkers started applying his linguistic theory to other disciplines. Chief among them were Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes working in the fields of anthropology and culture respectively. After a gap of about four decades, semiology, as Saussure had envisaged, had finally taken off. And Structuralism was another term used to designate the basic premises of its operations.

Thus, Barthes defined Structuralism as a mode of analysis of cultural artifacts, which originates in the method of contemporary linguistics. "I have been engaged in a series of structural analyses which all aim at defining a number of non-linguistic languages"

writes Barthes in his early days. Structuralism slowly spread into other fields to the extent that in the 1960s and 70s, it permeated almost every sphere of human thought. This all-pervasiveness is evident in the definition of a theorist like Frederic Jameson: Structuralism is an attempt "to rethink everything in terms of linguistics".

But why should the method of linguistics be used for an analysis of social and cultural phenomena? Jonathan Culler in his book *Structuralist Poetics* offers two fundamental insights by way of suggesting an answer: (a) because social and cultural phenomena are also signs of a different signifying system just as words are signs of the linguistic system; (b) like linguistic signs they do not have essences but are defined by a network of relations. So, when one studies the meaning of a cultural artifact or social event, one discovers that like a linguistic sign, its defining qualities are the features which distinguish it from others and enable it to bear meaning within the system.

1.4.3 Binary Oppositions

An interesting insight offered by Structuralism into the operations of human language, cognition and thought was the concept of 'binary oppositions'. Binary means dual or involving pairs, so binary opposition would refer to a pair in which the two terms are in a state of opposition. Structuralism argues that human language and discourse can be understood as structured in terms of binary oppositions. For political reasons, these oppositions always function as a hierarchy.

Consider the ideology of colonialism for example. It can be seen as structured around the binary opposition white / black. The opposition also functions as a hierarchy and sees white as arbitrarily superior to black and constructs a whole world-view on it. Or consider the Freudian theory of the human mind. It is structured around the binary opposition : unconscious/ conscious and considers the unconscious superior to the conscious. We have grown up accepting these oppositions as valid ways of ordering and understanding all spheres of our life : familial, cultural, or political.

Forms of binarism have been present in human thought from the earliest times. Human discourse has always used binary oppositions to mark differences in an otherwise random sequence of features and thus give shape to experience and the universe. Dualisms in philosophy like subject/object, God/man, temporal/eternal are the very foundation of entire world-views.

The structural linguist, Roman Jakobson , about whom you will read in some detail later, showed that we identify a phoneme (the smallest meaningful unit of sound) by consciously using a number of binary oppositions which make it possible to differentiate between otherwise similar sounds. We distinguish "puck" from "buck " because the binary opposition " voiced/unvoiced" makes it possible to distinguish between two plosives (/p/ is voiced /b/is unvoiced). Thus, what would otherwise be heard as the same sound is heard differently. So, binary oppositions help us mark differences, and structure our discourses on them.

1.5 LITERARY STRUCTURALISM

We have seen that Saussure's linguistic theory reviewed language as :

- (a) delinked from the real world.
- (b) a self-sufficient system functioning by its own rules.

Some structuralist critics borrow these fundamental theoretical insights from Saussure and interpret literature as language. They say that literature is a self-sufficient system which functions through an inter-relation between the units it is composed of, having little to do with objective reality. Literary Structuralism originates in this impulse.

1.5.1 Linguistics and Literary Structuralism

Interpreting literature as language is in practice a complex process. Literary Structuralism does borrow its approach from linguistics but these approaches are varied. Jonathan Culler outlines three distinct ways in which linguistics has influenced literary structuralism:

- A. As a scientific discipline, linguistics suggested to critics that a rigorous and systematic study did not necessarily mean looking for causal explanations—that is, linking elements in the text to objective cultural/personal facts through cause and effect. An element in a literary text, like an element in a linguistic system, could be explained by its place in a network of relations rather than in a chain of cause and effect. It therefore justified the desire to abandon historical and biographical criticism.
- B. Linguistics provided a number of concepts, which could be applied arbitrarily in discussing literary works. Some common examples already encountered, are signifier, signified; langue, parole; diachronic, synchronic etc. These concepts can be employed skilfully or ineptly on the literary text but they do not by virtue of their linguistic origin produce valid insights. However, the use of such terms may help one identify relations of various kinds in a text, which are responsible for the production of meaning.
- C. Linguistics provides structuralists with a model of how one should go about studying systems of signs. In this case, linguistic concepts are not used arbitrarily but as constituents of a model. This is a stronger claim about the relevance of linguistics and in Culler's opinion characterizes Structuralism proper.

But within the third perspective, there are different ways of interpreting and applying the linguistic model. To borrow from Culler again, four distinct ways of interpreting can be outlined :

1.5.1.1 Jakobson's Poetic Analyses

In the first category are linguists like Jakobson who claim that linguistics provides a *discovery procedure* which can be applied directly to the language of literature to reveal poetic structures. That is, linguistics can define the structures in a given piece of language that make it poetic.

Let us spend some time understanding this claim. Jakobson, the linguist believed that a linguistic utterance fulfilled any one of the six functions – one of which was the poetic. He also believed that the fundamental aim of linguistics was to study verbal forms in relation to any one of the six functions. That is, which characteristics of a verbal form are performing what function in a text. In the context of poetry, it means identifying which features make the language poetic.

Further, the poetic function is defined as the maximum foregrounding of the text itself, and, not its content. For Jakobson, the principal technique used for foregrounding is the use of highly patterned language – i.e making conspicuous use of words and phrases, using them as much more than message carriers.

Put simply, the poetic use of language involves selecting and placing in a sequence items that are *phonologically and grammatically* related. A linguistic analysis would aim at revealing these patterns formed by the repetition of these related items.

"Any unbiased, attentive, exhaustive, total description of the selection, distribution and interrelation of diverse *morphological* classes and *Syntactic constructions* in a given poem surprises the examiner himself by unexpected, striking symmetries and anti - symmetries, balanced structures, efficient accumulation of equivalent forms and salient contrasts . . . " writes Jakobson.

We are now in position to understand the claim with which we began. This passage suggests that if we follow patiently and correctly the procedures of linguistic analysis we can produce a complete inventory of patterns in a text. That is, linguistics provides a discovery procedure for poetic patterns in that, if followed correctly it will yield an account of the patterns present in the text responsible for the poetic effect. Jakobson's problem is that he thinks these structures are static and objectively present in a text. As we will see later, they may be fairly dynamic and relative.

1.5.1.2 Greimas' Semantic Analysis

In the second category we can consider the semantic analyses by linguists like Greimas which illustrate that although linguistics does not provide a procedure for the discovery of literary structures, some of the complex operations of reading may at least be partially identified by applying linguistic techniques directly to the language of literature.

Greimas starts on the assumption that linguistics and particularly its subset 'semantics' ought to be able to account for meaning of all kinds, including, literary meaning. But as he works out his theory, it emerges that literary meaning cannot be explained by a method which works up from smaller units to larger ones. That is, literary meaning is not as simple an affair as general meaning would be. We may be able to specify a broad framework of meaning for a text. But the process by which individual units contribute to the filling up of a reader's framework of meaning of a literary text, involves some complex expectations and semantic operations. His theory, thus, only partially explains the complex operations involved in making sense of a literary text

1.5.1.3 Todorov's Grammar of *Decameron*

Todorov's analysis of Boccaccio's *Decameron* represents the third category which works on the assumption that if we apply linguistic categories metaphorically to a body of texts we can produce results which are as valid as an account of a linguistic system. Todorov segments and classifies the *Decameron* in the hope of producing a grammar or general set of rules, of the way the narratives or plots are structured out of their basic units. The strategy works on the dubious assumption that the *Decameron* is structured like language, which can be revealed through a systematic dismantling of its constituent units. This, to say the least, may not be true. A large variety of structures can be found within the *Decameron* depending on the linguistic category one starts the investigation with. For example, reading each story as a sentence and defining its units as noun, adjective and verb is one way of discovering its structure just as reading each story as an argument may lead to identifying it as structured out of a subject, predicate, etc. None of these two views and others like them can be seen as privileged—as revealing the real structure of the *Decameron*.

1.5.1.4 Culler's Structuralist Poetics

In the fourth category fall theorists like Jonathan Culler who believe that the linguistic method cannot serve as a discovery procedure. We cannot transport concepts or theories from linguistics and apply it to literature in the hope of discovering its meaning. Instead, linguistics should be used as a general model for semiological investigation. That is, we should try to construct a poetics, which will

stand to literature as linguistics stands to language. This, according to him, is the most appropriate use of the linguistic model.

Put simply what Culler is saying is that instead of copying linguists, literary critics should learn from them. Saussure observed meaning in circulation and set out to explain how it is possible for language to mean. Similarly literary critics should observe certain accepted readings of literary texts and try to construct a theory about how such meanings arise. In other words, the structuralist critic ought to evolve a theory of the practice of reading. Culler himself sets out to construct a poetics of the lyric and the novel in his book *Structuralist Poetics*

This view has its own limitations. Culler seems to be inspired by the assumption that the process of reading literature can be caught within a set of principles. Just as Greimas believed that a theory of semantics could explain literary meaning, similarly Culler seems to believe that a theory of reading can catch literary reading too. As his efforts demonstrate, the project is destined to be incomplete.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this preliminary survey of the development of literary theory between the 1920s and the 1960s, a tendency becomes clear. With New Criticism started a project of reading literature systematically by breaking it into its constituent units. This project was limited in many senses. Two of the important limitations were the privileging of the images and the single-text approach. Northrop Frye in his works addressed these limitations but advanced the project in a powerful mythic-subjective direction. It was only with Structuralism that the project of studying literature in a systematic and structural way really began. The structuralist believed that s/he had succeeded in splitting the literary text into objective structures and worked on the assumption that an explanation of the inter-relationship of these structures could explain the literary experience. In the next Unit, you will study how this assumption was limited and the structuralist had been actually constructing the structures when s/he thought s/he was discovering them.

1.7 QUESTIONS

1. Identify two common features between the new critical and the structuralist approaches to criticism.
2. Outline the sign theory of language as propounded by Saussure highlighting its specific features.
3. Explain with two examples how linguistics has affected literary criticism.

1.8 GLOSSARY

Archetypes : Certain original or primordial ideas which have been present in the human imagination in one form or another across many cultures and eras. For example, the story of a king and a queen losing and regaining their prince/ princess is an archetype, which recurs across many cultures and eras.

Base and Superstructure : In the writings of Karl Marx, Base refers to the system of production and the economic relations of a society. The Superstructure

refers to all the other social, cultural and political activities undertaken by the society.

Langue and Parole	:	Langue refers to the complete grammatical system used by a particular linguistic community. Parole on the other hand refers to an individual's particular use of language, the actual speech act.
Phonology	:	Science of vocal sounds or the system of sounds in a language. So, a phonological analysis would try to study the way sounds are arranged in a sentence and the effect they achieve.
Semantics	:	A branch of Linguistics dealing with the production of meaning.
Signs	:	In Saussure's theory of language, a sign refers to a combination of the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the graphic or the verbal element of a word—that is, the mark that we make while writing it or the sound which we make while uttering it. The signified refers to the concept that we evoke in the mind of the reader or the listener.
Synchronic and Diachronic	:	Two approaches to the study of a subject. Synchronic relates to the study at a particular period, without considering its past or present. Diachronic refers to its study through its historical development.
Syntax	:	Refers to the grammatical arrangement of words in speech or writing.

1.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 BEGINNING DECONSTRUCTION

Structure

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 - 2.2.1 Beginning Deconstruction
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- 2.8 Glossary
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2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit has three objectives. The **first** is to bridge the gap between Structuralism and Poststructuralism, the **second** to give you a working awareness of Deconstruction and the **third** to outline some of the common strategies used in a deconstructive analysis.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Structuralism flourished for a relatively short period—about two decades or so. In the late 1960s, another movement, deriving its name from Structuralism began to emerge—Poststructuralism. "After" Structuralism, in terms of time, as the term can be interpreted at one level, Poststructuralism can be seen carrying forward certain ideas and issues within Structuralism to their supposedly logical end. However when the term 'post' is interpreted as 'after' in the thematic sense, Poststructuralism begins to emerge as a break away from conventional Structuralism. Indeed, the underlying theoretical matrix which supports Poststructuralism has so radically departed from the basic premises of Structuralism that it seems justified to refer to it as an independent movement.

Poststructuralism turns certain insights of Structuralism against itself and points to certain fundamental inconsistencies in method, which the structuralist could not correct. In his writings on Saussure, Derrida shows where Saussure failed to grasp the full significance of his own theories.

Having said this much, one realizes that it is difficult to catch Poststructuralism in any opening statement—precisely because of its multi-faceted nature. What we have said until now is only one way of entering this diffuse and diverse field. Another one is to begin exploring the topic under discussion: Deconstruction. It is one of the main movements within this stream, therefore let's move on to it.

2.2 DEFINING DECONSTRUCTION

Let me begin with an anecdote. A Japanese friend of Jacques Derrida (the man with whom Deconstruction is associated) once asked him to suggest an approximate definition of the term. Derrida replied : "All sentences of the type 'Deconstruction is X or Deconstruction is not X', a priori miss the point, which is to say that they are at least false. As you know one of the principal things at stake in what is called in my texts Deconstruction is precisely "the *delimiting of Ontology* and. . . the third person present indicative S is P".

Derrida has always resisted attempts to reduce Deconstruction to a concept definable in terms of a method or technique. For it is precisely this idea or assumption that meaning can be grasped in the form of some proper self-identical concept that Derrida is most determinedly out to deconstruct.

Yet, if the institution of teaching and more fundamentally, the process of communication, have to continue, I or Derrida, must attempt to say something which gives you a working idea that Deconstruction is about something. It is in this spirit and with all due respect to Derrida's refusal to define Deconstruction that I proceed to give you a glimpse into the phenomenon.

2.2.1 Introducing Deconstruction

Deconstruction has been variously presented—as a philosophical position, a political or intellectual stance or just simply as a strategy of reading. As students of literature and literary theory, we should be interested in its power as a mode of reading; therefore most of the points about Deconstruction in this Block will be made through instances of reading literature and philosophy.

Let us begin here with a simple reading of Derrida describing a general strategy of Deconstruction:

Every philosophical argument is structured in terms of oppositions and in this "traditional philosophical opposition we have not a peaceful co-existence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy. One of the terms dominates the other (*axiologically*, logically etc.), occupies the commanding position. To deconstruct the opposition is above all, at a particular moment to reverse the hierarchy". Deconstruction, Derrida implies, looks upon a text as inherently riddled with hierarchical oppositions. A deconstructive reading uncovers not only these hierarchical oppositions but also shows that the superior term in the opposition can be seen as inferior.

When we put together some other strategies of Deconstruction outlined in Derrida's writings, a working definition begins to emerge. "To deconstruct a *discourse* is to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical opposition on which it relies, by identifying in the text and then dismantling the *rhetorical* operations that produce the supposed ground of argument, the key concept or premise."

This explanation by Jonathan Culler is comprehensive. So, let us treat it as a companion to the description by Derrida cited above in order to advance our working idea of Deconstruction.

Broadly speaking Derrida and Culler are making these points:

1. Deconstruction is a "searching out" or dismantling operation conducted on a discourse to show:

2. How the discourse itself undermines the argument (philosophy) it asserts.
3. One way of doing it is to see how the argument is structured/constructed, that is investigate its rhetorical status or argumentative strategy. As Derrida argues, this structure is often the product of a hierarchy in which two opposed terms are presented as superior and inferior. Deconstruction then pulls the carpet from below the superior by showing the limited basis of its superiority and thus reverses the hierarchy, making the superior, inferior.
4. This reversed hierarchy is again open to the same deconstructive operation. In a way, Deconstruction is a permanent act of destabilization.

So, Deconstruction points to a fallacy not in the way the first or second hierarchy is constructed but in the very process of creating hierarchies in human thought (which as I have stated earlier, is indispensable to most if not all human arguments or thought.). Deconstruction does not lead us from a faulty to a correct way of thinking or writing. Rather it shows us the limitations of human thought operating through language even while harboring the same limitations itself. Every deconstructive operation relies on the same principle it sets out to deconstruct and is thus open to deconstruction itself.

Yet, Deconstruction is not simply about reversing hierarchies—though it is one of the things a deconstructive analysis achieves. Fundamentally, it is a way of understanding the structure of a *discourse*, locating its controlling centre and identifying the unfounded assumptions on which it relies to function as a discourse. It may be compared to a probing operation that uncovers fault lines in a discourse, which may include ideological assumptions and suppositions.

2.2.2 Nietzsche's Deconstruction of Causality

Let us consider a brief exposition of this principle in Nietzsche's deconstruction of causality. Causality is an accepted fact of our life. In our day-to-day life we take it for granted that one event causes another, that causes produce effects. This is the principle of causality and it asserts that cause comes before effect in terms of time and reason. That is when we think, cause always gets a priority in creating and existing before an effect. Yet, Nietzsche argues that this principle of causality is not given but the product of a rhetorical operation, which effects a chronological reversal.

Suppose one sits and feels a pain. This leads one to look for a cause and noticing a pin discovers the cause for the pain. In the process of explaining the pain one reverses the order in which perception took place—instead of 'pain to pin' one thinks: pin to pain. "The fragment of the outside world of which we become conscious comes after the effect has been produced on us and is projected a posteriori as its 'cause' ". On the contrary, continues Nietzsche "the basic fact of experience is that the cause gets imagined [established?] after the effect has occurred". The principle of causality leads us to substitute the cause for the effect as the originating term.

Let us investigate further what this simple example implies. First, it does not lead to the conclusion that the principle of causality is faulty and should be done away with. On the contrary, the deconstruction itself relies on the notion of cause: the experience of pain *causes* us to discover the pin and thus *causes* the production of a *cause*. To deconstruct causality one must operate with the principle of causation itself. To repeat what has been said earlier—the deconstruction operates through the very principle it deconstructs. It attacks a rational structure from the inside.

Second, Deconstruction reverses the hierarchical opposition of the causal scheme. In our normal distinctions between cause and effect, the cause becomes the origin of the

effect, producing it in some way. The effect is derived, secondary and dependent upon the cause. Deconstruction exchanges these properties and upsets the hierarchy. If the effect (i.e. pain) causes the cause (i.e. pin) to become a cause, then the effect and not the cause should be treated as the origin. We have already seen that the effect (pain) cannot be treated as the origin. If neither *cause* nor *effect* can unproblematically occupy the position of origin, then origin is no longer originary, it loses its privileged status.

2.2.3 Why Deconstruct?

Now that you have had some idea of Deconstruction, let us pose ourselves a basic question - why deconstruct? What use does this strategy have for us? We have already said that it neither explains a text nor leads us from a faulty to a correct way of thinking. Then, is it not a futile exercise?

Some attacks have been made on Deconstruction on these grounds but they seem to miss an important implication of this principle. In the process of reversing hierarchies a whole strategy of the process of making hierarchies is uncovered and found wanting. The strategy uncovered can be roughly termed ideology and as we all know ideologies have distinct political implications. For instance, here, the ideology which makes us perceive the pin as primary is one of *rationality* from which causality derives.

This may be difficult for you to understand at this stage, so, let's consider another hierarchy: white/black. The supposed superiority of whites over blacks operative in certain minds, (yet being undermined progressively) was responsible for the ideology of colonialism. This led to a brutal and exploitative rule by colonial powers over almost the whole of Africa and parts of Asia, for over three hundred years. By investigating and showing as groundless the thought process which posited white as superior to black, Deconstruction continues to counter the destructive potential of racist ideologies. In reversing the hierarchy, it helps initiate a process by which the politically oppressed can be elevated to positions of power and also reminds us that the new hierarchy too is deconstructible.

2.3 DECONSTRUCTING DEFINITIONS

The beginning of this unit recorded Derrida's resistance to defining Deconstruction. Now let us try to understand that antipathy towards definitions—in the process we will have deconstructed the concept of "definition". To begin with, let us revert to our fundamental guide—the Oxford English Dictionary. To define comes out of two terms "de" and "finis". One of the senses of the prefix 'de' is to complete something as evident in the word denude 'Finis' is a Latin term meaning end. So, to define a thing is to 'complete its ends' or 'settle the limits of'. Later, it acquired the contemporary sense: "declare the exact meaning". In either case there is a presumption that there exists something which can be presented in a definition—either delimited from the world's plenitude or "built - up" / "declared" through a linguistic system. That pre-linguistic phenomenon beyond thought, beyond articulation, which a definition would exactly represent in language, is an illusion.

If we analyze Derrida's response to his Japanese friend, this point stands substantiated. Derrida explains his resistance to definitions through his efforts to:

1. Delimit Ontology - that is set limits to or circumscribe the science dealing with the essence of things.
2. Prove that all statements saying 's' is/ is not 'p' wrong.

In questioning Ontology, Derrida is questioning the essence of things, the possibility that anything can have a stable and concrete essence, which can be represented or defined in a linguistic or any other system. The argument about *essence* and *existence* began with Plato who argued that essence resides in heaven as a superior *form*, while existence is its replication in an inferior *substance*. Deconstruction would reverse this hierarchy by the simple argument that any reference to *essence* has to begin with *existence*. If essence is dependent on existence then its primacy is undermined and the real primacy of existence asserted. This is the observation that the deconstructionist would bring to the notion of definition. S/he would assert that the presumption that anything has a concrete pre-linguistic existence, an essence, which can be presented exactly in a definition, is an illusion.

Point 2 reiterates Point 1; we cannot have an exact representation a given thing (s) in terms of another (p). The meaning of anything (including essences) cannot be represented or defined in terms of another self-identical concept.

Derrida's refusal to define Deconstruction should be understood along these lines.

2.4 DECONSTRUCTING STRUCTURALISM

Let us now focus on Structuralism, specifically its root—Saussurean linguistics and attempt to deconstruct it. In the process, I also hope to acquaint you with some typical approaches and operations involved in deconstructive readings.

2.4.1 The Inaugural Moment: "Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"

This is a difficult essay. Please read and re-read the original before reading and re-reading this explanation.

"Perhaps, something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an event. . . [presumably] when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought". This is the opening statement of the essay whose title appears in the title to this section. However, it is especially relevant because it marks the moment when Post-Structuralism or even Deconstruction as a movement begins, opposing itself to Structuralism as well as traditional Humanism and Empiricism.

If you recall, Structuralism, taking its cue from Saussurean linguistics held out the hope of achieving a scientific account of the structure of a wide range of cultural phenomena. The structural Anthropology of Levi Strauss tried to do this for myths. In literature, critics like Jakobson and Todorov tried to outline the structure of poetry and the narrative respectively.

Derrida's opposition and critique of the structuralist project begins with the observation that all such analyses imply that they are based on some secure ground, a 'centre', that is outside the system under investigation and guarantees its intelligibility. Such a secure ground for Derrida is a philosophical fiction, created by the structuralist in the hope of discovering that scientific account. That is to say, there is no fixed or definite structure, of say, a myth. One has to decide the idea or the centre around which one would want to study the structure of the myth.

Let us try to understand this difficult and complex statement. What we need to start with is the concept of structure itself. So, recall the structure we started with—your pen. A structure is always of an entity, a particular mass of plastic, steel and ink fit together into an organized whole only when we start putting it together with the idea or end of re/assembling a pen. By themselves, that is without the idea or end of a pen, they do not add up to the structure of a pen. So, what makes these pieces

constituents and helps them constitute a particular structure, is the idea of a pen or the end that it has to be assembled as a pen .

Therefore Derrida comments " how can one perceive an organized whole except by starting with its end or purpose!". Similarly in literature, unless one has postulated a definite meaning for a work one cannot discover its structure, for the structure is that by which the end, or that meaning, is made present. A different meaning would entail a different structure. So, the structuralist knows beforehand the entity whose structure s/he is investigating and whose constituent units and interrelations s/he is outlining. This knowledge is necessary if the structure has to be presented as coherent.

This knowledge is the centre Derrida refers to. So, when he claims that the study of a structure is governed by "a move which consists of giving it a centre" what he perhaps means is that a priori knowledge which in a sense dictates the structures the analyst will find in the text. Understandably, he also claims that this centre forms and organizes the structure, permitting certain combinations of elements and excluding others.

This notion should not be difficult to understand. When one speaks of the structure of a literary work, one starts with the meanings or effects of the work and tries to identify the structures responsible for those effects. Possible configurations or patterns, which do not contribute, are rejected as irrelevant. That is to say, an (intuitive?) understanding of the work's meaning functions as the "centre", governing its play. It is both the starting point that enables one to identify structures as well as a limiting principle. Derrida, in this essay identifies such a "centre" functioning in Levis Strauss' structural anthropology. If we take this notion to the hierarchy in binary oppositions we have already discussed, the centre would refer to the controlling intent that constructs the hierarchy and ensures that it stays in place.

But to grant any principle, intuitive understanding or primary knowledge this privileged status is an ideological step. Notions of meaning of a particular work are determined by the contingent fact of readers' history and the critical and ideological concepts current at that time. Why should these particular cultural products be allowed to remain outside the play of structure, limiting it but not limited by it in turn? To make any effect the fixed point of one's analysis cannot but seem a dogmatic and prescriptive move, which reflects the desire for absolute and authoritative meanings.

Therefore, the status of such centres came to be seriously questioned "at the moment when theory began to consider the structured nature of structures", writes Derrida. Implicitly, the statement also claims that structural thought had shown a blindness towards its controlling "centre" and was deluded that it was discovering structures when it was actually constructing them from the textual matter, under the control of a centre. Poststructuralism corrected this blindness of Structuralism and opened the possibility of displacing the "centre" during an analysis of the system itself. Though one could not start without an implicit/explicit centre, Poststructuralism hopes to displace the centre from its role of an unexamined postulate by its rigorous deconstructive analyses.

It is with this conviction, not to let any centre function as an unexamined postulate that Deconstruction approaches not only structuralist but all discourses, for Derrida's point is that Structuralism shares with Western metaphysics this desire for a stable centre. This is commonly referred to as the decentering of a system. It implies that there is no centre that cannot be replaced by another one, which itself would be equally vulnerable.

Saussure built his linguistic theory around certain hierarchies, which if investigated thoroughly can be found to be problematic. Let us start with the first :

(a) **Langue / parole.** Saussure conceived of language as a stable system and shifted the focus of linguistics from a study of its *parole* to its *langue*. He did this because he believed that a diachronic study of *parole* would be extremely varied and thus impossible to complete, while a synchronic study of *langue* was systematically possible.

Further, Saussure postulated the sign theory and argued that the word 'cat' is 'cat' because it is not 'cap' or 'bat'. But how far is one to press this process of difference? 'Cat' is also what it is because it is not 'bat' 'mat' and so on. Where is one supposed to stop? It would seem that this process of difference in language could be traced round infinitely. But if this is so, what has become of Saussure's idea that language forms a stable system whose *langue* he was out to study. Saussure's *langue* suggested a delimited structure but it appears impossible that in language we can draw a line. In other words *langue* comes to harbour some of the key characteristics of *parole*.

(b) **Signified/ Signifier :** Saussure's sign theory insists on the purely differential nature of the sign but maintains a rigorous distinction between the signifier and the signified. The signified is equated with a concept while the signifier is associated with a material or verbal form. The signifier, in Saussure's theory exists to give access to the already existing signified. This, according to Derrida, is problematic for he suggests that Saussure's

equation between the signified and the concept leaves open in principle the possibility of conceiving a signified concept in itself, a concept simply present to thought, independent from the linguistic system, that is to say, from a system of signifiers. In leaving this possibility open, . . . [Saussure] accedes to the traditional demand of what I have proposed to call a "transcendental signified" which in itself or in its essence would not refer to any signifier, which would transcend the chain of signs and at a certain moment would no longer itself function as a signifier. On the contrary. . . from the moment one puts into question the possibility of such a transcendental signified and recognizes that every signified is also in the position of a signifier, the distinction between signifier and signified and thus the notion of sign becomes problematic at its root"

That is to say, if you want to know the meaning (signified) of a signifier, you can look it up in the dictionary but all you will find are more signifiers and so on . The process we are discussing is not only infinite but also circular—that is, at a particular point in this search, one may land up with the same signifier one started with and repeat the same process again. Signifieds can only be known in and as signifiers—you will never arrive at a final signified which is not a signifier in itself. So, the concept of a signified may be theoretically valid but doesn't exist in practice.

This does not mean that the notion of sign could or should be scrapped; on the contrary, the distinction between what signifies and what is signified is essential to any thought. But it does follow that the distinction between the signifier and the signified cannot be one of substance. Saussure's linguistic theory is thus, on the one hand, a powerful critique of logocentrism and on the other hand its explicit affirmation. His arguments about the purely differential nature of the sign and the absence of any positive content in it are the critique. At the same time the assumption that the signifier exists to give access to the signified and thus seems to

be subordinated to the concept or meaning that it communicates, is the affirmation. So, Derrida says that the neat distinction between a signifier and a signified and the primacy granted to the signified in Saussure's theory cannot be accepted and the hierarchy has to be reversed.

An important implication of the earlier arguments is that meaning is not immediately present in the sign. Given the fact that the meaning of a sign is constituted by its difference from an infinite number of signifiers—it has to be scattered or dispersed along the whole chain of signifiers. That is to say, meaning is never fully present in any one sign alone, but is rather a kind of constant flickering of presence and absence—"Half there, half not there". Reading a text is more like tracing this process of constant flickering than it is like counting the beads of a necklace. It feels like an endless quest for something which keeps slipping out.

Thus, in Derrida's parlance meaning is not only the product of difference but 'differance'. This is a new term coined by Derrida. Let's examine its meaning and implications. The French verb "différer" means to "differ" and 'defer'. Differance seems exactly the same as difference but the ending 'ance' which is used to produce verbal nouns. So, 'difference' is a verbal noun meaning "difference - differing - deference". Differance thus designates both a passive difference already in place as the condition of meaning and a continuous act of differing which produces differences and deference.

When we apply this to the production of meaning it comes to imply a process in which the signifier differs as well as continues to differ from an infinite number of signifiers, creating a store of meaning by the differences already achieved and anticipating differences about to be achieved. At no point in our experience of a signifier, are all the differences exhausted to yield a stable and final signified. Thus meaning, the product of difference is deferred—"Half there, half not there".

Another sense in which meaning is never stable, identical with itself, is that signs must be repeatable or reproducible. Thus, the word 'cat' is a sign because we can use it under different circumstances in which it may mean somewhat similar things. So, repeatability or iterability is an essential characteristic of the sign, yet, it is also what divides its identity, because it can always be reproduced in a different context with a changed meaning. It is difficult to know what a sign originally means: we simply encounter it in many different situations, and although it must maintain a certain consistency across those situations, it is never absolutely the same. "A cat drinking milk" and "A cat licking cream" evoke different ideas in our mind even when we are referring to the same cat. The signified is always altered by the chain of signifiers in which it is entangled. In simple words, the meaning of a word changes as its context changes.

Yet another aspect contributing to the instability of meaning is the concept of 'trace'. Every word, the deconstructionist would have us believe, has accumulated a number of meanings in the history of its existence. All these meanings exist within the semantic framework of that word as 'traces'. As the word continues to evolve, the various meanings sediment within its framework. Any word within a given text can thus be claimed to signify any or all of the diverse senses it has signified through its recorded history. For this mode of reading, the limits of what a word can mean are set only by the history of that word. A word, thus, instead of giving access to a meaning becomes a "vibratory suspension" of equally likely meanings, which may include incompatible or even contradictory meanings.

The implication of all this is that language is a much less stable affair than Saussure had considered. It is not a well defined, clearly demarcated structure containing the following hierarchies as Saussure would have us believe :

It now begins to look much more like a sprawling limitless web where there is a constant interchange and circulation of elements, where none of the elements is absolutely definable and where everything is caught up and traced through by everything else. It is this web-like complexity, which Poststructuralism designates by the term "text". If this is so, then the expressive/realistic function of literature and language, already discredited by the structuralists, suffers another serious blow.

2.5 SOME OPERATIVE STRATEGIES

Most of Derrida's writings on Saussure and other philosophers of the Western tradition, chiefly Plato to Rousseau and Levi Strauss, harbor a critique of the way human thought operates through philosophy and the sciences. To begin with, let us see how and what Deconstruction identifies as problems in that "way" of operation and let's make Saussure's view on writing and speech the first site of investigation.

2.5.1 Writing versus Speech

The Western philosophical tradition, observes Derrida, all the way from Plato, Saussure to Levi Strauss, has consistently looked down upon writing as a mere lifeless, alienated form of expression and consistently celebrated the living voice. Thus, Saussure says: *The object of linguistic analysis is not defined by a combination of the written word and spoken word: the spoken word alone constitutes its object.*

This is because writing is considered simply as a means of representing speech, a technical device or external accessory that need not be taken into consideration when studying language. As mentioned earlier, Plato too shares this view. In *Phaedrus* he says that separated from the father or the communicative intent, writing can give rise to all sorts of misunderstandings since the speaker is not there to explain to the listener what s/he has in mind.

In speech, my words seem immediately present to my consciousness and my voice becomes their spontaneous medium. Although I use signifiers in speech, they disappear as soon as they are uttered and do not obtrude on the meaning. In writing by contrast, my meanings threaten to escape my control: the written / printed word has a durable material existence and can be circulated, cited and reproduced in ways I did not foresee or intend. This is the case which Saussure and commonsense make against writing and for speech.

However, the moral fervour that marks Saussure's discussion on writing indicates that something important is at stake. He speaks of the "dangers" of writing which "disguise[s]" language and even on occasion "usurps" the role of speech. The "tyranny of writing" is powerful and insidious, leading for example, to errors of pronunciation that are "pathological", a corruption of the natural spoken form. Writing, supposedly a representation and inferior form of speech, threatens the purity of the system it serves.

But, if writing can affect speech, the relationship is more complicated than it first appear. Saussure's hierarchy "speech / writing" is first threatened by Saussure's taking to the example of writing to explain the nature of linguistic signs. How can one illustrate the notion of a purely differential unit? Saussure seems to ask himself and replies: "Since an identical state of affairs is observable in writing, another system of signs, we shall use writing to draw some comparisons that will clarify the

whole issue ". The letter 't' for example can be written in various ways so long as it remains distinct from l,f,d, etc." Thus writing, which Saussure claimed not to be the object of linguistic inquiry turns out to be the best illustration of the nature of spoken linguistic units. The announced hierarchy that makes writing a derivative form of speech, is inverted, and speech is presented, explained, as a form of writing.

In fact Derrida goes on to show that all the characteristics which privilege speech over writing are already present in writing. Additionally, the disappearance of the signifier in speech which creates the impression of direct presence of thought is illusory. However swiftly the spoken word vanishes, it is still a material form which like the written word works through its differences from other forms. So, if the vocal signifier is preserved for examination, as in a tape recording, so that we can "hear ourselves speak ", we find that speech too is a sequence of signifiers which works through differences. It is precisely this work of difference that the privileging of speech seeks to suppress. So, if speech also operates like writing then we have a new concept of writing—a generalized writing or *archi-écriture* as Derrida calls it - that would have as its sub-species a vocal writing and a graphic writing.

Behind Saussure's prejudice (also operating in the writings of Plato, Husserl, Levi Strauss and others) lies a particular view of man. This view sees man as able to create and express his own meanings, as in full possession of himself and dominating language as a transparent medium to express his innermost being. Derrida goes on to show that this view is based on a "metaphysics of presence" which originates in the "suppression of difference". The inability to see the "differing and deferring" nature of meaning leads to the illusion of the presence of meaning behind a word. From here, this notion of presence contaminates human thought in various spheres.

2.5.2 Deconstructing Presence

Like Saussure's privileging of speech over writing, most Western philosophy too relies on the metaphysics of presence. Among the familiar concepts that depend on the value of presence are:

The immediacy of sensation : It is commonplace to assume that on touching something we recognize its heat on a pre-linguistic plane, that is its heat is a priori present and then the mind processes it in terms of language and transforms that sensation into the word *hot* . On the contrary, deconstruction would see here a fault similar to Saussure's privileging of speech and argue that nothing exists on the pre-linguistic plane and the sensation is re/cognized as *hot* only via language.

The presence of ultimate truths to divine consciousness : This pervades almost the whole of Plato's philosophy. In banishing the artist from his Republic, Plato argued that the artist was at three removes from the *I/ideal*. So, there is the divine idea of a chair , that is its essence , which the carpenter copies by giving it a material form. The painter copies further from the carpenter's model and is thus at three removes from the idea / essence. Deconstruction would show that the essence or *I/idea* of a chair is a construct deriving from the carpenter's or the artist's creation.

Truth as what subsists behind appearance: We have seen this notion operating behind Saussure's assumption that language is an appearance behind which truth lies. Deconstruction would argue that all truths are linguistic constructs. The notions of "making clear", "grasping", "demonstrating" and as you have already seen "defining" all invoke the notion of presence. That is, these notions presume independent existences which they set out to define or demonstrate. Deconstruction would show that

there are no such independent presences. All presences are constructs of systems—to define something is in a very crucial sense to re/create it. Deconstruction works through its close readings to reveal that any notion of presence on which a discourse banks is a fiction, which can be seen to be created within that system. Thus, Saussure's banking on the notion of a self-present meaning to privilege speech over writing is shown as incorrect and meaning is revealed to be a product of the system of which speech is also a part.

2.5.3 Critiquing Logocentrism

In philosophy this dependence on "presence" is inextricably linked to "logocentrism". So, Derrida says "Just as Western philosophy has been phonocentric (as evident in the references to Plato and Saussure), so also it has been in a broader sense "logocentric." In order to understand this claim let us begin with the word *logos*.

In ancient Greek philosophy, *logos* referred to cosmic reason, regarded as the source of world order. Derrida can be thus interpreted as saying that philosophy has always been centered on *reason*, which gives validity to all operations, acts as an unexamined centre. If we examine the operations of this reason closely, it can be seen to create some ultimate presence, truth or reality to act as an unassailable foundation on which whole discourses can be built. A great number of candidates for this role—God, the Idea, the World spirit, have been thrust from time to time. This unexamined centre then creates a hierarchy, assumes the priority of the first term and conceives the second as a complication, negation or a deficient form of the first.

For example, religion as a discourse relies on the unquestioned primary status of God and arbitrarily devalues man as a complication, negation or a deficient form of God. Since each of these centres hopes to found the whole system of thought it must itself be beyond the system. It cannot be implicated in the very thought, which it attempts to order: it must somehow be anterior to them. That is, God should exist independently, outside religion.

That any such transcendental entity is a fiction is one consequence of the post-structuralist theory of language we have outlined. There is no concept that is not shot with traces and fragments of other ideas. It is just that out of this play of signifiers, certain meanings are elevated by ideologies to a privileged position, around which, other meanings are forced to turn. Consider in our own society freedom, democracy, order and so on. Often they seem to be the origin of all other meanings in our life, but when investigated they turn out to be themselves derived from other ideas or concepts.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

The working idea that emerges from the foregoing discussion is that deconstruction is a "searching out" or dismantling operation conducted on a discourse to show how the discourse itself undermines the argument (philosophy) it asserts. One way of doing it is to see how the argument is structured/constructed, that is identify the terms presented as superior and inferior in it. Deconstruction then pulls the carpet from below the superior by showing the faulty basis of its superiority and thus reverses the hierarchy, making the superior, inferior. This reversed hierarchy is again open to the same deconstructive operation.

All human thought, from the basest to the most noble, is subject to such investigation and exposure. Though a frightening and apparently futile project, it has had distinct positive political implications.

But, deconstruction is not solely a matter of reversing hierarchies. Fundamentally, it involves looking into the structure of a discourse and revealing the moments when certain assumption/s become/s its controlling centre. The centre in turn creates its hierarchies, which an interpretation can go on to reverse.

A deconstructive analysis when applied to Saussure's theory of language reveals certain embarrassing moments when the theory contradicts itself. Deconstruction starts with the binaries langue/parole, synchronic/diachronic, signified/signifier, speech/ writing and shows how each can be reversed. The privileged place each occupied in Saussure's theory is thus proved arbitrary.

Such arbitrary privileging has gone on in the Western world for centuries now and deconstruction aims to correct this fallacy. Certain recurrent fallacies like the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism are identified in many philosophical projects and imploded by deconstruction. But it should also be remembered that, by its own nature, deconstruction involves its own dismantling. The process which implodes these fallacies can also be shown to be fallacious—*ad infinitum*.. It is a methodology based on suspicion and skepticism and fits in with the general mood of questioning that characterizes the present intellectual activities of the West.

2.7 QUESTIONS

1. Explain Derrida's resistance to definitions and to defining deconstruction in particular.
2. Attempt a deconstruction of the principle of causality as evident in your day-to-day life.
- 3 Explain the concept of a structure and discuss the notion of a stable centre.
- 4 Discuss the limitations of deconstruction as a method of critical inquiry.

2.8 GLOSSARY

Discourse:

Ordinarily the word refers to a talk, argument or assertion on a subject held forth in speech or writing. However, it was given a special sense by the French theoretician, Michel Foucault. He uses the word to refer to the relationship between language and social institutions. To examine language at the level of discourse is to identify the institutional rules that make possible particular significations and consequently particular forms of knowledge.

Logical:

Reasoned correctly, defensible on grounds of consistency.

Rhetoric:

A special use of language, its structures and possibilities designed to achieve a persuasive or assertive effect irrespective of the truth of the statement. To analyze the rhetorical status of a text is to understand the way it uses the structures and possibilities of language to persuade us about its truth claim.

Transcendental Signified:

A signified, as we know, is not an independent entity but the product of the interplay of a number of signifiers. A transcendental signified would be one that escapes this play of signifiers and has a privileged existence. It is in this sense that the

adjective *transcend* is used here – as that which goes beyond or is independent of the play of signifiers which produce other signifieds. This, as Derrida has shown us, is a philosophical fiction.

2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 3

IMPLICATIONS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 'From Work to Text'
 - 3.2.1 The Work is Concrete
 - 3.2.2 The Text is Always Paradoxical
 - 3.2.3 The Text Practices the Infinite Deferral of the Signified
 - 3.2.4 The Text is Plural
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- 3.3 The Death of the Author'
 - 3.3.1 How did the Author Emerge?
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 - 3.3.3 Who Killed the Author?
- 3.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5 Questions
- 3.6 Glossary
- 3.7 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In the preceding units, you prepared for Deconstruction with some preliminary concepts relating to New Criticism and Structuralism and studied Deconstruction proper as it applied to Structuralism in general and Saussure's linguistic theory in particular. In this Unit, I will attempt to explain how it has affected criticism and our concept of the literary work. I propose to do it in two parts. In the two parts we will study the content and implications of two essays: "From Work to Text" and "The Death of the Author" by the French theorist and critic, Roland Barthes. These essays are broadly agreed to be deconstructive in intent. They outline the consequences of reviewing literature on the revised poststructuralist theory of language.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Roland Barthes is regarded as a pre-eminent structuralist in literary studies, the structuralist who developed a method for studying the structure of cultural signs and discourses. There are some who also argue that it was Barthes who prepared the way for Derrida and much that has happened in poststructuralism. Yet, most of Barthes' later works are often cited as poststructuralist in intent, showing the reader, what it means in literature to theorize the way poststructuralism does. Although some (if not most) of Barthes is difficult and elusive, trying not to conform to any accepted theory completely, the two essays we have chosen to discuss are coherent examples of the application of the poststructuralist theory of language to literature. After having read these two essays, you will also have had yet another concrete manifestation of how deconstruction questions and inverts accepted hierarchies like author/ reader, reading/writing etc.

My analysis of the essays divides into two sections: "Understanding the Essay" and "By Way of Conclusion". Try to read the essays along with or before the section titled "Understanding. . ." then re/read the original essay, going back to my

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My analysis of the essays divides into two sections: "Understanding the Essay" and "By Way of Conclusion". Try to read the essays along with or before the section titled "Understanding. . ." then re/read the original essay, going back to my

explanations. Move on to the *Conclusion* only after you feel confident about having understood the main argument of the essay.

Implications

3.2 ESSAY 1: 'FROM WORK TO TEXT'

One important implication of the poststructuralist view of language is the passage from "work" to "text"—an idea we have already brushed through in UNIT 2. This essay should clarify it further. Meanwhile it is important for you to be clear about what this new way of looking at language implies. Therefore, it would be advisable for you to revise that section in Unit 2 before proceeding further.

The theory of the "text" was developed by those associated with the Journal *Tel Quel* in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which included apart from Barthes, Derrida, Julia Kristeva and Sollers. Although the idea of "text" is implicit in the writings of all these theorists, it derives primarily from a deconstruction of structural linguistics, spelt out most clearly in Barthes' theory of the "text" to which this essay substantially contributes. Thus Barthes begins by speaking of the debt which the notion of the "text" owes to the changing view of language: "A change has been taking place in our ideas about language and as a consequence about the literary work".

In order to clarify the main ideas behind the notion of a "text" Barthes offers some *enunciations* or definite statements to indicate what he has in mind when speaking of a text. The status of these enunciations are metaphoric—that is, they do not define the text but suggest its nature indirectly. Barthes, like Derrida earlier, is not ready to commit the deconstructionist heresy of definition. So, with this pre-condition Barthes sets on to describe what the notion of a "text" implies and how it has evolved from "work". This is the intention reflected in the title "From Work to Text". Barthes proceeds point-wise in this project and so shall we.

3.2.1 The work is concrete. The text is a methodological field

The work has a material existence, the text does not. Therefore, they cannot be distinguished as objects. The difference, Barthes says, is as follows: "The work is concrete, occupying a portion of book space [say on the book-shelf]; the text on the other hand is a methodological field . . ." The work can be seen in bookstores, in card catalogues and course lists, while the text reveals itself, articulates itself according to or against certain rules. While the work is held in hand, the text is held in language—it exists only as discourse. In other words, the text is experienced only in an activity of reading.

Barthes is fairly lucid here but the lucidity is illusory, so let's investigate his concepts a little further. Methodology refers to "the process or way in which a particular mental activity proceeds" and "field" refers to the scene or space of an activity or influence. Therefore, a "methodological field" refers to a scene or space in which a particular mental activity proceeds, a space, which a particular form of mental activity creates. A certain degree of abstraction is involved here so try to grasp it carefully. When speaking of "text" we refer to a *mental space* in which proceeds a particular *mental activity* set in motion by the act of reading a work. It is in this sense that Barthes refers to the work as something concrete while presents the text as a process—something dynamic and transient.

3.2.2 The text is always paradoxical

"Doxa" refers to a commonly accepted opinion or more simply public opinion. Therefore, paradoxical means something, which goes beyond commonly accepted opinions. In claiming that the text goes beyond the limits of 'doxa', Barthes perhaps

wants to imply that in containing the play of a number of interpretations, a text always tends to go beyond what is the commonly accepted notion of a work/genre or type of writing. This liberation of the text from a fixed centre (which holds the work together) gives it a subversive potential, through which, it continuously challenges all boundaries set up by commonly accepted opinions or theories. The text, in other words, always calls into question all pre-existing assumptions about its meaning.

It is on these grounds that Barthes writes that what constitutes a text is its "*subversive force with regard to old classification.*"

3.2.3 The text practises the infinite deferral of the signified

The work is tied to one signified. In other words to read a "work" is to practise the Saussurean stability of the signified—or to revel in the possibility of a fixed meaning. Meaning can be fixed in two ways. On the one hand, one can attribute straight, literal meanings to words. The work would then pose a challenge only to the linguist who would study the production of this simple meaning. On the other hand, we can assume that its meaning is fixed but hidden; that is, there is in it something deeper than the straight and literal meaning. In this case it would interest a school of criticism like Marxism, Freudianism, etc., which would look for a relevant meaning in it. Criticism up to Structuralism practices this brand of reading a work.

The "text" on the contrary practices the infinite deferral of the signified—invites us to defer meaning. Barthes here reminds us of all that we have read while deconstructing the signifier and the signified—that is, the production of meaning through difference. If you recall the complex web-like flickering structure of meaning outlined while discussing the production of meaning in a sentence, you will not have much difficulty in understanding this aspect of a text. I say so because it is the same theory of reading, which we applied to a sentence there, which Barthes evokes here to assert the infinite deferral of the meaning of a text.

Continuing on the same premises, Barthes says that the 'infinite' or infinite play of the signifier does not imply that meaning is something unnameable, beyond language, but the idea that *fixity* is not a part of its identity. In the context of reading, this perpetual play of signifiers should not be thought of as leading from a surface to a deeper level of meaning, but merely undirected and unpurposive movement. The logic that governs the reading of a text is not that of comprehension—that is, to find out what it exactly means, but, to merely revel in the free-play of its signifiers. This free-play is generated by the symbolic rather than referential status of language. The symbolic status of language and hence of the text, is the product of the divorce between the "word" and the "world"—an idea you encountered in Saussure's theory of language. Language does not connect directly with the reality and a text creates a plane of its own, inhabited by forces different from the real. "A work whose integrally symbolic nature one conceives, perceives and receives is a text."

3.2.4 The text is plural

It is not only that a work can have many meanings, its plurality is irreducible—that is, it cannot be limited to a fixed number. Every context will create its own meaning for the text, but even within a given context, the meaning is irreducibly plural. So, in a text many meanings co-exist and each of these meanings is traversed by the others—constituting a part of it and constituted by it in turn—each carrying the traces of others and inextricably linked to them.

The text thus becomes a site of various echoes and resonances emanating from plural readings and contexts. Therefore, Barthes says that the text's plurality is not because of the ambiguity of its contents but because of its 'stereographic plurality'.

In order to understand the term 'stereographic' you have to first understand the term stereoscope. A stereoscope is something all of us have played with in our childhood. It is an instrument for viewing a pair of photographs, taken at slightly different angles, each with one eye. The two photographs combined create an impression of depth and solidity. A stereograph is the photograph used in a stereoscope. Viewed from this metaphor, each of the plural readings of a text is like a stereograph, similar yet different from other stereograph(s) uniting in the single image or reading of a text.

Each text is also the product of many other texts—that is, it is inter-textual. This inter-textuality does not mean that it should be possible at a given moment, or in a given reading, to identify a fixed number of texts out of which the present text is constituted. So, in reading a particular statement in a text we might hear resonances of various other texts, yet no text or set of texts may be said to be the determining one for the effect perceived. It is in this sense that Barthes says that the quotations we identify in a text are without quotation marks and that is what I intend to suggest by the word resonance rather than a direct hearing of another text.

3.2.5 The text is read without the father's signature

The work is usually considered the product or child of forces outside it—that is, both its creation and meaning are seen as determined by outside forces. Barthes identifies three of them here: the first includes 'race' and 'history'.

The Marxist school, for example, would consider certain historical forces creating or determining the form or bounds of a particular work. Thus, it is commonplace to speak of 19th century Russian classics as the embodiment and product of certain historical forces culminating in the 1905/1917 Revolution.

Second, Barthes speaks of conventional criticism's efforts to see works as part of a larger tradition. Thus, it may see a work as inaugurating a particular tradition and others continuing it, marking the different stages of that evolving tradition. F.R. Leavis and Raymond Williams practised this brand of criticism for a long line of English novelists, starting from Dickens to Lawrence and Forster.

Third, Barthes refers to the tendency of allocating or devoting the work to an author, a tendency which aims at explaining everything in the terms of the author's experiences, views and intentions. The best example of this is the biographical school of criticism.

The 'text' on the other hand, is read without the guiding intent of race, history, tradition or the author. All these may affect our reading of a text but not provide any absolute guiding framework for its meaning. The concept of inter-textuality (discussed earlier) would necessitate the resonance of historical, biographical or other texts in our reading of a given text, but a text cannot be tied to a single or multiple texts as its determined product. So, the author enters into a reading of his / her text, but only as a guest, as one of the texts that will participate in the play of inter-textuality—not as the controlling or determining force.

3.2.6 The text abolishes the distance between Writing and Reading

A work is ordinarily an object of consumption—that is to say that in reading a work we presume that a reputed/ not so reputed name, or one who has been worth printing

or reviewing, has something valuable to offer. A sincere reading on correct lines can consume its value, if necessary, with the help of criticism.

The text on the other hand, empties the work of this conceivable value and fills it with play, production and activity. There is no definite meaning that the reader can now consume—instead the reader is now actively involved in the production of meaning. Thus, meaning and significance, which had conventionally been assumed to be tied to the author now come to be associated partly with the reader. It is not that the reader's involvement is intensified in the text. It is rather that the reader now has a more definite involvement. S/he refuses the fixed meaning handed down to him/her through tradition and instead, reads and writes simultaneously in the process of deciding a text's meaning.

3.2.7 The text is linked to pleasure

The work is linked to a certain kind of pleasure. I can enjoy reading Shakespeare or Milton but this pleasure is the pleasure of appropriation / consumption. This pleasure, Barthes says, is one of separation. It is linked to the fact that I cannot write what I am reading. The text on the other hand, yields a different kind of pleasure—a pleasure without separation. The play that characterizes a decentered text ensures that there is going to be no stability, which a reader can appropriate and be separated from. Instead, the reader is going to be continuously implicated in producing the meaning that the text approaches. This yields a different kind of pleasure designated by Barthes and Derrida by the French term '*jouissance*'. We may refer to it as *bliss* but there is also an erotic element associated with it.

3.2.8 By way of conclusion

At the end of having read an account of Barthes' idea of the text, you may be feeling "idealess" about it. You may have understood his arguments but still fail to close your fist over the meaning of the word "text" or state in approximate terms that "A text is. . .". This is because all statements about the text themselves have to be texts, and being texts they will be marked by an indeterminacy which will not let you point your finger to a concrete suggestion about what a text is or should be. This is the formulation with which Barthes concludes his essay.

But before we conclude this attempt at understanding Barthes' essay, let's discuss a point which occurred at the beginning of this essay—Barthes' claim that the passage from 'work' to 'text' is an epistemological shift rather than a radical break. Perhaps the shift Barthes has in mind is the shift in Saussurean linguistics and after, from the referential to the differential/deferential nature of meaning. I say so because the notion of the text is the logical fallout of applying a deconstructive view of language to literature. This is not a radical break because we are operating within the broad framework of deciphering the relationship between signs and meaning.

3.3 ESSAY 2 : THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

This essay is structured not as an exposition but as an argument. Therefore we will study it differently. I will not attempt here a commentary parallel to the essay but try to organize Barthes' arguments in the essay in response to a series of questions. Broadly speaking, the essay can be read as answering these four questions:

- (a) How did the author emerge?
- (b) What functions did the author perform?
- (c) Who killed the author?
- (d) Implications of the death.

In the process of answering these questions, I hope to develop the arguments Barthes cites in this essay and help you understand the causes for and implications of the emergence and death of the author.

Implications

3.3.1 How did the Author emerge?

The author, say, a Barthes is a modern (read new) figure, a product of Western society. Your own society does not use this idea – the Hindi equivalent of this concept i.e. *lekhak* translates into “writer” rather than “author”. In some *ethnographic* societies, Barthes says, the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator whose “performance”—the mastery of the *narrative code*—may possibly be admired but never his genius at having “authored” the tale. In our own mythology, both Valmiki and Tulsidas are credited with giving a shape or narrative form to the story of Lord Ram rather than authoring it. On the contrary, a Western classic like *Decameron*, or *The Canterbury Tales* is tied firmly to the tail of its author.

Barthes explains this through a particular process in the development of Western thought. In the Renaissance, the Western world displaced “God” from the centre of the universe and put “Man” there. Broadly speaking this is the *Humanism* of the Renaissance. Barthes sees it continuing in the rise of English *Empiricism*, French *Rationalism* and finally a deep personal faith of the *Reformation*, reflected in the life of Martin Luther. All these led to the discovery and consolidation of the prestige of the individual. This faith also led to the rise of positivism in philosophy (a movement that recognizes only positive facts and observable phenomena). The man-centered world now started recognizing only those facts, which could be observed and verified. Further, it is in this centering and faith in the powers of the individual where Barthes sees the rise of capitalism—a system centered on a man and his wealth. In literature, this faith and confidence in the power of the individual to construct a stable world, a sphere of value and significance, found expression in the concept of an ‘Author’.

3.3.2 What functions did the author perform?

Once the concept of an author was in place it exercised a certain influence, or “tyranny” as Barthes would say, on the interpretation of literary texts. Thus, the content of a work began to be understood and explained in terms of the author's life, tastes, passions and experiences. This tendency to look for causal factors in the life of the author tended to spill over from the biographical school to the marxist or psychoanalytic schools. In fact, Barthes sees the continuing tyranny of the author in the way some critics persist in reading the literary work as a product of the author. He also refers to the way we classify works in bibliographies and histories under the head of an author to emphasize our inability to break free of the author as a determining force. The implication of such classification is that we see the author as a living voice behind the work, speaking to us about his own views and experiences through the transparent medium of language. This view as we have argued before, is a fallacy.

3.3.3 Who killed the author?

Though the sway of the author remains powerful, it is also certain that some writers have long attempted to counter it. In France, Mallarme was the first to *see* and to *foresee* the necessity to substitute language itself for the author who, until then, was supposed to be in complete control over language. Mallarme's entire *poetics* consists in suppressing the author in the interest of writing. Paul Valery in his own way stressed the written nature of all linguistic and philosophical projects. Furthermore,

Barthes goes on to discuss the role of Marcel Proust and Surrealism in weakening the hold of an individual over a work's meaning.

Finally, Barthes narrows down to the revised theory of language as the culprit that decisively killed the author. He shows us that the act of stating something is an empty process, which does not require the support of the speaker to function as a statement. What he is trying to say is that the meaning of a sentence does not depend for its existence on a speaker's presence or intent. The signs/words themselves are enough to set a meaning into play. The authorial intent is not a necessary element in the understanding of a text.

The author disappears from behind the work also because in Poststructuralism there is no "Individual" or "Self"; only a "Subject". The term "Individual" has the implication that a human being is in some way given and finally formed—a stable creature in control of and creating things around him. On the contrary, the notion of a "Subject" emphasizes the fact that the individual is constructed at the point of entry into the symbolic orders of language and discourse. So, there is no definite entity whose intent we can read in a work. Thus, language instead of being created by man becomes the creator of man, at least in the sense we *know* ourselves. Being a "subject" man is also reduced to a field in which numerous forces are at play. Instead of stability, it is the notion of flux that comes to characterize the notion of a subject—therefore, no single moment of one's existence is completely identical with another. All these insights combined have contributed to the death of the author in poststructuralist thought.

The author had to disappear also because the writing individual speaks from a specially problematic site in the text—a site where a writing subject, an independent subject or the person who happens to write, a fictional character through which the author speaks, the ideas of the age, universal wisdom etc. all meet, mixing inextricably with each other. The text thus harbors a voice without a fixed or determinate origin. The writing subject who appears to be that origin is revealed on closer scrutiny to be a flux of different forces only a few of which have been outlined above. Thus his/her status as an author with a single unified intent comes under question.

3.3.4 Implications of the death

The most obvious implication of this death is the fact that the author's life, experiences, passions, intent cease to be important determinants of the meaning of a text. The text is seen as embedded in language, which performs according to its own rules. Therefore, Barthes writes that instead of the author we now have the "scriptor" who merely writes, giving a material/tangible shape to the text without limiting or controlling its meaning in any significant way.

Because the author dissolves into the identity of the scriptor, the reader is foregrounded in producing the meaning of a text. This leads Barthes to say that every text is "eternally written here and now" because the reader in a sense writes/ re-writes the text in every act of reading/re-reading it. The reader is so important because the interaction of forces that characterizes the interpretation of a text is set into motion and has play in the mind of the reader. Thus, the reader comes to play a new and redefined role in the process of the production of meaning. Instead of a fixed and a determinate meaning being transferred to the reader in the process of reading, reading a text now looks like a play of numerous forces focused on the reader. In the process, the conventional hierarchy writer/reader is deconstructed to yield a more important place to the reader, which can be deconstructed in subsequent readings.

The next important implication of the death of the author is the fairly radical questioning which it initiates about the mimetic function of literature. The "mimetic" view sees a literary work as "representing" or "mirroring" a particular reality through the agency of an author. So, it is commonplace to believe that E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* represents an Englishman's perception of colonial India. But with the death of the author, a text can no longer simply designate or represent something which the author had in mind, something which was objectively present there and the author was describing. No matter how hard the author tries, the meaning of his/her written text will be determined/controlled by a *set* of forces the writing sets in *play* in the mind of the reader. This "set" and "play" are highly subjective and cannot be spoken about in any concrete terms as yet.

An important implication of the above-stated argument is that certainty of expression becomes an impossibility. The claim that I can mean anything fixed, that I deal with stable meanings in communicating with someone else is effectively undercut. Indeed the picture that now emerges is that instead of man writing through language to express a fixed meaning, it is language that writes through us, creating meanings in our minds whose theoretical status is extremely dubious. You should now be in a position to understand what Mallarme and Valery had been trying to say by stressing the importance of language as well as the observation with which Barthes opens this essay "Writing is the destruction of every *voice*".

In that case, what does the author/writer actually do in writing a text? His/her job, Barthes would have us believe is only to mix writings. Every statement that I write as indicative of my intent is crossed over and through by "*codes*" from other writings, which makes it a tissue, woven by presences of earlier read statements in the mind of a reader.

Put simply, Barthes seems to be saying that every element read in a text evokes a chain of associations in terms of which the reader interprets the meaning of that element. For example, when you encounter the term "love" in 16th century poetry two things happen in your interpretation of it: 1. the word is nebulously defined by its difference from other words in your vocabulary. 2. all previous usages of that word (literary, non-literary, aural, visual, metaphorical etc.) interact with the given context to give you an idea of what the word should mean here. This chain of associations though broadly unified in a culture may be significantly different for individuals, therefore, the term may have distinct shades of meaning for different readers even within a given culture. So, what the author does by using the term "love" is not to transfer a fixed value or counter to you but to set in motion a chain of associations which will interact with the context to suggest the meaning of the word for you.

3.3.5 By way of conclusion

All that we read before has one fairly important consequence, which merits separate exploration. It is the radical foregrounding of the reader. The death of the author marks the birth of the reader in a new and more important role. Instead of being a passive and receptive experience, reading is now transformed into a creative activity with a considerable role played by the reader in the production of meaning. This fact has important political consequences.

If there is no voice or a fixed intent behind writing, it ceases to be a dependable political media—that is, an agency through which a message may be effectively conveyed. The control of what a text can convey to the reader now slips out of the grip of the author to disseminate into a bewildering galaxy of forces operative in a culture, outside the control of any single individual or group of individuals. This proves to be a fairly liberating experience for the lay reader as it not only opens new

vistas to be explored through the text but also resists the imposition of readings, which may have vested interests behind their propagation.

Understandably this theory of reading/writing is labeled 'humanistic' in intent because it stresses so much the role and interest of the readers. Some critics see this theory as "humanism hypocritically turned champion of human rights". They argue that it is hypocritical because while talking about man, it shifts the focus to forces beyond man's control and generates a world-view from which all certainties seem to have disappeared. Barthes shirks this attack but retorts by saying that what had been treated as "humanism" before (that is the Humanism of the classics) was limited because it focused on the writer and not the reader. This theory advances further towards humanism by shifting the focus to the reader.

Centering on the author meant listening to what s/he had to say and that in turn meant flowing with him/her in the act of "setting aside, ignoring, smothering or destroying" many issues the text is capable of generating ; issues that often contradict the professed intent of the author/age. It is to sacrifice the rich plurality of a given text in lieu of bowing down to an ostensibly neutral but actually ideologically charged voice. When the Renaissance displaced God from the centre of the universe, it effected a similar shift, choosing to read in the natural/cultural text not the manifestation of a divine will but a set of bewildering forces—cultural, political, social etc., engendered by man. Roughly in the same way, the poststructuralist reader reads in the text not the author's will but the play of a host of forces, amongst which the author is only one. And this tendency spills over from reading literature into all spheres of thought, wherever there is a centre which wants to dictate or control the meaning of a phenomena.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

The two essays discussed in this Unit are fairly radical statements of the poststructuralist view of literature. We hope you have had a concrete instance of how Deconstruction questions and inverts accepted hierarchies like author/reader, reading/writing etc..

"The Death of the Author" is a logical continuation from the passage 'From Work to Text'. As the control of the author loosens over the meaning of the work, his/her significance diminishes and a point comes when the author's significance is reduced to a minimum. This is what Barthes refers to as the death of the author and as we have seen, it occurs at the cost of the rebirth of the reader in a new, redefined, more creative and free role.

Each of these two points as we have seen has distinct political implications. Together, they liberate the reader from accepted readings and permit him/her the opportunity to write/read the text in a new way.

3.5 QUESTIONS

1. Outline three important differences between a work and a text.
2. Illustrate Barthes' idea that the *text practices the infinite deferral of the signified*.
3. If the author was the father in Barthes' view of reading before poststructuralism, who do you think was the mother.
4. Give a socio-historical account of the emergence of the author.

3.6 GLOSSARY

Enunciations	:	Express definitely, proclaim.
Subversive	:	That which serves to overturn, upset or effect destruction, often in an indirect way.
Ethnographic	:	Relating to a scientific description of the races of men. In this context, Barthes seems to be referring to societies which are organized around certain races.
Humanism	:	One of the most important ideals of the English Renaissance which had two important characteristics : (a) placing man at the centre of the universe. (b) a renewed interest in ancient Greek and Latin scriptures because these scriptures focused on the unlimited powers of the human being.
Empiricism	:	A school or branch of philosophy based on or acting exclusively on observation and experiment and not on theory. It celebrates and relies on the individual's power of observation.
Rationalism	:	A school of philosophy that treats reason as the foundation of certainty in knowledge. It considers reason the ultimate authority in religion as well as elsewhere.
Reformation	:	A 16th century movement for reform of abuses in the Roman Catholic Church ending in the establishment of the Reformed or Protestant Church. It derived sustenance and motive power from fiercely individualistic leaders like Martin Luther.
Voice	∴	The specific implication behind the use of this word here is to suggest an individual behind it who is the centre or the origin of a fixed, concrete meaning.
Code	∴	A set of objects or categories drawn from a single area of experience and related to one another in ways that make them useful logical tools for expressing other relations.

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UNIT 4 DECONSTRUCTING POETRY

Structure

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

Having had a glimpse of the theory behind Deconstruction and a broad view of how it has affected our reading and understanding of literature, it is now time to conduct a first hand deconstruction of a text. This Unit aims to familiarize you with one way of deconstructing poetry. Two pieces have been selected—one from the Romantic era and the other from the Renaissance.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Let us recall what a deconstructive reading involves. You should also look at the relevant section of Unit 2. The working idea evolved there was that Deconstruction is a searching out or dismantling operation performed on a discourse to understand how its argument is constructed. One way of doing it is to identify the binary oppositions in the discourse and their position in a hierarchy—that is which one is superior and which one inferior. Deconstruction then pulls the carpet from below the superior term by showing the faulty basis of its superiority and thus reverses the hierarchy, making the inferior (temporarily) superior. In the process the discourse is revealed as undermining its primary argument—that is the superiority of the first term. With this idea in mind, let us approach William Wordsworth's poem "Afterthought".

4.2 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S 'AFTERTHOUGHT'

I thought of thee [the River Duddon] my partner and my guide,
As being passed away—Vain sympathies!
For, backward, Duddon! As I cast my eyes,
I see what was, and is, and will abide;
Still glides the stream, and shall forever glide;
The Form remains, the Function never dies;
While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,

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We men, who in our morn of youth defied
The elements, must vanish—be it so!
Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live, and act and serve the future hour;
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope and faith's transcendent dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know.

4.2.1 A Summary

Broadly speaking, the poem's argument runs thus: some time in the past the poet thought of the river Duddon, which he considers to be his partner and guide, as something which has passed away. However, in the present he realizes that that feeling of loss was futile and incorrect. The first thought about the passing away of Duddon is the original thought to which the later one, (which sees the original as incorrect), is fixed as an afterthought. The original thought is erroneous because the river in its 'Form' and 'Function' appears permanent. As opposed to the river's permanence is the condition of man, who in the confidence of his early youth may appear to defy the powers of time, but ultimately has to face death. The poet, almost stoically, accepts this fate for mankind, but finds consolation in something else. Human hands have the power to create works of art, which can transcend time—this is the first consolation. The second is that faith, hope and love suggest that there is more to man than his corporeal/material self (as suggested by reason and knowledge) and this self is perhaps also immune to the destructive powers of time.

So, we may summarize the poem as follows:

- (a) The river appeared to be transient but turns out to be eternal. So, this "afterthought" to the original thought.
- (b) Its content and appearance may change but its "Form" and "Function" remain the same.
- (c) As opposed to the permanent river, men are transient. However, there are two consolations:
- (d) Art produced by man can survive us and the fact that faith, hope and love tell us that man is more than his corporeal/material self—which is what reason would have us believe.

4.2.2 Earlier Critical Readings

A simple reading of the poem would stop above. A biographical reading would attempt to explain the poem's preoccupation with the theme of "permanence versus transience" in terms of some personal crisis in the poet's real life. A historical/material reading would interpret Wordsworth's preoccupation with permanence and transience as representing the wilful turning off of the 19th century aristocracy towards *abstractions* to escape a threatening and turbulent working-class movement emerging slowly but steadily in that era. We could go on outlining other interpretations of the poem but for our purposes here let us concentrate on a New Critical reading of the poem.

4.2.3 A New Critical Reading

A New Critic would read the theme of "permanence versus transience" as one providing the central tension in the poem. This tension for the New Critic is generated by a series of images operating through paradox and irony. Among the

paradoxical images of the poem are the river as a life or event which is capable of passing away and Art as a living and performing entity. Irony is revealed in the way apparently transient objects are shown to be permanent and vice-versa. Put together they help the reader delve deeper into the theme of the poem, that is, the permanent / transient nature of the river/ man/ art.

While claiming permanence for art, the ambivalence of the phrase 'serve the future hour' also tells the New Critic that the eternal "life" of art/river is an extremely problematic phenomenon, which does not guarantee its permanence in any single form. This ambivalence and *undecidability* about the exact status of the river, would be seen by the New Critic as evidence of Wordsworth's unified sensibility and balanced vision of truth.

4.2.4 A Structuralist Reading

Structuralist critics on the other hand would go beyond the paradoxical/ironical images locked in tension to identify the binary oppositions operating in the poem. They would show how the interrelations between the binaries help the poet build up his argument. In other words, they would try to explain structurally, how the poem achieves the effect, which an individual receives at the end of having read it. The structuralist looks for binary oppositions because its discovery is one of the central strategies in explaining a text's structure for most of them.

The primary binary oppositions functioning in the poem are:

Permanence/ Transience

Essence/ Existence

Faith/ Reason

Form/ Content.

Art / Life

These binaries are used by the poem to construct the *Romantic* dilemma of being caught between permanence and transience. The theme of transience is built on the evidence provided by concrete existence and reason. So, man in his actual life, the river in its actual flow (or content) appear to be transient—that is what reason tells us. But, we can have faith like Wordsworth that man in his Essence, the river in its Form and Function are permanent. Another aspect which makes man eternal is his capacity to create / perceive truth and to embody it in art which never dies.

There is also a clear hierarchy evident in these binaries. For the poet, the first term in each of the binaries is superior to the second. So, permanence is posited as the superior term because in being immune to the powers of time, it overcomes the loss associated with transience. The true Duddon, that is its Form and Function, is something like the platonic Essence / Idea—thus permanent. Wordsworth here adopts the typically platonic and romantic stand—Form is essential and unchanging while content is disposable and transient. The fact that Wordsworth intends to give positive value to permanence is also evident in his final invocation of the transcendent powers of art as providing immortality to the artist. He also invokes love, hope and faith, which suggest man's possible permanence.

Transience is loss. The poet, therefore, sympathizes with the flowing river, which for him is a metaphor of his own passing age. The river in its content is seen as a memory that has "passed away". The sense of loss is also evident in the looming apprehension of death tied necessarily to the fate of mankind.

So, the poem posits the threat of transience but overcomes it through a problematic Platonism that asserts permanence. The Structuralist thus reveals how the poem's argument is woven around binaries—one set privileged over the other.

4.2.5 A Deconstructive Reading

The deconstructionist examines all the hierarchies used by the structuralist and the premises on which they are based to reveal certain embarrassing moments in the text when the reversal of these hierarchies leads to the collapse of the poem's primary argument.

The binaries perceived by the structuralist can be also seen as the metaphysical hierarchies, which the deconstructionist looks for. But, while the structuralist looked for binaries to explain the poem's structure, the deconstructionist looks for the metaphysical hierarchies to examine the poet's understanding of the reality of the phenomenon depicted in the poem.

We have seen that "Permanence-Transience" is the main binary around which the poem is structured—aspects of the river/man/art falling under one of the heads. The other hierarchies : "Form/content"; "Essence/existence"; faith/ reason" should also be kept in mind. For the deconstructionist this hierarchy reflects the fact that the first term in each pair is privileged in the poet's understanding of the reality under investigation.

So, the river's 'Form' and 'Function' and the capacity of art to transcend time make them permanent and thus superior to a merely transient man.

But, when we look into the matter a little more carefully, a reversal seems to be initiated. To "seek the future hour" is not the same as surviving into the future—because it involves performing an entirely different function. Wordsworth's poem will take a different meaning for a different age. The Form of Wordsworth's poem, which is supposedly eternal, will be determined by the way it is read by later generations. All that will survive is an empty material form, an empty set of signifiers awaiting the interpretive powers of a new reader, who will transform it into a new entity suited to the needs and contingencies of a new age. The feeling of immortality, which inspires the artist, is after all a matter of faith—a faith that his work has some transcendent value, which each generation will find significant. Derrida's critique of "Presence" reminds us that such a transcendent value / truth is a philosophical fiction. Each reading generation constructs that fiction for itself. Only language keeps performing through the generations.

A concrete manifestation of what has been said perhaps lies before your very eyes on the pages you have just read. Is this poem a proof of Wordsworth's survival or passing away? Has the original poem lived through time to reveal its truth to us? Does the poem have the same meaning for us as it did for Wordsworth's age? You may have a strong tendency to say "Yes" but Derrida will remind you that only the printed marks are the same. What we read as this poem is not only to a certain extent indeterminate but also unique to our cultural position—thus necessarily different from a reading emanating from a Romantic or any other culture. Thus, the permanence of art on closer scrutiny turns out to be actually transient. The poet's argument is reversed—man cannot have the consolation that art will outlive him/her.

Let us now examine the other hierarchies operating in the poem. Form, Essence and faith link together in providing the argument for permanence. So, as you read, the Form—sharing some of the traits of the platonic Essence lends permanence to the river—that is, the poet's faith. Content, on the other hand, sharing the characteristics of the platonic existence becomes a transient/material embodiment of the divine form and the poem would have us believe the superiority of the first over the second. However, reason tells us otherwise. What we know as the Essence of a thing is after

all a deduction from the total/partial number of instances of that thing which we encounter in our day to day life.

Let us open up this a little further by investigating the relation between the Essence and existence of say a chair. We realize immediately that contrary to Plato's conviction it is not the Essence of a chair that precedes its existence but its existence that precedes its Essence. The idea or the Essence of a chair is in the last instance a deduction from the number of chairs we have seen and analysed—that is, our experience with a number of concrete chairs. Ideas cannot exist in isolation from material realities. There can hardly be an idea, which is not linked directly/indirectly, through an originary lead to some material form. Therefore the primacy attributed to Form/Essence/faith in platonic / wordsworthian thought now shifts to its opposite: content/existence/reason.

In terms of the poem's argument what it means is that the "Form" of the river/art which is perceived as a "permanent unity" is actually a "transient multiplicity". The Form of the river is a constructed unity, a large part of which actually changes with time. Even those aspects which appear not to, can actually change once we change the parameters of construction. That is Essence/Form is itself a linguistic construct.

This point needs further explanation. Where do we get to the word "river" from—the obvious answer is language. Everything that we understand by the Essence/Form of a river comes to us through language. That is the Essence/Form of the river is constructed in and through language. Now, ask yourself a simple question—how can a system itself so dynamic and unstable produce an entity as stable and unified as the platonic / wordsworthian Essence/Form?

So, the claim about the permanence of art/river/man can be reversed to show that the poem actually argues about their transience.

4.2.6 Deconstructing Deconstruction

Having dethroned the permanence of art/river, the deconstructionist cannot sit back and let the new hierarchy prevail—that is s/he cannot complacently accept that art is transient. When we reconsider, a certain claim for permanence re-asserts itself—after all the printed marks and a certain core of meaning do remain the same. It would be unfair to argue that the word 'cat' means entirely different things for different ages. Only when the fundamental though arbitrary link between the animal and the sign 'cat' is broken can the meaning of the word change and this is not easy to break. On the other hand, certain other things may change. The signifier 'cat' may evoke a cat unique to my experience in my mind, perhaps also evoke a unique set of associations with the animal or even mean other but fixed things than the four-legged animal. No matter how the word has evolved and whatever the theoretical indeterminacy attached to it, we need to share a certain kernel of meaning which makes communication possible in the first place—no matter in whatever rudimentary form. So, to rephrase the question asked earlier—does the poem mean the same to us as it did to Wordsworth? The answer remains *no* but with a qualifier—there are certain similarities in the way Wordsworth and we read it. The poem's existence in language gives it a certain dynamicity and stasis. The deconstructionist has put you on a see-saw.

If the claims for both the permanence and transience of art can be made good, then what do we make of the poem? If you remember, the New Critic reached the same ambivalence and saw it as an evidence of Wordsworth's unified sensibility and balanced vision of truth. The deconstructionist however interprets it differently. For him/her there is no a priori truth about the relationship between art and permanence / transience which a poet can convey through his/her work of art. So, s/he would leave

the question of truth open. Truth like all other issues has to be delinked from the idea of presence.

4.3 JOHN DONNE'S 'THE CANONIZATION'

The second example that I propose to use to familiarize you with the process of deconstructing poetry, is *The Canonization* by the English Metaphysical poet, John Donne.

For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsie, or my gout,
My five grey hairs, or ruin'd fortune flout,
With wealth your state, your mind with Arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honour, or his grace,
The Kings reall, or his stamped face
Contemplate, what you will, approve,
So, you will let me love.

(9)

Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?
What merchants ships have my sighs drowned?
Who saies my tears have overflow'd his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove?
When did the heats which my veines fill
Add one more to the plagueie Bill?
Soldiers finde wars, and Lawyers find out still
Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love.

(18)

Call us what you will, we are made such by love;
Call her one, me another flye,
We are tapers too, and at our owne cost die,
And wee in us find the 'Eagle and the Dove.
The Phoenix riddle hath more wit
By us, we two being one, are it.
So, to one neutrall thing both sexes fit,
We dye and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.

(27)

We can dye by it, if not live by love,
And if unfit for tombs and hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;
And if no peece of Chronicle we prove,
We'll build in sonnets pretty roomes;
As well a well wrought urn becomes
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombes,
And by these hymnes, all shall approve
Us Canoniz'd for love:

(36)

And thus invoke us; you whom reverend love
Made one of another's hermitage;
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;
Who did the whole world's soule contract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes
(So, made such mirrors, and such spies,
That they did all to you epitomize,)
Countries, Townes, Courts: Beg from above

4.3.1 A Summary

Broadly speaking the poem's argument runs thus:

Troubled/exasperated by the hindrance caused by an outsider's speech in his act of love, the poet asks the intruder to keep quiet and not disturb him. Instead he suggests a few alternatives which the intruder can indulge in: if he wants to speak then he can "chide/flout" the poet's palsy, gout, five gray hairs or ruined fortune. Or, the intruder can also do a whole lot of things other than speaking about the poet's health/wealth and love. These activities are acquiring wealth, knowledge of the arts, finding a career and retaining a post, entering the king's court or the service of a subsidiary Lord, or simply earn money. The intruder can think of any other opportunity as long as it does not interfere with the poet's love session.

In the next Stanza, the poet gives concrete reasons why he should be allowed to love. His love has not injured, drowned, overflowed, frozen, or heated anything. Life goes on normally even while the poet and his beloved continue to love. So, there is no reason why they should be interrupted.

The lover and the beloved perhaps appear strange to the rest of the world, and thus invite curiosity and interruption. However, the poet is not worried about what they are going to be labelled as. Whatever strangeness they embody is the result of their love. They show a unique and mysterious unity. Together they embody the complementarity of the Eagle/Dove, Taper/Fly and the Phoenix. Their experience of love is fulfillment, destruction, and renewal at the same time.

At this point, a disturbing thought enters the poet's mind. Perhaps they may not be able to live with this kind of love. Why this threat is perceived is not clear. However, once dead, they will be fit for sonnets and 'well wrought urns' if not for half-acre tombs and hearse. The poet then goes on to prescribe the hymn that future generations will sing in praise of their love—the love of saints. Their unique and mysterious love, the poet would have us believe, has transformed them into saints, *canonized* them.

4.3.2 The Hierarchies Operating

Even in this sketchy summary, you can probably see that the poem's world is divided into two: the private sphere of the lovers' experience and the public realm of the outer world. To speak in the structuralist parlance, the main binary opposition operating in this poem is the private / public or the lover-centred world / materialistic Renaissance world. These binaries could also be considered as the metaphysical hierarchies the deconstructionist looks for. That is, the poet understands/ depicts the reality of the situation in terms of these binaries, and, intends the private lover-centred world to be superior to the public materialistic Renaissance world.

So, the poet in the first stanza while arguing for the perpetuation of the lover-centred world rejects the public sphere as of no consequence to him and his beloved. In the second stanza, the private world of the lovers is shown to function independently, not deriving any sustenance from, or interrupting the public world in any way. The third stanza defines the unique and distinct elements, which sets the private world apart and perhaps elevates it in contrast to the public materialistic world of the Renaissance.

From this point onwards the poet not only rejects the public world and shows a lack of the lovers' dependence on it but seems to grow more confident about the

superiority of the private world. In the fourth stanza, the public and private come into direct confrontation but the poet, while not suggesting the power of the public world, arbitrarily devalues it by willingly accepting a private and smaller alternative. By the end of the fourth and the whole of the fifth stanza, he is more confident about the value of the private world and thinks that the public world will invoke this private world to gain some of the unique/mysterious qualities associated with it.

In all the poet seems to be progressing from an explicit personal rejection of the public world to declaring the independence of the private world from this public world, to a putative superiority of the private world.

4.3.3 A Deconstructive Analysis

Now let us see the potential latent in this poem to disrupt the hierarchy operating. You have probably felt that the superiority of the lovers' world is a self-professed presumption—the outer world does not say so—is not even given a voice. On the contrary, the suggested voice of the outer world has a fairly disruptive potential, enough to trouble the poet to the point of exasperation at which the poem opens. This world is marked by all the positives, vitality and contradictions which characterize life. It carries the potential to chide/flout, acquire wealth, position etc., has the power to destroy the poet's reputation and probably shroud him in oblivion. In spite of all these powers ascribed to the public world, the poet feels that it will ultimately sing that prescribed hymn in their memory—somehow value the unique and mysterious state achieved by the poet and his beloved. Why does the poet feel so? Let us try to understand it.

The only claim made good by Donne in this poem about the superiority of the lover's word is a uniquely mysterious and spiritual experience of love which makes them saints, thus deserving the attention of the outer world. This, the deconstructionist is going to argue, is a philosophical fiction. What Donne experiences with his beloved as spiritual love, is in the last instance a state of harmony between two individuals in which the outer world and their corporeal selves contribute significantly. Despite claims to the contrary, this experience is subject to time. Donne's spiritual experience of love comes to acquire some of the permanence associated with Essence. But the deconstructionist will argue that Donne and his beloved continuously construct the significance of their relationship through and in experience. In other words, the significance of the relationship lies not in its mystic essence, but in the dynamic and lively experience that it leads to—perfectly within time and within the parameters of the day-to-day world.

If the supposedly spiritual experience is nothing but a material/corporeal experience, well within the parameters of the day-to-day world, then the putative superiority of the private sphere is undercut and the poet's claim to superiority proven false. In other words, the private world, instead of being a superior world is revealed as a part of the public world. The hierarchy private/public is thus deconstructed into a new public/private one.

The poem in a virtually self-contradicting spirit acknowledges the superiority of the public world in various oblique ways. Did you notice the disproportionately large amount of poetic space devoted to the supposedly inferior public world? The lovers' world is one of deprivation, while all the positives lie in the public world. This world has its corrosive and destructive powers, which is duly acknowledged by the poet, against which he appears helpless. Stanza 1 is significant in this respect. Not only is the poet hindered to the point of destruction by the powers of this world, but the last line seems to imply that this world has effective control over whether the poet will be allowed to love or not.

Reading deeper into the poem's argument we realize that it is the "sonnets" and the "hymns" which the public world is going to read/sing which will establish the lovers' position as saints. In fact, the whole idea of "saints" drags the public into the private sphere in a way that proves suicidal for the main argument. Looking for fame, renown and public acceptance (as evident in the desire for sainthood) are facts connected to the public sphere. So, the lovers' private world is directed towards achieving fame in the public sphere – something, which they have already looked down upon as inferior. Then why try to achieve it? Finally, it appears, Donne is after all trying to "get a place" – but one lower in the hierarchy he has made. However, this craving for fame reverses that hierarchy for the reader. If spiritual love, is for the sake of gaining renown, then it no longer remains "peace" but is characterized by some of the "rage" associated with love in the public / Renaissance world

4.3.4 Identifying the Stakes

Having identified an operating hierarchy and reversed it, let us now ask ourselves a question which every responsible deconstructionist asks him/herself at the end of having deconstructed an hierarchy. Why was this hierarchy functioning? What ideological or political purposes was it serving?

The answer probably lies in viewing this poem as a historical document reflecting a conflict between certain historical forces.

Donne wrote his "Songs and Sonnets" in defiant reaction against the artificial sweetness and platonic idealism of Medieval love poetry which he found spilling over into Elizabethan love poetry. An apt demonstration of this defiance is the famous opening of "The Sunne Rising". Yet, despite such a pronounced break from the medieval tradition, Donne's poetry harbours a residue of the medieval love element which often stands in contrast to the sensual, passionate and individual centred love of the Renaissance.

This is especially evident in Donne's relationship with Petrarch in this poem. While some of the Petrarchan similes (Stanza 2) are almost ridiculed as being unreal and hyperbolic, the Phoenix image which suggests the unique fusion of the poet and his beloved in an act of synthesis, creation and destruction is borrowed from him. It is strange, but the medieval continues to live in Donne's poetry in a fairly important way.

At least a large part of this survival can be explained in terms of Donne's historical position. His cultural equipment was in many ways that of a medieval scholastic thinker, but he lived his day-to-day life in a world charged with science, trade, commerce and a blatant individualism, set out to conquer the whole world. On the one hand, he was influenced by the holy fathers steeped in medieval theology—on the other, the prosperous Dukes of Milan, Galileo, Copernicus, Vinci and Luther. Writing in the early part of the English Renaissance, his texts are understandably split—between a receding and hence more wilfully arrogant medieval world and the newly-emerging but powerful Renaissance.

What we have in '*The Canonization*' is a particular version of this conflict—in which the superiority of the dominant Renaissance stream is evident—despite its avowed project to argue the superiority of the world of spirit. Donne's arbitrary privileging of the private spiritual world in the poem suggests that the Medieval world of spirit was in the throes of a deep crisis in the face of a powerful materialistic Renaissance which dominates the poem. The hierarchy thus acquires a distinct political overtone depicting a receding but arrogant historical force arbitrarily asserting itself against an emerging but powerful one.

4.4 LET US SUM UP

In the two poems discussed in this Unit, two major binaries of Western thought, permanence / transience and private/ public, as reflected in the two poems, have been questioned and reversed. Thus Wordsworth, relying on the conventional romantic notion of the superiority of the world of spirit, tries to assert the permanence of man/art/river. However, as our analysis reveals, this assertion is problematic. Donne's 'The Canonization' tries to assert a similar superiority of the private spiritual world over the public materialist world. But this superiority too is revealed to be insufficiently argued. On the contrary, we have historical evidence to suggest that the hierarchy was actually functioning in the opposite way.

If you look into the two binaries a little more carefully, you will realize that the two are part of the same old platonic argument about essence/existence. It is interesting but this binary pervades the literary mind from the 17th to the 19th centuries and Derrida would say even into the twentieth century. The point to be remembered is that Deconstruction itself practices it even while alerting us to its presence and recurrence.

4.5 QUESTIONS

- (1) Outline the major differences between a new critical, structuralist, and a deconstructive reading of a poem.
- (2) Explain how Wordsworth's 'Afterthought' constructs its arguments through a series of binaries.
- (3) Outline important points of similarity and difference between a structuralist and poststructuralist reading of 'The Canonization'.
- (4) Show how each of the two poems discussed suffers from the same metaphysical fallacy.
- (5) Show the strengths and limitations of deconstruction in relation to actual criticism of a literary/ non-literary text.

4.6 GLOSSARY

Abstraction	:	Refers to the process or stripping something of its concrete accompaniments, leaving it at the immaterial level of an idea or concept.
Romantic	:	Refers to a movement in literature and the arts almost at the end of the 19th century which is characterized by a special emphasis on the powers of the imagination, a world of spirit and nature.

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Structure

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous Unit, we acquainted you with the process of deconstructing poetry. This Unit aims at familiarizing you with how to deconstruct a play. The play is specially chosen: *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. It is special because unlike other plays, it does not use, but deconstructs conventional oppositions associated with notions like meaning, consciousness and time. The play, as you know, suggests the meaninglessness of life by showing the meaninglessness of a number of notions on which the conventional meaning of life depends. So, this Unit instead of analyzing the larger argument of the play focuses on these problematic notions. At the end of it, you should be in a position to figure out how a play can question accepted oppositions instead of using them.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Samuel Beckett (1906-90) wrote *Waiting for Godot* sometime between 1945 and 1950 soon after his return to Paris in 1945 at the end of World War II. The death, destruction, horror and utter chaos experienced by Beckett during and after the war years both as a member of the French resistance and in his tenure as a Red Cross volunteer in Ireland, seem to have created a ferment, which made the next five years a particularly fertile phase in his life. Apart from *Waiting for Godot* he wrote four other plays, all in French.

Waiting for Godot explores a static situation. In Act 1 two tramps Vladimir and Estragon wait on a country road for an appointment with someone called Godot. Godot never comes but the tramps meet an aristocrat and his menial: Pozzo and Lucky and a messenger boy who informs them that Godot will not come 'today' but definitely 'tomorrow'. Act 2 repeats Act 1 with some important differences. But the basics remain the same—Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot but meet Lucky and Pozzo and a messenger boy who carries the same message again.

If you have not read the play, please read it now.

5.2 WAITING FOR GODOT : A DECONSTRUCTIVE ANALYSIS

In order to deconstruct this rather difficult play we must be clear about the literary philosophical movement from which it derives : Theatre of the Absurd.

5.2.1 *Waiting for Godot* and the Theatre of the Absurd

The phrase was coined by Martin Esslin in his book of that name. He used it to denote a group of playwrights who he thought shared some common philosophic and artistic premises. In the beginning of this book, Esslin stresses that there is no such thing as a movement of absurd dramatists, the term is useful as "a device to mark certain fundamental traits, which seem to be present in the works of a number of dramatists."

The common traits identified by Esslin are 'a sense of disillusionment and loss of certitude characteristic of our [Modern] time'. All the unshakeable assumptions of man had been swept away and had not been replaced. Progress, nationalism, secularism, fascism which had emerged as the new ideals had also collapsed and had not been substituted. Man engaged in life with the same zest and dedication suddenly lost the goal of his actions—was at a loss about the meaning/purpose of his existence. Therefore, man felt like an irremediable exile. His original homeland had been lost and no new one was available. "This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting truly constitutes the feeling of absurdity" (Esslin).

Eugene Ionesco, in his definition of the absurd, also echoes a similar sentiment. "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose . . . Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost, all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless. "

As you have probably felt in these preliminary statements, the Theatre of the Absurd borrows its basic principles from Existentialism. It acknowledges the fundamental meaninglessness of human existence but takes it a step further. Instead of accepting the meaninglessness of human life as a simple fact which can be talked about. The Theatre of the Absurd goes on to show that not only is life meaningless, but everything *with which* we can talk about this meaninglessness is also fundamentally meaningless.

In his book, Esslin attempts to establish *Waiting for Godot* as a representative play of the Theatre of the Absurd—displaying the anxiety and lack of *rational discursivity* characteristic of these plays. So, according to Esslin, the play enacts the predicament of the modern man caught in a meaningless existence and puts it forward in an equally meaningless way.

In the process of living a meaningless existence, man creates a number of institutions with which to cover up the meaninglessness. Society (represented by Pozzo and Lucky), knowledge (represented by Lucky's speech), friendship, art, religion and a number of similar institutions are shown to be constructs and thus fundamentally meaningless. For the common man, they serve to cover the fundamental meaninglessness of life. All through life man keeps hankering or waiting for some kind of absolute meaning or significance, while life slips by.

5.2.2 The Problem of Meaninglessness

What you read above was a conventional absurdist reading of the play. On a *close reading* however, this interpretation (seeing the play as meaningless), runs into

problems. Let's see where and how. In order to do this, let us start by investigating where the meaninglessness shows in the play.

Well, it's pretty obvious. Recall what happens in the play - two tramps, uttering almost nonsense and doing nothing substantial, wait in an uncertain timeframe for a dubious appointment with someone they do not know and who doesn't come. They are not even sure of the place where they are supposed to wait. However, even this uncertainty is not certain. A messenger boy creates a dubious hope that Godot might come the next day. If that is the plot of *Waiting for Godot* could there be anything more or even equally meaningless?

Everything conventionally used in a play to generate meaning: that is its story, character, time and dialogue is carefully rinsed of any potential to signify. This lack of conventional meaning generating elements is carefully engineered to suggest the lack of any fundamental meaning in human life. So, the meaninglessness of the play is supposed to suggest the meaninglessness of life.

Then, what is the problem with it? The problem is that in spite of all this, the play cannot be taken as a statement of the absolute meaninglessness of life, on the contrary, it suggests a certain kind of meaning to it.

5.2.2.1 Meaningless to Meaningful!

Why does the charge of meaninglessness encounter problems? In order to find this we have to investigate how this charge was constructed.

That label of meaninglessness was inspired by the absurdist vision. So, as Ionesco argues "Cut off from his metaphysical, transcendental and religious roots " man finds his existence meaningless. This is the meaninglessness or vacancy we thought was suggested in the play. In saying this two problems immediately arise:

- (a) The exact implications of the word *meaningless*. Contrary to the general expectation of vacancy, the expression *meaningless* has a special sense here. The point I'm trying to alert you to is that the concept *meaningless* functions through a system of meaning and is as loaded with significance or meaning as any other term in the English language. Therefore to use this word as a description of something is not to describe a vacancy in the literal sense but a vacancy in a very special sense of the term. To function in this sense, a framework is required within which it can suggest the idea of vacancy.

Let's investigate the framework within which this statement of meaninglessness held true for *Waiting for Godot* and to do this let us go back to Ionesco's statement:

Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost, all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless.

What are the *metaphysical, religious and transcendental roots* in the first place? Rationality, Christianity, and an unbounded faith in the doctrine of Progress—one could say. The Western man had fostered the illusion that there was some absolute meaning and significance to life, controlled by the infallible powers of Reason, God and Progress.

Then what caused the severance? The bloody Revolutions, ceaseless exploitation, dehumanization, and other problems associated with industrialization in Europe, including the two devastating wars. By the end of the Modern era, it was clear that

life was the product of a number of social, cultural and political forces, which far from being ideal and infallible had such terrible implications.

It is only when we understand these roots and their severance that we get the framework within which the cry of meaninglessness makes sense. So, it is because of the Western man's earlier assumption that there was some absolute meaning and significance to life, controlled by absolute powers like god and reason, that life has now become meaningless. Outside this framework, life remains as meaningful /less as before. The meaningless in other words is a special case of the meaningful.

- (c) At another though related level, is the problem that the text seems to suggest a meaning to life. Ironically, an act of interpreting the text transforms its meaninglessness into meaning. That is, the play seems to be saying that this state of severance from the metaphysical, transcendental and religious roots is a given fact, which creates a certain vacancy. That is one of the meanings. Additionally, absolute meaning in metaphysical, transcendental and religious terms may be absent but other kinds of meaning may be available. What the absurdist had considered absolutely *meaningless* was a context bound vision. Life takes on another meaning once we change the context. The meaningless, in other words, is once again revealed as a special case of the meaningful.

So, the play too opens up to a number of symbolic and metaphoric interpretations. One significant landmark in this regard is the performance at the San Quentin Penitentiary.

So, Esslin and Ionesco may label life as meaningless, but a close reading of the play can question this label. This reading, apart from arguing the context-bound significance, and the *meaning of meaninglessness* would go on to argue that we cannot be sure about the meaninglessness of life until we are sure about its meaningfulness. Meaningful and meaningless instead of being opposites are thus revealed to be interconstitutive. If you refer back to the two questions raised above, they too are saying the same thing : the meaningless harbours some of the key traits of the meaningful. So, the deconstructionist seems to be saying that no absolute statement about human life as meaningful/meaningless can be passed. It is for this reason that Godot acquires a dubious status: neither can we be sure that he will come, nor can we be sure that he will not.

5.3 THE PROBLEM OF GODOT

The character (?) of Godot is a specially problematic site in the play where some important conventional oppositions are questioned in a deconstructive manner. One such opposition is presence / absence.

In conventional philosophy, presence has always been privileged over absence. So, it is commonplace to think of presence as the given superior term and absence as a deficiency or lack. Read the section on logocentrism in Unit 2 to figure out this point.

However, in the hierarchical opposition presence / absence, the deconstructionist would want to demonstrate that for presence to function as it is said to, it must have the qualities that supposedly belong to its opposite – i.e absence.

Consider for example Zeno's paradox of the flight of an arrow. At any given moment, a flying arrow is at a particular spot—and since it is always in a particular spot, it could never be in motion. We on the contrary want to insist, quite justifiably, that the arrow is in motion at every instance, yet its motion is never present at any given moment. Motion can be present only if the present instance is not something given but the product of the relations between the past and future. Something can be

present at a given instant only if the instant is already divided within itself, inhabited by the non-present.

This paradox is a fairly effective critique of the notion of presence. We think of the real as what is present at any given instance because the present instance seems a simple absolute. The past is a former present, the future an anticipated present—both somehow deriving from the present. But it turns out that the present instance can serve as that ground only insofar as it is not a pure and autonomous given but is marked by a difference and deference—that is difference. Thus, instead of defining absence in terms of presence, as its negation, we can treat presence as the effect of a generalized absence or difference.

How is all this related to the character of Godot? The answer is simple. Like Zeno's paradox, the character of Godot is a site where the hierarchy presence/absence is questioned and the superiority of either is left undecided. Godot is a dramatic reminder of the fact that presence is constituted by absence. Let's see how.

Is Godot present or absent? The text is non-committal. If you investigate it closely, it offers plenty of evidence that Godot is present and perhaps an equal amount that s/he (?) is absent. Textual evidence puts us on a see-saw.

On the one hand, is the pre-textual fact of the appointment with Godot; on the other, is the complete textual uncertainty about it. The boy as a stage device argues both for and against Godot's existence. For example his presence, his reference to a concrete physical place where Godot lives, his message, and most important his expectation about a response from Vladimir and Estragon suggest that Godot is a real / present figure. However, when we consider his responses carefully we realize that they are evasive and uncertain—nothing is committed through them. The reference to his brother which draws a parallel with Cain and Abel gives Godot a mythical ring and prompts us to equate him with the Old Testament God.

At the end of having studied this summary of textual evidence, how far are we from deciding the question of Godot's presence / absence? Perhaps as far as we were in the beginning. This play is notorious for taking with the left hand what it gives with its right. Therefore, no certainties can be arrived at about Godot in this play.

Then what does this uncertainty point to? It appears to be an effective attack on the assumptions of conventional philosophy which banks on presence and absence as absolute, independent and hierarchically arranged categories in terms of which we can understand the world. Godot questions this confidence and highlights the fact that presence and absence instead of being opposites and in that order are actually interconstitutive and do not follow that order. In order to be sure of the absence of something, we have to be sure about its presence and vice-versa. By showing that neither presence nor absence can be considered the superior term, the assumptions of conventional philosophy are deconstructed.

5.3.1 Godot as the Transcendental Signified

The character (?) of Godot by its perpetual suspension between presence and absence suggests interesting parallels with an idea in poststructural linguistics, which is central to the idea of Deconstruction.

Derrida's critique of Saussure's linguistic theory in Unit 2, reflected on the notion of the *transcendental signified*. From that critique we know that a signified is not an independent entity but the product of the interplay of a number of signifiers. So, the search for a signified always leads to an infinite number of signifiers. A transcendental signified, as you have already read, would be one that escapes this

play of signifiers and has a privileged existence. Such a signified, as Derrida tells us, is a philosophical fiction.

Analogically, we can think of the play as a complex set of signifiers in search of a transcendental signified called Godot. It would then be clear that like the dog-song at the beginning of Act 2, or a text in the current sense of the term, it can never escape from its endless chain of significations and arrive at that signified – that is Godot is a fiction and can never arrive. Yet, just as the poststructuralist theory of language has to presume the dubious presence of some transcendental signified, simultaneously generating and generated by the act of *differance*, to explain the origin and functioning of meaning, (See Unit 6). Similarly, the text has to presume the presence of a Godot whose arrival will give it meaning.

5.4 THE PROBLEM OF TIME

Just as Godot is simultaneously present and absent in the play, so is time. Let's see how.

Time can be considered absent because the play operates within an extremely uncertain time frame. No one, including Beckett seems to be sure about any of the time fixing factors in the play.

Let's examine some primary textual evidence in this regard. What is the time frame in which the play exists? We cannot be sure. Act One takes place one evening between twilight and moonshine—so does Act Two. That is all one gets out of the play in terms of its time scheme.

How much time has lapsed between Act One and Two? One day as the stage direction would have you believe. Other things suggest the contrary. The bare tree now has three or four leaves. Pozzo has gone dumb and Lucky has gone blind, apart from growing much older. Definitely more than a day has passed. How long have Vladimir and Estragon been together? The play is again notoriously evasive in its response. At the beginning of the play, Vladimir, consoling himself about the terrible nature of his existence explains :

Vladimir : ... (*Cheerfully.*) On the other hand what's the good of losing heart now, that's what I say. We should have thought of it a million years ago, in the nineties.

At the end of Act One, Estragon asks Vladimir how long they have been together and Vladimir's response is "**50 years perhaps**". The point I am trying to alert you to is that the text is not going to give you any certainty regarding its time frame.

Even other questions like Vladimir, Estragon, Lucky, Pozzo's age encounter similar evasive responses. The play's distrust of time is most potently suggested in this speech at the end of Act Two:

Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It's abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, One day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we will go deaf, one day we are born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you?

In other words, the play seems to do away with the conventional notion of time. Then, how and where is it present? Examine the following conversations:

Vladimir: Time has stopped.

Pozzo: (cuddling his watch to his ear). Do not you believe it, sir, do not you believe it. (He puts his watch back in his pocket.) Whatever you like but not that.

Now let us move on to this:

Pozzo : What time is it?

Vladimir : (*Inspecting the sky*). Seven o'clock. . . Eight o'clock. . .

Estragon: That depends on what time of year it is.

Pozzo : Is it evening?

Silence. Vladimir and Estragon scrutinize the sunset.

Estragon : It's rising.

Vladimir : Impossible.

Estragon.: Perhaps it's the dawn.

Vladimir : Do not be a fool. It's the west over there.

Estragon : How do you know?

Pozzo: (anguished). Is it evening?

Vladimir : Any way it hasn't moved.

Estragon : I tell you it's rising.

Pozzo: Why do not you answer me?

Estragon: Give us a chance.

Vladimir: (reassuring). Its evening, sir, its evening, night is drawing nigh. My friend here would have me doubt it and I must confess he shook me for a moment. But it is not for nothing I have lived through this long day and I can assure you it is very near the end of its repertory.

In statements and conversations read so far, two concepts of time are evident. The first is *clock or linear time* and the second *subjective time*. Clock time is a construct, operating through differences and thus can be questioned. This is what is suggested dramatically in the confusion between the rising and setting sun. But the agony of having lived a meaningless existence is real—Vladimir can vouch for that. Whether one calls the duration morning or evening is immaterial. The fact that Vladimir has lived through the agony of the day is guarantee enough that time exists.

James L. Calderwood in an analysis of time in *Waiting for Godot* takes a theoretical route to the same conclusion. He approaches the question of time through the problem of memory. So, he says

The absences and uncertainties of memory on the characters' parts would seem to suggest that they live entirely in the present. But what is the present without the past and the future? Its home is the temporal space between the "no longer" and the "not yet". But for Didi and Gogo the present exists merely as an unbearable route to a future in which Godot's arrival will justify their present waiting. If he comes. But he won't. The past is lost to memory, the future is not yet and never to be, and the present is negated. From one standpoint—the felt presence of the duration—there is a dreadful excess of time in Godot. From another—the erasure of past, present and the future - there is no time at all in it. Time in this timeless play is simultaneously present and absent.

The argument about absence needs annotation. Calderwood is borrowing the deconstruction of presence quoted earlier which suggests that the present instance is constituted by the past and the future. Because this play operates within a framework of uncertain past and future, the present itself becomes uncertain. That is the reason why time is considered absent.

What does this questioning of Time point to? The fundamental experience of living is felt as a flux which we choose to label and control by the mechanisms of conventional time. Clocks, hours, days, etc. are all devices to shape and control this perceived flux. By virtue of being external impositions on this flux these categories are dispensable. Time understood as these categories can be thought of as non-existent. On the other hand, the felt duration of life is real. Time as a subjective experience is present. The questioning alerts us to this fundamental difference between the subjective and objective experience of time. In one sense it is present, in another it is absent.

5.5 THE PROBLEM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Waiting for Godot, as we have seen, deconstructs many important oppositions of conventional Western thought. The last opposition we are going to discuss as being deconstructed by the play is conscious / unconscious.

A powerful humanistic tradition of which Descartes is only the most obvious representative has always defined the human subject in terms of its consciousness. The 'I' is that which thinks, perceives and feels. Following this tradition, pre-Freudian psychology had looked upon consciousness as a plenitude and the unconscious as its negation or complication.

One of Freud's achievements is that he questions the hierarchical opposition conscious / unconscious. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* he writes:

It is essential to abandon the overvaluation of the property of being conscious, before it becomes possible to form any correct view of the origin of what is mental. . . . The unconscious is the larger sphere, which includes within it the smaller sphere of the conscious. Everything conscious has an unconscious preliminary stage; whereas what is unconscious may remain at that stage and nevertheless claim to be regarded as having the full value of a psychical process. The unconscious is the true psychical reality.

To speak in Freudian terms, the human mind can be seen as structured in three layers: the conscious, the preconscious and the unconscious. Images and ideas move from the unconscious to the conscious, which may later be repressed into the preunconscious. At no point of time however, is the complete unconscious transformed into the conscious. Therefore, what is in the conscious necessarily originates in the unconscious whereas what is unconscious may never come into the conscious—remain inaccessible to it.

The conscious according to Freud is the tip of the iceberg—implying thereby that the main body is the unconscious. Taken literally, it implies that 90 percent of the human mind is the unconscious—only 10 percent conscious.

In most of his writings on dreams, jokes, neurosis, children etc., Freud discusses the determining force of the unconscious over the conscious, making the conscious a particular derivative instance of the unconscious process. Freud implies that the unconscious is not a product of repression of the conscious but it is the unconscious that creates the conscious. In order to explain the origin of the conscious and unconscious in the human mind, Freud takes recourse to something similar to the Derridean *différance*. For Freud, the unconscious is both constituted by repression and is the active agent of repression. *Like différance, which designates the impossible origin of difference in differing and of deferring in the difference, the unconscious is a non-originary origin which Freud calls primary repression, in which the unconscious initiates the first repression and is constituted as repression.*

Three points have been made in the last three paras:

- (a) The unconscious as the origin of all and the conscious as the destination of some ideas.
- (b) The unconscious occupying a much larger portion of the human mind than the conscious.
- (c) The unconscious as a constituting force over the conscious as well as itself.

All the three arguments suggest that contrary to the assumptions of pre-Freudian psychology, it is the unconscious, which is the primary plenitude of which the conscious is the derivative. Let's see how *Waiting for Godot* arrives at a similar conclusion.

5.5.1 Examining the Play

The play investigates the issue of the unconscious through devices like the dream or a close introspection of consciousness itself. Consider this little chat between Estragon and Vladimir:

Estragon: I had a dream.

Vladimir: Do not tell me!

Estragon: I dreamt that -

Vladimir :DO NOT TELL ME!

**Estragon: (*gestures towards the universe.*) This one is enough for you?
(*silence.*)**

Estragon's gesture deliberately obliterates the divide between dream and reality - an act he tends to commit in other instances in the play. Such attempts to substitute dream for reality alert us to the play's tendency to view reality / consciousness as a special case of the dream / unconscious. The tendency changes into a disturbing question when we read this soliloquy of Vladimir at the end of Act Two:

Vladimir: Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be? (*Estragon, having struggled with his boots in vain, is dozing off again. Vladimir stares at him.*) He will know nothing. He will tell me about the blows he received and I will give him a carrot . . . At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, he is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep. (*Pause.*) I can't go on ! (*Pause.*) What have I said ?

This important speech by Vladimir raises some important problems. Vladimir

- (a) cannot verify whether he was asleep or awake in the past.
- (b) cannot verify whether he is asleep or awake then.
- (c) cannot find sufficient guarantee that one is awake when one thinks so.
- (d) is not convinced that consciousness and memory are sufficient guarantee of one's being awake.
- (e) is unable to convince himself that he is awake.

And these problems are not only specific to Vladimir but to every introspecting mind.

Systematically, Vladimir undercuts all the certainties associated with consciousness to finally reveal that consciousness by itself is unverifiable. We cannot be sure that the conscious exists. In that case the state of human mind would be a generalized state of unconsciousness which may lapse into a consciousness whose actual status is extremely dubious. We have come back to the privileging of the unconscious—not via the Freudian but the textual route.

5.6 LET US SUM UP

In this rather brief detour of a fairly large amount of theoretical ground, you should have crossed the following points:

- (a) *Waiting for Godot* as a representative play of the theatre of the absurd challenges some important oppositions of conventional Western thought.
- (b) As an absurd play, it questions the rationalist assumption of meaningfulness of life and the existentialist assertion of its meaninglessness. In doing so, it questions the oppositions meaningful/meaningless showing that the meaninglessness of life actually suggests a kind of meaning.
- (c) Through uncertainties relating to Godot, the play questions the primacy of presence by showing that it is always already inhabited by absence.
- (d) Like Godot, Time is shown as both present and absent in the play.
- (e) Vladimir's speech questions the conscious/unconscious hierarchy showing, like Freudian psychology, that the conscious is actually a derivative from the unconscious and not vice versa.

Each of these cases, you will realize is hitting against a conventional hierarchy which was serving particular ideological ends. Rationality, cognition, classification as control and the immediate as the real—each of these ideas can be seen as constructing their respective hierarchies and as being perpetuated by it in turn. As Derrida argues, a powerful humanistic tradition appears to be behind all these. Deconstruction does not step outside this tradition but implodes it in a spirit of self-critique.

5.7 QUESTIONS

- (1) Examine how *Waiting for Godot* questions the meaninglessness of life.
- (2) Godot is more of a stage device to put across a theoretical point rather than a real character. Discuss.
- (3) Discuss the notion of clock/linear time and explain how it is absent from the play.
- (4) Consciousness is a presumption, unconsciousness a certainty. Elucidate from your reading of *Waiting for Godot*.

- Modern** : A diffuse period between the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century characterized by a feeling of disorder as a result of the collapse of all certainties in human life.
- Rational discursive** : Rational denotes something based on reason. Discursivity refers to the attribute of proceeding by argument. Put together the two denote a way of arguing or thinking that proceeds in a reasoned, logical and connected manner.
- San Quentin Penitentiary:** An American prison house.

Let me quote Esslin's description of a performance of *Waiting for Godot* at this penitentiary:

"On the 19th November 1957, a group of worried actors [of the San Francisco Actors' Workshop] were preparing to face their audience [of fourteen hundred convicts].... No wonder, the actors and Herbert Blau, the director were apprehensive. How were they to face one of the toughest audiences in the world with a highly obscure, intellectual play that produced near riots among a good many highly sophisticated audiences in Western Europe? Herbert Blau decided to prepare the San Quentin audience for what was to come. He stepped on the stage and addressed the packed darkened North Dining Hall.... Blau compared the play to a piece of jazz music 'to which one must listen for whatever one may find in it'. In the same way he hoped there would be some meaning, some personal significance for each member of the audience in *Waiting for Godot*.

The curtain parted. The play began. And what had bewildered the sophisticated audiences of Paris, London, and New York was immediately grasped by an audience of convicts. "

The San Quentin News on the following day reported that "The prisoners had no difficulty in understanding *Godot*." One prisoner said 'Godot is society', another said 'he is the outside'. A teacher at the prison house said "They know what is meant by waiting and they knew that if Godot finally came, he would only be a disappointment."

5.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 6 RE-ASSESSING DECONSTRUCTION

Structure

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- 6.2 The Turn Towards Language
 - 6.2.1 Positioning Structuralism
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6.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this introductory survey of the theory, implications and applications of deconstruction, let us pause for a moment to re-assess what we have read so far and try to see why this theory emerged and critique the parameters within which it functions. It is especially necessary to do so in the case of deconstruction because left to itself, the theory sounds all-encompassing, and can lead us to the view that all meaning and interpretation are futile activities. Just as it is important to understand what is useful in deconstruction, similarly, it is also important to understand where the theory falters and why. It is with this aim in mind that the last Unit has been conceived and written.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Deconstruction as a theoretical movement falls under the broad category poststructuralism. Therefore, in order to assess deconstruction properly we should first be clear about poststructuralism.

Poststructuralism as a movement carries forward ideas from Structuralism at the same time as breaks away from it. Language appears to be at the heart of both. Therefore, our initial thrust is going to be an understanding of the special status accorded to language in critical thought in the second half of the twentieth century.

We will then move on to examine the socio-political conditions under which poststructuralism emerged.

Having done so, we will begin our re-assessment by turning deconstruction against itself. Following this, we will highlight some important problems associated with this theory and finally show how the problems prepared the grounds for its displacement by other theories.

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6.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this introductory survey of the theory, implications and applications of deconstruction, let us pause for a moment to re-assess what we have read so far and try to see why this theory emerged and critique the parameters within which it functions. It is especially necessary to do so in the case of deconstruction because left to itself, the theory sounds all-encompassing, and can lead us to the view that all meaning and interpretation are futile activities. Just as it is important to understand what is useful in deconstruction, similarly, it is also important to understand where the theory falters and why. It is with this aim in mind that the last Unit has been conceived and written.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Deconstruction as a theoretical movement falls under the broad category poststructuralism. Therefore, in order to assess deconstruction properly we should first be clear about poststructuralism.

Poststructuralism as a movement carries forward ideas from Structuralism at the same time as breaks away from it. Language appears to be at the heart of both. Therefore, our initial thrust is going to be an understanding of the special status accorded to language in critical thought in the second half of the twentieth century.

We will then move on to examine the socio-political conditions under which poststructuralism emerged.

Having done so, we will begin our re-assessment by turning deconstruction against itself. Following this, we will highlight some important problems associated with this theory and finally show how the problems prepared the grounds for its displacement by other theories.

6.2 THE TURN TOWARDS LANGUAGE

As students of literature, if you recall the late Modern period in Western Europe, you will find that expression and its primary tool, language are at a crisis. Broadly speaking, the crisis had three significant dimensions :

- (a) The communicative function of language had come under question. It was no longer possible to share the rationalist or empiricist trust of the great 19th century middle-class that language did hook itself on to the world .
- (b) The emerging industrial society had reduced most utterances in language to mere instruments of science, commerce, advertising and the bureaucracy.
- (c) An author could no longer presume that s/he shared with her/his audience a framework of collective beliefs which a writing could evoke, question and /or advance. In fact, such a framework had already been lost and it was being questioned if in the ideological turmoil of the twentieth century, such a shared framework could possibly be re-invented?

Right from Coleridge to Forster and Beckett, most Modern authors are struggling with some or all of these questions. It was questions such as these, rooted in the real historical conditions of the Modern era, which foregrounded the problem of language so dramatically. The Formalist and Structuralist preoccupation with language can be understood as an effort to restore to an alienated language the richness it had been robbed of.

But it was also possible to set up language itself as an alternative to the social problems one encountered—to denounce gloomily or triumphantly, the traditional notion that one wrote about something or for somebody and to make language itself one's cherished object. In his masterly early essay *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), Barthes maps some of the historical developments by which writing for the French 19th-century Symbolist poets became an "intransitive" act : not writing for a particular purpose, or a specific topic, as in the age of "classical" literature, but writing as an end and passion in itself.

Writing , thus, turns in on itself in a profound act of *narcissism* but always troubled and overshadowed by the social guilt of its own uselessness. Unavoidably complicit with those who have reduced it to an unwanted commodity, it strains to free itself from the contamination of social meaning, either by pressing towards the purity of silence as with the Symbolists or by seeking an austere neutrality, which would hope to appear innocent but which in reality turns out to be a literary style.

6.2.1 Positioning Structuralism

Structuralism is best seen as both a symptom of and reaction to the social and linguistic crisis outlined earlier. It escapes from investigating the socio-political implications of the referential function of language to investigating its structure. This is an ironic act, since as Barthes shows, few moves could be more socio-politically significant—in the sense of asserting that crisis, and showing the structuralist's inability to engage with it.

But, this is not an empty escape in holding society and politics at bay, Structuralism focuses exclusively on the linguistic system and initiates an intensive investigation of the common signs we use in our day-to-day life. It alerts us to their property to change with time and also tries to explain the dynamics of the structure within which this change takes place.

6.2.2 Positioning Poststructuralism

Just when Structuralism was at its zenith, something of great significance occurred in the history of Western Europe. In 1968, a student movement swept across Europe,

striking against the authoritarianism of the educational institutions and, in France combining with the workers to briefly threaten the capitalist state itself. For a dramatic moment, the state teetered on the brink of ruin: its police and army fought on the streets with students who were struggling to forge solidarity with the working class. However, in the absence of a coherent political leadership, the movement plunged into a confused melee of socialism and anarchy. No wonder it was rolled back and finally dissipated—betrayed by its supine Stalinist leaders and the inability of the working class to assume power.

“Poststructuralism was a product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and anticipation, carnival and catastrophe that was 1968. Unable to break the structures of state power, Poststructuralism found it possible instead to subvert the structures of language” writes Terry Eagleton. Nobody at least was likely to beat the revolutionaries over the head for doing so. The student movement was flushed off the streets and driven underground into discourse. Its enemies, as for the later Barthes, were coherent belief systems of any kind—in particular all forms of political theory and organization, which sought to analyze, and act upon, the structures of society as a whole. What was operative in the 1968 Paris was a political system of this kind—for the leaders of the movement attempted to unite and lead all the oppressed sections of the society but failed: the oppressing system proved too powerful for them.

All such total and systematic thought was now suspect as terroristic and that is why poststructuralism turned against structuralism with a certain vehemence. What they saw in structuralism was not its ahistoric stance but the very idea of structure itself—its claim of being ‘total and systematic’. Structuralism, by refusing to acknowledge the limiting/controlling role of the centre in founding a system suggested a totality in approach that the poststructuralists attacked relentlessly.

So, in the works of Derrida and others we find a grave doubt cast upon classical notions of truth, reality, meaning and knowledge, all of which could be exposed as structured systematically around a centre. Unable to break the ‘total structure’ of late monopoly capitalism and other coherent systems that pretended to confront it, thinkers within poststructuralism trained their guns on other established monoliths like truth, reality, meaning and knowledge.

6.3 DECONSTRUCTING DECONSTRUCTION

As a part of this project, let us go back to an actual deconstruction conducted by Derrida - say the deconstruction of Saussure's theory of language. So, take a quick look at what you read in Unit 2, specially the quotation from Derrida where he reveals Saussure's theory of language as logocentric and contaminated by the metaphysics of presence. Agreeing with Saussure on the essentially differential nature of all meaning, Derrida goes on to point out that despite Saussure's insistence on the purely differential nature of the sign, Saussure maintains a rigorous distinction:

between the signifier and the signified and the equation between the signified and the concept leaves open in principle the possibility of conceiving a signified concept in itself. The signifier exists, [Derrida continues], to give access to the signified and seems subordinated to the concept of meaning that it communicates.

So, Saussure's theory is shown as making a neat distinction between the signifier and the signified and arranging them in an hierarchy: signified/signifier. This as Derrida shows later is a fallacy—the signified cannot be conceived independently of the signifier. The only concrete entities in terms of which we can talk about signifieds

are the signifiers themselves. Thus, he reverses the hierarchy in Saussure's theory and shows the theory to be contaminated with the traditional notion of presence.

Then what is the linguistic model according to Derrida? Instead of Saussure's signified, Derrida would start with the written letter : marks-on-blanks, as the basic unit—the a priori given. Everything else he would see as imported from outside or generated in a reader's interaction with these marks. "Ultimately man finds in things nothing but what he himself has imported into them" says one of his dedicated followers, J.H. Miller.

So, just as Saussure's model of language takes a certain signified presence as its starting point and is thus labeled logocentric, similarly, Derrida's model which takes the written sign for granted, can be labeled 'graphocentric'—centred on the marks-on-blanks. These marks would through a process of difference produce (?) meaning.

As the process of signification continues over years, these marks accumulate "traces" of meanings. Any signification that difference has activated in a signifier in the past remains active as a "trace" in the present instance as it will in the future, and these traces accumulate like sediments giving the meaning of that word a diversity. Thus, whenever we try to ascertain the meaning of a word, Miller would have us believe, we encounter a number of meanings present in a state of "vibratory suspension", which will not permit us to accept any one meaning as the only meaning of the word.

But what sets this process of difference into motion? If a human mind learning language starts with these marks-on-blanks, then, what sets into motion the system of differentiation through which at least a couple of meanings are created which can then through mutual differentiation inbreed other meanings and create a complete system? This is one of the basic questions about language, which the deconstructionist cannot satisfactorily answer without committing a heresy.

In order to answer it, Derrida offers the notion of difference. Combining the ideas 'difference—differing—deference' difference denotes both a 'passive' difference already in place as the condition of signification and an act of differing which produces other differences. How does that passive difference arise in the first place? To answer this Derrida would ask us to believe in an impossible process in which difference originates in the process of differing without the differing terms having any kind of a priori signification.

All this adds up to say that just as Saussure's theory is based on the logocentric model, similarly Derrida's theory of difference is based on the graphocentric model. Derrida's deconstruction of Saussurean linguistics is also dependent on an origin, ground and end. His origin and end are his graphocentric premises and the impossible notion of difference in which he sees the origin of meaning.

To say that Derrida's critique of Saussure harbours the same limitations is nothing new. If you remember the point where we defined deconstruction, we stressed that deconstruction critiques a fallacy even while harbouring the same fallacy itself. Then, why should anyone read deconstruction seriously if it remains a fault-finding exercise without suggesting any positive remedy? If you continue reading the same section, you will find a good reason for indulging in this fault-finding exercise. However, for the moment let us move on to other problems, which this theory generates for a lay reader.

6.4 SOME IMPORTANT PROBLEMS

6.4.1 The Problem of Responsibility

One of the major problems associated with this theory, hinted at earlier, is that it gives its practitioners a fairly wide scope to operate but does not fix any real responsibilities on them. One of the ideas central to deconstruction is that there can be no *truth claims* in linguistic utterances because language is a specially problematic medium (?) yielding only indeterminate meanings. Think about this carefully and you will realize that this theoretically sound view is simultaneously very mischievous. It allows you to ride rough shod over everybody else's beliefs without having the inconvenience of having to adopt one yourself. The view that the most significant aspect of any piece of language is that it does not know what it is talking about smacks of resignation to the impossibility of truth. But it also frees you in one stroke from having to assume a position on important issues, since what you say of such things will be no more than a play of signifiers, and so, in no sense to be taken as true or serious. This stance is mischievously radical in respect of everyone else's opinions, able to unmask the most solemn declarations as mere play of signs, while it implicitly arrests that play in conveying the strategy and result of the unmasking. In other words, deconstruction is blind to its own vulnerability as a critical practice.

6.4.2 The Problem of Practical Experience

One of the fundamental problems we face in accepting this theory of language is that it goes so much against our day-to-day experience. If we live in a world where things do mean, and communication does take place, then where have we got this theory wrong - or where has this theory gone wrong? For Derrida would have us believe that meaning is uncertain and unstable, "Half there—half not there". In that case how do we interpret and understand the world and communicate it to others? The difficulty here is of reconciling the opinion of a seasoned deconstructionist like Miller who feels that a word or a passage is "indeterminable", "undecipherable", "unreadable", with a humanistic opinion like Abrams' who believes that authors exploit "the possibilities and norms of their inherited language to say something determinate and... [assume] that competent readers insofar as they share their own linguistic skills, would be able to understand [approximately] what... [they] said".

One way of understanding and reconciling the deconstructionist's claim of indeterminacy with the humanist's one of relative determinacy is to point out two limitations in deconstruction: (a) the lack of a practical perspective and (b) the generalizing sweep about all linguistic utterances. The deconstructionist indulges in both these limitations with scant respect to the origin, nature and performance of language as a practical institution.

Let us take the first charge first: that is the lack of a practical perspective. While assessing a particular text, the deconstructionist does not allow for any distinction on lines of purpose or norms that may be operative while interpreting the text, say whether the text is to be taken literally or metaphorically. So, when Lear in Shakespeare's play *King Lear* says "Pray you undo this button"; as an individual's statement it can be seen as conveying a straight wish for undoing the button's hold, in the sense that instead of Lear, if it were a friend speaking to us, we would have advanced, accepted his/her communicative intent and unbuttoned the dress. Language here serves a simple practical purpose. However this is not to say that the statement means only that. The same statement can be read in several other, perhaps metaphorical ways. We can read in it a desire for release, a wish for assistance in seeking the release, etc. The point to be noted is that Lear's immediate wish for unbuttoning is conveyed effectively, no matter what else we make out of that

statement. That is when read in a simple/straight communicative context, the statement does function and reveals a functional meaning, while in the metaphorical mode it can signify a number of other things.

Now let us try to understand the deconstructionist's objection. Any understanding of the functioning of that statement in the communicative context, theoretically, cannot overlook the state of indeterminacy. Derrida appears to be right.

But practically, we do arrest the indeterminacy, even if for a fleeting moment to create a meaning/sense (?) which forms the basis of our understanding and subsequent action. How does that happen? Is this what Derrida means by saying *Half there...* ?

All this amounts to saying that deconstruction does not pay enough attention to the practical aspects of the operation of language while theorizing about it.

Similarly, when deconstructionists like Miller speak of the concept of "trace" to explain the indeterminacy of meaning, they are guilty of bracketing a number of other important forces which are at play in the process of creation of meaning. A word which has accumulated a number of traces in its history may theoretically speaking be in a state of "vibratory suspension" but, in the process of communication, that vibration is temporarily suspended by forces emanating from the social /political/ historical context, authorial intent, the reader's expectations, his/her potential or frame of mind, etc. That is what experience shows us - otherwise every reading of a word would leave us eternally confused.

6.4.3 The Problem of '*Telos*'

Another important problem associated with this theory is the problem of "telos" or "goal/end" which it does not seem to address practically. If all interpretation is misinterpretation and if all criticism of texts can engage only with a critic's own misconstruction, why bother to carry on the activities of criticism and interpretation? Miller poses this question again and again and offers a rather disheartening answer. For him as for many other deconstructionists reading a text is like unravelling a spider's web, finally reaching an impasse. So, discussing Pater's writing, Miller writes:

Pater's writings, like those of other major authors in the Occidental tradition are at once open to interpretation and are ultimately indecipherable, unreadable. His texts lead the critic deeper and deeper into a labyrinth until he confronts a final aporia. This does not mean, however, that the reader must give up from the beginning the intent to understand Pater. Only by going all the way into the labyrinth, following the thread of a given clue, can the critic reach the blind alley, vacant of any Minotaur, that impasse which is the end point of interpretation.

Let us study carefully what Miller has to say about interpretation here. Interpretation for him is not an impossibility but in one sense it finally leads to an impasse. He is deceptively silent about what happens in the process—something, which would have been relevant for anyone interested in understanding the way language functions. Because the critic reaches a final impasse therefore Pater's writings remain ultimately indecipherable and unreadable—that is, no stable meaning (perhaps fixed meaning) can be attributed to it. This reduces all efforts at interpretation into a circular activity where the critic starts from a given premise to reach a blind alley again and again—no matter which text s/he is reading. The whole of human enterprise and achievements through language is thus reduced to a spider's web which the deconstructionist can do nothing about except unravel and show us that it

was simply a web of words leading to nothing. That a particular purpose is served in weaving or following this web of words does not find place in a deconstructionist's explanation.

Or perhaps it does. In one of his writings, Derrida poses the difference between "Expression" and "Indication". There is always a gap between the two—the first being what we aspire to and the second what we achieve. That is the aspiration may be of an impossibility but the achievement is a definite possibility. Exploring this issue Derrida writes:

Everything in my discourse, which is destined to manifest an experience to someone else, must pass through the mediation of the physical aspect. This irreducible mediation commits every expression to an indicative operation.

What Derrida asks us here is not that we abandon all notions that language expresses but that we temper it with a proper awareness that language only indicates. This is because the physical aspect, which is language, (fundamentally a system of signs) effects some decisive changes which transform the expression into an indication. Derrida in other words is filling the silence, which we had noted in Miller's statement.

We are not negating here the impossibility of a fixed meaning, but why should we negate the process of interpretation which has a distinct practical relevance in our lives? Miller's brand of Deconstruction does not seem to ask itself this.

This way of looking at language is patently academic and theoretical and should be carefully accepted, if only because at its heart is a notion about language, which read without qualifiers, conflicts directly with our practical assessment of the linguistic system. It is for this reason that deconstruction has been variously misunderstood and the charge of hypocrisy labeled against it.

6.4.4 The Charge of Hypocrisy

First let us try to understand why the charge of hypocrisy has been leveled. If deconstruction questions the importance of language as a vehicle of communication then why does the deconstructionist write? If one of the things that deconstruction would have us believe is that the communicative powers of language are suspect, then why use language to communicate that across to us? Without the faith that writing conveys, even if approximately, the writer's intent, the project of writing becomes what could be called a graphic babbling exercise. So, if the deconstructionist is not babbling, s/he is indulging in hypocrisy. On the one hand, s/he would have us believe that language fails in communication, on the other, s/he uses language to express that failure of language to us. If the deconstructionist is right (and here we are speaking expressly of Miller), then how does he hope to express that opinion across to us. The deconstructionist is simultaneously doing two things—exploiting a system to take us to a particular goal (of asserting their argument) and even while leading us there trying to show us that the system does not function (in Derrida's case perfectly) - simply because, theoretically, there are not enough grounds for its effective functioning.

6.5 THE RISE OF NEW HISTORICISM AND CULTURAL CRITIQUE

At the end of this reassessment of deconstruction let us try to put together the problems outlined. Broadly speaking, we noted the following :

1. Its ahistoric nature

2. Wilful subversion of all coherent structures
3. Solely graphocentric premises
4. Lack of any real responsibility
5. Contradicts practical experience
6. Appears to be goal-less
7. The charge of hypocrisy

To a certain degree each of these factors contributed to the sidefining of this theory. Deconstruction had a specially short but intense period of dedicated following and by the 1970s a new ferment could be noticed in the Western academic circles—a ferment which gave rise to the somewhat similar streams of Cultural Critique and New Historicism. The new historicist practice developed throughout the eighties, particularly on the pages of the journal *Representations*.

Reacting to the avowedly ahistorical approach of structuralism and poststructuralism, Western critical thought seemed to have turned towards history with a renewed interest. The new historicists did not negate the premises of poststructuralism but used its strategies for their own purposes. New historicism was thus both a reaction against poststructuralism and a continuation of its strategies of textual reading.

New historicism is best seen as a method of reading which attempts to examine textual *traces* of the past but with the revised notion that the past is available to us in the form of a textuality which is also embedded in the present. For the new historicists, there can be no single unified history as in E.M.W. Tillyard's *Elizabethan World Picture* but only shifting and contradictory representations of numerous histories. Instead of being seen as a unified representation of the past, History is now reviewed as a narrative construction involving a dialectical relationship of the past and present concerns. Thus, the historian is neither a transcendental commentator nor an objective chronicler because s/he is always implicated in the discourses, which help construct the history of a given era.

Even in this elementary definition of new historicism, you can probably discern many poststructuralist terms and phrases: "Textual traces of the past", "Past... available to us as textuality", history as constructed out of "discourses"; these are all ideas new historicism borrows from poststructuralism and uses to understand and reconstruct the complexity that is our past. Like deconstruction, new historicism acknowledges its own limitations too. At the same time you can also see its renewed concern with history, its faith in meaning and its sense of responsibility about reconstructing the past - crucial points where it departs from poststructuralism.

6.6 LET US SUM UP

At the end of this re-assessment you should be familiar with the following ideas. The turn towards language which we find in structuralism is an outcome of the questioning of the effectiveness of language as a tool of expression and a world of collapsing certainties where very little is left to be expressed. poststructuralism continued on the lines of structuralism in its analysis of language but questioned it relentlessly. At least a part of the reason was political. From its inception, poststructuralism was against anything *total and systematic* and it was against this aspect of structuralism that the attack seems to have been leveled.

However, poststructuralism itself is not without problems. Derrida's deconstruction of Saussurean linguistics can be shown to harbour the same problems which it challenges. And that is just the beginning of the charges against it. A close and sensitive reading also identifies problems relating to responsibility, honesty, practical experience and telos. It is charges like these that kept simmering in the minds of

many readers and prepared the ground for the emergence of other historically and socially relevant projects like New Historicism and Cultural Critique.

6.7 QUESTIONS

- (1) Explain and comment on the turn of critical attention towards language at the end of the modern era.
- (2) Explain and comment on the Derridean notion of difference as the source and process of the creation of meaning.
- (3) What do you understand by the term "telos". How does deconstruction conflict with the idea?
- (4) Analyze a day-to-day use of language and critically examine a deconstructionist's reaction to it.

6.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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