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Preface

Dear Students,

This book contains Self- Learning Material on the core paper Critical Theories III. You must have seen the detailed syllabus prescribed for this paper. The syllabus contains the book from which certain chapters have been prescribed for you for detailed study of the topics stated in the syllabus. Besides, there is a list of reference books for additional reading on those topics. In this book there are four Units dealing with the topics in the syllabus, in a detailed manner, making them simple for you to understand. In addition to that, there are one sentences or one word questions interseperated in each unit along with some objective type questions also. They are meant for making you go back to the unit again and again in search of the answers so that you become more and more familiar with the topics and ideas contained in the unit. For self- check, there are answers of these questions given at the end of each unit. Try to answer the questions in the self-check exercise and then only see the answers given at the end of the unit. This will help you to correct your own answers.

Even though each unit in this book extensively deals with the topics in the syllabus, these are only notes for your guidance. You ought to refer to the original materials in the books prescribed. The units in this book are topics simplified for your guidance. You should supplement this material from your own additional reading.

There are exercises given at the end of each unit, which contain broad answer type questions, which you may face in the final examination. Try to write answers for these questions with the help of this book.

We wish you best luck in your final examination.

- Editors

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Each Unit begins with the section objectives -

Objectives are directive and indicative of :

1. what has been presented in the unit and
2. what is expected from you
3. what you are expected to know pertaining to the specific unit, once you have completed working on the unit.

The self check exercises with possible answers will help you understand the unit in the right perspective. Go through the possible answers only after you write your answers. These exercises are not to be submitted to us for evaluation. They have been provided to you as study tools to keep you in the right track as you study the unit.

Dear Students

The SLM is simply a supporting material for the study of this paper. It is also advised to see the syllabus for 2024-25 and study the reference books and other related material for the detailed study of the paper.

Unit-1 (a)
Introduction to Poststructuralism and Deconstruction

1.1 Learning Objectives

1. Understand Core Concepts: To understand the foundational principles of poststructuralism, including the rejection of fixed meanings, the instability of language, and the critique of binary oppositions.
2. Familiarity with Key Theorists: To identify key figures in Poststructuralist theory, such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Julia Kristeva, and their contributions.
3. Recognize Historical Context: To recognize the historical and intellectual context from which poststructuralism emerged, particularly its relationship to structuralism.
4. Apply Concepts to Texts: To analyze texts, media, or cultural phenomena using Poststructuralist frameworks, focusing on concepts like deconstruction, power/knowledge, and intertextuality.
5. Critique of Meaning and Authority: To critically evaluate how poststructuralism challenges the idea of authorial intent and fixed meanings in literature and other discourses.
6. Engage with Theoretical Language: To engage with and interpret the complex language of poststructuralist theorists.
7. Synthesize Ideas: To synthesize Poststructuralist ideas with other critical theories to develop nuanced interpretations of texts and social phenomena.
8. Reflect on Implications: To reflect on how poststructuralist thought reshapes ideas about identity, power, culture, and knowledge in contemporary contexts.

1.2 Introduction

Poststructuralism is a significant movement in literary theory, philosophy, and cultural criticism that emerged in the mid-20th century as a response to the structuralist framework. While structuralism focuses on uncovering the underlying structures that govern meaning in language, culture, and society, poststructuralism

challenges the stability of these structures and questions the very possibility of fixed or universal meanings. At its core, poststructuralism posits that meaning is not inherent or stable but is constantly shifting due to the dynamic nature of language, context, and interpretation. It critiques the idea of absolute truths, binary oppositions (e.g., male/female, self/other), and centralized authority in meaning-making, arguing instead for the plurality and fluidity of perspectives. Poststructuralism is a way of thinking that challenges the idea that meaning, truth, or reality is fixed or stable. It suggests that everything we know is shaped by language, culture, and context, making meanings fluid and open to interpretation. Instead of seeing things as black-and-white or following strict rules (like structuralism does), poststructuralism argues that there are no absolute truths. Meaning changes depending on who is interpreting it, when, and where.

For example:

1. A book does not have one “correct” meaning—it depends on how the reader interprets it.
2. Concepts like "good" or "bad" are not universal—they vary between cultures and situations.

In simple terms, poststructuralism teaches us to question everything we think we know and to embrace complexity, uncertainty, and multiple perspectives. Poststructuralism’s insights have opened new avenues for critical thought, particularly in areas such as feminism, postcolonial studies, and queer theory. By challenging the foundations of traditional knowledge, it encourages a more inclusive and dynamic approach to understanding the world.

Key figures associated with poststructuralism include Jacques Derrida, who introduced *deconstruction* as a method of analysing texts to reveal their internal contradictions; Michel Foucault, who explored the relationship between knowledge and power in shaping discourses; and Roland Barthes, who declared "the death of the author," shifting focus from authorial intent to the reader’s role in creating meaning. Poststructuralism has had a profound impact on various disciplines, including literature, sociology, cultural studies, and gender studies. It invites us to interrogate not only texts but also cultural norms, ideologies, and power structures, encouraging a more critical and nuanced understanding of the world.

Key Questions to Consider:

1. How does language shape and limit our understanding of reality?
2. What happens to meaning when it is viewed as fluid and context-dependent?
3. How do power and knowledge intersect in shaping societal norms and truths?
4. What is the relevance of poststructuralist ideologies?

1.3 Historical Context

Poststructuralism arose in the intellectual milieu of 1960s France, a time marked by significant political upheaval, social change, and philosophical exploration. Structuralism, which dominated the intellectual landscape during the 1950s and 1960s, focused on identifying the structures underlying human activities and cultural artifacts. Drawing from Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of linguistics, structuralists believed that meaning was determined by systematic relationships within a structure, whether it be language, mythology, or social systems. However, the 1960s also witnessed a growing dissatisfaction with the limitations of structuralism. Critics argued that structuralism's focus on universal structures failed to account for individual agency, historical specificity, and the instability inherent in language and culture. Thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Julia Kristeva spearheaded this critique, forming the core of what came to be known as poststructuralism. Poststructuralism is thus not a rejection of structuralism but a radical extension and critique of its ideas. Where structuralism sought to uncover hidden structures, poststructuralism reveals the instability of those structures and the impossibility of fixed, determinate meanings.

Poststructuralism has profoundly reshaped how we understand texts, language, identity, and power. Moving away from the rigid, deterministic frameworks of structuralism, poststructuralism emphasizes the fluidity and complexity of meaning. It challenges the idea that language can neatly represent reality, arguing instead that meaning is unstable, deferred, and always open to interpretation. Figures like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and Judith Butler have led this intellectual movement, each contributing a unique perspective on how language, power, and identity are constructed and deconstructed. Through concepts like "deconstruction," "intertextuality," and "performativity," poststructuralism insists that there are no absolute truths or fixed meanings. Instead, meaning emerges through relationships,

contexts, and the play of language. It also critiques the ways power is embedded in language and social structures, showing how knowledge and power are interconnected. Moreover, poststructuralism rejects the idea of a stable, unified identity, highlighting the ways in which identities are constantly shifting and constructed through discourse. Poststructuralism invites us to think critically about how language shapes our understanding of the world and challenges us to explore the multiple, often contradictory meanings that arise in texts and social interactions. By questioning dominant narratives and uncovering the complexities of meaning and identity, poststructuralism opens up new ways of reading, interpreting, and engaging with the world around us. Its influence continues to shape fields like literary criticism, cultural studies, philosophy, and gender theory, making it an indispensable framework for contemporary thought. Poststructuralism has been one of the most influential intellectual movements of the 20th century, challenging long-standing assumptions about language, meaning, identity, and power. Emerging as a response to structuralism, which sought to find universal structures underlying all human culture and thought, poststructuralism argues that meaning is never fixed, stable, or predetermined. Instead, it is fluid, dynamic, and constructed through the complex interplay of language, culture, and social power.

At the heart of poststructuralism is the idea that language is not a neutral or transparent medium through which we access truth but a system of signs that is inherently unstable. Jacques Derrida's concept of "deconstruction" epitomizes this view, showing that texts and words never have a single, fixed meaning. Instead, their meanings are deferred, always subject to interpretation and influenced by context. In other words, meaning is always in flux, never fully present, and can never be fully captured by a single interpretation. Derrida's concept of *différance*, a term that combines "difference" and "deferral," encapsulates this idea that meaning is perpetually postponed, shaped by the play of language and cultural conventions. Michel Foucault, another key figure in poststructuralism, offers a radically different approach by focusing on the relationship between power and knowledge. Foucault argues that power is not simply wielded by a single authority or elite but is diffused throughout society, embedded in institutions, discourses, and everyday practices. In this sense, knowledge is not objective or neutral but is a product of power dynamics that shape what is considered "truth." This view of power as decentralized and omnipresent, combined with Foucault's theories of surveillance, discipline, and "bio-

power," challenges traditional notions of authority and offers critical insights into how social and political systems maintain control. Poststructuralism also critically engages with the notion of identity, emphasizing that identity is not inherent or fixed but is socially and linguistically constructed. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, for instance, builds on poststructuralist thought by suggesting that gender is not an innate essence but is performed through repeated actions and discursive practices. This insight challenges traditional views of gender as a biological or stable category, opening up space for more fluid, diverse understandings of gender identity. The poststructuralist rejection of "grand narratives" or universal truths is another cornerstone of its philosophy. Influenced by the work of thinkers like Lyotard, poststructuralists argue that the grand, all-encompassing narratives that claim to explain history, society, or human nature (such as Enlightenment ideals, Marxism, or colonialism) are no longer credible or useful in understanding the complexities of contemporary life. Instead, poststructuralism calls for a focus on local, marginalized, and often contradictory narratives that offer alternative ways of understanding human experience. This decentralization of knowledge and the emphasis on the multiplicity of voices is key to poststructuralist thought, as it challenges the hierarchies of dominant discourses and opens new possibilities for interpretation and resistance.

The role of the author, too, is reconsidered in poststructuralism. Roland Barthes's essay *The Death of the Author* is a pivotal moment in poststructuralist theory, suggesting that the author's intentions and biography should not limit or determine the meaning of a text. Instead, meaning is created by the reader, who brings their own experiences, knowledge, and interpretations to the text. This shift from author-cantered to reader-cantered interpretation highlights the subjective, interactive nature of meaning-making and reinforces the poststructuralist view that meaning is always contingent on context.

In literary criticism, poststructuralism has had a profound impact, encouraging readers to see texts as open to multiple interpretations rather than fixed in a singular reading. By emphasizing the interplay of texts with other texts (intertextuality), the social and historical contexts in which they are produced and received, and the multiplicity of voices within them, poststructuralism provides a rich framework for analysing literature and culture. It challenges critics to move beyond surface readings and to engage with the deeper, often contradictory forces at play in the creation of

meaning. Poststructuralism's focus on the dignity of the subject has also influenced feminist and postcolonial thought. Feminist theorists like Judith Butler and Bell Hooks have utilized poststructuralist ideas to analyse how gender and sexuality are socially constructed and how language and discourse play a critical role in maintaining systems of oppression. Similarly, postcolonial theorists have applied poststructuralist frameworks to deconstruct colonial narratives and to explore how power operates in the production of knowledge about the "other." The poststructuralist view of the self is another important area of exploration. Traditional models of identity, whether psychological or social, often assume a coherent, unified subject. Poststructuralism, however, challenges this assumption by proposing that the self is not a stable, essential entity but rather a construct shaped by language, social norms, and power structures. This view of the self as fragmented, multiple, and continually in flux has had profound implications for studies of identity, agency, and subjectivity.

Poststructuralism encourages a radical rethinking of how we approach texts, language, identity, and society. By emphasizing the multiplicity of meanings, the instability of language, and the complex relationships between knowledge and power, it calls for a more critical, nuanced engagement with the world around us. Poststructuralist thought challenges us to question assumptions, deconstruct dominant narratives, and explore the complexities of social and cultural phenomena. It encourages us to embrace uncertainty and complexity, opening up new avenues for intellectual inquiry and social transformation. Poststructuralism’s influence has been far-reaching, not only in philosophy and literary theory but also in fields like sociology, political science, cultural studies, gender studies, and psychology. Its ideas continue to shape debates on identity, power, representation, and knowledge, making it a vital framework for understanding the complexities of the contemporary world. By rejecting fixed meanings and stable identities, poststructuralism creates space for new possibilities, encouraging the exploration of diverse, often marginalized perspectives and fostering a more inclusive, critical approach to understanding human experience.

Key Points to Remember

1. Fluidity of Language: Language is fluid and unstable; meaning is always deferred and dependent on context (*différance* by Derrida).

2. Rejection of Binary Oppositions: It challenges binary oppositions (e.g., male/female, self/other), exposing the power hierarchies they create.
3. The Death of the Author: Roland Barthes argued that the author's intent does not fix a text's meaning; interpretation lies with the reader.
4. Power & Discourse: Michel Foucault explored how knowledge and power shape societal norms and truths through discourses.
5. Deconstruction: A method introduced by Derrida to reveal contradictions within texts, showing how they undermine their own logic.
6. Intertextuality: Julia Kristeva emphasized that no text exists in isolation; all texts are interconnected and shaped by prior works.
7. Multiplicity of Meaning: Poststructuralism denies the idea of singular, definitive meanings, advocating for multiple interpretations.
8. Critique of Universal Truths: It rejects grand narratives and universal truths, emphasizing local and context-specific knowledge.
9. Impact on Diverse Fields: Poststructuralism has influenced literature, philosophy, cultural studies, gender studies, and more, providing tools to critique power, identity, and representation.

1.4 Core Principles of Poststructuralism

1. Instability of Meaning and "Différance"

Jacques Derrida, one of the most prominent figures in poststructuralism, introduced the concept of *différance*, a French term that plays on the dual meanings of "to differ" and "to defer." This concept suggests that words and concepts do not have fixed, inherent meanings. Instead, meaning is always in flux, shaped by the interplay of language and context. Meaning arises from the differences between words, and these differences are never fully resolved. A word always carries with it a chain of other words and meanings (through associations, connotations, historical context, etc.), and thus, no single, final meaning can ever be grasped. This leads to the idea that meaning is always deferred—there is never a point at which language reaches a final, absolute interpretation. This concept directly challenges the idea of stable, determinate meanings proposed by earlier thinkers such as Ferdinand de

Saussure, who posited a more fixed relationship between signs (words) and their referents (concepts).

2. Deconstruction

Deconstruction is Derrida's method of critically analysing texts to uncover hidden assumptions, contradictions, and binary oppositions that shape meaning. Deconstruction works by questioning the stability of the text, showing that the meanings produced are not the result of a simple or straightforward process but are instead the result of complex relations between language, power, and context. The goal is to demonstrate how a text can simultaneously uphold and undermine its own arguments. Derrida argued that texts often contain internal contradictions (e.g., metaphysical presuppositions, biases) that prevent them from offering a final, unified meaning. By showing how texts are self-contradictory or self-undermining, deconstruction reveals the instability of meaning.

For example, in analysing a philosophical or literary work, a deconstructive reading might highlight how the text relies on a set of oppositions (e.g., good/evil, male/female) and reveal how these oppositions depend on one another, making them unstable and fluid.

3. Intertextuality

Julia Kristeva introduced the concept of intertextuality, which emphasizes that texts do not exist in isolation but are always in dialogue with other texts. All texts are influenced by the larger network of cultural, historical, and social narratives. The meaning of any given text cannot be understood without considering its relationship to other texts within this broader web. Intertextuality challenges the notion of originality and authorial authority, arguing that texts are always interwoven with other voices, influences, and interpretations. For example, a novel is never a singular work of art but a part of a larger cultural and literary tradition. This view aligns with poststructuralism's emphasis on multiplicity and plurality in meaning.

4. Decentred Subjectivity

Poststructuralism rejects the notion of a stable, autonomous subject (or self). The idea of the "cantered subject" in classical philosophy, particularly in Cartesian thought (e.g., *Cogito, ergo sum*), assumes a subject who is capable of self-reflection and free will. Poststructuralists, following figures like Michel Foucault and Derrida,

argue that the self is not a stable, isolated entity but is shaped and constructed by language, culture, and power relations. Foucault, for instance, suggests that knowledge and power create the individual subject. Rather than seeing individuals as independent agents, poststructuralism emphasizes the role of external forces—including social norms, institutions, and discourses—in shaping how we understand ourselves. This critique is particularly pronounced in Foucault's work on subjectivity and power/knowledge, where he argues that knowledge about individuals (psychology, biology, criminology) is intricately tied to social control mechanisms. The subject, therefore, is "decentred"—fragmented and constituted through a variety of social forces, rather than being a stable, coherent self.

5. Power and Knowledge

Michel Foucault also contributed heavily to poststructuralism's critique of power. His work suggests that power is not just top-down oppression but operates through complex networks of social relationships, institutions, and discourses. Power is embedded in everyday practices and shapes what is considered knowledge, truth, and normativity. Foucault's concept of power knowledge indicates that knowledge is not neutral but is shaped by the power structures in place. What counts as "truth" is always contingent upon historical, cultural, and political contexts. This challenges Enlightenment ideals of objective, universal truths and emphasizes that what is considered knowledge is always shaped by power dynamics.

For example, in his work on the history of madness (*Madness and Civilization*) or on sexuality (*The History of Sexuality*), Foucault demonstrates how knowledge about human beings is not universal but produced through specific cultural and historical conditions.

6. Rejection of Grand Narratives (Metanarratives)

Poststructuralism is known for its critique of grand narratives or metanarratives. These are overarching stories or theories (e.g., Marxism, Enlightenment, the idea of historical progress) that claim to offer universal explanations for all human history and experience. Poststructuralists, particularly Jean-François Lyotard, argue that such grand narratives reduce the complexity and diversity of human experience to a single, totalizing framework. Poststructuralism insists that there is no single, universal truth or one-size-fits-all explanation for the world. Instead, meaning is contingent and local, dependent on specific contexts and perspectives. This idea is

part of a broader rejection of totalizing theories in favour of embracing the plurality of voices, experiences, and interpretations that make up society and culture. The world is not explained by one dominant narrative but is composed of many conflicting, sometimes contradictory, narratives.

7. Language as a System of Difference

Poststructuralism challenges the structuralist notion that language functions as a simple mirror of the world. For poststructuralists, language does not reflect reality but constitutes it. As Derrida argues, language functions as a system of differences, where meaning is derived from the relationships between words and their contrasts rather than from any direct correspondence with the world. This view questions the assumptions behind conventional approaches to meaning, suggesting that language is not a neutral tool that represents the world but an active force in shaping our perception of reality. The idea that language shapes thought and perception is a cornerstone of poststructuralism.

1.5 Glossary

Authorial Intent: The idea that the author's intended meaning is central to understanding a text. Poststructuralism challenges this by emphasizing the role of the reader.

Authority refers to who has the power to define meaning or truth; questioned by poststructuralist thinkers.

Binary Oppositions: Pairs of concepts like male/female, nature/culture, which structuralism relies on. Poststructuralism deconstructs these to show their instability.

Deconstruction: A method of analysing texts to reveal contradictions and instability in meaning, developed by Jacques Derrida.

Discourse: A system of ideas, language, and practices that shape how knowledge and power operate, explored by Michel Foucault.

Différance: Derrida's term for the way meaning is deferred and dependent on differences between words, making it never fully fixed.

Fragmentation: The idea that identity, meaning, or texts are not unified but made up of diverse, shifting elements.

Intertextuality: The concept that texts are interconnected and that meaning arises from their relationship to other texts, introduced by Julia Kristeva.

Language: Seen as unstable in poststructuralism, as meanings of words are always shifting based on context.

Multiplicity: The poststructuralist belief in multiple interpretations and perspectives rather than a single truth.

Power/Knowledge: A concept by Foucault that shows how power and knowledge are interconnected and shape social norms.

Reader-Response: The idea that the reader, not the author, plays the central role in determining a text's meaning.

Semiotics: The study of signs and symbols in language and culture; Poststructuralism expands this to highlight instability in meaning.

Subjectivity: The idea that identity and experience are shaped by language, culture, and power rather than being fixed or innate.

Textuality: The focus on texts as dynamic, interconnected, and open to multiple interpretations.

1.6 Key Contributors to Poststructuralism

1. Jacques Derrida

Derrida is perhaps the most influential figure in poststructuralism. He is best known for developing deconstruction, a method of reading texts that uncovers their internal contradictions and challenges fixed meanings. His concept of différance suggests that meaning is always deferred, making it fluid and never fully accessible. Derrida also critiqued the traditional hierarchy of speech over writing, asserting that both are unstable systems of signification.

Famous Works: *Of Grammatology* (1967), *Writing and Difference* (1967), *Speech and Phenomena* (1967).

2. Michel Foucault

Foucault's work explored the relationship between knowledge and power and how these elements shape social structures and norms. He introduced the concept of discourse, the ways in which knowledge is produced and controlled. Foucault also

analysed how institutions (such as prisons, hospitals, and schools) shape and normalize behaviour. His theory of the panopticon examines how surveillance in modern society enforces control.

Famous Works: *Discipline and Punish* (1975), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), *The History of Sexuality* (1976).

3. Roland Barthes

Barthes is known for his essay "The Death of the Author," where he argued that the meaning of a text is not determined by the author's intent but by the reader's interpretation. He is also influential in semiotics, the study of signs and symbols in culture. Barthes analysed how cultural myths shape our understanding of the world, particularly in his work *Mythologies*.

Famous Works: *Mythologies* (1957), *The Death of the Author* (1967), *S/Z* (1970).

4. Julia Kristeva

Kristeva is credited with developing the concept of intertextuality, the idea that texts are interconnected and that meaning is shaped by these relationships. She also contributed to poststructuralism through her exploration of the semiotic and symbolic aspects of language, focusing on how language shapes subjectivity and identity. Kristeva's work has been influential in feminist theory and psychoanalysis.

Famous Works: *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), *Powers of Horror* (1982).

5. Jean Baudrillard

Baudrillard’s work revolves around hyperreality, the idea that in modern culture, simulations and images become more real than reality itself. He argued that media, advertisements, and consumer culture have created a world in which distinctions between the real and the imagined blur. His critique of consumer society and its relationship to signs and images makes him a significant figure in poststructuralism.

Famous Works: *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), *The Consumer Society* (1970).

6. Judith Butler

Butler is known for her work in gender theory, particularly her book "Gender Trouble," where she argues that gender is not a biological fact but a performative act. In line with poststructuralism, Butler suggests that gender is constructed through repeated behaviours and societal expectations, challenging the binary understanding of gender.

Famous Works: *Gender Trouble* (1990), *Bodies That Matter* (1993).

Task 1. Answer the following questions in one word/ phrase or sentence type questions

1. Who is considered the father of deconstruction?
2. What does différencee" in Derrida's philosophy refer to?
3. Which of the following bestdescribes poststructuralism's view on meaning?
4. What is the key concept introduced by Roland Barthes in "The Death of the Author"?
5. Which poststructuralist thinker is associated with the concept of "power/knowledge"?
6. Accordingto poststructuralism, what role does "discourse" play in shaping knowledge?
7. Which of the following is a key idea of Michel Foucault's work?
8. Poststructuralism critiques grand narratives by emphasizing:
9. What does "intertextuality" refer toin poststructuralist theory?
10. Which of the following best describesthe poststructuralist view of identity?

Task 2. Multiple choice type questions:

Choose the correct alternative for the following questions.

1. What principle did Jacques Derrida critique in his work on deconstruction?

   A) The centrality of the author's intention

   B) The structuralist focus on binary oppositions

   C) The idea of universal cultural myths

D) The importance of historical context in texts

2. Which poststructuralist thinker is most closely associated with the concept of gender performativity?

   A) Judith Butler B) Roland Barthes

   C) Julia Kristeva D) Michel Foucault

3. Poststructuralism's approach to truth is best described as:

   A) Absolute and universal

   B) Relative and constructed through discourse

   C) Determined solely by empirical evidence

   D) Inaccessible to human understanding

4. In Foucault's theory, which of the following is true of modern society?

   A) Power is only held by government institutions.

   B) Power is decentralized and operates through societal norms and knowledge.

   C) Knowledge is independent of power relations.

   D) Power is invisible and irrelevant in shaping behaviour.

5. Who is the philosopher most closely associated with the concept of "deconstruction"?

   A) Michel Foucault B) Jacques Derrida

   C) Roland Barthes D) Judith Butler

6. What is the primary focus of poststructuralism regarding meaning?

   A) Meaning is fixed and inherent in texts.

   B) Meaning is determined by the author's intent.

   C) Meaning is fluid, contextual, and constantly shifting.

   D) Meaning is irrelevant in understanding texts.

7. What does the concept of "différance" in Derrida's philosophy suggest?

   A) Meaning is always fully present.

B) Meaning is permanently deferred and never fully realized.

C) Language can only represent objective truths.

D) Texts are fixed in their interpretation.

8. According to Michel Foucault, power is:

A) Concentrated in the hands of the elite

B) Something that is only exercised through violence

C) Decentralized and permeates all aspects of social life

D) A fixed and unchanging force

Conclusion

Poststructuralism, emerging in the mid-20th century as a reaction to structuralism, fundamentally challenges the idea that language can provide fixed or stable meanings. While structuralism posits that underlying structures govern the systems of language, poststructuralism asserts that meaning is always deferred, fluid, and context-dependent. Drawing on the works of theorists like Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes, poststructuralism contends that language is inherently unstable and is shaped by power, culture, and ideology rather than representing a transparent reflection of reality. One of its core concepts, *deconstruction*, advanced by Derrida, interrogates binary oppositions (e.g., male/female, presence/absence), showing how these oppositions are not natural but constructed, often reinforcing hierarchical structures. In this way, poststructuralism reveals the contradictions and hidden ideologies within texts, challenging traditional notions of authorship and authority. Barthes' notion of the "death of the author" further dismantles the idea that a text's meaning is determined solely by the author's intent, instead suggesting that readers bring their own interpretations, thus decentralizing authority. Foucault's focus on power and knowledge further explores how discourses shape our understanding of the world, indicating that knowledge is not objective but contingent upon social structures and historical contexts. Poststructuralism, therefore, opens up a more dynamic, interpretative approach to texts, encouraging critical engagement with cultural narratives and questioning established norms and truths.

General Questions Essay Type and Short Answer/ Short Notes type for practice

1. Explain the concept of "deconstruction" as introduced by Jacques Derrida. How does it challenge traditional notions of meaning and language?
2. Discuss Michel Foucault's view on power and knowledge. How does he connect these concepts in his analysis of modern society?
3. What is the significance of the "Death of the Author" in poststructuralist theory, and how does it change the way we approach literary texts?
4. How does poststructuralism critique structuralism's focus on fixed meanings and universal truths? Provide examples to illustrate your answer.
5. Describe the concept of "intertextuality" and its implications for literary analysis. How does it challenge the traditional view of the text as a standalone entity?
6. Explain Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. How does it intersect with poststructuralist ideas about identity and language?
7. Discuss the relationship between language and power in poststructuralist thought. How do theorists like Foucault and Derrida suggest language shapes social and political realities?
8. What does poststructuralism say about the stability of identity? How does the fluidity of identity challenge traditional ideas of selfhood?

Answers :

Task 1 Answers

Answer the following questions in one word/ phrase or sentence

1. Jacques Derrida
2. The process of deferring meaning,
3. Meaning is subjective and constantly shifting,
4. The reader determines the meaning of a text
5. Michel Foucault,
6. It shapes and determines what is considered truth or knowledge,

7. The relationship between power and knowledge,
8. Diverse, localized perspectives and smaller narratives
9. The idea that texts are interconnected and derive meaning from their relationships with other texts
10. Identity is an illusion dependent on social context and language.

Answers

Task 2 Multiple choice type questions. Choose the correct alternative for the following questions.

1. B) The structuralist focus on binary oppositions
2. A) Judith Butler
3. B) Relative and constructed through discourse
4. B) Power is decentralized and operates through societal norms and knowledge.
5. B) Jacques Derrida
6. C) Meaning is fluid, contextual, and constantly shifting.
7. B) Meaning is permanently deferred and never fully realized.
8. C) Decentralized and permeates all aspects of social life

Suggested Reading

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1.2.1 Learning Objectives

1. Understand the basics of deconstruction.
2. Introduction to Jacques Derrida
3. Deconstruction and Language
4. Binary Oppositions and Hierarchical Structures
5. The Process of Deconstruction in Texts
6. Implications of Deconstruction for Literary Criticism
7. Practical Application of Deconstruction

1.2.2 Introduction

Deconstruction is a critical theory and philosophical approach that challenges traditional ways of thinking about language, meaning, and interpretation. Developed primarily by French philosopher Jacques Derrida in the late 20th century, deconstruction seeks to reveal the inherent instability and fluidity within texts, concepts, and systems of thought. Rather than offering fixed interpretations, deconstruction invites readers to question the assumptions underlying language and meaning itself. At its core, deconstruction argues that language is never a transparent medium for expressing reality; instead, words and signs are always in flux, meaning is constantly deferred, and interpretation is always open to multiple possibilities. This creates an ongoing tension within texts, where binary oppositions (e.g., presence/absence, male/female, good/evil) can be overturned, revealing how these oppositions are not natural but are constructed and maintained by societal structures. The theory of deconstruction, often regarded as one of the most radical philosophical movements of the 20th century, has profoundly impacted the fields of literary theory, philosophy, linguistics, and cultural studies. By questioning assumptions that underlie our understanding of concepts, deconstruction opens new avenues for interpreting and engaging with the world. In this comprehensive chapter the principles and practices of deconstruction are discussed.

Deconstruction emerged from the intellectual traditions of structuralism and poststructuralism, two movements that revolutionized the way scholars think about texts and meaning. Structuralism, spearheaded by figures such as Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss, posited that human culture, including language, can be understood as a system of underlying structures. These structures, while hidden from view, shaped human behaviour, thought, and communication. However, Derrida's critique of structuralism was not an outright rejection but a reconsideration of its premises. Structuralism's belief in stable systems and structures was challenged by Derrida's view that such systems are always in flux, incomplete, and contradictory. His ideas were deeply influenced by the work of Martin Heidegger and Immanuel Kant, especially their critiques of metaphysical certainty and fixed meanings. Derrida's deconstruction is thus a response to the need for a more fluid and dynamic understanding of meaning, one that escapes the bounds of static structural systems.

At its core, deconstruction involves a close reading of texts to identify contradictions, ambiguities, and tensions that undermine their apparent coherence. It questions binary oppositions—such as good/evil, male/female, speech/writing—that dominate Western metaphysics and philosophical traditions. Derrida argued that these oppositions are not neutral; they are hierarchical, privileging one term while relegating the other to a secondary position. For instance, in the speech/writing dichotomy, speech is often considered authentic and primary, while writing is viewed as derivative. Deconstruction exposes how these hierarchies are constructed and how the supposedly inferior term often disrupts the dominance of the other.

One of the key concepts in deconstruction is *différance*, a term coined by Derrida that signifies the endless deferral of meaning in language. Words derive their meaning not from inherent essence but through their differences from other words. As a result, meaning is never fully present or fixed; it is always shifting, deferred, and shaped by context. This notion undermines the idea of a text having a single, definitive interpretation, opening it up instead to multiple possibilities. Deconstruction does not aim to destroy texts or dismiss meaning altogether. Rather, it seeks to demonstrate that meaning is not stable or self-evident but contingent on the interplay of language, context, and interpretation. By focusing on the marginalized, overlooked, or contradictory elements in a text, deconstruction reveals the complexities that are often concealed by surface readings. This methodology

dismantles traditional hierarchies and gives voice to suppressed perspectives within the text, making it a powerful tool for critical analysis. The methodology of deconstruction involves several key practices. First, it closely examines the structure of a text to identify moments of tension where language contradicts itself. Second, it pays attention to what is excluded, suppressed, or marginalized in the text, arguing that these omissions often hold the key to its deeper meanings. Finally, deconstruction destabilizes the authority of the text by showing that its meaning is always contingent and open to reinterpretation. While deconstruction has been influential in literary studies, philosophy, and cultural critique, it has also faced criticism. Some accuse it of being overly abstract, relativistic, or nihilistic, arguing that it undermines the possibility of stable knowledge. However, its proponents contend that deconstruction is not about destruction but about revealing the inherent complexities and ambiguities in language and thought. In essence, deconstruction invites readers to engage with texts more critically and creatively. It challenges conventional ways of thinking, opening up new possibilities for interpretation and understanding, and demonstrating that meaning is always dynamic, contested, and evolving. Far from being a method with fixed rules, deconstruction is an ongoing process of questioning, exploration, and discovery.

1.2.3 Key Concepts of Deconstruction

1. Binary Oppositions

One of the central features of deconstruction is its critique of binary oppositions, which are pairs of terms that have been traditionally understood in relation to one another. These pairs are often hierarchical, where one term in the pair is privileged over the other. For example, in Western metaphysics, we find oppositions like presence/absence, light/dark, truth/falsehood, and man/woman. Derrida argues that these binaries shape much of Western thought and language and that they operate to establish power dynamics within systems of knowledge and belief. In his seminal work *Of Grammatology*, Derrida examines how these binary oppositions function within texts. He contends that the privilege of one term over the other (e.g., presence over absence, speech over writing) often leads to a distortion of meaning. Deconstruction seeks to dismantle these hierarchies, showing that the "inferior" term in the binary is just as essential to the structure of meaning as the privileged term. By

deconstructing these oppositions, Derrida reveals the instability and fluidity of meaning, allowing the so-called "inferior" term to be reconsidered in a new light.

2. Differance

Perhaps one of Derrida's most important contributions is the concept of differance (a term that Derrida coined to capture both "difference" and "deferral" simultaneously). According to Derrida, meaning is not something that can be captured in a singular moment or fully fixed by language. Instead, meaning is always deferred. Words and concepts gain meaning only in relation to other words and concepts, and this relationship is never static. There is no ultimate, self-contained meaning that can exist independent of its context. The idea of differance demonstrates that meaning is always in a state of flux, shifting between different interpretations and contexts. For example, the word "cat" does not have a fixed, intrinsic meaning—it is defined by its difference from other words like "dog," "bat," and "rat." Each of these words helps establish the meaning of "cat" by marking its difference from them. Furthermore, the meaning of "cat" can never be fully captured because its definition is always postponed or deferred, dependent on the context in which it is used.

3. Trace

In combination with the idea of differance, Derrida introduces the concept of the trace. A "trace" refers to the remnants or marks left by absent meanings, and these traces influence how we interpret a word or text. When we read a word or sign, we are not merely engaging with its immediate, surface-level meaning; we are also interacting with the traces of meanings that have been left behind, consciously or unconsciously, from other contexts, cultures, and historical periods. For example, when we read the word "freedom," it evokes not only the contemporary political or philosophical meanings of the term but also traces of historical, cultural, and ideological baggage. These traces can be contradictory and layered, which further complicates our understanding of any given concept. By analysing these traces, deconstruction allows us to peel back layers of meaning and discover the complexities hidden beneath.

4. Undecidability

Another crucial concept in deconstruction is the idea of undecidability, which refers to the inherent ambiguity of texts. Derrida argues that texts are never fully

determinate or closed; they always harbour contradictions and gaps that defy definitive interpretation. This resistance to closure creates an "undecidable" space within the text, where multiple meanings can coexist and no single interpretation is ever final. For instance, when reading a literary work, we might encounter moments where the text seems to present conflicting messages or where it is unclear which meaning should be privileged. These moments of undecidability invite further interpretation and reflection rather than providing a single, clear answer. Deconstruction, then, encourages readers to engage actively with these ambiguities and resist the urge to simplify or resolve them.

5. Deconstruction and Its Critique of Western Metaphysics

A central aim of deconstruction is to challenge the Western metaphysical tradition that privileges logocentrism, the belief in the existence of a fixed, rational, and stable core of truth. In Western thought, particularly in the works of philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes, truth and meaning were often seen as something permanent and self-evident. Language was believed to reflect these truths directly, and meaning was understood as a transparent medium for communicating reality. Derrida's deconstruction undermines this traditional metaphysical view by showing that language cannot fully capture or represent truth in its totality. Language is not a mirror that reflects the world; it is a system that produces meaning through differences and relationships. Thus, truth itself becomes elusive and unstable, a construct that is always subject to interpretation and revision. In works such as *Writing and Difference* and *Of Grammatology*, Derrida critiques the metaphysical foundations of Western thought by deconstructing its fundamental concepts. By exposing the inherent contradictions in these concepts—such as the privileging of presence over absence or speech over writing—Derrida opens up new avenues for thinking about language, truth, and knowledge that transcend the limits of traditional metaphysics.

6. Deconstruction and Literary Theory

Deconstruction has had a profound impact on literary criticism, offering a new way of reading texts that emphasizes the ambiguity, multiplicity, and instability of meaning. In the realm of literary theory, deconstruction challenges the idea that there is a single, authoritative interpretation of a text. Instead, it encourages readers to engage with the text's internal contradictions and tensions, recognizing that meaning

is never fixed but always in process. A key feature of deconstruction in literary criticism is its emphasis on intertextuality—the idea that texts do not exist in isolation but are part of a network of relationships with other texts, contexts, and discourses. For deconstructionists, every text is a site of interaction between multiple voices, references, and influences. Rather than seeking a final, unified meaning, deconstruction highlights the interplay between different meanings and the destabilizing effects of this play. For example, a deconstructionist reading of a novel might focus on how the narrative subverts its own themes, characters, or plot structures, revealing contradictions that challenge conventional interpretations. Deconstruction also encourages a focus on the language and style of the text, examining how certain words or phrases resist stable meaning or create unintended associations.

Key Points to Remember

1. **Deconstruction Challenges Traditional Meaning:** It questions the assumption that meaning is stable and fixed, suggesting instead that meaning is fluid, unstable, and always in flux.

2. **Binary Oppositions**: Deconstruction focuses on binary oppositions (e.g., good/evil, man/woman) that structure much of Western thought. It aims to expose and dismantle these hierarchical pairings, showing that they are constructed, not natural.

3. **Differance:** A central concept of deconstruction, differance refers to the idea that meaning is always deferred and never fully present. Words gain meaning only in relation to other words, and this meaning is never final.

4. **Trace:** Derrida's idea of the trace suggests that every word or sign carries with it a mark or remnant of other meanings, even those that are not immediately visible. These traces complicate any attempt to define meaning in a fixed way.

5. **Undecidability:** Deconstruction highlights the undecidability in texts—moments where meaning cannot be fully determined or settled. This opens up space for multiple interpretations and challenges the notion of a definitive reading.

6. **Critique of Western Metaphysics:** Deconstruction critiques the Western philosophical tradition of logocentrism, which seeks to establish a stable, unchanging

center of meaning. Derrida argues that language cannot capture the full essence of truth or reality.

7. **Deconstruction and Language:** Language is seen not as a transparent vehicle for expressing pre-existing truths but as a system that creates meaning through differences. It is inherently unstable and cannot fully represent the world.

8. **Intertextuality:** Deconstruction stresses the idea of intertextuality, the interconnectedness of texts. Meaning is shaped by the relationships between texts, and no text exists in isolation.

9. **Impact on Literary Theory:** In literature, deconstruction challenges the idea that there is one "correct" or final interpretation of a text. It reveals how texts often contain contradictions and multiple layers of meaning.

10. **Deconstruction's Broader Influence:** Beyond literature, deconstruction has influenced various fields such as philosophy, law, gender studies, architecture, and cultural studies, offering new ways of thinking about identity, justice, and societal structures.

1.2.4 Glossary

Binary Oppositions: Pairs of terms that are typically understood in a hierarchical relationship, where one term is privileged over the other (e.g., good/evil, male/female). Deconstruction seeks to destabilize these oppositions and reveal their constructed nature.

Differance: A central concept in Derrida's philosophy, it refers to the idea that meaning is always deferred and never fully present. It combines "difference" (meaning through contrast) and "deferral" (meaning postponed), illustrating how words can never fully capture meaning.

Deconstruction: A philosophical and critical method developed by Jacques Derrida that seeks to expose and dismantle the assumptions and hierarchies inherent in texts, language, and systems of thought. It challenges the idea that meaning is fixed or stable.

Intertextuality: The concept that texts do not exist in isolation but are interconnected with other texts, cultures, and contexts. Meaning is shaped by the

relationships between texts, and a text's significance can be understood through its references and influences from other works.

Logocentrism: The belief in a central, unchanging truth or "logos" (reason) that language can accurately represent. Deconstruction critiques logocentrism, arguing that language is not a transparent vehicle for expressing truth but is a system of signs with inherent instability.

Presence: A term used in traditional Western philosophy to denote the idea that truth and meaning can be directly and fully present or grasped. Deconstruction challenges this by showing that meaning is always deferred and never fully realized.

Trace: The concept that every word or sign carries with it a remnant or trace of other meanings, histories, or contexts. This suggests that meaning is never self-contained or isolated but always shaped by other meanings and influences.

Undecidability: The idea that meaning or interpretation can never be fully determined or fixed. Deconstruction highlights moments of ambiguity and contradiction within texts that prevent any singular, definitive reading from emerging.

Text: In deconstruction, "text" is not limited to written works but refers to any system of signs or symbolic representation. This includes spoken language, cultural practices, and even visual or material objects that communicate meaning.

Writing: Derrida challenges the traditional privileging of spoken language over written language. In deconstruction, writing is not seen as secondary to speech but is part of a larger system of signs, where meaning is created through differences between signs, whether spoken or written.

Repetition: A term used in deconstruction to indicate how meaning emerges through recurring patterns or structures. Repetition suggests that meaning is not original but is always repeated and recontextualized, never fully fixed.

Deconstructive Reading: A type of reading that uncovers the contradictions, ambiguities, and instabilities in a text. Rather than seeking a single, fixed meaning, a deconstructive reading focuses on how meaning shifts and how texts undermine their own supposed certainty.

Phonocentrism: The belief that speech is a more direct or authentic form of communication than writing. Deconstruction critiques phonocentrism by emphasizing the importance of writing and revealing its role in creating meaning.

Aporia: A state of puzzlement or impasse in understanding, often found within deconstructive readings. It highlights moments in a text or argument where contradictions or ambiguities prevent a clear, final resolution of meaning.

Metaphysics of Presence: The philosophical tradition that emphasizes the immediate presence of truth or meaning, often privileging direct experience or speech over written language. Deconstruction challenges this by suggesting that all forms of representation are mediated and contingent.

Play of Signification: A concept that emphasizes the fluid and dynamic nature of meaning. In deconstruction, meaning is never fixed but always in play, with words and signs constantly shifting in relation to one another.

Philosophical Deconstruction: The application of deconstruction to philosophical ideas, revealing the inherent contradictions and instabilities within traditional philosophical concepts, such as the nature of reality, truth, and knowledge.

Subversion: In deconstruction, subversion refers to the way in which texts or systems of thought undermine or destabilize their own foundational assumptions. Deconstruction is often about revealing how these systems contradict themselves.

Radical Interpretation: A key deconstructive idea that suggests interpretation is always radical, meaning that meaning can never be fully pinned down and any interpretation remains open-ended.

Hermeneutics: The theory and methodology of interpretation. While traditional hermeneutics seeks to uncover the "true" meaning of a text, deconstruction challenges this aim, arguing that interpretations are never final but always subject to change.

1.2.5 Key Contributors

1. Jacques Derrida

Role: Founder of deconstruction.

Contribution: Derrida is the central figure in the development of deconstruction. His work critiqued the foundational concepts of Western philosophy, particularly the

idea of a fixed or stable meaning. In works like *Of Grammatology* (1967), *Writing and Difference* (1967), and *Speech and Phenomena* (1967), Derrida explores how language and meaning are unstable and deferred, introducing concepts like differance, trace, and logocentrism. He questioned the hierarchy between speech and writing and critiqued traditional metaphysical assumptions, arguing that meaning is always mediated through systems of signs.

2. Michel Foucault

Role: Philosopher, historian, and social theorist.

Contribution: While Foucault is not a deconstructionist per se, his work on power, knowledge, and discourse heavily influenced deconstruction. Foucault's examination of how truth and knowledge are socially constructed and dependent on historical and cultural contexts aligns with Derrida's critique of fixed meanings. In works like *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault explored the ways in which systems of knowledge are constructed, maintained, and challenged, which dovetails with Derrida's concerns about the instability of meaning.

3. Paul de Man

Role: Literary critic and theorist.

Contribution: One of the most prominent figures associated with deconstruction in literary theory, de Man's work extended Derrida's ideas into the realm of literature. His essays, such as *Allegories of Reading* (1979), explored how language in literary texts reveals contradictions and instabilities. De Man focused on how texts often resist fixed meanings and the inherent ambivalence in the act of reading itself, emphasizing the tension between the reader's interpretation and the text's resistance to full understanding.

4. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Role: Postcolonial theorist, feminist scholar, and translator.

Contribution: Spivak is known for applying deconstructive methods to postcolonial studies and feminist theory. Her essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), critiques Western intellectual traditions and uses deconstruction to examine how marginalized groups, particularly women in the Global South, are silenced. She applies Derrida's ideas of language and power to show how colonial structures have

shaped the ways in which the voices of the subaltern are excluded from historical and cultural narratives.

5. Hélène Cixous

Role: Feminist theorist and writer.

Contribution: Cixous' work is crucial in the development of écriture féminine (feminine writing), which is influenced by deconstruction. In her seminal essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975), Cixous critiques the traditional male-dominated language and proposes a writing style that challenges patriarchal norms. Like Derrida, she emphasizes the fluidity and instability of meaning, particularly in how language has been used to marginalize women.

6. Jacques Lacan

Role: Psychoanalyst and theorist.

Contribution: Lacan's psychoanalytic theories were instrumental in deconstructing the relationship between language and the unconscious. Although not directly associated with deconstruction, Lacan's ideas about the mirror stage, the symbolic, and the real have been influential in deconstructive thought, particularly in their emphasis on the role of language in shaping identity and subjectivity. Derrida engaged with Lacanian concepts, particularly in relation to how language structures the psyche and challenges the idea of a stable self.

7. Emmanuel Levinas

Role: Philosopher, particularly known for his work on ethics.

Contribution: While Levinas is more concerned with ethics and the philosophy of the Other, his critique of traditional metaphysical thought and his emphasis on the role of the Other in shaping meaning have been influential in deconstruction. Derrida's later work engaged with Levinas' ideas, particularly in terms of the ethical implications of deconstruction. Levinas's focus on responsibility to the Other challenges the notion of self-contained meaning, which resonates with deconstructive ideas about the instability of language.

8. Jürgen Habermas

Role: Philosopher and sociologist.

Contribution: While Habermas is not directly a deconstructionist, his critique of positivism and his interest in communicative action influenced deconstructive thought, especially in relation to language and communication. Habermas emphasized the possibility of rational communication, but Derrida critiqued this, showing that language is always subject to play and is never fully rational or determinate. The tension between Habermas's emphasis on communication and Derrida's focus on the instability of meaning reflects the broader debates within poststructuralism.

9. Richard Rorty

Role: Philosopher.

Contribution: Rorty was a pragmatist philosopher who was influenced by deconstruction, particularly in his critique of traditional philosophy. He argued against the search for objective truths and instead suggested that meaning is shaped by social practices. While not a deconstructionist himself, Rorty's focus on the contingency of language and his rejection of foundationalism align with Derrida's critique of stable meaning.

1.2.6 Questions

A) Answer in one word/phrase/sentence

1. Who is considered the founder of the theory ofdeconstruction?
2. What is the central focus ofdeconstruction?
3. Which concept is central todeconstruction?
4. What does the term *logocentrism* signify indeconstruction?
5. Indeconstruction, what does the term *différance* imply?
6. Deconstruction challenges the idea of:
7. According to Derrida, binary oppositions are
8. Deconstruction encourages critics to…
9. What does Derrida mean by "there is no outside text" (*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*)?
10. Deconstruction often involves in ….

Questions

B) Multiple Choice Type Questions: choose the correct alternative for the following questions.

1. Which of the following works was written by Derrida?

   a) *The Archaeology of Knowledge* b) *Of Grammatology*

   c) *S/Z* d) *Writing and Difference*

2. In which text does Derrida explore the idea of *différance*?

   a) *Speech and phenomena* b) *Writing and Difference*

   c) *Margins of Philosophy* d) All of the above

3. Which term describes Deconstruction's critique of metaphysical assumptions?

   a) Phono centrism b) Logocentrism

   c) Binary opposition d) Structuralism

4. Derrida's Deconstruction is often associated with which philosophical movement?

   a) Postmodernism b) Existentialism

   c) Humanism d) Marxism

5. How does Deconstruction view the relationship between speech and writing?

   a) Speech is primary and writing is secondary.

   b) Writing destabilizes the primacy of speech

   c) Writing is a corrupted form of speech.

   d) Speech and writing are identical.

1.2.7 Conclusion

Deconstruction, as a critical theory, provides a framework for understanding the complexities of language, meaning, and text. Originating from the work of Jacques Derrida, it challenges traditional assumptions about language, textuality, and the

search for absolute truth. By emphasizing the fluidity of meaning and the instability inherent in language, deconstruction seeks to expose the underlying assumptions and contradictions in texts, unravelling the binary oppositions that have historically structured much of Western thought. A key takeaway from this lesson is that deconstruction is not about destroying or negating meaning but about revealing the multiplicity of meanings that exist within any text. It encourages readers to question the fixed meanings attributed to words and concepts, recognizing that meaning is always deferred and context-dependent. Through the exploration of concepts like "differance," "trace," "binary oppositions," and "logocentrism," deconstruction exposes the ways in which language and texts are contingent and constructed rather than natural or objective. Deconstruction also challenges the hierarchical relationships that privilege certain terms over others, such as the dichotomy between speech and writing, or presence and absence. By destabilizing these oppositions, deconstruction encourages a more nuanced, open-ended approach to interpreting texts, one that appreciates their complexity, contradictions, and potential for multiple readings. In practical application, deconstruction can be used to analyse literature, philosophy, politics, and even everyday communication, offering valuable insights into power structures, marginal voices, and the fluidity of meaning. It does not offer a definitive answer but invites readers to explore and engage with the text in a more dynamic and critical manner. Deconstruction reshapes our understanding of language and meaning, fostering an awareness of the complexities and nuances that are often overlooked in traditional interpretations. By recognizing that meaning is always in flux and that texts are never fully stable, deconstruction invites us to approach all forms of communication with a critical and inquisitive mindset.

1.2.8 Broad Answer type questions for practice

1. Explain the concept of "differance" in deconstruction and its implications for meaning in language.
2. Discuss the role of binary oppositions in deconstruction and how Derrida critiques their traditional hierarchical structure.
3. How does Jacques Derrida's theory of logocentrism challenge the traditional emphasis on speech over writing? Give examples.
4. In what ways does deconstruction reveal the inherent contradictions and instabilities within a text? Explain with reference to specific texts or examples.

5. What is the significance of the "trace" in deconstruction, and how does it contribute to the understanding of meaning and absence in a text?
6. Describe the concept of "undecidability" in deconstruction. How does it challenge the idea of fixed or singular meanings in texts?
7. Explain the process of "decentring" in deconstruction and its effect on traditional methods of textual interpretation.
8. How does deconstruction critique the idea of a fixed, central meaning in a text, and what does it suggest about the role of the reader in constructing meaning?
9. Discuss how deconstruction can be applied to the analysis of power structures within texts, particularly in relation to marginal voices or themes.
10. Describe how deconstruction can be used to analyze a literary work of your choice. Focus on how it uncovers contradictions, instabilities, or hidden assumptions in the text.

Answers of 1.2.6: Questions

A) Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence

1. Jacques Derrida,
2. Exposing contradictions within texts
3. Logocentrism,
4. The belief in a fixed, central meaning or truth
5. The endless play of meaning in language
6. Stable textual meaning
7. Construct hierarchies with power dynamics
8. Search for contradictions and ambiguities in texts
9. Everything is textual and mediated by language.
10. Examining how language disrupts itself

B) Multiple Choice Type Questions:choose the correct alternative for the following questions

1. b) Of Grammatology 2. d) All of the above

3. b) Logocentrism 4. a) Postmodernism

5. b) Writing destabilizes the primacy of speech

Suggested Reading

Primary Sources / Foundational Texts by Jacques Derrida:

1. *Of Grammatology* (1967)
2. *Writing and Difference* (1967)
3. *Speech and Phenomena* (1967)
4. *Margins of Philosophy* (1972)

Secondary Sources Books for Further Reading

5. *Deconstruction: A Reader* by Martin McQuillan (2006)
6. *The Derrida Reader: Writing Performances* by Julian Wolframs (1998)
7. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* by John D. Caputo (1997)
8. *The Philosophy of Derrida* by Todd May (2006)
9. *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* by Drucilla Cornell (1992)
10. *Deconstruction: A Very Short Introduction*by Geoffrey Bennington (2002)

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Unit-1 (b)
Introduction to Psychoanalysis and Reader Response Theory

Objectives:

After reading this unit, you will be able to

- Know the relation between psychology and literature
- Know the various critics and principles of psychoanalytical criticism
- Examine the literary text with the help of psychoanalytical principles
- Know the importance of reader in the interpretation of the text
- Acquaint yourself with the various critics and principles of reader response criticism
- Apply the principle of reader response criticism to the interpretation of the text.

1.2.1 Introduction

Dear students, this is the first unit of this paper. There are four schools of critical theories that are prescribed and introduced to you both in this unit and in this paper. This unit intends to give you general information about each of these schools, like its origin, development, its basic tenets and its important practitioners. In the remaining part of the paper, texts or essays based on some of these schools are prescribed. The four schools discussed in this unit are Post-structuralism, deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and Reader Response Theory. In fact, all these schools are basically post-structural in nature. In that, each of them challenges the belief of the permanent

meaning or the presence of meaning in the entities. In this part of the unit, two of these schools Psychoanalytical Criticism and Reader Response Theory are discussed. The psychoanalytical criticism can be seen as the potential extension of the concerns of the psychological approach to the study of literature. However, the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan transcend the general belief about psychology of the author and enter into the realm of deep rooted repressions and its implicit representation in the literary works. Freud views literature as the expression of repressed wishes in the indirect, implicit and symbolic form. And the basic concern of the psychoanalytical critic, he thinks, is to unveil the relation between the repressed wishes and its representation in the literary text in general. Jacques Lacan, on the other hand, talks of the three stages of child development and the way these are associated with both the form of the literary text and also the content expressed in each of them. His discussion of the Pre-linguistic, the Linguistic and the Mirror Stages are important.

In Reader Response Theory, as it is argued by many scholars, we face the views of many critics regarding the reading process in general and the importance of the entity of the reader in the interpretation of the text in particular. In the discussion provided here we have tried to seek the roots of Reader Response Theory in the Phenomenological Philosophy and the views expressed by many scholars in Europe and America in particular. The views of Jauss, Iser, Fish, etc are said to important, which are discussed in detail in the given material.

1.2.2 Subject Matter

Psychoanalytical Criticism

Friends, in this part of the unit, we are concerned with what is called psychoanalytical criticism. This criticism is associated with some important modern psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) and Jacques Lacan (1901 -1981). In fact, you will be studying one of the essays of Jacques Lacan in the syllabus of this semester (which is included in this SIM). M. H. Abrams uses the terms psychological criticism and psychoanalytical criticism almost interchangeably. However, he is of the view that psychological criticism precedes and is a kind of precursor of psychoanalytical criticism. He defines it as

> Psychological criticism deals with a work of literature primarily as an expression, in fictional form, of the state of mind and the structure of personality of the individual author.
>
> (Abrams, 247)

The basic tenet of psychological criticism is that it views literature as expression of some state of mind or personality of the author. The same belief underlines the psychoanalytical criticism also. More about psychoanalytical criticism will follow after a while.

Abrams claims that this criticism emerged during the early decades of the 19th century as a result of a newly accepted view about the nature of literature. Earlier, literature was seen from mimetic or pragmatic perspectives. But during the 19th century the expressive view (that literature is the expression of the author's mind) of literature dominated. However, some critics like Peter Childs and Roger Fowler (in *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*) claim that psychology, literature and literary criticism have been studied together right from the Greek times. For example, when Aristotle proposed his theory of catharsis, he had the psychological effect of tragedy on the minds of the audience. Similar psychological concern is also noticed in the dilemma of Hamlet in the famous play by Shakespeare. In concern with English novel, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* comes out as the best example where the psychological state of the protagonist is made available to the readers. Similarly, with the arrival of Romanticism to England, the focus centered on the creative act itself. Among many, Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*, claimed Imagination as the source of creativity. He also coined the word 'unconscious' for the first time. Psychological speculation in English criticism also continued in the essays of Swinburne and Pater, and T. S. Eliot.

When Abrams treats the early decades of the 19th century as the beginning of Psychological criticism, he had the statement of Thomas Carlyle in mind. Carlyle argued that the usual question with the critics of his time is "mainly of a psychological sort, to be answered by discovering and delineating the peculiar nature of the poet from his poetry." The critical procedures followed during the Romantic period (which are still popular today) are based on the assumption that there is a strong correlation between the literary work and the distinctive emotional and mental traits of the author:

(1) reference to the author's personality in order to explain and interpret a literary work;

(2) reference to literary works in order to establish, biographically, the personality of the author; and

(3) the mode of reading a literary work specifically in order to experience the distinctive subjectivity, or consciousness, of its author. (Abrams, 248)

The similar view is also evident in the claim made by John Kable in his Latin lectures – *The Healing Power of Poetry* (published in 1944). He claims: “Poetry "is the indirect expression . . . of some overpowering emotion, or ruling taste, or feeling, the direct indulgence whereof is somehow repressed". In view of Kable, then poetry is nothing but the expression of repressed feelings. This repression, Kable asserts occurs due to the author’s sentiments of ‘reticence’ and ‘shame’. There is always a kind of conflict in the mind of the poet between the need for expression and compulsion to repress. The conflict is resolved when the poet expresses these ‘secret mental emotions’ in art form, providing the poet a kind of ‘healing relief’. Art, therefore, Kable thinks, serves as "a safety valve, preserving men from madness." This particular view of Kable sounds very much like that of Freud. Therefore, Abrams calls it ‘a proto Freudian literary theory’.

The 1920s marked the beginning of the widespread form of psychological literary criticism known popularly as Psychoanalytical Criticism. Many tenets and procedures of this school are proposed by Sigmund Freud. A dynamic form of psychology developed by Freud is called psychoanalysis, which he claimed is a means of analysis and therapy for neuroses. Freud developed it further to account for ‘history of civilization, including warfare, mythology, and religion, as well as literature and the other arts’. The theoretical frame of the ‘classical’ psychoanalytical criticism is set forth in a brief comment that Freud makes about the workings of the artist’s imagination. He gave this comment by the end of the twenty-third lecture of his *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1920). Abrams provides the account of Freud’s views in the following words:

> Literature and the other arts, like dreams and neurotic symptoms, consist of the imagined, or fantasied, fulfillment of wishes that are either denied by reality or are prohibited by the social standards of morality and propriety. The forbidden, mainly sexual ("libidinal") wishes come into conflict with, and are

repressed by, the "censor" (the internalized representative within each individual of the standards of society) into the unconscious realm of the artist's mind, but are permitted by the censor to achieve a fantasied satisfaction in distorted forms which serve to disguise their real motives and objects from the conscious mind. The chief mechanisms that effect these disguises of unconscious wishes are (1) "condensation" (the omission of parts of the unconscious material and the fusion of several unconscious elements into a single entity); (2) "displacement" (the substitution for an unconscious object of desire by one that is acceptable to the conscious mind); and (3) "symbolism" (the representation of repressed, mainly sexual, objects of desire by nonsexual objects which resemble them or are associated with them in prior experience). The disguised fantasies that are evident to consciousness are called by Freud the "manifest" content of a dream or work of literature; the unconscious wishes that find a semblance of satisfaction in this distorted form he calls the "latent" content.

(Abrams, 248-49)

As the quote shows, the very first thing that we find is a kind of plane statement where Freud straightway claims that all arts in general and literature in particular is nothing but imagined or fantasized wish fulfillment of the writer. That is, the writer uses literature as a means of his/her wish fulfillment. According to Freud, the wishes that the writer tries to get fulfilled through literature are mainly of libidinal nature, i.e sexual in nature. These wishes are not allowed in the normal course of life either due to the pressures of reality or the moral concerns. As a result, the non-fulfilled wishes in reality go deep into the unconscious mind of the writer. The mind then tries to get these wishes fulfilled in one way or the other. Literature is thus a means of this fantasized satisfaction of the wishes. Freud identifies three ways of fulfilling the wishes: Condensation, Displacement and Symbolism. Similarly, the distinction between the ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’ content of literature is also important for the purpose of psychoanalytical analysis of literature.

In addition to this kind of repression of emotions, Freud also identifies another and even more powerful repression in the unconscious of the individual as a source of literature. This time, Freud turns to the stages of psychosexual development of individual right from the infancy onwards. The repression that has taken place at these stages also get repressed into the unconscious and it remains there as a kind of ‘fixations’. Whenever these early repressed wishes get triggered in the adult life, it

gets revived and a kind of fantasy of satisfaction modeled on the way of childhood is the result.

Considering these cases of repression of emotions in literature, Freud argues: The chief enterprise of the psychoanalytic critic, in a way that parallels the enterprise of the psychoanalyst as a therapist, is to reveal the true content, and thereby to explain the effect on the reader, of a literary work by translating its manifest elements into the latent, unconscious determinants that constitute their suppressed meanings. (Abrams, 249)

Freud asserts that the artist is not a neurotic personality. He is endowed with a high degree of special power to sublimate. That is to say, he can transform the instinctual drives of sexual goals to the ones of non-sexual goals. Similarly, the artist in the writer is able to transform the merely personal content of wish-fulfillment by elaborating it into a manifest feature of a work of art itself. This concealment or deletion of the personal elements, helps the work of art capable to satisfy the unfulfilled desires of the others as well. Another ability that Freud identifies in the writer is called 'puzzling' ability or his 'genius'. It is the ability to create the artistic medium and form in such a way that it suits the faithful image of the creatures of his imagination. Thus literature represents a complex and artfully shaped fantasized wish fulfillment which helps both the writer and his readers to gratify their repressed wishes. Literature thus provides a way back to reality out of the unconscious.

After Freud explained his psychoanalytical literary theory during 1920s, he went on elaborating and refining it. This account is discussed in two of his books: *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933) and *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1939). A major refinement that Freud introduced to his theory is his concept of mind having neat and systematic classification of its three functional aspects - Id, Ego and Superego. For Freud, Id incorporates libidinal and other desires; Superego represents the internalization of standards of morality and propriety; Ego, according to Freud, tries as best it can to negotiate the conflicts between the insatiable demands of the id, the impossibly stringent requirements of the superego, and the limited possibilities of gratification offered by the world of "reality". The models and theory proposed by Freud has been used by many critics to analyze and interpret literary works, including Freud himself. Among others, Freud has given excellent analysis of major plays of Shakespeare like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The development of Structural and Post-structural theories made many to revive Freud's contribution to literary theory. Close attention was given to many of the ideas of Freud and their validity was tested. Harold Bloom's idea of *anxiety of influence*, particularly his idea of composition and reading of poetry, seem closely to be based on Freud's ideas of Oedipus Complex and defense mechanism of dreams. Many feminist critics have criticized and challenged Freud's theory for its phallus centrism and the concept of 'penis envy'. However, there are many feminist critics also who have analyzed the writing and reading of literary texts in the light of a revised version of Freudian concepts and mental mechanisms.

Carl Gustav Jung is another psychoanalyst known for his contribution to literary theories. Though he is a student of Freud and also interested in unconscious, his theorization of the phenomenon differs. Unlike Freud, he does not look at individual 'unconsciousness' as the source of literature. Rather, for him, the collective unconsciousness is the source of great literature. Literature, for him, is not a disguised libidinal wish fulfillment. On the other hand, great literature, he considers is the result of collective unconsciousness which is expressed through common myths whose patterns recur in diverse cultures. These common myths are proof of the availability of collective unconsciousness. Jung's works thus shaped Myth Criticism and Archetypal Criticism rather than Psychoanalytical Criticism.

Jacques Lacan (1901 – 1981) is a French psychoanalyst popular during the contemporary period. His works are influential to the extent that he is called 'the French Freud'. His central ideas are discussed in *Écrits* (1977) and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (1977).The most important feature of Lacan is his conception of and the relation of language and psychoanalysis. Therefore, it is said that he has developed a Semiotic version of Freud. He converted the basic principles of psychoanalysis as formulations of linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure. He applied them not to the individual psychology but to the overall operation of the process of signification. The oft-quoted dictum of Lacan is 'The unconscious is structured like a language'. It shows how important is a language for the theory of Lacan. He does not see human mind as pre-existing to language, but as constituted by the language we use. Even the early stages of psychosexual development are formulated as Pre-linguistic State of development and the Stage after the acquisition of language. The Pre-linguistic is called the Imaginary and the other one is called the Symbolic Stage. In between these two stages is what

Lacan calls a Mirror Stage. The important feature of the Imaginary stage is that 'there is no clear distinction between the subject and an object, between the self and the other selves. It is in the next, i.e. the Mirror Stage that the infant learns to identify his or her image in the mirror. This is how it begins to develop a sense of a separate self which is gradually enhanced from the encounters with the other people. In the Symbolic Stage, the infant assimilates the inherited system of linguistic differences. Thus it gets constituted by the symbolic system. It learns to accept his/her predetermined position in the differences – male/female, father/son, mother/daughter. This symbolic realm of language represents the law of the father. In this realm, the phallus is the privileged signifier that establishes the mode of other signifiers. In this context, Lacan views all the processes of linguistic expression and interpretation as desire for a lost and unachievable object. Thus, the entry of the infant upon language represents its 'simultaneous submission to social authority, in which the individual passes under the name of 'the Father' and is coloured with patriarchy at the very moment of emergence from undifferentiation' (Childs and Fowler, 192).

After Lacan, many other have also undertaken psychoanalytical criticism in different ways. The important critics among them are – Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, feminist psychoanalysts as Juliet Mitchell, Jacqueline Rose, Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Nancy Chodhorow, etc.

Reader Response Criticism

According to M. H. Abrams, Reader Response Criticism does not designate a school of criticism but the views expressed by various critics about (1) the reader's role in the process of interpretation of the text or (2) the process of interpretation of the text itself. Surprisingly enough, many of these both American and European critics share their views on the process of reading and the role of the reader therein. Such views came into prominence around 1960s. In fact, across the history of literary criticism and, the 19th and the early decades of 20th centuries in particular, many critics have expressed their views about the role of the reader in the consumption of a literary text, the effect of the work of art on the reader, and also the subjective and historically oriented responses of the reader to the literary texts. For example, right from the Greek times, the critics like Plato, Aristotle and Longinus have expressed their views about the effect of literary text on the reader (theory of catharsis, for example). Similarly, there are many critics who claim that without the existence of the reader, the text is useless. Particularly, during the 19th century it was believed that

the literary text produces a powerful emotional impact on the reader. This and other schools like symbolism and impressionism stressed that the reader's response to literary texts are essentially subjective. The schools of criticism like feminism and Marxism are essentially based on the social orientation of literary texts and as such they demand socially and historically oriented responses of readers.

As a reaction to these subjective and historically oriented responses, during the early part of the 20th century, New Criticism and Formalism emerged. These theories stressed the organic unity of a literary text; texts are seen as complete in themselves. They also believe that literary texts have static meaning in their structures, and also that the readers do not have any significant role to play in the process of the interpretation of the text. The poem is about itself before it is about the poet, or the reader.

Reader Response Criticism challenges these views and opinions. The most important thing about Reader Response Criticism is that it adopts the perspectives of the reader or audience. We can say that the poem does not have any existence until it is read; its meaning can only be discussed by its readers. The different interpretations of the text are the result of the different ways of reading employed by the readers. The potentially meaningful code (language) has been read and interpreted by the reader. Therefore, he actualizes the poem. It means the addressee is actively involved in constructing the meaning of the poem.

Reader Response Critics think that the poem never self-formulates its meaning. The reader has to act on the material of the text in order to produce the meaning. In the view of Wolfgang Iser, the literary text always contains the blanks which the reader has to fill in order to interpret it. The basic problem posed in the Reader Response Criticism is whether the text itself triggers the readers' act of interpretation (guides it) or whether the interpretative strategies of the reader provide solutions to the problems thrown up by the text.

However, even before the Reader Response Criticism, some scholars have theorized the reading process. For example Umberto Eco in his *The Role of the Reader* (1979) classifies the text as either open or closed. Whereas the 'open' texts invite the reader's collaboration in the production of the meaning (for example, James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*), the closed texts (comics, detective fiction)

predetermines the reader's response. Eco also provides his speculations regarding the way the code of the text determines its meaning as it is read.

Phenomenology: Contribution of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger

Phenomenology is a modern philosophy based on the assumption that in the process of determination of the meaning the perceiver plays a central role. **Edmund Husserl** thinks that the proper object of philosophical investigation is human consciousness and not the objects of the real world. The reason is that we are able to discover the universal or essential qualities of things that appear in consciousness. Thus phenomenology seeks to unveil the underlying nature of both human consciousness and phenomenon. Thus it claims that the individual mind is the centre and origin of all meaning. In the context of the literary theory, phenomenological criticism does not encourage purely subjective criticism. Rather it seeks to enter into the world of a writer's works and to arrive at an understanding of the underlying nature or essence or writings as they appear to the critic's consciousness. As an example, we can cite the early works of an American critic – J. Hillis Miller and his book *Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire*. It shows that the act of interpretation is possible because the text allows the reader to access the author's consciousness. However, critics like Derrida would think of it as a kind of 'logocentricism' where the meaning is centered on a 'transcendental subject' (the author) and can be re-centered on another such subject (the reader).

Martin Heidegger rejects the 'objective' view of his teacher Edmund Husserl, which marks a shift toward reader-oriented theories. Heidegger argued that our consciousness both projects the things of the world and is also subjected to the world where we have our existence. Therefore, we can never adopt the attitude of detached contemplation. Our thinking process always occurs in a situation. Therefore, it is always historically based. Hans-Georg Gadamer applied Heidegger's theory to literary criticism in his *Truth and Method* (1975) to produce situational approach to literary theory. He claimed that meaning of the text depends on the historical situation of the interpreter. Gadamer influenced the tenets of Reception Theory.

Hans Roberts Jauss

He is a leader figure in German Reception Theory. He provided historical dimension to reader oriented theories. In his writings, he has sought to compromise the stands of Russian Formalism, that ignores history, and social theory that ignores

the text. He is highly influenced by the term 'paradigm' and borrows it from the philosophy of science (T. S. Khun) to apply to literary theories. It means 'the scientific framework of concepts and assumptions operating in a particular period'. Relating it to literary studies, he uses the term 'horizon of expectations', which refers to 'the criteria readers use to judge literary texts in any given period'. Among other things it means that each period has its own criteria of judging literary texts which may or may not be useful for and followed in the other periods. Therefore, he asserts that the older literary outlook ceases to make sense in the new period.

Referring to his concept of 'horizon of expectations', it can be said that these criteria help the readers to decide how to judge a poem as, for example, an epic or a tragedy or a pastoral. As an example, we can cite the way the Augustan period poet Alexander Pope's poetry was judged. His poetry was judged on the criteria which were based upon the values of clarity, naturalness and stylistic decorum. But this does not establish the value of Pope's poetry for all. During the second half of the 18th century, critics asked question whether Pope is a poet at all. They suggested that he is 'a clever versifier who put prose into rhyming couplets and lacked the imaginative power required of true poetry'. During the modern period, on the contrary, critics have worked with changed horizon of expectations and they now value Pope's poem for 'their wit, complexity, moral insight and their renewal of literary tradition'. Thus, when the work appears for the first time, it is judged and interpreted with the existing horizon of expectation, but this process does not exhaust the meaning of the text permanently, its meaning is not established permanently. In this context Jauss writes: "A literary work is not an object which stands by itself and which offers the same face to each reader in each period. It is not a monument which reveals its timeless essence in a monologue." We then need to ask the question – what is the final value or meaning of a work of art? Is it the first reading, or the subsequent or the present one? Jauss answers this question with Gadamer's views. He argues that all interpretation of past literature arise from a dialogue between past and present.

Another leading exponent of German Reception Theory is **Wolfgang Iser**. He is largely indebted to Roman Ingarden and Gadamer for his views on reader oriented criticism. However, in contrast to Jauss, Iser decontextualizes and dehistoricizes the text and reader. In many of his books and writings (particularly in *The Implied Reader* and *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*) he expresses his

views about the text and the process of reading. He thinks that text is a potential structure and it is concretized by the reader when the later relates his / her extra-literary norms, values and experiences to the text. Thus, for Iser, the process of reading is marked by a kind of oscillation (frequent change) between the power of the text to control the way it is read and the reader's 'concretization' of the text in the light of his / her experiences. Iser therefore thinks that 'meaning lies in the adjustments and revisions to expectations which are brought about in the readers mind in the process of making sense of his or her dialectical relationship to the text' (Selden *el al*, 52). It therefore seems that Iser does not resolve the issue of the factor that determines the meaning of the text. However, the distinction between the Implied Reader and the Actual Reader refers to the same point. The Implied Reader is created by the text itself and it amounts to 'a network of response inviting structures' which guide us to read the text in certain ways. On the contrary, the Actual Reader received certain mental images in the process of reading; but these images are based on the reader's 'existing stock of experiences'. On the basis of this, Iser claims that the task of the critic is not to explain the text as an object but its effect on the reader. The process of reading, as it is envisioned by Iser, creates the possibility of the modification in the reader's world-view itself due to internalizing, negotiating and retrieving the partially indeterminate elements of the text. Iser therefore says, reading 'gives us the change to formulate the unformulated'.

Stanley Fish: In reader oriented theories, Fish developed his own perspective which he calls an 'affective stylistics'. His conception of reading process more or less matches to that of Iser's. Fish particularly concentrates on the 'adjustments of expectations' that readers make as they pass along the text. However, he is different from the other critics in that he concentrates on the immediately local level of sentence for investigation. He does not give any special status to literary language. This separates him from other formalists and New Critics. He claims that we use the same reading strategies to internalize both literary and non-literary sentences. He directs his focus on 'responses of the readers in relation to the words of sentences as they succeed one another in time' (Selden *et al*, 55).

In the process of reading, then, the reader has to continuously adjust his expectation of meaning. This makes the total movement of the reading as the meaning of the text. Many critics have criticized Fish for not providing a clear formulation of his theory. Fish is simply of the opinion that his concept of 'reading

sentences' follows a natural practice of informed readers. Such a reader has enough syntactic and semantic knowledge (linguistic competence) required for reading. An informed reader of a literary language has also to acquire the knowledge of literary conventions known as literary competence. Jonathan Culler criticizes Fish with following points:

> **1** He fails to theorize the conventions of reading: that is, he fails to ask the question 'What conventions do readers follow when they read?'
>
> **2** His claim to read sentences word by word in a temporal sequence is misleading: there is no reason to believe that readers actually do take in sentences in such a piecemeal and gradual way. Why does he assume, for example, that the reader, faced with Milton's 'Nor did they not perceive', will experience a sense of being suspended between two views?
>
> (Selden *et al*, 56)

The basic objection is that Fish generalizes his own experience of reading as a norm while he theorizes the reading process. After these criticisms, in his next work – *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980) Fish modifies his position by introducing the concept of 'interpretative communities'. It refers to the norms and assumptions of reading shared by a community. Of course, with the introduction of the concept of interpretative communities, the whole problem of text and readers and subjective and objective reading disappears. Similarly, it also rejects any possibility of deviant interpretation of the text.

Michael Riffaterre is a French semiotician. He accepts the Russian Formalist's view of poetry as a special use of language. Since the poetic language is different from the ordinary language, Riffaterre claims that linguistic features of a poem could not even be perceived by an informed reader. In 1978, he developed his theory in ***Semiotics of Poetry*** where he claimed that the competent readers go beyond the surface meaning of the text. In order to understand the poem's meaning, it requires only ordinary linguistic competence. But there are frequent ungrammaticalities in the poem which can only be understood by a reader having literary competence. The ungrammatical features of the text uncover a second or higher level of significance. This is important for establishing the structural matrix of the poem; which is nothing but a single sentence or a single word. Riffaterre's reading process is summarized by Selden and other in the following way:

1 try to read for ordinary 'meaning';

2 highlight those elements which appear ungrammatical and which obstruct an ordinary mimetic interpretation;

3 discover the 'hypograms' (or commonplaces) which receive expanded or unfamiliar expression in the text;

4 derive the 'matrix' from the 'hypograms'; that is, find a single statement or word capable of generating the 'hypograms' and the text.

(Selden *et al*, 58)

David Bleich – He is an American critic. He used the principles of psychology to the reader theory. In his book *Subjective Criticism* (1978) Bleich gives his sophisticated arguments in favor of a shift from objective to subjective paradigm in critical theory. His idea of subjective criticism is based on the assumption that 'each person's most urgent motivations are to understand himself'. His classroom experiment made Bleich distinguish two types of activities (1) the reader's spontaneous response to a text and (2) the meaning the reader attributed to it. Though the second is seen as the objective response, it is based on the subjective response of the reader. Whichever perspective the reader applies to the interpretation of the text (like moralist, Marxist, Structuralist, Psychoanalytic, etc.) it reflects the subjective individuality of the reader's response.

Summary

As the discussion given in this unit so far shows, both psychoanalytical criticism and reader response criticism are post-structural schools of criticism. The psychoanalytical criticism can be seen as the extension of the psychological criticism of the earlier period. However, it marks the sophistication of the theories of Freud, Jung and Lacan. All these psychoanalysts have developed their respective theories capitalizing a particular principle. For example, Freud thinks sexual instincts as the base and accordingly uses Libido, Phallus as the basic principles of his theory of the functions of mind. Lacan, on the other hand, capitalizes the relation between language and psychology and proposes three stages of child development and its implications to the literary studies. Jung, in contrast to both Freud and Lacan, talks of collective unconscious as the source of great literature. In Reader Response Theory, we have tried to trace its origin in the phenomenology and the views such scholars as

Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. The contribution of the Reader Oriented Critics like Hans Roberts Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, Michael Riffaterre and David Bleich is also taken into consideration for the development of the theory.

1.2.3 Check Your Progress:

1. Which school views literature as expression of some state of mind or personality of the author?
2. Who coined the word 'unconscious'?
3. Who delivered the lecture 'The Healing Power of Poetry'?
4. The disguised fantasies evident to consciousness is called ------- content by Freud.
5. Which content Freud thinks is important for psychoanalytical critics?
6. What are the three ways of wish fulfillment, according to Freud?
7. What are the three functional aspects of mind, according to Freud?
8. What according to C. G Jung is the source of literature?
9. Instead of psychoanalytical criticism, Jung's works are said to have shaped ----.
10. Who is called 'the French Freud'?
11. In which books did Lacan publish most of his research?
12. Who argues that 'the unconscious is structured like a language'?
13. Who argues that human mind is constituted by the language we use?
14. Which three stages of child development are proposed by Lacan?
15. Whereas the Imaginary Order is associated with the Pre-linguistic stage of Lacan, the Symbolic Order is associated with ------- stage.
16. The symbolic realm of language represents the law of ---------.
17. Who argues that learning of language represents the child's 'submission to social authority'?
18. Who is said to 'actualize the poem'?
19. Which philosophy views that in the determination of the meaning, the role of the reader or audience is central?

20. Who thinks that the proper object of the study of philosophy is human consciousness?
21. In his book *Truth and Method*, ---------- produced situational approach to literary theory.
22. Who borrows the term 'paradigm' from philosophy of science?
23. Who uses the term 'horizon of expectations'?
24. What is meant by the phrase 'horizon of expectations'?
25. Who decontextualizes and dehistoricizes the text and reader?
26. What does the concept f Implied Reader of Iser refers to?
27. Who makes the distinction between the Implied and the Actual Reader?
28. Who developed 'affective stylistics'?
29. Who says that in the process of reading, the reader continuously adjusts his expectations of meaning?
30. The knowledge of literary contentions is called ---------.
31. Who introduces the concept of interpretative communities?
32. Which reader response critic sticks to the distinction between ordinary and the poetic language?
33. Who applied the principles of psychology to reader response criticism?

1.2.4 Answers to Check Your Progress:

1. Psychological / Psychoanalytical Criticism
2. S T Coleridge
3. John Kable
4. Manifest Content
5. Latent Content
6. Condensation, Displacement and Symbolism
7. Id, Ego and Superego
8. Collective Unconscious

9. Myth Criticism and Archetypal Criticism
10. Jacques Lacan
11. *Ecrits* (1977) and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1977)
12. Jacques Lacan
13. Jacques Lacan
14. The Pre-linguistic, The Linguistic and the Mirror Stage
15. The Linguistic Stage
16. Father
17. Jacques Lacan
18. The reader
19. Phenomenology
20. Edmund Husserl
21. Martin Heidegger
22. Hans Roberts Jauss
23. Hans Roberts Jauss
24. The criteria to decide how to judge a poem
25. Wolfgang Iser
26. A network of response inviting structures or the book
27. Wolfgang Iser
28. Stanley Fish
29. Stanley Fish
30. Literary Competence
31. Stanley Fish
32. Michael Riffaterre
33. David Bleich

1.2.5 Exercise:

Short Notes:

1. David Bleich's views about reading
2. Michael Riffaterre's contribution to Reader Response Criticism
3. Stanley Fish's Affective Stylistics
4. Hans Roberts Jauss's contribution to Reader oriented criticism
5. Wolfgang Iser's views about reader and reading
6. Martin Heidegger's concept of reading
7. Edmund Husserl's contribution to reader response criticism
8. Psychological Criticism
9. Role of Unconsciousness in Freud's theory
10. Creative Writing as wish fulfillment
11. Distinction between Id, Ego and Superego
12. Relation between Language and Psychoanalysis for Lacan
13. Criticism on Freud

Broad Questions:

1. Write a detailed note on Reader Response Criticism.
2. Critically evaluate the contribution of various scholars to reader response criticism.
3. "Reader Response Criticism is not a school of criticism but it consists of the views of various scholars about the process of reading." Discuss.
4. Prepare a detailed note on psychoanalytical criticism.
5. Critically examine the contribution of Freud to psychoanalytical criticism.
6. Discuss the contribution of Jacques Lacan to psychoanalytical criticism.

1.2.6 Books for Further Reading

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Unit-2 (1) Jacques Derrida – Specters
(2) Roland Barthes – The Death of the Author

Section I: Jacques Derrida – 'Specters of Marx'

The present Unit is divided into the following Sections:

2.1.0 Objectives:

By the end of this Unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the meanings of the terms 'Marxism, Communism, etc.'
- Explain different debates associated with Marxism and Communism.
- Find relationship between the crisis of new world order and Marxism.

2.1.1 Introduction

Jacques Derrida is a French philosopher whose name has become almost equivalent to the term 'deconstruction'. The most important specialty of Derrida in his philosophical and literary writings is the particular way he attends to language. Derrida was born in Algeria to French-speaking Jewish parents. Thus he grew up in a multilingual and culturally complex family. He experienced at firsthand sufferings for being both a French and a non-French. Right from his childhood, Derrida shows his likes for both literature and philosophy. During his school days he wanted to be a teacher. When he started to read philosophy, he notes, he was awestruck. But as we know his career is known for his contribution to both philosophy and literary studies. Derrida performed his two years obligatory military duties in Algeria as a teacher of

French and English during the Algerian War. Derrida came into lime light due to his speech at a landmark conference "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man," at Johns Hopkins University. With Derrida many other such scholars as Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Georges Poulet, and Lucien Goldmann also delivered their talks in the conference. The conference shaped the way structuralism and post-structuralism influenced literary studies in United States. Derrida's contribution was his famous and ground breaking essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," which is seen as the break between the two schools. In 1967 Derrida published his first three books: *Speech and Phenomena* (a critique of Husserl's concept of the sign), *Of Grammatology* (an introduction to the necessity and impossibility of a science of writing) and *Writing and Difference* (a collection of essays on authors that include Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, G. W. F. Hegel and Emmanuel Lévinas). Derrida published three more books in 1972: *Dissemination* (a collection of four long essays), *Margins of Philosophy* (another collection of essays); and *Positions* (the texts of three interviews). These early books are touchstones for deconstructive literary criticism; many others followed. In 1975, Derrida become the member of the Yale School (the other members were Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartman, and Harold Bloom). From this time, Derrida's career was divided between two countries: France and United States.

Jacques Derrida is basically known for his theory of Deconstruction. However, in the present syllabus, Derrida's another contribution to modern critical theories, which is equally popular, his views about Marx and Marxism and their relevance in the new world, which are given in his famous book – *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (1993) is prescribed. In fact, this book appeared in the later part of the career of Derrida. But scholars confused and even doubted regarding the reason of Derrida to turn to Marx and Marxism. Here is Derrida addressing a political philosophy. In reality the occasion was provided by a 1993 colloquium held in America titled "Whither Marxism?" (What is the future of Marxism?) Derrida was the main invited speaker of the event and it was organized by two scholars – Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg. The contemporary scenario of the time is like this: With the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the early 1990s, the whole world was thinking that Communism is dead and Marxism finished. United States which represented Capitalism is the sole remaining superpower, which is seen as triumphant. In 1990, President George W. Bush

foresaw the emergence of a new world order. Similarly, in his well known and bestselling book – *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), American political philosopher Francis Fukuyama captured the jubilant mood of the times.

In the last chapter of the book, which is included here, Derrida criticizes the celebrating views of President George Bush and Fukuyama regarding the new world order calling it a new global disorder and enlists its ten plagues. Derrida also quotes Marx's own statement: 'I am not a Marxist.' With this quote Derrida makes the point that although Marxism is seen as a philosophy, a dogma, a program, a theory; Marx's works are also full of many other heterogeneous spirits especially those of critique, historical change, and revolution. Referring to the first line of Marx and Engels's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism," Derrida is able to identify many different ghost or specters in the texts of Marx. The main point made by Derrida in the essay seems to be that the world is not done with Marx's critiques of global capitalism. We still are in need of many more such critiques. In the essay, Derrida recalls a similar attempt made during 1950s to drive away the spirit of Marx. Derrida thinks that the hegemonic political orders are always 'haunted by past and future specters such as suffering multitudes, militant organized workers, and revolutionaries seeking economic, political, or racial justice'. The editors say that this book is another *undecidable* of Derrida (i.e. whose meaning is difficult to decide). But in the parts of the two chapters prescribed here, in 'Injunctions of Marx', Derrida explicitly looks for the return to Marx both in theory and practice and in 'Wears and Tears', Derrida enumerates why we need to return to Marx.

2.1.2 Subject Matter:

Summary of the Text

As you know, in the present text *The Specters of Marx*, there are parts from two chapters – Chapter I 'Injunctions of Marx' and Chapter 2, 'Wears and Tears'. Accordingly, in the following part of the unit, a paragraph-wise summary of the text is given so that the students will use it while reading the original text. As we have seen the first chapter 'Injunctions of Marx', represents Derrida's call for return to Marx and Marxism. Accordingly, he has developed his chapter. As you know, the book *The Specters of Marx* is a revision of Derrida's earlier essay presented in the conference. The part that Derrida added to the text while publishing it in the form of

a book is given in round parentheses. There are in all twelve selected paragraphs in chapter 1. And chapter 2 is basically concerned with the discussion of ten plagues of the new global order. Accordingly the summary of the chapters is given in accordance with the enlisted ten points.

From Chapter 1. Injunctions of Marx

Para 1 and 2

Derrida here talks of the specters (ghosts) of Marx or of Marxism or of Communism. However, he laments that nobody is ready to talk of the spirit of Marxism or Communism today, as if it is non-existent.

He accepts that he was thinking of the title of his lecture – "Specters of Marx", and to his surprise, until he reread *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* recently, he realized that this ghost was haunting his memory and here he generalizes his condition to that of Europe in general with the statement – "A specter is haunting Europe – the specter of communism."

Para 3, 4 and 5

While talking about the *Manifesto*, the very first thing that manifests is that **it is a specter**, the first paternal character, as powerful as it is unreal, a hallucination or **simulacrum** (something that is made to look like another thing) that is more actual than a living presence.

After reading the *Manifesto* and some other works of Marx, Derrida realized that there is no text in the philosophical tradition whose message is more urgent today. Here lies the greatness of the *Manifesto*. However, to his surprise, both Marx and Engels in their preface to the re-edition of 1888, have accepted the possible 'aging' and 'intrinsically irreducible historicity' of their ideas. That is to say, they have accepted the fact that as time passes, their ideas may not be as relevant as they were during the earlier period.

The greatness of this work lies in the way it has explicitly issued this warning, its envisioning of the transformation of the theses proposed in the text, envisioning progressive enrichment of the knowledge as a result of the **rupture** (an occasion when something suddenly breaks apart or bursts) and restructuration. It is for these reasons that the writers have incorporated in the text the unpredictability of the new knowledge, new techniques and new political givens. Similarly, no other text seems

to be concerned so lucidly with the new techniques, and media. And very few texts shed so much light on law, international law and nationalism.

It is for this reasons that Derrida says that if one does not read, reread and discuss Marx and goes beyond 'scholarly reading and discussion of his view', one is committing a 'fault, a falling of theoretical, philosophical, political responsibility'. In the context of the disappearing of the Marxist dogmas and ideological apparatuses like states, parties, cells and unions, we do not have any excuse for turning away from the this responsibility. Derrida is quite sure that there no future without Marx, without the memory and inheritance of Marx, of his genius or at least one of his spirits.

Derrida further talks of resisting the temptation of the memory of Marxism, for him and many of his generation, Marx was a quasi-paternal figure: the way it cultivated various **filiations** (relationships), the (Marxist) way of reading and interpreting a text which is absolutely and thoroughly determinate. He is very modest in his opinion that one needs not be a Marxist or a Communist in order to accept this obvious fact of the influence of Marx on their personalities. We all live, Derrida argues, in a world or a culture where the marks of this inheritance (Marxist) are present at depth, though they are directly visible or not.

Para 6 and 7

Derrida contrasts the world-view of the young people today and those of his generation. Many young people today are the reader-consumers of Fukuyama (American philosopher and neoconservative political economist whose works celebrate the triumph of capitalism over communism) and probably they do not realize the importance of the influence of Marxist ways on their personalities. For the people of the generation of Derrida, the eschatological (end of human history) themes – of "end of history", of the "end of Marxism", of the "end of philosophy", of the "end of man", of the "last man" – were the daily bread before forty years. Derrida calls this 'the bread of apocalypse (the destruction and end of the world)" and it was naturally in their mouth, i.e. they all have fed on this bread. Considering its prevalence, Derrida has nicknamed it "apocalyptic tone in philosophy" in 1980.

Derrida asks the question, what is the consistency or the taste of this "apocalyptic tone in philosophy"? On the one hand, it was reading or analysis of those scholars who were nicknamed the classics of the end. They have formed the

canon of the modern apocalypse (end of History, end of Man, end of Philosophy, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, with their addition to the Kojevian will or the will of Kojeve himself.) (Alexandre Kojeve is a Russian French philosopher famous for his lecture (delivered during 1930s) on those German philosophers who addressed the end of man and end of philosophy topics like Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger). On the other hand, the "apocalyptic tone in philosophy" indissociably means what we had known or the concern with the totalitarian terror in all the Eastern countries, all the socio-economic disasters of Soviet bureaucracy, the Stalinism of the past and the neo-Stalinism in process. (Roughly speaking this is the time from the Moscow trials to the repression in Hungary. The invasion of Hungary in 1956 by Soviet troops to suppress a short-lived anti-Communist revolution. This helped Joseph Stalin to consolidate his power in Soviet Union and he accused many of engaging in a treasonous plot and many were executed.) Derrida argues that it is in this context that Deconstruction developed, and one can understand nothing of this period of deconstruction, particularly in France, unless one takes this historical entanglement into account.

Para 8 and 9

In order to remove the risks, Derrida asks the question – what are the risks to the works of Marx or also to his injunction (law and orders). The most important risk that Derrida perceives is to use the untroubled interpretations (exegesis) of the classified works of Marx / Marxism in order to neutralize the political imperative. This Derrida sees as a coming fashion or stylishness of a culture or in the university. But this can also be a cushioning operation. However, Derrida thinks that this stereotyping ultimately leads to depoliticize the Marxist reference, by putting on a tolerant face, to neutralize a potential force. This is done basically by tiring and weakening body and by silencing the revolt, which initially inspired uprising, indignation (feeling of anger caused due to an insult), insurrection (to take control using force and violence), revolutionary momentum. Derrida thinks that people may readily accept the return of Marx or the return to Marx on the condition that a silence is maintained about his injunction. However, Derrida does not approve of a simple decipherment or interpretation of Marx's works; he says (people demand) that the interpretations must transform changes in the world.

In the name of the concept of reading leading to the neutralization of Marx, we are ignoring a danger: (some people think) since Marx is dead and Marxism seems to

be in rapid decomposition, we are concerned with Marx without bothering about Marxism or even Marx himself as a historical figure; we are concerned only with what is said in the text (by the ghost of Marx). We treat Marx as per the academic rules – calmly, objectively, without bias, and also by respecting the norms of hermeneutical, philological, philosophical interpretation. Some people will whisper that Marx is a great western philosopher whose works are worthy of careful study. He doesn't belong to the communist, the Marxist or the Parties, he ought to figure among the great western philosophers. – such kind of neutralization of Marx has been and will be heard. But Derrida strongly disagrees with and opposes this neutralization.

But when Derrida turns or returns to Marx in the present essay, he wants to do 'something other', i.e. 'to do everything we can so as to avoid the neutralizing anesthesia of a new theoreticism, and to prevent a philosophico-philological return to Marx from prevailing'. This 'doing everything'; causes Derrida to give priority to the political gesture, for a time being, and leave away the work of philosophical interpretations that their position-taking requires.

Para 10, 11 and 12

While preparing this paper with the title Specters of Marx, Derrida was thinking of all the haunting obsessions that organizes the dominant influence on discourse today. While the new world (dis)order (allusion to George W Bush's phrase 'new world order' in September 1990 speech) of neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism was being established, nobody could think of it without the ghost of Marx. Hegemony organizes repression; therefore, haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony, Derrida asserts. However, while talking about haunting, Derrida was not thinking of the introduction of the *Manifesto*. During 1847-48, Marx and Engels have already talked about the haunting – "Specter of Communism". This terrifying specter was still to come in Europe. It was named, but was still to come beyond its name. It was promised, but only promised. However, still today, this specter is terrifying. One can never distinguish between the future-to-come and coming back of a specter. The 1848 marks the widespread upheaval of Communism throughout the Europe, called the First International. From this time onwards people were sure of the specter that it is there. Therefore, it was dreaded as Communism to come. The people of Europe feared that in future "it does not become an actual, effectively present, manifest, non-secret reality". Therefore, the question asked by the people of the old Europe was

already the question of future: whither Communism? (What is the future of Communism?) Derrida tries to deconstruct the meaning of this phrase – it is about "future of communism" or "about communism in future"; and since it is concerned with Europe it can also mean "whether there would still be any future and any history at all for Europe"? (Derrida provides the answer to this fear of people regarding the specter of communism. It is the first movement that has presented itself as geo-political i.e. it has reached the limits of the earth and limits of political as well. It is international in the true sense of the term.)

The representatives of the forces of the State wanted to be sure and certain that there is a definite difference between the specter and the reality, between a spirit and reality. This dividing line has to be drawn and it has to be assured. That is, the fear of Communism is a thing of past and today it doesn't exist in reality.

Derrida laments that even today, after almost a century and a half of the publication of *Manifesto*, there are many throughout the world who are worried about the specter of Communism. They are convinced that there is only the specter of communism without body, without present reality, without actuality or effectively, but now it was a past specter. It was only an illusion, a phantasm, or a ghost. There is another worry for these forces - that since communism is a thing of past, it should not come back. Derrida ends the first chapter with the fear of the people regarding communism: "In future, we hear everywhere today, it must not re-incarnate itself; it must not be allowed to come back since it is past."

From Chapter 3: Wears and Tears

In the next part of the essay, From Chapter 3: Wears and Tears, Derrida refers back to the phrase of George W. Bush – the concept of The New World Order, which Derrida calls 'disorder'. Derrida does not seem to be happy with the picture of the contemporary world or rather he critically comments that the picture of the world today is 'bleak' or 'one could say almost black'. The world is constantly in the state of crisis. This shows Derrida's discontent with the present global reality.

Derrida laments the fact that on the name of international and civil-international wars (and many more wars between, among and within countries and ethnic groups), the so called liberal-democrat Europe and the world are tearing apart. As a result, the entire regiments of ghosts (of what, communists, Marxists, etc.) have returned. Armies from every age with postmodern techniques of warfare (like information

technology, panoptical (panoramic view), surveillance via satellite, nuclear threat, etc.) have also returned. Therefore, Derrida says satirically, let us accelerate the things. Since the dividing line between civil and international cannot be made, let us blacken the picture of the world still further. Considering this, Derrida ventures to name this only with a single trait – the euphoria (extremely strong feeling of happiness or excitement) of liberal-democrat capitalism which resembles the blindest and most delirious of hallucinations and increasing hypocrisy of formal or juridicist rhetoric of human rights. The matter here is not of collecting 'empirical evidence' or analysis of them in all directions, but of the double interpretation that the concurrent (occurring at the same time) readings of the picture oblige us to associate.

After summing up the condition of the New World Order today, Derrida goes on enumerating what he calls the 'ten plagues' of the 'new world order'. They are as follows:

1. The first of these plagues is unemployment. In the New World Order, the new market, new technology, new world-wide competitiveness have been well-calculatingly deregulated. Here the words like labour, production and unemployment also deserve to be renamed. The new givens (basic facts, truth, etc) are responsible for the changes in the methods of traditional calculation and also for reinterpretation of the conceptual oppositions between work and non-work, activity, employment and their contrary. This regular deregulation of the market is managed, calculated and 'socialized' and is irreducible to prediction. In the new era, the function of inactivity, non-work or underemployment has changed drastically. The 'new unemployment' does not resemble 'employment' in its experience and calculation, unlike what is called in France that the 'new poverty' resembles 'poverty'.
2. The massive exclusion of homeless citizens from any participation from the democratic life of states. Similarly, the expulsion and deportation of many exiles, stateless persons, and immigrants from a so-called national territory heralds a new kind of experience of frontiers and identity.
3. The ruthless economic wars within, between and among the European countries, the United States and Japan. These wars control everything (including other wars) the practical interpretation and an inconsistent and unequal application of international law.

4. The inability to master the contradictions in the concept, norms and reality of the free market (the issue of non-protection to the cheap labour vs. the interventionist interests of the capitalist states). Therefore, it has become very difficult to protect one's own interests and also one's own 'social advantages'.

5. The aggravation of the foreign debt and other connected mechanisms are starving or driving to despair a large portion of humanity. This causes their exclusion from the same market in which the new logic seeks their inclusion.

6. In the Western democracies, the arms industries and trade are associated with the scientific research, economy and socialization of labour. The suspension or cutting back of them runs the risk of unemployment. The arms trafficking is largest in the world even compared to drug trafficking; and both of them cannot be separated from each other.

7. The spread of the nuclear weapons is uncontrollable, for it has exceeded the control of the statist structures and entered every declared market.

8. The inter-ethnic wars are proliferating due to the archaic / primitive conceptual phantasm of community, the nation-state, sovereignty, boarder, native soil and blood. Derrida does not say that archaism is bad in itself; it keeps some irreducible values. However, by **tele-**technic (at or over a long distance) technology, on the name of ontopology (decentralization for inclusion to help the world see the unseen, change the unchanged) this conceptual phantasm is made outdated. This process of dislocation is spread in an unheard of fashion that has always been differentiated and accelerated and it is just as archaic as archaism itself. This process seeks positive condition of stabilization. However, the spatial difference initiates the feeling of displacement leading to the national rootedness in the memory or anxiety of a displaced. Therefore, both time and space are out of joints in the new world order.

9. Power of capitalist phantom-States – In the new world order, it is almost impossible to ignore the growing and undelimitable power of the super-efficient capitalist phantom-states who have emerged as mafia and drug-cartels (a group of companies having monopoly over something) worldwide, even in the socialist states of Eastern Europe. These phantom-states have entered everywhere so secretly that they are no longer identified, nor can they be dissociated from the process of democratization. The concern of Derrida regarding these capitalist

phantom-states is seen in the following statement: These phantom-states invade not only the socio-economic fabric, the general circulation of capital, but also statist and inter-statist institutions.

10. International Laws and Its Institutions: Despite the fortunate perfectibility and undeniable progress made by the International Laws and its Institution like United Nations, Derrida identifies two limitations in them. First, their norms, charters, mission, etc depend on certain historical culture, particularly they are based on certain European philosophical concepts, which have theoretico-judicial, speculative and even practical applicability. The second limitation is that these universal international laws remain, in their application, largely dominated by a particular nation-state (having superior techno-economic and military power). These nation-states are not only manipulating the decision making of United Nations, but also its enforcement, causing in a way the incoherence, discontinuity, inequality of states before laws. However, Derrida is not all pessimistic about the international laws and Institutions. He praises those who are working towards perfectibility and emancipation of these institutions, though insufficient these efforts seem. One such example that Derrida cites is that of interference or intervention in the sovereignty of a state on the name of humanitarian concerns. Derrida asks us to salute those who have been working in this direction.

After the discussion of these ten plagues of the new world order, Derrida questions why one would not please the Marxist spirit, if one is dissatisfied, and even depressed by the contemporary scenario. One would not talk of the specter in singular, but in plural as specters or spirits which one would not chase away, but in the sense of the critiques of the contemporary situation, one would keep them close by and would even allow them to come back.

People may interpret this gesture of Derrida as "a belated-rallying-to-Marxism", which Derrida thinks misunderstanding his stand quite badly. However, Derrida does not disagree with the view that his stand is 'more urgent then ever' though it sounds 'untimely'. People were already saying that Derrida has picked a good time to salute Marx. Of course he says that he believes in the political virtue of the disagreement, i.e. one will be politically benefitted of one's stand, if one is having luck. Even though one does not benefit politically, the fact remains that whatever he is saying is nothing but his demand for justice. His stand bears witness to justice, which must be

disadjusted, irreducible to exactness and to law. However, demand for justice is not the decisive motivation for his stand. In order to make his stand clearer, he again reiterates: I am not a Marxist (which was already said by Marx himself). And then he asks the decisive questions – "What is the distinguishing trait of a Marxist statement?" And who can say – "I am a Marxist?"

In the last paragraph of the essay, Derrida goes on answering the questions. According to Derrida, taking inspiration from the spirit of Marxist is to keep faith in Marxist principles and basically its principle of 'a radical critique', which is a procedure ready to undertake its self critique. Derried thinks that this self-critique wants its own transformation, re-evaluation and self-interpretation. This spirit of self-critique is more than a style and it is heir to a spirit of Enlightenment, which Derrida thinks must not be renounced at any cost. Derrida distinguishes between this spirit from other spirits of Marxism which are associated with the body of Marxist doctrine, to its supposed systematic, metaphysical or ontological totality (particularly its dialectical method and dialectical materialism), its fundamental concept of labour, mode of production, social class and the whole history of its apparatuses (projected or real: the Internationals of the labour movement, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the single party, the State, and finally the totalitarian monstrosity). Derrida's spirit is the spirit of Enlightenment, of self-critique and of Marxism in this sense.

Critical Commentary

As we know, some paragraphs from two chapters of the book *The Specters of Marx* are included in your syllabus. The first of these chapters is 'Injunctions of Marx' and the third is 'Wears and Tears'. Both the chapters are in contrast to each other, for they talk about two different and contrasting situations. In the first chapter, Derrida acknowledges his (and many like him, called 'people of his generation') indebtedness to Marx for many different things. However, he laments that the young generation is celebrating the philosophy of such people as Fukuyama, who proclaim the end of the world philosophy. Derrida also laments that the new generation is depoliticizing and neutralizaing the political mission of Marx and his Manifesto. On the name of academics and university education, Marx is simply thought as one of the greatest western thinkers and is kept in the library. His writings are read, many of his injunctions prevailed across many of his texts are also been deciphered. And thus the political agenda of Marx is neutralized. This is done in Europe and across the globe due to the fear of the people of the Communism. That it would come back. It

was thought to come during the middle of the 19th century, however, it did not come. But with the disintegration of Russia, people have again thinking of Communism and its ghost. They are saying that it is a thing of past and it should not come back. Derrida does not disapprove of this fear and this neutralizing attempt of the people. However, he makes us aware of the new world order proposed by the neo-liberal capitalism. And in the light of the plagues of the new world disorder, no one would like that the spirit of communism does not come back.

In the very beginning of the chapter, Derrida laments that people have forgotten the spirit of Marxism or Communism, as if it is non-existent. Derrida does not separate him as well from this forgetfulness. However, as he was invited to deliver a speech at a conference in America on the future of Marxism, he re-read the *Manifesto*. However, the ghost or the spirit of the *Manifesto* was haunting his mind for a long time. Though this re-reading proved to be an immediate cause of his remembering the ghost, he has never forgotten it in the true sense of the term. However, the similar plight can be seen of the people of Europe. They seem to have forgotten this spirit, but in reality they always have a kind of respect for Marx and his injunctions, for many of them have learnt many things from him. Derrida asserts that the very first thing that the *Manifesto* manifests is that **it is a specter**, the first paternal character, as powerful as it is unreal, a hallucination. He argues that that there is no text in the philosophical tradition whose message is more urgent today. However, to the surprise of Derrida, both Marx and Engels in their preface of 1888, have talked about the possible 'aging' and 'intrinsically irreducible historicity' of their ideas given in the *Manifesto*. That is to say, they have accepted the fact that as time passes, their ideas may not be as relevant as they were during the earlier period. Similarly, they have incorporated the unpredictability of the new knowledge, new techniques and new political givens. Moreover, no other text seems to be concerned so lucidly with the new techniques, and media. And very few texts shed so much light on law, international law and nationalism. Such issuing of a warning explicitly is a symbol of greatness of the work, asserts Derrida. It is for this reason that Derrida says if one does not read, reread and discuss Marx and goes beyond 'scholarly reading and discussion of his view', one is committing a 'fault, a falling of theoretical, philosophical, political responsibility'. Derrida is quite sure that there no future without Marx, without the memory and inheritance of Marx, of his genius or at least one of his spirits. For many of his generation, Derrida asserts, Marx was a

quasi-paternal figure: the way it cultivated various **filiations** (relationships), the (Marxist) way of reading and interpreting a text which is absolutely and thoroughly determinate. Though one is or is not a Marxist, we all live, Derrida argues, in a world or a culture where the marks of Marx's inheritance are present at depth.

Derrida contrasts the world-view of the young people today and those of his generation. Many young people today are the reader-consumers of Fukuyama and probably they do not realize the importance of the influence of Marxist ways on their personalities. For the people of the generation of Derrida, the eschatological (end of human history) themes – of "end of history", of the "end of Marxism", of the "end of philosophy", of the "end of man", of the "last man" – were the daily bread before forty years. Considering its prevalence, Derrida has nicknamed it "apocalyptic tone in philosophy" in 1980. This tone consists of, on the one hand, reading or analysis of those scholars who were nicknamed the classics of the end. They have formed the canon of the modern apocalypse. On the other hand, it means what we had known or concerned with the totalitarian terror in all the Eastern countries, all the socio-economic disasters of Soviet bureaucracy, the Stalinism of the past and the neo-Stalinism in process. Derrida argues that it is in this context that Deconstruction developed.

In order to remove the risks, Derrida asks the question – what are the risks to the works of Marx or also to his injunction (law and orders). The most important risk that Derrida perceives is to use the untroubled interpretations of works of Marx / Marxism in order to neutralize their political imperative. This Derrida sees as a coming fashion or stylishness of a culture or in the university. But this can also be a cushioning operation. However, Derrida thinks that this stereotyping ultimately leads to depoliticize the Marxist reference, by putting on a tolerant face, to neutralize a potential force. This is done basically by tiring and weakening body and by silencing the revolt, which initially inspired uprising, indignation, insurrection revolutionary momentum. Some people may think, since Marx is dead and Marxism seems to be in rapid decomposition, we are concerned with Marx without bothering about Marxism. We treat Marx as per the academic rules – calmly, objectively, without bias, and also by respecting the norms of hermeneutical, philological, philosophical interpretation. In the present essay, Derrida wants to do 'something other', i.e. 'to do everything we can so as to avoid the neutralizing anesthesia of a new theoreticism, and to prevent a philosophico-philological return to Marx from prevailing'. This 'doing everything';

causes Derrida to give priority to the political gesture, for a time being, and leave away the work of philosophical interpretations that their position-taking requires.

Derrida was thinking of all the haunting obsessions that organizes the dominant influence on discourse today. While the new world (dis)order (allusion to George W Bush's phrase 'new world order' in September 1990 speech) of neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism was being established, nobody could think of it without the ghost of Marx. During 1847-48, Marx and Engels have already talked about the haunting – "Specter of Communism". This terrifying specter was still to come in Europe. It was named, but was still to come beyond its name. The 1848 marks the widespread upheaval of Communism throughout the Europe, called the First International. From this time onwards people were sure of the specter that it is there. Therefore, it was dreaded as Communism to come. Therefore, the question asked by the people of the old Europe was already the question of future: whither Communism? (what is the future of Communism) Derrida tries to deconstruct the meaning of this phrase – it is about "future of communism" or "about communism in future"; and since it is concerned with Europe it can also mean "whether there would still be any future and any history at all for Europe"? Derrida laments that even today, after almost a century and a half of the publication of *Manifesto*, there are many throughout the world who are worried about the specter of Communism. It was only an illusion, a phantasm, or a ghost. There is another worry for these forces - that since communism is a thing of past, it should not come back. Derrida ends the first chapter with the fear of the people regarding communism: "In future, we hear everywhere today, it must not re-incarnate itself; it must not be allowed to come back since it is past."

Derrida does not seem to be happy with the picture of the contemporary world. He critically comments that the picture of the world today is 'bleak' or 'one could say almost black'. The world is constantly in the state of crisis. This shows Derrida's discontent with the present global reality. Derrida laments the fact that on the name of international and civil-international wars the so called liberal-democrat Europe and the world are tearing apart. Considering this, Derrida ventures to name this only with a single trait – the euphoria of liberal-democrat capitalism which resembles the blindest and most delirious of hallucinations and increasing hypocrisy of formal or juridicist rhetoric of human rights. After summing up the condition of the New World Order today, Derrida goes on enumerating what he calls the 'ten plagues' of the 'new world order'. They are as follows:

1. The first of these plagues is unemployment. In the New World Order, the new market, new technology, new world-wide competitiveness have been well-calculatingly deregulated. Here the words like labour, production and unemployment also deserve to be renamed. The new givens (basic facts, truth, etc) are responsible for the changes in the methods of traditional calculation and also for reinterpretation of the conceptual oppositions between work and non-work, activity, employment and their contrary. This regular deregulation of the market is managed, calculated and 'socialized' and is irreducible to prediction.
2. The massive exclusion of homeless citizens from any participation from the democratic life of states. Similarly, the expulsion and deportation of many exiles, stateless persons, and immigrants from a so-called national territory heralds a new kind of experience of frontiers and identity.
3. The ruthless economic wars within, between and among the European countries, the United States and Japan. These wars control everything (including other wars) the practical interpretation and an inconsistent and unequal application of international law.
4. The inability to master the contradictions in the concept, norms and reality of the free market (the issue of non-protection to the cheap labour vs. the interventionist interests of the capitalist states). Therefore, it has become very difficult to protect one's own interests and also one's own 'social advantages'.
5. The aggravation of the foreign debt and other connected mechanisms are starving or driving to despair a large portion of humanity. This causes their exclusion from the same market in which the new logic seeks their inclusion.
6. In the Western democracies, the arms industries and trade are associated with the scientific research, economy and socialization of labour. The suspension or cutting back of them runs the risk of unemployment. The arms trafficking is largest in the world even compared to drug trafficking; and both of them cannot be separated from each other.
7. The spread of the nuclear weapons is uncontrollable, for it has exceeded the control of the statist structures and entered every declared market.
8. The inter-ethnic wars are proliferating due to the archaic / primitive conceptual phantasm of community, the nation-state, sovereignty, boarder, native soil and

blood. Derrida does not say that archaism is bad in itself; it keeps some irreducible values. However, by **tele-**technic (at or over a long distance) technology, on the name of ontopology (decentralization for inclusion to help the world see the unseen, change the unchanged) this conceptual phantasm is made outdated. This process of dislocation is spread in an unheard of fashion that has always been differentiated and accelerated and it is just as archaic as archaism itself. This process seeks positive condition of stabilization. However, the spatial difference initiates the feeling of displacement leading to the national rootedness in the memory or anxiety of a displaced. Therefore, both time and space are out of joints in the new world order.

9. Power of capitalist phantom-States – In the new world order, it is almost impossible to ignore the growing and undelimitable power of the super-efficient capitalist phantom-states who have emerged as mafia and drug-cartels (a group of companies having monopoly over something) worldwide, even in the socialist states of Eastern Europe. These phantom-states have entered everywhere so secretly that they are no longer identified, nor can they be dissociated from the process of democratization. The concern of Derrida regarding these capitalist phantom-states is seen in the following statement: These phantom-states invade not only the socio-economic fabric, the general circulation of capital, but also statist and inter-statist institutions.

10. International Laws and Its Institutions: Despite the fortunate perfectibility and undeniable progress made by the International Laws and its Institution like United Nations, Derrida identifies two limitations in them. First, their norms, charters, mission, etc depend on certain historical culture, particularly they are based on certain European philosophical concepts, which have theoretico-judicial, speculative and even practical applicability. The second limitation is that these universal international laws remain, in their application, largely dominated by a particular nation-state (having superior techno-economic and military power). These nation-states are not only manipulating the decision making of United Nations, but also its enforcement, causing in a way the incoherence, discontinuity, inequality of states before laws. However, Derrida is not all pessimistic about the international laws and Institutions. He praises those who are working towards perfectibility and emancipation of these institutions, though insufficient these efforts seem. One such example that Derrida cites is

that of interference or intervention in the sovereignty of a state on the name of humanitarian concerns. Derrida asks us to salute those who have been working in this direction.

After the discussion of these ten plagues of the new world order, Derrida questions why one would not please the Marxist spirit, if one is dissatisfied, and even depressed by the contemporary scenario. One would not talk of the specter in singular, but in plural as specters or spirits which one would not chase away, but in the sense of the critiques of the contemporary situation, one would keep them close by and would even allow them to come back.

In order to make his stand clearer, he again reiterates: I am not a Marxist (which was already said by Marx himself). And then he asks the decisive questions – "What is the distinguishing trait of a Marxist statement?" And who can say – "I am a Marxist?"

In the last paragraph of the essay, Derrida goes on answering the questions. According to Derrida, taking inspiration from the spirit of Marxist is to keep faith in Marxist principles and basically its principle of 'a radical critique', which is a procedure ready to undertake its self critique. Derried thinks that this self-critique wants its own transformation, re-evaluation and self-interpretation. This spirit of self-critique is more than a style and it is heir to a spirit of Enlightenment, which Derrida thinks must not be renounced at any cost. Derrida distinguishes between this spirit from other spirits of Marxism which are associated with the body of Marxist doctrine, to its supposed systematic, metaphysical or ontological totality (particularly its dialectical method and dialectical materialism), its fundamental concept of labour, mode of production, social class and the whole history of its apparatuses (projected or real: the Internationals of the labour movement, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the single party, the State, and finally the totalitarian monstrosity). Derrida's spirit is the spirit of Enlightenment, of self-critique and of Marxism in this sense.

Summary

As the paragraph-wise summary and the critical commentary of the text shows, the essay included here consists of two chapters. The purpose of the first chapter is to discuss the fear of the people of the Communism. But at the same time, Derrida unveils the greatness of the book The Manifesto of the Communist Party written by Marx and Engels. Derrida argues that many people have been influenced by the

teaching of the book, by the reading techniques associated with Marxism and wants to show the usefulness of the ideas of Marx during the apocalyptic tone of the neo-liberal, neo-capitalist world order of today. In the next chapter, Derrida highlights the ten plagues associated with the new world order. This new reality has changed the life of human beings to the extent that people would be ready to welcome communism wholeheartedly. Derrida here wants to show that by the end of the first chapter, people were in fear that communism should not be the reality. But by the end of the second chapter, due to the dissatisfaction with the present day reality, they are ready to accept the spirit of communism.

2.1.3 Check Your Progress:

1. Where was the conference 'Whither Marxism?' organized?
2. Who organized the conference 'Whither Marxism?'?
3. Who wrote the book *The End of History and the Last Man*?
4. Which book opens with the sentence - "A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of communism."?
5. Who have accepted the unpredictability of the new knowledge, new techniques and new political givens in their book?
6. Who have visualized the possible 'aging' and 'intrinsically irreducible historicity' of their ideas?
7. According to Derrida, one is committing a 'fault, a falling of theoretical, philosophical, political responsibility', if one is not --------.
8. According to Derrida, we do not have future without -------.
9. Who was a quasi-paternal figure not only for Derrida but for many of his generation?
10. According to Derrida, who has shaped the habits of reading and interpreting a text?
11. Which Russian French philosopher is known for his lecture on the topic 'end of man' discussed by such philosophers like Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger?
12. Why, according to Derrida, has he turned to Marx in the present essay?

13. According to Derrida, what is characterized by neo-capitalism and neo-liberalism?
14. The 1848 widespread upheaval of Communism throughout the Europe is called ---------.
15. In the -------- the dividing line between the civil and the international cannot be made.
16. Derrida uses the phrase 'the euphoria of liberal-democrat capitalism' to refer to ------.

2.1.4 Answers to Check Your Progress:

1. America
2. Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg
3. American political philosopher Francis Fukuyama
4. *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*
5. Marx and Engels
6. Marx and Engels
7. If one is not reading, rereading and discussing Marx
8. Marx or any of his spirits
9. Marx
10. Marx
11. Alexandre Kojeve
12. 'to do everything we can so as to avoid the neutralizing anesthesia of a new theoreticism, and to prevent a philosophico-philological return to Marx from prevailing'
13. The New World Order
14. The First International
15. The New World Disorder
16. The New World Disorder

2.1.5 Exercises:

Broad Question:

1. Discuss in detail Derrida's views about Marxism expressed in his essay.
2. 'The only hope in the new global disorder is Marxism.' Discuss in the light of *The Specters of Marx*.
3. Comment on fear of people of the specters of Marx.
4. To what extent would you support Derrida's stand that there is no future without Marx. Explain.
5. Write a detailed note on the ten plagues of new world order.
6. Who, according to Derrida, is a Marxist? Comment in the light of the essay.
7. Why does Derrida praise Marx and his *Manifesto*? Illustrate.

Short Notes:

1. Greatness of the Manifesto
2. The Specter of Marx
3. Marx as a paternal figure
4. Emergence of Deconstruction
5. The apocalyptic tone in philosophy
6. Neo-liberalism and Neo-capitalism of the new world
7. The neutralization of Marx and his texts

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Section II: Roland Barthes – 'The Death of the Author'

The present Unit is divided into the following Sections:

2.2.0 Objectives:

By the end of this Unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the meanings of the terms 'Author, text, Screpter, etc.'
- Explain different debates associated with the role of author and its role in the process of interpretation.
- Find relationship between the author, text, reader and the process of interpretation.

2.2.1 Introduction

Roland Barthes (1915 – 1980) is a modern critical theorist who came to prominence in France in 1960s. He started his writings as a Structuralist and ended as a Post-Structuralist. His important works are – *Writing Degree Zero*, *Mythologies*, *The Elements of Semiology*, *S/Z*. He is greatly influenced by Derrida and Lacan, and other important modern critical theorists. His writings show that his interests shifted from the general rules and constraints of narrative to the production of meaning in the process of reading. In fact, Roland Barthes is famous for many things: for announcing the 'death of the author'; for articulating the theory and practice of intertextuality, for promoting the study of cultural sing-system, etc. Barthes is influenced by Marxist theory and Existentialist philosophy and literature, particularly, he is influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre.

He is best known for his proclamation – "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author". The essay 'The Death of the Author' proved to be one of the most controversial texts of post-structuralism. In his *Textual Analysis of Poe's Valdimar* – by breaking down the text into small units of sense or lexis, Barthes aims to show how they carry many different meanings simultaneously on different levels or in different codes. In almost all of his writings, Barthes challenges the conventional distinctions between critic and creator, fiction and non-fiction, literature and non-literature.

'The Death of the Author' (1968) is perhaps the most widely read of his essays. The essay led to the cultural myth of Barthes himself. According to Graham Allen, "*Death of the Author* is a usefully condensed expression of Barthes' developing post-structuralist approach to the issues of reading, writing, and the relationship between texts and the signs which comprise them." Barthes criticizes the Author who has always functioned within capitalist society as the 'anchor' of the literary work's signifier. Therefore, some critics argue that Barthes' essay can be said to be a transitional one, in that within it the movement from structuralism to post-structuralism can be detected. What makes the essay post-structuralist is not the proclamation of the death of the author, but rather the emergence within it of the theory of the text and of intertextuality.

2.2.2 Subject Matter:

The Death of the Author

'The Death of the Author' is perhaps one of the most read, commented and prescribed critical essays during the modern times. The essay is said to be the proof of Barthes' changed position from a structuralist to a post-structuralist. The essay, basically argues that once the writing is complete, the author (one who is said to be responsible for the creation of the text) loses its contact with the text, and the author's voice and the point of origin of the text get lost. However, the text brings into focus the other aspects, like the language, the reader and their active role in the process of the making of the text. Therefore, it is said that though the essay proclaims the death of the author, it also declares the emergence of the role of the reader and that of intertextuality in the process of the interpretation of the text.

Writing

In the very beginning of the essay, Barthes voices his views about the process of writing. He begins the essay with a couple of lines from Balzac's short novel *Sarrasine*: *'This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings, and her delicious sensibility.'* These lines refer to a castrato character disguised as a woman. Referring the lines, Barthes asks the question: Who is speaking thus? And he has answered the question with a couple of possibilities in the mind of the readers: (1) Is it the hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden beneath the woman? (2) Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? (3) Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas on femininity? (4) Is it universal wisdom? (5) Romantic psychology? Barthes, however, says that we will never be able to know exactly who is speaking the lines in the text, for writing is the destruction of every voice, and every point of origin. That is to say, once the process of writing is complete and the text is ready, we would never be able to definitely say that the lines in the text are of a particular person. Every voice and every point of origin of the text is destructed in the process of writing. Therefore, for Barthes, writing is the neutral, composite, oblique space that makes the author lose its identity and the identity of the very body of the writing emerges. This process of disconnection between the text and the author is abrupt rather than gradual: as soon as the narration is complete, the voice or the text loses its origin, the author enters into his own death and writing begins. This explains why in ethnographic societies the responsibility of a narrative is never assumed by a person; rather a mediator, a shaman or a relator is appreciated for his / her performance (his mastery of the narrative code, i.e. language) rather his/her genius. It means that the writing loses its creator once it is complete. That is to say, during the ancient times, the narratives were orally transmitted from one generation to another, without knowing the 'author' of the orature, and in the process the skills of the narrator are admired rather than his genius, as he is not the source of the narrative.

Author

Barthes has also commented on the institution of the Author. According to Barthes, the Author is a modern figure and a product of our society. It emerged during the Middle Ages, with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation in the 'prestige of the individual' or as it is put, the

'human person'. A prestigious role has been attached to the author as a creator of the text. According to Barthes, to attach the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author is positivism and represents the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, where greatest importance is attached to the individual. In the world of literature, the author is the king in that the histories of literature are full of biographies of writers, interviews and magazines and 'men of letters' are anxious to unite the texts and their persons through diaries and memories. Thus the image of literature in ordinary culture is centered on the author, his person, his life, his testes, his passions. In criticism as well, the explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if the work is an allegorical and transparent fiction about the author.

Challenges to the Institute of Author:

According the Barthes, this prestigious institution of author has been challenged in modern times:

1. In France, Mallarme was the first to realize the necessity to substitute language itself for the person supposed to be the owner of the text. He thinks that it is language of the text that speaks and not the author. Therefore, he thinks that to write is to reach that point where only language act 'performs'. Thus the entire poetics of Mallarme consists of suppressing the author in the interest of writing (which further leads to the restoration of the place of the reader).
2. Paul Valery, another French poet and critic, due to his concern with the Ego psychology, dilutes the theory of Mallarme to a considerable degree. However, his taste of Classicism makes him call into question the institution of author and even sometimes deriding (making jokes and adverse comments) the author. He acknowledges the essentially verbal nature of literature which makes him think that the concern with the interior of the author is pure superstition. Rather he stresses the 'linguistic' or even 'hazardous' nature of literary activity.
3. Proust – Despite the psychological nature of his analyses, Proust is essentially concerned with blurring the relation between the author and his characters. He does not make his narrator omniscient, who has seen, felt and is writing but one who is going to write. Thus Proust gave modern writing its epic.
4. Surrealism – though surrealism was unable to provide supreme place to language, still it contributed to displacing the image of the Author by maintaing

that the writer is unaware of the meaning of the text he produces. A surrealist author ceaselessly demands abrupt disappointments of expectations of meaning, for this kind of writing is automatic and is an experience shared by a group of people writing together.

5. Linguistics – provided the destruction of the Author by showing that the meaning of a text can be reached at without any reference to the author. In linguistics, the author is nothing more than an instance: language knows only a 'subject' and not a 'person' and the 'subject' is sufficient to make language hold together.

Barthes views Writing with and without Author. He is of the opinion that during the modern times, the place of the Author is taken by Scripter. He therefore contrasts the roles of the Author and that of the Scripter. He thinks that the removal of the author is not simply an historical fact; rather it transforms the modern text. Particularly the temporality is different:

When Author is believed – author is always the past of his own book – they stand in a single line divided into before and after. The author is thought to nourish the book, which entails that the Author exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it as if a father to his child.

On the other hand, the Modern 'Scripter' is born simultaneously with the text; in no way equipped to precede the writing; is not the subject and the book a predicate; thus every text is eternally written here and now. Writing is no longer an operation of rewriting, notion, representation and 'depiction' rather it is a 'performative' (in the sense of Austin's speech act) something like I declare, I sing, etc. Thus the writing of the modern scripter has no other origin than language itself which calls into question all origins.

Text

In the absence of the Author, what happens to the text. This has also been visualized by Barthes. According to him, without the author, the text is not a line of words with a single 'theological meaning' (the message of the Author – God) but it is a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writing, none of them original, blend and clash. The text turns out to be a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture – a place where the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings and never to express

himself. The scripter does not have passions, humours, feelings, impressions to be poured into a text, but rather had a dictionary from which he draws writing.

Interpretation of Text:

With the removal of the author, to decipher a text becomes quite fertile. To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception of text suits criticism because its important task is to discover the Author i.e. its society, history, psyche, liberty beneath the work. Therefore, historically, the reign of the Author was also been the reign of the critic. This explains why criticism is undermined along with the Author. In the modern Authorless text, everything is to be disentangled and nothing is deciphered; there is nothing beneath in literature. According to Barthes, the modern activity of disentangling is 'anti-theological' in that it does not bestow an ultimate meaning on a text.

Importance of the Reader

Barthes reveals the existence of writing – 'a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader. "A text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination." Such a reader is without history, biography and psychology: he is simply the someone who holds together the written text. Barthes criticizes that Reader is ignored in classical criticism. In order to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth of the Author. "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author."

Summary

As is clear from the discussion so far, the essay claims to comment on many modern critical concepts simultaneously. For example, it talks about structuralism, capitalism, poststructuralism, reader-response criticism, etc. However, it is always better to concentrate on what exactly the writer has discussed in the text. The first and foremost thing about the essay is indicated in the title. That it talks about the death of the author of the text. That is to say, the essay is a deliberation on the institution of author. Barthes begins his essay with the argument that once the process of writing the text is complete, the first thing that happens is that the author loses his contact with the text, he loses his voice and the author dies. In the remaining part of the essay Barthes is concerned with two things – (1) is there any

once else who has also talked about the death of the author and (2) what happens to the text and its interpretation after the death of the author.

Regarding the first of these points, as Barthes shows in the essay, he is not the only person who has claimed that once the writing is over the author dies. Here the author dies means for the interpretation of the text, the author is not indispensible. The text can mean, and can be interrelated without any reference to the author. Therefore, it is evident that many writers, critics and schools have already realized the uselessness of the institution of author for the interpretation of the text. However, for some schools and movements the author is a necessary fact. For example, Barthes argues that author is the construction of capitalist ideology. Similarly, in literary studies the author and his/her literary works are so closely related to one another that they are identified with each other's name.

In the context of the second point, Barthes argues that without reference to the author, the text can be interpreted. To clear this point, Barthes discusses the distinction between the author and the modern day scripter. According to him, without the author, the text is not a line of words with a single 'theological meaning' (the message of the Author – God) but it is a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writing, none of them original, blend and clash. With the removal of the author, to decipher a text becomes quite fertile. To give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing.

According to Barthes, the modern activity of disentangling is 'anti-theological' in that it does not bestow an ultimate meaning on a text. Barthes reveals the existence of writing – 'a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader. "A text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination." This is how Barthes praises the institution of the reader. Such a reader is without history, biography and psychology: he is simply the someone who holds together the written text. Barthes criticizes that Reader is ignored in classical criticism. In order to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth of the Author. "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author."

2.2.3 Check your Progress:

1. According to Barthes, what is the point of origin of a text?

2. Once the process of writing the text is over, what, according to Barthes, happens?
3. In the beginning of the essay, 'The Death of the Author' the lines from ------ novel of Balzac are quoted.
4. Referring to the lines from Balzac's novel, what question does Barthes ask?
5. According to Barthes, --------- is the neutral, composite, oblique space that makes the author lose its identity.
6. In order that writing should begin, what is necessary to happen?
7. What quality of the narrator is admired rather than his genius, according to Barthes?
8. Who, according to Barthes, is a modern figure and a product of our society?
9. The author as a modern figure emerged during ------- times.
10. What, according to Barthes, represents the attachment of prestigious role to the institution of author?
11. Mallarme substitutes ---------- for the person supposed to be the owner of the text.
12. Who asserts that to write is to reach that point where only language act 'performs'?
13. Who argues that the consideration of the interior of the author is pure superstition?
14. Who is said to be concerned with blurring the relation between the author and his characters?
15. According to Barthes, who has taken the place of author during the modern times?
16. Who says that the text's unity lies not in the point of origin, but in its destination?

2.2.4 Answers to Check your Progress:

1. The Author
2. The author loses its contact with the text and his voice.

3. *Sarrasine*
4. Who is speaking thus?
5. Writing
6. The author should enter his own death
7. His skills
8. The Author
9. The middle ages
10. the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology
11. Language
12. Mallarme
13. Paul Valery
14. Proust
15. The scripter
16. Barthes

2.2.5 Exercises:

Broad Questions:

1. Prepare a detailed note on Barthes views on the institution of author.
2. Do you agree with Barthes that with the completion of the text, the author enters into his own death? Explain.
3. Discuss 'The Death of the Author' as a poststructural text.
4. "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author." Comment.
5. "A text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination." Discuss in the light of Barthes views.

Short Notes:

1. The author
2. The text

3. Challenges to the institution of Author
4. the author and the scripter
5. The reader
6. Interpretation of text
7. Writing

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Unit-3

Wolfgang Iser's *Interaction between Text and Reader* and Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*

3.1. Wolfgang Iser's *Interaction between Text and Reader*

3.2 Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*

Introduction:

Unit No 3 focuses on two influential essays in literary theory: Wolfgang Iser's *Interaction between Text and Reader* and Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*. Both of these works delve into the intricate relationship between literature, its

readers, and its creators, yet they approach this relationship from distinct angles, offering valuable insights into the nature of meaning-making in literary studies.

Wolfgang Iser's essay, *Interaction between Text and Reader*, presents a central idea in reader-response theory, which argues that meaning in literature is not fixed within the text itself but is co-created by the interaction between the reader and the text. Iser introduces the concept of "gaps" or "blanks" within the text—areas of ambiguity, absence, or open-endedness—that invite the reader to actively participate in constructing meaning. This idea challenges the traditional notion of the text as a self-contained entity and positions the reader as a key figure in the process of interpretation.

On the other hand, Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* focuses on the relationship between poets and their literary predecessors. Bloom argues that writers, particularly poets, experience a psychological struggle, or "anxiety," when confronted with the overwhelming legacy of their forerunners. In Bloom's view, this anxiety results in a process of misreading or misprision—where poets distort, revise, or "misinterpret" the works of earlier poets in order to assert their own unique voice. Bloom's theory is deeply psychoanalytic, suggesting that the poet's interaction with their precursors mirrors a psychological conflict akin to a child's relationship with a parent.

Together, these essays provide complementary perspectives on the dynamics of literary creation and interpretation, one focusing on the active role of the reader in the construction of meaning and the other examining the psychological dynamics of literary influence and originality. Through studying these two influential works, students will gain a deeper understanding of how texts and authors engage with their audiences and their predecessors in the ongoing process of meaning-making.

3.1 Wolfgang Iser's *Interaction between Text and Reader*

3.1.1 Introduction:

Wolfgang Iser's essay "Interaction between Text and Reader" is a foundational work in reader-response criticism, a theoretical framework that emphasizes the role of the reader in the creation of meaning in literature. Iser's approach challenges the traditional view of a text as containing a fixed, authorial meaning that is passively

received by the reader. Instead, Iser argues that meaning arises through the active engagement of the reader with the text.

In this essay, Iser draws on phenomenology, a philosophical movement initiated by Edmund Husserl, and the work of Roman Ingarden, who studied the interaction between literary works and their readers. Iser focuses on how readers fill in the gaps, or indeterminacies, left by the author, thereby co-creating the text's meaning. According to Iser, reading is not a passive reception of information but an active, dynamic process that is shaped by the reader's personal context, cultural background, and interpretive skills.

3.1.2.1 Structure of the Text and the Reader's Response:

The beginning of the essay emphasizes that understanding a literary work involves more than just analyzing the text itself. In order to highlight the importance of the interaction between the structure of the text and the reader's response, Wolfgang Iser refers to the 'Phenomenological theory of Art'. Basically, phenomenology is a philosophical movement that examines how people perceive and experience the world and when it is applied to literature, it deals with how individuals experience and interpret texts. It suggests that meaning is not fixed within the text itself, but is created through the interaction between the reader and the text. In this approach, the reader's personal experience, emotions, and perceptions play a crucial role in how the text is understood. Further, Iser cites his own idea "schematized aspects" which he has more comprehensively explored in his book *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. "Schematized aspects" refers to the structured elements or frameworks within the text that guide or suggest how the reader should engage with it. These are the formal features, patterns, or components (such as plot, language, symbolism, etc.) embedded in the work that shapes the aesthetic experience or the meaning of the text.

Further Wolfgang Iser explains that a literary work has two main poles: the "artistic" pole, which is the author's written text, and the "aesthetic" pole, which is how the reader interprets and experiences it. The work itself is not just the text or the reader's experience, but something that exists between these two poles. This makes the work "virtual" because it can't be fully captured by either the text or the reader alone. The dynamic nature of the work comes from the reader engaging with the text,

considering different perspectives, and creating meaning as they go, which also changes the reader's own thoughts and understanding.

It means the literary work exists between the author's text and the reader's interpretation. The meaning of the work comes from the interaction between the two, so focusing only on the author's techniques or the reader's psychology won't fully explain the reading process. Both poles are important, but understanding the relationship between them is key to understanding the "virtual" work. In literary works, the message is not simply passed from the author to the reader like a one-way transmission. Instead, the reader "receives" and creates meaning from the text. There isn't always a shared code between the author and the reader, but one might develop during the reading process. To understand the impact of the work, we need to look for patterns or structures that describe how the reader and text interact.

The interaction between a literary text and the reader is difficult to understand because there are not many guidelines in literary criticism. The text and the reader are easier to analyze separately, but the actual interaction between them is harder to describe. However, there are general conditions of interaction that can be applied to the reader-text relationship. Further, Iser suggests that in order to understand the interaction between text and reader, one should consider the findings from the Tavistock School. The Tavistock School is a group of psychoanalysts who studied communication and human relationships. Wolfgang Iser believes that the findings of the Tavistock School are useful in understanding the interaction between text and reader because the Tavistock School's research on communication and human relationships provides valuable insights into how people interact on a psychological level. Their work emphasizes the dynamic and complex nature of communication, which can be applied to the relationship between a literary text and its reader. Just as their studies show that communication involves more than just the transfer of a message (it involves psychological engagement, interpretation, and interaction), Iser argues that reading a text is a similar process, where the reader actively engages with the text, interpreting and constructing meaning as part of a dynamic interaction.

3.1.2.2 Check your progress:

1. What does Iser's "Phenomenological theory of Art" emphasize?

   a. Author's techniques
   b. Interaction between reader and text
   c. Fixed meaning in the text
   d. Objective analysis

2. What are “schematized aspects”?

   a. Reader’s emotions b. Author’s intentions

   c. Structured elements guiding the reader d. Plot events

3. What are the two main poles of a literary work?

   a. Author and critic b. Text and reader’s interpretation

   c. Plot and theme d. Character and setting

4. How does the Tavistock School relate to Iser’s theory?

   a. It focuses on the text’s literal meaning

   b. It studies reader’s psychological engagement

   c. It ignores the reader’s interpretation

   d. It emphasizes the author’s intent

5. What does the “aesthetic” pole focus on?

   a. The text’s structure b. The reader’s interpretation

   c. The author’s message d. Historical context

3.1.3.1 Interpersonal Relationships and Perception:

Further Wolfgang Iser mentions R. D. Laing’s ideas on interpersonal relationships and perception. His ideas about interpersonal relationships serve as a metaphor for this interpretive process. In his work *The Politics of Experience*, Laing discusses how we perceive ourselves through the eyes of others and how our actions are shaped by our assumptions about how others see us. Just as we are constantly interpreting others’ perceptions of us (even though we can never fully access their actual experience of us), readers similarly interpret a text, even though they cannot access the author’s exact intentions or the definitive meaning of the text. The text, like other people, remains something that the reader engages with and interprets through their own lens.

In *The Politics of Experience*, R. D. Laing explains that we can never fully understand another person’s experience, just as they can’t fully understand ours. Our experiences of each other are invisible and inaccessible, which Laing calls “no-thing.” This “invisibility” is the foundation of all interpersonal relationships. We act

as though we understand how others see us, even though we can't truly know their thoughts or feelings. This constant guessing and interpreting drive our interactions with others. Communication is not just a natural process, but an act of interpretation, where we shape not only our understanding of others but also our own sense of self.

By drawing on Laing's ideas, Iser highlights the relational and interpretive nature of reading. The act of reading is akin to interpersonal communication, where meaning is never fully fixed or accessible, but instead is continuously negotiated and constructed through interaction between the text and the reader. Just as we can never fully experience how others see us, readers can never fully grasp the text's meaning without their own interpretive involvement.

Wolfgang Iser highlights an important difference between reading and social interactions. In social interactions, like conversations between two people, there is direct face-to-face communication. People can ask each other question to check if they truly understand each other. However, in reading, the text cannot adjust to each individual reader, and the reader cannot directly ask the text whether their understanding is correct or not. Iser also mentions that in social interactions, there is usually a clear purpose or goal, and a common reference point (called a *tertium comparationis*) that helps both people understands each other. In contrast, when reading a text, there is no immediate context or clear framework for understanding; the reader must actively create meaning from the text. Iser highlights a key difference between the relationship between a reader and a text, and what he calls dyadic interaction (a face-to-face interaction between two people). In dyadic interaction, there is a shared frame of reference, meaning both people can rely on common understanding, ask questions, and adjust their communication in real-time. However, in the text-reader relationship, there is no immediate, shared context. The clues or "codes" that could guide the reader are scattered throughout the text and must be actively reconstructed or restructured by the reader. This shows two major differences: first, there is no ready-made context in reading like in dyadic interaction, and second, the reader must create meaning from the text, unlike in direct social interaction where communication is more immediate and guided.

In essence, by referring *tertium comparationis*, Iser is highlighting a key difference: while social interactions are regulated by a shared reference point that helps participants interpret each other's actions and words, the text-reader interaction

requires the reader to create their own interpretive framework, often piecing together meaning from the text's fragmented clues.

3.1.3.2 Check your progress:

1. According to R.D. Laing in *The Politics of Experience*, what is the basis of all interpersonal relationships?
   a. Shared understanding b. Mutual goals
   c. Invisibility of experience d. Emotional connection
2. How does Laing describe the process of interpreting others' perceptions?
   a. A natural process of understanding
   b. An impossible task without context
   c. An act of constant guessing and interpretation
   d. A straightforward reflection of their true thoughts
3. What does Iser argue is missing in the reader-text relationship compared to dyadic interaction?
   a. Emotional engagement b. Shared reference point
   c. Interpretive framework d. Immediate purpose
4. What must readers do to make sense of a text according to Iser?
   a. Ask direct questions of the text
   b. Apply a shared cultural framework
   c. Actively create their own meaning
   d. Look for authorial intention
5. In social interactions, what helps participants interpret each other's actions?
   a. Shared emotions b. Tertium comparationis
   c. Interpretive frameworks d. Immediate goals
6. How does Iser describe the clues or "codes" in a text?
   a. Fixed and easily understood
   b. Scattered and requiring reconstruction
   c. Provided explicitly by the author
   d. Equivalent to a shared reference point

3.1.4.1 Communication Through Gaps:

Further in the essay, Iser explains that the lack of a clear, shared understanding (or common frame of reference) between the text and the reader is what drives the interaction in reading. This is similar to how communication in social interactions arises from the fact that people cannot fully experience how others experience them. In both cases, there are "gaps"—in social interactions, these gaps are filled through questions and understanding, while in reading, these gaps arise because the text cannot directly communicate its meaning to the reader. The "no-thing" or the absence of a defined context in both interactions leads to communication, as it creates an asymmetry or imbalance that requires active engagement to understand. In dyadic interaction, this imbalance is resolved through shared context and conventions, leading to clear communication. However, in the text-reader relationship, this imbalance remains undefined, which allows for a wider range of interpretations and communication possibilities.

Iser explains that for communication between a text and a reader to be successful, the text must guide the reader in some way, though not as directly as in face-to-face conversations. Unlike social codes that clearly govern interactions, the control in reading is more subtle. The text doesn't explicitly control the reader, but it sets up certain elements that stimulate communication and understanding.

Iser uses Virginia Woolf's comment on Jane Austen's novels to illustrate this point. Woolf says that Jane Austen's novels seem simple on the surface, but they actually provoke deeper emotions and thoughts in the reader. Austen leaves gaps in her stories—what is unsaid in the dialogue—that compel the reader to fill in those gaps with their own thoughts and projections. These unsaid elements, or implications, make the simple scenes seem more meaningful and profound. The "enduring form of life" Woolf mentions is not directly written in the text but comes to life in the reader's mind through their interaction with the text. In essence, the meaning of a text emerges not just from what is written but from the reader's active participation in interpreting what is unsaid, filling in the gaps, and giving new significance to the story.

Iser explains that communication in literature works through a dynamic interaction between what is explicitly stated in the text and what is left unsaid. This relationship is not controlled by a fixed code, but by the balance between revelation

(what is shown) and concealment (what is hidden). What is concealed pushes the reader to think and interpret, while what is revealed guides their understanding. As the reader fills in the gaps in the text, the meaning begins to unfold. The gaps act as a central point that drives the entire process of communication between the text and the reader.

3.1.4.2 Check your progress:

1. What drives the interaction in reading, according to Iser?
   a. Fixed meaning b. Lack of shared context
   c. Explicit control d. Social conventions
2. What creates the "gaps" in reading?
   a. Reader's misunderstanding b. Text's inability to directly communicate
   c. Authorial intention d. Absence of conventions
3. What does Virginia Woolf highlight about Jane Austen's novels?
   a. They lack emotional depth. b. Their gaps provoke deeper thoughts.
   c. They provide fixed interpretations. d. Their meaning is fully explicit.
4. How does Woolf describe the "enduring form of life" in Austen's novels?
   a. Written clearly in the text b. Revealed through explicit dialogue
   c. Emerging from the reader's interaction d. Guided by strict conventions
5. How does meaning in literature emerge?
   a. Solely from the text b. Through reader's active interpretation
   c. From authorial intention d. Using shared social norms

3.1.5.1 Negation, Blanks, and Perspectives in Text-Reader Interaction:

Iser also highlights another important element in the text-reader interaction: negation. In a text, negations (things that are denied or contradicted) help shape the reader's understanding. Negation often introduces familiar ideas or concepts, only to cancel them out, which challenges the reader's assumptions. Even though these negations cancel out certain elements, they still remain visible in the reader's mind, altering how they view the familiar concepts. This process leads the reader to reconsider their position or attitude toward what is being presented in the text, guiding them to adopt a deeper or more nuanced understanding.

Iser focuses on how the "blanks" in a text—what is left unsaid or unexplained—trigger and guide the reader's thinking. These blanks are like invisible connections between different parts of the text, guiding the reader to link various ideas and perspectives, even though the text doesn't directly tell them to do so. The blanks act as hidden "joints" within the text that prompt the reader to engage in the process of ideation (thinking and interpreting). As the reader connects the ideas and fills in the gaps, these blanks gradually "disappear," because the reader has made sense of them by linking the different parts of the text. In this way, the blanks control the reader's activity by guiding them through the process of making connections and creating meaning.

Iser explains that to understand the hidden structure of a text, we need to pay attention to how the different parts of the story are presented to the reader. The most basic way this happens is through the plot. The story may suddenly shift, with the narrative stopping unexpectedly or changing direction. Sometimes, a section of the story focuses on one character, only to be followed by the introduction of new characters. These changes are often marked by new chapters, which help distinguish different parts of the text. However, the purpose of this division is not to separate these parts, but to encourage the reader to find the connections between them. Also, during the reading process, the reader only sees certain parts of the text at any given time, and their attention moves between these different perspectives as they read. This shift in perspective and sudden changes are part of how the text guides the reader to create meaning.

Further in the essay, Iser explains that a narrative text is made up of different perspectives that shape the meaning of the story. These perspectives include the narrator's viewpoint, the characters' viewpoints, the plot's direction, and the viewpoint of a fictional reader (a reader imagined by the author). Each of these perspectives helps convey the author's message, but none of them alone is enough to fully understand the text. The meaning comes from how these perspectives interact and weave together in the reader's mind as they read.

As the text unfolds, these perspectives often become more complex and divided. For example, the narrator's perspective may be split into that of the implied author (what the author wants to convey) and the narrator's own voice. The hero's perspective may be contrasted with that of minor characters, and even the fictitious reader's perspective can be divided into the explicit (what is clearly shown) and

implicit (what is suggested but not directly stated). This increase in complexity and "blanks" (things left unsaid or unclear) forces the reader to actively fill in the gaps and connect the different perspectives to make sense of the narrative.

3.1.5.2 Check your progress:

1. What is the role of negation in a text?

   a. Introduces new ideas b. Cancels familiar concepts

   c. Simplifies the text d. Clarifies the plot

2. How do blanks affect the reader?

   a. They create confusion b. They guide thinking and interpretation

   c. They are ignored by the reader d. They separate parts of the text

3. What is the fictional reader?

   a. The reader's real viewpoint b. The character in the story

   c. An imagined reader by the author d. The narrator's voice

4. What does the narrator's perspective split into?

   a. The hero's view

   b. The implied author and narrator's voice

   c. A new character's perspective

   d. The fictional reader's thoughts

5. What does Iser mean by the "hidden structure" of a text?

   a. The parts of the story that are easy to understand

   b. The unexplained or implied connections between elements

   c. The plot points that are directly stated

   d. The physical layout of the text

3.1.6.1 Blanks, Vacancies, and the Creation of Meaning in Text:

As the reader moves their attention between different parts of the text, the constant shifts in perspective create a network of views. Each perspective gives not only a glimpse of other parts of the story but also of the central idea or theme

(referred to as the “imaginary object”). No single perspective in the text can fully represent this central idea; it only shows one part of it. The overall meaning or object emerges from the connections between these perspectives. These connections are largely shaped and guided by the “blanks” or gaps in the text, which the reader fills in, helping to form the full understanding of the text.

To explain how the “blanks” work in a text, let’s first look at how they function and then give an example to make it clearer. As the reader goes through the text, different parts of the story, such as the characters, narrator, plot, and fictional reader’s perspective, come into focus one by one. These parts are not only arranged in a sequence but also reflect and influence each other. The “blank” acts as a gap between these sections, helping to link them together. This gap creates a space where the reader can connect the different parts and understand how they relate to each other. Whenever there are at least two connected ideas or viewpoints, a “referential field” is created. This field helps the reader make sense of the text by providing a framework for understanding. It is the basic unit that helps the reader navigate through the text and build meaning.

The first important role of the “blank” is that it helps organize the text by creating a space where different parts of the story (such as characters, narrator, plot, etc.) can interact with each other. These parts are all equally important and are brought together in a way that shows both their similarities and differences. This creates a kind of tension, which needs to be resolved. As Arnheim pointed out, “It is one of the functions of the third dimension to come to the rescue when things get uncomfortable in the second,” meaning when the different parts of the text seem disconnected, a new perspective is needed to make sense of them.

The “third dimension” here refers to the framework that the reader creates to understand these connections. This framework is also a “blank,” meaning it’s not fully explained by the text and requires the reader to fill it in. At first, the blank simply connects the different parts of the text, showing how they relate to each other. But once the connections are made, the blank becomes the unspoken structure that helps the reader form a clearer understanding of how the parts fit together. This shift in the blank’s role shows that it controls how the reader understands and connects the different parts of the text.

The third and most important function of the "blank" is explained here. Once the different parts of the text have been connected and their relationships understood, a specific moment in the reading process is created. This moment has its own structure. As the reader moves through the text, their viewpoint shifts between different parts or perspectives. The segment that the reader focuses on at any given moment becomes the "theme" of that moment. The theme of one moment becomes the background for the next segment, which then becomes the new theme. When a segment becomes the theme, the previous one loses its importance and becomes less relevant. This space, or "blank," is often filled by the reader, allowing them to focus on the new theme.

In this context, it's better to think of the "marginal" or "horizontal" positions as "vacancies" rather than "blanks." While blanks refer to parts of the text that are connected but not fully explained, vacancies refer to sections of the text that are not currently part of the main theme. Vacancies are important because they guide the reader in shaping the aesthetic experience of the text. They help the reader understand how a new theme relates to the previous ones. However, these connections aren't directly given in the text—they are created by the reader's own thinking and imagination. The reader uses these vacancies to link different parts of the text, creating a field of understanding. This process allows the reader to connect different ideas, themes, and perspectives, transforming them into the overall meaning or "aesthetic object" of the text. Here the author refers the "aesthetic object" as the final, complete understanding or interpretation of the text that the reader creates through their reading process. It is not something directly presented or fully formulated in the text itself, but rather a product of the reader's engagement with the text.

3.1.6.2 Check your progress:

1. What role do shifts in perspective play in a text?
   a) Simplify the story
   b) Create a network of views
   c) Make the central idea clearer
   d) Eliminate the need for interpretation
2. How is the "central idea" or "imaginary object" formed in a text?
   a) From one clear perspective
   b) From the connections between different perspectives
   c) From a single viewpoint

d) From the narrator's viewpoint alone

3. What is a "referential field"?

a) A summary of the plot

b) A space created by two connected ideas

c) The narrator's main message

d) A literal field described in the text

4. What does the "third dimension" refer to?

a) The actual physical text

b) The new perspective needed to connect parts of the text

c) The reader's emotional response

d) The narrator's voice

5. What is the "theme" of a moment in the reading process?

a) The most important character

b) The segment the reader focuses on at any time

c) The final message of the text

d) The unresolved question in the plot

3.1.7.1 Blanks and Perspectives in *Tom Jones*:

The "aesthetic object" can be understood through the way Fielding's *Tom Jones* presents contrasting character perspectives. The novel portrays the complexity of human nature by delineating the characters in that way. In *Tom Jones*, Fielding sets up contrasting characters with different moral or philosophical perspectives. For example**: 1)** Allworthy represents benevolence (goodness and kindness). **2)** Squire Western represents ruling passion (strong, often selfish desires). **3)** Square represents the idea of "the eternal fitness of things" (a philosophical outlook that everything should be in balance). **4)** Thwackum sees the human mind as inherently sinful (a negative view of human nature). These characters and their contrasting views reflect the norms and ideologies of 18th-century thought systems. These contrasts highlight the moral and philosophical debates in the story. These different perspectives create vacancies, or spaces in the text where the reader must fill in the connections. The reader's task is to use their own interpretation to connect these differing perspectives, creating a deeper understanding of the text as a whole. The aesthetic object here is

the meaningful image of human nature that the reader constructs by interpreting these gaps and connecting the contrasting characters' views.

In *Tom Jones*, the hero is connected to various ideas and systems from the 18th century, such as latitudinarian morality (a broad and tolerant approach to ethics), orthodox theology (traditional religious beliefs), deistic philosophy (the belief in a creator who does not intervene in the universe), eighteenth-century anthropology (the study of human societies and cultures during the 18th century), and eighteenth-century aristocracy (the social class of nobles during that time). These ideas are presented in contrast with each other through the perspectives of the hero and other characters, creating gaps or "missing links" that the reader must fill in. These gaps help the hero's actions and the societal norms he is linked with to shed light on each other, forming a bigger picture.

However, the hero's actions often don't fit neatly into these norms. Through the events of the story, these norms are reduced to simple representations of human nature. The reader must notice this connection for themselves because the text doesn't always directly explain it—although it is hinted at through the way the themes and backgrounds are set up.

As the hero's actions often go against these norms, the reader has to interpret the consequences in different ways. For instance, when the hero breaks the rules, it could be seen as showing that the norms are too narrow and fail to capture the complexity of human nature. Alternatively, the hero's violation might reveal the imperfections in human behavior, with the norms then shaping how we understand the situation. This process of changing viewpoints and themes shapes the reader's overall understanding of the story.

Further essay illustrates how characters and norms interact to shape meaning in Tom Jones. Characters like Allworthy, Squire Western, Square, and Thwackum represent specific principles or norms. These norms define human nature by focusing on one central idea, and anything that doesn't align with that idea is viewed negatively. For example, if a character's actions contradict the norms, they are seen as negative or flawed.

However, when these "neglected" possibilities—such as actions or traits that go against the norm—begin to influence the story and challenge the principle, the norms themselves are questioned. These previously negative actions show the limitations of

the norms and, in doing so, begin to cast doubt on them. The norms that were once presented as fixed and unquestionable start to seem restricted, and human nature becomes more complex, revealing the diversity of human experience that was previously suppressed.

Thus, the norms that once defined and controlled human behaviour are now seen not as absolute truths, but as restrictive, limiting how much of human nature they can capture. The reader begins to shift focus from what the norms represent to what they exclude—leading to the development of a fuller, more complex understanding of human nature. This shift allows the aesthetic object, or the complete picture of human nature, to emerge, showing the richness of experiences that were initially ignored or suppressed by the rigid norms.

In essence it can be understood that the author wants to highlight how the tension between character actions and societal norms helps to unfold the complexities of human nature, transforming what seems to be negative or restricted into a broader understanding of human experience.

The example describes how the perspectives of characters and their norms shift, changing the way we interpret actions and behaviours. When the norms (represented by characters like Allworthy, Squire Western, etc.) are the main focus, the hero's actions are seen through the lens of these norms, and his actions are judged according to them. However, when the hero himself becomes the main focus (the theme), and the norms of other characters act as the background, his spontaneous and good intentions are seen as impulsive and flawed.

This shift in perspective transforms the hero's position. Instead of using the hero's perspective to judge the norms, we now see that even the best of intentions can fail without careful consideration. Spontaneity, which was once valued, now appears as a reckless quality that needs to be controlled by prudence (cautiousness and good judgment). Only when spontaneous actions are guided by prudence can they lead to success and self-preservation.

In simpler terms, the author wants to show how the role of the hero changes depending on the norms that surround him. When the norms dominate, the hero's actions seem to lack value. But when the hero is in the spotlight, his lack of caution and self-control becomes a flaw, teaching us that even good intentions must be tempered with careful thought.

3.1.7.2 Check your progress:

1. What does “aesthetic object” mean in Tom Jones?
   a. Physical beauty b. What the reader understands
   c. Moral lessons d. Perfect characters
2. Who believes in “the eternal fitness of things”?
   a. Squire Western b. Allworthy c. Square d. Thwackum
3. What does the hero’s impulsiveness teach?
   a. Spontaneity is best b. Rules don’t matter
   c. Prudence is important d. Recklessness is fine
4. What makes the reader’s interpretation unique?
   a. Their judgment of characters b. Their role in filling missing links
   c. Their focus on society’s rules d. Their agreement with the hero
5. What does Reader-Response Criticism emphasize in Tom Jones?
   a. The author’s intent b. The universal morality of the text
   c. The reader’s role in creating meaning d. The perfection of societal norms

3.1.8.1 Reader Participation and the Blank:

The essay explains how the changes in the way we understand the text are influenced by the relationship between the theme and the background in the narrative. As the reader moves through the text, each new theme (the focus of attention) is shaped by the previous segment, which acts as the background or marginal element. Once a theme is understood, it influences the reader’s perspective, creating a feedback loop that changes how the reader interprets the next segment.

This process is called hermeneutic, which refers to interpretation. It happens subtly and may not always be conscious. The vacancy (the empty space between segments that invites the reader to make connections) plays a key role in this transformation. It helps organize the structure of the narrative and guides the reader’s understanding. The vacancy ensures that the transformation of the text’s segments is not random but follows a logical and structured pattern. This self-regulating process is crucial for creating meaningful interaction between the text and the reader.

In simple terms, the blank in a fictional text plays an important role in guiding how the reader understands and interacts with the story. It represents a gap or an

empty space between different perspectives in the text, indicating the need for connections between them. This gap forces the reader to link different parts of the story, creating a referential field – a space where various perspectives interact and influence each other.

As the reader moves through the story, they focus on one perspective at a time (the theme), while the other perspectives remain in the background, shaping how the reader views the main focus. These background perspectives influence the new themes and are also influenced by them. This process is reciprocal, meaning each theme influences the next one, and this feedback loop helps create a deeper understanding.

The reader's viewpoint is not random; it is guided by the changing positions of these "vacant" spots in the story. The reader fills these blanks, and by doing so, they help bring the story's deeper meaning to life. The blank shifts throughout the text, and its changing positions guide the reader's journey, helping them form a comprehensive view of the story, which ultimately leads to the creation of the aesthetic object – the full meaning or artistic experience of the text.

The author is explaining the concept of reader participation in a text, especially how the blank plays a central role in shaping the reader's engagement with the story. Reader participation is not just about the reader accepting or adopting the perspectives presented in the text, but rather about the reader actively connecting, interacting, and transforming those perspectives. As the reader makes these connections, a deeper understanding or aesthetic object starts to form.

The blank functions as a tool that organizes this participation, guiding the reader through a process that mirrors how they think and process information. The blank is described as a paradigmatic structure, meaning it acts as a model or a framework that structures how the reader's mind works while interacting with the text. By filling in the gaps, the reader brings different parts of the text into interaction, transforming each one and creating meaning.

The shifting blank plays a crucial role here by creating a sequence of images (ideas or scenes) that influence each other. These images are not static; they evolve as the reader moves through the text. Even though each new image or perspective is meant to resolve issues or contradictions from the previous one, it still retains traces of the earlier images. This sequence of evolving images helps create the overall

meaning of the text in the reader's mind, making the reading experience dynamic and alive.

3.1.8.2 Check your progress:

1. How does the relationship between theme and background affect the reader's understanding?
   a. Creates confusion b. Guides perspective
   c. Prevents change d. Eliminates interpretation
2. What is the process of hermeneutic in the context of the text?
   a. Random shifts b. Feedback loop
   c. Focus on setting d. Fixed structure
3. How does the reader contribute to the creation of the "aesthetic object"?
   a. Passively accepts b. Fills in gaps
   c. Focuses on theme d. Follows instructions
4. What is meant by the "shifting blank"?
   a. Fixed theme b. Evolving perspectives
   c. Character thoughts d. Sequence of actions
5. What is the purpose of the referential field created by the blank?
   a. Simplify plot b. Link perspectives
   c. Make narrative predictable d. Eliminate contradictions

3.1.9.1 Analysis of the Essay:

Wolfgang Iser's theory of the interaction between the text and the reader is a central concept in literary criticism that emphasizes how meaning in a literary work is not just encoded in the text itself but emerges through the reader's active participation. For students of literary criticism, understanding Iser's ideas helps explain the dynamic relationship between the text and the reader, which he calls the "co-creation of meaning." Below is a more explicit explanation of Iser's ideas in relation to text-reader interaction:

The Role of the Reader's Participation:

Iser argues that the meaning of a text is not pre-determined by the author, nor is it fixed within the text itself. Instead, readers bring the text to life through their active

engagement. Literary meaning is co-constructed through the reader's participation in the interpretive process.

Reader participation means that the reader doesn't just absorb the content but engages deeply, filling in gaps, interpreting ambiguities, and actively constructing meaning as they read. Iser claims that the text's true meaning emerges in the reader's mind, not solely in the text itself.

The Importance of Gaps or "Blanks":

A crucial concept in Iser's theory is the "blank". These blanks are gaps or omissions in the text—places where information is missing or ambiguous. Iser believes that these blanks are essential for the reader's engagement because they create a space for the reader to fill in, allowing them to actively participate in the meaning-making process.

These gaps are not just accidental omissions; they are structural features that guide the reader in making connections and filling in the blanks. For example, an incomplete description of a character, an ambiguous event, or an unresolved plot point forces the reader to imagine, infer, or predict what might happen next, thereby shaping their interpretation.

Creation of Meaning:

According to Iser, meaning is not inherent in the text but is created by the interaction between the text and the reader. The text provides a framework of ideas, themes, and structures, but it is the reader who actively fills in the gaps, interprets the narrative, and creates meaning.

This process is dynamic and continuous. As the reader progresses through the text, their understanding is constantly reshaped, deepened, or reinterpreted based on the information they encounter. Each segment or "blank" in the text invites the reader to reconsider the previous segments, leading to a constantly evolving interpretation.

The Referencing Field:

Iser introduces the idea of a "referential field," a mental space where the reader's interpretations of the text interact with each other. This field is organized by the shifting perspectives in the narrative and the blanks that exist between them.

The referential field is constructed as the reader engages with different textual segments. For example, when a segment or theme is introduced, it becomes the "foreground" of the reader's focus. Earlier segments recede into the background, but their influence on the interpretation of later segments continues.

The reader's focus constantly shifts from one segment to another, and the meaning of each segment is transformed as it is seen in relation to others. This creates a holistic interpretation where no segment is understood in isolation but as part of a larger, interconnected whole.

The Aesthetic Object:

For Iser, the aesthetic object is the ultimate meaning that emerges as a result of the reader's interaction with the text. It's not a fixed object within the text but a product of the reader's active engagement.

The aesthetic object is shaped by the sequence of interpretations and connections the reader makes, using the framework of themes, blanks, and the shifting referential field. The reader fills the gaps, connects the dots, and thus constructs a personalized and dynamic interpretation of the text.

Iser's aesthetic object is fluid and open—it's not something that is given but something that is created through the reader's imaginative and intellectual involvement with the text.

The Hermeneutic Process:

Iser describes the interaction between text and reader as a hermeneutic process—meaning that interpretation is a constant, ongoing exchange between the reader and the text.

This process is not passive. As the reader engages with the text, they interpret, re-interpret, and adjust their understanding based on new information, perspectives, and connections they make as they read. The text itself doesn't provide all the answers but leaves gaps that require the reader to engage in active interpretation.

Feedback loops occur in which the reader's understanding of one segment influences their interpretation of subsequent ones. This creates a constantly evolving understanding of the text, leading to meaning creation that is always in flux.

The Theme-and-Background Structure:

The theme-and-background structure is one of Iser's core ideas for how the reader engages with the text. Each narrative moment in the text presents a theme (a foregrounded idea or segment), and background (previously introduced segments) that condition and influence the new theme.

As readers shift their focus to new themes, they reinterpret the earlier background segments in light of the new information. Each theme becomes a "lens" through which the background is viewed, and the background, in turn, shapes how the new theme is understood.

This shifting of focus from theme to background and back creates a dynamic relationship between the reader's interpretations of different segments, allowing for reciprocal transformations in the meaning of the text.

Reciprocal Transformation:

Reciprocal transformation refers to the way in which the textual segments interact with one another through the reader's shifting viewpoints. Each segment does not exist in isolation but is transformed as the reader moves between different perspectives and themes.

For example, a character's actions might appear ambiguous or negative until the reader has more context or new information, at which point their understanding changes. These reciprocal transformations enrich the meaning of the text, showing how the text's meaning is never fixed but continuously shaped through the reader's engagement with it.

Thus, Iser's theory emphasizes that the reader is not a passive consumer of meaning but a co-creator of the text's meaning. The blanks or gaps in the text serve as invitations for the reader to actively participate in the construction of meaning. The text itself does not offer a fixed meaning; instead, it offers a framework that the reader fills in through their interpretive activity. This interactive process gives rise to the aesthetic object, which is the final meaning that emerges from the reciprocal interaction between the text and the reader's interpretive process.

For students of literary criticism, Iser's theory is essential because it redefines the role of the reader in the act of interpretation, emphasizing that meaning is not found but made. The interaction between the text and reader is dynamic, creative,

and ever-changing, making the process of reading a deeply personal and interpretive act.

3.1.9.2 References used in Wolfgang Iser's Interaction between Text and Reader

Husserl's Phenomenology

Iser draws heavily on Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, particularly the concept of intentionality—the idea that consciousness is always directed toward an object. This framework underpins Iser's claim that a text does not exist as a fixed entity but becomes meaningful only through the reader's interaction with it. The "intentional object" (what the text represents) is formed in the mind of the reader through a dynamic process of interpretation. Husserl's influence allows Iser to emphasize the active role of the reader in creating meaning and the importance of the reader's perspective in filling in gaps (or indeterminacies) in the text.

Roman Ingarden's Theory of Aesthetic Objects

Iser builds on the ideas of Roman Ingarden, a key figure in phenomenological aesthetics, who argued that literary texts are "schematic" and require the reader to "concretize" them. For Ingarden, the text is a structure with layers, including linguistic, semantic, and schematic aspects. It contains "places of indeterminacy" that the reader must fill in to create a complete aesthetic experience. Iser expands this idea to argue that meaning is not embedded in the text itself but emerges as the reader interprets and fills in these gaps, thus engaging in an interactive process with the text.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutics

Hans-Georg Gadamer's ideas about interpretation and the fusion of horizons are central to Iser's argument. Gadamer claimed that understanding involves a dialogue between the reader's historical context and the world of the text. This dialogic process creates new meanings that go beyond the author's intent or the reader's preconceptions. Iser incorporates Gadamer's concept to stress that the act of reading is inherently subjective and historical, shaped by the reader's background, expectations, and imagination.

Gestalt Psychology

Iser references Gestalt psychology, which emphasizes that perception is an active process of organizing sensory input into meaningful wholes. This principle is

applied to literary texts: the reader perceives the text not as a collection of isolated details but as an interconnected structure, actively filling gaps to form a coherent interpretation. This framework supports Iser's claim that the reader's role involves synthesizing textual elements and resolving ambiguities to form a gestalt or unified meaning.

Reception Theory (Hans Robert Jauss)

Hans Robert Jauss, a fellow advocate of reception theory, influenced Iser's view of literature as a dynamic interaction between text and reader. Jauss emphasized that the reader's historical and cultural context affects how a text is understood. Iser extends Jauss's ideas to argue that texts are not static; their meanings change as new readers encounter them in different contexts, contributing to their reception history.

Structuralism and Semiotics (Saussure and Eco)

Iser engages indirectly with ideas from Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics and Umberto Eco's semiotics. The text, as a system of signs, has inherent structures that guide but do not dictate interpretation. The reader interprets these signs to construct meaning. By referencing these ideas, Iser highlights the text's polysemy (multiple possible meanings) and the reader's creative role in navigating these interpretive possibilities.

The Role of Fiction in Aesthetic Theory (Kant and Schiller)

Iser also draws on broader aesthetic theories, including Immanuel Kant's and Friedrich Schiller's ideas about imagination and aesthetic judgment. Fiction is not bound by reality, allowing the reader to explore possibilities beyond their immediate experience. These references reinforce Iser's argument that literature provides a space for imaginative engagement, encouraging readers to reflect on themselves and the world.

Conclusion:

Wolfgang Iser's essay redefines literature as an interactive process, where the reader actively participates in constructing meaning. The essay bridges phenomenology, hermeneutics, and psychology, emphasizing the dynamic, subjective, and contextual nature of reading. Ultimately, Iser shows that literature's true value lies in its ability to engage readers in self-reflection and broaden their understanding of the world.

3.1.10 Broad Answer type Questions:

1. Discuss Wolfgang Iser's concept of the "implied reader" and its role in the reading process.
2. Explain Iser's idea of "gaps" or "blanks" in a literary text and how they influence the reader's interaction with the text.
3. Analyze Iser's claim that reading is a creative process involving both the text and the reader.
4. Discuss the relationship between the text's structure and the reader's imagination in Iser's theory.
5. How does Iser's essay challenge the traditional idea of a single, fixed meaning in literature?

3.1.11 Key

3.1.2.2.:	1. b),	2. c),	3. b),	4. b),	5. b)
3.1.3.2.:	1. c.,	2. c.,	3. b.,	4. c.,	5. b., 6. b.
3.1.4.2. :	1. b.,	2. b.,	3. b.,	4. c.,	5. b.
3.1.5.2.:	1. b),	2. b),	3. c),	4. b),	5. b)
3.1.6.2.:	1. b),	2. b),	3. b),	4. b),	5. b)
3.1.7.2.:	1. b.,	2. c.,	3. c.,	4. b.,	5. c.
3.1.8.2.:	1. b),	2. b),	3. b),	4. b),	5. b)

3.1.12 Further Reading:

Wolfgang Iser *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*

Stanley Fish – *Is There a Text in This Class?*

Jonathan Culler – *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature*

3.2 Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*

3.2.1 Introduction:

Harold Bloom's essay *The Anxiety of Influence* explores the psychological conflict that poets experience when grappling with the legacy of their literary predecessors. Bloom argues that poets are often haunted by the works of earlier

writers, leading to what he calls the "anxiety of influence." This anxiety manifests as a subconscious struggle, where poets feel compelled to either consciously or unconsciously misread, revise, or distort the works of their forerunners in order to establish their own originality and identity. Bloom introduces the concept of misprision, a deliberate act of misinterpretation, as a way for poets to assert their independence while still being shaped by their literary inheritance. The essay suggests that this tension between influence and independence is central to the creative process, emphasizing the psychological complexity involved in literary creation.

3.2.2 From *The Anxiety of Influence* (Introduction. A Meditation upon Priority, and a Synopsis):

3.2.2.1 Misprision, Tradition, and the Poet's Struggle for Originality:

Harold Bloom is a complex figure in literary criticism, often described as both a cantankerous rebel and a staunch traditionalist. He navigates a tension between defending the literary tradition and challenging those who want to break from it. For Bloom, the tradition of great writers is both a blessing and a curse—it's something we can't escape, yet it defines the path poets must take. He is critical of those who wish to undermine or abandon the literary canon, the collection of works deemed foundational to Western literature, while also fighting to ensure the "strong" poets maintain their central place in literary history.

Bloom's argument centers on the idea that we, as readers and writers, are "belated" sons—we arrive late into a literary tradition that has already been established by great poets. We will never surpass our literary forebears, but it is crucial for us to deny our inferiority in order to create something original. This relationship to tradition mirrors Sigmund Freud's Oedipal conflict: just as sons rebel against their fathers to define themselves, poets must rebel against the poets who came before them to establish their own voices.

Bloom's idea of "misprision" (a term meaning misunderstanding or misinterpretation) is central to his view of poetry. He argues that to create, a poet must misinterpret previous works. Each poem is a misreading of earlier poems, and this process of misunderstanding allows the poet to assert their individuality. According to Bloom, criticism is also a form of misinterpretation, and there's no real distinction between what poets do and what critics do—both are engaged in acts of

misreading. In his “Manifesto of Antithetical Criticism,” Bloom claims that all criticism alters the text it interprets, even when it aims to be faithful. This connection between poetry and criticism led Bloom to be associated with deconstructive theory, though his focus is on the psychological struggle for self-creation, rather than a postmodern rejection of selfhood.

Bloom sees poets as seeking immortality through their work, attempting to replace nature and earlier poems with their own creations. However, this goal is complicated by an inevitable ambivalence: poets are influenced by their predecessors, yet must deny this influence to claim originality. Bloom labels this conflict the “anxiety of influence”—a tension that every poet faces when trying to define themselves in relation to those who came before.

Bloom’s notion of “revisionary ratios” refers to six strategies poets use to revise and challenge the works of their precursors. These strategies allow the poet to maintain a relationship with tradition while asserting their own voice. Great poetry emerges from the tension between contraction (the act of revising or misreading) and expansion (the creative act of writing). Bloom admires those poets who manage to assert their individuality through this radical revision of tradition.

Ultimately, Bloom argues that the literary tradition is so deeply ingrained in us that we cannot escape it, even if we try. He believes that the tradition is both unitary (it forms a continuous, cohesive whole) and conflicted (it contains tension and contradictions). For Bloom, the role of the critic is to defend this tradition and to highlight the greatness of poets who have achieved true originality within it, often in contrast to those who challenge or dilute it.

Bloom’s work is controversial, as it emphasizes competition, aggression, and individual self-assertion, all of which have been critiqued by other critics, such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who favor more collaborative and nurturing relationships in literature. Some also criticize Bloom’s ahistoricism, the idea that the Oedipus complex applies universally to all families and poets across history, which may oversimplify complex cultural and historical dynamics.

In sum, Bloom’s work offers a vision of literature as a battleground where poets, through acts of misreading and misinterpretation, carve out their own space in a tradition that is both constraining and empowering.

3.2.2.2 Check your Progress:

1. What does “misprision” mean?
   a. Misunderstanding b. Rewriting
   c. Memorization d. Tradition
2. How does a poet establish their own voice?
   a. Copy the past b. Misinterpret earlier works
   c. Follow tradition d. Agree with predecessors
3. What connects poets and critics in Bloom’s view?
   a. Similarity b. Misinterpretation
   c. Repetition d. Truth
4. What are “revisionary ratios”?
   a. Poet strategies b. Critical methods
   c. Historical facts d. Literary genres
5. What is the goal of the “strong” poet?
   a. Follow tradition b. Be immortal
   c. Write together d. Learn history

3.2.3.1 Introduction

Harold Bloom introduces his theory of poetic influence, emphasizing that poetic history is shaped by intra-poetic relationships—the complex interactions and tensions between poets. He aims to de-idealize traditional views of influence, which often portray it as a smooth, harmonious process, by showing that poets often misread their predecessors to assert their own voices. This misreading is not a failure but a necessary creative act that clears space for new poetic expression. According to Bloom, poetic influence is thus inseparable from poetic history, with strong poets creating their legacy through these competitive, sometimes antagonistic, relationships.

Harold Bloom further discusses the challenges faced by strong poets—those with the talent and determination to engage deeply with their precursors. Bloom contrasts these poets with weaker figures, who tend to idealize their predecessors rather than challenge them. He argues that self-appropriation, the process by which a poet tries to create their own identity through influence, is fraught with anxiety,

because no poet wants to admit that they are not truly independent or original. Bloom uses Oscar Wilde as an example, noting how Wilde struggled with the anxiety of influence and was aware of how his own work reflected that of earlier poets, especially in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, which echoed Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and other Romantic poets. Wilde, understanding this tension, famously wrote that influence is a painful transference of personality, where the disciple takes something valuable from the master, resulting in a sense of loss. Wilde further expressed his bitterness in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, where he claimed that influence is immoral because it robs the influenced person of their individuality. According to Wilde, when a person is influenced, they lose their ability to think or feel for themselves, becoming an echo of another's thoughts and passions. This passage illustrates the deep anxiety and sense of loss that can accompany influence, as well as the struggle for originality that poets must confront when engaging with the weight of tradition.

Harold Bloom explores the complex dynamics of poetic influence, focusing on how poets, particularly those like Wilde and Stevens, attempt to assert their individuality and deny the extent of their dependence on past poets. Bloom begins by referring to Wilde's review of Pater's *Appreciations*, in which Wilde claims that Pater has "escaped disciples," a remark that reflects the tendency of major aesthetic figures to deny any debt to their predecessors, despite the obvious influence they receive. Bloom uses this to illustrate a broader tendency among poets to deny the obligation they owe to earlier figures, a denial that becomes more pronounced as each generation of poets struggles to assert their own originality.

Bloom then discusses Wallace Stevens, a poet who, like Wilde, insists on his independence from past influences. In his letters, Stevens vehemently denies being influenced by poets like Coleridge, Wordsworth, or even modernists like Eliot and Pound, claiming that his "reality-imagination complex" is entirely his own. He expresses disdain for critics who attempt to identify influences and echoes in a poet's work, seeing such criticism as a misguided attempt to reduce poetry to a collection of imitations rather than an individual voice. Stevens' view is presented as an example of how poets sometimes go to extreme lengths to reject the idea of poetic influence, even to the point of self-deception.

However, Bloom argues that poetic influence is not necessarily detrimental to a poet's originality. In fact, influence often makes poets more original, even if it does

not always make them "better." Bloom introduces the concept of poetic misprision, a term he uses to describe the way poets reinterpret and revise the works of their predecessors. This process is not merely about tracing sources or ideas but involves the life-cycle of the poet-as-poet, which Bloom compares to Freud's family romance—a psychological model in which the poet's relationship to previous poets mirrors familial dynamics, full of tension and reinterpretation. Bloom acknowledges that the history of poetic influence is deeply intertwined with the modern poet's sense of melancholy—a kind of existential anxiety born from the Enlightenment's skepticism about its intellectual heritage. This skepticism stems from the dual inheritance poets carry: the classical tradition of the ancients and the Renaissance masters.

Bloom deliberately shifts focus from the historical study of influence, as explored by critics like W. J. Bate, to the intra-poetic relationships between poets, framing these interactions as a kind of family romance. He revises Freud's theories to highlight the competitive and creative tensions between poets, rather than focusing solely on the Freudian idea of family dynamics. Through this, Bloom emphasizes that poetic influence is a central, ongoing process that shapes the development of poetry, not just as a historical or intellectual exchange, but as an intimate, often fraught relationship between poets.

Harold Bloom traces the influences of Nietzsche and Freud on his theory of poetic influence, while also critiquing their views on the artist's relationship to influence. He acknowledges Nietzsche as a major influence, particularly for his focus on the antithetical, or oppositional, nature of human creativity, and sees Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* as a profound exploration of the tension between asceticism and artistic revision. Bloom also draws from Freud, particularly his studies of defense mechanisms and the concept of sublimation, which Bloom uses as an analogy for how poets revise and engage with their predecessors. However, Bloom criticizes both Nietzsche and Freud for underestimating the nature of poets and poetry. He rejects Nietzsche's more abstract, philosophical approach to influence and sublimation, and he challenges Freud's optimistic view that emotional development can involve the substitution of earlier attachments with more mature forms of desire. Bloom believes that poets cannot accept such substitutions—they must fight to preserve their initial creative impulse rather than seek relief in second chances or substitution.

Bloom further critiques Freud's concept of sublimation, which he aligns with Platonic and Christian ideals of emotional growth, where lower desires are exchanged for more refined or spiritual modes. Bloom argues that for the strong poets, such substitution does not lead to true artistic creation. Instead, sublimation in poetry represents a surrendered dream, a longing for immortality that cannot be replaced by pragmatic wisdom. Bloom uses Wordsworth's *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* to illustrate this point, suggesting that while Wordsworth recognizes the role of repetition and sublimation in development, his ode ultimately grapples with failure and the tyranny of time, reflecting the anxiety of influence. For Bloom, the poem's strength lies in its protest against time and its ability to acknowledge the failure inherent in the poet's struggle against earlier, greater works, such as Milton's *Lycidas*. In this context, Bloom emphasizes that the strong poet cannot accept simple substitution; rather, they must wrestle with their predecessors, even if it means facing defeat, in order to preserve the originality of their artistic vision. The anxiety of influence is central to this struggle, as poets fight not just with time, but with the overwhelming presence of past masterpieces.

Harold Bloom argues that the poet's journey begins with a profound rebellion against the inevitability of death, a rebellion more intense than that experienced by other people. The poet, or ephebe, as Bloom refers to them (a term taken from Ancient Athens), is inherently an anti-natural or antithetical figure, seeking something impossible—just as their precursors did before them. Bloom sees this quest as an essential part of the poetic process, but he also believes that it leads to the diminishment of poetry over time. According to Bloom, literary history shows that the great poets of the English Renaissance are not matched by their descendants in the Enlightenment, and this decline continues through the Romantic, Modernist, and post-Modernist movements. He suggests that poetry's death will not be a sudden event but rather a gradual self-destruction, brought about by its own past achievements.

Bloom implies a tragic element in this process, suggesting that Romanticism, despite its brilliance, may have been a tragic and self-baffling endeavor, akin to the myth of Oedipus. In this analogy, the poet's relationship to their predecessors is like Oedipus's blindness to the truth about his fate; poets are blind to the muse that is their precursor-poem, and their struggle is marked by this blindness. However, like Oedipus, poets eventually transform their blindness into a form of insight, revising

the works of their precursors to create something new. Bloom refers to these revisionary movements as a key part of the poet's life-cycle, which he sees as the process through which one poet deviates from another. He identifies six such movements, which he considers minimal and essential to understanding poetic development, though he acknowledges that the number and names of these movements could be different. The six movements are derived from various Western traditions, and Bloom hopes they will offer a useful framework for understanding how poets evolve in response to their predecessors.

Harold Bloom explains why he excludes Shakespeare from the central argument of his book, despite acknowledging Shakespeare's immense stature as the greatest poet in the English language. Bloom argues that Shakespeare belongs to an earlier age—before the anxiety of influence became a significant concern in poetic consciousness. Additionally, Shakespeare's work falls outside the scope of his theory because his primary precursor, Marlowe, was a poet of lesser stature, making the influence between them not comparable to the intense struggles between strong equals. Bloom contrasts this with poets like Milton, who had to grapple with a more dominant precursor in Spenser, or Coleridge, who struggled with Milton and Wordsworth. For Bloom, the key focus of his study is the dynamic between strong poets and their major precursors, who are often "composite figures" rather than singular, overwhelming influences. He stresses that the battle between strong equals—similar to the mythological conflict between Laius and Oedipus—is the essence of poetic influence, and that his concern is exclusively with the poet in a poet, the internal struggle of the poetic self.

Bloom then moves on to suggest how this revised understanding of poetic influence can offer new insights into literary history. He uses the example of the Victorian disciples of Keats—Tennyson, Arnold, Hopkins, and Rossetti—to demonstrate how the influence of Keats shaped their poetry in different ways. Bloom argues that Tennyson triumphed over these poets, not necessarily because of his superiority to Keats, but because he "held his own" in comparison to their relative defeats in the face of Keats's legacy. In contrast, Arnold's poetry blends Keatsian style with anti-Romantic sentiment, while Hopkins' and Rossetti's works are marked by tensions that reflect their struggle with Keats's influence. Bloom further extends this analysis to the Modernist poets, specifically Pound and Stevens, both of whom

had ongoing, often hidden, battles with their Romantic predecessors, including Browning, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Emerson, and Whitman.

Bloom's ultimate goal is to offer a more accurate reading of poetic history, grounded in the anxiety of influence and the way poets respond to their predecessors. He acknowledges that his approach reflects his own critical vision and personal anxieties, shaped by the challenges of his own time. Bloom finds strength in the contemporary works of poets like A. R**.** Ammons and John Ashbery, whose poems confront the death of poetry and the challenges of being late-comers in a long poetic tradition. He also critiques the limitations of contemporary literary criticism, particularly Formalist criticism, Archetypal criticism, and certain trends in European criticism, which he believes fail to engage meaningfully with individual poems. In response, Bloom proposes a more antithetical practical criticism that can better address these issues, drawing from the contemporary critiques of scholars like Angus Fletcher, Geoffrey Hartman, and Paul de Man. This new approach, according to Bloom, would offer a more dynamic and productive way of reading poetry, one that acknowledges the poet's battle with their precursors and the deep complexities of influence.

Harold Bloom outlines a theory of poetry that is deeply rooted in aphorism and mythic patterns, drawing from both traditional and personal sources. He asserts that the book itself is a form of argument, with its various elements—parables, definitions, and the exploration of revisionary ratios—working together to meditate on the melancholy of the creative mind's desperate insistence on priority. Bloom connects this to the ideas of Giambattista Vico, who viewed all of creation as a severe poem, arguing that priority in the natural order and authority in the spiritual order must be unified for poets. For Vico, this unity of priority and authority is essential to Poetic Wisdom, and he reduces both to property, in a Hermetic sense that Bloom aligns with the concept of Ananke—the unavoidable, dreadful necessity that governs the Western imagination.

Bloom also references Valentinus, a second-century Gnostic thinker who proposed that the ultimate spiritual state, called the Pleroma or "Fullness," involves a divine unity where understanding of the Father is unknowable. Valentinus's teachings suggest that the search for something already inherent is the most fated of quests, a theme that resonates with the poet's quest for originality. For Bloom, the strong poet's Muse, symbolized by Sophia (wisdom), embodies this solipsistic

search, as the poet seeks something beyond their own understanding, but the quest itself is often futile—an endless loop within the Unconditioned Mind, or the cosmic framework inhabited by the greatest poets after Milton.

He concludes by describing the fall of the poet into what Valentinus termed the Dark Intention, an essential but powerless force within the Pleroma that gives rise to the poet's quest. According to Bloom, the ephebe (the young poet) must undergo this fall into darkness and passion, where they are both crippled and blinded. If they manage to emerge from this struggle, they become one of the strong poets, who are marked by their ability to wrestle with their precursors and overcome the inherent contradictions in their artistic journey. The imagery here highlights the poet's battle with their own limitations and the daunting task of finding originality within the constraints of tradition.

3.2.3.2 Check your Progress:

1. Which poet does Bloom use as an example of anxiety of influence?
   a. Byron b. Wilde c. Yeats d. Eliot
2. What term does Bloom use to describe how poets reinterpret their predecessors?
   a. Sublimation b. Misprision c. Influence d. Subliminal
3. Which poet is known for denying all influences, according to Bloom?
   a. Tennyson b. Stevens c. Wordsworth d. Coleridge
4. Who is NOT mentioned by Bloom as a poet who struggles with influence?
   a. Hopkins b. Keats c. Coleridge d. Blake
5. What is the "Pleroma" in Bloom's theory?
   a. A style of poetry b. A poetic battle
   c. The divine unity of wisdom d. A poetic method
6. What are "revisionary ratios" in Bloom's theory?
   a. Imitation b. Challenges c. Innovations d. Revisions
7. What role does anxiety play in poetry?
   a. Hinders b. Ignored c. Promotes d. Solves
8. What does Bloom criticize about Freud's sublimation?
   a. Misunderstood b. Overused c. Misapplied d. Ignored

9. What is the “family romance” concept?

a. Harmony b. Rebellion c. Imitation d. Collaboration

10. Why does Bloom exclude Shakespeare?

a. Influence b. Precursor c. Originality d. Independence

3.2.4 (SYNOPSIS: SIX REVISIONARY RATIOS)

In this section, Harold Bloom introduces the concept of six revisionary ratios, which are central to his theory of poetic influence. These ratios represent the different ways in which poets react to, misread, or creatively reinterpret the works of their precursors in order to carve out their own space in the literary tradition. Bloom argues that these revisionary movements are essential to understanding how strong poets navigate the tension between their need for originality and their inevitable debt to the poets who came before them. The ratios are not fixed or rigid, but serve as a framework for examining the complex relationships between poets and their precursors, and how these relationships shape the development of poetry itself.

3.2.4.1 Clinamen:

Harold Bloom explains the concept of Clinamen, a term he uses to describe a specific type of poetic misreading or misprision. The term comes from the Roman poet Lucretius, where it refers to the swerve of atoms, a small, random deviation that enables change in the universe. Bloom adapts this idea to poetry, suggesting that a poet engages in a clinamen when they intentionally swerve away from the work of their precursor. This swerving happens when a poet reads their precursor’s poem in such a way that it appears to follow the same path up to a certain point, but then deviates at a key moment. The poet’s new work implies that the precursor poem, although accurate and powerful in many ways, should have swerved—taken a different turn at that moment, just as the new poem does. This swerve represents a corrective movement in the poet’s own writing, signalling that while the precursor’s influence is acknowledged, the poet must depart from it in order to forge their own original path. Thus, Clinamen is a deliberate, creative misreading that leads to a new, distinct direction in poetry.

3.2.4.2 Tessera:

Harold Bloom introduces the concept of Tessera, which he defines as both completion and antithesis. He borrows the term not from its use in mosaic-making,

where it refers to a small tile used in creating a larger picture, but from ancient mystery cults, where it signified a token of recognition—a fragment, such as a piece of pottery, that when combined with other fragments, would restore the whole vessel. Bloom applies this idea to poetry, suggesting that a poet engages in Tessera when they antithetically complete their precursor's work. This happens when a poet reads the precursor's poem and retains its essential terms or concepts but gives them a new meaning, as if the precursor failed to take the poem far enough. In this way, the poet doesn't just imitate or continue the precursor's work but reinterprets it, completing it in a new, often opposite direction. Tessera is, therefore, both a form of creative completion and a subtle contradiction that reshapes the precursor's ideas while still acknowledging their foundational role.

3.2.4.3 Kenosis:

Harold Bloom introduces the concept of Kenosis, which he describes as a breaking-device used by poets to create discontinuity with their precursor. He borrows the term from St**.** Paul, where it refers to the humbling or emptying-out of Jesus, who voluntarily relinquishes his divine status to become human. Bloom uses this idea to explain how a later poet might appear to empty themselves of their poetic power or inspiration, as though they are ceasing to be a poet altogether. However, this act of humbling is not a true or absolute loss. Instead, it occurs in relation to a precursor's poem of emptying, meaning that the later poet's apparent deflation or reduction is influenced by and mirrors the precursor's own act of poetic deflation. The poet seems to lose their imaginative power, but in doing so, they are still engaging with the precursor's work, which is also emptied or reduced. Therefore, the later poem is not as fully deflated as it may appear, since it is shaped by the precursor's own humbling. Kenosis thus represents a poetic surrender or deflation that is, paradoxically, still a form of engagement with the precursor's influence.

3.2.4.4 Daemonization:

Harold Bloom explains the concept of Daemonization, a process in which a later poet reacts to their precursor's Sublime by moving toward a personalized Counter-Sublime. The term Daemonization is drawn from Neo-Platonic philosophy, where a daemon is an intermediary being—neither fully divine nor human—that enters the adept to assist them. Bloom applies this idea to poetry, suggesting that the later poet opens themselves to what they perceive as a power in the precursor's work, but one

that does not belong to the precursor directly. Instead, this power is believed to come from a realm beyond the precursor, perhaps a higher or different level of existence. The later poet, in their own poem, positions their relationship to the precursor's work in such a way that it generalizes or abstracts the unique qualities of the earlier poem. This move essentially dissolves the distinctiveness of the precursor's Sublime, replacing it with a more personalized version of transcendence or power. Daemonization thus represents a poet's attempt to reclaim and reinterpret the strength of their precursor's work, but in a way that shifts its original significance and places it within the poet's own unique context.

3.2.4.5 Askesis:

Harold Bloom introduces the concept of Askesis, which refers to a process of self-purgation or self-discipline aimed at achieving a state of solitude. Bloom takes the term from ancient practices, particularly from pre-Socratic shamans like Empedocles, who engaged in rituals of purification and separation. For the later poet, Askesis is different from Kenosis, in that it is not about emptying oneself of poetic power but about curtailing or restricting part of one's own imaginative and human capabilities. The poet intentionally yields or limits part of their creative potential in order to distance themselves from others, including their precursor. In the poem, the poet achieves this by positioning their work in such a way that it causes the precursor's poem to undergo a similar process of Askesis, truncating or limiting its own poetic power. Essentially, both the later poet and the precursor experience a reduction in their imaginative endowment, though this process is driven by the later poet's desire to separate and define themselves more distinctly from their precursor. Askesis, therefore, is about self-imposed limitations and a kind of purification that leads to artistic independence.

3.2.4.6 Apophrades

Harold Bloom explains the concept of Apophrades, which refers to the return of the dead—a term taken from ancient Greek culture, where certain days were thought to be unlucky, as the dead would return to inhabit the homes they once lived in. Bloom uses this idea to describe a particular phase in a poet's development, where, in their final phase, the later poet appears to open their work once more to the precursor's influence. At first, this openness might seem as though the poet is revisiting their flooded apprenticeship, the earlier stage of their creative life when

they were heavily shaped by the precursor. However, the effect of this return is uncanny. Instead of merely re-embracing the precursor's style or themes, the later poet's work begins to mirror the precursor's signature style so closely that it seems as if the later poet has authored the precursor's characteristic works themselves. This phenomenon creates an eerie sense that the later poet has, in a way, become the precursor, or that the precursor's work is being recreated through the later poet's vision. Apophrades thus represents a moment when the poet, having fully internalized their precursor's influence, reaches a point where their own achievement is so deeply intertwined with the precursor's that it feels as though the two poets have merged creatively.

3.2.4.7 Check your progress:

1. What does "Clinamen" refer to in Bloom's theory?

   a. Reinterpretation b. Deviation c. Imitation d. Tradition

2. Which Roman poet inspired the concept of "Clinamen"?

   a. Horace b. Virgil c. Lucretius d. Ovid

3. What is the purpose of the "swerve" in Clinamen?

   a. To imitate b. To assert originality

   c. To acknowledge influence d. To copy

4. The term "Tessera" in Bloom's theory is borrowed from:

   a. Ancient poetry b. Mosaic-making

   c. Greek mythology d. Ancient mystery cults

5. Harold Bloom's concept of Kenosis is borrowed from:

   a. Plato b. Paul c. Aristotle d. Socrates

6. The concept of Daemonization is derived from:

   a. Stoicism b. Neo-Platonism

   c. Existentialism d. Empiricism

7. What is a Daemon in Neo-Platonic philosophy?

   a. Divine b. Human c. Intermediary d. Eternal

3.2.5.1 Interchapter: A Manifesto for Antithetical Criticism

In this part Harold Bloom introduces his vision for a new approach to literary criticism that challenges conventional methods. He argues for a criticism that is more dynamic and confrontational, focusing on the antithetical relationships between poets and their precursors. This approach emphasizes the struggles and conflicts that shape literary creation, rather than merely tracking influences or historical contexts. Bloom calls for a criticism that is deeply engaged with the individuality of poets and their works, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how poets revise and reimagine their predecessors. In this section, he lays out the principles of this revisionary criticism, aiming to make it both a practical and philosophical tool for analyzing poetry in a way that reflects the complexity and anxieties inherent in the creative process.

Harold Bloom outlines the nature of Antithetical Criticism, which he defines as a method of reading and interpreting poetry that focuses on the misinterpretations or swerve (clinamen) between poets and their predecessors. According to Bloom, every poet misreads their precursor in a way that creates an antithetical relationship. The first step of Antithetical Criticism is to understand how a poet's descendants misread their precursor, and then to read those descendants as if we were their disciples, learning how they revise their predecessors. However, true Antithetical Criticism begins when we compare these revisions, measuring the swerve or deviation between the first and second poets.

Bloom further argues that criticism, like poetry, is inherently antithetical because we cannot read a poet purely as a poet in isolation. Instead, we always read a poet in relation to their family romance—the network of influences and relationships that shape their work. For Bloom, reading a poet means understanding how they have been shaped by and have shaped other poets, rather than reducing their work to a set of themes, images, or psychological interpretations. He stresses that true poetic history is not about tracing influences in a linear, reductive way, but about understanding how poets suffered each other, much like how a person's life is shaped by their family or their displacement of familial relationships. Thus, reading poetry through Antithetical Criticism becomes an exercise in understanding the complex, revisionary relationship between poets, rather than simply analyzing themes or ideas in isolation.

Harold Bloom explores his theory of poetic influence and how poetry itself is essentially a misinterpretation or misreading of earlier works. Bloom asserts that every poem is a misinterpretation of a parent poem, and this misreading is not an overcoming of anxiety, but the anxiety itself. For Bloom, poetry is fundamentally about misunderstanding**,** misinterpretation, and misalliance—the poet's act of reading and reinterpreting the works of predecessors in a way that both preserves and deviates from their original meaning. This process of misreading or misprision is more radical and intense in poets than in critics, but Bloom emphasizes that it is a difference in degree, not kind. He argues that all criticism is essentially prose poetry, because critics, like poets, engage in misinterpretations, only their work is in prose.

Bloom compares the relationship between critics and poets by suggesting that critics have multiple precursors—not only poets but also other critics. In contrast, poets are often shaped by a smaller number of precursor poets, though, as literary history grows, poets' precursors increasingly include critics as well. The anxiety at the heart of poetry is the anxiety of influence, a feeling of being haunted or displaced by the work of predecessors. For Bloom, poetry is a family romance, with poets engaging in a romanticized (and sometimes incestuous) relationship with their literary forebears, always trying to overcome and revise them.

Bloom uses a metaphor of influence **as** influenza—a disease that infects poets, making them misinterpret and revise the work of earlier poets. Health in the context of influence, Bloom argues, would mean stasis or stagnation, which no poet could thrive in. He contrasts this idea with the notion that schizophrenia represents "bad poetry," because a schizophrenic lacks the strength **of** misprision—the deliberate, perverse act of misreading and revision that creates art.

Poetry, according to Bloom, is both contraction and expansion. The revisionary act, which is an act of misreading or deviation from the precursor poem, is a contraction, but the process of making poetry—of creating something new from the old—is expansive. The best critics, like Empson and Wilson Knight, are those who have engaged in the most profound antithetical misreadings, offering interpretations that swerve away from accepted readings.

Bloom suggests that the meaning of a poem is not a fixed thing but can only be understood in relation to other poems. These may include the precursor poem, the poem a poet writes as they read, rival poems (those written by poets of the same

tradition), or even poems that should have been written—the poems that could have been but never were.

Ultimately, Bloom argues that poetry is a poet's melancholy about their lack of priority—the sense that they have not created their own original self but are haunted by the works of their predecessors. Poems arise out of the illusion of freedom, the belief that the poet can find their own voice in relation to their precursors, even though the poem itself is a product of anxiety and misreading. This sense of melancholy is what drives the poet to write and revise, to make sense of their place in the tradition.

Bloom concludes by noting that criticism is a tautology, a form of self-reflection where the critic knows that their interpretations are both right and wrong. Criticism, like poetry, is about knowing the hidden roads between poems, tracing the paths that lead from one poet's work to another's. The critic, like the poet, is involved in a perpetual act of misreading and re-interpretation, a process that makes criticism itself a kind of poetry.

3.2.5.2 Check your progress:

1. What is the primary focus of Bloom's *Antithetical Criticism*?
   a) Influence b) Misreading c) History d) Themes
2. How does Bloom describe the relationship between poets and their predecessors in *Antithetical Criticism*?
   a) Linear b) Symbiotic c) Antithetical d) Isolated
3. What does Bloom mean by *misprision* in poetry?
   a) Misunderstanding b) Imitation c) Repetition d) Expansion
4. What metaphor does Bloom use to explain influence in poetry?
   a) Flame b) Disease c) Inheritance d) Battle
5. What does Bloom consider to be the "heart" of poetry?
   a) Creativity b) Anxiety c) Imagination d) Criticism
6. What does Bloom claim about the meaning of a poem?
   a) It is fixed b) It is definitive c) It is relative d) It is simple
7. Who does Bloom cite as the best critics who engage in profound misreadings?
   a) Empson b) Coleridge c) Plato d) Nietzsche

3.2.6 Glossary of Important terms:

1. **Anxiety of Influence**: The tension poets experience when they must both rebel against and be influenced by their precursors.
2. **Misprision**: Misunderstanding or misinterpretation, a necessary act for poets to assert their own voice.
3. **Oedipal Conflict**: The psychological struggle of sons rebelling against their fathers, applied to poets and their predecessors.
4. **Revisionary Ratios**: The strategies poets use to revise and reinterpret earlier works to assert their originality.
5. **Clinamen**: The "swerve" or deviation a poet makes from a precursor's work to create something new.
6. **Tessera**: Completing and antithetically revising a precursor's work by giving its terms a new meaning.
7. **Kenosis**: The act of self-emptying or humbling, where a poet seems to reduce themselves but is still influenced by the precursor.
8. **Daemonization**: Turning to a "Counter-Sublime" power in the precursor's work that the later poet believes was previously hidden.
9. **Askesis**: A movement of self-purging and curtailing to attain solitude and distance from the precursor's influence.
10. **Apophrades**: The return of the dead, where a poet revisits and inhabits the works of their precursors, seeming to create them anew.
11. **Self-creation**: The process by which a poet establishes their own identity by revising tradition.
12. **Belatedness**: The idea that poets (and readers) arrive late into a pre-existing literary tradition.
13. **Strong Poets**: Poets who assert their individuality by radically revising tradition.
14. **Influence**: The powerful impact a precursor's work has on a later poet, which the poet must resist in order to claim originality.

15. **Intertextuality**: The relationship between texts, where the meaning of one text is shaped by its connections to others.
16. **Cultural Studies**: A field of criticism that Bloom critiques for challenging traditional notions of literary greatness.
17. **Greatness**: The exceptional quality of a work or poet that endures over time and is recognized as transcendent.
18. **Ephebe**: The newcomer poet who struggles to define themselves in relation to their predecessors.
19. **Family Romance**: The psychological and literary concept where a writer's identity is shaped by their relationship to their literary "family"—their predecessors and influences.
20. **Misinterpretation**: The act of reading a text in a way that differs from its original meaning, which is essential for creating original poetry.
21. **Sublime**: A concept of overwhelming greatness or beauty, often associated with nature or artistic achievement, which poets must either embrace or challenge.
22. **Counter-Sublime**: A reaction against the traditional notion of the Sublime, where the poet finds a new, often darker or more personal, form of greatness.
23. **Rejection of Influence**: The poet's attempt to deny or subvert the influence of their precursors in order to claim their own voice.
24. **Poetic Wisdom**: The knowledge that poets acquire by engaging with and revising the tradition they inherit, often through conflict with their predecessors.
25. **Hermetic Reduction**: The process of reducing complex spiritual or philosophical ideas to simple, symbolic forms, as seen in the works of ancient mystery cults.
26. **Revisionary Movement**: The poet's conscious attempt to revise and reinterpret the works of their predecessors to create something new and original.
27. **Dialectic of Expansion and Contraction**: The dynamic process in which a poem both revises (contracts) and expands (innovates) in relation to the poet's precursors.

28. **Intellectual Autonomy**: The independence a poet must achieve by asserting their own creative voice against the influence of past poets.
29. **Poetic Lineage**: The tradition of poets who are linked through their works, creating a chain of influence that a later poet must navigate.
30. **Antithetical Criticism**: A critical approach that emphasizes the conflict between a poet and their precursors, viewing each poet's work as a deviation from the past.
31. **Literary Canon**: A set of works considered to be of the highest quality and most significant, which Bloom defends against revisionist approaches.
32. **Cultural Resentment**: Bloom's term for the attitude of critics who challenge the traditional literary canon, often associated with ideological criticisms that question the "greatness" of past works.
33. **Plato's Ideal Forms**: Philosophical conceptions of perfect, unchanging forms of beauty and truth, which Bloom ties to his notion of "greatness" in literature.
34. **Psychoanalytic Theory**: A theory of the mind influenced by Freud, which Bloom applies to explain the poet's relationship to their precursors in terms of conflict and desire.
35. **Freud's Oedipus Complex**: The theory that children experience unconscious desires for the opposite-sex parent and rivalry with the same-sex parent, applied to literary relationships between poets and their precursors.
36. **Creative Misreading**: The act of reading a precursor's work in a way that allows the later poet to develop a unique and original voice, rather than simply copying the original.
37. **The Anxiety of Influence**: Bloom's central concept that poets must confront their precursors and fight against their influence to achieve creative originality.
38. **Genius**: The exceptional creative ability to produce works of enduring greatness, which Bloom believes is shaped by struggle with the tradition.
39. **Tautology**: A statement that is true by definition or repetition, which Bloom uses to describe the circular logic of poetic influence.

40. **Ideological Criticism**: A type of criticism that focuses on the political, social, or cultural implications of a text, which Bloom critiques for its tendency to reduce the text to its ideological content.

41. **Selfhood**: The poet's sense of identity, which is both shaped by and in conflict with the literary tradition they inherit.

42. **Imaginative Solitude**: The state in which the poet feels isolated in their creative process, often marked by a struggle to assert originality against their influences.

43. **Divination**: The act of seeking to gain insight or achieve immortality through poetry, as poets strive to join the ranks of great writers.

44. **Artistic Immortality**: The goal of the poet to transcend time and be remembered as a creator of lasting works of art.

45. **Crisis of Influence**: The sense of crisis that occurs when a poet feels overwhelmed or overshadowed by their precursors, leading them to either reject or reinterpret their works.

3.2.7 Key:

3.2.2.2 1. a., 2. b., 3. b., 4. a., 5. b.

3.2.3.2 1. b., 2. b., 3. b., 4. d., 5. c.,
6. b., 7. c., 8. c., 9. b., 10. b.

3.2.4.7 1. b., 2. c., 3. b., 4. d., 5. b., 6. b., 7. c.

3.2.5.2 1. b., 2. c., 3. a., 4. b., 5. b., 6. c., 7. a.

3.2.8 Broad Answer-type question:

1. Explain Harold Bloom's concept of the "anxiety of influence" and how it relates to a poet' relationship with their predecessors.

2. "Poetry is a misreading of previous poems." Explain Harold Bloom's concept of "misprision" and how it allows poets to assert their originality in the face of literary tradition.

3. "Influence is a painful transference of personality." How does Oscar Wilde's view of influence as a "painful transference" align with Bloom's theory.

4. "Influence cannot be simply rejected." How does Harold Bloom use the example of Wallace Stevens to demonstrate the tension between rejecting and embracing poetic influence?
5. How does Bloom's analysis of poets like Wilde, Stevens, and Tennyson contribute to his understanding of the anxiety of influence?

3.2.9 Further Reading:

1. The Anxiety of Influence: A Critique (1982) by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar
2. Harold Bloom: A Study of the Critic (2002) by David Mikics
3. The Cambridge Companion to Harold Bloom (2007), edited by David Mikics
4. The Anxiety of Influence and the Poetic Tradition (2007) by Mark Amodio

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Unit-4

A) JAQUES LACAN - THE MIRROR STAGE AS FORMATIVE OF THE FUCTION OF I

In this Unit we shall be studying two important essays – Jacques Lacan's 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of I' and Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. Both the essays employ psychoanalysis. Lacan's post-structuralist psychoanalytic theory builds on Sigmund Freud's work. It focuses on how language structures the unconscious and shapes identity. Laura Mulvey, applying Freudian and Lacanian ideas, developed the "male gaze" theory, arguing that cinema often objectifies women and reinforces patriarchal structures.

In Section I we shall be studying Lacan's essay and then in Section II turn to Mulvey's essay.

SECTION I

JAQUES LACAN: THE MIRROR STAGE AS FORMATIVE OF THE FUNCTION OF I

4.1.1 Objective:

After Studying this Section, you will be able:

1. To understand the concept of the Mirror Stage
2. To analyse how Lacan describes the moment when an infant recognizes its reflection and how this recognition shapes the formation of the ego.
3. To explore the role of Misrecognition (Méconnaissance) in Identity Formation
4. To examine how the subject mistakenly identifies with an external image, leading to a lifelong tension between the ideal self and the fragmented lived experience.
5. To analyse the Relationship between the Imaginary and the Ego
6. To investigate how the mirror stage establishes the *Imaginary Order*, where the self is formed through images and illusions rather than a stable, internal reality.
7. To evaluate the Mirror Stage's influence on Psychoanalysis and Subjectivity
8. To connect the Mirror Stage to later Lacanian concepts
9. To explore how the mirror stage serves as a foundation for Lacan's broader theories, including the *Symbolic Order*, the *Real*, and the function of language in structuring identity.

4.1.2 Introduction

Jacques Lacan's essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (1949) is a foundational text in psychoanalytic theory and critical thought. In this work, Lacan introduces the concept of the mirror stage, a pivotal moment in early childhood development when

an infant recognizes its reflection in a mirror and, in doing so, begins to construct a sense of self. However, this recognition is also a misrecognition (méconnaissance), as the child identifies with an external, idealized image that does not fully correspond to its lived experience. This misalignment between the real, fragmented self and the coherent image in the mirror establishes a lifelong tension in human subjectivity.

Lacan argues that the mirror stage marks the formation of the ego (moi), which emerges from an external identification rather than from an internal, stable essence. This challenges classical psychoanalytic notions of the ego as a rational, cohesive entity, as proposed by Freud. Instead, Lacan sees the ego as fundamentally imaginary, rooted in illusions and alienation. The mirror stage, therefore, serves as an entry point into what Lacan later defines as the Imaginary Order, a realm of images, illusions, and identifications that shape human perception and identity.

This essay is crucial in understanding Lacan's broader psychoanalytic framework, including his later developments of the Symbolic Order (language and social structures) and the Real (that which resists representation). By redefining how the self is formed, Lacan's theory of the mirror stage has had a profound influence on psychoanalysis, philosophy, literary theory, and cultural studies. His insights continue to shape discussions on identity, alienation, and the nature of human consciousness.

Lacan argues that between 6 and 18 months of age, infants recognize their reflection in a mirror and identify with it, forming a sense of self. However, this image is *illusory*—it presents an idealized, coherent version of the self that contrasts with the infant's fragmented, uncoordinated experience of their own body.

4.1.3 Analysis of the essay

Jacques Lacan's essay, *"The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience"* (1949) introduces the *mirror stage* as a crucial phase in early childhood development, where the infant's recognition of its own reflection marks the formation of the ego. This recognition, however, is inherently a *misrecognition* (*méconnaissance*), as the child identifies with an external, idealized image rather than its fragmented bodily reality. This process of identification and alienation remains central to Lacanian psychoanalysis, influencing broader discussions on identity, self-perception, and subjectivity. This analysis

explores the key aspects of Lacan's argument, its theoretical context, and its implications in psychoanalysis, philosophy, and cultural studies.

4.1.3.1 Lacan's Theoretical Context

Lacan developed his theory of the *mirror stage* within a psychoanalytic framework that sought to reinterpret Freud's theories through the lens of structural linguistics and philosophy. Drawing from Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theories and Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology, Lacan emphasized the role of language and symbolic structures in shaping the unconscious. While Freud posited that the ego acts as a mediator between the id and external reality, Lacan argued that the ego itself is a construct, formed through an externalized and fundamentally alienating process of identification.

The *mirror stage* aligns with Lacan's broader psychoanalytic project of redefining subjectivity. By challenging Freud's notion of the ego as an internally cohesive and rational entity, Lacan presents the self as fractured, dependent on external representations, and caught within a network of linguistic and symbolic relations. His ideas later influenced poststructuralist thinkers such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, who extended his critique of stable identities to broader discourses on power and knowledge.

4.1.3.2 The Mirror Stage: Formation and Function of the Ego

The *mirror stage* occurs between six and eighteen months of age, when an infant first recognizes its reflection in a mirror. At this moment, the child jubilantly identifies with the reflected image, perceiving it as a coherent, unified version of itself. However, this image is an illusion—it presents an idealized self that contrasts with the child's lived experience of its body as fragmented and uncoordinated.

Lacan argues that this identification with the mirror image constitutes the birth of the ego (*moi*). The child internalizes the image as its *Ideal-I* (*moi idéal*), forming the basis of selfhood. However, this identification is also a misrecognition (*méconnaissance*), as the self is never fully coincident with the image. This misalignment introduces a fundamental alienation that persists throughout life, as individuals continually seek an unattainable sense of wholeness.

This process has lasting implications: the subject becomes dependent on external recognition to sustain a sense of self. The ego, rather than being an innate

essence, emerges from an externalized, illusory identification. This challenges Cartesian and Enlightenment notions of a rational, autonomous self, positioning identity as an ongoing negotiation between self-perception and external validation.

4.1.3.3 The Imaginary Order and Its Implications

Lacan situates the *mirror stage* within what he calls the *Imaginary Order*, one of the three registers of human experience (alongside the *Symbolic* and the *Real*). The *Imaginary* is the realm of images, illusions, and identifications, where the ego is formed through visual representations rather than direct access to reality.

In the *Imaginary*, the subject's identity remains unstable, as it is based on an external image that can never be fully integrated. This instability manifests in various ways: the desire for recognition from others, the need for validation through social constructs, and the tendency to define oneself through external reflections (such as relationships, media, and cultural symbols).

The *mirror stage* also introduces a lifelong dialectic between the self and the *Other*. Since identity is constructed through an external image, the subject is always in relation to an *Other*—whether it be a literal other person, societal norms, or language itself. This relational structure becomes more complex as the subject transitions into the *Symbolic Order*, where identity is further mediated by linguistic and cultural signifiers.

4.1.3.4 Alienation and the Divided Subject

A crucial aspect of the *mirror stage* is the alienation it produces. Because the subject identifies with an external image that it can never fully embody, it experiences a fundamental split within itself. Lacan's concept of the *divided subject* captures this internal division: the individual is always caught between an idealized self-image and the fragmented reality of its own existence.

This alienation is not merely a developmental phase but a structural condition of human subjectivity. Throughout life, individuals continue to pursue an unattainable unity, seeking wholeness in external objects, relationships, and social roles. This unattainability fuels desire, which Lacan sees as central to human experience.

Later in his work, Lacan expands this idea through his theory of the *Real*, the dimension of experience that resists representation and remains outside the realms of the *Imaginary* and the *Symbolic*. The *Real* represents the aspects of existence that

cannot be symbolized or fully comprehended, reinforcing the subject's sense of lack and incompleteness.

4.1.3.5 The Transition to the Symbolic Order

While the *mirror stage* initiates the formation of the ego, it is only the beginning of the subject's entry into broader symbolic structures. As the child acquires language, it transitions from the *Imaginary Order* to the *Symbolic Order*, where identity is structured by linguistic and cultural signifiers.

Language plays a crucial role in this transition. Once the child enters the realm of language, its sense of self is no longer based purely on images but is shaped by the signifiers that structure meaning and social relations. The *Symbolic* is governed by the *Big Other* (*Grand Autre*), a concept representing authority, societal rules, and the unconscious structures that determine subjectivity.

However, this shift does not resolve the alienation introduced by the *mirror stage*. Instead, it extends it into new forms: language, while essential for communication, is always inadequate in fully capturing the subject's experience. There remains a gap between what can be expressed and what is felt, perpetuating the sense of lack that drives human desire.

4.1.3.6 Implications for Psychoanalysis, Philosophy, and Culture

Lacan's *mirror stage* has had a profound impact across multiple disciplines. In psychoanalysis, it reframes the ego as a site of fundamental alienation rather than a stable mediator of reality. This perspective has influenced clinical approaches to identity disorders, neuroses, and the nature of desire.

In philosophy, Lacan's theory aligns with existential and poststructuralist critiques of stable identity. Thinkers such as Althusser, Foucault, and Derrida have drawn on Lacan's ideas to examine how identity is constructed through ideological and discursive frameworks.

In cultural and media studies, the *mirror stage* provides a lens for understanding how identity is mediated through images and representations. The rise of digital culture, social media, and virtual realities amplifies Lacan's insights, as individuals increasingly engage with curated versions of themselves that reinforce the dynamics of the *Imaginary Order*.

4.1.3.7 Conclusion

Jacques Lacan's *mirror stage* remains a pivotal concept in psychoanalytic theory, redefining the formation of identity as a process of external identification and alienation. By demonstrating that the ego is an illusory construct rather than an innate essence, Lacan challenges traditional notions of selfhood, emphasizing the role of the *Imaginary*, *Symbolic*, and *Real* in shaping subjectivity.

This analysis highlights the enduring relevance of Lacan's insights, particularly in an era where identity is increasingly mediated by visual and digital representations. As individuals continue to navigate the tensions between self-perception and external validation, the *mirror stage* offers a crucial framework for understanding the complexities of human identity and the illusions that sustain it.

Check your progress -1

Q. Say whether the following statements are true or false.

1. Lacan's concept of the mirror stage suggests that an infant's recognition of its reflection is a completely accurate perception of the self.
2. The mirror stage occurs between 6 and 18 months of age, when an infant first identifies with its reflection.
3. Lacan argues that the ego (*moi*) develops from an internal, pre-existing essence rather than from external identification.
4. The mirror stage introduces the child into the Imaginary Order, where identity is shaped through images and illusions.
5. According to Lacan, the idealized image in the mirror aligns perfectly with the infant's real experience of its body.
6. The concept of *méconnaissance* (misrecognition) refers to the subject mistakenly identifying with an external, idealized image of the self.
7. Lacan's theory of the mirror stage directly challenges Freud's idea of the ego as a stable and rational entity.
8. The Symbolic Order, which Lacan later develops, is primarily concerned with images and visual identifications rather than language and social structures.

9. The mirror stage plays no role in Lacan's later theories about subjectivity and the unconscious.
10. Lacan's theory of the mirror stage has influenced not only psychoanalysis but also philosophy, literary theory, and cultural studies.

Check Your Progress - 2

Q. Answer the following in one or two paragraphs.

1. What is the mirror stage in Lacanian theory?
2. How does Lacan's view of the ego differ from Freud's?
3. What role does alienation play in the mirror stage?
4. What is the Imaginary Order, and how does it relate to the mirror stage?
5. How has Lacan's mirror stage influenced other disciplines?

4.1.4 Summary

Jacques Lacan's essay *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I* is a foundational text in psychoanalytic theory, introducing the concept of the mirror stage as a crucial moment in early childhood development. The mirror stage occurs between six and eighteen months of age, when an infant first recognizes its reflection in a mirror and identifies with it. This recognition marks the formation of the ego (moi), but it is simultaneously a misrecognition (*méconnaissance*), as the child perceives itself as a unified, coherent being despite its actual experience of bodily fragmentation and lack of coordination.

Lacan argues that this identification with the mirror image creates the foundation of the ego. The child internalizes the reflected image as its *Ideal-I* (*moi idéal*), forming an idealized version of itself. However, this process is inherently alienating because the self can never fully coincide with this externalized ideal. This alienation remains a central aspect of human subjectivity, as individuals continually seek an unattainable sense of completeness.

Lacan contrasts his view with Freud's, who saw the ego as a rational mediator between the id and reality. Instead, Lacan claims the ego is constructed through an externalized and illusory identification, making it unstable and dependent on

recognition from others. This idea undermines Enlightenment and Cartesian notions of a stable, autonomous self.

Lacan situates the mirror stage within what he calls the Imaginary Order—one of the three registers of human experience, alongside the Symbolic and the Real. The Imaginary Order is the realm of images and identifications, where the subject constructs its sense of self through visual representations rather than direct access to reality. Since the ego is formed in this domain, it remains fundamentally dependent on external reflections, such as relationships, media, and cultural symbols. The mirror stage also establishes a lifelong dialectic between the self and the Other. Since identity is constructed through an external image, the subject is always in relation to an Other—whether that be another person, society, or language itself. This relational dynamic deepens when the subject enters the Symbolic Order, where identity is further mediated by linguistic and cultural signifiers.

A key implication of the mirror stage is the concept of the divided subject. Because the self is based on an unattainable ideal, the individual experiences a lifelong sense of lack. This sense of incompleteness fuels human desire, as individuals seek wholeness in external objects, relationships, and societal roles. Later in his work, Lacan expands this idea through the concept of the Real, the domain of experience that cannot be symbolized or fully represented.

Lacan's mirror stage has had a profound influence on psychoanalysis, philosophy, and cultural studies. It has reshaped understandings of identity formation, influenced poststructuralist thinkers like Derrida and Foucault, and provided insights into contemporary issues like media representation and digital identity. By demonstrating that the ego is an illusory construct, Lacan challenges traditional ideas of selfhood and highlights the ongoing role of misrecognition and alienation in shaping human subjectivity.

4.1.5 Terms to Remember

Mirror Stage – A developmental phase (6–18 months) in which an infant recognizes its reflection in a mirror, leading to the formation of the ego through an external image.

Ego (Moi) – The self as constructed through identification with an external image rather than an internally coherent entity.

Ideal-I (Moi Idéal) – The perfected, unified image that the infant sees in the mirror and mistakenly identifies as its true self.

Imaginary Order – One of Lacan's three orders (Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real); it involves images, illusions, and identifications that shape the ego.

Méconnaissance (Misrecognition) – The mistaken identification with an external image, leading to a divided sense of self.

Alienation – The psychological state in which the subject feels estranged from its true self due to identification with an external, idealized image.

Gestalt – The perceived wholeness of the mirror image, which contrasts with the infant's fragmented experience of its body.

Symbolic Order – The realm of language, law, and social structures that the subject enters after the mirror stage.

The Real – That which exists beyond symbolization and representation, resisting integration into the Imaginary or Symbolic orders.

Identification – The psychological process through which the subject forms its identity by identifying with an external image.

Imago – An idealized mental image that influences the subject's perception of itself and others.

Other (Autre) – A concept referring to external influences (such as language, society, or authority figures) that shape the subject's identity.

Big Other (Grand Autre) – The ultimate authority (language, law, or the unconscious) that structures meaning and subjectivity.

Fragmented Body (Corps Morcelé) – The infant's pre-mirror-stage experience of its body as uncoordinated and disjointed.

Jubilation – The initial joy experienced by the infant upon recognizing its reflection, before realizing the alienating effects of the image.

Libidinal Investment – The unconscious emotional and psychic energy directed toward the mirror image.

Dialectic – A process of tension and resolution, used by Lacan to describe the shifting relationship between the subject and its mirror image.

Imaginary Identification – The formation of identity based on images rather than symbolic structures.

Self-estrangement – The subject's inability to fully coincide with its idealized mirror image, leading to internal division.

Psychoanalytic Experience – The process through which psychoanalysis reveals the unconscious structures shaping the subject's identity.

4.1.6 Answers to Check your progress –1

1. *False*	2. *True*	3. *False*	4. *True*
5. *False*	6. *True*	7. *True*	8. False
9. *False*	10. *True*		

4.1.7 Answers to Check your progress –2

1. The mirror stage is a developmental phase occurring between six and eighteen months, where an infant recognizes its reflection in a mirror and identifies with it, forming the foundation of the ego. However, this recognition is a misrecognition, as the reflected image is an idealized, external representation rather than the child's fragmented bodily reality.

2. While Freud viewed the ego as a mediator between the id and reality, Lacan argued that the ego itself is a construct formed through an alienating process of identification with an external image. This challenges the idea of a stable, internally cohesive self.

3. Alienation arises because the child identifies with an image that it can never fully embody. This creates a permanent sense of division within the self, as individuals continue to seek an unattainable sense of wholeness throughout life.

4. The Imaginary Order is one of Lacan's three registers of human experience, associated with images, illusions, and identifications. The mirror stage occurs within this order, as the ego is constructed through visual representations rather than direct access to reality.

5. The mirror stage has impacted psychoanalysis, philosophy, and cultural studies by redefining identity as fragmented and externally mediated. It has influenced

thinkers like Derrida and Foucault and provided insights into media culture, social identity, and the effects of digital representations of the self.

4.1.8 Exercises:

Q. Write descriptive essay-type answers to the following questions:

1. Explain the concept of the 'Mirror Stage' as outlined by Lacan. How does it shape the individual's sense of self and identity?
2. Discuss the implications of Lacan's 'Mirror Stage' for understanding human subjectivity and its relationship with others. How does this stage contribute to the formation of the 'I'?
3. Analyse the role of misrecognition (méconnaissance) in the 'Mirror Stage.' How does it impact the individual's perception of their own image?
4. Examine Lacan's integration of psychoanalysis and philosophy in his discussion of the 'Mirror Stage.' How does he use Freudian ideas to articulate his arguments?

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SECTION II

LAURA MULVEY: 'VISUAL PLEASURE AND NARRATIVE CINEMA'

4.2.1 Objectives:

After studying this section, you will be able to:

i) Understand Laura Mulvey's contribution to feminist film criticism

ii) Understand how Laura Mulvey uses Freud's psychoanalysis to describe the working of cinema and the pleasure we derive from it

iii) Understand how she uses Lacan's concept of 'mirror stage' to describe mainstream traditional Hollywood cinema

iv) Grasp why she says she uses psychoanalysis as 'a political weapon' for displaying how the film form has been structured by 'the unconscious of patriarchal society'

v) Comprehend her theory of 'male gaze'

vi) Differentiate between Narcissistic aspect of scopophilia and Voyeuristic-scopophilia.

vii) Analyse films on your own using Laura Mulvey's analysis to find the kind of scopophilia employed and to breakdown the looks.

4.2.2 Introduction:

Laura Mulvey is a contemporary feminist cultural theorist. The prescribed essay is considered a foundational text in feminist film criticism. Before this essay the study of films was limited to cataloguing images of women in films. Mulvey used psychoanalytic perceptions of Freud and Lacan to show how sexual difference and inequality is observed not only in the subject matter of mainstream commercial films but also in the typical ways employed by these films of looking at the women in the films.

Laura Mulvey, a professor of film studies and media studies, has also co-directed several avant-garde films that undermine conventional cinematic methods of filming women. When the prescribed essay was written, there were hardly any works that investigated the form of texts. This was a time when the impact of French feminists like Kristeva, Cixous, and Irigary – who used psychoanalysis – was yet to be noticed. At such a juncture, Mulvey used psychoanalysis of Freud and Lacan to

show how the established visual apparatus looks at women in the films as passive objects of the male gaze.

4.2.3 Analysis of the Essay:

The essay is divided into four sections. Let's look at each of this section in detail now. The divisions and sections of the essay are maintained here for the ease of comparison with the original.

4.2.3.1 Section 1: Introduction

A. A Political Use of Psychoanalysis

In this part Laura Mulvey spells out her intention of using psychoanalysis to study films, their appeal and how films use 'the socially established interpretation of sexual difference' (Mulvey, p. 1954). The established way of interpretation controls 'images as well as erotic ways of looking and spectacle' (Mulvey, p. 1954). She also makes it clear that she will be employing psychoanalysis as 'a political weapon' with the aim of displaying how the film form has been structured by 'the unconscious of patriarchal society'. In other words, Mulvey argues that how society sees images and derives erotic pleasure from them is governed by the symbolic social order which is essentially patriarchal and phallocentric.

Mulvey then proceeds to explain some basic concepts from psychoanalysis like phallocentrism and role of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious. The role of woman is like a linchpin or cornerstone – it gives order and meaning to the patriarchal world. Mulvey calls this the paradox of phallocentrism as the image of the castrated woman or the lack of phallus in her, in fact, produces the phallus as a symbolic presence. Using psychoanalysis, she explains this paradox further:

To summarise briefly: the function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious is twofold: she firstly symbolises the castration threat by her real lack of a penis and secondly thereby raises her child into the symbolic.

Once this has been achieved, her meaning in the process is at an end. It does not last into the world of law and language except as a memory, which oscillates between memory of maternal plenitude and memory of lack. Both are posited on nature (or on anatomy in Freud's famous phrase). Woman's desire is subjugated to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound; she can exist only in relation to castration

and cannot transcend it. She turns her child into the signifier of her own desire to possess a penis (the condition, she imagines, of entry into the symbolic). Either she must gracefully give way to the word, the name of the father and the law, or else struggle to keep her child down with her in the half- light of the imaginary. Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning. (Mulvey, P. 1955)

In other words, Woman symbolizes the threat of castration. Her existence remains limited to castration. She can't outdo it. Secondly, she imagines that penis is the condition of entry into the symbolic and so turns her child into the signifier of her desire to possess a penis. Woman becomes the signifier for the male other and the bearer of meaning and not the maker of meaning.

Mulvey explains that Lacan's psychoanalysis is very helpful in understanding women's oppression and the frustration created by the phallocentric system. It helps women to articulate the problem better: how to fight the unconscious structured like a language while still caught within the language of the patriarchy? The way she suggests is to start with using the tools provided by patriarchy to examine patriarchy itself. One such tool is psychoanalysis. Even if there are many things yet to be done, psychoanalytic theory at least can help us understand the *status quo,* of the patriarchal order in which we are caught.

B. Destruction of pleasure as a radical weapon.

In this part of the essay Mulvey turns to cinema to explain how this system of representation works. She underlines the fact that the unconscious which is formed by the dominant order. The unconscious structures the ways of seeing and the pleasure in looking. Here her focus is on the formal *mise en scène* reflecting the typical mainstream Hollywood style cinema. Mulvey says this kind of cinema arose and remained popular to a great extent due to its manipulation of visual pleasure and because it coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order.

Then she states the objective of the article - "to discuss the interweaving of that erotic pleasure in film, its meaning and, in particular, the central place of the image of woman. It is said that analysing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article." (Mulvey, p. 1956)

4.2.3.2 Section II: Pleasure in Looking /Fascination with the Human Form

Part A.

Cinema offers many pleasures to the audience. Mulvey focuses on two contradictory pleasures offered by cinema (both have origins in infantile processes by which we learned to separate ourselves from others):

1. The process that Freud calls 'Scopophilia' (pleasure in looking) – we enjoy making others the object of our controlling gaze.
2. A process of identification that is like Lacan's mirror stage – through this process we derive pleasure from identifying with an ideal image on the screen.

These two processes, according to Mulvey, structure the male and female viewer differently. Mulvey argues that the male spectator can't endure sexual objectification. So he deflects the tension by splitting his gaze between spectacle and narrative. A woman on the screen becomes the primary erotic object for the screen characters as well as the audience members. The spectators identify with the male protagonist who acts within the parameters of time and space created by the film's narrative where as a woman on the screen becomes the object of the dominant male gaze and exists outside the narrative illusions of time and space the film creates. Cinema produces for the audience a sense of separation, a voyeuristic fantasy and voyeuristic separation. It creates for the audience an illusion of looking in on a private world. It makes possible for them repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire onto the performer.

Part B.

Cinema satisfies their wish of seeking pleasure through looking. It also encourages the narcissistic aspect of this pleasure. As the focus of the mainstream film is on the human form, curiosity and desire to look mingle with the fascination for likeness and recognition. Drawing on Lacan's theory of mirror stage (the way the moment when a child recognizes its own image in the mirror is crucial for the constitution of the ego) and the matrix of the imaginary, of recognition/misrecognition and identification, Mulvey argues that the cinema has structures of fascination strong enough to allow temporary loss of ego and to provide ego ideals through the star system.

"The mirror phase occurs at a time when children's physical ambitions outstrip their motor capacity, with the result that their recognition of themselves is joyous in that they imagine their mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than they experience in their own body. Recognition is thus overlaid with misrecognition: the image recognised is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego…" (Mulvey, P. 1958)

And

"Stars provide a focus or centre both to screen space and screen story where they act out a complex process of likeness and difference (the glamorous impersonates the ordinary)." (Mulvey, P. 1958)

Part C.

In this part Mulvey summarises the argument made in A and B parts: how two contradictory aspects of the pleasurable structures of looking are created in cinema –

1. Scopophilic aspect (arises from plea sure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight). It implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen (active scopophilia); it is a function of the sexual instincts.

2. That developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen. It demands identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his like. It is a function of the ego libido.

Mulvey reminds us that Freud saw them interacting and overlaying each other. According to Mulvey they are formative structures that have no intrinsic meaning. They have no signification until they get attached to an idealization. However, cinema has evolved, she contends:

"… a particular illusion of reality in which this contradiction between libido and ego has found a beautifully complementary fantasy world. Sexual instincts and identification processes have a meaning within the symbolic order which articulates desire. Desire, born with language, allows the possibility of transcending the instinctual and the imaginary, but its point of reference continually returns to the traumatic moment of its birth: the castration complex. Hence the look, pleasurable in

form, can be threatening in content, and it is woman as representation/image that crystallises this paradox." (Mulvey, P. 1959).

4.2.3.3 Section III: Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look

After pointing out that the visual apparatus of mainstream film is further complicated because the process of gazing on the female object of desire is both pleasurable and threatening, she proceeds to say that even if film creates an illusionistic world that allows for the free play of desire, in actuality the viewer is never free from the circumstances that gave rise to those desires within the symbolic social order, especially from the castration complex. The female object of the gaze, because she lacks a penis, is associated with the primordial fear of castration; although that threat initiates the male subject's integration into the symbolic social order, it also creates considerable anxiety. For this reason, the controlling male ego must attempt to escape the threat of castration evoked by the very gaze that gives it pleasure. Mulvey maintains that the male unconscious has two means of disarming the threat. The first is a form of voyeurism— investigating the female, demystifying her, and either denouncing, punishing, or saving her. The second is male disavowal, achieved by the substitution of a fetish object that becomes reassuring rather than dangerous. She examines these processes in the films of the directors Josef von Sternberg (1894– 1969) and Alfred Hitchcock (1899– 1980).

She further shows that the cinema employ three looks:

1. the look of the camera,
2. the look of the audience,
3. the look of the film's characters.

An illusion of truth and reality (mimesis) is created by denying or downplaying the first two (the material process of recording and the critical reading of the viewer) and by emphasizing the last.

Only by disrupting the seamlessness of this whole visual illusion can women's subordination to the male gaze be defied. Before the pleasures of mainstream film can be challenged, Mulvey argues, viewers must be able to break down the cinematic codes that create the controlling male gaze and the illusionistic world that satisfies the desires it invokes.

Part A.

Mulvey begins this section by pointing out that due to sexual inequalities, pleasure in looking is split:

1. Active/ male
2. Passive/female

The male gaze is the defining gaze and it projects its fantasy onto the female figure. The female figure is styled accordingly. It is simultaneously looked at and displayed. It is coded for visual and erotic impact "so that it can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (P. 1959). She plays to and signifies male desire. However, her visual presence tends to stop the development of the story-line in "moments of erotic contemplation", and hence, this alien presence has to be integrated with the narrative. Mulvey quotes here Budd Boetticher:

"What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance" (quoted in Mulvey, P. 1959).

She also points out how in the recent "buddy movie" the active homosexual eroticism of the central male figures can do away with this distraction. However, in the traditional movie, the woman on display functions on two levels:

1. as erotic object for the characters within the screen story
2. as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium

The gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are properly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude. For some time the sexual impact of the displayed woman takes the film into a no man's land outside its own time and space. Mulvey gives example of Marilyn Monroe's first appearance in *The River of No Return*, Lauren Bacall's songs in *To Have and Have Not*.

Part B.

In this part Mulvey focuses on the inability of the male figure to bear the burden of sexual objectification (due to the ruling ideology – which is patriarchy). She says, 'man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like' and

"Hence the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of advancing the story, making things happen. The man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralise the extra- diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle." (Mulvey, P. 1960)

This becomes possible by making the film's centre a main controlling figure with whom the spectators can identify – the main male protagonist. The spectator makes the male main protagonist his screen surrogate. This gives the spectator a sense of omnipotence which is derived from the power of the male protagonist as he controls events and from the active power of the erotic look.

Mulvey makes the major point here that the male protagonist's glamorous features are not meant as erotic object of the gaze but are the characteristics of "the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror. The character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator, just as the image in the mirror was more in control of motor co- ordination" (Mulvey, P. 1960).

She also points out that for this active male figure, a three-dimensional space corresponding to that of the mirror recognition is created using camera technology and movement and editing. The limits of screen space are blurred, allowing the protagonist to command the stage.

Part C1.

Mulvey gives example of the film *Only Angels Have Wings* and *To Have and Have Not*, to elucidate her arguments in parts A and B.

"… the film opens with the woman as object of the combined gaze of spectator and all the male protagonists in the film. She is isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualised. But as the narrative progresses she falls in love with the main male protagonist and becomes his property, losing her outward glamorous characteristics, her generalised sexuality, her show- girl connotations; her eroticism is subjected to the male star alone. By means of identification with him, through participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her too.)" (Mulvey, P. 1961)

She is careful to add that the female figure in psychoanalytic terms has a deeper problem: she is an object of pleasure but is also a threat of castration and hence unpleasure.

"The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re- enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object (an avenue typified by the concerns of the film noir); or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous (hence overvaluation, the cult of the female star)" (Mulvey, P. 1961).

Mechanism 1:

Voyeurism; has associations of sadism; pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjugating the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness. This sadistic side fits in well with narrative. Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end. Example: Hitchcock's movies (both mechanisms are used)

Mechanism 2:

This second possibility is called fetishistic scopophilia by Mulvey. It makes the object have a lot of physical beauty and transforms it into something satisfying in itself; can exist outside linear time as the erotic instinct is focused on the look alone. Examples: Sternberg's movies.

Part C2.

In this part Mulvey dissects movies of Hitchcock and Sternberg to prove her point. She analyses Sternberg's *Morocco* and *Dishonoured* to show how the most important absence is that of the controlling male gaze within the screen scene.

At the end of *Morocco*, Tom Brown has already disappeared into the desert when Amy Jolly kicks off her gold sandals and walks after him. At the end of *Dishonoured*, Kranau is indifferent to the fate of Magda. In both cases, the erotic impact, sanctified by death, is displayed as a spectacle for the audience. The male hero misunderstands and, above all, does not see. (Mulvey, P. 1962)

On the other hand, in Hitchcock, the male hero and the audience see the same thing exactly, but "it is the role of the hero to portray the contradictions and tensions experienced by the spectator".

In *Vertigo* in particular, but also in *Marnie* and *Rear Window*, the look is central to the plot, oscillating between voyeurism and fetishistic fascination. Hitchcock has never concealed his interest in voyeurism, cinematic and non- cinematic. His heroes are exemplary of the symbolic order and the law— a policeman (*Vertigo*), a dominant male possessing money and power (*Marnie*)—but their erotic drives lead them into compromised situations. The power to subject another person to the will sadistically or to the gaze voyeuristically is turned onto the woman as the object of both. Power is backed by a certainty of legal right and the established guilt of the woman (evoking castration, psycho analytically speaking). True perversion is barely concealed under a shallow mask of ideological correctness— the man is on the right side of the law, the woman on the wrong. Hitchcock's skillful use of identification processes and liberal use of subjective camera from the point of view of the male protagonist draw the spectators deeply into his position, making them share his uneasy gaze. The spectator is absorbed into a voyeuristic situation within the screen scene and diegesis, which parodies his own in the cinema (Mulvey, P. 1963).

Mulvey further says:

"…*Vertigo* focuses on the implications of the active/ looking, passive/looked- at split in terms of sexual difference and the power of the male symbolic encapsulated in the hero. Marnie, too, performs for Mark Rutland's gaze and masquerades as the perfect to-be-looked-at image. He, too, is on the side of the law until, drawn in by obsession with her guilt, her secret, he longs to see her in the act of committing a crime, make her confess and thus save her. So he, too, becomes complicit as he acts out the implications of his power. He controls money and words; he can have his cake and eat it." (Mulvey, p. 1963)

4.2.3.4 Section IV: Summary

In this last section Mulvey points out the importance of the article as by using psychoanalysis she has shown how traditional mainstream films offer pleasure and unpleasure and the importance of scopophilic instinct (pleasure in looking at another person as an erotic object) and ego libido (forming identification processes) in giving this cinema its formal characteristics. Her analysis of the image of woman as the

passive raw material for the active gaze of man also is ground-breaking in analysing the content and structure of this representation. In this section she further says that cinema is different from other forms like strip-tease, theatre etc. due to the place of the look and the possibility of varying and exposing it. Cinema builds the way woman is to be looked at into the spectacle itself. Cinematic codes create a gaze, a world and an object to produce an illusion to suite the desire. This is done through controlling the dimension of time (through editing, narrating) and through controlling space (through changes in distance, editing).

Most importantly, Mulvey says that to challenge the mainstream film and the pleasure it provides, we need to break down the cinematic codes and their relationship to formative external structures. The way she suggests is to first break down (analyse) the voyeuristic-scopophilic look as it is the mainstay of the pleasure principle of these films. This she breaks down into three looks:

1. The look of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event
2. The look of the audience as it watches the final product
3. The look of the characters at each other within the screen illusion.

In the traditional mainstream cinema, the first two are denied and subordinated to the third. There is a purposeful attempt to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience. As the material existence of the recording process and the critical reading of the spectator are absent, this cinema cannot achieve reality, obviousness and truth. There is an inherent contradiction ("the female image as a castration threat constantly endangers the unity of the diegesis and bursts through the world of illusion as an intrusive, static, one-dimensional fetish" (p. 1965) in the structure of looking in this cinema. This cinema subordinates the two looks materially present in time and space "to the neurotic needs of the male ego". Through use of camera, an illusion of Renaissance space, an ideology of representation confirming with the perception of the subject is created. Thus, camera's look is disavowed and the look of the audience is also denied. She says,

"…as soon as fetishistic representation of the female image threatens to break the spell of illusion, and the erotic image on the screen appears directly (without mediation) to the spectator, the fact of fetishisation, concealing as it does castration fear, freezes the look, fixates the spectator and prevents him from achieving any distance from the image in front of him." (Mulvey, p. 1965)

So, to challenge this cinema, we need to “free the look of the camera into its materiality (actual mechanisms) in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics (analysis of interaction) and passionate detachment.” This will destroy the satisfaction, the pleasure and privilege of the ‘invisible guest’ and expose the voyeuristic mechanisms on which these films depend.

4.2.4 Conclusion:

Laura Mulvey's 1975 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" stands as a cornerstone in feminist film theory, challenging the very foundations of cinematic representation. This ground-breaking work not only revolutionized film studies but also profoundly influenced broader discussions on gender, spectatorship, and power dynamics in visual media.

Key Arguments:

The female figure as a threat to male wholeness is a concept that is explored in Laura Mulvey's influential article on cinematic pleasure and spectatorship. Mulvey argues that traditional narrative cinema not only reinforces patriarchal ideology but also structures the way we see and derive pleasure from looking. In this context, women are positioned as spectacles, existing solely for the male gaze, while men are portrayed as active agents driving the narrative. Mulvey's article presents several interconnected arguments that have since become fundamental to feminist film criticism:

1. **The Male Gaze:** Mulvey posits that mainstream cinema is structured around a "male gaze," where the camera assumes the perspective of a heterosexual male viewer. This gaze objectifies women, presenting them as passive subjects of male desire and fantasy.
2. **Scopophilia:** Drawing on Freudian psychoanalysis, Mulvey argues that cinema exploits the pleasure derived from looking (scopophilia). This pleasure is divided into two forms:
    - *Active/male*: The viewer identifies with the male protagonist, sharing his power of the gaze.
    - *Passive/female*: Women are positioned as objects to be looked at and desired.

3. **Narrative Structure:** Mulvey contends that classical Hollywood narrative structures reinforce these gendered power dynamics, with male characters driving the plot forward while female characters often serve as spectacles that interrupt narrative flow.
4. **Visual Pleasure:** The article identifies two contradictory aspects of pleasurable structures of looking in cinema:
    - *Voyeuristic-scopophilic look*: Pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight.
    - *Narcissistic aspect of scopophilia*: Identification with the image seen.
5. **Psychoanalytic Framework:** Mulvey employs Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts to explain how cinema reflects and shapes unconscious desires and fears related to sexual difference.

Mulvey's work is ground-breaking in its application of psychoanalytic theory to film criticism, offering a new lens through which to view gender representation in cinema. Her analysis provides a compelling explanation for the persistent objectification of women in film and media.

Strengths:

- Offers a systematic framework for understanding gender dynamics in cinema
- Provides a vocabulary for discussing power imbalances in visual representation
- Highlights the political implications of cinematic techniques and narrative structures

Criticism:

- Focuses primarily on heterosexual dynamics, potentially overlooking other forms of sexuality
- Assumes a universal spectator experience, which may not account for diverse audience perspectives
- Relies heavily on psychoanalytic theory, which some critics argue is outdated or culturally specific

Contemporary Relevance:

Despite being written over four decades ago, Mulvey's ideas remain strikingly relevant:

1. The concept of the male gaze has been extended to analyse representation in video games, social media, and online advertising.
2. Many contemporary filmmakers consciously subvert or challenge the male gaze in their work.
3. Intersectionality: Modern scholars have built upon Mulvey's work to explore intersectionality of race, class, etc.

4.2.5 Check your Progress.

1. What is the main concept Laura Mulvey critiques in her essay?
    a) Patriarchy in society
    b) The portrayal of women in literature
    c) The male gaze in cinema
    d) The role of directors in filmmaking
2. According to Mulvey, what technique in cinema reinforces the male gaze?
    a) Camera angles emphasizing male vulnerability
    b) Objectification of women as visual spectacles
    c) Equal representation of genders
    d) Use of naturalistic cinematography
3. What psychoanalytic theory does Mulvey draw upon to analyse cinema?
    a) Jungian analysis
    b) Behaviourism
    c) Psychoanalysis
    d) Existentialism
4. Which of the following is NOT one of the pleasures Mulvey identifies in narrative cinema?

a) Scopophilia

b) Exhibitionism

c) Identification with the male protagonist

d) Voyeurism

5. What does Mulvey propose as a solution to challenge the male gaze in cinema?

a) Stop making films

b) Create alternative feminist filmmaking practices

c) Remove women from narratives

d) Focus solely on male characters

4.2.6 Exercises:

Q. Write descriptive Essay-Type answers to the following Questions:

1. Discuss the concept of the "male gaze" as introduced by Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." How does this concept help in understanding the representation of women in classical Hollywood cinema?
2. Analyse the ways in which Mulvey's use of psychoanalytic theory enhances her arguments about cinematic representation. What roles do Freud's and Lacan's theories play in her analysis?
3. Examine the dual functions of women in cinema as outlined by Mulvey - scopophilia and narcissistic identification. How do these functions contribute to the reinforcement of patriarchal ideology?
4. Critique Mulvey's essay by considering its limitations and the criticisms it has faced. How have subsequent feminist film theorists, such as bell hooks and others, expanded or challenged Mulvey's ideas?
5. Explore the concept of "destruction of pleasure" as a radical weapon in feminist film theory. How does Mulvey propose this can be achieved, and what impact does she believe it will have on film and society?

4.2.7 Answers to Check your Progress:

1. Answer: C. The male gaze in cinema

2. Answer: B. Objectification of women as visual spectacles

3. Answer: C. Psychoanalysis

4. Answer: B. Exhibitionism

5. Answer: B. Create alternative feminist filmmaking practices

4.2.8 Terms to Remember:

1. Phallocentrism:

Phallocentrism, a term primarily used by feminist theorists, refers to the privileging of the masculine (the phallus) in understanding meaning or social relations. It essentially means a worldview or system of thought that centres around the male, often to the exclusion or subordination of the female.

The editor of the *Norton Anthology* describes it thus:

"The psychoanalytic system in which sexual difference is defined as the difference between having and lacking the phallus; the term has come to refer to the patriarchal cultural system as a whole insofar as that system privileges the phallus as the symbol and source of power. Because of that privilege, women suffer "penis envy" and men suffer the "castration complex" (the fear of every male child that his desire for his mother will be punished by castration by his father; more generally, the fear of becoming "castrated" like women that leads men to cling to masculinity); both terms are originally from the theories of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). (P. 1955)

2. **The Symbolic and the Imaginary**: In the theories of the psyche put forward by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901– 1981), the Symbolic is the dimension of language, law, and the father; in contrast, the Imaginary is modelled on the preverbal mother- child dyad, or on the relation between an infant and its mirror image.

3. **Mise en scène:** everything within the frame of a shot - including the actors, settings, costumes, action, lighting – in a film.

4. **Libido**: a pleasure derived from idealizing the self.

5. **Diegetic:** (of sound in a film, television programme, etc.) occurring within the context of the story and able to be heard by the characters.

6. **Extra- diegetic:** elements or entities that exist outside the fictional world or story being told, such as voiceovers, superimposed captions, or the narrator themselves.

7. **Fetishistic:** having an excessive and irrational devotion or commitment to a particular thing. Fetishism is the attribution of inherent non-material value, or powers, to an object; erotic fetishism is a sexual fixation on an object or a body part. The object of interest is called the fetish.

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