

# LITERARY THEORY for DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

Special material for Lectureship Exams

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## ASSIGNMENT 3

### Roland Barthes's "Death of an Author"

#### Introduction

- Introduction to Roland Barthes
  - Renowned French literary theorist, philosopher, critic, and semiotician.
  - Major contributor to structuralism, post-structuralism.
- Barthes's Structuralist Works
  - Focus on how texts create meaning through structures.
  - Key work "Mythologies" - analyzes myths and signs in popular culture.
- Transition to Post-Structuralism
  - Became increasingly aware of the limits of structuralism
  - Move towards questioning structures, emphasizing fluidity, and multiplicity of meaning.
  - Major works include "Death of the Author", S/Z, The Pleasure of the Text
  - Key concepts include the instability of language, the role of the reader.
- Introduction to "Death of the Author"
  - Landmark essay published in 1967.
  - Radical shift in thought about authorship and textual interpretation.

#### The Context

- Post-Structuralist ideas
  - Emphasizes the decentralization of meaning, fluidity, and reader's interpretative role.
  - Critiques structuralist idea of fixed meaning and stable structures.
- Placing "Death of the Author"
  - Central to post-structuralist theory.
  - Challenges traditional literary criticism focusing on authorial intent. EXPLAIN HUMANIST CONCEPT OF AUTHOR-GOD

#### Summary of "Death of the Author"

- Main Argument
  - Denial of the author's control over textual meaning.
  - The author's identity becomes irrelevant in interpretation.
- Key Concepts
  - A text exists independently of its author.
  - Begins the essay by taking an example from Balzac's Sarrasine. He quotes a line from the novella on femininity which could not be attributed to either the author or the narrator. Argues that we can never know as – "Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing".
  - Multiplicity of Meaning— Texts have multiple interpretations, shaped by readers.
  - The Role of the Reader— Readers actively produce meaning through their engagement with the text.
- Against Authorial Intent
  - Critique of reliance on author's biography, intentions to interpret a text.

#### Definitions of Key Concepts

- Author-God
  - Conventional notion of the author as the ultimate source of meaning. The author is a product of modernity and capitalism.

- Barthes argues for the "death" of this concept.
- Scriptor
  - Term used to describe the role of the writer post-death of the Author.
  - Writer is not a creator but a compiler of pre-existing texts and cultural codes.
  - The reader is a scriptor
- Intertextuality
  - Idea that texts are interconnected, drawing on existing texts, influences.
  - Meaning is constructed within this network of relationships.
  - Barthes's student Julia Kristeva developed this idea
- The Birth of the Reader
  - The reader becomes central to the creation of meaning.
  - Shifts focus from author to reader's role in interpreting texts.

### Conclusion

- Impact on Literary Theory
  - Radical rethinking of how texts should be analyzed.
  - Diminished focus on authorial intent, biographical criticism.
- Legacy
  - Influential in developments of reader-response criticism, deconstruction.
  - Encourages active, dynamic engagement with texts leading to multiple interpretations
  - Resonates with digital age's focus on collaborative, networked content creation.

## Derrida's "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"

### Introduction

- Introduction to Derrida and Post-Structuralism
  - Jacques Derrida was a French philosopher best known for developing a form of semiotic analysis known as deconstruction. BRIEFLY WHERE IS HE FROM, WHAT ARE HIS WORKS— ANSWER THE QUESTION HERE ITSELF IN A SENTENCE
  - Derrida's work significantly impacted literary theory, philosophy, and linguistics, leading to the emergence of post-structuralism. WHAT ARE HIS IDEAS
  - Post-structuralism challenges the idea of fixed structures and absolute meanings, suggesting that texts can have multiple interpretations.
  - "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" is one of Derrida's seminal works that marks the shift from structuralism to post-structuralism.

### Summary of the Essay

- The Concept of Structure
  - Derrida begins by discussing the concept of "structurality" and its importance to human sciences.
  - He critiques the idea of a fixed centre within structures, arguing that this centre limits the play of meanings. GIVE EXAMPLES OF STRUCTURES
- The Event and the Rupture
  - Derrida identifies a moment of rupture in the history of structure, where the centre is no longer seen as fixed. TALK ABOUT HUMANISM AND STRUCTURALISM HERE
  - He suggests that this rupture has led to a new form of thinking where structures are open to endless play.
- The Free Play of Signifiers
  - In the post-structuralist view, meaning is not fixed but rather a free play of signifiers (words, symbols) that can be interpreted in multiple ways.
  - This challenges the traditional belief in stable, singular meanings within a text. GIVE EXAMPLES OF DECENTRING AND FREEPLAY IN LITERATURE
- The Critique of Metaphysics
  - Derrida argues against the metaphysical tradition that seeks absolute origins or ultimate meanings. DERRIDA AS AGAINST CHRISTIAN CENTRE, AGAINST EUROCENTRIC DISCOURSES

- He suggests that the quest for a single, unchanging truth is impossible because meanings are always deferred.

### **Conclusion**

- Impact on Literary Theory
  - Derrida's essay had a profound impact on literary theory, particularly in the development of deconstruction.
  - Deconstruction emphasizes the instability of meaning and the complex interplay of elements within a text. HOW IS IT DONE? DOUBLE READING, APORIA
  - This approach has influenced numerous fields, including literary criticism, cultural studies, and philosophy, encouraging scholars to question and reinterpret established norms. PSYCHOANALYSIS, FEMINISM, POSTCOLONIALISM, CULTURAL STUDIES
  - Derrida's ideas fostered a more dynamic, fluid understanding of texts, promoting multiple interpretations and a deeper engagement with the complexity of meaning.

## **Now Read Extra and write this!**

### **Julia Kristeva's Contributions**

#### **Introduction**

- Julia Kristeva is a towering figure in the realm of literary theory, particularly noted for her contributions to feminism and poststructuralism.
- Born in Bulgaria, Kristeva relocated to Paris, where her academic prowess flourished.
- Her work is profoundly interdisciplinary, drawing from psychoanalysis, linguistics, semiotics, and feminism.
- Kristeva's theories, notably intertextuality, chora, abject, semanalysis, genotext, and phenotext, have deeply influenced contemporary thought and challenged traditional notions in literature and beyond.

#### **Intellectual Context**

- Kristeva's feminist theory disrupts patriarchal structures, advocating for a fluid, dynamic view of identity and gender.
- Her poststructuralist leanings question the fixed meaning of texts, emphasizing the role of the reader and the plurality of interpretations.

#### **Definitions of Key Concepts**

- Intertextuality
  - Coined by Kristeva, this term refers to the way texts interact with and shape each other. Rather than being isolated works, texts are interconnected, influenced by past and contemporary writings. Intertextuality underscores the idea that meaning is relational. GIVE EXAMPLES
- Abject
  - The abject is central to Kristeva's work in "Powers of Horror." It refers to what is cast off or excluded from societal norms and identity, inducing both fear and fascination. The abject challenges the boundaries between self and other, the clean and the impure, emphasizing the fragility of human constructs.
  - In Literature, abject represents the threat that meaning is breaking down and constitutes our reaction to such a breakdown. It deals what disturbs identity, system, order in Literature.
- Chora
  - Derived from Plato, in Kristeva's terms, chora refers to a pre-linguistic, maternal space associated with the semiotic realm. It is a space of rhythms, bodily drives, and movements, preceding symbolic language and order.
  - In Literature, feminist texts like the Modernist works of Virginia Woolf or Postmodern works like those of Doris Lessing represents chora.
- Semanalysis

- Different from traditional semantics, semanalysis involves the study of meaning as generated through the energies and drives associated with the chora. It combines semiotics and psychoanalysis, focusing on how the pre-linguistic chora disrupts and interacts with the symbolic order of language. MENTION TRADITIONAL METHODS OF READING AS FOCUSING ON FIXED IDEAS AND FIXED STRUCTURES
- Genotext
  - This term signifies the underlying, often chaotic, drives and processes that influence the creation of a text. The genotext includes the pre-linguistic, bodily rhythms and energies, linked to the chora, which contribute to a text's meaning. EXAMPLES OF FEMINIST TEXTS
- Phenotext
- Contrasting with genotext, phenotext refers to the surface structure of a text, encompassing its syntax, grammar, narrative, and explicit meaning. It is the orderly, cohesive aspect of text that adheres to the rules of the symbolic order.

### **Conclusion**

- Julia Kristeva's ideas have left a lasting impact on literary theory and cultural criticism. REFER LATER FEMINISTS AND LGBT THEORISTS ETC
- By challenging the stability of meaning and the integrity of individual texts, she opens up literature to a multiplicity of interpretations and underscores the dynamic interaction between texts, readers, and society.
- Her concepts, particularly the abject and intertextuality, have had significant implications for feminist theory, enhancing our understanding of identity, difference, and the complexities of human experience.

