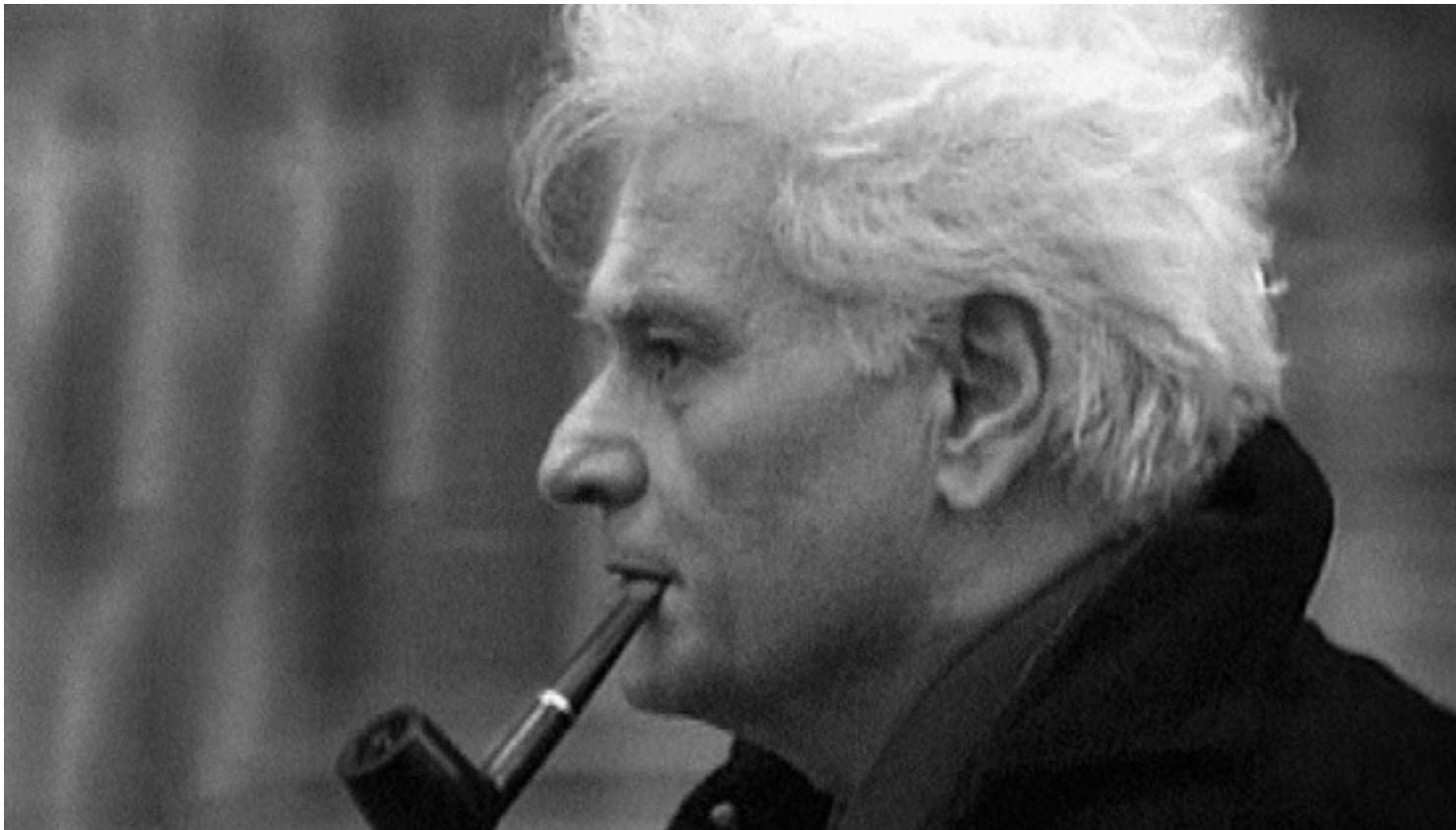


UTE » Sharing English Literature: Reading and Discussion Practice

Lesson 20 - April 8th, 2025 . Discovering J. Derrida's thought



Jacques Derrida
(Algeri, July 15th, 1930 – Paris, October 9th, 2004)

- [An Introduction](#)

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- What does Derrida say about language?

The thrust of Derrida's idea is that, **language is chaotic and meaning is never fixed**, in a way that allows us to effectively determine it (that is, meaning is unstable, undecided, provisional and ever differed).

Through concepts like **deconstruction, différance, textuality, the metaphysics of presence, and the critique of logocentrism**, Derrida's work allows discourse analysts to uncover the hidden assumptions, contradictions, and power dynamics within texts.

Deconstruction **challenges the traditional binary oppositions that structure language and thought, such as presence/absence, speech/writing, and reality/appearance**. By blurring these boundaries, deconstruction reveals the instability of language and the inherent play of differences that constitute meaning.

Derrida is referring to meaning and that meaning is never fixed but is always fluid. There is no way to access one central truth about a text by way of metatextual apparatuses and any interpretation is likewise always contingent to its context. Derrida found purpose in situating texts within layers of meaning to try to make sense of them, so he is not saying interpretation is self-contained only within the text (a common mistake about this idea) but that interpretation is a layer of meaning that alters meaning too, and that one need consider the context of text and context of textual interpretation as well. This leads to Derrida's notion of free play, where signification is slippage and never absolute. He is also not advocating for utopianism or textual nihilism where the world outside the text is irrelevant. He literally means the text is in a state of flux and no codex or fixed signification system (a text outside the text) is illuminating if the text has not been considered as an autonomous, semi-agent context of reasonable but complicated networks of signification between the text, author, and reader.