

III B.A English Literature
Literary Theory
Topic: Structuralism

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Literary Criticism

STRUCTURALISM

History

- Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, existentialism, such as that propounded by Jean-Paul Sartre, was the dominant European intellectual movement.
- Structuralism rose to prominence in France in the wake of existentialism, particularly in the 1960s.
- The initial popularity of structuralism in France led to its spread across the globe.

Structuralism:

- Structuralism first comes to prominence as a specific discourse with the work of a Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, who developed a branch of linguistics called “Structural Linguistics”.
- Saussure died before he was we have the meticulously recorded notes of several of his students made during the 2nd course of 1908-1909.
- Defining ‘Structuralism’ in a brief statement is not less than a challenge. It is not only hard to define but also takes multiple forms of a common denominator as evidence. The ‘structures’ which many ‘structuralists’ used have acquired diverse significations.

Features:

- ❑ All texts, all meaningful events and all signifying practices can be analysed for their underlying structures.
- ❑ Such an analysis would reveal the patterns that characterize the system that makes such texts and practices possible.
- ❑ Structuralism promises to offer insights into what makes us the way we are.

Structure and System:

- The idea of structure presupposes the reduction or breaking down of linguistic segments or features.
- A structure presupposes a notion of unity existing above particular segments or features, of a whole above the composing and functioning elements.

System

- The notion of System here is to be contrasted with the idea of inventory – a non-ordered list of elements – that was important and prevalent at one stage in the development of linguistics.
- (e.g. Neogrammarians, followers of Darwinian theory, or even in the introspective and normative approach so much in use in traditional linguistics during the Renaissance and after)

Claude Levi-Strauss:

- Claude Levi-Strauss: (1908-2009) “Father of Structuralism”
- Born in Brussels in 1908. He became a professor of Sociology in Brazil in 1934.
- It was at this time that he began to think about human thought cross-culturally and alterity.
- Levi Strauss has been noted as singly associated for the elaboration of the structuralist paradigm in anthropology.
- Claude Levi-Strauss was a French Social Anthropologist and a leading exponent of Structuralism
- Often Known as the “father of modern anthropology”, he revolutionized the world of social anthropology by implementing the methods of structuralist analysis developed by Sassuro in the field of cultural relations
- **Structuralism** is an approach used to analyse culture. Developed by Claude **Levi-Strauss**, it asserts that human culture, being the set of learned behaviours and ideas that characterize a society, is just an expression of the underlying structures of the human mind.

Ferdinand De Saussure (1857 – 1913)

- ✍ Swiss Linguist
- ✍ Language is not just about the relationship between words and the things they designate.
- ✍ Linguistic Signifier: language is a system of signs rather than a naming process. Each sign has 2 binary opposites.
- ✍ A signifier (the sound pattern of a word, either in mental projection or in actual, physical realization of a speech act) and a signified (the concept of meaning of the word):
language v/s parole
- ✍ Originated in the early 1900s, in the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure.
- ✍ Subsequently taken up by the Prague (Roman Jakobson), Moscow and Copenhagen schools of linguistics.
- ✍ In the late 1950s and early 1960s, structural linguistics was challenged by Noam Chomsky and other like theorists.

Roman Jakobson (1896 – 1982)

- ☞ The term “structuralism” was introduced into linguistics by Jakobson in the early days of the linguistic Circle of Prague, founded in 1926.
- ☞ While Saussure focused on examining language as a static system of interconnected units, Jakobson’s *Structural Linguistics* suggests that the identity of a sign is determined by its existence in a state of contrast with other signs that can be either syntagmatic or paradigmatic.
- ☞ paradigmatic relations are sets of units that exist in the mind; e.g the phonological set cat, bat, mat, fat, or the morphological set ran, run, running. The units of a set must have something in common with one another, but they must also contrast with each other, else they would collapse into a single unit.
- ☞ Syntagmatic relations are temporal and consist of a row of units that contrast with one another, like “the man hit the ball” or “the ball was hit by the man”.
- ☞ What units can be used in each part of the rows is determined by the units that surround them.
- ☞ There is therefore an interweaving effect between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations.

Characteristics of Structuralism:

- Language constructs the basic nature of our perception or reality.
- Structuralism allows the structuralism to investigate the manner in which literary texts are structured.
- Structuralism seeks the process of meeting & production. It even analysis hoe the text constructs meaning.

Relationship of Literary Theory and Structuralism

Precisely, Northrop Frye, a Canadian literary critic, employed a different structuralism approach as he compartmentalized genres of literature into four mythoi.

- Historical criticism or modes theory (thematic, tragic and comic)
- Archetypal criticism or myths theory (tragedy, comedy, satire, and romance)
- Ethical criticism or Symbols theory (mythical, anagogic, literal, descriptive and formal)
- Rhetorical criticism or genres theory (epos, drama, lyric, epos)

Semiotic and Structuralism

Saussure is one of the well-known figures who introduced 'Semiotics' into structuralism. Another theorist Charles Sanders presented semiotics theories to expand the horizon of structuralism. The ideas of semiotics help structuralists analyze the sign systems that define human experiences. The theorists incorporated three critical ideas into structuralism.

- *Iconic Signs*, in which both signified thing and signifier resemble each other, for example, tags of 'Men and Women' on washroom doors
- *Indexes*, in which the signifier's job is indicating the signified, such as smoke and fire
- *True symbols*, it refers to the conventional and arbitrary relation between signifier and signified a thing.

Examples:

The methods of literary analysis described and demonstrated in Barthe's book *S/Z*, published in 1970. This book of some two hundred pages is about Balzac's thirty pages story 'Sarrasine'. Barthe's method divide the story into 561 'lexis' or units of meaning, he classifies the using five codes.

1. The Proairetic
2. The Hermeneutic code
3. The cultural code
4. The semic code
5. The Symbolic code

Thank
You!