



## THE STUDY OF STRUCTURE AS A CRITICAL THEORY: THE ANALYSES OF JACQUES DERRIDA AND GERARD GENETTE

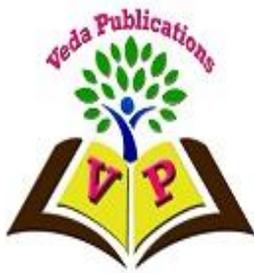
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### ABSTRACT



Jacques Derrida and Gerard Genette are the versatile critics of the 20th and 21st centuries. Both the critics deal with the 'Structuralism'. Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher, deals with semiotics that discusses the significance, representation, reference and meaning. His lecture 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences' is an advanced theory of Literature. Jacques Derrida's theory is about Post Structuralism.

Gerard Genette is a French Literary Theorist and Critic. In his Literary Theory. Structuralism is examined with the underlying invariant structure. The literary conditions may change but never the literary structure. The structure is an assessment of Literature. The structure appeals to all times. The action, theme, plot, the narrative and the different components of Literature are universal. This is how the theories of Jacques Derrida and Gerard Genette appeal to the readers on the whole by culminating at the same point.

This article provides the structures of Literature by striking a parallel between Gerard Genette's structuralism and Jacques Derrida's Structure, Sign, and Play.

**Keywords:** *Structure, Structuralist Movement, Literature, Critical Theory, Narrative. Center.*



Jacques Derrida (1930 - 2004), an Algerian born French philosopher, critically engages with structuralism and is best known for developing a form of semiotic analysis. His lecture 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences' was a lecture presented at Johns Hopkins University on 1966. Although presented at a conference intended to popularize Structuralism, the lecture is widely acclaimed as the starting point for Post Structuralism in the United States. He comments on what the structure is and what he terms as the "structural quality of structure". This article showcases the extent of limits of structuralism, which provides the structures by striking a parallel between the theories of Gerard Genette's structuralism and Jacques Derrida's Structure, Sign, and Play.

Jacques Derrida explains that the concept of structure is as old as the concept of episteme or knowledge.

On explaining the structure he first defines what a center is - "an organizing principle that allows for limited play", i. e. center gives structure its structural quality, and "orients, balances and organizes the Structure".

Therefore the center that leads coherence and the quality of structure to a structure, is at the same time escapes it. Therefore, the paradoxical concept of center being both inside and outside the structure, i.e. the center that governs the center escapes its totality at the same time. For example: God is the center of human life, yet at the same time he is not the part of this life. He is absent from the play of human life. Jacques Derrida then chooses to call the center as "a transcendental signifier."

Genette (1930 - 2018) was a French Literary Theorist, Critic associated with the Structuralist movement. In Literary Theory. Structuralism is an approach to analyze the Narrative material by examining the underlying Invariant Structure. The Invariant Structure means a permanent overview of the Literary work. The ages may change. The social conditions and the perception of Literature may change. But the structure stands permanent according to Gerard Genette. The authors of any region, era may attempt their Literary Narratives. But their perception about its permanent structure stands the same. For example, a Literary Critic applying a Structuralist theory might say that the Authors of 'West side Story' did not write anything new. Because their work has the same Structure as William Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'.

In Gerard Genette's words, 'If the Writer questions the Universe, the Critic questions Literature, that is to say the 'Universe of Signs'. 'Structuralism' is the offshoot of certain developments in Linguistics and Anthropology. Structuralist Criticism aims at forming the Science of Literature from a study of the literary works. The best work in Structuralist Poetics has been done in the field of Narrative. In the words of Gerard Genette, the Universe of Science means the notable and note worthy elements in a work of Art. They carry out the significance and the prominence of any work of Literature to form a structure. In Structuralism, the structure is the Universalized theme or concept. That stands permanent in the study of Literary Criticism.

Examining the history of structures Jacques Derrida elaborates that one center gets replaced by



another. Thus the factors governing the play too get epistemologically shifted. For example, the center of human society shifted from God to Renaissance man. Thus, at given point the center of the structure cannot be substituted by various permutations but historically the center can get replaced.

Jacques Derrida points out that at a point when structurality of structure is examined, the structure gets destroyed.

At this moment, with the removal of center, infinite play takes place. Each sign defines itself with respect to other signs, showing that there is no center. And in this case even “transcendental signifier” needs to be defined with respect to other signs. So there is no structure and all is then a discourse.

An important question answered by the deconstructionist is that “where and how does this de-centering, this thinking of structurality of structure, occur?” To this the answer comes as follows: there is no particular event or doctrine that caused it. . A pertinent point here to be noted is that nowhere is Derrida favoring the doing away of structures. In fact, what he is suggesting is that necessity to keep a structure for discourse has to take place. The focus is on an alternate play, of not conforming to the entire concept of sign itself.

Gerard Genette's Structuralism by Structural Analysis makes it possible to uncover the connection that exists between a System of Forms and a System of Meanings. The Structuralist critic discovers the relation of the Literary forms and their meanings. In a work of Literature, the superficial addition of the Literary embellishments may go to any extent. The

Literary Styles, Forms, Diction may be different from Author to Author. But, the structure is the final outcome that leaves a permanent impact on the readers or audience. The relation between Code and Message is important. We get meaning by the Structural Relationship in a given work. It is not introduced from outside.

Gerard Genette adds ‘Structures are not directly encountered objects’. The Structures are Systems of Latent relations conceived rather than perceived. It is a Literary Discovery. According to Gerard Genette, the thematic Analysis is also a part of the Structures.

The main point of focus of Jacques Derrida, in the first place, is not withering away the structures but finding flaws in it. What structuralism does is to attribute a truth value to a structure; this is what is shaken, by the theory of deconstruction. Then you can discard the structure or use it to find its play.

He calls this method as “bricolage” and the person doing that is a “bricoleur.”

For example an engineer is someone who builds structures that are coherent, stable, and have a fixed center and an absolute truth value.

Finally Derrida observes, that there are two ways to interpret structure, sign and play: one aims to decipher an absolute truth and avoid play and the other affirms play. The first way was dominant throughout human history and the second is only emerging now. Play must supersede the alternatives of presence and absence and hence there is no need to be concerned with the absence of the center or of origin. Play is possible if we can forego our need for truth. It is possible then, to have a philosophy without concepts, without orientation.



According to Gerard Genette the Structuralist idea is to follow Literature in its overall evolution. Over a period of its progress, Literature has passed through many phases seeing many literary genres, Styles, Manners, etc.,. But, the theme addresses a larger part of the man in relation with one another, man in relation with the society around and man in relation with himself only. In this way, the Literature appears to be rich. In this sense, Literary History becomes the history of the system. This system is the Literary Structure of a work of Literature. This is nothing but the history of its structure. It is the evolution of the functions that is significant, but not that of the elements.

Gerard Genette's Structuralist Literary Criticism argues that the Novelty value of a Literary Text can lie only in a new Structure. But it is not in the specifics of character, development and voice in which that structure is expressed. Gerard Genette also believes that Structural Criticism is untainted by any of the transcendent reductions of psycho analysis or Marxist explanation. Structural Criticism reaches the bone structure of any work. It is not certainly a superficial examination.

The versatile theories of Gerard Genette and Jacques Derrida are both leading to new discoveries in Literature and critical studies, by creating new horizons of depth and insights, while proving to be very important theories in the study of new approaches of Literature and Literary theories.

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