ABSTRACT

One of the harshest criticisms against Structuralism is the claim that it is not useful for the study of individual works. The paper interprets this claim as a misreading of the success of the theory in the area of poetics. It accuses such criticism of ignoring the theory’s applicability to different levels of analysis—anything from the institution of literature and an individual work. This paper defends the theory against this claim through two steps. The first introduces three major structuralist principles: "autonomy," "langue-parole" and "relations" and shows the variety of values that these principles can assume according to the level of analysis adopted in a study—i.e., literature, a homogenous group of literary works or an individual literary work. Establishing the variety of the values that the theoretical principles can take in application is necessary as it defeats the belief that these principles, when employed in a critical study, have only one true value that is related to producing poetics of either the institution of literature, a genre or a group of homogeneous works. The second step presents a practical example of how the three principles discussed in the first chapter can be applied to the study of an individual work. William Shakespeare's As You Like It is selected for this purpose. The application of the three principles in the study of the play prove to be both feasible and useful in determining the identity of the play as a comedy. The paper concludes by affirming the flexibility of the original spirit of Structuralism, which does not frown upon studying individual literary works.