

## Abstract

Traditional interpretive criticism is concerned with what a literary work means rather than with the system which influences interpretation. The interpretive method defines works of literature within an established literary convention, but chooses to emphasize the results of the reading process rather than the process itself.

Structuralism examines the way in which literary works generate meaning and reveals the structures which a reader employs when he reads. These structures form the literary conventions which constitute the implicit literary knowledge of a reader. This implicit knowledge is Jonathan Culler's "literary competence", and it establishes the parameters which guide interpretation.

Culler's incorporation of Roland Barthes' "Five Codes" in his (Culler's) structuralist approach to the novel provides a method of analysing novelistic conventions. An analysis of the conventions which guide the interpretation of the novel, provides a "standard" from which one may examine the 'avant-garde' novel. Having recognised the conventional structures of the novel, one is better able to identify instances of subversion which characterise the 'avant-garde' work.

Samuel Beckett's trilogy, Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable fall within the ambit of the 'avant-garde' novel. These three novels are examined in this paper from a structuralist perspective, based on Culler's notion of structuralism