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Structuralism as a Method of Literary Criticism

CONSIDERATIONS OF STRUCTURALISM as a mode of literary criticism consistently encounter two problems. First, though "structuralism" is generally taken to refer to a single methodology, the diversity of approaches actually included under this term is immense. (And this is not just because structuralism is theoretically applicable to all subject matters, and has, therefore, necessarily a variety of formulations; this diversity exists even within a single discipline.) Because of this, it is difficult to discern the basic assumptions that underlie and define the structuralist approach. Second, since structuralism has its origins primarily in the physical and social sciences, it is necessarily the case that, even if its essential principles can be deduced, they will be expressed in a terminology and context that makes their applicability to literary criticism obscure and even doubtful. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to determine a few fundamental assumptions that are shared by almost all varieties of structuralism, and to illustrate, or at least suggest, their relevance to literary criticism. Accordingly, using the theories of Jean Piaget, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michael Lane, and Roland Barthes, I shall begin by defining "structure," follow this with a discussion of what appear to be four defining principles of structuralism, then briefly consider a few supposed and real disadvantages of the method as a means of literary criticism, and conclude with an actual structuralist analysis that illustrates the concepts involved in, and the advantages of, the approach.

Piaget once defines "structure" as a "system of transformations,"¹ and though there are various elaborate definitions of "structure" available, this succinct phrase includes the two concepts most important for literary criticism. By using the term "system," Piaget is emphasizing that structures are not aggregates, i.e., "composites formed of elements that are independent of the complexes into which they enter" (p. 7). Instead, a system is such that, in the words of Lévi-Strauss, "It is made up of several elements, none of which can undergo a change without effecting changes in all the other elements."² And by using the term "transformations," Piaget is pointing out that one or more units of a structure,

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¹Jean Piaget, *Structuralism*, trans. and ed. Chaninah Maschler (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), p. 5.

²Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Problems of Method and Teaching," *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967), p. 271.

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and, therefore, the structure itself, can undergo change, but that the transformed structure will still be recognizable as the same one, or at least of the same class.

Piaget is dealing primarily with the sort of structure one would encounter in the sciences, and Lévi-Strauss with the type one finds in anthropology, but it is not too difficult to transfer their ideas into the realm of literature. One can see, for example, that a whole novel or poem would be a system in the sense defined above. One can also see that smaller units within the total work would also qualify as systems: the various male/female relationships in Lawrence's *Women in Love* (Birkin and Ursula, Birkin and Hermione, Gerald and Gudrun, and Gudrun and Loerke) are obvious examples of separate variations of one recognizable structure. The transformations are more complex, but, again using *Women in Love* as an example, it is evident that as each of the male/female relationships is recognizable as being of the same structure and yet as different from one another, the various elements of these structures must be being seen as transformations of one another. And in comparing these couples, these structures, one is isolating the transformations undergone. Of course, the sort of structure found in *Women in Love* is not the only kind encountered in literature. One could, for example, identify Honor Klein of Iris Murdoch's *A Severed Head* as being of the structure of the Terrible Mother. One could then analyze the transformed elements that emerge as one compares the appearance of the Terrible Mother in myth with that of Honor Klein in the novel. This would involve an operation quite different from that of comparing the male/female structures of *Women in Love*. Instead of dealing only with structures within a work of art, one would be dealing with a structure within the work and another external to it. As these two examples suggest, the possible ways in which structures occur in literature are varied and numerous, but that they do occur in literature in the sense defined by Piaget is clear.

Given, then, this definition of "structure," it is now possible to go on to discuss structuralism itself, or at least the basic principles of structuralism. The first of these, the emphasis on relations, arises out of the above-given definition. Lane says, "Probably the most distinctive feature of the structuralist method is the emphasis it gives to wholes, to totalities. . . . a new importance has been given to the logical priority of the whole over its parts."³ Now at first glance Lane's statement of the principle seems accurate. Yet Piaget reminds us that structuralism's reaction to "atomism" is not simply a reversal; it is not just a matter of emphasizing wholes instead of parts. Rather, he says, "it is neither the elements nor a whole . . . , but the relations among elements that count. In other words, the logical procedures or natural processes by which the whole is formed are primary, not the whole . . . or the elements" (Piaget, pp. 8-9). Lane's claim, then, is a slight misstatement. But the main point is clear: as a structure is a system, particular relations are going to exist among its elements. And in so far as literary criticism can define these relations, i.e., the ways in which elements interact and are dependent on one another, it can gain insight

³Michael Lane, "Introduction" to *Introduction to Structuralism*, ed. Michael Lane (New York: Basic Books, 1970), p. 14.

into the literary work. If one can, for example, grasp the set of relations that holds among several novels of a particular type (categories such as "Bildungsroman," first person narrative, and Naturalistic), if one can see the relations that obtain among the several elements of a single novel, or if one can define the relations existing between a mythic and a novelistic expression of the same structure, or existing among the elements of that structure as it appears in the novel alone, one will, sometimes simply by a process of comparative morphology, perceive things imperceptible without the structuralist method. Whether one is dealing with the "smallest" structure one can isolate, or with a series of structures seen as variations of one structure or as elements of a larger structure, an investigation into the relations that hold among the constituent units will necessarily force "information" to emerge that is different from that which would result from a concentration on the elements themselves or on the wholes which they form.

Another principle that is essential to structuralism and pertinent to literary criticism is the synchronic/diachronic distinction. Barthes comments, "watch who uses . . . *synchronic* and *diachronic*," for this is one of the discriminations out of which "the structuralist vision is constituted."⁴ Structuralism as it investigates the elements of a structure, the relations among them, and the process of transformation which occurs within the structure, is not primarily concerned with diachronic formation, the order of precedence among the elements. Instead, its concern is with the synchronic, with, as Lane puts it, "relations across a moment in time, rather than through time" (pp. 16-17). It is not that time is ignored; it is just that it is not emphasized in the "structuralist vision" in the way that it is in nonstructural methodologies. Now, a corollary of the synchronic way of seeing is an absence of interest in causality. Structuralism, because its view is synchronic, does not seek a cause as an explanation of why and how two structures can be said to be of the same class, yet different from one another. Rather, it is interested in "'laws of transformation'": "the law-like regularities that can be observed, or derived from observation, by which one particular structural configuration changes into another" (Lane, p. 17). The question of causality does not arise here.

The relevance of the synchronic/diachronic distinction to literary criticism is easy to illustrate; the appropriateness of the so-called laws of transformation is not. (Unquestionably, the concept of *laws* of transformation is more suitable to the sciences than to literary criticism.) To view *Women in Love* as the presentation of Birkin's spiritual development through time, the specific phases in his development and their causes being considered essential, is to see the novel diachronically. But to isolate the four main couples as the structural principle of the novel is to view the work synchronously. Clearly, one's understanding of this novel, or of any work, will differ greatly according to whether one approaches it diachronically or synchronously. Yet, even if one has approached a work synchronously, and has determined the structuring systems, to go on from there and define the rules that allow one structure to be transformed into

⁴Roland Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity," *Partisan Review*, 34 (1967), 83.

another is difficult. It might be that, in the case of *Women in Love*, one could focus on the different characteristics of the Great Mother archetype expressed by each of the females in the couples, and on the different qualities of the mythological hero encountering the Great Mother embodied by each of the males, and use these as the basis for deriving laws of transformation. That is, one could define the principles inherent in each of the two archetypal figures and in the archetype of the mythological encounter itself, and maintain that the structures as they are expressed through the characters and situations of *Women in Love* can be said to be transformations of one another and of the archetypes only in so far as they embody some of, or variations of, the principles defined. In effect, that each of the couples and their situations have certain elements in common and in difference, and that both the similarities and differences be essential elements of the Great Mother/hero-encounter archetype would form the laws of transformation, the "law-like regularities." I do not suggest that this is a wholly adequate solution to the problem, but it may at least indicate a possible way in which one would proceed in order to determine the laws of transformation of a given structure.

The third tenet, that the structures sought exist "below the surface," is less difficult to deal with. Lévi-Strauss often warns that when one is seeking to define the structures of a social activity, one must beware of "secondary elaborations,"⁵ that is, of the explanations of the social activities that might be given by those participating in them. This caution, though it is directed at structuralist anthropology, is relevant to structuralist literary criticism. Works of literature are, of course, something other than mere "secondary elaborations," but it is still true that, although the only material one has for an understanding of a work's structure is the work itself, the structure of the work will be something other than that which is immediately evident on the "surface." Barthes is useful on this point. As he explains his version of structuralism, the goal of the "structuralist activity" is to construct a "*simulacrum* of the object," for this "makes something appear which remained invisible, or if one prefers, unintelligible . . ." (Barthes, p. 83). Structuralism effects this through a two-phase activity. First, it submits the work to a "dissection" whereby the "fragments" (equivalent to what have been termed "elements" above) are revealed. (Barthes, p. 85). And then, through a process of "articulation," the "rules of association" of these "units" are established (p. 86). This description of structuralism in terms of dissection and articulation is helpfully suggestive. To dissect a work of art in order to determine its structures is to delve "below the surface" of the work. In other words, to see a work synchronously so as to isolate its structuring principles and the elements that form the structures involves a going beyond that which is immediately manifest. And to articulate the structures discovered, that is, to define these structures in terms of their elements as well as of the relations among them, does, as Barthes suggests, "make something appear which remained invisible." The "*simulacrum*" that is the result of the structural analysis will be a description of structures that exists only at a great

⁵Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction: History and Anthropology," *Structural Anthropology*, p. 19.

“depth,” and which cannot be uncovered without the application of the structuralist method.

Almost all discussions of structuralism emphasize the method's universality; structuralism is applicable to any area of investigation and is, therefore, useful in any scholarly discipline. What this indicates, of course, is that structures are universally present. And if structures are everywhere, there is at least the possibility that there are necessary relations among these various structures, regardless of the field of inquiry in which they happen to appear. This possibility, the final defining principle to be discussed, is one of Lévi-Strauss's main concerns, and it is through his ideas that this issue is best developed. Lévi-Strauss, like many structuralists, takes structural linguistics as the model of the sort of structuralism he uses in his own field. For as Lévi-Strauss points out, “among the social sciences . . .” structural linguistics is “the only one which can truly claim to be a science.”⁶ Yet it also has all the properties essential to a structural methodology. That is, linguistics concentrates on the “*unconscious* infrastructure,” focuses on “*relations* between terms,” employs the “concept of *system*,” and “aims at discovering general laws” (p. 31). And, as Lévi-Strauss says, “when an event of this importance takes place in one of the sciences of man, it is not only permissible for, but required of, representatives of related disciplines immediately to examine its consequences and its possible application to phenomena of another order” (p. 31). Following his own advice, Lévi-Strauss discovers significant parallels between linguistic problems and kinship problems, his particular area of concern. He finds that both phonemes and kinship terms are “elements of meaning,” that both types of elements acquire their meaning “only if they are integrated into systems,” that in both spheres “the observable phenomena result from the action of laws which are general but implicit,” and that in both cases the respective systems “are built by the mind on the level of unconscious thought” (p. 32). Lévi-Strauss's further discussion makes clear that the differences between the two subjects are great, and that even the four listed similarities are simplifications; nevertheless, his conclusion is that “Although they belong to *another order of reality*, kinship phenomena are of the *same type* as linguistic phenomena” (p. 32).

The success that linguistic structuralism has had in attaining to the conditions of a science, and the parallels Lévi-Strauss discovers between linguistic and kinship phenomena, are not without meaning for literary criticism. Language, as Lévi-Strauss points out, is a “social phenomenon,” and one of its most important characteristics is that “much of linguistic behavior lies on the level of unconscious thought.”⁷ That is, the laws according to which humans learn and use language are not consciously known. But since language can be studied scientifically, its “systems of relations which are the products of unconscious thought processes” can be derived and analyzed (p. 57). The question that arises, then, is, “Is it possible to effect a similar reduction in the analysis of other forms of social phenomena?” (p. 57)

⁶Lévi-Strauss, “Language and Kinship,” *Structural Anthropology*, p. 29.

⁷Lévi-Strauss, “Language and the Analysis of Social Laws,” *Structural Anthropology*, p. 55.

Well, as Lévi-Strauss's above-reproduced discussion of the parallels between linguistic and kinship problems suggests, a similar reduction seems possible with respect to at least one other social phenomenon. And, what is important to literary criticism, it is *possible* that the social phenomenon called "literature" can also be "reduced" to structures that are the "products of unconscious thought." After all, literature seems to share the same parallels with linguistic phenomena that kinship phenomena do. As has been shown above (in the discussion of the definition of "structure"), one can isolate "elements of meaning" in literature too, and these elements have meaning only in so far as they are part of a system. And of literature too it can be said that "the observable phenomena result from the action of laws which are general but implicit." Lévi-Strauss's assertion that this is true of kinship systems is based on the "recurrence of kinship patterns, marriage rules, similar prescribed attitudes between certain types of relatives, and so forth . . ." in different societies in different parts of the world.⁸ Certainly something similar occurs in literature—the literary equivalents of these constantly recurring "patterns," "rules," and "attitudes" are generally referred to as archetypes in literary criticism. As for the fourth condition, that the systems are "built by the mind on the level of unconscious thought," it would seem that this must hold simply because the third condition does. How else can we explain the existence of archetypes? In addition, the fact that the archetypes of literature are the same as those of myths (assumedly the products of an unconscious process) indicates that both these systems have their origins in the unconscious. It is at least possible, then, that literature, like kinship systems, is "*of the same type*" as linguistic systems, and that, therefore, literature too is accessible to a structural analysis that will reveal structures produced by an unconscious process.

Now, it must be noted that Lévi-Strauss somewhat arbitrarily labels structural linguistics a "science"—one might not wish to grant the discipline this status. It must also be noted that Lévi-Strauss only points out certain basic similarities between linguistic and kinship phenomena; he then suggests—he does not prove—that because these similarities exist, kinship systems can be investigated in the same way that linguistic ones can. Finally, it must be noted that the parallels among linguistic, kinship, and literary phenomena are rather tenuous—obviously literature cannot be reduced solely to an unconscious process. Thus, what is being said about this fourth defining principle is perhaps closer to "wish" than fact. But it is worth exploring. Because if, indeed, language, kinship systems, and literature can be analyzed at least partially in terms of unconsciously produced structures, the same may be true for all other social phenomena. And if this can be done, it may be found that the various structures isolated, whether they be found in myth, art, religion, or whatever, may have some necessary relation to one another. The question is, as Lévi-Strauss puts it, "can we conclude that all forms of social life are substantially of the same nature—that is, do they consist of systems of behavior that represent the projection, on the level of conscious and socialized thought, of universal laws which regulate the un-

⁸Lévi-Strauss, "Language and Kinship," p. 32.

conscious activities of the mind?"⁹ What is being expressed here is the possibility of determining the relationships of all forms of social life to one another on the basis of their structural correspondences—and this includes the relation of literature to other aspects of existence—as well as the possibility of determining the very structuring process of the psyche. And if such correspondences, what the structuralists usually call “homologies,” do exist, a byproduct could be that structures in various spheres would mutually elucidate one another. Understanding the structural configurations in one area could lead to the understanding of structural configurations in another. Thus, of the four defining principles discussed, it is this last one that has the most far-reaching and exciting implications.

The preceding discussion of structure and structuralism has shown that structuralism as a method of literary criticism is one that attempts to see literature synchronously in order to isolate its structures—which exist “below the surface”—as well as to define the relations and rules of transformation that hold among these structures. In thus revealing the structuring principles of literature, structuralism seeks not only to elucidate the work itself and the structural parallels among various literary works, but also to relate the literary structures to structures existing in the nonliterary realm, and to elucidate those related structures in terms of the literary structures. Of course, it is a method that has inadequacies. One that is most evident is that it involves assumptions, some, like Lévi-Strauss's supposition that there is a given relationship among all types of structures determined by the structuring capacity of the mind itself, that can never be proven or disproven. Others, of course, are open to possible substantiation or refutation. But that assumptions do exist is not necessarily significant. Any sophisticated theory in criticism, or in any other field, will entail assumptions. Another problem of structuralism is that different structuralists find different structures in the same work. Lévi-Strauss, in an interview, expresses the problem: “Instead of searching methodically for the real meaning behind consciously elaborated metaphors, people believed they could use it [structuralism] as a pretext for indefinitely substituting one set of metaphors for another. That gave birth to what I would call a ‘structuralism-fiction.’”¹⁰ This does not seem to be a valid objection. Different critics are always going to develop different interpretations, even if they are using the same methodology. And to assume there is a “real meaning,” or that one can separate structuralism from “structuralism-fiction” is a mistake. Structuralism, in so far as it is a method of literary criticism, is not and never will be a science. Literature for obvious reasons, will not yield to a scientific approach. And “real-meaning” exists, if it exists anywhere, only in the sciences. One further objection should be noted—and it is a serious one. As Lane says, “structuralist methods offer little or no help in the evaluation of literary works . . .” because structural “criticism can do no more than test for a validity that is defined by a work's possession of a ‘coherent system of signs . . .’” (Lane, p. 38). I am afraid this is a valid objection. It is true that no theory of literary criticism offers an

⁹Lévi-Strauss, “Language and the Analysis of Social Laws,” pp. 57-58.

¹⁰Lévi-Strauss, “Interview/Claude Lévi-Strauss,” *Diacritics*, 1 (1971), 45.

ultimately defensible basis for evaluation, but that does not vindicate this inadequacy in structuralism.

Aside from these failings—or, to be exact, this one failing—structuralist criticism has important advantages. These are suggested in the definition given in the previous paragraph, as well as in the paper as a whole. Yet a brief example of an actual structuralist analysis will serve to illustrate them, and to clarify the above-elaborated concepts. In Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, the principal structure that underlies the novel is that of the various male/female conflicts. In its first appearance it is but roughly sketched. The reader learns little of Alfred Brangwen and his wife other than that the woman is "a thing to herself . . . separate and indifferent,"¹¹ that the man is capable of "deep, tense fury" (p. 8) that injures the woman, and that the two, nevertheless, generally get along well and achieve deep satisfaction with one another, because "They were two very separate beings, vitally connected, knowing nothing of each other, yet living in their separate ways from one root" (p. 8). But the second appearance of this structure, the courtship and married life of Tom and Lydia, is extensively developed. The conflict between Lydia, who is self-absorbed, foreign, and ultimately inviolable, and Tom, who, in turn, fears, rages against, and worships this "awful unknown" (p. 90), is traced through various stages and several years. However, the struggle between Tom and Lydia is finally less mutually fulfilling than is that between Alfred and his wife. For though this battle of wills sometimes culminates by temporarily creating a binding "spell" (p. 51) or a vital "connection" (p. 57) between the two, and though Lydia achieves contentment, the cost for these achievements is Tom's being, as Lawrence puts it, "reduced" (p. 99). The third variation of the structure, the relationship of Will and Anna, is even more thoroughly elaborated, and is shown to be even less mutually satisfying. Though Will begins as a self-sufficient, confident young man interested in Christian architecture and symbolism, and deeply moved by religious mystery, he becomes a dependent and frustrated middle-aged man. For Anna, who is devoted to and fulfilled by the "violent trance of motherhood" (p. 217), and who wishes to acknowledge only the conscious self and intelligible experience, is obsessed with destroying the vague and inarticulate passion that constitutes Will's being. Only thus, by destroying Will, can "Anna Victrix" extend "the little matriarchy" (p. 205) to include not only her many children, but also her husband. And the final transformation of the structure, the one the novel presents most fully, exhibits much the same characteristics. Again, the couple, Ursula and Skrebensky, is involved in a struggle for domination, though it is far more violent battle than have been the preceding three. Again, the male is too weak to meet the challenge—indeed, Skrebensky proves to be totally inept. And, again, reciprocal fulfillment is denied the pair; in fact, in this variation of the structure, even the female fails to gain satisfaction from the relationship.

Thus a synchronic analysis of *The Rainbow* shows it to be informed by four variations of one structure, or, synonymously, by four similar structures. And the

¹¹D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), p. 7. All further quotations of this novel will be from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

differences among these four versions, or structures, are explained largely by the changes undergone by the above-discussed defining elements. That is, the above description of the four structures indicates that, as one variation follows another chronologically, the male becomes increasingly weaker; the female, conversely, be- increasingly more dominant; and the relationship itself, because it depends on the equivalent strength of the male's and female's wills for its success, becomes increasingly less satisfying. Changes in these three constitutive elements, then, account to a great extent for the transformations among the structures; changes in these elements form, in part, the so-called laws of transformation pertinent to these structures.

Yet there is one additional element which, though it occurs in and partially constitutes only three of the four variations, also undergoes change and does, therefore, contribute to the transformations of the structures. In each of the last three expressions of the structure, there is an emphasis on the concern with and/or attempts at self-realization manifested and/or made by one member of each pair. And these concerns with and/or quests for self-fulfillment form a fourth constitutive element. With respect to Tom and Lydia, the focus is on Tom. He is shown, at age twenty-four, as being stirred and inspired by the seductive young woman and by the foreigner (her lover) who displays such "exquisite graciousness" (p. 19). Tom's brief experience with them at the hotel in Matlock makes him aware that there is "a life so different from what he knew" (p. 19), that there is something beyond the "reality of Cossethay and Ilkeston" (p. 21), and that there is stagnation and incompleteness in his present way of being. Tom is shown a second time, at age twenty-eight, as experiencing this same sense of there being a "far world" (p. 24) in which he does not participate, and of his being only "fragmentary" and "incomplete" (p. 35); in this instance it is the discovery and love of Lydia that so stimulates him. And even when Tom is older, at age forty-five, he is depicted as still feeling that something is "missing in his life" (p. 124), and that: "One was never right, never decent, never master of oneself. . . . He was a man of forty-five. Forty-five! In five more years fifty. Then sixty—then seventy—then it was finished. My God—and one still was so unestablished!" (p. 125, 131). Indeed, there is no indication in the novel that Tom ever feels that he has participated in that other world or that he has at last become established. Though he is always aware that, in some way, he is not fulfilled, he never discovers how to achieve self-fulfillment.

In the case of Will and Anna the pattern is the same; the emphasis is on the male's search for self-satisfaction, and the quest is unsuccessful. Once Anna has forced Will to realize the narrowness of his religious conception and passion, a process that culminates in the Lincoln Cathedral scene, Will is left without the senses of meaningfulness and belonging that have previously, though without Will's awareness, pervaded and defined his being. He attempts, at first, to deal with this newly created absence by maintaining a faith in religious symbols themselves, in spite of their invalidity as representations: "Still he loved the Church. As a symbol, he loved it . . . for what it tried to represent, rather than for that which it did represent" (p. 203). "The water had not turned into wine. But for all that he would live in his soul as if the water *had* turned into wine" (p. 169).

And Will complements this belief in the "as if" by taking on various church related roles: he does repair work in the church, conducts the choir, and teaches Sunday school classes. Yet, as time passes, it becomes clear that Will has not succeeded in finding an adequate substitute for his lost belief and the sustaining sense of himself it gave him. At one point, because "Education" comes into "the forefront as a subject of interest" among the public (p. 235), he begins to teach night-classes in woodwork. At a later point he takes up wood carving anew, a craft he had enjoyed twenty years previously, before he married Anna. But he finds that "he could not quite hitch on—always he was too busy, too uncertain, confused" (p. 354). He turns to modeling in clay. Yet he discovers that "the pitch of concentration would not come"; so, "With a little ash in his mouth he gave up" (p. 354). Then he tries, in succession, painting, making jewelry, and working with metal—but these too fail to satisfy. And at age forty, in his final appearance in the novel, Will is seen making one more attempt. This time he is planning to move to Beldover, where he is to become "Art and Handicraft Instructor for the County of Nottingham," and where once again he will seek "coming into his own" (p. 418). However, though Will seems to have a clearer idea than does Tom of how to proceed in order to gain self-satisfaction, there is no suggestion that he ever succeeds; there is no indication that he ever discovers a role or activity that compensates for what has been lost and that allows him a sense of self-fulfillment.

But in the case of Ursula and Skrebensky, the third instance of this element, and the one the novel treats most extensively, the situation is radically different. Here, for the first time, the emphasis is on the female's attempt at self-realization, and here there is at least a symbolic suggestion of hope with respect to the attempt. Early in her life, Ursula displays an acute and troubling sense that she must somehow achieve self-definition: "As Ursula passed from girlhood towards womanhood, gradually the cloud of self-responsibility gathered upon her. She became aware of herself, that she was a separate entity in the midst of an unseparated obscurity, that she must go somewhere, she must become something. And she was afraid, troubled. Why, oh why must one grow up, why must one inherit this heavy, numbing responsibility of living an undiscovered life? Out of the nothingness and the undifferentiated mass, to make something of herself!" (p. 281). And for Ursula, to "become something" is not merely to take on socially respectable roles. Most people, according to Ursula, "assume selves as they assume suits of clothing. . . . 'They think it better to be clerks or professors than to be the dark, fertile beings that exist in the potential darkness'" (p. 448). It is this "darkness" Ursula intends to explore in order to "make something of herself"; it is authentic selfhood that she seeks. Accordingly, as a girl Ursula resists the influence of people in general—the "mob lying in wait for her"—and of her own family; she realizes that both offer only "the commonplace, the average," and are, therefore, antagonistic to her "undiscovered self" (p. 269). Similarly, as a young woman Ursula recognizes that "the machine" (p. 349) that is the society of the colliers and that people such as Winifred Inger and Uncle Tom give themselves to is a form of death-in-life, and must, therefore, be opposed if the possibility of selfhood is to be preserved. And, a few years later Ursula perceives that even the woman's

normal pattern of life, the settled marriage as it is offered to her by Anthony Schofield, is inimical to her quest, and that this too must be rejected.

Ursula's attempt to achieve authenticity does not, though, consist only of defense against social forces that threaten to submerge her identity. It also involves introspection, pursuit of goals, and relations with other people. Ursula, for example, explores in depth the attraction she feels towards her romanticized version of Christianity, and meditates often on the concept of the "Sons of God" seeking "daughters of men"—an idea that stirs her as though it were "a call from far off" (p. 274). She sets out to, and does, succeed in the "man's world . . . the world of daily work and duty . . ." (333), enduring two years of elementary school teaching that both injures and strengthens her soul; and she determines to, and does, continue her education, not only so that she can carry on her progress in the "man's world," but also so that she can further seek "the source of the mystery" that she has discovered life to be (p. 436). Finally, Ursula undergoes an experience with Skrebensky that offers her an escape from the vulgarity that has pervaded much of her life, that effects the sort of self-awakening and fulfillment that can be achieved only through sexual experience, and that produces in her a self-development that can occur only through the opposition of wills that love with a male entails.

Of course, ultimately the affair with Skrebensky is ended. Though Ursula would like to be able to fulfill her self through relationship with Skrebensky, once she realizes that he is incapable of growing with her and that her will is far stronger than his, she is compelled to reject him. Indeed, as the wild horses scene suggests, Ursula's separation from Skrebensky is literally forced upon her; her resistance to it, in fact, her consciousness, is overcome by an autonomous, unconscious power. And this occurrence suggests the essence of Ursula's psychic constitution. Ursula's early perception of "the cloud of self-responsibility," her consistent defense against social forces that threaten to frustrate her fulfilling this responsibility, her active exploration and pursuit of ideas and circumstances that offer possibilities of self-definition, along with this overwhelming need to sever her attachment to Skrebensky, illustrate that Ursula's defining characteristic is her drive toward self-definition. And it is because this drive toward self-realization is *the* constitutive factor in her psychic make-up that the novel ends with Ursula's perceiving the rainbow. Whether or not it is logically defensible, through this symbol the novel suggests that Ursula, because of her fundamental commitment to self-definition, will succeed where her male antecedents have failed.

There are, then, four elements that constitute the structures isolated above and that, accordingly, are the bases of the transformations they undergo. These elements and the structures they compose are, in Barthes' terms, the "fragments" that underlie the surface of the work—in this instance, the narrative line: the history of three generations of Brangwens—and that are revealed once the work has been subjected to the processes of "dissection" and "articulation." And though these elements have been abstracted for purposes of discussion, and sometimes treated as if they exist independently of one another, as *The Rainbow* clearly shows and as the above-stated definition of "structure" requires, they are inter-related; it is impossible to separate, for example, the increase in the female's

dominance from the diminution of the male's power, or the attempts at self-realization made by a member of a couple from the quality of the relationship he or she is involved in. Yet, it has been maintained above not only that structuralist literary criticism reveals a work's underlying structures and their components, but also that it seeks structural correspondences between the work and other modes of being. As Judy Osowski puts it in her review of structuralism, it is "a critical activity that offers a theory and method for placing a work in a larger perspective . . ." that "extends systems of the work into, and relates them with, the outer world of other systems."¹²

Well, according to Erich Neumann, one of the most serious and pervasive problems of modern western civilization is its overwhelmingly patriarchal structure. Indeed, in Neumann's opinion, patriarchy represents to the "psychologist of culture" one of the main causes for "the peril of present-day mankind."¹³ The basis for Neumann's maintaining that a condition of "peril" exists and that patriarchy is a major cause of this condition is complex, but two factors are relevant here. First, in a patriarchy the female is not allowed to contribute substantially to the form and development of the society; accordingly, the society is deprived of the benefits that can be gained only by allowing such participation. Admittedly, there is controversy as to what the female contributes that the male cannot—in Neumann's view, it is a greater oneness with the unconscious—but, undoubtedly, a species which exists in a form that allows only minimal participation by one of its two sexes will be restricted, indeed, one-sided, in its development and in its definition of itself. Second, and this factor is closely related to the first, neither the male nor the female in a patriarchy is able to achieve what Neumann (and Jung before him) terms "psychic wholeness"; both sexes are limited to developing aspects of their selves that are in accordance with patriarchal values. Elements of one's personality, be one male or female, that are not esteemed by the patriarchal world view will not be cultivated; if their existence is not wholly denied, it will certainly be repressed. The result will be that individuals in a patriarchal society will have little chance of self-realization and that, correspondingly, the society as a whole will suffer. For, as Neumann points out, "a sound individual is the basis for a sound community" (p. xlii). It is true that these two circumstances would obtain in a matriarchy also: one sex would not be allowed full participation, and members of both sexes would be thwarted in their attempts at self-fulfillment. Both forms of society, after all, are one-sided. But the present concern is the patriarchal structure which now prevails. In Neumann's view, it is clear that this structure's inability to take advantage of and allow for the expression of its female members, and its incapacity with respect to the self-fulfillment of all of its members, are "threatening the existence of Western mankind . . ." (p. 57). It is also clear to Neumann that the imbalance which constitutes this threat and which has become a defining element in the society's structure suggests its own solution: "Western mankind must arrive at a synthesis that includes the feminine world . . ." (p. xlii).

¹²Judy Osowski, "The Structuralist Concept of Form: Roland Barthes, George Poulet and J. Hillis Miller," *Modern Schoolman* 49 (1972), pp. 349, 350.

¹³Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, 2nd. ed., trans. Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series, No. 47 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963), p. xlii.

If Neumann's description and assessment of western society is valid, plainly there are structural affinities between *The Rainbow* and the society of which it is a part. And the above structuralist analysis, in accordance with the theoretical claims preceding it, has succeeded in isolating these homologies. It has defined and elaborated, with respect to one of the four elements underlying *The Rainbow's* structure, the frustrations and failures encountered by three individuals, both male and female, who seek self-fulfillment. And it has also implied, in discussing this same constituting element, that, although the female is the dominant member of three of the four relationships that make up the novel's structure, her participation in the larger society is in most cases severely limited. That is, it has been pointed out that in two of the three cases in which there is an emphasis on the self-realization attempted by one member of a couple, that member is the male. And the emphasis is necessarily placed on the man in these instances, because only he ventures into the society in order to carry out his quest. (The search for self-fulfillment does, after all, as Tom's, Will's, and Ursula's experiences illustrate, involve one's relation to society.) The females in these two couples do not establish relations with their society at all; instead, their spheres of existence are narrowly restricted. Lydia is "quite indifferent to Ilkeston and Cossethay, to any claim made on her from outside . . ." (p. 98). And Anna is "so complacent, so utterly fulfilled in her breeding" (p. 352), that she too lacks any interest in the outside world. Thus, the analysis reveals that this one element of *The Rainbow's* structure involves characteristics that are homologous with both of the principles Neumann sees as distinctive of modern patriarchal society—limited participation by the female, and frustration of attempts at self-realization.

But the above structuralist analysis not only shows *The Rainbow* to possess homologies with respect to the basic structure of western society. It also indicates, first, that the work has structural correspondences with the state of "peril" that presently characterizes this society. And it reveals, second, that the novel suggests the same remedy for this condition as, according to Neumann, the society's given structure dictates. With reference to the first additional correspondence, the analysis has illustrated that increasing dissatisfaction in the male/female relationships and increasing male impotence are constitutive elements of the novel's structure. That, as the generations pass, male/female relations deteriorate, first to the extent that only one member is gaining satisfaction, and then to the degree that neither is, is a sign in any society that something is fundamentally wrong. And that, from generation to generation, the male becomes less and less able to assert (and fulfill) himself—to the point that, in Skrebensky's case, he is reduced to "helpless sorrow" (p. 466) by his relationship with a woman—is also indicative of a major flaw in any society, but is especially so in a patriarchal one. Not only the presence, but also the prominent structural function of these two elements in *The Rainbow*, make it clear that the fictional society, like the society existing outside of the novel, is in "peril," and that, correspondingly, the one is a homologue of the other in this respect. With reference to the second additional correspondence, discussion of the third variation of the fourth element, i.e., Ursula's quest for selfhood, has shown that her quest involves succession to a role that has in previous generations been reserved for males. But the novel's emphasis

on Ursula's entering into and challenging of the society, the "man's world," in order to fulfill her self, highlights not only the contrast between Ursula and her male forebearers—it marks also the distinct differences between Ursula and her female predecessors, and between Ursula and her male contemporaries. While Ursula conceives of herself as, and becomes, a "traveller on the earth . . ." (p. 417), Anna, though she is aware that there is "something beyond her," merely asks, "why should I start on the journey?" (p. 192). And whereas Ursula rejects Skrebensky's marriage offer in order to continue her quest for her self, Skrebensky, nominally the inheritor of the male tradition of self-seeking, wants only "to marry quickly, to screen himself from the darkness, the challenge of his own soul" (p. 482). These three contrasts do not appear incidentally in the novel; they are stressed. For through the pronounced presentation of these contrasts, the novel makes it clear that the modern woman's role and her relation to the male must be radically changed. Just as the society outside the novel requires that the female's function be drastically altered and expanded if its dangerous imbalance is to be corrected, so, homologously, *The Rainbow's* presentation clearly indicates that, if the structural deficiencies of the society it presents are to be rectified, it is this element that must undergo fundamental transformation. Thus, in both of these additional correspondences, as in the first, that there are intricate homologies between the fictional and social spheres is manifest.

In determining the structure and elements of *The Rainbow*, as well as the structural correspondences between the work and external society, the above example of a structuralist criticism does illustrate both the applicability of the definition and principles developed above, and the advantages of the approach. Structuralist criticism is able to define incisively the structural components of a work of fiction and their relations with nonfictional structures. Literary criticism is often very inept in the first of these functions, and is almost always so in the second. Literary criticism definitely needs a methodology which enables it to relate the work and its criticism to other spheres of existence. But here a few qualifications must be submitted. First, the above structuralist analysis establishes only the relations between *The Rainbow* and the society of which it is a part; notwithstanding the claims made in the preceding elaboration of the theory, it does not go on to illustrate the possible correspondences the work might have with other nonliterary realms, such as mythology, or religion. It is not that this is impossible; it is that such a task exceeds the scope of this brief example. Second, although the analysis does show that there are structural correspondences between the fictional and the nonfictional worlds, it does not show either that these relations are necessary ones, or that such relations, were they expanded to include various spheres of existence, could lead one to a paradigm of the structure of the psyche itself. But these two postulates of Lévi-Strauss are ignored not because to illustrate them would exceed the scope of the analysis, but because, as was stated above, there is no way to conclusively prove or disprove them.

Yet, even though structuralism may not yield a model of the mind, or at least cannot be proven to do so, it is possible that it gives an insight into a related matter—the structure of the reader's experience of a literary work. Osowski, in

her commentary on Barthes' concepts of dissection and articulation, says, "Through this process of decomposition and subsequent recomposition certain previously unperceived structures are raised to the level of consciousness" (p. 350). Now, this is not an exact statement of Barthes' view; therefore, its implications are not necessarily to be attributed to him. But in stating that "previously unperceived structures are raised to the level of consciousness," Osowski (and perhaps Barthes) is implying that structuralism is able to bring to consciousness what has previously been experienced unconsciously. It is as if in delving into and isolating the structure of a work, which, as was stated above, lies "below the surface," one correspondingly delves into and isolates the structure of the reader's unconscious experience of that work. Or, to use and slightly pervert another terminology, it is as if when, by virtue of the synchronous approach, one seeks what Northrop Frye calls the "pattern" of the work—for example, the four couples and the differences among them as explained by their constitutive elements—instead of the "rhythm"¹⁴—the history of three generations—one is also investigating the unrealized experience of the reader. Admittedly, this supposition is in the same category as Lévi-Strauss's postulates: its validity cannot be conclusively determined. Yet, also like Lévi-Strauss's hypotheses, it is an intriguing suggestion, one that merits consideration.

¹⁴Northrop Frye, "The Archetypes of Literature," *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), p. 14.

