Lecture Six: Structuralist Theories 1. Introduction : Structuralism is a way of thinking that works to find the fundamental basic units or elements of which anything is made. Structuralism appears in a variety of disciplines or fields, including anthropology, linguistics, mathematics, and literary and cultural criticism. In any field, a structuralist is interested in finding the basic elements – the units – that make up any system, and in discovering the rules that govern how those units can be combined. A structuralist analysis is not concerned with anything beyond the interrelationship of units and rules. Structuralist approaches to literature challenged some of the most cherished beliefs of the ordinary reader. The literary work, we had long felt, is the child of an author's creative life, and expresses the author's essential self. The text is the place where we enter into a spiritual or humanistic communion with an author's thoughts and feelings. Another fundamental assumption which readers often make is that a good book tells the truth about human life – that novels and plays try to 'tell things as they really are'. However, structuralists have tried to persuade us that the author is 'dead' and that literary discourse has no truth function. Thus, it would not be misleading to use the term 'anti–humanism' to describe the spirit of structuralism. Indeed the word has been used by structuralists themselves to emphasize their opposition to all forms of literary criticism in which the human subject is the source and origin of literary meaning. 2. The Linguistic Background: The Structure Structure is not something that we can easily identify. It's all very well to say that all the elements of a text are interconnected and that the various functions of these elements and the relations between them constitute a structure but that does not really help. However, for the French structuralism, structure is even more fundamental than form. Form is inevitably bound up with meaning; structure, however, is what makes meaning possible. It is that which enables meaning to emerge. This is an enigmatic claim that clearly needs some explanation. After all, we are not even aware of the structures that supposedly play a role in the creation of meaning. It seems to us that we ourselves create meaning. We create meaning by saying something, or by making a gesture, or through a work of art, if we happen to have the talent – we create meaning because we want to express something by way of language, music, choreography, painting, film, and a good many other means. Meaning would seem to be produced by you and me, and not by an invisible and intangible structure. Structuralism has its origin in the thinking of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) who in the early twentieth century revolutionized the study of language. Nineteenth–century linguistics is mainly interested in the history of language – for instance, in how French and Italian developed out of Latin, or how English, Dutch, and German developed out of the West–Germanic language that the ancestors of the English, the Dutch, and the Germans shared some fifteen hundred years ago. They studied the origin of individual words (modern English 'way', for instance, derives from Old English 'weg') and they tried to formulate the laws that apparently govern processes of linguistic change. Comparing new and old forms of a language, and using related languages to support their findings, historical linguists were able to discover the rules that govern linguistic transformations and to reconstruct how the various European languages had developed over historical time. Saussure adopted a completely different angle. Instead of the usual historical, diachronic approach – following language through time – he opted for an ahistorical and far more abstract approach. To Saussure questions concerning the way particular languages changed over particular periods were subordinate to a more fundamental question: how does language work? So

instead of actual instances of language use – spoken or written – Saussure focused on the question of how language actually works in order to formulate general insights that would be valid for all language use and for all languages. Here, it should perhaps be pointed out that this is also different from what grammarians – the other type of linguist around in Saussure's time – used to do. Grammarians wanted to describe the underlying grammatical rules that we automatically follow when we talk or write. So they analysed instances of language use – our individual utterances, which Saussure called paroles (plural) – to get at those rules. But Saussure is interested in how language as suchworks – in what he called langue – and not in the grammatical matrix of this or that language. This approach led Saussure, whose work only found wider circulation after it was published in 1915, four years after his death, to the idea that language should first of all be seen as a system of signs (he himself did not use the term 'structure'). Second, those signs are in the first instance arbitrary – after which they have become conventions – and have not taken their specific form because of what they mean, but to be different from other signs. That is to say, the 'signs' are simply the words that we use: 'way', 'yard', 'yarn'. 'Way' is 'Weg' in German and some of us will know that it is 'chemin' in French and 'camino' in Spanish. We need only a very superficial knowledge of a foreign language, or even of a dialect form of our own language, to know that the words we use to refer to the objects around us are different in other languages. From that knowledge it is only a small step to the realization that the link between a word and what it refers to must be arbitrary. Since other languages have different words for what we call a 'way' – and for all our other words – and in spite of that would seem to function perfectly well, we can only conclude that calling a way a 'way' is not a necessity. There is clearly nothing in what we call a 'way' that dictates the particular word 'way'. If that was the case people everywhere would use 'way'. In fact, if real world objects dictated our language we obviously would all speak the same language. As it is, the relation between the sign 'way' and what it refers to is indeed fundamentally arbitrary – in the sense that 'way' could have been quite different. In fact, since it once was 'weg', it already has been different. The arbitrariness of course only applies to the fundamental relationship between words and what they refer to. In actual practice, those relationships have become a matter of convention. If we want to refer to an object, a table for instance, we automatically use the word that everybody uses. When Dr Seuss in 1950 first used the word 'nerd' in If I Ran the Zoo, the relationship between 'nerd' and what it referred to was arbitrary. As a matter of fact, if he had not provided illustrations with his story we would have had a hard time figuring out what to make of 'nerd'. Now it is still arbitrary but also a matter of convention: there is now a standard relationship between 'nerd' and a certain type of person. If the form of words is not dictated by their relationship with what they refer to, then that form must have its origin elsewhere. Saussure traces the origin of the form of words – of linguistic signs – to the principle of differentiation. New words like 'nerd' take their place among existing words because they are different. The whole system is based on often mininal differences: in ways, days, rays, bays, pays, maze, haze, and so on only the opening consonant is different. Words, then, function in a system that uses difference to create its components. (A more practical way of saying this is that we automatically fall back on difference if we want to coin a word.) As Saussure himself says of all the elements that make up a linguistic system: 'Their most precise characteristic is being what the others are not' ([1915] 1959: 117).

This is fairly self-evident. But then Saussure introduces an argument that seems completely counterintuitive. The principle of difference that gives rise to the signs (words) of which language is made up, he tells us, also gives rise to their meaning. The usual assumption might be that the meaning of words derives from what they refer to and that it is the world we live in which gives the words in our language their meaning. However, that cannot be true. After all, if that were the case we would indeed all speak the same language. Does this mean that Saussure's improbable claim is correct? Are language and the world that we intuitively feel is reflected by that language really so separated from each other as he suggests? A strong point in Saussure's favour is that form and meaning cannot be separated. If we change 'ways' to 'days' or 'rays' we do not only have a new form but also a new meaning. In other words, the differential principle does not only work to distinguish words from each other, it simultaneously distinguishes meanings from each other. A linguistic sign – a word – is both form and meaning. Saussure calls the form – the word as it is spoken or written – the signifier and the meaning the signified. A change in the signifier, no matter how minimal, means a new signified. We must accept that meaning is indeed bound up with differentiation. But is it the full story? Not quite. Here it should be introduced another counterintuitive complication. A sign's meaning, its signified, is not an object in the real world, as we tend to think. That is which words refer to, but what they refer to is not the real world – at least not directly. Take a seemingly uncomplicated word like 'tree' which my American Heritage College Dictionary (3rd ed) defines as 'A perennial woody plant having a main trunk and usu. a distinct crown'. What this definition makes clear is that 'tree' does not refer to any single object in the real world but to a category of objects which may or may not have 'distinct crowns'. The meaning of the sign 'tree' includes oaks, beeches, and chestnuts but also dwarf pines and Douglas firs. Its signified is a man–made category, a concept. A little reflection will tell us that this is also true of other signs: love, table, child, field. They all refer to concepts – not unrelated to the real world, but clearly the product of generalization and abstraction. It is those concepts that we then apply in our actual use of language to the real word, where they then have concrete referents. In a sentence like 'That tree over there' the sign 'tree' has an actual referent. Our intuition that meaning is bound up with the real world is not completely wrong, even if the relation between meaning and the world is a matter of convention and much less straightforward than we tend to think. But 'bound up with' is a vague phrase. Which of the two is dominant in this relationship? Do the real world and everything that it contains indirectly determine the meanings of our language or does our language determine our world? To put this more concretely: does the fact that there are chestnuts somehow give rise to the admittedly arbitrary sign 'chestnut' or does the fact that the sign 'chestnut' has somehow come into being allow us to see chestnuts as a separate species among trees? If we did have the word 'horse' but did not have the word 'pony' would we still see ponies as ponies or would we see them as horses much like all other horses because our language would not offer us an alternative? If the latter were true, then it might be argued that language precedes thought and constitutes the framework within which thought must necessarily operate. Some theorists, including Saussure, have thought so and have argued that our reality is in fact constituted by our language. If that is indeed the case, then the language that we inherit at birth is for all practical purposes an autonomous system that carves up the world for us and governs the way we see it. (It is never quite

autonomous because we can tamper with it and for instance expand it – witness Dr Seuss's nerd.) This position which claims that our reality is determined by language is called linguistic determinism. To many people such a position appears unnecessarily radical and turns an interesting insight with a limited range of application into an iron law. We can perhaps agree on two principles, however. If we for a moment forget about the way we use language (or language uses us) and focus on language itself, we can agree that if we see language as a system of signs, then the meanings that arise – the signifieds – are first of all arbitrary in their relationship to the real world and second the product of difference in the sense that difference has a crucial, enabling function. Without difference there would be no language and meaning at all. The role that difference plays in its turn implies that meaning is impossible without the whole system of differences: the structure within which difference operates. After all, signs must differ from other signs and they need these other signs to be different. Although meaning is in the first instance produced, or at least enabled, by difference, it is at a more fundamental level produced, or again at least enabled, by the structure: by the relations between the signs that make up a language, or, to give this a wider application, between the elements that together make up a given structure. Meaning, then, resides not so much in those individual elements, but rather in the relationships between them – an admittedly improbable claim that will be further explained below. 3. ANTHROPOLOGICAL STRUCTURALISM These principles are indispensable for an understanding of the various approaches to literature that together constitute the French literary structuralism of the 1960s and 1970s. They are even more indispensable for a proper understanding of the so–called poststructuralism that developed after structuralism. The anthropological structuralism that was developed in the later 1940s by the French anthropologist Claude Levi–Strauss has never had much direct relevance for literary studies, but its indirect influence, through its apprehension and adaptation by poststructuralism and poststructuralism's many offshoots, is still immense.. Like all structuralisms, anthropological structuralism is directly indebted to the Saussurean concept of language as a sign system governed by difference. However, anthropological structuralism gave the idea of a system of signs that function in the first instance because they are different from each other a much wider range – already foreseen, incidentally, by Saussure himself – and transposed it from linguistics to anthropology, that is, from the study of language to the study of cultures that from a Western perspective seemed 'primitive'. Levi–Strauss was the first anthropologist to see the potential of Saussure's analysis of language as a way of approaching the most diverse cultural phenomena. In the early decades of the twentieth century anthropology was still largely descriptive and functionalist: it sought to record the myths, taboos, rituals, customs, manners, in short, everything that was recordable, of the non–Western cultures that it studied, and it tried to establish their function. Levi–Strauss broke with that tradition in two major ways. The first way is indebted to Vladimir Propp's study of Russian fairytales. Transposing Propp's idea to the field of myths, Levi–Strauss tried to show how the most diverse myths, recorded in cultures that seemingly have no connection with each other, can be seen as variations upon one and the same system of ideas. More important for our purposes here is that Levi–Strauss saw the possibilities of Saussure's notion that meaning is ultimately the product of difference for the study of discrete cultural phenomena. For the structuralism that Levi–Strauss developed in a series of major anthropological publications, the almost countless discrete

elements that together make up a culture constitute a sign system. Eating customs, taboos with regard to menstruation, initiation and hunting rites, the preparation of food, the rules underlying so called kinship relations – in short, everything that has a cultural origin, and is not biologically determined, counts as a sign. The discrete bits of culture that we can distinguish are not meaningful in themselves, but draw their meaning from the sign system in which they function and, in particular, from their difference from other signs. As Levi–Strauss put it with regard to masks: 'A mask does not exist in isolation; it supposes other real or potential masks always by its side, masks that might have been chosen in its stead and substituted for it' (Levi–Strauss 1982: 144). What a given element signifies within a culture depends on the system, and not on an intrinsic meaning (which it does not have). Just like the relationship between the linguistic sign and its real world referent, the relationship between a specific cultural phenomenon and what it expresses – its meaning – is arbitrary in the sense that it is determined by convention. 4. BINARY OPPOSITIONS: However, the relationship between a cultural sign and what it expresses is no necessarily completely arbitrary. Levi–Strauss's anthropological structuralism is interested in the question of how our ancestors once, sometime during the evolutionary process that gave us the sort of conscious awareness of ourselves and our environment that animals lack, started to make sense of the world they found themselves in. A very basic mental operation consists in the creation of opposites: some things are edible, others are not, some creatures are dangerous, others are not. Classification in terms of such oppositions, in which the opposites are related to each other because they express either the presence or the absence of one and the same thing (edibility, danger, and so on), seems a natural thing to do, the more so since it would seem to be reinforced by nature itself. Man and woman constitute a binary pair, intimately related yet in a crucial way each other's biological opposite; our right hand and left hand constitute another closely related pair of opposites. Levi– Strauss's basic assumption is that our primitive ancestors deployed this simple model, or structure, to get a grip on a world that slowly began to appear to them as something separate and alien. For Levi– Strauss, the structure of primitive thinking is binary. Having acquired the rudiments of language, our ancestors must have started to categorize their world in very basic terms that always involved a presence and an absence – light/darkness, man–made/natural, above/below, noise/silence, clothes/naked, sacred/profane, and so on. Prehistoric men and women must have organized their experience around such +/– (that is, binary) oppositions. For Levi–Strauss such binary oppositions, the most fundamental of which is that between that what is man–made and that which is part of nature (between culture and nature, in simpler terms),constitute the basis of what we call culture. The basic apprehensions of reality that we find in those oppositions get translated into cultural acts. Once they have found expression in certain rites, taboos, customs, manners, and the like, they get permutated over time until as often as not they have become completely unrecognizable. In fact, they may appear in completely different and even contradictory guises in different cultures. In some cases, the meanings that were attached to the original opposites and that found expression in their cultural materialization were clearly rooted in the real world: it makes sense to attach a positive value to things that are edible and it also makes sense to attach a negative value to things that make you sick or will kill you. In other cases, however, those meanings are as arbitrary as the relationship between a linguistic sign and its real world referent and are based not on

factuality (as in the case of edibility), but on what we would call superstition. The standard positive valuation of light and negative valuation of darkness, for instance, ignores the fact that light and darkness are in themselves neutral natural phenomena and that how we value them depends on the circumstances (it is for instance a lot easier to hide from an enemy in the dark). Meanings attributed to the pair above/below (as in a number of major religions) are even more obviously arbitrary. Cultural signs position themselves somewhere on a sliding scale between pairs of opposites and in so doing express a relation between two terms, one of which represents a presence while the other represents an absence – a notion that, as we will see, is crucial for the poststructuralism of the 1970s and after. It should be clear that anthropological structuralism, in spite of its overriding interest in the way the human mind has from the beginning interacted with its natural environment, does not take up a humanist position. Whereas an interest in form is wholly compatible with humanism (as in the New Criticism), structuralism denies that the individuals whose behaviour it studies are autonomous and act and think the way they do out of free will. On the contrary: if I was a member of a 'primitive' tribe, my personal contribution to a ritual would only take its meaning from its function in the whole, from its relation to other parts of the ritual, and not from my personal intention. It is, in fact, questionable whether it would be at all possible for me to have a personal intention in a primitive culture in which everything, down to the smallest thing, is governed by assumptions, conventions, and rules of unknown origin that cannot be questioned. Anthropological structuralism, then, takes up a firmly anti–humanist position. 5. CLAUDE LEVI–STRAUSS AND 'THE STRUCTURAL STUDY OF MYTH': A signifying system can be any part of a culture that contains signs which can be 'read' and interpreted by determining signification (how signifiers are connected to signifieds) and by determining value (how one sign is different from all other signs in the system). This idea is at the heart of any kind of structuralist analysis. Saussure applies it to language; Claude Levi–Strauss, an anthropologist, applies it to kinship systems and other forms of cultural organization, including myth. For Levi–Strauss, structuralist analysis offers a chance to discover the 'timeless universal human truths' so beloved of the humanist perspective, but using a methodology that seems much more objective and scientific. As an anthropologist, Levi–Strauss wanted to discover, at the level of structure, what all humans share by virtue of being human. One of the most basic structures shared by all human societies is kinship: every society that has ever existed anywhere has had some sort of system for deciding who can marry whom, who inherits what from whom, and how all of these relationships are named. Such a kinship system operates like Saussure's langue, containing units – in this case, men, women and children, who are labeled as fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters – and rules for connecting those units. In The Elementary Structures of Kinship (1969) Levi–Strauss points out two important functions of kinship systems. The first is that kinship systems structure how goods, ideas, and people are 'exchanged' within a culture, giving form to that culture's economic, educational, religious, and social relations. He specifically notes that kinship systems explain what he calls 'the exchange of women,' wherein family groups 'give' a woman to another family to be a wife, and receive in exchange something of equal value, known as a bride–price. More important to us now, however, is Levi–Strauss's insistence that the relations among units within the kinship system, or any structure, occur in binary pairs, which are either similar to each other or different from each other. This

corresponds, in linguistics and literature, to the idea of metaphor and metonomy: metaphor is the establishment of a relation of similarity between two things (A is like B, or A is B), while metonomy is the establishment of a relation of contiguity, or closeness and difference, between two things. An example is saying 'crown' for 'king,' or 'sails' for 'ships.' The main point here is that relations between units in a system can only be analyzed in pairs: you know that A is A because it's not B, and A is A because it's not Q, and A is A because it's not %. You can only examine A in relation to one other unit of the system at a time, comparing A: B, A: Q, A:%.What's important to Levi–Strauss here is not the identity of any individual unit, any parole, but the relation between any two units compared in a binary pair. Levi–Strauss's writings on kinship, culture, and myth often start to look like algebraic equations because of this focus on relational pairs. He uses as an example the idea of clans or totems within a tribal system, which are only comprehensible in structural relation to each other. A tribe may have a turtle clan and a hawk clan, but the practices of each clan are not related to the animal they're named after, but rather to the structural relationship between all possible clan animals. You can't understand the turtle and hawk divisions by thinking about how turtle people are like turtles and hawk people are like hawks; rather, you have to think about how the difference or relation between real turtles and real hawks are reproduced in the relations between turtle people and hawk people. If this were a mathematical problem, we'd call real turtles A, real hawks B, turtle people C, and hawk people D, and the structural relationship would be expressed as A is to B as C is to D, or A: B::C: D. In The Raw and the Cooked (1969) Levi–Strauss discusses how binary pairs, particularly binary opposites, form the basic structure of all human cultures, all human ways of thought, and all human signifying systems. If there is a common 'human nature' or 'human condition,' from this perspective, it's that everyone everywhere thinks, and structures their worlds, in terms of binary pairs of opposites, like 'the raw and the cooked.' Even more importantly, in each binary pair one term is favored over the other: cooked is better than raw, good is better than evil, light is better than dark, etc. This idea is crucial both to Levi–Strauss's structuralist analysis of myth and to many of the poststructuralist ideas we'll be looking at in the rest of this book. In his essay 'The Structural Study of Myth,' Levi–Strauss looks at another kind of human universal: the similarity of myths from cultures all over the world. He notices that cultures widely separated by geography or time still have distinctly similar myths explaining, for example, the creation of the world, the creation of language, the difference between the sexes, and other facts of human existence. Given that myths could contain anything – they are stories, not bound by rules of accuracy or laws of probability – why are so many myths from so many different cultures so much alike? He answers this question by looking not at the content of each myth, but at their structure. While the specific characters and actions differ greatly, Levi–Strauss argues that their structures are almost identical. In making this argument, Levi–Strauss insists that myth is a language, because it has to be told in order to exist; we might add that myth is a language in the sense that any signifying system, as described by Saussure, can be called a language. Myth, as language, consists of both langue and parole, both the synchronic, ahistorical structure and the specific diachronic details within that structure. Levi–Strauss adds a new element to Saussure's langue and parole, pointing out that langue belongs to what he calls 'reversible time' and parole to 'non–reversible time.' He means that a parole, as a specific unit or instance or event, can only exist in linear time, which

is unidirectional – you can't turn the clock back. Langue, on the other hand, since it is simply the structure itself, which doesn't ever change, can exist in the past, present, or future. Think of the 'sentence' of English: 'The adjectival noun verbed the direct object adverbially.' If you read the sentence word by word, you read from left to right, one word at a time, and it takes a second or two to read the whole sentence: that's non–reversible time. If you don't 'read' the sentence, but see it as a whole, as the name of the structure of English, it exists in a single moment, every moment, yesterday the same as today the same as tomorrow. That's what Levi–Strauss calls reversible time, because it doesn't matter whether you go forward in time or backward in time: the structure, the langue, is always the same. A myth, according to Levi–Strauss, is both historically specific, a kind of parole existing in non–reversible time as a story, and ahistorical, part of a langue that exists in reversible time as a timeless structure. He also says that myth exists on a third level, in addition to langue and parole, which also proves that myth is a signifying system of its own, and not just a subset of language. He explains that third level in terms of the story the myth tells. That story is special, because it survives any and all translations and variations. A myth can be altered, expanded, reduced, paraphrased, and otherwise manipulated without losing its basic shape or structure; you might want to think again about the example of 'princess, stepmother, prince' to see that, no matter what details you add to the story, the structure of relations among the units remains the same. He thus argues that, while myth as structure looks like language as structure, myth is actually something different from language per se – he says it operates on a higher or more complex level. Myth and language both consist of units put together according to certain rules, and in both these units form relations with each other, based on binary pairs or opposites. But myth differs from language as Saussure describes it because the basic units of myth are not phonemes but what Levi–Strauss calls 'mythemes.' A mytheme is the 'atom' of a myth – the smallest irreducible unit that conveys meaning. Levi–Strauss's analysis of myth identifies the mythemes and then examines the sets or 'bundles' of relations among mythemes. He thus creates for myth a two–dimensional structure, which allows for a different kind of 'reading' than the one–dimensional linear structure of language. Saussure's language is a line; one word is connected to the next in a grammatical structure. Levi–Strauss's myth, however, is like a square or rectangle: it has both a horizontal and a vertical dimension. Perhaps the best illustration of this shape is a musical score, with treble and bass clef. You can read the music for the melody, reading left to right, page by page, and you can read the music for the harmony, reading up–and–down, seeing the notes in the treble clef in relation to the notes in the bass clef. These two dimensions – the melody and the harmony, the horizontal non–reversible left–to–right way of reading and the vertical reversible up–and–down way of reading – are where Levi–Strauss finds his bundles of relations among units or mythemes. Basically, a structuralist analysis of myth would first find the smallest component parts, the mythemes, which are usually one event or position or action in the narrative, the story, of the myth. Then the structuralist would lay these mythemes out so they can be read both horizontally and vertically, diachronically and synchronically, for 'plot' and for 'theme.' The story of the myth exists on the vertical left–to–right axis; the themes of the myth exist on the horizontal up–and–down axis. The relations formed by any two of the mythemes in this array constitute the basic structure of the myth. In 'The Structural Study of Myth,' Levi–Strauss lays out the myth of Oedipus in this way, and sees

in the synchronic (vertical) relations certain patterns, or what I've called 'themes,' developing. One such theme is the idea of having some problem walking upright; Levi-Strauss takes that theme and runs with it, seeing it as an expression of a tension between the idea of chthonic (literally, 'from the underground gods,' but here meaning 'having an origin in something external') and autochthonic (here meaning 'self-generated') creation. He then sees that tension, or structural binary opposition, as present in myths from other cultures. This, to Levi-Strauss, is the significance of the myth: it presents certain structural relations, in the form of binary oppositions, that are universal concerns in all cultures. It may seem to you (as it does to me) that Levi-Strauss's analysis sounds a lot more like his interpretation of the myth rather than an objective reading of its universal structure. We might look at the Oedipus myth and come up with different interpretations for what he sees in the bundles of relations. For example, we might agree with him that one column focuses on ideas about walking upright. From that, we might see some fundamental anxiety about physical ability and disability, which is an expression of the tension between being fit for survival and needing charity and kindness; we could then read that tension (between selfishness and altruism) as the fundamental universal structure that the myth articulates. So here's where you can start to see how this kind of structuralist reading might apply to a literary text. Once you've found the mythemes, the constituent units of a story, and laid them out in a two dimensional grid, you can interpret them in an almost infinite number of ways. Your reading will depend on what you select as your mythemes and how you lay them out. This brings up the notion that maybe structuralism isn't as 'objective' and 'scientific' as it hopes to be, and that perhaps it is not uncovering universal human structures. Levi-Strauss, in fact, wants to present structuralist analysis as very much a scientific method; in 'The Structural Study of Myth' he concludes that his method brings order out of chaos in the same way any scientific theory does, enabling investigators to account for widespread variations on the same structure. Structuralist analysis 'enables us to perceive some basic logical processes which are at the root of mythical thought,' and can 'provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction.'2 He refers here to contradictions like a culture's belief in two opposite things, like chthonic and autochthonic origins, or selfishness and altruism. Every culture has these contradictions, because every culture organizes knowledge into binary opposites, according to Levi-Strauss; myth helps reconcile these contradictions or opposites according to a discoverable logic. Levi-Strauss insists that the 'logic' of structuralist analysis is just as rigorous as the logic of science. He wants interpretation to gain the same kind of cultural authority that scientific analysis has, and he thus invokes the mechanisms that give science its truth value: its logic and objectivity. One might critique Levi-Strauss's views by pointing out that his own argument sets up an opposition between science and myth, favoring science as the preferred method of truth, even as he asserts that myth is just as 'true' as science. But that's a deconstructive reading, not a structuralist one.