

structuralist criticism: Almost all literary theorists beginning with Aristotle have emphasized the importance of structure, conceived in diverse ways, in analyzing a work of literature. (See form and structure.) "Structuralist criticism," however, now designates the practice of critics who analyze literature on the explicit model of structuralist linguistics. The class includes a number of Russian formalists, especially Roman Jakobson, but consists most prominently of a group of writers, with their headquarters in Paris, who applied to literature the concepts and analytic distinctions developed by Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics* (1915). This mode of criticism is part of a larger movement, French structuralism, inaugurated in the 1950s by the cultural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who analyzed, on the model of Saussure's linguistics, such cultural phenomena as mythology, kinship relations, and modes of preparing food. See linguistics in literary criticism. In its early form, as employed by Lévi-Strauss and other writers in the 1950s and 1960s, structuralism cuts across the traditional disciplinary areas within and between the humanities and social sciences by undertaking to provide an objective account of all social and cultural practices, in a range that includes mythical narratives, literary texts, advertisements, fashions in clothes, and patterns of social decorum. It views these practices as combinations of signs that have a set significance for the members of a particular culture, and undertakes to make explicit the rules and procedures by which the practices have achieved their cultural significance, and to specify what that significance is, by reference to an underlying system (analogous to Saussure's *langue*, the implicit system of a particular language) of the relationships among signifying elements and their rules of combination. The elementary cultural phenomena, like the elements of language in Saussure's exposition, are not objective facts identifiable by their inherent properties, but purely "relational" entities; that is, their identity as signs is given to them by their relationships of differences from, and binary oppositions to, other elements within the cultural system. This system of internal relationships and of "codes" that determine significant combinations has been mastered by each person competent within a given culture, although he or she remains largely unaware of its nature and operations.