

plot, theme, etc.) tend to vary from one critic to the next in both placement and weighting. Since any but the most rudimentary of suspected numerical patterns would hardly have structural value unless somehow intended by the poet—typically, one expects, by dint of rather unrhapsodical computation—textual evidence of the poet’s “intentions” will probably prove more crucial in identifying a poem’s numerical design than has been our experience with the structural features traditionally studied. Closer attention to such (more objectively verifiable) evidence, especially the *formal* clues the poet left behind, may help future research avoid some of the excesses which have marred the fledgling years of this promising but exacting new field of literary scholarship.

THOMAS ELWOOD HART
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To the Editor:

I would like to comment on R. G. Peterson’s article. How is it possible for a discussion of such topics as “concentric structure,” “chiasm,” “symmetry,” etc. to ignore the numerous structuralist and semiotic investigations into these very topics? Jakobson’s path-breaking papers, which were required reading when I was a graduate student in Slavic studies, deserve at least some acknowledgment. Riffaterre’s disagreement with Jakobson on the relevance of numerical calculations and structural symmetries is notorious. Herman Weyl’s classic treatise on symmetry is fundamental reading for anyone who is interested in the subject and implicitly refutes Peterson’s excessively narrow idea that “the only possible expression of symmetry is in relation to a center” (p. 370). I venture also to mention my own paper on automorphic structures which proposes a classification of the symmetries and anti-symmetries and offers a psychological interpretation of symmetrical structures in poetry.

DANIEL LAFERRIÈRE
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Mr. Peterson replies:

Although these letters raise a variety of important questions, Laferrière and Hart mention works I might have included. The bibliography of so large and imperfectly defined a subject is of alarming size and shape. Where are its limits? What use of measure and symmetry would qualify for inclusion? What would not? I tried to describe—within the limits of my own interests and abilities, no less than the general expectation that *PMLA* will contain something in addition to footnotes—a large subject, and I thank these writers (as well as

many who wrote me personally) for information about relevant studies.

More fundamental in Laferrière’s letter is his attempt to force my article into conflict with Hermann Weyl’s classic *Symmetry* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1952). I can avoid that simply by quoting the part of my sentence Laferrière has omitted: “Because the work of literature is apprehended in time. . . .” My idea would be “excessively narrow” if it were as he claims, but it referred to *literature*—to which symmetry is applied by metaphor—and not to geometry, mathematics, nature, and the visual arts (the subjects of Weyl’s book). Why this must be so becomes obvious on a moment’s reflection or a reference to Lessing’s *Laocoön*.

It was possible and necessary for me “to ignore” structuralism and semiotics. Their object, after all, is to study not measure and symmetry but the processes of communication. Of the many “systems” and “structures” discussed (see, e.g., Riffaterre’s criticism of Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss, *Yale French Studies*, 36–37, 1966, 200–42), a few are concentric, but that, like number symbolism, is really incidental to these disciplines, as well as to the arguments made by their critics. A serious difficulty arises, moreover, when we talk about “structuralism” in literature, and that Laferrière writes as he does suggests that I should have emphasized it. The concept involves us in a visual metaphor and the risk of analyzing characteristics not of the work but of the metaphor, of treating the literary work, made up of sequential elements, as if it were something visible, made up of coexisting elements. It is, of course, possible mentally to see a poem or novel in retrospect—and this (what we do when we diagram structure or describe a work as “concentric”) has utility for analysis and teaching—but we should not mistake the poem or novel thus recollected for the original, nor the recollection for the sequential esthetic experience.

I accept Hart’s “methodological suggestion” that analysis begin with number. This is consistent with the sequential quality of literature and may help avoid distortion of the work to make it fit some visual metaphor. I agree in general with his comments on the fourth and fifth theses, though I think number symbolism should have some connection with manifest content and esthetic ambience. Observation that a modern poem, e.g., has 100 lines should include more than the reminder that 100 has long been a significant number, if we are not to be given a critical truth that is both trivial and esthetically irrelevant. Even though “esthetic impact” is hard to satisfy in practice, it is not impossible. Each of us can think of a few cases where criticism has renewed or intensified esthetic responses.

Hart and Heninger speak about the warrant we can