

A STRUCTURAL THEORY OF CONTENT IN PROSE FICTION

An examination of a model and a method
by Lubomir Dolezel *

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This paper takes as its starting point "the essentially anthropological premise that literature is a cultural institution and may therefore be analysed with reference to the social sciences" Literary structuralism is built on this basic premise. Even though most structuralists define structuralism as a mode of analysis of cultural artefacts originating in the methods of contemporary linguistics, Dolezel is of the view that linguistically *oriented* stylistics is limited in scope because this "method" can give only a partial explanation of text structure. Therefore he sees the need for a special theory of text content. Taking "motif" as the elementary unit of content, he sets out to explain the system of a motif theory and then proceeds to illustrate his method by analyzing a "scene" from Hemingway's short story "The Killers".

The author of this paper applies the same method to another "scene" from "The Killers" and establishes the fact that Dolezel's conclusions are generally acceptable. However, Dolezel's method has its own limitations, such as the lack of any satisfactory criterion for the selection of certain elements from the story in the course of paraphrase and condensation. This paper examines some of these shortcomings and the alternatives suggested.

* Dolezel's views and an exposition of his method occur in *Literary Style: A Symposium*, ed. Seymour Chatman, 1971. Oxford University Press (London and New York)

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