

Structural Symmetry and Its Significance in the Book of Ruth

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The Purpose of this Study

A host of commentators through the ages have observed that the book of Ruth is “a splendid example of the storyteller’s art” (Morris, p.229). Why is this so—why are biblical scholars so uncharacteristically agreed in their evaluation of the quality of this narrative? One expression of the reason for Ruth’s popularity is as follows:

... not only because the content of the story proves to be so interesting, but because the narrative develops in a relatively clear and easy manner. Furthermore, the Hebrew is not particularly difficult, and there are not many textual complications. (de Waard and Nida, p. 1)

When we look for specifics, however, not a great deal is said, at least not in most of the major commentaries. Many stress characteristics of content, or theme, and here, of course, there is quite a range of opinion as each one of the central characters is seen to play a major role in one formulation or another: Yahweh, Naomi, Ruth, Boaz—even King David is mentioned. Some observers do take note of a number of the literary features of the book, but this is not usually done in a systematic or comprehensive fashion. A few even come to a negative conclusion about its construction. One mentions, in passing, “its artless simplicity” (Morris, p. 317). Another “expert” concludes, “There is no artistic elaboration in the style. There is not a vestige of aim at fine writing” (Morison, p. xiv).

It does not lie within the scope of the present study to make a detailed survey and evaluation of the scholarly literature on Ruth. The reader is directed to the listing of references at the back for a selection of works that are especially relevant. The specific purpose of this paper is to carefully examine the formal properties of the book, particularly with regard to its larger discourse structure. We hope to demonstrate that this composition consists of a number of intricately constructed symmetrical patterns, all of which are skillfully woven together to highlight the book’s principal theme as well as a number of important sub-themes. After a presentation of the major aspects of these structures and their relation to the theme(s), we will briefly draw attention to some of the main implications of this type of analysis for both an exegesis and an exposition of the text. Several of the more detailed minor structures will be outlined in an appendix.

The Twofold Structure of Ruth

A thorough study of the text of Ruth reveals that it is organized on the basis of two distinct but complementary modes of development. The first, and more obvious, is a “linear” framework which accompanies and subdivides the normal, chronologically established plan of narrative construction, i.e., “plot”: setting – conflict – augmentation – climax – resolution – coda. The second structure is “concentric” in that it manifests a chiasmic (or inverted) pattern of development, i.e., [A – B – C ... X ... C’ – B’ – A’]. The two types of organization, which are unfolded concurrently as the narrative progresses, are established and reinforced by a number of literary devices, the principal one being repetition (a similar phenomenon, realized in prophetic discourse, i.e., Malachi, is described in Wendland, 1985). These larger structures are discussed below, first of all with regard to aspects of a more formal nature, and secondly, with respect to the part which they play in the articulation of the narrator’s theme.

The Linear Structure

The major segments of this structure are demarcated in the normal way for narrative discourse, namely, through major shifts in the temporal or spatial setting and/or in the cast of characters and the dramatic situation

which they are in. The twelve sections which comprise the book of Ruth are listed below. Each principal unit and sub-unit, including the book as a whole, is labeled with a heading which summarizes its main thought (topic).

Yahweh Reveals His Unfailing-Faithfulness through His Faithful People

- I. (1:1-22) The “Bitter” Life of Naomi
 - A. (1-5) Naomi loses her family in Moab
 - B. (6-19a) Ruth shows faithfulness to Naomi
 - C. (19b-22) Naomi returns to Bethlehem in shame and sorrow
- II. (2:1-23) Ruth Gleans in the Fields of Boaz
 - D. (1-3) Ruth’s plan to find food
 - E. (4-16) Boaz shows kindness to Ruth
 - F. (17-23) Ruth reports her success to Naomi
- III. (3:1-18) Ruth Appeals to the Faithfulness of Boaz
 - D’. (1-6) Naomi’s plan to find Ruth a husband
 - E’. (7-15) Boaz agrees to help Ruth
 - F’. (16-18) Ruth reports her success to Naomi
- IV. (4:1-22) Naomi is “Blessed” Through Boaz and Ruth
 - B’. (1-10) Boaz “redeems” Ruth
 - C’. (11-17) Ruth bears Obed for Naomi
 - A’. (18-22) The family-line of King David

Let us examine this structure more closely. The following is a summary of the justification, expressed in both linguistic and literary terms, for putting these breaks where they are (and not someplace else) in the text. In most cases the reasons are quite evident, but at several points a fuller explanation is necessary due to a certain complication in the overall pattern. [Note: text citations within single quotation marks represent a very literal translation of the Hebrew. The standard versions are indicated by the normal abbreviations, e.g. GNB, RSV, NIV, etc.]

- A. The narrative begins with the familiar opening formula **וַיְהִי** ‘And it was,’ followed by an expression of general time, ‘in the days of the judges judging.’ The presence of the *waw* consecutive is not really surprising in view of its occurrence at the onset of other OT historical texts, e.g. Exodus, Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Esther, and Ezra.
The first section.(1:1-5), which furnishes the narrative setting, ends with the report of a state involving an even more serious “lack” (i.e., of life) than was the case at the beginning (i.e., lack of food). The overt “conflict” of the story has thus been initiated, and this is intensified throughout chapter one to a peak in Naomi’s final speech.
- B. The second section (1:6-19a) starts out with a typical verbal marker, **וַתָּקָם** ‘and she arose,’ and entails a shift of scene, that is, away from the land of Moab. This unit is comprised almost entirely of the conversation between Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, which took place somewhere ‘on the road to return to the land of Judah’ (v.7).
- C. **וַיְהִי** again signals the onset of a new narrative segment (1:19b-22), one which sees the two women, Naomi and Ruth, finally arriving at their destination in Bethlehem. Notice that the chapter, or we could say Act One of the drama, ends at the point where it began (*inclusio*) with a chiastic mention of place names:
(1:1) a man went from *Bethlehem*
to live in the regions of *Moab*

(1:22) returned from the regions of *Moab*
they arrived at *Bethlehem*

The unit opens at a time when there was ‘a famine in the land,’ and it concludes on a positive note ‘at the beginning of the harvest of barley.’

- D. Section D (2:1-3) starts off with a further specification of the setting or background which happens to be relevant at this juncture. A new participant in the account, namely “Boaz,” is introduced by means of a circumstantial (non-event/narrative) clause. This unit both begins and ends by mentioning Boaz and his clan “of Elimelech” (*inclusio*), a fact which is crucial in the subsequent unfolding of events.
- E. Another familiar marker of aperture is found at the beginning of this unit (2:4-16), that is, וַיִּבְרַח: ‘and behold!’ followed by a participle (‘coming’) instead of a finite verb. Boaz, who was just introduced in the preceding section here somewhat unexpectedly makes his appearance, and the significance of this occurrence is highlighted by the exclamation. This whole unit features the speeches of Boaz either to or about Ruth.
- F. The initial boundary of this segment (2:17-23) is not as distinct as the others. Some would place the opening at the next verse where there is an indication of another shift in setting, namely, from the field to the town. However, one can see a bracketing device (enclosure) in the words ‘and she [Ruth] gleaned in the field’ (vv. 3/17) which border the dialogues of Boaz. That a major break occurs here is supported by the fact that v. 17 also marks the onset of a new section in the concentric organization of this discourse (see below). Ruth’s activity of “gleaning” is mentioned once more at the close of the unit (v. 23). The latter verse also incorporates a phrase which is found at the end of Act One, that is, a time reference to ‘the harvest of barley’ (cp. 1:22; this poetic feature, i.e., similar endings, is known as *epiphora*).
- D’. Just as in Act Two, so also the opening section of Act Three features an important “strategy” conversation between Ruth and Naomi (similar discourse beginnings = anaphora). This dialogue occurs at some indefinite time after the close of the preceding Act, which as we have seen is distinguished by a temporal margin in each case (i.e., the reference to harvest-time). The beginning and ending of this unit (3:1-6) is marked by the mention of its principal speaker, namely, ‘her mother-in-law.’
- E’. Section E’ (3:7-15), just like the corresponding section E of Act Two, manifests a sudden shift to the third major character in the story: ‘And Boaz ate ...’ The unit ends with the report that Boaz ‘came/went to the city’ after providing Ruth with a considerable amount of food “to eat.”
- F’. This segment of the account (3:16-18) switches back to the actions of Ruth and a movement back to the initial setting of Act Three: ‘And she came to her mother-in-law.’ Just as in the corresponding paragraph of Act Two, so also here we hear Ruth report back to Naomi what has transpired between herself and Boaz.
- B’. A shift of scene and focal participant (i.e., ‘Boaz,’ which occurs in emphatic clause-initial position) signal the opening of Act Four. This section (4:1-10) consists mainly of the words of Boaz as he swiftly and shrewdly carries out the business at hand, that is, the “redemption” of Naomi’s property and her dead son’s wife, Ruth.
- C’. The initial boundary of this section (4:11-17) is rather indistinct. A clear break occurs at the “people’s” response of v. 11, but there is some overlap at the beginning as they first reply to Boaz’ appeal to them as ‘witnesses’ to the proceedings, and then move into a mixed sequence of topics which constitute the resolution of the account. There is an underlying unity, however, in that everything revolves around the birth of Obed. The narrative segments simply report the fact itself and its results, while the dialogue portions of this unit record the community’s prior and subsequent words of blessing and praise.
- A’. The genealogy which rounds out the narrative is clearly a distinct chunk of discourse (i.e., 4:18-21). It is not an isolated unit, however, as some have supposed.

The twelve segments that comprise the linear structure of the book of Ruth, as outlined above (in four Acts), were labeled in a way which designates the overall symmetry of the sequence, i.e.,

[(I) A – B – C (II) D – E – F (III) D' – E' – F' (IV) B' – C' – A']

This may require some explanation (for a similar plan of organization [but with a somewhat different segmentation], see Gow, 1984). Let us first examine the two internal Acts. Here we find a rather large number of similarities which link the three respective internal sections, or “episodes,” of Acts II and III. The following is a summary of the principal correspondences:

- Main participants:* Ruth and Boaz as they meet for the first and second time; Naomi also features in the dialogues with Ruth which occur in the episodes that envelop the major action in (E) and (E').
- Setting:* There is a movement from the home of Naomi to Boaz' property (grain-field/threshing-floor) and back again in each Act.
- Topics:* The sequence of general topics follows a similar pattern, i.e., (D/D') a “plan” concerning Ruth is announced (E/E') Boaz shows kindness and offers protection to Ruth; (F/F') Ruth reports back to Naomi.
- Feature:* In each of the central sections Boaz praises Ruth's good character, her “faithfulness,” in particular, which is emphasized.

The correspondences between Acts One and Four, though not quite as transparent as those pointed out above, are nevertheless worthy of note. The parallelism in the sequence is disturbed as (A') appears after (C'), but this is not too surprising since a common structuring device in Hebrew discourse is the *inclusio*, which features a similarity in form and/or content at the beginning and ending of specific units, in this case the narrative as a whole. The likeness that connects (A) and (A') is admittedly of a rather broad, thematic nature, and yet, considering the many other similar patterns which permeate the story, it is not implausible, i.e., (A) the family line of Elimelech is apparently “cut off” in Moab; (A') the genealogy reveals that not only has the family line of Elimelech (a name which means ‘[my] God is King’) been mended through Obed, the child of Ruth and Boaz, but it has in the process become entwined with the illustrious line of King “David” (4:21), who like Elimelech also hailed from “Bethlehem” (1:1). Thus the genealogy, which many scholars consider to be a later addition to the book, is seen to function as an integral part of the text as it has been received. The major point of similarity between (B) and (B') lies in the demonstration of “unfailing-faithfulness” (טֹדָה) by Ruth and Boaz respectively. Their action is set in relief by the contrasting behavior of those two characters who took the alternative course when confronted with the same choice, namely, Orpah and the גֵּיזְרֵי. Sections (C) and (C') also feature a crucial contrast, this time one involving Naomi. In (C) we hear her bitterly complaining to the women of Bethlehem about how Yahweh has treated her. She is so upset that she wants to change her name from “Naomi” [‘pleasant, lovely, delightful’] to “Mara” [‘bitter’]. In (C'), on the other hand, it is the women of Bethlehem who address Naomi in words of praise to Yahweh, who has so wonderfully blessed her in Ruth's child. They then proceed to name the child “Obed.”

These striking correspondences on the linear plane of the discourse, which serve to segment the text into twelve discrete but integrated portions, are accompanied by another important literary technique that helps to weld them all into a harmonious whole, namely, junction. By means of junction, which includes a number of literary devices, primarily repetition, the transitions between the individual units of the story are neatly smoothed over to bridge one segment of the account with the next. This is seen, first of all, at the junctures which separate the four larger divisions. At the very end of each Act, the final verse in fact, one finds a narrative element which anticipates, as it were, the onset of the next Act with regard to setting, plot development, and/or participant interaction. These linkages are as follows:

- I. The concluding time setting is specified as ‘the beginning of the harvest of barley’ (1:22).
- II. The first episode presents Ruth's plan to support herself and her mother-in-law by ‘gleaning in the field behind the harvesters’ (2:3).

- II. At the end of this unit, the seemingly redundant information is offered that ‘[Ruth] lived with her mother-in-law’ (2:23).
- III. The significance of the preceding utterance becomes apparent in the very next verse (3:1) as Naomi initiates her proposal to remedy this unnatural and unproductive situation.
- III. Naomi’s closing words are almost prophetic; ‘Indeed, the man will not rest until he settles the matter today’ (3:18).
- IV. Act Four begins with “the man,” Boaz, proceeding ‘[to] the gate’ to do just what Naomi said he would, namely, to settle the matter of Ruth’s ‘redemption.’

Over and above these major connections (and notice how the traditional chapter divisions are thereby justified), there are a number of smaller ones which serve to join most of the twelve constituent sections together. All of these (except the junctions between D’ and E’ [3:6/7] and C’ and A’ [4:17/18]) involve a reiterative device known (technically) as anadiplosis, and more popularly as the insertion of “hook” words. Thus, the end of one section features an expression (consisting of one or more lexical items) that is found right away at the beginning of the subsequent unit, either exactly or, less concretely, in the form of synonymous terms. We will not display all of these, but below are given several examples to illustrate the technique, which is similar to that outlined above for the principal segments. The first instance is quite simple:

- (B) ‘ ... being determined *she to go with her ...* ’ (1:18)
- (C) ‘And they *went, the two* [of them] ... ’ (1:19)

The next example is a little more involved:

- (B’) ‘ ... from among his brothers and from the *gate* of his place, *Witnesses [are] you* today!’ (4:10)
- (C’) ‘And they said all the people who were in the *gate ...* ’ [*We are*] *witnesses!* (4:11)

The final passage shows how anadiplosis may be employed as “evidence” to confirm or disprove the presence of a larger structure in the text:

- (A) ‘*And she arose she and her daughters-in-law, and she returned ...* ’ (1:6)
- (B) ‘*And she left from the place where she was and two of her daughters-in-law with her. And they went ...* ’ (1:7)

In this case the device would suggest a juncture in the text between verses 6 and 7. Such a division would correspond with the outer boundary of the first major concentric pattern of the narrative (see below) in contrast to the break which was posited above for the initial linear segment, i.e., 1:1-5. In such places where an “overlapping” of principal structures occurs, one will frequently observe the presence of a “hinge” verse, that is, one which has lexical, semantic, and sometimes also syntactic, textual links in two directions, both forward (cataphoric) and backward (anaphoric). This appears to be the situation as far as 1:6 is concerned: there are valid reasons for connecting it with the initial discourse segment (i.e., 1:1-6) and, on the other hand, one could also view the verse as the beginning of the next unit (i.e., 1:6-18). Of such is the verbal artistry for which the book of Ruth is famous.

Some other prominent aspects of the linear organization of Ruth are discussed in appendix A. But enough has been presented thus far to indicate that the polished symmetry in the sequence of narrative events points to a more fundamental purpose underlying such patterning than mere artistry—than telling a beautiful story. Rather, there is a clear intimation that the story’s formal manner of construction bears an important relationship to its expression of theme. This observation is strongly supported by the concentric structure of the discourse, to which we now turn for consideration.

The Concentric Structure

A concentric, or chiasmic, structure (“introversion”) is constructed through the repetition of textual elements: syntactic frames, key items of vocabulary, important ideas, and sometimes even features of sound. The validity of such a structure is dependent upon both quantitative and qualitative criteria, for example, QT: the number of repeated items and their distribution in the discourse; how often the structure is found in the text as a whole to establish it as a definite stylistic feature; QL: how close are the repetitions in form—the greater the exactness, the more probable that the structure is, indeed, significant; in what way does the structure relate to the theme of the discourse—the more evident this relationship, the more firmly established and important the literary pattern becomes. The need for validation is critical in cases where several competing structures exist (or, more exactly, hypotheses concerning the discourse structure—each of which demands formal proof as a measure of its acceptability). Testing and evaluation are also necessary to ensure that a structure is actually present and perceptible in the text. By its very nature an introversion works *against* the expected development of a discourse (of whatever type: narrative, lyric, expository, admonitory, exhortative, etc.) and the normal chronologically oriented reading/hearing process. Rather than moving forward from beginning to end as is the case in linear construction, a concentric pattern first moves forward to a certain spot, then backward again in regular step-by-step fashion to a point which corresponds in certain definable respects to its beginning. The issue of audience expectation is crucial here: modern Western literature is simply not composed on the basis of introversion; ancient Hebrew texts, on the other hand, are filled with the device, a fact which would indicate that the original receptors of these works were fully prepared to process and hence to evaluate them with regard to their contribution to the form as well as the content of a given piece. Indeed, the evidence would suggest that the recognition and interpretation of such chiasmic structures were an important part of every “literate” person’s “literary” competence. And since the general presence of introversion in biblical literature is an undisputed fact (though its specific manifestations within a particular discourse are often open to debate), it behooves contemporary exegetes and expositors alike to take such forms into consideration as they analyze the original text. This by way of introduction to a presentation of the principal concentric patterns that appear in the book of Ruth.

Segment 1: 1:1-6 (coinciding with unit A of the linear structure, except for the last verse as noted above)

- A (1a) motivation: “famine” in Judah
- B (1b-2) the family moves: ‘they went to the regions of Moab’
- C (3) family loss—Elimelech “dies”: ‘and she was left, she and her two sons’
- D (4) family gain—the sons marry “Moabite wives;” Orpah and Ruth
- C’ (5) family loss—Mahlon and Chilion “die”: ‘and she was left, the woman, without her two sons and without her husband’
- B’ (6a) the family moves: ‘and she returned from the regions of Moab.’
- A’ (6b) motivation: “food” [‘bread’] in Judah

It is important to take note of the fact that introverted structures of this type tend to place information of special importance to the plot or theme in central position, that is, at the core of the chiasm. In this case we find Ruth introduced at (D), the person whom Yahweh will use to bring life out of death. In certain introversions, especially those with a “double core” (e.g. if there were a D’ to complement the D element above), the focal/emphasized material is located at the outer boundaries of the structure (i.e., at A and A’) either in addition, or in preference, to that of the nucleus.

Segment 2: 1:7-22 (i.e., B and C)

- A (7) narrative (movement): ‘and she left ... and her two daughters-in-law ... and they went ... to return to the land of Judah’
- B (8-9a) speech: Naomi appeals to her daughters-in-law to “return;” she invokes the blessing of Yahweh, i.e., יְהוָה , upon them
- C (9b) narrative (non-verbal action): ‘kissed ... raised voices ... wept’
- D (10-13) speech: Naomi appeals to daughters-in-law to “return”
reason: there is no hope—no “sons” for “husbands”
no יְהוָה from Yahweh [implied]
- C’ (14) narrative (non-verbal action): ‘raised voices ... wept ... kissed’
- B’ (15-18) speech: Naomi appeals to Ruth to “return”
Ruth refuses with an oath upon Yahweh’s name
her words proclaim יְהוָה toward Naomi
- A’ (19-22) narrative (movement): ‘and they went, the two [of them] ... and [they] returned from the region of Moab
speech (enclosed): no יְהוָה from Yahweh [implied]

This introversion is longer and rather more complex than the first in that certain key individual elements are lexically and thematically interlocked with one another. The core (D), in particular, links up with all of the other “speeches” in the pericope, namely, (B), (B’), and (A’). The latter unit, which in contrast to the rest incorporates both narrative and direct discourse, thus ties together, conceptually that is, both the center as well as the boundaries of the entire structure.

Segment 3: 2:1-23 (i.e., D + E + F)

- A (1-3) introduction (chiasm): focus on “Boaz”
- B (4-5) Boaz: “blessed”—he notices Ruth (direct speech)
- C (6-7) Ruth: her activity—“gleaning”—a hard worker (participant perspective, i.e., direct speech)
- D (8-9) Boaz: invitation to Ruth (drink) + command to young men regarding Ruth
- E (10) Ruth: response—she requests “favor” as a “foreigner”
- F (11-12) Boaz: praise—Ruth’s יְהוָה behavior
invocation of blessing [יְהוָה] upon Ruth by Boaz
- E’ (13) Ruth: response—she requests continued “favor” as one ‘not your maidservant’
- D’ (14-16) Boaz: invitation to Ruth (food) + command to young men regarding Ruth
- C’ (17-18) Ruth: her activity—“gleaning”—a hard worker (narrator perspective)
- B’ (19) Boaz: “blessed”—he noticed Ruth (report in direct speech)
- A’ (20-23) conclusion (chiasm in parallel with A): focus on “Boaz”

Notice the alternating sequence of focal participants, i.e., Ruth and Boaz. In addition to the cohesion generated by the repetition of important thematic elements, which will be discussed later, this introversion is held together sequentially by means of an unfolding enigma. Right at the beginning (A), the narrator inserts a tacit clue that Boaz is the one who will figure in Yahweh’s plan to restore Naomi and to “redeem” Ruth. This hint is implicitly reinforced by Boaz’ own words in the central section (F) as he wishes Ruth Yahweh’s protection [‘refuge under his wings’]. In the last unit (A’), then, Naomi discloses the plan almost completely when she links Yahweh’s יְהוָה with Boaz, who is “one of our kinsmen-redeemers” (NIV). The stage is thus set for the events of Act III.

Segment 4: 3:1-18 (i.e., D’ + E’ + F’)

- A (1-2) Naomi's plan: Boaz will provide the solution to their predicament
 B (3-4) Naomi's instructions to Ruth concerning Boaz
 C (5-6) Ruth 'does' what Naomi tells her to do
 D (7a) image of fullness—Boaz eating at the granary
 Boaz 'comes' to the place
 E (7b) secrecy stressed: Ruth comes, lies down
 F (8) symbol of לֵוִי's responsibility is enacted: Ruth lies at Boaz' feet (at midnight)
 G (9) identification sought: who are you? [Ruth]
 you are the לֵוִי [Boaz]
 you must 'redeem' me
 H (10) Boaz: in praise of Ruth's דָּקָה
 H' (11) Boaz: promise of דָּקָה to Ruth
 G' (12-13) identification confirmed: I am the לֵוִי I will 'redeem' you (if possible)
 [narrative tension is reintroduced]
 F' (14a) symbol of לֵוִי's responsibility is re-enacted: Ruth lies at Boaz' feet (until early morning)
 E' (14b) secrecy stressed: Ruth arises, no one must know that she has been there
 D' (15) image of fullness: Boaz pours out grain for Ruth
 Boaz 'comes' from the place
 C' (16) Ruth reports what Boaz 'did' for her
 B' (17) Boaz' instructions to Ruth concerning Naomi (indirect report)
 A' (18) Naomi's plan: Boaz will provide the solution to their predicament

This extended introversion, which is composed of both corresponding and contrasting elements, resolves the enigma of Act II, especially in the central portions of the structure (G—G'). In the process, the narrative's chief thematic concern is further developed as דָּקָה behavior once more comes to the fore (H—H', the core being expressed as two units due to the double parallelism which it manifests [see below]). Act III thus prepares for the final resolution of both plot and theme in Act IV.

Segment 5: 4:1-11a (i.e., B')

- A (1-2) introduction to the case: 'elders' summoned to 'the gate'
 B (3) the land issue: 'field ... Elimelech ... Naomi sells'
 C (4a) Boaz' offer to לֵוִי: 'buy' (before witnesses)
 D (4b-c) 'redemption' at stake: Boaz explains/ לֵוִי agrees
 E (5a) the land issue: 'field from the hand of Naomi'
 E' (5b) the marriage issue: 'Ruth the Moabitess ... to raise the name of the dead upon his inheritance'
 D' (6-7) 'redemption' at stake: לֵוִי explains and refuses
 C' (8) לֵוִי's offer to Boaz: 'buy' (shoe = symbol of witness)
 B' (9-10) the land issue: Boaz has 'bought all ... of Elimelech ... from the hand of Naomi'
 the marriage issue: 'and Ruth the Moabitess ... to raise the name of the dead upon his inheritance'

A´ (11a) conclusion of the case: ‘elders ... at the gate’ agree as ‘witnesses’

The narrative tension, which was introduced in the preceding Act with Boaz’ mention of ‘a לִוְיִי nearer than I’ (3:12), reaches its peak at the core of this inversion as Boaz suddenly reveals to that individual that ‘Ruth the Moabitess’ is a part of the ‘redemption’ transaction (E´). The importance of what is being discussed is rhetorically underlined as Boaz repeats before all present the two principal issues involved (structurally, then, B´ summarizes the main elements of B, E, and E´). Notice that here again we see a slight skewing between the near and the concentric structures as the closing boundary of the former was placed at v. 10. When working with such patterns in biblical literature, the analyst must always allow the text to determine its own Structural plan. The aim is to have the formal design of the discourse reveal what it can about the thematic intention of the original author, and not to impose an alien intention and interpretation through the unwarranted manipulation and alteration of the text as received.

Segment 6: 4:11b-17 (i.e., C´)

- A (11b-12) the people invoke the blessings of ‘Yahweh’ upon Ruth, Boaz, their ‘seed’ and especially the ‘house’ or family liner which is traced back to ‘Judah’; may its ‘name’ be great in ‘Bethlehem’
- B (13) narrative: Boaz ‘took’ Ruth; she ‘became’ a wife to him
she bore a ‘son’
- C (14) the women praise [‘bless’] Yahweh
they invoke blessing upon the child: great ‘name’
- C´ (15) the women invoke blessing upon the child: to ‘restore’ Naomi
they praise Naomi’s ‘daughter-in-law’ [i.e., Ruth]
- B´ (16) narrative: Naomi ‘took’ the ‘child’s she ‘became’ a nurse to him
- A´ (17) the women praise Naomi for her ‘son’ they give him a ‘name’: his line is traced forward to ‘David’ [i.e., of Bethlehem]

As indicated above, the dialogue sections, A—C and C´—A´, are very closely interrelated. There is thereby revealed a double focus, first of all upon the ‘child’—the ‘seed’ (A) who has become a ‘redeemer’ [לִוְיִי] for Naomi (C) and will become her ‘restorer’ and ‘sustainer’ (C´), namely, ‘Obed’ (A´). The seed was necessary for Naomi’s redemption, and a ‘servant’ (i.e., the meaning of the name ‘Obed’) for her restoration/renewal. That is the narrow, or immediate, perspective. There is also a much wider, historical perspective outlined, one that extends from “Judah” [through “Pharez”] (A) to “David” (A´). The genealogy which follows has thus been artistically anticipated.

Segment 7: 4:18-21 (i.e., A´)

This unit is strictly linear in nature, but as we have seen, it does play an important part in the overall structure of Ruth as a fitting conclusion to the whole, both narratively and thematically. Preparations for the genealogy in its entirety were made in the preceding Segment 6, while its end point, namely, “David” (which duplicates the last word of 6), may have been foreshadowed right at the beginning of the account (and periodically thereafter) in the special emphasis that was placed on the location ‘Bethlehem of Judah’ (1:1-2), the birthplace of Israel’s famous king. The genealogy, then, is not merely a listing of ancestral names, for it, too, manifests a definite structure, one which may derive some special significance from the symbolism that was associated with the numbers involved. David, obviously the climax of the sequence, occurs in the *tenth* generation from Pharez, while Boaz, a major participant in the present story, is listed in *seventh* position. This may be a coincidence, perhaps, but having noted the great care with which the author has crafted his narrative, it seems rather unlikely that he would allow the shaping of this final unit to chance.

Thematic Insights from a Structural Analysis

The relation of structure to theme has been noted on several occasions in the preceding discussion, but it is necessary to develop this point in more detail so that one might better appreciate its importance to the communication of the message of Ruth, both for the book's original receptors as well as for readers today. It seems clear that the narrative's linear construction is concerned, at least to a certain extent, with King David's ancestry. That is demonstrated by the last two sections, i.e., C' and A', as shown above. There is strong evidence to suggest that the book was composed toward the end or shortly after David's reign, perhaps by the same author who wrote the books of Samuel (Morris, pp. 229-239). It may be noted in this connection that the latter, which is largely taken up with the life of David, nowhere presents his genealogy. That Ruth supplies, both in narrative fashion as well as in the formal listing of the תּוֹלְדוֹת 'generations' of Perez, thus carrying on the official line of descent from its earliest record in Genesis (the last [i.e., tenth] one presented being that of Jacob, Genesis 37:2). In any case, the book of Ruth shows in a highly dramatic manner how Yahweh was at work, actively shaping the events of human history to establish and preserve the ancestral line of "the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob" (2 Samuel 23:1, NIV). As Morris observes: "a genealogy is a striking way of bringing before us the continuity of God's purpose through the ages" (ibid., p. 318). As the book of Ruth illustrates in such intimate personal terms, that divine purpose concerned the lives of individuals in addition to that of the nation of Israel as a whole.

Closely associated with the above-mentioned purpose of legitimizing the family-tree of King David, which may well have been to a greater or lesser degree apologetic in nature at the time of composition, there is another, more subdued sub-theme expressed, namely, one that concerns Israel's relations with the foreigners living in its midst. Throughout their history the Jews were continually vexed by this issue. On the one hand, the people were strongly exhorted to avoid intermarriage with the heathen nations which surrounded them and to refuse to adopt their customs, particularly those connected with religious worship. Indeed, it was Yahweh's will that they be a "holy" nation, one which was clearly set apart from the pagan environment in which they were living. But there were times, especially in later years, when the Jews took their exclusivism too far. They developed an extremely proud, self-righteous attitude as Yahweh's privileged, "chosen" people, which was dangerous to the practice of their religion in two ways. It led, first of all, to mere ritualism and outward formalism in worship, where the religious act, no matter how improperly motivated or carelessly executed, was considered to be valid and "acceptable" to Yahweh (so tragically exemplified in the story of Eli's two sons). And secondly, the Jews became so separatist in their perspective that not only did they look down upon the people of other tribes, but worse, they demonstrated no desire to convert them—to bring others into the sphere of Yahweh's saving purpose (as illustrated in the book of Jonah). There was thus a constant tension between in-group and out-group, Jew and Gentile, foreigner and family, during Israel's history and a continual flux that moved between the two extremes of syncretistic accommodation and blatant racism.

During the reign of King David, then, it appears that a more egalitarian spirit prevailed generally. This was demonstrated most visibly in David's own relations with foreigners. Indeed, when he was forced to flee from the murderous designs of a jealous Saul, he entrusted his parents to the safekeeping of the king of Moab (1 Samuel 22:3). On a number of occasions during this dark period of his life, the only place he and his men could find refuge was among Israel's arch-enemies, the Philistines (1 Samuel 27). He was also befriended by King Nahash of Ammon (2 Samuel 10:2). Later, at the time of Absalom's rebellion, David was assisted by other Ammonites (2 Samuel 17:27). Foreigners comprised a prominent part of his personal bodyguard, namely, the Cherethites and Pelethites (2 Samuel 8:18), and of his army as well, under the leadership of men like Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 11:3), Zelek the Ammonite (2 Samuel 23:37), and Ittai the Gittite (2 Samuel 15:32). Hushai the Archite (2 Samuel 15:32) was among David's closest friends and advisers. Thus, in view of the book's clear connection with the history of King David, it is not surprising to find a strong emphasis on Ruth's non-Israelite

background. This emphasis, maintained by a repetition that often becomes redundant, at least in translation, carries on throughout the text as an integral part of its linear structure from beginning to end, e.g.,

This, then, was how Naomi came back from *Moab* with Ruth, her *Moabite* daughter-in-law.
(1:22, GNB)

[‘Moab,’ or a derivative, is mentioned five times in the first six verses of chapter one]

Ruth’s “Moabite-ness” is also accented in several of the book’s key speeches, especially in the last chapter, e.g.,

“ ... if you buy the field from Naomi, then you are also buying Ruth, the *Moabite* widow...”
(4.5, GNB)

“In addition, Ruth the *Moabite* ... becomes my wife.” (4.10, GNB)

The mention of “Boaz” in the concluding genealogy is not just another name. It makes a much greater impression than all of the rest, except perhaps the final one, “David,” with which it has already been linked (4:17). Moreover, on the basis of the narrative just recounted, the reader/hearer automatically associates with Boaz, subconsciously at least, his devoted wife “Ruth—the Moabitess.” The underlying theological message of this reiteration of the “foreigner” motif is that Yahweh is a God for *all* peoples, provided they worship him in the proper way, i.e., in the OT, according to the stipulations of the Mosaic Law. Ruth herself enunciates this theme in her famous confession of allegiance at the beginning of the account:

“Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God” (1:16, GNB).

It is no coincidence that this passage also figures in what the overall structure of the book points out as its primary theme, to which we now direct our attention.

By her pledge of loyalty (and in her subsequent behavior), Ruth exhibits to Naomi the very דָּבָר which Naomi had invoked upon Ruth earlier in their conversation:

‘May Yahweh do to you unfailing-faithfulness (דָּבָר)
just as you did with the dead ones and with me.’ (1:8)

The words quoted above from 7:16 juxtapose the central correlates upon which the covenant between Yahweh and Israel was based, i.e., “my people” and “your God” (cp. Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 7:26; Jeremiah 30:32; Ezekiel 36:28; Hosea 2:23). This sacred covenant, in turn, was to be established, first of all, and then reaffirmed in דָּבָר behavior. The word דָּבָר is one of those crucial biblical terms that cannot easily be defined—in a sentence, or even a paragraph. Its meaning pervades (some 245 times) the Hebrew Testament, particularly (though not exclusively, as the book of Ruth demonstrates) in the relationship between God and his chosen people. The meaning of the word also varies according to the context, depending upon the two parties involved and the situation in which they are interacting. But we might describe the essence of דָּבָר as follows:

Hesed refers to the faithfulness that a person freely demonstrates in fulfilling his obligations to another party (whether an individual or a group) to which he (or she) is related in a special way. It designates the loyal devotion (i.e., concerned, compassionate, loving, etc.) which is manifested by people (or, and especially, Yahweh) who are bound by a close interpersonal relationship (e.g. by blood, marriage, friendship, agreement, etc.) to preserve their mutual wellbeing (*shaloom*) and interests, whether physical or spiritual.

This would seem to capture the quality of character being exhibited in a focal way by the main participants of the book of Ruth: Ruth to Naomi, Boaz to Ruth, and Yahweh to all three. Notice that the רָדַם theme comes to the fore in the central section of each of the first three Acts, namely, B, E, and E', In the final Act (IV), the pattern typically shifts, but an interesting correspondence develops in the process. In the first segment of IV, i.e., B' (which relates to the B unit of Act I), Boaz obviously shows רָדַם by undertaking the responsibility of caring/providing" for Ruth (i.e., in the act of a לָאָה 'redeeming'—not "buying" [GNB, denoting a commercial transaction, which this was not, see Schneider, 1982]). Structurally, we remember, there has been an alteration in the order of corresponding units, i.e., (A') which patterns with (A) occurs in final position. Thus the (B') section appears first in the Act.

However, רָדַם is also very prominent in the middle (C') unit of IV as well in the words of blessing and praise that emanate from the residents of Bethlehem. To what, then, does this segment correspond? Clearly, as shown in the linear pattern, to unit (C) of Act I. But here we observe that a dramatic reversal has taken place. In (C, i.e., 1:19-22) we heard Naomi come about as close as she could to actually cursing Yahweh—and why? Because of his apparent *lack* of רָדַם towards her:

“ ... the Almighty has made my life very bitter ...
The LORD has brought me back empty ...
The LORD has afflicted me;
the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.” (1.20-27.)

[Notice the chiasmic ordering in the use of the divine name. This alternates with a sequence of bicola in parallel which runs throughout this highly poetic pair of verses. As is often the case in Hebrew narrative, direct speech of a particularly significant nature is rhetorically heightened by means of a variety of literary devices.]

This fundamental conflict between Naomi and Yahweh remains unresolved as the events of the story are recounted, right up until the structurally corresponding section (C') at the end when the women of the city joyously proclaim to Naomi what Yahweh has worked in her life:

Blessed [be] Yahweh who has not caused to fail for you a kinsman-redeemer today!” (4:14).

God has thus graciously reversed Naomi's state of bitterness, emptiness, affliction, and misfortune, and her final situation is much better than the way things were in the beginning, even when her two sons were alive, for as the women put it:

“Your daughter-in-law loves you [there must have been a reason for their specifying this point], and has done *more for you than seven sons!*” (4:15, GNB)

In other words, Yahweh has demonstrated his abundant רָדַם —his unfailing faithfulness—to Naomi through the רָדַם of his servant (1:16) Ruth. By “redeeming” and “restoring” (4:14-15) Naomi, Yahweh has most wonderfully vindicated his “name,” or reputation, in the eyes of all concerned. He was, is, and always will be the God of free and faithful love to all those who are bound to him by an everlasting covenant—a covenant founded upon and manifested by רָדַם behavior. That is the enduring message of Ruth, one which far transcends issues of individual (i.e., David's family-line) or even national concern (i.e., Jew-Gentile relations)

This is a theme which needs to be apprehended, appreciated, preached, and applied today just as much today as it was long ago “in the days when the judges ruled” (1:1, NIV).

The artistically fashioned structure of Ruth not only articulates, but it also enhances this thematic emphasis on **טִשָּׁנָה**. This is as obvious on the concentric plane of composition as it is on the linear level just discussed. We see the anti-theme, i.e., Yahweh’s lack of **טִשָּׁנָה**, manifested in the central core of the largest unit of Act I (sub-section D of unit B, 1:10-13; see the structural outline above with further detail given in the appendix). Then notice the clear pattern of introversion that is evident in Ruth’s response, whereby she, almost in contrast to Naomi, seeks to place herself—as a proselyte—within the sphere of influence of Yahweh’s **טִשָּׁנָה** (revealed implicitly, as noted above, in the key covenantal terminology which she employs):

- A (1:16a) prohibition: ‘do not urge *me* to leave *you*’ (i.e., no separation!)
- B (16b) loyalty in life: ‘where you go, I will go, where you stay, I will stay’
- C (16c) epitome of **טִשָּׁנָה**: ‘your people—my people, your God—my God’
- B’ (17a) loyalty in death: ‘where you die, I will die’
- A’ (17b) oath: ‘may Yahweh deal with me ... if death separates between *me* and *you*’

Next we examine the nucleus of the long introversion that spans Act II, (i.e., sub-section F of unit E, 2:11-12). Again we find that although **טִשָּׁנָה** is not explicitly mentioned in Boaz’ words, they are unmistakably implied in the blessing which he invokes upon Ruth:

- Reason (11): everything you did for your mother-in-law—you left father, mother, land; climax: ‘you came to a *people* whom you did not know’
- Result (12): may Yahweh repay/reward you—the God of Israel ‘whom you came to take refuge under his wings’

We observe that the two major topical elements of Boaz’ speech, namely, “people” and “God,” correspond to the core of Ruth’s confession in 1:16 (C above). And as he was wishing Yahweh’s **טִשָּׁנָה**, or protection, upon Ruth, Boaz perhaps knew even at this stage (since he was obviously familiar with her family background) that he might well have a role to play in effecting it. This association is later strengthened at the opening of the final structural unit of Act II (i.e., A[^]) as Naomi praises Boaz for the **טִשָּׁנָה** which he had shown toward Ruth:

‘Blessed (be) he (i.e., Boaz) by Yahweh, who (i.e., Boaz) has not abandoned his **טִשָּׁנָה** with the living and with the dead!’ (2:20) [This controversial passage will be treated in somewhat more detail below.]

The convergence of structure and theme continues in Act III as Boaz’ blessing, which occurs at the midpoint of the principal inversion (H—H’ of unit D[^]), both reiterates what he had to say in 2:11-12, and takes his manifestation of **טִשָּׁנָה** toward Ruth a major step forward. He is fully prepared to act as the **לְגֹאֵל** for Naomi and Ruth:

- X (10a) blessing: from “Yahweh”
- Y (10b) praise/reason: Ruth has shown **טִשָּׁנָה** in her behavior
- X’ (11a) promise: from Boaz—I will do everything for you, i.e., **טִשָּׁנָה**

Y' (11b) praise/reason: Ruth's 'noble' behavior is known to all [thus complementing Boaz' 'nobility,' 2:1]

Thus sub-section X—Y (3:10a-b) corresponds with (2:11), especially in the explicit recital of Ruth's deeds, while X'—Y' (3:11a-b) matches segment (2:12), except that instead of merely wishing Ruth well (Yahweh's blessing) as in II, Boaz here promises that he is going to act on Ruth's behalf (as an agent of Yahweh—note his oath in 3:13b).

The theme of **דָּוָה** is continued and ultimately concluded then in the introversion which constitutes the structural middle of Act IV (i.e., C—C' of unit C', see earlier diagram). Again we find a remarkable correspondence of thematic elements, coupled with the essential progression necessary to mark a climax; in the development at this point. Yahweh's name is invoked once more, but this time in praise for blessings received, rather than in hopeful anticipation (4:14), Boaz has performed his **דָּוָה** -duty as **לְיָגוּל**, and the focus of attention thus shifts from him to his offspring. Naomi is introduced into the thematic core, primarily to highlight how Yahweh has kept his **דָּוָה** in relation to her in contrast to what she had earlier concluded (unit C of Act I, 1:19-20). And finally, there is one constant, namely Ruth, whose deeds have been foregrounded in each of the concentric nuclei. Here she receives what amounts to the ultimate compliment in Hebrew society: 'she is better to you than *seven* sons!' (4:15).

Thus, we have seen that the book of Ruth is much more than a "delightful story." To be sure, the exciting narrative captures and holds our attention. But at the same time it conveys a powerful message in the words and deeds of its central participants. An understanding of Yahweh's perfect, yet fathomless, **דָּוָה**, as worked out in the **דָּוָה** behavior of his people, is every bit as relevant today as it was when God first inspired the book's composition. It is this topic in particular which the author illuminates and emphasizes by means of the subtle symmetrical patterns, both linear and concentric, which constitute the rhetorical framework for his discourse. The act of communication can only be enhanced where we have such a magnificent fusion of form and content, of structure and theme. It remains for the contemporary scholar and the average reader alike to discover these patterns, not only to augment their appreciation of the text's sheer aesthetic value, but also to help motivate the application of its message to their everyday life and relationship to Yahweh.

The Application of a Structural Analysis

A structural analysis of the type carried out on the preceding pages has several important applications for students of the Scriptures. These may be categorized for convenience into two general groups: those which pertain to the exegesis, or interpretation, of the original text, and those which concern the exposition, or presentation, of the text. Several examples pertaining to each category are given below in conjunction with a general discussion of the value of such an approach to complement more traditional methods of biblical study.

Exegesis

The activity of exegesis properly precedes that of expositions before one can competently explain the biblical message, one must first of all correctly understand it. Sound exegetical procedures dictate that a thorough investigation must be made of both the original text as well as its situational context. The latter would include all relevant factors that pertain to the historical and cultural (i.e., social, economic, educational, political, religious, etc.) setting in force when the initial, divinely inspired communication event took place. Textual analysis involves the application of both linguistic and literary methods in the effort to determine the significant units of form and meaning in the discourse and their relationship to one another. It is important to recognize that these analytical techniques need to be directed at the macrostructure as well as the microstructure of the text under consideration, that is, not only at the level of the sentence and its constituents, but also beyond

the sentence to the larger units of composition which comprise the discourse as a whole. A variety of approaches for investigating a work's macrostructure are circulating within the province of contemporary biblical studies. Some are positively essential to give one an adequate picture of how a text is organized, others are not so helpful, while still other schools of thought, such as so-called "source criticism," are positively misleading, both in their basic presuppositions about the original documents and in their resultant methodology. A valid exegetical study begins with a careful grammatical and lexical analysis of the overt verbal form of the received text, with emendation allowed only rarely under very strictly controlled circumstances. This, coupled with the insights to be derived from proven anthropological and sociolinguistic methods, acts as the basis for a determination of the meaning and purpose of the work in its historical setting.

A literary-poetic type of approach, such as has been illustrated in this paper, takes the exegetical process a step further by examining any additional structures (other than grammatical) that happen to be indicated by the various compositional devices which the author has incorporated as part of the text's wider plan of organization. The aim, however, is not merely to discover and describe these structures per se, for that would be a rather sterile formalist exercise. Rather, the analyst should always endeavor to demonstrate how such structural patterns served to enhance the communication of the message in its original context. A functional perspective is thus a major prerequisite for this sort of study, i.e., to ascertain not only the significant forms of the discourse, but also how and why they were employed to enable the author to convey his message in a meaningful way to his receptors. "Meaning" in this sense involves more than semantic information—"facts" which can be stated in the form of logically ordered propositions. It encompasses also the intention(s) of the author (e.g. whether he wanted to warn, praise, defend, exhort, correct, and so on) as well as the various emotions which normally accompany the expression of content (e.g. anger, grief, joy, hope, satisfaction, discouragement, etc.), whether on the internal (participant) or external (author-audience) level of communication. Obviously in the case of a book like Ruth, there is very little that can be said about intention and emotion on the external plane of text transmission since we have virtually no background information on the situation in which the work was first composed. Thus, the present analysis was taken up largely with an elucidation of the principal theme and sub-themes that were found to be manifested by the symmetrical patterns of discourse organization.

As far as the macrostructure of Ruth is concerned, the results of this study more or less speak for themselves. The following conclusion was reached, namely, that two distinct compositional frameworks, the linear and the concentric, converge at key points in the discourse, particularly at the structural core of each Act, to develop and highlight the central theme of "דָּוָן in action"—on both the divine and the human levels of participant interaction. Admittedly, there may be some debate with regard to certain features of the different structures that were posited, but the plan as a whole seems to be fairly well established, largely through the repetition of selected items of form and content, within the text itself. Before leaving this aspect of the subject, however, it is necessary to make one more general comment on the nature of this method of analysis. The use of a variety of current literary terms and procedures in the examination and discussion of this narrative does not mean to imply fictionally in the object of investigation. In other words, I take the story to be a historically accurate record of the events surrounding Ruth, Boaz, Naomi, and their family which took place sometime during the rule of the 'judges' (1:1). The narrator obviously shaped his story selectively in a way that was most conducive to the accomplishment of his communicative objectives in telling it, but the essential factuality of the account need not have been compromised in the process. He formulated the narrative with great skill and artistry, utilizing (whether consciously or not) the compositional techniques that were common to his age, his language, and the type of literature concerned. The aim of today's analyst, then, is to reverse that process, using all of the linguistic and literary tools at his disposal, in order to discover those original techniques so that their effect upon both the form and the content of the discourse can be specified, thus clarifying, and perhaps correcting, his interpretation of the intended message. This effort, though painstaking at times, is always rewarding, and never ceases to heighten one's appreciation for these ancient biblical texts.

Turning, then, to the microstructure of Ruth, we may observe how the results of a structural analysis can at times serve to shed light upon exegetical problems of a narrower scope. The following two examples illustrate this application with regard to a variant textual reading and a specific issue of interpretation respectively.

Most Hebrew manuscripts read the final clause of 3:15 as follows, ‘And he came to the city.’ But a feminine form of the verb, i.e., ‘and *she* came ...’, occurs in some texts, and this is followed by the Syriac version as well as the Vulgate. Of contemporary translations, only the NIV retains “he.” Most modern commentators support the amended position, e.g. Morris:

The Hebrew text says at the end of the verse ‘and he went into the city’ but this must be an early scribal error. (p. 295)

However, why this need be an “error” is not clearly explained, especially in view of the fact that the MT reading makes perfectly good sense without any change. This reading is validated also by the structural pattern of the discourse at this point. Sections D (3:7a) and D’ (3:15) in the sequence of concentrically arranged elements focus upon the actions of Boaz, in contrast to the surrounding segments where Ruth is the primary agent, i.e., C (3:5-6)/C’ (3:16) and E (3:7b)/E’ (3:14b). Furthermore, in D we hear that ‘[Boaz] came to lie down’ at the threshing floor, while in D’ he leaves the scene, i.e., ‘and he *came* to the city.’ Thus the form of the discourse as composed by the author would seem to support the text as it stands, that is, in the MT.

The second passage involves a serious ambiguity in the Hebrew text. Ruth 2:20 reads (literally): ‘Blessed [be] he by Yahweh, *who* has not withheld his unfailing-faithfulness with the living and the dead.’ The question is: to whom does the “who” refer, to “Yahweh” or to the antecedent of “he,” namely, Boaz? Virtually all versions (except LXX and the Vulgate) and commentaries adopt the former interpretation, despite the fact that this leads to the problem of determining how Yahweh manifests his רַחֲמָיו to “the dead” (a concept that does not occur elsewhere in the OT), e.g. NIV:

“The LORD bless him:” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. “*The LORD* has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.”

In a recent study of this passage, Rebera (1985) comes to the opposite conclusion. He does so for the following reasons (we can but summarize the key points of this most thorough and closely-argued article):

- a) A syntactic comparison of Ruth 2:20 with 2 Samuel 2:5 shows that these passages are almost identical in structure. In the latter passage, the antecedent of the “who” in the relative clause is the pronoun of the main clause (i.e., in this instance “you”), and not “Yahweh”: ‘Blessed [be] you by Yahweh, who have done this unfailing-faithfulness to Saul ...’
The passage often cited in support of Yahweh being the antecedent, namely Genesis 24:27, is actually different in both form and function (i.e., Genesis 24:27 is an ascription of praise to Yahweh while Ruth 2:20 is an invocation of blessing by Yahweh).
- b) The expression הַמֵּתִים ‘the dead’ in 2:20 is used in specific reference to the deceased husband and sons of Naomi, as is the case also in 1:8 where the identical form appears. The focal topic in the conversation between Ruth and Naomi in 2:19-22 is Boaz. In 2:19 Naomi invokes a blessing upon ‘the one who noticed [Ruth].’ This is stated in general terms since she did not as yet know who that person was. Once Ruth tells her, Naomi can in turn be more specific in a subsequent blessing (2:20) because this was surely now a manifestation of רַחֲמָיו behavior between relatives.

- c) Considering the context of Naomi's utterance in 2:20, it seems less likely that she would be lauding Yahweh here, rather than Boaz, for his demonstration of $\tau\upsilon\pi\eta$. At the close of Act I, we recall, she made a most bitter complaint with regard to Yahweh's treatment of her. In 'afflicting' and 'bringing misfortune upon' her, it seemed as if Yahweh had forgotten his $\tau\upsilon\pi\eta$ toward her. It would therefore be too soon to expect that by the end of the events recorded in Act II, she would have been already convinced that her earlier accusation was wrong. This fundamental shift in outlook, i.e., from viewing Yahweh as oppressor to Yahweh as defender, which is such a crucial part of the author's theme, fits much more naturally just after the climax of the account in Act IV, namely, in the address of the women of Bethlehem to Naomi (4:14-15). Such an interpretation is much more in keeping with the overall organization of the text, as has been outlined on the preceding pages.

Another important piece of structurally-based evidence in this connection concerns the patterning of discourse units in Act II. In both of the A (2:1-3) and A' (2:20-23) segments, there is a decided emphasis upon the part that Boaz will play in the lives of Naomi and Ruth. In A, he is carefully introduced by the narrator along with the information that he was 'a relative of [Naomi's] husband,' which implicitly points to his future role. This suggestion is made more concrete, then in Naomi's words at the onset of section A': "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsmen-redeemers" (2:20b, NIV). It is more probable, therefore, in both the immediate as well as the wider textual setting (as delineated by a structural analysis), that Boaz is the person designated by what in strict isolation appears to be an ambiguous relative clause:

"Blessed be he by the Lord, *since* he has not forsaken his $\tau\upsilon\pi\eta$ [$\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$]." (2:20a, LXX) [Notice how the Septuagint clarifies the referent in its rendering.]

Exposition

The application of an exegetical study can take many forms, such as a sermon, Bible class, doctrinal essay, radio devotion, religious drama for television, and so on. In each of these areas, a structural analysis, which is an important part of the exegetical process, can add a new dimension to the presentation of the biblical text. By showing how the original author organized and arranged his material, following definite techniques of composition, the expositor can increase one's understanding of and appreciation for the message as it was communicated in its original setting and also its relevance for a contemporary audience (however narrowly that may be defined). This is particularly true in the case of the prophetic books, which many people, clergy and lay alike, simply avoid because they cannot discover the underlying framework or plan that enables them to make sense of the work as a whole. But as we have attempted to demonstrate in this examination of Ruth, the insights to be derived from a study of discourse structure are also significant where narrative texts are concerned. Ruth is, indeed, a captivating and encouraging story—but why? Yes, God does manifest his gracious providence on behalf of the common man (and woman)—but can we not be more specific than that? Why is that "dry" (to the average Westerner, but not to peoples who take their ancestral relations seriously) genealogy seemingly tacked on to the end of the story? Why is there so much apparent repetition in the text (again, a criticism that would probably occur first to a Western reader)? A structural analysis is able to contribute a great deal toward the answering of questions such as these. The modern reader, especially one with no knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, might still fail to fully comprehend the biblical writer's literary technique and manner of composition. But at least he would be able to better understand *what* he was trying to accomplish—and perhaps also *why* in

terms of a wider communications process, one which also needs to be investigated in relation to the original historical and cultural context. As we have tried to point out, this type of study has special relevance for an exposition of the larger “meaning” of a work, that is, its major theme and sub-themes and how these relate to the various linguistic and rhetorical forms of the text.

We would like to suggest one specific area where the results of a structurally-oriented exegesis may be applied, namely, Bible translation. Here we are thinking not so much of the insights for understanding the original text that might be gained (these were noted above), but its presentation to the readers of today. One aspect of a translation which comes immediately to mind is that of chapter and section headings. Some of the more modern versions pay at least some attention to this often neglected feature of exposition, but frequently the results are minimal or even misleading in the information which they convey to the reader. The New English Version, for example, presents the following phrases in summary of the book’s content: “Naomi and Ruth” and “Ruth and Boaz”—not much enlightenment there. Similarly, the Living Bible offers but two titles to cover (presumably) the subject matter of Ruth: “Boaz befriends Ruth” and “Boaz marries Ruth.” Where Naomi and Yahweh fit into the scheme of events is left implicit, and this might lead the uninitiated reader to erroneously conclude that they are not all that important to what is going on. The Jerusalem Bible begins the second chapter with the heading “Ruth in the fields of Boaz,” which may be alright for people who already know what the story is about, but could well give others a wrong initial impression of what this chapter contains, e.g. was Ruth perhaps lost out in the fields of Boaz? The JB version continues with this introduction to chapter three: “Boaz sleeps.” Indeed, that is true, but it certainly is not one of the major events of this unit. Furthermore, one might conclude from this that Boaz was somehow at fault for sleeping, for what other significance could one otherwise attach to such a normal activity? On the other hand, unnecessarily “cryptic” would be the only way to characterize the Revised Standard Version’s title for chapters three-four: “Next of kin.” One of the best contemporary versions with regard to section headings is the Good News Bible. Here we find the following titles for Ruth:

Elimelech and His Family Move to Moab
Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem
Ruth Works in the Fields of Boaz
Ruth Finds a Husband
Boaz Marries Ruth
Boaz and His Descendants

This is somewhat better than the rest, but the listing still gives too much prominence to only two participants in the account, namely, Boaz and Ruth. In addition, it closely adheres to a simple outline of the surface narrative; no indication of the underlying thematic/theological import of the story is suggested.

But that brings up a pertinent question: what is, or should be, the purpose of section headings in a translation? These are intended primarily as supplementary aids for the reader, of course, but what information would be most helpful to him and in what format ought this be presented? In general we might say that such titles should offer a basic summary of the content of a unit, including, if possible, at least some indication of the author’s theme, especially in places where this is emphasized or important in the development of the discourse. These headings ought to be placed at natural points in the text’s structure (as determined by prior analysis) and frequently enough to be relevant, first of all, and retainable in the average reader’s memory span. Depending on the degree of detail desired (too much is as bad as too little), it may be possible to incorporate several levels of importance, i.e., principal divisions, major subdivisions, plus points of special significance, either to highlight the message itself or to prevent any misunderstanding at especially difficult junctures, e.g. where there is a sudden shift in the speaker/addressee in the discourse, such as in the prophecy of Isaiah (for more detail on this subject, see Fry, 1984). The outline presented earlier of the linear structure of Ruth would be one proposal that might be considered to begin with.

But what can be done about the equally important concentric patterns that are found in a book like Ruth (as illustrated on the preceding pages and in the appendix below)? Should these simply be left for the commentaries to deal with? The answer to this question depends a great deal on the receptor constituency for whom the translation is intended. How much detail can they handle in the text and how much do they expect? As we have attempted to show, this aspect of the form of the discourse does have a particular relevance to the expression of the book's theme, and hence one could argue that the organizational plan ought to be regarded as an integral part of the message as originally intended. But the question remains as to whether a presentation of this material will actually enhance the average reader's understanding of the text or will it only confuse him? Only a comprehensive testing of the receptor group can find these answers out. In situations where there are clear indications that information of a structural nature would be helpful to the readership, then it may be included in the translated text, either in the form of footnotes where issues of local significance arise, or as part of a general introduction to the book as a whole. Alternatively, an appendix-type of arrangement might be worked out. Any decision with regard to such matters of format can only be made on the basis of receptor feedback which could be obtained after the publication of smaller Scripture portions, or even an entire Testament. In cases like this, the "how" is sometimes just as crucial to determine as the "what" and the "when." With a book as symmetrically organized as Ruth, the issue of form and format is just as important for exposition as it is for exegesis.

Appendix

The following is a selection of comments and diagrams of a structural nature which were perhaps too detailed to fit smoothly into the preceding discussion. These illustrate further the extent to which symmetrical patterns, both linear and concentric, have been artistically built into the narrative of Ruth. They are not merely decorative in function, but as was the case with the larger forms, these “minor” structures serve to focus unobtrusively upon key items of information in the author’s development of plot (narrative progression) and theme.

Linear Structure

a) The first example is a simple instance of how the narrator employs parallel phrasing in an “envelop”-type construction to establish the boundaries of a particular sub-unit in the discourse, i.e., (c—c´) of section A of Act I. It is a segment which highlights the sub-theme of lack/deprivation” which runs throughout the Act:

‘And he died Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, and she was left, she and her two sons.’ (1:3)
‘And they died also both of them, Mahlon and Chilion, and she was left, the woman without her two sons and without her husband.’ (7:5)

b) The following is a more elaborate example of such parallel phrasing. This one occurs at the core of Naomi’s first speech to her daughters-in-law, i.e., (d) of section B, Act I. Again, the idea of deprivation is thereby emphasized:

‘Return, my daughters.
 Why would you go with me?
 (Are) any more sons for me in my belly
 and they might be for you for husbands?
 Return, my daughters.
 Go,
 for I am [too] old
 [to be] married to a husband.’ (1:11-12a)

c) Ruth’s well-known oath of allegiance manifests a parallelism which accents the bond which she hoped to forge with Naomi:

<i>You</i>	<i>Me</i>
‘For where you go, and where you stay, your people [will be] and your God (will be) Where you die and there	I will go, I will stay: my people, my God. I will die, will I be buried.’ (1:16b-17a)

It is interesting to note that the *inclusio* which demarcates this speech features the pronominal references in reversed order:

‘Do not urge *me* to leave *you* ...
 ... if death separates between *me* and between *you*.’ (1:16a, 17b)

d) Naomi's instructions to Ruth concerning what she should do at the threshing floor is encoded in the form of a fast-moving series of action verbs. The climactic nature of this sequence is revealed as the actual events unfold in exactly the same order:

'Do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished to eat (1) and to drink (2). And it shall be in his lying down (3) ... you will go (4) and you will uncover his feet (5), and you will lie down (6).' (3:3-4)

'And Boaz ate (1) and he drank (2) ... and he went to lie down (3) at the far end of the grain pile. And she went (4) quietly, and she uncovered his feet (5), and she lay down (6). (3:7)

The intervening words of direct speech and narrative reinforce this stress upon "doing" things exactly—on following directions:

'And she said to her, "All which you say, *I will do.*"

And she went down to the threshing floor, and *she did* all which her mother-in-law commanded.' (3:5-6)

e) There is a subtle sequence in the terms of address involving Ruth which reflect her increasing status in the narrative (cp. Berlin, pp. 88-89). Ruth refers to herself as follows: 'foreigner' [נְכַרְיָהָ] (2:10); 'maidservant' [שִׁפְחָה] (2:13); and 'handmaid' [אֲמָהָ] (3:9). Boaz, on the other hand, addresses her first as a 'young woman' [נַעֲרָה] (2:5); then, recognizing her as family (but lower status), with the expression 'my daughter' [בְּתוּרִי] (2:8); and finally, after she has fully revealed her intentions at the granary, as 'worthy woman' [אִשָּׁת חַיִּל] (3:11), which now corresponds to his characterization by the narrator in (2:1): 'a man of great honor.' [אִישׁ גְּבוֹר חַיִּל].

f) Lastly, there is an important contrast that is developed in the linear patterning of content in Acts II and III respectively (cp. Rebera, 1981b). These differences may be summarized as follows:

- | <i>II</i> | <i>III</i> |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ public action, daytime, crowded "stage" ▪ detailed, slow pace ▪ Ruth and Boaz get to know each other ▪ expanded quote margins and use of personal names | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ private activity, nighttime, only key participants present ▪ fast pace, only essentials mentioned ▪ Ruth carries out Naomi's plan with regard to Boaz ▪ minimal quote margins and use of personal name |

The formal contrast between these two Acts is a reflection of the developing theme. In II, Boaz overtly shows חֶסֶד to Ruth because she was a stranger and in need of help, but more importantly, because of the חֶסֶד which she had publicly demonstrated to Naomi (2:11). In III, there is an air of secrecy which envelops the action throughout (e.g. 'she came quietly, ... and lay down,' 3:7; 'Let it not be known that a woman has come to the threshing floor,' 3:14). The aim was to have Boaz acknowledge the חֶסֶד which he must show Ruth as her גּוֹאֵל, and this plan (of Naomi's) had to be carried out both swiftly and silently so that it might be concluded as smoothly and as soon as possible. Thus the form of the discourse mirrors its content, and this harmonious fusion is another mark of an expert communicator.

Concentric

a) In Naomi's final speech of Act I (1:20-21), her words take the form of a double, interwoven chiasm, which 'is a structural image of her tortured thinking at this stage in the account:

- A Do not call me Naomi!
 B Call me Mara,
 because he has made me very 'bitter' *the Almighty* (X).
 B' I as a full one went away
 and empty he has brought me back *Yahweh* (Y).
 A' Why do you call me Naomi,
 B'' and (for] *Yahweh* (Y') he has afflicted me,
 and the *Almighty* (X') he has brought misfortune upon me?

Thus the chiasm [A—B—B'—A'] is interlocked within chiasm [X—Y—Y'—X'] just as, according to Naomi's perspective, the two focal participants have come into conflict in life.

b) The following diagram shows how the corresponding segments A—A' of Act II pattern together in concentric form as well as in content, thus foregrounding Boaz, the new participant in the account:

- (A) a (2:1) Boaz of the clan of Elimelech mentioned
 b (2:2) Ruth gleaning: a request
 b' (2:3a) Ruth gleaning: action
 a' (2:3b) Boaz of the clan of Elimelech mentioned
 (A') a (2:20) Boaz' בָּרַךְ praised by Naomi
 b (2:21) Ruth gleans with 'the young men'
 b' (2:22) Ruth gleans with 'the young women'
 a' (2:23) Ruth *gleans* with the servants of *Boaz*; she lives with *Naomi*

Notice how the last element ties together key lexical items from both the (a) and the (b) units of the structure, thus serving as an effective concluding statement (device of "closure").

c) Boaz' reiterates his dramatic promise to Ruth (3:13) as the core of an introversion whose boundaries deal with more mundane matters:

- A 'Stay tonight, and it will be in the morning
 B if he redeems you—good,
 let him redeem you.
 B' And if he is not willing to redeem you,
 and [then] I will redeem you ...
 A' Lie down until the morning.'

Notice that these very same core elements are duplicated consecutively in Boaz' actual offer to the גֹּאֵל in Act IV (4:4).

d) A chiasm also contributes to the shock effect of Boaz revelation to the גֹּאֵל (4:5):

- A ‘On the day of your *buying* the field
- B from the hand of *Naomi* ...
- B’ and (from) *Ruth the Moabitess* ...
- A’ you have *bought* [it] to raise up the name of the dead ...’

The essential form and content of this announcement is then later reproduced in Boaz’ oath to the elders of the city (4:10):

- A ‘I have *bought* all
- B from the hand of *Naomi* ...
- B’ and also *Ruth the Moabitess* ...
- A’ I have *bought* for myself ...’

Such symmetrical patterns do not simply appear by chance. They are created as the verbal artist fashions his discourse in a manner that foregrounds the main aspects of his message, which in this case happens to be Yahweh’s words of encouragement (through his טֹרֶן) to his people.

e) The people respond to Boaz’ declaration with a blessing that positions the key elements of content on the borders of an introversion (4:11-12):

- A ‘May *Yahweh* grant *the woman*
- B who is coming to *your house*
- [to be] as *Rachel* and as *Leah*
- who both built the *house of Israel*.
- C And [may you] act ably *in Ephrath*,
- C’ and [may you] call a name *in Bethlehem*.
- B’ And let *your house* be
- as the *house of Pharez*
- whom *Tamar* bore to *Judah*
- A’ through the seed which *Yahweh* shall give to you from this *young woman*.’

f) And finally, we take note of the introverted patterning that is inherent in the sequence of personal “evaluations” which runs throughout the story:

- A Naomi castigates Yahweh to the women (1:20-21)
- B the workers praise Ruth (2:7)
- C Boaz praises Ruth (2:11)
- D Naomi praises Boaz (2:19-20).
- C’ Boaz praises Ruth (3:10-11)
- D’ Naomi commends Boaz (3:18)
- B’ the elders bless Ruth (4:11-12)
- A’ the women laud Yahweh, the child of Boaz, and Ruth to Naomi (4:14-15)

Thus we see once more how the concluding unit in the series acts as a fitting climax and summary of the whole—truly, structural symmetry at its best!

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