THE NARRATOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE 'HEROIC BIOGRAPHY'

II. THE MODELS

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This is the second paper in a series attempting to lay down criteria for the study of the heroic biography. An earlier paper, 'The Heroic Biography, a Genre of Criticism', outlined the most influential theories available: 1. Historical, 2. Astral, 3. Myth-and-ritual, 4. Ritual-astral, 5. Psychoanalytical, 6. Spiritualist, and 7. Theological. Further, it pointed out the basic shortcoming these all share: they are reality-oriented theories which give pride of place to the referential function of language while downplaying the importance of the poetic function. The present paper will offer a chronological survey of the most important models proposed to date in this field of study, and draw from it some basic reflections regarding the nature of such narratives.

1. Johann Georg Von Hahn

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, and in the wake of a growing interest in the study of Sanskrit and its links to Western languages, it became fashionable to speak of the 'Aryan' race. Von Hahn's model is probably innocent of the racialist bias the word was given by others both before him and in the early twentieth century;[1] and in fact his term simply designates the cultural complex nowadays referred to as 'Indo-European'. His book *Sagwissenschaftliche Studien* (published posthumously between 1871 and 1876) concentrated on fifteen heroic figures (or pairs of figures) from the Greco-Roman, Germanic, Persian and Hindu domains, to wit: Perseus, Herakles, Oedipus, Amphion and Zethus, Pelias and Neleus, Leucastus and Parrhasius, Romulus and Remus, Theseus, Wittich, Siegfried, Wolfdietrich, Cyrus, Keï Khosrov, Karna, and Krishna.[2] His method was to break down the life of the hero into a list of incidents, situations, traits and motifs, arrange these 'biographically', and group them into four major episodes or stages, each potentially encompassing a paradigm of options which may (but need not) occur in the life of a specific hero; in different ways this was going to become the blueprint for subsequent models.

The synoptic table of his *Arische Aussetzungs-und-Rückkehr Formel* is to be found between pages 340 and 341 of the original German text (most Internet reproductions omit it). The table (but not the book) was translated into English as 'The Aryan Expulsion-and-Return Formula' (the word 'formula'—German *Formel*—here means 'model') and included in the fourth edition (1888) of a much older work, John Dunlop's *The History of Fiction* (1814), which turns out to be one of the very first efforts towards a comparative theory of literature. In this fourth edition, revised by Henry Wilson and re-titled *The History of Prose Fiction*, the translation of Von Hahn's table was inserted (with no comment) as an appendix after the last page (504) of the first volume. This is of interest because, in the wake of the consecration of the *novel* form as the paramount vehicle for fiction in the nineteenth century, the insertion of this table into a book dealing with world prose narrative denotes an awareness, on the editor's part, of the need for some *theory* of fiction, a need already brought home by the panoramic view taken by Dunlop, which revealed vast similarities among countless narratives. Table I reproduces the essentials of Von Hahn's scheme as translated in Wilson's edition.

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[1] Notably, Gobineau (1853-56).
[2] See also Taylor 1964.

TABLE I

Von Hahn (1871-76)   THE ARYAN EXPOSURE-AND-RETURN FORMULA

Birth   1. Principal hero illegitimate
       2. Mother, daughter of native prince
       3. Father, a god or a stranger

Youth   4. Omen to a parent
       5. Hero, in consequence, exposed
       6. Suckled by brutes
       7. Reared by childless herdsfolk
       8. Arrogance of the youth
       9. Service abroad

Return 10. Triumphant home-coming, and return abroad
       11. Fall of the persecutor; acquisition of sovereignty; liberation of mother
       12. Foundation of a city
       13. Extraordinary death

Demise (or *Subordinate Figures*)
       14. Slandered as incestuous and early death
       15. Vengeance of the injured servant
       16. Murder of the younger brother

Item (12) is very often absent in the texts, and so the question must be asked whether we should expect all of these 'traits' to be present every time in each of the narratives, or whether they (or which of them) constitute optional elements; in any case, a rationale for the whole model remains to be provided. It is not clear whether a *chronology* of events is meant; but, assuming that it is, we note that items (14)-(16) do not adhere to a chronological order, and so we must point at the incongruity of having a major stage 'Demise' (reformulated as 'Subordinate Figures' in the fifth edition of *The History of Prose Fiction*, 1896) following (13), 'Extraordinary death,' but containing matter that must have predated the hero's death; clearly the materials included in this fourth stage need a different treatment. We further note that (1), (2), (3) and (8) are not, properly speaking, events but traits of the character, though it is of course meant that such traits will only manifest themselves in action and so generate actual episodes (a point first laid down as a *law* of folk narrative in Olrik 1921). As it stands, the table provides a listing of motifs rather than a sequence of developments; the question is what narrative role such episodes play in the overall scheme, and what the internal logic of their arrangement may be. But if we claim that there need be no logic to it all, we will have to conclude that countless story-tellers have told narratives that made no sense to them and to their hearers, and we must therefore renounce the possibility of interpretation.

2. Alfred Nutt

Folklorist Alfred Nutt's 1881 monograph *The Aryan Expulsion-and-Return Formula in the Folk and Hero Tales of the Celts* was a direct response to Von Hahn's book, whose title he took up. In the wake of a renewed interest in the Gaelic language, culture and folklore in the late nineteenth century—an interest which would soon lead to what has come to be known as the 'Irish Literary Revival'—Nutt tried to show that Von Hahn's model fully applied to Celtic hero-narratives. Well versed in medieval Irish literature and folklore, Nutt's essay is important because it applies an existing model to a set of data not covered originally by it, and in this doing initiates a scientific process of testing a hypothesis in order to either confirm or modify it. Aware, for instance, of the incongruity signalled above, he cautiously relabelled the fourth stage as 'Supplementary incidents' (but the problems mentioned earlier remain unsolved in his approach).

TABLE II
Alfred Nutt (1881)   THE CELTIC EXPULSION-AND-RETURN FORMULA

Birth   I. Hero born out of wedlock, or posthumously, or supernaturally
II. Mother, princess residing in her own country
III. Father, god or hero from afar

Youth   IV. Tokens and warnings of hero's future greatness
V. He is in consequence driven forth from home
VI. Is suckled by wild beasts
VII. Is brought up by a childless (shepherd) couple, or by a widow
VIII. Is of passionate and violent disposition
IX. Seeks service in foreign lands
IXa. He attacks and slays monsters
IXb. He acquires supernatural knowledge through eating a magic fish

Return   X. He returns to his own country, retreats, and again returns
XI. Overcomes his enemies, frees his mother, and seats himself on the throne
XII. He founds cities
XIII. The manner of his death is extraordinary

Supplementary incidents
XIV. He is accused of incest; he dies young
XV. He injures an inferior, who takes revenge upon him or upon his children
XVI. He slays his younger brother

On the whole, Nutt offers more options than did von Hahn: he gives three alternatives to characterise the hero's extraordinary origin at (I), and three versions of (IX) which include the popular monster-fight (though the reason why they are not classed as distinct incidents is unclear). Still, methodological questions arise. For example, the founding of a city (XII) remains problematic: if it is more than an occasional episode in a few myths, what significance can be assigned to the event, what narrative function does it perform? Likewise, why should he be accused of incest (XIV), and at what point in the formula does this happen? What is the logic of revenge (XV) in the overall scheme? Like von Hahn, Nutt gives the hero's liberation of his mother and his occupying the throne as parts of the same incident (XI), but again offers no suggestion as to the significance of such a juxtaposition. In all this, of course, we do not want to know what happened to this or that hero 'in reality' but to uncover the conventions—the 'laws'—if any, that govern the composition of all such narratives. What is interesting is to see how the tales Nutt collects do largely adhere to a model that was devised for a different set of texts; all in all, it seems Von Hahn had struck gold.

3. Otto Rank

Rank's early work was much indebted to Freud's thinking, and his model in *Der Mythus von der Geburt des Helden,* 'The Myth of the Birth of the Hero' (1909), heavily relies on the Freudian concept of the Oedipus complex.[3] His heroes are Sargon, Moses, Karna, Oedipus, Paris, Telephus, Perseus, Gilgamesh, Cyrus, Tristan, Romulus, Hercules, Jesus, Siegfried and Lohengrin (half of these correspond to figures in Von Hahn's canon, though it does not seem Rank was acquainted with either his or Nutt's approaches). Without in the least touching the language and syntax of the translation, I have taken the liberty of breaking up his single paragraph into a set of episodes and motifs so as to bring out the similarity which his model bears to the others.

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[3] And in fact, it was published as volume 5 in the series *Schriften zur Angewandten Seelenkunde*, edited by Sigmund Freud.

TABLE III
Otto Rank (1909)   THE 'STANDARD SAGA'

1)   The hero is
- the child of most distinguished parents,
- usually the son of a king.
2)   His origin is preceded by difficulties:
- Continence,
- prolonged barrenness,
- or secret intercourse of the parents due to
- external prohibition or obstacles.
3)   During or before the pregnancy, there is a prophecy,
- in the form of a dream or oracle,
- cautioning against his birth,
- and usually threatening danger to the father (or his representative).
4)   As a rule, he is surrendered to the water, in a box.
5)   He is then saved
- by animals,
- or by lowly people (shepherds),
6)   and is suckled
- by a female animal,
- or by an humble woman.
7)   After he has grown up,
8)   he finds his distinguished parents, in a highly versatile fashion.
9)   He takes his revenge on his father, on the one hand, and
10)   is acknowledged, on the other.
11)   Finally he achieves rank and honours.

   It is worthy of note that Rank makes the hero's tale end at the point of recognition, and says nothing about his later life (e.g., as a legislator), or about his death (though examples of dying heroes abound in his book); this 'ending' recurs in the schemes of Propp and others below. As in Nutt's (but not in von Hahn's) model, at least some 'incidents' (e.g., (2), (5)) exhibit a variety of possible realisations, and the significant coincidences among the various models begin to raise a battery of questions: why should the hero's conception or birth be surrounded by extraordinary circumstances? Why should he pose danger to his father? Why should animals or lowly people rescue him in infancy? Practically every step in the models calls for an explanation.

4. Vladimir Propp

Because for thirty years Propp's work was unknown in the West, his model, originally published less than twenty years after Rank's, failed to have an impact until the 1960s. Working within the general framework of Russian Formalism (and seemingly unaware of the earlier formulas), Propp distilled his model from fairytales rather than myths;[4] and his discovery of the structure of fairytales has become the foundation of Narratology.[5] On the basis of one hundred Russian tales from Aleksander Nikolayevich Afanasyev's 1855-67 collection, he stipulated that all fairytales are built on a limited number of *functions*, that is, actions which are decisive for the advance of the plot. Propp was fully aware that he was not dealing with a replica of *events* in the 'real life' of a number of heroes but with specifically *narrative* constituents in need of structural explanation. In a major step which neither Nutt nor Rank had taken, he claimed that every function displays a variety of possible realisations or 'function forms'; for an illustration, some of the fifteen forms Propp stipulated for function VIII are given below. Besides a Roman numeral, every function is assigned a letter (the first eight functions, forming the preparatory sequence, receive Greek letters).

TABLE IV

Vladimir Propp (1928)   THE THIRTY-ONE FUNCTIONS OF THE FAIRYTALE

0.   *Initial situation* (α)
I.   *One of the members of a family absents himself from home* (β)
II.   *An interdiction is addressed to the hero* (γ)
III.   *The interdiction is violated* (δ)
IV.   *The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance* (ε)
V.   *The villain receives information about his victim* (ζ)
VI.   *The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings* (η)
VII.   *The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy* (θ)
VIII.   *The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family* (*A*)

A^1 *kidnapping of a person*
A^2 *seizure of a magical agent or helper*
A^3 *the ruining of crops*
......
A^{10} *casting into the sea*
A^{11} *the casting of a spell, transformation*
.....

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[4] 'Folktale' (*skazka*) was an editor's misnomer for 'fairytale'. Though modern critics prefer 'wondertales', I retain the term wich has become associated with Propp's book.
[5] For detailed analysis see Aguirre 2011.

       A^{14} *murder*

       A^{15} *imprisonment, detention*

VIIIa. *One member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something* (*a*)

IX.   *Misfortune or lack is made known; the hero is approached with a request or command; he is allowed to go or he is dispatched* (*B*)

X.   *The hero agrees to or decides upon counteraction* (*C*)

XI.   *The hero leaves home* (↗)

XII. *The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or a helper* (*D*)

XIII. *The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor* (*E*)

XIV.   *The hero acquires the use of a magical agent* (*F*)

XV.   *The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search* (*G*)

XVI.   *The hero and the villain join in direct combat* (*H*)

XVII.   *The hero is branded* (*I*)

XVIII. *The villain is defeated* (*J*)

XIX. *The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated* (*K*)

XX.   *The hero returns* (↘)

XXI.   *The hero is pursued* (*Pr*)

XXII. *Rescue of the hero from pursuit* (*Rs*)

XXIII. *The hero, unrecognized, arrives home or in another country* (*0*)

XXIV. *A false hero presents unfounded claims* (*L*)

XXV.   *A difficult task is proposed to the hero* (*M*)

XXVI. *The task is resolved* (*N*)

XXVII. *The hero is recognized* (*Q*)

XXVIII. *The false hero or villain is exposed* (*Ex*)

XXIX. *The hero is given a new appearance* (*T*)

XXX.   *The villain is punished* (*U*)

XXXI. *The hero is married and ascends the throne* (*W*)

As indicated earlier, Propp's ending is similar to Rank's, which in the domain of fairytales makes much sense since they always leave the hero at the moment of success and reward; we will have occasion to reflect on what this ending portends for the genre of fairytales as a whole. Propp distinguishes functions—in the technical sense given above—from all other elements which play a subordinate, not a structural role, such as motifs, characterisation, description, trebling, etc. The forms themselves of the functions are accidental and subject to much variation, their place in the sequence being the all-important factor. His hypothesis (essential to the construction of a 'grammar' of narrative) is that all fairytales follow the same pattern—they are variations on a single mould. Exceptions are no such, only defective, corrupt or fanciful realisations of the model. We may object to the claim that one specific tale type lies at the origin of all fairytales—namely, type ATU300, 'The Dragon-Slayer' in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (2004) classification—, but on the whole this is one of the most precise and productive models proposed.

5. Fitzroy R. Somerset, Lord Raglan

Raglan first published his findings in an essay (1934) which was later expanded to book-length (1936). He proposed twenty-two traits to characterise the hero's life, but (as if in answer to a problem left pending by earlier researchers) he candidly stated that his twenty-two items were optional traits, and his method was to determine how closely a given hero's life adhered to the ideal formula by simply counting the number of traits his life contained. No single hero-tale fulfilled expectations one hundred per cent, but most were found to display a majority of the 22 items. This renders the model more flexible (and aligns it with very contemporary descriptions of genre as a *fuzzy set*—see Attebery 1992), but also makes it fall short of the universality it aspires to, and leaves us with the question whether some traits are more mandatory than others.

TABLE V

Lord Raglan (1934)   THE PATTERN OF MYTHOLOGICAL HERO STORIES

1. His mother is a royal virgin.
2. His father is a king, and
3. often a near relative of his mother, but
4. The circumstances of his conception are unusual, and
5. He is also reputed to be the son of a god.
6. At birth an attempt is made, often by his father, to kill him, but
7. He is spirited away, and
8. Reared by foster parents in a far country.
9. We are told nothing of his childhood, but
10. On reaching manhood he returns or goes to his future kingdom.
11. After a victory over the king and/or a giant, dragon, or wild beast,
12. He marries a princess, often the daughter of his predecessor, and
13. Becomes king.
14. For a time he reigns uneventfully, and
15. Prescribes laws, but
16. Later he loses favour with the gods and/or his subjects, and
17. Is driven from the throne and city.
18. He meets with a mysterious death,
19. Often at the top of a hill.
20. His children, if any, do not succeed him.
21. His body is not buried, but nevertheless
22. He has one or more holy sepulchres.

The logic of it all remains a problem. Sometimes two traits seem to stand in complementary distribution, e.g., (2) and (5). Like Von Hahn and Nutt, Raglan relates the hero's marriage (12) and his obtention of kingship (13). Whereas

optionality is built into the model, no 'function forms' (to use Propp's term) are contemplated. Quite a few of his 'functions' seem to be in need of explanation: why should his father seek his death? What significance is to be attributed to his dying 'often at the top of a hill'? Why should he lie unburied yet have several sepulchres? Answers not in the light of actual fact or custom but in narrative terms are needed.

6. Joseph Campbell

Campbell's is one of the most ambitious and comprehensive accounts of the heroic biography to date. He provides a rationale which, whether or not convincing, is persuasive: all narratives everywhere tell variations on the one story—the *monomyth*—which humanity has been narrating to itself from the beginning. The monomyth tells a tale which is the narrative equivalent of rites of passage as defined by anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep. As the rite consists of three stages: *preliminal* (separation from the ordinary milieu), *liminal* (initiation, tests, trials) and *post-liminal* (incorporation to the ordinary world), so the tale displays three major stages, Departure-Adventure-Return:

> *A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.* (Campbell 1949: 31)

This is what Campbell calls 'the nuclear unit of the monomyth'. As I did with Rank, I have broken up (and summarized) Campbell's account into what (following Propp) I will call *functions* and *function forms*.

TABLE VI
Joseph Campbell (1949)   THE 'MONOMYTH'

I. The Call to Adventure
1. *The Call*. The hero encounters a herald or guide who summons him to a quest. He is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds to the threshold of adventure.
2. *Refusal of the Call*. Should he turn a deaf ear to it, a destructive power will dog his steps and blight his attempts at leading an ordinary life.
3. *Acceptance of the Call.* A chance encounter with a helper, teacher, tempter or initiatory priest provides him with the first assistance for the quest.

II. Entering the Other World

4. *The Crossing of the Threshold*. He encounters a Threshold Guardian—an ambivalent figure, threatening and seductive, protective yet dangerous—who watches over the established bounds but who must be challenged if the hero is to access a new zone of experience. This experience depends on a release of forces beyond reason which include the gift of a higher wisdom, the ecstasy of inspiration, or the divine enthusiasm which alone the custodian of the passage (Pan, Dionysus, the sirens, the Muses &c.) can bestow.

5. *Venturing into the Dark.* He defeats or conciliates this power and goes alive into the kingdom of the dark, or he is slain by the opponent and descends in death (passing into the temple interior, being swallowed by a monster, dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, he journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which threaten him (tests), while some give magical aid (helpers). The whole adventure is 'a transit into a sphere of rebirth.'[6]

6. *At the nadir of the mythological round* he undergoes a supreme ordeal.

III. The Reward

7. *Obtention of the boon* (gift of drink, food, fire, grace, life; bride-theft, fire-theft).
8. *Hierogamy*. Sexual union with the Queen Goddess of the World.
9. *Father-atonement*. Recognition by the father-creator.
10. *Apotheosis*. His own divinisation.

IV. The Return

11. *He sets forth* under the protection of the benign powers,
12. or *he flees* and is pursued.
13. At the *return threshold* the transcendental powers must remain behind.
14. *The hero re-emerges* from the kingdom of dread.
15. *The boon* that he brings restores the world.

This model makes it possible for Campbell to advance a claim similar to (though of course much more ambitious than) Propp's claim for fairytales: that all stories are the one story. Structurally, the scheme exhibits a unity—derived from the rite-of-passage analogy—well beyond what most other models offer. A tripartite division yields a spatial metaphor for human action which follows a departure-and-return formula (Von Hahn had identified something like this structure over thirty years before van Gennep came up with it), but now involving a middle element—the threshold—with a key narrative function. This liminal zone, constituting a domain of experience radically distinct from our ordinary world, is the ground for adventure and change.

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[6] Campbell 1949, 92.

7. Jan de Vries

De Vries proposed two different (though comparable) schemes for respectively the hero of the fairytale (De Vries 1954) and that of myth (De Vries 1959, trans. 1963); for the sake of brevity, only the second of these is shown. He mentions previous models (Von Hahn's, Raglan's, and his own for fairytales), but, though he was familiar with Propp's *Morphology* (he published a twelve-page review of Propp's Russian volume in 1930), he is strangely silent about it in both works. Like other researchers before him, he wrote that '[i]n considering the history of various heroes we are struck by the appearance of the same or at least similar motifs'; after listing dragon fight, maiden rescue, an obscure youth or an unusual birth, he adds:

> It is not necessary that the lives of all heroes should contain the complete series of these motifs. Yet one always has the impression that a hero's life is the more or less complete reflection of a pattern in which these elements have their fixed places […] a hero's life is not the fortuitous combination of marvellous deeds and experiences, but […] has to be the expression of a certain idea (1963: 210, 211).

De Vries went on to define this 'idea' in cultic terms, as associated with religious rituals of initiation and myths of creation. This is one version of the myth-and-ritual theory we had occasion to examine in my earlier paper and need not detain us. What matters for us here is that these notions—each tale selects a number of motifs from out a 'complete series' in which they occupy fixed positions—count precisely among the main criteria in Propp's analysis.

TABLE VII
Jan De Vries (1959)   THE PATTERN OF AN HEROIC LIFE

I. *The begetting of the hero*
    A. The mother is a virgin, who is in some cases overpowered by a god, or has extra-marital relations with the hero's father
    B. The father is a god
    C. The father is an animal, often the disguise of a god
    D. The child is conceived in incest

II. *The birth of the hero*
    A. It takes place in an unnatural way
    B. The 'unborn' hero, i.e. the child that is born by means of a caesarean section

III. *The youth of the hero is threatened*
    A. The child is exposed, either by the father who has been warned in a dream that the child will be a danger to him, or by the mother who thus tries to hide her shame
    B. The exposed child is fed by animals

C. After that the child is found by shepherds, etc. or is taken to them
D. In Greek legend various heroes are brought up by a mythical figure

IV. *The way in which the hero is brought up*
A. The hero reveals his strength, courage, or other particular features at a very early age
B. On the other hand the child is often very slow in his development: he is dumb or pretends to be mentally deficient

V. *The hero often acquires invulnerability*

VI. *One of the most common heroic deeds is the fight with a dragon or another monster*

VII. *The hero wins a maiden, usually after overcoming great dangers*

VIII. *The hero makes an expedition to the underworld*

IX. *When the hero is banished in his youth he returns later and is victorious over his enemies. In some cases he has to leave the realm again which he has won with such difficulty*

X. *The death of the hero*

One of the soundest traits of a 'structuralist' approach is evident in both Propp's and De Vries' models (though some of the other models do seem to point in this direction): the narrative is shaped by a *syntagma* of actions (= Propp's function string) each of which offers a *paradigm* of possible realisations (= Propp's function forms).[7] This systematises the combinatorial principle which allows for an inexhaustible variety of tale-formations. For the rest, old problems reappear: must the dragon-fight (VI) and the expedition to the underworld (VIII) take place respectively before and after the winning of the maiden (VII)? How common (how optional) are all such incidents? Following de Vries we could label all elements in his table 'motifs'; but these can be of several kinds: some are events, some actions, some static, some descriptive (e.g., I.A: His mother is a virgin, or IV.B: The hero is dumb); and, as Propp warned, only motifs which constitute *actions* that are decisive for the plot can be labelled *functions*.

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[7] The observation about syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes is due to Levi-Strauss's (1960) critique of Propp's text.

8. Conclusions

Other models and schemes have been proposed since the nineteen-fifties, most of them derivative of Propp's or Campbell's.[8] Their study raises many questions: whether the number of 'traits', 'steps' or 'functions' is an absolute given (Propp, for example, extracted thirty-one functions from one hundred fairytales, but it is legitimate to ask whether a considerably larger corpus, or a corpus taken from other linguistic areas, might require modifications); whether one and the same model can be applied unchanged to different genres (including literary genres); whether functions are mandatory or optional, and whether they are monolithic or allow for different manifestations; whether the order of appearance of functions matters (whether the life-story of a hero follows a necessarily chronological arrangement); and whether an improved model is possible—one that will take the best of each and smooth out the inconsistencies. But we can already outline some of the major insights to be drawn from the above survey.

To begin with, it is clear that we deal with *a genre of criticism*, though it is difficult to ascribe it to one discipline, as it crosses the boundaries of folkloristics, mythography, anthropology, literary studies and even the study of religion (such would clearly be the case with Dumézil's approach to the problem of epic). Furthermore, this critical genre deals with a *genre of fiction*, which implies a narrative of events. Were we to look at the lives themselves of characters we might be satisfied with confirming that in the main they resemble each other, and leave it at that: when reality is our measuring standard we cannot query the yardstick. But attending as we do to the *narratives* of such lives we are bound to enquire into the laws, principles or rules that generate all such texts; and these laws cannot be of a spiritual, mental or religious kind, nor can they follow models in nature, but must be textual, compositional—in other words, narratological. Taking them as messages, we could say that whereas criticism has mostly paid attention to the *referential function of language*, a foregrounding of the *poetic function* is at present required.[9]

The narratives in question seem to follow a roughly chronological order, and therefore to adhere to some narrative logic. For example, we had occasion to point out how in several of the models the hero's ascension to the throne is related either

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[8] See, e.g., Delarue and Tenèze 1957-85, Greimas 1966, Brèmond 1970, Leeming 1973, Dundes 1976, O'Cathasaigh 1977, Jason 1988, Apo 1995, Miller 2000 and, viewing the hero's tale as a subordinate part of a cosmological myth, van der Sluijs 2011. A good survey for the twentieth century can be found in Meletinsky 2000. On the structure of the heroic (non-Jungian) archetype see Julio Caro Baroja 1991.

[9] See my 'The Heroic Biography, a Genre of Criticism'.

to his liberating his mother or to his marriage. The meaning of these juxtapositions is unclear; but if one argues that mere coincidence is at work one relinquishes the attempt at obtaining a model. If, on the other hand, one accepts that there is significance in such 'coincidences', one is committed to developing a theory that will explain their underlying logic.

Most of the models postulate a manageable division of the sequence into stages. Von Hahn and Nutt offer just four (but their sequential nature is somewhat unclear), De Vries has ten. Campbell again gives four, the middle two constituting the adventure properly so called, which corresponds to the liminal stage in *rites de passage*; he thus proposes the addition of a threshold zone separating and linking departure and return, which seems a most useful concept. Propp suggests *sequences* of functions with an iterative value (the hero runs a gauntlet and emerges victorious; then he optionally runs a second gauntlet; and so forth); and the narrative function of iteration (which he dismissed as unimportant to his model) is another topic for enquiry.

Folklorist Alan Dundes found Propp's terms 'function' and 'function form' unsatisfactory and, building on the analogy of phonetics (where 'phoneme' and 'allophone' respectively designate a sound and variations on it within the language), he proposed to use 'motifeme' and 'allomotif' instead; 'motif' would then be the equivalent of the linguistic 'phone'—the abstract term designating any and all human vocal sounds (Dundes 1964: 59). This linguistic analogy is useful; there is sense in distinguishing the abstract *motifs* (as listed in, e.g., the *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*; see Thompson 1955-58) from the *motifemes* (*functions*) which are the specific units of narrative, and from the *allomotifs* (*function forms*) which variously realise each motifeme. The tale of a hero's life, then, does not simply consist in a series of motifs; rather, its constituent units are narrative functions (motifemes), and these are *actions or events* of significance to the plot and not, for instance, traits of character, or qualities of persons or objects. All other motifs (i.e., traits, qualities, objects, etc.) which do not constitute significant action are to be studied on a different—not narrative—level.

The string of functions shapes a *syntagma*, the various forms a function can take constitute a *paradigm*. The stages of the syntagma, though fixed, are selective; the paradigm offers optional forms. All the models considered acknowledge the need to differentiate between mandatory and optional elements—constants and variables (Propp 13). Further, the notion of a *narrative logic* must be extended to the ordering and selection of functions and function forms.

This again brings up the issue of the precise relation between individual elements and the text as a whole. Models differ as to the importance they assign to the insertion of a multiplicity of incidents into a chronological string: are a virgin birth, incest, revenge, the founding of a city and many others simply motifs, or do they have the status of motifemes, that is, enter into proper functions at given slots in the sequence? In other words, do they possess narrative significance? If one accepts that convention (rules, laws, principles) governs folk narrative one must be consequent and accept that no incidents are casual or arbitrary, rather they respond to narratological needs.

The purpose of the present project is to explore the possibility of constructing a model on these minimal features; whereas previous researchers have worked mostly independently of each other when not ignoring earlier work, this undertaking can only succeed if it takes existing models—their insights, but also their flaws—into account; we can only build on the shoulders of others. For the realisation of the full potential of this approach, Propp's reflection on his own scheme is to be given serious consideration:

> The scheme is a *measuring unit* for individual tales. Just as cloth can be measured with a yardstick to determine its length, tales may be measured by the scheme and thereby defined. The application of the given scheme to various tales can also define the relationships of tales among themselves. We already foresee that the problem of kinship of tales, the problem of themes and variants, thanks to this, may receive a new solution (Propp, p. 65).

On this premise it is possible to use the scheme in order to assess not only different tales within the genre of fairytales but equally other genres of folk narrative (such as myth, epic or ballad), as well as literary texts and genres (such as *The Odyssey*, *Hamlet*, or Gothic fiction), so long as it is understood that the assessment of differences may require adjustments to the model.[10] But, beyond differences, what all researchers seem to agree on is that the tales do not constitute a mere congeries of items but shape a *pattern* in which events take *fixed* positions; as de Vries put it,

> a hero's life is not the fortuitous combination of marvellous deeds and experiences, but […] has to be the expression of a certain idea (p. 211).

It is this idea (another word for it might be 'theme') that Campbell sought to bring to light with his concept of the *monomyth*. But before we reach for some such universal theme the scheme must be modulated to take into account variation and evolution—it must provide a historical model. And were it to appear that, in a

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[10] For an application to Gothic see Aguirre 2014, 2019a.

historical perspective, the fictions of a certain period or group do not adhere to time-hallowed patterns—perhaps that they refuse to deal with heroes, or that they are unable to do so—the worth of the model would not be invalidated thereby; on the contrary, such a finding would tell us that the fiction system in question significantly departs from the model, and this surely would be an extremely valuable insight.

Some scholars have agreed that a 'final' episode in the biography must naturally concern the death of the hero. Trivial as the question may be, it is necessary to ask ourselves why, and the immediate answer seems to be that, as in life, so in narratives; was this what von Hahn, Nutt, Raglan or De Vries thought—a reality-centered reading? As we observed, Otto Rank was the first to terminate the model at the point of the hero's reward: again, what led him to this peculiar conclusion? To credit Propp's analysis, one particular genre of traditional narrative, the fairytale, makes an even more radical claim: the tale of the life of the hero ends at the point of happiness. No less. Campbell's model in turn reveals a dimension of narrative so apparently obvious as often to pass unnoticed: the tale has a *direction*. Our narrative traditions do not simply pile up events, they order them towards some goal—they are *telic* in the sense in which Victor Turner uses the term to indicate 'a system of ends and means' (Turner 1968: 3). This is a consideration which seems to encompass all others: regardless of whether they end happily or tragically, myth, epic, folktale and legend assign a *sense* to the hero's life: he does not move blindly, he *advances*; he does not simply act, he *seeks*. His adventure has structure, direction, significance. Whether it ends—tragically—in death, or reaches—exhilaratingly—a sense of achievement and plenitude, his is a meaningful endeavour.

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