

## THE ANNOTATED PROPP

### 1.3.

## THE GRAMMAR OF PROPP'S FUNCTIONS

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### 1. Introduction

This is the third in a run of working papers arising from the project *The Annotated Propp*, which seeks to apply to Gothic narratives Vladimir Propp's model for the study of fairytales.<sup>1</sup> Two earlier papers dealt with 1) a breakdown of the project itself<sup>2</sup> and 2) an outline of Propp's functional system.<sup>3</sup> This third paper proposes a detailed examination of the way Propp handled functions, and to discuss two specific problems: the semantic value of structure, and the number of functions.

To begin with, and because a panoramic of the model is crucial to my discussion, I reproduce here the table of Proppian functions presented in 'Outline'. References to functions follow the presentation given there, that is, code letter, summary of the function, definition, and function number in Arabic (rather than Roman) numerals (and, to avoid confusions, always preceded by a capital 'F': F2, F31).

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Propp (1928) *Morphology of the Folktale* (henceforward *Morphology*), trans. Laurence Scott, revised Louis A. Wagner (Austin: University of Texas Press 1968). The term 'fairytales' will be retained although the modern tendency is to use 'wondertales' instead.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Annotated Propp I: Gothic Fiction and Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*,' in *The Northanger Library Project* (2019),

[https://www.northangerlibrary.com/documentos/1.1\\_THE\\_ANNOTATED\\_PROPP\\_I.pdf](https://www.northangerlibrary.com/documentos/1.1_THE_ANNOTATED_PROPP_I.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> 'The Annotated Propp II: An Outline of Propp's Model for the Study of Fairytales' (henceforward 'Outline'), in *The Northanger Library Project* (2011),

<https://www.northangerlibrary.com/documentos/AN%20OUTLINE%20OF%20PROPP'S%20MODEL%20FOR%20THE%20STUDY%20OF%20FAIRYTALES.pdf>.

THE THIRTY-ONE FUNCTIONS (the generic string)

$\alpha$	Initial situation	(0)
$\beta$	Absentation	<i>One of the members of a family absents himself from home</i> (F1)
$\gamma$	Interdiction	<i>An interdiction is addressed to the hero</i> (F2)
$\delta$	Violation	<i>The interdiction is violated</i> (F3)
$\epsilon$	Reconnaissance	<i>The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance</i> (F4)
$\zeta$	Delivery	<i>The villain receives information about his victim</i> (F5)
$\eta$	Trickery	<i>The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings</i> (F6)
$\vartheta$	Complicity	<i>Victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy</i> (F7)
$\lambda$	Preliminary misfortune	<i>Preliminary misfortune caused by a deceitful agreement</i> (F7a)
A	Villainy	<i>The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family</i> (F8)
$\alpha$	Lack	<i>A member of a family lacks something or desires to have something</i> (F8a)
B	Mediation	<i>Misfortune or lack is made known; the hero is approached with a request or command; he is allowed to go or he is dispatched</i> (F9)
C	Beginning counteraction	<i>The hero agrees to or decides upon counteraction</i> (F10)
$\uparrow$	Departure	<i>The hero leaves home</i> (F11)
D	First function of the Donor	<i>The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or a helper</i> (F12)
E	The hero's reaction	<i>The hero reacts to the actions of the future Donor</i> (F13)
F	Provision of magical agent	<i>The hero acquires the use of a magical agent</i> (F14)
G	Guidance	<i>The hero is led to the whereabouts of an object of search</i> (F15)
H	Struggle	<i>The hero and the villain join in direct combat</i> (F16)
I	Branding	<i>The hero is branded</i> (F17)
J	Victory	<i>The villain is defeated</i> (F18)
K	Liquidation of Lack	<i>The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated</i> (F19)
$\downarrow$	Return	<i>The hero returns</i> (F20)
Pr	Pursuit	<i>The hero is pursued</i> (F21)
Rs	Rescue	<i>Rescue of the hero from pursuit</i> (F22)
O	Unrecognized arrival	<i>Unrecognized, he arrives home or in another country</i> (F23)
L	Unfounded claims	<i>A false hero presents unfounded claims</i> (F24)
M	Difficult task	<i>A difficult task is proposed to the hero</i> (F25)
N	Solution	<i>The task is resolved</i> (F26)
Q	Recognition	<i>The hero is recognized</i> (F27)
Ex	Exposure	<i>The false hero or villain is exposed</i> (F28)
T	Transfiguration	<i>The hero is given a new appearance</i> (F29)
U	Punishment	<i>The villain is punished</i> (F30)
W	Wedding	<i>The hero is married and ascends the throne</i> (F31)

To recapitulate some essential features of the model: fairytales are conceived as consisting of *functions*, which Propp defines as *actions that are significant for the plot*. Fairytale-tellers select functions from out a string of ordered possibilities (the *generic string*). The number of functions available is thirty-one. Functions within a tale are arranged in *sequences*, and a tale consists of one or more sequences each of which must preserve the order in which functions appear in the generic string (as we shall see below, a number of codified exceptions are possible). A function is an abstract notion which in each tale will be conveyed by specific forms (*forms of function*). A sequence of functions constitutes a *syntagma*, while the forms of a given function shape a *paradigm* of options.

The relations among functions require the kind of study they have not so far received. I write of a ‘grammar’ because certain peculiarities of the model go well beyond the notion of *morphology* and pertain to the domain of *syntax*—rules of composition at different narrative levels. Needless to say, these papers are no substitute for the *Morphology* itself, and readers are strongly advised to familiarise themselves with Propp’s volume.

## 2. Function inversions

At pp. 26-7 Propp points out that the appearance of the Villain in fairytales (function  $\epsilon$ ) is preceded by functions  $\gamma$  and  $\delta$ :

$\gamma$  Interdiction *An interdiction is addressed to the hero* (F2)  
 $\delta$  Violation *The interdiction is violated* (F3)

He then goes on to identify the interdiction properly so called as  $\gamma^1$ , and to propose a variation: ‘An inverted form of interdiction is represented by an order or a suggestion ( $\gamma^2$ )’ (p. 27); a corresponding distinction is made for function  $\delta$ . Without in the least modifying Propp’s point we may reformulate these functions slightly for greater clarity:<sup>4</sup>

$\gamma$  Injunction *(Either a command or a prohibition is issued or implied)* (F2)  
 $\gamma^1$  Interdiction  
 $\gamma^2$  Command

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<sup>4</sup> For my use of the term ‘injunction’ see ‘Outline’.

$\delta$  Response to injunction (*The injunction is either complied with or disregarded*) (F3)  
 $\delta^1$  Interdiction respected or violated  
 $\delta^2$  Command heeded or disobeyed

Now, it follows from Propp's presentation that, whether or not the injunction is responded to appropriately, the next function in the string will introduce the villain ( $\epsilon$ ) (p. 28):

$\epsilon$  Reconnaissance *The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance* (F4)

The idea is that the villain, taking advantage of the conditions created by the response to the injunction, tries to obtain information from or about his victim. Once again, this is labelled ( $\epsilon^1$ ) and distinguished from ( $\epsilon^2$ ), 'An inverted form of reconnaissance is evidenced when the intended victim questions the villain', and ( $\epsilon^3$ ), 'Other forms of reconnaissance'. This in turn affects the next function:

$\zeta$  Delivery *The villain receives information about his victim* (F5),

which is then labelled ( $\zeta^1$ ) and predictably exhibits variations:

*An inverted or other form of information-gathering evokes a corresponding answer. ( $\zeta^2$ - $\zeta^3$ ) Koščej [the villain] reveals the secret of his death [...], the secret of the swift steed [...], and so forth. (p. 29)*

The point is important because it allows us to discern a property of functions: where they involve an event between parties, the way these engage in that event may (to speak in grammatical terms) take an 'active' or a 'passive' construction; but it does not matter whether information is given or received—just as it does not matter whether the inquiry at ( $\epsilon$ ) is carried out by the victim or by the villain, *or whether a character toes or crosses the line at ( $\delta$ )*. Function inversions clearly reveal that whatever the outcome of the injunction, and however the reconnaissance is conducted or the information obtained, a necessary consequence will follow, namely, the commission of villainy; *and this imparts a strong deterministic aura to the structure of the tale.*

### 3. Paired functions.

The pairing of functions is a phenomenon noted by Propp. ‘The forms of violation correspond to the forms of interdiction. Functions F2 and F3 form a *paired* element’ (p. 27). Interestingly, Propp adds that ‘The second half can sometimes exist without the first’ (p. 27), that is to say, where the second appears the first may be omitted, while the converse does not hold: if the first function is present, the second must follow it. The same proviso is made at p. 29 for the pair  $\varepsilon$ - $\zeta$  (F4-F5): information may be proffered without a prior reconnaissance. Again, the next two constitute a pair:

$\eta$  Trickery      *The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings* (F6)

$\vartheta$  Compliance      *The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy* (F7)

And of ( $\vartheta$ ) we are told that ‘this function can also exist separately. No one lulls the hero to sleep: he suddenly falls asleep by himself’ (p. 30). In all three cases, whereas the first function of the pair identifies the cause or reason for the second, the second may occur without the first; in other words, there need be no explicit causal factor. Another way of putting this is to say that ( $\vartheta$ ), understood as the event itself of, say, the hero falling asleep, is the primary function, and may (but need not) be *expanded* into ( $\eta$ - $\vartheta$ ) so as to provide the event with a plausible narrative explanation.

Another case in point: as a result of ( $\vartheta$ ) the following function, pivotal for the whole tale, ensues:

A Villainy      *The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family* (F8)

But the scholar reflects that some tales may ‘proceed from a certain situation of insufficiency or lack, and it is this that leads to quests analogous to those in the case of villainy’:

We conclude from this that lack can be considered as the morphological equivalent of seizure [one of the forms of A], for example. [...] And so we see that a tale, while omitting villainy, very often begins directly with a lack (pp. 34-5).

This possibility is covered by positing an alternative form of (A), identified by lower-case (a):

*a* Lack *A member of a family lacks something or desires to have something* (F8a)

This poses an interesting problem. We are told later that, as a result of the hero's actions, a corresponding function obtains:

*K* Liquidation of Lack *The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated* (F19)

At p. 53 we read that functions (*A*) and (*K*) constitute a pair, in the sense that (*K*) counterpoints (*A*) or cancels the breach created by (*A*).<sup>5</sup> Now, *K* is defined as 'Lack liquidated', whereas *A* is defined as 'Villainy'; it was made clear that (*A*) and (*a*) are two possible forms of one function (pp. 35-6), but (*K*) clearly cancels out the second of these only, the Lack. Therefore we must conclude that all villainy leads to a lack, but not every lack is the outcome of villainy; and *K* always remedies a Lack (*a*) which may or not result from Villainy (*A*). In other words, (*a*) is the primary function and can be optionally expanded to (*A-a*), to so as to provide a convenient cause for the initial misfortune.

Propp names several other pairs: Struggle—Victory (*H-J*, F16-F18),<sup>6</sup> Pursuit—Deliverance from pursuit (*Pr-Rs*, F21-F22), Branding—Recognition (*I-Q*, F17-F27) (pp. 109-110).<sup>7</sup> One presumes that the principle extends to these: in a given pair the second function is necessary, the first is optional. A related aspect of the model is the fact that, as Propp noted, certain functions 'may be arranged according to groups':

Thus villainy, dispatch, decision for counteraction, and departure from home (*ABC*), constitute the complication. Elements *DEF* [Donor tests the hero, Hero's reaction, Provision of a magical agent] also form something of a whole (pp. 64-5).

I will identify these (continuous or discontinuous) groups as *segments*. Again we should ask ourselves whether all functions in a given segment have the same degree of structural importance. We shall return to this point below, but from the discussion so far we may conclude that certain functions have an explanatory rather than a structural role in the tale. *This observation should pave the way for a reduction in the number of basic functions.*

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<sup>5</sup> Clearly, then, pairs are not necessarily formed by consecutive functions.

<sup>6</sup> In 'Outline' (p. 6) I explained the need for re-lettering functions 17 and 27 in view of a mistake in the English translation.

<sup>7</sup> Victory may be obtained by a villain's gallant surrender without a struggle; recognition of the hero need not depend on a previous mark or token given to him. True, it would appear there can be no rescue unless there is some manner of pursuit; but it is theoretically sensible to suppose, e.g., that the hero is rescued from a tar-pit into which he fell 'by mistake'.

#### 4. Expanded or contracted functions.

We have noted that, in a given pair, certain functions can be looked at as primary, and as susceptible of 'expansion'. At page 30 Propp writes:

A special form of deceitful proposal and its corresponding acceptance [ $\eta$ - $\vartheta$ , F6-F7] is represented by the deceitful agreement. ('Give away that which you do not know you have in your house.') [...] This element may be defined as

$\lambda$  Preliminary misfortune caused by a deceitful agreement (F8)

If ( $\lambda$ ) subsumes  $\eta$ - $\vartheta$ , here is a case of *condensing* two functions (the villain's suggestion, the unwitting victim's compliance) into one. Is this a special case? It would appear that sometimes two functions can be represented as one, and vice versa. For example, let us consider  $D$ :

$D$  The Donor tests the hero. *The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or a helper* (F12).

Among the various forms of  $D$  we find:

$D^1$  The Donor tests the hero.

$D^2$  The Donor greets and interrogates the hero.

Of  $D^2$  Propp writes the following:

This form may be considered as a weakened form of testing. Greeting and interrogation are also present in [ $D^1$ ], but there they do not have the character of a test; rather they precede it. In [ $D^2$ ], however, direct testing is absent, and interrogation assumes the character of an indirect test (p. 40).

A greeting may or may not constitute a function: it may be simply *presupposed*, or it may be detached as a separate function. What this means is that there can be no automatic reading of  $D$ , and that the analyst is obliged to decide when a certain action will constitute a function and when it will not. Almost the same occurs when, after  $D^4$ , *A prisoner begs for his freedom* (where the captive will turn out to perform a Donor role), a subsidiary form ( $D^{4*}$ ) is contemplated:

$D^{4*}$  The same as the preceding, accompanied by the preliminary imprisonment of the Donor. If [...] a forest spirit is caught [by the hero], this deed cannot be considered an independent function: it merely sets the stage for the subsequent request of the captive (p. 41).

Prior events which have led to this situation need not constitute *relevant* actions; the main thing here is the request itself for freedom, which may, or may not, be motivated by the hero's previous deeds or by some other cause. Propp's point is that *not every action counts as a function*, and so, much care should be taken in deciding whether or not a given action merits the status of function. This confirms two points, namely, 1) that functions are subject to expansion or contraction, and 2) that some functions may play an explanatory rather than a structural role; what is yet more interesting, it argues once again that *the total number of basic functions may be much smaller than the thirty-one postulated by Propp*.

## 5. Function order.

Propp lays much stress on the proposition that functions always occur in the same order; this provides a reliable schema for analysing fairytales, and shows that all fairytales belong to the same type.<sup>8</sup> But the following is a selection of points where he acknowledges that a number of possible variations are codified into the system:

The tale generally mentions an absention at first, then an interdiction. The sequence of events, of course, actually runs in reverse (p. 26).

The phrase 'the sequence of events' echoes an important nuance which Russian Formalist criticism introduced into the study of narrative, itself resonating to a much older distinction established by Latin rhetoricians. The string of events presented in the chronological order in which they take place in reality is called, when found in a narrative text, the *fabula*, a Russian word usually translated as the 'story' of the narrative; the order which the narrator imposes upon these events, the way they are arranged in the text, is then called the *syuzhet*, or 'plot', of the narrative.<sup>9</sup> The first

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<sup>8</sup> The further conclusion Propp extracts from this is objectionable: the fact that all tales are 'of one type' does not warrant the proposition that they are all versions of one specific type in the Aarne-Thompson classification system of folktale types—as Propp would have it, type AT300, 'The Fight with the Dragon' (see Antti Aarne & Stith Thompson, *The Types of The Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn). Helsinki: Folklore Fellows Communications n<sup>o</sup> 74, Academia Scientiarum Fennica 1961). In the current state of our knowledge it is as impossible to ascertain the ultimate origin of fairytales as it is to determine the 'original' language spoken by humankind. Having said which, Joseph Campbell's masterpiece *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Abacus: London 1949), which proposes a universal pattern for all narrative (the *monomyth*), does provide food for serious reflection.

<sup>9</sup> See Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique' in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press 1965), pp. 3-24.

corresponds to what rhetoricians called *ordo naturalis*, the second to *ordo artificialis*.<sup>10</sup> Late critiques of this terminology and of its underlying assumptions<sup>11</sup> do not detract from its practical usefulness.

Propp's schema calls for Branding (*I*) to follow Struggle (*H*); however, (*I*) may sometimes precede (*H*): 'a princess awakens him before the fight by making a small wound in his cheek with a knife' (p. 52). On the strength of such examples Propp goes on to write of 'unstable functions':

the sequence of functions is not always the same as that shown in the total scheme. A careful examination of the schemes will show certain deviations. In particular, one may observe that elements *DEF* often stand before *A*. Does this not break the rule? No, for this is not a new, but rather an *inverted (obraščennyj)* sequence.

The usual tale presents, for example, a misfortune at first and then the receipt of a helper who liquidates it. An inverted sequence gives the receipt of a helper at first and then the misfortune which is liquidated by him (p. 107).<sup>12</sup>

(Note that revealing reference to 'the *usual* tale'). Thus, it is not uncommon for the hero to receive a magic sword at first, later to undertake an adventure in the course of which he will have occasion to use his gift profitably: so that the *usual* segment *C↗...F* (*Decision to depart—Departure—...Receipt of magical helper*) becomes *FC↗*. A similar case occurs when the *usual* order (*ABC↗*) appears as (*C↗AB*): the hero decides to leave home (*C*), often 'to see the world', and sets out (*↗*), then learns (*B*) of the misfortune (*A*) which has already taken place (p. 107). Other inversions are mentioned at pp. 107-8:

<i>H Pr</i>	( <i>Struggle with villain—Pursuit of the hero</i> )	→	<i>Pr H</i>
<i>Q Ex</i>	( <i>Recognition of the hero—Exposure of false hero</i> )	→	<i>Ex Q</i>
<i>U W</i>	( <i>Punishment of villain—Reward for hero</i> )	→	<i>W U</i>
<i>T U</i>	( <i>Transfiguration of hero—Punishment of villain</i> )	→	<i>U T</i>

Awareness of these phenomena is important to avoid too rigid an application of the model to fairytales. To take another example, Propp's table specifies that the villain will appear and act (*η*) *after* the victim has, e.g., disobeyed an injunction (*δ*), and this 'after' carries a strong causal implication ('in consequence of'); but villains may equally

<sup>10</sup> See Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook for Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study* (1960), tr. Matthew T. Bliss (Leiden: Brill 1998), 213-14.

<sup>11</sup> Beginning with what now appears to be an unjustifiable primacy granted to 'plot' over 'story'; see Jacques Derrida, 'Living On – Border Lines' in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom & al. (New York: Seabury Press 1979), pp. 75-176.

<sup>12</sup> By 'helper' (or 'magical agent') Propp means a person, animal or object thanks to which the hero is enabled to undertake and solve his task.

intervene *in order to* get their victims to disobey the injunction ( $\eta$ ,  $\delta$ ), as, for instance, when the wolf persuades Little Red Riding Hood to take the wrong path. In other words, the development of events is determined by the tale's structure, not by the characters' actions or intentions, and the causal nexus between functions is therefore spurious: it is part of the logic of the *syuzhet*, not of the *fabula*.

What these 'instabilities' reveal is that chronological time (*ordo naturalis*) does undergo modification in this narrative genre. Fairytales come perhaps close to being naked *fabula*, 'story'—but not quite; my own expression 'close to' is deceptive, for it merely indicates proximity not to facts themselves but to the boundary which radically separates fact from fiction; however seemingly faithful to chronological order, the fairytale will ever remain on the thither side, obeying the rules of fiction, not of reality. We are therefore not discussing the sequence of real events but a preferred choice of storytellers, or what Propp (p. 107; see above) interestingly called *the usual tale*. *Ordo naturalis* may then be no more than the most conventional or prototypical order listeners are wont to expect in texts; and *ordo artificialis* may be no more than *departure from a narrative convention* rather than 'from the real order of events'.

## 6. Assimilations.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the model touches upon the similarities among functions. Propp pointed them out in many cases and warned that a given action may be realized by different functions depending on the place where it occurs. Thus, if a wedding takes place at the beginning of the tale it is not function *W*, *Reward*; in fact it may have no functional value at all.

Propp distinguished *Departure of the hero* ( $\nearrow$ ) from *Absentation* ( $\beta$ ) (p. 39). It is obvious that these occur at different points along the string, may affect different characters ( $\beta$  often—though not always—concerns the elders,  $\nearrow$  always concerns the hero), and trigger off different events. But the fact remains that ( $\beta$ ) and ( $\nearrow$ ) initiate similar courses of action: as Absentation of elders (or of younger people) prepares the ground for the Villain's appearance ( $\epsilon$ ), so the hero's Departure makes his encounter with the Donor (*D*) possible. Both situations therefore involve an approach, reconnaissance and questioning of or by an Other.

For another instance, let us examine the first function form of *F*, *The hero acquires the use of a magical agent* (F14):

*F*<sup>1</sup> *The agent is directly transferred.* Such acts of transference very often have the character of a reward [...]. Some tales end with the moment of reward. In these instances the gift amounts to something of a certain material value (p. 44).

What this means is that in such tales *F*<sup>1</sup> is equivalent or *assimilated* to *W*, *Reward*. The same issue arises with function *K*; its designation, *Liquidation of lack* (F19), speaks for itself, but then we read that

the receipt of an object of search is sometimes accomplished by means of the same forms as the receipt of a magical agent [...]. Designation of these occurrences: *KF*<sup>1</sup>, direct transmission; *KF*<sup>2</sup>, indication; etc. [...] (p. 55).

In other words, the difference between *F* and *K* is less than obvious. Since *F* can also be identified with *W* in some instances, some generalization is badly needed here.

Another problematic function is (*G*) *Guidance, delivery, spatial transference* (F15). This is the moment when the hero is led to the critical site where the climax (*H*, *Struggle with the Villain*) is to take place; but we are told that function *G* as such 'is sometimes absent: the hero simply walks to the place (i.e., function *G* amounts to a natural continuation of function  $\nearrow$ )' (p. 51). What distinguishes ( $\nearrow$ ) and (*G*) then is only the different place they occupy in the string. But if the one can be 'a natural continuation' of the other, how much of a real difference exists between them? Another case in point is (*H*) *Struggle* (F16):

[t]his form needs to be distinguished from the struggle (fight) with a hostile donor. These two forms can be distinguished by their results. If the hero obtains an agent, for the purpose of further searching, as the result of an unfriendly encounter, this would be element *D*. If, on the other hand, the hero receives through victory the very object of his quest, we have situation *H* (pp. 51-2).

The distinction is a very precise one, but the similarity refuses to go away. We have to keep two notions carefully apart: whereas the *syntax*—the placing of the functions in the generic string—warrants a differentiation, from a strictly *morphological* viewpoint no such difference is readily in evidence. Further examples confirm this. If '[a] return is generally accomplished by means of the same forms as an arrival' (p. 55), how do we distinguish (other than by position in the string) between  $\searrow$  and *O*? If *D*<sup>1</sup> (*The Donor tests the hero*, F12) often consists in a hard or difficult commission, how similar is this to

*M* (Difficult task, F25)? And again, how similar to *H* (Struggle with villain, F16)? It begins to be legitimate to ask: how many other engagements may the hero enter into, and to what extent may a series of such engagements define his adventure?

Propp writes of ‘the influence of certain forms upon others. This phenomenon may be termed the assimilation of the means of fulfilment of functions’ (p. 66); he stresses ‘the principle of defining a function *according to its consequences*’ (p. 67); and faithful to this principle he points out that

all tasks giving rise to a search must be considered in terms of *B*; all tasks giving rise to the receipt of a magical agent are considered as *D*. *All other tasks* are considered as *M* (p. 67).

Taken together, these statements acknowledge that certain forms are, *qua forms*, identical and differ only in terms of position and consequences—in other words, they confirm that morphology is to be differentiated from syntax. One and the same task may appear in several different slots: *B*, *D* and *M* are assimilated to each other. Again,

Identical forms adapt themselves to different functions. A certain form is transferred to a different position, acquiring a new meaning, or simultaneously retaining an old one (p. 70).

In lieu of ‘assimilation’ of one function to another, we could then speak of ‘diversification’ of one function into several. A function, while retaining one form, changes meaning (which may alter its form somewhat) depending on where in the series it appears. This means that *B*-tasks, *D*-tasks and *M*-tasks are all *the same function* (Task). Generalizing: as with engagements, the tale abounds in tasks (though these are often ‘graded’ or *phased*),<sup>13</sup> or: Engagement and Task are the essence of the tale.

## 7. Conclusions

The following statements sum up much of the foregoing analysis of the grammar of functions:

- 1) *Not every action counts as a function, but only those that directly further the plot.*

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<sup>13</sup> On *phasal structures* see my *The Thresholds of the Tale: Liminality and the Structure of Fairytales* (Madrid: The Gateway Press 2007), pp. 129-39.

2) *The 'grammatical' value of certain functions can be inverted since, however they are realised and whatever their outcome, the same necessary consequence is to follow; this argues that their structure imparts a deterministic quality to fairytales.*

3) *Functions are often paired; in a given pair the second function is necessary, the first is optional and has an explanatory but not a structural value.*

4) *Functions are subject to expansion or contraction. Again, some functions may play an explanatory rather than a structural role.*

5) *Certain functions can be assimilated to other functions; or one function can be said to 'diversify' into several depending on position in the string.*

6) *The development of events is determined by the tale's structure, not by the characters' actions or intentions (see 2.). The order of functions is rigid with respect to the generic string, but with respect to a given function segment it is variable and subject to narrative logic.*

From my analysis of function inversions (section 2) two conclusions can be drawn. One is that, whereas certain actions will necessarily take place, who is to perform them will depend on narrative choices: in a situation where information is going to be given that will affect the course of events, 'active' and 'passive' versions are possible; in other words, who does what is not as important as the fact that a specific event is to happen. The second conclusion is that, whether or not an injunction is followed or opposed, necessary consequences will ensue, most particularly the commission of villainy. Certain events will take place regardless of whether or not characters act, or of who performs certain actions. We know that in most fairytales the 'happy ending' is a foregone conclusion; such structural arrangements as analysed earlier confirm the genre's deterministic slant. It remains to be noted that this determinism is of a 'providentialist' nature, to be distinguished from the fatalism that rules, say, Classical tragedy.

It was observed that, in a given pair of functions, one of them contains or presupposes the other; while the one is necessary in a given tale, the other will be optional. It follows that a description of the system must differentiate between functions which have a structural role and others whose role is merely explanatory; while making provision for the second type, a structural model such as Propp's should

initially account for the first only. This suggested that the number of basic functions might be lower than thirty-one.

This point was confirmed by a different kind of evidence. If functions are subject to expansion and contraction—if, given a captive Donor, we may but need not be told how he came to be imprisoned—then the cause is once more a secondary matter as it plays no structural role, and may be dispensed with in an account of structurally significant actions. A further piece of evidence was provided by the reflection that functions can assimilate to other functions: if *F* (Obtention of a magical agent, F14) may count as *W* (Reward, F31), not only does this argue that they are morphologically identical and are to be differentiated by position (syntax) only, but equally that the number of basic functions can be reduced if only we can clarify the system of possible positions and their value along the generic string.

The definition of function can be tightened somewhat in the light of these reflections. A function is 1) an *action* which 2) is *significant* for the plot, 3) occurs *at some specific point* in the generic string, and 4) occupies a *'moveable' place* in a given segment within the generic string. Features (1) and (2) are sufficiently clear; let us examine the other two.

If a hostile figure is defeated near the start of the tale this is not function *J* (Victory over the villain, F18) but, for example, a preliminary manifestation of function  $\vartheta$  (namely,  $\vartheta_{neg}$ , The Villain fails to deceive his victim, a form of F7), or perhaps a special form of *F* where a Donor is vanquished and forced to give up a magical agent ( $F^s$ , The agent is seized, F14). These instances illustrate the importance of feature (3) in our definition: position in the generic string is vital in assigning a function to an action.

On the other hand, significant action occurs not only at key places along the string but also as a moveable part of a narrative segment. Given a segment *HJK*, for instance, it is feasible for the hero first to liquidate a lack (*K*), *then* to brave the villain who demands restitution of the object stolen from him (*HJ*); likewise, though the standard order is *UW*, it will not be impossible for the villain to be put to death (*U*) *after* the hero has been rewarded with the crown (*W*) and, as new king, empowered to mete out punishment. Or again, given the segment *C $\nearrow$ FGHJ*, the hero may casually come across the magic sword (*F*), and only then set out (*C $\nearrow$* ) and face an adventure (*GHJ*). Such inversions are possible within the appropriate narrative segments. While it is not my purpose to work out type and range of all possible permutations here, I am interested in

acknowledging that since these are, as the evidence has shown, not accidental, irregular or atypical phenomena, this aspect of functions must be taken into account in any survey of the model.

This, however, raises another question: what counts as a narrative segment? It would appear, for instance, that the set of functions  $\nearrow DEFG$  possesses its own narrative logic: Departure ( $\nearrow$ ), Encounter with the Donor ( $D$ ), Response to his test or need ( $E$ ), Obtention of a magic agent ( $F$ ), and Guidance to the site where the hero is expected to put this agent to use ( $G$ ). Or again: functions  $QTE\!x\!UW$  shape a logical segment: Recognition of the hero ( $Q$ ) and Transfiguration ( $T$ ), followed by a corresponding Exposure of the villain ( $Ex$ ), concomitant with respectively Punishment ( $U$ ) and reward ( $W$ ). Can the entire string be systematised in this way, and what will such an operation tell us? Again, if certain functions are positionally unstable, then positions must be defined as relative not only to the generic string but more particularly to given narrative segments; these observations must supplement reflections on the number of basic functions, and yield three further considerations:

- 7) *The tale's providentialist form of fate is an entailment of narrative structure.*
- 8) *The number of basic functions may be lower than thirty-one.*
- 9) *This number can be reduced if the position and value of functions with respect to both string and segment can be clarified.*

In a subsequent paper I hope to be able to examine the issues of number, segment and position, and propose a reduction of the basic functions down to what may be called a 'nuclear sequence'.



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