

One of the ways the Functions of dramatis personae discovered by Vladimir Propp to be interpreted

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Abstract

The name Vladimir Propp and the book «Morphology of the Folktale» are known today to many people around the world, not only to literary scholars. Many scholars try to find the functions of dramatis personae in various writings or films, we can see this watching videos on YouTube or reading scientific articles. But what do they actually mean, these «functions of dramatis personae» (I also once found the concept of «Functions of Propp»)? Okey, not really, but in general. In this manuscript I show one of the ways to answer the question.

Keywords: *Vladimir Propp, Morphology of the folktale, functions of dramatis personae.*

Introduction

The concept of «Functions of dramatis personae» (Propp, 1968) is known today to many people around the world, not only to scientists. It has been found that there is a single class of folktales that contains a unique list of character actions. Vladimir Propp was very impressed by this fact after he discovered it in the first half of the twentieth century (we can read this on page 106 of his book), but he left no thoughts on what the functions of dramatis personae mean. Although I am not a literary scholar, at the moment I have the impression (after watching half a dozen scholarly articles and several videos by different authors on YouTube) that specialists in the aforementioned field focus only on finding the Functions of Propp in various literary works, rather than trying to answer the question for a long time. For this reason, I will use my own essay «Literary Clichés and the Age of Revolution» (Serhii Yaremko, 2023) as a basis for the current investigation. Briefly, this paper argues that all literary writings we know since the «Epic of Gilgamesh» reflect the struggle between the order (the law represents this phenomenon in human society) and chaos; the last thesis is especially illustrated by the Age of revolution in human history. The single actions of the characters (the actions), which are an important object of consideration in this essay, are analogues of the functions of dramatis personae, since I made the formulation of this concept after reading the book «Morphology of the Folktale»

Methods

As the present work is based entirely on the conclusions contained in the essay «Literary Clichés and the Age of Revolution,» I must report on the methods that were used.

How the actions must be identified

The most important principle in identifying actions is that a rare action must occur at least three times in independent sources. Non-rare actions are accepted for observation without question.

How the graphic schemes were made for the transmission of the composition of the writing.

Although the schemes placed in the essay «Literary Clichés and the Age of Revolution» were made using actual existing plots, they [the schemes] are largely based on intuition (as opposed to the Six Major Plot Archetypes (Jockers, 2014)).

The interpretation of the set of the characters

The essay «Literary Clichés and the Age of Revolution» tells only about the six major dramatis personae: lord (it is assumed that this person means the phenomenon of the highest level - usually Law (Order), although with some approximation it can be the sovereignty of the nation (remember, for example, the struggle of William Wallace against the English conquerors)); enemy of lord - Chaos; traitor of master, ie.i.e., the collective First Servant of Law - the leaders of the revolution who become tyrants shortly after the tyranny is removed; helper of master - the collective Second Servant of Law, i.e., a number of principled individuals (often dissidents) in society; people; the remnant of people, indicating mass death in society.

Principles and Laws

The principle of exclusion (a sort of analogy to the Pauli exclusion principle) and the Law of equilibrium (we should remember that under normal conditions we do not observe individual quarks) were borrowed from quantum mechanics.

Results

Prehistory

Initial situation; it is not a function (alpha).

We can actually see the relic of the First Service when the introduction describes the wealth and happiness of protagonist - it means that Law arises in society because Chaos is caught by the actions of Servant 1 at this moment.

Rebellion

III. Violation: interdiction is violated (delta); a paired element;

V. Delivery: villain receives information about his victim (zeta); a paired function;

VII. Complicity: victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy (theta); subfunction: preliminary misfortune (lambda) wherein villain deliberately causes the difficult situation;

VIII. Villainy: villain causes harm or injury to a family member (A); crucial function by means of which the actual movement of the tale is created; the complications begun by an act of villainy;

VIIIa. Lack: one member of a family either lacks something or desires to have something (a);

XXI. Pursuit, chase: hero is pursued (Pr);

XXIV. Unfounded claims: a false hero presents unfounded claims (L).

It is about the illegal possession of power in society by Servant 1 and the betrayal of Order as planned by Chaos; as a result, the status of Law at this time decreases.

The «Desert»

XV. Spatial transference between two kingdoms, guidance: hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search (G).

Servant 2 supports Law by being imprisoned after the start of the Servant 1's rebellion.

XVI. Struggle: hero and villain join in direct combat (H).

This function clearly shows the process of overcoming the offer of chaotic illegal pleasures by Second Servant.

XVII. Branding, marking: hero is branded (J).

While maintaining loyalty to Order, Second Servant bravely suffers the cruelty of Servant 1 for a long time - this is the plan of Law.

Collapsing

I. Absentation: a family member absents him/herself from home (beta);

I must explain that current function is an analogy to the episode "Enemy does not pay attention hero/heroine for a short time, and then enemy loses his/her target", which can be seen in the cinematic trailer for the PC game "Assassin's Creed" (MegaJizzBurger, 2011) - I mean the moment when Altaïr Ibn-La'Ahad disappears after the church bell stands between protagonist and the spectator. This means: Chaos gets all the power over the mind of the ally.

X. Beginning counteraction: seeker agrees to or decides upon counteraction (C);

XI. Departure: hero leaves home (arrow/up).XIII. The hero's reaction: hero reacts to the actions of future donor (E);

XXVI. Solution: the task is resolved (N);

XXVII. Recognition: hero is recognized (Q);

XXVIII. Exposure: false hero or villain is exposed (Ex).

It is about how Servant 1 completely slips under the influence of Chaos (so that this person can not control himself at this moment, the latter event causes the traitor to wage war against the powerful opponent); in the meantime, Servant 2 shows all his/her loyalty to Order.

XXII. Rescue: rescue of hero from pursuit (Rs).

We are talking about total overcoming of the consequences of the rebellion that was caused by Chaos.

XIV. Provision or receipt of a magical agent: hero acquires the use of magical agent (F);

XVIII. Victory: villain is defeated (I);

XIX. Liquidation of misfortune or lack: the initial misfortune or lack is liquidated (K); this function, together with villainy(A), constitutes a pair: the narrative reaches its peak here;

XX. Return: hero returns (arrow/down);

XXIX. Transfiguration: hero is given a new appearance (T);

XXX. Punishment: villain is punished (U);

XXXI. Wedding: hero is married and ascends the throne (W).

Well, presently we see the promotion to helper and the punishment to traitor by all the functions observed.

The servants of Law are put to the test

II. Interdiction: an interdiction is addressed to hero (gamma);

IV. Reconnaissance: villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance (epsilon);

VI. Trickery: villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or his belongings (eta) [at this point the villain may assume a disguise];

XII. The first function of the donor: hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his/her receiving either a magical agent or helper (D);

XXIII. Unrecognized arrival: hero, unrecognized, arrives home, or in another country (o);

XXV. Difficult task: a difficult task is proposed to hero (M); one of the tale's favorite elements.

All these functions represent a very interesting phenomenon - the action «Master tests out servants», which is very rare in the works; and it [the action] usually manifests when the villain receives the gun without bullets. The presently observed functions represent the development of society as a test of loyalty to Law, while in the works there is usually talk of overcoming the Servant 1's rebellion against Order (this is where dualism shows itself (another manifestation of dualism can be seen in the fact that Functions XXI-XXVIII form The second round of tests to hero)).

The connective incident

IX. Mediation, the connective incident: misfortune or lack is made known; hero is approached with a request or command; he is allowed to go or he is dispatched (B).

The present function is a complex of essentially different actions, so it is not considered in this manuscript.

Discussion

Negative factors

This manuscript is based on an essay, not on a scientific article; in this case, it is not a serious discussion;

We currently have the lack of resources to illuminate the mentioned topic, as it has already been said;

Thanks to the fractal reflections, there are at least three positive characters to observe: master, helper and remnant. This fact obviously leads to many meanings;

The graphic schemes were created mostly intuitively;

The interpretation of the characters is partly based on the assumptions;

The influences that the functions have on each other - we start reading about it on page 66 of the mentioned book (Propp, 1968) - also lead to many interpretations.

Positive factors

Only stable, verified actions of the characters have been considered;

The interpretation of the characters is based in part on analogies discovered in human history;

The theses advanced in the initial essay are generally based on human history.

Conclusion

A solid space for serious discussion has been left.

References

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