

One of the Ways the Functions of 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 Propp (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 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 «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

The base of the research

Postulates

I must say that my work is based on these two postulates:

The code of laws (the Order) is the highest ruler of human society;

The set of literary clichés must be universally realisable, since it is quite stable (that is, certain character actions are repeated in works in a certain proportion, regardless of the authors' wishes).

Principles

The principle of relativity for actions states that the action "Hero/heroine hides behind the obstacle to escape the danger" (seen in the movie "Anthropoid" (Ellis, 2016): I mean the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich) and the action "Hero/heroine is suddenly separated from enemy by the obstacle" (the latter is clearly seen in the episode of the TV series "The Game of Thrones" "The Spoils of War" (Benioff, Weiss & Shakman, 2017)) are synonymous.

The "prism" principle states that many actions/characters etc. describe only one concept at the same time (albeit from different sides). So there is a list of archetypes: Doctor, Fireman, Police Officer, etc. I realise that all these archetypes (no matter how many of them we have) represent only one volumetric concept of a higher level.

The principle of exclusion state that the spheres of activities of protagonist and antagonist cannot overlap: it means that when we encounter an action which connected with both the antagonistic characters at the same time, we automatically get two meanings (one of which refers to Form and the other to Content) at that moment.

The law of equilibrium

The Law of equilibrium states that the negative determiner usually has some physical advantage over the opponent in society. The formulation for this law is: The sum of moral and physical properties for each determinant in society is a constanta ($A+B=constant$ a). A proof: If this law is false, then the negative determiner cannot fulfil the destructive role in society.

Objects of the research

I've seen more than two hundred movies (genres: action, science fiction, crime, historical drama, etc.), have read more than a dozen novels of analogous genres, and have also watched many documentaries (subjects: astronomy, geology, evolutionary biology, history, etc.).

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.

Virtually identical scenes

Virtually identical scenes have this characteristic: they are quite rare. If we compare the movies "Avatar" (Cameron, 2009) and "Skyline" (Strause & Strause, 2010), we see the scene "A warrior releases an arrow, then the warrior is killed, and after that the arrow hits the target". Analogously, when watching the cinematic trailer for the PC game "Assassin's Creed: Revelations" we see the episode "Hero/heroine is tied up by the enemy, then suddenly he/she knots enemy's neck with a rope, and after that hero/heroine jumps down": this is possible because we have already seen the movie "Rob Roy" (Caton-Jones, 1995).

The simplest episode

It is very useful to create the simplest episode (another - episode), which consists only of two actions of the character (such a condition was established due to Chaos theory) - these actions can belong either to a single character or to two different characters.

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, i.e., the collective First Servant of Law - the leaders of 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.

Results

Prehistory

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

It's one of the few relics of the First Service in works. It points to the first stage of revolution, when Servant 1 uses force to make society serve Law (even if only formally). We can claim that chaos is tied up by the actions of the First Servant at this moment: thus we see the first half of the episode "Hero/heroine brings down enemy, and then enemy rises" (Serhii Yaremko, 2023).

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" (MegalizzBurger, 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.

Addition 1. A list of simplest episodes

«Hero/heroine brings down enemy, and then enemy rises» - this episode was partially observed in the essay «Literary Clichés and the Age of Revolution» (Serhii Yaremko, 2023), it manifests itself mainly in fictions when the damaged body of antagonist becomes regenerated.

The episode «Hero/heroine gets into danger and then is rescued by his/her friend» is clearly seen in the Battle of the Long Night (Benioff, Weiss & Sapochnik, 2019) when Sir Jorah Mormont rescues his Quinn; it explains how Servant 2 supports Order during the Servant 1's rebellion.

The simplest episode «Hero/heroine gets the help of a friend, and then enemy punishes the friend» can be seen in the action «Hero/heroine meets the hard shelling» («The Dark Valley» (Prochaska, 2014)); its meaning lies in the imprisonment of Second Servant after an unsuccessful attempt to stop First Servant when that person starts committing acts to illegally get the prolongation of his/her being in power in society.

The episode «A gymnast beats the opponent(s) in fight and then he/she is bitten" is shown when a well-trained fighter faces the single, much stronger opponent or a group of opponents who are ordinary

people and tells us that Chaos has no perspective in the war that force wages against Order; the current episode is clearly shown in the trailer for the PC game «Assassin's Creed: Origins» (DigiC Pictures, 2017).

The episode «The performer of the task does not succeed, and then the doubler does the task» is often shown when a soldier is hit during an attack and then the next soldier kills an enemy; it can be seen in the movie «My Way» (Je-gyu, 2011) - I mean the action «Hero/heroine meets the next wave of enemies» in the scene where a group of Japanese kamikazes lead the fight against Soviet tanks. This simplest episode obviously shows the success of Second Servant in keeping the code in mind.

«Someone shows a weakness, and then the weak is murdered» - this episode focuses on the First Servant's fear of losing power in society and the subsequent complete slide under the influence of Chaos, and manifests itself when a fugitive sees his/her foot (hair, clothes, etc.) caught on the obstacle (this action has already been discussed in the essay «Literary Clichés and the Age of Revolution» (Serhii Yaremko, 2023)), among other ways.

The episode «Enemy avoids punishment by cheating, and then enemy meets the punishment caused by that cheating» - it refers to the two antagonistic characters and can be seen in episode 2 of the German TV series «Generation War» (Kolditz & Kadelbach, 2013). First servant makes the rebellion with the help of chaos, and then chaos fills that person's mind - this is the meaning of the episode we are watching. It can be added that in the action «Enemy accidentally releases hero/heroine from custody» (as seen in the movie «Sherlock Holmes: a Game of Shadows» (Ritchie, 2011) - I mean the scene where the wall is breached by a shell) we see another manifestation of the current phenomenon.

«Hero/heroine meets the danger caused by enemy and then successfully avoids the danger» - the simplest episode showing how Order fights the Servant 1 rebellion, and often seen when protagonist dodges a hard blow during the fight (a wall is smashed, not the protagonist's head), runs while antagonist shoots, and so on. In this case, I recall how Captain Wolf Larsen and the schooner «Ghost» dodge a great typhoon in the novel «The Sea Wolf» (London, 2000).

The episode «Enemy holds hero/heroine captive, and then hero/heroine frees himself/herself» tells about how Servant 2 is overcoming the lure of illicit pleasures offered by Chaos during the Servant 1's rebellion; it can be seen in the action «Hero/heroine pulls the bullet (the arrow, the sword, etc.) from his/her own body» (a good example of this action can be found in the movie «Seraphim Falls» (Von Ancken, 2006)).

The episode «Enemy pushes hero/heroine away with a blow, and then hero/heroine damages the obstacle with his/her own body» (it is seen mainly in fictions, as in the movie «I, Robot» (Proyas, 2004)) is one of the variants of the episode «An armed enemy attacks the unarmed hero/heroine, and then hero/heroine strikes enemy with his/her own weapon», which is also partially used in «Literary Clichés and the Age of Revolution» (Serhii Yaremko, 2023).

Now, I would like to report on two episodes related to the action «Master puts the servants to the test» - they are both quite rare and show the development of society as a test of loyalty to Law, while at the same time most of the actions and episodes focus on overcoming the consequences of Servant 1's rebellion against Order (we see here the manifestation of dualism). The episode «An unfaithful servant tries to kill his/her master with a gun, and then meets the absence of bullets» was already shown in the film «Red Sun» (Young, 1971) and illustrates the process of illegal possession of power in society, which First Servant performs. Next, «Hero/heroine sees a lure and does not fall into the trap,» as it was shown

in the film «Death Race» (Anderson, 2008) - the episode that focuses on complete loyalty to Law which Servant 2 shows.

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