

A Morphological Reading of The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe Based on Vladimir Propp's Narrative Theory

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Abstract: This paper makes a narrative analysis of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* with Propp's morphology of the folktale, to further prove that "Propp's model has the explanatory power to account for narratives that had not even come into being at the time the model was developed" (Simpson, 2004:71) and that the sequence of functions that realized in narratives is not always identical.

Keywords: Narrative Analysis; *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; Propp's Morphology of the Folktale

1. Introduction

This paper tries to further prove two points. The first point is that Propp's morphology of the folktale can be applied to narratives that had not come into being at the time the model was developed. The second is that the sequence of functions of narratives is not always follow a straightforward linear chronology, which means the sequence of functions will change with different tales. There are two other parts in this paper besides the introduction part and the conclusion part. Part one introduces the 31 functions of dramatis personae and seven basic types of character roles and illustrates the connections between 31 functions and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* with a table. The second part includes a discussion about Table 1 and shows the result of the discussion.

2. Method

Fairy tale belongs to a special type of narrative fiction. This type of narrative fiction has its own structural features. Vladimir Propp's morphology of the folktale is considered a seminal research achievement in the study of folktale. And there are 31 functions of dramatis personae which undertaken by seven basic types of character roles in the model of morphology of the folktale. This paper tries to find out the functions realized in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by analyzing and comparing.

2.1 The 31 Functions of Dramatis Personae

Here are the 31 functions and definitions of functions realized in this tale:

1. Absentation: One of the family members of a family absent himself from home; 2. Interdiction; 3. Violation; 4. Reconnaissance: The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance; 5. Delivery: The villain receives information about his victim; 6. Trickery: The villain attempts to deceives his victim in order to make possession of him or of his belongings; 7. Complicity: The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy; 8. Villainy: The villain cause harm or injury to a member of a family; 9. Mediation: The hero is approached with a request or command; 10. Beginning counteraction: The seeker agrees to or decides upon counteraction; 11. Departure: The hero leaves home; 12. The first function of the donor; 13. The hero's reaction; 14. Provision or receipt of a magical agent: The hero acquires the use of a magical agent; 15. Spatial transference between two kingdoms/Guidance: The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search; 16. Struggle: The hero and the villain join in direct combat; 17. Branding; 18. Victory: The villain is defected; 19. Resolution: The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated; 20. Return: The hero returns; 21. Pursuit; 22. Rescue; 23. Unrecognized arrival; 24. Unfounded claims; 25. Difficult task: A difficult is proposed to the hero; 26. Solution: The task is resolved; 27. Recognition; 28. Exposure; 29. Transfiguration: The hero is given a new appearance; 30. Punishment; 31. Wedding: The hero is married and ascends the throne.

(Scott, Trans, 1968)

2.2 The Main Connections Between 31 Functions and The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

After reading the whole story, the writer found out the plots that might explained by these functions and made comparison between the plots and functions. The main connections between 31 functions of dramatis personae and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* will be showed in Table 1.

Table 1 Propp's Model and The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

Functions of Dramatis Personae	Narrative events in <i>The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe</i>
1. Absentation	With their parents absent, the children whose names are Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy are sent away from London during the war because of the air-raids.
4. Reconnaissance	White Witch talks with Edmund to get information about he and his brother and sisters.
5. Delivery	Edmund tells White Witch that he has one brother and two sisters, and that one of his sisters has already been in Narnia and has met a Faun.
6. Trickery	White Witch deceives Edmund by treating him with a box of Turkish Delight to persuade him to bring his brother and sisters to her.
7. Complicity	Edmund agrees to White Witch's persuasions: he would not tell others about her and he would bring his brother and sisters to her.
8. Villainy	The Faun Tumnus is arrested, awaiting his trial on a charge of spies and fraternizing with human.
9. Mediation	The Faun Tumnus is imprisoned, the three children want to save him so they are going to meet the Lion, Aslan.
10. Beginning counteraction	Peter, Susan and Lucy choose positive action and decide to fight with White Witch.
11. Departure	They depart for the Stone Table at night with loads over their shoulders to meet Aslan before White Witch reaches there.
14. Provision or receipt of a magical agent	Father Christmas gives the three children magical presents: a shield and a sword for Peter; a bow, a quiver of arrows and a horn for Susan; a little bottle of magical liquid and a small dagger for Lucy.
25. Difficult task	Aslan leads Peter to fight with the wolf.
26. Solution	Peter killed the Wolf with his sword.
15. Guidance	Aslan gives Peter plans for campaign and leads Peter to the combat.
16. Struggle	Edmund and Peter lead an army to fight desperately with White Witch with her army.
18. Victory	Peter wins the battle with the help of Aslan and the Witch is dead.
19. Resolution	Ice melt and other seasons return to Narnia.
20. Return	The four children return to the castle of Cair Paravel.
29. Transfiguration	Aslan solemnly crowned them.
31. Wedding	They sit on the four thrones and become the kings and queens of Narnia.

2.3 The Seven Basic Types of Character Roles

The seven types include: Hero, Villain, Donor, Helper, Dispatcher, False Hero and Princess.[7] First, not all folktales include seven types of character roles. Second, these seven roles would be distributed among different roles. For example, if a hero kills the villain wolf, then the wolf's brothers who chasing the hero take the role of villain. Third, on contrary, one character could act as more than one role, as a donor who gives the hero a magical agent can also be a helper.

There are five types of Character roles in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*: Hero: Peter; Villain: White Witch, The Wolf; Donor: Father Christmas; Helper: Aslan, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, Father Christmas, Edmund; Dispatcher: Aslan. In this story, Edmund is deceived by the White Witch at first, but later he realizes that the White Witch is an enemy and he made a mistake by himself. So, he becomes a Helper

by supporting the Hero after he is rescued. From the classification above, it is easy to know that Aslan acts as both a Helper and a Dispatcher. Because it is Aslan who gives the Hero plans for campaign, leads the Hero to the combat and helps the Hero to defeat the Villain and achieve the final victory.

3. Discussion and Result

This part analyzes Table 1 in detail and explains how does this example support the points raised in the introduction. At last, the result of discussion will be offered.

3.1 Detailed Analysis of Table 1

Function is the smallest unit in narratives. The act realized by certain type of character role is called function. In different tales, although names of characters change, neither their actions nor the functions carried by their actions change, which also makes it possible for researchers to do researches on the functions of tales.

Let's discuss how the scheme applies to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*:

At the beginning of a tale, there is always some sort of initial situation that give some context of the tale. The members of a normal family will be introduced and the future hero is usually only mentioned with his/her name and status. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, four children named Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy, are sent away from London to the house of an old Professor. This is the initial situation of this tale, which conforms to Propp's description.

Absentation of function 1 is accord with the absence of the parents of four children. Nobody prohibits the children from getting into the wardrobe. Therefore, without interdiction and violation, function 2 and function 3 are not present. One function may develop into another as a story goes on. In other words, one function may connect tightly with another in a tale out of logical necessity. When White Witch talks to Edmund, both function 4 and function 5 are realized. White Witch deceives Edmund with a box of Turkish delight in order to catch all his siblings. And Edmund completely accepts her persuasion because of the magical power of Turkish delight and her lies. Therefore, this plot realizes both function 6 and function 7. White Witch does harm to Faun Tumnus by imprisons him and ruins his home. Even though Faun Tumnus is not a member of the family, Faun Tumnus is a friend of Lucy and regarded as a helper of the children. Therefore, this event also fits function 8. In most tales, the Hero comes out in function 9. However, in this tale, the event that realizes function 9 does not give readers a clear image of the real hero. In spite of this, this event still conforms to function 9, because the hero is among the three children and is going to take his mission later. Making a decision to confront the difficulties and taking their departure for help are good explanations for the definition of function 10 and function 11. Father Christmas gives the three children magical presents without testing, interrogating or interrogating them. In a word, they receive their presents without difficulty. Hence, function 12 and function 13 are absent and the story develops directly into function 14.

After receiving the presents, Peter is faced with a difficulty that he has to fight with the Wolf dispatched by White Witch to rescue his sisters. As a result, he kills the Wolf and win the battle completely, which demonstrates that Peter is the potential hero. In this way, the pair of function 25 and function 26 is fulfilled. Aslan shows Peter with his plan and lead peter to the combat, which satisfy the definition of guidance. Therefore, function 15 is located. Peter and Edmund join in a direct battle with White Witch is the climax of this tale. This climax corresponding to the function 16 in this given scheme. However, this combat should be distinguished from the combat with the Wolf which will be explained in the later part. As a result, White Witch is defeated, victory achieved and function 18 is realized. Peter wins the battle without getting injured, so there is no need of branding and no mark is left on his body. Function 17 is missing. After the victory, the resolution in this tale reflects by the change of climate and freedom back to the land, which is the manifestation of function 19. Function 20 is carried by the return of the four children to the castle of Cair Paravel. No False Hero can be found in this tale. So, the functions undertaken by False Hero cannot be applied to this tale. Hence, function 24, function 27, function 28 and function 30 are not present. The 'new appearance' in function 29 can be understood as a crown here. So, when Aslan solemnly crowns them, the hero gets a new appearance. In most tales, the hero marries the princess and ascend the throne. However, in this tale, hero becomes the king by himself which realizes function 31.

3.2 Discussion about the Two Points and the Result

Propp's Morphology of the Folktale was originally published by Russian scholar Vladimir Propp in 1928 and its English translation appears in 1958. And the first edition of this book was published in 1950.

The creation of this model is much earlier than the creation of this story. Propp also said that not all of the functions would be realized in a tale. As shown in the table above, 19 functions of this scheme can be located in this tale. Hence, this means that this model can be applied to this tale without any difficulty. Meanwhile, “there are other two cases which show the application of Propp’s model to *The Jungle Book* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*.” Both of the two film comes out after the year 1928, while the model still has the power to account for these two narratives. With these three supportive examples, there is a reason to believe that “Propp’s Morphology of the Folktale also have the explanatory power to account for folk narratives that had not even come into being at the time the model was developed.”

According to the translation of the book, *Morphology of the Folk Tale* in 1968 by Laurence Scott, the sequence of functions is always identical. (1968) By no means do all tales give evidence of all functions, but no matter which one were missing, the proper sequence of the functions will not be disturbed. However, Simpson shows different view on this issue: Nor is Propp’s model suggest that all narratives, in their manifestation as discourse, follow a straightforwardly linear chronology.

Back to the table above, it is easy to see that the sequence of functions realized in this tale are different from the sequence in the model. And the narrative analysis of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* presents the same result that the functions do not appear in the same sequence just as this scheme describes. In this regard, the writer is inclined to agree with Simpson’s view on this issue when Propp’s model is applied to narratives come after the creation of the model.

It is necessary to state that these examples do not mean that Propp’s view on the sequence of functions is wrong. Because Propp got this point after analysis of a lot of tales before 1928 and this point is created before or in the year 1928. Therefore, this point can be applied to tales before 1928 but cannot explain tales created after 1928. The content and structure of the folktale are developing day by day, this model must catch up with its pace. In brief, criticisms are far from enough, more attention should be put on the development of this model.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, the writer applies Propp’s model to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to further prove that “Propp’s model has the explanatory power to account for narratives that had not even come into being at the time the model was developed. And find out an answer for the question: Is the sequence of functions that realized in narratives is always identical or not? In the meantime, the writer comes up with a conclusion that no theoretical model is perfect, so not only criticism but also reasonable suggestions are in demand for a better prospect.

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