Vladimir Propp: *Morphology of the Folktale, 1928*

Soviet literary critic and formalist scholar. He analyzed the basic plot components of Russian folk tales to identify their simplest irreducible narrative elements.
*His **Morphology of the Folktale** was published in Russia in 1928. Represented a breakthrough in both folkloristics and morphology and influenced Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. His character types are used in media education and can be applied to almost any story, be it in literature, theatre, film, television series, games, etc.*

Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp
(1859-1970)

Vladimir Propp broke up fairy tales into sections. Through these sections he was able to define the tale into a series of sequences that occurred within the Russian fairytale. Usually there is an initial situation, after which the tale usually takes the following 31 functions.

I. Introduction:
1. ABSENTATION: A member of a family leaves the security of the home environment.
2. INTERDICTION: An interdiction is addressed to the hero ('don't go there', 'don't do this'). T
3. VIOLATION of INTERDICTION. The interdiction is violated (villain enters the tale).
4. RECONNAISSANCE: The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance. The villain (often in disguise) seeks information, searches for something valuable or tries to capture someone.
5. DELIVERY: The villain gains information about the victim.
6. TRICKERY: The villain attempts to deceive the victim to take possession of victim or victim's belongings.
7. COMPLICITY: Victim taken in by deception, unwittingly helping the enemy.

II. Body of the Story
8. VILLAINY or LACK: Villain causes harm/injury to family member (by *abduction, theft of magical agent, spoiling crops, plunders in other forms, causes a disappearance, expels someone, casts spell on someone, substitutes child etc., commits murder, imprisons/detains someone, threatens forced marriage, provides nightly torments*); Alternatively, a member of family lacks something or desires something (magical potion etc.).
9. MEDIATION: Misfortune or lack is made known, (*hero is dispatched, hears call for help* etc./ alternative is that victimized hero is sent away, freed from imprisonment).
10. BEGINNING COUNTER-ACTION: Seeker agrees to, or decides upon counter-action.
11. DEPARTURE: Hero leaves home;

III. Donor Sequence
12. FIRST FUNCTION OF THE DONOR: Hero is t*ested, interrogated, attacked* etc.
13. HERO'S REACTION: Hero reacts to actions of future donor (*withstands/fails the test, frees captive, reconciles disputants, performs service, uses adversary's powers* against him);
14. RECEIPT OF A MAGICAL AGENT: Hero acquires use of a magical agent (*directly transferred, located, purchased, prepared, spontaneously appears, eaten/drunk, help offered by other characters*);
15. GUIDANCE: Hero is *transferred, delivered or led* to whereabouts of an object of the search;
16. STRUGGLE: Hero and villain join in direct combat;
17. BRANDING: Hero is *branded (wounded/marked, receives* ring or scarf);
18. VICTORY: Villain is defeated (*killed in combat, defeated in contest, killed while asleep, banished*);
19. LIQUIDATION: Initial misfortune or lack is resolved (object of search *distributed, spell broken, slain person revived, captive freed*);

IV. Hero´s Return
20. RETURN: Hero returns;
21. PURSUIT: Hero is pursued (pursuer tries to k*ill, eat, undermine* the hero);

22.RESCUE: Hero is rescued from pursuit (*obstacles delay pursuer, hero hides or is hidden, hero transforms unrecognisably, hero saved from attempt on his/her life*);
23. UNRECOGNIZED ARRIVAL: Hero unrecognized, arrives home or in another country;
24. UNFOUNDED CLAIMS: False hero presents unfounded claims;
25. DIFFICULT TASK: Difficult task proposed to the hero (trial by ordeal, riddles, test of strength/endurance, other tasks);
26. SOLUTION: Task is resolved;
27. RECOGNITION: Hero is recognized (by mark, brand, or thing given to him/her);
28. EXPOSURE: False hero or villain is exposed;
29. TRANSFIGURATION: Hero is given a new appearance (is made *whole, handsome, new garments* etc.);
30. PUNISHMENT: Villain is punished;
31. WEDDING: Hero marries and ascends the throne (is rewarded/promoted).

Occasionally, some of these functions are inverted, as when the hero receives something whilst still at home, the function of a donor occurring early. More often, a function is negated twice, so that it must be repeated three times in Western cultures.

He also concluded that all the characters in the 100 tales he analyzed could be resolved into

7 BROAD CHARACTER FUNCTIONS:

The villain — struggles against the hero.
The dispatcher — character who makes the lack known and sends the hero off.
The (magical) helper — helps the hero in their quest.
The princess or prize and her father — the hero deserves her throughout the story but is unable to marry her because of an unfair evil, usually because of the villain. The hero's journey is often ended when he marries the princess, thereby beating the villain.
The donor — prepares the hero or gives the hero some magical object.
The hero or victim/seeker hero — reacts to the donor, weds the princess.
The false hero — takes credit for the hero's actions or tries to marry the princess.

These roles could sometimes be distributed among various characters, as the hero kills the villain dragon, and the dragon's sisters take on the villainous role of chasing him. Conversely, one character could engage in acts as more than one role, as a father could send his son on the quest and give him a sword, acting as both dispatcher and donor.

Propp's 31 functions also fall within

6 STAGES: 1. preparation 2. complication 3.transference 4. struggle 5. return 6. recognition

A stage can also be repeated, which can affect the perceived order of elements.
There seems to be at least two distinct types of structural analysis in folklore. One is the type of which Propp's Morphology is the exemplar par excellence. In this type, the structure or formal organization of a folkloristic text is described following the chronological order of the linear sequence of elements in the text as reported from an informant. Thus if a tale consists of elements A to Z, the structure of the tale is delineated in terms of this same sequence. Following Lévi-Strauss, this linear sequential structural analysis we might term "syntagmatic" structural analysis, borrowing from the notion of syntax in the study of language. The other type of structural analysis in folklore seeks to describe the pattern (usually based upon a priori binary principle of opposition) which allegedly underlies the folkloristic text. This pattern is not the same as the sequential structure at all. Rather the elements are taken out of the "given" order and are regrouped in one or more analytic schemas. Patterns or organization in this second type of structural analysis might be termed "paradigmatic", borrowing from the notion of paradigms in the study of language. Respectively equivalent to syntagmatic and paradigmatic are the terms "diachronic" and "synchronic." Diachronic is the analysis that gives the reader a sense of "going through" the highs and lows of a story, much like the pattern of a sine wave. The second term, synchronic, is where the story is taken in all at one time, like in the pattern of a circle. Most literary analyses are synchronic, offering a greater sense of unity among the components of a story. Although both structural analyses convey partial information about the story, each angle of analysis delivers a different set of information.