

## TOWARDS THE STUDY OF NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

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### ABSTRACT

The earliest, preserved to our time texts, are myths that were characterized by a high degree of ritualization and narrated about the basic order of the world. Mythological events were of cyclic nature when in any event of the present we could discern its past and future incarnations. On the other hand, mythological texts could be read as linear texts that included discretion of verbal thinking, the notions of "beginning" and "end" and time organization. This fact, together with desacralization of initial texts and break of their connection with religion and its cults, brought about the birth of such genres as fairytale with introduction of freer mode of narration, addition of an element of imagination and shift of stress from collective to social or family values; and legend of sacral or historical persons or events with the stress on tribal or family values, and later -- fictional works with even greater stress on personal fate and values even in case of close connection of fictional works with initial mythological archetypes. T.S.Eliot (1920) called it a "mythic method", ... a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. The paper gives a brief survey of different approaches to structural study of myths (Levi-Strauss 1963, Campbell 1949, 1965, Tokarev, Meletinsky 1980), fairytale (A. Aarne 1910, V. Propp 1928, A.J.Greimas 1966, Meletinsky 1982), legend (Levintom 1982), the interaction of myth with works of fiction (T.S.Eliot 1920, Frazer 1923, Lotman, Mints, Meletinsky 1982).

**Key words:** narrative structure, myth, fairytale, legend, fiction

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Myths, generally defined as a traditional story or legend, offering an explanation of religious or supernatural phenomena such as the gods, heroes, the many forces of nature (*Current Literary terms* 1979:190), are still widely interpreted in conflicting ways (Levi-Strauss 1963: 206-208): as collective dreams, as the outcome of a kind of aesthetic play, or a basis of ritual. Some scholars (Tokarev, Meletinsky 1980: 19) believe that myths in primitive societies were closely connected with magic and rituals and served the purpose of preservation of natural and social order. Secondly, mythological thinking has certain logical and psychological peculiarities; thirdly, myths represent the oldest form of symbolic language by means of which man modeled, classified and interpreted the outer world, society and himself. Specific traits of mythological thinking are present not only in the imagination of the people of antiquity, but also of other epochs, so also myth as a dominating form of thinking is characteristic of archaic cultures, at some level or as a "fragment" it may be present in various cultures, especially in literature and art which are connected to it genetically and share with it common features (e.g. metaphorism). Joseph Campbell described mythology as having a fourfold function within human society in his work *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology* (1965:4). 1 The Metaphysical

Function: Awakening a sense of awe before the mystery of being. 2 The Cosmological Function: Explaining the shape of the universe. 3 The Sociological Function: Validate and support the existing social order. 4 The Pedagogical Function: Guide the individual through the stages of life. Carl G.Jung (1964) treated mythology as reflection of common to all people "collective unconscious", as an encyclopedia of archetypes.

Whatever the controversy about the nature and function of myths, most scholars agree that they represent the earliest, preserved to our time texts that reflect the ancient perception of the world and served the main source for development of folklore and fiction.

The relation of myth and written fictional works may be viewed in two aspects: evolutionary and typologically. The evolutionary aspect considers myth as a definite stage of consciousness which historically preceded written literature. From this point of view literature deals with disintegrated, relict forms of myth and actively contributes to its decomposition. Myth and following it art and literature are in opposition as they never co-exist in time. The typological aspect implies that mythology and written literature are opposed to each other as two different points of perception and description of the world which co-exist and relate, but manifest to a different degree in different epochs (Lotman, Mints, Meletinsky 1982: 58).

Mythological texts were characterized by a high degree of ritualization and narrated about the basic order of the world, its laws, the laws of its creation and existence. The events and their protagonists were gods or the first people, ancestors, etc. Having happened once, the events could be repeated in the constant rotation of life. These stories must have been fixed in collective memory as rituals represented not only as verbal stories, but also as gestures, ritual performances, dances and ritual singing.

On the other hand, mythological material could have been read from the point of view of everyday consciousness and included discretion of verbal thinking, the notions of the "beginning" and "end", linearity and time organization. This engendered perception of personifications of one character as different ones. A single character of archaic myth turned in his transformations into a multitude of characters that were in complex relations, into a "crowd" of gods who received their professions, biographies and relations. The introduction of a single plot language as the result of a mythological image splinter engendered fictional narration that gave birth to art and literature.

The interaction of literature and myth acts as a constant flow of myth into literature and indirectly through fine arts, rituals, folk festivities, religious mysteries and in the latest centuries through mythological concepts, aesthetical and philosophical studies and folkloristics (Lotman, Mints, Meletinsky 1982:58-59). The founder of neo-mythologism, Richard Wagner, thought that it was via myth that people created arts, that myth is the poetry of life perception that has a universal character. Wagner's ideas about mythological art as the art of the future as well as Friedrich Nietzsche's ideas (1872) about the life-saving role of mythologizing "philosophy of life" explain the attempts to organize forms of cognition as mythopoetical (in opposition to analytical cognition of life). At the basis of neo-mythologism is the cyclic concept of the world, "eternal rotation" (according to Nietzsche). In the world that is governed by the principle of constant repetition, we can discern in any event of the present its past and future incarnations (Lotman, Mints, Meletinsky 1982:61-62).

In his work *The Structural Study of Myth* (1955) Claude Levi-Strauss treats myth as a language phenomenon of a higher level than phonemes, morphemes or semantemes. Mythemes are large constitutional units of a sentence level. If we divide a myth into short sentences we will distinguish certain functions and find out that mythemes represent relations where each function is attributed to a certain character. In this respect Levi-Strauss's analysis is very close to V. Propp's study of fairy tale (1928). He considered myth to be different from other language phenomena as it belongs simultaneously to both Saussurian categories – langue and parole (Levi-Strauss 1963: 209-210). As historical narration about the past it is diachronic and not inverted in time, as a means of explaining present and future – it is synchronous and inverted in time. Because of its complexity and dual nature, the constitutional units of myth reveal their meaning not separately, but only in combinations or bundles of relations that have two dimensions – diachronic and synchronous. Methodically these combinations of relations are revealed when different versions of a myth are listed one under the other so that a vertical column represents a sequence of mythological events in time and in a horizontal line the relations are grouped in such a way that each column represents a junction with a meaning that does not depend on the sequence of events in each version. The

horizontal dimension is important for reading a myth, the vertical one – for its understanding (Levi-Strauss carried out his analysis on the example of Oedipus myth).

One of the genres that appeared directly as the result of desacralization of myth was fairy tale (Meletinsky 1982: 441-444). In archaic folklore the difference between myth and fairy tales is hard to distinguish. Most scholars do not doubt generation of fairy tale from myth as in archaic fairy tales there is a close plot similarity between myths, rituals and tribe customs. An important point in turning myths that had a ritual background and represented a part of rituals or comments to them into a fairy tale was disconnection of those myths from the ritual life of a tribe. When restrictions on telling myths were abolished and uninitiated listeners (such as children and women) were allowed to hear them, it provoked the teller to add his own imagination to entertain the listeners, which inevitably led to weakening of faith in the stories he told. In such cases the sacral part was extracted from myth and family relations were stressed. The initial authenticity was replaced by relative trustworthiness which led to a more conscious and free flow of imagination.

An important part in the genesis of fairy tale plays demythologization of the time and place of action, a transfer from a strict localization of events to indefinite time and place of action. These are followed by demythologization of the results of actions, i.e. absence of characteristic to myth etimology. (Meletinsky 1982: 442-443). Like a myth, a developed fairytale has a single morphological structure represented by a chain of losses (problems or insufficiencies) of some values and their acquisitions that are joined together by the actions of a protagonist and represent the result of those actions. The trials of a protagonist of a fairytale are comparable with the trials of initiation or matrimonial rituals in archaic society and its myths. As each person used to pass through initiation or other intermediate (e.g. from one age group to another) rituals, fairy tale with its interest in the fate of a person widely used mythological motifs connected with initiation rituals. These motifs marked different stages in protagonist's life and became symbols of his heroism. Marriage in a fairy tale is a later and a more individualized ritual compared with initiation in myths with which it is connected genetically, therefore, it would be possible to suppose that initiation is a ritual equivalent to a certain type of myths and archaic forms of a fairy tale, and marriage – to a later, more developed fairy tale (ibid).

A large contribution to the study of the structure of fairy tales and development of the theory of narratology was made by Vladimir Propp. In his book *The Morphology of the Folk Tale (1928)* he analysed a whole series of Russian folk tales and came to conclusion that the same events were repeated in each story, creating a consistent framework. Propp identified fundamental components of Russian fairy/folk tales and the relationship of these elements to each other. In this Propp responded to Antti Aarne (1910, 1961), who focused on motifs (i.e. repeated story elements) by arguing that Aarne identified patterns but ignored the function(s) of these elements. For Propp, the appropriate unit of analysis was the function of dramatic personae (i.e. character plus action), which differed from Aarne's use of motifs in that Aarne placed more emphasis on the action, whereas Propp argued that the action must be contextualized by an understanding of its actor.

Propp starts his analysis with dividing a text into consecutive actions. Therefore a fairy tale may be retold in short phrases, such as: parents leave, they prohibit the children to go out and so on. All predicates give a composition of a fairy tale, all subjects, objects and other parts of a phrase determine the plot. The content is brought down to a sequence of short phrases which are generalized as certain functions which are named as short, general indication of an action by nouns (e.g. absence, interdiction, violation and so on). Such text fragments that contain a certain action and accordingly a function, may be called a narrative syntagma. Propp identified 31 functions typical for all fairy tales (function is an action or event defined from the point of view of its significance in the course of the action). All functions following one another in time sequence constitute a syntagmatic line. Sometimes functions have an inverted sequence. Not all functions are necessarily present in all fairy tales, but generally one function requires the next one. Most functions constitute pairs such as: lack -- liquidation of lack, struggle – victory and so on. The analysis established an invariant plot scheme in comparison to which separate fairy tales represent a number of variations.

Propp's structural model is based on the following criteria:

- 1) All fairy tales share the same fundamental structure;
- 2) All fairy tales are constructed on the basis of one single string of actions or events called „functions“;
- 3) Function is a significant action or event that is fundamental unit of analysis;
- 4) All fairy tales are composed of the same functions, though not every function

appears in every tale; 5) Functions are independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled; 6) The number of functions available to fairy tale-tellers is thirty-one; 7) With (codifiable) exceptions, functions always follow a strict order; 8) Tales are organized into *sequences*; each sequence is composed of a selection of functions in the appropriate temporal order, and constitutes a narrative episode; 9) Each function is susceptible of realization by different means (forms of function): Propp offers lists of the „function forms” that appear in his corpus (but warns that others are possible); 10) Only seven characters are available to fairy tale-tellers: hero (the protagonist), false hero (or antihero or usurper), villain (the antagonist), donor, helper, dispatcher, princess (sought-for person) and/or her father. The number of characters does not change and each character has his or her sphere of actions, i.e. one or several functions. Although the plot is driven by the actions and choices of the hero (the protagonist), these narrative functions are spread between the main characters.

After the initial situation is depicted, the tale takes the following sequence of functions: 1. Absentation, 2. Interdiction, 3. Violation, 4. Reconnaissance, 5. Delivery, 6. Trickery, 7. Complicity, 8. Villainy, 9. Mediation, 10. Beginning counteraction 11. Departure, 12. First function of the Donor, 13. The hero's reaction, 14. Provision of a magical agent, 15. Guidance, 16. Struggle, 17. Branding, 18. Victory, 19. Liquidation of Lack, 20. Return, 21. Pursuit, 22. Rescue, 23. Unrecognized arrival, 24. Unfounded claims, 25. Difficult task, 26. Solution, 27. Recognition, 28. Exposure, 29. Transfiguration, 30. Punishment, 31. Wedding. The hero is married and ascends the throne.

For the breakdown of tale elements Propp thus uses a three-tier arrangement. A first level concerns major blocks of events (sequences). The second level consists of major, significant actions (functions). The third level offers alternative versions of these functions (“function forms”). The functions shape (according to Lévi-Strauss 1960: 1-36) a *syntagma*, the forms a function can take in a given corpus (*allomorphs* in Meletinsky's terminology 1973: 201-254) shape an open *paradigm* of options. The syntagma is one, and closed. The paradigms are open, and subject to expansion; this last point is important in any attempt at applying the model to other narratives than fairy tales, since there is no reason why further allomorphs could not be found in alternative texts. Paradigmatic variation is envisaged by the **model itself**, whereas syntagmatic variation is not; the latter will therefore, whenever it occurs, constitute the literary equivalent of a mutation.

As it is, Propp has worked out two structural models (Meletinsky 2000) – one represents a linear, time sequence of actions, the second – of characters. Consequently Propp gives two definitions to a fairy tale: 1 a tale that is constructed as a regular sequence of given functions in a variety of forms, and 2 fairy tales that represent a seven character scheme. According to Propp, only seven characters are available to fairy tale-tellers. Because of actions, i.e. distribution of functions according to characters, the second model is dependent on the first.

31 functions in Russian folk tales bear a certain similarity to Joseph Campbell's monomyth. The concept of monomyth refers to the theory that sees all mythic narratives as variations of a single great story. The theory is based on the observation that a common pattern exists beneath the narrative elements of most great myths, regardless of their origin or time of creation. The central pattern most studied by Campbell is often referred to as *the hero's journey* and was first described in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949, 2008). The basic structure can be classified using the various stages of a hero's adventure through it, stages such as *the Call to Adventure*, *Receiving Supernatural Aid*, *Meeting with the Goddess/Atonement with the Father* and *Return*. However, fairy/folk tales are much more straightforward in that they consist of a specific actor/action while the elements of the monomyth speak much more to a process akin to character development.

A.J. Greimas (1966, 174-185 and 192-212) proposed the actant model for the study of fairy tales, which is based on Propp's theories. The actant model allows us to break an action down into six facets, or actants: (1) The subject (for example, the Prince) is what wants or does not want to be joined to (2) an object (e.g. the rescued Princess). (3) The sender (e.g. the King) is what instigates the action, while the (4) receiver (e.g. the King, the Princess, the Prince) is what benefits from it. (5) A helper (e.g. the magic sword, the horse, the Prince's courage) helps to accomplish the action, while (6) an opponent (the witch, the dragon, the Prince's fatigue or a suspicion of terror) hinders it.

The six actants are divided into three oppositions, each of which forms an axis of the description: I The axis of desire: (1) subject/ (2) object. The subject is what is directed toward an object. The relationship established between the subject and the object is called a junction, and can be further classified as a

conjunction (e.g. the Prince wants the Princess) or a disjunction (e.g. a murderer succeeds in getting rid of his victims's body).

II. The axis of power: (3) helper / (4) opponent. The helper assists in achieving the desired junction between the subject and object; the opponent hinders the same (e.g. the sword, the horse, courage, and the wise man help the Prince; the witch, the dragon, the far-off castle, and fear hinder him).

III. The axis of transmission (the axis of knowledge, according to Greimas): (5) sender / (6) receiver. The sender is the element requesting the establishment of the junction between subject and object (e.g. the King asks the Prince to rescue the Princess). The receiver is the element for which the quest is being undertaken. I.e. the receiver (or positive receiver) is that which benefits from achieving the junction between subject and object (e.g. the King, the kingdom, the Princess, the Prince, etc.). Sender elements are often receiver elements as well.

Another literary genre that developed from myth was legend (Levintom 1982: 45). Legend (from the Latin "legenda" -- what ought to be read) as a group of folklore texts is united by an element of wonderful, fantastic but perceived as something truthful that happened at the boarder of historical and mythological time or at historical time. Legends may be connected with characters of either sacred or mundane history where the element of miracle is not necessary. However the dictinction is true for the cultures where the dominating tradition with the prevailing religion replaced earlier existing mythological systems (as in Christianity and Islam) and is more ambiguous in the traditions where the religion (e.g.Buddhism) has not abolished former mythological systems, or in polytheistic mythologies without any cardinal changes.

The opposition of legend to other genres may be based on different features. To myth, which is connected with legend on the basis of belief in its truthfulness and an element of "miraculous" that are of universal, collective value, the legend may be opposed as the text belonging to a tribe or a family tradition. In this the opposition of myth – legend is close to the opposition myth – fairy tale. In the cultures without change of religious systems legend may be opposed to myth by its status (different degree of sacrality) and its connection to the cult. In continuing traditions as well as in those with the change of mythological systems, legend is less sacred in comparison to myth and describes later events than those in myth. Telling about the events that took place after mythological time, in historical time, legend occupies the place between myth and historical description (Levintom 1982: 46).

Besides legends where the action takes place in historical or mythological time, the European tradition has legends where the action takes place in abstract time, like in fairy tales (Ibid). However the beginning of such legends has a definite starting point, e.g. not earlier than the end of evangelic events. Such legends are correlated with fairy tales and indicate to similarity of the time of creation of these two genres.

Searches for the place where the events took place are characteristic to legend as a "trustworthy" genre. Such legends are called "social-utopian and are correlated not only with history, but also with the bearers of a social situation and boarder with the genre of legendary tradition and may include plots connected with historical, non-sacred persons.

The development of narrative from myth with its stress on universal values and close connection with religion and its cults goes via fairy tales with desacralization of initial texts, introduction of freer mode of narration, addition of an element of imagination and shift of stress from collective to social or family values, or via legend of sacral or historical persons or events with the stress on tribal or family values to fictional works with even greater stress on personal fate and values, even in case of close connection of fictional works with initial mythological archetypes.

Mythology has always been one of the main sources of themes for works of fiction. Mythological imagies were widely used during the period of classicism. Romantisist philosophy at the beginning of 19-th century (Schelling 1989) stressed the importance of myth as the prototype of any creative work, looked at mythology as the necessary condition and source of material for any kind of poetry. Ritualism of J.G. Frazer (1923) and his followers (Cambridge group of researchers) suggested that the sourse of heroic epos, fairytales, medieval novel, drama of the Renaissance, the works which used the language of Biblical and Christian mythology, as well as naturalistic novels of the 19-th century, were initiation and calendar rituals. T.S.Eliot (1920) called it a "*mythic method*", ... *a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.*

However, it should be noted that folklore is different from modern and postmodern storytelling, which may use some of these familiar elements but will often combine them in new ways or otherwise play with conventions.

The above presented approach to diachronic development of narrative gives us a possibility to trace, with the help of the above mentioned methods of analysis, the development of archetype depiction on the basis of similar functions from myth through fairy tale or legend to works of fiction with all varieties and similarities brought about by time as well as by different perceptions of similar events by different authors.

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