

Study of proppian analysis as applied to film. essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

That a setoffs laws, neatly defined to suit one narrative medium, can be applied to another is not unlike comparing apples and oranges and including, ' Now that I know how the apple tastes, I can appreciated the orange better.

' Flippant as that comparison sounds, it's not far from the case. Prop's 31 functions were identified originally in a specific style of Russian Folktale known as the ' Wanderlust' (which would translate as fairytale).

Outwardly containing various and largely fantastic events such as dragons, magic beans and faithful animal companions, Prop found that all stories revolved around a central quest: A hero attempting to liquidate a villainy or a lack and eventually prove himself worthy to marry. Although this plot easily ND directly applied to the hundred stories Prop studied, was its reach larger than that? Observing the narratives of various films in the context of Prop's Morphology, we can hope to come to some conclusions of the matter.

But before I go further, want to discard the often-repeated claim that Prop had discovered in his 31 functions the fundamental functions of all narrative arcs. Prop himself claims that his analysis was purely taxonomic and confined to the texts he had studied.

He likened his analysis to botany, and merely identified the attributes of the Wanderlust and grouped them gather. He also clearly rejects the notion that his characterizations would work for other narratives such as religious tales. Similarly, different movies are structured in very different ways. Take Annie Hall, which was originally written to have no narrative whatsoever.

And although it was recur to center around the relationship its protagonists, it still has little actual plot development in a Propping sense.

And although it would seem that the formula fails because Annie Hall appears to be nothing but a series of comedy sketches, the plot does have a definite progression. But Prop fails to address the obvious emotional and Psychological progressions that take place in the film. But that isn't to say that movies fail to fall into the patterns at all. The proto-quest detailed by Prop provides a very solid foundation to base other quest-based movies.

Genres such as the western, the detective movie, science fiction and fantasies have story foundations that can be subjected to Prop's morphological analysis. Primarily because these narratives are constructed with more direct focus on the plot, and it is energetically pushed forward as the movie progresses.

To look at this a little more carefully, I would like to study Prop's idea of Moves. Morphologically, a tale may be termed any development proceeding from Villainy (A) or a lack (a), through intermediary functions to functions employed as a denouement (which could be liquidation (K), a reward a wedding (W) etc. This type of development is termed a move. (Prop, 1968) John Fell argues that movies consist of a series of moves arranged in many fashions. He suggests a few options.

- 1 . One move after another: ex. One villain is killed and another appears.
2. Moves start together, but fulfilled one after another: Some one is killed and another kidnapped.

The hero first kills the villain who did the killing and then saves the kidnapped person. 3. A move may begin and end within a larger move: A subplot that is introduced and finished while the larger plot continues. 4. Moves run concurrent to each other.

Since the structure of film is more complicated than that of a fairy tale, analysis of film's structures would be impossible breaking films into moves.

Lets look at an example in Peter Woolens analysis of North by Northwest. Although Woolen divides his work into days, that term seems to have little elevate to the structure. So will divide the plot into moves instead. The first move of the analysis is given below. Peter Woolens Analysis a (Initial Situation): Thrilled is established 13 (Association): Thrilled leaves his office.

Y (Interdiction): Thrilled says that his mother doesn't like him drinking. Violation): Thrilled goes to the bar for the meeting. E (Reconnaissance): A call is made for George Kaplan (Delivery): It appears that Thrilled responds. A (Villainy): Villains kidnap Thrilled. Thrilled is taken to the Townsend Mansion. D (Donor): Vandals comes in and questions him.

Interrogation. E- (Failed Reaction): Thrilled replies that he knows nothing. (Magical Item): Vandals orders his execution. G-? (Guidance): Villains fake fatal driving accident. K (Liz audition): Thrilled Escapes.

P (Pursuit): Thrilled drives away, PL_Assured by villains.

Police arrest Thrilled. RSI (Rescue): The move establishes the initial situation, the first villainy and the first liquidation. This sequence is largely self-contained and triggers the next move by creating the lack that motivates

Thrilled to solve the mystery. The lack that motivates the second move is the lack of information and is liquidated when the professor, acting as a donor, provides the appropriate exposition.

Soon afterwards, as the villains put Eve in danger, the third move casts her in the traditional role of the Princess and Thrilled as the hero who rescues her.

These three represent the very fundamental acts of the film, but there are other sub-sequences within a film that could be called a Propping sequence. Examples arise largely in detective stories generally revolving around red herring or lines of investigation, but could also be a a-Arc or secondary plot. As can be evidenced with the murder sub-plot within the film when Thrilled is framed for a crime he doesn't commit only to be exonerated by the police when the truth about Kaplan is explained to them. As such we can see that films could be considered to be a complex arrangement of Propping moves.

John Fell demonstrates that *Kissing Me Deadly* is similarly structured where villainy follows villainy in quick succession while the overarching mystery continues.

Similarly, Wayne and Ford's *The Searchers* follows multiple Propping pipelines, one for each character. John Wayne is after revenge for the death of his loved one, and Jeffrey Hunter is off to rescue his sister. Each has their own move even though both characters actions are largely linked. A third arc also begins when the older sister is also kidnapped resulting in her boyfriend also joining the quest.

But that storyline abruptly ends soon after the girls death when Native American's kill him. I would argue that the move is one of the most important elements that could help adapt Propping plots towards a film narrative, in order to capture the complexity of film. But its also clear that some liberalized interpretation of character functions is necessary in the case of filming narratives. Clear examples include tripling the role Of the villain in North By Northwest to not just Van Dam but his assistants.

Similarly multiple characters often occupy helper roles and donor roles.

In Mystery movies especially, any character that gives information to the hero could be considered a donor. But this route also gets into difficulties. Although some character functions are split among characters, this leads to complications in terms of characterizations. Fell demonstrates by showing that in Underworld (1 927), it isn't the hero that wins over the princess but the helper.

Also with the film Shutter Island (2010), the hero turns out to be the villain later in the film as result of a surprise reveal.

Which throws large elements of the films characterization askew. Shutter Island is an interesting example to discuss another difficulty experienced while looking at Propping analysis and that is the problem of stories and the telling Of stories. Shutter Island begins in ' in media rest' Prop never makes it very clear is Prop's morphology applied to the telling of stories also sometimes known as ' The Street' or of the story itself known as The Fibula'. The villainy in Shutter Island initially appears to be the damping and confining of Teddy Daniels on the island.

But it is later evident that the violent killing of Teddy's (Andrews) children and wife appears to be the more serious villainy.

But the truth only appears late in the movie, but earlier chronologically in time. Prop has never made it explicitly clear in which way we are supposed to interpret these events. A similar problem is encountered in *The Third Man*. In the beginning, it appears that the plot is fueled by the lack of information leading to the riddle of Harry Lime's death.

But as the plot progresses and it emerges that Lime is alive, the true villainy appears to be the trafficking of penicillin.

Looking at the film in Fibula terms and Street terms will feel very different. Other structural issues also occur in more modern movie. As in *No Country For Old Men*, where an interesting situation arises. In the film, it's difficult to attach a definite character sphere to its main character Lineally Moss.

Looking from outside he appears to be Princess (the character in peril).

The hero, Sheriff De Tom Bell is out to protect Lonely from the villain Anton Chirurgic but fails. Lonely is killed and Chirurgic escapes and so the film ends tit the plot unfinished, with Propping arcs for the character.

But many of these problems could be caused by the ambiguities of Prop's original statements and the fact that we apply a set of rules originally intended for fairy tales to films. Also, because of Prop's strong obsession with story and action over psychological progression it loses its meaning as films begin to internalize. I will repeat that we are comparing apples to oranges.

That said, they are both fruits arena they, and do have some few things in common.