

# A Morphological Analysis of Narrative Functions in C. S. Lewis's Series

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## ABSTRACT

The study viewed C. S. Lewis's high fantasy series, The Chronicles of Narnia through Propp's Morphology. The researcher used Propp's thirty-one (31) narrative functions in order to find out the adaptability of Narnia chronicles to the narrative structure proposed by Propp. Originally used by Propp for folktales, it determined its adaptability to the C. S. Lewis's high fantasy subgenre. The researcher analyzed each of the seven Narnia books in terms of completeness of narrative functions and the order that the narrative functions occurred in the series. Results showed that in *The Magician's Nephew*, the total narratemes present were twenty (20); in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, twenty-four (24); in *The Horse and His Boy*, twenty-three (23); in *Prince Caspian*, twenty-two (22); in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, twenty (20); in *The Silver Chair*, thirty (30), the highest number of Propp's narratemes adopted, therefore Propp's narrative structure was almost complete in this book; in *The Last Battle*, the total narratemes present were twenty-seven (27). The books adapting over half of Propp's narratemes showed that Propp's functions fitted quite well into C. S. Lewis's high fantasy series. All of the seven (7) books of Narnia have not strictly followed Propp's order of structure. Nevertheless, even though some narratemes were lacking, the most important functions constituting the tales' core plotlines were common for all the seven (7) books. It implied that Propp's narrative structure originally for folktale could be adapted to a high fantasy work like C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The lacking narrative functions not conforming to Propp's pattern could give way to structures meant to cater story quests with non-linear, unpredictable plotlines to view morphological structures more accurately.

**KEYWORDS:** *Propp's Morphology, narrative functions, high fantasy*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A lot view reading as a worthwhile activity but with the advent of technology, competing forms of leisure, and academic commitments, encouraging people to read has now become a challenge. Aronson<sup>1</sup> shares that there is an existing dominant negative view that children and teenagers do not read. Today, many reading programs overlook an essential component of literacy instruction that helps children develop an enduring love of reading. To use the right choice of literature in the form of fiction particularly fantasy genre allows readers to read at their own pace and for the sheer pleasure of it.

It is a matter of fact that human experience is universal.<sup>2</sup> The readers all love it when the hero succeeds. They all love it when the villain gets his/her just rewards. They also tend to agree about just what qualities make a hero or a villain in the first place. In 1928, a Russian scholar named Vladimir Propp, published a seminal work on Russian Folktales<sup>3</sup> which was

<sup>1</sup> Marc Aronson, *Exploding the Myths: The Truth about Teens and Reading*; (London: Scarecrow Press, 2001), p.112.

<sup>2</sup> Trulie Peterson, *Everything Old is New Again*; London (Forward Motion E-press: c2009), p2.

<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Propp. *Excerpts from The Morphology of the Folktale*; Translated by Laurence Scott, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp 8-11.

later translated into English in 1958. Propp's focus though, was not solely on the characters; rather, the structure of the narrative itself and how these pieces come together to form the whole. Propp's Morphology looks at the shape the tales themselves take, the experiences that tend to hold true over the course of most folk tales. Broken into 31 narratemes, these are further divided into spheres. While not all stories contain all 31 of Propp's narratemes and certainly not all in the same order, most stories contain a majority of these elements. He has proven that his morphology can be applied to broader sources, (not only to Russian folk tales) and is ideally suited to the fantasy genre, the descendant of folk tales. Propp's Morphology is based on the groundbreaking work of Carl Jung and Claude Levi-Strauss among other scholars' search for meaning of archetypes: the concept that the human race is grounded in common experiences and common strains of character that readers all can recognize and then stand as a model for experiences that come after.

Clive Staples Lewis, author of the high fantasy series, *The Chronicles of Narnia* believes that fantasy stories appeal to children and appear to make sense to them. The researcher chose C. S. Lewis's high fantasy books, *The Chronicles of Narnia* as the subject of her study because Lewis's seven-book series are widely regarded as the landmark of children's literature. Lewis contributed a vast amount of his

writings to the world of literature through the fantasy genre which made him a respected author in contemporary literary circles. To find out Propp's adaptability of narrative theory to a high fantasy subgenre, the researcher used C. S. Lewis's, *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The study was aimed at viewing C. S. Lewis's high fantasy series, *The Chronicles of Narnia* through Propp's Morphology. Specifically, it aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. determine Propp's narrative functions present in the high fantasy series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*;
2. *Narnia*; and find out Propp's morphological structure in the seven (7) books of *The Chronicles of Narnia* in terms of the following:
  - A. completeness of narrative functions
  - B. order of narrative functions

### Significance of the Study

This study is beneficial to the following groups/sectors that are in one way or another involved in this relevant pursuit for knowledge. Particularly, this study will be most important to:

Reading and Children's Literature teachers. C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* is another good source of literature; a highly-recommended material to develop independent reading and communicative competence through verbal interpretation and skill-building activities. More so, object lessons could be drawn for children to earn time-honored values.

Students taking Language and Literature subjects. With *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis as a springboard, learning the intricacies of the language would not be a predictable, monotonous, and bore-some experience, rather in a much fun, more relaxed and encouraging atmosphere which provides a more conducive environment in learning the language.

Language and Literature teachers. Since literature is life itself, what could be more motivating than to teach a classic that epitomizes human truths represented by the product of one's curious mind and wild imagination? This study, therefore, contributes to the modern strategies in pedagogy to help improve quality of learning and instruction.

Curriculum planners. Taking priority on the learners' experiences in learning the language while in the process of planning, developing and implementing the curriculum to come up with the most appropriate curriculum design often yields successful language learning.

Readers. An encounter with fantasy adventures is always a pure delight regardless of a person's purpose. Whether for requirement or pleasure, fantasy works in literature is always a good-read.

Future researchers. This study provides reference to future studies with the aim of learning the language through a morphological analysis of high fantasy genre.

C.S. Lewis's and V. Propp's advocates. The researcher has found sense in using these two authors' works to contribute to the vast support groups of Lewis and Propp who do not only have the sole purpose of writing to entertain but educate as well.

### Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study covered the high fantasy series of C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The chronicles consist of seven (7)

books published from 1951 to 1956. The researcher is guided with the objective, that Lewis's works would yield findings on adaptability of Propp's structure of narrative functions on high fantasy subgenre like *Narnia Chronicles*. The researcher did not go deeply into the linguistic form of C.S. Lewis's writings; linguistic aspect is seen through the researcher's attempt to find out the adaptability of V. Propp's Morphology of Folktale through the use of 31 narratemes and its respective order of occurrence in C.S. Lewis's high fantasy series.

### Theoretical Framework

The study being steeped in New Criticism has used Propp's Morphology, a theory which makes use of narratemes or narrative functions of characters in the progressing of the text. The major premises of New Criticism include: literature exists as "art for art's sake," or a written work's content is equal its form.<sup>4</sup> Propp's Morphology represents a theory which looks into the 31 naratemes or narrative functions of the characters in the series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It also aims to classify, categorize, and catalog works primarily according to their formal attributes thus, the morphology. Propp's theory not only believes characters giving structures to the text, but also progressing of the narrative.<sup>5</sup>

This study is also inclined with Formeaning-Response Approach<sup>6</sup>, (coined from form+ meaning) a theory which considers form to understand language. Such theories support the researcher's view that the study of form and meaning are intertwined regardless of any literary genre one has to use.

### C. S. Lewis's, *The Chronicles of Narnia*

During the Second World War, C.S. Lewis took in a number of children who had been evacuated from their homes due to the Nazi air raids in London. Having no children of his own, he decided that the best way that he could entertain his young guests would be to tell those stories. A very short fragment of one such story survives. In it, four (4) children (two girls and two boys) are evacuated from their home, separated from their parents, and sent to live with a 'strange old professor'.

The aforementioned depicts a real-life account of C.S. Lewis's children houseguests. As a child, Lewis always favored fairy tales and fantasies. As an adult, he has a strong respect and love for children.<sup>7</sup> Lewis found it necessary to expand his setting from the musty old house of a strange old professor to his earliest childhood day-creation of his own imaginary country: Animal-land, which was later assumed into the larger state of Boxen. Lewis's young imagination was meticulously detailed he even plotted out his nation's steamship routes and railway timetables, a place reflective of the same great imaginative detail present in his creations. His enduring love of fairy stories enabled him to write about the particular genre immediately. Also, it was a perfect

<sup>4</sup> Dmitry Olshansky. *The Birth of Structuralism from the Analysis of Fairy-Tales*; (London: Forward Motion E-Press: 2005)p3.

<sup>5</sup> Stuart Price. *Media Studies: Film Communication Media-Propp's Theory*, (London; Longman: 2005), pp 3-6.

<sup>6</sup> Harlan Kellel, "Formeaning-Response Approach", *English Teaching Forum*; (Japan: Momoyama Gakuin University, 2009), 11-16

<sup>7</sup> Peter J Schakel, *Reading with the Heart: The Way Into Narnia*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan; (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), p12.

format for a children's book. Thus, he decided that his book would be a tale of magic and fantastic adventure. No surprise that the houseguests fragment mentioned earlier was identified to the opening passages of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the first book written by C.S. Lewis among the Narnia series. And so began *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Soon Lewis's fairyland developed its own history, geography, myths, legends, and prophecies. The attention he addressed to the details of Narnian life reveals that Lewis was not just intending to write a children's story anymore; he was also participating in that powerful magic that Professor Tolkien calls "sub-creation" (related to suspension of disbelief). Given that the author sought to make art imitate real life in this fashion, it is highly possible that Lewis's original intention in writing the *Chronicles* was to entertain these young evacuees with a fantasized version of their own stories. C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* gradually expanded in breadth and scope. What was foreseen from the outset then as a collection of stories for children has now developed into a complex depiction of an entire moral universe. Lewis's purposes in writing the books were built on top of one another. Most definitely, his Christian beliefs would greatly impact all of his works. Peter J. Schakel, a professor of English at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, states that the book is primarily a fictional story with exciting adventures. Accordingly, the writer, Chris Monroe in his interview account with director Andrew Adamson ("Shrek" and "Shrek 2"), producer Mark Johnson, and actress Tilda Swinton (the White Witch) of Disney's *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* on December 2, 2005 quotes Adamson's thoughts similar to that of Doug Gresham, stepson to C.S. Lewis, that the story is basically a family story echoing with universal values of unity, sacrifice, empowerment and forgiveness. Devotees consider Narnia as one of the finest fantasies ever created. It is then fitting to use such high fantasy work as the study material through which morphology in language may be learned.

### Propp's Morphology

Vladimir Propp was a Russian formalist who studied the narrative structure of fairy tales. He started as a linguist, but changed his field to folklore. Propp was recognized as one of the inventors of structuralism whose work has become one of the major analytical tools in the field of folklore in the twentieth century. His narrative theory achieved world recognition as the first application of structuralism and created the foundation for new disciplines, such as narratology, semiology and structural anthropology. Umberto Eco considers that "Saussure + Lévi-Strauss + Hjelmslev + Propp had drawn up the method, which tried to be integral one that is known as structuralism"<sup>8</sup>. Propp's starting point was the fairy tales and morphology, which means form or structure. Before, in the field of structuralism, the focus had been on the motif. Propp, on the other hand, had focus on the structure, and it was this that he wanted to study. Yet, he also shows that the motif can be broken down into smaller units and that they are constant, e.g. there has to be a hero and a villain. In 1928, his *Morphology of the Folktale* was published. In Propp's work, he wanted to pinpoint the basic pattern in fairy tales, the one thing that every fairy tale variety had in common. He found 31 functions that are to be found in fairy tales. Very few fairy

tales consist of all the 31 functions. Most of the functions come in same order. The logic ones, e.g. victory has to take place before the battle, this always has to come in that order. Other functions on the other hand could take place in different places, e.g. the hero can receive a magic object either before leaving home or after leaving home. The functions also follow each other in a natural manner, e.g. when given an interdiction, logically the next function is interdiction is violated. Functions can be combined, making the functions much broader. This has been done by A.J. Greimas<sup>9</sup> who developed Propp's work in 1966 and Norwegian folklorist Gudleiv Bø who argued that in the case of Norwegian fairy tales the number of functions could be reduced to 11.

Lévi-Strauss<sup>10</sup> compared Propp's model with chemical formulae. He thus considered morphology to be a doctrine of forms, of relations between the parts and the whole: i.e. a doctrine about structure.

Stuart Price<sup>11</sup> argues that Propp's morphology only consists of limited character types and that one should feel free to identify the theme e.g. the stooge in a sci-fi film, who is usually nameless and usually killed early on to suggest the power of the alien force; a typical modern character type. Changing the traditional format will change the whole way the text is received. With this the assumption that Propp's theory only applies to fairy stories and to other similar narratives based around 'quests' but not to all narrative. As for Propp, he considers characters, as variable elements. According to the first principle of Propp's morphology, "the constant element of the fairy-tale is a function, independently of who realizes it". Though Propp's method allows an avoidance of historical, psychological and cultural explanations of the text, so as to turn literary studies away from research into characters and their motives (as undertaken by A. Veselovsky) to a search for a structure that arranges the plot in all fairy-tales, Propp's successors such as Roland Barthes, A. J. Greimas and Claude Lévi-Strauss tried to spread this method and resolve similar tasks, looking for the narrative elements in all contemporary culture: from newspaper chronicle to mass novel, to the semantics of any type of narrative text<sup>12</sup> and analysis of primitive peoples and their elementary structures of kinship.

Although Propp's investigations may appear rather limited, his method became significant for a wide range of disciplines and occasioned a methodological turning point in the humanities. Propp's scheme originally for folk tales, could also be used to generate new tales. In fact, Dundes<sup>13</sup> had Propp's Morphology been programmed for a computer. His story design has proven extendedly useful in analyzing the structure of literary forms (such as novels and plays), comic strips, television plots, cinematic epics (e.g. Star Wars saga, *Gone with the Wind*, *Lawrence of Arabia*) and the like, follow

<sup>9</sup> A. J. Greimas. *Sémantique Structurale: Recherche de Méthode*; (Paris: 1966), II.

<sup>10</sup> 10 Claude Lévi-Strauss. *Les Structures Élémentaires de la Parenté*; (Paris: 1949)I.

<sup>11</sup> 11 Stuart Price, *Media Studies: Film Communication Media-Propp's Theory*, (London; (Longman: 2005), pp6-14.

<sup>12</sup> G. Thomas. V. *Propp's Narratemes & Morphology of the Folktale: Screenplay Structure the PROPPER Way*; (USA: 2009), p2.

<sup>13</sup> Alan Dundes, "On Computers and Folktale" *Western Folklore* (1965), chap. 24, pp. 185-189.

<sup>8</sup> Umberto Eco. *La Structura Assente. Introduzione* *Allaricerca Semiologica*; (Milan: Bompiani, 1968), I.

Propp's story design almost exactly. He was less interested in the matter than to arrive at a typology of narrative structures. By analyzing types of characters and kinds of action in a hundred traditional Russian folk tales, Propp was able to arrive at the conclusion that there are just 31 generic narratemes. Certain studies remark that Propp's order of characters and events is restrictive. Functions and events should be randomly applied as new narratives are met, e.g. the hero may kill the villain earlier than Propp expects. Propp explains that there is a law for the sequence of events in a fairy tale. While not all are present in every tale, he found that all the tales he analyzed displayed the functions in unvarying sequence. For example, you cannot wreck a car before you are driving it. It is not possible to run into anything without driving the vehicle first. This means that the sequence of functions in the stories is always identical. Some tales skip some functions, but they are always in the same order. If you assigned X, Y, and Z to a story, X would always come before Y or Z, and so on. He believes that not every fairy tale containing a theft produces this construction. If this construction does not follow, subsequent patterns, however similar, cannot be compared, for they are heteronymous or of different types. His analysis, in all probability is regarded by generations as one of the major theoretical breakthroughs in the field of folklore in the twentieth century.

## 2. Method

### Research Design

The study is a qualitative research which used textual analysis method called as *explication de texte* which refers to explanation or close reading of the text in viewing C.S. Lewis's high fantasy series, *The Chronicles of Narnia* through Propp's Morphology. Such method of literary criticism deals with the interrelatedness of details in a written work being examined and analyzed in an effort to understand its structure and discover meanings.<sup>14</sup> The study tried to find out the adaptability of Propp's Morphology to the series through his 31 narrative functions.

### Research Procedure

First, the study set to find out the adaptability of Propp's Morphology to a high fantasy series, C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* through Propp's 31 narrative functions. Second, it determined the completeness, and order of Propp's narrative functions as reflected in the series. This measured as to what extent Propp's structure was used in C. S. Lewis's seven high fantasy books.

### Discussion

The results showed that C. S. Lewis's high fantasy series, *The Chronicles of Narnia* were able to adapt Propp's morphology of folk tale.

In *The Magician's Nephew*, the total narratemes present were 20. Propp's narrative structure was not complete in this book but the narratemes occurred according to Propp's order. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the total narratemes present were 24. Propp's narrative structure was not completely adapted in this book but the narratemes occurred according to Propp's order. In *The Horse and His Boy*, the total narratemes present were 23. Propp's narrative structure was not complete in this book and the narratemes did not occur according to Propp's order. In *Prince Caspian*, the total narratemes present were 22. Propp's narrative

structure was not complete in this book and the narratemes did not occur according to Propp's order. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the total narratemes present were 20. Propp's narrative structure was not complete in this book and the narratemes did not occur in order. In *The Silver Chair*, the total narratemes present were 30, therefore Propp's narrative structure was almost complete in this book. The narratemes did not occur according to Propp's order. This story had the highest number of Propp's narratemes adapted. In *The Last Battle*, the total narratemes present were twenty-seven 27. Propp's narrative structure was not complete in this book and the narratemes did not occur according to Propp's order. All of the 7 books adapted over half of Propp's narrative structure. These made the majority of the main story arc of *The Chronicles of Narnia* followed most of the narratemes that Propp has identified. The books adapting over half of Propp's narratemes showed that Propp's functions fitted quite well into C. S. Lewis's high fantasy stories. Even though some narratemes were lacking, the most important functions constituting the tales' core plotlines were common for all of the 7 books.

### Conclusions and Implications

Based on the results, most of Propp's narrative functions were found in the series and appeared in order of Propp's morphology. Although a few functions moved spaces, either up or down the structure based on the plotlines in *Narnia chronicles*, the order of most functions followed that of Propp's pattern. The absence of certain functions did not change the order of most of the functions in the structure. This only implied that Propp's morphology of folktale could be adapted to a high fantasy work like *Narnia chronicles*. What could have been worked out was the need for the structure to accommodate all of the narratemes, particularly those which were lacking because it gave way to sudden twists in the tales. On this note, Propp's structure needed modernization in a way that would fit well a material that portrayed non-linear and unpredictable plotlines like *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

There were recurrences of narrative functions in the series. For instance, in *The Silver Chair*, the function on recognition of triumph received by Eustace and Jill did not end the tale, because in their journey back to the Primary World (Earth), they needed to triumph over the bully villains. This way, it utilized the fourth sphere narratemes (functions 20-31) which were optionally provided by Propp in case of additional story events. Propp's adding up the fourth sphere in the structure probably meant that he was readying the idea that his structure would open more areas of investigation in morphology particularly, besides that of Russian fairy tales. No wonder then if the functions did not occur completely, and in order of Propp's structure like in the case of *Narnia chronicles* because the series highly represented a recent breakthrough in fantasy literature-high fantasy subgenre, a material quite much ahead from the traditional narrative structure of Propp in 1928. Functions then could be repetitive. In this sense, Propp's morphology would best serve materials having the nature of quests like epics, novels, and the like. Long accounts could not avoid narratives being repeated.

Some functions could appear identical but the meanings of functions were totally different. In *The Last Battle*, Roonwit, a centaur warned King Tirian that evil was coming to Narnia in the form of an Ape named Shift while in *The Horse and His Boy*, a centaur prophesied that Shasta would save Narnia and

<sup>14</sup> Elaine Showalter. *Teaching Literature*; (Blackwell: 2009), p98.

Archenland from danger. The previous proved to impersonate the Lion Aslan and spread wickedness in all creatures of Narnia, while the latter meant to raise the hopes of Narnian creatures and Archenland inhabitants with the coming of a hero. Both were functions on interdiction (warning/prophesy) but the meanings conveyed were totally opposite. This attested the idea that delving alone into the surface structure of a text could not ensure real meaning and total comprehensibility of the material. This implied that Propp's morphology should only form initial part of one's investigation in order to make the most of a certain literature. This was an inadequacy which The Chronicles of Narnia helped to highlight. It failed to look at a mood or emotion conveyed within a story merely concentrating on the surface structure, rather than looking deeper. In the case of The Chronicles of Narnia, there were events that happened at the end rather than at the beginning of the story as Propp would have expected it to. Propp was basic in his analysis, too structured. He seemed to overlook the fact that not all stories were so clear-cut, not all stories had heroes and villains that were clearly defined as this study had observed. Interestingly, this part could serve as tool to work out story-authoring activities for the purpose of coming up with tales with much interactive plotlines and sharper hooks since story twists trend in reading and literature.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study came up with the following recommendations:

1. To fit into Propp's folktale story structure, a tale should have enough thirty-one (31) story units or narrative functions. Stories that follow a close, linear and predictable outline would be appropriate to adapt Propp's narrative structure. Reasonably, not all narrative functions need apply to a story;
2. Despite Propp's morphology being highly-structured, modifying Propp's order of narrative functions to fit a study material could not be avoided. It was advisable to deviate if there was a need to do so in order to fit well into the literature selected like epics and novels;
3. With the interesting nature of the study material, the study suggests to find out a narrative structure that would not be as restrictive as that of Propp's morphology of folk tale;
4. Encourage studies meant to provide linkage between surface structure and meaning interpretation in a way

that characters' emotions would form part in the narratives so literatures would be used to a greater extent;

5. Future studies be made establishing practical strategies and advantages using high fantasy subgenre in reading and literature; and
6. Future studies be conducted pertaining to adaptability of narrative structures using the country's literature.

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