Structure and Form: Reflections on a Work by Vladimir Propp

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The supporters of structural analysis in linguistics and anthropology are often accused of formalism. The accusers forget that structuralism exists as an independent doctrine which, indeed, owes a great deal to formalism but differs from formalism in the attitude it has adopted toward the concrete. Contrary to formalism, structuralism refuses to set the concrete against the abstract and to ascribe greater significance to the latter. *Form* is defined by opposition to content, an entity in its own right, but *structure* has no distinct content: it is content itself, and the logical organization in which it is arrested is conceived as property of the real.

This difference deserves some elaboration. We can now do so, thanks to the publication in English of an early work by Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*. Propp was one of the main representatives of the Russian Formalist school during the short period in which it flourished, roughly from 1915 to 1930.

The author of the introduction, Svatava Pirkova-Jakobson, the translator Laurence Scott, and the Research Center of Indiana University have rendered a tremendous service to the social sciences with the publication of this far too neglected work in a language accessible to new readers. In 1928, the date of the Russian edition, the Formalist school found itself in a crisis; it was officially condemned in the Soviet Union and lacked contacts with the outside world. In his subsequent works, Propp was obliged to give up formalism and morphological analysis and devote himself to historical and comparative research on the relationships of oral literature to myths, rituals, and institutions.

However, the message of the Russian Formalist school was not lost. In Europe, the Prague Linguistic Circle took it up and spread it; since about 1940 Roman

Jakobson's personal influence and teachings have carried it to the United States. I do not imply that structural linguistics and modern structuralism in and outside linguistics are only extensions of Russian Formalism. As I have already mentioned, they differ from it in the conviction that, if a little structuralism leads away from the concrete, too much structuralism leads back to it. But although his doctrine cannot in any way be called Formalist, Roman Jakobson has not lost sight of the historical role of the Russian School and its importance. In dealing with the antecedents of structuralism, he has always reserved a prominent place for it. Those who have listened to him since 1940 have felt indirectly this remote influence. If, as Pirkova-Jakobson writes, the author of these words seems to have "applied and even extended Propp's method" (p. vii, *p. xxi*)[1], it cannot have been done consciously, since he had no access to Propp's book until its appearance in English. But through Roman Jakobson some of its substance and inspiration had reached him. I am afraid that, even today, the form in which the English translation was published will do little to popularize Propp. I would like to add that printing mistakes make the book difficult reading, as do the obscurities that may perhaps exist in the original but seem rather to result from the translator's failure to render Propp's terminology and terse style. It will thus not be useless to follow the work closely while condensing its theses and conclusions along the way.

Propp begins with a brief history of the problem. Works on folktales consist mostly of collections of texts; generalizing studies are few and they are elementary. To justify this situation, some scholars complain of insufficient data. The author rejects this plea because in every other field of knowledge the problems of description and classification have been posed very early. In addition, there has been no lack of attempts to discuss the origin of folktales, even though one can speak about the origin of any phenomenon only after it has been described (p. 4, *p. 5*).

The existing classifications (Miller, Wundt, Aarne, Veselovskij) are of some practical use, but they shatter against the same obstacle: it is always possible to find tales in them that come under several categories at once. This remains true, whether the classification is based on the *types* of tales or on the *themes* brought into play. The assembling of themes is arbitrary with everybody and rests on the intuitions and theoretical creed of each author rather than on analysis (intuition being, as a general rule, more trustworthy than theory, as Propp remarks, pp. 5-6, 10; *pp. 5-6, 11*). Aarne's classification provides an inventory that is most helpful, but his assembling of themes is purely empirical, and tales are assigned to particular rubrics in an arbitrary way.

The discussion of Veselovskij's ideas is particularly interesting. Veselovskij split up themes into motifs, so that in his system, the theme adds only a unifying, creative dimension: it stands over motifs, which are treated as further irreducible elements. But in this case, Propp remarks, each sentence constitutes a motif,

and the analysis of tales must be taken to a level that today would be called "molecular." However, no motif can be said to be indivisible, since an example as simple as "a dragon abducts the king's daughter" may be decomposed into as least four elements, each of which is commutable with others ("dragon" with "sorcerer," "whirlwind," "devil," "eagle," etc.; "abduction" with "vampirism," "putting to sleep," etc.; "daughter" with "sister," "bride," mother," etc.; and finally "king" with "prince," "peasants," "priest," etc.). Smaller units than motifs are thus obtained, which according to Propp, have no independent logical existence. I have dwelt so long on this point because Propp's statement, which is only half true, shows one of the main differences between formalism and structuralism. I will come back to it later.

Propp gives Joseph Bédier full credit for the distinction between variable and constant factors in folktales, with the invariants constituting elementary units. However, Bédier was unable to define what these are exactly.

If the morphological study of tales has made so little progress, it is because it has been neglected in favor of research into origins. Too often so-called morphological studies resolve into tautologies. The most recent one (at the time of Propp's writing), by the Russian R. M. Volkov (1924), demonstrated nothing except that "similar tales give similar schemes" (p. 13, *p. 15*). Yet a good morphological study is the basis of all scientific investigation. Moreover, "as long as no correct morphological study exists, there can also be no correct historical study" (p. 14, *p. 15*). According to Propp's formulation in the opening paragraphs of Chapter 2, his whole undertaking rests on the working hypothesis that wondertales make up a special category of folktales. At the beginning of the study, wondertales are empirically defined as numbers 300 to 749 in Aarne's index. The method is outlined in the following manner.

Consider the statements:

1. A king gives the hero an eagle that carries him to another kingdom.
2. An old man gives Sučenko a horse that carries him to another kingdom.
3. A sorcerer gives Ivan a little boat that takes him to another kingdom.
4. The princess gives Ivan a magic ring; young men appearing from out of the ring carry Ivan into another kingdom.

These statements contain both variables and constants. The dramatis personae and their attributes change, but the actions and the functions do not. Folktales attribute identical actions to various personages. It is the constant elements that will be used as a base if the number of these functions proves finite. Now, we see that they recur very often. It can be stated that "the number of functions is startlingly small, compared with the great number of dramatis personae. This explains the twofold quality of a folktale: it is amazingly multiform, picturesque, and colorful, and, to no less a degree, remarkably uniform and recurrent" (p. 19, *pp. 20-21*).

To define the functions, that is, the constituents of the tale, let us first disregard the dramatis personae, since their role is only to "support" the functions. A function is designated simply by the name of an action: "interdiction," "flight," and so forth. Second, in defining a function, we should consider its place in the narrative. A wedding, for instance, will have different functions depending on its role. Different meanings are given to identical acts and vice versa, and correct results can be determined only by putting the event among others, that is, in relation to preceding and succeeding ones. This operation presupposes that the *sequence of functions is constant* (p. 20, *p. 22*); as will be shown later, the sequence allows certain deviations of secondary importance, exceptions to a norm that can always be restored (pp. 97-98, *pp. 107-8*). The individual tale contains all the functions; however, their succession remains stable. Thus, the total system of functions—the empirical realization of which may well not exist—seems to present the character of what would be called today metastructure.

The preceding hypotheses lead to one last conclusion, although Propp admits that it seems at first glance "absurd or perhaps even savage": All wondertales are of one type in regard to their structure (p. 21, *p. 22*).

Finally, Propp poses the question whether the research needed to confirm or invalidate his theory must be exhaustive. If so, it will practically never be completed. Yet if the subject of the study is functions, the investigation will come to an end only when new functions stop turning up, provided, of course, that the sampling be random and as if "dictated from without" (p. 22, *p. 23*). Following Durkheim—no doubt unintentionally—Propp emphasizes that "we are not interested in the quantity of material but, rather, in the quality of the analyses of it" (p. 22, *p. 24*). Experience shows that a hundred tales constitute more than enough material. Consequently, the analysis will be confined to the tales 50 to 151 in Afanas'ev's collection.

We will skim more rapidly over the functions that form the subject matter of Chapter 3. Each function is summarily defined, reduced to a single term ("absence," "interdiction," "violation," etc.), and given a coded sign—a letter or symbol. For each function, Propp distinguishes the species from the genera, the former being sometimes subdivided into varieties. The overall scheme of the wondertale is as follows.

After the "initial situation" has been explained, a character goes away. This absence leads to some misfortune, either directly or indirectly (through the violation of an interdiction or obedience to an injunction). A villain enters the scene, obtains information about his victim, and deceives him to cause him harm.

Propp analyzes this sequence into seven functions coded with the first letters of the Greek alphabet to distinguish them from the subsequent functions (coded with capital Latin letters and many other symbols). These seven functions are indeed preliminary in two ways. They set the action going, and they are not universally present, as some tales start directly with the first main function, which is

the action of the villain himself—abduction of a person, theft of a magic agent, bodily injury, the casting of a spell, substitution, or murder (pp. 29-32, *pp. 30-35*). A "lack" results from this "villainy," unless the initial situation links up directly with the state of lack. The lack is noticed, and the hero is asked to remedy it.

There are now two possible paths. The victim may become the hero (heroine) of the tale, or the hero may be distinct from the victim and come to his or her rescue. The hypothesis of the uniqueness of the tale is not thereby invalidated, because no tale follows both characters simultaneously. Consequently, there is only one "hero-function," which either character can "support." Nevertheless, a choice is offered between two sequences: (1) appeal to the seeker-hero, the hero's departure on a quest; or (2) dismissal of the victim-hero and perils to which he or she is exposed.

The hero (victim or seeker) meets a "benefactor," willing or unwilling, obliging or reserved, helpful or hostile at first. The benefactor tests the hero (in many varied ways, which can go as far as engaging the hero in combat). The hero reacts negatively or positively, on his own or by means of supernatural intervention (there are many intermediate forms). The acquisition of supernatural help (object, animal, person) is an essential feature of the function of the hero (p. 46, *p. 50*).

Transferred to the place of his intervention, the hero joins in combat with the villain (struggle, competition, game). The hero receives a mark of identification, physical or other; the villain is defeated, and the initial lack is liquidated. The hero starts home but is pursued by an enemy and escapes through help received or some stratagem. Several tales end with the hero's return and his subsequent marriage.

Other tales go on to what Propp calls another "move." Everything begins anew—villain, hero, benefactor, tests, supernatural help—after which the narrative follows another direction. So a series of "*bis*-functions" must be introduced (pp. 53-54, *p. 59*), which are followed by new actions. The hero comes back in disguise, and a difficult task is proposed, which he successfully accomplishes. He is then recognized, and the false hero (who has usurped his place) is exposed. At last, the hero receives his reward (bride, kingdom, etc.) and the tale ends.

The inventory summarized above leads Propp to several conclusions. First, the number of functions is very limited: thirty-one altogether. Second, the functions presuppose one another "with logical and artistic necessity"; they belong to the same axis so that no two functions are ever mutually exclusive (p. 58, *p. 64*). On the other hand, some functions can be grouped in pairs ("interdiction"—"violation"; "struggle"—"victory"; "persecution"—"rescue," etc.) and others in sequences (for instance, the group "villainy"—"appeal for help"—"decision for counteraction"—"departure from home"). Pairs of functions, sequences of functions, and independent functions make up an invariant system. This is a real touchstone, which allows us to evaluate each tale and find its place in a classification. Each tale is given a formula analogous to chemical formulae; it contains a

string of letters (Greek or Latin) and symbols used to code the various functions. Letters and symbols can receive an exponent denoting a variety within a specific function. For instance, the formula for a simple tale summarized by Propp will be:

$$\beta^3\delta^1 A^1 B^1 C \uparrow H^1\text{-}I^1 K^4 \downarrow w^0$$

The eleven symbols read so: "A king (father of) three daughters"—"the daughters go walking"—"stay late in the garden"—"a dragon abducts them"—"call for help"—"quest of three heroes"—"battles with the dragon"—"victory"—"rescue of the maidens"—"return"—"rewarding" (p. 114, *p. 128*).

Once he has defined the rules of classification, Propp devotes Chapters 4 and 5 to the solution of three difficulties. The first of these, already mentioned, refers to what seems to be an assimilation of one function to another. Thus, "the testing of the hero by the benefactor" may be told in a way that makes it indistinguishable from the "assigning of a difficult task." In such cases the identification is achieved not by the content of the function, which is ambiguous, but by its context, that is, by the place it occupies among the other functions. Conversely, a statement that appears to be equivalent to a single function can cover two really distinct functions, as, for instance, when the future victim allows himself or herself to be "deceived by the villain" and at the same time "breaks an interdiction" (pp. 61-63, *pp. 69-70*).

A second difficulty stems from the fact that, once the tale has been analyzed into functions, some residual material is left to which no function corresponds. This problems troubles Propp, who suggests dividing what is left into two non-functional categories: the connectives and the motivations.

The connectives most often consist of episodes explaining how character A learns what character B has just done, which he or she must know in order to take action. More generally, the connective serves to establish an immediate relation between two characters or between a character and an object, whereas circumstances in the story permit only an indirect relation. The theory of connectives is doubly important. It explains how the functions may seemingly be linked in the tale, even though they do not follow one another, and it reduces the phenomenon of trebling to a single function in spite of connectives, which do not have the nature of independent functions but serve to make trebling possible (pp. 64-68, *pp. 74-75*).

Motivations are "all reasons and aims of characters which give rise to their deeds" (p. 68, *p. 75*). But it often happens that the actions of the characters are not motivated. Propp concludes that when motivations exist, they may have an origin of their own. Indeed, the motivation for a state or for an action sometimes itself takes the form of a tale developing within the main tale and acquiring an almost independent existence. "The folktale, like any living thing, can only generate forms that resemble itself" (p. 70, *p. 78*).

We have seen that the thirty-one functions to which all wondertales can be re-

duced are "supported" by a certain number of dramatis personae. When the functions have been classified according to their "supports," each character will emerge performing several functions in the "sphere of action" that characterizes that person. Thus, the functions "villainy"—"struggle"—"pursuit" form the sphere of action of the villain. The functions "transference of the hero"—"liquidation of lack"—"rescue"—"solution of a difficult task"—"transfiguration of the hero" define that of the magic helper, and so forth. It follows that the dramatis personae of the tale, like the functions, are limited in number. Propp notes seven main characters: the villain, the donor, the magic helper, the sought-for person, the dispatcher, the hero, and the false hero (pp. 72-73, *pp. 79-80*). Other characters exist too, but they are part of "connectives." The correspondence between each of the seven characters and his or her sphere of action is rarely defined in a unique way. The same character can be active in several spheres and a single sphere can be shared among several characters. Thus, the hero can do without a magic helper if the hero has supernatural power; and in certain tales, the magic helper assumes functions that are elsewhere the attributes of the hero (pp. 74-75, *pp. 82-83*).

If the tale is looked upon as a whole, is it still possible to distinguish several parts of it? Reduced to its most abstract formula, the wondertale can be defined as a development that starts with villainy and ends with a wedding, a reward, and the liquidation of lack or harm, the transition being made by a series of intermediate functions. Propp designates such a whole by a term that the English translator renders as 'move' and that we prefer to call *partie* in French, which means both the principal division of a tale and a game of cards or chess.[2] We are indeed confronted with both things at once, since the tales containing several *parties* are characterized by the recurrence of the same functions at several intervals; in successive card games also one periodically shuffles, cuts, deals, calls, plays, and takes the tricks. In other words, *one repeats the same actions* in spite of *different deals*.

A tale can comprise several *parties*. But do these not constitute as many tales? This question can be answered only after the relations among the *parties* have been morphologically analyzed and defined. The *parties* may follow each other, or one may be inserted in another, interrupting its development, while it is itself subjected to the same type of interruption. Two *parties* may also be introduced simultaneously and one held over until the other is ended. Two successive *parties* may receive a single conclusion. Finally, it happens that certain dramatis personae are split into two, and they can be told apart only by some mark.

Without going into details, we will just note that Propp speaks of one single tale (in spite of several *parties*) when a functional relation exists among the *parties*, but, if those are logically disjointed, he analyzes the narrative as distinct tales (pp. 83-86, *pp. 92-96*).

After giving an example (pp. 86-87, *pp. 96-98*) Propp returns to the two prob-

lems formulated at the beginning of his book: the relationship between the wonder-tale and the folktale in general and the classification of wondertales regarded as an independent category.

The wondertale is a narrative containing a limited number of functions whose order is constant. The formal differences between several tales result from the choice made by each among the thirty-one functions and the possible repetition of some of them. However, nothing prevents the making up of tales in which wondertale personages have a role, but the narrative deviates from the previous norm. This is the case of the *Kunstmärchen* by such authors as Andersen, Brentano, and Goethe. Conversely, the norm may be respected in the absence of such characters. [. . .] For lack of a better definition and not without hesitation, Propp accepts the formula "tale with seven protagonists," as he feels he has shown that these seven protagonists form a system (pp. 89-90, *pp. 99-100*). But if one day we were able to give the investigation a historical dimension, the term "mythical tales" would be more suitable.

An ideal classification of tales would rest on a system of incompatibilities among functions. But Propp has recognized a principle of reciprocal implication (p. 58, *p. 64),* which presupposes an absolute compatibility. Now—with one of the second thoughts so frequent in his book—he reintroduces incompatibility restricted to two pairs of functions: "struggle with the villain"—"hero's victory" and the "assigning of a difficult task"—"solution." These two pairs are so rarely encountered within the same *partie* that the cases contrary to the rule can be viewed as exceptions. Four classes of tales emerge: those using the first pair, those using the second pair, those using them both, and those rejecting them both (pp. 91-92, *pp. 101-2).*

As the system reveals no other incompatibility, the classification continues according to the varieties of specific functions that are present everywhere. Only two functions are so universal: "villainy" and "lack." The tales will thus be distinguished according to the forms taken by these two functions within each of the four classes.

The problem becomes even more complex when one attempts to classify the tales into several *parties*. However, the privileged case of the tales in two *parties* makes it possible, according to Propp, to solve the apparent contradiction between the morphological unity of wondertales (postulated at the beginning of the work) and the incompatibility of the two pairs of functions (introduced at the end) as offering the only possible basis for a structural classification. In point of fact, when a tale comprises two *parties* (of which one includes the pair "struggle"—"victory," and the other "difficult task"—"solution"), these pairs are always in the order in which they have just been cited, that is, "struggle"—"victory" in the first *partie*, "difficult task"—"solution," in the second. Moreover, the two *parties* are linked by an initial function, common to both (pp. 93, *p. 103*).

Propp regards this structure as a certain archetype from which all the wonder-tales have been derived, at least in Russia.

By integrating all the typical formulae a canonical formula is obtained:

$$\text{A B C} \! \downarrow \! \text{D E F G} \; \frac{\text{H J I K} \! \downarrow \! \text{Pr-Rs}^{0} \text{ L}}{\text{L M J N K} \! \downarrow \! \text{Pr-Rs}} \; \text{Q Ex T U W}^{*}$$

from which the four fundamental categories are easily drawn, corresponding respectively to:

1. First group + upper group + last group.
2. First group + lower group + last group.
3. First group + upper group + lower group + last group.
4. First group + last group.

The principle of morphological unity remains intact (p. 95, *p. 105*). The principle of the invariable succession of functions also remains intact, though subject to the permutation of function L, "claims of a false hero" in the final or in the initial position, depending on the choice between two incompatible pairs: HI and MN. Propp accepts other permutations of isolated functions and even sequences. The typological unity and the morphological kinship of all wondertales is not brought into question by these permutations, since they imply no difference in the structure (p. 97-98, *p. 106*).

The most striking aspect of Propp's work is the power with which it anticipates further developments. Those among us who first approached the structural analysis of oral literature around 1950, without direct knowledge of Propp's attempts a quarter of a century earlier, recognize there, to their amazement, formulae—sometimes even whole sentences—that they know well enough they have not borrowed from him: the notion of an "initial situation"; the comparison of a mythological matrix with the rules of musical composition; the necessity of a reading that is at once "horizontal" and "vertical" (p. 107, *p. 119*); the constant use of the idea of a group of substitutions and of transformation in order to resolve the antinomy between the constancy of the form and the variability of content (*passim*); the effort—at least indicated by Propp—to reduce the specific functions to pairs of oppositions; the privileged case of myths in structural analysis (p. 82, *p. 90*); and, finally and above all, the essential hypothesis that there exists, strictly speaking, but a single tale (pp. 20-21, *p. 22*), that the collection of known tales must be treated as a series of variants of a unique type (p. 103, *p. 113*), with the result that one may discover through calculations vanished or unrecorded variants, exactly as one can infer the existence of invisible stars as functions of the laws of astronomy. These are so many intuitions, whose perspicacity and prophetic character arouse our admiration. They earn for Propp the devotion of all those who, unknown to themselves, were his followers.

If in my discussion I am led to formulate certain reservations and to offer some

objections, they can neither diminish Propp's tremendous merit nor contest the priority of his discoveries.

This made clear, one can try to guess the reasons that made Propp choose wondertales, that is, a certain category of tales, to test his method. These tales should not be classified as separate from the rest of oral literature. Propp writes that, from a certain point of view ("historical" according to him, but we think also psychological and logical), "the fairy tale in its morphological bases amounts to a myth. We, of course, realize," he adds immediately, "that, from the point of view of contemporary science, we are stating a totally heretical idea" (p. 82, *p. 90*).

Propp is right: there is no serious reason to isolate tales from myths, although the difference between the two is subjectively felt by a great many societies, although this difference is objectively expressed by means of special terms to distinguish the two genres, and finally, although prescriptions and prohibitions are sometimes linked with one and not the other (recitation of myths at certain hours or during a season only, whereas tales, because of their "profane" nature, can be narrated any time).

These native distinctions are of great interest for the ethnographer, but it is not at all certain that they are based on the nature of things. On the contrary, folktales in one society are known to be myths in another, and vice versa. This is the first reason to beware of arbitrary classifications. Besides, the mythologist usually notices that in an identical or remolded form the same tales, the same characters, and the same motifs reappear in the tales and myths of a given community. Moreover, in attempting the complete series of transformations of a mythical theme one can seldom limit oneself to the myths (so qualified by the natives); some of these transformations must extend to the tales, although it is possible to infer their existence from the myths proper.

There is no doubt, however, that almost all societies regard the two genres as distinct and that the regularity of this distinction has some cause. I believe that such a cause exists but reduced to a difference of degree, which is twofold. Tales are constructed on weaker oppositions than those found in myths. The former are not cosmological, metaphysical, or natural, but, more often, local, social, and moral. In addition—precisely because the tale is a weakened transposition of the theme whose stronger realization is the property of myth—the former is less strictly subjected than the latter to the triple consideration of logical coherence, religious orthodoxy, and collective pressure. The tale offers more possibilities of play, its permutations are comparatively freer, and with time they acquire a certain arbitrary character. But if the tale works with reduced oppositions, these will be so much more difficult to identify. And the difficulty increases because, when the oppositions become very weak, they mark an instability that comes close to literary creation.

Propp saw this latter difficulty very clearly and said "that the purity of folktale construction"—indispensable for the application of his method—"is peculiar only to the peasantry—to a peasantry, moreover, little touched by civilization. All kinds of foreign influences alter and sometimes decompose a folktale." In this case, "it is impossible to make provision for all details" (p. 90, *p. 100*). Nonetheless, Propp admits that the narrator has relative freedom in the choice of certain characters, in the omission and repetition of certain functions, in determining the forms of the functions, and, finally, to a much greater degree, in the nomenclature and the attributes of the characters added to: "a tree may show the way, a crane may give a steed a gift, a chisel may spy, and so forth. This freedom is a peculiarity of the folktale alone" (pp. 101-2, *pp. 112-13*). Elsewhere, he mentions the attributes of these characters, such as "their age, sex, status, external appearance (and any peculiarities of same), and so forth," which are variable because they "provide the folktale with its brilliance, charm, and beauty." Thus, external causes alone can explain why in a tale one attribute is substituted for another; they are a transformation of real-life conditions, the influence of foreign epic literature, bookish culture, religion, and superstitions. "The folktale has gradually undergone a metamorphic process, and these transformations and metamorphoses are subject to certain laws. These processes create a multiformity which is difficult to analyze" (p. 79, *p. 87*).

All this really means that the tale lends itself imperfectly to structural analysis. This is no doubt true in a measure, but less so than Propp believes, and not exactly for the reasons he gives. I will return to this problem, but first we must find out why, given such conditions, it is the wondertale that Propp chose for testing his method. Should he not rather have used myths, the privileged value of which he recognizes several times?

The reasons for Propp's choice are many and are of varying importance. As he is not an ethnologist, one can suppose that he had no access to or control over mythological material collected by him and among peoples known to him. In addition, he started on a path on which others immediately preceded him. It is tales, rather than myths, that his predecessors discussed and that provided the ground where certain Russian scholars outlined the first plans of morphological studies. Propp takes up the problem where they left it, using the same material: Russian folktales.

I believe that Propp's choice can also be explained by his lack of knowledge of the true relationship between myth and the folktale. He has the great merit of seeing in them *species* of the same *genus*, but he remains faithful to the idea of the historical priority of the former over the latter. He writes that to be able to start studying myth, one would have to add to the morphological analysis "a historical study which, for the present, cannot enter into our task" (p. 82, *p. 90*). A little further on he suggests that "very archaic myths" constitute the realm

in which folktales have their distant origin (p. 90, *p. 100*). He even says, "Everyday life and religion die away, while their contents turn into a folktale" (p. 96, *p. 106*).

The ethnologist will beware of such an interpretation because he knows that in present times myths and folktales exist side by side. One genre cannot then be held to be a survival of the other, unless it is postulated that tales preserve the memory of ancient myths, themselves fallen into oblivion. [For a discussion of such hypotheses, see Lévi-Strauss 1976, Chapters 9 and 14.] This proposition could not be demonstrated most of the time (since we are ignorant of all or almost all the ancient beliefs of the peoples we are studying and call them "primitive" precisely for this reason); besides, the usual ethnographic experience leads one to think that myth and the folktale use a common substance, each in its own way. Their relationship is not that of anterior to posterior, of primitive to derived. It is rather a complementary relationship. Tales are miniature myths, in which the same oppositions are transposed to a smaller scale, and this is what makes them difficult to study in the first place.

The preceding considerations certainly must not make one disregard the other difficulties Propp mentions, although one could formulate them in a slightly different manner. Even in our contemporary societies the tale is not a residual myth, but it certainly suffers from existing alone. The disappearance of myths has broken the balance. Like a satellite without a planet, the tale tends to get out of orbit, to let itself be caught by other poles of attraction.

Such are some additional reasons for turning to civilizations in which myth and the tale have coexisted until a recent period and sometimes continue to do so, in which the system of oral literature is whole and can be looked upon as a whole. The point is not to choose between the tale and myth but to realize that they are the two poles of a field that also includes all sorts of intermediate forms and that their morphological analysis must be the same, or else one may miss elements belonging to the same system of transformations.

Propp appears to be torn between his formalist vision and the obsession with historical explanations. One can, to some degree, understand the regret that made him give up the former in order to turn to the latter. As soon as he had settled on folktales, the antinomy became overpowering. Clearly, tales have history, but a practically inaccessible history, since we know very little about the prehistoric civilizations in which they originated. But is it really history that is lacking? The historical dimension appears rather as a negative factor resulting in the discrepancy between the tale as it exists and a missing ethnographic context. The opposition is resolved when one observes an oral tradition still in action, like those studied by ethnography. There the problem of history does not arise, or it arises only in exceptional cases, since the external references necessary for the interpretation of oral tradition belong to the same plane as the tradition itself.

Thus, Propp is the victim of a subjective illusion. He is not torn, as he thinks,

between the demands of synchrony and diachrony. *It is not the past that he lacks, it is context.* Formalist dichotomy, which opposes form and matter and defines them by antithesis, is not forced on him by the nature of things but by the accidental choice he made in an area where only form survives, whereas matter is absent. Reluctantly he dissociates them and at the most decisive moments of his analysis he believes that what escapes him in fact has escaped him by right.

Except for certain passages, prophetic but very timid and hesitating, Propp divides oral literature in two: a form, which is of prime importance because it lends itself to morphological study, and an arbitrary content, which, just because it is arbitrary, he treats as less important. I would like to stress this point, since it sums up the difference between formalism and structuralism. For formalism, the two areas must be absolutely separate, as form alone is intelligible, and content is only a residual deprived of any significant value. For structuralism, this opposition does not exist; structuralism does not treat one as abstract and the other as concrete. Form and content are of the same nature, amenable to the same type of analysis. Content receives its reality from its structure, and what is called form is a way of organizing the local structures that make up this content.

The limitation, which we believe to be inherent in formalism, is particularly striking in the main chapter of Propp's work, the one on the characters' functions. The author categorizes them in genera and species. It is clear, however, that the former are defined exclusively and the latter only in part by morphological criteria; unwittingly Propp uses these criteria to reintroduce some aspects of content. The generic function "villainy"' is subdivided into twenty-two species and subspecies, such as: the villain "abducts a person," "steals a magic agent," "plunders or spoils the crops," "steals the daylight," "makes a threat of cannibalism," (pp. 29-32, *pp. 31-34*). The whole content of the tales is thus decomposed step by step, and the analysis oscillates between formal terms—so general that they can be indiscriminately applied to any tale (this is the generic level)—and a simple registration of the raw material, whose formal properties alone have been said at the beginning to possess an explanatory value.

The inconsistency is so flagrant that Propp desperately seeks a middle position. Instead of systematically cataloging what he maintains are species, he isolates some of them, putting together, pell-mell, in a single "specific" category all those not frequently encountered. "It is technically more useful," he writes, "to isolate several of its most important forms while, on the other hand, generalizing about those remaining" (pp. 29, 33, *pp. 31-32, 35*). But either one deals with specific forms and then one cannot formulate a coherent system without cataloging and classifying them all, or there is only content and—according to the rules set by Propp himself—one must exclude it from the morphological analysis. In any case, a drawer filled with unclassified forms does not constitute a species.

Why, then, should he rob Peter to pay Paul and feel happy about it? For a very simple reason, which explains another weakness of the formalist position.

Unless content is underhandedly reinterpreted as form, the latter will remain at so high a level of abstraction that it stops meaning anything and has no heuristic value. *Formalism destroys its object.* With Propp, it results in the discovery that there exists but one tale. In this way, the explanation is shifted elsewhere. We know what *the tale* is; however, since we observe not an archetypal tale but so many concrete tales, we are left without any resources of classifying them. Before the epoch of formalism we were indeed unaware of what these tales had in common. Now we are deprived of any means of understanding how they differ. We have passed from the concrete to the abstract but can no longer come down from the abstract to the concrete.

Concluding his work, Propp quotes an admirable page from Veselovskij:

> Is it permissible in this field also to consider the problem of typical schemes . . . schemes handed down from generations as readymade formulae capable of becoming animated with a new mood, giving rise to new formations? . . . The contemporary narrative literature, with its complicated thematic structure and photographic reproduction of reality, apparently eliminates the very possibility of such a question. But when this literature appears to future generations as distant as antiquity (from prehistoric to medieval times) seems to us at present—when the synthesis of time, that great simplifier, in passing over the complexity of phenomena, reduces them to the magnitude of points receding into the distance, then their lines will merge with those which we are now uncovering when we look back at the poetic traditions of the distant past—and the phenomena of schematism and repetition will then be established across the total expanse." (Quoted by Propp, p. 105, *p. 116*, from A. N. Veselovskij, *Poètika*, Vol. II.)

These views are profound but, at least in the passage given above, one cannot perceive on what basis the differentiation will take place when, looking beyond the unity of literary creation, one tries to determine the nature of and the reason for its variety.

Propp was aware of this difficulty and the last part of his work consists of an attempt, as feeble as it is ingenious, to reintroduce a principle of classification. There is but one tale, but this tale is an architale comprising four groups of logically connected functions. If we call them 1, 2, 3, 4, the concrete tales will be divided into four categories, depending on their use of all four groups or three groups (for logical reasons only 1, 2, 4 or 1, 3, 4 are possible), or two groups, which must then be 1, 4, (see p. 175 above).

Yet this classification into four categories leaves us as far from real tales as does the single category, since each category includes dozens or hundreds of different tales. Propp knows this so well that he continues: "Further classification can also be made according to the varieties of this obligatory element. Thus at

the heading of each class will come the folktales about the kidnapping of a person, then folktales about the stealing of a talisman, etc., on through all the varieties of element A (villainy). Folktales with *a* (i.e., folktales about the quest for a bride, for a talisman, etc.) appear thereafter'' (p. 92, *p. 102*). What does it mean if not that morphological categories do not exhaust reality and that the content of the tale after being rejected as an inappropriate basis for classification is admitted again because the morphological attempt has failed?

There is a more serious matter still. We saw that the fundamental tale, of which all tales offer an incomplete realization, is formed of two *parties* whose certain functions are recurrent—some being simple variants of others and some belonging specifically to each *partie* (see p. 173 above). These specific functions are, for the first *partie*, "struggle," "branding the hero," "victory," "liquidation of lack," "return," "pursuit of the hero," "rescue"; and for the second *partie* "the hero's unrecognized arrival," "assigning a difficult task," "success," "recognition of the hero," "exposure of the false hero," and "transfiguration of the hero."

How are these two series differentiated? Could they not be treated as two variants, so that the "assigning of a difficult task," would be a transformation of the "struggle" (or, rather, of the testing of the hero that takes place before); the false hero, a transformation of the "villain"; the "success," a transformation of the "victory"; and the "transfiguration," a transformation of the "branding"? In this case, the theory of the fundamental tale in two *parties* would collapse and, with it, the weak hope of a tentative morphological classification. There would then be, truly, a single tale. But it would be reduced to such a vague and general abstraction that nothing would be learned from it about the objective causes of a multitude of concrete tales.

The proof of the analysis is in the synthesis. If the synthesis appears to be impossible, it is because the analysis is incomplete. Nothing testifies more strongly to the inadequacy of formalism than its inability to reconstitute the empirical content that served as its starting point. What has it lost along the way? Precisely the content. To his great credit, Propp discovered that the content of tales is *permutable*. But he too often concluded that it is *arbitrary*, and this is the reason for his difficulties, since even permutations conform to rules. [For an attempt at joint synthesis of form and content see Lévi-Strauss 1976, Chapter 9.]

In the myths and tales of the Indians of North and South America the same actions are attributed—depending on the tales—to different animals. As an elementary example, let us consider birds: eagle, owl, crow. Shall we distinguish, as Propp does, between the function (constant) and the characters (variable)? No, because each character is not given in the form of an opaque element, confronted with which structural analysis should halt, telling itself to go no further. When, after the fashion of Propp, the narrative is treated as a closed system, just the

opposite is true. The narrative does not contain any information about itself, and the character is comparable to a word occurring in a document but not registered by the dictionary—or even to a proper noun, that is, a term independent of context.

To understand the meaning of an element, we must always look at it in all its contexts. In oral literature, these contexts manifest themselves in numerous variants, that is, in a whole system of compatibilities and incompatibilities. That the eagle appears by day and the owl appears by night in the same function permits the definition of the former as a day owl and of the latter as a night eagle; consequently, the relevant opposition is that of day to night.

If the oral literature considered is of an ethnographic type, there are other contexts provided by the ritual, religious beliefs, superstitions, and factual knowledge. It turns out that the eagle and the owl together are put in opposition to the crow, as predators to scavenger, whereas they are opposed to each other at the level of day and night, and that the duck is in opposition to all three at the new level of the pairs sky-land and sky-water. Thus, step by step, we define a "universe of the tale," analyzable in pairs of oppositions interlocked within each character who—far from constituting a single entity—forms a bundle of distinctive features like the phoneme in Roman Jakobson's theory.

In the same manner, the American narratives sometimes mention trees, designating them, for example, as plum tree or apple tree. But it would be equally false to believe that only the concept *tree* is important and that its concrete realizations are arbitrary or that there exists one function of which the tree is only a "support." The inventory of contexts reveals that, philosophically speaking, what interests natives about the plum tree is its fecundity, while the apple tree attracts their attention because of the strength and depth of its roots. The one introduces a positive function, fecundity, the other a negative function, earth-sky transition, and both are related to vegetation. The apple tree, in its turn, is opposed to the wild turnip (removable plug between the two worlds), itself realizing the positive function of the sky-earth transition.

Conversely, by carefully examining the contexts, we can eliminate false distinctions. Among the Plains Indians, mythical narratives about eagle hunts refer to an animal species sometimes identified as wolverine, sometimes as bear. We can decide in favor of the former, for the natives, telling of the wolverine's habits, especially remember that it makes game of traps dug into the ground. The eagle hunters, however, hide in pits, and the opposition eagle-wolverine becomes that of "game in the sky" to a chthonic hunter, the strongest one conceivable in hunting. By the same token, this maximum amplitude between elements generally less remote explains why eagle hunting is subjected to a particularly exacting ritual (see Lévi-Strauss 1954-55, 25-27; 1959-60, 39-40, and 1962, 66-71).

To maintain, as I have done, that the permutability of contents is not arbitrary amounts to saying that, if the analysis is carried to a sufficiently deep level, behind

diversity we will discover constancy. And, of course, the avowed constancy of form must not hide from us that functions are also permutable.

The structure of the folktale as it is illustrated by Propp presents a chronological succession of qualitatively distinct functions, each constituting an independent genre. One can wonder whether—as with dramatis personae and their attributes—Propp does not stop too soon, seeking the form too close to the level of empirical observation. Among the thirty-one functions that he distinguishes, several are reducible to the *same* function reappearing at *different* moments of the narrative but after undergoing one or a number of *transformations*. I have already suggested that this could be true of the false hero (a transformation of the villain), of assigning a difficult task (a transformation of the test), etc. (see p. 181 above), and that in this case the two *parties* constituting the fundamental tale would themselves be transformations of each other.

Nothing prevents pushing this reduction even further and analyzing each separate *partie* into a small number of recurrent functions, so that several of Propp's functions would constitute groups of transformations of one and the same function. We could treat the "violation" as the reverse of the prohibition" and the latter as a negative transformation of the "injunction." The "departure" of the hero and his "return" would appear as the negative and positive expressions of the same disjunctive function. The "quest" of the hero (hero pursues someone or something) would become the opposite of "pursuit" (hero is pursued by something or someone), etc. Thus, instead of Propp's chronological scheme, in which the order of succession of events is a feature of the structure

$$A, B, C, D, E, \ldots \ldots \ldots M, N, H, \ldots \ldots \ldots T, U, V, W, X$$

another scheme should be adopted, which would present a structural model defined as the group of transformations of a small number of elements. This scheme would appear as a matrix with two, three or more dimensions:

$$
\begin{array}{ccccc}
w & -x & \dfrac{1}{y} & 1-z & \ldots \\[2ex]
-w & \dfrac{1}{x} & 1-y & z & \ldots \\[2ex]
\dfrac{1}{w} & 1-x & y & -z & \ldots \\[2ex]
1-w & x & -y & \dfrac{1}{z} & \ldots
\end{array}
$$

$$\ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots \ldots$$

Its system of operations would be closer to Boolean algebra.

In Vol. I of *Structural Anthropology*, p. 209, I have shown that this analysis alone can account for the double aspect of time representation in all mythical systems: the narrative is both "in time" (it consists of a succession of events)

and "beyond" (its value is permanent). With regard to Propp's theories my analysis offers another advantage: I can reconcile much better than Propp himself his principle of a permanent order of wondertale elements with the fact that certain functions or groups of functions are shifted from one tale to the next (pp. 97-98, *p. 108*). If my view is accepted, the chronological succession will come to be absorbed into an atemporal matrix structure whose form is indeed constant. The shifting of functions is then no more than a mode of permutation (by vertical columns or fractions of columns).

These critical remarks are certainly valid for the method used by Propp and for his conclusions. However, it cannot be stressed enough that Propp envisioned them and in several places formulated with perfect clarity the solutions I have just suggested. Let us take up again from this viewpoint the two essential themes of our discussion: constancy of the content (in spite of its permutability) and permutability of functions (in spite of their constancy).

Chapter 8 of *Morphology of the Folktale* is entitled "On the Attributes of Dramatis Personae *and Their Meaning*" (italics added). In rather obscure terms (at least in the English translation) Propp reflects upon the variability of elements. This variability does not exclude repetition, and one can recognize some basic forms, as well as some derived, or heteronomous forms. Propp distinguishes an international model, national or regional models, and finally models characteristic of some social or professional groups. "By grouping the material of each heading, we are able to define all methods, or more precisely, all aspects of transformation" (p. 80, *p. 89*). But in reconstituting a typical tale from basic forms peculiar to each group one notices that this tale conceals certain abstract representations. The tests imposed by the benefactor on the hero can vary depending on the tale, and yet they imply a constant intention with regard to the dramatis personae. The same holds for the tasks imposed on the abducted princess. Among these intentions, which are expressible in formulae, we observe a common feature. In comparing "these formulae with other attributive elements, we unexpectedly come upon a connective link in both the logical and the artistic plans. . . . Even such details as the golden hair of the princess . . . acquire a completely special meaning and may be studied. The study of attributes makes possible a scientific interpretation of the folktale" (pp. 81-82, *p. 90*).

As Propp does not have at his disposal an ethnographic context (which, ideally, a historic and prehistoric inquiry could alone procure), he gives up this program as soon as he has formulated it or postpones it until better times (which explains his return to the search for survivals and to comparative studies). "Everything we state, however, is in the form of a supposition." Nevertheless, "the study of the attributes of dramatis personae, as we have outlined it, is of great importance (p. 82, *p. 90*). Even reduced for the time being to an inventory (of little interest in itself), the study may lead us to examine "the laws of transformation

and the abstract notions which are reflected in the basic forms of these attributes" (p. 82, *p. 90*).

Here Propp gets to the bottom of the problem. Behind the attributes first dismissed as an arbitrary, irrelevant residue, he feels the presence of "abstract notions" and a "logical plan," whose existence (if it could be established) would allow us to treat the tale as a myth (p. 82, *p. 90*).

As far as the second theme is concerned, the examples gathered in Appendix II show that Propp does not hesitate at times to introduce notions such as the negative function or the reverse function. He even uses a special symbol for the latter (=). We have seen (p. 183 above), that certain functions are mutually exclusive. There are more that presuppose each other, such as "interdiction" and "violation," on the one hand, "deception" and "submission," on the other; these two pairs are most often incompatible (p. 98, *p. 108*). (The second system of incompatibilities pertains to functions that Propp called preparatory because of their contingent character. It should be remembered that for Propp the main functions have only one pair of incompatibilities.) Hence the problem explicitly stated by Propp: "Are the varieties of one function necessarily linked with the corresponding varieties of another function?" (p. 99, *p. 109*). Always in some cases ("interdiction" and "violation," "struggle" and "victory," "branding" and "recognition," etc.); occasionally in others. Certain correlations can be unilateral, others reciprocal (the act of throwing down a comb always appears in the context of flight, but the opposite is not true), so "unilaterally and bilaterally substitutable elements would appear to exist" (p. 99, *p. 110*).

In an earlier chapter, Propp studied permissible correlations between the different forms of "testing" of the hero by the benefactor and the forms of "transmitting the magic agent" to the hero. He concluded that two types of correlations exist, depending on whether bargaining does or does not characterize the transmission (pp. 42-43, *pp. 46-47*). In working with these rules and others like them, Propp foresaw the possibility of verifying his hypotheses experimentally. It would be sufficient to apply the system of compatible and incompatible functions, of implications and correlations (total or partial) to the making of synthetic tales. One would then see these creations "come alive and become folktales" (p. 101, *p. 112*).

Obviously, Propp adds, that would be possible only if the functions were distributed among the dramatis personae (borrowed from tradition or invented) and if no omission were made of motivations, connections, "and other auxiliary elements" (p. 102, *p. 112*) whose creation is "absolutely free" (p. 102, *p. 112*). Let us repeat that it is not free; Propp's doubts show that his attempt first appeared (to him) unsuccessful.

The origin myths of the western Pueblo Indians start with the account of the first human beings' emergence from the depths of the earth where they lived at first. This emergence must be motivated, and it is indeed motivated in two ways:

either humanity becomes conscious of its miserable condition and wishes to escape from it, or the gods discover their own loneliness and call the people to the surface of the earth to have people pray to them and worship them. One recognizes Propp's "situation of lack" motivated either from the human viewpoint or from that of the gods. But this change of motivation from one variant to the other is so far from being arbitrary that it brings in its wake the transformation of a whole series of functions. In the last analysis, it is linked to different ways of posing the problem of the relationship between hunting and agriculture (see Lévi-Strauss 1976, Chapter 11, 1952-53, 19-21, 1953-54, 27-29). But it would be impossible to arrive at this conclusion if the rituals, technique, knowledge, and beliefs of the peoples concerned could not be studied sociologically and independently of their occurrence in myth. Without those data one would remain in a closed circle.

The error of formalism is thus twofold. By restricting itself exclusively to the rules that govern the arrangment of elements it loses sight of the fact that no language exists whose vocabulary can be deduced from its syntax. The study of any linguistic system requires the cooperation of the grammarian and the philologist. In regard to oral tradition it means that morphology is sterile until fertilized by direct or indirect ethnographic observation. Propp's idea that the two tasks can be separated, that the grammatical study can be undertaken first and the lexical study postponed until later will result only in the production of a lifeless grammar and a lexicon in which anecdotes-replace definitions. In the end, neither will accomplish its purpose.

This first error of formalism is explained by its failure to understand the complementarity of signifier and signified, which has been recognized since Saussure in all linguistic systems. But to this error, formalism adds another; it treats oral tradition as a linguistic expression similar to all the others, that is, amenable to structural analysis in different measure, depending on the level.

It is now believed that language is structured at the phonological level. We are gradually becoming convinced that it is also structured at the level of grammar but less convinced about vocabulary. Except perhaps for certain privileged areas, we have not yet discovered the angle from which vocabulary would yield to structural analysis.

An analogous view of oral tradition explains Propp's distinction between a single truly morphological level—that of functions—and an amorphous level where characters, attributes, motivations, and connections all pile up and which is the exclusive area (as it is said about vocabulary) of historical investigation and literary criticism.

This view ignores the fact that myths and tales (each of them itself a language) are "hyperstructural"; they form a "metalanguage" in which structure operates at all levels. It is owing to this property that they are immediately recognized as folktales or myths and not as historical or romantic narratives. Like all discourses, they naturally employ grammatical rules and words. But another

dimension is added to the usual one because rules and words in narratives build images and actions that are both "normal" signifiers, in relation to what is signified in the discourse, and elements of meaning, in relation to a supplementary system of meaning found at another level. To give just one example: in a tale a "king" is not only a king and a "shepherdess" not only a shepherdess; these words and what they signify become recognizable means of constructing a system formed by the oppositions *male/female* (with regard to *nature*) and *high/low* (with regard to *culture*), as well as by all possible permutations among the six terms.

Language and metalanguage, which, united, constitute folktales and myths, can have certain levels in common, though these levels are shifted in them. While remaining elements of the narrative, the words of myth function as bundles of distinctive features. From the point of view of classification these mythemes do not belong to the level of vocabulary but to the level of phonemes. The difference between them is that they do not operate on the same *continuum* (resources of sensuous experience in one case and of the phonatory apparatus in the other), and the similarity between them is that the *continuum* is decomposed and reassembled according to the binary and ternary rules of opposition and correlation.

The problem of vocabulary differs then, according to whether language or metalanguage is considered. Because in American tales and myths the function of the trickster can be "supported" sometimes by the coyote, sometimes by the mink, or sometimes by the crow, an ethnographic and historical problem is posed, comparable to a philological investigation of the modern form of a word. And yet it is altogether a different problem from that of discovering why a certain animal species is called *vison* in French and "mink" in English. In the second case, the result can be considered as due to chance, and it is only necessary to reconstruct the development that led to a definite verbal form. In the first case, the restrictions are much stronger because the constituent elements are few and their possible combinations are limited. The choice must be made among the existing possibilities.

However, if we look a little more closely, we notice that this seemingly quantitative difference is not related to the number of constituent units (this number is not of the same order of magnitude in dealing with phonemes and mythemes) but to the nature of the constituent units, qualitatively different in the two cases.

According to the classical definition, phonemes are elements that have no meaning but whose presence or absence serves to differentiate other units—words, which are endowed with a meaning of their own. If these words seem arbitrary in their phonetic form, it is not only because they are the random products (although possibly less so than it is believed) of numerous phonemic combinations allowed by every language. Verbal forms mostly owe their arbitrary character to the fact that their constituent units (phonemes) are themselves undetermined with regard to meaning. There is no reason why certain combinations of sounds should convey the meaning they do. As I have tried to show elsewhere (Lévi-Strauss 1967,

Chapter 5), the structuralization of vocabulary appears at another stage: a posteriori and not a priori.

It is a different matter with mythemes, since they result from a play of binary or ternary oppositions (which makes them comparable to phonemes). But the elements themselves are already meaningful at the level of language; they are the "abstract representation" of which Propp speaks and which can be expressed by words. Borrowing a neologism from the building technique, one could say that, unlike words, mythemes are "prestressed." Of course, they are still words but with a double meaning; they are *words of words*, operating simultaneously on two levels: that of language, where they retain their own meaning and that of metalanguage, where they participate as elements of a supermeaning, the fruit of their union.

If this is true, it follows that nothing in folktales and myths can remain alien or resistant to structure. Even vocabulary, that is, the content, emerges stripped of the character of "naturing nature" (*nature naturante*), in which one is ready (probably by mistake) to detect unpredictable and contingent entities. In tales and myths, vocabulary appears as "natured nature" (*nature naturée*). It is something given, with its laws, which impose a kind of grid upon the real and upon the mythical vision. For the latter it only remains to discover the permissible arrangements of the pieces of a mosaic whose number, meaning, and shapes have been determined beforehand.

We have denounced the error of formalism, namely, the belief that grammar can be tackled at once and vocabulary later. But what is true for some linguistic systems is even more so for myths and tales, because in this case grammar and vocabulary are not only closely linked while operating at distinct levels, but are inseparable and cover each other completely. In contradistinction to language with its problem of vocabulary, metalanguage has no level whose elements do not result from strict operations carried out according to the rules. In this sense everything in metalanguage is syntax. But in another sense everything in it is vocabulary, since the distinctive elements are words. Mythemes are also words; functions (mythemes raised to the second power) are designated by words, as Propp knows very well. And it is likely that languages exist in which an entire myth can be expressed in a single word.

Postscript

In the Italian edition of his work (Propp 1966a) Propp responded to my discussion with an offended harangue. Invited by the Italian publisher to answer but, concerned not to perpetuate what seemed to me to be a misunderstanding, I restricted myself to a brief comment. Not having kept the original, I can reconstruct the text approximately from the translation on page 164.

> All those who read the essay that I wrote in 1960 about Propp's prophetic work included in this volume by the Italian publisher cannot have failed to take it for what it was meant to be: a homage rendered to a great discovery that preceded by a quarter of a century all the attempts made by others and myself in the same direction.

> This is why I note with surprise and regret that the Russian scholar, to whose deserved fame I thought I had modestly contributed, saw something quite different in my words: not a courteous discussion of some theoretical and methodological aspects of his work but a perfidious attack.

> I do not wish to engage with him in a polemic on this subject. It is clear that treating me as a philosopher he shows that he ignores all my ethnological work, whereas a profitable exchange of views could have been based on our respective contributions to the study and interpretation of oral traditions.

> But whatever conclusions better informed readers can draw from this confrontation, Propp's work will, to them and to me, forever keep the merit of having been the first.

"Soviet Literature" (Gorky 1953, 298-332), is a survey of world literature from the point of view of class struggle. It is a landslide against "bourgeois culture," "bourgeois literature," and "bourgeois philosophy" (which included nearly everybody from Dostoevsky to Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, and Henri Bergson). It also contains several passages on mythology, epic poetry, and folktales (mainly about their connection with reality and their superior mastery). Quotations from this speech, together with similar quotations from Belinskij, Černyševskij, and Lenin, have become indispensable currency in Soviet folkloristics.

18. Pjotr Vasíl'evič Kireévskij (1808-56): an outstanding collector of folklore. Very famous is the three-volume set of Russian songs he published: Kireevskij 1860-74.

19. In this passage Propp attacks the Finnish school and uses the word formalism as a general term of abuse. A. I. Nikíforov was a pioneer in the study of folktale morphology (see Nikiforov 1928), and his opinion must have meant very much to Propp. Incidentally, the Finnish School was much less devoted to statistics than it is usually believed. Cf. Jason 1970.

20. The Pečóra, the Onéga, the Pínega, the Mezén', and the Kulój are rivers in the north of the USSR. All five flow through the Archangel region.

21. Čerdyn' is a town in the Urals, in the Perm' region; Xár'kov is a major city in the Ukraine. Novogrúdok is a town in the Grodno region of Byelorussia; Nóvyj Toržók is a town near Kalínin (Tver'). Uézd and gubérnija were administrative territorial units in prerevolutionary Russia (the gubernija was made up of uezds). Pokatigoróšek means 'roll-a-pea'. In this tale the brothers are working in the field. Their sister is going to take their dinner to the field but is abducted by a dragon along the way. The brothers fail to rescue her because they renounce the help of the shepherds and are also captured by the dragon. Meanwhile, their mother finds a magic pea that becomes her youngest son. His name is Roll-a-pea (Pokatigoróšek). He kills the dragon and sets his family free. There are two Byelorussian versions of the tale (see Afanas'ev 1957, nos. 133 and 134). Of the three versions of the tale "Seven Simeons" (see Afanas'ev 1957, nos. 145-147), only no. 147 was recorded in the Novyj Toržok uezd. According to this tale, a man has seven sons; they were born on the same day, and each is called Simeon. Each possesses a unique skill. The tsar sends them to obtain a bride for himself. The youngest brother, who is a master thief, gives the prospective bride a beautiful cat and lives in her house three days. Later the brothers abduct the princess, and the tsar marries her.

22. In the Onéga tradition it is Dunaj who shows Prince Vladimir his bride, while in the Mezén' tradition it is Dobrynja. See note 14 on No. 2.

23. Dobrynja: see note 15 on No. 2.

24. Aljoša and Tugarin: see note 16 on No. 2.

25. Il'ja and Idolišče: see note 9 on No. 2.

26. Sadko: see note 44 on No. 2.

27. Djuk Stepanovič: see note 11 on No. 2.

Supplement

1. The page numbers in Prof. Lévi-Strauss's text refer to the first edition (1958). As the second edition (1968) is now more commonly used, we have added in italics the page references to this latter edition when it is cited in the text. [Translator's note]

2. The English word 'move' is closer to the Russian term xod than the French partie. In Monique Layton's translation partie is rendered as 'move', in accordance with the English text of Morphology, but it seems advisable to retain Lévi-Strauss's own word. The same has been done with bienfaiteur (it corresponds to 'donor' in the English text). Lévi-Strauss could have used donneur but preferred not to do so. This terminological distinction, as well as Lévi-Strauss's equation of 'plot' with thème, is discussed in Propp's rejoinder, and it is important not to smooth down the disagreement between the two scholars, even though 'move', 'donor', and 'plot' would be preferable to partie, 'benefactor', and 'theme'.

Theory

and History

of Folklore

Vladimir Propp

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