

**FROM
FAIRY TALE
TO FILM
SCREENPLAY**

**WORKING WITH
PLOT GENOTYPES**

TERENCE PATRICK MURPHY



From Fairy Tale to Film Screenplay

From Fairy Tale to Film Screenplay

Working with Plot Genotypes

Terence Patrick Murphy

Yonsei University, Korea

palgrave
macmillan



© Terence Murphy 2015
Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2015 978-1-137-55202-0

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2015 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-56129-2 ISBN 978-1-137-55203-7 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137552037

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Murphy, Terence Patrick, 1964–

From fairy tale to film screenplay : working with plot genotypes / Terence

Patrick Murphy.

pages cm

Summary: "From the time of the Classical era of Greece and Rome, literary theorists have been concerned with the subject of how the plots of stories are organized. In *The Poetics*, Aristotle put forward the crucial idea that a plot must possess sufficient amplitude to allow a probable or necessary succession of particular actions to produce a significant change in the fortune of the main character. In the early twentieth century, the Russian scholar Vladimir Propp put forward the radical idea that each of the plots in his corpus of a hundred Russian fairy tales consisted of a sequence of 31 functions executed in an identical order. In this way, Propp had provided a workable solution to the mystery of how that 'significant change in the fortune of the main character' might be brought about. In effect, what Propp had done was to discover the first plot genotype, the functional structure or compositional schema of a particular short fiction, the Marriage fairy tale. But Propp was mistaken in his belief that all plots were the same. Although the exact number of plot genotypes is still unclear, this number is not excessively great. Plot genotypes fall into set categories, which means that the analysis of a few important fairy tales will shed light on the way in which most fairy tales—and by extension most short stories and dramatic texts and Hollywood screenplays—are also organized. This study explores the plots of ten fairy tales to lay the foundations for a complete description of the plot genotype"—Provided by publisher.

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Fairy tales in motion pictures. 2. Fairy tales—film adaptations.

3. Plots (Drama, novel, etc.) I. Title.

PN1995.9.F34M88 2015

809.3'924—dc23

2015019255

*For my mum and dad,
with love and affection*

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
1 From the Hollywood Paradigm to the Proppian Plot Genotype	1
2 Vladimir Propp's Functional Analysis of the Fairy Tale	9
3 A Functional Analysis of Charles Perrault's <i>Cinderella</i>	16
4 Formulating the Concept of the Plot Genotype	27
5 The Robber Bridegroom Genotype	31
6 The Robber Bridegroom Genotype in <i>Wrong Turn</i> (2003)	46
7 The Frog Prince Genotype	56
8 The Frog Prince Genotype in <i>Pretty Woman</i> (1990)	66
9 The Puss-in-Boots Genotype	102
10 The Puss-in-Boots Genotype in <i>The Mask</i> (1994)	111
11 The Little Red Riding Hood Genotype	144
12 The Little Red Riding Hood Genotype in <i>Psycho</i> (1960)	151
13 Conclusion	172
<i>Appendix: Plot Genotype Theory and the Hero's Journey</i>	177
<i>Notes</i>	182
<i>Bibliography</i>	188
<i>Index</i>	192

Figures

2.1	A simplified version of Vladimir Propp's original plot analysis	14
2.2	The cast of characters in Vladimir Propp's 31-function plot structure	15
3.1	The 31-function plot genotype of Charles Perrault's <i>Cinderella</i>	24
3.2	The cast of characters in Propp's 31-function plot genotype	26
5.1	Marriage vs. Survival: The choice of the Second and Third Plot Functions	34
5.2	Reciprocal-Retrospective Functions in <i>The Robber Bridegroom</i>	35
5.3	Marriage vs. Survival: The choice of the Pivotal Eighth Plot Function	36
5.4	Marriage vs. Survival: The choice of the Pivotal Nineteenth Plot Function	39
5.5	The 29-function plot genotype of <i>The Robber Bridegroom</i>	40
5.6	The cast of characters in <i>The Robber Bridegroom</i>	43
5.7	The sequence of functions in the 29-function plot genotype	43
5.8	The cast of characters in the 29-function plot genotype	45
6.1	A set of Reciprocal-Retrospective Fourth and Fifth Functions in <i>Wrong Turn</i>	47
6.2	The 29-function plot genotype of <i>Wrong Turn</i>	53
6.3	The cast of characters in <i>Wrong Turn</i>	55
7.1	The order of the Fourth and Fifth Functions in <i>Cinderella</i> and <i>The Frog Prince</i>	58
7.2	Two heroic perspectives on the Sixth and Seventh Functions in <i>The Frog Prince</i>	59
7.3	The Heroine's choice in the Sixth and Seventh Plot Functions	60

7.4	Two options for the Pivotal Eighth Function ...	60
7.5	... and a third one	60
7.6	The 23-function plot genotype of <i>The Frog Prince</i>	63
7.7	The Reluctant Princess and the cast of characters in <i>The Frog Prince</i>	65
7.8	The Frog Prince and the cast of characters in <i>The Frog Prince</i>	65
8.1	A set of reciprocal false Fourth and Fifth Functions in <i>Pretty Woman</i>	69
8.2	A set of reciprocal Fourth and Fifth Functions in <i>Pretty Woman</i>	77
8.3	A set of reciprocal Sixth and Seventh Functions in <i>Pretty Woman</i>	77
8.4	The Pivotal Eighth Function dilemmas of Edward and Vivian	78
8.5	Defeat-in-Victory: The Pivotal Nineteenth Functions of Edward and Vivian	92
8.6	The genuine motivations of Edward and Vivian (Difficult Tasks)	92
8.7	The 31-function plot genotype of <i>Pretty Woman</i>	95
8.8	The Reluctant Prince and the cast of characters in <i>Pretty Woman</i>	101
8.9	The Frog Princess and the cast of characters in <i>Pretty Woman</i>	101
9.1	The inverted Fourth and Fifth Functions in <i>Puss-in-Boots</i> and <i>The Frog Prince</i>	103
9.2	The Ornamentation Function in <i>Puss-in-Boots</i>	106
9.3	The 23-function plot genotype of <i>Puss-in-Boots</i>	108
9.4	The cast of characters in <i>Puss-in-Boots</i>	110
10.1	A substituted Second and Third pair of Functions in <i>The Mask</i>	113
10.2	Reciprocal-Retrospective Fourth and Fifth Functions in <i>The Mask</i>	113
10.3	Stanley's Journey: A substituted Sixth and Seventh pair of Functions	116
10.4	Dorian's imaginary Journey: A substituted Sixth and Seventh pair of Functions	125
10.5	The Proppian sequence of Return-Pursuit-Capture in <i>The Mask</i>	133

10.6	The 31-function plot genotype of <i>The Mask</i>	137
10.7	The cast of characters in <i>The Mask</i>	143
11.1	The choice of the Second and Third Plot Functions in <i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>	145
11.2	The Complication sequences in <i>The Robber Bridegroom</i> and <i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>	146
11.3	The Eleventh Function in <i>The Robber Bridegroom</i> and <i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>	147
11.4	The 18-function plot genotype of <i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>	148
11.5	The cast of characters in <i>Little Red Riding Hood</i>	150
12.1	The complications of requesting and accepting in <i>Psycho</i>	153
12.2	Reciprocal-Retrospective Fourth and Fifth Functions in <i>Psycho</i>	154
12.3	Reciprocal-Retrospective Sixth and Seventh Functions in <i>Psycho</i>	155
12.4	The 29-function plot genotype of <i>Psycho</i>	166
12.5	The cast of characters in <i>Psycho</i>	171
A.1	A comparison of the Hero's Journey and plot genotype analysis	178
A.2	The plot genotype of Jack and the Beanstalk	179

Acknowledgements

Four chapters in this book draw material from previous publications.

Chapters 4 and 5 draw upon Terence Patrick Murphy, "The Pivotal Eighth Function and the Pivotal Fourth Character: Resolving Some Discrepancies in Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folk Tale", *Language and Literature*, 17.1 (February 2008): 59–75.

Chapters 7 and 16 draw upon Terence Patrick Murphy, "Opening the Pathway: Plot Management and the Pivotal Seventh Character in Daphne Du Maurier's 'Don't Look Now' ", *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 37.2 (July 2008): 151–168.

1

From the Hollywood Paradigm to the Proppian Plot Genotype

Introduction

Long dominated by the Hollywood memoir and the “how-to” manual, the art of the Anglo-American film screenplay has a relatively brief academic history.¹ In *Script Culture and the American Screenplay* (2008), Kevin Alexander Boon argues: “Literary scholarship, while fully absorbed with drama, ignored the screenplay, and film studies, though aware of the screenplay as an interstitial cog in the filmmaking process, only occasionally cast a critical eye toward the written text, which had been the controlling narrative voice in most contemporary American film production for nearly a century.”² The reasons for this neglect are not hard to discover. Unlike film, the drama of the theatre has strong historical ties to the university, with an academic pedigree defined by Aristotle’s *Poetics* and the art of William Shakespeare. In contrast, the beginnings of cinematic art and the film screenplay are somewhat shabby. Originating in the peep shows and nickelodeons at the turn of the twentieth century, the cinema, despite its rapid rise to financial importance, was long kept at arm’s length by the academy.³ What is more, although a number of prominent American writers, including F. Scott Fitzgerald and William Faulkner, did try their hand at screenplay writing, their experience of the sometimes cavalier and usually commercial priorities of Hollywood did not enhance the artistic case for the film screenplay very far.⁴ Later anecdotal evidence, such as that of the sexually flamboyant Tennessee Williams working with Elia Kazan or the radical English dramatist Trevor Griffith’s experience in collaborating

with Warren Beatty on the script of *Reds* (1979), seemed to confirm the irremediably philistine nature of Hollywood practice.⁵ The film screenplay was a commodity that could be bought and sold at will; it could be quickly alienated from its original creator; it could be quickly remolded to fit quite divergent ideological or commercial *diktats*.⁶

A more serious approach to the question of the screenplay had to wait until the generation of the American *auteur* cinema and the rise of university film studies in the 1970s. Although film clubs had existed in both the United States and the United Kingdom since at least the 1930s, the university was slow to offer the new dramatic form official accreditation. Indeed, it is probably true to say that a genuine theory of film screenplay structure did not emerge until the rise of the VHS cassette recorder in the 1970s had made repeated screenings of the same movie possible.⁷ And when it did, film screenplay theory arose first not in the universities of the Ivy League but rather in Syd Field's classes on screenplay structure at the Sherwood Oaks Experimental College in Hollywood. Field's classic text *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (1979) had been preceded by the first edition of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's *Film Art: An Introduction* (1977). Over the years, this textbook was to become an increasingly lavish, color-print, coffee-table moneymaker, heralding the arrival of the serious academic study of cinema. The continued success of Bordwell and Thompson's book into the new century demonstrated that film studies professors had won the intellectual argument for studying film as dramatic art. Curiously enough, however, the initial focus on such apparently more sophisticated thematic issues as the jump cut, *mise-en-scène* and the male gaze also had the curious effect of marginalizing the study of the screenplay as literary art.

The serious academic study of the film screenplay, arguably the major dramatic art form of the last 100 years, is then largely the work of the new millennium. Fittingly, the wife and husband team of Thompson and Bordwell has helped to lead the way. In 1999, Kristin Thompson wrote her influential study *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (1999); seven years later, Thompson's husband David Bordwell penned *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (2006). These two works demonstrated an effort to refocus the study of cinema on the

issue of filmic poetics, a theory of the combination of word, image and sound within the overall viewing experience. But it is only within the last ten years that a large body of scholarship has begun to focus on the screenplay itself as a form of artistic creation, an artistic form to be treated with the academic seriousness formerly reserved for the poem, the short story and the dramatic text.⁸

A central debate inherited by the new theorists of the film screenplay is that of plot structure. The origins of this debate are found in the world of theatre criticism, and its first major theorist is arguably William Archer, the friend of Bernard Shaw and translator of Henrik Ibsen. It was in reaction to Archer's major Aristotelian study *Play-Making: A Manual of Craftsmanship* (1912) that Lajos Egri penned his own defiantly character-centered polemic *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (1946).⁹ Although Egri's *The Art of Dramatic Writing* drew most of its textual examples from the theater, its influence on the work of later screenwriters, most noticeably Woody Allen, is well known. With the gradual eclipse of Broadway by Hollywood, first in financial terms, later in artistic ones, the way was increasingly open for a generation of screenwriters and theorists to begin to formulate a theory of the film screenplay.¹⁰

In 1979, Syd Field, a writer and sometime screenplay reviewer, wrote his important study *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (1979). In this book, Field first popularized the Three-Act Paradigm of Set-Up, Confrontation and Resolution for conceptualizing and creating the Hollywood screenplay.¹¹ The success of Field as a screenplay analyst is bound up with his central focus on structure. As he notes, a common fault of many screenwriters is to sit down in front of a typewriter and simply to begin typing with no thought about overall direction. The end result will often be an abandoned incomplete manuscript, the result of the screenwriter's failure to conceptualize the journey the central character undertakes as one with a beginning and an end, one in which that character undergoes a meaningful change. The budding screenwriter neglects the need for a clear screenplay structure, one which includes two well-crafted plot points, the first at the end of Act I, the second at the end of Act II, to swing the action round in a new direction. By insisting on the importance of screenwriters working out these four essential requirements of the plot, Syd Field did the entire Hollywood dream industry a major service.

Nonetheless, although Field's approach handles the issue of overall structure expertly, it falls down when it comes to offering the screenwriter advice on how to successfully build each of the three individual Acts.

To take one example: What exactly should a screenplay be doing from the initial introduction of the main character to the first plot point?

According to Field, the screenwriter must inform the audience *who* the main character is, must outline what the dramatic *premise* is and must sketch in the dramatic *situation*—the circumstances surrounding the action.¹² Then, in support of his argument, Field devotes a chapter of *Screenplay* to demonstrating how the screenplay writer Robert Towne succeeds in carrying out these three demands in *Chinatown*.

How is this done in *Chinatown*? How is this done in any screenplay? According to Field, the main character takes "action", which causes a "reaction"—and this process gets repeated until the screenwriter arrives at the first plot point. There's only one problem with this advice. It's not what happens in *Chinatown*. If you examine Act I of that screenplay, you will see that there's not much sense of Jake Gittes taking action. Indeed, most of what he does is precisely the opposite: He *advises* both his first client and the false Mrs Mulwray *not to do anything, not to take any action at all*. In other words, Field tells you that your Hero should take action—and then he analyzes a screenplay in which the Hero does nothing apart from advising his two clients against taking action of any kind.

Why is this? What is the advice that Field gives at this point both vague and misleading? The reason is that there is a deeper level of plot analysis that Field fails to consider: This is the level of the plot genotype.

Introducing plot genotype theory

In evolutionary biology, the genotype refers to the inherited instructions an organism carries within its genetic code. These instructions are important because they can be used to understand how a particular organism is specialized within the group to which it belongs.¹³

By extension, the plot genotype represents the functional structure or compositional schema of a particular story. It is a set

of instructions, written in the language of the plot function, for executing a particular fairy tale plot.¹⁴ The major contributor to the theory of the plot genotype is Vladimir Propp, and the key innovation in Propp's method was his adoption of a functional approach to plot analysis. As he argues, a plot function is "the act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action".¹⁵

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle writes that a plot needs to have sufficient amplitude to allow a probable or necessary succession of particular actions to produce a significant change in the fortune of the main character.¹⁶ In *Morphology of the Folktale*, what Propp did was to push Aristotle's analysis beyond the terms in which he had found them. By offering a list covering each one of Aristotle's probable or necessary actions, in a sequential order of 31 functions, from an Initial Situation through to a final Marriage, Propp had found a way to negotiate the terms of the entire plot. Flush with the success of his methodology, Propp stated: "I feel that in its present form this study is accessible to every fancier of the tale, provided he is willing to follow the writer into the labyrinth of the tale's multiformity, which in the end will become apparent to him as an amazing uniformity."¹⁷

In truth, however, Propp's belief in "an amazing uniformity" is overstated. Not all fairy tales contain the 31 functions that Propp believed to constitute this invariant structure. Some fairy tales, indeed, exist as virtual hideous mirror images of the Marriage fairy tale on which Propp focuses most of his attention. In sharp contrast to the romantic fairy tales that Propp focused on, these mirror image fairy tales provide the basic plot lines for the horror movies of the Hollywood tradition.

But the fact that Propp got so much right but got the major truth wrong turns out to be a good thing. What it means is this: Not all plots are the same. What it also means is that by a friendly critique of the original model, it is possible to develop a new set of plot genotypes, each with its own accompanying cast of characters. These plot genotypes, derived from the corpus of European fairy tales, can then be shown at work in a range of Hollywood screenplays.

In this book, I will outline the plot genotypes for *The Frog Prince*, *The Robber Bridegroom*, *Puss-in-Boots* and *Little Red Riding Hood*, and I will show how these genotypes provide the underpinnings for the film screenplays of *Pretty Woman*, *Wrong Turn*, *The Mask* and *Psycho*,

respectively. It is my belief that after a close reading of my book, you will be able to offer a much richer description of what is going on at any particular point in a screenplay. In this way, you will become much sharper at understanding how screenplays work. And you will become much better at learning how to write coherent screenplays yourself.

Using the concepts of plot genotype theory, you will be able to explain how J. F. Lawton sets up the Lack/Entrapment plot point at the end of Act I in the screenplay of *Pretty Woman*, from the moment Edward leaves the party for Lewis Industries to the moment when Vivian Ward takes her momentous decision to be at Edward's beck and call for five days.

Similarly, you will be able to describe the way in which the Donation and Struggle in Act II of *Wrong Turn* is organized, and you will be able to contrast this with the quite different Donation and Struggle in Act II of *Psycho*.

In much the same way, you will be able to describe the distinct Difficult Tasks in Act III of Edward Lewis in *Pretty Woman* and Stanley Ipkiss in *The Mask*. And finally, you will even be able to state in a clear way exactly how Robert Towne moves his screenplay of *Chinatown* from the opening to the moment when the real Mrs Mulwray shows up in the office of Jake Gittes.

Criticizing the work of Syd Field

In *Screenplay*, Syd Field states: "A screenplay is like a noun—it's about a person, or persons, in a place or places, doing his or her or their 'thing'. All screenplays execute this basic premise. The person is the character, and doing his or her thing is the action."¹⁸

Field's major contribution to the art of the screenplay comes in the form of what he calls "the paradigm", a basic structure that all screenplays of any worth are said to follow. For Field, a screenplay consists of three major Acts: Act I is the Set-Up; Act II is the Confrontation; and Act III is the Resolution.

Act I consists of about "thirty pages to set up the story, the characters, the dramatic premise, the situation (the circumstances surrounding the action) and to establish the relationships between the main character and the other people who inhabit the landscape of his or her world".¹⁹

Act II represents “a unit of dramatic action that is approximately sixty pages long, goes from page 30 to page 90” during which “the main character encounters obstacle after obstacle after obstacle that keeps him from achieving his or her dramatic need”.²⁰

Act III represents “a unit of dramatic action that goes from the end of Act II, approximately page 90, to the end of the screenplay” and serves to offer a solution to the screenplay. A solution refers to whether the main character lives or dies, succeeds or fails, marries or not, wins or loses, stays or leaves.²¹

Within this structure, a plot point serves to unite Act I with Act II; a second plot point serves to unite Act II with Act III. According to Field, “a plot point is any incident, episode, or event that ‘hooks’ into the action and spins it around into another direction”.²²

At the level of the plot taken as a whole, this advice is remarkably good. Well-written plots do tend to exhibit a Three-Act structure, with plot points that spin the action around at the end of Act I and Act II. At a deeper level, however, Field’s advice is less successful. The notion of Heroic Action–Reaction doesn’t take us very far; and for many screenplays, it’s pretty clear that it’s not even true as an approximate description of what is happening.

The main difficulty with Field’s approach is its lack of a deeper level of analysis. You can see this as soon as you turn to what Syd Field has to say about what is supposed to take place within each Act:

If your character *acts* in your screenplay, somebody, or something, is going to *react* in such a way that your character *reacts*. Then, he will usually create a *new* action that will create another reaction.

Your character acts, and somebody reacts. Action-reaction, reaction-action—your story always moves toward that plot point at the end of each act.²³

Elsewhere, Field *does* offer a more specific set of directives for what Act I is supposed to accomplish. In his discussion of the Set-Up, Field suggests:

The reader must know what’s going on immediately. Tricks or gimmicks don’t work. You’ve got to set up the story information in a visual way. The reader must know *who* the main character, what

the dramatic *premise* is, that is, what it's about, and the dramatic *situation*—the circumstances surrounding the action.²⁴

In support of his approach, Field offers an analysis of the Set-Up in Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*. First, Field points to the way in which the visual description of Jake Gittes conveys his character traits. Then he notes how the screenplay visually signals the fact that Gittes runs a detective agency. After this, he suggests that the dramatic premise is established when the phony Mrs Mulwray tells Gittes that she believes her husband is seeing another woman. Finally, Field states that the plot point at the end of Act I is executed when Gittes returns to his office to discover the real Mrs Mulwray waiting for him.

In terms of his overall understanding of what is going on, there is little with which to disagree. But what does Field have to say about the nature of the conversation that takes place between the characters? What kinds of things get said? Who says them? And to what end? On this subject, Field has very little to offer. The point is simple but profound: There is much more going on in the opening segment of *Chinatown* than can be understood in terms of a simple theory of action–reaction.

The rest of this book will offer you a richer theory of plot structure than the one Field outlines. It will do this not by contradicting anything Field has to say about the Hollywood paradigm, but by complementing it with a deeper level of analysis. By means of a detailed study of four Hollywood screenplays—*Pretty Woman*, *Wrong Turn*, *The Mask* and *Psycho*, you will become thoroughly well versed in plot genotype theory. And a good understanding of plot genotype theory will allow you to think through the intricacies of plot in such a way that you won't get lost again. In this way, it will encourage you to think much more readily about the more important stylistic aspects of your screenplay—issues of sequence length, tone or register and the language of characterization.

2

Vladimir Propp's Functional Analysis of the Fairy Tale

The contribution of Aristotle

In *The Poetics*, Aristotle suggests that a plot needs to have sufficient amplitude to allow a probable or necessary succession of particular actions to produce a significant change in the fortune of the main character.¹ What this means for Aristotle is that in comedies, the main character moves from bad to good fortune, while in tragedies the main character moves from good to bad fortune. With these definitions, Aristotle commits himself to the view that all well-structured stories have something in common.

But there is little sign that Aristotle ever considered the idea that behind the extraordinary range of Greek drama, there might lurk a fundamental uniformity. For Aristotle, the plot – the actions, motifs and characters – was either well-constructed or flawed. The audacious insight – *that the plots of all well-made stories were, in effect, the same* – was not to receive strong critical support until the middle years of the twentieth century.² The first scholar to put forward this argument in a serious way was Vladimir Propp.

The work of Vladimir Propp

Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp was born in Russia on 17 April 1895 and studied German and Russian philology at Saint Petersburg University during the years of the First World War. In the early 1920s, while teaching German in a Russian high school, Propp came into contact with the school of Russian Formalism, whose members included Roman Jakobson, Viktor Shklovsky and Aleksandr Nikiforov. One of the major concerns of the Russian Formalists was to investigate the origins of the Russian folk tale. In his essay "The Relationship